

Chapter 7

Chapter 7: Forgotten Priorities

The sight of those torn papers scattered across my hospital bed should have bothered me, but instead, I felt relief washing over me.

"Why would I sign divorce papers?" I asked, looking between Celeste and Dmitri who seemed to be bewildered about what was happening but not saying anything.

I could see the glances that they exchanged with each other but I ignored it as I had no idea what it meant.

"We have three beautiful children together. We're a family."

Celeste's face had gone pale as if I had said something so ridiculous, and she was gripping the bed rail so tightly her knuckles were white.

"Xenois, you should rest. You are tired now and not really in your right state of mind. We can talk about this later."

"I don't want to rest," I said, reaching for her hand again as I could see her tensing up but she didn't pull away. "I want to understand what's been happening here and why is everyone acting like I have gone crazy. Why does everyone seem so surprised that I love my wife?"

Troy tugged at my hospital gown gaining my attention as he said solemnly.

"Dad, you never tell Mom you love her."

"What?" That couldn't be right. Was Troy lying to me or was this true?

"Of course I tell your mother I love her. I tell all of you I love you every day."

The boys exchanged those bewildered looks again, and Soren shook his head slowly. "No, Dad. You don't."

I felt uneasy hearing these words from my son. What kind of father didn't tell his children he loved them? What kind of husband didn't express love for his wife and made sure that she knew it? None of this made sense to me and I don't know how I could be this cruel to them.

Before I could think about this further, my phone buzzed on the bedside table gaining everyone's attention as Celeste reached for it automatically.

"It's... Sophia," she said, looking at me, keeping her voice neutral as Dmitri eyebrows shot up as if he realized something.

Sophia? The name seemed to be familiar in my mind but I had a vague idea of who she was.

"Answer it," I said, though I wasn't sure why.

Celeste handed me the phone, and I pressed accept. "Hello?"

"Xenois! Finally!" A woman's voice, filled with irritation, rang out as I almost moved away from the phone.

"I've been waiting at this damn airport for over two hours. Where the hell are you?"

Airport? I frowned, trying to place the voice, and what situation that would enable me being at the airport to meet her. Slowly, I realized who this was.

Sophia Hale. My... ex-girlfriend? The memory felt strange, as if I was staring at someone else's photograph.

"Sophia," I said slowly glancing at Celeste who seemed to be avoiding my gaze and focusing on the boys instead. "I'm sorry, I was in an accident. I'm in the hospital."

"Hospital? Are you serious right now?" Her voice grew higher if that was possible at all. "I flew all the way here because you said you had something important to tell me. You said it was urgent."

I had no memory of making such a call, of making such promises.

Looking at Celeste, and my children gathered around my bed, I couldn't imagine what could have been so urgent that I'd summon my ex-girlfriend from wherever she'd been.

"I think there's been a misunderstanding," I said carefully trying to defuse the situation.

"You should go to a hotel. I'm not... I can't leave the hospital right now."

"A hotel?" Sophia sounded shocked like she couldn't believe what she was hearing at all.

"Xenois, what's wrong with you? You told me to come. You said you missed me, that you'd made a mistake. You promised we'd—"

"I promised what?" I interrupted, genuinely confused. Miss her? Made a mistake? Looking at Celeste, at the way she looked so beautiful while exhausted and barely putting on any makeup. I couldn't get the idea of missing Sophia when I had her.

"You know what you promised," Sophia continued, her voice sounding more seductive in a way that made me uncomfortable. "About us getting back together. About how your marriage was just business, and now that it's over—"

"My marriage isn't over," I said firmly, surprising myself with how sure I sounded as well. "And it's not business. I love my wife."

The silence that followed was loud. I could hear Sophia's gasp, could see the way Celeste's eyes widened in shock and fear, and could feel my children's surprised stares as their mouths dropped open looking at me.

"Your wife?" Sophia finally managed. "Xenois, you hate that woman. You told me—"

"I don't hate anyone," I cut her off, my voice harder now as I hated the fact that Sophia seemed determined to drag her name to mud while in my presence.

"And I don't appreciate you speaking about my wife that way."

Celeste was staring at me like she'd never seen me before, blinking her eyes as Dmitri held her shoulders, either in confusion or surprise as well.

Dmitri looked at me like he was seeing a double but his expression changed to neutral quickly when he saw I was looking at him.

"What the hell happened to you?" Sophia demanded angrily as I could hear the chaos on the other side of the phone.

"This isn't like you at all. You don't do feelings, Xenois. You don't do love. That's what you always told me."

"Maybe I've changed," I said quietly feeling uncomfortable when I heard her. Was I really that closed off from my own wife that everyone was finding it a surprise.

"Changed? In a few hours? Xenois, this is ridiculous. I'm coming to the mansion. We need to talk face to face." She demanded, like she had a right to my life and house like she owned it.

"No." The word came out more forcefully than I'd intended. "You're not coming to my home. You're not welcome there."

Another sharp intake of breath. "Not welcome? Xenois, I've been to your house dozens of times. I practically lived there before you married that—"

"Careful," I warned, my voice dropping

dangerously as I growled out my next words. "Very careful how you finish that sentence."