

Fated Marriage: Spoiled by My Ice Billionaire

Chapter 7 The Second Shirt You Ripped

News spread like wildfire that she'd been called up to the CEO's office. Everyone assumed Damian had questioned her closely, so by lunchtime, as she sat eating in the company cafeteria on the 10th floor, people kept shooting glances and whispering behind her back. It only made them all the more certain that the plagiarism scandal had really happened. But none of it bothered Isabelle one bit while she ate. She stayed perfectly calm and looked across the table at Harrison. "Mr. Osman, I'd like to take some time off starting the day after tomorrow." Harrison noticed how drained she was, and with everything that had happened that day, he finally agreed. Eleanor immediately chimed in supportively. "Yeah, you should rest. Once the security cameras are fixed, the truth will come out." "I'm not taking time off because of this," Isabelle said. "I'll get everything sorted before I go so it doesn't cause trouble for the company. I'm just exhausted and need a break." She didn't explain further. Instead, she pulled out her phone, sent Damian a \$50 Venmo, and left a note: "Breakfast money." Damian was upstairs in a meeting when his phone pinged. The room was tense and deadly quiet. Everyone froze, holding their breath, wondering who'd dared forget to silence their phone. But Damian simply unlocked his phone and checked the alert. The second he saw the Venmo, he let out a soft, unexpected snort of laughter. All the executives in the conference room stared at him in shock. It was the first time anyone had ever seen him so much as crack a smile. Brian, standing right beside him, saw exactly what was going on. "We'll adjourn for now," Damian said. "We'll resume this afternoon." He tapped to accept the fifty dollars.

After Eleanor finished eating, she saw the HR manager walk past, then

leaned in to whisper to Isabelle.

"I heard from HR that the CEO's hiring a secretary—and he specifically wants a woman.

"You think Mr. Cross is finally gonna drop that ice-king act?"

Damian had taken her fifty dollars without a second thought.

In Isabelle's mind, even someone pointing a blowtorch at him wouldn't be able to thaw that man.

Isabelle didn't argue or correct her.

Once she and Eleanor went their separate ways, Isabelle headed down to the underground parking garage and called Gary from her car.

She'd stood him up the night before, lying that her car had broken down and asking him to take it in for servicing.

The real kicker was that Nicole and Gary had run into each other that same night. Terrified Isabelle would catch them together, they'd pretended to be nothing more than casual friends.

Gary had waited at the theater entrance all night, but Isabelle never showed. All he got was Nicole mocking him.

Gary was quite the actor, and Isabelle could tell he actually liked her—so he'd jumped at the chance to take her car in.

She'd known he would.

When someone's got a guilty conscience, they'll bend over backward to make things right.

Sitting in her car, Isabelle adjusted her hidden camera and touched up her makeup.

Then she cast her mind back to everyone's expressions that morning.

Most of the people who'd been badmouthing her had acted normal, but one person in the crowd had stood out: someone with a faint, amused smirk, like they were enjoying the show.

It was Wendy Quinn.

She was the transportation director's daughter and one of the key

designers on the team.

Everyone at work liked her—she was wealthy, good-looking, and good at winning people over with small gifts.

Isabelle wasn't ready to jump to conclusions just yet.

That afternoon, when the workday ended, she slipped out ten minutes early—the first time she'd left early since joining Cross Group.

She returned to her car, changed into a black tactical jacket and pants, then hid in a dark spot near the elevators to watch the departing cars.

She kept her phone ready, snapping nonstop photos, determined not to miss a single detail.

Finally, Wendy stepped out in her clicking heels, slid into her BMW, and slowly pulled away.

That was all the confirmation Isabelle needed.

She stood there deep in thought for several minutes before emerging from her hiding spot near the elevators.

She must have been in too much of a hurry, because she crashed straight into a tall, dark figure stepping out of the elevator.

Her white size-37 canvas sneakers caught on his leather dress shoes. Her phone flew out of her hand, and her whole body pitched forward.

Then a strong, firm arm wrapped around her waist, yanking her upright and pulling her tight against his chest.

Isabelle slammed into his hard chest, and the hair tie holding her blonde ponytail snapped at the worst possible moment, sending silky blonde waves cascading over her shoulders.

She clutched at his shirt reflexively, and two buttons tore free, pinged off, and struck her right between the brows.

"Ow!"

The sharp sting made her nuzzle her forehead into his chest, and she immediately breathed in a faint, crisp sandalwood scent.

She regained her balance slowly, rubbing her stinging forehead, before lifting her gaze to her unexpected savior.

"Mr. Cross..." The words slipped out before her cheeks burned bright pink instantly.

Their eyes locked, tangled in a quiet, unspoken moment.

Isabelle's palm pressed to his chest, feeling the steady rise and fall of his breath. She could almost feel his heartbeat thrumming through the material.

Off to the side, Brian averted his eyes, pretending he'd seen nothing at all.

In the dim glow, Damian's gaze drifted down to her loose, spilled hair, then fell to the shirt she'd practically ripped open.

Through the open fabric, she glimpsed his sharp, defined collarbone and solid chest muscle.

"That's the second shirt you've ruined," he said.

His voice was completely emotionless, as if stating a mundane, trivial fact.

It was true—this was the second one.

The first had gotten torn in his car.

Damian slowly loosened his arm from her waist.

Isabelle bit her lip and carefully smoothed his shirt back into place, then straightened his tie.

Damian froze completely stock-still, not daring to move as her small hands brushed lightly against his skin again and again.

His entire body burned hot, his vision grew hazy, and he couldn't bring himself to look directly at her.

Once Isabelle had finished fixing his clothes, she stepped back two paces and bowed to him at a full ninety degrees.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Cross!"

Damian didn't say a word. He only swallowed hard and held her phone

out to her.

She took it with both hands, thanked him hurriedly, then turned and practically fled to her car.

As soon as she sank into the driver's seat, she buried her face in her hands and pressed her forehead against the steering wheel.

This is a disaster! Am I just fated to keep running into him lately?

And why won't my stupid face stop burning bright red?

It took her a long while to calm down.

Once she had her emotions under control and confirmed Damian had left, Isabelle got out of her car again and headed for the elevators.

She went to the break room and fixed two cups of coffee, then split a sleeping pill in half and dropped one half into each cup.

She took the elevator down to the second floor and walked to the security office, set the coffees by the door, and knocked three times.

The door opened. The guard looked around but saw no one—only two steaming cups of coffee with a sticky note that read: "Thanks for your hard work."

He smiled, picked up the coffees, and closed the door.

About ten minutes later, Isabelle knocked again, but this time there was no reply.

She checked carefully to make sure no one was watching, then slipped quietly inside.

The surveillance system wasn't broken—the footage had simply been edited and cut. She found the deleted video in the computer's Recycle Bin, copied it to a flash drive, then slipped out silently.

Back home, she ate a sandwich while going through the recovered footage.

It was definitely Wendy.

The timestamp showed just after 1:00 a.m., which explained why she'd seen the woman hurrying out of the underground parking garage so

frantically earlier.

"Oh god... did she see me with Damian...?"

Just the thought of him made Isabelle's face burn hot all over again.

Wendy's dad is in business with Damian—her family runs all the shipping for Cross Boutique.

If I blow this whole thing wide open, will it hurt him?

Isabelle thought it over carefully and decided she couldn't act rashly.

She sighed, turned on a movie, and settled onto the couch to finish her sandwich.

That was when she spotted his suit jacket lying on the couch beside her...

The memory of their tight embrace in the parking garage made her heart stutter all over again.

A thousand messy thoughts tangled inside her.

She lay awake the entire night.

After tossing and turning restlessly, she had only one choice—to go and find Damian in person.