

41 Birthday Dinner

The restaurant Richard chose to celebrate his wife's birthday was one of the most exclusive places in the city. Normally, the waiting list to book a table, even for someone of his status, was several months long. It was simply that popular. 1

However, this time he was lucky—the owner of the restaurant was a big fan of Amelie's philanthropic work. Once Richard mentioned it was for her birthday dinner, the owner needed no further convincing and promptly reserved the best table for them.

When they were led to their table, an expensive bottle of champagne was already waiting for them in the bucket of ice. As they took their seats, the waiter explained that, in honor of the special occasion, tonight's dinner would feature dishes that had never been served at the restaurant before.

'I see Richard has put a lot of effort into this. And to think that it is all just for a show...'

Mr. Clark offered his wife a glass of champagne



and raised his own, prepared to make a toast.

"Happy birthday, Amelie. I am a little disappointed that you decided to refrain from traveling this year but I hope this day still feels a little more special to you."

Somehow, his mentioning of the word "special" made her think about Liam's gift brought to her by Captain Pantaloons. Having decided not to shatter Richard's illusion of being the source of her smile, she slowly emptied her glass and said a forceful "Thank you."

"Now, are you ready for your surprise gift?"

"Sure."

Yet again, she couldn't force herself to say more. There was nothing special about that gift nor there was anything surprising. She could bet a billion dollars that he would give her another piece of jewelry and she would win.

Richard carefully retrieved a long velvet-covered jewelry box, opened it, and placed it on the table before his wife, revealing its luxurious contents.

Amelie fixed her eyes on the diamond bracelet

inside the box. A slight shiver of irritation coursed through her entire body.

A bracelet. Something to wear on her wrist. She hated it. She hated to have things on her wrists. She hated the way they felt and she hated that they always got in the way of her clothes. And what she hated the most was the fact that Richard knew about that. He must have. 1

'The only thing I can bear to wear on my wrist is the watch because I always have to be aware of the time and it's impolite to look at my phone when I'm having company. He knows this. There were so many times when he offered to buy me a bracelet but I kept telling him that I hated them. And now... He made such a big deal of this gift when clearly he bought it last minute.' 1

Once again, she was reminded of Liam and his gift. They were all the same--just jewelry-- but Liam's gift felt different. It **felt** special. Probably because he actually put some thought into it. 1

Amelie's silent reaction made Richard feel a bit awkward. He took the bracelet in his hand and finally said, "Will you give me your hand, please?"

Amelie's first instinct was to refuse but she

couldn't argue tonight; the reporters were still there, eagerly waiting for her to accept the gift with a happy smile on her face. She decided to comply.

She stretched her arm across the surface of the table and felt the coldness of the platinum base touch her skin, sending tiny goosebumps all over it; and when the round lock clicked under the pressure of Richard's fingers, Amelie couldn't help but feel as if her hand was trapped in a handcuff.

She couldn't wait to take it off.

Once Richard was done putting the bracelet around her wrist, Amelie was about to withdraw her hand but to her surprise, her husband moved her palm closer to his face and lightly moved his lips over her skin, leaving a gentle kissing sensation. 1

Amelie's body trembled under his touch. She imagined those lips kissing Samantha's body and it tied her stomach in knots. 1

With one rapid motion, she pulled her hand away from Richard's face which only made him angry.

"Can you show a little more affection at least once? You are my wife, for god's sake!"

Amelie looked at his frowning expression and tried hard to fight back the desire to smile. Yes, it was funny. It was funny how he only thought of her as his wife when it was beneficial for him. He had a wife to keep appearances and he had a lover to receive the affection the wife never gave him. He had a cake and he ate it too. 1

Moving her eyes down to her plate, she wrapped her fingers around the silver fork and said quietly, "Let's just eat, Richard."

The rest of the dinner went by in silence, and although they both wished to finish with it as soon as possible, neither Amelie nor Richard seemed to have any appetite and barely touched their food.

After they were done with the dessert which also remained almost untouched, it was finally time to leave the restaurant.

"Are you going back to the hotel again?" Richard left his seat and asked Amelie, preventing her

from darting from the hall. Amelie replied without looking at him. "Yes."

"Let me take you there with my car."

Mrs. Ashford looked at her husband's face and widened her eyes. Now that was a real surprise.

At first, she wanted to reject his offer but the image of him getting all upset again made her change her mind.

"There might still be reporters outside; if they see us going somewhere together, this would be even better than seeing us here."

"Alright. I will dismiss my driver then."

He managed to surprise her a couple more times this evening. First, by driving the car himself. Second, by telling her that he would walk her to her room. 1

"Why would you want to do that?" Amelie couldn't understand his behavior at all. Richard wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and Mrs. Ashford noticed that he was sweating. "Are you unwell?" 2

Richard sighed and loosened his tie. "I need



some water..."

Amelie got a little worried and decided to let him go to her room with her.

As they exited the elevator, she marched straight to the door and started looking for her room key when suddenly she heard a loud thud behind her. Scared, she turned around and realized that Richard fainted.

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