

HOW A DYING WOMAN REWROTE HER EPILOGUE

Chapter 1

"I'm sorry, Miss Elodie Thorne. You missed the optimal window for surgery..."

Elodie stood frozen for a long time, clutching the diagnosis confirming her uterine cancer, before she finally dialed Jarrod Silverstein's secretary, Keith.

The line rang endlessly before he picked up, his tone as flippant as ever.

"Yes, Mrs. Silverstein? Can I help you?"

Elodie's fingers curled, stiff and cold. "Is Jarrod there? I need to speak with him."

"Mr. Silverstein is unavailable at the moment," Keith replied.

"Please, could you put him on—"

She didn't even finish before another voice floated through the receiver-a woman's voice, gentle and sweet. "Jarrod," she teased, "what's this surprise? Why all the secrecy?"

"Look up," came Jarrod's deep, familiar voice-so gentle, yet never for her.

A second later, Keith cut the call without hesitation.

At that very moment-

Boom-

An explosion thundered from across the harbor. Elodie looked up, her face drained of color.

Brilliant fireworks burst over the distant waterfront, streaks of color twisting together in the midnight blue sky-beautiful, like something out of a fairy tale.

A noisy crowd had gathered outside the hospital.

"You heard? That's President Silverstein from The Silverstein Group. He threw this whole fireworks show for his girlfriend's birthday-cost over three million dollars!"

"She's Sylvie Fielding, you know! PhD from Pinecrest Institute of Technology, all the top companies are fighting to hire her. She's smart, gorgeous, comes from a powerful family, and her boyfriend is not only handsome but totally untouchable!"

"No wonder Mr. Silverstein is so crazy about her. Who wouldn't be proud to have a girlfriend like that?"

Elodie watched the lavish display for a long time, the test results crumpling in her hand until finally, the thin paper slipped from her fingers and fluttered to the ground.

She turned and walked away.

Later that night.

Jarrood came home to find Elodie sitting alone in the darkened living room.

He flicked on the lights, frowning. "Why aren't you in bed?"

Elodie looked up at him. His jacket was slung over his arm, and his dark eyes-cold and unreadable as ever-rested on her.

She used to think his indifference was just his nature, but tonight, she understood:

the man who was ice in her arms could burn like fire for someone else.

"I couldn't sleep," her voice was barely more than a whisper. "I went to the hospital today."

Jarrood tossed his coat onto the couch, barely interested. "What did the doctor say?"

Elodie had been complaining of stomach pain for weeks. He'd promised to go with her, but there was always some billion-dollar deal or urgent crisis at work to pull him away.

Just yesterday, he'd told her he'd come along. But then he found out Sylvie had hidden her birthday from him.

He left the office in a rush just in time to arrange the fireworks.

He hadn't spared a thought for Elodie.

"It's nothing. The doctor said just wait and see," Elodie said softly, lowering her eyes. "Why are you home tonight?"

Jarrood hesitated for a moment, then moved closer.

He pulled Elodie into his arms, his breath hot against her neck, voice low and rough.

"It's

your fertile window."

"You insisted we stick to this schedule every month for the Silverstein family's heir. Did you forget?"

The scent of expensive women's perfume clung to his clothes, sharp and unmistakable—a cruel bullet shattering what was left of Elodie's pride.

He wasn't wrong. Three years of marriage, and Jarrod had always been distant. Only when pressured by his grandmother to "carry on the Silverstein line" did he reluctantly come home and go through the motions with her.

Have a child? That hardly seemed possible now.

Elodie had always been gentle, always gone along with whatever was asked of her. But tonight, something inside her snapped.

"Jarrod, aren't you worried your girlfriend might get jealous if you sleep with me?"

Her eyes glittered in the darkness, the way a wounded animal finally bares its fangs.

Jarrood studied her, his face growing cold.

After a long moment, he let out a mirthless laugh.

"Why should I care? We're married in secret-you're the one who has to stay hidden."

"You chose to be the understudy. What right do you have to make demands?"