

Chapter 56

Following the intense aftermath of the board meeting the Maybach didn't return to the penthouse. Instead, it drove deep into the wooded suburbs north of the city, finally turning onto a private, unmarked road. It passed through three separate security checkpoints before pulling up to a low, sprawling compound of concrete and smoked glass. It was one of Harding's private security and training facilities.

Anissa stepped out of the car. Alex Stone held the door for her. In her hand, she carried several large, elegant paper bags from the city's most exclusive premium steakhouse, filled with fresh, custom-ordered catering she had arranged earlier that evening. The rich aroma of truffle and roasted meats cut through the crisp night air.

Alex led her into a communal lounge area. Half a dozen off-duty security operators, all built like professional linebackers, were sitting around, cleaning weapons or drinking protein shakes. They all snapped to attention when she walked in.

Anissa smiled, a warm, genuine expression that took them by surprise. She placed the bags on a large steel table.

"I brought dinner," she said, her voice light. "Fresh from the steakhouse. Please, help yourselves. Consider it a thank you for all your hard work."

The men exchanged hesitant glances. They were used to taking orders, not gifts. Especially not gifts that cost more than their monthly salaries.

Alex, understanding her intent, was the first to move. "Thank you, Mrs. Snow." He took a container of Wagyu. That broke the ice. The others followed, their stoic professional faces breaking into quiet, grateful smiles. They were hardened men, but the simple act of being treated with respect and generosity was not lost on them.

As they ate, Anissa turned to Alex. "Is the firing range open?"

He nodded. "Twenty-four-seven, ma'am. Would you like a tour?"

Anissa shook her head. "Not a tour," she said, a small, dangerous smile playing on her lips. "A demonstration. I need to know my practice is paying off."

Alex's eyebrows rose slightly, but he simply nodded and led her down a



long, soundproofed corridor.

The indoor range was stark and functional. The air smelled of gunpowder and cleaning solvent. Alex retrieved a standard-issue Glock 19 from a locked cabinet and handed it to her.

Anissa took the weapon. Her movements were deliberate, careful, and focused. She dropped the magazine, checked the chamber, and slammed the magazine back into place with the heel of her hand. It was a sequence she had drilled into her muscle memory during grueling private defensive sessions over the past few weeks.

Alex's professional smile faltered. He watched her, a new, sharp respect dawning in his eyes. This was not the idle curiosity of a billionaire's wife; this was someone preparing for survival.

Anissa slipped on a pair of protective glasses and ear defenders. She took her stance in the shooting lane, her body perfectly balanced, relying on the same low center of gravity she used for her grappling techniques. She raised the pistol, both hands steady.

She took one deep breath, and the world narrowed to the front sight and the paper target fifteen feet away—the standard distance for close-quarters defense.

CRACK CRACK CRACK

Three shots, fired in quick succession. The sound was deafening.

Alex pressed a button, and the target came gliding back on its electronic track.

Three holes, clustered tightly together in the center of the target's chest. It wasn't the pinpoint precision of a career sniper, but it was a brutally effective, lethal grouping. The kind of shooting that required absolute nerve and intense, unflinching focus.

The other security guys, drawn by the sound of gunfire, had gathered at the entrance to the range. They stared at the target, their mouths slightly agape. She hadn't outshot them, but she had proven she wouldn't freeze with a gun in her hands.

Anissa placed the Glock on the counter. She turned to Alex, her eyes calm. "Am I qualified to watch my own back?"

Alex snapped back to his professional posture, but his voice was filled with a new, profound respect. "More than qualified, Mrs. Snow."

She reached into her Hermes bag and pulled out her own sidearm. It was a compact, matte-black Glock 43—a practical, easily concealed



defensive weapon.

"This one is more my style," she said.

She raised the smaller pistol, this time with fierce determination.

The next six shots were a burst of controlled violence. The lighter pistol snapped sharply in her hand, but her wrists were locked, pushing stubbornly through the recoil. Every round hammered into the center mass of the paper target.

Silence.

The entire security team stared, completely and utterly stunned into submission. Not by superhuman skill, but by the sheer, cold-blooded grit of the woman standing before them.

Anissa lowered the weapon, the barrel smoking slightly. She ejected the magazine and cleared the chamber, her movements precise and automatic.

She looked at the men, her expression serious. "I need you to protect me," she said, her voice clear and strong. "But I also need you to know that I am not helpless. I need you to trust my judgment, even when it seems strange. We are a team."

Alex Stone, Harding's most trusted man, stepped forward. He stood at attention.

"Mrs. Snow," he said, his voice ringing with absolute conviction. "You're not just the boss's wife. You're one of us. We've got your back. Always."

Anissa smiled, a real, satisfied smile. She had their loyalty. Not because of Harding's money, but because of her own strength and unyielding will to survive. Her foundation in this new world was now a little more secure.