Stop Talking

Back to Dubai. The same tower. The same floor. Different rules.

P4 wasn't locked anymore. It was a house now. On paper.

Daniel had the master bedroom. April had the second bedroom, with the three cribs pushed together against one wall so she could reach all of them from the bed without getting up. I had the third bedroom. I never left. I packed up my whole life in Dallas, every last thing I owned, and moved it to Dubai, and I watched the children.

All the children. Not just the three.

Daniel's sisters came down to P4 every single day after school, the twin girls from the reception, a year older now and twice as loud. They'd kick their shoes off at the door and climb right up on April's bed, one of them holding DJ, the other one holding Jai, and the both of them leaning over Toni's crib to whisper to her like she was a secret they'd been trusted with.

"You are so strong, little sister," they'd tell her. "You are so strong."

Those two girls were the only ones in that family who ever came down to P4 without wanting something.

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April ran her business from the kitchen table.

Laptop open. Calls at three in the morning, Dallas time, with a baby on her shoulder and a burp cloth on the other one. She had started a postpartum concierge service for American women who'd ended up stuck in Dubai: women who'd married into money and found out too late what the money cost. Nobody missed the irony. April least of all.

Money was her armor now. Every dirham she made went into an account that only I had the password to. She'd made sure of that before she ever unpacked.

On the days the rules said, she and Daniel went to the marriage classes. They sat a chair apart. They nodded when they were supposed to nod. Then they came home to the same house and went into different rooms and shut different doors.

And Daniel was still seeing her. The government one. Married, badge on a lanyard, lobby bar at one in the morning. He didn't even try to hide it anymore. He'd come home late in a cloud of cologne that wasn't April's, and he'd walk right past those three cribs on his way to his room without once turning his head to look in them.



The family was making it a living hell for us.

Daniel's mother left articles on April's pillow. Printed out, folded neatly, about dutiful wives and quiet wives and wives who know their place. April read every one of them, and then she used them to line the bottom of the diaper pail.

Daniel's father turned the air conditioning off in April's half of the house. In Dubai. "If she wants to talk to the press without her

husband," he said, to anybody who would carry it back to her, "she can sweat."

The cousins took pictures of me at the grocery store with the triplets. Three car seats in one cart and me pushing it. Somebody posted one with a caption I didn't need translated. *Who is the nanny? The American?*

I'm Tonya. I'm the one who's been here for everything. But sure. The nanny.

Then April's own mother and father flew in. They sat down at that kitchen table, right where April did her business, and they meant well. That was the hardest part. They meant every word.

Her mother was holding Toni, who was finally big enough to be held without a monitor clipped to her. "Baby," she said. "You need to stop this nonsense before it gets out of hand. You have three babies. You have a husband who can provide. Just be quiet for the year. Do the classes. Go home with him when it's over. Stop the business. Stop the interviews. Please."

Her father didn't say much. He hardly ever did. He just looked at DJ, at that forehead, Daniel's forehead, and he said it plain.

"He's going to take them, April. You know that. This is his country. It's his father's building."

April didn't cry. She was bouncing Jai on her knee, and she didn't stop bouncing him.

"Then let him try," she said.

I was standing in the doorway with my arms crossed. Somewhere along the way I had turned into the mean old dog at the gate. I didn't mind it. Somebody had to be.



That’s when the little things started.

Not big things. Just enough to make the back of your neck prickle.

A black Land Cruiser followed me and the triplets to the pediatrician. The same black Land Cruiser, two days in a row.

A note showed up under the P4 door one morning. No handwriting. Typed. Two words.

STOP TALKING.

April’s business account got reported four hundred times in one hour, and they shut it down for a day.

And the nursery camera went dark at two in the morning. Just went offline. When it came back on, the cribs had been moved.

An inch. That’s all. Just one inch.

But somebody had been in that room.

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I found it first. I didn’t tell April right away. I checked every lock on that floor. I stood over Toni’s crib and counted her breaths until I was sure. Then I walked straight out to the balcony, where Daniel was on the phone with *her*, laughing about something in a voice he never once used in that house.

“Somebody may be out to harm them,” I said. Low, so the girls wouldn’t hear me from the kitchen. “Your son. Your daughter. Jai. My best friend. In your father’s house.”

Daniel looked at me with the phone still at his ear. And for just a second, all of it dropped off him. The football player, the husband, the son. Just for a second, he was only a man standing on a balcony who had heard what I said.

“I didn’t—” he started.

“I know you didn’t,” I said. “But your family did. Or she did. Or somebody who doesn’t like April going out with her head uncovered, and running a business, and talking to the press without you. I don’t know which one. But you need to pick a side, Daniel. Right now.”

He didn’t answer me.

He looked away, out over the city, and he put the phone back to his mouth and went back to his call.

I didn’t waver. And neither did April. Of course we didn’t.

That night I pushed all three cribs into one room. April’s room. I locked the door from the inside, and I wedged a chair up under the handle, and then the two of us lay down on the floor between those cribs with a blanket and two pillows, the way we used to do at sleepovers in the third grade. Only this time, there were three babies breathing above us, and a chair jammed against a soundproof door.

Neither one of us slept much.

Outside, Dubai kept watching.