

THE EX-WIFE'S BURNING ELEGANCE

Chapter 7

Keen scrunched up his little face, saying, "My stomach has gotten a lot better. The doctor said it's okay to have a little sometimes. But Mom always wants to control and make me do what she says."

Hearing the word "control" out of a five-year-old's mouth felt oddly mature.

As Haynes was about to respond, his phone buzzed in his pocket.

He answered, and Rachel's voice came through the line somewhat hesitantly. "Haynes, are you home now?"

"Yeah, I'm."

"And is Ms. Cameron back yet?" asked Rachel.

Haynes paused. "Why do you ask?"

"Well," Rachel stammered, "I saw Ms. Cameron. She's having dinner with a young man, and they seem pretty close."

There was a brief silence before Rachel cautiously added, "Do you think

something happened earlier today that upset her? Maybe you should try talking things over with her?"

Haynes' expression darkened. Stella ditching dinner at home to meet another man was not what he expected.

His voice turned colder. "Where is she now?"

Rachel provided an address.

"Got it," Haynes said curtly before hanging up.

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Inside a small diner, Antoney Watson watched Stella intently. "Have you made up your mind?" he asked.

Stella nodded. "Nocturne Stella is a piece my mom had composed for me, and I've put it on hold for the family for five years."

She sighed wistfully, her eyes reflecting a distant sadness.

"And now?" Antoney's voice was deep and understanding, "Rejoining the performance circuit will keep you incredibly busy. You might not have much time for your husband and child."

"Keen's health is stable now," Stella replied with a hint of irony. "Besides, he doesn't need me hovering anymore."

"And what about Haynes?" Antoney pressed, "Will he be okay with this?"

Mentioning Haynes' name brought a chill to Stella's eyes. "I don't need his permission to live my life."

Antoney studied her quietly before speaking, "But he won't approve of you spending time with me."

"I don't need his approval."

As she said this, Stella felt a pang of guilt remembering how she'd distanced herself from Antoney because of something Haynes had said. "I'm sorry, Antoney."

Antoney shook his head gently. "Star, you have nothing to apologize for. If anything, I owe you. I promised your mom I'd look out for you. But I couldn't keep that promise. I let you suffer through so much."

Antoney had been Stella's friend since childhood. They both learned to play the violin under her mother's guidance. Now, Antoney was a renowned violinist, and his striking looks and soulful demeanor made him a heartthrob beyond the classical music world.

Despite his fame and fortune, he was no match for someone like Haynes, a man with deep pockets and powerful connections.

"It's not your fault," Stella began, but her sentence got cut short by a soft voice behind them.

"Ms. Cameron, what a surprise to see you here!"

Stella turned to find Rachel, dressed in a pristine white sundress, standing there. Meeting that unwelcome face twice within a day was too much to sour her mood.

Stella's tone was icy. "And why would that concern you?"

Rachel smiled sweetly. "Oh, Ms. Cameron, there's no need to be upset. But since Haynes actually went back home today, why aren't you cooking at home?"