

THE EX-WIFE'S BURNING ELEGANCE

Chapter 4

"Star, have you decided to go through with the divorce?"

Stella gave a gentle nod. "Yeah, I've made up my mind."

"But what about Keen?"

"Even if I tried to fight for custody, I wouldn't stand a chance against the O'Brien family. Besides..." Stella's face twisted into a bittersweet smile, "Keen might not even want to be with me. To him, Rachel is likely the best thing right now."

Abby frowned in disapproval. "You went through hell to bring Keen into this world, laboring for a day and a night. You've been there for him every single day, sacrificing so much. How could he prefer the woman who tore his parents apart over you?"

Stella replied calmly, "This just proves they're father and son. Even their taste in women is the same."

"And what about Haynes? Does he know you're leaving?"

Stella shook her head. "He's probably busy tending to his 'dream girl' right now."

Before marriage, Stella owned a cozy little apartment, but it had been ages since she lived there. After cleaning up the place, Abby suggested they hit the town.

Abby said, "Star, we haven't gone shopping together since you had Keen. How about a little retail therapy?"

That was true. Since Keen was born, Stella's life had been about family and childcare. She had lost herself, her life, and her time.

Watching Abby's eyes sparkle, Stella remembered she used to be full of life and energy. Five years of marriage had aged her too quickly, making her feel like a mere shadow of who she once was.

Stella felt a strange tightness in her chest. "Sure."

Just then, Abby's phone rang. Whatever she heard from the other end made Abby frown.

After a moment, she said, "Okay, we'll be there soon."

Putting the phone away, Abby turned to Stella, "Star, someone wants to pay a hefty price for the violin you consigned to Pearce Music House, the 'Nocturne Stella.' The manager says the potential buyer has quite a reputation, and he's too nervous to say no. Since you're free today, why don't we check it out together?" Stella hadn't played the violin in five years. Her life had been consumed with caring for Keen, leaving anything related to the violin entirely in Abby's hands. Hearing Abby mention it felt like a blast from the past.

As Stella and Abby entered the music store, Stella's steps faltered.

A tall, handsome man stood there with a delicate, pretty woman, admiring a display labeled "Not for Sale."

The woman's voice was soft and melodic, "The legendary Nocturne Stella is even more beautiful than I imagined!"

"Haynie, you know how much I love playing the violin for you. I want to host a concert in my final days and would love to use the Nocturne Stella. What do you think?"

The man's voice was deep and resonant. "I think it's a great idea."

The store manager trailed behind them, wiping his brow nervously. Spotting Stella and Abby, his eyes lit up as if he'd seen a lifeline.

"Ms. Murphy, you're finally here! Mr. O'Brien would like to purchase the Nocturne Stella. The conditions are yours to set. What do you think..."