

Chapter 9 Demons Take Up Residence

The freezing morning rain lashed against the black marble of the tombstone.

Cedrick stood alone in the private graveyard of the Garrison estate. He wore a long black trench coat, completely ignoring the rain soaking his hair.

He stared at the name carved into the stone: Elena Garrison.

He knelt down and placed a rare, black iris at the base of the grave.

"I'm back, Mother," Cedrick whispered, his voice devoid of any warmth. "The people who locked you in the dark... I will make them bleed."

He stood up and walked back to the main road.

A convoy of eight black Maybachs rolled through the massive iron gates of the Long Island estate. The tires crushed the gravel like a military invasion.

The estate staff stood in a terrified line on the front steps.

Cedrick stepped out of the lead car. His Blackwater security team instantly swarmed the property, physically dragging Hyman's loyal guards out of the security room and throwing them off the grounds.

Cedrick walked into the grand foyer. He looked at the historical portraits on the wall, sneered, and ordered his men to throw all of Hyman's belongings out of the master suite window.

The takeover was absolute. The estate now belonged to the tyrant.

An hour later, Cedrick walked alone to the glass greenhouse behind the main mansion.

This was where Hyman had locked him up as a child. No food. No heat.

Cedrick closed his eyes. The memory hit him. A little girl in a white dress, sneaking to the glass window in the dead of night. She smelled like flowers. She had pushed half a sandwich through the crack, saving his life.

She was the only light he had ever known. And he was going to find her.

The sound of plastic wheels scraping against wet stone broke his concentration.

Cedrick opened his eyes. Through the foggy glass, he saw a cheap yellow taxi idling at the servant's entrance.

Isidora stepped out into the rain. She was wearing a hideous brown raincoat. She dragged a battered suitcase out of the trunk.

The head butler walked down the steps, sneering at her.

"Miss Wyatt. Master Kevin ordered that you be placed in the south wing. Ground floor," the butler said arrogantly.

The south wing ground floor was a damp, sunless room usually reserved for the lowest-ranking maids. It was Kevin's petty revenge.

Isidora didn't argue. She just nodded and started dragging her heavy suitcase across the cobblestones.

Cedrick stood in the shadows of the greenhouse watching her pathetic, submissive posture. His jaw ticked with annoyance.

A sudden gust of wind blew across the courtyard.

It was that faint trace of iris again. Cedrick's heart gave an unnatural, heavy thud against his ribs. The scent hit his brain, bringing an uninvited wave of calm that aggressively clashed with his ruthless nature. It was an anomaly. A glitch in his iron-clad control. Why did this unremarkable, muddy woman carry an aura that demanded his attention?

He pushed the greenhouse door open and strode across the wet grass, his eyes locked onto Isidora's back. He needed to assert dominance, to crush whatever strange psychological effect she was having on him.

Hearing the heavy footsteps, Isidora turned around. When she saw Cedrick marching toward her like a demon out of hell, she gasped. Her hand slipped, and the heavy suitcase crashed onto the wet stones. She had glanced at the greenhouse just a second too long, her eyes betraying a flicker of forbidden nostalgia.

Cedrick stopped right in front of her. He stared at her thick glasses and the cakey foundation melting slightly in the rain. He caught that fleeting look in her eyes.

"Miss Wyatt," Cedrick demanded, his voice tight with an emotion he couldn't hide. "Why were you staring at that glass? Have you been sneaking around this estate before today?"



Isidora's blood ran cold. She had been here. She had fed a starving boy in that very greenhouse years ago. But looking at the ruthless, terrifying billionaire standing in front of her—the man who had threatened to crush her bones to dust—her survival instincts screamed. She could not let this monster see any crack in her armor.

Isidora looked down at her muddy shoes and shook her head. "No," she stated, her voice flat and deliberately hollow. "I was merely looking at the architecture. This is my first time on Long Island."

Cedrick stared at her for a long, agonizing moment. His dark eyes narrowed, searching her plain, rain-streaked face for a lie. The strange, momentary pull he felt evaporated, replaced by a deep, freezing contempt. She was just a dull, submissive creature after all. His mind was playing tricks on him.

"Of course," Cedrick sneered, his voice dripping with disgust. "Someone like you doesn't belong here."

He turned his back on her and walked away.

Isidora stood in the rain, letting out a shaky breath. She had survived the interrogation. But the real nightmare was just beginning.

