

THE EX-WIFE'S BURNING ELEGANCE

Chapter 8

Rachel's voice was light, and her expression was gentle, the picture of an innocent and charming woman. In contrast, she made Stella seem harsh, cold, and distant.

But Stella detected the challenge and mockery hidden in Rachel's words.

She looked up to catch the glint of triumph Rachel hadn't hidden from her eyes.

"Why is it so uncommon for Haynes to come home?" Stella shot back. "It's because you, Ms. Pearce, have taken up all his free time. Are you pretending not to know what's really happening?"

Rachel looked shocked as she grabbed Stella's hand and rushed to explain. "Ms. Cameron, please, that's not what I meant."

But Stella cut her off before she could finish. "If you're not playing dumb, it's just a lack of self-awareness, isn't it?"

Stella withdrew her hand and said, "Ms. Pearce, people who are oblivious to themselves are truly unbearable."

"Ah!" Rachel let out a sudden gasp and stumbled backward.

Before Stella could react, a tall figure stepped in, catching Rachel before she fell.

"Rachel, are you okay?"

Rachel looked back at the newcomer with wide, teary eyes like she was the most wronged person in the world. "Haynes, I'm fine. Ms. Cameron didn't mean it. Please don't be mad at her, okay?"

Haynes' gaze flickered, and he finally noticed Stella standing nearby.

His brow creased, his voice turning cold. "Stella, apologize to Rachel."

That wasn't the first time something like this had happened. In the past, Stella would rush to say things like, "It wasn't me," "Let me explain," "I didn't do it," or "Please believe me."

But Haynes never took her side, always insisting she should apologize to Rachel.

If she refused, Haynes would give her the cold shoulder. He wouldn't answer her calls or reply to her messages. He treated her like she was invisible, wouldn't say a word to her, and wouldn't even spare her a glance.

Eventually, even Keen joined in, leaving her feeling isolated. In the end, she would have to lower her head and acknowledge her mistakes.

Thinking about it, Stella let out a bitter laugh. "Why should I listen to you? Who do you think you are?"

Haynes blinked, almost thinking he heard her wrong. "What did you say?"

Stella fixed her gaze on Haynes, her voice icy. "When I cared about you, your word was law. But now that I don't care, who do you think you are?"

Haynes finally grasped her meaning. In his memory, Stella had never spoken to him like this.

She was always gentle and considerate. She would leave the light on when Haynes came home late. She'd make him a late-night snack when he worked late in his study. And she'd bring him a hot drink when he came home drunk.

Though she hadn't been as agreeable since Rachel returned, she had never defied him like this or confronted him so directly.

A strange irritation stirred in Haynes' chest.

Just then, a young voice piped up. "Mom, you told me we should apologize when we make a mistake. So, shouldn't you apologize to Rachel now if you did something wrong?"