

Chapter 6

I remained silent, considering how to respond.

But Bennett thought he understood. He turned back to his parents. "The wedding isn't cancelled, just rescheduled. Maddie must not have worded it clearly, causing confusion.

"Mom, Dad, please go home. We'll send the official date soon. Maddie and I are getting married."

Somewhat reassured, his parents left.

Watching Bennett's convincing performance, I felt nothing but bitter irony.

Anyone watching would think he was genuinely committed to this marriage.

Yet he was the one who had left me standing alone at our engagement party, the one who had postponed our wedding.

After his parents drove away, Bennett turned to me with a remorseful expression.

"I'm truly sorry about what happened. I shouldn't have left you dealing with everything alone at the party.

"Don't worry, nothing will interfere this time. The wedding will happen without any issues."

I said nothing, wondering, "Without issues? Unlikely.

"This time, Bennett, I'll be the one walking away."

His phone rang suddenly.

I recognized the ringtone immediately, "Mariage d'amour", a piece I'd never heard him use before.

Bennett answered. In the quiet house, Sharlene's voice came through clearly.

"Benny, I fell in the bathroom. Could you take me to the hospital?"

Bennett hesitated, his eyes darting toward me.

After a moment, he covered the receiver, whispering, "Lena doesn't know many people here since she just returned, so I..."

"Go."

I cut him off, unable to bear another justification.

His lips tightened. "I'll just take her to the hospital and come straight back."

Then he was gone.

I watched him disappear through the doorway, acutely aware that the part of my heart reserved for Bennett was being surgically removed.

Bennett didn't return for days.

The only message I received that evening stated he was dealing with an important surgical case and wouldn't be back soon.

Was there really surgery? Or was he with Sharlene?

I could no longer distinguish truth from lies in anything he said.

Not that it surprised me anymore. Nor did I care.

His promises always seemed to have

His promises always seemed to have exceptions when it came to Sharlene.

For me, they never seemed to apply.

I stopped thinking about him and focused on clearing out the rest of my belongings.

The process proved more difficult than expected.

Bennett, with his medical background, maintained everything in perfect order.

Yet he allowed me to disrupt his meticulously organized closet.

He let me wedge my colorful, chaotic sketches between the pages of his valuable medical textbooks.

He'd even cleared half of his desk space for my comic books.

I remembered asking him tentatively back then, "Am I distracting you?"

The corner of his mouth had twitched, or perhaps I'd imagined it.

"No. Having you nearby is comforting."

It had been one of our rare, genuinely peaceful moments.

How could I not have mistaken his tolerance for something deeper?

But tolerance was just tolerance, not love.

Pulling myself back to the present, I continued gathering my sketches.

A book slipped from the pile and hit the floor, scattering photographs and letters across the hardwood.

I bent to collect them, but froze when I saw what they were.

These were photographs of Bennett and Sharlene from their college years.

The letters were their old love notes, exchanged during that time.

The photos and letters had yellowed slightly with age, yet their edges remained perfectly smooth.

He had kept them meticulously intact.

Compared to this careful preservation, Bennett's everyday kindness toward me was nothing worth mentioning.

The way he treated me differed little from how he might treat any patient.

Suppressing the ache in my chest, I put

everything back exactly where it had been, pretending I'd never seen any of it.

Exhausted, I finally collapsed into bed and fell into a heavy sleep.

I was awakened late that night by Quintina's call.

Her voice was tense with panic. "Maddie, is Benny alright? Is his hand injured?"

I was completely confused. "What are you talking about?"

A sharp silence fell, and then her voice rose. "You don't know? It's all over Twitter! How can you not know what's happened to your own fiancé?"

I quickly opened Twitter. The top trending story glared back at me in bold red text.

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"New York Mount Sinai Hospital Patient Attack: Surgeon Shields a Woman from Knife Assault"

The video showed an agitated man lunging toward Sharlene with a blade. Bennett pulled her behind him, raising his arm to block the attack.

The knife sliced clean through his sleeve.

It had been close.

A few inches lower, and it would have severed the tendons in his wrist, ending his career forever.