

Nine Rejected Marriages, I Wed My Ex's Rival

Chapter 111:

Garrett's pupils contracted. He had expected her to be subdued, perhaps apologetic. Not this. Not this stunning, defiant masterpiece. The sight of her, so beautiful and so untouchable, only stoked the fire of his anger. Who was she trying to impress?

Amelia ignored the ice in Garrett's eyes and the contempt in Kian's. She walked calmly to the empty seat beside Garrett and sat down, offering him a polite, distant smile. "Sorry I'm late."

She was the perfect Mrs. Thornton: composed, elegant, impenetrable.

Leighton, ever the gracious observer, broke the tense silence. "Hello again, Mrs. Thornton. You look absolutely beautiful tonight."

Kian just snorted. "You can dress up a pig, but it's still a pig."

Garrett said nothing. He just watched Amelia, his eyes cold and challenging, waiting to see how she would handle the attack.

Amelia acted as if Kian hadn't spoken. She picked up her menu and turned to Leighton, her voice smooth as silk. "What looks good to you, Miss Beaumont? I hear the foie gras here is divine."

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With that one move, she had elegantly cut Kian out of the conversation, dismissing him as irrelevant.

A flicker of admiration crossed Leighton's face. She played along, and the two women began to discuss the menu, their conversation creating a bizarre pocket of civility in the otherwise hostile room.

Kian was left fuming, ignored.

Garrett watched them, a muscle twitching in his jaw. He hated being on the outside, especially when it was his wife and his oldest friend creating the barrier.

The food began to arrive. Leighton, with the casual intimacy of a lifelong friend, reached over and served Garrett a piece of steak from the platter. "Your favorite, Garrett. Medium rare. Let's see if the chef got it right."

The gesture was so natural, so practiced.

She even reached over with her napkin to dab a tiny speck of sauce from the corner of his mouth, her tone affectionate and chiding. “Still a messy eater. Some things never change.”

Amelia’s hand, which had been lifting a spoonful of soup to her lips, froze mid-air.

It was a small thing, but it felt like a physical blow. That effortless familiarity, the kind built over decades of shared history, was something she could never replicate. It was a language she didn’t speak.

For the first time, with painful clarity, she understood. She was the intruder here.

Garrett seemed to notice her stillness. He frowned and gently pushed Leighton’s hand away. “I can do it myself.”

But his next words made Amelia’s heart sink even further.

He ignored Amelia completely and looked at Leighton. “Stop fussing over me. You should eat more. You’re too thin.” His voice was gruff, but it held a warmth, a deep-seated affection that was reserved only for family.

Amelia looked down at her soup. It suddenly tasted like ashes.

She had to face the truth. In their world, a world of shared memories and unspoken understanding, she was the one who didn't belong.

For the first time, she began to seriously consider what she would do when their contract was over.

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Chapter 112:

Kian watched the exchange, a smug look on his face. He thought he saw an opening, a crack in their facade. He prepared to deliver the final blow.

Garrett's attention, despite his exchange with Leighton, had never truly left Amelia.

He saw the way she stared down at her plate, her shoulders slumped, looking small and lost. A strange, unwelcome pang of softness went through him.

On an impulse he didn't understand, he used the serving fork to place a piece of lobster from the main dish onto her plate. It was her favorite.

"Eat," he said, his voice rough.

The small gesture silenced the table.

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Amelia looked up, startled, a flicker of confusion in her eyes.

Leighton's smile remained, but her gaze sharpened.

For Kian, it was the final straw. He saw it as Garrett once again falling under her spell.

He couldn't wait any longer. He shot to his feet, his chair scraping loudly against the floor. He pointed a finger at Amelia.

"Garrett, wake up!" he shouted. "Do you really think she gives a damn about you?"

He recounted her words from the department store, embellishing them with his own outrage. "She admitted it herself! She said you were nothing but her ATM! That this was all just a 'business arrangement!'"

Garrett's face went rigid. He didn't look at Kian. His eyes were locked on Amelia, a silent, burning demand for an explanation.

Amelia's heart plummeted. She had never imagined Kian would throw her own words back at her like this, in front of everyone.

She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. What could she say? That she'd lied to protect him? They would never believe it.

Her silence was her confession. In Garrett's eyes, it was an admission of guilt.

And then, in the suffocating silence, a lifeline.

Her phone, sitting on the table, began to vibrate, the screen lighting up the tense space between them.

The name flashing on the screen made her blood run cold: Kayson Edwards.

In that moment, the call felt like a rescue.

"Excuse me," she said, her voice tight, grabbing the phone as if it were a life raft. "I have to take this."

She fled the room, the weight of their gazes like physical blows on her back.

The moment she was gone, Kian turned to Garrett, his voice triumphant. "See? What did I tell you? She's still wrapped up with him!"

Garrett's face was a thundercloud. His hand was clenched so tightly around his whiskey glass that his knuckles were white.

Leighton watched it all, a glint in her intelligent eyes. "I need to use the restroom," she announced, rising gracefully.

She didn't go to the restroom. She followed the sound of Amelia's heels down the corridor, stopping just out of sight at a corner.

Amelia was leaning against the wall, taking a deep breath before answering. Her voice was ice.

"Kayson, what do you want?"

His voice came through the phone, weak but persistent. "Amelia... why won't you see me... I was wrong..."

"Kayson, we are over," she cut him off, her voice sharp with impatience. "I'm married. I love my husband."

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Chapter 113:

She said the words again, as much for herself as for him.

He started to sob, a pathetic, broken sound, rambling about their past.

“If you contact me again,” she said, her voice devoid of any pity, “I will file for a restraining order.”

She hung up.

She leaned her head back against the cool marble wall, closing her eyes, feeling utterly drained.

Around the corner, Leighton had heard every word. Her face was a mask of complex emotions: surprise, confusion, and above all, a deep, burning curiosity.

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She didn't go back to the table right away. She pulled out her own phone and sent a quick, encrypted text to her assistant.

Amelia had just hung up the phone when a hand clamped around her wrist like a steel trap.

She gasped and spun around, her heart leaping into her throat. It was Garrett. His eyes were burning with a terrifying, uncontrolled fire. He must have followed her.

He didn't say a word. He just gripped her wrist, his fingers digging into her skin, the force of it promising to leave bruises. He dragged her back toward the private dining room.

When they re-entered, the scene was set. Kian was sitting back, a smug, expectant look on his face. Leighton had already returned to her seat, sipping her wine as if she had never left.

Garrett didn't release her. He shoved her roughly into her chair and stood over her, his large frame casting a menacing shadow.

"Do you have anything to say to me?" he bit out, the words forced through clenched teeth.

Panic seized her. How much had he heard? Had he heard her brutal rejection of Kayson, or had he only heard enough to know she was on the phone with him?

She couldn't risk it. She fell back on the only defense she had, the one she knew would hurt him the most.

"Who I speak to on the phone," she said, her voice trembling slightly, "is not covered in our contract."

It was like throwing gasoline on a bonfire.

The last thread of his control snapped.

A raw, guttural sound tore from his throat. With a violent sweep of his arm, he cleared the table. Crystal glasses, fine china, silver cutlery, everything went crashing to the floor in a deafening explosion of sound.

Wine splattered across the silk wallpaper like blood.

Kian and Leighton jumped to their feet, their faces masks of shock.

Amelia flinched back, her own face pale with terror. She had seen his anger before, but this was different. This was a complete loss of control. This was pure, destructive rage.

His chest heaved, his eyes were bloodshot. He stared at her not like a husband, but like an enemy.

He leaned down, planting his hands on the arms of her chair, trapping her. His face was inches from hers.

“Do. You. Love. Him?” he snarled, each word a separate, venomous strike.

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Chapter 114:

The smell of whiskey and fury enveloped her. She was too terrified to think, to form words. She could only shake her head, a frantic, desperate denial.

But it didn't calm him. It seemed to enrage him further. He saw it as another lie, another evasion.

Leighton, realizing the situation was spiraling into genuine danger, finally intervened. "Garrett, you're drunk. Let's call it a night."

She grabbed a stunned Kian and shot him a look. Kian, for all his bluster, looked scared. He had wanted to humiliate Amelia, not unleash a monster.

They scrambled out of the room, leaving Garrett and Amelia alone in the wreckage.

With the audience gone, Garrett's focus narrowed entirely onto her.

He looked at her terrified, tear-streaked face, and the rage in his eyes warred with a visible, heart-wrenching pain.

He straightened up. He reached into his jacket, pulled out his wallet, and extracted the sleek, black Amex card.

He tossed it into her lap. The gesture was utterly contemptuous.

Amelia stared at it, uncomprehending.

Garrett's voice was a shard of ice. "Since you're so fond of 'business arrangements,' here. Take it. Buy whatever you want."

He paused, his final words designed to shatter her completely.

“Everything except my heart. That’s not for sale.”

And with that, he turned and walked out, leaving her to break down completely amidst the ruins of their dinner and the shards of her own heart.

“My God, Leighton, did you see him?” Kian’s voice was shaky as he buckled his seatbelt. “He looked like he was going to kill her.”

The violent scene had rattled him. He was now convinced Amelia was some kind of black widow, a dangerous siren capable of driving a man like Garrett to madness.

Leighton, however, was perfectly calm as she expertly pulled the car away from the curb. Her serenity was a stark contrast to his agitation.

“Kian,” she said, her voice placid. “Do you really think Garrett lost control like that simply because Amelia is a gold-digger?”

“What else could it be?” he sputtered.

She shook her head, a small, knowing smile playing on her lips. “A man doesn’t destroy a room because his ‘ATM’ takes a call from an ex. He gets angry. He feels cheated. But Garrett’s reaction... that wasn’t anger. That was heartbreak.”

She let the silence hang for a moment before delivering her conclusion.

“He’s in love with her, Kian. Deeply.”

The idea hit Kian like a physical shock. He replayed the past few weeks in his mind: Garrett’s fierce defense of her, his constant possessiveness. It suddenly made a terrifying kind of sense.

“No way,” he argued, shaking his head. “If he loves her, why would she take Kayson’s call? Why would she say all that stuff to me?”

A sly glint appeared in Leighton’s eyes. “That’s the interesting part. I followed her. I heard the call.”

She recounted the conversation verbatim: Amelia’s cold, final rejection of Kayson, the threat of a restraining order.

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Kian was utterly bewildered. “I don’t get it. One minute she’s playing the money-grubbing whore, the next she’s cutting off her ex like he’s a stranger. What is she playing at?”

Leighton pulled up in front of Kian’s apartment building. She turned to him, her expression thoughtful, and began to weave a new, far more compelling narrative. She wasn’t going to tell him Amelia was a victim; that was too simple, too boring.

“Have you considered,” she began, her voice low and persuasive, “that she isn’t a simple gold-digger, but a master-level emotional manipulator?”

She laid out her theory. “She played the part of the bimbo for you, to make you underestimate her. She took Kayson’s call in front of Garrett to provoke him, to test his limits. And her rejection of Kayson? A classic push-pull tactic to keep him on the hook.”

“This woman,” Leighton concluded, her eyes gleaming, “is playing a game with all of us. She’s enjoying having two of the most powerful men in the city wrapped around her little finger.”

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The theory was brilliant. It was dramatic, complex, and it fed directly into Kian’s love for intrigue.

His eyes lit up. Amelia wasn’t just a cheap con artist; she was a worthy adversary. He felt a surge of purpose.

“That psycho,” he breathed, clenching his fists. “I have to expose her. I have to save Garrett from her.”

Leighton smiled, satisfied. She had successfully turned her pawn from a bumbling gossip into a man on a mission.

After Kian got out of the car, her smile faded. She knew her theory had holes, but she didn’t care. Amelia Frye was a puzzle box, and she intended to enjoy peeling back every single layer.

Back at the penthouse, Garrett had returned. He didn't go to the master bedroom. He went into the guest room and closed the door.

Amelia had sat alone in the ruined dining room for what felt like hours before the club manager had politely asked her to leave. The bill had been settled.

When she got home, the closed guest room door was a clear message. He didn't want to see her.

She stood outside it, her hand raised to knock, but she let it fall. What could she say? How could she explain without revealing the threat against him?

She retreated to the master bedroom and spent a long, cold night curled up with Mochi.

The next morning, Garrett was gone.

But he had left something for her on the dining table. It was a document.

A supplemental agreement to their prenuptial contract. It was written in cold, unforgiving legalese, outlining the "duties" of Mrs. Thornton in public and private, including a clause forbidding any and all contact with "certain specified individuals."

At the bottom, in stark black ink, was Garrett's sharp, angry signature.

He had taken her at her word. He had locked their relationship down, turning it into nothing more than a cold, cruel contract.

The following days at the penthouse were colder than a Siberian winter.

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Garrett adhered strictly to the new terms. He slept in the guest room. They had zero direct communication. Any necessary information was relayed through Mrs. Ingram, who moved about the apartment with a pained, worried expression.

Amelia signed the humiliating document. It felt like a confession, a penance for a crime she hadn't committed. It was the price for her "betrayal."

She tried to play her part. She sat with him at breakfast each morning, a fake, brittle smile on her face. He ignored her completely, his attention fixed on his tablet, his presence a wall of ice.

One evening, Amelia worked late at her studio, putting off the moment she would have to return to the frigid apartment.

When she finally let herself in, she went to the kitchen for a glass of water and froze. Garrett was there. He was standing at the island in a black silk robe, his back to her, chopping lemons.

The sound of the knife hitting the cutting board was unnaturally loud, each slice a dull, angry thud.

She started to back away, but his voice, cold and sharp, stopped her. "Stay."

She froze, her back still to him.

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He didn't turn around. He just kept chopping, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "What's the matter, Mrs. Thornton? Unwilling to perform the 'companionship' duties outlined in your contract?"

Her hands clenched into fists, her nails digging into her palms. She turned to face him, her own expression a matching mask of ice. "My apologies, Mr. Thornton. Am I required to stand here until you are satisfied?"

Her retort, the mimicking of his cold formality, was the spark that lit the fuse. He brought the knife down hard. The blade, slick with lemon juice, glanced off the board.

It slid across the back of his left hand, opening a deep, clean gash.

Dark red blood welled up instantly, dripping onto the white marble countertop. Startlingly bright.

He stared at it, his expression blank, as if the hand belonged to someone else.

A strangled scream escaped Amelia's lips. In that instant, every wall she had built, all the coldness, all the pretense, crumbled to dust. She lunged forward.

She grabbed his hand, the sight of the deep, bleeding wound sending a fresh wave of tears to her eyes. “Are you insane?” she cried, her voice breaking.

Her panic, her tears, they were utterly, transparently real.

Garrett looked at her, at the genuine terror on her face, and the glacier in his chest began to crack. But what rushed in to fill the void was a raw, desperate wave of emotion that was even more dangerous.

He yanked his hand back, splattering a few drops of blood across her cheek.

He grabbed her by the shoulders, backing her up against the hard edge of the island, his eyes red-rimmed and wild. “What’s this? Concerned now? Is this part of the performance too, Miss Frye?”

She shook her head, sobbing, trying to reach for the first-aid kit, but he held her fast.

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Her tears, her frantic struggle to help him, were the things that finally broke him. He couldn't take the torment anymore. He had to know. He had to know if any part of her was his.

He lowered his head and crushed his mouth to hers.

The kiss was not gentle. It was a punishment. It was a desperate, starving claiming. He bit at her lip, tasting her tears and his own blood, trying to devour her, to brand her soul with his own pain and possession.

She struggled for a moment, but the raw agony in his kiss, the sheer, overwhelming force of his need, melted her resistance.

She kissed him back.

She met his desperation with her own, her hands coming up to clutch his hair, pulling him closer. It was a kiss of blood and tears and shared misery, a brutal confirmation of a desire that had become too painful to bear.

In the living room, her phone, forgotten on the sofa, lit up with an incoming call from Kayson. But this time, there was no one to answer it.

Garrett broke the kiss only to lift her into his arms. He strode from the kitchen, across the living room, and kicked open the door to the master bedroom, the one that had separated them for days, shattering the cold peace between them forever.

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Sunlight streamed through the floor-to-ceiling windows, painting stripes of gold across the rumpled sheets. Amelia woke slowly, wrapped in Garrett's arms.

Every muscle in her body ached, a dull, pleasant soreness that brought a hot blush to her cheeks as memories of the night before flooded her mind.

She risked a glance at him. He was still asleep, the hard lines of his face softened, the perpetual frown between his brows smoothed away. He looked younger, almost peaceful.

His left hand, resting on her waist, was wrapped in a thick, slightly clumsy bandage. She had gotten up in the middle of the night, after he'd finally fallen into an exhausted sleep, and tended to the cut herself.

A complicated mix of tenderness, relief, and anxiety churned inside her. Had last night been a truce? A reconciliation? Or just a temporary cease-fire before the next storm?

As if sensing her gaze, his eyelashes fluttered. He opened his eyes.

They stared at each other in the quiet morning light, the air thick with a new, fragile awkwardness. His eyes were dark and unreadable.

He was the first to speak, his voice a low, gravelly rasp. "Good morning, Mrs. Thornton."

The title, which had been a weapon just days before, now sounded different. It was possessive, intimate.

Her heart skipped a beat. "Good morning," she whispered back.

Miles away, at the Carlisle estate, the atmosphere was one of triumphant relief.

Richard Carlisle was looking at a document, a genuine smile on his face for the first time in weeks. He looked at Kamila with something approaching admiration. “You did well, Kamila. The Thornton lawyers officially withdrew the lawsuit against your mother yesterday.”

Kristen was ecstatic, grabbing Kamila’s hand. “Oh, my darling girl, you’re mommy’s little savior!”

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Chapter 118:

Kamila offered a modest, gentle smile. “I just did what I had to do. We’re a family.” Inside, she was glowing. She had used the crisis to cement her value, to make herself indispensable.

She decided to press her advantage. “Mother,” she said, her voice soft and concerned. “Now that this is over, I think I should go see Kayson. I hear he’s still very ill.”

Kristen, now putty in her hands, agreed instantly. “Of course, you must! You’re his fiancée! You’re a thousand times more compassionate than that ungrateful Amelia. You deserve the best.”

Kamila had what she wanted: a mandate. But she wasn’t rushing to the hospital.

She went to her room, took out her phone, and began to compose a message. Her tone was no longer threatening. It was a masterful performance of reason, of reluctant duty, of putting on a brave face.

She sent the text to Amelia.

“Sister, I know you don’t want to see me. But Kayson, he’s refusing treatment. He won’t see me. He says he just wants to see you one last time, to hear you say goodbye in person, before he can let go and move on.”

“Please. Do it for me. So that he and I can have a chance at a new beginning. Come to the hospital. The three of us can finally put everything behind us.”

“Two o’clock this afternoon. City General, VIP wing. Kayson and I will be waiting for you.”

The message was a work of art, a perfect moral trap. If Amelia refused, she would be the cruel woman standing in the way of a dying man’s peace and a young couple’s future happiness.

Back at the penthouse, Amelia had just finished a quiet, surprisingly peaceful breakfast with Garrett.

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Before he left for work, he had hesitated at the door, then walked back to her. He leaned down and pressed a soft, brief kiss to her forehead.

“Wait for me for dinner tonight,” he murmured.

The simple gesture, the promise of a shared meal, felt like a new beginning. It left her feeling light and hopeful all morning.

She thought, foolishly, that their relationship was finally on the right track.

Then she saw the text from Kamila.

The text message glowed on the screen, a perfect moral trap.

Amelia's fingers went cold. The warmth from Garrett's morning kiss, the fragile hope she'd been nursing all day, evaporated like mist.

The phone felt heavy in her hand, a small, ticking bomb.

Meanwhile, at City General Hospital, Kayson Edwards was recovering from his injuries and would soon be discharged. Yet, a heavy gloom hung over him. During his hospitalization, he had been constantly depressed. His father, Marcus, hadn't visited him once, and his grandmother, Evelyn Edwards, had only come when he was comatose.

With the engagement annulled, he was completely alone. Sunlight streamed into the VIP ward, but as Kayson stared at the golden rays, his heart was filled with an overwhelming desolation.

In the past, Amelia would always be by his side at this hour. Now, the empty room was a stark reminder that everything was gone and could never go back.

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Chapter 119:

Kamila Carlisle walked in, carrying a container of freshly cut fruit. As she reached out to touch him, she used too much force, making him wince in pain.

Kayson withdrew his hand, his expression cold and distant. Deep down, he couldn't help but compare her clumsiness to Amelia, who had never been so reckless with him.

Sensing his mood, Kamila tentatively brought up Marcus, noting that their engagement was now officially annulled. She was trying to gauge Kayson's true feelings.

Kayson, looking pale and gaunt, his eyes empty, turned to her. "Is everyone just hoping I break the engagement with Amelia?" he asked, his voice hollow.

Kamila offered a defense. "Kay, your repeated broken promises are proof enough that you didn't really want to marry her."

A sudden, oppressive weight entered Kayson's tone as he retorted, "If I had no intention of marrying her, I wouldn't have made nine appointments to register at City Hall."

Kamila lowered her voice, piercing his delusion. "But out of those nine times, you didn't show up to a single one."

The car pulled up to the VIP entrance of the hospital. The moment hospital security spotted Amelia arriving, they reported it immediately. Kian Sinclair, currently lounging at a racing club, saw the secretly taken photos and instantly forwarded them to Garrett Thornton, informing him that his wife was visiting her ex-boyfriend.

The corridor was unnervingly quiet, the silence amplifying the sound of her heels clicking on the polished floor. Amelia suddenly noticed a camera flash behind her. She paused and glanced around the empty hallway, but seeing no one, she dismissed it and continued walking.

She found Kayson's room. The door was slightly ajar.

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She raised her hand to knock, to get this over with.

But a hoarse, low voice from within froze her in place.

“...The reason I missed those nine appointments,” Kayson’s voice drifted out, “is because Kamila is more important to me than...”

“Kay, you don’t have to say it,” Kamila interrupted softly, timing her words perfectly to cut off his unfinished sentence, ensuring Amelia heard this incredibly hurtful declaration in its entirety.

The difference between knowing the truth and hearing it firsthand was a chasm of pain. A wave of profound disappointment, self-mockery, and utter heartbreak washed over Amelia.

The carefully constructed reason she had built for herself, to get closure, to make a clean break, shattered into a million pieces. It was a joke. She was a fool.

She lowered her raised hand, her fingers numb. She didn’t take a single step into the room.

She didn’t knock.

She turned on her heel and walked away. The sharp, resolute sound of her heels echoed down the silent corridor.

Inside the room, Kayson instantly froze. He heard the footsteps and realized who it was. Amelia had been there. And she had left.

“Amelia!”

Ignoring his injuries, he ripped the IV needle from the back of his hand. Ignoring the bloom of blood, he threw off the blankets and scrambled out of bed to give chase.

“Kay, wait!” Kamila cried, trying to block his path.

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