

40 Weak Spots

The quiet sound of the car engine was almost soothing. Amelie leaned back in her seat, letting the subtle smell of leather wrap her in its comforting embrace. She looked at the moving view outside the car window while Anna's fast fingers typed something on the laptop she was balancing on her knees. 1

Finally, the stillness inside the car was shattered by Amelie's quiet voice, "So what did the lawyer say?"

Anna immediately stopped typing and looked at her boss, adjusting the round black frames on her face.

"Mr. Berg said the same thing everyone else said before him, Mrs. Ashford. Your share in this marriage is equal to the prenuptial agreement. If you initiate the divorce, then you will only be left with just a little over three percent of the company shares and settlement money; everything else will remain in Mr. Clark's possession. That includes the Emerald Hotel too."

Amelie let out an almost inaudible sigh and shifted her eyes back to the car window.

'Yes, no matter how many times we go over my marriage contract, even with the outside lawyers, the verdict is always the same – if I want to remain the equal owner of JFC Group, I have to stay married to Richard. His father managed to find a lot of loopholes to make sure that I wouldn't be able to leave him no matter what. Did Mr. Clark senior simply count on my greed?' 1

Her mind was a burden to her right now; the heaviness of the impending disappointment was compressing her heart like a thorny vine.

'The thing that hurts me the most is losing my hotel and all the charity work I have worked so hard to establish... This is simply ridiculous. Even the human connections I have, they all will go to Richard, leaving me with absolutely nothing. Not even friends.'

"Anna," her quiet voice called out her assistant's name again while her eyes were still fixed on the view outside the window, "Do you think I should divorce him?"

"No," Anna replied sternly and without



hesitation. "Mrs. Ashford, I know this is not an easy thing to deal with but you have too much to lose by giving your husband the upper hand. Mistresses come and go but what you have is forever. It... pains me to realize that if you decide to leave, you will be treated no better than one of those mistresses." 2

Amelie didn't say anything and closed her heavy eyelids.

Although Anna was just her executive assistant, Amelie chose her for this role because she was perceptive and intelligent. She joined her a few months after Amelie got married to Richard and has been loyally helping her ever since. If there was someone whom she trusted almost just as much as she trusted Elizabeth, it would be Anna.

Still silent, Mrs. Ashford pressed her right temple against the glass of the window, feeling its soothing coolness that instantly erased a tiny part of her concerns.

'Marriage contracts are made to shackle women to their husbands, especially if they know that the woman brings more value to their business. That is why barely anyone divorces their



husbands; there is just too much to lose. It's a contract, after all. You sign it and live the life you are bound to live; you break it and you face the consequences. The rich cry a different kind of tears.' 2

Her thoughts slowly drifted back to her past; she started thinking about Richard's family.

'Mrs. Clark was like a mother to me but at the same time, she was just a stranger protecting her son's stable future. All my life she tried to mold me into someone like her — a perfect wife; a perfect partner; a perfect supporting character in her son's glorious life. Before, I never really had any regrets. I worked hard to become who I was supposed to become and with that being said...'

Amelie slid her fingers over her wedding ring and frowned. *'I won't let some cunning woman waltz in on Richard's rekindled feelings and take away the results of my life's work. I'll find a way to protect what belongs to me.'* 1

The car pulled up to the restaurant and while the valet was on his way to open the door for



Amelie, Richard stepped in and opened the door himself, offering her his hand which greatly surprised his wife.

Shaking off that bewildering feeling, Amelie forced herself to smile at him and placed her hand in his, instantly noticing how hot it felt to her touch. Richard moved her hand over to his forearm and covered it with his other hand, smiling affectionately as they both knew that they were followed by the reporters hired by Mr. Clark.

As they walked to the restaurant's door, Richard noted, "You look very beautiful today, Lily. I'm glad I didn't miss with the color of the dress."

Her only response was a reserved "thank you"; there was no use giving him any credit, Amelie knew that the dress was selected by the owner of the store who knew her tastes very well.

Richard continued, "The reporters will be discreet and will only stay until I give you my gift. They just need a few good shots of us enjoying the celebration."

Amelie was surprised once again. "You got me another gift?"



"Why are you so surprised? It's funny how you always forget that I get a second gift for you for every one of your birthdays."

He was right; he always had a second gift prepared. In the past, he used to say that it pleased him to see her bewildered expression.

Now, Mrs. Ashford felt nothing but weird. Suddenly, all the warm memories of her past birthdays resurfaced, flooding her head and heart with the confusing feelings of nostalgia and regret.

Richard was good. He knew all her weak spots and he never hesitated to abuse them. Amelie could only hope that at least today, she would finally be able to resist. 1