

Chapter 40

The midday sun pierced through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the penthouse, casting harsh geometric shadows across the master bedroom.

Anissa woke up with a pounding headache. She rolled over, her hand instinctively reaching out across the massive mattress. The sheets were perfectly flat. Ice cold.

She sat up, rubbing her temples. She grabbed her phone from the nightstand. She unlocked it and stared at the screen.

Nothing.

It had been three days since Harding had stormed out of this room and flown to London. Three days of absolute, deafening silence. He hadn't sent a single text. He hadn't made a single call. He had completely ghosted her.

A surge of hot, prickly irritation washed over her skin. She threw the phone onto the mattress. She was Anissa Snow. She had just dismantled a corporate empire and saved her brother's life. She was not going to sit in an empty apartment and pine for a man who couldn't handle his own biology.

Suddenly, the sharp, melodic chime of the penthouse doorbell echoed through the halls.

A minute later, Eleanor, the head housekeeper, knocked gently on the bedroom door. "Madam? You have a visitor."

Anissa threw on a silk robe and walked out to the livingroom.

Standing in the center of the room, wearing a blood-red trench coat, oversized blackout sunglasses, and holding a venti iced coffee, was Clara Finnegan.

Clara was Anissa's best friend from college, a high-powered fashion publicist with a tongue sharper than a scalpel. Anissa hadn't seen her in months. Clara had been in Milan running a massive PR campaign, and Anissa had deliberately avoided dragging her best friend into the toxic, dangerous mess of the Roy family's downfall. She had meant to call Clara, to finally unload the impossible weight of the last few months, but

the chaos had consumed her. It seemed her best friend's uncanny timing was still flawless.

Clara pulled down her sunglasses, her sharp blue eyes scanning Anissa's messy hair and pale face.

"Good lord," Clara deadpanned. "You look like a Victorian widow who just found out her husband died penniless. You are absolutely radiating sexual frustration."

Anissa groaned, sinking into the white leather sofa. "Shut up, Clara."

Clara walked over and dropped a beautifully wrapped, matte-black shopping bag onto Anissa's lap. There were no logos on the bag.

"What is this?" Anissa asked, eyeing the bag suspiciously.

"That," Clara said, taking a sip of her coffee, "is an ice breaker. You told me the Wall Street cyborg ran away to London because things got a little too hot in the hallway. When he gets back, you put on what's in that bag, and I guarantee he forgets whatever ghost he's running from."

Anissa peeked inside the bag. She saw a flash of black lace and a terrifyingly small amount of silk. Her face instantly burned crimson. She shoved the bag away. "I am not wearing that! He doesn't even want to look at me!"

"Bullshit," Clara snapped, grabbing Anissa's arm and hauling her off the sofa. "Men are simple creatures. Now go wash your face. We are going to Fifth Avenue. You are going to swipe that black card until it melts, and we are going to remind you that you are the baddest bitch in this city."

An hour later, Anissa stepped out of the penthouse looking like a weapon. She wore a tailored, bone-white Alexander McQueen suit that fit her like a second skin, paired with stiletto heels that clicked like gunshots on the pavement.

The air on Fifth Avenue was crisp. They spent two hours walking through the VIP rooms of Dior and Chanel, Clara ordering champagne while Anissa bought anything she briefly glanced at.

As they walked out of the Chanel flagship store, Anissa carrying nothing while a security guard trailed behind them with the bags, Clara suddenly stopped dead in her tracks.

"Oh, look what the garbage truck dropped off," Clara sneered.

Anissa looked up.

Walking directly toward them on the crowded sidewalk was Trent Vance,

Connor Snow's former frat brother and most obnoxious sycophant. He looked terrible. His suit was off-the-rack, slightly wrinkled. The arrogant aura he used to carry when he rode Connor's coattails was completely gone.

Hanging off his good arm was a stunningly beautiful, heavily botoxed woman. It was Melody Cairns, a C-list soap opera actress who had clearly swooped in to pick up the pieces of Trent's shattered ego. She was carrying three shoppingbags from mid-tier designer brands.

The four of them stopped. The pedestrian traffic flowed around them like water around stones.

Trent stared at Anissa. His breath caught in his throat. She looked like a goddess. The white suit, the flawless makeup, the absolute aura of untouchable power—she was a thousand times more beautiful and more terrifying than the quiet, overlooked girl who used to trail after Connor. A sickening wave of regret—not for love, but for a colossal missed opportunity—twisted his stomach.

Melody felt Trent tense. She looked at Anissa, her eyes narrowing with instant insecurity. She recognized her from the tabloids.

Melody plastered on a fake, sugary smile. "Oh my god, Trent, isn't this Connor's ex? The one he dumped?" Melody looked Anissa up and down. "Wow, I guess that breakup settlement really bought you a nice makeover. Enjoying the alimony?"

Anissa didn't even blink. She looked at Melody the way one looks at a smear of dirt on a white shoe. She didn't say a word.

Clara, however, stepped forward, her red trench coat flaring.

"Alimony?" Clara laughed, a sharp, barking sound that made heads turn. "Honey, are you illiterate or just stupid? The woman standing in front of you is the legal Matriarch of the Snow Empire. That broken-winged pigeon you're holding onto has to call her Auntie. She could buy your entire television network and cancel your show before lunch."

Melody's fake smile shattered. Her face turned a violent shade of magenta. She looked at Trent for defense, but Trent was staring at the ground, his face pale.

"Shut your mouth," Trent hissed at Clara, his humiliation boiling over. He looked up at Anissa, his eyes filled with venom. "You think you've won, Anissa? You think you're a queen? Connor is rotting in some European backwater because of you! But Harding doesn't love you. He's using you to secure the trust. You're just a prop. He's probably sleeping with

someone in London right now!"

The words doesn't love you and London hit Anissa directly in her open wound. Her expression didn't change even a fraction of an inch, but the faint, mocking smile on her lips vanished entirely. She took a slow, deliberate step forward. The sheer, terrifying weight of her silent presence forced Trent to instinctively step backward, dragging Melody with him.

Anissa looked at Trent's terrified eyes.

"My marriage is none of your concern," Anissa said, her voice a low, lethal purr. "But let me make one thing very clear, Trent. I own this city now. If I ever see your face on Fifth Avenue again, I will make sure your family's little hedge fund joins Connor in exile."

Trent's jaw clamped shut. He shrank back, completely emasculated in front of his new girlfriend and half of Manhattan. Anissa didn't wait for a response. She turned to Clara.

"I'm bored," Anissa announced loudly. "Let's go to Harry Winston. I need some new diamonds."

She walked past Trent, her shoulder brushing his, leaving him standing on the sidewalk in absolute, crushing defeat.