

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 51[483 words]

When Jasper caught Haynes' gaze, his face immediately gave him away. He was never good at hiding things.

Haynes instantly pieced it all together. His deep-set eyes flickered. "What exactly happened here?"

Stella acted like she didn't even hear him, not bothering to glance at him.

Neville chuckled and asked, "Star, what happened just now?"

Stella could ignore Haynes but couldn't brush off Neville. She was tired of this whole suspicion and explanation routine. Instead of answering, she picked up her phone from the side and casually tapped the screen.

A video started playing, showing Jasper's booming voice echoing through the room.

"Stella, you murderer!"

The shaky footage revealed Jasper picking up a water glass and throwing its contents at Stella. The screen went blurry as the liquid hit the camera.

Haynes suddenly remembered noticing Stella's hair was a bit damp when he entered the room, and there were some watermarks on the sheets, too.

As Stella wiped the screen dry, Jasper's voice filled the room again when he pointed at Stella, arrogantly threatening her, and moved toward her like he was ready to pounce.

As he reached out, Stella kicked him away. Unprepared, Jasper stumbled into a nearby table, knocking over glasses and taking Rachel down.

The video ended, leaving the room in a deafening silence.

Haynes' inscrutable eyes settled on Rachel. "Rachel, is that how it went?"

Rachel looked stunned and took a moment before nodding. "Yes. Ms. Cameron didn't push me."

"Why didn't you say so earlier?"

Rachel's eyes reddened with frustration. "I came to ask Ms. Cameron about the car accident. Falling was a small incident. I never intended to blame Ms. Cameron."

Indeed, Rachel had never claimed Stella pushed her. Jasper had pinned the fault on Stella.

Haynes' chiseled features darkened, his expression a storm barely contained. He turned to Jasper, his voice cutting through the tension like a blade. "Apologize. Now."

Jasper was shocked. "What?"

Haynes' eyes were cold. "Apologize to Stella."

Jasper was reluctant. As a man, especially one dealing with his friend's girl, it didn't sit well with him. Reluctantly, he muttered, "Stella, I'm sorry."

Stella raised an eyebrow. "What was that? I didn't catch it."

Jasper bit his lip, his expression one of humiliation. He repeated, louder, "Stella, I'm sorry."

Stella responded coldly, "I think Mr. Wilkinson shouldn't bother apologizing." Jasper's eyes lit up with hope. "Haynie, Stella said I don't have to apologize..."

Before he could finish, Stella interjected, "Because no matter how he apologizes, I won't forgive him. Instead of a reluctant apology, perhaps he should experience having a few cups of water thrown at him. It might be more effective."

Jasper's eyes widened in anger, and he shouted, "Stella, you're going too far! Didn't you kick me?"

Stella leaned back against the headboard. "You didn't think it was too far when you threw water on me. Now you do? Jasper, don't you see the hypocrisy?"

"I kicked you in self-defense. Who knows what you would've done next? Lying here injured, I'm no match for a man like you."

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Jasper's face flushed with anger as he charged forward to confront Stella, but Neville stepped in, blocking his path with effortless ease.

"Even with a room full of witnesses," Neville remarked, his tone deceptively calm, "Mr. Wilkinson had the audacity to lay hands on Star. It speaks volumes about his usual behavior—and why he thinks he can get away with it."

His gaze flicked to Haynes, a faint, knowing smile playing on his lips.

"It's simple, really. Someone's been indulging him. Tell me, Mr. O'Brien, how far does your favoritism extend? First your precious first love, and now... her friends? What's next—her dog? Does it mean anyone connected to Ms. Pearce, regardless of who they are, can walk all over Star and bully her?"

Haynes' sharp eyes were unreadable as he remained silent before finally looking at Stella. "What do you want me to do to make this right?"

Jasper's expression shifted slightly. "Haynie..."

Stella replied calmly, "Since he threw water at me first, let him face the same fate -one hundred cups."

Jasper clenched his fists instinctively, his face full of resentment.

Standing nearby, Rachel was wide-eyed in disbelief, unable to fathom Stella would be so straightforward before Haynes.

She opened her mouth to speak, "Haynie..."

But Haynes interrupted her softly before she could plead.

"Would you like to do it yourself, or should someone else handle it?"

His question was directed at Stella.

With a serene expression, Stella said, "I'm not in the best shape now, so let's have someone else do it. It's not worth worsening my injury over him."

Haynes nodded, his eyes deep and inscrutable. "Alright."

Jasper shot Stella a venomous look before abruptly leaving the room.

Rachel realized that discussing the car accident at that moment wouldn't benefit her, so she quickly followed suit and left.

After all the commotion, a hint of fatigue settled across Stella's features.

She had expected Haynes to side with her, which caused no ripples in her heart. After all, with undeniable evidence, if his buddy dared to harm his woman and he did nothing, could he still be considered a man?

Moreover, this situation didn't involve Rachel. If Rachel had been the one to act, that might have been a different story altogether.

She closed her eyes. "I'm tired, and I'd like to rest. We can discuss anything else tomorrow."

Neville and Haynes stood still, not moving from their spots.

Neville stepped forward. "Star, have a bite to eat before you sleep."

Remembering how Neville had been helping her these past few days, Stella opened her eyes and gave him a grateful smile. "Thank you, Mr. Connolly."

Neville said, "I had the kitchen prepare some of your favorite dishes, but since your injuries are still healing, you should avoid anything too spicy."

Stella's eyes lit up as she glanced at the food Neville had brought. It turned out to be all her favorite food.

Standing nearby, Haynes oddly found the scene somewhat irritating. It was as if Neville truly belonged beside Stella while he was merely an outsider.

Haynes pressed his lips into a thin line, an inexplicable displeasure rising within him.

"Mr. Connolly," he broke the warm atmosphere, "you should leave if nothing else. I can take it from here."

Neville paused, a look of surprise crossing his face. "Mr. O'Brien, staying here seems rather pointless for you. Why not check on Ms. Pearce instead?"

Haynes' handsome face remained impassive as he said, "Stella is my wife. Naturally, my presence here is more meaningful than yours, Mr. Connolly."

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Neville raised an eyebrow, ready to say more, but Stella cut him off. "Mr. Connolly, you can head home now. I need a word alone with Haynes."

Neville nodded lightly, acknowledging the situation. "Okay, call me if you need anything."

As Neville exited, Haynes' expression turned stormy, his chiseled features hardening into a mask of icy disdain. "Stella," he said, his voice dripping with venom, "we're not even divorced yet, and you're already throwing yourself at someone else?"

Of course. This man never missed an opportunity to twist the knife.

Stella responded indifferently, "Someone's phone was unreachable, and after I got rushed to the hospital, the doctors urged me to call my family over. I had no choice but to call someone I could rely on for help."

Abby was the first person she reached out to. But after Stella had a car accident the day before and couldn't pick up Marvin. So, when Stella woke up, she had no choice but to call Neville and explain the situation. Not long after, Neville showed up with Marvin to visit

her. They didn't leave until Abby arrived later. Abby had stayed with Stella all night, and come morning, Stella insisted she head home for some rest.

Stella looked up at Haynes. "Or was I supposed to wait for the hospital to toss me out on the street?"

Haynes' Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed hard, choosing to remain silent. When Stella had no one to turn to, he had been at the hospital, tirelessly attending to Rachel's needs.

Stella picked up the food Neville had brought her and ate slowly, deliberately. The hospital room fell into a brief silence.

It wasn't until Stella finished her meal that Haynes broke the quiet. "You and Rachel... how did you end up colliding?"

"You should ask Ms. Pearce that question, not me," Stella replied, steady and unflustered. "I've said it before. Her car came out of nowhere and hit me."

Haynes' gaze was as deep as the night. "But the eyewitnesses I spoke to claimed you darted into the road without slowing down."

As expected, it wasn't just a coincidence. Rachel had planned this.

Stella lifted her eyes to meet Haynes'. "Have they found the surveillance footage from the accident yet?"

Haynes shook his head. "Not yet."

Stella wasn't surprised in the least. Rachel had meticulously planned everything, leaving no room for simple mistakes.

"So, Mr. O'Brien," Stella said evenly, "do you believe I intentionally crashed into Ms. Pearce?"

"Intentional or not, you rushed out without slowing down. According to the eyewitnesses, you're at fault for this accident," Haynes replied.

"And?" Stella prompted.

Haynes said, "Right now, public opinion is escalating. If you publicly apologize to Rachel, we can end this whole thing."

Stella raised an eyebrow, a flicker of surprise crossing her features. She chuckled, "Just an apology, huh? With Ms. Pearce injured so badly, I thought you'd at least demand I serve time behind bars."

Haynes' expression remained cold. "Rachel's injuries aren't critical. I'll handle her side of things. Once you apologize, I'll quell the media storm."

Stella's brow furrowed slightly, "So, Mr. O'Brien, you'll just let the public backlash run its course if I refuse to apologize, right?"

Haynes looked down at her. "Stella, I owe Rachel a resolution to this accident."

An apology to smooth over the chaos - such a trivial punishment wasn't much of a penalty.

Stella's heart remained steady, and her emotions unruffled. "I didn't crash into Rachel. Rachel crashed into me. If anyone should apologize, it should be Rachel."

Haynes seemed stunned by Stella's stubbornness in the face of overwhelming

evidence. He frowned deeply. "You claim Rachel hit you first. I've had it investigated, and the evidence is clear. Are you still going to deny it?"

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"Haynes, are you seriously going to convict me based on a few bystanders' words? Isn't that a bit rash?"

Although Haynes had investigated this time-unlike before when he blindly trusted Rachel-the results were exactly what Rachel wanted him to see.

"Stella, what are you trying to say?"

Stella looked steadily into his handsome but distant face and said, "What I'm saying is, I didn't hit Rachel with my car, and I won't apologize to her. She should be the one apologizing to me."

Haynes' eyes grew colder. "Stella, it's just an apology. How hard can it be?"

"An apology is easy enough," Stella replied, calm and steady, "but only when I've done something wrong. I haven't done anything wrong, so why should I apologize?"

His gaze was icy. "Whether you meant it or not, you hit someone. An apology is a must."

"You're right, except I told you I didn't hit Rachel. She hit me."

Haynes lost his patience. "Stella, you're being unreasonable!"

Stella looked away. "Save your breath, Haynes. I won't apologize to Rachel. Go ahead and throw me in jail if you think you can."

"Fine, you've got guts," Haynes said with a bitter laugh. "Just don't come crying to me later."

In the following days, Haynes didn't call. It seemed he was waiting for Stella to admit she was wrong and apologize.

Stella paid no mind.

Meanwhile, a news story about the truth behind Rachel's accident shot to the top of the headlines and became the talk of the town. The article even included several photos to back up its claims.

The news painted Stella as malicious, accusing her of deliberately causing the accident to kill Rachel. With so-called "solid evidence," the internet was flooded with insults directed at her.

[This woman is pure evil! She broke the couple up, and now she's out for blood? Does she think Mr. O'Brien will fall for her if Rachel's out of the picture? Dream on! A woman like her will never know true love!]

[She's terrifying! Mr. O'Brien, run! Divorce her before it's too late, or she might turn on you out of spite!]

[Go to hell! I curse this wicked woman, Stella, to drop dead!]

[We can't let a murderer like her roam free. She needs to be locked up!]

[Death penalty!]

[Second that.]

The comment section was a sea of vitriol against Stella.

Extreme commenters threatened to send her death threats, photoshopped her obituary, and even leaked her contact details online. Her phone was bombarded with calls, and she received countless vile messages.

The uproar was so intense that any rational voices pointing out the lack of solid evidence got drowned out by endless accusations.

Criticizing her seemed to be the only acceptable stance. Anyone who spoke as a neutral was labeled an apologist or a troll.

Three days later, Stella left the hospital. Her health had improved, so she didn't bother informing anyone.

However, as she stepped out, a mob appeared out of nowhere, surrounding her.

"Stella, you heartless murderer! Don't think you can bribe your way out of the law's reach and escape justice!"

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"You'd do anything to marry into money, wouldn't you? How do you even have the nerve to show your face in this world?"

"I can't stand women like you, so vain and superficial. If you dropped dead, it would serve you right!"

"If the law won't punish you, we will! Today, we're dishing out some justice on behalf of the universe!"

The crowd trapped Stella in the middle, shoving and hurling insults at her. One of them even pushed her to the ground.

That was when a hospital security guard noticed the disturbance and quickly intervened. "What are you doing? Get out of here, now!"

When the guard arrived, the mob scattered, leaving Stella on the ground. As she tried to gather herself, a pair of polished black leather shoes appeared in her view.

Stella instinctively looked up. Her vision blurred, but she could make out a handsome, aloof face.

Eyes downcast, the man surveyed her bedraggled state with dark, piercing eyes.

He said calmly, "I've talked to Rachel. She won't press charges for the car accident, but you have to apologize to her publicly."

Stella closed her eyes briefly, taking deep breaths to calm herself. She tried to push herself up from the ground, but her limbs felt like jelly. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stand up.

There she was, utterly useless and pathetic, especially before Haynes. She always seemed to be in such a state around him.

At that moment, Stella felt a bitter laugh bubbling up. Her lips curved into a smile,

but her eyes betrayed her, welling with tears before anything else.

Haynes watched her, his gaze deepening. His lips pressed together as he stepped forward, intending to help her up.

But a slender hand stretched out to Stella before he could reach her. "Stella, are you okay?"

Stella looked up to see a handsome face. Her throat felt tight, choked with emotion. "Mr. Connolly."

Neville helped her to her feet. "Sorry, I've been busy the last few days and forgot you were getting out."

Stella replied, her voice hoarse, "I didn't want to bother you, so I didn't mention it."

Neville glanced at the wound on her foot. "You hurt your forehead. Let's return to the hospital and have it checked."

Stella rejected it. "It's nothing, just a scratch. A quick bandage will do."

"No way." Neville insisted, his expression uncharacteristically serious. "You need a proper check-up."

Seeing his resolve, Stella nodded in agreement. "Okay."

Neville supported her as they walked toward the hospital entrance.

Just then, Haynes gripped Stella's wrist. His face was expressionless, his voice icy. "There's no need to trouble Mr. Connolly with taking Stella to the hospital."

Neville, however, didn't release her hand, feigning surprise. "Mr. O'Brien, you're taking Stella to the hospital? Funny, I didn't see you rushing to help her when she was on the ground."

Haynes' expression darkened, but a cheerful voice rang out before he could respond. "Haynie, you're here!"

A slender figure dashed over, throwing herself into Haynes' arms without a second thought.

"Haynie, did you come to pick me up because you knew I was being discharged today?" Rachel's voice was sweet, her eyes glowing with warmth. Her face lit up with joy. "I told you, Haynie, you really didn't have to come if you're too busy."

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The handsome couple stood embraced, looking like they had stepped out of a romantic movie. They were the perfect match.

Stella watched the scene unfold with a face as blank as a winter sky, yet she felt a tightening in her throat as if a giant hand was squeezing it, making it hard to breathe.

So, Haynes was at the hospital to pick up Rachel. And he saw her being humiliated.

Haynes furrowed his brow and gently nudged Rachel away. "Rachel..." he began, but then he saw Neville supporting Stella as they walked away.

Haynes' eyes chilled, ready to follow them, but Rachel clung to his arm and said, "Haynie, a few more eyewitnesses reached out to me this morning. They said they were willing to testify."

"Testify?" Haynes asked, his gaze sharpening.

"Yes, Ms. Cameron hasn't admitted she hit me, right? With these eyewitnesses, she can't deny it." Rachel's voice was soft like a summer breeze. "Don't worry, Haynie. Ms. Cameron is your wife. I won't make things hard for her. I wasn't hurt too badly. I can drop the charges if she apologizes."

"The online rumors are tarnishing Ms. Cameron's reputation. This could be her opportunity to publicly clarify the facts and rebuild her image."

"By then, I'll support Ms. Cameron, saying the accident was just an accident. She didn't do it on purpose. And it was an unfortunate event. That should smooth things over."

Rachel smiled as she spoke, sounding like she was entirely considering Stella's best interests. She didn't mention her injuries or grievances, her understanding seeming boundless.

Haynes' eyes softened a bit. He murmured, "If only Stella were half as sensible as you."

Rachel smiled. "It's okay. Maybe she's just confused now. Give her some time, and she'll come around."

That night, a few people claiming to be eyewitnesses posted videos describing what they had seen.

"I had gotten off work and was passing by when I saw Ms. Cameron's car suddenly speed out and slam into Ms. Pearce's car."

"And she didn't slow down at all. It scared me stiff! At first, I thought the driver had mistaken the gas for the brake, but then I realized she hadn't tried to steer away. It seemed intentional."

"A lot of bystanders saw it, not just me."

With one eyewitness speaking up, others soon followed, all attesting Stella's actions were over the line and calling for her to apologize.

...

As Stella remained silent, when the buzz started to fade, she suddenly announced she would hold a press conference.

Everyone assumed Stella had finally buckled under the pressure and was ready to apologize.

The internet buzzed with excitement, like a Thanksgiving dinner in full swing. Those criticizing Stella felt vindicated, believing their voices had brought about justice.

On the day of the press conference, the venue was packed. Stella hadn't invited any specific media outlets, allowing anyone to attend, resulting in a bustling, crowded scene.

Neville glanced at the sea of people below. "Star, once you open this can of worms, there's no going back. If you go through with this, there might be no turning back with Haynes..."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 57[525 words]

Lately, Stella and Neville had become quite familiar with each other.

As they got to know each other better, Stella was surprised to discover just how many hobbies she and Neville shared.

Neville was also a big fan of concerts. He even minored in the violin in college but had to set aside his passion when he took over the family business.

Despite not being a maestro, his insights into music were unique, which gave Stella a fresh perspective she found enlightening.

In the past, Neville had playfully called her "Star" before Haynes to help her out. Now that they were friends, the nickname stuck, and it didn't seem out of place.

Stella smiled wryly. "Rachel thinks she's got everything perfectly covered, but it's full of flaws. Today, I'll show the world who Rachel truly is."

Since Rachel returned, Stella had faced her share of grievances because of her. She genuinely despised Rachel but had never intended to ruin her.

After all, if a man cheated, it might mostly be his fault. Blaming the other woman wasn't fair. If she couldn't keep a man's heart, it was her problem. If it wasn't Rachel, it might be someone else.

Previously, Rachel had only played small tricks. But recently, Rachel had crossed a line, pushing Stella to her limit. If Haynes and Rachel wanted to play dirty, they could go to hell for all she cared.

Neville raised an eyebrow. "But if you release this video, your future with the O'Brien family might not be pleasant."

That was true. The O'Brien family was not only Haynes but included Haynes' mother, Deanna, and his sister.

"It doesn't matter," Stella replied, her voice steady. "Haynes and I have no future together."

Her name had been smeared across the internet for days, and not a single soul from the O'Brien family had lifted a finger to defend her. Why should she care about their precious reputation?

From then on, she wouldn't sacrifice an ounce of herself for people who didn't deserve it.

Neville's lips curled into a faint, almost imperceptible smile, and he said nothing more.

As the time approached, Stella nodded to Neville and headed to the stage. She hadn't released the video earlier because she feared Haynes would suppress it. That was not the outcome she wanted.

With the press conference being live, Haynes couldn't stop it even if he tried.

...

Half an hour before the press conference, Haynes leaned back in his office chair and watched the live feed on his screen.

Just then, a knock came at the door.

Benson entered, looking uneasy. "Mr. O'Brien, I've received some important information I need to share with you."

Haynes glanced over at him. "What is it?"

Benson hesitated, his lips moving as though he found it difficult to say it out, and a sheen of sweat appeared on his forehead. "Ms. Cameron's press conference isn't about an apology. It's to play a video."

"What kind of video?" asked Haynes.

"It's the footage related to the car accident," Benson stammered. "Mr. O'Brien, you should see it for yourself."

With that, Benson handed Haynes an iPad.

Haynes took the device, finding a video barely a minute long. As he pressed play, his eyes widened in shock, disbelief written across his face.

Seconds ticked by, and the video ended.

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The office descended into an eerie silence.

The footage captured the full sequence of the accident. It wasn't Stella who had recklessly swerved into Rachel-it was Rachel who had deliberately crashed into Stella.

Rachel had lied, which meant the eyewitnesses' testimonies were all lies.

The video was a game-changer, a bombshell revelation. One could only imagine the uproar it would cause once it got out.

Benson spoke softly, "Mr. O'Brien, in half an hour, Ms. Cameron plans to release the video publicly. What do you suggest we do now?"

If this video got out, it would utterly ruin Rachel's reputation.

Haynes remained silent for a long time before finally saying, "Replace the video first. Get the car ready. We're heading to the press conference now."

Benson was shocked but quickly nodded and left the room.

He had expected Haynes to cover for Rachel but hadn't anticipated such drastic measures. Haynes planned to swap out the video entirely during a live broadcast watched by audiences worldwide!

It was understandable that Stella wanted to clear her name. But if the video got replaced, Stella might have to endure the blame forever.

Of course, if Stella released the video, Rachel could face similar consequences, along with being labeled as a homewrecker-a stigma that society eagerly condemns.

Benson sighed quietly. Between Stella and Rachel, Haynes had chosen to protect Rachel.

...

The press conference began on time, with Stella stepping onto the stage.

Camera flashes erupted in a frenzy, their blinding light overwhelming anyone who dared to look directly at them.

Stella surveyed the journalists and media representatives, raising her voice and announcing, "Before we proceed with questions, I'd like to show everyone a video."

The room's lights dimmed as the screen before Stella flickered to life.

Puzzled but intrigued, the audience turned their attention to the screen, curious about what Stella intended to reveal.

However, after waiting a while, the screen remained blank, a sea of white with nothing on it.

The once-quiet hall erupted into murmurs.

"What's going on? Wasn't there supposed to be a video?"

"What's Stella trying to pull? Is this some stunt?"

"I thought we were in for something big, but there's nothing."

"What's the deal? Is she stalling for time?"

The crowd expressed their discontent, snapping pictures of Stella in rapid succession.

The live stream's chat was flooded with comments mocking Stella.

Frowning slightly, Stella was bewildered, wondering where things had gone wrong.

Then, a staff member hurried onto the stage and whispered to Stella. "Ms. Cameron, someone has replaced the video."

Stella was momentarily stunned but quickly realized who was behind the sabotage, her eyes glinting with anger.

A cold, defiant smile played on her lips. "No problem. I have plenty of backups. The video is in my cloud storage now. Or, even better, I can play it for everyone here without the screen."

With the new technology, devices could zoom in and capture the entire event even if it was hard to see from a distance.

Did Haynes think he'd render her powerless by swapping out the video? He was dreaming!

Just then, a commotion erupted near the entrance. Someone shouted, "Haynes is here," and all eyes turned toward the figure entering the room.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 59[498 words]

The man who strode into the room exuded an air of cool detachment, standing tall and composed as if he had stepped out of a classic Hollywood film.

His features were chiseled and handsome, with an effortless elegance in every movement. A powerful, almost tangible aura surrounded him, leaving those in his presence breathless.

Upon his arrival, Stella instinctively clenched her fists, a glint of cold determination flashing in her eyes.

Like bees drawn to honey, the journalists swarmed around Haynes O'Brien.

"Mr. O'Brien, are you here to bring justice, to hold the murderer accountable?" one journalist eagerly asked.

"Mr. O'Brien, you've been silent about Mrs. O'Brien's alleged attack on Ms. Pearce. Does your silence mean you believe Mrs. O'Brien is guilty?" another pressed.

"Mr. O'Brien, are you planning to divorce Stella?" came a bold question from the back.

Cameras flashed incessantly, capturing every nuance of Haynes' impassive expression. He remained composed, looking as chilly as ever.

In response to the barrage of questions, he said, "Please, step aside."

Though his voice was calm, his gaze was piercing, making those around him shiver and instinctively step back.

Haynes cut through the crowd and turned to Benson beside him, "Clear the room. The press conference is canceled."

The announcement caused a stir, and the room buzzed with disbelief.

Ignoring the uproar, Haynes moved gracefully toward Stella on the stage.

A sharp, sarcastic laugh escaped Stella's lips, cutting through the chatter like a knife.

Her clear and unwavering voice rose above the clamor. "Canceling the press conference, Mr. O'Brien? Afraid I might reveal something that would seal Ms. Pearce's fate?"

The crowd's focus shifted back to Stella, cameras and recorders once again capturing every word.

"Sealed fate? What does she mean?"

"Is there more to this story?"

"If Stella's holding a press conference, there must be something significant."

Haynes reached the stage, his sharp eyes, deep and unreadable, fixed on her. He grasped her wrist gently, murmuring, "Let's talk this over at home."

Stella stepped back, shrugging off his hand with a cold defiance.

"Why should we go home to talk, Haynes? So, I can keep taking the fall for Ms. Pearce and endure all the criticism?"

His gaze hardened. "I'll handle this, Stella. Let's go home first."

She couldn't help but laugh bitterly. "Haynes, this isn't like you."

He knew Rachel would be over if the truth came out, so he wanted to handle it quietly to protect her.

Where was he when the world was tearing Stella apart online? Probably in the hospital, soothing Rachel, promising to fix everything, and condemning Stella as the supposed 'villain.'

Haynes' patience wore thin, and his voice turned steely, "Stella, how long will you keep this up?"

"Keep this up?" Stella's gaze was icy. "In your eyes, anything less than protecting Rachel is 'keeping this up,' huh?"

Realizing he might have overstepped, Haynes paused. "I'll make it right, Stella. I'll clear your name. You don't want the world seeing our mess, do you?"

Stella pondered, her gaze steady, "Fine, let's talk then."

A flicker of relief softened Haynes' usually stern expression.

Stella turned and headed toward the backstage, with Haynes following closely behind.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 60[512 words]

If she guessed it right, he had the live stream they all witnessed cut off. Whatever she planned to reveal today wouldn't leave this room.

It would all end up being a press conference with nothing disclosed, leaving everyone feeling tricked.

Haynes could still twist the story for Rachel, pulling every PR trick in the book. He might even use Stella as a pawn in his schemes. After all, he was ruthless.

...

In the backstage lounge, Stella eyed Haynes. "Mr. O'Brien, what do you want to discuss with me?"

Haynes' voice was calm and as cold as ice. "I'll handle the online chatter and fallout for you..."

Before he could finish, Stella interrupted softly. "If you plan to silence everyone by force, I'm afraid I can't accept that. Even if you scrub all the posts and articles, the label of a malicious murderer will remain in everyone's mind."

Stella held his gaze, a slight smile on her lips.

"I might stir up even more anger and end up with a mob on my doorstep."

Haynes' eyes flickered to the scar on her forehead, healed but still visible, his expression deepening slightly. "I'll clear your name."

"Clear my name?" Stella scoffed. "It's been ages, Mr. O'Brien, and now, you finally consider clearing my name?"

He met her eyes, speaking slowly, "Name your terms. Whatever you need."

Stella's eyes glinted. "I have two conditions." she said.

Haynes agreed without hesitation, "Alright."

Stella replied coldly, "Mr. O'Brien, perhaps you should wait until you hear them before you agree."

"Go ahead."

"The first condition," Stella continued, "I want one hundred million dollars."

Haynes' expression darkened. A hundred million was no trivial sum. "What do you plan to do with that kind of money?" he asked, his voice edged with suspicion.

Stella replied casually, "Consider it compensation for emotional distress and defamation. After being slandered for so many days, you don't think Ms. Pearce admitting she was wrong will suffice, do you?"

After a few seconds of silence, Haynes finally spoke. "Fine."

Stella's heart was coldly amused. He was willing to part with one hundred million without batting an eye for Rachel's sake.

Then Haynes spoke again, "Is that your endgame?"

Stella looked up at him. "What do you mean?"

"Did you go through all this trouble to extort money from me?"

Stella's expression cooled, and she couldn't be bothered to explain. "If that's what you think, then sure."

His sharp eyes bore into hers, as deep as a midnight lake, as shadowy as a forgotten valley.

"This video was from your dashcam footage. You had this evidence but chose not to reveal it to the police. Stella, you did this deliberately, didn't you?"

"Yes." She smiled, though it was devoid of warmth. "If I had shown it earlier, how could I blackmail Mr. O'Brien for one hundred million now? Besides..."

"I wanted to see what Ms. Pearce would do without evidence and how much Mr. O'Brien would trust me."

"Everything went as I expected."

Stella didn't look sad or disappointed, as if she were talking about something that had nothing to do with her.

Haynes frowned. "For money, you were willing to be vilified and let others hurt you. Stella, is money that important to you?"