

## Chapter 10

The next evening, Brendan Maynard and Chloe Ellis sat at a Michelin-starred restaurant. The table was covered in rose petals, and a bottle of expensive champagne sat in an ice bucket. It was meant to be a belated birthday celebration.

But the atmosphere was tense.

"You look tired," Chloe commented, taking a sip of her champagne. "You barely slept last night."

Brendan didn't respond. He was staring at his phone, which sat face down on the table. He kept picking it up, checking the screen, then putting it back down.

Chloe sighed, a hint of frustration in her voice. "Why don't you just call her?"

Brendan looked up, his expression annoyed. "Call who?"

"Jayde, of course. It's been over a day. She hasn't wished you a happy birthday. I can see it's bothering you."

"It's not bothering me," he said defensively. "She's an adult. It's time she stopped depending on me for everything. I haven't interfered with her life at all lately."

Chloe raised an eyebrow. "You haven't, but I have. I've been sending her messages for you, remember? Pictures of us. Reminders that you're with me now." She let out a small, bitter laugh. "Honestly, it's getting a little tiring."

Brendan's jaw tightened. "Did she reply?"

"No," Chloe said flatly. "Not a single word. She just leaves them on 'read'."

The information sent a sharp pain through Brendan's head. He felt a sudden dizziness, a confusion that he couldn't shake. Why did her silence hurt so much?

"You know," Chloe said, her voice softening as she leaned forward, "Jayde is a very proud person. When she decides on something, she

< Chapter 10

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sticks to it. If you've hurt her, she won't come back easily. Maybe you should be the one to reach out."

"I know her better than you do," Brendan snapped, his pride stung. "She's stubborn. She needs to face a bit of harsh reality to understand her place."

He believed that if he continued to show his life with Chloe, Jayde would eventually give up her foolish crush and come back to being his compliant little sister.

Chloe just looked at him, a knowing, almost pitying look in her eyes. She changed the subject.

"So, what about our wedding? The planner needs final decisions on the venue."

"We'll proceed as planned," Brendan said, his voice firm. He stood up abruptly. "I have to go."

He left the restaurant without another word, leaving Chloe alone at the table surrounded by rose petals.

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