

## School fight

Elizabeth POV

The following day, Elizabeth woke up with a terrible ache in her neck. She'd fallen asleep in the armchair near Sophia's bed. She pushed off the blanket. When did she put a blanket over herself? Her thoughts lingered for a moment, realizing someone else must have done it while she slept.

"Ellie?" Sophia's tired voice sounded.

"Sophia, how are you feeling? Are you alright?" Elizabeth asked, jumping to her feet and stumbling toward the bed.

She felt the little girl's forehead, and to her relief, it didn't feel hot anymore.

"Not so good...but I am hungry," The little girl rubbed her tummy.

"Okay, how about I go and make you something. What would you like?" Elizabeth started rambling again.

"Pancakes! Why are you talking funny?" Sophia giggled.

"What?" Elizabeth asked, when the door opened.

"Oh, good, you're up." Matteo walked into the room with a glass of water and some crackers.

"Oh, Sophia wanted pancakes, I was just about—"

"I'm sure she did," Matteo smiled warmly at his daughter. "She can have pancakes when she's better. Today we'll be having light meals only."

"Oh, right," Elizabeth sheepishly said, feeling like an idiot as she watched a pouting Sophia eat a cracker.

"Why don't you go and lie down? Take the day off." Matteo suggested softly, standing next to her. His face was void of the usual frown he always had especially for her. For a moment, Elizabeth just stared at him, trying to reconcile the man before her with the cold boss she knew. Did she just see the ghost of a smile?

"But Sophia might—" She spluttered.

"Sophia's ne. And I'll be right here. I'll be home all day."

"Daddy, will you come and snuggle with me?" Sophia asked. Matteo didn't hesitate to kick off his shoes and slide into the bed next to his daughter.

God, all it did was make him even hotter. He was such a handsome man, but seeing him care for his daughter the way he did made her ovaries come to life.

"Elizabeth," His deep voice brought her out of her wet dream, "sleep," he commanded.

Elizabeth dragged her feet to her room and plopped on the bed. She'd been convinced that she wasn't tired, but when her head hit the pillow she was out like a light.

Over the next few days, everything turned back to normal, or as normal as things could be with a four-year-old. Sophia was back to her usual energetic self and Matteo was back to being distant. The only upside was, she hadn't seen Victoria at breakfast anymore.

But of course, she'd spoken too soon.

"Oh, good, Matteo, you're ready. Our ight is waiting." Vittoria strutted into the kitchen, her heels clacking on the stone oor. Elizabeth stirred her coffee, pretending she didn't notice her, but she couldn't help but feel envious of the woman's natural grace. The way she walked, the way her dress t around her perfect form.

"Ah, the nanny," She sneered at her. Ah, the w\*\*\*e. That was what Elizabeth wanted to say, but she knew better than to start a ght in front of Sophia.

"You're going away?" She asked when Matteo entered the kitchen with a suitcase.

"Hmm," He hummed. "A business trip. It will only be three days." He didn't even look at her. God, she wanted to slap him sometimes. What was his problem?

"I'll miss you, daddy," Sophia jumped off the chair next to Elizabeth and ran toward him. Matteo crouched down and caught his daughter, embracing her tightly.

"Daddy will miss you too. But I'll bring you back a present." He smiled when she cheered. "Listen to Elizabeth while I'm away."

He suddenly turned to her.

"If you have any problems, let Rosemary contact me." He curtly nodded before turning to leave. Let Rosemary contact me she mimicked inside of her mind. Asshole. She wasn't even allowed to call him herself. The smirk on Victoria's face told her she was not imagining things.

If he was going to be cold towards her, she would do the same.

Sophia had been unusually quiet since the day Matteo left. She still gave Elizabeth a sleepy smile in the mornings, but her usual energy seemed dimmed, like a light bulb losing its brightness. Elizabeth noticed the little girl staring off more often during breakfast or picking at her food without her usual enthusiasm.

On the second morning, Sophia slid into her chair without a word. Elizabeth frowned.

"Sophia, aren't you going to bring your doll to the table?" Elizabeth asked, hoping to coax out a giggle. Sophia shrugged.

"Not today," she muttered, poking at her toast.

Elizabeth felt a twist in her stomach. "Sweetie, are you feeling okay?"

Sophia hesitated. "Can I...can I stay home today?"

Elizabeth knelt beside Sophia's chair. "Why? You love school."

Sophia looked away, chewing on her lip. "I just...don't want to go, please."

It was so unlike her, and Elizabeth couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. But whenever she asked, Sophia just shrugged, giving no real answers.

After coaxing her for a while, Sophia nally agreed to go to school, but Elizabeth made sure to tell the teacher to keep an eye on her.

During the day, Elizabeth couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong, but if Sophia didn't talk, then how could she help her?

By the third day, Sophia's quiet mood had deepened. The girl clung to Elizabeth's hand longer when they arrived at school, and though her lips formed a smile, her eyes were distant. The knot in Elizabeth's chest tightened.

She decided to go to school half an hour earlier. She needed to see what was going on for herself. What was Sophia hiding from her?

As the time for school to end approached, more and more parents arrived.

"There she is," She suddenly heard Romano's voice behind her.

"Hey, I'm sorry about the other day,"

"It's okay, you had a valid reason," he smiled. "How about we reschedule?"

"Sure. How about this weekend?" Elizabeth asked, her eyes darting to the classroom door.

"It's a date," Romano winked.

The school bell rang and Elizabeth waited with a knot in her stomach. She wanted to know what or who was the reason for Sophia losing her light.

The children sprinted out of the classroom and the teacher approached one of the waiting mothers. While Sophia ran toward her, a boy held out his foot, tripping her.

"Soggy Sophia! She's so squishy!" the boy taunted, laughing loudly.

Elizabeth's jaw dropped. Did that little gremlin just—

She hurried to help Sophia, who was wincing and cradling her hand. "Sophia, are you okay?"

But before she could nish her sentence, the boy's mother piped up, unfazed by what just happened. "Come on, Jake," she called in a breezy, dismissive tone.

Elizabeth's head whipped around. Oh, no you don't.

"Excuse me," Elizabeth started, standing to her full height, "but your son just tripped Sophia and called her chubby!" Her voice had an edge to it now, while Sophia stood, tears in her eyes, holding her injured hand.

The woman barely glanced at her. "Kids," she chuckled, as if it were nothing.

"Kids?" Elizabeth repeated, her voice rising. "Why don't you see my kid running around tripping others?" She obviously knew Sophia wasn't her child, but she didn't want to explain the whole nanny thing—especially to this stuck up snob.

The mother shrugged. "Look, lady, it's survival of the ttest. Maybe your kid just isn't as tough."

Elizabeth blinked. Survival of the ttest?

"Wow," Elizabeth snapped. "I see where Jake gets his 'charm' from."

"Excuse me?" the woman barked, stepping closer. "How dare you—"

Before Elizabeth could blink, the woman shoved her. Shoved her!

"Oh, hell no," Elizabeth muttered, barely holding onto her restraint. "Did you just push me?"

Elizabeth's pulse skyrocketed, but she still tried to keep it cool. She was going to be the bigger person here.

Then, the woman shoved her again, harder this time. That was it.

Without even realizing what was happening, Elizabeth launched herself at the woman like a wild cat, and suddenly, they were rolling on the ground, hair-pulling like they were twelve again. The kids were cheering them on like it was a wrestling match. Somewhere in the back of her mind, Elizabeth could hear Sophia's voice, but all she could focus on was making sure this woman learned not to mess with her or Sophia.