

Chapter 12

"Did I wake you?" Vance muttered, sitting on the bed's edge, looking at her against the backlight.

For a moment, Rebecca was disoriented.

He stood up, adding, "Not getting up to prepare my clothes?"

She rolled over. "Find them yourself. I'm still sleepy."

"It's been two days now—two days without you picking out my outfit. Mrs. Bradford, you're neglecting your duties," he whined. 1

She sat up and saw that he was already fully dressed, standing neatly by the bed.

"You..." She suddenly lost her tongue.

Vance adjusted his tie. "Alright, no more sulking. I'll come home early tonight, so you won't have to wait."

He might not realize it, but she no longer waited for him like she used to.

"Say something," he pressed when she didn't respond. 1

"Okay," she replied indifferently.

"That's better." Satisfied at last, he added, "We'll have guests over for dinner tonight. Cheer up, and don't ruin the mood, okay?" 1

So, that was what this was about.

The reason he was so insistent on coaxing her back to a good mood was to avoid losing face in front of guests.





"Who is coming for dinner?" she asked, puzzled.

In their five years of marriage, they had never hosted anyone at home.

"You'll find out this evening," he said mysteriously. "It's a surprise for you."

She couldn't imagine what kind of surprise he could have in store. Remembering his mention the night before about not making it to dinner with her parents, she wondered if he had invited them over instead.

She didn't press further, hoping only that Vance would leave soon, followed by Nancy. The luxury dealer was due to arrive shortly.

At ten o'clock sharp, Nancy headed out as usual. Ten minutes later, the dealer called, and Rebecca invited her upstairs.

The dealer was a stylish young woman named Vivian Wright. Professional and efficient, she quickly inspected the items and transferred the payment.

"If it weren't for the purchase receipts and records you have for all these, I really wouldn't dare take them," she muttered.

Rebecca understood what she meant.

It wasn't about doubting authenticity, but who in their right mind would buy ten identical watches? Anyone dealing in second-hand goods would suspect they were stolen.

"All set. If you have anything else to sell next time—bags, jewelry, whatever—just contact me," Vivian said, packing the watches into a large bag.

"Sure, thank you," Rebecca replied, watching the transfer notification pop up on her phone. 2

No matter the circumstances, having money in hand always brought a sense of security. Vance had given her so many things over the years, and turning them into cash at least realized their value. 1

After seeing Vivian out, she switched on her phone and deleted the bank notification.

Her account now held a substantial balance. She had to admit that while Vance had invested no heart in their marriage, he had been extraordinarily generous with money.

Over five years, with few places to spend it, she had saved quite a sum—more than enough for her studies abroad. 1

She opened a fresh notebook and flipped to the first page, writing: [Countdown to Leaving Vance: Day 30. Declutter: handling gifts.]

Then, she began preparing the documents needed for her visa application.

Since she would be traveling with the troupe for performances, she printed out the relevant materials, bundled them with her passport, and arranged for a delivery service to send them to Lauren.

The day flew by once again.

In the evening, she thought about browsing a few more posts before resting, but the algorithm pushed another of Catherine's new updates to her feed.

The photo showed Catherine sitting in a shopping cart at the



supermarket. The person pushing the cart wasn't fully in frame. Only their hands and the sleeves of their shirt were visible.

But that was enough for her to identify Vance. She had picked out all his clothes, and she recognized the cufflinks immediately.

They were ones she had disliked the originals for and had custom-made for him. They were one of a kind.



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