

Chapter 12

Sunlight streamed into the penthouse dining room, glinting off the silver and crystal. The air was quiet, filled only with the gentle clink of a fork against porcelain and the rustle of newspaper pages.

Anissa sliced into a perfectly poached egg, the golden yolk spilling over a bed of smoked salmon and hollandaise. She savored the bite, a small, genuine pleasure in a world that had, for the first time, become peaceful.

Across the long marble table, Harding sat, seemingly engrossed in the Wall Street Journal. The morning light caught the gold rims of his glasses, but his gray-blue eyes were unreadable, as always. He hadn't said a word about her confrontation with the Roy family, yet a team of his lawyers was already systematically dismantling their financial empire.

Eleanor, the head butler, approached the table, her steps silent on the polished floor. She leaned down and whispered something into Harding's ear, her expression carefully neutral but tinged with a hint of trouble.

Harding folded his newspaper with a crisp snap and placed it beside his coffee cup. He looked at Anissa, his gaze direct.

"Connor is making a scene in the lobby of my building," he stated, his voice calm, as if discussing the weather.

Anissa's fork paused mid-air. A flicker of profound annoyance, of sheer exhaustion with the man's existence, crossed her face. It was a fleeting shadow, quickly replaced by a cold resolve.

"If he's determined to die," she said, her voice quiet but sharp, "then let him die."

A ghost of a smile touched Harding's lips. It didn't reach his eyes, but it was there. He pressed a small, discreet button on the underside of the table.

"Alex," he said into a hidden speaker. "Let one call through to Mrs. Snow's personal phone. From my nephew."

A few seconds later, the new phone Harding had given her, resting on the table beside her plate, began to vibrate. The screen lit up with a name she thought she had erased from her life.

Connor Snow.

She stared at it, a relic from a buried past. Harding gave her a slight nod, an unspoken permission, an encouragement. She pressed the green icon

and activated the speakerphone

The serene morning was instantly shattered.

"ANISSA! WHAT THE HELL IS THIS? WHAT KIND OF SICK GAME ARE YOU PLAYING? YOU GET YOUR ASS DOWN HERE AND YOU COME HOME, RIGHT NOW!"

Connor's voice, raw and hysterical, blasted from the small device, echoing off the marble and glass.

Anissa didn't respond. She simply looked at Harding, her expression a perfect mask of indifference. The man on the phone was a stranger screaming into the void.

Her silence seemed to unnerve Connor. His tone shifted, softening slightly, but the arrogance was still there, thick and suffocating.

"Look, I know you're angry," he said, his voice strained with forced patience. "I get it. But this has gone far enough. I can forgive you for this... this stunt."

Anissa finally picked up her fork again. "You're mistaken, Connor," she said, her voice as cool and smooth as the polished marble. "I'm not angry."

"Then what is it? Money?" he shot back, his voice rising again. "Is that it? You want more? I told Felicity I'd buy you the Fifth Avenue place. Is that not enough?"

A small, humorless laugh escaped her lips. The sound was like ice scraping against glass, and it seemed to physically wound him through the phone.

"I don't need your apartment, Connor," she said, taking another deliberate bite of her breakfast. "I already own the building."

A choked, strangled sound came from the other end. "That's bullshit! That's my grandfather's! It's all a show, a lie you cooked up with him to punish me! You are my fiancée, Anissa! You belong to me!"

His possessive rage was a familiar poison. But before she could deliver the final, cutting blow, a large, warm hand covered hers, gently taking the phone.

Harding lifted it to his mouth. His voice was low, a deep rumble that carried an absolute, lethal authority.

"Mr. Snow," he said, the honorific dripping with contempt. "I believe you need to adjust your vocabulary."

The line went dead silent. The only sound was Connor's ragged, panicked breathing. He recognized his uncle's voice.

"She is my wife now," Harding continued, his tone dropping even lower, each word a hammer blow. "Your aunt. Your superior. If you harass her again, you will face consequences beyond your limited imagination."

Connor, in a last, desperate gasp of defiance, managed to stammer, "Uncle... don't let her fool you. She's a manipulative bitch just trying to climb the ladder."

Harding's response was a short, cold laugh. He ended the call.

He handed the phone to Eleanor. "Have this number permanently blocked from all Snow networks. And dispose of this device. We'll get Mrs. Snow a new one."

Anissa watched him, a strange, unfamiliar feeling blooming in her chest. It felt like safety. But it was tangled with the cold reality of their contract. This was a business transaction. He was protecting an asset.

"Was that necessary?" she asked, her voice soft. "He is your nephew."

Harding walked around the table until he stood behind her chair. He placed his hands on her shoulders, his touch firm and grounding. The warmth seeped through the thin cashmere of her sweater.

"When it comes to protecting you," he said, his voice a low murmur just for her, "there is no such thing as 'too much.'"

As if on cue, his executive assistant entered the dining room, holding a freshly printed document. He placed it on the table in front of Anissa.

"Madam," the assistant said with a respectful bow. "A draft of the restraining order against Mr. Connor Snow. It has been prepared by our legal team. Should he attempt to contact or approach you again, he will face immediate federal charges."

Anissa looked down at the crisp, legal paper. Her name and Connor's, separated by a wall of unforgiving legal text. She ran her finger along the edge of the paper, feeling the sharp finality of it. This was the power Harding wielded. Effortless. Absolute.

She took a deep breath. She picked up the pen offered by the assistant and signed her name at the bottom, the ink a dark, definitive slash. A final severing of a tie that had once been a noose around her neck.

Miles away, in the cold, sterile lobby of the Snow Industries tower, Connor stared at his phone, the disconnected call screen mocking him. A guttural scream of pure, impotent fury ripped from his lungs. He threw the phone against the marble floor, where it shattered into a thousand pieces.

He had lost her. And now, the law was coming for him.



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