

## Chapter 5

Thinking of the months she'd poured into the Redcrest Valley project, Stella looked at Evan with a colder, sharper mockery in her eyes. The air fell silent. Nearly half a minute passed before Evan spoke again, his voice tightly controlled. "What are you trying to say?" "What exactly are you planning to sue her for?" The words court summons had made his chest jolt hard. When he looked at Stella now, there was no warmth left in his gaze. "What do you think?" Stella met his eyes with open scorn. "Evan Wright, you were the one who told me my design for the Redcrest Valley tourism project got rejected, weren't you? "So tell me. Was it my design that got cut, or was it me?" The silence deepened. Outside, rain and wind battered the windows, unable to cool the thick, stifling air between them. Stella glanced at the hand Evan still had braced against the door. "Can you let go now?" His expression stiffened. When he spoke again, the words came out strained, almost suffocating. "This isn't what you think." "Save it," Stella said calmly. "You can explain everything to the judge." "Stella Rowan!" "Let go." "Do you really have to tear the family apart like this?" Stella fell silent. What did true, bone-deep coldness feel like? Family? She let out a soft, bitter laugh. "Family... how disgusting." He didn't try to give her a real explanation. Maybe because he couldn't. And using the word family at a moment like this only made it worse. Stella pushed harder against the door. Evan instinctively tightened his grip. "You can't sue her," he said urgently. "She just gave birth." Stella said nothing. What a line. She had lost two children because of Summer. He hadn't believed she was pregnant, accusing her of making a scene. Now that she wanted to take Summer to court, he panicked. Stella closed her eyes. Then she lifted her leg and kicked out again. This time, Evan was ready. His instincts made him release the door. Before he could react, the door slammed shut in his face with a heavy bang. "Stella, open the door. Let's talk this through." Evan pounded on the door like he'd lost his mind. Stella stood there, her face frozen, her back pressed against the door. She answered only once. "Talk to my lawyer." Hearing the word lawyer made Evan's chest seize. Stella turned and walked into the bedroom, shutting the door behind her. Then she crawled under the covers, blocking out the world completely. She didn't know how long the doorbell and pounding continued before it finally stopped. Half-asleep, exhausted and weak, Stella drifted in and out of dreams. Sometime in the middle of the night, she was shaken awake. "Stella. Stella." Her body felt like it was being thrown from a freezer into flames. She forced her eyes open. It was Jennifer. "Jennifer." "You have a fever," Jennifer said anxiously. "I'm taking you to the hospital." Jennifer hadn't been able to rest easy. She'd brought her housekeeper over in the middle of the night to help look after Stella. Thank God she came. If Stella had burned through the night like this, who knew what would've happened by morning? Jennifer's phone kept buzzing nonstop. Evan was calling. She was already fed up. She didn't answer until she'd helped Stella into the car. "What do you want?" she snapped. "Pass this on to Stella," Evan said. "No matter how angry she is at Summer, it can wait until Summer finishes her postpartum recovery." "Evan Wright, go to hell," Jennifer shot back. Stella, half-conscious, heard his words through the speaker. Her chest went even colder. Jennifer glanced at Stella's pale face, rage boiling over. "You're so damn worried about Summer's recovery, but your own wife just—" She didn't get to finish. The phone was suddenly gone from her hand. Jennifer turned to see Stella grab it and hang up without hesitation. "What are you doing?" Jennifer burst out. "Let me tear him apart." She was furious beyond words. She was just an outsider, and even she was furious beyond control. How had Stella endured this for so long? Jennifer looked at her with aching sympathy. "He doesn't believe it," Stella said quietly. "Talking to him is a waste of breath." Jennifer fell silent. She knew it was true. Hadn't Stella gotten angry over Summer countless times these past six months? Not only had Evan never cared, he'd only crossed more lines. This time, he'd even accompanied her to give birth. It was sickening. Stella narrowed her eyes. "Don't mention my miscarriage to him again." "Why?"

Jennifer asked. Why? Because to him, the pregnancy had always been fake. Just another tantrum. After years of marriage, there wasn't even basic trust left. What was the point of asking for more? "We're getting divorced anyway," Stella said calmly. "I want it clean. No loose ends." And she didn't want his guilt. Guilt lingered. It clung. It dragged things out. Jennifer understood immediately, and it only made her heart ache more. "That bastard." She was furious. "Alright," she said, swallowing it down. "Let's get you to the hospital." Seeing how drained Stella was, Jennifer didn't say anything else. They had once been so good together. Now they'd reached a point where neither love nor hate was worth holding onto. Jennifer helped Stella into the hospital. And of course, they ran straight into Evan and Summer. Evan was holding a baby in his arms, several people trailing behind him. Summer sat in a wheelchair, being pushed along, wiping tears from her face. "Evan, nothing can happen to the baby." "Don't worry," he said gently. "Everything will be fine." That softness in his voice. Stella realized it was the first time in six months she'd heard him speak with that kind of sincere tenderness. It was nothing like the half-hearted way he'd always soothed her. She heard it clearly. He meant it. As they passed each other, Evan saw Stella. He stopped, lips parting as if to say something. Before he could, Summer broke down crying. "Evan, if something happens to the baby, I won't live either." In the end, Evan pulled his gaze away from Stella's deathly pale face and strode forward. The group behind him rushed to keep up, pushing Summer along. Whether Stella was angry or not was beside the point. Jennifer was shaking with rage. "Evan Wright, you stop right there, you piece of—" "Hey—Stella, Stella!" The weight against her arm suddenly gave way. Stella's body slid downward, and Jennifer panicked, grabbing her just in time. At the elevator entrance, Evan heard Jennifer shout and instinctively turned around. He saw Jennifer holding Stella, yelling, "Doctor! Someone help—now!" Evan's heart lurched. Without thinking, he shoved the baby into someone else's arms and broke into a run toward them.