

Chapter 73

Breaking Bonds

However, another woman came to Stella before she could speak to Miles. Having just gotten downstairs, she was on her way to work when she bumped into the woman. Wearing clothing styled in a minimalist fashion, the woman had a noble air about her, garnering her the attention of others. Her hair was styled into a bun behind her head. Although she was around sixty years old, she looked like a thirty-year-old due to both her physique and face. All in all, Stella felt inferior to her in every aspect.

The woman then walked up to her. "Are you Stella Johansson?"

"Yes," Stella replied in deference. To be honest, she already had a premonition that she might meet someone like her. There was only one such noble woman who would come in search of her. Back when Miles didn't attend his own wedding, Stella already knew his parents would never let things slide, and here she was.

"I'm Miles' mother, Adele Evans. I would like to have a word with you if you have time to spare." While Adele sounded aloof, she was also unrelenting in her demand. Even though she inquired beforehand whether Stella was free, she must've known that Stella would push everything else aside in order to talk to her.

"Of course, Mrs. Grant," Stella replied politely despite knowing that Adele most probably had her own agenda that would throw obstacles in her relationship with Miles.

Upon arriving at a cafeteria, Adele cut to the chase. "Miles' father and I didn't really care if he wed Yvonne, so we don't hold it against him for not attending the wedding, but Miss Johansson..." At that moment, she squinted her eyes at Stella. "Do you know why Miles chose you?"

Startled by the question, Stella realized she had no answer to that. She had always been curious as to why Miles chose to sleep with her during their first encounter. While she was drunk, Miles was sober. There was a time when she used to suspect that he was a man who had no qualms sleeping around with whoever seduced him. However, she recognized that she might have gotten the wrong impression after beginning to date him. All in all, she didn't know much about him at all despite their relatively intimate relationship.

Adele slid a photo across the table toward her. It depicted a young, pretty, and elegant woman who looked almost identical to Stella, with her eyes bearing the most semblance to Stella. "This is..." Perplexed, she lifted her head to throw a question at Adele.

"Did you think a person of Miles' age and status had never had a girlfriend?"

One sentence from Adele was enough to stir up a surge of emotions in Stella. He had another woman! While it wasn't that she never thought about it, she dared not dig deep in fear of hurting herself and getting jealous over it. Therefore, a single photo was enough to rip her heart open until it bled. "I never thought about it," Stella replied.

"While Miles did not attend the wedding, I also caught wind of his relationship with you, so I decided to start an investigation on you. Not only are you a divorcee, but your ex-husband is currently in jail, while

your father's character..." Adele let out a chuckle. "I'll stop right there. However, did you presume that you might be a good match to Miles given your circumstances?"

All the while, Stella was clenching her fists tightly. While she knew they were a mismatch, she didn't care since Miles knew everything about her. As long as Miles wasn't disgusted by her, she thought it wouldn't matter.

"Stay away from Miles, and I promise a sum of five hundred thousand within a month after." With that, Adele left.

Stella was feeling down while on the verge of tears. She didn't care if she had an unsightly past, but she resented the fact that she looked like his ex. It wasn't until then that she came to know that she had always been a substitute for his ex. No wonder he slept with me as soon as we met.

After Adele left, she inspected the photo closely before realizing it was a photo that the woman took when she was at Ingerheim River four years ago. Written behind the photo was her name: Gabriella Summer Nolan.

'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate.' Her name was derived from the above line in a love sonnet written by Shakespeare, so she must've at least hailed from a scholarly family, which was far better than Stella. She didn't like being someone else's substitute, so she went to Matthew for confirmation. Seeing that he was Miles'

Never had she been to Matthew's office in such a solemn mood, which seemed to bewilder him. He was so intimidated by her that he didn't actually know how to host her. To that, she demanded, "Don't bother. All I want to know is if you know Gabriella Summer Nolan."

While Matthew was pouring her some tea, his hands began trembling. He never expected her to ask him that. "Was he the one who told you?" Matthew asked.

Judging from his reaction, she must have been involved with Miles at some point. Stella's heart sank when she finally realized why there were women's clothing in his apartment, as well as a necklace in his mansion. They must've belonged to that woman.

The revelation was heart-wrenching. All of a sudden, she felt like an idiot for coming to Matthew for confirmation. She didn't even know why she even cried when she knew the truth would only hurt herself. "Do we look alike?" Stella asked.

After a prolonged silence, Matthew nodded, crushing the one last fantasy that she was clinging to. While she hoped that she had nothing to do with his ex, she was forced to face the truth. Even if Matthew told her they didn't look alike, she wasn't blind to the truth. No wonder Miles cares about me and loves having sex with me. It's all because I look like his ex. Later on, she asked, "Where has she gone?"

"I don't know why they broke up. All I know is that she went missing after that."

With a rueful smile on her face, she thought, So he found himself a substitute since he felt melancholic after his ex went missing just like that. This is such a farce. While I felt jealous over him, grieved for him, and even went through an abortion because of him, ultimately losing myself in the process, I was only a substitute to his ex. No longer intent to dwell on the topic, she left Matthew's office, only to return to

Miles's office in the company. However, she didn't know Miles had also been through a struggle of his own due to something that he heard from a certain someone.

Upon seeing her, Miles asked in an aloof manner if she had business with him. She never came to his office without him summoning her, so he wondered why she came. Ever since the incident with Xavier, a splinter seemingly got caught in their relationship. Without hesitating, Stella said, "President Grant, let's break up." In the end, she thought she should remain as his subordinate and nothing else. All other identities were too intimate, and it felt like an underground relationship to her.

Hearing that, Miles stopped writing for a second to ponder on her request before replying, "Sure."

Stella clenched her fists. While she expected him to bombard her with questions or try to persuade her to stay, he did neither. It was all her wishful thinking, and they broke up just like that. When she returned to her desk, she recalled that she still owed him 1.2 million, so she sent him a message. 'I'll repay the money that I owed you as soon as possible.'

'Whatever.' That was the only reply she got.

Rumors began circulating when they stopped contacting each other for a few days. Back when Miles was courting Stella, he made his efforts widely known, but nothing of the sort happened anymore, nor did Stella pay anymore visits to his office. Miles' love life had always been up for speculation, so not only were his employees curious, but they were also sensitive regarding all of its changes. Everybody was paying close attention to how things would unfold, while Kevin kept his silence regarding the matter.

In fact, Stella could now see that other than his experience and genius, Kevin wasn't that great of a person. He was always flattering his superiors. Even the fact that he was willing to teach Stella everything stemmed from the need to get to Miles' good side. Other than that, he wore a mask while working with other people, so she could never know his true self. All she knew was that he was a conniving person.

One day, Yulia gave Stella a call to invite her to grab a meal together. Despite their rocky past, Stella accepted the invitation since Yulia was her cousin. Throughout their meal, Yulia made no mention of Miles. Instead, she chose to reminisce about their shared childhood memories. The happy memories elicited from Stella a fond smile.

Stella assumed that Yulia was merely agitated by the fact that she couldn't get Miles. Since they had a fairly solid relationship to begin with, and Yulia wasn't the one who published the post, Stella figured that they should no longer have a reason to fight with each other now that she had broken up with Miles. Therefore, she was optimistic about their meeting.

After a while, they began talking about their respective lives as of now, during which Stella said, "Yulia... I've broken up with President Miles."

Yulia was taken aback by the revelation before saying, "Why would you even mention that? Possession over a man shouldn't have affected our relationship! Anyway, why did you break up?"

Stella told her the specifics of her encounter with Adele before lamenting, "I'm but a substitute for his ex. Besides, aside from our bodies, we had all sorts of barriers between us in all other aspects of our relationship. We might be incompatible with each other after all, so I broke up with him." All the while,

Stella had been stirring her coffee while hanging her head low, so she didn't notice Yulia's awkward expression when the latter understood that they had great sex.

After letting out a disgruntled snort, Yulia told Stella that things had been awkward between Xavier and her. After having worked for such a long time in a foreign company, she was already feeling bored and irritable, so she was almost tempted to go on an impromptu vacation.

While Yulia might only be mentioning it casually, Stella had taken it seriously. She expected that things would get even more awkward between Miles and her in the future, which she already experienced first hand during the past few days.

Due to seemingly uncanny coincidences, she always bumped into Miles in the corridor. Sometimes, he brushed past her without even noticing her presence when he was busy reading the documents he held. Other times, he would see her entering an office that he just got out from.

The awkwardness between them persisted, seemingly without an end in sight. Therefore, she had even thought of quitting her job, thus told Yulia, "I've been thinking of quitting my job."

"What? Are you sure?"

"Yeah." Seeing that it was getting late, Stella said, "I'm going home now."

Yulia hummed in agreement before watching her leave, all the while thinking nonstop, I'm sorry, Stella. I made a dirty move. Xavier had been drinking during the past few days due to him being in an irritable mood, after which he would tell me a lot of his secrets. After that, I relayed a fabricated version of Xavier's visit to your house to a certain someone whom Miles trusted, who in turn told Miles about it. Therefore, Miles came to the understanding that you had sex with Xavier during his visit.

In the end, possession over a man broke the sisterly bond between Stella and Yulia.