

## Chapter 14 She'll Probably Lock Me Out Tonight

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The crystal chandelier bathed the private room in a mellow golden glow, and the delicate chime of champagne flutes cut through the low hum of conversation.

Several young men in tailored suits lounged indolently on the leather sofas, the air heavy with the mingled scent of cigars and high-end perfume.

Across the table, Luca Nash tipped his glass toward Caiden, his gaze snagging on the ring glinting on Caiden's hand. A sly grin curled his lips. "You're really still wearing that ring? What'll your sweetheart say when she spots it?"

Everyone knew Luca meant Jessica.

Heads turned instinctively toward Caiden's hand.

The diamond caught the chandelier's light, scattering sharp, cold brilliance that almost stung the eyes.

Caiden lowered his eyes briefly, exhaling smoke through his nose before speaking with dry nonchalance. "What? You think I'm about to toss out a ring worth over a million?"

The quip drew loud, rowdy laughter from the group.

"Looks to me like you're still hung up on Noreen."

Caiden dragged leisurely on his cigar, the ember burning a dull red, then let the smoke curl upward like a careless sigh. "Hung up?" he echoed softly.

A quiet chuckle slipped past his lips as he tilted his head down. "She's someone who means absolutely nothing to me."

His voice carried the same detachment one might use to discuss a forecast, cool and unbothered.

He lifted his glass, the clink of ice sharp in the heavy air. "Cheers."

The door handle slipped slightly under her grip as Noreen faltered.

Inside, golden light spilled from the chandelier, drenching the room in a warm, almost theatrical glow. Clusters of elegantly dressed guests murmured over champagne, their laughter humming beneath the music.

While she hesitated on the doorway, Jessica strode forward and pushed the door wide open.

Dozens of gazes snapped toward the entrance at once. The chatter fractured into silence as soon as Noreen came into view.

A single, drawn-out moment passed before someone finally filled the void.

"Well, look who decided to show up." Mason Watts, draped in a blindingly purple suit, lifted his glass toward her with a smirk. "Mrs. Evans—what a rare surprise."

Unruffled, Noreen held herself with quiet poise, giving Mason only a faint nod before gliding past him toward Caiden.

Caiden lounged on the sofa, idly tapping the edge of his cigarette. Ash drifted into the crystal ashtray, the faint crackle silencing Mason mid-breath.

His gaze lifted through a lazy veil of smoke, dark eyes unreadable. "What's this about?"

Noreen's voice came soft but steady. "I need to speak with you alone. Can we?"

A low laugh slipped from his throat. "Seriously? What's the matter with you? You came all the way here just to speak with me? What—home isn't good enough for you?"

Noreen's fingers curled into tight fists at her sides as frustration pricked beneath her calm mask. "I tried. But you've already made it clear you

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won't be setting foot home for the next three months."

Amusement tugged at the corner of Caiden's mouth. "And how would you know whether I've been home or not?"

Their eyes locked—hers sharp, his cool and probing

The air between them thickened, the party fading to a brittle hush. Not a soul dared to break the silence.

People in the room had always sensed the frost between Caiden and Noreen, but this was the first time they'd seen it flare so openly.

Noreen had usually swallowed her pride and smoothed over their fights, but not tonight.

Before anyone could breathe again, Jessica stepped forward in her delicate heels, her voice soft and coaxing. "Please, Caiden, go easy on her. You're being too harsh. Can't you see Noreen's about to break down?"

The remark snapped every curious gaze toward Noreen.

She stood rigid, refusing to look away from Caiden, her expression carved from quiet steel.

A faint crease formed between his brows, giving Caiden's face a sharper edge.

With a sharp flick, he crushed the cigarette into the ashtray, then rose to his feet. Grabbing his suit jacket off the back of the sofa, he said flatly, "Let's go."

Jessica froze at his sudden decision.

Panic flashed across her face as she rushed to hook her hand around his arm. "Hey, Caiden, don't get upset with Noreen. You're both worked up right now. Whatever this is, talk it through tomorrow."

Before he could respond, she pivoted toward Noreen, trying for a soothing tone. "Please, Noreen. Just go home tonight, alright?"

Noreen's tone stayed smooth, but every syllable hit like a slap. "This is between Caiden and me. If you want to have a say, wait until the divorce is final and you're wearing the ring. Until then, you're nothing more than a

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bystander."

Her blunt words drained the color from Jessica's face.

"I only meant..." Jessica stammered, her fingers tightening around Caiden's sleeve.

Noreen didn't bother to listen. Her attention slid past Jessica, settling on Caiden with quiet finality. "Are we going?"

"Caiden." Jessica reached for Caiden's hand, but he didn't so much as glance back.

Noreen had already slipped out of the private room, her figure disappearing into the hallway.

A careless smile played at the corner of Caiden's mouth. "Have fun, everyone. My wife's made it clear. If I hang around any longer, she'll probably lock me out tonight."

Luca let out a low sigh and shook his head. "You've had a few drinks. I'll take you home."

"Don't bother. My wife is here." Without waiting for another word, Caiden strode out after Noreen.

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The ride back unfolded in heavy silence, neither of them uttering a word.

Neon lights bled across the car windows in quick, fractured streaks, casting fleeting colors on their faces.

When they arrived at the mansion, Noreen stepped through the doorway first. The moment the door clicked shut behind them, she cut straight to the point. "Caiden, we need to div—"

Before the rest of her words left her lips, his hands slid around her waist, and he pressed her back against the door, holding her firmly in place.