

Chapter 48

At exactly noon, Anissa stepped out of the armored SUV and handed her keys to the valet outside Le Bernardin.

She was wearing a razor-sharp, black Alexander McQueen tailored suit. She wore no jewelry, save for her massive diamond wedding ring and a single, heavy bracelet hidden beneath the cuff of her left sleeve. She looked like an executioner arriving for a scheduled beheading.

She walked into the hushed, opulent dining room. The maitre d' immediately recognized her and bowed, leading her past the crowded tables toward the exclusive private dining rooms in the back.

He opened the heavy oak door to Room 3.

Anissa stepped inside. The door clicked shut behind her, sealing the room.

She stood at the head of the long mahogany table and slowly swept her eyes over the occupants. A cold, cynical smile touched the corners of her mouth.

Sitting around the table were Lorraine, holding a lace handkerchief; Ashlee, her eyes artificially red; Connor, wearing a slightly wrinkled suit with his arm still in a cast; and Beatrice Snow, Connor's mother, sitting rigidly with her chin held high.

There was no sick father. There was no hospital bed. It was exactly the ambush she had expected.

Lorraine immediately stood up, forcing a tragic, trembling smile onto her face. She reached her hands out toward Anissa. "Oh, Anissa, darling. Thank God you came. Sit down, please."

Anissa didn't move. She didn't take Lorraine's hands. She pulled out the chair at the head of the table, furthest away from all of them, and sat down. She placed her Hermes bag on the empty chair next to her.

"Where is Harold?" Anissa asked, her voice flat and bored. "I thought he was supposed to be saving the children."

Lorraine's hands dropped. She looked nervously at Beatrice. "Your father... he's doing damage control with the press at the hospital wing. We came as his representatives to negotiate."

Ashlee sniffled loudly, dabbing her dry eyes with a napkin. "Sister, please don't be mad at Mom for using the charity as leverage. She just wanted us all to be together to fix this mess. We've been in so much pain lately."

Anissa picked up her crystal water glass. She took a slow sip, completely ignoring Ashlee's existence.

Beatrice cleared her throat. She adjusted her pearl necklace, trying to project the aura of a grand matriarch, completely ignoring the fact that she had been exiled.

"Anissa," Beatrice said, using a tone of forced magnanimity. "Let's stop playing games. We are all adults. Connor has made mistakes, yes. But our family is willing to be the bigger people and forgive your recent... outbursts. Aurthur Snow might be angry now, but blood is thicker than water."

Connor leaned forward, resting his good arm on the table. He looked at Anissa with what he clearly thought was a smoldering, romantic gaze.

"I know you only married my uncle to make me jealous, Anissa," Connor said softly. "You proved your point. You got my attention. But the joke is over now. It's time to come home."

Anissa slowly lowered her water glass. She stared at Connor. Her thumb pressed brutally hard against her index knuckle, trying to suppress the physical urge to vomit.

Beatrice continued, laying out the trap. "If you sign the divorce papers today, and transfer the control of the trust fund back to Connor, I will personally guarantee that you and Connor can remarry. You will still be a Snow."

Lorraine eagerly jumped in, deploying the moral blackmail. "Anissa, listen to her! Harding is a monster. He doesn't love you. He will use you and throw you away. Connor is your true love. And if you give the fund back, we can save your father's company. We can save the family!"

The room fell dead silent. The four of them stared at Anissa, holding their breath, waiting for the obedient, desperate-for-love girl they used to know to cave in and surrender the money.

Anissa looked down at her lap. Her shoulders began to shake.

Connor smiled, thinking she was crying. He started to stand up to comfort her.

Suddenly, Anissa threw her head back. A loud, sharp, genuinely hysterical laugh erupted from her throat.



She laughed so hard her chest ached. She wiped a tear of mirth from the corner of her eye. She looked at the four shocked faces staring at her.

"Are you all suffering from collective brain damage?" Anissa asked, her voice echoing loudly in the private room. "Did you drink contaminated water?"

Lorraine slammed her hand on the table. "Anissa! Show some respect!"

Anissa's laughter died instantly. Her eyes turned into chips of black ice. The oppressive, terrifying aura of the Snow Matriarch flooded the room, pinning them to their chairs.

She leaned forward, planting both hands flat on the mahogany table.

"You want me," Anissa said, enunciating every single word with lethal precision, "to give up my position as the legal wife of the Emperor of Wall Street, to come back and marry a broke, exiled, crippled piece of garbage who can't even pay his own hotel bill?"

Connor flinched violently, his face turning a sickly gray.

Anissa turned her freezing glare to Beatrice. "And you, Beatrice. Are you so desperate for cash that you're hallucinating? You have no power. You have no status. You are nothing."

Beatrice's face contorted in absolute fury. She pointed a shaking finger at Anissa. "You ungrateful little bitch! You are nothing without us!"

Anissa didn't blink. She sat back in her chair, crossing her legs. The war had officially started, and she was going to slaughter them all.

