

A Deadly Air
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Chapter 1

My husband died in a fire trying to save me, leaving behind a mountain of debt and a newborn child.

I worked hard to pay off the debt while raising the child, only to unintentionally discover that my husband hadn't died at all. Instead, he was sleeping with my cousin.

"Honey, you're so clever. You transferred all the company funds and faked your death, leaving that stupid wife of yours to shoulder all the debt.

"She's so clueless that she doesn't even realize the son she's raising isn't hers, that I swapped him out. Once she's done paying off the debts, the three of us can live a great life together."

I silently sneered, pretending I knew nothing, and continued to raise the child.

I had just finished a day of work, utterly exhausted, when I returned to my rented apartment.

As soon as I opened the door, I saw Amelia Williams bustling about. She was wearing an apron, setting a feast on the table.

"Claire, I know you've been busy. I didn't have much to do, so I thought I'd come over to help."

I was already used to it. Ever since my husband, Nathan Smart, died in that fire, Amelia had been frequently coming over to "help", even taking a spare key to my home so that she could come and go as she pleased.

She claimed it was because she sympathized with how hard it was for me to work and raise a child alone.

However, deep down, I knew the real reason—she just didn't trust me to take good care of her precious son.

At the dining table, my son loudly exclaimed, "Aunt Amelia is so nice to me! I love Aunt Amelia!"

Amelia affectionately patted his head before turning to me. "Claire, come sit down. Dinner is ready."

It was as if they were truly mother and son.

With a faint smile, I put my bag down and sat at the table. "Alright, Amelia. Your cooking has gotten even better."

With someone cooking and helping to care for my child for free, why should I complain?

After dinner, Amelia sat on the couch, looking at me with feigned concern. "Look at you—so young, but already with wrinkles decorating the corners of your eyes. It must be so exhausting working at the company."

She let out a sigh, pretending to wipe away nonexistent tears.

"My dear cousin Claire, how can your life be so miserable? Widowed at such a young age and burdened with so much debt... If Nathan could see you working yourself to the bone like this, he'd be so heartbroken in heaven."

Watching her performance, I couldn't help but sneer inwardly. If I hadn't seen her and my supposedly deceased husband together at a hotel with my own eyes, I might have believed she genuinely cared about me.

Noticing her sorrowful expression, my son ran straight into her arms. "Aunt Amelia, you're the best! Not only did you make my favorite sticky ribs, but you also gave me a present! I love you the most!"

Amelia hugged him with a smile. "Of course! I don't have any children of my own, so from now on, you will be my one and only little darling. Okay, Alex?"

"Okay!"

Watching their intimate interaction from the side, I couldn't help but find it utterly ridiculous.

Since my son Alex was born, Amelia had always taken over—celebrating his birthdays, and attending parent-teacher meetings—as if she were his biological mother.

Whenever I asked why she was so involved, she always replied, "I know Nathan left you with a mountain of debt when he passed away, and you're busy working to pay it off. Just leave Alex to me, and focus on your job.

"I don't have a husband who died for me or such a sweet child like you do. I'm all alone in this world with no one to love me except you, my dearest cousin. I've decided that I'll never marry or have children. I'll spend my life helping you take care of Alex."

While she was playing games with my son, there was a knock at the door.

When I opened it, I saw my neighbor, Mrs. Keeley, standing there with a young man.

"Mrs. Keeley, what brings you here? Is something wrong?" I quickly invited her in.

She got straight to the point, pushing the young man forward. "This is my youngest son. He's still single. Since you're single too, I thought of introducing the two of you to each other."

She pulled me to the couch and sat down to speak persuasively, "You're managing the company and raising Alex on your own. As a woman, I know how tough that is. Since we're neighbors and know each other well, I thought maybe the two of you could be together."