

Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 81:

When she returned home, a subtle smile lingered at the corners of her lips.

Andrew strolled toward her with his hands tucked casually into his pockets. “Where did you disappear to?”

“I married you, but I didn’t sign over my freedom. Do I have to report my every move?”

His arm slid around her waist, drawing her in until her hip brushed his. His gaze—sharp and brooding—caught hers. “No reports. But meeting with another man? That’s off-limits.”

Her lashes fluttered as she said lightly, “I went to see Liam.”

“You—” Andrew’s hold around her waist turned possessive, unyielding.

“I let him know I’m a married woman,” she added, her tone careless as if it meant nothing at all.

A slight arch rose in Andrew’s brows. He tilted her chin up with one finger. “Good girl.”

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He had suspected Liam hadn’t moved on. Now her words confirmed it.

Their breaths mingled in the narrow space between them, bodies pressed close, the air thick with gathering heat.

Color climbed Cathryn’s neck as she lowered her gaze and whispered, barely audible, “My period... it’s over.”

The words slipped out before she could stop them, and immediately she wanted the floor to swallow her whole. Why had she said that? Yet her body had been restless for days, skin prickling, chest and stomach humming with a strange, aching warmth. Her thoughts betrayed her, flashing images of Damien stepping from the shower, water tracing the hard lines of his torso.

Andrew’s breath caught for a beat. He’d planned to coax her slowly, step by step—but she had just opened the door for him. His palm slid into her hair, fingers warm against her scalp, his voice low and velvet-smooth. “Tonight, you shower first.”

Last time, he'd waited for her in bed, only for everything to be ruined by her period. This time, nothing was being left to chance.

Cathryn gave a small nod, still blushing fiercely. "Let's use my room..." she murmured.

She showered first, leaving the steam-slick bathroom for him. Tonight, his shower ran longer than usual, the faint hiss of water carrying through the walls.

Curled beneath the covers, Cathryn propped up her phone and worked quickly, fingers flying as she reinforced her firewalls. Hackers had traced her once—she wasn't about to give them another chance. She was halfway through the final step when the door creaked open.

Andrew strode in, damp hair clinging to his temples, a towel hanging low on his hips.

Heat surged into her cheeks. She ducked under the quilt, heart hammering, too shy to look at him directly. The first time they'd been together, the room had been swallowed in shadows, and even after that night, she still couldn't bring herself to stare at his body openly.

"Are you ready?" he murmured, his tone gentle.

She nodded quickly, her face burning.

He lifted the quilt and slid in beside her, his warmth erasing the space between them.

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Chapter 82:

The clean scent of his skin mingled with the furnace-like heat radiating from him, flooding her senses. It felt like a spell tightening around her, pulling her in until resistance became impossible.

Before she even realized what she was doing, her legs curled around his waist, her body fitting to his as if it had always belonged there.

A shadow crossed Andrew's gaze, dark and ravenous. Her unguarded eagerness hit him like a drug—addictive, overwhelming.

He lowered his head, his mouth closing over the curve of her breast.

Cathryn's breath hitched as a scorching jolt tore through her, heat bursting behind her eyes like sparks. A shaky moan slipped out before she could swallow it.

That sound snapped the last thin thread of Andrew's restraint. Desire surged through him as his hand slid lower, hooked the edge of her underwear, and tugged it away. Even if the world turned to ash tonight, nothing would stop him from pulling her close and claiming her.

Right before her final sliver of resolve gave out, Cathryn tapped the last key on her phone, sealing the final layer of her firewall. No hacker would ever find her again.

Then she parted her lips and let Damien's searing kiss swallow her whole.

Abruptly, a shrill ringtone shattered the moment, slicing through the charged silence. It was Andrew's phone on the nightstand. He ended the call with a sharp jab, irritation tightening his jaw.

The phone rang again, and he shut it off without hesitation.

It screamed a third time.

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This time, he didn't silence it. Three calls in a row—that was the code between him and Karl. It could only mean one thing.

Kestrel.

Cathryn grabbed his arm, her eyes bright with urgency and heat. "Don't pick up."

Her plea almost undid him. He stared down at her, every muscle straining to ignore the phone and lose himself in her instead. But iron control locked him in place.

"One word," he murmured, brushing a fleeting kiss over her lips before he thumbed the screen.

"Karl."

“Mr. Brooks,” Karl’s voice came fast and sharp. “We just picked up Kestrel’s signal at Crownspire Villa. It only lasted a few seconds—then it vanished.”

Andrew’s head snapped up, shock flashing through his eyes. Crownspire Villa—the very house he was in right now.

Cathryn, desire still shimmering across her face, tightened her grip on his arm.

Heat surged through Andrew’s veins as his fists clenched, every muscle locking as he fought for control. How the hell had Kestrel breached his own home?

Andrew couldn’t shake the thought that Kestrel might have slipped into the house disguised as staff.

The idea hit him with the cold bite of steel. His chest tightened as he drew a sharp breath. He leaned over Kathryn and pressed a fleeting kiss to her lips, but his mind was already elsewhere. “Stay here. Give me ten minutes.”

Before she could answer, he gathered his discarded clothes with swift, practiced motions and strode out of the bedroom, the door closing behind him with a muted thud.

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Chapter 83:

Cathryn sat upright, fists clenched. Frustration swelled in her chest until it spilled out in a strangled cry. She slammed her fists into the mattress, the dull thuds echoing her anger. “Damien, you bastard!”

He’d lit a fire in her veins, only to abandon her to the blaze he’d started.

Meanwhile, Andrew’s long strides carried him to the living room, where Gavin waited—composed as ever. Andrew’s eyes flashed with command. “Bring every servant in the house here.”

Within six minutes, the household staff assembled beneath the chandelier’s pale light, forming two rigid rows. Their faces were a patchwork of apprehension and confusion.

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Most of the women, in plain uniforms, looked to be in their forties or older, hands clasped in front of them. A few men stood among them, broad-backed and stooped with age, their expressions solemn. At the end of the line hovered a boy of about eighteen, posture restless, gaze skittish.

Andrew's attention snapped to him. His voice cut through the heavy silence. "Who are you?"

The boy flinched, shrinking behind one of the older men.

The man offered a sheepish smile. "He's my son."

Gavin stepped forward, voice calm and matter-of-fact. "That's Walter Briggs, the gardener. His son left school early—he wasn't much for studying—and he's been learning the floral work at his father's side."

Andrew's eyes narrowed as he took a step closer. The boy shifted, shoulders hunched.

"Do you know computers?" Andrew asked.

The boy nodded faintly. “Yes.”

Andrew’s pulse quickened, his gaze sharpening with sudden interest. “Programming?”

The boy shook his head, his voice small. “No. I just play games.”

Walter’s hand shot out, cuffing him sharply across the head. “Still daring to mention games?”

Andrew’s expression hardened, disappointment weighing on his features. “So—you can’t write code?”

The boy nodded. “Don’t know a thing about it. That takes real schooling. College, at least.”

Walter bent low, his laugh forced and nervous. “Mr. Brooks, you give him too much credit. He’s hopeless with his books—that’s why he dropped out. If he had even a spark of talent, I would’ve moved heaven and earth to keep him in school.”

Andrew’s scowl deepened, the shadows across his face turning stark. He swept his gaze over the assembled group, eyes searching for any flicker of unease. “What is your education level?”

Gavin, standing straight as a blade, answered evenly. “Mostly middle or high school, Mr. Brooks. Only the nutritionist is university-trained, but he’s on leave.”

Andrew’s jaw set, a muscle ticking. Kestrel’s unmistakable signal had appeared here, within the walls of his own estate. That meant the nutritionist’s absence ruled him out.

Andrew’s gaze moved from face to face, probing. “Any of you skilled with computers?”

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Chapter 84:

The servants exchanged uneasy glances. A ripple of nervous laughter broke the silence. One of the maids finally found her courage. “Mr. Brooks, you must be kidding. We can barely turn them on.”

Andrew’s stare lingered on Margaret. She lifted her hands quickly, as if shielding herself from suspicion. “Please, Mr. Brooks, don’t ask me. I only finished primary school. I know nothing about computers.”

“Is everyone here?” Andrew demanded.

Gavin answered steadily. “All except the nutritionist. And Mrs. Brooks has retired for the night.”

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Andrew’s brow twitched as his thoughts churned. Could Kestrel be Cathryn?

The idea flickered—dangerous and absurd—before he forced it away. Margaret had at least completed primary school. Cathryn had never set foot in a classroom, not even for a single day.

Illiterate, through and through. The boy was right. True programmers were forged in universities, shaped by years of discipline. And whoever had written that world-shaking code would be far beyond anything ordinary. It was far more likely that Kestrel was Jordyn.

Still, unease gnawed at Andrew. The signal had flared here, inside these walls, only to vanish without a trace. Had someone stumbled upon Kestrel's phone?

"Did anyone here come across a phone?" Andrew asked, his voice weighted with suspicion.

Blank stares met him. Heads shook in unison—quick, eager denials.

The fire in Andrew's eyes dimmed, but instinct still pulsed in his veins. Kestrel was close. Too close. Right under his nose, and yet still invisible.

At last, Andrew exhaled and dismissed them with a flick of his hand. "You may go."

The servants filed out, footsteps whispering over marble. Silence returned—thick, suffocating. Andrew decided Kestrel could wait. The night ahead with Cathryn... that was his true pursuit.

He turned back toward her bedroom, his stride quick with anticipation. He reached for the door, but it wouldn't move.

Locked. From the inside.

His chest sank. He rapped softly, the sound almost pleading against the polished wood. “Cathryn, it’s me.”

Her voice came tight, trembling with simmering anger. “You seem very busy. I’d rather let you be and not disturb you. Good night.”

Andrew closed his eyes, forcing calm into his breathing. When he spoke again, his tone was gentler—coaxing. “Cathryn, it was my fault. Whatever you want to unleash on me as punishment, I’ll accept it. Just don’t shut me out.”

A pause. Then the faint click of the lock. The door opened a fraction.

Hope rose in his chest like a tide.

But the moment he stepped forward, she lifted her leg and pressed her bare foot against his chest, holding him back with a strength born of fury. Her eyes burned into his—sharp, unyielding.

“Who exactly have you been looking for?” she demanded. From the moment she had met him, he always seemed to be chasing someone.

“You’re not looking for another woman, are you?” Her voice cut—sudden and bright with anger.

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Chapter 85:

A moment ago, Andrew had been ready to take her, every nerve taut with desire. Heat surged through him, reckless and unrestrained, urging him to claim what...

...stood so perilously within reach. Then the sharp trill of the telephone cut through the room, slicing the moment in two.

Cathryn's world measured a man's sudden departure in simple terms: a man who walked out on a woman in bed did so for one reason only—another woman.

Andrew reached for her ankle, his fingers catching it and giving a gentle, searching squeeze, as if trying to steady something within both of them. His voice dropped. "It's nothing like that. Just work. There is nothing else."

She had never been to school. The longer explanations he kept—about encrypted lines and vulnerabilities and someone named Kestrel—would have been a foreign language to her. He had learned the necessity of letting certain arguments die rather than grinding them down until they scraped raw.

"Then go to bed with your precious work," she snapped, the slam of the bedroom door echoing like a verdict.

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He left her burning—thirsty like a traveler reaching for water and finding only sand. And then he hit the brakes and told her to wait ten minutes.

By the time the minutes dragged themselves across the clock, each one stretched thin as wire, her longing had soured into something darker. The ache in her chest hardened and blistered until it was no longer yearning, but fury.

Outside the door, he stood and nearly got struck in the face by its force.

Andrew fished his phone from his pocket just as it began to ring again. Karl's name flashed on the screen, the urgency in his voice an audible tremor even through the line. "Kestrel has reinforced the firewall. We can't break in."

Andrew's jaw clenched until it ached. "Then you might as well brace for my wrath," he said, each word a small hammer blow.

He cut the call and let the phone settle back into his hand. The timing of every interruption felt personally malicious; of all the minutes Karl could have chosen to call, he had picked the exact one when Andrew was about to take his wife. Karl was heaven-sent only to ruin him.

Karl, on the other end of the line, stared at his screen, wondering what he had said to provoke such a reaction. What had he said wrong?

Karl replayed the entire conversation with Andrew in his head and found nothing wrong.

Andrew had always been explicit: anything related to Kestrel went straight to him—no delays. If Andrew didn't answer immediately, Karl was to call three times in a row. It was their silent signal that something urgent had come up with Kestrel, and Andrew would pick up no matter what.

Karl had followed those instructions like gospel, so he couldn't understand how he'd managed to upset Andrew now.

Meanwhile, Andrew trudged back to the guest room and fell across the bed, completely drained. He'd finally made progress with Cathryn, and he had no intention of letting it slip away.

Just as Cathryn drifted off to sleep, Margaret's frantic knock rattled her door.

"Mrs. Brooks, something's wrong!"

Cathryn shot upright, startled. "What happened?"

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Chapter 86:

Margaret sounded genuinely panicked. “It’s Mr. Brooks. He’s throwing up and running a fever. I think it’s food poisoning!”

Cathryn dressed quickly and yanked the door open. “What did he eat tonight?”

Margaret wrung her hands, clearly on edge. “He ate the usual dinner. I can’t figure out what went wrong—everything was normal until now.”

Cathryn marched toward the guest room. “Wake Gavin and get Andrew to the hospital.”

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The moment she turned the doorknob and stepped inside, she was yanked in hard—and the door swung shut behind her.

Darkness swallowed the room. In the next instant, strong arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her onto the bed.

“You’re really this worried about me?” His deep voice rumbled against her ear, smooth and warm.

It didn't take Cathryn long to catch on. Damien wasn't suffering from food poisoning—he'd staged it to lure her over.

She shoved at his chest, not bothering to hide her irritation. "You did this on purpose."

Andrew let out a low laugh. "You've been 'seducing' me on purpose more than once. Can't I plan something intentional for a change?"

She gave a sharp laugh and rolled her eyes. "I never seduced you. You're so full of yourself."

He grinned, pinning her in place. "Honey, I've been learning a few skills, just waiting for the chance to try them on you. Want to see how I perform this time?"

She glared back at him, cheeks flushed. "Don't call me honey." She reminded herself their marriage only lasted a year, which made the sweetness of an endearment feel wrong.

Andrew brushed her protest aside and murmured, "I don't care, honey."

His lips claimed hers—soft at first, then with a growing urgency. In that instant, Cathryn understood this was it. She was finally about to surrender to him, body and heart. Nerves fluttered through her, and she trembled as anticipation rose in waves.

Andrew noticed and paused, stroking her gently. His voice stayed steady and warm. “It’s alright. Trust me. I’ll make you feel good.”

The reassurance soothed her, loosening the tightness in her chest until her tension melted away.

He guided her through every moment, careful and attentive, and Cathryn discovered a kind of pleasure she had never known. Instead of pain, it felt as though she were weightless—lifted higher and higher by his touch.

That night, she found comfort in every sense, her body and soul finally at peace in his arms.

When morning came, sunlight spilled through the curtains, and they woke tangled together.

Heat crept up Cathryn’s cheeks as fragments of the night rushed back to her.

Andrew chuckled and tightened his embrace. “How is it you blush over the smallest things?”

She gave his chest a light push, still flustered. “Because you’re shameless.”

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Chapter 87:

Andrew caught her hand and kissed her palm, his smile lazy. “Think I’m shameless? Just wait. I haven’t even started.”

Cathryn’s eyes widened. “What are you planning to do?”

A playful smile tugged at Andrew’s lips, full of teasing intent. “Surely you don’t think a man stops at one round.”

She pressed a hand to her chest, incredulous. “You didn’t stop at one last night... I lost count after three...”

Even when she begged him to ease up, he only held her tighter, determined to prove he still had plenty of stamina left.

Andrew arched an eyebrow. “According to my calculations, that was just one round.”

Cathryn glared at him. “You really don’t know when to quit.”

With a sly grin, he drew her closer and guided her hand down beneath the covers. “Want to find out where I’ll stop pushing? Try it...”

Cathryn resisted, but Andrew was relentless, tugging her back against him and pulling the blanket over them again.

Sunlight spilled across the room, chasing away the secrecy of the night, yet they still ended up tangled together in the bright morning—breathing hard, hearts racing all over again.

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Cathryn's cheeks burned. Giving in to him with daylight pouring through the window made everything feel even more daring.

Hours slipped by before Andrew finally let her go, leaving her limp and exhausted against the pillows.

Andrew sat up and gently rubbed her waist. "Take it slow today. I'll ask Margaret to bring breakfast up. You need to recover." He pressed a kiss to her damp hair.

Cathryn forced herself upright. "Absolutely not," she protested. The thought of the staff gossiping if they saw trays delivered to their bedroom in broad daylight—rather than dining downstairs—made her want to disappear.

Andrew caught her hesitation and teased her, giving her nose a playful tweak. "We're married, you know. What's the harm in a little breakfast in bed?"

Cathryn quickly hid her face behind her hands. "Please. Just don't let Margaret bring the meal here."

Andrew laughed and squeezed her hand. "Fine. Then let's head downstairs and eat together."

She shook her head. "You go first. Give me ten minutes to pull myself together."

With the servants bustling around outside, she couldn't bring herself to walk out of the bedroom at his side. It would be far too obvious what had happened in here.

Andrew looked at her, genuinely confused. "Why so shy, honey?"

Cathryn fixed him with a serious stare. "Stop calling me that."

With a subtle arch of his brow, Andrew answered indulgently, "Sure, if that's what you want."

Cathryn fixed him with a sharp look, steady-eyed. "You go out first."

Smiling, he gave her hair a playful ruffle before pulling on his clothes and stepping out, the door clicking shut behind him. Only then did her chest loosen. She rose and went to the mirror to get dressed—then froze.

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Chapter 88:

Hickeys bloomed across her neck, a trail of bruised red where his mouth had lingered. They were bold, scandalous, and impossible to miss.

She yanked a high-collared dress over her head, trying to hide every trace. Damien was infuriating. He could stroll out calm and smug, while she was left to face the world like this.

She lingered in the room longer than she meant to, waiting until her stomach's hungry growl finally drove her out. Unable to put it off any longer, she slipped out of the bedroom.

The living room, normally alive with the servants' footsteps and chatter, lay in hushed stillness. A lavish breakfast spread gleamed on the dining table, perfectly arranged.

In an instant, it clicked for Cathryn. Damien had clearly sent the staff away, knowing how shy she was, leaving her free to eat in peace.

A soft smile touched her lips. She hadn't expected this kind of quiet consideration from him.

Her thoughts drifted back to last night—to the way he'd watched every flicker of her expression, holding himself back for her sake. She had whispered, "Don't worry about me." But he had kissed her with exquisite care and promised in a low murmur, "I won't let you feel even the slightest pain."

Just then, her phone vibrated. Damien's name lit up the screen.

"Have you eaten?"

"Just starting now," she replied, warmth curling in her chest.

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Andrew's low chuckle rumbled through the line. "Why so late?"

"I wasn't hungry," she lied stiffly, unwilling to give him another chance to tease her about being bashful.

His voice dipped, smooth and intimate. “Last night... did it feel good?”

Cathryn nearly dropped the phone, her ear scorching as if someone had pressed a hot coal to it. Saying things like that under the sheets was one thing, but hearing it in broad daylight was mortifying.

“There’s no one beside me,” Andrew added, his tone light.

A small breath slipped out as her shoulders finally relaxed. “Mm-hm,” she mumbled, unwilling to confess how much she’d enjoyed it.

That tiny sound was all the confirmation he needed. A low laugh rumbled down the line. “So my technique isn’t bad. Don’t worry—I’ll only get better.”

“And you’re that smug about it? Ha!” Her face burning, she hung up before he could say anything else.

Not long after, she changed clothes, slipped quietly out of the house, and bought contraceptives at the nearest pharmacy.

At the same time, Andrew lounged back in his leather chair, twirling his phone between his fingers, a lazy, satisfied smile curving his lips.

He couldn't have been more pleased with last night. Every inch of her body, every soft gasp, had pulled him deeper under her spell.

"Cathryn..." He whispered her name, savoring it, warmth flooding his chest.

His phone buzzed, yanking him from his reverie. Amanda's name flashed on the screen.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 89:

“Grandma...” he began, but Amanda’s sharp tone crashed over him. “That night—the one you slept with—it wasn’t the Hathaway girl I chose for you. Tell me, who was she?”

A chill swept through him. “What exactly are you trying to say, Grandma?”

“I just got off the phone with Mrs. Hathaway. She swears her granddaughter never met you that night. So tell me—who was that woman in your bed?”

Andrew pushed up from his seat in one swift motion, his features hardening to steel. So Cathryn hadn’t been the one his grandmother had chosen at all. Then who on earth had she been?

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“Damien, answer me!” Amanda pressed, her tone slicing through the silence like a blade.

“I... I don’t know,” he admitted, each syllable carrying a bleak, hollow edge. If Cathryn wasn’t handpicked by Amanda, how had she ended up in his hotel room that night? Had Cara planted her there on purpose?

A vise seemed to clamp around Andrew’s chest, his heart surging into his throat as his fist clenched tight.

Amanda's questions still rang in his ears, but he ended the call with a sharp tap and pulled up the surveillance footage.

Footage from that night in the hotel hallway played on-screen, rewound and replayed until every frame was burned into his mind.

Cathryn appeared, scanning room numbers one after another, restless and intent.

Her steps stopped at his door.

With a soft creak, the door swung open, and she slipped inside without hesitation.

Andrew's jaw locked, his molars grinding until pain shot through his temples. Had Cara orchestrated the entire thing—sending Kathryn into his room while he was too drunk to resist—then letting Kathryn play innocent, prodding his temper until he proposed on his own?

The more he replayed her tiny hesitations, her guarded glances, the tighter suspicion coiled in his chest. It had to be true. Cara had done this deliberately—saddling him with a divorced, uneducated woman just to humiliate him.

Andrew's fist crashed down on the desk, the sharp sound echoing through the room. He snatched up his phone and barked an order to Karl, "Find out if Cara and Kathryn have ever run into each other."

He wasted no time calling Gavin next. “From now on, you watch Cathryn’s every step. When she leaves the house—where she goes, who she meets—I want it all on record.”

Andrew was certain that if Cathryn truly was Cara’s pawn, she would slip up sooner or later.

Back at Crownspire Villa, Cathryn hesitated outside the guest room Andrew had been using, warmth rising to her cheeks. “Take his bedding and set it up in my room,” she murmured to Margaret. After everything that had happened between them, she saw no reason to keep him at a distance anymore.

“Right away, Mrs. Brooks.” Margaret’s face lit up as she bustled off to gather the pillows and quilts and carry them into the master bedroom.

The rest of the staff caught on at once, delighted. To them, newlyweds finally sharing a room was only natural. Sleeping apart after marriage—what kind of nonsense was that?

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 90:

A low, cutting voice split the air. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Startled, Cathryn turned sharply, her heart lurching. Damien stood in the doorway, his face shadowed like gathering thunder.

Margaret froze, clutching the pillow to her chest, yet still forcing a smile. “Mrs. Brooks asked me to move your bedding into her room...”

“Put it back,” Andrew murmured, his voice stripped of any hint of feeling.

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Cathryn’s eyes widened in disbelief as she stared at Damien. Margaret hovered in the master bedroom doorway, her gaze darting between Andrew and Cathryn.

With a sharp glare at Margaret, Andrew snapped, “Take my things back to the guest room. Did you not hear me?”

Margaret flinched, then hurried to gather his bedding and return everything to its original place.

The rest of the staff exchanged uneasy glances, not daring to ask what was going on.

Heat rushed to Cathryn’s cheeks as she lingered in the doorway, humiliation tightening her chest. She had assumed last night changed everything between them. His tenderness, the way he had held her, the hours they’d spent tangled together—she’d thought it was only natural they would share a room now. She’d finally opened her heart and gathered the courage to accept him.

And yet, all he gave her now was rejection.

Worse, he made it look as though she had been the one chasing him—desperate to pull him into her bed.

Mortified, she turned to slip back inside.

“Don’t move.” Andrew’s voice cut through the air, sharp and commanding.

He closed the distance in two strides and clamped a firm hand around her throat.

Margaret rushed forward, alarm flashing across her face. “Mr. Brooks, please calm down. Why don’t you just talk this through?”

“Leave!” Andrew barked.

Both Cathryn and Margaret jolted at the harshness of his tone.

Margaret lowered her head and shot a look at the rest of the staff, silently ushering everyone out with her. She couldn’t make sense of it. Only hours ago, Andrew and Cathryn had seemed inseparable, wrapped up in each other well into late morning. He’d been smiling all day, and the bruised marks on Cathryn’s neck said enough about what had happened. Even when Cathryn thought she was alone, she couldn’t hide the way her lips kept curving into soft, private smiles.

Now the air had turned brittle and cold. Andrew looked furious, and no one could understand why.

Cathryn’s confusion sharpened into something painfully raw. Their last exchange had been full of Damien’s teasing—his lazy, intimate questions about how she’d felt the night before. And now he stood in front of her, hand at her throat, his face clouded over with something dark and unreadable.

“Who sent you to my side?” His tone was cold, unyielding.

Cathryn’s lashes fluttered as shock rippled through her. “I don’t understand. What are you talking about?”

“You’re not the woman my grandmother picked for me,” he said through gritted teeth.

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Chapter 91:

The blood drained from Cathryn's face in an instant. So he'd finally uncovered the truth.

"Did Cara send you?" His fingers tightened, digging in until she winced at the pressure.

"I don't even know who that is," she forced out, her voice strained but steady.

"Then who gave you my hotel room number?"

Even as his grip burned, she held his gaze, refusing to look away. "If I told you it was all a mistake, would you honestly believe me?"

A sharp, humorless laugh slipped from him. "Out of three hundred and thirty-eight rooms at the Olekgan Hotel, you just happened to end up at my door? You really expect me to buy that?"

Cathryn didn't hesitate. "I didn't even knock. I was in the hallway checking the number. You're the one who yanked me inside before I could say a word."

A frown carved itself into Andrew's face. His memory of that night was a wreck—too much alcohol, everything blurred at the edges. He couldn't even recall opening the door. The only thing the security footage showed was her stepping into his suite—nothing before it.

“You know the hotel has cameras all over those halls,” she said, calm and unflinching. “Feel free to review the footage yourself.”

He might have been lost in a drunken haze that night, but she remembered every detail. His room number had been 8277. Liam and Jordyn’s was 8227. One transposed digit—an easy mistake.

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Suddenly, Karl’s voice crackled through Andrew’s phone. “Mr. Brooks, I double-checked. Cathryn has no ties to Cara. If anything, Cara and Zoe have only ever exchanged a nod at charity galas. Nothing more.”

Some of the suspicion in Andrew’s eyes loosened, just slightly. “Send me the full hallway footage outside my door. Every second from that night.”

The files arrived almost instantly.

On the screen, Cathryn stood outside 8277, double-checking the number and glancing down at her phone. The next moment, a hand shot out from inside, hauled her in, and the door slammed shut.

Andrew’s lashes fluttered. Realization struck.

Cathryn's voice went cold as she met his stare. "You were the one who pulled me in, not the other way around."

Andrew swallowed hard. "Then why didn't you push me away?"

A wry smile flickered across Kathryn's lips. "I told you. I said—"

"You had the wrong person—that I was already married. You accused me of playing games with you."

Something shifted in Andrew's eyes. Even with his memory in shambles, it sounded exactly like something he might have said that night.

Cathryn kept going, her voice tightening. "Let's be honest. I didn't agree to marry you because I had some romantic dream. For three years, I was trapped in a loveless marriage with Liam while he spent every waking minute tangled up with my half-sister, Jordyn. As if that wasn't enough, the two of them joined forces with my father to kill my mother and steal everything she owned. Liam divorced me and made me walk away with nothing. Richard threw me out onto the street, leaving not a cent in my name."

Her eyes shimmered, but she forced her breathing steady. "I was desperate. The day I met you at the hospital, I overheard your assistant call you 'Mr. Brooks.' You offered marriage. I had nothing left—no family, no home, no money. So yes, I thought I could use the Brooks name to claw my way back and make them pay for what they did."

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 92:

“So you said yes because you wanted my family’s power and influence,” Andrew said, his expression unreadable.

Silence stretched between them before Cathryn finally spoke, her voice barely above a whisper. “But didn’t you marry me for a reason, too? I’ve put all my cards on the table. Maybe you should tell me—what did you want from me?”

Andrew’s eyes flicked away. “That’s not something you need to know.”

Cathryn blinked back tears, then nodded anyway. “Of course. All I’m expected to do is follow our contract.”

Before he could say another word, she spun on her heel and slammed the bedroom door.

Andrew stared at the door, then toward the guest room, frustration tightening in his chest. He’d almost managed to keep her close—almost.

“Margaret, who told you to move my bedding out of the master bedroom?” Andrew’s voice sliced through the hallway.

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Margaret froze mid-step, eyes wide. “Wasn’t it your instruction, Mr. Brooks? You told me yourself.”

Andrew muttered under his breath as he slammed the door behind him. “Obedient to a fault.”

Margaret stood there, stunned. No wonder Cathryn wanted nothing to do with him—who could keep up with his moods? She decided then and there that, from now on, she’d take her cues from Cathryn.

That night, Andrew tossed and turned, sleep refusing to come. He clutched his stomach and groaned loudly enough for Cathryn to hear, staging another bout of “sickness.” Margaret hurried over and reported his discomfort.

Cathryn didn’t even step out to check. “If he’s really that sick, have Gavin drive him to the hospital,” she called through the door, her voice flat as stone. She didn’t open it.

For days, the house fell into a strange routine. Cathryn stayed hidden in her room until he left, only coming out once she was sure he was gone. They lived under the same roof without crossing paths, each trapped inside their own silence.

Andrew tried calling, but she ignored him. He texted, but once the messages began to pile up, she blocked him without hesitation.

He was desperate. He scoured the internet for advice—how to placate her. He sent flowers, expensive gifts, even handwritten notes, but every offering found its way back to him unopened. He felt completely lost.

One afternoon, Margaret dusted quietly while Cathryn lay stretched out on the sofa, flipping through a stack of comics.

Pictures soothed her in a way words never could. She’d always hated dense paragraphs; reading them felt like wading through mud. Dyslexia made every line a battle, but she had a sharp eye for images—whether in art or code. Letters, though, had always felt like enemies.

She turned another page, jaw tight with anger. Damien's accusations still rang in her ears—no proof, just his hand clamped around her throat. If she truly had been one of Cara's spies, would he really have gone as far as to kill her? The thought made her skin crawl.

And to think she had actually worried about his comfort in the guest room—had even invited him into her room. She couldn't help but feel ridiculous now. It seemed sympathy for men only ever led to trouble.

Cathryn shook her head, trying to scrub away the memory of Damien's fingers digging into her neck. Her thoughts drifted back to the auction—the figure seated behind the frosted glass on the second floor. Andrew, silent and watchful. Same family, same blood. Yet how could two brothers be so completely different?

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 93:

Andrew had only seen her once, yet he had let her walk away with the painting after bidding thirty million. Damien, on the other hand... he had shared her bed, seen every part of her, and still dared to put his hand to her throat.

Right then, Cathryn made up her mind. She would repay the debt she owed Andrew. He had allowed her to have her mother's painting without a fight, and he had acquired plenty of her mother's collection at the auction. Someday, she would buy each piece back from him, no matter how long it took. But first, she needed a way to get closer to him.

From the other side of the room, Margaret broke the silence. "Mrs. Brooks, do you know your husband's birthday?"

As housekeeper, it was Margaret's job to keep track, and she already had Cathryn's date memorized. But Andrew's? That remained a mystery.

Cathryn answered without looking up. "I have no idea."

A spark lit in Margaret's eyes. "Would you mind asking him for me? I'd love to plan something special in advance."

Margaret had noticed the cold distance growing between Cathryn and Andrew lately. She hoped that a birthday gesture might help break the ice.

But Cathryn was still simmering with resentment. The idea of approaching Andrew herself was out of the question.

Margaret's smile faltered. "Mr. Brooks has been snapping at everyone all week. I wouldn't dare ask him anything right now."

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After a beat, Cathryn stood and slipped outside into the courtyard, where Gavin was giving directions to the staff. She didn't waste words. "Do you know when my husband's birthday is?"

Gavin answered instantly, bowing his head. "May twenty-first, Mrs. Brooks. That's in three days."

Cathryn nodded absently, turned away, then paused and glanced back. "Tell me... what sort of gift do successful men appreciate most?"

Gavin couldn't help a small smile. "Are you looking to spend big, or keep it simple?"

“Simple,” she answered without hesitation. Her budget was painfully tight.

“Cufflinks,” Gavin suggested after a thoughtful pause.

She lifted a brow. “Cufflinks?”

Gavin nodded. “A suit, a watch, shoes—those are all expensive. But cufflinks are practical, and a man can wear them every day. If you want them to mean something, you can design the pattern yourself. I’ll arrange for a jeweler to make them. It’ll be personal and affordable.”

Cathryn’s lips curved into a genuine smile. “That’s a wonderful idea. Thank you, Gavin.”

Gavin watched her walk away, still smiling, then discreetly dialed Andrew. “Mr. Brooks, your wife is planning something for your birthday. She’s picking out a gift.”

Seated at the head of a boardroom table, Andrew felt an unexpected warmth bloom in his chest. Kathryn must have forgiven him—maybe, just maybe, tonight she would finally let him back into her bed.

He forced his focus back to the meeting, pushing through the agenda with new urgency. All he wanted was to finish and rush home to her.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 94:

When Cathryn returned to the living room, she told Margaret, “His birthday is May twenty-first.”

Margaret began counting on her fingers. “That’s just three days from now.”

But Cathryn barely heard her, already lost in thought. She hurried back to her room and began sketching designs for Andrew’s cufflinks.

She browsed design galleries online—intricate animals, star maps, gears, noble insignias. None of them spoke to her. Her gaze drifted to the painting on the wall: Midnight Lilies.

Suddenly, inspiration struck. Midnight-blue lilies with a delicate silver chain. She would craft a pair of chain-link cufflinks—classic, elegant, and deeply personal.

She had chosen the gift for a reason. Andrew had let her have Midnight Lilies at the auction, a gesture she hadn't forgotten. Even if she couldn't hand the cufflinks to him in person, this would be her way of expressing gratitude.

She had read that chain-link cufflinks had been a gentleman's choice for centuries and were still favored in aristocratic circles—a quiet mark of elegance and taste.

As she sketched, her mind flashed back to that night at the auction—the shadowy silhouette behind the frosted glass, dignified and still. She could picture Andrew now: dark suit, crisp shirt, those midnight lilies gleaming at his cuffs.

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Later that evening, Andrew arrived home earlier than usual. “Where’s my wife?” he asked, scanning the living room.

Margaret replied, “She’s in the bedroom, Mr. Brooks. She’s been working in there since this afternoon.”

Andrew's gaze flicked to the master bedroom door, now firmly shut.

"And my bedding... did she put it back where it belongs?"

Margaret blinked, confused. "Back where, Mr. Brooks?"

Andrew frowned. "Where else would my bedding belong? Back in Cathryn's room, of course."

Margaret shook her head firmly. "Mrs. Brooks didn't give that order."

His jaw tightened, the lines of his face hardening. He lifted a hand to knock on Cathryn's door, but Margaret quickly stopped him.

"Mrs. Brooks said she doesn't want to be disturbed."

Andrew's brows knit. "What is she doing in there?"

"I have no idea," Margaret replied, shaking her head.

Andrew's expression darkened further. Margaret's tone carried a subtle chill, almost dismissive, as if he were the one being unreasonable.

His mind flicked back to the last time he'd upset Cathryn—the sting of her anger, the fragile thread of forgiveness. He couldn't risk snapping it again. With a quiet sigh, he let his hand fall from the door.

By the time Cathryn finished sketching her cufflink design and set down her pencil, the clock had crept past eight. She headed to the dining room and stopped short.

Damien sat at the table, waiting.

Her face fell instantly. She turned on her heel, but Margaret's voice rang out behind her. "Mrs. Brooks, the food's just been reheated. Please, have dinner first."

Left with no graceful escape, Cathryn sat and ate in stiff silence.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 95:

Throughout the meal, Andrew tried to catch her eye, offering tentative glances and careful remarks, but she never looked up once.

When the plates were cleared, Cathryn rose without a word and started toward her room.

“Cathryn,” Andrew called after her, frustration edging his voice. “Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

She paused only long enough to shoot him a frosty look. “No.”

The word landed between them like a stone.

Andrew bit back the urge to ask whether she planned to celebrate his birthday with him, at home or somewhere else. Then he remembered her secretive preparations. The gift. She must be saving a surprise.

He swallowed the question, forcing himself to be patient. If she was thoughtful enough to design a gift for him, surely she was planning something, too. Whether it was at home or in a restaurant didn't matter. As long as it came from her, he would be satisfied.

He started, "Then get some rest. Don't tire yourself—"

Bang! The door slammed in his face before he could finish.

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Andrew stood frozen, a deep frown carved into his brow. What was that supposed to mean? Hadn't she forgiven him already? Why was she still shutting him out?

Then it struck him. She was proud—too proud to admit her heart had softened. She might have forgiven him on the inside, but she needed him to suffer a little longer.

The thought soothed him. His lips curled into a small smile. Without complaint, he retreated to the guest room.

His birthday was only two days away. On his birthday, she would definitely let him hold her again. The anticipation made his chest tighten with restless excitement.

The next morning, Andrew lingered in bed on purpose, wanting Cathryn to eat breakfast without him. But when he finally emerged, the dining room was empty.

“Where did my wife go?” he asked.

“Mrs. Brooks had breakfast, then asked Mr. Miller to drive her out,” Margaret answered.

A grin tugged at his lips. Of course. Cathryn must be finalizing his birthday surprise. He told himself not to spoil it, but curiosity gnawed at him. At last, he pushed open her bedroom door.

The glow of her computer lit up dozens of cufflink designs. Hand-drawn sketches were scattered across the desk. He beamed. So it was true—she had been working on something for him.

Andrew picked up one sketch, studying the delicate lines. It looked like a flower, or perhaps a leaf, still rough and unpolished. Warmth spread through his chest. Whatever she designed, he would cherish it.

He set the paper back exactly where it had been and left the room, satisfaction lingering in his steps.

For the next two days, Cathryn practically lived in the artisan's workshop, overseeing every meticulous detail as her design was brought to life. It wasn't about money. It was about the effort woven into the gift.

Gavin discreetly snapped a few photos of her leaning over the artisan's bench, brows furrowed in concentration, her whole being poured into the work. He sent them to Andrew.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 96:

Andrew traced her face in the photo with his thumb, a soft smile stealing over him.

When Andrew's birthday finally arrived, he rushed home early. The dining table was already set: a lavish feast, fresh flowers, and candles flickering like tiny stars.

Andrew chuckled under his breath. "Where's my wife?"

Margaret emerged from the kitchen with a tray of lamb chops. "She went out early this morning," she replied.

The smile on his face was impossible to suppress. Of course—she must have gone to pick up the gift.

He remembered how late her lights had burned the night before. She had been working tirelessly, all for his birthday. When she learned the date, there had been only three days left. Apparently, she'd devoted every second of those three days to perfecting his present.

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Andrew's gaze swept across the table—every dish was one of his favorites. And at the center, like the crown jewel of the evening, stood a bottle of rare '87 Lafite.

A soft laugh slipped from his lips as he lifted the bottle. "Did Cathryn prepare all this?"

Margaret's eyes darted away, hesitation clouding her face. "Ah... yes."

But in truth, Margaret had done it all herself. Watching the cold war drag on between Andrew and Cathryn had been unbearable; she hoped this birthday dinner might thaw the ice and draw them back together.

Andrew shrugged off his jacket and loosened his tie, the gesture casual yet commanding. "Bring me the crystal glasses from my study."

Fine wine, a beautiful dinner, and the woman he adored—tonight was destined to be flawless.

He sank into his chair, anticipation coiling in his chest as he waited for Cathryn to return.

Then his phone buzzed. A video from Gavin.

Andrew tapped it open, and the screen lit with an image that stole his breath. Cathryn stood beside a craftsman, her gaze intent as she watched him shape a cufflink with meticulous care.

The craftsman chuckled. "Miss, you're pouring so much heart into this piece. I'd guess it's meant for someone you love?"

A delicate blush painted her cheeks. “It’s just repaying a favor, nothing more.”

Andrew’s eyes lingered on the screen—on that shy flush blooming across her face. A smile curved his lips, unbidden and irresistible. So shy. Why was it so difficult for her to admit the truth—that he was the man she loved?

The craftsman dipped his brush, sweeping midnight blue across the delicate lily petals. “Tell me—what sort of man is he?”

Cathryn watched as the color deepened, her thoughts drifting to a memory: a poised, unmistakably graceful silhouette she had glimpsed once behind a frosted glass partition. A slow, wistful smile curved her lips. “He’s accomplished,” she said softly, “and he carries himself with quiet strength. There’s a grace to him—a kind of nobility you can’t miss.”

She had never seen Andrew’s face. People whispered that he was scarred, but she knew confidence like his could not be hidden, much less diminished.

Meanwhile, watching the video at home, Andrew nearly laughed. He pressed his lips together to hold it back. So that was how Cathryn saw him—imposing, dignified. It struck him then that she hadn’t said a word about appearances. She saw his character.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 97:

His chest tightened with longing. If she were in front of him now, he would kiss her until she couldn't breathe.

The craftsman paused his brush. "No wonder you chose chain cufflinks," he said, admiration warming his tone. "That style has a certain refinement. It's the kind of thing royalty favors these days. You must have put real thought into it."

Cathryn's smile softened. "A gift should be thoughtful," she murmured. "It means more when you choose it for someone special."

With a nod, the craftsman presented the finished set. "Here they are. Take a look and tell me what you think."

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Cathryn cradled the cufflinks in her palm, her eyes bright as she turned them over. “They’re exactly what I hoped for. Thank you.”

Andrew watched the video feed, unable to make out the details of the gift. It didn’t bother him. Before long, he would be holding them himself.

Carefully, Cathryn placed the cufflinks into a velvet box and tied the ribbon with her own hands.

Andrew set his phone down, a contented sigh escaping him. He would wait for Cathryn to come home and celebrate his birthday with him.

The clock read half past nine.

His stomach rumbled, and he realized how hungry he’d become. Patience was starting to feel like work. How he wished Cathryn would walk through the door this instant.

In another part of the city, Cathryn settled into the back seat as Gavin started the car.

She asked quietly, “Mr. Miller, do you happen to know where Mr. Brooks lives?”

Gavin's hands froze on the wheel. "Mr. Brooks?" Wasn't Mr. Brooks waiting at home for her?

Then it hit him. Cathryn wasn't asking about Damien. She wanted to find Andrew.

Gavin glanced out the window, buying himself a moment. "Maybe he's at the Brooks estate," he said carefully. "Honestly, I can't say for sure."

"You have his number, right? Could you give him a quick call and ask if he can meet up?" Cathryn asked, her eyes fixed on Gavin with quiet urgency.

Gavin shifted in his seat, clearly uneasy. "It's almost ten. Maybe you should try another time. Right now, your husband is probably waiting for you to join him for dinner."

Cathryn faltered for a moment, but pressed ahead. "Just find out where Andrew is right now. I won't take up much of his time. I'll give him the gift and then leave."

The car screeched to a stop, jolting Cathryn against the seat.

Wide-eyed, Gavin turned toward her. "Mrs. Brooks, are you saying those cufflinks are meant for Mr. Andrew Brooks?"

Cathryn nodded. “Yes. I want to thank him for allowing me to have Midnight Lilies.”

Gavin smacked his forehead. Damn it. He had gotten everything wrong. Back at home, Andrew was still waiting, expecting that gift to end up in his hands. So what now?

His voice came out strained. “Then why did you ask about your husband’s birthday the other day?”

“That wasn’t me who wanted to know,” Cathryn replied evenly. “Margaret wanted me to ask on her behalf.”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 98:

The words struck Gavin like lightning splitting the sky.

“By the way, when is his birthday?” Cathryn added, almost casually.

A long sigh escaped Gavin, heavy and tired. How was he supposed to untangle this mess?

“If it’s too much for you, then take this and deliver it to Andrew yourself,” Cathryn said, placing the wrapped box into his hands.

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Gavin stared down at the gift box. “Mrs. Brooks, why does this have to reach him tonight?”

As it turned out, today was Andrew’s birthday. What a cruel twist of timing.

Cathryn’s brow furrowed. “Because it was only finished today.”

The rush to meet the deadline had swallowed her whole, and only now did she finally have the completed piece in her hands. The moment it was done, she'd wanted to place it in Andrew's palm herself—hoping the gesture would stay with him, hoping it might smooth the path forward.

Anyone could deliver a gift. But the program she had written—the code she'd crafted—had to be presented by her. For that, she needed Andrew's goodwill first.

Gavin asked carefully, "Should we head back now?"

Cathryn glanced at the clock and realized it was already past ten. Damien would still be awake.

"Since we're already out," she said, "take me to the lake. I want a drive. I want to feel the night air."

She rolled the window down, closed her eyes, and let the breeze sweep across her face.

Gavin parted his lips as if to speak, then closed them again. Telling her that it was Andrew's birthday felt pointless now. It was already too late.

When Cathryn finally stepped through the front door, it was nearing midnight. She headed straight for the bedroom.

“Don’t you have anything to say to me?” Andrew’s voice cut through the quiet.

Her steps faltered. She turned and found him seated at the dining table, so still it felt unnatural—like the air around him had frozen.

A frown tugged at her brow, confusion tightening in her chest. He had asked her that same question the other night. What was left to say when nothing between them had softened?

Her lips barely moved. “Good night.”

She turned away, walked on, and shut the bedroom door behind her.

In the silence that followed, the sound of Andrew’s knuckles cracking was sharp and ugly as his grip tightened. For more than six hours, he had sat there—hunger gnawing at him, pride scraping raw—waiting like a fool, only to be dismissed with a hollow “good night.”

He couldn’t name the exact moment everything had gone wrong, but the truth pressed down like a weight he couldn’t shrug off.

Cathryn had never planned to celebrate his birthday at all.

Just then, Gavin stepped inside, shoulders hunched, eyes lowered as if he could avoid Andrew's gaze by refusing to meet it.

"Why didn't you pick up the phone?" Andrew's words sliced through the air like ice.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 99:

"I was with Mrs. Brooks all day, and my phone died," Gavin replied, his voice unsteady.

“And where, exactly, did you go?” Andrew asked, his tone sharpened by anger.

Carefully, Gavin produced a neatly wrapped package and held it out.

Andrew’s expression eased at once, the tension in his brow loosening—finally. So there had been a delay. Trouble along the way. That had to be it. Still, the gift had made it home.

He took the box, a faint curve lifting at the corner of his mouth.

“This is the present Mrs. Brooks chose for you,” Gavin said.

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Andrew gave a low hum and began untying the ribbon, slow and deliberate, careful with every pull.

Inside lay a pair of cufflinks—each one carved with a lily washed in deep midnight blue. The same design he’d seen glowing on her screen, the one she’d sketched with such focus.

Then Gavin added, quietly, almost as if he wished he could swallow the words back down, “For you as Andrew Brooks.”

Andrew’s smile went rigid.

“What did you just say?”

In an instant, the truth dropped like a blade.

Cathryn hadn’t made this for his birthday at all.

She had made it for Andrew.

Gavin stood with his head lowered. “Mrs. Brooks wanted to give you the cufflinks in person to repay the debt for the painting. But it was late, so she entrusted me with delivering the gift instead.”

Andrew’s grip tightened around the box until his knuckles blanched. “So this was never meant to be my birthday gift.”

“I apologize, Mr. Brooks. I misunderstood the nature of the gift,” Gavin said quietly.

Andrew's jaw flexed, his voice slicing through the silence. "Cathryn didn't even know today was my birthday, did she?"

Gavin gave the faintest nod.

Andrew's gaze drifted to the untouched dishes arranged neatly on the table. "Margaret."

Margaret hurried over, nearly tripping in her haste. "Yes, Mr. Brooks?"

His tone was glacial. "These dishes. The wine. Who prepared them?"

Margaret hesitated. "It... it was Mrs. Brooks—"

Andrew pinned her with a look.

Her knees went soft. She dropped her eyes. "It was me. I made them."

Andrew's fist slammed into the table. A glass tipped, hit the floor, and shattered.

Margaret froze, hardly daring to breathe.

Holding the cufflink box, Andrew's expression turned to carved ice. Cathryn's words from the video replayed in his mind—noble, elegant, carrying an extraordinary presence. And it hit him again: she hadn't been describing her husband. She had been describing a man she'd never even seen.

Gavin ventured carefully, "Mr. Brooks... Andrew Brooks and Damien Brooks are both you. Whoever Mrs. Brooks meant to give the gift to, it was still you."

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 100:

A bitter laugh slipped from Andrew. "That's not true. To her, I'm only the pampered rich man. Andrew Brooks is the untouchable CEO of Brooks Group."

In other words, she had designed those cufflinks to please someone else.

"Mrs. Brooks was only repaying a kindness," Gavin said gently, trying to soothe him. "You allowed her to have Midnight Lilies, and this was her way of showing gratitude."

"As her husband, I went to great lengths to secure the scar-fading potion from Dr. Clarke for her," Andrew snapped. "Where was my repayment?"

Gavin lowered his gaze. "Even so... these cufflinks were meant for you."

Andrew's face darkened further. "It's not the same."

Gavin wisely fell silent. It was not his place to interfere in a couple's quarrel.

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Andrew stared at the twin blue lilies gleaming on the cufflinks—beautiful, mesmerizing. The gift had been intended for Andrew Brooks. Even if that was still him, jealousy twisted inside him, absurd and searing.

He was actually jealous of himself.

Andrew shoved the gift box into Gavin's hands. "Put it away."

While turmoil raged in the dining room, Cathryn remained unaware, sleeping soundly after several nights of staying up late.

By morning, Cathryn found Margaret bent over the sink, scrubbing what looked like an entire banquet's worth of dishes. Cathryn blinked. "Margaret, did you throw a party last night without me?"

Margaret shot her a sharp look. "Mrs. Brooks, how could you forget Mr. Brooks's birthday? Forgetting is one thing—but coming home late and going straight to bed?"

Cathryn froze. "Yesterday was Damien's birthday?"

Margaret jabbed a finger toward the pile of dishes. "I cooked a feast. He waited for hours and didn't touch a single bite. And when you finally returned, you didn't even wish him happy birthday."

Cathryn frowned. “Why didn’t you remind me beforehand?”

Margaret’s hands flew up. “You were the one who told me the date of his birthday!”

Cathryn pressed her forehead with a groan. “I must’ve been so distracted that I completely forgot.”

“He was furious last night,” Margaret muttered, rinsing another plate.

Cathryn’s stomach sank. She realized she’d crossed a line. After cooling down for a few days, she’d thought there was no need for a cold war between her and Damien. She had married him by taking someone else’s place—she was the one at fault from the very beginning. He had every right to be angry.

Besides, he had given her a place to live when her own family and the Watsons had abandoned her and left her penniless. That alone was a kindness beyond measure. And over the past month, even knowing she was using his influence, he had treated her well. She should have been grateful.

With that thought, Cathryn bit her lip. She ought to make it up to him with a birthday gift.

A pair of custom cufflinks, maybe? But designing and producing them would take too long.

Turning hesitantly to Margaret, Cathryn asked, “Do you have any cash on you?”

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