

Prologue

Elizabeth POV

Fired.

She couldn't believe it. As she stood in front of Mr. Copeland's desk and the man drawled on, summing up all the reasons she was incompetent, her mind started reeling.

Her relationship with her boyfriend of ve years had just ended, and as a parting gift—she'd discovered this morning—he'd emptied out their joint savings account.

246,81. That was the current balance of her bank account.

1250. That was the amount of rent that was due in less than two weeks. What the f**k was she going to do?

She could put out an ad for a roommate, but that would take ages. Plus, nding one that wouldn't try to sleep with her was a challenge all on its own.

Calling her father was out of the question. That was at the bottom of her list, right before selling her body for money.

She cleared out her desk on autopilot, and before she realized it, she was out on the sidewalk.

Trac buzzed and people pushed past on their way home from their jobs.

She nally looked up, in search of a taxi to drive her to her apartment. While she still had one at least.

The moment her eyes skimmed the street for a yellow cab, they landed on a girl in the middle of the busy road, who was walking across.

The box containing her oice supplies dropped from her arms as she rushed forward. It was as if time slowed down when she saw a taxi speeding toward the girl, who stood still, tears streaking down her tiny face.

"Got ya!" Elizabeth clutched the girl to her chest, her heart raced while she panted, as the taxi that had nearly hit her honked its horn and rolled down its window.

"Keep a better eye on your kid, lady!" But Elizabeth ignored the angry driver, all of her attention moved toward the girl. She couldn't have been more than four years old.

"Are you okay?" the little girl shook her head as tears kept dropping from her eyes.

"Where's your mommy?" Was the rst question that came to mind.

"I don't h—have a m—mommy." The girl choked a sob, clutching to Elizabeth as if she were a lifeline.

Shit! Now the girl was crying even harder. Elizabeth knew nothing about children, other than being certain that she didn't want any.

"I'm sorry, please, don't cry!" she hissed, nervously looking around. What if people thought she was some kind of child snatcher?

"Your daddy then?"

The little girl's bottom lip trembled, as snot dripped from her little nose. "Daddy's always working." She whispered, looking down, while her little body still trembled with the occasional sob.

"Who is here with you then?" She asked, looking around for anyone who looked like they were missing a little girl.

"My nanny took me to the park, but she's mean." She pouted, while her little face scrunched up.

"I miss my mommy," She suddenly whispered as a new wave of tears welled up in her eyes.

"It's okay," she said, patting the girl on the head in an awkward attempt to comfort her. Her eyes desperately darted around, searching for anything that could help her. Maybe she should call the police? But rst she needed to distract the little munchkin in her arms.

"Why don't we go for some ice cream?" she asked when her eyes landed on the ice cream parlor down the street. All kids like ice cream? Right?!

"Ice cream," the little girl's face lit up while she swiped the snot away with the back of her hand, before wiping it on Elizabeth's 1500 dollar suit. Well, swiped away wasn't the right word for it. It was more of a smeared out all over the kids face kind of situation.

Elizabeth held back a gag reex as she glanced at the goo on her shoulder. Just f*****g perfect.

She placed the now excited little girl on the ground, while she took the little slimeball's hand in hers and led her down the street.

Elizabeth watched on as the girl ordered two scoops of ice cream, one banana and one chocolate, which cost a goddamn arm and leg, before complaining of a stomach ache halfway through.

Elizabeth sent up a silent prayer that she had gotten in IUD years ago, so she could enjoy the pleasures of a good f**k, without the pain of whatever she was watching unfold in front of her.

She'd been so captivated by the trainwreck in front of her—the kid had ice cream everywhere—that she'd completely forgotten to call the police. Oh s**t! Now she was a kidnapper.

Just when she took out her phone to make the call, something caught her eye. The girl was wearing something around her neck.

"What's that?" Elizabeth asked, gently tugging the necklace out of the girl's shirt. It had some kind of pendant hanging from it.

"That's Daddy's number," the girl spoke in a chirpy voice.

Elizabeth clenched her jaw. She could have been rid of this little menace an hour ago, without spending half of what was left in her checking account if she'd spoken up sooner.

Breath, just breath, she calmed herself.

She opened the pendant, took out her phone and dialed the number inside. It connected on the rst ring.

"Hello?" a gruff, deep voice asked.

"Um, yes, this is Elizabeth Livingston speaking. I'm calling you to inform you that I've found your daughter. She—"

"Oh, thank God. Is she okay?" The man on the other end of the line sighed in relief.

Elizabeth looked over at the girl, whose face was covered in a mixture of snot and ice cream, with ice cream dripping down her chin, onto her t-shirt.

"Um...yes," It wasn't a lie. The kid seemed ne.

"I'm going to kill Suzy," The way the man said it caused a chill to run over Elizabeth's spine.

"Where are you? I'm coming to get her right now," Elizabeth quickly gave him the name of the ice cream parlor. Luckily, he'd heard of it, because she was not good at giving directions. Come to think of it, she wasn't particularly good at anything.

"Come on, let's...get you cleaned up," she sighed, making a face at the girl's state. Fifteen minutes later, she looked...better-ish. Well, at least her face didn't look as if it was going to attract ants any longer, though the same could not be said for her clothes.

"Come on, kiddo, your dad should be here any minute," Elizabeth spoke, leading the child back into the parlor.

A few minutes later, while she was letting the menace draw on the back of her termination letter, while she scrolled through her phone in search of a new job, a deep voice brought her out of her inner turmoil.

"Sophia, there you are," The little girl's face lit up, as she hopped off the chair and was scooped into.... The most gorgeous man's arms Elizabeth had ever seen. Holy crap. He looked as though he had walked right out of one of those weird perfume commercials. He was tall, dark and... dangerous. His skin was tanned, his suit jacket hugged his obviously muscular arms... he was... wow.

"Thank you so much for taking care of her," the man said, barely sparing her a glance. Wait a minute, how did she know that he was who he said he was? Sure, the kid seemed to know him, but how smart were kids really? I mean she had come with her, a stranger, hadn't she?

"Can I see some ID, please," Elizabeth spoke, pushing the little girl, who was now bouncing around excitedly, behind her. The man's eyes hardened, as he xed her with a hard stare.

The man exuded a dangerous aura, but Elizabeth held her ground. Though she was glad to be rid of the kid, she couldn't go handing her over to some pedophile, now could she?

"She just called me daddy." He countered.

"So? You could have coaxed her to do that. I'm going to need some proof. Some pictures, maybe." Pictures without a shirt, preferably. Get your head out of the gutter. She scolded herself internally.

"This is ridiculous," The man huffed, shing his cellphone out of his jacket's inner pocket, scrolling, before holding the phone up in her face. It was an adorable photo of Sophia handing him what looked like to be a homemade Father's Day present.

She huffed a response, before lowering herself to make eye contact with the girl.

"Sophia, I am Elizabeth," She spoke, talking very slowly, while pointing to herself. In her defense, she didn't know kids could be smart, so stop judging! "Is this man," she pointed at the hunk behind her, "your daddy?"

"Yes!" Sophia shrieked, causing an eardrum to explode—It felt that way at least.

"What are you doing? The man rolled his eyes, pulling his daughter toward him.

"Sophia, say goodbye to the lady," her father said.

"Elizabeth," she corrected, causing the man to huff once more.

"Bye Ellie!" Sophia ran toward her, to her utter horror. She almost wanted to kick the girl in an attempt to at least save her pants from destruction, but even she knew that wasn't socially acceptable. And she didn't want to admit it, but a tiny part of her child's loathing heart melted.

"Daddy, can Ellie be my new nanny?" Elizabeth froze, and she could swear, so did he.

The man's cold gray eyes gave her a once over, before moving back to his daughter's beaming smile.

His eyes then glanced over her termination letter, which had darted to the oor. Elizabeth quickly crumbled the paper and threw it in her purse. She felt her cheeks heating.

"You want the job or what?"

Elizabeth began to splutter, thinking of the least impolite ways to say no, when he said something that made her change her mind completely.

"It pays 1000 dollars a week," He glanced at the cellphone in his hand as it started ringing.

"When do I start?"