

# Flash Marriage To My Best Friend's Father

Chapter 221:

“He’s not using the market,” Weston added, eyes on his tablet. “He’s liquidating offshore accounts, family trusts – everything he can reach. He’s using the cash to hire private investigators and corporate spies, leaking years’ worth of the Lunas’ illegal shipping manifests and money laundering operations to the SEC and the FBI. It’s a financial murder-suicide. He’s burning his own family’s remaining reputation to take the Lunas down with him.”

“He’s bankrupting his own family to destroy yours,” Dallas said, the strategy clicking into place. “It’s a suicide mission.”

“He’s trying to outdo you,” Eliza whispered. A heavy stone settled in her stomach. “He’s destroying himself so I’ll owe him.”

“It’s working,” Azalea said. “The Hyde name is being dragged through the mud right alongside the Lunas. His parents are frantic.”

The door opened again. Cathey Norton stepped in, eyes wide with carefully manufactured concern. She was the new marketing intern Ferd Koch had forced onto the company payroll the previous month – a girl rumored to be Ferd’s illegitimate daughter.

“Oh, look,” Cathey chirped, her voice thick with malice. “The grieving widow Koch. Or should I say, the almost-ex-wife? Did the lawyers file the papers before he died, or did you just hit the inheritance jackpot?”

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Eliza stiffened. The sheer venom was startling even from her.

“Get out, Cathey,” Dallas growled from the bed.

Cathey startled, realizing he was very much alive. “I — I was just checking on you. For Anson!”

“Tell Anson he’s next,” Dallas said.

The Hyde Estate was grand, but it felt cold. Servants whispered in the hallways.

Eliza could hear Anson shouting from the study before the door even opened.

“Leak the Panama accounts! Now! I don’t care about the blowback!”

Edward opened the door. “Anson — look who is here.”

Anson turned. He looked manic — hair disheveled, sleeves rolled up, eyes wild. “Eliza?” He rushed toward her, stopping just short of her sling. “Are you hurt? Did they hurt you?”

“I’m fine. Stop this, Anson,” Eliza said firmly.

“I’m destroying them.” He gestured to his computer screens, which blazed with leaked bank records. “The Lunas. For what they did to you.”

“You’re destroying your parents.” Eliza pointed to Edward and Victoria, huddled by the door. “Your future.”

“I don’t care!” Anson shouted. “If I don’t have you, I don’t need a legacy! I’m doing this for you!”

“This isn’t love,” Eliza snapped. “This is a tantrum.”

Anson went still. “A tantrum? I am avenging you.”

“Dallas handled the Lunas. The FBI is already involved. You are just making noise,” Eliza said, cutting through his justification cleanly.

“Dallas,” Anson laughed – a short, bitter sound. “Always Dallas.”

“He protects me without destroying himself,” Eliza said. “You destroy everything just to prove a point.”

“I did it for you! Five years ago! I built this company for us!” Anson pleaded.

“You built it for yourself. To control me.” Eliza refused the guilt that tugged at the edges of her resolve. “Stop this, Anson. Or I will never speak to you again.”

“If I stop...” Anson looked at her with desperate, pathetic hope. “Will you stay?”

“No,” Eliza said. “But I will forgive you. Eventually.”

It was a crumb. But for a starving man, it was a feast.

Anson looked at his parents. Then at Eliza. Then he slumped into his chair, picked up the phone, and spoke quietly. “Kill the data drop.”

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Edward and Victoria exhaled in relief.

“Thank you, Eliza,” Victoria said stiffly.

“Don’t thank me,” Eliza said quietly. “Just teach him how to lose.”

She turned to leave.

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“He doesn’t love you like I do,” Anson whispered to her back.

Eliza paused at the door. “He loves me better.”

She walked out.

Outside, Dallas was leaning against his black SUV, waiting. Eliza crossed to him quickly. “Take me home.”

Dallas opened the door. “Done?”

“Done,” Eliza said.

They were back in the safety of Eliza’s apartment. The city lights twinkled outside, indifferent to the war they had just fought.

Dallas helped Eliza change out of her clothes. With only one good arm, she needed him to unbutton her shirt. His fingers were gentle, brushing against her skin.

“You were brave today,” he said, kissing her shoulder.

“I felt cruel,” Eliza sighed, leaning into him. “Breaking his heart to save his wallet.”

“You saved his life. He was spiraling,” Dallas assured her.

“I told his parents about the dependency. About how I used him too,” Eliza admitted.

“You didn’t use him. You survived him,” Dallas said.

Eliza looked at him. “And what about us? Did I use you?”

Dallas paused. He looked away for just a moment. “You used me to get free,” he said honestly. “And I let you.” He held her gaze. “But now you are free. So stay because you want to.”

“I want to,” Eliza said.

She pulled him down into a kiss. It deepened quickly – the brush with death had left them both hungry for life.

He carried her to the bed.

“Your arm...” he hesitated.

“Is fine. I have another one,” Eliza said, the joke coming out soft and weak.

They made love slowly, with quiet certainty. There were no ghosts in the room. Only them.

Afterward, Eliza fell asleep on his chest, exhausted.

Dallas stayed awake, staring at the ceiling shadows.

He knew he still had one secret left — the connection to her mother. The reason the Solomon name had drawn him in long before he ever met Eliza. Diana Solomon had shown him a kindness he had never known, and he had never told her daughter.

I have to tell her, he thought.

His phone buzzed on the nightstand.

He picked it up. A text from Anson.

You won the battle. But the game isn't over. She thinks you're her savior — but she has no idea about your real motives, does she? She doesn't know why the name 'Solomon' caught your attention in the first place.

Dallas's eyes narrowed. Anson didn't know the specifics, but he had found a thread and was already pulling on it.

Tell her, the message continued. Or I'll enjoy finding out the truth myself and delivering it personally.

Dallas deleted the text.

The peace was shattered again.

He looked at Eliza sleeping quietly against his chest. "I'll tell her," he whispered to the dark. "My way."

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## Chapter 223:

The first rays of dawn were painting the penthouse in shades of grey and rose when Eliza's phone buzzed on the nightstand. It was a new device – a sleek, encrypted model Dallas had given her the day after the cemetery – its screen a stark, unfamiliar black. She stirred, the warmth of Dallas's arm still heavy and comforting across her waist. The memory of the previous night, of their shared vulnerability, was a fragile shield she wanted to hide behind forever. But the phone buzzed again, insistent.

She carefully slid out from under his arm, her bare feet cold against the floor. The screen lit up with a blocked, untraceable number. She knew, with a sickening certainty, who it was.

I know what Dallas is hiding about your mother. The truth. If you want to hear it, meet me. The park near your old place. 10 a.m.

A second text followed immediately.

If you don't come, I'll find a way to deliver the message at the penthouse.

A threat dressed as a revelation. Eliza's heart hammered against her ribs. She looked back at Dallas, sleeping soundly, a faint purple bruise still visible on his

temple from the accident. He looked peaceful, and she couldn't bear to shatter that peace with Anson's poison.

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But the seed had already been planted. What Dallas is hiding. This had to end — on her terms.

An hour later, after telling the Sentinel guard stationed in the hall that she was going for a walk to clear her head, she was sitting on a park bench near her old apartment, in the secluded spot where the city noise faded to a dull hum. She checked her phone.

I'm making dinner. Don't be late.

The text was from Dallas. Domestic. Simple. It made her chest ache with a sharp, sudden longing to be there — in the warmth of the penthouse — instead of here, waiting for a ghost.

Anson arrived five minutes late.

He didn't look like the polished heir of the Hyde dynasty. His shirt was wrinkled, his eyes rimmed red, as though he hadn't slept in days. He stopped a few feet away, his gaze locking onto her face like a starving man spotting bread.

"You came," he said. His voice was rough. Hope flickered in his eyes — pathetic and terrifying in equal measure.

Eliza didn't stand. She reached into her bag and pulled out a small velvet box. "I came to give you this."

She held it out. Inside was the promise ring he had given her when she was eighteen — a diamond chip on a thin gold band. It used to look like a promise. Now it looked like a shackle.

Anson stared at the box but didn't take it. He shoved his hands into his pockets. "I don't want it back. I want you."

"Anson, I'm married," Eliza said. Her voice was steady, stripped of the tremor that used to appear whenever she spoke to him. She raised her left hand.

The afternoon sun caught the custom diamond ring Dallas had placed there. It flashed — bright and unforgiving.

Anson stared at the ring. He didn't scream. He didn't lunge. He laughed — a dry, hollow sound, like dead leaves scraping across pavement. “Married?” He tilted his head. “To Koch? Legally?”

“Yes. It's done.”

Anson sat down heavily at the other end of the bench and rubbed his face with both hands. “You ruined the timeline, El.”

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Eliza frowned. “Timeline? What are you talking about?”

“The plan,” he muttered, eyes fixed on the gravel beneath his expensive shoes. “I’ve been working on it for so long.”

He turned to look at her, his expression eerily calm. “I knew Buck was stealing from the company three years ago. I saw the books. I saw the transfers.”

Eliza went still. The wind seemed to stop. “You... you knew?”

“I let him,” Anson said.

The words hit like a physical blow. “You let him bankrupt us? You let him destroy my father’s legacy?”

“I needed you to lose everything,” Anson said. He wasn’t apologizing. He was explaining — as though it were a perfectly logical business strategy. “I needed the Solomon name to be worthless. I needed you to be cornered, with nowhere left to go. So you would need me to save you.”

Eliza felt bile rise in her throat. She gripped the edge of the bench. “You engineered the liquidity crisis?”

“I blocked the bank loans.” His eyes were manic now. “I called in favors. I made sure every door closed in your face except mine.” A twisted smile formed on his lips. “I was going to swoop in. Pay off the debts. Buy the estate. And marry you. I was going to be the hero.”

Eliza stood up. Her legs were shaking. “You destroyed my life... for a hero complex?”

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“I did it for love!” Anson shot to his feet. “To bind you to me! To make sure you never looked at anyone else!”

“That’s not love,” Eliza said, backing away. “That’s a hostage situation.”

“And Koch?” Anson sneered, stepping toward her. “You think he’s different? Some white knight?”

“He saved me when you were drowning me,” Eliza said, her voice rising.

“He didn’t just stumble upon you, Eliza.” Anson dropped his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “He’s been watching you for a very long time.” He paused,

letting it settle. “He has a history with your family. A history he’s kept hidden. He knew your mother — long before the fire.”

Eliza stopped. “What?”

“He’s just playing a longer game,” Anson said, watching the seed take root in her eyes. “A deeper calculation.”

“You’re lying,” Eliza said — but her voice lacked conviction.

“Ask him,” Anson challenged. “Ask him why he used to lurk around your family’s estate as a boy. Ask him about your mother’s secret.”

Eliza turned and ran. She couldn’t breathe. The air felt thin, tainted by his words.

Anson stood alone in the park, watching her go.

“You’ll see,” he whispered to the empty air. “We are all monsters.”

Eliza burst into the penthouse, chest heaving, skin clammy with sweat. The elevator ride had felt like an eternity, Anson's words echoing in her skull. He knew your mother. He's been watching you.

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Dallas was in the kitchen, stirring pasta sauce at the stove with a dish towel thrown over his shoulder. She noticed for the first time how he favored his left side – a subtle wince tightening the corner of his mouth as he moved, the faint purple bruise at his temple a stark reminder of the accident. The smell of garlic and tomatoes, the soft jazz drifting through the room – it all felt jarringly wrong against the chaos in her mind.

He turned, smiling. "El? You're early. Dinner isn't quite—" He stopped when he saw her face.

Eliza stood on the other side of the marble island, gripping the edge until her knuckles turned white.

“Did you know my parents?” she asked.

Dallas froze. The wooden spoon went still in the sauce.

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His silence was louder than a scream. Eliza felt her heart sink.

“Did you know them before I met Anson?” she demanded, her voice climbing.  
“Before the bankruptcy?”

Dallas set the spoon slowly on the counter. He wiped his hands on the towel, his movements deliberate, careful.

“Yes,” he said quietly.

The world tilted.

“Was this — us — planned?” Her voice trembled. Tears pricked her eyes. “Like Anson planned the bankruptcy? Was I just a target for you too?”

“No.” Dallas moved around the island, reaching for her. “Eliza, listen—”

“Stay back!” She stumbled away, her voice cracking. “Everyone is plotting! Everyone is using me!”

It all collided at once — the car accident, the pain in her healing arm, Anson’s horrific confession, and now this. A perfect storm with nowhere left to break.

Her vision blurred. Black spots danced across her eyes. The room spun.

“Eliza!” Dallas shouted.

Her knees gave way. The floor rushed up — and then strong arms caught her before her head could meet the tiles.

Then darkness.

Across the city, in the library of the Hyde Estate, Anson poured himself a drink. His hand was shaking.

The door opened. Edward and Victoria Hyde walked in, their expressions grim but calculating.

“We heard,” Edward said, closing the door behind him. “She married Koch.”

Anson downed the scotch in one swallow. “It’s over.”

“Not necessarily,” Victoria mused, settling into a leather armchair and smoothing her skirt. “A marriage between a Solomon and a Koch creates an opening.”

Anson looked at his mother. “An opening?”

“We are hemorrhaging capital after your little stunt,” Edward said, pacing the room. “We need an infusion. A merger is out of the question, but we could propose

a strategic alliance — using Eliza as the bridge. Koch has the resources to stop the bleeding.”

“She is not a bridge!” Anson hurled his glass against the fireplace. It shattered, crystal raining down across the hearth. “She is a person!”

“She is a Koch now,” Victoria said coldly. “And we need Koch capital.”

“You want me to use the woman I love to get a business deal?” Anson looked at them with undisguised disgust.

“You already destroyed our business to satisfy your ego,” Edward replied, his voice sharp. “At least this would be profitable. It’s the only move we have left to avoid total collapse.”

Anson stared at them. For the first time, he saw his own reflection in their eyes — the manipulation, the coldness, the casual reduction of people to instruments. He understood, with sudden and nauseating clarity, exactly where he had learned to be a monster.

At the hospital, Dallas paced the corridor outside the emergency room.

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A doctor stepped out. "Mr. Koch?"

Dallas stopped. "How is she?"

"Acute stress reaction," the doctor said. "She's physically exhausted, and the emotional shock triggered a vasovagal syncope. She needs rest – no shocks, no stress."

Dallas looked through the glass. Eliza was sleeping, hooked to a monitor. She looked small. Fragile.

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Weston stood beside him, arms crossed.

“I should have told her sooner,” Dallas whispered, pressing his hand flat against the glass.

“Then tell her everything now,” Weston said, his voice low. “The whole truth. All of it. Or you lose her for real.”

The hospital room was dim when Eliza woke. The only light came from the machines and the streetlamps beyond the window.

Dallas was sitting in the chair beside the bed. He wasn't looking at his phone. He was watching her.

Eliza shifted. Her head throbbed. “Don't lie to me,” she said, her voice raspy.

“I won't,” Dallas said. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “Not anymore.”

“I knew your parents,” he began. “But I wasn’t plotting to marry you. I was... watching you.”

“Why?” Eliza asked. She felt cold.

“Because I was the boy behind the fence.”

Eliza frowned. “What fence?”

“Fifteen years ago. I was fifteen.” Dallas looked at his hands. “My family — the Kochs — they are superstitious. An astrologer told my father I was a bad omen. A curse on the family fortune, because I was born during a market crash.” He laughed, a short, bitter sound. “So they sent me away. To a boarding school upstate. It was more like a holding cell for unwanted rich kids.”

Eliza listened in silence, the image of the powerful Dallas Koch as a discarded child settling over her like cold water.

“The school was next to your family’s summer estate,” Dallas continued. “Solomon Manor. I used to sneak out at night and sit by the iron fence, watching your family in the garden.” His voice softened. “I saw Arthur pushing you on the swing. I saw Diana planting roses. I saw you — a little girl, laughing, running around in a

yellow dress.” He looked up at her. “You were the only color in my grey world. I didn’t want to own you, Eliza. I just wanted to be near the warmth.”

He paused. “I was a ghost haunting your happiness.”

Eliza pictured it — a lonely teenage boy pressing his face against cold iron bars, watching a family he could never have. Her heart ached, pulling at the edges of her anger.

“But Anson said you knew them,” she prompted.

“I did. One winter, I ran away from the school. I was freezing.” Dallas’s jaw tightened at the memory. “I hid in your potting shed.”

“Your mother found me.”

“My mother?” Eliza breathed.

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“She didn’t call the police. She didn’t call the school.” A faint smile crossed his lips. “She brought me hot cocoa and a blanket. She sat with me until I stopped shivering.” He paused. “She told me: ‘You are not a curse, Dallas. You are a survivor.’”

Eliza’s eyes filled with tears. That sounded exactly like Diana.

“She saved my life that night. And she gave me a reason to fight my way back – to claw back to power. To prove them all wrong,” Dallas said.

“So this is gratitude?” Eliza asked, the hardest question she had. “You married me to pay her back?”

Dallas looked at her with an intensity that made the air in the room go heavy.

“It started as gratitude,” he admitted. “It ended as something else.”

“What else?” Eliza held her breath.

Dallas opened his mouth. Closed it. He looked, for just a moment, terrified. “I can’t tell you yet. You won’t believe me.” He stood abruptly. “Rest. The doctor said no stress. I’ll be outside.”

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He left before he said too much.

He couldn’t bring himself to tell her the rest of it – the part about his father’s sins and Diana’s role in covering them up. Not now. Not when she was this fragile. It would sound like another manipulation, another debt. He would be just another man with a hidden agenda.

Eliza lay back against the pillows. The monster Anson had painted – the calculating predator – was gone, replaced by a lonely boy crouched in a potting shed, shivering in the dark.

She touched her ring. It felt heavier now. Loaded with history. Loaded with a debt she didn't yet understand.

Eliza was discharged two days later. The ride back to the penthouse was silent.

When they walked in, Eliza stopped in the foyer. "I'll take the guest room."

Dallas flinched, but he nodded. He carried her bag down the hall and lingered in the doorway, his large frame filling it.

"I need time, Dallas," Eliza said, not meeting his eyes. "It's... a lot."

"Take all the time you need," Dallas said. "I'm not going anywhere."

He closed the door. The quiet click of the latch sounded like a gunshot to him.

Inside the guest room, Eliza stared at the ceiling. She turned the story over and over in her mind. Then, slowly, a hazy image surfaced – not a clear memory, but an echo of a feeling. A cold shed, the smell of damp earth, the outline of a boy with dark, haunted eyes. A phantom weight in her hands – the plush fur of her favorite

stuffed rabbit, an offering made in childish sympathy. It was a fragment, a whisper from a night she had always dismissed as a strange dream.

He's been part of my life forever, she realized.

But was it love? Or was he simply trying to recreate the family he had never had? Was she just a prop in his healing — the way she had been a prop in Anson's power play?

Days passed. They lived like roommates.

Dallas made breakfast before she woke. He left notes on the counter. Have a good day. Take your vitamins. He kept his distance, careful not to pressure her.

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Eliza returned to work at S&D on light duty. She felt his presence everywhere regardless — Sentinel in the car, Weston in the lobby. He was a protective shadow she couldn't outrun.

One evening, she found him on the balcony.

He was leaning against the railing, looking out at the city lights. Smoke curled from his fingers.

"You don't smoke," Eliza said from the doorway.

Dallas startled slightly. He stubbed the cigarette out immediately. "Old habit. From the war. It comes back when... when things get loud."

Eliza stepped out onto the cool concrete. "Why didn't you come for me sooner? When my parents died?"

Dallas kept his eyes on the skyline. "I wanted to. I prepared to. But Anson was already there. And you looked... safe." He paused. "I didn't want to bring my darkness into your life unless I had to. I have enemies, Eliza. The Koch family is a viper's nest."

"But you did," Eliza said quietly. "You brought the Koch enemies. The Lunas."

"I know," Dallas said, his voice raw. "And I hate myself for it."

He turned to face her. "My love for you is selfish. It's a wish fulfilled for me, but a danger for you."

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"So let me go," Eliza said, testing him.

Dallas gripped the railing until his knuckles cracked. He looked at her, and the hunger in his eyes was almost frightening.

"I can't," he whispered. "I tried. I can't."

The honesty stunned her. It wasn't a scheme. It was a compulsion — something raw and biological, beyond calculation.

“Goodnight, Dallas,” she said, and retreated inside, overwhelmed.

Dallas stayed on the balcony and watched her go, knowing he was losing her to fear. His phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out.

Weston: Intel from the DA's office just came in.

He read the message.

They're fast-tracking the case. The DA is officially seeking the death penalty for Buck. The evidence is irrefutable.

Dallas closed his eyes. “She's going to break again.”

Eliza was at her desk at S&D when her phone erupted.

News alerts. Texts. More alerts.

**BREAKING: Buck Solomon Officially Charged with Double Homicide; Sources Confirm Prosecutors Will Seek Death Penalty.**

The court had proved it. He had tampered with the brakes. Premeditated murder of Arthur and Diana Solomon – for the insurance money.

Eliza stared at the screen. The finality of it hit her like a wave of cold water.

She didn't feel happy. She didn't feel relief. She felt hollow. Her last living relative was a monster who had killed the people she loved most.

She left work early. The penthouse was empty – Dallas was still at the office. She sat on the sofa in the dark, staring at nothing, depression settling over her like a heavy blanket.

The door burst open. Azalea marched in, swinging a key ring, and flipped on every light.

“Get up,” she commanded. “We are not doing this.”

Eliza blinked against the sudden glare. “He killed them, Azalea. My uncle killed them.”

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“I know,” Azalea said, pulling her off the sofa. “And he’s going to rot. But you are alive. And you look like a Victorian widow.” She steered Eliza toward the bedroom. “Put on a dress. We’re going out. You need noise. You need alcohol.”

Eliza was too tired to argue. She put on a simple black dress.

Azalea took her to The Velvet Lounge, a high-end jazz bar in midtown. The music was loud, the air thick with perfume and expensive cologne.

“To justice,” Azalea toasted, ordering two strong martinis. “And to moving on.”

Eliza sipped her drink. The burn of the alcohol was grounding.

“Look who’s over there,” Azalea murmured, nudging her and nodding toward a dark corner booth.

Eliza turned.

Dallas was sitting alone. A bottle of whiskey stood in front of him, half empty. He wasn’t looking at his phone. He wasn’t working. He was staring at a small, square photograph in his hand.

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“He’s been miserable since you moved to the guest room,” Azalea whispered.

A waitress in a tight red dress approached Dallas's table and leaned over, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Can I get you anything else, honey?"

Dallas didn't look up. He shrugged her hand off. "Leave the bottle. Go away."

The waitress huffed and retreated.

Eliza watched him. In the dim light, stripped of his jacket and his CEO armor, he looked like that lonely boy behind the fence again.

"He blames himself for everything that happened with Buck, you know," Azalea said.

Eliza frowned. "Why? He didn't kill them."

"He feels responsible. He thinks that if he had been more involved — if he had found a way to intervene all those years ago when he was watching your family — he could have exposed Buck and saved your parents." Azalea paused. "He carries the world on his shoulders. Even things that were never his to carry."

Eliza felt a crack open in the wall she had built around herself. He was suffering too. He was grieving her parents in his own quiet way.

She stood up. "I'm going to him."

Azalea smiled over the rim of her glass. "Finally."

Eliza crossed the crowded room. The jazz faded into the background. Dallas looked up as she approached – his eyes unfocused at first, then widening slowly as they found her face.

Eliza reached the booth. Dallas tried to stand, but swayed. He caught the edge of the table for support.

"Eliza?" he slurred. "Are you real?"

"I'm real," she said softly. "Sit down."

She slid into the booth beside him and gently pressed him back onto the leather seat.

Her eyes fell on the photo resting on the table. An old Polaroid, its edges worn soft with age. It showed a young Eliza – maybe five years old – in the garden of the Solomon Estate, smiling at a butterfly perched on her finger.

“Where did you get this?” she asked, touching the corner.

Dallas covered it with his hand instantly. “Took it through the fence. My only souvenir.” He looked at her, his blue eyes swimming with unshed tears and whiskey. “I’m sorry about Buck.”

“It’s not your fault,” Eliza said.

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## Chapter 230:

“I should have protected you better,” Dallas said, hanging his head. “From Anson. From the truth. I failed.”

At the bar, Weston and Zane were watching.

“Look at him,” Zane said, shaking his head. “The Wolf of Wall Street, brought to his knees by a girl in a black dress.”

“He’s not brought to his knees,” Weston said, his expression grim. “He’s terrified. He thinks she hates him, and he doesn’t know how to fix it.”

“Anson really did a number on her head,” Zane sighed. “Making her think Dallas is some kind of predator.”

“She’s seeing the truth now.” Weston pointed. “Look.”

Eliza had taken Dallas’s hand. She wasn’t pulling away.

“Let’s go home, Dallas,” Eliza said.

Dallas laughed — a short, bitter sound. “Home? To the guest room? To the silence?”

“To our home,” Eliza said. “We’ll see about the room.”

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She looked up and signaled Weston. “Help me get him to the car.”

Weston and Zane crossed the room quickly. “We’ve got him, Mrs. Koch.”

They hauled Dallas to his feet. He leaned heavily on Weston, his legs unsteady. “She came for me,” he mumbled as they made their way to the exit.

“Yeah, boss,” Weston said, a rare smile crossing his face. “She did.”

Azalea fell into step beside Eliza. “See? He’s just a guy who loves you. A really rich, emotionally constipated guy.”

Eliza nodded. The fear Anson had planted — the image of Dallas as a cold mastermind, calculating and predatory — was fading.

They loaded him into the back of the SUV. Eliza climbed in beside him. Dallas slumped against the seat, his head dropping onto her shoulder. He smelled of whiskey and sandalwood.

Eliza stroked his hair. It was soft.

“I don’t want to be a debt,” she whispered to his sleeping form. “I want to be a wife.”

Dallas shifted in his sleep, his hand moving instinctively to find hers — and holding on tight.

The morning sun filtered into the penthouse kitchen. Eliza was nursing a coffee when Azalea walked in, looking far too cheerful.

“So?” Azalea leaned against the counter. “Did you sneak into the master bedroom?”

Eliza blushed. “No. I put him to bed and slept in my room.”

“Boring,” Azalea rolled her eyes.

“But...” Eliza traced the rim of her mug. “I realized something. I missed him. Even when he was just in the next room.” She paused. “I think I love him, Azalea.” She said it out loud for the first time without fear. “Not because he saved me. But because he sees me.”

Azalea let out a quiet squeal. “Finally! I was about to lock you two in a closet.”

“But I’m still confused,” Eliza frowned. “Anson got in my head. About Dallas’s motives. About the Koch family rejecting me.”

“Ignore Anson. He’s desperate,” Azalea said, waving a hand.

“I need to talk to Dallas. When he’s sober,” Eliza decided.

“I’ll tell Zane to keep Dallas busy at the office. You meet him there for lunch.” Azalea was already plotting. “Wear something that says ‘I’m the CEO’s wife, not a business liability.’”

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Message from Noa: Lovely readers, hope you liked today's chapters, have a beautiful morning. God loves you and Noa wishes you all the best. (—☺—)

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