

Chapter 13 Caiden Was Here Too

Over the past two years, Noreen had watched Caiden turn his back on her so many times she couldn't remember them all.

Each time he stormed out, leaving the door reverberating in his wake, she was left alone to quietly swallow the ache.

Eventually, the sting dulled, and numbness took its place.

Since the night he left this time, the house had stayed cold and silent. Not once had he come home.

Even at the company, their paths hadn't crossed—not a single accidental glimpse in the hallway.

Today marked her last day after finishing the handover.

When she looked around the office and saw the reluctant smiles of her colleagues, she decided to host a small farewell dinner. It felt like the only fitting way to close this chapter of her life with a clean, quiet goodbye.

As the clock edged toward the end of the workday, Noreen reached for her phone and dialed Waldo's number.

The line barely rang once before he picked up, his voice tight with urgency. "Noreen? Are you calling to say you've changed your mind about resigning? If that's the case..."

"Where's Caiden? I can't get through to him." Cutting him off mid-sentence, Noreen went straight to the point.

Waldo hesitated, his gaze flicking toward Caiden, who sat behind his desk with a stormy expression clouding his face. After a brief pause, he responded in a steady tone, "Mr. Evans is overseas on a business trip. He's in a meeting right now, and I'm not sure when he'll be back. Is it

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A faint line formed between Noreen's brows as she replied, "No need. Just let me know when he's back."

The words tasted bitter on her tongue.

She was Caiden's wife, yet she didn't even know his schedule.

Waldo acknowledged her request and opened his mouth to continue, only to realize the call had already disconnected.

He lowered the receiver, his fingers tightening briefly against the edge of the desk before he turned toward Caiden, who lounged behind the desk with glacial features.

"Maybe your wife's missing you, Mr. Evans," Waldo ventured cautiously.

A faint, almost imperceptible smirk flickered at the corner of Caiden's mouth. He lifted his wrist to check the time. "Clear my schedule for tonight," he ordered in a low, firm tone. "I'm going home."

Still bewildered, Waldo offered a brief nod, his eyes lingering on Caiden in question.

For weeks, Caiden had been slipping in and out of the office like a man hiding from the world. It had been obvious he didn't want to face Noreen.

So what on earth had changed so suddenly?

Only minutes ago, he'd told Noreen that Caiden was overseas in a meeting. Now Caiden was heading home.

...

The restaurant hummed with overlapping chatter, crystal chandeliers scattering golden light across the glasses of red wine.

Leyla downed half her water in one breath, the glass thudding against the table as she set it down.

"Jessica's completely lost it," she burst out. "She just trashed three years' worth of marketing data models—said they weren't 'forward-thinking' enough. That stupid bitch doesn't even know how to make a pivot table in Excel!"

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Across from her, Nettie Wright let out a dry laugh, her shoulders sinking with shared exasperation. "That's not even the worst of it. She made me redo the entire presentation eleven times. Eleven. And then she ended up using the first draft."

Leyla let out a derisive snort. "Jessica's got no real skill. The only reason she's sitting in that director's chair is that she's Mr. Evans' girlfriend, isn't she?"

Noreen stirred her seafood soup without touching the conversation swirling around the table.

Leyla leaned closer, lowering her voice like she was about to spill state secrets. "And guess what? I caught her in the break room this morning whining to Mr. Evans about cutting her finger. He personally went and got her a band-aid."

Noreen's hand stilled on the spoon. "This morning?" she asked quietly.

Leyla gave an eager nod. "Yeah. This morning."

A thought flickered across Noreen's mind, pulling the corners of her mouth into a faint, bitter curve.

So he hadn't been in some overseas meeting after all. He'd simply chosen to avoid her.

A dull heaviness settled over her chest, the weight pressing down like a stone.

Just how much did Caiden resent her now?

He couldn't even bring himself to acknowledge her departure properly.

She wasn't trying to make things difficult. If they wanted to be together, she was willing to let them. But Caiden didn't even want to sit across a table and sign the divorce papers.

A curious voice chimed in. "Wait, Mr. Evans is married, right? No one seems to know what his wife looks like."

"She probably can't compare to Jessica. Otherwise, why would Mr. Evans

act like his wife doesn't exist?"

"I think Jessica isn't nearly as stunning as Noreen."

"Noreen is gorgeous—she's just unlucky. Isn't that right, Noreen?" Nettie suddenly steered the conversation straight toward Noreen.

Several intrigued gazes turned in unison. Noreen dabbed the corner of her lips with a napkin, watching a faint damp mark bloom against the white paper. Whether it was soup or something else hardly mattered.

"I'll go take care of the bill," she said with an easy smile, pushing back her chair.

As she walked off, a young trainee let out a wistful sigh. "Jessica really has it good."

The night wind funneled through the revolving door, carrying away the last trace of warmth.

Noreen deliberately folded the bill, creasing the paper again and again until the sharp edge sliced into her fingertip.

Two years of marriage, and Caiden had never once announced their relationship in public.

She was well aware of how his circle viewed her—like an inconvenient footnote. Jessica, on the other hand, commanded their admiration without even trying.

Everyone mirrored Caiden's stance. His open favoritism made Jessica untouchable, while Noreen became someone they could disregard without consequence.

"Noreen!" The sharp, clear voice yanked her back to the present. Lifting her gaze, she spotted Jessica striding toward her on stiletto heels, each click against the marble floor ringing with arrogance.

She swept a quick glance behind Noreen. "All by yourself tonight?"

"No," Noreen answered evenly. "Dinner with colleagues."

She shifted as if to walk past, but Jessica angled her body, deliberately blocking the way.

"Caiden's upstairs," Jessica drawled, her voice smooth and unhurried. "Everyone's here. Since we've run into each other, why not come up and say hi before you head out?"

Noreen froze for a breath.

Caiden was here too.

A quiet sigh escaped her lips. "Alright. Let's go."

She hadn't been able to reach him for days. If she let this moment slip by, who knew when he'd finally agree to sign those divorce papers.

