

150 A Strange Relationship

The morning sun cast a warm glow over the vast Bennett estate and Amelie turned her face toward it for a moment, inhaling the refreshing scent of rain that had just stopped. 1

The gentle breeze tugged at her hair, lifting a few loose strands as she returned to reviewing the spreadsheets on her laptop. Just like always, the mornings in the mansion were quiet and serene but today, her mind could not find either peace or focus.

Liam had dropped a bombshell on her earlier that morning. He had invited Einar Ingvarsson to stay with them while he was in the country. The news had caught her completely off guard.

Einar, staying in their home? The very idea seemed absurd. She had immediately asked Liam why Einar couldn't just stay at the Emerald Hotel like any other visiting executive. After all, considering the tense confrontation between Liam and Einar in her office just months ago, it seemed like a clear recipe for disaster.

But Liam had been persistent, explaining that he wanted to start fresh with Einar.

"If you want him to strike a deal with the Diamond Group," Liam had said in a cunning tone, "we need to start over on a clean slate. Inviting him here shows that I bear no animosity. It's good for business, and the press will love it. It'll show them that we're more than just business partners—we're friends. After all, he agreed to the idea too!"

Amelie had reluctantly accepted such an arrangement, though a strange unease had settled in her chest. Liam had no idea about the complicated history she shared with Einar. He didn't know that Einar had once harbored feelings for her, feelings that might not have completely faded. He even kissed her once! 2

The thought of Einar staying under the same roof made her heart flutter with uncertainty. 2

Her attention was drawn to the driveway as a sleek black car with tinted windows slowly approached the mansion gates. Amelie's breath caught in her throat as she recognized the car. It was definitely Einar.

Her heart raced, and she felt a slight tremble in her chest.

With a deep breath, she stood up and smoothed the non-existent wrinkles from her knitted dress. She had to maintain her composure.

As Einar stepped out of the car, she made her way down to the entrance, her mind spinning with the weight of uncertainty.

Einar looked different—almost diminished. The confident, larger-than-life figure she remembered was gone, replaced by a man who seemed uncharacteristically nervous. As they shook hands, she noticed his palm was slightly sweaty, a detail that only heightened her unease.

"Mr. Ingvarsson," she greeted him warmly, curling her lips into a friendly smile. "It's nice to see you again so soon. Welcome to our home."

Einar's smile was thin, almost strained. "Thank you, Mrs. Bennett. It's... nice to see you again too."

As they made their way to the living room, the atmosphere between them felt heavy, charged with an undercurrent of tension. Einar glanced

around the room, taking in the luxurious surroundings before finally speaking while they were taking their seats on the soft couch. "This house is beautiful. It's... very you."

Amelie's smile faltered slightly. "Thank you, but I can't take credit for the decoration. The house was already like this when we moved in. I admire it nonetheless. Strangely... I have always dreamed of living in a place like this."

He nodded, but there was something in his gaze—something that made her feel exposed, as though he could see through the polite facade she had carefully constructed. "Living in a place like this suits you, Mrs. Bennett," he continued. "After all... you've always deserved the best."

His words sent a light shiver down her spine. The way he said it, with that almost wistful tone, confirmed what she had been fearing. He still had feelings for her.

"Well... Thank you." Amelie nodded shyly, and Einar shifted awkwardly, his eyes darting around the room as if searching for something to anchor himself. "Congratulations on your marriage," he finally said, though the words seemed to stumble

over his lips.

"Thank you," Amelie replied with a soft smile on her face.

The room fell silent, and they both felt that the awkward tension was almost suffocating.

After a while, Einar opened his mouth as if to say something more, but the words wouldn't come out. He hesitated, and then finally, with a voice tinged with an emotion Amelie couldn't quite place, he asked, "Are you happy?"

The woman looked at him, meeting his gaze fully for the first time since he had arrived. She hesitated too as if afraid to tell a lie but there was no lie to tell. Thus, she offered him a warm, friendly smile and finally answered, "Yes, Mr. Ingvarsson. I'm very happy."

Einar's smile was bittersweet, his eyes reflecting a sadness he couldn't hide. But beneath that sadness, there was also a hint of relief.

He wasn't here to disrupt her life; he was here to make peace with it. 2

After their conversation, Amelie called for Molly,

one of her maids, and asked her to fetch the butler to help Einar settle into the guest room.

"If you need anything, please don't hesitate to let me know," she told Einar with a gentle smile. "I'll have Mary assigned as your personal maid for the duration of your stay."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bennett," Einar said, his voice sincere. He lingered for a moment, as if there was more he wanted to say, but then he simply nodded and followed the butler out of the room.

'I still want to call her Mrs. Ashford... I still want to call her by her name.'

Meanwhile, in her study on the other side of the mansion, Vanessa Bennett was engaged in a phone conversation with one of her friends abroad. She paused and pulled the phone away from her face when she heard a knock on her door.

"Come in," she called out, ending the conversation with a short exchange of goodbyes.

The door opened to reveal Mrs. Estelle Greene, the previous housekeeper, shifting somewhat nervously as she made her way through the room. Vanessa noted the unusually serious expression on Estelle's face when she approached the desk.

"What is it, Mrs. Greene?"

"Mr. Einar Ingvarsson has arrived," Estelle informed her in a low voice.

Vanessa's eyes narrowed slightly as she considered this news. "I see. Thank you for letting me know."

The woman hesitated, glancing at the door before leaning in slightly. "But you know, Mrs. Bennett... Something is strange about his relationship with the new mistress."

Vanessa arched a brow, her curiosity surging. "Strange? What do you mean?"

"I've been observing them," Estelle began, choosing her words carefully. "And eavesdropping a bit... They seemed very awkward with one another. Something tells me that their relationship was—or perhaps still is—

more than just professional."

Vanessa leaned back in her chair, tapping her fingernails rhythmically on the desk as she mulled over this new information. *'More than professional, huh?'* she thought, her lips curving into a slow smile. *'How interesting...'*

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