

Marie's Watch Sample Chapter

She gazed around at the breathtaking scene; a smile played on her lips. The ladies were dressed in beautiful gowns, and the gentlemen looked dashing in their suits. The musicians performed as couples danced. The fashion worn at this class reunion denoted an era long past. Festive lights twinkled from where they dangled above the crowd.

The infectious sounds of laughter and the clinking of glasses held high by reunited friends wrapped Marie in a sea of joyful elation. Streamers adorned the large hall, candles flickered within frosted chimneys at each table, and the food buffet, which flanked the entirety of one large wall, was being tended by a crew of neatly uniformed caterers. The aromas of roast turkey and ham wafted about the room with each slice of the carver's knife.

The five-piece band beckoned many to the tiled dance floor. The colored gowns swirled and swayed, at times engulfing the stark-black contrast of their partners' suits. Small groups gathered in a few locations within the large room, and tables were peppered with others choosing to dine while they conversed.

"I'm glad you came. It's nice to see you again," Marie said to a woman who was passing by. "It's been a long time."

The woman paused briefly, but Marie's attention wasn't directed toward her, so she moved on.

Marie was a beautiful woman. She greeted friends she hadn't seen in years. Though she was courteous to the people in attendance, it was clear she was preoccupied. Time and time again, her gaze fell upon the door leading to the entryway.

"Hi! How've you been?"

Marie turned toward a former classmate who had stepped toward her, a man she vaguely remembered. She wasn't quite paying attention, but his questions prodded for answers.

"Yes, I'm married, and we have a daughter." Marie's voice trailed off, and her smile faltered before resuming its place upon her full and rosy lips, though worry tugged at the corners.

Her visitor passed on, noting her indifference.

Marie was wearing a pale yellow gown that was fitted to her petite waist and draped to the floor, giving her the silhouette of a goddess. The capped sleeves became nearly sheer as they tapered to her dainty wrists. Her posture offered nothing less than proper form, and the classy fit of her attire indicated she could have been a woman of wealth and fine upbringing. The milky white complexion of her face, with only a proper hint of color, set the stage for her dramatic, dark eyes to catch one by surprise. She wore her chestnut hair pulled back with a wisp of tendrils left free to frame her face. She was a vision.

This gathering in early June of 1932 was one only the wealthy could afford, and wealth was in short supply ever since the stock market had crashed. The staff was solemn as they wandered among the crowd delivering drinks and offering hors d'oeuvres. They appeared detached and methodical as they worked.

Marie, seeming to remember something of import, strode determinedly through one of the doors to the rear of the great room. Making her way down a corridor and a set of steps, she entered a room where there were children playing, being watched by nannies dressed in uniform. As she perused the room, a young girl about the age of five rushed to wrap her arms around her waist.

"Mommy, you look beautiful."

Marie gazed down at Abigail. "Thank you, darling." Marie's soothing tone brought a smile to her child's face.

Grasping Marie's hand, Abigail pulled her toward the group of rambunctious kids. "Mommy, look who's been my nanny."

An older woman stepped from the crowd of children to greet Marie. "Hello, Mrs. Towell. How are you this evening?" She was well groomed; not a hair strayed from her tight bun. She seemed a bit firm for Marie's taste.

"I'm fine, Miss Sidney. Thank you." It was difficult for Marie to hide her disappointment in the nanny assigned to her daughter this evening. She had cared for Abigail on a number of previous occasions.

"And may I point out how fine you look in that gown," commented Miss Sidney, who very seldom shared opinions. It felt odd to Marie that she offered one now.

"Ma'am, I needed to speak with you. I must be leaving by eight o'clock. I know you've been told, but I wanted to remind you."

Marie glanced at the clock and felt pressed for time. Seven o'clock would be upon them in just more than twenty minutes, and her husband had still not arrived. She bent down to her daughter and kissed her cheek.

"Okay, love. I'm going back to my party but will return with your father by eight."

As Marie rose to her full height of five and a half feet, her daughter grasped her hand in both of hers and tugged to pull her back down. Tiptoeing as high as she could reach, she placed a kiss upon her mother's cheek in return.

"Okay, Mommy. See you soon."

Marie glanced back once she reached the door to see her daughter holding hands with Miss Sidney. She pondered her dislike of this woman and wondered what it was that made her feel uneasy. Abigail always seemed happy when she was with Miss Sidney, yet there was an aura of darkness around the nanny that concerned Marie. Opening the door, she returned to the party upstairs.

Marie was just reaching the lobby when she saw David coming up the stairs. The doorman opened the door for him as Marie rushed to greet him.

"Where've you been? The reunion's been well under way, and our friends have been wondering if you're really coming. I keep telling them what a busy man you are." Marie reached up to embrace her tall husband and then wrapped her arm through his.

"Just now I was able to get away from the office. I'm sorry if I've kept you waiting. I didn't know there was a reunion taking place tonight. Please forgive me." He smiled down at Marie. "How's Abigail? Is she enjoying the festivities?"

"Oh, yes. I think so anyway. Miss Sidney is with her." With a quick glance around, Marie leaned in closer. "You know, I don't much like her. I think she's putting bad ideas into our daughter's head. Perhaps I should have her replaced."

Marie became quiet as she considered Miss Sidney's true motives for being with Abigail. She started to feel her heart race and fought the temptation to return to the nursery immediately and retrieve her daughter.

Shaking those thoughts aside, she remembered that time was not in her favor to accomplish all she had hoped this night. She looked up at her husband and asked, "What time is it?"

David pulled his coat sleeve back to see the face of his watch. Marie was feeling anxious as she tried to see it as well. He was taking his time and was too calm. Didn't he realize they had to rush?

"Mm, it's nearly seven. Why? What is it?"

She considered her options. The reunion would have to wait, she decided. Marie turned to the doorman and smiled before grabbing her husband by the hand.

She glanced at David with a crafty look. "Come, let's be quick."

Not giving the doorman the opportunity to do his job, she opened the door herself, pulled her ball gown up within her free hand, and tugged David into a trot as they raced down the marble stairs and across the parking lot. Reaching the grass, she continued her explanation but did not slow her pace.

“Miss Sidney, she has to leave by eight. There’s not much time.” She cast a flirting look at her husband, which brought a similar smile to his face.

They arrived at the neighboring apartment building in minutes where the doorman smiled, tipped his hat, and held the door open for the familiar couple. They breezed past and entered the well-maintained lobby. It was old, which offered a character that was desirable, and it was located in the heart of Raleigh, which gave additional value. It was centrally located to the most influential of businesses as well as the capitol building.

The community of leaseholders who rented these accommodations did not know one another. In most cases the comings and goings of each tenant was private, which is why they chose this building. The security was first rate, and that was reflected in the price.

David and Marie entered the elevator. She giggled and, releasing her husband’s hand, pushed the button that would lead them to her destination. David smiled when she looked back at him. She loved him so much.

“I love you, Marie.” His voice was soft.

Marie smiled in response. He was a devoted husband. She often felt like she didn’t deserve him. She was blessed.

“Thanks. I love you, too.” She felt the heat rise to her cheeks, but she needed to pay attention now. She glanced up and focused on the numbers as they ascended floor by floor and waited for just the right moment before stating, “Here we are!”

Whether it was an obsession, or some oddity, she had to announce their arrival just before the bell rang. It was a game that took all of her attention, but she rarely missed her cue.

The elevator opened to a comfortably furnished and extremely neat apartment. It was the best. The view was stunning, especially from the balcony. The neighborhoods of the city were below, and the clear sky of this warm June night spread out above. Though nights like this didn’t happen often, Marie loved when she was able to be home with David.

“What time is it, David?” Marie’s voice was rushed, and though she was smiling, she knew the concern could be heard in her voice.

After a glance at his watch, he responded, “It’s just after seven.”

She felt the pressure of time. “Oh no, come. We must hurry.” Marie pulled him through the apartment to the doorway of his bedroom. “There’s not much time. Here, help me with this, please.” She turned her back to him and held her head to the side as David unzipped the back of her gown. She watched the look on his face.

Shrugging out of the sleeves, she dropped it to the floor and climbed onto the four-poster bed. “Come, honey.” She smiled and patted the space beside her.

He answered her urgency, undressed, and slid onto the bed beside his wife.

“It’s nearly eight o’clock, Mr. Towell.” Miss Sidney sounded irritated when David and Marie arrived to claim their daughter.

“I’m aware of that, Miss Sidney,” David responded in an equally firm voice.

“Daddy! Daddy!” Abigail stood quickly from the puzzle she was working on in the corner of the room. She ran to David as he knelt and snuggled into his embrace.

“Daddy, Miss Sidney was helping me make that puzzle. Isn’t it beautiful?” she asked, stepping back. Abigail pulled at David’s hand. “Come see.”

“Mr. Towell, I must leave now.”

“Yes, Miss Sidney. We’re leaving.” David turned his attention back to his daughter and followed her lead. “Honey, that’s beautiful. Good job. I’m proud of you.”

Abigail looked up at her dad’s face and smiled.

“Honey, we have to clean it up now.”

“Oh, I don’t want to break it. I’m not done.” Abigail looked pleadingly at her father.

“Mr. Towell, I must leave,” Miss Sidney’s sharp voice broke in.

Abigail ran to her. “Please, Miss Sidney. Can I leave it?” Her voice was shaky. “We can work on it again, can’t we?”

Miss Sidney looked down at her. “Miss Abigail, you know the rule about cleaning up each night.” Returning her attention to the parents, Miss Sidney continued, “I must really leave now.”

“Thank you for your help with our daughter,” David said.

“Come on, honey.”

David helped Abigail take the puzzle apart and put it away. He then took Abigail’s hand and placed an arm behind his wife as they exited the nursery together.

“Abigail, I’m proud of you for following the rules without complaining. I know that was hard.”

Abigail turned her attention to her father as they went up the stairs. “It’s okay. We’re busy tomorrow anyway.”

Then she whispered, “Cause it’s gonna be my birthday.” She looked up at her daddy, and he gave her a wink. “Daddy, how was your day? I missed you.”

“Thanks, honey. I had a busy day, but I’m glad to be with you. Sorry I’m so late.”

“Don’t you think Mommy looks pretty?”

David turned toward Marie and smiled. “Yes, honey. I think she’s radiant.”

“Radiant? What’s that?” Abigail laughed.

“Very beautiful, honey. I think she’s very beautiful.” David paused and kissed his wife. “And her beauty shines like the sun.”

“Come on, Mommy and Daddy.” Abigail giggled and pulled at her parents to move them forward.

The trio entered the great room where Marie had been waiting for her husband earlier. Gone were the decorations that had adorned the halls, gone were the musicians and gaily clad dancing couples, and gone was the very memory that had consumed Marie’s mind and caused her to dress tonight in such grand fashion.

The staff was present, just as they were earlier, and so were the patients they tended in this high-class transition house, a transition house for the mentally ill.