

The Mafia Don's Hidden Heiress

Chapter 1 — Silence

I don't move at first. I'm still beside him, my hand resting against his sleeve, trying to hold on to something that's already gone. The apartment feels too quiet, like the air has settled around what happened and refuses to move.

Then I hear it.

The elevator.

It's a small sound, but it cuts through everything. My body reacts before I can think it through. My hand pulls back slowly, and Gabriel's voice comes back to me, clear enough that it feels recent.

Do not let anyone see you.

My heart starts beating faster.

Someone is coming up.

I don't know how I know, but I do. This building doesn't have random movement. Everything is controlled. Everything is deliberate. The sound of voices in the hallway, low and steady, doesn't belong here unless it means something.

I stand up, my balance catching a second late. My eyes move around the room quickly, not even sure what I'm looking for. The door is still open. I walk toward it and stop just before reaching it, listening.

The voices are closer now. I still can't make out the words, but the tone is clear.

Calm & measured.

As if nothing is wrong.

That's what unsettles me.

I step into the hallway and pull the door almost closed behind me, leaving it the way I found it. My hand stays on the handle for a second before I let go.

Then I start walking.

Not fast. Not slow. Just enough to look like I belong here.

Behind me, the elevator doors ope. The voices come out with it, quiet but steady. No urgency. No confusion. It sounds like a conversation that was already happening before they got here.

I keep walking.

Each step feels exposed. Like I'm doing something I shouldn't be doing.

Then I feel it again.

That same shift in the air from earlier. A presence moving past me, close enough that I'm aware of it without actually seeing it. I keep my eyes forward and don't react. I don't know why, but I don't want to turn.

I reach the corner and turn it, and only then does the pressure ease slightly. I don't stop until I get to the stairs.

The café is warm and loud in a way that feels out of place. People are talking, laughing, moving around like everything is normal. I sit at a table near the window without thinking about it, my hands still unsteady.

I can still see him.

The way he was lying there. The way nothing in the room was disturbed.

My phone is in my hand before I realize it. I call her.

She answers quickly.

"Elena."

Her voice is steady.

"I went to see him," I say, the words coming out uneven. "He told me to come, and the door was open, and I thought maybe he stepped out but he didn't—he was on the floor and I tried to—"

I stop, my throat tightening.

There's a pause.

"Where are you?" she asks.

"At a café. Near his building."

"Did anyone see you?"

"I don't think so."

"Did you touch anything?"

"I tried to wake him."

Another pause.

"Stay where you are."

The line goes quiet for a second.

"I'm coming."

She hangs up.

I stare at my phone for a moment longer than I should. Something about that conversation sits wrong, but I don't have the energy to pull it apart yet.

She arrives faster than I expect.

"Elena." "Darling"

I stand up, my chair scraping slightly. "He's dead."

"I know."

I look at her. "You know?"

Her hand comes to my arm, steady. "We need to leave."

"Wait—how do you—"

"Not here."

There's something in her tone that makes me stop pushing. She pays quickly and leads me out.

The air outside feels colder.

Her car is parked across the street. I'm halfway toward it when something catches my attention.

I look up.

Across the street, a few cars down, someone is standing beside a black car. He isn't doing anything. Just standing there, like he has nowhere else to be.

Something about him feels familiar.

I don't see his face clearly. The angle and the light don't allow it. But the build. The stillness. It pulls at something in my memory.

As I step off the curb, I catch a faint scent in the air. Clean. Expensive. It doesn't belong to the street or the cold.

My chest tightens.

I've come across it before.

He opens the car door and gets in without hesitation. The car pulls away smoothly, like it was always meant to leave at that exact moment.

"Elena."

My mother's voice pulls me back.

"What is it?" she asks.

I shake my head. "Nothing."

She studies me for a second, then lets it go.

At home, everything feels too normal, except it's not.

I sit on the edge of the couch, and this time it hits properly. Not sharp. Not sudden. Something heavier.

"He was just there," I say, my voice breaking. "He told me to come and I thought—"

I stop.

The words won't come.

The tears do.

Across from me, my mother stands still, watching.

My phone buzzes on the table. I don't move. She picks it up, glances at the screen, then turns it toward me.

"Look."

I take it slowly.

Breaking news: *Renowned fashion executive found dead in London residence.*

The words feel wrong.

Too fast.

Too public.

I look up at her.

She's already watching me.

And for the first time, something else settles in my chest.

Not grief. Not shock. Something quieter.

Because she's not reacting like someone who just lost him.

And I don't know what that means yet. but I know I don't like it.