

## The Last Goodbye Chapter 17

“Since the last time Valerie was hurt by someone she trusted, she’s been wary of forming new relationships,” Zoe remarked pointedly. “To be honest, your condition isn’t good. There’s no guarantee it will improve.”

“I know,” I replied with a forced smile. “But we still have to try.”

Zoe’s brows furrowed as she glanced at the clock, silent for a moment.

When the reminder bell chimed, she shrugged off her coat without hesitation. “If I were in your shoes, Jeffrey, I wouldn’t drag things out with Valerie. A clean break would be better. The public wouldn’t keep criticizing her, and her reputation would be spared.”

“And what makes you think I’m the one holding on?”

“You love her,” Zoe said. “You went to great lengths to win her over. How could you let her go so easily?”

It seemed my feelings for Valerie had been obvious to everyone. Even Zoe, who had been abroad for years, was aware.

The passion of those days had left its mark on everyone around us. Everyone, except Valerie.

“But the truth isn’t what you think it is,” I said quietly. “I’ve already asked for a divorce. It’s Valerie who won’t agree.”

Zoe looked skeptical but didn’t push further. Her gaze, however, remained cold. “You seem determined to survive.”

“Isn’t that human nature?”

Zoe said nothing in response, her eyes narrowing as she studied me.

After a pause, she spoke. “I can’t control everything, but don’t do anything that could harm Valerie. If you do, you can forget about a successful surgery.”

“Whatever I do from now on has nothing to do with Valerie.”

“Really?” Zoe crossed her arms, her skepticism apparent.

“Time will prove it.”

When Alfred returned, he found that I had already discharged myself from the hospital. Though clearly exasperated, he had no choice but to accept it.

On the drive back, he talked incessantly, trying to lighten the mood.

As I gazed out at the passing scenery, lost in thought, I suddenly said, "Take me to the old Page family estate."

The estate was immaculate, a testament to Valerie's insistence "g it maintained regularly.

For a moment, it felt like I had stepped back into my childhood.

The courtyard was lush with greenery. The wind whispered through the pavilion by the lake, and faint laughter echoed in the distance.

"They sound so happy," I murmured.

Alfred glanced at me, puzzled. "I don't hear anything."

Was the laughter only meant for my ears?

"Mr. Page," Alfred said—cautiously. "You might be hearing things."

"Maybe," I said with a shrug.

This was where I grew up. It was also where I first fell for Valerie. Even if there were ghosts here, I wouldn't mind. I reached out toward the pavilion as though I could somehow touch the past.

"Mr. Page, let's head somewhere else," Alfred urged gently, pulling me from my thoughts.

I blinked, realizing I had wandered dangerously close to the lake's edge. One more step, and I would have been in the water.

Falling in step behind Alfred, I let him lead me through the estate.

The last time I had been here, I hadn't paid much attention. But with a clearer mind, I now realized that the old estate had hardly changed. The antiques still sat in their places, untouched by time.

The objects remained, but the people who had once filled this space were long gone.

Sensing my mood had lightened, Alfred spoke up. "Mrs. Page knew how much this place meant to you. After she bought it, she made sure nothing was disturbed. She just never found the right time to bring you here. Honestly, I think she still cares about you."

I picked up an antique, rolling it between my fingers with a flicker of amusement. “So, do you think she cares more about me or Andrew?”

On my phone, a gossip article was still open. The headline read, “Ms. Lindberg, don’t spoil Andrew too much. When you took him out, I’ll admit, I was jealous.”

Alfred fell silent when he caught sight of the screen.

The answer was already clear.