

## Chapter 13 No.13

Elena Vitiello POV

Six Months Later

The vanity mirror in the penthouse was expansive, framed by a halo of backlit LEDs designed to banish every shadow.

I let the towel pool at my feet.

Turning slightly, I angled my body to inspect my left shoulder.

The skin graft had finally healed. The angry rawness had faded into memory. Now, it was a silvery, textured topography—a map of a foreign country. A sovereign nation of pain.

I traced the ridges with my fingertips.

I didn't cry. I hadn't shed a tear in six months. Dante always said tears were a useless expenditure of hydration.

Slipping into my silk robe, I stepped out into the bedroom.

Beyond the floor-to-ceiling glass, the New York skyline glittered—a sprawling ocean of electric diamonds. It was a view that cost millions. A view that screamed absolute power.

My phone buzzed against the mahogany bedside table.

Mother: Did you hear about the Ricci girl?

I stared at the name. It felt distant, like reading about a character in a book I had closed a lifetime ago.

Elena: No.

Her reply came instantly.

Mother: She tried to sue the city for the assault. Case dismissed. She's

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Elena: No.

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Mother: She tried to sue the city for the assault. Case dismissed. She's working at a diner on the South Side now. They say the scars are... extensive.

I set the phone down face-first.

I felt nothing. Not the warmth of joy, nor the weight of pity. Just a cold,

Dante walked in. He was still clad in his suit trousers and a crisp white dress shirt, the sleeves rolled up to reveal his forearms. He looked weary, but his eyes sharpened the moment they landed on me.

"You're awake," he said.

"Waiting for you," I replied softly.

He crossed the room in three long strides. He didn't ask about my day; he didn't need to. He reached out, sliding his hand beneath the lapel of my robe.

His warm palm cupped the scar on my shoulder, his thumb tracing the ridge of the burn with possessive familiarity.

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

The ritual question. Every night the same words.

"No," I said.

"Good."

He leaned down, pressing his lips to the mark. They were searing hot against the cool, damaged skin.

"I have a meeting with the Chicago delegation next week," he murmured, the vibration of his voice humming against my flesh.

My heart didn't stutter.

"Oh?"

"Your father is sending his new Lieutenants to negotiate the port deal. They've been reinstated. Apparently, they worked hard in the camps."

He pulled back, searching my eyes.

"Rossi and Bianchi"

Luca and Matteo.

So, they had climbed the ranks. They had crawled out of the mud. And now they were coming here.

"Do you want me to cancel it?" Dante asked. "I can have them sent back. Or I can have them disappear."

His gaze trawled mine, hunting for a flicker of fear or a ghost of lingering affection.

He wouldn't find either.

I smiled.

It was sharp. Dangerous. The kind of smile I had learned from him.

"Why cancel?" I asked, my voice smooth as glass. "I need to wear my new dress somewhere."

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