

*Excerpt from Imperfect Affections by Charmaine Pauls*

The women's reply is lost on me as I step outside and close the door. All I can focus on is the blue Aston Martin that comes to a stop behind the truck. I stand rooted to the spot, watching Leon with growing dread as he gets out of the car and makes his way over with long but unhurried strides.

He's wearing dark jeans, a faded T-shirt, and a leather jacket—his signature work attire. Only, he's not at the office where Elliot must be moving his precious Johannesburg Country Club mug and coaster to his new desk. He's here, pinning me with a stare cold enough to freeze the sun. It's a violent kind of cold, the kind that only dangerous men possess. They don't make threats or raise their voices. They pull the trigger calmly and quietly. They're efficiently deadly.

He stops two steps away from me, measuring me with that cool gaze. "Violet."

I swallow around the lump in my throat. "Leon."

"The moving company employee said there's a confusion."

Lifting my chin, I try to look confident instead of scared. "Yes." I wave a hand at the truck. "What's the meaning of this?"

He looks over his shoulder at the vehicle, studying it for a second before turning back to me. "You're moving in with me." His words are flat, toneless. "We're getting married."

The word pops out of its own accord. "No."

He raises a brow, an unfriendly smile playing on his sensual lips. "No?"

My mouth is so dry it feels as if my lips are glued together. I have to wet them before I can speak. "That's what I said."

He advances on me, closing the small distance between us and putting our bodies flush together. "Once again, you're mistakenly assuming I'm asking."

I back up, my heel hitting the step behind me. "Gus won't force me."

His smile turns mocking. "Because I'm not his new partner after all?"

Not sure how to answer that without provoking his anger, I remain quiet.

He cups my head, his fingers gentle on my scalp while his gaze bores into mine. What I see in his eyes makes me shudder. In contrast to his light touch, he looks at me like he wants to crack me open and break me apart.

“Here’s the thing you don’t understand, Violet. It doesn’t really matter what Gus says. Tonight, you’ll be sleeping in my bed. Tomorrow, you’ll wake up in my bed. And the next day, and the next.”

A shiver runs through me.

He searches my eyes, but he’s not looking for emotions. He’s not interested in my feelings. He’s evaluating them like an artist studying a subject to assess the color.

“Tomorrow, my darling, you *will* say *I do*.”