

Nine Rejected Marriages, I Wed My Ex's Rival

Chapter 15:

In the car, the city lights streaked past in a blur of red and gold. Kayson forced himself to take a breath, trying to regain some semblance of control. He dialed Amelia's number again and again. Each time, the call went straight to the cold, impersonal voicemail.

The feeling of powerlessness was a venom in his veins. She had always been within his reach, a constant in his life. Now, for the first time, she was a ghost.

Meanwhile, in the back of a custom Maybach, Amelia could feel the weight of the emerald ring on her finger, heavy as a stone. It felt like it was burning her skin.

The moment she was back in the car, she started to pull it off.

Garrett's hand shot out, covering hers, stopping the motion. His voice was low and commanding. "Leave it on. My mother doesn't give gifts she expects to be returned."

He paused, his gaze intense. "Besides," he added, his tone hardening slightly, "you need a clear symbol that you're a married woman now."

Amelia's fingers curled under his hand. She didn't argue. He was right. The ring was a shield.

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Her purse vibrated. A call from an unknown number. She ignored it.

Garrett glanced at the phone screen, which she'd left on the console. "That's one of Kayson Edwards' private numbers," he said casually.

Amelia's blood ran cold. Of course he knew. He knew everything.

The phone rang again. And again. The persistent buzzing grated on her nerves. With a sharp, frustrated sigh, she grabbed the phone and powered it off.

A slow, satisfied smile spread across Garrett's face.

Kayson's taxi pulled up in front of Amelia's apartment building. He hurried inside, fully assuming that Amelia was currently indoors.

As he rode the elevator up, his mind raced. He was convinced she was just throwing a fit. All he needed to do was appease her a little, say a few soft words, and they would make up like they always did.

He strode to her apartment door and pressed his thumb against the fingerprint scanner on the lock. He had installed it himself. His print was registered as the primary user.

Nothing happened. The lock flashed a warning. Frowning, Kayson pressed his thumb down again. And again.

A continuous string of errors beeped loudly in the quiet hallway. After several consecutive failed attempts, a small screen above the scanner lit up.

Two words flashed in stark, digital red.

“ACCESS DENIED. SYSTEM LOCKED FOR 5 MINUTES.”

He stood frozen outside the door, staring at the flashing red light, completely stunned.

After dinner, Amelia and Eleanor had chatted for so long that Garrett eventually had to feign exhaustion just to extract them from Eleanor’s house.

In the car, Amelia couldn't help but sigh in relief. "Your stepmother is incredibly warm and kind," she admitted, looking out the window. "It's completely different from what I expected." Then a sudden realization hit her, she was getting too close to her fake husband's family. That was dangerous territory for a contract marriage.

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Chapter 16:

Still, the comfortable atmosphere made her candid. "To be honest, I thought you were an illegitimate child. I assumed Eleanor would be resentful, that she'd mistreat you and make things difficult for me by extension. I had practically braced myself for a night of dodging insults."

Garrett chuckled, steering the car smoothly. "Eleanor is my father's second wife. She's open-minded and gracious, nothing like Kristen Carlisle's rigid and mean-spirited nature." He cast a sideways glance at her, his tone teasing. "Though, considering you were

supposed to help Kayson Edwards take me down, I would have thought you'd thoroughly investigated my background by now."

Amelia felt a sharp pang of guilt. She had never investigated Garrett. Her only contribution to Kayson's rivalry had been blindly cursing Garrett's name whenever Kayson was frustrated.

The car pulled back into Garrett's residence at The Elysian Towers.

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As soon as the door opened, the smart lighting throughout the apartment flickered to life automatically. A pair of new fluffy slippers had been laid out waiting for her by the entrance.

Amelia's gaze fell to the emerald ring on her finger. It glowed under the soft lights of the foyer, a beautiful, heavy lie.

Something soft and furry brushed against her ankle.

Amelia gasped, her heart leaping into her throat. She looked down.

A pair of wide, sapphire-blue eyes stared up at her. A stunningly beautiful Ragdoll cat, all white fur with delicate light gray tips on its ears and tail, was winding itself around her legs, a low purr vibrating from its chest.

The tension in Amelia's body dissolved in an instant. She sank to her knees, and the cat immediately padded forward, rubbing its head against her outstretched hand.

Her heart melted. She gently scooped the cat into her arms. It was surprisingly heavy, a warm, purring weight against her chest. It felt like coming home.

"Oh, you are just precious," she cooed, burying her face in its soft fur. The cat seemed to love her instantly, nuzzling affectionately against her neck.

"It seems Mochi approves of you."

Garrett's voice, low and amused, startled her. He was leaning against the doorway of what looked like a study, watching them. He had changed out of his suit into a simple grey cashmere sweater and dark trousers. The casual clothes made him look younger, less like a corporate raider and more like... a man. In his home.

However, as he saw the cat practically melting into Amelia's embrace, a flicker of unmistakable jealousy crossed his face. His eyes narrowed slightly at the furball.

Sensing the sudden shift in the man's mood, Mochi's ears twitched. The cat scrambled out of Amelia's arms in a panic and darted down the hallway.

“Oh, wait!” Amelia started to go after it.

Garrett caught her arm, his grip firm but gentle. “Change your shoes first,” he instructed, nodding toward the slippers.

Amelia felt a blush creep up her neck as she slipped on the soft shoes. “He’s yours?”

Garrett walked toward her, his movements fluid and relaxed. “Mochi,” he murmured, his eyes glinting at Amelia. “Say hello to the real master of the house.”

Amelia’s blush deepened.

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Chapter 17:

He watched her, his expression softening as he saw the genuine, unguarded affection she had for the animal. As they moved into the living area, Amelia couldn't help but open up.

"I've always loved cats," she confessed, her voice tinged with a lingering sadness. "But I was never allowed to have one. Kristen absolutely despised animal hair, and Kayson claimed he had severe rhinitis, so it was always out of the question."

She paused, a bitter smile touching her lips. "My best friend, Tatum, has a Ragdoll too. I used to go over just to pet it. But one day, I came home with some cat hair on my clothes. Kayson noticed."

Her voice dropped, the memory still stinging. "He was furious. He mocked me, comparing me to Kamila, saying how elegant and mature she was while I was just a messy, childish distraction. We had a massive fight."

Garrett stopped walking, his jaw tightening as he listened.

“He gave me the silent treatment for half a month,” Amelia finished quietly, staring at her hands. “In the end, I was the one who broke. I apologized and promised never to go to Tatum’s house again, just to make peace.”

Garrett looked at the woman in front of him, her face glowing with a soft sadness as she recalled the past, and felt a surge of cold, hard contempt for Kayson Edwards. He had taken this small, simple joy from her and crushed it, simply because he could.

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Amelia was unaware of the thoughts racing through his head. The confrontation with Kayson had drained her, leaving her emotionally raw. The unexpected comfort of the cat and her sudden confession had lowered her defenses, and memories she had long buried began to surface.

The memory of Kayson’s cold words, the sting of his casual cruelty. She rubbed her arms, suddenly feeling chilled.

Garrett noticed the flicker of pain in her eyes, the momentary shadow that crossed her face. He walked over to the bar and poured her a glass of warm water, placing it gently into her hands.

“Drink this,” he said softly, his gaze deep and steady. “You’re my wife, Amelia. You don’t have to walk on eggshells around anyone anymore.”

His words were a comforting anchor. A promise of protection, yet still a gentle reminder of their arrangement.

Amelia took a sip, the warmth spreading through her chest. She pulled out her phone, the screen lighting up. Her thumb hovered over her contacts. She scrolled past the lingering names from her past and found Garrett's number.

After a moment's hesitation, she tapped on his profile. She deleted the formal, distant "Garrett Thornton" she had originally saved him as, and simply typed in "Garrett." Then, feeling a flutter in her chest, she pinned his contact to the very top of her list. It was a quiet acknowledgment of the shift between them, a step closer, a silent admission that he was now the most important presence in her new life.

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Chapter 18:

Later that evening, after a long, hot shower, she walked over to the jewelry box on her new dresser. She looked at the emerald ring, its green fire seeming to mock her.

With a decisive movement, she slid it off her finger and placed it carefully inside the velvet-lined box.

She needed to remember what was real and what was part of the performance.

Across the room, in the shadows of the doorway, Garrett watched her. His expression was unreadable, but as the lid of the jewelry box clicked shut, his eyes darkened.

Garrett didn't move from the doorway. He watched as Amelia closed the lid on the jewelry box, the soft click echoing in the silent bedroom.

He pushed himself off the doorframe and walked toward the wet bar, the picture of casual indifference. He picked up a heavy crystal tumbler, swirling the amber liquid inside. The ice clinked softly against the glass.

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The air grew thick, charged with a dangerous quiet. Amelia could feel the shift in his mood as if it were a drop in temperature.

She decided to face it head-on. Her voice was a little dry. “That ring... it wasn’t part of our agreement.”

Garrett turned, leaning back against the bar. He raised the glass to his lips, his eyes, dark and intense, fixed on her over the rim. “And what, exactly, do you think our agreement is?”

He set the glass down with a soft thud and began to walk toward her. Each step was slow, deliberate, predatory.

Amelia’s instinct screamed at her to run, but she stood her ground, her heart hammering against her ribs. She took an involuntary step back. And another.

Her back hit the cool, unyielding wall of the bedroom. She was trapped.

Garrett didn’t stop. He came to a halt just inches from her, placing one hand on the wall beside her head, caging her in. The scent of whiskey and something uniquely his, clean, masculine, and expensive, enveloped her.

He leaned in, his body a wall of heat. His breath fanned across her cheek as he spoke, his voice a low, rough murmur. “Our agreement is far more complicated than a piece of paper, Amelia. You’re testing my boundaries. And I’m... curious about yours.”

His face was so close she could see the flecks of gold in his deep blue eyes. She could see her own reflection in them, small, trapped, and wide-eyed. Her pulse was a frantic drum in her ears.

She bit down on her lower lip, a nervous, reflexive action.

Garrett's gaze dropped to her mouth. He watched the way her teeth sank into the soft flesh of her lip, turning it a shade darker. A muscle in his jaw tightened. His throat moved as he swallowed.

He was going to kiss her. She knew it. And the most terrifying part was, she wasn't sure if she wanted to stop him.

Just as he lowered his head, the shrill, piercing ring of her new phone shattered the moment.

The sound was like a bucket of ice water, dousing the heated tension in an instant.

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Chapter 19:

Amelia used the interruption to duck under his arm, her body trembling as she scrambled for the phone on the nightstand.

Meanwhile, Kayson had been pacing in the cold outside her old building for nearly an hour, a cigarette burning down between his fingers. He couldn't accept it. He couldn't accept being locked out.

He ordered Leo, "Get me in that building. I don't care how."

"Sir, that's breaking and entering," Leo warned, his voice shaking.

Kayson whirled on him, his face a mask of fury, and kicked the side of his own car, leaving a deep dent in the door. "That was my home!" he roared.

Losing the last of his reason, he found a service entrance, bypassed the dozing security guard, and took the stairs. He used a crowbar he kept in his trunk for emergencies to pry open the lock on Amelia's apartment door.

The building's security system shrieked to life, a deafening alarm echoing through the hallway.

Security guards rushed up the stairs, but Kayson shoved them aside. The lobby concierge, a man who had taken countless tips from Kayson over the years, recognized him and didn't know what to do.

Torn between a furious ex-tenant and the blaring alarm, the manager made a desperate choice. He dialed the new contact number Amelia had left for emergencies.

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Amelia's hand was shaking as she answered the phone. "Hello?"

The manager's panicked voice flooded the line. "Ms. Frye, I'm so sorry to bother you, but Mr. Edwards is here... He broke into your apartment and triggered the alarm."

The last of the heat from Garrett's proximity vanished, replaced by an icy dread.

“Call the police,” she said, her voice flat and cold. “Tell them it’s trespassing.”

“Ms. Frye, please...” the manager begged, his voice cracking. “He’s Kayson Edwards. Please, for my sake, can you just come and handle this?”

Amelia closed her eyes, a wave of exhaustion washing over her. She knew Kayson. If the police came, he would make an even bigger scene. It would be in the papers by morning. Her new life would be tainted before it had even begun.

She opened her eyes, her decision made. “I’m on my way. Give me twenty minutes.”

She hung up and turned to face Garrett. His expression was calm again, the predator safely back in its cage. But his eyes were still dark, watchful.

“I have to go back,” she said, her voice tight with a mixture of apology and resolve. “I need to end this. For good.”

Garrett simply nodded. He walked to the closet and retrieved her coat, holding it open for her. “Do you need me to take you?”

She shook her head, slipping her arms into the sleeves. “No. This is something I have to do alone.”

She turned and walked out of the apartment without another word, leaving him standing alone in the center of the vast, silent room, his eyes following her until she was gone.

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Chapter 20:

The taxi ride back to her old life felt like a journey into the past. The concierge and two nervous-looking security guards were waiting for her in the lobby, their faces etched with relief and anxiety.

“He’s still up there, Ms. Frye,” the manager whispered, wringing his hands. “He won’t listen to us.”

Amelia's face was a cold, emotionless mask. "Give me the master key," she commanded, her voice leaving no room for argument. "Have your men wait by the elevator on this floor. If you hear anything that sounds like a struggle, you call 911 immediately. Do you understand?"

The manager nodded, quickly handing over the key.

She rode the elevator up in silence, her reflection in the polished steel doors looking back at her like a stranger. Hardened. Unflinching.

She reached her floor. The apartment door was ajar, the wood around the lock splintered and damaged. She pushed the door open easily. Right in the entryway sat Kayson's luggage.

For the past nine years, Amelia had poured her heart into taking care of his daily life, packing his bags, ironing his clothes, finding joy in every mundane chore.

But now, with her love entirely dissipated, the violently destroyed lock and his discarded luggage only filled her with utter disgust.

She steadied her breathing and walked inside. Instead of sitting on the sofa waiting for her, Kayson was standing near the bathroom, loosening his tie with an irritated expression as he searched for a washcloth. He acted as if picking the lock had never happened.

He looked up as she entered, his brow furrowing. “Where did you put my things? You’re hiding my stuff and wasting money on a hotel just to prove a point?” he accused, his tone dripping with impatience.

His nonchalant, entitled attitude completely infuriated Amelia. Tonight was supposed to be her wedding night with Garrett, yet it had been disrupted by Kayson’s trespassing.

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Comparing the two men in her mind, she finally saw Kayson for what he truly was: full of arrogant entitlement. The noble, aloof charm that had once captivated her now seemed entirely tiresome and hollow.

Amelia ignored his complaints. She walked to the center of the room, the space feeling hollow and empty now that her things were gone. She turned to face him, her posture ramrod straight.

She reached into her handbag and pulled out a small, navy blue velvet box. She didn’t open it. She tossed it onto the coffee table in front of him. It landed with a soft, final thud.

Kayson glanced at the box. He knew that box.

Amelia’s voice was as cold and sharp as broken glass. “I came back to make a few things perfectly clear, Kayson. First: the engagement is cancelled. We are breaking up. That ring is yours again.”

She paused, letting the words sink in. “Second: your personal items have already been packed and sent back to the Edwards family. I will also be withdrawing my shares from your company, so there will be no financial ties between us whatsoever.”

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