

Chapter 3 3

Analia didn't leave immediately. She sat on the velvet ottoman in the foyer, her suitcase beside her like a loyal dog. She needed to do this right. When Clive came downstairs ten minutes later, he was fully dressed for the office, his tie undone around his neck. He saw her sitting there and let out a sigh of relief that sounded more like condescension.

"Good," he said, walking over. "You came to your senses. Now, fix this tie. The knot is never right when I do it."

He thrust his chin out, exposing his neck, waiting for her familiar fingers. It was a ritual. Every morning for four years.

Analia didn't move. "You have hands, Clive."

Clive froze. He turned his head slowly, looking at her as if the ottoman had started speaking. "Excuse me?"

Analia reached into her purse and pulled out a folded document. It was a handwritten list on the back of a hospital discharge pamphlet she had scribbled on in the waiting room.

She placed it on the marble console table.

"We need to talk about the separation," she said.

Clive's eyes narrowed. The relief vanished, replaced by a cold, hard anger. "You are pushing your luck, Analia. I told you, I don't have time for games."

"It's not a game." She stood up. "I want a divorce."

The word hung in the air, absorbing the oxygen.

Clive stared at her, then threw his head back and laughed. It was a harsh, barking sound. "Divorce? You? Analia, don't be ridiculous. You'd be on the street in a week. You have no job. You have no skills. You have nothing without me."

"I have my dignity," she said, though her voice shook slightly. "And I'd rather sleep on the street than in a bed that smells like her."

"Oh, grow up," Clive snapped. He stepped closer, looming over her. He used his height as a weapon. "Angelena is a star. She is under immense pressure. She is fragile. You... you are just a decoration. A very expensive decoration that my father bought to make me look stable."

The words hit her like physical blows. Decoration. Bought.

"The decoration is broken, Clive," she said, meeting his gaze. "I'm tired of

being your prop. And I'm tired of being the villain in Angelena's soap opera."

"Don't you dare speak her name," Clive warned, pointing a finger at her. "She is pure. She has been through hell."

"Pure?" Analia let out an incredulous laugh. "She put an ultrasound picture in a married man's pocket. That's not purity, Clive. That's a territorial pissing contest."

Clive's face turned a violent shade of red. His hand twitched, instinctively moving toward his chest pocket, then stopped. He knew. Deep down, he knew.

"Get out," he whispered.

"What?"

"I said, get out!" He roared, grabbing a crystal vase from the table and hurling it at the wall. It shattered, shards raining down on the pristine floor. "You want to leave? Go! Get the hell out of my house!"

He reached into his jacket, pulled out a checkbook and scribbled furiously. He ripped the check out and threw it at her. It fluttered to the ground, landing near her feet.

"There," he spat. "Severance pay. Take it and disappear." Ⓢ

Analia looked at the check. It was blank. He hadn't even filled in an amount. He was telling her she could name her price to go away.

She looked at him, seeing the trembling rage in his hands, the fear behind his eyes that he refused to acknowledge.

She stepped over the check.

"I don't want your money, Clive," she said quietly. "I just want my name back."

She grabbed her suitcase handle.

"If you walk out that door," Clive shouted, his voice cracking, "I will freeze everything. The cards, the accounts, the club memberships. You will be a ghost in this city."

Analia opened the heavy front door. The hallway air was cool. Ⓢ

"I was already a ghost here, Clive," she said.

She tossed her key card onto the console table. It landed with a sharp clack next to the unsigned divorce list.

She walked out.

The door didn't slam. It clicked shut with a terrifying finality.

Clive stood alone in the foyer. The silence was deafening. He looked at the blank check on the floor. He looked at the shattered vase.

Panic flared in his chest, a sudden, irrational feeling that he had just

made a catastrophic mistake.

He grabbed his phone. His fingers shook as he dialed his lawyer.

"Gillespie," he barked when the line connected. "Freeze her accounts. All of them. Now. I want her to have zero access to funds by noon."

He hung up and stared at the door, waiting. Waiting for the realization to hit her. Waiting for her to turn around and knock.

She didn't.