

Chapter 7 No.7

The next morning the silence in the penthouse was heavy.

Elena found Julian at the kitchen table, reading a newspaper. He was wearing a crisp gray shirt, his hair wet from a shower. He looked... domestic...

"I'm going to work," she announced, grabbing a piece of toast.

Julian lowered the paper. "Are you sure? The press is camping outside the school."

"I'm a history teacher, Julian. I have a curriculum. And if I hide, they win."

"Silas will drive you," was all he said.

When she arrived at St. Jude's Prep, the atmosphere was toxic. The security guard looked at her with pity. The students whispered behind their hands.

"Did you see the photos?"

"I heard she was pregnant with his baby."

"Gross."

She kept her head high and walked to the staff room.

Sarah, the math teacher who had always hated her, was holding a tabloid magazine. She slammed it on the table when Elena walked in.

"Well, if it isn't the bride of Frankenstein," Sarah sneered. "How much did he pay you? Or do you just have a thing for broken toys?"

"Excuse me?" Elena felt the blood rush to her face.

"You're a disgrace to this school," Sarah spat. "Parents are calling. They don't want a gold-digger teaching their kids ethics."

Just then, the principal, Mr. Henderson, hurried in. He looked pale.

"Miss Miller... I mean, Mrs. Sterling," he stammered.

"Am I fired?" she asked, bracing herself.

"Fired? Good heavens, no!" Henderson looked terrified. "We value your contribution immensely. In fact, we've received a... generous anonymous

grant this morning contingent on your continued employment and comfort."

Sarah's jaw dropped. "What? You said yesterday you were going to suspend her!"

Henderson turned to Sarah. His face hardened. "Pack your things, Sarah. You're let go."

"What?!" Sarah shrieked.

"We found evidence that you sold student information to the press," Henderson lied badly. "Security will escort you out."

Elena stood there, stunned, as Sarah was dragged away, screaming.

Her phone buzzed. A text from an unknown number.

Have a good day, Mrs. Sterling. - J

She looked out the window. The black SUV was still at the curb. Silas gave a tiny wave.

When she got home that evening Julian was exactly where she left him.

"How was work?" he asked without looking up.

"Strange," she said, sitting across from him. "My work bully got fired. And the principal gave me a raise. Did you...?"

"I made a few calls," Julian shrugged. "I may be an outcast, but I still know where the bodies are buried. Henderson has a secret fondness for offshore betting sites that aren't exactly legal. An old friend tipped me off."

It was a lie. She knew it was a lie. But looking at him—this man who couldn't even walk, yet could move mountains for her—she felt a lump in her throat.

"Thank you," she whispered.

She walked over and hugged him. She wrapped her arms around his neck and buried her face in his shoulder.

He stiffened. For a second, he didn't move. Then, slowly, his large hand came up and patted her back.

"You're my wife, Elena," he said, his voice rough against her ear. "No one hurts what is mine."