

## Departure with a Belly Chapter 351

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*Either he's afraid to let me see it because he's tampered with it or because, as he said, he really thinks it'd hurt my eyes for me to read it in the car. In any case, he's put the agreement away, so I can't see it anymore. At this thought, Victoria lost all interest in talking to him anymore.*

*Alaric probably saw what she was thinking, too, and he didn't say another word.*

*They remained silent all the way until they got to school.*

*It was Alaric who had sent the kids to school this morning. This time, he got out of the car again to pick them up, while Victoria didn't move one bit. Just a moment later, she saw Alaric bring the kids back.*

*The two kids threw themselves at Victoria while greeting her as soon as they got in the car. Before Alaric got in, Nicole even looked up and whispered to Victoria, "Mommy, have you agreed to let Mr. Night be our daddy?"*

*This question... Victoria's lips parted slightly. Just when she was about to say something, she saw Alaric about to get in the car as well. She bit back the reply on her lips, saying instead, "Sweetie, we'll talk about this when we get*

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home.”

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*Nicole was pretty well-behaved this time. After hearing Victoria say that, she obediently shut up and kept quiet.*

*Alaric and his chauffeur sent them home after that. Before they got out of the car, he asked softly, “Shall we have dinner together this evening?”*

*Victoria paused for a moment at his question. Then, she replied, “Maybe another time.”*

*Nevertheless, the man put the design drawing in her hand. “If you still have time after reading the agreement when you get home, you may take a look at this design drawing.”*

*Victoria stared at the design drawing forced into her hand. After a moment, she nodded. “Okay, I got it. You may go back,” she said before turning to go upstairs with the kids.*

*Alaric leaned against the car, his eyes gloomy as he watched her and the two kids go upstairs, making sure they were safe before getting back in the car. After that, he lowered the car window and stared coldly at the scenery outside.*

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*The chauffeur took a peek at him through the rearview mirror. Feeling that*

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*something wasn't quite right with the man, he gingerly said, "Don't lose heart, Mr. Cadogan. It's normal for women to be a little haughty at first, but she'll*

*surely soften up over time."*

*Hearing this, Alaric darted a look at him. He replied impassively, "What do you know?"*

*The chauffeur was lost for words. Fine, it's true that I don't know anything. My wife didn't divorce me, anyway. However, he dared not say this in front of his boss. What else could he say? So, he had no choice but to silently drive Alaric home.*

*They got in front of the gate to Cadogan Residence when the chauffeur saw from afar a slender and frail figure standing in front of it. After realizing who it was, he hurriedly said, "Mr. Cadogan, Miss Johnson is here again."*

*Alaric had been musing on the house's design. Upon hearing this, he immediately knitted his brows. He then looked ahead of him, and sure.*

*enough, there was Claudia, standing in the dark right by the gate to*

*Cadogan Residence with a forlorn expression on her face. She seemed to have been waiting for a long time.*

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*Alaric pursed his lips, feeling displeased. He had already made himself very clear to Claudia, but this woman didn't seem to understand him, and this produced a feeling of aversion in him. On second thought, however, he hit upon a question: Am I also as annoying as Claudia in Victoria's mind's eye. when I pestered her? Just the thought of this possibility alone sent a pang through his heart and caused him to frown. No, this can't be!*

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*Immediately, he became more determined to cut all ties with Claudia.*

*Hence, when the car came to a stop, he ordered right away, "You get out and tell her to leave."*

*Having witnessed what Claudia was capable of, the chauffeur didn't get out of the car right after hearing the man's words. Instead, he asked, "What if Miss Johnson refuses to leave?"*

*"In that case, just call Terrance and tell him to get somebody here."*

*At Alaric's reply, the chauffeur nodded at once, knowing what to do. "Roger that, Mr. Cadogan," he said, unbuckling his seatbelt before getting out of the car.*

*Standing in the cold wind, Claudia clutched the strap of her handbag, which*

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*held something Scarlett had given her saying that it would help her*

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*succeed. At first, she had wanted to tarry for several days, since the odds were really against her if she came to Alaric at this moment after only a day.*

*However, Scarlett told her to strike the iron while it was hot, so she eventually came at Scarlett's urging. She took a deep breath. My success or failure depends on this, so I mustn't flinch.*

*Unexpectedly, however, the person who got out of the car wasn't Alaric but his chauffeur.*

*As the chauffeur came toward her, she darted a glance inside the car, but it was too pitch-dark for her to see anything. With no alternative, she turned toward the chauffeur. "Where's Alaric?" She didn't address the chauffeur with honorifics, nor did she speak to him respectfully; there was even a questioning tone in her voice.*

*Compared to Victoria, the chauffeur really disliked Claudia, who turned her nose up at everyone and prided herself on her status as a well-born lady. Not only that, she queried the chauffeur in this attitude. At first, he had wanted to politely ask her to leave, but now, annoyed with her attitude, he instantly abandoned the idea of being nice to her. He stiffly urged, "Miss Johnson, please go back. Mr. Cadogan doesn't want to see you."*

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*Claudia's countenance changed drastically at his words. She looked inside the car. "Did he tell you to say that?"*

*The chauffeur nodded vigorously. "Yeah, that's what Mr. Cadogan said. He doesn't want to see you."*

*Claudia's previous arrogance vanished instantly. Biting her lower lip, she stepped forward, saying, "Sir."*

*The chauffeur was speechless.*

*"Can you please plead with Alaric for me? I really have something important to talk to him about this time."*

*The chauffeur was a middle-aged man, so his heart softened when Claudia actually called him 'sir.' But then, he recalled Alaric telling him to phone Terrance to get somebody over at once if she refused to leave. But doing this would embarrass her a lot, no? At the thought of this, he had no choice but to say, "Miss Johnson, it's not that I want to make things awkward for you, but Mr. Cadogan really doesn't want to see you. I advise you not to stay here any longer on such a cold day. Just go back."*

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*"No, I can't." Clutching her handbag, Claudia took a step forward as if*

*grasping at straws. "Sir, just tell Alaric for me that I came this time to say goodbye to him, okay?"*

*The chauffeur was startled by her words. "You want to say goodbye?"*

*"Mm-hmm." Claudia nodded pitifully.*

*The chauffeur was surprised. After looking back at the car, he nodded.*

*"Alright, given your special circumstances, I'll go talk to him."*

*"Thank you so much, sir."*

*The chauffeur got back in the car. Seeing him come back so quickly without getting rid of Claudia, Alaric said with a frown, "She won't go? Just call Terrance and tell him to come here and deal with it."*

*"No, that's not the case." The chauffeur subconsciously waved his hand. "Mr. Cadogan, the thing is, Miss Johnson really seems to have something else to talk to you about."*

*Alaric pursed his lips in displeasure. What else could she want to talk to me about? She's just not giving up, that's all.*

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*To his surprise, the chauffeur said the next second, "Miss Johnson says she's here to say goodbye to you."*

*“Say goodbye?”*

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*Alaric somewhat doubted what he had just heard, Claudia came to say goodbye to me? What the hell is that? His narrow eyes squinted slightly as he eyed Claudia, who seemed quite frail while standing in the cold wind. It was unclear what she was wearing underneath in this seemingly chilly weather. She appeared to be shivering with cold; even her fair cheeks were red. On the surface, she did look distressingly pathetic.*

*And yet, it was actually such a woman who had quietly deleted the text message about Victoria’s pregnancy and even paid her 7 million in private behind his back. What she was up to was already self-explanatory. Had Victoria not given birth to the kids herself, he might have ended up really losing both his children.*

*The idea that such a pair of adorable kids might have ceased to be made Alaric feel as if a knife were being twisted in his heart. No, I can’t feel sorry for her. I’ve done more than enough in the past to repay her kindness, and her family has been riding the coattails of my family’s power and influence since then. As long as I’m always indebted to her, I don’t mind letting them take advantage of the Cadogans for life—provided that she knows her place. At the thought of this, he icily refused at once, “No, I’m not gonna talk to her.” He*

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added, "If she wants to say goodbye, she can say that to me over the phone."

He would never want to see this woman anymore.

The chauffeur didn't expect Alaric to be so hard-hearted as to refuse to even get out of the car to let Claudia bid him farewell. Seeing that the man.

wouldn't give in to persuasion, he had no choice but to button his lip. After all, he had been paid to work for him. Soon, he left the car once again.

Claudia changed color immediately when she saw the chauffeur walk alone toward her with no sign of Alaric getting out of the car. "Mister? Is he still not going to talk to me?"

The chauffeur nodded gravely. "You should go back."

"No, I can't!" Claudia burst out crying at once. Slumping next to the car without scruples, she sobbed, "Al, just come out and meet me, will you? I'm here just to say goodbye to you. Don't you even want to see your savior one last time now that I'm leaving?"

Her voice soon came through due to the close proximity. Hearing her mention again how she had saved his life, Alaric felt his heart being gripped in an instant. There were times when he wondered why: Why the hell would I

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owe my life to her? It would've been better if some things never happened in the first place. Well, thinking that way makes me look like an "sshole, but... had I known I'd be in such a tight spot today, perhaps I shouldn't have....

Feeling a headache coming on, he pinched the space between his eyebrows.

*The chauffeur couldn't bear to see this, though. "Mr. Cadogan, now that she's leaving, why don't you just.... come out and talk to her for a minute? In any case, it'll be the last time, I guess."*

*His last remark made Alaric come around. He's right; if she's really here to say goodbye to me, then this will be the last time. I'll just see what she's really up*

*1. to. At the thought of this, he buttoned up his suit jacket and got out of the car with a grim expression.*

*Claudia was almost crying her heart out in the cold wind. Tears fell from her eyes like strings of pearls; seeing Alaric step out of the car, she immediately came up to him, saying, "Al, you're willing to meet me at last! I thought you wouldn't want to talk to me anymore."*

*Seeing how wan she looked, Alaric recalled how she had unhesitatingly jumped into the rapid river current and injured herself to save his life back then, and this made him feel a bit of sympathy toward her. "Why would I?"*

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*first, he wanted to take off his suit jacket and drape it around her shoulders,*  
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*but he resisted the urge at the thought of Victoria and the two kids. Fine, I'll owe it to her. Just call me an \*sshole. I'm a human being, so I can't be perfect at everything.*

*"I'm leaving already, so I just want to come and talk to you for a minute. Can I?" Claudia stepped forward in an attempt to take Alaric's hand.*

*Alaric subtly took a step back. Nevertheless, he eventually replied, "Just say whatever you want to say."*

*Claudia darted a glance toward the house. She pleaded in a whisper, "I'm freezing out here. Can we talk inside?"*

*Alaric glanced at her while pursing his thin lips slightly. After a moment, he replied, "Fine, just get in and say what you have to say once and for all. I won't see you ever again after tonight."*

*At hearing this, Claudia bit her lower lip hard. "I got it. Don't worry, I'll disappear by myself after tonight, and I won't show up in front of you anymore."*

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*Claudia sat on the couch in the house with a glass of steaming boiled water in front of her. Having nearly gone numb from the cold for a long time in the chilly wind, she gradually regained warmth at this moment. After staring at the glass of water for a long time, she took a deep breath and looked up at Alaric. "Do you have wine?"*

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*Alaric frowned at her question. "Do you think I'd let you drink here at this hour?"*

*Claudia gave a pale smile. "I just knew you wouldn't let me, but this is already the last time. After tonight, I won't bother you anymore. Just drink a little with me, okay? I have something to say to you, and once I'm done, you'll no longer have to keep in mind how I've saved your life."*

*Silence fell over the room.*

*Claudia dared not say another word, fearing that Alaric would heartlessly turn her down as soon as she spoke. She had no choice but to wait.*

*After a long time, Alaric turned around.*

*Claudia turned pale at once. Just when she thought the man was going to turn her down, she heard him say, "This is the last time."*

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*Her face brightened up. "Don't worry, I'll keep my promise."*

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*Alaric soon fetched the wine and wine glasses over. At the sight of this, Claudia remarked with a smile, "I never thought we would actually part ways like this after so many years."*

*Alaric paused what he was doing for a moment. He darted a glance at Claudia, whose eyes were looking down; in the end, he gave an inward sigh. Back when he was younger, he had mistaken his gratitude toward Claudia for a different kind of affection. This had led him to say that kind of thing, which had caused so many misunderstandings. Come to think of it, she's also a victim here, and I owe her a debt of gratitude for saving my life. At the thought of this, his hostility toward the woman faded somewhat, but it didn't dissipate altogether. Not only that, he even doubted what Claudia had said. After all, would she actually leave like that after pestering him for so many years? "You may say whatever you want to say now. Also, you may name your terms. The Cadogans will satisfy you as long as they can."*

*Claudia noticed that he was speaking of the Cadogans but not himself.*

*Seems like he's really determined to cut all ties with me. Clutching the small packet inside her handbag, she looked up with a smile. "What if I ask for resources or money? Is that okay too?"*

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*“Yeah, it’s okay,” replied Alaric without the slightest hesitation.*

*Claudia said, “Alright then, I want five percent of the Cadogan Group’s shares.” She thought the man would say no to her exorbitant demands, which she had talked over with Scarlett before coming here. Scarlett said to her, “Ask him for the shares, which he’ll certainly refuse. When he does, just ask him for money. This time, he surely won’t turn you down. Put this in his drink while he’s off writing the check.” She had already figured out how to get everything done.*

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*After this, all that’s needed is his cooperation. Claudia had already prepared herself and was only waiting for the man to turn her down.*

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*“You want five percent of the shares? Okay.”*

*“No? Well then, I-” Claudia had barely begun her speech when the man’s “Okay” threw her off balance. Stunned, she froze on the spot, unable to believe what she had just heard. Did I... hear it wrong just now? Did Alaric just agree to give me five percent of the shares?*

*Claudia had checked out the Cadogan Group’s profitability earlier on. She had only a slight understanding of it, but from what she knew, her personal worth would skyrocket in the future if Alaric really gave her five percent of the company’s shares. But... how could he possibly agree to it? She looked at the man in disbelief. “Al, you...” Is he really willing to give me five percent of the Cadogan Group’s shares just to cut all ties with me? Can he actually go this far for Victoria’s sake?*

*Realizing that he was only doing so for Victoria's sake, Claudia ground her teeth in hatred. However, recalling her objective, she held back and said with*

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*a smile, "Al, don't tell me you'd really give me five percent of the shares? We're talking about five percent of the shares here, you know."*

*Alaric looked up at her. "You think that's a lot?"*

*Claudia replied, "Isn't it so?"*

*"Well then, let's add another five percent to make up ten percent for you."*

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*Claudia's heart skipped a beat. "W-What?" She thought she had heard it wrong; her heart began racing wildly. "Ten percent, you say?" This was so tempting, she thought she was on the verge of accepting it. Didn't she take credit for saving Alaric's life back then because she wanted to stay by his side? Even now, she wanted to stay by his side for the title of the future wife of the Cadogan Group's president. And the only reason she was after the title was for the money. If I can really get the ten-percent shares, then why do I have to...*

*Just when her heart was pounding, Alaric replied coldly without even looking up, "That's right, but you've got to sign an agreement. There'll be no more contact between you and me after you accept the shares. All the things I've said before will be null and void, and you're not allowed to bring them up ever*

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*again."*

*Claudia had to admit that she was really tempted. She hadn't thought the*

*man would give her five percent of the shares, but not only did he agree to do so, he even offered double the amount just to have nothing more to do with her and be with Victoria... Her mind, previously calm and clear, went astray at the thought of this. She bit her lower lip. Inwardly, she was still resentful and unsatisfied.*

*Actually... had Victoria not put a spoke in my wheel, the whole Cadogan Group would've belonged to my child, let alone ten percent of its shares; even Alaric would've been mine, too. And yet, now I can only get ten percent of the company's shares. Why is that so? Why should I give way to Victoria like that? All of this could've been mine in the first place! At the thought of this, she made a new decision in her mind. Looking up at Alaric, she said with a wry smile, "Al, I didn't think you would go this far for her sake. But since you're willing to do this, it means that your feelings for her are no longer something that I can interfere with at will. In that case, all I can do is wish your two happiness."*

*Her last remark caused Alaric to look at her in surprise. "So you're accepting it?"*

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*Claudia nodded gently. "I think you're right. Adults should behave with dignity, and it's really ugly to keep pestering you. It's true that I love you a lot, but it's really difficult for love to be reciprocated, so I have no choice but to give you my blessing and wish you two can stay together forever," she said in all sincerity with complete composure as though she had really gotten over it.*

*Alaric's hostility vanished when he heard her wish that he and Victoria could stay together forever. His lips curved into a faint smile. "Thank you."*

*Claudia felt her heart clench. He really knows how to hurt me deeply. "Well then, can we sign the agreement now?"*

*Alaric looked at her. "I'll have someone draw it up and send it to you tomorrow."*

*"No." Claudia shook her head. "Let's get it done tonight. We're talking about ten percent of shares here. I'm afraid you'll regret it." The thing was, she might never have had the opportunity to be alone with him like this and have drinks with him again after tonight, so she had to seize this opportunity to get the shares and sleep with him in order to get pregnant with his child. And besides, God probably took pity on her and thus decided to help her out, for she happened to be in her fertile period these days. As long as I can get*  
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*pregnant at one stroke—coupled with my having saved his life before—I'll no longer have to worry about being unable to contend against Victoria, no? she thought, forming a plan in her mind.*

*Alaric looked at her for a long time. Then, he stood up and went out to call his attorney.*

*Seeing that he had gone out, Claudia thought her opportunity had arrived at last. Immediately, she unzipped her handbag and took out the powder Scarlett had given her. After slipping it into one of the wine glasses, she swiftly uncapped the wine bottle and filled the glass to the brim. Then, she hurriedly swirled the wine in the glass to make sure the powder was evenly*



*dissolved.*

*This was her first time ever doing so, and her heart was pounding so much with fear that it nearly jumped out of her chest. For the first time, she felt so despicable, but there was nothing she could do about it. It's his fault for not being with me, no? I can't be blamed for this; I just love him too much, that's all. I want both him and the Cadogan Group!*

*Perhaps due to nervousness, her hand suddenly trembled as she swirled the wine glass, spilling a lot of red wine at once. Startled, she nearly threw the*

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*wine glass away.*

*Just then, she heard footsteps outside; Alaric seemed to have returned.*

*Turning ashen with fright, Claudia hastily put the glass of wine back where it was. Since it was too late, she could only rush to pull out a paper towel from the side and wipe the spilled red wine off the table.*

*The sound of footsteps could be heard reaching the door.*

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*Alaric had returned, but the wine glass in front of her was still empty. She could only hurry to pour wine into her glass and was midway through it when the man came in.*

*"I've let my attorney draw up the agreement, and he'll deliver it here as soon as it's done. You-" Alaric intended to tell her to leave now, only to pause for a moment when he came in and saw what she was doing.*

*Claudia suppressed her nervousness while feigning composure. "Okay, I'll wait here, then. Shall we have a couple of drinks?" she said. With that, she*

*picked up the wine glass she had just finished pouring in front of her and brought it to her lips, drinking most of it in one gulp.*

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*Alaric darted a glance at her. "Suit yourself," he replied. Then, he turned around and was about to leave.*

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*At the sight of this, Claudia instantly called out to him in a panic. "Don't go, Al. I still have something to say to you."*

*Alaric paused at her words. "We've already said whatever there is to say. There's no point in saying anything else."*

*"Even so, I'd like to say it. After all, tonight is our last night together—no, the last bit of time before your attorney arrives."*

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*Picking up the wine glass on the table, Claudia finished what was left in it and then refilled it in front of Alaric. Then, she held it in her hand and swirled it gently. "Just take it as honoring me one last time for the sake that I once saved your life. Let's part on good terms, okay?"*

*Alaric's thin lips almost compressed into a thin line. His eyes were cold, but eventually, he sat down in front of her. "Is drinking with you considered parting on good terms? Are the double shares I'm giving you not a nice enough way of ending things amicably?"*

*Claudia's face twisted into a mournful smile. "I just knew you'd think that way. But Alaric, my love for you is genuine. Even if you weren't a company president but just an ordinary person today, I'd still love you. Why do you think*

*I asked for the five percent of shares? It's totally because you won't have peace of mind as long as you're indebted to someone. If I didn't ask anything of you, you wouldn't even think that I sincerely wanted to make a clean break with you. Well, it's good the way it is now. Now that I've accepted your company's shares, you won't feel indebted to me anymore, no?" she said before raising her wine glass. "It's been so many years now. Here's a toast to wish you happiness."*

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*She raised her wine glass in mid-air, but she never got a response. Still, despite her aching arm, she continued to hold her glass of wine up high and waited, unwilling to give up. Finally, just when she thought she wouldn't succeed tonight, Alaric lifted his glass of wine and impatiently clinked it against hers before taking a few sips from it. "Is that enough honor for you?" He placed his glass back on the table with a slight clatter.*

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*Claudia's heart thumped wildly as she made sure the man had swallowed what he had drunk; even her hand tightened on her glass of wine. Did he drink it? I did it at last!*

*Alaric had only taken a few sips of his drink, but she had long prepared for this. To prevent him from overdrinking or drinking only one sip just for show, she had prepared plenty of the stuff. Just one sip of it was enough to take effect on the man, and besides, he had drunk more than that.*

*All I have to do next is stay here long enough. At the thought of this, Claudia drank up all the wine left in the glass. The wine was cold, and it cooled her*

*stomach as she drank it. The effects should kick in in about 20 minutes. Once he comes under its influence, I'll have to sleep with him a few more times instead of just once; it's best to make sure I'll get pregnant. Taking a deep breath, she stood up and said to the man, "I need to use the bathroom."*

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*Alaric watched with a frown as she entered the bathroom. He wondered if he was imagining things, but he couldn't help feeling that something was odd about Claudia today. Perhaps because her change was so drastic, he felt there was more to it than it seemed, but then, some of his misgivings were dispelled when she asked for the five percent of shares. Instead of thinking more about it, he merely sent a text message urging his attorney to hurry up before calling Terrance to come over immediately. His relationship with Victoria wasn't getting anywhere at the moment, and he wasn't sure at all whether he could get back together with her. That being said, now that he had the idea of courting her again, he couldn't be alone with another girl like this anymore.*

*After making the phone call, he went out and stood alone outside the room. The cold wind greeted him, taking away some of his heat. It would take about ten minutes for Terrance to arrive, and he decided to stand outside for a while before going back in.*

*After standing for a long time, he heard light footsteps from behind, followed by Claudia's voice. "Al, why are you standing here?" Her voice quavered a little, and there was a look of panic in her eyes, which gradually disappeared after she saw him.*

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*Claudia freaked out the moment she came out and saw that Alaric was gone. It took her a while of searching to find the man, whom she thought had gone out to see someone else. Of course, what she feared most was that he had gone to Victoria. Won't I be playing into Victoria's hands if he goes to her? No, I won't let this kind of thing happen. She stepped forward and persuaded in a soft voice, "It's chilly out here, and you're not dressed warmly enough. It's better to get back inside."*

*Seeing her approaching, Alaric subconsciously took a couple of steps back to keep his distance from her, and his bushy eyebrows furrowed slightly.*

*Whether it was because Claudia had been bothering him the whole time or because Terrance had yet to show up after a long time, he actually felt extremely restless deep down; even his body felt irritably hot. In addition to the coolness, the night breeze actually made him feel a bit comfortable.*

*All at once, he was alerted by this strange feeling. Seeing the panicked look in Claudia's eyes, he recalled the drink he had consumed just now. If possible, he really didn't want to suspect the woman in front of him; she had risked her life to save him back then, after all. However, the heat in his body reminded him that everything tonight smelled fishy. For no apparent reason, she came over saying she was going to leave; then she asked for shares and drinks and said yes to everything I said. At the thought of this, he strode outside*

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*immediately.*

*At the sight of this, Claudia was startled, and she quickly caught up with him.*

*“Al, what’s wrong with you?”*

*Alaric stopped dead in his tracks and stared at her with gloomy eyes. “What do you think?”*

*Fixed by his penetrating gaze, which seemed to be able to see into people’s hearts, Claudia felt as though she had nowhere to hide. Sheepishly, she averted her eyes, saying, “I—I don’t know what you’re talking about.”*

*However, Alaric let out a sneer before turning around to leave at once.*

*At the sight of this, Claudia anxiously tried to catch up with him, but the man strode so fast that she couldn’t keep pace with him at all. In just a moment, she lost him right away; not only that, she didn’t even know where she was.*

*She pulled her coat together and shivered as she walked on, not because of the chill but because the drink she had consumed just now was starting to take effect on her. She didn’t see Alaric when she came out of the bathroom just now, so she drank up what was left in his glass, thinking she might as well drink a bit of it since they would end up together anyway. But now, Alaric was*

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*gone, while she... She fished out her phone and called Scarlett with*

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*trembling hands.*

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*Victoria tucked Nicole in before turning to check on Nathan. After making sure that they were both well tucked in, she turned off all the lights in the room*

*except for a small nightlight. Then, she closed the door and left.*

*It was especially quiet in the house after the kids were both asleep.*

*Not feeling sleepy at this moment, Victoria took out the agreement that Alaric had brought her when he came to pick her up during the day. As she didn't get a chance to read it in the car during the day, she had no choice but to read it now.*

*She read through it carefully. Its contents were the same as what she had previously sent to Alaric, with no alterations whatsoever. In fact, it was printed one-for-one. Turning to the last page of the document, she saw Alaric's signature. All that was needed was for her to sign her name, and the agreement, existing in two copies, would come into effect immediately.*

*After pondering for a moment, she put down the agreement and went to her*

*6/7*

*study to get her pen. However, just when she was about to sign the agreement, the doorbell rang. She paused to look up at the door. Who could be visiting at such a late hour?*

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*Victoria could only place her pen down and rose to her feet to head toward the foyer.*

*Due to the fact that she lived alone, Victoria had always been extremely vigilant, and she had equipped her door with cameras and a peephole.*

*Hence, she first turned on the cameras to take a look at the visitor*

*upon*

*reaching the foyer.*

*However, when she caught sight of the figure that appeared on the screen and the face that belonged to it, she immediately froze.*

*Alaric? Why is he here? What's he doing at my house at this hour?*

*Although she was not worried that he would harm her as he wasn't a stranger, she didn't feel inclined to open the door for him due to their relationship with each other. Besides, a phone call would suffice if he had something important to tell her.*

*1/8*

*However, she recalled the agreement that would soon be signed and realized that he would have many more opportunities to spend time with her children in the future. Since she had already made her decision, it seemed Wed,*

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*that there was no longer any reason for her to continue pushing him away.*

*At that thought, Victoria let out a sigh and walked toward the door before opening it for him.*

*2/8*

*Alaric had been waiting by Victoria's door for a long time, but she still hadn't opened the door. He lowered his gaze toward his shoes. Due to the late hour, he hadn't held much hope that she would open the door for him when he arrived, and he only pressed the doorbell to try his luck. If she couldn't hear him, then he would just forget about it.*



*Just like that, he waited for what felt like an eternity with downcast eyes, and yet nobody came to open the door for him. However, when he was about to leave in dejection, the door suddenly opened, and he turned to look at Victoria in disbelief at the sound.*

*The moment their eyes met, Victoria was startled by his appearance.*

*When she was checking the cameras, she had mostly seen his figure, and only half of his face was shown, so she wasn't able to tell, but now that they were face to face, she noticed that Alaric's face was flushed crimson, as if he were drunk.*

\*

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*Moreover, there was something amiss with his gaze. Could he have gotten drunk and come to her to cause a fuss?*

*At that thought, Victoria took a step back, distancing herself from him. "It's very late. What are you doing here? Do you need anything?"*

*3/8*

*Alaric pursed his lips slightly. She was right. What was he doing here at this hour? Besides, what could he even achieve by coming to her when he was in this condition? In fact, he shouldn't have shown up in the first place. Even if he was doing this to get her back, it was all the more reason for him not to disturb her here.*

*However, for reasons unknown even to himself, his feet seemed to take him to where she was as if they had a mind of their own. Even at a time like this, she was the only person he wanted to be with. And yet...*

*Thinking that, he panted lightly and said, "It was an accident."*

*Victoria was utterly confused. An accident? He came all the way to her house to ring her doorbell in the middle of the night, and now he was saying that it was an accident. Did he take her for a fool?*

*As they spoke, she sensed that there was something off about him and*

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*asked with a frown, "Why are you panting so much? What did you do?"*

*4/8*

*Her voice was extremely gentle and pleasant to the ears, not in a way that was deliberate, but rather because she always had such a lovely voice.*

*Moreover, she was dressed in a nightgown, most likely due to the fact that she had been getting ready to retire for the night. Her hair which was always pulled back during the day now cascaded down her shoulders, while her fair face and exquisite features were free from any makeup. Her brows were relaxed, and underneath her small nose was a pair of rosy and seductive red lips.*

*Red lips... Alaric's breath caught in his throat, and he felt as if his body was heating up even more. He forced himself to move his eyes away from her face. "It's nothing. I'll leave now."*

*Upon saying that, Alaric summoned all of his willpower to turn around. He couldn't stay here for another minute; any longer and he might get into trouble. He might be able to hold himself back if it came to someone else, but the fact that the person standing before him was the woman he loved only added fuel to the fire.*

*“Wait a second.”*

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*Unexpectedly, he had just turned around when Victoria called out to him from behind.*

*5/8*

*At her voice, Alaric’s feet came to a halt. It wasn’t because he was unwilling to move, but rather that his body refused to heed his mind, and the struggle between his limbs and his brain caused him to be rooted in place without walking forward or turning around.*

*Meanwhile, Victoria walked over and circled around before coming to a stop before him, where she placed a hand on his forehead emotionlessly. The moment her hand came into contact with his skin, she immediately retracted it from the scorching heat that was emanating from him.*

*“Why... Why is your skin so hot?”*

*When she first caught sight of his red face upon opening the door earlier, she assumed that he was drunk, which would explain why he would show up at her door in the middle of the night. However, as their conversation went on, she couldn’t detect the smell of alcohol on his body at all, yet his face remained flushed and his breaths were heavy as he spoke, and he even told her that his visit was an accident.*

*Victoria found this strange, and as she expected, she realized that he was*

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*burning hot the moment she touched his forehead.*

*“Weren’t you perfectly fine when you went back earlier? Why do you have a*

*fever all of a sudden? What did you do?"*

*That was just a while ago!*

*"You have a really high fever. It's so late at night; I think I should call an ambulance for you." As soon as she finished speaking, she retracted her earlier words and corrected herself. "No, you're still conscious now, so they might not come over even if I call them. Besides, it takes too long to wait for an ambulance. It's best for you to go to the hospital immediately, but..."*

*If she followed him to the hospital, she didn't feel safe about leaving the two children alone in the house.*

*But... Victoria bit her lower lip as she glanced at Alaric, who seemed delirious from the fever. Eventually, she gritted her teeth and made the decision to take him to the hospital.*

*"Forget it, I'll just go with you, but you must give Mr. Levane a call right now and tell him to head to the hospital right away. After he arrives, I'll...."*

*Before she could finish, Alaric, who had been motionless, suddenly took a step forward and wrapped her in his arms, putting a stop to Victoria's next words as she froze in place. All she could feel was his heavy breaths in her ear and the sheer heat that enveloped her while he hugged her.*

*At first, she wanted to push him away, but she could tell from his current behavior that he must have gone delirious from the fever. Did she really have to call an ambulance after all?*

*Just as she was about to push him off her and call the ambulance immediately after, Alaric spoke strenuously into her ear.*

*"I don't need to go to the hospital."*

*His hot breath fanned her ear as he spoke, causing Victoria to shrink away in a subconscious attempt to avoid him.*

*“Why not? You’re burning with a fever...”*

*“I don’t have a fever,” Alaric protested feebly, unable to stop his large hands from tightening around her waist, pulling her soft body closer to him.*

*Hence, every inch of their bodies was practically molded together save for*

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*their clothes, leaving Victoria unable to catch her breath from his strong grip.*

*“Did the fever make you lose your mind? How can you say that you don’t have a fever when your body is this hot?”*

*“I-I don’t have a fever... I-It’s Claudia...”*

*His words were all over the place, but Victoria instantly understood—not only did he not have a fever, but it was also connected to Claudia.*

*Could it be that... Claudia had given him...*

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*1/9*

*Upon the realization as to why Alaric was boiling hot even though he hadn’t drunk or come down with a fever, Victoria couldn’t help but gulp. Her lips were slightly parted, most likely due to her shock, and she then bit on her lower lip after a moment.*

*“So? Why did you come to me if you knew what condition you’re in?”*

*The man who was hugging her fell silent for a long while before he replied, “... don’t know.”*

*Alaric’s voice sounded a little lost. “Except for you.... I didn’t know who else to*

go to.”

*After saying that, he tightened his embrace and closed his eyes, burying his head in her neck. He felt terrible from holding himself back, and the only way he could calm himself down was by holding her like this and surrounding himself with her scent. That way, he would know that the person next to him was her and not anyone else.*

*“You came to me because you didn’t know who else to go to?”*

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*“No...” From his voice, he seemed to have lost his train of thought, and even his sentences turned broken. “I... just wanted... to see you.”*

*27/0*

*Hearing that, Victoria felt a little peeved, yet there was nothing she could do.*

*“How would it help if you came to me? Just by our relationship alone, do you think I would help you?”*

*Upon saying that, she pressed both of her hands on Alaric’s chest and used all of her strength to shove him away.*

*Alaric stumbled backward until he hit the wall, his gaze lowered. Due to his crimson face and how much he’d been restraining himself, he strongly resembled a kicked puppy.*

*I thought he just had a fever. I never expected him to actually be...*

*Victoria wanted nothing more than to knock him out and send him away.*

*After all, he had to be a fool to fall into a woman’s trap like this.*

*“You can just go wherever you want. If you were able to be tricked to this extent, you should give up on living and just dig a hole in the ground and bury*

*yourself in it.”*

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*3/0*

*After leaving those biting words behind, she immediately went back into the house and closed the door.*

*Bam!*

*The sound of the door slamming shut reverberated loudly in the hallway.*

*After the echo faded away, it became unusually silent. All that remained was Alaric’s heavy breaths, despite his best attempts to control them.*

*If I was able to be tricked to this extent, I should give up on living and just dig a hole in the ground and bury myself in it?*

*Although he was in pain, Alaric still heard every single word that left Victoria’s mouth. She must be furious and disappointed in him at the sight of his current state, right? After all, he was disappointed in himself too.*

*However, how exactly was he supposed to fully repay Claudia for saving his life? Perhaps he didn’t deserve to have her for the rest of his life. Perhaps...*

*As Alaric felt his consciousness slowly seep away into nothing, the door that had been closed suddenly opened once more. He thought that he was just imagining things, but a pair of slippers soon appeared in his line of sight.*

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*He hadn’t noticed when Victoria had opened the door earlier, but he now*

*4/9*

*realized that she was wearing a pair of fluffy blue slippers, and they even had*

*a cartoon image printed on them that was the same as the one she liked as a child. He didn't think that the things she liked would remain the same even after all those years.*

*We*

*Alaric slightly raised his head to look at her with a confused gaze.*

*Although Victoria was facing him, her eyes were looking elsewhere as she said in a cold voice, "Come inside for now. I'll give you something to drink, and then we can think of a solution."*

*Hearing that, Alaric was a little dumbfounded and even thought that he had misheard.*

*"A—Are you fine with that?"*

*"Don't overthink it!" She immediately interrupted him, "It's only because I've already agreed to you taking care of the children, so I can't just sit by and watch you get hurt. If you were fine today, it wouldn't be my concern if something happened to you, but since you're already here and I know about it, I won't be able to escape the responsibility if you end up getting sick later,*  
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*so I just want to save myself that trouble. Got it?"*

*Although she had just gone on a ramble, Alaric's expression remained unchanged, leaving her unsure whether he had been listening to her.*

*"Did you hear me?"*

*Alaric raised his gaze. "Yeah."*

*5/9*

*Victoria fell silent. Forget it, he clearly looks like he hasn't listened to anything I*



*said. Besides, he's barely in his right mind now, so why should I waste my breath?*

*"Come on in."*

*She took two steps back to allow Alaric to enter.*

*However, he only gazed into her house, his feet still rooted to the ground.*

*"What? You don't want to come in? Then I'll just go..."*

*Before she could finish, Alaric immediately strode into the house, closing the door behind him with a loud bang.*

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*Once he was inside, Victoria dragged him to the couch in the living room and instructed him to sit while she went to get him some water to drink.*

*"I want it to be iced," he suddenly requested.*

*"What?" Thinking that she had misheard him, Victoria asked, "You want iced water?"*

*"It'd be best if it were iced water... If not, cold water is fine, too."*

*"But we're in the middle of winter..."*

*While she spoke, Victoria suddenly recalled something, and she stopped refuting his words. When she walked into the kitchen, she subconsciously opened the fridge.*

*As it was still winter, there were no iced bottled waters to be found in the fridge, only a few cans of beer.*

*Iced beer should be fine, right? With his current state, he probably needs to lower his body temperature as soon as possible.*

*At that thought, Victoria pulled out two cans of iced beer and was just about*  
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*to bring them to Alaric when she recalled that he had been recently*

*7/9*

*hospitalized due to gastrointestinal bleeding, and it was likely a bad idea for*  
*him to consume iced beer at a time like this.*

*A brief pause later, she stuffed the two cans of iced beer back into the fridge*  
*and poured a glass of warm water, which she headed back outside with.*

*After retrieving the glass from her, Alaric fell silent for a moment before he*  
*asked, "Where's the iced water?"*

*"Don't have it."*

*"Then... Cold water?"*

*Victoria had already been irritated, and his barrage of questions annoyed her*  
*even further, so she simply rebuked, "Don't drink it if you don't want to."*

*After getting scolded, Alaric fell unusually quiet before he took the glass of*  
*water and gulped it down slowly. He was taking his time, and from the looks*  
*of it, it seemed that even a single sip of water was an extremely painful feat*  
*for him. At the same time, his forehead was dripping in sweat, causing*  
*Victoria to feel as if he would burst into smoke at any second.*

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*She pursed her lips before heading to the bathroom to retrieve a wet towel.*

*"If you're finished with that, lie down here."*

*Alaric didn't reply, most likely due to his immense discomfort, and he quickly heeded her words. Victoria then placed the wet towel over him—since his body was practically burning up, she planned to treat his symptoms like she would for a fever. After that, she retrieved another wet towel as well as some alcohol in order to help him lower his body temperature.*

*She stood behind him and asked in a lowered voice, "Will you wipe your body yourself or should I help you?"*

*And yet, there came no response from Alaric who was lying on the couch. He couldn't have gone delirious from the heat, right? she wondered in confusion.*

*Thinking that, Victoria hurriedly reached out to push him, and while he let out a muffled grunt, he still remained motionless. It was clear that he was in extreme discomfort.*

*Fine, I'll just help him to the end. I'll just think of it as me wanting him to spend some money on renovating the house for the children.*

*8/9*

*At that thought, she hastily helped him up and removed his suit jacket from his body, letting him lie down again once he was only left with a shirt.*

*Although it was just a simple task, it left her so exhausted that she was gasping for breath. She hadn't expected Alaric to be so heavy when he seemed so lean, and even just supporting him so that he wouldn't keel over had sapped her of most of her strength.*

*Panting from exertion, Victoria began to unfasten the buttons on his shirt.*

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*However, as soon as Victoria touched his button, her wrist was grabbed by a strong force. She looked up and was met with Alaric's dark gaze. In the dim living room, Alaric stared intently at her; his eyes were like a predator eyeing prey.*

*Victoria was startled since she didn't notice he had woken up. Good, he's awake. I can tell him to clean himself up. However, he seems kind of off. Is he not right in the head? Although she had never tried it herself, she had heard things about being unable to control oneself if they were drugged. What if... Before she could think any further, the grip of her wrist tightened, and she could hear Alaric's breath becoming heavier.*

*Immediately, her expression changed drastically, and she tried to struggle out of his grasp. "The alcohol and towel are right beside you. Since you are awake, you can do—ah!" Before she could finish her words, she yelped when Alaric pulled her toward him. Then, Victoria's view turned upside down as Alaric pinned her to the couch. His breath was hot, and his scent surrounded her. He pinned Victoria's hands above her head and leaned down toward her. In that split second, Victoria's heart almost jumped out of her chest. She remembered the kids were still sleeping in the room and whispered, "What*

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*are you doing, Alaric?"*

*However, Alaric ignored her and continued to lean downward.*

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*Just as Victoria thought about kicking Alaric to get him back to his senses, the latter leaned against her and stopped moving as he stared at her silently. Their faces were inches apart from each other, and Victoria could see lust intertwined with struggles reflected in his orbs. Since Alaric was holding himself back, he frowned deeply and breathed heavily. After some time, he relaxed slightly and lowered his head.*

*Seeing his reaction, Victoria panicked. Did he give in?*

*However, at this moment, Alaric cupped her face and pressed his lips against her forehead. After that, he shakily backed away and looked at her with a pale face. "Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt you." Then, he quickly released her and scrambled away.*

*After he left, Victoria sat on the couch in a daze. She could still vaguely feel the warmth of his lips on her forehead. After some time, she returned to her senses and quickly chased after him. With a loud bang, Alaric entered the bathroom and closed the door. Then, Victoria could hear the water running. It*

*2/6*

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*was evident as to what he was doing there. Although taking a cold shower was the best way to deal with it, it was winter. Victoria couldn't care less if it was summer, as she would also gladly drag him into the bathroom and let the cold water do its magic.*

*3/6*

*If he were alert enough, he wouldn't have stepped into the trap. Rather than coming to me, it's best if I let him take a cold shower. That way, he'll never*

*make the same mistake again. Thinking about it, Victoria made up her mind and turned around, yet she halted after taking a few steps. Then, she went back and turned the doorknob, but it didn't budge. Hmm? Did he lock himself in the bath?*

*She frowned and tried to say something, but Alaric cut her to it.*

*"Don't come in." Although his voice sounded strained, he was panting heavily. Plus, he was being drugged, so Victoria knew he was probably jerking off in there.*

*In that split second, she pursed her lips and resisted the urge to drag him out of the bathroom. Still, she couldn't stand it and said to him through the door, "Just take a cold shower, and don't do anything you are not supposed to."*

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*The only response she got was Alaric's heavy panting.*

*Victoria's eyes widened when she heard it. "I'm talking to you, Alaric. Are you listening? Alaric!"*

*However, no matter what she said, Alaric ignored her, seemingly having decided not to listen to her. Plus, he might be too busy to acknowledge her.*

*Victoria was furious. She gave up on talking to him since she knew it was useless. Then, she went to the living room and took his cup to the kitchen.*

*After cleaning the cup, she went to check on the kids. Seeing that they were still asleep, she relaxed.*

*4/6*

*After a few minutes, she went to the bathroom and knocked on the door. The*

*water was still running as if Alaric was addicted in there.*

*This b\*stard! Victoria scolded him inwardly. She gave up and waited for him in the living room. In the end, she was getting drowsy since Alaric was still in there. Soon, she fell asleep against the couch.*

*After some time, Victoria jolted awake. The living room was silent, but her heart was thumping wildly. Up until now, Alaric was still in the bathroom. Did he faint in there?*

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*Thinking about it, Victoria quickly went to the bathroom. At this moment, the water had stopped running and was silent. She twisted the doorknob and realized it was still locked from the inside. Thus, she could only knock on the door and call him. However, there was no response.*

*Victoria frowned and wondered if he had fainted in there. Suddenly, there were noises behind the door, and the door was unlocked. Immediately, Victoria pushed the door and entered the room.*

*5/6*

*As soon as she entered the bathroom, she saw Alaric lying on the cold ground. He was soaking wet and looked miserable. His hair was dripping wet, and there were water droplets on his pale face.*

*Looking at his face, Victoria quickly crouched and touched his forehead. The touch was not burning hot anymore but rather icy cold. It seems like the effect must have worn off. Then, she turned up the hot water and put the showerhead in Alaric's hand. "Are you awake? Here, soak yourself in warm*

*water to warm yourself up.”*

*Initially, Alaric had his eyes closed. When he heard her voice, his eyes fluttered open. Although he said nothing, he obeyed her words and took the showerhead. The warm water made him regain his consciousness. Alaric looked up and saw her leaving the bathroom. After some time, she came back with a set of men’s clothing.*

*“The clothes are on the rack. After you are done washing yourself, wear it and come on out.”*

*the*

*At her words, Alaric silently looked at her momentarily before asking, “Where did the clothes come from?”*

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*“What?” Since Alaric’s voice was low, Victoria couldn’t hear what he was talking about with the water running. Thus, she crouched down and asked again, “What did you just say?”*

*Alaric stared at her intently and replied, “Where did these clothes come from?” After all, there was no man in her house, so where would the clothes come from?*

*1//*

*This time, Victoria heard his words clearly. She paused and was about to say something when Alaric said sulkily, “I don’t want to wear someone else’s clothes.”*

*Hearing his words, Victoria was speechless. Judging by his reaction, is he refusing to wear the clothes because he thought it was someone else?*



*Thinking about it, she smirked coldly and said, "Fine then. Don't wear it. Just sit here for all I care. I will call your assistant and tell him to pick you up." There was no way she would agree to his silly request when he had disturbed her in the middle of the night.*

*After she had finished her words, she was about to leave when she felt a tug*

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*on the hem of her shirt. She turned around and saw Alaric gripping her shirt.*

*"What are you doing?" asked Victoria while frowning.*

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*Alaric lowered his eyes, and his eyelashes still had water droplets. "Please don't kick me out. I'll wear it."*

*Victoria felt her breath hitched. Looking at his miserable state, she felt she had mistreated him. She kept quiet and pinched the bridge of her nose. "Let go." Good Lord!*

*"Are you going to ask me to leave?"*

*"Why are you staying here? Don't you have a home to go to? Your temperature has already turned normal. You are fine," said Victoria.*

*"Are you going to kick me out just because I'm fine?"*

*"What else do you expect?"*

*"Okay." Alaric threw the showerhead away. "I'm not going to rinse myself with hot water."*

*Victoria was speechless as she looked at him in shock. She never knew that*

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*he could be so shameless.*

*3/7*

*In the meantime, Alaric had already got the taste of acting pity, just like what happened at the hospital. At that moment, he also realized that Victoria would only acknowledge him if he were miserable. Otherwise, she would definitely ignore him.*

*Although it was pathetic to act miserable, he had no choice but to do so.*

*Thus, he had made up his mind and tugged on her even harder. “Will I be sick if I sit here all night long? Will you care for me if I’m sick?”*

*Hearing his words, Victoria knew what he was planning and looked at him.*

*speechlessly. “Are you trying to trick me, Alaric? Do you think I will let you stay if you are sick?”*

*“Yes.” Alaric nodded,*

*Victoria was speechless. Forget it. I can’t argue with him since he is already shameless.*

*“Just get up and change your clothes.”*

*Alaric pursed his lips at her words. Although he was unhappy, he slowly stood*

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*1. up.*

*When Alaric stood before Victoria, the latter noticed his shirt sticking closely to his body. When Victoria’s eyes trailed downward, she quickly averted her gaze. “Hurry up. I’m leaving.”*

*As Alaric watched her leave in a hurry, he lowered his gaze and chuckled*

*deeply. However, when his eyes fixated on the clothes, he stopped smiling and only had one thought in his mind—Whose clothes are these? There is no way she would have guessed I would be coming, right?*

*Alaric clutched onto the last hope as he wore the clothes. However, his face turned grim immediately when he felt the clothes were bigger than his. The good thing was that the clothes had no smell, so nobody had worn them before. Still, just the thought of Victoria preparing clothes for someone else made Alaric upset.*

*Could it be that it's for Mervin? Are they that close?*

*Jealousy filled Alaric's mind as he thought about it.*

*“What are you dilly–dallying inside?”*

*≡*

*Alaric returned to his senses when Victoria's voice rang from the other end of the door. When he stepped out of the room, she eyed him up and down thoughtfully.*

*It looks like the clothes are still too big for him.*

*Thinking about it, she nodded and said, “Although the clothes are kind of big, you just have to endure it.” Then, she gave him a jacket. “Here's my coat.*

*Come on and wear it.”*

*Hearing her words, Alaric took it from her. Her coat was slightly oversized since she needed to wear it under layering pieces. Her scent still lingered on the coat, surrounding Alaric as he wore it. However, he was still upset about the clothes. Thus, he walked toward her and whispered, “Whom are you preparing for these clothes?”*

*Victoria stopped what she was doing and looked at him. “Do you really want to know?”*

*Alaric stared at her in silence. Victoria looked at him momentarily before saying, “It’s for Mervin.”*

*In that split second, Alaric’s expression darkened. “What did you say?”*

*“What’s wrong? I thought you hoped I would say his name since you keep bugging me.”*

*Alaric kept quiet.*

*“Are you satisfied now?” Then, she pointed at the water cooler. “Go and grab yourself a glass of warm water. You seem capable enough to do so.”*

*“The drug hasn’t worn off yet,” replied Alaric.*

*Victoria gave him side-eyes.*

*“Can I sleep on the couch?”*

*“Do you expect I would allow you to enter the room?”*

*Alaric looked at her with a pale face. “If you agree…”*

*“No. Just keep quiet and sleep on the couch. It’s getting late now, and the children still have to go to school tomorrow.”*

*Looking in the direction where Victoria had pointed, Alaric pursed his lips and lowered his eyes. “Okay.”*

*After Victoria had left, Alaric sat on the couch. The room was quiet, and he was still warm from the hot shower. However, his heart seemed to be as cold as Antarctica. He lowered his head and stared at his clothes with death glares. The thought of Victoria preparing the clothes for Mervin made him want to throw them out. Sadly, he could do nothing.*

*On second thought, it's fine if it's for Mervin. After all, I am the one who is wearing the clothes and staying by her side. Thinking about it, Alaric relaxed and felt happy. Never would he expect that this could turn into a blessing in disguise. However, as he thought about what Claudia did, coldness filled his eyes.*

#### *Chapter 359*

*After Victoria went back to her room, everything finally settled down. She had even taken a nap while waiting for Alaric, but now that he was fine, she couldn't find any peace within herself. Instead of sleeping, Victoria's mind was consumed by thoughts of the events that had happened earlier on as she lay on the bed.*

*It was apparent that Alaric didn't want anything to happen between him and Claudia when he came to Victoria's place after falling into Claudia's trap. In the past, Victoria wouldn't have believed this because he had previously asked for a divorce for Claudia's sake, even though their marriage was a sham. However, his favoritism toward her had been evident back then.*

*But why didn't anything happen between him and Claudia? Victoria would think of it this way because if there was something between him and Claudia, Claudia wouldn't have resorted to such drastic measures against him.*

*Originally, Victoria wanted to sort out their relationship, but the more she thought about it, the more she realized that she didn't understand Alaric.*

*Logically speaking, he liked Claudia at the time, and she was his savior, but both of them didn't sleep together, which made it seem strange. On the other*

*hand... even though they both claimed it was a fake marriage, the two of them...*

*Victoria turned over and got more confused the more she thought about it. It was ridiculous. Could it be that Alaric mistook his gratitude toward Claudia as love when he was young? But how could he not distinguish between mere liking and genuine emotions? Unable to find an answer, Victoria finally sat up and gazed quietly at the pitch-black scenery outside her window.*

*Perhaps... She thought that this would be a good time to call Summer. With this thought in mind, Victoria took out her phone and dialed Summer's number. Due to the time difference, it was daytime where Summer was.*

*Summer was quite surprised when she received Victoria's call. "This is the first time you're calling me during the day. What's up? It should be late at night over there. Haven't you slept yet?"*

*"I..." Victoria sounded hesitant.*

*Being Victoria's longtime best friend, Summer could sense that something was wrong and asked sensitively, "What happened?"*

*"Well..." Victoria nodded and told Summer about the recent events and everything that had happened tonight.*

*At that, Summer sighed. "Well, what can I say? You two are really destined to have an ill-fated relationship. It's been five years, and he still hasn't given up on you. Don't tell me he liked you before?"*

*Liked me? Those words made Victoria's heart skip a beat, and she instinctively denied it. "That's impossible."*

*As her best friend, Summer could easily detect that something was off from*

*her words. She said with a smile, "Why are you so quick to deny it? I'm not saying you like him. I'm just saying he likes you."*

*"Isn't it normal for me to deny it? If he liked me, why did he want a divorce back then, and why did he make me have an abortion?" Victoria replied.*

*"Wasn't he unaware of your pregnancy? Wasn't the abortion a misunderstanding?"*

*Victoria bit her lip after hearing that. "Even if it was a misunderstanding, this wouldn't have happened if he hadn't given his phone to Claudia."*

*Summer fell silent upon hearing that. She sighed and asked, "So, what do you think about it?"*

*"I haven't thought about it."*

*"Why are you calling me in the middle of the night when you haven't thought about it?" Victoria was speechless after hearing that.*

*Seeing that Victoria was silent, Summer directly hit the mark and said, "You still like him, don't you?" This question made Victoria frown, and she was about to respond when Summer continued, "Don't be too hasty to deny it. If you truly didn't harbor any feelings for him, you wouldn't be torn, and you wouldn't have allowed him in."*

*"I..." Victoria muttered.*

*"Are you trying to say that the reason you let him in was because he's the father of your children?"*

*Victoria was speechless for a moment. She didn't expect Summer to guess what she was about to say, so she pursed her lips and didn't respond.*

*"Does your silence imply agreement? If it's just because he's the father of*

*your children, that's all the more reason you shouldn't help him. Weren't you always afraid that he would take your children away from you? If he falls for Claudia's trap tonight, then he and Claudia will get together. Once Claudia has a child, Alaric and her will have their own children. By that time, do you think that they will still fight for your kids' custody?"*

*Victoria remained silent because she realized that Summer was right. If Alaric fell into Claudia's trap tonight, then he and Claudia... When they had their own child, they probably wouldn't care about Nicole and Nathan anymore.*

*Why she chose to help Alaric was beyond her because she had shut him out but regretted her actions and caved in by letting him in, and then...*

*Victoria rubbed her forehead at the thought of it. Opening the door for the first time was fine, but doing it the second time... That was her problem. If Alaric misunderstood her actions because of that, then she could only blame herself.*

*"Are you speechless?" Summer chuckled lightly. "So, you still like him? Otherwise, you wouldn't have been that harsh toward Bane."*

*"I just wanted to vent to you, not have you speculate whether I like him or not," Victoria responded.*

*"Well, I'm just casually analyzing it for you. I should at least do this for my best friend so that you won't regret it in the future."*

*"What is there to regret? I won't regret it."*

*"Is that so? If you're not going to regret it, you should kick him out now. You still have a chance to cut off his thoughts."*

*"Do you think that it will happen just because I did something?"*



*“That’s true.” Summer sighed. “But he’s still so devoted to you after all these years. If he had known, why bother in the first place? Also, I never expected that you would inform him about your pregnancy through a text message.”*

*Victoria’s intention was for Summer to help her solve her problems, but she ended up discussing Victoria’s feelings for Alaric which troubled her even more. “I’m going to hang up now. I need to get some rest.”*

*“You’re annoyed because I hit the nail on the head about your feelings.”*

*Summer giggled.*

*“Alright, let’s talk another day.” Victoria straight away hung up on Summer’s call and laid down.*

*Still liking him? I must be out of my mind to continue liking him. Hadn’t he hurt me enough five years ago? As she contemplated, there was a sudden knock on the door. She was startled and quickly sat up from the bed.*

*“Who is it?”*

*“It’s me.” Alaric’s deep voice came from outside the door.*

*Hearing that, Victoria hesitated for a few seconds, then got up to open the door. After opening the door, Alaric saw Victoria standing in front of him with a grim expression.*

*“What do you want?”*

*Alaric pursed his lips and said, “It’s cold outside. Do you have another blanket? Or... can I sleep in your room?”*

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*Victoria thought she had misheard him. She could overlook his first request, but she wondered what his intentions were when he uttered the second*

*request.*

*“Sleep in my room? Do you know what you’re saying?” Victoria looked at him. speechlessly. “Do you think that our relationship has returned to what it used to be just because I signed that agreement?”*

*“No.” Alaric lowered his gaze, his voice muffled. “It’s just that I’ve been soaked in cold water for too long tonight, and it’s cold outside.”*

*“Can’t you cover yourself with a blanket if it’s cold?” With that, Victoria turned around and opened the cabinet. She was going to retrieve another blanket for him, but she realized that the cabinet was empty when she opened it. She had only prepared an extra blanket just in case she needed it but had already given it to Alaric.*

*If that blanket isn’t enough for him... Victoria turned around resentfully and handed him her own blanket. “Here, are two blankets enough for you? It’s almost 3.00AM, and if you disturb my sleep again, I won’t hesitate to kick you out.”*

*When Alaric saw her handing him the blanket from her own bed, he refused to accept it. “It’s okay. One is enough.” He turned around and walked away after saying that.*

*Victoria was speechless after hearing that. Suit yourself! She couldn’t be bothered with it anymore.*

*After shutting the door, Victoria lay back down and covered herself with the blanket before closing her eyes. She decided to sleep, but after lying down for nearly ten minutes, all she could think of was Alaric saying he felt cold. Upon careful consideration, she realized that his claim of feeling cold had*

*some validity. He had endured a long shower under cold water, and given his recent frail health, the cold could potentially exacerbate his gastric issues.*

*Moreover, he looked so weak that he could barely stand when he approached her earlier on.*

*A few seconds later, Victoria turned over and sat up. Just this once. This would be the last time she would show any concern for him. After sending him away tomorrow, she would turn a blind eye to all his pitiful acts. Victoria opened the door and made her way to the living room. The living room was quiet, and the lights were turned off. She found the switch before turning it on, and the room was instantly illuminated.*

*The next moment, Victoria saw Alaric curled up on the couch. His complexion seemed even worse than when he went to borrow a blanket, and his forehead was drenched in cold sweat. When Victoria reached out to touch his forehead, she was startled by how hot it was.*

*This time, she was certain that he was truly running a fever caused by illness, unlike before... Victoria pushed him lightly, but he didn't respond. It seemed like he was barely conscious due to the high temperature.*

*With that, she opened the cabinet and took out a fever patch and some medicine that she usually prepared for her children. She applied the patch to his forehead and administered a fever-reducing pill along with water. After everything was done, she was so exhausted that it left her breathless and panting. She was utterly speechless as she looked at Alaric, whose face remained pale. This was no ordinary fever, and Victoria dared not leave his side, fearing that he might become delirious.*

*From time to time, she wiped his body with alcohol to try to lower his temperature. When she wiped him for the second time, Alaric suddenly opened his eyes and looked at her with a faint gaze. "Snowball."*

*Victoria's actions paused upon hearing that nickname, and she furrowed her eyebrows. "Don't call me that." In her memory, it had been a long time since someone called her that.*

*"Snowball." He insisted on calling Victoria that way even though she stopped him from doing so. "Snowball, can you forgive me?" he asked.*

*Because of this, Victoria gave him a strange look, wondering if he was delirious from the fever.*

*Despite Alaric's genuine delirium, his intense gaze fixated on Victoria as he pleaded, "Even if you refuse to forgive me, please give me a chance to redeem myself." He held her slender wrist tightly and spoke desperately. "I'll treat you exceptionally well. I'll give you everything you desire. I'm even willing to sacrifice my life for you, okay?"*

*However, Victoria merely reached out to touch his forehead as if she hadn't heard his words. His fever has gone down, but how could he still be feverish enough to talk about giving his life away?*

*"No." Victoria wiped him with alcohol while rejecting him impassively. As she*  
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*wiped the back of his arm, she thought for a moment and said, "Raise your hand and turn over. I'll wipe your back." If he hadn't woken up, she would have done it herself. However, since he was awake, she'd get him to turn over to save some effort. When she noticed that he remained still after her request,*

*she urged, "Hurry up."*

*Alaric, who was lying motionless, finally raised his hand. Victoria waited for him to turn over, but unexpectedly, he suddenly wrapped his arm around her neck and forcefully pulled her into his embrace. "Ah!" Victoria exclaimed. She dropped the towel as she fell into his arms.*

*Before she could react, he held her chin firmly as his breath enveloped her. In an instant, their foreheads touched, creating an intense intimacy between them. "Why not?" His hot breath sprayed across her face as he spoke.*

*Their lips were so close that they were almost touching. Their breaths intertwined, filling the air with an ambiguous atmosphere. Victoria's eyelids trembled as she felt overwhelmed by the situation. Just as she was about to step back, Alaric leaned in toward her.*

*As he went in for a kiss, Victoria instinctively tried to move away. However, her movements were too slow, and in the next moment, his soft lips were*

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*pressed against hers, making Victoria's heart skip a beat.*

*Before she could fully comprehend what was happening, Alaric, who wasn't willing to let go of the taste of sweetness, firmly held the back of her head and fiercely enveloped her slightly parted lips while she was caught off guard.*

*b/7*

*"Mmm..." Victoria initially reached out to push him away, but the moment her hand made contact with his chest, a surge of desire coursed through him. He reacted to her unintentional provocation by smoothly shifting his hand from*

*the back of her head to the side of her neck. With gentle pressure from his thumb against her jaw, she found herself forced to tilt her head slightly, revealing her slender and fair neck.*

*Victoria always possessed an elegant demeanor and had grown even more captivating compared to five years ago when she was merely a sweet, young lady. Alaric, who was captivated by her irresistible allure, gazed at her with a mixture of confusion and enchantment. Compared to his previous restraint when the medicine took effect, he now kissed her passionately and greedily.*

*Under this relentless assault, Victoria's heart pounded like thunder, and it was almost deafening. Coupled with the vast difference in strength between men and women, Victoria couldn't push him away at all. Gradually, she lost strength under his assault, and her body almost melted, half leaning into his embrace as their breaths intertwined. Victoria finally couldn't bear it anymore. She reached out and pushed his shoulder, making a muffled sound.*

*Only then did Alaric become aware of the unfolding scene and cautiously took a step back before bringing his forehead in gentle contact with hers. As he let out a heavy exhale, he asked in a hoarse voice, "What's wrong?"*  
*What's wrong? How dare he ask me what's wrong?! Victoria rolled his eyes at him. As she was about to utter a response, the once commanding figure crumbled right before her eyes before she could do so. He collapsed onto the couch with a thud and lay there motionless with his eyes closed. Victoria was dumbfounded and speechless as she froze on the spot. What on earth just*

*happened?*