



TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL

—KINGS OF MAFIA—

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
MICHELLE HEARD

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Dedication

To my readers who dream about meeting their own morally grey villain
who'll love and worship them.

Songlist

Click here - [Spotify](#)

Knocking on Heaven's Door – RAIN

Metamorphosis – MILCK

Here Come The Monsters – ADONA

What a World We Live In – Oshins

Stand By Me – Ki:Theory

Caught In The Fire – Tommee Profitt, Sam Tinnesz

Save You – Turin Brakes

The Heart Wants What It Wants – KELSON

Have A Little Faith In Me – SYML

Where It Stays – Charlotte OC

Life Begins – Shelly Fraley

Synopsis

Attending a party with my stepbrother, I'm in for the surprise of my life.

It's not a regular party, but instead, *my wedding*.

To Angelo Rizzo.

A coldhearted man who's feared by all. Including me.

Turns out my stepbrother owes the Cosa Nostra money, and I'm being used to repay his debt to Angelo Rizzo.

Do I have a choice?

No. Not when it comes to matters concerning the Cosa Nostra.

Three hours later, I have a new shiny wedding ring on my finger and a husband I'm terrified of standing by my side.

Yep, my life just took a turn for the worse.

There's no hiding. No running.

All I can do is face the nightmare that awaits me and pray I'll survive being married to **Angelo Rizzo**.

Tempted By The Devil

Mafia / Organized Crime / Suspense Romance
STANDALONE in the KINGS OF MAFIA series
Book 1

*Please note the Kings of Mafia series is not connected to any other series
I've written.*

Authors Note:

This book contains subject matter that may be sensitive for some readers.

There is triggering content related to:

Dub Con

Forced Marriage

Physical and Mental Abuse

Loss of family

Graphic Violence

18+ only.

Please read responsibly.

“Fear cuts deeper than swords.”

— **George R.R. Martin,**
A Game of Thrones.

Chapter 1

Tori

Angelo Rizzo; 34. Vittoria – Tori Romano; 23.

“Mark my words,” Giorgio says. “By the end of the year, I’ll be one of the bosses.”

I almost let out a snort. Listening to my stepbrother go on and on about how important he is in the Cosa Nostra is ridiculous.

He wishes.

Giorgio is...well, he’s a narcissistic asshole. There’s no other way to put it. Everyone knows there are only five bosses in the Cosa Nostra – Rizzo, Torrisi, Vitale, La Rosa, and Falco. The five families run New York, and no one dares go against them.

Giorgio is all talk, and one day, it will get him killed.

A girl can hope.

Instantly, I’m hit with a wave of guilt for wishing my stepbrother dead.

Forgive me, Father.

Since my father and stepmother died in a car accident seven years ago, Giorgio took over Papà’s place in the Cosa Nostra. It went straight to Giorgio’s head, and he’s become downright unbearable to live with.

My aunt on Mamma’s side of the family asked Giorgio to let me live with them, but he wouldn’t hear of it. Sadly, my mamma died of pneumonia when I was three years old, and my aunt, uncle, and cousin are the only family I have left.

I was only sixteen, but Giorgio’s word was law in our family, so no one

dared go against him. Now I'm twenty-three and still stuck with the bastard.

I suspect he's only holding onto me to get my share of the inheritance that will pay out when I turn twenty-five.

He's already blown through more than half of his share, wasting it on gambling, alcohol, and women.

Giorgio was the perfect stepson to my father. Papà even adopted Giorgio as his own, so I can't blame Papà for leaving him in charge of our finances. Even I was shocked when I learned what a vile person Giorgio really is.

Cettina, Giorgio's mother, and Papà got married two years after Mamma died. I was five, and Giorgio was thirteen, so we grew up as brother and sister.

But overnight, he changed into a different person. One that's violent, selfish, and greedy.

I don't know what I'll do when I turn twenty-five in two years, but Giorgio won't get a dime from me. I'm hoping I can cash in my inheritance and run to somewhere he won't be able to find me.

Clearing my throat, I murmur, "Excuse me. I'm going to the restroom."

Giorgio's eyes are on a beautiful woman who just came in, and he doesn't pay me any attention as I get up from my chair.

Walking to the back of the restaurant, I glance around the establishment. The place is packed, and even though I've grown up around these people, they all feel like strangers.

Every Friday we have lunch at *Piccola Sicilia*. The restaurant belongs to Angelo Rizzo, and I've only seen him a few times. It's never long enough to get a good look at him.

Not that I want to. The five heads of the Cosa Nostra terrify the living crap out of me. They're known for being brutal when it comes to business.

Growing up in the Cosa Nostra, I've learned to fear the five families like

the rest of the Sicilians who call New York their home.

Even Giorgio is shit scared of them. He talks big in front of me, but when he has to speak to one of Angelo Rizzo's men, he's pathetically humble.

Whenever he's forced to eat a slice of humble pie, I'm the one who suffers. The last time Big Ricky scolded Giorgio for being late for work, Giorgio broke two of my ribs.

He seldom leaves marks on my face because he loves to parade me in front of the single men in the Cosa Nostra. I know he plans to marry me off to one of them, but he's holding out for my inheritance.

The only solace I can find in the crappy situation is that Giorgio can't force me to marry him. We live in a tight-knit Sicilian community who would disapprove if he tried to marry me. After all, we were raised as brother and sister. It's my only saving grace and also the reason he hasn't looked at me in a sexual way. To Giorgio, the only thing that matters is getting his grubby hands on my inheritance.

I slip into the restroom, and after relieving myself, I wash my hands and touch up my lipstick. My eyes flit over the light peach summer dress I'm wearing, making sure the fabric isn't stuck in my underwear. It happened to Aida when we were fourteen, and I almost died of second-hand embarrassment for my cousin. Since then, I always check my clothes to ensure nothing is out of place.

My gaze locks on my reflection in the mirror, and I lift my chin.

Just two more years of this hell, then you can run away and create a new life for yourself.

As I step out of the restroom to return to the table, an office door opens to my right. Not thinking, I glance in the direction of the sound, and instantly, I'm doused in ice.

I have a clear view of Angelo Rizzo, who's gripping a man by his neck. I

can't hear what's being said, but as Big Ricky comes out of the office, I see Angelo slam a knife into the man's throat.

Mother of God.

The squeak escaping me has Big Ricky's eyes snapping in my direction.

Crap!

My heart instantly hammers against my ribs, and I quickly dart to the left. I know it's stupid of me to run, but my flight or fight instinct kicks in, and flight always wins.

I don't even reach the end of the hallway before being grabbed by the arm and hauled back to the office.

NoNoNoNoNo!

"I didn't see anything," I plead. Big Ricky ignores me, which has me begging, "I won't tell anyone. Please."

I'm shoved into the office and stumble forward. My eyes lock on Mr. Rizzo, who's wiping the blood from the knife, and the sight brings me to a dead stop.

His head is lowered, and focused on cleaning every crimson drop from the blade, he orders with a low and threatening tone, "Remove the body."

With wide eyes, I watch as the man's body is dragged out of a side door by Tiny, who doesn't even break a sweat. Then again, he's a mountain of a man. The trail of blood smeared on the tiled floor almost makes me gag.

Father, I've been a good girl. I've never dated and kept myself pure for marriage. I attend church every Sunday. Please get me out of this mess. You owe me.

Slowly, Mr. Rizzo lifts his head, and when his hazel eyes lock on me, shivers of fear rush through my body.

Crap.

Just one look from Angelo Rizzo and my mouth goes bone dry. I swallow

hard on the lump of panic in my throat.

His eyes crawl from my head to the sandals on my feet before they flick to Big Ricky.

“She saw what happened,” Big Ricky explains.

I quickly shake my head, and my voice quivers as I plead, “I won’t tell anyone. I promise.”

Mr. Rizzo lifts his hand, and while his thumb scratches his bottom lip, his eyes lock on me once more.

The brutality in his gaze delivers a punch to my stomach.

Father, I don’t want to die. Get me out of this mess, and I’ll do anything you want.

Tiny comes back into the office, and without taking his eyes off me, Mr. Rizzo hands the murder weapon to him.

“She’s Romano’s sister,” Big Ricky informs his boss.

If my heart beats any faster, I’m going to pass out.

Mr. Rizzo lifts an eyebrow. “Vittoria.”

He knows my name?

Of course, he does. I’m pretty sure nothing happens in his territory without him knowing.

Mr. Rizzo takes a deep breath while slowly stalking closer to me. “I haven’t seen you since your father’s funeral.”

The urge to back away overwhelms me, but by the grace of God, I manage to stand still.

When he stops mere inches from me, I have to tilt my head back to look up at him.

If I weren’t so freaking terrified, I’d take the time to admire the man’s attractiveness. His black hair is in stark contrast with his hazel eyes. There are tiny golden flecks that make it look like flames are burning in his brown-

green irises. I know he's in his early thirties and still unmarried because he's too busy ruling over his territory with an iron fist.

When Tiny stands close behind Mr. Rizzo, I realize they're the same height. Easily two and a half heads taller than me.

Where Tiny is all bulging muscles and brute strength, Mr. Rizzo's body is firmer, giving me the impression of stealth and death cloaked in an expensive suit.

Tiny has a round face, whereas Mr. Rizzo has a sharp jaw.

My eyes keep flitting between the two men while I'm overly conscious of Big Ricky behind me.

Mr. Rizzo's eyes remain locked on my face, and when I can't stand the pressure anymore, I whimper, "I won't tell anyone what I saw."

A frown line appears between his eyebrows, and his words are soft and dangerous as he murmurs, "I know."

What does that mean? Am I free to go, or is he going to kill me?

GOD!

When Mr. Rizzo suddenly lifts his hand to my face, I cringe back and let out a frightened sound. I pinch my eyes shut, and fisting my hands at my sides, I try to brace for the punch.

My skin stretches tightly over my cheekbones and jaw, and I clench my teeth.

Seconds pass, and when I feel something tug at my hair, my eyes fly open.

Mr. Rizzo's gaze watches me closely while he wraps a curl of my hair around his forefinger.

Confused by what he's doing, I startle again when Giorgio's voice booms outside the office. "For fuck sake. Tori, get your ass out of the restroom!"

I hear Big Ricky move, then the hinges of the office door squeak, and he

says, “Your sister is with Mr. Rizzo.”

“What?” Giorgio gasps.

I hear more movement behind me, but my eyes remain on the biggest threat in the office. *Angelo Rizzo.*

“What did you do?” Giorgio hisses at me.

A frown forms on Mr. Rizzo’s forehead, and as he lets go of the curl, I nervously brush my hand over my hair while quickly taking a step away from the terrifying man.

Needing to explain myself, I ramble, “As I came out of the restroom, the office door opened. It drew my attention, and I accidentally saw Mr. Rizzo... ah...do something. I didn’t mean to look. It just happened.” My hand flies to my chest, and covering my racing heart, I swear, “I won’t tell anyone.”

Mr. Rizzo’s eyes flick to Big Ricky. “Escort Miss Romano to a table and get her a cup of coffee while I speak with her brother.”

Huh?

Not sure I heard right, I ask, “I get to leave?”

Mr. Rizzo’s penetrating gaze returns to me. “For now.”

Intense relief washes through me as I quickly exit the office with Big Ricky.

I cautiously glance at Big Ricky, who’s not much taller than me. “I’m really sorry.”

With the corner of his mouth lifting slightly, he nods. “It’s okay, *bellissima.*” He leads me to a table and nods at the chair. “You can wait here while Mr. Rizzo talks to your brother.”

“Stepbrother,” I correct him. Big Ricky looks the least threatening of the bunch, which gives me the courage to ask, “How much trouble am I in?”

He shakes his head. “As long as you keep quiet, you’ll be fine.”

More relief floods me, and with hope filling my heart, I ask, “Really?”

He nods again before gesturing for a server to come closer. “Bring a cup of coffee for Miss. Romano.”

When the server leaves, Big Ricky looks at me again. “Stay right here.”

I nod and watch as he walks toward a table where three men are enjoying lunch.

Letting out a breath, I slump in the chair while wiping my palm over my forehead.

Dear God. That was intense.

I stare at the table as the terrifying past few minutes replay in my mind.

Crap, I’m going to be in so much trouble with Giorgio.

A heavy feeling settles over my shoulders, and I glance at the hallway again.

I can’t believe I just came face-to-face with Angelo Rizzo.

God, the man is intense.

And handsome.

And freaking scary.

Now that I’m no longer in the direct line of fire, I realize just how attractive Angelo Rizzo is. I understand why Aida, my cousin, was so infatuated with the man when I saw her a couple of months ago at a family gathering.

He might be one of the most attractive men I’ve ever seen, but it doesn’t take away from how terrifying he is. If anything, it adds to it.

Father, it’s me again. Thanks for saving my butt.

My thoughts turn to the murder I witnessed, and it brings all the fear back.

Growing up in the Cosa Nostra, you’d think I’d be used to crime and corruption, but that’s not the case for me. I don’t think I’ll ever get used to seeing someone die.

Just two more years, then you can make a clean break from Giorgio and this world.

Chapter 2

Angelo

As Vittoria is escorted out of the office, I walk to my desk and take a seat behind it.

My eyes flick to Giorgio, who looks like he's about to shit himself.

He was only twenty-one when he took over from Tony, but during the past seven years, he hasn't done half the work Tony used to do for me. He also has a gambling problem that's starting to cost me money.

"I hear you like spending time at Fallen Angels," I mutter. The strip club was the first business I opened, so I have a soft spot for the establishment.

The club has three sections. *Heaven*, where customers can only watch the girls dance, and *Hell*, where everything goes. The gambling room is in the third section, called *Purgatory*.

Needless to say, the place brings in a fortune.

"Yes, sir," Giorgio says.

When he aims for one of the chairs by my desk, Tiny places a hand against the man's chest before shaking his head at him.

No one sits in my presence. Well, unless your last name is Rizzo, La Rosa, Torrisi, Falco, or Vitale.

"What is his tab standing at?" I ask.

I know the exact amount, but I don't want to give Giorgio the impression I have any interest in his life.

"Just shy of three hundred thousand," Tiny answers.

Lifting an eyebrow, I shake my head.

Giorgio begins to sweat, the drops beading on his forehead and running down his temples. "I'll settle the tab soon."

"Yes, you will," I say. "Today."

His eyes go wide as saucers. "I can't get the money that quick."

With zero mercy on my face, I mutter, "That sounds like your problem."

Tiny takes a threatening step toward Giorgio, which has him rambling, "I'll get the money. I just need a month."

My eyes narrow on the fucker.

His scared gaze darts between Tiny and myself, then he adds, "I'm the only family Tori has left. Please give me a month. I promise I'll get the money."

I've heard that before.

Usually, right before I kill someone.

But the debt is not the reason Giorgio is standing in front of me. If it were, he'd be dead already, and truth be told, tomorrow would've been his last day if it weren't for his little sister.

Vittoria Romano.

I've been so busy I haven't realized the girl blossomed into a beautiful woman.

I'm used to people looking at me with fear, but seeing terror in Vittoria's eyes had my cock hardening at the speed of light, which was an unusual reaction for me.

I wonder what it would be like to bend her to my will.

I have a healthy sex drive, but lately, all the women seem to blur together. It's become boring as fuck. There's also the matter of my uncle, who's been nagging that it's time for me to take a wife.

Then, the scared little fawn appeared in front of me, and her doe eyes had my pulse racing faster.

“Vittoria is twenty-three,” I mention.

Giorgio does a double take before his face lights up with relief. “Yes.”

“She’s of marrying age.”

“Yes.” His head bobs up and down. “I’m just waiting until she’s twenty-five before arranging a marriage for her.”

Finding the fucker funny, I let out a rare chuckle. “What makes you think you’re allowed to arrange a marriage for her?” I lift a hand and wave at the desk. “Did I miss the part where you’re the one in charge?”

Giorgio’s eyes widen again. “N-no, sir.”

Why wait until she’s twenty-five?

I push the thought to the back burner. Tiny can look into Vittoria’s personal life after I’ve dealt with her brother.

Resting my elbows on the desk, I lean forward. “You’re not to arrange a marriage for Vittoria without my blessing.”

I want my fill of the woman before she’s passed off to whoever I deem good enough.

Giorgio nods, then asks, “About the debt, sir. Is a month okay?”

For now.

I nod and wave a hand at the door, indicating for the fucker to leave.

As soon as he’s gone, I glance at Tiny. “I want to know everything about Vittoria Romano.”

“Yes, boss.” He hovers for a moment, then asks, “What do you want me to do with Duncan’s body?”

“Drop it off at his house so his family can bury him.” Pulling my phone out of the breast pocket of my jacket, I add, “Pay for the funeral and give his wife fifty thousand. God knows she needs it after putting up with him for so long.”

Big Ricky comes into the office as Tiny leaves. “The girl left with her

brother.”

I nod as I scroll through all the emails and messages.

“I don’t think she’ll talk,” he mentions.

I nod again while I look at the meeting scheduled for Tuesday at five p.m. Every two weeks, the five heads of the Cosa Nostra meet. In the beginning, it was to keep the peace, but over the years, we’ve become friends. Now we play poker while talking business.

My cousin was supposed to take over the Rizzo seat in the Cosa Nostra, but he was assassinated by the Quintero cartel when they tried to move into New York.

I was nineteen when I took over so my uncle could retire as head of the Rizzo family. He still helps with the business in Sicily and keeps an eye on everything for me, which is something I want to discuss with him. It’s time for him to step away from the business so he can enjoy his old age.

Fuck, has it already been fifteen years?

Time flies when you’re making money.

No wonder Uncle Maurizio’s been on my case about getting married. He’s scared I’ll be taken out before I get the chance to give the Rizzo family an heir.

The only problem is the women from suitable families are either older than me or still in school. Uncle Maurizio’s been dropping hints that I should marry Valentina Toscano, who’s from an influential family, but that’s never happening. She’s six years older than me and batshit crazy.

Vittoria’s beautiful face pops into my mind, but I shake my head because the Romanos are way beneath the Rizzos.

At least she’s fucking Sicilian.

I shake my head again because I sure as fuck don’t want Giorgio for a brother-in-law.

My gaze lowers to my right hand, and I rub my fingers together as I recall the feel of her silky hair.

She flinched as if she thought I was going to hit her. A woman only has that reaction when she's been beaten before.

My eyes narrow as my thoughts turn to my parents. Before they were killed in a hit-and-run, my father used to beat the shit out of my mother. Every other night, her blood coated the walls.

The world I grew up in has made me a hard man, but I'll never hit a woman.

Again, the memory of Vittoria flinching ghosts through my mind.

I begin to tap my fingers on the desk as she fills my thoughts.

I'm easily twice her size. Her heart-shaped face is framed by golden brown curls that look like they refuse to be tamed. Her doe eyes hold a mysterious power that has the ability to grab my attention.

The woman is fucking beautiful.

"Boss?" Big Ricky says to get my attention.

I forgot the man was still in the office, and shaking my head to rid my thoughts of Vittoria Romano, I tuck my phone back into my pocket.

Letting out a sigh, I stand up and mutter, "Let's head over to the club."

Every day, I'm surrounded by beautiful women, but none of them has grabbed my attention like the little fawn with her wild hair and doe eyes.

Chapter 3

Tori

“You little fucking bitch!” Giorgio roars as I’m shoved into the house.

My family home used to be filled with love and laughter before Papà and Cettina, Giorgio’s mother, died. Now, it’s filled with hopelessness and violence.

Giorgio’s palm connects with the back of my head, and stumbling, I lose my balance. I sprawl over the wooden floor that takes hours to polish, intense pain shuddering through my brain.

My handbag slides beneath a side table, and before I can push myself up, Giorgio’s foot connects with my right side.

My teeth sink into my bottom lip to keep the cry of pain from escaping.

The first time he hit me, I was left with a black eye. I couldn’t leave the house for two weeks. Everyone at the Parish asked where I was, and it upset Giorgio. Since then, he doesn’t touch my face.

“Because of you, I only have a month to find a fuck-ton of money! I’ll have to take a chunk out of my stocks.”

Another kick to my stomach makes the air explode from my lungs. My vision goes spotty, and an agonizing sound bursts over my lips.

I feel tears fall down my cheeks as I gasp through the pain.

It doesn’t help to beg or argue. If I dare say a word, it will only anger Giorgio more. I manage to curl into a fetal position and wrap my arms around my waist.

Giorgio shoves his boot against my back and puts his full weight on me

as he sneers, “One of these days, I’m going to kill you.”

The pressure eases off my back, and I hear him stomp into the living room.

Bastard.

Pushing myself up, I suppress a groan from the pain radiating through my abdomen and torso. I don’t bother grabbing my bag from beneath the side table, and using the wall for support, I stumble to my bedroom.

Shutting the door behind me, I make sure to lock it, and finally, in my safe space, I slide down to the floor until I’m sitting flat on my butt.

Silent tears roll down my cheeks, and I don’t bother wiping them away.

Just two more years.

Still, it feels like an eternity. Is the money even worth it?

Maybe I can run away in the middle of the night and find a small town where I can work as a waitress?

Keep dreaming. You don’t have a dime to your name. Are you going to walk to the small town?

Feeling trapped and hopeless, I pull my knees to my chest and wrap my arms around my shins.

God, I miss Papà. I don’t remember much of Mamma, but I know I look like her.

I was the apple of Papà’s eye until the day he died. Even when he married Cettina, things didn’t change. I thought I was the luckiest girl for getting a loving stepmother and big brother. Things were so good until they passed away.

It felt like my life went from sunny to thunderous in the blink of an eye, and the storm hasn’t stopped. If anything, things just keep getting more volatile.

Giorgio pounds his fist against my bedroom door, making me startle.

“Go clean the mess in the living room!”

Closing my eyes, I swallow the tears down before answering, “I’m coming.”

I hear him stomp away, and pulling myself up, I unlock the door and open it. I peek down the hallway and see Giorgio’s door slam shut.

He moved into our parents' bedroom a month after they were buried. I thought he was being disrespectful, and when I mentioned it to him, he slapped me so hard it felt like my teeth rattled. He said he deserved the main bedroom now that he was the head of the family.

After the first time Giorgio hit me, I cried my eyes out. I couldn’t understand why he changed so much, but with time, I realized he was always evil and just hid it from our parents.

I dart across the hall to my bathroom and grab a couple of Advils to help with the dull ache in my side.

Walking to the living room, I stop by the side table to pick up my handbag. I set it down on one of the couches before seeing pieces of shattered glass scattered on the floor and whiskey trickling down the wall.

Letting out a sigh, I head to the kitchen to get everything I’ll need to clean the mess Giorgio made.

You can hold out for two more years. You need your inheritance so you can make a fresh start somewhere else.

I collect all the pieces of glass and throw them in the trash before wiping down the wall.

When I’m done with the chore, I walk back to the kitchen.

It’s my favorite place in the world. I love baking and cooking. Needing to take my mind off the crap I’m dealing with, I start to make apple pies for the coffee hour we always have after Mass.

While I peel one apple after the other, the tension slowly drains from my

body, and the painkillers lessen the ache in my side.

Cutting the apples into slices, I dream about meeting a loving man in whatever small town I move to. We'll have a white-picket fence around our house. Maybe three or four kids and a dog.

I'll be a stay-at-home mom, making sure my husband has a delicious dinner waiting when he returns from work.

I'll be far from Giorgio and the Cosa Nostra, and with time, I'll even forget they exist.

After Sunday Mass, I hurry to the tables where everyone gathers for tea and coffee and quickly switch on the urns.

It's been two weeks since the incident at *Piccola Sicilia*. Giorgio seems to be on edge about the money he owes Mr. Rizzo and has taken his stress out on me. He even tried to get me to sign a document stating he would be my beneficiary should I die.

Shaking my head, I still can't believe he thinks I'm so stupid that I'd sign my own death warrant. I know the moment I sign that document, he'll get rid of me. Giorgio wants my money, and he'll kill to get it.

With the danger increasing by the day, I'm not sure I can hold out for another two years, but I don't know what else to do.

If I go to Aunt Maria, Giorgio will find me there. It will place her in a horrible position because she and the rest of my family are bound to the laws of the Cosa Nostra.

Even if I ask her for money so I can run away, she will get in trouble for aiding me. Nothing happens without the Cosa Nostra knowing about it.

Feeling miserable, I let out a sigh.

"Did you bring three pies?" Rosa asks as she joins me behind the tables.

I force a friendly smile to my face. “Yes, but there seems to be more people than usual.”

“Keep a slice for Father Parisi.”

Nodding, I take the pies from their containers and place a slice on a plate. Rosa prepares a cup of tea, and while she takes the beverage and pie to Father Parisi, I begin to help the parishioners who are already milling around the table.

I keep smiling and greeting everyone, and soon, the rush passes, and I’m able to pour myself a cup of coffee.

My head is lowered when I hear a voice rumble, “Morning, Vittoria.”

My eyes snap up, and I accidentally pour hot water over my hand. “Ouch!”

“Are you okay?” Rosa asks while Mr. Rizzo, who’s scared the living hell out of me, rushes around the table.

When he gets close to me, my mouth instantly goes dry, and my heart sets off at a wild pace. Rosa darts to the end of the table to get away from us and cautiously watches Mr. Rizzo.

Not a single soul here will dare go against Angelo Rizzo.

He grabs a dishcloth from the table, and taking hold of my hand, he pats my skin dry before inspecting the red spot.

My eyebrows fly up, and my lips part in shock.

His voice is still a low rumble as he mutters, “It doesn’t look too bad. You need to be more careful when working with boiling water.”

With eyes as wide as the saucers on the table, I stare at Angelo Rizzo as if he’s lost his mind.

Does he actually care about me burning my hand?

His gaze snaps to mine, and just like before, I feel the punch of his brutal gaze.

I pull my hand free from his, and swallowing hard, I ask, “Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?”

His eyes narrow on me for an unnerving moment before he slowly shakes his head. “Come with me.”

What?

Feeling nervous as hell, my tongue darts out to wet my lips. “Where?”

Without answering, he turns around and proceeds to leave the building with Tiny and Big Ricky right behind him.

I’ve never seen Mr. Rizzo at Mass before, so this can’t be good.

I can feel the other parishioners' eyes on me, but I know none of them will step in to help me. Confused and scared, I reluctantly follow after the man.

There are overgrown gardens at the front and sides of the cathedral, and at the back is a very old cemetery.

My stomach turns to lead as I follow the three men to the back, but I keep a safe distance as Mr. Rizzo looks at the weather-worn tombstones.

I wrap my arms around myself, and as the silence stretches, my body begins to tremble.

Father, don’t let this man kill me on holy ground.

Actually, don’t let him kill me at all.

After the longest minutes of my life, Mr. Rizzo tips his head at Tiny and Big Ricky. My fear multiplies when his two guard dogs wander off to give us some privacy.

A breeze picks up, making the fabric of my dress billow around my legs. My hands slap down against my sides, and I quickly grab fistfuls of the fabric to keep it in place.

When he still doesn’t say anything, I ask with a quivering voice, “Why did you want me to come with you?”

With one hand in a pocket and the other lifting to rub over his jaw, his eyes narrow on me again.

Jesus, I'm going to die of a nervous breakdown if he doesn't speak soon.

A frown forms on his forehead then he says, "You look tired."

Wow, what a way to say I look terrible.

Feeling self-conscious after his comment, I give him a frown of my own while shaking my head. "Honestly, this is nerve-wracking. Can you please tell me why you want to speak to me?"

Keep your mouth shut, Tori!

Maybe it's because I feel so trapped and scared all the time that I'm starting to slip up.

I must imagine it, but the corner of his mouth almost lifts in a smile before returning to the usual grim line. It was only for a split second.

Mr. Rizzo steps closer to me, his body moving like a wolf that's stalking his prey. Intense fear ripples through me, and my breathing speeds up.

When he stops in front of me, he tilts his head and locks eyes with me. "Your brother paid me a visit yesterday."

"Stepbrother," I correct him.

I hate it when people refer to Giorgio as my brother.

Mr. Rizzo's right eyebrow lifts, and I quickly apologize, "I didn't mean to interrupt you, sir."

"You can call me Angelo."

I've never heard anyone call him by his first name.

Caught off guard, I blink at him.

He folds his arms over his chest and looks downright terrifying as he stares at me.

"Giorgio has informed me you're untouched."

What. The. Hell?

I continue to blink at him as my face goes up in flames, and embarrassment sets my insides on fire.

I can't get offended because the capos of the Cosa Nostra have a right to know the status of any woman who's of marrying age. In most cases, they must give their blessing when a marriage is arranged, which means this conversation is nothing out of the ordinary for Angelo.

Feeling red from my toes to my hair, I nod.

Please, please, please, Father. Don't let this man arrange a marriage for me. Then I'll never get away from Giorgio.

Angelo's eyes narrow again. "You're a virgin?"

Oh, geez.

I nod again.

"You've never dated?"

More heat pours into my cheeks as I nod for the third time.

When he suddenly moves his hand to my hair, I instinctively flinch from the years of abuse I've suffered from Giorgio.

Crap.

Angelo pauses for a moment, his gaze sharpening on my face before he twirls a curl of my hair around his finger.

"You flinch as if you think I'm going to hit you."

His comment makes my insides turn to ice, and the tremble in my body grows.

Unable to tell a lie on holy ground, I admit, "You scare me."

He lets go of my curl and murmurs, "I don't find pleasure in hitting women."

His words don't make me feel any better.

Chapter 4

Angelo

For the past two weeks, I haven't been able to stop thinking about Vittoria.

After Tiny found out everything he could about her, I had them bring in Giorgio. The fucker was quick to fill in the blanks where she was concerned. It's clear the man has no loyalty to his family.

But not willing to just believe every word coming out of Giorgio's mouth, I needed to hear it straight from Vittoria. I know she's too fucking terrified to dare lie to me.

I drink in her beauty as the wind ruffles her curls. Even though her soft brown irises are trembling with fear, she doesn't break eye contact.

She has more guts than that shady stepbrother of hers, who offered her to me on a silver platter as payment for his debt.

I told him I'd kill him with my bare hands if he mentioned a word to her while I considered his proposal.

It aggravates the fuck out of me that Giorgio was so quick to offer Vittoria's virginity to me as payment for his debt. She's worth more than a measly three hundred thousand dollars.

She's worth more than Giorgio's pathetic life.

What pisses me off is the fact that he has enough money stashed away in investments on the stock market to pay what he owes me, but he'd rather sacrifice Vittoria's innocence.

The fucker is willing to sell her virtue, then once she turns twenty-five, he'll pawn her off to a man who doesn't mind spoiled goods.

I've also found out why he's waiting until she's twenty-five. Vittoria will get access to her inheritance, and Giorgio probably wants it.

It fucking infuriates me.

Staring at the woman who's popped into my mind more than I care to admit, I can clearly see how innocent she is.

When Tiny looked into Vittoria's life, he couldn't find a single black mark against her.

Every Sunday, she serves coffee and tea after Mass. When one of the parishioners is sick, she delivers home-cooked meals to them.

This woman is as pure as they come.

In my world, she's rare, and I like to collect unique items.

Vittoria's tongue darts out to wet her lips, and the nervous action draws my eyes to her mouth.

I'd bet every last dime I have on my name she hasn't even been kissed.

Mesmerized by the woman, I murmur, "Have you ever been kissed?"

Her brows furrow together while the pink on her cheeks deepens in color.

Christ, she's so fucking innocent that a simple question about a kiss has her blushing.

Vittoria shakes her head, and I can see how difficult it is for her to keep eye contact with me.

I step closer until there's only an inch between us, and leaning down, I take a deep breath of her scent. She smells like cookies and dough, instantly making my mouth water, and I catch a hint of something soft and floral.

"I'll see you soon, *piccola cerviatta*."

Calling her little deer comes naturally, and as I walk away, I feel her eyes burning on my back.

Vittoria Romano might not come from a worthy family, but she has something no one else in our community can offer me – her innocence.

Giorgio's in for a surprise because I don't just want Vittoria's virginity. If I take her, I'll marry the most beautiful woman in New York. She'll warm my bed and give me heirs.

And finally, Uncle Maurizio will stop fucking nagging me.

Honestly, it doesn't matter to me whether I'm married or not. The notion of loving a woman has never appealed to me, but owning this beautiful woman is definitely tempting.

"Are we leaving?" Big Ricky asks as I approach him and Tiny.

"Yes." I walk to the SUV with blacked-out windows, and after climbing into the backseat, I mutter, "Drop me off at the club, then bring Giorgio Romano to me."

"Yes, boss," Tiny replies while Big Ricky starts the engine.

During the drive to the heart of Long Island, where Fallen Angels is situated, my thoughts are inundated with the opportunity that's been presented to me.

Before I laid eyes on Vittoria, I didn't give two shits about getting married. Sure, I knew I'd take the plunge at some point, but there was no urgency.

There's still no urgency.

But the thought of having the beautiful little deer warming my bed is just too good to pass up.

I'll have something no other man has touched.

The corner of my mouth lifts, but the smile quickly disappears when I think of Giorgio.

I'm not known for giving second chances, but the sadistic side of me wants to play with the fucker as if he's a mouse. I want to see how far he'll go before I kill him.

When Big Ricky pulls up to the front of the club, Tiny escorts me inside

before returning to the SUV to carry out my order.

Fallen Angels is closed on Sundays, so besides a couple of workers who are cleaning the place from top to bottom, it's quiet.

I head straight to my office to double-check the deposits banked over the past week. I have people who do everything for me, but when it comes to money, I don't trust a living soul.

Besides the strip club and casino, I own a fleet of ships that transport prohibited goods worldwide.

Salvatore handles the schedule for the fleet, while Eddie makes sure shit doesn't go down at my club. He also runs the restaurant and casino for me. Sunday is Eddie's only day off, so I don't even bother checking if he's in his office.

I feel Eddie is an excellent candidate to run things in Sicily on my behalf when my uncle retires. I have to think of someone else who we can train to take over from Eddie. It's not going to be an easy decision to make because, besides Renzo, Damiano, Dario, and Franco, the heads of the other four families, I only trust Salvatore, Eddie, Tiny, and Big Ricky.

I keep my circle small because, in my world, it's the only way to stay alive.

There's a knock at my office door before Tiny enters, followed by a shit-scared Giorgio, who doesn't look like he's gotten any sleep since we last spoke.

It makes me recall how tired Vittoria looked.

Tiny shoves the fucker forward, and he comes to a staggering stop in front of my desk. My eyes lock on him with disgust, while his pleading gaze is filled with terror.

I could kill him and just take Vittoria.

My tone is filled with danger as I mutter, "If I take Vittoria for myself, I

won't tolerate any interference from you."

Confusion flutters over his face before it's followed by relief. "So you're taking her virginity in exchange for wiping the three hundred thousand off my name?"

I stare at the man until it looks like he's going to piss himself before I say, "I haven't made up my mind yet. If you breathe a word of this discussion to her, it will be the last thing you do."

"O-of c-c-course," he stammers. "I'm not stupid. The last thing I want is for her to run away."

Tilting my head, I ask, "Is that something you think she'll do?"

His head bobs up and down. "Since she was a teen, she's had a stupid dream of living in a small town with a white-picket fence house and the perfect husband. She's keeping herself pure for marriage."

My eyes narrow on the fucker for insulting Vittoria's childhood dream. If she marries me, she'll have a fucking castle and everything her heart desires.

"What else does she dream of?" I demand.

"The usual bullshit. Being a mother."

That's good to hear.

Waving a hand, I dismiss Giorgio. The gesture has Tiny gripping the fuckers arm and shoving him out of my office.

When I'm alone again, I stare at the spreadsheet on my laptop, but I don't see any of the numbers.

My thoughts are with the beautiful little deer who might become my wife. Knowing she's a flight risk, I begin to devise a plan. If she can't know about the wedding, I'll have to lure her to the ceremony under false pretenses. I also don't want her fucking stepbrother knowing I'm taking more than just her virginity.

Once I have her in front of the priest, she won't be able to escape and will

have no choice but to marry me.

Do I feel shitty about being prepared to trick a woman into marrying me?

No. Not one bit.

In my territory, I take what I want. Vittoria will quickly learn to obey me and be a good wife, and in return, she'll live a life of luxury. She can raise our children while I continue to rule over my empire.

Deciding that Vittoria will become my wife, the corner of my mouth lifts.

Soon, the little deer and all her innocence will be mine.

Chapter 5

Tori

My body aches as I walk into the quiet cathedral. I glance at the empty pews and adjust a couple of hymnals that were just shoved into the holders.

I set down the dish of *pasta alla Norma* I brought for Father Parisi on one of the benches so my hands are free. Moving to the front, I remove the old flower arrangement from the stand next to the pulpit and carry the wilting bouquet to the kitchen.

I place the wilting bouquet on a counter and quickly grab a trash bag where it's kept beneath the sink.

Letting out a sigh, I take everything apart so I can dispose of the flowers before making sure the kitchen is clean.

It's something I do every Tuesday, so Father Parisi doesn't have to worry about it. Then again, he'd probably leave the flowers right where they are until Rosa brings a fresh arrangement.

After throwing out the flowers, I return to the pews and pick up the pasta dish before heading to Father Parisi's office.

Gingerly, I rub over the tender spot on my hip where Giorgio kicked me last night.

Refusing to let the thoughts darken one of the few mornings I get away from the house, I let the silence in the cathedral wash over me. I always feel calm when I come here, and today is no different.

Reaching the office, I quickly knock on the door before entering the room. "Morning, Father."

His head lifts from the paperwork he's looking at, and a smile forms on his face. "Morning, Tori."

I meet with Father Parisi every Tuesday to discuss the flower arrangements and what I'll bake for the parishioners to enjoy after Sunday Mass. The Parish pays for everything, so I don't have to ask Giorgio for money.

I'm also paid a small fee for my effort that goes toward my feminine products and toiletries.

Taking a seat in front of his desk, I place the pasta dish down on the corner so it's not in his way.

The cooked meal earns me a grateful smile from my priest. "Thank you. With you and Rosa always bringing me food, I don't have to worry about it."

"You're welcome. I love cooking." I pull the shopping list from my handbag. "I thought it would be nice to have cannolis at the next service."

Father Parisi waves a hand. "You're in charge, so whatever you want to bake is good with me. How much will you need?"

I show him the list and the total I'll need to buy all the ingredients, and while he takes the cash out of a small box, I ask, "Should I order roses for the next flower arrangement?"

He makes a grumbling sound. "Whatever you feel like."

Even though he always accepts my ideas, I run them by him out of respect.

As Father Parisi hands me the cash, his eyes lock on me. His eyebrows draw together, and while he sits down again, he asks, "Are you getting enough rest? You look tired."

I let out a chuckle and shake my head. "Wow, it's the second time I heard that in the last few days. I'll put in more effort with my appearance."

Feeling self-conscious, I pull the lightweight cardigan I'm wearing tighter

around myself. Even though it's hot outside, I have to wear something with long sleeves to hide the bruises on my arms. My summer dresses are also a no-go, so I'm stuck wearing jeans to cover my legs.

Father Parisi tilts his head, concern etched into the lines on his face. "That's not what I meant. Is everything okay at home?"

Not wanting to talk about my dire circumstances, I nod as I climb to my feet. "I better get the order for the flower arrangement to Rosa."

Shaking his head because I didn't answer him, he mutters, "I'm here whenever you want to talk."

I force a smile to my face as I whisper, "I know. I just don't want to talk about it right now."

"I won't pressure you." Letting out a sigh, his eyes lower to the paperwork on his desk. "See you on Sunday, Tori."

"Have a good week," I murmur before slipping out of the office.

I love Tuesday and Sunday mornings because it's the only time I'm guaranteed not to be around Giorgio.

Honestly, he's been an absolute nightmare since the incident at *Piccola Sicilia*. I've done my best to stay out of his way, but I'm shouted at every time he gets home. The beatings are also happening more and more regularly.

It feels as if the violence is escalating, and the worry keeps me up at night.

As I walk the couple of miles between the cathedral and Rosa's flower shop, my thoughts turn to the Parish's money in my handbag. It might be enough for a train ticket, but just thinking about stealing it has me making the sign of the cross.

Forgive me for my impure thoughts, Father.

The sun beats down on my head, and soon, I feel uncomfortable from the heat.

Suddenly, a black SUV pulls up beside me, and I give the vehicle a cautious look as I pick up my pace.

When I hear a door open, I glance over my shoulder, and seeing Angelo, I come to a dead stop on the sidewalk.

Oh, God. I'm seeing way too much of the man.

Without greeting me, he asks in a demanding tone, "Where are you going?"

I point down the street. "To Rosa's flower shop."

"Get in," he orders, gesturing to the backseat with a nod of his head.

Ugh.

I let out a heavy breath as I walk to the SUV, and with apprehension tightening my stomach into a hard ball, I slide into the backseat.

Angelo climbs in beside me, which has me moving closer to the other door so there's more space between us.

My heartbeat speeds up, and a shiver rushes up my spine.

I know I should be grateful to be out of the scorching summer heat, but the last place I want to be is stuck in a car with one of the Cosa Nostra's leaders.

"It's too hot to walk," he mutters. Giving me a side glance, he grumbles, "Why are you dressed so warm?"

I wrap my arms around my middle and squeeze my body against the door as I lie, "It was cool when I left the house."

Forgive me, Father.

Without an order from Angelo, Big Ricky drives toward Rosa's store. A heavy silence fills the air, and I'm so freaking conscious of the dangerous man beside me I can't stop my body from trembling.

I also can't help but notice how attractive he is, and it makes a weird sensation flutter through my abdomen.

Angelo doesn't try to start a conversation with me, and when Big Ricky stops the vehicle in front of the store, I let out a relieved breath.

Forcing a thankful smile to my lips, I glance at Angelo. "Thank you for the ride."

He doesn't take his eyes off the document he's reading and just nods.

Opening the door, I murmur, "Bye." I quickly climb out of the SUV, and shutting the door behind me, I rush around the back of the vehicle and dart into the airconditioned store.

"Mother of God, Tori. Is that Mr. Rizzo's car?" Rosa asks, her eyes wide on the vehicle still parked outside her store.

"Yes." I shrug and try to play it off as nothing. "He just gave me a ride because it's so hot outside."

She lifts an eyebrow at me. "That man does nothing for free. Be careful of him."

Nodding, I follow her to the back, where she spends most of her time making bouquets.

"Can we have roses for the Parish this week?" I ask while trying to do my best to ignore the fact that Angelo Rizzo is giving me way too much attention.

"Roses are expensive, but I can add baby's breath and daisies."

"That would be great." I glance at all the buckets holding various fresh flowers. "I made *pasta alla Norma* for Father Parisi," I inform her so we don't accidentally prepare the same dish for him.

"Okay. I'll make *maccu* for him later this week."

Soup? In this heat?

Thankfully, Rosa doesn't notice the surprise on my face because she's busy cutting stems shorter.

"What are you baking for Mass?" she asks.

“Cannolis. It’s been a while since we had them for coffee hour.”

“Make extra in case there are more people again.”

Nodding, I say, “I will.” Taking a step toward the front section of the store, I add, “I should get going. I want to be home before lunch.”

Rosa holds a pink carnation out to me. “Yes, get out of this heat.”

Taking the flower, I offer her a friendly smile. “See you on Sunday.”

Leaving Rosa to her work, I notice the SUV is still parked out front.

Oh no!

I hesitate for a moment, but knowing I can’t hide here all day, I let out a groan as I leave the store.

The moment I step onto the sidewalk, the backdoor of the vehicle is shoved open.

God, help me.

When I cautiously glance inside, Angelo mutters, “Get in.”

Father, did I do something to upset you? It’s really starting to feel like you have forsaken me.

“Ah...why?” I ask, fear making my voice quiver.

Angelo’s eyes flick to me, annoyance tightening his handsome features. “It’s fucking hot, Vittoria. Get in.”

I feel like whining like a puppy as I carry out his order, and when I shut the door, Big Ricky asks, “Where to, Miss Romano?”

“Ahh...the grocery store just down the road.” I glance between the back of Big Ricky’s head and Angelo, who’s back to giving the document in his hand all his attention.

This is so freaking weird.

Between the volatile situation at home and having to deal with seeing Angelo Rizzo way more than I’d like, the tension in my body is reaching breaking point.

Chapter 6

Angelo

The tension coming off Vittoria makes the air tremble.

It's too fucking hot outside for her to be walking around in what can only be described as winter clothes.

I have a million things to tend to before the poker game tonight, but knowing Vittoria would visit Father Parisi this morning, I ordered Big Ricky to drive past the cathedral.

Having her schedule puts me in a position to watch her.

But it wasn't my intention to drive all over town like a fucking chauffeur.

She's my future wife, and I might as well get used to taking care of her.

Once we're married, she'll have a driver and guard to take her wherever she needs to go.

Unable to focus on the contract in my hand, I give up and glance at the trembling beauty beside me. I notice the flower that's being crushed in her tight grip and mutter, "You're killing it."

Vittoria's eyes fly to my face as she gasps, "I'm what?"

I gesture at her hands. "You're killing the flower."

Her gaze flits to her lap, then she mutters. "Shoot." She eases her grip on the wilting carnation, then adds, "Technically, it's already dying."

With my eyes locked on her exquisite face, I ask, "Why are you out and about on such a hot day?"

Her gaze darts to me again. "I had errands to run." She fidgets with the carnation, and I don't think she's aware of what she's doing as she starts to

pull the petals off.

“And the errands couldn’t wait?” Now, I’m just asking questions to hear the soft tone of her voice.

“Ah...” Her fingers move faster, the petals falling one by one onto her lap. “I always meet with Father Parisi on Tuesdays to give him a cooked meal and to discuss the baked goods for after Mass.”

Of course, she provides meals for the holy man.

She pauses, and her tongue darts out to wet her lips before she continues to ramble, “I stopped by Rosa’s store to tell her what kind of flower arrangement to prepare for Sunday, and now I’m going to the store to get the ingredients for the cannolis we’ll serve after Mass.” Finally, she stops talking so she can suck in a desperate breath.

I find the way she rambles fascinating and even...cute.

In the meantime, the carnation has been obliterated, and when she notices, she lets out a panicked sound. “I’m so sorry!”

Clearly terrified that I’ll punish her for messing in my car, she frantically gathers the petals.

Big Ricky finds a parking spot outside the grocery store, and it has me saying. “We’re going in with her.”

“What?” Vittoria whisper-shrieeks, her wide eyes staring at me with shock.

“It’s not open for discussion,” I mutter as I get out of the SUV.

Truth be told, I’m enjoying our little interaction way too much.

I wait for Vittoria to climb out, and when I place my hand on her lower back, she almost jumps out of her skin with fright.

I ignore her reaction, figuring she’ll get used to me once we’re married.

Big Ricky hovers somewhere behind us as we walk into the store, and I grab a cart.

Vittoria gives me a confused look, but she doesn't have the courage to ask why I'm joining her on her shopping trip.

Every pair of eyes in the store locks on me, and I feel the wave of fear ripple through the aisles. As we head toward the baking section, people scatter to get away from us, and it has Vittoria nervously glancing up at me.

"What do you need?" I ask so she'll focus on why we're here.

She digs a scrap of paper out of her handbag, and rushing from one ingredient to the next, she quickly gathers what she needs.

When we reach the cashier, the woman keeps her eyes lowered as she scans everything.

The fear all these people feel for me is thick in the air. It's something I've worked my ass off to attain.

It's power.

When Vittoria pulls a few dollars out of her handbag, I mutter, "I'll pay."

"It's for the Parish," she says, her eyes filled with uncertainty.

I don't repeat myself. Ever.

Ignoring her comment, I hand my black limitless card to the cashier to pay for the meager ingredients that don't even fill a shopping bag.

I'll have to arrange a card for Vittoria.

While the payment is being processed, I make a mental note not to forget.

The cashier's trembling like a leaf in a shitstorm as she hands the card back to me. I tuck it back into my wallet while Big Ricky grabs the shopping bag.

When we leave the store, Vittoria scurries to stay beside me while whispering, "Thank you. I'll let Father Parisi know you paid for everything."

"You'll do no such thing," I order.

"But I didn't use the money he gave me," she argues. "He'll ask why."

For a moment, I'm impressed that she's got enough courage to argue with me.

"Then don't tell him why, and keep the money for yourself," I mutter.

She stops dead in her tracks and stares at me as if I've lost my mind. "I'm not lying to Father Parisi, and I'm certainly not keeping the Parish's money."

When she motions the sign of the cross, I let out an unexpected chuckle. "Why?"

"It's lying and stealing," she gasps, looking absolutely shocked.

The corners of my mouth curve up as I close the distance between us. When I lift my hand to her face, she startles, and her complexion grows pale.

Ignoring her strong reaction, I brush my fingers over her cheek while I keep her terrified eyes imprisoned by mine. I lean down, and when she holds her breath, a chuckle rumbles from my chest.

"It's not stealing when I've paid for everything. I'm ordering you to keep the money, which is technically mine."

Instead of using words, a squeak escapes her as her head bobs up and down.

Lifting my head an inch, my eyes capture hers again. "Relax, Vittoria. I don't plan on killing you."

The air wooshes over her lips, and figuring I've fucked enough with her for one day, I pull away and gesture at the SUV. "Get in."

Like the little deer she is, she dashes to the vehicle and hurries to get inside.

When I slide in next to her, she practically squashes herself against the other door.

I'm fucked up for taking so much pleasure in her fear, but the thought doesn't stop my mouth from curving into a smirk.

Christ, I'm high from the exhilaration of hunting my little deer.

Chapter 7

Tori

By the time the SUV stops in front of my house, I feel faint with fear and confusion.

I can't even bring myself to look at Angelo as I say, "Thank you for everything."

Grabbing the plastic bag, I quickly climb out of the vehicle and shut the door before rushing up the path to the porch.

Father, we need to talk.

Why are you allowing this man to cross paths with me constantly?

I unlock the front door, and as I step into the house, I let out a breath of relief when I hear the SUV drive away.

Freaking finally.

I shut the door and make sure to lock it again before walking to the kitchen.

I can't believe what happened today. Why did Angelo drive me around? What does he want?

People like him don't do anything without expecting something in return.

I set the bag down on the counter and unpack the groceries.

It's only then I remember the dollar bills in my handbag, and digging the money out, I stare at it.

Even though Angelo ordered me to keep the money, I'm definitely giving it back to Father Parisi on Sunday.

The Parish can take the groceries as a donation from Angelo. I'll explain

the situation to Father Parisi and ask him not to mention anything to anyone.

Pulling out a chair by the kitchen table, I sink down on it and let out a groan.

It feels as if my usually quiet life is spiraling into an abyss of chaos and violence, and I don't understand why.

Suddenly, Giorgio walks into the kitchen, and before I can hide the money, his eyes lock on the dollar bills. Without a word, he stalks toward me and grabs the notes from my hand.

Crap!

"The money belongs to the Parish," I argue as I stand up to take it back from him.

He shoves the money into his pocket, and stepping into my personal space, he sneers, "Now it belongs to me."

His hand connects with my shoulder, and he shoves me so hard I fall against the table. Pain throbs through my lower back, but I ignore it as I keep my eyes locked on Giorgio.

I expect him to beat and kick me again, but luckily, the shove is enough for him.

When he leaves the kitchen, I fall back into the chair and rest my face in my hands.

I can't take much more. Father, please let Giorgio go out so I can be alone.

Seconds later, I hear the front door slamming shut as Giorgio leaves the house.

Thank you.

A sob rattles from my chest, and wrapping my arms around myself, I allow the tears to fall.

I'll do anything, Father. Please help me out of this impossible situation.

It takes me a few minutes before I manage to gain control over my emotions, and looking at the groceries, I get up and put everything away.

Giorgio probably went to Fallen Angels to gamble, which means he won't be home for a while.

Thank God for small mercies.

Walking to my bedroom, I strip out of the warm clothes and change into a summer dress. As I pass the mirror that's mounted against the wall, my reflection catches my attention.

I stop, and seeing the bruises on my arms and legs, I feel miserable. Gripping the seam of the dress, I lift the fabric until I'm able to see the purple, red, and brown marks all over my torso and sides.

Every bruise feels tender, and I know it's a miracle I don't have any broken bones.

Refusing to wallow in self-pity, I lower the dress and leave my bedroom.

Giorgio's out, so I'm going to prepare a feast for dinner and eat until it feels like my stomach will burst.

When I'm back in the kitchen, I gather some potatoes and sit at the kitchen table to peel them.

I'm making *crocchè*, a Sicilian dish made of mashed potato and egg covered in bread crumbs. After I fry the little balls, they're crispy and delicious.

I also prepare *scaccia*, a thin flatbread layered with vegetables, cheese, and meats.

Once my meal is ready, I grab a soda from the fridge and carry the plate to the living room.

Sitting on one of the couches with my legs folded beneath me, I place the plate on my lap and grab the TV remote.

I put on *Virgin River*, and as I get lost in other people's lives, I enjoy

every bite of my food.

The TV show takes place in a small town surrounded by trees and a beautiful river.

I'd love to live there.

Maybe my dream will come true one day.

When I'm done eating, I place the plate on the coffee table and lie down on the couch. I watch episode after episode, and it helps to ease my worried mind.

While I watch *Virgin River*, there's no evil stepbrother who's going to end up killing me.

There's no mafia leader who's taken a weird interest in me.

There's only my dream of a brighter future.

Pain explodes through my body as I'm suddenly thrown against the coffee table.

Waking up with one hell of a shock, I don't have time to protect myself. My eyes snap open, and the next second, I'm grabbed by my neck and hauled into the air.

When my gaze locks on the man, icy fear pours through my veins.

Vito Strano.

He's one of Damiano Falco's men.

"Where is Giorgio?" Vito demands with a threatening tone.

"Fallen Angels," I wheeze through the tight hold he has on my neck.

I'm tossed like a rag doll, and slamming into the liquor cabinet, the bottles rattle as I fall to the floor.

I quickly push my upper body from the wooden floor and stare in total shock at the group of men who belong to one of the heads of the Cosa Nostra.

Without another word directed at me, the men trash the living room before leaving.

It's only then the realization of what happened sinks in. My shock spirals into a chaotic mess of horror, panic, and bleakness.

This way of life is going to kill me soon. I just know it.

Getting up off the floor, a cry escapes me when I accidentally step on a shard of glass. One of the glass doors of the liquor cabinet shattered when my body hit it. I didn't even notice.

Careful not to step on any more shards, I limp to the bathroom and sit on the side of the tub so I can remove the piece of glass from my foot.

I pull my first aid kit from the cupboard and use an antiseptic wipe to clean the cut before putting a bandaid on.

Letting out a hopeless sigh, I stare at the drops of blood on the tiled floor.

It's happened before where men have come looking for Giorgio, but it's the first time one of them hurt me. Usually, Giorgio's the one getting beaten up by them.

Hopefully, they'll kill him tonight so I can live the rest of my life in peace.

Guilt floods my soul, and I motion the sign of the cross.

Forgive me, Father. Today's just been very stressful.

Rising to my feet, I'm careful not to put too much pressure on the cut and limp to the living room so I can clean up the mess.

I'm so tired.

A little help would be nice.

Not that I'm being pushy, Father, but can you send me a fairy godmother to clean up this mess?

With a heavy sigh, I get to work, and once the living room has been restored to its former glory, minus the glass panel in the liquor cabinet, I

slump down on the couch.

How did they get in?

Darting to my feet, I hurry to the front door. The lock isn't broken, which means Giorgio didn't lock it when he left.

Bastard!

Shaking my head, I turn the key. I almost secure the deadbolt, but then Giorgio will kill me for sure for locking him out of the house.

Letting out another tired sigh, I mutter, "Just another day in the Cosa Nostra." I walk to the kitchen to wash the dishes, and as I pour water into the sink, I whisper, "It's getting too difficult to continue living like this. I just want it all to end."

Chapter 8

Angelo

I throw down a Jack of Hearts and mutter, “One card.”

Carlo, one of Damiano’s men, slides a card my way, and when he sees me frown at the Jack of Spades, he gives me an apologetic look.

Tonight’s game is being hosted at Damiano’s house. We each take turns to host a game, and I had mine the last time we got together.

“You have zero poker face,” Dario says with a mischievous grin while he slides another chip into the growing pile. “I raise you all another hundred thousand.”

“Fuck off,” I grumble.

I’m on a losing streak, and they’re all getting a kick out of it.

Damiano’s also frowning, and when Renzo and Franco throw down their hands to bow out, Dario lets out a chuckle.

Damiano narrows his eyes at Dario. “If I catch you cheating, you’re going to bleed.”

“I never cheat.”

“Right,” I mumble. Knowing I have a shit hand, I fold. “I need a drink.”

Carlo moves to the bar and pours a round of bourbon while Damiano matches Dario’s bet.

The two men stare at each other for a while before Dario adds another two chips to the pile.

“Fuck you,” Damiano mutters as he bows out.

Dario starts to laugh as he gathers the chips, which has Damiano

demanding, "Show us your hand."

Dario turns the cards over, and it's the shittest hand I've ever seen.

I pin my friend with a dangerous look. "Do you want to die tonight?"

Dario just shrugs. "It's all about the poker face, brother."

"How's business for everyone?" Renzo asks before popping a pretzel into his mouth.

"Busy," Franco replies. "I got new printers, so the cash is flowing again."

Printing counterfeit cash is where most of Franco's profits lie.

"Things are quiet on my side," Renzo mentions.

"Your shipment of arms will dock next week, then you'll have something to do," I say before taking the tumbler of bourbon from Carlo.

A smile spreads over Renzo's face. "Thank fuck."

Damiano glances at me, and seeing the serious expression in his eyes, I ask, "What's on your mind?"

"One of your men owes me half a mil."

Christ.

"Who?"

"Giorgio Romano."

The fucking fucker.

My eyes flick from Damiano to Renzo, then Franco, before settling on Dario. "Does he owe anyone else money?"

The other three shake their heads.

I turn my attention to Damiano. "He's a problem I'm currently dealing with."

"I've sent my men to rough him up."

My eyes narrow on my friend. "Where?"

"At his house."

Vittoria.

“They’re not to lay a finger on his sister,” I order.

Damiano’s eyebrow lifts, and curiosity sparks in his dark brown irises.
“Why?”

Damiano is the least forgiving out of the bunch of us. He has no problem killing an entire family for the sins of one.

Knowing I can trust the men in the room, I admit, “I’m making her my wife.”

Silence falls over the table until you can hear a pin drop. Four faces stare at me in shock, but Damiano is the first to recover from the bomb I just dropped.

He gives me an incredulous look. “You’re getting married?”

“Yes, but there won’t be an elaborate wedding because Vittoria doesn’t know, so don’t expect an invitation.” Wanting to make sure Vittoria will be okay, I say, “Call your men and make sure they don’t touch my future wife.”

The corner of Damiano’s mouth lifts as he pulls his device out of his pocket, “Never thought you’d force a woman to marry you,” he mentions, and after he dials a number, he mutters, “Don’t touch Romano’s sister when you pay him a visit.”

He listens to whatever his man says, then lets out a sigh. “Who?” There’s a moment’s pause before he mutters, “Bring Vito to me.”

When he ends the call and sets the device on the table, he mutters, “They already went to Romano’s house.”

I suck in a deep breath of air. “And?”

“Vito tossed her around, but she’s alive.”

White-hot anger ignites in my chest as I rise to my feet.

“Where are you going?” Dario asks.

“To make sure my woman’s okay.” I pin Damiano with a glare. “Keep Vito here. I’ll deal with him when I return.”

He climbs to his feet and mutters, “I’m coming with.”

Franco, Renzo, and Dario also stand up while Dario says, “None of us are missing out on this.”

The incident won’t bring bad blood between Damiano and me, but I can’t promise Vito will live to see another day.

As we all leave the room, Damiano tells Carlo, “When Vito arrives, have him wait for us.”

“Yes, boss.”

We all file out of the house, and seeing as Dario’s car is parked behind ours, I say, “Dario, you’re driving.”

I take the passenger seat of the G-Wagon while Damiano, Franco, and Renzo climb into the back.

When Dario starts the engine, I give him the address. Suddenly, opera blares over the speakers, and it has me giving Dario a what-the-fuck look.

He turns the sound down to a bearable volume, then says, “I was jamming on the way here.”

“To opera?” Renzo asks. “You’re fucking weird.”

“Thank you,” Dario says with a joking tone.

“It wasn’t a compliment,” I mutter.

Fifteen minutes later, when Dario pulls up at the front of Vittoria’s house, I don’t wait for him to switch off the engine. I climb out of the car, and halfway up the path, I hear my friends’ footsteps behind me.

I bang on the front door with a fist, and a moment later, I hear Vittoria ask, “Who’s there?”

“Angelo.”

She mutters something I can’t make out, then opens the door. The moment her eyes land on the five of us, she shrieks and tries to shut the door again.

I quickly place my foot in the way and shove it open.

Vittoria staggers backward, her features tightening with alarm. “Oh, God. I don’t know what Giorgio did. I had nothing to do with it,” she rambles. “He’s not here.”

I grab hold of her shoulder, and as my eyes scan over her body, I see bruises on her arms and legs.

Damiano also notices the bruises and says, “Those are old, Angelo.”

Vittoria limps backward to get away from us as we all enter her house, and it has me barking, “Why the fuck are you limping?”

“I stepped on broken glass,” she whimpers, her eyes filled with terror and shining with tears.

Not thinking and just reacting, I stalk to her, and picking her up bridal style, I carry her to the kitchen table that’s visible from the foyer.

Her eyes are wide on me, and she makes a distressed, squeaking sound. I feel how badly she’s trembling, and when I set her down on the table, she grabs hold of my biceps to keep her balance.

I’m leaning half over her, and bracing my hands on either side of her hips, my eyes lock with hers. My voice is filled with fire and brimstone as I ask, “What happened when Vito and his men visited you earlier tonight?”

Tears spiral down her cheeks, and her chin quivers. The sight has me staring at her like a dumbfounded idiot because never in my life have I seen anything more adorable than the face before me.

Fuck. She’s way too fucking cute when she cries.

Something shifts in my chest, and not thinking, I push her legs open so I can move closer, and wrapping my arms around her, I press her head to my chest.

I’ve never comforted anyone in my life, and it feels foreign.

Renzo clears his throat, then mutters, “We’ll wait in the living room.”

I hear my friends move to the other room to give us some privacy.

Vittoria pushes against me, and reluctantly, I take a step back. With her fingertips, she quickly wipes the tears from her face.

Her voice is strained as she answers my question, “Vito just threw me around. I fell against the liquor cabinet, and that’s when the glass panel broke, and I cut my foot. Besides that, they just trashed the living room, then left.”

It could’ve been so much worse.

“Which foot?” I demand.

“My right one,” she whispers, her eyes searching my face as if she’s trying to figure out the mysteries of life.

I take another step back before crouching, and taking hold of her right ankle, I inspect the bandaid beneath her heel.

Satisfied that it’s an injury she can easily recover from, I straighten to my full height. My eyes flit over every inch of her, and lifting a hand to her bicep, I brush a finger over one of the many bruises. “Who did this to you?”

I already have my suspicions, but I want to hear it from her.

She shakes her head. “I’m clumsy.”

My eyes narrow on her. “I kill people for lying to me.”

The moment the words leave my mouth, I regret them.

She wraps her arms around herself and glances between me and the entrance to the foyer. “Why are you all here?”

“Damiano told me he sent men over to beat up Giorgio.”

“Giorgio’s not here.”

I let out a deep breath. “I know. We’re just here to check on you.”

Her eyes dart to my face, and her features tighten with a fuck-ton of confusion. “W-why?”

I don’t bother lying as I answer, “You’re innocent.”

She scoots off the table and takes a step away from me before glancing in the direction of the foyer again. "Can you all leave, please?"

Nodding, I call out, "Let's go, guys."

When I leave the kitchen, the other four heads of the Cosa Nostra file into the foyer. Vittoria stays as far from us as the small space in the foyer will allow.

I need to get her away from Giorgio and out of this house as soon as possible.

With my eyes locked on her terrified face, I say, "I'll see you soon, *piccola cerviatta*."

At our wedding.

Stepping out of the house, I pull the front door shut behind me and follow my friends to the G-Wagon.

"Don't kill Vito," Damiano says after we've all climbed into the vehicle. "As a favor to me. He was only doing his job."

Letting out a huff, I mutter, "Fine."

When we get back to Damiano's place, and I walk into the mansion, I shout, "Vito!"

Not even a second later, the man comes out of the kitchen.

"You hurt Vittoria," I growl. Seeing his confused expression, I add, "She belongs to me."

The emotion drains from his face, and he doesn't even try to say something in his defense.

In our world, men die for less, so when I pull my gun from behind my back, where it's tucked into the waistband of my pants, Vito nods and folds his hands in front of him.

"You can thank your boss that I'm not killing you." I walk closer and, aiming at his right foot, I pull the trigger.

“Carlo,” Damiano shouts over Vito’s pain-filled cry. “Pour the bourbon.”

“After this bit of action, kicking your ass at poker is going to feel a little anti-climactic,” Dario chuckles as he follows Damiano and Franco to the entertainment room.

Renzo pats my shoulder. “Come on. One of us needs to beat his arrogant ass at poker.”

My eyes lock with Vito’s, and he quickly straightens up before saying, “Thank you, sir. I won’t make the same mistake again.”

Nodding, I walk to the entertainment room, and taking a tumbler from Carlo, I down the amber liquid.

Once Vittoria is married to me, I’m killing Giorgio with my bare hands for touching her, and then I can fucking focus on my work.

Chapter 9

Angelo

Walking into the cathedral, I head down the aisle, barely taking notice of the empty pews.

Father Parisi comes out of the confession booth, and the instant his eyes land on me, he hurries toward me. “Mr. Rizzo. This is unexpected.”

I’m not a man of religion, and the walls of this building rarely see me, so I can understand why he’s surprised that I’m here.

Wanting to get out of the cathedral as quickly as possible, I mutter, “Where can we talk in private?”

“Are you here for confession?”

I let out a chuckle, and shaking my head, I say, “I’m comfortable with the idea of going to hell.”

Big Ricky stifles his laughter behind me with a fake cough.

Father Parisi looks visibly disappointed with my comment. He gestures toward a door. “We can talk in my office.”

I follow the holy man to the back of the cathedral and into his office. It’s so fucking stuffy in here it makes my skin itch.

Glancing at Big Ricky, I order, “Wait outside.”

“Yes, boss.”

I shut the door before turning my attention to the priest.

There’s a cautious look on Father Parisi’s face as he asks, “If it’s not for salvation, why are you here?”

Cutting to the chase, I say, “I’m getting married and need you to perform

the ceremony.”

Surprise flutters over the old man’s face. “Oh.” He blinks at me before letting out a sigh of relief. “That’s such good news. When will the wedding be held?”

He probably thought I wanted to use the Parish for illegal reasons.

“Tomorrow night.”

The quicker I get this over with, the sooner I can give all my attention to my business again.

His eyebrows lift. “That’s earlier than I expected. Will it be held here at the cathedral?”

I shake my head. “The ceremony will take place at my estate. I expect you to be there at seven p.m.”

He moves closer to his table as he asks, “Who’s the bride?”

“Vittoria Romano.”

The priest's eyes fly to my face, and the blood drains from his complexion. “Tori hasn’t said anything to me about marrying you.”

Taking a step closer, I tilt my head. My tone is low, carrying the promise of death, as I say, “That’s because she doesn’t know, and it will stay that way until we’re both saying our vows in front of you.”

A pleading expression tightens his features. “Mr. Rizzo, I can’t perform a forced marriage between you and Tori.”

My patience starts slipping, and I clench my jaw as my eyes sharpen on him. “You will do as I say, or a new priest will sit in this office.” I take another threatening step closer to him. “And you will not tell anyone of this until Vittoria is married to me.”

“She’s a good girl,” he pleads. “Don’t do this to her.”

Done with this conversation, I mutter, “Seven p.m. sharp tomorrow night. Don’t make me add killing a priest to my list of sins.” Wanting to get through

to the man so he'll keep his mouth shut, I close the distance between us and stare him down with all the brutality I'm capable of. "I'll drain you of every drop of blood in your body before nailing you to a fucking cross for your entire Parish to see."

The old man swallows hard on his fear while his body shakes, his head bobbing frantically up and down.

Done with the meeting, I stalk to the door, and pulling it open, I leave the stunned priest in his office and walk out of the cathedral.

I want to get this wedding over and done with so my life can return to normal.

God help whoever gets in the way of me putting my ring on Vittoria's finger.

Tori

For once, Giorgio looks worse than me with his broken arm, crooked nose, and black eyes.

Mr. Falco's men beat the living crap out of him, and my only regret is that I didn't get to see it happen.

Wearing a cream silk gown with long lace sleeves, I frown at Giorgio. "Why am I even going with you?"

This dress must've cost more than all the clothes in my cupboard, but I'm glad it covers my arms and legs so none of the bruises are visible.

"Because we have to present a united family," he mutters impatiently. "This is an important night for me. I'm finally getting the recognition I deserve."

Looking at his beaten-up face, I find that hard to believe.

Giorgio's eyes sweep over me, and looking disgusted, he says, "You could've done something with your fucking hair."

"It takes hours to straighten my hair," I argue. "It's not like you gave me much time to prepare."

Giorgio came home an hour ago, threw the dress and heels at me, and told me to get ready. There was only time to bathe and put on some makeup.

He takes a threatening step toward me, but for some reason, he seems to restrain himself from hitting me.

Instead, he shoves a finger in my face and hisses, "You're fucking testing my last nerve. Shut the fuck up. When we're at Mr. Rizzo's place, you'll just fucking smile and not say a fucking word."

I just stare at him, and usually, it would make him beat the living hell out of me, but I'm at the point where I don't care anymore.

"Fucking bitch," he snaps, and grabbing my arm, he shoves me toward the front door. "Mark my words. When we get home, I'm going to make you wish you were never born."

"You've done that plenty of times before. The threat doesn't scare me," I mutter as I walk out of the house.

The flat of Giorgio's hand slams against the back of my head. "Shut the fuck up!"

After shutting the door and locking it, Giorgio grabs my bicep and drags me to his Dodge.

My foot is still tender from the cut I got Tuesday night, and the heels aren't helping. I'm pushed into the passenger seat, and the door's slammed shut.

I adjust the silky fabric around my legs before tugging the safety belt over my chest and securing it.

Anger rolls off Giorgio in waves as he climbs into the car. He starts the

engine, and pulling away from the curb, he mutters, “Don’t fucking embarrass me tonight. Attending a party at Mr. Rizzo’s mansion is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You should be fucking happy I’m bringing you along.”

I’d rather stay at home.

Glancing out the window, I don’t take in any of the passing scenery.

After everything that’s happened the past two weeks – the repeated beatings, Angelo popping up everywhere, the attack from Damiano, the visit from all five heads of the Cosa Nostra – I’m done.

It is what it is, and nothing I do will change my crappy circumstances.

When Giorgio pulls up to a pair of massive black gates, a guard dressed in black combat gear approaches us.

Of course, Angelo would have an army guarding him. The man has more money than God.

Giorgio quickly rolls down the window, and with a smug voice filled with self-entitlement, he says, “Mr. Romano for Mr. Rizzo.”

Mr. Romano. Give me a break.

I cover my mouth as laughter threatens to burst from me.

The guard glances at me before signaling for the gate to be opened.

When Giorgio steers the car up the long driveway, he lets out a whistle. “Once your inheritance pays out, I’m buying a place like this.”

I take in the impressively manicured gardens. Someone must put a lot of effort into keeping the trees and hedges neatly trimmed.

It’s beautiful.

When my eyes land on the mansion that seems to be bathed in rose-gold light as the sun hangs low in the sky, my lips part because I’ve never seen such a breathtaking house.

Ivy covers the side of one wall where a Lamborghini is parked, and I

notice two statues of cherubs perched on either side of an arch that seems to lead to the front door.

Trust the devil to live in a place that looks like heaven.

We climb out of the Dodge, and I quickly smooth the wrinkles out of the expensive gown.

It's the first time Giorgio bought me something like this, and it makes me worry about his motive. His story about us showing a united front is a load of hogwash.

"Don't embarrass me tonight," Giorgio mutters under his breath as we walk through the arch.

On either side of the cobbled path is water with smooth pebbles framing the ponds. Bright green creepers with tiny leaves snake between the darker stones, giving the space an enchanted feel. I see Koi hiding beneath floating leaves that sprout small purple flowers.

Wow, this place is straight out of a dream.

The front door is three times the size of ours at home and made of black frosted glass. Before we can knock, it swings open, and we're met by Big Ricky.

"This way," he says without bothering to greet us.

I don't hear music or anything related to a party, and a frown starts to form on my forehead.

Something's not right.

We're led past an open-plan living room with a sunken lounge where the furniture consists of black couches and a light-colored wooden coffee table. There's a massive flat-screen TV mounted against the wall.

I tilt my head back to look at the glass ceiling that gives a clear view of a very old tree, the green leaves rustling in a breeze. The stunning view makes a smile curve my lips.

Wow.

We're taken into an open space where stairs go up to the first floor on either side of the room. Lifting my eyes, I see Angelo standing on the upper floor area with his hands resting on a wrought iron railing.

Dressed in a three-piece black tuxedo, the man looks more like a god than the devil he is.

A freaking handsome devil, but a devil nonetheless.

My heart thumps heavily in my chest as if it's getting ready to make a run for it. Every muscle in my body tenses because the wolf's den is the last place I want to be.

"Welcome," Angelo murmurs as he walks to the landing before stealthily taking the stairs down to where we are. The low and deadly timbre of his voice has goosebumps spreading over my arms.

God, I can't believe I'm in Angelo Rizzo's house.

"Mr. Rizzo, I just want to say how honored I am to be here tonight," Giorgio says with respect dripping from the words.

Angelo flat-out ignores Giorgio, and coming to a stop in front of me, his eyes drift from my head to my toes, making a blush creep up my neck.

"You look beautiful, Vittoria."

I clear my throat before whispering, "Thank you."

"Follow me," he orders.

An apprehensive feeling turns my stomach into knots, and as we follow Angelo, I hear Big Ricky right behind us.

Every nerve ending in my body is on guard, and my eyes keep darting around, hardly taking in any of the luxury decorating the mansion.

Something is very wrong.

Chapter 10

Tori

We're taken through a set of glass doors at the back of the mansion, and stepping onto a veranda, my gaze keeps flitting over all the beauty, which I can't help but notice.

The backyard is very big, and the lawn looks freshly cut. There are lounge chairs situated on either side of a rectangular pool, and the water looks as blue as the sky.

Potted flowers add color to the garden, and there are four large ones at every corner of the pool.

I see Father Parisi standing by Tiny, but there are no other guests.

Are we early?

Without saying a word, Angelo continues to walk to the side of the house until he stops beneath the tree I saw when I was in the living room.

Everyone follows him, and when he turns to face me, a shiver creeps down my spine.

I'm not going to lie, I feel super uncomfortable being the only woman here.

Two of Angelo's men come to stand on either side of Giorgio, and a hollowness settles in my stomach.

For a moment, the thought that they're going to kill us flits through my mind. But then Father Parisi gives me an apologetic look, making an eerie sensation coast over my body.

Oh, God. No!

The realization hits as Angelo locks eyes with me, and his order is cold when he says, “We’re getting married, Vittoria.”

Waves of shock slam into me, forcing me to take a step backward.

“What?” Giorgio snaps. “That was not the deal!”

Angelo’s eyes remain on me as he mutters, “We had no deal, Romano. You’ll keep your mouth shut until you’re given permission to speak.”

My lips part on a gasp, and for a long moment, I can only stare at Angelo.

Slowly, the shock of his announcement is joined by intense fear and desperation.

No.

I shake my head, my mouth unable to form words.

Angelo moves closer to me, and it takes all my courage to stand still while every cell in my body screams for me to run.

His intense gaze bores into mine. “In exchange for canceling the three hundred thousand dollars he owes, Giorgio offered your virginity to me. After I’ve had my fill of you, he intended to pawn you off to a man who doesn’t mind spoiled goods.”

My eyes drift closed, and even though I shouldn’t be surprised or hurt, the betrayal still stings and my heart squeezes painfully.

It’s the most vile thing Giorgio’s ever done to me.

I feel Angelo’s hand on my chin right before he demands, “Open your eyes.”

They pop open, and seeing how close he’s standing to me, my mouth grows bone dry.

His amber irises burn like the sun on me. “With me, you will enjoy a life of luxury. You’ll be safe.”

His words mean nothing to me, because the men of the Cosa Nostra only know how to be violent and selfish.

I pull my chin free from his hold and lower my head. I can't look at anyone right now.

I'm well aware of how the Cosa Nostra works, and I know there's no way of escaping this wedding.

"I just need a moment to process the shock," I whisper.

"I'll give you a minute," he says before turning his attention to Father Parisi, "Father, you can take your place. The ceremony will start soon."

Pressing my palm against my stomach, I suck in deep breaths.

There's nowhere to run and no escaping the impending wedding. What the capos of the Cosa Nostra want, they get.

I let out a quivering breath, and lifting my head, I see Angelo standing by Father Parisi.

They're waiting for me.

Never in a million years did I think I'd marry into one of the five families.

My mind races to process what's happening, and the same thoughts keep popping up.

I don't have a choice. This wedding will happen, and I'll become Angelo Rizzo's wife. I'll cook his meals. I'll share a bed with him. I'll bear his children.

Holy crap!

My breaths speed up as one realization after the other hits.

But one thought stands out above all the others – I'm marrying Angelo Rizzo. Right now. Right here.

Mother of God!

"Take your place beside me, Vittoria," Angelo orders.

Slowly, my feet move, and a cloak of darkness wraps around me, covering me in despair.

When I stop next to Angelo, my body is nothing but a trembling mess.

My heart is hammering against my ribs, and my breaths are shallow and fearful.

I lift my eyes to Angelo's face as he nods at Father Parisi to begin.

While Father Parisi reads a passage from the scripture, I look at the man I'm marrying as if I'm seeing him for the first time.

He's so much bigger than me and a hell of a lot stronger than Giorgio. Angelo will probably be able to kill me with a single punch.

I swallow hard, and as tears threaten to fall, I fist my hands at my sides.

Don't cry. Save your tears for the long years ahead.

I take in Angelo's amber eyes, black-as-ink hair, and powerful body.

He reaches for my hand, and his touch is gentle as his fingers wrap around mine. Feeling how I'm trembling, he gives me a comforting squeeze.

The tender gesture confuses me, and no matter how hard I try to fight it, a seedling of hope is planted in my heart.

Angelo once told me he doesn't find pleasure in hitting women. Maybe he won't hurt me. At least not physically.

My attention returns to the ceremony when Father Parisi says, "Angelo and Vittoria, have you come here to enter into marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?"

Angelo's eyes remain locked on me with the intensity of an inferno as he answers, "I have."

Silence follows Angelo's reply, and when I take too long to speak, Father Parisi clears his throat to get my attention.

My lips part, and as the last of the sun disappears over the horizon, I whisper, "I have."

Garden lights illuminate the yard, and if I weren't being forced to marry a capo of the Cosa Nostra, I'd take a moment to admire how magical everything looks.

“Since it is your intention to enter into the covenant of Holy Matrimony, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and His church.”

Angelo gives my right hand, which he’s already holding, a firm squeeze before he says, “I, Angelo Rizzo, take you, Vittoria Romano, for my lawful wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part. I will love and honor you all the days of my life.”

Love? Honor? Those words have no place in the Cosa Nostra.

“Vittoria, it’s your turn,” Father Parisi whispers.

My eyes dart between my priest and Angelo. “What do I say?”

Father Parisi gives me a compassionate look. “Repeat after me.”

I take a deep breath, and my heartbeat slows down until it feels like a whisper in my chest as I repeat the words Father Parisi murmurs to me. “I, Vittoria Romano, take you, Angelo Rizzo, for my lawful husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health...” I pause to take another breath, and my voice is softer when I continue, “...until death do us part.”

My chin begins to quiver, and unable to lie by saying I’ll love this man, I whisper, “I’ll honor you all the days of my life.”

It’s the only promise I can make right now.

There’s a moment’s silence before Father Parisi says, “What God joins together, let no one put asunder.”

There’s no running away.

There’s no place to hide.

The dangerous man in front of me is my future.

My dreams of living in a small town with a loving husband go up in smoke.

“Exchange wedding rings,” Father Parisi instructs.

Before I can think to worry about Angelo's ring, he removes a small crimson velvet box from his pocket, and opening it, he pulls two wedding bands from the pillow. He hands me the thicker ring that has the letters A & V engraved on it.

A for Angelo and V for Vittoria.

I'm confused by the romantic gesture.

When Angelo pushes the thinner band onto my ring finger, he says, "Vittoria, receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Fidelity. Yeah, I'll believe it when I see it. Men in the Cosa Nostra don't know the meaning of monogamy.

I push the ring onto Angelo's finger, repeating what he just said, but once again, I leave out the word 'love.'

Father Parisi clears his throat before announcing, "In the sight of God and these witnesses, I now pronounce you husband and wife."

Angelo leans down to kiss me, but at the last second, I turn my face, and his lips brush over my cheek.

I keep my eyes lowered, wishing I could find a quiet corner where I can process what's happened in the past hour.

I married Angelo Rizzo.

Chapter 11

Tori

After Angelo tells everyone to leave, even Tiny and Big Ricky, I find myself alone in the living room with my new husband.

God, this is not what I meant when I said I'd do anything if you'd help me out of the impossible situation with Giorgio.

Angelo removes his tuxedo jacket and drapes it over the back of a couch. "Sit down, Vittoria."

I walk to the other side of the coffee table, so it's between us, and cautiously take a seat on one of the black couches.

The tree's branches throw ominous shadows through the glass ceiling, and it makes a shiver creep up my spine.

What do I do? How do I even begin to process this nightmare?

Panic keeps flaring hot in my chest, and with every passing second, my dread grows.

Angelo doesn't join me immediately, but instead, he walks to a side table where a bottle of whiskey stands. He pours the brown liquid into two tumblers, and picking them up, he brings a glass to me.

"Drink every drop. It will help settle your emotions."

Like he cares about how I feel.

I down the alcohol to appease him, and it burns a path down my throat, making me cough while my eyes tear up.

Angelo takes a seat across from me, the coffee table between us. For a moment, he enjoys the whiskey before he rests the tumbler on his knee.

He looks at me, and I feel the punch of his intense gaze in the pit of my stomach.

“We need to discuss a few things.”

Yeah, we do.

He pulls the bowtie free from around his neck and tosses the black fabric onto the coffee table. Letting out a sigh, he relaxes back against the couch, and it's the most casual I've ever seen him.

“You'll be loyal to me.”

I nod because that's a given.

“And I'll be loyal to you.” My eyebrow lifts, and it has him asking, “Have you lost your ability to speak?”

“No.” Maybe it's because of the nightmarish rollercoaster ride I've been on the past two weeks, but I can't keep myself from snapping, “I wasn't aware what I said mattered. Up until this point, I haven't had any choices where my life is concerned.”

To my utter surprise, the corner of Angelo's mouth lifts into a smirk. “You've always had a choice, Vittoria. Even tonight.”

A huff escapes me, and I shake my head. “Right. Either I marry you, or I die. Great choice.”

“That wasn't the choice I offered you.” He leans forward and places the tumbler of whiskey on the coffee table before resting his elbows on his thighs. “You had a choice between marrying me or giving your virginity to me before being forced to marry another man.”

There's a stab of heartache from how low Giorgio was willing to sink for money.

Angelo's features tighten with an emotion I can't place, then he says, “By marrying you, I kept you from suffering a worse fate.”

My shoulders slump, and I put the empty tumbler down on the table

before covering my face with my hands.

If Giorgio had gotten his way...

I shake my head to rid myself of the dark thoughts.

Angelo is right, but I can't bring myself to thank him, because it doesn't feel like I have anything to be grateful for.

Lowering my hands, I meet his eyes again.

He stares at me for a few seconds, then says, "We *will* have a normal marriage."

Sex...

My mind comes to a screeching halt, and I wrap my arm around my stomach as my lips part in a gasp. My voice is hoarse when I whisper, "We have to consummate the marriage."

Angelo's eyes narrow on me for a moment, but then the impossible happens, and his features soften with something akin to empathy.

He shakes his head once, then murmurs, "I'm not going to force you to have sex with me."

It doesn't matter. We've said our vows. I'm bound to this man until death do us part. It's my duty as his wife to share his bed.

I turn my head and stare at the black screen of the TV as I say, "We have to consummate our marriage. It's the right thing to do."

"Look at me," he orders.

My eyes snap back to him.

He shakes his head at me. "The last thing I want is a traumatized wife who feels I violated her. I'm too busy to deal with that kind of shit."

Even though his words are cold, they offer me a sense of comfort.

I do have a choice.

I stare at Angelo...my husband, and whisper, "Thank you."

A frown forms on his forehead. "For what?"

“Not forcing yourself on me.”

He slumps back against the couch, and when he rolls his shoulders, I hear a crack.

Whether I like it or not, we’re married. Honestly, if I had to choose between being married before losing my virginity or being forced to sleep with Angelo and then marrying another...there is no choice.

My tongue darts out to wet my lips before I say, “I’ve made a vow, and I intend to keep it. I’ll be your wife in every sense of the word.” When he just stares at me, I add, “But I have one request.”

“What?”

“No kissing me on the mouth.”

A frown line appears between his eyes as he mutters, “Why?”

“It’s the one thing I’d like to keep until I’ve developed feelings for you.”

He thinks about my request, then nods. “I’ll respect your no-kissing rule.”

“Thank you.”

When silence falls between us, I start to feel nervous and fidget with the silky fabric of my expensive gown.

Tilting my head, my eyes flit to Angelo, who’s still staring at me. “Did you buy this dress for me?”

He just nods.

While we’re on the subject of clothes...

“I assume I have to move my belongings to your house?”

He shakes his head. “My men already brought your clothes over. Everything’s in the main bedroom.”

My eyes widen with surprise as I gasp, “What? When?”

“During the ceremony.” He lets out a tired sign. “The moment you left home, they went in to gather your things.”

Holy crap, this man does not waste time.

I nod, and when silence falls between us again, I glance around the room and whisper, “You have a beautiful home.”

“It’s your mansion as well.” Angelo stands up, and picking up his jacket, he pulls his cell phone out of the breast pocket. “Make yourself at home while I’m out.”

“Out?” I sit up straighter. “On our wedding night?”

He glances at me as he unlocks the device’s screen. “I think you can do with some alone time, and I won’t be out for long.”

Without another word to me, Angelo walks toward the front door while dialing a number.

My eyes lock on the gun tucked into the waistband of his pants behind his back, and I swallow hard on the lump of fear in my throat.

“We’re heading out,” I hear him say before the front door shuts behind him.

I sit frozen for a while before I glance around the living room.

I’m married to Angelo Rizzo.

The thought hits like a ten-pound hammer.

It’s the last thing I expected to happen to me.

Even though I appreciate the conversation we had, the situation feels insane. One minute, I’m single and suffering under Giorgio’s boot, and the next, I’m married to a terrifying man.

Hearing the front door open, my eyes snap to the foyer, and I see Tiny come in.

He gives me a lop-sided grin. “Hey, Mrs. Rizzo. I’ll be your guard.”

Mrs. Rizzo.

Rising to my feet, I let out a disgruntled huff. “You don’t have to worry. I’m not going to run away.”

He shakes his head. “That’s not what I meant. I’m here to protect you.”

“Oh.” I tuck a curl behind my ear, but it refuses to stay put. “Okay.”

He waves a hand in the direction of the stairs. “Don’t mind me. Just go about your business and pretend I’m not here.”

That’s impossible. The man is a mountain and hard to miss.

Giving Tiny a smile, I say, “I’m going upstairs.”

“Okay.”

When he walks toward the couches, I head out of the living room. I glance at the marble statues and artwork before taking the stairs to the first floor. Peeking into a couple of rooms, I finally find the main bedroom.

I don’t see my luggage and head into a massive walk-in closet.

My eyes widen with surprise when I find all my clothes on the left side of the closet.

I glance to the right side and stare at Angelo’s suits. Everything is color-coordinated and aesthetically pleasing.

Letting out a sigh, I wrap my arms around myself and look at my clothes again.

Angelo was right. I need some time alone.

Sinking down to the thick carpet, I close my eyes.

I’m married to Angelo Rizzo.

Until the day I die, I’ll be his wife.

We’ll have children.

Will he be a good husband? Will he learn to love me?

Will I learn to love him?

I bring up his image in my mind’s eye and try to think of him as my husband.

Angelo is very attractive, and he seems to be calm and collected. Maybe things can work between us.

Desperate for some kind of hope, I latch onto the thought.

He said he would be loyal to me, which means I won't have to share him with a group of mistresses. Right?

My eyes pop open, and a frown forms on my forehead.

I better make it clear to him I won't tolerate infidelity.

Taking a deep breath, I let it out slowly before climbing to my feet.

If you want your husband to stay out of other women's beds, you'll have to satisfy him.

But how? I don't know much about sex.

Shaking my head, I shove the thoughts aside before I start panicking. Not sure what the rest of the night will hold, I pull a pale green summer dress from the closet and search for underwear.

I'm going to take a relaxing bath to calm my nerves, then I'll deal with everything as it happens.

When I walk into the big bathroom that's decorated in black and white stone, my stomach spins with nervousness.

It feels weird being alone in Angelo's mansion, but seeing as it will be my home, I push through with my decision to take a bath.

The sooner I get used to my new environment, the easier things will be.

Chapter 12

Angelo

I have one thing to take care of before I start my married life with Vittoria.

Big Ricky stops the car in front of the club, and when I get out, he follows me inside.

The place is buzzing with life, and music beats in the air as I head to the back.

I shove the office door open and find Giorgio on his knees in the middle of the room while Eddie sits on a chair by my desk with his gun in his hand.

“Mr. Rizzo,” he says with urgency, tightening his words. “I don’t have a problem with you marrying my sister.”

“Stepsister,” I correct him as I unbutton the cuffs of my dress shirt. I roll the sleeves up, then say, “This is about you beating Vittoria.”

“What?” he gasps. “I don’t know what she told you, but she lied. I have never—”

I lunge forward, and my fist connects so hard with his jaw that spittle flies into the air.

Continuing to roll up my sleeves, I say, “I fucking memorized the vows for Vittoria because I know how important the church is to her.” My eyes flick to the bastard. “So I’m definitely not going to let some fucker insult her.” I glare at the piece of shit that’s my brother-in-law. “You will not disrespect Vittoria.”

Giorgio looks pathetic, his fear of me etched all over his face. “Yes, sir,” he mumbles as blood trickles down his chin.

I'm not lying. It took me half an hour to memorize the shit I needed to say at the ceremony because I knew Vittoria would take our vows seriously.

I might not love her yet, but I want to do right by her from the start. I refuse to be a piece of shit like my father.

I tip my head at Eddie, and he gets up from the chair. Grabbing hold of Giorgio, he drags the fucker to the back of the room, where the cordless reciprocating saw is waiting.

Eddie forces Giorgio face down on the floor before stepping on his broken arm to keep it in place.

I roll my shoulders as I join them, and picking up the saw, I switch it on.

When the saw hums, Giorgio starts begging, "No, please! I won't ever touch her again. Please, Mr. Rizzo! Please."

Crouching in front of him, I say, "You can be glad I'm not killing you tonight."

I want to play with my prey before I end his pathetic life.

Without an ounce of mercy, I cut through the cast around his arm, and it has Giorgio pleading with God to save him.

I stop the second I slice into his skin and let out a chuckle. "If you piss on my floor, I'm cutting off your dick as well."

"God, please, Mr. Rizzo! I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry!"

"Not sorry enough," I growl before I bring the blade down on his arm.

Giorgio's screams of agony fill the air, and recalling the bruises on Vittoria's arms and legs, I cut through the bone and sever his forearm in two.

Standing up, I switch off the saw and toss it to the side. I lock eyes with Eddie and order, "Throw the shit in the trash and drop the fucker off at the nearest hospital."

As I walk to the door so I can get back to my new wife, I say, "Giorgio, you better be back at work a week from now."

Through his hysterical cries, he manages to mumble, “Y-y-yes, s-sir.”

I leave the office with Big Ricky right behind me and head straight out of the club and to the car.

Once I’m comfortable in the back seat, I stare out the window and think about the woman waiting at home for me.

We’re definitely consummating our marriage tonight, but I need to remember she’s an untouched virgin. I have to take her fears and feelings into consideration.

I don’t want to traumatize Vittoria, so I’ll have to put her at ease, which is something I’m not used to doing.

So no losing control and fucking her until she can’t walk.

The corner of my mouth lifts because I finally have Vittoria, and her body is mine to enjoy.

Only mine.

When Big Ricky parks the car at the front of the mansion, I get out and head inside to find Tiny in the living room, where he’s watching baseball reruns.

“Where is she?”

He points in the direction of the stairs. “The main bedroom.”

“You can go,” I order as I head to my bedroom.

Tiny and Big Ricky live in the apartment above the garage, so they’re always on standby.

Where Tiny can kill a man with a single blow, Big Ricky never misses a shot. They’ve been with me from the start, and they’ll probably be with me at the end.

When I walk into the bedroom, I see Vittoria standing in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows.

She doesn’t hear me approach, and when I come up behind her, my

reflection shows in the window.

“God!” She startles and places a hand over her heart while swinging around to face me.

My gaze drifts over the green dress, then I say, “You changed out of the gown.”

A nervous expression tightens her features as she begins to ramble, “I took a bath. I hope you don’t mind. I thought it would help me calm down, and I wanted to shave for tonight so I’m not all hairy.” The pitch of her voice climbs with every word spilling from her mouth. “But none of it helped, and I’m going to have a nervous breakdown because I don’t know what to expect or do and...and...and.”

Gripping her shoulder, I pull her against my chest and wrap my arms around her. “Shh. It’s going to be okay,” I say in an attempt to ease her anxiety.

Her body trembles in my hold while I try to think of something else to say. Coming up empty, I just rub my hand up and down her back.

I press a kiss on her wild hair while I place my other hand behind her head, then I repeat, “It’s going to be okay.”

She rests her cheek against my chest, and letting out a deep breath, she asks, “Are you going to have mistresses?”

“No.”

Her voice sounds vulnerable as she admits, “I have no experience, so I don’t know what to do.”

“Just follow my lead, and you’ll be fine.”

Silence falls between us, and seeing as she doesn’t pull away, I continue to rub my hand up and down her back.

After a while, she asks, “Why me?”

I lower my mouth to her curls and take a deep breath of her soft floral

scent. “You have something I want.”

Vittoria moves her head to glance up at me, putting our faces inches apart. Feeling her breath on my mouth makes the urge to kiss her strike hard.

“What do I have?” she asks.

My eyes capture hers, and I get lost in her brown irises brimming with vulnerability. “Your innocence.”

She lowers her gaze to my chest. “You could’ve just taken it.”

Even though she’s not looking at me, I shake my head. “I like knowing my wife has never been touched by another man.”

She tugs her bottom lip between her teeth, then glances up at me again. Lifting my hand to her mouth, I free her lip before brushing the pad of my thumb over the indent her teeth left.

No kissing.

Fuck.

It’s the only thing she’s asked of me, and I intend to respect her request.

Taking a step back from her, my eyes drift over her bare arms where new bruises have joined the old ones.

Anger explodes in my chest, and for a moment, I play with the idea of taking Giorgio’s other arm.

I lift a hand to her bicep and brush my fingers over the purple and brown marks. “I dealt with Giorgio tonight, and he’ll never touch you again.” When her eyes widen and her lips part, I say, “Don’t bother covering for him. I allowed you to lie to me once when you said you’re clumsy. I won’t tolerate it a second time.”

When my eyes lock with hers, she nods before asking, “Did you kill him?”

I shake my head. “Not yet.”

Not wanting to get into the gruesome facts, I turn around and start to

unbutton my vest. “I’m going to shower. Change out of the dress into your pajamas.”

I remove my weapon from behind my back and place it in the bedside drawer where I can easily get to it during the night.

Because she’s a God-fearing woman, I know Vittoria won’t try to kill me.
“Ah...”

I glance at her and lift an eyebrow. “You’re sleeping in the same bed as me. It’s not negotiable.”

“It’s not that.” She wraps her arms around her middle. “I don’t have anything suitable to wear for a wedding night.”

The corner of my mouth lifts, and going into the walk-in closet, I pull one of my T-shirts from a hanger and take it to her. “Wear this.”

Her eyebrows draw together as she takes it from me. “Your shirt?”

“Yes. I want you to sleep in my shirts,” I spell it out for her.

“Oh...okay.”

“Only the shirt, Vittoria. Don’t wear anything else,” I order before grabbing a pair of sweatpants and walking into the bathroom so I can shower and get back to my innocent little deer.

Chapter 13

Tori

I move as quickly as possible to change out of the dress and into Angelo's T-shirt.

I can smell his woodsy scent on the fabric, and it makes butterflies erupt in my stomach.

Not being allowed to wear any underwear makes me feel even more nervous.

So far, Angelo has been understanding, and I try to focus on that instead of the dangerous man everyone knows him to be.

Men like him are used to taking what they want and not caring about other people's feelings, but at least he's trying. I'm very grateful for that.

He's even hugged me, and I have to admit it helped calm my nerves a little.

But my anxiety is spiking again because as soon as he comes out of the bathroom, we'll probably have sex.

Holy crap.

I press my hand over my stomach, that's in knots, and glance at the bed covered in pristine white sheets.

How does he keep it so clean?

God, Tori. You're about to lose your virginity, and you're thinking about sheets.

Tonight, I'll be naked in front of a man. For the first time.

My heartbeat speeds up for the millionth time today, and a tremble ripples

through me.

I swing around to turn my back to the bed, and my eyes lock on Angelo, who's leaning with his shoulder against the doorjamb, his gaze burning on me.

Holy mother of God.

He's only wearing black sweatpants.

I'm stunned speechless, as I stare at his bare chest, covered in tattoos. There's an angel reaching a hand up to the devil while they're surrounded by a spray of bullets inked on his skin.

The sight makes a shiver crawl up my spine.

Angelo pushes away from the doorjamb, and as he slowly moves toward me, his steps seem predatory, as if he's hunting me.

Instantly, my breaths speed up until they come in shallow puffs over my lips.

His muscles ripple beneath his golden skin, and the veins snaking down his arms make my stomach clench with a sensation I've never felt before.

Angelo stops an inch from me, and I smell the fresh scent of his shower gel. A drop of water falls from his damp hair, and it trickles down his chest, only to disappear into the waistband of his low-hanging sweatpants.

I become overly aware of the dominance filling his dark aura and swallow hard as I lift my eyes to his face. The golden flecks in his amber irises burn like flames, and I feel the heat on my skin.

When he lifts a hand to my face, I accidentally flinch, and it has his eyes narrowing on me.

"I'm sorry," I whisper before my tongue darts out to wet my dry lips.

His palm settles against my cheek, and he leans down until I feel his clean-shaven jaw brush against mine.

"Take a deep breath, *piccola ceviatta*. I don't want you passing out on

me,” he orders, his voice sounding like a rumble of thunder.

I do as I’m told, but with my anxiety threatening to spiral out of control, it’s not helping much.

When Angelo pulls back an inch, my eyes dart to his, and I blurt out, “Will it hurt?”

His thumb brushes over my bottom lip before he says, “I don’t know. It’s different for everyone.” His gaze lowers to my mouth as the pad of his thumb tugs at my lip again. “I’ll make you as comfortable as possible before taking your virginity.”

Yeah, I don’t think that’s a possibility.

His eyes grow darker as he says, “About your no-kissing rule. Does that only count for your mouth?”

When I nod, he whispers, “Thank fuck.”

He lowers his head again, and when I feel his lips brush over my jaw, goosebumps erupt on my skin.

I don’t even realize what I’m doing as I grip hold of his biceps, but when the heat of his skin warms my palms, tingles spread through my insides.

Angelo lets out a growl, but it doesn’t sound dangerous. Instead, he seems satisfied that I’m touching him.

Suddenly, his mouth latches onto my racing pulse, and his teeth sink into my skin.

When I feel his tongue brush against my throat, a gasp escapes me, and my eyes fall shut.

Oh, God. That feels...intense.

He leans more into me, and I feel his hands on the outside of my thighs before they bush upward to my hips and slip beneath the shirt.

As the fabric moves up my body, he pulls back and orders, “Lift your arms.”

My chest rises and falls with desperate breaths, and slowly, I raise my arms above my head.

The air kisses my heated skin as he tugs the shirt off, and standing naked before him, I quickly try to cross my arms over my chest.

Angelo takes hold of my wrists and pushes them to my sides, so I'm fully exposed to him.

"Don't cover yourself." The command is another rumble of thunder as he takes a step back before letting his eyes burn over every inch of me.

I begin to tremble uncontrollably, and when I see a flash of anger in his gaze, my self-worth sinks to rock bottom because it feels like he's not happy with my body.

His fingers brush over the ugly brown bruise on my hip, then his voice strikes like a bolt of lightning. "I should've taken the fucker's other arm as well."

My eyes widen, and for a split second, I wonder what he means by the threat, but then I realize he's not angry because he thinks I'm inadequate. He's upset because of the bruise.

Only then does his gaze move to my breasts, and I watch as the anger drains away from his features. In its place, desire ignites in his irises.

His hand brushes up my side, and when his palm covers my breast, I suck in a quivering breath.

Angelo's eyes snap to my face, and he searches my expression before saying, "You're beautiful, Vittoria." He closes the small distance between us again, and when his mouth brushes against my earlobe, he whispers, "You're an exquisite work of art."

My self-worth soars sky-high from his praise, and it makes me feel special.

This man can have any woman, and he's probably been with dozens –

and even though my body is marred with bruises, he thinks I'm beautiful.

As if he can read my mind, his fingers brush over another bruise by my ribs, then he says, "No one will ever leave a mark on your skin again." His gaze locks on mine. "Unless..."

My heart leaps to my throat. "Unless?"

"I leave bite marks on you." The corner of his mouth lifts in a predatory smirk. "But I promise it will be because of pleasure and not pain."

Holy crap.

Angelo is so intense the entire world has faded from my mind. My attention is one hundred percent focused on him.

He moves forward, and his stomach presses against my breasts. I'm eye level with his chest, and feeling his skin touching mine makes my abdomen tighten.

Using his body, he pushes me backward until my calves touch the bed.

He gestures with a nod of his head for me to climb onto the mattress, and as I carry out the silent order, my nerves turn my stomach into a spinning mess.

When I lay my head down on one of the pillows, Angelo doesn't remove his sweatpants but instead places a knee on the bed. He takes hold of my legs and pushes them open.

Intense heat spreads up my neck and face, and I struggle not to slam my legs shut again.

Thankfully, he's looking at my face and not down south.

Bracing a hand beside my shoulder, he leans over me, and I feel impossibly small compared to his much bigger size.

He lowers his head and brushes his mouth along the curve of my jaw. "Try to relax, Vittoria."

Yep. Not gonna happen.

Chapter 14

Tori

Angelo lies down on top of me, and his weight pushes me deeper into the mattress. A groan rumbles from him as his breath coasts down my throat before he presses a kiss to my shoulder.

“Fuck, your innocence is intoxicating,” he murmurs, then his teeth scrape over my skin as his mouth moves down to my breast. “I want to devour you.”

A sense of fear ghosts through me, and I swallow hard on the nervous ball in my throat.

His right hand skims down my side before it slips between my legs. I squeeze my eyes shut, and my face goes up in flames.

Being touched for the first time, I’m unable to focus on how it feels. My emotions are too chaotic.

As he parts my folds and the pad of his thumb rubs my clit, he murmurs, “Open your eyes.”

When I do as I’m told, I find all his attention is focused on my face.

His thumb strokes the tiny bundle of nerves between my legs, causing anticipation to build in my abdomen.

A wolfish smirk tugs at his mouth, then he moves down my body until his broad shoulders force my thighs to open as wide as possible.

His warm breath ghosts over my sensitive flesh, and I’m so freaking thankful I took another bath.

My thoughts come to a sudden standstill when Angelo’s tongue licks through my folds. A squeak escapes me, and self-conscious as hell, I cover

my eyes with my left hand.

He lets out a dark chuckle right before his mouth latches onto my clit with a ferocity that makes my back arch off the mattress.

“God,” I cry, my right hand flying down to grab hold of his hair.

Where I was painfully embarrassed a second ago, I’m now unable to remember my freaking name as *Angelo devours* me.

He does not hold back one bit. There’s no gentleness and only a ton of lust and desperation – as if he’s starved all his life and he finally has a meal in front of him.

My fingers tighten in his hair, and for a moment, I’m not sure whether I should attempt to push him away or force him closer.

Tendrils of pleasure unfurl between my legs, drawing a moan from me.

All my worries take a backseat to what Angelo is doing to me.

The fear I feel for him subsides, and desire takes its place.

My muscles tense as his teeth tug at my clit while his thumb massages my opening. He’s doing things to my body I would never have thought of before him.

When he sucks hard, my head tilts back, and my hips lift off the bed. The pleasure grows and grows, and before I know what’s happening, ecstasy seizes control of my body.

My eyebrows draw together, a whimper escaping me.

Angelo’s palm presses against my clit while he peppers my abdomen with kisses, working his way up until his face hovers above mine.

I can’t keep my hips from swiveling and rub myself against his palm as overwhelming pleasure consumes me.

With his eyes burning on me with uncontrollable hunger, he growls, “Christ, you’re too fucking beautiful when you come on my hand.”

I’m still consumed by ecstasy as he moves back to settle into a kneeling

position between my quivering thighs. His finger circles my opening before pushing an inch inside me. He doesn't go any further but repeats the action of circling my opening, slowly stretching me.

His free hand swallows my breast, and he begins to squeeze and knead my skin before rolling my nipple between his fingers.

Breathless, I'm inundated with all the new sensations I'm experiencing. There's so much pleasure it's left me a trembling mess, but still, a need for something more builds inside me.

"I assume you're not on birth control."

My voice is raspy as I whisper, "No."

"We'll have to take care of that because I don't want you getting pregnant yet."

My eyebrows draw together as I gasp, "Why?"

I would've thought he'd want an heir as soon as possible.

"Besides the fact that we need to get to know each other," Angelo pulls away from me, and climbing off the bed, he shoves his sweatpants down his muscular thighs, "I want to enjoy your body for a while before we have children."

My eyes lock on his manhood, and I blink like an idiot. I've never seen a man naked before, and I know nothing about size and girth, *but damn...*

There's no way he's going to fit inside me.

While I'm processing the shock of his size and blatantly staring at his body, that looks like a powerful weapon, he grabs a condom from the bedside table.

Using his teeth, he rips the packet open before rolling the protection onto his hard length.

I expect him to lie on top of me again, but instead, he grips my hips, and I'm unceremoniously flipped onto my stomach.

A breath bursts from me, and the next moment Angelo's teeth sink into my butt cheek. A weird sound escapes me, but then he peppers my back with kisses. His lips knead, his tongue lashes, and his teeth tug at my skin until my body feels like it's humming with pleasure.

Angelo touches every inch of me before I'm flipped onto my back again. His features are drawn tight with a possessive expression as he rubs his hands up and down my front and sides. His palms move to my arms, then to my hips before coasting down my legs.

Again, my thighs are pushed open, and as he lies down on top of me, his mouth latches onto my throat. His kisses become demanding while he pushes his manhood through my folds.

I grip hold of his shoulders, my breaths nothing but quick puffs over my lips.

I didn't expect this brutal and unforgiving man to show me so much affection and desire. Honestly, I thought he'd climb on top of me, do the deed, then ignore my existence.

While his mouth lavishes my neck and shoulders with wild kisses, his hardness continues to rub against my clit, and soon my abdomen starts to tighten.

"Angelo," I whisper, my voice filled with awe because of the pleasure he's making me feel.

His head snaps up, and his eyes lock on me with a burning passion. "Say my name like that again, and I will fuck you raw."

What?

I misunderstand, and when fear tightens my features, he quickly frames my face and leans so close I can feel his breath on my lips.

"No kissing!" I shriek just in time.

Angelo presses his forehead to mine, and closing his eyes, he sucks in

deep breaths of air.

His voice is hoarse as he admits, “It’s difficult.”

“What?”

“Not losing control.”

It’s only then I realize how considerate he is. Angelo is doing so much for me, and I’m stuck in my head.

Wanting to show him how grateful I am that he’s making this experience as pleasurable as possible for me, I lift my head and press a kiss to his cheek.

I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss the side of his neck before saying, “Thank you for giving me so much attention.” Then I suck in a breath for courage and add, “Take my virginity, Angelo. I’m ready.”

Chapter 15

Angelo

Vittoria kissing my cheek makes something shift in my chest, but the one to my neck has my control dangerously slipping.

“Thank you for giving me so much attention.” I hear her take a deep breath. “Take my virginity, Angelo. I’m ready.”

I used every ounce of strength I possessed to take things slow with her, but her permission shoves me over the edge.

I push my left hand beneath her head, and as my fingers wrap around the back of her neck, my right hand shoots down between us.

My mind is clouded with desire as I position my cock at her soaked entrance, and with untamed need, I enter her with a brutal thrust.

Her pussy wraps fucking tight around me before I’m forcefully stopped by her narrow walls.

I’m only a quarter of the way in, and unable to think clearly because of the intense pleasure, I pull back before forcing my cock to the hilt inside her.

A satisfied groan is ripped from my chest, and my body shudders from how good she feels.

Christ, nothing has ever felt this good.

Vittoria’s body curves into mine, and she lets out a painful cry.

The sound instantly clears my mind, and when I hear her whimper against my neck, I quickly wrap my right arm around her shoulders.

“Fuck, *mia piccola cerviatta*. Are you okay?”

Her breaths keep hitching, and when I hear a soft sob, I pepper kisses

against her curls. "I'm so fucking sorry."

Needing her to adjust to my cock, I don't move and just keep kissing her hair and temple until she seems to feel better.

Her breaths warm my neck, then she whispers, "It's okay. You can continue."

Gripping a fistful of her curls, I tug her face away from my neck so I can see her eyes.

Big mistake.

HUGE.

Her red-rimmed eyes and the tears on her cheeks take a sledgehammer to the high walls around my heart and smash right through them.

Her fingers caress the hair at my nape, and her mouth curves up into a shy smile. "Are you okay?"

No.

No, I'm not.

I've forced Vittoria to marry me, and I'm taking her virginity, but instead of hating me, she's asking me if I'm okay.

With my walls down, she walks into my black heart and makes herself right at home, and for the first time in my life, I feel a flicker of love.

I've taken her innocence, and instead of destroying it with my brutal nature, it's shining a glimmer of light in the vast darkness of my soul.

The urge to kiss her draws a groan from me, but I have to settle for the feel of her breath on my lips as I slowly pull out of her.

The pleasure is already intense, making my cock feel sensitive.

My eyes keep hers imprisoned as I sink back inside her, and I see the flinch of pain on her face. I keep my pace slow until she no longer shows signs of discomfort.

As I thrust into her again, her lips part and a moan escapes.

I tighten my hold on her hair, and moving my right hand down to her side, I tilt my head and lick the salt of her dried tears from her cheek.

Pulling out, I slam into her to check her reaction. When she gasps, and her arms tighten around my neck, the corner of my mouth lifts in a satisfied smirk.

She's ready.

I push myself up, and kneeling between her thighs, I grip hold of her hips and tug her ass up until her knees brush against my sides.

With a brutal hold on her hips, I plunge inside her tight warmth. Yanking her against me, I start to hammer into her.

Vittoria grabs hold of the covers, and when I look down at her pussy taking every inch of my cock, I see the evidence of her virginity.

The sight of her blood coating the condom twists something in my chest.

Fuck!

Angry with myself, I pull out and rip the fucking rubber off. I let out a growl as I slam back inside her.

This time when I pull out, the crimson tinge of her virginity coats my cock, and it sends a shudder through my body.

Mine.

My hold on her is too rough as I start to fuck her hard, my eyes feasting on the sight of her pussy stretched around my cock, making me feel primal.

The sound of her skin slapping against mine fills the room, and it only makes me move harder and faster.

Sweat coats my body, and my breaths saw over my lips, and when I hear Vittoria whimper and moan, I yank her against me every time I thrust brutally hard inside her.

She starts to sob, and my eyes snap to her face, but instead of tears, I find pleasure tightening her features. Her hands grip the covers tightly as her back

arches off the bed. Her eyes are squeezed shut, and unrecognizable sounds begin to spill over her lips.

I feel her clench around my cock, and only when desperate whimpers come from her, do I press my thumb against her clit.

With the next thrust, I order, "Come for me, baby."

I flick her clit, and she comes apart in front of me. Just like before, her eyebrows pinch together, and it almost looks like she's in pain.

So fucking beautiful.

Her lips part, and as a cry is torn from her, she starts to convulse.

With my eyes drinking in the sight of my woman orgasming, I fuck her so hard that my body loses all strength the instant pleasure erupts through me.

"Fuck!" I growl as I slump down on top of her and bury my face against her neck, my cock jerking inside her as I come.

"Christ, Vittoria," I groan, ecstasy fucking paralyzing me.

I hear her gasp for air as my body keeps jerking against hers, and by the time I've spilled the last drop inside her, my heart is a thundering mess in my chest.

It takes a good minute before my strength returns, and I push my upper body off her. When I glance down at Vittoria, the words just come.

"My wife." I take a much-needed deep breath. "You belong to me."

Her cheeks are flushed, and she's still gasping for air as she stares at me.

Honestly, it looks like she's in shock.

A frown forms on my forehead. "Are you okay?"

She nods, but her eyes start to shine with tears.

"Use your words, Vittoria," I order.

"I-I'm o-overwhelmed." When a sob bursts from her, she reaches for me.

I quickly wrap her up against my chest and press a kiss to her temple.

"It was a m-million times better t-than I t-thought it would be," she

rambles through her tears. “T-thank you.” She presses a kiss against my collarbone, and I listen as the sobs lessen as she regains control over her emotions.

When she glances up at me, her fear for me is dimmed by a look of awe.

Pushing my luck, I turn my cheek to her and order, “Give me a kiss.”

She quickly obeys, and I savor the feel of her lips on my skin.

Letting go of Vittoria, I pull out of her. “Stay right here.”

She nods, still looking stunned by the sexual experience we just shared.

It’s cute.

I chuckle as I walk to the bathroom to get a washcloth, and a smirk tugs at my mouth while I wet the fabric. Walking back to the bed, I rest a knee on the mattress and force Vittoria’s legs open again.

I drink in the sight of the evidence that we consummated our marriage before I gently clean my wife.

She’s so sensitive, her body jerks with every brush of the washcloth over her pussy.

“So fucking perfect,” I murmur, and when I’m done cleaning her, I lean down and press a kiss to her swollen clit.

I walk back to the bathroom and take care of myself before returning to bed, where my wife is still sprawled over the covers with a post-sex glow on her face.

Chapter 16

Tori

Angelo switches off the light before moving me onto my side and lying down behind me. He pushes an arm beneath my pillow, and the other he wraps around me, resting his forearm between my breasts.

His fingers caress my throat, and I feel as he presses a kiss to my hair.

In the darkness, the position feels intimate.

My thoughts are overrun with everything that's happened tonight. My emotions are all over the place, and I can't focus on anything long enough to process it.

Now that the afterglow of sex has faded, my fear and confusion have returned full force. Just because he made me feel pleasure doesn't mean he's suddenly a different person.

Angelo is still one of the bosses of the Cosa Nostra. He's still ruthless and violent.

He's still a stranger.

The sounds in and around the mansion aren't familiar, and I feel totally out of place lying on the expensive sheets.

Even the pillow feels weird beneath my head.

Angelo lets out a sigh, then his voice rumbles behind me. "What are you thinking about?"

"That I have a lot to get used to," I admit.

"Like?"

I try to move into a more comfortable position, but then my butt rubs

against Angelo's manhood, and feeling how hard he is, I quickly keep still.

Crap, he asked me a question. What was it again?

I think for a moment, but unable to remember, I ask, "What were we talking about?"

He lets out a chuckle. "One brush of my cock against your ass, and you lose your train of thought."

My face goes up in flames, and I press it into the pillow.

Angelo pulls me away from my hiding spot and nudges me onto my back. He moves over me, and I have no choice but to open my legs to accommodate him when his weight pushes my body into the mattress.

I'm able to make out his silhouette in the dark as he stares down at me.

"How sore are you?"

My eyebrows fly up, and feeling self-conscious, I whisper, "Down there?"

Bringing his hand to my face, his fingers caress my cheek as he nods.

"Uhm...it's not bad. Just tender."

I've had periods that were way worse.

I'm not going to lie. It feels uncomfortable having such personal conversations with him.

Suddenly, he pushes his body off mine, and climbing out of bed, he grabs his sweatpants from the floor and puts them on.

Without saying a word, he leaves the room.

I sit up in bed and stare at the doorway.

If he's going to wear sweatpants, I'm wearing the shirt.

I quickly get off the bed and pick up the T-shirt before walking to the bathroom. I switch on the light and shut the door behind me.

After pulling on the shirt, I quickly relieve my bladder before going to the sink so I can wash my hands. As water runs over my fingers, I glance at my

reflection in the mirror.

Spotting red blemishes on my throat, the memory of Angelo sucking and biting my skin flits through my mind.

I turn off the faucet and dry my hands before I lift the shirt and look at my abdomen, hips, and thighs.

Holy crap.

I can clearly see the imprints of his hands on my hips from how tight he held me. But the marks feel different from the ones Giorgio left on me because Angelo didn't hurt me.

Well, except for when he took my virginity. It hurt a hell of a lot, but I can't blame him for that.

"Vittoria," I hear him call.

"Coming."

I quickly lower the shirt, and when I open the door, it's to find Angelo right in front of it.

His eyes sweep over me before stopping on the marks he left on my throat, then the corner of his mouth lifts in a proud grin.

His features completely change from deadly to looking hot as hell, and I gawk at him.

Of course, the man doesn't miss a thing, and as quick as the grin came, it vanishes. With a dark frown, he asks, "Why are you looking at me like I've grown two heads?"

I shake my head. "I'm not. You just look different when you smile."

His eyebrows draw together. "Different?"

I'm not telling this man he looks freaking hot when he smiles.

I clear my throat, then explain, "More relatable."

He stares at me for a moment, then takes my hand and drops two tablets in my palm. "It's for the pain. Take them." He gestures to the bottle of water

next to the bed.

There's a trickle of warmth in my heart because he cares enough to make sure I'm not in pain.

Walking to the bedside table, I twist the cap off and swallow the medication. As I set the bottle down again, I glance at Angelo only to find him watching me like a hawk.

Even though I know I won't get much sleep, I climb back into bed.

It's going to take some time getting used to sharing a bed with Angelo Rizzo.

He switches all the lights off before climbing in beside me, and just like earlier, he moves me onto my side and pulls my back against his chest.

He slips his hand beneath the fabric of the shirt, and once again, he rests his forearm between my breasts.

"Sleep, Vittoria," he murmurs while his arm tightens, and I'm given a hug.

I feel more confused than ever about Angelo because I never thought he could be caring and gentle.

I take a deep breath, and closing my eyes, I try to ignore the seedling of hope spouting in my chest.

Maybe...just maybe, he'll be a good husband.

After lying awake for most of the night, and only drifting off in the early morning hours, I startle awake.

Prying my eyes open, I glance around the foreign room, and it takes a moment to remember I'm in Angelo's bedroom.

"God," I groan as I turn onto my back. My body aches in places that shall not be named.

“Don’t give me that fucking excuse!” Angelo’s voice thunders from outside the bedroom door. “Find the bastard and bring him to me. I want every dime he stole from me.”

I shoot up into a sitting position, and fear trembles through me.

The door opens, and one hell of an angry Angelo stalks inside. His expression is dark and ruthless, his eyes filled with a world of danger.

Crap.

I’m too freaking scared to ask what’s wrong as my cautious gaze takes in the expensive suit he’s already dressed in. It looks like he’s been up for hours. I didn’t even notice when he got out of bed.

He stalks toward me and drops a black credit card on the white covers. With rage darkening his tone, he growls, “Don’t call me for permission every time you want to buy something. There’s no limit on the card.”

My head bobs up and down, and I swallow hard on the fear he makes me feel.

When his gaze locks with mine, he asks, “Where’s your cellphone?”

I quickly shake my head. “I don’t have one.”

A frown on his forehead makes him look scarier. “You’re fucking kidding, right?”

I shake my head again. “I haven’t had time to get a new one after my old one broke.”

I feel guilty for the lie.

Giorgio broke my cell phone in a fit of rage, and I don’t have money for a new one.

Angelo mutters something beneath his breath before saying, “Tiny will take you to get a phone. Send me the number the moment you have it.”

“Okay.” I swallow hard before whispering, “Thank you.”

Looking at the ruthless mafia boss, I can’t believe he’s the same man who

took my virginity last night.

The seedling of hope I had wilts before turning to ashes in my heart.

I know it's only a matter of time before I see the real monster. He'll probably hurt me much worse than Giorgio used to.

Or maybe he won't.

Angelo stares at me momentarily before he turns around and leaves the bedroom.

I let out a slow breath and only then realize how tense I am from the fear.

Father, I have no idea how I will survive being married to Angelo Rizzo. What were you thinking letting this happen?

I lean forward and pick up the card so I can place it on the bedside table. Once again, I become aware of all the aches in my body as I climb out of bed.

When I straighten the covers, a red stain catches my eye, and I stare at the spot.

I'm torn between the pleasure I experienced last night and the fear of my unknown future in this mansion.

Angelo's naked body flits through my mind – every muscle and inch of golden skin.

Can you call a man beautiful?

I remember when he entered me.

The pain. The fullness. The connection.

I can still feel him inside me.

Pressing my hand to my heart, I close my eyes and shake my head to rid myself of the thoughts.

Just because he was nice to you last night and made you feel indescribable pleasure, doesn't mean he's not still the same bad man as yesterday.

Chapter 17

Tori

After taking a long bath and getting dressed in a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, and a light cardigan, I creep out of the main bedroom.

It feels like I'm trespassing.

I glance over the wrought iron banister, and not seeing anyone, I sneak from bedroom to bedroom, taking a look around the mansion that's now my home.

Cautiously, I head down the stairs while my eyes flit around. The décor is modern, and everything feels expensive.

When I step into the living room, I see Tiny sitting on one of the couches.

His eyes snap to me, then a crooked grin forms on his face. "Morning, Mrs. Rizzo."

"Morning," I whisper. I swallow on the dryness in my throat before asking, "Where's the kitchen?"

He points to the left. "Through there."

"Thank you."

When I step into a state-of-the-art kitchen, there's a woman who seems to be in her late fifties or early sixties. I suck at guessing someone's age.

Her eyes flit to me, and for a very uncomfortable moment, she looks me up and down.

"Morning," I say, the awkwardness I'm feeling visible in my tone.

Slowly, a smile spreads over her face, then she walks closer to me. "Morning, Mrs. Rizzo. Welcome to the mansion. I'm Rita, Mr. Rizzo's

housekeeper.” She lets out a chuckle. “Your housekeeper as well.” She waves a hand around the kitchen. “I do everything you require of me.”

“Ah...just call me Tori,” I say because I’m not comfortable with the title Mrs. Rizzo. It’s going to take some time getting used to my marital status. I gesture at the coffee pot. “Can I have some?”

Her eyebrows fly up, and she rushes closer. Gripping hold of my forearm, she gives me a friendly smile. “This is your household, Tori. You don’t have to ask for anything.”

A sudden burst of emotion in my chest makes my breath hitch.

I’ve been through so much the past twenty-four hours, and just because Rita is kind to me causes tears to burn in my eyes.

I wave a hand in front of my face while blinking like crazy to hold the tears back. “I’m sorry. Everything is overwhelming.”

She rubs a hand up and down my bicep and gives me a compassionate look. “You don’t have to apologize. I understand.” Stepping away from me, she heads to the coffee pot. “How do you like your coffee?”

“Two sugars and cream, please.”

I manage to regain control over my chaotic emotions, and walking closer to her, I ask, “I know you’re the housekeeper, but will it be okay if I prepare dinners?”

Her eyes dart to my face. “Of course. I’m here to make life easier for you. If you want to change anything, just let me know so I don’t step on your toes.”

Gosh, she’s lovely.

I have a sudden urge to hug Rita, but fist my hands at my sides because that would be weird, seeing as I just met her.

When she hands me a cup of steaming coffee, I almost groan with relief. I take a few sips, savoring the goodness, then murmur, “Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome.” Her gaze keeps drifting over my face, then she blurts out, “You’re beautiful. I can see why Mr. Rizzo married you.”

My cheeks warm from her compliment. “Thank you.” Wanting to form a relationship with her so I won’t be alone in this huge mansion, I say, “I hope we can become friends.”

Her smile widens until it reaches her dark brown eyes. “I’d like that too.”

Meeting Rita makes me feel a little better after all the craziness I’ve been put through.

The comfortable bubble pops as Tiny comes into the kitchen. Where I startle at his sudden appearance, Rita remains relaxed.

His eyes come to a rest on me. “Mr. Rizzo said I need to take you to the store. What time would you like to leave?”

I glance down at the cup in my hand before I answer, “As soon as I’m done with my coffee?”

I didn’t mean for it to come out sounding like a question, but Tiny intimidates the hell out of me.

I mean, I’ve seen the man drag a body away like it was nothing but a sack of potatoes.

“Okay.” He proceeds to walk to the fridge, and opening the door, he helps himself to a bottle of water.

He seems comfortable in the mansion, and it makes me hope I’ll feel the same way soon.

Whether I like it or not, this place is now my home.

As soon as Tiny leaves the kitchen, I move closer to the fridge. I take a look at everything so I can plan what to prepare for dinner.

As I shut the door, I glance at Rita, who’s leaning against a counter while watching me with a soft smile.

“What are Mr. Rizzo’s favorite meals?”

She shrugs. "He's seldom home for dinner, so you can make whatever you're in the mood for."

I feel a flicker of relief, knowing I probably won't see much of Angelo.

"What time do you go home?" I ask out of curiosity.

"I work from seven a.m. to four p.m."

I nod before I finish the last of my coffee, then my gaze searches for the sink. Noticing an arch, I head toward it and find a dishwasher. I quickly rinse my cup before placing it in the appliance.

Taking a deep breath, I smile at Rita before I leave the kitchen so I can go to the main bedroom to get my handbag and the credit card.

Staring at the wide selection of cell phones, I nibble on my bottom lip.

Which one do I choose?

Tiny's fiddling with the latest Samsung phone, and when he catches me watching him, he puts it down. "Which one do you want?"

I lift a shoulder and let out a huff. "I suck when it comes to technology. I just want something so I can send texts and make calls."

He picks up the Samsung again and moves closer to me. "You should take this one. The quality is pretty good, and it's easy to use."

"Okay."

A grin spreads over his face, then he asks, "What color do you want?"

"Ah...what do I get to choose from?"

"Lime, silver, violet, and graphite."

My eyebrows draw together. "What's graphite?"

Tiny lets out an amused chuckle. "It's a dark grayish color."

"Uhm..." I nibble on my bottom lip while I think about which one I should choose, then say, "I'll take the violet one."

He gives me a pleased smile. “Good choice, Mrs. Rizzo.”

“Tori,” I blurt out, but then I quickly explain, “I’m not used to Mrs. Rizzo. Just call me Tori.”

He nods, then signals for an attendant to assist us.

I let Tiny handle all the technical work while I stick close to his side.

During the drive to the store, he made it clear that I’m never to leave his sight. I don’t want to make him angry, so I’m doing as I’m told.

It takes a freaking long time before we finally get taken to the counter so we can pay. I dig the credit card out of my wallet, but when I see the price, my mouth drops open.

Angelo will kill me if I spend so much.

My eyes fly to Tiny’s face, and leaning closer, I whisper, “It’s too expensive. Angelo will get angry.”

He frowns at me as he shakes his head. “No, he won’t. He ordered me to make sure you get a cell phone.”

“Yes, but not one that’s so expensive!” I feel a twinge of panic and shake my head hard at the cashier. “Sorry, I have to choose a different phone.”

“Give us a moment,” Tiny tells the cashier before he takes hold of my hand and tugs me to the side. He pulls his phone from his pocket and dials a number. “Mr. Rizzo, can you tell Tori it’s okay if she gets an expensive phone? She’s very worried.”

Noooooo!

Oh God.

Crap.

Why did he do that?

A second later, the device is shoved into my hands.

An icy fear coats my skin, and my heartbeat explodes into a frantic fluttering in my chest.

With a trembling hand, I place the phone against my ear. My words are nothing but a squeak as I say, "I'm sorry. I didn't think Tiny was going to call you."

Angelo's voice sounds like a destructive storm is brewing when he asks, "Did I not say I don't want you asking my permission whenever you have to buy something?"

I feel like crying, and swallowing hard, I whisper, "Yes."

'Please. I'm sorry,' I hear a man's voice pleading in the background.

Shock vibrates through me, and my breath stalls in my throat as the blood drains from my face.

"Then buy the fucking phone," Angelo orders.

Right before he hangs up on me, I hear something that sounds a lot like a gunshot.

Nauseated from all the fear and shock, I lower the phone, and luckily, Tiny takes it from me before I drop the device because I'm shaking badly.

As if he's in a tunnel, I hear him ask, "What did he say?"

Stuck in a terrified trance, I can only shake my head.

Tiny folds his mountain of a body in half to meet my eyes. Concern etches a deep frown on his forehead, then he mutters, "Jesus."

I'm taken by my arm and tugged back to the counter, where Tiny completes the purchase before ushering me out of the store.

Did I just overhear Angelo killing a man?

Only when I'm bundled into the backseat, and Tiny is behind the steering wheel does he ask, "What happened?"

My eyes meet his in the rearview mirror. "I think I heard Angelo shoot a man right before he hung up on me."

Tiny lets out a relieved sigh before he mutters, "That's what happens if you steal from the boss."

I wrap my arms around my waist, and lowering my head, I close my eyes.
I don't think I'll ever get used to all the violence in the Cosa Nostra.

Chapter 18

Angelo

Jesus fucking Christ.

While Big Ricky and Eddie dispose of the body, I sit down behind my desk.

I rub my hand over my face as I let out an angry huff. I didn't mean to be so harsh with Vittoria, but the call came at the worst possible time.

She sounded fucking terrified.

I shake my head, wondering how the fuck I'm going to get Vittoria not to fear me.

Big Ricky comes back into the office. "What do you want me to do with the drugs?"

"Flush them," I mutter.

Jacks, one of the bartenders, stole two grand to buy drugs, which was a stupid move on his part.

Like I've said before, I don't make a habit of giving second chances.

My thoughts turn back to Vittoria and how scared she sounded over the phone.

I've never done relationships before, so I'm in uncharted waters.

Christ, my longest relationship is with Tiny and Big Ricky. They're tough as nails, so I don't have to worry about their feelings.

I let out a chuckle at the ridiculous thought.

Now, I have a skittish deer for a wife, and as intoxicating as the idea is, it's also unnerving.

I seriously have to ease up on Vittoria. I can't treat her the same as every other person in my life.

But, Christ, I'm not known for being gentle. How do I go about solving this problem?

"You look worried," Big Ricky says as he takes a seat across from me.

I let out a sigh. "It's the whole married life thing."

His eyebrow lifts, then he asks, "Can I be honest?"

I gesture for him to continue.

"You practically bit Vittoria's head off when she called. You should apologize."

I let out a snort, but seeing Big Ricky is serious, I frown at him.

He gives me a grin, then says, "Don't kill me, but I really think you need to be softer when dealing with her."

I narrow my eyes at him. "Softer? Me?"

He nods. "Here, you're the boss, but at home, you're her husband. She's not just another employee."

I let out a chuckle as I shake my head. "If I'm too soft on her, she'll walk all over me."

"No. If you're too hard on her, she'll never love you."

His words hit me square in the chest.

"Look." He shifts closer to the table, his eyes locked on mine. "You chose this girl because she's innocent and kind. Don't force her to become a hard woman. If you don't want her to change, you have to make her feel safe and secure with you."

"Since when are you so good at giving relationship advice?"

He leans back in his chair, and with a smirk, he mutters, "I've learned how to handle the ladies from watching romance movies."

Laughter bursts from me, which is rare. Standing up, I nod to the door.

“Come on, we need to head to the restaurant.”

Putting in effort with my marriage, I make sure I’m home at five p.m. so Vittoria and I can get to know each other better.

Not seeing her in the living room, I head to the main bedroom, but she’s not there.

I quickly take a shower and change into a pair of sweatpants and a T-shirt before I go in search of my wife.

My wife.

A smile tugs at my mouth, and when I near the kitchen, a delicious aroma assaults me.

Christ, that smells good.

I find Tiny sitting by the island while Vittoria stands in front of the stove with her back to me.

I press my pointer finger to my lips, gesturing for Tiny to stay quiet, before quickly stepping out of the kitchen.

“I’ll be back in a second,” I hear Tiny say, and a moment later, he joins me in the living room.

“How’s she doing?” I ask.

He shakes his head. “It’s been a tough day. She’s been on edge ever since the call, and she refuses to take the new phone out of the box.”

“I’ve got this.” I tip my head toward the front door. “You can go.”

With a nod, Tiny leaves, and I head back to the kitchen. I lean my shoulder against a wall, and crossing my arms over my chest, I watch as Vittoria carefully tastes a sauce.

A small smile plays around her lips as she whispers, “Perfect.”

Pushing away from the wall, I walk toward her, and just as I come up

behind her, she turns to the side.

She lets out a blood-curdling scream, and ducking to the right to avoid me, she loses her balance.

I react fast and grab hold of her so she doesn't fall. Instinctively, I pull her against my chest, my arms wrapping around her.

She stands frozen in my hold, her breaths audible as they rush over her lips.

After a couple of seconds, she whispers, "Sorry. I didn't know you were home."

I lift my hand to her chin and nudge her face up so she'll look at me, then turning my head, I say, "Kiss me hello."

When she pushes onto her tiptoes, I lean down, and the moment her lips meet my cheek, there's a burst of warmth in my heart.

You're not the boss here. You're her husband.

Vittoria takes a step away from me and glances at the stove. "Rita said you're seldom home for dinner."

My eyes drift over her pale face. "That was before I got married."

"Oh."

I don't miss the flash of disappointment on her face, and it hits me square in the chest.

Her eyes dart between me and the stove, then she asks, "Have you eaten?"

I shake my head. "Whatever you're making smells mouthwatering."

She cautiously moves closer to the stove. "I'm making gnocchi and chicken with a creamy pesto sauce."

"Sounds good." I take a seat at the island. "Tiny says you refuse to take the phone out of the packaging."

She freezes again, and keeping her eyes on the pot of sauce, she says,

“It’s expensive. I told him we should get something cheaper.”

“Vittoria.” Her eyes dart to me, and I tap my thigh. “Come sit.”

Her eyebrows pinch together, but she obeys. Her body is fucking tense as she sits down on my lap. I take hold of her chin again and nudge her face up.

“I’m not going to hurt you.”

Her gaze searches mine before she says, “I’m sorry about the call.”

“It’s okay.” Her floral scent drifts to me, and I almost lean in to kiss her but stop myself.

Jesus, I hate the no-kissing rule.

I let out a heavy breath before asking, “What can I do to make you feel comfortable with me?”

Worry creases her forehead. “I just need time to adjust. I’ll do better in the future.”

My hand moves to her cheek, and I lean a little closer. “You’re doing just fine, *mia piccola cerviatta*. I’m asking because I want to make things easier for you.”

“Oh.” Her eyebrows draw together while her eyes keep darting over my face. “It would be...” Her tongue darts out to nervously wet her lips. “It would help if I knew what to do and not to do so I don’t make you angry.”

Usually, I would get annoyed having to explain shit, but I suddenly possess a world of patience.

I shake my head. “I wasn’t angry with you.” She seems to relax a little, and I ask again, “What can I do to make things easier for you?”

She lets out a shaky breath. “Be less terrifying?”

A pleased smile spreads over my face. “Okay. I’ll focus on that. What else?”

Just like the night before, she stares at me as if I’ve grown two heads. Remembering she said, my smile made me seem more relatable, I keep my

lips curved up.

Her eyes soften a little. “The smile helps a lot.”

“I’ll smile more.” I nod. “What else?”

Vittoria tilts her head while she keeps staring at me, then as if she’s approaching a bear, she carefully wraps her arms around my neck and gives me a hug.

“Hugs would be nice,” she admits, “They make me feel better.”

I squash her to me, and an unexpected groan rumbles from my chest.

God, she feels good in my arms.

“The food is going to burn,” she whispers near my ear.

I let out a chuckle and reluctantly let go of her.

Caution still fills her eyes, but she looks less tense than when I got home.

Proud of myself, I watch as she continues to cook.

You did good, Angelo.

Chapter 19

Tori

It feels like I have whiplash.

Since Angelo scared the living crap out of me, he's been...nice, for lack of a better word.

I can feel his eyes on me as I pour the pesto sauce over the gnocchi, chicken, and rosa tomatoes.

Letting the dish rest for five minutes, I turn to him and ask, "Do you want to eat in the dining room?"

Earlier today, I familiarized myself with all the rooms in the mansion.

Rita is so good at her job that there's nothing for me to do, which is a bit of a concern.

Angelo shakes his head. "We can eat in the living room."

I nod as I grab two plates, and setting them down, I dish up for us. I make sure the rims of the plates are clean of any sauce before sprinkling freshly chopped parsley and shredded parmesan over the food.

Taking cutlery from the drawer, I glance at Angelo. "Food's ready."

He stands up, and my eyes drift over the sweatpants and shirt he's wearing.

I have to admit, he doesn't look as threatening in casual clothes.

I hand him a knife and fork, but he drops the knife on the counter before picking up a plate and heading to the living room.

I grab my own plate and follow after him. When I see him taking a seat, I pick the spot farthest from him.

I can't stop myself from staring at him when he takes a bite of the food, and a second later, I find myself mesmerized by the way his jaw moves as he chews.

Really? Does the way he eats have to be so hot?

His eyes flick to me, and he catches me gawking at him.

"It's delicious," he murmurs. "Where did you learn to cook?"

I lower my eyes to the plate on my lap. "The local library."

"The library gives cooking classes?"

I let out an unexpected chuckle that stuns me. "No, I used to check out recipe books so I could practice at home."

He lifts an eyebrow at me. "You taught yourself to cook."

I'm surprised when he looks impressed with me.

I take a bite of my food and glance at the shadows the old tree's branches are casting on the floor.

Tilting my head up, I look at the glass ceiling. "The tree is pretty."

"I like it too. That's why I had the house designed, so it's a feature."

Silence falls between us while we enjoy the rest of our food, and once we're done, I get up and walk to Angelo. I take his empty plate and carry the dishes to the kitchen.

I load everything into the dishwasher, and when I step into the main part of the kitchen, it's to find Angelo eating the leftover food straight from the pan.

"Crap, I'm sorry. I'll dish up more for you next time."

"The portions you served were fine." He shakes his head. "But it's so fucking good, I wanted more."

A weird sensation spreads over my body because Angelo is enjoying the food I made. Giorgio never had anything positive to say.

He sets the pan down, and closing the distance between us, his hand grips

my hip before he kisses my forehead. “Thank you, baby.”

And just as suddenly, he lets go and heads to the fridge. “What do you like to drink?”

I feel so freaking confused. One moment, he’s all fire and brimstone, and the next, he’s...perfect.

“Soda,” I murmur.

“Hmm...we have OJ, cranberry juice, and beer.” He glances at me from over his shoulder, “Which one?”

“Cranberry juice, please.”

He hands me the bottle, then says, “Let’s sit in the living room so we can talk.”

I take a fortifying breath and follow him with a sinking feeling in my stomach.

When I aim for the same spot I sat in before, Angelo says, “No. You’re sitting next to me.”

Shoot.

I change direction and leave space between us as I take a seat.

I open the juice and take a sip while wondering what he wants to talk about.

“Turn your body to face me,” he orders.

I shift and rest my shoulder against the back of the couch before locking eyes with him.

Angelo rests his arm on the cushion behind me, and I feel his fingers in my hair as he says, “I’m sorry about earlier.”

The apology catches me totally by surprise. It’s the last thing I expected to hear from him.

“I was dealing with a...situation when the call came through.”

Before I can censor my facial expression, my eyebrow darts up.

Once again, I'm surprised when he chuckles. "Fine, situation isn't the right word."

No, it's not.

Too brave for my own good, I say, "I heard a man's voice."

Angelo lets out a slow breath. "He's an employee who stole from me."

"How much did he take?"

"Two thousand."

Because he doesn't seem as dangerous as usual, I ask more questions. "And you killed him for it? Why not just let him pay you back?"

He shakes his head, and the darkness returns to his eyes, making me regret my questions.

"Whether someone steals ten dollars or millions doesn't matter. I don't give second chances."

Right.

I nibble on my bottom lip and glance in the direction of the TV.

"About the phone..." My eyes flit back to his face as he says, "I don't care how much it cost."

"I don't understand. Earlier, you killed a man for two thousand dollars, but it's fine if I pay more than that for a phone?" Again, I instantly regret the words.

His voice is filled with tension as he snaps, "He stole from me, and you're my wife. There's a huge fucking difference, Vittoria."

Instead of being startled by the harsh tone of his voice, I feel bad.

He glances away from me and takes a couple of breaths before looking at me again.

"I understand," I whisper. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"I'm not used to being questioned." When I nod, his hand slips around the back of my neck before he adds, "But that doesn't mean I don't want you to

ask questions.”

“You’re very confusing,” I mutter.

The corner of his mouth lifts, instantly softening his features. “That’s why we’re getting to know each other.”

I nod and take another sip of my juice.

“Let’s talk about the state of your wardrobe.”

My eyebrows fly into my hairline.

“As my wife, you represent me, so I need you to get more clothes. The few items you have are not acceptable.” I feel his fingers brush against my skin, and it gives me goosebumps.

“And there’s no spending limit,” he adds. “I’m a wealthy man, and as my wife, what’s mine is yours.”

“Ahh...okay. I’ll take care of it as soon as possible,” I say to appease him. “Is there anything specific you want me to wear?”

He shakes his head. “Just make sure it’s not revealing.”

“Okay.”

He stares at me for a moment, then asks, “Why don’t you have a job?”

Feeling embarrassed, I lower my eyes to the bottle in my hands as I swipe my thumb repeatedly over the label. “I wasn’t allowed to work. I’ll start looking for one tomorrow.”

“That’s not what I meant.” He lets out a breath, then explains, “I was just wondering whether you wanted to work or stay at home. I’m just giving you the option, but I’d like it if you stayed home and took care of the household.” The corner of his mouth lifts. “And after tasting your food, I’d appreciate a cooked meal from you every now and then.”

A smile spreads over my face. “What are your favorite dishes?”

He thinks for a moment, then answers, “I can’t think of anything specific.”

When he's quiet for a long while, I peek up at him and find his gaze still locked on me.

His hand lowers to my cardigan, and he tugs at the fabric. "You don't have to cover the bruises when you're with me."

I set the bottle down on the coffee table and quickly shrug the cardigan off before getting comfortable again.

Angelo looks so relaxed I'm starting to forget he's a mafia boss and begin to see the man beneath all the violence.

He places his hand on my thigh and gives me a squeeze before asking, "How do you feel today?"

"Just a little tender."

Angelo's eyes lower to my mouth. "How long do you think it will take before I'm allowed to kiss you?"

I let out an awkward-sounding chuckle. "I don't know."

Suddenly, he grabs hold of me and pulls me onto his lap so I'm straddling him. He lifts his hands and frames my face.

"Then I'll just have to improvise."

He closes the distance between us, and when I feel his jaw brush against my cheek, tingles erupt in my stomach. He blows air over my skin, making goosebumps spread over my arms, and my eyes fall shut.

His hand lowers to my arm as he lets out a chuckle so close to my ear I feel the vibrations in the air.

Dear God.

Slowly, with his skin grazing mine, he turns his head until I feel his lips brush dangerously close to my mouth. I feel him hardening beneath my butt, and flashes of the passion we shared last night flit through my mind.

I'm overwhelmed with sensations, and a kaleidoscope of butterflies erupts in my stomach, making a quivering breath flutter over my lips.

Holy crap, this is intense and intimate, and he's barely touching me.

"You're so fucking beautiful," he growls softly, and I almost let out a moan. "So fucking innocent." Again, his jaw brushes against mine, the day-old stubble scraping my skin.

It's unlike anything I've felt before, and my body starts to tremble with anticipation and need.

"Mine," he groans, his tone filled with the promise of sex and pleasure.

God.

Again, I feel his lips dangerously close to my mouth, and I experience a strong urge to turn my face to his.

When I open my eyes, it's to see hunger tightening his features.

God, he's so attractive.

It's only then I realize he's actually managed to get me to relax so much that I feel desire for him.

Chapter 20

Angelo

I brush my fingers through Vittoria's curls while I enjoy every second of the moment we're sharing.

With the desire burning in her eyes, she looks like a fucking siren.

Keeping my tone soft, I say, "Tell me about your childhood."

Her hands slide from my shoulders down my chest until they settle against my abs.

My cock jerks from her touch. I take hold of her shirt and tug the fabric over her head. My palms find her breasts, and I knead them through the thin fabric of her bra.

Her cheeks flush pink, and her voice is shaky as she asks, "Ahh...what do you want to know?"

A smirk tugs at my lips, and when she tilts her head back, I forget what we're talking about.

Leaning forward, my mouth latches onto her throat, and I begin to feast on her soft skin.

Vittoria's hands fly to my hair, and her fingers twist with the strands as she moans, "Angelo."

Hearing my name on her lips has me locking an arm around her lower back, and standing up, I turn and lie her down on the couch. My body sinks down on top of hers, and I continue to lick and suck at her skin.

Tugging the cup of her bra down, my mouth finds her nipple, and I bite her tender flesh until it's a hard bud. I give her other breast the same attention

before pressing kisses over her stomach.

When I reach the seam of her jeans, I pull the zipper down and yank the clothes off her. As I bite her hip, her ass lifts, and another moan drifts from her.

With her naked beneath me, I continue to suck and bite at her skin until I lift her one leg over my shoulder. Parting her with my fingers, my tongue swipes over her clit.

The taste of her has me completely under her spell. I suck and bite until her hips swivel, and her fingers threaten to rip my hair out.

I fucking feast on her pussy, and only when she gasps, “Angelo, please,” do I show her mercy.

Bringing my thumb to her clit, I use the right amount of pressure to send her over the edge as I sit up so I can watch her come apart for me.

Her hands grip the couch on either side of her body, and just like before, it looks like she’s in pain as her body starts to convulse and a cry falls over her lips.

This woman is the sweetest fucking temptation I’ve ever experienced.

The moment she starts coming down, I lower myself between her quivering thighs and lap at her pussy like a starving man. I take every drop of wetness she spills, a groan rumbling from my chest.

Vittoria jerks with every stroke of my tongue, and it makes me eat her as if she’s my last meal.

I’m so fucking lost in devouring her that I lose track of time and only realize she’s coming again when she screams as if I’m fucking murdering her. I chuckle against her sensitive core before crawling up her body.

Looking down at her flushed face as she desperately gasps for air, I say, “I love the way you come for me.”

Her body is limp from all the pleasure, and I easily move her as I lie

down so she's half on top of me and half pinned between my side and the couch.

While she recovers from all the pleasure, I lazily trail my fingers up and down her back, just enjoying how soft her skin feels.

Her voice is hoarse when she says, "I didn't know this kind of pleasure existed."

"It's only the beginning," I murmur.

With her cheek resting against my chest, I only have a view of her wild curls as she asks, "What do you mean?"

"Once it doesn't hurt anymore, I won't have to be careful with you, which means I can fuck you senseless until the neighbors hear you scream."

She tilts her back to look at me. "Will it hurt again?"

"Probably." Seeing the flash of worry, I add, "Only until you're used to me. The first time is the worst."

I close my eyes and continue to brush my fingers up and down her back.

This moment is perfect.

Vittoria lies still for a long while, and just as I'm about to drift off to sleep, she moves onto my lap. I keep my eyes closed, but the corner of my mouth lifts when she pushes the shirt up my chest.

The instant her lips brush over my peck, my body shudders, and my cock becomes painfully hard.

Wanting to see how far she'll go, I decide to let her have her way for a while.

Gripping the back of my shirt, I tug it over my head, and the action has desire darkening Vittoria's eyes. There's still caution on her face, but at least the fear is gone.

When she kisses and licks my shoulders and pecks, I feel her breasts brush against my stomach.

Jesus, I'm going to come in my pants.

I shove the sweatpants down, and Vittoria quickly takes over, pulling the fabric down my legs.

Before she can move too far up my body, I order, "Lick my cock."

Her cheeks flush bright red, but she leans down. I quickly brush her curls out of the way and watch her tongue swipe over the sensitive head where precum is beading.

"Wrap your hand around me."

I watch as her hand comes closer, and her fingers wrap carefully around the base of my cock.

So fucking good.

"Harder, baby." She tightens her grip, but it's not nearly enough. "Much harder."

Her fingers become a vice, and I let out a satisfied groan.

"Suck the head while you stroke my cock," I order.

Her eyes flit to my face, and her lips close around the swollen head.

Jesus fucking Christ. Erotic doesn't begin to describe the view I have.

As she sucks me into the heat of her mouth, her hand moves slowly up and down.

I'm not going to last long.

"That's it, baby. I love watching you take my cock." My hoarse words give her a confidence boost, and she sucks harder, swirling her tongue around the sensitive head.

I shudder from the intense pleasure, and it only takes the sight of her cheeks hollowing out to push me over the edge.

"Pull away, I'm going to come," I warn her, but for the first time, she doesn't listen to me, and as I start to jerk in her hot little mouth, I watch as she swallows my release.

“Fuck, baby,” I groan, my body shuddering from the pleasure.

When she’s taken every drop from me, she lies down on top of me and takes a deep breath.

I wrap my arms around her and press a kiss to her hair. “You’re such a good fucking girl, it’s killing me.”

She doesn’t reply to my comment, and as the light fades in the room and night creeps in, I feel her muscles relax and her breaths even out.

Realizing she’s fallen asleep on top of me, a smile spreads over my face, and I whisper, “I’m going to make you love me so much that you can’t live without me. I’ll become your god and the one you pray to.” I pull my fingers through her curls. “And I’ll love you like you’re my salvation.”

Hours pass, and when I’m pretty tired myself, I maneuver myself out from under my sleeping wife before I lift her bridal style to my chest. I carry her naked body to our bedroom and carefully lay her down on the bed.

She stirs and mumbles something unintelligible.

Bracing my hands on either side of her head, I lean over her and stare at her parted lips.

I could kiss her right now, and she’d never know.

The temptation almost overwhelms me, but at the last second, I pull away from her and walk into the bathroom.

Chapter 21

Tori

When I wake up, I find myself alone in bed. It takes a moment before I remember I fell asleep on top of Angelo.

He must've carried me to bed.

I don't know how to feel about everything that's happening. Let's just say I'm cautiously optimistic right now.

As I turn onto my back, I see the phone I bought yesterday lying on Angelo's pillow. I reach for it, and when I unlock the screen, there's a message. I open it, and a smile tugs at my mouth as I read it.

Angelo: My cock misses your mouth. Enjoy shopping for clothes and anything else you like.

Not knowing what to reply, I keep reading the text over and over.

After a while, I give up and just type something generic.

Vittoria: Morning. I hope you have a nice day.

I climb out of bed and quickly fix the covers and pillows before heading into the bathroom so I can take a bath and get ready for the day.

When I'm lying in the balmy water, my thoughts turn to Angelo. I lift my left hand and take a closer look at the wedding band on my ring finger.

It's only then I see the same inscription that's on Angelo's ring.

A & V.

I appreciate what he did last night. I mean, at least he's trying to get to know me and not treating me like crap.

Suddenly, I think of something I can text him, and I grab the loofah and

soap. I quickly wash my body and hurry out of the bath.

With the towel wrapped around my body, I pick up my phone and see he's read the first message I sent.

I quickly type the words and watch as he instantly reads it.

Vittoria: You asked about my childhood last night. One of my happiest memories is of my father enjoying the first plate of food I made when I was fifteen. Since he passed away, no one has appreciated the effort I put in. I just want to say thank you for enjoying the dinner I made. It meant a lot to me.

Within seconds, he replies.

Angelo: You're welcome, baby. I can't wait to see what you make for dinner tonight. I'll be home at five p.m. sharp.

A smile curves my lips, and feeling a little better about my uncertain future, I put the phone down and get dressed.

When I leave the bedroom with the phone in my handbag, I go in search of a cup of coffee.

I find Tiny and Rita in the kitchen, and when they notice me, they stop talking.

I'm just about to wonder whether I interrupted an important conversation when Rita gives me a warm smile. "Morning, Tori. Coffee?"

"Please." I sit down by the island and glance between them. "Did you guys have a good night?"

"No, my grandchild is sick. She kept me up half the night," Rita says.

My eyebrows draw together. "Oh no, I'm sorry to hear that. Why did you come in?"

"Because there's work to be done." She sets the cup of goodness down in front of me.

"I slept like a baby," Tiny mutters.

“Babies hardly sleep,” Rita comments.

He rolls his eyes at her. “Fine...I slept like the dead.” His gaze rests on me. “You look better today.”

“I feel better.” I take a sip of the coffee. “Surprisingly, I slept through the night.”

I expected to have sleepless nights for the unforeseeable future, but that doesn’t seem to be the case.

“Mr. Rizzo said I must take you shopping.”

I nod. “He wants me to get more clothes.”

Tiny pulls his phone out and looks at something. “He gave me the name of a store to take you to.”

“Can I see?”

When he turns the screen toward me, I frown. “*Oscar de la Renta*. I’ve never heard of the place.”

“Finish your coffee. It’s an hour and a half drive.”

“Do we really have to go that far just for clothes?”

Tiny nods. “Boss’s orders.”

I quickly drink my coffee, then follow Tiny to the SUV.

I still feel very uncomfortable around Tiny, seeing as I don’t know him that well, so instead of trying to make conversation, my thoughts mull over everything that’s happened.

Angelo is a very confusing man, and I’m struggling to get a read on him. The past two nights, he’s been pleasant to be around, but during the day, I’m constantly reminded of his status in the Cosa Nostra.

How do I separate the two? Is it even possible?

Giving up on trying to figure out who Angelo really is, my thoughts turn to the routine I had before I was forced into this marriage.

I really hope Angelo doesn’t have a problem with me attending church on

Sundays and helping out during coffee hour.

Crap!

The ingredients for the cannolis are still at my old home.

Suddenly, Tiny asks, “Everything okay, Tori?”

I hesitate for a moment, then ask, “Could we stop at my old house? I have to get the ingredients I bought to make cannolis.”

He considers my question before saying, “We’ll see if there’s time after the shopping trip.”

At least it’s not a no.

“Thank you.”

Feeling relieved, I remind myself to talk to Angelo tonight about my church activities. I’ll also have to ask his permission to continue making meals for Father Parisi.

So many changes.

I glance out the window at the passing scenery and think about the intimate times I’ve shared with Angelo. I thought I was going to pass out last night from all the pleasure.

The man makes me feel things I didn’t even know existed.

Lowering my head to hide my face from Tiny’s view, a small smile tugs at my lips as I think about how good it feels when he praises me.

When I gave him a blowjob, I was so freaking nervous, but soon my confidence soared. Making him orgasm filled me with pride.

Just thinking about Angelo’s naked body beneath me while I sucked his cock has my cheeks flushing bright red and tingles exploding in my stomach.

Even though he still scares me, I can’t deny that I’m attracted to him.

The man is unbelievably handsome, and I’m growing to like the dominant way he takes charge of situations.

My thoughts are so consumed with my husband I startle when Tiny says,

“We’re here.”

My head pops up. “Oh.”

We’re parked in front of *Oscar de la Renta* on Madison Avenue, but the store seems to be closed.

“Are they open?” I ask when Tiny holds the door so I can climb out of the SUV.

He nods while he presses the fob to lock the vehicle. Standing really close to me in a protective manner, he tips his chin toward the shut doors.

As we approach the entrance, a woman rushes closer and quickly unlocks the doors.

Stepping inside the store, I’m met with polite smiles from the staff.

“Welcome, Mrs. Rizzo. We’re so excited to assist you today.”

A shy smile tugs at my lips. “Ah...thank you.”

When I don’t see any other customers, I lean closer to Tiny and ask, “Isn’t it weird that we’re the only customers?”

He shakes his head and whispers, “Mr. Rizzo had the store close for the day so they could give all their attention to you.”

Warmth bursts in my chest, and it’s so intense I press my palm to my heart.

Angelo did this for me.

The attendant, who seems to be in charge, gestures to a small seating area. “Would you like a glass of champagne?”

I let out a chuckle. “Thank you, but it’s a little early for that.”

“Coffee, tea, or perhaps a glass of juice?”

My smile widens as I say, “Coffee would be really nice.”

“Make that two,” Tiny mutters.

I glance at all the beautiful clothes on display as I take a seat.

A man comes to sit across from me, and giving me a friendly smile, he

says, “Hi, I’m Ian, a sales associate at *Oscar de la Renta*. We’re so happy to be of service to you today. Mr. Rizzo said we’re redoing your entire wardrobe. He gave us a quick rundown of what he prefers for you to wear, and I’ve pre-selected items based on his requests.”

Holy crap.

I feel overwhelmingly flattered that Angelo went through so much trouble for me. It’s so considerate of him.

My heart squeezes with a foreign emotion.

“First, I’ll take your measurements, to ensure the clothes fit perfectly.”

“Okay.”

Tiny takes my handbag from me and gives me a toothy grin as if he’s enjoying this as much as me.

I’m asked to stand, and it only takes Ian a minute or so to take all my measurements, then he smiles over my head at someone. “Ah, here’s the coffee. Thank you, Susan.” His gaze returns to my face. “Have a seat and enjoy the beverage while we show you the selected items.”

I sit down beside Tiny, who’s still grinning from ear to ear. Leaning closer, I whisper, “It looks like you’re enjoying this.”

His head tilts closer. “I just like seeing you happy.”

His comment catches me by surprise, and for the first time since I laid eyes on the mountain of a man, I feel safe in his presence.

While I sip on my coffee, two women bring multiple items, and my eyes feast on the three-quarter pants boasting a flower pattern. “I really like those.”

I’m shown a variety of blouses, pants, and skirts, and it becomes more and more challenging to say no because everything is gorgeous.

Minutes become hours as dresses and gowns are displayed to me, and by the time we move onto jackets and coats, my stomach rumbles something fierce.

Tiny stops all the activity with a simple order, “Mrs. Rizzo needs something to eat.”

“There’s a cute bagel shop down the street,” Susan says. “I can make a quick run if that’s okay?”

Tiny glances at me for approval, and when I nod, he replies. “Three bagels with cream cheese.”

“Thank you,” I add.

Overwhelmed by all the attention, I proceed to look at handbags, scarves, and shoes.

Even though Angelo told me not to worry about how much I spent, it’s easier said than done.

When Susan returns with the bagels, and we pause so we can eat, I whisper to Tiny, “Can you find out how much everything will cost?”

Ian overhears my question and answers, “Mr. Rizzo asked that we send the invoice to him, so you don’t have to worry.”

Yeah, that’s not going to happen.

“I’d still like to know how much everything costs,” I demand.

“Give me a moment, please.” Ian takes a few minutes to talk to his assistants while Tiny and I enjoy our bagels.

When Ian returns, he tells me with a broad smile, “The amount is just shy of two hundred thousand.”

I sputter from the shock, my eyes blinking as if I’m having a seizure.

Tiny pats my back and says, “Don’t argue. This is what Mr. Rizzo wants.”

Yeah, but still...

Feeling very uncomfortable, I force a smile to my face and nod.

Do not freak out.

You represent Angelo, and it will upset him.

But daaaaamnnnn...two hundred thousand dollars.

Chapter 22

Angelo

Sitting across from Salvatore, we review the schedules of the fleet we currently have at sea.

“Will Renzo’s shipment still dock on time?” I ask.

“Yes, I’m expecting it Tuesday before lunch.”

Salvatore is a lot like me. He’s all business and painfully private. From what I know, the man lives like a hermit.

But he’s fucking loyal and a hard worker, and it’s all that matters to me.

My phone vibrates, and when I check the message, I see it’s from Tiny.

Tiny: We’re wrapping things up. Tori asked if we could swing by her old place to pick up ingredients for the cannolis she wants to make. Is that okay with you?

Giorgio is still in the hospital, but I don’t want Vittoria anywhere near her old home.

Angelo: No. She doesn’t go near her old house. Take her grocery shopping.

Tiny: Yes, boss.

Tucking my phone back into my pocket, my eyes flick to Salvatore, then I announce, “By the way, I got married.”

His eyebrows fly into his hairline. “That’s the last thing I expected to hear from you.” Giving me an incredulous look, he asks, “Are you serious?”

“Do I ever joke around?”

“No.” He lets out a deep breath. “I suppose congratulations are in order. I

hope you'll have a good marriage."

"Thank you."

We continue with our work, and once we're done verifying the status of each vessel, I say, "Keep up the good work."

"I will." Salvatore gives me a smile. "When are you leaving for your honeymoon?"

My eyebrow lifts because the thought hasn't crossed my mind. "There's no honeymoon." Remembering the upcoming trip to Sicily, I say, "I'm taking my wife to Sicily so she can meet my family."

"Let me know when you'll be out of the country."

"I will." Rising to my feet, I walk to the door. "See you next week."

Big Ricky's already waiting by the SUV as I emerge from the warehouse that's situated at the back of the shipping yard.

When he spots me, he opens the door so I can climb into the backseat.

The moment he's behind the steering wheel, I say, "We have to check whether Vittoria has a passport, and if not, get one for her ASAP."

His eyes meet mine in the rearview mirror. "Is it for the trip to Sicily?"

"Yes. I forgot about it."

"I'll get to work on it first thing tomorrow morning." As he steers the vehicle toward the exit, he mutters, "Shit, tomorrow is Saturday." His eyes flick to mine again. "I'll take care of it on Monday."

There's a moment's silence, then Big Ricky asks, "Are you taking off this weekend?"

"I never take weekends off," I mumble, my attention on all the emails that came in during my meeting with Salvatore.

"But you're married now."

Right.

I tuck my phone in my pocket, then say, "Yeah, I should spend more time

with Vittoria.”

My eyebrows furrow together as I think of things we can do instead of just sitting at home.

As if Big Ricky can read my mind, he says, “You can take her out for dinner to *Piccola Sicilia*. Maybe watch a show or movie?”

A chuckle rumbles from me. “Me, watch a movie? That’s some sense of humor you have there.”

“Fine, ask Vittoria what she would like to do. It will go a long way in showing her you’re willing to compromise.”

“Christ, I ask your advice once, and now you won’t shut up,” I mutter.

He lets out a chuckle. “I’m an expert with the ladies, remember. Do shit they love and...”

When he cuts the sentence short, I demand, “And?”

“You know...they’re very giving in bed.”

Not wanting to know about his sex life, I grumble, “Shut up.”

Still, I can’t stop my lips from curving into a smile.

Big Ricky brings the SUV to a stop, and as I climb out, I say, “You can take the night off. I’m staying in with Vittoria.”

“Thanks, boss.”

We go our separate ways, and when I walk into the mansion, I’m assaulted by delicious aromas.

My stomach rumbles, and my mouth waters.

Nearing the kitchen, I hear Tiny say, “This is the best thing I’ve ever tasted.”

“Great. Eat faster. Angelo will be home any moment, and I still have to set the table,” Vittoria rushes him.

“I’ll take the plate to my apartment. Thanks for the food, Tori.”

When Tiny comes out of the kitchen, he shoves a massive bite of meat

into his mouth and mumbles around it, “Hey, boss.”

“Did she have a good day?”

He nods while swallowing the food, then says, “She’s doing much better.”

“Good.” I nod at the front door to show he can leave before I head into the kitchen.

I find Vittoria in front of the stove but pause as my eyes take in the blue floral dress she’s wearing. It reaches all the way to her feet, the fabric soft and flowing. She’s braided her hair, but unruly curls have gotten loose.

When she turns around, I lose my ability to breathe.

It’s only the second time I see her with makeup, and the subtle changes make her fucking exquisite.

“You look incredible,” I breathe, in total awe of my wife.

A shy smile curves her lips as she walks toward me. When our eyes meet, I don’t see the usual fear trembling in them.

Placing a hand against my chest, she wraps her other one behind my neck, tugging me down. She presses a tender kiss to my cheek but doesn’t immediately pull away.

With her breath skimming over my skin, she says, “Thank you for everything, Angelo. I appreciate it.”

I grip hold of her hip, and as my eyes find hers, I murmur, “You’re welcome.”

Our faces are dangerously close to each other, and when her gaze lowers to my mouth, the overwhelming urge to claim her sweet lips hits me square in the chest.

Before I can give in, she pulls away and glances at the stove. “Dinner will be ready in twenty minutes.”

“I’ll take a quick shower while you finish up in here.”

I walk toward the door, but her voice stops me.

“Angelo.” I glance over my shoulder. “Thank you for trying so hard. I know it can’t be easy.” The blush on her cheeks deepen in color. “I felt special today.”

A satisfied smirk curves my lips. “I’m glad to hear that.”

I leave the kitchen so I can change into comfortable clothes and get back to my beautiful wife.

Entering the bedroom, I head straight for the walk-in closet. Taking a moment, I check all the clothes Vittoria bought, making sure nothing is too revealing.

I’m happy with the collection Ian chose for my wife, and with a smile, I grab a pair of jeans and a T-shirt before heading into the bathroom.

I notice new shampoo and conditioner bottles and a floral-scented body wash. There’s also a small bottle of perfume, and picking it up, I inhale the scent.

It smells like Vittoria, and I memorize the perfume's name so I can get her more.

Dropping my clothes on the counter, I switch on the faucets in the shower, and while the water warms up, I strip out of the suit.

I step beneath the warm spray and let out a sigh as my thoughts turn to the weekend. It will be the first time I don’t work because I’ve never had a reason to stay at home.

But I’ll get to spend time with Vittoria, and I plan on learning as much about her as possible.

I also plan to fuck her senseless.

I feel I’ve given her enough time to recover from losing her virginity.

Chapter 23

Tori

After I light the two candles, I quickly shut the curtains so the room will be darker.

I turn to look at the intimate corner of the dining room table, and happy that it looks romantic, I hurry back to the kitchen.

I want tonight to be special for Angelo. It's my way of making an effort to get closer to him.

I've prepared baked eggplant with melted parmesan and roasted duck with blackberry-orange sauce.

Before Rita left, she showed me the wine cellar and helped me pair the perfect bottle with our dinner.

I take the chilled Romanee-Conti from the fridge, and grabbing the corkscrew, I try to figure out how the gadget works.

"Need some help?" Angelo suddenly says behind me.

"God!" I let out a startled chuckle, then mutter, "Please."

I wish the man would make a sound so I hear when he enters a room.

I hand him the bottle and corkscrew.

He checks the label. "Nice choice."

"Rita helped me choose the wine," I mention as my gaze drifts over the faded blue jeans and white T-shirt he's wearing.

My eyes stop on his bare feet, and I can almost imagine he's just an ordinary man.

But that's the furthest thing from the truth.

My attention is drawn to his strong hands as he twists the cork out of the bottle, and I admire the veins snaking up his arms.

The cork pops out, and he hands the bottle back to me.

“What else can I do?”

I shake my head. “You can take a seat at the dining room table.”

I follow him out of the kitchen, and I notice the gun tucked into the waistband of his jeans. It makes me remember who Angelo is.

Entering the dining room, he looks at the candlelit dinner I’ve prepared, and I try to gauge his reaction.

His eyes flick to me as he sits down, then he asks, “Are we celebrating something?”

I pour some wine before taking a seat to his left. “I just wanted to do something special for you.”

His hand covers mine, and he gives me a squeeze. “Thank you, *mia piccola cerviatta*.”

As I place a couple of slices of the roasted duck and some of the eggplant parmesan on his plate, I ask, “Why do you call me your little deer?”

I’m not fluent in Italian, but I know enough to understand the term of endearment.

“You’re skittish like one.”

I load some food into my plate, then look at him as he takes a bite.

Everything in me stills as I watch him closely.

His eyes drift shut, and he lets out a groan. “Christ, the duck melts in my mouth.” He opens his eyes and bathes me with a look of pride. “You should’ve become a chef.”

Happy because he likes the food, I smile like an idiot.

A frown line forms between his eyes. “Is that something you’d like to do?”

“What?” I cut a small piece of duck. “A chef?” Popping the bite into my mouth, I begin to enjoy my meal.

“Yes.”

I shake my head. “I love baking and cooking, but it’s a relaxing hobby.” Taking the chance that’s been presented to me, I say, “I wanted to ask you something.”

He nods as he continues to eat.

“I’d like to attend Mass Sunday morning.”

His eyes lock with mine, and my stomach drops.

Angelo takes a sip of his wine before he says, “I don’t expect you to change your routine, Vittoria. You can continue with your church duties.”

Thank God.

I let out a relieved breath, which he notices.

Reaching a hand out to my face, he tucks a curl behind my ear. “Unless you plan on doing something out of the norm, you don’t have to ask my permission.”

“Okay.”

“Just don’t leave the house without Tiny.”

I nod and glance at my plate. “Ah...can I also continue to make food for Father Parisi?”

The corner of his mouth lifts. “Of course.”

Feeling relieved, I eat in silence for a minute before I think to ask, “How was your day?”

Angelo clears his throat. “Do you really want to know?”

Right. Do I want to hear about all the people he tortured and killed?

But he’s my husband. If I’m going to learn to love him, I’ll have to accept what he does for a living.

I take a deep breath before I nod.

He lifts an eyebrow at me, then says, "I spent most of my day at the shipping yard. It was actually boring."

That's not what I expected to hear.

"Why were you at a shipping yard?"

"I own a fleet that transports illegal goods worldwide."

Nodding, I take another sip of my wine. "How many businesses do you have?"

"Three. *Piccola Sicilia*, Fallen Angels, and the fleet." He seems to relax as the conversation grows more comfortable. "But I spend most of my time at the club."

Not knowing much about Fallen Angels except that Giorgio loves to go there, I ask, "I'm assuming Friday nights are busy at the club. Are you going there after dinner?"

He shakes his head. "I have someone who manages everything." The corner of his mouth lifts in a hot grin. "I'm yours for the weekend."

He's mine.

The words hit me right in the heart, and I quickly drink the rest of my wine.

"Before I forget," Angelo says while relaxing back in his chair, "We're taking a trip to Sicily soon. Do you have a passport?"

I shake my head. "No."

"We'll get you one."

Are we going on our honeymoon?

Excitement bubbles in my chest. "Why are we going to Sicily?"

"I have business to take care of, and I want you to meet my family."

Crap.

I didn't even consider Angelo's family. Instantly, nerves tighten in my stomach.

“I took over from my uncle, but he’s still involved in the business. He runs things on my behalf in Sicily,” Angelo informs me. “He’ll be happy to hear I finally got married.”

I twirl the wine glass around and around as I nod to show I’m listening.

“When we’re visiting with them, don’t worry if they bring up the topic of heirs.”

My eyes dart to his. “I won’t mind if they do.”

“I don’t want you to feel pressured about having children.”

I let out an awkward chuckle. “I’m not on birth control, and you took off the condom the other night.”

His eyes narrow on me. “Does that bother you?”

I quickly shake my head. “No. We’re married.”

“Giorgio mentioned you want to be a mother,” he says.

God. I haven’t even thought of Giorgio since the wedding. It sucks that he doesn’t even check to see if I’m okay.

“Yes, I’ve always wanted children of my own.”

I just never thought it would be with Angelo Rizzo.

My gaze drifts over his face, and I wonder whether he’ll be a good father.

“If it will make you happy, then we won’t start you on birth control.”

The corner of my mouth lifts at the thought of holding a baby in my arms. “It will make me very happy.”

Angelo reaches for my arm and trails his fingers over my skin. Goosebumps rise beneath his touch, and he looks fascinated by my reaction to him.

When his fingers trail over the back of my hand, I turn my palm up and close my fingers around his. Angelo’s eyes snap to my face, and I feel a fluttering sensation in my stomach.

Gathering my courage, I admit, “I really want our marriage to be a

success.”

His features soften, and for the first time, I see affection in his eyes. “I want that too, *mia piccola cerviatta*.”

The sensation grows until it feels like my stomach is doing cartwheels.

“You’ll have to change your nickname for me soon,” I tease him.

“Why?”

“I’m only skittish around new people.”

The corner of his mouth lifts. “Does that mean you’re getting used to me?”

My thumb brushes over his golden skin. “Yes.”

“That’s good to hear.” His tone is low and intimate, causing tingles to spread over my body.

I take a deep breath then look at our empty plates. “Are you ready for dessert?”

“There’s dessert?”

Smiling at him, I pull my hand free from his and start clearing the table.

Angelo gets up as well and helps me carry everything to the kitchen.

When I open the fridge to take out the strawberries and freshly whipped cream, I ask, “Are you allergic to anything.”

“No.” Instead of returning to the dining room, he takes a seat at the island. “Do you have any allergies?”

I shake my head, and placing the dessert on the marble top, I say, “It’s nothing elaborate. I wanted to stick with the fruit theme.”

Just like the night before, Angelo pats his jean-clad thigh. “Come sit here.”

My face heats as I sit on his lap, and I wrap my left arm around his neck.

This position is so freaking intimate.

He picks up a strawberry and scoops some cream onto it before bringing

it to my mouth.

My heartbeat speeds up, and I part my lips to take a bite. As soon as my teeth sink into the strawberry, Angelo orders, “Hold still.”

Why?

He leans closer, and tilting his head, he bites into the other half. I feel the brush of his lips for a split-second, turning my emotions into a chaotic mess.

Holy freaking crap.

I feel lightheaded from the intensity of the light touch.

Our eyes lock, and I wonder what it would feel like to kiss Angelo.

He’s already swallowed his bite when he chuckles, “Eat the fruit, *la mia tentatrice*.”

I beg to differ. I’m the one who’s tempted by the devil.

Chapter 24

Angelo

I watch as Vittoria's tongue darts out to swipe up the cream from her lips, and it makes me rock fucking hard.

When I bit into the strawberry, I almost gave in and claimed her mouth.

The only reason I'm honoring her request is because I want her to kiss me out of her own free will. From the flush on her cheeks and the desire in her eyes, I know I won't have to wait much longer.

Christ, I hope not. A kiss never meant anything to me until she slammed me with the restriction. Now, it's the one thing I want most in the world.

Gripping hold of the fabric by her thigh, I order, "Feed me, baby."

When she reaches for a strawberry, my hand slips down to her calf.

"I love this dress," I compliment her.

"You better. It cost a small fortune," Vittoria mutters as she brings the fruit to my mouth.

Taking a bite, I slip my hand beneath the fabric and trail my fingers up her leg. A shiver ripples through her, making my lips curve into a smirk.

As I swallow, Vittoria brings her thumb to the corner of my mouth and swipes some cream off my lip. I watch as she sucks it from her thumb, and instantly I lose control.

In a single swift motion, I rise to my feet, and shoving the strawberries and cream out of the way, I set her ass down on the island.

Finding the zipper on the dress, I pull it down before ripping the sleeves down her arms so I can get to her breasts.

The moment my mouth latches onto her nipple, a satisfied groan rumbles from my chest.

Vittoria's fingers weave through my hair as she gasps from my sudden attack.

I push her so she lies down on the island, then say, "You're the only dessert I want."

I pull her dress and underwear off, and once I have her naked, I order, "Don't move."

Noticing how quickly the bruises on her body are fading, a smile forms on my face.

Fuck, I can't wait for them all to be gone.

I walk to the fridge and press the lever for the ice dispenser. Catching a cube, I bring it to my mouth as I slowly stalk back toward her.

Her eyes follow every move I make while her chest rises and falls with quick breaths.

With the ice captured between my teeth, I brace my hands on either side of her hips and lean over her. I trail the melting cube around her nipple and watch as the pebble hardens.

Another shiver rushes through her, and she squeaks when I move the ice down to her abdomen.

Fuck, I love seeing goosebumps spread over her body.

Her hips lift off the marble top as I drag the ice over her slit, and I let out a predatory chuckle.

When the cube touches her clit, she grabs hold of my wrist and arches her back. "Angelo!"

"Hmm?"

"It's cold," she complains.

I move back up her body until I'm face-to-face with her. Bringing my

hand to her chin, I pull at her bottom lip with my thumb, and when she opens for me, I drop the ice into her mouth.

“Suck it, baby.”

My hand travels back down her body until I reach her soaked pussy, and wanting to torture her, I keep my touch featherlight as I massage her clit.

I watch as she carries out my order, her cheeks hollowing the same way they did last night when she took my cock like a good girl.

When her lips part and she sucks in a breath, her hips swivel as she searches for more friction.

One of her hands shoots down and grips my wrist while the other wraps around the back of my neck.

Her eyebrows draw together, and she whimpers, “Angelo.”

I lower my head and let my mouth feast on her jaw and throat before I say, “Tell me what you want.”

“P-pleasure.”

Her back arches again, and she tries to push my hand closer to her pussy.

I chuckle against her throat and feel her body tremble as if the sound vibrates through her.

To drive her wild, I move my hand to the inside of her thighs and continue to trail my fingers over her soft skin.

“Tell me exactly what you want me to do,” I order.

She lets out a frustrated groan. “The same as last night.”

I lift my head and lock eyes with her. “No cheating, baby. Describe in detail where you want my hand.”

Her features tighten with more frustration, and she glances away from me. “I want you to rub my clit.”

“Look at me,” I demand. When her eyes flick back to mine, I say, “You have a fucking hot body, Vittoria. I want nothing more than to sink balls deep

inside you.”

Desire sparks in her brown irises.

I trail my finger dangerously close to where she wants it as I order, “I want you to feel confident when we have sex. Tell me exactly what you want.”

She pushes me back as she sits up, and grabbing hold of my shirt, she rips it over my head. “I want you naked,” she demands with a bossy tone that makes my cock jerk with need for her.

Obedying her, I remove the gun from behind my back and place it on the counter before I unzip my jeans and shove them down my legs.

When I step closer to her, she wraps an arm around my waist, and her fingers dig into my ass cheek. “I want you inside me.”

I grip her chin with my thumb and forefinger, and tipping her head up to me, I lean down and let my breath skim over her lips. “You’re such a good fucking girl.”

She pushes against my hold, and I expect a kiss, but at the last second, she pulls free from my fingers, a teasing grin tugging at her tempestuous mouth.

Christ, this woman will be the death of me.

Vittoria scoots her ass to the edge of the marble top and wraps her legs around me.

I look down at her glistening pussy and slowly push my cock through her folds.

“Yessss,” she hisses, her head falling back to expose her throat to me.

I wrap my fingers around her pretty little neck, and as I thrust harder, stroking her clit with my cock, I squeeze until my fingertips dip into her skin.

With hooded eyes, she watches me, her lips parted as she takes desperate breaths.

I keep stroking her clit until the head of my cock is painfully swollen and coated with her wetness, then I order, "Give me permission to kiss you."

The corner of her mouth twitches, then she whispers, "No."

My eyes narrow as I growl, "*La mia tentatrice.*"

Without giving her any warning, I slam my cock deep inside her.

Her hand slaps against my chest as her features tighten with pain, but she doesn't break eye contact with me.

My body shudders as her tight walls grip my cock like a vice.

Nothing has ever felt as good as being buried inside Vittoria.

Jesus. Her pussy will make me a believer that there's a heaven.

Another shudder rakes through me, and as I growl, I pull out and slam back inside her.

Her body jerks from the hard thrust, and gripping my shoulders, her nails dig into my skin.

I pull completely out of her, and grabbing hold of her sides, I pull her flush with my chest. I lift her from the marble top and carry her to the living room, where I sit down with her on my lap.

Bringing my hand to her face, I trail my fingers over her temple and cheek, then demand, "Put my cock back inside you."

Vittoria doesn't disappoint as she reaches down between us and positions me at her opening. She tentatively sinks down on my cock until her clit rubs against my pelvis.

With fascination, I watch as my wife learns that this position gives her access to rub her clit to her heart's content.

Without having to tell her what to do, she begins to swivel her hips and grinding down on me.

"That's it, baby," I groan, my cock swelling impossibly from the erotic sight.

I move my hands to her breasts and get lost in the feel of them as I knead her flesh and tweak her nipples.

Vittoria's grip tightens around my neck, and desperation flutters over her features.

"Do you need me to fuck you, baby?" I murmur, my tone hoarse from all the desire.

"Yes." Her head bobs up and down. "Yes, please."

"Please, who?" I taunt her as I grip hold of her hips to keep her from moving.

Her body quivers as she begs, "Please, Angelo."

I lift her off of me, and when I stand up, she gives me a confused look.

"On your knees, baby. Hold onto the back of the couch," I order.

She quickly moves into a kneeling position on the couch and grips hold of the cushion.

"Spread your legs wide."

She obeys and glances at me from over her shoulder.

Enjoying the view of her sexy ass, I place my knee next to hers on the couch to steady myself and grip her hips tightly. I line up with her opening and fill her with my cock in a single brutal thrust.

Buried to the hilt again in what's become my favorite place on earth, I let out a groan, "You take me so fucking well." My eyes drift shut from the incredible feel of her wrapped around me. "Such a fucking tight little pussy that's only been touched by me," I hiss with possessiveness.

Holding Vittoria in place, I suck in air through my teeth as I start to fuck her with no restraint. I watch as her ass cheeks turn red from my abs slapping against them, and it makes me move faster and harder.

Cries begin to spill over her lips, and soon she's sobbing, "Angelo. Yes. God. Yesssssss."

Her pussy contracts around me as her orgasm strikes, and pleasure sizzles down my spine. Ecstasy tenses my body, and I fall over her as my cock jerks inside her.

My teeth sink into her shoulder, where I smother my growls, my release filling her.

Our bodies jerk and tremble, and slick with sweat, we gasp for air.

“Christ,” I groan against her skin. “Fucking you has become my new favorite thing to do.”

Sitting down next to Vittoria, I pull her closer. She straddles my lap, and we both look down at the evidence of our orgasms coating her pussy.

I swipe my finger through her folds, and bringing it to her lips, I murmur, “Open.”

An apprehensive expression fills her eyes, but she does as she’s told. I dip my finger into her mouth, then say, “Suck, baby.”

Her tongue brushes against my finger as she listens.

“Such an obedient little *figa*.”

Chapter 25

Tori

I've made two batches of cannolis, and as they cool down, Angelo comes into the kitchen.

"Christ, I love the smell in the house since you moved in."

I grin at him from where I'm leaning with my hip against the counter while drinking a cup of coffee.

When I woke up this morning and felt his arms around me, there was a shift in my heart.

I'm starting to see Angelo in a different light. Not once has he been violent with me. Even though I'm well aware he can change at any time, I'm clinging to the hope that he'll never raise a hand against me.

He's been kind and patient with me...and even loving. Sometimes, I forget he's one of the heads of the Cosa Nostra. I forget he's killed people. I forget he makes a living from criminal activities.

When he's home, he's just Angelo, my husband.

We're forming a bond, and it has my feelings changing toward him.

I'm not always on high alert around him, and I even smile more.

Angelo steals a cannoli and leans back against the counter. With his eyes on me, he takes a bite.

I watch as he enjoys the dessert, and more warmth trickles into my heart.

I can learn to love this man.

He tilts his head and asks, "What's going on in that mind of yours?"

I take a deep breath and let it out slowly before I admit, "You're different

from what I expected.”

“What did you expect?”

He takes another cannoli as I answer truthfully, “Violence.”

He eats the whole thing in two bites before he says, “My father used to beat the shit out of my mother. I’m no saint, but it’s the one thing I’ll never do.”

Hearing about his parents, my eyebrows draw together. “I’m so sorry. It must’ve been awful.” I glance down at the caramel liquid in my cup. “My father was gentle and caring.”

“I know. He was a big teddy bear. Everyone felt the loss when he died.”

Right. Angelo knew my dad.

Angelo closes the distance between us and framing my face with his hands, he captures my gaze with his.

“When I saw you at the funeral, it never occurred to me Giorgio would treat you so badly. If I had known, I would’ve placed you somewhere safer.”

He leans down and presses a tender kiss an inch from my mouth, then murmurs, “I’m sorry you suffered since your father died.”

Another kiss is pressed a hair-width closer, and anticipation explodes in my chest.

My breathing speeds up, and it has Angelo pulling back so our eyes can meet.

“Give me permission, Vittoria,” he whispers.

I consider his request, but not feeling ready, I shake my head. “I just need a little more time.”

He lets out a deep breath and pulls away from me. “In that case, I’m taking half the cannolis.”

He’s not angry with me.

A smile spreads over my face. “I made double so you could have some.”

“I’ll have to spend extra time in the gym to work off all the food,” he chuckles before leaving the kitchen.

Silence falls at the loss of his presence. I feel an urge to follow him so I can be near him again, but suppressing it, I start to clean the kitchen after baking all morning.

A kiss is the only thing I have control over, and I want it to happen when I’m in love with Angelo.

When I’m done with the chore, I leave the kitchen and find Angelo lying on the couch and reading a book.

I stop dead in my tracks and stare at the big, bad mafioso doing something as ordinary as reading.

My mouth tips up in a smile, and walking closer, I ask, “Can I join you.”

His eyes flick to my face. “Of course.” He reaches his hand out, then murmurs, “Come lie by me.”

I’m careful as I crawl over him and lie down half on top of his body. Resting my cheek on his chest, I let out a sigh.

When he continues to read his book, I ask, “Can I watch TV?”

“Sure.” The word rumbles from him before he picks up the remote and hands it to me.

I switch on the TV and find my way to Netflix. I can’t remember which episode I was last on, and to play it safe, I start season two of *Virgin River* from the beginning.

Getting comfortable, I quickly get lost in the show.

During the second episode, Angelo mutters, “I’d kill half the people in that town just for being annoying.”

A chuckle escapes me. “Yeah, Hope is a bit much, and Charmaine is a conniving witch.”

“Bitch,” he corrects me. “What the fuck did he see in her?”

“I don’t know,” I sigh with happiness.

“The guy needs to grow a pair.”

“Uh-huh.”

After a few minutes, Angelo mutters, “Christ, why do you like this show?”

“It’s fun.”

“If it’s fun you want, all you have to do is ask, baby.”

I let out a burst of laughter and move to the other end of the couch. Lifting Angelo’s legs, I rest them on my lap, then say, “Hush now, I’m missing half of what’s happening.”

He tries to read his book for a while but eventually gives up and watches the show with me. Every now and then, he comments about the people being idiots, making the smile on my face grow wider and wider.

Father Parisi ignores all the other parishioners and rushes to where I’m getting everything ready for coffee hour.

“Tori, I was so worried,” he exclaims, and grabbing my hand in both of his, he asks, “Are you okay?”

I give him a smile to set him at ease. “Don’t worry about me. I’m fine.”

Before we can continue talking, Rosa joins us. “That’s a beautiful dress you’re wearing.”

“Thank you.”

It’s one of the new ones Angelo bought for me.

Her eyes dart to where Tiny is standing near a wall. I’ve already given him two cannolis and a cup of coffee. I caught him nodding off several times while Father Parisi delivered the sermon.

“What is he doing here?” Rosa asks.

Bracing for the questions she's going to unleash on me, I answer, "He's my guard."

"What?"

Father Parisi's attention is drawn away from us by a group of men, and as I continue with my work, I say, "I got married to Angelo."

"Angelo Rizzo!" she whisper-hisses as she covers her mouth, her eyes wide with shock. "God, have mercy." She motions the sign of the cross before her hands fly to my forearm, gripping it tightly. "I don't know what to say. Are you okay?" Her eyes flit to Tiny, then she whispers, "I don't have much, but I have enough for you to run."

Bless her heart.

Patting her hands, I shake my head. "There's no need for that. Angelo is good to me."

"That man doesn't have a good bone in his body! He's pure evil."

"Hush," I chastise her when I suddenly feel defensive of Angelo. "He's my husband, Rosa. Don't disrespect him."

Her hands jump away from my arm, and she takes a step back, disappointment filling her eyes.

I give her a pleading look as I say, "I'm married to him, Rosa. I made a vow before God, and I won't break it. This is my life now."

Understanding where I'm coming from, she nods. "It's such a shock."

Trust me, I know.

Widening my smile, I add, "Angelo is really good to me. I'm better off with him than I was living with Giorgio. He's been nothing but kind and loving with me."

"Is that so?" I hear a familiar sneer behind me.

Oh crap.

I haven't seen Giorgio since the wedding, and just hearing his voice sends

a shiver down my spine.

Turning around to look at him, my eyes widen when I see he's lost part of his left arm. "What happened? Did you get an infection from breaking it?"

Giving me a brotherly smile I haven't seen in over seven years, he wraps his other arm around my shoulders and says, "Let's go for a walk. We have a lot to talk about, Vi-Vi."

Hearing his old nickname for me throws me for a complete loop, and he manages to steer me toward the opposite side of the room and away from Tiny.

Not wanting to leave the safety of the crowd, I pull back and say, "No. We can talk here."

His eyes turn dark with the rage I'm very acquainted with, and he hisses, "Now that you're living the perfect life, you've forgotten about me? After everything I did to make Angelo marry you, this is the thanks I get? Not even a visit to the hospital?"

I quickly shake my head. "I didn't know you were in the hospital."

"Sure you didn't. Don't act all fucking innocent, Tori. What shit did you tell Angelo about me?"

I shake my head again.

Giorgio takes a step closer to me and growls, "I lost my fucking arm because you complained to Angelo that I beat you."

My eyes widen with shock, and I keep shaking my head.

"Back away from her," Tiny grumbles as he takes hold of my arm, pulling me to his side.

Instantly, Giorgio's face transforms from angry to passive. "Hey, Tiny. I'm just catching up with my little sister."

Tiny pushes me toward the table. "Go help Rosa."

Not arguing, I hurry back to my duties. I have to force a smile around my

lips while I serve the parishioners.

Holy crap. Angelo cut off Giorgio's arm.

Because of me.

I don't know how I feel about that.

Giorgio sure as hell had it coming after all the abuse and pain he inflicted on me.

A week ago, I would've been consumed with guilt, but now...

Angelo took revenge for what was done to me. He didn't come home bragging about it but just dealt with the problem.

Warmth floods my chest, and tears well in my eyes.

It's been so long since I had a safe place to call home, and it's overwhelming when I realize I'm safe with Angelo.

And Tiny.

Angelo will hurt anyone who lays a finger on me.

The moment I'm done serving coffee and tea, I ask Rosa, "Is it okay if you finish cleaning up this week? I'll clean up next Sunday."

"Uhm...yeah, sure."

"Thank you!" Grabbing my handbag, I rush to Tiny, and as we leave the cathedral, I say, "Thank you for looking out for me."

"It's my job." His eyes flick down to me. "Are you okay?"

I give my guard, that's quickly becoming my friend, a smile. "Yeah. I was just shocked to see he lost his arm."

After climbing into the car, my stomach begins to buzz with anticipation, and by the time the vehicle pulls up the driveway, my knee is bouncing like crazy.

The instant Tiny parks in front of the entrance, I say, "Thanks! See you tomorrow."

I dart out of the car and hurry toward the front door, and stepping inside, I

call out, “Angelo.”

I don’t find him in the living room or kitchen and call again, “Angelo.”

I check the bedroom and still not finding him, I start to worry because he said he’s not going out today.

I rush to the back to check on the veranda, and when I see him lift himself out of the pool, a smile breaks over my face.

He picks up a towel and wipes the fabric over his head, drops of water streaming down his muscled body.

“Angelo!”

His head snaps up, and concern instantly tightens his features when I break into a run to get to him.

Chapter 26

Angelo

“What happened?” I demand as Vittoria runs toward me.

She shakes her head, and plows into my chest. As she tilts her face up to me, there’s so much emotion in her eyes it looks like she’s a second away from crying.

“What the fuck happened?” I growl, ready to rip whoever upset her apart with my bare hands.

She shakes her head again as she reaches up, and framing my jaw, she pushes herself on her tiptoes. I automatically lean down, and when she stops a breath away from me, I realize what’s happening.

I wrap an arm around her waist and lock her body to mine. Bringing my other hand to her cheek, I brush her curls out of the way.

My eyes search hers to make sure I’m not misreading the moment, then she whispers, “I’m ready.”

I stare at my beautiful angel, and the last resistance around my heart is obliterated. The most intense emotion detonates in my soul and my entire world shifts on its axis.

Brutal possessiveness. Unreasonable jealousy. Violent protectiveness.

They all shudder through my body as this woman claims every inch of my dark soul.

I brush the unruly curls out of her face again, my gaze staring deep into hers. In this magical moment, I connect with her in a way I’ve never connected with another person.

With unconditional love spreading through every fiber of my being, I close the distance between us.

My lips brush over hers before I pull slightly back again. Our eyes lock, and I make a silent vow to her.

I'll protect you with all my strength. I'll love you until the day I die. From this moment, I live for you, my precious wife.

My mouth takes hers with an uncontrollable hunger that forces her a step backward. I hold her so tight her feet lift from the floor.

Fucking finally.

Her lips feel like the soft rays of the sun in the early morning hours. When my tongue enters her mouth, and I taste her for the first time, her light is so strong it forces the cold darkness in me back until she's shining brightly in my heart.

I groan into her mouth, and my body shudders from the intense emotions she evokes in me.

Tilting my head, my lips knead hers, my tongue dominates her mouth, and my teeth tug at her lips, wanting her never to forget this kiss.

Her first kiss.

I growl against her mouth, "Mine."

Before she can nod, I claim her again and devour her until we're both breathless. Needing more, I carry her to the veranda, and sinking down on a lounge chair, I pull her onto my lap.

My hand wraps around the back of her neck, and I hold her in place as I steal more kisses from her.

Time falls away, and nothing matters but Vittoria and how fucking intoxicating she tastes.

Even when my lips tingle from all the friction, I keep lapping at her mouth.

I'll never get enough of her.

I break the kiss for a moment and look at her flushed face. Her eyes slowly drift open, and all I see is amazement.

Not wanting to burst the intimate bubble we're caught in, I whisper, "Does this mean you're developing feelings for me?"

She moves her hands to my jaw and brushes her thumb over my bottom lip. "Yes."

A smile spreads across my face, and I hug her tightly. My hand grips her chin, and I lower my head again, sealing our mouths together.

For someone who never cared for kissing, I can't bring myself to stop.

As the minutes trickle by, the kiss grows gentler, and between the brushes of our lips, Vittoria smiles.

When I finally lift my head, she lets out a happy sigh, then whispers, "Now I regret making the rule."

I smirk at her. "Hmm...if only you'd known what you were missing."

She trails her fingers over my cheek and jaw while she stares at me.

Standing up with Vittoria in my arms, I carry her bridal style toward the pool.

She quickly catches on and tightens her arms around my neck. "No, Angelo. I washed my hair this morning!"

Letting out a dark chuckle, I run and leap into the pool. The water swallows us for a moment before I push her to the surface.

The instant my head breaks through the water, I yank Vittoria to my chest and seal our mouths together.

Holding onto my shoulders, she wraps her legs around my waist. I reach down between us, and as I devour her once again, I free my cock from the swimming trunks. I shift her panties to the side, and I enter my wife with a desperate thrust.

Christ, her pussy is my personal heaven.

Mine. All. Fucking. Mine.

Vittoria moans, and I feel a shiver race through her body.

I push her against the side of the pool, and while memorizing every inch of her mouth, I fuck her slow and deep.

“We can postpone the trip,” I mutter.

Standing with my arms crossed over my chest, I stare down at Tiny in the hospital bed.

Yesterday, his appendix ruptured, and we had to rush him to the emergency room.

I almost had a fucking heart attack, and the scare made me realize how much Tiny means to me.

Vittoria sits next to the bed and straightens the sheets over her bodyguard’s chest while saying, “Just get better, okay.” There’s so much worry on her face it squeezes my heart. “Is there anything I can get for you?”

Tiny shakes his head. “I’m good. Stop worrying.”

She shakes her head and takes his much bigger hand in her smaller ones.

Over the past two and a half weeks, the two have become close. Tiny’s a fucking overprotective bear when it comes to Vittoria, and she’s accepted him as her friend.

Tiny glances at me. “Sorry, boss.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry for,” I assure him.

He sighs before saying, “Go on the trip. I’ll get out of this place soon, then I can fly out to join you.”

Giving him a scowl, I shake my head. “When was the last time you had a break?” When his eyebrows draw together, I mutter, “Right. You can’t even

remember. Stay at home and let Rita take care of you.”

His eyes flit to Vittoria, but I quickly intervene. “Big Ricky will be with us. Nothing will happen to Vittoria.”

“Your health is important to us,” Vittoria says while patting his hand. “Please get some rest.”

Tiny grumbles something under his breath, then mutters, “Fiiiiine.”

Big Ricky steps forward from where he was hovering behind us. “Don’t you dare watch The Vampire Diaries without me.”

Tiny lets out a chuckle but stops and flinches in pain.

Letting out a sigh, I move forward and pat his shoulder. “You deserve time off. Get some rest.”

“Yes, boss.”

Vittoria gets up from the chair, and leaning over Tiny, she presses a kiss to his forehead as if he’s a big baby. “I’ll call every day to check in on you.”

A disgruntled sound rumbles from my chest because her lips are touching another man. I know it’s just Tiny, but the jealous side of me doesn’t want to share her with anyone.

Tiny lets out a chuckle, which gives him a stab of pain in his gut.

“Serves you right,” I mutter.

“So jealous,” Vittoria teases as she comes toward me.

I hold out my hand to her, and when she places her palm against mine and our fingers interlink, I tell Tiny, “And lay off on the junk food.”

He lets out a heavy sigh. “Yes, boss.”

We leave the room with Big Ricky right behind us.

If I didn’t have two important meetings lined up in Sicily, I’d postpone until Tiny was good to travel.

I check the time on my wristwatch and say, “We’ll just swing by the mansion to get our luggage, then haul ass to the airport.”

“Okay,” Vittoria murmurs, her worry for Tiny still etched on her beautiful face.

She grips my forearm with her other hand and moves closer to me when we exit the hospital.

She’s a fucking quick learner. I only had to tell her once that I want her glued to my side whenever we’re out in public, and she’s not once slipped up.

It’s just easier for me to protect her should there be a sudden attack.

Not that I’m expecting one. Things have been good the past year.

Vittoria and I climb into the back of the SUV, and when Big Ricky slides behind the steering wheel, I say, “You’ll have to stay with Vittoria whenever I have to take care of business.”

I see his eyebrows draw together in the rearview mirror, but he doesn’t argue.

Since he started working for me, he’s never left my side. Where I go, he goes. But with Tiny in the hospital, I need him to protect my precious wife. I’ll also have Uncle Maurizio’s men at my disposal while we’re in Sicily.

Besides, I can take care of myself.

Chapter 27

Tori

As the private jet slows down on the runway, nerves tighten my stomach.

I've experienced a roller coaster of emotions over the past month. But the past three weeks have also been a dream come true instead of the nightmare I expected when I was forced to marry Angelo.

I've become good friends with Rita and Tiny. My relationship with Big Ricky is still developing because I don't see him as often.

I haven't heard from Giorgio since he confronted me at the cathedral. All the bruises he left on me are gone, and being out from under his control is a dream come true.

My duties at the Parish have continued as normal, although Rosa's more distant than usual. I don't blame her. People only know the dark side of Angelo, and they fear him the same way I used to.

There are still times I'm cautious around him, especially when he comes home in a bad mood. He never takes it out on me but is just quieter than usual.

The most important change is the way I feel about him.

I've fallen in love with the way it feels when he touches me.

Every time he gets home from work and walks into the kitchen, my heart skips a beat and my stomach fills with butterflies.

I'm in love with my husband, and it feels good.

All the hopes and dreams I've had are finally within my reach.

"Let's go, baby," Angelo murmurs as he unclasps my seat belt.

I take his hand as I climb to my feet, and sucking in a deep breath of air, I follow him to the exit.

“Don’t worry. My family will love you,” he says in an attempt to put me at ease. “Uncle Maurizio’s like a father to me.”

“Okay,” I whisper, tightening my hold on his hand.

Big Ricky is the first to leave the plane, and only when he calls, “Clear,” do we take the steps down to the tarmac.

My eyes dart to the three black SUVs parked near the private jet before settling on a man who looks like he’s in his late sixties or early seventies.

When Maurizio Rizzo was the head of the Rizzo territory in New York, I was too young to understand anything about the Cosa Nostra.

Angelo lets go of my hand when we near the man, and I watch as they smile at each other before hugging.

“It’s good to see you, Zio,” Angelo chuckles.

“It’s been too long.”

When they pull apart, Angelo takes hold of my hand and tugs me closer. “I want to introduce you to Vittoria.” There’s pride in his eyes as he says, “I finally listened to you and got married. Vittoria is my wife.”

Hearing Angelo introduce me as his wife has warmth spreading through my heart.

His uncle’s eyes widen with shock. “What?”

I feel like I’m under a microscope as his eyes flit over me before he turns his attention back to Angelo. “You got married? When? Why weren’t we invited?”

Angelo lets out a chuckle and pats his uncle’s shoulder. “It happened in the spur of the moment. I saw Vittoria and just knew I had to have her.” He gives me a wink. “She didn’t have much choice in the matter.”

My cheeks warm from all the attention, and as I hold my hand out to

Maurizio Rizzo, a retired capo of the Cosa Nostra, I swallow hard and say, "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir."

Mr. Rizzo's eyes flick to me again, and it takes a very uncomfortable moment before he shakes my hand. Then a smile spreads over his face, and I'm tugged into a hug.

"When can we expect an heir?" Mr. Rizzo asks as he lets go of me.

Angelo warned me his family would be eager to ask about babies, so I'm not caught off guard by the question.

Letting out a chuckle, I answer, "Hopefully soon, sir."

"We're family. Call me Zio Maurizio," he says, and a moment later, I'm forgotten as he starts to bombard Angelo with questions about the businesses in New York.

Letting out a relieved sigh, I glance at Big Ricky. I miss Tiny, and it must show on my face because Big Ricky moves closer to me, giving me a comforting smile.

When we reach the SUVs, Big Ricky holds the door open so we can climb into the backseat. With Uncle Maurizio opting to drive, Big Ricky takes the passenger seat.

Uncle Maurizio's men are in the vehicles at the front and back of us as we're driving out of the airport.

Angelo places his hand on my thigh, and I quickly take hold of it while leaning into his side. Feeling his strong body next to mine sets me at ease.

It's my first time in a foreign country, and I eagerly look out the window.

There's an old charm to all the buildings, and I'm excited to explore the island.

Lifting my head toward Angelo, I whisper, "Thank you for bringing me here."

He lowers his face and presses a kiss to the corner of my mouth. "You're

welcome, baby. As soon as I'm done with the meetings, I'll show you around."

I snuggle against his arm and take a deep breath of his woodsy aftershave while I continue to look at the scenery.

Soon, we're being driven up a stretch of road that winds up the side of a steep hill, and a massive three-story villa comes into view. It's situated on a cliff, and in the distance, I can see the blue Mediterranean Sea.

"Gosh, it's beautiful here," I murmur, my eyes feasting on the scenic view.

"Angelo was born in this villa," Uncle Maurizio mentions. "And so was my son, Roberto."

I remember when Roberto was killed. It's all everyone in Long Island talked about for weeks.

"I'm sorry for your loss," I say, thinking it must be a nightmare losing your only son.

I don't think I could survive such heartbreak.

Uncle Maurizio stops the SUV near the front door that's standing open. I notice four guards loitering in the front yard.

When the other guards who escorted us from the airport join them, I count ten altogether.

Back home, Angelo only has Big Ricky and Tiny. Oh, and Simon, who's stationed at the gates of our mansion.

I lean into Angelo and ask, "Why are there so many guards?"

He lets out a chuckle. "Cause none of them are as good as Tiny and Big Ricky." He tugs me closer and wraps his arm around me. "I'm trained in all forms of combat, so I'm capable of protecting us as well."

Hearing the confidence in his tone, my abdomen tightens with attraction. The corner of my mouth lifts as we walk into the villa.

An elderly woman comes toward us with her arms wide open. “Angelo. Finally.”

He quickly pulls away from me and hugs his aunt.

“I’ve missed you, my boy,” she says with a wide smile. “Welcome home.” As they pull apart, her gaze flicks to me. “You brought company?”

“Zia Gloria, let me introduce you to my wife, Vittoria,” Angelo says, once again looking proud.

Aunt Gloria gasps, and I’m gripped by the shoulders, her shocked gaze glances up and down my body, before she says, “Such a beautiful wife.” Then she scowls at her nephew. “No wedding?”

“It was sudden,” he explains. “I didn’t want to risk losing Vittoria. I wanted her by my side, and the only way to ensure that was to marry her as quickly as possible.” His eyes rest lovingly on me for a moment before he turns his attention back to his family.

My heart. Only Angelo can make a forced marriage sound like the most romantic gesture.

“Welcome, Vittoria,” she says before hugging me.

“Thank you,” I say, appreciating the warm reception we’re getting from his family. It makes me feel a hell of a lot better. “Please call me Tori.”

“Come, come, come,” Aunt Gloria says as she walks deeper into the mansion. “There’s so much to catch up on.”

We’re ushered through the house and out onto the veranda, where a pitcher of iced tea is waiting. I hardly get to see what the interior of the villa looks like.

As we’re all taking a seat, Aunt Gloria says, “We should’ve had a big wedding here at the villa.”

Angelo grips hold of the patio chair I’m sitting on and pulls it closer until I’m right next to him. He takes my hand and rests my palm on his thigh.

“I was so taken with Vittoria there was no time to plan a big wedding,” he explains. His eyes flick to my face. “It was love at first sight. I instantly became obsessed with her.”

My heart.

Learning that Angelo fell in love with me the moment he saw me fills my entire soul with warmth.

Angelo looks at his aunt and uncle as he mentions, “I thought we could have a party to celebrate our union while we’re here?”

“Yes! That will be perfect,” Aunt Gloria beams. “We’ll invite everyone.”

“Just arrange the party for when I’m done with my meetings,” Angelo says.

“Hmm...” Uncle Maurizio grumbles. He glances between Angelo and me, then asks, “What’s your family name?”

“Romano,” Angelo answers on my behalf. “She’s Tony’s daughter.”

Uncle Maurizio’s eyebrows lift. “Tony, who handled the collections for us?”

When Angelo nods, Uncle Maurizio lets out a deep breath. I can’t tell if it’s a good or bad thing.

Aunt Gloria pours iced tea into glasses, then says, “The flight must’ve been tiring.”

“It was the same as usual,” Angelo replies.

“Thank you for the iced tea,” I murmur as I pick up a glass and hand it to Angelo before helping myself.

Aunt Gloria waits for me to take a sip before she says, “Tell us about yourself, Tori.”

I let out an awkward chuckle. “I never know how to answer that question.”

“Vittoria is very active in the local Parish, and she’s an excellent cook,”

Angelo informs them. “She’s also shy, so you’ll have to be patient with her.”

I squeeze his thigh to say thank you for answering on my behalf.

“If you like cooking, I’d love to show you some Sicilian recipes I got from my grandmother,” Aunt Gloria mentions.

I smile widely. “I’d love that.”

Even though I still feel awkward because I’ve just met Angelo’s family, I’m hopeful we’ll get along. Knowing how important his uncle and aunt are to him, the last thing I want is to drive a wedge between them.

Aunt Gloria starts telling me about all the traditional dishes she wants to show me while the men discuss business. Not even ten minutes later, I find myself alone in the kitchen with Aunt Gloria, looking at her vast collection of recipes.

“We have to make caponata,” Aunt Gloria says. “There’s a secret ingredient my grandmother added that gives the dish a lovely tang.”

Feeling excited, I nod as the last of the tension leaves my body.

Chapter 28

Angelo

Introducing Vittoria to my family went much better than I expected.

In the past, Uncle Maurizio mentioned several times it would be to our benefit if I married a woman from a family with business ties to the Cosa Nostra. Someone like Valentina Toscano.

Aunt Gloria took Vittoria to the kitchen to show her the recipe collection she's so proud of, and I'm expecting some kind of blow-back now that we're alone.

Uncle Maurizio glances over the backyard, then lets out a sigh and murmurs, "You've always had an eye for beauty."

A grin tugs at the corner of my mouth. "Right? Vittoria is exquisite." When my uncle's gaze meets mine, I say, "I love her."

It's the first time I'm saying the words out loud. I know Vittoria is taking longer to develop the same feelings for me, but I feel I've made significant progress with her in the past few weeks. It's only a matter of time before my wife will love me the same way I love her.

His eyebrow lifts. "When did you marry the girl?"

"It's been three weeks."

Another heavy breath escapes him. "I understand you're taken with her, but don't you think it's a little too soon to talk about love, Angelo?"

I shake my head. "No."

I don't elaborate because there's nothing to explain. I love my little temptress. End of story.

Needing to make sure everything is okay between us, I say, “I know you were hoping I’d marry Valentina, but she’s bat-shit crazy. Vittoria is perfect, and she’s an amazing wife. I want you to be happy for me.”

My uncle nods as his eyes flit over my face. “I understand.” He’s quiet for a moment, then he nods and changes the subject. “Do you want me to accompany you to the meetings?”

I’m relieved because he’s not as upset as I thought he’d be. I knew if he met Vittoria, he’d see she’s the right woman for me.

“It’s not necessary,” I reply. “I know how you despise politics.”

A disgruntled expression tightens his features. “Sangriotti is a shark.”

“Unfortunately, he’s the Minister of Justice, and we need him in our pocket.”

“I know,” Uncle Maurizio sighs. “I’m getting too old for this shit.”

I’ve wanted to address the subject for a while, and feeling now’s the right time, I say, “You’ve done a lot for the family. Don’t you think it’s time you retire and enjoy your time with Zia Gloria?”

His eyes narrow on me. “And who do you suggest to run things here in Sicily?”

“Eddie. He’s been with us for years and has proven he’s ready to take on more responsibility.”

Uncle Maurizio and Eddie’s father were good friends, and I’m hoping the two families’ shared history helps to soften my uncle’s heart.

After a few seconds, Uncle Maurizio nods. “Send Eddie to me. I’ll train him, and once I’m sure he’s ready, I’ll retire completely from the business.”

My eyes narrow because everything is just too easy. My uncle is a stubborn man by nature.

He notices my sharp gaze and lets out a chuckle. “I’m seventy-four, Angelo. I’m tired.”

I take in the deep lines on his face and murmur, “You deserve to live your golden years out in peace. I want you to be happy.”

Looking visibly touched by my words, he stares at me for a long while. “You’re like a son to me, Angelo.”

I nod and clear my throat because this is getting a little too emotional for my liking.

“I want you to be happy as well,” Uncle Maurizio murmurs.

The corner of my mouth lifts. “I am. You don’t have to worry about me.”

Big Ricky comes around the side of the house, and when he’s close enough, he says, “Sorry to interrupt, boss. I spoke with Bruno, and he said he’d escort you to the meeting while I stay with Tori.”

Even though the guards protect my uncle and aunt, they’re employed by the Cosa Nostra, which means they all report to me.

Uncle Maurizio’s eyebrows lift. “Why is Big Ricky staying with Tori?”

“Because Tiny isn’t here,” I explain.

“Still...” He shakes his head. “She’s safe here with us.” He waves a hand at Big Ricky. “Take him and Bruno. I don’t trust Sangriori as far as I can throw the fucker.” When he sees the hesitation on my face, he adds, “We have half an army, Angelo. The girl will probably be in the kitchen with Gloria for the rest of the day.”

Fuck, I feel so overprotective of Vittoria, but leaving Big Ricky behind will be a stupid move. I have more enemies in Sicily than in Long Island. Besides, Vittoria is with my family, and Uncle Maurizio’s right, there’s half an army guarding them.

“Fine,” I mutter. I glance at Big Ricky. “Get the car ready. We’re leaving in ten minutes.”

“Yes, boss.”

I get up from the comfortable chair, then say, “I’m going to check on

Vittoria before I head out.”

Uncle Maurizio climbs to his feet with a groan, and it makes me realize how old he’s gotten.

It’s time he retires. As soon as I’m back in Long Island, I’ll send Eddie to take over.

We head into the house, and when I hear Vittoria’s voice from the kitchen, a smile spreads over my face.

“So you grill the eggplant in butter instead of olive oil?”

“Yes. It makes a huge difference,” Aunt Gloria answers.

Stepping into the kitchen, it warms my heart to see Vittoria and Aunt Gloria sitting by the table. There are scraps of papers, journals, and cooking books spread out before them.

My wife looks like she’s in seventh heaven.

I lean over her and press a kiss to her forehead. “I have to go to the meeting.”

She quickly gets up from the chair, wraps her arms around my neck, and whispers, “Be careful.”

Holding Vittoria tightly, I press my face into her hair and take a deep breath of her floral scent.

When I pull back, I lock eyes with her. “I’m taking Big Ricky with me. Are you okay with that?”

She quickly nods. “Of course. I’ll feel better knowing he’s with you.”

My eyes flick to my uncle and aunt, and it has Aunt Gloria saying, “Tori will be fine with us. We’re going to prepare a feast for dinner.”

Hearing Aunt Gloria call Vittoria by her nickname sets me at ease.

Lowering my head, I press a tender kiss to my little temptress’ mouth before letting go of her.

“I should only be gone for two hours.”

Vittoria nods, and I drink in the sight of the soft smile playing around her lips.

God, I'm so fucking lucky to have this beautiful creature as my wife.

I lift my hand and brush my fingers over her cheek before stepping around her and walking out of the kitchen.

“Let me show you to your bedroom so you can freshen up before we start cooking,” I hear Aunt Gloria say.

As I reach the front door, Uncle Maurizio pats me on the back. “Good luck with the meeting. Call me if you need backup.”

“I’ll be fine,” I mutter.

I join Big Ricky and Bruno, and soon, we’re driving away from the villa where I spent most of my childhood.

Chapter 29

Tori

Glancing around the room, Aunt Gloria brought me to, I can't keep from smiling.

"You have such a beautiful home," I compliment her as I walk out onto the balcony.

The room is on the second floor, and it has a spectacular view of the Mediterranean Sea. I grin when I see a couple of sailboats bobbing on the blue water.

The bedroom is situated on the side of the house, but we still have an amazing view. The breeze plays with my curls as I glance down to the rock garden below. Seeing how high up I am, I feel a slither of fear and lightheadedness.

I turn around and walk back into the bedroom, but there's no sign of Aunt Gloria.

I didn't hear her leave.

The next moment, Uncle Maurizio comes into the room, and with a hostile expression, he tosses an envelope on the bed. "There's five thousand euros. It's more than you deserve."

Huh?

His dark eyes lock with mine, and when I see the disgust on his face, my heart sinks to my stomach.

Oh, no!

He crosses his arms over his chest, then mutters, "I don't know what you

did to make Angelo marry you, but this farce ends today. It's an embarrassment to the family that he married someone like you."

Intense shock shudders through me because I didn't expect this at all. My lips part, but no words come out.

"Angelo should've married Valentina Toscano and not the likes of you." His eyes sweep over me with a look of hatred. "Take the money and fuck off."

The anger deepens on his face, and it makes me feel like I'm something Angelo found in the gutters.

The sudden verbal attack catches me totally off guard, and I don't know what to say. My heart shrivels in my chest as fear and panic slowly spread through my body.

When I don't respond, Maurizio growls, "Take the money, woman! Your luggage is in the car waiting out front. Leave Angelo and never contact him again, or I'll make you disappear."

The threat has my fear spiking dangerously high. Even though Maurizio is no longer the head of the Rizzo territory in New York, he's still part of the Cosa Nostra. He's still dangerous.

Over the past weeks, I've been lulled into a false sense of security. I finally felt safe and no longer on guard that people like Giorgio would hurt me.

The last thing I expected was Angelo's family bribing me to leave him. Sure, I braced for the awkwardness of meeting them, but not this.

"Ahhh..." My eyebrows pinch together, and I place a hand over my tight stomach. "I can't leave Angelo."

Angelo will hunt me down and kill me if I dare betray him. I mean, he killed one of his bartenders for stealing two thousand dollars! What Maurizio is asking of me is so much worse.

I've also fallen in love with my husband, and I don't want to leave him.

"The money is enough to buy a ticket back to America. Go, and if I find out you contacted Angelo, I'll make you wish you were never born," he threatens.

"Angelo will never believe I left him," I whisper, the shock making my voice hoarse.

"Angelo will believe what I tell him," Maurizio snaps. "He'll believe me over a woman he's only known a few weeks." He shakes his head. "I heard about the farce of a wedding the day after it happened and looked into your family. You're a bunch of bottom-feeders and not worthy of the name Rizzo. Over my dead body will I allow you to give birth to a Rizzo heir."

God, they faked being shocked by the news, and we fell for it. I thought they liked me.

It just shows how good they are at keeping up a deceiving act around Angelo. There's no telling what they'll make him believe.

Maurizio's right. They're his family, and I'm still getting to know him.

The intensity of the shock lessens enough for me to say, "Angelo will be very upset when he finds out you're trying to coerce me into leaving him."

Maurizio stalks closer to me, and I instinctively cringe backward. He shoves his finger in my face while a deadly rage ripples over his face.

"You've only been married three weeks," he bites out, the rage darkening his tone.

I take another step backward and find myself on the balcony. The wind whips the fabric of my dress against my legs while my eyes are wide on the old man.

"Angelo will get over you in a heartbeat, and Valentina will be there to comfort him," he continues to say. "Either you fucking leave, or I'll bury your body in my backyard. When Angelo and Valentina get married here, I'll

make sure they say their vows on the spot where your corpse is being eaten by worms.”

Oh my God. This can't be happening.

My heart hammers against my ribs, and my breaths grow shallow.

“Angelo will never believe I just left him without a word,” I whisper, tears threatening to overwhelm me.

“He’ll believe what I tell him!” Maurizio shouts in my face, and I flinch again.

I can't...what?

I shake my head as the gravity of the situation bears down on my shoulders.

What do I do?

My eyes dart to the envelope holding the bribe money, then I spot my handbag.

I need to call Angelo!

My gaze flits back to Maurizio, and when I try to dart past him, he grabs hold of my waist and yanks me backward. I lose my footing and stagger into Maurizio. My side hits the balcony’s railing, and with zero control, I tip over the side.

Fear explodes in my chest, and I grab hold of Maurizio.

Everything happens so freaking fast I don’t realize what’s going on until it’s too late.

I’m unable to scream from the intense shock and stop breathing as we both go over the side of the balcony. My body reacts, and I manage to grab hold of the railing.

I feel Maurizio's fingers grasping at my dress, then a second later, I hear a sickening thud below. Hanging on the side of the balcony, I make the mistake of glancing down.

Seeing Maurizio's body bent at a weird angle over a boulder, his eyes frozen in death, makes a harrowing emotion darken the world around me.

Mother of God!

My breaths are nothing but shallow rasps, and I feel lightheaded from the trauma I've been subjected to.

In grave danger of falling to my death, I let out a desperate sob.

No.

NONONO.

My fingers tighten their hold on the railing, and the fear of falling gives me a strength I didn't know I possessed to frantically pull myself back to safety.

I drop onto the floor of the balcony and gasp for air as the trauma and dire circumstances shudder through me.

Maurizio's dead.

Angelo's beloved uncle is dead, and it's my fault.

'Uncle Maurizio's like a father to me.'

Recalling Angelo's words, I push myself to my feet and hurry into the room. Frantic fear keeps me from thinking clearly.

It happened so fast that I can't process it at all.

Desperation and dread have me grabbing the envelope and my handbag before I rush out of the room. My eyes dart around, and I expect the guards or Gloria to intercept me at any moment.

I fly down the stairs, my breaths mere pants while I keep glancing frantically around me. My heart pounds harder and faster as I run toward the front door.

I can't believe what just happened.

This isn't real.

It's just a nightmare.

No! Why? Why did this happen?

God.

I'm inundated with panicked thoughts, and each one has me moving faster as I dart out of the house.

Once Gloria realizes Maurizio is dead, she'll probably order my death on the spot.

The mafia never asks questions, they just kill.

They won't believe it was an accident.

The retired head of the Cosa Nostra is dead because of me.

The guards will kill me.

God, Maurizio is dead!

A sob bursts from me as I hurry to the sedan parked out front.

Please, Father. Don't let them find Maurizio's body before I'm gone. Help me!

Yanking the door open, I climb behind the steering wheel and start the engine. My eyes flit wildly around, and seeing the guards multiplies my fear.

GoGoGo!

I push the gas pedal to the floor, and with screeching tires, the vehicle darts forward. The guards all glance at me, and it makes me hold my breath as I race toward the gates.

Luckily, the gates start to open, and my lips move as I say one silent prayer after another.

Please. Please. Please.

Forgive me. I didn't mean to kill him.

Don't forsake me in my darkest hour.

Why? WhyWhyWhy?

When I glance in the rearview mirror, there's no sign of Gloria, and I can only pray she doesn't find Maurizio's body before I've managed to put a safe

distance between the villa and myself.

They're going to think I killed Maurizio. The entire Cosa Nostra will want me dead.

Angelo will never forgive me.

I'm going to hell.

I have no idea where to go as I turn onto a road, but I floor the gas pedal. My knuckles are white from my tight grip on the steering wheel, and I keep glancing in the rearview mirror, expecting the guards to come after me.

My thoughts are a jumbled mess, and the fear, shock, and panic have me spiraling into a dark pit of despair.

Angelo will never forgive me for killing his uncle.

God, it happened so fast.

The traumatic incident replays in my mind, and a sob bursts from me as the shock of what just happened rolls over me in shuddering waves.

How do I even begin to explain the nightmare? Who will believe me?

Seeing a café on the corner of an intersection, I quickly pull over and ask for directions to the airport.

The waitress looks at me like I'm a crazy person, but luckily, she gives me the directions.

I pull away from the curb with screeching tires, and my paranoia and fear grow with every mile I put between the villa and myself.

My heart shrinks into a tiny ball when I realize the three weeks I shared with Angelo is all I'll ever have. He's an unforgiving man, and I've seen him kill someone with my own eyes. He killed that bartender for stealing two thousand dollars.

He will kill me.

But I can try to explain. I'll tell him it was an accident.

He won't believe you, especially if Gloria tells him some lie.

God.

God.

Oh God.

More sobs shudder through me as my mind keeps racing.

What do I do?

Chapter 30

Angelo

We're five minutes away from the office building where I'm meeting with Sangriotti when my phone starts to vibrate.

Pulling the device out of the breast pocket of my jacket, I frown when I see Aunt Gloria's name flashing on the screen.

"Zia Gloria?" I answer.

She weeps uncontrollably, and it sends icy shivers down my spine. "He's dead," she gasps. "She killed him!"

"What?" I pat Big Ricky's shoulder, then order, "Turn around. We're going back to the villa!" Focusing on my hysterical aunt, I snap, "Who's dead?"

"Your uncle. That snake you brought into our home killed him."

What the fuck?

A dark frown forms on my forehead as all my emotions spiral into chaos. "Uncle Maurizio is dead?"

"Y-yes," she sobs. "Vittoria pushed him off the balcony."

No, she didn't. She wouldn't.

"What. The. Fuck?" I growl before I shout, "Drive fucking faster!"

I'm torn between the shock of Uncle Maurizio's death and my aunt blaming Vittoria for it.

Aunt Gloria weeps uncontrollably, and it has me biting out, "No one does a single fucking thing until I'm there."

I end the call and almost crush the device as the shock of my uncle's

death hits me square in the chest.

“What happened?” Big Ricky asks, his worried eyes flicking between the road and the rearview mirror.

“Aunt Gloria says Vittoria killed Uncle Maurizio,” I say, unable to believe that Vittoria could do such a thing.

Not my wife.

Not my innocent little deer.

My mind races, and I can only come to one conclusion – Uncle Maurizio must’ve tried to get rid of her because he wasn’t happy with the marriage. Vittoria defended herself.

That’s the only acceptable explanation because if there’s one thing I’m fucking sure of, Vittoria is a God-fearing woman who wouldn’t hurt a fucking fly.

The woman I love isn’t capable of committing murder.

Never.

I refuse to believe it.

The moment Big Ricky stops the SUV in front of the Villa, I climb out and run into the house that used to hold so many happy memories for me.

Aunt Gloria is in the middle of the living room, weeping as she clings to Uncle Maurizio’s body.

I take in his ghostly pale face and the trickle of blood that’s dried on the side of his slightly parted lips.

Fuck.

No.

When the loss of my uncle registers, I shake my head as my heart breaks.

No.

I take a step closer, and losing control of my emotions, I shout, “What the fuck happened?”

Aunt Gloria glares at me, and with rage, she cries, “She killed him!” A sob rattles through her. “She killed my Maurizio.”

No. Impossible.

“What did you do to Vittoria?” I demand, my voice cold and lifeless.

My tone gets Aunt Gloria’s attention, and she begins to ramble, “She wanted to run away and leave you, but when Maurizio locked her in the room so she couldn’t get away, she shoved him over the balcony.”

Vittoria, leave me? Never.

I shake my head. “Don’t fucking lie to me.”

As I stare at the woman who was like a mother to me, I see the truth she’s trying to hide, and my entire world is ripped to fucking shreds.

The sense of betrayal is instant, ripping the humanity from my soul.

“It’s the truth,” she shouts, but as she looks at me, the emotion drains from her face as she realizes I don’t believe her lies.

Her voice shakes with anger as she says, “You were supposed to marry Valentina and not some pathetic little girl. Everything was planned, and you ruined it all.”

She moves fast, grabbing the gun from behind Uncle Maurizio’s back, but Big Ricky fires a shot before she can point the weapon at me.

That did not just fucking happen!

I take a step back as another blow of betrayal slams into me.

No.

Uncontrollable anger floods my chest as I watch my aunt slump over my uncle’s body.

The breaths rasp over my lips, and I drop to my knees from the force of destructive emotions reaping chaos in my chest.

I trusted them.

“Find Vittoria Rizzo!” Big Ricky shouts the order to the guards. “Seach

every part of this fucking island and bring her back unharmed. If anyone lays a hand on the boss' wife, I'll fucking kill you myself."

Uncle Maurizio and Aunt Gloria fucking betrayed me.

Vittoria. My angel.

I gasp through the unbearable heartbreak and deceit that's darkened my world to black.

"Boss." I feel Big Ricky's hand on my shoulder. He crouches beside me. "Angelo!"

My eyes snap to his.

"We have to find Vittoria."

He's right.

I climb to my feet and shake my head in an attempt to regain my composure. "How did she get away from the villa?"

Big Ricky pulls out his phone and makes a call. I listen as he orders, "Ask the guards how Vittoria escaped the villa."

My eyes lock on the man who's used his body to shield mine, who's killed to keep me safe, who's been there every step of the way.

He sees me staring at him and gripping my shoulder, he squeezes it.

He's my common sense right now. He's taken control of the situation because he knows I need a moment to process the cluster fuck of a nightmare.

Suddenly, he ends the call. "Tori took one of the cars. Maurizio instructed them to let her leave." He looks up at me, then says, "We'll find her."

It takes another minute for me to regain control of my emotions, and shoving the shock to the back of my mind, I think clearly for the first time since shit went down.

I yank my phone from the breast pocket of my jacket and quickly dial Vittoria's number.

The first attempt goes to voicemail, and I hang up and try again.

Finally, she fucking answers. “I-I’m so s-sorry,” she sobs.

“Where are you?” I demand, my tone hoarse from the blow I’ve suffered.

“I-I’m s-sorry. F-forgive m-me.”

“Where the fuck are you, Vittoria?” I shout.

The call ends, and I let out a frustrated growl.

The tracking device.

I had a tracking device placed in both our wedding rings so Tiny and Big Ricky could find us in case shit ever went sideways.

Thank fucking God.

I quickly log into the app, and a second later, the red dot shows clearly on a map.

“Fuck!” Big Ricky exclaims. “I forgot about the tracking devices. Where is she?” He steps closer to take a look at the phone screen.

The signal shows she’s at the airport.

“Let’s go,” I growl, and without giving my uncle and aunt's bodies another glance, I stalk out of the villa.

Ignoring the backseat, I climb into the passenger side while Big Ricky slides behind the steering wheel.

As he speeds away from the villa, I shake my head. “What the fuck were they thinking? That I’d believe some bullshit story of Vittoria leaving me?”

“People do desperate things in desperate times,” Big Ricky mutters.

They were fucking stupid. I told Uncle Maurizio I love Vittoria, and still, he tried to get rid of her.

Thank God he didn’t kill her.

My innocent little deer.

The love of my fucking life.

“I can’t believe it,” I murmur as the shock hits once again. “Vittoria must be scared out of her fucking mind.”

“We’ll find her,” he assures me.

Jesus fucking Christ.

A breath shudders from me, and I struggle to accept that my family betrayed me. They tried to get rid of Vittoria.

I just need to fucking hold my wife again.

Fuck, she must be so fucking traumatized!

Christ, baby. I’m fucking sorry.

Chapter 31

Tori

Reaching the counter, I'm breathless as I ask, "When is the next flight to America?"

The attendant frowns as she looks at her computer screen. "Where in America?"

"I don't care. Anywhere."

Her eyes dart over my face. "Are you okay?"

I nod and squeeze the words out. "I lost...I lost my husband."

I lost Angelo.

A heartbreaking cry threatens to rip free from my throat.

He sounded so angry over the phone. I just know if he finds me, he'll kill me.

Oh God.

Another wave of trauma, fear, and heartbreak shake me to my core.

Compassion softens the attendant's features. "I'm so sorry." She quickly checks the screen again, then says, "There's one boarding right now with Swiss Air. It's destined for Minnesota. Will that be okay?"

I nod frantically. "How much?"

"One thousand six hundred euros."

I quickly take the envelope from my handbag and give her the cash and my passport. "I'll take it."

My heart beats out of my chest, and I keep glancing around me while she processes the purchase.

Don't let them find me.

Please, Father. Keep me safe.

When the attendant prints the ticket, she says, "I've upgraded you to first class at no extra charge." Giving me the ticket, her smile is filled with sympathy. "Do you have any luggage you have to check in?"

I shake my head. "I'm traveling light." Because in my panic, I forgot to grab my luggage from the car. There's no time to go back to the parking area.

"Is that all I can help with?"

I quickly nod. "Thank you so much!" I glance around me again. "Where do I go?"

She points to her left. "Straight down there and through the lounge for first-class passengers."

My eyes lock with hers for a brief moment, and I swallow hard on my tears. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

When I dart away from the counter, I struggle not to run. Feeling more and more frantic by the second, I keep glancing around me as I hurry toward the area the attendant pointed out.

Entering the first class section, my eyes land on security personnel, and it instantly makes my heart flutter in my chest as my anxiety spikes.

What if they stop me?

What if one of them works for Angelo?

God. Please. Please. Please.

"Come forward," the security guard says with a nod at me.

My mouth is bone dry as I place my handbag in a container. I step through the body scanner, and when it doesn't beep, I release a relieved breath.

The guards don't even look at me again, and I quickly grab my handbag

and rush down a hallway.

When I hurry toward another attendant, she smiles at me. “Just in time. They called to say you’re on your way.”

“Thank you so much,” I gasp, my hand trembling as I hand her my passport and ticket.

She checks everything before handing the documents back to me. “Enjoy your flight, Mrs. Rizzo.”

Hearing my married name, my heart squeezes painfully in my chest.

“Thank you,” I whisper before I enter the walkway leading to the plane.

Almost there.

Once I step aboard, I’m shown to a cubicle with a luxurious seat. I slump down and cover my mouth as my mouth trembles from the effort it’s taking not to cry.

My heart keeps pounding as the minutes until take-off slowly creep by.

Please, Father. Help me escape this terrible fate.

Finally, the announcement is made, and the plane begins to move. I glance out of the small window, and as the plane speeds up and everything begins to blur, I hold my breath.

My stomach drops as the aircraft takes flight.

Lowering my head, I stare at the wedding ring on my finger, and now that I’m safely in the air for a while, the trauma and heartbreak overwhelm me.

Silent tears stream down my cheeks, and I turn my back toward the aisle. I wrap an arm around my middle and wipe the tears away as they fall.

When there’s a soft touch on my shoulder, I startle and glance at a flight attendant as she says, “Sorry, Mrs. Rizzo. I just want to pay my respects to you for your loss. My name is Claire. If there’s anything you need, don’t hesitate to call me.”

The other attendants must’ve told her.

Nodding, I whisper, "Can I have some water and tissues, please?"

"Of course." I watch as she hurries down the aisle, and a moment later, she's back with a bottle of water and a packet of Kleenex.

She crouches by my seat and rubs her hand up and down my arm. "Are you okay?"

I shake my head, and covering my face, I'm unable to stop crying because she's being so kind to me.

Claire keeps rubbing my shoulder, then whispers, "I'm so sorry. I wish I could do more."

Sucking in a shuddering breath, I nod before saying. "Thank you. It's just..." I glance at her. "I'm just processing the shock."

"I completely understand." She gives me a compassionate look. "I'll be right back."

I nod, and when she straightens up and walks away, I turn my back to the aisle again.

A few seconds later, she returns with a tumbler of whiskey. "This will help with the shock."

"Thank you." I take a sip of the liquid that tastes like gasoline, and when it burns down my throat, a cough sputters from me.

"Can I get you something to eat?"

I shake my head as I set the tumbler down. "I'll be okay. Thank you for everything."

I'll never be okay again.

Claire returns to her duties, and my thoughts are inundated with flashes of Maurizio and me going over the balcony's railing.

I see his body lying over the boulder and the death stare in his lifeless eyes.

I keep seeing it.

Over and over.

I cover my mouth with a trembling hand, unable to process the trauma.

I hear Angelo's anger in his voice.

I lost him.

Unbearable heartache shudders through my body.

I lost more than just Angelo. Tiny. Rita. Even Big Ricky. Just as I thought I finally had the family I always wanted, it's been brutally ripped away from me.

What's worse is they'll come after me – not because they want me back – but because they want revenge.

The people I've come to love want me dead.

I'll never know peace again. I'll have to constantly live on guard and move from place to place.

Why did this happen?

I'll never be able to return to Long Island. I won't see Father Parisi and Rosa again.

I've truly lost everything that mattered.

Once again, I'm assaulted by the traumatic memory of Maurizio falling to his death.

I killed a man. It's a mortal sin.

No amount of asking for forgiveness will wash the stain from my soul.

Even God has forsaken me.

My tears fall silent over my cheeks as my grim reality reaps destruction in my soul.

I'm so sorry, Angelo.

In desperate need of comfort, I dig my cell phone out of my bag and open the chat I share with Angelo. I scroll to the very beginning and read all the messages we've sent each other. But none of them offers me any comfort.

Instead, the texts break my heart.

In this moment of devastation and darkness, I realize I wasn't just in love with Angelo. *I love him.*

I love him with my whole heart and soul.

And I didn't even get to tell him.

Angelo.

As the plane flies toward Zurich, where I have to catch a connecting flight, my soul weeps for the immense losses I've suffered.

Chapter 32

Angelo

One of the guards found the sedan, and after searching the vehicle, Vittoria's luggage was retrieved from the backseat.

The tracker's signal disappeared ten minutes ago, meaning she's probably on a fucking plane. It's either that or the ring was destroyed, which I seriously doubt.

"Find out what flight Vittoria is on!" I bark the order as I walk back to the SUV.

"Where are we going?" Big Ricky asks while he grabs hold of the luggage to bring it along.

"To the private jet. We need to be up in the air STAT."

"Call me as soon as you know which flight Mrs. Rizzo took," Big Ricky shouts at Bruno, who's already jogging toward the airport's entrance.

He waves a hand in the air to show he heard the order.

Jesus, baby, stop running so I can get to you.

We climb back into the SUV, and while Big Ricky drives to where the private jet is, I make a quick call to the pilot so they can refuel and get ready for take-off.

Christ. The only thing I have counting in my favor is that she'll have to catch a connecting flight, whereas the private jet will fly directly to JFK.

I double-check to make sure I'm not wrong, and when I see that there are no direct commercial flights between Sicily and the USA, I let out a sigh of relief.

I'll get there before her.

That's if she's even going to New York.

I let out an angry sigh.

I need to notify the other heads of the Cosa Nostra of what happened. Dialing a number, I listen as the call connects.

"Hey, what's up?" Damiano mutters.

"I have bad news," I say, my voice hoarse from all the stress. "My uncle and aunt are dead. They fucking betrayed me."

"Jesus Christ, Angelo!" Damiano sucks in a shocked breath. "I'm so fucking sorry, brother. What can I do to help?"

"Just be on standby. I might need your help finding Vittoria."

"Why isn't she with you?"

"I don't know all the details, but Vittoria ran when my uncle died. She must be traumatized and not thinking clearly."

"Fuck," he breathes. "Want me to try and track her down?"

I shake my head even though he can't see me. "No. I've got it covered."

"Are you on your way home?"

"Yeah," I sigh. "As soon as I have Vittoria, I'll call a meeting."

"Okay. Do you want me to tell the others?"

"Please. I'd appreciate that."

"Consider it done." He pauses for a moment. "I'm here for you."

"Thanks."

As we end the call, Big Ricky stops the SUV near the private jet. I climb out of the vehicle and roll my shoulders to ease some of the tension.

My eyes land on the pilot as he rushes down the steps.

"Mr. Rizzo. We'll be ready for take-off in thirty minutes."

I nod before heading up the stairs, and taking a seat, I brush my hand over my face.

Jesus Christ.

My mind goes over everything I know, and leaning my head back against the headrest, I close my eyes.

Vittoria must be beside herself with fear.

Fuck, and I just got her to feel safe with me. I fucking hope to all that's holy this incident doesn't make her terrified of me again.

Big Ricky sits down across from me and says, "I just spoke to Bruno. Vittoria is heading to Minnesota."

A frown forms on my forehead. "Why there, of all places?"

"It was the first available flight."

"Tell the pilot," I mutter.

I glance out the window, my need to hold Vittoria in my arms overwhelmingly strong.

Tori

It feels like I'm caught in a daze of terror and paranoia as I get off the plane in Minnesota.

The flight was torturously long. Twenty-six hours of reliving the nightmare over and over.

I can't remember when last I ate, not that I'm hungry. With the pit of fear in my stomach, I feel too sick to think of food.

God, it feels like I haven't slept for weeks. The last time I got some rest was on the flight to Sicily. My dress is all wrinkled, and my skin feels sticky.

I look as bad as I feel.

I walk with all the other passengers, and realizing I have to go through

passport control, a wave of exhaustion rolls over me.

The wariness in my bones makes my legs feel heavy.

I fall into the back of the line and nibble on my bottom lip as I cautiously glance at all the people.

I'm already tired from all the running, and I know Angelo will catch up to me at some point.

Unless I never use my name again. How do I even do that? I'll need a new name, ID, and social security number.

I lower my head and let out a heavy sigh.

There's a good chance Angelo's already waiting for me by the exit.

Where I had to take a commercial flight, he had the convenience of using his private jet. He's powerful and could easily have found out which flight I was on.

Dear God.

The line creeps forward, and when it's my turn, I hand my passport to the officer. The man glances at me before checking my passport. "Why the short trip to Sicily?"

My frail nerves tighten my stomach.

"Something came up, and I had to come home."

His eyes narrow on me. "What?"

"A death in the family."

My heart thunders in my chest, but then he just stamps the passport and hands it back to me before calling out, "Next."

I'm going to die from a nervous breakdown long before Angelo gets to me.

I follow the other passengers, and as they head to the carousels to collect their luggage, I move to the side to wait a moment.

If Angelo is here, I'll need to get past him without him seeing me, and I

can only do that if I hide in a crowd.

That's if he's even here. He could still be in Sicily. He could've sent one of his men to kill me. He might not even know where I am.

There are so many possibilities, but I'm preparing for the worst.

My eyes lock on a family of seven, and I quickly move in their direction. The parents struggle with their two younger boys while the three teenagers walk slightly ahead of them.

When the mother stops to pick up one of the boys, I catch up to them. Using the mother and child as cover, I quickly pull the strap of my handbag across my chest.

Once you're through the doors, just run.

I stick next to the woman, and as the exit comes closer, my heart pounds out of my chest. The urge to look for Angelo as we walk through the open doors is intense, but I don't want to give away my position.

Suddenly, the boy starts to cry, and the mother stops to put him down.

My eyes dart to all the people waiting for the passengers, and the moment my eyes lock on Angelo, the blood freezes in my veins.

Nooooooooo!

My body instantly goes into flight mode, and I dart in the opposite direction from him.

Oh God. He's going to kill me.

I've felt fear before, but it's nothing compared to the terror coating my skin right now.

My breaths burst over my lips, and I keep glancing over my shoulder. Big Ricky is closer to me than Angelo. I didn't even see him when I started running.

Both men are catching up to me, and I let out a shriek, running as fast as I can.

Barreling through the exit, I turn right and sprint up the sidewalk. My eyes lock on a cab, and rushing toward the vehicle, I yank the back door open and climb inside.

“Where to?” The driver asks.

“Go! GoGoGo!” I shriek as I glance out the back window. “Just go!”

When the cab pulls away from the curb, Big Ricky aims his gun at us.

“No!” I breathe.

Before he can take the shot, Angelo stops him. A second later, they jog toward a black SUV.

“Please go faster,” I beg as I turn my attention to the driver.

“What’s the rush?” he asks, his eyes flicking to the rearview mirror.

“Someone is following me.”

The man shakes his head. “I don’t want no trouble, lady.”

“Please. I’ll give you a thousand dollars. Just get out of here.”

The mention of money seems to do the trick because as soon as we leave the airport, he drives much faster. When we get onto the interstate, he goes over the speed limit, and I feel a flicker of relief.

“Thank you,” I say, and as I glance out the back window again, my heart sinks as I watch the SUV weave through traffic.

I frantically look around the area, wondering if I should ask the driver to stop so I can get off the highway.

Before I can decide what to do next, the SUV speeds past us and turns sharply in front of the cab.

“Jesus!” The driver shouts as he slams on the brakes.

“God!” I shriek, and the second we come to a stop, I shove the door open and dart out of the cab.

“Hey,” the cab driver shouts. “Come back here.”

Not caring, I run into oncoming traffic. Cars swerve to avoid me, and

tires screech.

“Vittoria!” I hear Angelo shout really close behind me.

No.

It feels as if everything slows down, and a memory of Angelo looking at me with love flashes through my mind’s eye.

I feel his lips on mine.

I hear him chuckle.

I let out a blood-curdling cry as absolute devastation rips through my soul.

A car honks, and as my eyes snap in the direction of the alarming sound, it’s to see the vehicle speeding toward me.

Suddenly, I’m grabbed from behind. My feet leave the ground, and I’m swung out of the way of the speeding car.

“Nooooooooooooo! No-no-no-no!” I scream, the terror I’ve experienced since Maurizio’s death becoming too much to handle. It feels like I’m losing my mind.

Angelo’s voice rumbles like thunder, “I’ve got you.”

My vision blurs as I’m tossed over his shoulder, and the last thing I see are tire marks on the road before I pass out.

Chapter 33

Angelo

Feeling Vittoria's body go limp over my shoulder, I hurry toward the SUV.

Big Ricky has his weapon drawn to handle anyone who tries to intervene.

"Hey! What are you doing with that girl?" A woman shouts.

"Mind your own fucking business," Big Ricky growls.

The way Vittoria screamed still echoes through my mind, and it's easily the most haunting thing I've ever heard.

Lowering Vittoria from over my shoulder, I quickly pick her up bridal style and climb into the backseat of the SUV. "Let's go!"

Big Ricky slides behind the steering wheel, and within seconds, we're speeding away from the traffic we caused.

Vittoria's body is limp in my hold, and as I look at her face, my heart breaks when I notice how pale she is.

"Baby," I whisper.

She's been through so much. Just thinking about the trauma she's suffered has rage burning in my veins.

"I've got you," I murmur as I brush wild curls away from her face. I pull her closer to my chest and hold her tightly as Big Ricky drives toward the airfield.

When I shift her into a more comfortable position, I tug her handbag's strap over her head and drop the bag on the floor.

Bringing my hand to her pale face, I tenderly brush my fingers over her cheek.

“You’re safe,” I whisper.

Bent over my wife, I press my mouth to her forehead. I close my eyes and thank all that’s holy she’s safely back in my arms.

I’m never leaving her alone again. Either Tiny, Big Ricky or myself will be with her at all times.

When the SUV stops near the private jet, I wait for Big Ricky to open the door before I climb out of the vehicle with Vittoria in my arms.

He gives her a worried look. “Jesus, boss.”

“Let’s get her home,” I mutter.

We board the plane and don’t give a fuck about rules, I refuse to let go of my wife to put on a seat belt. Sitting down, I cradle her on my lap.

It’s a short flight back to New York, and by the time I carry Vittoria into our home, I’m fucking exhausted.

“Call a doctor,” I order Big Ricky.

I expected Vittoria to regain consciousness on the plane, but she’s still out cold, and it worries the hell out of me.

“On it,” he says as I leave him in the living room.

I take Vittoria to our bedroom and carefully lay her down on the bed.

Taking off her shoes, I toss them to the side.

“The doctor is on his way,” Big Ricky informs me.

“Good. Shut the door and wait downstairs for him.”

When I hear the bedroom door close, I head to the walk-in closet and pull one of my shirts from a hanger. I return to Vittoria’s unconscious body, and sitting down beside her, I carefully remove her dress and underwear.

I’m fucking relieved when I don’t see any bruises on her body.

Once I have her in my shirt, I go to the bathroom to wet a washcloth. My eyes lock on my reflection in the mirror, and I swear it looks like I’ve aged ten years from worrying about Vittoria’s safety.

Heading back into the bedroom, I sit down beside her and tenderly wipe down her arms, legs, and feet.

My first instinct is to take care of her, and knowing there's not much more I can do, I feel frustrated as fuck. I pull the covers over her before I take hold of her limp hand, holding it in both of mine.

I press my mouth to her fingers. "Wake up, baby." A breath shudders from me. "Please wake up."

Now that I have Vittoria back, my thoughts spiral down a dark tunnel, and I think about everything that could've gone wrong.

Uncle Maurizio could've killed her.

She could've been grabbed by any of my enemies while she was running.

I could've been too late, and that fucking car could've hit her.

I could've lost Vittoria.

I let go of her hand, and gripping her shoulders, I pull her into my arms. Feeling how limp she is, shreds my soul into an unrecognizable mess.

"Christ, baby," I groan. "Open your beautiful eyes."

There's a knock at the door, which has me laying her back down. I make sure she's covered before I get up.

"Come in."

Big Ricky opens the door, and Dr. Barnes comes into the room. I have the man on my payroll in case any of my men need medical assistance or to remove bullets.

"Afternoon, Mr. Rizzo. What can I do for you?"

I gesture at Vittoria. "My wife passed out three hours ago and hasn't regained consciousness."

He moves closer, and opening his medical bag, he removes a stethoscope. "Did Mrs. Rizzo show any signs of illness before she fainted?"

"She experienced something traumatic," I answer vaguely.

“No injuries?” he asks as he listens to her breathing and heartbeat.

“No.”

“Is she pregnant?”

My eyes flick to Vittoria as I reply, “I don’t know. There’s a possibility, though.”

I watch as Dr. Barnes takes her blood pressure, and when he’s done examining her, he looks at me. “Her blood pressure is a little low. My guess is she’s exhausted and just needs rest.” He glances at Vittoria again. “I’ll set an IV to get some fluids into her.”

I stare at Vittoria as I ask, “Her blood pressure is a little low?”

He nods as he climbs to his feet. “She just needs rest and to take it easy for a few days, but I’ll check on her again. Let me know if her condition changes.” He locks eyes with me. “You said she suffered trauma, so I’d recommend she speak with a therapist.”

“That’s something I’ll worry about once she’s woken up.” I let out a sigh. “How long will she be on the IV?”

“The saline bag will be empty in forty-five minutes, then you can remove the needle.” He glances between Big Ricky and me. “You’ve done it before, right?”

We both nod. We’ve dealt with one of the guys being on an IV a few times in the past.

We watch as Dr. Barnes sets up the IV, and I hate when the needle pricks her skin. He gestures for Big Ricky to keep the bag raised above Vittoria.

“Thanks, Doc.” I nod as I glance at Big Ricky. “Pay Dr. Barnes and show him out.” I take the IV bag from him and sit down next to Vittoria.

Dr. Barnes tips his head at me before he leaves the room with Big Ricky.

My phone starts to vibrate, and I quickly pull the device out of my pocket. Seeing Damiano’s name flashing on the screen, I answer, “Hey, I

found Vittoria.”

“Good. When will you be back?”

“I’m already home,” I inform him.

“We’re coming over.”

Before I can tell him not to bother, he hangs up.

Letting out a tired sigh, I lean over my wife and press a kiss to her lips while making sure to hold the IV fluids above her like Dr. Barnes demonstrated.

Wake up, baby. My soul won’t rest until I see your beautiful smile again.

My eyes drift over every inch of her face, and intense pain slashes through my heart when I think how close I came to losing her.

I’m never leaving you alone again.

“Can I get you anything?” Big Ricky suddenly asks, his tone tense with worry.

I get up and shake my head. “I need you to stay with Vittoria. Damiano and the others are on their way.” I look at Vittoria again before I say, “Call me the second she wakes up.”

“Okay.” He takes the bag from me, and as I pause beside him, I place my hand on his shoulder and lock eyes with him. “Thank you.”

This man is one of the most important people in my life, and I’ll never be able to repay him for everything he’s done for me.

He nods as he murmurs, “Anything for you.”

Leaving the bedroom, I shrug out of my jacket as I head down the stairs.

With everything that’s happened the past two days, I feel unsettled and irritable as fuck.

I toss the jacket over the back of the couch, and before I can sit down, I hear the front door open.

Damiano, Renzo, Franco, and Dario rush into the living room, and I take

a moment to shake their hands. Dario is the only fucker who hugs me. The main doesn't give a shit about personal space.

"What the fuck happened?" Damiano asks.

Franco walks to the side table and pours five tumblers of whiskey. "Everyone helps themselves. I'm not a waiter."

We all grab a tumbler, and I quickly down the burning liquid before pouring more into the glass.

I glance between my friends, then shake my head. "I don't know the full story yet." I walk to the couch and slump down on it. "Christ."

They all take a seat, their eyes locked on my face.

Shrugging, I shake my head again. "When we got to Sicily, everything was fine. My uncle and aunt were happy to see us. I left Vittoria with them so I could go to a meeting, but before I got to Sangrioti, I got a hysterical call from my aunt." I take a sip of the alcohol before I continue, "She said Vittoria tried to run away, and when they locked her in a room, she shoved Uncle Maurizio over the balcony."

They all look at me with shock on their faces.

"Seriously? Vittoria killed Maurizio?" Renzo asks.

I shake my head. "No, she could never commit murder. I'm waiting to hear her side of the story."

"Where is she?" Damiano asks.

"She's passed out upstairs." I lean back against the couch. "Big Ricky is watching over her."

"Maybe she killed Maurizio by accident?" Franco asks.

I shrug. "It's a possibility. We all know Maurizio had a quick temper. He could've attacked her, and she fought him off." I narrow my eyes. "No, Maurizio would've killed her. He's stronger than her." I rub a hand over my face. "Fuck. I just want her to wake up."

“You said your aunt is dead as well,” Damiano mutters. “How did she die?”

“She tried to feed me a pathetic lie, and when I called her out, she admitted they wanted me to marry Valentina Toscano. They tried to get rid of Vittoria.” I suck in a deep breath of air as I recall what happened.

“Angelo,” Dario says, and I realize my thoughts drifted off.

I clear my throat before I down the rest of the whiskey. “Aunt Gloria tried to pull a gun on me, and Big Ricky killed her.”

“Christ,” Franco mutters. “That’s fucked up shit.”

“Yeah.” Renzo shakes his head in disbelief.

“I’m sorry, brother.” Damiano gives me a compassionate look. “Sometimes the ones closest to us become the biggest threats.”

Truer words have never been spoken.

We’re all quiet for a moment before Damiano says, “You should take a few days off. We’ll keep an eye on your businesses.”

I shake my head. “I can’t ask that of you.”

“You’re not asking shit of us,” Renzo grumbles. “We’re offering. This is how the brotherhood works.”

“I’ll take care of the club,” Dario chuckles.

“Leave the strippers alone,” I playfully warn him.

“Hey, if they throw themselves at me, who am I to say no,” he jokes.

“I’ll check in with Salvatore and the fleet,” Renzo offers.

“I’ll keep an eye on the restaurant,” Franco quickly stakes his claim. “Let Eddie know he can contact me if he needs help with something.”

When my eyes lock with Damiano, he says, “My ass will keep an eye on you to make sure you get some rest.”

The corner of my mouth lifts. “Thanks, brothers.”

This is what makes the Cosa Nostra so fucking strong – the fact that we

have each other's backs.

Together, we're unbeatable.

Chapter 34

Tori

Running down an empty stretch of road, shadows darken as they creep toward me.

I open my mouth to scream, but there's no sound.

Pressure builds around me, and it feels like I'm being chased, but I can't see anyone.

Intense loneliness engulfs me, and suddenly, I'm wearing a wedding dress.

Black ink slowly spreads up from the seam of the dress, and my body feels heavier and heavier as I try to walk.

The ink reaches my neck, and I gasp for air as I stare up at the black sky.

Unable to open my mouth, my panic and fear become so intense it feels like I'm being strangled.

"Noooo!" I slam into something hard as I startle awake. My breaths are nothing more than gasps.

"I've got you," Angelo's voice rumbles above my head.

Oh, God. No!

As I realize I slammed into Angelo's chest, and I feel his arms around me, all the terror and trauma come rushing back.

Maurizio telling me how my corpse will be eaten by worms.

The struggle on the balcony before falling over the railing.

Maurizio's fingers grasping at my dress.

The sickening thud.

Seeing his body broken over a boulder.

The fear of falling to my death and the struggle to pull myself onto the balcony.

The fear of being stopped as I escaped the villa.

The terror of running away from Angelo.

Darting into traffic to escape Angelo.

Him grabbing hold of me.

“Are you—”

Instinctively, I try to scramble away from him as a cry tears from my throat.

“Baby!”

His hold on me tightens as I frantically push against his chest, but not being able to break free, I resort to begging, “P-please. It w-was an accident. P-please, Angelo.”

He’s going to kill me.

He’s going to kill me.

He’d going to kill me.

The devastating thought has me pushing and straining to escape his tight hold.

Keeping an arm locked around me, he uses his other hand to grip hold of my chin. “Open your eyes, Vittoria. Look at me!”

As I grab hold of his wrist, my eyes pop open, and the second I see his face, I start to sob uncontrollably.

Letting out a growl, he hugs me so tight it hurts.

“Christ, I’m so fucking sorry I left you with them. I’m here. You’re safe. I’ve got you, baby.”

Still feeling scared, his words start getting through to me, and I begin to cry uncontrollably.

My body slumps in his hold as a sliver of relief drains all my strength from me. “An-ge-lo,” I sob, my shoulders shuddering from the terrible weight I had to carry. “I-I’m s-sorry.”

“Jesus Christ,” he groans as if he’s in physical pain. I’m pulled onto his lap, and he peppers my face with kisses. “There’s nothing to be sorry for. I know you didn’t kill my uncle, and you ran because you were scared. It’s okay. I’m not angry.”

Angelo keeps pressing kisses everywhere, his arms steel bands of safety around me. The trauma from the past couple of days has me sobbing against his chest.

“Boss?” I hear Big Ricky’s voice.

“Get sugar water!” Angelo snaps.

Time warps around me as the traumatic events keep rattling through my mind.

Suddenly, a glass is pushed against my lips. “Drink, baby.”

I manage to take a few sips before a sob shudders through me. I’m forced to drink more of the sweet water, then the glass disappears, and Angelo rocks me in a comforting way.

“I’m here, *mia piccola cerviatta*. You’re safe.”

Lost sobs quiver over my lips, and my fear and panic ease enough for me to think clearly.

It’s only then I realize I’m in our bedroom and I’m wearing one of Angelo’s shirts.

He takes hold of my jaw and nudges my head back so he can see my face. When our eyes lock, my mouth begins to tremble.

“Better?” he asks softly. There’s so much worry on his face it can easily be mistaken for rage.

“I’m s-sorry,” I whimper.

He shakes his head. "It's okay, baby."

His palm brushes over my cheek in such a loving way tears spiral from my eyes again.

Lowering his head, he presses a tender kiss to my trembling lips.

His gaze locks with mine again before he says, "I was so fucking worried about you. How do you feel?"

How do I feel?

Shook to my core, I feel stuck in a pit of despair.

I feel a little lost.

Lifting my arm, I grab hold of his shoulder. I pull myself up, and when I bury my face against his neck, I cling to him with all my strength.

His hand brushes up and down my back, as he just holds me for a while.

"Christ, baby, you're breaking my heart," he groans as his arms tighten around me. "Please talk to me."

Gone is the man who orders me to use my words.

Gone is the ruthless man who terrifies the living crap out of me.

Wrapped up in my husband's strong arms, a sense of safety settles over me.

"I thought I lost you," I whimper, my voice hoarse and as vulnerable as I feel. "I thought you were going to kill me."

"Never," he growls. "Never, *mia piccola cerviatta. Mia raggio di sole.*"

Hearing him call me his little dear and ray of sunshine helps ease more tension from my body.

He pulls back so he can see my face, and with his fingers wrapping around the side of my neck, he looks at me with so much tenderness it makes me feel super emotional.

His voice is gentle as he says, "I'll never harm a hair on your body. You're my everything."

I grip hold of his wrist as my face crumbles again. My breaths quiver over my lips. "It all happened so fast. I didn't know what to do."

"If anything ever happens again, the first thing you do is call me, Vittoria. Never run from me."

"I panicked," I say, my voice filled with tears.

"I know, baby." He lowers his head and kisses me again. "I should've left Big Ricky with you. You'll never be alone again. One of us will always watch over you."

I nod frantically because I'll never trust anyone again. With Angelo, Tiny, or Big Ricky, I'll be safe. They'll keep people away from me.

My face crumbles again as I cry, "I w-was s-so s-scared."

"Oh, baby," Angelo groans, his arms tightening around me again. "I'm so fucking sorry."

Crying in the safety of Angelo's strong arms, exhaustion floods my body, and no amount of resistance keeps me from falling asleep.

Angelo

The past two days have easily been the longest of my life.

I'm on fucking edge, and every time Vittoria makes a sound and moves, I hold her tighter.

At first, I was struggling to process the deaths of my uncle and aunt, but now I wish they were alive so I could fucking kill them.

Uncontrollable rage keeps flooding my chest, and knowing I can't get revenge for what they did to my wife is eating away at me.

I haven't slept since the night before we left for Sicily, and until I'm sure

Vittoria is okay, I won't be able to shut an eye.

Suddenly her body tenses, and she tries to curl into a fetal position. I'm still cradling her against my chest, refusing to lay her down on the bed.

"Shh...I've got you, baby," I whisper, hoping my words will get through to her.

"No," she mumbles. She's weak as she slaps my chest, then her fingers grip my shirt. "No."

Bringing a hand to her face, I brush my palm over her soft skin and hair. "Wake up, baby."

She startles, and her body jolts in my hold. Her eyes fly open, and seeing the raw terror darkening her irises delivers a brutal blow to my heart.

"Fuck, Vittoria," I groan desperately. "What can I do to make you feel better?"

I'm used to being in control, but I have no idea how to console her.

Her face transforms into the cute fucking expression she always has when she cries, and it strips my soul bare. Tears spiral over her cheeks, and they obliterate my heart.

My desperation grows, and I rock her again as I pepper her cheeks with kisses.

This time, she doesn't weep like before and manages to gain control over her emotions.

My eyes drift over her beautiful face as I ask, "Do you feel better?"

She lets out a shuddering breath, and gripping my shirt tighter, she whispers, "I keep seeing it."

My fingers caress the side of her face. "Seeing what, baby?"

"Everything." Her eyes glaze over, and her voice sounds fragile as fuck when she whispers, "Maurizio's body."

Careful not to push her, I keep my tone gentle as I ask, "Can you tell me

what happened?”

Her face crumbles as she looks at me with desperation trembling in her eyes. “You’ll get angry. You’ll hate me.”

I shake my head hard. “No, I won’t.” Taking a deep breath, I correct myself. “I won’t get angry at you, but I am fucking pissed off because you were put through this fucking hell.”

Her eyebrows draw together, and she hesitates before she asks, “What did Gloria tell you?”

“It doesn’t matter right now. I want to hear your side of the story.”

I keep caressing the side of her face, hoping it will help set her at ease so she’ll open up to me.

Vittoria swallows hard and shifts on my lap so she can sit up a bit straighter. She rests her head against my shoulder and lets out a tired sigh.

“It all happened so fast,” she whimpers. “I went to the bedroom with Gloria, and while I looked at the view from the balcony, she left me alone. I didn’t think anything of it. The next second, Maurizio came in and threw an envelope on the bed. He said there was five thousand euros in it because it’s all I was worth.”

My teeth grind from the effort it’s taking not to lose my shit. I wrap my hand around the side of her head and press my mouth to her curls.

Jesus Fucking Christ. Five thousand euros. The degradation she must’ve felt.

With my mouth against her hair, I growl, “You’re worth more than all the money in the world. You’re fucking priceless, Vittoria.”

She moves her hand from my chest and grips my wrist tightly. “He told me to leave you so you could marry another woman, and if I didn’t, he’d bury me in the backyard.”

The mother fucker!

Knowing how cruel my uncle could be, I can only imagine how traumatizing it must've been for Vittoria.

I clench my jaw as I listen to her stammer, "H-he said he'd m-make s-s-sure you'd say y-your vows on t-t-the spot where m-my corpse is b-being eaten b-by w-worms."

Fuck.

I struggle to drag in a breath as white-hot rage floods me.

Fuck.

I crush Vittoria against my chest and bury my face in her hair.

Fuck.

Breathe!

I gasp, and it has Vittoria wrapping her arms around my neck. She shifts again as she straddles my lap, and her fingers weave through my hair.

"I'm sorry," she whimpers.

I shake my head as I try to regain control over the rage, thirsting for destruction and revenge. Only blood will quench its thirst.

Pulling back, I frame her face and lock eyes with her. "What happened after that?"

Her hands grip my wrists again, and her eyebrows draw together.

Looking at my innocent little deer, I'm unable to understand how anyone could hurt her.

"I told him you'd never believe I just left you," she whispers. "He shouted at me, and when I tried to get to my phone so I could call you, he yanked me backward. We stumbled against the railing..."

Her face tenses with the horror she's reliving.

"Then..." She gasps and tightens her hold on my wrists. "Then we..." Her breaths come faster. "I feel sick." Her body convulses, and darting to my feet, I pick her up bridal style and rush into the bathroom.

Unable to get to the toilet in time, Vittori tries to push away from me as she starts to heave. Bile trickles over her fucking arm and hits the floor, and I quickly set her on her feet and help her to bend over the sink.

Once again, my fucking heart breaks as my wife's body convulses with dry heaves because of the fucking nightmare she's been through.

I open the cold water and pour some over the back of her neck and arm. As her body jerks violently, the sounds coming from her destroy me.

Suddenly, she loses all strength, and I manage to catch her around the waist before she can drop to the floor.

"I've got you, baby."

I move her into the shower and open the faucets. Leaning her body against mine, I grip hold of the shirt and get it off of her.

She feels hot to the touch, and I keep the water cool as I hold her beneath the spray.

After a few seconds, she whispers, "Feels good."

When her strength returns and she's able to stand by herself, I make the water a bit warmer.

Still dressed in my suit, I grab a loofah and body wash.

"Your clothes are getting wet," she says.

"I don't care," I mutter as I begin to wash her body while making sure to keep my touch gentle. "You're all that matters."

My eyes lock with hers. "You're my entire fucking life, Vittoria." My voice grows hoarse as I admit, "I would die if I lost you."

Chapter 35

Tori

Angelo is so careful with me that it makes me feel even more emotional.

When he's done washing every inch of my body, he turns off the faucets and helps me out of the shower. My eyes drift over him while he uses a towel to pat my skin dry.

Even though I'm still reeling from all the trauma, incredible love fills my heart for this man.

He places an arm beneath my back and another beneath my legs, then lifts me to his chest and carries me back to the bed.

After setting me down, he rushes to the walk-in closet for a clean shirt and gently pulls the fabric over my head.

"I need to brush my teeth," I say, my eyes constantly locked on him.

"Okay."

When he moves to pick me up again, I shake my head. "I can walk."

"I know." He lifts me into his arms and heads back into the bathroom with me.

Once I'm on my feet and I'm brushing my teeth, Angelo cleans the floor.

Seeing this badass mafia leader wipe up the mess I made only makes me love him more.

He quickly washes his hands, and when he's done, he stands next to me and rubs his palm up and down my back.

I spit the toothpaste out and rinse my mouth before I say, "You need to change out of those wet clothes."

“I will. As soon as you’re back in bed.”

My heart. He makes me feel incredibly special.

Angelo wraps an arm around me, and I lean into his side as we leave the bathroom.

Once he has me tucked under the covers, he heads to the walk-in closet. I watch as he strips before pulling on a pair of black sweatpants. Coming straight back to bed, he sits down beside me.

Bracing his forearms on either side of my head, he leans over me, his eyes searching my face.

I lift my hand and brush my fingers over the dark stubble covering his jaw. “I’m sorry I ran away from you.”

He grips my hand in his and presses a kiss to my fingers. “It’s okay, baby.” A dark expression tightens his features, then he asks, “Do you think you could tell me the rest?”

My stomach churns, and shivers rush down my spine.

I swallow hard as I nod. My fingers tighten around his as I say, “I stumbled, and we both lost our balance. It happened so fast, and as I fell over the railing, I managed to grab hold of it, but...” My tongue darts out to wet my lips, and I lower my eyes to his chest. “Maurizio tried to grab hold of my dress, but he couldn’t, and...” The memory shudders through me, and my breaths speed up. “H-he f-fell.”

When Angelo is too quiet, my gaze darts to his face, and seeing the rage burning in his eyes, I start to tremble.

“I’m so sorry,” I whimper. “It was an accident.”

He shakes his head hard, a ruthless expression tightening his features, as he growls, “You went over the railing?”

I nod, and swallowing again, I say, “I managed to pull myself back onto the balcony.”

Extreme pain ghosts over his face as he shakes his head repeatedly. His voice sounds dangerous as he growls, “You almost fucking died.”

He grabs hold of me, and a second later, I’m squashed against his chest.

“I almost lost you,” he groans. “Christ.”

Hearing the heartache in his tone, my tears start to fall again.

He peppers desperate kisses over my face, and when his actions feel frantic, I quickly frame his jaw with my hands and say, “I’m here. I didn’t die.”

He nods and presses his mouth to my palm. Shutting his eyes, he takes deep breaths.

When he opens his eyes again, the golden flecks are on fire. “What happened then?”

“I grabbed the envelope and my handbag and ran.” I glance around the room. “Maurizio said a car was waiting for me, and I used it to get away from the villa. I also used some of the cash, but the rest should still be in my handbag.” My tongue darts out to nervously wet my lips. “It’s proof that I’m telling the truth.”

“I don’t need any proof, Vittoria.”

My gaze meets his, and we stare at each other for a long moment before I whisper, “I was scared you wouldn’t believe me. That you’d think I k-killed Maurizio.” My face crumbles beneath the weight of my guilt, and I lower my eyes to the covers. “I d-did k-kill h-h-him.”

He grips my face between his hands and forces me to look at him again. “No, you didn’t, Vittoria. It was an accident. You didn’t kill anyone, and even if you did, it would be self-defense.”

Desperately needing to believe him, I nod.

His eyebrows draw together as he says, “Don’t ever run from me again.”

My head bobs up and down. “I won’t.”

He pulls me into a hug, and I hear as he takes a deep breath. “Christ, I was so fucking worried. I died a thousand deaths.” He pulls back again to meet my eyes as his palm brushes over my curls. “I’ll never hurt you, baby. *Never.*”

I nod again, feeling stupid for thinking he wanted to kill me.

“I’m sorry. I panicked and couldn’t think straight,” I try to explain.

He lets out a heavy breath. “I know.” His eyes caress my face. “Just don’t ever run from me again.”

“I won’t,” I whisper. I wrap my arms around his neck and hold him as tight as I can.

After a while, he asks, “Do you feel better?”

Even though my world is still tainted by the horrific incident, I nod because I feel safe in Angelo’s arms. I didn’t lose him. If anything, it feels as if this nightmare has brought us closer together.

“Do you think you could eat something?” he asks.

I pull back and rub my hand over my burning stomach. “I still feel queasy.”

“Some toast might make you feel better,” he murmurs as he gets up.

When Angelo lifts me into his arms, I don’t bother arguing and rest my head on his shoulder. I close my eyes as he carries me out of the room, so freaking relieved he’s not angry with me.

“How is she?” I hear Big Ricky ask.

“Better,” Angelo answers. “Grab a blanket from the linen closet.”

I open my eyes when Angelo sets me down on the couch, and when Big Ricky hands him a fluffy blanket, he quickly covers me with it.

“I’ll be right back.” He glances at Big Ricky. “Stay with her.”

“Yes, boss.”

Angelo heads to the kitchen, and a moment later, he calls out, “Where’s

Rita?”

“She went to pick up Tiny. They should be back any minute,” Big Ricky answers before he looks at me and asks, “How are you feeling?”

I lift the blanket to my chin. “I’m okay.”

He nods and glances over his shoulder. “Do you need help in the kitchen?”

Angelo comes into the living room and grumbles, “Can you make toast for Vittoria?”

“Sure, boss.”

Big Ricky gets up and heads to the kitchen while Angelo comes to sit next to me. I’m hauled onto his lap before his arms form steel bands around me.

Once again, he presses kisses to my hair, and I feel so loved it makes me emotional.

The front door opens, and a second later, Tiny rushes into the living room, a mixture of guilt and panic on his face.

“Tori!”

“I’m here.” I sit up a bit straighter, but Angelo refuses to let go of me.

Tiny darts around the couches as if he didn’t have surgery a couple of days ago and sits down on the coffee table. His worried gaze flits over my face.

“I’m okay,” I say to set him at ease.

“I’m so fucking sorry,” he groans as if it’s his fault everything happened to me.

I reach across to him and grip his hand. “Don’t, Tiny. You were in the hospital. I’m sorry I caused you so much worry.”

His big hand closes around mine, and for a moment, it looks like he’s going to cry, then he mutters, “I’m never leaving you alone again.”

Feeling loved, a small smile plays around my lips. "I'm never going on a trip without you by my side."

Big Ricky comes into the living room with a small plate and two slices of burned toast.

When Rita gasps, I realize she's here as well.

"No, no, no! She can't eat that!" she scolds Big Ricky. "Give it to me."

Rita grabs the plate and hurries back into the kitchen.

When Big Ricky gives me an apologetic look, I say, "It's okay. Can I ask a favor?"

"Anything."

"Can I have coffee?"

"On it," he murmurs before darting back into the kitchen.

Angelo lets out a chuckle. "You have everyone wrapped around your little finger."

I let go of Tiny's hand and lean back against Angelo's chest as I ask, "How do you feel, Tiny?"

"I'm fine," he mutters. "I'm more worried about you."

"I'll be okay."

"Sit on a couch, Tiny," Angelo orders. "What did the doctor say?"

"I'm good to go," Tiny replies while moving to the couch closest to me. "He said I can eat what I want."

"Sure, he did," Angelo mutters as his arms tighten around me. He glances down and stares at me for a moment. "The two of you aren't allowed to leave the house for the next week."

A smile tugs at my mouth. "You're grounding us?"

"Yes." His eyes are still filled with worry.

Rita comes into the living room and hands me a plate. Seeing the cream cheese slathered on the toast, I smile at her. "Thank you."

A moment later, Big Ricky brings me a steaming cup of coffee.

"I feel spoiled," I murmur as I bite into the toast.

"We were so worried," Rita says as she hovers near the coffee table.

I swallow hard on the toast and take a sip of coffee as I glance at the people who've become my family.

With a quivering voice, I whisper, "You're all going to make me cry."

"Why?" Angelo asks, concern forming a frown on his forehead.

"Because I feel loved."

He takes hold of my chin, and when I meet his eyes, he says, "You are loved, baby."

"Everyone out," Big Ricky orders.

Tiny obeys with a grumble, and I hear him ask Rita, "What's for lunch?"

I don't hear her reply, my focus entirely on Angelo.

He tilts his head, then murmurs, "What's that look for?"

I shake my head and take another bite of the toast. When I swallow it down, Angelo tips my face up so I'll look at him.

"Use your words."

My lips curve up, and heat spreads up my neck as I say, "You're loved too."

His eyebrows draw together, and I watch as he realizes what I'm trying to say, then the corner of his mouth lifts in a hot grin. "Yeah?"

I set the cup and plate down on the coffee table before I straddle his lap and wrap my arms around his neck. I take a deep breath and meet his intense gaze.

"Yesterday, when I thought I lost you, it broke my heart."

Angelo lifts a hand to the side of my neck and brushes his thumb over my skin.

I lean closer and press a soft kiss to his mouth, and when I pull back an

inch, I admit, “It felt like my world came crashing down around me.”

He lets out a slow breath before saying, “You can never lose me, *mia piccola cerviatta*.” Closing the small distance, he gives me a kiss, then his eyes lock with mine again. “I love you so fucking much, Vittoria. Nothing, and I mean *nothing* on this godforsaken planet, will ever keep me away from you.” He kisses me again. “You’re ingrained into my heart and soul.” Another kiss. “Christ, I fucking love you.”

My lips curve into a smile against his, and I let out a happy chuckle.

Hearing how much I mean to him erases the tainted darkness that’s been surrounding me like a heavy cloak. I know it will take time for me to work through all the trauma, but right now, I feel blessed.

I feel happy.

I feel incredibly loved.

Angelo loves me.

Chapter 36

Angelo

It's been a long day, and I feel so fucking agitated I could kill someone.

I'm staring blankly at the TV screen, not really watching the movie as I sip on a tumbler of whiskey. Suddenly, my phone starts to vibrate, and letting out a sigh, I pull the device out of my pocket.

"Rizzo," I mutter.

"It's Eddie. I thought I'd let you know Giorgio's running another tab in the casino. It's already sitting at eighty thousand. Do you want me to cut him off?"

Unreasonable anger flares through my chest as I growl, "I'll handle it."

"He's also been harassing the strippers and bragging about being your brother-in-law," Eddie adds fuel to the fire.

I should've killed the fucker already.

Ending the call, I down the rest of the whiskey before I get up and walk to the bedroom so I can change out of the sweatpants.

The fucker seriously has a death wish, and I'm done playing with him.

When I've changed into a suit, I tuck my gun into the waistband of my pants as I head back to the living room.

Vittoria is lying on one of the couches, and Tiny is sitting by her feet. He probably moved closer to her the moment I got up.

They're busy watching a romantic comedy while Rita keeps bringing them food and drinks.

Vittoria's eyes flit to me as I lean over her. Pressing a kiss to her mouth, I

say, "I'm just heading out for an hour. I won't be long."

"Ah...okay."

Without having to say a word to Big Ricky, he follows me out of the house, and only when we're both in the SUV does he ask, "Where are we going?"

"Find Romano."

After he starts the engine, he makes a quick call. "Hey, is Romano at the club?" A moment later, he mutters, "Thanks."

Big Ricky's eyes meet mine in the rearview mirror. "He's not at the club. Should I swing by his house?"

"Yes."

During the drive, I fist my hands on my thighs as the fucking stress and worry of the past two days pour over me like boiling water.

I can't kill my uncle for what he said and did to Vittoria.

I can't kill my aunt for trying to take a shot at me.

But I can fucking kill Giorgio Romano for everything he's done to Vittoria and for being a piece of shit who doesn't deserve to breathe.

I'm going to take out all my anger on the fucker.

When Big Ricky stops the SUV in front of Vittoria's old house, I shove the door open and climb out. I stalk up the pathway and take the steps to the porch.

Big Ricky pounds on the front door before he glances around the area.

The moment the door opens, my arm pulls back, and I slam my fist into Romano's nose. The fucker staggers backward before falling flat on his ass.

He lets out a groan as his hand covers his nose, blood quickly trickling through his fingers. There's a mixture of confusion and fear on his face as he says, "I didn't do anything."

Big Ricky quickly checks the living room, and I hear him growl, "Get

out.” A moment later, a scantily dressed woman scurries past me, and I recognize her as one of the strippers from the club.

Sucking in a deep breath of air as I drink in the sight of Romano’s blood, I shrug my jacket off and pass it to Big Ricky to hold.

I also remove my gun, which has Romano’s eyes going wide as saucers. I hand the weapon to Big Ricky because I won’t need it, and I want it out of Romano’s reach.

“Get up,” I order in a low tone.

Romano quickly climbs to his feet, and he looks at the blood covering his hand before his confused eyes fly to me. “What did I do? I’ve been working twice as hard.”

I shake my head at him, and glancing around the shitty little house, I mutter, “I hear you’re harassing my strippers and telling everyone you’re my brothers-in-law.” I let out a dark chuckle. “Either you’re fucking stupid, or you have the biggest pair of balls I’ve ever seen.”

Panic flashes over his face. “I was just playing around with the girls. It was harmless fun.”

I suck in a deep breath of air as I look at the piece of shit.

“You have shares, but instead of cashing them in, you traded your sister to settle your debt.”

“But that’s in the past. We...”

My eyes lock on the fucker. “It’s not,” I snap. “This is about the eighty thousand dollars you owe me after your last fuck up. This is about you mouthing off to everyone who will listen. This is about you fucking with my business.” A growl rumbles from my chest. This is about you abusing Vittoria!” I take a step closer. “This is about you sacrificing her for three hundred thousand dollars, and then you dare to run another tab at my casino.” I take another step, and he staggers backward. “This is about you wanting to

control her until she turned twenty-five so you could get your grubby fucking hands on her inheritance.”

Romano’s eyes widen even more, and I let out a dark chuckle. “I know everything.”

“Mr. Rizzo...p-please,” he stammers as he takes another step backward.

I shake my head slowly as my eyes pin him with all the brutality I possess. “You hurt the woman I love more than anything on this godforsaken planet and then dared to fuck with my business.”

He falls to his knees and begs, “I’m sorry. I’ll never do anything to hurt her again. I’ll stay away from the strippers and casino.”

“No, you won’t,” I growl.

I impatiently gesture for him to get up, but when he gives me a pleading look, I unleash every ounce of rage on him. With a vicious growl, I kick him against the side of his head.

Romano sprawls backward, and before his body stills, I’m on top of him, my fist slamming into his face.

I remember every bruise on my wife’s body. I remember how she flinched away from my touch. I remember her fear.

I feel the skin break over my knuckles as I keep smashing my fist into the fucker’s face.

I remember the fear I felt when I couldn’t find Vittoria. I remember the fucking terror when she ran into traffic. I remember the rage when she told me what my uncle did to her and how she almost died.

All I see is blood. I feel the bones in his face break beneath my fist.

It’s not enough.

Getting up, I grab my gun from Big Ricky, and aiming at the fucker’s head, I pull the trigger.

A pool of blood quickly forms beneath Romano’s head, and as I look

down at his lifeless and swollen eyes, I finally feel a sense of relief.

I hand the weapon to Big Ricky again as he asks, “Do you feel better?”

“No, but it’s a start,” I mutter as I walk to the kitchen. I open a faucet and wash my hands, watching as the red water spirals down the drain.

“Want me to call the cleaners?”

I nod, my eyes still on my busted knuckles. “Yes. Have them dissolve the body and replace the floor.” I dry my hands on a dishcloth and turn to look at Big Ricky. “I want this fucking place cleaned from top to bottom for Vittoria.”

Walking out of the kitchen, I step over Romano’s body and head down the hallway. I check every room, and when I open the closets in the main bedroom, I say, “Clear out the fucker’s shit and remove any trace of him from this house.”

“Okay.”

As I head back down the hallway, I order, “Pay Damiano the five hundred thousand Romano owed him.”

“I’ll take care of it, boss.”

I stalk out of the house, and when I climb into the back of the SUV, Big Ricky asks, “Home?”

“Yeah.” I let out a deep breath.

Home. To my wife.

He hands me my jacket and gun before starting the engine, and as he drives away from the house, I dig my phone out of my pocket.

I open the screen and send a text to Damiano.

Angelo: Giorgio Romano is dead. His debt will be settled.

A moment later, his reply comes through.

Damiano: Thanks for the good news. How’s Vittoria doing?

Angelo: She’s better.

Damiano: Did she tell you what happened?

Angelo: My uncle tried to get rid of her. They struggled and went over the side of the balcony. He fell to his death.

Damiano: Jesus. Let me know if there's anything I can do for you.

Angelo: Thanks.

Big Ricky stops the SUV in front of the mansion, and when we climb out, he says, "I'll take care of the body and house," he reminds me. "And I'll make the payment."

"Thanks. When you're done, take the rest of the day off. You need some rest."

"Thanks, boss."

We go our separate ways, and as I walk into the house, I hear someone chant, *'Get low, get low. To the window. To the wall. Till the sweat drop down my balls.'*

I come to a stop in the living room and mutter, "What the fuck are you watching?"

"The Proposal," Tiny says with a grin. "My girl Sandra Bullock is in it."

Vittoria sits up on the couch, then her eyes lock on my hands. "What happened?" She darts up, and forgetting that she's only wearing my shirt, she rushes to me. "Did you get hurt?"

"You're only wearing a shirt," I growl.

"Don't worry," Tiny says. "My eyes are glued to the TV."

Vittoria gives me a sheepish expression. "Oops."

"Oops, my ass," I mutter as I walk to the couch to grab the blanket. I wrap it around her shoulders, then tug her closer and press a possessive kiss to her mouth.

When I lift my head, she repeats her question from earlier, “What happened to your hands?”

I nod for her to follow me as I walk to the stairs, and once we’re in the bedroom, I take hold of her shoulders.

“How do you feel?”

“Fine.” She frowns at me. “Tell me what happened.”

Not wanting her to find out from someone else, I say, “I killed Giorgio.”

Her eyes widen. “Oh my God. Did he attack you? Are you okay?”

I let out a chuckle as I shake my head. “He didn’t attack me. The fucker doesn’t have the balls.” My expression grows serious again. “It was time he paid for what he did to you.” I move my hands to the sides of her neck and lean down. “I wasn’t going to let him live after the hell he put you through.”

I watch as she processes the news, and her eyebrows pinch together. “I understand.”

My gaze searches her as I ask, “Are you okay?”

She lets out a slow breath before saying, “Yes. I knew it would happen eventually, so I’m not surprised.”

“I’m having your house fixed up, and when it’s ready, we’ll go back so you can grab what you want to bring here.”

A smile tugs at the corner of her mouth. “I’d like that very much.” She grips hold of my hand and pulls me to the bathroom. “Let me take care of your hands.”

“Hmm, I like the thought of you taking care of me.”

Vittoria pulls a small first aid kit from below the sink, and it has me saying, “I didn’t know we had a kit in our bathroom.”

“I placed it here right after I moved in.” She gives me an apologetic look. “In case I needed it.” She shrugs as she takes an antiseptic wipe out of the kit. “It was before I knew you wouldn’t hurt me.”

I watch as she gently cleans the cuts on my knuckles, then I glance at her face again. "Thank you."

There's a small smile around her lips, but it quickly disappears when she asks, "How are you?"

I give her a puzzled look. "I'm fine."

Vittoria shakes her head. "How are you with everything that happened? They were your family."

They? Giving her a questioning look, I ask, "You know about my aunt?"

"Tiny told me while you were out."

I let out a sigh. "What else did Tiny tell you?"

Her eyes fill with compassion for me. "Just that Big Ricky had to kill her to protect you."

I shake my head before I admit, "The betrayal hurts." I step closer to her and rest my palm against her cheek. "But it's nothing compared to the fear I felt when I discovered you ran away."

She turns her head and presses a kiss to my palm as she takes hold of my wrist. When she stares up at me, I notice how her eyes soften.

"I love you, Angelo."

Her confession bathes me in so much light and warmth the world falls away until there's only us.

Lowering my head, I press my forehead against hers and demand, "Say it again."

Her lips curve up in a beautiful smile. "I love you."

With a desperate need to taste her words, my mouth slams against hers. I bring my hands to the sides of her neck, and holding her in place, I kiss her with all the love I feel for her.

My lips feast on hers as my tongue brands hers with hard strokes, and I groan from how good it feels.

Lowering my hands to her hips, I lift her up and set her ass down on the counter. Vittoria opens her legs so I can step between them, and not waiting for an order, she quickly unfastens my belt before pulling down the zipper of my pants.

She shoves the fabric down, and when her fingers wrap around my cock, a satisfied growl rumbles from my chest. My woman lines me up with her soaked opening, and I thrust hard inside her.

“Fuck,” I groan from the intense pleasure of being deep in her pussy. “You feel like home.”

She wraps her hand around the back of my neck and kisses the fuck out of me.

Pulling out, I slam back into her warm body, and as the kiss grows wilder, I fuck her with all my strength. The sound of our skin slapping mixes with Vittoria’s moans and whimpers.

I feel her pussy clench around my cock, and knowing she’s close, I push a hand down between us and rub her clit.

“God,” she gasps against my mouth. “Angelo.”

When her orgasm tears through her, her breaths explode over my lips, and not long after, I find my own release deep inside her.

Our eyes remain locked as we come together, and I feel so fucking connected to her, nothing will ever be able to tear us apart.

Chapter 37

Tori

After convincing Angelo I was really okay, he finally agreed that I was allowed to leave the house before the one week was up.

I'm sitting in the Cathedral on a Saturday, which is out of the norm for me.

Tiny sits beside me, playing a racing game on his phone while my eyes are locked on the confession booth.

I didn't lie to Angelo about being okay, but I still need to talk to Father Parisi.

As time crawls by, I glance around the Cathedral while thinking about how much my life has changed.

It feels like an entire lifetime has passed since I married Angelo. Besides the incident in Sicily, everything has been perfect.

I lower my head as a smile curves my lips.

Angelo might be a devil when it comes to other people, but with me, he's an angel. I've never felt so loved before.

I hear movement, and lifting my head, I see a parishioner leave the confession booth.

"I'll be right back," I say to Tiny as I get up.

"Wait," he murmurs as he puts his phone away and climbs to his feet. He walks with me to the booth and checks inside before nodding at me. "I'll be right outside."

"Thanks, Tiny." When I step into the booth, I give him a quick smile

before shutting the door.

I take a seat on the bench, and making the sign of the cross, I murmur, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It’s been two months since my last confession.” Taking a deep breath, I whisper, “I doubted my husband and ran from him.”

God, it was the biggest mistake I’ve ever made. I’ll never doubt Angelo again.

I hear Father Parisi move. “You ran from your husband?”

“Yes, but he found me, and I’ve asked his forgiveness.”

He clears his throat. “Are you okay? Did he hurt you?”

“No.” I shake my head, and lowering my head, I admit, “His uncle died because of me, and I was scared, but Angelo wasn’t angry with me.”

“His uncle?” Father Parisi gasps. “Maurizio Rizzo?”

“Yes.” I shift on the bench. “He fell to his death because I stumbled into him.”

The horrific incident flashes through my mind, and I tighten my hands into fists on my lap.

“I’m going to assume there’s more to that story,” Father Parisi whispers as if he’s scared someone will hear.

“Yes, but I don’t want to talk about it.” My eyes flit to the partitioning between us. “If that’s okay with you?”

“Of course.” He lets out a heavy breath, then asks, “Do you have any more sins to confess?”

“I didn’t feel bad when I learned that my stepbrother was killed.”

“What?” Father Parisi gasps, and this time, he opens the small window between us and stares at me in shock. “What happened? Are you okay?”

I nod before saying, “I’m fine.”

“How did he die?”

I shake my head. "I can't tell you."

Father Parisi stares at me momentarily, then shuts the window again. "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

I make the sign of the cross again and whisper, "Amen."

When I step out of the confession booth, Father Parisi's door opens, and he grabs both my hands. Giving me a worried look, he whispers, "Do you need help?"

I shake my head, and with a smile spreading over my face, I say, "I just needed absolution." I squeeze his hands. "I'm not in any danger, and Angelo is good to me." I take a deep breath before admitting, "I love him."

I feel Tiny behind me, and Father Parisi quickly lets go of me. He takes a step backward but still looks worried as his eyes meet mine.

"I'm safe and happy, Father," I say to put him at ease. "It's all I ever wanted."

Tiny places his hand on my shoulder as Father Parisi nods at me. "I'll see you both tomorrow?"

My smile widens. "Yes."

When he walks away from us, I turn to look at Tiny, whose eyes instantly lock on my face.

With a frown, he asks, "Did it go okay?"

I nod. "It went as well as I expected."

With Tiny close to my side, we walk out of the Cathedral, and when I'm sitting in the back seat of the SUV, I let out a sigh.

I know going to confession won't magically erase the guilt I feel for the part I played in Maurizio's death, but it makes me feel a little better.

Tiny starts the engine, and pulling away from the curb, he says, "If you ever need to talk about what happened, I'm here."

I glance out of the window. “Thanks, Tiny.” I let out a sigh. “I think it’s just going to take some time for the memories to fade.”

“Time heals all,” he murmurs.

My thoughts drift for a moment, then frowning, I meet his eyes in the rearview mirror. “What’s your real name?”

He lets out a chuckle before saying, “Sebastiano.”

“I feel bad that I only thought to ask now. Sorry, Tiny.”

“It’s okay.” He grins from ear to ear, then adds, “Just never call me Sebastiano.”

“I won’t. You’ll always be Tiny to me.”

When we get home, and I head into the mansion, Angelo is leaning against the back of the couch, his eyes on me.

“Were you waiting for me?” I ask as I walk closer to him.

“Yes. There’s something I want to discuss with you.”

My eyebrow lifts as I stop in front of him. He grips hold of my hips and tugs me closer.

“When did you last have contact with your aunt?”

A frown forms on my forehead. “A few months ago, before my phone was broken. Why?”

“I think it’s time I meet them,” he replies. “Would you like to invite them over for dinner?”

My eyes widen, and a smile spreads over my face. “I’d like that very much.” My shoulders sag as I admit, “But I don’t have their phone number anymore. It was on my old phone.”

“I’ll get it for you,” he promises.

“That will mean a lot to me.”

As I start to wrap my arms around his neck, he shakes his head. “You need to change into the dress I left on the bed.”

“Why?”

Angelo presses a quick kiss to my mouth, then murmurs, “It’s a surprise.”

“How much time do I have to get ready?”

The corner of his mouth lifts in a hot smirk. “As long as you need, *mia piccola cerviatta*. There’s no rush.”

Feeling excited, I leave him in the living room and hurry up the stairs. When I walk into the bedroom, I see the pale blue gown Angelo chose for me to wear. It’s one of my favorites that I got on my shopping spree at *Oscar de la Renta*.

Because Angelo said I could take my time, I walk into the bathroom to open the faucets and pour some bath salts into the tub.

As I watch the water fill the tub, I think about the stressful week we’ve had. First, Tiny had to be rushed to the hospital, then the nightmare in Sicily. Giorgio dying.

It’s crazy. I don’t understand why people can’t just live together in harmony.

I wasn’t lying when I confessed that I didn’t feel bad when Angelo told me he killed Giorgio.

I feel relieved because I won’t have to worry about him trying to hurt me again. When my inheritance pays out, he won’t be there to take it from me, and the house Papà worked so hard for now belongs to me.

I feel some good came out of the crazy week, though.

I’ve realized Angelo, Tiny, Rita, and Big Ricky are my family, and they mean the world to me.

I place my hand over my abdomen as I glance down. There’s just one thing missing.

Letting out a deep breath, I close the faucets and strip out of my clothes. Stepping into the balmy water, a smile spreads over my face.

Just as I close my eyes, I feel Angelo's presence. His movements are still silent as always, but I can feel a shift in the air.

I turn my head, and opening my eyes again, I see him crouching beside the tub. His fingers dip into the water.

"How did it go at confession?"

My smile widens. "Good."

He stares at me for a while, then says, "Big Ricky and I will join you for Mass tomorrow."

Surprised, my eyebrow pops up. "Really?" I sit up in the tub and grab the loofah. "I thought church wasn't your thing?" I squirt some body wash on and start to wash my legs.

Angelo takes the loofah from me and orders, "Lie back."

I relax in the tub and watch as he continues to wash my leg.

He lets out a sigh, then says, "We're going with you to show everyone you're mine." His eyes flick to my face before he continues to wash my other leg. "We're going to make a few public appearances together to make a statement."

"Okay." I glance in the direction of the bedroom. "Is that why I have to wear the gown?"

He shakes his head. "No, that's for me." Getting up, he leans over the tub and presses a possessive kiss to my mouth before demanding, "Don't braid your hair. I want your curls wild and free."

A happy smile spreads over my face. "Okay."

I watch as he walks out of the bathroom and let out a contented sigh.

Who would've thought Angelo Rizzo would be the best thing to ever happen to me?

Chapter 38

Angelo

I'm sitting on the couch when I hear Vittoria's heels clicking on the stairs.

Getting up, I walk to the foot of the stairs, and I glance up at her.

My woman looks breathtaking in the blue silk gown, and with the makeup accentuating her beautiful features, she's a fucking wet dream.

I step closer and hold my hand out to her. A smile lights up her face as her fingers wrap around mine, and when she stops on the last step, her eyes are filled with love.

I tug her against my chest and wrap my other arm around her lower back to pin her to me. Lowering my head to her ear, I take a deep breath of her floral scent.

My words are a low growl filled with desire for my wife. "You take my breath away, *mia piccola tentatrice*."

Lifting her hands to my clean-shaven jaw, she looks at me as if I'm her entire world, and I've never felt more powerful.

She presses a soft kiss to my lips, then whispers, "I love you, *il mio diavolo*."

I grin against her mouth when I hear her call me her devil. She's not wrong. I'll fucking raise hell for her.

Weaving our fingers together, I tug her away from the stairs, and we head out of the house, where Tiny and Big Ricky are waiting by the SUV.

They both grin from ear to ear when they see us, and Tiny says, "You look beautiful, Tori."

“Thank you,” she chuckles.

I tug her away from the SUV, and she gives me a confused look, but it quickly turns to surprise when I open the passenger door to the Lamborghini.

As she climbs inside, I say, “Tiny and Big Ricky will follow us in the SUV.”

She nods before glancing around the interior of the luxurious sports car.

I shut the door and nod at my men as I walk around the front of the Lamborghini, then unbuttoning my suit jacket, I slide behind the steering wheel.

I make sure Vittoria’s safety belt is secure before pulling on my own. Starting the engine, I grin when it roars to life.

Christ, I love the sound.

“Ready?” I ask as I wink at my wife.

Excitedly, her head bobs up and down, and as I place my hand on the back of her headrest to reverse the car, she lets out an unexpected moan.

My eyes flick to hers, and seeing the desire on her face as she tugs her bottom lip between her teeth, I almost change my mind about going out.

“If you keep looking at me like that, I’m going to fuck you right here in the car,” I warn her.

She places her hand on my thigh and brush her fingers against the outline of my hard cock. “Then you have to stop looking so hot.”

I let out a predatory chuckle, and shifting the gear into drive, the Lamborghini roars as I steer it toward the gates.

Even though the car is built for racing, I keep to the speed limit so we don’t lose Big Ricky and Tiny in the early evening traffic.

“Where are we going?” Vittoria asks while the little temptress keeps stroking her pinky against my sensitive cock.

“Baby, if you don’t stop, I’m going to come before we reach our

destination,” I warn her while grabbing her hand and moving it toward my knee. “Bad girl.”

She lets out a chuckle and turns her attention to the scenery outside.

“I’m taking you out to dinner,” I answer her question.

“At *Piccola Sicilia*?”

I nod as I turn up one of the main streets in Long Island.

I’ve closed my restaurant for the evening so I can have a candle-lit dinner with my wife.

When I bring the Lamborghini to a stop outside *Piccola Sicilia*, I turn off the engine and unbuckle the safety belt. “Wait for me to open your door.”

“Okay.”

I check the rearview mirror and wait until Big Ricky and Tiny have scanned the area before I climb out of the vehicle. Walking around the front, I glance around me to make sure it’s safe.

I open the door, and taking Vittoria’s hand, I pull her out of her seat and grip her against my side. When we walk into the restaurant, her smile widens as she glances at the empty tables. “It’s only us?”

“Yes. I wanted you all to myself,” I murmur.

Reaching the candle-lit table, I pull out a chair for her. I had Eddie prepare everything for tonight.

Our chairs are next to each other, and we have a view of Lake Ronkonkoma in the distance.

I sit down beside Vittoria, and I smile at my wife.

She glances at where Tiny and Big Ricky have their own table before giving me all her attention. “This is lovely.”

“A special night for my special girl,” I murmur right before a server brings a bottle of wine to the table.

“Evening, Mr. Rizzo...Mrs. Rizzo. May I pour?” he asks.

I nod and watch as he fills our glasses to the half mark.

When he leaves us alone, I take hold of Vittoria's hand and just stare at her while I sip my wine.

Her smile keeps growing until she chuckles, "If you keep staring at me like that, I'm going to spontaneously combust."

I let out a burst of laughter and rub my thumb over the back of her hand. "Serves you right for almost making me combust in the car."

She gives me a sheepish grin, which only makes me love her more.

Tilting my head, I relax in the chair. "We haven't talked about it yet, but I wanted to know what you plan to do with your inheritance when it pays out."

Her eyebrows draw together. "You know about it?"

The corner of my mouth lifts. "I know everything, baby."

She playfully rolls her eyes at me, then says, "I don't know. Initially, I was going to use the money to get away from Giorgio." She shrugs. "I'll probably just leave it in my bank account."

"If you want, I can help you invest the money?"

She nods, looking a little relieved. "I'd appreciate it."

My thumb keeps brushing over her soft skin. "What do you want to do with your father's house?"

She thinks for a moment, then replies, "I don't want to sell it."

"You don't have to." My eyes drift over her face. "You can rent it out or just leave it empty."

She turns her hand over beneath mine and weaves her fingers with mine. "I'll think about it."

The server brings us our appetizers, and while we enjoy the seared scallops, I feel calm for the first time this week.

Vittoria pats the corners of her mouth with her napkin, then asks, "How many children would you like to have?"

I grin at her as I answer, “As many as you want. I’m at your service twenty-four-seven.”

Laughter bursts from her, and I drink in the magical sound.

We enjoy the rest of our meal, and after the dishes are cleared from the table, I remove the tiny velvet box from the breast pocket of my jacket and get up from the chair.

Vittoria gives me a questioning look until I sink down on one knee before her.

“I know I’m doing this all backward, but...” I open the box to reveal the diamond ring to her, “The moment I laid eyes on you, I fell irrevocably in love for the first time in my life. You cast a spell over me, and I just had to have you. I wanted to wake up to your beautiful face for the rest of my life. I wanted to own every ounce of your innocence. I wanted you more than anything.”

I suck in a deep breath as I take hold of her left hand, and brushing my thumb over her wedding ring, I continue, “You’re the light in my life, Vittoria. *Mia raggio di sole*. Without you, there is only darkness.”

She uses her free hand to wipe a tear from her cheek as she gives me a trembling smile.

“I know I could’ve done things differently when I forced you to marry me, but the risk of losing you kept me from thinking clearly. I don’t regret it, and I’d do it again.”

She lets out a chuckle and shakes her head at me.

Taking the diamond ring from the box, I hold it in front of her left hand. “I vow to *love* and honor you all the days of my life, Vittoria.”

She slips off her chair and kneels in front of me as tears spiral down her cheeks. Looking deep into my eyes, she says, “I vow to *love* and honor you all the days of my life, Angelo.”

With a smile spreading over my lips, I frame her face and press my mouth to hers.

Applause erupts from Tiny and Big Ricky before Tiny lets out a whistle.

Tori

As I glance around the Cathedral, I let out a sigh.

All the pews around us are empty. Not because Angelo forbade anyone to sit near us, the parishioners are all just too scared to come close to us.

While Father Parisi gives a sermon about weathering storms in life, Tiny nods off for the fourth time.

Nudging my elbow against his arm, he sits up straighter and tries to blink the sleep away.

I focus on the sermon again, but I can feel the other parishioners stealing glances at us. Where it would've bothered me a month ago, I no longer care. Angelo is my husband, and I'm proud to have him by my side.

I hear Big Ricky murmur something to Angelo, then they chuckle softly.

Scowling at them, I mutter, "Shhh...behave!"

They both shut their mouths and give me innocent expressions. I shake my head at them while I struggle to keep from smiling.

Angelo leans closer until I feel his breath on my ear, "It's a turn-on when you act all bossy. Maybe I can take you into the confession booth and confess my sins?"

I place my hand on his thigh and press my lips together as I fight the smile. "Hush."

Tiny keeps nodding off, and eventually, I leave him be.

Father Parisi says, “May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

I form the sign of the cross and murmur, “Amen.”

Angelo and Big Ricky quickly copy my actions.

“The Mass is ended. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

“Thanks be to God,” I respond to Father Parisi’s words.

“Finally,” Tiny sighs next to me. “I don’t know what they put in the AC, but it knocks me out every Sunday.” He gets up with the rest of us, then says, “Time for coffee and muffins.”

“I swear it’s the only reason you come with me,” I tease him while Angelo takes hold of my hand.

All the parishioners wait for us to file out of the pew and keep a safe distance behind us.

“Grab a muffin, Tiny. We’re not staying for coffee hour. I don’t think the parishioners’ nerves will last another hour with Angelo here.”

“We should stay to fuck with them,” Big Ricky chuckles.

Giving him a scowl, I whisper, “No cursing!”

Looking regretful, he apologizes, “Sorry, Tori.”

“Let’s head home,” Angelo says before he covers his mouth to hide a yawn.

“Can we come over for lunch?” Tiny asks after he’s swiped two muffins from the coffee table. “We have to finish watching *Two Weeks Notice*.”

I glance up at Angelo as we leave the Cathedral. “I prepared everything to make a roast with crispy potatoes, sweetcorn, and...”

“Please, boss,” Tiny begs.

“Fine,” Angelo mutters, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“Yes!” Tiny grins from ear to ear as he opens the backdoor of the SUV.

I climb into the vehicle, and when Angelo scoots in beside me, I lean my

head against his shoulder. Lifting his arm, he wraps it around me and presses a kiss to my hair.

While Big Ricky drives us home, Angelo's finger brushes over the diamond sparkling on my ring finger, and my thoughts return to our date.

It was perfect and emotional.

I rub my cheek against Angelo's chest and let out a happy sigh.

Thank you for making my dreams come true.

"What are you thinking?" Angelo asks.

"How happy I am." I tilt my head back to look up at him. "And how most of my hopes and dreams came true."

"Yeah?" He lowers his head and presses a soft kiss to my mouth.

"Yeah," I breathe against his lips.

Epilogue

Tori

(Two years later...)

While Adriano plays on the kitchen floor, I put the finishing touches on the special dinner I prepared for tonight.

Leaving the food to rest in the oven, I turn around and look at my son, who's the spitting image of his father.

I check the time and let out a sigh. "Your daddy is late."

"Daddy," Adriano chuckles while playing with his blocks.

It's already past five thirty. Angelo should've been home already.

Crouching down, I pick up Adriano and walk to the living room, where I left my cell phone.

Tiny glances at me, then smiles at Adriano. "Hey, buddy. Are you done helping Mommy cook?"

I let out a chuckle. "I wish. Do you know what's keeping Angelo?"

He shakes his head. "Want me to make a call?"

"Please." I put Adriano in his playpen and watch as Tiny calls someone. Probably Big Ricky.

"Hey, Tori wants to know why Angelo is late," Tiny says. He listens for a moment, then mutters, "I'll tell her." When he ends the call, he looks at me. "There's a meeting at the club with the other heads of the Cosa Nostra that's running a little late."

"Why tonight of all nights?" Letting out a huff because the dinner is going to spoil, I shake my head. "Take me to the club."

Tiny's eyebrows fly up. "Are you serious?"

"Yes. Rita needs to go home, and the food can't rest too long." I walk back to the kitchen and find Rita, where she's unpacking the dishwasher. "Do you mind watching Adriano? I won't be long."

"Of course. Should I keep an eye on the food?"

I shake my head. "No, I've turned off the oven."

I head back to where Adriano is blissfully playing with his toys and press a kiss to his head. "Mommy will be back soon."

I'm going to drag your father's butt home.

Leaving the house with Tiny, I climb into the back of the SUV, and as he drives us to the club, I think about Angelo's reaction when I got pregnant with Adriano. I was so excited I didn't plan anything special and just blurted the news out to him.

He fell to his knees in front of me and kissed my abdomen with tears in his eyes. The only other time he was that emotional was when I gave birth to our son.

My mouth curves into a smile.

"Does all of this have anything to do with the nausea you've been having the past week?"

I give Tiny a look of warning. "You're sworn to secrecy. Don't say a word to Angelo."

"My lips are sealed," he chuckles, a wide smile on his face.

He stops the SUV in front of Fallen Angels, and I wait for him to open my door before I get out.

Walking into the club, all the staff hurry to greet me with respect. It's something that took some getting used to.

I ignore the strippers on stage and all the men leering at them and head straight to Angelo's office.

Big Ricky is leaning against a wall, and when he sees me, a grin spreads over his face. “Hey, Tori.” He opens the office door for me and steps out of the way.

When I enter the room, five sets of eyes lock on me.

Over the past two years, I’ve learned to trust the other four heads of the Cosa Nostra.

“Sorry for the interruption, gentlemen,” I say before my eyes lock on Angelo. “I’ve planned a special dinner, and the food will spoil if you don’t come home.”

Honestly, I’m just so freaking excited to tell him the good news.

Angelo gets up from his chair. “You’ve heard her. Meeting’s over.”

Dario lets out a burst of laughter, but none of them argue, for which I’m grateful.

Angelo stops in front of me and presses a soft kiss to my mouth. “I like it when you get all bossy.”

Taking his hand, I pull him out of the office, doing my best not to just blurt out the news.

You can wait another thirty minutes.

When we climb into the SUV, Angelo gives me a questioning look. “Is everything okay?”

I nod and roll my lips between my teeth to keep my mouth shut.

“Baby?”

When I won’t look at him, he grips hold of my chin and forces me to meet his gaze. “What’s going on.”

I make a frustrated sound then the words burst from me, “I’m pregnant!”

Shoot.

Angelo’s eyebrows draw together, then his eyes drop to my abdomen. “You’re pregnant?”

My excitement floods me, and I nod like a crazy person. “I took three tests to be sure. We’re having another baby!”

His hand covers the space where our second baby is growing, and his eyes shine just like the first time we got pregnant.

“Adriano’s getting a little brother or sister,” I say, unable to stop smiling.

Angelo frames my face and kisses the ever-loving crap out of me before murmuring against my lips, “You’re fucking incredible.”

“It takes two to make a baby,” I tease him.

His eyes capture mine again. “Yeah, but you do most of the hard work.”

I shake my head. “It’s not hard work.” I brush my hand over my abdomen. “It’s just another one of my dreams coming true.”

The End.

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I think every author fears they might be forgotten if they wait too long between releasing books. That's not the case with my epic readers! You know how to make a girl feel special. Thank you for your endless support.

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Love,
Michelle.