

New Beginnings Chapter 31 - 40

Chapter 31

“Fun?” That idea made Victoria scrunch her nose.

“Of course.” Summer propped her chin up, excitedly explaining, “Do you know a child is fun to play with? Like, if you give birth to a daughter, you can dress her up prettily every day like a real-life doll. Have you played the game, Project Makeover? Raising a child is just like dressing your avatar inside the game.”

Feeling speechless, Victoria, who had never played any games, looked at Summer perplexedly.

“By the way, let me be your child’s godmother.” While rubbing her hands excitedly, Summer had a secretive look in her eyes. “If you’re busy, I can move in with you. Hehe. Let me make it clear that I’m not moving in with you because I want to play with your child.”

Not knowing what to say, Victoria suddenly realized why Summer insisted

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on letting her keep the child.

“That’s right.” Summer suddenly became stern and asked, “I almost forgot to ask. Did Claudia come to you yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“What the heck? What did she say to you?”

Then, Victoria told her friend everything that happened yesterday.

After listening to her explanation, the emotional Summer began throwing a fit again. “Gosh! How shameless can she get? Giving you money to leave Alaric? Who does she think she is? Alaric’s wife? Is she and Alaric even dating? She dared to come to you and put on airs!”

While she was criticizing Claudia, Victoria did not feel like stopping her because she knew that was how Summer was. If Summer could not rant, she would feel uncomfortable all over.

Once she was done, Victoria handed her a tissue while advising, “This is the last time. Don’t criticize her again.”

“What was that?” Summer widened her eyes. “How can you still speak up for her when she treated you like that?”

“Summer, she helped me once.”

“When?” Summer was confused and asked, “Why is this the first time I’m hearing about this?”

Victoria’s eyelids hung low, saying, “It was a long time ago.”

It was when the Selwyns had just filed for bankruptcy. All of her bank accounts were frozen, and she was only left with a few hundred dollars in her PayPal account.

Back then, she did not know what had happened, and her dad’s phone was constantly busy, so she could only rush home as quickly as she could.

When she returned home, she discovered her house was a mess. A bunch of people was sealing the entrance with tapes while some were splashing paint onto the walls. A few were even thinking of heading inside and clearing everything out.

Victoria's dad, Tony Selwyn, was roughly pushed around while attempting to stop them but ended up breaking his leg. When she witnessed that, she was so pissed that she went over and argued with them. Then, she called the police but had her phone slapped away.

The scene was a chaotic mess.

In the end, the person in charge there received a call, and his attitude immediately changed as he humbly and flatteringly spoke on the phone, "Alright, I understand. Yes, I'll leave with the others now."

After he hung up the call, he walked over and glared at Victoria. "Hmph! Consider yourselves lucky. We're not going to take this house anymore. It's all yours." With that, he sneered and taunted, "You wouldn't have gotten this chance if Miss Johnson hadn't known our boss. We're only doing this for the sake of Miss Johnson, understand?"

Miss Johnson...

A name flashed across Victoria's mind.

"Is the person you're referring to Claudia Johnson?"

"That's right. Consider yourselves lucky. Let's move."

Never would she have imagined that Claudia had helped her that day, so she called her a while after those men left.

“Are you alright? Did they frighten you? I might’ve been a little late with my call. I heard Mr. Selwyn was injured, so I arranged for a car to your house. Once it arrives, get inside, and the driver will drive you to the hospital. I’ve also arranged for a doctor to tend to your dad.”

Meanwhile, Victoria clutched her phone, unable to wrap her head around what was happening. “Why are you helping me?”

She knew she was not close to Claudia as they only knew each other through Alaric and did not get along well.

When Victoria found out about his feelings for Claudia, their relationship became even more estranged, so she stayed away from Claudia as much as possible. After all, she was never a benevolent person.

Though she would not see Claudia as her enemy or hate her, she could never become friends with her. However, she did not expect Claudia to help her.

After hearing Victoria’s question, Claudia chuckled softly. “It’s because you’re Al’s friend. A friend of Al’s is a friend of mine, so of course, I’d help you. You don’t have to feel like you owe me anything, and don’t tell anyone I helped you! Think of it as Al helping you.”

When Claudia said that, Victoria had it all figured out. She’s only helping

me for Alaric's sake.

She pursed her pale lips while hesitating. At that moment, Tony suddenly began coughing heavily, and the maid beside him yelled hysterically, "Mr. Selwyn! Mr. Selwyn, are you alright? Miss Selwyn, we need to send him to the hospital."

Then, Claudia's worried voice sounded from the phone.

"Is Mr. Selwyn alright? Victoria, let's talk some other time. You need to send him to the hospital as soon as possible. The driver will be arriving shortly."

Victoria glanced at her dad, who had broken out in a cold sweat looking all pale, and her hands formed tightly into a fist. In the end, she released her fists listlessly as though she had succumbed to fate.

She told Claudia on the phone, "I owe you one. Thank you."

"What are you saying? Didn't I tell you to think of it as Al helping you? Go on and take care of your dad." The call was quickly hung up.

Victoria put away her phone and ran to Tony before helping him. "Dad, are you alright? Hang on. A car will be arriving soon."

Just as she finished speaking, someone brought a driver inside, and everyone helped Tony get into the car.

On the road to the hospital, Tony looked at his daughter and asked carefully, "Snowball, who called you earlier?"

Snowball was a nickname Tony gave Victoria. From the beginning of her

memories, she grew up in a single-parent family, and her dad was her only caretaker.

Being a cute and lovable girl as a kid, she looked like a tiny snowman whilst wearing a white dress, so he gave her the nickname, Snowball.

Since then, he had been calling her that until now.

Victoria was silent for a while before replying, “It’s Claudia. She helped us, so I owe her a favor.”

Hearing that, Tony was shocked and immediately beckoned, “Snowball, let’s get out of this car.”

The father-daughter duo lived together, so he could see that his obedient daughter liked Alaric. However, the matter between Alaric and Claudia had spread throughout their social circle.

As his daughter had already taken her hands off that matter, what was she to do now that she owed her love rival a favor? Therefore, Tony immediately insisted on getting off.

However, Victoria held him down and urged with a pale face, “Dad, don’t! Even if we get off now, it won’t change the fact that we’ve already accepted her help. If she hadn’t made the call, those people outside our house wouldn’t have left.”

With a faint smile, she comforted him. “It’s fine. Perhaps we aren’t fated to be together.”

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It was then that Victoria owed Claudia a favor.

Also, Victoria discovered just how crucial Claudia's call was when she was out asking others for help.

At that time, the Selwyns lost all their properties except for that house.

When they started to get back on their feet, Victoria intended to sell the house to gather funds for her father to restart his business. However, Tony declined her suggestion and instructed her sternly, "You can deal with the house however you want. Since I could start my business from scratch back then, I can do it again now. You should mortgage the house to those people and use the money to treat Claudia to a meal. Then, see if there's anything you can help her with so that you can return the favor as soon as possible."

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Tony stroked her head and smiled warmly.

"Even if I lose everything, I can't let my snowball bow down before her love rival. So, don't worry. I will get back on my feet. As a matter of fact, I have contacted one of my friends. He will help us if I ask him for help."

No, you're lying.

Victoria overheard his call and knew the other party refused to help them.

The friend Tony was talking about had received a lot of help from Tony

before. Yet, he refused to aid Tony at such a critical moment. What an ungrateful b*stard.

Tony had lied to her so that she wouldn't worry about him. Also, he didn't want his daughter to owe Claudia any more than she had now.

After being silent for a while, she raised her head, revealing a pitiful look on her face as she spoke in a low and weak tone, "Dad, how about Mr. Cadogan..."

As soon as she said that, he immediately turned grim. "We can't! Let's not mention the fact that Adrian still doesn't know about this because even if he does, he will definitely help us without me asking him for help. But Snowball, have you ever thought about what you would do after we accept his help? The daughter I raised is the best young woman in the world, and I don't want to see her bowing her head before anyone. Don't worry. Even if I don't have any money, I will still find a way. It would just take a little more time, so you have to wait for me, alright?"

That night, Victoria returned to her room and cried so hard that her eyes were swollen.

After that, she didn't mortgage the house but sold it. Then, she transferred the money into Tony's bank account.

When she came out of the bank, she took out her phone and stood in her spot while looking at the photo of her and Alaric.

Perhaps my feelings for Alaric aren't as strong as I thought. I need this money. It turns out that, in reality, nothing can beat hardships.

Victoria and Summer stayed together for two hours before parting.

During her trip back home, Victoria silently counted the days she still had before getting divorced. When I visited Grandma a while ago, she was doing very well. The doctors estimate she will be able to go through surgery in about a month. Once she had surgery and recuperated for some time, Alaric and I could finally end this marriage, and he could fulfill his promise to Claudia. Claudia is gentler and kinder than me, and she comes from a better family than I do, so Grandma will like her, too. They will have a great future together and won't need me to worry about anything.

"Mrs. Cadogan."

The driver looked at Victoria through the rearview mirror and noticed she seemed a little out of it, so he reminded her, "When are you going to visit Old Mrs. Cadogan today?"

Hearing that, she was stunned and woke up from her daze.

Noticing she looked a little lost, the driver reminded her again, "Today is Sunday."

When Victoria heard that, she returned to her senses and muttered, "Is it Sunday already?"

Time has passed so quickly.

Since both of them were busy with work, Griselda only allowed them to visit her on Sundays and would get angry at them if they visited her on any other day.

Sundays. Since Alaric had gotten so drunk yesterday and went home with Claudia, perhaps they are now...

The driver asked, "Do you need me to call Mr. Cadogan?"

Victoria subconsciously answered, "No need. He's busy."

He didn't reply, so she continued, "I'll head over on my own."

In the end, he could only nod and drive away.

Having been working for the Cadogans for a long time, he had noticed something wrong with the atmosphere at home and heard some rumors shared around the household. Now that he saw how Victoria was behaving, he felt heartbroken for her.

At the best nursing home in Gandra.

When Victoria arrived, one of the nursing staff greeted her with a smile and informed her, "Mrs. Cadogan, you've arrived. Old Mrs. Cadogan was just telling us about you. My colleague and I suggested bringing her out for a walk downstairs, but she refused, saying that she wanted to wait for you in her room so that you wouldn't have to wait for her."

Hearing that, Victoria couldn't hold back her chuckle. "Actually, I'm fine

waiting for a while.”

The nursing staff replied, “It’s mostly because you only come visit her once a week, so she cherishes the time she spends with you and thinks that the more time she can spend with you, the better.”

Victoria was surprised to hear that and was stunned for a moment before “From how I see it, she’s doing fine. Her emotion has been calm with no ups and downs.”

Then, Victoria asked, “How about her eating habits and rest?”

“I think they’re the same as always.”

“Thank you.” Victoria nodded. “But I still have to trouble you to help me cross-check her recent sleeping and eating habits.”

The nursing staff nodded and promised, “Sure, no problem. I’ll take a look.”

“Thank you.”

After thanking the nursing staff again, Victoria turned around and headed **to** Griselda’s room.

Meanwhile, with the help of her personal caretaker, Griselda had returned to her room and was now resting on the bed, waiting for her granddaughter-in-law and grandson to come and visit her.

Though she had grown old and showed signs of old age, she hadn’t lost her elegance and calmness. Her gray hair was tied behind her head, and she wore a cotton dress that looked delicate and warm.

The moment she heard footsteps coming from outside, Griselda showed a joyous and excited expression that didn't fit her age.

"It's about time, so Victoria and Alaric must be coming to see me."

Just as she finished talking, a familiar and slim figure appeared at her door.

"Victoria," she called out happily. "You came."

Victoria then sprinted over and stopped before Griselda.

"Grandma. Good to see you."

"Good to see you, too."

Feeling extremely happy, Griselda quickly held Victoria's hand.

However, the smile on her face immediately disappeared after touching Victoria's hand and was replaced with surprise and concern. "Why is your hand so cold? Are you feeling cold?"

Before Victoria could reply, Griselda started nagging, "You're skinny and can't handle the cold. How can you wear so little in this weather? Where's Alaric? Is this how he takes care of you?"

At the mention of Alaric, she finally realized something.

"Speaking of which, where is he?"

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At the mention of Alaric, Victoria suddenly remembered the scene she saw outside the nightclub last night.

Where is he? Of course, he's at Claudia's place.

As for what happened and what they did last night that caused him not to appear before Griselda now, Victoria felt the answer was perfectly clear.

She was sulking but couldn't vent her emotions before Griselda, so she found an excuse that wouldn't be easily exposed later to cover for Alaric.

"He was up late last night, so he's still resting."

After saying that, Victoria realized that she was telling the truth. Alaric had been up late last night, but no one knew what he was doing.

When Griselda heard that, she instantly became resentful as she

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criticized, "How old is he? Why is he still staying up all night?"

Meanwhile, Victoria smiled and didn't say anything.

When Griselda noticed Victoria's behavior, she sighed. "You're the only one who can stand his attitude."

"No way," Victoria replied softly.

As she didn't feel like continuing that topic, she suggested bringing

Griselda out for a walk in the garden in her wheelchair, and Griselda

agreed.

Following that, the caretaker brought over Griselda's wheelchair and helped her get on it.

Griselda's legs weren't in terrible shape, but she couldn't walk for an extensive period. She could walk a few steps around her room but not outside.

Once she was settled in her wheelchair, Victoria opened the cupboard and grabbed a thick shawl and blanket. She then wrapped them around Griselda before heading out.

In the meantime, Griselda wrapped the shawl tightly around herself in satisfaction before exclaiming, "This material feels so comfortable. I remember complaining about them being thick and heavy when I was younger. I have grown to like them now, but I'm no longer young."

Victoria could hear a trace of dismay in Griselda's voice and felt strange, so she comforted her, "Grandma, I think this material suits the current you better. It goes well with the custom-made dress you're wearing now, and it makes you look stunning. I have always admired your beauty and temperament."

That was the truth, as every woman in the Cadogan Family looked

stunning, whether it was Griselda or Victoria's mother-in-law.

That showed that the Cadogan men had a sharp eye for women.

When mentioning that, Victoria added, "Grandma, I remember seeing you and Mom together at a banquet I attended when I was still a child. I thought you two were sisters."

She was young back then. So, when she saw the two beautiful women with delicate features and no wrinkles standing together, she thought they looked like a pair of elegant and noble sisters.

Griselda found that funny and joked, "Oh, you. You're such a sweet-talker. I'm convinced, and I suddenly feel like I'm not old anymore."

After she said that, Victoria bent down and wrapped her arms around Griselda's shoulders to hug her.

"Grandma, you're not old, to begin with. I like you a lot."

Griselda treated her very nicely.

So, Victoria liked her a lot, but not because Griselda was Alaric's grandma or because she wanted to be Griselda's granddaughter-in-law.

It was because Griselda had always been nice to Victoria since childhood.

My own grandmother passed away early, and I don't have a mom, but the

love Grandma gave me made up for all of that. Even if Alaric and I got divorced...

As Victoria thought of that, she hugged Griselda even tighter. "You will always be my grandma."

They saw someone approaching them when they were about to reach the **door**.

He had a tall, lean figure and handsome face, but his eyes looked cold.

When both sides met each other, Victoria stopped walking.

"Alaric?"

Griselda was surprised to see Alaric here.

"Grandma," he greeted Griselda in his deep voice.

His voice sounded a little raspy and laced with a hint of sexiness.

When Victoria saw him, she scoffed softly. Her scoff was so soft that it was almost inaudible, but Alaric seemed to have noticed it and glanced at her.

"What's going on with you? Victoria said you stayed up late last night, so I thought you wouldn't make it today."

Alaric didn't expect that to be the excuse Victoria used.

matter if I stayed up late. Even if I stay up all night, I will still come and see

you.”

“Such a glib talker.” Griselda deliberately criticized him disdainfully but couldn’t suppress the joyful smile on her face.

After that, Alaric approached Victoria and offered, “Let me do it.”

When he approached Victoria, she couldn’t smell any alcohol on him.

Instead, he smelled of fresh soap.

Not only that, but his clothes were also different, and his inner shirt was ironed flatly and hugged his figure very well.

Victoria felt like she could easily guess who was behind all of this.

It might have been that Alaric had stayed over at someone’s home and that person had ironed his clothes this morning.

While she was still lost in her thoughts, Alaric was already standing very close to her.

Just as his hand was about to land on the wheelchair, she quickly withdrew her hand and took two steps backward to keep a small distance between them.

She was acting like he was a plague or something.

Meanwhile, Alaric was stunned at her sudden action.

A few seconds later, his handsome face turned grim as an icy aura enveloped his whole body.

At first, he felt his heart melt a little after listening to Norwood's hypothesis, but now, he scoffed silently.

It seems like I've been overthinking this situation.

"What's the matter?" Griselda noticed they still hadn't moved after Alaric stood over, so she asked out of curiosity.

Hearing her question, Alaric regained his composure and curled his thin lips.

"It's nothing, Grandma. Let's go."

After that, he pushed Griselda's wheelchair in the direction of the garden while Victoria followed beside them.

When they accompanied Griselda to the garden, Alaric would usually push the wheelchair while Victoria would hug his arm or tug on the corner **of** his shirt.

Sometimes, she would be so clingy that she was like his tail.

However, today, Victoria kept quite a large distance between them, making it seem like they weren't a couple but strangers.

As time progressed, Alaric's expression became darker, and the aura around him turned colder.

Suddenly, he stopped.

“Grandma, I need to send a text message,” he informed Griselda.

Griselda nodded as she didn't think that was something out of the ordinary.

Then, he pulled out his phone and began tapping on the screen.

When Victoria saw that scene, she averted her eyes emotionlessly.

He must be texting his lovely Claudia. They might not have been apart for long, and he's already missing her. How clingy.

She entirely lost control of her emotions and was filled with jealousy.

The phone in her bag vibrated, so she frustratedly took it out without thinking much about it.

The next moment, she froze.

That was because it was a message from Alaric. Why are you standing so far away? Are you trying to make Grandma doubt our relationship?’

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When Victoria received the text message, she subconsciously looked up,

coincidentally meeting Alaric's impenetrable black eyes.

Alaric was staring at her.

She glanced at him, pursed her lips, and turned her head to ignore him.

Her actions rendered Alaric speechless.

Victoria took a look at her phone when she received another message.

'Come over.'

No way. I don't want to.

'You are free to do whatever you want once Grandma has completed the operation. Be good right now and cooperate with me. Didn't you mention

Chapter 34 Did You Look for Me?

that our relationship is built on mutual benefits?'

Victoria finally came to her senses after reading the last sentence.

That's right. We are doing this for our own benefit.

We have reached a consensual agreement on this matter. Why am I being so dramatic?

She took a deep breath while reflecting before slowly walking over to Alaric.

Even though she had mentally prepared herself, approaching him was still difficult for her.

When she finally moved to his side, Alaric's face contorted with a dark

expression.

He was extremely speechless when he looked at Victoria.

Suddenly, Alaric reached out and grabbed her.

She was taken aback and subconsciously avoided his hand, but she was too slow. Eventually, he caught her. With a scowl on his face, he drew her hand to his arm and said softly, "Hold my arm."

A heavy silence fell upon them.

Victoria was stunned. I can't believe he said this right in front of Grandma.

Albeit reluctantly, she complied with his request; after all, she didn't want to make Griselda worry.

Victoria had no choice but to hold his hand reluctantly.

"Hold on tight and follow me," Alaric said, exhaling a sigh of relief and turning away helplessly.

"Alright," she responded impatiently.

Griselda, who had been sitting in front of them silently, finally chuckled and asked, "Did you two reconcile?"

"Grandma?"

"He didn't come with you today, so I have a feeling something is wrong.

You two have always visited me in pairs ever since I was in the nursing home."

Victoria lowered her gaze and pursed her lips as she heard this.

She thought she was doing a good job, but she hadn't counted on Griselda's meticulousness. Victoria could not hide anything from her. Worse, Griselda knew what was going on but chose to remain silent. What should I do?

"Grandma, we just had a minor conflict, but it's alright now," Victoria replied after some thought.

"Small fights between young people are common. It just needs to be quickly resolved by the two of you. Alaric, as a man, you should be more considerate toward Victoria, alright?"

"When do I fail to treat her with consideration and respect?"

Alaric had been tolerating Victoria for the past two years. She always insisted on having things done her way.

Griselda expressed her displeasure with his response as she said, "You should agree with my request. Why are you talking back?"

"Okay... Yes, Grandma," he replied helplessly.

The three of them then spent the next 20 minutes strolling through the garden. Victoria was concerned that Griselda would catch a cold, so she suggested they return indoors. At this point, the nurse just so happened to call her as well.

"The doctor has arrived to do his rounds. Please bring Old Mrs. Cadogan back to the ward."

After ending the call, Alaric and Victoria brought Griselda into the hospital.

They were unable to enter the room during the focused examination.

Right after Griselda was pushed into the consultation room, Victoria immediately released Alaric's arm and kept a safe distance from him.

She noticed him frowning at this point and announced, "I'm going to the restroom."

Then, before he could even say anything, she turned around and walked away.

She entered the restroom and went straight to the sink, where she discovered liquid soap.

Victoria washed her hands repeatedly, her face frosty.

She reasoned that she wouldn't be as repulsed if Alaric merely bumped into Claudia. She wouldn't have thought that Claudia had intentions.

However, Victoria felt sick to her stomach every time she remembered that Alaric had spent the night with Claudia the day before.

It elicited pure and vile disgust in Victoria.

The weather was chilly. Her palms had lost their warmth by the time she finished washing them, leaving them icy cold.

She then wiped her hands before exiting the restroom.

In a fraction of a moment, she came to a sudden halt and looked at Alaric, who was leaning against the door.

His eyes were slightly lowered to the ground, his facial features were extremely defined and delicate, and his long eyelashes were prominent.

After hearing the shuffling noise, Alaric turned to face her, his gloomy gaze falling on her hands.

Victoria's hands were bright red from all the scrubbing.

“Why did you wash your hands so hard?” A hint of mockery flashed across his eyes, and his thin lips parted slightly. “Did you come across anything dirty?”

“Yeah, that's why I washed it a few more times,” she responded accordingly.

A truculent frown warped his face when he heard that.

This woman!

Victoria was not in the mood to continue the conversation, so she left.

However, she had to walk past him on her way to find Griselda.

As a result, she took a few deliberate steps forward in order to avoid Alaric.

When the man noticed this, he couldn't take it any longer and strode forward to pinch her hand.

“Victoria, are you trying to test my patience? You think I'm filthy, don't you?

What did I do to deserve your disdain?”

She howled in pain as she tried to break free from his grip. He tightened his grip on her as he saw her struggle.

A frown formed on Victoria's angry face.

"Let me go, Alaric."

He ignored her plea and looked at her with cold, dead eyes.

Victoria was unfazed. "Are you admitting to doing something filthy?"

She could feel Alaric pressing down on her hand even harder as she said those words.

Following that, he flipped her hand over and tightly clasped his fingers around hers.

"What if I admit it?" His voice was deep, and his gaze was fixed on her.

Victoria flinched from great disgust and curled her lips stiffly, "Do you think this is fun?"

We are divorcing soon. Why is he acting this way now?

Alaric pursed his lips and looked at her calmly.

"Not at all. But I'd advise you not to avoid me. Do you think Grandma won't notice?"

She took a deep breath after hearing his words.

"Okay. I promise that whatever happened today will not happen again while Grandma is in the hospital."

After that, she paused before adding, "Don't worry. I'll play my role well."

Alaric was in desperate need of her assurance.

Griselda was a sensitive and observant elder. He was afraid she would

notice any problems between him and Victoria.

The original plan was for Victoria to play along with him.

However, when he heard her assurance and promise, he felt a dull pain in his heart.

The pain felt like a rusted, blunt knife was cutting cruelly and slowly into his chest.

On top of that, his throat became congested and hoarse.

He looked at Victoria's pale face and asked subconsciously in a raspy voice, "Did you look for me last night?*

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Victoria immediately denied it. "No." Then, she questioned, "Who **told** you that?"

Alaric narrowed his almond-shaped eyes. "Since you said you didn't look for me, why would you care who told me about it?"

She replied without care, "Oh, I just wanted to see who's the gossip queen. West Finn? Or Norwood Oaks? That's right. Norwood called me, saying you were drunk, and he wanted me to head over. I wanted to say no, but he hung up on me first."

He frowned at her unbothered reply.

She continued, "I had wanted to get the butler to pick you up, but I didn't want to wake up an elderly man in the middle of the night. Since West and

Norwood were both there, I figured they'd look after you. Even if you were drunk, nothing would happen to you.“?”

Chapter 35 Pretending to Look Loving

“And?”

Victoria's explanation was logical and acceptable. She responded, “After I reached that conclusion, I went to bed.”

After she finished her reply, she stared at him, asking, “So, who told you I went to look for you? I'd have to thank them for taking care of my image.”

Alaric was quiet, but Victoria did not stop there. “By the way, are your friends still unaware of the transactional nature of our relationship? Was that why they had to make up stories on my behalf so that we wouldn't fight?”

He tightened his grip on her hand with a strength that almost crushed it.

She endured the pain and chuckled. “Tell them about it if you have a chance to. I'd rather not get their calls whenever you're drunk. You know I sleep early, but the calls always come late. If I am woken up-”

Before she could finish her sentence, he had flung her hand in disdain and left with a sour face.

When she was alone, she looked at her hand that was held by him. A long silence later, she ultimately did not go to the restroom to wash her hands

again.

It's fine.

Since their relationship was transactional, she had to always keep her guard up, especially when they had to visit his grandma every week. It would be unimaginable to keep washing her hands every time they feigned affection.

After regaining her composure, she left as well.

“Old Mrs. Cadogan is recovering faster than we expected! If she keeps up the good job, we can bring forth the surgery.”

Victoria overheard the doctor speaking to Alaric when she arrived in front of the doctor's office.

“How soon?” Alaric asked. She didn't enter and chose to stand with her back against the wall.

“It depends on the circumstances. We can bring forth the surgery by a fortnight if she continues making good progress.”

“Thank you.”

“Mr. Cadogan, you're most welcome. We're honored to have your trust.”

There was nothing more to eavesdrop on at this point, and Victoria proceeded to Griselda's room. When she was almost there, she ran into the nurse from the morning.

“Mrs. Cadogan, you're finally here! I got the data and was about to look for

you.”

She didn't forget about that and nodded at the nurse. “How's it?”

“Mrs. Cadogan, follow me.”

Victoria paused for a brief moment but soon followed the nurse into another room. The nurse was honest with her. “Since we have been keeping track of Old Mrs. Cadogan's diet and sleep, I checked with the nurses from the morning shifts, and they told me that these minor changes were within normal range. That's why we didn't pay extra attention to these statistics.”

Victoria bent down to check out the data on the computer screen.

Griselda's diet and sleeping habits were meticulously recorded on the computer because the nurses couldn't memorize all the details about every single patient due to the sheer number of patients they had to handle. To deal with that issue, the nursing home would record the patient's condition digitally.

After checking carefully, she realized the nurse was right in that the changes were so minor that they could be ignored. The nurses had a range for each indicator, and any changes that did not exceed the maximum limit would be considered normal.

She pursed her lips and fell into deep thought. I might have been overthinking it.

She could sense a slight change in Griselda's mood, and it was not in a positive way.

"Mrs. Cadogan, I understand your concern. But *you* might have felt distressed because you were overly concerned."

Victoria did not argue and even concurred, "Yes, I might be distressed because I care about her too much."

As Victoria was sensible, the nurse did not say much after hearing that.

Victoria smiled at her. "Can I trouble you to print the recent data for me?"

The nurse was a little surprised by the request, but she nodded. "Of course."

"Thank you."

"Mrs. Cadogan, you're welcome."

Although the nurse found Victoria's behavior rather odd, she went ahead and completed the simple printing task right away. Victoria watched on but was suddenly reminded of something else. She said, "I'll come to take the printed documents before I leave. Please keep it with you for now."

"Sure, Mrs. Cadogan."

With that, Victoria went to visit Griselda. When she arrived, she found Alaric sitting across from his grandma as he spoke with her. He sat there with a light smile and warm eyes. Victoria always knew that he was a loving grandson.

“Victoria, you’re back.”

“Grandma!” She joined their conversation.

The smile vanished from Alaric’s eyes, but he quickly pulled himself together. Then, they seemed to have put aside their disagreement from before and pretended to look loving like a pair of newlyweds in front of Griselda. They chatted with her until dusk fell.

“Alright, it’s late. Why don’t you hurry home now?”

Something occurred to Victoria, and she shook her head. “Grandma, it’s still early. I’d like to hang around for a bit.”

“How is it still early? You’ll need time to travel home. It will be late after you wash up and go to bed.”

“It’s fine, Grandma. I took annual leave for a few days, so I’m pretty free now.”

“You took leave?”

“Yes.” Victoria nodded. “That’s why I will be visiting you for the next few days. I hope you don’t find me annoying.”

Griselda was excited when she heard that Victoria would be visiting daily, but her excitement died down soon enough as she lamented, “It’s fine.

Don’t visit me daily. There’s nothing but patients here. It’s not good for you to stay around for too long.”

Victoria was taken aback by the comment. Alaric quickly said, “What are you talking about? You’re not a patient! The doctor said you’re in good condition, and the surgery can be brought forward by a fortnight! After the surgery, you won’t need to stay at the nursing home anymore.”

Chapter 36

Griselda was stunned momentarily. “Bring the surgery forward?”

“Yes.”

Silence dawned upon Griselda, and Victoria gave it a thought *before* saying, “Grandma, it’s not as scary as it sounds. All you have to *do* is to take a nap. Once you open your eyes, you’re all fine.”

Her voice sounded brisk and cheeky, and even Alaric could not help but glance at her. It had been a long time since she looked this bright. The joy rubbed off on Griselda as she broke into a smile. “You always know how to make me smile.”

“Nah, I’m telling the truth, Grandma. If you don’t believe it, you can ask the doctor tomorrow.”

“Fine, fine. I know that you’re worried about me. I’m not afraid.”

It was 8.00PM when they left the nursing home. Victoria intended to spend more time with Griselda, but Griselda needed to rest, so the duo had no choice but to leave.

The couple was so immersed in their own world that they could not stay away from each other after leaving the room. It was not until they walked quite a distance that Victoria turned expressionless and finally let go of Alaric's hand. His face darkened the moment she did that.

"You should get going first," she suggested.

His brows creased. "What are you going to do?"

"I need to check on Grandma's recent medical records."

"I'm coming with you."

Flustered, she shook her head. "It's okay. I can do it alone."

Chapter 36 Your Hunch Is Right

"Do you wish rumors that I have left you all alone in the middle of the night spread in the nursing home?"

Words failed Victoria, and ultimately, she caved in. They took a whole stack of Griselda's medical records from a nurse.

"Thank you."

"My pleasure, Mrs. Cadogan. Are you leaving right now?"

"Yes."

"Safe travels, then."

"Thanks."

When they came out of the nursing home, Alaric gazed at the stack of

papers in her hands. “What’s with that?”

Since it was related to Griselda, Victoria leveled with him without hiding anything. He pursed his lip and glanced at her upon hearing her thoughts.

“You do care a lot for Grandma.”

She paused for a moment before responding, “It’s not because of you.”

He went silent for a moment. “Did I say that it’s because of me? Why are you so defensive against me?”

“Am I? I’m just explaining.” His casual remark did not bother her. However, the way she spoke with equanimity rendered him helpless.

“Let’s hurry back home.” Alaric paced up upon her reminder.

By the time they walked to the entrance, they could see the Cadogan

Family’s car. She looked at Alaric. “Is the cab not here yet?”

He returned a dubious look. “What do you mean?”

“Didn’t you say that you’re not going home? I thought you’d call for a cab,” she reminded him ‘kindly’.

He rued every single word he said last night. He planned on going home with her, but she did not give him the chance at all.

“I’ll be going first, then.” Victoria smiled lightly before entering the car.

Without a second thought, she closed the door and urged the driver to hit the road.

What about Mr. Cadogan? The driver gingerly sneaked a peek out of the

window to see the glum Alaric. The driver whispered, “Mrs. Cadogan, what about-”

“He has something else to attend to, so he’s not coming with us. Let’s go.”

He did not have the nerve to say anything nor drive the car. Alaric was his boss, yet the person in the back seat was Alaric’s wife.

Alaric had a soft spot for Victoria; she made the decisions for most of the matters, and he listened to everything she said.

In short, the driver could not afford to offend either one of them.

Suddenly, the car door opened, and Alaric entered the car. He seated himself so naturally and gazed at the driver coldly. “Let’s go.”

His voice was so icy that the driver drove the car immediately, not wanting to stay at the place any longer.

A weird atmosphere lingered in the air. Victoria assumed Alaric would not come along after she put it that way, but he proved her wrong. Still, she shrugged it off because he was the one embarrassed, not her.

She began to flip through the medical records. She did not speak to Alaric, papers in the car.

A couple of moments later, he could not help but shift his gaze onto her.

Under the dim light, she leafed through the documents while her long eyelashes fluttered as she blinked her eyes. She was so focused that she showed no desire to talk to him.

When he could not hold in his urge any longer, he piped up, “Is something wrong with Grandma’s condition?”

Her hand halted, prompting him to frown. “What? Can’t I follow up with my grandmother’s condition?”

Hearing that, Victoria pursed her lips and gave him a confused stare.

“That’s not it.”

She then handed the papers to Alaric, hinting to him to study on his own and not to bother her.

He was at a loss for words. He took the papers and began reading them seriously since they pertained to Griselda.

Alaric was a little distracted by her expression at first, but he soon became immersed in the records as time passed.

He initiated another conversation once he finished reading. “There’s a tiny change in her diet and sleep routine.”

“Yes,” Victoria answered instantly when it came to Griselda’s matter. She added, “I’ve asked the nursing staff about it. He said that it’s normal to see such small changes. It’s nothing particular to take note of.”

“Is that so?” His lips formed a thin line before he returned the records to her. “How did you manage to catch that when the doctor and nurses didn’t?”

“Because I can sense it.” She explained further in case he could not

understand, “I’m more sensitive than others. That’s why. Do you

Alaric glanced at her, but it went unnoticed by Victoria. “Of course, it’s just a hunch. It’s not accurate.”

“The difference in the data proves that your hunch is right.”

Chapter 37

That’s right. The data I obtained has shown that there is some slight difference. So, indirectly, my sixth sense is spot on.

Victoria grunted her affirmation but didn’t say a *word*. She merely retrieved the data and put it away by folding it nicely.

After she had done that, she suddenly recalled something and spoke to Alaric, “Actually, I can sense that Grandma’s afraid of undergoing surgery. You shouldn’t have mentioned to her that the surgery would be brought forward earlier in the afternoon.”

Alaric was stunned to hear that. “Is that so?”

“Yes.”

He glanced over at her and noticed the extremely intent look on her face.

Suddenly, he realized what she had said at the nursing home was true.

Chapter 37 Let’s Call a Truce

She mentioned that her concern for Griselda had nothing to do with him.

She had not said this in a fit of anger but truly regarded Griselda as her grandmother.

As soon as Alaric realized this, he pursed his lips and said, “Okay, I got it. I’ll comfort her the next time I visit her.”

They spoke calmly to each other since their discussion topic was Griselda’s issue. It was something hard to come by as of late.

However, silence descended upon them once they finished talking about that matter.

Even the driver felt quite surprised as he drove the car. Things were quite tense when they first entered the car, and it felt as if they were going to bicker loudly any minute from then. However, not only did they not bicker, they even started to discuss Old Mrs. Cadogan’s health condition amicably.

The driver had initially mused to himself, A couple’s fight sure didn’t last long. However, soon after that, the duo stopped talking once again. The atmosphere turned tense once more, and things became icy as before.

The driver was rendered speechless. Oh, well. Whatever. I don’t get this, so I should just focus on driving.

When they arrived at Cadogan Residence, Victoria got out of the car before Alaric and headed upstairs. She didn’t stride inside, but her footsteps weren’t exactly slow, either. Shortly after that, she walked ahead, and Alaric was left behind.

The servants noticed Victoria enter the house first with a face devoid of

expression.

Not long after she walked up the stairs, Alaric also went upstairs with a thunderous look on his face.

Ever since the madam came back home in the rain previously, the atmosphere at home seemed increasingly strange. The servants started to feel slight trepidation as they completed their jobs, and they worked even harder than before.

They feared they would become the couple's punching bag if they made any mistakes in their jobs.

Once the two of them went upstairs, the servants couldn't help themselves and gathered to discuss.

"Judging by Mr. and Mrs. Cadogan's current situation, they should be close to getting a divorce, right?"

"Oh my gosh! What sort of nonsense did you just say?! They should be just having a tiff. It's not to the extent of a divorce, right?"

"Haven't you heard what someone said the other day? Mr. and Mrs. Cadogan's marriage is a sham. He is in love with someone else. Now that the person he loves is back, how can he marry the person he loves if they don't file for divorce?"

"Well, it might seem that way, but they have been married for so long now. Surely, they would have developed some feelings for each other, right?"

Look at how close Mr. and Mrs. Cadogan are most of the time. Anyway, in my opinion, they definitely wouldn't get a divorce."

"I'll bet on the opposite, and I reckon they will definitely file for divorce. Just wait for it. It's going to happen soon. It's either this month or the following month."

The opinion of the crowd was divided, and they remained intent on their discussion about Alaric and Victoria's marriage.

Meanwhile, Victoria took a shower upon returning to her room. Her emotions were now calmer than before.

On the way back home, she had been thinking about this matter.

Griselda's surgery was due soon, **so** it was unnecessary for her to show her temper to Alaric at this point.

He had mentioned from the start that their marriage was just a fake one. If a divorce was inevitable, then it would be quite normal for him to be entangled with Claudia.

However, the thing Victoria found most perplexing was that he had mentioned her pregnancy to Claudia. I can't comprehend this. What was he thinking about?!

On the other hand, if one looked at things from another perspective, he was in love with Claudia, so it went without saying that he would be honest and unreserved with her.

As such, Victoria could now understand his behavior, but from her point of view, she couldn't find it in herself to agree with that.

Despite her disagreement, she had to maintain a calm front on the surface during this period.

After she came out from the shower, she saw Alaric lying on the couch in the bedroom. He must be exhausted because he had removed his jacket and lay there with his eyes shut.

As soon as he heard some noise, he immediately opened his eyes and looked at Victoria.

She had been staring at him, to begin with, so their eyes met as he glanced at her. Instantly, she turned her eyes in a different direction awkwardly.

However, Alaric wasn't fussed by that, and he merely asked calmly and serenely, "Are you done?"

She replied moodily, "Yes."

"I'll go and take a shower, then."

After he said that, he got up and entered the bathroom.

Half an hour went by before he finally exited the bathroom.

78%

He wiped his wet hair with a clean towel while walking out of the bathroom. Suddenly, he paused in his tracks and looked at Victoria, who

was currently fast asleep while leaning against the edge of the bed.

She had a pillow supporting her lower back, holding a book in her hands.

She had switched on the bedside lamp, and now she remained fast asleep against the edge of the bed. She had just flipped several pages of the book she was holding.

Alaric continued to stare at her for quite some time before finally flinging the towel in his hand aside and walking over to her.

He approached her and remained silent as he stared at her under the dim light. She had a pair of pretty eyes. However, she looked cold and detached when she wasn't smiling. It was quite apt to describe her as a frosty princess found in a winter wonderland.

Victoria looked exceptionally lively when she smiled. Her bright smile could light up any room.

Other than these two appealing qualities she possessed, he had also seen a more attractive side of her. Back then, the charm in her eyes was enough to drive him insane.

He couldn't help lifting his hand as he placed the tip of his finger on her brow ridge. Subsequently, he shifted his finger downward and touched her eyelid..

Immediately, he felt a warm sensation go straight into him from his fingertip.

Alaric pursed his lips slightly as his eyes turned as dark as coals.

Suddenly, he felt her eyelid move beneath his fingertip, and he immediately retracted his hand as if he had been zapped by electricity.

He pretended that nothing had happened.

However, he didn't get the chance to move away as Victoria had already opened her eyes by then.

At that point, their eyes met.

Speechless, Alaric remained in place.

Meanwhile, Victoria shot him an odd look. She likely hadn't realized he had touched her with the tip of his finger earlier on, so she asked, "What are you doing standing in front of me?"

Alaric spoke up leisurely and with composure, "Just checking if you were asleep."

At the mention of this, Victoria realized she had been fast asleep earlier

She had been reading while Alaric was in the bathroom, and she was waiting for him to come out so they could continue their negotiation.

However, she fell asleep without even realizing it after barely flipping a few pages of the book.

In the past, she had heard others mention that pregnancy would result in one becoming sleepier than usual, but she never believed that claim. Now,

it seemed that it was true.

As soon as Victoria thought of this, she coughed awkwardly. “Yeah, perhaps I was just too tired by everything this morning.”

After she finished saying that, she closed the book in her hands and asked, “Are you done showering?”

“Yes.” Alaric sounded moody, and he kept his dark eyes intently on her.

He was trying to guess her train of thought.

Her attitude seemed to be much better than this morning.

After further consideration, he tried to suppress himself, but in the end, he couldn't resist his urges any longer. “Are you-

Not mad at me anymore? That was what he intended to ask.

“Alaric, let's call a truce.”

Both of them spoke up at the same time. Victoria spoke succinctly and swiftly, **so** Alaric didn't get the chance to finish his sentence as she interrupted him.

“A truce?” He wasn't too sure what she meant.

Chapter 38

“Yeah. Let's stop fighting.”

Victoria nodded lightly. “Can we act like we used to before?”

Act like we used to? Alaric's heart almost leaped in joy due to her words.

He didn't even realize he was stuttering. "D-Do you mean..."

She glanced at him before lowering her eyes and uttering in a serious tone, "I thought about it carefully on the way home. Grandma's mood might seem stable now, and our minor changes might not pose an issue, but after all, the operation will be done in two weeks. We shouldn't be quarreling during this period in case she discovers some clues and risks affecting her health."

When he heard that, he realized something. "Do you mean..."

"Do you still not understand? It's a very critical period for Grandma now."

Chapter 38 It Doesn't Matter

We must cooperate with each other. Two weeks later, you are free to do whatever you want. Nobody and nothing can stop you then."

Victoria felt that she had expressed her idea very clearly. "You are clever. You should understand what I mean."

His lips twitched in response. She was right. How could he not understand her?

She wasn't proposing reconciliation with him nor was she no longer upset.

She only agreed to a truce for the sake of Griselda, but what could he possibly say? She was doing everything for the sake of his grandmother.

Alaric snickered sadly in his heart.

At the end of the day, he was just shooting himself in the foot.

“Okay,” he answered in a deep voice.

Seeing his current expression, Victoria wavered. She almost brought up the idea that she was going to keep that child with him, but on second thought, she decided against it.

Since Claudia already knew about her decision, she would have definitely told him about it. The reason he wasn't bringing it up could be a silent agreement.

At least he has a conscience. Victoria then lifted the blanket and said to him, “Now that we've come to an agreement, let's get some rest.”

After saying that, she suddenly thought of something. Quickly, she got out of bed, opened the cabinet, and looked at the bolster lying in the corner.

That bolster was initially placed between her and Alaric on the bed as their boundary for a long time. One day, however, it suddenly vanished, indicating that their relationship had taken a step further.

Now, however, it seemed that it was time for it to play its role again.

Victoria pulled it out and placed it in the middle of the bed.

When Alaric saw that, his expression darkened. What else did he expect of her?

From the moment she offered to call it a truce, he thought that their relationship could return to normal.

After she was done, Victoria turned around and noticed how Alaric was still standing on the spot with a twisted expression.

She was no longer bothered to read his mind at this point. “Are you not going to sleep? If that’s the case, I’ll go to sleep first. Turn off the lights when you’re ready to go to bed.”

Without waiting for his reply, she lay in bed, covered herself in the blanket, and shut her eyes in front of him.

Alaric was completely speechless by her actions.

Staring at the bolster in the middle of the bed, he sneered before walking over with a gloomy expression and laying down stiffly like a corpse.

Once the lights were switched off, the room plunged into darkness. At the same time, his senses were infinitely magnified.

Alaric breathed heavily, unable to feel the pull of sleep.

Before long, however, the sound of even breathing could be heard from the person lying next to him.

He couldn’t help turning over to look in Victoria’s direction in the dark. He stared at her for so long that he couldn’t even fathom what he was thinking.

After the couple agreed to reconcile, they no longer ignored each other at home.

As usual, after getting out of bed, Victoria washed up. Seeing Alaric getting

dressed, she even helped him with his tie.

There were dark circles under his eyes. While Victoria slept soundly beside him last night, he hardly slept a wink. It was only when the sun rose that he felt drowsy.

After falling into a slumber, he heard Victoria getting up beside him.

Since he had no intention of sleeping anymore, he decided to get up.

Due to the lack of sleep in his system coupled with her reaction that triggered his anger with nowhere to vent, he got dressed in a rough way.

He was even more impatient when he had to wear his tie.

At that moment, he didn't expect that Victoria would walk up to him and offer to help him.

"Allow me," she uttered softly.

At that, Alaric lowered his eyes and stared at her.

Victoria deliberately avoided his sharp gaze and added, "Bend over, or I can't do it properly."

Alaric's lips were pursed into a thin line. As if contemplating, he stood in the spot without bending over.

His actions made Victoria look him in the eye.

"Are you finally willing to look at me?" He smirked.

Victoria was at a loss for words. What's up with him? Didn't we have a good chat last night? What is he up to now?

Alaric didn't know what was going on with himself either. Recently, he started behaving strangely and became easily irritable. He wanted to see **her** but he didn't want to see her: he wanted her to take the initiative to she approached him.

“Don't be like this, Alaric. Didn't we agree to cooperate with each other for the next two weeks?”

Alaric frowned upon hearing that, took a step back, and pursed his lips.

“Forget it. You don't have to put up an act when there are no maids around us.”

With that, he strode off, leaving Victoria standing on the spot, dumbfounded. After a while, she sneered. He's being absolutely unreasonable!

Without waiting for him, she went downstairs to have breakfast while Alaric came down shortly after.

Due to the incident with his tie before, Victoria carried the anger in her heart and ignored him after noticing his presence. Watching him coming down the stairs, the maids hurriedly returned to their rooms as they were afraid of him.

They gathered at the door and gossiped with each other as they watched him striding over and taking a seat beside his wife.

His action surprised them.

“Has Mr. and Mrs. Cadogan reconciled?”

“They never ate breakfast together before this. I can’t believe Mr. Cadogan would take the initiative to sit beside her today.”

“Have you heard that a lover’s quarrel is quickly resolved? They’ve always been close. Besides, they even shared a bed every night. They’d make up eventually!”

On the other hand, Alaric sat beside Victoria with a long face.

As soon as he took a seat, she could sense the icy, cold aura he exuded.

Without having to turn her head, she could feel how reluctant he was as he sat next to her.

However, the discomfort she felt was quickly suppressed. Two weeks. I just have to endure him for two weeks.

After two weeks, she would be able to leave this place. All she had to do now was to endure the hardships for the sake of Griselda, her baby, and herself.

She mentally prepared herself before pouring a glass of milk for Alaric with a gentle expression. She even smiled at him when he looked at her.

“Good morning, honey.”

Alaric was rendered speechless as he clenched his teeth hard. It doesn’t matter to her, does it?

Chapter 39

On that day, Alaric finished his breakfast while looking displeased.

The maids couldn't see his face because he had his back toward them.

They merely assumed the two had made up based on their intimate interactions.

In the following days, Victoria didn't have to enter the company as she requested annual leave. She took the time to accompany Griselda every day in the nursing home.

Griselda's mood was obviously elevated after a few days,

Simultaneously, Victoria felt calm and reassured over this short period.

Things seemed to go according to her plan. Before she knew it, three to four days passed in the blink of an eye.

Chapter 39 Claudia's True Colors

Sometimes, when she was left alone, she would caress her belly.

To be frank, her mentality had undergone changes.

When Victoria first found out that she was pregnant, she was still quite confused about what to do with the child, but as time passed, she gradually felt connected to the child in her belly as if they shared the same body and heart. Thus, her love for the child grew.

Many times, she would even tell the baby secrets that she couldn't tell others.

This further brought Victoria closer to her child.

At first, things were going as expected.

Victoria thought she could accompany Griselda peacefully until the day of her operation, but as soon as her annual leave was used up and she was about to return to the company for work, Claudia called her once again and asked to meet her.

Since the previous incident, she had been hesitant to meet Claudia because she knew what the latter was up to.

At that thought, she rejected Claudia without hesitation.

378%

“Miss Johnson, I understand why you’d like to see me, but I’ve made my decision. I’m not going to change my mind no matter what, so we don’t need to meet again.”

Perhaps she had spoken too bluntly as Claudia went silent for a second before asking, “Are you sure nothing can change your mind?”

“Yes.”

“Victoria.” Claudia’s voice suddenly softened. “I remember that you owe me a favor, don’t you?”

Victoria’s gaze instantly turned cold in response.

Claudia continued, “What if I ask you to do me a favor now? Will you still reject me?”

Victoria bit her lower lip hard, her lashes trembling.

“You don’t need to answer me in a hurry. Perhaps, we can meet up first.”

After hanging up the phone, Victoria stood on the spot as her mind went blank.

It was not that she didn’t think about repaying Claudia her favor, but she intended to do it in another way.

As long as she needed help, Victoria was even willing to sacrifice her life for her. However, she never thought Claudia would use that as a condition during this time.

At a quiet cafe on Rodeo Street, Victoria noticed the ‘closed‘ sign in front of the door of the cafe as she was about to enter.

Just then, her phone rang.

“Victoria, push the door and come in. My friend owns this cafe. They aren’t open for business yet.”

Victoria hung up the phone blankly before pushing open the door.

As soon as she entered, she noticed Claudia waiting for her in the corner.

Claudia waved at her to indicate her seat.

Victoria walked over with steady steps and stopped in front of Claudia.

There was a man with a scar sitting next to Claudia. The man looked fierce, but when he saw her coming, he stood up straight away and spoke in a gentle voice.

“Hello, beautiful. You must be Claudia’s friend. Would you like to have a

drink?”

The man looked at Victoria with a hint of surprise in his eyes.

Without much thought, Victoria replied, “No, thanks.”

The man was taken aback by her refusal, but Claudia chimed in, “Carlo, give her a cup of warm milk.”

Carlo Jabba nodded neatly. “Sure. I’ll get it and leave you guys to do the talking.”

Before leaving, Carlo couldn’t help taking another glance at Victoria.

Claudia caught all his subtle actions, and once he left, she smiled at Victoria. “Come over and take a seat.”

Victoria glanced at her and took the seat opposite her.

Claudia judged her outfit as she uttered softly, “Carlo is a friend I met abroad. He’s an open-minded and honest guy. After returning to the country, he opened this cafe. Even though he isn’t very ambitious, he earns enough to get by. He’s into serious relationships and treats his girlfriend gently.”

She then paused for a while before saying tentatively, “If you have nowhere to go after divorcing Al, you can consider him.”

Victoria was speechless as she heard that.

She suddenly raised her head and blurted, “Miss Johnson, even though I owe you a favor, did I give you the right to decide for my marriage?”

Claudia was stunned by her response before she chuckled. “Of course not. Don’t get me wrong, Victoria. I’m not trying to decide your marriage. I just think my friend here is a great person.”

“Is that so? Then why don’t you consider him?” Victoria snapped.

Claudia’s smile faded.

Since when were they so close to each other?

Her true colors were revealed as time passed.

Frankly speaking, Victoria did not assume that Claudia would help her out sincerely. After all, they had Alaric stuck between them, but it was also true that Claudia once helped her out.

After a moment of silence, Claudia picked up the spoon and stirred the coffee in front of her while commenting, “I never expected you to be so aggressive to your savior, Miss Selwyn.”

Her tone was no longer gentle, and her voice was completely different now. It was crisp and clear now as she looked at Victoria with disdain.

Despite that, her current look made Victoria feel much at ease.

Following a chuckle, Victoria blurted, “Are you finally letting go of your act? Honestly, your true face is more pleasing to the eye. At least, I don’t find you insincere.”

“Insincere?” Claudia sneered. “I just think you’re not worthy of my kindness. I initially thought that you would be a nice lady despite not being smart,

but I can't believe you're such an ungrateful person.”

“Ungrateful?” Victoria rubbed her fingertips and narrowed her eyes in a judgmental expression. “I may be an ungrateful person in your eyes, but I never expect that your kindness and righteousness would lead you to kill.”

When Claudia heard Victoria's last two words, her expression changed entirely.

“What nonsense are you talking about? When did I kill someone?”

“Does that mean you won't threaten me to get an abortion just because I'm indebted to you?”

Claudia felt as if a cotton ball was stuffed into her mouth all of a sudden.

It took her a while to speak. “The child is like a time bomb. If you were in my shoes, there is no way you can accept it.”

After saying that, she glared at her. “Why do you want to keep the child when you're going to get a divorce? You could've remarried and carried another child. So, why insist on keeping this one? Do you think I have no idea about what you're thinking?”

Chapter 40

Victoria didn't even have to stand in her position to understand that it was unacceptable, but she was Victoria, not Claudia.

She could only consider the matters from her own perspective.

“What a pity. I'm not that great of a person nor am I willing to sacrifice. The

child is in my belly, so whether or not I want to keep them is my decision.

No one else can decide the life or death of my child except me.”

“You-”

“If you want me to return the favor, sure. I am willing to do anything you ask of me except this.”

Her child was her family. How could she let someone else decide on her behalf whether to keep the child or to have an abortion when she was reluctant to do that?

Chapter 40 Not Interested in Raising Someone’s Chi

“Are you really going to do whatever I say?”

“Yes, as long as it isn’t anything outrageous.”

Favors must be repaid, but if her demands were too high, then she shouldn’t even think about it.

Claudia started pondering about it.

In fact, before she came here, she had predicted that Victoria wouldn’t agree to her request easily.

Who was Alaric? He was the heir to the Cadogan Family. Whether it was his family background, character, or the way he presented himself, they were all top-notch.

In Claudia’s eyes, no one else in the world could compare to him.

Who wouldn't want a man like him? Who would be willing to give him up if they captured his heart?

What about Victoria? Her family went bankrupt, prompting her to hold on to Alaric like a lifeline. If she had become his real wife, then she would have been living in a rags-to-riches fantasy.

Had she been willing to give up on him, she wouldn't have gotten pregnant.

The child could be considered a token for Victoria to hold Alaric back. Thus, Claudia couldn't possibly allow that token to exist. Otherwise, it could possibly affect whether they would get a divorce eventually.

Now that Victoria wasn't willing to abort the child, Claudia had to use other means.

Moreover, the most important thing to do now was to calm Victoria down. spoke. "Sure. Aborting the child is indeed cruel. Even I can't bear to do that. In that case, let's sign an agreement."

"An agreement?"

As soon as the question slipped out of Victoria's tongue, Carlo served the cup of warm milk.

"Here's your milk, beautiful."

Claudia stopped talking before offering him a sweet smile. "Thanks, Carlo!"

Carlo winked at her. "You're welcome. It's my honor to treat two beautiful ladies to some drinks. Enjoy."

After that, he left once again without any inquiry into the content of their conversation. No wonder Claudia chose this place.

Acting as if she was being considerate; Claudia pushed the glass of milk in front of Victoria. “Since you can’t take any other drinks for now, have some warm milk.”

Victoria glanced at her and noticed that she was wearing her facade again.

“What? Are you afraid that I might have drugged the milk?” Claudia chuckled. “Don’t worry. If I wanted to do such a nasty thing, I wouldn’t have asked you out.”

Withdrawing her gaze, Victoria no longer wanted to continue that topic.

Instead, she changed the subject. “What were you saying about the agreement?”

Claudia smiled. “Seems like you can’t bear to stay any longer with me.”

“What? Don’t you want to get it over and done with?”

“Of course, I do.”

While saying that, Claudia took out a paper folder and handed it to Victoria.

“This is the agreement. Take a look.”

Victoria took it with a poker face.

Seeing her calm look, Claudia couldn’t help holding her breath. At this

point, Victoria didn't even seem to have any other better idea, but she could still appear so calm and collected. How on earth did she do that? All of a sudden, she recalled the scene where Victoria plunged into the river many years ago.

It was a risky act, but she jumped down without hesitation. Claudia, on the other hand, panicked and was unsure of what to do.

In her dreams, darkness penetrated her nervous system often, showing a clear contrast between herself and Victoria.

In front of others, Claudia was highly praised because she sacrificed herself to save Alaric.

Behind others, however, she was just a clown under Victoria's mask. The harder Victoria tried to save Alaric, the more despicable and shameless she appeared to be as she robbed the credit.

Outsiders all deemed her as pure, naive, and had a great personality, but in reality...

No. Stop thinking about it. Stop thinking about it.

The past was now in the past. Everyone knew that she was Alaric's savior now, and even Alaric himself thought so.

The only person who knew the truth was Victoria, who had lost her precious memory when she was diagnosed with a serious illness back then. She would never be able to get her memories back in this lifetime.

“I have a question about this agreement.”

Victoria’s cold and distant voice sounded, pulling Claudia’s sanity back.

She noticed how Victoria’s face was superimposed with the younger version of her face before they were separated.

In the past, her young face was delicate and bright, but now, Victoria looked a little cold. Her features had grown as she aged, making her look even more beautiful than before.

Claudia forced a smile.

“What problem?”

Victoria glanced at her before looking down at the agreement again.

Although the agreement seemed to be overlapped, it merely revolved around a few main points.

Firstly, she had to leave the country after the divorce and promise not to return within five years; secondly, she was not allowed to mention the child to Alaric, nor could she use the child as a token for self-pity; thirdly, she couldn’t engage in any intimacy with Alaric before their divorce; lastly, Claudia would offer her an amount of money, and if Victoria had to raise the child, Claudia was willing to undertake the obligation of supporting the child until he or she reached adulthood.

Under Claudia’s gaze, Victoria tapped the table with her fingertips lightly before asking, “Why can’t I mention the child to Alaric?”

Hearing that, Claudia widened her eyes. When she drafted the agreement, she had done it in a rush.

Nonetheless, Victoria wasn't dumb. It made sense that she would be doubtful of the agreement, but Claudia insisted on using the agreement to suppress her. Otherwise, Victoria could possibly make a slip of the tongue by mentioning the child in front of Alaric while they still lived together.

After much thought, Claudia decided to risk it.

Anyway, she had something on Victoria, so if the latter refused to sign the agreement, she was going to use other means that were up her sleeves.

In order to make Victoria believe her, Claudia had long prepared an answer to her question.

Looking into her eyes, Claudia uttered in a soft voice, "It's all for your sake."

Victoria looked at her judgmentally.

Claudia picked up the coffee cup and took a sip. With a look of disdain, she explained, "Since you two are childhood friends, I believe that friendship still stands between the two of you if not for love. Otherwise, he wouldn't have helped you, right? But he will live with me for the rest of his life soon. Your child isn't just going to be an obstacle for us, but he or she will also become a threat to the two of you. He seems to really care about

it, do you understand? Most importantly...”

She paused for a moment, then continued, “I worry that if you bring up the child too often, he might eventually ask for him or *her*. I’m not interested in raising someone else’s child, Victoria.”