



82 Without This Marriage, I Am Nothing ¹

Amelie stood before the hospital registration desk while the nurse was looking up Sophie's name in the system. Even these few short moments of rest were enough to help her come to her senses as she didn't want to appear before Sophie in such a distressed state. ¹

For once, she was grateful for the nurse's slow fingers.

"Sophie Fisher, room 315, recovery ward. She has just finished her physical therapy."

The nurse's chipper voice rang in Amelie's ears, jolting her back to reality. She smiled, thanked the nurse, and headed straight toward the elevators, pressing the cold round button to take her to the third floor.

Leaning over the elevator's wall, she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the elevator's mirror.

'I look horrible... I am ditching work today; I should just spend this day in bed.'

As that decision was made, the elevator doors slid open and Amelie walked through the long, brightly lit corridor, searching for Sophie's room.

At last, there it was.

"Sophie? Can I come in?"

Amelie knocked lightly on the door and her question was met with a quiet "Yes". As soon as she opened the door, the woman's heart sank and her heart started beating faster.

"Mrs. Ashford! Mrs. Finch told me you would come. I... well, you can see it for yourself."

Amelie approached the girl's bed, her glistening eyes glued to a couple of crutches next to the bedstand.

'This brings back unpleasant memories...'

Seeing how Amelie was looking at the crutches, Sophie couldn't hold back her tears anymore.

"Mrs. Ashford, what am I to do now?"

The girl's wailing lament shook Amelie's entire body as if she were electrocuted. She took a seat

next to Sophie and embraced her in a warm hug, patting her head with her soft hands.

"What do you mean, Sophie? Your life does not end with this. You will go through all the physical therapy you need and once your leg is completely healed, we will see what can be done about your dancing career."

Sophie buried her face in Amelie's shoulder, her body shaking uncontrollably while she continued to cry. "But the doctor said that my joint is no longer strong enough to be put under such pressure! I have failed you so much, I am so sorry! All I had was ballet, I was not prepared to do anything else! What am I going to do, Mrs. Ashford?"

Amelie felt her heart contract painfully and she had to struggle to hold back her own tears. She continued to gently slide her hand over Sophie's head, whispering in a shaking voice, "Nothing is over, Sophie. It's going to be alright."

She didn't know, however, whether these words were addressed to Sophie or herself.

The meeting with Sophie left Amelie with a bitter aftertaste. If before she was too exhausted to even think, now, her mind was in shambles, and restless thoughts were filling her head to the point where she was scared that it might actually explode.

Since she was no longer feeling sleepy, Amelie decided to take a stroll around the gardens behind her hotel to clear her mind in refreshing solitude.

To her pleasant surprise, fate didn't want her to be alone that day.

"Mr. Bennett?"

At first, Amelie thought her frantic mind was playing tricks on her, but there was no mistake -- it was Liam, standing tall and confident, his jet-black hair fluttering under the gentle touch of the summer wind.

"Miss Ashford!"

Liam almost ran toward the woman and stopped right before her, making her recoil in surprise. His beautiful, smiling face and bright eyes exuded genuine excitement.

"What are you doing here?" She still couldn't believe that he was standing right before her, "You said you were busy so I didn't bother you with my messages. Is everything alright with the company?"

Liam took Amelie's hand in his and gently placed it on top of his forearm, inviting her to take a walk. As they moved through the shadow under the garden's trees, the man remained quiet for quite some time before finally replying.

"There is nothing wrong with the company, but I do feel a lot of pressure. I went from doing nothing to becoming the person in charge of everything, so I feel slightly overwhelmed."

Amelie smiled and nodded understandingly. "I felt the same when I got my first assignment at the charity board. I was trained for this and knew how everything had to operate in theory but when I had to actually do it myself... I felt like crying every single day."

"At least no one was constantly nagging you to get married," he answered somewhat bitterly and the woman offered him a bewildered look.

"I suppose it is time for you to start thinking

about marriage... I got married to Richard when I was twenty-six as well. Has your grandfather already started sending you on blind dates?"

She tried not to sound so serious but it seemed that her words still managed to upset her companion. Pouting, Liam shook his head and sighed.

"I want my future wife to be a good friend and partner to me. I need someone smart and level-headed; someone who can share the burden of managing a company as big as Diamond Group. The girls he is trying to set me up with are all shallow and vain, and... The perfect woman I prefer to make my wife is already married."

He stopped and looked Amelie in the eyes when he said the last sentence. Amelie felt shivers coursing all over her body while hot blood rushed to her cheeks.

It was a strange sensation, especially since she was not sure whether he was being serious or not. Amelie decided to change the subject.

"I have met one of my proteges today. She broke her leg and is scared that she won't be able to

dance anymore. She told me something that shook my world completely. The ballet was her life, without it, she would be nothing; she was not prepared to do anything else."

She then lowered her gaze, her voice trembling as she added, "I feel the same, Mr. Bennett. Without this marriage, I am nothing."

Liam widened his eyes in shock. "What?"

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