

Chapter 9

I stared at Damien, a mixture of fury and incredulous laughter bubbling in my chest. My eyes burned with unshed tears.

"You really think I would still marry you?" I whispered, my voice breaking. "After what you did tonight, you still have the nerve to talk about marriage?"

My voice rose, filled with a hatred so intense it felt like it was physically choking me. "I would rather die than be your wife."

The look in my eyes must have finally gotten through to him. I saw his composure crack, a flicker of something like pain in his own eyes. He flinched as if I had struck him.

"I... I don't know what you mean," he stammered, feigning confusion.

"Don't you dare play dumb with me!" I shrieked, pointing a trembling finger at the smashed projector. "That! That was you! You did that to me!"

His face went pale. "You think... you think I was the one who played that video?" His voice held a note of genuine, wounded disbelief.

"Yes!" I bit down on my lip, the coppery taste of blood filling my mouth again. It didn't matter. "The cameras in my room were hidden. You're the only one who knew how to get past my security. You can pick any lock. You're a world-class hacker. You put them there to humiliate me! To punish me for slapping your precious Eve!"

I was sobbing now, the words tearing from my throat. "We grew up together, Damien! How could you be so vile?"

My grief and rage culminated in a single, desperate act. I lunged forward and slapped him across the face with all my strength.

The sound echoed through the silent ballroom. A bright red handprint bloomed on his cheek.

My father, who had been watching in stunned silence, finally moved. He hobbled forward, his cane shaking in his hand. "Damien," he said, his voice trembling with a terrifying fury. "Was it you?"

I could see the deep hurt in my father's eyes. He had loved Damien like a son. He had planned to give him everything—his daughter, his empire.

"Tell me the truth," my father demanded.

Damien stood tall, his expression unreadable, even with the mark of my hand on his face. "No, sir," he said, his voice calm and steady. "It wasn't me. I would never humiliate my future wife."

His face was so sincere, his denial so absolute, that for a split second, a sliver of doubt entered my mind.

But I crushed it. I couldn't afford to trust him. Not ever again.

"I will prove my innocence," Damien said, turning to the crowd. He pulled out a laptop. "The signal that controlled the projector can be traced. It leaves a digital footprint." He looked directly at me, his eyes burning with a strange fire. "And when I find who did this, I will tear them limb from limb."

