

## Departure with a Belly Chapter 371

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Chapter 371

She felt his lips pressing against hers, and her breathing stopped for a moment. She tried to move back, but he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into his embrace, then deepened the kiss.

When she realized what was going on, Victoria shoved him away. "Hey, I was in the middle of talking. What was that?"

Alaric looked at her, still thirsting for more. He said honestly, "You looked a bit jealous, so I wanted to kiss you."

"I'm not jealous," denied Victoria.

Alaric smirked, much to her annoyance. This is serious, and yet he's making it into a joke. Why? Is he trying to distract me from the fact that he doesn't trust me? She asked, "You were trying to distract me, weren't you?"

"Huh? What are you talking about? I trust you." He pinched her cheek, but then the look on his face turned solemn. "But what is this all about? I thought she was the one who saved me. Why didn't you tell me that was not the case?"

Oh, he's finally getting serious about this. He wasn't kidding. Victoria got serious as

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well. "Because I used up all my strength to save you, and the river washed me away."

Alaric froze for a moment.

"After that, I hauled myself back up onto dry land. I blacked out and got a fever, then I forgot everything." Victoria looked at him. "You know I was badly ill back then, don't you?"

Alaric said nothing. He was trying his best to remember that event. After he regained consciousness, everyone told him that Claudia hurt herself just to save him. Since she was the only one with him before he fell, he thought it was Claudia who saved him.

Before he fainted, he saw a silhouette jumping into the river, but he wasn't conscious enough to see who it was. He knew it was a girl, but he didn't see her face. Still, it looked like Claudia, so he didn't suspect anything.

He then heard about someone getting admitted to the hospital and went to see who it

was. It turned out to be Victoria. For some reason, Victoria had fallen into the river as well during the trip and caught a fever that kept her unconscious for some time. When she woke up, everyone asked her what happened before she fainted, but she couldn't remember.

Victoria said, "I had forgotten about that, but for some reason, the memories came flooding back. Probably because I knocked my head on the vase."

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3/6

Oh, right. That incident. The timeline checks out. She fell into the river and had a fever, so she might lose some memories, and then she knocked her head on a vase, and which might help her regain some memories. Alaric narrowed his eyes and hissed, "So she has been taking credit for someone else's work all these years?"

Victoria pursed her lips. "Yeah, I guess you can say that." She then shot him a mocking look. "And you can't even recognize your savior."

It riled up some guilt in Alaric. "Sorry. I wasn't fully conscious, so..." If he had been conscious, he wouldn't have been fooled for so many years. Claudia kept using that favor to make him do her bidding, including that request.

"Forget it." Victoria turned around. "It's been a long time. If I hadn't remembered it, would've thought she was the one who saved you too."

He looked at her and pursed his lips. "Don't worry. I won't let her get away with this."

Victoria sneered. "Like that's going to help. Everyone thinks she's the one who saved you, and it's been years since then. Now you're going to tell everyone I was the one who

saved you instead of her? Do you have proof?"

"No."

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"Then..."

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She felt something weighing down on her shoulder. Alaric turned her around and pulled her closer. "If evidence is what we need, then the evidence is what I'll find."

"What?"

other Alaric said calmly, "I was just going to cut all ties with her without taking any action because she saved my life after all, or so I thought. Now that I know she lied through her teeth all this time, she can only wish I had only cut ties with her."

Victoria looked at him and turned away. "And what's that got to do with me?"

The light from the porch shone down on Alaric, shrouding his face in the darkness, and he muttered, "Snowball."

It had been a long time since she heard that nickname.

"I'm going to find the evidence, and our families will meet up tomorrow to cut all ties with her. After that, can you give me a chance to court you?" He huddled closer.

Before he could get too close, she pushed his hand away and took a few steps back.

Her hurried response made Alaric chuckle sweetly. "It's fine if you don't have the answer

right now. I'll come back once I'm done with this matter."

Victoria said nothing. Silence fell between them, and he looked at her. "I have to go."

Of course, he had to. It had been a while since he came, and it was already late. "I see."

She put her hands in her pockets. I'm going to see him off just like this.

"Can I hug you before I leave?"

Huh? She was about to say no, but he went ahead and pulled her into his embrace. She couldn't pull her hands out of her pockets in time to refuse, so she fell into his chest.

The air around her was filled with his scent, and she felt like he wanted to pull her whole being into himself.

It was just a hug, but Victoria was turning red. It's not even a kiss. Even though the shirt, she could feel his warmth, and the thought of pushing him away slowly left her mind. She let him hold her.

Eventually, time passed. Alaric only wanted to hug her for a bit and cure a bit of his longing, but he gained a bit more than that. He got a kiss and a hug, though she pushed him away before the kiss could get any further. That's why I asked for a hug. She wouldn't say no to that.

However, the longer he hugged her, the more he wanted to stay. He tightened his hug and buried his head in her neck, taking in her scent greedily. But I have business tomorrow. He eventually let her go, though reluctantly. "Wait for me. Call me if you need anything."

Victoria hung her head low so he wouldn't see her blush. Coolly, she said, "Just go." The light in Alaric's eyes dimmed a little, but he smiled. "Wait for me."

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*After he left, Victoria remained standing in the doorway and took a few deep breaths to calm herself down. She touched her cheeks after some time and found that they were still hot. It was just a hug. She was surprised he trusted her without any hesitation. So that means he's always liked me more, then.*

*"Mommy?" a boy asked from behind.*

*Victoria froze for a moment and turned around only to see Nathan staring at her. It surprised her. "Nathan? Why are you still up?" I thought he was asleep. She averted her*

*gaze. How long has he been standing there? He didn't see anything, did he? She walked*

*toward him and crouched down to pick him up. "You should've worn more clothes.*

*Don't want to catch a cold, do you?"*

*Nathan wrapped his arms around Victoria's neck.*

*Nervously, she asked, "So how long have you been up?"*

*"Long enough to see Mr. Night out here."*

*Oh, um... He saw it, huh? She smiled awkwardly. But eh, it's fine. He's seen it tons of times anyway. She patted his head. If he's not bringing it up, I won't either.*

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*However, Nathan brought it up. "Are you really going to date Mr. Night?"*

2/5

*Victoria paused for a moment. She was reminded of what Nicole told her and sighed. "I can't be sure, but you shouldn't butt into this. If anything comes of this, I'll tell you and Nicole, alright?"*

*Nathan nodded. "Okay."*

*"Good boy." Victoria took him back to his room and tucked him in.*

*Claudia eventually fell asleep. Scarlett was the one taking care of her, but since Alaric didn't show up, Scarlett eventually got tired and went home, telling her servants to deal with the matter instead. Claudia kept mocking the servant after they came, and even when they just wanted to give her some fruits, she shooed them away.*

*Eventually, the servant wouldn't even go close to Claudia and stood in the corner, only responding when Claudia needed them. When Claudia fell asleep, the servant heaved a sigh of relief and left her corner.*

*Even though Claudia was asleep, it was a fitful sleep, for she had a dream where people*

*found out that she took credit for Victoria's work. She fell from grace and became*

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*public enemy number one. Everyone called her a shameless whore for taking credit that belonged to someone else just to get close to Alaric.*

*3/5*

*Without the Cadogans' protection, her family quickly fell into decline, and a big part was thanks to the Cadogan's animosity toward them. She woke up with a start, and the only thing that greeted her was a silent ward. There was not a soul inside, not even the servant her mother sent, much to her chagrin. "Where the hell are you, Lila? You're here*

*to take care of me, not slack off!"*

*Lila quickly came in. "Miss Claudia, I—1*

*Claudia grabbed something and hurled it at Lila. "Where the hell were you?"*

*Shocked, Lila moved away and tried to explain herself, but someone came in. When she*

*realized who it was, the look on Claudia's face changed. "Alaric..." What? Why is he here? Claudia thought she was seeing things. She didn't think Alaric would come when she was having a fit. This is awkward. She had always presented herself as a gentle and soft-spoken woman, not a wench. This was far from her usual facade.*

*Panicked, she quickly got out of bed. "Alaric!" She started crying and pounced at him. "I thought you'd never speak to me again."*

*Alaric looked at her wrist. "Why the fury?"*

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*Claudia quickly explained, "I—I was in a bad mood because I thought you didn't care about me anymore, so... I'm sorry, Lila. I didn't mean it. Are you alright?"*

*Lila nodded. What a two-face b\*tch. She then took a few steps back and said, "I'll be going now. Please, enjoy yourselves." She left and closed the door.*

*Claudia had no idea what time it was, but it must be late. She couldn't believe Alaric would come over at this hour. "Are you still mad at me? I-I can explain. Don't listen to them. I didn't sleep with any guy."*

*A smirk curled Alaric's lips. He didn't talk about that. Instead, he went around and sat down on a chair.*

*The distance he was putting between them was not unnoticed. Panicked, Claudia followed behind him. "You don't believe me?"*

*Alaric poured himself a glass of water, but he didn't answer.*

*Claudia sat down. "Where did you go last night?" She bit her lip. "Did you go to see Victoria? You still can't forget about her, can you? But she hurt you five years ago. Even if you two date, she'll still dump you again, but not me. All I care about is you. I won't abandon you, Alaric. I saved your life, remember?" She gritted her teeth. "Please, trust*

- 1. me. I saved your life, so I won't lie to you. I almost got myself killed just to save you. It*

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*was so cold, and I even hurt my hand. I..."*

*"Yeah, it was cold. Really cold." Alaric couldn't hold it in at that point. "The girl who saved me must be freezing. She must've lost all her strength after she saved me."*

*"Yes." Claudia nodded. "It took me everything I had just to save you."*

*"Really?" Alaric looked at her coolly. "It took you everything just to save me?"*

*Claudia was in a hurry to present herself as a damsel in distress. Alright, let's go with Mom's plan and make him marry me. She was oblivious to the trap Alaric was setting up, and she nodded.*

*5/5*

*Alaric cocked his brow. "If you did lose all your strength just to save me, how did you get me onto dry land?" After Victoria told him the truth, Alaric thought back to that day and realized something was off. Even he fell sick after falling into the river. If Claudia did jump in to save him, she should have been down with a fever or worse, considering she was injured. After all, the river was freezing and the weather was cold.*

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*The question stumped Claudia, and she froze, staring at him. Eventually, she realized what was up. Does he know? He knows I took the credit? No way. He was unconscious back then, and Victoria lost her memory. There's no way he could've found out unless Victoria regained her memories, but it's been years. She should've remembered a long time ago. That means she never remembered, so what happened?*

*If she did regain her memory, she would've come over and fought me for what I did. Or she might tell the whole world she was the one who saved Alaric. This is nothing.*

*Probably paranoid because of the dream. This is actually a good chance. If I make myself out to be a poor, poor girl, he's going to take pity on me. It'll be easy for me to convince him to marry me then.*

*If I can't do that, I'll threaten him with another suicide. I'm in the hospital anyway. The medical staff can save me if anything happens. It's no big deal. Thus, she came up with a plan to make herself look as pitiful as possible. If the plan worked, Alaric would be shackled to the favor even more, and she could even make him marry her.*

*She started lying through her teeth. "I lost most of my strength, but I held on because I really, really wanted to save you. I didn't want to die either. We were both so young, so I mustered up all my strength to pull you up."*

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*Alaric looked at her coolly, not the least bit fazed by the story. "And how did you get back up on land?"*

*"Um, I crawled my way up after I saved you." Claudia didn't jump into the river, nor did*

*she save him, but she could imagine the scene, so she made things up. Victoria must've tried to get back onto dry land after she saved Alaric. So that was what she told him.*

*Alaric's lips twitched. "So, you're saying that you got up onto dry land all by yourself after you saved me even when you had barely any strength left."*

*Thinking there was no problem with that statement, Claudia nodded.*

*A moment later, Alaric snapped, "Liar."*

*Shocked, Claudia said, "What? I-I didn't lie. Y-You don't believe me?"*

*"The currents were too powerful to swim in, so you couldn't have dragged me back up to land yourself."*

*"B-But I used up*

*all my strength, that's how."*

*Alaric grabbed her hand. "If you did use all your strength to do that, then why weren't*

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*your hands injured? I remember that your arms were fine. The only place injured was your wrist."*

*In order to make things more believable, Claudia cut open her wrist with a stone.*

*3/5*

*Alaric chuckled. "You cut your wrist with a stone, didn't you? At least you weren't a total idiot. You actually tried to make things more believable."*

*Claudia's eyes went wide. "D-Did someone tell you something?"*

*Alaric smirked. "Take a guess."*

*Panic set in immediately. Claudia thought he was asking her about the past just to*

*know more about the process, but she thought wrong. If he knows the truth, I'm done for. I can't let that happen. She started getting nervous and spoke without thinking. "No, I did save you. Don't listen to Victoria. She's just trying to make you pity her. She's trying to make you dump me."*

*Ah, finally. She let something slip. Alaric narrowed his eyes and hissed coldly, "I don't remember telling you who told me the story."*

*Claudia froze.*

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*4/5*

*"You and I were the only ones there, weren't we? Why did you think Victoria was the one*

*who told me anything? If she wasn't there in the first place, then you wouldn't have even*

*cared about what she told me, would you?" Sharply, he added, "So that means we were*

*not alone. There was someone else."*

*"No, no!" Claudia shook her head violently, looking away. "I have no idea what you're*

*talking about. We were alone, and I was the one who saved you. I— I just brought Victoria*

*up because you sought her out last night. You did, didn't you? So that's why you're*

*taking this attitude with me. I know I shouldn't have drugged you, but I was too worried*

*that Victoria might take you away, so I... I made a mistake. You can't call me a liar just*

*because of one incident. I did save you. Don't fall for her lies. She must be trying to trick*

*.*

*you. She's making things up just to sabotage me because of what happened last night."*

*Agitated, she tried to move closer to Alaric, but he got up and put some distance between them. The refusal to get close to her was not lost on Claudia, and she stood petrified. It was just like that time he interrogated her about the texts. I can't believe it. He's already pulled the same trick once, and I fell for it again. I shouldn't have brought Victoria up. That was stupid of me.*

*What Alaric said next crushed her. "Just stop acting. She's gotten her memories back." What? She regained her memories? Who did? Victoria? Claudia's eyes went wide, and she was in a stupor.*

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*Alaric stepped ahead, the look in his eyes chillingly cold.*

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*"You took the credit for someone else's work. They risked their lives for it, and you stole the fruit of their labor. How low can you go, Claudia?"*

*"I did not! She lied to you!"*

*Alaric said sharply, "Oh, someone did lie to me, but it was not her."*

*Claudia froze for a long, long time while staring at him, and then she laughed. "Yeah, w*

*eren't alone, but so what? So what if she was there? I risked my life to save you. Just because she was there with us doesn't mean you can prove that she saved you."*

*"Ah, so you confess."*

*"So what? You'd suspect me but not her? She regained her memories after a decade? Give me a break. That's like a fairy tale, and you immediately bought the story? If you never thought of believing me at all, then why did you even come here?"*

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*Claudia was panicking a little just now, but now she had regained her clarity. He's here to make me confess to everything, but as long as I deny it, no one can make me do anything. With that thought in mind, she looked at him. "You're just being ungrateful. You want to trick me into spilling everything so you can explain yourself to Victoria. I won't let you. I risked my life to save you, and I almost died. I don't care what Victoria thinks, but no one can take my credit away. You want to deny it? Fine, but don't even think you can make me say anything."*

*After saying that, she sat on her bed, took her shoes off, and got onto the bed. "I saved you Everyone only saw you and me at the riverside back then. Victoria was nowhere to be found. What makes she think she can take the credit away? If you want to deny it, fine by me. But you'll have to prove I didn't save you"*

*Ah, so she's realized it. Alaric sneered. Guess she's not as stupid as people think she is*

*He approached the woman and looked at her imperiously. "Do you think I can't do anything to you just because I have no evidence?"*

*That's right. You can't do anything without evidence. Claudia looked at him straight in the eye. "As long as you can't prove I didn't save you, I'm still your savior. I will not let Victoria slander me. You can take her side, but they'll call your family an ingrate."*

#### *Chapter 374 Wealth Transfer*

*Alaric chuckled, but there was no mirth in his laughter. There was only darkness and malice, and Claudia couldn't help but feel a little unnerved.*

*"Do you truly think I trusted you back then because I didn't want my family to be the object of gossip? Do you seriously think I care what the public thinks of me?"*

*The woman on the bed said nothing. She met his eyes, but the look within them was dark. They were as dark and calm as the sea. As merciless as the ocean. It was only*

*then she realized this was how he had always been. This man didn't care about the family's reputation. The Cadogans only tolerated her because they thought she had been the one who saved his life. They only helped her because of that, not because they were afraid of the public's opinion. Not Alaric, and certainly not his parents.*

*"Wrong. Move."*

*Horror crept onto Claudia's face. "I-"*

*2/5*

*Alaric left before she could say anything. Regret filled her heart, and in her panic, she hollered, "Where are you going, Al? You can't do this to me!" However, no matter how much she shouted, he wouldn't stop. She leaped out of bed and went after him, but not once did he turn back, not even after she fell to the ground. He would no longer be nice to her, not since he had seen through her act.*

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*3/5*

*Lila had been standing outside. She saw Alaric coming out with a dark look on his face while Claudia was chasing after him. However, when she tried to catch up to him, Claudia slipped and fell to the ground, so Lila hurried over to help her up. "Miss Johnson." Though, the moment she touched Claudia, the latter flung her hand away.*

*"Piss off! Don't touch me!"*

*Hatred filled Lila's heart, and she bit her lip hard. He's dumped you, you wench! Don't give me that attitude.*

*It was late at night, and a phone call woke Scarlett from her dreams. She quickly came to the hospital, looking irascible. When she met her mess of a daughter, she asked, "What happened?"*

*Lila told her what she knew.*

*“What? Alaric came?” Surprise flashed in Scarlett’s eyes, and she went over to hold Claudia’s hand. “Why didn’t you tell me? He came to see you, didn’t he?”*

*There was nothing but defeat and sorrow in Claudia’s eyes. She sat there limply, unresponsive to her mother’s questions.*

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*“Claudia? Say something!” The sight of her daughter looking so down frustrated Scarlett.*

*Claudia finally raised her head, staring at her mother with tearful eyes. “He knows, Mom. Alaric has found out. He won’t spare me. He won’t spare the family.”*

*A frown creased Scarlett’s forehead. “Know what? What are you talking about?”*

*“It’s Victoria. She’s gotten her memories back, and she told him the truth. He knows I wasn’t the one who saved him. He’s coming after me. After us. What should we do?”*

*4/5*

*Claudia was almost talking gibberish and even slurred at times, but Scarlett managed to get the gist of things quickly, and her face fell. She grabbed Claudia’s shoulder and stared at her in disbelief.*

*“What are you talking about? What do you mean you aren’t the one who saved him? I thought you were the one who pulled him out of the river.”*

*Claudia didn’t tell anyone about that secret, for she thought no one but herself could be trusted with it. Even her family didn’t know she took the credit for Victoria’s deed. If it weren’t for the fact that Alaric knew, she would keep it a secret forever, but things were different now. Alaric knew, and he was a merciless man. She needed to tell her family*

so they could find a way out. "We have to move our wealth overseas, or we're done for."

*If the family's done for, I am done for. Regret finally sank in, and she realized she*

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*should've stopped her chase sooner. Even though she couldn't be with Alaric, at least she could still be his savior, and no one would ever try to lay a finger on her just because of that. She could still find herself a good man, and her family could still have the Cadogans backing them up.*

*5/5*

*However, that was nothing but a shattered dream now. Alaric didn't care about anyone's opinion, and people wouldn't dare to curse him, either. The public worshiped the strong. They wouldn't think Alaric did anything wrong, even if he did attack Claudia's family. To them, the Cadogans had done everything to repay the favor, and if Alaric told the public about this, they would trust him wholeheartedly. After all, the Cadogans had been granting the Johnsons every request. If he did come down on them, there must be a reason for it.*

*"I made the wrong move, Mom. You have to move all our assets elsewhere."*

*The reveal shook Scarlett to her core. When she finally snapped out of it, she quickly went to the balcony and called her husband. However, it was already late at night, and her husband was fast asleep, so the call went unanswered. Frustrated, she came back in and slapped Claudia. "I can't believe you even lied to us!"*

*With that, she stormed off, leaving a surprised Claudia alone with a dumbfounded Lila.*

#### *Chapter 375*

*1/5*

*Claudia lay back on her bed, covering her face and crying her heart out. Even she felt*

*like beating herself up. She should've stopped while she was ahead, but it was too late for regrets. No one could help her now. Wait, there is still someone who can help me. She had someone in mind, and she quickly leaped out of bed. "Quick, get me a cab, Lila!"*

*It was a busy night, indeed.*

*Claudia and Lila were at a quiet plaza. Ethan poured a cup of tea for Bane, and steam swirled in the air. Claudia stood before Bane while Lila held her up. She had been standing for quite a while, but Bane didn't even let her sit. Ethan showed her no hospitality either, aside from the cup of tea.*

*She had come out in a hurry, so she was wearing nothing but patient attire, revealing her wrist covered in cut wounds. The only warm clothing she had was from Lila, but even so, the cold still made her shiver. She yearned for a cup of tea. It should be enough to warm me up.*

*However, no matter how much she stared at the tea, Bane still didn't move. He looked aloof, unlike his usual self, though he was still elegant as ever as he sipped his tea. He blew on it and took a sip.*

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*2/5*

*A gust of wintry gale whizzed past the place, and the ladies shivered. No longer able to hold it in, Claudia inquired, "B-Bane, so what d-do you think?"*

*Finally, the man looked at her for a brief moment before putting his cup down. "I'm sorry, Miss Johnson, but I have no plans on working with a fool."*

*Ethan looked at Bane upon hearing that. That's the man I know. The persona he*

*acquired after meeting Miss Selwyn is disappearing.*

*Claudia paled, and her lips started trembling. "W-What did you say?" It was a hurtful reply, even though Bane was speaking politely. When he said he would see her, she thought he was amenable to a partnership, but no. She had it wrong.*

*"You have nothing to bargain with me anymore, and you wasted all your overwhelming advantage. Despite all the edge you had, you still lost. I see no reason to work with someone who has no brains or brawn. I am no philanthropist."*

*She is worthless to me. Bane then told Ethan, "Escort her away."*

*Ethan stepped ahead and was about to escort Claudia away, but she flung Lila's hand off and shouted, "No! I am not leaving! You like Victoria, don't you? We can make a deal!"*

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*"Oh?" Bane smiled. "Do you still think you have anything that's tradeable? After everything that's happened, you're worth nothing to Alaric anymore. And so what if I like her? I see no point using that to negotiate." His smile was slowly turning into a*  
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*sneer. "You should not bring my love for her up, let alone use it for your nefarious ends, scum."*

*The look on his face sent shivers down Claudia's spine. She had a feeling Bane was not*

*as friendly as he pretended to be. This man was on the brink of madness. If this were any other time, she would have left right away, but not this time. Now, she was desperate. She stepped ahead and bit her lip. "I am not trying to crack any jokes. Do you truly think you love her? Do you love her so much that you can ignore it when she's*

*kissing another man?"*

*Bane looked at Ethan. "Take her away."*

*"She's going to start a relationship with Alaric soon, and you're just going to let them do it? I know you've been by her side for the last five years. Don't you want to be with her? Are you just going to let someone else take her away from you?" Claudia screeched like*

*an insane banshee. She was at her wits' end, but Bane remained calm and collected.*

*"Had enough?"*

*Claudia froze. What? He's unfazed even after all that? No way. He must have stayed*

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*with Victoria for years because he likes her. It was the reason Claudia stopped asking her men to keep an eye on Victoria. She thought Bane and Victoria would end up together sooner or later. No woman could resist a man like Bane if he kept up with his advances for years. They would relent and say yes in the end.*

*4/5*

*However, Victoria was dirtier than she imagined, whereas Bane had more patience than expected. Even when things were looking dire enough for him, he was still unfazed.*

*While she was in a stupor, Ethan came ahead and coldly said, "Miss Johnson, please leave."*

*She looked at Bane. He didn't seem interested in talking to her, so she went around him*

*, but before she left, she said, "I don't understand. If you never wanted to deal with me, why did you agree to this meeting?" If he thinks I'm worth nothing, he could've just skipped out on this meeting. There was no need to waste my time. There must be a reason, but I just failed to find it. I can't leave just yet.*

*However, what Bane said next dashed her hopes. "Ah, you're reading too much into it. I just want to see the look on your face when you find out you lost to her."*

*Claudia's eyes went wide in disbelief, and flames of fury filled her heart. She clenched her fists in anger, irritated that he would play her like a fiddle. Though, that anger was soon replaced by envy. She envied Victoria for earning the love of good men, for getting*

#### *Chapter 275 Not Working With Idiots*

*5/5*

*the affection of someone like Alaric and Bane, without having to do anything. If I could date even one of them, I'd die happy.*

*"Miss Johnson, do leave at once." Ethan came up to her once again, but this time, he was not as polite anymore. "Or I will be forced to call the guards."*

*Claudia glared at Bane hatefully. "Don't regret this. With that, she went away, and Lila was about to leave, but she was reminded of something. She then bit her lip and quickly came back to Bane to tell him something*

*And that little something managed to rile Bane up a little*

#### *Chapter 376*

*1/6*

*It was a peaceful morning. The rays of sunshine shone on the land warmly, and a gentle breeze kissed Victoria's face. She enjoyed the winds for a while before closing the window. Then, she washed herself up and got ready to make breakfast.*

*After Alaric left, she thought she would lose sleep over the regained memories, but to her surprise, it didn't take long for her to fall asleep. Sure, the thoughts swirled in her head for a while after she lay down, but she fell asleep eventually.*

*Just as she put the bread into the toaster, someone rang the doorbell. Victoria paused*

for a moment. It's early. Who could it be? She checked the intercom and saw someone unexpected outside, but she opened the door anyway. "Bane? What brings you here?" Bane stood in front of her, smiling. Gently, he said, "It's been a while. Am I unwelcome now?"

"Of course not..." She forced a smile and let him in.

The man looked around and changed his shoes like he usually did. "It's the weekend. You guys have nothing to do, do you?"

"Oh, it's already the weekend?" I can't believe I forget about it, but it's no big deal. They

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didn't have the habit of sleeping in, even on the weekends. Thus, they had been living a healthy lifestyle.

Bane paused for a moment before he continued to change his shoes. He then looked at her, saying, "Guess you've been too busy to even notice."

Victoria smiled awkwardly. Ever since that meeting with him, it felt awkward just to talk to Bane. After all, she wasn't exactly kind with her words because she had to make it clear she was rejecting him. She thought he wouldn't come over again, but apparently, that was not the case.

He noticed her fidgeting, and he stood still. "The romance route has failed, but that doesn't mean we can't be friends."

She snapped out of it and nodded. "We can. We can always be friends as long as you want to."

*Always be friends, huh? He pursed his lips as he looked at Victoria. "But what if I don't want to?"*

*The woman looked shocked. "Excuse me?"*

*"I mean, if I refuse to just be friends with you, will we become nothing but strangers?"*

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*Strangers, eh? She did think that was what they would end up as. As long as she could make him give up on her, she didn't mind being the bad guy. But why does it seem like he's not given up just yet? She bit her lip, pondering over how to respond to him. At this moment, Bane patted her head.*

*"It was just a joke. Calm down. We can crack some jokes, can't we?"*

*Victoria looked at him. His smile was warm and inviting, and she smiled, too. It would be great if they could be friends. After all, she didn't want to lose a friend unless it was really necessary.*

*"I'd like to take you three on a ride. Do I have that honor?"*

*Victoria would love to since this meant they could be friends again, but then she remembered Alaric had told her to wait for him. What if I'm out when he comes?*

*Bane noticed her pensive silence, and something glinted in his eyes. He pursed his lips in displeasure. "Is something the matter?" She was going to say no, was she? Was I too late?*

*A while later, she smiled at him. "It's alright. Thanks for still thinking of me as a friend. Of course, we can go." It should take Alaric a while to settle matters. We're just going out for a little fun. We'll be back soon. Even if he did come over, he would call if he*

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*couldn't find me. I'll just explain things to him later. With that thought in mind, she agreed to the invitation.*

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*Bane heaved a sigh of relief. "Where are Nathan and Nicole? It's been a while. Have they missed me?"*

*Since they were friends again, Victoria felt much better, and she smiled. "You should ask them yourself. The surprise is always best left unsaid until the moment is right."*

*The sun shone on her face, and her eyes were filled with the light of the stars. She was so beautiful that he couldn't take his eyes off her. It had always been his dream to make*

*her his woman, but she had never thought of him that way. Just when he finally thought he had a chance, that happened. The light in his eyes dimmed for a moment, but he resumed his old self quickly. "I'll do that later, then."*

*"So, where are we going?" asked Victoria.*

*"We're going on a picnic. I've told my men to set up the tent."*

*Huh? She was a little surprised. He told his men to set up a tent even before inviting me?! What if I said no? That'd be a waste of time for his men, wouldn't it? "By the way, my dad told me your family's setting you up with someone."*

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*The mention of that made Bane clench his fists, and he smiled. "Yes. My grandpa wants to find someone for me."*

*"So, did you find anyone you like?"*

*5/6*

The man looked at her. Victoria sounded really at ease when she asked that question; it was as if she was asking him what he had for breakfast. The blind date didn't seem to faze her at all. She was probably asking because she thought of him as a friend. Just a friend. He could feel something cut his heart open, but he forced a smile and put on a friendly facade. "Not yet, but I'm not in a hurry. I'll run into someone I like sooner or later."

Victoria was glad to hear that. "That's great. I'm happy for you. You'll find someone you like eventually. I know you'll be happy."

Bane looked at the beautiful lady for a while and said, "I will. I will be happy." And I need to fight for my happiness.

She went into the kitchen before coming back out with some toast. Then, she poured a few mugs of milk. "Care to have breakfast with us?"

"Sure."

"Um, we don't have much food left for the picnic, so maybe-

"It's alright. They've prepared everything. All we have to do is show up."

"Oh... I see. Thanks." Victoria couldn't help wondering, Did he have everything prepared

before coming here?

"Well then, I'll go and see the kids." With that, Bane went into the kids' bedroom.

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Even though Bane said there was no need to prepare, Victoria still opened her fridge and prepped whatever food was available. Then, she went to pack her kids' things.

Halfway through, Bane came. When he noticed what she was doing, he said, "You don't have to bring so many things. We can buy them over there, anyway."

"During a picnic? That's going to be a hassle. I should just prepare everything. Besides, we're using this at home, anyway. If we buy anything more, it will take up space." After

*saying that, she tucked everything into her bag.*

*Bane joked, "I think you should bring your makeup along. Maybe you'll need it along the way."*

*"No. We're going on a picnic, not like we're traveling." She was a bit of a sloth. Ever since she had kids, she rarely put makeup on whenever the children were around since they would kiss her anyway. She didn't want them to accidentally ingest her makeup, so she rarely used them anymore. Being a mother sure is hard.*

*Bane said nothing, and he packed the things up with her. Since it had been a while since the kids saw him, they were really warm toward him. Nicole even sat in his lap during breakfast as she chugged on her milk. "It's been a while since you came, Mr. Bane. Do you not like me anymore?"*

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*He patted her head upon hearing that. "I'm already here, aren't I? And I'll be seeing you a*

*lot from now on."*

*"Really? Promise?"*

*"Pinky promise."*

*They made a pinky promise, and Victoria smiled. "You're such a child, Bane."*

*They finished their food, and Victoria busied away in the kitchen. Bane told her she didn't have to do anything, but she said, "I'm almost done, anyway. Just give me some time."*

*He leaned on the door and checked the time, a hint of impatience flaring in his eyes, but it disappeared soon after. We still have time. I am not in a rush.*

*A moment later, Victoria was finally done packing. Before they left, she decided to text Alaric, telling him about the picnic. She wanted to inform him that he should come by at night if he wanted to see her.*

*Though, when she was done typing out the message, she hesitated. She thought it might be a bit too passionate on her side. Before he shows that he's serious, I don't have to do this, do I? Thinking of that, she deleted the text and left with Bane.*

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*Bane was holding their stuff, and Ethan was waiting right outside the car. When he saw them, he smiled. "It has been a while, Miss Selwyn. I thought you wouldn't come." As he spoke, he opened the car door for them.*

*Before entering the car, Victoria asked, "Why the change of cars?"*

*Ethan averted his gaze. "The last one broke down, so we changed it out. Go in, Miss Selwyn. We're running late."*

*"Alright."*

*They went inside, and the kids sat around her. A while later, Bane came in as well, but the car didn't leave just yet. Victoria looked outside and noticed Ethan making a call a distance away while looking solemn. She then asked, "He looks serious. Is something the matter?"*

*"It's alright. We'll set off after he's done with the call."*

*Ethan came in after that, and Victoria said nothing. About 10 minutes later, her kids were starting to feel sleepy, and they leaned on her, rubbing their eyes. "I'm sleepy, Mommy," Nicole said.*

*Victoria looked at the little girl and pinched her cheek. "But you just woke up,*  
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*sleepyhead. What happened?"*

*Cutely, Nicole shook her head in confusion, which melted Victoria's heart. The woman then patted her lap as she said, "Sleep, then."*

*"I'll do it." Bane took the girl into his arms. "They got sleepy right away. Nathan might want to sleep, too, so I'll take Nicole."*

*Victoria looked at Nathan, who seemed to be feeling drowsy as well. He has a point.*

*Thus, she nodded. "Sure."*

*The moment Nicole lay in Bane's arms, she fell asleep soon after and even started snoring.*

*Victoria couldn't help thinking, She's so happy-go-lucky.*

4/6

*A few minutes later, Nathan said he got sleepy as well, and he lay in Victoria's lap. She thought that was odd. "Weird. Did they not sleep well last night? It's odd seeing them so sleepy."*

*"It's normal for kids to get sleepy in moving cars," responded Bane gently.*

*"But Nathan and Nicole usually get sleepy after a long while. This is a bit too fast." She*

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*found it confusing, but she chalked it up to bad-quality sleep. Maybe they woke up after*

*I left and didn't sleep well.*

*"Sleeping's alright, isn't it?" Bane combed through Nicole's hair and covered her with a blanket he took from behind. "Once they wake up, they'll be at the destination."*

*"True."*

*Ethan took another blanket and handed it to Victoria. "Take this, Miss Selwyn. It's going to be cold; you might need one."*

*Since Nathan was asleep, Victoria took the blanket and draped it over Nathan and herself. The car kept going ahead, and she looked outside before letting out a yawn.*

*For some reason, she was getting sleepy, too. Maybe it was because of the kids. She tried to keep herself awake and asked, "So, where are we going?"*

*Receiving no answer, she turned to look at Bane. He was still holding Nicole, but he was*

*already resting his eyes. Even Bane's fallen asleep? He must've missed that question, or*

*he would've said something. Perhaps, I should sleep, too. With that thought in mind, she leaned on her seat, and before long, she fell asleep.*

*Unbeknownst to her, after she drifted off, Bane opened his eyes. There was no exhaustion in his gaze, though. He was wide awake.*

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*"Ethan, Bane called out coldly.*

*Ethan quickly took Nicole from him.*

*Then, Bane removed Nathan from Victoria's arms and quietly stared at the sleeping beauty. Slowly, he moved his hand to her face, caressing her cheek.*

## Chapter 378

1/7

*Bane's warm fingertips grazed across the cool skin of Victoria's face. Her soft, fair skin felt pleasant to the touch.*

*Ethan watched as Bane's fingers danced tenderly across Victoria's face. After stroking her eyes and nose, they eventually fell on her ruby-red lips.*

*All at once, Ethan averted his eyes in a panic. He dared not look any closer.*

*Bane's fingers rested on Victoria's lips. The plumpness of her lips reminded him of freshly made pudding. Though he had never touched pudding with his hands before, he knew it had to feel the same.*

*Ever since he was a teenager, he desired her.*

*He wanted her eyes on him, so he kept doing things to get her attention, even if it meant angering her.*

*He kept doing it anyway.*

*Thus, she detested him for a very long time and would turn away immediately if she spotted him in the distance.*

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*Bane was dismayed by this for a time, but he never regretted it because he was the one she paid the most attention to, apart from Alaric.*

*He preferred her hatred over her indifference. At the very least, hatred meant that he had made a lasting impression on her and he succeeded.*

*Later on, there was the entire situation with Alaric and Claudia. Claudia saved Alaric, and thanks to Bane's influence, Alaric thought his feelings of gratitude were of a romantic kind instead.*

*The night when Victoria came of age, Bane knew she was hiding behind the tree because he spotted the edge of a familiar dress. However, she was too afraid to step out, so he purposely tricked Alaric into saying those things.*

*He figured that was enough for her to give up on Alaric.*

*Due to his family issues, he had to leave the country for a very long time. He couldn't predict what would happen, but since Claudia had gotten Alaric's promise and Victoria was aware of it, then he knew that even if he left for a few years to deal with his family's problems, it was unlikely that anything would happen between Victoria and Alaric.*

*It never occurred to him that the Selwyns would face a crisis of their own, and that this matter would cause the relationship between the two to accelerate so quickly. By the 1229 Thủ, 6 Jul 'o gi*

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*time he found out, it was too late.*

*Nevertheless, Bane didn't give up. He still had matters to attend to at the time, but eventually, he still managed to find the chance to take Victoria away from Alaric.*

*Claudia had proven to be an incredibly useful pawn.*

*Unfortunately, she was also a very foolish one, and now, she was a useless one.*

*Most importantly, Claudia wasn't the one who saved him. It was Victoria.*

*In that case... What was the point of keeping Claudia around?*

*Initially, Bane thought he could simply stand on the side and watch. After all, Alaric would have gone back to Claudia because she was his savior. Alas... What now?*

*It wasn't Claudia who saved his life. It was Victoria.*

*In reality, it made sense. After he had been rescued, she too had fallen into the water, became seriously ill, and subsequently lost her memory.*

*As she had lost her memory, Claudia stole the credit.*

*Of course, you would, Claudia. Bane sneered to himself. How did the truth come out?*

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*Did Claudia foolishly expose herself or has Victoria regained her memories?*

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*Bane drew himself out of his thoughts. His fingers slowly moved away from Victoria's lips. After tucking the blanket around her, he bent down and kissed her forehead. "Don't be mad at me, Victoria."*

*By the time he returned to his seat, his expression had returned to normal.*

*Ethan brought Nicole over to Bane. "Mr. Morison."*

*Bane carefully took Nicole into his arms and made sure she was lying down comfortably. As he tended to the children, he asked, "How much longer before we arrive?"*

*"In approximately twenty minutes. The helicopter will take us to the departure point. It should take a little over an hour in total."*

*Ethan cast a hesitant glance at Victoria and her children. "Will Miss Selwyn and the children wake up halfway?"*

*"Most likely not," Bane responded with an indifferent expression. "Even if they do, nothing will change."*

*Ethan looked at Victoria one more time before continuing tentatively, "Mr. Morison,*

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*everything is set up for the picnic..."*

*Bane's only reaction was to hum in acknowledgment.*

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*"What I mean is... We can still make it there in time. Miss Selwyn and the children won't suspect a thing when they wake up. They'll just think they fell asleep out of exhaustion."*

*At last, Bane turned to look at Ethan. "What are you trying to say, Ethan?"*

*Ethan sighed and said, "I'm afraid you'll regret this, Mr. Morison. In Miss Selwyn's eyes, you've always been there to help her. You're like a brother to her. You're someone she can trust and rely on. If she finds out... She'll despise you."*

*"So what?" Bane smirked mockingly. "What I'll truly regret is allowing her to end up with another man."*

*Ethan got the message. Bane's mind was made up. Ethan wasn't going to be able to talk him out of it.*

*He sighed to himself and stayed silent. Nevertheless, he knew this wasn't going to end well. The relationship Bane had established with Victoria was bound to be destroyed by this.*

*However, due to the present situation, Bane no longer cared about that.*

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*Maybe Mr. Morison should've tried his best to stop Miss Selwyn from heading back to*

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*Corynthea instead. None of this would've happened, and at the very least, there wasn't anyone hanging around her when she was abroad.*

*It felt like a dream that went on forever.*

*Except, there was nothing but darkness in this dream—not a single color to speak of.*

*Victoria regained some of her consciousness. Her eyes were still shut, but she felt a strange sense of weightlessness. It was as if she had gotten water in her ears.*

*She struggled hard and finally managed to open her eyes. Immediately, she was greeted by the blue sky outside the window.*

*Somewhat dazed, Victoria thought she was still dreaming. However, once her head finally cleared, she realized where she was.*

*What happened? Why am I on a plane? Where are Nate and Nicky?*

*Victoria tried to get up, but the side effects of what she had been fed left her body feeling rather weak still. She stumbled forward and thought she was going to crash to the ground.*

*Yet, the fall didn't happen. A pair of strong hands caught her and held her close.*

*"Are you hurt?" A worried voice rang out above her.*

*Victoria looked up and saw Bane. It took her ten seconds to go from panicked to calm again. She stood up and stared at Bane before a thought occurred to her. "Where are we?" she asked curtly.*

*Bane seemed to have prepared himself for this. "You saw for yourself, didn't you?" he responded simply.*

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*Bane acted as if everything was now a foregone conclusion.*

*He was clearly prepared to suffer the brunt of Victoria's fury.*

*Victoria took a deep breath to stop herself from blowing up and glanced out the window to estimate where they were.*

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*1/8*

*She couldn't see any sign of land, so the plane must have been in the air for quite some*

*time now.*

*"Where are Nicky and Nate?" she asked.*

*"They're up in front. Don't worry. Someone's keeping an eye on them."*

*"I want to see them."*

*"Sure." Bane nodded. "I'll bring you to them."*

*Bane brought her to a different cabin. The children were awake and were busy eating.*

*They even smiled at Victoria when they spotted her.*

*It was evident that someone had explained things to them. Since the two of them*

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*trusted Bane, they didn't feel suspicious at all.*

*Nevertheless, Nathan asked quietly, "Mommy, weren't we supposed to go on a picnic?*

*Why did we get on a plane?"*

*Victoria smiled and stroked his head. "It was a last-minute change of plan. Is the food good?"*

*"It is."*

*"Go ahead and eat. I'll be in the back of the plane talking to Mr. Bane, but I'll come back*

*a little later, okay?"*

*“Okay.”*

*Both children nodded.*

*Once Victoria confirmed that they were safe and well, she got up and caught Bane’s gaze. She forced herself to stay calm as she walked off.*

*Bane expected this reaction from her. His lips curved ever so slightly as he followed her out.*

*Once they were in a different cabin, Victoria stopped and said with her back to Bane,*

*2/8*

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*“Where’s the final destination?”*

*“Somewhere out of Corynthea.”*

*“How much longer?”*

*Bane didn’t respond.*

*3/8*

*Victoria didn’t care about his silence. She went ahead and said what she wanted to say.*

*“Once we arrive, I’m buying tickets for the earliest return flight. I’m taking the children back to Corynthea. If we get home safely, I’ll just think of today’s events as a short vacation.”*

*She said so because she wanted to give Bane a chance to stop whatever he was doing before it was too late.*

*He has been very kind to me. If possible, I don’t want us to have a falling out.*

*However, Bane kept mum.*

*Victoria turned around and looked him in the eye. “I can pretend like nothing ever happened.”*

*At last, Bane met her gaze.*

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*“But, it already has.”*

*“I just told you. I can pretend like nothing ever happened.”*

*Bane smiled. “Victoria, how can you pretend like something never happened when it did?”*

*Victoria was speechless.*

*She frowned in displeasure. “It’s not too late to stop. I don’t want the children to think badly of you.”*

*Nicky and Nate think of Bane as a kind and caring man. If they find out...*

*At the very next moment, Bane took a step closer. Just as he reached out to touch.*

*Victoria’s face, she took a step back to avoid him.*

*His hand hung awkwardly in the air.*

*Victoria stared at his frozen hand. She was a little startled as well.*

*Bane calmly withdrew his hand and stared at Victoria with a serious gaze.*

*“I like you, Victoria. I don’t want to give up just like that. I can’t act as if nothing ever  
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*happened. It’s impossible.”*

*Victoria pursed her lips.*

*“Does liking someone mean you can abuse the trust the children and I have in you, knock us out, and kidnap us onto a plane? Is that how you prove that you like someone?”*

*Bane’s eyes flickered with sadness.*

*"I'm sorry. I didn't want to do this either, but it's been five years, Victoria, and you still refuse to accept me. I had no choice but to resort to this. Don't be mad at me."*

*The conversation wasn't going anywhere.*

*They were on a plane right now so there was no point in flying off the handle, and Victoria wasn't the kind of person who would do that in the first place.*

*5/8*

*She took a deep breath and said, "I don't know how much longer it'll be before we land, but you can take this time to reconsider. If you change your mind and send us back to Corynthea safely, I can still act as if nothing ever happened."*

*With that said, she no longer paid him any attention. She sat down and closed her eyes*

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*warily.*

*6/8*

*The effects of the drug hadn't worn off yet. She was still exhausted and her eyelids felt heavy. Nevertheless, her head was a mess right now. Even though her eyes were closed, she was still preoccupied with what Bane had just said.*

*She was also feeling rather regretful. Why did she let stubborn pride stop her from sending Alaric a text before they left?*

*If I did, he would've known that something had happened once he received the text, right? And now...*

*A thought occurred to Victoria. She opened her eyes and stuck her hand in her pocket.*

*It was empty. Her phone had disappeared.*

*She turned around and looked at Bane who was still standing. "Where's my phone?"*

*Bane smiled and sat down.*

*“You can’t use your phone when the plane’s in the air, Victoria.”*

*After a pause, Victoria said, “I wasn’t planning on using it. You can at least give it back to me, right?”*

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*“Sure. Once we get off the plane, I’ll give your phone back to you.”*

*7/8*

*Victoria was a little suspicious about that. Well, time isn’t up yet. He can still reconsider. I hope he thinks things through and changes his mind. All she could do now was hope for such an outcome.*

*It was a long plane ride. When it was nearly noon, a flight attendant brought lunch over. It was a private plane equipped with a private chef, so it wasn’t regular plane fare. Alas, Victoria wasn’t in the mood to eat.*

*Bane set the food out in front of her. “It’s time for lunch. Eat something.”*

*Victoria didn’t have an appetite and wasn’t going to eat, but since it was still within the window of time for him to change his mind, she wanted to ease the tension between them, so she nodded and took a few bites.*

*“Although there’s a chef on the plane to prepare the food to order, the ingredients aren’t all that fresh. The textures are a little unappetizing. Once we arrive, I’ll hire a chef to cater to your meals.”*

*Victoria stopped eating.*

*“What do you mean?”*

*“You shouldn’t work anymore. You can just stay at home and take care of the children. If you want to start a company, I’ll do it for you. You can just have an honorary position in the company and drop in whenever you feel like managing it. When you’re not*

*interested in the company, you can just spend time with the children. Or, you can just indulge in other pleasures, like spa treatments. I'll arrange for a team of spa therapists to come to the house every day."*

*The more he said, the deeper Victoria's frown became.*

*Not only has he not changed his mind, but he has already formulated a plan to restrict my movements.*

*At first, Victoria was willing to have lunch with Bane just so that her relationship with him didn't sour any further, but she could no longer do that. She set her cutlery down.*

*"I'm done."*

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*When Bane looked at her plate, his brows creased.*

*"You barely had a few bites, Victoria."*

*She didn't answer.*

*Bane could tell that she didn't want to be in his presence.*

*He pressed his lips together. Upon thinking of something, he said, "Fine. You probably don't like the food. It's alright. We can eat something better once the plane lands."*

*He got someone to clear the plates.*

*Then, he brought over a glass of red wine. "Want some?"*

*"No thank you."*

*Bane raised the glass and slowly downed it.*

*Once he was done, he quietly stared at Victoria. However, she wasn't looking at him.*

*Her eyes were closed, and her hands were crossed in front of her. It looked as if she had fallen asleep.*

*Bane kept staring in silence for quite a while. At last, he sighed.*

*It's fine. Once we settle down, I'll take good care of her.*

*Amid everyone's complicated feelings, the plane landed safely in Mauldin.*

*Due to the time difference between Mauldin and Corynthea, it was daytime over here even though it was late at night back there.*

*"We can wash up and rest at the hotel near the airport first. Once you three are well-rested, I'll take you to the house."*

*Bane had everything all set up over here.*

*He would've brought them straight to the house if it hadn't been because he wanted to be considerate of the fact that Victoria barely got any rest on the plane.*

*Victoria didn't move. "It's been hours. Have you still not thought things through yet?"*

*"I gave it a lot of thought before I came to this decision, Victoria."*

*Bane smiled and took her arm. "Come. Let's get off the plane."*

*Victoria didn't move from her seat.*

*"I thought we were friends, Bane."*

*3/8*

*"Of course." Bane nodded. "From now on, I can be your friend and the one who has the most intimate relationship with you."*

*Victoria flung his hand off. "You're crazy."*

*Bane simply glanced at his hand. He wasn't upset.*

*"Let's not talk about this for now. Can we get off the plane first?"*

*"What if I refuse to?" Victoria retorted.*

*Bane adjusted his glasses.*

*"If you're too tired to move, I can always carry you off the plane myself. I'm not tired. If that doesn't suit you, I'll just have to get Nate and Nicky to convince you instead."*

*Victoria was speechless.*

*She looked at the handsome man in front of her. It took her every ounce of patience she could muster to stop herself from flaring up. If Nicky and Nate came over...*

*While Victoria was still thinking, Bane took a few steps forward to scoop her up into his arms.*

*Victoria jumped in fright. She fled backward and smacked Bane's hands away from her. His hands froze in the air once more.*

*The atmosphere grew tense.*

*A moment later, Bane withdrew his hands.*

*"You don't want me to carry you off the plane?"*

*"No. I can walk by myself."*

*Victoria took a few steps forward before saying curtly, "Please step aside."*

*Bane looked as calm and gentle as ever as he took a few steps back to get out of her way.*

*Victoria walked off. Upon seeing that he was following her, she hastened her steps to stay further away from him. She didn't notice the flash of dejection in Bane's eyes.*

*Once she got off the plane, she saw Nathan and Nicole standing outside with Ethan. As soon as she saw the children, she began to consider how she could escape with them.*

*There were two other middle-aged men apart from Ethan. They looked like they were trained in combat.*

*She couldn't even escape by herself, let alone with the children.*

*In any case, Bane still had her phone.*

*Since he dared to take me here, he must've gotten a hold of my passport and documents. How on earth did he do it? Did he search my room when I was cooking?*

*Victoria thought to herself.*

*Once Bane came over, Victoria asked, "Where's my phone?"*

*Afraid that he would renege on his word, Victoria reminded him, "You told me you were going to give my phone back to me once we get off the plane, right?"*

*"That's right." Bane kept his word. He took a phone out of his pocket and passed it to her.*

*Victoria was a little taken aback as she took it from him. Did he really just give my phone back to me? Is it because of what I said on the plane? Did he actually listen? He didn't listen to all of it, though.*

*However, as soon as she turned the phone on, she noticed what was going on.*

*Her original SIM card had been removed. The one in her phone right now was probably a local SIM card.*

*It meant that there was no point in getting it back at all.*

*Victoria stared at Bane.*

*"How could you change my SIM card without my permission?"*

*As soon as she asked that question, she realized how stupid the question was.*

*Why did I bother asking him that? He even brought me to a different country without my permission. Why would he ask for permission to change my SIM card?*

*"You can't use your Corynthean SIM card here," Bane calmly explained. "That's why I changed it to a new SIM card for you. You won't have any problems with this one."*

*Victoria opened WhatsApp and realized that all her apps had been deleted and re-downloaded. All the accounts were new ones, and she only had two contacts listed.*

*One was Bane and the other was Ethan.*

*There wasn't anyone else's contact information.*

*Even her call logs had been wiped clean. Basically, her entire phone had been reset. Victoria couldn't stay calm anymore. She was just about to explode when...*

*"Mommy?"*

*The children grew impatient and called out to her. She looked down and saw two pairs of curious eyes looking back at her. That was all it took for her to stamp out the flames in her.*

*I mustn't get angry in front of the children! I mustn't get angry in front of the children! After repeating the mantra to herself several times, she was finally able to put a lid on her rage and stop herself from flaring up in front of them. She stuffed the phone into her pocket and walked over with a smile.*

*When they got into the car, she sat with the children and kept them right beside her. She instructed them to stick close and never to leave her side.*

*Her tone was extremely stern, so the two children obediently clung to her.*

*Bane tried to help out with them a few times, but Victoria grasped them tightly and refused to let him touch them. She gave a half-hearted excuse. "It's Mommy's first time in this country and Mommy's a little scared. You two need to keep Mommy company."*

*Since she put it that way, the children stuck to her and ignored Bane.*

*Bane felt a little helpless. She was starting to rebel against him.*

*However, he wasn't surprised. From the day he made this decision, he knew he had an uphill battle ahead of him.*

*He was able to take on all the challenges life threw at him, but when it came to her... All*

*he could do was take it one day at a time.*