

After finishing up her work, Elodie got a call from Keith.

He relayed Jarrod's instructions, making his intentions perfectly clear.

Elodie understood instantly. No matter how anyone tried to spin it, Sylvie had been involved with Jarrod while he was still married—she was, in every sense, the other woman. Jarrod wanted Elodie to handle the fallout, to smooth things over officially. If anyone decided to dredge up old scandals, he needed Elodie—the wife—to publicly "clear Sylvie's name." That way, Sylvie couldn't be accused of breaking up a marriage, and Jarrod could silence any rumors or moral outrage.

Jarrod really was willing to go to any lengths for Sylvie.

As for Jarrod's barely veiled threat about her "considering her options"—it was just a warning. If Elodie didn't play along, she could forget about working

anywhere else once she left The Silverstein Group. He could easily ruin her career.

For three years, she'd done everything right, devoting herself to being the perfect wife. From the day they married, she'd cut all ties with her past, determined to make a new start. But it had earned her nothing-certainly not Jarrod's love.

She was exhausted.

A bitter smile tugged at Elodie's lips. In a calm, almost detached tone, she said, "I'm taking sick leave. If you insist I work while I'm ill, that's a violation of labor law. We can let the courts settle it."

She was already heading for divorce and about to quit her job-she couldn't care less about Jarrod's feelings now.

After work, as soon as Elodie got in her car, she saw a message from her father, Malcom Harcourt:

Your brother is getting out of prison. We're having a family dinner. Are you coming home?

It looked like an invitation, but Elodie knew better. Malcom would much rather his "rebellious" daughter stayed away and didn't spoil the celebration.

Back when she and Ivan had been together, Malcom considered it a disgrace. He thought she'd brought shame on the family, and if she hadn't been useful— marrying into a powerful family like the Silversteins—he would've disowned her years ago.

But that man had been Ivan. The person who once meant everything to her. After a moment's hesitation, Elodie touched up her makeup to look more presentable, then drove straight to the Harcourt estate.

If it weren't for Ivan, she would never have anything to do with the Harcourts again.

When she arrived, one of the housekeepers eyed her with thinly veiled disdain. "Ms. Thorne, what brings you here?"

Elodie didn't bother to reply. This had stopped being her home years ago—even the staff looked down on her and made it clear she wasn't welcome.

Harcourt descended

Reba Ha

"Elodie?" Re

the stairs, her expression icy. "Wow, you've got some nerve. Ivan's barely home for a minute and you're already showing up to make everyone uncomfortable. Does it make you happy, ruining things for the rest of us?"

Reba was Malcom's illegitimate daughter, born from an affair and, by some cruel irony, shared Elodie's birthday. Yet now Reba strutted around like the perfect daughter, lording it over Elodie.

"If you're so virtuous, you could always move out of my mother's house. Let's see

how high and mighty you are then." Elodie's voice was steady and cool.

Her mother had bought this house herself, selling her paintings for a small fortune. Now Malcom, Laverne, and Reba all lived here in comfort, enjoying the fruits of Ker mother's legacy. And Reba had the gaff to act superior?

Reba's face twisted with anger, but she quickly recovered, shooting Elodie a look full of malicious glee. "Let's see if you can keep that attitude after what's about to happen."

A curious female voice interrupted their exchange.

From the sitting room, two people emerged, arm in arm. Queenie Jett, seeing Elodie's face, tugged on Ivan's sleeve and whispered, "She's beautiful."

Ivan barely glanced at Elodie before turning his full attention back to his

girlfriend, his arm snug around her waist. "She's my sister. Just like Reba. You're jealous of my ow sister?" Ivan teased. Queenie blushed as she gave Ivan a playful nudge, then turned to Elodie. "So

Ivan has two sisters? What's your name?"

Elodie stood frozen, caught off guard by Ivan bringing his girlfriend home to meet

the family. That showed just how serious he was about Queenie.

The Ivan who once wanted to marry her, who would have given up everything just

to be with her, was gone. Now he treated her and Reba exactly the same.

She swallowed, her throat dry. "Elodie."

Queenie looked a little surprised, her expression thoughtful. "How come your last name isn't Harcourt?"

Elodie didn't answer.

Queenie smiled, undeterred. "I'm Queenie. You can call me "

"Call her 'sister-in-law.'"" Ivan cut in smoothly, this time actually looking at Elodie. "I've finally found someone I'm serious about. You should see her as your sister- in-law."