

The Billionaire's Secret Wife

Chapter Fourteen

The next morning, Vanessa thought that maybe she'd spoken too soon.

Zoe greeted her with, "Harry and John are looking for you. They want to see you immediately. In the Grand Conference Room."

Vanessa raised an eyebrow. It was the nicest one the firm had, the one the partners used to impress new recruits and clients. She walked briskly down the hall, getting a few strange looks along the way. They barely registered. Strange looks were becoming almost normal, now that she was working so little.

She stopped in front of the dark wood door and took a deep breath. The Grand Conference Room isn't designed for layoffs. You'll be okay.

She knocked once and went inside. The conference room had a long mahogany table with expensive leather chairs. The windows gave a panoramic view of downtown Los Angeles, and the pristine cream walls had built-in shelves that held strategically placed awards and photos of the partners posing with various VIPs. It had been designed to impress.

Neither Harry nor John sat at the head of the table. Oh no. That seat currently belonged to another, far more important person: Barron Sterling.

Vanessa paused. Despite his age, Barron looked as languid and deadly as a great white shark. Fortunately his eyes twinkled with something that looked like good humor. She wondered about it for a split-second before remembering that it had to be because Justin had survived the crash. Totally understandable.

A Saville Row suit encased his solid body, only a hint of softness around the middle betraying his advanced years. He toyed with a sugar cookie that was on a plate in front of him.

Tags:

Source:

The Billionaire's Secret Wife - Page 48

Vanessa nodded to him and turned to the partners. “You were looking for me?”

“Yes.” John glanced at his watch. “For the last twenty-six minutes.”

She flushed. “I wish you’d called.”

“Nonsense,” Barron said, his gaze turning flinty as he glanced at John. “I’d never let anybody disturb my niece’s morning.”

She blinked a few times. “Your niece?”

Barron wiped his hands clean and rose. Facing her, he spread his arms. “Welcome to the family, Vanessa.”

She stared at Barron, then at the partners. The latter looked quite pleased. They were actually beaming at her like she was a prize race-horse who’d just won the triple crown.

“Mr. Sterling, I think there’s been a mistake,” Vanessa said thinly. Despite her suggestion to make their marriage public the night before, she was certain Justin hadn’t gone ahead and told his great-uncle. He knew how Barron was.

“Nonsense. I don’t make mistakes. And please, call me Barron.”

No mistakes? She bit the inside of her cheek. She could think of a few times, but mentioning them now wouldn’t be prudent.

Barron continued, “My only objection to all this is that you didn’t invite me to the wedding. Despite what you might’ve heard, I make a marvelous wedding guest.”

“I’m sure,” she said automatically. Her stomach suddenly started churning. “Excuse me,” she said, then bolted from the conference room.

John yelled from behind her, and Barron muttered something. She couldn’t make out anything, her ears ringing. She reached the bathroom and emptied her stomach.

She rinsed and wiped her mouth. Her cheeks looked flushed, matching the apple red of her hair, but otherwise she was deathly pale. She put a hand to her forehead. How could Barron know about the marriage?

As she walked out of the bathroom, she bumped into Stan. He gave her a smirk too big for his small head. “Now it’s Barron Sterling, eh?”

“Back off, Stan.” She gritted her teeth at how shaky she sounded. It was galling to look weak in front of the enemy. Stan raised a supercilious eyebrow and walked off; she composed herself and marched back into the conference room.

Barron munched on his sugar cookies, while the partners sat to his left, making small talk and trying to appear nonchalant, as though an associate running out was an everyday occurrence. Vanessa closed the door. “Sorry about that.”

“Are you all right? You look a little peaked,” Barron said. “Perhaps I shouldn’t have barged in like this after the unfortunate incident yesterday, but I simply couldn’t wait.”

“I’m fine, thank y—”

“I agree with Mr. Sterling.” Apparently Barron hadn’t given Harry leave to call him by his first name. “You should take some time off. I’ve seen your billable hours, and you’ve been working too hard recently. We’re all quite concerned.”

Concerned? Vanessa’s jaw loosened. Harry hated associates billing fewer than a hundred hours a week, to the point that he called them “parasites.” He probably thought she was the most indolent sloth in the history of mankind since she was only working forty.

“Harry’s right,” Barron said.

“Sir, that’s—”

“Vanessa, we’re family now. You’ll call me Barron, or Uncle Barron, if you wish.”

Her hands tightened into fists. “Naturally.”

Barron rose to his full height. He wasn’t particularly tall, but the confident way he held himself gave him a commanding air. “Take a week or so off. We can do all the right things to welcome you into the family. And perhaps you can change your name while you’re at it? Vanessa Sterling... It has a certain ring to it.”

She forced a smile. “I have to admit, it does,” she said, all the while thinking We’ll see.

* * *

Her cell phone was ringing in her purse when Vanessa made it back to her office. It was Kerri Lloyd, Justin’s cousin.

“Oh my gosh, I can’t believe you’re family now!” Kerri said. “I thought Barron was joking when he told me this morning.”

Tags:

Source:

The Billionaire's Secret Wife - Page 49

“He wasn’t.”

“I see that. This is awesome.”

“Thank you,” Vanessa said through rubbery lips. She stood at her window, not really seeing the view.

There was a beat of silence. “You don’t sound so good. Are you still shocked about the accident?”

Vanessa made a non-committal noise.

“We’ve got to meet and chat. I never pegged Justin for the impulsive elopement type.” Then Kerri added, “You either, for that matter. But this is so romantic.”

Romantic? “There’s nothing to tell, really.” It had been about the baby. The heir. Saccharine I love yous had never been exchanged.

“You don’t expect me to believe that, do you? Listen, I gotta go, but we’re definitely meeting up sometime soon. Barron said it was a secret elopement, but now that it’s out, I’m sure your parents will want to chat.”

Kerri hung up as Vanessa bit back a groan. Damn it. It wasn’t just her parents, but her brothers who’d descend upon her. Shane might even call, for news this big.

Two knocks and her door opened. Zoe stuck her head in. “Hey, is it true you’re married to Justin Sterling?”

“Where did you hear that?”

“Everyone’s talking about it.”

She sighed. Apparently, gossip was the only thing in the universe that traveled faster than light. “Yes, it’s true.”

“Wow. No wonder you almost fainted yesterday.” Zoe flushed. “I wish I’d known. I would have phrased things a little differently.”

“It wasn’t your fault. We were trying to keep it quiet.”

“Still, it’s so romantic. Young love. Did you elope in Vegas?”

Vanessa shook her head. “Canada.”

“Huh. I had no idea Canada was an elopement destination.”

“We’re just crazy iconoclasts. Um, would you mind closing the door? I have a few things I need to wrap up. And if anybody calls, I’m not in.”

“Sure. By the way, Sandra said you have the next two weeks off. She wanted me to remind you.”

“Of course,” Vanessa said, trying not to kick her desk. Sandra was Harry Dickson’s secretary. Harry would’ve never given her that many days off if she’d asked, but since Barron had practically demanded it... “Thanks.”

Vanessa sat down. Her phone rang again, and she turned it off. So many emotions were roiling...and she wanted to throttle Justin for the mess in her office! How could he have let Barron know? Her husband had all the finesse of an elephant in heat.

She would’ve preferred to announce their marriage in a way that would minimize the disruption to both of their lives. Now, with everyone whispering about it everywhere, that was impossible.

Don’t be ungrateful. You would’ve given anything to have Justin alive just a day ago. You got your wish. Don’t get angry over something Barron’s done. Justin might not have had anything to do with it.

She closed her eyes and dragged in some air. Maybe it would be good for her to take some time off, talk with family, and figure out her next steps. This was just a minor hiccup in her life. Besides the firm was already making it clear she wouldn’t have made partner anyway. What did it matter if everyone knew she was a Sterling now? Her career was effectively over.

She turned the phone back on and called Iain and Mark first. Neither picked up—they were generally busy—so she left them both a message, letting them know she was married to Justin Sterling.

Dane, on the other hand, had an assistant who was a news and gossip magnet and superb at reading situations. She instantly connected Vanessa to him.

“Make it short; I’m in a meeting,” Dane said.

Vanessa sighed. Work before family—her oldest brother’s MO. “I got married.”

A stunned silence, then he said, “To whom?”

Tags:

Source:

The Billionaire's Secret Wife - Page 50

“Justin Sterling.”

“Prenup?”

She

frowned. “No.”

“You did well then.”

“There’s more to a marriage than a prenup or lack thereof.”

“Of course. But it’s nice not to sign one, especially if you’re a woman and have fewer assets.”

“Do you ever actually listen to yourself?”

“Yes. And as a high-priced lawyer, you know I’m right.” He hung up.

She glared at the phone. She should’ve known Dane would be callous about the whole thing. Not even a token “congratulations.”

Well, what did she expect from the manipulative jerk? At least her three other brothers were nice. Since she no longer knew Shane’s number, given all his travels, she emailed him a short message, letting him know she was married and that she missed him. It wasn’t like Shane to be gone so long, as adventurous as he was.

Then she debated who she should call next. It was going to be either her mom or dad, and she flipped the “inner conflict resolution” quarter she kept in her desk drawer. It came up heads.

She dialed and waited. Ceinlys picked up on the fourth ring. “Hello dear.”

“Hi, Mom.”

A beat of silence. “What’s wrong?”

Vanessa closed her eyes briefly. There was no escaping the maternal mood radar. “I just wanted you to know that I, ah, got married. To Justin.”

“You what?”

“I married him. Justin Sterling.”

“Justin Sterling.”

“Yes.”

“When did this happen?”

“About seven weeks ago.”

“Vanessa!” Ceinlys gasped. “And you never told me. He didn’t mention it either...and both of you came over to my party!”

“Well, we weren’t going to tell anybody for the time be—”

“I am not ‘anybody.’ Really, Vanessa. Keeping an affair like this from your own mother. Marrying someone like him isn’t just a matter of love.”

Ceinlys would know from experience. Vanessa covered her face with a hand.

“Did you negotiate your own prenup?” her mother asked.

She sighed. “There isn’t any prenup.” Not for a lack of trying. She would’ve preferred everything to be laid out crystal clear.

Ceinlys made a vague humming noise. “I see. Well. When is the honeymoon?”

“Whenever Barron decides is good, I guess,” Vanessa grumbled.