

## Principle's office

Elizabeth POV

She sat in the principal's oce, Sophia next to her, holding an icepack to her wounded wrist—the b\*\*\*h and that gremlin on the other side. Elizabeth had explained what had happened—while Miss stuck-up told a completely different story, and since she was only the nanny, they had to wait for Sophia's parent to arrive.

Elizabeth tapped her foot on the oor, her arms folded over her chest, while the other woman held a cloth to her nose. Elizabeth smirked—she'd hit her good.

The silence in the oce was deafening—not even the children spoke. The principal was a strict looking woman with glasses on the tip of her nose. Her scrutinizing gaze made Elizabeth feel as though she was the student, waiting for her parents to arrive.

She could hear his footsteps echoing in the hallway—a fast and condent pace. He entered the room—his presence palpable in the air, commanding attention. Elizabeth didn't dare look at him.

"Daddy!" Sophia called out, running to him. How she wished she could do the same.

"Ah, Mr. De Luca, I'm so glad that you could make it."

Elizabeth had been asked to wait in the hallway while Sophia, Matteo and the other party spoke in the oce. She really hoped that Sophia wouldn't get expelled because of her, but the evil smile on the b\*\*\*h's face when she left the oce told her that bad news was coming her way.

"I hope you'll think twice before messing with me in the future—not that you'll be allowed on the school grounds any time soon," She threw her head back and laughed like a banshee. Elizabeth imagined hitting her in the nose again and a smirk of her own pulled at her lips. If she'd been sure there was no hope of Sophia staying at this school, she would have done it.

Oh s\*\*t, maybe if she offered to resign, Sophia would be allowed to stay? Elizabeth started pacing the hallway as her thoughts raced.

Finally, after another few minutes, the oce door opened.

"Sophia, why don't you wait with Elizabeth—I need to speak to Ms. Heart in private for a few more minutes. The oce door shut and Elizabeth wondered how much trouble she would be in when they arrived home.

"Are you okay?" Elizabeth asked Sophia, who leaned on her, her eyes falling closed. Elizabeth's swollen eye felt like it would burst out of her skull, but she would do it all over again to protect Sophia.

"Thank you, Ellie," Sophia whispered, making this whole ordeal worthwhile.

When Matteo nally left the oce, Elizabeth opened her mouth to speak, but he silenced her with a look—a look she couldn't decipher.

"We'll talk at the manor," he said, before scooping Sophia up. Elizabeth slouched behind him. She was certain she was going to get red. At least it was Friday night, maybe she could drink her sorrow away at some bar, she sighed internally.

They drove back in complete silence, while Sophia slept on the back seat.

When they arrived, Matteo scooped his daughter out of the car and disappeared inside—a man who sat in his car when they drove up followed behind him, carrying a bag. She wondered if she was still allowed to follow behind him. Maybe she was banned from the manor? Don't be silly, your stuff is still inside. She told herself.

When she nally had the courage to go inside, she wondered if she could sneak into her room without being seen.

"Elizabeth?" Matteo's voice sounded from the kitchen. She dragged her feet, all the while thinking about how she could explain what had happened. She hadn't done anything wrong? Had she? She replayed the scene over and over inside of her mind.

"Sit," Matteo ordered, his back to her. Elizabeth plopped down at the kitchen island, all the while looking at her hands. She could hear him dragging a chair toward her before his feet stopped in front of her. A nger gently pulled her head up, as Matteo hooked a nger under her chin. Elizabeth looked up, expecting a scolding, but was surprised when Matteo gently placed a towel-wrapped ice pack against her swollen eye.

She let out a sigh of relief. It felt so good.

"What happened?" He asked her.

"I'm sure that b—woman told you what happened, and probably the principal too," Elizabeth mumbled.

"I want to hear it from you," he softly spoke—his tone a far cry from his usual strict one.

"I—Sophia told me she didn't want to go to school, but I was confused—she loves school," Elizabeth began, explaining how Sophia had pleaded with her, and that she'd coaxed the little girl to go anyway. Matteo nodded silently, letting her speak, calmly taking her in.

"And then, when I was waiting outside of her classroom, I noticed this little gremlin tripping Sophia, before calling her chubby! Not just saying chubby, no, that little jerk had a whole song," Elizabeth gestured with her hands violently. Matteo's eyes darkened.

"And then?" He asked. She could feel the shift in his demeanor.

Elizabeth told him the whole story, from the moment that b\*\*\*h excused her son's behavior and shrugged it off, to the moment she pushed her, all the while waving her arms in the air.

"She pushed you?" Matteo asked, his eyes darkening further.

"Right? I was like, excuse me, did you just push me? And she did it again!" Matteo's features hardened. She could tell why he was so successful in business. Matteo De Luca was not one to be tried with.

"Anyway, I think I broke her nose. I got her good," Elizabeth chuckled. A ghost of a smile pulled at Matteo's lips—before disappearing.

"How is she?" she asked, referring to Sophia.

"The doctor said her wrist isn't broken, so that's good. But she'll have to be careful."

"That's great news," Elizabeth let out a sigh of relief.

"Why don't you get some rest," Matteo suggested, standing up and handing her the ice pack.

"She's not expelled, is she?" Elizabeth hesitantly asked.

"No. I sponsor the school generously." He stated, walking away.

"Oh, and Elizabeth," her name sounded so hot coming from his mouth, "Don't worry, you won't be seeing Mrs. Griffen or her son again." Elizabeth opened her mouth, wanting to ask why not? Was the boy expelled? But Matteo had already left the room.

The next day, Elizabeth was woken up by knocking on her door.

"Not again," She groaned, pulling her pillow over her face. But the banging persisted. Elizabeth stomped out of her bed, toward the door. She was not a morning person—it was hard enough getting up in time on weekdays to get Sophia to school, but it was a Saturday for crying out loud! She grabbed her dressing gown, and slid it on.

"What?!" She jerked the door open, a sneer on her face.

"Oh, I—" Elizabeth quickly closed her dressing gown. Matteo stood at the door—one of his eyebrows raised at her tone.

"How can I help you?" She asked, trying to sound professional.

"I have a meeting. I was wondering if you could take Sophia shopping?" he asked.

"Um, yeah, sure,"

"Rosemary will hand you my black card." He stated, while walking away. He always did that —yell orders at her while walking away. It drove her absolutely crazy!

"Okay," Elizabeth shouted after him.

"And Elizabeth?" He added, stopping at the top of the stairs. "I would be disappointed if I didn't see at least a few purchases from Victoria's Secret,"

Elizabeth's mouth dropped open as Matteo hurried down the stairs.

Did—Did he just give her permission to shop?