

THE EX-WIFE'S BURNING ELEGANCE

Chapter 1

It was one in the morning.

Stella Cameron suddenly stumbled upon Rachel Pearce's Facebook post.

"Thanks to Mr. O'Brien and little Keen for the gifts. Keen even handmade this mug himself!"

Stella clicked on the photo. A necklace and a DIY mug appeared on her screen. She could faintly see the words on the mug, "Happy Birthday, Mom."

Stella glanced at the dining table, the untouched dinner that had gone cold, and the birthday cake with candles still unlit. A wry smile crept onto her lips.

She recalled a news alert she received earlier that day: "Confirmed! The usually reserved Haynes O'Brien from elite circles is secretly married and has a five-year-old son!"

In the photo, a tall, handsome man and a slender, beautiful woman were walking hand in hand with a five-year-old boy at a theme park.

Rachel gently patted Keen O'Brien's head while Haynes gazed at her with an intensity and tenderness Stella had never seen.

That was a picture-perfect family of three, with the little boy looking so much like Haynes.

Today was supposed to be Stella's day. It was her birthday and her fifth wedding anniversary with Haynes. Yet, it seemed like Rachel was the one having the celebration.

Stella's husband and son had spent the day with Rachel, even giving her gifts meant for Stella.

Stella wasn't surprised. She was used to it by then.

Rachel was Haynes' first love, diagnosed with a terminal illness and only a year left to live. Her dying wish was to see him one last time.

Haynes wanted to do something meaningful for Rachel in her final days, hoping that Stella would come to terms with it. Although Stella was reluctant to accept it, she realized she couldn't stop him, as it was the first time Haynes had ever spoken to her with such seriousness.

She felt her heart dug out, leaving an empty, aching void. She sat in the dark for what seemed like an age when the front door opening broke the silence. Haynes walked in with Keen.

Seeing Stella in the dining room, Haynes paused, surprised. He seemed to have forgotten the day, looking at Stella with bewilderment. "Why aren't you asleep yet?"

Stella replied coldly, "I have something to discuss with you."

Haynes furrowed his brow and glanced down at Keen. "Keen, head upstairs and sleep."

Keen rubbed his eyes, yawning as he passed by Stella. Then, as if remembering something, he stopped. "Happy Birthday, Mom."

Keen looked up at her, his eyes remarkably similar to Haynes'.

"Dad and I didn't mean to forget your birthday. We have plenty of time together as

a family, but Rachel only has six months left."

"You're not mad at us over something so small, right?"

Stella couldn't tell which hurt more-being forgotten or being remembered but still ignored. After Keen left, silence filled the room.

Haynes spoke first, breaking the quiet. "What do you want to talk about?"

He stood in a white shirt and black trousers, features as sharp as a portrait, his presence as cold and distant as the moon on a winter night.

Stella took a deep breath. "Haynes, I want a divorce."

His gaze wavered like ripples across a lake stirred by the wind, but soon, it was calm and still again.