

# Flash Marriage To My Best Friend's Father

Chapter 251:

She knew the building. It was a historic brownstone in Manhattan, near Museum Mile, shuttered for decades — a sleeping giant in the art world. The transfer came with an endowment, a vast archive of techniques, and a fully equipped laboratory.

This wasn't just money. The ten million from Ferd was a safety net; this was a kingdom. This was a career. Jeannine was handing her the keys to a legitimacy Eliza had been fighting for her entire adult life. She traced the seal on the document, and a surge of excitement — pure and electric — shot through her veins. She could hire staff. She could take on projects that the Solomon name had been barred from. She could build something that was entirely hers.

Then she stopped.

She remembered Azalea's face at the dining table the day before. The way the girl had looked at the diamonds, then at Jeannine, with that heartbreaking mixture of longing and resignation. See? She still hates me.

Azalea was the “stray” — the daughter of a soldier Jeannine considered beneath the family. Jeannine had never given Azalea anything but criticism and cold shoulders. If Azalea discovered that Jeannine had given Eliza — an outsider, a

Solomon — an entire institute, while Azalea received nothing, it would confirm her worst fear: that she didn't belong. That she was unlovable in the eyes of the Koch matriarchs.

The excitement curdled into guilt. Eliza couldn't do that to her. Not now, when Azalea was finally opening up, finally beginning to trust her.

She made a decision.

She slid the documents back into the envelope, carried it to the living room, and found a drawer at the bottom of the built-in bookshelf — stuffed with old manuals and tangled cords — and pushed the envelope deep beneath them.

Her phone rang. The screen lit up with Dallas.

Eliza cleared her throat. "Hello?"

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"Did the package arrive?" His voice was low, ringed by the ambient hum of the office.

“Yes,” she said carefully. “It came just now.”

“What is it? Jewelry? More hideous antiques?”

“Just... some stocks,” Eliza said. The words tasted like ash. “And some old bonds. Financial stuff.”

“Boring,” Dallas laughed — a short, dismissive sound. “Jeannine lacks imagination. I expected something more dramatic.”

“Yeah,” Eliza breathed. “Just paper.”

“I’ll see you at dinner. I’m wrapping up the acquisition of the Hyde warehouses. It’s brutal.”

“Okay. Love you.”

“Love you,” he replied, and the line went dead.

Eliza stared at the phone. Lying to Dallas felt wrong. It felt dangerous. He had a way of sensing things, of detecting secrets beneath the surface. But this was for Azalea.

The front door flew open.

A whirlwind of wet raincoat and backpack burst into the foyer. Azalea was home early.

“Eliza! Eliza! Look what I found!”

She ran into the living room, her hair frizzy from the humidity, waving a crumpled flyer. Her face was flushed with excitement.

“The Lynn Institute! Someone posted a photo this morning of a locksmith’s van outside!” She thrust the paper forward. “There’s a rumor on the history blogs that it might be reopening!”

Eliza’s heart slammed against her ribs.

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“Why... why do you care about an old building?” she asked, her voice carefully controlled.

Azalea stilled. Her expression softened, turning wistful. She looked down at the flyer.

“My mom,” she said quietly. “Before she got really sick, she worked as a waitress at a diner a few blocks from there. She used to take her breaks in the park across the street and stare at that building and dream. She said it was full of magic that could fix broken things. She said she wished she could go inside just once – to see a place so beautiful.”

Azalea looked up, her eyes shining. “If Grandma Jeannine sold it to some developer to turn into condos, I’d never forgive her. It’s the only thing of hers that’s actually cool.”

Eliza felt the floor drop out from under her. The Institute wasn’t just a building to Azalea. It was a memory. A thread connecting her to the mother she had lost.

And now Eliza owned it. And she couldn’t say a word.

“Maybe,” Eliza stammered, leaning back against the very bookshelf concealing the deed, “it’s just maintenance. Checking the pipes.”

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“I hope so,” Azalea frowned, studying the flyer. “If it opens, we have to go. We have to be the first ones in.”

“Yeah,” Eliza whispered. “We have to go.”

She understood, in that moment, that the secret she had just accepted was heavier than any tiara.

The rain had cleared overnight, leaving the city scrubbed clean and bright. Sunlight poured into the penthouse kitchen, bouncing off the stainless steel appliances, but Eliza felt a distinct cloud hovering over her head.

She stood at the counter, pressing coffee grounds into the French press, her mind drifting to the bottom drawer in the living room. The deed lay there like a ticking bomb.

Azalea was perched on a barstool, scrolling through her phone with the intensity of a stockbroker, a piece of dry toast going stale in her hand.

“Grandma Jeannine is trending,” she announced, mouth full. “Hashtag ‘The Ice Queen Melts.’”

Eliza poured the hot water. “What did she do?”

“She donated a hundred grand to a puppy shelter yesterday,” Azalea scoffed, rolling her eyes. “Trying to buy goodwill after Gigi publicly humiliated her. Classic damage control.”

“Maybe she’s changing,” Eliza suggested, carrying the coffee to the island. “People can change, Azalea.”

“Leopards don’t change their spots, El. They just learn to hunt better.” Azalea tapped her screen. “She’s up to something. Mark my words.”

Eliza blew on her coffee, desperate to change the subject. “How is Forrest?”

The transformation was instantaneous. The cynicism evaporated, replaced by a flush of pink across Azalea’s cheeks. She looked down at her lap. “He’s... okay. He asked me to study later. Library. Just study.”

“Good,” Eliza smiled, feeling a genuine warmth. “Keep it that way. If Dallas finds out you’re doing anything other than algebra, he’ll hire a bodyguard to sit between you.”

“He’s a tyrant,” Azalea grumbled, though she was smiling.

The intercom on the wall buzzed. The sharp sound made both of them jump.

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Eliza crossed to it and pressed the button. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Koch." The concierge's voice was polite but strained. "There is a visitor for you. A Mr. Hemmings."

Eliza frowned. The name sounded formal, unfamiliar. "I don't know a Mr. Hemmings."

"He presented a card, ma'am. With the Chapman family crest."

Eliza froze. Chapman. Claudine's family. The name brought a rush of cold memories — the mango cake, the hospital bed, the sneer on Claudine's face.

"What does he want?" she asked, her grip tightening on the receiver.

"He says he has a delivery. And a message."

"Send him up."

"Are you crazy?" Azalea spun around on her stool. "Chapman? Claudine? Why are you letting them up? Do you want to get poisoned again?"

"It's a butler, Azalea. Not a hitman," Eliza said, though her heart was racing.

A few minutes later, the elevator doors slid open. An elderly man stepped out, dressed in a suit that had seen better days, his posture slightly stooped. He looked tired, worn down by the collapse of the family he served. He held a small envelope in both hands.

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“Mrs. Koch. Miss Koch.” He bowed deeply.

“What does Claudine want? More trouble?” Azalea rose from her stool and moved to stand beside Eliza, her posture instinctively defensive.

“Miss Claudine is leaving,” the butler said, his voice raspy. “She is moving to Switzerland. The family estate has been seized. She is going to a facility in Zurich.”

“Good riddance,” Azalea muttered.

“She requests a brief audience with you, Mrs. Koch. To return something.” His eyes met Eliza’s – and they were sad. “Before she goes.”

“Tell her to mail it,” Azalea snapped. “We don’t do audiences with psychos.”

“She wishes to apologize. In person.” The butler paused. “She is not well. She has been humbled. She leaves tonight.”

Eliza looked at the old man. She saw the genuine concern in his eyes, the quiet loyalty he still carried for a mistress who had not earned it.

“I’ll go,” Eliza decided.

“Eliza — no! It’s a trap!” Azalea grabbed her arm. “She’s going to push you off a balcony or something!”

“It’s closure, Azalea. I need to close this book.” Eliza gently removed Azalea’s hand. “I need to see her defeated. For myself.” She held Azalea’s gaze. “I’ll take security. I won’t be alone.”

“Fine,” Azalea huffed, crossing her arms. “But if she tries anything — literally anything — I’m calling Dad. And he will level the entire city block.”

The butler bowed again. “Thank you, Madam. She is at the Plaza. Suite 402.”

Eliza went to her room to change. She chose a white suit — sharp tailoring, pristine fabric. It was the color of surrender, but on her, it looked like victory. Pure. Untouchable.

She took out her phone and texted Dallas.

Meeting Claudine. Don't worry. Taking guards. Need to finish this.

The reply came instantly.

I'm tracking you. You have 40 minutes. Then I come in.

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Eliza smiled at the screen. His protectiveness settled over her like a warm blanket. She grabbed her purse and headed for the elevator.

The Plaza Hotel was a monument to old New York luxury, but as Eliza walked down the carpeted hallway of the fourth floor, it felt like a transit station. Two members of Dallas's security team flanked her, their presence heavy and silent.

Eliza knocked on the door of Suite 402.

"Come in," a voice called. It sounded thin.

Eliza signaled the guards to wait outside and pushed the door open.

The suite was in disarray. Open suitcases were scattered across the floor, filled with clothes that had been packed in haste. Tissue paper and shoe boxes littered every surface. Claudine Chapman sat by the window in a wingback chair, wearing no makeup, her hair — usually lacquered into perfection — hanging limp around her face. She looked smaller. Younger.

She didn't turn around as Eliza entered.

"You came," Claudine said to the glass.

“You asked,” Eliza replied, standing near the door. She didn’t sit.

Claudine turned slowly. Her eyes were red-rimmed. She held a small velvet box in her hand. She rose and walked to the coffee table, setting the box down.

“This was supposed to be yours,” she said. “He gave it to me, but it was always meant for you. I don’t want it.”

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“Why give it to me?” Eliza asked, her voice cool.

“Because he never looked at me the way he looks at you. Even when he was proposing.” Claudine let out a bitter, jagged laugh. “Consider it a final piece of evidence. Proof of his obsession. I hated you, Eliza. I thought you were a thief. I thought you stole his attention.”

“I didn’t steal him. I never wanted him,” Eliza said.

“I know.” Claudine wiped a tear from her cheek with the back of her hand. “That makes it worse. You won without playing. You didn’t even want the prize.” She looked at the ring box. “He is obsessed with you. It’s not love – it’s sickness. He ruined my family just to get to you. He used us.”

“I know,” Eliza said softly.

“What is it like?” Claudine asked suddenly, looking up. “To be loved by Dallas Koch?”

Eliza paused. She thought of the rose garden. The way he held her when she had nightmares. The way he had stood up to his father the day before.

“It’s quiet,” she said. “And safe. He lets me breathe.” She met Claudine’s gaze. “Anson suffocates. Dallas supports. That’s the difference.”

Claudine nodded, absorbing the words. She looked around the disordered room. “I’m going to Zurich. Rehab. Then maybe art school. Somewhere far away.”

“Good luck, Claudine,” Eliza said. And surprisingly, she meant it.

She looked once more at the ring box on the table — the symbol of everything that had gone wrong between them.

“I don’t want it either,” she said.

She turned and walked out. The door clicked shut, sealing Claudine and her broken engagement in the past.

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Eliza moved down the hallway, the guards falling into step behind her, and took the elevator to the lobby.

As the doors opened, she saw him.

Dallas was leaning against a marble pillar near the entrance, arms crossed over his chest, wearing a dark grey suit. He looked impatient, checking his watch every few seconds.

“Thirty-one minutes,” he said as she approached, his eyes scanning her face for cracks.

“She talked slowly,” Eliza smiled, walking straight to him.

Dallas didn’t spare a thought for the tourists or the staff. He pulled her into his arms right there in the lobby and buried his face in her hair, inhaling deeply, grounding himself.

“Did she hurt you?” he murmured against her ear.

“No.” Eliza rested her head on his chest and listened to the steady beat of his heart. “She just surrendered.”

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“Good.” Dallas pulled back, his hands gripping her shoulders. “Now let’s go home. I don’t like you being near her bad luck.” He guided her toward the revolving doors.

As they stepped out onto 5th Avenue, the wind whipped Eliza's hair across her face. She brushed it back and glanced across the street.

A figure stood near a newsstand — a man in a trench coat, disheveled, his eyes dark and hollow.

Anson.

He was watching them. He saw Dallas's hand on the small of her back. He saw the way Dallas leaned in to shield her from the wind. Just as Eliza's eyes met his, she saw him look down at his phone. The obsessive hatred in his expression morphed instantly into raw panic. He clutched the phone, his face draining of color, then turned and ran — not toward them, but away, swallowed by the midday crowd.

"Eliza?" Dallas asked, sensing her hesitation.

Eliza turned her head away. She chose not to see him. She chose not to engage.

"Nothing," she said, stepping into the waiting car. "Just a shadow."

The Hyde Estate felt different from the Koch mansion. Where the Koch home was cold and imposing — a fortress — the Hyde manor felt suffocating, like a mausoleum filled with heavy drapes and old secrets.

Victoria Hyde lay on the chaise lounge in the sitting room. She looked frail, her skin the color of parchment, a handkerchief pressed to her lips as she coughed — a wet, rattling sound.

“We must send a dowry, Anson,” Victoria insisted, her voice weak but stubborn. “She was our daughter in all but name. People will talk if we send her off with nothing.”

Anson stood by the window, staring out at the grey garden. He looked as though he hadn’t slept in days.

“No!” He spun around. “A dowry means she is married! I do not accept this marriage!”

“She is married, son,” Edward Hyde said wearily from his armchair. He looked aged, defeated by the financial ruin Dallas had brought down on them. “To Dallas Koch. It is done. The papers are signed. Everyone knows.”

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“It is a sham! A contract! She loves me!” Anson paced the room, his hands raking through his hair. “She’s confused. She’s scared.”

“She returned your ring, Anson,” Victoria said softly. “Claudine told me before she left for the airport.”

Anson froze mid-step. The color drained from his face. “She... returned it?”

“She didn’t even touch it,” Victoria said, pity settling in her eyes. “She left it on the table. She walked away from it.”

“No,” Anson muttered, his eyes going wild. “She’s been manipulated. Dallas is forcing her. He’s brainwashing her.”

Victoria clutched her chest. The strain of the argument hit her like a physical blow. Her breath hitched and turned into a gasp.

“Victoria!” Edward rushed to her side, seizing her hand.

She collapsed back against the cushions, wheezing. “My heart...”

Anson stood frozen, watching his mother struggle to breathe, his mind still snagged on the ring. His obsession was hurting the only people left who cared about him.

“Call the doctor!” Victoria gasped. “And call Eliza!”

“Why Eliza?” Anson asked, his voice hollow.

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“Because I need to make peace,” Victoria wheezed, tears leaking from the corners of her eyes. “Before I... before it gets worse. I need to see her.”

Forty minutes later, in the back of the Rolls Royce, Eliza stared out the window as the city gave way to the manicured lawns of the old money estates. Her phone rested on her lap, silent after the call from Edward.

Is she okay? Eliza had asked when he called.

Stable, Edward had said. But she wants to see you. And Dallas. To discuss the dowry. And to say sorry.

Eliza glanced at Dallas now. He was reading a report on his tablet, his face impassive.

“You don’t have to go,” she said. “I can do this alone.”

Dallas didn’t look up. “She raised you. We go. But we do it on my terms.” He swiped to the next page.

“We will settle the debt,” he said, his voice devoid of emotion. “Once and for all. You walked out of that house a victim. You walk back in as Mrs. Koch.”

Eliza felt a knot tighten in her stomach. Returning to the Hyde house felt like stepping back into a cage she had chewed her way out of. The smell of the polish, the sound of the clocks — it all triggered a visceral reaction she couldn't reason away.

Then she looked at Dallas. He set the tablet down and reached over, covering her hand with his. His palm was warm, rough with calluses, and it grounded her.

“I'm with you,” he said. “Let them try to rattle the cage. I'll tear the bars down.”

Eliza took a slow breath. She wasn't a scared girl anymore. And this time, she was bringing the lion with her.

“Okay,” she said. “Let's go finish it.”

The Hyde living room smelled of lavender and decay. Eliza sat on the velvet sofa, her posture rigid. Dallas sat beside her, his arm draped across the back of the seat, his fingers resting near her shoulder — a casual, deliberate display of ownership.

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Edward sat opposite them, looking small in his chair. Anson stood by the unlit fireplace, glaring at Dallas with a hatred so potent it felt like heat radiating across the room.

Victoria was resting upstairs, sedated, but she had insisted they speak with Edward first.

“We have prepared a portfolio,” Edward said, his voice unsteady. He pushed a thick file folder across the coffee table. “It is from Victoria’s personal trust, established before our marriage. It is all that remains untouched – real estate, some bonds. Valued at around five million dollars.” He looked at Eliza, his eyes watery. “Consider it her inheritance. For the years she spent with us. For everything.”

Eliza looked at the file. It was guilt money.

“I don’t want money,” she said softly. “I just want to be left alone.”

“Take it,” Anson cut in, his voice jagged. “It’s Hyde money. It means you are still a Hyde. It means you owe us.”

Dallas laughed – a cold, sharp sound that silenced the room.

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“She is a Koch,” he said. He reached out and placed his hand on the file, not to take it, but to pin it down. “She doesn’t need your money. I spend five million on jet fuel.”

Anson bristled, taking a step forward.

“However,” Dallas pivoted, his eyes locking onto Edward, “we will accept it. As a donation.”

“A donation?” Edward blinked.

“To the Lynn Restoration Institute,” Dallas said smoothly. “Eliza is the new Director. Your money will restore old paintings. It’s fitting.”

“And in return,” he continued, “Koch Industries will acquire the remaining assets of the Hyde Group. We will absorb your debts and offer you a minority, non-voting stake in the new subsidiary. It is not a rescue, Edward. It is a final buyout. It saves your family from public bankruptcy and ruin.”

Edward’s eyes widened. The deal was an execution, but a merciful one — a private death instead of a public hanging. A lifeline pulling the Hydes back from the edge of total disgrace.

“A business acquisition?” Edward asked, his voice wavering between hope and humiliation.

“Yes,” Dallas said. “But it comes with a condition.” He turned his head slowly toward Anson. “Anson stays away from my wife. Permanently. No calls. No visits. No stalking across the street.”

“You are buying me off?” Anson shook with rage. “With my own father? You think I can be bought?”

“I am offering your family a lifeline,” Dallas said. “Take it, or drown. If Anson comes near her again, I pull the deal and crush what’s left of your company before lunch.”

Edward looked at his son. Then he looked at the contract Dallas had produced from his jacket pocket.

“Anson,” Edward whispered. “It’s a good deal. We need this.”

Anson stared at his father with undisguised betrayal. “You’re selling her too? Just like you sold her to Claudine?”

“She is already gone, son!” Edward shouted, slamming his hand on the armrest. “Wake up! She is married!”

Anson let out a guttural cry. He seized a priceless porcelain vase from the mantel and hurled it against the wall.

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Shards of blue and white exploded across the room. Eliza flinched, instinctively leaning into Dallas. Dallas didn't move a muscle.

"I hate you all!" Anson screamed. "You are all whores for money!" He turned and stormed out through the French doors into the garden.

The room rang in the wake of his outburst.

Eliza stood up. Her heart was hammering, but her mind was clear.

"I need to talk to him," she said. "One last time."

Dallas caught her wrist. “Eliza. No.”

“I need to do this, Dallas.” She looked down at him. “To end it. He needs to hear it from me – not a lawyer.”

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Dallas glanced at the garden door, then back at her face. He saw the resolve there. Slowly, he released her wrist.

“Five minutes,” he said. “If you’re not back, I come out swinging.”

Eliza nodded. She walked to the doors and stepped out into the cool evening air.

Behind her, Edward signed the contract with a trembling hand.

“I’m sorry, Dallas,” he said, staring at his own signature. “He is... unwell.”

“He is broken,” Dallas said, watching Eliza’s retreating figure through the glass. “But he will heal. If you keep him away.”

The garden was steeped in shadow, the sun dipping below the horizon. Anson sat on the old wooden swing set at the far end of the lawn — the same swing he used to push her on when she was ten, when she first arrived, scared and lonely.

His head was in his hands. His shoulders were shaking.

Eliza approached slowly. The grass muffled her footsteps.

“Anson.”

He looked up. His eyes were red, his face streaked with tears. But beneath the grief, there was a hard, glittering edge that hadn't been there before. He didn't look like a man who had given up. He looked like a man who was recalibrating.

“Go away,” he rasped. “Go to your billionaire. Go count your diamonds.”

Eliza sat on the stone bench nearby. She didn't sit on the swing beside him. That space was gone.

“You saved me when I was little, Anson,” she said softly. “You gave me a home when I had nothing. I never forgot that.”

“And then I sold you,” Anson spat, his voice thick with self-loathing. “To Claudine. To Dallas. I failed you.”

“You didn’t sell me,” Eliza said. “You just didn’t choose me. You chose the family. You chose fear.”

“I tried!” Anson argued, gripping the chains of the swing until his knuckles turned white. “I tried to protect the family so I could protect you! I thought if I had the power, I could keep you safe!”

“But in doing so, you hurt me the most,” Eliza said gently. “You became the very thing I needed protection from.”

“I love you, Eliza,” Anson whispered. “More than him. He doesn’t know you. He just bought you.”

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“You love the memory of me.” Eliza stood. “The girl who needed you. The victim.” She took a step closer, but kept her distance. “I’m not that girl anymore, Anson. I’m a woman. And I love Dallas.” Her voice didn’t waver. “He sees me. He doesn’t want to save me — he wants to stand with me.”

Anson flinched. The words struck him like a physical blow.

He rose abruptly and walked toward her. For a moment he looked dangerous, his hands clenched into fists. Eliza held her ground.

Then he collapsed. He pulled her into a hug — a desperate, crushing embrace — and buried his face in her neck, inhaling the scent of her, committing it to memory not as a keepsake, but as fuel.

“He won’t make you happy,” Anson whispered into her hair. The pleading was gone from his voice now, replaced by something colder – the tone of a man making a prophecy. “He is a machine, Eliza. Machines break. And when he breaks, he will crush you.”

“He won’t,” Eliza said, pulling back. She did not return the embrace.

Anson held her arms a moment longer than necessary. He looked into her eyes, and what lived there was not the grief of a man walking away. Anson wasn’t walking away.

“You think this is freedom,” he said, his eyes dark and hollow. “But it’s just a longer leash. Go with him. Go see how cold his world really is.” He leaned in, his voice dropping to a quiet, terrifying murmur. “And when he fails you – and he will – don’t worry about where to go. I’ll be right here. Waiting to pick up the pieces. Just like I always have.”

“Goodbye, Anson,” Eliza said, feeling a chill move through her despite her resolve.

She turned and walked back toward the house. She could feel his eyes on her back – burning, dissecting, waiting.

Anson watched her go. The white suit glowed in the twilight. He lowered himself back onto the swing and pushed off, moving alone through the darkening garden.

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He didn't cry anymore. He pulled out his phone.

"She's gone," he muttered to himself. "For now."

He didn't delete her number. Instead, he opened a hidden folder on his phone labeled Surveillance.

"I won't let you off that easy, Dallas," Anson whispered to the empty night. "You better watch your back. Because the moment you slip, I'm taking her back."

The Rolls Royce glided down the highway, the privacy partition raised, sealing them in a cocoon of leather and silence.

Dallas was driving. He had dismissed the chauffeur earlier. His grip on the steering wheel was tight, his knuckles white, and the speedometer needle was creeping higher than usual.

Eliza watched him. His jaw was set hard.

“You’re quiet,” she said.

“He hugged you,” Dallas said flatly. He didn’t look at her. His eyes stayed fixed on the road.

“You saw?”

“I watched from the window,” Dallas said. “He held you for twelve seconds. I counted.”

“It was a goodbye hug, Dallas.” Eliza reached for his hand on the gear shift.

He pulled it away before she could touch him. “He smelled your hair. I saw it. He buried his face in your neck.”

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Eliza laughed lightly. It was almost absurd. “Are you jealous of a broken man? He was crying, Dallas.”

“I am jealous of the wind that touches you,” Dallas growled. “I don’t like another man’s scent on you. Especially his.”

Eliza studied his profile – the sharp nose, the intense brow. He was furious in that primal, possessive way that used to frighten her but now made her blood hum.

She decided to tease him. She felt light, almost reckless after the weight of the goodbye with Anson.

She unbuckled her seatbelt. The click was loud in the quiet car. She leaned across the center console and brought her lips close to his ear.

“You know,” she whispered, “he said he would wait for you to fail.”

“Let him wait,” Dallas said, the engine note rising. “I’ll bury him under the foundation of his own house.”

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Eliza trailed a finger down the side of his neck, feeling his pulse jump beneath her touch. “But you won’t fail me, right?”

“Eliza, sit back,” Dallas warned, his voice rough. “I’m driving.”

“Or what?” She bit his earlobe gently.

Dallas’s control snapped. With a low curse, he wrenched the wheel. The car swerved smoothly off the main highway and down an exit ramp, and he didn’t ease off until they were on a dark, deserted service road overlooking the distant city lights. Gravel crunched sharply as he threw the car into park. He unbuckled his belt and turned to her. His eyes were predatory, dark pupils swallowing the iris.

“Or I will show you exactly who you belong to,” he said.

Eliza’s breath caught. She had poked the bear, and the bear was hungry.

“We’re off the highway,” she reminded him, her voice already breathless. “But people could still see.”

“Let them,” Dallas said – completely illogical, and incredibly compelling.

He took her face in both hands and kissed her. It wasn’t gentle. It was a claiming – deep and possessive, erasing the memory of Anson, erasing the past, branding her with his taste.

Eliza melted into him, her hands tangling in his hair. This was the passion she wanted. The fire that burned away every trace of coldness from her life.

A car’s headlights swept past the end of the road – a distant reminder of the world they had left behind. Dallas broke the kiss, breathing hard. His forehead came to rest against hers.

“Home,” he muttered. “Now. Before I get arrested for public indecency.”

He pulled back, shifted into gear, and merged onto the road. He drove considerably faster now.

Eliza buckled up and touched her lips with her fingertips. She smiled. She liked it when he lost control.

They burst into the penthouse foyer like a storm. Dallas didn't bother to hang up his keys — he tossed them onto the console table, where they slid and clipped a vase. He was still in predator mode, his hand gripping Eliza's firmly.

“You're back!”

Azalea was sprawled on the living room sofa, a bowl of popcorn balanced on her stomach, the TV blaring a reality show.

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Message from Noa: Lovely Tuesday for you dear readers. God loves you and Noa wishes you all the best. ( • ◡ - ) ✧

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