

Chapter 1

Ten Years Later (After Shattered Vows)

Harper

“GOOD MORNING, MRS. Ellis. Morning, Hazel,” I greeted them as I walked into the kitchen. Hazel was already sitting at the table, eating breakfast, while Mrs. Ellis tidied up.

“Good morning, Harper,” Mrs. Ellis replied.

“Morning, Mom!” Hazel chirped between bites.

“How did you sleep?” I asked, pouring myself a cup of tea.

“Good. When is Daddy coming home?”

“Later today,” I replied. She is such a daddy’s girl, whenever he is away her mood becomes gloomy. She is his spitting image, and they share the same mannerisms, like a little clone of his.

“Okay,” she responded, perking up at the thought of his return.

Glancing at the clock I asked, “Do you have your homework ready?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“Where’s your brother?” I questioned, looking around.

Hazel shrugged. “I don’t know. He’s probably still asleep.”

I sighed, shaking my head. “I swear, you two are the cause of my gray hair.” I headed upstairs, thinking about how I have one early bird and one night owl.

“Hanzel!” I called as I approached his room. No response. I opened the door to find him sprawled out on his bed, drooling, with his phone still clutched in his hand. Well, that explains why he is tired, I thought. For someone who isn’t a morning person, he sure loves staying up past his bedtime.

“Alexa, play kids’ wake-up music,” and soon, New Soul by Renee and Jeremy started playing through the room.

A few minutes later, Hanzel stirred, groaning as he opened his eyes. “Morning, Mom,” he muttered, wiping his face.

“Morning, baby, time to get up,” I said, walking over to ruffle his hair.

“Mom, I’m not a baby anymore,” he whined, pulling the covers over his head.

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I chuckled. “You’ll always be my baby, no matter how big you get.”

“Not if I’m as big as Dad.” You will always be my baby boy,” I told him, pulling the covers off him. “Now get up and get ready for school.”

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“But I’m not a baby,” he mumbled under his breath.

“Were you on your phone again after bedtime?” I questioned, crossing my arms.

“Yes... but only a little,” he admitted sheepishly.

“And what did Daddy and I tell you would happen if you stayed up late and didn’t wake up on time for school?”

“You’d take my phone away,” barely audible.

“I didn’t hear you.”

“You would take my phone away,” he repeated louder this time, still avoiding eye contact.

“Good. I am taking it as soon as you get home from school today, and you are not getting it back until Monday. You hear me?”

“Yes, Mom,” he replied, looking like a puppy that had just been scolded.

“Now, get ready and meet me downstairs in 20 minutes,” I instructed before leaving his room.

After breakfast, I drove the kids to school. “Please behave yourselves,” I warned, giving each of them a kiss goodbye.

With the kids dropped off, I headed to the office for my 9:00 AM appointment, feeling like I had already tackled half the day before it even truly began.

Annie’s International Fusion & Bar (AIFB) has grown to ten restaurants across Florida, Georgia, and New York, with me and Carlos still thriving as business partners, one of the best decisions I have ever made. Today’s meeting is particularly important, as we are discussing a potential

collaboration with the Miami Heat to set up an AIFB restaurant on-site for players, their families, and seasonal pass holders. This could be a momentous change for our brand.

Miles on the other hand is currently in Texas, working on closing a land deal for his next venture, and I am anxiously waiting for a text from his assistant, Caleb, to confirm if the deal went through. I have tentatively planned a dinner party to celebrate, but of course, I need the official go-ahead first.

Upon arriving at work, I was greeted with a cup of lemon ginger tea and the loud, enthusiastic voice of my temporary assistant, Sofia.

I could not help but think, why did I agree to this in the first place? Then I remembered the countless times she begged and persuaded me, saying this would be like an internship, giving her real-world experience and helping her figure out which industry to pursue. And just like that, I gave in.

Over the years, we have grown incredibly close she is like the little sister I have always wanted. But like any sibling, she can be a pain in the rear at times. When she changed her major from business to art, she agonized over whether it was the right fit for her. After some persistence, Maria and William finally approved. Then, she changed her mind again and dropped out of university altogether. You can imagine how upset her parents were. They gave her an ultimatum: return to school or get a job. Since she refused to go back, they cut off her financial support.

With my assistant Kayla out on maternity leave, I needed someone to fill the role temporarily and that is how I ended up in this current situation.

“Carlos is already in the conference room waiting for you. Here is the projected sales report for next month. And after this meeting, you have a call with the editor from the Food Network,” Sofia informed me, handing over the documents.

“Thanks, Sofia,” I replied, giving her a quick nod not trying to show the small upturn of my lips, I took the report and prepared for the meeting.

“Good morning, Carlos,” I greeted as I walked into the room.

“Morning, Harper,” he replied with a smile.

I took a seat next to him to review the report and make sure the presentation was ready to go. A little while later, there was a knock on the door, and Sofia entered to let us know our guests had arrived. After a brief greeting, we dove into the pitch. Once we finished the presentation, we had a casual conversation before they left, assuring us they would get back to us within a week, whether they decided to move forward.

After they left, I headed to my office for my next meeting. While on the call, I glanced at my phone and saw a message from Caleb, confirming that they had secured the contract and would be leaving in a few hours. Excited, I quickly texted Mrs. Ellis to let her know the celebratory dinner party was a go. I then messaged Sofia to inform

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everyone on the guest list that dinner was still on for 7 PM.

Once my meeting wrapped up, I said goodbye to Carlos, letting him know I’d see him later, and made my way to our flagship restaurant to pick up the food for tonight. I had decided to have AIFB cater the dinner, allowing Mrs. Ellis and I to focus on desserts and ensure the house was ready.

When I arrived at our original location, I was greeted by the staff, catching up with them for a bit before they loaded the food into my car, and I was on my way. “I was thrilled,” I couldn’t wait to see Miles and celebrate the big news with everyone.

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As the party was in full swing, our parents were happily occupied with their grandchildren, while our friends stood around chatting and drinking. I caught Sofia staring intently at someone, and instantly, I recognized that look. When I followed her gaze, my mouth nearly dropped open it could not be what I was thinking. Shaking it off, I refocused and took in the scene around me. Everyone was laughing, and enjoying themselves, and it hit me how lucky I was for all these people who had been the rock and support for both Miles and me through everything.

“Can I have a dance with my beautiful wife?” Miles asked, catching my attention.

“Of course,” I replied, smiling as I offered him my right hand.

He took it, gently kissing it before pulling me close. As we swayed from side to side, I couldn’t help but reflect on everything we had been through to get to this moment. It was not all rainbows and butterflies, but standing here in his arms, I knew it was all worth it.
