

No Second Baby, No You, Only Divorce

Chapter 12

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After the event, Vincent walked toward the school building with his assistant, Abbott Clarke. Scarlett made sure her students were safely back in their classroom, then headed to the nurse's office.

Vincent was waiting for Marcus in the office, standing by the window. When he saw Scarlett walk past, he froze. He hadn't expected to see her here. But Scarlett didn't even glance at him- she kept her eyes straight ahead, like he was just another stranger.

Marcus noticed Vincent's stare and frowned. "Mr. Stewart, everything okay?"

Vincent's gaze followed Scarlett until she disappeared around the corner. He turned to Abbott, his voice low. "Didn't we keep our travel plans quiet?"

Abbott nodded, confused. "Yes, sir. Only a handful of people knew you were coming here."

Vincent's jaw tightened. He thought back to their early marriage-how Scarlett had once followed him to a business trip, pretending to be "in the area" so she could see him. He'd assumed she'd stopped that kind of thing, but maybe he'd been wrong. "Do you think she followed us here?"

Abbott hesitated, then shrugged. "It's possible. She used to do that before."

Before Vincent could say more, Marcus walked in, apologetic. "Mr. Stewart, I'm so sorry for the wait-I had to make sure the kids got back to class. Thank you for being so patient."

Vincent waved it off. "No need to apologize. I was just—"

Marcus cut him off, grabbing his arm. "Listen, Mr. Stewart-this town's struggling. Everyone's moving away, and the kids... they don't have much hope. What you're doing for them? It's a miracle. The teachers and I wanted to thank you-we set up a small dinner at the diner downtown. Nothing fancy, just home-cooked food. Please say you'll come."

Vincent was about to decline-he hated small-town dinners, hated the forced chitchat-but Marcus' eyes were so earnest. He found himself nodding. "Sure. I'll be there."

At 5:30, Scarlett got a call from Marcus, begging her to join the dinner. "We need someone who's 'been around'," he'd said. "You're the only one who's lived in the city-you can keep the conversation going." She'd tried to say no, but Marcus was impossible to refuse.

When she walked into the diner's private room, she froze. The table was small-only seven or eight people, all school staff-and at the head of it sat Vincent, with Abbott beside him. She hadn't realized the dinner was for him.

Vincent looked up when the door opened. He wasn't surprised-he'd assumed Scarlett had

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found out about the dinner and shown up to "accidentally" run into him. But then Marcus spoke, and Vincent's brow furrowed.

"Dr. Theron! So glad you could make it-take a seat!"

Dr. Theron?

Vincent stared at Scarlett. He'd forgotten she was a doctor. Back when they were married, she'd given up her career to be a full-time mom-he'd never thought she'd go back to it.

Scarlett ignored his gaze, scanning the table for an empty seat. She picked the one farthest from Vincent, sliding into it quietly.

Vincent's frown deepened. Abbott noticed, too-he'd worked for Vincent long enough to know Scarlett used to jump at any chance to sit next to him. Now, she was practically across the room. What was going on?

Marcus raised his glass, launching into a toast to Vincent. "To Mr. Stewart-thank you for giving our kids a future!"

Everyone cheered, and Vincent took a small sip of his wine, polite but distant.

Scarlett kept her head down, picking at her mashed potatoes. She joined in the toasts when she had to,

but otherwise stayed quiet. She didn't want to talk to Vincent, didn't want to even look at

him.

Finally, Marcus turned to her, raising his glass again. “Dr. Theron-this one’s for you. In the two months you’ve been here, you’ve fixed every scraped knee, every ear infection, every panic attack. These kids love you-you’re like a second mom to them. Thank you.”

Two months?

Vincent’s head snapped up. Scarlett had been here for two months? That meant she hadn’t followed him-she’d been here long before he’d even planned the donation.

He looked at her again. She was wearing a simple blue dress, no makeup except for a touch of lip balm, but she looked different. Happier. More alive. Back when she’d been stuck at Oakland Villa, she’d always looked tired-like she was just going through the motions. Now, there was a light in her eyes he’d never seen before.

For the first time in years, Vincent found himself wondering-who was Scarlett Theron, really? And why had he never bothered to find out?

