

Nine Rejected Marriages, I Wed My Ex's Rival

Chapter 51:

Amelia's instincts urged her to stay right where she was. She watched him approach, her pulse quickening with a sweet, nervous anticipation. She held her ground, feeling completely safe as he stopped directly in front of her.

He stood close enough to offer his warmth, his presence a comforting shield rather than a cage. He reached out, his hand resting lightly on the wall beside her, his body radiating a steady, protective heat. The scent of him—whiskey and expensive cologne—filled her senses, overwhelming her in the best way possible.

He leaned down, his voice a low, gentle murmur. "Are you worried about him? Or are you worried about me?"

The gentle weight of his attention made her breath hitch. She bit her lip, shaking her head mildly. "I just think... it wasn't necessary to ruin a friendship over me."

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“Not necessary?” He let out a soft sigh, offering a faint, reassuring smile. “He insulted my wife in my home, Amelia. Defending you will always be necessary.”

A soft tremor went through her, her heart melting at his words. “But we’re... it’s a contract,” she whispered, the words feeling flimsy and entirely irrelevant even as she said them.

His fingers gently cupped her cheek, his thumb brushing her skin with exquisite care. “A contract?” he repeated, his voice smooth and incredibly soft. “Amelia, did you forget whose names are on that marriage certificate?”

His thumb stroked the soft skin of her jaw. “Even if it started as a contract, it is a marriage. Legally, and in the eyes of the world, you are my wife.”

His voice dropped lower, each word a soothing balm on her soul. “Which means protecting you is not just my right. It is my privilege. My promise to you.”

She was stunned into silence. She had never imagined he saw their arrangement this way. She stared into his eyes, so close she could see the flecks of gold in the dark blue depths. She saw sincerity, she saw a deep, unwavering protectiveness, and she saw an undeniable affection that made her breath catch.

His voice softened, becoming a low, hypnotic murmur. “You never have to face these things alone anymore. Just let me protect you. Do you understand?”

Her heart fluttered, its rhythm a joyful dance. This feeling—of being so genuinely chosen, so tenderly protected—was something she had craved her entire life.

Kayson had always told her to be “understanding,” to “see the bigger picture.” This man was willing to stand against anyone to keep her safe.

Without hesitation, guided by a blossoming affection, she found herself nodding.

A gentle smile lit his eyes. He let his hand slide from her cheek to rest warmly on her shoulder, keeping her close.

He lowered his head until his forehead rested against hers. Their breaths mingled in the small space between them.

“Stop sleeping in the guest room, Amelia,” he whispered.

It wasn’t a demand. It was a heartfelt invitation.

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Chapter 52:

Her heart skipped a beat. She thought of his rumored intimacy issues, yet here he was, bridging the gap between them. It wasn't just about appearances anymore. He wanted her close, and truthfully, she wanted to be close to him. To understand him. Maybe even... to heal him.

And if she were in the master bedroom... she could truly be his partner.

Driven by a tangled mess of warmth, growing trust, and a quiet, hopeful longing, she gave a soft, willing nod.

A slow, genuinely happy smile finally touched Garrett's lips.

He straightened up and took her hand. His palm was large and warm, enveloping her smaller, colder one.

She didn't pull away.

She let him lead her, in silence, down the hallway and into the master bedroom. Into his world.

The king-sized bed felt like a vast, empty continent.

Amelia lay on the absolute farthest edge, her body as stiff as a board. She had wrapped the duvet around herself so tightly she felt like she was in a cocoon, a flimsy barrier against the man lying just a few feet away.

The silence was deafening, broken only by the sound of her own ragged breathing.

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She heard the rustle of sheets as he turned over.

"Relax." Garrett's voice came out of the darkness, low and rumbling. "I'm not going to do anything to you."

His reassurance had the opposite effect. It only made her more tense. In her mind, it wasn't a promise; it was a confirmation of his struggle. He was actively restraining himself, fighting his own demons.

Sometime in the dead of night, sleep finally claimed her. She fell into a restless dream, a confusing chase through dark, winding corridors. She was running from something, and in her sleep, her body sought comfort, an anchor.

Her hand reached out, searching for warmth, and closed around what her dreaming mind registered as a pillow.

It wasn't a pillow.

It was Garrett.

Garrett was jolted awake by a small hand moving across his chest. He felt delicate fingers fumbling with the silk of his pajama top, accidentally catching and pulling the tie of his robe.

The knot came undone. The robe fell open.

Amelia's hand, warm and soft, came to rest directly on the bare, hot skin of his chest.

His entire body went rigid. Every muscle locked. Sleep vanished, replaced by a jolt of pure, unadulterated lust that shot straight to his groin.

He gritted his teeth, his breath catching in his throat.

He looked down. In the dim light filtering through the window, he could see her. She was curled against his side like a kitten, her face peaceful, her breathing deep and even. She was completely oblivious.

His throat was sandpaper. He fought a war with himself, a brutal, silent battle between his baser instincts and the desperate need not to frighten her.

He lost. Or maybe he won.

With painstaking slowness, he gently lifted her hand from his chest, disentangled himself from her unconscious embrace, and slipped out of bed.

He practically fled to the bathroom.

The next morning, Amelia woke up alone. She was sprawled in the middle of the massive bed. The duvet was half on the floor.

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Chapter 53:

She sat up, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. Her gaze fell on a chair in the corner. Garrett's dark silk robe was tossed over it, the belt undone, hanging loosely.

She had no memory of how she'd ended up in the center of the bed. But the sight of the robe sent her imagination into overdrive.

She must have done something in her sleep. Touched him. Gotten too close. It must have triggered his condition, sent him into a panic. He'd had to escape from his own bed.

The bathroom door opened, and Garrett emerged. He had dark circles under his eyes, and his hair was damp. He looked exhausted, as though he had just splashed his face with cold water.

His eyes met hers for a fraction of a second before he looked away, a flicker of something she interpreted as pained embarrassment in his gaze. He turned abruptly and disappeared into the walk-in closet, his movements stiff and hurried.

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It was all the proof she needed.

He was repulsed by physical contact.

A wave of guilt washed over her. She felt terrible. She had to be more careful, even in her sleep.

The atmosphere at breakfast was excruciating. Mrs. Ingram, seeing Garrett's tired eyes and the tense silence between them, beamed. She clearly assumed they were just a typical pair of newlyweds, exhausted from a night of passion. Her knowing winks and cheerful comments made Amelia want to crawl under the table.

Garrett, suffering from a night of zero sleep and frustrated desire, was sullen and quiet. To Amelia, his dark mood was just another symptom of his unstable condition.

They rode the private elevator down to the parking garage in suffocating silence.

Halfway down, the elevator gave a sudden, sharp jolt. It dropped a few inches with a sickening lurch before catching itself.

Amelia cried out, a small gasp of fear. She lost her balance, her arms flailing. Her hand shot out, her fingers closing instinctively around the closest solid object.

Garrett's arm.

Her nails dug into the hard muscle of his bicep as she clung to him for support.

His body went completely still. He looked down at her hand, clamped onto his arm like a vice.

The reality of what she was doing crashed down on her. She was touching him. Triggering him.

She snatched her hand back as if she'd been burned. She scrambled away, pressing herself against the far wall of the elevator.

“I’m sorry!” she blurted out, her voice high with panic. “I didn’t mean to!”

Her frantic apology, her look of sheer terror, her desperate retreat...

To Garrett, it could only mean one thing.

She was disgusted by him. The thought of touching him, even by accident, horrified her.

The temperature in the small, enclosed space plummeted.

Garrett’s face, already strained from a sleepless night, became a mask of cold, hard fury.

For three days, Kayson parked his car across the street from Amelia’s old office building. He sat there for hours, watching, waiting.

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Chapter 54:

He was convinced it was all a matter of time. She was just having a tantrum. Soon the drama would be over, and she would come back to her job, back to her life. Back to him.

On the fourth morning, a sleek, gunmetal-gray Maybach he'd never seen before pulled up to the curb.

His heart gave a painful lurch.

The rear door opened, and Amelia stepped out.

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She looked different. She was wearing a sharp, cream-colored pantsuit, her hair pulled back in a sleek, professional style. She looked powerful.

Kayson's hand was on the door handle, ready to get out, to confront her, to end this stupid game.

But then the driver's side door opened.

Garrett Thornton emerged.

He walked around the front of the car, his movements easy and confident. He reached Amelia and, with an act of casual intimacy that felt like a knife in Kayson's gut, reached out and smoothed down the collar of her jacket, which had been ruffled by the wind.

It was a gesture a husband makes for his wife. Effortless. Familiar.

Kayson's blood ran cold.

He watched, frozen, as Amelia gave Garrett a small nod, then turned and walked, not into her old building, but into the gleaming glass tower next to it. The headquarters of Sterling Corp.

She didn't even glance at the building where she had worked for five years.

A wave of dizziness washed over Kayson. It wasn't just a new man, a new car. It was a new life. A new career path. Everything had changed.

His phone began to ring, a frantic, shrill sound. It was Kamila.

He answered with a snarl. "What?"

Kamila's voice was a torrent of panicked sobs. "Kay! It's over! It's all over!"

She told him that the Carlisle family's most important project, a joint venture with Sterling Corp, a deal that was supposed to save their floundering company, had just been canceled. At the last minute. With no explanation.

"The whole family was counting on this deal to stay afloat!" she wailed. "We're ruined!"

Kayson was about to hang up, his mind still reeling from what he'd just witnessed, when Kamila said something that made his blood freeze.

"The representative from Sterling... he said it was the wish of 'Mrs. Thornton.'"

Kamila's innocent, confused voice continued, "Kay, who is Mrs. Thornton? When did we ever offend someone from the Thornton family?"

The words hit Kayson like a physical blow.

Mrs. Thornton.

He stared at the Sterling Corp building where Amelia had disappeared. He thought of Kamila's words. The pieces clicked into place, forming a picture of such devastating clarity that it stole the air from his lungs.

This wasn't a game. This was a war. And he had already lost.

Inside Sterling Corp, Amelia aced her interview. Her portfolio was brilliant, her ideas were fresh, and her presentation was confident. She walked out of the conference room feeling a surge of exhilaration. She was starting over.

When she exited the building, she was surprised to see the Maybach still parked at the curb.

She walked over and tapped on the tinted window.

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Chapter 55:

It rolled down to reveal Garrett, leaning back in the driver's seat with his eyes closed. The tension from their encounter in the elevator still hung between them like a physical wall. He looked exhausted and angry.

Amelia needed an escape. From him, from the city, from everything.

"I have to go to Chicago next week," she said, the words coming out in a rush. "For work. It's a week-long trip."

Garrett opened his eyes. They were dark and unreadable. He studied her for a long moment, his gaze so intense it felt like a physical touch.

“I know,” was all he said.

Just then, her phone buzzed. The screen lit up with Kayson’s name.

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Without a second’s hesitation, she declined the call and blocked his number.

A moment later, a text message appeared: We need to talk. About Carlisle and Sterling.

She typed back two words.

Not interested.

And hit send.

The hotel room in Chicago was sterile and lonely.

Amelia had arrived that afternoon. A colleague had helped her with her bags and check-in. It was her first business trip alone, and the freedom was mixed with a profound sense of isolation.

She unpacked her suitcase, her movements mechanical. A sudden, sharp pang of longing for her cat, Mochi, hit her, and she instinctively reached for her phone to text for an update. Just then, her phone vibrated.

A message from Garrett. It was a short video.

Curious, she tapped it open.

The video was shaky, clearly filmed on a phone. It showed Mochi, her fluffy white cat, sprawled contentedly across a pair of long legs encased in expensive-looking dark trousers. A large, masculine hand with long, elegant fingers scratched the cat right under its chin.

There was no music, only the sound of Mochi's ridiculously loud, happy purr, and, just at the end, a soft, low chuckle that was unmistakably Garrett's.

Amelia's heart did a strange little flip in her chest.

She watched the video again. And again. A slow, involuntary smile spread across her face.

She typed a quick reply. Thank you. He looks happy.

In his office, Kayson stared at his new phone, the one he'd bought after smashing the last one. He had tried calling Amelia, but it wouldn't go through. Blocked.

He was changing his strategy. The anger hadn't worked. He would try being "the good guy."

He had his assistant find out which hotel she was staying at in Chicago. He sent a massive bouquet of white roses to her room, anonymously. The card simply read: Wishing you success.

Amelia saw the flowers, read the card, and knew instantly who they were from. She picked up the entire vase and dumped it, flowers and all, into the trash can.

When Kayson received no response, he decided to play his trump card.

He had the hotel operator connect him directly to her room.

Amelia answered, her voice wary. “Hello?”

The moment she heard Kayson’s voice, she prepared to slam the phone down.

“Wait!” he said, his voice urgent. “Don’t hang up! I have to tell you something. It’s about Garrett Thornton. He’s been lying to you!”

His words stopped her.

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Rival**

Chapter 56:

Kayson seized the opportunity, his tone shifting to one of pained sincerity. “Amelia, do you really think it’s a coincidence that Sterling canceled the deal with your family?”

He let that sink in. “I looked into it. It was Garrett. He pulled the strings. He’s using you, Amelia! He’s using you as a weapon to destroy me, and he’s willing to ruin your family to do it!”

He waited for the explosion. For the tears, the accusations, the inevitable turning back to him.

Her response floored him.

There was a long, dead silence on the other end of the line. When she finally spoke, her voice was eerily calm.

“Kayson, did you forget? I’m a Carlisle, too.”

He was speechless.

“You, of all people, know how they treated me,” she continued, her voice like ice. “Are you seriously asking me to feel sorry for them now?”

The cold logic of it hit him like a physical blow. He had no answer.

“And another thing,” she said, her voice dropping, each word a perfectly aimed dart. “This is between me and my husband. It’s none of your business.”

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Click.

She hung up.

Kayson stared at the dead phone, a profound sense of powerlessness washing over him. He didn’t know this woman. This cold, sharp, ruthless stranger.

In her hotel room, Amelia’s hand was trembling. She didn’t trust Kayson, but his words had planted a splinter of doubt in her heart.

She looked at her phone, at the video of Garrett and the cat. Could the man who had sent her that small, thoughtful comfort be capable of such a cold-blooded act of revenge?

She took a deep breath. She had to know.

She opened her text conversation with him, the one with the cat video. Using it as an excuse, she typed out a new message.

Mochi is adorable. By the way, do you know anyone at Sterling Corp?

The reply came almost instantly.

A single word.

Yes.

The blunt, immediate admission stunned Amelia. She had prepared herself for denial, for evasion. All the arguments she had rehearsed in her head died on her lips.

She took a shaky breath and typed again. Why?

This time, the reply didn't come right away. Amelia stared at the screen, at the three little dots that indicated he was typing, then disappeared, then reappeared. The silence stretched, each second a small eternity.

Then her phone rang. A video call. From Garrett.

Her heart leaped into her throat. She hesitated for a beat, then accepted the call.

His face filled the screen. He was in his study, the familiar dark bookshelves behind him. His expression was calm, his eyes intense.

"Some things," he said, his voice a low rumble through the phone's speaker, "are better not said over text."

Amelia's stomach clenched. She waited for him to deliver the sentence.

He didn't waste time. "I had the deal canceled," he said, his voice flat and direct. "Because of what they did to you at that dinner. Specifically, because of the slap your mother gave you."

Amelia's pupils dilated. He knew. Of course he knew.

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Chapter 57:

“I told you,” he continued, his tone even but carrying an absolute, unshakeable authority, “that no one gets to hurt my wife. They made you cry. So I made them lose a contract. It’s that simple.”

The brutal, primitive logic of it shocked her. It was savage. It was terrifying. And it was the most profoundly protective thing anyone had ever done for her.

She opened her mouth, but no sound came out.

He seemed to read her mind. “The deal isn’t completely dead, of course,” he added, a new, dangerous edge to his voice.

“If the Carlises—specifically, your mother and your sister—come to our home and personally apologize to you for that slap, the partnership can be reinstated.”

He looked directly at her through the screen, his gaze unwavering. “The choice is yours, Amelia.”

He was giving her the power.

The words washed over her, a complex wave of shock, gratitude, and a strange, liberating sense of release.

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She thought of her mother’s cruel face, of Kamila’s false tears, of every small and large humiliation she had ever suffered in that house.

She looked at the man on the screen, the man who had handed her a sword and the right to use it.

And for the first time since she had met him, she gave him a real smile. It was small, but it was genuine, filled with a hard-won peace.

“No,” she said, her voice clear and steady. “They deserve it. I don’t want their apology. And I don’t want the deal reinstated.”

A flicker of deep, profound satisfaction lit Garrett’s eyes. It was the answer he had been waiting for.

At the Carlisle mansion, the atmosphere was toxic.

Amelia’s father, Richard, was screaming at Kristen, blaming her for offending a powerful, unseen enemy. Kristen shrieked back, calling Amelia a curse on their house. Kamila sat on the sofa, weeping, complaining that Kayson was ignoring her calls.

“What good is crying now?” Richard roared. He rounded on Kamila. “You! Go to Kayson! Beg him! Amelia always listens to Kayson. If Kayson goes to talk to her, everything will be sorted out.”

Kristen latched onto the idea. “Yes! Kayson will know what to do!”

Richard added, his voice full of dismissive contempt, “And all this talk of Amelia marrying into the Thornton family is nonsense! She doesn’t have it in her! It’s just some rumor Kayson started to spite us!”

They were a family drowning, and they were clinging to a fantasy, refusing to believe that the daughter they had cast aside now held their fate in her hands.

Forced into a corner, Kamila tearfully agreed to go find Kayson one more time.

After the video call ended, Amelia felt lighter than she had in years. She and Garrett chatted for a few more minutes, easy, simple talk about Mochi.

The distance between them had suddenly, impossibly, shrunk.

Kayson's penthouse was a disaster zone.

He was standing in front of an open suitcase, shoving wrinkled shirts into it with clumsy, angry movements. He was supposed to be flying to Chicago for a major business summit, but his mind was a chaotic storm of Amelia.

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Chapter 58:

Everything was wrong. He couldn't find a matching pair of cufflinks. His favorite tie was missing.

For nine years, Amelia had managed his life with quiet, invisible efficiency. His bags were always perfectly packed, his suits perfectly pressed. Without her, he was helpless, a child in a man's body.

The doorbell rang. It was Kamila, letting herself in.

She took in the scene—the messy apartment, Kayson's disheveled appearance—and a flicker of contempt crossed her eyes before she quickly masked it with a look of profound sympathy.

"Oh, Kay," she breathed, rushing to his side. She began to expertly fold his shirts, her movements an eerie echo of Amelia's.

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Kayson let her, but it felt wrong. Her touch was wrong. Her presence was wrong.

As she worked, Kamila began to cry, a soft, pathetic litany of her family's woes, her parents' pressure. She clutched at his sleeve, her voice a desperate, cloying whine.

"Kay, you're the only one who can help us. Please, just talk to Amelia. Ask her to be merciful."

At the mention of Amelia's name, Kayson yanked his arm away as if he'd been burned. His eyes turned to ice.

"This is a Carlisle family matter," he said, his voice flat and cold. "It's a business dispute between you and the Thorntons. It has nothing to do with me."

Kamila stared at him, her mouth falling open. "Nothing to do with you? Kay, but we..."

"I am not," he interrupted, his voice rising, "going to humiliate myself by begging her on your family's behalf."

He had already tried. He knew exactly how it would end.

Kamila's tears stopped instantly. She had never, in all their years, heard him refuse her so completely.

A flicker of pity—or perhaps just lingering habit—made Kayson soften his tone slightly. “I can’t help you with your business. But if you need anything, personally, I’ll take care of you.”

That one phrase, “take care of you,” drew a final, uncrossable line between them. She wasn’t his partner. She was a responsibility. A charity case.

Kamila knew, in that moment, that she had lost. She left without another word, her world crumbling around her.

The industry reception in Chicago was a glittering sea of champagne flutes and power suits.

Amelia moved through it with a newfound confidence. She was dressed in a sleek, dark blue jumpsuit that was both professional and stylish. She wasn’t hiding in a corner. She was networking, engaging, her conversation sharp and insightful.

She was no longer Kayson Edwards's silent, beautiful accessory. She was a presence in her own right.

Kayson arrived late. He scanned the crowded room, and his eyes found her instantly.

And he froze.

He felt a profound sense of dislocation, as if he were looking at a stranger.

He watched her laugh with a senior executive from Sterling Corp. He saw her passionately debating a design concept with an industry legend. Her colleague brought her a document, and they conferred in low, easy tones, a team.

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Chapter 59:

This woman—poised, brilliant, radiating a quiet power—was not the Amelia he knew. Or the Amelia he thought he knew.

A cold, terrifying panic began to creep up his spine. It felt as if he had owned a priceless diamond, kept it locked away in a velvet box, only to have it stolen. And now, in the hands of another, it was blazing with a fire he had never known it possessed.

He wanted to go to her, but his feet felt like they were encased in concrete.

As if sensing his stare, Amelia glanced in his direction.

Her eyes swept over his face, and for a fraction of a second, they registered him. There was no shock. No anger. No hatred.

There was nothing.

It was the look one gives a piece of furniture, a face in a crowd. Utterly, completely blank.

Then she turned away, a polite smile returning to her lips as she resumed her conversation.

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That single, dismissive glance was more devastating than any fight, any scream, any tear. It was a clean, surgical cut.

In that moment, Kayson Edwards understood.

He hadn't just been replaced.

He had been erased.

The next morning, Amelia arranged for vehicles to take her clients on a factory inspection. Buried in work for days, she had no time to entertain personal matters, completely ignoring the relentless, unanswered calls from Kristen and Richard lighting up her phone screen.

Frantic with anxiety, Kristen and Richard pulled every string they could until they discovered she was on a business trip in Chicago. Coincidentally, Kayson was also in Chicago for a summit. Seizing the opportunity, Kamila Carlisle proactively bought a ticket and flew out to the snowy city.

Before boarding, Kamila made a calculated move: she deliberately refrained from booking a hotel. Upon landing, she contacted Kayson, who was currently tied up at a social engagement. Kayson immediately arranged for his assistant, Leo, to go and pick her up.

At the front desk, they were informed that the hotel was fully booked due to the summit. Leo called to ask for instructions, and it was decided that Kayson's suite was spacious enough to accommodate Kamila for the night.

Just as Leo was hesitating over the arrangement, Amelia, returning from her outing, happened to appear in the lobby. Kamila immediately intercepted her on the spot. "Amelia! Please, wait!" she cried out, her voice echoing through the grand hall.

In front of a crowd of company staff, Kamila put on a flawless display of frailty and pitifulness.

"Amelia, Mom and Dad are worried sick," Kamila pleaded, her eyes brimming with unshed tears. "I came all this way to beg you. Please, spare the Carlisle family's project! If you're angry, take it out on me. I'm willing to bear all your resentment alone, just don't punish our parents!"

Sensing the awkward atmosphere and the growing whispers among the staff, Leo stepped forward. "Perhaps we should move to the restaurant or a private lounge?" he suggested gently, hoping to prevent bystanders from mistakenly thinking Amelia was bullying her sister.

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Chapter 60:

“Let go of me,” Amelia said coldly, attempting to pull her hand back, but Kamila shed tears at the perfect moment.

“No, I won’t let go until you forgive us!” Kamila sobbed, her grip surprisingly strong for someone so seemingly fragile. “Hit me if you have to! Slap me, beat me, do whatever you need to vent your anger, but please, let the family go!”

At that moment, Kayson arrived at the hotel by car, the headlights piercing through the snowy night and sweeping across the glass doors of the lobby.

Catching a glimpse of Kayson's tall figure approaching the entrance, Kamila suddenly changed her tactic. Her fingers dug into Amelia's wrist like a vice.

Before Amelia could react, Kamila forcefully grabbed Amelia's hand and yanked it violently toward her own face. "Stop it, Amelia! Please don't!" Kamila shrieked, making it look as though Amelia was the aggressor.

Bystanders hurriedly stepped forward to pull them apart.

Amelia's arm flared with severe pain from the tight grip. "Are you crazy? Let go!"

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As she struggled fiercely to break free from Kamila's manic hold, the sudden release of tension sent Amelia's arm flying forward.

Guided entirely by Kamila's own forceful yank, Amelia's palm accidentally swung heavy and hard against Kamila's face.

CRACK.

The crisp sound left the entire lobby stunned into absolute silence.

Kamila staggered back, a look of pure, orchestrated shock on her face, before crumpling to the floor like a broken doll. She clutched her cheek, a bright red handprint already blooming on her pale skin, tears streaming down her face as she looked up with wide, terrified eyes.

And from the direction of the doors, a voice, choked with fury, roared her name.

“Amelia! What the hell are you doing!”

Kayson was storming toward them, his face a mask of pure rage.

The hotel lobby plunged into a sudden, pin-drop silence as Kayson strode in. He was covered in a dusting of snow, his face thunderous with rage as he marched directly toward Amelia.

Leo stepped forward, attempting to mediate the situation, but Kamila was faster. She immediately covered her cheek, tears spilling over as she put on a perfect show of vulnerability. “Don’t blame her, Kayson,” she sobbed, her voice trembling. “It was my fault. I begged her to hit me...”

Kayson’s gaze turned glacial, completely ignoring anyone else’s attempt to explain. He glared at Amelia, his voice harsh and accusing. “You’re taking out your resentment toward Kristen on someone who can’t fight back! Is this how you bully the weak?”

Leo, having witnessed the entire exchange, tried to clear Amelia's name, but his words were drowned out by Kamila's escalating cries.

Amelia stood there, a bone-deep chill seeping into her heart. Nine years of companionship, reduced to this baseless suspicion. She looked at Kayson, her voice devoid of emotion. "Even if I explained it a thousand times, it wouldn't weigh as much as a single tear from her. Yes, I hit her."

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