

Chapter 5 Whose Marriage Is This, Yours Or Mine

Suppressing a weary sigh, Ivy turned to the maid and told her to bring Noreen a shawl.

"It's chilly," she said in a calm, detached tone. "Wrap yourself up. What if you catch a cold?"

Noreen offered a faint smile. "I'll be alright. This outfit's already warm enough."

In all the years she could recall, Ivy had never shown her this kind of concern. The sudden warmth felt less like comfort and more like an omen creeping in through the cracks.

Silence pooled between them.

Ivy didn't press on, and Noreen didn't probe.

Eventually, Ivy exhaled slowly, her gaze clouded with something old and heavy. "Cheryl's been gone for two years now. In all that time, you and Caiden have hardly spent a day together. If there'd been a child between you, maybe things wouldn't have unraveled like this."

Noreen kept her head slightly lowered, listening but refusing to give her thoughts away.

"I've truly been fond of you," Ivy went on softly. "I never had a daughter of my own—only Caiden. But watching him live like this... a mother can't help but ache for her son."

Her voice dipped into a low murmur. "If Cheryl hadn't interfered back then, Caiden and Jessica would've married long ago. Their child would already be calling me Grandma by now."

"Just get to the point," Noreen responded, her tone flat. She could already guess where this was heading.

Another sigh escaped Ivy. She reached out, her palm warm and deliberate as it wrapped around Noreen's hand. "You grew up in this house. Affection grows naturally when people live together. Even if I've

< Chapter 5 Whose Marriage Is This, Yours Or .. 🎁 +120 Points at most
been hard on you, it's only because I care. No matter what happens, if you choose to, you can still think of me as a mother."

Noreen quietly pulled her hand back, slipping free of Ivy's grasp. "Sorry, but I'd rather not."

From the moment Cheryl had taken her in, Ivy had never truly accepted her.

When Cheryl's health began to decline and she spent most of the year in the hospital, Noreen had been left alone in the house with Ivy.

On those nights, dinner was often a luxury. Ivy's kindness only surfaced when Cheryl was watching.

Once she turned away, Noreen might as well have been a stray tucked in the corner.

The faint softness in Ivy's expression vanished in an instant.

She pulled out a lace-edged handkerchief and scrubbed her palms, turning them over as though Noreen's touch had left something contaminating on her skin. "You've been married for three years and still haven't had a child," she said, her tone sharpening. "Do you have any idea how humiliating it is to face that question at every social gathering?"

Her gaze slid to Noreen's abdomen, a flash of contempt passing through her eyes. "If I'd known you couldn't give me grandchildren, I wouldn't have agreed to this marriage—no matter how much Cheryl insisted."

A bitter laugh escaped Noreen's throat.

During their first year together, Caiden had insisted they enjoy their time alone, and contraception had been their silent agreement.

But after Cheryl's death, something between them shifted without warning. The distance grew so wide that they hadn't even shared a bed since. Under those conditions, how could a child possibly exist?

Yet, none of that mattered to Ivy. "If you can't have children, then we'll find someone who can," she muttered coolly, her lips curving in a faint, dismissive smile. "You and Caiden never had any real feelings to begin with. The person he loves has always been Jessica. I truly like that girl—she's gentle, thoughtful, from a respectable family. She knows how to make us proud."

Her tone turned even colder. "Pick a time to divorce Caiden. I'll make sure you walk away with a decent sum. But if you insist on being stubborn,

< Chapter 5 Whose Marriage Is This, Yours Or... 🎁 +120 Points at most
don't blame me for doing things the hard way. We've known each other for years, and I'd rather not let this get ugly. We need a daughter-in-law who can actually shine in society."

Ivy's blunt words struck Noreen like a blade, leaving a sharp, breathless ache lodged beneath her ribs.

Her fingers curled into her palms, nails biting into flesh until the sting anchored her trembling composure.

She forced her voice steady. "Don't worry. I'll find the time..."

"Mom!" Caiden's voice cut through the air like a whip. Noreen's head snapped up, and she caught sight of him framed in the doorway, his expression carved from ice.

He closed the distance in a few swift strides, the crisp black suit on his tall frame accentuating the hard lines of his face. His gaze flicked across her pale features, cool and unreadable.

"Whose marriage is this—yours or mine?" His voice was low, edged with restrained fury.

"You..." Ivy faltered, the sudden pushback knocking the wind out of her.

A flash of anger twisted her lips as she let out a sharp, humorless sneer. "I'm doing this for your own good. Why can't you recognize what's best for you? Jessica's back now. Do you really expect her to linger around without a proper title?"

For you