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***1. SAMAYRA'S POV***

***She was broken, with scars that told her story****.*

The rain poured down, matching my gloomy mood. The usual energy of Mumbai was hidden behind the grey sky. I stood at my window, lost in the sound of the raindrops.

Ishanya's call interrupted my reverie. "Hey Sam!! Did you get the parcel?"

"Parcel? Ishanya, my birthday is still far away," I said, laughing.

"Arre, I know yaar, but I sent it early. I'm busy with my cousin's wedding here in New York. I wanted to ensure it reaches you on time," Ishanya explained.

She sent me a gift for my so-called birthday, which is still many days away, but she gets more excited about my birthday than I do.

"Okay, I'll check. But you shouldn't have sent it so early," I teased.

"I had to! Besides, I'll be back before your birthday. We can celebrate then," Ishanya said enthusiastically.

Just as I was about to ask, "How's Vivaan and little Rehan?" Ishanya interrupted the conversation.

"Sorry, I'm getting called for a function. Catch you later!"

The line went dead.

I smiled, missing my friend already.

I decided to freshen up. Wrapped in a plush towel, I stood before my closet, a haven of colors and textures. Racks of intricately embroidered kurtas and sarees lined one side, while Western wear filled the other. A shelf displayed my favorite accessories - statement jewellery and scarves.

"Something cheerful," I thought, choosing a vibrant yellow kurta with delicate floral patterns pairing it with distressed denim jeans and slip-on sneakers. Matching earrings completed the outfit. The brightness lifted my mood.

I styled my hair, letting loose waves cascade down my back. A light dusting of makeup enhanced my features - a subtle blush, defined eyebrows, and a soft lip gloss.

Before leaving, I paused at my puja room, seeking comfort in the familiar ritual. I lit a diya, said a silent prayer, and applied a kumkum bindi.

I started my car, opting to drive instead of walk due to the rain. The courier office was nearby, and I arrived quickly.

The familiar staff greeted me warmly as I approached the counter.

"Ma'am, please sign here with your full name," the clerk asked, his eyes fixed on me.

I hesitated, my pen hovering over the paper. Full name? The question cut deep, a painful reminder of all I'd lost. My father, my sole source of love and support, was gone. His warmth, his kindness, his guiding hand - all silenced forever.

My mind recoiled from memories of my mother's indifference, her coldness that still lingered like an open wound. And my surname? A constant reminder of the family that never truly accepted me.

The staff's gentle prompt broke the spell: "Ma'am, hurry up, it's almost lunchtime." I checked my watch; it was 1 pm.

With a shaking hand, I scribbled "Samayra." The loneliness echoed through me like a hollow whisper. I took my parcel and walked away.

Outside, the rain had stopped, and the atmosphere was pleasant. I drove with the windows open, inhaling the scent of rain-soaked earth - hayee ye mitti di khushboo.

Everything looked vibrant, as if the plants had just taken a refreshing shower. Even the air was clean, a rare respite from Mumbai's usual car exhaust fumes.

At the traffic signal, I noticed a couple heading to college, hand in hand, tears pricked at the corners of my eyes as I recalled his gentle guidance. My heart twisted, memories of him resurfacing.

Why was I thinking of Arnav? Had I forgotten that fateful night, the pain he caused? Five years had passed, but the wounds still lingered.

My heart aches, remembering those moments.

My phone rang, breaking the silence. "Rohan speaking." My PA's crisp voice cut through.

"Ma'am, I've sent you the book signing details. Please review and let me know if any changes are required."

"Thank you, Rohan. I'll check and get back to you."

As I ended the call, pride swelled within me. I wished my father were here to see this - I had become an author, fulfilling his dream.

But before I could savour the moment, my phone buzzed again, shattering the silence.

"Samayra, we need to talk..." The voice sent a shiver down my spine.

IT'S HER....

My mother.

"Samayra, are you there?" her voice had cut through my thoughts earlier, demanding and impatient, just like always.

It took everything in me to respond, to stop myself from hanging up and pretending I hadn't heard her. "Yes... I'm here," I'd whispered, my voice weak and trembling, a far cry from the confident woman I'd become. The woman who had survived without her mother's love. Who had made a life-despite her.

My chest tightened as she continued. "We need to talk. It's important."

Important. Now it was important. After all these years of silence, of pretending we didn't exist to each other, now she suddenly had something important to say.

I'd waited my whole life for her to tell me something was important-me, maybe, that I was important to her. But of course, that wasn't what this was about. It never had been.

"What's so important now?" I had asked, my voice small, the words trembling on my lips. "After all this time, what could possibly be so important?"

I didn't expect an answer, not really. And even if she had one, I didn't want to hear it. Not from her. Not after everything.

But I knew better. I should have known better.

Her voice returned, colder than ever. "It's not just about you, Samayra. There are things you need to know about the family."

Family. The word twisted in my chest, a cruel joke. Family meant love, support, safety-everything my mother had never given me. Family had been my father, the one person who had made me feel like I mattered. And now, even he was gone.

"Can you meet me tomorrow at home?"

HOME??????

That word hit me like a punch to the gut. Home. The house I grew up in but never truly belonged to. The house that held all the cold memories, the silences, the looks that said I wasn't wanted. That house was never mine.

I could feel the familiar knot tightening in my chest. I closed my eyes, trying to keep my voice steady as I spoke. "I'll meet you," I said, my voice cracking despite my efforts to keep it together. "But not there. Not at that place. We can meet somewhere else... outside. A resort, maybe."

She paused for a moment, long enough that I wondered if she was even listening. Then, as casually as she'd started the conversation, she said, "Okay."

And just like that, she hung up, without a goodbye, without a second thought. The silence on the other end felt colder than the rain outside.

I stared at my phone, my fingers trembling, the weight of her words pressing down on me like a boulder. All these years, I had tried to distance myself from her, from that house, from everything it represented. But here she was, barging back into my life as if nothing had changed, as if I hadn't walked away from that suffocating place all those years ago. My breath hitched, and suddenly, I felt the tears welling up. My vision blurred as the dam I'd been holding back started to crack. I was done pretending to be strong. I was done holding it all in.

I parked my car at the corner of the road, unable to drive any further. The pressure in my chest built, and the tears I had been fighting spilled over. I gripped the steering wheel, my knuckles white, as sobs wracked my body.

I wanted to scream. I wanted to cry until there was nothing left. All the hurt, all the rejection, all the love I never got-everything came crashing down at once.Why now? Why did she come back into my life just when I had finally started to feel like I was moving forward?

I cried like I hadn't in years, my body shaking with the force of it, the rain outside merging with the storm inside me. I cried for the little girl who never got her mother's love, for the woman I had become who still carried the weight of that loss, and for the strength it would take to face her again.

I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready. Not after so many years.

***2. SAMAYRA'S POV***

***Blood ties can bind, but they can also suffocate.***

I drove home, my mother's words echoing in my mind. "We need to talk." Just four words, yet they had thrown everything into chaos. Something so small shouldn't hurt this much, but it did.

As I entered the building, Harish Kaka, the watchman, noticed my tear-streaked face. "Kya hua, Samayra beta? You look upset," he asked softly.

I forced a weak smile, trying to hide the pain. "It's nothing, Kaka. Just a lot on my mind today, "I murmured softly.

His expression softened, though I could see the doubt in his eyes. "Take care, beta. If you need anything, I'm here."

I nodded and hurried to the lift, needing the peace and quiet of my apartment. As soon as I got in, I went straight to the bathroom. I turned on the shower and let the cold water hit me, hoping it would make the pain go away. But it didn't. The pain stayed with me, no matter how long I stood there.

I finally got out and wrapped myself in a towel. My eyes were puffy and my skin felt cold, but that was nothing compared to the chaos inside me. As I walked into the living room, I saw the package from Ishanya. For a moment I was distracted by curiosity.

I opened the parcel and found a stunning silver necklace. The pendant was shaped like a delicate flower, with tiny sparkling stones in the centre. The thin chain was elegant, making the necklace look both simple and beautiful. Alongside it was a note in her familiar handwriting:

"To my dearest Sam, can't wait to celebrate your birthday together! Love, Ishanya."

Tears welled up again, but this time, they were tears of bittersweet memories-of the late-night talks, the endless jokes, and the unwavering friendship. I quickly pulled out my phone and messaged Ishanya, "Thank you so much for the beautiful necklace! miss you girl!"

The rest of the evening went by in a blur, my mind filled with questions that wouldn't let me rest. The next morning, I woke up with a sense of unease. I arrived at the cafe, seeking a moment of clarity.

I stepped into the cafe, surrounded by its cozy atmosphere. Soft morning light poured in through big windows, shining warmly on wooden tables. The scent of fresh coffee and baked goods filled the air.

By the window, my mother sat poised, sipping her favourite masala chai. She wore a stunning navy blue kurta that flowed gracefully with a matching churidar and dupatta, exuding elegance. The sunlight caught her silver jewellery, making it sparkle like tiny stars, while her hair was neatly styled in a bun. As I walked closer, my anxiety heightened, when I saw him.

Varun, my elder brother standing behind her, his eyes met mine. They were filled with guilt and desperation.

I hadn't seen him for years.

Memories of the boy he used to be flooded back, but now, he looked different-older, burdened.

I sat down slowly, bracing myself. "You wanted to talk?" I asked cautiously, looking at my mother.

"You have to help your brother."

"What kind of help?" I pressed.

"You're the only one who can save him."

"What is it?" I asked, my voice soft, though my heart was racing.

My brother stepped forward, clearing his throat nervously. "It's about my company..."

I cut him off. "Father's company!!"

"Yes, Father's company," he said quietly. "Mother managed it after he passed, but... now it's in trouble."

The words struck me hard, bringing back memories of my father's legacy-Malhotra Media, a renowned publishing house known for its magazines, articles, and online content. It had been founded by my grandfather, and expanded by my father. It was a symbol of our family's success and pride.

But now, it was struggling?

His's voice pulled me back to the present. "It started after we published an article about Siddhanth Oberoi's mother."

My eyes snapped to his. "What article?"

He looked away, shame washing over his face. "We reported that she's alive and in rehab for drug addiction."

A wave of disbelief crashed over me. "Why would you allow such a publication? Don't you know who the Oberois are?"

"My brother's words echoed in my mind: 'Siddhanth Oberoi, the business tycoon-his empire spanned real estate, tech, and finance." He was involved in everything, and his influence was everywhere. But behind the headlines, his personal life was a mystery. There were rumors about his family, suggesting he had a sister, but no one knew the truth about his parents. Were they alive or dead? No one knows.

His shoulders slumped under the weight of his decision. "I thought it was sensational news. It would attract readers and boost our revenue. But when Siddhanth found out, he exploded. He ordered us to take it down, and we did"

The gravity of his words settled like lead in my stomach. "And what happened after that?"

"Siddhanth was furious. He threatened me, saying the only way to save me and Malhotra Media was if..." He hesitated, dread creeping into his eyes.

"If what, Varun bhai..." I started, the words slipping out automatically, but I quickly caught myself, hesitating. "No, I mean... if what, Mr. Malhotra?"

His voice trembled. "If you marry him."

For a moment, I was paralyzed by shock. The absurdity of it felt unreal. "Marry him? Are you serious?" I struggled to comprehend the implications. Siddhanth Oberoi-the very man whose family secrets had triggered this chaos-was being offered as a solution to our problems?

I scoffed, trying to process. "Why would he want to marry me? I have nothing to do with Father's company."

His shoulders slumped. "I... I don't know," he mumbled, his voice barely above a whisper.

My anger flared. "You don't know? You're asking me to marry someone to save the company, but you don't even know why he wants this?"

My brother averted his gaze, his silence louder than any words he could have spoken.

I stood up abruptly, my chair scraping against the floor. My heart pounded in my chest, fury mixing with confusion. How could they even ask me that?

"I can't marry him," I said, my voice firm. "Never." I picked up my bag and walked away, but my mother grasped my hand, her grip tightening. Her touch sent shivers down my spine, but it wasn't gentle. It was forced.

"I don't want to lose my beta," she pleaded, her voice trembling. "I already lost my husband, that too, because of..." She hesitated.

I looked back, shaking off her grip. "Why did you stop?" I asked angrily. "Just say what you think. Call me by the same name you always do-murderer." I turned to my brother, my voice rising. "Why would I even help you? Have you ever considered me your sister after Father died? Did you both ever see me as family? But now, suddenly, you're asking me to marry someone just to save yourself?"

His gaze dropped, the weight of my words settling between us like a thick fog. "I... I know things have been difficult since..."

"Since he died?" I snapped, cutting him off. "You both made it clear I was no longer part of this family. So why now?

"Please, Samayra, consider this proposal. Not for me, but for the company that Father built."

The mention of my father's name hit me hard. Memories flooded back, and a lump formed in my throat. Saving his legacy suddenly seemed important.

Yet, uncertainty crept in. Was I being selfish by refusing? Was I really considering my family's well-being?

I shook off the doubts and picked up my bag. "I have to go," I muttered, avoiding eye contact. Without another word, I turned and walked away, leaving my brother and mother staring after me.

I stepped out of the cafe, my mind reeling with thoughts. I pulled out my phone and dialed Rohan, my PA.

"Rohan, book an appointment for me with...," I hesitated, "with Mr. Oberoi."

"Mr. Siddhanth Oberoi, ma'am?" Rohan's voice was laced with curiosity.

"Yes, that's the one. And gather all the information you can about him. I want to know everything."

"It won't be easy, ma'am," Rohan said. "Just try," I pressed.

"What's the purpose of the meeting ma'am?" he asked.

"I need to discuss the proposal he made through my family," I replied.

"Understood, ma'am. I'll also gather information about him for you."

I cut the call. I had to meet him, no matter what. The proposal, my family's legacy, and my own future hung in the balance. I needed answers, and only Mr. Oberoi could provide them.

***3. SIDDHANT'S POV***

***He's not here to forgive, nor to forget. He's here to take control.***

I gripped the steering wheel tighter, the leather creaking under the pressure as I sped down the road. Malhotra Media had crossed a line by publishing that article about my mother—about that woman. I didn't care what they said about her.

 She had made her choices a long time ago, and I had stopped caring about her the day—well, that's not important now. But my sister, she still thought of her as our mother. And because of that woman, my sister's life had been nothing but pain. I had protected her, shielded her from the mess that woman had left behind. She already lived through a childhood full of hell.

The engine roared louder as I pressed harder on the gas. Trees and buildings blurred by, but I barely noticed. All I could think about was my sister—her tears, her panic, her fear. The road stretched ahead, empty and dark, but it didn't calm the storm raging inside me. The tires screeched as I took sharp turns, the car jolting with every twist. I didn't care. My pulse pounded, matching the thrum of the engine.

But now, because of Malhotra Media, it was worse. They had dragged my sister through it all over again. My hands tightened on the wheel until I thought it might snap. The thought of my sister, shaking and crying because of that article, made my blood boil. I could feel the rage surging, hot and uncontrollable. I slammed my foot on the accelerator, the engine roaring in protest, but I didn't care. The city lights flickered by like ghosts, disappearing in my rear- view mirror. I needed to do something-anything.

I wanted to smash something, to hurt someone. They had hurt my sister, and that was something I couldn't let go. Not this time. Malhotra Media would pay, one way or another.

 The wind whipped through the small crack in the window, cold and sharp against my skin, but it did nothing to cool the heat rising in my chest. I could feel the steering wheel tremble under my grip, the whole car vibrating as I pushed it to its limit. The world outside was a blur, but inside the car, everything was crystal clear—rage, burning and relentless.

The phone buzzed in my pocket, dragging me out of my boiling thoughts. I didn't have to look to know who it was—Dadaji. He always knew, always sensed when I was about to lose control. I hesitated before answering.

"Where are you?" His voice was steady, but I could hear the warning in it.

"Handling business," I said, my voice tense.

"Come home. Now."

There was no arguing with him. Dadaji didn't ask; he commanded. But I wasn't scared of him. Since that terrible day when me and my sister lost everything, I had become emotionally distant from everyone. The day we buried our past, I buried my faith in God along with it.

I exhaled sharply, pushing down my anger just long enough to turn the car around. The fury surged within me, a restless beast clawing at my insides, desperate to break free. Each heartbeat hammered a relentless reminder: I was done feeling powerless.

The drive home was a blur, and by the time I walked into Dadaji's study, the storm inside me hadn't calmed down. He was waiting, sitting in his leather chair, surrounded by shelves filled with books that towered like ancient fortresses. Dadaji had a vast collection—classic literature, history, philosophy—each tome a testament to his wisdom. He watched me with piercing eyes, as if he already knew what I was planning.

"I know you're thinking of going after Malhotra Media," he said, his tone calm but firm.

I didn't bother hiding it. "They deserve it," I shot back. "They came after us. After my family."

Dadaji leaned back, his gaze unwavering. His grandfather was a good man. So was his father. You can't destroy everything they built because of one person's mistake."

I clenched my fists, my chest tightening with anger. "One person's mistake?" I repeated, my voice low and dangerous. "That mistake nearly destroyed my sister, Dadaji. She saw the article, and it broke her. She couldn't even breathe, couldn't stop crying." The memory of my sister's panic attack made my blood boil all over again. I could still hear her gasping for air, see the fear in her eyes.

"That woman ruined us once," I continued, my voice shaking with rage. "I won't let them do it again."

Dadaji sighed, his expression softening, but I could see the disappointment there too. "I know you want to protect her, Siddhanth. But revenge won't bring you peace. Destroying their company won't make your sister any safer."

I gritted my teeth, fighting back the urge to argue. I couldn't defy Dadaji, not openly. His word was law. But I couldn't let it go, not after what they did.

That night, I barely slept. The rage kept me awake, twisting in my gut, demanding action. Destroying Malhotra Media wasn't an option anymore—not with Dadaji standing in my way—but control... control was different. If I could control the company, I wouldn't need to destroy it. They'd be under my thumb, and they'd answer to me.

I reached for the bottle on my nightstand, a bottle of aged whiskey. I poured myself a glass, the amber liquid swirling as I downed it in one go, the burn barely registering. The whiskey wasn't enough to calm the storm in my head, but as I poured another, and then it hit me.

Yes... she was the key.

The one piece that would give me everything I needed.

I sat up, my mind racing. This was how I'd win. I didn't need to tear down the company.

I just needed the right leverage—her.

The next day, I stormed into Varun Malhotra's office, my jaw clenched and my fists itching to throw a punch. I saw the motherfucker sitting behind his desk, looking every bit the spineless coward I expected him to be. My blood boiled just watching him. Pathetic. I wanted to punch him right then and there, but not yet. No, I would do worse than that. I would crush everything he had.

I threw a file across the desk. It slid right in front of him, and I could see the panic flash in his eyes. "You want to save this company, Mr. fucking Malhotra?" I spat, my voice low and venomous. "Save yourself? Then sign the damn papers and do what I want."

He swallowed, his hands trembling as he reached for the file. I stood still, watching him in cold silence as he flipped through the papers. His eyes darted over the pages, panic setting in as he slowly grasped just how deep he was in. My anger simmered beneath the surface, but I held it in check, choosing to let him squirm a little longer.

Without a word, I turned and dropped onto the leather couch in his office, my movements deliberate, confident. I stretched out, taking my time, letting him see that I was in no rush. This was my moment, and I wanted him to feel every second of it. My arms rested along the back of the couch as I watched him fumble with the papers, knowing that he had no way out.

His breath hitched, his fingers shaking as he reached the part I was waiting for. His head snapped up, confusion and fear etched into his face. "This... but why this? What does this have to do with saving the company?" His voice was shaking, desperate for answers.

I tilted my head slightly, my eyes locked on his.

"I don't owe you an explanation, bastard. You don't get to ask questions here." My tone was sharp, cutting. "You have no choice but to sign those papers if you want to live through this. If you want Malhotra Media to survive. Either you sign, or everything burns."

"But... she won't agree. She will never go along with this," he stammered, his voice weak.

I leaned forward, my eyes narrowing. "I don't care if she agrees. That's your problem, not mine. And if you don't make this happen..." I stood up slowly, towering over him. "I'll destroy your company. But not before I destroy you."

His eyes widened in terror. He knew I wasn't bluffing. I took a slow step toward him, my voice dropping to a deadly whisper. "You won't just lose everything you've built. I'll make sure you have nothing left. You won't even be able to walk down the street without wondering if it's your last day alive."

I watched him break, his hands shaking as he stared down at the contract. I didn't need to hear his answer. I'd already won.

I turned and walked out without another word, ignoring his desperate calls behind me. His pleading meant nothing.

As I left the office, my phone buzzed. I pulled it out, glancing at the screen. A message from Vikram, my trusted PA. The photo loaded first—a headshot of her.

Samayra Malhotra. With it came the details I needed.

My lips curled into a smirk. This was it. My sister had suffered enough because of this mess, but now it was their turn. I would make it worse for them. Much worse. They thought they knew pain? I was about to show them what real suffering looked like. And I wouldn't stop until they begged for mercy.

But mercy wasn't something I gave.

***4. SAMAYRA’S POV***

***Sometimes, the hardest choices lead to the most meaningful journeys***

"Hello," I answered the call. "Kya hua tum dono ko itni subah subah call, vo bhi video call?" I asked, my hair messy and eyes still half-asleep.

"Hello, babe! We called to check if you're ready for your big day—it's your book signing event!" Isha said enthusiastically.

"Yes, darling, I'm so happy for you!" Prisha added with a big smile.

"And today, Prisha madam ji actually picked up the call! Otherwise, you know na, she's usually lost with her jaanwars," Isha teased.

"Excuse me! It's called wildlife photography, and that's my profession, okay? Not like you, just chilling and running a café from a comfy chair!" Prisha shot back.

My besties, Isha and Prisha. Isha owns a café in Bandra, and Prisha is a wildlife photographer, who starts snapping wherever she goes. They both wanted to attend my event but Isha is still in New York and Prisha is in Himachal Pradesh for her work.

"Alright, bas karo, haan!" I laughed, cutting in. "Now, do you have anything else to say, or was this just a morning dose of nok-jhok?"

"Actually, yes," Isha replied. "So, tell us—what are you planning to wear? Decided anything yet?"

"No, I'm still confused," I admitted, turning my phone's camera to show my closet. "Since you both called, help me pick, na!"

"Hi, Maasi!" Little Rehan suddenly appeared in the background. Isha turned to him and said, "Wish Maasi good luck! Today is her big day!"

His innocent excitement made me smile. "Good luck, Maasi!" he said in his baby voice.

"Thank you, Rehan bacha! You're the best!" I replied with a smile.

"Hello! Another Maasi is also here," Prisha chimed in with a grin.

"Hello, my cutie!" Prisha added, waving at Rehan.

Rehan's eyes lit up, waving back at Prisha. "Hi, Prishu Maasi !" he said with a shy smile.

"Baby, go to Daadi; she was calling you," Isha said, trying to shoo him away.

As Rehan ran off, I heard Vivaan's voice in the background. "Good luck with your event, Sam," he called out. I could see him behind Isha, phone in hand, looking busy as usual.

"Ahh, look at Mr. Businessman, always on a call," Prisha teased.

"Don't say anything about my husband!" Isha shot back, rolling her eyes dramatically.

I couldn't help but laugh, feeling grateful for the little chaos they always brought into my life.

"Okay, now tell me what I should wear. I'm confused between the red and black dress," I said, glancing at both options hanging in my closet.

Prisha smiled, "Black one! It'll definitely grab attention."

Sam, this is a book signing, not a hike in the hills! Wear the red dress! You look fab in red."

I glanced at Prisha, who was already shaking her head. "No, not the red—it's too predictable. Go with the black one—it's classy and suits your vibe better."

"Okay, okay, bs karo ab tum dono! I'll go with... black one," I declared, putting an end to the debate.

Isha made a dramatic pout. "Fine, black it is. But you owe me dinner for this betrayal."

Laughing, I ended the call, wishing I could tell them all about the proposal, but I couldn't, not before I met Siddhanth.

I wore my black dress, pairing it with golden earrings and a small, cute pendant. I clicked a mirror selfie and sent it to my So-Called-Bitches whatsapp group.



Isha's message popped up: "Ooh, my hottie! Looking fab!" Just then, Prisha replied, "Yes, my choice is always fab!" I smiled at their compliments.

Next, I paused in front of my father's photograph and reached out for his aashirvaad. A tear trickled down my cheek, and I brushed it away, whispering a quiet thank you. Then, I went to the pooja room, lit a diya, and took a moment to ask for God's blessings.

"Aur Samayra beta, all the best! Aaj aapka bada din hai, na?" said Sunita aunty with a warm smile, handing me my breakfast.

 I hugged her and said, "Thank you, aunty."

I took my BMW and drove to the venue. The restaurant looked beautiful for the event. Soft lights hung from the ceiling, and tables were decorated with fresh flowers. Guests started to arrive, many holding copies of my latest novel, filling the space with excitement.

The event coordinator greeted me with a smile. "It's a pleasure to have you here. We're expecting a great turnout!"

I nodded, pushing away my thoughts. "Thanks! I can't wait."

At the signing table, I introduced myself and thanked everyone for coming, sinking into the rhythm of signing book after book and adding personal notes for each reader. But soon, a strange sensation crept over me, like a prickling awareness that someone was watching.

I glanced up, scanning the crowd, and that's when I saw him. Standing in the back, dressed in a formal suit, his face mostly covered by a black mask. Our eyes met for a moment before he looked away. Just a fan, maybe? I told myself, trying to ignore the unease. But something about him felt off.

After the event, I slipped into the restroom, needing a moment to breathe. Leaning against the sink, I pulled out my phone and called my assistant Rohan.

"Any update Rohan? Did you reach Siddhanth?" I asked, impatience slipping into my tone.

"No, ma'am. He's still unreachable, but I'm trying," he replied.

I sighed in frustration and ran a hand through my hair. Then a strong hand grabbed my elbow and pulled me back. Before I could react, he had me pinned against the cold wall, knocking the air out of me. My heart raced as I struggled to make sense of what was happening.

"I looked up and met the cold, dark eyes of the man from earlier. He stood over me,  his gaze intense and unyielding."

"W-What—" I began, but my voice faltered.

He leaned in close, his breath warm against my ear as he whispered, "You don't need an appointment, my would-be wife." His lips barely brushed my skin, sending a shiver down my spine.

*Siddhanth Oberoi.*

I pushed him, but he stood there like a fictional character straight out of a book, arms folded across his chest. No, I couldn't admire him like that.

"How did you get here? It's an exclusive event. How did you even get the tickets?" I asked, my frustration bubbling to the surface.

He smirked, as if I had made a joke. "tickets? This is my family restaurant," he replied, his tone casual.

Ignoring his words, I pressed on. "I want to talk to you regarding the proposal.......

He cut me off. —the marriage proposal that I made to your brother!!"

"Yes, I pressed on, why do you want to marry me? I'm not even involved in my family's business." I crossed my arms defensively.

"You ask so many questions, Ms. Malhotra, he said, raising an eyebrow. "Shall we step outside? We are standing in the restroom."

We walked out toward a room, perhaps a cabin in the restaurant. He gestured for me to sit, and I obliged, taking a seat across from him. Before I could start, he tossed a file in front of me, and signalled for me to open it.

I hesitated but eventually opened the file, my heart sinking. Inside was a marriage contract. "What is this?" I exclaimed. "I'm here to ask you why you want this marriage, and you're giving me marriage contract papers?"

He leaned forward, testing my patience. "I'm not here to answer your questions. If you want to save your family's legacy—the company that your grandfather started, and your brother—just do as written here. You have only one option: marry me."

Before he could open the cabin door, I stepped in between us, leaving no space and increasing the heat of the moment. "Fine, if it's the only way to save my family, I'm ready to marry you, but I have some conditions too."

He stood there, listening to me intently. I grabbed the paper from the table, quickly jotting down my terms before handing it to him. "If you get the time, just read these. And never try to act like my husband. You are my husband in front of the world, but..."

"...but?" he prompted, his tone almost teasing as he leaned back slightly, clearly enjoying my hesitation.

"But this doesn't mean you get to dictate my life," I replied, trying to keep my voice steady. "We'll have a marriage in name only. I won't be part of your life."

He raised an eyebrow, teasingly. "So you want the benefits of marriage without the commitment? Interesting."

I didn't bother to respond to that. "We'll be a couple for others, but in front of each other, we'll act like strangers."

"Don't worry, Miss. Malhotra. I'm not interested in you," he replied, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"Good," I said, feeling a sense of relief wash over me. "And one more thing: just call me Samayra."

"How about my would-be wife?" he asked, his tone playful yet probing.

"Let's not jump to titles just yet," I shot back, crossing my arms defiantly. "This arrangement is strictly business."

He leaned forward, his gaze locked onto mine. "Business or not, it still comes with its own set of challenges. Are you really prepared for that, Miss. Samayra?"

I took a deep breath, holding his stare. "I've faced challenges before. I can handle whatever comes my way Mr. Oberoi.

We had an unspoken agreement, a balance of power between us. As we left the cabin, I knew this was just the beginning of a complicated journey that would test us both.

**Aankh unki ladi yu meri aankh se,**

**Dekh kar yeh ladai maza aa gya......**

****

***I was there for revenge, but there was something about her that caught my attention.***

I put the contract papers - the ones she gave me with her conditions - on the seat beside me as I drove my Porsche, concentrating on unfinished business.

My phone rang. "Hello?"

A pause, then my informant's steady voice: "He's here."

"Good," I replied coldly. "I'll be there in ten minutes. Don't let him leave."

I hung up, my grip tightening on the wheel. No one had ever dared to leak information about my family—until today. They would regret it.

I parked my Porsche and walked to the outhouse where all my... less official business took place. My men were outside, alert and waiting.

"He's inside, sir," one of them said in a low voice.

I walked in and saw the man - the assistant to the doctor who's treating my mother. He looked terrified, slumped in a chair with his hands tied. His eyes were wide open, and he was sweating, clearly afraid of what was coming.

I moved closer and grabbed his chin, forcing him to look up at me. "So, you thought you could cross me?" I said, my voice low and threatening.

He trembled, unable to respond.

"You leaked my family's information," I said, leaning closer, my voice cold. "Did you really think I wouldn't find out?"

He shook his head, fear written all over his face.

My bodyguard returned quickly, carrying a small metal box that held my tools. I could see the fear deepening in his eyes.

I opened the box slowly, the sound of metal clinking filling the dim room. "You think you can leak my family's information and walk away from it?" I asked, my tone hard. "You have no idea who you're dealing with."

I leaned in closer, my voice a mere whisper, "You'll wish you never crossed paths with me."

He said nervously, "I-I didn't mean to... It was an accident!" His voice trembled, and I could see he was desperately trying to find a way out.

"Accidents don't happen in my world," I replied, stepping back to give him a moment to process his impending fate. "You made a choice, and now you'll pay the price."

I picked up a sharp instrument from the box, letting it glint under the weak light. "Now, let's start with a simple question: was it Varun who asked you for the details?"

He swallowed hard, his eyes darting around as if looking for an escape. "Y-yes, it was Varun. He wanted the information to boost the revenue and TRPs for Malhotra Media."

"Of course he did," I sneered, my grip on the instrument tightening. I ordered my men to tie him up until he understood who Siddhant Oberoi is and never to cross me again.

I stepped out of the outhouse and headed back to my penthouse. Once inside my room, I went straight for the shower, wanting to wash away the blood on my hands. My mind was a mess, swirling with thoughts and images.

Suddenly, her face appeared in my mind—how she had been sitting at her book signing event, talking and smiling, giving autographs to her fans. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. I had already seen her picture sent by my assistant, but seeing her in person, wearing a tight black bodycon dress that perfectly hugged her slim figure, took my breath away.

But when I called her 'Miss Malhotra,' there was something in her eyes that suggested she hated being addressed that way. The same look appeared when I mentioned saving her brother. It was clear she was hiding something behind her smile.

What the fuck was wrong with me? This is not you Siddhant. Why was I thinking about her? She was just a business deal. I was marrying her for the sake of my revenge—nothing else. Nothing was going to happen between us. Never.

Suddenly, my gaze fell on the paper she had handed me, stating her conditions for our marriage. I picked it up and started reading:-

1. Don't expect anything from this marriage.

2. Separate rooms after the wedding.

3. We will never get involved in each other's business.

4. I want a mini-library and a study area where I can write my books without disturbance in the house where we'll live after the marriage.

The last condition was marked with a star. As I read it, a small smile crept onto my face.

No, no—what was this girl doing to me? I had never smiled like that before, but here I was, grinning at a list of demands.

She was something different. It frustrated me how easily she caught my attention. I shook my head, reminding myself that I was marrying her for revenge, not to get distracted by her.

It's all about revenge—nothing else, just revenge.

***6. SAMAYRA’S POV***

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***When fate knocks, will you answer?***

"I couldn't believe I'd agreed to this marriage. I wasn't sure why I did it. Maybe it was guilt, maybe... maybe my mother was right; that accident happened because of me. She lost her husband because of me."

Mr. Malhotra—my brother—had called me on the way back from the event.

**Flashback**

I answered up the call. It was my brother.

"Thank you, Sam. Thank you for agreeing to this marriage..."

"For Dad's reputation and his company," I interrupted, ending the call before he could say more.

**Flashback Ended**

I knew I was doing this for my dad, not my brother. I lay on my bed, staring at the ceiling, lost in thought... thinking of those intense dark eyes... that sharp face... his strong, stiff posture—Siddhant Oberoi. The man was like a shadow haunting my mind.

Suddenly, a message pulled me back. It was from Isha and Prish.

Isha: "I'm coming back to Mumbai tomorrow!"

Prish: "I'll be there on Friday morning! My work is almost done."

Isha: "Gentle Reminder—girls's night at my place on Friday!"

I smiled. I had to tell them about the marriage and everything. Maybe Friday night would be the right time.

**Time skip... Friday Night**

"Prish, I'm outside your apartment come fast," I told her over the phone.

"I'm coming, just give me a minute. I forgot my camera," she replied.

"Hurry up, or Isha will kill us both," I warned.

Five minutes later, Prisha rushed down, dressed in her favorite night shorts and a pink top for our pj party.

"Sorry, I got a bit late," she apologized, sliding into my car.

"Just a bit?" I asked, rolling my eyes.

"Arey ok baba, let's go. Isha's waiting."

As we arrived at the Shekhawat Mansion, I parked the car. Ishanya, Vivaan and his parents had recently moved in, and it was a stunning place—grand architecture with elegant details, designed by Vivaan's younger brother, Karan.

"You're late! I knew it was because of Prisha," Isha said as we entered.

"No, no! Sam was the one who got us late," Prisha defended with a laugh.

"Fine, it was me. I'm sorry, ladies," I confessed, laughing.

"Forget it. Let me show you the beauty of the Himachal valleys, "I took a ton of photos. I'll show you," Prisha, pulling out her camera.

"It's a pj party, Prisha, not a slideshow night!" Isha groaned.

"Oh come on. By the way, where's Rehan, Vivaan and aunty, uncle?" I asked, changing the topic.

"Rehan's asleep, and Vivaan's at the office for an important meeting. Mum and Dad decided to stay in New York; Dad's working with Shekhawat's New York branch," Isha replied.

"Well, then this is a full-on girls' night, just us!" I cheered, high-fiving Prisha.

"Yes! I did so much shopping for you guys. Let me show you!" Isha exclaimed.

Prisha and Isha were busy chatting about the cute outfits and accessories Isha had bought, including the latest Gucci collection and a Dior dress, while I tried to find the right moment to share my news.

Finally, I mustered the courage to speak up. "I'm getting married next week," I blurted out, silencing them both.

The room went quiet, and they both turned to me, shock etched on their faces.

"What?!" Isha finally exclaimed, her eyes wide with disbelief. "Married? To whom?"

Prisha leaned in closer, a look of confusion mixed with curiosity. "You can't be serious! Who is he?"

This was it—the moment I had been dreading but knew I had to face. "It's Siddhant Oberoi.

***7. SAMAYRA x SIDDHANT OBEROI***

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***What if the right one is the one we least expect?***

**Samayra' Pov**

We heard a voice—"What?"—but it wasn't any of us. We turned toward the doorway, and there stood Vivaan, shock written all over his face. "You're marrying Siddhant Oberoi?"

My heart raced as I nodded. "Y-yes. Siddhant Oberoi. The CEO of Oberoi Enterprises".

Vivaan shook his head, clearly in disbelief. "Are you serious, Sam? Do you even know him? Why on earth are you marrying him? Are you guys... dating?"

Before I could respond, Isha interrupted with a raised eyebrow. "Vivaan, shouldn't we be the ones asking her that? Also... who is Siddhant Oberoi anyway? Do you know him?"

Vivaan sighed, glancing at her. "Yes, sweetheart, you know him too. Remember the business party two months ago? I introduced you to my childhood friend, Sidd?"

Isha's eyes widened as it clicked. "Wait... that guy? The one who practically threatened his own client just for looking at his sister the wrong way?"

Vivaan nodded, and Prisha groaned in frustration. "Would someone please explain what's happening here?"

Vivaan's phone suddenly buzzed, and he glanced down, his expression tightening. "Sorry, ladies. Emergency call—got to go" he said, slipping out of the room with a nod.

As soon as he was gone, Isha and Prisha turned back to me, their eyes intense.

Prisha spoke up first, curiosity lacing her voice. "Sam, I've heard of this Siddhant guy. Didn't your brother's publication publish out that article about his mother? A friend told me it caused a huge bawaal before it was taken down within half an hour."

Isha's gaze softened as she looked at me. "Sam, are you marrying him to save your brother or something?"

"It's... it's not like that," I said, trying to gather my thoughts.

"Then why, Sam? Why Siddhant Oberoi, of all people?" Prisha pressed, her expression full of worry.

I took a deep breath. "It's for my father's reputation and the company, that's all. It's mutual—we both agreed to this."

Isha sighed, reaching out to squeeze my hand. "Well, just know we're here for you, Sam. But please, don't do this for anyone else—especially not for your mother or brother. Do it only if it's what you want."

Prisha spoke up, her tone soft. "Exactly. You don't owe this to anyone."

"And let's be honest, he's not that bad; he's just thoda zyada protective of his family, especially his sister. Plus, he's super sexy, Sam," Isha said with a playful grin. "He's the kind of guy who's all trouble—but the best kind of trouble."

"Stop it, Isha!" Prisha said with a laugh. "If Vivaan heard you saying that about his childhood friend, bichara Siddhant will be fucking dead!"

Isha laughed, rolling her eyes. "Fine, fine! I'm just saying Sam's lucky. And... well, I can imagine their chemistry—especially in bedroom."

"Guys, stop!" I interrupted, cheeks burning. "This is just a marriage, nothing more!"

They both shared a mischievous look. "Okay, we'll see," they said, bursting into laughter.

**Siddhant's Pov**

"Kaha hai tu? Mere office aa, kaam hai!" I barked into the phone, irritation bubbling beneath the surface. Vivaan's response was quick, "haa, aata hu. Mujhe bhi kuch kaam hai tere se." But before I could say another word, he cut the call.

I was buried in files in my cabin, trying to focus when suddenly someone banged the door open. It was Vivaan, his energy filling the room. I got up, ready to exchange the usual banter. "Bhai, kaisa rha NYC ka trip? Chal ab thoda business ki tarf dhyaan de le.

But then he got straight to the point, "Are you marrying Sam? I mean Samayra? But why?"

I smirked, knowing it wasn't what he expected. "Because I fell for her at first sight."

"Stop it, Sidd!" he shot back.

"Don't call me by that FUCKING name!", I shouted.

"I'm the one who should be shouting" he continued, "You are not the guy who falls for any girl easily. Tell me the damn reason. Is it because of the article?"

I threw a file in front of him. "Read this".

He opened it, his eyes widening as he processed the information. "FORTY FUCKING PERCENT? She owns that many shares of Malhotra's? Does she even know about this?"

I shook my head. "No, she doesn't know. Not even her brother is aware. "Daadji ordered not to destroy Malhotras because of his fucking friendship with Samayra's grandfather. But that won't stop me from taking control of Malhotra Media, I said with a smirk.

"Arey, Ye to tu aise bhi kr skta hai ! Use your damn power!" he urged.

"Haan, kr skta hu, but my family's reputation is more important," I replied.

"I know this is business, but don't ever try to hurt Sam. She is like sister to me," he warned.

"Aur meri hone vali biwi," I shot back.

My phone buzzed, interrupting the moment. It was Avani, "Bhai, daadu wants to meet you abhi. Aur bhai, vo shyd gusse mein hai. Chachi, Chachu aur Riaa bhi aaye hain. Please come fast!" The call ended before I could respond.

"Kya hua?" Vivaan asked, noticing my sudden change in mood.

"Kuch na, Avani called. You know na daadaji and meri shaadi ki news," I replied, sharing a laugh with him.

As I entered the Oberoi Mansion, I could feel the atmosphere shift. Everyone was gathered in the hall, and Riaa and Avani came running to hug me. "Bhai, we missed you!" Avani exclaimed. She lived in Delhi with my Chachi, Chachu, and our cousin Riaa for her studies.

"What is this?" my grandfather asked, holding up his phone. "Yeh media ko kaafi zyada interest hai meri shaadi mein, jaise kisi film ka scene ho raha ho!" I muttered". He read the headline aloud. "CEO OF OBEROI ENTERPRISES GETTING MARRIED? IS IT A BUSINESS DEAL OR SOMETHING ELSE?".

"Wow, Bhai, You are getting married!" Avani and Riaa cheered excitedly.

"Avani, Riaa, go to your room!" Chachi intervened.

"But—" Avani started to protest.

"Go to your room, bacha," I said, leading them upstairs before turning my attention back to Daadaji.

"Daadaji, You told me not to destroy them, but at least I can own it," I said, trying to reason with him.

"This is not a way to do this," he responded.

"Marriages like this is common in business world, daadaji," I insisted.

He stepped closer, his expression softening. "I can't stop you from doing what you think is right, but remember this: don't ever take out your frustrations on Samayra for her brother's mistakes. She deserves your respect. If I catch you disrespecting her even once, you'll see that your Daadji budhe nhi hue hai ," he said with a small smile, a hint of warning in his eyes.

"Congrats, Siddhant beta!" Chachi and Chachu chimed in.

I smiled back, thinking about **her**.