Complete Privacy

Dallas. Seventy-two hours later.

No gold. No fountains. No twins. Just my apartment, with the blinds pulled shut against the afternoon like the afternoon had been asking questions.

There were two tests lying on my bathroom counter. Both of them positive.

April was sitting on the edge of my tub in a pair of my sweatpants. She was not flawless now. Her hair was pulled up any kind of way, no bows, nothing, and the Louis Vuitton was nowhere in sight. She looked like what she was: a girl who had flown halfway around the world and back in one week and gotten married somewhere in the middle of it.

“I’m keeping it,” she said, before I could say a word.

I was standing in the doorway. “Okay.”

“Don’t ‘okay’ me.” Her eyes came up hard. “I need you to say it’s the right thing.”

“It’s your body, April. It’s your call. But we still don’t know __”

“I know.” She cut me right off. “I slept with them both that week. I know exactly what I did. I’ve known since the plane.”

I came in and crouched down in front of her, so we were eye to eye. The same height we’d been at those little desks.

“Then we need to know what you’re going to say in Dubai,” I said. “Because Daniel is still over there. Three weeks. And his daddy already thinks you’re hiding something.”

April reached into the pocket of my sweatpants and pulled out a piece of paper, folded in half, then in half again. She opened it on her knee.

A plane ticket. Dallas to Dubai. One way. Tomorrow.

“I’m going to tell him,” she said. “In the tower suite, in the same room where we stayed the night of the reception. I’m going to tell him the baby may not be his.”

I stared at her. “April, that’s suicide. In Dubai? With his family right there? With people who are practically royalty in the building? You cannot walk in there with a maybe-it’s-yours speech. They will bury you.”

“That’s why I need you to come.” She folded the ticket back up, small. “You sit outside the door. If he yells, you hear it. If he __”

“If he what?”

April didn’t finish.

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Dubai. Twenty-four hours later. The same hotel.

Daniel had stayed up in the tower suite the whole time we were gone. When April walked in, he smiled at her like nothing had ever happened. Like the reception had never ended, and she’d only stepped out to powder her nose.

“Baby,” he said. “You came back.”

I'd checked the hallway on the way up. It was clear. No rookie. Nobody. I sat down on the bench outside the suite door with my knees pulled up, the way I used to sit outside the principal's office in middle school, waiting on April to come out of whatever she'd gotten herself into.

She went inside. She closed the door. It was a heavy door. It didn't slam. It sealed.

Right before it shut, I heard her voice through the crack.

"I have to tell you something," April said. "I'm pregnant. And it may not be yours."

Silence.

Then Daniel's voice, low. "What did you say?"

"I said—"

And then the door clicked. Not just closed. *Locked.*

I stood up. I tried the handle. Locked from the inside.

I knocked. "April?"

Nothing.

I pressed my ear flat against the door, and there was nothing to hear, because there was nothing to hear. That was the whole point of that suite. I'd read it in the brochure on the nightstand the night of the reception, and I remembered it word for word now: *Five full bedrooms with baths. Soundproof walls. Complete privacy.*

There was a little slit of glass set in the door, narrow as a mail slot. I put my eye to it.

Daniel wasn't yelling. That was what scared me most. He was just standing there in the middle of the room, staring at April, holding the folded ticket she'd brought in with her.

And April was backing toward the far wall, one hand on her stomach.

I banged on the door. “April!”

The hallway stayed empty. Gold, and quiet, and Dubai watching again.

Inside the suite, the lights went out.

⁂

I started running.

Not down the hall. Through it. I was shouting her name, but the walls just swallowed it. Soundproof. Complete privacy.

The hotel staff got to me first. Two men in black suits, polite the way Dubai is polite, and confused.

“Ma’am, you cannot make this noise. The guests are—”

“My best friend is in there,” I said, “and the door just locked behind her. Open it.”

The taller one tried his key card. The little light on the lock turned red.

“It is locked from the inside with the deadbolt,” he said. “Only the guest can—”

“Then break it.”

He looked at the other one. “We need the manager’s approval. And the owner’s family—”

“I don’t care whose family it is.” I was not crying. I was in that flat voice again, the one from the bathroom, the one from college. “This is the April Tower. Daniel’s wife is in there. You want that on the news?”

That word moved them.

It still took ten minutes. It felt like a whole afternoon of detention. I paced that hallway. I pressed my ear to every seam in

that door. I called April's phone and it went straight to voicemail. I called Daniel's phone and it went straight to voicemail.

Finally they came: security, a manager in a gray suit, a master key, and a hydraulic tool somebody wheeled off the service elevator like it was room service.

They broke the door.

The suite was dark. Every curtain drawn. The gold lamps all off. It smelled like champagne and perfume and something else, something metallic, that I didn't want to put a name to.

"April?" My voice cracked for the first time.

No answer.

The living room was empty. The kitchen was empty. The first bedroom was empty. In the second bedroom, Daniel's suit jacket hung over the back of a chair. In the third bedroom, April's clutch lay on the bed. Her phone was inside it, powered off.

The fourth door was a bathroom. Locked.

My heart hit my ribs, the same as that night in college.

"April, if you can hear me, I'm right here. Open the door."

Silence.

They broke that one too.

An empty tub. Wet towels all over the floor. A window cracked open a hand's width, the hot night air coming in through it. It only opened that far. Nobody was going out that way.

And on the mirror, written in lipstick:

TONII — I HAD TO. DON'T LOOK FOR ME.

And under that, smaller:

I'm sorry.

I stared at it until the letters swam.

“She’s gone,” the manager said quietly behind me. “The service elevator. There is footage. She left eight minutes ago.” He paused. “Alone.”

I turned around and looked at him. “Alone? With a deadbolt on the door? With Daniel in here?”

The manager didn’t answer me.

At the back of the suite, past the kitchen, there was a second door I hadn’t noticed going in, plain and narrow, the kind the staff use. It was standing open.

I grabbed April’s clutch off the bed and shoved her phone down in my bag, and I went for the hallway.

I wasn’t going to the police. Not yet. Not with Daniel’s name on the building. I was going to find my best friend, the same way I’d found her the first day of third grade, when she was trying her hardest to lose her daddy.

“Pull the cameras,” I told security. “Every exit. The parking. The airport. All of it. Now.”



But I didn’t go to the airport.

I went back into that dark suite and sat down on the floor right where April’s clutch had been, and I made the manager bring his tablet to me, and I made him play it again. All of it. Not the part he wanted me to see.

“Look,” he said finally, and he rewound it.

Camera one. Hallway outside the service door. 9:41 p.m.

Daniel came out of the back of the suite. Calm. He was straightening his shirt cuffs. And April was with him, a step ahead

of him, her head down. His hand was on her arm.

Just above the elbow. Not yanking. Just holding.

I had seen that hand on that arm before. I had seen it when I was eight years old.

Camera two. Service elevator. 9:42 p.m.

The two of them inside. Daniel held up a key card and pressed a button. Not the lobby.

P4.

“What is P4?” I said.

The manager didn’t want to say it. “It is not guest parking. It is private. The owner’s level. When Mr. Daniel’s father is in Dubai, he lives there. It is not in the directory.”

Five full bedrooms with baths. Soundproof walls. Complete privacy. The same as the suite upstairs, only underneath it, where nobody looks.

I stood up.

“Open P4,” I said.

“Ma’am, I cannot. That is the owner’s private residence. It is locked from—”

“Open it.”

We rode the service elevator down. When the doors opened, it was a different hotel. No gold down there. Bare concrete. Quiet, except for the air conditioning humming loud enough to cover just about anything.

There was one door at the end of the hall. Heavy. No handle on the outside, only a keypad. A little window in it, blacked out.

I knocked. Nothing.

Then a sound. Faint. Not a scream. A chair, moving across a floor.

I hit that door with both fists. “April! April, if you’re in there, make a noise!”

Nothing came back. Soundproof.

I turned to the manager. “That’s her. That’s where she is.”

He shook his head. “We cannot open it without Mr. Daniel or his father. This is—”

“The twins stay down here when they visit, don’t they?” I said.

He hesitated, and the hesitation told me yes.

“Then open it for the twins,” I said, low. “Get on your radio and tell him the twins are crying.”

It worked. The manager got on his radio. Two minutes later the door buzzed, and it opened from the inside.

Daniel. He was sweating now. His shirt had come untucked.

“Tonya.” He tried to smile. “You shouldn’t be down here.”

Behind him I could see a slice of the room. A bedroom, bigger than the ones upstairs. The bed made. The curtains closed over a window that didn’t need curtains, because there was nothing on the other side of it but more building. A tray of food on a table, untouched. A bottle of prenatal vitamins on the nightstand.

And April, sitting up on the bed with her hair down and her hands in her lap. Looking at me.

She wasn’t crying. She wasn’t bruised. She was just... contained. Like something put away on a shelf. And it was all over her face, without her saying one word: nine months.

“Daniel,” I said. “Move.”

He didn’t move. “She’s safe here. Until we know whose it is. My father agreed. It’s for the family. It’s for her. She can’t be out there, with the cameras and the questions.”

Over his shoulder, April’s lips moved. One word, no sound.

Go.

Not *help me*. *Go.* Go, before he sees what you're about to do.

And I understood. This wasn't one night. This was a plan. Private doctors. A private floor. No exit, no phone, no police report with his father's name on it. Nine months, hidden down here, until the baby was born and could answer the question for everybody.

I took one step back. I looked at Daniel. I looked at April.

"Okay," I said quietly. "Okay, Daniel. You keep her safe."

I turned around and walked back to the elevator, and I didn't look back, because April had told me not to.

But as soon as those doors closed, I reached into my bag and pulled out April's phone. The one Daniel thought was switched off for good. Back in Dallas, before we got on the plane to come here, I had made her set up the emergency SOS on it, just in case. She'd rolled her eyes at me.

I held the buttons down.

I was not leaving Dubai.

I was going to get her out. Even if it took nine months.