

## Broken 124

Chapter 124 Fragile Peace AMY Finished Things had finally started to feel... calm again. Not perfect, not without worry, but calm enough that I could wake up without expecting something terrible to happen before breakfast. Daniel and I had been getting along better than ever. We didn't talk much about what we were because I don't think either of us needed to label it because we are already husband and wife. We ate dinner together most nights, sometimes talking about work, sometimes about nothing at all. He'd lean in closer when he spoke, and I didn't move away. When his hand brushed mine, neither of us pretended it didn't happen. It was strange how natural it felt, being close to him. After everything we'd been through, the arranged marriage, the lies, the chaos, the betrayal made the growing connection between us felt almost unreal. That morning, I had just finished reviewing a few files for the next council audit when I heard my name from the reception area. "Mrs. Carter," the front desk officer said, peeking into my office. "Someone's here asking to see you." I looked up, already expecting it to be one of the department heads. "Who?" The man stepped aside and Mark walked in. For a second, I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. His hair was shorter, he looked thinner, and there was a tension in his face I hadn't seen before. "Amy," he said quietly. I stood slowly. "Mark. What are you doing here?" He smiled nervously. "I came to apologize. For everything." I stayed behind my desk, unsure what to say. "I don't think there's anything left to apologize for," I said carefully. Let I remember, I told you I don't want to see your face again. "It's been years." "I know." He ran a hand through his hair. "But... it's not just about us. It's about Clara." At the sound of her name, something cold passed through me. "What about her?" Fragile Peace He hesitated, glancing at the open door. "Can we talk somewhere private?"

I almost said no, but curiosity got the better of me. I nodded toward the conference room beside my office. We walked in, and I shut the door. Mark sat down, rubbing his palms together. "Clara's sick. Really sick. And no one seems to understand why." I folded my arms. "I'm not sorry to hear that because she deserves every bit of it. But why are you telling me?"

His eyes met mine, "Because... I think it has something to do with you." My chest tightened. "What's that supposed to mean?" He leaned forward slightly. "Before she got this way, before she started having these strange fits, she talked about you. Said she needed to fix something. Said it was the only way she'd ever be free from you." I stared at him, confused and angry at the same time. "Free from me? I haven't spoken to her in months after she tried the last dirty trick." "I know," he said quickly. "But she wasn't making sense. I thought it was jealousy at first, or resentment.... but now? The doctors can't explain what's happening to her. It's like something's eating her from the inside out."

My voice came out low. "Are you saying she did something to herself? Because of me?" He looked away. "I don't know. I just thought you should know. Maybe it'll help you understand... if something happens." That last line hit me harder than I expected. He stood up that, mumbling something about needing to go, and left before I could respond. For a long time, I sat in that empty room, staring at the table. Something inside me twisted uneasily. Clara had been jealous, yes, even cruel at times, but this sounded darker. And if what he said was true, whatever she'd done might have connected her to me in ways I didn't understand and it made me pretty sure that it had something to do with that ritual she attempted. I stayed at work until late, trying to focus, but my mind kept replaying Mark's words. When I got home, Daniel was already in the living room. He looked up from a file when I walked in, instantly noticing the tension in my face. "Rough day?" he asked.

“Something like that.” He watched me for a moment. “What happened?” I hesitated, “Mark came by today.” His entire posture shifted. “Mark?” “Yes,” I said. “He said he wanted to apologize... but then he started talking about Clara.” Daniel’s tone cooled. “What about her?” Finished I told him everything. The illness, the strange things Mark said, the warning that somehow it might be connected to me. When I finished, Daniel was silent. Finally, he said something, “You shouldn’t have to deal with that. He shouldn’t have come here.” “He didn’t threaten me,” I said softly. “He just looked... lost. But something about the way he spoke felt like more than concern. Like he’s hiding something.” Daniel turned back to me, his jaw tense. “If Clara did something dangerous, we’ll find out. You’re not alone in this.” “It’s strange,” I murmured. “I thought I was done with all that but somehow, it keeps finding me.” He stepped closer, close enough that I could feel the warmth of his presence. “Maybe the past isn’t done with us yet. But whatever it brings, we’ll handle it together.” I smiled faintly. “You sound so sure.” “I am,” he said simply. We stood there for a few seconds before he reached out and tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. His fingers lingered just a little longer than they needed to. “Get some rest,” he said finally, his voice gentler now. I nodded, but neither of us moved away right away. Eventually, he turned, leaving a brief kiss against my forehead before walking out. I stood there alone, still feeling the warmth of it long after he left. Later that night, I couldn’t sleep. I kept thinking about Clara, about Mark’s face, about the strange pull I’d been feeling lately that uneasy awareness that something was building again.