

Flash Marriage To My Best Friend's Father

Chapter 51:

“He looked at you like a man who remembers you crying,” Dallas corrected. “I don’t like men who have memories of you that I don’t.”

Eliza felt the heat rise in her face. He wasn’t just being protective.

He was jealous.

Dinner arrived with the clatter of a cart.

A nurse placed a tray on the rolling table and swung it over Eliza’s lap. “Soft foods only for the next twenty-four hours,” she instructed. “Your throat is still swollen.”

The tray held a bowl of beige, watery oatmeal and a cup of green jello. It looked deeply depressing.

Eliza picked up her spoon and took a few careful bites. Tasteless, but warm. After five spoonfuls, she set the spoon down.

“I can’t finish,” she sighed, pushing the tray away. “It hurts to swallow.”

Dallas was watching her from the chair. He hadn’t eaten since lunch the day before.

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“You need calories,” he said.

“I can’t,” she said.

Dallas stood, pulled the tray toward himself, and picked up her spoon. The one she had just used.

“Dallas! That’s mine – germs!” Eliza reached out to stop him.

Dallas looked at her. The corner of his mouth moved — not quite amusement, something more like resolve. He was breaking one of his own rigid rules, and he was doing it deliberately.

“We shared breath yesterday, Eliza. I blew air from my lungs into yours. A spoon is nothing.”

He ate the oatmeal. Calmly, efficiently, using her spoon, working through her leftovers. Each bite was a quiet statement — a methodical dismantling of the professional distance between them.

Eliza watched him. It was such an intimate, domestic thing. Husbands ate their wives’ leftovers. It was the kind of unremarkable act that only happened between people who belonged to each other.

It felt too real. Too married.

Panic rose in her chest. The walls were crumbling, and she needed them back.

“Dallas, we should review the contract,” she said, keeping her voice even.

Dallas paused with the spoon halfway to his mouth. He lowered it slowly. “Now?”

“Yes,” she said, her voice betraying a slight tremor. “This caretaking. The hospital bills. The ambulance. None of it is in the agreement. I don’t want to accrue extra obligations. We should itemize everything.”

Dallas set the spoon down. The clatter against the plastic tray was sharp in the silence.

His eyes went cold. The warmth from the shared meal evaporated.

“Fees?” he asked quietly. “You think this is billable hours?”

“Isn’t it?” Eliza said, the lie tasting bitter. She was desperate — desperate to protect her heart from the dangerous business of hoping. “Everything is business with you. I’m an asset. You’re protecting your investment.”

Dallas studied her for a long moment. He looked at her trembling hands. He saw the fear hiding behind the defiance.

He stood abruptly and crossed to his coat, hanging on the back of the door. Eliza’s heart dropped. She had pushed too far. He was leaving.

He rummaged in the pocket and came back to the bed, tossing a small paper bag onto the sheets.

Organic gummy bears.

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Chapter 52:

“I checked the ingredients,” he said flatly. “No mango. No artificial dyes. No poison.”

Eliza picked up the bag. “Is this — a contract amendment?” she asked weakly.

“No,” Dallas said. “It’s dessert. Eat it and stop talking about the contract.”

He returned to the chair and opened his laptop.

“I’m working now,” he said, not looking at her. “Since you love business so much.”

Eliza opened the bag and put a red gummy bear in her mouth. It was sweet and yielding.

She watched him type. His jaw was set, tight with controlled irritation. He was angry. But he was still here – sitting in an uncomfortable hospital chair, eating her oatmeal, and bringing her candy.

Her attempt to push him away had failed. Or perhaps, she thought, he had simply decided not to be pushed.

Morning light filtered through the hospital blinds, painting thin stripes across the linoleum floor.

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Dallas was already awake. He had shaved in the small bathroom and changed into a fresh suit that Weston, his driver, had brought up earlier. He looked crisp, professional, and entirely distant.

“The doctor says you can be discharged this afternoon,” he said, checking his watch. “I have a meeting with the legal team regarding the incident at The Plaza. Weston will stay outside your door.”

“Thank you,” Eliza said.

She missed the man who had slept in the chair beside her. This was the CEO.

“I’ll see you at home,” he said.

He turned and walked out without a kiss. Without a touch.

The chill settled into the room the moment he was gone. She had asked for business only, and she had gotten it. So why did it hurt this much?

Down in the lobby, chaos was building again.

Anson Hyde had returned. He looked as though he hadn't slept. He was still wearing the tuxedo from the night before — minus the tie, the collar open, a day's worth of stubble on his jaw.

He tried to move past the reception desk and head for the elevators.

Two large bodyguards in black suits stepped into his path like a wall.

"Mr. Hyde," one of them said, his voice flat. "You are not permitted."

"I need to see her!" Anson's voice cracked. "Get out of my way!"

"Ms. Solomon has no brother on record," the guard stated, without expression.

"I'm going up there!" Anson tried to push past them. It was like a child throwing himself against a tank.

People in the lobby had stopped. Phones were out. The flashes started.

The elevator doors opened. Dallas stepped out.

He took in the scene — Anson making a spectacle of himself, the gathering crowd, the recording phones — and walked over. The lobby parted for him like water.

“Hyde,” Dallas said, his voice perfectly even. “You are embarrassing yourself.”

Anson spun around, his eyes wild. “You! You’re keeping her from me! You have guards blocking the elevators!”

“She doesn’t want to see you,” Dallas said.

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Chapter 53:

“Let her tell me that!” Anson shouted, pointing a trembling finger at Dallas. “To my face! If she tells me to leave, I’ll go. But I know she won’t. She loves me!”

Dallas studied him for a moment, running through the calculation quickly and cleanly. If he blocked Anson now, Anson would play the victim. He would tell the press that Dallas Koch was holding Eliza Solomon against her will.

But if Eliza rejected him — if she looked him in the eye and cut him off herself — Anson would die a social death that no press spin could resurrect.

Dallas knew she was ready.

“Fine,” Dallas said. “Five minutes. Under supervision.”

He nodded to the guards. They stepped aside.

“You’re coming with me,” Dallas added, already turning toward the elevator. “I want to see this.”

In Room 302, Eliza was staring at a magazine she wasn’t reading.

The door burst open. Anson rushed in, bringing with him the stale smell of champagne and a sleepless night.

“Eliza! Thank God.” He crossed to the bed, reaching for her.

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Eliza flinched and drew her knees up. “Anson?”

Dallas positioned himself in the doorway, arms crossed. He didn’t speak. He simply watched.

“They wouldn’t let me in last night,” Anson said, the words tumbling out. “I was out of my mind with worry. Look at you — you’re pale.”

“I almost died, Anson,” Eliza said quietly.

“I know! It was Claudine — she’s unhinged!” Anson moved closer, his voice dropping to something pleading. “But you’re safe now. Come home, Eliza. I’ll take care of you. We can go back to the Manor. Everything can go back to the way it was.”

Eliza looked at him. He looked pathetic — hollow-eyed, rumpled, clutching at something that had already dissolved.

Then she looked at Dallas. He was still. Solid. Waiting.

The choice was here.

Anson grabbed Eliza’s hand, his palms damp. “Claudine is sorry. I made her apologize. We can fix this.”

Eliza pulled her hand away as if he had burned her. “Fix what, Anson? My throat? The fact that you watched her poison me?”

“I froze,” Anson stammered. “My mother grabbed my arm. I’m sorry. But you know I love you. You know I’ve always loved you.”

“You love owning me,” Eliza corrected him, her voice gaining strength. “You love having a pet.”

“No. That’s not true.”

“I am grateful to the Hyde family for raising me,” Eliza said, choosing her words carefully. “You are like a brother to me, Anson.”

The word hung in the air. Brother.

Anson recoiled as if she had slapped him. “Brother? I loved you. We were meant to be married.”

“We were children,” she said. “And then you got engaged to Claudine. You chose her. You chose the money.”

“That’s business!” Anson shouted. “My heart is yours!”

“My heart is closed to you, Anson,” Eliza said firmly. “Please leave.”

Anson turned red, his humiliation curdling into rage. He spun around and pointed a trembling finger at Dallas.

“It’s him, isn’t it? This capitalist vulture – he’s brainwashing you!” Anson spat. “He’s just using you. He doesn’t love you. He’s playing some sick game.”

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Dallas pushed off the doorframe and walked forward slowly, deliberately. His guards had already discreetly cleared the hallway outside, ensuring the confrontation remained private. “Careful, Hyde,” Dallas warned. “Slander is expensive.”

“She’s coming with me!” Anson yelled. “She’s our family’s responsibility. The trust – everything my father set up for her – is under my control.”

“She is not your financial dependent,” Dallas said calmly.

“Then what is she? Your employee? Your mistress?” Anson sneered. “How much are you paying her to spread her legs for you?”

Eliza gasped. She looked at Dallas, pleading with her eyes. Don’t.

But Dallas had already read the wild desperation in Anson’s face – the way he grasped for any lever of control, any threat that might still work. This wouldn’t end. Anson would hound her, use the press, leverage the Hyde name, unless he was faced with a wall he simply could not climb. A legal, absolute fact. Dallas needed a nuclear deterrent. He needed to burn the bridge so thoroughly that Anson could never cross it again.

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“She is my wife,” Dallas stated.

The room went dead silent. Even the heart monitor seemed to pause. Anson blinked. He shook his head. “What?”

“We are legally married,” Dallas repeated. “She is Mrs. Koch.”

Anson looked at Eliza, his face gone gray. “Eliza? Is this true? Tell me he’s lying.”

Eliza closed her eyes for a brief moment, then opened them and looked straight at Anson.

“Yes.”

Anson stumbled back against the wall. “You — you married him? The enemy? Why?”

Eliza looked at Dallas. She looked at the man who had stood by her while Anson watched her choke.

“I married a man who knows how to use an EpiPen,” she said softly.

That line destroyed Anson. It cut through every excuse he had ever made for himself, exposing his failure in the most brutal and practical way possible.

Dallas opened the door wide. “Get out. Before I call the police for harassing my wife.”

Anson looked like a ghost. His eyes moved from Eliza to Dallas as the full weight of his defeat settled over him. Then, broken and hollow, he shuffled out.

The door clicked shut.

Eliza and Dallas stood alone in the silence. The secret was out.

Eliza stared at the closed door, her heart pounding.

“You broke the contract,” she whispered. “Clause 7. Confidentiality.” She turned to look at Dallas.

Dallas turned to face her. He didn’t look apologetic. He looked triumphant.

“He needed a reality check,” Dallas said. “And you needed to be free. As long as he believed there was still a chance, he would have kept coming.”

“Now he knows – he’ll tell everyone!” Eliza panicked. “The press, my quiet life...”

“He won’t,” Dallas predicted, his voice certain. “Shame will keep him quiet. He lost to me. To admit that the woman he claimed to love married his worst enemy? It would destroy his reputation. He’ll bury this secret deeper than anyone could.”

Eliza tried to get out of bed. “I need to leave. This is too much.” The IV line tugged at her arm and she winced.

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Chapter 55:

Dallas was at her side in an instant. “Stop.”

He glanced at the IV bag. It was empty. “You’re being discharged anyway.” He helped her to her feet, steadying her as her legs wavered beneath her.

“Change your clothes,” he said, guiding her toward the ensuite bathroom.

Eliza walked in and clutched the edge of the sink for support. She felt exposed. Unsteady.

Dallas followed her inside and closed the door behind him, turning the lock with a quiet click.

“Dallas?” She stepped back against the marble counter. The room was small and intimate.

“You called me your husband,” he said. His eyes burned with a dark, quiet fire. “You admitted it to him.”

“I had to,” she defended. “To make him leave.”

“Did it feel like a lie?” He stepped closer, crowding her gently against the sink.

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Eliza couldn't answer. It hadn't felt like a lie. It had felt like safety. It had felt like the truth.

Dallas reached out and carefully peeled the medical tape from the back of her hand. He pulled the IV needle free, and a tiny drop of crimson welled up against her skin. He picked up a cotton ball from the jar on the counter and pressed it to the spot. Then he lifted her hand to his lips and kissed the wound – right over the cotton.

Eliza gasped. The sensation was electric, shooting straight down her spine.

Dallas lowered her hand and cupped her face in both of his, his thumbs tracing slow arcs across her cheekbones.

“You belong to me, Eliza,” he vowed. “On paper. In this hospital. Everywhere.”

He lowered his head and kissed her. It was nothing like the kiss at the apartment. This was possessive. Deep. Something that marked her at the level of the soul. He tasted of mint and certainty.

Eliza gripped his shirt. She didn't push him away. She melted into him, enveloped by a warmth that lingered in the air – the ghost of steam, or perhaps simply the heat radiating off him.

“Let's go home,” he murmured against her lips.

“Home,” she echoed.

She hadn't said the penthouse. She had said home.

Eliza changed into the clothes Weston had brought – soft gray cashmere joggers and a matching sweater. They were comfortable, expensive, and warm.

She opened the bathroom door. Dallas was waiting, checking his phone.

“I can walk,” she said, stepping out.

“You’re weak,” he said, pocketing the phone. “And the press is downstairs. If you walk, they’ll swarm. If I carry you, they’ll keep their distance.”

It was a lie, or at least an exaggeration, but Eliza didn’t fight it. She was too tired.

He scooped her up bridal style. She felt weightless in his arms and hid her face in the crook of his neck, breathing in his scent.

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They exited the room. The nurses at the station stopped working to watch, their expressions caught somewhere between envy and awe. Dallas carried her to the private elevator at the end of the hall, bypassing the main lobby entirely, and they descended to the basement garage.

The silver Maybach was waiting — a silent, armored beast. Weston held the rear door open. Dallas settled her into the leather seat, then slid in beside her.

The car moved. Smooth. Silent. A cocoon of luxury.

Eliza looked out the tinted window as the city streets blurred past.

“Anson,” she murmured. “He looked destroyed.”

Dallas stiffened beside her. “Are you pitying him?”

Eliza turned to look at him. “No. I’m just surprised. I never thought I’d see him like that. He was always so arrogant. So sure of himself.”

“He realized what he lost,” Dallas said. “Too late.”

He reached over and took her hand, playing idly with her fingers, tracing the shape of the silver ring she wore.

Eliza felt a quiet thrill move through her. She liked that Anson knew. She liked that Anson knew she belonged to Dallas Koch. It felt like revenge. And it felt like safety.

“Are you angry I told him?” Dallas asked. His voice was softer now, the edge gone.

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Eliza looked at him. “I should be. You broke the rules.”

“But?” he prompted.

“But I’m glad he can’t bother me anymore,” she admitted. “I’m glad the door is closed.”

Dallas smiled — a real, rare smile that reached his eyes. “He won’t touch you again. I promise.”

Eliza leaned her head against his shoulder, just for a moment. She was exhausted. The allergy attack had emptied her completely. She closed her eyes and let the rhythm of the car carry her, steady and soothing, until she drifted off against him.

Dallas watched her sleep. He signaled Weston to drive slower.

His phone buzzed. A message from Azalea.

Azalea: Did you tell him? Is he crying? Did you crush him?

Dallas typed a reply with one hand.

Dallas: He is handled. She is safe.

Eliza woke up in her own bed in the penthouse. Sunlight streamed through the sheer curtains.

She stretched. Her throat felt better — still scratchy, but the swelling was gone.

She walked out to the kitchen, where Mrs. Higgins stood at the counter, chopping kale.

“Good morning, Mrs. Koch,” Mrs. Higgins beamed. “Mr. Koch ordered a specific breakfast. Anti-inflammatory protocol.”

She set a glass of thick green sludge and a bowl of oatmeal on the counter.

Eliza sighed. “Green smoothies. Joy.”

Dallas walked in wearing jeans and a black t-shirt. Casual Dallas – a rare sight, like spotting a unicorn in the wild.

“Eat,” he said. “Then we have appointments.”

“Appointments? I’m fine,” Eliza argued, taking a sip of the green drink. It tasted like grass and lemon.

“Allergist. Nutritionist. And a tailor,” he listed, leaning against the counter.

“A tailor?”

“To replace the dress I ruined with the needle,” he said, perfectly matter-of-fact. “And to reinforce the seams of your other clothes. You seem prone to medical emergencies.”

Eliza felt heat rise to her cheeks at the memory of the needle punching through her thigh.

“You don’t have to control everything,” she grumbled.

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Chapter 57:

“I do when it concerns your survival,” he countered, his eyes dark and unyielding.

Azalea bounced into the kitchen in pajamas covered in cartoon avocados.
“Morning! How’s the invalid?”

“Oppressed,” Eliza said, gesturing to the smoothie.

“Dad’s in General Mode,” Azalea whispered, loudly enough for the entire room to hear. “Good luck. He’s got spreadsheets.”

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Dallas ignored them both. “Car in ten minutes.” He picked up his coffee and walked out to the balcony to take a call.

Eliza turned to Azalea. “He’s intense. Even for him.”

Azalea’s smile faded. She looked serious. “He was scared, Eliza.”

Scared? Dallas?

“I’ve never seen him that scared,” Azalea said. “Not even when — well, never mind. But listen.” She leaned in, her voice dropping. “When he came back from the war, he was a mess. He has scars, Eliza. Inside and out. Losing people triggers something in him. He controls things because he believes that if he manages every variable, nobody dies.”

Eliza looked toward the balcony. Dallas was pacing, his broad back to them. She thought about the scars she had sensed but never seen.

His control wasn’t about power, she realized. It was a trauma response. He was terrified of the chaos that took people away from him.

Her annoyance dissolved into understanding.

“I’ll go get ready,” Eliza said softly.

She finished her smoothie and headed to her room, resolved to be patient with him.

From the hallway, Dallas watched her go. He pressed a hand to his chest, right over his heart. The fear of losing her still lived there, a cold, stubborn knot.

He needed to secure her future. Not just her health.

He pulled up a browser on his phone and navigated to the careers page for S&D Design, the prestigious architecture firm owned by Koch Industries. His thumb hovered over the listing for a Junior Restoration Consultant. A quiet, determined look settled over his face. He wouldn't simply hand her the position — that would be an insult to her pride. But he could open a door, and make sure the opportunity found its way to her. The rest would be up to her. He only needed to build the arena. She was already a fighter.

The morning sun struck the floor-to-ceiling windows of the penthouse, but its light never reached the dining table. The mood was heavy — thick enough to choke on.

Eliza watched Dallas across the vast expanse of marble as he lowered his tablet. He looked like a king surveying a battlefield he had already conquered, but she saw it now — the tension in his shoulders wasn't arrogance; it was vigilance. The rigid set of his jaw wasn't anger; it was control. Azalea's words from the night before echoed in her mind: He controls things because he thinks if he controls every variable, nobody dies.

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Chapter 58:

He hadn't spoken a word to her all morning. This wasn't the cold shoulder of a lover's quarrel. It was the calculated distance of a general repositioning his troops after a perceived threat. She had been in danger. He had been scared. And now he was building walls to ensure it never happened again.

She pushed her spoon around her bowl of oatmeal. She couldn't live inside his fortress forever. If she remained only a protected asset, she would eventually become a prisoner of his fear. She needed to build her own walls, her own life — so she could stand beside him, not behind him.

Dallas's eyes dropped to her hand, which trembled faintly against the ceramic bowl.

“Speak,” he commanded, his voice low and resonant in the quiet room. “You are vibrating.”

Eliza drew a breath and released the spoon. It clattered against the bowl — a sharp sound that made her wince.

“I want to apply to S&D Design,” she said, forcing herself to meet his eyes. “For the Junior Restorer position.”

Dallas didn’t blink. His face was a mask of indifference, but his fingers tightened almost imperceptibly on the edge of the tablet. He knew exactly which listing she meant. He had been staring at it on his phone just the night before.

“It is the best firm in the city,” he noted dryly.

“I know.” Eliza sat up straighter, reaching for the same confidence she had felt in the hospital when she stood up to Anson. “I updated my portfolio. I want to do this on my own merit. I don’t want handouts.”

“Merit is good,” Dallas said, lifting his coffee cup. “But connections are faster.”

“No calls, Dallas.” She leaned forward. “Please. I need to know I’m good enough. After everything with the Hydes, I need to know I have value that isn’t attached to a last name.”

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Dallas looked at her determined eyes. He saw the fire there – the same fire that had made her slap Anson. He respected it. He gave a single nod. “As you wish.”

He took a sip of coffee, concealing the slight curve of his lip. He didn’t tell her that he was the majority shareholder of S&D Design. He didn’t tell her that Augustina Koch, the founder, was his aunt. He would let her have her merit.

Ping.

The elevator doors slid open. Azalea burst into the room in a whirlwind of shopping bags and chaotic energy.

“Eliza! Emergency!” she announced, dropping the bags on the pristine marble floor.

Dallas sighed. The peace was gone.

“I need a plus-one for the gallery opening tonight,” Azalea continued, ignoring her father entirely. She snatched a croissant from the center platter. “And I invited Liam!”

The air in the room instantly froze. It was a physical drop in temperature.

Dallas slowly set down his coffee cup. The porcelain clinked against the saucer.

He turned his head toward Azalea. The movement was slow and predatory.

“Dr. Sumner?” His voice was deceptively calm – the surface of a lake before a storm.

“Yes!” Azalea grinned, oblivious to the danger. “He’s dreamy, he’s a doctor, and he likes art. Perfect for Eliza! He kept asking about her.”

The blood drained from Eliza’s face. She kicked Azalea under the table. Hard.

“Azalea, I’m married,” Eliza hissed.

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Chapter 59:

“To a contract!” Azalea whispered back, leaning in. “You need a backup plan for when the year is up. Liam is safe. He’s nice.”

Dallas stood.

His shadow fell over the table, engulfing Eliza. He didn’t look at Azalea. His dark eyes were fixed on Eliza’s throat.

“There is no backup plan,” he stated, the finality in his tone quietly terrifying. “And she is busy tonight.”

Azalea frowned. “Doing what?”

“Reviewing her portfolio,” Dallas said smoothly. “With me.”

“Boring!” Azalea groaned. “Eliza, tell him you want to go. Liam is expecting you.”

Eliza looked up at Dallas. His jaw was tight, a muscle ticking feather-light beneath the skin. His eyes were warning her. Daring her.

She sensed the danger — not physical violence, but something more devastating. He was jealous, and Dallas Koch did not handle jealousy gracefully.

“Actually,” Eliza said, her voice only slightly unsteady, “I really do need to prep for the interview. S&D is competitive.”

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Dallas’s shoulders relaxed. Just a fraction of an inch. A victory.

“Fine,” Azalea pouted, seizing another croissant as she marched toward her room. “I’ll go with Liam alone. More for me. You guys are no fun.”

The room fell silent again.

Dallas’s gaze dropped briefly to Eliza’s lips before he pushed back from the table and walked away, leaving her breathless — and unsettled by how much she liked being held in place by him. She was, after all, his wife now, even if she still felt like a pawn on his very dangerous chessboard.

The coffee shop was trendy, loud, and smelled of burnt sugar. It sat directly across the street from S&D headquarters.

Eliza was at a small round table, nervously reviewing her notes. Azalea had tricked her into coming. “Just a quick coffee, El,” Azalea had chirped, her tone conspiratorial. “Liam is here. He’s got some insider tips on the S&D curator you’re trying to impress, and apparently he even knows the HR guy, Gavin Ross. Think of it as networking, not a date!”

Eliza had caved. She needed every advantage she could get before the interview, and Azalea’s enthusiasm was hard to resist — especially after Dallas’s intense territorial display the day before. She needed to prove her value, and if a coffee meeting with an old friend could help, she would take it.

The bell above the door chimed. Liam Sumner walked in. He wasn't wearing his white coat today — just a casual leather jacket and jeans. He looked young, approachable, and safe.

“Eliza,” he smiled, spotting her. “It’s good to see you outside the hospital.” He sat down opposite her and ordered a black coffee.

“Thanks for meeting me, Liam,” Eliza said. “Azalea mentioned you know Gavin Ross?”

“The HR manager? Yeah, we play squash,” Liam nodded. “He’s tricky. Likes confident people. Don’t let him smell fear.”

Eliza typed a note on her phone. Confident. Got it.

They talked for twenty minutes. Liam was charming. He was funny. He was everything Anson wasn't, and everything Dallas wasn't. He was normal.

“Eliza,” Liam said, his voice softening. He reached across the small table and covered her hand with his.

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Eliza froze. His palm was warm and dry.

“About your boyfriend,” he asked gently. “Is it serious? Azalea made it sound complicated.”

Eliza looked at his hand, then at his kind eyes.

“Liam, I’m married,” she said. “To Dallas.”

Liam looked shocked. He drew his hand back slightly, but didn't remove it entirely. "Married? I thought — Azalea just said it was complicated."

"It is," Eliza admitted. "But it's legal. And I take my vows seriously."

Liam exhaled slowly. He looked disappointed, but respectful. "Lucky guy. If he ever messes up — call me." He gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

Eliza pulled away. "I have to go."

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She didn't see the black Maybach parked across the street.

She didn't see the tinted window roll down an inch.

She didn't see Dallas Koch watching. His hand gripped the leather steering wheel with enough force to make it groan. He had seen the touch. He had seen the way Liam leaned in, the quiet possessiveness of his hand over hers.

“Weston,” Dallas said abruptly into the intercom. “Go.”

Later that evening, Eliza returned to the penthouse.

The lights were dim. The city skyline glittered outside, cold and distant. Dallas was on the sofa with a glass of whiskey in his hand — not drinking it, only staring at the amber liquid.

“How was the strategy meeting?” he asked. His voice was rough, like gravel.

Eliza set down her bag. She felt the mood of the room immediately. “It was fine. Liam gave me tips on the HR process.”

Dallas stood and moved toward her — slow, silent, and deliberate, like a panther closing distance.

“Did he touch you?” he asked.

Eliza blinked. “He held my hand for a moment. To be comforting.”

“I don’t like other men touching my wife,” Dallas said, his voice dropping to a growl.

He reached her without hesitation and pulled her flush against him. His body was hard and radiating heat.

“Dallas, you’re jealous,” she whispered, her heart hammering against her ribs.

“I am territorial,” he corrected.

He cupped her jaw and tilted her head back, his eyes searching hers for any trace of resistance. When he found none, he brought his lips down onto hers.

It wasn’t gentle. It was a claim — a physical overwriting of Liam’s touch. He kissed her until she was breathless, his tongue sweeping into her mouth and demanding everything. His hands tangled in her hair, holding her exactly where he wanted her.

Eliza’s knees went weak. She clung to his lapels, overwhelmed by the taste of whiskey and want.

He pulled back, leaving her lips swollen. His breathing was heavy.

“Now everyone will know who you belong to,” he said darkly.

He released her and walked back to the whiskey, leaving Eliza standing in the middle of the room. She pressed her fingers to her bruised mouth, her heart beating faster than it ever had for Anson.

Thunder rattled the windowpanes of the penthouse. It was 3:00 AM.

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