

Claimed By My Fiancé's Ruthless Uncle

novel Chapter 6 No.6 - -

Elisa stood under the shower in her own apartment, scrubbing her skin until it was raw and pink. The water was scalding, but she couldn't feel warm.

She stepped out and wiped the steam from the mirror. There was a bruise on her neck, just below her ear. A dark, purple mark.

She stared at it, touching it tentatively. It throbbed.

She covered it with heavy concealer, layer after layer, until the skin looked perfect and fake.

Her phone rang. It was the landline. She had left her mobile turned off, afraid to see the notifications.

She picked it up. "Hello?"

"Where the hell are you?"

It was her father. Arvel Hamilton didn't do greetings.

"I'm at home, Dad," Elisa said, her voice raspy.

"Chris called me. He said you had a fight. He said you walked out on him."

"He walked out on me," Elisa corrected, gripping the phone cord. "He forgot our anniversary."

"Grow up, Elisa," Arvel snapped. "Men forget dates. It's not a reason to jeopardize a merger worth three billion dollars."

"Is that all this is to you?"

"Don't be dramatic. We have a liquidity problem, Elisa. You know this. If Osborne pulls out, the gallery goes. The trust goes. Everything your mother built goes."

"Elena wouldn't mind," Elisa said bitterly. "She'd love to see Mom's gallery sold off."

"Leave Elena out of this," Arvel warned. "She's trying to help. Hayley is trying to help. You're the one making things difficult. Fix this, Elisa. Call Chris. Apologize. Get that ring back on your finger."

The line clicked dead.

Elisa lowered the phone. Her hand was shaking. Fix this.

She walked into her study and sat down at her desk. She retrieved a slim,matte black device from a hidden compartment in her desk-a hardened, military-grade slate that operated on a closed satellite network. She bypassed the regular login and booted up a secure, encrypted system.

She logged in, her credentials a string of alphanumeric chaos. The system that bloomed on the screen wasn't a browser; it was a global market nerve center of her own design.

Numbers scrolled across the screen. Offshore accounts in the Caymans, shell companies in Singapore, high-frequency trading algorithms running on servers in Zurich.

The primary liquidity pool displayed a number so vast it was almost abstract, a figure capable of bringing nations to their knees or propping them up on a whim.

She could write a check right now and save Hamilton Holdings. She could buy her father out. She could buy Chris out.

But she couldn't. Not yet. Her mother's will was ironclad. The voting rights to the family shares-the real power-only transferred to her upon her marriage or her twenty-eighth birthday. She was twenty-five.

If she revealed her money now, Arvel would sue for control. Elena would find a way to drain it.

She had to be smarter.

She looked at the screen, her reflection ghostly against the code.

"Scorched earth," she whispered.

She wouldn't just leave Chris. She would dismantle him. She would let the merger go through, let their finances entangle, and then she would pull the thread that unraveled the whole sweater.

The doorbell rang.

Elisa jumped. She closed the slate instantly, sliding it back into its hidden dock.

She walked to the door and looked through the peephole. A delivery man holding a massive bouquet of white roses.

She opened the door.

"For Ms. Hamilton," the man said, handing her the flowers.

There was a card. I'm sorry. Stress at work. Let's start over. - C.

No signature. Just an initial.

Elisa took the flowers. She walked into the kitchen and dropped the entire bouquet, vase and all, into the trash compactor. The sound of crunching glass and stems was satisfying.

She needed a plan. She needed leverage.

She thought of the recording on her phone. That was a start. But she needed more. She needed proof of the financial misconduct Chris had bragged about.

And she needed to make sure the man from last night-the stranger-never found her.

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