

Chapter 22 Unexpected Visitor

As soon as Caden finished speaking, Gerry's eyes flickered open.

It took a couple of seconds for it to register that Caden was right beside him.

Eyes wide, Gerry pulled the headphones off and asked in confusion, "When did you get here?"

"Just now, actually."

Caden had arrived late, so Alicia was already done recording the song.

There was no way she'd perform it again just because he'd walked in.

Not that it mattered; Caden wasn't particularly interested in the music. He was there for the fun, nothing more.

But Gerry's reaction was something else. "It's exactly what I envisioned—actually, beyond what I expected. No wonder she's able to compete with you for the top spot; she's got real talent, Caden."

Caden studied him, intrigued.

Gerry, a man rarely impressed, especially when it came to other artists, seemed unusually enthusiastic.

"Is that so?" Caden's response was deliberately indifferent. "Guess I'm going to lose our bet."

"Better get that land ready for the transfer," Gerry quipped with a smug grin as he handed over the lyric sheet to Caden.

"Don't feel too bad about missing the recording session. Here, take a look at her lyrics instead. Maybe you can pick up a thing or two from her writing."

Caden took the piece of paper, scanning the page in silence. He let out a short breath, raising a brow.

"I thought your movie was about Transformers fighting zombies. Why are the lyrics so... heartfelt?"

What?

Gerry's mood shifted in an instant. His gleaming eyes narrowed, irritation creeping into his tone. "Zombies? Seriously? It's a heartwarming sci-fi film! Didn't I send you a copy? Didn't you watch it?"

"Oh, I don't watch cartoons," Caden replied nonchalantly.

"Cartoon?!" Gerry spat indignantly. "It's 3D animation! Not a cartoon! I spent a fortune on it!"

At that moment, the door creaked open, and Alicia stepped out.

Caden glanced up, his gaze lingering.

The warm light from the recording booth spilled into the room, casting a soft glow on her face.

She looked like an angel.

Alicia discreetly massaged the ache in her waist, her voice calm but tired. "Mr. Hopkins, let's wrap up for today. If anything comes up, don't hesitate to reach out, 'kay?"

At this, Gerry glanced at his watch.

"Actually, I've reserved a spot at an exclusive rooftop restaurant downtown. Care to join us for dinner, Alicia?"

She hesitated, a flicker of discomfort passing over her features.

But declining might not sit well with her business relationship with Gerry, so she nodded—albeit reluctantly.

The restaurant, located in the heart of the city, was a thirty-minute drive away.

Gerry settled into the front passenger seat, while Alicia and Caden found themselves sharing the backseat.

Unspoken, they both gravitated toward their respective windows, the space between them wide enough to park a car.

Gerry, ever the optimist, was already scrolling through prime properties for sale.

He specifically looked for photos of pricey, hard-to-obtain pieces of real estate.

Smiling gleefully, he even showed a few to Caden. "How about this one?"

Caden gave the photos a dismissive glance, his tone frosty. "Why not go for the White House while you're at it?"

"If you can get it, I'll take it," Gerry joked without missing a beat.

More pictures followed.

"Just pick one from these," Gerry said complacently.

Caden's lips twisted into a faint smirk. "Careful. Wouldn't want to count your eggs before they've hatched, would you?"

Alicia shifted slightly beside him, the subtle movement catching Caden's attention.

He turned his head, his gaze sharp.

She quickly stiffened, pretending to be engrossed in the scenery outside.

Her long, wavy hair cascaded over her shoulders, obscuring half of her face.

But Caden still saw that her delicate eyebrows were slightly furrowed.

He said nothing, but his gaze lingered before turning back to the conversation.

When they arrived at the restaurant, Caden and Gerry got off promptly. Alicia, however, lingered in her seat.

"Mr. Hopkins," she called after him with an apologetic smile, "go ahead. I need to touch up my makeup."

Gerry, knowing how much women cared about their looks, simply nodded. "No rush. When you're ready, just tell the concierge to bring you up. Use my name."

"Thank you."

Caden shot her a brief glance before heading for the entrance.

Beside him, Gerry strolled casually, rattling off the latest entertainment gossip as if nothing was amiss.

Out of nowhere, Caden stopped in his tracks.

"Hang on, I think I left my phone in the car. You go on ahead. I'll catch up."

Gerry arched a brow, clearly unconvinced, and cast a suspicious glance back at the sleek vehicle parked behind them.

His eyes narrowed slightly.

"What are you two up to, scheming behind my back?"

Caden barely spared him a second look, too indifferent to bother with an answer.

Inside the car, Alicia was in a quiet panic. She scrubbed frantically at the bloodstain on her pants with a wad of tissues.

Her period had come out of nowhere, completely throwing her off.

Between her erratic schedule and endless stress, it had been delayed, and she hadn't thought much of it—until now.

Now, the deep red stain was spreading across her pants.

Worse yet, it had soaked into Gerry's pristine leather seats—seats worth more than the money she had in the bank.

Each wipe of the tissue felt like a tally against her dwindling savings.

How much was this going to cost her?

She had been careful, saving bit by bit over the last two years, but this? This was a disaster.

Just as she was furiously working to blot the stain, the car door clicked open.

Alicia's heart skipped a beat, and she froze.

Looking up, her eyes met Caden's.