

Chapter 6 6

5:00 AM.

Analia's phone vibrated against the wooden floorboards of Zoe's living room.

She groaned, rolling off the couch, her back protesting. Who called at 5 AM?

She looked at the screen. The Penthouse Landline.

She answered, her voice thick with sleep. "Hello?"

"Mrs. Wilson," the sharp, grating voice of Mrs. Zhang, the head housekeeper, pierced her ear. "Mr. Wilson cannot find his grey striped tie. The silk one."

Analia blinked looking at the dark window. "Is the house on fire, Mrs. Zhang?"

"No, madam."

"Is someone dead?"

"No, madam. But Mr. Wilson is extremely agitated. He has an important board meeting and—"

"Mrs. Zhang" Analia cut her off. "It is five in the morning I do not live there anymore."

"He says if you come over and find it, he might consider unlocking one of your credit cards," Mrs. Zhang said, her tone dripping with disapproval. She clearly enjoyed this.

In the background Analia heard a crash. Clive throwing things.

"Tell him," Analia said, feeling a surge of cold rage, "that the tie is in the third drawer of the island dresser, underneath the pocket squares. Where it has always been."

"He says he looked there."

"Then tell him to get his eyes checked," Analia snapped.

There was a scuffle on the other end, and then Clive's voice came on. Heavy, breathless, angry.

"Analia. Stop this childishness. Come home. I can't find anything in this damn closet."

"That sounds like a personal problem, Clive," she said.

"I'm giving you an opening here," Clive said, his voice lowering to that manipulative baritone he used in negotiations. "Come find the tie. We'll have breakfast. We can talk about... terms."

He wasn't asking for a tie. He was asking for order. He was asking for his control back. He was realizing that without her, his domestic life was chaos.

"I'm busy," Analia said.

"Busy? Doing what? Sleeping on your friend's cat-hair sofa?"

"Busy filing a restraining order if you call me before 8 AM again," she said.

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me."

She hung up. Then, she blocked the landline number.

She sat in the dark, her heart racing. It wasn't fear. It was exhilaration. For four years, she had jumped every time he snapped his fingers. Today, she snapped back.

She got up and made coffee. She stood in front of Zoe's full-length mirror. She put on the black turtleneck and slacks she had bought from a thrift store yesterday. It was simple, stark, and commanded attention.

She wasn't Mrs. Wilson today. She was Starfall.

In the Penthouse, Clive stared at the dead phone.

He hurled it onto the bed.

"Find the damn tie!" he screamed at Mrs. Zhang.

The housekeepers scurried away, terrified.

Clive stood in the middle of the massive walk-in closet. It was overflowing with clothes, yet he felt like he had nothing to wear. Analia used to lay out his outfits. She matched the socks, the watch, the cufflinks.

He pulled open the third drawer.

There it was. The grey striped tie. Right where she said it was.

He stared at it. She hadn't hidden it. He just... hadn't looked. He was so used to her handing it to him that he had forgotten how to look.

He snatched the tie, feeling a sudden, sharp pang in his chest. It wasn't love, he told himself. It was annoyance. Inconvenience.

His cell phone rang. Angelena.

He looked at the caller ID. Usually, seeing her name made him smile. Today, it felt like a chore.

He answered. "Hey."

"Clive!" Angelena wailed. "Have you seen Twitter? Someone leaked a video of me yelling at that stupid makeup artist. They're calling me a 'Karen'! You have to fix it!"

Her voice was shrill. It grated on his nerves, which were already frayed from the tie incident.

"I'm handling it, Angel," he said, rubbing his temple. "Just stay off social media."

"But it's unfair! I'm pregnant! I have hormones!"

"I know," Clive said, looking at the empty side of the bed where Analia used to sleep. "I have to go. I'm late."

He hung up on her too.