

Chapter 7 The Shackles of Capital

The ballroom emptied out rapidly, leaving behind shattered glass and the stench of ruined reputations.

Isidora walked quickly down the quiet, carpeted hallway toward the underground parking garage. She needed to leave before the press found her.

As she passed a half-open VIP lounge door, a large hand shot out from the darkness.

Fingers wrapped around her bicep like a steel vice. She was violently yanked into the room.

The door slammed shut and locked.

Isidora stumbled, falling backward onto a leather sofa. The scent of cedarwood filled her lungs.

She scrambled to her feet, glaring at Cedrick.

"Mr. Garrison," Isidora said, her voice sharp. "Tonight was a disaster. As the head of the family, you need to officially cancel this engagement immediately."

Cedrick sat down slowly in a single armchair. He crossed his long legs, watching her like a hawk watching a mouse.

"Cancel it?" Cedrick asked, his tone dangerously soft. "Why would I do that?"

Isidora stared at him in disbelief. "Kevin is a laughingstock. The merger is toxic. There is zero value left in this marriage!"

Cedrick leaned forward. The air in the room suddenly felt too heavy to breathe.

"Miss Wyatt, do you really think playing a dirty video is enough to flip the Wall Street tables?" Cedrick mocked. "Garrison stock will tank tomorrow, yes. And I will use that panic to buy out the retail investors at rock

bottom. You didn't hurt me. You just made me richer."

He stood up, his tall frame casting a shadow over her.

"And you?" Cedrick continued. "You are nothing but the sacrificial lamb both families will use to absorb the public's anger."

Isidora's chest tightened, but she refused to back down. "I have more evidence. If they push me, I will burn the Garrison name to the ground"

Cedrick's hand shot out. He grabbed the back of her neck, his fingers tangling in her hair, and pulled her face inches from his.

"Try it," Cedrick whispered, his eyes pitch black. "But I promise you, before you strike the match, I will crush your bones into dust."

The heat of his breath hit her skin. The physical proximity sent a violent shiver down her spine, a terrifying echo of last night.

Suddenly, her phone vibrated violently in her clutch.

Cedrick glanced at the bag. He slowly released her neck and gestured with his chin. "Answer it."

Isidora pulled her phone out. The caller ID read: Arsenio Wyatt.

She swiped answer. "What."

"Get your ass to Lenox Hill Hospital right now," Arsenio's voice roared through the speaker. "You will apologize to Kevin and Hyman."

"I will not apologize!" Isidora yelled back. "He cheated! He humiliated me!"

Arsenio let out a cold, venomous laugh. "Fine. Don't apologize. But if you aren't at that hospital in thirty minutes, I'm having your mother's grave exhumed."

The words hit Isidora like a bullet to the chest.

Her blood turned to ice. Her fingers went completely numb, almost dropping the phone.

"You can't do that," Isidora gasped, her voice breaking. "That plot was paid for from her trust! You have no right!"

"Your mother's final resting place is on land I control. Thirty minutes," Arsenio said ruthlessly.

The line went dead.

Isidora's knees gave out. She collapsed back onto the sofa. The air left her lungs. Her mother had passed away years ago, but Arsenio had controlled every aspect of the funeral and burial, placing her in a private cemetery he could hold over Isidora's head. It was the only leverage her father needed.

Cedrick stood perfectly still. He had heard every word. A flicker of cold understanding crossed his eyes. The desperation. The blackmail. She wasn't a scheming gold digger manipulating her way into high society; she was a cornered hostage fighting for her mother's final peace. He still saw her as a plain, unremarkable pawn, but her motive was survival, not greed.

"It seems your grand rebellion couldn't survive a single phone call," Cedrick mocked coldly.

Isidora looked up. Her eyes were bloodshot, but no tears fell. Pure, unadulterated hatred burned in her stare.

"You people are monsters," she whispered.

Cedrick adjusted his expensive cuffs. "Welcome to the real world, Miss Wyatt. Monsters only eat the weak."

He walked to the door, opened it, and looked back at her. "Thirty minutes. I'd hate for your mother's grave to be disturbed."

He walked out.

Isidora closed her eyes. She forced the bile back down her throat. She pushed her ugly glasses up her nose, stood up, and walked toward the hospital.

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