

Marrying My Ex's Powerful Billionaire Uncle novel

Chapter 3 - Anissa Roy and Harding Snow -

The corridor leading to the main hall was dark and narrow. Harding bent his arm, offering it to her.

Anissa slipped her hand through the crook of his elbow. Her fingers brushed against the bespoke fabric of his suit. The sudden, intense heat of his body radiated through the material.

The warmth hit her like a physical blow. Her brain misfired. A violent wave of PTSD crashed over her.

The dim wall sconces blurred. The hallway twisted, morphing into the freezing, snow-covered streets of New York from her past life.

She remembered the agonizing cold. Ashlee had framed her. The Roy family had thrown her out without a dime. The temperature was twenty below zero.

She remembered dialing Connor's number with frostbitten fingers. She remembered hearing Seraphina's sweet, giggling voice on the other end before the line went dead.

She remembered Lorraine's voice on the voicemail. Die in the street, Anissa. Just don't bleed on my carpets.

The phantom ice clawed at her lungs. Her chest tightened. She couldn't breathe. Her knees buckled, and she stumbled forward.

Harding's arm shot out. His large hand clamped around her waist, gripping her tight. He pulled her flush against his solid chest, stopping her fall.

"Are you afraid?" his voice rumbled right against her ear, deep and incredibly grounding.

Anissa looked up. She stared at the sharp, perfect lines of his jaw. The memories shifted again.

She remembered floating above her own dead body.

She saw Harding. The ruthless tyrant of Wall Street, standing in a sterile morgue. He had taken off his own wool coat and draped it over her frozen corpse.

She saw his private armed security storming the Roy estate, taking her ashes by force.

She saw him standing alone in a private cemetery in Long Island, hosting a funeral for a woman he barely spoke to in life.

She remembered the suffocating weight of the dirt, the terrifying finality of death. She remembered the sheer, incomprehensible shock of waking up today, breathing, her heart beating in her chest. Why was she back? How was she back? The universe had given her a second chance, a miraculous reversal of fate that defied all logic. And in this new life, the only man she knew she could trust was the one who had shown her mercy when she was nothing but a memory. He had stood in that freezing cemetery, a solitary figure of absolute power, giving her the dignity in death that her own blood had denied her.

In the present, Anissa's fingers dug into his arm. Her knuckles turned stark white.

She took a ragged breath. She shoved the vulnerability deep into her stomach and shook her head. "I just realized it's too late."

"Too late to see them for who they are," she whispered, her voice hardening into steel. "But early enough to destroy them."

Harding looked down at her. His eyes dropped to the faint redness at the corners of her eyes. A violent, terrifying darkness flashed in his pupils.

His assistant's voice crackled over the radio. "Sir. The main hall screens are rebooted. The press is in position."

Harding lifted his hand. He gently adjusted the edge of her lace veil. The softness of his touch completely contradicted the lethal aura surrounding him.

"Once we push these doors open," Harding said in a low gravel, "you are the hostess of Manhattan. No one will ever make you lower your head again."

The organ music abruptly stopped. A second later, the grand, imposing chords of a royal wedding march shook the walls.

The heavy oak doors at the end of the hall were slowly pulled open by two ushers. Blinding white light from hundreds of camera flashes spilled into the dark corridor.

Anissa straightened her spine. She lifted her chin, her eyes turning into chips of ice. She looked like a queen stepping onto a battlefield.

"Pleasure doing business with you, Uncle," she whispered.

Harding heard the word. His jaw twitched. A dark, possessive smirk touched his lips.

"According to the legal documents being drafted right now," Harding corrected her, "you will call me husband."

The doors opened completely. A thousand eyes and camera lenses snapped directly onto them.