



Chapter 12

"Bella, can I... not take the deputy manager position?" Alexander's voice carried a nervous edge.

His expression left Isabella with a pang of discomfort. She pressed her lips together before speaking. "Alex, you're still young. You should take on important roles to gain experience. You understand what I mean, don't you?"

Alexander's face turned pale, and his body swayed slightly, as if her words were too heavy to bear. Yet he heard the firmness in her tone.

After a long silence, he finally lowered his head and said in defeat, "Alright, Bella. I understand."

An inexplicable ache rose in Isabella's chest. She exhaled softly but pressed, "Another thing—knock before you come into my office next time."

Alexander's face was drained of color, his eyes reddened. He hummed in reply and turned away like a beaten dog. The sight of him so subdued only deepened Isabella's unease.

Just as he reached the door, she couldn't help herself. "Alex."

He turned back slowly, his reddened eyes glistening, as though holding back tears.

Isabella sighed. "Work hard. You can still come to me if you ever need anything. I'll always be your sister. As for Vivian, tell her not to repeat what she did again."

In the end, she couldn't help but compromise.



Alexander nodded and pulled the door open.

'She's pushing me away.' The thought was clear in his mind, but he refused to accept it. A flicker of resentment flashed in his eyes.

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Meanwhile, Dominic was still searching for a job, but his resume was far from impressive. A few companies acknowledged his academic background, but the positions he applied for weren't a match. They suggested starting in a different role, assuring him that with his education, he would have strong prospects for advancement.

He turned them all down. His target was a monthly salary of at least 3,000 dollars, but the roles on offer barely reached 700 dollars. The gap was far too wide.

Another day was wasted.

By 4:00 p.m., Dominic arrived early at Blossom Elementary. Leaning against the gate, he lit a cigarette, frustration etched across his face. He had never imagined himself facing a crisis that felt like middle-aged unemployment.

Anxiety pressed down on him, suffocating and heavy. But he knew this wasn't something that could be solved overnight.

He pulled out his cracked phone and scrolled absently through his social media apps with a bitter smile. He didn't even have a single friend he could really talk to.

On WhatsApp, only a couple of group chats remained active: one with high-school classmates, another with university friends.

Dominic no longer felt he belonged in either. Checking his other social



media apps, he saw his last post had been half a year ago, with only a handful of likes.

For the first time, he felt the full weight of his failure. The truth was unavoidable. After the divorce, he might not only lose custody of Lilith but also struggle to feed himself.

The thought ignited a surge of helpless anger, and he muttered, "Damn it."

His foul mood eased only when Lilith ran out of the school gates.

"Daddy!" she shouted and leapt into his arms with pure joy.

Dominic's lips curved into a warm, genuine smile.

Carrying his daughter, he stopped by the supermarket to buy groceries before heading straight home.

"Do your homework, sweetheart. Daddy will make dinner," Dominic reminded her gently as he set the groceries down.

A little later, he heard the front door open. Peeking out, he saw Isabella had come home.

"Honey! Something smells amazing. What are you cooking?" She lifted her head, her nose twitching as she smiled.