

Chapter 8 No.8

The hospital garden was a small patch of green amidst the concrete, a designated smoking area that everyone pretended was for "fresh air."

Aurora sat on a bench while Joe was getting his final vitals checked. She needed a break from the hospital smell.

Two doctors in white coats were standing near a fountain, smoking cigarettes and talking loudly.

She only got the grant because she slept with the Dean, one doctor said, exhaling a cloud of smoke. "There's no way a woman her age leads a neurology department without being on her knees."

The other doctor laughed. "Tell me about it. They diversity-hire these chicks and we have to clean up their mess."

Aurora's hands clenched into fists. She hated sexism. She hated incompetence. But mostly, she hated the combination.

She stood up and walked past them. As she did, she paused, not looking at them directly.

Dr. Halloway's research on synaptic plasticity is cited in over three hundred papers this year alone, she said to the air. "Perhaps if you spent less time smoking and more time reading, you wouldn't be stuck on resident rotation for the third year in a row."

She kept walking.

The doctors turned red, sputtering indignantly, but she was already gone.

Bravo, a voice said from behind a large hydrangea bush.

Aurora turned.

An older woman stepped out. She was elegant, wearing a Chanel suit that was probably vintage and priceless. She had silver hair styled in a

neurology department without being on her knees."

The other doctor laughed. "Tell me about it. They diversity-hire these chicks and we have to clean up their mess."

Aurora's hands clenched into fists. She hated sexism. She hated incompetence. But mostly, she hated the combination.

She stood up and walked past them. As she did, she paused, not looking at them directly.

Dr. Halloway's research on synaptic plasticity is cited in over three hundred papers this year alone, she said to the air. "Perhaps if you spent less time smoking and more time reading, you wouldn't be stuck on resident rotation for the third year in a row."

She kept walking.

The doctors turned red, sputtering indignantly, but she was already gone.

Bravo, a voice said from behind a large hydrangea bush.

Aurora turned.

An older woman stepped out. She was elegant, wearing a Chanel suit that was probably vintage and priceless. She had silver hair styled in a perfect bob. She was holding a slim cigarette holder.

Beatrice Thorne. Elias's mother. The Matriarch.

Aurora recognized her instantly.

That was magnificent, Beatrice said, taking a drag. "I've wanted to say that to Dr. Idiot over there for years. But, you know, don't make a scene, Beatrice."

Aurora relaxed her stance. "I don't like bullies."

Neither do I, Beatrice said. She sat on the bench and patted the spot next to her. "Sit. Tell me who you are."

Aurora sat. "I'm Aurora."

Aurora. Pretty name. I'm Beatrice. I'm hiding from my son. He treats me like I'm made of glass.

Elias? Aurora guessed.

You know him? Beatrice's eyes sharpened.

We... have crossed paths.

He's as stubborn as his father, Beatrice said fondly. "He won't marry. He won't give me grandchildren. He just works and stares at spreadsheets."

I tell him, 'Elias, money doesn't hug you back.' He says, 'Money doesn't lie to you either.'

Aurora laughed. "He's not wrong."

Beatrice looked at Aurora. She saw the intelligence, the fire. "You. You're not a debutante. You have... grit."

I'm definitely not a debutante, Aurora said.

Good. I hated debutantes. Boring. Like eating unseasoned chicken.

Suddenly, Elias appeared at the garden gate. He looked frantic. When he saw his mother sitting on a bench with Aurora, he stopped dead in his tracks.

His two worlds were colliding.

Mother, Elias said, walking over. "I've been looking everywhere for you. You're not supposed to be smoking."

Oh, hush, Beatrice waved him off. "I'm making a friend. Elias, this is Aurora. She just verbally castrated two doctors. It was delightful."

Elias looked at Aurora. He looked at his mother. A look of sheer horror passed over his face.

You know each other? Elias asked.

We just met, Aurora said, standing up. "Your mother is charming, Elias."

Beatrice's eyes widened. "Elias? First name basis?" She looked between them, a wicked grin spreading on her face. "Oh. Oh."

It's not what you think, Elias said quickly.

It's exactly what I think, Beatrice declared. "Finally. Someone who isn't afraid of you."

Aurora checked her phone. "I have to go. My neighbors ready."

Wait, Beatrice said. "Come to dinner, Sunday."

Mother, no, Elias groaned.

I'd love to, Aurora lied, just to annoy Elias. "But I'm busy."

She nodded to Elias.

Good luck with the headaches, she said.

She walked away.

Beatrice grabbed Elias's arm. "That one. I like that one. If you don't marry her, I will adopt her."

Elias watched Aurora leave. He felt a headache coming on, but this time, it wasn't medical. It was complications.

Our ads aim to provide better support for authors.

