

## Chapter 19

A wave of sympathy went through the remaining guests. "He seems like a good kid, just led astray," someone murmured.

The other four—Kennith, Leo, and the two others, Marco and Sam—followed Javier's lead. They knelt before my father, thanked him for his generosity, and accepted their exile. They promised that the companies my father had set up for them would continue to funnel profits back to the Barron family, a lifelong tithe of gratitude.

Then, one by one, they knelt before me.

"We were never your enemies, Elena," Kennith said, his voice thick with regret. "We were just fools. We were so blinded by our shared past with Eve that we couldn't see the angel right in front of us. We are so, so sorry."

They all promised their undying loyalty, that they would be waiting for my call, ready to serve me in any way. Then, they too filed out of the room, leaving a trail of broken promises and shattered futures behind them.

Javier looked at me, his expression full of a sorrow that seemed different from the others.

"The videos didn't show me with her," he said, his voice choked. "Because I was never with her."

I frowned, thinking back. He was right.

"I never touched her," he said, taking a shaky step toward me. "Elena... I've always been in love with you."

I stared at him, stunned. "Then why? Why did you join them in mocking me? Why did you help them?"

A bitter, self-deprecating smile twisted his lips. "Because I'm a coward. And a fool. I thought if I encouraged them to hate you, to push you away, that eventually... you would be left all alone. And

then you would finally see me." He shook his head. "I was a fool."

