

ONCE THE FOOLISH WIFE, NOW HIS ETERNAL OBSESSION

Chapter 7:

“Cathryn, is that true? Is your mother really gone?” Harold struggled to rise, his voice tight with disbelief.

Tears streaking her cheeks, Cathryn nodded.

Harold sank heavily back into his chair, grief crushing the breath from him. “Bettina... how could she go before me...”

His sorrow filled the room, and the guests sat frozen. Some women lifted handkerchiefs to their eyes. Bettina had grown up surrounded by comfort and respect. People spoke of her with warmth, remembering her gentle spirit—until her supposed mental illness pulled her from the world. No one had expected the next news about her to be that she was gone.

And to make it worse, her husband was hosting a party for someone else—without even holding a proper funeral for the dead.

The women at the party, imagining how easily it could have been them, dabbed at their eyes all the more.

Cathryn stepped toward Jordyn, removed the white flower pinned to her own dress, and fastened it to Jordyn’s chest. “My mother died as the rightful Mrs. Moore. If you’re really family, you should mourn her with us.”

A low ripple of voices spread through the crowd, and someone spoke up. “But your father divorced your mother years ago. Zoe is Mrs. Moore now.”

Cathryn’s reply cut cleanly through the noise. “The truth is, my father never divorced my mother at all.”

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The room erupted.

Zoe had spent decades living in the Moore household, acting as though she were the lady of the house. Richard had always brought Zoe and Jordyn to social events, presenting them like they belonged.

The guests stared, stunned.

“If they were never divorced, then Zoe was never his wife. That would make Jordyn illegitimate.”

“Can you believe it? Bettina’s barely gone, and Richard throws a birthday bash for his mistress. Who does that?”

“It’s shameful. Some people have no decency at all.”

Tension crackled across the room. Richard stepped forward, hands raised in a show of control. “Let me explain. Bettina and I drifted apart a long time ago. The truth is, I never filed for divorce because of her health. She couldn’t cope with it. I didn’t want to push her further. Her passing caught us all off guard, so we kept quiet until now. As for Zoe’s birthday, the invitations were sent out

weeks in advance. Canceling at the last minute would have stirred up even more gossip.”

His eyes landed on Jordyn, her red dress glittering under the harsh lights. He slapped her hard, the crack echoing through the hall. “Change your clothes. Stand next to your sister and mourn properly.”

Jordyn covered her face with her hands and fled into the shadows, sobbing as she went.

Richard moved through the room, smoothing things over with soft words and practiced gestures. Then he approached Harold. “Don’t think I’m cold, Harold. Bettina meant something to me once. I’m only holding it together for the sake of tonight. After everyone leaves, I’ll come to you. We’ll talk properly.”

Harold’s eyes narrowed. “Since you already brought Zoe into your house, why didn’t you divorce Bettina?”

Richard lowered his gaze, his voice subdued. “Any time I tried to end the marriage, Bettina’s condition worsened. I delayed the divorce for her sake.”

A weary sigh escaped Harold. He waved Richard away. “It’s nothing but a mess you created. Bettina’s gone. Whatever you do with Zoe from here, that’s your business.”

Anger flared in Cathryn’s eyes. She saw straight through Richard’s careful phrasing and polished charm—he bent reality as easily as breathing, reshaping every story to suit himself.

“Thank you for your understanding,” Richard said, as smooth as ever, looking at Harold.

Jordyn returned dressed in black, a pale flower pinned at her shoulder. Tear tracks still streaked her cheeks. Standing beside Cathryn in matching mourning clothes, the two half-sisters made a strange sight—united in grief at a party that had begun as a birthday celebration.

Zoe tasted the bitterness of it. Tonight was supposed to belong to her, yet the entire mood had shifted to mourning.

Richard raised his voice to the gathered guests. “From this moment on, Zoe stands as the true lady of this home, and Jordyn is my daughter.”

The declaration soothed Zoe and Jordyn, restoring their pride.

A sly smile tugged at Jordyn’s lips as she shot Cathryn a triumphant look, her eyes flashing with quiet satisfaction. “You’ve lost everything, Cathryn, despite your cleverness. Your mother, your family, even your place here. In the end, I’m the one who came out on top,” she muttered to herself.

Cathryn pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, putting on a show of weeping that carried across the hall.

Unable to hold back, Harold pulled Liam to his side and placed Cathryn’s hand in Liam’s. His voice trembled as he spoke. “The Moores owe everything to Cathryn and Bettina. With Bettina gone and my own strength failing, Cathryn has no one but you. I’m counting on you to protect her.”

Liam bowed his head, unease flickering in his eyes.

Cathryn caught the hard look Jordyn shot her. She forced more tears and buried herself against Liam's chest, her sobs echoing through the hall. "Sweetheart, you're the only person I have left now."

Sympathy rippled through the crowd. Whispers swelled as people stared at Cathryn with pity. A few guests even clapped Liam on the back, murmuring encouragement and urging him to look after her.

Pinned under the weight of so many stares, Liam had no choice but to wrap his arms around Cathryn, offering awkward comfort as best he could.

Off to the side, Jordyn fumed, jealousy flaring in her eyes. That shameless Cathryn still wanted to steal Liam back. She wouldn't sit by and let it happen—not while she was still breathing.

Music drifted through the hall as the banquet resumed. The lights dimmed, and a massive screen flickered to life, playing a highlight reel of Richard and Zoe's happiest moments together.

Jordyn seized the chance. Grabbing Liam by the wrist, she pulled him into a shadowed corner and shoved him against the wall, her voice low and sharp. "Why did you hold Cathryn just now?"

Liam slipped an arm around her waist, trying to soothe her. "It was for show. Harold and everyone else was watching. I had no choice."

Jordyn narrowed her eyes, twisting in his arms, her anger refusing to loosen. "I saw your hand on her back."

His fingers traced slow circles over Jordyn's chest. "Don't waste your energy worrying about Cathryn. You're the only woman I want, and you know it."

His words finally chipped away at her jealousy. The fear she'd felt drained away, replaced by a rush of heat as his hands wandered.

They melted into each other, oblivious to the watchful gaze tracking them from the darkness.

Back in the main hall, Cathryn sat just below the stage, eyes fixed on the screen. The "happy family" of three—Richard, Zoe, and Jordyn—smiled in every frame. Liam appeared now and then, while Jordyn showered him with sickly-sweet affection.

A cold, sly grin crept across Cathryn's lips. She retrieved her phone from her purse and tapped quickly. In an instant, the screen onstage glitched.

A hush swept over the hall.

At first, the video was nothing but darkness. Then two shadowy figures appeared, pressed close together, their voices carrying clearly through the sudden silence.

"Liam, no one's going to catch us, right?" a woman whispered, breathless and eager.

"It's pitch black. Who's going to see us?" a man replied, his breathing unsteady with anticipation.

No one needed to imagine the rest. The guests knew exactly what they were hearing.

Then the camera shifted. Faces flared into view on the screen—Jordyn, her clothes rumpled, her eyes heavy with want.

And buried against her, unmistakably caught in full display, was Liam.

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