

## Chapter 9 A small bet.

Hannah's POV:

"Hannah, are you with me? You didn't answer if you think that taking care of Tess is enough punishment." Ethan demanded.

I couldn't guess what he was thinking, but since a storm practically broke a few minutes before, I nodded slightly in agreement. Sometimes, I didn't even know why I just agreed with some situations that Ethan made me go through. I think that when the subject was Ethan, it was another old habit that I couldn't kill. Damn, I should resist more, after all, he didn't care about me. I should start not caring about him as well.

When we reached downtown, I thought that Ethan would take me straight to our manor, but he changed the path and decided to drive straight to the hospital. I guess that Tess's case was more serious than I had imagined.

I thought that soon I would be back to the hospital because of the baby and all the medical care involved in a pregnancy, but I didn't imagine that I would be back so soon, and not because of Ethan's mistress. I just wanted to go home, but I followed Ethan through the cold corridors to Tess's room. The smell of cleaning products used in the hospital asepsis was churning my stomach, or maybe it was the fact that I was going to face Tess one more time that made me queasy, but it wasn't like I had a choice at that point.

Tess had an IV tube connected to her arm and seemed paler. Still, that woman somehow managed to look charming. Her small frame in that huge ward made her look even more fragile and innocent. She was almost adorable if you were able to forget her obnoxious behavior.

She saw Ethan enter her room first and opened a wide smile, which vanished when I came just after him. Her dark eyes were narrowed and cold. After a few seconds of one of the most awkward silences of my life, she said: "Ethan, what is she doing here? I don't want to see her!"

It seems that all her lovely posture was gone, and even worse: because of the whole ordeal today, it seems that now she had more coldness and hatred kept especially for me. Well, even though she had done all that to herself, I don't know if I would feel different if it had happened to me. Besides, I knew that I was there to serve as a scapegoat for all her troubles. It seemed the humiliation would never end.

Ethan walked toward her, raised the back of her bed so she could be in a sit-up position, and hugged her tightly, resting his chin against her head to calm her down. After a few moments, he murmured to her: "Calm down, Tess. It will be alright. She will be here to take care of you. I think that this would suit her as punishment, don't you think?"

He probably made this public display of affection just to hit my nerves, because although I had witnessed their interactions before, they were never that explicit. Or maybe because he believed that now that Grandpa Michael was buried, he didn't owe a thing to anyone. I don't know. But what I did know was that their interaction was hurting me like hell and that I must endure all of that, according to them.

Tess considered his argument for a minute or two, then she opened an evil smile toward me and said: "Okay, you are probably right." I knew that she was willing to turn my life into hell, so I took a deep breath to calm myself down. Do you have any idea how unfair this is? Two people choosing for you whether you have the right to go or should you stay against your will?

It was completely silly of me to stay, I know, but deep down I felt guilty about the fact that I contributed to Tess being at the hospital. If I just had remained silent and not teased her, she would probably have left me alone, I would have descended the stairs and she would have remained in one piece. I knew that I hadn't pushed her, but I was so used to taking the blame for this kind of trouble that it didn't make any difference one more trouble in my account or not.

Still, in fact, someone needed to take care of her at the hospital, and Ethan was a busy businessman. He hardly would stay full-time with Tess at a hospital when he had so many issues to solve, and so many people to control, and I don't think that she had anyone that could take care of her like a parent, a sibling, or a friend, so deep down I knew that if it had been for any other reason, that would be me here anyways, even if I had nothing to do with the reason why she was at the hospital. I feel as if I had no alternative but to stay here after all.

It was already dark outside, and Tess had already eaten. I went out to get something to eat and when I got back, Ethan was sitting on the armchair talking to Tess. It sounded like a very animated conversation between them, and she was all smiles to him. Ethan, however, remained with his usual poker face.

I switched places with Ethan and settled down to sleep in the armchair next to Tess's bed. It wouldn't be a comfortable night, but if it was, they'd think I wasn't being punished enough. Even so, I managed to sleep for a few hours.

Around two in the morning, Tess woke up and started making some noise until she woke me up. She probably had slept too much during the day, and now her biological clock must be messed up.

"Oh, you are awake, Hannah," Tess told me excitedly. Of course, I was. She managed to wake me with so much noise! "I thought that we could have a little chat, and I decided to tell you a little piece of my mind. So, I have to say, Hannah, you humiliate yourself too much. Don't you have one single drop of pride?"

I honestly didn't know what to say to her, so I shrugged, dded with my engagement and wedding ring a bit, and then murmured: "Well, isn't that what love is made of anyway?"

"Well, not necessarily," Tess told me. She had a smile on her face, and for the first time, she seemed just a little honest with me. "Aren't you tired of these silly games?" she asked me curiously.

Maybe I was, maybe I was not. I guess that you don't get tired easily if you are in love with someone. But since this was the first time that we were having a civilized conversation, I decided to not name it, so I just shrugged and told her: "Well, it is what it is."

She nodded, understanding what I was talking about. And then, she decided to change the subject: "Can I have a cup of water, please? I wanted tea to calm myself down a little bit" She stood slightly and elevated her bed.

I nodded and murmured: "Sure." And then I stood up and moved toward the water jug.

"Boiling water, please!" She exclaimed. Of course, she would be demanding. I could expect a lot more from her in the next few days. I poured her a cup of hot water and prepared an infusion. After a couple of minutes, I gave it to her.

Tess never thanked me for that tea. Instead, she sipped it and murmured: "Well, I think that you are pitiful, and you don't even have minimal self-respect. Maybe you are just a sad girl. Look, I don't blame you for my baby, but I still can't help but hate you. After all, you have the one and only thing that I wanted."

I think I knew what she meant by that. Although she feels pity for me, she couldn't really sympathize because I had what she wanted the most. So, I just nodded silently. I knew that we were rivals, but it was good to have a glimpse of her perspective too. At least now I had all the confirmation that I needed to act accordingly.

"Come here, Hannah," Tess demanded. "I want to say something to you, but I will need to whisper it."

I obliged her and got closer to her bed. She grabbed my wrist forcefully and dragged me closer to her. And then, she whispered in my ear: "Let's make a small bet and see if your husband still cares about you, shall we?" And then, without me being able to react in time, she dropped that boiling tea in my hand.

"Ow! Why did you do that?" I exclaimed. What the hell was wrong with her? And then, I realized. She was willing to hurt me to see if Ethan still cared about me. The problem was that I didn't agree with her 'small bet.' Still, that crazy woman spilled boiling water on me just because.

Tess put the cup down and pretended to be startled. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Hannah! I didn't mean to hurt you. The cup was too hot and it was an accident. Are you alright?"

I must admit that: this woman was almost a professional actress!

I recoiled my hand and murmured: "Don't worry. It was nothing, Tess." But she wasn't paying attention to me anymore. She was looking beyond me to the room's door, where a tall gure was observing our interaction.

Ethan was back.