



Her Dark Obsession

Author: *Kylie Kent*

Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, Dark

Description: Aurora

Prey or be prey Its the way of life Me I prefer option one Hunting down those who hurt the people I love is my lifes mission Ive never allowed myself to be caught in someone elses sights At least until now Love makes you do crazy shit Which is why when I heard what my family was planning to do to the OMalleys I had to take drastic measures Connor might pretend to hate me but he doesnt know I just saved his life He can thank me later As soon as we outrun these targets on our backs

Connor

You can't control who you fall in love with. You can, however, avoid the person like the plague. Especially when you're supposed to be sworn enemies.

Aurora Valentino is, well, Aurora. There are no words to describe her. One thing I've always known, though, is that she was put on this earth to torture me.

A piece of forbidden fruit dangled right in front of my face.

When I wake up tied to a bed, her face hovering above mine, panic is the first thing I should feel. And I'd be terrified... if my brain weren't being controlled by other parts of my anatomy.

I know I can't have her, but that won't stop me from wanting her.

Right now, this insane-as-f*ck girl is holding me captive. And even though I should, I don't think I want to escape.

Her Dark Obsession is book 1 in the Obsessive Love Trilogy, a cliffhanger should be expected!

Total Pages (Source): 84

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

Chapter One

Some species mate for life—ducks, swans, and Valentinos just to name a few. I'm supposed to fall into the latter. I've seen it, grown up surrounded by it. Love. That soul-crushing, all-consuming love that has you living entirely for a person other than yourself. I don't think that is ever going to be in the cards for me, though.

For that to happen, you have to be attracted to someone. You have to feel something other than... well, nothing. I've never felt that. I love my family, my parents, my brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins, and of course my grandparents. I love them fiercely, and they are who I live for. They are what keep me going, get me through the motions of day-to-day life.

The thing is, I'm constantly bored. Everything is so repetitive. Everyone around me is so fake. Including me. People think they know me, but they don't. Your teenage years are supposed to be the best of your life, or so my mother would have me believe. She enjoyed being young and free—although she also knew she loved my father since she was six years old.

Like I said, Valentinos mate for life. And me, I'm Aurora Valentino. I'm many things, though. A mafia princess, my father's pride and joy, and my mother's mini me... at least in the looks department. Unfortunately, I did not inherit her bubbly, outgoing personality. Not that anyone would know that because, again, I'm fake.

I'm good at pretending to be who people want me to be, or who they expect me to be. Until I can't pretend any longer and I explode. That only happens occasionally, and my family blows that off as me being Aurora. Literally, they have turned my name

into a verb. Because in our family, nothing is crazy unless I'm the one doing it.

My father named me after a Disney princess. He said I was born asleep. Calm, quiet, and the most beautiful creature he'd ever laid eyes on. He took one look at me and thought of Sleeping Beauty. Hence the name. My mom says it was the calm before the storm, seeing as I made up for that lack of noise later on.

In my defense, I also have two older brothers and a bucket-load of cousins even I have trouble keeping up with. My mom is an only child. Just her and my grandfather. But my dad is one offour. My nonno says he was trying to birth an army, but Nonna wasn't having it after the twins—my dad's youngest brothers.

I think Nonno has his army now, though. Between his kids, grandchildren, and all the extended family around the globe. My nonna is Australian. She moved to New York to work as a teacher when she was young. Met my nonno and, well, mated for life.

I have the kind of family a lot of people envy. They're loving, fiercely protective, and loyal to the bone. It comes with the mafia blood that runs through our veins. And I love them. All of them. Including the two idiots I'm currently sending death glares to.

Dante and Orlando. My cousins are younger than I am, but they never got that message. No, they think it's their sole purpose in life to follow me around and make sure I don't do anything stupid. If you were to ask them, they'd say they're protecting me and simply following orders from their fathers, those same twins I mentioned, which has Dante and Orlando looking more like brothers than cousins.

Orlando is a rockstar, a legit billboard-reaching rockstar. He inherited his talent from his mother. My Zio Katy is America's sweetheart.

But Dante is a different breed. He's a child prodigy. A genius, brains he inherited from both of his parents. The kid is practically a walking Wikipedia. I'm not sure

there's a lot he doesn't know or can't find out.

Right now, though, those two are pains in my ass. They weren't supposed to be at this party. I came here to be alone. Which is probably a strange concept. I mean, who goes to a party to be alone? Me. Because as many people as there are here, they don't see me. And if they do, they pretend not to.

People tend to keep a wide berth around me. Over the years, I've made sure to incite not only fear but the idea that I could strike at any moment. Unlike Dante and Orlando, when I snap, it's not something I'll do to you in public. No, it'll be private. Between you and me. I don't need an audience, but the rumors that go around about me are enough to have everyone looking at me differently.

I watch my cousins become the life of the party, every dipshit here wanting to get into their good graces. They put us Valentinos on a throne and the very few people we let close are part of the royal court, as the students at school like to call it.

It's no secret what our family does. Although we're also not stupid. The rumors are never confirmed. They might know we're mafia, and we might act the part. But this is America, and we're all innocent until proven guilty. Fortunately for us, no one has ever been found guilty of anything.

It helps that my dad is the country's best defense attorney and my Zio Livvy is the second best. They'll probably end up having to defend me one day—I have no doubt about that.

Everyone in my family has a talent or a skill they excel at. The only thing I excel at is fooling people into believing I'm normal when I'm anything but. I don't have the same feelings other kids my age seem to have. That's part of the reason I got dressed up and came to this party tonight. To see if I felt... anything.

I watch everyone around me. Humping and grinding on each other. Some couples look like they're doing a lot more than just grinding. And still I feel... nothing. No arousal. No flutters in my heart or stomach. Just nothing. I know what's supposed to happen. I should be turned on, wet. I should feel something downstairs that makes me want to lose all inhibitions and climb another human like a flagpole.

And that's my current problem. I've never been aroused. Ever. I've been around beautiful people, both male and female, but I can't seem to get it up, so to speak, for either sex. It's not for lack of trying either. I've had both guys and girls show interest in me.

"Did you come to a party to mope?" Dante leans on the wall next to where I'm standing.

"No, I came here to find some poor soul and fuck the life out of him." I smirk when my cousin cringes.

"You do that, and I'll be sure to kill him before either of you reaches the finale," he snarls like a rabid dog.

"Challenge accepted." My smile widens as I tip the top of my beer at him. I don't particularly like beer, but it's the only bottled drink here and I'm too smart to take a drink someone else has mixed.

"That wasn't a fucking challenge, Aurora," he says.

"Scared you'll lose?" I raise a brow at him.

"Not at all. How exactly do you expect to seduce some fucker when I'm right next to you, being the ultimate cockblock?" Dante laughs.

I school my features. My cousin might be the smart one in the family, but when it comes to manipulation, no one does it better than I do. “Is that the new girl? Josie. Who invited her? I didn’t think she had any friends,” I say while looking in the direction I clocked the object of my cousin’s obsession five minutes ago.

As predicted, Dante pushes off the wall. “Don’t move,” he tells me. Or tries to order me.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

He walks right towards Josie. And once I check that Orlando is preoccupied with tonight's bed-warmer—his words, not mine—I walk up the stairs. It's supposed to be off limits, but I've grown up taking what I want and not asking for permission. This particular party is being hosted by Kenny, one of the football players.

It's quiet up here. I open the first door, walk in, and close it behind me. My back presses against the wood as I tip my head back, close my eyes, and inhale. Silence. The music from downstairs is gone. Just gone.

“Are you lost?” a voice with a deep Irish accent asks me.

My lashes snap open. How did I not notice someone else was in this room? I always notice everyone.

A pair of eyes stares back at me. They're the darkest green color, like emeralds. But it doesn't matter how long I stare. I'm no closer to figuring him out. He's as closed off as one can be. Not a single ounce of emotion in his features.

“I asked you a question? Are you deaf?”

Breaking out of my stupor, I raise a single eyebrow at him. “Do I know you?”

“Not yet, you don't.” He smirks as his glare roams up and down my body, and something strange happens. It's as if a tiny trail of fire ignites my skin. Following his gaze. What the hell is that?

“What makes you think I want to know you?” I counter.

The guy stalks towards me. All six-foot-something of him. Those dark-green eyes accompany a perfectly symmetrical face, a strong jawline, and high cheekbones a lot of women pay thousands of dollars to achieve. Framed by a mess of blonde hair I want to run my fingers through.

I frown at the foreign thought. Why the hell do I want to touch his hair? I might not know why, but I want to. Which means I'm going to. I step towards him, closing the gap as my hand reaches up and pushes his hair from his forehead.

"Why do I get the feeling I should run right now?" he asks me.

I lift a shoulder. "If you knew who I was, you'd already be out the door," I tell him, at the same time a strange buzz runs through my body. A buzz I have no plans of ignoring.

Chapter Two

Few things excite me in this world: food, football and sex. Right now, it's the latter that's on my mind. But if you saw the blonde bombshell who's right in front of me, your dick would be doing all the thinking for you too.

This girl emits trouble. One look at her and I knew... I don't know how, but I just knew that she's not someone I'm supposed to be touching. But I've always been the type to take what I want, regardless of the consequences. And right now, I want her.

"And why would I run from a ride like you?" I ask her.

"A ride?" she repeats.

"It's a compliment. Means you're hot as fuck." I don't move. Standing right in front of her as she runs her hands through my hair with a strange look on her face. Almost

as if she's experiencing something for the very first time.

"Does it work both ways? If I were to describe you as a ride, would that mean I think you're hot?"

"You think I'm hot, babe?" I smirk.

"It was a hypothetical question," she says, while the way she's touching me begs to differ.

"Good to know I'm hypothetically hot in your eyes, then." I chuckle and step forward, closing the small gap between us. Pressing my body up against her and not doing a single thing to conceal my hard-on.

"I should warn you... being here with me, like this, is dangerous for you."

My lips tip up. "You probably shouldn't have said that." My hands grip her hips, grinding her body against mine.

"W-why?" she asks.

"I don't run from danger, babe. I'm the type of guy who runs head-first into it." If I wasn't thinking with my dick, I'd probably ask her what she meant. Instead, all I can think about is how fast I can rip this little black leather dress from her body and sink inside her.

I'm pretty sure I've never been this hard for anyone before. Then again, I've never had a girl this fucking hot either. And I don't even know who she is. "What's your name?"

"What's yours?" she fires back.

“Connor. When I make you come so hard you see stars, that’s the name I want to hear you screaming.” I lift a hand, running my fingers across the bottom of her red-painted lips. I expect the makeup to smear, but it doesn’t. That just makes me wonder what it would look like on my cock.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“You really think you can make me come so hard I scream?” She raises a perfectly sculpted brow at me. This girl comes from wealth. Then again, everyone at this party does. The senior class of New York Prep. My cousin’s school, soon to be my new school, starting Monday.

“I know I can.” My hands dig into her hips and my cock strains against my jeans.

“Mmm, well then, what are you waiting for, Connor? Make me scream your name.” Her face is flushed, her breathing comes out in short pants, and the pulse in her neck beats rapidly.

“Your name.”

“Huh?”

“You haven’t told me your name,” I remind her. I wouldn’t usually care, but I want it. I want all of her, even her goddamn name. Especially that.

“Aurora,” she says breathily.

“Well, Sleeping Beauty, get ready for a kiss that’s not only going to wake you up, but that’ll send you into another galaxy,” I say before slamming my lips onto hers.

My tongue pushes into her mouth, and Aurora’s fingers tug at the hair at the nape of my neck. Her leg hikes up, wrapping around my waist and pulling me harder against her. My own hands cup her ass before hiking her higher and walking back over to the bed. Where I throw her onto the mattress, pick up her legs, and flip her over so she’s

lying on her stomach. I climb onto the bed and reach for the zipper of her dress before slowly dragging it down her back until the material peels off her. Which is fucking great for me.

Once I have the fabric separated, I stand and flip Aurora over again. She smirks up at me as I tug the leather away from her body. “Fucking hell,” I hiss, staring down at her.

Aurora’s arms shoot up to cover her stomach. “What?” she asks me.

“You are fucking gorgeous.” I grab her arms and move them back to her sides. “I want to look. I’ve never seen anything so beautiful before,” I tell her.

Her face heats up as my gaze travels down her body. She’s not wearing a bra. Her breasts are on full display for me while a pair of lace panties cover her pussy. They’ll be gone soon too. My eyes catch on the matching set of leather garters on her thighs, each holding a small knife.

I raise my brows at her. “Expecting trouble?”

“Always expect trouble and then you’ll never be caught off guard,” she tells me.

“Fucking hot,” I grunt out. My fingers go to her panties. I start to slide them down when Aurora’s hand reaches for her right thigh. I shake my head. “Leave them. Like I said, it’s hot as fuck.”

“You’re not scared I’ll stab you while you’re fucking me?”

I smirk down at her as I pull her panties over her ankles. “Not in the slightest. And honestly, I wouldn’t care if you did. A little bit of pain can quickly turn into pleasure, babe.”

“You might regret telling me that,” she says.

My hands spread her legs open. “Look at you, fucking drenched.” I run a single finger through her folds and then hold my hand up between us. “Look how wet you are for me.” I lean forward before rubbing the pad of my thumb over her bottom lip. Aurora surprises me when she opens her mouth and proceeds to suck it clean. A groan leaves my throat. “Fuck, I have a feeling I’m not going to survive this.”

“I’ll try not to kill you. I really don’t feel like burying a body tonight,” she says after releasing my finger with a pop. Her hands reach for the bottom of my shirt, and I help her tug the hem over my head. “It’s not fair that I’m naked and you’re still dressed.”

I step off the bed, reach into my back pocket, and pull out my wallet, opening it to retrieve the condom I always keep on me for emergencies before tossing the foil packet onto the bed. I then drop my wallet onto the nightstand and kick off my boots, bending down to remove my socks. Aurora sits up and scoots towards the edge of the mattress.

She grabs me by the belt loop, unbuttons my jeans, and then slides down my fly before yanking the denim off my ass. I hook my fingers into my boxers, lower them to the floor, and step out of them along with my jeans.

Aurora stares at my cock, almost like she’s never seen one before. But that’s insane, because a girl this hot has not gone untouched. She also has the confidence of someone who’s not a virgin.

She shakes her head slightly, then looks up at me. “I’m still waiting for you to make me scream,” she taunts.

I push on her shoulders until she’s flat on her back and I’m leaning over her as my mouth latches on to one of her perky tits. Sucking until I have her back arching off

the bed. My other hand slides up between our bodies, stopping when I reach her pussy. My fingers run up and down her wet lips. She's fucking drenched for me.

"Oh god." Aurora moans while her hands grip the back of my head.

I release her nipple and stare up at her. "Connor."

"What?"

"The name you're looking for is Connor," I growl. My mouth comes down on to her neck, and I bite the tender skin.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Fuck... Connor.” Her nails dig into my back as her hips gyrate against me.

“That’s exactly what I plan to do,” I say as I push two fingers inside her, scissoring them as I try to open her up. “Jesus Christ, you’re tight as fuck.” I’m so damn hard. “I can’t wait to slide my cock inside your cunt.”

“What are you waiting for? An invitation?” Aurora laughs.

“You want that, babe? You want me to slide my cock inside you? Fuck you like you’ve never been fucked before?”

“I wouldn’t be naked underneath you right now if I didn’t,” she growls at me. “Hurry up.”

Her legs open wider as I position myself at her entrance. I don’t push into her, though. I want this to last, and I know if I dive in right now, it’s not going to. I also need to wrap my shit up. I’m young, not dumb.

Sitting on my knees, I fist my cock and run the tip up and down her cunt. I’m leaking precum all over her. “Fuck, your cunt is pretty,” I say as I reach for the foil wrapper.

“Can a cunt even be pretty?” she asks, her brows drawn down in confusion.

“Yes. Because yours is.”

“That would imply you’ve seen ugly ones?”

“Meh, they’re all different, but I’ve never seen any as pretty as yours.” I tear into the foil, pull out the condom, and slide it down my cock. Aiming my tip at her entrance before I look down at her. “You ready?”

Aurora nods her head. Appearing eager as fuck. Her legs falling open as I start to slide inside her. She’s fucking tight. I don’t want to hurt her, but I also have this insane hunger, a need to be buried as deep as I can get.

With one thrust, I bottom out. But that’s not what has me stilling. Aurora’s body tenses and then relaxes. That wasn’t normal. There was a fucking barrier. I’ve fucked a virgin before. I know what the fuck it feels like. And it felt a lot like what just happened.

I drag my cock back, looking down to see it coated in her blood. “You’re a virgin?”

“Not anymore,” she says. “Is that a problem?”

“Fuck no.” My voice comes out as a growl as I slide back into her. She’s so fucking wet and tight. But then something else hits me. I pull out completely, hold her thighs open, and stare down at her pussy before sliding my body lower.

“What are you doing?” Aurora asks, sitting up on her elbows to watch me.

“I want to taste it,” I tell her.

“You what?” Her eyes go wide.

“Your blood. I want to taste your virgin blood.” My tongue swipes up the length of her slit.

“That’s not—ohhh...” Aurora’s back falls flat onto the mattress.

Chapter Three

Holy shit...

Connor's tongue pushes into my opening. He can't seriously be licking me down there right now. I mean, this can't be normal. I'm bleeding. I should stop him. But I can't bring myself to do it. Because, for the first time in my life, I'm feeling... something.

My stomach tightens, and tingles run right through me. What the hell is happening? I can't stop it. Whatever train wreck he's doing to my body, I'm steamrolling towards it.

"Fuck, I knew you'd taste good," he growls into my pussy; then his tongue flattens against my clit.

"Connor," I moan. I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of calling out his name, but it just slipped out. "I..."

"I know. Let it happen," he tells me before he goes back to sucking on my clit.

"Fuck!" I scream as my entire body tenses up, pleasure assaulting my every nerve ending. Did I just...? Was that...? "What was that?" I ask aloud without realizing it.

Connor kisses his way back up to my mouth. "That was an orgasm. You never had one of those before?"

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I shake my head. I honestly never thought I would.

“Not even by yourself? You know, when you’re alone in your room, thinking about hot Irishmen?”

“I’ve never thought about hot Irishmen.” I laugh. “And, no, never.” And not for a lack of trying. Believe me... I’ve spent hours trying to pleasure myself. It just never worked.

“Are you okay? You wanna keep going?” Connor asks.

I blink up at him. He’s so sincere. “Yes.” I don’t want to stop. I want more.

“Let me know if it hurts too much,” he says, sinking his cock inside me.

There’s a twinge of pain, but it’s not bad. “I’m good with pain,” I tell him.

“I have no doubt.” Connor chuckles and starts to gently rock against me.

“You said you were going to fuck me. This does not feel like fucking,” I remind him.

“That was before I knew you were a virgin,” he says.

“Connor, I don’t want gentle. I don’t want you to hold back. Show me what you got.”

“Okay, remember that when you’re walking with a limp tomorrow.” He shifts onto his knees, scooping underneath my legs before he hikes them up and pushes them

into my stomach. Then he starts to move. And I mean really move.

I asked for this. This is exactly what I asked for, and I don't regret it.

That feeling starts building in the bottom of my stomach again. With each thrust, Connor hits something that ignites a fire inside me. And when his thumb presses against my clit, while he continues to fuck me... well, that's just like adding gasoline to the mix.

If I knew sex felt this good, I would have tried it ages ago. Then again, my body has never reacted to anyone like this before. At least now I know I'm not completely broken.

It'd be weird if I took a picture of a guy while he sleeps. I know that. But fuck it. I don't care. I want something to remember this moment.

Picking up my phone, I snap a photo of Connor. His hair covers his eyes. My fingers itched to push it back out of his face. I don't do that, though. I need to make a clean escape. I knew what this was when it started. I don't need or want it to be anything more. He promised to make me scream his name. He promised to wake me up and he delivered on both.

I scoop my shoes off the floor and open the door, flinching when it squeaks. I look back over a shoulder. Thankfully, Connor hasn't moved.

I make it out of the house without anyone seeing me. They're all passed out cold and in various stages of undress. I never understood the appeal before, didn't understand why people were so quick to jump into bed with each other.

I get it now. I wonder if something's been unlocked, if I'll feel those tingly things for other guys or girls. I'm not picky.

Once I'm outside the gates, I call an Uber. I can't go home looking like this, at this hour of the morning. I really don't need to deal with my dad and brother going apeshit at the thought of me actually having sex.

I had sex. I smile at the thought. It was good. Connor, as depraved as he is, was good. My cheeks heat up at the memory of what he did to my body, at the way I reacted to his touch.

Thirty minutes later, I'm sneaking through the back door of my aunt and uncle's place. My cousin Mabilia is the only one I trust to lie for me and say I was here all night. And sneaking into this house is no easy feat. My uncle is the Pakhan of the Russian Bratva. Which means this place is like Fort Knox.

I didn't exactly sneak onto the estate. I walked through the gates. The guards didn't even look twice at me. It's not the first time I've crept into Mabilia's room. I am, however, sneaking through the house, because I do not want to have to explain to my aunt or uncle why I'm here.

I make it into Mabilia's room. It's dark, not an ounce of light. "Fuck." I curse under my breath when I trip over something on the floor.

A lamp flicks on, and my cousin glares at me from her bed. "What the fuck, Aurora?"

"Shhh." I make my way over and jump under the covers. "Go back to sleep, and if anyone asks, I was here all night," I tell her.

"Sure. But first, where were you really and why do you smell like sex?" Mabilia asks.

"How do you know what sex smells like?" I counter.

"I just do. Go and shower before you stink up my sheets. For all I know, my papa has

dogs specifically trained to sniff out sex and probably has them run through my room every day.” She sighs.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Actually, I bet he does.” I wouldn’t put it past my Zio Mikhail. He is crazy protective of his daughter. Then again, all of our fathers are. “I’m borrowing some pajamas,” I tell her.

“Fine. After you shower,” Mabilia grumbles and rolls over.

“Aurora, I didn’t know you were here,” my Zia Izzy says when I plonk myself down at the table the following morning. I’m starving, and they make good breakfast. It’s a mixture of Russian and Italian foods.

“I stayed over in Mabilia’s room.” I smile. The lie easily slips from my tongue.

“What are you girls getting up to today?” my aunt asks.

“I have to go home. Enzo is taking me sh—ah, shopping,” I tell her, quickly covering up another lie. My brothers have been taking me shooting for years. Secretly, of course. Everyone else in my family seems to be hung up on making sure I don’t have guns.

“Your brother is taking you shopping?” Zia Izzy laughs. “Why? What are you holding over his head?”

“Well, if I told you that, I wouldn’t have that carrot to dangle, now would I?” I don’t have anything. But if I did, I wouldn’t be telling anyone.

“Right.” My aunt shakes her head.

“Thanks for breakfast. My car’s here.” I get up and kiss my uncle’s cheek.

“Oh, Aurora,” my aunt calls out before I get too far.

“Yeah?”

“Next time you want to sneak into the house, try using a little more stealth. You were loud,” she says.

“Got it. I’ll keep that in mind,” I tell her.

“You’re off your game, princess.” Enzo laughs as I fire another round.

I glare at my brother over a shoulder. He’s not wrong. I am off my game. “At least I have game,” I tell him. “When was the last time you even had a date? And taking mom out to lunch doesn’t count.” I turn back towards the target and fire. Hitting it center mass.

Enzo steps up behind me and snatches the pistol from my hand. “What do you mean you have game, Aurora?” he grunts.

“Exactly what I said.” I turn on my brother and smirk, tilting my head to look up at him because all the men in my family are impossibly fucking tall.

Enzo glares down at me. “Take it back. Right now. Take it the fuck back, Aurora. You are not dating. You do not have a game of any kind,” he says.

“Who died and made you my father? Because last I checked, Papa was very much still breathing. Now, if we’re done here, I’m going home.” I shove at my brother’s chest. The bastard doesn’t move. Not an inch.

“Sure, let’s go home. Let’s see what Pops has to say about his little princess dating.” Enzo wraps an arm around my shoulder.

My elbow connects with his ribs, which has him dropping his hand.

Twenty minutes later, we’re walking into our house and Enzo is calling out, “Pops, you here?”

“What the hell are you yelling about now?” Our father comes out of the living room.

“Got a question for you. What do you think about Aurora dating?” Enzo asks.

My father looks at me. “I don’t think about it, because it’s not happening. Right, princess?” he says, almost pleadingly.

“Of course not, Papa. Why would I date? Boys are idiots,” I tell him, walking up and kissing his cheek.

“That’s what I thought.” He smiles at me.

“She told me she had game, Pops,” Enzo insists.

“And you shouldn’t be narsing on your sister. Where’s your loyalty?” Papa scolds.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“My loyalty flew out the window when keeping her hymen intact became priority,” Enzo retorts.

“First, never mention your sister’s hymen to me again. And second, it is intact.” Papa points at Enzo.

“Well... it’s not actually. But that doesn’t mean I’m dating either. So you can both relax. I’m going to my room. I need to get ready for school tomorrow.”

“Don’t move another step.” My father’s voice drops into that don’t fuck with me tone. It’s the same one he uses in the courtroom. “Savvy, 9-1-1! Now!” he calls out to my mother.

“What?” Mom comes down the stairs.

“Repeat what you just said, Aurora.” Papa gestures a hand to me. He’s not making eye contact.

“They’re overreacting, because I told them my hymen wasn’t intact. But I’m not dating. So we’re good,” I tell my mom.

Her eyes go wide. “Oh my gosh, Aurora, you were supposed to come to me. We had a deal.”

“I wasn’t able to come to you yet, because these Neanderthals can’t accept that I’m grown.”

“Little girl, you are far from grown,” Papa says. “Tell her, Savvy. Tell her to take it back.”

“Matteo, calm down. Need I remind you we were both two years younger than she is now when you... you know... with me...” Mom laughs.

“Ew, gross,” Enzo and I groan at the same time.

“We were best friends, and it was different,” Papa says.

“Not different. Now, Aurora, you and me, upstairs. You two find someone else to bother.” Mom aims a glare at my father and brother.

“Wait... What do you mean you’re not dating anyone? Who the fuck are you sleeping with if you’re not dating anyone?” Enzo asks.

“None of your business. And it’s not like you date all the girls you sleep with.”

“That’s different,” my brother growls.

“No, it’s not. Get with the times. Women have desires too.” I smirk as my brother and father share a disgusted look.

“Enzo, get the shovels. We’ve got a boy to find and a body to bury,” Papa grunts as he storms off down the hall.

I shake my head. They’re never going to find him. No one saw us together. And honestly, I’ve never even seen Connor around before. He must go to a different school, because I for sure would have noticed him if he went to New York Prep.

Chapter Four

My arm swipes out at the persistent annoying fucking sound that is my alarm. Groaning, I roll over and pick up my phone. The numbers 7:16 stare back at me. Fuck. I'm late. Most of the time, I wouldn't give a shit if I were late. But today is my first day at a new school. The last thing I want is to be walking in late.

Then again, that could work in my favor. What better way to gain attention, to let them know I've arrived, than to have a captive audience when I walk in?

Truth was... I was hoping to get in early. I wanted to find her. Aurora. I watched her fall asleep next to me. I've never seen anything more beautiful. When I finally let myself drift off, I thought I'd be waking up with her right where I left her. I didn't. She fucking bounced.

Never in my life have I had a chick just leave. I'm usually the one doing the running out. Is this how they feel? Cheated out of something? I have no idea. I shouldn't care that she didn't stick around, but fuck if it doesn't sting the ego a little.

I know she had a good time. I made sure of it. And I know she ain't got nothing to compare it to either. Which means I'm the best she's ever had. I just need to find her and remind her how fucking good it was. Because I'm not done with Aurora, not in the slightest.

After the world's quickest shower, I get dressed and jog downstairs, planning on making a hasty escape from the house. Luck was not on my side, though.

"Connor, where do you think you're running off to?" my mother asks.

"School, Ma. You know, that shite education you insist on me having?" I kiss her cheek.

"Come and eat. You can't learn on an empty stomach and no child of mine is going to

school hungry.” Tugging at my arm, my mother pulls me towards the kitchen.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“I’m fine. I’ll get something on the way, Ma. I’m gonna be late.”

“Since when do you care about being late for school?” This comes from my father, who is sitting at the head of the dining table.

“Since it’s the first day, Da. First impressions are everything, remember?” I raise a brow, throwing his own words back at him.

My father isn’t someone who usually tolerates my smart-ass mouth. Right now, I don’t give a shit. We’ve been butting heads since he decided it was time to move. I had a life in Boston, one I fucking loved.

“Get going then. Don’t wanna hold you up on your first day,” he says, waving a dismissive hand at me.

I turn and walk right out the front of the house. My cousin Kenny is waiting for me, leaning against his bright-red Ferrari. “You’re late,” he says, looking up from his phone.

“I know.” I open the passenger side door and toss my bag onto the floor of the car. “You didn’t have to pick me up.”

“And let you work your way around New York Prep alone? You’d end up dead within minutes,” he says.

I laugh. “Doubtful. I was at your party. There were nothing but bored, rich brats spending their da’s money.”

“Maybe, but there are other families, prominent families you do not want to cause shit with,” he tells me.

I already know that. My father made sure I was briefed on who exactly I’d be attending school with. There are two rival families with kids enrolled at NYP. The Italians and the Russians. The Valentinos and the Petrovs.

And then there’s us, the O’Malleys. Let’s just say I’ve been ordered not to make waves with the others. School is supposed to be neutral turf. As long as they stay the fuck out of my way, there won’t be any problems.

“You didn’t catch the Valentinos at the party?” Kenny asks.

“Dante and Orlando? I saw ‘em. Not sure what the big deal is.” I shrug. They looked like little punks to me.

“They rule the school. Keep your head down and your mouth shut,” Kenny says. “Trust me, the family does not want a war right now.”

“I’m well aware of what the family fucking wants,” I grunt.

Kenny weaves in and out of traffic, causing the rosaries hanging from his mirror to swing around as he goes. I wouldn’t be surprised if that crucifix broke off and hit one of us in the face.

The reason my father moved us out here was to clean up, but they’re also planning something bigger for New York. Something the other crime families aren’t going to like. At all. They’ll all be calling for war when word gets out what we’re up to. By then, it’ll be too late. Everything will be in motion. The order this city has known for so long will no longer exist.

“Just stay away from the Valentinos and Petrovs. I know how partial you are to pretty blondes, but you do not want to go there,” Kenny says. “Besides, there’s plenty of other fish at this school for you.”

I don’t bother replying to him. There is one particular blonde I plan on tracking down as fast as I can. My cock twitches at the thought of finding the little runaway.

As Kenny parks next to the rest of the other “my daddy has money” cars, all eyes stop and stare in this direction. “What the fuck is everyone staring at?” I ask him.

“You.” He smirks. “You’re new meat. Like I said, plenty of fish looking to willingly swim onto your hook, if you know what I mean.”

I laugh at his stupid euphemism. “Let’s do this,” I say as I round the front of the car.

“Actually, I know I said I’d give you the tour and shit, but I gotta run. Coach is gonna have my ass if I’m not in the locker in five,” Kenny says. “Catch you at lunch.” He runs towards a building in the opposite direction of where I’m currently heading.

I don’t need anyone to hold my hand. I’m capable of finding my way through a fucking school. A loud bell rings out and everyone starts scattering off in various directions. Great, now I am late.

Taking my time, I find my way to the student services office. I need a schedule. I need a map and shit. And then I need to find my way to my first class. Tracking down Aurora will have to wait.

I don’t even know if she goes here. I should have asked Kenny, but my gut told me not to. Some things are worth keeping to yourself, and I have a feeling that girl is one of those things.

I push through the doors and walk up to the student services desk while plastering on my best smile. Which my mother says will either get me into trouble or out of it, depending on who I'm using it on. "Hi, I'm Connor O'Malley. I need to pick up a schedule."

"Connor, welcome to New York Prep. You didn't get everything emailed to you?" the woman behind the desk asks me.

"Sorry, ma'am, I don't think I did," I tell her. Which is probably a lie, but who the fuck has time to check emails?

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“It’s okay. Give me a minute. I’ll get everything printed out for you, Connor. Take a seat,” she says, nodding to the row of single chairs by the glass wall.

“Thank you,” I reply before walking over. The moment I sit down, the door opens. I don’t bother looking up. I don’t know anyone but my cousin. But then I hear a voice. Her voice, and that has my head snapping up straight.

My eyes travel from her feet, up the back of her legs. The hem of her skirt stopping mid-thigh. I don’t need to see what’s underneath it, though. I already know. That’s a picture I won’t be forgetting in a hurry.

“Miss Valentino, I can’t change your class. I’m sorry. There just aren’t any others with vacancies,” the lady says to Aurora. I don’t need to see her face to know it’s her, but I do need to check my hearing.

Did she just say Valentino? As in, the Valentinos? The ones I’m supposed to be staying away from?

Fuck me. Another streak of bad luck and it’s not even lunchtime yet, seeing as the one good thing I’ve found in this city is the very definition of forbidden fruit.

I stand from my chair and walk over to the desk, stopping right behind her. Close enough that I know she’s aware of my presence. She’s just doing her best to ignore it. I can see it, though. Her chest rising and falling hard. Her cheeks flushed.

“There has to be something. Do I need to call my lawyer?” Aurora says, which has me laughing. Who the fuck calls their lawyer over a class schedule?

“Miss Valentino, I’m sorry, but there really is nothing I can do. But please, have your father call me if you must,” the receptionist says.

“Fine. I’ll have to suffer through it.” Aurora huffs and spins around. Her brows go up, and her palms land on my chest, pushing me backwards. “Have you ever heard of personal space? Jeez,” she growls—yes, she fucking growls at me.

My hand reaches out, locking around her wrist before she can get away. “Hold up. I could use a friendly face to show me where my first class is.” I smile at her, even though she’s glaring at me.

“What about this?” She waves a finger around her perfectly made-up face. “Says friendly?”

“Here you go, Connor. Welcome to New York Prep. I can have someone come and help you out for the day if you’d like,” the receptionist asks while handing over a pile of papers.

“Oh, no, that won’t be necessary, ma’am. Aurora and I are old friends, aren’t we, mo mhuirnín?” I grin.

“I don’t know you,” Aurora spits out. Looking over my shoulder at the receptionist, she smiles. “I’ll show him to class, Miss.” She twists her arm until I have no choice but to let go and then proceeds to storm out of the student services office.

I catch up to her in the hallway. “I didn’t take you for a scaredy cat, kitten.”

Aurora stops dead in her tracks. She turns on her heels with her hands firmly on her hips. Her head tips back and those red fucking lips, the same red as on the soles of her shoes, pout. “I. Am. Not. Scared. Of. You,” she says, annunciating each word slowly.

“Then why are you running away? Again?”

“Ever thought maybe I just don’t like you?” she asks.

“Nope, you like me plenty. More than you should actually,” I tell her.

“You’re a cocky asshole. I don’t like you,” she says.

“You liked me the other night. Need a little reminder of just how much you liked me, sweetheart?” I look past her and spot a closet. That’ll do.

“Don’t even think about it. I don’t know what kind of girl you think I am, but I am not the kind you drag into a janitor’s closet. What’s your first class? I’d like to be done with this encounter now.” Aurora extends a hand towards me.

“First, I wasn’t going to drag you into a dirty janitor’s closet. Second, my first class is AP Math. And third, we are far from done with this conversation,” I tell her, leaning in until my lips press against her ear. “I can still taste your innocence on my tongue and I want more.”

Aurora’s breath hitches. She takes a step back and shakes her head. “I didn’t take you for being smart, but whatever. It’s over there,” she says, pointing to a door to our left. “Oh, and my cousin Dante is in that class. You should tell him everything you did to me the other night. He’d love to hear it.”

“You think I won’t?”

“Oh, I want you to.” She smiles sweetly. “Nothing like having someone else do your dirty work for you.”

I laugh. “See you round, mo mhuirín!”

“Connor, if you see me in these halls, and there are actual people around, you do not know me. We’ve never met. And if you go around suggesting otherwise, I’ll make sure every girl here knows exactly how... disappointing you were in the sack.”

My lips tip up. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. I don’t kiss and tell.” I lift one shoulder. “I don’t need to.”

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

With that, I turn and walk down the hall, which isn't easy with a hard-on. The fact that she's a Valentino should have me staying far the fuck away from her. My head knows that. But fuck, I want her even more now. I can see why Eve caved with that damn apple.

Chapter Five

When I eventually walk into class, the teacher stops talking. Looks at me and waits for me to sit down before continuing. She doesn't say a single word, just gives me that disapproving look—as if I need her approval.

Besides, it's not my fault I'm late. It's Connor's.

Just the thought of him is making my heart race. What the hell is he doing here? I was never supposed to see him again. I liked it better that way. I could pretend that I wasn't affected by his presence.

“What happened?” Krystal asks under her breath.

“Nothing,” I tell her, not bothering to look her way. Krystal is one of my best friends, as much as someone like me can actually have friends. When your family runs the city's underworld, it's safer not to let people get too close.

Except I did let someone get close. I let Connor get closer to me than anyone ever has before. And I liked it. A lot. The fact that he knows that pisses me off. I don't even know why. It just does. I don't like letting anyone have the upper hand on me. But I can't control the way my body reacts to him.

It started the moment I walked into the student services office. I became hyperaware. That tight feeling in my stomach—the same one I had on Saturday night—came back. That's how I knew it was him. Either that, or I was suddenly hot for the school receptionist. Considering Miss Kemp is in her mid-fifties and hates me, I should be glad it's not her I have an uncontrollable lust for.

That's all it is. Lust. I've never felt it before, to the point I thought I was broken. But now that I've felt it, I want more. Just not with him.

Argh, why is this happening to me? Why him? He's cocky, and don't even get me started on that stupid smile of his with one dimple that pops in on his right cheek. I want to get my blade and cut the stupid thing out.

And then there's his eyes. Green. Emerald green. And that stupid accent. Irish with a lot of Boston mixed in. I might have looked him up yesterday. I was bored, and I wanted to know who I gave my V card to. So sue me. It's not like anyone else wouldn't want to know. It doesn't mean I wanted to see him again. I didn't. I don't.

I wonder if he'd be dumb enough to tell Dante what he did with me? I have no doubt my cousin would cut the bastard's fingers off right there in front of everyone. The men in my family are a little... unhinged when it comes to thinking they're protecting us.

He wouldn't. Connor can't be that stupid. He has to know who I am. He's the O'Malley heir. And I'm a Valentino princess. No world exists where our paths should cross. Well, not the way they did.

Oh my god, I could just imagine what my brothers would do if they found out I slept with an Irishman. I wouldn't say we're mortal enemies, but we're certainly not friends.

And the Irish? They like to stay under the radar. Most people at this school wouldn't even know that they're hanging out with Irish mafia. Especially Kenny. Connor's cousin, whose house we were at on Saturday. I should have put two and two together, figured out that they were related.

I guess I did in the back of my mind.

Maybe that's it. The forbidden thing is why I'm so into him. I can't think of any other logical reason. He is literally everything I hate in a guy. Attractive, overconfident, cocky. Okay, maybe that's extreme. I do like attractive people. I've just never liked one as much as I like him.

Lust, I remind myself. It's lust, not like. I do not like Connor O'Malley. I might want to climb him and ride him like my favorite roller coaster, but I do not like him. Besides, people sleep with people they don't like all the time.

Take my cousin Orlando, for example. He's always sleeping with girls he wouldn't give the time of day to. He can't stand most of them. Doesn't mean he doesn't like their bodies.

I wonder if Connor would let me use him for his body. Get this lust thing out of my system. I don't know why he wouldn't go along with that. He's a guy. What guy is going to say no to getting laid?

"You look like you either want to kill someone or... Nope, you just look like you want to kill someone," Krystal says.

I turn and glare at her. "You want it to be you?"

She just smiles at me. "You wouldn't kill me. If you were going to, you would have done it by now." She laughs. "Who is it? Want me to bring a shovel?"

This is why I like Krystal. She really would bring a shovel. For all her annoying attributes, she's loyal. I also don't doubt she likes the benefits of being friends with me. Everyone at this school wants to befriend a Valentino. It's safe passage through the high school years. You become untouchable.

"Unless it's Dante. He's far too cute to be burying." Krystal smirks. And there's her flaw. She crushes way too hard on my cousins. Mostly Dante, who wouldn't touch her, because I've threatened to cut his balls off if he messed with any of my friends. But Krystal doesn't know that.

"It's no one. And gross," I tell her.

Krystal shakes her head. "Did you see the new guy at Kenny's party? Rumor has it he's starting today, and he's fine with a capital F. By the way, where the hell did you disappear to on Saturday night?"

There have been numerous times I've wanted to kill Krystal. None more than right now. I can even picture it. My hands wrapped around her neck, squeezing the life out of her. Her lips turning blue.

"Whoa, why do you look like I just killed your cat?" she asks, shifting away from me slightly.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

Smart girl.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Deny, deny, deny. I will not react. No one can know that I know who Connor is. It’s for his safety as well as mine.

I might have told him to go and brag to Dante about being with me, but I did that knowing full well he wouldn’t. I don’t know how I knew. I just did. I mean, anyone with half a brain wouldn’t be stupid enough to do that. And Connor isn’t stupid. Stupidly good looking, yes. But stupid dumb? I don’t think so.

I just need to avoid him for the foreseeable future. It’s a big school. How hard can it be?

Never in my life have I spent my day looking over my shoulder, or walking through the halls dodging a certain someone whenever I saw their ugly beautiful face. This isn’t me. I’ve never had to hide from anyone. So why the hell am I hiding from him?

Because I don’t trust that the cocky asshole won’t just walk up and start talking to me. Sure, I can be a bitch and pretend to not know him. I could put him on blast and make him a literal pariah of the school. No one other than his family would talk to him. Because they all listen to me.

I don’t want to do that, though. I just want to avoid him until he forgets I exist. Which really shouldn’t be long. Judging by the way my brothers and cousins fuck and forget girls, I’m sure it’s a matter of time before Connor has moved on to someone else.

“Why are you acting cagey?” Dante closes my locker door on me.

“Cagey? What does that even look like?” I ask him.

The asshole pulls out his phone, snaps a photo of me, and then turns the screen around. “Like this.”

“Funny, it’s a good thing you’re an academic, because a comedy career isn’t in the cards for you.” I pat his chest, hiking my bag higher onto my shoulder.

“You see Orlando around?” Dante questions.

“Have you checked under all the skirts?” I deadpan.

“He’s not that bad.” Dante shakes his head, even though we both know our cousin is that bad when it comes to his dick. Dante’s different. He has his eyes on one girl. A girl who won’t give him the time of day. Which just makes the whole thing funny.

“Why are you looking for him anyway?” I ask.

“I was going to get him to give me a ride home.”

“Where’s your car?”

“In the shop. Looks like it’s your lucky day. I can just ride with you instead.” Dante wraps an arm around my shoulder as he leads me out of the building.

“You know, I could have better things to do with my time than drive you around,” I tell him.

“But you will anyway because you love me.” He smirks.

I roll my eyes. The hairs on the back of my neck rise with awareness. He's here. Somewhere.

"That ass is in my AP math class," Dante says under his breath.

"What ass?" I look around for that exact ass I know nothing about.

"The new Irish fucker," Dante says while glaring in the direction of Kenny's red Ferrari.

I make the mistake of glancing over. Connor is there. Staring right at me. Shit. What the hell is he doing? Does he have a death wish?

"What the fuck is he looking at?" Dante grunts. "What fun little torture devices you got on you?"

"Me? Nothing," I tell him.

"Please, you are always strapped with shit. Give me a toy. I want to play with the new kid, Aurora," Dante says with a sinister smirk.

"Get in the fucking car, Dante. Or don't and walk home for all I care." I open the back door, toss my bag on the floor, and then climb into the driver's side.

Dante follows and buckles himself into the passenger seat. He then bends down and pulls out a packet of Cheetos from his bag.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Don’t even think about eating those in my car, Dante, or you really will see what torture devices I have on me,” I warn him.

I love my car. My dad bought her for me. She’s a custom baby-pink Mercedes G-Wagon with white leather seats and matching pink trim. She’s mine. And Dante is not getting his fucking orange Cheetos dust all over my clean seats.

“Fine, but just so you know, I’m starving. I didn’t eat lunch today,” he groans, dropping the packet back into his bag.

“Why’d you miss lunch?” I purposely missed lunch. I didn’t want to chance running into Connor in the cafeteria.

“I was busy.” Dante looks out the window as I pull out of the school’s parking lot.

“Busy chasing Josie around? Has she even said two words to you yet? Other than fuck off?”

“She has, actually. Just today she said: Stop following me, Dante.”

“Wow, that’s almost like a marriage proposal. Did you hand her your dick along with your balls?” I ask him.

“Fuck off.” Dante switches on the radio. Blasting it and effectively cutting off any chatter we might have had.

I’m not going to lie. It is fun to see my cousin so twisted up over someone. Dante

always gets what he wants. He's literally a spoiled rich kid who's never heard the word no. Until now, it seems.

Chapter Six

All of last week I looked for her, waited for my chance to get her alone. That chance didn't happen. I'm not in any of her classes. And she's spent the week ignoring my existence the best she could.

Aurora's good. I'll give her that. The few times I've caught a glimpse of her, she won't make eye contact with me and then vanishes as if she wasn't there to begin with. Not anymore. I've decided I'm done waiting for her to acknowledge me.

Which is why I'm currently standing in front of the student services changing my AP class to general math. It's just the excuse I need to be near her. A place she can't turn the other way and run.

"All set, Connor. Are you sure you want to drop back? Your grades from your previous school are impressive," Miss Kemp asks me.

"I'm sure. It's a lot settling into a new city and all." I smile at her before walking out of the office. My eyes immediately scan the crowd of students, looking for a mass of blonde hair. When I don't see her, I keep walking.

"Yo, bro, where you been?" Kenny asks from where he's leaning against my locker.

I shove him out of the way. "Student services. Why?"

"Not just now, this past weekend. You didn't come to the party," he says.

"Da had me doing shit for him," I lie. My father hasn't had me do much of anything

since the move. He's been oddly quiet about what he's doing here. And that's fine by me. I don't care if they're here to burn the city down, as long as we eventually return to Boston.

"All weekend?" Kenny raises a brow.

"Ever think I just don't want to hang out with you?"

"No. That's impossible. I'm fucking lovable," he says. "Ask around. You love me, right?" He questions a passing girl, who blushes and nods her head. He then turns back in my direction. "See? Me, loveable." He gestures a finger to his chest before throwing it at me. "You, bullshit."

"You off your meds or something, Kenny?" After dumping my AP math textbook into my locker, I slam the door closed and click the lock into place.

"Nope, took them this morning. My mam makes me," he says.

"Sure." I laugh.

"Meet for lunch?"

"Don't you have a cheerleader's skirt to be crawling up or something?"

"Not today, cousin. Today, I'm gracing you with my company." He salutes me as he backs away.

The bell goes off, and I wait for the hall to be empty before I head to my first class. Math with Aurora. A smile spreads across my face. This is going to be fun.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

By the time I walk into class, everyone else is already seated, which is exactly what I wanted. I needed to know where she was sitting. I spot her. It's not hard. She stands out like a shiny fucking diamond.

"Can I help you?" Mr. Porter asks me.

"Ah, yeah, I just transferred into this class." I hand him the piece of paper Miss Kemp gave me.

"Okay, take a seat, Mr. O'Malley," he says.

"It's just Connor," I tell him before heading to the back of the room where there just so happens to be an open seat.

Aurora glares at me as I slide in beside her. "What the hell are you doing?" she hisses.

I look around the room. "Math?" I ask her. "This is general math, right?"

I see her lips twitch. She won't let herself smile at me. That's fine, because I like this feisty, pissed-off look she has going on. "Why are you sitting here?"

"Looked like a good spot." I shrug.

"If you're done, Miss Valentino, we can get on with today's lesson," Mr. Porter calls out.

“Oh, I’m done, Mr. Porter.” Aurora smiles at him.

“We are far from done,” I whisper under my breath while pulling my laptop out of my bag.

“We never started,” Aurora counters.

Ignoring her dig, I keep my attention on the front of the class, not that I need to. A preschooler could do this fucking shit. Halfway through the lecture, I’m bored out of my mind. My hand drops under the table to Aurora’s bare thigh. She jumps, clearly caught off-guard.

“Get your filthy fucking Irish hand off me!” she grinds out between clenched teeth.

“That’s not what you were saying the night we met.” My hand moves higher up her leg.

“Connor, I’m not going to give you another warning,” she says.

“You can pretend all you like that you don’t want me touching you, babe, but you and I both know you do,” I tell her, slowly stalking my fingers upwards until I reach the hem of her skirt, and a sharp stabbing pain radiates through my hand. “What the fuck?” I curse under my breath. I look down and see a pen protruding from my skin.

Before I can say anything more, Aurora smirks at me and stands from her seat. “Mr. Porter, I just got my period. I need to use the restroom.” She picks up her bag and walks out.

Fucking hell. She just fucking stabbed me with a pen and walked out. I don’t know if I’m impressed or... No, scratch that. I’m fucking impressed.

I pick up my own bag and drop my laptop inside it. “Sorry, sir, I seemed to have jabbed myself somehow.” I raise my hand to the teacher, the one that’s still impaled right in the spot between my thumb and index finger, before I pull out the pen. Blood runs down my palm. “Fuck, that hurts like a bitch.”

“Mr. O’Malley, go to the nurse’s office now,” Mr. Porter says, pointing to the door.

“Sure thing, sir,” I tell him.

It doesn’t take me long to find Aurora, especially since I walked straight into the closest girls’ bathroom.

“What are you doing in here? Last I saw, you weren’t a girl,” she says, folding her arms over her chest.

“You made me bleed. You should kiss me better.” I hold up my hand to her.

Aurora takes a step backwards. “You are out of your goddamn mind if you think I’m kissing any part of you.”

My head tilts to the side, my eyes roaming up the length of her body. “You know, when I made you bleed, I kissed you better. Fair is fair,” I remind her.

“Again, not happening,” she says.

Well, fuck. I didn’t think I’d have to work this hard to get her onboard with the idea. “Did you really get your period?”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“What?”

“In class, you said you got your period. Did you? Or were you just using that as an excuse to leave?”

“That is none of your business. Jesus, Connor.” She shakes her head.

“It wouldn’t matter. You know. I’d still fuck you anyway.” I’m not afraid of a little blood.

“You’re insane. And unless you want more holes in your body, you need to leave,” she says.

“I’d let you put as many holes in my body as you wanted... if you let me fill just one of yours.” I laugh as I take a step closer.

“Hard pass,” she says.

I keep moving until her back is pressed up against the basin. Then I lean forward, my mouth right next to her ear. “What are you scared of, Aurora? That you’ll enjoy it?”

“Pfft. I am not scared of you,” she says.

“Good. I don’t want you to be afraid of me. I want you to come for me.” I use my injured hand to spread her thighs apart. My fingers moving upwards until they reach the side of her panties. I don’t waste time, and I don’t give her a chance to push me away before I find her clit. Pressing my fingers against her and circling them while I

watch her expression.

“I’m not coming for you,” she says with a perfect fucking poker face.

“You will,” I tell her. Since she’s not pushing me away, I continue stroking her. Fuck, she’s wet. “Feel that? You’re fucking drenched, mo mhuirnín. Is it me, or the violence that turns you on?”

“Violence? What violence?” she asks, her breath hitching ever so slightly as she fights harder to keep control of her body’s reactions to me.

“You stabbed me with a pen, Aurora.”

“You touched something that doesn’t belong to you,” she fires back.

“Oh, but it does. This...” My fingers move lower, pushing into her opening. “It’s mine. I’m the only man who’s ventured between these thighs, and I plan to keep it that way. So...” My lips leave a trail of kisses up and down her neck. “If you want to come again, it’s going to be for me. Come, Aurora.” I can feel her pussy clenching around my fingers. She’s close, so fucking close. She wants this. I can see it in her eyes. “Let go. Let yourself feel it, Aurora,” I whisper in her ear.

She does. Her hands land on my shoulders, her mouth opens, and I take that opportunity to slam my lips on hers. My tongue delves in, tasting every inch of her while swallowing her moans. I’ve never enjoyed making a girl come so much before. Sure, I’ve always made sure whomever I’m with has a good time. But Aurora? I want her to fucking explode.

I continue stroking her until her hands flatten against my chest, and she pushes me off her. Taking a step back, I bring my fingers to my lips and suck her juices from the tips. They’re still covered in my own blood from where she stabbed me, but if I can

taste her, I don't fucking care.

"Don't touch me again. Next time you try, I won't just stab you with a pen. I'll break your whole damn hand." She turns on the tap and I watch as she pulls down some pieces of paper towel, wetting them before wiping between her legs. When she discards the towels in the trash, they're covered in both me and her. My blood, her cum.

"You liked it. You came for me," I tell her.

"No." Aurora turns to me, straightening her shoulders. "I came for me. You were just the tool I used to get there. No different from a vibrator really. Maybe just... not as good." She smirks.

I laugh. "It's funny. If that were true, I wouldn't have been the first one to give you an orgasm." If she thinks I've forgotten, she's wrong. She told me it was her first orgasm last weekend, which means she wasn't getting there from her vibrator either.

"Whatever you think this is, whatever you've conjured up in that pretty little head of yours, it's not. This, you, me, we are nothing." She huffs before shoving past me.

"You're wrong," I tell her. "You and me, we are something."

Aurora's hand lifts and I barely see the glint of the blade she throws right at my fucking head, missing me only by a hair. The knife hits the mirror behind me before falling into the sink. "Next time, I'll make sure it hits an eye," she says over a shoulder before walking out the door.

I can't wipe the smile off my face, though, as I grab her knife and shove it in my bag. Maybe I'll use it to cut her panties off next time I get her alone.

Chapter Seven

Have you ever felt the need to prove a point? I have that problem. Often. But never more than right now as I'm sitting in the cafeteria.

Krystal is next to me, quiet, probably because she knows I'm in a foul-ass mood. And it's all because of him. Connor fucking O'Malley. I hate him. And I hate that I let him touch me the way he did in the bathroom this morning.

Also, the guy must have a death wish. He knows what would happen if either of our families found out he was messing around with me. Mine would hunt him down and slaughter him like a fucking pig. Actually, they'd have to beat me to it. Because right now, killing Connor seems like the easiest way to get rid of him.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I wanted to feel. More than anything, I wanted to find someone who could bring out those feelings I thought I'd never experience. I just don't want it to be him. It's not going to be him.

I refuse to let myself get carried away with someone I shouldn't even be talking to. I won't do it. Nope. Not happening. And honestly, that stupidly pretty face of his with that stupid dimple just pisses me off. I'm not turned on. I don't want his hands back on my body. Not at all. And the way he's looking at me from across the room, like he has a right to be watching me?

Well, fuck...

A huge smile spreads across my face when an idea pops into my head. If he wants to see me lose control, then I'll show him.

"Oh no, what is that look for? What are you about to do, Aurora? I know that look and it's not good," Krystal says.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I tell her while glancing around the cafeteria. I don't see Dante or Orlando, which is good. And then I spot him. Kenny O'Malley. Connor's cousin. And probably the only guy in this school who will let me use him the way I'm about to.

I stand and head straight towards Kenny. I don't like the guy. He's a jock and just as forbidden as Connor is. But I can fake it. I step out in front of him. Stopping him from getting to his table, where Connor is sitting, and take the tray of food from his hands.

“Aurora? Can I do something for you?” he asks, sounding almost amused.

“You can, actually.” I smile up at him. “Go along with it,” I tell him. “I need to prove a point to some dipshit and you’re going to help me.”

“You trying to get me killed?” He laughs.

“Not today.” I snake my arms around his neck and pull his head downwards. My lips crash onto his, and Kenny does not disappoint. His hands warm my back and he pulls me tight against him. His tongue pushes into my mouth, and even though I feel nothing—not a single damn flutter—I fake it.

My fingers twist in his hair, and I let out a little moan when we break apart. “Thanks for your help,” I say, patting Kenny’s chest before pivoting around.

My gaze falls to the table Connor is no longer sitting at, and then I hear the back door to the cafeteria slam against the wall. He left. Huh, guess that bothered him. Good. Let it. It’s not like he’s going to retaliate against his own cousin. I’m not stupid. I’ve been around arrogant crime family kids my whole life. I know how these boys operate.

If I had kissed some ordinary guy, Connor probably would have beaten the shit out of him to prove a point. I know this because it’s exactly what my cousins would do. But as far as Connor is concerned, he needed to learn that I belong to no one and especially not him.

When I sit back down at the table next to Krystal, Dante is already there, glaring at me. “What the fuck was that about?” he asks me.

“What was what?” I play dumb.

“Don’t try to be cute, Aurora. Why the fuck were you kissing that fucker? Oh god,

are you and him...?" Dante shakes his head from side to side. "No, just no."

"First, no one died and made you boss. So shut your mouth, unless you want me to sew it shut for you. Second, I can and will kiss any-damn-body I want. I own me, not you, not anyone else." I'm fuming by the time my rant is over.

Dante looks at Krystal. "Who pissed her off?"

"You?" Krystal says but phrases it as a question.

"Nope. What's going on here? Who exactly are you trying to stir up, Aurora?" Dante's gaze pierces into mine.

Good luck to him because I will never tell. Connor is a filthy little secret I'll take to my damn grave.

"I'm not hungry anymore. Dante, nice chat as always. Oh, and you might want to think twice about eating Nonna's cake on Sunday. Your slice might end up with something a little special in it," I tell my cousin with a smile. "Krystal, catch you later."

Walking out of the cafeteria, I get exactly five steps before I'm yanked into a dark room. My fist swipes out, connecting with whoever the fuck thought they could grab me. I'm reaching for the knife I have tucked in my skirt when I hear him.

"Ow, fuck me," Connor groans.

"No thanks," I grunt as I push against him before reaching for my phone. "Siri, turn on flashlight." The room lights up and I see his face, his lip's split, and I smile. I made him bleed. Again. "What the actual fuck do you think you're doing?" I hiss at him.

Connor wipes his lip with his thumb. “Me? What the hell was that out there? My fucking cousin, Aurora. Are you serious? You just made out with my fucking cousin in front of the whole fucking school.”

“So?”

“So?” he mimics and then laughs. Not a funny, ha-ha laugh. No, it’s more of an I’ve lost my whole damn mind, insane kind of laugh. One that has me taking a step back, a small step, but still a step.

I need to not let my guard down around this guy. I might have slept with him, one time, but I don’t know him. He could have dragged me in here to kill me, for all I know. I mean, it’s possible. He could try anyway. I wouldn’t go down without a fight, though.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“You don’t own me, Connor. We slept together one time. Get over it,” I tell him.

Connor tilts his head to the side. Those dark-green eyes sear into me. “Get over it? You want me to get over it?”

“Yes. I want you to leave me the hell alone. I want you to look the other way if you see me. Not stare. I want you to pretend that night never even happened.” It’s a lie. I know it is as soon as the words leave my mouth. I don’t want to forget that night, and I don’t want him to forget it either. But I can lie and maybe eventually believe it. It’s better for both of us.

I don’t like Connor O’Malley. I do not want him to push me up against this door and make me come again. I do not want those lips of his on mine. Not in the slightest.

“Yeah, that’s not gonna happen. You see, you’re not easily forgettable, Aurora,” he says.

“Try harder,” I tell him. “You know who my family is. I know who your family is. There is no universe that exists where we are ever going to be anything more than strangers.”

“I’m not too good at doing what I’m told to do.” Connor smirks. “And I couldn’t give a fuck who our families are. I’m not done with you, and you sure as shit do not want to be done with me.” Connor steps forward, his face a breath away from mine. “Don’t go around kissing other guys to try to get me to back off. It won’t work.”

My knee jerks up, connecting with his balls, and my hands push against his chest.

Connor curses and stumbles backwards. “Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do, asshole,” I say, opening the door and storming out.

Who the fuck does he think he is? Anyone who knows me would tell you I will never let someone own me, control me. Fuck that. I’m going back to the non-feelings way of life. It was easier. Lonely? Sometimes, sure. But it was clean, simple. Whatever this is with Connor is the opposite of clean and simple.

There are still two periods left before the end of the day, but I’m done. I can’t be here anymore.

A light tap on my bedroom door sounds out through my otherwise-quiet room. The door opens, and my mom’s voice breaks the silence. “Aurora, sweetheart, you okay?” she asks.

“I have a headache,” I tell her. It’s not far from the truth. Connor is a headache, and the way my mind can’t stop thinking about his stupid face is giving me a migraine.

“You need something for it?” Mom sits on the edge of my bed, her hand pressing against my forehead.

“I took some Tylenol. I just need to sleep it off I think,” I tell her.

“What’s going on? You’re not yourself?”

“Nothing. I’m just tired.”

She looks at me in that mom way, like she knows I’m bullshitting but she’s not going to press me. “We’re going to Italy for a month. We’re leaving tomorrow,” she says.

That has me shooting up in bed. “What? Why? I can’t just go to Italy for a month.”

Then again, a whole month in another country might be what I need to end whatever this stupid thing is that I have for Connor.

“Dante got expelled. Your father got him down to a month’s suspension, and Nonna wants a family vacation, so we’re all going,” she says. “Dad’s arranged for you to miss school, but you’ll have to keep up with your studies remotely.”

Great. I don’t really care about doing school work. I’m not smart like Dante or gifted like Orlando with his music. I’m just me. And I’m okay with that. I have no intention of going to college, not that my parents know that yet.

When you come from a family of highly-successful people, it’s hard to be the one with no drive to be the best at anything. Well, maybe killing...torture. I think those are more my calling. Maybe I can just work for the family forever? Be their best hitwoman?

My Mom would hate the career choice, but she’ll come around. She always does.

“I’m sorry. I know it’s not ideal, but this is important to your grandparents,” Mom says.

“It’s fine,” I tell her. “What time are we leaving tomorrow?”

“Ten in the morning. Want me to pack for you? Should I call the doc to come check on you?”

“No, I’m okay. I can pack. I don’t need much.” Besides, it’s Italy. I can always shop.

When mom walks out, I pick up my phone and open Instagram. I might have already been stalking Connor on the app. But in my defense, he followed me first. I click on his name and tap the message button.

Me:

I have the solution for your obsession with me. I'm going away for a month. You have all that time to get over it.

He responds almost immediately.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

Connor:

Where are you going? And do you really think a month is long enough to forget me? You'll need longer than that, mo mhuirnín.

I copy the last words he typed and paste them into Google to find out what it is he keeps calling me. My sweetheart. Oh, hell no. Opening the social media app again, I write back.

Me:

Wasn't obsessed to begin with, so nothing to get over for me. And I'm nobody's sweetheart, asshole.

Chapter Eight

She's supposed to be back today. I've gone the whole damn month without reaching out to her while she's been in Italy with her family. Did I obsess over her social media every time she uploaded a new post? Absolutely, but I'm not ashamed.

I resisted the urge to message her. She says she wants me to forget about her, but she doesn't. Aurora's been more active on social media this past month than she ever has been. Posting pictures of herself with captions directed at me, or at least that's how I read them anyway.

I'm probably seeing what I want to see. Still, I don't fucking care. She's coming back. Her last Snap yesterday was of her in her bedroom, commenting on how good it

was to be home.

I mostly wanted to prove her wrong, prove that a month apart wouldn't douse the fire that's ignited between us. I know she feels it. The fact that I've gone back to instantly looking for her through the crowds tells me that fire isn't dimmed in the slightest. If anything, I'm more hungry for her than I was before she left.

I've kept myself busy working for my dad, doing odd jobs while trying to decipher what he's actually up to here in New York. The more time I spend in this city, the less I'm missing Boston. Which I guess isn't a bad thing.

"Hey, Connor, I missed you on Saturday. You said you were going to be at the party." Melissa, one of the cheerleaders who's been trying to hang off me for the last two weeks, wraps her hand around my arm. It's her way of trying to claim ownership. I know that. I'm about to shake her off, but then my eyes are drawn behind Melissa and I spot her. The girl I actually want to own me.

Aurora.

And she looks downright pissed, her glare honed in on where Melissa's hand is on my arm. When she looks up at me, our eyes connect—and, oh, she's more than pissed. Which is why I smile at her and let Melissa step in closer to me. She wanted me to forget her. This is what she wanted, so I don't know why she looks like I just killed her cat.

Turning my attention back to Melissa, I shake my head. "I had other shit I had to do," I tell her. Usually I would have shaken her off by now. The fact I haven't makes her more bold as she moves a hand to my chest.

"Why don't we meet up at lunch?" Her offer isn't the least bit tempting. A chorus of gasps has me looking back down the hall, to where Aurora is pressing her lips against

some guy's mouth.

"Who is that?" I ask Kenny, shoving Melissa aside.

"Timothy, stoner," Kenny says. "Also about to be a dead man when her cousins find out about that little show."

Not if I get to him first.

"Catch you later," I say, heading towards the exit I saw this Timothy kid walk out. I brush right past Aurora. "Hope you made it worth it for him," I tell her and keep walking.

It doesn't take long to find Timothy behind the building smoking a joint. Grabbing him by the shirt, I catch the fucker off guard and throw my fist into his face. The joint drops from his hand and smoke billows out of his mouth as he chokes on it. My fist slams into him again and again until I'm pulled off him.

"Whoa, man, walk it off." Some punk-ass kid pushes me. I throw a punch at him before I turn and stomp away. Aurora is there, by the door, watching the whole damn thing.

"This isn't a game you want to play with me, Connor. I will win." She smirks at me.

"Who says I'm playing a game?" I counter while shaking out my hand.

"Do you really think you can just go around and beat up every guy I kiss?"

I shrug. "Don't see why not."

"Maybe I'll just follow your lead and start kissing girls, then. It didn't look like you

spent the last month lonely.”

I smile. “Jealous?”

“Are you?”

“Insanely,” I admit.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Huh, I’m not.” Aurora laughs. “I don’t care who you let all over you. As long as you stay out of my way.”

As kids, we’re taught not to play with fire, that we’ll end up burned if we do. I feel like that warning should come attached to Aurora. Because whatever the hell we’re doing, someone is going to get burned or we’ll both blow up together.

My tray hits the table with a thud. “Whose face did your hand meet?” Kenny asks, looking at my bruised knuckles.

“Just be thankful it wasn’t yours again,” I tell him. The day Aurora kissed him right here in this very cafeteria, I made the excuse that I wanted to spar in the ring with him. I went overboard and broke his nose. It’s healed now, but I still get a little joy out of the knowledge that I did it.

“Oh, fuck,” Kenny says, his eyes wide when he looks at Timothy. He makes the sign of the cross. “Tell me that you are not doing what I think you are doing.”

“How the fuck am I supposed to know what you’re thinking, asshole?”

“Aurora Valentino?” he says her name like it’s a question.

“Who?”

“The hot psychotic blonde over there.” He points to the table the Valentinos are all sitting at together.

“Never noticed her before,” I lie.

“Yeah, and I’m the fucking Virgin Mary,” Kenny deadpans. “Nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing good can come of that, Connor.”

I wouldn’t say nothing good. Because the two times I’ve watched Aurora come, it’s been fucking epic. “Why do you say she’s psychotic anyway?” I mean, I get it. The girl is fucking violent. She’s made me bleed twice. I’m also here for it.

Kenny looks at me with a stupid expression. “You know that girl Melissa you were talking to this morning?”

“Yeah, what about her?”

“You didn’t hear what happened?”

“Obviously not. Do I look like the local gossip rag?” I grunt.

“She was taken out of the girls’ bathroom in a stretcher, ambulance and all. Rumor has it her wrist was broken and she was knocked unconscious,” Kenny says.

My gaze falls to Aurora. She didn’t. Did she? “Who did that to her?”

“No one is talking about it, which means one thing. It’s one of them.” Kenny nods his head towards the Valentino table. “And as much as I hate those douchebags, Dante and Orlando wouldn’t hurt a chick, so that leaves one Valentino. The scariest of them all, if you ask me.”

“She doesn’t look that scary,” I say, staring at her while I pull my phone out of my pocket. I open the Instagram app and send Aurora a message.

Me:

Not jealous, huh? Does Melissa know that?

I see her look down at her phone and pick it up. She's typing out a reply before my own phone vibrates in my hand.

Aurora:

I don't know what you're talking about. Stop messaging me.

Me:

So you don't care if I get up, walk over to the nearest girl, and drag her into an empty room?

Aurora:

Not at all. Before you go, though... do me a favor and ask your cousin if he's got five minutes to spare for me?

My hand clenches around my phone.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Look, I’m not saying you shouldn’t... Actually, that’s exactly what I’m saying. You fucking shouldn’t go there, man,” Kenny says.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Tell her to leave me out of your fucked-up foreplay.” He looks over my shoulder, reading my message exchange.

Me:

Kenny says you’re psychotic. He’s not interested, but I can scratch that itch for you if you want?

Aurora:

When hell freezes over.

I laugh. She says that now, but we’ll be in hell together one day, so it’s never going to freeze over.

“Why are you fighting at school? You’re supposed to be keeping a low profile,” my father asks me. The dinner table in the O’Malley household is anything but cozy. It’s formal as shit and silent unless you’re asked a direct question.

“Someone disrespected me, Da. Did you want me to let that slide?” I tell him.

“How so?”

“Some punk called me a leprechaun fucker. So I knocked him out.” I shrug.

“Who?”

“No idea. Some stoner,” I say. My dad is only interested in making sure it wasn’t someone important. Someone related to one of the other crime families.

“Good. Don’t let little shits disrespect you. Still, we’re not trying to gain too much attention,” he reminds me.

“I’m aware, Da.”

“Have you made any friends yet? You haven’t brought anyone over,” my mom says.

“I have friends, Ma. They’re back in Boston,” I tell her. When her face falls, I feel bad. “I hang out with Kenny and his group. Speaking of, I told him I’d go hang out tonight. Can I be excused?”

“Sure, honey. Have fun,” she says.

Once I’m in my car, I message my cousin to tell him I’m picking him up. I don’t know where we’re going but I can’t be home right now.

I pull up to his place a few minutes later. The gates open, and I drive up to the door. I don’t bother getting out. Instead, I wait for him to walk over.

“Wanna take my car?” he asks.

“Not a fucking chance. Get in, asshole.”

“I hate this car,” he groans. There is nothing wrong with my Mustang. It’s a hell of a

lot better than his pretentious Ferrari.

“Deal with it.”

“Where are we going?”

“To drink whiskey until I pass out,” I tell him.

“Cabin?” The family has a little cabin about an hour out of the city. We’ve used it for parties a few times.

“Sounds like a plan.”

“So, any blonde reason you’re drinking yourself stupid?” Kenny laughs.

Page 20

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Nope.” Truth is... I can’t get the image of Aurora out of my fucking head. I haven’t been able to stop thinking about her for the last month. And now that she’s back, now that she’s close, it’s worse.

Half a bottle of whiskey later, I do the one thing you’re never meant to do. Drunk text.

Me:

I can’t stop thincsing offff u. Y?

My phone lights up with an incoming call. “Hello?”

“Are you drunk?” It’s her. Her voice. Aurora.

“Huh?”

“Connor? Where are you?” she asks me.

“Where are you, Sleeping Beauty?”

“Not funny. Where are you, Connor?” she repeats.

“At the cabin. I’m not drunks,” I tell her. “You’re pretty, you know.”

“I know,” she says, disconnecting the call.

The phone drops from my hand, and my eyes start to close as sleep finally takes over. I hope I dream about her.

Chapter Nine

Stopping the car, I switch off the engine and take a deep breath. I shouldn't be here. I don't even know why I came. What do I care if the asshole is drunk? He's big enough to take care of himself. I'm not his keeper, and I'm not his girlfriend.

So why the hell did I drive all the way out to the O'Malley cabin to check on him?

I shake my head, and step out of the car and into the cold night air, wrapping my sweater around me tighter. I'm only wearing the shorts and tank I went to bed in and my furry UGG boots I got the last time we went to Australia. I had this black cardigan in the back seat, thank god, because it's fucking chilly out here.

Connor's is the only other car in the driveway, which isn't surprising. Most people don't party on a school night. They save that for weekends. I've been to this cabin once or twice before. Kenny is known for his killer parties. I don't ever stick around long, though. Drunk teenagers aren't really my scene.

I open the trunk of my car, lift the carpet, and pull out a small pistol. Never be under-prepared and you'll stay alive. My brother's words echo in my head. If my parents or any of the other oldies knew I had this, they would have a hissy fit. No one wants me to have guns. Well, other than my brothers, who have been secretly taking me to the range for years.

Gripping the pistol firmly in my hand, because I have no idea what I'm walking into here, I make my way up to the front door. It's quiet. I can't hear music or talking. I twist the handle, not surprised when it opens, before I walk in and shut the door quietly.

Where the hell is he?

I make my way into the kitchen. There's nothing there. Just as I turn, I see a figure out of the corner of my eye and my hand raises.

"Don't shoot," Kenny says, holding his hands in the air.

"Why not? No one would even know," I ask him.

"I would know, and I'd come back and haunt your pretty little ass." He smirks.

I lower my gun, because I have no intention of actually shooting this kid. "Where's Connor?"

"First, how about: How are you, Kenny? Sorry I broke into your house, Kenny. Second, what the fuck do you want with my cousin, Aurora? And third, how'd you know we were here?"

"First, I'm not sorry. Second, none of your damn business, and third..." I smile at him. "Where is he?" I repeat.

"You know, whatever you two are doing is going to end in tragedy... Like Romeo and Juliet style tragedy. Nothing good is ever going to come out of you two fooling around."

It's on the tip of my tongue to tell him he's wrong, because I came from Connor and me fooling around. I don't say that, though. I am a lady after all. "When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it, Kenny. If you're not going to help me, I'll find him myself."

Page 21

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Top floor, third door on your right.” Kenny sighs, “But if anyone asks, I didn’t know shit about this.”

“Smart choice.” I walk past him and make my way upstairs. I’m about to raise my hand and knock when I decide to just open the door. If Connor didn’t want me to come and check on him, he wouldn’t have called me. Okay, technically he texted me, and I called him.

But he was wasted. I’m just here to make sure he hasn’t choked on his own vomit or something. I’d hate for him to die and then people find out I was the last person he spoke to. Considering we’re not supposed to be speaking to each other at all.

There’s a lamp turned on, casting a low light over the room. And Connor is sitting in a chair, slumped back. Passed out. I walk over and kick at his shin, probably harder than I should. “Wake up.”

“Huh?” His eyes flutter open and a smile spreads across his face. “Mo mhuirnín, good dream.”

“How much did you drink?” I ask him.

Connor slips as he tries to sit higher in the chair and shakes his head. “Ut-uh, this is the part of my dream where you start getting naked, SB.”

“SB?” I ask.

“Sleeping Beauty, my Sleeping Beauty.” He smirks. “You’re so beautiful, mo

mhuirnín.”

“Okay, Prince Charming, you seem fine, so I’m gonna leave you to it. Try not to drown in your own vomit.” As I turn to leave, Connor reaches out and grabs hold of my wrist.

“Why do you have a gun?” he asks me.

“Why are you drunk?”

“Because I can’t stop thinking about you. Thought it’d help,” he says, standing up and not letting go of my wrist.

“Did it?”

“Not even a little.” He shakes his head and pulls me towards the bed.

“What are you doing?”

“Getting on that bed with you.” He smirks at me. “This is my dream. I get to say how it goes.”

“This isn’t a dream, Connor, and you’re drunk.”

“Mmm, come on, Aurora. Just lie here with me,” he says, pulling me down on top of him as he falls onto the mattress. “That’s better.” Connor rolls over to his side. I fall next to him. His fingers reach up and brush my hair out of my face. “It didn’t work.”

“What didn’t work?”

“The month. You left for a whole month and told me to forget. It didn’t work.”

I smile. I don't know why, but I like his drunken honesty, his vulnerability. "I didn't forget either."

"I know. I'm not easily forgettable. And you gave me your V-card, babe. That's something you'll never forget." He smirks at me.

"I'm still holding a gun you know. I could wipe that stupid smile off your face with the pull of a trigger," I tell him.

"You're not going to shoot me." His hand moves to my leg, and his fingers start trailing up and down, leaving goose bumps on my skin.

"You seem pretty sure about that." I raise the barrel, pressing the cold metal against his chest. The safety is on. I'm not completely insane.

"I am sure," he says. "But let's put that down, because I'm going to make you come. It's been too fucking long. And I don't want you accidentally pulling the trigger when your body explodes."

I let Connor take the gun from my hand. He places it on the bedside table while rolling his body on top of mine. "Connor, you're drunk. We shouldn't be doing this."

"I'm not that drunk, and we most certainly should be doing this."

"I'm not taking advantage of you," I tell him, while my hands do the opposite, snaking under his shirt and roaming over his abs.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Trust me, Aurora, I’m the one with the advantage here,” he says, pushing up onto his knees. Using one hand, he pulls the shirt over his head, revealing all the smooth skin I want to lick until I’ve had my fill.

I should be stopping him, right? There’s some sort of social norm that says you shouldn’t sleep with a drunk person. But damn, I can feel myself get wetter and wetter, with the way he’s looking at me like a starved lion that hasn’t eaten in months.

Connor licks his lips. “I’ve been dreaming about this, probably still am,” he says as he hooks his fingers into my sleep shorts. I lift my hips off the bed, letting him drag the material down my legs.

Again, the idea to stop him crosses my mind and then his fingers are touching me, spreading the lips of my pussy apart as he stares at me.

“Fuck me, so damn perfect. And so fucking mine,” he says, gliding a single finger from the bottom to the top of my pussy.

“Oh shit.” My voice shakes as pleasure starts to build in my lower stomach. I’ve only experienced this feeling with Connor. Well, actually, I did a little self-exploration while I was in Italy, but I was thinking about Connor the whole time so he was still there, in a way.

“I love how you react to my touch.” Connor leans down, his shoulders holding my legs open as he settles between them, before blowing onto my core.

“Mmm.” My eyes close.

“Open your eyes. Look at me. Watch,” he tells me.

Leaning up on my elbows, I stare down at his face buried between my legs. His tongue slides up my center, and I struggle to stay upright. The pleasure is too much already.

“This isn’t how I want this,” Connor says. Gripping my hips, he moves onto his back, taking me with him before settling me so I’m sitting on his face.

“Shit.” I balance myself on my knees, trying to take my weight off him.

“Hold on to the headboard and ride my face, Aurora. I want you to give me everything you got while I eat you out,” he says.

“You what?” I can’t do this. Can I?

Connor’s hands grip my hips and he pulls me down onto his mouth, which closes around my clit as he sucks on me. My head falls back, my body falling forward. My hands grab on to the headboard. I look down into Connor’s deep-green eyes. He’s staring up at me while he sucks, licks, and whatever the hell else he’s doing to me.

“Oh shit, Connor, I’m going to...” I scream as insane pleasure tears through me. He doesn’t stop. He continues to suck and lick me while I grind myself against his face.

Once I’m completely spent, I tumble to the side. What the hell was that? And can we do it again? These questions I keep to myself.

“You good?” Connor asks, pushing my hair out of my face.

I smile up at him. “Perfect.”

“That was just the beginning.” He smirks. Then he’s sitting up and unbuttoning his jeans before he pulls his wallet from his pocket. Digging around until he finds a condom.

“You always carry those with you?” I ask him.

“This has been in there since the last time we were together,” he tells me.

“So, you either went around having unprotected sex the entire time I was gone, or you didn’t have sex at all?”

“I didn’t have sex at all,” he confirms.

I want to believe him, but I also don’t want to be stupid. How can someone who looks like him not have gotten laid for a whole month? We’re also not together, so he’s free to do what he wants. Although I think the message I gave Melissa today at school will let all the girls know that Connor isn’t a free agent.

“You don’t believe me. I can’t make you, but I can work on it.” He rips the foil packet open with his teeth. “Do you want this, Aurora?” he asks, rolling the condom down onto his shaft.

I nod my head. Because I do want this. I want him. “Yes,” I say aloud.

“Good.” He lines up his cock with my entrance and slowly pushes inside me. There’s a slight twinge of pain. But other than that, I just feel... full. Complete.

Chapter Ten

My head thumps. Little hammers bang around inside, causing havoc. Opening one eye, I find Aurora staring down at me. I must still be dreaming. I had the most epic fucking dream about her last night.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“You might want to take these. Don’t worry. There’re only Tylenol. I’m not trying to poison you.” She holds out her palm. “Yet,” she adds, raising her brows at me when I take the pills from her.

“Aurora?”

“Last I checked, that’s who I am.”

“Sleeping Beauty. I must still be dreaming,” I groan, shoving the pills into my mouth and reaching for the water bottle in her other hand.

“Not dreaming,” she says. “You do remember last night, don’t you? It was only the most important night of our lives, Connor. Tell me you didn’t forget that we got married.”

I smile. “We got married? For real? That’s awesome.”

“You’re insane. And, no. I was joking, you ass. As if I’d marry you.” Aurora turns around. When she bends down to grab something off the floor, I get a full view of her ass hanging out of her tiny shorts.

“Wanna put a wager on it, mo mhuirín?” I can change her mind. I get that we’re doomed before we even begin. But it’s a ship I’m willing to go down on.

“Aw, Connor, baby, you don’t have enough money in the world to bet against me.” Aurora laughs, throwing my shirt at me. “Get dressed. I’ll drop you somewhere you can grab an Uber.”

“Why are you dropping me anywhere? I have a car.” I push up on the mattress and pull my shirt over my head.

“Kenny took your car. He left you a note on the kitchen counter,” she says.

I blink. Fucker took my car? He’s fucking dead. I’m going to fucking kill my own cousin. “I’m going to kill him,” I groan aloud.

“Oh, fun, can I help?” Aurora asks, and I actually think it’s a genuine offer.

“And ruin that pretty manicure by getting blood on your hands? Never,” I tell her.

“Don’t you worry. I can always paint my nails red. It was a bitch getting the blood off them yesterday,” she says, looking down at her white-tipped manicure.

“Actually I wanted to ask... What did you do to Melissa?” I know Kenny told me some story about Aurora beating the girl unconscious, but my cousin has a way of exaggerating things.

“Why? Did you like her or something?” Aurora glares at me. And I smile because she’s jealous, which means she likes me a lot more than she pretends to hate me.

“No. Just curious.” I shrug.

“I wasn’t going to do anything, but then I saw her in the bathroom and heard her talking to one of her friends about how she was going to meet up with you later and give you the best blow job of your life.” Aurora’s gaze flicks down my body before she lifts her eyes to meet mine again. “And then, I don’t know what happened. But somehow, her hair ended up tangled in my fist and her face was hitting the basin.” She pauses. “A few times, her head hit the basin a few times. But then I remembered how she had her hand all over you earlier, so I grabbed it and stomped on her wrist

until I heard it break.”

I stare at the girl in front of me. How the fuck can someone who looks so fucking... innocent be so fucking... unhinged? “Aurora, you can’t go around doing that to people.”

“Actually I can. And I did. If you really care that much about Melissa, you can go and see her at the hospital. I hear she’s awake. But you can find your own way there.” She closes her arms around her waist.

“I don’t want to see Melissa. I don’t want you getting into trouble because you’re jealous when you don’t have any reason to be.” I reach forward and tug Aurora towards me.

“Pfft, I’m not going to get into trouble. And besides, I happen to have the country’s best defense attorney on my payroll,” she says.

“Your father isn’t on your payroll, Aurora. And like I already told you... I don’t want anyone else, so no need to get all Harley Quinn on our classmates.”

“You’re right. My father wouldn’t charge to represent me. But I’m not crazy, Connor.” Aurora pushes away from me. “Also, you beat the shit out of Timothy because I kissed him. He didn’t even kiss me back.”

“I didn’t leave any broken bones,” I counter.

“So? It’s not my fault you’re not as good at fighting as I am.” She shrugs.

“How about we both agree not to go around fighting people? Or kissing anyone else either.”

“Is this your way of asking me to be... exclusive with you?” Aurora asks.

“Yes.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“I don’t know. I’ve got a lot of other options right now. My dance card is literally full.”

“Who? And they won’t be able to dance if I break their legs,” I tell her.

“Now who’s the crazy one?” Aurora laughs. “Come on, I need to meet my cousin so I can borrow a uniform from her.”

I don’t miss how she doesn’t agree to my offer, but I’m not going to push it either. I’ll just make sure every guy within reaching distance knows not to fucking touch her.

True to her word, Aurora dropped me off just outside the city limits and told me to call an Uber. I get it. We shouldn’t be seen together. At least not until we figure out what the fuck we are.

Now, though, as I watch her from across the hall, I want nothing more than to walk over and make my fucking claim public knowledge.

“You know you’re being way too obvious,” Kenny says, stopping in front of me and blocking my view.

“You know, I can’t seem to find a fuck to give,” I tell him.

“You will when your father finds out about this little double life you’re leading.”

I shrug. I don’t fucking care what my family thinks about me seeing Aurora. I don’t care what anyone thinks. She’s the first girl who’s managed to actually keep my

interest for longer than an hour. She's literal fire, and I want to douse her in gasoline and see how bright she can burn. I didn't tell her how her craziness turns me on. When she told me what she did to Melissa, I wasn't appalled like I should have been. I was fucking horny.

Maybe we're both insane. Or we're the normal ones and everyone else around us is...

Nope, that doesn't work. We're insane. And what we are doing is insanely dangerous for both of us.

I won't let her get caught, though. I know my family, and I know there are no limits to what they'd do to her if they found out she was sleeping with me. Just to prove a point that they could too. It wouldn't even have anything to do with her last name.

"You got something to say, O'Malley?" Aurora's cousin calls out to me.

I look around the now silent hall. "To you? No," I answer him. Kenny moves to stand by my side.

"Then why the fuck are you staring?" Orlando goads.

I blink and force my lips into a smirk. "Isn't that what people do at zoos? Stare at all the animals on display? My bad, I was waiting for you monkeys to start performing tricks," I tell him.

Out of nowhere, something shiny and silver flies right past the side of my face. I turn and see the object on the floor before bending down to pick it up.

"Did you just throw a fucking ninja star at my head?" I ask Aurora.

"Next time, it'll hit your face. That was a warning. Consider yourself lucky,

O'Malley. I don't usually give warnings," she says, walking up to me. She smiles while plucking the star from my fingers, and then stomps off. "Don't ever talk to my cousin like that again."

"Didn't realize the boys in your family needed the girls sticking up for them, princess," I call out after her.

Aurora spins back around, and before I know it, that same throwing star is stabbed through my left arm. "I told you—one warning. You should have kept your pretty little mouth shut."

"You think my mouth is pretty, princess?" I ask while silently cursing at the pain traveling up my arm. This is going to need fucking stitches.

With a shake of her head, Aurora continues storming off in the opposite direction. Her two cousins, Dante and Orlando, just stare at me before following her.

"That's what you're sleeping with? I'd be keeping one eye open if I were you," Kenny mutters.

"She's harmless."

"Tell that to the thing sticking out of your arm." He gestures in my direction before ripping the star out of my skin.

"Ow, fuck," I hiss.

"Yeah, that needs stitching up," Kenny tells me.

My phone pings with an incoming message. I pull it out of my pocket and glance at the screen.

Page 25

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

Aurora:

Meet me in the library, last study room on the top floor. I'll stitch up your arm.

Me:

You just stabbed me with a fucking ninja star.

Aurora:

You should have kept your mouth shut.

Me:

You didn't have to stab me.

Aurora:

I did. You badmouthed my cousins. Are you coming or not?

Me:

Be there in a sec.

“You should change her name in your phone. Also, really? The girl just fucking stabbed you, Connor. What's to say she's not luring you there to finish the job?”
Kenny asks me.

“Make sure I’m buried back in Boston. I don’t want my eternal rest to be in this hellhole of a city,” I tell him, and head to the library.

I follow Aurora’s instructions and find her in the last room with a medical kit laid out on the table.

I look from her to the needle in her gloved hands. “You’re not stitching me up.”

“Yes, I am. Sit down and shut up.” She points at the chair in front of her. “Take off your shirt.”

“If you wanted to get me naked, you could have just asked. You didn’t have to stab me,” I tell her. I shrug out of my blazer and undo the buttons of my shirt before slipping my arm free.

“I would say I’m sorry, if I was in fact sorry. But I’m not,” she says.

“Have you done this before?” I ask her.

“No, but I’m a quick learner.” She grins. “At least with this sort of stuff, I am.”

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing. You going to be okay? Need something to bite down on?” She quirks a brow.

“Like you?” I mirror the gesture.

“I meant like a belt or something,” she says.

“I’m good.” I brace myself for both the pain and the infection I’m more than likely

going to end up with for letting her do this.

Why the fuck am I letting her do this?

I look up into her eyes and I see it. The concern she's hiding. "I'm okay, you know. Not the first time I've been stabbed."

"Who else has stabbed you?" she asks... casually? "Want me to sort 'em out?"

"No, I don't. I want you to kiss me better since it's your fault I'm bleeding. Again," I tell her.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

Surprisingly, Aurora bends down. Her lips press over the open wound before she brings her mouth to mine. My hand wraps around the back of her head as I deepen the kiss, tasting a mixture of my own blood and her.

Chapter Eleven

Picking up my phone from the breakfast table, I kiss my mom and then my dad goodbye.

“Who is calling you at this hour?” Papa asks when my phone starts ringing. I look at the display before turning the screen to show him.

“Trial number one,” I tell him, my brother Lorenzo’s name flashing across the screen. I miss him something crazy. While we were in Italy, he did the unthinkable. Asshole ran off and got married.

I helped him, like any good sister would. I wasn’t missing my brother’s wedding for anything. But, seriously, he married the daughter of our parents’ friends from Australia. Kyla. I’ve always liked the girl. Never thought she’d become my sister, though. But here we are.

“Lorenzo, you homesick already?” I ask, answering the call as I make my way to the garage.

“I miss you,” he says. “How’re things?”

“Same. Not much has changed. I just have one less brother trying to lock me away in

Rapunzel's tower." I laugh.

"She escaped. There are no windows to climb out of in the tower I have planned for you, little sis," he tells me. "You staying out of trouble?"

"Yes, Dad, I am." I start the ignition and wait for the car's Bluetooth to pick up the call before I pull out of the garage. "I'm heading to school as we speak."

"School, huh? That where you threw a star at some kid yesterday? Or is that where you knocked a girl unconscious and broke her wrist?" my brother asks me.

"I feel like it's the same place for both of those incidents," I say, while trying to figure out which one of my cousins is the narc. My money is on Orlando, because ever since we've been back, Dante has been all up in Josie's ass.

"Aurora, why?" Lorenzo sighs.

"Two reasons. One, I won't be disrespected. And two, I won't let anyone disrespect my family."

"You know you don't need to fight Orlando and Dante's battles. They're big boys," he says.

"I know, but it was fun." I laugh. Also, better me than them. Connor wouldn't have got off lightly if I waited for Orlando to retaliate. The only reason he didn't is because I beat him to it. So, basically, I saved Connor. In a way.

"You really need to rein it in. Think of Mom. How is she going to feel if she finds out what you're up to at school?" My brother's right. My mother would be upset.

"Way to lay on the guilt. It's not like I didn't have a reason."

“I’m not saying you didn’t. But please, just try to stay out of trouble,” Lorenzo pleads with me. “Maybe you can come to Australia during the break.”

“I knew you missed me, but I’m busy this summer.”

“Doing what?” he asks.

“Working on my tan,” I tell him. “Where’s Kyla? I wanna say hi.”

“Hello, Aurora?” My sister-in-law’s voice comes through my car’s speaker.

“Hey, I need you to make sure my brother can’t hear me.” I haven’t told anyone what I’m about to tell her. But she’s my sister now, and this is the kind of things sisters share, right? Also, we’ve been friends for as long as I can remember.

“Okay, I’m alone. What’s going on?” she asks me.

“I met someone. A guy,” I admit.

“Ohhh, oh shit. Lorenzo is going to lose his shit, Aurora,” she whispers.

“He’s not going to know,” I remind her.

“Well, not from me, he won’t. Tell me everything,” she squeals.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I knew I could count on her. “I’m so glad you’re my sister.” I grin. “His name is Connor. He’s... ah... not Italian. And he is... I don’t know. He makes me feel things.”

If anyone understands what I mean, it’s Kyla. She’s a lot like me in the feelings department. It’s why we’ve always gotten along well. We understand each other.

“Okay, that’s a good thing. Did you... you know?” she says.

“Have sex?”

“Yeah? Did you?”

“Yes.”

“And you liked it?” she presses.

“Oh, I liked it a whole lot,” I tell her. “Probably too much.”

“I know the struggle.” She sighs.

“Ew, nope, we are not swapping sex stories. You’re sleeping with my brother, Kyla.” I laugh.

“Well, you started it,” she says. “Okay, what else? I’m taking it no one knows about him? Is he from school?”

“He just transferred here, from Boston.”

“Does he know who you are? Like who your family is?”

“He does.”

“Okay, well, that’s good. I guess. When are you going to break it to them?” she asks.

“Just so I know when my husband is going to suddenly need to fly to New York.”

“Not anytime soon. It’s early and we’re not dating. Just slept together a couple of times. It’s not that serious.”

“Are you being safe? Because teen mom isn’t how I picture your future.”

“I am,” I tell her. “So, how is it being married?”

“Amazing. I have the world’s best husband.”

“Are you just saying that because I’m his sister?” I laugh.

“As scary as you are, no, I mean it.” She sighs. “I never thought I could love like this.”

“What does it feel like?” I genuinely want to know.

“It’s like I can’t breathe when he’s not near, and when he is near, my skin prickles with awareness. My stomach fills with butterflies when I look at him, and my chest aches when I think about anything happening to him,” she says. “It’s hard to explain.”

“Yeah, I think I get it.” Wait. No, I don’t get it because I am not in love. I’m in lust.

That's not the same thing. "I mean, I get what you're saying, not that I feel any of that," I clarify.

"When you do feel it, don't fight it, Aurora," Kyla says.

"I just got to school. I gotta go. Tell Lorenzo to chill. Maybe give him a kid or something so he can stop worrying about me."

"Even if we have kids, your brother will always worry about you. You know that," she tells me.

"I know. Love you." I cut the call and look around the parking lot.

Connor's car is already here, but so is someone else's I wasn't expecting. I get out and walk over to where my cousin Mabilia is leaning against her trunk.

"What are you doing here?" I ask her.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Papa enrolled me. Told me I messed up one too many times, so now I have to go here with the plebs. His words, not mine,” she says.

I laugh. I can see my uncle saying that. He wanted his kids at the predominately Russian school. Mabilia got expelled just before we went to Italy. I didn’t realize she wasn’t back yet. I’ve been a shitty cousin for not calling and checking in on her.

“Well, now we get to hang out at school together.” I smirk.

“Oh, fuck no. What the fuck are you doing here?” This comes from Orlando.

“I go here now.” Mabilia smiles.

“No, it was bad enough with one of you, but both of you. Fucking hell.” He shakes his head. “It’s too early for this.” He turns and walks away. “Stay out of trouble,” he yells out at us over a shoulder.

“So, you wanna give me the tour?” Mabilia asks.

“Sure, come on.” I link my arm with hers and we walk in together.

“Damn, there’re a lot of fine-ass guys here. You’ve been holding out on me,” she says, looking at all the crowds gathered around in their cliques.

“Not them,” I say when her gaze falls on Kenny and his group of jock friends. Connor isn’t there. Still, Mabilia needs to stay far away from the jocks.

“But they’re so pretty,” she says.

“The captain, Kenny, is Irish,” I tell her.

She laughs. “Papa would make an Irish stew out of him.”

When my phone pings with a message, I check it quickly and then pocket the device again when I see Connor’s name on the screen. “So, let me take you to student services and get your schedule sorted, or do you already have it?”

“I have it. And a locker, number four-one-one.”

“Up this hall. I’ll show you.” Her locker isn’t anywhere near mine.

“Hey, I tried to call you last night.” Krystal approaches us. “Mabilia, how are you?”

“Good, you?” My cousin doesn’t like Krystal. They’ve met a few times at parties. But Mabilia is polite.

“Good,” Krystal says.

“Why were you calling me?” I ask her.

“To see if you wanted to go to a party this weekend. You’re welcome to come too, Mabilia.” Krystal looks hopeful. She wants to be liked, always has.

“I can’t,” Mabilia says, dismissing her before turning to me. “I can catch up with you later.”

“Ah, you sure?” I ask her.

“Yep, positive.” As she says this, the bell rings.

“Show me your schedule.” I take the piece of paper from her hand. “Okay, your first class is down the hall, fourth door on the left.”

“So your cousin goes here now?” Krystal asks when Mabilia is out of earshot.

“Yep,” I say. “Who’s throwing this party anyway?”

“Kenny, who else?” she asks with a raised brow.

“I’ll think about it,” I tell her as I pull my phone out of my pocket and read the message from Connor.

Connor:

Don't wear panties to math.

I snort. Aloud.

"What's up?" Krystal asks.

I shake my head and pocket my phone again. "Nothing. Just my brother being an idiot as usual. I gotta go. Catch you at lunch?"

"Sure," she says. We don't have any classes together this morning. I do, however, have a math class with Connor. And when I walk in late, he's already seated in the back, right next to my empty chair.

"Sorry I'm late, sir," I say as I pass Mr. Porter.

"Miss Valentino, get your textbook out, page one sixty-three," he replies with a disapproving tone that makes me want to cut his damn tongue out of his mouth.

I drop into my seat and start digging through my bag.

"You okay?" Connor asks.

"Peachy," I hiss under my breath.

"Did you get my message?"

"I did, and if you even think about touching me right now, I will cut your fingers off,"

I tell him with a smile.

“You like what my fingers can do to you way too much to cut them off,” he says confidently.

“Wanna wager on that?”

“Nope.” He shakes his head and turns his attention back to the front of the class. After about five minutes, Connor looks across to me again. “Seriously, what’s wrong?”

“I want to cut out the teacher’s tongue and shove it up his ass,” I whisper.

“Want me to hold him down for you?” Connor lifts a brow.

I look at him, considering his offer. Is it genuine? I have no idea. “Do you actually mean that? Would you really do that?”

He lifts one shoulder up and down. “If it means you’re not maiming me, then sure. I’m still recovering from where you stabbed me yesterday.” He smirks.

I roll my eyes. “I kissed you better.”

“Maybe I need a little more to really recover?” he suggests.

“Or you just need to toughen up,” I counter.

Chapter Twelve

Aurora was in a mood this morning. I don’t know what pissed her off, but I’d be lying if I said her bitchiness didn’t turn me on. I haven’t seen her since first period,

and I'm aching to fucking touch her. Which is why I'm currently waiting in the same study room of the top floor of the library we were in yesterday. I messaged her and she said she'd come by, but that was thirty minutes ago.

Is she standing me up? And why am I still sitting here waiting like a fucking loser?

Because it's Aurora, and she's worth waiting for. She's gonna show.

The bell rings out, signaling lunch is over, and I stand and pick up my bag. Stopping in my steps when the door opens and Aurora walks in appearing flustered.

"Sorry. I came as soon as I could," she says.

"What happened?" I ask her.

She shuts the door. "My cousin started here today. I couldn't just leave her by herself."

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“How many fucking cousins do you have?” My bag drops to the floor with a thud as I approach her.

“A lot.” She laughs. “But I’m here now. What did you want?”

“You.” My hands dig into her ass as I pick her up and slam her back against the door. “I need you,” I say before my lips slam down onto hers. My tongue delves into her mouth and my cock grinds into her pussy. Fuck, I need to lose these clothes. I need to be inside her. “You’re fucking addictive.”

“Mhmm. Or you’re just a horny teenager and I’m here,” she says.

My face pulls back from her mouth. “Is that what you think this is?”

Aurora lifts one shoulder. “I don’t know, Connor. I’m not exactly the expert on this, remember?”

I shake my head. “You’re right. I am fucking horny, but only when I think about you. Which is all the fucking time by the way.”

“Connor?”

“Yeah?”

“Shut up and kiss me. If I’m missing class for this, you better make it worthwhile.”

My lips slam back down onto hers, and I carry her over to the desk. Sitting her ass on

top. My hands roam under her skirt until I find the knife I know she's always carrying on her hip. Unclipping the leather clasp, I remove the blade and step back. "Open your legs for me, Aurora."

"Is this where you try to slit my throat? Catch me unaware? Because I have to warn you... it won't end well for you if you try." Aurora smirks at me while spreading her thighs apart, revealing a pair of pink lace panties.

"I have no intention of slitting your throat, babe, especially not before I have the chance to come down it."

Fuck, now I want her lips wrapped around my cock.

A deep blush rushes up Aurora's neck to her cheeks.

"Do you want that? You want me to shove my cock into that smart fucking mouth of yours? You want to swallow everything I have for you?"

She licks her lips. "I..."

"You want it, but that's not what's happening right now," I tell her. Stepping forward, I lift the fabric of her skirt while the tip of the knife catches on the side of her panties.

Aurora wraps her hand around mine and presses down until the blade pierces her skin. I look at where a tiny drop of blood stains the lace of her underwear. I continue slicing through the lace, then move on to the other side and repeat the action before pulling the fabric away from what I really want. Her pussy. I run the tip of the blade down over her clit.

Aurora sucks in a breath, watching the metal run over her sensitive skin. "So fucking hot."

I've never been with anyone who is as... adventurous as Aurora, and to think she was untouched. "The fact that I'm the only one to see this, to have been inside you, is a fucking turn on," I tell her.

"What makes you so sure you're the only one?" She lifts a challenging brow.

I pause my movements. Something in my chest twists. The thought of her letting someone else see her like this, someone else shove their cock into her, has my vision turning red.

I take a deep breath and try to rein in my anger. She's just baiting me. She doesn't mean that.

I push her back down on to the table, climb on top of her, and straddle her hips. The knife presses against her neck, and Aurora smiles up at me with that same raised brow. "Tell me who the fuck you've let fuck you, Aurora."

"Jealous?" she asks, amusement in her tone.

I press the knife in harder, not enough to cut, but enough to let her know that I will. "Insanely. Don't fuck with me. Who?"

Aurora laughs, literally fucking laughs in my face. And then, out of nowhere, she moves. I land on my back and she's climbing on top of me. Her hand covers mine, once again pressing the blade closer to her own neck. "It's hot. How jealous you are," she says.

"This isn't a game, Aurora. I'm not fucking sharing you with anyone," I tell her.

"Well, that's not your choice, Connor. My vagina. I get to decide who gets inside it, not you."

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“You think I won’t find out? Maybe I’ll slaughter them in front of you, then turn around and fuck you in their blood.”

“Sounds kinky. Could be fun.” She shrugs, “But how about you fuck me, right here, on this table. Like you promised.” She removes the knife from my hand and tosses it onto the floor. Her lips come down on mine.

Rolling her over onto her back, I reach into my pocket for the condom I put there and hand it to her. “Hold this,” I tell her while I unbutton my pants and free my cock.

Aurora tears into the foil packet and then rolls the rubber down my shaft.

“Are you ready for me?” I ask her. “Are you still sore from last night?”

“Don’t you dare think about taking it easy on me, Connor,” she growls. Her legs tighten around my waist.

Lining up my cock with her entrance, I thrust into her. Hard. Bottoming out. “Fuck,” I grunt. She’s so fucking tight. It’s like I’m breaking through that barrier all over again.

The fact she didn’t give me an answer hasn’t gotten past me. I’m still fucking fuming at the thought of someone else feeling this. Feeling what’s mine.

I pull out and slam into her. I continue this, gripping her hips to hold her still while I fuck her. Hard, fast. I want to imprint the shape of my dick into her cunt. I want her walking with a fucking limp, and I want her to know that it’s because of me. I’m the

only one fucking her.

I don't stop thrusting. When her mouth opens and a moan escapes, I reach my hand down and grip her throat. "Look at me. It's me. I'm the only one fucking you, Aurora," I tell her. I feel her pussy clench around my dick. Fuck, I'm close. "I want you to come for me. Show me how pretty you come."

"Shit, Connor!" Aurora screams my name. Her mouth hangs open in that perfect O-shape as her entire body spasms underneath me.

I grunt as I thrust, one, two and three more times, spilling my seed into the rubber.

"That is way more fun than history class," Aurora says breathlessly.

I pull out, lean down, and capture her lips between mine before I straighten. Removing the condom, I tie a knot around the top and throw it in the trash bin. Before pulling my pants up and adjusting my clothes. I watch as Aurora stands, pullsher skirt down, and fixes her blouse. She's not wearing fucking panties anymore. I probably should have thought about that before I cut them off her.

I scoop up the scraps of lace from the floor and pocket them, then kick off my shoes and undo my pants again.

"What are you doing?" Aurora asks, confusion written all over her face.

"Taking off my boxers. You're not walking around school without fucking underwear, Aurora," I tell her. I pull my boxers down my legs and hand them to her. It's better than nothing.

"You should have thought about that before you cut them." She laughs while swiping the boxers out of my hand. "I'm only wearing these because I don't want to get a UTI

or some shit from sitting on unclean surfaces.”

“I don’t care about the why, just as long as you’re not naked under that skirt,” I tell her, yanking my pants back up my legs.

“Why are you pissed?”

“Really?” I raise a brow. “I want names, Aurora. I want to know who.”

“What?”

“Who you’ve fucked over the last month,” I clarify.

“It’s really bothering you, huh?” she asks.

“No, I just want to send them a fucking cake.”

“You’re an asshole. You know that? I haven’t fucked anyone but you.” She shakes her head and picks up her bag, hiking it up onto her shoulder. “But that can stop now.”

“It’s not stopping.” My arm wraps around her waist. “You want this just as much as I do.”

“Maybe, but I have self-control.”

The bell indicating the period has ended and the next class is about to begin rings out.

“What do you have now?”

“Geography, you?” she says.

“AP Physics.”

“Do me a favor and keep this to yourself. I don’t need my family knowing about us,” she tells me.

“You think I want mine knowing?” I laugh. “I don’t want those assholes anywhere near you.”

Aurora pauses, her hand on the door. “You don’t like your family?”

“I love my family. Do I like everything they do? No. And what they’d do to you... Well, you don’t want that.”

“I mean, they could try. I’m not a weak little girl, Connor.”

“Oh, trust me, I’m well aware of that. I have stitches to prove it.” I point to my arm.

Aurora smiles proudly. “Yeah, you do. Thanks for... whatever this was. I’ll, ah, talk to you later.”

“Aurora.” I stop her before she walks out the door.

“Yeah?”

“No one else,” I tell her. Feeling the need to make that point sink in.

“Sure, whatever you say, Charming.”

“Charming?”

“Yeah, like Prince Charming. He woke up Sleeping Beauty. You, Connor, have woken me up.” She smiles and then walks out, leaving me wondering what the fuck she’s talking about.

What did I wake up?

I pull my phone out of my pocket and change her name to SB in my contacts. Sleeping Beauty, because she is my very own princess. I just hope I can protect her from all the evilness this world of mine is going to throw at her. No matter how strong Aurora insists she is, or how much she can take, I don’t want her to have to deal with any of it.

I just have to make sure no one finds out about us. Not yet anyway. Not until I can come up with a plan to keep her safe.

As I walk into my physics class, I notice Dante Valentino glaring at me from across the room. I smile back just to fuckwith him as I sit down. Then I unlock my phone screen and send Aurora a message.

Me:

Out of curiosity, how much would you kill me if I were to wipe that cocky smirk off your cousin’s face?

SB:

Which one?

Me:

Dante.

SB:

I poisoned my best friend at lunch today because she said something about my cousin I didn't like. What do you think I'd do to someone who actually goes out of their way to hurt one of them?

My brows draw down. She poisoned her best friend? What the actual fuck? And then she just came and met up with me like nothing happened.

Me:

What'd you poison her with?

SB:

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I only made her sick. I have to go. We aren't all born with academic brains.

Me:

I'll do your homework for you.

She doesn't read my last message. Guess she really is focusing on class.

Chapter Thirteen

Three weeks later

For three weeks, I've been meeting Connor in the study room in the library. We've been careful not to be seen together. But when we are together, it's... intense. I don't know how he makes my body feel the way it does, or why it only works for him. But I'm not going to deny myself the pleasure he can give me.

I have, however, been missing a lot of classes. A fact I'm sure my parents are going to notice. At least my grades won't slip. Thanks to Dante, who is currently sitting in my room effortlessly completing my homework for me. And watching him do it without much thought is creeping me out.

I should be used to how easily academic stuff comes to him, and I don't begrudge him for it. Especially since he's been doing my assignments for me for as long as I can remember. No one knows, other than Orlando and Mabilia. If our parents found out, they'd be pissed. They do not condone cheating. But we've been doing it this way for so long now it'd be hard to just start doing it myself and end up failing.

Because I would fail. I mean, I might pass, if I put hours upon hours into studying and memorizing shit. But there would be a noticeable difference in my grades—that's for sure.

“Have you told them you don't plan to go to college yet?” Dante asks me.

I look at him. “I'm still breathing, so that'd be a no.”

“They're not going to kill you. Trust me, the family has had more reason than school to kill you, Aurora.” He laughs.

“It's not that easy. My mom thinks I'm going to be some successful businesswoman or something. And Dad keeps telling me I can do anything I want, be anything I want.” I sigh. “I can't, though.”

“You can. You're a Valentino. The world is your oyster,” Dante says.

“I'm a girl. It's different for me,” I groan. Because, let's be honest, it is different for the girls in our family.

If one of the boys goes off on a killing spree or something, they're just a Valentino. If I was to kill someone or do something a little violent, I'm insane. Or crazy. There must be something wrong with me, because I shouldn't want to do those things. I should be content being a very well-kept princess.

That's never been me, though. I'm far too much of a free spirit. I'm also protective. I could never stand by and let anything happen to someone in my family. In my defense, if the oldies didn't want me to fight, they shouldn't have equipped me with the skills to do so. Besides, the sexist bullshit of girls needing a man to protect you will never fly with me. I learned from a group of very strong women. The Valentino men might think they're running the show, but they'd be nothing without the women.

And they all know it.

“At least I’m not dating my cousin.” I laugh.

It’s the newest way to insult Dante, because my Zio Theo and Zia Maddie adopted his girlfriend Josie, saving her from an awful foster home situation. Which Dante is grateful for, but also a little resentful over. He asked Josie to marry him. He wanted them to get their own place and live happily ever after. Thankfully, the girl must have some brains because she said no.

Both my and Dante’s phones ping at the same time. I pick up mine and read the message.

Orlando:

Valentino hangar, now. Alessandro is going to Idaho. We’re crashing.

“Idaho? What the fuck is in Idaho?” I ask, looking up at Dante, knowing he just got the same message I did.

“No idea. Let’s get Josie and go.” He closes his laptop and packs it into his bag. I don’t think he goes anywhere without that thing.

I follow him out the door. Because it’s not like I have a lot of other plans this weekend. Well, I was supposed to meet up with Connor, but family comes first, right? I’d also have terrible FOMO if they all went without me.

“Really?” My cousin Alessandro points at me. “That’s a liability, not a help.” His words are directed to my brother Enzo as we all situate ourselves on the Valentino jet.

“I didn’t call her.” Enzo holds up his hands.

“No, I found out from Orlando. But you should have told me yourself,” I huff, walking to the back and sitting opposite Alessandro and his new girlfriend. “Hi, I’m Aurora, your new cousin.”

“Hi.” Cassidy looks at Alessandro, probably wondering what circus she’s found herself trapped inside.

Page 34

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know he’d call them all,” Alessandro tells her in a much softer tone than I’ve ever heard my cousin use on anyone else.

“We don’t travel alone, because it’s safer in numbers,” I explain.

“Shut up,” Enzo grunts at me.

I stand and move seats, claiming the empty spot next to Orlando. I don’t know what their problem is. If Cassidy is joining the family, she might as well know how we operate. And judging by the way Alessandro is looking at her, she’s not going anywhere.

I pull out my phone and message Connor before takeoff.

Me:

Going out of town for the weekend.

Charming:

Where you going?

Me:

Idaho.

Charming:

What's in fucking Idaho?

Me:

Not you.

Charming:

Aurora, why are you going to Idaho?

I pocket my phone without replying. Because fuck him. I don't owe him an explanation. He should be thankful I even let him know and didn't just stand him up.

"Who's Charming?" Orlando asks.

"None of your business."

"You know it'd take Dante two seconds to hack your phone and find out," he hums.

"And it'd take me two seconds to blow up your favorite guitar." I smile at him.

"You wouldn't," he says.

"Wouldn't I?"

"Yeah, you would." He nods his head. "I didn't see anything."

"There was nothing to see," I remind him, because there wasn't.

I know the moment I walk into my house that my dad knows what happened. Of course my brother told him. Why wouldn't he? Enzo is standing right next to me. He

squeezes my hand. He hasn't left my side since the incident back in Idaho. The one where I saved someone.

"She didn't have a choice," Enzo says.

"I know," my dad replies before turning and walking down the hall. "Follow me."

My hand tightens around my brother's. I'm grateful that he's here. I don't know why I'm nervous. These are my parents. They love me regardless. Deep down, I know that. But the truth is I never want to disappoint them. And I feel like what I did in Idaho is going to be the disappointment of a lifetime.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

My dad stops outside the living room. He wraps his arms around me. “For the record, I love you, princess. And I’m so fucking proud that you’re my daughter. I’m proud of you,” he whispers.

“Thanks, Papa. I love you too,” I tell him. Holding him a little tighter than I normally would. I then walk into the living room, where my mom is waiting on the sofa and my brother Lorenzo’s face is blown-up on the television screen. “Family meeting?”

“Aurora, we just want to debrief with you and make sure you’re okay.” Mom stands and hugs me. Enzo lets go of my hand and moves over to the sofa.

“It wasn’t her fault,” Enzo repeats. “She didn’t have a choice.”

“You had a choice not to fucking take her with you in the first place. You had a choice not to leave your sister alone while you went God knows where with Alessandro. She shouldn’t have been alone!” My dad yells at my brother. “Do you have any idea what could have happened to her?”

“Stop yelling at Enzo. It’s not his fault either. I wasn’t alone. I was with Dante and Orlando. And I’m not some damsel, in case you’ve all forgotten.” I’m not letting them blame my brother for something I did.

“Aurora, sweetheart, calm down. No one is blaming anyone. Right, Matteo?” Mom directs to Dad.

“Right,” he grunts.

“We are just concerned about you. Maybe we should make an appointment so you can talk to someone,” Mom says.

“No. I don’t need a shrink. I’m fine,” I tell her.

“This is the first time you’ve killed someone, Aurora. It can take a toll on your mind,” Lorenzo says. “It is the first time, right?”

“Yes, it’s the first time. But again, I’m fine. I appreciate your concern. I really do. But if and when I need help, I’ll let you all know. Until then, I’m going to go shower and climb into bed.”

“Okay, sweetheart. I’ll bring you up a hot chocolate,” Mom says.

“Thanks, Mom. Love you.” I hug her and then move on to my dad before making my escape upstairs.

I sit in the shower until my fingers turn wrinkly. I really am fine. I wasn’t lying to my parents. I don’t think I’m going to lose any sleep over what I did. In fact, I didn’t exactly hate it. Of course, I can’t say that because they really would have me in with a shrink. Probably in a nice white jacket too.

After wrapping myself in a fluffy robe, I walk back into my room and find a cup of hot chocolate on my nightstand and my mom on my bed. “I wanted to make sure you were okay,” she says.

“Thanks.” I lower myself onto the bed and pull the covers up over my knees. “I really am okay.”

“You know, when we were sixteen, your dad came to my house the first time he... well, the first time it happened for him. He wasn’t okay. And it’s completely fine for

you to not be too,” she says.

“What if I am, though?”

“Then I’m glad. You didn’t do anything wrong, baby. You saved a life. But for the love of God, please don’t make this a habit.”

“I won’t,” I tell her.

She sighs as she reaches out to stroke my hair like she used to do when I was little. “When I found out I was having a girl, I was ecstatic. After two boys, I was finally getting my girl. But that joy turned to fear because, while I’ll always worry about the boys, I knew they’d be able to take care of themselves. But a girl? I didn’t want her to have to fight for her life. Ever. I didn’t want her to have to experience violence and evil. And your father made me a promise that no matter what, he would teach our little girl everything she needed to know to protect herself. To never have to rely on a man for anything.” Mom pauses. “And he did, and for that, I’m really glad. I still worry even though I know you can take care of yourself. I will never not worry because horrible things happen to women in this world.”

“I know, Mom. And you and Papa and everyone else have taught me everything I need to know. I promise I will always be careful.” As I say the words, Connor’s face pops into my head. I have literally been sleeping with the enemy. I’m a traitor. “Mom, how did you know you were in love? With Papa?”

“Well, he didn’t really give me much choice.” Mom laughs. “I’m kidding. I knew because when I thought about losing him, I felt like my life was going to be over. Plus, it helps that he’s hot as sin.”

“Ew, gross.” I make a gagging sound, and my mom laughs.

“Are you seeing someone?” she asks.

“Not really,” I say.

“So, sort of then? But you don’t want the family to know yet.”

I nod my head.

“Okay, well, when you’re ready, I can’t wait to hear all about him. Until then, make sure you’re safe,” she says. “I can stop your father and brothers from doing a lot of things, but killing the boy who knocks you up? Not even Nonna could stop them from doing that.”

Chapter Fourteen

Aurora went to Idaho. For what? I have no fucking idea. She said she'd be gone the whole weekend but she got back last night. It's now Sunday. I could wait another day to see her at school, and I probably should. But I don't want to.

Which is why I'm hanging out at the empty church she's sitting inside. I don't want to interrupt her. I might be an ass, but I've been raised Catholic my whole life and whatever Aurora's relationship with God is, I'm not interfering with it.

She stands and I watch as she makes the sign of the cross before turning around. Her steps stop when she sees me. "Connor?" She looks around, probably to check if anyone else is here, but we're alone. "What are you doing here?"

"Me? I'm here to talk to my old friend Jesus, obviously. We're like this." I hold up my crossed fingers.

"Really? Well, don't let me stop you," she says.

"I must say... I'm surprised to see you here." I walk towards her.

"Why? You don't think I go to church?" she asks.

"No, I figured you'd burst into flames the moment you stepped through the doors." I smirk. I'm honestly surprised she hasn't. I know I've said the wrong thing when her face drops. It's only for a split second before she recovers.

“Funny. If running that crappy Irish wannabe crime family doesn’t work out for you, you could try stand-up,” she says.

I laugh. “I have no intention of taking over the family business,” I admit out loud for the first time.

“Really? Pretty sure the heir doesn’t usually get a choice, Connor.”

“Pretty sure everyone has a choice.”

“To live or die maybe.” Aurora lifts one shoulder. “Did you follow me here?”

“No.” I didn’t follow her. I followed the GPS location of her phone.

“I should go.”

“Or... you could stay.” Taking hold of her hand, I pull her towards the side of the church.

“What are you doing? Where are we going?”

“Somewhere we can be alone.” I take her through the back and up the stairs, and Aurora groans.

“Really, Connor, why are we climbing up here?”

“Because no one else is going to come up here,” I tell her. This staircase leads to the bell tower.

“No shit, because no one in their right mind is climbing these stairs,” she grumbles. Once we’re at the top, I sit on the floor. It’s a small space, but we’re alone. Aurora

sits next to me. “Is this where you push me out the window? Let me plunge to my untimely demise.”

I laugh. “Why the fuck would you come all the way up here with me if you thought I was going to throw you down?”

“Because I’d make sure I took you with me.” Aurora’s lips tilt up into half a smile.

“What happened?” I ask her.

“What do you mean?”

“You seem... distant.” She’s more closed off than she has been over the last few weeks. We’ve had a lot of fun together, had a lot of conversations. I know her. And I know that something’s wrong.

“I’m just tired,” she says. “So, if not to throw me out the window, what did you bring me up here for?”

“To talk?”

“Connor, I don’t want to talk right now.” Aurora rises up onto her knees, pulling her top over her head and revealing a blue silk bra that’s struggling to contain her breasts. Along with two knives that are attached to a matching halter.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

Fuck, that's hot. I mean, side boob is always hot. But side boob with a knife attached? Fucking smoking.

"You get these designed to match your bras?" I finger the custom holster.

"You want to talk about where I get clothes made or do you want to make me come?" Aurora counters.

"Yeah, talking is overrated," I tell her, wrapping my arm around her waist and pulling her down on top of me. My mouth latches on to one of her breasts, sucking her nipple through the silk while removing each knife from her body, because I am not taking the risk of her stabbing me again.

"Oh god!" Aurora moans. Her arms wrap around the back of my neck, holding my head against her chest. Not that I plan on going anywhere.

I let my hands roam up and down her legs, which are now straddling me, as I continue to lavish her breasts. "I need you," I tell her.

"You have me. Right here. Now what are you going to do with me?"

"The possibilities are endless, but I think I'll settle for making you scream my name."

"You think you're that good that I'll scream your name?" Aurora grinds her pussy against my cock.

Fuck me, I think I might be the one screaming soon.

I sit back on my knees. “Roll over.”

Her brows draw down. “Why?”

“Because I said so. Roll over,” I repeat as I undo my pants and free my cock. Aurora pauses momentarily before she repositions herself so she’s lying on her stomach.

Scooping my hands under her hips, I pick them up until she’s bent over and on her knees. “Ow, shit, I think I just got a splinter,” she groans.

I flip her skirt up and slide her panties down to her knees. “Fuck, I love your ass.” My hands grab each perfect, fuckable, round globe.

“Connor, hurry up.” Aurora pushes herself backwards into my hands.

“You can’t rush greatness, babe.” I lean forward and run my fingers through her folds from her clit right up to her asshole. Circling around.

Aurora’s body stiffens. “Wh-what are you doing?”

“Shh, I’m enjoying what’s mine,” I say, biting down on her left ass cheek hard enough to leave a mark. I swipe my tongue over the raised skin, soothing it before moving back to her puckered hole.

“No,” she says.

“Aurora, relax. Enjoy it. Trust me, you will.” My hands spread her cheeks apart as my tongue delves in, licking around her back hole. I press my fingers into her clit, circling while continuing to eat out her ass. It doesn’t take long for Aurora to start grinding her ass into my face harder. Chasing that high. I move my fingers south, pushing them into her dripping-wet cunt. “I want you to scream my name when you

come,” I tell her.

“Oh, God!” she yells out, and I bite down again. That’s not the name I want to hear.

My tongue pushes into her asshole while my fingers pump in and out of her pussy. Increasing speed as I feel her tightening around me.

Her body starts shaking. “Jesus, God, oh, Jesus Christ!”

The bell above rings right as she comes, drowning out the sound of her screams. I roll her over, settling myself between her legs. “You still with me?”

“Uh-huh.” She smiles breathlessly up at me.

“Good.”

Aurora’s orgasmic bliss has well and truly worn off. She’s currently sitting across from me, glaring at everyone who walks near our table. We found a little hole-in-the-wall dive bar. Noone who knows us would ever come to a place like this, which makes it safe.

“You know I never thought bitch face could be hot. But somehow, on you, it just fucking is.” I lift my beer to my lips.

“Did you just call me a bitch?” she asks me.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I laugh. “I’m not that brave,mo mhuirnín.” Because I have no doubt if I called Aurora a bitch, she’d jump across the table and strangle me. “I called your face a bitch. Different.”

“Do you know how long it takes for someone to bleed out when you slice through their carotid artery?” She lifts a challenging brow.

“I do,” I tell her.

“Well, do you know how long it takes me to have a knife sticking out the side of your neck?”

“How long?”

“Less than a minute,” she says.

“I have no doubt. Which, again, is why I didn’t call you a bitch. I said you have a hot resting-bitch face.” I shake my head. “What are your plans after we finish school?” I need to change the subject before she really does try to jump over the table.

“I don’t know,” she says.

“We graduate in six months. You have to have some plans. College? Travel? What are they?”

“I’m expected to go to college,” she says, looking away.

“But you don’t want to?”

“I’m not academic. I don’t want to go through another four years of pretending to be something I’m not,” she admits.

“What do you mean pretending to be something you’re not?”

“My parents think I get grades all on my own. But Dante’s been doing my assignments for me since the fifth grade.”

“That’s... wow, okay. Why?” I ask her.

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m stupid. I can’t do it.” She shrugs.

“One, you are far from stupid, Aurora. Whoever put that idea into your head is a fucking moron. And two, you can do whatever you want. You’re a fucking Valentino,” I remind her.

“Wow, you sound just like my dad.” Aurora laughs.

“I just had my tongue in your ass. Trust me, I’m nothing like your dad.”

Her face blushes, and her eyes widen as she looks around to make sure no one heard me. “Oh my god!” she hisses at me.

“Yeah, that’s what you were saying, by the way. Not once did the name Connor come out of your mouth.”

“Oh, I’m aware.” Aurora smiles proudly. “It did take effort not to say it, though, so don’t be too hard on yourself. You fought the good fight.”

Something shifts in Aurora's eyes as her glares settles over my shoulder. When I turn around to see what she's looking at, she's already out of her seat and walking past me.

"Fuck." I get up and follow her.

Aurora picks up a cue from the pool table, and then hits some guy over the back of the head with it as he's caging some girl against the wall. He lets go of the girl and turns around. "What the fuck? You little bitch. You're going to pay for that," he yells, taking a step towards Aurora.

"Yeah? And who's going to make me? You?" She laughs, still clutching the stick in her hands.

When I see his fist come out towards her, I shove her out of the way, blocking the blow and throwing one of my own. My knuckles connect with his jaw. He was actually going to hit her. I see fucking red. Before I know it, I have the guy on the ground. Hitting him over and over again.

"Connor, stop." Aurora grabs my arm and tries to pull me back.

I stand and look at her.

"I don't need you to jump in and defend me." She glares at me, before turning to the guy on the ground. Kicking at him with the toe of her shoe. "And you're a fat, fucking ugly bastard. Try picking on someone your own size."

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I grab her hand and drag her out of the bar.

“Don’t do that,” she says, pulling her arm free.

“Do what?”

“Protect me, fight for me. I can do it myself,” she yells, and storms down the alleyway.

I follow her, my voice rising as I shove her against the brick wall. “Yeah, guess what? I’m gonna keep doing it, so get used to it.” My mouth slams down on hers, and Aurora wraps her arms around my neck. Pulling me tighter against her.

Chapter Fifteen

“Aurora, why does it feel like forever since I’ve seen you?” my grandfather asks, pulling me into his arms.

“It’s been a week, Nonno. I was here last Sunday and the Sunday before that.” I laugh. “And every Sunday of my life.”

“A week is too long. You should visit more often. I’m not getting any younger, you know. Soon I’ll be dead and you’ll wish you’d visited more,” he says, laying the Catholic guilt on thick.

Which then has me thinking about last weekend when I was at the church with Connor. Not something I need to be thinking about when talking to my grandfather.

“How are you feeling after the Idaho incident?” he asks.

“Fine,” I tell him. “Does this mean I can become a made woman?” I already know the answer. Women in the family don’t get made. It doesn’t mean they can’t be useful or work for the family. My Zia Izzy is probably more lethal than any of my uncles combined. And she learned from her mother, my nonno’s sister, Angelica.

Nonno laughs. “If ever there was a woman who’d take over this family, I have no doubt it’d be you, sweetheart,” he says, kissing my forehead. “But as long as I’m alive, that is not happening. I want a better life for you.”

“Better? Or lamer? I don’t want to be kept,” I tell him. “I don’t want to just marry some guy and have him take care of me.”

“What female in this family gives you that impression?” He lifts a challenging brow.

“None,” I admit, because all the females in this family are strong-willed and don’t take kindly to being ordered around.

“Exactly. You can be whatever you want to be, Aurora. I just wish you’d choose a safer path. I’m too old to be worrying about my grandchildren.”

“You’re not that old, Nonno, and I’m not the one you need to worry about. I’m the good one.” I give my grandfather the most innocent smile I can muster.

“Yeah, and I’m the fucking Easter Bunny.” He laughs. “I got you something to celebrate. But if you tell your mother, I’ll deny it.”

“Celebrate what?” I ask, curious as to what he could have for me.

“Your first kill,” he says casually, then adds, “And hopefully last,” as he passes me a

white box with a pink ribbon on top.

“You got me a gift? I should kill people more often.” I grin.

“I can take it back.” Nonno reaches out a hand to grab the box, and I pull it away.

“It was a joke. Jeez, you kill one guy and suddenly everyone thinks you’re unhinged,” I mutter.

“Yeah, that’s why people think that.” Nonno shakes his head.

I peel the ribbon off the box and lift the lid. “You got me a stun gun? I love it.” I smile up at my grandfather while swiping up the sparkly pink device.

“It won’t kill anyone, but it will give you time to get them down and walk away,” he says.

“Yeah. Okay, I’ll just walk away.” I smirk.

“Now, let’s go eat before your grandmother sends a search party in here,” Nonno says.

When we walk out to the dining room, everyone is already seated. I pull out the empty chair next to Mabilia and pick up the wine glass in front of me. “Hey, you’ve been oddly quiet this week.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Quiet? You’ve seen me every day at school? That’s when you’re not sneaking off to the library,” she whispers.

My cup pauses midair, and I turn to look at her. “I’m studying. A lot. You know, final year.”

“Is that what the kids are calling it these days? Studying?” She laughs. “Just so you know, I know. And I’m not telling you what to do, but be careful with that one.”

“I am,” I say. “I know what I’m doing.”

“No basket tonight, Nonno?” Enzo asks. My grandfather has made it a habit of having everyone empty their weapons into a basket before family meals. It’s not like we’re out to kill each other. Stab? Maybe, but definitely not kill.

“No,” Nonno replies while looking at me.

“Okay, tell me how school’s going?” my grandmother asks, changing the subject. “Dante?”

“It’s school. It’s almost done,” my cousin says. “But don’t worry, Nonna. I’ll be sure to graduate top of the class.”

“I don’t know. That new kid is pretty smart,” Josie tells him.

“What new kid?” Zio Romeo asks.

“Connor fucking O’Malley,” Dante groans. “He’s an ass, but what can you expect from those Irish fucks?”

“Language,” Zia Livvy scolds.

“O’Malley... Stay away from him.” This comes from Antonio, my cousin Tilly’s fiancé. He’s also the Don of one of the five families.

“I can tell my own damn family who they can and can’t mix with, Antonio,” Zio Theo says. “Dante, stay away from O’Malley. They’re up to something. And whatever it is, it isn’t good.”

“Well, really, are any of our families up to any good in this city?” I ask.

“Compared to them? Yes,” Zio Theo replies.

Right. I fight the urge to roll my eyes. I don’t know what Connor’s family has up their sleeves, but it can’t be that bad. And I’m certain they are no threat to us. I mean, they could try to be, but it won’t end well for them.

I asked Connor to meet me before school. I’ve been here for half an hour. Ever since dinner last night, I’ve been wondering what this family is doing in New York. And what impact whatever the hell they’re doing will have on mine...

I’m literally in bed with the enemy. Okay, it’s usually a desk, or a wall, or the floor. You get the point. But I’m not stupid. If Connor is hoping to get me to let my guard down, give him some deep-rooted family secrets... well, that’s not going to happen. Ever.

I’ve never been in the school library this early. The staff isn’t even here. It’s eerie. The whole place is quiet. Besides the footsteps coming from just outside the room.

The handle twists open and Connor saunters in with a smile on his face. I lift my arm and aim my gun center mass. “Close the door,” I tell him.

He tilts his head to the side, never dropping that stupid smile, the dimple in his cheek twitching. “Is this your new version of foreplay, mo mhuirnín? I didn’t think you were bored yet,” he says, closing the door and securing the lock.

I don’t move, my hand steady. “Why are you here?”

“You called me, asked me to meet you here?” he says as he tosses his bag onto the ground.

“No, here in New York. Why did your family come here? What are they planning?”

Something flickers. His eyes darken and his face hardens. “What makes you ask that?”

“Call me curious.”

Connor steps towards me. And before I know it, he snaps the gun out of my hand and points it at my head. “Aurora, you really trying to kill me right now? Like I said, if this is just foreplay, I can be down for that.”

“I want to know why your family is here, Connor. What they are planning and how it’s going to impact mine. I should warn you, though: If your father is going up against the Italians, it’s a fight you don’t want to be involved in.”

“Why? What makes you think the Valentinos are all that, Aurora? You have no idea what the Irish are capable of,” he says. There’s a proudness in his tone I’ve never heard before. He’s barely spoken about his family and when he has, it’s never like this.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“You really think your family could take down mine?” My arms fold across my chest, and I sit my ass on the table. He can keep the gun. He’s not shooting me. “The Valentinos built this city before the O’Malleys even crawled out of whatever whiskey-soaked gutter they came from.”

Connor shakes his head. He narrows his eyes and his brows furrow. Guess he didn’t like the insult. Tough, because there are plenty more where that came from.

“You mean the Valentinos bribed, bled, and backstabbed their way through the cracks in someone else’s empire.” He takes a step towards me, stopping when he’s pressed between my open legs. “The O’Malleys? We earned our territory. We held it. And we didn’t have to hide behind gold fences and Gucci suits to do it.”

I laugh. It’s true. We are flashier. And it’s not because the Irish don’t have the means. His cousin drives a Ferrari. They can be flashy. Most of them choose not to be. Me? I’m not ashamed of liking the finer things in life. “Please. Your grandfather ran protection rackets for the Russians back in Boston, Connor. My grandfather made senators kneel.”

“You think that makes you royalty?” The barrel of the gun presses into the side of my head. “It makes you a target. It always has and it always will.”

“Then pull the trigger already,” I dare him. And judging by the look on his face, he’s either going to kiss me or shoot me right now.

We stare into each other’s eyes, the decision weighing heavy on our shoulders. Then, his free hand wraps around the back of my neck, tangling in my hair and pulling my

face upwards. His lips descend onto mine and his tongue pushes its way into my mouth.

Connor breaks the kiss, his eyes much softer now as he stares down at me. “We shouldn't be doing this,” he says. “It's going to end in disaster.”

“Then stop,” I whisper, my fingers reaching into his belt and dragging his body closer to mine.

“I don't think I can,” he admits.

“Then don't.” I shrug. “Some disasters are beautiful.”

“Yeah, name one?”

“Romeo and Juliet, greatest love story of all time.” I smile. “Bonnie and Clyde.”

“Joker and Harley would be more fitting,” Connor suggests.

“Doesn't Harley dump the Joker? She goes on to live a full life of crime, while he falls apart without her?” I ask.

“Sounds about right then,” he says before slamming his lips back down onto mine. The gun lands on the table beside us. My arms wrap around his back, gripping his ass as I pull him even harder against me. I'm starting to think we are in serious trouble if we're both this turned on after an argument.

He had a gun to my head and all I can think about is how quickly I can get his pants off, how fast I can get that cock of his inside me. I'm sure a shrink would have a field day with our relationship.

“Do you think we’re only doing this because we’re not supposed to?” I ask Connor.

“No, I’m doing this because you’re fucking smoking hot. And I happen to like your crazy ass. Even when you point a gun at me before breakfast.” He smirks. “I’m taking you to Boston by the way. My friend’s throwing a party this weekend.”

“You want me to come to a party with you? In Boston?”

“Mhmm.” Connor’s lips move along my collarbone.

“Okay,” I agree, while trying to silently figure out how I’m going to leave town for a whole weekend without anyone knowing.

Chapter Sixteen

I’ve been pumped all week for this trip. I almost couldn’t believe Aurora actually agreed to come with me. Although I wasn’t expecting her to bring a friend. Or in this case, her cousin, who might just be as insane as she is.

“So, Mabilia, how are you liking New York Prep?” I ask, looking up into the rearview mirror.

Mabilia glares back at me and says something in Russian. I have no idea what, but I’m figuring I probably don’t want to know. Aurora’s sitting next to me. She turns and speaks to her cousin in Italian. Again, no fucking idea what they’re saying.

“Fine. But just so you know... my new favorite meal is Irish stew.” Mabilia huffs before replying to me in a sugary-sweet voice that doesn’t match her expression. “School is great, Connor. How do you like it?”

I smile at Aurora. “It has its perks.”

“Yeah, like the library? I hear it’s epic. Peoplescreamabout how good it is.” Mabilia snorts, trying to cover a laugh.

“Mabilia.” Aurora glares at her cousin over a shoulder.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“The library is second to none,” I chime in.

“So, Boston... You got any crazy ex-girlfriends? Or crazycurrentgirlfriends there?” Mabilia’s eyes connect with mine in the mirror.

“I don’t date crazy chicks, and I don’t have any ex-girlfriends,” I tell her.

“Aren’t you dating Aurora? Or is that not what this whole thing is?” Mabilia asks.

“We’re dating,” I say at the same time Aurora says that we’re not. “Wearedating,” I repeat, my words more for mygirlfriendthan for her cousin.

“But you just said you don’t date crazy chicks?” Mabilia appears genuinely confused as she gestures to the passenger seat.

“Aurora isn’t crazy,” I say, my voice firm and probably louder than it should be. “She’s perfect the way she is.” I pick up her hand, bring it to my mouth, and kiss her knuckles. It’s a little strange showing her affection in front of someone. We’ve been sneaking around for months now, if you count the time she was in Italy, which I do. But we’ve never been seen so much as talking to each other. I don’t hate it, though.

“Who is going to be at this party?” Aurora asks, changing the subject.

“Old friends,” I tell her.

“Old friends, as in the family kind of friends or the school kind of friends?”

“A bit of both, but the family kind are loyal to me. You don’t have anything to worry about,” I explain.

“Of course she doesn’t. That’s why I’m here. To slaughter anyone who even thinks about looking at her the wrong way,” Mabilia says from the back seat.

I look over at Aurora with a raised brow. “It’s a party. Try not to slaughter anyone.”

“Fuck,” Mabilia curses while staring at her phone.

“What?”

“My dad invited Tommy for dinner.” She sighs.

“Who’s Tommy?” I ask.

“Her boyfriend, who really is lucky to even still be alive. I didn’t think he’d last this long,” Aurora tells me.

“Tommy, you cannot go to dinner.” Mabilia has the phone to her ear. “I’m going to Boston. Girls’ trip.” I can’t hear the other side of the conversation. “Fine. I’ll text you, but you cannot tell my dad where I am. He thinks I’m at Aurora’s.”

“Wait... You each told your parents you were spending the night at the other’s house?” I ask.

“It’s not like I could tell my father I was going to a party in Boston with the heir to the O’Malley family, is it?” Aurora replies.

“No, but aren’t your parents’ cousins? They’re going to talk to each other and figure it out.” I laugh.

“They will, but by then, it’ll be too late and we’ll be on our way home.” She smiles.

“Right.” There’s a rest area coming up. “I’m stopping for gas. You need anything?”

“Chocolate,” Aurora says. “I’ll go inside and get snacks.” She leans over and kisses me before jumping out of the car.

As I’m filling up, Mabilia climbs out of the back and runs into the gas station. “What the fuck?” I call after her.

Then I see it and I’m running too. Some fucker is attempting to hold up the shop. He’s waving a gun around hysterically, and as I push through the door, I hear him yelling at the guy behind the counter, ordering him to get the money. Mabilia and Aurora are both standing by the register. Neither looks too worried, but that’s because they’re both fucking insane.

“I have a problem with what you’re doing here,” I say, walking up to the gunman, who turns his aim on me.

“Yeah, what you going to do about it, tough guy? Fuck off,” he grunts.

“You see, I would... but that’s my girlfriend you pointed at.” I continue walking.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Stop! I will shoot you!” he says, his hand a little shakier now.

“You should know who I am before you do that,” I tell him.

“Why the fuck do I care who you are? Stop.” The guy takes a step backwards.

“I’m Connor O’Malley.” I smile when his skin visibly pales. That was the reaction I was waiting for. “Which means we have two options here.”

“I didn’t know she was yours.” He shakes his head back and forth.

“Actually, I’m my own person. I don’t belong to anyone,” Aurora adds.

“Babe, not the time,” I tell her before holding up a finger towards the guy. “Option one, you hand over that gun to me. I turn the barrel towards you and pull the trigger.” I pause to look him over. “I’ll start on your knees and slowly work my way up your body. You won’t die straight away, but you will bleed out eventually.” Then I hold up a second finger. “Option two, you put that barrel to your own head and pull the trigger. Save yourself the agony. So, what’s it going to be?”

The whole gas station is silent, but the guy makes the smart choice when he lifts the gun to his head and shoots.

“Coward,” I grumble as I turn to the attendant and pull out a wad of hundred-dollar bills. “Here, call the cops and tell them he walked in and killed himself. You got CCTV?”

He nods.

“I’m gonna need it wiped. We weren’t here. And if I hear otherwise, I’ll be back,” I tell him and wait for him to nod again. I then look to Aurora. “You get everything you need, babe?”

Both girls are staring at me with strange expressions on their faces. “Yep.” Aurora scoops up an armful of snacks. “Let’s go.”

When we’re back in the car, Aurora pivots in her seat to face me.

“Just so you know, I didn’t need you to come in and save me,” she says.

“I know,” I tell her.

“But also, is there going to be a bedroom at this party because I’m suddenly really turned on?” she whispers.

“I can hear you,” Mabilia groans.

“Don’t eavesdrop then,” Aurora replies.

“Let’s raise the stakes.” Patty, one of my oldest friends, calls out to the two jocks on the opposite side of the table. We’re currently playing a round of beer pong and we’ve let ‘em think they’re going to win by purposefully missing.

Aurora is standing to my left. We stopped to check into a hotel first. I can’t exactly take her to my family home. Not without my father finding out anyway, and that’s a fight I don’t want to be having yet. She changed into a tight little black leather skirt and a white V-neck shirt that’s fucking see-through and showing a black lace bra underneath. She’s also wearing a pair of Doc Martens.

I've spent the night with my hands all over her, partly because I fucking love touching her, and partly because I wanted to know where all her little weapons of destruction are hiding. She never goes anywhere without carrying something. The fact that I know she can and will take care of herself when needed is a turn-on, and honestly, it gives me a peace of mind. Because the world we live in is fucking cruel. Especially to beautiful girls like Aurora.

"What you thinking?" I ask the two jocks.

"We win, you hand over your girl to us. We'll take real good care of her. You win, you keep her." One of 'em eyes Aurora up and down. My vision goes red. My composure though? Calm as fuck.

Before I can put them in their place, Aurora is sauntering towards them with a smile. "It's cute that you two little boys think you could handle even one second with me."

"Fucking hell." I shake my head when I see her hand reach up the side of her leg, just under her skirt. "You really shouldn't have said that," I tell the guys.

"What's going on? You really gonna let 'em talk about your girl like she's a piece of meat?" Patty asks.

"Watch." I have no intention of letting them off the hook. I'm just going to wait until Aurora's had her fun first.

"Oh, baby, I'd show you the night of your life," one of the jocks tells her. My fist clenches at my side. I count to ten in my head to stop myself from ending the little fucker before Aurora has time to put on her show.

I see the glint of light reflecting off the blade in her hand. When she rounds the table, the fucker screams and bends at the waist. "Yeah? A night I won't forget, huh? That

would be incredibly difficult without a dick,” Aurora tells him.

“You fucking bitch! You stabbed me in the balls!” The guy hisses as he falls to the floor.

Page 44

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“I thought you wanted me to touch your balls.” Aurora steps over top of him, before looking to the second guy. “You still want a night with me?”

He shakes his head and then he’s turning around and running out the door.

“Didn’t think so,” she calls after him as she makes her way over to me. “What about you?”

“Fucking always,” I tell her.

“What the fuck?” Patty slaps the back of my shoulder. “She’s a keeper. I don’t care what her last name is.”

“I know.” I smirk. My arm snakes around Aurora’s waist, and I pull her up against me.

“Someone get this piece of shit out of here!” Patty yells, kicking at the jock still screaming on the ground.

“You ready to find that room?” I ask Aurora.

“I was ready four hours ago,” she replies.

“Where’s your cousin?” I look around. I could have sworn Mabilia was here a few minutes ago.

“She left with Tommy.”

“Good. Let’s head back to the hotel. I’m going to make you scream my name tonight and I don’t want these horny fuckers to hear you. They’d be jerking off to the memory of your moans for the rest of their lives.”

“Is that what you do when I’m not around?” Aurora lifts a brow at me.

“Yup. You’re in the shower with me every morning.” I laugh.

Aurora looks back over a shoulder as we exit the house. “I like your friends,” she says. “You must miss being here.”

“I miss it less when I’m with you,” I admit. “I hated moving to New York, but then I met you, and suddenly I didn’t hate it as much anymore.”

Chapter Seventeen

“To the grave,” I whisper, joining pinkie fingers with Mabilia.

“To the grave,” she echoes.

We’re about to face the firing squad, so to speak. Both of our phones have been blowing up and we’ve been summoned home. Mabilia’s parents are at my house waiting for us. We had Tommy drop us off out front, because he does not need to be caught in the crossfire. We knew this would happen, and we did it anyway.

Worth it. I saw a totally different side of Connor last night.

He was in his element, in the city he considers home, surrounded by his friends. I’ve seen him hanging around with Kenny and Kenny’s friends, but I don’t think Connor has made an effort to really make any of his own. Well, besides me. Then again, I do tend to take up a lot of his time.

The minute I open the door, I hear the yelling. Mabilia and I share a look. Recognizing the voices immediately. Our fathers. It stops when we walk into the living room.

“Oh, thank god you’re home. Where have you been?” My mom wraps her arms around me tight. “Do not say anything smart-mouthed. Now is not the time.”

I nod slightly, acknowledging her warning.

“Where the fuck were you both?” This comes from my Zia Izzy. “Seriously, do you two have any idea what happens to young girls like you when you run off on your own?”

“Yeah, nothing because we’re not helpless, Mama. We can and will defend ourselves,” Mabilia says. “We just went to a party. It’s really not a big deal, and we kept the rule of two.”

“Just went to a party? You hear that, Mikhail? Our daughters just went to a party?” My dad paces up and down the living room, while my uncle stands perfectly still with his hands in his pockets.

“Whose party?” Zio Mikhail asks.

“I don’t remember. It was some random kid,” I tell him.

Page 45

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“A random kid? You ran off for an entire night, lied to us, for a random kid?” my dad questions, and suddenly I feel like I’m on the stand in his courtroom.

“It was stupid. We won’t do it again,” I huff. “It’s just... exams are coming up and we were both stressed and wanted to have fun.”

“Mabilia, you’re stressed about school?” My uncle turns to my cousin.

“A little,” she replies, going along with my lie.

“Homeschool can be arranged,” he reminds her.

“It’s not that bad, Papa. We just wanted to have fun,” Mabilia says.

“You know what else is fun? Being able to go to bed knowing where your children are,” Zio Izzy hisses.

“Okay, I think we all need to take a breath. The main thing is that the girls are safe. They’re home and nothing happened,” my mom, ever the voice of reason, tells everyone.

“Nothing happened, right?” Zio Mikhail asks, looking at me and then over to Mabilia.

“I might have stabbed a guy in the balls.” I lift a shoulder.

My dad’s lips tip up before he forces them to drop again. “What do you mean you may have stabbed a guy in the balls?”

“He said something crude to me, so I stabbed his balls,” I explain. “He’s not dead. He’ll be fine.”

“Who is he?” Papa asks.

“I don’t know. I didn’t stick around to ask his name.”

“Okay, Mabilia, we’re leaving. We will talk about this at home,” Zia Izzy says.

Once Mabilia and her parents are out the front door, my dad turns to me. “Really, Aurora, the balls?” He shakes his head.

“You didn’t hear what he said he wanted to do to me, Papa.”

“If I did, he’d be dead,” my dad grunts. “I swear to God I’ve aged fifty years over night.”

“And somehow you don’t look a day over thirty.” I give him my most innocent smile.

“Cute, but it’s not going to work this time. I’m taking your credit cards and car.”

“How will I get to school?” I ask him. “And what if I’m hungry or thirsty? How will I buy food?”

“Fucking hell.” My dad turns to my mom. “Savvy?”

“I think our daughter knows what she did was wrong and she’s not going to do it again,” she tells him.

“I won’t,” I agree, even though I probably will.

“No, you won’t, because I’m going to lock you away and throw away the fucking key!” my dad yells.

“Okay, Matteo, calm down. Aurora, go upstairs,” Mom intervenes. I give her a grateful look. My dad is overreacting. It was a party and I didn’t even kill anyone.

After showering and changing into a pair of tights and an oversized shirt, I plop down on my bed and pick up my phone. There’s a missed message from Connor.

Charming:

You still alive?

Me:

Page 46

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

You worried about me, Charming?

Charming:

Not so much you. You're a survivor. I'd be more concerned about whomever you're up against. Seriously, though, how bad was it?

Me:

My mom is calming down the situation. And by situation, I mean my father.

Charming:

Is he going to let you see the light of day again?

Me:

I'd like to see him try to stop me.

I add a laughing emoji to my message.

Charming:

Patty told me I should marry you. His exact words were: wife that girl up.

Marry me? He can't be serious. He's joking. I think. My heart starts to speed up.

Me:

I'm not wife material. I don't like being kept or told what to do.

Charming:

That's what I like most about you.

There's a knock on the door, and I drop my phone as my mom walks in. "Hey, how is he?" I ask, seeing as I left her to deal with the mess I made with my dad.

"He'll survive," she says, rolling her eyes. "But you really need to not do this again, Aurora."

"I know," I tell her.

"There is so much in life I want you to experience, enjoy. And you can't do that if your father locks you away, which he will," she says, sitting down on the edge of my bed.

"I know," I repeat.

"Whoever he is, I really hope he's worth the trouble."

"I think I might be in love." I sigh. "I mean, I don't know. It's stupid." I have no idea what it feels like to be in love, but I do know I like Connor a lot. I mean, there's not really much not to like about him, once you get past the whole Irish thing. I'd be lying if I said his accent wasn't a turn-on, though.

Also, he's just as unhinged as I am. Okay, maybe not. But he's not afraid to fight and he doesn't back down. What he did at the gas station, how he handled that whole

situation, that was fucking hot.

“It’s not stupid, baby, but you need to be careful. And make sure he really is the one before you take on that fight with your father and uncles,” she says. “And brothers.”

“Well, Lorenzo is on the other side of the world. He doesn’t get a say.” I smirk, finally finding a positive outlook on my brother moving to Australia.

“Don’t underestimate what your brother would do for you, Aurora. If you think an ocean would stop him, think again, sweetheart,” Mom says.

“Maybe I’ll just do what you and Papa did, and run off to Vegas and get hitched. Then it’ll be too late. They’ll just have to accept it,” I joke.

“Don’t you dare do that to me, Aurora Valentino. Promise me right now that you will not get married without me there. I’ve had one kid do that, and you’re my only daughter. I need to be there for all of it. And as much as he might be a grouch about it, it will break your father’s heart if he doesn’t get to walk you down the aisle. Promise me you won’t do that to us.” Mom sounds genuinely stressed.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I hold out my pinkie finger. “I promise,” I tell her.

“Thank you. And don’t go MIA again,” she adds before pushing up from the bed.

“I love you, Mom.”

“Love you too, sweetheart. Just try to stay out of trouble,” she says.

“Always.” I smile. We both know I won’t.

I’m about to pick up my phone and check if I have any more messages from Connor when my door opens again. This time, my dad walks in.

“You doing okay?” he asks.

“I am. Are you?”

“I’d be better if you didn’t make me worry about you every second you’re out of my sight.”

“You taught me everything I know so you didn’t have to worry, remember?”

“I taught you too well. You can’t go around stabbing guys in the balls, Aurora,” he says.

“Why not?”

“Because you just can’t. What if he hit back? What if he had a knife too?”

“I’d still come out on top. Don’t worry, Papa, I will always come out on top.”

“That’s what everyone says before they end up at the bottom of a hole, Aurora. You need to be more careful.”

“Okay. I will.” I nod my head. I have no idea what to say to my dad to put his mind at ease right now. So I climb up on my knees and wrap my arms around his neck. “I’m really lucky you’re my dad.”

“You are,” he agrees.

“And I’m sorry I made you worry. But I really did just want to have fun. We’re teenagers. You can’t tell me you didn’t go to parties as a teenager.”

“I...” He starts and then stops. “I get it. I do. And I’m not trying to suffocate you, princess. I’m just trying to keep you in one piece.”

I lower my arms and rest my back against my headboard. “I know.”

“You are my greatest achievement, Aurora. I am so fucking proud of you.”

“Even if I’m stabbing jerks in the balls?” I ask.

“Especially when your stabbing jerks in the balls. But don’t do that again.” He points a finger at me.

“Got it.” I really don’t, but I’ll pretend I do. “You know, one day soon, Lorenzo and Kyla will give you a grandchild to worryabout and you won’t need to spend all your time worrying about me.”

“A grandchild?” My father shakes his head. “No, nope, I’m too young for that, and I will worry about you until I take my last breath.”

“Thank you. I love you, Papa.”

“Love you too, sweetheart.” He turns to leave. “No more parties with Mabilia, though.”

“Why not?”

“Because you two together are bad news. Take Dante... or Orlando.”

“You do know Orlando spends all night chasing girls and Dante is Josie-obsessed. They’re literally the world’s worst chaperones. But sure, I’ll go to parties with those two from now on.”

Page 48

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Take your brother,” Papa says, changing his mind.

“Oh, college parties, even better.” I laugh.

“No parties,” he says firmly before walking out of the room.

I finally pick up my phone and read the missed messages from Connor.

Charming:

Breakfast in the library tomorrow?

Charming:

I’ll bring actual food.

Charming:

Or not?

Charming:

...

Me:

Sorry. My parents were talking to me. I’ll be there.

Charming:

You in trouble again already?

Me:

No, I'm the favorite child. I did have to promise my mom I wouldn't ever run off to Vegas and get married, though.

Charming:

Damn, there goes my plans for next weekend.

I stare at the message. He's joking again. I know that. But why is my heart racing so damn fast?

Me:

Funny you'd think I'd marry you.

Charming:

You will one day.

A stupid smile forms on my face and I toss my phone aside. Nope, I am not getting love-drugged. I'm not falling down that rabbit hole.

Chapter Eighteen

I walk downstairs and into the kitchen, where my dad is sitting with his second. My uncle, also Kenny's father. You know when you enter a room and the chatter

suddenly stops. Yeah, well, that just happened.

“What’s the crack?” I ask.

“Where have you been?” my father counters.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“School.” It’s five in the afternoon. Where does he think I’ve been? I’m still in the stupid fucking uniform.

“I need you to do a job tonight,” he tells me.

The arm I had reaching into the fridge for a bottle of Gatorade pauses. I haven’t been asked to do a job since we moved. Why now? “What is it?”

“We’re hitting the Italians tonight,” Dad says, and my blood goes cold.

“What do you mean by hitting? How?” I keep my face neutral. I always knew it was going to come down to choosing between her and my family. I just thought I’d have more time.

I also thought I’d be clear fucking headed when it came to my choice. The idea of going against my family has never crossed my mind before. I’ve only known Aurora for a few months. Am I really considering choosing her?

“We’re hitting their restaurants. Here’s a list. I want you to firebomb them all,” Dad says, handing me a piece of paper with five addresses on it.

“There’re gonna be people in these buildings, Da,” I tell him.

“Collateral damage,” he says. “You got a problem with the job, boy?”

“Nope.” I pocket the list. Because I’m not a fucking idiot. I know better than to question orders.

“Take Kenny with you,” my uncle adds. “He needs to start getting more involved in the family business.”

I’ve always envied how Kenny was able to stay out of the shit. I guess things are changing. I don’t think my cousin has the stomach for it, though.

“Sure.” I throw a mock salute in their direction and walk out without my fucking Gatorade. Although now I feel like I need something much stronger.

Fuck. How the fuck am I supposed to attack her family?

I dial Kenny as I jump into my car. “Hey, what’s up?” he answers.

“We have a job to do, from the boss. I’m picking you up. Where are you?”

The line goes silent for a moment. We both know what this means for him. He thought football would be his way out. I guess our fathers have other ideas. “Ah, home,” he finally answers. “What’s the job?”

“I’ll tell you when I get there.”

Thirty minutes later, I’m sitting in Kenny’s driveway and he’s staring at me. “Seriously? You’re going to do this?”

“We are doing this. We don’t have a choice,” I remind him.

“There’s always a choice. You know she’s going to hate you when she finds out.”

“She’s not going to find out,” I grunt.

“Yeah, keep telling yourself that.”

“Do you know what happened the first and last time I refused to do a job?” I ask my cousin, because he has no idea. The fact he thinks there’s a choice is a joke. I know I told Aurora something different but part of me knew it was a fantasy. As long as my da’s alive, I have to do what he says or someone else pays the price.

“No,” Kenny says. “But seriously, Connor, she’s gonna find out.”

“No, she’s not,” I tell him. “When I tried to refuse to do a job, my father made one of my friends do it. Then he shot the kid. Point blank, in front of me, because he wasn’t family. We don’t have a choice.” I’ve lived with Shaun’s death over my head since I was thirteen. He thought he was doing a favor for my dad, and he was happy to do it. And because of me, a kid is dead. I haven’t refused to do a job since.

“Okay, let’s do it.” Kenny nods.

I pull out my phone and check her location. It pings at her house, but I need to make sure she’s there with it. I also need to make sure she has no plans to go out tonight.

Me:

What are you up to tonight?

Page 50

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

SB:

Not much. You?

Me:

Staying in. You at home? Send me tit pics.

SB:

In your dreams. I'm not sending you pics.

Three seconds later, an image of Aurora's middle finger pops up on my screen. I scan the background. She's in her bedroom. Good.

Me:

Not tits but I'll take it. Talk later.

SB:

Okay.

The car rolls to a stop outside the first restaurant. "You ready?" I ask Kenny.

"Ready," he says, reaching into the gym bag at his feet. He pulls out two glass bottles filled with gasoline and two pre-soaked rags.

“You gotta be quick. They will come at you as soon as they see you,” I tell him.

“Got it,” he replies, and I watch as he gets out of the car. Leaving the passenger-side door open.

A brick goes through the glass window. He lights up the first rag, using the flame to light the second one, and the same arm that scored him the quarterback spot on the team sets the building ablaze. Kenny runs and dives into the car. The tires screech as I pull out into traffic.

“Fuck,” he says.

I look across at him. “You good?”

“Yeah,” he huffs.

“Don’t watch the news tomorrow,” I tell him. He doesn’t need to see the number of casualties.

Two hours later, I’m back home. I text Aurora, because I need to know that she’s okay. I need to make sure she doesn’t find out it was me who attacked her family’s business.

Me:

Wanna skip school tomorrow?

SB:

Sure. I’ll have to try to ditch the detail, though. Leave it to me.

Me:

What detail?

SB:

Someone attacked the family tonight. The oldies have tightened security.

Me:

Page 51

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

Who did it?

I know I'm a fucking ass. I should just leave her alone. I should break things off, because we're never going to be able to be together.

SB:

No idea, but they'll find out. They always do.

Me:

I'll meet you in the library. We'll go from there.

Guilt eats at my chest as I listen to Aurora talk about her family. She hasn't said much about the attacks, just that they existed. She's smart not to tell me anything I could take back to my dad.

I'm also not asking her questions. I don't want to know. All I want to do is forget what I did and move on. We're laid out on a picnic blanket under a huge-ass tree in the park. Aurora's head resting on my shoulder, my fingers mindlessly twirling in her hair.

"Do you think we're ever going to be more than a secret?" she says.

"Do you want to be more?"

"I don't know."

“I think we will be whatever we want to be. No one can stop us, Aurora. I won’t let them.” As I say the words, my parents’ faces pop into my head. I don’t know if I can stop them, but I will go down trying. I won’t let go of her, not until I’m dead.

“We can’t take on armies alone, Connor. That’s suicide.” She sighs.

“Maybe, but what’s worse? A lifetime watching each other from a distance? Getting married and having kids with other people? Building a life without each other?” I ask her. Because even though we’re young and I know it’s fast, I don’t want to see her with another fucking guy.

“I would rather watch you live a life without me than watch you die,” Aurora whispers.

“I’d rather die together,” I admit.

“Well, that’s... an idea.” She laughs.

“We could always just run away,” I suggest.

“I can’t leave my family, and you can’t leave yours. Besides, mine would find me for sure.” She sighs again. “My family isn’t bad, Connor. They aren’t bad people. I can’t break their hearts by doing something selfish.”

I close my eyes, realization hitting me hard. Aurora will never choose us over her family. She will never choose me. “Maybe we just keep being a secret for a bit longer, then. We don’t have to know all the answers right now.”

“Yeah,” she says, her voice soft.

I look up at the sky through the branches. I don’t know how I’m going to keep her. I

don't know what our future holds, but I do know I want her and I do know I don't want to lose her. I send a silent prayer to God. Maybe this is the punishment for my sins. Give me something so good and then take it away. Make me feel the kind of pain all the casualties and their loved ones have felt over the years.

With the shit my family does to make money, I wouldn't blame him. It disgusts me most days. But they are my family. I can't say they're good people, though, not like Aurora can. Because I'm not blind. I know what they are. They're monsters, just like me.

My arm wraps around her tighter, holding her closer to me. "We should go."

"I'm not ready."

Yeah, me either. Something in the pit of my stomach tells me that the other shoe is about to drop and neither of us is going to survive the fall.

My mind is whirling with scenarios, trying to come up with a game plan, and I keep coming up empty. I just don't see how it's possible. Our families are never going to let us be together. Honestly, I'm surprised we've lasted this long without being caught.

"Have you told your parents you're not planning on going to college?" I ask.

"No." Aurora snorts. "That's not an argument I'm looking forward to having."

"Do you really think they're going to force you? If you tell them you just aren't interested in academics, they'll understand, right?"

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Everyone in my family is great at their chosen career. It’s almost like I’m failing as a Valentino if I don’t figure out what I’m good at.”

“You’re good at plenty of things, Aurora. You just need to figure out what you want to do.”

“I’m good at the things I’m not supposed to do,” she says.

“Like stabbing innocent guys with pens?”

“You were putting your slimy fingers up my skirt, and you got off light. I could have just cut your whole hand off.”

“Every mob family needs a good enforcer. Just tell ‘em you’re their latest recruit.” I laugh.

“I wish.”

“I was joking. Find something else, babe. I don’t want you touching other dudes all day.”

“Even if it is draining them of their blood?”

“Ever thought about opening a café? A bookshop? You could go into modeling,” I suggest. “Scratch that. I don’t want people staring at you more than they already do.”

“Maybe I’ll just figure it out later. Today, I want to be an ordinary girl on a date with

an extremely hot guy she sorta likes,” Aurora says, sitting up on her elbows.

“You think I’m hot?” I run a hand down the front of my body.

Aurora rolls her eyes. “Don’t fish for compliments. It’s not very charming, Charming.”

Chapter Nineteen

Ever since we skipped school and went to the park two weeks ago, Connor has been different. It’s almost as if he’s distancing himself from me—although we spend just as much time sneaking around. I’m questioning whether it’s in my head. I’ve never been in any kind of relationship, and I’m not always known for being rational. And when it comes to Connor, I’m definitely not being rational.

He is filling my every thought to the point that I think I might be obsessed. If I’m not with him, or at least looking at him from across the hallway in school, I’m thinking about when I can see him next.

Everyone believes I’m taking senior year seriously with all the time I’m spending in the library. They don’t know that the only thing I’m studying in there is Connor’s body. In detail.

I know that this thing between us is going to end. I’m not an idiot. I get that there is no future for us. Our families will never allow us to be together, and I don’t think I’d ever go against my family. Not for something so selfish.

For now, though, I’m going to enjoy him for as long as I can. He woke me up, and I’m not ready to go back to sleep yet. I’ve tried. I’ve looked at other people, waiting to see if my body would respond the way it does to Connor. It doesn’t work.

He tells me that we will figure out a way to get through it together. And I tell him he's delusional and shouldn't live with his head in the clouds. But I so want to join him there.

Every girl wants the fairy tale, right? Their very own Prince Charming? Well, I found mine. He just comes with the wrong last name. It's easy to forget when I'm with him. It's usually when we part ways that I remember why we need to be a secret.

"Earth to Aurora, hello?" My cousin Tilly snaps her fingers in front of my face.

"What?" I ask, shaking thoughts of Connor out of my head.

"Who is he?" She narrows her glare at me.

"Who is who?" I look around the shop's interior.

"The boy on your mind." She points to my face. "I know that look. I see it in the mirror when I'm thinking about Antonio."

"Not all of us are stupidly in love, Tilly." I scowl and walk towards the back of the store. I can't tell her. She's the good girl in the family, the one who never breaks the rules. Well, that was until she met her fiancé, who also happens to be a Don.

When she called me to go shopping, I jumped at the chance for a distraction. Connor went back to Boston this weekend. He wanted me to go with him but I couldn't get away. Not with the extra security we all have on us at the moment.

Someone is attacking the family, and I'd be an idiot to put myself in a situation where I was vulnerable, and that's what I'd be if I went to Boston with him. There's also the fact I promised my mom I wouldn't disappear or do anything dangerous while the oldies deal with the threat.

They don't know who is targeting us, or at least they're not telling me. The adults tend to keep family business to themselves. Which means, unless it's something we have to know, we don't know shit.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

I wonder if Dante or Orlando have heard anything. They've been awfully close at school lately. I know they've been told to be. But honestly, if something were to happen, it'd probably be me either getting us into trouble or out of it. I'm good at both.

Picking up a dress, I turn to tell Tilly I'm going to try it on. Only to immediately drop the hanger. My feet are moving but I'm not fast enough. The sound of a gunshot deafens me. By the time I reach the guy holding the gun, I'm too late. He just shot my cousin.

My sweet, innocent, good cousin.

I reach under my skirt and take hold of my blade. I don't even think before my arm is lifting and my knife is slicing across his neck. I smile when I see the first drops of blood spill free. The gun in his hand clanks against the floor and his hand comes up to his throat. Dead eyes connect with mine.

Good, I'm going to be the last thing this motherfucker sees.

My foot kicks out at his stomach. He falls over and I jump on top of him, stabbing him over and over again until I hear her. Tilly making a whimpering sound.

I crawl off the asshole and over to my cousin. "It's okay. Tilly, keep your eyes open," I tell her, holding my bloodied hands over her open wound. "Someone call a fucking ambulance."

I look outside. Where is the security detail? We had one of our soldiers outside the

store and now he's gone. What the hell is happening?

When the paramedics arrive, I breathe a sigh of relief. She's going to be okay. I jump in the back of the ambulance with her. Both of the paramedics pale when I give them her name. Most people in this city know who my family is. Hopefully, it makes them work harder to save my cousin's life.

I've locked myself in my bathroom. To say my parents are distraught would be an understatement. My whole family is in shock over what happened today. Tilly woke up, though. She's going to be okay. Thank god. But the guy who shot her? He's never waking up. I made sure of that.

My parents keep looking at me, waiting for me to break down or do something. The thing is, I don't feel bad. I don't feel anything. Actually, that's a lie. I do feel something. It's just not something I can tell them. They wouldn't understand.

The room is filled with steam. I'm not even in the shower. I'm sitting on the tile floor because I just wanted ten minutes of peace. Ten minutes where I can just be me without being looked at like I'm a bomb about to explode.

I wish I knew what a normal person would do in this situation. Would they cry? Would they say they were sorry? Should I do that? Pretend that I'm remorseful? Maybe then they wouldn't look at me like I'm this monster.

I know they don't mean to look at me that way, and that I could just be reading more into it than what it is. I can't blame them. Their little girl is going around killing people. It's a lot for any parent to accept. Even mine.

There's a knock on my bathroom door. "Aurora?" my brother Enzo calls out from the other side.

Reaching up, I unlatch the lock and then the door opens. Enzo walks in, closing it behind him. He sits on the floor next to me.

“You doing okay?” he asks.

“Why are you here, Enzo?”

“Enjoying the steam room you have going on. You know, I bet if you asked Pops for a sauna, he’d put one in here for you. Probably save water,” my brother says, leaning over and nudging his shoulder with mine. “What’s on your mind?”

“You mean other than the fact that our cousin is lying in a hospital bed? Someone shot her, right in front of me, and I didn’t stop it,” I tell him.

“No one expects you to stop every bullet, Aurora.”

“I should have been closer to her. I walked to the back of the store. I should have stayed with her.”

“And then what? Have you both laid up in the hospital? It’s not your fault, Aurora.” Enzo wraps his arm around me, pulling me against him.

“I could have stopped it,” I whisper.

“Maybe. But we can’t live in a world of what ifs,” he tells me.

I get what he’s saying, but it also doesn’t change what I know to be true. I could have stopped it. I know I could have.

“I don’t want you to put this on yourself. You’re a seventeen-year-old girl, Aurora. You should be out having the time of your life. Not fighting for it.”

“Are you saying I should be out partying and meeting boys?” I smile up at my brother.

“Fuck no, but you should be having fun,” he grunts. “Just without the wholeboysthing.”

“Mmm, is that what you’re doing? Having fun? No girls?” I pinch his side, sitting up and forcing his arm to drop from my shoulders.

Page 54

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“There are no girls who matter,” he says. “Which is exactly why you need to stay away from boys. We’re not good people, Aurora.”

“Well, when you do find the one, she’s going to be lucky to have you.”

“I’ll be happy not finding the one,” he mumbles. “We could just live with Mom and Pops forever and continue to drive them crazy.”

“Do you think love conquers all?” I ask him.

“It could. I guess. I mean Lorenzo is still breathing against the odds. I really thought Kyla’s dad would have fed him to the pigs by now,” he says. Our older brother’s father-in-law is known for feeding his enemies to his pet pigs.

“It didn’t for Romeo and Juliet.” I sigh as Connor’s face flashes through my mind.

“That’s fiction. It’s not real life.”

“What if it were, though? Star-crossed lovers from warring families? Do you think they’d stand a chance?”

Enzo looks at me, like really peers deep into my eyes. I’ve said too much. He knows.

Shit! Abort! Abort! I don’t know how to backpedal so I freeze.

“Why are you asking me that, Aurora?” Enzo finally says after staring into my damn soul for what feels like forever.

“No reason. We’re reading the book in English class and I was curious.” I shrug. Good save.

Judging by the look on my brother’s face, he doesn’t believe me, though. “I think history would tell us that couples from warring families getting together never ends well,” he says.

“Yeah, you’re right.” I stand and wait for my brother to do the same. “Now, I really am getting in the shower, so you need to leave.”

“Do me a favor. If you start dating someone, let me know,” he says. “I don’t care who he is. I just need to know that he’s worthy of you.”

I nod my head in agreement, looking away because I don’t want to lie to him. There is no way in hell I’m sending a firing squad in Connor’s direction.

After showering, I towel dry my hair and walk out to my bedroom, freezing on the spot when I see someone sitting on my bed. Not just someone. But someone who really shouldn’t be in this house.

“Connor?” I look to my door. It’s closed.

“It’s locked,” he says.

“How? What? Wait... What happened? Are you okay?” All sorts of things go through my head. None of them good. Something happened to him. He needs to hide out. He needs help.

“I heard about your cousin. I came to see if you were okay,” he says.

He’s here for me? Why? I mean, coming into this house is like walking straight up to

the devil and signing over your soul. He's not getting out of here alive. Well, not easily anyway. And how the hell did he even get in?

Chapter Twenty

"How did you get in here? And are you suicidal? Seriously, Connor, they're going to kill you if they find you." Aurora walks over to the door, checking the lock that's already in place.

"Mabilia helped me," I tell her. "Come here." I hold out a hand and wait for her to walk towards me. "I had to check that you were okay."

"You couldn't have called?" she asks as she straddles my lap.

"I could, but it's not the same." My arms wrap around her waist, holding her body as close to mine as I can. "Are you okay?"

"Everyone keeps asking me that," she replies, burying her face into the crook of my neck.

"Well, I'm not everyone and I actually want to know," I tell her. "Are you?"

Aurora sits back. Her eyes connect with mine. "I'm... I think I'm broken."

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

My brows furrow. “What do you mean broken?”

“I mean, I’m okay. I shouldn’t be. I just killed someone, and I...” Her mouth clamps shut, cutting off her words.

“You what?” I pry.

“I liked it,” she whispers.

“You liked it?”

“I liked that I killed him, Connor. I know it’s not right. I should feel remorse or something. But I just don’t.” Aurora stands and starts pacing the room. “My family has always thought I was crazy—insane—and I’m starting to think they’re right.”

I push to my feet and walk over to her, stopping her movements. I take her hands in mine and squeeze. “You are not crazy, Aurora. You are not insane either. You’re just...you and there is absolutely fucking nothing wrong with you.”

She smiles a little. “You’re just saying that because you want to get into my panties.”

“I’m saying it because it’s the fucking truth. There isn’t a single thing about you that I don’t like. And who cares if you enjoyed killing the asshole who shot your cousin? You were protecting yourself, Aurora. There is nothing wrong with that,” I tell her. “And I’m fucking glad you did.” I lean in and press my lips against her forehead. “I was scared. When I heard what happened, I thought... Well, I don’t want to lose you. Also, it’s the first time you’ve killed someone. You could very well be in shock.”

Aurora drops my hands and looks away. “It’s not the first time.”

“It’s not? Okay, killing someone to protect yourself or your family still doesn’t make you a fucking serial killer. There is nothing wrong with you,” I assure her. “And I will keep saying it until you believe it because I can tell you don’t.”

“You don’t get it, Connor. I liked it,” she huffs.

“I heard you.”

“I liked seeing his blood spill onto my hands. I liked the fear I saw in his eyes and I liked when I felt his body go limp,” she explains. “I liked it all. I wanted to do it again.”

“Okay. You wanna go out now? I’m sure we can find some scumbags who deserve to die,” I offer her.

Aurora shakes her head. “Stop.”

“Stop what?”

“Stop pretending that it’s normal. It’s not,” she says.

“You’re right. It’s not normal. But it’s you. And I love you regardless of if you want to become New York’s next serial killer. I’ll even help you, if it makes you happy. But I love you no matter what.” My heart races. I haven’t said those words out loud before.

Neither of us moves. A tear falls down Aurora’s face. “You love me?” she whispers.

“I love you,” I repeat.

“Even though I’m crazy?”

“You are not crazy. But I’d love you even if you were,” I tell her.

“I love you too,” she says, and her voice shakes with emotion.

I take two steps, closing the space between us. “Good, because I wasn’t really going to give you any other choice.” My arms wrap around her waist, pulling her against me.

“What are we going to do?”

“About what?”

“Us?”

“We’re going to sleep on it,” I tell her.

“No, you can’t sleep here.” She shakes her head. “We need to figure out how to sneak you out without anyone seeing you. Or shooting you.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“I’ll be fine,” I tell her. “Come on, lie down with me for a little bit.” I take her hand as I lead her over to her bed. I’ve seen it in many video calls I’ve had with her, but never in my life did I think I’d be in her bedroom. I guess I am as insane as she thinks she is, because it really was suicidal to sneak up here. Alsoworth it.

Aurora lies down with me but her gaze keeps going to the door.

“It’s going to be fine,” I say.

“You don’t know that,” she replies.

“I promise I will not let myself get caught in here. Now, tell me about how we’re going to become the Bonnie and Clyde of serial killers together.”

Aurora’s hand comes up to slap at my chest. “Shut up. We are not. I’m not saying I want to go around killing people. I just don’t hate doing it.” She sighs. “Can I tell you something?”

“Anything.”

“I never felt before you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, I never felt attracted to anyone. I never felt this overwhelming need for anyone before I saw you,” she says. “And now you’re all I can think about and it’s suffocating. I feel like I can’t breathe when you’re not near me.”

“Well, if you ever need to breathe, come and find me. I’ll always be around for you,” I say. “No matter what happens, I will always be your oxygen.” And I mean that. I know the chances of us living a happily ever after are slim to none, but I will never turn my back on this girl. If she needs help, I’m going to help her.

“Promise?” She holds up her pinkie.

I mirror the gesture before I bring our joint fingers to my lips and kiss them. “Promise.”

Aurora fell asleep within fifteen minutes. I stayed in her bed, holding her for an hour. Just staring at her. She really is a true sleeping beauty, so fucking breathtaking. I was supposed to be distancing myself from her. Tonight, I did the opposite. I feel like I went all in. We both did.

It’s just going to hurt more when it all blows up in our faces. The thought of her hurting doesn’t sit well with me, and I just can’t figure out a way to make sure that doesn’t happen.

Kenny’s car stops in front of me. I called him to come and get me once I was clear of Aurora’s house. It wasn’t easy getting out unseen. Let’s just say I hope the blocker I put on the property’s CCTV worked. If not, I have no doubt her father will see I was there.

Again, if I get killed because I wanted to give my girlfriend a bit of comfort when she needed it, then so be it. I don’t regret it.

“Nice neighborhood,” Kenny says, giving me the side-eye as I climb into his passenger seat.

“It’s not bad.” I shrug.

“You know who lives just 'round the corner? Aurora Valentino, that little asylum escapee you're not supposed to be dating.” He laughs.

“Don't call her that,” I growl. “There is nothing wrong with her.” I know she plays into the whole insane vibe, but after tonight, I also know it fucking bothers her that people believe it.

“Jeez, relax. I was joking,” Kenny says. “Mostly. But seriously, you can't tell me she's not a little unhinged.”

“She's not unhinged,” I reply. “She's just... misunderstood.”

“Fuck, you've got it bad.” Kenny shakes his head. “Where am I taking you?”

I think about it for a minute. I don't want to go home and deal with my parents right now. “Cabin.”

“Party?”

“On a Sunday?” I raise a brow at him.

“Why not?” Kenny picks up his phone and dials a number. I tune him out as he starts ordering his friends around.

You know those moments where you have hindsight? I'm having one of those right now as I watch drunken teenagers fall over each other, grind together half naked, or puke their guts up because they can't handle their alcohol. I should have told Kennynoto his party idea.

At the time, I thought it'd be a good distraction, something to take my mind off the girl I left sleeping in her bed. The one I just gave my heart to on a silver fucking

platter. She's probably going to be the one to crush it too, and knowing Aurora, she'll do it with her bare hands.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:47 am

“Hey, I haven’t seen you around much.” Melissa, the same girl Aurora put in the hospital for talking to me, drops down beside me on the sofa.

“And you’re not seeing me now, for your own good. Go away,” I tell her.

“Are you with Aurora? Because that’s fucked up. You know she’s a psychopath, right?” Melissa says.

“Who?” It takes everything in me not to retaliate. I get it. My girl can be spontaneous, but she’s not a fucking psychopath. She does have feelings. For me, at least.

“Aurora Valentino. If you’re not dating her, then you should let her know that.” Melissa laughs.

I stand and shake my head. “For someone who got the shit kicked out of them, you sure are brave, opening your mouth about her.”

“She’s not here.” Melissa shrugs.

“If you think that’ll stop her from finding out, then you’re the one who needs your head checked.” Putting my empty beer bottle down on the table, I walk away before I say anything else. I head upstairs and lock myself away in the bedroom. I pull out my phone and smile when I see a message from Aurora.

SB:

Are you still alive?

Me:

I am. You disappointed?

SB:

Relieved.

SB:

Thank you for coming over. But don't do it again.

Me:

What if I told you I have fantasies of fucking you in your bed?

SB:

Screw it. You only live once. Risk your life for me, Charming.

I laugh out loud and plop down on the bed.

Me:

See you in the morning. Breakfast in the library?

SB:

I'll be there.

I set my phone on the wireless charger that's sitting on the bedside table before

rolling onto my back and staring up at the ceiling. My mind goes over all the different ways of making sure Aurora can stay mine. Of making sure my family doesn't use her against me, because that's exactly what they'll do if they find out I love her.

They'll see me as a traitor, and to teach me a lesson, they'll kill her and make me watch. Or it'll be worse than that. They'll torture her instead. They could make her disappear, ensure I'd never find her again. Or that if I did, she wouldn't be the same girl.

Aurora is strong. She's a fighter, and as much as I want to think she can handle anything that comes at her, she's still just a teenage girl. And everyone has a breaking point. Even her. The only way I can think of to keep her is to marry her. And for that, we'll have to wait until we're both eighteen, which is only a few months away.

Then I'll need to convince her to go against her promise to her mother and marry me without anyone knowing...

I shake my head. I can't do that to her. I can't make her go against her family.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

Maybe we just need to accept that this is temporary. It'll last a lifetime, the love I have for this girl. But actually having her? It's not going to be forever.

Chapter Twenty-One

Connor's dick plunges forward, filling me completely. I bite down on my bottom lip, trying to stop myself from screaming and letting the entire school know what's going on in this study room.

"Fuck me," Connor hisses from where he has me bent over the desk.

"Pretty sure you're the one doing the fucking." I smile at him from over a shoulder.

His hand lifts before it comes down and slaps my right ass cheek. "You need to come. I want to feel your cunt convulsing around my dick, Aurora."

"Make me then." We both know I don't take orders well. If there is anything I don't like, it's being told what to do. Even in this scenario.

Connor chuckles. "You want me to make you come? You want me to make your body explode with pleasure?" he asks, slowing his pace. His cock pumps in and out of me. I feel every inch of him.

"I want you to make me see stars, Connor."

One of his hands reaches under me. His fingers press against my clit, rubbing small circles. Bolts of pleasure run through my entire body. Connor's thrusts pick up speed

again, and the sound of our skin slapping together fills my ears. I don't know how we haven't been caught yet, considering how often we're in here.

"Come, Aurora. Fucking give me what I want," he grits out.

"Don't you dare come before me," I warn him.

"Never," he says, pumping harder. I should know he has never let himself come before I do. I don't know how he manages to do it, because I've actually tried numerous times to make him lose that last shred of control he has.

Connor's other hand wraps around my ponytail. My neck bends backwards. "Fuck," I groan as I let go. I can't hold back anymore. I come, my pussy convulsing around him, just like he wanted.

"Yes, you feel so fucking good." Connor thrusts into me one more time before his body stills behind me. After a few seconds, he pulls out and flips me over and his lips slam onto mine. "I fucking love you," he tells me.

"I love you. Probably too much."

"Good. Because I love you more than anything." He stands and holds out a hand. I take it and slide off the desk.

Then he bends over and picks up my panties before passing them to me. He doesn't destroy them anymore. The thought of me walking around without anything underneath my skirt drives him insane.

Once I'm completely dressed, I pull the scrunchie from my hair, running my fingers through the ends before tying it back up. Connor is leaning against the wall, staring at me, his legs crossed at the ankles.

“What?” I ask him.

“You really are beautiful,” he says. “Hold still.” He takes his phone from his pocket, holds it up, and snaps a picture of me.

“If anyone sees that on your phone, we’re both dead,” I remind him.

“Worth it.” He smirks.

I pick up my bag and grab the breakfast wraps and two bottles of orange juice I brought with me. “Eat. You’re going to need your energy later,” I say as I pass him one of each.

“You made me breakfast? I never pictured you for being domesticated, mo mhuirnín,” he replies, unwrapping the paper.

“First, I’ve told you before... I’m not your sweetheart, and I’m also not domesticated. I stopped at the store and picked these up.”

“Thank you. And you’re wrong.”

“About what?” I ask before biting into my breakfast.

“You are my sweetheart, and I don’t care if you say or think otherwise. You can’t change my mind.”

I smile, bigger than I should because the thought of being Connor’s sweetheart is... Well, it makes those pesty butterflies swarm in my stomach. “You know, I don’t hate being yours.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“Thanks for breakfast. See you in math. Also, I’ve made plans for us after school.” Connor leans in and kisses me one more time before walking out of the study room.

I’ve never loved math class more than I do right now. I just have to get through two other periods first.

Walking through the hall, I head straight for my locker. I make sure to put an extra sway in my hips when I see Connor across the hall with Kenny. His eyes roam up the length of my body. Even after just being with him in the library, I want him again. It’s a hunger I’ve never felt before and one I want to feed. Constantly.

“You look flushed. Are you feeling okay?” Mabilia is waiting at my locker.

“Uh-huh, fine,” I tell her, punching in my pin and opening the metal door.

“Sure you are. You might want to tell that Irishman to stop eye-fucking you. It’s obvious,” she says.

“He has a name,” I grunt.

“Yep, but I like Irishman better,” she says, snapping her P.

“Whatever. I’ve got to get to class. I need you to cover for me this afternoon. I have to disappear for a few hours.”

“Fine. We can be each other’s alibis. I have plans too.” She raises her eyebrows up and down.

My nose scrunches up. “Gross.” With that, I slam my locker closed and walk away.

I have no idea what kind of plans Connor made. He just said after school. Now, I’m waiting for him in the room in the library, but he’s not here. I keep checking my phone, and still nothing.

I’m tempted to call him, to find out what’s keeping him, but that would be needy, right? Just as I’m about to cave, a text pops up on my screen.

Charming:

Room 69, Four Seasons Midtown. There’s a key for you at reception under the name Briar Rose. There’s an ID card in your locker to match the name.

I roll my eyes at the alias he gave me. Really? That’s original.

Me:

A hotel room? And you couldn’t think of a better name?

Charming:

Are you coming or not? And I happen to love Sleeping Beauty.

My stomach does that swarming thing again as I type out a reply.

Me:

See you soon.

I tap the card against the keypad, and the little screen lights up green before I push

inside the room and let the door close behind me. I don't know what I was expecting, but this wasn't it. The entryway is lit up with candles all over the floor, and a path of rose pedals leads me past the living area and into the bedroom of the suite where Connor is sitting on the bed.

More candles are randomly placed around the room. And flowers too. So many flowers are scattered everywhere. "You did all this?"

"I skipped last period," Connor says with a nervous smile.

"Why?" I ask, dropping my bag to the floor.

He hands me a flute of champagne. "Because I want as many memories with you as possible, and I don't want them to all be over the table of a study room. You deserve better than that."

"Thank you. This is... incredible." I bring the champagne to my lips, and the sweet bubbles float over my tongue.

"You are incredible." Connor reaches for me, pulling me down on top of him so I'm straddling his waist. The champagne spills all over the front of my blouse in the process.

Page 60

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“Well, you have me for a few hours, Mr. O’Malley. What do you plan to do with me?” I toss my now-empty glass to the floor.

“First, I’m going to lick every drop of this thousand-dollar bottle from your chest. Then I’m going to lick every single inch of your body.” His tongue runs along my cleavage.

“Mmm, I think I like those plans,” I tell him, watching as he unbuttons my blouse. I’m going to have to trash it. That champagne is not coming out. Thankfully, I won’t be needing this uniform for much longer anyway.

“Fucking perfection,” Connor groans, his hand cupping my breast while his tongue continues to lap the spilled champagne from my skin.

Chapter Twenty-Two

People say that the high school years are the best of your life. As the ticking time bomb of graduation approaches, I’m starting to think they might be right. I know that once this year is over, whatever Aurora and I have won’t be the same.

It’s easy to sneak around here without getting caught. She doesn’t intend to go to college; otherwise, I’d be following her there. I got accepted to Harvard. It was always my number one choice, and I got in on my own merit, not because my father paid them off.

He didn’t know I’d applied until I presented the acceptance letter I received last week. I haven’t told Aurora yet. How do you break it to the girl you love that you’re

going to be leaving? I know she can't come with me. I'd take her. I'd support her if that's what she wanted to do.

In our worlds, you don't always get to do what you want, though. And even if she wanted to, she can't leave her family. The fact I have to let go of one dream to have another is pissing me off. I want it all. I want everything. But more than I want Aurora for myself, I want her alive.

I want her to live a full life. I want her to be safe. For that to happen, I have to leave her behind. I just don't know how I'm going to tell her. Or even if I should. It might be better for both of us if I just disappear. She'll be able to move on. She's fucking gorgeous. It's not like she'll be alone for long. I see how all these fuckers look at her. And I'm sure if they weren't so fucking chicken shit, they'd have made a move by now.

I'm certainly not complaining that I found her untouched. I love knowing I'm the only guy who's ever seen her come. I'm the only guy who knows what she feels like. I plan to keep it that way.

There's also the whole thing of me getting accepted into such a prestigious school. Aurora is very self-conscious about her academic ability. Personally, I think she's a lot brighter than she lets herself believe. But how can I bring up Harvard when she'd never be able to attend an Ivy League? Well, not without paying her way in. I don't want to make her doubt herself or let her think she is less-than.

She's not. Aurora is the single most perfect thing I've ever touched. If I could get her to see herself how I see her, she'd never have a single doubt again.

Kenny plops himself down next to me. "You're actually gracing us with your presence for lunch today? What happened? Your date stand you up?" he says.

“Fuck off,” I grunt at him. Aurora didn’t stand me up. She said we need to eat lunch with other people occasionally to keep up appearances. I told her fuck appearances and that the only one I cared about was hers. Naked.

“Wow, the honeymoon period over already.” Kenny laughs.

“You done?” I ask him.

“Yep,” he says, filling his mouth with a forkful of today’s pasta. “Party tomorrow night. You’re coming.”

“Am I?” I raise a brow. I’d much rather say I was there and go hide out with Aurora. We only have a few months left of school. I want to spend as much time with her as possible. Not around Kenny and his jock friends.

My phone vibrates against my leg. Hoping it’s Aurora and she’s changed her mind about meeting up with me in the library, I pull it out of my pocket and smile when I see her name.

SB:

You should eat.

I look up and across at the Valentino table. Sure enough, she’s staring back at me. I return my focus to my phone and type out a reply.

Me:

Are you stalking me now?

SB:

I'll be stalking you forever.

Me:

Forever is a long time.

SB:

Page 61

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

It's not long enough...

I smile. It really isn't.

"Guess the honeymoon is back on, judging by that grin." Kenny nudges my shoulder.

"Fuck off," I tell him again.

Me:

Regret not eating with me?

SB:

I regret not letting you eat me for lunch.

Fucking hell, now I'm sitting next to my damn cousin with a hard-on.

Me:

See you in math.

Standing from the table, I pick up my bag and walk out of the cafeteria. I can't sit here while she's just across the room and not storm over to her. I want to grab hold of her, kiss the fuck out of her, and let everyone know that she's fucking mine.

That would be suicide, though. For both of us. And as romantic as Romeo and

Juliet made it seem, dying together isn't how I want our story to end.

A short walk later, I find myself on the bleachers, looking out over the football field. I've never really liked the sport. Sure, I've watched the games, mostly because it's less painful than listening to Kenny bitch about the lack of family support.

"Didn't take you for a stoner, O'Malley." The voice belonging to Orlando Valentino has me turning my attention from the field to the side of the bleachers, where he's standing and looking at me.

"Didn't take you for someone who'd care about what I'm doing, Valentino," I counter. How the fuck someone as perfect as Aurora comes from a bunch of assholes astounds me.

"I couldn't give a fuck what you're doing. As long as you're doing it far away from my family," he says.

I want to jump down and knock the smile off his face. I can see it. His blood spilling, his body on the ground, my fist the cause. I can't do that, though. Because of her. Aurora would never forgive me. And beating the shit out of her cousin isn't something I can hide from her like the restaurant fires.

Instead of doing what I want, I walk down the stairs, turning in the opposite direction of Orlando when I get to the bottom.

"You really just gonna walk away?" he calls after me.

"Yeah, I am. You can go write a song about it, rockstar," I call back. Orlando is a teen pop sensation. Helps that he has the family money and connections to back him. But he is every bit the rockstar he wants to be.

Thankfully, the asshole doesn't follow me.

When I walk into math, Aurora is already there. She smiles at me and I swear everything feels right. "Where did you go?" she asks.

"Outside. I didn't want to sit next to my cousin with a hard-on." I smirk.

"Huh, guess that could be awkward." She laughs. "So, is it still hard?"

"I'm looking at you. So that would be a yes."

"Mmm, too bad we're in math. I would totally ease that problem for you if we weren't."

"Wanna skip?" I ask her.

"Tempting, but I think I'll stick around here," she says, opening her textbook.

"Fine. But just know I'd much prefer to do my math on your naked body," I hiss out.

Page 62

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

The teacher starts passing out sheets of paper. “Pop quiz,” he says as he slams a worksheet onto our desks.

“Fun.” I smirk at him, pissing him off. This teacher hates me for effortlessly completing every problem he gives the class.

“Shit.” Aurora sighs, her fingers twirling a pencil through them as if she’s holding a knife. Then again, she did stab me with a pen once. I wouldn’t put it past her to use a pencil the same way.

“It’s okay,” I tell her.

“I know it’s okay.”

“No talking,” Mr. Asshat shouts in our direction. “Time starts now.”

I want to offer Aurora some words of encouragement. I can see her sitting there attempting to calculate the problems. I get through them as quick as I can; then I reach over, take her sheet from her and replace it with the one I just finished.

Returning her glare with a wink, I complete the problems again, the fingers of my left hand skirting up the inside of her thigh and under the hem of her skirt. I will miss this school uniform. Something I never thought I’d admit.

“Connor, stop,” Aurora hisses under her breath.

“You don’t want me to stop,” I tell her. “Just let me help you relax.”

Before I know it, something sharp is pressing against my dick. I glance down and see a tiny blade. Where the fuck did she even get that from? “You’re not going to cut my dick. You like it too much,” I say with more confidence than I feel.

The thing about dating someone like Aurora is that anything is possible. You should never underestimate her.

“I don’t know. My dildo did a mighty fine job last night. I don’t think I need your dick anymore.”

I look at her. Horrified. Not because she’s holding a knife to my dick, but because she used a dildo in place of me. “Why do I feel cheated on?” I ask her. “That’s... We’re exclusive.”

“It’s a toy, not a person. It doesn’t count.”

“If it pleases you, enters you, it counts,” I tell her, my fingers riding higher before slipping underneath the fabric of her panties.

“You’re insane,” she says.

“But you love me that way.” I push inside her. Aurora opens her legs wider.

Shifting my body to shield hers from the rest of the class, I slowly move my fingers in and out. A blush forms on her chest, creeping its way up her neck and then her cheeks.

“I love this look on you,” I tell her.

“Connor,” Aurora seethes. The tip of her blade presses against me harder. I should stop. Heed her warning. Because, let’s be honest, no one wants their fucking dick cut.

Do I do that smart thing, though? No, because I can feel her wetness coating my hand, and I want more. I want to feel her cunt pulsing around me. I want to give her the release she desperately needs right now. Relieve her stress.

“Mind moving that blade, babe?” I ask her.

“Mind moving your fingers?” she replies.

My lips tilt up as I pump my hand faster. “Not at all. Anything you ask, I’ll give you.”

Aurora drops the blade. It lands on my chair between my thighs. Her hand grips my arm, her nails digging in. I wouldn’t be surprised if they break skin. Not that I care. Nothing is going to stop me from feeling her come on my hand right now.

Looking across at her, I can see that she’s close. I can feel that she’s close. “Please,” I whisper. “I need it just as much as you do.”

I can’t explain it, but seeing her come, feeling her come... it’s euphoric. It’s up there with experiencing my own orgasm.

She comes. Her thighs squeeze together and her back goes rigid. Her teeth biting down into her bottom lip. Fuck, I want to kiss those lips. Once she stills, I remove my fingers from her and suck them into my mouth. My eyes close as the taste of her hits my tongue.

“You’re perverted,” Aurora whispers, straightening herself in her seat.

Page 63

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“Only when it comes to you.”

“Good, because I will cut a bitch.” She smirks, as if her words are a joke. We both know full well they’re not.

“I’m aware,” I tell her. “FYI, if I get killed sneaking into your bedroom tonight, make sure I’m buried back in Boston.”

“You’re not breaking into my bedroom,” she huffs.

“I am. I have a dildo to destroy.”

“You can’t seriously be jealous of a vibrator.” She laughs.

“Miss Valentino, Mr. O’Malley, papers now, and then you can both go and see the principal,” the teacher calls out.

Aurora laughs. “Okay. Are we in middle school?”

“You’re acting like it, so yes,” he fires back.

I remembered her mentioning how much she wanted to rip this fucker’s tongue out. Now I wonder if she’d hold him down while I do it for her.

Chapter Twenty-Three

My hands run down the sides of my body, over my hips. I’m wearing a pair of black

leather shorts with a see-through corset top that laces up at my back. Paired with my favorite red-bottomed pumps. My hair hangs in loose curls down my back and my lips are painted the brightest of reds.

“Your father is never letting you out of the house dressed like that,” Mabilia says from where she’s perched on my bed.

“Which is why he won’t know I’m wearing this,” I tell her, picking up a long black dress and sliding it over my head. “This isn’t my first rodeo, coz.”

“Oh, I’m aware,” she says. “At least tonight you won’t be crawling into my bed smelling like sex.”

“Nope, I plan on staying the night with Charming,” I say. I’m careful never to utter Connor’s name in this house. You can’t be too safe.

“Sure, well, I’ll be at Tommy’s if you need me,” she says.

“All I need is for you to be my alibi. If anyone asks, I’m having dinner with you guys.”

“You know Dante and Orlando will more than likely be at that party.”

“Dante will be too busy with Josie to notice me. And Orlando, well, I’m sure he’ll be otherwise occupied too.”

“Yeah, keep telling yourself that.” Mabilia shakes her head. “Okay, you ready?”

“How do I look?” I ask her.

“Like a nun.” She grins. “Your Papa will approve.”

We both laugh as we make our way downstairs. “You know, if your boyfriend’s cooking kills me, I’m going to haunt you until your dying day,” I tell Mabilia when we hit the landing.

“Girls, where are you two off to?” Enzo walks through the front door, standing in the entryway and blocking our exit.

“Tommy is cooking us dinner,” Mabilia says with pride.

“He still alive? Thought the Pakhan would have put an end to him by now.” My brother flicks an invisible piece of fluff from his coat.

“Don’t be an ass. It doesn’t suit you,” I tell him.

“If the girls in this family had better taste in men, I wouldn’t have to be an ass,” he replies.

“Really, and who would be a better option?” I ask him.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“Girls, females. If you want to date, find a girl. Way better than any scumbag.” He smirks.

“Aw, well, if and when I find someone worth dating, I will make sure you never find out.” Pushing up on my tiptoes, I kiss my brother’s cheek. “See you later. Don’t wait up,” I tell him. “Oh, and try to get a life sometime between now and tomorrow. It’s sad how much you’re all up in ours.” I shove him out of the doorway.

“Aurora, if you ever start dating, do me a favor and don’t fall in love,” Enzo says.

“Why?”

“Because I’d hate to be the reason your heart gets broken when I tear the head off the fucker dumb enough to touch you.” He smiles as if he’s picturing doing just that.

“Yeah, guess I’ll have fun cutting the heart out of whatever poor woman ends up falling for your... lack of charm.”

“What the hell are you arguing about now?” My father’s voice booms down the hallway as he approaches us.

“Nothing, Papa. Enzo was just telling Mabilia and me how much he wants us to be lesbians.” I smirk.

“What the fuck? Nuns, you both can become nuns,” my dad says.

“Yeah, too late for that,” Mabilia mutters, shaking her head.

“For you, maybe. Not for my princess. Right, Aurora?” Papa looks right at me.

I swallow. “Of course, Papa. We gotta run. Tommy is cooking us dinner.” Taking hold of Mabilia’s hand, I drag her out the front door before closing it behind us. Then I turn my glare on her. “What the hell was that?”

“What was what?”

“You basically just told my father I wasn’t a virgin.”

“You’re not,” she says like she doesn’t see the problem. “Besides, you’re the one who told him your hymen wasn’t intact, remember?”

“That was different. It was coming from me, and he doesn’t take what I say seriously half the time. When it comes from someone else, it’s more believable.”

She shrugs. “I still don’t see the big deal.”

“Oh, okay, let me call Zio Mikhail and let him know what you’re up to tonight, then.” I dig my phone out of my clutch.

“Okay, stop. I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking. Besides, your father is blind when it comes to you. No way is he going to think you’re not his innocent little princess.” She laughs.

“It’s not that I care if he knows I had sex. It’s the questions that will come with it. Like the whotype of questions.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t date the enemy then,” she tells me.

Have I mentioned how much I hate parties? I’ve messaged Connor five times to find

out where he is, and he hasn't responded yet. So here I am, making my way through the crowds, looking for him.

I don't even see his cousin, and Kenny is usually one of the loudest people at these parties. I can't exactly ask anyone if they've seen either of them because I'm not supposed to be looking for them. It'd help if Connor would answer my damn texts.

"Hey, you look like you could use a drink," Krystal says, handing me a red Solo cup.

"Hey." I take the cup but don't drink from it, because I'm not a fucking idiot. "I didn't know you would be here?"

My and Krystal's friendship has been strained ever since I poisoned her at lunch a few months back. She deserved it, though. I don't remember what she said to Dante, but she wasn't nice. And nobody is an ass to my family.

"Yeah, well, here I am." She smiles. "Why are you here? You hate these things."

"Change of scenery." I shrug. "Thanks for the drink. I need to go find my cousin," I lie before walking off.

I don't see Connor anywhere, so I head upstairs. I might as well secure a room, because as soon as he does make an appearance, we're going to need one. When I find an empty bedroom, I walk over and close the door behind me. Sitting on the bed as I mindlessly sip at the liquid in the cup I'm holding. Beer. Gross. Even though I know I shouldn't, I scull the contents and pull out my phone.

Me:

Page 65

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

Where are you? Let me know when you get here, or just come find me. Upstairs, third door on your right.

He still doesn't message me back. I push up from the bed and start pacing. I have no idea how much time has passed but the room starts spinning. My vision blurs and my mind races with all sorts of images of Connor.

His lifeless body. Covered in blood on the floor...

Oh my god! What if he's not here because he's dead? Fuck. I need to find him.

I go to walk out the door but the floor spins and I end up on the ground. My hands move to my head and grab at my hair. Something isn't right. Something is wrong. I can hear screaming. And then I hear someone calling my name.

"Aurora, what's wrong?" A hand reaches out and touches my shoulder.

Oh god, they've killed Connor and now they're coming for me.

I should let them. If Connor's gone, I don't want to be here anyway. I need to let them kill me. I want to let them kill me, but then my fight instinct kicks in. And I don't know I'm doing it until it's too late. My hand is holding a knife to his neck and then I'm slicing. I shove at the figure in front of me and he falls to the floor. Dead eyes stare up at me.

Oh god, what have I done?

“Fuck.” My hands pull at my hair again. I scoot away until my back hits the wall. I find my phone. I can’t call Connor.

I dial Dante. “Hey what’s up?” he answers.

“Dante... I...” I sob. My vision is still blurred. I don’t know what I did. Why would I do this? What is happening?

“Where are you?” he asks.

“Party,” I tell him.

“Aurora, where?”

“Upstairs.” The phone drops to the floor, my eyes on the figure that fills the doorway. Connor.

He’s not dead. He’s here.

Rushing in, he falls to his knees in front of me. He takes my hands in his and inspects every part of my body. “What happened?”

“I don’t know... He grabbed me... I don’t know,” I repeat.

“You...” Connor looks at his cousin’s lifeless corpse. “Fuck.” He moves over to Kenny. “You did this?”

I nod my head, and the whole room spins. “Something is wrong,” I say, my voice hoarse.

“No shit. You just fucking killed my cousin, Aurora. What the fuck were you

thinking?” Connor yells.

I cover my ears with my hands. “I didn’t know,” I tell him. “I don’t know what’s happening.”

“You didn’t know.” Connor looks at me in a way he’s never looked at me before. “You didn’t know?” he repeats. “You fucking like this shit!”

“No.” I shake my head. I didn’t like this. “No.”

“Liar.” He stands and takes two steps back over to me. “You like killing. You told me, remember?”

“No, I love you. I wouldn’t do this to you.”

“This isn’t love, Aurora. You just killed my family,” he says. “My blood.” His lips tilt in disdain, his eyes empty. “Your crazy fucking ass killed my cousin.”

“No, don’t say that.”

“Why not? It’s the truth. We both know it. You’re fucking insane. You’re going to continue going around killing people because you like it. Because you’re fucking psychopath!” he yells at me.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“What the fuck?” Dante rushes in and shoves Connor aside.

“No. Connor, no, you don’t mean that. You love me. I love you. You don’t mean that.” I don’t care who knows anymore. He has to believe me. He has to.

“Love you? I will never forgive you for this. I don’t want to see your face ever again,” he says before adding the last nail to my coffin. “I hate you.”

“No!” I scream. Dante’s arms wrap around me as I try to get up and go after Connor. He doesn’t mean it. He’s just in shock.

“What the fuck happened in here?” Dante asks.

“Your psychotic cousin just killed mine. That’s what happened. She just started a damn war,” Connor tells him.

Dante looks from Connor to me. “What the fuck happened, Aurora?”

“I don’t know. Something is wrong. I don’t know.” I keep repeating the same words over and over.

“She needs to be locked away. Get her the fuck out of here.” Connor kneels down and pulls the knife out of Kenny’s neck. “Take this.”

“She can’t even walk. What did you give her?” Dante lets me go and pushes at Connor’s chest.

“She’s probably drunk on the fucking high she gets from killing. Go on, ask her. Ask her how much she loves the kill.” Connor looks down at me.

I shake my head. This isn’t happening. This can’t be happening. I must be dreaming. It’s a nightmare. This isn’t real.

“What are you talking about?” Dante asks.

“I’m telling you to get her the fuck out. She can’t be here,” Connor hisses. “I can’t see her right now.”

“Okay.” Dante reaches down and pulls me to my feet.

“No, don’t take me. He needs me. I need to stay. I need to help,” I plead with them.

“Help? You can’t help. You’re a fucking mess, Aurora. You need to stay the fuck away from me. I mean it,” Connor says.

Tears fall down my cheeks.

“You talk to her like that again and you’ll be the next Irish fuck to meet the devil,” Dante says, and I grab on to his shirt to steady myself.

“Take me home,” I whisper.

The whole world is spinning as Dante guides me out of the house and onto the passenger seat of his car.

“What happened?” Josie asks from where she’s sitting in the back.

“I ruined everything,” I tell her. “I had it and I lost it.”

“Seriously, Aurora, you’ve been seeing that fucker?” Dante growls, the tires of his car screeching as he pulls out of the driveway.

“Why is everything spinning?” I groan.

“Josie, call the doc. We’re going to need him.”

“Where are we taking her? We can’t take her home like this,” she says.

“We’ll go to the pool house,” Dante says. “Just tell the doc to meet us there.”

“I don’t know why I did that,” I say. “Why would I do that?”

“I don’t know.” Dante sighs. “But it’s going to be okay.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“No, it’s not. He hates me.” More tears fall down my cheeks.

“I’m going to fucking kill him,” Dante grunts.

“No, you can’t touch him. I love him.” It feels good to say it aloud to someone. It would be better if it wasn’t because it’s the end of our story.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Love makes you do things you’d never thought possible. Like lie to your parents, your cousin’s parents, your entire family about what went down the night before. As soon as Aurora was gone, I called it in. I had to.

To say my father and uncle are ready to wage war is an understatement. Which is exactly why I told them some Albanian kid was responsible. I lied and said he got the jump on me before he ran out.

I can’t give her up to them. If I told them who really did this, they’d find her and they would do unspeakable things to her before they eventually killed her. I can’t let that happen. No matter how much I hate her right now for what she’s done, there’s still an overwhelming need within me to protect her.

Which makes me hate myself. What kind of fucking cousin am I that I’m protecting Kenny’s killer?

Pathetic. I wonder if she planned this all along. Get me hooked on her, get me to let my guard down, and then pounce. Wouldn’t surprise me.

Well, joke's on her. If she thinks this is over, she's fucking delusional. This is far from over. My family might not know who did this, but I do. And in our world, there is only one way to settle a debt like this. An eye for an eye.

Luckily for me, Aurora has a shit-load of cousins to pick from. Any one of them will do. I'm not bothered. I might not want her to endure the physical torture of what my family would dish out to her. But emotional pain? That's something she's going to feel tenfold.

She once said that she didn't feel anything before me. That I woke her up. At the time, I thought it was sweet. I thought it was an indication that we really were soul mates. Now, I see that knowledge as my biggest weapon. Something I can and will use against her. I want her to feel the kind of pain I'm feeling right now, the loss. I want her to suffer, but I also want her alive. Which is fucked up, because I hate her. I want to hate her.

Kenny deserves to be avenged. His death will not go unanswered. I can't let my feelings for Aurora get in the way of that, at least not completely.

"You doing okay?" My mom taps on the door.

"I'm alive, so yeah," I tell her.

"What happened to Kenny... It's not your fault, Connor," she says, walking farther into my room.

She's wrong. What happened to my cousin is entirely my fault. I was the one who brought Aurora around, even after seeing how unhinged she could be. Fuck, I embraced her craziness, loved it even. It's my fault Kenny is dead. If I didn't invite Aurora to that party, she wouldn't have been there.

“This life, it comes with perks and it also comes with risks. We all know that our enemies reaching us is a risk,” my mom says.

“Is that what you’d say if it were me? If I were the one who was killed and not Kenny?” I ask her.

I think about all the times I’ve been alone with Aurora, about all the things I’ve let slide because I was fucking blinded by her. She stabbed me, more than once, and I thought it was hot. Maybe I’m just as insane as she is. I have to be, right?

“It is the life we chose,” my mom responds.

“You chose. I didn’t choose shite. I was born into it,” I remind her.

“You’re right. You don’t have a choice, Connor. I’m sorry about Kenny. It is a tragedy, but how we respond to this event will pave the way for our family in this city,” she tells me.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, your father, your uncle, the rest of your family is downstairs planning to carry out an act of vengeance for Kenny while you’re up here moping.”

She’s right. I am moping, because I just had my heart ripped out of my fucking chest. It might as well have been me in Kenny’s place. How the fuck do you go on living without a heart?

Or is it a gift? I could choose to embrace this pain, embrace the darkness and become the monster my family has always wanted me to be.

“You’re right.” I stand and kiss my mother on her cheek. “I’m being selfish when I

should be thinking of Kenny. I'm going to go help Da," I tell her.

"Good. I know it's hard, Connor. But this is your destiny. The sooner you accept it, the better," she says.

"I know." Like I said, it's not like I have much of a choice. I'm the fucking heir to the O'Malley family. It's not something I'll ever be able to forget.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

Passing the bar, I scoop up a bottle of Jameson, remove the cap, and take a huge swig of the amber liquid. I was going to go and join my father's meeting, but maybe finding somewhere to be alone with this bottle would be better.

"It won't help, you know."

I turn at the sound of my uncle's voice. "It might," I say, taking another swig.

"If I thought for a second it would, I'd be joining you," he grunts.

Guilt eats at me. He just lost his son because of me and he doesn't even know it. "You're the future of this, Connor. Becoming a raging alcoholic isn't in the cards for you." He takes the bottle from my hands.

I don't say anything. Because, well, what the fuck can I say? Nothing is going to make a difference right now.

"We have plans to hit them tonight. I expect you to be there. For your cousin," he tells me.

"I'll be there," I agree. "What's the plan exactly?"

"The Albanians had a royal wedding today, one of the boss's daughters. We're going to make sure she has a honeymoon she'll never forget. Or survive," he says.

And this is exactly why I didn't give up Aurora. As much as I hate her right now, I know I couldn't stand back and watch her be tortured and killed. Is it fair to let an

innocent woman take the brunt of my family's wrath?

No, but if it's between a stranger and Aurora, well, just like my last name, it's not much of a choice.

She's going to haunt me forever. I'm never going to be free of the hold she has on me. Hate and love... it's a fucking fine line.

"Stay close," my father tells me.

I look at him. He has never shown concern for my welfare, and that wholestay closething is an oddly concerning thing for him to say. "Okay?" I question.

"We just lost one kid, Connor. I do not want to be burying another."

"Don't worry, Da. I'm not going anywhere," I reply with a smirk.

My stomach is rolling, and it's taking everything in me not to fucking throw up right now. We make our way into the hotel, and a minute later, we're pushing our way inside the honeymoon suite. The naked couple in bed blissfully unaware of the horrors they're about to encounter.

If I were a better person, I'd call this off, tell my family I made a mistake. That it wasn't the Albanians who killed Kenny...

Her face pops into my mind. Aurora. If I don't give them someone to target, someone to blame, they won't stop looking until they find the person responsible. And I know they will. They'll find her, and it'll be Aurora being grabbed. It'll beherscreams in my ears.

"I'm going to fucking kill you," the guy two of my father's soldiers just dragged out

of bed yells.

“That will be a bit hard, lad, considering you won’t be alive too much longer,” my father says.

“What the fuck do you want? Don’t touch her.” The poor guy focuses on his new bride, who is being tied down, spread-eagle on the bed, completely naked. Tears fall down the side of her face, and my uncle shoves a piece of cloth in her mouth, muting her cries for help.

“You took something from me. Well, your family did. And you are going to be the one to pay for it. First...” My uncle stands from the bed. He starts undoing his belt, slowly dragging it out of the loops of his trousers. “I’m going to make you watch as I take the thing you love most in the world.” He then brings the leather belt down onto the woman’s stomach, and screams fill the room. Her body writhes on the mattress but there is nowhere for her to go.

Everything blurs. Her face is replaced with Aurora’s, her body one I know so well. And I watch as the belt rains down on her, hitting her thighs, her arms, her breasts.

Closing my eyes, I inhale. It’s not Aurora. It’s not her.

When I open them again, I steel my expression and force myself to watch. This is my fucking fault too. There is no one to blame for these people enduring my family’s cruelty but myself.

“Stop! I’ll give you whatever you want. Just stop,” the guy cries out.

My uncle laughs. “There isn’t anything you have that we want.”

My father walks behind the man, grabbing hold of his hair and forcing his face up.

“Watch... The fun part’s about to happen,” he says and then nods towards one of his soldiers. “You first.”

The sick bastard smiles like he just won a prize. “Thanks, boss,” he says, unbuttoning his pants. My gaze goes from the guy in the chair to the woman in the bed. I try to think about what I would do if I were in this situation.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

Would I watch as the love of my life got brutally raped by a dozen guys?

Fuck no. Which is exactly why I'm standing here, watching a completely innocent woman get violated in the worst possible way. The guy, though? Her husband? He watches without making a single sound. He doesn't plead for her or himself. He's accepted their fate. He knows neither of them is making it out of this room. He's dissociating. Smart.

Two hours later, they finally let the woman die. My father is the one to do it, slitting her throat. That's when her husband decides to scream again. It's a feral sound, as if someone is burning him from the inside out.

I know I've already said it, but I hate her. Aurora. I hate her for making me have to watch this. I hate her for making me have to choose between her and two innocent fucking people. I fucking hate her for making me fall in love with her.

My phone vibrates with an incoming message.

SB:

How long do I have before they come for me?

My brows draw down. Why the fuck is she messaging me? And now?

Me:

They will never know it was you. I made sure of it.

SB:

Thank you.

Me:

I didn't do it for you. Lose my number.

I didn't lie to my family to protect Aurora. I lied to protect myself from having to watch what they were going to do to her. I did it forme. Because I can live with a lot of things, but watching her die? I can't live with that image in my mind.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Earlier this year, I was under the impression that not being able to catch feelings for someone was a curse. Now, I know it's the opposite. I'd do anything to go back to those cold, empty days. Anything to not feel the pain ripping through my entire body.

The doctor says I was drugged—something was in the beer Krystal gave me. I was stupid enough to drink it, even though Iknew better. I don't care, though. Drugged or not, I broke us. I am the reason for the pain I'm feeling. Worse than that, though, I'm the reason for Connor's pain.

Every time I look at my hands, all I see is Kenny's blood. And then the disgust on Connor's face directed at me. I can't unsee it.

I stand and rush into the bathroom. I haven't left Dante's pool house yet. I can't bring myself to go home. I can't pretend that I'm okay when I'm not. And how do I explain to my parents that I'm falling apart because I finally killed someone and it didn't feel good?

This was what I wanted. To feel something. Remorse, guilt, sadness. Well, guess I hit the motherfucking jackpot, because I've got them all.

I push down on the soap pump and cover my hands with the liquid, lathering it under the running water. I scrub at my hands but I can't get them clean. I can still see it. The blood. It won't come off.

"Whoa, stop. Aurora." Dante turns off the tap before grabbing my wrists. "You're fucking burning yourself."

"I can't get it off. I need to get it off," I tell him.

"They're clean, Aurora. There's nothing there," he says.

"The blood. I killed him. I killed us. Dante, I can't fix it."

"You're a Valentino. You can fix anything."

I shake my head. "He hates me."

"He's not worth your tears, Aurora. No one is worth your tears," my cousin says. He pulls me against him, his arms wrapping around me. "You are going to be okay. I promise."

I shake my head. I'm not going to be okay ever again. I don't want to feel this. "I want it to go away. I want all the pain to go away."

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“I have the solution.”

I turn to see Orlando in the doorway. Next to him is Mabilia. He has a bottle of Jack Daniels in one hand and a bottle of champagne in the other.

Moving out of Dante’s hold, I walk over to Orlando and snatch the champagne out of his grip. Then I walk back over to the sink, smash the top of the bottle on the edge of the counter, and then pour the contents down the drain. I can’t look at champagne. It reminds me of him. In that hotel room. Licking it off me.

“Ahhh!” I scream as I throw the empty bottle at the mirror.

“Okay then. We’re angry. Good. Let’s go find something or someone to take it out on, preferably an Irish something,” Mabilia says. “I Googled it, you know.”

“You Googled what?” I ask her.

“The recipe for Irish stew. It says to use beef, but I’m sure human meat will cook up just fine. I mean, I wouldn’t eat it, but I’ll happily serve it to the fucker’s parents.” She smiles.

“That’s... Just no. No one touches him.” I point at each of my cousins. “I mean it.”

“You can’t expect us to do nothing, Aurora. He hurt you.”

“He had no choice! I gave him no choice!” I scream at them.

“There’s always a choice,” Orlando tells me. Why does everyone keep saying that? “Right now, the right choice is to get drunk.” He turns and walks out of the bathroom.

“Great idea, as long as it’s not champagne.” I follow him.

“That bottle was worth two grand, by the way,” Mabilia huffs.

I don’t care how much it was worth. It felt good smashing it.

Orlando pours four glasses of whiskey and hands us each one. I’m not a drinker, especially a whiskey drinker. But right now, I’ll take anything that promises to make the pain go away.

Downing the glass in one go, I hand it back to Orlando. “Another.”

Without question, he refills it. “So, revenge, what are we doing?” he asks. “I know you, Aurora. And if this happened to any of us, you wouldn’t just sit back and let it pass.”

“It didn’t happen to you, though. It happened to me, and I’m not doing anything. I don’t want to hurt him. I’ve already done that.” The second glass of whiskey finds its way into my throat, burning all the way down.

“It wasn’t your fault, Aurora. You were drugged, and when you tell him that, he will understand,” Mabilia says.

“We’re not telling him. He discarded me like yesterday’s trash. He has shown his lack of loyalty. I don’t even want him anymore,” I lie. I want nothing more than to have Connor wrap his arms around me and tell me everything is going to be okay. Tell me that he loves me.

“Okay, well, tonight, we get fucked up.” Orlando refills my whiskey for a third time.
“Tomorrow, we regret our choices.”

“To getting fucked up.” I raise my glass before tipping it back.

Everyone left. I told them I was going to sleep. I lied then too. I just wanted to be alone. I need to call him. I need to hear his voice. Except, every time I dial his number, it goes to voicemail. He’s not answering.

Okay, well, if he’s not going to talk to me, he can at least read my message.

Me:

I know you hate me. I hate myself right now too, but I need you to know how sorry I am. I love you. I will always love you.

I see the read notification on the message and then nothing. He’s just going to ignore me.

Lying down, I let the tears fall freely. I don’t know if I can make it through this. How can you go on living when it feels like your heart is torn in two? When every breath feels like you’re drowning?

“Care to tell me why you’ve moved into my pool house, Aurora?” Zio Romeo walks in through the glass door. “And why you smell like a brewery and look like shit?”

“Well, gee, nice to see you too, Zio,” I groan as I sit up on the bed.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“It’s always a pleasure to see you, Aurora. I would like to know why you’ve been holed up in here all weekend, though? And if you plan on staying? I can have Zia Livvy make a room up for you in the house, you know.”

“Thanks. I just... I’m going home today,” I tell him.

“You haven’t answered my question.” Zio Romeo is smart. Nothing ever gets past him. But I can’t tell him that I’m here hiding from reality.

“I was hanging out with Dante and Orlando. I fell asleep.”

“Try again. Who is he? Give me a name and I’ll break his kneecaps before I remove his head from his body,” my uncle grunts.

And that is exactly why I can’t tell the oldies in the family what happened. I can’t risk them going after Connor to avenge my heart.

“There is no boy.” I sigh. “And if there were, I’d never tell you.”

“Aurora, whoever he is, don’t ever forget your worth. Not every douchebag you encounter is going to be able to see it, so it’s up to you to remember.” Zio Romeo walks over to me, kisses my forehead, and then walks back to the door. “You can stay for as long as you want, but expect a visit from your father within the hour.”

“Thanks. I’m just going to have a shower,” I tell him. I knew I couldn’t hide out here forever. I just need to wash off. I need to figure out a way to pretend that I’m not falling apart on the inside.

“Good, 'cause you really do smell like a brewery.” Zio Romeo chuckles as he closes the door.

After showering and changing into some sweats I borrowed from Dante, I run a brush through my hair. My reflection stares back at me. I don't have makeup here, and Zio Romeo was right. I do look like shit. Tired. My eyes are red and puffy from crying. Dark circles are starting to form too.

When I walk into my aunt and uncle's house, my dad is there. In the kitchen. “Princess, didn't know you'd be here,” he says.

“Yes, you did.” I roll my eyes.

“You're right. I did. Come on, I'll give you a ride home so you can get ready for school.” It's not a question or an option. It's a get in the fucking car, you're coming home kind of statement.

“Okay,” I say before turning to my Zio Romeo. “Thanks for letting me stay.”

“Anytime,” my uncle replies.

My dad is quiet. He doesn't say a single word for the first ten minutes of the drive. Then it's like the floodgates open. I'm honestly impressed he lasted as long as he did. “Okay, spill it. What happened?”

“Nothing happened. Can't I just hang out with my cousins because I like them?”

“You can, but I know you. Something is wrong. I want to know what it is.”

When I don't answer him, he sighs, running a hand over his face. “You can tell me anything, Aurora. I mean anything.”

“You won’t understand this, Papa.”

“Try me,” he says. “There is nothing I wouldn’t do for you. You know that.”

“I know. But I really messed up,” I whisper.

“Messed up how? I can fix whatever it is if you tell me.”

“I was... seeing someone, and I did something bad. Really bad, and now he hates me.” Okay, that’s a watered-down version of what actually happened.

“You were seeing someone? What the fuck? Who?”

I knew that would be the thing he focused on. “No one you know. And it doesn’t matter. He’s never going to talk to me again after what I did.” I’m fighting hard to not let the tears fall again.

“Then he’s a fucking idiot and not worth your time. You are perfect in every fucking way, Aurora,” my dad tells me.

“You have a very biased opinion of me.” I laugh.

“Maybe, but that doesn’t make it not true. Tell me who he is and I’ll sort it out.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“You mean you’ll erase him from this earth.”

He shakes his head. “No, I’ll return his body to the earth.”

“It’s fine. I’m not going to die from a broken heart,” I say. “I don’t think.”

“Your heart is broken? Now I’m really going to kill him.” My dad reaches over and squeezes my hand. “I love you.”

“I know. I love you too.”

When we get home, I don’t get to escape to my room like I intended. My dad makes me follow him into the theater room. Orders me to sit and wait for him. It takes five minutes. I’m ready to go and hide somewhere when he walks back in with my mom, along with a tray of snacks.

“I’ve got all the good stuff: ice cream, chocolate, candy,” he says, sitting next to me.

“Why?” I ask.

“If you won’t let me kill him, then this is all I’ve got. We’re going to binge-watch some crappy rom-com and eat our weight in this shit,” my dad says.

Mom sits on the other side of me. “I know it doesn’t seem like it right now, but it will get better. I promise.” She wraps her arms around me, and I let myself lean into her. I can’t stop it. The tears just fall.

“Fuck, just give me a name, Aurora. I won’t kill him. Just hurt him a little,” Papa says. Which only makes me cry harder.

“Shh, it’s okay to cry, baby. It’s okay to be sad and feel everything you’re feeling. We can stay here for as long as you like,” Mom tells me.

“I have to go to school,” I reply through my hiccups.

“Not today, you don’t,” Papa says. “We’re all staying put right here.”

“Thank you.” I hug my mom tighter.

They don’t even know what happened, and they’re ready to take a day off from their jobs to sit here with me while I drown in my heartbreak.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Farewell to our beloved son, Kenny O’Malley.

I stare down at the words on the paper in my hand. I’m glad I can’t see the faces of the congregation from where I’m seated in the front row. Although there is the sense of everyone’s eyes falling on me. Guilt eats at my chest. No one knows what I did. They won’t ever know. But I do. And sometimes that’s all it takes to drive a man insane.

The sound of thunder booms from outside the church. It’s not surprising. God ain’t happy I’m in here. The last time I was inside this building, I wasn’t exactly... respectful either. I was with her. The girl I’m doing my fucking best not to think about today.

Kenny deserves my full attention, at the very least, considering I’m the reason he’s even in there. The dark mahogany casket is covered in white lilies and green

carnations, symbolizing our Irish heritage. I had to help carry it in. I also have to help carry it out.

The sound of soft cries and sniffles drowns out the organ music. It always surprises me. Funerals, the sadness that comes with them. The realization that we're all going to end up here one day, in a casket, with our loved ones crying over us.

The grief, it won't last. I know that after today, most of the people filling this church won't give Kenny a moment's thought. That's what happens. Once you're gone, you're gone. And in our world, we're exposed to a lot of loss. I don't usually have the addition of guilt mixed in with it, though.

The music stops, and Father McGowan stands at the altar, a look of sorrow twisting his features. "We are gathered here today to celebrate the life of Kenny O'Malley, a young man whose light touched so many in his seventeen short years."

My attention turns to my family. Not a single one of them makes a sound. No tears, nothing. Just blank faces staring back at the priest. Cold. That's the feeling I get from them. Makes me wonder if my parents would even care if it were me in that casket...

Father McGowan continues talking about Kenny, his love for football and life. The brightness and joy he brought with him, skipping over the darkness that my cousin had to recently embrace—all the shit that comes with bearing our last name.

My mind goes blank throughout the service. I barely listen to people as they take turns to either read bible passages or talk about their memories of Kenny. His football coach stands up there describing my cousin as a leader on the field, always encouraging his teammates and playing with his whole heart. Every single attendee displaying a fondness that his own family fails to show.

After the final blessing, I stand, along with my father, uncle, and two of our most-

trusted soldiers. Together, we each take a handle of the casket, ready to carry it out of the church. As I'm walking down the aisle, I don't look into the pews until we reach the end. Where I spot the last fucking person I expected to see. Aurora fucking Valentino stares back at me. Her eyes glassy with tears.

Rage fills me. She doesn't get to do that. She doesn't get to come here and look like that. Look like she's grieving. I force my feet to continue down the path and out of the church. Because if I stop right now, if I let on to who she is and why she's fucking here, we're both as good as dead.

Once everyone is gone, I make my way back into the church. I don't know how I know, but I find myself walking up the back staircase that leads to the bell. When I reach the top, I see her standing at the edge of the open window.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

My heart stops. Torn between wanting to walk over and push her, and wanting to pull her to my chest.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” I ask before grabbing the back of her shirt and tugging her towards me. Then I slam the window closed.

Aurora’s back lands against the wall. “I... I wanted to see you,” she says.

“How fucking dare you!” I yell, taking a step forward. My hand wraps around her throat as I push her harder against the brick wall. “Do you get some perverted fucking kick out of this? Coming to the funeral of the guy you fucking killed?” I hiss, my face so close to hers I can feel her breath brush across my lips.

“No, I wanted to see if you were okay. I had to see you, Connor.” She’s not fighting me off. Her body goes limp.

“Yeah, well, I don’t want to see you. If I never see you again, it will be too fucking soon. You disgust me,” I tell her, almost believing my own words.

“You don’t mean that.” Aurora’s eyes fill with a fresh wave of tears. I’ve seen a lot of looks on this girl but never one so... broken.

I can’t allow myself to care, though. This is her fault. “You did this. You,” I say, my hand squeezing a little harder. “I wish I never met you. I wish I never fucking touched you.” I let go of her, and she falls onto her knees in front of me.

“You don’t mean that,” she repeats, shaking her head.

“Oh, I fucking mean every word of it. You’re sick. You should be locked up. You are fucking crazy, Aurora. Look at you! Did you really think you could come here and I’d just what? Welcome you with open arms?” I laugh hysterically. I don’t know what else to do.

Does she not understand the danger she’s put us both in by being here? Fucking hell. It’s as if she has a death wish.

She needs to stay away from me, and the only way I can guarantee that is to make her hate me as much as I hate her right now.

“You really are pathetic. On the ground, crying. For what? A fairy tale you let yourself foolishly believe? Guess what? I’m not the Prince Charming in your story. I’m the fucking Grim Reaper. And mark my words, I will be collecting on the debt you owe my family.” With those parting words, I turn and walk out. Ignoring the sound of her sobs behind me.

This is the last place I want to fucking be. Walking through the hall of this preppy fucking school full of preppy fucking assholes. It was bearable when I had her. When I had one good thing in these suffocating fucking walls.

Everyone looks at me with pity. I know what they’re thinking. He lost his cousin. It should have been him.

No one would miss me as much as they’ll miss Kenny. The school’s star quarterback. I walk right past the jocks, a group of guys I’d usually stop and chat with, when Kenny was with them. They were his friends, though. They’ve never been mine.

My steps stop when I spot Ian with a sling around his arm, his face various shades of black, blue, and purple. “What the fuck happened to you?” I ask him. He was one of Kenny’s friends. The guy looks away, doesn’t make eye contact with me, so I turn

my glare on the kid standing next to him. “What happened?”

“The Valentinos happened,” the kid says.

“Why?”

“He gave Krystal a cup of laced beer at the party. Turns out, Krystal gave it to Aurora and she drank it.”

“Aurora drank laced beer? What the fuck was it laced with?” I ask, my fist clenching at my side.

“GHB,” Ian tells me. “Krystal was supposed to drink it, not Aurora.”

I look at him, at the sling on his arm. He got off fucking easy. Why the fuck is he still breathing? That’s something I’m going to change. Now.

“You’re coming with me,” I grunt as I take hold of his arm, the one not broken because I don’t need to make a scene in the middle of the hallway, and guide him to the staircase.

“Wait, where are we going?” Ian asks.

“Upstairs,” I reply, nudging him from behind. He tries to stop, so I push harder. “Because I want to talk to you alone. You know my family and the Valentinos aren’t friends, right? It seems we now have a common enemy.”

My words put him at ease and he walks up the stairs. Fucking idiot.

Once we get to the fourth level, I take him into one of the empty classrooms. Walking over to the window, where I look down at the concrete path right below us. This

should work. “You know I saw Aurora that night,” I tell him.

“You did? Was she okay?”

“It was right after she killed my cousin.” I walk over to him and he backs up. “You see, Ian, we have a problem here. One, you know the truth about who killed Kenny. And two, you’re the reason he’s dead.”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

The kid's face pales. He shakes his head back and forth. "No, she wasn't supposed to drink it."

"But she did," I remind him. I tug him over towards the window. I've been looking for a way to get my fucking anger out. Maybe this is it. I need it. I need the violence. Except this is like taking candy from a baby. The fucker isn't going to put up much of a fight.

"Please, Connor, man, you don't have to do this. I won't say shit," he tells me.

"Mmm, yeah, I think I do. I don't take risks or leave loose ends." I pick him up and push his top half out the window. When he starts to scream, I let go, shoving him all the way out. It only takes seconds for his body to hit the ground.

I once told Aurora she wasn't crazy for enjoying the kill. I wasn't lying. Because I feel it too, a rush like no other.

I jog back downstairs and stop at my locker, which is currently on fire. Students gather around, no one doing a thing to put out the flames. When I glance over a shoulder, I see her. Aurora, leaning against the opposite side of the hallway with a smirk on her face. Tilting my head, I fight my own smile.

Is that the best she's got? I'm disappointed. She's better than this.

I walk over, ignoring her as I look to Dante. "I finished your job for you, by the way. You're welcome." Just as the words are out of my mouth, an ear-piercing scream comes from outside the building.

Guess someone found Ian.

I storm out and head straight for my car. I'm not sticking around. I need to go home and I need to find some whiskey. Drink myself stupid until I can sleep.

A quick drive later, I walk in on my father holding a meeting in the dining room. "Son, you're just on time." He waves me forward.

"Da? What's going on?" I ask him.

"We're hitting the Italians again tonight. The Valentinos have a shipment coming in. We're going to intercept it," he says.

This makes me smile. "I'll help."

I pull out a chair. They don't question me, thank god. I've distanced myself from the family business as much as I could since we moved to New York. Maybe it's time to jump back in.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Nothing says love like throwing someone out a four-story building for you. I mean, Connor might not admit it—the love part that is—but he did tell Dante he finished the job for him. And minutes later, Ian's body was discovered splattered on the concrete.

The same fucker who gave Krystal the laced cup of beer that she then gave to me. Dante and Orlando worked him over, but we try not to commit murder at school. It leads to too many questions.

Why would Connor do that? And why would he then tell Dante it was him?

There is only one answer to both. Love. Connor O'Malley still loves me. He also hates me. Which is fine. I hate me for what I did, so I can't expect him not to.

But love? That's what I'm choosing to focus on. Especially now, when doubt starts creeping into my mind, Connor's words telling me I need help and that I'm crazy playing back on repeat. It's my one major insecurity. It's always been the joke or not joke in the family that I'm the crazy one.

I've worked hard to not let it get to me, to continue being myself no matter how crazy I might become. Authentic crazy is better than fake sane, right? At least that's what I've always told myself.

I do things on instinct, which has always worked out well for me. Until Kenny. I can't even really blame the drugs, because my hands still stabbed him. I killed him. I don't know how I'm going to get Connor back or find a way for us to be together. But I'm not going to give up.

I don't expect him to forgive me. I wouldn't forgive me. But there has to be a way for us to get past this. I refuse to believe otherwise. And honestly, after his grand gesture with Ian, no amount of hateful words that come out of his mouth will make me believe that he hates me more than he loves me.

It's that belief that is keeping me from completely falling apart. Also, the fact that I can see he's just as miserable as I am. How do I know that? I might have bribed Dante to hack into his house's CCTV system. The O'Malleys are a paranoid bunch. They have cameras everywhere.

I've been watching for a few days. Every chance I get, I park one street over and just sit here. Scrolling through the feed. It's torture, because I want to touch him. I want to reach out to him. I want him to reach for me like he used to.

Connor is asleep. I've been watching for a few hours, just to make sure he's completely out of it. Over the last few days, I've scoped out the security, and I'm pretty confident I can get in and out without being noticed.

Picking up my bag, I slip from my seat, quietly close the door, and walk around the corner. Connor's house is just three lots down. But I'm not going in through the front. Because that would be stupid. I'm going in through the back. I've seen a window that I'm thinking leads into the basement.

Pulling up the camera feed, I check the backyard. I know that the guards walk the property line, and in about two minutes, they'll move to the front, giving me four minutes to run through the yard and break into that window.

This is a lot of effort. He better appreciate what I'm doing for us.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

When I see the guards start down the side of the house, I run. Push the pane of glass upwards and sigh when I find it unlocked. I squeeze through the small space, turn on my phone's flashlight app, and glance around.

Yep, it's a basement. Also a torture chamber by the looks of all the tools and chains. I don't have time to see what they have on hand before logging back into the CCTV to check the rest of the house. I've never seen any of their guards inside the property and I don't see anyone else up and walking around either.

It doesn't take long for me to navigate the house's interior and find Connor's room. I hold my breath when the door creaks as I close it behind me. He stirs in his sleep but he doesn't wake up.

Time to get to work.

I place my bag on the ground, open it, and start pulling out the items I brought with me.

Connor thinks he's just going to forget me. Forgetus. Well, I'm not going to let him. I've got everything with me to make sure that doesn't happen.

First, I pull out a pair of my panties. They're pink. He told me these were his favorite. I find his school blazer on the back of his desk chair and shove the lacy material into the inside pocket. I smile to myself, picturing his reaction when he finds them.

Next, I pull out a photo of us. It's one I took on my phone and told him I'd deleted because he was paranoid someone would see it. Picking up his wallet, I shove the

photo into the space with his credit card. So that it will fall out the moment he goes to pay for something.

Then I pick up his phone, holding the screen in front of his face to unlock it. I scroll through his contacts and add a new one. Name: Briar Rose. After adding the number of the burner phone I have just for this purpose, I set his phone back down on the wireless charger. That contact will come in use later on.

Lastly, I grab the bottle of vanilla bodywash, the exact same one I use, and walk into his bathroom. Emptying the contents of his into a plastic bag I brought with me, because I don't want to turn on a faucet and wake him up, and replace it with mine. As soon as Connor showers in the morning, he's going to smell me. And he's going to be flooded with memories of my body while he's naked under the hot water.

Shit, I can't think of Connor naked right now. I need to focus.

While I'm at it, I pick up his hairbrush and run it through my own hair until enough of my blonde locks are tangled in the bristles, before pulling out the red lipstick I brought with me. I then draw a heart on his mirror. It's not like he's not going to know it was me anyway. I might as well leave a note. I finish it off with our initials: SB 4 PC. Sleeping Beauty for Prince Charming. And leave the lipstick on his bathroom counter. There is only one more thing I have to do...

Grabbing my bottle of perfume, I spray the collar of his school blazer, then make my way into his closet and do the same to the entire contents.

Try to forget me now, asshole.

My eyes flick to the bed and I walk over and spray the last bit on his pillow. He rolls over, and I freeze, but he doesn't wake up.

Okay, time to leave.

Pulling up the CCTV footage, I look through the house and make sure the coast is clear. Then I take one last look at Connor and make a mad dash for the basement.

It takes another ten minutes of waiting in the creepy torture dungeon before the guards do their rounds and I climb back through the window, run across the lawn, and jump over the back fence into the neighboring property. My heart races, not slowing until I'm safely back in my car.

"Wake up, princess. We're going to the range." My brother's voice booms through my dream. My dream about Connor and his mouth on things I don't need to be thinking about when my brother is in my room.

"Go away!" Reaching under my pillow, I pick up the pretty pink stun gun Nonno gave me and wave it in Enzo's direction. "I will use this on you," I warn him.

"Don't care. Get your ass up, little sister. We're going to the range, and then I'll drop you off at school," he replies before walking out of my room. Shutting my door not so quietly.

I could go back to sleep, but he ruined my dream. There is no going back to that. Maybe the range will get a bit of the pent-up rage out of my system before I have to face Connor.

The thought of him finding all the Easter eggs I left in his room makes me smile, but I also have no doubt it's going to piss him off. Then again, he's kinda hot when he's angry. I mean, when he had his hand wrapped around my throat, I wasn't scared. I was turned on. I know I have issues, but the best thing is the fact that he does too.

I rush through my shower and don't bother with makeup today. My hair gets bundled

up into a messy bun. I honestly can't even remember the last time I went to school fresh faced. Guess there's a first for everything.

I run downstairs, where Enzo is waiting for me in the foyer. He eyes me for a second. "Are you sick?"

"No." I scowl at him. Do I look that bad without makeup?

"Good. Let's go." He holds the front door open.

The car ride to the range is quiet. I can tell Enzo wants to say something but he's holding back. I really just want to shoot some targets right now. Maybe I can imagine they're Connor's heart. Put a bullet right through it like he has mine.

Two rounds in. That's all it takes for my brother to start in on me. "You're off your game, Aurora. What's wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong," I grunt as I stare down the target at the end of the lane and pull the trigger. I tried to imagine it was Connor's heart, but that just made me miss. I can't hurt him more than I already have. I need to work on fixing us.

Page 76

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“Don’t give me that shit. Something is up with you. You’ve been acting... strange for the last few weeks,” Enzo says.

I pivot on my heel to face him. “My boyfriend dumped me.”

Enzo’s eyes go wide. “When the fuck did you get a boyfriend?” he asks, taking the pistol from my hand and placing it on the bench behind me.

“For a few months.” I shrug. “But I did something he didn’t like too much and he dumped me.”

“Well, he’s not worth it then. What’s his name?” The question comes out as casually as if he were asking me for the time. I’m not that stupid though.

“Nice try. You’re not going to find out.”

“Is he from school?”

“Enzo, drop it,” I growl, reaching for the pistol behind him.

My brother wraps his arms around me, trapping me against his chest. “I’m sorry. What can I do to make you feel better?”

“Let me shoot. I’m going to be fine. He’s going to realize the error of his ways soon and come back to me anyway.” I smile.

“Aurora, that’s... Do Mom and Pops know?”

“Yes.”

“Why am I always the last to know anything?”

“You’re not. Lorenzo doesn’t know.” I smile up at Enzo. “Kyla does, though.”

“What did you do?” my brother says, catching me off guard.

“Huh?”

“The thing you did that this jerk didn’t like. What was it?” Enzo clarifies.

“I killed his cousin.”

My brother’s eyes widen again. “Yeah, I can see how that might put a strain on a relationship.”

About thirty seconds later, Enzo stares at me with an inquisitive look on his face, and then he shakes his head.

“What?” I ask him.

“An Irish kid from your school was killed a few weeks back,” he says.

“I know.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, no.” He shakes his head again. “Does Pops know who you were dating?”

“No, and you’re not going to tell him. Or anyone. Sibling confidentiality and all, Enzo. I mean it.” I point at him.

“I won’t tell, but you are not seeing some Irish fucking scum again either,” he grunts, disgust written all over his face.

“He isn’t scum.” I’m tempted to kick my brother in the shins right now. That’s gotta be better than shooting him, right?

Chapter Twenty-Eight

She’s lost whatever was left of her goddamn fucking mind. What the fuck was she thinking breaking into my house? Coming into my room? And how the hell did I sleep through it all?

I dreamed I could smell her. I woke up smelling her and thought it was just left over from my dream. Nope, my whole fucking room smells like her perfume. If that didn’t make it obvious she was here, it became real clear when I walked into the bathroom and saw the shit she drew on my mirror.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

Do you have any idea how fucking hard it is to wash red lipstick off glass with just water and hand soap? Not something I ever thought I'd have to do.

As soon as I saw the writing, I got out my laptop and logged into the cloud for the security system and deleted the footage.

My frustration didn't end there, though. No, my whole morning has been filled with Aurora. She was in my shower, her hair in my fucking brush, her scent everywhere. If she was trying to drive me insane, she's succeeded. I've tried really fucking hard to not think about her.

Every time I do, guilt eats at me. It's a betrayal to Kenny. I can't betray my cousin because my dick wants the girl who killed him. I don't want to want her. When I told her that I hated her, I meant it. I do hate her. But there's still this fucking need for her I can't get rid of.

I can ignore it. I'm not weak, and I know whatever the fuck it is, it'll pass with time.

When I get to school, I seek her out. It doesn't take long to find her standing by her locker with her cousin Mabilia. "You've seriously lost your fucking mind," I hiss, trying to keep my voice low. The last thing I need is for the whole school to know our business.

"Oh, babe, that was lost a long time ago." Aurora smiles at me. "How's your morning been?" Her hand lands on my chest and my whole body ignites. My cock hardens.

"I've had better. Whatever game you're playing, stop," I tell her. Pulling her lipstick

out of my pocket and shoving it into her hand. “Stay the fuck away from me.”

“Whoa, I don’t know who the hell you think you are, but you cannot talk to her like that.” Mabilia squeezes herself between us. “Give me a reason, Connor. Just one. And your family will be down another heir.”

“I’d love to see you try.” I raise an eyebrow and then look behind her at a fuming Aurora.

“You think I can’t? Or won’t?” Mabilia asks.

“I have no doubt you’d try. But as crazy as you are, she’s worse, and I know she’d never let you put so much as a scratch on me.” I nod my head towards Aurora. “Isn’t that right, princess?”

She pushes Mabilia to the side, leaning up on her tiptoes as her lips press against my cheek. “See you later, Connor,” she says and then walks off, dragging Mabilia behind her.

What the fuck was that?

I expected her to fight back. She acted like nothing was even happening. She really is losing it. If she’s not going to listen to me, maybe I can get someone in her family to put a fucking leash on her and keep her the fuck away from me.

I walk outside and hone in on my target. Dante. The asshole thinks he’s the king around here. Let’s see if his subjects actually know how to follow orders—something tells me Aurora is the exception.

Doesn’t matter. I can’t let her think she can just come into my house without any consequences.

“You need to do something about this,” I tell Dante, showing him the screenshot of Aurora walking through my bedroom. “She doesn’t know what they’d do if she gets caught breaking into my house. Make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

“You know the easiest way to stop her from doing shit like that is for you to just disappear. Want me to help you with that?” he asks.

“You can threaten me all you like. And just like I told Mabilia earlier, it’s pointless. We both know you’re not going to act on it. What would your insane cousin think if you did? You know she loves me, right? Who knows what crazy shit she’d do for someone she loves,” I remind him.

I see it coming and do nothing to stop it. His fist hits the side of my face. He can throw a punch. I’ll give him that. I smirk.

“Guess we’re about to find out just how deep that love goes.” I laugh as I turn and walk away.

I haven’t been sitting next to her in class. But today, I want to. I want her to see the bruise forming on my face. I want to see her reaction.

Am I an asshole for inciting a bit of family conflict? Sure. But do I care? Not one single bit.

I don’t doubt where Aurora’s heart lies. I know she loves me. It’s the fact she killed my cousin I can’t look past. And the fact my family will kill her, after they do unthinkable horrors to her first.

I count in my head. Three, two, one. And just like that, Aurora’s hands are on my cheeks, turning my face in her direction. “Who the fuck hit you?” she asks.

“Don’t fucking touch me.” I shove her arms aside.

“Answer the question, Connor,” she says.

“Why? What are you gonna do? Kill another innocent kid?” I ask, and watch as her face falls. I’ve never seen that expression on her. Remorse. And now I feel like a real ass. But I’m not going backwards.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers. “Wait a minute. Remind me again... who was it who helped Ian climb out that window?”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“What can I say? I see someone in need, and I help. I’m charitable like that.” I almost forget that I hate this girl, almost. But then Kenny’s lifeless body flashes through my mind. “Stay away from me, Aurora. I mean it. You don’t know the type of people I live with. If they would have caught you, well, you don’t want to know the nightmare that would follow. And rein yourcousins in. This...” I point to my face. “...was Dante’s one and only shot.”

I stand up and walk out of class. Straight to my car. I don’t have the energy for fucking school right now. I also don’t want to be around when Aurora and Dante square off. That’s a war I want no part of. Even if I did cause it.

My heart races. Tonight is the night we hit the Valentino shipment. A whole container of weapons. I didn’t hesitate to volunteer my time to help with the acquisition of those weapons. But now, sitting in the car, waiting for my father’s signal, doubt is settling in.

I pull out my phone and message Aurora. I need to make sure she’s as far away from here as possible. I’m sure she’s not going to be at a container yard, but who the fuck knows if she’s following me or not?

Me:

Meet at the cabin. I want to talk.

Less than three seconds. That’s how long it takes her to reply.

SB:

Okay.

That's it. Just okay? Fuck, she's too trusting. Why isn't she questioning why I suddenly want to talk? How does she know I'm not walking her into a trap? Now I really do want to talk to her. Make her see some fucking sense and get her shit together before she gets herself killed.

"Ready?" my dad asks.

"Ready." I nod at him.

I'm fully kitted out: Kevlar vest, multiple handguns, and a rifle. This isn't the first time I've done this. Used to join my father's crew all the time in Boston. Aim, break in, shoot anyone who tries to get in our way, load the container onto the back of one of our semis, and get out. It's actually pretty easy.

Following my dad and a handful of his soldiers, I don't hesitate when I spot the first guy to aim a barrel in our direction. I pull the trigger. That was for Kenny. I might not be able to take out the person who actually killed him, but I can take out members of the organization responsible for creating her.

In less than an hour, we're driving away from the container yard, a load of Valentino weapons on the back of our truck as we make our way to the warehouse.

I wasn't planning on heading to the cabin. I figured she'd show up, realize I wasn't there, and leave. But when I logged into the GPS tracker I have on her phone, I saw that she was still there. And now, I feel like an ass. Again.

I could just ghost her. That would be the smart thing to do.

But, no, I'm fucking drawn to her and can't seem to stop myself. I also have

something of hers I want to return because having them in my pocket is driving me insane with need. She left a pair of panties in the pocket of my school blazer. I didn't find them until I got home. I was tempted to keep them. They were my favorite.

Stopping at the local convenience store near the cabin, I pull in to the first open spot and grab a bottle of whiskey. I'm going to need it if I'm going to get through the rest of the night. When I tug my card out of my wallet to pay, a piece of paper falls onto the counter. I pick it up, turn it over, and see a picture of us. Aurora and me.

I scrunch it up in my hands and shove it into the front pocket of my pants. Is there anything she didn't fucking touch? I should have watched the rest of the footage. But I didn't want to risk leaving it up, so I took a screenshot and then deleted the recording.

I park at the cabin, jump out of my car, and walk inside. The bottle of whiskey in one hand and a gun in my other. Because this is Aurora I'm meeting after all. Who the fuck knows what she's got on her?

I pause when I find her laid out on the sofa. Asleep. I set the bottle down on the table, pick up the throw blanket from the back of the chair, and put it over her.

"Mmm, Connor, I love you," she mumbles, still asleep.

"I know," I whisper back, kissing the top of her forehead.

Then I stand and walk right back out the front door. I can't be here with her. She's a fucking weakness I don't need. A temptation I thought I was strong enough to resist. But now, I'm not so sure.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

He was here. I woke up at around three in the morning, a blanket over me and a bottle of whiskey on the coffee table. The same brand that Connor likes to drink. I searched the entire cabin, hoping to find him, but the place was empty. It is empty.

I pull out my phone and send him a message.

Me:

Why didn't you wake me?

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

Charming:

Alternate ending, Sleeping Beauty should have stayed asleep. The prince should never have kissed her.

Well, if that isn't a blow to my already-shattered heart...

I don't care, though. I'm not going to let his words deter me. He loves me. The fact he came, the fact he wanted to meet up with me means he loves me. I just need to get the love to outshine the hate. I can do it. He'll come around.

Me:

Fairy tales aren't real. You and me, that's real.

He reads my message but doesn't respond. I don't bother to send any more either. I'll wait. Until I'm at school, and that's when I'll message him again. First I need to shower, change, and eat.

I'm about to leave the house, eager to get to school, when the voices coming from my dad's office stop me. They're yelling. My dad and uncles. Something's wrong. They're usually so calm.

I tiptoe towards the door—frankly, I'm surprised there are no soldiers standing in the hall to stop me. I don't even need to press my ear against the wall. I can hear them clear as day.

“What do you mean the whole container is gone?” my dad asks.

“Exactly that. They took the whole fucking thing. We lost four men. Six wounded,” Zio Theo says.

“Got it.” Zio Romeo’s voice booms out, almost like he’s excited.

“Who?” That growl comes from Zio Theo again. He’s mad. I could almost imagine the little vein in his forehead popping.

“Fucking O’Malley,” Zio Romeo says, and my stomach drops.No...

“The Irish?” my dad questions.

“You know any other O’Malleys?” Zio Romeo replies.

“They’re dead. I want my fucking container back and I want their heads rolling down the fucking streets!” Zio Theo yells.

Shit. No.My hands shake as I run out of the house.Think! I need to think. This isn’t happening. This can’t be real.My family is going to go after Connor’s. They’re going afterConnor.

“Fuck!” The scream comes out as soon as I shut myself inside my car. Okay, I just need a plan. I don’t give two shits if they go after the O’Malleys. From what Connor told me, they’re not good people. I do, however, give a lot of shits if they touch him. I won’t let that happen.

I know what I have to do. But I’m going to need supplies.

I start up my car and drive to the storage shed I’ve had for the last few months. Once

I'm there, I unlock the door and open the safe. It's where I keep spare documents. My grandfather taught me to be prepared for anything. Which is why I have three passports in different names, matching credit cards and driver's licenses. I also have one for Connor, because, well, when I knew I loved him, I knew I'd do anything to protect him. Including hiding him. I just didn't think I'd be having to hide him from my family.

Once I have all the documents and a stash of cash, I pick up the bag of clothes I left here. I also have wigs, hair dye, glasses, pretty much everything I need to become someone else.

It takes me an hour to drive around the city and collect the rest of the cash and weapons I've stashed in random places people don't look. First stop was the church confessional. Under the seat, where I'd taped a handgun and a plastic bag of ten-dollar bills. Smaller bills mean less scrutiny when you're paying for things.

Next stop was the library, one of my newer hiding spots. Another bag of money tucked beneath the shelf that houses Sleeping Beauty. I didn't leave weapons here on the off chance some kid would find it.

The last stop is the penthouse my family owns in the city and the safe I left in one of the guest bedrooms. I grab a vial of midazolam and a syringe from inside, lock it up again, and rush back to my car. Then I pick up my burner and message Connor.

Me:

I need air.

He once told me he'd always be the air I needed if I felt like I couldn't breathe. Let's hope he meant it. Five minutes later, he messages back.

Charming:

Aurora? Where are you?

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

One thing I didn't think of was a meetup location. I need to get him onboard with the idea of letting me help him. Or at least keep him away from his family long enough for him to miss the ambush I know my father and uncles are planning. We own a little hunting cottage about three hours upstate. It'll have to do. Now, how the hell do I get Connor there?

Me:

School parking lot.

If I can get him in my car, I can knock him out long enough to get us to the cottage. Once we're there, he's not going to have any way to leave.

Charming:

Be there in ten.

Thank god.

I get the syringe ready and slip it into the door beside me. He can't hate me any more than he already does, right? I know he's going to be pissed that I'm doing this, but he'll realize I'm doing it for him. I hope.

Nine minutes later, Connor pulls up next to me. He gets out, looks around the otherwise-empty lot, and then climbs into my car. My hands are still shaky, my breathing deep as I try to remain calm. The thought of something happening to him is sending me over the edge. I know that, and I can't do a single thing to stop it.

“What’s wrong?” Connor’s eyes rake over my entire body. His hands reach over and take hold of mine. “You’re trembling. What the fuck happened?” he asks, his voice lethal. He’s ready to fight for me. I just hope he continues to feel that way when he wakes up.

“I’m sorry,” I tell him. I let the tears fall down my cheeks.

Connor pulls me against him. His arms wrap around me. “Aurora, you need to tell me what happened. I can’t help you if you don’t talk to me.”

I pull back. My hand reaches down and wraps around the syringe. “Everything is wrong. It’s all a mess.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I... I can fix this. Can you just hold me for a minute longer? I’ll fix it.”

“What are you fixing?” he asks even as he’s tugging me closer again.

I climb over the center console and straddle his lap. “Us. I’m going to fix us,” I say before stabbing the syringe into the side of his arm.

“Ow, what the fuck?” He pushes me backwards. “Did you just drug me?”

“I’m sorry. I had to.” I climb back over the center console and lock the doors. He’s not getting out.

“What are you doing?”

“Put on your seat belt,” I tell him before peeling out of the parking lot.

“Fucking hell, Aurora. Stop the car and let me out!” he yells.

“I can’t.”

When I screech around the corner, he finally does as he’s told and clips himself in. His words are slurring and then he’s asleep.

I know we can’t go far yet. My family will track me. When we reach the city limits, I stop at a used car dealership. Hand the guy a couple thousand for a beat-up piece of shit, and give him the keys to my Mercedes. I know my father will come looking for it. Looking for me.

After I move my bags from my car to the new one, I have to figure out how to do the same with Connor. It takes effort, but I manage to grab him under his arms and drag him out. I then shove him into the back seat and shut the door, while the salesman watches me.

“Thanks for your help.” I smile at him. Asshole could have given me a hand. But no, he’d rather watch me struggle.

I take my phone, pull Connor’s out of his pocket, and toss them both out the window. I have the burner just in case we need to reach out to someone.

Three hours later, I stop in front of the cottage. And a half an hour and a lot of effort after that, I finally have Connor inside and on the bed. He’s going to wake up with bruises from when I dropped him and dragged him up the stairs.

But you try lifting a six-foot something brick. It’s not easy.

Page 81

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

Once he's settled in, I handcuff his wrists to the headboard. I know he's going to be really angry when he wakes up, and I don't want him running out before I have a chance to explain. I need him to listen. I need him to see that I didn't have a choice.

There's no food in the fridge or cabinets, and the closest store is twenty minutes away. So, satisfied my little abductee can't run off, I head into the small town and get supplies for a couple of days. We just need time to figure out a plan on where to go next.

When I get back, I put all the groceries away and text my brother. I can't talk to my dad yet.

Me:

It's Aurora. I'm okay. I'll be in touch in a couple of days.

Enzo:

Where the fuck are you?

The message comes through and then the phone immediately starts ringing. I hit the answer button. "Enzo, I'm fine."

"Where are you? Everyone is out looking for you, Aurora. Your car was found at some dodgy-ass dealership."

"I know. I left it there. I had to."

“Why? What are you up to?”

“They were going to go after him, Enzo. I couldn’t sit back and let him get killed,” I explain.

“You’re doing this for that fucking Irish fucker who broke your heart?” he shouts into the phone.

“No, I’m doing this forme. I love him,” I say.

“Tell me where you are. I’ll come get you.”

“I can’t. I love you, but I can’t. Tell everyone not to worry.” I cut the call and power down the phone.

Chapter Thirty

My head feels groggy. Am I still drunk? Was I even drinking?

I can’t remember. My eyes snap open to the blinding light. And when I try to move my arms, they don’t budge. “What the fuck?”

I tilt my head up and see what’s stopping them. Handcuffs. I’m handcuffed to a bed. I scan the room. I don’t know where I am or how the fuck I got here. I tug until the metal starts cutting into the skin on my wrists. They aren’t going anywhere. Fuck.

I use the bedposts to pull myself up until my back is flush with the headboard.

“Oh, you’re awake.” At the sound of her voice, relief washes over me.

“Why am I cuffed to the bed, Aurora? How’d I get here?” I ask her.

“I got you here. Sorry, you might have a few bruises.” She walks over and sits on the bed.

“Unlock these cuffs,” I tell her.

“I will. Soon. First, I need you to listen to me and not freak out,” she says.

“What the fuck? Get me out of these.” I start thrashing against the cuffs again.

“Stop. You’re only going to hurt yourself.” She straddles my lap. “I just want to explain.”

“You can do that without sitting on me,” I grunt.

Why the fuck am I getting hard? I’ve been kidnapped by a psychopath. She could do anything to me right now, and I couldn’t do a thing to stop her. And still, having her sit on me, her pussy pressing down on my cock, I’m fucking hard.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“It doesn’t seem like you mind me sitting on you all that much, Connor.” She smirks.

“My dick doesn’t have a brain, Aurora. Just because he still likes you doesn’t mean I do.” Probably not wise to taunt her, but fuck it.

“That’s... I don’t believe you. Anyway, don’t you want to know why you’re here?”

“Why?”

“I’m saving us.” She smiles like she just solved world hunger.

“There is nous,” I remind her. “Now let me go.”

“There will always be anus, even if you refuse to let yourself acknowledge it.”

“Aurora, we were destined to break up. You know that. I know that. If my family found out about you, they wouldn’t just kill you. They would...”

“They would what?” she asks, craning her neck to one side to stare at me.

“Do you know what they did after Kenny died? What I did?”

Aurora shakes her head.

“I had to give them someone, Aurora, and it sure as fuck wasn’t going to be you. So I lied. I told them the Albanians did it,” I admit.

“Okay, I... You could have given them my name,” she says.

“No, I couldn’t. They found the daughter of the Albanian boss. It was her wedding night, and I watched as my father and uncle had ten of their men beat and rape the girl, while her husband was forced to watch. It went on for hours before they finally killed them.”

“You... More innocent people died because of me?” Aurora climbs off the bed and starts pacing the room.

“No, they died because of me. Because I gave my family the Albanians,” I tell her.

“Because you were protecting me,” she says. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

“And what? Watched as they raped you? Watched as they beat you? As they broke you? No thanks.” I shake my head. Just the thought of that happening to her makes me feel fucking sick. “Aurora, take off the fucking cuffs!”

“I can’t. You’re going to leave and I need to make sure you stay.”

“Why?” I ask her.

“They’re going to kill you, Connor. I can’t let them kill you,” she says.

“Who?”

“My family.” She falls to the ground, sitting with her back against the door.

“Why would your family want to kill me?” I need more details. I don’t know what she’s talking about.

“They know your family stole a container. Killed some of our men. They’re going to attack, Connor,” she says.

“What?” They’re going to attack my family? I need to warn my father. I need to get my mother out of the house. “When?”

“I don’t know, but I had to make sure you weren’t there.”

“Aurora, you need to let me go.” I pull harder on my wrists, but nothing budes. “I need to warn my parents.”

“No.” She shakes her head.

“What do you meanno?”

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“You said it yourself. They’re not good people, Connor.”

“That doesn’t make them not my parents.” I keep pulling at the cuffs. My wrists are bleeding but I can barely feel it.

“I can’t lose you,” she says.

“So you thought you’d kidnap me?”

“Boyfriend-nap.” She shrugs. “Better than being a widow.”

My brows draw down. “Pretty sure you gotta be married to be classed as a widow.”

“I have a plan,” she says.

“Oh, great, she has a plan. I can’t fucking wait to hear what craziness you’ve cooked up.” I laugh.

“I might be crazy, but guess what? You love me, so some would say you’re crazier.”

She’s so sure that I’m still in love with her. I don’t have it in me to tell her I’m not. It would be a lie. I could try to get her to believe me, but at this point, I don’t think it’d make a difference. She’s clearly made up her mind about us.

“What’s the plan here, Aurora? You gonna keep me tied up for the rest of our lives?”

“No. Just until I know you’re not going to do something stupid like go back to the

city,” she says.

Back to the city? Where the fuck are we?

“What if it were me? What lengths would you go to if you overheard that your family was coming to attack mine?”

“I made sure you weren’t anywhere near where the attack was happening, Aurora. I didn’t fucking kidnap you,” I grunt.

“Last night,” she says. “You knew they were going to take the container?”

“I didn’t just know. I helped them.”

“Why would you steal from my family?” she asks.

“Why would you kill my cousin?” I throw back at her.

“I didn’t do that on purpose. It was an accident. I wasn’t myself,” she says.

“I know. I’m sorry. Aurora, unlock the cuffs,” I reply more calmly. “Let’s talk.” Maybe if she thinks I’m onboard with her insanity, she’ll free me. “Tell me what the plan is.”

“We’re going to lie low here for a few days, and then we can move. Find someplace no one will go looking for us. Just you and me,” she says. “I have passports, credit cards. We can go anywhere.”

I blink. How long has she been planning this? She has passports? “Aurora, we can’t just leave. You can’t leave your family.”

“I can’t leave you.” She shakes her head. “I’m not crazy, Connor. I know you feel it too.”

She’s prepared to leave her family for me?

“Okay.” I nod. “Let’s do it. Just you and me,” I agree, because she’s not going to free me if I don’t. “On one condition.”

“What?”

“Never drug me again.”

“What if...?”

“Never,” I interrupt her.

Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:48 am

“Okay, deal.” Aurora smiles. Until the sound of tires on gravel has her frowning. “Fuck.” She stands and rushes over to the window.

“Aurora, get me out of these,” I tell her.

“It’s the Irish,” she says. “How the hell did they find us?”

I probably should have mentioned that there’s a tracking device in my wallet, my shoes, and my belt. My parents are paranoid of me being taken. They can’t lose their heir. But I’m not worried about that right now. I’m worried about her and what they’re going to do if they get to her.

“Aurora, you need to fucking untie me. They cannot find you here,” I call out to her.

“Okay.” She comes over and unlocks the cuffs.

I shake out my arms. “Is there a back door?”

“Yeah.” She bends down and picks up a bag. “Follow me.”

I don’t know why I listen to her, but I do. I trail behind her, dropping my wallet to the ground before losing my belt and kicking off my shoes.

The sound of the front handle jiggling has me pushing her faster out the door and closing it behind us. All I can see is forest. Where the hell did she take me?

“We need to run,” I whisper.

“That way.” Aurora points to the left. “But first, I need to do something. You go. I’ll catch up.”

I look down at her as she digs around in her bag. “Yeah, that’s not happening. What are you doing?”

“Creating chaos.” She smirks at me as she holds up a hand grenade.

“Fuck no. Get up.” I pull at her arm.

“Wait! We need that,” she says, reaching for the bag. She scoops it up again and I drag her along the yard. When we reach the edge of the woods, she slips out of my hold.

I turn around to grab her again, but she’s already running back towards the house. Fucking hell, this girl is going to get us both killed.

I follow after her, stopping when I see her arm sling back and the grenade launch through the air. It lands by the cabin before detonating.

“Aurora!” I yell out. But she doesn’t turn around. She’s staring off into the distance. I follow her line of sight and freeze.

No. This is not happening. One of my father’s men has a rifle pointed at her. And when I step closer, I see the bright-red light aimed at Aurora’s forehead.

I dive for her, and the sound of a single gunshot pierces the air, right before both of our bodies hit the ground...

Connor and Aurora’s story is not over yet, continue their obsessive crazy love in His Deadly Devotion.