

## Chapter 5

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The final hundred days before the exams had them all on edge.

Mandy whipped up Calvin's favorite meals daily and made sure he did not play hooky. She was on chauffeur duty morning, noon, and night.

James pulled out all the stops, bringing in a star tutor to boost his grades. He would sit right there during study sessions to keep an eye on Calvin.

However, despite all that, Calvin just barely managed to get into a run-of-the-mill college out of town.

"What on earth is going on in that head of yours? All this extra help and your grades are still stuck in the mud!" James exclaimed.

I gently tugged at James' arm.

"They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Maybe he got his smarts from me? Listen, son, when it's time to find a partner, aim high education-wise. You don't want to shortchange your future kids!"

I did not mean much by it, but the words hung heavy in the air.

That night, a heated argument broke out in the room next door.

I flicked on the surveillance feed, and there was Mandy, clad in a slinky nightie, tears streaming down her face.

"It's all on me. I'm the one with the lousy brain, messing up your family's stellar genes."

James did not argue, almost as if he agreed with the accusation.

Mandy, steaming mad, whacked him with a pillow.

"Shh, keep it down! What if Sally wakes up?"

"So what if she does? I'm sick of this anyway. What am I now? The other woman? A side chick? I'm stuck waiting for you and your kid, and that woman too!"

James quickly wrapped Mandy in his arms.

"Just hang in there a bit longer. Once Calvin is in charge of the company, I'll make Sally vanish, and then you and I will have our big, fancy wedding!"

The room was charged with their secret romance, and I did what I always do—I saved the video, keeping it for evidence someday.

On the day Calvin was off to college, James clung to his son.

Mandy was behind them, quietly crying. They watched Calvin until he was on the plane, and only then did they leave with heavy hearts.

I could not help but tease them, "Anyone else would think you two are an item. He's just off to school, not like he's gone for good. Is all this drama necessary?"

Mandy, realizing she had been a bit over the top, scrambled to explain, "I watched Calvin grow up, okay? I'm attached!"

"Sure, honey. You can get attached to anything if you're around it long enough—even pets." James said.

I just chuckled.

"Let's face it, our boy's grown up. He's got his own life now. We just need to look after ourselves!"

Back home, Mandy told me a relative was sick and she wanted to quit.

I did more than just let her go—I gave her a bonus. They must have thought I was an idiot, letting them play me like that.

After Mandy left, James started coming home less and less.

Whenever I asked, he would say he was hooked on night fishing. Yeah, right.

Unbeknownst to him, the overpowering perfume clinging to his clothes and the lipstick stain on his collar were dead giveaways. Still, I played it cool, knowing that the time for payback had not come yet.

When he stumbled in one night, a coldness clung to him that sent shivers down my spine.

James smelled strongly of booze.

"Honey, I've been missing our boy. You think he's doing alright? Once he's back to take the reins of the business, you can hang up your hat, and we'll jet-set around the globe. Does that sound good?"

I fought back a wave of disgust and managed a smile. "Absolutely. As soon as he's ready to run the whole show, it'll just be the two of us in our own little world!"

Despite his tipsy grin, James' eyes were sharp as ever.

"We're about to be a complete family again!"