

## Chapter 37 No.

Eulalie didn't drive back to the estate. Isla was vibrating with nervous energy and anger, and taking her home to Mrs. Holloway would be like throwing a match into gasoline.

She pulled into a 24-hour diner on the outskirts of the city. The neon sign buzzed: JOE'S.

"Grease?" Isla asked, eyeing the place. "Mother would have a stroke."

"Good," Eulalie said.

They sat in a red vinyl booth. Eulalie ordered coffee. Isla ordered a double cheeseburger and a milkshake.

When the food came, Isla ate like she hadn't seen food in a week. Between bites, she looked at Eulalie.

"Why did you stay?" Isla asked. "Five years. If he was like this... why?"

Eulalie traced the rim of her coffee cup. "Because I thought love was about endurance. I thought if I could just be perfect enough, useful enough, he would see me."

"And now?"

"Now I know that you can't make someone love you by bleeding for them. They'll just drink the blood and ask for more."

Isla put her burger down. Her eyes filled with tears. "I hate him. He's my brother, but I hate him."

"Don't hate him," Eulalie said. "Hate is passion. Be indifferent. It hurts them more."

At that moment, miles away, Caden stumbled into the penthouse.

Adalynn had gone to an after-party. He had come home, expecting... something. A light. A scent of lavender. A glass of water on the

nightstand.

The apartment was pitch black. The air was stale.

"Eulalie?" he called out. His voice echoed.

For a split second, the exhaustion and the scotch erased the last month from his memory. He forgot she was gone. He forgot the empty closets. He just felt the wrongness of the dark house and instinctively called for the one person who made it right.

Silence answered him. Reality crashed back in.

He walked into the kitchen. Empty. The fridge was bare except for a bottle of champagne and some takeout boxes.

He went to the bedroom. The bed was made, pristine and cold.

He checked the monitor on the wall. Elara's room was dark; she was asleep. Martha must have put her down hours ago.

Panic, sharp and sudden, pierced his alcohol haze. Where was she? She always waited up. Even when they fought.

He pulled out his phone. He saw the missed call from earlier. 9:32 PM.

He dialed her number. 📞

In the diner, Eulalie's phone lit up on the table. Husband flashed on the screen.

Isla froze. "It's him."

Eulalie looked at the phone. She watched it ring. One ring. Two rings. Three.

She didn't reach for it. She reached for a fry.

"Aren't you going to answer?" Isla whispered.

Eulalie flipped the phone face down.

"I'm off the clock," she said.

She took a bite of the fry. It was salty and greasy and tasted like rebellion.

Back in the penthouse, Caden stared at his phone as the call went to voicemail.

The person you are trying to reach is unavailable.

He threw the phone onto the sofa. He sat down in the dark, loosening his tie. For the first time in five years, he was completely, utterly alone. And the silence of the apartment was louder than the engines at the track.