

Flash Marriage To My Best Friend's Father

Chapter 171:

“For letting Dallas Koch touch you,” Anson sneered. “I know he’s been with you. But I can overlook it. I can clean you.”

The word hung in the marble air between them.

Dirty.

Eliza’s hand moved before she had finished the thought.

The slap cracked through the lobby like a gunshot. Staff at the concierge desk looked up. Heads turned.

Anson’s head snapped to the side. A vivid red mark bloomed across his pale cheek.

“I am not dirty,” Eliza said, her voice low and absolute. “I am loved. By a man who is twice what you will ever be.” She held his gaze without flinching. “I don’t love you, Anson. I never will again. You are nothing to me.”

Anson touched his cheek slowly. The softness in his eyes extinguished, replaced by something flat and black.

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“You love him?” He laughed – a dark, broken sound. “You love Koch?”

“Yes,” she said, and the word tasted like freedom. It was the first time she had said it so plainly, so defiantly, without hedging or apology. “I love Dallas.”

Anson lunged. He wrapped his arms around her and crushed her against his chest.

“You’re lying! You’re trying to make me jealous!” He forced his face toward hers, trying to kiss her.

Eliza pushed back hard against him. “Get off me!”

“Hey – back off!” One of the guards broke into a run toward them.

A camera flash burst from somewhere nearby.

Hunter Lloyd – notorious social climber and blogger – stood ten feet away with his phone raised and a wide, predatory grin on his face.

“Trouble in paradise, Hyde?” Hunter called out.

Anson didn’t release her. He held on tighter, possessively, and turned to face the camera with deliberate calm.

“She’s mine, Hunter,” he said. “Put that in your blog.”

Eliza felt sick. He was staking a claim on her body in public, against her will, and using it as a performance.

Then a hand came down on Anson’s shoulder.

A large hand. On one finger, a simple silver wedding band. On another, a heavy gold signet ring.

Dallas didn't speak. He ripped Anson away from Eliza with a single, violent motion and shoved him back. Anson's feet tangled beneath him and he crashed into a large planter, sending soil spilling across the marble floor.

Dallas stepped between them. A wall of muscle and barely contained rage, his suit jacket strained across his shoulders.

"Touch her again," Dallas said. His voice was quiet — the kind of quiet that was far more frightening than shouting. "And I will break every finger in your hand."

Anson straightened his jacket, working to reassemble some shred of dignity. "This is between me and my fiancée, Koch."

"She is not your fiancée," Dallas said. "She just slapped you. Are you deaf, or simply stupid?"

Hunter Lloyd was still recording from the periphery, his phone raised and his grin wide. "Oh, this is gold. The Koch heir versus the Hyde heir."

Dallas turned his head slowly toward Hunter. "Delete it."

“Free press, man,” Hunter smirked.

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“Mr. Lloyd —” Dallas began, his voice dropping another register. Before he could continue, a man in a discreet grey suit materialized silently at Hunter’s side. Dallas’s security. “This is a private residence. Mr. Koch’s privacy policy requires a data wipe of all unauthorized recordings. Your phone, please.”

The smirk disappeared. Hunter looked from the impassive security guard to Dallas’s glacial stare and understood immediately that this was not a request. He handed over the phone. The guard worked the screen for a moment, then returned

it without ceremony. “The data has been permanently erased. Have a good evening, sir.”

Dallas turned back to Anson. “Leave. If I see you near this building again, I call the police. Then my lawyers. Then the SEC.”

Anson looked past him to Eliza. “You’re choosing him? A soulless capitalist? A machine?”

Eliza stepped out from behind Dallas. She stood tall.

“I’m choosing the man who respects me,” she said. “Go, Anson.”

Anson’s eyes cut back to Dallas, cold and hollow. “You’ll get bored of her. And when you do, I’ll be there.”

He stormed out. The threat lingered in the air like smoke long after the glass doors had closed behind him.

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Dallas turned to Eliza. His chest was rising and falling with the effort of controlled adrenaline. He took her hands and turned them over carefully, checking her wrists.

“Are you hurt?”

“No. I’m okay,” she breathed. “You came.”

“The app sent a proximity alert while I was on my way home,” he said, his voice still tight. “The front desk called a second later. I came down from the garage.”

He steered her toward the elevator, away from the curious eyes of the lobby staff.

Inside, the silence was dense.

Dallas pressed the button for the fourth floor – his floor. His apartment. Not hers.

“You finally said it to his face,” he stated, his gaze fixed on the closed metal doors. His voice was rough.

Eliza looked at him. “What?”

“You told that bastard you love me.” He turned then, and his eyes were unguarded – stripped of their usual armor in a way she had never seen before. “I need to know it wasn’t just a weapon, Eliza. Not just something to wound him with. I need to hear you say it now, when he’s not here, when there’s no war to fight.”

Eliza understood the weight of what he was asking – the difference between a confession hurled in battle and one offered freely in the quiet. She looked at his face, at the worry there, at the man who had become her shield.

“I meant it,” she whispered.

Dallas exhaled. A shudder moved through his entire frame.

He stepped forward and backed her gently into the corner of the elevator.

“Say it again,” he said, his voice thick. “To me.”

Eliza looked up at him. “I love you, Dallas.”

He didn't wait. He kissed her — not gently. It was possessive and desperate, a claiming. His hands tangled in her hair, his mouth fierce against hers.

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The elevator dinged at the fourth floor. He didn't stop. He walked her backward out into the hallway and across to his door, his thumb finding the keypad without looking. The door to Unit 4A clicked open behind her.

She was home.

The heavy door slammed shut behind them, propelled by the heel of his shoe. The sound cracked through the cavernous, empty living room like a gunshot. Then the lock engaged.

Click.

Silence.

Dallas pulled back — just an inch, just enough for oxygen to rush into the narrow space between their mouths.

“Dallas, wait,” Eliza gasped, her chest heaving. The air in the room felt thin, charged.

He stared at her. His pupils were blown so wide the blue of his irises had been reduced to thin, electric rings around the black. The composed CEO, the cold strategist — gone. In his place was something raw and terrifyingly focused.

“You said you love me,” he said. His voice was raspy, stripped of its usual polish, rough as gravel grinding against glass. “Prove it.”

He didn’t wait for an answer. He reached for her coat, his movements sharp. His fingers grazed her wrist as he moved to slide the fabric down her arms.

She flinched.

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It was involuntary — a micro-movement of pain. The bruise Anson had left when he grabbed her was fresh, the tissue beneath still throbbing.

Dallas froze.

The air conditioner hummed. It was the only sound in a world that had suddenly stopped turning. He didn’t push the coat off. Instead, he took her hand — his grip gentle now, terrifyingly so, in contrast to the storm in his eyes. He lifted her wrist. He pushed the sleeve of her sweater up.

The purple marks were stark against her pale skin. Four distinct fingerprints. Anson’s grip, branded into her like a claim that wasn’t his to make.

“He did this,” Dallas said. The temperature in the room seemed to drop. It wasn’t a question. It was a statement of fact, delivered with a lethal calm that was far worse than shouting.

“It’s nothing. Just a grab,” Eliza tried to pull her hand back, panic fluttering in her throat. “It doesn’t even hurt.”

“Don’t lie to me.” He didn’t release her. He drew her closer instead, eliminating the last inch of space between them, and buried his face in the crook of her neck — inhaling slowly, as if trying to memorize something.

Then he went rigid.

Every muscle in his chest turned to stone against her.

“You smell like him,” he whispered.

The tone was dangerous. Not an accusation – a realization that seemed to physically wound him.

Eliza understood with a jolt of cold horror that he was right. Anson’s embrace in the lobby – that suffocating, desperate grip before Dallas had torn him away. Anson wore Santal 33. Distinctive, cloying, the kind of scent that clung to fabric like a second skin. It was on her coat. It was on her neck.

“He grabbed me before you came,” Eliza said quickly, her hands coming up to rest on his chest, feeling the heavy, erratic pound of his heartbeat. “I couldn’t push him off fast enough. It was only a second.”

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Dallas pulled back to look at her. His eyes were dark, swirling with an irrational, primal jealousy that defied all logic.

“You let him hug you,” he accused.

“I didn’t let him!” Eliza’s voice rose. “I slapped him! You saw me!”

“But his scent is on you,” Dallas said, shaking his head slightly, as though the smell itself were suffocating him. “On my wife.” He looked at her neck, then at her wrist, then back to her eyes.

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Something shifted behind his gaze.

“I need to wash him off.”

He didn’t ask. He gripped her waist – his hands large, burning through the fabric of her clothes – and lifted her. The world tilted as he hoisted her into his arms, her legs wrapping instinctively around his waist. He didn’t move toward the bedroom. He marched directly to the master bathroom.

The room was vast, clad in grey marble that radiated cold even from a distance. He didn’t stop at the sink. He walked straight into the enormous walk-in shower – a glass enclosure large enough for four people – reached out, and wrenched the handle.

Water exploded from the rainfall head above. It was freezing for a split second, shocking the breath from her lungs, before turning scalding hot.

“Dallas! You’re ruining your suit!” Eliza cried as the water soaked his expensive navy jacket instantly. The wool darkened, heavy and sodden against his frame. His white shirt turned translucent, clinging to his skin.

“I don’t care about the suit,” he said, water streaming down his face and matting his dark hair to his forehead. “I care about what’s mine.”

He set her down on the wet tile but kept his hands on her. He ripped his soaked jacket off and threw it into the corner of the shower, where it landed with a heavy, wet slap. Then he tore at his shirt – buttons snapping free and ping-ponging against the glass walls – and pulled it open.

He grabbed a sponge and the bottle of body wash from the shelf. Sandalwood and amber. His scent. He poured a generous amount onto the sponge and brought it to her neck, his movements frantic, desperate – no, furious.

“Dallas, stop!” Eliza gasped, twisting away as the sponge grazed her skin. It wasn’t the roughness of it that startled her, but the raw, barely leashed desperation in his touch. “You’re scaring me!”

He stopped instantly.

The rage on his face didn’t fade – it shattered. It broke apart completely, revealing something raw and bleeding underneath. He dropped the sponge. It fell to the tile and swirled in the soapy water draining away between their feet.

He pressed his forehead against hers. The hot water pounded down on both of them, a relentless drumbeat, soaking her clothes through, plastering her hair to her skull. They were drenched, heavy, breathing the same steam.

“I want him gone, Eliza,” he whispered. Water ran down his nose and dripped onto her lips. “From your skin. From your head. From your heart. I need him gone.”

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Eliza looked at him — really looked at him. This wasn’t jealousy. This was terror. The terror of a boy who had been discarded, who had learned to believe that

everything he allowed himself to love would eventually be taken from him or tainted beyond recognition.

“He is gone,” she said, her voice unsteady but certain. She reached up and cupped his wet face in her hands, feeling the water run slick over his skin. “You are here. Only you.”

Dallas made a sound low in his throat — half groan, half something that might have been a sob.

He kissed her.

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The water roared around them, deafening and isolating, sealing them off from the rest of the world. This was nothing like the kiss in the hallway. This was a claim. Desperate, consuming, tasting of rain and relief and everything that had gone unsaid for far too long. He kissed her as if she were the only solid thing left in his world.

He lifted her again, effortlessly, pressing her back against the warm, wet tiles.

“Wrap your legs around me,” he commanded against her lips. “Now.”

She did.

Sunlight poured through the floor-to-ceiling windows – aggressively, cheerfully bright, entirely at odds with the state of her body. They were at the penthouse. After the lobby, after everything, he had driven them straight here, as if her smaller apartment were somehow too contaminated by the day’s events. He had needed a fortress, and this was it.

Eliza woke alone in the king-sized bed. The sheets were tangled into a chaotic nest of high-thread-count Egyptian cotton that smelled of sex and Dallas. Her body ached – a dull, throbbing soreness radiating from her hips, her thighs, her neck.

She sat up slowly, the sheet pooling at her waist. She looked at the large mirror on the opposite wall.

She gasped.

There were marks. Vivid, purple-red marks. A cluster of hickeys bloomed along the curve of her neck and down to her collarbone. Darker, finger-shaped bruises were stamped onto her hips – impressions of where he had held her down, held her up, held her close.

She pressed her hand over her mouth, her face burning. Last night hadn't been making love. It had been an exorcism. Borderline feral.

She turned to the pillow beside her. Empty, but a piece of heavy cardstock rested on it.

Meeting. Eat breakfast. Do not leave.

The handwriting was sharp, angular, and entirely characteristic.

"Bossy," Eliza muttered to the empty room. But she was smiling. She traced the ink with one finger. It felt married. It felt real.

She found a silk robe on the floor — his — and wrapped it around herself. It swallowed her completely, the hem dragging along the floor, the sleeves hanging well past her hands. She rolled them up and walked out to the kitchen.

The smell of coffee reached her first. Then the sight of Azalea.

She was perched on a barstool at the island, looking impossibly fresh in a school uniform, eating a croissant.

“Morning, Mrs. Koch,” she chirped without looking up from her phone. “You look... ravished.”

Eliza pulled the robe tighter around her neck. “Azalea! How did you get in?”

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“Dad gave me a key for emergencies,” Azalea said, finally looking up. She smirked over the rim of her coffee mug. “My emergency is a lack of caffeine and a surplus of curiosity. I heard there was a category five hurricane in the lobby yesterday and came to survey the damage.” She aimed a manicured finger at Eliza’s neck, where the robe had slipped slightly. “He marked you. Like a territory.”

Eliza clapped a hand over her collarbone, her face scarlet. “It’s not what you think. We had a fight.”

“With Dad? And it ended in bed?” Azalea took another bite of croissant, unbothered. Flakes scattered across the pristine marble. “Classic.”

“He was... different,” Eliza admitted, moving around the island to pour herself a glass of water. Her throat was dry. “Scared. Aggressive.”

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Azalea’s chewing slowed. The snarky teenager mask slipped, just for a moment, and she set down her mug.

“You know about his condition, right?” she asked quietly.

“The insomnia?” Eliza said.

“No. The intensity.” Azalea made air quotes with her fingers. “The doctors call it hyper-fixation with possessive tendencies – stemming from abandonment issues.”

She leaned forward, elbows on the counter. “He doesn’t want things often, Eliza. He doesn’t care about cars or houses or art. But when he wants something — when he actually lets himself care — he wants to consume it. Own it. Protect it to death.”

Eliza gripped her glass. “Protect it to death?”

“He was like that with my mom’s memory,” Azalea said, her voice quieter now. “He built a fortress around it. He’s like that with you now. I saw his face when he came back from the lobby yesterday. He looked like he wanted to burn the city down.” She paused. “He thinks everyone he loves leaves eventually. So he holds on too tight. It’s not cruelty, Eliza. It’s panic.”

Eliza thought of the shower. The frantic desperation in his hands. I want him gone. It made sense now. The aggression hadn’t been anger at her — it had been a desperate attempt to erase the threat of losing her altogether.

“Is that why he has such a... high sex drive?” Eliza blurted, and immediately wanted to disappear through the floor.

Azalea choked on her croissant. She coughed violently, pounding her chest. “Ew! Oh my god, Eliza! I do not need to know about my dad’s sex drive! That is disgusting!”

“Sorry! Forget I said that!” Eliza waved both hands.

“But — yes,” Azalea managed, wiping tears from the corners of her eyes as she recovered. “Physical touch grounds him. It proves you’re real. If he can feel you, you’re not a ghost. You’re not leaving.” She pointed again at Eliza’s neck. “The marks are proof of life. For him.”

Eliza touched the tender skin at her collarbone. Proof of life.

“Exactly,” Azalea said, her equilibrium fully restored, complete with a wink. “Wear them like diamonds. Or use concealer. Your choice. Though knowing Dad, he probably prefers the diamonds.”

Eliza’s phone buzzed on the counter.

Anson: We aren’t done.

Short. Ominous. A familiar, reflexive dread tried to surface — the ghost of a past she was determined to bury. But then her eyes dropped to her wrist. Not Anson’s angry purple bruise, but a newer, deeper mark from Dallas’s grip the night before. A claim. Her annoyance rose swiftly and eclipsed the fear. He was pathetic.

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She deleted the message and blocked the number again.

“What was that?” Azalea asked sharply, her eyes narrowing. She missed very little.

“Spam,” Eliza said. She forced a smile. “Just spam.”

Azalea looked at her for a long moment, chewing her lip.

She didn't believe her.

The wind on the rooftop terrace of the S&D Group Private Club was gentle, carrying the mingled scents of charcoal and expensive cologne. Below them, Manhattan glittered like a spilled jewelry box — indifferent and beautiful.

It was a private gathering for the inner circle. Just them.

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Eliza wore a high-necked navy dress. Elegant, conservative, and crucially, it concealed every single mark Dallas had left on her skin.

Dallas stood at the massive stainless-steel grill, his suit jacket discarded and his sleeves rolled to the elbows. He looked domestic yet undeniably powerful, flipping steaks with the same precision he brought to signing billion-dollar contracts. He caught Eliza's eye across the terrace and winked — a small, intimate gesture that made her stomach turn over — then went back to the fire.

Eliza sat at a low table with Azalea and Zane Sterling. Zane was cutting into his steak with surgical focus.

“Great meat,” he commented, loading a piece onto his fork. “Boss is in a good mood.”

“He should be,” Azalea said, pulling her pink lemonade through a straw. “He destroyed his enemy today.”

Eliza’s fork stopped halfway to her mouth. “Enemy?”

Zane let out a low, dry chuckle. “Anson Hyde. Or should I say, the former heir of Hyde Corp.”

“What did Dallas do?” Eliza set her fork down. It clattered against the ceramic plate.

“Pulled the credit lines,” Zane said, ticking off fingers. “Called in the outstanding loans from the auxiliary banks. Triggered a liquidity crisis. Hyde stocks dropped twelve percent by the closing bell.”

“It was a bloodbath,” Azalea added cheerfully, in precisely the tone one might use to describe a sale at Sephora. “Anson lost his seat on the board. The shareholders voted him out at four o’clock.”

Eliza looked over at Dallas. He was laughing at something the chef had said, his head tilted back slightly. He looked relaxed. At ease.

And yet he had just dismantled a generational legacy in the span of eight hours. He had reached out with an invisible hand and crushed the Hyde family's financial spine before dinner.

"Why?" Eliza whispered.

Zane set down his utensils and looked at her directly, his expression shifting to something serious. "Because Anson touched you. In the lobby."

He took a measured sip of wine. "The Boss doesn't do warnings, Eliza. He doesn't do slaps on the wrist. He does evictions."

Dallas crossed the terrace toward them, carrying a plate.

"For my wife," he said, setting it down in front of her. "Filet. Medium rare. No mango salsa."

He had remembered. He had remembered the allergy that had nearly killed her. He remembered everything.

“Did you ruin Anson?” Eliza asked quietly.

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The table went still. Azalea studied her nails. Zane found something interesting in his wine glass.

Dallas’s smile didn’t waver, but his eyes grew deliberate. He pulled out the chair beside her and sat down.

“I protected my investment,” he said, spreading his napkin across his lap with unhurried calm. “And I protected my family.”

He picked up his cutlery and began cutting his meat. “He won’t bother you again. He can’t afford the gas money to drive to The Aurelia anymore.” The joke was dark, but the truth beneath it was real. Anson had been neutralized.

Azalea and Zane laughed, the tension dissolving. Eliza managed a smile. She looked at the man beside her. To the world, he was a monster — a ruthless, cold-blooded force who dismantled lives before sitting down to eat. But he was her shield.

“Thank you,” she whispered, picking up her knife.

Dallas leaned over and pressed his lips to her forehead. They were warm. “Eat. You’re too thin.”

Later, Eliza excused herself and slipped away to the restroom. In the quiet of the marble stall, she opened her phone.

News alert: Hyde Corp Crisis — Anson Hyde Ousted from Board Amidst Liquidity Scandal.

It was real.

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Dallas Koch wasn't merely a lover. He was a king. And whether she was ready for it or not, she was the queen sitting beside him on the throne.

The lobby of S&D Group Headquarters was a cathedral of glass and quiet intimidation. Security guards stood like statues near the turnstiles, and the air carried the faint smell of ozone and ambition.

Eliza gripped the handle of her tote bag. Inside was a bento box — leftover steak from the BBQ, sliced over rice. A peace offering. A thank you. Lunch for her husband.

She approached the reception desk. The woman behind it looked as though she had been carved from ice, a delicate silver headset curving along her jaw.

"I'm here to see Dallas Koch," Eliza said.

The receptionist scanned her face, her expression professionally blank, though a flicker of recognition crossed her eyes as she glanced at her monitor. "One moment, miss. I see a Ms. Solomon is on staff." Her gaze traveled briefly over

Eliza's Skechers and jeans — a silent assessment. “However, Mr. Koch's schedule is booked back-to-back. He doesn't take unscheduled meetings. Do you have an appointment?”

“No, I'm his... wife,” Eliza said. The word felt heavy and unauthorized on her tongue.

The receptionist suppressed a sound — not quite a laugh, but the weary exhale of someone who had heard every variation of every excuse. “Of course, ma'am. And I'm Beyoncé. You'll need to go through his executive assistant for clearance like everyone else. If you'll please step aside — you're holding up the line.”

Humiliation washed over Eliza, hot and prickly. It was worse than being treated like a stranger. She was an employee here. A nobody, trying to jump the chain of command.

She turned to leave, her face burning.

“Eliza!”

The voice was sharp and commanding. The private elevator doors pinged open.

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Genevieve Koch stepped out, flanked by two assistants who both looked quietly terrified. She was wearing a tweed suit that had almost certainly cost more than Eliza's entire education.

"Gigi!" Eliza said, startled.

The matriarch marched toward her, cane clicking rhythmically on the polished floor. "What are you doing here? Did you break up with the boyfriend? The adequate one?"

Behind the desk, the receptionist's jaw shifted almost imperceptibly. The matriarch knew this girl?

Eliza's mind raced. Gigi didn't know she was married to Dallas. She believed Eliza had a boyfriend.

"I'm here to see my boyfriend," Eliza said, stacking one lie cleanly on top of another. "He works here."

"Oh!" Gigi's eyes brightened. "Which floor? Is he an executive?"

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"Sixth floor," Eliza said, the first thing that surfaced in her mind tumbling out. "Accounting."

Gigi wrinkled her nose. "Accounting?" she repeated, her internal calculus visibly turning. An artist with an accountant. "Dull. But stable. Still – excellent! I'm going up to see my grandson on the top floor. I'll walk you to the elevator." She linked her arm firmly through Eliza's. Her grip was surprisingly strong.

"Come along," she commanded.

They entered the elevator together. Behind the reception desk, the woman who had just dismissed Eliza looked as though she might need a moment to sit down.

“So, this boyfriend,” Gigi said as the doors closed. “Is he treating you well?”

“Yes. He’s wonderful,” Eliza said, perspiring mildly.

“Good. If he ever messes up, drop him. My grandson is single. And rich. And he needs a wife who isn’t a plastic doll.” Gigi gave her a decisive wink.

The elevator dinged at the sixth floor.

“Here you go!” Gigi gave Eliza a gentle push toward the doors. “Go find your Romeo.”

Eliza stumbled out into the Accounting Department.

It was a landscape of grey cubicles, ringing phones, and furious typing. One by one, heads turned toward the girl in jeans who had just been deposited from the executive elevator by the formidable Gigi Koch.

She had no boyfriend here. She had a lunchbox for the CEO and absolutely no plan.

She needed to reach the top floor without Gigi seeing her.

She located the fire stairs door. Card access only.

Damn.

A young accountant passed by with a headset slung around his neck and a name tag that read Ben. He had kind eyes and the expression of someone who had seen stranger things but was still curious.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

“I’m looking for the bathroom,” Eliza said.

“Down the hall, take a left,” Ben said, with a smile that suggested he thought she was lost, cute, or both.

Eliza walked briskly to the bathroom, locked herself in a stall, and pulled out her phone.

Eliza: I'm stuck in Accounting. Hiding in the bathroom. Gigi is here. Help.

Dallas was in the middle of reviewing acquisition files for a tech startup when his phone buzzed.

Stuck in Accounting. Hiding in the bathroom. Gigi is here. Help.

He frowned. Accounting? Why was his wife in Accounting?

Before he could reply, the heavy oak doors of his office swung open. Gigi didn't knock. She never knocked.

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“Dallas! You look pale. You need sun. And you need to get married!” she announced, dropping her purse onto his desk.

“Hello, Grandmother,” Dallas sighed, placing his phone face down. “Good to see you too.”

“I met a lovely girl downstairs,” Gigi continued, pacing the room without pause. “Kind eyes. Helps old ladies pick up silver locket on the side of the road. She has a boyfriend in Accounting.”

Dallas paused. “Accounting?”

“Yes. Wastes herself on a number-cruncher. He probably wears polyester blends,” Gigi sniffed. “You should steal her. She has backbone. I like backbone.”

The dots connected instantly. The girl with the kind eyes. The girl Gigi had encountered on the road. The girl currently hiding in a bathroom stall on the sixth floor.

Dallas suppressed a smirk. “What’s her name?”

“Eliza. Eliza... something.” Gigi waved a dismissive hand. “Solomon? Yes. Solomon.”

“I’ll keep an eye out for her,” Dallas said, rising and buttoning his jacket. “Actually, I need to go inspect Accounting. Right now.”

Gigi narrowed her eyes. “Since when do you inspect Accounting?”

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“Since you told me to steal a girl,” Dallas said, and walked past her.

Five minutes later, the elevator doors opened on the sixth floor.

The department went silent. Chatter died. Typing stopped.

“Mr. Koch!” The department manager — a man named Tom — shot to his feet so quickly his chair rolled back and struck the wall.

Dallas ignored him. He scanned the room until he caught a flash of movement near the large potted ficus by the restrooms.

He walked straight over.

Eliza was peering out from behind the leaves, clutching her tote bag to her chest like a shield. Her eyes went wide the moment she saw him.

“I heard you’re looking for your boyfriend,” Dallas said, loudly enough to carry across the silent room.

Eliza turned a brilliant shade of red. “I found him. He’s busy.”

“Is he? Let’s ask him.” Dallas reached out and took her hand.

He pulled her toward the executive elevator.

“Mr. Koch?” Ben the accountant squeaked as they passed.

Dallas looked at him. Ben sat down immediately.

Inside the elevator, the doors slid shut and sealed them in privacy. Dallas immediately pressed Eliza back against the mirrored wall, his hands braced on either side of her head.

“Boyfriend in Accounting?” He raised one eyebrow, amusement flickering behind his eyes.

“I panicked! Gigi was there — she forced me off the elevator!” Eliza said, breathless.

“Gigi wants me to steal you from your boyfriend,” Dallas said, a low chuckle escaping. He leaned in until his nose grazed hers.

“She tried to set me up with you,” Eliza laughed, the last of the tension dissolving. “She said you were single and rich.”

“She’s half right,” Dallas murmured. He pressed the button for the garage.

“Where are we going?” Eliza asked.

“To prove to my grandmother that I stole you.”

The elevator descended smoothly. When the doors opened onto the VIP garage, Gigi was in the process of climbing into the back of her vintage Rolls Royce. Her driver stood holding the door.

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