

CEO's Unwanted Wife

Chapter 2

Emma stood just inside Alex's corner office at Kensington Corp, the city skyline stretching behind his poised figure. His tailored suit hugged his frame, his focus buried in the reports on his desk.

"Here are the reports you asked for." She stepped forward, the documents held tightly in her grip.

Alex didn't look up, his piercing gaze fixed on the papers as he took them from her hand.

"Thanks," he muttered, the curt word slicing through her like a blade.

She lingered, fingers brushing the edge of his desk, hoping for a glance, a flicker of warmth. "Is there anything else you need?"

He flipped a page, his jaw tight. "No. That's all."

She lingered a second too long, then caught herself. "I'll be at my desk if you need anything else."

"Noted," he said, flipping a page, still not meeting her eyes.

She turned, the weight of his dismissal pressing down on her as she exited, the door clicking shut behind her. The power between them—him as the untouchable CEO and secret husband, her as his subordinate, his hidden contract wife—hung heavy.

Later, near the printing machine, Emma was feeding papers into the tray when two voices, low and sharp, cut through the noise.

"Did you hear Vicky Langford is back in town?" the HR head whispered, leaning toward the PR manager.

"Yeah, and apparently, she and Alex go way back," the other replied, voice dripping with intrigue. "A bond like that... no one can touch it."

Emma's hand froze mid-motion, her chest tightening. "Way back?" she breathed, barely audible over the printer's drone.

"I heard they were inseparable once," the HR head added. "Some say she's the one who really has his heart. It's still unknown why she left, but now that she is back..."

The words stabbed deep, each one a reminder of her place in his life. "I'll never be her," she whispered to herself, gripping the edge of the machine as pain flared in her heart.

Another woman, noticing Emma's presence near the printer, hissed, smirking at her friend. "Emma's just a plaything, nothing more."

"Poor thing, thinking she matters," another chimed in, laughing softly. "She's a nobody."

She kept her back to them, holding herself still, letting the sting settle quietly.

Then came Harper.

"Oh look, Emma pretending to work," Harper Reed, a junior analyst and Alex's cousin, said with a smirk.

Emma turned slowly. "Is there something you need, Harper?"

"Just wondering how it feels to be the placeholder," she said, stepping closer. "You know, until Vicky gets settled."

Emma's face burned, her voice low but sharp. "Stop it, Harper. You don't need to start it here. I'm not in the mood."

Emma stayed composed. "If you have a problem, take it to HR. Otherwise, stop wasting my time."

Harper's smile faded. Without warning, she shoved past Emma, knocking her off balance. Emma stumbled, her ankle twisting as she hit the floor with a wince.

"How dare you!" Emma gasped, clutching her arm, frustration and hurt welling up in her chest.

"What, can't handle a little slip?" Harper taunted, stepping closer.

Rage and humiliation surged through her. Without thinking, Emma stood up from the ground, swaying on her injured feet a little, and slapped Harper hard across the face. The crack echoed in the now-silent room.

Everyone around them gasped. They didn't expect the 'quiet Emma' to retaliate like this.

Harper staggered back, eyes wide with shock. "You'll regret that, you little—"

"What the hell is going on here?" Alex's voice boomed as he stormed into the break room, his presence sucking the air from the space.

Emma's heart pounded, her foot still throbbing as she faced Alex. His cold eyes locked on her, narrowing with disapproval.

"Explain yourself, Emma," he demanded, crossing his arms. "You know the rules. No scenes in my company."

Her voice trembled, the public reprimand cutting deeper than the pain in her foot. "Harper pushed me on the ground. I—I just reacted."

"Reacted?" Alex snapped, his tone icy. "You don't get to 'react' like that here. You're an employee, not a child throwing tantrums. This is the Kensington group, not a kindergarten."

Her cheeks flamed, the weight of everyone's stares crushing her. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean—"

"Save it," he cut her off, his words sharp. "You've embarrassed yourself enough. Get to the infirmary now and have that foot checked."

She bit her lip, fighting back tears, unsure if he felt anything for her at all. Then his gaze shifted to Harper, his voice dropping to a dangerous low.

"And you," he said, staring down at Harper. "Leave her alone. You might be a part of the family, but no one gets to disrupt laws here. I'm reporting this to HR, and I expect a full account from you. One more time you mess with her... I won't say it twice."

Harper flinched, muttering, "Fine, whatever," before slinking back. Emma stood frozen, caught between his harshness and that fleeting hint of protectiveness, her heart aching with confusion.

"Get back to work, all of you," Alex ordered, turning away without another glance at her. "This is over."

Hours later, after finishing the quarterly summary and securing a half-day of personal leave, Emma sat by her grandmother's bedside in the sterile hospital room, the steady beep of machines filling the silence. She forced a smile, hiding the storm inside.

"How are you feeling today, Gran?" she asked softly, taking the frail hand in hers.

Her grandmother's eyes fluttered open, a weak smile forming. "Better now that you're here, dear. You look tired, though. Everything okay?"

Emma swallowed hard, the weight of her secrets—her contract marriage, Alex's coldness, the cruelty at work—pressing down. "I'm fine. Just busy."

"Don't lie to me, child," her grandmother rasped, squeezing her hand. "I can see it in your eyes. What's wrong?"

"Nothing you need to worry about," Emma insisted, her voice cracking. "I just want you to rest."

Her grandmother sighed, closing her eyes. "You're too good to me. But don't carry the world alone, Emma."

Emma nodded, her hand resting instinctively on her stomach, a silent promise to her unborn child. "I won't," she whispered, though the loneliness gnawed at her, the ache of being unseen by Alex sharper in the quiet hospital air.

Leaving the hospital, Emma trudged through the cool evening, her mind heavy with the day's wounds. As she passed a familiar restaurant, her weary eyes caught a silhouette through the window—Alex.

Her breath hitched, a fleeting hope sparking.

But then she saw her. Vicky, sitting across from him, her elegant frame leaning forward, a soft smile on her lips.

"No," Emma gasped, her voice breaking as her world shattered. "Not her. Not again."

She turned away, unable to watch any longer, the image of them together burning into her mind. The weight of betrayal pressed down, her steps faltering as she walked away.

Her hands clenched at her sides, heartbreak and jealousy twisting inside her. "I'm just the hidden contract wife, aren't I? Always hidden, always second."