

## Chapter 11

For a week, Emilio lived in a fog of guilt and disbelief. He sent his team searching, scouring the globe for any trace of Elana, refusing to accept the digital ghost on his screen.

"There's nothing, sir," his assistant reported, his voice grim. "No flights, no credit card activity, nothing. Her last known location was the hospital."

The hospital. The words triggered a memory. Hayden's triumphant smile in the hallway. Her chilling promise that Elana would never come back.

A cold, terrifying suspicion began to form in his mind.

"I want you to pull all of Hayden Cleveland's activity for the past month," Emilio ordered, his voice like ice. "Surveillance, phone records, financial statements. Everything. I want to know everywhere she went and everyone she talked to."

The report came the next morning. It was a mundane record of a socialite's life—shopping trips, lunches, salon appointments. But two entries stood out.

A meeting at a coffee shop with an unidentified woman, the day before Elana's "accident." The surveillance photo was grainy, but he could just make out the shape of Elana's profile.

And a second trip, on the day Elana disappeared. Hayden's car was tracked to a remote, desolate stretch of coastline near the very mountain road where Elana's car was found. The footage showed her meeting with two rough-looking men, men his security team quickly identified as known criminals, hired muscle.

The pieces clicked into place, forming a picture of unimaginable horror.

He sent the evidence to the police. The men were arrested within hours.

Emilio sat across from one of them in a cold, sterile interrogation room. The man sneered at him, his eyes full of a defiant hatred.

"Your wife isn't coming back," the man said, a cruel smile playing on his lips. "The bitch got what she deserved. Your girlfriend, Hayden? She pushed her off that cliff with her own two hands. Watched her fall."

The air left Emilio's lungs. The man's words, the undeniable evidence, the confession—it was all real. Hayden, the sweet, devoted mother of his child, was a monster. A murderer.

He walked out of the police station in a daze, the full weight of his actions crashing down on him. He had not just betrayed Elana. He had led her to her death.

He was waiting in Hayden's apartment when she came home, Leo chattering happily by her side.

She saw him on the sofa, flanked by two grim-faced police officers, and her smile vanished.

"Emilio? What's going on?" she asked, her voice trembling with a feigned confusion.

He didn't speak. He just gestured to the laptop on the coffee table. He hit play.

The recording of the criminal's confession filled the silent room, every brutal detail of Elana's last moments echoing in the air.

Hayden's face went white. She lunged for him, her hands outstretched. "It's a lie! She's trying to frame me! Elana is alive, she's..."

He recoiled from her touch as if she were a snake. He threw a stack of papers at her feet—the surveillance photos, the phone records, the bank statements detailing the payment to her hired killers.

"Explain this, Hayden," he said, his voice a low, dangerous whisper.