

Chapter 10 No.10

Elisa didn't go back to the apartment. She couldn't face Chris. Not with Gallagher's scent still clinging to her memory, not with his threat hanging over her head like a guillotine.

She went to the gallery.

She locked the glass doors and flipped the sign to Closed. She went into her back office and pulled the blinds.

She sat in the dark for ten minutes, just breathing.

A choice.

If she broke up with Chris now, her father would disown her. She would lose the trust. She would lose the gallery.

If she didn't, Gallagher would blow up her life.

She needed a third option. She needed an escape hatch.

She picked up her encrypted phone and dialed a number in Zurich.

"Dr. Weber," she said when the line connected. "It's Elisa."

"Elisa? Is everything alright?" The old doctor's voice was concerned. He had been her mother's confidant.

"No. I need a favor. A big one."

"Name it."

"I need a diagnosis," Elisa said. "Acute nervous breakdown. Severe depressive episode. Suicidal ideation. I need it backdated to last week."

"Elisa... are you in danger?"

"Yes. But not from myself."

"I see." There was a pause. "I can send the paperwork. But you will need to seek treatment. To make it credible."

"I will," Elisa said. "I'm going to play the part."

"Where will you go?"

"Nowhere. I'm staying right here. In the snake pit."

"Very well. Check your fax in ten minutes."

Elisa hung up.

She stood up and looked around the office. This was her sanctuary. Her art. She grabbed a heavy crystal vase from her desk—a gift from Arvel—and threw it against the wall.

It shattered.

She swept a stack of books off the shelf. She overturned a chair. She pulled at her hair until it was messy, smudged her mascara until she looked like a raccoon.

She went to the bathroom and used a red lip liner to draw jagged marks on her wrists. From a distance, they looked like scratches. Like hesitation marks.

The fax machine beeped.

Elisa grabbed the papers. Diagnosis: Major Depressive Disorder with Psychotic Features. Recommendation: Immediate Inpatient Care.

She crumpled the paper slightly and left it on the center of her desk, under the lamp.

She took out her phone. She typed a text to Chris.

I can't do this anymore. The voices are too loud. I'm sorry.

She hit send.

Then she took the SIM card out and snapped it in half. She dropped the pieces into her coffee mug.

She took a deep, shuddering breath, the actress preparing for her role. She unlocked the gallery's front door, leaving it slightly ajar for Christo find. Then, she walked out into the evening chill, not to a getaway car, but to a taxi that would take her back to the penthouse. Back to the gilded cage.

She entered the silent apartment, the air thick with the memory of their fight. She went straight to the study. She didn't turn on the lights. She simply sank to the floor in the center of the room, curling her knees to her chest, making herself small and broken. She stared at the wall, her eyes wide and unblinking and waited.

The performance was about to begin.

The front door opened downstairs. Heavy footsteps echoed in the foyer.

Chris was home.