

Chapter 900 Registered The Marriage

Hailee's gaze bounced between the registrars and Merlin, who stood there calmly awaiting her papers. Her feet refused to move. Her thoughts refused to line up. She simply stopped functioning.

Only moments ago, fear had been coiling tight in her chest, her mind spinning with all the ways Merlin might deal with her recklessness last night. Now, she was being urged to marry him. The shift was violent in its suddenness, like someone had yanked the ground out from under her before she could brace herself.

Merlin, however, had no such hesitation. He knew her far too well. He understood that if Hailee were given even a breath to collect herself, this would unravel. Doubt would creep in. Panic would bloom. He would lose his chance. Therefore, he acted before she could catch up. His hand dipped into her bag, quick and unceremonious, retrieving her ID and passport. Without waiting for permission, he passed them to the registrars as though this outcome had been inevitable all along.

The registrars typed swiftly, fingers tapping in practiced rhythm, then produced a marriage certificate framed with ornate borders and slid it across the counter. Merlin signed without pause. The pen barely slowed before he pressed it into Hailee's palm and pointed to the empty line beside his name. "Here," he said quietly. "Sign."

Hailee barely registered the paper beneath her fingers. Words spilled out of her mouth instead. "Did your family approve of this? Of us getting married?"

"I'm twenty-seven," Merlin answered flatly. "I don't need approval to get married." He leaned closer, his tone firm, relentless. "Hurry up and sign.

My family doesn't tolerate premarital relationships. You crossed that line last night. The fastest way to settle it is to make this official. Sign."

Her thoughts dissolved under the pressure. The part of her that usually resisted went silent, overridden by instinct. Just like she had followed his instructions without question at work, her body reacted faster than her mind did. She wrote her name before she realized she had done so.

The registrars completed the remaining formalities and brought the seal down with a decisive stamp.

Merlin took the certificate immediately. He scanned it once, then again, his attention snagging on the sight of her name beside his own. Satisfaction settled into him, deep and solid. This was not fleeting or emotional. This was the law. This was permanence. This was possession in its most unassailable form. He was no longer available. He had a wife. One major objective was complete. Children would come next. Soon, ideally. He didn't want their children to be too far apart in age from Cole's. They could arrange a childhood betrothal later. ○

Hailee, meanwhile, stood frozen. Her thoughts were everywhere. She was married. And to Merlin, her boss. But she hadn't even called to tell her father about this! And just yesterday, she had sworn to Elliana that marriage was not in her future, that independence was her plan.

The silence stretched. The registrars frowned slightly, glancing between them before directing a puzzled look at Merlin.

Merlin flashed an easy smile, polished and disarming, as if nothing about this scene was out of the ordinary at all. "My wife is simply overwhelmed," he smoothly said.

As he spoke, he gracefully slid over a generous tip he had prepared in advance. He followed it with a polite word of thanks, delivered with practiced ease.

The registrars' eyes lit up instantly. Pocketing the money, they broke into

a broad smile and offered the newlyweds an enthusiastic stream of congratulations.

Around the corner, half-hidden by the stairwell, four witnesses silently exchanged stunned looks. Merlin's arrangement had left them speechless. "Good lord!" Adah muttered in a low voice. "Merlin had come well prepared! Poor sweet Hailee—tricked into marriage just like that."

"Honestly," Elliana chimed in, "this whole thing deserves a case study. Merlin is quite something."

Cole laughed under his breath. "Now, ladies, let's be fair. It was your 'sweet, innocent' Hailee who pounced on Merlin first. He's just being a stand-up guy and taking responsibility. How is that 'tricking' her?"

Elliana and Adah blinked, words failing them. Fine. Annoyingly enough, Cole had a point. Hailee had made the first move. Lucky for her, Merlin had been into her all along. A drunken misstep that turned out surprisingly well. If Merlin had not wanted her, this situation would have been far less flattering.

After a short, awkward beat, Adah's mood shifted. She grinned, eyes gleaming with mischief. "You know what, Elliana? Now, I get why you and Hailee bonded quickly. Because you are the same kind of lightweight. One drink and all common sense evaporates. Truly kindred spirits."

Elliana felt heat rush straight to her face. She could not even argue. Her tolerance was abysmal. On her wedding night, she had taken exactly one glass of wine, woken up disoriented, mistaken Cole for her cat, stripped him bare, and attempted to flirt with him like that was perfectly normal behavior. The memory alone was enough to make her cheeks burn.

Of course, Cole had to pipe up at that exact moment. "Yeah, my wife really is a disaster when she is drunk. I can vouch for that."

Cole's endorsement fueled the imagination.

Allan, never one to pass up a chance to stir the pot, leaned in with a mischievous glint in his eye. "Oh, Cole—do tell. What kind of things did Elliana pull on you?"

Elliana panicked and twisted Cole's arm. Hard. He yelped loudly, milking the pain with dramatic flair.

As they bickered, Allan suddenly seized Adah's hand and dragged her toward the stairs.

Adah stumbled after him, baffled. "Allan, what is wrong with you?"

Allan did not slow down. Instead, he raised his voice toward the registrars, who were already packing up. "Hold on a moment. Another couple wants to get married. Could you spare five more minutes?"

