

Chapter 8 8

"Cut!" Gaylon yelled. "That's a wrap. My god."

He opened the booth door. "That was... visceral. Where did you train? Juilliard?"

Analia smiled faintly. "Life."

Gaylon handed her a contract. It was already drafted. "Standard deal, but I bumped the backend points. If the movie hits, you're rich."

"I have one condition," Analia said, scanning the legalese. "My identity remains secret. No press tours. No photo shoots. Just the voice."

"Done," Gaylon said. "Mystique sells."

She signed Starfall.

"Welcome to the Pantheon," Gaylon shook her hand.

"I have to go," Analia said, checking the time. She felt exposed here. "Thank you, Gaylon."

She grabbed her bag and headed for the door.

"Wait, take the private elevator," Gaylon said, pointing to the back. "Avoid the lobby."

"Thanks."

Analia hurried down the hallway. She pressed the button.

The doors opened immediately.

And there he was.

Clive.

He was standing in the elevator, alone, checking his watch. He looked up as the doors opened.

Analia's heart stopped. She was three feet away from him.

She was wearing a hat and sunglasses, but he was her husband. He knew the shape of her face. He knew her hands.

She instinctively ducked her head, pulling the brim of her hat down.

Clive looked at her. His eyes narrowed as they swept over her. A jolt of recognition sparked in his chest—something about the curve of her jaw, the way she held her shoulders. It was terrifyingly familiar.

But his brain rejected the data instantly. Analia was at home, probably

weeping into a silk pillow or calling her mother. Analia wore cashmere and pearls, not a thrifted trench coat and a baseball cap. Analia wouldn't be in a service elevator at Apex Media. 3

He dismissed the familiarity as a trick of the light, a symptom of his own exhaustion. To him, she was just a crew member. A nobody.

"Excuse me," Clive said, his voice impatient. "Is Studio B down this hall?"

He didn't know her.

The realization was a double-edged sword. It saved her, but it cut deep. He looked right at her and saw nothing.

Analia didn't trust her voice. If she spoke, he would know.

She just nodded and pointed a finger down the hall, away from the elevator.

"Thanks," Clive grunted. He stepped out, brushing past her shoulder.

The contact sent a jolt of electricity through her. She smelled him—sandalwood and arrogance.

She dove into the elevator and hammered the 'Close Door' button.

As the doors slid shut, she saw Clive turn around. He was frowning, looking at the elevator.

"Wait," he said.

The doors slammed shut.

The elevator dropped.

Analia collapsed against the metal wall, gasping for air. Her knees were jelly.

She had done it. She had signed the contract. She was the lead. And her husband was walking down the hall to fire a ghost.

Clive walked into Studio B.

"Gaylon," he said, walking in without knocking. "We need to talk."

Gaylon looked up from the mixingboard. "Clive. Good to see you. You just missed her."

"Missed who?"

"Starfall. She just left."

Clive looked at the empty booth. He looked at the half-drunk bottle of water on the stand.

"She was here?" Clive asked.

"Just walked out. Took the back elevator."

Clive's frown deepened. The woman in the hat. The one who wouldn't

speak.

"What did she look like?" Clive asked.

"Short, brunette... honestly, hard to tell. She wears a lot of baggy clothes. Very secretive."

Clive shook his head. Paranoia. He was seeing Analia everywhere because of the guilt. It couldn't be her. Analia was probably crying into a pillow somewhere.

"Listen, Gaylon," Clive said, sitting down. "About Angelena..."

"It's done, Clive," Gaylon cut him off. He pressed a button.

Analia's voice thundered through the speakers. "Blood is fuel."

Clive froze.

The voice... it was unfamiliar. Powerful. Terrifying. It sounded nothing like his soft-spoken wife.

"She's incredible," Clive admitted, against his will.

"She's the Queen," Gaylon said. "Angelena is out. Tell Kole to send the severance."

Clive sat there, listening to the voice of the woman who was about to destroy his mistress's career, having no idea he used to wake up next to her every day.



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