

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 41[527 words]

The swarm of reporters exchanged glances, their faces lighting up with sycophantic grins.

"Since it's Mr. O'Brien's request, we better oblige."

They quickly dispersed, not daring to linger or snap any sneaky photos. Who was Haynes O'Brien? Anyone who dared to cross him wouldn't last long on this turf.

Once the reporters had cleared out, the air turned eerily still and cold.

Haynes glared at Stella, nestled in another man's arms, his eyes dark and his presence chilling.

He parted his thin lips, uttering two cold words. "Get down."

Stella felt uneasy being held by someone she barely knew. With all the rumors surrounding her, she was determined not to drag Neville into her chaotic situation.

She spoke softly, "Please, put me down."

Neville seemed oblivious to Haynes' menacing glare. "No can do. Your ankle's sprained. We need to get you to a doctor."

Haynes' gaze locked on Stella, his eyes like frozen glass, exuding a frosty aura. He spoke coldly, "Stella, I'm telling you to get down."

Usually, Haynes kept his emotions under wraps, and Stella had rarely seen such intensity in him. At the moment, his expression was stormy, his gaze icy, as if he were staring at something profoundly detestable.

Seeing her unmoved, Haynes' eyes grew even more terrifying. He took slow, deliberate steps toward them and reached out, ready to pull Stella down.

Neville attempted to block him with his arm, but with Stella in his hold, his movements got hindered, failing to stop Haynes.

In a swift motion, Haynes yanked Stella from Neville's grasp. With a firm grip on her wrist, he began to walk away.

As she landed, a searing pain shot through Stella's sprained ankle, making her wince. Just then, Neville grabbed her other hand.

Haynes stopped in his tracks, his eyes narrowing at Neville as he spoke with icy contempt. "Let her go."

Neville's lips curled into a casual smile. "I believe I'm the one who should be saying that."

Haynes' brows arched arrogantly, "You think you have the right?"

Neville chuckled. "Whether I do or not, it's not up to you. What matters is how Star feels about it."

Neville turned his gaze to Stella, his voice gentle. "Star, do you want to go with him?"

Stella knew Neville was calling her that on purpose to irk Haynes.

Her eyes darted to Rachel, who stood not far away. Haynes and Rachel had just left the same restaurant, likely after sharing a meal and informing Rachel about Stella's so-called predicament to win a smile from his first crush.

Stella's expression turned neutral, choosing not to look at Haynes but instead at Neville. "My ankle's hurt. Could you please take me to the hospital, Mr. Connolly?"

Neville's smile widened. "Between us, there's no such thing as trouble."

Haynes' eyes flashed with disbelief as he coldly remarked, "Stella, don't tell me you're tangled up with this guy again."

Stella frowned in discomfort. "Mr. O'Brien, isn't it amusing? There's no scandal with Mr. Connolly, no tangled affairs. We shared a meal, and he was kind enough to help me. Yet, in your eyes, that means I'm involved with another man?"

Stella glanced at Rachel indifferently. "Is it that every time I speak to a man, it implies some improper relationship? Are you projecting your ways onto others, Mr. O'Brien?"

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Neville flashed a wry smile. "Mr. O'Brien, when Star got cornered earlier, you weren't here to save her. Are you trying to steal my thunder now?"

Haynes' eyes darkened, lost for words.

Standing nearby, Rachel piped up in Haynes' defense. "Haynie just got here. He didn't mean to leave Ms. Cameron hanging."

Neville's lips curled. "When the reporters swarmed Ms. Pearce, Mr. O'Brien reprimanded them quickly. Yet, when they slandered Star with all sorts of rumors, there wasn't a peep out of him in her defense."

Rachel cut in impatiently, "Ms. Cameron has already admitted to some of those claims herself. They're facts now, not rumors. If you don't believe it, Mr. Connolly, why not ask her yourself?"

Neville didn't even glance at Rachel, his focus fixed on Haynes. "Mr. O'Brien, is that what you think, too?"

Haynes' eyes were deep, his gaze lingering on Stella. "Are you coming down or not?"

It seemed Neville's words were falling on deaf ears. Talking to Haynes was like talking to a brick wall. Stella spoke softly, "Mr. Connolly, can you please take me to the hospital first?"

Neville chuckled lightly, "At your service, Star."

As Neville carried Stella past Haynes, a cool breeze followed in their wake.

At the hospital, the doctor examined Stella's foot. It was just a minor scrape, nothing serious.

Neville stepped out to take a call, and Stella, leaning back in the chair, drifted off to sleep.

Her dreams were a jumble of bizarre images. Rachel's malicious grin appeared, and then Haynes and Keen pushed her into a nightmarish abyss.

Stella jolted awake with a start. Her breath came in quick gasps, and a light sheen of sweat covered her forehead.

"Bad dream?" A deep, calm voice broke the silence beside her, offering a few tissues.

Stella accepted them, murmuring, "Thanks."

As she wiped her forehead, she turned to see a tall, familiar figure. She froze, blinking in surprise, then frowned. "Why are you here?"

Haynes noticed the chill in her expression and let out a humorless laugh. "Disappointed not to see who you were expecting?"

Stella's voice was cold. "Not seeing who I want isn't the problem. Seeing someone I'd rather avoid is what's unsettling."

Haynes looked at her and said, "If you apologize, I'll clear the air and say it was all a misunderstanding."

Apologize?

Stella nearly laughed. "I didn't do anything wrong. Why should I apologize?"

Haynes hadn't anticipated her stubbornness after all this time, and his voice turned cold. "Stella, do you still think you did nothing wrong?"

Stella clenched her hands into fists, her knuckles turning white from the pressure. The online accusations had driven her mad, and Haynes expected her to concede. Seriously? It was laughable.

She replied icily, "My biggest mistake in life was marrying you!"

Haynes' face hardened. "Stella, that's enough."

Stella's laugh was bitter. "I've had enough. You can be blind to Rachel's faults, but I refuse to play the fool who takes everything lying down."

Haynes' eyes were gloomy. "You're asking for too much."

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"I want a lot, but is it as much as your Rachel?" Stella glanced at Haynes with a slight lift of her eyes. "For your precious Rachel, you gave her my wedding. You dropped one hundred million to launch her career without batting an eye, and then you froze my card, claiming I'm the one who's asking too much?"

Haynes' voice was icy. "These aren't reasons for you to keep targeting Rachel."

Stella retorted with sarcasm, "Oh, it's all on me because Ms. Pearce is pure as the driven snow."

Haynes heard the sarcasm loud and clear, which irked him. Stella seemed unreasonable to him now.

Just as he was about to speak, Stella cut him off. "I hope Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Pearce clear up all the false information about me online. Or else, don't blame me when your reputations get ruined."

Haynes' deep eyes were inscrutable. "Ruined reputations?"

"Yes, Mr. O'Brien, don't you believe it?"

"Not really," he replied dryly.

Stella smiled, not pressing further. "Well, let's wait and see."

Their conversation ended on yet another sour note.

Not long after Haynes left, Neville returned and drove Stella back home.

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The following day, Stella drove to pick Marvin up from school. Though the storm was far from over, Marvin hadn't seen her in days and insisted on meeting her.

Thinking of Marvin warmed Stella's heart. Even the pain in her chest seemed to ease a little.

Traffic was heavy at this hour, and Stella texted Marvin lest he got anxious. [Sweetie, I'm stuck in traffic and might be a few minutes late.]

Marvin quickly texted back, [I understand, Stella. Don't worry. Just be careful.] A small smile tugged at the corners of Stella's lips.

Back in the day, whenever Stella went out, even if she wasn't late, Keen would give her a hard time if she got slightly delayed. Once, when she had a cold and coughed the whole way, Keen was too busy texting Rachel to ask if she was okay.

As she approached an intersection, ready to turn, a car suddenly hurtled towards her! Stella's expression changed, and she tried to swerve, but it was too late. The car crashed straight into hers.

Bang! With a deafening noise, Stella lost consciousness briefly.

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She didn't know how long had passed, but through the shattered glass, she heard soft sobbing that slowly brought her back to consciousness.

"Haynie, you're finally here. That rookie driver was terrifying. She didn't even hit the brakes and slammed into me. I thought... I thought I'd never see you again..."

Blinking groggily, Stella could see through the cracked windshield the tall, familiar figure of Haynes lifting Rachel out of the car. Rachel? Could Rachel be the one who hit her?

Rachel was crying, her face streaked with tears.

She threw herself into Haynes' arms, "Haynie, I thought I was going to die. I was so scared..."

Haynes soothed her in a low voice, "Don't be afraid. I'm here."

The scene outside was chaotic, with plenty of onlookers around the spectacle.

Haynes didn't glance in Stella's direction as he moved through the crowd, seemingly intent on getting Rachel away from the scene.

Black smoke mingled with fiery sparks, and the acrid smell of gasoline stung Stella's throat, making her cough.

"Cough, cough!"

Stella struggled to get out of the car, only to find her foot trapped and unable to move. Instinctively, she reached for her phone in her pocket, desperate to call for help.

The car was catching fire, and if she called the emergency services, they might not arrive in time to save her from being burned alive.

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Stella's heart raced as she pressed the call button for Haynes, her instincts in overdrive. It was funny how danger seemed to sharpen her senses.

She could hear the familiar ringtone from Haynes' direction. Her palms were slick with cold sweat, making her grip on the phone slippery and uncomfortable.

Stella's eyes were on the path Haynes had taken, and despite everything, she was clutching her phone tighter.

Haynes halted abruptly. Though Stella had long ceased to care for him, her heart raced uncontrollably in this critical moment.

Haynes pulled out his phone, his expression deepening when he saw her name on the screen.

Just then, Rachel's voice broke the tension. "It's Ms. Cameron's call. It looks like she's come around," Rachel said with a faint, weak smile. "Haynie, you should answer it. Keen needs his mother. Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. I've got not much time left anyway."

Haynes' eyes flickered before he disconnected the call. "I'll take you to the hospital first," he said, dismissing everything else as he carried Rachel away.

In that instant, Stella's mind went blank. It was as if a heavy hammer had struck her heart. Her vision darkened, and she fainted.

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"Did you see? The woman brought into our hospital earlier is Haynes' old flame, Rachel, right?"

"Yeah, that's her. You should've seen Mr. O'Brien when he brought her in. He looked so worried and heartbroken. It's a shame they're star-crossed lovers who never got their happy ending."

"I heard Haynes' wife got her position by playing dirty tricks to break them apart so she could marry him."

"I saw Haynes by Ms. Pearce's bedside. How he looked at her was so tender! I know it's wrong, but part of me wants them to be together."

Amid the gossip, Stella stirred awake.

"Hey, she's awake," someone noticed, bringing the chatter to a halt.

"Ms. Cameron, how are you feeling?" a voice asked.

Stella shook her head, feeling a wave of dizziness wash over her.

"A bit lightheaded," she admitted.

The doctor nodded. "Besides some minor injuries and a mild concussion, you've got a slight sprain in your foot. You'll require a few days of observation. Contact your family to settle the hospital bills."

Family? Her family was probably by Rachel's bedside right then.

A bitter smile crept onto Stella's lips. After a moment's pause, she made a call.

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Haynes drove home once he was sure Rachel was stable and had finally soothed her into sleep. When he arrived, it was midnight, and the house was in darkness.

Exhausted, Haynes rubbed his temples as he pushed open the bedroom door. It was dark there, too.

Once upon a time, no matter how late he returned, Stella would always leave a light on for him. She'd wake up to ask if he'd eaten or needed anything.

But since Stella had left, everything felt different. At first, Haynes didn't notice the change. But tonight, the silence felt unusually cold for some reason.

He flicked the switch on the wall, flooding the room with light. Yet the room was empty.

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Haynes suddenly remembered he had received a call from Stella at Rachel's car accident. But things were so urgent that he didn't have the chance to answer her call, so he hung up.

Thinking about this, Haynes decided to call her back. The phone rang and rang, but nobody picked up.

Eventually, the call went to voicemail, and Haynes' brow furrowed deeper. He tried calling a few more times, but still, there was no answer. Was Stella ignoring him because he had hung up on her earlier?

Jasper always said not to spoil women too much. Perhaps he'd been too lenient with her, so she gave him the cold shoulder.

Meanwhile, in the hospital room, the phone on Stella's bedside table buzzed persistently, but she was already fast asleep.

It wasn't until she woke up the following morning that she noticed the missed calls on the screen. She smirked as she placed the phone back on the table.

Half an hour later, there was a knock on her hospital room door. A few uniformed traffic officers came in to investigate the accident.

Stella truthfully recounted the incident. "I was making the turn when the other car came out of nowhere without slowing down."

The officers noted her statement and asked, "Ms. Cameron, are you sure it was the other car that hit you, not the other way around?"

A subtle unease hit Stella as she listened to the officers. She asked, "Are they not admitting it was their fault?"

In accidents like these, determining fault is crucial.

The officer didn't hide the truth. "Well, the area of the car accident is remote, and there are no cameras, so it's hard to determine fault for now. We need both parties' statements first."

Stella inquired, "Is the other driver in the same hospital?"

"Yes, this is the closest hospital to the accident site," the officer replied. "Currently, that driver insists you hit them. We're actively searching for witnesses and other evidence, and we'll keep you updated, Ms. Cameron."

"Thank you," Stella replied politely.

The officers left soon. As Stella watched them go, her eyes darkened with contemplation. She never believed in coincidences like this. Of all the people, she had to collide with Rachel. Was this some twisted way of forcing Haynes to make a choice?

Benson quietly reported to Haynes in another hospital room, "The traffic officers said the other driver doesn't admit fault. They're even claiming Ms. Pearce was the one who caused the crash. That area is secluded and has no cameras. If we wait for the investigation, it might take a while..."

Lying in bed, Rachel looked terrified upon hearing this. "That person came out of nowhere, like a bat out of hell, without slowing down. It was drunk driving or attempted murder..."

She glanced at her hand wrapped in a cast, tears welling in her eyes. "I wanted to hold a concert in the little time I have left, but now, I don't even know if my hand will ever recover..."

Haynes replied calmly, "I've arranged for a medical team to look after you. Focus on getting better, and I'll handle the rest."

Rachel shook her head, tears blurring her vision. "That person must have pulled some strings to remove the surveillance footage. That's why we can't find any evidence. I'm afraid it will just fade away..."

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"Don't worry. I won't let you get the short end of the stick on this," Haynes assured.

Rachel managed a small smile through her tears. She knew Haynes wasn't the kind to make promises lightly. If he promised something, he never failed to deliver.

A few minutes later, Benson stood outside another hospital room. He'd learned the driver of the car that collided with Rachel's was staying there. Naturally, Haynes wouldn't handle this sort of thing in person.

Benson knocked on the door and stepped inside.

Meanwhile, Haynes lingered in the hallway and called Stella again. Just like yesterday, he heard silence. An inexplicable frustration bubbled within him.

He was about to try calling again when Benson emerged, looking perplexed.

"What's with the quick exit? Did they refuse to admit fault?" Haynes asked, pausing his actions.

Benson glanced at him, hesitant to speak. After a moment, he finally said, "Mr. O'Brien, you... you might want to see this for yourself."

Benson was an outstanding assistant, capable of handling such matters with ease. It must be something significant if he suggested Haynes take a look himself.

Haynes looked at him curiously and pushed open the door. His gaze froze when he saw the woman sitting on the hospital bed. "Stella, what are you doing here?"

Stella had heard from Benson why Haynes was there. And his arrival didn't surprise her in the least.

Leaning against the bed, Stella looked pale with a few scabbed wounds on her forehead. She regarded him coldly. "Mr. O'Brien, you should already know why I'm here. The reason for your visit is probably clearer to you than to me."

Haynes' eyes narrowed to slits, his voice low and dangerous. "You're the one who hit Rachel?"

Stella shrugged, her tone casual to the point of indifference. "Yeah."

The pieces snapped into place for Haynes. His piercing gaze flickered, the certainty in his eyes wavering like a candle caught in a draft.

"When you called me yesterday..." His voice tightened, each word clipped. "You were in the car?"

Stella's voice was calm, giving nothing away. "When you rescued Ms. Pearce, my foot got trapped. I called you to help me out, too."

But he had hung up. He would have seen Stella if he had glanced in her direction. But he hadn't. His attention had been entirely on Rachel, ignoring everyone else.

Was she disappointed? She'd long since given up expecting anything from him, so no. She was not disappointed. But the feeling of being left behind in a life-or-death situation was awful. It was something she never wanted to experience again.

"I'm sorry," Haynes said quietly. "I didn't know you were there."

Stella chuckled. "Right, you didn't know I was there, too. You thought my call was about something trivial, so you hung up without hesitation. Because..."

She met his gaze, stating firmly, "In your world, I just don't matter that much."

At that moment, any explanation he could offer would sound like an excuse. Haynes stayed silent without a word to offer.

Stella closed her eyes briefly. When she opened them again, they were clear and devoid of emotion. "Mr. O'Brien, if you came to see me, say what you need."

It was then that Haynes remembered the purpose of his visit. "Did you crash into Rachel?"

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Stella leaned back, and her voice was steady but firm. "She crashed into me."

"Rachel said you dashed out and intentionally collided with her," Haynes replied, his tone as cold as his gaze.

Stella tilted her head to meet his eyes, which were as inscrutable as a winter night. "So, you believe Ms. Pearce?" she asked.

Haynes paused, his silence stretching the moment. "Rachel has no reason to crash into you."

Stella retorted, "And I have a reason to do that?"

Haynes held her gaze, his eyes sharp and unfathomable. "So, did you do it on purpose?"

"No."

The room fell into a thick silence. The only sound was the distant hum of hospital machinery.

After what felt like an age, Haynes broke the silence with a sharp tone. "Get some rest. I'll look into this."

Stella watched him leave, her expression unreadable. She knew he didn't believe her. He was biding his time, waiting for evidence. If he believed her, he wouldn't have asked the question in the first place.

Not long after Haynes left, Stella's phone buzzed with a call from Antoney. "Star, I heard about the accident. How are you holding up? Is it serious?"

Stella's brow furrowed slightly. "How did you find out, Antoney?"

His voice was low, almost a whisper. "It's all over the news, Star. Are you okay?"

Stella reassured him. "I'm fine, just some minor injuries. I should be out of here by tomorrow or the next day. Don't worry about me."

"Alright, but if you need anything, call me."

Antoney wanted to help Stella get the news off the headlines, but despite his fame, his reclusive nature meant he didn't have the connections to handle such media storms.

After hanging up, Stella lay back, closing her eyes to think through her next move. Rachel was bold, likely having covered all her bases, even arranging so-called witnesses.

With public opinion already spiraling, Rachel had set the stage perfectly, even risking herself to ensure the plan's success. That would be a tough nut to crack.

Stella felt a dull throb at her temples. With Rachel's repeated schemes, any hope of an amicable ending with Haynes slipped further away.

Just then, a loud bang on the door shattered her thoughts. "Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Before Stella could respond, the door was flung open, and Jasper stormed in with Rachel trailing behind, her arm wrapped in a bandage.

"Stella, you murderer!" Jasper yelled, his finger pointing accusingly at her. "Last time, Rachel nearly drowned, and you weaseled your way out. Let's see how you explain it this time!"

Stella's expression turned icy, her voice matching her demeanor. "Get out of my room!"

"It's you who should get out!" Jasper grabbed a glass of water from the table and hurled it at Stella. "I'm telling you. Haynie won't let you off easy this time! You'll go jail, murderer!"

Still injured, Stella couldn't dodge and got splashed in the face.

"You dared to harm Rachel! Even if I beat you to a pulp, Haynie would thank me!" Jasper shouted, advancing toward Stella with fury in his eyes.

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As Jasper approached the hospital bed, Stella suddenly lashed out with a swift kick to his stomach.

Caught off guard, Jasper stumbled backward and crashed into a nearby table. The cups on the table clattered to the floor, shattering into countless pieces.

Standing nearby, Rachel instinctively reached out to help Jasper, but her injured hand couldn't support her, and she fell to the ground with him. She landed amongst the shards.

At that moment, the door to the hospital room swung open. A tall, poised man stepped inside, pausing as he took in the chaotic scene before him. "What happened here?"

Jasper was sprawled on the floor, wincing in pain. Upon seeing Haynes, his temper flared.

He scrambled to his feet, pointing accusingly at Stella.

"Haynie, this 'frail' woman-supposedly too injured to even leave her bed-just took down both me and Rachel in one go! If she's not faking it, what is she, some kind of martial arts

master? She kicked me, for crying out loud! And Rachel? Still recovering, and this vicious woman deliberately shoved her. It's not just cruel-it's downright evil!"

Haynes glanced at the unscathed Stella, then at Rachel on the floor, her skin cut by the shards. Blood trickled from her wounds, painting an alarming picture.

Despite the pain, Rachel bit back any cries, tears welling in her eyes as she struggled to rise.

With her arm injured, Rachel struggled for ages, unable to stand, only getting more cuts as she tried.

Haynes' eyes narrowed. He swept Rachel up from the floor.

Looking at Jasper, his tone was cold. "Get someone to clean up this mess. I'll take Rachel for treatment first."

Jasper wanted to hurl a few more insults at Stella, but she had closed her eyes, and her face was as indifferent as a bystander.

With a huff, Jasper ordered the shards to be cleaned, not out of concern for Stella stepping on them, but because he was sure Haynes would be back to confront Stella after dealing with Rachel.

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An hour later, Haynes and Rachel returned. Rachel, who had been able to walk earlier, sat in a wheelchair.

Stella took one glance around, then retreated into her phone with disinterest.

Noticing Stella's detached demeanor, Haynes furrowed his brow slightly. "Stella, don't you have anything to explain?"

Stella's response was curt. "No."

Pushing the wheelchair, Jasper spat out, "Of course she doesn't! This was all her doing every bit of it! From crashing into Rachel's car to shoving her on purpose, it's obvious how twisted she is!"

Haynes looked at Stella, asking, "Stella, is that true?"

Stella didn't even bother to look up. "Whatever you say."

It was clear to everyone that Stella's attitude was dismissive at best.

Rachel was in tears. "Ms. Cameron, you've misunderstood my relationship with Haynie. I can explain. Haynie and I aren't what you think..."

Stella's brow twitched slightly, and she smiled wryly at Rachel. "Ms. Pearce, are you sure about that?"

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Rachel wiped away the tears welling in her eyes. "Ms. Cameron, I know you've always held my past with Haynie against me, but that was ages ago."

"Everyone's got a past. Is it so hard to forgive?" Rachel's eyes trembled slightly. "Do you think it would take my death for you to let go?"

Stella looked up, a sly smile on her lips. "Well, if that's what it takes, by all means, go ahead."

Haynes' face darkened. "Stella!"

Stella chuckled. "Haynes, you shouldn't look so grim. Ms. Pearce was the one talking about wanting to die, not me. Is it someone else's fault if she chooses to be so dramatic?"

Rachel's eyes widened in disbelief, tears streaming down her cheeks. She abruptly stood from her wheelchair and made a mad dash for the window nearby.

"Since Ms. Cameron wants me dead, I'll gladly oblige!" she cried out.

"Rachel, don't do anything stupid!" Jasper exclaimed, rushing to stop her.

Haynes, whose expression was cold and stern, grabbed her first. "Rachel, what are you doing?"

Frantic and hysterical, Rachel shouted, "I know Ms. Cameron hates me. If she hates me so much, let me die! Let go of me! Just let me die!"

Haynes' lips tightened into a thin line. "Calm down, Rachel."

But Rachel was beyond reason, her voice hoarse from crying. "I should never have returned. I should never have shown my face here again!"

The room descended into chaos, like a pot boiling over. Amidst the turmoil, a voice cut through, cold as ice. Stella's laughter seemed to echo unnaturally in the heated room.

"Since Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Wilkinson don't want you to die, why don't you eat dirt instead?" Stella said with a mocking grin, staring at Rachel. "Ms. Pearce, aren't you always eager to follow my suggestions? I doubt you'd refuse."

Jasper was livid, pointing an accusing finger at Stella. "Stella, you're going too far!"

Stella shrugged, feigning innocence. "I tell her to die, and she's ready to jump. Now that I'm being kind and changing my mind, you're still unhappy?"

She paused as if a revelation struck her. "Oh, I get it. You'd prefer if she went ahead and died, right?"

"Stella, you, you..." Jasper was red with rage, teeth clenched, but words failed him under her audacity.

Haynes' eyes were dark and intense. "Stella, enough." he snapped.

Stella laughed coldly, her expression hardening. "The ones who should stop are you all."

Her gaze sliced through Haynes like a knife. "I haven't even started holding you accountable. Yet here you are, causing a scene in my room! Have you ever heard the saying, 'those who start trouble are the worst.'?"

"I didn't push Rachel, but even if I had, she deserved it!"

As Haynes was about to retort, the door swung open.

"What's going on here? Why all the noise?" A deep, resonant voice came from the doorway.

Neville paused, taking in the scene: Rachel's tearful face, Jasper's anger, and Haynes' icy demeanor. Realizing the tension in the room, he forced a polite smile.

"Apologies," he said calmly. "The doctor mentioned Star needs peace. If there's anything to discuss, let's save it for after she's discharged."

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After finishing his piece, he placed the lunchbox he brought onto the table, done with the crowd.

"Star, you haven't had breakfast, right? I brought you some," Neville said kindly.

"Thank you, Mr. Connolly," Stella replied with gratitude.

Seeing this unfamiliar man visiting Stella, Jasper couldn't help but sneer, "Oh wow, not even divorced from Haynie yet, and you've got someone lined up? Here is a hospital. Even if you're in a rush, maybe try to be discreet?"

He paused, aware of Haynes' presence, and refrained from going too far but added with disdain, "Stella, have you no shame?"

Neville ignored Jasper, turning his amused gaze toward Haynes instead. "Mr. O'Brien, no matter how much you dislike Star, is it necessary to gang up on her with your first crush and buddy while she's injured and at her weakest?"

Haynes' handsome face seemed to darken with a chill. "Since you know she's my wife, Mr. Connolly, why are you here, so early in the morning, showering attention on my wife?"

Neville, heir to the Connolly Group, had been residing in Aetheria for some time. Rumor had it he had a five-year-old child, with the mother's identity a mystery. Gossip suggested the child was illegitimate since there was no word of Neville ever marrying. The Connolly Group was a powerhouse, on par with the O'Brien Group, and had leaned toward collaborations with enterprises in Novaris, hinting at expanding there.

Neville met Haynes' gaze with a calm smile. "Mr. O'Brien, knowing you're Star's husband, why aren't you concerned about her well-being or whether she's had anything to eat? Instead, you parade around with your first crush, flaunting your relationship?"

"Mr. O'Brien, if you don't care for Star, someone else will."

Jasper couldn't hold back. "We're here to ask Stella, this murderer, why she deliberately hit Rachel and nearly killed her!"

Neville glanced at Jasper and said leisurely, "You're not the police. You have no right to interrogate Star. If there are questions, let the police handle them. Right now, Star needs rest. So please, leave."

Jasper bristled, "Hey, who do you think you are to tell us to leave? I haven't even settled the score with her for knocking Rachel and me to the ground!"

"Star knocked you to the ground?" Neville asked as if hearing a joke. "Maybe you should check with the doctor to see if Star, in her current state, could even get out of bed to kick anyone."

Though his words were directed at Jasper, his gaze remained fixed on Haynes. "Star's foot isn't broken but got a minor sprain. She can't get out of bed or put any weight on it for three days."

A subtle smile played on Neville's lips. "Mr. O'Brien, do you think a woman confined to her hospital bed has the strength to harm this gentleman and Ms. Pearce?"

"Besides," he added as if struck by a thought, "Mr. O'Brien, if you doubt it, you can always have a doctor check Star's injury to see if I'm lying."

Haynes' eyes narrowed, his intense gaze suddenly turning toward Jasper.