

Chapter 3

Laura stood right behind Cedric, looking at me with a pitiful expression.

"Rachel, Ced just got back from his business trip. Tina wanted to see him, so I invited him over for dinner. If you're mad ~~at me~~, but how could you curse my daughter like that?" Laura spoke through tears.

Cedric's face twisted in pain, clearly distressed for her. "Don't cry, Laura. Retribution will come her way soon enough!" he comforted her.

My face had gone numb from the pain, and my heart was dead and hollow. Laura's daughter was still alive, being fed and cared for by Cedric. But my daughter, my Stella, was gone. Marrying Cedric was my retribution.

"Rachel, it's your daughter who's mute, not you! Stop pretending to be pitiful! It's disgusting!" Cedric yelled.

His words stabbed at my heart. He could say whatever he wanted about me, but not about Stella. In anger, I raised my hand and slapped him.

Smack!

Cedric froze, then his face twisted in anger. "You dare hit me?!"

"You can hit me, but I can't hit you?" I sco ed.

For a moment, Cedric stared at me in confusion. "Rach, what the hell is going on with you today?"

"Rachel, Ced always said you were unpredictable and frightening. I didn't believe him, but now I see you're truly that short-tempered. You're terrifying..." Laura moved closer to me, crying as she grabbed my hand and pressed it to her face. "If you need to hit someone, hit me. Go ahead, hit me if it makes you feel better."

I found Laura's actions repulsive and yanked my hand away. And in our struggle, she suddenly let out a scream and ~~fell~~, ~~biting~~ ~~her~~ ~~face~~. A red mark ran down her cheek as if scratched by a nail.

"Rachel! You're insane!" Cedric exploded, pushing me aside.

I was ~~ung~~ against the ~~co ee~~ table, and everything on it was knocked to the ground with a deafening crash.

Cedric looked back at me, seemingly about to reach out, but Laura grabbed his arm. He turned back to her and asked, "Are you hurt?"

Lying there among the scattered items, I laughed. For Stella's sake, I had never kept my nails long, always trimming them down to the quick. Laura, on the other hand, had extensions with glittering rhinestones. It was too bad Cedric was blind to the truth.

Slowly, I stood up, a groan escaping my lips. "Ugh..."

I had fallen so many times yesterday while searching the mountain that my body was covered in bruises. And I nearly broke my back on the ~~co ee~~ table too.

Hearing my voice, Cedric glanced at me and, surprisingly, began to walk toward me. "Rach—"

But the next second, Laura cried out. "Ced, will my face be ~~dis gured~~? I'm a beauty consultant. If my face is scarred, I'll never be able to work again." She sobbed uncontrollably.

I stormed to the bedroom, grabbed the bag I had packed earlier and Stella's newest doll, then walked out.

"You haven't even apologized to Laura and you're thinking of running away? You really think I'll fall for your act?" Cedric said, displeasure evident on his face as he blocked my path.

"Out of my way. I need to get to Stella. She's waiting for me," I replied coldly.

Cedric frowned. "Stella isn't home? Where did you leave her? And now you're going out to look for her in the middle of the night?"

My eyes reddened as I glared at him. "Do you really not know where she is?"

Impatience ~~ashed~~ across Cedric's face. "How would I know where she is? Stop acting. It's obvious you told her to hide just to scare me." He started calling out, "Stella! Stop hiding! Come out and see how awful your mother is!" He grabbed my arm, trying to drag me into Stella's bedroom, determined ~~to~~ ~~make~~ me

In our struggle, something fell out of my pocket. It was Stella's death certicate.

Cedric picked it up, read it, and his expression fell. "What is this?"