

Chapter 49

The air in the private dining room was toxic. Beatrice was breathing heavily, her chest heaving with rage, but Connor reached out and grabbed his mother's arm, forcing her to sit back down.

Connor's face was pale, but his eyes burned with a desperate, manic determination. He refused to believe Anissa was truly gone. He thought she was just acting tough because she was hurt. He needed to prove his devotion.

He reached into the inner pocket of his suit jacket with his good hand. He pulled out a small, black velvet jewelry box and slid it slowly across the polished mahogany table toward Anissa.

"Anissa," Connor said, his voice dropping to a soft, pleading whisper. "I know words aren't enough. I know I hurt you. But I want to show you that I've changed."

He reached over and popped the lid of the box open.

Resting on the white satin was a thin silver chain holding a cluster of small, cloudy crushed diamonds. Under the harsh overhead lights of the restaurant, it barely sparkled.

"I had this custom-made at Tiffany's," Connor lied smoothly, his chest puffing out slightly. "It cost me fifty thousand dollars. It's the last bit of money I have to my name, Anissa. I spent everything I had left to show you my true heart."

Ashlee, sitting across the table, stared at the necklace. Her eyes widened in genuine sickening jealousy. She clasped her hands together. "Oh my god, Anissa. Fifty thousand dollars? That is so romantic. He gave you his last dime. How can you be so cold to him?"

Lorraine nodded vigorously. "It's true love, Anissa. A man who gives you his last dollar is a man you can trust. Not like Harding, who just buys you off with his spare change."

They were building a pathetic, cheap altar of moral superiority, trying to force Anissa to kneel at it.

Anissa looked down at the tiny, dull necklace. Her face was completely devoid of emotion.

She reached out with her right hand. She used her thumb and index finger to pinch the thin silver chain, lifting the necklace out of the box. She held it up in the air, examining it for two seconds as if it were a dead insect.

Then, she moved her hand over the bowl of rich, creamy lobster bisque sitting in front of her.

She opened her fingers.

Plop.

The fifty-thousand-dollar necklace dropped directly into the thick orange soup, sinking instantly to the bottom.

Connor leaped out of his chair. His eyes bulged in absolute horror. "What the hell are you doing?! That was my last fifty grand!"

Anissa picked up her heavy linen napkin. She slowly, elegantly wiped a tiny drop of soup from her thumb.

"Fifty thousand dollars?" Anissa repeated, her voice dripping with absolute, freezing disdain. "Connor, that wouldn't even cover the sales tax on the jewelry my husband buys me."

She reached across her body with her right hand. She grabbed the cuff of her left sleeve and slowly pulled the black fabric up her forearm.

The overhead lights hit her wrist.

The room exploded in a blinding flash of light. Wrapped around Anissa's wrist was a thick, heavy bracelet made entirely of flawless white diamonds, interwoven with massive, impossibly rare blood-red rubies. The sheer brilliance of the stones was physically painful to look at. It was the legendary 'Phoenix Wing' bracelet, the missing companion piece to the priceless Phoenix necklace Harding had already given her.

Beatrice Snow gasped loudly. She slapped both hands over her mouth. She was a former society queen; she knew exactly what she was looking at.

"That's..." Beatrice choked out, her face turning chalk white. "That's the Phoenix Wing. It vanished at the Sotheby's auction in Geneva last year. It sold for ten million dollars."

Connor stared at the rubies. His jaw went completely slack. The massive, insurmountable wall of wealth crashed down on his head, instantly crushing his delusion. Harding wasn't using Anissa. Harding was treating her like a queen. Connor's fifty-thousand-dollar sacrifice was a pathetic joke. He collapsed back into his chair, utterly defeated.

Ashlee couldn't handle it. The jealousy mutated into pure, hysterical madness.

She slammed her hands on the table and stood up, pointing a shaking finger at Anissa.

"You're lying!" Ashlee screamed, her face twisting into an ugly mask. "Harding Snow is a cold-blooded machine! He would never spend ten million dollars on a piece of trash like you! You must have found out one of his corporate secrets! You're blackmailing him!"

Anissa's eyes narrowed into dangerous slits.

She didn't argue. She didn't yell. She didn't even reach for her water glass to retaliate. Instead, Anissa raised her hand and elegantly snapped her fingers.

The heavy oak door of the private room opened instantly. The maitre d' and two massive, suited security guards stepped inside. Anissa didn't even look at Ashlee. She kept her eyes locked on Lorraine.

"This woman is having a hysterical breakdown and disturbing my meal," Anissa instructed the maitre d', her voice a symphony of absolute, chilling authority. "Have your security escort her out the back service alley. And send the bill for my ruined appetite to the Roy Group's bankruptcy lawyers."

Ashlee let out a piercing high-pitched shriek of shock as the two guards grabbed her by the arms and physically dragged her out of the room, her designer heels scraping pathetically against the mahogany floor.

Lorraine jumped up, grabbing napkins and frantically trying to reach for her daughter. "Are you insane?!" Lorraine screamed at Anissa. "She is your sister!"

Anissa stood up. She placed both hands flat on the table, leaning forward, her presence dominating the entire room.

"I am the Matriarch of the Snow Empire," Anissa said, her voice dropping to a terrifying, absolute calm. "My husband spends his money on me because I am his. And if any of you ever disrespect me again, I will drown you."

She looked at Connor, who was staring blankly at the soup bowl.

"Take your cheap sincerity," Anissa sneered, "and rot in hell."