

Chapter 7 No.7

It was 6:00 PM when Chris came home.

Elisa was sitting in the living room, a book open on her lap. She hadn't read a single page in an hour.

The door opened and Chris walked in. He looked refreshed. He was wearing a new suit. He was carrying a box from La Maison du Chocolat.

"Babe," he said, putting on a sad, puppy-dog face. "I'm such an idiot."

He walked over and knelt by her chair. He placed the chocolates on the table.

"I was so stressed last night," he said, taking her hand. "I didn't mean what I said about space. I panicked"

Elisa looked at him. She really looked at him. She saw the pores in his skin, the slight redness in his eyes. He looked ordinary. Pathetic.

"It's okay," she lied. Her voice was smooth, detached. "I overreacted too."

Chris let out a breath, shoulders sagging in relief. "Thank god. I love you, Elisa. You know that, right?"

He leaned in to kiss her.

Elisa smelled it. Underneath his cologne, faint but distinct. Chanel No. 5. It wasn't her perfume. It was old-fashioned. Heavy.

She turned her cheek at the last second, letting his lips graze her jaw. "I'm still a little upset, Chris."

"I know, I know. I'll make it up to you. I promise." He stood up. "I'm going to jump in the shower. Then let's order in? Thai?"

"Thai sounds good," Elisa said.

Chris took off his jacket and threw it over the back of the sofa. He

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11:44 

loosened his tie as he walked toward the bedroom: "Be right back."

Elisa waited. She counted to thirty. She heard the water turn on in the master bath.

She moved.

She went to the sofa and picked up his jacket. She patted the pockets. His wallet. His keys. And...

A phone. But not his iPhone.

It was a small, black Blackberry. A burner.

Her heart hammered against her ribs. She pulled it out. It was locked.

She tried 1234. Incorrect.

She tried his birth year, 1995. Incorrect.

She paused. She looked at the bathroom door. The water was still running.

She typed in 1012. Her birthday.

The screen unlocked.

Elisa felt a wave of nausea. He used her birthday to lock away his secrets. It was a twisted form of ownership.

She scrolled through the messages.

Ivy: When can I see the loft?

Chris Thursday. I'll bring the keys.

Ivy: Did you tell the Ice Queen you were working late?

Chris She believes anything I say.

Elisa's hand shook. She scrolled further. There was an email attachment. A PDF.

Deed of Sale. 145 Hudson Street, Unit 4B. Owner: Ivy Maxwell.

He bought her a loft. With whose money?

She kept scrolling. She found a group chat app called "Signal". The group name was GameStop.

Dash: Short squeeze is coming. Get in now.

Chris I'm leveraging the Hamilton account. Dumping 5 million tomorrow.

User2: Is that legal?

Chris Only if you get caught.

Insider trading, embezzlement.

This wasn't just cheating. This was prison time.

The water in the bathroom stopped.

Elisa froze. She quickly pulled out her own phone and snapped photos of the screen. The deed. The texts. The trading chat.

She heard the shower door open.

She shoved the Blackberry back into the jacket pocket, exactly how she found it. She threw herself back into the armchair, picking up her book.

Chris walked out, toweling his hair. He was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt.

"Did you order the Pad Thai?" he asked, smiling.

Elisa looked up. She forced her mouth to curve upward. "Just about to."

She stood up and walked over to him. She wrapped her arms around his waist, resting her head on his chest. She could hear his heart beating. A steady, lying rhythm.

"I missed you," she whispered, fighting the urge to vomit.

"Missed you too, babe," Chris said, kissing the top of her head.

He had no idea he was holding a grenade.