

THE EX-WIFE'S BURNING ELEGANCE

Chapter 3

Haynes furrowed his brow and quickly muttered, "I'll be right there," before striding out the door, not even sparing Stella a second glance.

Stella watched his retreating figure with a blank expression. She'd lost count of how many times Haynes had rushed out late at night because of one of Rachel's "emergency" calls.-

The following morning, Stella was all packed up and ready to leave. As she passed by Keen's room, she hesitated for a moment. After a brief pause, she checked in on Keen before leaving.

Keen had been born prematurely, and as a result, he'd always been a bit frail. Stella had always looked after him personally, not trusting anyone else with the task. He took after Haynes in looks and, to some extent, in temperament-cool and distant.

It was the weekend, so Keen wasn't at school. He was in his room working on his homework.

When Stella walked in, he greeted her, "Morning, Mom," before focusing on his books again.

Stella looked at Keen, whose profile closely resembled Haynes, and spoke softly, "Keen, I'm leaving. Take care of yourself."

Without raising his gaze, Keen replied casually, "Okay."

Since Rachel had come into their lives, Keen had grown more distant from her.

Rachel had once posted a video on social media. In it, Keen was munching on an ice cream, his words muffled and indistinct.

"I love hanging out with Rachel. I get to eat all sorts of yummy stuff," he said.

Rachel asked, "Is your mom not nice to you?"

"Mom's always telling me what to do, what not to do, what I can't eat," he replied. "So, who do you think is better, me or your mom?" Rachel pressed.

"Sure, you! If my mom were half as nice as you, I'd be happy," Keen answered.

Stella knew that compared to a strict mother, the indulgent and easygoing Rachel was much more appealing to him.

She ensured he went to bed on time and avoided junk food to help him regain his health. Thanks to her care, Keen was healthier than he'd ever been. But their relationship had grown colder.

As Stella was about to leave the room, Keen suddenly called out. "Mom."

She turned to look at him.

"You always said you would like anyone I like. I like Rachel. Does that mean you'll like her too?" he asked.

Stella paused, feeling the last thread of her resolve snap. She closed her eyes briefly, a silent smile on her lips.

"You've always wanted to protect Rachel, haven't you? Well, now you and your dad can look after her together," she said.

Keen looked puzzled, not grasping her meaning.

Stella didn't elaborate. She turned and walked out of the house.

Her friend, Abby Murphy, was waiting by the car outside the house. After helping

load the luggage into the car, Abby looked at Stella.