

# Love in the Season of Blossoms

## Chapter 5

The shattering glass cut Alden off mid-sentence. Vivian jerked back from his arms like a startled rabbit.

“Willow, you’re awake!” She rushed to the hospital bed. Tears were already welling in her eyes. “How do you feel? Are you still in pain? This is all my fault...”

Willow’s pale lips curled into a sneer. “How could I get better with you in my sight?”

Vivian’s tears fell harder. Her shoulders trembled as if the words had struck bone. She bit her lip, threw Alden a glance, and ran out.

Alden took a half-step after her, then forced himself to stop.

He turned to Willow. His voice was low. “Ms. Willow, it was a tense situation. I didn’t have time to react...”

Willow didn’t answer. She just turned away and stared out the window. She didn’t want to hear it.

For three days, Alden stood guard outside her hospital room like some dutiful sentry. Not once had she spoken to him, not until the day they discharged her.

Willow walked straight to the study. Her legs were still unsteady from her injuries. She yanked open the mahogany drawer and pulled out a gleaming black leather whip.

This was the Rooney family’s traditional method of discipline. One strike could split flesh.

“Send for Alden,” she told the butler.

Alden pushed the door open to find Willow meticulously cleaning her whip. Sunlight poured through the floor-to-ceiling windows, carving shadows beneath her lashes.

“You’re my bodyguard, Alden. And you failed to protect me,” she said, lifting her gaze to meet his. “You don’t object to being punished, do you?”

Alden stood motionless. His eyes widened just a fraction, but Willow didn’t miss it.

This Blythera scion had probably never imagined a day when someone would dare to discipline him. He was the renowned sole heir of the Wilders.

How many people groveled for his favor every day? Who in their right mind would even think of laying a hand on him? And yet, here she was, whip in hand.

Willow studied his expression, then suddenly laughed.

He was actually hesitating. He could resign and walk away, but he didn't. Was it Vivian holding him back? Was he staying close because he hoped it would bring him closer to Vivian?

Willow's eyes burned. Her laughter was hovering dangerously close to tears.

Alden gritted his teeth and finally muttered, "No."

The moment the word left his lips, Willow's heart wrenched violently. Her grip hardened on the whip, and she raised her arm.

"Stop!"

A slender figure suddenly threw itself in front of Alden, desperately shielding him.

Tears welled in Vivian's eyes, and her voice was shaking. "Willow, if you need to punish someone, punish me! Den has nothing to do with this!"

"Move." Willow's voice was icy.

"No!" Vivian shook her head as tears streamed down her face. "I'm the one who got you hurt. Take it out on me—"

Alden tried to pull her back. "Ms. Vivian, this isn't your fault."

But she planted herself, refusing to give an inch.

Fury burned through Willow at the sight of her. Her whip lashed out. The crack split the air, sharp and piercing.

She'd aimed for Alden, but Vivian threw herself in front of him, taking the full force of the strike. A cry tore from her lips as her body shuddered, then folded.

Alden caught her before she hit the ground. His gaze fell on the wound. When he looked up again, Willow found herself staring into eyes so cold they burned.

There was murder in them. It was as if, in the next breath, he'd tear out her throat. A frozen dread seized her, locking her in place.

“Get out.”

Her voice trembled.

Alden swept Vivian's unconscious body into his arms and strode away. The study door slammed behind him with a deafening crash.

Willow stood rooted in place. Her hands were trembling too violently to clutch the whip.