

## Chapter 1 Mr. Wilson, I Need The Money

"Are you going to undress yourself, or should I do it for you?" The man's voice dripped with contempt, and at the sound of it, Helena Ellis immediately tensed.

She froze as the zipper of her gown slowly loosened, the cool air brushing against her bare skin. In a panic, she grabbed the fabric and turned around to the man, her eyes meeting his intense gaze.

"You're wearing a dress that was never meant for you. Emily should be the one wearing it." His words, sharp and unforgiving, cut straight through her.

The man before her was Alden Wilson, heir to Cheson's top business empire. He was never supposed to be her husband—he was meant to marry her half-sister, Emily Simpson. But when Emily disappeared without a trace just before the wedding, Helena was forced to step in and take her place.

It all began when Gemma Simpson, her estranged mother who had barely spoken to her since she reached adulthood, unexpectedly appeared at her door. Instead of a greeting, the first words that came out of Gemma's mouth were a demand that Helena marry Alden in Emily's place.

Gemma grasped Helena's hands tightly and pleaded, "Helena, how are you going to manage your father's nursing home expenses? His bills will only keep increasing. Just help Emily this one time, and the Simpson family will take care of the bills."

Helena didn't hesitate to refuse right away.

But the next day, her father was gone. Without any warning, the Simpson family had taken him. Her father, already fragile from his worsening dementia, became their bargaining chip. And that was how Helena ended up in that wedding dress, forced to take vows meant for someone else.

Helena was left with no other option. She did what she had to do. Her father was the only person who had ever truly stood by her.

It all began when Gemma Simpson, her estranged mother who had barely spoken to her since she reached adulthood, unexpectedly appeared at her door. Instead of a greeting, the first words that came out of Gemma's mouth were a demand that Helena marry Alden in Emily's place.

Gemma grasped Helena's hands tightly and pleaded, "Helena, how are you going to manage your father's nursing home expenses? His bills will only keep increasing. Just help Emily this one time, and the Simpson family will take care of the bills."

Helena didn't hesitate to refuse right away.

But the next day, her father was gone. Without any warning, the Simpson family had taken him. Her father, already fragile from his worsening dementia, became their bargaining chip. And that was how Helena ended up in that wedding dress, forced to take vows meant for someone else.

Helena was left with no other option. She did what she had to do. Her father was the only person who had ever truly stood by her. There was no way she would abandon him now.

She pushed the painful memories aside, lowered her head, and reluctantly spoke to Alden, who stood before her. "Mr. Wilson, this arranged marriage is just a formality for business. Whether it's me or someone else, it makes no difference."

"Don't look away when you're speaking to me," he replied, his tone cold and sharp. With a firm hand, Alden tilted Helena's chin up, making sure their gaze met.

Only then did she catch sight of something behind his ear. A small device. Sleek. Subtle.

A cochlear implant.

Alden was hearing-impaired. Was this the secret that sent Emily running from the wedding?

"Knowing why your sister ran away, do you still want to marry me?" Alden's lips curved into a tight, sarcastic grin.

He had just returned from abroad, so most people hadn't heard the news yet of the hearing loss he'd suffered twenty years ago.

"I'll marry you," Helena replied, masking the flicker of doubt in her eyes.

"And what's your reason?" Alden asked, his voice low and firm. His expression shifted, darkening as the playful mask slipped away.

Helena took a deep breath, regaining the composure of a news anchor. "My parents told me this marriage would only last until the development project is complete. I was promised full compensation from the Wilson family, money that'll be mine alone. Mr. Wilson, I need the money."

The Wilson family stood to gain far more than just money from this marriage. For Helena, this wasn't about ambition or greed. What she sought wasn't wealth or status, only what had been agreed upon.

That money could keep her father in proper care.

A low chuckle escaped Alden as he said, "You're not shy about what you want, are you?"

Many women had attempted to get close to him for his wealth, but none had ever been as bold as Helena.

"If we're calling this a transaction," he added coolly. "Then I have every right to inspect what I'm paying for."

Helena's whole body stiffened. Her face turned pale, her breath caught in her throat, and her arms fell limply at her sides.

Was he suggesting that they would start their marriage with sex?

A wave of regret swept through her chest. She hadn't even kissed her ex-boyfriend of four years. How could she possibly even give herself to a man she had only just met?



The air grew heavy, nearly suffocating her. Her vision blurred, her knees gave way, and she was on the verge of collapsing to the floor.

Before she could hit the floor, two strong arms caught her, pulling her into an embrace.

Alden's unexpected warmth surprised Helena, and little by little, the pressure in her chest began to ease.

She had lived with this condition for as long as she could remember, never able to be intimate with any man. Every attempt at physical closeness left her gasping for air.

And yet, something about Alden's touch calmed the storm inside her.

His chest was firm and warm against her cheek, his heartbeat steady and loud in her ear.

Alden's fingers lightly brushed her bare skin with a gentleness that left her confused. Just as Helena had prepared herself for more, his hands suddenly pulled away without any warning.

"How long have you been like this?" Alden asked quietly.

"I... I'm not sure," Helena answered, her voice low and uncertain.

One doctor had explained that it wasn't something medicine could cure, as it stemmed from deep within, something firmly rooted in her mind.

Alden gave a soft, ironic laugh. "So, the Simpson family must believe that pairing a woman like you with a disabled man like me is quite the deal."

No words left Helena's lips. Instead, she gripped her gown tightly, fighting the rising fear in her chest.

Did Alden intend to call off the marriage? If he called off the marriage now, what would happen to her father? The Simpson family had made it clear that no marriage meant no help. And they might never let her see her father again.