

BACKUP GIRL NO MORE: ADIOS TO MY V-CARD AND MY FIRST LOVE

Backup Girl No More

Backup Girl No More Chapter 21

Chapter 1

He claimed he couldn't marry her. A wife's duties would cage her: preparing daily meals, tending to husband and children, serving in-laws. He said he loved her too much to limit her freedom.

I stared at the screen, my chest tightening until I could barely breathe. Yet I remained silent, composed.

The next morning, I returned to the TV station. What Jackson didn't know was that I had my own form waiting to write – a transfer request to become a war doctor in Continent of Azora. As I signed

my name, I drew in a deep breath. The one I truly loved still waited on those distant battlefields. I

was going to find him.

“You're returning to medicine?!” The startled voice echoed through the hospital hallway that morning.

I handed over my reassignment papers with steady hands. “Yes, I'd like a permanent position in the

Nyara Republic.”

The director paused, taking the form. His brow furrowed as he read. “Zoey...” He exhaled softly, searching for words. “Your work in the Nyara Republic three years ago was exceptional. But now?

You're on marriage leave! You're about to be married – how can you make such a risk?”

He watched me, expecting justification.

I lowered my gaze, fingers intertwined. "I'm not getting married anymore."

"What?" His face registered shock.

Meeting his eyes firmly, I stated, "I'm calling off the wedding."

The night before, Jackson had gone shopping for wedding tableware, asking me to send him the list

from his computer. Opening the "Wedding Plans" folder, I'd stumbled upon another spreadsheet –

his relationship ledger.

Six women, each meticulously cataloged: height, appearance, family background, personality traits. My entry topped the list.

Name: Zoey

Background: Orphan, limited social connections

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V-Card and My First Love

Chapter 1.

Personality: Dutiful, maternal, unambitious

Notes: Proficient in household duties, suitable for childbearing Highlighted in yellow: "Ideal for marriage"

My fingers hovered over the keyboard as heat pricked my eyes. After a moment, I scrolled down.

His assessments of the others were equally clinical: "Excessive spending habits – rejected" "Poor work ethic – rejected" "Has dependent sibling – rejected"

Until the final entry: Sara. Her page held no ratings, no analysis. Just a single line: "You are a bird,

meant to soar proudly into distant skies."

–

This time, I didn't waver. I closed the folder, erased the files, and opened another document my unfinished application for a medical position in the Nyara Republic, where they desperately needed

surgeons.

As I signed my name, clarity washed over me: I wasn't meant for a cage built to ground a free spirit.

More importantly, the man who truly held my heart was still there, waiting.

Backup Girl No More Chapter 22

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

I remembered how Jackson had wavered over Sara's name while finalizing our wedding guest list.

Adding it, deleting it, over and over. When I asked why, he just smiled and said, "She's traveling the

world. She wouldn't come back just for this."

So she was his first love.

His Instagram was still open on the screen. I found Sara's profile and clicked through. Their message history was gone, but her latest post made my heart sink:

"The man I love is getting married? Well, I'm going to sabotage his wedding car and crash the whole

thing!"

Jackson's response below: "It wouldn't change anything. I still won't marry you." "Fine! Must mean you've found your soulmate, right?" "What are you talking about?" "Whatever! With your controlling family, being your wife would be like being a servant. No thanks!" "I know. That's why I'm marrying who they want me to marry." "I just couldn't bear to see you trapped like that."

"Couldn't bear to." Those words felt foreign coming from Jackson.

We'd met through a matchmaker. He was everything on paper – young, successful, the youngest associate chief physician at a prestigious hospital, with movie–star looks. But his controlling parents.

were why he remained single.

They wanted the perfect traditional daughter–in–law: submissive, hardworking, intuitive, and servile.

Because the moment I first saw Jackson, I thought: for that face, I'd do anything.

Two years together. His parents adored me. He grew accustomed to coming home to spotless floors, hot meals, and freshly pressed shirts. But he remained distant, politely detached.

Until his birthday this year. I decided to bake him a cake. The oven exploded during preheating.

When they rushed me to the ER, arm covered in glass shards, he came running. For the first time, I saw panic in his eyes. He held my face, voice shaking: “You don't have to do all this for me... Please, you don't have to...”

I thought then that he truly cared.

Later, he proposed.

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V–Card and My First Love

Chapter 2

I foolishly believed it was love, that he wanted to build a future together. Until last night, when I saw his exchange with Sara.

Sara – the one he loved enough to let go.

The screen's harsh glow illuminated my face. In that moment, I knew – this had to end.

Backup Girl No More Chapter 23

Chapter 3

Back home from the hospital, I unearthed several dusty camera bags from the back of my bookshelf – relics of a life I'd deliberately buried. The camera felt foreign in my hands, its batteries long dead.

While the charger did its work, I slipped the memory card into my computer and opened the forgotten photos. The first showed me treating a woman for cholera on a dirt road in Congo. The

second captured a child soldier, barely five, dwarfed by his rifle. The third revealed refugees in East

Meridian Province, huddled under tattered shelters...

The scent of smoke and dust seemed to seep through the screen, yanking me back. My chest tightened, pain spreading like tendrils through my body. I leaned back, eyes closed, willing my pulse to slow. A wry smile crossed my lips. Would Jackson still call me “obedient and docile” if he saw

these?

My phone buzzed – Jackson texting the restaurant address. Tonight was the dinner with his wedding

party. I had few close friends, so they were all his people. But this wasn’t just any gathering. Sara

had come home.

By the time I arrived, they’d ordered. Jackson sat at the head of the table, Sara beside him. No place

had been set for me.

Sara noticed my arrival with a smirk, looking me up and down. “Just grab a chair wherever,” she said casually.

I pulled one to the furthest corner. Jackson watched impassively, saying nothing.

“Sara, we didn’t think you’d make it back!” someone broke the silence.

“Miss Zoey’s wedding? I’d crawl here if I had to – just to see who he’s marrying.”

Knowing looks passed around the table, laughter tinged with mockery.

“Well, you two do have history.”

The conversation centered on Sara after that. She regaled them with tales: Celestial Sea tuna fishing, hiking the Camino de Santiago, scaling Uluru. They hung on every word, eyes shining with

admiration.

“Zoey, how can you go to such dangerous places as a woman?”

“Hmph!” Sara shot me a glance, voice dripping with disdain. “Some of us think beyond cooking and

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V-Card and My First Love

Chapter 3.

playing housewife.”

The words cut deep. I knocked back a shot of tequila, its burn numbing my tongue until the food lost

all taste.

She commanded the room, and Jackson... Jackson watched her with such tenderness his gaze could

melt butter.

During her story about Saharah Kingdomian scammers, she turned to him suddenly. “Want to learn how to say ‘my darling‘ in France?”

Jackson hesitated, then shook his head.

“I’ll teach you!” She leaned into his shoulder, whispering in his ear. “Chérie~”

He gently straightened her, ears flushing pink. “Sit properly...”

“Say it with me!”

He sighed, yielding to her playful persistence. “Chéri...”

“Perfect! You’re my chérie~”

Her eyes danced mischievously before fixing on me. “Ever been to Continent of Azora?”

Backup Girl No More Chapter 24

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Someone burst out laughing. “Her? She probably never leaves her hometown!”

Even Jackson smirked slightly, shaking his head. Sara's eyes narrowed with satisfaction. "My mistake! I should've asked which market has the cheapest vegetables or which toilet cleaner works

best!"

More laughter erupted. She turned away smugly, starting another story.

I slowly clenched my fists. Something inside me burned. Must be the alcohol, I thought. Why else

would such juvenile taunts get under my skin?

"I've been there." My voice cut through the noise, calm but firm.

The laughter died instantly. Sara turned, momentarily startled, before sneering, "What?"

"I've been to Azora."

Surprise flickered across her face before she recovered, voice dripping contempt. "No need to pretend. If you haven't been, just admit it! Lying only makes you look pathetic."

"I'm not lying."

"Oh really?" She crossed her arms, chin lifted. "Then tell us, where exactly? The coastal cities? The

tourist spots?"

I met her gaze steadily. "The Nyara Republic."

The room went silent.

"...Nyara?" someone echoed uncertainly. "She must be drunk," another laughed nervously, "making

up stories!"

The fire inside me blazed hotter. I wasn't alone there—there were countless others. Journalists, peacekeepers, aid workers... Were we all not "normal people"?

I swept my gaze across the table, each word deliberate: "Not only have I been there, I lived there for

a year. I've witnessed resource wars, worked in epidemic treatment centers, distributed aid with UN workers. I took a bullet."

Stunned silence fell. They stared at me, dumbfounded.

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V-Card and My First Love

Chapter 4

I swirled my wine, fixing my gaze on Sara, voice turning glacial: "And one more thing. There are no yellowfin tuna in the Celestial Sea—wrong climate entirely. The ancient paths don't start in Westland; they run through the Northern Kingdom. And the sacred rocks of the Southern Isles? Closed to

climbers since 2019."

My lips curled into a slight smile. "Sara, lying is risky. It's so easy to get caught."

Her face drained of color.

Confused glances darted around the table. Sara leapt to her feet, voice rising shrilly: "She's just some orphan nobody—how could she have been to such places? She's the liar!"

I rested my chin on my hand, smiling faintly. "Then show us your photos. You've been everywhere; surely you took pictures?"

Her composure crumbled. "I... I..."

"Don't tell me you have none?"

She turned to Jackson, nearly crying. "Jackson! What's wrong with your fiancée?! This was supposed to be my welcome party! How can you let her attack me like this? Fine! If I'm so unwelcome, I'll

leave!"

She made a show of wiping her eyes before storming out.

Chaos erupted. Others urged Jackson, "Go after her! It's late—what if something happens?"

Backup Girl No More Chapter 25

Chapter 5

Everyone else stood to leave.

“We’re heading out, Zoey.” Their whispered comments carried clearly to my ears. “Who does she think she is, challenging Sara? As if she didn’t steal someone else’s man.” “Just jealous. Look at Sara – beautiful, accomplished. What’s she got?” “Picks a fight with Sara, and her own husband runs after

her. Pathetic!”

Their mocking laughter faded down the hallway, leaving the private room in eerie silence.

Alone, I let out a bitter laugh and poured another drink, downing it in one go.

Truth be told, Sara wasn’t entirely wrong – I hadn’t been to those places. But I knew she was lying.

Because of my mother.

I wasn’t always parentless.

My mother served with Doctors Without Borders in conflict zones. Back then, a woman working abroad while her husband raised their child was unthinkable. Neighbors would sneer: “Your mother

abandoned you!” I’d fight back with my tiny fists, defending what little pride I had, only to face crueler mockery.

Mother sent letters with exotic stamps, describing her work in vivid detail, always including photographs. When Father read them to me, I’d picture her – my hero in a white coat.

She once wrote: “Zoey, most people live in small worlds, but the real world is vast. See it for yourself. Only by broadening your horizons will you discover what you truly want.”

But when I was five, she died serving in the Kosovo War. Her colleagues recovered only her ID badge. Inside, among the patient records she died protecting, was a photo of me – from who

knows

when.

I was too young to understand “killed in action,” but I remember the neighbors’ cruel words: “See?

Women who step out of line never end well.”

I lost my mother, but her words stayed with me: Go see for yourself. Document everything. Only

then will you know what you truly want.

Yesterday, finding that old camera, its worn body still seemed to hold her warmth. Her legacy, my childhood guide. Burying my face in my hands, tears slipping through my fingers, I whispered: “Mom, I miss you so much...”

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V-Card and My First Love

Chapter 5

The next morning, a splitting headache jolted me awake. Opening my eyes to a familiar ceiling – home. But how did I get here?

After gulping water to soothe my throat, I noticed Jackson in the living room, face dark with anger. “Is this how a proper wife behaves?” Ignoring him, I headed for the study. The desk was empty.

“Where’s my camera?” My voice cracked.

Jackson smiled coldly. “I gave it to Sara.”

My breath stopped. “What did you say?”

Arms crossed, he smirked. “Didn’t you tell her to take more pictures?”

A roar filled my head. He gave my mother’s legacy to Sara?

The glass slipped from my hand, shattering. I lunged, grabbing his collar: “How dare you touch my

camera?! How dare you?!”

Jackson flinched, startled by my fury. “Sara... she’s at the Santa Cloud Hotel.” “Room number!” “1103.”

I shoved him aside and ran.

Speeding to the hotel, I burst onto the eleventh floor and kicked open 1103. Sara appeared, livid. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

Ignoring her, I stormed in. There it was – the camera sitting quietly on the TV stand. I grabbed it and

turned to leave.

“Stop!” Sara yanked me back, voice shrill. “Jackson gave that to me! You have no right!”

I turned and slapped her hard. “This is mine. My mother’s legacy. You have no right.”

She stood stunned, then screamed: “How dare you hit me, you bitch!”

She lunged, clawing and shrieking as we struggled. In the chaos, I heard the camera strap snap. Then Sara, in blind rage, grabbed the camera and smashed it to the floor.

A sharp crack echoed. I stood frozen, watching my mother’s last remnant shatter before my eyes.

1.

Released on February 6, 2025

Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Cruel satisfaction flashed in Sara’s eyes. “If I can’t have it, neither can you!”

A wave of blind fury crashed over me. I lost all reason. Grabbing her hair, I slammed her against the wall with every ounce of strength. One impact, and blood began trickling from her forehead.

Sara screamed, “Help! Murder! She’s trying to kill me!”

The door burst open. Jackson rushed in, taking in Sara’s bloodied state. His face went pale. He pinned me against the wall, voice shaking with rage and shock: “Zoey! Have you lost your mind?!”

Behind him, Sara swayed unsteadily, one hand pressed to her bleeding forehead, the other trembling. “Darling,” she whimpered, “I’m... I’m terrified.”

I shoved Jackson away and fell to my knees. With shaking hands, I tried gathering the shattered camera pieces. They were cold and sharp, refusing to fit back together no matter how I tried.

Glass sliced into my fingertips, blood dripping onto the floor, but I barely noticed.

Jackson grabbed my hands roughly. “Stop it! It’s broken! You can’t fix it!”

I recoiled violently, tears streaming endlessly.

Through clenched teeth, he shouted, “It’s just a damn camera! You can buy another! Is this worth going crazy over?!”

His words cut like a knife. This wasn't just a broken camera. It was my mother's only remaining gift, her final legacy. To him, it was nothing but a worthless object.

I looked up, hatred surging through me. I slapped him hard, smearing my blood across his cheek.

“Jackson, get out! Get out of my life!”

His face froze in shock. Without hesitation, I yanked off my engagement ring and hurled it into the trash.

I packed everything and returned to my hometown to visit my mother. I sat before her gravestone all day.

Jackson called repeatedly. I never answered. Finally, I blocked his number.

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V Card and My First Love

Chapter 6

Sometimes shame overwhelmed me. Would my mother be disappointed? She'd raised me to live proudly, bravely, to explore the vast world. Instead, I'd wasted three years on a man who didn't deserve them.”

On the third day of my usual cemetery visit, I found something unexpected by her stone.

A pot of bird-of-paradise flowers. My heart stopped. They were her favorite.

Who had been here?

I rushed to the cemetery office to ask. The staff said someone brought flowers every few months. They gave me an address.

A suspicion formed, but I dared not believe it. Following the address led me to a small flower shop.

The owner explained: Three years ago, someone had placed a standing order. Bird-of-paradise flowers delivered to Amanda's grave every three months.

“They paid three years in advance, so I remember clearly,” the shopkeeper said.

My heart raced. “Who placed the order?”

The shopkeeper checked their records. “A man named Joseph.”

My breath caught. I nearly collapsed.

“We haven’t been able to reach him lately,” they continued. “Had a supply issue once and wanted to

ask about substituting flowers, but never got through.”

They looked up, expression turning concerned. “Miss, are you... are you alright?”

Released on February 6, 2025

Chapter 7

I rubbed my tired eyes and waved dismissively. “I’m fine, really.”

The perceptive shopkeeper offered me tissues and a cup of floral tea before turning to tend their flowers.

I sat quietly for a long while, letting my emotions settle. Finally, I chose a bouquet of daisies and prepared to leave.

As I reached for my wallet, the shopkeeper stopped me. “This one’s on the house.”

I looked at them, confused.

They smiled softly, lost in memory. “Miss, I just remembered something Joseph said back then. He told me someone might come asking about this order one day. ‘If she comes alone, give her flowers. Tell her: Keep moving forward; the starlight will light your path.’”

That day, I broke down completely at my mother’s grave.

I never imagined he would reach out to me like this. Never thought I’d still need his comfort after all this time. What must it have taken for him to leave those words with the shopkeeper? I alone understood the meaning of “if she comes alone.” It meant he was no longer here.

That evening, my colleague called. “Zoey, your flight’s booked for next week.” “Who’s your insurance beneficiary this time? Your husband?”

I shook my head. “Please list Doctors Without Borders.”

“Why them?”

I sniffled softly. “Because he was their doctor.”

As I stumbled out of the cemetery, I saw Jackson waiting. He looked disheveled, unshaven, exhausted. Wordlessly, he handed me a box. Inside lay a camera – the same model as my mother’s. “Couldn’t fix the old one.”

We stood in silence, staring at each other. I didn’t take the box. I didn’t care how he’d found me, or where he’d discovered this 1994 camera. What I treasured was already broken. An identical replacement meant nothing.

Seeing my rejection, he rubbed his temples wearily. “Come home. The wedding’s next week.

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V Card and My First Love

Chapter 7.

Invitations are out. If you keep making trouble, there’s no fixing this.”

I laughed bitterly. “I’m the troublemaker?”

He sighed, grabbing my hand. “Zoey, I know you’re acting out because you love me. You think I favor her, giving away your things. But she demanded an apology. I gave her that old camera to get her off your back. You humiliated her publicly- I had to do something.”

Looking at him, I felt a flicker of pity. “Jackson, I don’t love you.”

He froze, then his expression hardened. “Don’t lie. If you didn’t love me, why look at me like that?”

I chuckled softly, withdrew my hand, and touched his face. “Such a shame... I’ll never see this face again.”

His expression shifted with dawning realization. “You-”

His phone rang. Sara. He hesitated before answering.

Her voice came through, desperate: “Jackson, I’m leaving... I’m sorry for causing trouble. I just... got jealous of her.”

“Sara, where are you?”

“Don’t come. Go to her. She’s your future.”

The call ended. Jackson thrust the box into my arms and ran, vanishing down the street.

I watched him go and sneered. Lifting the box, I dropped the camera in a nearby trash can. I was leaving too.

The next week flew by – physical training, language review, story development, guide coordination. Jackson kept texting from new numbers.

[What did you mean that day?] [Don't we have more to discuss?] [Sara apologizes for what happened.] [Where are you?]

I ignored them all.

The day before departure, he messaged: “Wedding's tomorrow. Will you come?”

I snapped my SIM card, grabbed my suitcase, and headed to the airport.

Sunlight streamed through the window as we took off. From here to Nyara's capital, there were no

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V-Card and My First Love

Chapter 7

direct flights. I'd transfer in the Saharah Kingdom – almost twenty hours total. Time enough for memories.

Pulling down the airline eye mask, I whispered: “Joseph, I'm coming back. I miss you so much.”

Chapter 8

Released on February 6, 2025

Chapter 8

I first met Joseph at a refugee camp in Meridia. The eastern region of the Nyara Republic was in turmoil at the time. Armed groups, driven by the scramble for mineral wealth and ethnic rivalries, regularly raided villages, forcing hundreds of thousands to seek sanctuary in major cities.

When I arrived at the camp, several physicians were attending to a young girl. She had sustained injuries from an explosion, with shrapnel lodged in her ear canal. Her violent thrashing and piercing cries made the medical team hesitant to proceed.

“Joseph!” someone called out.

A tall figure stepped forward. After assessing the situation, he unexpectedly produced a deck of playing cards from his white coat and began performing sleight-of-hand tricks. The girl's attention was immediately captured, her struggles ceasing, allowing the doctors their window of opportunity.

As the metal fragment clinked into the surgical tray, the cards in Joseph's hands had vanished, replaced by a delicate violet native to Azora. The girl gazed in wonder, tugging at his sleeves in search of the disappeared deck, but found nothing. She burst into delighted giggles, pulling at her parents' clothing with excitement.

Joseph presented the flower to the child and guided her grateful parents out of the medical tent. The scene was so striking that I couldn't resist capturing it on my phone. The camera's shutter caught his attention. He turned, slightly startled, and inquired in French, "We don't see many new faces here.

Where are you from?"

"America," I responded.

His eyes brightened as he switched to English. "I'm Joseph. Currently stationed in Meridia."

"Where did you get that flower?" I asked, intrigued. Fresh blooms were a rare sight in the camp.

He beamed with pride. "I grew it myself. Would you like to see?"

Following him to his quarters, I discovered an ingenious garden he had crafted from salvaged materials – foam containers, plastic bottles, and broken tiles. The space flourished with local violets, daisy, tropical orchids, and native azaleas.

"What made you decide to grow these?" I asked.

He casually propped his feet on the table, responding with quiet conviction, "Because flowers bring joy."

-A

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V-Card and My First Love

Chapter 8.

Noting my puzzled expression, he let out a soft laugh. "You're probably thinking food, clean water, and medicine should take priority, and flowers are an unnecessary luxury, right?"

I nodded.

His voice grew gentle but resolute. "Everything here pushes people to forget beauty, but flowers remind them they're alive – that there's still something worth anticipating. Where there's hope, there's life." A confident smile played across his features as he winked. "That's why flowers matter."

His optimism and passion radiated like a beacon, resonating deeply within me. I found myself transfixed by his vibrant spirit.

Being the only two from US in the entire camp, we naturally gravitated toward each other. Contrary to my initial impression, Joseph was fiercely dedicated to his work. He shared comprehensive data on casualties and treatments, and even guided me through my first surgical procedure – a successful emergency cesarean delivery.

Later, he noticed an alarming pattern in AIDS–related deaths at the camp. “We’ve been distributing

antiretrovirals, yet the mortality rate keeps climbing...”

“That doesn’t add up unless they’re not taking the medication,” I observed.

“Let me investigate,” I volunteered.

After interviewing numerous refugees, I uncovered a disturbing truth: nearly all distributed medications, not just antiretrovirals, were being traded on the black market. Dealers would exchange bags of moldy cornmeal for these life–saving drugs because the refugees’ immediate need

to feed their families outweighed all other concerns.

Joseph and I risked our safety to alert the United Nations, triggering international media coverage. The UN World Food Programme mobilized swiftly in response. When the relief convoy finally

arrived, an unprecedented wave of jubilation swept through the camp.

We worked tirelessly, treating the sick and distributing supplies until exhaustion overtook us. After

handing the final sack of potatoes to a mother cradling her infant, Joseph and I collapsed against a truck’s side panel.

He turned to me, his smile as brilliant as the morning sun. “Zoey, thank you.”

“For what?”

“Before you arrived, I could only watch helplessly as they suffered. You showed me purpose and helped the world see both them and us.”

Released on February 6, 2025

Chapter 9.

Chapter 9

Joseph and I quickly fell into an easy rhythm working together. He was universally beloved at the camp – not just for his exceptional medical skills and reliability in crises, but for his infectious humor that could coax a laugh from anyone. Even my most reticent interview subjects would open up when he was around, sharing stories they'd normally keep close to their chest.

I found myself gravitating toward his presence more and more.

One day, while following him as he sprayed cholera preventive solutions around the camp, we heard a piercing cry for help from an empty tent. We rushed over and pulled back the flap to find a man pinning a young girl to the ground, tearing at her clothes.

My blood ran cold. I lunged forward, shoving the man away. He stumbled but quickly regained his footing, cursing as he raised his fist to strike.

Before the blow could land, Joseph pulled me behind him and thrust forward his work ID. "If you

want to keep receiving medical care, I suggest you leave. Now."

The man's eyes fixed on the red cross emblazoned on Joseph's badge. With a stream of muttered obscenities, he hastily pulled up his pants and fled.

We escorted the girl to the UNHCR office and arranged for her relocation to a different tent. Once

everything was settled, Joseph gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze. "Don't let it get to you. You did

good."

I stiffened. "I'm fine."

Violence and crime were inevitable realities in refugee camps – I'd known that from the start.

But Joseph cocked his head, studying me. "You don't look fine."

His observation caught me off guard. I touched my face reflexively, as if to verify his words.

Then, without warning, his serious expression melted into a playful grin as he pinched my cheeks. "Your emotions aren't just written on your face, you know!"

It became his new favorite game. Every time we met, he'd observe me for a moment before declaring, "You're in high spirits today," or "Alright, who got under your skin this time?"

I couldn't help but laugh, equal parts irritated and amused. "How do you do that?"

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V-Card and My First Love

Chapter 9

He leaned back, lacing his fingers behind his head with a knowing smirk. "I have a younger brother. You remind me of him sometimes – both of you try to bottle everything up inside."

The mention of family made my smile fade, and I fell quiet.

"What about you?" I ventured carefully. "Doesn't your family worry about you being here?"

His expression turned neutral, almost detached, as he shook his head. "We're not in contact anymore."

"What? Why?" The words tumbled out before I could stop them.

"I wouldn't play by their rules." There was resignation in his voice. "They were suffocating. Growing up, everything was dictated – this program, that activity. Any resistance meant punishment."

"I did what they wanted – studied medicine, landed a hospital position. But it was never enough. They kept pushing – chase that promotion, build that reputation, bring honor to the family name. I couldn't live like that anymore."

"With Doctors Without Borders, I can focus on what medicine should be about – saving lives. That's

what I love."

He exhaled heavily. "I worry about my brother, though."

I looked at him questioningly. A bitter smile crossed his face as he continued, "They had him as a backup plan, in case I proved disappointing. After I left, they pushed him down the same path I'd escaped. He puts on a show of compliance, but I know he's drowning inside."

"I heard he fell for this free-spirited girl, but my parents..." He trailed off, shaking his head. "They made sure that ended quickly."

It was the first time he'd opened up about his family. I hadn't expected such pain beneath his cheerful exterior.

We sat in companionable silence until he turned to me. “What about you? What brought you here to practice medicine? Doesn’t your family worry?”

Backup Girl No More Chapter 30

Chapter 10

Chapter 10

Perhaps because he had shared his own family story so openly, I found myself willing to speak.

“My mother passed away,” I said hesitantly. “And my father, like yours, severed ties with me.”

That year, at my mother’s funeral, a sea of black-clad mourners filled the hall. The officiant delivered a lengthy eulogy, but my mind drifted halfway through. I remember looking at my mother’s photograph – her gentle smile seeming to reach out to me – and I smiled back.

The next instant, my father’s hand struck me to the ground.

“Your mother is dead!” he roared. “How dare you smile?”

Every eye in the room turned to me as if I were some kind of monster. Terror gripped me. Tears welled in my eyes, but I bit my lip, not daring to make a sound.

The first year after her death, my father would sit in the living room at night, poring over her letters

and photographs. By the second year, he had packed her belongings into boxes and pushed them into a forgotten corner. By the third year, he had remarried.

My new stepmother dragged the boxes into the yard, declaring she would burn them all. I

desperately salvaged what I could from the pile, clutching my mother’s camera to my chest. The flames left their mark on my skin.

That camera became all I had left of her.

Later, my half-sister was born. The family’s attention shifted entirely to her. I grew up like a shadow, turning eighteen without anyone noticing.

I enrolled in medical school. On move-in day, my father handed me a thick envelope.

“You’re an adult now,” he said. “Don’t come back.”

I nodded and counted it – thirty thousand dollars. The price of severing our blood ties.

At university, professors and classmates praised my aptitude for medicine, noting how I remained composed in any situation. When I began practicing, this became my trademark strength.

I let out a small sigh. These memories, buried so deep, had never been shared before.

Joseph's brow furrowed, the usual hint of mischief vanishing from his expression. His voice carried

Backup Girl No More: Adios To My V Card and My First Love

Chapter 10

an unusual gravity.

“Zoey, don't you realize? You were only five years old.”

I froze. “What?”

“Laughing and crying are a child's birthright,” he said softly. “You've been holding yourself back

because no one ever let you be a child.”

His gentle words hit me like lightning.

After the funeral, my father had stopped speaking to me. When my sister arrived, my needs were always secondary. Through college, I juggled studies with survival. Thinking back, I couldn't recall a single moment when I'd been allowed to simply be a child.

I lowered my head. “Maybe so... but I'm grown now. I can't act like a child anymore. To laugh when I

want, cry when I want...”

Before I could finish, a sudden jolt shot through my ribs, like a spark of electricity. I yelped in surprise and spun around.

Joseph had poked my side, wearing an impish grin. “Says who?”

I tried to dodge, but he caught me. It was as if he'd found some hidden switch – I couldn't stop giggling, no matter how hard I tried to maintain composure. The laughter burst out of me like air from a balloon.

“Stop! No more! It tickles! Hahaha... please!”

I struggled to escape but found myself cornered. Tears of laughter streamed down my face.

“Have mercy, Dr. Joseph! Let me go!”

He flashed a mischievous smile and reached out again. I curled into a defensive ball, bracing myself, but the expected tickle didn't come.

Cautiously peeking up, I saw his open palm extended toward me. In it lay a piece of candy.

“Here's a treat for the little one,” he said with a gentle smile.

I stared at him, speechless. Unwrapping the candy, I popped it in my mouth. It wasn't particularly good – artificial fruit flavor, overly sweet. But it made my eyes burn.

Joseph crouched down, pulled me to my feet, and wrapped me in his arms.

Chapter 10

“Go ahead and cry,” he whispered. “It's alright. I know it hurts.”

The warmth and strength of his embrace crumbled my final defenses. How long had it been since I felt understood, cherished? So long that I'd convinced myself I didn't deserve it.

Yet here, in a distant land across the world, he comforted me with a piece of candy, as if I were still

that little girl.

In that moment, the tears I'd held back since I was five years old finally broke free, twenty years of

pain pouring out at once.

He kept patting my back gently, letting his shirt absorb my tears. At some point – I'm not sure when –

I cried myself to sleep in his arms.

From then, Joseph and I began dating..