

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 31[584 words]

Neville withdrew his gaze. "No, I didn't expect you to be so concerned about Marvin."

Stella smiled. "Mr. Connolly, anyone would be concerned if you offered them a million dollars."

Abby interrupted from the side, "Exactly, Mr. Connolly. You don't need to offer me a million. Just a hundred thousand, and I'd treat Marvin like royalty."

Neville chuckled, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "Alright, I'll ensure all the details about Marvin are sent to you, Ms. Cameron."

He glanced at Marvin. "Before we go, I'd like to talk with Marvin."

Sensing the moment, Stella said, "I'll wait for Marvin downstairs."

With that, she and Abby left the hospital room, thoughtfully closing the door behind them.

Once they were gone, Neville raised an eyebrow and asked Marvin, "Are you sure it's her?"

More animated, Marvin nodded earnestly. "Yes, it's her. I want her to be my mom."

Neville scratched his chin thoughtfully. "If it were any other woman, it might be easier. Money could sort it out even if she had a husband and kids. But this woman is married to Haynes. It won't be easy."

Marvin insisted stubbornly, "I don't care. I want her as my mom!"

"Timing is everything," Neville laughed. "Six months ago, it might've been impossible, but now, there's a good chance."

"In the past half-year, what Haynes has done for his 'first crush' has become public knowledge. His judgment and that of his son seem uncannily similar. Even his kid favors this 'first crush.'"

"Now, Stella's living on her own." Neville looked down at Marvin, "This is your opportunity. I've set the stage. Now, it's up to you."

Marvin's face showed none of a child's innocence. He nodded resolutely, "I'll do my best to win her over!"

"That's the spirit." Neville ruffled his hair with a gentle smile. "When you want something, go after it, even if it requires a bit of cunning. But tell me, what is it about her that you like?"

A while back, Marvin had transferred to a prestigious kindergarten. Within days, he said he liked a woman and wanted her to be his mom.

When Neville first heard this, he thought it was some scheming woman trying to cozy up to Marvin. After some investigation, he discovered the woman was Haynes' wife.

She seemed to be a stay-at-home mom, rarely appearing in public. There weren't even any photos of her online. People knew Haynes was secretly married but had no idea who his wife was.

There had been quite a stir about Haynes and another woman. Many speculated that Haynes' secret wife was Rachel.

Marvin explained, "I observed them for a few days and noticed the way she looks at her child-so full of warmth. No other mother gazes at their child quite like that. It made me think that's exactly how a mom should be."

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As night fell, Abby dropped Stella off at her apartment. It was already late, and Marvin had fallen asleep in the backseat.

After parking, Abby watched as Stella carefully carried Marvin out of the car.

"Stella, are you sure you want to care for this kid? I know the pay is good, but I feel his dad isn't someone you want to cross. If anything happens to this kid, he won't take it lightly."

Stella's expression was calm. "I know."

Abby was confused. "Then why are you doing it?"

Now that the initial allure of the money had faded, Abby had many concerns. If the boy were fine, all would be fine. But if anything happened, Stella could be in serious trouble.

Stella sighed softly, "Abby, I just want to find something to keep myself busy."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 32[586 words]

Abby looked puzzled. "Find something to keep yourself busy?"

"Yeah, it's weird suddenly having all this time on my hands," Stella replied with a wry smile. "I need to find something to keep myself busy and make money."

She paused, then added, "Haynes took action and froze my credit card. I have some savings, but Antoney wants to start a studio, and that will take a lot of cash."

"That jerk Haynes froze your card?" Abby exclaimed, unable to hold back her anger. "After all these years you've put into the family, he couldn't even buy you a bouquet. Meanwhile, he spends more money on the fireworks show for Rachel than on you!"

Stella sighed, "I can make money babysitting other people's kids, but when it comes to my family, I got my card cut off."

Abby, who wasn't married yet, felt a chill run down her spine hearing about Stella's marital woes. And Stella had married into a wealthy family, no less.

If she had married into an ordinary family, wouldn't that mean working, doing all the house chores, and raising the kids alone? The thought was terrifying, especially possibly facing complaints from both husband and son.

Abby was deep in thought when Stella's voice interrupted her. "A woman has to stand on her own financially to truly have confidence and strength. Without that, even your own child might not look up to you."

That made a lot of sense.

Abby nodded in agreement, then she said, "I'm between jobs right now, so if you need anything, call me anytime."

"Thanks, Abby."

Abby waved it off. "Come on. We're like family. There's no need for formalities."

After saying goodbye to Abby, Stella carried Marvin and headed home.

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The following morning, Stella took Marvin to school. As they stepped outside, a sleek black car was already waiting at the curb, drawing the attention and whispers of passersby.

The driver quickly approached them, introducing himself with a respectful smile when they came down. "Ms. Cameron, good morning. I'm Marvin's driver. I'm here to take him to and from school. You can call me Hans."

Stella wasn't surprised to see a driver show up at her door. She returned his smile, "Thank you, Hans."

Hans opened the car door for them. "You're too kind, Ms. Cameron."

About twenty minutes later, Stella noticed the route Hans had taken seemed familiar. It looked a lot like the one leading to Keen's kindergarten.

Curious, Stella asked, "Hans, which kindergarten does Marvin attend?"

Marvin had only recently moved to Neo-Vespera, and the information Neville sent her didn't mention his school.

Hans smiled, replying, "He goes to the Neo-Vespera Future Leaders Preschool, just nearby."

Hearing it, Stella raised an eyebrow slightly.

Keen attended that preschool, too.

The Neo-Vespera Future Leaders Preschool was the best in the area. Only kids from families with influence or prestige could get in. But having only money or power wasn't enough.

While Stella had guessed Neville wasn't ordinary, she hadn't expected his connections to be so impressive.

Stella walked Marvin to the entrance, instinctively reminding him, "If anything happens, call me, okay? Play nice with the other kids, and I'll be here to pick you up after school."

Marvin nodded, glancing back several times as he walked into the school.

Stella felt a pang of nostalgia. When Keen first started preschool, he would look back at her, reluctant to leave.

But at a point, Keen stopped responding to her reminders and started showing impatience instead.

Just then, she heard a surprised voice from behind. "Ms. Cameron, are you here to see Keen?"

Turning around, Stella was surprised to see Keen, Rachel, and Haynes standing a short distance away.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 33[521 words]

Seeing the situation unfold, Stella felt like a heavy stone pressing down on her chest, suffocating her.

During their five-year marriage, Haynes had never accompanied her to drop Keen off at kindergarten. She had suggested it once, but Haynes brushed it off, claiming he was too busy with work.

It turned out it wasn't about being busy. It was just that Haynes didn't want to go with her.

Still groggy and yawning, Keen looked like he had stayed up late again. But upon hearing Rachel's words, his eyes widened in surprise, and he saw Stella standing not too far away.

Rachel glanced down at Keen and smiled. "See, Keen? I told you Ms. Cameron isn't mad at you. Look, she came to see you so early."

A glint of triumph flashed in Keen's eyes as he glanced at Stella, putting on an air of mock superiority. "Don't assume your little schemes will make me fall in line. I won't forgive you until you apologize to Rachel."

Rachel turned to Haynes and smiled, "Haynie, it seems Jasper's idea did have some effect."

Haynes gave a nonchalant nod and told Stella, "Rachel doesn't have a good appetite lately. Go and prepare some special meals for her."

Stella gave him a strange look and quietly muttered, "Ridiculous."

Stepping in to mediate, Rachel adopted a soothing tone. "Ms. Cameron, there's no need to argue with Haynie. Let's sit down and work this out calmly. You haven't worked in years and don't have any income. You've grown accustomed to a comfortable life, so it must have been quite difficult for you since you left home, hasn't it?"

Her words implied that Stella had used their child as a pawn to draw attention. Haynes' cold gaze landed on Stella. "Apologize to Rachel now. And I might overlook what happened."

Keen frowned, his face full of displeasure. "Mom, I'm not your tool for gaining favors."

Stella looked at the trio united against her and found it utterly laughable. To an outsider, it might seem like they were a family, and she was the villain bullying them.

Rachel pleaded with a sincerity akin to a close friend, "Ms. Cameron, let it go."

Stella laughed coldly. "Let it go? Freezing my accounts and demanding an apology is your idea of letting it go? Ms. Pearce, would you want such a deal?"

Rachel opened her mouth, at a loss for words.

Just then, Keen suddenly stepped before Rachel, arms spread protectively, his expression serious. "Don't bully Rachel anymore!"

Stella was genuinely shocked. Keen had always been eager to please Rachel but had never taken such an openly oppositional stance against her.

No, that wasn't right. Stella often conceded first, so situations like this never escalated.

Seeing Keen's hostile glare, Stella stumbled, nearly losing her balance.

Rachel's eyes flickered with a subtle glint as she moved to support Stella. "Ms. Cameron, be careful-ah!"

Rachel suddenly stumbled sideways, as if shoved, swaying dangerously toward the street.

A car was speeding closer, and just as it seemed Rachel might collapse into its path, Haynes reacted instantly. With sharp reflexes, he yanked her back, pulling her safely into his arms.

Rachel's eyes brimmed with tears, her body trembling with fear. "Haynie, I, I almost couldn't see you again."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 34[532 words]

Tears streamed down her cheeks like a delicate flower caught in the rain, utterly heart-wrenching.

Haynes stood there, his expression as cold as winter, his gaze sharp as a blade, cutting through the air toward Stella.

Rachel grabbed Haynes' arm. "Haynie, it's not Ms. Cameron's fault. Please don't blame her. It was my fault for not standing properly..."

Seeing the situation unfold, Keen rushed over with worry. "Rachel, are you okay?"

Rachel forced a smile. "I'm fine..."

But before she could finish her sentence, Rachel fainted.

Forgetting about Stella, Haynes scooped Rachel into his arms and strode toward the parking lot. Keen followed closely, neither of them sparing Stella a second glance.

Stella watched Haynes and Keen's retreating figures, feeling like her heart had sunk into the icy sea. She closed her eyes, took several deep breaths to steady herself, and slowly walked away on trembling legs.

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At first, Stella assumed Marvin might be a handful, given the hefty payment Neville had offered.

However, after spending the day with him, she was pleasantly surprised. Marvin turned out to be a delight—he wasn't picky, happily ate whatever she prepared, and was both sweet-natured and well-mannered.

That evening, Stella's phone buzzed right after she had lulled Marvin to sleep. Answering the call, she heard Abby's urgent voice on the other end. "Star, what are you up to? Have you seen the news?"

Stella quietly closed Marvin's bedroom door. "I just got Marvin to sleep, why?" she replied.

"You're trending!"

"Trending?" Stella was puzzled. "Why am I trending?"

"Someone dug up your identity. Ugh, it's too much to explain over the phone. You need to check it out for yourself!"

After hanging up, Stella skeptically opened the trending topics on her phone.

She was generally a low-key person, and in the five years of her marriage to Haynes, they had hardly appeared together in public. Aside from a few of Haynes' acquaintances, almost no one in the social circle knew her. How could she possibly be trending?

Curious, Stella tapped into the trending topic. At the very top was a headline that was garnering massive attention. Clicking on it, Stella found her photos staring back at her.

"Uncovering the Mysterious Mrs. O'Brien: A Deep Dive into Stella Cameron's Life."

Below the headline were several photos with exclusive watermarks and descriptive text.

"Everyone knows the famous socialite Mr. Haynes and his unforgettable first love, Ms. Rachel Pearce, who recently returned from abroad."

"However, five years ago, Haynes suddenly rushed into marriage, the reasons unknown. It was only recently that we discovered the marriage was due to an unexpected pregnancy."

"The bride? None other than Haynes' wife, Stella Cameron."

"Rumor has it that she shamelessly wormed her way into Haynes' life, forcibly breaking him and Rachel apart, sending Rachel abroad."

"Recently, Rachel returned home, gravely ill, to seek treatment. Envious and spiteful, Stella began making things difficult for Rachel, even wishing for her demise."

Below this text were several photos and a video clip. Most were shots of Stella pushing Rachel, with Rachel looking teary-eyed, like a delicate, wronged damsel. Stella clicked on the video, which opened with her voice uttering explosive remarks.

"I can't compare to Ms. Pearce's charm. Haynes' sister adores you. His friends are smitten. And even Haynes and Keen can't resist you. Heck, even God seems to favor your type."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 35[536 words]

Rachel's voice trembled as she spoke, her vulnerability palpable.

"Ms. Cameron, you don't need to remind me. I know I don't have much time left." "Ms. Cameron, you're right. What Haynes gave me is all a sham. I'm sorry."

The scene shifted abruptly to a clip of Stella "pushing" Rachel into the water, followed by a distressing moment where Rachel apologized, looking utterly defeated.

Then, as if to seal the narrative, a video showed Rachel nearly losing her balance and almost getting hit by a car earlier that morning.

The comments under this trending topic exploded.

[Wow, Rachel only has six months left, and Stella's cursing her to die?]

[Sleeping her way to the top? Gross! This wife is so vicious. Maybe there's more to Rachel's illness than we know!]

[So, this tragic couple was separated by Stella? What a despicable woman! And I thought she was just a pretty face.]

[Pfft, pretty? My friend is a plastic surgeon, saying her face is all fake.]

[Poor Rachel, not only did this homewrecker steal her man, but she almost got her killed!]

[This is attempted murder! Let's tag the police and bring this murderer to justice!]

[It's unfair. Rachel is talented and beautiful, a brilliant violinist, and now, this illness? What a cruel twist of fate!]

[I heard Stella hasn't worked since she got married. She's a useless housewife, nothing compared to Rachel.]

The wave of criticism against Stella was overwhelming and one-sided.

Usually, in such stories, there would be a debate about the 'perfect victim' or 'victim-blaming,' but not with Stella's case. There wasn't a single dissenting voice. In an instant, Stella became the pariah, the villain everyone loved to hate.

Stella scrolled through the comments with a blank expression. After closing the news app, she took a deep breath, contemplating her next move.

Just then, her phone rang again.

She glanced at the caller ID and picked up after a few seconds.

Jasper's haughty voice rang through the phone. "Stella, Rachel is awake. Haynie is demanding that you come to the hospital and apologize!"

Stella responded coolly, "I'm not going."

Jasper chuckled coldly. "Haynie said you'll regret it if you don't!"

Stella's voice was icy. "Tell Haynes that marrying him is the only thing I've ever regretted."

With that, she hung up and turned off her phone.

By the next day, the story had exploded online. Stella's name was plastered everywhere, but not in a positive light. Overnight, she had become infamous, a viral sensation for all the wrong reasons.

The following morning, Stella got up as usual, making breakfast for Marvin, seemingly unfazed.

When it was time for school, Stella took Marvin downstairs. As soon as they stepped out of the building, something came hurtling toward her.

"Stella, you homewrecker, murderer, how dare you show your face!"

Instinctively, Stella wanted to dodge, but then she saw Marvin beside her. If she moved, Marvin would get hit. So, she stayed put, shielding Marvin with her body.

Smack! A sticky egg splattered against her forehead, the yolk trickling down with a nauseating sensation.

A group of fashionably dressed young women charged toward her with fury in their eyes, each armed with rotten lettuce, eggs, tomatoes, and water bottles.

Upon spotting Stella, they launched their barrage.

"You bitch, you almost drowned Rachel. Go to hell!"

"Disgusting plastic surgery freak! If men saw the real you, they'd run for the hills!"

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 36[561 words]

"Murderers deserve the death penalty!"

The group of girls was in a frenzy, their eyes blazing with hostility, faces twisted with rage. They looked like they wanted to tear Stella apart as if she were their arch-nemesis.

To someone looking in from the outside, it might have appeared as though Stella had done something unforgivable to them.

Stella surveyed their expressions and quickly deduced those girls were likely Rachel's fans. Although she wasn't a frequent internet user, Stella had recently learned that Rachel had amassed a massive following online.

It was only the previous day that Stella discovered Rachel had millions of devoted fans, drawn to her delicate beauty, talent with the violin, and inspiring

determination to live life to the fullest despite her terminal illness. In six months, Rachel had become as well-known as a B-list celebrity.

Rachel's rise to fame wasn't by mere chance. Someone was orchestrating it behind the scenes. That someone was Haynes.

Rachel had signed with a media company under the O'Brien Group's wing. Haynes hadn't bothered to dispel the rumors about him and Rachel, explaining to Stella that it was all part of a plan to boost Rachel's profile.

As Haynes explained, Rachel's final wish was to become a star, and with so little time left, they couldn't wait for her to slowly build a fanbase. Spreading gossip was the quickest way to make her famous overnight.

Despite her reservations, Stella had to bite her tongue and accept the situation. She hadn't realized how quickly Rachel's supporters had multiplied until then.

Seeing the hostile crowd, Stella quickly handed Marvin to Hans, the driver. "Hans, take Marvin and go."

Hans understood the danger. The mob's anger was directed at Stella, and lingering could put Marvin at risk. He nodded and picked Marvin up. "Come on, little man. We need to leave."

But Marvin squirmed, refusing to leave. "No, Stella's in danger. I can't leave her here."

Stella's heart warmed at his words. Her husband and son treated her like an enemy, yet this boy, whom she'd only known for two days, stood by her side unwaveringly.

"Marvin, you must go. I can handle this," Stella said gently. "If you stay, I'll be worried about your safety."

Marvin's eyes were filled with concern, but he nodded reluctantly. "Okay, but..." Stella urged him. "Go on. I can manage."

Marvin realized staying would only hinder her. If Stella had dodged, the egg would have hit him instead.

Hans carried Marvin to the car, and they drove off. When the car started moving, Marvin pulled out his phone to call Neville. "Dad, Stella's in trouble. It's your turn to play the knight in shining armor."

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As Marvin's car disappeared from view, another bottle of water came at Stella. Thud! The bottle struck Stella's head, making her vision blur as she nearly fainted. Blood trickled down her forehead, staining her clothes.

Once full of righteous fury, the crowd suddenly fell silent as if poured over by a bucket of ice water. These keyboard warriors, so bold online, were visibly shaken at the sight of real blood.

At that moment, a sleek black luxury car rolled up the street, catching everyone's attention. In a panic, someone shouted, "Run!" and the crowd quickly scattered.

Stella touched her forehead, her fingers coming away stained with blood.

The black car stopped beside her, and the window slid down to reveal a handsome face.

The man's cold, detached gaze settled on her bloodied visage.

"Stella, do you realize your mistake?"

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 37[633 words]

When seeing her injured and bleeding, Haynes' first words weren't ones of concern. Instead, he asked, "Do you realize your mistake?"

Seeing her in such a state, even a stranger passing by would likely stop and ask if she was okay. Yet her husband was waiting for her to admit fault. Stella couldn't help but let out a laugh.

Haynes frowned. "What's so funny?"

Stella wiped the blood from her forehead, though the wilted lettuce leaves and egg yolk smeared across her clothes left her looking quite the mess.

"I'm laughing at how all my efforts over the years went down the drain," she replied.

She chose not to bother cleaning herself up. Through the car window, her gaze met Haynes', her face blank as she said, "Is this your way of making me regret? By staging an online witch hunt and sending a mob after me, all to get revenge for your beloved Rachel?"

Haynes was silent for a few moments. "Do you think I'm behind all this?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Stella chuckled. "I moved to a new place, and even with the best detective work, no one should have found me so quickly and accurately. Who else could have orchestrated this? Didn't you have Jasper warn me that I'd regret it?"

She locked eyes with Haynes. "If you can't bear to let Rachel suffer injustice, why not just divorce me? Then you two could be together openly and rightfully."

A hint of anger flickered across Haynes' face. "Stella, I've explained countless times that Rachel and I aren't like what you think. Can you stop this baseless drama?"

Stella sneered, "If you don't divorce me, expect more of this 'drama.'"

Haynes' gaze turned icy. "So, you will keep being stubborn?"

Stella replied firmly, "Yes."

Haynes laughed bitterly. "Fine. Let's see if you never come to me for help."

With that, Haynes drove off, leaving Stella standing there.

Another day and night went by, and Stella remained the center of everyone's attention.

Haynes hadn't spoken up for her or tried to suppress the news. His apparent indifference left Stella feeling like a pariah, with everyone eager to have a piece of her.

While Haynes stayed silent, Rachel took to social media. "My hospitalization has nothing to do with Ms. Cameron. The incident by the lake was an accident, and we've reached an understanding. I don't intend to hold Ms. Cameron accountable."

"As for the rumors about Ms. Cameron stealing my boyfriend, that's ancient history. Please, let's not dredge this up again."

Rachel's post sent the internet into a frenzy.

By stating that the lake incident was resolved and not pursuing Stella, it only confirmed the rumor that Stella had pushed Rachel. Rachel brought up the past without clarifying, subtly implying Stella had indeed been the "other woman."

However, Rachel, Haynes, and Jasper knew the truth. When Stella and Haynes got together, Rachel and Haynes had parted ways.

Then, another scandal erupted, linking Stella with Antoney. Renowned for his looks and talent, Antoney was a well-known musician. Yet being entangled with a married woman, especially Haynes' wife, brought him his fair share of backlash.

And still, the storm wasn't over.

As if things couldn't get worse, the police knocked on Stella's door. "Ms. Cameron, we received a report accusing you of attempted murder. We need you to come with us for questioning."

The police took Stella to the interrogation room.

Though the internet was rife with conspiracy theories, with some calling for her head, speculation wasn't evidence. Like Rachel's slip into the water and the near-miss with the car, none of it could prove Stella had murderous intent.

The interrogation dragged on from morning until night. Finally, having extracted nothing of substance, the interrogators had no choice but to release her.

As she left the room, a young officer hurried over to the lead interrogator and whispered something in his ear.

The interrogator's eyes narrowed slightly, and he asked softly, "Are you sure?"

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 38[640 words]

The young officer nodded.

"Ms. Cameron," the interrogator continued, turning his attention to Stella, "a new eyewitness has come forward. We need to investigate this further, which means, unfortunately, you can't leave now."

An eyewitness? If there had been an eyewitness, the whole mess wouldn't have dragged on for so long. And now, out of nowhere, a witness had appeared.

Stella felt like she had sunk into an icy abyss, her whole body cold as stone. Whoever orchestrated this knew how to time their move, sending someone to point the finger at her, clearly with the intent to bury her. The sheer malice of it all was chilling to the bone.

The interrogator maintained a polite demeanor, but his voice held an undeniable authority. "Ms. Cameron, we need your cooperation for the investigation."

Stella quickly collected herself. "May I ask who the witness is?"

The officer shook his head. "I'm sorry, but we can't disclose the information for the witness' safety. If you have objections, you can contact a lawyer or call a friend to bail you out."

Everything was happening too fast. Stella hadn't even had a moment to think about getting a lawyer.

Antoney got caught in a media frenzy, and she couldn't drag him into this. Abby was too naive to handle someone like Haynes. One wrong word, and she might be in trouble, too.

Was Haynes waiting for her to admit guilt, ready to keep her locked up until she did? A hint of irony flickered in Stella's eyes.

She lowered her long lashes, her voice calm. "I understand."

As the officer was about to escort Stella to the holding room, a smooth, deep voice, rich and resonant like a cello, broke the tense atmosphere. "Ms. Cameron."

Stella looked up. A man in a crisp white shirt stood casually not far away. He was strikingly handsome, with a relaxed, almost nonchalant air. His slightly open shirt collar hinted at a rebellious streak.

His lips curved into a flawlessly calibrated smile, and his deep eyes resembled cherry blossoms drifting on a dark pond-captivating yet perilous.

"Mr. Connolly?" Stella was surprised. "What are you doing here?"

He wasn't supposed to be back until the weekend.

Neville smiled softly, replying, "I heard from Marvin that you've run into some trouble."

Marvin? Stella's expression shifted slightly. Since someone had pelted him with eggs that morning, she had sent Marvin home for a while. With her situation unresolved, having him around was too risky.

Since her troubles began, Haynes and Keen had acted deaf. Stella hadn't received a single call from them. But Marvin? He called every day, sent messages, checking in on her.

A stranger showed more concern for her than her husband and son, who seemed to have all the time in the world to go gallivanting with Rachel.

Neville addressed Stella, "Let's discuss this outside. I've arranged for your bail. We can leave now."

Stella considered his offer for a few seconds, then nodded slightly. "Thank you."

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Meanwhile, in an office elsewhere, Benson entered to find Haynes watching the flat-screen TV on the wall.

The screen displayed a news segment of Stella getting pelted with eggs, surrounded and overwhelmed by a mob. She looked forsaken, like a lost soul, disheveled and humiliated.

Benson awkwardly shifted his gaze away, his voice low as he reported, "Mr. O'Brien, not long ago, Ms. Cameron was taken in for questioning. An eyewitness has come forward with evidence. She might be kept in custody if no one bails her out."

Benson hesitated. "Should we bail Ms. Cameron out?"

Haynes turned his gaze to Benson. "When did this happen?" he asked.

"This morning."

Haynes glanced at his phone. The screen was blank. There was not a single call or message.

"If she'd rather face public humiliation and stay trapped indoors than admit she's wrong, then she clearly doesn't want anyone's help." A cold smile played on Haynes' lips. "Isn't she tough? Let her handle it herself, then. She can fend for herself in there."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 39[496 words]

As Stella left the police station, the sky had darkened. She glanced at Neville and spoke softly, "Mr. Connolly, thank you."

With a casual smile, Neville replied, "Marvin likes you. Consider it a perk of the job. Do you want me to handle those online news stories for you?"

Stella's eyes flickered with curiosity. "Can you suppress the news, Mr. Connolly?" Neville raised an eyebrow. "What? You don't believe me?"

"You must already know who I am, Mr. Connolly," Stella said. "I'm Haynes' wife. The O'Brien family runs Neo-Vespera. Not many can stop Haynes if he wants something done."

Neville seemed a bit surprised. "You think Haynes is behind this?"

With a hint of sarcasm, Stella replied, "I can't think of anyone else."

Neville's eyes narrowed slightly. It seemed the relationship between this couple was worse than he had imagined. They were falling apart without him even lifting a finger.

After some thought, Neville said, "I offer because I can do it. Ms. Cameron, tell me if you need it."

Stella hesitated. "Suppressing the news isn't necessary. But there's another thing I'd like your help with, Mr. Connolly."

Neville leaned closer, intrigued. "Go on."

Stella murmured something into his ear, and Neville let out a low, appreciative chuckle. "Brilliant. That's far more effective than trying to bury the story. Consider it done."

Stella smiled sincerely. "Mr. Connolly, I can't thank you enough."

Neville replied, "If you want to thank me, Ms. Cameron, take good care of Marvin." Stella nodded lightly. "I will."

Even if Neville hadn't helped her, she had decided to do her best at her new job and take good care of Marvin.

Neville checked the time. "I just got off a plane and haven't eaten yet. If you're free, would you join me for dinner?"

Given how much Neville had helped her, Stella readily agreed. "Sure, dinner's on me."

Neville smiled, "Alright."

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By the time they finished dinner, night had fallen.

Stella excused herself to the restroom and settled the bill. As she was returning, blinding flashes surrounded her, and a swarm of reporters popped out of nowhere, encircling her.

"Ms. Cameron, who was the gentleman you dined with? Is he your affair partner?"

"Ms. Cameron, there are rumors about you and Antoney. Are you in several relationships?"

"Ms. Cameron, people claim you've climbed the social ladder by being someone's mistress. Don't you realize that breaking up relationships is wrong? Do you even understand what shame means?"

"Sources say the police took you in for questioning this morning. Are you a murderer?"

The reporters formed a tight circle, trapping Stella with no way out.

When Stella realized what was happening, it was too late. She frowned and said, "I'll hold a press conference soon to address all your questions."

But the reporters weren't satisfied and kept firing sharp questions at her, even pushing and shoving her around.

Stella was shoved and pushed, her feet stepped on over and over, and in the chaos, she even lost a shoe. Already drained from a full day of questioning, she felt even more frazzled and overwhelmed by the relentless barrage of reporters.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 40[431 words]

She wanted to push through the reporters, but their circle was as impenetrable as a brick wall.

"Ms. Cameron, could you answer my question?"

"Ms. Cameron..."

"Ms. Cameron..."

The reporters buzzed around Stella like bees.

Out of nowhere, someone shoved Stella, sending her sprawling onto the ground.

A sudden outcry erupted as she struggled to get back on her feet. "Oh my God! Mrs. O'Brien hit someone!"

With that shout, every flashbulb in the vicinity turned toward Stella, capturing her from every angle. The noise and the sea of unfamiliar faces threatened to engulf her, leaving her breathless.

Suddenly, a deep, commanding voice cut through the chaos outside the circle. "Step aside."

The crowd turned, finding a tall, imposing man standing behind them.

Stella's eyes widened in shock. It was Neville.

Neville took advantage of the reporters' momentary distraction and moved to Stella's side. His gaze fell on her twisted ankle, and his sharp eyes narrowed. "I'll take you to the hospital."

With that, Neville helped Stella to her feet.

Seeing Neville, the reporters buzzed with renewed energy, swarming toward him like moths to a flame.

However, his aura was formidable, and the reporters hesitated to treat him with the same impertinence as they had Stella.

"Sir, may I ask what your relationship is with Ms. Cameron? Are you aware of the rumors about her?"

Neville's piercing gaze fell on the female reporter, his eyes like shards of ice. "Are you questioning me?"

The reporter attacking Stella earlier was speechless, unable to muster a word under Neville's intense stare.

Neville glanced at Stella's ankle again and said, "You've sprained your ankle. Let's get you to the hospital."

Without waiting for her response, he scooped her up into his arms.

At that moment, another cold and clear voice emerged from the night. "Oh? Quite the spectacle here."

The man's voice was crisp, like a mountain stream, carrying an edge of chill.

The crowd turned toward the sound. Under the gentle moonlight, the man's features were sharply defined as though dusted with a layer of frost.

He stood quietly, his eyes gleaming like gemstones beneath icy water, his lips twisting into a mocking smile.

The reporters froze momentarily, "Haynes?"

The beautiful woman beside Haynes spoke softly, "The rumors online are unfounded. Please don't harass Ms. Cameron any further..."

It was only then that the reporters noticed Rachel by Haynes' side.

Rachel was at the center of this media storm, and the reporters had been desperate to interview her. However, her hospital had been off-limits, strictly guarded.

Yet, Haynes' icy gaze cut through the air like a sword before they could converge on Rachel.

The excitement on the reporters' faces turned to stone.

Haynes' expression was steely. "Ladies and gentlemen, that's enough for today."