

Breakfast meeting

Elizabeth POV

After meeting that gorgeous specimen of a man, De Luca's mood had changed dramatically and when the introduction day was over, they quickly made their way back to his car.

They drove back in silence. Yes, it was the uncomfortable kind, where you're not sure if you should say something or not. And then suddenly, a tickle in your throat will emerge out of nowhere, causing you to hold your breath, swallow, any-thing but cough—that kind of silence.

Arriving back at the manor, Elizabeth knew something was denitely wrong when he unbuckled his daughter and walked off toward the house, leaving her ustered in her seat.

She narrowed her eyes at his retreating back, nostrils aring. The man was so infuriating. The one moment, he treats her like a bloody lady, opening her door. The next, he's a total jackass.

She sat in the car for a moment longer, trying to compose herself—and talk herself out of keying his car. That might be a bad idea considering he was her boss.

When she nally made it back inside, Parsley—better known as Rosemary—smirked at her while dusting the staircase. That bloody woman! Elizabeth saw right through that one, always trying to be prim and proper, but she knew the woman was lusting after Matteo's perfect ass just as much as she was.

Elizabeth's eyes scanned the empty hallways. Where were Mr. De Luca and Sophia?

Just when she thought of looking upstairs, a faint, playful giggle reached her ears from the sitting room. Elizabeth followed the sound—her heels clacking on the stone oors—the murmur of voices growing clearer with each step.

When she pushed open the door slightly, the sight before her made her heart melt, and her earlier irritation move to the back of her mind—waiting until she was alone in her room to resurface.

Matteo had thrown the expensive white couch cushions on the oor, for him and Sophia to sit on. The curtains were drawn closed, and on the large TV screen, a movie was playing. It was the movie about that Princess who has ice powers. Elizabeth had seen a commercial for it once or twice. And there was this annoying song. Something about letting go, but that was all she recalled.

"I'm going to fweeze you with ice!" Sophia yelled, jumping on the pillows, shooting invisible ice at him using her hands. Matteo responded by grabbing her and tickling her. The pair laughed. It was an endearing sight, and it was clear to Elizabeth that this denitely wasn't Sophia's rst time watching that movie.

When the little pumpkin noticed Elizabeth, she cheered. "Ellie, come and watch Fwozen with us!" Matteo didn't respond at all. He didn't even look at her.

"I'd love to," Elizabeth overexaggerated. She couldn't disappoint Sophia, and if she could irritate Matteo further, it would be a win for her.

A few minutes later, one of the kitchen staff brought a tray of snacks.

"Ooh, popcorn," Elizabeth said, grabbing a handful—at the same time as Matteo. Their hands brushed, causing Elizabeth to pull away quickly, throwing her popcorn in the air.

"Crap," she cursed. When Sophia giggled and repeated the word, Mr. De Luca responded to her presence for the rst time, by glaring at her, before reprimanding his daughter.

They watched for about an hour in—Sophia all the while reenacting the scenes, much to her amusement—when suddenly, they noticed Sophia had fallen asleep.

Matteo took the little girl in his arms and placed her on the pillows next to him—removing her from in between them.

"Poor kid had a big day," Elizabeth chuckled. Watching Sophia sleeping was so endearing, that she forgot that she was supposed to be mad at Matteo—Mr. De Luca. Oh, whatever, it's not like he could hear her thoughts anyway.

"She did," Matteo smiled.

"Can I ask you something?" Elizabeth asked, grabbing another handful of popcorn in the dimly lit room—the only light coming from the TV screen.

"Hmm," Matteo responded with something between a hum and a grunt. A grum. Elizabeth chuckled at her own silliness. When her attention refocused on the room, she saw Matteo looking at her with a lifted brow.

"Oh, sorry, I was—never mind. How long have you been a single parent for? It must not have been easy, losing Sophia's mother."

"It wasn't," Matteo spoke, a torrent of emotions crossed his features, before he spoke again. "Sophia was only a baby, just three months old."

"Oh, wow. I'm sorry," Elizabeth spoke softly, placing her hand in his and giving it a squeeze. She froze. s**t! What was she doing?

To her surprise, Matteo didn't pull away, or reprimand her. No, he held her hand, before using his thumb to caress her palm. The gesture was somehow very intimate. Elizabeth looked at their hands. When she looked up, Matteo was looking at her. Only now did Elizabeth notice how close they were sitting.

Her eyes uttered to his lips. She took in the features of his face. His strong jawline, his high cheekbones, his cold blue-grey eyes. There was no denying he was very handsome. She had to suppress the urge to run her ngers through the stubble on his chin.

Matteo sat in complete silence, taking her in as much as she was him. It was as if they were drawn together, drawn closer. She could feel his breath on her face, tickling her cheek. His lips were inches from hers...

"Daddy, I'm tired." Sophia suddenly complained, causing Matteo to move away from her abruptly. Elizabeth couldn't help but feel slightly disappointed, before cursing herself. What was she doing? She needed this job.

That night, Elizabeth tossed and turned, angry with herself for almost kissing her boss. Come tomorrow, she would be nothing but professional. She could rope in her sarcasm and be nice—at least she hoped she could.

The following morning, after absolutely no sleep, Elizabeth thought it best to get up early. It was only ve o'clock, but she decided to go on a run around the manor, using its jogging trail for the rst time. Elizabeth pushed her body to its limits, the burn of her muscles soothing her racing mind.

After a shower and her morning makeup routine, Elizabeth sat at the kitchen island drinking a coffee. It was too early to wake up Sophia for her preschool.

Voices echoing down the hallway caught her attention. Matteo appeared in the kitchen, laughing. Elizabeth had never seen him in such high spirits before. A smile of her own appeared, and she was just about to say something nice, when a woman entered the kitchen. She was wearing a dressing gown that had opened, revealing a silk negligée.

The woman hadn't noticed her yet and continued her conversation.

"It's your fault, by the way, that I overslept. You exhausted me last night," She giggled, placing a hand on his chest. Matteo, on the other hand, had noticed her. He looked straight at her, when he pulled the woman closer to him.

"Is that so?" He asked huskily, before planting a kiss on her mouth.

Elizabeth averted her gaze, and cleared her throat.

"Oh, I'm sorry," The woman startled, closing her dressing gown, "I didn't notice you there. You must be the new help." b***h.

"I'm the new live-in nanny, Elizabeth, and you must be the paid help for the night," Elizabeth said in a silky sweet voice, ignoring Matteo's glare.

"Oh, no dear, I'm Vittoria. Matteo and I grew up together," Her laugh had a sharp edge to it.

"Well, it's nice to meet you, Victoria," Elizabeth said, purposely mispronouncing her name.

"Actually, it's Vi-tt-oria," The woman spoke with an irritated tone. Bingo. First mistake, don't give away your weakness. Elizabeth just knew she was going to mispronounce this woman's name e-ver-y time they met, which she hoped wouldn't be so often.

"Oh, I'm sorry, maybe I should just refer to you as Matteo's midnight trainer." Matteo slammed his hand down on the table.

"That's enough. And it's Mr. De Luca to you. Don't forget." Elizabeth repressed the urge to roll her eyes, when suddenly, Sophia skipped into the kitchen, immediately changing the atmosphere.

"Daddy!" Sophia's eyes lit up every time she saw the man. It was clear he was her hero. Matteo smiled and kissed his daughter on the head.

"Sophia, hi!" Vittoria smiled brightly, opening her arms.

To Elizabeth's amusement, Sophia only glanced at her, before running to Elizabeth, not even greeting the woman. Good girl, she clearly had a sixth sense for snakes. What's that saying about dogs again? If they don't like someone, they have a good reason. Must be the same with kids.

"Ellie!" The girl said, Elizabeth held open her arms and Sophia immediately jumped into them. Elizabeth ashed a smug smile Victoria's way.

This was going to be fun.