

## Chapter 7

The words, the video, the sheer audacity of her, hit me like a physical blow. My vision tunneled. A primal roar tore through me, and before I could even process what I was doing, my hand shot out. The sharp crack echoed through the marble foyer. Delilah's head snapped to the side, a crimson mark blooming on her cheek.

"You're disgusting!" I spat, my voice shaking with rage. "You vile, manipulative little parasite!"

Her eyes, wide with shock, slowly turned to me, then narrowed with a venomous fury that ripped through her innocent facade. Just then, Devon appeared at the top of the grand staircase, drawn by the commotion. His gaze, ice cold and burning with a terrifying anger, locked onto me. I knew then. I had just signed my own death warrant. His retribution would be swift, and it would be brutal.

The birthday ball, meant to be a joyous celebration, was a blur of forced smiles and polite chatter. I moved through the opulent ballroom like a puppet, my plastered smile aching. Every time I caught Devon's eye, a chill ran down my spine. I knew he was planning something, something terrible. But the hours ticked by, the music played, and nothing happened. The suspense was a slow, agonizing torture.

Finally, the moment came. My father, beaming with pride, took center stage, tapping a microphone. The music faded. A hush fell over the crowd.

"My esteemed friends, family, and colleagues," he began, his voice booming with emotion. "Tonight, we celebrate not only my daughter Amira's 21st birthday, but also a momentous occasion for the Estrada family. Tonight, we announce her engagement, and the future of Estrada Records!"

A ripple of excitement went through the guests. Whispers of "Devon" and "the lead singer" filled the air. I looked across the room, my gaze finding Bentley. He was smiling, a warm, reassuring presence. Our eyes met, and he gave me a subtle, loving nod. A genuine, unforced laugh escaped my lips, a rare moment of pure happiness amidst the chaos. He made a small, almost imperceptible gesture, touching his heart, then pointing to me. My heart swelled. This was real. This was what I deserved.

Just as my father raised his hand to make the big announcement, the

massive projection screen behind him, usually displaying the Estrada Records logo, flickered. Then, it sprang to life, filled with images that made my blood run cold.

It was me. My face, flushed and breathless, on the screen. My voice, soft and intimate, whispering Devon's name. A montage of my most private moments, moments I had thought were sacred, moments of unguarded affection and vulnerability I had shared only with him in my dreams. My tearful confessions of love, my clumsy attempts at seduction, my desperate pleas for his attention. It was a video compilation of my deepest, most embarrassing secrets, stolen from my private journals, my old phone. My entire, pathetic, one-sided love affair with Devon, laid bare for the entire world to see.

The room erupted in gasps, then whispers, then outright laughter. I saw my father's face crumple in horror. My head whipped around, searching for Devon. He stood at the back of the room, his face utterly devoid of emotion, watching my public crucifixion with a cold, detached gaze.

"You bastard!" I screamed, my voice tearing through the chaos. "How could you be so cruel?!"

My father, his face ashen, roared into the microphone. "Turn it off! Now!" But the screen remained frozen, looping the humiliating footage. "Security! Shut it down! Now!"

Chaos reigned. Guests were gasping, pointing, some fleeing in embarrassment. My father's security team scrambled, but the system was locked.

Then, Bentley, a blur of righteous fury, sprinted onto the stage. With a guttural yell, he lunged at the projector, smashing it with his bare hands. The screen went black, plunging the room into merciful darkness for a precious second, before the emergency lights flickered on.

My father, his face contorted with rage, turned to the remaining guests. "Find him! Find whoever did this! I want their head!"

A senior partner, an old family friend, rushed to my father's side, his voice urgent. "Julian, you must salvage this! Announce the engagement to Devon, now! It's the only way to save face, to save Amira's reputation!"

My father's eyes, filled with a desperate pain, flickered to Bentley, who was now beside me, pulling me into a fierce embrace, shielding me from the judging eyes.

Bentley held me tight, his body rigid with anger. Then, he released me, stepping forward, his voice cutting through the stunned silence like a

< Chapter 7



+120 Points at most

sharp knife. "Amira Estrada is my fiancée!" he declared, his voice ringing with authority. "And I swear to God, I will find the bastard who did this, and I will tear him apart!"

The guests gasped, a new wave of shock washing over them. Devon, Jordan, Bryant, and the other Fellows stood frozen, their faces pale, their eyes wide with disbelief. Their carefully laid plans had just imploded. And I, for the first time in my life, felt a flicker of hope.



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