

Chapter 7

Brooklyn Barr POV:

Hours after the ceremony, after the small, joyful reception with our handful of true friends and family, Joel and I walked back to the chapel. The sun was setting, casting a golden glow on the snow. It was peaceful. Perfect.

And then the peace was shattered.

A taxi screeched to a halt, and Kaden tumbled out. He was a wreck. His suit was rumpled, his hair was wild, and his face was blotchy and tear-stained. He stormed towards us, his eyes locking on me with a terrifying intensity.

"Brooklyn."

He grabbed my arm, his fingers digging into my skin. "You have to explain this to me. What is this? A joke? A game to make me jealous?"

Joel immediately stepped between us, his body a solid shield. "Let go of my wife."

The word 'wife' seemed to stun Kaden into silence. He dropped my arm as if he'd been burned.

"Wife?" he whispered, his eyes wide with disbelief. He looked from Joel to me, his gaze pleading. "No, Brooklyn, no. You can't. We have five years. Five years of history. Who even is this guy? Some... some glorified librarian?"

"He's my husband," I said, my voice cold and even. I stepped out from behind Joel, my fear replaced by a strange, hollow calm. The drama Kaden thrived on had no power over me anymore. "And he's a neurologist. The one who has been treating the permanent injury I sustained while saving your life."

"You cheated on me," he accused, his voice rising to a hysterical pitch.

A small, ironic smile touched my lips. "That's rich, coming from you. How is Annmarie's asthma? Did she enjoy her fifty-thousand-dollar dress?"

I saw the flicker of guilt in his eyes before it was replaced by defiance.

"That was different! I told you, she needed me!" he insisted. "And you know what? I forbid you from ever saying her name again! You're not worthy!"

I just looked at him. The man who had flaunted his mistress in my face was now trying to protect her honor from me. The absurdity was staggering.

"You're right, Kaden. I'm not worthy of saying her name," I agreed. "And I'm not worthy of being abandoned on my wedding day for her fake panic attack. I'm not worthy of having my deepest sacrifice thrown back in my face like an accusation. You're free now. You can go be with the woman you're actually worthy of."

"But I don't want her! I want you!" he cried, his voice breaking. "This was all just... a temporary thing! A stupid mistake! You're the one I love!"

"No, you don't," I said, the truth of it settling over me with absolute finality. "You love the idea of me. You love the girl who saved you, the girl who you thought would forgive you for anything. That girl is gone, Kaden. She died in a cake shop in Miami."

I started to list his transgressions, not for him, but for me. To remind myself of every cut, every betrayal.

"You forgot my doctor's appointments. You prioritized Annmarie's dog over my eyesight. You threw her a party for her half-birthday and forgot the anniversary of the day I almost died for you. You stood by and let me go into surgery to donate bone marrow for your cousin because Annmarie was 'too scared' of needles, and then you left me at the hospital, alone and in pain, because she had a headache." I took a breath. "You even sneered at me when I fainted from exhaustion a week later. You called me weak."

With every word, his face grew paler. He was finally seeing the full, ugly tapestry of his neglect.

"Why didn't you say anything?" he whispered, his voice hoarse.

"I did," I said flatly. "A hundred times. In a hundred different ways. You just called me dramatic and told me to get over it."

He had no answer.


"Tell me, Kaden," I said, my voice dropping to a near whisper. "Why did I choose this place? This mountain?"

He looked around, confused. "Because... it's pretty? Because it's a good ski resort?" He brightened, a desperate hope dawning in his eyes. "Because it's where we got engaged?"

The last ember of my old love for him died in that moment. He didn't remember. He truly did not remember. He was there, but he wasn't there.

"No, Kaden," I said, my voice devoid of all emotion. "It's because this is where I saved your life. It's the place that cost me a piece of myself to keep you whole. I thought it meant something. I thought it meant everything. I was wrong."

I turned my back on him, taking Joel's hand. "Let's go home."

As we walked away, Kaden let out a sound of pure anguish. It was the sound of a man who had just realized he'd thrown away a winning lottery ticket because he couldn't be bothered to read the numbers. 

He looked from my retreating back to the imposing, snow-covered cliff looming above us. The very cliff from the accident. And in his ruined, desperate eyes, I saw a terrible, theatrical idea being born. An idea only a narcissist could conceive.

He thought he could re-stage the past to reclaim the future.



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