

## Departure with a Belly Chapter 61

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After leaving the ward, Alaric held Victoria's hand before walking away. It took Victoria a great deal of effort to break free from his grasp.

"What are you doing, Alaric?"

With a deep gaze, he stared at her and replied, "We're going back first for today."

"Didn't you see Grandma's expression just now? She wants to leave the nursing home. She doesn't want to stay here." She furrowed her delicate eyebrows.

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After the incident earlier, she speculated that Griselda must be worried about causing trouble for her family if she was at home, so she could only stay in the nursing home. She wanted to go back, but she didn't dare.

Victoria was frustrated, having visited Griselda every weekend but failing

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to notice the older lady's underlying feelings. If I had known earlier, I would have brought her back home and taken care of her. Maybe she wouldn't have fainted before the surgery today.

“I know.” Alaric’s voice was deep. “But as you saw, she’s currently refusing to listen and angry at me.” Suddenly, he remembered something and added, “Not at you.”

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Hearing that, Victoria froze. Right. When Grandma uttered those angry words earlier, they were all directed at Alaric, but she has always been kind and polite to me. At this thought, she felt even more heartbroken because, despite having a bad mood, Griselda had to restrain her feelings when facing her.

“So, we’ll let her calm down for the night while we go back and pack things

1. up. We’ll come to pick her up tomorrow.”

She thought for a moment and realized that he was right. However, she

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was also worried that a long delay might increase Griselda’s stress from staying alone in that environment.

With that thought in mind, Victoria suggested, “Can’t we bring her back tonight?”

“Tonight?”

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“Yes. It’s actually still quite early now. We can go back and have the maids

clean up the room. Then, we can tell Grandma to expect us to pick her up in two hours. What do you think? I think two hours should be enough for her to calm down.”

At that, Alaric pondered for a moment and agreed with a nod. “Alright.” “Then, let’s go and tell Grandma right now.” As she said that, she excitedly turned around to inform Griselda about the plan.

After Victoria and Alaric left, Griselda had been sitting alone by the

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window, lost in thought while gazing at the moonlight. Suddenly, she heard familiar footsteps. Before she could react, Victoria had already stood in front of her and said joyfully, “Grandma, we’ll go back first to have the maids clean up the room. We’ll come to pick you up in two hours. Please wait for us here, okay?”

The moment she finished speaking, she turned around and left without paying attention to Griselda’s reaction. Before leaving, she instructed the caregivers to take good care of Griselda and then left the nursing home

with Alaric.

On the way back, she was filled with excitement. Since Griselda was coming home, she started thinking about how to decorate Griselda's room and kept asking Alaric various questions along the way.

Meanwhile, he calmly responded to all her questions. When they stopped at a red light, he glanced at her and saw her joyful profile, which made him think about their divorce. However, judging from her current look, it

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seemed like she had already put their divorce behind her.

"By the way, it might be inconvenient for Grandma to go up and down the stairs. How about we arrange for her to stay on the first floor?"

"Sure. You can call in advance to have someone clean up the room." He nodded.

"That's a good idea." After all, it'll take nearly an hour to get back home from here. At once, she made a phone call back home.

When Hector learned that Griselda was returning home, he immediately instructed the maids to tidy up the room.

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Although it was already nighttime, it didn't stop them from cleaning. The Cadogans had plenty of brand-new bedding and covers, and the maids

didn't have much work to do during the day. So even if the bedding was new, it had been aired out that day or the day before and was still in pristine condition.

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Victoria hung up the phone after giving her instructions, but at the same time, Alaric's phone started ringing again. The melodious ringtone echoed in the enclosed car, sounding somewhat abrupt.

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Initially, she had a smile on her lips, but when she heard the ringtone, she froze for a second, and the smile gradually faded from her face. Then, she leaned against the seat and turned her head to look out the window.

Apart from the ringing, there was no other sound inside the car. Alaric noticed the sudden change in the atmosphere as well and glanced at her from the corner of his eye. Then, he said, "Answer the call for me, Ms. Snowball."

At his request, Victoria hesitated for a moment, then declined. "You answer it yourself."

"I'm driving."

"You can pull over and answer it."

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Alaric chuckled at her words out of irritation. "Is it really that difficult for you to answer it for me?"

"No." Since things had come to this, she didn't care anymore and said directly, "But I don't feel like helping you."

Seeing her stubborn and domineering attitude, Alaric wasn't surprised.

There happened to be a temporary parking spot ahead, so he drove the car there: After stopping, he fixed his gaze on her for a moment and said, "If there is a past life, I must have owed you a lot for you to treat me like that."

After that, he took out his phone to check the caller ID. "It's my mom."

At these words, Victoria, who had been indifferent before, straightened up a bit and subconsciously said, "How could it be..."

The phone had been ringing for too long, so the ringing had automatically stopped.

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Just then, his gaze lingered on her fair and beautiful face as he asked in a deep voice, "Who did you think it was?"

"Well, you should call her back then." She turned her face away, avoiding the topic.

Without pursuing the matter further, he returned Kathryn's call.

Within seconds after he dialed the number, the call was immediately picked up. Since he had put the call on speaker, the voice echoed inside the car.

"Al, your father and I just landed, and we're on our way to the nursing home. How is your grandma? Has she had the surgery?"

"Not yet, Alaric briefly explained what had happened, then furrowed his brow. "Don't you think it's too late for you guys to come now?"

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"I'm sorry, Al. Your father and I have been extremely busy recently. When

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we knew that the surgery was pushed forward, we postponed our work so we could come home. We thought that with you and Victoria being with her, there wouldn't be any problems. But I was wrong this time. I won't make the same mistake again."

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Kathryn appeared strong and assertive to the outside world, but she was gentle toward her family. If someone didn't know her well, they would assume she had the same soft and gentle demeanor when faced with everyone.

The first time Victoria witnessed this stark contrast in the Cadogan Residence, she was quite surprised. The powerful and authoritative woman in public had turned into a docile little lamb in front of her family. Initially, she couldn't understand how a person could have two faces. However, when she witnessed Kathryn instantly calm down the irritable Emanuel, she understood right away.

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Kathryn was a smart person who cared deeply about her family. Her relationship with Emanuel was also excellent. In her understanding, apologizing to her husband, children, and elders wasn't about winning or losing. This was the mentality that Victoria admired.

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Unfortunately, she couldn't do that in front of Alaric. After all, she and Alaric were not a real couple.

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Alaric was indeed quickly won over by his mother's gentle words. "Alright. Victoria and I will bring her back home tonight. Don't bother going to the nursing home. Just come home."

"You're bringing your grandma back home?" Kathryn seemed somewhat surprised at this news and asked, "Is Victoria there with you?"

He didn't answer whether she was or not, but he just glanced at Victoria, signaling with his eyes. Since the call was on speaker, she could hear it herself.

So, Victoria called out to Kathryn, "Hi, Mom."

Hearing that, Kathryn immediately let out a gentle chuckle. "Oh, you're there too. You've worked hard taking care of Grandma."

"It's no big deal. Thank you, Mom, **for** your concern."

Although Kathryn didn't show the same kindness toward her as Griselda did, she still maintained the appropriate manners. She had never scolded her, and when she learned that they were getting married, she was only slightly surprised, saying, "I didn't expect you two to be together so soon. I thought it would take a long time for someone to understand his feelings." And then she agreed.

However, at that time, Victoria didn't quite understand the meaning of her words. What did she mean by understanding his feelings? She thought that Kathryn probably misunderstood that Alaric had feelings for her, which was why she said that. But because she and Alaric were only pretending to be married, she didn't dwell on it any further.

"Alright, since Grandma has you two to take care of her, your dad and I will be relieved, It's already late today, so we won't go there now to cause a disturbance. Let's have a meal together tomorrow."

"Okay." Victoria agreed.

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After that, Kathryn exchanged a few more words with Alaric before

hanging up the phone.

Both Alaric and Victoria were quiet on the way back. It wasn't until the car was close to its destination that she turned her head to the left. "You're going to be disappointed."

Caught off guard by her sudden statement, Alaric was confused.

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She then calmly said, "Since Grandma's surgery has been postponed, the divorce date will also be pushed back."

At her words, his hands gripping the steering wheel froze for a moment. He pressed his lips together and said in a bitter tone, "It wasn't supposed to be at this time anyway, according to the original plan."

Griselda's health condition was good, so the surgery was rescheduled half a month earlier, and their divorce date was also brought forward by half a

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month. Now that she couldn't undergo surgery, the date could only be

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pushed back, which didn't deviate much from his original plan. Besides, he had long prepared for various contingencies, considering Griselda's condition.

Victoria acknowledged with an 'Oh', and then asked, "Is that okay? How are you going to explain it to Claudia?"

"That's between me and her," he replied with a frown.

At this moment, a wry smile tugged on her lips. "True, you're right."

When the car arrived at its destination, before he could even park properly, she got out of the car and slammed the door shut with a loud thud, leaving him speechless.

Hector, who had heard that they were bringing Griselda back, came out happily to welcome them when he heard the noise. However, what he saw was Victoria walking past expressionlessly, followed by Alaric with a

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gloomy face. It took him a while to snap out of his daze, and he rubbed his forehead in confusion. "What's happening again?"

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Meanwhile, Victoria went straight to the room on the ground floor where Griselda would stay. The maids were efficient, as they had already changed the bedsheets after she made the phone call. Since the house was already cleaned on regular days, apart from changing the bedsheets, there was no need to do anything else.

"Mrs. Cadogan, the room for Old Mrs. Cadogan is almost done. Please have a look and let us know if there's anything else you'd like to arrange."

Victoria looked around and was quite satisfied. "Bring in some potted plants, change the curtains to a more elegant color, and add some soothing scented candles."

The maid nodded and went to fulfill the requests.

Over an hour later, the two of them set off to the nursing home to pick up

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Griselda.

During the two hours of waiting, as her grandson and granddaughter-in-law told her that they were coming to take her home, Griselda's emotions were a mix of joy and complexity.

She was joyful because she could finally leave the nursing home, but it was complex because going back home seemed to be causing trouble for them due to her current condition. After all, no matter how well-prepared the house was, **it** was not a nursing home, and they would undoubtedly devote more attention to taking care of her.

However, before she could dwell on it for long, she heard the voice of a caregiver. "Old Mrs. Cadogan, Mr. and Mrs. Cadogan are here to pick you up."

Upon hearing that, Griselda became slightly nervous.

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On the contrary, the two caregivers were very happy, with smiles on their

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faces as they said, "We've packed up your belongings for you, Old Mrs. Cadogan." Griselda didn't have much, and everything was packed into two suitcases.

Worried, she wanted to speak up but was interrupted as Victoria and Alaric walked in through the door. "Grandma?"

Seeing that the caregivers had already packed the luggage, Victoria instinctively said to Alaric, "Go and carry Grandma's luggage."

Alaric raised an eyebrow but didn't refuse. He walked over and took the luggage in his hands.

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Meanwhile, she approached the wheelchair. “Grandma, the room you’ll be staying in has been cleaned up by the maids. You can rest once we get there. Did you take a shower just now after we left?”

Griselda shook her head, for she was too anxious to even take a shower.

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“It’s alright. We’ll shower you once we’re back home,” Victoria said, not giving Griselda a chance to think about anything else. She pushed the wheelchair and walked outside, signaling Alaric with her eyes.

While standing in place, Alaric looked at her series of actions, and he couldn’t help but smile before he picked up the luggage and followed.

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Amidst the night, Griselda and Victoria sat in the backseat of the car.

Although it was late and it was time for Griselda to rest, her gaze was lively as she looked out at the receding city scenery.

From the side, Victoria saw the anticipation on her face. Indeed, no matter how luxurious the nursing home is, staying there for a long time will eventually make her fearful and bored.

At this thought, she held Griselda’s arm and gently leaned on her shoulder before whispering, “I’ll take you to the mall in a few days.”

Griselda was pleasantly surprised. “Can I?”

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“We’ll ask the doctor beforehand, but going for one or two hours should be

fine.”

Griselda didn't say anything more, but everyone could feel her mood improving. With that, the atmosphere in the car became much better.

Victoria originally thought that the pleasant atmosphere could last for a while, but little did she know that as the car approached the gate of the Cadogan Residence, she saw a familiar and slender figure from a distance.

Even in the middle of the night, that person insisted on wearing a white dress, standing at the gate while communicating with the security guard. Then it seemed like the security guard noticed something and pointed in their direction. Following his finger, the slender figure turned around and looked over.

At this moment, the car's headlights shone on Claudia's beautiful face, making her features clearly visible.

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When Victoria thought of Griselda beside her, her heart skipped a beat.

“Who is that young girl? She looks... quite familiar.”

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In that instant, Victoria felt her heart skip a beat, and she looked at Alaric because she had no idea how to respond to Griselda's question.

After all, they had a good view of Claudia from the backseats, and he had seen her, too, when he was behind the wheel. In addition, she was the

woman he loved, so it was natural for him to take note of her presence.

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After that, he slowed the car down and stopped at the villa's entrance.

When the vehicle pulled over, Claudia grabbed her purse, walked to the passenger seat, and knocked on the window. Then, when the car window rolled down, she smiled softly and said, "You're back, Al. How is Grandma? I'm sorry. I know you told me not to worry about her, but I still want to come and check for myself." After saying that, she casually glanced at the back of the car. Since she didn't see Victoria in the passenger seat, she knew Victoria would be in the back seat.

At that moment, Claudia thought Alaric had reserved the passenger seat

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for her, and she was overjoyed. However, she noticed that there were two people in the back; one was Victoria, and the other was... As soon as

Claudia saw who it was, her expression changed drastically. Old Mrs. Cadogan?! Why is she here? Suddenly, her intention to flaunt Victoria over

Alaric's claim vanished. The smile on Claudia's face stiffened, and she wondered if Griselda would misunderstand the words she had just said.

Will it affect my relationship with Al?

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While Claudia was perplexed, Griselda was staring *at* her with confusion in her eyes.

“Don’t you remember her, Grandma? She is Claudia, the one *who saved* Alaric when he was young. She *is his* lifesaver,” Victoria explained calmly.

When Griselda heard that, she *said*, “*It’s you, and you’ve* grown so much. *Please accept* my apologies for not recognizing *you* sooner.” As soon as

*Claudia* was, *Griselda* treated her with courtesy since she

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On the other hand, Claudia shook her head and smiled. “It’s fine, Grandma. How will I get angry because of such a trivial matter? Speaking of which, I should be the one to blame. After all, I have not visited you for a long time due to my busy schedule. I hope you won’t treat me as a stranger because of that.”

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“I did ask Victoria before about your condition. Never would I think that we’ll be in touch so quickly.”

After hearing that, Claudia glanced at Victoria. Before she could say anything, Alaric raised his chin and said, “Get in the car and talk.”

The weather was cold then, and she only wore a dress. Her face was pale as she stood in the cold wind, looking pitiful.

“It’s late, so I won’t be going in. After all, it would be inconvenient for me to do so.” Claudia smiled and shook her head. The tip of her nose was bright red from the coldness. “Moreover, I came here because I heard about

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Grandma's surgery. Since she is fine, I can go home with ease now."

Ultimately, she didn't get in the car and instead braved the bitter weather while standing outside.

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When Victoria heard that, she looked thoughtfully at Claudia's white dress. Since discovering Claudia's true identity, she knew it was no coincidence that she would be dressed in this manner and be standing there. She wondered if Claudia had lost her cool when Alaric wouldn't want to divorce then, so Claudia came here in the middle of the night without giving it a second thought. However, Claudia had never expected to encounter Griselda. As Victoria observed Claudia leaning against the car window and speaking those intimate words to him, she became too apathetic to care about them. All she wished was that Griselda wouldn't be affected by this.

At that moment, Victoria knew Alaric would not leave Claudia alone in the cold. Moreover, Victoria was also worried that he would accidentally spill the beans. So, she took the initiative and said, "It's not too late. Hurry up

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and get in the car. Since Grandma has returned in time, you can stay here and talk to her for a while. I'll let the driver send you home later." She invited Claudia with a calm voice.

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When Claudia heard that, she looked at Victoria, seemingly surprised that she would say something like this. However, Claudia soon knew the reason and nodded. "Thank you, Victoria." After that, she walked over and sat with them.

They had no problem sitting in the back since they were all skinny. In addition, Victoria had been sitting so close to Griselda that there was a vast empty seat off the side.

After Claudia entered the car, she greeted Griselda with enthusiasm. Meanwhile, Victoria breathed a sigh of relief when she saw that Claudia hadn't gone for the passenger seat. Thank God she is smart enough, she thought.

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"Thank you for coming over to check up on me, Claudia. You must be tired." Griselda was polite with her, and the two began to murmur.

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After some time, the car drove into the villa and stopped in the garage. Then, the servants grabbed out the wheelchair that they prepared beforehand. When the car door was opened, Alaric carried Griselda and carefully put her in the wheelchair.

When Claudia exited the car, she noticed Victoria approaching Griselda and pushing the wheelchair for her. Seeing the trio standing together like

a happy family, Claudia gripped her dress tightly. However, she soon thought of something and smiled again as she followed them.

On the other hand, Hector was elated to learn Griselda had returned. So, when he heard some noises from the front door, he immediately led the servants to greet them. However, they were shocked when they saw the three of them, plus Claudia, who hadn't been invited. When they saw that, all the servants exchanged instant glances, and because they worked for

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a wealthy family, they quickly suppressed their emotions when Griselda approached them.

"Welcome home, Old Mrs. Cadogan!" Everyone was excited, and they even prepared a show for her.

Before her admission to the nursing home, Griselda had seen various national and international performances. After a while, she became bored at the nursing home, so she was interested in the show the servants had prepared for her.

As Victoria stood beside Griselda and saw the excitement on her face, she couldn't help but smile.

On the other hand, Alaric watched the scene and slowly blinked. Then, he smiled and whispered to her, "Are you the one who set this up?"

After hearing that, she subconsciously shook her head and replied, "No. It

must be Hector who set this up.”

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He clicked his tongue when he heard that. Seeing his grandmother in such a good mood also put him in a cheerful mood. “He is quite a considerate man.”

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“Of course. Otherwise, how will he become the Cadogan Family’s butler?”

When he heard that, he smiled silently to express how he felt.

In the meantime, Claudia deliberately kept her distance from Alaric since she didn’t want to reveal their relationship to Griselda. However, she could overhear what he and Victoria were saying even as she stood behind them. They complement each other well and look stunning in their matching dark outfits. It’s as if they’re a perfect match, while I’m just an outsider standing here, unsure of what to do. At that moment, a glint of viciousness flashed across her eyes as she bit her lips.

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After the show ended, everyone went inside the house. Then, Hector ordered the chef to make some meals that adhered strictly to Griselda’s health requirements. However, since it was getting late, she ate only a few

bites before setting down her silverware.

“Thank you, everyone. I’m thrilled today,” Griselda said. Afterward, she went to clean herself. Initially, Victoria wanted to help, but Griselda gently patted her hands and said, “You don’t have to help me. I can wash myself. After all, I can still walk.”

Before Victoria could say anything, Griselda had already turned her head to Claudia and said, “It’s getting late, Claudia. Why don’t you stay here for the night? I’ll let Victoria ask the servants to clean up a room for you.”

At that moment, Claudia was eating absent-mindedly before Griselda spoke to her. When she heard Griselda’s words, she immediately shook her head and said, “It’s fine, Old Mrs. Cadogan: It’s inappropriate for me to

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stay here.”

“Why not?” Griselda asked. “We have many guest rooms in our house. Plus, it won’t be a headache to clean it. You are our savior. It’s only right that we let you stay the night.”

Given what Griselda has said, it would be rude for Claudia to continue declining her invitation. Moreover, Claudia also wanted to stay for the night. After all, she would then be able to get closer to Alaric.

Before Claudia could say anything, Victoria smiled and said softly, “Mr. Bowen, can you please find someone to clean up a room for Miss Johnson.”

“Yes, Mrs. Cadogan.” Hector nodded in head sulkily.

Throughout the conversation, Alaric was quiet as he sat in his seat. Soon, the others left and returned to their stations, leaving the masters alone.

The few servants who stayed behind sensed something weird and

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scurried off. When no one was around them, Claudia glanced at Victoria before looking at him and asked quietly, “Would it be bad if I stay for the night, Al? I—I think I should get going.”

On the other hand, Victoria observed Claudia still seated despite her declaration that she was leaving.

“It’s fine. You can stay here for a night,” Alaric replied with a faint expression.

“Then...” Claudia turned her gaze to Victoria. “Can I stay for the night, Victoria? Will you be unhappy about it?”

When Victoria heard that, she was at a loss for words. After all, she had never expected to be involved in this matter. Why did she ask for my permission when she had already asked him? She knows I can’t say anything, yet she still wants to act eccentric. Thinking about **it**, she smiled and acted generous. “Of course not. I’m happy that you are staying.” Then,

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she cocked an eyebrow and asked, “Do I need to swap places for the sake of you two?”

When Alaric heard her words, he frowned deeply and looked at Victoria.

In the meantime, Claudia was baffled by her words. After some time, she asked dryly, “W—What do you mean by that?”

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Victoria tugged her hair behind her ear and looked relaxed. “I meant what I said. Think about it, Miss Johnson. I’m sure you’ll understand.” Then, she stood up from her seat and didn’t want to say anything more. “Call me if you need anything. I’ll try my best to help you.” After saying that, she walked away.

As Alaric watched her leave, a cold aura emanated from him. Next to him, Claudia sat with a puzzled expression; after all, she hadn’t anticipated Victoria’s statement. Initially, she wanted to provoke Victoria, but she never thought Victoria would say it aloud to his face!

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After that, Claudia looked at him with a sad face. “Did I say something wrong, Al? I’m sorry. I didn’t know that she would be angry. I think I’ll just go home.” As she spoke, she stood up and rushed out.

As she hurried by, he reached out and tugged on her arm. “Just stay. You don’t have to care about her words,” he said with a frown.

“But-”

Suddenly, Hector rushed over and cut her off. “Sir, Miss Johnson’s room is

ready.”

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Huh? Is my room already done? They just left minutes ago. How could they possibly have cleaned it so fast? Claudia looked at the butler in shock. She wondered if he had cleaned the room thoroughly for her.

“Okay.” However, Alaric wasn’t in the mood to notice it. Instead, he looked at her and said, “Hector will lead you to your room. Get some rest.” Then, he walked in the direction where Victoria had left.

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“Al...”

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However, he did not hear her calling out to him, and as he left, he turned his back on her.

As Claudia stood on the spot, she was upset. She hated the fact that Victoria had said those strange words. However, Hector’s cold voice sounded before she could think any further. “Shall I take you to your room, Miss Johnson?”

Although she didn’t like his attitude, she couldn’t do anything. Thus, she forced a smile on her face and said, “Thank you, Mr. Bowen.”

However, the butler ignored her words and walked away with a stoic expression. She could only suppress her dissatisfaction and quickly chased after him.

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When Victoria went to her room, she closed the door and entered the bathroom. She propped her hands on the sink and looked into the mirror, seeing herself in the reflection. After uttering those words, she was pleased to see Claudia's bewildered expression and Alaric's distressed face. As expected, one can only be defeated in their own way, she thought. Since she dares to say weird things to me, I can do the same. I don't need to get angry because of her. I can fight back using her way. After all, everyone knew how to act pitifully.

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When she was deep in thought, someone opened the bathroom door. She was startled and turned to see Alaric enter the bathroom. Since he was tall, the bathroom became narrow as soon as he stepped inside. Her frown deepened as soon as she laid eyes on him.

"What do you mean by that earlier statement of yours?" he asked coldly, looking at her with a darkened gaze.

Victoria shrugged in response and replied, "I'm trying to help you guys.

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What else am I doing?"

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After hearing that, Alaric frowned even deeper and emitted an even more

intimidating aura.

Meanwhile, she didn't want to be in the same room as him, so she planned to leave. However, she couldn't get out since he was blocking the door. "Please move," she said.

Alaric didn't budge and just stood there like a rock. Victoria frowned and squeezed through the gap on the left side. Just as she was about to pass through, he leaned toward the left side and blocked her way.

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She was rendered speechless by his conduct. Hence, she silently looked at him and walked over to the other side. However, he also blocked the other side and had no intention of letting her exit the bathroom. After a while, she was fed up with him, so she raised her head and glared at him. "What exactly do you want? If you have nothing to do, you can just find your-"

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Before she could finish her words, Alaric grabbed her shoulders and pinned her against the cold bathroom walls.

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Even if Victoria had worn a thick coat, she could still feel the coldness from the wall due to the cold weather. In addition, Alaric's hands were firmly and firmly gripping her shoulders, which caused her to remain immobile in that position.

She struggled to free herself from his grip, but her efforts were futile, and she soon found herself out of breath. Hence, she raised her head, glared

at Alaric while giving him a cold smirk, and said, "What are you doing? Are you angry that I have said your thoughts aloud?"

On the other hand, Alaric looked at Victoria with a grim expression. The woman before him had bright eyes that seemed to glow under the lights. At that moment, stars seemed to fill her eyes, which looked mesmerizing. Other than that, she had a high nose and rosy lips. Although her lips were soft and sweet, her words were so hurtful that he wanted to silence her and forbid her from ever speaking again. As he thought about it, he abruptly bent over and kissed her before she could say anything else. Then, when she saw that he was getting closer to her, she felt uneasy about the situation. "You-" As soon as she spoke her first word, she felt a familiar pair of lips on hers.

Before Claudia had intervened in their lives, Victoria had never rejected Alaric's kisses. After all, she loved him and longed for his touch. Although she had never refused him, she was shy when he first kissed her. Moreover, his kisses were intimidating, the same as his personality. Every time they kissed, the overwhelming sensation would make her snap back to her senses only when it was done. The same thing happened this time, perhaps because he was angry because his kiss was so intense. He grabbed her cheeks and pressed down on them, causing her cheeks to become misshapen. She could feel his icy presence all around her, and their kiss seemed to express his frustration.

After that, she shoved him away with all her strength and smacked him across the face. His head jerked to the side, and an imprint of a hand

appeared on the side of his face. Additionally, his lips were slightly red,

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which gave his initially charming face a sinister appearance. After some time, he turned his head back and stared at her intently.

Noticing his gaze, Victoria glared at Alaric while wiping her lips. Then, she straightened her clothes and walked out of the bathroom. As she turned to leave, he grabbed her arm and pulled her back. Suddenly, her usually calm and composed demeanor was being riled up. "Are you crazy, Alaric? If you want sex, you should find your true love and don't touch me."

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At that moment, a glint flashed across his eyes when he heard that. So, he grabbed her chin firmly and said, "What did you say? Repeat what you just said."

She raised her head and looked at him. "If you want to have sex, go and find someone else. Don't try to use me as a tool." She stared into his eyes and emphasized each of her words.

After hearing her words, he was enraged.

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However, Victoria curled her lips and said, "Do I need to remind you of the last time you spent the night out with Claudia? Don't worry. Since you helped me when my family went bankrupt, I will cover up for you two.

Grandma won't know any of this. How about that?"

“What do you mean by spending the night outside with her?” After saying that, Alaric narrowed his eyes. “Have you misunderstood something?”

“Misunderstood?” How could I possibly misinterpret something I have witnessed with my own eyes?

When he looked at her and realized she was upset because of a misunderstanding between him and Claudia, he felt a weight lifted from his shoulders. Soon, his facial expression softened, and he explained with pursed lips, “It’s not what you think. That night-”

However, Victoria quickly cut Alaric off before he could explain what happened. “I have no interest in hearing what happened that night. You

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don’t have to tell me.” Does he think that he can fool me because I wasn’t there? Saying that he had never spent the night with Claudia? she thought. Unfortunately, she was by the scene and saw Claudia leaving with him. He also didn’t come home for the whole night and was even late to the nursing home the next day. She didn’t know what he did last night but was too lazy to care about it. After everything had happened, she felt that she was starting to lose herself. Although she had loved him for many years, she didn’t want to be a fool who only cared about love. When she recalled the moment she scolded him, she promised never to go through the same experience again. It was too scary for her since she didn’t feel

like herself.

After she calmed down, her emotions vanished. As she looked at him, she looked calm and composed.

On the other hand, Alaric had also sensed the changes in Victoria. He could see the calm and indifference in her. Looking at her, he felt a pang in his heart, seemingly as if a knife had stabbed him. After some time, he

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laughed sarcastically and said, "I'm not going to have sex with anyone else when I'm not done divorcing you. Do you see me as such a lowlife person?"

In the meantime, she had completely calmed down. When she heard his words, she remained calm and asked, "Does it matter what kind of person you are to me?"

"Does it not matter?" he asked as he squinted his eyes.

"Who knows?" Victoria smiled faintly. Then, she gently wiped the blood off Alaric's lips. Her touch was as soft as a feather as her fingers gently grazed his lips. "I'm sorry. Does it hurt? Please put some medicine on your lips afterward. As for you and Claudia... You can still ask **for** my help if needed. I will be willing to play along."

"Are

you sure you will hold on to this matter?" He grabbed her wrists and gritted his teeth as he spoke,

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## Chapter 65 Don't Touch Me

"Let go of me," she said faintly.

Instead of letting go, Alaric gripped Victoria's hand even tighter.

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After that, she frowned and had a different reaction than before. "It hurts."

After saying that, she struggled slightly. Seeing that she couldn't free herself from his grip, she gave up and stood there, allowing him to grab her hand. Then, she lowered her eyes and said nothing.

Soon after, there was complete silence in the bathroom. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door, but they ignored it. Meanwhile, Alaric was too angry to answer the door. On the other hand, the person by the door knocked again when being ignored.

"What is it?" he asked with annoyance and impatience.

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Immediately, the sound died down by the door. After some time, Claudia's soft voice sounded. "I-It's me..."

## Chapter 65 Don't Touch Me

When Alaric heard her voice, he frowned.

After seeing his reaction, Victoria chuckled and looked at him. "Come on, let go of me. If you stay here any longer, your dear Claudia will be worried about you," she said as she gently swayed their linked hands.

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## Chapter 66 What Are You Guys Doing?

## Chapter 66

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Alaric frowned when he heard her words. At that moment, a cold glint flashed across his eyes as he gave off an intimidating aura. Just as Victoria thought he would do something to her, the latter turned around and left. Victoria breathed a sigh of relief and smiled mockingly at the same time.

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On the other hand, Claudia gripped her fingers nervously as she waited by the door. If I heard it correctly, Alaric seems to be irritated. It was as if he was being interrupted while doing something important. Claudia felt unsettled by his reaction. Moreover, she started panicking when Alaric didn't open the door after stating who she was.

What is he doing there? Why isn't he opening the door? Claudia was in a nerve-racking mess. When the door finally opened, she immediately raised her head and eyed Alaric up and down.

His clothes are still the same as before. Although he hasn't taken off his

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jacket, it seems wrinkly.

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Claudia soon reassured herself that having a bit of wrinkle on one's clothes was normal. Then, just as she raised her head and looked at Alaric, she noticed a small slit on his lips. At that moment, she felt her blood run

cold. Since the color of the cut was light, she wouldn't have noticed it if she hadn't been close to him.

Alaric didn't notice her odd expression and asked faintly, "Why are you here?"

At that moment, Claudia snapped back to her senses and smiled awkwardly. "I don't have any suitable clothes. I was thinking about asking Victoria to lend me some."

She is here to ask for clothes? Alaric frowned and asked, "Didn't the

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Looking at her reaction, Alaric pursed his lips and seemed to be unhappy.

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Sensing that Alaric would get mad, Claudia said, "Don't be angry, Al. It's normal that they didn't prepare any clothes for me beforehand since this was my first time staying over. I'll just borrow some clothes from Victoria if she is willing to."

As Alaric heard her words, he frowned and recalled how fierce she was. I don't think she will be willing to do it. Even if she lends Claudia some clothes, she will surely provoke me once Claudia leaves, he thought.

As he thought about what to do, he heard Victoria's voice from behind. "I'd be happy to oblige. Come on in."

In that split second, Alaric turned his head around.

Victoria stood there and smiled at Claudia. She had already tidied herself, combed her hair, and straightened her clothes. She looked the same as

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before. However, as a woman, Claudia could tell that Victoria had lipstick on before going up the stairs. Currently, her lip was bare, and there was a cut on Alaric's lips...

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It took much force from Claudia to remain smiling as she followed Victoria into the room.

"Follow me."

As Claudia entered the room, she began looking around. The bedroom was huge and the bathroom was the size of a standard bedroom. Since Claudia came from a wealthy family, she wasn't too surprised by the bedroom's layout. However, she was envious when she saw the wardrobe that covered almost half of the bedroom which was filled with designer clothes, bags, and jewelry.

Victoria stopped at a section and said to Claudia, "Look around. Feel free to take anything you like. You can also take the clothes you want to wear tomorrow."

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Since they were almost the same height and size, Victoria wasn't worried that her clothes wouldn't fit Claudia.

At this moment, they were the only two in the wardrobe. Claudia looked at Victoria and didn't seem to be in a rush to choose her clothes. Seeing that she kept staring, Victoria knew she wanted to speak with her. However, she would wait until Claudia decided to speak up.

As expected, Claudia couldn't wait any longer after a few seconds. "You broke our promise, Victoria," she said in a low voice.

Victoria froze briefly before asking, "When did I ever do that?"

"You had lipstick on before you went upstairs," replied Claudia as she stared at Victoria's lips intently.

Hearing her words, Victoria knew what Claudia was implying. Things did happen since her lipstick was gone, but she didn't feel the need to deny it.

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"That means you broke our promise, Victoria. You are a liar."

"No." Victoria shook her head. "I'm a trustworthy person. If it weren't for Grandma, I wouldn't even want to be near him."

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Her words riled Claudia up. Immediately, Claudia smirked coldly and said,

"You're saying that Al is the one who wants to be near you?"

Victoria didn't say anything.

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“Stop joking. There is no way he would do such a thing.” After all, how could Alaric still be with Victoria after she returned?

Victoria shrugged in response and said, “You wouldn’t be standing here right now if I decided to be a liar, Miss Johnson. All I have to do is tell Grandma the truth.”

Claudia’s expression changed drastically when she heard Griselda being mentioned.

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“Why did she suddenly decide to postpone the surgery? Did you say anything to her?” Claudia questioned.

She had her suspicions about Victoria. She felt that Victoria must have said something to Griselda since the latter had decided to delay the surgery when nothing was wrong.

Victoria’s expression turned cold. “I wish her well more than anyone else.”

Claudia was baffled by how serious Victoria was, but she then let out a cold snort and thought, Stop pretending to be nice to Old Mrs. Cadogan. I don’t trust that you would treat that old hag nicely if it weren’t for Alaric.

Some things needed to be broken to change. Victoria hated the fact that Claudia kept bugging her, so she put it bluntly and said, “If you don’t trust me, we can forget about the promise.”

Forget about the promise? No way! I won’t let that happen!

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Claudia suppressed her anger and put up a smile. "Please don't be mad at me, Victoria. I was getting kind of worked up because I misunderstood you. To be honest, I believe you. Otherwise, I wouldn't have let you repay my gratitude. I just love Alaric too much and was anxious. That is why I would say such unreasonable things. Don't worry. I won't say it ever again." Then, she took a few steps forward, seemingly trying to grab Victoria's hand.

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Victoria took a few steps back and avoided her touch.

At this moment, Alaric's cold voice sounded outside the wardrobe. "What are you guys doing?"

Immediately, Claudia's expression changed, and she immediately replied, "We are choosing outfits. We'll be out in a second." Then, she stopped trying to get close to Victoria and simply chose some clothes before leaving.

When she left the wardrobe, Alaric looked at her and said, "Are you done

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picking the clothes?"

Claudia smiled at him and replied, "Yes, I've got it. I'll be heading back to my room."

Alaric nodded at her response.

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Since they were at the Cadogan Residence, Alaric didn't accompany her to avoid misunderstanding. On the other hand, Claudia also left the scene quickly. After she had left, Victoria walked out of the wardrobe. Alaric pursed his lips and looked at her with a complicated expression.

"What were you guys talking about in there?" he asked.

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"It's none of your business." Victoria glanced at him.

Hearing her words, Alaric went silent.

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"Why do you need to ask about what happened when we were just in there for about three minutes? Are you afraid that I will hurt her?" Victoria asked with amusement.

"That's not what I meant." Alaric frowned, looking clearly upset.

"What is it then? Do I need to tell you everything about our girl talks?"

Hearing her words, Alaric could tell that Victoria had no intention of acting nice toward him. She had changed so much. Other than playing pretend in front of Griselda, she treated him like a stranger. As Alaric noticed this

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Chapter 67 Morning Sickness

In the meantime, seeing that he was silent, Victoria took her clothes and went to wash herself. After that, she climbed into the bed and went to

sleep. During the whole process, she ignored Alaric, seemingly as if he was invisible. Angered by the situation, he went to the bathroom and washed himself. Then, he lay on the bed with a grumpy face.

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Although the duo slept together, there was a long-shaped pillow in between them. It was as if they lay in separate beds.

Since Victoria had not slept well the last night, she immediately fell asleep as soon as she lay down. Once she cleared her mind, she had a good sleep. When she woke up, Alaric was already gone. Subsequently, she looked at the time and frowned when she saw it was already past 8.00AM -she had overslept. She quickly got out of bed and tidied herself before going downstairs.

When she walked down the stairs, she realized everyone was already sitting at the table and eating. As she approached them, she suddenly

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stopped in her tracks. She saw Claudia sitting beside Griselda and taking care of her. At that moment, she knew Claudia was trying to get on Griselda's good side.

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Although Victoria didn't like what Claudia was doing, she knew that Alaric would soon divorce her and Claudia would be Griselda's granddaughter-in-law. Thus, she felt relieved.

As she walked toward the table, Griselda was the first to notice her. She waved her hands and said, "You're up, Victoria. You must be starving, right? Come and have some breakfast."

The servants quickly placed the utensils before Victoria as she sat down. Victoria smiled at Griselda and greeted her. "Good morning, Grandma. How was last night's sleep?"

"I didn't sleep well. It might be due to the fact that I was overly excited

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since I just came back home," Griselda sighed.

Hearing her words, Victoria looked at her worriedly.

"Well... You should get some rest after breakfast, Grandma," she said.

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"Don't worry. I'm fine. I'm very wide awake now, but I'll go to sleep once I'm tired." Griselda comforted her.

At this moment, the servant had placed Victoria's breakfast on the table.

Griselda noticed it and said, "Let's eat first."

"Okay." Victoria nodded.

Claudia was upset that Griselda had a better attitude toward Victoria. Still, she could do nothing except continue taking care of her. "Try more of this, Grandma. It's good for your digestion," she said.

"Thank you, Claudia." Griselda treated her with courtesy. Although she was

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## Chapter 67 Morning Sickness

also kind toward Claudia, she didn't act as naturally as she was when being around Victoria.

During the whole conversation, Alaric sat there with a stoic expression. He had dark circles under his eyes due to lack of sleep and had a grumpy face. Ever since Victoria came downstairs, he had his eyes glued on her. However, Victoria seemed to have ignored him and acted as if he was invisible. She had never once looked at him. Because of that, Alaric pursed his lips in frustration.

Just as Victoria grabbed a glass of milk and was about to drink it, a servant placed a bowl of fish fumet in front of her. "Drink this, Mrs. Cadogan."

It was rare for Victoria to drink soup in the morning. She mostly drank juice or milk since she wanted to keep her body in perfect shape. Thus, the chefs would always count the calories when making her meals. However, Victoria wasn't surprised when she saw the soup being brought to her.

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After all, the chefs would change the menu because of Griselda's arrival. Nevertheless, she knew that this soup wasn't her serving. She supposed

that Griselda had wanted her to drink it.

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As expected, just as she was dazed, Griselda smiled and said, "Drink some soup. You are too skinny."

Victoria stared at the soup for a moment before nodding. "Thank you, Grandma."

There shouldn't be a problem if I eat this on some occasions. If I gain weight from it, then so be it. Plus, I'm pregnant now. I shouldn't be dieting like before. I need to eat more nutritious food. Thinking about it, Victoria grabbed a spoon and scooped the soup.

Just as she was going to drink it, she felt nauseous. At that moment, her expression changed drastically. Before others could react, she threw away the spoon and sprinted away as she covered her mouth.

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## Chapter 67 Morning Sickness

Everyone was shocked by her sudden actions and stood there unmoving. Alaric was the first to react and quickly chased after Victoria with a grim expression. The next person to respond was Griselda.

"What's wrong? Is she unwell?" Her voice snapped the others back from their trance. They quickly rushed over while pushing Griselda with them. Soon, Claudia was the only one left at the dining table. She held the bowl unmoving as she stood there, not even noticing that her spoon had fallen into the bowl and splashed out the soup. Her face was as pale as a ghost,

and there was only one thought in her mind.

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Did Victoria just experience morning sickness? It should be! Otherwise, she wouldn't have been nauseous when she smelled the meat. What should I do? No one knows she is pregnant, and I doubt Victoria will tell them. Old Mrs. Cadogan would have learned by now if she had intended to say anything. However... Old Mrs. Cadogan is a woman. Not only that, but she is also a woman who has experienced childbirth. What if she notices

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something?

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Thinking about it, Claudia panicked. She put down the bowl and quickly chased after them.

There was a bathroom on the first floor. When Victoria dashed into the bathroom, she immediately retched by the sink. Although her stomach was churning, she didn't throw up anything since she had just woken up. Not to mention, she didn't eat much last night. Still, she couldn't stop the nauseous feeling. After some time, she began to sweat, and her face was pale.

While in misery, she felt a pair of hands calming her down, soothing her back.

Tears brimmed Victoria's eyes as she retched. After a few minutes, the nauseous feeling was gone. However, she had lost all strength. Her limbs

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were weak, and she almost fell after taking a few steps. Quickly, a pair of arms caught her by the waist, and she was carried. When Victoria felt herself being lifted, she subconsciously snuggled into Alaric's embrace.

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At this moment, Griselda arrived. She looked at Victoria worriedly and asked, "How is she?"

Alaric had a grim expression as he hugged her closely. "I'm not sure. I'm going to take her to the hospital while you guys continue to have breakfast."

As he spoke, Claudia soon arrived. Her expression changed when she heard Alaric was taking Victoria to the hospital. When Alaric walked past her, she quickly chased after him and said, "I'll go with you guys."

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Who would have thought the house would be in chaos because of Victoria's sudden reaction?

As Victoria snuggled against Alaric, her mind was still fuzzy.

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Besides them, Claudia seemed to have thought of something and suggested, "It will take us some time to go to the hospital, Al. Why don't we take her to my friend's clinic? I think it might be food poisoning."

Although Claudia seemed calm on the outside, she was already a mental mess. After all, Alaric would know the truth if he took Victoria to the hospital. Thus, she insisted on going to her friend's clinic since she could hide the truth if Victoria were required to do a checkup.

As she thought about it, she suddenly recalled the last time Victoria had a fever and refused to go to the hospital. She remembered thinking that Victoria was throwing a tantrum at Alaric because of her. Thus, she was

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Chapter **68** Thought-provoking

trying to gain Alaric's attention. At that moment, Claudia despised her.

However, now that she thought about it, she understood why Victoria refused to go to the hospital or take any medications. There were clues all along.

"A clinic?" Alaric frowned and refused her suggestion. "I think it's best if we go to a hospital. It has a higher standard." He wasn't trying to embarrass Claudia as he just wanted to take Victoria to a hospital and do a checkup since he felt that she must be extremely uncomfortable to have thrown up so badly.

However, Claudia had a grim expression when she heard his words. She looked at Alaric and thought, Does he think the clinic I recommended has low standards?

Sadly, Alaric couldn't care less about her at the moment. Right now, all of his attention was on Victoria.

Suddenly, he heard Victoria's weak voice. "Stop."

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Chapter 68 Thought–provoking

He stopped dead in his tracks and looked at her. In the meantime, Victoria

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had regained her senses. She patted his hand and signaled him to put her down.

However, Alaric frowned and didn't budge.

Sighing, Victoria opened her mouth and said, "Put me down."

"You're feeling unwell. You should go to a hospital," Alaric replied as he silently hugged her tighter.

"I'm fine now," said Victoria.

"You wouldn't be vomiting your guts out if you were fine." His words were blunt. No matter what, he was unwilling to put her down.

"That's because I had gotten a whiff of..." Initially, Victoria would say that she threw up because of the smell of meat. However, she swallowed her words back. After all, Alaric had thought she had already gotten an

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Chapter 68 Thought–provoking

abortion. Thus, he would notice something wrong if she told him the truth.

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When Alaric saw that she paused mid–sentence, he squinted his eyes.

"What is it?"

Before Victoria could say anything, Claudia rushed toward them and

came to the rescue. “The soup must have been too much for her. I feel uncomfortable smelling it when I drink it too. Victoria just had a bigger reaction than me. Could it be that it’s because she dislikes fish?”

Hearing her words, Victoria glanced at her. After all, Claudia was right. She hated fish.

As expected, Alaric looked at her with a suspicious look. “The fish fumet is overbearing for you?” He still had his doubts about Claudia’s words. After all, Victoria wouldn’t have reacted so intensely even if she disliked fish. However, he knew that Victoria didn’t like eating fish since they were young. Thus, he trusted that she felt nauseous because of the smell of fish.

Chapter **68** Thought–provoking

Then, Claudia added, “I think it stinks too, but those who love it wouldn’t be able to sense it.” Then, she seemed to have thought of something and said, “It’s the same as how you dislike sweet foods, Al.”

Still, it doesn’t make sense to react so strongly even if she dislikes it, Alaric thought as he looked at Victoria. At that moment, he felt that she was hiding something from him. As he recalled the shredded report that Hector informed him, his eyes darkened.

However, before he had the time to think further, Victoria fidgeted. “How many times am I going to tell you? Put me down.”

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“Are you sure you don’t want to see a doctor?” asked Alaric as he squinted his eyes.

Victoria took a deep breath out of exhaustion. “I’m not sick. I just don’t want

to drink the soup. Should I go to the hospital because of this?”

Her face seemed better than before, and her lips weren't pale. She didn't

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Chapter 68 Thought–provoking

look like a sick person would be, and only then did Alaric put her down.

As soon as Victoria's feet touched the ground, Claudia immediately wrapped her arms around Victoria's. “Are you alright? I think it's best if you eat something light after going home. Your stomach must be weak since you have just recovered from a fever. Maybe it's time you eat less oily food.”

Although Claudia acted like she was worrying about Victoria, she was actually trying to hide the truth from Alaric.

Looking at Claudia, Victoria had a thoughtful expression. However, she soon brushed it off. They both had an agreement. Since Victoria decided not to break the promise, Claudia would do the same too.

“Yeah.”

“I'll take you back home. If you feel unwell again, I'll take you to the hospital.”

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Chapter 68 Thought–provoking

“Okay.”

Then, Claudia supported Victoria as they walked back to the house.

In the meantime, Alaric stood there and watched as they left. Since when were they so close?

When Alaric carried Victoria out of the house, Griselda wanted to tag along. However, Hector stopped her.

“Don’t worry, Old Mrs. Cadogan. Mr. Cadogan will surely take good care of her.” Hector’s words calmed Griselda down.

That’s right. With Alaric by Victoria’s side, he will surely take good care of her. On the contrary, he would need to take care of me if I follow them since I’m in a wheelchair.

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#### Chapter 68 Thought–Provoking

As Griselda thought about it, she soon calmed down.

“Do you want to continue eating, Old Mrs. Cadogan?”

She shook her head. How could she eat when she was worried sick about Victoria? She wondered whether Alaric had been taking good care of Victoria.

The more Griselda thought about it, the more nervous she was. However, there was nothing she could do.

At this moment, a servant suddenly exclaimed, “Is that Mrs. Cadogan?”

When Griselda heard her words, she turned around and saw that Claudia was supporting Victoria as they entered the room.

Immediately, the servant knew what Griselda was thinking and quickly pushed her over. At the same time, Victoria knew that Griselda was worried about her. Thus, she refused Claudia’s help after entering the

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## Chapter 68 Thought–provoking

house and quickly rushed toward Griselda.

“Did I scare you, Grandma?”

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Griselda grabbed her hand and shook her head. “Why did you come back all of a sudden? I thought you were feeling unwell. Why didn’t you do a checkup at the hospital?”

“I’m fine.” Victoria smiled and said awkwardly, “It’s just that... I don’t like fish. That is why I feel nauseous when smelling it.”

“Nauseous?” You wouldn’t have reacted strongly just because you dislike it, though, thought Griselda. Slowly, she seemed to have realized something.

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## Chapter 69

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“That’s right, Grandma.” To prevent Griselda from getting suspicious, Victoria made things up. “I never liked fish ever since I was young. When I was little, I thought that it was something delicious. However, I threw up as soon as I tried it. I might have been traumatized when I got a whiff of the smell.”

When Griselda heard her words, the thoughtful expression on her face was gone. After all, she felt it was normal to get traumatized by throwing up after eating something at such a young age.

However, she was still worried about Victoria. “Are you sure you are fine?”

It's best if you get a checkup from the hospital."

"It's fine, Grandma. There's nothing wrong with me. Do I look sick to you?"

asked Victoria.

Griselda eyed her up and down and realized that she had indeed

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recovered. Still, she couldn't help but pinch Victoria's cheeks gently. "Why didn't you tell me sooner that you don't like fish?"

Victoria whined. "That's because you like it, so I want to have a taste too.

Initially, I thought I wouldn't throw up again since I'm already an *adult*.

However, who knew... I'm sorry, Grandma. I'll make sure to inform you next time about the food I dislike. It won't happen again."

"Alright now, dear. You must be starving. Come on, eat some food."

"Okay. I want to have some chicken soup."

"I'll tell the servant to prepare it for you."

"Okay."

Just as Victoria stood up and was able to push Griselda back home,

Claudia whispered, "Let me do it, Victoria. You must still be weak from all that vomiting."

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When Victoria heard her words, she looked at Claudia and knew the latter was trying to get Griselda's liking. Thus, she didn't say anything. After Claudia left with Griselda, Victoria was about to follow them when she heard a voice from behind.

3/9

"Did you really throw up after eating fish when you were young?"

Only when Victoria heard Alaric's voice did she realize he was standing behind her. She turned around and was met with his sharp gaze. "I never heard you say anything about it," he added.

Victoria averted her gaze and felt guilty when she looked into his eyes.

"Why should I tell you such an embarrassing thing?"

Hearing her words, Alaric said with a snort, "I have known every embarrassing moment about you." Since they were childhood friends, Alaric had seen her grow from a child to an adult, which meant he knew all her awkward puberty moments.

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Victoria was startled when she heard his words. That's right. Alaric and I have known each other for years. We know each other like the back of our hands. Sometimes, she wondered if Alaric wouldn't even love her, even if Claudia didn't rescue him. After all, they were too familiar with each other. Thus, how would Alaric be able to fall in love with her when he had seen all her downsides?

Still, Victoria insisted and said, "There are many things you don't know

about me.” Then, she ignored him and left. On the other hand, Alaric pondered for a moment before following her footsteps.

After what had happened, Victoria hadn’t eaten any oily food and tried to eat as blandly as possible. She was afraid to let the cat out of the bag if she ate any of those foods again. However, she didn’t notice that Alaric was watching her every move.

After breakfast, Victoria suggested taking Griselda for a stroll, which Claudia insisted on tagging along. Thus, the duo left the house with

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Griselda. Initially, Alaric wanted to tag along but was forced to stay back due to work. Therefore, he could only remind them not to go too far.

At that moment, Hector said, “I’ll accompany them, Sir. Since they are just taking a walk nearby, I don’t think there should be a problem.”

“Okay.” Alaric nodded. “Keep a lookout for them.”

It had been a long time since Griselda had left the nursing home. Thus, she was excited and enjoyed the moment she could leave the house and look around other than the nursing home’s garden. She was in awe when she saw the people walking outside the villa and the house’s structure. As Victoria walked behind them, she saw Claudia smiling while pushing the wheelchair. She looked gentle and patient as she talked with Griselda.

Looking at them, Victoria couldn’t help but admit that Claudia knew how to act like a gentle and sweet person. Plus, she knew how to win Griselda’s

heart. For the whole afternoon, Griselda had burst out laughing because of  
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her words.

When it was almost 11.00AM, Griselda felt tired. Claudia noticed it and said softly, "Are you tired, Old Mrs. Cadogan? Why don't we go back and take a rest? It's almost noon. If you want to come out again, I'll come by tomorrow and accompany you."

Griselda nodded since she was exhausted. Then, Claudia pushed her back to the house while Victoria fell behind. When Hector noticed it, he slowed down.

"Mrs. Cadogan." He called out to Victoria.

Victoria turned to look at him with confusion. "What is it, Mr. Bowen?"

Seeing that she was looking at him with confusion, Hector felt resentful. He lowered his voice and said, "You should be taking charge of the situation more."

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"Huh?" At first, Victoria didn't understand what he meant. However, she soon realized it and smiled. "It's fine. As long as Grandma is happy."

However, Hector seemed to be opposed to her words. "Old Mrs. Cadogan will be happy too if you accompany her. Plus, you are her

granddaughter-in-law. She would be thrilled.”

Victoria looked at Hector with surprise. When she saw the resentment in his eyes, she sighed and said nothing.

Seeing that she was calm, Hector continued, “You can’t always be passive, Mrs. Cadogan. She did a favor for the Cadogans in the past and is now trying to get on Old Mrs. Cadogan’s good side. If you don’t act soon, she will soon replace you.”

Replace me? Victoria thought self-deprecating. The title of Mrs. Cadogan was never mine. Thus, there is no way someone will take it away from me. According to our agreement, that title was never mine, to begin with.

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Although the others may think I’m Alaric’s wife, I know my place.

Hector was anxious when he saw that Victoria remained calm and didn’t seem to get worked up by his words.

Is she going to divorce Mr. Cadogan? he thought.

To be honest, Hector had taken a liking for Victoria. After all, Victoria wouldn’t think lowly of them and have treated them well. As for Claudia, she was Alaric’s savior, but that was it. Alaric wouldn’t need to marry her because of this. After all, who would be willing to rescue others or to be rescued if one would lose their freedom after saving a person? Moreover, Hector could tell that Alaric had feelings for Victoria. However, he didn’t make a move since Claudia had saved his life. Hector couldn’t understand

what Alaric was thinking. Moreover, he couldn't figure out why Claudia would leave two years ago if she truly loved Alaric and decided to return **now.**

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As he thought about it, he realized he didn't understand what was on the younger generation's mind.

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After they returned and put Griselda to rest, Claudia looked at Victoria and said, "Thank you." She knew Victoria had the chance to stop her from getting close to Griselda if she wanted during their walk. Yet, she didn't do anything.

"I'm sorry that I have accused you of being a liar."

Initially, she didn't believe it when Griselda postponed the surgery because she fainted. After all, how would a person suddenly faint when they were fine just a moment ago? She thought that Victoria had told Griselda the truth, which was why Griselda would play along. Claudia knew she had a dark mind. However, after some time, she realized that Griselda knew nothing about it, and Victoria didn't stop her from getting close to Griselda. At that moment, Claudia knew that she had made the right choice. Victoria was indeed a grateful person.

When Victoria heard her words, she put up a forced smile and said

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nothing.

“I have to go back today. Otherwise, Old Mrs. Cadogan might suspect something. However, I still intend to come tomorrow. Can you invite me over?”

Victoria frowned at her request. “You can just come over whenever you like. Why should I invite you over?”

“I’m afraid that Old Mrs. Cadogan will be suspicious about me. She would surely have doubts if I came here by my own will. However, things would be different if you called me over. She might think we have a close relationship.”

Victoria pursed her lips and stared at Claudia. She didn’t accept or refuse her proposal.

Looking at her expression, Claudia stepped forward and stood close to her, seemingly as if they were best friends. “What’s wrong, Victoria? You

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don’t want Grandma to be sad after you leave, right?” Claudia chuckled.

“I’m doing this for her own good by spending time with her.” A glint flashed across her eyes as she thought of something. “You saw it yourself too.

Grandma is happy. If she is in better health, the surgery can happen **soon**.

At that time, you can take your unborn child and leave. Don’t you want this

to happen?”

After spending a few days together, Claudia knew Victoria cared for Griselda. Although she didn't know if Victoria did this out of her wishes or Alaric's, she knew she wouldn't waste her time on a dying person if it weren't for Alaric's sake..

As expected, Victoria wavered at her words. Although she looked unhappy, she said, “Okay.” Then, she looked at Claudia impatiently. “Do you have anything else to say? If not, I'm leaving.”

Claudia didn't care about her attitude since she had gotten what she wanted. Thus, she smiled and said, “I'm done talking. You can go and do  
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your business. Just don't forget to invite me over tomorrow.”

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To her surprise, Victoria turned around and left before finishing hearing her words. As Claudia stood on the spot, she was upset. Then, she left after calming herself down.

When Victoria returned to her room, she sat by the bed and was exhausted. Although they didn't walk far from home, she was still worn out, even if she wore sneakers.

However, she didn't think much since she still had things to do. She took

out her laptop and went to the study room. After all, she wanted Yasmin to be able to handle things herself as soon as possible. Although Yasmin worked hard to meet her expectations, there was a price to pay. The common disadvantage of learning things too quickly was that there would be many issues, so Victoria had to help her.

As soon as Victoria opened her laptop and contacted Yasmin, she heard the latter crying, as expected.

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“You’re finally back, Miss Victoria... I would be dead if you weren’t here.”

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Victoria was speechless by her reaction.

“Why is it so hard? Compared to these few days, I feel like I used to be in heaven. You had such a tough life, Miss Victoria. It’s terrifying.”

After Victoria heard her blabbering, she cut her off and said, “Alright now. Don’t worry about it. If anything happens, just solve it. After all, you’ll have **to** face it sooner or later.”

She could still help Yasmin now that she was here. However, Yasmin would get scolded if she made a mistake after she was gone.

Alaric wasn’t a gentle boss. When he brought her to the company to learn, he was extremely strict to the point Victoria thought he had changed to someone else. Whenever she made a mistake, he would scold her.

Sometimes, he would scold her in front of his subordinates, which was

humiliating.

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At first, Victoria would get mad and upset about his doings. She would feel embarrassed being scolded by him since she had feelings for him. Thus, she threw multiple tantrums at him. Yet, whenever that happened, Alaric only frowned and said, "Are you sad because I scolded you? What are you going to do in the future? Are you going to cry whenever you encounter a problem?"

At that moment, Victoria was infuriated by his words. She wiped her tears and gritted her teeth. "I'll do better next time."

Eventually, she did better than before. Alaric was still strict, as usual. Until the day he could not find any mistakes in her work, Victoria had become an outstanding secretary. Moreover, she learned many business strategies and ways to negotiate.

As Victória recalled what had happened, she was thankful for Alaric. After all, it was he who gave her a chance to elevate herself. Even if she were to quit working at Cadogan Group, she could start her own company without

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relying on him.

"Miss Victoria?" Suddenly, Yasmin's voice snapped her back to her senses.

She stopped thinking and started working.

Fifteen minutes later, she had solved all of Yasmin's problems and told her to try it herself. After Victoria was done with Yasmin, she was going to continue working. However, as she looked at her laptop for mere seconds, she began to yawn uncontrollably. Tears formed in her eyes as she kept yawning.

Why do I feel sleepy when I had enough sleep last night?

As Victoria thought about it, she couldn't help but caress her stomach. "My baby, is it you who is tired? I didn't walk much, yet you are exhausted?" she said with a smile.

More importantly, she felt hungry. She could feel that her food consumption was higher than before. However, on second thought, it was

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normal since she now had two mouths to feed.

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"Fine. I'll stop working for your sake. Let's have some food. Then, we'll go to sleep." As Victoria spoke, she closed her laptop and headed out.

Suddenly, the balcony door of the study room was pushed open, and someone entered the room. The man was handsome, and his deep dark eyes were like the deep ocean. He was approaching Victoria.

As soon as Victoria saw who he was, her mind went blank.

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