

What makes a power couple

Chapter 11:

Flicking the cigarette into the ashtray, Cloud set aside his usual charm for something far more serious. “Still no sign of anything.”

“Then keep digging.”

“Alright, alright. I’ve got a date waiting, though. Can’t leave a lady hanging.” He ended the call with a tap.

Settling into the couch, Nicole kept her face composed, though her eyes stayed sharp. No chance—that incident from five years ago didn’t just disappear without leaving something behind. It didn’t sit right with her.

Snapping out of her thoughts, she reached for her suitcase and wheeled it into the master bedroom without another glance back.

Inside, the space was wide, all in icy blue and white. It looked more like a display model than a place someone lived in. It reminded her too much of Aidan.

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She picked up the carefully arranged toiletries Duran had prepared and headed to the bathroom.

Facing the mirror, she stared at the reflection looking back. Every feature was perfectly placed, yet those eyes told another story. There was a sly tilt at the corners, a whisper of mischief. But beneath that was something tougher. Something unbending.

A sigh slipped past her lips. Her earliest memories didn't include her parents. They had already abandoned her by then.

When she turned eighteen, they dragged her back into the picture—only for Marissa to push her toward ruin. And Cathy? Cathy hadn't blinked before sending her off to rot in a mental hospital.

She had the resources to escape. Every door was within reach. Still, Nicole stayed. Not because she was weak, but because a small part of her hoped. She waited for remorse. For a single apology. For her family to admit they'd done her wrong.

But instead, they handed her over for marriage like she was an object to be traded.

Her lips thinned. If that was all family amounted to, she wanted no part of it.

Later that evening,

As soon as Aidan walked through the door, Duran hurried over to tell him everything that had happened in his absence.

Without missing a beat, Aidan headed straight to his grandmother's room and knocked.

"Come in," Analia answered.

Lilah was inside, holding a spoon near Analia's mouth, coaxing her to take the last of her medicine. When Lilah spotted Aidan at the door, her whole face brightened. "Aidan."

Not a word left Aidan's lips. That silence said more than enough, and Lilah quietly made her exit without protest.

With the medicine done, Analia downed a glass of water, then popped a chocolate into her mouth. She slowly turned, lips curled into a sly smile. "Let me guess. You came to confront me?"

Aidan's stare was unflinching. "Weren't you the one who insisted that I should call off the engagement?"

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Chapter 12:

Her smile vanished, and she glared at him like he'd just said something utterly stupid. "That bullshit came from some washed-up fortune-teller. She didn't have a clue what she was talking about. I went to someone else. Got a second opinion. And guess what? That girl's a blessing. Not just for you, but for this entire family. She's bright, she's good-hearted, and she saved my life, Aidan. You should be falling to your knees in thanks."

His eyes narrowed. He didn't expect this twist—the woman who'd saved Analia was the same woman he would marry. It couldn't all be by chance. Could it?

Analia noticed his hesitation and went straight for the opening. "One more thing. This new fortune-teller said your bad luck—it bleeds into everyone near you. But Nicole? She balances that out. The two of you belong together."

With a sharp exhale, Aidan gave a dry laugh. “Oh, so now I’m the one who’s cursed, huh? Come on, Grandma. You really expect me to buy that this isn’t just one of your little plots dressed up as prophecy?”

“Ugh, my back—it’s aching like crazy. I’m completely worn out from today. I need to lie down. You should get some sleep too. Go on now, off to bed with you.”

Without warning, she switched off the lights. The room was swallowed in darkness, her tired groans still echoing.

Left with no other choice, Aidan turned and walked out.

Outside, Leonel was already waiting and rushed to meet him. “Sir, Ms. Wilson is in your room at the moment. Would you like me to arrange for her to be taken home?”

Aidan’s lashes lowered, shadowing his unreadable eyes. His voice came out low and rough. “No, leave it.”

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Though surprised, Leonel didn’t ask questions. He gave a short nod, figuring Aidan wanted to deal with it on his own.

In front of the bedroom door, Aidan hesitated. The image of Nicole flashed in his mind—those bold eyes from the time she faced down that wild wolf, steady and burning with resolve.

“Was fate really that careless? Or had every move been planned, like someone had mapped it all out from the start?” Aidan wondered. With that question circling in his head, he opened the door.

Pale moonlight filtered through the blinds, casting soft silver bands across the room.

Aidan slowed his pace as he caught sight of Nicole, sound asleep and curled into herself.

Without thinking, he moved closer, his steps quiet and measured, as if silence were the only language that fit the moment.

In sleep, Nicole looked entirely different. The usual fire behind her eyes had vanished, replaced by something quiet—almost fragile.

As his gaze swept across the space, he noticed how untouched it felt. Not a single object was out of place. She hadn't rearranged a thing.

That stillness stirred a voice in his mind—his grandmother’s words, clear and impossible to ignore.

His throat tightened as he swallowed hard, the low light reflecting off the unreadable glint in his eyes. After a long pause, he stepped back, choosing not to disturb her.

By morning, Nicole emerged from the room, her expression calm, having already straightened everything before stepping out.

Just as she rounded the corner, Nicole came face to face with Aidan.

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Chapter 13:

Dressed in a white shirt with the top buttons casually undone, he stood there effortlessly composed. His trousers were pressed to perfection, not a wrinkle in sight. That tall, cool presence gave off an air of quiet detachment—refined, distant, and striking all at once.

Seeing him like this, no one would have guessed he was someone struggling with a serious condition.

Lifting her chin slightly, she kept her voice even. “I need to make a quick trip home.”

“I’ll come with you.” Aidan didn’t skip a beat. His voice made it clear there was no room to argue.

The response caught her off guard. She blinked, thrown by how quickly he agreed. For someone who seemed irritated by her very presence, this wasn’t what she expected. After all, she was just a substitute bride, nothing more in his eyes.

The thought made her hesitate. “It’s really alright. I can go alone...”

“This was Grandma’s idea. If you’ve got a problem with me coming, go ahead and take it up with her,” Aidan said bluntly, cutting her off.

A tight smile tugged at Nicole's lips. There was no chance she'd actually go through with that. "Let's not make it more complicated than it needs to be," she said with a breezy tone.

By the time they entered the living room, Duran stepped forward to inform Aidan that Lilah had taken Analia to the hospital for a check-up.

Breakfast was quick and quiet before the two of them left the house together. Inside the car, Aidan reclined slightly, head resting against the leather seat, eyes shut, his entire posture radiating a quiet warning—leave him alone.

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His right hand moved in a slow, unconscious rhythm, his thumb grazing the surface of the emerald ring on his other hand. The emerald was rare and precious, with a bright color and flawless clarity.

Nicole's gaze drifted to the ring, her expression gradually shifting into something more focused. That ring brought back memories she hadn't let herself revisit in a long time. The one left behind for her had looked just like it—rare, priceless, and unforgettable.

Long before she was locked away, Nicole had placed the emerald ring inside a bank's safety deposit box. But just yesterday, when she sent her assistant to retrieve it, the response stunned her. Cathy had already claimed it.

Somehow, Cathy had presented forged medical records, claiming Nicole was mentally unfit to handle her own assets. A quiet tension gripped Nicole as her fingers curled slightly. No matter what it took, she would reclaim that ring today.

Roughly forty minutes later, their car rolled to a stop in front of the Wilson family estate.

Both Aidan and Nicole stepped out together, silent but steady.

Carl Sampson, the Wilsons' longtime butler, stood frozen for a beat. His gaze flicked between the two, as if trying to confirm whether the man beside Nicole, so distant and commanding, was truly her bridegroom.

In a quick flurry of motion, Carl approached. "Nicole, allow me to inform the family of your arrival."

Nicole lifted a hand with ease, brushing off the offer. "No need. Go back to what you were doing."

"As you wish."

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Chapter 14:

Not a single banner hung across the walls. No congratulatory flower arrangements. The villa, dull and cold, gave off no indication that anyone inside even remembered Nicole was going to get married.

With every step, Aidan's presence seemed sharper. His expression remained unreadable, but the paleness of his skin and the chill in his eyes gave him a blade-like aura.

A few maids, standing at a distance, couldn't stop staring. Whispers passed between them as they gawked at the famously elusive man of the Moore family.

Nicole and Aidan made their way through the garden and into the living room. From somewhere inside, Cathy's grating voice pierced the silence. "Finally got rid of that nuisance. The house can breathe again."

Trailing behind that came Marissa's sweet tone, laced with fake sympathy. "Don't say that, Mom. Nicole's had such a tough time."

"How can you still defend her after what she pulled yesterday? I've said it before, treat her like she's gone. You lost your sister the moment she walked out that door."

Brody's voice followed, steady and cold. "The only thing that matters now is keeping the Moore family in the dark about her history. If that comes out, we're done."

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A smooth voice interjected from the side, "What kind of past could be so terrible that you'd all rather erase your own blood than deal with it?"

The unexpected question startled Cathy. She spun around and went still when seeing Aidan.

She had never seen Aidan with her own eyes. She hadn't the faintest clue what he looked like. And now, staring at the man standing before her—tall, composed, and terrifyingly sharp—she was rattled. This wasn't the frail, dying figure she had built up in her head.

Cathy's brows tightened in confusion, but her mouth was quicker than her thoughts. With zero hesitation, she jabbed a finger at Nicole and retorted, "You selfish little brat! You sneak out of the Moore household in the middle of the night with your lover and dare to

bring him here? Are you completely out of your mind? Do you want this whole family destroyed?”

A low chuckle escaped from Nicole, dry and amused. Cathy wasn’t even angry anymore. She was just loud and desperate. It was almost impressive, getting in a double insult toward both her and Aidan in one breath.

“Now this is about to get entertaining,” Nicole pondered.

Across the room, Marissa couldn’t stop staring. Her eyes traced every line of Aidan’s frame, trying to piece together what kind of man her sister had suddenly brought into their world. She clearly hadn’t seen this coming. The man didn’t need to speak loudly—his presence demanded attention.

Over six feet tall, he stood straight, each move exuding quiet authority, with sculpted features and eyes that cut right through her.

A sharp inhale caught in Marissa’s throat. Every part of him radiated something dangerous and real.

She needed a moment to collect herself before finally speaking, her tone soft and laced with fake concern. “Sis, now that you have a husband, you can’t keep acting like a single woman. A husband won’t tolerate that kind of behavior.”

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Chapter 15:

At the sound of it, Nicole's eyes narrowed. Marissa wasted no time twisting the narrative, making her look unfaithful with just a single line.

Without blinking, Nicole's gaze flicked toward Aidan, who remained still. His expression was unreadable, except for the cold stillness beneath his eyes.

A smirk played at the edge of Nicole's lips. "So let me get this straight. The man beside me is suddenly a disgrace? Didn't you all arrange this marriage? Or has my husband magically turned into an unpresentable lover?"

The shift in Marissa's expression was instant. Her sweet facade cracked. Words failed her. For once, she had nothing to say.

The words got stuck in Cathy's throat. She stood frozen, unable to make a sound.

"What the hell? Wasn't Aidan supposed to be some hideous, half-dead creep?" Cathy thought in disbelief.

With a slow glance, Aidan looked over Cathy and Marissa, his cold, arrogant stare saying it all—he saw them as little more than pests.

A chill crept up Cathy's neck. She shifted uncomfortably, stealing quick glances at him while trying to figure him out.

She had expected some sickly man barely clinging to life. Instead, what stood before her looked like trouble dressed in designer. There was nothing about him that suggested illness or weakness.

Marissa's face went pale. She bit her lip, her mind refusing to accept that this was really Aidan.

Without wasting a second, Brody stepped into his role as the head of the family. He raised his voice at both his wife and daughter. "Have you two lost your minds? Show some respect and apologize right now!"

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Trying to recover from the blunder, Cathy hurried to piece herself together and pulled a strained smile. “We weren’t expecting you this early, Aidan. Come on in. Take a seat.”

Aidan glanced at his watch with disinterest. His words came out cold and sharp. “This early? It’s already ten in the morning. Or you just don’t want me here?”

There was no doubt about it. He was going out of his way to make things hard for Cathy.

“I didn’t mean anything like that. I just...”

His response came with the sharpness of a cold slap. “Then I see no reason to treat people like you matter.”

Flustered and scrambling, Cathy tried to fix things. “No, Aidan. Please. I messed up. I didn’t realize who you really were.”

“My mom didn’t mean any disrespect, Mr. Moore. She’s just nervous. She’s scared my sister might let you down, and that’s why she—”

“Noisy.” With that, Aidan flicked his eyes toward Leonel, who was already folding back his sleeves. When cleanup was needed, he never paused to ask why.

Leonel raised his hand and delivered a hard slap to Marissa’s face.

The blow snapped her head sideways, and a glaring red mark started to bloom on her cheek. For a moment, she couldn’t move. Her body stiffened, her breath caught. Tears welled up without warning. No man had ever dared strike her before. She burned with shame and rage but kept her mouth shut.

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Chapter 16:

Nicole hadn’t counted on Aidan sending Leonel to act without hesitation. The sound of that slap still echoed in her ears.

Without a word, Aidan fixed his gaze on Marissa. She was frozen in place, too shaken to speak. “And you believe you’re in any position to school my wife?”

There was something in his presence that made the air feel suffocating. One raised brow from him was enough to send a chill crawling through the room. Nicole faltered. Hearing him refer to her as his wife like it had always been true caught her off guard.

Across the room, Cathy and Brody looked like they wanted to defend Marissa, but fear clamped their jaws shut.

Eyes cold and cutting, Aidan scanned the room. “Funny. I have never heard you express your joy at your daughter getting married. What, you really don’t want this marriage to happen?”

Brody jumped to speak, his jaw tight. “No, no, nothing like that. It’s just...” He struggled to finish. The weight in the air made each word harder to pull out.

Still red-eyed from crying, Marissa tried to fix things. Her voice was soft and sweet. “Please don’t get the wrong idea, Mr. Moore. Mom and Dad were just emotional about my sister leaving home. They didn’t want to make too big a fuss.”

Trying not to laugh, Nicole gave Marissa a quick glance. She had to hand it to Marissa—no one played the innocent act better. That teary gaze and gentle tone could have most men wrapped around her finger.

But Aidan didn't fall for sob stories. "Want another slap?" he snapped.

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Marissa's face went pale. She clamped her mouth shut, too afraid to say anything else.

Desperate to change the subject, Brody called for the servant. "Bring coffee!" Then he turned to address Aidan, "Mr. Moore, please have lunch with us before heading out."

"I'm not here to eat. But I did hear something worth mentioning. Word has it that the woman you handed me had been locked in a mental hospital for five years. Said she was thrown in for having a filthy life."

The shift in conversation made Nicole's brows twitch. Things had just taken a sudden turn.

Brody looked like he'd swallowed nails. Every word Aidan threw at him hit like a hammer. He finally understood. Aidan had come not to celebrate, but to expose them—for switching out Marissa and sneaking Nicole in her place.

Marissa's heart raced. If she pinned Nicole as a thief stealing her place in the Moore family, would Aidan consider marrying her instead? Yet, she didn't utter a sound. All she did was glance at Cathy, hoping she'd step in.

Cathy picked up on her daughter's silent plea right away. But at this point, she knew there was no way Aidan would believe them. Trying to explain now would only make a mess of things.

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Chapter 17:

She forced a small smile and said, "That's not possible. Nicole has always been a proper girl. Mr. Moore, you shouldn't believe every bit of gossip you hear. There are jealous women out there who just can't stand the fact that Nicole married well. They're spreading lies, that's all."

Aidan narrowed his eyes, shooting a cold look at both Cathy and Brody. “Is that so?”

It came out sounding like a question, but his tone made it clear. He didn’t believe a word of it.

A sharp pain crept into Brody’s head. He understood exactly what was on the line. If Aidan believed Nicole had some dark history, she’d be kicked back into their care. And worse, their whole family name would be dragged through the dirt.

The choice was already made. There was no going back now. All they could do was try to keep Aidan from snapping.

Brody rubbed his sweaty hands on his pants, struggling to steady his voice. “Please, Mr. Moore. Those stories are nothing but lies. I’ve known Nicole her whole life. She’s always been a good girl. She’s never even dated anyone.”

A cold smirk tugged at Aidan’s lips. “Then why did you throw her into that mental hospital?”

With a slow lean back, he crossed his legs, each move calm but filled with cold control. The air turned chilling, pressing down on everyone in the room.

The room went dead silent.

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A sharp knot twisted in Brody's stomach. That was when it hit him—Aidan wasn't looking for answers. He was just watching them squirm.

Everything had unraveled the moment Cathy and Marissa spoke ill of Aidan. And now, the fallout had come down on every last one of them. It felt as though Brody was perched at the very edge, one wrong word away from the—

If he said Nicole hadn't been sent away on purpose, Aidan would spin it as them marrying off a mentally unstable daughter. If he admitted it, then they were heartless. Either way, they were trapped.

Before Brody could open his mouth, Cathy beat him to it. Her voice came out smooth, but her grip on calm was slipping. "Mr. Moore, you're mistaken. Nicole wasn't seriously sick. She just had awful insomnia for a long while. I heard that place had top doctors, so I sent her there hoping they could treat it. It wasn't because of any mental breakdown."

Nicole felt the weight of Aidan's stare land squarely on her. He didn't blink once as he asked, "Is that so?"

Trying to read his mood, Nicole kept her gaze fixed on him. Whatever he was thinking, he wasn't showing it. One thing was certain: she had to stay on guard.

No one here would lift a finger to shield her. Left with no other choice, she nodded.

Relief finally crept into Cathy's chest as she saw Nicole didn't retort.

But Aidan wasn't finished. "Then tell me. Did the treatment help you at all?"

Locking eyes with him, Nicole answered without flinching, "It helped a lot."

Something shifted in her chest as she said it. Aidan wasn't the kind of man who let others dictate his next move. Whether she stayed beside him or not, the choice would rest entirely in his hands.

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Chapter 18:

Though he said nothing more, Aidan kept studying her face. That calm mask she wore now didn't erase the memory of her steely glare the day she took down his wolf like it was nothing.

Trying to lighten the moment, Brody sprang to his feet with an eager grin. "Let me pour you some fresh coffee, Mr. Moore. It's excellent." But Aidan didn't reach for the cup.

Nicole had grown tired of the forced politeness. Her patience was done. She turned toward Cathy and said calmly, "Mom, I need to talk to you. Just the two of us."

Still bubbling with questions, Cathy took the chance and trailed Nicole into one of the bedrooms.

The second they stepped into the room and shut the door, Cathy's carefully composed face shattered. "I thought he was dying! He looked better than any of us! Would it have killed you to warn us? Marissa ended up humiliated because of you, and now we're cornered with no options left! What were you thinking, Nicole?"

Without reacting to the outburst, Nicole narrowed her eyes, her tone turning cold and firm. "That ring you grabbed from my bank safe? It's mine. If you want to avoid a problem, give it back. Now."

Mid-rant, Cathy came to an abrupt stop, her anger stalling out. “Since you already got your sister’s shares, why are you still making a scene over that damn ring?”

Not a flicker of emotion crossed Nicole’s face. She had stopped expecting decency from her mother a long time ago. This response? Predictable to the letter.

She arched one brow and replied, “Tell me, five years ago—was it really my mistake, or were you and Marissa the ones pulling strings behind the scenes? Think hard. You know the truth. That ring better be in my hand soon, or you might not like how I handle things now.”

Unease tugged at Cathy’s heart, fearing Nicole might cause trouble over reclaiming the ring. Still, she tried to mask it with a scowl. “I gave it to Marissa right after I took it. It’s just a piece of jewelry. Let it go already.”

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Marissa had taken the ring. For Nicole, it wasn’t a surprise—it only confirmed what she had already suspected.

Tension tightened in Nicole’s jaw as she jerked her hand back. Her voice sliced through the air. “So she’s the one holding it. Fine. I’ll go get it myself.”

Cathy reached for her arm instantly, panic flaring in her voice. “What are you saying, Nicole? Go get it yourself? She’s your sister! How could you even think about taking it from her?”

While Marissa and Cathy treated it like a meaningless accessory, Nicole knew better. That ring held the weight of the truth she’d been seeking. It was the last piece of a life torn apart.

A cold laugh slipped from Nicole’s lips as her eyes gleamed with a sharp edge. The sorrow was long gone. “Keep that precious daughter of yours close. Regret has a nasty way of showing up late.”

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Chapter 19:

Cathy had known Nicole for a lifetime, yet she barely recognized the woman standing before her now. This version of Nicole was sharper. Unyielding. It unsettled Cathy in a way she couldn't shake.

Without another word, Nicole turned on her heel and marched straight for the living room.

"Where are you going?"

Facing ahead, Nicole answered in a cold, steady voice. "I'm taking back what should've never been stolen."

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Right then, Marissa stepped into view, balancing a plate of neatly sliced fruit. She bent down with practiced ease, setting it on the coffee table.

As she leaned in, the necklace around her neck slid free from beneath her blouse. Hanging from it was the ring—bright, unmistakable, and catching the light for all to see.

Nicole came to a dead stop. Her hands clenched into fists so tight her knuckles turned bone white. Memories came crashing in like a tidal wave.

The sting of her mother's betrayal. Marissa's lies and tricks. The baby she'd never get to hold. And that awful night with a stranger who turned a deaf ear to every cry to stop...

The past hit her like a storm. Every memory pierced through her chest like shards of glass. Her breaths grew angrily deep, her whole body stiffening like stone, hatred spreading everywhere.

Aidan saw it too. The ring caught his eye, and for once, there was a flicker in his gaze that Nicole couldn't quite pin down. Without a word, he stepped forward and grabbed the necklace, tearing it clean off Marissa's neck.

"Mr. Moore—" Marissa was caught off guard; her voice barely came out.

But Aidan didn't so much as glance at her. He stared at the ring in his hand, turning it slowly, his expression carved from stone. His voice dropped, low and sharp. "Where did you get this?"

A chill ran through Marissa as her eyes flicked between Aidan's face and the ring he held in a tight grip. It was the exact same one she'd taken from Nicole back then.

"Does this ring belong to him?" Marissa wondered.

Still, she couldn't believe it. Back then, just to spite Nicole, she'd purposely shoved Nicole into the arms of some sleazy man well past his prime. Linking any of that mess to Aidan seemed impossible.

Even so, the way Aidan looked at the ring told her everything she needed to know. He recognized it. Without a doubt.

Thoughts collided in her mind. If this ring actually mattered to him, maybe she could twist it to her advantage.

Her eyes lingered on Aidan's flawless face, her chest tightening with desire. She badly wanted him.

Everything Nicole owned had always found its way into her hands eventually. This time was no different—she had simply slipped up and let Nicole take center stage for once. That didn't mean it had to stay that way.

Saying nothing, Marissa stood frozen. But Aidan wasn't a man who entertained silence. His tone sharpened, his patience thinning. "One last time. Where did you get this ring?"

From the staircase, Nicole watched everything. Her heart thumped hard, a tight drumroll inside her chest. Her nails bit into her palms, but the pain didn't register.

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Chapter 20:

Was it possible? Could Aidan really be the one who gave her that ring?

As much as she wanted answers, she held back. Rushing in now wouldn't help.

Marissa drew in a shaky breath, arranging her face into something soft and vulnerable. She knew...

How to play this game. No sudden moves. In her gentlest voice, barely above a whisper, she murmured, "Someone very special gave it to me. It was a gift."

With the ring pressed firmly in his hand, Aidan ran his thumb over its surface, slow and steady, like he was trying to pull answers from the worn edges.

There was no longer any doubt. He remembered it. This was his—or it had once been his. He'd given it to a woman five years ago, sealing a promise between them.

Since that night, she had disappeared—completely. Not a single trace left behind. Her whole life scrubbed clean, so thoroughly that even the world's best hackers came up empty.

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When he finally reached her trail, it ended with a grave. The report claimed she'd died during childbirth.

But his gut had never accepted it. He couldn't let go of the memory of that girl trembling in his arms, so small, so scared. She wasn't the type to vanish without a fight.

Now, staring at Marissa, Aidan's voice came out quiet but laced with something cold and dangerous. "Tell me the name. Who gave this to you?"

Panic rushed through Marissa's mind as she scrambled for a response. She couldn't afford to mess this up. Keeping her eyes wide and her voice shaky, she said softly, "I—I don't really remember. Everything from that time's a blur. All I know is, this ring meant a lot. That's why I never took it off. But how do you know it?"

As his fingers slowly loosened around the ring, a realization settled over Aidan. The woman from five years ago—she wasn't dead. All this time, he'd been following the wrong trail.

By the staircase, Nicole remained rooted in place. She watched in silence, each second fueling her need to uncover the truth between Aidan and that ring. With a small tilt of her head, Marissa tried to sound innocent, though her voice had a syrupy edge. "So tell me, Mr. Moore. Is this ring something personal? Or are you holding onto it for someone else?"

The second Marissa asked, Nicole felt her heart slam against her chest. Her breath caught like it had nowhere to go.

Aidan had already made his decision. No one could learn the truth about that night until he found that woman; there was too much at stake. The risk of someone twisting the story to serve their own interests was far too great. Without another word, he returned the ring to Marissa, his voice low and unreadable. "One of my friends used to carry it. He asked me to help him find it."

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