

Chapter 8 No.8

Elisa waited until Chris was snoring. A deep, rasping sound that used to comfort her, but now sounded like a pig at a trough.

She slipped out of bed and went into the study. She uploaded the photos from her phone to her encrypted cloud server. She organized them into folders: Adultery, Financial Fraud, Assets.

She stared at the folder labeled Medical. It was empty.

A cold thought crept into her mind. Ivy. The models. The club.

If Chris was sleeping around without protection and knowing him, he was -she was at risk. And the stranger...

She touched her stomach. The stranger had been... intense.

She needed to know.

The next morning Elisa told Chris she was going to the gallery early to prep for an exhibition. She chose a boutique clinic in a discreet SoHo brownstone, one that catered to celebrities and paranoid billionaires, with no ties to the major medical conglomerates. Discretion was its only product.

She wore sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat. She signed in as Elisa Smith.

The nurse handed her a clipboard. Elisa filled it out, her hand hesitating over the Sexual History section.

Number of partners in the last 12 months:

She wrote 2.

She sat in the waiting room, flipping through a brochure about HPV. Every sentence made her skin crawl.

"Ms. Smith?"

0.0%

11:46 

Elisa stood up. The nurse led her down a hallway lined with expensive art.

"Dr. Reynolds is running a few minutes behind," the nurse said, opening a heavy oak door. "Please, make yourself comfortable inside. She'll be right with you."

Elisa walked in. The room was a study, not an examination office. Leather chairs, a mahogany desk, books lining the walls.

And standing by the window, his back to her, was not a doctor in a white coat, but a man in a flawlessly tailored suit. His shoulders were broad, stretching the fabric.

Elisa frowned. The silhouette was familiar.

"Hello?" she asked.

The man turned around.

Elisa dropped her purse.

It was him. The stranger from the hotel.

Gallagher Osborne was holding a file in his hand. Her file. He wore no glasses, and his gaze was direct, predatory.

His expression was unreadable, but his eyes were dancing with a dark amusement.

"Ms. Smith," he said, his voice low and smooth. "Or should I say, Ms. Hamilton?"

Elisa took a step back, her hand fumbling for the doorknob behind her. "You... what are you doing here?"

"The clinic's owner is an old friend," Gallagher said, taking a step toward her. "He owes me a great many favors. When the name 'Elisa Hamilton' was flagged on his patient list—even under an alias—he was kind enough to inform me."

"I'm leaving," Elisa said. She turned the knob.

It was locked.

She rattled it. "Open the door."

"We need to talk," Gallagher said. He tossed the file onto the desk. It landed with a heavy thud. "About why you ran out on me yesterday morning."

"I didn't run," Elisa said, her voice shaking. "I left."

"You left a ring on my nightstand," Gallagher said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the diamond. He held it up to the light. "Did you think this was funny?"

"I thought it was appropriate," Elisa snapped, finding a shred of courage. "Since you clearly know who I am now."

"I knew who you were the moment you walked into the hotel," Gallagher said.

Elisa froze. "What?"

"I'm Chris's uncle, Elisa."

The room spun. Uncle.

She had slept with Chris's uncle.

"Oh my god," she whispered. She pressed her back against the door. "You... you sick..."

"Careful," Gallagher warned, his voice dropping an octave. He closed the distance between them in two long strides. He planted a hand on the door, right next to her head. He leaned down, trapping her.

"You came to me," he murmured. "You begged me."

"I didn't know!"

"Does it matter?" Gallagher searched her eyes. "Would you have stopped if you knew?"

Elisa opened her mouth to say yes, but the lie died on her tongue.