

Chapter 2

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The air went dead silent. Tension hung thick between the three of them, sharp and ready to explode. Stella stared at Evan, then kicked over the chair beside her. It crashed to the floor with a thunderous bang. Her whole presence turned cutting and aggressive. “Go ahead. Tell your mother. What kind of soup do I even know how to make? “Summer says she wants the chicken soup I supposedly make. Is that really not obvious enough for you? Or did you forget that I don’t even know how to cook?” Every word was charged with anger, each sentence sharp as a blade. Stella had just lost her child. Her entire system was still in shock. Anyone who dared poke her right now was asking to get blown up. Dora flew into a rage. “You— I mean—” Evan cut in, his expression stern. “If you don’t know how to make it, then don’t. Have the staff do it. Is this really worth making such a scene over?” That same dismissive tone again. Like none of it was a big deal. Stella fell silent. Her heart went completely cold. Dora snapped, furious. “What kind of bad luck did our family run into? She can’t even give birth herself, and now someone else has children and she’s the one causing trouble—” “That’s enough.” Evan interrupted her sharply before she could finish. That only made Dora angrier. “You just keep indulging her!” She turned to storm off. Just as she was about to leave, Stella spoke again. “Mrs. Wright, you’ve got it wrong,” Stella said coldly. “It’s not that I can’t have children. It’s that the baby I was carrying two years ago was lost after Summer ran her car into me. “Don’t twist the facts and slap the label of ‘infertile’ on me to cover up your cruelty.” Stella threw off the label Dora had pinned on her for the past two years without mercy. And the way she addressed her as Mrs. Wright made it unmistakably clear. The formal title hung in the air like a physical barrier. Dora nearly fainted on the spot when she heard Mrs. Wright and cruel mother-in-law in the same breath. “This is outrageous. Absolutely outrageous.” Had she completely lost her mind? Dora was so furious she could barely stand. She turned on Evan instead. “This is the woman you married. Do something about her!” With that, she stormed out in a rage. Evan’s gaze darkened when Stella called his mother Mrs. Wright. Displeasure flickered in his eyes. But in the end, he said nothing. He turned and followed his mother out. Watching his back as he left, Stella felt nothing but bitter irony. Things had blown up like this, and he still went after her. Was it really because his brother was gone and he felt responsible for Summer? Or was it simply because he wanted to be there for her? Once they were gone, Marianne approached anxiously. “Mrs. Wright, you don’t look well at all. Should I call a doctor to come take a look?” Even the housekeeper could see something was wrong. She knew a doctor should be called. But Evan— Stella waved her off. “No, it’s okay. You can go.” She was too angry to hold herself together. Marianne hesitated, then finally nodded and left. Once Stella was alone, her phone began to vibrate. It was a call from her best friend, Jennifer Tanner. At the sight of the name on the screen, some of the rage drained from Stella’s body. “Jennifer.” “I’ve been calling you all afternoon. Why didn’t you pick up? Did you hear about Summer Bailey giving birth to twins?” “I did,” Stella said flatly. “Evan was there with her.” “You knew? And you didn’t stop it?” Jennifer snapped. “Summer gives birth, and he’s there with her? In what role exactly? Doesn’t the Wright family have enough people to take care of her?” Jennifer was furious on Stella’s behalf. Evan didn’t even know how to keep his distance. Steven had been gone for six months. And for those six months, Stella had been simmering in resentment over Summer’s complete lack of boundaries. Was Evan really that oblivious, or did he just not care how Stella felt? Stella’s voice was as cold as her eyes. “What can I do? Evan has the same face as Steven. Apparently that’s enough to soothe her depression.” Wasn’t that the excuse they’d used over and over these past six months? Calling Evan away whenever

Summer lost control? Whenever Summer lost control, the first call always went to Evan. Jennifer knew all of this, and it only made her angrier. "The entire Wright family is seriously messed up in the head." Summer couldn't accept that Steven was gone, so they kept Evan paraded in front of her. He had a wife of his own. Comforting another woman like this, what kind of nonsense was that? "I miscarried this afternoon," Stella said quietly. "When you were calling me, I was already on the operating table." Jennifer fell silent. "...What?" Then it hit her, and she exploded. "You miscarried, and Evan was by his sister-in-law's side when she's giving birth? Is he insane? Does he even know?" His wife was going through surgery for a miscarriage, and he was accompanying another woman deliver twins. What was wrong with him? Stella opened her eyes, dark and hollow. "Come pick me up." She was exhausted. And she loathed every inch of this place. Even the air made her sick. She hung up the phone. Stella went upstairs and packed her personal belongings at record speed. She also gathered everything she'd bought for Evan over the years. Marianne saw her carrying a pile of things outside the villa and setting them on fire. She rushed over in alarm. "Mrs. Wright, what are you doing? Please stop burning things. "If the madam finds out, she'll say it's bad luck again." Dora had already been furious over the earlier scene. If she saw this, there was no telling how ugly it would get. "Bad luck is perfect," Stella said coldly. "If I knew witchcraft, I'd curse the entire Wright family to hell." Her voice was filled with hatred and disgust. As she spoke, she went back upstairs. Trip after trip, she carried down everything tied to Evan and threw it into the roaring flames. When Jennifer arrived, she saw Stella standing at the villa entrance. In front of her, a mound of charred things smothered in ash. Stella's face was pale. She looked fearless. Detached. Jennifer strode over. She was tall and pulled Stella straight into her arms, shielding her with an umbrella from the pouring rain. "You just miscarried, and you're standing out here getting soaked?" Jennifer scolded. "Are you trying to wreck your health?" Without waiting for an answer, she wrapped an arm around Stella and marched her toward the car. As she felt the warmth of Jennifer's embrace, the tension Stella had been holding all night finally collapsed. ... Inside the car. Jennifer grabbed a dry towel and roughly wiped Stella's wet hair. "What were you burning?" "Everything I bought for him. And everything he bought for me." Jennifer glanced at her. "If you want to cry, then cry. I know you're not supposed to after a miscarriage, but it's still better than bottling it up." They'd been so good together once. And yet, in just six months, everything had been torn to pieces. Stella kept wiping her hair and let out a short laugh. "Cry? No. Why should I cry alone?" She would make the people who deserved to cry do it properly. Jennifer fell silent. When Stella's hair was mostly dry, she put the towel aside. "Just watch. Someone in the Wright family is about to cry plenty." Meeting Stella's ice-cold gaze, Jennifer nodded. "You're right. They should be the ones crying, not you." There was no room for a third person in a relationship, no matter how that third person tried to exist. And Summer hadn't even bothered to hide it these past six months. She'd been openly competing for Evan's affection. That kind of shamelessness only came from one belief: Stella couldn't do anything about her. Jennifer started the car and drove away from the villa. Rain pounded against the windows as the wipers swept back and forth. "After you lost that baby two years ago," Jennifer said, "you couldn't get pregnant again, right?" Two years ago, Stella and Evan had been expecting a child. Before Stella even knew she was pregnant, Summer had hit her with a car. She had lost the baby before she even reached the hospital. Summer had cried harder than anyone afterward, insisting it hadn't been intentional. In the end, the matter was quietly buried. Steven was still alive then, and Summer hadn't shown any obvious interest in Evan, so Stella hadn't pushed it further. But looking back now, it was likely Summer had already set her sights on Evan back then. She'd known about the pregnancy and had done it on purpose. After that, Stella never conceived again. For the past two years, because she couldn't get pregnant, Dora had treated her with open contempt. Bag after bag of herbal medicine had been sent to her. And today—When Summer went into labor, the shove she gave Stella had felt deliberate. Jennifer frowned. "Back then, I didn't think much of it. But after Steven died, watching how Summer's been acting around Evan, it really feels like that car accident was intentional." The word intentional made the air around Stella turn icy. Two years ago. Today. Stella said flatly, "She shoved me today, too." The

image flashed through her mind. Evan holding Summer, looking at Stella with that dismissive 'stop making trouble' expression. Rage surged through her chest. "So that means two years ago was definitely deliberate," Jennifer said sharply. "Her husband was still alive, and she was already eyeing her brother-in-law. That's twisted." Stella didn't respond. Twisted? Looking at it now, yes. Especially over the past six months. Summer's obsessive, aggressive possessiveness toward Evan was anything but normal. "So what are you going to do?" Jennifer asked. "Just let it go?" Let it go? Stella looked out the window. The rain was heavy, flooding the streets in no time. Did she look like someone who would just let it go? Her eyes were as cold as the rain outside. "First, I divorce Evan." "And then?" Stella didn't answer right away. She watched the rain slide down the glass before asking calmly, "Ruby Bailey's export business has been doing very well these past few years, hasn't it?" Ruby Bailey was Summer's wealthy mother. These past two years, Summer had dared to act the way she did because she had Dora backing her. And because she had a rich mother standing behind her. Jennifer said carefully, "Yeah, but why are you bringing up her mother? That's not a woman anyone can easily mess with." She was warning her. Ruby hadn't built an empire by accident. A woman who could grow her business to that scale didn't get there without ruthless methods. "What if that business gets cut off?" Stella asked calmly. Jennifer fell silent. Cut off... the business? "The materials she deals in are only sold overseas," Jennifer said slowly. "If that pipeline gets shut down, it'd be no different from taking her life." She glanced at Stella. "Why are you asking this, babe? Don't tell me you expect me to help you take on the Bailey family. I don't have that kind of pull." Ruby's network was no joke. She was like an old tree with roots tangled deep through Harbor City. No one could shake her easily. Seeing Stella remain unmoved, Jennifer squeezed her cold hand. "Don't do anything stupid." Something stupid? Stella didn't answer. But in her mind, a face surfaced. She thought of the foreign man from Eirden who had found her a month ago, the memory of him pulling her into his arms still vivid.