

## Chapter 3

Beneath the swirling lights, Lorelei clung to Ryan, appearing like the perfect couple everyone envied.

No one seemed to notice that I wasn't the bride, nor did they care about my absence. It was as if all the guests had agreed that Lorelei was the woman Ryan intended to marry.

But soon, my mother sensed something was wrong.

With the murmurs of the crowd around her, she rushed forward, her voice ringing out in accusation. "Where's Alexis? Why are you with this woman?"

All eyes turned to her, focusing intently on the confrontation.

Lorelei feigned concern, grabbing my mother's hand. "Mrs. Harding, Alexis didn't show up. You can't blame Ryan for that!"

My mother, however, didn't buy her flimsy excuse. She immediately pulled her hand away, fury lighting up her eyes. "You've tried to sabotage Alexis more than once! You must have done something to keep her from coming! What did you do with my daughter?"

My mother's urgent questions ignited whispers among the guests.

"Oh! So this isn't Mr. Wolfe's fiancée? What is she doing here?"

"Is she trying to ruin their relationship? Is she a mistress?"

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As I listened to their words, I noticed Lorelei's eyes glistening with unshed tears. She tugged at Ryan's hand, a hint of vulnerability in her voice. "Ryan, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to make you the center of all this!"

Her act seemed to work on Ryan, who smiled at her, offering what looked like a comforting gesture.

But then, his gaze turned cold as he glanced at my mother. "Your daughter has done something so disgusting, and you still dare to talk about her?"

My mother stood frozen, taken aback by his fierce glare.

Ryan, still holding Lorelei's hand, bypassed her and approached the podium.

With everyone watching, he took the microphone and announced in an icy tone, "The original bride, Alexis Harding, cheated before our wedding. She knew she couldn't show her face here, so she called off the wedding! Now, I will marry Ms. Lorelei Floyd!"

At those words, the guests turned on me, their opinions swiftly shifting.

"Oh, my gosh! I didn't realize Alexis was so promiscuous! Ugh! That's just disgusting!"

My mother remained my only defender, her voice rising above the crowd. "No! Alexis would never do such a thing! She's always loved Ryan! It's Ryan who betrayed her!"

Her desperate cries fell on deaf ears, met with even more vicious insults.

Suddenly, she clutched her chest, collapsing to the ground.

Watching her fall, my heart felt like it had frozen in place. I rushed toward her, wanting to lift her, but my hands passed through her.

"Mom! Mom, wake up! It's me, Alexis! Someone help her! Please, somebody, help!"

Desperation overwhelmed me as I knelt by her side, crying out for assistance.

But no one came forward.

I turned to Ryan, only to see his back retreating, holding Lorelei as they walked away.

I felt powerless as I lay over my mother's still body, watching her heart stop beating. The pain in my chest was unbearable. I felt as if I had been struck with a heavy blow as I gasped for breath.

"Mom, I'm so sorry! I shouldn't have ignored your warnings. I shouldn't have insisted on marrying him. I've caused this! Please, wake up! Just open your eyes and look at me, okay?"

But she wouldn't respond anymore.

Trembling, I reached out to touch her pale cheek, but my hand trembled in the air, unable to connect.

Everyone around us acted as if she didn't exist, laughing, drinking, and enjoying their meal as if nothing had happened.

How could people be so heartless?

Finally, a hotel staff member arrived with a team to take her body away. I wanted to follow her, but I felt anchored to the spot.

Was this some divine punishment for throwing away my life for a man unworthy of my love? Even in death, I seemed trapped in Ryan's world.

Wasn't it enough for me to suffer? Why did my mother have to be punished too?

As despair threatened to engulf me, Ryan returned to our new home with Lorelei.

I had decorated every corner of this place for our wedding, a testament to my hard work. Now, it felt like each detail mocked my naïve dreams.

Lorelei stood on her tiptoes, shyly kissing Ryan, who gently caressed her face. Their chemistry sparked between them, and they prepared to head upstairs.

But before they could leave, Ryan's assistant suddenly showed up.

"Mr. Wolfe, you might want to take a look at Ms. Harding's body and decide how to handle it!"

Ryan paused for a moment, then replied with irritation, "This again? But I want to see if she's really dead or just faking it!"

Reluctant, he followed his assistant toward the basement.

When the heavy door swung open, a wave of rancid odor hit him like a wall.