

Nine Rejected Marriages, I Wed My Ex's Rival

Chapter 91:

Amelia stood her ground, her hands clenched into fists at her sides. “The one who broke the contract was Kayson. He was the one who didn’t show up on the day we were supposed to get our marriage license. He stood me up for no reason. His endless broken promises and constant absence have already drained every ounce of feeling I had for him.”

Before Kristen could interrupt, Amelia’s voice rose, trembling with years of suppressed pain. “And you? You’ve always been so biased. You never cared about the grievances I’ve suffered for so long. Not once have you ever offered me a shred of comfort!”

Kristen let out a short, derisive laugh, completely unfazed by Amelia’s pain. She expertly wielded the weapon of family guilt.

“Your grievances?” Kristen whispered poisonously. “You did this. You put Kayson in the ICU. The Edwards family is losing their minds.”

Amelia’s face went white. She knew it was a trap, a manipulation, but the severity of the claim sent a sliver of ice through her veins.

Kristen's verbal assault continued, each word a lash against Amelia's fragile self-worth. "Did you really think you could climb into a new bed and escape your past? You owe the Edwards family. You will always owe them."

Kristen pointed a perfectly manicured finger at Amelia's face. Her tone was no longer questioning; it was a sharp, brutal command.

"Now. You are going to go change your clothes, and you are coming with me."

Amelia's voice was barely a whisper. "Where?"

A cruel, triumphant smile spread across Kristen's face. She enunciated each word with sadistic pleasure.

"To the hospital. Where you will get on your knees at Kayson's bedside and apologize to him and to every single member of the Edwards family."

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"The Edwards family is demanding accountability," Kristen said, her voice recovering its icy edge. "You are going to come with me to the hospital right now and explain to them personally why this engagement is annulled."

Amelia's face was pale, almost translucent, but her eyes were unnervingly calm. She looked directly at her mother.

"Fine," she said, her voice clear and steady. "I'll go with you."

It wasn't a surrender. The engagement had been a joint decision between the two families, and she knew that breaking it off required a face-to-face explanation.

More importantly, Evelyn Edwards had always treated her with genuine kindness—she was one of the very few elders who had ever offered Amelia any real familial warmth. Amelia wanted to make a special trip just to apologize to the old woman.

In her gaze, there was a flicker of steely, cold resolve. She was choosing her battlefield. She was tired of hiding, tired of being protected. She was going to face this herself, to cut the final, cancerous tie to her past on her own terms.

Amelia turned back to Kristen. "I need to change," she said, her tone flat. It was a strategic move, a way to buy a few precious minutes.

"You have five," Kristen snapped, impatient but satisfied.

Amelia walked toward the bedroom, closing the door firmly behind her. The click of the latch was deafening in the quiet apartment.

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She moved swiftly and efficiently, pulling a simple, high-necked dark dress from the closet, something conservative and unassuming. She began to change. She knew she was walking into a hostile environment, but she wasn't going to let them walk all over her.

Amelia took a deep breath, smoothing down her dress. "I'm ready."

She walked out of the bedroom. Kristen was waiting, tapping her foot impatiently. She gave Amelia a sweeping, critical look, like a farmer inspecting livestock before a sale. Satisfied, she nodded toward the door.

Just as the two women were getting ready to head out, Mrs. Ingram, the head housekeeper, was preparing breakfast. Seeing the guest, she offered a warm, polite smile. “Good morning, ma’am. Would you care for some tea or coffee?”

Kristen didn’t even break her stride. She shot the housekeeper a look of utter contempt, a cold sneer that dismissed Mrs. Ingram as entirely beneath her notice.

Amelia paused at the door, her expression tightening slightly at her mother’s rudeness. She turned to the housekeeper. “Mrs. Ingram, please keep an eye on Mochi for me while I’m out,” she requested softly.

“Of course, Mrs. Thornton,” Mrs. Ingram replied, nodding dutifully.

Then Amelia turned and walked out, Kristen close behind her.

As the door clicked shut, Mrs. Ingram stood alone in the foyer. She glanced at the cold water cups sitting untouched on the table and felt a shiver run down her spine. The oppressive atmosphere the two women had left behind made her deeply uneasy.

Mrs. Ingram had worked for wealthy, powerful, and often volatile families for over thirty years. Her senses, honed by decades of observation, screamed that something was terribly wrong.

The older woman had looked incredibly mean, and the two of them had interacted more like bitter enemies than mother and daughter. She was genuinely worried that Amelia was going to be wronged.

She didn't hesitate. She immediately pulled out her phone and dialed Garrett's number.

The phone rang several times before it connected. However, it wasn't the master of the house who answered. Garrett was currently locked in a lengthy, high-stakes meeting.

"Mr. Thornton's phone, Casey Henderson speaking," the crisp, professional voice of Garrett's assistant came through the line.

"Mr. Henderson," she said, her voice low and urgent. "There's a problem. Mrs. Thornton has just left the apartment with an older woman. The woman looked very severe and mean-spirited. They acted like enemies, sir. I'm very worried about Mrs. Thornton."

Casey, who was standing just outside the main conference room doors, stood bolt upright. "Taken by who? Where?"

"I don't know who she was," Mrs. Ingram said, quickly describing Kristen's appearance. "And I don't know where they were going. But the atmosphere was dreadful."

Casey's mind processed the information with lightning speed. He glanced at the closed doors of the boardroom. Interrupting Garrett now, during a critical juncture of a long meeting, would be disastrous, and by the time the meeting ended, it might be too late to intervene. This was not a simple matter.

"I understand. Thank you, Mrs. Ingram. You did the right thing," he said, his voice calm and reassuring.

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He hung up the phone. There was no hesitation. He couldn't wait for Garrett. He needed someone who could intervene from the outside, with the full, unimpeachable authority of the family. He needed a sledgehammer.

His thumb flew across his phone's screen, past Garrett's name, past his own contacts, to the one familiar number reserved for the most dire of emergencies.

He pressed call.

The phone rang once.

"Clarence."

Inside Kayson's VIP hospital suite, the air was thick with a toxic blend of grief and recrimination.

Evelyn Edwards had held back her concern for an entire day, but her heart had finally softened, bringing her to the hospital to visit her grandson.

The doctor's diagnosis hung heavily in the room: Kayson would require long-term rest and was highly susceptible to lasting sequelae.

Susan Edwards sat by the bed. She had endured countless folk remedies and grueling IVF procedures just to bring Kayson into the world, and she treasured this son beyond measure.

Looking at Kayson, who was covered in severe injuries and lying unconscious, Susan hadn't slept a wink all night. She wished she could bear the pain in her son's place.

At the same time, she harbored a bitter resentment toward Evelyn for showing up so late, feeling a chilling disappointment at the matriarch's delayed arrival.

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Evelyn sat by the bed, repeatedly sighing in a low voice over the tragic turn of events.

Susan wept and accused, "This is all because Amelia canceled the wedding! Kayson shouldn't have had to endure such a brutal beating!" She was terrified her son would be left with a lifelong root cause of illness.

Evelyn pointed out the root cause. "He drove her away! Kayson broke his promises time and time again, forcing Amelia to make the hard choice to cancel the wedding!" The two women fell into a heated argument.

Consumed by anger, Susan brought up the previous day. "I told her yesterday that Kayson's life was in danger! I begged her to come see him, and she refused!"

Susan firmly believed Amelia was greedy for their family's status and had long been secretly involved with Garrett Thornton. She spat out vicious, venomous curses against Amelia.

"Stop it!" Evelyn sternly reprimanded her. "I will not allow you to slander Amelia's good character!" With a long, heavy sigh, Evelyn turned and, supported by a servant, left the ward.

Susan was left alone, silently crying at her unconscious son's bedside.

Then, a knock sounded on the door.

The door opened, and Kristen walked in, bringing Amelia with her. Kristen deliberately pushed Amelia forward, offering her up as a target for Susan to vent her pent-up resentment.

Amelia had come specifically to explain the truth about the engagement to Evelyn. Hearing that the elderly woman had just left, Amelia had no desire to stay and planned to leave immediately.

Susan, suppressing her wild rage, feigned a gentle tone as she questioned Amelia. "Why did you refuse to come see Kayson yesterday?"

Amelia ignored the underlying venom. Her reply was brief and calm. “I was busy.”

Her nonchalant answer completely enraged Susan.

Susan lunged forward, fiercely grabbing Amelia’s arm and violently yanking her further into the ward.

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When Susan suddenly let go, Amelia lost her balance and stumbled backward. Kristen, standing nearby, deliberately dodged out of the way instead of helping, causing Amelia to crash heavily into the coffee table.

A sharp pain shot through her leg, but Amelia endured it, forcing herself to stand back up. She looked at Susan with cold detachment. “Kayson’s illness has nothing to do with me. Since Evelyn isn’t here, I have no need to explain myself any further.”

She turned to leave.

This defiance detonated what little was left of Susan’s sanity. Her hatred surged like a tidal wave.

With a hysterical scream, Susan rushed forward, grabbing a handful of Amelia’s hair and pulling her back tightly.

“You’re not going anywhere!” Susan’s face was a mask of pure, ugly rage. “I forbid you to take a single step out of this ward until Kayson wakes up!”

In Chicago, the atmosphere was stifling. Garrett was in the middle of a grueling two-hour meeting, taking a brief pause to accommodate a short interview.

Off-camera, Casey Henderson was frantically giving him eye signals that Garrett only noticed when the reporter politely pointed it out.

The moment the interview concluded, Garrett took a sip of water. Casey rushed over, his face pale with anxiety, and delivered the news: Kristen Carlisle had gone to the residence and taken Amelia Frye.

Garrett's face instantly turned into a mask of cold, grim fury. He harshly blamed Casey for the delayed report, slamming his water glass down. "Get the car. Now. We're going back to New York."

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Casey didn't move. He stood his ground, blocking the doorway. "Sir, you can't. The flight is at least two hours. You cannot leave this meeting halfway. By the time you get back, it will be too late." He paused, his expression darkening. "Furthermore, Kayson Edwards was admitted to the hospital yesterday."

Connecting the two events, it was easy to guess that Kristen had taken Amelia straight to the Edwards family—right into the hospital.

Garrett's eyes were bloodshot, his face a mask of primal fury. He stubbornly insisted on returning. "I don't give a damn, Casey! They're hurting her!"

"I've already handled it, sir," Casey said, his voice firm and calm, the only anchor in Garrett's storm. "I contacted Mr. Clarence and asked him to go and look after Amelia."

As Clarence's former secretary who had been specifically assigned to Garrett, Casey still held the elder Thornton's deep trust. "He's already on his way. I've also booked a noon flight to New York for you. Please, finish the meeting before we move. Don't let this personal matter derail your work."

The name Clarence was a splash of ice water. Garrett's forward momentum halted. He knew Casey was right. His brother's arrival carried the official weight of the Thornton dynasty. It was a strategic move, not an emotional one. It was the correct move.

But the knowledge did nothing to quell the violent inferno of helplessness and rage inside him.

He glared at Casey, his voice a low, deadly promise. "If anything happens to her, Casey. If she has a single scratch that isn't accounted for, I will burn their entire world to the ground."

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Inside the hospital room, the cruelty was absolute.

Susan lunged forward, her hands locking onto Amelia's hair. With a vicious, unhinged yank, she tore out several strands.

Amelia lost her footing, crashing heavily to the floor. Her elbow struck the unforgiving tiles, a blinding, agonizing pain shooting up her arm. She gasped, curling in on herself as her ear rang with a high-pitched whine.

Standing nearby, Kristen watched with zero pity. Her only concern was severing ties and escaping the fallout. "I've delivered her to you," Kristen said coldly, adjusting her coat to leave. "Now, Susan, I expect you to stop targeting Amelia and leave the Carlisle family out of this."

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"Stop right there!" Susan shrieked, stepping into Kristen's path. Her eyes darted to the heavily injured, comatose Kayson on the bed, her heart twisting with profound injustice. She glared at Kristen.

“You call yourself a mother? How could you just stand by and let your precious daughter tear up the engagement to marry someone else?” Her eyes gleamed with a toxic malice as she pointed at Amelia. “You want to be cleared of this? Then you teach this wretched girl a lesson yourself.”

Amelia gritted her teeth against the throbbing in her elbow. She knew all too well how extremely Susan spoiled Kayson.

Years ago, when Marcus Edwards had cut off Kayson’s funding, Susan had desperately sold off her own designer bags just to subsidize her son—even though Kayson had stubbornly returned the money. Now, seeing her son clinging to life, Susan’s emotional breakdown was entirely predictable.

But Amelia refused to suffer this humiliation in silence. “Let me go,” she forced out, her voice trembling but defiant as she struggled to sit up, “or I will call the police right now.”

Susan let out a harsh, mocking laugh, wielding her seniority like a weapon. “Call them! A mother disciplining her disobedient daughter is perfectly justified. The police have no right to interfere!”

As the two women closed in, fueled by a shared, ugly madness, pain bloomed all over Amelia’s body. Her head swam. A black fog of despair began to creep in at the edges of her vision.

Just as she felt herself starting to slip away, she saw it.

On the bed, Kayson's fingers twitched. His eyelids fluttered.

But his mother and her own were too consumed by their brutal work to notice.

Outside, in the hushed, sterile corridor, a tall, imposing figure came to a stop in front of the door to VIP Room 602. He was flanked by a driver whose neck was as thick as a tree trunk.

Clarence Thornton had arrived.

Amelia's world had shrunk to a universe of pain. The sharp thud of a shoe against her ribs. The searing ache in her scalp where Kristen's fingers were tangled in her hair. The cold, sterile smell of the hospital floor against her cheek.

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“Beg me,” Kristen hissed, her voice a venomous whisper right next to Amelia’s ear. She yanked her head up, forcing Amelia to look at her triumphant, twisted face. “Say you were wrong. Say it, and I’ll make her stop.”

Amelia’s lip was split. She could taste the metallic tang of blood. She focused on Kristen’s jeering eyes and forced the words through her swollen mouth.

“You... can go... to hell.”

That last spark of defiance was all it took. Kristen’s face contorted with fury. She raised her hand, ready to deliver another stinging slap.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Three distinct, measured knocks on the heavy door. They weren’t loud, but in the chaos of the room, they landed with the force of thunderclaps.

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Kristen's hand froze mid-air. Susan's kicking ceased.

The two women stared at each other, their frenzied rage momentarily replaced by confusion. They thought Evelyn had given up and left.

"Get out!" Susan shrieked at the door, her voice ragged. "We're busy!"

There was no reply from the hallway. But a palpable pressure, an unnerving stillness, seemed to press in through the closed door, sucking the air out of the room.

The pause lasted only a few seconds. But it was the only opening Amelia would get.

A primal instinct for survival surged through her. She gathered every last ounce of strength she had left and exploded upward from the floor. She slammed her body into Kristen, who was still distracted by the door, knocking her off balance.

She didn't look back. She didn't hesitate. She scrambled for the door, every cell in her body screaming for escape.

“Get her!” Kristen shrieked, recovering.

Susan lunged, her fingers brushing against the torn fabric of Amelia’s dress, but she was too late.

Amelia’s trembling hand closed around the cold, metal handle of the door. She twisted it, yanked it open, and threw herself into the hallway.

She was a bird freed from a cage, stumbling, disoriented.

She ran headfirst into a wall.

A wall of solid, unyielding muscle, clad in exquisitely tailored wool.

Strong hands gripped her upper arms, not with violence, but with a firm, steadying force, stopping her from collapsing.

Amelia looked up, her vision blurred by tears and pain. Through the haze, she saw a handsome, aristocratic face that was as cold and unforgiving as a glacier.

Clarence Thornton.

Behind him, his driver, Chester, stood like a stone sentinel, his broad body effectively blocking the view from the rest of the corridor.

Clarence's gaze was swift and clinical. It swept over her, taking in the angry red mark on her cheek, the torn dress, the bruises already forming on her arms. There was no surprise in his eyes. Only a chilling drop in temperature, a descent into a frozen, silent fury.

From inside the room, Susan and Kristen came rushing out, ready to drag their victim back. They skidded to a halt at the sight of the man holding Amelia. They froze, petrified.

They didn't know who he was, but they could feel it. The aura of absolute, old-money power that radiated from him was suffocating.

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Clarence didn't even spare them a glance. His entire focus was on the trembling woman in his arms. With a smooth, deliberate motion, he shrugged off his own expensive, custom-made suit jacket and draped it over Amelia's shoulders, enveloping her in its warmth and the scent of clean linen and power.

The gesture was possessive, protective. A silent declaration of ownership.

Only then did he turn his head. Only then did he deign to look at the two women cowering in the doorway. His eyes were devoid of all emotion, as flat and dead as a winter sky.

His voice, when he spoke, was perfectly calm, almost conversational, which made it all the more terrifying.

"Ladies," he said. "Were you having fun?"

At that exact moment, inside the room, Kayson's eyelids fluttered again. He fought his way up from the depths of unconsciousness, his eyes cracking open to a blurry, distorted world.

He saw the doorway. He saw his mother's and Kristen's horrified faces. He saw the tall, imposing figure of the man who stood like a judge and executioner.

And he saw Amelia, sheltered in the man's arms, her face bruised and tear-streaked.

He tried to speak. He tried to call her name. But all that came out was a weak, rattling sound in his throat. The darkness rushed back in, pulling him under.

But he had seen it. In that last, fleeting moment of consciousness, Kayson Edwards had seen everything.

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Susan, recovering from the initial shock, fell back on her usual weapon: blustering entitlement. She pointed a trembling finger at Clarence.

"Who do you think you are? This is a private family matter! Get out!"

Clarence's gaze finally settled on her. It was the look a scientist might give a particularly uninteresting insect under a microscope. He spoke two words, his voice a quiet statement of fact that landed like a physical blow.

“Clarence Thornton.”

The name. That single, powerful name was a bomb that detonated in the silent hallway.

The color drained from Susan’s face. Kristen, beside her, looked as if she might faint. They had not just picked a fight. They had declared war on an empire.

Kristen, ever the survivor, reacted first. She immediately tried to sever herself from the sinking ship. A sickly, fawning smile stretched across her lips.

“Mr. Thornton, you’ve misunderstood,” she simpered, her voice unnaturally high. “I was just... disciplining my daughter. A mother’s prerogative.”

She was trying to downgrade a criminal assault to a domestic squabble.

Clarence ignored her pathetic attempt as if she hadn’t spoken. He looked down at Amelia, who was still huddled inside his jacket. His voice, when he spoke to her, was a stark contrast: gentle, respectful.

“Do you want to call the police?”

He didn't decide for her. He didn't command. He offered her the choice, handing her back the power that had been so brutally stripped away.

Amelia lifted her head. Her eyes were swimming with unshed tears, but beneath the pain was a new, hard fire. She looked past Clarence, her gaze locking onto Kristen.

Her voice was clear, each word a perfectly sharpened blade, severing the final tie.

"I don't have a mother."

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The declaration hung in the air, more damning than any accusation. It was a complete and total revocation of Kristen's identity, of her very existence in Amelia's life.

The fake smile on Kristen's face froze, then crumbled into an expression of pure, panicked disbelief.

Amelia then turned her gaze back to Clarence. Her voice was quiet, but it carried the weight of her decision. "Yes, Mr. Thornton. I want to press charges. They assaulted me. Both of them."

Clarence gave a single, decisive nod, as if she had merely asked him to pass the salt.

He took out his phone. He didn't dial 911. He dialed a number from his private contacts.

The call was answered instantly.

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"I need a team at City General Hospital," he said, his tone flat and clinical. "My sister-in-law has been assaulted. Yes, file the suit. For the most severe charges applicable."

He paused, his cold eyes flicking briefly to the two women in the doorway.

“The defendants are Susan Edwards... and Kristen Carlisle.”

Hearing her name spoken aloud, uttered like a death sentence, was too much for Susan. Her legs gave out, and she crumpled against the doorframe, a strangled sob escaping her lips. The reality of her actions, the catastrophic consequences, had finally crashed down upon her.

The threat of the law was a guillotine, and it sliced their toxic alliance in two.

“It was her!” Susan shrieked, pointing a shaking finger at Kristen. “She started it! She told me to do it! I was just upset about my son!”

Kristen, seeing her escape route cut off, turned on her former ally with the viciousness of a cornered rat. “You liar! You’re the one who dragged my daughter here! You hit her first!”

The two women who, moments before, had been united in their cruelty, were now at each other’s throats, screeching and clawing to shift the blame. It was a pathetic, ugly spectacle.

Clarence watched them for a moment, his expression one of utter disdain. He had no interest in their squabbling. He turned his attention back to Amelia.

“We need to get your injuries documented,” he said calmly. “To establish a record.”

He gestured to his driver. “Chester. Clear a path.”

Chester stepped forward, a mountain of quiet menace, effectively blocking the two hysterical women from view and giving Clarence the space to guide Amelia away from the scene.

As they started down the hall, Evelyn finally pushed past the chaos at the door. She rushed toward them, her face etched with anguish and self-reproach when she saw the full extent of Amelia’s injuries.

“Oh, my dear child,” she whispered, grabbing Amelia’s free hand. Her own was trembling. “I’m so sorry. I’m so useless...”

Amelia looked at the one person in that family who had ever shown her a shred of kindness and gave a small shake of her head. It wasn’t her fault.

Clarence gave Evelyn a curt, respectful nod, an acknowledgment of her station, before leading Amelia toward the elevators.

Just before the polished steel doors slid shut, Amelia glanced back one last time.

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She saw Susan and Kristen, still shrieking at each other like fishwives in the market. She saw Evelyn watching them, her face a mask of profound disappointment and heartbreak.

An alliance had been shattered. A family's carefully constructed facade had been ripped away, exposing the rotten core beneath.

And Amelia was finally, blessedly, walking away from the wreckage.

The summit in Chicago had dragged on for an excruciatingly long time.

The meeting was delayed by over twenty minutes before it finally concluded, and Garrett had spent the entire duration sitting on pins and needles, a restless tension coiled tight in his muscles.

The moment it adjourned, he immediately prepared to leave, intending to rush straight back to New York.

Casey stepped into his path, blocking his exit. “Sir,” Casey said, his tone urgent but steady. “Clarence just called. He said to tell you that Amelia is safe and unharmed.” Casey paused, watching his boss’s rigid posture. “Also, due to the meeting’s delay, we’ve already missed our scheduled return flight. He advised that you complete the rest of your itinerary here before leaving.”

Garrett was half-doubtful, his anxiety refusing to settle. Ignoring the biting chill of the Chicago air, he stood outside in nothing but a thin dress shirt and vest, dialing Amelia’s number.

Shivering slightly in the freezing wind, he waited for her to pick up. Casey quickly gestured for someone to bring an overcoat and quietly draped it over Garrett’s shoulders.

When the call finally ended, Garrett's demeanor had shifted. The frantic energy had drained away, leaving him visibly disheartened. He turned to Casey, his voice low. "Tell the pilot there's no need to rush the return trip."

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Casey blinked in surprise. "Where are you going, sir?"

Garrett shot him a fleeting, complicated glance, then turned on his heel and headed back toward the summit venue. On the phone, Amelia had repeatedly insisted that everything was fine. He had no justifiable excuse to drop everything and fly back to her immediately.

Meanwhile, Kamila had just returned to New York from the hospital in Chicago.

She was still reeling from the sheer terror Garrett had instilled in her earlier. To make matters worse, she had waited all day for a comforting phone call from Kayson, but nothing came. Filled with grievances and feeling utterly dejected, she had planned to go home and pour her heart out to Kristen.

But the moment she stepped through the door, she was intercepted by the Carlisle family's maid, Faye Miller, who was her biological mother. Faye pulled her aside, her face pale, and warned her that a massive crisis had hit the family, urging her to speak carefully.

After making sure no one was around, Faye lowered her voice to a frantic whisper. “The Edwards family found out about Amelia’s marriage. When Kayson went home, Marcus beat him so severely he ended up in the hospital.”

“Then Susan convinced your mother to bring Amelia to the hospital. The two of them ganged up and bullied Amelia there. Now the Thornton family is absolutely furious. They’ve put out the word that they’re going to sue your mother and put her in jail.”

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So much chaos had erupted in just two days. Kamila processed the shocking news as she walked further into the villa. The atmosphere was heavy and suffocating.

Richard Carlisle was pacing anxiously back and forth by the window, while Kristen sat on the sofa, looking completely distraught and unhinged.

Shedding her usual fragile, damsel-in-distress persona, Kamila stepped forward and proactively took the burden upon herself. “Don’t panic,” she told her parents, her voice surprisingly steady. “I have a way to neutralize the Thornton family’s pursuit of this.”

Richard looked at her with blatant distrust. “What could you possibly do?” he snapped, his frustration boiling over. “The Thornton family’s legal team has never lost a case!”

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“On top of that, the Carlisle family has just lost several major projects. The company’s vitality is severely damaged. We absolutely cannot afford a prolonged legal battle. The only option is for Kristen to go to them and apologize.”

Kamila didn’t argue. Instead, she slowly extended her hand, revealing a small, faint cut on her finger. It was the scratch she had gotten from the shattered glass when Garrett had smashed the mirror in the restroom.

“This,” Kamila said, a glint of cunning steel flashing in her soft eyes, “is evidence that Garrett hurt me.”

Richard and Kristen stared at her, confused.

“If the Thornton family dares to sue Mother,” she continued, the vicious plan taking shape in her words, “the Carlisle family will countersue Garrett. We’ll hold each other in a stalemate.”

Clarence’s driver delivered Amelia to the penthouse like a fragile package. She walked into the silent apartment, the events of the day swirling in her head, and collapsed onto the sofa. She pulled a cashmere throw blanket over herself, curling into a tight ball, a wounded animal seeking a safe place to hide.

The doorbell rang a short while later.

When she opened it, Eleanor Thornton was standing there, her face etched with a deep, maternal concern. She was holding a silver thermal carafe.

Eleanor’s eyes immediately went to the angry red mark, now turning a dark purple, on Amelia’s cheek. Her own eyes instantly filled with tears.

She didn’t ask questions. She didn’t demand details. She simply stepped inside, set the carafe on the table, and pulled Amelia into her arms.

The embrace was soft, warm, and smelled faintly of Chanel No. 5. It was a mother’s hug.

The simple, unconditional comfort was what finally broke Amelia. The dam of control she had so carefully constructed shattered. A ragged sob tore from her throat, and the tears she had been holding back for hours began to fall, hot and fast.

Eleanor just held her, stroking her hair, murmuring soft, soothing words. “It’s alright, my dear. You’re safe now. It’s all over. We’re here. No one is ever going to hurt you again.”

It was the first time in her life Amelia had ever been comforted by a parent after being hurt.

After a long moment, Eleanor gently guided her back to the sofa. She opened the thermal carafe, and the rich, savory aroma of chicken soup filled the room.

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