

## Chapter 10

Brooklyn Barr POV:

Chace called me every day for a week.

"You have to come see him, Brooklyn," he pleaded, his voice raw with exhaustion. "He just lies there, staring at the ceiling. He only says your name. He did this for you."

"No, Chace," I said, my patience worn thin. "He did this for himself. For his ego. You think I'm the first person he tried to manipulate with a grand, empty gesture? Ask Annmarie."

I told him not to call again. He finally stopped.

A week later, I got a text from a mutual acquaintance. It was a screenshot of Annmarie's latest Instagram story. She was in Cabo with a new man, a polo player with a vacant smile and an impressive trust fund. The caption read: "So happy to have a man who can keep up with me! #strong #healthy #goodvibesonly."

She had visited Kaden once in the hospital. She had taken one look at the man in the bed—the man with two shattered legs and a prognosis that included the words 'permanent mobility issues' and 'wheelchair-bound'—and she had walked away without a word. Her transactional interest had expired the moment he could no longer be her hero, her provider, her source of drama.

Kaden had lost everything. His body, his pride, his mistress, and the woman he finally realized he couldn't live without. He was left with nothing but the consequences of his own choices.

A year passed. The world, which had once shimmered and blurred with pain and stress, settled into a beautiful, steady clarity. My life with Joel was quiet, solid, and real. It was built not on grand gestures and life-or-death drama, but on the thousand small, daily choices to see and support one another.

We were at the hospital for one of my regular check-ups. As we walked down the corridor, I saw him.

Kaden.

He was in a motorized wheelchair, being pushed by a weary-looking aide. He was thinner, his face etched with a permanent bitterness. He saw me at the same moment I saw him. Panic flared in his eyes, and he quickly turned his head, staring intently at the wall as if fascinated by a water stain. He was hiding. The great Kaden Blankenship, the daredevil, the master of the universe, was hiding from me.

I felt nothing. No pity, no anger, no satisfaction. Just a vast, quiet emptiness where my love for him used to be.

I turned away, taking Joel's hand. A few minutes later, we were in Joel's office—he insisted on handling my check-ups himself—looking at the results of my latest scan.

"Everything is perfectly stable, Brooklyn," Joel said, his face breaking into a wide, beautiful smile. He pointed to a tiny, flickering blip on the screen of another monitor. "And it looks like our other little project is doing just fine, too."

Tears of pure joy filled my eyes as I looked at the ultrasound, at the tiny, beating heart of our baby. Our future.

As we left the hospital, hand in hand, I glanced back down the corridor. Kaden was still there, parked against the wall. He was watching us, his face a ruin of regret and envy. He saw my hand resting on my stomach. He saw the way Joel looked at me, with a love so pure and unconditional it was a physical force.

He saw the life that should have been his.

He knew, in that moment, what he had truly lost. Not just a fiancée, but a partner. Not just a history, but a future. The woman who had loved him enough to save his life was now a stranger, and her world, once built entirely around him, no longer had a space for him even in its farthest, darkest corners.

He watched until we disappeared from view, a lonely, broken man in a world of his own making, forever haunted by the ghost of a love he had destroyed.