

Chapter 3

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Gretchen looked smug at the sight of me being slapped. "There's the proof you wanted, Melinda—you have syphilis! What else can you say now?"

I clutched the diagnosis tightly and pointed to the date on it. "You must've forged this. I was at work on the 14th of July. I didn't go to the hospital at all!"

She pointed at the sky. "I swear to God that I'll die of an accident the moment I leave this place if I forged that!"

The guests started believing her when they heard her swear on her life like that.

"Stay away from her, everyone. Syphilis is contagious."

"You really can't judge a book by its cover. I can't believe she has an STD when she looks so upstanding!"

"Anyone would be unlucky to have her as a daughter-in-law."

Everyone was starting to side with Gretchen. If I couldn't prove my innocence, things would only end up the same as they had in my past life. I would have to spend the rest of my life being wronged and the target of mockery.

But where would the diagnosis have come from if it hadn't been forged? I'd never been to the hospital!

Just then, Shirley held Gretchen's arm, looking ashen as she asked, "Didn't I tell you to destroy that, Mom? Why do you still have it?"

I looked at her. "You knew about this, Shirley?"

Her gaze darted around, and she stuttered, unable to form a coherent sentence. Gretchen said, "You threw this away at home; Shirley and I found it together. She was kind enough to try to preserve your dignity and told me to destroy this. She wanted me to act like none of this ever happened."

I suddenly recalled a time when Shirley told me she'd lost her identification and was waiting for her new one to be ready. She'd borrowed mine so she could go out with her friends.

I connected the dots and finally understood everything—the diagnosis was real, but Shirley was the one with syphilis. She was afraid of people finding out she had an STD, so she'd taken my identification when going to the hospital.

Gretchen had discovered the diagnosis at home, so Shirley had taken the opportunity to push the blame on me. At the same time, Shirley had still been afraid of Gretchen spreading the word, ultimately leading to the truth coming out. That was why she kept trying to get Gretchen to shut up.

In my past life, I'd been overwhelmed by mockery and had ultimately lost my life because of it. Yet Shirley had been happily enjoying her honeymoon in Moldove with her newlywed husband.

Since she was the cause of my misfortune, she couldn't blame me for being ruthless.

I went onstage while holding the diagnosis. I snatched the emcee's microphone and said, "This diagnosis from Inkton Hospital is falsified. I demand an explanation from the dean."

I repeated my words thrice before a balding middle-aged man in a suit stepped forward. He was the dean of Inkton Hospital and a relative from Shirley's husband's family. We'd been introduced in the past.

"How can you make up lies, miss? It's been over half a decade since Inkton Hospital's inception, and we've always prided ourselves on our medical prowess and word of mouth. There's no way we would falsify a diagnosis!" he cried.

"How do you explain this, then? I've never been to your hospital, yet this report indicates that I have syphilis. How is that not falsified?" I asked.

Off stage, Shirley was panicking. She said to Jacob, "Hurry up and get Mel off the stage, Jake. It's my wedding today—what will my husband and his family think of me if she keeps causing a scene like this?"

Jacob hurried on stage and grabbed me, wanting to drag me away. "Haven't you disgraced yourself enough, Melinda? Do you want the whole world to know about the dirty things you've done?"

I shook him off and slapped him. He owed it to me. "We've been together for seven years, Jacob. Don't you have even the slightest bit of faith in me?"

He shoved me to the floor and roared, "The report makes it clear that you have syphilis! How do you expect me to believe you?"

I fell to the floor, scraping my palms and knees. The pain couldn't compare to the pain in my heart, though. This was the man I'd given everything up to marry.

Gretchen fanned the flames, saying, "You should divorce this shameless woman right now, Jake. We have proof of her cheating—we can make her leave the marriage without a penny to her name!"

They were staying in the house I owned, and they now wanted me to leave without a penny to my name. They already had everything planned out, huh?

I would make Gretchen pay for this, but first, I had to clear my name with everyone watching.

I got to my feet and approached the dean with the diagnosis report. "Your hospital falsified this diagnosis, leading to my husband wanting to divorce me. You have to clear my name!"

He took the report and looked at it, saying that it was authentic and that I shouldn't be unreasonable. However, I insisted that I'd never been to the hospital.

We were at a stalemate. That was when the dean said the hospital had installed surveillance cameras in each room to ensure patients like me couldn't cause trouble when there were disagreements. He called someone and had them send him that day's surveillance footage.

I suggested playing the footage on the large screen in the hall so that everyone could see what had happened. This made Shirley pale in fright. She hurried over to put a stop to everything. "No, you can't—"

I grabbed her arm. "I know what you mean, Shirley. You want to wait for your husband to join us so he can watch it, too, right?"

"You're the only one who believes I'm innocent; I won't let you down. I will prove my innocence with everyone watching—I won't let your in-laws look down on you."

Someone immediately asked Shirley's husband to join us. When everyone was ready, I asked the dean to play the footage. The large screen lit up, and a doctor in a white coat called for the next patient.

The door opened, and a slender woman entered the room.