

Chapter 2

Dante smiled at me across the breakfast table. It was his signature politician smile—perfect teeth, empty eyes, and utterly practiced.

"Happy Anniversary, tesoro," he said. He slid a velvet box across the mahogany.

It wasn't the ring. My heart sank before I even opened it. It was a pair of diamond earrings.

"They are beautiful," I said, though I made no move to put them on.

"I have a surprise for you later," he said, checking his watch. "The jeweler called. The Graff Pink is ready."

He stood up and kissed my forehead. His cologne smelled expensive, crisp and clean, but it barely masked the cloying, floral undertone of another woman's perfume.

"I have to go to a meeting," he said. "I'll pick you up at noon."

"Okay."

The front door clicked shut. I watched his Ferrari pull out of the driveway from the window, waiting until the roar of the engine faded into silence.

I opened my laptop and logged into my secret account. I wrote romance novels under a pseudonym. It was my escape. My heroines always had men who would die for them. Men who would burn the world down just to see them smile.

I used to think I was writing about Dante. Now, I realized I was writing about a ghost I had never met.

I closed the laptop and opened Instagram, navigating straight to the search bar.

I typed in the name I saw on the burner phone: Little Trouble.

Her real name was Mia. Her profile was public.

She was pretty in a chaotic way—big eyes, pouty lips, and displayed a lot of skin. She worked at a club called The Velvet Room. Fazio territory.

I scrolled through her stories.

There was a video posted three hours ago. The caption read: "Daddy spoils me."

In the video, a man's hand—wearing a watch identical to Dante's Patek Philippe—was sliding a ring onto her finger.

I froze.

It was a pink diamond. Oval cut. Halo setting.

It was my ring.

The caption continued: "He says the one for the wife is just a copy. This is the real one."

Acid churned in my stomach.

It wasn't just cheating. It was a humiliation ritual. He had given his mistress the original and was planning to give me, the daughter of the Vitiello Don, a duplicate.

I took a screenshot and saved it to a secure folder.

At noon, Dante picked me up. He was in a good mood, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel as he hummed along to the radio.

We arrived at the jeweler's. The security guard nodded at us. We were royalty here.

The jeweler, Mr. Rossi, came out from the back. He looked nervous, a sheen of sweat glistening on his upper lip.

"Mr. Fazio, Miss Vitiello," he said, bowing slightly. "The ring is exquisite."

He placed a box on the glass counter and opened it.

The pink diamond sparkled under the halogen lights. It looked exactly like the one in Mia's video.

"One of a kind" Mr. Rossi said, his voice wavering slightly. "Sourced from the Argyle mine. There isn't another stone like it in the world."

Dante picked it up. He took my left hand.

"For my Queen," he said softly.

I looked at him. I looked at the ring.

It was a beautiful lie.

"It fits perfectly," Dante said, sliding it onto my finger.

I looked at the stone. I wondered if Mia was wearing hers right now. I wondered if they laughed about it in bed.

"Thank you, Dante," I said. My voice was flat.

He frowned slightly. "Is something wrong? You seem... distant."

"Just nerves," I said, forcing a tight smile. "The wedding is close."

"Don't worry," he said, squeezing my hand. "I'll take care of everything."

He paid, and we left.

In the car, I twisted the ring on my finger. It felt heavy. It felt like a handcuff.

"I was thinking" Dante said. "Tonight, we should go out. Luca is throwing a little party at The Velvet Room. Just close friends."

The Velvet Room. Where she worked.

He wanted to take me to his mistress's workplace. He wanted to parade me in front of her while she wore the real ring and I wore the paste.

The audacity was breathtaking.

"Sure," I said. "I would love to go."

Dante smiled. He thought he was winning. He thought I was the stupid, sheltered princess he could play with.

He didn't know that I had already made the call. He didn't know that every breath he took was now on borrowed time.