

Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 261:

With a sigh, Sophie leaned against the counter. “Brooks Group might look impressive from the outside, but inside it’s all politics and backstabbing. And trust me, with looks like yours, people are going to give you a hard time.”

Cathryn smiled faintly. “I’ll manage. I’ll just do my job.”

Suddenly, panic flashed across Sophie’s face. “Wait. Do I still smell like mop water?”

Leaning in, Kathryn took a quick sniff and shook her head. “Nope. You’re good.”

Just then, Sophie seemed to remember something. “Shoot! I’m supposed to get these documents up to the CEO. I almost spaced and left them behind.”

Cathryn’s eyes widened. “You mean Andrew Brooks?”

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Sophie quickly shushed her, a finger pressed to her lips. “Keep it down! You can’t just say his name like that.”

Lowering her voice to a whisper, Cathryn asked, “Is Mr. Brooks in his office right now?”

“Yeah, he’s in. I need his signature on these papers,” Sophie replied.

Quick to seize the moment, Cathryn asked, “Would you let me take them up for you?”

Sophie pulled the folder back, giving Cathryn a suspicious look. “What are you planning?”

Cathryn went still. The way everything had unfolded made it seem like she’d plotted the whole thing just to get near Andrew. A nervous laugh escaped her. “It’s nothing weird. I’ve just heard a lot about him. I thought I’d catch a glimpse, that’s all.”

Sophie studied her again. “You’re not harboring some crazy crush on Mr. Brooks, are you?”

Cathryn shook her head firmly, her voice clipped. “No. Absolutely not.”

Sophie gave her a sympathetic pat on the shoulder, her lips curving in a faint smile. “Forget it, Cathryn. Girls like us could never climb high enough to reach someone like Mr. Brooks. Besides...” Her gaze flicked over Cathryn’s plain uniform and drifted away, leaving the rest unsaid.

Cathryn caught the meaning well enough. After all, she was nothing more than a janitor.

With a grin, Sophie leaned closer, her breath brushing Cathryn’s ear. “Though honestly, I’m curious about Mr. Brooks, too. They say his face is ruined, that he never lets anyone see it. I wonder what he really looks like.”

But Cathryn’s interest was different. She didn’t care if Andrew was scarred or beautiful; she only wanted to meet him face-to-face—and talk business.

“I should get these documents delivered,” Sophie murmured, smoothing her skirt before slipping into the CEO’s office.

Cathryn lingered in the hallway, ears straining for any hint of conversation behind the heavy door. Silence pressed back at her.

When Sophie reemerged, Cathryn darted forward and tugged her into the restroom.

Sophie squeaked in surprise. “You’re still here?”

“Did you see him?” Cathryn asked, her eyes alight with urgency.

Sophie shook her head, disappointed. “No. Seems like the rumors are true—he stays behind the partition.”

“But the signature?”

Sophie’s lips curved wryly. “Mr. Owens carried the file in for him.”

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Chapter 262:

Cathryn snatched the folder and flipped straight to the last page. There it was: Andrew Brooks. The letters swept across the paper, bold and vigorous, like the hand of a man who bowed to no one.

Cathryn's mind conjured the figure behind the frosted glass partition back at the auction house—the refined silhouette, the aura of command. The penmanship matched the man she imagined.

“Careful,” Sophie whispered, casting a nervous glance toward the corridor. “Once you finish cleaning, head straight downstairs. The thirty-eighth floor is forbidden territory. Mr. Owens does not tolerate strays.”

As they descended together, Cathryn ventured, “Which department do you work in?”

“Administration,” Sophie replied.

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A wistful note slipped into Cathryn's voice. “If only I could get into Administration...”

There, documents were passed directly into Andrew's hand for signature—there was a real chance of seeing him.

Sophie chuckled, shaking her head. "Admin isn't for everyone. The first requirement is computer skills. You probably can't manage that, right? No schooling, no certificates..."

Cathryn lifted an eyebrow but held her tongue. She wouldn't boast—though if there was one thing she excelled at, it was computers. Keeping her tone modest, she asked, "What exactly do I need to learn?"

Sophie softened and pulled out her phone. "Here—let's exchange numbers. I'll send you some beginner tutorials. You can teach yourself if you're serious."

"Thank you," Kathryn said warmly, saving the contact.

"Be warned," Sophie added, a trace of doubt shadowing her encouragement, "it'll be tough starting from scratch. But if you put in the hours, you might manage."

Cathryn's smile was steady, confident. "I'll start tonight."

Sophie brightened. "So determined. Who knows—maybe one day we'll be colleagues."

She meant it kindly, though she doubted Cathryn would ever master office software.

Cathryn, however, felt a spark of joy. On her first day, she'd made a friend.

When she arrived home, Damien was already waiting, as if he'd been counting the minutes.

"How was your first day?" His smile carried both warmth and curiosity.

"Good," Cathryn replied evenly.

"Which department?"

She hesitated, then forced the lie out smoothly. "Administration."

There was no way she could admit she'd been scrubbing floors.

Andrew nodded, satisfied. Ethan had arranged it well. Administration meant light work, plenty of women, and relative safety for her.

Dinner passed quickly. Later, Cathryn retreated to the bedroom and flipped open her laptop. Sophie’s tutorials loaded onto the screen—basic demonstrations on office software, painfully simple.

Cathryn gnawed at her thumbnail, restless. Was this really what Administration did all day? It felt more like a holiday than work.

Andrew watched Cathryn bent over the laptop, practicing with office software. A faint twinge of satisfaction stirred in him.

“This stuff can be a little tricky,” he said. “If you get stuck, just ask me.”

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Her fingers stilled on the keyboard. Out of nowhere, she asked,

“What kind of man is Andrew?”

He froze. “Why ask that so suddenly?”

Her gaze shifted to him, sharp and searching. “I want to know—what kind of person is he in your eyes?”

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One brow arched, and a teasing smile curved his lips. “Tall, devastatingly handsome, gentle to a fault...”

Cathryn let out a sharp laugh, bitter at the edges. “I once thought the world of him. But in the end, he’s no different from every other businessman—driven only by profit.”

Once, Andrew had rescued her from a desperate moment by bidding on her mother's painting. Out of gratitude, she had fashioned him a pair of cufflinks with her own hands, believing, in her naivety, that a small token could bridge the distance between them. Looking back, she realized it had been nothing but wishful thinking.

For the longest time, she had puzzled over his motives—why a stranger would step in for her again and again, without so much as a proper introduction. Now the truth tasted bitter on her tongue. Andrew never moved without a reason. Every gesture had been a calculation. Every favor, an investment.

Perhaps he had coveted her mother's paintings from the very beginning, approaching her only to satisfy a hidden agenda. And now, standing shoulder to shoulder with Liam and Jordyn, he had revealed himself as just another profiteer.

"Disgusting man." The words hissed through her clenched teeth, sharp enough to cut.

Andrew nearly coughed in protest. How had he become the target of her fury without warning?

Her arms slipped around his neck, sudden and teasing, her voice softening as her eyes gleamed. "Relax. I meant your brother, not you. Why that look?"

His throat tightened. No words came.

When she praised Andrew, his heart smoldered with envy. When she cursed Andrew, it felt like knives driving into his chest. The urge rose to tear down the mask and declare he was Andrew—but fear chained his tongue. If the truth surfaced, would she stay, or vanish from his life altogether?

“Cathryn...” His voice broke with desperation. His arms cinched around her waist as though she might disappear if he loosened them. “Let’s not get divorced. Please.”

She studied him in silence, her gaze steady, as if peeling back every layer of his soul. Then a faint smile touched her lips. “So the prenup means nothing now?”

He looked solemn. “Not anymore.”

Her mouth curved, playful yet edged with warning. “Then it depends on you. Behave, and I will stay. Slip once, and divorce is back on the table.”

His fingers pinched her waist, testing—half teasing, half earnest. “Then tell me... what counts as good? And what damns me as bad?”

She tilted her head, thoughtful, then delivered the verdict with quiet finality. “Lying to me. That is bad.”

The words struck him like a lash.

After a long, suffocating beat, he forced a dry chuckle and murmured, “It is late. Let’s get some sleep.”

Cathryn and Andrew tumbled onto the bed in a playful blur of laughter and tangled limbs.

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Chapter 264:

The next morning, Cathryn and Andrew shared breakfast in the quiet comfort of their home.

Andrew leaned toward her with a boyish grin. “Cathryn, let’s go to work together from now on.”

She glanced at the sleek Maybach parked outside and shook her head. “Your car is too flashy. I’d rather not draw that kind of attention.”

In her mind, she could already hear the whispers—colleagues gossiping about the cleaner who stepped out of a billionaire’s car. The thought made her stomach tighten.

“We’ll be discreet. No one will notice,” Andrew murmured, taking her hand and guiding her toward the car with quiet insistence.

Before they even reached the company entrance, Cathryn tugged at his sleeve and insisted on getting out.

Andrew sighed, resigned, and motioned for Yosef to pull over.

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Cathryn rolled down the window, scanned the street for prying eyes, then slipped out like a shadow, darting into the Brooks Group lobby with the swiftness of someone guarding a fragile secret.

Watching her retreating figure, Andrew shook his head, half amused and half resigned. They were husband and wife, yet they carried on like fugitives hiding an affair.

Inside the lobby, Cathryn was drawn by a loud commotion near the restrooms. Curious, she walked over—only to find Bessie standing meekly with her head bowed, while Vanessa unleashed her scorn.

“Do you have any idea how much this outfit costs? You couldn’t afford it even if you scrubbed toilets for two whole years,” Vanessa sneered, her voice dripping with contempt.

“I was simply standing here. You’re the one who bumped into me,” Bessie answered in a low voice.

Vanessa scoffed, eyes flashing. “Why would I bump into the likes of you—a lowly cleaner?”

“Vanessa, watch your mouth.” Sophie rushed forward, sliding protectively in front of Bessie.

Smugness sparked in Vanessa’s gaze as she smirked at the gathering crowd. “Don’t be fooled by Sophie’s polished little act. That woman scrubbing restrooms is none other than Sophie’s mother.”

Gasps rippled through the colleagues nearby. Sophie—the fashionably dressed beauty admired by many—had a mother cleaning floors?

Yet Sophie didn't flinch. Shoulders straight, chin high, she met their stares with unshaken pride. "Yes. My mother is a cleaner. She never had the chance to study, and this is the work she can do. But she earns every coin with dignity, and there is no shame in that."

Bessie's eyes softened, gratitude shimmering as she looked at her daughter.

Cathryn, watching from the side, felt her lips curve in quiet approval. In a world so obsessed with titles and appearances, Sophie's unguarded honesty shone like rare gold.

Vanessa had expected shame, not defiance. The certainty in Sophie's voice unsettled her. Still, she recovered quickly, her smirk sharpening. She swept a hand toward a few men hovering nearby. "And you lot—weren't you tripping over yourselves to chase Sophie because of her looks? Tell me, who among you still wants to be the son-in-law of a cleaner?"

A flush of embarrassment crossed the men's faces. Not long ago, they had wooed Sophie with flowers and grand declarations. Now they shifted uncomfortably, their gazes dropping to the floor.

"We're just colleagues," one of them muttered hastily.

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Sophie rolled her eyes. What a bunch of snobs. They'd been all over her, pouring out their hearts and swearing undying love—until they heard her mother was a cleaner. Then they couldn't distance themselves fast enough.

"The daughter of a lowlife is still a lowlife," Vanessa sneered, her voice like venom. "Sophie, you will never rise above your station."

Bessie straightened, her voice firmer now. "Miss Grant, my daughter studied day and night. She graduated from Olekgan University with top honors. She joined Brooks Group on her own merit. She is not a lowlife."

Vanessa's smile curved cruelly. A dangerous gleam lit her eyes. "Then allow me to show you the distinction between a lowlife and a noble one."

Alarm prickled down Sophie's spine. "Vanessa, what are you planning?"

With slow, deliberate steps, Vanessa closed the distance and stopped in front of Bessie, arms folded. "Kneel. Polish my shoes."

The words cracked through the air like a whip. Both Bessie and Sophie froze, shock written plainly across their faces.

Vanessa tilted her chin, contempt heavy in her gaze. "Do it, or I'll make one call and your daughter will be out of this company by sundown."

A chorus of whispers rippled through the crowd as everyone leaned closer, drawn to the cruelty unfolding before them. Vanessa was the only daughter of the Grant family—an old name that carried weight in Olekgan's business circles—and rumors often linked them to the powerful Brooks family. It was through those very connections that Vanessa had secured her place at Brooks Group.

Bessie had heard those rumors, and dread coiled in her chest. She shook her head, voice trembling. "Please, don't—"

Vanessa raised her foot with regal arrogance, her lips curling into a cold smile. "On your knees. Polish my shoes, and perhaps I'll spare your daughter."

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Bessie's body quivered from head to toe. She was no stranger to hardship, no stranger to humiliation. Age had worn down her pride long ago, but kneeling here—in front of her daughter's colleagues—would brand Sophie with shame that could never be washed away. Yet if she refused, her daughter's career would be crushed before it even began.

The Grants were ruthless. Brooks Group was Sophie's future. Their family had sacrificed too much already. Bessie had worked every odd job she could find just to see her children through college. Sophie had fought tooth and nail for her chance at this prestigious company. Bessie could not, would not, let her daughter's future be shattered.

Bessie shifted forward, ready to bend her knees.

"Mom, no!" Sophie grabbed Bessie's arm in desperation, yanking her back. "I earned this job. I got into Brooks Group on my own. She can't just throw me out!"

One of Sophie's colleagues leaned in and murmured urgently, "Vanessa's family is untouchable. They say Cara has already arranged a marriage with the Grants. Vanessa is supposed to marry Andrew..."

Sophie's breath caught. A shiver ran down her spine. She was still new to the company, still green enough to believe effort alone could shield her—but now she understood just how deep Vanessa's power ran.

“Kneel.” Vanessa stood there, imperious, as though Sophie and Bessie were nothing more than pawns placed at her feet.

Cathryn made her way through the crowd, weaving past shoulders and elbows until she finally reached the front. Everything felt backward in this place—people who worked hard for every penny were treated as if they were invisible, while criminals were handed the keys to the kingdom.

Vanessa turned pale, the boldness in her expression fading fast. “Cathryn, what nonsense are you talking about? Have you lost your mind?”

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Facing the crowd, Cathryn didn't flinch. "You've all seen the headlines, haven't you? The Grant family lining their pockets under the guise of charity?"

Chatter broke out around them. The story had made the rounds, sure—but after Vanessa strutted back into work, boasting about her family's connection to the Brooks family, everyone assumed the scandal had been buried.

A voice from the back spoke up. "Weren't the Grants supposed to be marrying into the Brooks family? Mr. Brooks would never just drop the Grant family, right?"

A slow, knowing smile spread across Cathryn's lips. "That's strange, don't you think? Mr. Brooks personally sent Douglas to prison. If there really were an engagement, would he put his own future grandfather-in-law behind bars?"

Another wave of whispers rolled through the crowd. Was it possible the entire engagement had been nothing more than a made-up story?

Vanessa had always carried herself like the future Mrs. Brooks, bullying coworkers under that pretense. Now those same coworkers stared at her with open contempt.

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Enraged, Vanessa shouted, "You're just jealous, Cathryn! You don't even know Mr. Brooks. Stop making things up!"

Cathryn let out a laugh. “You’re right. I don’t know him. But you keep bragging about your relationship, so why not give him a call? Let’s see if he’ll come down and fire Sophie just for you.”

A desperate whimper slipped from Bessie. “No, please... I’ll do anything. I’ll get on my knees. I’ll even clean her shoes...”

“Stop it, Mom!” Sophie cut in, her voice hard.

But Bessie was trembling so badly she could barely stand. The Grants and the Brookses were far beyond what people like them could afford to provoke.

Bessie reached for Cathryn’s hand, her voice unsteady and trembling with emotion. “I understand you’re trying to help, but we can’t cross the Grant family or the Brooks family...”

Cathryn held her hand with steady pressure. “You don’t have to be scared, Bessie. I’m right here with you.”

Deep down, Cathryn almost hoped Vanessa would actually try calling Andrew. She knew Andrew wouldn’t lift a finger to help a woman like Vanessa.

But Bessie's eyes brimmed with doubt. What could a girl like Cathryn really do—someone so young, with no education, who scrubbed floors for a living?

Just then, Ethan walked into the lobby. The moment the staff saw him, silence fell.

Waving both arms in the air, Vanessa did everything she could to catch Ethan's attention. A polite nod was all she got in return. Ethan's gaze barely lingered, and it was obvious he had no idea who she was.

Pleased with herself, Vanessa beamed at the crowd. "See? Mr. Owens and I know each other well."

Cathryn raised her voice, clear and confident, just as Ethan approached the elevator. "Excuse me, Mr. Owens, could you spare a second?"

Spotting Cathryn in the lobby, Ethan paused. He assumed the only reason someone like her would be here was for an undercover inspection. He turned on his heel and strode forward, pushing through the crowd toward Cathryn.

Vanessa hissed under her breath, "What are you doing, Cathryn?"

A gentle smile played on Cathryn's lips. "Since everyone's so invested in your connection to Mr. Brooks, let's hear it from someone who actually knows him."

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Chapter 267:

Sweat prickled at Vanessa’s temples. Never in her wildest dreams did she expect Cathryn to drag Andrew’s secretary into this mess with a room full of witnesses. Whispers swirled among the employees—how could a janitor have the nerve to flag down Ethan?

Ethan’s demeanor shifted the moment he reached Cathryn, and he greeted her with unmistakable warmth. “Do you need something, Ms. Moore?”

Andrew had drilled it into Ethan: never reveal the details of Andrew’s relationship with Cathryn.

A stunned silence swept through the lobby. Ethan was notoriously distant, never going out of his way for anyone. And yet, here he was, addressing a cleaner with respect.

Vanessa seized the moment, eager to shift the spotlight. “Mr. Owens, you can confirm Mr. Brooks’s engagement, right?”

Ethan nodded, his expression impassive. “Yes. I’m aware of it.” He had been the one to draft Andrew’s prenup.

A ripple went through the room. “So Vanessa really is engaged to Mr. Brooks.”

Fear tightened Bessie’s grip on Sophie’s hand. Both of them wished they had never crossed Vanessa.

The shock hit Cathryn like a wave. Andrew was engaged?

Ethan’s gaze sharpened as he turned squarely to Vanessa. “Miss Grant, you’ve caused enough trouble by spreading baseless rumors about your supposed relationship with Mr. Brooks. If this continues, Brooks Group won’t hesitate to dismiss you.”

Every hint of color drained from Vanessa’s cheeks. One moment, she’d been the queen of the room; the next, she was utterly humiliated.

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For once, the office gossips didn't bother to hide their laughter, savoring every second of Vanessa's disgrace. "So Vanessa was never engaged to Mr. Brooks? Talk about a public meltdown."

Relief swept over Bessie and Sophie, their fear dissolving as they realized the danger had passed.

A soft exhale escaped Cathryn. So Vanessa had been bluffing all along. But another question burned in her mind: who was Andrew's real fiancée? If she could find that out, maybe her own path to him would finally open.

Ethan's voice pulled Cathryn back. "Ms. Moore, do you need anything else?" His professional smile never wavered.

Cathryn answered with a gentle shake of her head. "That's all for now. Thank you, Mr. Owens."

"Yes." With a respectful bow, Ethan slipped away, disappearing back into the flow of the office.

All around them, the staff stood frozen, eyes wide with shock. Why did it sound like Ethan was taking orders from Cathryn? And there was something in his tone that went beyond simple courtesy—something closer to genuine respect.

Cathryn hadn't even noticed she'd fallen back into the same rhythm she always shared with Ethan when no one else was around.

Turning back, Cathryn gently wrapped her fingers around Bessie's hand and gave it a comforting squeeze. "You don't have to worry, Bessie. You're safe now."

Bessie dabbed delicately at the corners of her eyes, her voice trembling with sincere emotion as she looked at Cathryn. "I believe in you."

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Chapter 268:

The courage Cathryn had shown—standing tall against Vanessa and even daring to address Andrew’s secretary—had stirred a deep respect in Bessie.

Vanessa, however, clenched her jaw, grinding her teeth. “My engagement to Andrew was arranged by my grandfather and Cara. As long as he hasn’t taken a wife, I still have a chance.”

Her stubborn declaration earned only contempt. The onlookers regarded her with thinly veiled disdain, their eyes like daggers. Humiliation burned through Vanessa’s veins—too bitter to swallow. She snatched up her phone and spat into it, “Jordyn, that insufferable Cathryn humiliated me in front of everyone, siding with that Sophie Blake.”

Jordyn’s response dripped with venom. “Cathryn again? Why does she refuse to vanish like the nobody she is?”

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“She’s nothing more than a janitor!” Vanessa hissed. “Yet somehow, Mr. Owens treated her as though she mattered.”

“Don’t worry,” Jordyn replied, her voice cold as steel. “I’ll make certain she regrets it at my birthday party tonight.”

Jordyn's eyes glinted with malice. She had recently dug into Cathryn's background and learned that a man had been shadowing her for weeks—Vince Garrity. An ex-convict. Society's refuse. As Jordyn studied Vince's details, a thought took hold. Judging by his age, Vince might be Cathryn's biological father.

Tonight, beneath glittering chandeliers where Olekgan's elite would gather, Jordyn planned to strike. She would rip Cathryn's mask away and expose her not as a Moore, but as the daughter of a convict. By the end of the night, Cathryn's name would be smeared across the city, her reputation shattered beyond repair. All that remained was to lure Vince into the open.

On the thirty-eighth floor of Brooks Group headquarters, inside the CEO's office, Ethan reported, "Liam just called. He requested to borrow some of our janitorial staff."

Andrew reclined in his leather chair, the city skyline gleaming beyond the glass. "Has the code Jordyn delivered cleared testing yet?"

"It's still running. So far, no anomalies," Ethan replied.

Andrew's gaze sharpened, suspicion flickering in the depths of his eyes. Could Jordyn truly be Kestrel?

"If there are no problems, shall we implement the code companywide?" Ethan ventured cautiously.

“No.” Andrew’s tone was edged with authority. “Keep testing.”

Trust was a currency Andrew did not grant lightly. If Jordyn’s code carried hidden flaws and they launched it on a large scale, the entire corporation could collapse overnight. His enemies would seize that moment to unseat him—and Cara was already sharpening her knives for the opportunity.

“Understood.” Ethan inclined his head. “And regarding Watson Tech’s request for our janitors...”

Andrew considered, his lips curling faintly. Watson couldn’t possibly cause chaos with a few cleaning staff. More likely, it was a clumsy attempt to ingratiate himself with Brooks Group. He gave a faint, dismissive wave. “It’s only cleaning staff, not engineers. Let them have what they want.”

“Understood.”

Moments later, Ethan relayed the order to Facilities. “Expect a call from Mr. Watson of Watson Tech. Grant him what he asks.”

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Chapter 269:

“Yes.”

Downstairs, Cathryn slipped into her gray uniform, mop and bucket in tow. Yesterday, Bessie had covered her restroom duties. Today, she had to do her job.

But Bessie stopped Cathryn, catching the mop handle with a firm grip. “You take the hallways today.”

Cathryn smiled softly. “Bessie, I can’t keep letting you cover for me.”

Bessie’s eyes softened as she studied Cathryn’s delicate features. She chuckled warmly. “Do you have a boyfriend?”

Cathryn blinked, caught off guard. “Why would you ask that?”

“If you don’t, how about I introduce you to someone?” Bessie asked with a gentle laugh.

From the first moment Bessie had met Kathryn, she’d felt a soft spot for her. And just last night, her daughter had come home glowing, gushing about a wonderful new friend—only for Bessie to realize it was Kathryn.

After today’s events, Bessie’s admiration for Kathryn had only deepened.

“I have a son,” Bessie continued proudly. “Not extraordinary, but steady. Dependable. The company he works for may not rival Brooks Group, but it’s a respected firm. He works at Watson Tech.”

The name jolted Kathryn like a spark of static. Her eyes sharpened. “Watson Tech?”

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Bessie beamed. “Yes. He’s doing very well. Watson Tech is about to go public, and he’s invested every bit of his savings into their stock.”

Cathryn clutched Bessie's hand, urgency tightening her voice. "Bessie, tell your son to sell his Watson Tech shares. Sell them immediately."

Bessie blinked in surprise. "I don't understand stocks—that's young people's business."

Cathryn held her gaze, solemn and unflinching. "Listen to me. He must sell. And if he has the chance, he should change jobs. He shouldn't stay at Watson Tech."

Bessie frowned, confused. "But I heard Watson Tech just signed a contract with Brooks Group. How could there be a problem?"

"Do you trust me?" Kathryn pressed, her voice low and steady.

There was a pause. Then, slowly, Bessie nodded. Kathryn might lack a degree, but there was something unshakable about her—an inner strength that demanded belief.

Relief loosened Kathryn's chest. She knew the truth: Watson Tech was hollow, its books cooked, its future already crumbling. The IPO was nothing but smoke and mirrors.

Bessie gave Kathryn's hand a gentle squeeze, her eyes kind. "Then I'll do as you say. But tell me, Kathryn... would you consider my son?"

Cathryn nearly dropped the mop. “Bessie, your son is a college graduate, isn’t he? I never even finished elementary school.”

“Nonsense,” Bessie scolded affectionately. “A diploma doesn’t raise a family. Character does—and you have more of that than most people I know.”

Cathryn bit her lip, cheeks warming. “Bessie, the truth is, I’m actually—”

Before she could finish—before she could admit she was already married—a voice cut across the hallway, shattering the moment.

“Why are you standing around chatting during work hours? Finish your tasks and be ready to head out with me this afternoon.” Aleena’s sharp voice cut through the doorway.

With a playful grin, Cathryn winked at Bessie before hurrying off, mop in tow.

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Watching Cathryn disappear down the hall, Bessie's heart tightened. That girl was far too young for a life spent cleaning up after others. Someday, she promised herself, she would find a way to make Cathryn part of her family—if only so she could protect her from a world that never seemed to give her a break.

Floor by floor, Cathryn powered through her chores until her hands ached and fresh blisters bloomed. She had grown up shut away in the servants' wing, eating, sleeping, and working alongside the staff. Mopping floors was nothing new.

On the thirty-eighth floor, Cathryn rolled her bucket into the restroom—only to freeze mid-step. Something didn't feel right.

She lifted her eyes and went still.

A tall man stood at the urinal, his fly undone, his body shamelessly exposed. The shock hit her like a slap—there was no mistaking what she'd seen.

The bucket slipped from her grip and crashed to the floor, sending soapy water splashing everywhere. Snapping back to herself, Cathryn whirled around and clapped both hands over her face. “I’m so sorry! I had no idea anyone was in here!”

Fury flared across Andrew’s face—then his expression flickered with shock when he recognized the woman in the doorway. Why was it Cathryn?

Horrificed, Cathryn abandoned her mop and bucket and bolted from the room.

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Outside the elevators, she collided with someone, nearly sending them both sprawling.

“Slow down, Cathryn! What happened?” Sophie steadied her, concern shining in her eyes.

Cheeks blazing, Cathryn mumbled, “It’s nothing, really...”

Sophie didn’t believe her. She guided Cathryn to the break room, pressed a cup of coffee into her hands, and asked softly, “You just came from the thirty-eighth floor, didn’t you?”

Cathryn managed only a small nod.

Sophie's face lit up. "Wait—did you actually run into Mr. Brooks?"

Another nod from Cathryn, her eyes fixed on the floor.

Unable to contain herself, Sophie grabbed Cathryn's arm, her voice bubbling with curiosity. "So? What's he like? Tell me everything!"

All Cathryn could picture was what she'd accidentally glimpsed—not his face, only the vivid memory of his penis. Still drowning in embarrassment, she mumbled, "He's... big. Really big."

Sophie blinked, confused. "Big? What are you talking about?" She'd never heard anyone describe a man like that before.

Snapping back to her senses, Cathryn hid her face behind her coffee. "Never mind. It was a total accident. I just barged in on him in the restroom. I didn't even get a good look at his face."

It didn't take Sophie long to connect the dots. A grin spread across her face, her tone turning wickedly mischievous. "Cathryn, don't tell me you actually saw—"

Before Sophie could finish, Cathryn clapped a hand over her mouth. “Keep your voice down! If anyone overhears, it’ll cause trouble.”

Sophie rolled her eyes, unfazed. “Who’s going to care? Certainly not that spoiled brat Vanessa—Mr. Owens already said she’s not Mr. Brooks’s girlfriend.”

Still, Cathryn’s brow furrowed. “Yeah, but someone’s engaged to him. We just have no idea who.”

A playful giggle escaped Sophie. “Whoever she is, I bet she counts her lucky stars every night. That man has a lot to offer.”

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