

Chapter 7 No.7

Two days later, Elias Thorne stood in the pristine hallway of Queens General Hospital. He wasn't the patient. Julian was in room 304, whining about his cast and the "tragedy" of not being able to play tennis for six weeks.

Elias had come to check on his nephew, but mostly, he was looking for a ghost.

The background check Graves had run came back with a file on an "Aurora Vance."

Born: Bronx, NY.

Education: GED.

Employment: None.

Marital Status : Divorced (Sterling Thorne).

The file made no sense. It described a nobody. A woman with no education, no skills, who had lucked into a marriage with a rich man and then been discarded.

It didn't describe the woman who disarmed three thugs with brutal efficiency. It didn't describe the woman who diagnosed a rare neurological condition by sight. It didn't describe the woman who wrote a complex herbal formula in perfect Mandarin characters.

There was a disconnect. A lie.

Elias walked toward the waiting room to take a call.

As he passed the nurses' station, he stopped.

She was there.

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Aurora was sitting in a plastic chair in the crowded waiting room. She was wearing a simple white blouse and black slacks—clean, but the fabric was worn, clearly second-hand.

She was reading a book. It wasn't a magazine. It was a thick, leather-bound volume that looked older than the hospital itself.

Elias watched. She turned a page with a reverence that seemed out of



Aurora didn't jump. She finished her paragraph, marked her page with a slip of paper, and then looked up. Her eyes were calm, assessing.

Mr. Thorne, she said. "Are you stalking me?"

I could ask you the same. You seem to be everywhere I am.

I'm here for a friend, Aurora said, nodding toward the trauma ward. "My neighbor took a fall. I'm waiting for his discharge papers."

And I'm here for my nephew. The one you crippled.

The one who crippled himself due to poor form and excessive ego, Aurora corrected without missing a beat.

Elias's lip twitched. He almost smiled. "Touché."

He sat in the chair next to her. The other people in the waiting room stared. A billionaire in an Italian suit sitting next to a woman in thrift store clothes was a spectacle.

The tea, Elias said, his voice dropping slightly. "It worked."

Aurora nodded. "I know."

My doctors say it shouldn't have. They claim it was a placebo effect.

Your doctors are linear. The body is a network, Aurora said, her gaze unwavering. "Western medicine treats the symptom. That formula treats the flow."

Where did you learn it?

Aurora looked at him, a flicker of something unreadable in her eyes. "Books. The library is free, Mr. Thorne."

You're lying, Elias said softly, but with absolute certainty. "The files say you're a high school dropout who married for money."

Aurora's eyes went cold. She closed her book with a soft but definitive snap.

The files say what the world saw, she said. "People see what they expect to see. Sterling saw a trophy. You see a mystery. Maybe I'm just a girl who reads a lot."

I don't think so, Elias said. He leaned in closer, invading her personal space just enough to make the conversation private. "I think you're the most dangerous person I've met in this city."

Is that a compliment?

From me? Yes.



A nurse called out a name, "Family of Joseph Miller?"

Aurora stood up immediately. "That's me." She grabbed her worn bag.

Wait, Elias said, standing as well. "I have a proposition"

I'm not interested in a job, Mr. Thorne.

Not a job. A partnership.

Aurora paused. She looked at him, really looked at him. She saw the power, the intelligence, and the faint, almost imperceptible tremor in his left hand as he gestured. She saw the way he subtly massaged his temple. It wasn't a partnership he was offering; it was a lifeline he was seeking.

I'm busy this week, she said, her voice dropping to a near-whisper. "And you should be resting. The pressure behind your left eye is getting worse. It's affecting your optic nerve."

Elias froze. His hand stilled. The casual confidence in his posture evaporated, replaced by a rigid stillness. "Excuse me?"

That tremor in your hand isn't carpal tunnel, Aurora continued, her gaze analytical, stripping away his billionaire armor to see the flawed biology beneath. "It's a symptom of a systemic neural inflammation. You're running on caffeine and adrenaline, and it's degrading the myelin sheath around your nerves. It's why the headaches are getting worse."

He stared at her. The top neurologists in Zurich, with their MRIs and PET scans, had taken six months to reach a similar, though less precise, conclusion. This woman had done it in a hospital waiting room, with nothing but her eyes.

Who are you? he demanded, his voice no longer that of a CEO making an offer, but of a man confronting the impossible.

Aurora smiled, a small, enigmatic curve of her lips. "Maybe I'm just a girl who pays attention." She held out a hand, not to shake, but to offer a final piece of unsolicited, life-saving advice. "Watch the market tomorrow, Elias. Keep an eye on Vanguard Pharma. And for God's sake, get some sleep."

She turned and walked away toward the nurse, leaving Elias Thorne standing alone in the chaos, his world tilted on its axis. He had come looking for a ghost and found a goddess, one who knew his secrets better than he did himself.

He pulled out his phone. "Graves," he said, his voice tight. "Forget the standard backgroundcheck. I want a full ghost protocol. I want to know where she was born, what she reads for breakfast, and who the hell taught her neurology."
