



KaraComet Presents

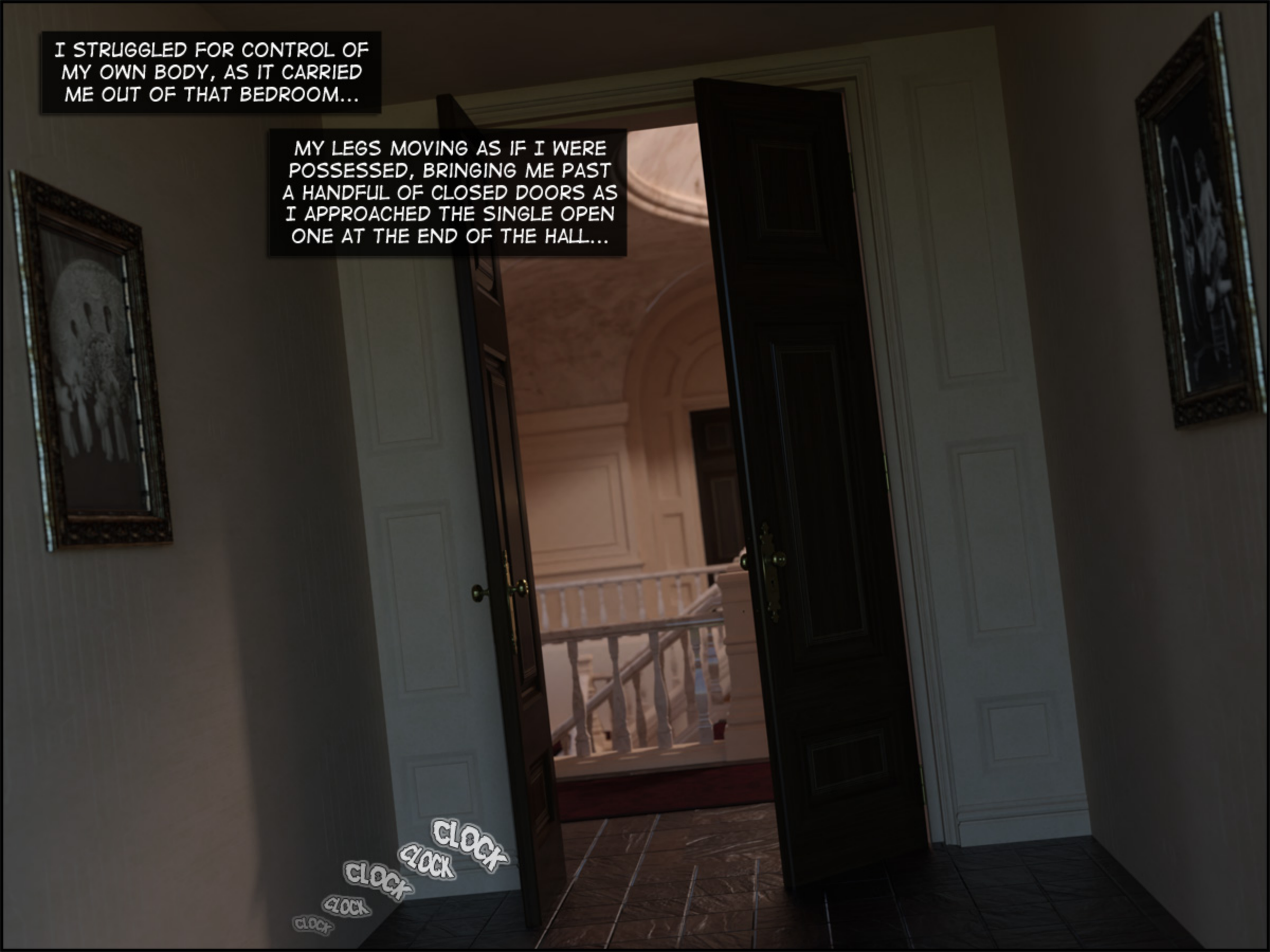
The Search For Detective Batson

Chapter 7: Home

I STRUGGLED FOR CONTROL OF MY OWN BODY, AS IT CARRIED ME OUT OF THAT BEDROOM...

MY LEGS MOVING AS IF I WERE POSSESSED, BRINGING ME PAST A HANDFUL OF CLOSED DOORS AS I APPROACHED THE SINGLE OPEN ONE AT THE END OF THE HALL...

CLOCK
CLOCK
CLOCK
CLOCK



IT WAS ONLY THEN THAT AGENCY
WAS RETURNED TO ME, SO LONG
AS I DIDN'T ATTEMPT TO CHANGE
THE COURSE I WAS SET UPON...

AND I PAUSED FOR A MOMENT
TO CONSIDER MY OPTIONS...

CLOCK
CLOCK

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a floral dress, is seen from behind, looking out of a large, dark wooden doorway. The room is dimly lit, with framed pictures on the wall. The doorway leads to a brightly lit, arched hallway with a white railing. The text "CLOCK CLOCK" is written in a stylized font near the bottom of the woman's back.

SOMEWHERE DEEP IN THE BACK OF
MY MIND, I KNEW THAT STEALTH
WAS ENTIRELY POINTLESS HERE...

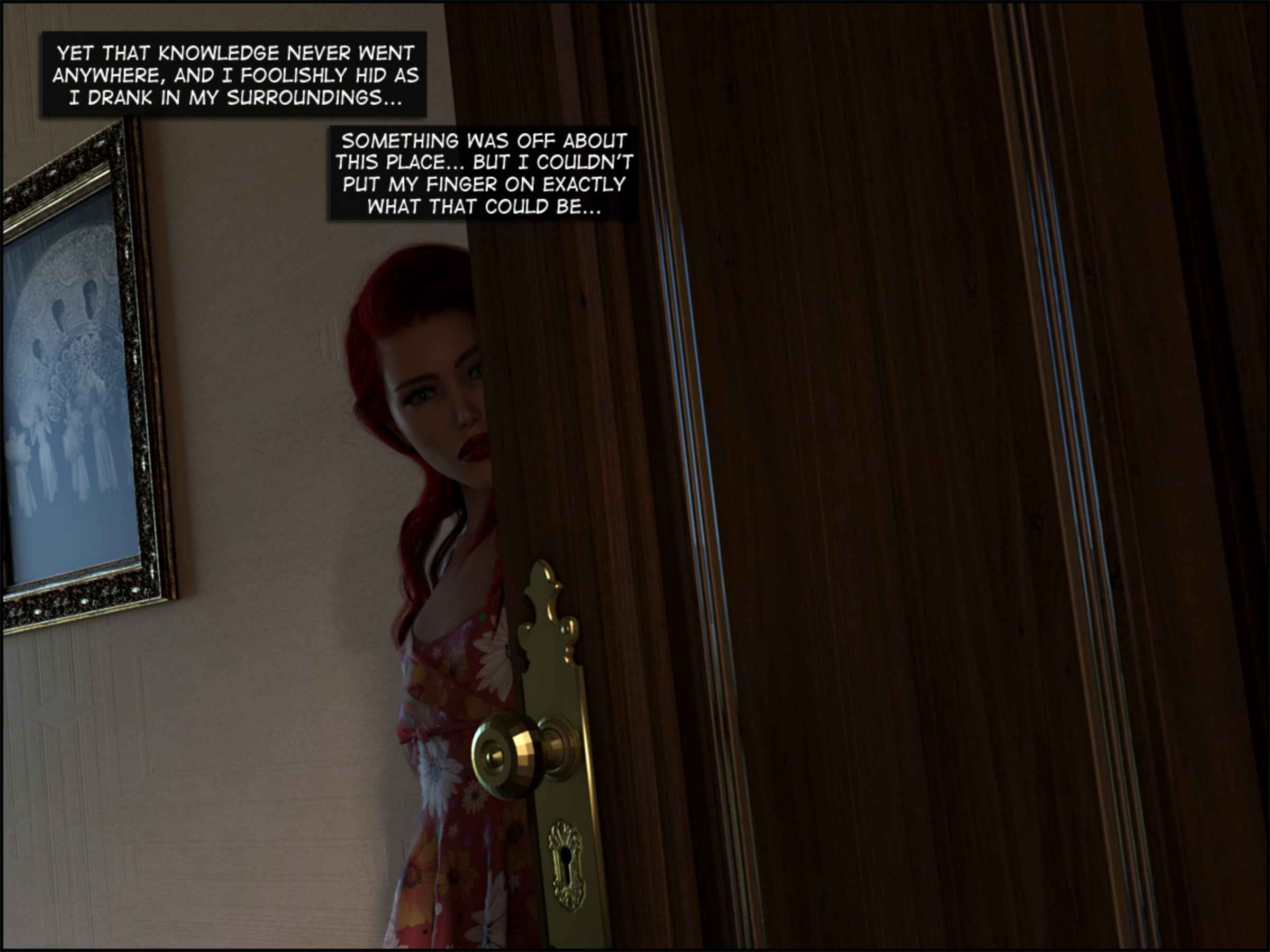
THE REVERBERATING CLACKS OF
THESE HEELS AGAINST THE HARD
FLOOR MADE SURE OF THAT...

CLOCK
CLOCK

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a red dress with white and yellow floral patterns and pink high-heeled sandals, stands in a doorway. She is looking towards the right. The doorway is framed by dark wood. The room on the left has a framed picture on the wall. The room on the right has a framed picture on the wall. The floor is dark wood. The lighting is dim, with a warm glow from the doorway.

YET THAT KNOWLEDGE NEVER WENT ANYWHERE, AND I FOOLISHLY HID AS I DRANK IN MY SURROUNDINGS...

SOMETHING WAS OFF ABOUT THIS PLACE... BUT I COULDN'T PUT MY FINGER ON EXACTLY WHAT THAT COULD BE...



I POSITIONED MYSELF THERE
A MOMENT, WAITING FOR ANY
SIGN OF MY CAPTORS IN THIS
MASSIVE ELEGANT STAIRWAY...

BUT NOBODY CAME, AND AFTER
CONVINCING MYSELF IT WAS SAFE,
I CAUTIOUSLY STEPPED OUT AND
BEGAN SEARCHING FOR AN EXIT...



AND THERE IT WAS...

THE FRONT DOOR WAS LEFT
COMPLETELY UNATTENDED...

NO
FLIPPING
WAY...!



EVEN WITHOUT ANY OF MY FORMAL TRAINING OR THE KNOWLEDGE THEY STOLE FROM ME, I KNEW THIS WAS LIKELY TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE...

THIS HAS TO BE SOME SORT OF GAME...

THERE'S NO WAY...



I LOOKED AROUND HASTILY, EYES
COMBING EVERY POSSIBLE AREA I
COULD SEE WITHIN THE CONFINES
OF THIS ENORMOUS HALLWAY...

YET, AN UNDERLYING SENSE
OF CONFUSION FOLLOWED...



AND IT TOOK ME FAR TOO LONG TO REALIZE WHY...

THIS IS A DIFFERENT PLACE...



IT WAS OBVIOUS, OF COURSE...
HAD I NOT BEEN SO DISTRACTED
EARLIER, I MAY HAVE NOTICED...

BUT I WAS FAR TOO ENTHRALLED AT
THE MOMENT TO CARE. WHEREVER I
WAS, I WOULD FIND SANCTUARY...



I ONLY PAUSED BRIEFLY TO
CONSIDER WHERE THEY HAD
INTENDED FOR ME TO GO...

ALL OTHER DOORS WERE
CLOSED, SAVE THE ONE
I JUST ARRIVED FROM...

THIS
DOESN'T
MAKE ANY
SENSE...





WHAT ARE THEY UP TO...?

WHERE IS EVERYONE...?

SLAMMM!

GASP!



THE UNEXPECTED SLAMMING OF DOORS BEHIND ME STOLE MY CONCENTRATION, AS MY BODY JUMPED IN RESPONSE.

JEEZUM CROW! WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT...?

I HATED HOW EASILY STARTLED I HAD BECOME, AND I SIMPLY FROZE UP AS I WAITED IN FEAR FOR WHATEVER CAME NEXT...

WHEN NOTHING ELSE DID, I
RAN. CAUTIOUSLY FLEEING
TOWARD MY ONLY CHANCE
AT ESCAPING THIS HELL...



A woman with long, wavy red hair is descending a red-carpeted staircase. She is wearing a pink dress with a floral pattern of white and yellow flowers. She is looking down at her feet as she descends. The staircase has a white marble railing with decorative balusters. The background shows a grand, classical-style interior with columns and a dark door.

COME
ON... I HAVE
TO HURRY...


THE MOVEMENTS OF MY ALTERED
BODY FRUSTRATED ME, AS I FOUND
MYSELF DESCENDING THE STAIRS
WITH AN UNINTENDED DELICACY...

THE SPEED AND AGILITY I KNEW
MY ENTIRE LIFE WERE ABSENT...

REPLACED WITH AN UNWELCOME
FEMININE GRACE. INCONVENIENT
AND UNCOMFORTABLY NATURAL...

ANXIETY HAD MY HEART POUNDING
HEAVILY IN MY CHEST AS I BEGGED
MY WEAK LEGS TO MOVE FASTER...



A woman with long, wavy red hair is standing on a grand, ornate staircase. She is wearing a short-sleeved, knee-length dress with a vibrant floral pattern in shades of red, yellow, and white. The staircase has a classic balustrade with decorative balusters. The background features large, arched windows and classical architectural columns, suggesting a grand, possibly institutional or historical building. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the woman and the architectural details.

EACH STEP ADDED TO THE SUSPENSE. I WAS CERTAIN THEY WERE WATCHING ME FROM SOMEWHERE, YET AT THE MOMENT, IT SEEMED I WAS COMPLETELY ALONE...


I BRIEFLY PONDERED WHAT LIFE WOULD BE LIKE FOR ME, IF I WERE TO SUCCESSFULLY ESCAPE THIS NIGHTMARE...

BUT THAT WAS A WORRY FOR ANOTHER TIME...

ALL THAT MATTERED RIGHT
NOW WAS MY FREEDOM...

I'M
ALMOST
THERE...



A woman with long, wavy red hair is walking away from the camera on a long, dark red carpet. She is wearing a floral-patterned, short-sleeved dress and pink high-heeled shoes. The carpet is laid on a light-colored, polished marble floor. The room is a grand, classical-style hall with several large, ornate stone columns supporting a high ceiling. In the background, there is a grand piano and a dark armchair. The lighting is warm and ambient, with some light coming from a window on the left. Three black text boxes with white text are overlaid on the image, providing a narrative context.

EVERY STEP I TOOK WAS FULL
OF PARANOIA AND DREAD...

EVEN WITH MY SHATTERED
INTELLECT, I KNEW THAT A
SINGLE PHRASE FROM THEM
COULD EASILY TURN ME INTO
THEIR OBEDIENT PUPPET...

BUT NO SUCH COMMAND
CAME AS I APPROACHED
THE VACANT ENTRANCE...

AND THEN I HESITATED...

BRIEFLY WONDERING WHAT
WOULD BE WAITING ON THE
OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR...

THE FAKE SOFIA MENTIONED
DINNER. WERE THEY PLANNING
TO TAKE ME SOMEWHERE...?

HUFF
HUFF

WAS I GOING TO BE SEEN
IN PUBLIC LIKE THIS...?

CLOCK
CLOCK

A TERRIFYING PROSPECT,
BUT IT DIDN'T MATTER...

ANY-
WHERE IS
BETTER THAN
HERE.

IF WE'RE
IN PUBLIC, I'LL
JUST...



I WAS SO OBSESSED WITH REACHING THIS EXIT, THAT I HAD ALREADY FORGOTTEN ONE IMPORTANT DETAIL...

THEY SOMEHOW MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO OPEN MY OWN DOORS...

COME ON...!



I WAS OUTRAGED BY THE
INJUSTICE OF IT ALL...

BUT EVEN WORSE, I WAS
DEEPLY FRUSTRATED WITH
THE STATE OF MY OWN
COGNATIVE ABILITIES...

WHERE
THE *HECK* DO
YOU WANT ME
TO GO!?



FOR ALEX BATSON, THIS
DEAD END WOULD'VE ONLY
BEEN A SMALL SETBACK...

BUT FOR LEXI, THIS WAS
A HUMILIATING DEFEAT...

TRY AS I MIGHT, I COULD
NOT IMAGINE ANY OTHER
WAY OUT WITHOUT HAVING
IT HANDED TO ME... I WAS
ABSOLUTELY FURIOUS...

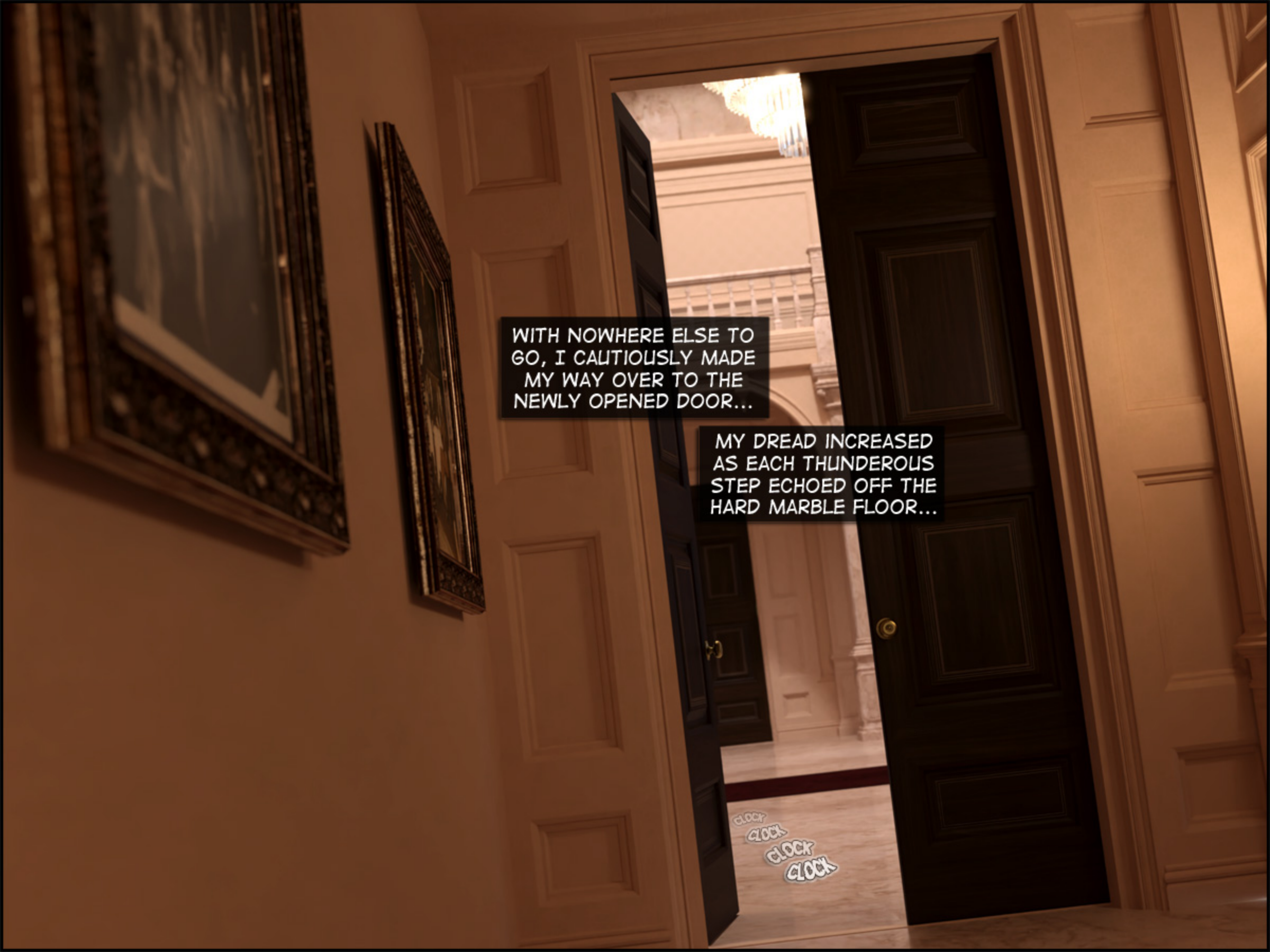


A FURY I COULD BARELY HOLD ONTO
AS ANOTHER SOUND FROM ACROSS
THE HALL STOLE MY ATTENTION...

THUNK...
CREEEEAAAK

HUH...?

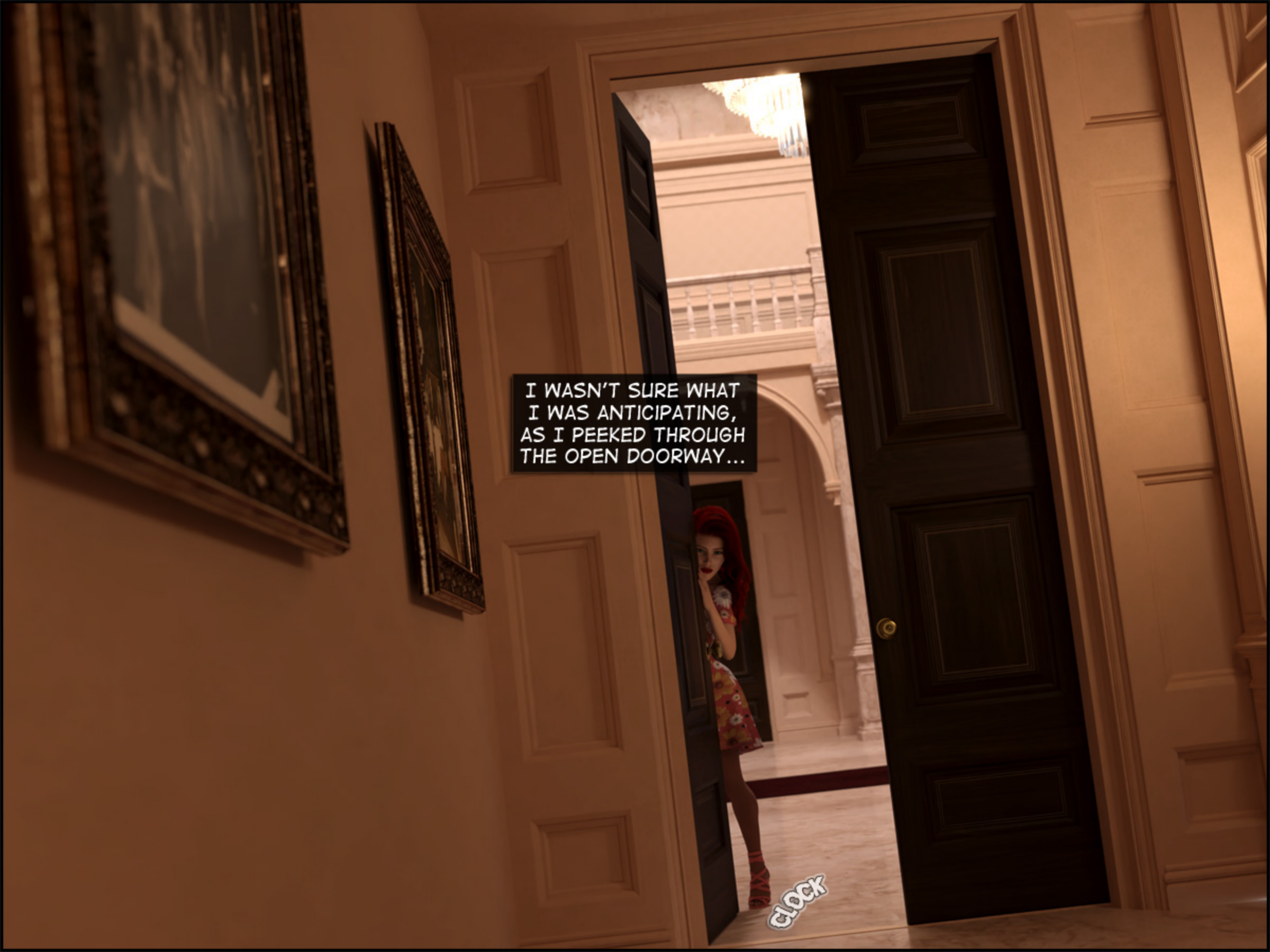




WITH NOWHERE ELSE TO GO, I CAUTIOUSLY MADE MY WAY OVER TO THE NEWLY OPENED DOOR...

MY DREAD INCREASED AS EACH THUNDEROUS STEP ECHOED OFF THE HARD MARBLE FLOOR...

CLOCK
CLOCK
CLOCK
CLOCK

A woman with long red hair, wearing a colorful floral dress and red high-heeled shoes, is peeking through a dark wooden doorway. The scene is set in a grand, ornate hallway with light-colored walls, framed pictures, and a chandelier visible in the background. The lighting is warm and dramatic.

I WASN'T SURE WHAT
I WAS ANTICIPATING,
AS I PEEKED THROUGH
THE OPEN DOORWAY...

CLOCK

IT CERTAINLY
WASN'T THIS...

CRAP...



THE MAN WAS HERE, CASUALLY
EATING AT A DINING TABLE AS
IF EVERYTHING WAS NORMAL...

I TRIED TO DISAPPEAR BACK
BEHIND THE DOOR, BUT MY
REFLEXES WERE TOO SLOW...




ONCE-AGAIN MY BODY
LOCKED UP, FROZEN IN
HORROR AS HE SPOKE...


ALEXIS,
YOU'RE
LATE...

SCRRRK
CHINK






I HOPE
YOU DON'T
MIND, BUT WE
DECIDED TO BEGIN
WITHOUT YOU.

A woman with long, wavy red hair and green eyes is the central figure. She is wearing a red dress with a vibrant floral pattern of white and yellow flowers. She has her hand to her chin in a thoughtful or nervous pose. The background is a grand, classical-style interior with a white marble staircase, a large chandelier, and arched doorways.

WELL,
WHAT ARE
YOU WAITING
FOR...?

COME
ON IN.

OKAY...



UNABLE TO REFUSE HIS COMMAND, I
MOVED TOWARD THE DINING ROOM...

MY NERVES WERE ON EDGE, AND
MY EMBARRASSMENT FROM BEING
SEEN LIKE THIS WAS INTENSE...


I COULD ONLY IMAGINE WHAT
THEY HAD PLANNED FOR ME...

A woman with long, wavy red hair is shown in profile, looking back over her shoulder. She is wearing a red dress with a vibrant floral pattern of white, yellow, and purple flowers. She stands in a room with a light-colored wall and a framed picture. To her right is a closed, light-colored wooden door. Further right, a dark wooden door is open, revealing a glimpse of an ornate, classical-style interior with arches and columns.

AS I RELUCTANTLY APPROACHED
THE MAN WHO STOLE MY LIFE AND
TRANSFORMED ME INTO... THIS...

I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF FROM
LOOKING BACK, EXPECTING THE
DOORS TO SLAM BEHIND ME...

CAPTURING ME ONCE MORE
FOR HIS NEFARIOUS PLANS...



BUT THEY DIDN'T... SOMETHING
STRANGE WAS GOING ON HERE...

THERE WAS AN UNEXPECTED KINDNESS
TO HIS DEEP VOICE AS HE ADDRESSED
ME. IT WAS ALMOST COMFORTING...

YOU HAVE
NOTHING TO
WORRY ABOUT,
ALEXIS...

A man with a mustache, wearing a dark grey suit, white shirt, and striped tie, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a pocket knife in his hands. He has a gold ring on his left ring finger. The background is a room with wood-paneled walls, a round mirror, and a window with red curtains. Two speech bubbles are present in the image.

YOU
MUST BE
HUNGRY, CHILD.
PLEASE, JOIN
US...

THIS IS A
SAFE SPACE. I
PROMISE.

"CHILD..." EVEN THOUGH THIS
MAN WAS CLEARLY MY ELDER,
THE CONDESCENSION IN HIS
WORDS WERE UNMISTAKABLE...

HE WAS PATRONIZING ME...

WHAT-
EVER... IT'S
NOT LIKE I HAVE
A CHOICE...

clock
clock
clock
clock
clock

AS YOU CAN SEE, WE ALREADY SET YOUR PLACE.

TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, HE WASN'T EATING ALONE...

CLOCK
CLOCK
CLOCK

MATTEO...

HOW
ARE YOU
PLANNING TO
TORTURE ME
TODAY...?



EACH WORD THAT LEFT MY MOUTH OOZED WITH SPITE...

YET THE PITCH OF MY NEW VOICE ONLY MADE MY TONE SOUND WHINY... BRATTY...

THAT IS NO WAY TO ADDRESS MY WIFE...

YOUR WIFE IS MAN, JUST LIKE... LIKE...

"ME," OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TO SAY...

THE INABILITY TO IDENTIFY MYSELF FANNED THE FLAMES OF MY FIERY INDIGNATION...

I WANTED TO HURT THEM ANY WAY I COULD, HOWEVER PETTY. BUT MATTEO NEVER FLINCHED...

THERE IS ONLY ONE MAN IN THIS ROOM, SWEET-HEART...

AND THAT MAN IS MY HUSBAND, DORIAN.

HOW DARE...



A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her mouth and nose. She has dark hair and is wearing a grey, ribbed sweater. Her lips are painted with a dark brown lipstick, and she is smiling slightly, showing her teeth. Two speech bubbles are overlaid on the image. The first speech bubble is in the upper left corner, and the second is below it. The background is dark and out of focus.

WE
MADE YOU
BETTER THAN
THIS, LEXI...

FROM
NOW ON, YOU
WILL ADDRESS US
PROPERLY, IS
THAT CLEAR?

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THEM TO
FLAUNT THEIR POWER OVER ME...

THANK
YOU, MISS
LEXI.

YES,
MM-MISS
SOFIA...

UGH!
YOU
ARE A
FREAKIN'
FREAK...





WELL,
THAT WAS
QUITE RUDE,
YOUNG
LADY...

WHY
THE *HECK*
ARE WE DOING
THIS, *MISS*
SOFIA...?

IS IT
SOME SORT
OF *PSY*... *CAH*...
YOU KNOW WHAT
I *FLIPPING*
MEAN...!

IS THIS,
LIKE, SOME
SICK GAME FOR
YOU...?

I'M, LIKE,
RUINED, OKAY?
YOU WON. I'M
NOT ME ANY-
MORE...

SO, NOW
WHAT? MORE
SURGERY UNTIL I
LOOK MORE LIKE
A FREAK...?

THAT'S
YOUR PLAN,
RIGHT? TO TURN
ME INTO ONE OF
THOSE NAUGHTY
TOYS...!?


SO WHY
ARE YOU SICK
FREAKS EVEN
DOING THIS
CRAP...?

YOU'VE
HUE... EM-BEAR...
MADE FUN OF ME
ENOUGH! YOU WIN,
OKAY...!?

YOU
TOOK MY
WINKY, AND...
MY SMARTS,
AND...

SNIFFLE



A woman with long, wavy red hair and a determined, angry expression is shown from the waist up. She is wearing a red dress with a vibrant floral pattern of white daisies and yellow sunflowers. She is looking slightly to her right. The background is a dimly lit room with light-colored paneled walls and two ornate chandeliers with multiple lit bulbs. A doorway is visible behind her. In the foreground, the back of a white chair with a red seat is partially visible.

I WILL
NOT PLAY THESE
GAMES WHILE YOU
RUIN MY MIND AND...
AND MUT-I-TATE
MY BODY...!

SO, JUST
DO WHAT YOU
ARE GOING TO
DO, AND STOP
FLUSSING WITH
ME...!



ARE YOU CERTAIN THIS IS HOW YOU WISH TO PROCEED WITH HER, DARLING...?

OUR LITTLE LEXI APPEARS TO BE DEEPLY DISQUIETED...

YES, DEAR, I'M CERTAIN.



YOU KNOW, LEXI, YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL THAT MY HUSBAND IS ALLOWING YOU FREEDOMS...

FAR MORE THAN LANA EVER HAD...

GRATEFUL...!?

A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey ribbed sweater, is seated at a dining table. She has her hand over her chest and is looking towards the camera with a slightly concerned expression. In front of her is a white plate with a salad of greens and cherry tomatoes. To her right is a wine glass filled with red wine. The table is set with silverware. In the background, there is a large framed painting of a traditional Chinese building. Four speech bubbles are overlaid on the image, containing text.

LOOK AT WHAT YOU DID TO ME...! I... I'M A *FREAKIN FREAK*...!

FREAK? MY DEAR, DON'T BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF...

YOU'RE SHAPING UP INTO SUCH A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN, ALEXIS...

I'M ACTUALLY A LITTLE BIT JEALOUS...

A man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and striped tie, is shown in profile, drinking from a glass. He has a serious expression. The background features a wooden wall with a round mirror reflecting a lamp and a window with red curtains. Three speech bubbles are overlaid on the left side of the image.

JEALOUS..!?

YES, DEAR.
YOU HAVE BEEN
GIFTED SO MANY
THINGS THAT WERE
NOT AVAILABLE
TO ME...

I'D LOVE
TO BE SMALL
LIKE THAT. YOU'RE
SO CUTE... SO
INNOCENTLY
FEMALE...



THEN DO THIS FREAKIN' CRAP TO YOURSELF, YOU JERK...!

I DON'T WANT TO LIVE LIKE THIS! I'M A M... A... NOT THIS...!

A-HEM!



CLOSE YOUR MOUTH, AND TAKE A SEAT.

THAT'S ENOUGH, YOUNG LADY...

AND JUST LIKE I DREADED,
I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF...

THEY GAVE A COMMAND, AND
I DID MY BEST TO FOLLOW...

MMM!





GOOD GIRL...

MMMNN!

THERE
THAT'S MUCH
BETTER...

IT'S QUITE
DIFFICULT TO
HAVE A MEANINGFUL
CONVERSATION, WITH
YOU SHOUTING AT THE
TOP OF YOUR LUNGS,
SWEETIE...

HMPH!



WE WILL
SAY WHAT NEEDS
TO BE SAID, AND IF
YOU CAN BEHAVE,
YOU WILL HAVE
A TURN...


IS THAT
CLEAR?

ALEXIS...?

MM-
HMM...

GOOD.



A man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and striped tie, is seated at a dining table. He is gesturing with his right hand while speaking. A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a light-colored ribbed sweater, is seated across from him, looking towards him. The table is set with a white tablecloth, silverware, a glass of wine, and a plate of food. The background shows a window with red curtains and a fruit basket on a side table.

NOW, AT THIS POINT, MY WIFE HAS MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR WHY YOU ARE HERE WITH US...

AND EVEN WITH YOUR... NEW LIMITATIONS, I WOULD HOPE THAT YOU ARE AT LEAST AWARE OF THE NATURE OF OUR WORK...

THEREFORE, I WILL ENDEAVOR NOT TO BE TOO REDUNDANT.


I STRUGGLED TO COMPREHEND FAR TOO MANY OF THE WORDS HE WAS SAYING AS HE SPOKE...

THE FAMILIARITY OF THE SOUNDS TOLD ME THAT THEY WERE ONES I LIKELY KNEW, YET I COULD NOT SEEM TO RECALL THE MEANING OF.

MY WIFE'S JUSTICE IS THE REASON YOU WERE CHOSEN, BUT IT IS NOT YOUR PURPOSE...

NOR DOES THE REMAINDER OF YOUR TIME WITH US NEED TO FEEL CRUEL OR UNNECESSARILY INHUMANE...





DESPITE WHAT YOU MAY BELIEVE OF US, WE ARE NOT MONSTERS...

YES. I COMPLETELY AGREE WITH MY HUSBAND...

LAWRENCE AND ALEXANDER WERE MONSTERS, AND WE HAVE RID THE WORLD OF THEM...

AND THANKS TO YOUR HELP, LEXI, WE WILL SOON RID THE WORLD OF ANOTHER...

I SEE NO REASON FOR HER TO PAY FOR THE ACTIONS OF A MAN THAT NO LONGER EXISTS.

I WAS CONFUSED... I HAD NO IDEA WHAT HELP I MAY HAVE PROVIDED...

NOR DID I UNDERSTAND THE SUDDEN CHANGE IN TONE...

A close-up shot of a man with a dark mustache, wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and striped tie. He is looking slightly to his right with a neutral expression. The background shows an ornate room with a chandelier, red curtains, and a window.

TRY AS I MIGHT, I COULDN'T HELP BUT SPACE OUT DURING MOST OF THEIR CONVERSATION. IT WAS TOO DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW, AND I WAS SOMEHOW GETTING... BORED...?

THEN IT SEEMS WE ARE IN AGREEMENT ON WHERE WE TAKE YOU NEXT...

AND WHAT PRIVILEGES YOU WILL BE ALLOWED.

I COULD FEEL MY AROUSAL BUILDING AS MY BOREDOM SET IN, WHICH ONLY HELPED FURTHER MY FRUSTRATION...

WE SHALL BEGIN BY GRANTING YOU LIMITED ACCESS TO YOUR NEW HOME HERE...


THIS WILL INCLUDE YOUR BEDROOM, THIS ROOM, THE GRAND HALLWAY, AND OUR ENTERTAINMENT ROOM...

AND, IF YOU CAN BEHAVE YOURSELF, WE WILL CONSIDER ADDING MORE PRIVILEGES IN THE FUTURE.

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW LONG I COULD RESIST THE URGE TO TOUCH MYSELF HERE...

I NEEDED TO FIND A DISTRACTION, SOON...



A woman with long, wavy red hair and green eyes is sitting at a table. She is wearing a red top with a floral pattern. The room has a fireplace in the background with a black metal grate. There are silhouettes of people on the wall above the fireplace. A small table with a white top and black legs is next to her. The scene is lit with warm, indoor lighting.

THAT
COULD VERY
WELL INCLUDE *DAY
TRIPS* OUTSIDE OF
THE HOUSE, BUT
ONLY AFTER YOU
HAVE HEALED
ENOUGH...

AND THAT CAUGHT
MY ATTENTION...

HMM...?

UNLESS,
OF COURSE,
THESE AREN'T
CONDITIONS
YOU AGREE
WITH...

WE COULD
VERY SIMPLY
JUST CONFINE
YOU TO YOUR
ROOM...

MMH
-MM!




GOOD...

NOW, WE
CAN TALK MORE
ABOUT ALL OF THIS,
BUT YOU'RE LIKELY
VERY HUNGRY...

SO,
PLEASE, HELP
YOURSELF. IT'S
ALL PERFECTLY
SAFE...

YOU
HAVE MY
WORD.



A woman with long dark hair and a grey sweater is sitting at a table. She has her hands clasped and is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In front of her is a white plate with a salad of greens and cherry tomatoes. The background shows a room with wood-paneled walls and a chandelier.

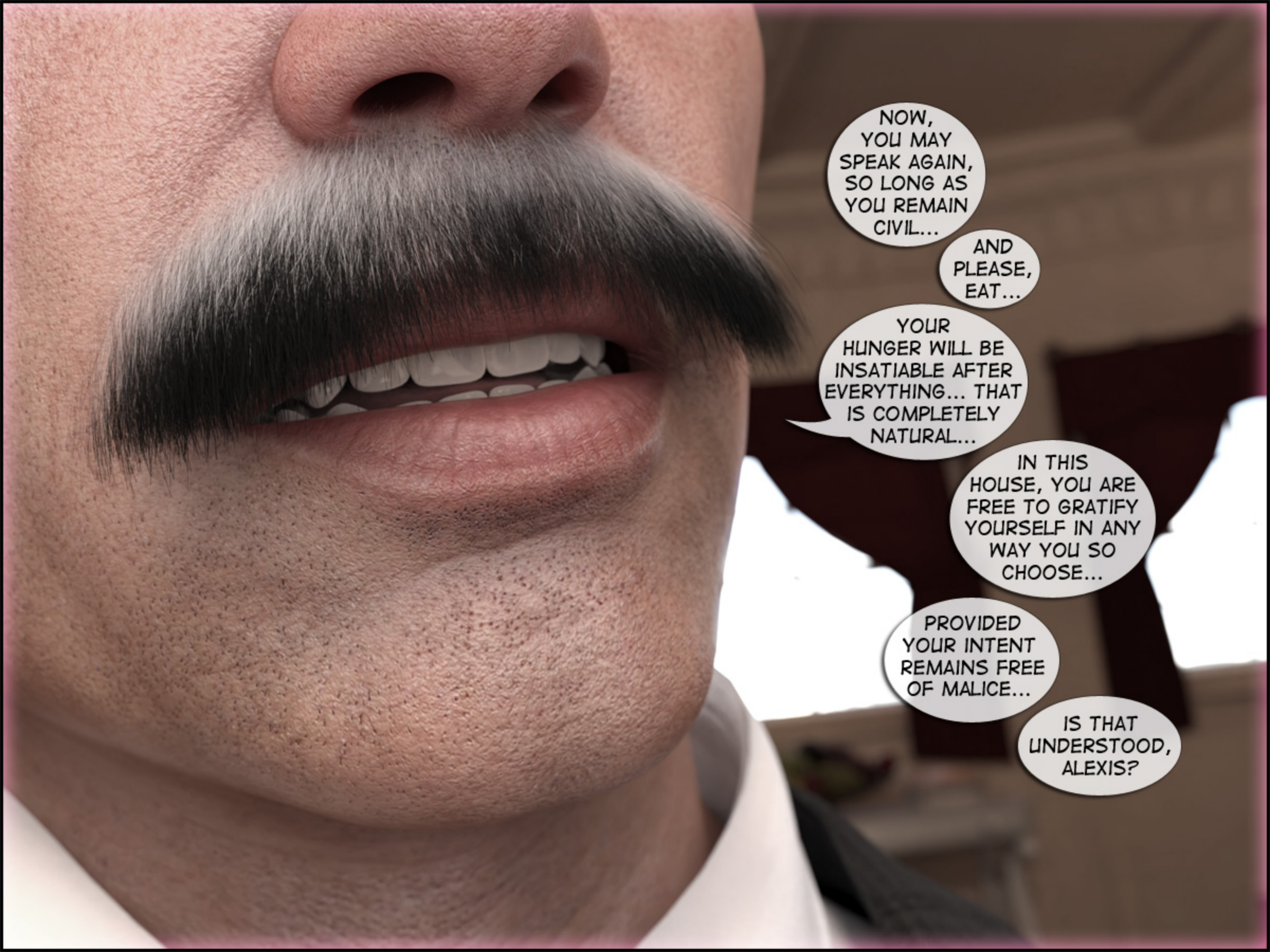
YES,
YOUR BODY
IS STILL HEALING
AND ADAPTING TO
OUR EXTENSIVE
WORK...

IF YOU
WISH TO REGAIN
YOUR STRENGTH,
YOU WILL NEED TO
EAT AND REST
WELL...

DURING
THIS TIME,
FOOD AND CLEAN
LAUNDRY WILL BE
PROVIDED FOR
YOU...

SHE MADE IT SOUND LIKE
I WAS A GUEST AT SOME
FIVE-STAR HOTEL, AFTER
EVERYTHING THEY DID...

I HATED THEM AND I WAS
SURE THERE WAS A CATCH,
BUT MY ONLY CHOICE WAS
TO PLAY ALONG FOR NOW...

A close-up photograph of a man's face, focusing on his nose, a thick grey and black mustache, and his mouth which is slightly open, showing his teeth. He is wearing a white collared shirt. To the right of his face, there are several overlapping speech bubbles containing text.

NOW,
YOU MAY
SPEAK AGAIN,
SO LONG AS
YOU REMAIN
CIVIL...

AND
PLEASE,
EAT...

YOUR
HUNGER WILL BE
INSATIABLE AFTER
EVERYTHING... THAT
IS COMPLETELY
NATURAL...

IN THIS
HOUSE, YOU ARE
FREE TO GRATIFY
YOURSELF IN ANY
WAY YOU SO
CHOOSE...

PROVIDED
YOUR INTENT
REMAINS FREE
OF MALICE...

IS THAT
UNDERSTOOD,
ALEXIS?



YES,
SIR...

I REACHED FOR THE PLATE AS I
CONSIDERED MY PREDICAMENT...

I HAD EXPECTED ONE OF MANY
DIFFERENT TERRIBLE THINGS AS
I VENTURED INTO THIS ROOM...

BUT I NEVER EXPECTED
THIS LEVEL OF MERCY...

I CHOOSE TO KEEP MY POSITION
AT THE END OF THE TABLE, NOT
WANTING TO MOVE ANY CLOSER...

THERE WAS STILL A FEELING IN
THE PIT OF MY STOMACH THAT
ANOTHER TRAP WAS ABOUT TO
SPRING ON ME IN THIS ROOM...

BUT MY STOMACH HAD
DIFFERENT CONCERNS...

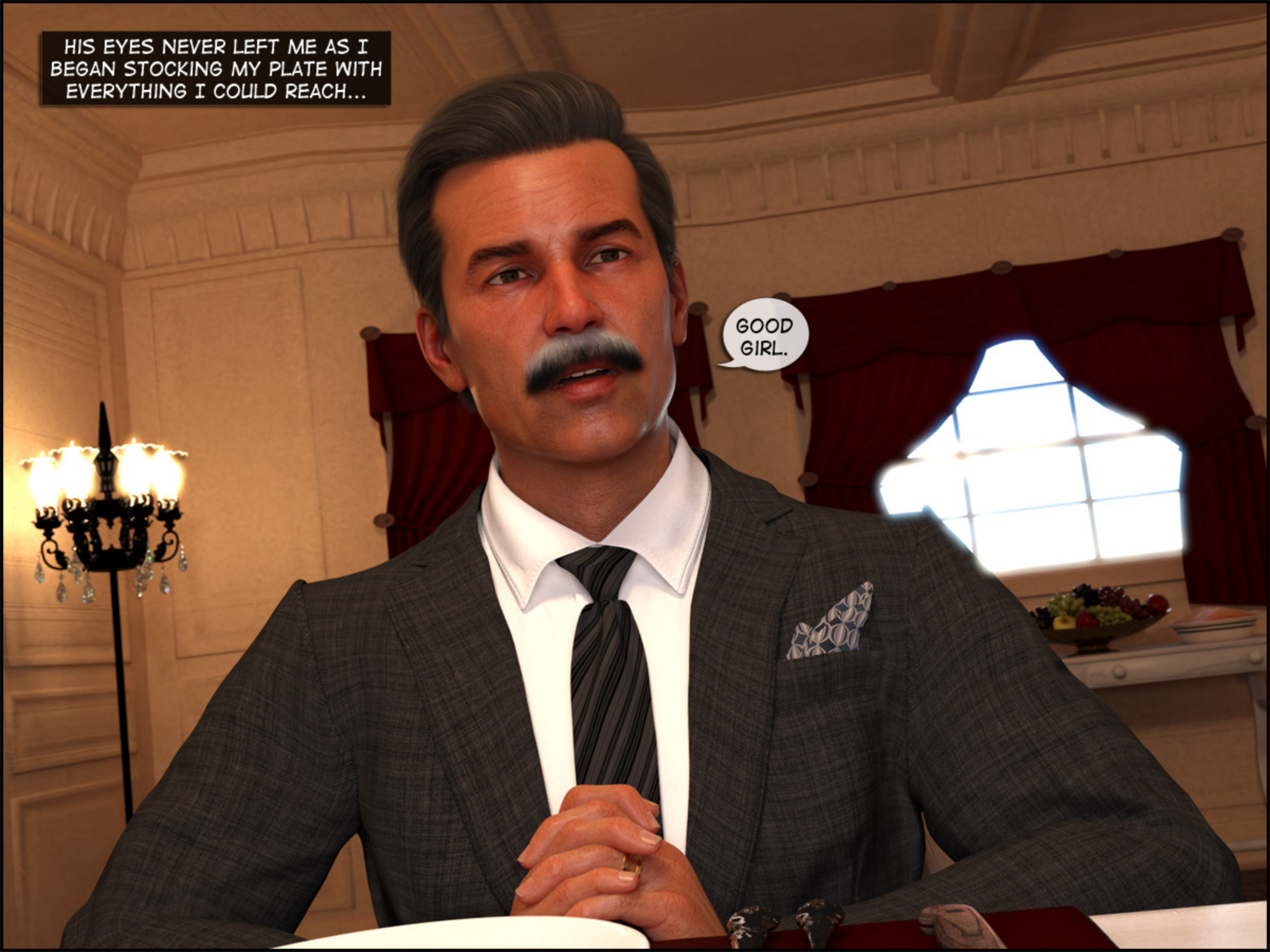
THIS MAN WAS RIGHT. I HAD
NEVER BEEN THIS HUNGRY IN
MY LIFE. I WAS STARVING....



GRMMMMBBBLL!

HIS EYES NEVER LEFT ME AS I
BEGAN STOCKING MY PLATE WITH
EVERYTHING I COULD REACH...

GOOD
GIRL.



HIS WORDS SENT A SHIVER
DOWN MY SPINE AGAIN...

AS PATRONIZING AS THEY
WERE, I COULDN'T HELP BUT
FEEL SOME LEVEL OF PRIDE
AT THE SOUND OF THEM...

MORE THINGS TO UNPACK
LATER, IF I REMEMBER...

THERE.
WE HAVE SAID
OUR PIECE, YOU
ARE NOW FREE TO
SAY YOURS...

WHAT'S
ON YOUR MIND,
SWEETIE...?

SWEETIE...



WHY
ARE YOU
DOING ALL OF
THIS...?

YOU
ARE FULLY
AWARE OF THAT
ALREADY.

NO. I
MEAN WHAT
IS, LIKE, YOUR
PLAN...?

WITH
ME... LIKE,
AM I GOING
TO BE SOLD LIKE
SOME SORT OF
SLAVE...?





AM I
GOING TO
BE LIKE MY...
LIKE HER...?

WHAT
HAPPENS
TO ME DOWN
THE ROAD...?

HOW
LONG DO I
HAVE...?

WELL,
THAT ENTIRELY
DEPENDS ON YOU,
AND WHAT YOU
CHOOSE...

MY WIFE'S
INITIAL PLAN FOR
YOU WAS DRIVEN BY
REVENGE, BUT SHE
IS WISER THAN
THAT...

YOU
HAVE PAID FOR
YOUR CRIMES, A
LIFE FOR A LIFE.
THE FUTURE IS
YOURS...

MM-
HMM...

YOU'RE
GOING TO
LET ME GO
FREE..?



YES,
EVENTUALLY, ONCE
WE ARE SATISFIED WITH
YOUR REHABILITATION,
AND ONLY AFTER YOUR
BODY HAS FULLY
HEALED...

THERE
ARE STILL RISKS,
AND NOBODY IS
MORE QUALIFIED TO
TREAT YOU IN THE
EVENT OF A MEDICAL
EMERGENCY...

"I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN IT
HAPPENS" I THOUGHT...

THEY MAY HAVE STOLEN A LOT OF
MY KNOWLEDGE, BUT I WAS STILL
WISE ENOUGH TO KEEP MY GUARD
UP... SOMETHING WASN'T RIGHT...

THAT WILL
TAKE TIME, AND
UNTIL THEN, YOU MUST
REMAIN WITH US FOR
OBSERVATIONS

BUT I COULD WORRY
ABOUT THAT LATER....

MMM...!



A woman with long, wavy red hair is seated at a dining table, looking down at her plate with a delighted expression. She is wearing a red top with a white and yellow floral pattern. Her hands, with red-painted nails, are positioned near her plate. The plate contains a piece of grilled salmon with distinct grill marks, a mound of creamy mashed potatoes, a portion of green vegetables, and a golden-brown croissant. A silver fork is held in her left hand. In the foreground, a silver knife and a silver spoon are visible on the white tablecloth. The background features a light-colored paneled wall with a framed picture of a landscape and a doorway.

OH,
MY GOSH,
THIS IS SO
YUMMY!

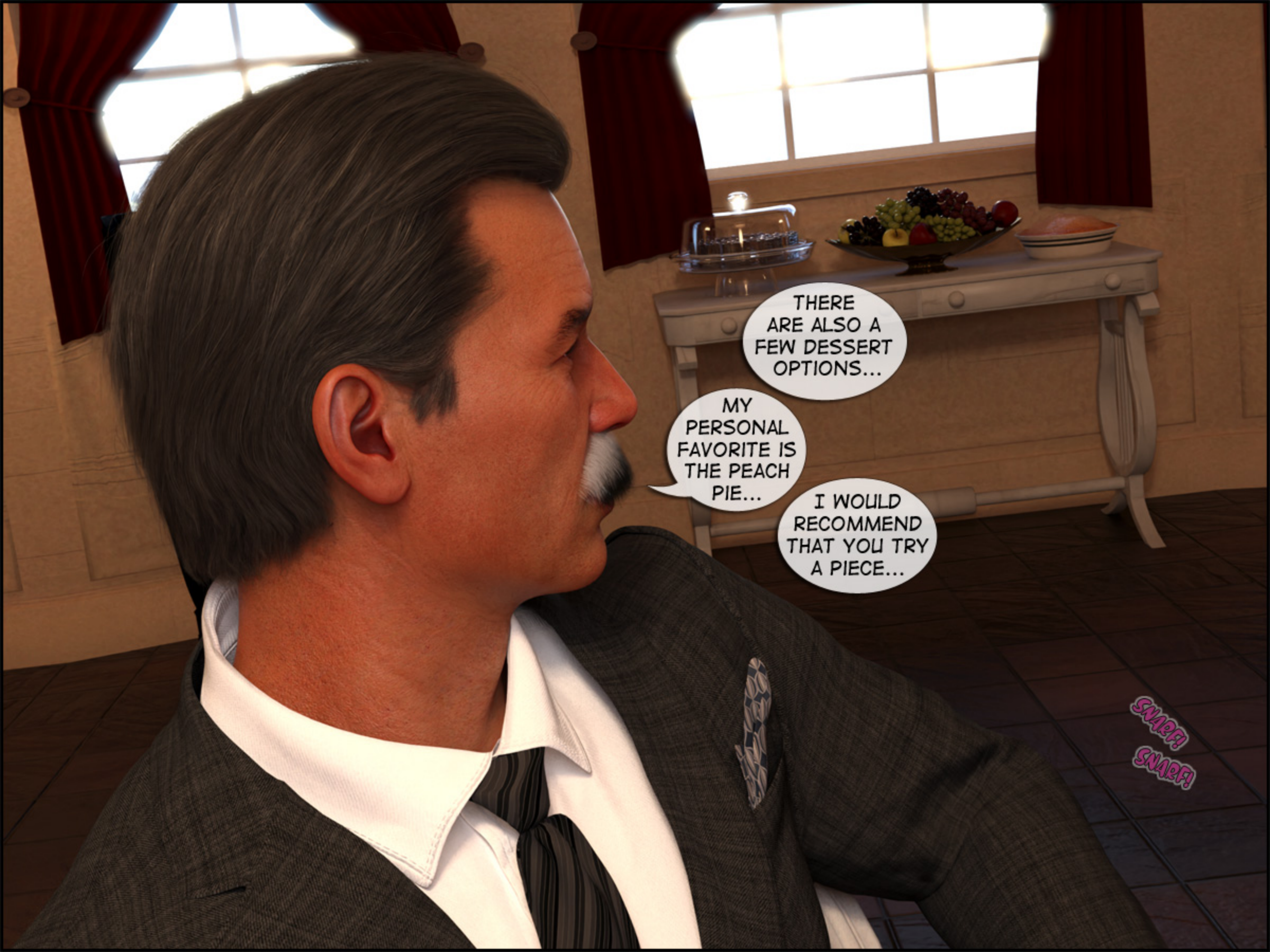
HOW ARE
THESE MASHED
POTATOES SO
CREAMY!?



I'M
GLAD YOU
APPROVE...

YOU'LL
FIND THAT
OUR CHEF IS
THE BEST IN
THE AREA.

SWAP!




THERE ARE ALSO A FEW DESSERT OPTIONS...

MY PERSONAL FAVORITE IS THE PEACH PIE...

I WOULD RECOMMEND THAT YOU TRY A PIECE...

SNAP!
SNAP!



YOU SHOULD
FINISH YOUR FOOD
BEFORE YOU MOVE
ON TO DESERTS,
HOWEVER...

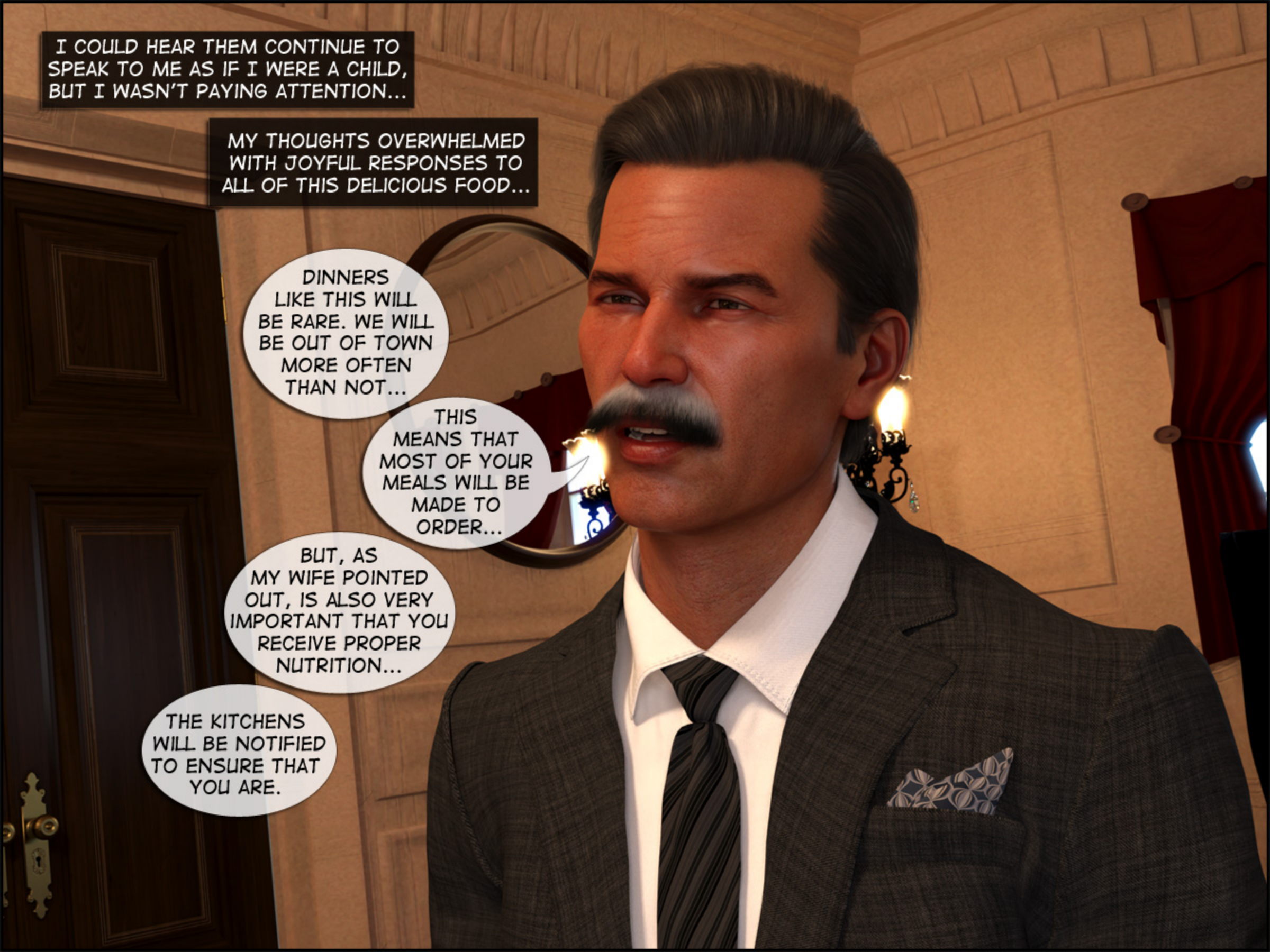
LEAFY
GREENS AND
PROTEIN ARE
VERY IMPORTANT
FOR YOU RIGHT
NOW...

SO, BE
SURE TO ALWAYS
HAVE SOME OF BOTH
BEFORE YOU INDULGE
YOURSELF IN
TREATS...

SNARF!

YES, MISS
SOFIA...

SNARF!

A man with a well-groomed mustache and slicked-back hair is shown from the chest up. He is wearing a dark grey suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a dark striped tie. A patterned pocket square is visible in his jacket. He is looking slightly to his left. The background features a dark wood door on the left, a round mirror on the wall, and a red curtain on the right. A chandelier is partially visible behind him.

I COULD HEAR THEM CONTINUE TO SPEAK TO ME AS IF I WERE A CHILD, BUT I WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION...

MY THOUGHTS OVERWHELMED WITH JOYFUL RESPONSES TO ALL OF THIS DELICIOUS FOOD...

DINNERS LIKE THIS WILL BE RARE. WE WILL BE OUT OF TOWN MORE OFTEN THAN NOT...

THIS MEANS THAT MOST OF YOUR MEALS WILL BE MADE TO ORDER...

BUT, AS MY WIFE POINTED OUT, IS ALSO VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU RECEIVE PROPER NUTRITION...

THE KITCHENS WILL BE NOTIFIED TO ENSURE THAT YOU ARE.



BUT DO NOT WORRY, HONEY...

YOU WILL NOT BE LEFT ALONE. THIS HOUSE IS EQUIPPED TO SEE THAT YOU ARE TAKEN CARE OF WHILE WE ARE AWAY.

WHY DO YOU KEEP DOING THAT...?



DOING WHAT, MY DEAR...?

SNARFI
THAT...

SNARFI
CALLING ME SILLY PET NAMES...


SNARFI

WELL, THEY SIMPLY JUST FIT YOUR NEW ROLE IN LIFE...

YOU'RE JUST SO CUTE...



WELL,
COULD
YOU...?

A woman with long, wavy red hair and red lipstick is sitting at a table. She is wearing a red top with a white and yellow floral pattern. She is holding a silver fork in her left hand. In front of her is a white plate with a piece of grilled food, possibly a burger patty, and a small amount of sauce. The background shows a wooden door and a tiled floor.

COULD
YOU JUST...?
HUH...

SOME-
THING ON
YOUR MIND,
LEXI...?

YEAH...

I LOST TRACK OF MY THOUGHTS, MY EYES
SCANNING THE TABLE FOR THE ONE THING
THAT ACTUALLY MATTERED RIGHT NOW...

A WAY TO CUT INTO THIS
GLORIOUS PORK CHOP...

OH...



I BRIEFLY LOCKED EYES WITH THE MAN, DORIAN, BEFORE HE FOLLOWED THEM BACK DOWN TO THE KNIFE IN FRONT OF HIM...

I GREW INCREDIBLY ANXIOUS AS HIS GAZE LINGERED ON IT, WONDERING WHAT IT MEANT...

WAS HE WAITING FOR ME TO ASK? WOULD I EVEN BE ALLOWED? OR DID I SOMEHOW CROSS A LINE...?

HMM...



I JUMPED AS HE SUDDENLY
STOOD UP, HIS HAND GRASPING
THE KNIFE I HAD COVETED...

GASP!

I SEE...

SCREEEEK!



HIS EYES NEVER LEFT MINE AS HE MOVED TOWARD ME WITH A VITALITY UNEXPECTED FOR A MAN HIS AGE...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING...?



I STARTED TO PANIC AS HE CLOSED IN ON ME...

EVERY NEGATIVE EMOTION MY HUNGER HAD SUPPRESSED CAME RUSHING BACK, AS I ANXIOUSLY AWAITED THE START OF MY NEXT ROUND OF TORTURE...

PLEASE...!
I'M SORRY,
I DIDN'T
MEAN...



A man in a dark grey suit, white shirt, and striped tie is leaning over a woman seated at a dining table. He is holding a large knife. The woman has long, wavy red hair and is wearing a floral-patterned top. She has her hands clasped near her chin, looking at the man with a questioning expression. The setting is a dining room with a white tablecloth, silverware, and a plate of food. In the background, there are wooden wall panels and a white cabinet with a window.

IT SEEMS
I'VE MADE AN
OVERSIGHT WITH
YOU, YOUNG
LADY...

HMM...?

CLANK!

BUT IT NEVER CAME...

I ONLY GRABBED ONE KNIFE FOR A TABLE SET FOR THREE...

HOW FOOLISH OF ME...?


NOW, DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE CAPABLE OF HANDLING IT...?

OR WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO CUT YOUR PORK CHOP FOR YOU...?

UM...




I, UH...
I CAN DO
IT...?



AN OVERWHELMING MIX OF FEAR
AND ADMIRATION GRIPPED ME AS
HE LEANED IN. I KNEW THAT I DID
NOT WANT TO UPSET THIS MAN...

IF
THAT'S
OKAY,
SIR...!



OF COURSE.
HOW ELSE ARE
YOU SUPPOSED
TO FINISH YOUR
SLIPPER...?


I HAD NOT EXPECTED HIM TO
ACTUALLY OFFER THE KNIFE...

COULD THEY REALLY MEAN
EVERYTHING THEY SAID...?

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER, MY DEAR...?

NO...



A woman with long, wavy red hair is seated at a dining table. She is wearing a red dress with a white and yellow floral pattern. She is holding a large, silver-handled knife with a white blade. The setting is a dining room with a white tablecloth, a plate of food, and silverware. In the background, there is a doorway and a chandelier.

OKAY,
THEN...

BE
CAREFUL
WITH THAT,
IT'S VERY
SHARP...

YES,
PAPA...

I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT AS I HELD
THE KNIFE IN MY TINY HAND...

IT WAS MUCH HEAVIER
THAN I EXPECTED...

A woman with long, wavy red hair is seated at a dining table. She is wearing a red dress with a white and yellow floral pattern. She is looking down at a knife she is holding in her right hand. To her left, a man in a dark grey suit and white shirt stands with his hands on his hips, looking towards her. The background shows a wooden chair and a wall with a decorative panel.

AND
WHAT DO WE
SAY...?

THANK
YOU, PAPA...

I BARELY ACKNOWLEDGED OUR
EXCHANGE OF WORDS AS I
CONSIDERED MY OPTIONS...

ONLY BRIEFLY REGISTERING
THE CONDESCENSION IN HIS
VOICE AS HE LECTURED ME
LIKE SOME STUPID CHILD...



AS HE TURNED TO WALK AWAY,
I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO...

I WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO
CONTROL MY LIFE AGAIN, SO
LONG AS THESE TWO LIVED...

THEY EXPECTED ME TO SETTLE. TO
LIVE A LIE OF THEIR OWN CREATION,
AFTER RUINING THE LIFE I BUILT...

IT WAS FOOLISH TO PUT A
WEAPON IN MY HAND...

GRRR!



OR SO I THOUGHT... FEAR
TOOK OVER IN RESPONSE
TO MY OWN BEHAVIOR...

THE LAST THING I WANTED
TO DO WAS HURT PAPA...

PAPA...?

THE WORD SLIPPED OUT BEFORE
I EVEN REALIZED I'D SAID IT...



AND TO MY HORROR,
PAPA RESPONDED...

YES,
MY DEAR,
WAS THERE
SOMETHING
ELSE...?

UH...
I...




I'D BEEN CAUGHT, AND THE FEAR ONLY GREW AS I WONDERED WHAT MY NEXT PUNISHMENT WOULD BE...

LINAWARE THAT I HAD FALLEN INTO ANOTHER ONE OF THEIR TRAPS...

AH. I KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON HERE...

GULP





BUT HE NEVER RAISED HIS VOICE...


IT'S
OKAY TO
ADMIT WHEN YOU
NEED HELP,
ALEXIS...

AFTER
ALL, YOU ARE,
SADLY, THE TYPE
OF YOUNG WOMAN
WHO OFTEN CAN'T
DO MUCH ON
HER OWN...

BUT
PAPA'S HERE.
ASK ME TO CUT
YOUR FOOD FOR
YOU, AND I
WILL...

**HIS WORDS STILL DRIPPED WITH A
KIND, FATHERLY CONDESCENSION
WHILE HE CONTINUED SPEAKING...**


**THEY WERE SOMEHOW
SOOTHING... LULLING...**



I COULD FEEL THE WEIGHT OF HIS STATEMENTS CHANGING ME, AS I STRUGGLED TO HOLD ONTO THE CONCEPT OF INDEPENDENCE...

I FEARED WHAT THAT MEANT AS THAT OTHER PERSONALITY MOMENTARILY TOOK OVER...

PAPA,
COULD YOU
PLEASE CUT MY
FOOD FOR
ME...?

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her eyes and hair. She has dark, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the right. The image has a soft, warm lighting. There are two text elements overlaid on the image: a speech bubble in the upper left and a black text box in the center.

OF COURSE,
SWEETHEART.
ANYTHING FOR MY
BEAUTIFUL GRAND-
DAUGHTER...


I COULD HEAR MYSELF TALKING, BUT I
WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT I SAID UNTIL
AFTER THE DIZZYNESS STOPPED...

IT WAS INCREDIBLY
DISORIENTING...

THANK
YOU, PAPA...

SCREEEEK!





ANY-
TIME, SWEET
PEA...

ALL
YOU HAVE
TO DO IS
ASK...

WAIT,
WHAT...?

IT REMINDED ME OF TIMES
I HAD GOTTEN BLACK OUT
DRUNK WITH THE BOYS...

AND AS MY AWARENESS RETURNED,
IT FELT LIKE I HAD BEEN SOMEHOW
FAST-FORWARDED THROUGH TIME...

MY BODY IN A NEW PLACE... MY MIND
LEFT TO PIECE TOGETHER FRAGMENTS
OF MEMORIES I SOMEHOW CREATED...

AND EACH TIME, I CAME BACK
A LITTLE BIT... DIFFERENT...

YOUR
GRANDFATHER IS
SUCH A GENEROUS
MAN, ISN'T HE,
ALEXIS...?

BUT
DON'T WORRY,
YOU WON'T HAVE
TO CALL ME
GRANDMA...

I STILL
PREFER MISS
SOFIA, ALTHOUGH
I MIGHT COME
AROUND TO
NANA...





I'M
QUITE
PARTIAL TO
NANA...

THANK
YOU, MY
DEAR...

IS SOME-
THING WRONG,
ALEXIS...? YOU
SEEM VERY
UPSET...

I WAS ASHAMED AT THE
FACT THAT SHE WATCHED
ME FAIL TO FREE MYSELF...

MY FACE FLUSHED WITH
EMBARASSMENT AS HE
CUT MY FOOD FOR ME...

BOTH ACTING AS IF I HADN'T
JUST ATTEMPTED TO KILL HIM
WITH THE VERY SAME KNIFE...

THE MOCK SWEETNESS
OF THEIR VOICES ONLY
MADE THINGS WORSE...

BUT IF THEY WEREN'T GOING TO ADDRESS IT, NEITHER WAS I...

AND WHY ARE YOU PRETENDING TO BE MY GRAND-PARENTS...?



OH, WE'RE
NOT PRETENDING.
YOU ARE LEGALLY
MS. ALEXIS JEAN
PASSION...

NINETEEN
YEARS OLD...
GRANDDAUGHTER
OF DORIAN AND
HIS LATE WIFE,
PRISCILLA.

WHAT...?



WHEN I WAS CAPTURED, I WAS A
FOURTY-TWO YEAR OLD MAN...

BUT...
WHY...?
WHY WOULD
YOU...?

YOUR
EXISTENCE
NEEDED A
COVER, MY
DEAR...

COULD I ACTUALLY PASS AS A
NINETEEN YEAR OLD GIRL...?

DID THEY SOMEHOW MAKE
ME YOUNGER AS WELL...?



YOU
WANTED
TO MAKE ME
PART OF YOUR
FAMILY...?

ME?
OH, HEAVENS
NO. I WAS VERY
HONEST WITH YOU
WHEN WE FIRST
SPOKE.

ALEX
DESERVED TO
SUFFER A LIFE OF
MISERY FOR WHAT
HE TOOK FROM
ME...

THEN
WHY DO
THIS...?



A woman with dark hair and a grey sweater is shown in a room. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The room has a window on the left showing a green landscape, and a mirror on the right reflecting a chandelier. There are several speech bubbles around her.

BECAUSE
YOUR GRAND-
FATHER MADE A
VERY COMPELLING
ARGUMENT...


YOU
WILL DO FAR
MORE FOR US LIKE
THIS, THAN IF WE
WERE TO SIMPLY
FOLLOW THROUGH
WITH MY ORIGINAL
PLAN...

IF YOUR
BODY WORKS AS
WE HAVE INTENDED,
IT WILL MEAN SO
MUCH MORE FOR
OUR FUTURE...

AND
WHAT ABOUT
ME IS SO DARN
SPECIAL...?

NOM

WHAT
ELSE HAVE
YOU DONE TO
ME...?



YOU
HAVE NOT
EARNED THAT
EXPLANATION
YET...

BUT DON'T
WORRY ABOUT
THE 'HOWS' OR
'WHYS'...

THEY
ARE BEYOND
YOUR LIMITED
COMPREHENSION.
ESPECIALLY
NOW...

BUT...

BUT
NOTHING.
YOU HAVE BEEN
GIVEN A LIFE OF
COMFORT AND
LUXURY...

FAR
MORE THAN
ANY *BATSON*
SHOULD EVER
DESERVE...

A woman with long, wavy red hair and a tiara with two glowing lights sits at a dining table. She is wearing a red dress with a white and yellow floral pattern. She has a surprised or questioning expression on her face. In her right hand, she holds a fork with a small piece of food. Her left hand is extended, pointing towards the left. On the table in front of her is a white plate with several small, round, brown items, possibly appetizers. A silver knife and spoon are also on the table. The background features a light-colored wall with a framed picture of a church and a white cabinet to the left.

MMF...
AN WHASH
HISH DEAL...?
PAPA...

WHY'SH
HE A PART'A
THISH...?

OH, I
HAD BEEN
DOING THIS LONG
BEFORE I MET
MY WIFE...

YOU
AREN'T MY
FIRST, AND
YOU WON'T BE
MY LAST...

BUT I
WOULDN'T BE
THE **MAN** I AM
TODAY WITHOUT
HER HELP...

HUH...?



A man with dark hair, seen from behind, is wearing a dark suit jacket and a white collared shirt. He is looking out a window with red curtains. The window shows a view of green trees. In the foreground, there is a white table with a bowl of fruit (grapes and an apple) and a white bowl with a brown substance. Four speech bubbles are overlaid on the scene, containing text.

BEFORE
SOFIA, I WAS
CONVINCED THAT
I WAS ALONE IN
THIS LIFE...

THAT
NOBODY
ELSE SHARED
MY VISION FOR
THIS BROKEN
WORLD...

BUT TO
ACHIEVE THAT
VISION, WE NEED
OUR INVENTIONS
TO BE FLAW-
LESS...

AND FOR
THAT TO OCCUR,
THEY NEED TO BE
THOROUGHLY
TESTED...

A man with a dark mustache, wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and striped tie, is shown in a close-up. He is speaking in a dining room. In the background, a woman with red hair is seated at a table, eating. The room is lit with warm, ornate lamps. A speech bubble from the man says: "THAT IS WHERE YOU COME IN...".

THAT IS WHERE YOU COME IN...

CHOMP

YOU SEE, PROGRESS ALWAYS COMES AT A COST...

AND MEN LIKE THE BATSONS ARE THE PERFECT CURRENCY.

FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS EVENING,
I TRULY DID FEEL LIKE A CHILD...

SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT IN THE
SHADOW OF THIS MAN'S POWER...

IN HIS CONVICTION...

PAPA...?

YES,
CHILD...?

HOW
MANY PEOPLE
HAVE YOU KILLED
DOING THIS...?



THE ROOM GREW SILENT FOR A MOMENT, AS ANXIETY SPREAD THROUGH MY ENTIRE BODY...

I WAS CERTAIN I ASKED THE WRONG QUESTION, BUT HE EVENTUALLY SPOKE, HIS COLD VOICE DEVOID OF EMOTION...

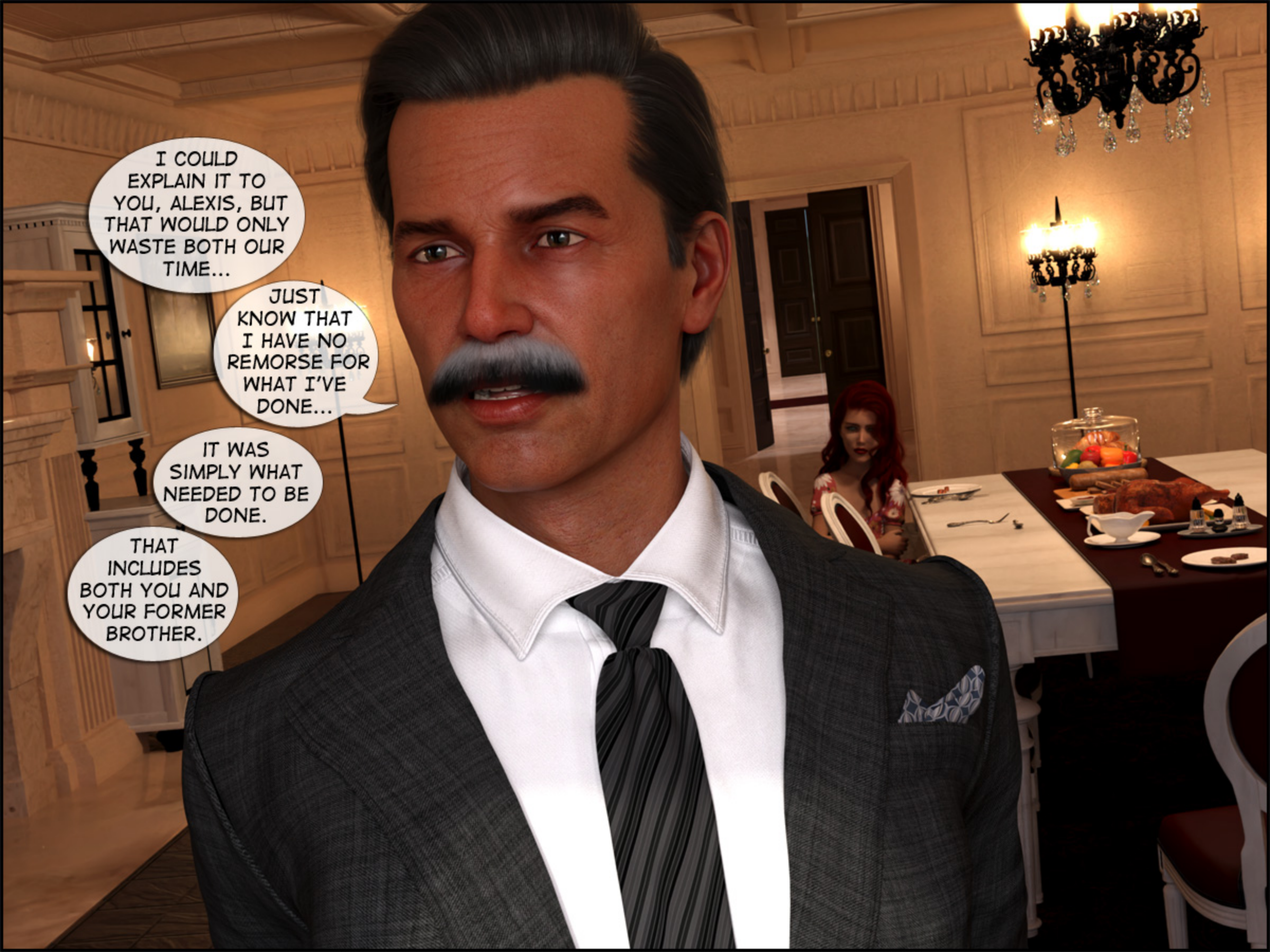
ONLY TWO. MY FATHER...

AND THE MAN YOU SEE BEFORE YOU.

NOTHING COMPARED TO THE HARGROVES', NOW IS IT...

I DON'T... WHAT...?



A man with a dark mustache, wearing a dark grey suit, white shirt, and striped tie, is shown from the chest up. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. The background is a dining room with a table set for a meal, including a turkey, bread, and fruit. A woman with red hair is seated at the table in the background. The room is lit by a chandelier and a floor lamp.

I COULD
EXPLAIN IT TO
YOU, ALEXIS, BUT
THAT WOULD ONLY
WASTE BOTH OUR
TIME...

JUST
KNOW THAT
I HAVE NO
REMORSE FOR
WHAT I'VE
DONE...

IT WAS
SIMPLY WHAT
NEEDED TO BE
DONE.


THAT
INCLUDES
BOTH YOU AND
YOUR FORMER
BROTHER.



YOU MAY NOT SEE THE PURPOSE YET, BUT YOU WILL, IN TIME...

ASSUMING YOU ARE ABLE TO SERVE YOUR PURPOSE...

WHICH IS...?

A close-up profile of a woman with dark, wavy hair, looking out a window. The background shows a village with trees and birds flying in the sky. Four speech bubbles are overlaid on the scene.

THAT
IS NOT
SOMETHING
YOU NEED TO
KNOW...

BUT YOU
CAN ENSURE
YOU DO BY EATING
AND RESTING VERY
WELL...

WE NEED
YOU HEALTHY.
THE NIGHTMARE
IS OVER...

THIS
COULD BE
A GOOD LIFE,
IF YOU ALLOW IT.
BUT IT *IS* YOUR
LIFE NOW.



I DON'T
GET IT...

WHAT
ELSE DID
YOU DO TO
ME...?

WHAT
COULD YOU
EVEN, LIKE, GET
OUTTA TURNING
US PRETTY...?

AND
MAKING US
ACT LIKE
THIS...?



ASIDE FROM ENTERTAINMENT? MY LOVE...?

RESEARCH, AMONG OTHER THINGS YOU'LL COME TO UNDERSTAND IN TIME, SWEETIE.

THESE PEOPLE WERE
PSYCHOPATHS...

HEY,
HOW ABOUT
A PIECE OF
PIE...?



NOW,
WE HAVE TIME
FOR ONE MORE
QUESTION,
SWEETIE...

MISS
SOFIA AND I
WILL BE GONE
WITHIN THE
HOUR...

WHICH
IS WHY WE
WANTED TO
DO THIS
TODAY.

WHAT...?


CALL IT A
CELEBRATION OF
MY GRAND DAUGHTER
ALEXIS'S NINETEENTH
BIRTHDAY.

A woman with long, wavy red hair and green eyes is seated at a dining table. She is wearing a red dress with a floral pattern of white and yellow flowers. Her hands are clasped on the table. The table is set with a white plate and silverware. In the background, there is a doorway and a wall sconce.

HAPPY
BIRTHDAY,
LEXI...

WHERE
ARE YOU
GOING?


THAT'S
NONE OF YOUR
BUSINESS.

A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and striped tie is leaning over a woman seated at a table. He is holding a white plate with a slice of pie. The woman has long, wavy red hair and is wearing a floral-patterned top. The background shows a wooden wall with a framed picture of a church.

I'LL ALLOW YOU ONE MORE QUESTION, BUT WE WON'T SHARE ANYTHING THAT MIGHT INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF YOUR STUDY.

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANT, AND I PANICKED. ASKING THE ONE QUESTION CONTINUOUSLY POUNDING AT THE BACK OF MY MIND...

SO WHO IS BARBARA DAVIS...?

A close-up, high-angle shot of a man with a dark mustache and slicked-back hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and striped tie. He is looking down at a woman with long, wavy red hair who is partially visible on the right side of the frame. The background consists of light-colored wooden paneling.

OH, BABS?
SHE WAS MY
FIRST...

HAD THE
BEST RECIPE
FOR HOME-MADE
COOKIES...

NOW,
I SURE HOPE
YOU ENJOY THE
PEACH PIE AS
MUCH AS
I DO...

BECAUSE
THIS IS THE ONLY
WAY YOU'RE GOING
TO GET IT FROM
NOW ON.

HIS WORDS WERE LOST
ON ME AS I CAUGHT THE
SMELL OF THE PIE...

I... IT
LOOKS SO
YUMMY...

I COULDN'T THINK
OF ANYTHING ELSE...






AND DO
BE SURE TO
BRUSH YOUR
TEETH BEFORE
BED, YOUNG
LADY...

YESH MISH
SHOFIA...

I WOULD'VE FELT
SO HUMILIATED...

IF THIS PIE WASN'T
SO DARN GOOD...




AND JUST
SO YOU KNOW,
THE KITCHENS WILL
NOT SERVE YOU
ALCOHOL...

NO
RECREATIONAL
DRUG USE OF
ANY KIND. NO
SMOKING. NO
DRINKING...

ALEXIS
IS A GOOD
GIRL...


WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE FOR
A CIGARETTE RIGHT NOW...

A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey ribbed sweater, is looking towards the left. Behind her, a man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit and tie, stands with his hands on his hips. They are in a room with a large window that looks out onto a traditional East Asian building with a tiled roof. A wine glass is visible in the foreground on the right.

YOU ARE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN PROPER HYGEINE AND A BEAUTY ROUTINE. IS THAT CLEAR, ALEXIS...?

YESH MISSH SOFIA...

YOU ARE A PASSION WOMAN. YOU MUST ALWAYS BE PRESENT-ABLE...

A man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie, stands behind a woman. The woman has dark hair pulled back and is wearing a grey ribbed sweater. They are in a dining room with a large window showing a landscape with a pagoda and trees. In the foreground, a table is set with a white tablecloth, silverware, a large roasted bird, and two glass salt and pepper shakers. The man is looking down at the woman, who is looking towards the camera.

YOU
WILL NOT
HARM YOUR-
SELF IN ANY
WAY.

UNTIL
WE RETURN,
YOU MAY DO AS YOU
PLEASE WITHIN THE
PARAMETERS SET
BY MY HUSBAND
AND I...

THE ILLUSION
OF FREEDOM...

HOPEFULLY IT CAME
WITH MORE PIE...



THANK YOU, SWEET-HEART.


WELL, OF COURSE, MY DEAR...

LEXI, I
HOPE ONE DAY
YOU ARE LUCKY
ENOUGH TO FIND A
GENTLEMAN LIKE
YOUR GRANDFA-
THER....

MMM♥

THIS PIE IS DELICIOUS,
AND THAT SOUNDS...



A woman with long, wavy red hair and green eyes is sitting at a table in a kitchen. She is wearing a red floral-patterned top and has red lipstick on. She is holding a silver fork in her right hand and looking down at a slice of pizza on a white plate in front of her. The kitchen background includes a stone fireplace mantel with several bottles, a white cabinet with a glass door, and a small round table with a white top and black legs.

ABSOLUTELY
TERRIBLE...

WUFF THE
FRICK...?



IT WILL
BE YOUR
CHOICE WHEN
IT HAPPENS,
LEXI...


WHAT
THE HECK
DOES THAT
MEAN...?



YOU'RE
BLOSSOMING
INTO A NINE-
TEEN YEAR OLD
GIRL...

YOU
MIGHT FIND
YOURSELF A
LITTLE BOY
CRAZY.

I ABSOLUTELY
WOULD NOT...

A close-up shot of a man with dark hair and a prominent mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and striped tie. He has a thoughtful expression, looking slightly to the left. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and a stone wall.

BUT YOU
ARE NOT PERMITTED
TO LEAVE THIS HOUSE
UNDER ANY CIRCUM-
STANCES.

WHEN WE
RETURN, WE WILL
HAVE ANOTHER
DINNER, AND
POSSIBLY A
GUEST...

A GUEST? WHO COULD
THAT POSSIBLY BE...?



TAKE
CARE OF
YOURSELF,
ALEXIS...

AND
PREPARE
FOR A FEMININE
CHECK UP WHEN
WE WE NEXT SEE
EACH OTHER...

AND WHAT THE HECK
DOES THAT MEAN...?



IS THE
PIE GOOD?


IT'S SO
GOOD!

IT'S SO
GOOD!



WHAT
THE HECK
IS HAPPENING
TO ME..!?

WHY
DOES EVERY-
THING TASTE
SO GOOD!?

A close-up, profile view of a woman's face, focusing on her nose and lips. She has dark brown lipstick and is wearing a grey and white striped top. The background shows a dark wooden door and a wall-mounted light fixture. Two speech bubbles are overlaid on the image, containing text.

DON'T
YOU WORRY
YOUR PRETTY
LITTLE HEAD
ABOUT IT...


JUST
ENJOY YOUR
FOOD,



FOR THE
NEXT TIME WE
MEET IN SESSION,
I WANT YOU TO
REMEMBER THE
NAMES OF FIVE
BOYS YOU FIND
ATTRACTIVE.

YOU'LL
GATHER THAT
FROM THE T.V. IN
THE ENTERTAIN-
MENT ROOM.

LIKE HECK I WOULD...



OKAY,
PAPA...

I WOULD...

ENJOY
THE LIFE OF
A PASSION, MY
DEAR...

UNTIL
WE MEET
AGAIN...

MMM♥




A man with a mustache, wearing a dark grey suit, white shirt, and striped tie, stands in the foreground. Behind him, a woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a grey ribbed sweater and a black and white plaid skirt with a black belt, stands in a dining room. The room features a table with a white tablecloth, chairs, and a window with red curtains. A chandelier hangs from the ceiling, and a floor lamp is visible in the background.

LET'S
KEEP A CLOSE
EYE ON HER
GROWTH OVER
THE NEXT FEW
WEEKS...

WE HAVE
A LOT OF NEW
THINGS WORKING
AT ONCE...

GET HARP
TO RECORD
TWENTY FOUR
SEVEN..

A woman with long red hair is seated at a long, white dining table in a formal, dimly lit room. The table is set with a dark red runner, white plates, silverware, and a large roasted bird. A chandelier hangs above the table, and several floor lamps provide warm lighting. The room features wood-paneled walls and a tiled floor.

AND THERE I WAS, LEFT
TO MY STRANGE FATE...

A FOURTY-TWO YEAR OLD MERC,
WHO IS NOW GRANDPA'S FAVORITE
LITTLE GIRL... WHAT THE FRICK IS
THAT EVEN SUPPOSED TO MEAN...?

THEY WERE TRYING TO GET
ME TO LOWER MY GUARD...

THEY WERE PLANNING
SOMETHING NEFARIOUS
WITH ME, I COULD FEEL IT.

BUT ALL I COULD THINK OF
WAS THIS GOSH DARN PIE...

To Be continued...



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