

## Chapter 17 Carsten, We're Even

Something in Carsten's expression quietly shifted.

For the briefest moment, his eyes lost focus, drifting somewhere far away.

Despite the coat being scorched beyond recognition, he knew exactly what it was the instant he saw it.

He had bought that coat for Evelyn during his senior year in college, right after securing an internship and receiving his first project bonus.

That purchase had come from the first real money he had ever earned with his own effort.

Originally, he had intended to buy her jewelry, the sort of flashy gift most men chose for their girlfriends.

However, Evelyn had refused that, explaining that she was studying medicine and accessories only got in the way at the hospital. Luxury brands had never meant anything to her anyway.

After some thought, the only thing she had asked for was a simple coat.

The price had been only a few thousand dollars, a trivial sum compared to what high-society women spent on a single outfit.

Even so, Evelyn had held it dear as if it were priceless.

Now, the garment she once treasured so much lay before him as nothing more than a heap of blackened, crumbling fabric.

Shock jolted through Carsten as he snapped his head toward Violet. "Who told you to burn that coat?"

His sharp tone made Violet flinch; tears slipped helplessly down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry, Carsten..." she murmured through trembling breaths. "I didn't

realize it was something that shouldn't be thrown away. You asked me to sort through Evie's belongings and I thought the old items didn't matter anymore."

"It's only a coat!" Yara cut in sharply, her annoyance obvious. "If it's burned, then it's burned. Why are you going after her over something so trivial? She's pregnant, Carsten. You can't upset her like this."

A beat later, Carsten forced himself to calm down, the flare of anger draining from his expression.

Indeed, his sister's words made sense. It was merely a coat, nothing more.

If Evelyn ever wanted another one, he could buy ten for her without a second thought.

So why did he have to make such a big deal out of it?

Lowering his voice, he tried to sound gentle as he said to Evelyn, "Even if Violet burned the coat I bought for you, you could have just reprimanded her. There was no need to hit her. Alright, I understand you're angry because the coat I gave you was destroyed. But at the end of the day, it's only a coat. If you want, I'll have a designer coat delivered to you tomorrow."

Evelyn studied Carsten's carefully composed expression. The patience he pretended to show now looked nauseatingly false, every trace of his tenderness suddenly revolting to her.

A sharp, mockingsmile curled at her lips. "Who said I was blaming her for that? Honestly, I should thank her for burning that pile of useless garbage."

With open disdain, she kicked the charred coat aside with the tip of her shoe.

Carsten's expression instantly darkened, anger tightening his jaw. "You really think the coat I gave you is garbage?"

"Isn't it?" Evelyn replied, her tone dripping with contempt. "The second another woman touches it, clothes or people, it's tainted. And anything tainted is nothing but trash. Burning it was the best thing that could've happened to it."

Although she spoke about the coat, the icy look she fixed on Carsten made the true target painfully obvious.

Heat flared in Carsten's chest.

The thought that the woman who had once centered her entire world around him now met his authority with open defiance was something he could not tolerate.

"Evelyn, what exactly do you want to do here?" he asked.

In an indifferent tone, Evelyn answered, "Nothing. I already told you—I came today for one thing. To take back what belongs to me."

She raised the dark wooden box in her hand slightly, her fingers steady around its edges. "Now that I have it... Carsten, we're even."

Without waiting for his reply, she turned on her heel and headed toward the door to leave.

Barely a few steps carried her toward the gate before Carsten's icy voice cut through the air behind her.

"Evelyn, think this through! Are you really going to keep acting this stubborn? Aren't you afraid I might actually leave you?"

But Evelyn's stride never faltered. Without once turning her head, she passed through the gate and vanished beyond it.

Color drained from Carsten's face, leaving his expression hard and dark.

Standing beside him, Violet lowered her voice gently. "Carsten... do you really think she means it this time? That she's actually breaking up with you?"

Carsten dismissed the idea instantly, saying, "No way! Evie can't live without me. This is just another one of her little tantrums; she is trying to force me to give in. Once she realizes that trick won't work, she'll come back to me."

As the words left his mouth, his gaze drifted slowly toward a storage box sitting nearby.

The moment he noticed what was inside a smug curve tugged at the corner of his mouth.

"See? She deliberately left her most precious things behind" he said with quiet satisfaction. "Just an excuse to come back to me."

Every item lying in the box was jewelry he had gifted her over the years.

Evelyn always treasured each piece as if it were irreplaceable.

No matter how he looked at it, he simply refused to believe Evelyn could truly abandon them.

In his mind, leaving them behind could only mean she wanted to keep a reason to return.

Such certainty convinced him that she must love him far too deeply to walk away from him.

The thought brightened his mood almost immediately.

Turning toward Violet, he spoke. "Violet, these all belong to Evie. Leave them alone from now on. I'll give them back to her myself on our wedding day. It'll make a nice surprise."

With a strained curve of her lips, Violet gave a slight nod, secretly grinding her teeth hard enough to make her jaw ache.