

Chapter 7 7

Analia stood outside the Apex Media building

It was surrounded by a small crowd of protesters holding signs: ANGELENA = BULLY and JUSTICE FOR THE MAKEUP ARTIST.

Zoe worked fast. The video leak had gone viral overnight.

Analia pulled her baseball cap lower. She wore oversized sunglasses. She looked like just another assistant rushing to work.

She slipped through the revolving doors.

The lobby was chaos. Phones were ringing off the hook.

She walked to the security desk. "I have an appointment with Gaylon Webb. Name is Starfall."

The guard didn't even look up. "ID?"

She handed him her passport. It said Analia Graves.

He frowned, looking at the list. "List says Starfall. Passport says Graves."

"Stage name," she said smoothly.

He shrugged and printed a badge. Visitor: Analia Graves.

She stuck it on her hip, covering it with her bag.

The elevator chimed.

As the doors slid open, a man stepped out. Tall, blonde, wearing a suit that cost more than Zoe's apartment.

Kole Hall. The CEO of Apex Media. Clive's best friend.

Analia froze. She turned her back to him instantly, pretending to study the directory on the wall.

Kole walked past her, talking on his phone. "Yes, Clive, I know you want to protect her, but the board is freaking out. The video is bad."

He paused right behind Analia. She could smell his cologne.

"Yeah, I'm heading to the studio now to meet Gaylon. He says he found a miracle replacement. If this Starfall chick is real, Angelena might be out."

Analia held her breath.

Kole glanced at the back of her head. He paused. There was something familiar about her posture. The way she held her neck.

"Kole?" Clive's voice tinny on the phone speaker. "Are you there?"

"Yeah," Kole said, shaking his head. "Just... thought I saw someone. Never mind. I'll call you back."

He walked away toward the executive elevators.

Analia let out a breath that shook her whole body. That was too close.

She got into the service elevator. She pressed the button for the 40th floor.

In the studio, Gaylon Webb was pacing.

When Analia walked in, he stopped. He looked her up and down. The thrift store clothes, the messy hair, the lack of makeup.

"You're Starfall?" he asked, skeptical.

"I am," she said. She didn't offer a hand. She walked straight to the booth. "Do you want to talk, or do you want to record?"

Gaylon smiled. "I like you already."

She stepped into the booth. The glass door clicked shut. It was soundproof. A sanctuary.

She put on the headphones.

"Scene 4," Gaylon's voice came through the talkback. "The Queen addresses her troops before the suicide mission. Action."

Analia closed her eyes. She imagined Clive's face. She imagined the blank check. She imagined the years of being told she was nothing.

She unleashed the beast.

"They call us weak because we bleed," she growled, her voice dropping to a terrifying whisper that vibrated the studio monitors. "But blood is fuel. And today, we burn the world down."

Gaylon sat in his chair, mouth open. The audio engineer gave him a thumbs up, looking terrified.

She was perfect.

Downstairs, a black Maybach pulled up to the curb.

Clive Wilson stepped out. He buttoned his jacket. He looked up at the building. He was here to strong-arm Kole. He was here to buy Angelena's career back.

He walked into the lobby, his presence parting the sea of employees.

"Where is Kole?" he demanded of the receptionist.

"Sound Studio B, sir. On the 40th floor."

Clive headed for the elevators. He was going to fire this 'Starfall' person himself if he had to. Nobody replaced his... nobody replaced Angelena.