

My Wedding, Not With You

Five years ago, I saved my fiancé' s life on a mountain in Aspen. The fall left me with a permanent vision impairment-a constant, shimmering reminder of the day I chose him over my own perfect sight. He repaid me by secretly changing our Aspen wedding to Miami because his best friend, Annmarie, complained it was too cold. I overheard him call my sacrifice "sentimental crap" and watched him buy her a fifty-thousand-dollar dress while scoffing at mine. On our wedding day, he left me waiting at the altar to rush to Annmarie' s side for a conveniently timed "panic attack." He was so sure I' d forgive him. He always was. He saw my sacrifice not as a gift, but as a contract that guaranteed my submission. So when he finally called the empty Miami venue, I let him hear the mountain wind and the chapel bells before I spoke. "My wedding is about to start," I told him. "But it' s not with you."

Protagonist:

Brooklyn Barr and Kaden Blankenship

Chapter 1

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Brooklyn Barr POV:

My fiancé changed our wedding venue from the one place on earth that meant everything to us, to Miami, because his best friend, Annmarie, said Aspen was too cold.

I stood there, hidden behind a large potted fiddle-leaf fig in the lobby of Kaden's private equity firm, and the words hit me like a physical blow. The air rushed out of my lungs, and the meticulously rendered architectural plans for the Aspen chapel, clutched in my hand, suddenly felt like a stack of worthless paper.

For five years, Aspen had been our sanctuary. It was more than just a location; it was a testament. It was the snow-dusted cliffside where I had found Kaden, his body broken and dangling from a frayed rope after a climbing move went horribly wrong. It was the place where, in the desperate, frantic scrabble to save him, a fall had left me with a chronic neurological vision impairment-a world that sometimes shimmered and blurred at the edges, a permanent reminder of the day I chose his life over my own perfect sight.

And he was trading it for Miami. For Annmarie.

I could see him through the glass wall of the conference room, leaning back in his chair, the picture of casual arrogance. His friend and colleague, Chace Harrington, a fraternity brother echo of Kaden's own privileged world, was perched on the edge of the table.

"Are you insane?" Chace asked, his voice a low murmur that I could just barely make out. "You haven't told Brooklyn?"

Kaden waved a dismissive hand, his focus on the phone he was scrolling through. "I'll tell her. She'll get over it."

"Get over it? Kaden, the woman has a binder. A binder thicker than our last quarterly report. She's been planning this Aspen thing for a year. It's... you know... her thing."

"It's a wedding, Chace, not a space launch," Kaden sighed, his voice laced with an impatience that felt like a thousand tiny cuts. "All that sentimental crap about the mountain... it's getting old. Besides, Miami is better. It's a party."

"Annmarie's party," Chace corrected, a smirk playing on his lips. "I heard she was complaining about the altitude."

"Her asthma flares up in the cold," Kaden said, his tone shifting, softening with a concern he never, ever used for me. "She needs the warm air."

"Right. Her 'asthma,'" Chace said, making air quotes. "The same asthma that didn't stop her from that yacht week in Croatia?"

"It's different."

"It's always different with Annmarie," Chace mused. "So, you're really changing everything? For her?"

"I'm not changing it for her," Kaden snapped, finally looking up from his phone, his jaw tight. "I'm changing it because Miami is more fun. It's a better vibe. Brooklyn will understand."

He said it with such casual certainty. Brooklyn will understand. It was the story of our relationship. Brooklyn, the reliable, the understanding, the one who gave and never asked. The one who saved his life and bore the scars, so he could continue living his, unimpeded.

"She's my fiancée. She loves me," Kaden continued, a self-satisfied smirk returning to his face. "She'll be happy wherever I am. That's the deal. She proved that on the mountain."

The coldness of his statement was breathtaking. He saw my sacrifice not as a gift, but as a contract. An unbreakable bond that guaranteed my submission.

A ringing sound pierced the air. Kaden's face lit up as he answered his phone, putting it on speaker.

"Kaden, darling!" Annmarie's saccharine voice filled the room, dripping with manufactured sweetness. "Did you get it?"

Chace leaned in, his eyes wide with theatrical interest.

"Of course, I got it," Kaden said, his voice a low, intimate purr that I hadn't heard him use with me in years. "It's waiting for you."

"Oh, my god, you are literally the best. I could kiss you!" she squealed. "The Valentino? The one we saw? The white one?"

My blood ran cold. The white one.

"The very one," Kaden confirmed. "Had it flown in from Paris."

"Fifty thousand dollars, Kaden! You are spoiling me rotten," she gushed. "I'll make it worth your while, I promise."

"I know you will," he murmured.

Chace let out a low whistle. "Fifty grand for a dress? Who are you marrying, Kaden, her or Brooklyn?"

Kaden laughed, a sound devoid of any real humor. "Annmarie needs to look her best. She's going to be the star of the show. You know how delicate she is."

Delicate. The word hung in the air, a cruel joke. I thought of my own wedding dress. I had found it in a small, elegant boutique, a simple A-line

of ivory silk that cost a fraction of that astronomical price. I'd sent Kaden a picture, my heart pounding with excitement.

He'd texted back a single, perfunctory word: Fine.

When it came time to pay, he'd tossed his credit card on the counter with an exasperated sigh, as if the three-thousand-dollar charge was a monumental inconvenience. He'd been on his phone the entire time, rushing me, complaining he was late for a squash game.

Fifty thousand dollars for Annmarie. Three thousand for me.

The math was simple. Devastating.

In that moment, standing behind the wilting leaves of a lobby plant, the entire five-year architecture of my life with Kaden Blankenship collapsed into a pile of rubble and dust.

The shimmering in my vision intensified, the edges of the world blurring not from neurological damage, but from the hot, silent tears that finally began to fall. He wasn't just having an emotional affair. He was building a whole new life with her, using the bricks of my love and the mortar of my sacrifice.

And I was just the foundation, buried and forgotten.