

Chapter 5

"Two million!" My voice cracked slightly, but the resolve in it was unyielding. The auctioneer's gavel came down with a decisive thud. "Sold! To Miss Estrada!"

A small, grim satisfaction settled in my chest. I had won. But the victory felt hollow, coated in the bitter taste of public defiance. I walked over to the payment desk, Jordan trailing a few steps behind me, a strange mixture of pride and unease on his face.

"That was... quite a statement, Amira," he murmured.

I ignored him, presenting my card to the auction house clerk. She smiled politely, swiped the card, and then her smile faltered. She tried again. The machine beeped, flashing "Transaction Declined."

My blood ran cold. "Try it again," I said, my voice tight. "There must be a mistake."

She tried a third time. Same result. "I'm so sorry, Miss Estrada," she said hesitantly. "But it seems... your account has been frozen."

Frozen. My own words from yesterday morning, demanding my father freeze the Fellows' accounts, echoed in my ears. He wouldn't. Not mine. He couldn't. This was impossible.

"That's ridiculous!" I snapped, my face flushing scarlet. "My father would never-"

"Here, Amira," Jordan interrupted, stepping forward. He handed his own card to the clerk. "Let me cover it. It's my treat, remember?"

The clerk, flustered, took his card. She swiped it. The machine beeped again. "Transaction Declined."

A stunned silence fell over the small payment area. Then, murmurs started. Whispers spread like wildfire through the room. "Estrada's accounts frozen? What on earth?" "The heiress can't afford her own bid?" Laughter, thinly veiled, began to ripple.

Humiliation, raw and scorching, washed over me. This wasn't just about a necklace. This was a public execution of my pride, my status. My vision

blurred. My cheeks burned.

Then, a voice cut through the noise, calm and utterly infuriating. "Allow me."

Devon. He stood beside me, his gaze unreadable, a ghost of a smirk playing on his lips. He handed his platinum card to the clerk. She took it, her hands trembling slightly. She swiped. The machine whirled, then a green light flashed. "Transaction Approved."

He took the velvet box containing the ruby necklace from the clerk. He didn't look at me. Instead, he turned and presented it to Delilah, who was standing a few feet away, her eyes wide with feigned surprise, but a glint of pure malice in their depths.

"Here, Delilah," he said, his voice soft, an intimate caress. "A token for my dear, sweet Delilah."

She gasped, her hands flying to her mouth. "Oh, Devon! It's beautiful! But ... but it was Amira's bid..."

"It belongs to you now," he stated, his voice firm, dismissive. He then leaned down and whispered something in her ear that made her giggle, a high, saccharine sound. The crowd watched, captivated by the spectacle. I was a puppet, my strings being pulled for their amusement.

Tears, hot and angry, finally broke free, streaming down my face. I was a joke. A pathetic, humiliated joke. He had done this. Devon, with his genius hacker mind, had orchestrated this. He had frozen my accounts, knowing I would bid, knowing he could publicly "rescue" Delilah and shove her victory in my face. This wasn't just about the necklace. It was about control. It was about proving he could break me.

"You bastard," Jordan hissed, stepping forward, his fists clenched. "You planned this, didn't you? You set her up!"

I just laughed, a broken, hysterical sound as tears streamed down my face. "He's a genius, isn't he, Jordan?" I choked out, a raw sob escaping my throat. "He can manipulate anything. He can destroy anyone." He had destroyed me. He had taken my dignity and thrown it on the floor.

He could ruin me. He could destroy everything I had.

Devon turned then, his eyes locking onto Jordan. His voice was low, dangerous. "Stay away from her, Jordan. She's my fiancée. And she's going home." His gaze, cold as ice, then flickered to me. "Go home, Amira. Now."

"No," I whispered, my voice trembling but firm. "I'm not your fiancée. And I'm not going anywhere with you." I turned and stumbled out of the auction house, leaning heavily on my crutches, the echoes of their laughter ringing in my ears.

I locked myself in my room for a week. The days blurred into a haze of pain, anger, and utter despair. Jordan tried to visit, knocking softly on my door, but I ignored him. I ignored everyone.

One night, the dull throb in my leg was overshadowed by the gnawing emptiness in my soul. I dragged myself to my desk, my fingers fumbling with a hidden panel. Inside, a small, discreet security device. My father, ever the paranoid businessman, had insisted on installing these, just in case. I had adapted them, connecting them to hidden cameras throughout the mansion, for my own privacy, for my own peace of mind. Now, they were a weapon.

I activated the system, my fingers trembling slightly. The screen flickered to life, showing a live feed of the Fellows' private lounge. They were all there, sprawled on the expensive leather couches, looking bored.

"She's still holed up in her room," Bryant grumbled, taking a swig from a glass. "This is getting annoying. Our schedule is being affected."

"Yeah," another said. "Who's going to talk some sense into her? We need her out and about. It's bad for PR."

"I'll handle my fiancée," Devon's voice cut through the air, chilling and authoritative. He walked into the lounge, his eyes scanning the room.

My finger instinctively slammed the "off" button. Fiancée. The word tasted like ash in my mouth. My stomach lurched.

"Fiancée?" Jordan's voice, laced with disbelief, broke the silence in the recording. "You really think she'll still play along after what you did?"

"She has no choice," Devon replied, his voice laced with chilling confidence. "She always comes back. She always will."

I closed my eyes, a single tear escaping. He was right. That's what I had always done. But not anymore. Not ever again.