

## Making amends

Elizabeth POV

Elizabeth had spent all day with Sophia, and everything they'd done had felt like a goodbye. Every game they played, every smile they shared, every song they sang—it only served to remind her that it would be the last time she would be seeing the little menace.

Matteo had specically requested that she wouldn't say goodbye to Sophia. He wanted to tell her himself after Elizabeth was gone. Apparently, he had a big business meeting today—or a family gathering. That's what she'd heard from the other staff at least.

The whole manor was bustling with activity as the staff ran around, making sure the place was perfect.

It must be a big business deal then, Elizabeth thought, as she carried her bags quietly down the stairs. Matteo had made sure that Sophia would be distracted by another staff member by four in the evening, giving her enough time to pack up and leave, but since she didn't have much—she'd left all the items she'd purchased using his black card behind. She didn't want to be reminded of him or of Sophia.

A hollow chuckle left her lips. For someone who hated children and didn't even want this job in the rst place, she sure felt sad.

Sophia had grown on her in these past few weeks—had stolen her heart.

When she entered the foyer, Rosemary stood waiting for her. She expected to see a malicious smile on the woman's face, but was greeted by a solemn expression instead. Even they had grown on each other. They would never be friends, but their snappy little comments were something she had grown accustomed with.

"Don't look too sad, I might just think that you'll miss me." Elizabeth teased.

"Don't atter yourself. I'm just sad that I'll have to nd someone new to insult every day," The woman sighed dramatically.

"Anyway, I have this for you." She handed Elizabeth two white envelopes. The rst one held a letter.

"It's a recommendation letter from Mr. De Luca," Rosemary explained. Elizabeth was surprised. She thought the man hated her. A tinge of sadness welled in her heart, but she quickly pushed it aside.

The second envelope held a signicant amount of cash.

"And that's severance pay," Rosemary told her with a small smile. But Elizabeth couldn't take it. It felt wrong after Matteo had gotten her out of her tight spot yesterday. She hadn't even asked what he'd had to do to get them to agree to free her.

Then again, what was he doing there anyway?

"I—I can't take it," Elizabeth shook her head, handing the envelope back to Rosemary, who looked confused.

Suddenly, one of the kitchen staff members came running toward them—a look a panic on her face.

"Miss Pritchard, the chef has just called in sick!" She said in a fearful exclamation.

"What? She should have been here two hours ago? Why didn't someone notify me before?" Rosemary sternly replied. She was in charge of all the staff members in the manor.

"I—We thought she was just running late," The woman stuttered, looking ashamed.

"Oh, this is terrible. The guests will be here in one hour! What are we going to do? How can I nd another chef so quickly?" Rosemary put a hand to her forehead, a frantic look on her face.

"Actually, I might be able to help," Elizabeth smiled.

"Okay, what do we have here?" She pulled open the fridge, inspecting what the chef was planning on making, what she'd prepared in advance and what ingredients she had in the cupboards and the fridge.

She quickly found two dried out baguettes from yesterday's lunch, tomatoes, garlic, basil, eggs, some leftover cooked spaghetti, yeast, onions, Parmesan,...

"Okay, I can work with this," She smiled.

"You're not poisoning Mr. De Luca to get back at him for ring you, are you?" Rosemary asked, taking in the scene warily.

"No," Elizabeth chuckled, "I'm actually a chef. I secretly took cooking classes, and learned a lot from my Italian grandmother," She smiled. Rosemary raised an eyebrow but seemed to accept the explanation.

"Okay, we have fty-ve minutes left. Are you sure you got this?" She asked.

"Yes," Elizabeth said, cutting the bread into slices while handing out orders to the kitchen staff. This was her passion—she could do this, as a token of gratitude to Matteo, for helping her in her time of need, even though he red her.

She quickly made the pizza dough she would need for the main course, and the two other doughs that would be needed for the desserts she had in mind—setting them aside to rise. Rosemary stood by, helping where she could.

"Thirty-ve minutes left," Rosemary shouted.

Elizabeth asked the kitchen staff to get started on the soup. She instructed them what vegetables to use and how to cut them while she made the Melanzane alla Parmigiana (Eggplant Parmesan)—in case pizza was too simple for the occasion.

When her dish was oven ready, she started working on the appetizers—roasting the bread for the Bruschetta al Pomodoro and making the Frittata di Spaghetti. It was a dish made from leftover spaghetti. It was simple, but delicious.

"Wow, this looks better than what Evita usually makes," Rosemary said, ordering the staff members to start serving the appetizers.

"Thank you," Elizabeth smiled, while she rolled out the dough for the pizzas. She'd made sauce from tomatoes, and asked another woman to start grating the mozzarella.

Elizabeth continued to work while the rest of the staff left with full dishes and returned with empty ones. The sight of the empty plates warmed her heart. At least they liked her food.

She slid the tart and cake into the oven before cleaning the kitchen. By the time every course had been served, it was hours later—way past the time Matteo had asked her to leave. She hoped he wouldn't be angry.

When Elizabeth nally left the kitchen, she said goodbye to the rest of the staff and Rosemary, before entering the foyer. Her bags were still where she left them. She picked them up and walked toward the door.

"Ellie, are you leaving?" A soft voice spoke behind her.

Elizabeth was startled to see Sophia.

"Sophia, what are you doing here? It's way past your bedtime." Elizabeth said, putting her bags on the oor.

"Is my daddy making you leave?" The little girl asked, tears brimming her eyes.

"No, of course not." She lied, "I did something bad, and I don't want you to get hurt, so I need to leave for a while." Elizabeth swallowed the lump that was forming in her throat.

"Are you coming back?" Sophia asked, as tears started spilling from her eyes. Elizabeth pulled her close, while the little girl sobbed into her shirt.

"I—I" She didn't know what to say—didn't know if she would make things worse.

"Sophia—Oh, there you are!" The woman who was supposed to be watching her suddenly appeared.

"You have to keep a better eye on her," She harshly spoke to the woman—afraid that no one was going to take care of Sophia like she did.

She stood by, watching as the little girl walked off, looking back every once in a while, tears slipping from her eyes.

When she was out of sight, Elizabeth broke down and silently cried. She was going to miss Sophia deeply.

"Elizabeth, can I see you in my oce?"