

Chapter 13 Fateful Encounte

The frosted glass door of the bathroom slid open with a soft hiss. A plume of warm, white steam drifted out, swirling into the cold, stark air of the living room.

Isidora flinched back instinctively, her spine pressing hard against the cold oak of the main door. There was nowhere left to run.

Cedrick Garrison stepped out of the bathroom. He was naked, save for a single, high-count cotton towel wrapped loosely around his waist.

Droplets of water traced paths down the sharp lines of his abdomen and along his defined V-line, rolling slowly before disappearing into the white terrycloth. He radiated an overwhelmingly aggressive male presence.

He was casually drying his dripping black hair with another towel as he looked up, his sharp gaze instantly locking onto the intruder standing by his door.

The moment he recognized Isidora, his movements paused. A deeply dangerous glint flashed in the depths of his eyes.

Isidora's breath caught in her throat. She stammered, trying to explain that she had been tricked, that Stella had lured her here. "I—Stella said you wanted to see me. I didn't mean to—"

But Cedrick wasn't listening. He tossed the towel he was using onto a nearby sofa and began to walk toward her, his bare feet silent on the polished floor.

With every step he took, the predatory pressure he exuded multiplied exponentially, forcing Isidora to bite down hard on her lower lip to keep from crying out.

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He raised a hand, planting it on the door panel next to her ear, trapping her completely between his chest and the unyielding wood.

"So desperate to get the family's attention again," he said, his voice a low, cold sneer. "You'd resort to a cheap trick like this? Climbing into my bed?"

The slut-shaming accusation ignited a spark of fury in Isidora. She snapped her head up, the eyes behind her black-framed glasses burning with a fire he hadn't seen before.

"If I were going to climb into someone's bed," she shot back, her voice trembling but clear, "I certainly wouldn't choose a bad-tempered, self-important tyrant."

The words struck their target with pinpoint accuracy. Cedrick's eyes darkened. His other hand shot out, his fingers clamping around her jaw.

He yanked her closer, the distance between them vanishing. His unique scent—a potent mix of shower gel and cedarwood—invaded her senses, overwhelming and absolute.

His thumb swiped roughly across her cheek, smearing the cheap foundation she wore. His voice was a low rasp, like sandpaper against stone.

"Since you dared to play with fire," he growled, his breath hot against her skin, "you'd better be prepared to be burned to ashes."

Just as he lowered his head, as if to silence her with a punishment far more severe than words, a commotion erupted from the hallway.

A series of frantic, heavy footsteps stopped right outside, followed by the metallic clatter of the doorknob being twisted violently.

"Why is this floor locked down?" Kevin's furious roar echoed through the door. "I'm the heir! Who gave you the authority?"

Isidora froze, her entire body rigid with terror. Her pupils dilated. Her fiancé was right outside the door, and she was pressed against his uncle in the most compromising position imaginable.

"Isidora!" Kevin yelled, his voice now laced with accusation. "Someone saw you sneak into the North Wing! Are you in there?"

It hit her like a physical blow. This was the second part of Stella's venomous plan. Not just to trap her, but to have Kevin catch her, utterly destroying her reputation.

A dull thud vibrated through the door and into her back as Kevin began to kick it.

In a surge of pure, unthinking panic, Isidora looked at Cedrick, her hands instinctively clenching the edge of the only thing covering him—the precariously knotted towel at his waist.

Cedrick didn't flinch. He didn't even seem surprised. Instead, he glanced down at her white-knuckled hands clutching his towel, and a wicked, cruel smirk curved his lips.

He leaned in, his lips brushing her ear. "It seems," he whispered, his voice a low, taunting caress, "your fiancé is in quite a hurry to catch us in the act."

Tears of desperation welled in Isidora's eyes. "Please," she begged, her voice a choked whisper. "You have to do something. He can't see me here. He can't."

Cedrick straightened up, a flicker of manic excitement dancing in his eyes. He released her chin, his gaze still locked on her terrified face. Then, he turned and walked away, heading toward the bedroom in the deeper part of the suite.