

Midnight III 201

Chapter 1683 - 201: You Have No Choice

Crystal was reaching the end of her rope. Tears ran down her eyes, and she wiped them away with her sleeve. "Is there anything that I can do to change your mind?" she begged.

Nathan met her eyes, and a shark-like Cheshire grin appeared on his face. "I will give you five million dollars a night," he said. "If you perform to my satisfaction for five nights in a row, then I will give you the money that you need to save your friend's Father's life! Do we have a deal?"

Crystal didn't want to be a prostitute, but if selling her body was the only way to get the money she wanted, she was willing to do it. She nodded her affirmation, and then she walked out of the office. Her head was in a haze, and her thoughts were all a jumble, but she was brought back to reality by the sound of her cell phone ringing.

It was Serenity. Crystal had sent her friend her GPS coordinates in the hopes that they could determine her location. She hoped that Serenity had some good news for her, but she was sorely disappointed.

"I can't find your location," Serenity said sadly. "I'm sorry..."

"I see." Crystal fell into deep thought. She had hoped to escape by herself and not let Nathan or Eric know where she was going. Crystal sighed. All she wanted was her original life. It had been simple, but at least she had been free to live it as she pleased.

Serenity: "What are you going to do?"

Crystal: "Eric said that he could take me out of here..."

Serenity: "What about Professor Davis?"

"He..." Crystal paused. After everything that had happened over the past few days, she couldn't think of a way to sum it up quickly. Finally, she said, "Serenity, I just want to go home..."

Serenity: "Fine. Let's get you home. Are you hiding something from me? What happened to Professor Davis?"

Crystal: "It's nothing... I simply want to live alone..."

Serenity: "Crystal, no matter what happens, you have to remember that I'm always with you, and I have your back."

When Crystal heard that, she began to cry. "Through all of this, you have been the only one I could trust and count on," she said. "I cannot thank you enough for your friendship and support."

"That's what friends are for," Serenity assured her. "Anyway, there was something else I wanted to talk to you about. I finally remembered where I'd seen the cufflink you were going on about."

Crystal: "Where?"

Serenity: "Do you remember my cousin Nancy Carter? She married a Kuerto man, and on her wedding day, our whole family went to Kuerto to attend the ceremony. Anyway, the groom - my brother-in-law - had the same cufflink as yours!"

"I do remember!" Crystal exclaimed. "Before she got married, we had dinner and drinks together." A picture of the tender, weak, mild-mannered woman appeared in her mind. "Do you have Nancy's address?"

Serenity: "You don't want to go there, do you? Kuerto is far away..."

"I would like to go there," Crystal answered with certainty.

Serenity: "Alright. I'll send the address to you later. When do you want to depart? I can have Nancy pick you up at the airport."

Crystal: "That would be great. And the sooner I can leave, the better. I had planned to go to a completely strange place anyway, to start a completely new life, and Kuerto sounds perfect!"

That evening Crystal went to her and Nathan's room to present herself to him. She knew that he was expecting her, so she was surprised to find that the door was locked. She had the key, though, so it presented no problem.

Nathan had given her the key when they had moved into the villa. It was a key with an infrared recognition system, and it could open all the doors in the manor.

"Including the door of my heart..." Nathan had said. Crystal remembered that night. He had pressed her hand on his heart and sung to her a love song. All men are liars - she thought bitterly - Liars and pigs! She tried to set aside the hurt in her heart as she unlocked the door and pushed it open.

Inside the room, the reading lamp was still on, and Helen was lying on the bed. She looked like she was asleep. She didn't see Nathan, so she was going to leave, but then she felt a hand on her arm. A familiar mint fragrance drifted into her nose. It frightened her, and she took a step backward. Her instinct was to run away, but the hand clamped around her wrist and twisted it behind her back. "Nathan," she whined. "You're hurting me..."

Nathan: "For a million dollars a night, I should be able to hurt you as much as I want. Or do you renege?"

"I do not," Crystal whispered.

Nathan: "Okay! let's do this."

Crystal: "You don't mean here, do you?"

Nathan: "What's the problem? This is our bedroom."

Crystal looked at Helen and said, "But Helen is sleeping..."

"I'm not worried," Nathan said as he pulled her towards the sofa. "If you are, then maybe you don't need the money as badly as you led me to believe..."

Crystal gritted her teeth and sat down beside him. She had no choice but to do as he bid her. Without his money, she could go nowhere.

Nathan took out his checkbook and a pen, and he wrote out a one-million-dollar check with Crystal's name on it. But he did not sign it. Instead, he held it in the air, waved it in front of her cold eyes, and said, "If you make me happy, I'll sign my name on this."

Crystal glared at Nathan. She had never hated anyone as much as she did Nathan at that moment. She wanted to kill him, but she knew that she couldn't. She needed the money too much. "Fine," she said. "But I still don't want to do it here with Helen sleeping there."

Nathan smirked and said, "You have no choice.. Not if you want the money...."

Chapter 1684 - 202: Nathan Davis, I Hate You

Nathan looked Crystal in the eyes and rudely "Bopped!" her on the nose. "Do you renege?" he asked playfully.

Crystal sighed and said, "I do not."

Nathan reached out without a word, dragged her into his arms, and began to caress her back. She went limp in his arms, and when his free hand found her thigh beneath her skirt, she forced herself not to flinch. She reminded herself to - Think of the money.

Nathan brushed her ear with his nose and whispered. "I've turned you on. I can tell." As he spoke, he moved his hand closer to her pussy, and her skin broke out in gooseflesh. After being with Nathan before, her body had been conditioned to be very sensitive to his touch. Her body felt feverish as if her blood vessels had been injected with an aphrodisiac, and she felt her panties dampen.

Against her will, Crystal had become aroused. Nathan's warm breath, the temperature of his skin, and the tender touch of his fingers inspired her most primitive instincts to come to life. Along with those natural instincts, though, came the socially programmed feelings of shame and hate. I am no different from a dirty wh*re - she realized. Still, she could not help but moan as Nathan's thumb brushed against her vulva, and she lifted her hips to embrace his palm.

Across the room from them, they could hear Helen breathing. Occasionally, she mumbled. She had a dainty snore that was precious rather than obnoxious. Crystal had no idea how she would respond if she woke up and saw what they were doing, but as Nathan rubbed her clitoris with his index finger, she discovered she did not care.

It would serve her right! - thought Crystal, wickedly, for all the times Helen had used her position of privilege to belittle her.

So far, all of Nathan's "below-the-belt play" had been above her panties, and when he tried to push them out of the way, she tightened her legs against him. "No!" she hissed. "Not that!"

Nathan blew on her ear and whispered, "Why not? Can't you bear it?"

As he used his strong hand to force her legs apart, she began to regret her decision to sell her body to him. "Let go of me!" she cried. She rolled her eyes at him and clenched her teeth.

Nathan: "Everyone has been having sex with you, Mrs. Bush. There's no need for you to pretend to be reserved. And besides, the night has just begun. Don't forget your obligations, my plaything."

"Don't!" Crystal whined. She was trying to keep her voice low so that she didn't wake Helen.

"Don't what?" Nathan asked as he bit her ear. "Don't stop?"

Crystal clenched her teeth and said, "Stop it! Obviously! I mean, stop it!"

Nathan smirked as he rubbed her pubic mound over her underwear. Finally, his hand came out, and he shoved it into her face. "You don't want me to stop," he laughed, "so quit playing around. Look at how wet you are. You're practically sopping wet!"

Crystal cursed as she reached out to push his hand away. "Does it make you happy to degrade me like this?"

Nathan: "Sure, it does. Did you think that I would make this easy for you?"

"Why do we have to do it in front of Helen," Crystal whined. "We could go somewhere else..."

The most insulting thing was not his humiliating words or even the things he was doing. The worst thing about what he was doing was that he was doing it in front of another woman.

"Forget that!" Nathan snarled, and he tore her skirt off. She seized one end of the fabric and tried to use it to cover the front of her panties. By now, they were utterly translucent, and Nathan could see every crease and fold.

Crystal gasped and said, "If you do this, I won't forgive you!"

Nathan shrugged. He wanted her to think that he did not care what she said, but when she started to cry, his heart ached. He could not wait to renew his old romance with her. Seeing her being intimate with Eric, though, and knowing that she intended to marry him, had sent him into a downward spiral - and now he wanted her to pay.

He thought about how Eric and Crystal had fucked in the spare room while everyone was eating. He had wished that he could rush in and take her by force, right there in front of Eric.

Then Eric would have known who Crystal belonged to.

Crystal widened her eyes with disbelief, and her pupils enlarged as Nathan applied pressure to her clitoris. She couldn't believe that he was pleasuring her in a room where another woman was present, but he seemed not bothered, and her vaginal fluid made her powerless to resist his invasion.

Her vision blurred as he slipped his hand into her underwear. He found her mons pubis, applied pressure, and made slow circles. Her heart was beating rapidly, and she bit her lower lip to keep from screaming. Her mouth filled with blood, but she didn't feel the pain.

Crystal's body tensed up as she experienced her first orgasm in what seemed an exceedingly long time. Once it was done, though, she felt dirty, and she began to struggle to escape Nathan's grip. Unfortunately, he seemed to have expected that, and he held her in place with one hand pressed against her abdomen and the other on her pubic mound.

Nathan shoved two fingers inside of Crystal, and all her oxygen escaped her. Once she settled, he leaned over her, smiled, and said, "If you want to wake her up, keep struggling. Twist and shout for all I care!"

When Crystal heard that, she went limp. "I give up," she said. "Do whatever you want..."

"Good girl." Nathan leaned in, kissed her ear, and said, "If you want the money to save your friend's Father, you had best behave."

As Nathan flexed his arm, Crystal saw the engraving on his arm. She touched it listlessly and whispered, "Nathan Davis... I hate you..."

Nathan could not bear to hear that, and for the rest of the night, he treated her extremely gently.. But it was still the cruelest sex that they had ever had for Crystal, and it left a painful shadow on her heart.

Chapter 1685 - 203: It Was An Accident

The following day, Crystal crept from the sofa, fumbled for her clothes, staggered back to her room, and went directly into the bathroom. Once the door was closed behind her, she looked in the mirror and frowned. Crystal felt like crying. "Nobody cares about your suffering," she told herself. "So, quit whining...."

Without bothering to undress, she climbed into the shower, curled up into a ball, and ran hot water over her trembling body. Eventually, the water began to cool, and she stripped off her clothes so that she could wash away the events of the night before. But, like a particularly bad smell - like that of a cigarette or a skunk's spray - no amount of scrubbing could alleviate her mental trauma. She could not believe that she had allowed herself to be forced for money, and she hated herself for enjoying it.

The whole time that Crystal was under the water, she cried. Her whole body hurt, but her heart hurt worse. The water ran cold, and she let it run over her until her skin was blue. By then, her teeth were chattering, but she finally felt numb, and with a hand that no longer felt like her own, she turned off the water.

Crystal took a long time drying off and getting dressed. By the time she was done, though, she had found a way to put on a false front. When she opened the bathroom door, she heard someone playing the piano in the living room, and she went downstairs.

The music had sounded professional, so Crystal was surprised to see Helen and Nathan playing a duet. They look good together - she thought bitterly. Suddenly, Crystal felt like an outsider in her own home. She didn't care for the music, but she didn't like the idea of skulking away like a beat dog, so she sat on the couch and pulled out her phone.

At the end of the song, Nathan glanced at Crystal. He produced a check from his shirt pocket, set it on the top of the piano, and said, "I am satisfied with last night's performance. So, I will live up to my end of the bargain. Here is your money. When you come again, though, I'll be looking for a little bit more

creativity and active participation on your part. It may not be tonight, though. I will call on you when I want you. Do you understand?"

Crystal grunted noncommittally, which irritated Nathan, so he got up and walked over to where she was sitting. Then he leaned over, gripped her jaw, and kissed her on the lips.

Crystal lifted her hand to slap him, but he caught it mid-swing. She glared at him. "Fuck off!" she hissed.

Nathan snickered as he let go of her chin. Then, he took Helen's hand with a wink and a nod and led her out of the living room. Once they were gone, Crystal went over to the piano and picked up her check. She touched the numbers and sighed sadly. The digits seemed to be laughing at her. If only there were one more zero - she thought - Then I would be set!! I could travel around the world, do and see whatever I wanted, and forget those that I want to forget.

After surfing the internet for the entire morning, Crystal began to feel bored. She remembered that when Helen had made bread, she had mentioned that Eric liked cranberry cookies, so she decided to do some baking. First, Crystal downloaded a baking APP. Next, she found a good recipe. Then she gathered the required ingredients and got to it - and time went by very quickly, as it often does when one is having fun.

Crystal's first attempt did not go well. The cookies came out of the oven as hard as rocks, and she started a fire. The second batch turned out better, though, and in the following days, she spent a lot of time baking in the kitchen. The best of the batches went into a special biscuit box, and the duds went into the garbage. In this way, when the day came for Eric to return, there was a large assortment of cookies waiting for him.

Meanwhile, Nathan had been keeping his eye on her. He thought - That Bitch! She cannot wait to leave me!

Crystal was packing her luggage in her room when she heard someone coming up the stairs. She thought that it was Eric and she rushed out to meet him. It happened to be Helen, though, and they bashed into each other, and the pregnant woman tumbled down the stairs.

Luckily, the doctor happened to be at the house at the time. She had initially come to take an in utero blood sample for the Paternity Test, and when she heard the sound of Helen falling combined with her screaming, she came running.

Nathan was the first to arrive at the bottom of the stairs, and he was startled by all the blood. Crystal was also stunned, and for a moment, she could not move. But once her mobility returned, though, she rushed down the stairs to see if Helen was alright. But when she knelt next to the pregnant woman, she received a slap across her face for her concern.

"You do everything you can to harm my baby!" Helen shouted. "How dare you push me down the stairs? You just want to make me miscarry! How can you be so vicious!?!?"

Crystal cried out in indignation: "It was an accident!"

Helen covered her abdomen weakly and said, "Crystal Smith, we both know that is bullshit, and you will go to hell if my baby dies!".

Nathan glared at the two women, and then he asked Helen, "Were there any witnesses? Do you have any proof that this was not an accident?"

"Proof?" Helen sneered. She dipped her fingers in the blood pooling between her legs and lifted them for everyone to see. "Isn't this proof enough?" she asked. "But surely someone must have seen something..."

Helen eyed two of her personal servants and gave them a stern look. Almost immediately, one of them stepped forward and said, "While I was cleaning the table, I saw Miss Smith rush towards Mrs. Davis. I didn't expect her to push her down the stairs, but that is what happened. I saw it with my own two eyes."

"I saw it too," the other servant said.

Crystal began to look around the room frantically. "Of course, her servants would say that!" she exclaimed. "But isn't it more likely that she put herself in this position intentionally to avoid having to take the Paternity Test? Doesn't it seem like too much of a coincidence that this happened, just as the doctor was about to take the sample from the fetus?"

"How can you say that!" Helen shouted.. She put her finger in Crystal's face and calmly said, "You pushed me, and now you have the gall to say that I did it deliberately in an attempt to kill my baby? That is crazy talk. No mother would harm her baby intentionally!"

Chapter 1686 - 204: One Life For Another

Nathan looked, first at Crystal and then at Helen. "Okay," he said. "Before we start accusing anyone of insinuation, let's have the doctor take a look. In the meantime, the guards will lock Miss Smith up and keep an eye on her."

Two strong men took hold of Crystal and escorted her out of the room without being told directly. She was led down the hall and pushed into the first room on the left. "We'll be on the other side of the door," one of the guards said, "so you may as well be good."

Crystal sat on the ground without saying anything, and as the door closed, she began to cry. Why does nothing ever work out right? - she wondered - And why does Helen have it out for me? I never did anything to her...

After about half an hour, the door was pushed open, and Nathan walked in. He had several bodyguards with him, including Jack, who was another one of his right-hand men.

Jack waved his hand, and two lower-ranking bodyguards pulled Crystal to her feet and out into the hallway. She assumed that they were taking her to Helen's room to plead guilty, so she did not struggle. But once she realized her assumption had been wrong, she asked, "Where are you taking me?"

The bodyguards ignored her question, and as they led her into the basement, she began to tremble.

At the bottom of the stairs, there was a long hallway. There were many doors on either side of them, but the guards did not stop until they reached the room at the end. Crystal looked around frantically, and she nearly wet herself when she saw the wooden cross that had been fastened to the wall. "D-D-Did N-Nathan ask y- you to k-keep me here?" she stuttered.

One of the guards chuckled as they fastened her to the cross, but neither of them answered her question. As afraid as Crystal was, she didn't start to cry until Jack entered the room with a whip. He gave her a cold and gloomy smile, which looked incredibly creepy in the dark, dank basement. "You killed Master Davis's baby," he snarled. "I am here to make you pay for that!"

Without waiting for a response, Jack let the whip taste her skin.

Crystal shrieked in pain. And he whipped her again. After that first cry, though, she refused to make a sound.

Jack continued to flog her viciously, and the more stubborn she was about keeping her pain to herself, the harder he whipped her. She was in agony, though. The expression on her face and the tears that ran from her eyes were evidence of that. Along with the physical pain, there was also emotional pain. It broke Crystal's heart to think that Nathan would subject her to this torture, and as time passed, she realized that she had lost the capacity to love. Her heart had died.

The whip flicked the side of her ear. It was the first attack that had targeted her face, and she nearly cried out. By now, her clothes had been shredded, and her body was one big open wound. Time had lost all meaning to her, and she began to prepare herself for death.

One life for another - Crystal thought absently. She no longer cared if she lived or if she died.

Suddenly, the overhead light turned on, and Crystal was momentarily blinded. The room fell silent, and then Eric's voice broke the silence. "Crystal?" he gasped. "Oh. My. God. Look what they've done to you..."

The man with the whip stepped up to Eric, but before he could say anything, Eric punched him so hard that he collapsed.

"Take me away from this evil house!" Crystal cried.

Eric: "I will ask the doctor to treat your wounds first. Then I will take you away, and I will never let anyone touch you again."

"What about Helen and her baby?" Crystal asked. "Do you believe me? I didn't push her!"

Eric replied without hesitation: "I believe you. Of course, I do!"

Crystal: "But she is your sister..."

Eric: "Ever since you saved your friend with a glass bottle, I've known that you are an honest person. In my heart, you are kinder than anyone, and even as you are, you are still my pretty." He embraced her then, and she began to cry tears of gratitude without saying a word. "Besides," he continued. "Helen has always been a conniving little cunt. I wouldn't trust her any further than I could throw her out!"

Despite her pain, Crystal chuckled. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Eric replied as he carefully took Crystal off the cross. He carried her into one of the spare rooms, and he had one of the servants call for the doctor to come and treat her wounds.

While Crystal was being tormented in the basement, in the master bedroom - Helen's stomach was twisting and turning nervously. She was lying on the bed, and when the doctor finally entered the room with Nathan and the other guard, she felt like she was going to vomit.

The doctor came over and sat on a chair that had been positioned beside the bed. "You've been through quite a lot," he said softly. "Now, I need to check on the baby. Can I do that?"

Helen nodded, and the doctor put a stethoscope against her belly. After a minute, she smiled and said, "It seems that everything is fine. You should still make an appointment for an ultrasound. Do you understand?"

Helen nodded again but said nothing. She knew what was coming next and she was terrified.

The doctor looked at Nathan and said, "Do you still want the Paternity test?"

Nathan: "That is why you're here."

The doctor nodded, and she began to rummage through her bag for what she would need, but before she was able to find what she was looking for, Vic rushed into the room. His face was white, and he was out of breath.

Nathan glared at him, and when he asked what the problem was, Vic whispered into his ear: "Someone has absconded with Crystal. I think it was Eric..."

Nathan's face turned red from rage, and he pushed Vic away as he stood up. He went directly to the room Crystal had been sleeping in, and he barged in - and when he found her in Eric's arms, he began to clench and unclench his hands at his sides.

Eric looked Nathan in the eyes and said, "Master Davis, I must take Crystal away from here."

Nathan scowled and said, "She can't leave." He would not let her go. He wanted to tell her that Helen's child was not his, and he still had to explain why he had been mistreating her.

"Mr. Davis..." Crystal whined. "Is it your intention to end my life?"

It broke Nathan's heart to hear her call him Mr. Davis. "Jack used the punishment arbitrarily..." he explained. "Surely, you understand."

Crystal: "Mr. Davis, I don't owe you anything anymore, and you no longer have any authority over me. We are over. You had no right to punish me, even arbitrarily..."

Nathan's head began to hurt as he realized that she was right. He rubbed his temples and squinted his eyes against the overhead light. "This has to stop," he muttered. Without a word of warning, Nathan strode forward and reached out to pull Crystal into his arms, and when Eric tried to stop him, he punched him in the face. Eric stumbled backward and fell on his ass.

Eric shouted his sister's name as he stood up, and Nathan punched him again, this time in the gut. Nathan was going to hit him a third time, but as his fist swung, he felt cold metal against his forehead, and he froze.

Crystal was holding a gun in her hands, and the muzzle was pressed against his head.

Chapter 1687 - 205: I Will Keep Your Secret

Crystal glared at Nathan. "If you hit him again," she said, "I will shoot you!"

"Do you know what you are doing?" Nathan asked. He tried to grab the gun from her, but she stepped backward - she didn't shoot.

Nor will she - thought Nathan as he stood up and stepped toward her.

Crystal didn't give him another warning. Instead, she lowered the gun, aimed at his left thigh, and fired. The sound of the blast was deafening, and everyone's ears began to ring. The attack barely slowed Nathan, though. He stumbled backward a step, but once he recovered his balance, he resumed his approach.

Crystal adjusted her aim and shot him in his right leg. This shot brought him to his knees. It was loaded with Tranquilizer Darts, so there was little blood, but she was happy enough with the results. She didn't need him dead. She only needed him out of the way.

Crystal rushed over to Eric. She gave him a big hug and asked him if he was okay. He said that he was, but Nathan reached out to grab her feet when she went to help him off the ground.

The moment Crystal felt Nathan's fingers touch her ankle, she spun around and shot him in the hand. Nathan shrieked as he fell backward, and the next time he tried to get up, he could not.

Meanwhile, Eric's bodyguards were subduing Nathan's bodyguards.

Once Eric was on his feet, he walked over to Nathan and spat in his face. "I should kill you for what you did to Crystal," he said. "And I might still..."

Crystal looked at Nathan. He looks so pathetic - she thought. After what he had put her through on the cross, her heart was dead for him. "He can't hurt us anymore," she said disdainfully. "Let's just go."

As soon as Crystal's wounds were cleaned and bound, she gathered a few of her things, and Eric took her away from that horrible place. It was a short trip to the airport, and along the way, Crystal began to

rummage through her backpack. She pulled out an exquisite tin box, put it in his hands, and said, "I heard that you like cranberry cookies, so I made some for you."

Eric was thrilled. He didn't want much. If he had his pretty, he was happy, but the fact that she had gone to the trouble to bake for him was almost too much to take in. He accepted the gift and held it in a way that suggested it contained much greater treasures than cookies.

Next, Crystal took out a purple frosted vial. "I learned about aromatherapy from Helen," she explained. "This is lavender. I really like the smell. Do you want to try it?"

Eric nodded, and she removed the cap so that he could get a good whiff of it. Almost immediately, he began to feel tired. He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Crystal looked at him and sighed. She felt sorry about what needed to happen next. Since leaving the villa, she had realized that things weren't going to work out the way Eric had planned. He might be good to her, but she knew that Nathan wouldn't let her go so easily. He would find her, challenge Eric, and they would both get hurt in the end. That was not what she wanted. She just wanted to go to a strange place where neither man could find her, a place where she could live as an independent woman.

Along with the cookies and therapeutic oils, she had also brought the fake ID and the Passport that Serenity had procured for her. When she got to the airport, she purchased her plane ticket and contacted Nancy so that she would have someone waiting for her at the other end.

It was a sixteen-hour flight to Kuerto, and it was early morning when the plane touched down. Looking out the window, Crystal felt the joy of having endless possibilities wash over her. She hadn't slept well on the flight, but she felt positively energized.

Because she didn't have much luggage with her, she was able to pass through customs quickly and without incident. Of course, she had felt nervous about how well the fake Passport would hold up, but her worries had been for nothing, and Nancy was waiting on the other side. She was a smaller woman, but the giant sign with Crystal's new name on it was impossible to miss.

The last time Crystal had seen Nancy, she'd been fifteen or six years old, but she still looked the same. Nancy was only five years older than her, and Crystal thought that they would become good friends.

The older woman rushed forward and gave her a big hug. After chatting for a while, she drove back to her villa with Crystal in the passenger seat beside her.

Compared with the manor where Crystal had been imprisoned, Nancy's home was not very big. The decoration style was traditionally European, with elements of Kuerto throughout. There was no sign of a male presence, and Crystal asked Nancy about her husband, Paul.

"We are recently divorced," Nancy admitted. "I haven't told anyone yet, so I would appreciate it if you kept my secret..."

Crystal: "I'm sorry. I didn't know. And of course, I will keep your secret. Can I ask you what happened?"

"It is not a long story," Nancy replied. "And it would be better told over coffee." She led Crystal into the kitchen, poured them each a cup of coffee, and as they sat down at the table, she continued: "At first,

Paul was truly kind to me. I thought that he truly loved me, but after we were wed, he told me that he only wanted me so that I could give him a child."

"That's awful!" Crystal exclaimed.

"It is," Nancy agreed. The room fell silent for a minute. She looked at her coffee, and as the steam washed over her face, she closed her eyes. "When we met, I was young and naive, and he played me like a fiddle. But, unfortunately, the good times did not last long, and everything changed after Clark was born."

"Where is Clark?" asked Crystal quietly. She felt terrible about reopening these wounds. She hadn't even known about the baby, let alone all the grief Nancy had been through since they had last seen each other.

Nancy's shoulders were slightly trembling, and tears had welled up in her eyes. "He drove me out of my own home," she replied. "Then he took Clark away.... and that's the end of the story, I guess."

Chapter 1688 - 206: It Won't Work

After everything that Crystal had gone through with Nathan, it broke her heart to hear that Nancy, like her, had been so disempowered by a man. Crystal had found her salvation, though, and she thought maybe Nancy could too. She touched her new friend's hand and said, "This doesn't have to be the end. There is always room for hope."

"I don't know about that," Nancy admitted. "Most of the time, I don't even know what I'm doing from day to day. Should I go back? Should I try to fight for custody of my son, or should I just leave well enough alone? I know that Paul will be a good Father to Clark, but the woman he is with is no good..."

Crystal: "When was the last time you saw your son?"

Nancy: "It's been a while. I don't know. Even when we were together, Paul didn't let me see Clark. I had to beg to see my own son, and most times, he still didn't let me see him..."

Crystal: "Were you sleeping together?"

Nancy: "Not after I got pregnant. After that, he brought another woman home with him, and he stopped making love to me. They had sex on our bed right in front of me. It was disgusting."

Crystal: "What an asshole!"

"The worst of it was..." Nancy shrugged and left her sentence to hang in the air, unfinished.

"The worst of it was... What?!?!" Crystal demanded.

Nancy: "That woman was also pregnant, and when Clark was born, she secretly bullied him. I tried to stop her, but do you know what happened? She threw herself to the ground, had a miscarriage, and blamed me!"

Crystal's face went white. She had experienced nearly the same thing. "There is a special place in Hell for bitches like that!" she exclaimed. "Let me guess; Paul believed her, right? I had the same experience. Are all men this blind?"

Nancy just shrugged and shook her head sadly.

Crystal: "What did Paul do?"

Nancy: "Well, he scolded me. He said that I was a vicious woman and that Clark's injuries were a result of my cruelty and negligence."

Crystal was furious. "Why haven't you fought for custody?" she asked.

Nancy: "His income is higher than mine, and his background is stronger than mine. So, he would win. If I could just see Clark occasionally, that would be enough. I begged Paul on my knees to let me, but he said no. It is useless to try..."

Crystal: "You kneeled to beg him? What an asshole! No Mother should have to beg like that to see their child!"

Nancy began to cry. She covered her face with her hands and said nothing.

Crystal: "I need to help you get Clark back!"

"It won't work," Nancy sobbed. "What can two single women hope to accomplish...?"

"I don't know," Crystal admitted. "But we should still try. You can't just sit and wait around like this."

"Okay, but can we talk about something else now?" Nancy dried her eyes with her sleeve and said, "You are here about the cufflink, right?"

"Yes." Crystal nodded and said, "There are other reasons too, though..."

"Of course, there are," Nancy agreed. "But for now, let me see what you've got."

Crystal sighed as she rummaged through her bag for the jewelry box. Once she found it, she handed it to Nancy, who immediately opened it up.

The cufflink was made of amber, and there was a small black spider in the middle. Nancy smiled and said, "I have seen this. Paul has one that is the same. It looks special, so I remember it very clearly. Will it actually help you find your family?"

"It might," Crystal replied. "My mother left this one to me. The original owner is my Father. Of course, Paul is too young to be my Father, but where did he get it? I'd like to know the answer to that question."

Nancy frowned and said, "With my relationship with him being as it is, I doubt he would answer any of my questions..."

Crystal: "Don't worry, I can handle this. I still can't believe what an asshole Paul turned out to be, though..."

"It doesn't matter." Nancy brought her fingers to her lips and giggled. "Do you want to hear a secret?" she asked..

Crystal smiled and said, "Of course!"

Nancy: "In private, I call Paul," Asshole Burnett!"

"Asshole Burnett!" Crystal laughed out loud and said, "That name is great!"

Nancy: "I think so too. What about Nathan? Should we call him 'Bitch Davis?'"

Crystal smiled and murmured noncommittally as she brought her coffee to her lips. There was a lot more to Nancy than her first impression had perceived. She was a gorgeous woman, and her temperament was outstanding. After being a housewife for several years, though, she'd begun dressing very casually. Thus, she looked a bit like a conservative dumpling.

"What are you thinking?" asked Nancy.

Crystal: "I thought that if we dressed you up, Asshole Bennett would regret the way he treated you and admit that he'd been wrong."

Nancy sighed and said, "That's not the case, though. He was the one that ordered me to dress this way. Now I do it out of habit, but I didn't always dress this way. Once upon a time, I was a real hotsy-totsy..."

Crystal: "I bet his lover dresses sexy, though. Am I right?"

Nancy: "How did you know?"

Crystal: "Men are like this. Their wives must be ordinary, but their lovers must be slutty. That way, they can keep their wives' home and have fun outside of their marriage."

Nancy began to look at Crystal differently. Her brow furrowed, and she said, "There is something very special about you. You are wise beyond your years, and I appreciate your counsel."

Crystal blushed. It had been a long time since someone had appreciated her for her mind. "I used to be the same as you," she said. "But being with Nathan forced me to grow up very quickly."

Nancy: "Was he really that bad to you?"

Crystal: "You have no idea. He locked me up and assaulted me. Then he had me put on a cross and lashed within an inch of my life. I barely made it out of there. But enough about me - What do you think about what I said? You're still young, so it's not too late to try out my idea. I really want to know whether Asshole Burnett will regret what he did if he sees you dressed differently."

Nancy frowned and said, "It won't work. He already has a sexy woman, and he has Carl. He won't care about me. And with his background, he can get any woman he wants."

Crystal: "Don't say that. He will regret what he did. I am sure of it. What is his background, anyway?"

Nancy: "Honestly, I don't know. He has a ton of bodyguards, though. That's all I know. If you truly think that your plan might work, though, let's give it a try. What should I do first?"

Crystal thought about it for a moment, and then she said, "Let's start in the bathroom. When was the last time you shaved your legs?"

Chapter 1689 - 207: What's Done Is Done

Crystal adjusted the camera and took a picture. The camera made a clicking sound, and Nancy changed her pose. The water in the tub splashed up the side of the tub, exposing her breasts, and the camera captured the moment. "There we go." Crystal laughed and said, "Just a few more, and then we'll be done."

The luxurious bathtub was made of transparent crystal. Ceramics surrounded it, and the room was lit by candlelight. The effect created a plethora of shadows, with each one going in a different direction. It was very sexy. There was a light sheen on the water from the Foam Bath, and rose petals floated prettily between Nancy's legs.

Nancy had a champagne flute in her hand. She took a sip, and she flinched when she heard the camera click thrice more. She had been resistant to this nude photo shoot, but Crystal had reminded her that her ex-husband had seen her naked a million times already, so it didn't really matter. Even now, though, as the shoot winds down, she can't help but wonder if they were doing the right thing. "Are you sure this is okay?" she asked. "He's never given me any reason to believe that he likes this sort of thing... or that he even likes my body."

Crystal: "Don't talk like that. You are beautiful."

Nancy: "Okay, but let's stop. You've taken a lot of pictures already, and Paul will be furious when he sees them!"

Crystal: "You look very nice. Trust me. If you want to get Clark back, you must take the initiative to make some effort!"

Nancy: "But how will these pictures help me get to see Clark? I don't understand..."

Crystal smiled. Although Nancy was older than her, she was very naïve. "If you want him to listen to you," she explained, "then you need to do something to get his attention. Once he sees these pictures, you will definitely have his undivided attention. Anyway, I think we've got enough photos. You can rinse off and get out of the tub if you'd like."

"Finally." Nancy finished her champagne, set the glass on the toilet, and pulled the plug.

Crystal leaned against the wall, and as her friend ran the shower, she began to upload the nudes to Nancy's WhatsApp page. "Does Paul use WhatsApp?" she asked.

"All of the time," Nancy replied. "If you send him the pictures on WhatsApp, he will see them as soon as you press SEND."

"That's good." Crystal smiled and said. Phase One is complete."

Nancy:" Phase One? Is there a Second Phase?"

Crystal laughed and said, "The next thing that we are going to do is accept your neighbors' invitation for their party tonight."

There was a newly married young couple living next door, and as chance would have it, they were hosting a party to get to know their neighbors.

On the far side of Kuerto, there was a private bathhouse called The Thermae Balneae. The bathhouse was part of an elite club, where posh executive types could come to indulge in their carnal desires. It was designed and fashioned after The Baths of Caracalla in Rome, and to Paul Burnett was his home away from home.

Typically, there were only ten to twelve patrons at any given time. Still, the bathhouse's capacity was much higher, and today there happened to be closer to twenty-five or thirty people, either relaxing as casual observers or engaging in one form of coitus or another.

Amidst the gaggle of intertwined bodies, Paul had a woman on all fours. Her face was resting on the ground, her legs were spread with her ass in the air, and each time he pushed himself deeper inside her, she groaned.

"Harder," she shouted. "Hurt me!"

Paul laughed. "You just wait. Next time we can try it without the foreplay!"

It wasn't long before Paul had spent his seed, and he sat down at the pool's edge to relax. The girl sat beside him, and after giving her a meaningful look, he pointed to his genitals and said, "You know what to do, so get to it." There was no meanness in his voice, but the command left no room for negotiation.

Paul moaned as the girl began to take care of him, but before he could properly enjoy it, his cell phone buzzed. The girl scowled and said, "Really? You couldn't have turned that off?"

He shrugged as he reached for his cellphone. He never turned it off. She knew that. After punching in his code, he saw that he'd received a message from Nancy. What the fuck does she want? - he wondered angrily. When he saw the pictures, though, his anger faded, all the color drained from his face, and he frowned. This was his first time seeing Nancy like this, and he almost didn't recognize her.

Who took these? Paul wondered - Was it a man?

Nancy looked gorgeous in the photos, and the expression on her face suggested a fascinating temperament that was noble and indifferent. He thought - This woman was the antithesis to the conservative housewife that birthed my son. He wondered if she had gone crazy and why she had sent the pictures.

Meanwhile, the girl was hovering over his shoulder. She hugged him from behind and pressed her bare breasts against his skin. Then, she leaned into his ear and whispered, "Put the phone away, okay. Why do you need those dirty pictures when you've got a real woman?"

Paul sighed. He looked at his phone, and he tried to set it aside, but his fingers refused to let it go. "I can't," he said. "I'm sorry, but I need to respond to this."

At Nancy's house - After Crystal sent the pictures, Nancy felt like she would be sick. "What did I do?" she gasped. "Take it back. Can't you do that?"

"I cannot," Crystal replied. "What's done is done. This is for the best, though. Why don't you get dressed, and I'll meet you in the living room?"

Nancy began to dry off, and she had just started to wrap a second towel around her hair when her phone rang. She saw that it was her ex-husband, and she began to squeal.

When Crystal heard her friend, she knew exactly who was calling, and she rushed into the bathroom.. She tore the phone out of Nancy's hand before she could answer it, and she rejected the call.

Chapter 1690 - 208: Woman Are You Crazy?

Nancy's ire began to rise. She glared at Crystal and said, "That was Paul. Why did you hang up on him like that?"

Crystal smiled and said, "This is part of the plan. We are going to build up some mystery around you and play a little game called Hard To-Get. So, please do not do anything without my say so. Do you understand?"

A shark-like Cheshire grin appeared on Nancy's face, and she said, "Oh, Crystal! You are so wicked. I love it. How did you get to be so smart?"

Crystal shrugged and said, "Maybe it's Maybelline." And both girls broke into a fit of giggles. They went into Nancy's room together, and while she was dressing, Crystal noticed a mark on her arm that she hadn't previously seen. She pointed to it and asked, "What happened?"

Nancy frowned and said, "I was kicked a while back, and I fell into the coffee table. I ended up being stuck in the hospital for half a month. It's all right now, though."

Crystal: "You know, I always look down on men that beat women. They are so rude."

Nancy: "After everything Nathan did to you, I can see why you would say that, and I completely agree with you. Why is God so cruel? He did not have to make men like this, but he did. Anyway, do you need to reapply for medicine on your wounds? I can find some for you."

"I'll be fine for a while longer," Crystal replied. "If you could get it for me later, though, that would be appreciated."

Suddenly, Nancy's phone rang, and she picked it up before Crystal could stop her. Crystal glared at her, but she just motioned for her to be quiet.

When Nancy heard who was on the other line, her face lit up, and she began to cry. The number belonged to Paul, but her son had called her, and she quickly turned on the speaker so that Crystal could listen in.

"Is that you, Mom?" asked Clark. Nancy could not believe that after all this time, she was finally talking to her son. She noted how much older he sounded, and it seemed that he had a vocabulary of a far older child.

Nancy: "Baby. It is me. I'm so happy to hear your voice!"

Clark: "Mom... Why did you abandon me? Daddy said that you don't care about me anymore. Please don't abandon me. I will be obedient. I won't be naughty..."

Nancy: "Clark, Mommy, didn't want to leave you. I won't abandon you, and I will never stop fighting to see you. Don't listen to your Father. Now, I have a question to ask you, and I would be grateful if you could tell me the truth. Is that strange woman still bullying you?"

Clark: "Mommy, I am so scared. She said I stole her things, but I didn't! I really didn't!

Nancy: "Can you let me talk to your Father?"

Clark: "Daddy's not here..."

Nancy: "Clark, Mommy's coming soon. Wait for me, okay?"

Clark: "Okay. Bye Mommy. I love you.

Nancy: "I love you too, baby."

After hanging up the phone, Nancy took off running, and Crystal followed her. On the way to the car, Nancy tried to phone Paul. Unfortunately, he picked up after the second ring, and even without the speaker on, Crystal could make out every word of their conversation.

"How dare you call me at this time?" Paul hissed. "Woman, are you crazy?"

Why is this a bad time?- Nancy wondered. She looked at the clock. It was just past ten, which wasn't that late. On the other hand, she could hear a woman's voice in the background, and she wondered if it was his lover. If so, that would explain his anger.

Paul: "Where did you find the bravery to dial this number?"

Crystal watched as Nancy's face turned red from rage. This is a Momma bear in action - she thought excitedly - And everyone knows that you don't fuck with a Momma bear's cubs!

Nancy took a deep breath and growled into the microphone. "Paul!" she roared. "If you hurt Clark, I will kill you!! And if that bitch that you are with hurts him, then I will kill you both!"

"How dare you!" Paul exclaimed. He waited a moment for a response, and when it didn't come, he realized that she'd hung upon him. "How dare she?" he muttered angrily. Then, he walked over to the window and calmly set his phone on the sill.

Paul owned the world's largest smuggling group. He was a member in good standing at Thermae Balneae. He controlled the trading of underground arms. He planned armed terrorist activities while preventing presidents and governments from taking countermeasures against him. He was a famous killer, extremely cold and cruel - and he was not used to being yelled at or hung upon. "That bitch!" he hissed under his breath.

There was a naked woman on the bed, and she could see that he was tense, so she got up and wrapped her arms around Paul. "My body is so hot," she murmured. "Come back to bed, okay? Don't you want to fool around a little more?"

Paul was no longer in the mood, though, but before he was forced to tell her so, his son began to shriek. Then, without a word, he went into action. Paul ran out of the room, and after following the sound for a few minutes, he found Clark. He had been locked in a small black room, and he became so afraid that he tried to climb out the window.

Clark had been trying to get to higher ground, but a branch had snapped. He'd fallen just over a meter, landing safely on a lower limb but scrapping both of his knees.

Almost immediately, the boy resumed his climb.

Clark's mother had once told him, "If you ever need me, but I am not around, look to the sky.. Then, even if you cannot see me, you can know that I love you and that I am thinking of you."

Chapter 1691 - 209: Where Is My Mommy?

The higher Clark climbed, the closer to his Mother he felt.

When Paul saw his son, he began to panic. "Don't worry!" he shouted. "Daddy will get you down from there!"

When Clark saw his Father, he was so afraid that he wet his pants. "Don't come up here," he cried. "You are all bad guys. Even you, Daddy!"

Where is my Mommy? - Clark wondered. She had said she was on her way, but he had not seen her yet, and he was beginning to wonder if she would show.

One of the servants shouted up to him: "Little master, don't move! I am coming up!"

When Clark heard that, he began to scramble up the tree as fast as he could. If his Mother came, he wanted her to be able to see him from afar. That way, she could rescue him from all of the bad people that were trying to force him down.

The servant stepped away from the tree. Paul gave her a dirty look, and she hastily explained her actions: "I just wanted to get the little master down, but as soon as I touched the tree, he became agitated, and he started climbing again. I was afraid that he would fall, so I stopped what I was doing."

Paul nodded and motioned for everyone to stand down. Sure enough, when Clark saw that the bodyguards and servants had left the tree, he calmed down.

Paul looked up and shouted, "What do you want?"

"I want my Mommy?" Clark wailed. Paul turned to one of his servants and said, "I don't know what to do..."

"The only thing to do now is to appease the little master's mood," the servant replied. "Once he's down, you can solve the deeper issue. After all, the child's body is delicate. If he falls from such a height, he will likely die..."

When Nancy and Crystal arrived, they were surprised to see everyone surrounding a tree. They were looking up, so Nancy looked up, and when she saw her son, she almost fainted.

Luckily, she didn't.

Nancy scrambled out of her car, raced over to the tree, and shouted up to her son: "Clark! Mommy is here, so don't move."

Clark looked down, and when he saw Nancy, his eyes brightened immediately. It turned out that his Mommy had been thinking about him, and now he knew that she wouldn't abandon him. "Mommy!" he shouted, and he stood up so that she could see him better.

Nancy turned to Paul, punched him in the chest, and said, "Why did you force such a little child to climb up a tree? What are you trying to prove? Don't you know that he could get killed?!?"

Paul grabbed her wrist and pushed her away. "Woman!" he hissed. "You are too much! He got up there on his own volition."

Nancy shook her head and said, "I don't believe it. He is too little. A child of his age is incapable of climbing a tree."

Paul looked at her incredulously. "Are you crazy?" he asked. "How dare you talk to me in this tone?"

"When it comes to my son, I do dare," Nancy replied. She stared at him fiercely and said, "If anything happens to Clark, I will make you regret you were ever born!"

This was the first time that Paul had seen Nancy like this, and her reaction pleased him. Thus, when they finally got Clark down from the tree, he allowed the boy to embrace his Mother.

At the Beverly villa - After having disappeared for 24 hours, Nathan's body was finally found. A maid saw him on the floor, and she shrieked because she thought that he was dead at first. She was so scared that the bucket in her hands fell to the ground, tipped over, and spilled soapy water all over the floor.

Vic had also been attacked, which meant that he, too, needed to be roused. He woke up first, though, and once he was capable of walking, he rushed to Nathan's bedside. It was not long after that that Nathan woke up. He anxiously looked around the room. It seemed that something was missing. He turned to Vic and asked, "What happened?"

"Crystal escaped," Vic replied. "And she used a tranquilizer gun on us on the way out. She shot me with one dart, but you got three. That is why you can't sit up, but I can."

Nathan sighed, and after a moment, he said, "I think I remember now."

Vic: "You did everything you could to stop her, but I guess she just really wanted to go... But who knows, maybe she will come back..."

Nathan: "I doubt it. If she left with Eric, she'd never come back."

Vic: "That's the thing. According to the inside line, Miss Smith did not return to the Bush's Mansion with Eric, and rumor has it that not only did she dr*g him too, but he is out looking for her. So she fucked you both over!"

Nathan: "Have any efforts been made on our part to locate her while we were passed out? Without Eric's help, she is far less likely to be able to hide from us successfully!"

"Our men have been looking," Vic replied.

"She hasn't been found yet, but every place we check where she isn't there narrows down our search. Your men are thorough and persistent. We will find her, and if she can't be reasoned with, we will bring her back by force!"

Nathan tried to sit up, but he was too weak. He could still barely move his arms and legs, and his mind was a bit hazy. "I can't believe she did this to us," he muttered. He felt a headache coming on, and he absently rubbed his temples.

Not knowing what to say, Vic wisely remained quiet.

Eventually, Nathan looked up, and he smiled. "This is just another game of Cat and Mouse," he said. "When I am back on my feet, I will find her.. And when I do, not even the old Davis will be able to stop me from doing as I please with her."

Chapter 1692 - 210: Don't Be Such A Drama Queen

Clark clung to his mother as she carried him to his Father's car. He was terrified that someone would take him away and that his mom would leave without him. He nuzzled against her, and the smell of her perfume offered him some comfort, but not enough that he was able to stop crying.

Paul climbed in behind the wheel. Crystal took the seat behind him, and Nancy sat with Clark beside her. Clark was afraid that his Father would send his Mother away, and he had insisted that they sit as far

away from him as possible. Clark hadn't even wanted to go to the hospital, but he had been injured while climbing down the tree, and his mother had insisted.

As the car pulled out of the driveway, Nancy glared at Paul's image in the rearview mirror. When he looked up, he saw her stroking their son's little face with her hands, and he returned her cold stare. How dare this woman stare at me? - he thought! She isn't even my wife

Nancy felt a pang of resentment in her stomach. If she hadn't married Paul, her life wouldn't be so bad. She saw that he had no redeeming qualities in hindsight, but she had been blinded by love.

Suddenly, the car veered off to the right, and instead of continuing on to the hospital, Paul pulled into the parking lot where their family doctor practiced. Nancy couldn't believe it. "Why are we stopping here?" she growled. "Clark needs the hospital!"

"He can see the Doctor," Paul said firmly. "He will be seen faster here."

It seemed that he didn't care enough about the boy to wait in the hospital, and Nancy was furious. At that moment, she wanted to punch her ex-husband in the face. "Clark is my baby!" she growled. "He is all I have. He is precious to my heart, and no one can compare to him. What is wrong with you? You are responsible for his injuries, but you won't take him to the hospital... Are you even human?"

Paul: "Don't be such a drama queen. Just get out of the car."

Nancy was shaking with anger, and it was the first time Paul had seen her so upset. Thus, he felt like he was talking to a different person, and as he got out of the car, he was surprised by how beautiful she was. How did I not notice this before? - he asked himself.

There weren't many people in the clinic's waiting room, and the doctor was able to see Clark right away. He gave the boy a once over, and everything seemed fine, but he ordered a CT scan. "Just to be on the safe side," he said.

There was a diagnostic imaging center next door, and Paul lit up a fag outside while Nancy checked Clark in. Once the nurses took the boy in, she joined him. What she had to do would be hard, but it was necessary. She took a deep breath, and without meeting his eyes, she said, "I'm sorry. You were right to bring him here."

Paul nodded thoughtfully. A minute passed without either of them speaking, and then he said, "Nancy, are you trying to use Clark to get back into my house?"

Nancy's face turned white when she heard that. Where is this going? - she wondered - Likely, it is nowhere good...

Paul: "If you apologize for what you did, then maybe I can give you a chance to turn over a new leaf. For Clark's sake."

Nancy: "Did you misunderstand something? I never want to enter your house again."

Paul was shocked.

Nancy: "I wouldn't go back if you cried and begged me to return. Marrying you turned out to be the biggest mistake of my life."

Paul frowned, and his ire began to rise. Before he could reply, though, Crystal walked out of the clinic with Clark in her arms. She passed the boy to his mother and said, "Everything's fine, and Clark was a very brave boy."

Although Paul did not allow Nancy to take Clark home, he said that she could return in the morning, make him breakfast, and spend some time with him. She did not know why he was so accommodating, but she tried not to overthink it. What mattered was that she would be able to see her son. So, to make the most of this opportunity, she got up extra early so that she would be there when he woke up - and, of course, she brought Crystal along in case she needed extra support.

When they arrived at the Burnett villa, a servant showed them to the kitchen, and they got to work. Nancy did most of the cooking, with Crystal occasionally helping out, and by the time Clark began to stir, she had nearly finished preparing his favorite breakfast foods.

"It's a lot of food," Crystal noted.

Nancy sighed sadly. "Clark has lost some weight," she said. "I know that I can't fatten him up with one meal, but I can try. Right?"

Crystal nodded wordlessly.

From upstairs, there came the shrill sound of a servant's startled cry; then, like a herd of elephants, the sound of a small boy running and jumping about. "Young master!" cried the servant. "Don't run around. Be careful not to fall!"

Clark had just gotten out of bed, and when he'd smelled breakfast, he remembered that his mother was there. He ran down the stairs, and when he saw Nancy in the kitchen, his face practically glowed.

"Mommy!" he shouted. He ran to her and jumped into her arms.

Just then, there was a noise at the door. Paul had just returned from his early morning run, and he was wearing a tracksuit. Without thinking, Nancy went over and got him a pair of house slippers. It was a part of a routine that they'd established while they were married. She'd done it a thousand times, and it felt as natural to her as breathing. It was only as she straightened up that she realized the faux pas she had committed, and her cheeks turned red from embarrassment.

Paul was also acting without thinking and turning events. Luckily, Clark was utterly oblivious to it. He began to giggle, and the mood lightened, and when the fit passed, he said, "I'm hungry."

"Well then, let's get you to the table."

Nancy kissed her boy on the forehead and said, "I've prepared all of your favorite foods."