



# Pen Pal

**Author:** *Stephanie Noircent*

**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Dark

**Description:** I thought I was safe behind paper and ink... until I became my pen pal's obsession—and his only way out.

It started with a letter. A curiosity. A reckless decision to write to a man locked away in Ashwood Prison.

Lorenzo Ricci, the son of the Italian Mafia boss, was supposed to be just words on a page. A prisoner with a past as dark as the ink he spilled. But letter by letter, he slipped beneath my skin. His confessions were raw. His promises, sinful. His obsession with me? All-consuming.

I should have stopped writing. I should have ignored the way he made me feel. Instead, I kept writing. And when fate led me to stand before him—not as his pen pal, but as his lawyer—I knew I was in too deep.

I told myself I could handle it. That I could balance the case, the temptation, the unrelenting hunger in his eyes. But when the walls of Ashwood closed in, when the nightmare I never saw coming trapped me in its grasp...

Enzo was there. Watching. Waiting.

Because monsters don't just lurk in prison cells. Sometimes, they write you letters. And sometimes... they come for what's theirs.

**Total Pages (Source):** 79

# Page 1

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Prologue

Enzo

Enzo

"Do you mind if I bring my intern with me?" my lawyer asked over the phone.

Great, another generation of blood-sucking vermin who only looked out for themselves. I didn't want anyone else to be this close to my case.

Then again, maybe I could have some fun. I should really teach this lawyer-in-training a lesson about how fucked up the system is and how they could make a difference. Or I could scare them so badly that they'd immediately make a career change.

Decisions, decisions.

"I don't mind," I replied dryly. "Bring him to our visit later."

"Good, she'll be happy to meet you. See you tomorrow," answered, and the line went dead.

She?

Oh, I would definitely have fun with that one.

I smirked as I hung up the phone, strolling to my cell. Some inmates scowled at me, but I didn't care. They were too cowardly to mess with me. Once I was transferred to this prison, I bathed in the blood of the top dog here, and no one gave me shit again.

Vitali nodded his head in greeting as I sat on my bunk. "Any progress?"

I shook my head. "Gerald just wants to bring in one of his interns."

Vitali curled his lip with distaste. "I hate it when they do that shit."

I shrugged. "I think it'll be fun. The intern's a woman."

Vitali's eyes glinted dangerously. "When's the last time you even saw a woman that wasn't your sister, Enzo?"

"That one deputy," I remembered vaguely. "But she retired years ago."

Vitali grinned. "I pity the woman, then. She won't know what hit her."

"Lights out, inmates!" a deputy called, banging his baton against a celldoor.

"Already?" Vitali exclaimed, shooting me a pointed look. "Good thing you got that phone call in when you did."

"Ricci, lights out," the deputy called, and I realized it was Russo, one of the deputies I had a connection with on the outside.

"Yeah, yeah," I sighed, rolling my eyes as I sat on my bunk.

Russo glared at me before moving on, harassing the other inmates before all lights closed and the prison was plunged into darkness.

The painted-over brick walls were white, the concrete floor was gray, and a permanent musty odor drifted in the recycled air. Condensation stuck on the moldy shower curtains, and the toilets constantly emitted a low hiss. The sink's faucet dripped intermittently enough that the guards either didn't notice or didn't care. The fluorescent lights hummed when they were on, bright and blinding, and our only respite was nighttime when they were shut off.

"You're not going to get any sleep, are you?" Vitali mused.

"Probably not," I admitted. My mind was most active at night, and now that I knew I was meeting someone tomorrow, it was all I could think about.

"Always the over-thinker," Vitali muttered as he turned over in his bunk. "Talk to you in the morning."

I turned to the desk behind my bunk and removed my glasses, resting them on it as I lay in my bed. The mattress was thin, barely a cushion for the hard metal frame underneath. The only way to avoid back pain was to change positions frequently. If I slept too deeply, I paid for it in the morning.

Gerald was a shit lawyer, and he wasn't getting me anywhere in my case. I was found guilty of murdering my sister's rapist, so at least that part of my rap sheet was over. But since I killed the top dog, a known child molester, I was on trial again. I was facing life in prison this time, but I didn't give a shit. When they gave me twenty years for my sister's rapist's murder, I knew that the justice system was fucked.

## Page 2

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When my sister stopped visiting me, I knew that I had lost the only family that I had. My parents lost custody of us when we were young, so my father didn't bother to visit me now. It didn't matter that he was the Italian mafia boss. All he cared about was himself and having an heir to pass his kingdom to.

So, I made a decision; I didn't plan on surviving my stay. My sister had a life of her own now. She was married and pregnant, so I knew that she would be fine. It actually brought a smile to my face, knowing that my father wouldn't have a son anymore to pass his legacy to, so he would be forced to give everything to my sister.

Everything was the least that she deserved after everything he put her through.

My mind raced with memories, mostly bad. I remembered hearing my sister's cries in the night as our father beat her. When I couldn't stand it anymore, I stormed into her room and knocked my father on his ass, and since that night, he only beat me.

When I showed up to school with two black eyes and a broken arm, only then did they finally call the police.

My sister and I were removed from our home and bounced around from foster home to foster home. No one wanted to adopt teenagers, and they were afraid my family would retaliate if they did. All we maintained was our names. Everything else was stripped from us.

So Sofia and I did what we could to survive, and when I was locked up for killing our high school coach when I was sixteen, I never saw her outside of these bars again.

When she turned eighteen, she was kicked out of her foster home and left to fend for herself. She went back to my father, but instead of hitting her this time, he saw her as a pawn in his game. He wanted to marry her off, setting her up with many different mafia princes.

She eventually chose one and refused to marry anyone else. Sofia fell in love and got married, and now she lived in his house with him.

I had my people watch them, and they confirmed that he treated my little sister like a queen. She deserved the life she had now, so I accepted it when she stopped seeing me.

I met Vitali when I was in juvenile hall, and we both got long sentences. We bonded over our shitty childhoods and mafia families, and now we were part of the same crew. Other than a few new faces here and there, no one messed with us.

All I could do now was pass the time and wait. Court dates were months apart, so I had to keep busy somehow. I mostly read books and worked out since there wasn't much else to do around here.

I closed my eyes, trying to will myself to sleep, but as usual, it eluded me. All I could do was try to relax my body and rest as the night dragged on.

I tossed and turned until I heard the dreaded words. "Count time!"

I groaned as I dragged myself from my bunk, getting to my feet along with Vitali. It was seven o'clock in the morning, and the count was also at seven o'clock at night. Deputies and guards counted each inmate in the prison, making sure everyone was accounted for.

Romano, another one of my family connections, was the deputy on shift this morning.

He glanced at Vitali and me before moving on to the other cells.

"Get any sleep?" Vitali wondered.

"No," I scowled. "You did, though."

"I accept my fate, so now I sleep like a baby," he shrugged. "Maybe you should try it sometime."

"I'm not done yet," I smirked. "Maybe I'll get found innocent."

Vitali laughed. "That's funny, Enzo. They've got you on video killing the guy."

"Would be a shame if Romano lost the video," I mused.

"I don't know what you have on him, but I doubt it's good enough for him to risk his career," Vitali chastised. "I know you might think so, but even you aren't invincible Enzo."

Maybe he was right. But until I was sentenced to life, there was still hope, however fast it was dwindling.

"Chow time, line up," Romano announced.

The cell doors unlocked, and inmates streamed out of their rooms, but I stayed rooted to the spot. Visiting hours sometimes started during breakfast, and I didn't want to miss my lawyer's visit.

I wanted to fire Gerald, and I wanted to do it in front of his intern.

I sat on my bunk and waited, and soon enough, Romano began calling out names

until he reached mine.

"Ricci, Salinas, Stevenson," he rattled on until finally, he ran out of names.

"Visitation time, line up."

I stood and walked to the line, slowly forming as inmates hurried to scarf the remainder of their food down their throats. The door to our block opened, and we followed the guard out the door to the visitation area.



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I was ushered into the legal visitation room. When the door closed behind me, I was on autopilot as I shuffled to the chair and sat, my eyes lifting to meet Gerald's.

"Hi, Lorenzo," he began. "Ready to go over your case?"

I could smell a hint of perfume, and my eyes searched the room. The intern wasn't here, but she had been. Did she step out, or did she get cold feet?

A knock sounded on the door, and it creaked open as the click of heels sounded behind me. Her perfume wafted into the room, and I stiffened. She smelled fucking divine.

The instant she walked into the room, I knew that she didn't belong here. Not in a place like this, where the damned went to rot behind bars. She walked in like a spark flickering in a place drenched with gasoline, too delicate and clean.

She rounded the table and stood by Gerald, not daring to take a seat as my heart nearly stopped.

She radiated with a light no one could touch, and I felt like a moth drawn to her flame. She had light, sandy hair and stormy eyes swirling with curiosity. She wore a fitted suit, her curves perfectly highlighted by the fabric, brown and plain, trying her damnest not to stand out.

My fingers curled against the table, metal biting into my skin. I could already feel the shift in the air—every set of eyes on her, tracking her movement as the door stayed open behind me. But none of them mattered because she was already looking at me.

The door clicked shut behind me, and she was alone with us. A greedy, money-hungry son-of-a-bitch, and a murderer.

She hesitated a fraction of a second before moving forward, sliding into the seat next to Gerald. Her pulse fluttered at her throat, but she forced herself to meet my gaze.

She was a brave little thing.

I smiled the kind of smile that had gotten me out of numerous dangerous situations, the kind that promised trouble.

"Lorenzo Ricci," she said, her voice steady, challenging.

I leaned forward, elbows resting on the cold table between us. "And you are?"

Her lips pressed together like she didn't want to tell me.

Interesting.

"You already know who I am," she replied instead. "I'm your lawyer's intern."

Mine. The word rolled through me, slow and dangerous.

She didn't realize what she'd done. She didn't know that stepping into my world—sitting here, speaking my name—meant that she was already tangled in my web. And I never let my prey go.

"You don't look like an intern," I mused. My gaze dragged over her—the crisp lines of her blouse, the way her hands tightened into fists against her skirt. "You look like something I could ruin."

Her breath caught. She hid it well, but I saw the way her fingers twitched and the way her throat worked as she swallowed.

"Let's keep this professional," she said, her voice clipped and stern.

I smirked. Oh, my little lawyer, you think you have a choice?

She shifted, reaching into her bag for the files she brought. I reached out just enough for my fingers to brush hers.

She froze, and I swear I felt it—like a current running through her, like recognition.

Her lips parted slightly, but she snatched her hand back before I could get a real grip.

So she felt it, too. The pull, the tension, the fact that no matter how much she pretended that this was just another case, she was already losing.

She could fight it all she wanted. She could keep her voice cool and her eyes sharp, but I saw her. I didn't lose the things that I wanted.

"My name is Amara Branson," she conceded, pulling some papers from her bag.

"Amara," I enunciated, testing her name on my tongue. "My little lawyer." It suited her; pent-up, frustrated, putting up a front she thought that I couldn't see. But I saw right through her, and she was easy to read.

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She wanted to make a difference in the world; they all did. I wondered how long it would take her to realize that I was a lost cause and that we all were.

Gerald leaned back, watching us, but I paid him no mind. All I could see and think about was Amara. Maybe he was testing her to see if she could hold up under pressure. Perhaps he wanted to see how she would react in the same room with a killer.

Whatever his reasoning, it didn't matter. Amara was here now, and she consumed me.

"You're being charged with the murder of Keith Rollins," she began. "Did you do it?"

I smiled as she glanced at me, gauging my reaction as she studied me.

"What do you think?" I asked.

Her lips pressed into a thin line as she looked at her papers, flipping through them as she shuddered.

"Why did you kill him?" she asked.

"Does it matter?" I grinned. "I'm not sure the state cares why."

"Humor me," she challenged. "I see here he had an extensive record, mostly sexual assault against minors. Were you aware?"

I gnashed my teeth in disgust. Keith was the worst of the worst, and I couldn't hear

him boast about the children he hurt anymore. He told anyone who would listen that he was getting out soon, and if the judicial system wouldn't stop him from hurting another child, I sure would.

And I did.

"You were," she answered, searching my face. "Do you feel the killing was justified?"

I lifted my gaze to hers. "Yes."

Her head tilted slightly in curiosity. I knew it would be her downfall; she was too interested in criminology, too curious for her own good. Gerald was disgusted when I told him why as if Keith was a saint and I killed a good man.

"Do you think it's right to make yourself the judge, jury, and executioner of your fellow inmate?" Amara pressed.

"For pieces of shit like that? Yes," I admitted. "The justice system failed his victims. He was going to do it again. Now he can't."

Her eyes rounded in understanding, and she glanced at Gerald. He nodded, confirming what I said was true, and she looked at me with new eyes. Like I wasn't the monster people painted me to be.

Like I was someone she could save.

"We can work with this," she nodded, stacking her papers neatly. "I can tell the judge and jury about his past record and how he was at a high risk of reoffending. You'll still get prison time, but everyone hates child molesters. You might just get manslaughter, which is a lesser charge than murder."

Something stirred inside me, a part of myself that I thought was long gone.

Hope.

Manslaughter had a minimum sentence of five years, and it would be over before I finished my sentence for killing my sister's rapist. I wouldn't get any additional time, and I could live some semblance of a life, getting out when I was thirty-six.

Gerald looked between us. "By God, I heard of a woman's touch, but I didn't believe it. I never got close to this far with him," he muttered to Amara.

"Maybe stop assuming all prisoners are irredeemable," she rebutted, smiling to quell the sting of her words.

She turned to me, picking a few papers from her folder before sliding them to me.

I looked at them. They were self-reflection worksheets customized to fit prisoners with violent crimes.

"Mail these to me as you finish them," she said. "I can come to see you every week, and we can delve into the why and how things could've been different."

"I don't regret what I did," I warned, giving Amara a pointed look. "Not for Keith, and not for that coach."

She hesitated before sighing, looking at Gerald and then at me. "They were bad men, Mr. Ricci. I can understand your lack of remorse. What I want you to understand is that it wasn't your job to kill them. We have systems in place for that—"

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"That failed miserably," I muttered. "Did you miss the part where I said Keith was being released and bragged about the next kid he would abuse?"

She cringed with disgust, looking to Gerald and back to me. I could tell she was conflicted. The ends justified the means, as far as I was concerned.

How dedicated was she to make the world a better place if she wouldn't break a few rules to make it happen?

"So my question is this, Amara. Who's really the monster? The penal system that gives a slap on the wrist to habitual sexual offenders, or people like me, who prevent them from destroying more lives?" I snapped.

Her lower lip quivered just a little, subtle enough for others not to notice. But I was watching her intently.

I wondered what would really happen here; would she redeem me, or would I corrupt her?

"I think that's enough for today," Gerald announced, the chair scraping against the ground as he stood. "I'll relay this new information to the judge, find out which deputies worked that shift, and subpoena them. They probably heard what he said before you attacked him, and information like that might stop a jury from convicting you."

Amara cleared her throat and stood, placing her neat little papers back in her bag. Gerald walked around her, exiting the room and leaving me alone with her.

My hand snapped forward, wrapping around her wrist. She gasped, regarding me warily as my grip tightened.

"If I do these worksheets and mail them in, will you write me back?" I wondered. "It gets awful lonely in here for men like me."

She tried pulling out of my grip, but she couldn't. "W-we'll see," she stammered. "If you can be honest and vulnerable in your reflection, I'll reply."

I could be honest, but being vulnerable would be a challenge. I never opened up to anyone, not even Vitali.

"I'll hold you to that, Amara," I breathed, releasing her wrist.

She scurried for the door, and I turned, watching her ass bounce as she took quick steps before disappearing behind the door.

Maybe I'll try this vulnerable thing, I thought. If it would get her to come back and keep in touch with me, I was tempted to open those floodgates to my fucked up past.

But I won't let her pretend she's not mine for long.

The guards took me back to my cell, and I immediately sat at my desk, looking over the worksheets. I chose one and filled it out as honestly as I could, but it wasn't enough. I wanted her to write back, not just about what I wrote in the worksheets, but about her as a person.

Dear Amara,

I thought I should warn you, my little lawyer. I don't do self-help. I don't sit in circles and cry about my past. I don't believe in second chances or fresh starts. Men like me



don't get those.

But you want me to fill this out, so I did. Not because I give a damn about "growth" or "rehabilitation." But because it means you'll read my words. Because it means, for a few minutes, I'll have your attention.

You asked me to list my biggest regret. There's a lot I should regret. Things I've done. Things I will do. But my biggest regret? I regret that you walked into my life when I had nothing left to offer you but the wreckage of who I am.

You also asked me to write down my biggest fear. Men like me don't get scared, Amara. But if I did—if I ever lost sleep over something—it wouldn't be the life sentence hanging over my head. It wouldn't be the bars that keep me in, the fights, or even the possibility of an early, bloody end. It would be this.

An empty cell. A stack of letters that never get answered. Silence where your voice should be.

I don't expect you to fix me. I don't expect you to save me. But don't make the mistake of thinking I don't need you. You might be the only thing keeping me human. Don't give up on me yet.

And if you ever try to disappear from my life, Amara... I'll find a way to bring you back. One way or another.

- Enzo

I smirked as I stuffed the letter in the addressed envelope, copying it from Gerald's business card he gave me when he first became my lawyer. I placed it in the outgoing mailbox and then returned to my cell.

"I'm gonna hit the shower," I warned Vitali as I grabbed my shampoo, soap, towel, and another uniform.

"Don't have to tell me twice," Vitali laughed as he stood, stretched, and waltzed out of our cell.

I pulled the shower curtain open, stepped inside, then closed it. I draped my towel over the shower rod along with my clean clothes and placed the soap and shampoo by the shower knob.

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I undressed, dropping the clothes just outside of the shower to wash later. I turned on the water, adjusting the spray until it was hot enough to stand, and I stepped into the spray.

Hot water was rare around here, and with how many inmates we were and how often they took a shower, I knew I had to be quick.

But I couldn't get Amara out of my head.

That quivering, pouty lip, those big, hopeful eyes, that thick head of hair, the curves on her petite form. She took over my thoughts, and my cock grew heavy with need.

I grunted, unable to resist, as I ran a soapy hand along my cock. It twitched, hard and swollen, and I gripped the base, giving one long stroke.

I tilted my head back, wetting my hair as I imagined Amara in here with me. I pictured how I'd peel her clothes off and soap up those perfect curves. I'd watch in fascination as the soap reflected light off the bubbles on her skin and how they'd slide down her body in the water.

I stroked my cock, the pressure building faster than I could contain it. I hadn't touched myself in a while, sick of the same faces in the magazines some men snuck in here.

But now I had all the inspiration in the world.

Imagining her perky tits pressed against my chest, I bit back a groan. Her skin would

feel so soft against mine; I just knew it.

Was she a freak in the bedroom? Did she like to be dominated, or did she like to take charge? I smirked as I pictured us both wrestling, fighting for control, until I finally subdued her. I'd lick her pussy until she saw stars, her thighs like earmuffs against my face.

I bet she tasted as delicious as she looked. There was no way a woman like her didn't taste sweet, heady, and addictive.

I could see it now; her smooth hands wrapping around my waist, her cunt already sopping wet for me, pink and swollen, her body flushed and ready.

How would I take her first? Maybe I'd fist her hair and drag her to her knees and make her taste my cock. If she looked up at me with those big doe eyes, I wouldn't last long.

Maybe I'd pin her against the wall, rub her greedy clit, and impale her with my cock. She'd feel so tight and perfect around me, milking me like she needed me as much as I needed her.

She'd moan my name, her cries short and desperate, and she'd come all over me, bathing me in her essence. She'd claw at my skin, marking me as hers, biting on my shoulder like an unrestrained animal as she lost herself to me.

Just as I would drown in her.

I groaned as the base of my spine tingled, and pleasure speared through me as I climaxed, bracing an arm against the wall at the intensity of it. My cock jerked, throbbing as I spurted in my hand, the liquid hot and thick.

I sighed, chuckling as I took the soap, shuddering as the water began to turn cold.

I got clean just to get dirty again, I mused to myself.

Amara

I was surprised to find Mr. Ricci's letter soon after I last saw him. Most inmates I saw didn't stay true to their word, but it seemed this one was different.

Mark was out drinking with his friends, so I tore the envelope open as I walked up the stairs, taking off my blazer and my hair tie. My feet ached from walking around in heels all day, and I told myself I'd wear flats if this continued.

I sat on my bed, reading over the worksheet he completed. It often took months before I got the kind of raw honesty Lorenzo offered on paper. It was like he had to be the tough guy in person, but when he wrote, he bared his soul.

I read his letter, and my heart pounded at the sincerity of his words.

It's just a case, I told myself. But his words were too real and too raw. It took me off guard. He wasn't like any inmate I'd ever met.

Or like any man I'd ever met.

I felt a pull—deep, dangerous, and unknown. I couldn't explain it, and it was nothing like I'd felt with my husband. It was different somehow.

Part of me warned me not to write back and that this was a dangerous game, some elaborate scheme this prisoner was making.

But the hope for his redemption was too strong. He had too much potential, and I

couldn't be the reason he became another life wasted behind bars.

So, I gravitated toward paper and penned a response.

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Dear Lorenzo,

I read your letter. Twice. I wasn't sure how to respond at first. I could tell you that self-help isn't about sitting in a circle and crying about the past, but I think you already know that. You wouldn't have filled out the worksheet if you didn't think, even for a second, that change was possible. That maybe—just maybe—you're more than the things you've done. And I believe that, Lorenzo. I believe you are more.

You said regret is just an anchor men like you drag behind them. Maybe you're right. But what if regret isn't supposed to weigh you down? What if it's meant to remind you of what you can still do differently?

You've lived your life believing that violence is the only way to get justice, that the system is broken, and that no one is looking out for people like you. But if two wrongs made a right, wouldn't the world be a much darker place? Wouldn't it mean there's no point in trying to fix anything at all?

I know the justice system isn't perfect. But it exists because revenge is just pain, looking for somewhere else to land. And you—whether you see it or not—are carrying too much of it. You don't have to hold the weight of the world on your shoulders, Lorenzo. I applaud you for opening up to me. I know it wasn't easy. It's never easy to look at yourself and wonder if you could have been someone different.

But you can still choose what kind of man you want to be now. And whether you believe it or not, I think that choice is still yours. I'm here. I'll keep writing.

Sincerely,

Amara Branson

I read over his letter again, touched by how personal it was. Hesitation crept in, alarm bells warning me about how dangerous killers were. I could be starting something that I couldn't walk away from.

But I had to take the risk. I'd be damned if another person got locked up forever when I could've saved him.

I addressed the envelope and decided to bring it straight to the mailbox on the corner of my street. I changed my heels for sneakers and walked quickly as rain began pouring from the clouds.

Mark's car was in the driveway. My heart sank. Would he be worried about me and wonder where I went?

I opened the door, hurrying inside as I wiped the raindrops from my bare arms. I scowled as I realized my blouse was soaked.

"Where have you been?" Mark demanded, sitting at the kitchen table. "How long were you out?"

"I just popped out for a few minutes to mail a letter for work," I panted, trying to catch my breath from the quick jog I took. "I didn't think you'd be home so soon."

His expression was neutral, watching and waiting. Confused, I removed my sneakers and stepped closer. His eyes trailed over my body, probably noticing that I was still in my work clothes.

I looked at the table in front of him, and I froze. He fisted Enzo's letter, and then I noticed the glint of anger in his eyes.



Seeing that I noticed the letter, he sneered, lifting the letter as he read it out loud. "Dear Amara," he started mockingly.

I winced as he read the entirety of it, heat burning my cheeks.

"Look at how this degenerate clings to you," he scoffed. "You really think a murderer can change? That he needs you?"

My brows furrowed. "You knew when you married me that I would be a lawyer. I have to deal with all kinds of people, Mark. That's the job."

"I didn't know you'd work with fucking killers, Amara," he snapped. "I bet he writes all his lawyer's interns love letters. You're not special."

"It's not a love letter," I placated. "If I can help rehabilitate offenders—"

"But you're not a fucking social worker or psychologist, are you, Amara?" he laughed. "You're just his lawyer's intern. You're there to learn from your boss, not cure his clients."

I cringed. I didn't know what to say to that. Maybe he was right, but I couldn't just sit back and let people spiral into a life behind bars when I knew I could do something about it.

Mark lifted a lighter, pressing the flame against the letter as it lit up, burning before my eyes.

"What the fuck, Mark?" I exclaimed. "That was so unnecessary!"

He stood, dropping the letter in the sink as he rushed me. I backed away until I hit a wall, and he grabbed my wrist, his hold bruising.

"You belong to me, Amara. Did you forget that?" he yelled, his breath reeking of alcohol.

I shook my head.

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"You're not writing him back. End of discussion," Mark shouted, throwing my wrist from his grip as he backed away. He ran a hand through his hair, laughing as he muttered insults before he walked off.

I stood frozen on the spot for a few moments, unsure how to react. Ever since Mark and I got married, he started showing his violent side more and more. I wasn't sure how much more of this I could take.

"Maybe you being a lawyer wasn't such a good idea," he called from the living room. "A woman having a job is emasculating, anyway. Let me provide like I was meant to."

No way, I thought. I worked too hard on my degree to give up now. But I stayed silent, instead dashing for the stairs. I darted into the bedroom, locking myself in the bathroom before I started the shower.

Maybe now he would leave me alone.

By the time I went to bed, Mark was already fast asleep, snoring softly.

I sat awake as the hours ticked by, staring at a blank piece of paper on my nightstand.

I wanted to write back so badly. I knew he would keep sending those worksheets, and I wanted to say something before Mark forbade me from writing again.

I was trapped. I still had to see Lorenzo for work, but I had to keep that spark of light alive in him.

Pushing the piece of paper away, I settled under the sheets. I'd write him from work, I decided. Mark couldn't track those letters or keep me from writing them in the office.

As long as Lorenzo kept writing to me, I promised myself that I would write back.

Because I wasn't letting him slip through my fingers when I could save him.

Days bled into nights, and I found it impossible to concentrate on my other cases. Time seemed meaningless until I would see Lorenzo again. The other inmates Gerald represented were remorseless criminals, but there was something about Lorenzo. I felt like I could really make a difference with him.

The next worksheet arrived, as did his letter.

Dear Amara,

It took longer than I'd like to finish this worksheet. I don't like dwelling on the past or rehashing unpleasant memories. I don't see a point to it, really, but I filled them out anyway.

Why am I the way I am? There are too many answers to that question, so I'll summarize; I am what life has made me. Everything that happened to me has led me to this moment.

You ask if I have regrets. My only regret is that I didn't kill my victims sooner before they could hurt others. Maybe then things would be different because there would be much less pain in the world.

But unless someone invented a time machine, regrets serve no purpose but to make the one with them miserable. So, I refuse to dwell on these thoughts.

You say it's the justice system's job to dispose of these low-lives. I can admit that's true. However, I can also tell you that they do a shit job of it. Thousands of criminals walk free all the time, and the judicial system fails the victims. What to do then? Just sit and wait until they hurt the next child?

I don't think any sane man could do that. The system is what needs to change because then men like me wouldn't need to keep the balance between good and evil in this world.

I know that without those miscreants, the world is a brighter place. Tell me that I'm wrong, and you'll be admitting the suffering of children is better than the death of their abusers.

Write back.

-Enzo

I sighed as I smoothed out the wrinkled paper as if he'd written the letter and then tossed it in the trash before he decided to mail it.

I was glad that he did. The insight into his mind was fascinating. His thought process had a certain morality and logic to it. I could work with this.

After I finished looking over the worksheet, I began writing a letter of my own.

Dear Lorenzo,

Thank you for completing this worksheet. I know it can't always be easy to examine yourself like that or to revisit unpleasant memories. I promise that good will come from this and that this discomfort is only temporary.

I can understand where you're coming from. The justice system does fail sometimes, and criminals walk the streets free every day when they shouldn't. Some innocent people get thrown in prison as well. It isn't perfect, but it's what we have, and we must respect it.

## Page 9

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When you kill, you give them a part of your life in return. I say this because, as a result, you have to serve time, often a life sentence, behind bars. You become a sacrificial lamb, taking on several lifetimes of confinement when, instead, you should be living your life.

If you want reform, demand it. Protest, write to your senators and congressmen, and set up informative events. Vote for people who believe the same things you do. There are plenty of things you can do to make a difference that doesn't involve killing people.

It seems you've put the weight of the world on your shoulders, tasking yourself to rid the planet of scum. But that isn't your job, Lorenzo. You aren't a martyr. That's why we have a justice system in place.

You can always report to the deputies what you hear the child abusers say, and maybe you could testify at their trials and help put them away longer. There are other ways you can help keep the world safe without taking a life.

You matter, Lorenzo, and you deserve to live a full life. I wish you'd treat yourself as if your life does matter and that you deserve to live it free of this place.

Maybe someday you'll see in yourself what I see in you. I don't see a broken man beyond repair. I see someone who wants to help the world but goes about it the wrong way. Let me show you alternatives. You can do this. I believe in you.

Sincerely,

Amara Branson

Before I knew it, the next day at work, there was another letter at my small desk in Gerald's office. Another worksheet was completed, and I skimmed over it. I wondered what Lorenzo had to say now, so I opened the letter quickly.

Dear Amara,

You called me Lorenzo and not Mr. Ricci. I appreciate that more than you know.

As for your view of the world, I fear you see it through rose-colored glasses. If left up to the justice system alone, pedophiles would continue to slip through the cracks, and more children would keep getting hurt. I need to prevent that as much as I can. I can't just let it happen.

Legality is not always the basis of morality. It was once illegal to harbor Jewish people from the Nazis. Does that mean those who did should've just obeyed the law? Should they have let those people suffer and die?

That's how I see it. Pedophilia is an epidemic that must be stopped. If I could guarantee immediate reform, maybe then I would stop.

The jury system always seemed odd to me. Why fill the pews with random people? Why not have experts in body language, psychologists, or people who can pick up cues if the defendant or prosecutor is lying? That would already be a vast improvement. But even if I got a petition with thousands of signatures, it would take years before this was implemented.

That would be the first step for me to stop killing. Maybe then I would walk a different path. But until then, I don't see how I could stop.



-Enzo

I exhaled sharply. He was making progress, already considering alternatives to killing. It was a vast improvement, and my heart soared at the knowledge.

I grabbed a pen, noting the time. Today was my second visit with Lorenzo, so I wanted to finish and send out my letter before I saw him.

Dear Lorenzo,

I just got your letter and worksheet. Thank you for your candor. I know it can take a long time to make a difference. In the meantime, let's find other ways you can stop pedophiles.

As I mentioned in my previous letter, you can always report what you hear to the deputies. They can transmit this information to the judge and prosecutor and possibly get resentenced. You never know until you try.

I'm headed out to see you soon, so I have to cut this letter short. Keep doing your worksheets, Lorenzo. You're really getting somewhere, and I'm proud of you.

Sincerely,

Amara Branson

I stuffed the letter in the envelope and dropped it in the mailbox on the way to Ashwood Prison.

Gerald followed me in his car, and we were shown to one of the legal visit rooms. I sat next to Gerald and waited, my hands fidgeting as we waited.

Then the door buzzed open, and we stood.

Enzo was led inside, and the door clicked shut behind him. I almost rolled my eyes. He styled his hair, shaved his face, and looked like he made an effort to look presentable. Who did he think he was fooling here? There was no way I would go for an inmate.

No way in hell.

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Lorenzo regarded me, his expression shuttered as he sat across from me.

Just as I suspected, he seemed to only open up through writing but maintained his tough persona on the outside. I figured it was a survival mechanism he'd adopted in prison.

Surely, it was seen as a sign of weakness, and a weak inmate was a dead inmate.

"Ms. Branson," he greeted.

"That's Mrs. Branson," Gerald corrected.

Lorenzo's brows shot up. Didn't he know I was married? I glanced at my ring finger, wondering if I forgot to wear my wedding ring last time. I looked back at him, and his expression was neutral again as if the information didn't affect him at all.

"I've got good news for you, Mr. Ricci," Gerald began. "The prosecution has agreed to drop the charges down to manslaughter. They don't believe a jury of your peers would convict you of first or second-degree murder due to the nature of your victim's crimes. The best they can hope for is manslaughter, and there is no minimum sentence. You have what, fifteen more years left to serve? As long as you get fifteen years or less, your stay in prison won't change."

"That's if they make it concurrent," Lorenzo corrected. "If they make my sentences consecutive, then I get thirty years. Fifteen for killing my coach and fifteen for Keith."

“They shouldn’t do that,” I added. “Manslaughter and second-degree murder are different charges, and the severity is different. They shouldn’t give you a larger sentence for manslaughter than second-degree murder, which is the sentence you’re serving now. If you can show some sign of remorse—“

“I have no remorse,” Lorenzo snarled. “He won’t ever touch another child again. Neither of them will.”

I winced. I didn’t know what to say to that, so I looked to Gerald for guidance.

“Pretend, then,” Gerald suggested. “If nothing else but to get a more lenient sentence.”

“I think I’ll get a more lenient one if I don’t show remorse,” he countered. “I’m the man who removes pedophiles from this plane. I think I should stick to being myself. Who wants to acquit someone who regrets killing pedophiles?”

“Unfortunately, we couldn’t prove that your coach was a pedophile,” Gerald began. “But if one of his victims were willing to testify, we could appeal—“

“No!” Lorenzo shouted, standing from his chair so fast I nearly jumped out of my skin. “She’s been through enough already. I won’t put her through that again!”

“Lorenzo,” I protested.

“Change the fucking subject, or I’m leaving,” he bellowed. “I won’t fucking budge on this.”

The door swung open, and a couple guards glanced at Lorenzo warily. “Everything okay in here?” one asked.

“I think it’s best we come back when Mr. Ricci is calmer,” Gerald suggested, standing. “We’ll return next week.”

“Don’t fucking bother,” Lorenzo snapped. “I don’t need your bullshit, Gerald. You can send Amara, but I don’t want to see you until you fucking change your tune. You work forme. Remember that.”

One of the guards grabbed his arm, and Lorenzo smirked, glancing behind him. “Fucking Russo,” he chuckled as the other guard grabbed his other arm and they escorted him from the room.

“Well, that went well,” Gerald muttered sarcastically as he gathered his briefcase. “I’ll suggest it again at our next visit. He’ll call when he’s ready to see us again, but you can’t see him alone until your internship is over and if he hires you. So I’m sorry, Amara. Looks like you’ll be focusing on your other cases from now on.”

“What about our correspondence?” I wondered, standing and slinging my bag over my shoulder. “We were making such good progress.

“Yeah, I can see that,” Gerald gestured to the door sarcastically. “If you want to write to him on your own time, be my guest, but you can’t do it during company time or in the office anymore. As far as we’re concerned, until he asks to see us again, we’re finished with Mr. Ricci.”

My heart sank. Mark wouldn’t let me write Lorenzo. I would have to sneak around just to send him a letter.

I’ll wait until he writes back to me first,I decided. I didn’t want to risk another big fight with my husband if Lorenzo wasn’t going to write back to me anyway.

So the waiting game begins,I thought, following Gerald out of the prison and back to

the office.

Enzo

Elusive Amara,

It's been three weeks, my little lawyer. Twenty-two days since I last heard from you. Five hundred and twenty-eight hours since I opened my cell door expecting another letter, another damn worksheet, some sign that you hadn't decided to forget about me. But there's nothing.

## Page 11

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You're smart, so I know you won't pretend this is an accident. You wouldn't just stop writing unless you wanted to. Did I scare you? Did you wake up one morning and decide I wasn't worth the effort?

Or—tell me, Amara—did someone make that decision for you? Because if that's the case... if someone is standing between me and you, keeping my words from reaching you—I will find out. And I will handle it.

You once asked me what I'd do if I had the chance to rewrite my life. A clean slate. I told you men like me don't get clean slates. That regret is just an anchor we drag behind us.

But maybe I was wrong. Maybe this was supposed to be my shot. You were supposed to be my shot. And now, I don't know what's worse—losing you before I ever really had you... or the fact that I'm starting not to care who I have to hurt to get you back.

Fix this. Write me back. Or I'll find another way to reach you.

-Enzo

The deputies walked past my cell every day, never delivering mail. Even Vitali received a few letters from his lawyer, but I got nothing.

As other inmates' letters piled high and mine remained empty, rage clawed in my gut. How dare Amara make me open up only to abandon me? Was this some kind of sick, malicious game she played? Was she undercover for the prosecutor, determined to make me snap and prove that I was guilty?

I sat at my desk, furiously scribbling on the shitty lined paper every prisoner got for writing letters.

Amara,

I don't know why I'm writing this. Maybe because I'm not ready to accept the truth. Maybe because some pathetic part of me still thinks you'll write back. Maybe because I need to get these words out before they rot inside me.

It's been six weeks. Forty-four days since your last letter. Over a thousand hours since I last saw your handwriting, since I last had proof that you still existed in my world.

I told myself to be patient. Maybe you got busy. Maybe you just didn't know what to say. But I'm done lying to myself.

You gave up on me. You told me I could be more. That I could change. But tell me, Amara, how the hell is a man supposed to change when the only person who believed in him decides he isn't worth the effort anymore?

You were the only thing keeping me human, and now I don't know what's left of me. I've seen men break in here and lose what little sanity they had left. I used to think I was stronger than that and that nothing could break me. Turns out, I was wrong. It wasn't the fights or the sentence, not even the thought of dying in this cage.

It was you. Or rather, the absence of you.

I hope you read this. I hope it makes you feel something—guilt, regret, fear, I don't care. Just something. Because you? You made me feel everything.

Now I feel nothing.



Don't bother writing back. I won't read it.

-Enzo

I stormed over to the large mailbox where every inmate dropped their letters to be sent off to the outside world. I slammed the letter inside and stomped back to my cell, gritting my teeth in barely restrained rage.

"Get Russo," I snapped to Vitali. "I need to see why this bitch stopped writing me."

Vitali whistled. "She better be dead if she knows what's good for her," he exclaimed. He knew I was a ticking time bomb, ready to explode.

When he returned with Russo, we had a plan. Vitali jumped me, shanking me where Russo called for a lockdown. He rushed me to medical, and in a blur, I was in an ambulance, headed to the hospital.

But when we arrived, and those doors opened, I slipped from my loose cuffs, knocked everyone out, and ran.

There was no one awake who could stop me.

The night air tasted like freedom, but it felt false when I knew it wouldn't last. I knew I'd get caught and get sent back to prison eventually.

Over these last weeks, I had my men on the outside look up Amara Branson. They gave me her home address, and that's where I ran to now. I hotwired a car and drove, pulling a stolen sweatshirt over my head. Her house wasn't far from the prison or the hospital. She was just out of my reach, but not right now.

Now she couldn't run from me.

I parked a block away, observing my surroundings. There was a small forest in front of Amara's house, and I blended in with the darkness across the street, crouching behind a tree.

## Page 12

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The house was modest, with a white picket fence and a small yard, the kind that people bought to settle down in.

A bright glow spilled through the kitchen window, illuminating the darkness like a beacon.

And then I saw her. Amara. Her hair hung in a loose ponytail, an apron tied loosely around her waist, and her sleeves rolled up as she moved like she belonged. She was clearly in her element, her happy place, her world.

Like a fool, I let myself pretend that she was waiting for me to walk through the front door. She'd turn, smile, and welcome me home like I was still worth something.

But that fantasy was cut short when someone walked into the kitchen after her.

He placed his hand on her shoulder, the gold wedding band glinting in the light. He wore a suit and a loose tie, like a man who had never had to ask for anything his entire life. He was clearly her husband, and he kissed her cheek, telling her something that made her laugh.

Something broke inside me, and I could feel it in my chest. The sharp, jagged, and foreign feelings clawed up my throat.

Sorrow. Jealousy. Rage.

So this was why she stopped responding to my letters.

They sat at the dining room table, and she plated their food, setting a meal down in front of him, who should've been me.

I watched as they ate and laughed, and she wiped something off his chin and shook her head.

They were happy. She was happy.

That's when I knew. Amara deserved a normal life, a clean slate, and a man who loved her. Not the broken, twisted thing that I had become.

I had to let her go.

I sighed, letting the last light in me extinguish for good, exorcising it from my body. I turned, walked away, and disappeared into the shadows.

Back to the prison, the cage, and who I really was.

My wound throbbed in my side as guards seized me, dragging me back to the prison. I didn't resist as they haphazardly patched me up in medical, then threw me in the hole.

The days blended together. I sat in the darkness, letting the truth settle inside me.

Amara was gone, and she wasn't coming back. She was my last chance at something good, but now there was nothing left of me to save.

I surrendered myself to my demons, done pretending, and let them claim me.

When I emerged from solitary confinement into my cell, I knew I wasn't the same.

I ignored Vitali as he approached me. I went straight to the phones, dialing a number I'd memorized.

Gerald picked up on the second ring, listening to the pre-recorded message before the call finally connected us. "Mr. Ricci?"

"You're fired," I stated, my voice blank and void of emotion.

"What? Why?" he asked.

"Your services are no longer required," I admitted, my voice flat, empty, and dead.

"Mr. Ricci—"

I hung up, thoroughly uninterested in what he had to say.

Vitali called my name as I walked past him, lining up as the guards called for rec time. Inmates got one hour of outdoor time per day, and I wouldn't miss this time for the world.

Because the man I'd watched for weeks, ever since Amara stopped writing me, was going as well.

## Page 13

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He was a child abuser and rapist, a monster worse than even me. He got transferred here recently, serving a puny two-year sentence. The justice system failed again, and he would be free to hurt more children once he got out.

Not on my watch.

I rushed him, grabbing his hair and stabbing my shiv between his ribs. His blood poured hot over my knuckles, and he gasped, gurgling pathetically as I rid the world of another piece of shit.

A thrill shivered up my spine. This was what I was meant to do, who I was born to be. If the judge and jury wouldn't execute them, I would.

The alarm blared through the speakers, a deafening echo I barely registered as I watched the spark of life leave my victim's eyes. By the time the guards dragged me away, the world faded to static, satisfaction buzzing in my ears.

Amara was gone, and I was exactly what I was always meant to be.

A lost cause.

Amara

Weeks passed, and no letter from Lorenzo. I went to see him once more after our meeting, but he was closed off, giving one-word answers only. I felt like I was losing him and his chance at rehabilitation.

I looked everywhere. There were no letters in my home, at my office, or unexpected notes hidden inside legal paperwork; nothing.

I tried to rationalize it at first. Maybe I was being impatient, and Lorenzo was trying to figure things out. After all, being vulnerable and admitting your faults can be daunting. Maybe he just needed time.

But time moved in a slow crawl until I walked into the office six weeks after Lorenzo's last letter.

I sat at my boss's desk, skimming over case files, when my mentor barged into his office.

"Mrs. Branson," he began, his voice tight. "I need to speak to you about Mr. Ricci."

My heart sank. Did he get killed in a prison brawl? Why did Gerald look so pained? Or was he finally reaching out?

"Mr. Ricci called and fired me this morning. He said he doesn't need legal representation," he informed.

Fired. Why would he fire Gerald? Was there a break in his case, and were the charges dropped? I quickly grabbed his file and flipped through it, finding no motion to dismiss or any new evidence.

My gut twisted. Lorenzo was making progress and getting better. Wasn't that what we both wanted? Had I misread him, and was he really as lost as he seemed in his letter? Did I project my hopes onto him, too naïve to see the truth?

I glanced down at the pile of mail that accumulated on Gerald's desk. Some were unopened, but none were from Lorenzo.

I guess it doesn't matter anymore, I thought.

Gerald's voice broke through my hazy thoughts. "I don't know if you heard, but Mr. Ricci escaped."

My stomach dropped like lead, and I stiffened, the words hovering around my mind like it refused to accept them.

"How? Ashwood is maximum security," I exclaimed.

"He got out after he was shanked by his cellmate and ran from the ambulance once it arrived at the hospital," Gerald explained. "He was out for a few hours."

"Do you know why?" I wondered. "I don't think he's broken out before."

"This was his first breakout. But, Mrs. Branson," Gerald hesitated. "He was caught not far from your residence. We believe he saw you."

I recoiled, the truth hitting me like a punch in my chest. The air burned in my lungs as they seized, fear lancing in my heart.

"What do you mean he saw me?" I stammered.

"The police found evidence that he was near your house," he admitted.

The thought of a murderer watching me when I was in my home made my blood run cold.



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"The break is still being investigated, but he's back in prison now," Gerald added.

Regret washed over me in waves as the realization hit me. I hadn't written back to him, though I didn't know why he stopped writing me. Did he feel abandoned or that I didn't care?

I blinked, fighting back tears at the thought.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Branson, I know the news must come as a shock," Gerald continued.  
"We can't help him now. He made his choice."

I inhaled a shaky breath, my hands trembling.

"Look, take the rest of the day off. I'd be upset too if a killer showed up at my house," Gerald offered.

I nodded, closing Lorenzo's file as I stood, smoothing out my skirt absent-mindedly. I gathered my things and hurried from the office.

I was barely aware of getting in my car and driving home, as if I was on autopilot until I found myself in the kitchen. I stared out the window like I could still feel him out there watching me.

The ghost of what we almost had.

Mark came in late that night, the sound of his jingling keys snapping me out of my trance. He kissed my forehead before he went to the kitchen to fix himself a drink,

but I couldn't even focus on him.

"Did you give any thought to what I said?" he wondered, loosening his tie. "I think you should cutback your hours at least. Look at you; you look shaken."

But he had no idea. I couldn't even concentrate, let alone process what he was saying.

My thoughts were filled with the man I couldn't forget, even after everything.

Lorenzo was back in prison, but there was no way for me to reach him. I stopped writing to him since he never reached out.

But maybe it wasn't his fault. Letters got lost in the mail all the time, and maybe even the guards were malicious enough to keep him from his mail. Mark told me to stop writing to him, and since I hadn't heard from Lorenzo, I did.

I swallowed, feeling a sense of loss deeper than it should be.

What if I'd written him anyway? If I had done things differently, could I have saved him? Could I have been the one to ensure he found redemption?

My phone rang. I picked it up, putting the phone to my ear. "Hello?"

"Hi, Mrs. Branson, it's Gerald. I'm sorry to say, Mr. Ricci killed another inmate."

I gasped.

"There's nothing more we can do for him. He was too far gone—"

But his voice faded away.

It was too late now; I knew it in my soul. He was too far gone, and I would never see him again. The worst part was that I wasn't even sure if I was wrong about him anymore. I knew there was good in him somewhere and that I hadn't been fooled.

But now, that good was gone, extinguished like the last flames lingering in a campfire.

Could someone like Lorenzo change? Could someone like him truly become a better man, or was I lying to myself this entire time?

I stood in the kitchen, staring out the window, and I realized something that shook me to my core.

I missed him, and not just the idea of him. Now, he was gone for good.

And it was my fault.

1

Amara

Five years later

Everything changed the day I caught my husband cheating.

Mark and I met in high school, and he was the new kid. He seemed so sweet and caring, and we married young. Others would call him traditional, and Mark wanted us to lead a traditional life. He wanted kids, the white picket fence, and a white-collar nine-to-five job while I stayed home and minded the house.

I was young and impressionable then, so I sacrificed my dreams for him. We were straight out of college when we married, and I had just passed the bar exam and began my internship. During my internship, I was assigned to an inmate, Lorenzo Ricci, who was a convicted murderer. I shadowed his lawyer, interviewing Lorenzo during law visits until Lorenzo got tired of his lawyer and fired him.

When Mark and I got married, I had just finished my internship as a lawyer. I barely had five cases under my belt before I quit my career for him.

We moved away from everything I'd ever known back to his hometown of Ashwood. I was now hours away from my friends and family, but I did my best to make my own life.

Everything changed the minute after I uttered those two words at the altar.

Mark grew cold and distant. We came home that night, and he was rougher with me than ever. Mark took what he wanted and didn't care if I enjoyed myself or not. The following day, I was bruised and sore, and he gave me fresh flowers and apologized,

claiming he drank too much and got carried away in the moment. I plastered a smile on my face, and I forgave him. What else could I do?

He bought us a house, and I fell in love with it. It had a white picket fence with a large backyard for our future kids to play. It was a modest three-bedroom bungalow with crown molding and a wrap-around porch. There was a porch swing out front, French shutters, and beautiful flowers. The inside was all hardwood floors and beige walls. I planned to paint them with earth tones to match my love of nature. It was in an ideal school district, a lovely suburban town with friendly neighbors. Mark furnished it with leather couches, cute rocking chairs, and a matching dining set. Our bedroom was large, and Mark joked that I could install a stripper pole to give him a strip tease. It was gorgeous, and it was everything I ever wanted in a home. What I didn't know was that it would become my prison.

I began to see his true colors when he came home from work after our honeymoon. He was early, and dinner wasn't ready yet. It still had a few minutes left in the oven, and Mark flipped out on me. He punched a hole in the drywall as he screamed, telling me how I was a failure and a terrible wife. Mark threw his empty plate at me, which smashed against my face. He shoved me until I fell on the floor, sobbing and clutching my bleeding nose. Mark shouted that he had paid the bills and that he was my husband, and I had to serve and obey him. He said that if I didn't, I was worthless, and he would put me out in the streets.

From then on, it only got worse.

If I burned dinner, Mark would burn me. He would press his lit cigarette against my skin and would laugh as I screamed in pain. My husband started slapping me around, and then he closed his fists when he hit me. He never took me to the emergency room, so I had to sneak into the free clinic while he was at work to get fixed up. I lost count of the times I needed stitches, splints, and casts. When he'd see those, he'd lose it again and beat me worse. Told me I better never tell anyone what he did, or he'd

kill my family.

That's when I began seeing a doctor for a birth control shot. He wanted kids, and so did I, but not with him. There was no way I would drag a child into this. If I took pills, he would find them, and if I wore a patch, he'd see it. He'd had an ex-girlfriend before with an IUD, and he claimed the strings poked him, so I knew that was out. An injection once every three months was the most inconspicuous option, and if he ever asked questions, I just told him it was a fertility shot or a vaccine.

I tried escaping through church, where pastors encouraged me to try marriage counseling with Mark, but he refused. So I tried to keep busy, volunteering since Mark didn't want me to have a job. There was a prison pen pal program to encourage rehabilitation, so I signed up. To my surprise, I was paired up with an inmate who never got mail, Lorenzo Ricci. I recognized the name and encouraged him to reflect on his crimes and why he committed them. We were getting somewhere, but eventually, Mark stopped me from going to church, too. I stopped hearing from Lorenzo, so I stopped writing him.

I knew my parents were worried about me. Mark always listened in on my calls and would hang up the phone often after only a few minutes. Then he stopped letting me talk to them at all. My husband took my cell phone away, and I was entirely at his mercy, especially without access to his bank account. He left some cash on the table for groceries, and if I didn't show him the receipt and give him the exact change, he would beat me.

I thought of leaving at first when I still had some self-esteem. As time passed, Mark wore me down, breaking me more and more until I was convinced I deserved this, that I was a lousy wife, and everything I did made him angry. The only solace I had was that he was loyal.

Until he wasn't.

I was out running errands when I realized I had forgotten the money Mark left on the table for me. I headed home, and when I opened the door, I froze.

There were clothes littered everywhere, clothes that weren't mine. A pair of pumps were laid by Mark's shoes, and my heart dropped. I heard the unmistakable sounds of moans upstairs. I removed my shoes and closed the door slowly before creeping up the stairs.

I burst through our bedroom door and gasped. Mark was there, naked with his secretary. He was fucking her in missionary, something he no longer did with me since he didn't want to see my bruised-up face.

Mark looked up at me and stopped, immediately pulling out as the secretary scrambled to cover herself. "What the fuck are you doing here, Amara?" he shouted.

I laughed. I couldn't help it. Was Mark asking me questions with accusation in his tone? He wasn't sorry at all, only that he got caught. I felt hurt, and part of me was devastated but profoundly relieved.

I could leave him now. No one would blame a woman for leaving her cheating husband. Loyalty was the last thread that kept our marriage together, and now that was gone. I was done.

I was even more done when I noticed the swell of the secretary's belly. She was single, and I was pretty sure that was my husband's baby she carried.

"You got her pregnant?" I countered, my voice shaking with shock.

"It's not like you can get pregnant," He sneered as he pulled his pants on. "We've tried for years and nothing! You can't even do the one job women have. You're fucking useless, Amara."

The secretary bolted from the room, muttering, “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry,” as she probably went for her clothes.

“You don’t have to leave,” I called after her. “You can have him. I’m done.” I turned to Mark, almost smirking as all the repressed rage at his treatment of me surfaced. “It’s over, Mark.”

He laughed. “You can’t leave me, bitch! You have nowhere, no one, and not a penny to your name. No one else will put up with a failure like you.”

At that moment, I didn’t care. “I’d rather be homeless than live with you for another second.”



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“You can’t get a divorce,” he spat. “I have proof you were cheating on me, too.”

I laughed. “I never even looked at another man, though maybe I should’ve.”

“Then what are these?” he snapped, pulling a shoebox out of a hidden corner of our closet. He upended the contents on our bed, and my heart sank as I saw the name repeated on all the envelopes.

Lorenzo Ricci.

So he never stopped writing me, after all. My jealous piece-of-shit husband kept them, waiting for this day to use them against me as some unfounded proof of infidelity. But Lorenzo’s letters were always platonic, so Mark had nothing on me.

“This just proves you’re a jealous, weak little man,” I shouted. “Those letters were platonic, and you knew it. You have nothing. I’m taking you to the fucking cleaners, you lying, cheating scum.”

He flew at me, and I almost welcomed him. I began forming a plan weeks ago, a plan to leave him. The day I decided to do it, I’d let him hit me just once. Then, I’d call the cops on our house phone, get him arrested, and go to a battered women’s shelter.

I didn’t expect him to punch me so hard that I’d black out.

When I finally came to, it was dark outside. Mark was gone, and I was alone on the hardwood floor of our bedroom. The air still reeked of sex, and I gagged at the memory of catching him here.

I crawled to one of the house phones on the dresser and grasped it, dialing 911.

“911, what’s your emergency?” a voice replied.

“617 Verity Lane, please hurry,” I croaked, my voice hoarse from screaming at Mark to stop hitting me. “My husband beat me. I think I have a concussion.”

“You stay right where you are, ma’am. Is he in the house?” the responder asked.

“No, I think he’s out with his mistress,” I breathed.

“What’s your name?” the voice questioned.

“Amara Branson,” I whispered. “Please...I think I’m gonna pass out. Hurry.”

Blackness dotted my vision as I heard the responder, but I couldn’t understand what she said. They sounded like I was underwater while she spoke to me from the surface. I felt like I was drowning, unable to breathe, as I collapsed.

Please, I begged the universe. Please don’t let me die here like this.

2

Amara

I startled awake, jolted by the sounds of running footsteps. A searing pain flooded through my skull, and I winced, sitting up and clutching my head. The sound of a code blared over the speakers, worsening my headache as I braced myself on the steel bars of the bed.

I was in the hospital bed with bars, speakers, and wires. Memories of why I was here

flooded over me; the 9-1-1 call, the beating, and my blackout. I sobbed at the reminder of finding Mark in bed with someone else. How I had left him and how he damn near tried to make sure I couldn't.

"You're awake," a nurse exclaimed softly as she approached me. "You've been out for two days. Your husband has visited nonstop. Poor thing is worried out of his mind. You gave us a scare, but you'll be alright."

I immediately looked around warily. I thought I was safe here and that he wouldn't find me. I was wrong. He was here.

"Whoa, whoa, calm down," the nurse reassured me, eyeing my heart monitor. "You're safe, Mrs. Branson. You're in the hospital. Your husband said you got mugged, and he found you at home like this."

I shook my head as much as my pain would allow. Did the 9-1-1 operator not understand me? Did they never show up? Was I left there for a day, where Mark found me still unconscious on the floor, and he called an ambulance to cover his ass?

"Keep him away from me," I whispered to the nurse. "He's the one—"

"There you are," Mark cooed, his voice dripping with sarcasm only I could pick up. "I'm so glad you're up."

I cringed, inching away from him. I needed to get out of here fast. How could I communicate this to hospital personnel?

"C-can you get me a coffee?" I stammered, not daring to look at Mark.

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He shook his head. “Later, hun. Let’s spend some time together. How are you feeling?”

I began to regret that I never told anyone what was happening in my home. The nurse smiled as she walked away, thinking she was leaving me with a loving husband.

Mark pulled the curtains around my hospital bed closed before he whirled to me, his eyes shooting daggers at me. “What the fuck were you thinking, calling the cops? You almost had me arrested, you bitch!”

“I was thinking that I didn’t want to die,” I whispered as I trembled, tears pouring from my eyes.

“You didn’t have to tell them it was me,” he seethed, grabbing me by the hair. “Thank God the cop that showed up knows me. You pull a stunt like that again, and I’ll pay a visit to your parents, you understand me?”

I whimpered, cowering and crying out at the waves of pain radiating through my head. “Stop it! Let me go!” I shouted, desperate to get out of his grasp.

An orderly opened the curtains as Mark released me, and I collapsed back on the bed. I prayed he saw, and I could hear the monitor's beeping accelerating.

“I’m going to have to ask you to leave,” the orderly barked firmly. “You’re upsetting the patient.”

“She’s my wife,” Mark snapped. “She’s just confused. She was in our home, and she

woke up in the hospital.”

“Funny because I’m pretty sure it had something to do with you yanking her hair from her scalp,” he snarled, motioning to security guards behind him. “The police also said something about no forced entry, so there was no break-in. Your knuckles are also scabbed over,” he said, nodding to Mark’s hands. “You might fool the officer from that night but can’t fool me. Now get out.”

“Your boss will hear about this,” Mark shouted as security flanked the orderly. He stormed away, and I felt myself sagging with relief. Finally, someone understood my distress.

“Thank you,” I sobbed openly, feeling broken and empty. “Thank you so much.”

“No problem, ma’am. Please tell me you’re leaving him?” he asked, looking at my chart.

“I already did,” I murmured, swiping the tears from my cheeks. “Then he did this to me.”

The orderly nodded sympathetically. “I’ll call some domestic violence shelters. We’ll find you someplace to stay tonight, don’t you worry. We’re moving you to a private room, and your ex won’t be allowed back in this hospital until you’re in the shelter.”

I nodded, wincing at the pain it brought me. “How bad did he hurt me this time? What’s the damage?”

“You have a concussion and several bruises. You had some internal bleeding that stopped on its own and some bruised ribs. Unfortunately, there’s not much we can do but wait, and then you’ll be all healed up,” the orderly frowned. “I took a look at your records. Those broken bones you came in about a few months ago ...was that him,

too?”

I nodded, tears welling in my eyes again. “I can’t keep living like this.”

He nodded. “We’ll get someone down here to talk to you shortly. I’ll move you to your room now.”

3

Enzo

The guards approached the many cells as they began shouting. “Mail call! Time for mail call! Anderson... Andrews... Barton...”

I sighed as the guards rattled off the names of the inmates who received letters. Since my incarceration, I never received a single one. My connection to the outside world was lost, and days rang long. I read every book in this prison twice, took every class, and did every job. I was bored out of my mind, and as the guards always said, a bored inmate is dangerous.

I’ve been locked up for most of my life. It started at sixteen when I killed my high school gym teacher, Mr. Michaels. No one knew why I did it except my little sister Sofia. She came to me crying one night, confessing that our gym teacher forced himself on her. She begged me not to tell anyone, so I promised not to. I’ve kept that promise since, and it’s not my story to tell. I couldn’t sit still and do nothing, though. I noticed Sofia didn’t come home after school one night, so I ran over there and caught him in the girls’ locker room with her. I flew in a blind rage and beat his face in until I saw his brain, and Sofia’s screams filled my ears.

I did a few years in juvenile hall for that before I was moved to Ashwood Prison, a maximum security facility. Sofia had begged me to appeal my sentence, and she felt

guilty. She said maybe if she came forward, they would reduce my sentence, and they probably would. But I'd seen boys my age retraumatized during cross-examination while they testified against their attackers. When they took us to court, we sat through everyone's cases, and I didn't want that to happen to my little sister. Mr. Michaels was dead, and he couldn't hurt her anymore, and I wouldn't let him do it again, especially beyond the early grave where I put him.

Her visits became few and far between as she grew up, and they stopped altogether when she moved away. She stopped taking my calls since I was a constant reminder of that traumatic night. I didn't insist. It wounded me deeply, but I understood. She needed to move on, and I had to let her.

I began to feel jealous of the inmates receiving letters, especially those with girlfriends and wives. A few men even got married while inside, although approval for that kind of thing was rare. It reminded me how alone I was, and how happiness and love were well out of my reach.

I found temporary respite in a pretty young intern named Amara Branson. She would shadow my lawyer until I fired his sorry ass. I was sad to see her go, but a few months later, she started writing me letters as part of a letter exchange program in church. If it had been anyone but her, I would've let the letters go unanswered, but I had something to look forward to for the first time in years.

I spent hours writing pages and pages to this woman, answering her questions, and taking her advice. It was the closest I ever came to being a good man. She made me think about what I'd done and how I could've acted differently. I didn't regret killing my sister's rapist, but maybe I could've gone down a different path.

But then she stopped writing me.

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Alarmed, I broke out of prison to ensure she was alright. I saw her happily cooking a meal for her husband at home, so I realized maybe she grew tired of me. So, even though it killed me, I went back to prison, let her go, and succumbed to my dark side.

If I were stuck here forever, I'd make myself useful. I went after child molesters and rapists, beating them to a bloody pulp and finishing them off with my shiv. It was a thrilling break in my routine, and I got off knowing I made the world a better place by ridding the earth of scum like them.

As the guards figured out my modus operandi, they kept sex offenders out of general population so I couldn't kill them anymore. Since then, things had been quiet, uneventful, and boring again.

Ashwood Prison had a permanent musty smell, the stone walls wet with condensation. Body odor wafted through the air, and the showers were cold and moldy. The floors were swept and mopped clean by various inmates, and beds always had to be perfectly made. Laundry was once a week, and you always risked getting your clothes and sheets stolen if you sent those out. The food was bland mush, often consisting of oatmeal, potatoes and gravy, creamed corn, ground beef, and beans. It all looked the same to me. Only inmates with money could buy good food from the commissary; otherwise, they were stuck eating prison slop.

Prisoners were allowed one hour of outside time per day, called rec time. Murderers and violent criminals like myself were often housed in the same wings and cells. The worst of the worst were in solitary confinement for their entire sentence. I found myself there numerous times for various fights. I didn't let anyone walk over me; if they looked at me wrong, I'd jump them. I was a force to be reckoned with, and the



other inmates knew it. I was mostly left alone, except for my crew.

Prison politics were different here. Some people sought out the top dog to dethrone him. Some sought his protection, and others wanted to be on the winning side. Those were the ones that made up my crew; they looked out for me, and I looked out for them. We treated each other like brothers because, like me, they didn't have anyone else. All we had was each other.

"It was my fucking lawyer again," Vitali muttered as he returned from visitation. "Useless motherfucker."

I snorted since I knew just what he was talking about. I've dealt with many lawyers before, and other than the rare few who had a good heart, most didn't care about their clients. Lawyers were money-hungry, always chasing that dollar and hustling. They were like strippers that way, and I hated dealing with those suited-up leeches.

"They usually are," I muttered, twirling my shiv. My crew surrounded me, and I was obscured from the guard's view.

"Didn't you fire yours?" Luca questioned, sitting across from me, blocking me from the view of the guards.

"Yeah, he told me to take a plea deal. He wasn't even willing to fight for me. Pussy," I snarled.

"Those are the worst," Vitali agreed, sitting beside me. "Most of them shouldn't ever have become lawyers."

I nodded in agreement, my eyes scanning the common room. Some inmates were milling about, minding their own business. I could tell some of them were up to no good. My crew and I shifted, sitting with our backs to each other, people-watching. It

allowed us to see anyone with bad intentions coming from a mile away.

Like fucking Sacha.

This man knew how to rub me the wrong way. We used to be friends in high school until he dated Sofia and broke her heart. I understood relationships ended, but he was another level of psycho.

Sofia never told me the whole story of what he did, but I knew it was bad. It was bad enough that our parents pulled her out of that high school and made her change schools. She didn't get to graduate with her childhood friends. That girl was robbed of so many rights it made my head spin.

We made eye contact, and the fucker grinned. Grinned at me, knowing what he did. Knowing that Sofia was a hair-trigger for me.

"Enzo, don't do it—" Ludovic began, his eyes also on Sacha.

"Fuck," Vitali muttered, knowing full well that I wouldn't let that slide.

"Here we fucking go," Luca groaned, getting to his feet as I launched to mine.

"Hey Lorenzo! How's that pretty piece of pussy doin'?" Sacha gloated, laughing with his friends. "That sister of yours was wild. What I wouldn't do to get a piece of that ass—"

My fist connected with his jaw before he said another slimy word about my family.

Sacha fell to the ground, his teeth littering the floor as his buddies jumped me. My crew jumped in the fight, beating them off me as I jumped on top of Sacha, punching him repeatedly as the incident alarm blared.

I saw red. I wanted this loser dead for hurting my sister and for talking about her that way. How dare he disrespect my family. He had no idea what I would do for my family, but he was about to find out.

I barely noticed the screams in the background, the guards shouting at everyone to get down. Vitali tried to urge me to stop and pull me off Sacha, not wanting me to catch another charge. But I didn't care. It would be worth it to eliminate every piece of scum off this earth.

When I started seeing grey matter, I stopped and looked at the blinding lights. My hands were covered in blood and gore. I laughed, tossing my hair from my eyes, and closed my eyes.

The guards grabbed me and dragged me away from what was left of Sacha, cussing and exclaiming at what I'd done. I couldn't stop laughing as a strange rush of exhilaration surged through my blood.

Two down.

I planned to destroy every person who'd ever hurt Sofia, and I wasn't done yet. They'd better stay away from Ashwood Prison or be next.

I felt myself hit a cold concrete floor hard before the click of the cell door as it slid shut alerted me that I was alone. I opened my eyes, and I recognized this place. We called it the hole, the place where inmates were put in solitary confinement as punishment. I wasn't sure how long I would get this time.

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“You’re being charged for this,” a guard spat at me through the windows. “You won’t get away with this, inmate!”

I sat up, eyed him, and smiled. “I want a lawyer.”

4

Amara

After I saw my first bruise heal, I started to go outside.

The battered women’s shelter’s address wasn’t posted anywhere; only residents and workers knew where it was. I was safe here for once in several years.

I was still tightly coiled around survival mode, so I couldn’t relax just yet. I needed to heal and start planning for the near future. I was newly separated, homeless, and jobless. What should I do next?

I opened my phone, scrolling through the dozens of missed calls from Mark. I knew it was time for me to change my phone number. I didn’t want him to be able to reach me again.

I dialed my phone company’s phone number, putting in a request to change my phone number due to harassment. Luckily, this was done for free. The agent checked my call log and saw that indeed, I was being harassed, and he granted me a phone number change. I restarted my phone, and I felt a huge sense of relief.

Just for good measure, I blocked his number, too.

A knock sounded on the door to my room. “Come in,” I called out.

A woman entered, and I noticed it was the social worker assigned to me here. “Hey Amara, how are you feeling today?”

I sighed. “I’m sorry, I totally forgot we had an appointment today. I overslept and—”

The social worker waved her hand dismissively. “Don’t worry about that. I’m here now.”

I smiled awkwardly as I smoothed out my jeans, a second-hand pair given to me when I came in. I never liked jeans, but they were in my size. My birth control shot just made me bloated.

“Okay,” I muttered, shifting on my unmade bed as I sat down.

“Let’s go over your reintegration plan,” she began, opening a binder. “I see you were a lawyer before you became a housewife?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Good, it should be easy to get a job then. Would any former employer hire you back?”

I cringed. “That’s the first place Mark would look. I’d rather find employment somewhere else.”

“Could you go back home to your family?” the social worker questioned, skimming over my file.

I sighed. “No, I don’t have a way to get there, and my family and I haven’t spoken in years due to Mark isolating me.”

“Okay, let’s get you a job somewhere nearby then, for the time being. You can get your divorce finalized, save some money, then move away if you want to,” the social worker beamed.

“That works,” I shrugged. “I’d like to save up enough for my own place once I start working.”

She nodded, flipping through my file. “Would your former employers give you good references?”

“I don’t see why not. I left on good terms,” I began. “Though I only have one former employer.”

“Okay. We’ll work on your resume together. I brought my laptop, so we can start it now, then browse some job websites and apply online. Sound good?”

“Yeah.”

She smiled and scooted over, and I sat beside her on the couch. She placed her laptop on the coffee table, opened it to a resume template, and began typing in my name and information.

She turned the laptop over to me, and I typed in my education and former workplace. I added in some internships and volunteer work I did, and I paused where I should list my address.

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“Don’t worry about that,” the social worker commented, typing in a P.O. box number for the shelter. “They won’t know the difference.”

She clicked the save button and opened a browser on CareerHunt, a local job search website. “Let’s see, there’s a few lawyer postings in Ashwood and several in the next town over in Lockwood.”

“I’ll apply to them all,” I nodded, steering the laptop toward me. I began typing a cover letter for all the postings, and I read over the descriptions before sending off my applications.

“Good! You should hear back from them soon. Keep an eye on your email,” the social worker exclaimed. She stood, shuffled her papers together, grabbed her laptop, and headed out. “Have a good day, Amara, I’ll see you at our next appointment.”

She closed my bedroom door, and I was left alone again.

A million thoughts rushed through my head as I collapsed on the couch, staring at the ceiling. Will anyone hire a lawyer barely out of university with only five cases under her belt? Will I have to work a minimum wage job and save for years just to afford to be someone’s roommate or basement dweller? I had no savings to fall back on, and Mark always kept his money in his bank account. I had nothing.

Even the clothes on my back were borrowed, cast-offs from the lost and found in the shelter. The food in my fridge came from the food bank, my toiletries donations. I felt a new kind of despair crash over me. All these years, and all I had to show for it were possessions that could fit in a child’s school bag.

Tears flowed from my eyes, and I winced at the pain crying caused me now. My concussion wasn't fully healed yet, and it was always a reminder of what Mark did to me.

I closed my eyes, hoping sleep would take me, as it was my only escape from my depressing reality. Only when I finally felt myself drift off did I hear the ping of my phone.

I groaned, grabbing it and opening my bleary eyes to browse notifications. All the sleep left me immediately when I realized it was an email from Career Hunt.

“Congratulations! You were accepted by Lockwood Law for an interview...”

I couldn't believe it. By the end of the week, I could have a job.

Things were finally starting to look up.

~\*~

“Mrs. Amara Branson? Right this way, please.”

I looked up from the magazine I was reading in Lockwood Law's waiting area, immediately dropping it back on the pile on the coffee table. I stood and followed the woman into her office, looking around and taking everything in.

From what I could tell, Lockwood Law was a woman-owned business with only women as lawyers. There was one lawyer for every area; federal, civil, and defense. I wondered why they had a job opening since every role seemed filled.

The woman gestured to the chair opposite her desk, and I sat, admiring her multiple degrees plastered on the wall. She sat behind her mahogany desk on a comfy leather



chair and held my resume.

“Hello, Mrs. Branson, I’m Marta Gonzales, the defense lawyer and owner of this place. So, Mrs. Branson, I see a large gap between your last employer and now. Why did you stop working so soon after your graduation?”

Wow, get right to the point, why don’t you. “My ex-husband preferred I stayed home and be his little housewife,” I began. “But I found that that life isn’t for me. I’m ready to go back to work.”

Marta nodded, seeming satisfied with that answer as she skimmed over my resume. “Dunn & Dunn had great things to say about you. The cases you took were all defense cases. Did you want to be a defense lawyer?”

“I’ll take whatever position you can offer me,” I blurted out. “But yes, defense is where I’m most experienced.”

“Good,” Marta smiled. “We need a second defense lawyer. Our caseload has nearly doubled, so we must hire new lawyers.”

“I can do that.”

“I did a background check on you. You have no priors, and you seem well put together to me. Out of all the applicants I received, you’re the most qualified. The other two are law students, but I need someone who’s already passed the bar and is ready to work,” Marta asserted. “Can I count on you?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I replied.

“Good! You can start now if you’re ready. I know just which case to start you out with.”

I smiled as she handed me a file as thick as my thigh, and my eyes widened.

“He’s one of our regulars. His name’s Lorenzo Ricci, and he’s been in prison since he was a teenager. He first got in for killing his sister’s coach, and then he caught some assault charges before he murdered a fellow inmate a few months ago. He’s difficult to work with, and he fired many lawyers before, including me,” she scoffs. “But his last lawyer retired, so his case now falls to you. He just got put back in with the other high-risk offenders, so you can visit him.”

I didn’t blink as I stared at her.

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She beamed at me innocently. “Any questions?”

Where should I begin?

5

Enzo

The Sergeant banged on the control desk to get all our attention. “Alright, visitation time!” Sergeant Meyer bellowed. “Everyone line up when I call your name. Ackerman, Anderson, Benson...”

He rattled off many names, and I tuned them out. I kept shuffling my playing cards until one of my crew nudged me.

“What?” I snapped.

“Um...they called your name,” Reynolds replied, his eyes widened.

Wait...what?

I never got visitors.

“Ricci! Get your ass down here, inmate, or we’re leaving without you!” Sergeant Meyer shouted.

I rolled my eyes as I stood, throwing my cards back on the table. “Must be my lawyer

again,” I muttered as I filed to the visitation line. No one else came to see me, and I was up for another assault charge for beating another inmate a few weeks ago.

I grit my teeth as the doors of Gen Pop opened, and we began to file out. A few of my crew also had lawyer visits today, but I wasn’t worried. I could hold my own.

Through the long hallways, we walked, led by several armed guards, to the visitation rooms. There was a large visitation room for friends and family where inmates sat at a booth and talked to their loved ones through glass. Other prisons allowed them to sit at the same table, but we were a maximum security facility. The only human contact that was allowed was when we were handcuffed and taken to court.

For lawyer visits, we got a private room all to ourselves with no cameras or phones. There were many rooms like those, and the inmates disappeared inside them one by one to speak with their lawyers. I took a deep breath before the door opened to one of the rooms, and the sergeant ushered me inside.

The lights were too bright, and the room was too small. It barely fit the desk and the two chairs inside. The ground had grey carpet, and the walls and ceilings were white. It looked clinical; the only pop of color was the mahogany desk and chairs.

Something was different, I realized as the door shut and locked behind me. The air smelled of a delicate floral perfume that I didn’t recognize. The short woman before me wasn’t my lawyer, though she was dressed like one. She had wide, innocent eyes and pale skin that looked soft. Her hair was pulled back in coils of golden curls, and her eyes were green like the finest emeralds. Her lips were full and pouty, and she bit them nervously as she regarded me. She wore a suit with a skirt, and I loved how that skirt clung to her hips. She was shapely, and I could almost feel the warmth that emanated from her skin. She looked like every fantasy I ever had, wrapped in a deliciously tempting package.

My heart stopped in my chest when our eyes met. She seemed afraid of me, which was the worst thing she could show. I fed off of fear, and it came off her in waves. I closed my eyes and inhaled slowly, taking in her scent and wariness before exhaling sharply.

I opened my eyes and met her stare. “You’re not my lawyer.”

She straightened and motioned for me to sit as she sat on one of the chairs. When I didn’t move, she shifted uncomfortably but opened her briefcase. She removed what looked like a file, and it was pretty thick. That must be mine. I was proud of how big it was.

“Your lawyer, Mr. Blake, retired,” she stammered, licking her lips, much to my fascination. “I’ve been assigned to your case.”

I lifted my head, assessing her. She seemed way too nervous to be a good lawyer, let alone to defend me on a murder charge. “Why?” I questioned.

She didn’t look at me, instead flipping through the pages of my discovery. “I’m a new hire, and they wanted to challenge me.”

She was too honest. I expected lawyers to lie through their teeth at almost every turn. She seemed like a recent graduate, though her age told me otherwise. She tilted her head to get a better look at something, and that’s when I noticed it.

Yellowing bruises around her temple and cheek.

Rage boiled inside me like an inferno. Who laid hands on this woman? What kind of scum of the earth hits women, especially one so drop-dead gorgeous? It explained her lack of confidence and her fear of men, especially a man like me. She was a little wounded mouse, and I was the big, bad wolf licking my chops for a snack.

“Look at me,” I ordered.

She hesitated before her eyes met mine.

“What’s your name?” I asked, approaching the desk. “I should know the name of my new lawyer.”

She nodded. “Of course. I’m Amara Branson.”

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I placed my shackled hands on the edge of the desk, leaning over it to peer at her. My blonde curls fell above my eyes, and I regarded her curiously. Either she was mugged, or she had some good-for-nothing boyfriend who was knocking her around.

“Is that Mrs. Branson or Miss Branson?” I drawled, lowering myself into the chair. I was still taller than her, even sitting down. I liked that she had to look up at me.

Her nose wrinkled. “Mrs. Branson, for now,” she mumbled as she dropped her gaze and flipped through the pages. “You’re aware of the charges?”

“Yes, and what do you mean, ‘for now’?” I pressed.

She looked up at me again. “I mean, that’s my name right now. Let’s stick to the subject, please.”

She looked so scared, so I decided to drop it for now. “Fine,” I relented.

She looked relieved. “Thank you. The charges against you are murder in the second degree and assault—”

“Murder?” I asked, feigning surprise. “I’m pretty sure the fucker was still alive when they dragged him off to medical.”

“He died of his injuries,” she interjected, her lips pressing together in a thin line of disapproval.

I smirked and shrugged. “Shit happens.”

Her hands trembled as she flipped to another page. “You were already convicted of several murders since your stay here at Ashwood. Mind telling me why?”

“Why, what?” I prompted, scooting forward.

“Why do you keep...killing people,” she whispered those last two words. “Why can’t you just...stop? Behave?”

I broke out with a cruel grin. “Where’s the fun in that?”

She shuddered with either fear or revulsion as she stacked my papers together and straightened them. “I recommend you plead guilty. There’s no reason to take this to trial; they have video footage of what you did, and an autopsy proved Mr. Sokolov died of the injuries you inflicted on him.”

“Is the prosecution offering a deal?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

She looked at me incredulously. “Why would they? They’ve got you. There’s nothing you have that they could want. You better hope they’re lenient.”

I scoffed. “I’m already doing life, darling. At this point, getting out of here is like a vacation.”

Her eye twitched. “You...you did this to get out of the prison?”

I reached across the table and grabbed her wrist. She yelped, trying to pull it back, but I was too strong. Her struggles caused a thrill through my blood, and I smiled at her whimpering.

“I don’t need a reason to kill,” I whispered, pulling her closer to me until I could taste her breath. “I enjoy it.”



She squeaked in horror, and I released her. She jumped back, getting to her feet and shoving the papers in her briefcase. “I think you need another lawyer,” she whispered as she made a break for the door.

“No, I don’t,” I sneered. “And you don’t want your new boss to take you less seriously than she already does. It’s hard for a woman, especially just starting out.”

Her shoulders stiffened, and I could tell my words were sinking in. She knew I was right. She knocked on the door to alert the guards, and the door was promptly unlocked and opened.

“I’ll see you in court, Mr. Ricci,” she stammered.

“I think you’ll see me before then, Mrs. Branson. After all, we need to plan my defense strategy,” I winked.

Huffing indignantly, she strolled briskly from the room as I laughed.

She was going to be so much fun.

And something about her was so familiar.

Amara

After I saw my first client ever since I returned to work, I ended my work day early and headed back to the domestic violence shelter. I was still shaken from the meeting I had with that murderer.

I don't need a reason to kill. I enjoy it.

I shuddered at the memory of his words. In the past, I gave all my clients the benefit of the doubt, but I was sure this man was guilty. Enzo Ricci had that cold, hard glint in his eye that I've seen in every hardened criminal. It was like he didn't have a soul.

When I first saw him, I was taken aback. He had curly blonde hair that hovered over his piercing blue eyes. He was tall, tattooed on his arms, hands, neck, and face. His chest piece disappeared under his orange jumpsuit, and it made me wonder what other ink he hid under those clothes...

He was dangerous and had a deadly smile with gleaming white teeth. He had a thin and small mustache above his upper lip. I never liked facial hair, but it suited him perfectly and framed his big, kissable lips. The scent of his cologne was still in my nose, smelling of fresh pine and cedarwood. Enzo was devilishly handsome, and I bet he was the downfall of many ladies and the breaker of many hearts.

His story was a sad one. He and his sister were taken from their parents at ages twelve and ten, and they bounced around from foster home to foster home. Enzo consistently scored abnormally high in protective instincts, always his sister's keeper. He was placed in a group home at age fourteen and then returned to a foster home

two years later. His anger issues progressively got worse until he snapped and killed his gym teacher. No one knew why, and he was given twenty years.

As time went on, he grew a penchant for killing. At first, they were almost reasonable, with the hits mostly being child molesters and rapists. He got into multiple fights in jail, always ending up back in court and solitary confinement. In prison, those fights turned into beatdowns and murders. The motivation behind the killings became more petty, with this recent murder listed as the result of a fight over an insult about Enzo's family member.

After his third murder, Enzo was sentenced to life in prison, and that was five years ago. His behavior kept worsening, and it seemed he no longer cared what happened to him. He was an intellectual puzzle and one of the reasons why I studied criminology in the first place.

I was always curious about how the mind worked, especially those of criminals. What brought them to commit crimes? Did they have any other choice? Was it due to trauma or a messed-up childhood? Each person was different, and they were all puzzling and fascinating.

Plus, this particular puzzle was six-foot-eight, muscled, and terrifying. Enzo was also sexy in his own way, with his commanding aura and unwavering confidence.

Wow, you sure know how to pick them, I thought to myself dryly. First, my husband, and now this guy. There was something seriously wrong with me.

A knock sounded at my door, and I jumped, clutching my chest as I attempted to calm down. Reluctantly, I opened the door. Of course, my social worker was there and all smiles as usual.

"Hi, Amara, I'm just checking in. How was your first day at work?"

“Hi, Sylvia. Um...eventful,” I admitted, biting my lip in apprehension. “Honestly, it was alot.”

“You’ve been out of the game for years; it’s bound to be a little overwhelming at first, but you can do it,” Sylvia encouraged. “Once you get your first paycheck in two weeks, you’ll be very proud of yourself. You just wait.”

“Sure,” I said, trying to placate her so she could leave my room. “I need to eat and rest now. Can we talk about this later?”

“Of course, you know where to find me. Have a good evening,” Sylvia sang as she turned away and headed back down the hallway.

I closed the door behind her and turned around, pressing my back against it. I locked the door before I slowly sank to the ground. I couldn’t believe this was my new reality.

I had a psycho client who was my first assignment in a new job I needed to keep to start over. My social worker was kind enough to drive me to work until I could afford a bus pass, but since my job was in the next town over, I couldn’t walk there. I also had this impending divorce I needed to deal with...it was all a lot.

But I had to suck it up if I wanted to survive.

A large crash sounded, and I screamed, ducking for cover. Glass rained on top of me as I cowered on the floor, shaking and crying.

I looked up and saw my bedroom window was shattered and glass littered all over my floor. I looked on the floor and saw a brick with a note attached to it. I tentatively reached for it as I heard shouting and running in the hall beyond my door. I flipped the brick over and gasped as I read the note.

I'm coming for you, bitch.

There was only one person who ever called me that. Mark.

I was numb as my door burst open and people flooded in my room, exclaiming over the mess, patting my back, and saying soothing words...

But all I could think of was that Mark found me.

I was in danger, and I had nowhere to go.

7

Enzo

*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:01 am*

I couldn't get my new little lawyer out of my head. She was a traumatized little thing; I could tell by her lack of confidence and the way she carried herself. She had fire in her, but it must've gotten her in trouble since she ignored the flame within her. She cowered instead when she was faced with the monster within me.

"You really pissed off Sacha's homies by pulling that shit," Luca muttered.

I shrugged. "He shouldn't have run his big mouth."

"You're starting to scare people," Vitali added with amusement.

"Oh, now they're starting to worry?" I chuckle. "I've killed for years. One more isn't that much."

"He was twice your size, Enzo," Ludovic scolded. "How the fuck did you pull that shit off?"

"Rage," I sighed fondly, remembering Sacha's pulp of a face when I was done with him. "Pure, unrestrained rage. Works every time."

"Remind me not to piss you off," Ludovic muttered, shaking his head in disbelief.

I smirked, stretching and yawning before regarding Vitali. "I need you to find someone for me."

He eyed me warily. "You're going to ice someone from the outside?"

“No,” I snorted. “Not this time. She’s my lawyer, and I want to learn more about her. See how qualified she is. According to her business card, her name’s Amara Branson, and she works at Lockwood Law.”

“I’ll see what I can find out,” Vitali nodded, getting up and heading to the phones.

“Fuck!” Luca exclaimed, reading a letter and clutching it so tightly it wrinkled.

“What?” I snapped.

“My sister Angela got arrested. She caught some battery charge, and I can’t do anything about it. FUCK,” he exclaimed, punching the table.

“HEY! Keep it down, inmate,” a guard snarled.

Ludovic cringed. “Not the time, man, not the time,” he warned the guard.

Before Luca got up, I grabbed his arm to help ground him. “Want me to send my lawyer to her? We’ll make sure she’s alright. We’ve got people on the outside who’ll watch over her, don’t worry.”

Luca nodded, gritting his teeth at the news. No one wanted their loved ones to be in trouble, especially when we couldn’t help them. “She was arraigned already, no bail. She’s stuck in there.”

“No bail for a battery charge?” I whistled. “What the fuck did she do, cut off someone’s dick?”

Luca glared at me, and I realized I hit the nail on the head. I burst out laughing. “Damn, who pissed her off?”

Luca groaned with frustration as he put his head in his hands. “Could be anyone. I love her, but she’s a crazy bitch. Our parents should’ve named her Lilith or some shit. She’s no angel, she’s a demon.”

I laughed, remembering growing up around Luca, Vitali, Ludovic, and all our siblings. We were all neighbors and family members of the same Italian mafia. Angela was always a little spitfire, playing innocent and causing chaos. She was a menace.

“The fucker probably deserved it,” I agreed, kicking back. “Besides, Angela will probably want to go to prison. It’ll be a fucking buffet for her.”

Luca snorted, a small smile plastered on his face. Angela was a notorious lesbian, and locked up with a bunch of women would be heaven for her.

“Hey, Enzo,” Vitali called as he approached. “I’ve got my people on it. From what they could see, she graduated a few years ago, has five cases under her belt, and won four. She just rejoined the workforce and married a Mark Branson.”

My face hardened. So my lawyer was married, after all. I clenched my jaw as I thought of all the wild things I would do to that man. Who else would’ve caused those yellowing bruises on her face?

“Put someone on the husband,” I ordered. “I want to know everywhere he goes and who he meets with.”

“Yes, Boss,” Vitali saluted as he returned to the phones.

I glanced at Ludovic, the only one with any semblance of a conscience. “You doing alright there, buddy?”



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“What do you want with her husband?” he asked, his nose wrinkling with distaste. “You know him or something?”

I grinned. “Oh, he’s about to know me very intimately, I promise you that.”

Ludovic sighed as he shook his head, staring off into the distance.

“Enzo!” Vitali shouted, jogging back over to us. “Look at the news!”

Puzzled, I got up and went to my bunk, where my commissary-bought TV was. I flicked it on the news channel, and my eyes instantly hardened.

“Sofia Ricci, the daughter of notorious crime lord Mateo Ricci, has gone missing. Police suspect foul play...”

I turned my eyes to my crew, whose eyes were wide with shock and anger. We knew exactly who was behind this. There could be no doubt.

“Tonight,” I muttered low so no one else could hear us. “We’re breaking out tonight.”

8

Amara

After the police left, I let out the breath I didn’t know I was holding. They pestered me with questions, and I couldn’t really answer them. All they could do was take the brick, dust them for fingerprints, and DNA test, but would they actually do it?

Knowing my husband, he didn't do this himself. He had someone do this for him.

The other residents helped me sweep the glass and board up my window until it could be replaced. I shook the whole time. If Mark knew where I was, then I wasn't safe here.

"I need to leave," I told my social worker. "Mark knows I'm here. I can't stay here."

"Do you want me to help you find a place? Maybe near your job, so you don't need a car?" she asked.

"I haven't gotten my first paycheck yet," I cried, tears filling my eyes. "I can't pay for a place, and I can't stay with anyone else and put them in danger."

"Oh, your first client paid your retainer already. You can use that to get a place, right?" the social worker questioned.

I froze. Lorenzo paid my retainer and directly to me? I fished my phone out of my pocket and looked at my banking app. Sure enough, I had fifteen thousand dollars in my checking account.

I could cry.

"Good, let's get you a place in Lockwood," the social worker soothed. "I'll put you in a hotel room for tonight, and we'll search for a place tomorrow. Don't worry, we'll keep you safe, okay?"

I nodded, still quaking as I clutched my bathrobe to me tightly. I padded over to my suitcase and started putting my meager possessions inside. I dragged it down the hall until I reached the spare room, and I plopped on the bed unceremoniously. The social worker closed the door behind me.

It was pitch black outside now, and a police officer was parked in front of the building to keep an eye on us. It didn't make me feel any better, though. In fact, it made me more nervous. The officer was making it obvious where I was now.

I closed my eyes, surrendering to the void as I attempted to sleep. The darkness refused to take me, though, so I tossed and turned fitfully for an hour before I gave up. I sat up, grumbling impatiently as I headed to the bathroom. Maybe a hot shower would help me sleep.

I shed my clothes and turned on the spray, putting it as hot as I could stand. I grabbed my toiletries from my suitcase, pulled out the soap and shampoo, and placed them along the shower wall before getting in.

The water scalded my skin so deliciously that I moaned, allowing myself to be submersed in the liquid heat. I was soaking in no time, my hair clinging to my body, and I stayed under the spray for at least several minutes before I grabbed my shampoo.

I squirted some lavender-scented shampoo in my hand and lathered it in my hair, the scent calming and soothing. My thoughts wandered to my first day at work and how my first client was terrifying. But something about him, his confidence, his aura, drew me to him. He was dangerous, and I wanted more.

I rinsed my hair and grabbed a washcloth and soap, lathering up the rag until it was nice and soapy. I ran it over my body, gently scrubbing my skin as I imagined it was Lorenzo who touched me. I pictured his large, tattooed hands cupping my breasts, stroking my nipples until they hardened, then gliding lower...

I jumped as my phone rang, and I dropped the washcloth on the shower floor. Muttering curses, I quickly ran the showerhead over my body to rinse off before I reached for the phone, wiping my hand on a towel before grabbing it. As I picked up,

I angled the spray away, seeing it was an unknown caller. “Hello?”

“Hello, darling,” came the rich, husky voice that sounded all too familiar.

Lorenzo.

“How did you get my number?” I whispered harshly, mortified.

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“I have my ways,” he purred. “Are you showering?”

I stopped dead in my tracks, frozen to the spot. “Y-yes, why? This is so inappropriate. Call me at work during office hours.”

“Mmm, I don’t think so, darling. I know what you were doing just now,” he cooed.

My jaw dropped. There was no way he would know what I was doing. “Yeah, I was showering, yourpoint?”

“You should really close your curtains,” he husked.

My eyes darted past the sheer curtain, and sure enough, my curtains weren’t drawn. Why did I leave the bathroom door open? Anyone could be watching me right now. Did he send someone to spy on me, and was this a three-way call?

“Yeah,” he groaned, and I heard shuffling on his end of the phone. “Show me how you want me to touch you again, gorgeous.”

His voice was hypnotizing, delicious, like warm honey dripping down my spine. I whimpered, my free hand moving of its own accord, dragging along my chest, between my breasts, and down to my navel.

“That’s my girl,” he whispered, growling as my hand drew lower. “What I wouldn’t do to be in front of you right now.”

I moaned, circling my clit with my fingers, my hips rotating automatically. This was

filthy, forbidden, but I couldn't stop. My pussy clenched, reminding me how empty I was as I felt myself get drenched down below. My clit throbbed against the pads of my fingers, sending jolts of pleasure straight to my core. I craved Enzo more than I had for any other man, aching for him sobadly.

"Fuck," he groaned, and I heard him lick his lips. "Look at you. A fucking delicacy."

I picked up the pace, moaning softly as I closed in on my clit, pure rapture mounting faster and faster, and I knew I was ready to burst.

"I'll make you forget your husband ever existed," Enzo rasped, his chest rumbling deeply. "You're mine now, darling. Say it."

"I-I'm yours," I yelped, desperate for release. I would tell Enzo anything if he just sent me over the edge. I'd never felt this much pleasure before. He was driving me crazy.

"That's my girl," he praised. "Now stick your fingers in your cunt and come all over yourself like a good girl."

I placed my thumb on my clit as I shoved my other fingers inside myself, and I shouted, spasming around them as I crashed. My knees buckled, and I had to kneel as I felt light-headed, unable to hold myself up.

"Beautiful," he murmured.

"Lorenzo—"

"Call me Enzo," he interrupted, and I could hear the smile in his voice. "Like you used to. Next time when you come, say my name."

I opened my mouth to say something but stopped myself. Smirking, I yanked the shower curtains open, stepped out, and walked toward the window, dripping everywhere.

In a black hoodie and pants, a man outside lowered a phone from his face, hidden in the shadows. I stopped at the window, dragged my fingers from my pussy, and smeared my arousal all over the window, smirking at the man.

“You made a mess,” I teased. “Come clean it up.”

His head tilted to the side, clearly amused by my boldness. He groaned, bringing the phone back to his lips. “Soon, Darling. I’ll be there before you know it.”

The line went dead. I winked at the man as I put the phone down. I grabbed the curtains and closed them, ending the show as abruptly as he ended the call.

I laughed to myself at the absurdity that just happened, but with my post-orgasmic bliss, I didn’t care. I shivered and returned to the bathroom to grab a towel and shut off the shower. I began to dry myself as I switched on the radio, hoping for relaxing music to help me sleep.

The radio announced that there was an inmate loose from Ashwood prison, that there was a riot, and some escaped.

I only realized there was no pre-recorded message on the phone announcing an inmate calling me from Ashwood prison. Enzo broke out.

It was him standing outside my window. It was Enzo who called me on that phone.

Fuck.

Call me Enzo like you used to.



## Page 27

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My heart sank as I ran to my window, looking frantically for the man I just spoke to, but he was gone.

But now I knew who he was.

He was the Enzo, my Enzo. The man I saw during my internship was my pen pal whose letters Mark kept from me.

I looked at my small pile of things and realized I still had that shoebox. I didn't remember how I got it, but it didn't matter. I ripped the top off as I picked up the letters one by one and read them.

My heart dropped. Enzo was finally opening up to me and being vulnerable in his letters, a first step toward redemption. But his letters changed when he thought I stopped responding; his letters got increasingly frantic and worried. He didn't know why I'd stopped writing him and didn't know what to think.

Dear Amara, he would typically start the letters out.

Then it changed to Dearest Amara, Elusive Amara, and just Amara when he was worried.

When I got to his last letter, it broke my heart.

Dear Amara,

Maybe you heard, but I broke out a few days ago. I went to your place, and I see now

why you stopped writing back to me. You have a husband at home now and are happy with your life. I'm sorry if I ever came between that. I'll let you go now. Be happy.

Yours always,

Enzo

9

Enzo

The police officer was easy to distract. Too easy. There was no way he could keep Amara safe. "I need one of you to stay here and watch her while I get my sister back," I barked, turning to Ludovic, Vitali, and Luca. "That pig is useless."

"I'll do it," Ludovic sighed. "If any of you others do it, you'll end up killing someone. Save all that energy for Sofia."

I glared at him. "If anything happens to her..."

"I'll guard her with my life," Ludovic promised. "Go. Get your sister. Bring her home safe."

I gave him a curt nod before turning to Vitali and Luca and motioning for them to accompany me.

We wandered the streets for a bit, looking for a car to hotwire. Vitali picked a sleek black sedan and went to work on it.

"That was fucking crazy," Luca exclaimed.

“Oh yeah,” I agreed, thinking back to our escape.

Prisoners ran everywhere, smashing everything they could find. After knocking them out, they grabbed the guards' lighters and set the place on fire. Screaming guards ran as shouts rang and bullets flew. It was chaos and the perfect diversion for us to get away.

We dragged some guards into a utility closet and exchanged clothes where we knew there were no cameras. When we came out, the inmates recognized us with our tattoos and faces and left us alone. We used the guards' keycards and got out of there, our heads down so the cameras couldn't make out our faces. Whichever dumbasses they left to man things while the riot was ongoing weren't too bright. But the important thing was that we got out.

We immediately got into one of the guards' cars and sped off. No one came after us, and we whooped and hollered with joy.

We made a pit stop at Sofia's house, where we got some clothes from her husband. The kids were asleep, and the teary-eyed man told us what happened. He was at work, the kids were in school, and Sofia had the day off doing housework and running errands. They ambushed her in her own home, breaking in and dragging her away, kicking and screaming. The kids returned to an empty house and called their father, who rushed home. She was already gone.

The engine roared to life. “Come on, Enzo, let's go!” Vitali hollered, opening the doors for me and Luca.

We hopped in, and Vitali gave me the driver's seat. “What was Sacha's last name again?” I asked through gritted teeth as I drove away from the shelter.

“Sokolov,” he replied, his tone as grim as my thoughts.

“Fuck,” I muttered, veering hard to the left. The Solokovs were a powerful family in the Russian mafia, and they would’ve taken my sister as revenge for killing Sacha. If she wasn’t dead already.

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“We need a plan,” Luca began. “We can’t just go in there with guns blazing.”

“Speaking of guns...” Vitali snorted, tossing each of us the guard’s guns, tasers, and batons. “This is a good start, but we’ll need more. Let’s go home and round up the boys.”

“That’s where the police will look for us first,” I shook my head. “We’ll have to call them and tell them to meet us there. They just kidnapped the Ricci mafia princess. There’s no way they’re not already en route to get her back.”

Luca grabbed the phone I used to call Amara, and he quietly dialed a set of digits before putting the phone to his ear. “Yeah, Ivan? It’s the Solokovs, they have Sofia. Round up all the boys. This means war.”

I smirked as I sped up. They wouldn’t go down without a fight, but killing is what I lived for. They’d have to cut off my arms and legs to keep me from eliminating them all now.

“What’s a couple more life sentences?” Vitali shrugged. “Ludovic might get out in a few years, but us three? We’re lifers. Might as well make it worth something.”

I gave him a curt nod as I reached the highway, nearly deserted at night. With Amara burned in my brain, I knew I couldn’t take as many risks as I used to. I needed to keep her safe from whatever danger she faced, as that cop proved. I wasn’t allowed to die today. Not as long as she still breathed air.

I could feel my heart pounding in my chest and the blood roaring in my ears. The

road blurred before me as I sped up, racing down the streets to get to my sister. Rage bubbled up inside me, and my knuckles turned white on the steering wheel.

“Maybe I should drive,” Luca mumbled as he observed me. “Don’t get us killed or caught before we even get there.”

“He won’t,” Vitali assured him. “He’ll do whatever it takes to save Sofia. Besides, we’re almost there.”

He was right. I wasn’t sure how long I was raging at the wheel, but a few more minutes and we’d be there. I glanced at some cars nearby and recognized some of them. We weren’t going in alone.

“That was fast,” Vitali smirked as he recognized our henchmen. “No one fucks with the Ricci family.”

I floored the gas, shooting through the night as fast as this car could, and didn’t stop until we reached the Solokov safehouse. I skidded the car to a halt, parking it before all three of us jumped out. Several cars pulled up behind me, the drivers coming out with guns drawn, machetes in hand, ready for anything.

I motioned for the others to go in the front door and make a lot of noise while Luca, Vitali, and I crept toward the back. That’s where they’d run out to escape, and we’d be ready.

My henchmen banged on the front door before busting it down, and I heard multiple gunshots as they pushed their way through.

I heard thundering steps moving toward the backdoor, and I smirked, kicking it down in one fell swoop. The door crashed into the house, and a dozen Solokov minions stared at me in horror.

I launched myself at a man, pressing the taser in his neck as he shook violently, foaming at the mouth. Another man jumped on me, and I flipped him, pressing my gun in his face, and shot him between the eyes.

Luca and Vitali were spraying bullets, mowing through the Solokov men, their expressions grim and serious.

I was smiling, laughing as I aimed and fired, taking down as many of the Solokov fuckers as I could. My senses sharpened as I heard muffled screams, and my gun clicked, empty.

“Bullets,” I called, and one of my henchmen threw something at me, but it wasn’t bullets, I realized as I caught it.

It was a fucking machete.

I grinned, let my fury take over, and dashed toward the screaming.

It sounded like a woman, and I prayed that it was Sofia.

I burst through the door, and a man was holding a gun to my sister’s head, the other hand on her mouth.

But I was too fast.

Before he could say anything, I sliced, cutting his fucking hand off that held the gun. He screamed, his blood spraying all over Sofia as she shouted, ducking as I stabbed through the man’s throat, cackling as his blood sleuthed down my blade.

“What the fuck, Enzo!” Sofia shouted, trembling in her crouched position. “He could’ve shot me!”

“Nice to see you, too, sis. It’s been a few years,” I taunted, turning and slicing through another man rushing me. “How have you been?”

“Fuck off,” she spat, standing on shaky legs as she held on to the wall.

“You good?” I asked, looking up and down the hallway to ensure it was clear. All I could hear were echoes of gunshots on the other side of the safehouse.



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“Just in shock,” she muttered, gripping my arm tightly. “What the fuck did you do to make them come after me, huh?”

“Beat your ex to a pulp,” I shrugged. “Sacha ran his fucking mouth.”

Her head whirled, regarding me with anger before her eyes flashed with something that softened her expression.

“Thank you,” she murmured.

I was taken aback by that, but I couldn’t let anything distract me. I had to get us out safely; now seemed the best time.

I grabbed her wrist and pulled, running for the side door. Luca stumbled after me, and Vitali was still shooting nearby.

I dragged her outside, seeing a few Sokolov stragglers left behind as they ran down the street, shouting for help. I laughed at them as Luca brandished his gun and shot them down one by one.

Sofia cupped her ears as I dragged her into the car I stole, shooting daggers at Vitali as he ran out of the safe house, making a beeline for us. I got in the backseat with my sister as Luca got behind the wheel, and Vitali took the passenger side.

I tossed the keys to Luca as he revved the car and tore out of the driveway, roaring down the highway and taking us away from danger.

“You went soft back there,” Luca exclaimed in astonishment. “You’re usually the one causing the most carnage back there.”

“Shut up, I don’t want to hear this shit!” Sofia shouted. I sighed, put my arm around her, and let her lean on me as she sobbed. She clutched at my hoodie, pulling me to her as she buried her face in my hood, crying her eyes out.

“Did they touch you?” I snarled.

“They fucking tried,” she cried. “I didn’t fucking let them.”

I looked at her arms and noticed that they were bruised and bloody. I fumed, wishing I had made those men suffer slow, horrible deaths like they deserved. But I had to focus on what mattered; my sister was safe now, and I had to return her to her husband.

Then I’d go check on my little lawyer.

10

Amara

Afew mornings later, I scoured everywhere online until I found a small two-bedroom house for rent. I sent the owner my information, and they ran a credit and background check on me before allowing me to visit. It was fully furnished, and I signed the lease that day.

The hotel was just a twenty-minute walk away, so I went back there, checked out, and slung my bag over my shoulder as I walked back to my new place. Still reeling from when my ex sent a brick through the shelter’s window, I peered over my shoulder once in a while to make sure he wasn’t following me.

Maybe it was my imagination, but I saw the same man behind me more than once.

He was tall, clearly over six feet, and wore black jeans and a black hoodie. His face was obscured in the shadows, so I couldn't tell who he was. I picked up the pace, trying to get as far away from him as possible.

I deliberately walked in the wrong direction until I lost him, and only then did I get back on the path to my new home. I quickly entered and shut the door behind me.

I went upstairs, placed my clothes in the closet, put toiletries in the bathroom, and tried to make myself home.

My phone rang, and I sighed as I picked it up. "Yes?"

"Hey, Amara, can you come in today?" Marta asked. "There's an issue with your client."

"Yeah, I know, he broke out," I sighed. "I saw it in the news."

"There's something else. You really should come in and see this," she insisted.

I frowned but knew I had to keep this job to keep my new place. So I agreed, hung up the phone, and dressed in something more work-appropriate.

I left out the back door in case whoever followed me was still around. I prayed it wasn't my soon-to-be ex-husband and began the short walk to my workplace.

I walked in without a word, going straight to my desk. A pile of paperwork awaited me, but letters were also on the stack. I sifted through the junk mail, but one envelope caught my attention with the return address.

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Ashwood Prison.

I froze. The letter was stamped the same day that I met Enzo. Had he written me, and I only saw the letter now?

Impatient, I tore it open, my eyes falling on the elegant scrawl on white lined paper.

Amara,

Hello again. I wonder what my name will sound like when you call it as you come for me.

-Enzo

I dropped the letter, a bolt of pure need and longing spearing me. No one had ever talked to me like that before, especially not a client. I was flustered and didn't know what to do with myself as I put the letter in a drawer and slammed it shut.

I looked at the letters again, and I gasped when I saw another one and another. It looked like he had written to me each day since I saw him, only stopping on the day he broke out.

I ripped the second envelope open, glancing up to ensure the door to my office was closed before I looked at the letter.

Amara,

No answer? That's alright. I've got all the time in the world to spend writing to you, baby. How about a poem?

Roses are red

Violets are blue

No matter where you go

I'll be watching you.

-Enzo

I shook my head at his words, trying to clear my head of filthy thoughts. The first letter was hot, but this one was scary. I threw it in a random drawer before I opened the last one, holding my breath as I read the words.

Amara,

I bet those lips would look beautiful wrapped around my cock. I'm thinking you're wondering what it looks like, just like I'm wondering what your pussy looks like. Is it wet for me already, baby? Are you touching yourself now thinking of me? You might not know it yet, but you're mine, Amara, and I don't share.

Get that divorce finalized, or I'll have to help it along.

-Enzo

I had to remind myself to breathe. Enzo was threatening my husband. Why did I find that thrilling? I shoved the letter into a drawer, slamming it shut as my heart pounded.

My panties were soaked and uncomfortable, but I had to work. I tried my best to forget about those letters as I read through the files on my desk.

Enzo was facing new charges for his escape, and he hadn't escaped alone. I shuddered at the thought. Were the others dangerous like him, and were they terrorizing the law-abiding citizens?

I tried my best to focus as I scrambled for a defense. Apparently, his sister had been kidnapped, and he broke out the same day. I was unsure whether she had recovered, so I began digging into this mysterious inmate.

I went to the beginning, searching every record of him and that gym teacher he killed.

When I found statements made by his sister, my heart sank.

In her initial statement, she stated that she was sexually assaulted by the gym teacher, who was her coach at the time. She said that Enzo had walked in on him raping her, and that's when he snapped. But the police had asked her why she didn't report the previous assaults and decided that she would say anything to get her brother out of jail.

But then I kept looking. During his first years in adult prisons, he only targeted child molesters and rapists. It fit his profile and explained his rage, and it only worsened. When all the sex offenders were gone, he went for other violent criminals until killing and fighting was all he knew.

The system had failed him, and he was a product of their failures.

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I went further back. Enzo went from foster home to foster home, running away from them if he wasn't placed with his sister. She was the only family he had since none of their blood family could care for them.

I printed everything I found, adding it to the massive folder of evidence the state had against him, but they didn't know the whole story. They didn't know that he was a product of neglect and abuse, nor that his first murder was in defense of his only family.

I looked up only when my boss knocked at my door and realized it was dark out.

"You should've left hours ago," she gasped. "I was just locking up. Go home, Amara. I'll see you in the morning."

"Right," I muttered, straightening my desk before I headed out. "See you in the morning."

The walk home was quick, but I still sensed that I was being watched. I looked over my shoulder, swearing, and saw a shadowy figure following me.

I hurried home, locking the door behind me. Heading to the kitchen, I fixed myself a sandwich with some of the food I had left over from the food bank since I had worked right through lunch. The growling in my stomach finally stopped, and I ate every bite. I jogged upstairs, ready to go to bed for the night.

A streetlight flickered, and I looked outside.

There was a man out there, standing below the streetlight, looking up at me. He didn't wave, didn't move, just stared.

My heart sank. Was it Mark? Was he here to hurt me again? I ducked, crawling across the floor as I swore, realizing I had left my phone in the kitchen. I heard it ring and was too far away to grab it now. If I went down there, Mark would probably throw another brick in the house and climb in, and this time, he would kill me.

I slowly stand, peeking outside, relieved to see that the man was gone.

But then my blood went cold. If I couldn't see him, then where was he? It wasn't like Mark to just walk away once he knew where I was.

"My Amara," a voice whispered, too close for comfort.

I opened my mouth to scream, but a hand clamped over it and muffled the sound. I was pinned against a warm, hard body, breathing heavily through my nose as I looked around, trying to find anything I could use as a weapon. I bit down on the hand hard, and the person behind me only chuckled as he leaned in, sniffing my hair.

"You're a little spitfire, baby," a familiar voice husked, and my teeth unlatched from his hand.

It was Enzo.

"Are you going to scream if I remove my hand now?" he questioned.

I shook my head and felt his lips curl into a smirk against my ear. "That's a good girl."

My knees went weak as his tattooed hand fell from my mouth but wrapped around



my throat instead. He spun me around to face him, the shadows obscuring his face from me as I took him in.

He wastall and dressed in all black. He pushed his hood away from his face, and I recognized him. His spectacles glinted in the glow of my nightstand's light, his blond curls falling over his face, and those full, kissable lips curled into a sinister smile.

I was caught in a predator's trap and could do nothing to escape.

"You went to work today," he grinned. "Did you get my letters, baby?"

I nodded. "All of them," I breathed. "Mark kept your letters from me. I didn't know you had written back and thought you had stopped. I'm sorry."

His eyes darkened, glinting with danger. I swallowed, wondering if he even believed me.

I didn't trust my words as both terror and lust swirled in my mind, my heart, my pussy. How could I be so turned on right now as an escaped killer held me by the throat?

"Are you going to write me back this time?" he murmured, his gaze raking over my body.

"I did," I admitted. I did right after I found out about what happened to his sister. I knew he'd end up in that prison, so I mailed it there, dropping it at a mailbox on the walkback from work.

"I can't wait to read it," he husked. "Got myself my little pen pal back. I wonder how she tastes."

I whimpered, my knees going weak as he turned, pinning me against the wall. His knee pressed against my pussy, forcing my legs apart as he lowered his face to mine, and I could taste his breath.

His mustache tickled my upper lip as he traced it with his tongue, flicking it between my lips, a silent order to open my mouth for him. I did, and he spat in my mouth, and the only thing that held me up was his knee as mine buckled.

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“Swallow,” he whispered, gripping my lower lip with his teeth, tugging it playfully. “Be a good girl and swallow; I’ll reward you.”

I closed my mouth and swallowed, the act filthy and titillating all at once.

His grin was feral and unhinged, and he crashed his mouth against mine, pushing his tongue into my mouth. He coaxed my tongue into his, where he bit it and swirled his tongue around the tip. I moaned in his mouth, unable to help myself. My head spun. No one had ever kissed me like this, not even close.

Enzo picked me up in his arms, tossed me to my bed, and placed me by the headboard as he tugged on something. I felt him wrap something—ropes?—around my wrists, securing me tightly to my headboard.

I could barely process this as he tugged my dress pants and panties down, exposing my drenched pussy. I whimpered, tugging on the ropes as he unbuttoned my suit jacket and dress shirt, exposing my breasts to him. I didn’t bother wearing a bra since my breasts were small enough to get away with it.

“Look at my little lawyer, all bare just for me,” he murmured, brandishing a knife.

“Don’t!” I gasped, flinching as he raised it to my throat.

“Don’t what, baby?” he rasped, dragging the blade across my collarbone. “I said I’d reward you, and I meant it.”

“Are you going to hurt me, Enzo?” I whined.

He smirked. "I am, baby, but you'll learn to love it, even beg for it."

Before I could protest, his knife slid down my chest to my breasts, circling my hardening nipples. My breath caught in my throat as he nipped them, dragging them into his mouth as he took long, deep pulls. I moaned, arching my back to give him better access as he tongued the sensitive nubs, my pussy clenching for more.

The knife pressed against my belly as he loomed over me, his other hand gripping my jaw, forcing my eyes on his. "Should I slice you open, baby?" he taunted, his thumb smearing blood across my lips. "Or should I fuck you first?"

Coldness seized in my chest, but fear wasn't what made my thighs clench.

He tilted his head to the side, studying me, reading every reaction like I was a puzzle he pieced together. "You like this, don't you?" The blade trailed up, pressing between my breasts over the rapid beat of my heart. "You like knowing I could end you right here."

My breath came in shallow, harsh pants. "I hate you."

He grinned. "Hate me harder, baby." The knife slid lower, down my legs, up my inner thighs, and between my legs as I gasped. "That's it," he whispered, licking the blood from my throat before biting down. I stiffened, whimpering as he flipped it, pressing the handle against my entrance. "Now scream for me."

Then he plunged it inside me, and my eyes crossed.

"Fuck," he groaned, lifting my hips so he could see his knife disappear inside me. He locked eyes with me as he lowered himself down my body, his lips found my clit, and he sucked it into his mouth.

“Enzo!” I shouted, my hips bucking as he grinned, nipping at my clit as he thrust the knife handle deeper inside me, positioning it until the thrusts had my knees wobbling and my breath gasping.

“That’s right, baby, say my name,” he murmured between licks. “Say my name as you come all over this knife like a good girl.”

He thrust the knife faster, and he sucked my clit deeper in his mouth, his tongue rubbing mind-numbing circles around the tip. I felt like he was pulling my soul from me through my clit, and it felt amazing.

I screamed as white-hot pleasure surged through me, my pussy clenching, clit throbbing in his mouth as I shuddered, washed up by the most blinding, powerful orgasm I ever had. “Enzo, Enzo, Enzo,” I moaned, unable to stop.

“Mmm, you’re delicious, baby,” he groaned, waiting until I went still before he dragged his knife from my cunt. “You made a mess, my little lawyer. You need to clean it up.”

He shoved the handle in my mouth, and I wrapped my tongue around it, sucking my juices dry from the handle as I held eye contact with him, my clit pulsing for more.

He chuckled, pulling the knife from my mouth as he shoved his fingers inside me, making me squeal from the intrusion.

“Now come all over my fingers,” he demanded, pressing the blade of the knife against my clit. The shock of the cold steel pressing against my over-sensitive bud made me scream, and he curled his fingers just right, raking against my G-spot.

I rocked my hips against his rhythm, exploding all over him, my wetness seeping down his hand as I shrieked, writhing and trembling as he wrung every jolt of

pleasure out of me. He drew out my orgasm, not slowing or stopping until I went slack.

I could feel tears running down my face, and I could only imagine how I looked with my makeup smeared.

“You’re a mess, darling,” he murmured. “A beautiful mess, just for me.”

I hummed, unable to form coherent words as he loosened the ropes around my wrists. I collapsed on my bed, breathing hard as he loomed over me, pressing his hips against me so I could feel how affected he was by what he’d just done to me.

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“I have to get back and read your letter now,” he husked, leaning down to kiss my swollen lips. “But I’ll be back before you know it.”

Then he backed away, fading into the shadows until he was gone.

11

Enzo

I was already addicted to my little lawyer, and I’d never forget her taste. She tasted like fucking peaches; who knew a girl could taste like my favorite fruit. She was delicious, and I couldn’t get enough.

I took her phone from her nightstand, downloading a tracking app to her phone as I went downstairs. I went through her calendar, noticing that she had a birth control shot appointment every few months. I smirked, erasing them from her calendar, and texted the clinic, informing them that all future appointments were canceled and she no longer needed their services.

I then deleted the clinic’s number after blocking them. Amara had her primary care practitioner to whom she could go for her medical needs. Since she was with me, she wouldn’t need birth control anymore.

A shiver snaked up my spine at the thought of her swollen with my child. One day.

I got back in my stolen car and drove off. Luca and Vitali were waiting for me.

“What is it with you and this girl?” Luca asked, driving us back toward Ashwood Prison.

“We’re going back already?” Vitali teased. “They picked up Ludovic a few hours ago.”

“That’s why we’re going back,” I replied. “We can’t leave our boy in there alone.”

“True,” Luca agreed. “He could hold his own, but he shouldn’t have to.”

“How long will we be in the hole this time?” Vitali wondered. “A month, maybe more?”

“Who the fuck knows,” I shrugged. “But I’ve got a letter waiting for me.”

“You never get mail,” Luca rolled his eyes.

But I did now.

“Found that piece of shit you were looking for,” Vitali announced. “His number and address, too. It looks like he moved his knocked-up secretary into his house, too. Fucking bastard.”

My lip curled in disgust. I’d never know how he could hurt someone as beautiful as my little lawyer.

“I’m making a pit stop at his place,” I grinned. “You still got some bricks back there?”

“Yeah, threw a bunch at the Sokolov fuckers,” Vitali laughed as he took a brick in his hands. “Want me to write a message on there?”



“Yeah,” I smirked, turning toward the suburbs of Ashwood. “Write ‘fuck around and find out’ on there.”

Luca laughed as Vitali wrote it, and I pulled up to the house. Vitali handed it to me, and I left the car running in the driveway. I hopped out, threw the brick at the bedroom window, got back in the car, and sped away.

I laughed as the man stuck his head out the window like an idiot. “Ah, damn, I should’ve stayed to throw another one at his head.”

“We can still go back,” Luca offered.

“Nah, I’ve got plans for him,” I promised, heading back to the prison. “Let him stew for a while.”

Sirens went off a few blocks from the prison, and I pulled over. The cop recognized us and immediately brandished his gun, his partner moving to the passenger side, pointing his weapon, too. They called for backup, and soon we were surrounded. None of us resisted as we were pulled out of the car, slammed on the ground, and handcuffed. I grinned as they threw us in three separate cars, driving us back to the prison we were headed for.

But I had a letter to read, so I didn’t mind.

~\*~

When I was back in the hole, mail call had already come and gone. To my surprise, a letter was still on my pillow waiting for me.

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I ripped it open with my teeth, trying to taste her on the envelope before focusing on her letter.

Dear Enzo,

This is very unprofessional.

Oh, who am I kidding? We've long crossed the boundaries between professional and unprofessional. I just got all three of your letters today, and I don't know what to say, only that my panties are now ruined because of you.

See you soon,

Amara

I grinned as I read her words over and over again. She was becoming fond of me, understanding that resisting our connection was pointless. I thought it would take longer, but Amara was clearly touch-starved. The way she came for me so fast showed me that her husband hadn't touched her right in years, if ever. She was so easy to please; it was almost depressing to know that Mark didn't even find her worth the effort.

But I had special plans for him.

I thought Amara was one of the many people who abandoned me when she stopped writing. But to know that she did, and he kept my letters from her and probably hers from me, sparked a fury inside me. I didn't think I could survive. But I intended on

letting it out, and letting Mark have it.

I was going to destroy him.

In the meantime, I took pen to paper and began writing my next letter to my new pen pal. Even in the hole, the prison let you have envelopes, paper, and pen, so no matter what I did, I still had a connection with the outside. I just couldn't call her from here.

Amara,

Just got your letter, baby. Tell me about my new charges, and let's meet soon to review my defense. It might take hours...and I intend to use every one of them.

Don't wear a bra or panties when I see you next. I can't wait to taste you again...

-Enzo

I smirked; no one, not even the deputies, could read legal mail. I addressed it to my little lawyer and her work address so they couldn't open it.

Maybe I'd surprise her and write her at her new place, too. But I had to be careful what I wrote because I didn't want to incriminate her, myself, or my crew. But I didn't want to risk the police looking for me there the next time I broke out, so I decided against it.

All I knew was that she was mine.

I'd never been this obsessed with anyone before. Amara consumed my thoughts and dreams, and nearly every action I took was with her in mind. I couldn't get her out of my head, and that was dangerous both for her and for me.

“Lights out, Ricci,” the deputy barked through the door.

I rolled my eyes but set the letter down next to my mattress so I could send it out tomorrow. I needed to rest, and although prison wasn’t ideal, I knew no one could hurt me here in the hole.

So I closed my eyes, licking my lips for a taste of my newest obsession, and let sleep take me so she could haunt my dreams.

12

Amara

When I got his letter, I had just arrived at work. I bit my lip at his words, my thighs clenching under my pencil skirt. I hurriedly called the prison, requesting a legal visit, and they gave me a spot this week. Not every prison allowed visits when the inmates were in the hole, but they couldn’t refuse legal visits. Inmates were still humans, and they had rights.

I grabbed my pen and began writing a response, ignoring the papers on my desk.

Enzo,

I’ll see you soon. I’m still sore from last time, but I can’t stop thinking about you. Not even my vibrator can make me come that hard, and nothing comes close to your mouth on me. Please...do it again.

-Amara

Feeling naughty, I took my perfume bottle out of my purse and sprayed the letter before slipping it into the envelope, licking the seal, and pressing it shut. I’d mail it

on the walk back home, giddy for a fucking criminal.

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What the fuck was wrong with me? But I didn't care. I'd had so little joy in my life that I decided to embrace what I got. He was the last tether I had tied to my past, a happy time before I married Mark. It was the closest I would get to getting that time back, and I didn't want to let it go.

Enzo's arraignment for his escape would be soon, and I had to be there. So I focused as hard as I could on work, preparing everything for the court date. I knew they wouldn't give him bail, so I knew not to ask for that.

We had a legal visit before the court date, too.

The court date was in two days, and our visit was tomorrow.

So I worked as fast as possible until I heard another knock at my door.

Once again, it was my boss.

"You're going to bankrupt me if you keep working this much overtime," she teased.

"Go home now, Mrs. Branson."

I nodded as I gathered my things.

"Gotta ask you something, though," she began. "You get some of your mail under the last name Branson, but your diploma says Roberts. Care to explain?"

"I'm married, and his last name is Branson," I replied, stepping out of my office and closing the door behind me. "But I'm going through a divorce anyway, so I'll be Ms.

Roberts again soon enough.”

“Oh, okay. Sorry to hear about the divorce,” Marta replied.

“Don’t be; he was a cheating, abusive bastard,” I admitted. It felt good to say it out loud after years of hiding it.

“Well, in that case, congratulations,” she smiled. “Let me know if you want our divorce lawyer on the case for you; make it happen faster.”

“Is he a shark?” I wondered.

“I only hire sharks,” she winked, ushering me out of the building.

“I’ll grab his card before I go to my law visit tomorrow,” I agreed.

Then I started the walk home, dropping my letter in the mail on the way there.

I went home, locking the door behind me. It was almost sad that Enzo hadn’t followed me home this time. But if his letter was any indication, he was firmly behind bars again. I wondered if he would break out again as I fixed myself a quick dinner and began my nightly routine.

My phone rang, and I reached for it, wondering if it would be Enzo.

“Hi,” my social worker chirped. “I need to schedule our next appointment. How’s next week?”

“I’m working pretty long hours. It’ll be hard to reach me,” I admitted. “It would have to be during lunch hour or something.”

I hurriedly scrawled in my agenda, noting that we'd meet each other at noon next week. It wasn't ideal for either of us, but lawyers could easily work sixty-hour work weeks, and I had no other guaranteed free time during her office hours.

I snapped the agenda shut as I turned to my window, looking at the flickering street lights and the rain. It pitter-pattered outside, picking up speed and intensity, like my heart.

Tomorrow, I'd see Enzo again.

A hot pang of longing curled in my belly, and I took a deep breath as I closed my eyes, leaning forward against the cool marble counter. I bit my lip as I imagined Enzo here with me, pushing up my skirt and having his way with me, pressing my face against the cold counter.

I dragged my fingers along the surface, my body coming alive with thoughts of him. My feet brought me up the stairs to my bedroom of their own accord, my blood buzzing with anticipation.

Pulled along by something intense and beyond common sense, the closet door slid open, and the black knit dress hanging in the back caught my eye. It was modest enough for the prison guards to let me in without issue, but it was tight enough for Enzo to take notice. I wondered if his eyes would darken, knowing I picked something out just for him.

I dragged my fingers along the fabric, soft to the touch, wondering where Enzo would grip the dress. Would he tear it off me, lift the hem gently, or feel it to ground him, reassure him that I was, in fact, there; solid, real, and not only a dream behind those four concrete walls.

I swallowed hard, heat like a live wire zinging beneath my skin. Would he lay me on



the table, mouth bruising and possessive? Or would he push me against the wall, hand tangling in my hair, telling me all the naughty things he wanted to do to me?

I trembled, stepping away, restless at the thoughts he elicited in my mind. My fingers shook as I peeled my clothes off my body and went for a shower.

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The scalding water beat against my skin, but it did nothing to temper the burning deep inside me. Nothing would, not until I saw him.

When I slid beneath the covers, my dress hung on the door, waiting, just like me.

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~\*~

My heels clicked against the concrete floor, my heart hammering as the guard walked ahead. He opened a tall door marked Legal Visitation Room and ushered me inside. I sat in one of the chairs as the guard slinked away, closing the door behind him as he went to get my client.

I opened my briefcase, my hands shaking as I laid papers on the table. Enzo was getting arraigned tomorrow, and I needed to inform him of the basics and what to do. I pulled out all the necessary forms and a few pens, leaned back in my chair, and waited.

And waited.

Every time I heard steps echoing down the hall, I straightened, hoping it was him. But so many people walked up and down the hall; it was unlikely that it would be him every time. It was visiting hours, after all, and so many inmates got visitation today.

I stood only when I heard the doorknob twist and the door creak.

I kept my features neutral as the guard swung the door open, letting in my client. He was in shackles, and his eyes darkened just like I imagined, his mouth tightening as his gaze raked over my tight dress, my curves on full display.

The guard unshackled him, told him to behave, and closed the door. Smirking, Enzo turned the lock, and it gave an audible click!

“Don’t you look delicious,” he purred, sitting in the seat across from mine.

A small smile escaped before I could hold it back, and I pushed some forms before him, handing him a pen. “I need you to read these papers and sign them. This is a new case, so you must agree to hire me as your lawyer if that’s what you wish. Then we need to go over what to expect tomorrow.”

Enzo’s eyes fell to the forms before flicking back to me, his jaw ticking. He took the pen and signed the papers before it clattered back on the table.

“This isn’t my first arraignment,” he informed, his eyes hard and cold. “I know what to expect.”

“The prosecution hasn’t offered a plea deal, and I don’t think they will,” I admitted. “You shouldn’t take this to trial because you’ll lose. You can plead—”

“Guilty,” he murmured.

I looked up from the forms as I gathered them, straightening them before putting them in my briefcase. “Pardon?”

“Guilty,” he repeated, standing from his seat and leaning over it as his hands rested on the table. “You know I am. Is that what you want me to plead?”

“It’s up to you, Mr. Ricci,” I breathed.

“Oh, so it’s Mr. Ricci now?” he snapped, slamming his fist on the table and making me jump. “What the fuck happened?”

“What?” I mumbled, scooting the chair away from the table as a surge of coldness seized my chest.

Enzo lunged for me, gripping my throat as he hauled me to my feet and slammed me against the wall. I squeaked, and he loomed over me, his eyes dark and dangerous, flashing with fury.

“Are you afraid of me, Mrs. Branson?” he growled, his eyes darting between mine.

“Yes,” I admitted, squirming in his grip.

“Do you think I’m like your husband? Do you think I’ll beat you to a bloody pulp and kill you right here?” he demanded.

I hesitated, and his eyes flashed with anger. I winced at his reaction but forced myself to review the facts.

I’d seen his entire rap sheet, and nothing in there even hinted at violence against women.

“N-no,” I stammered, trembling in his grip. Enzo was dangerous, terrifying, and a killer, but if he wanted to attack me or kill me, he would’ve done it already.

“Do you trust me?” he whispered.

“With what?” I exhaled.

“You.” It was a statement, not a question.

I didn’t answer; I couldn’t. I knew Enzo years ago, but now, he was night and day from back then. He was too far down the rabbit hole, unhinged and unstable. His blood was too soiled with blood, and he could never go back to the vulnerable, self-reflecting man who was my pen pal as an intern.

Now, he was unpredictable, violent, and a cold-blooded murderer. How could I trust him? How could anyone?

Sure, my body came alive under his touch. But maybe that was a mistake. Was a few nights of mind-blowing orgasms worth risking my livelihood, my career, my life?

Enzo nodded as if he could read my thoughts, like my lack of a reply was an answer in itself. He yanked my hair, pulling my head back, exposing my neck to him as he lifted his chin, looking down at me with those blue eyes swirling with menace.

“If only your husband hadn’t come between us,” he tsked, dragging his fingernails down a vein at my neck. “I might’ve made parole, gotten out, and found you before the fucker had a chance to lay his filthy hands on you. Maybe I could’ve been the man you wanted.”

I whimpered as his teeth latched on my ear, nibbling it, making me shiver.

“But I’m more than that now,” he growled. “I’m not the man you want. I’m the man

you need. Because you're mine, Amara, and no one hurts what belongs to me."

Enzo licked down my neck, latching on the skin below my ear, sucking, holding me still as all I could do was whimper as he marked me. I could feel the swell of my skin as he moved to the other side, biting into my flesh, making hickeys on my neck, and showing everyone that I was taken.

"You're a good girl, aren't you, Amara?" he breathed, his hands sliding down my body, groping my breasts through my dress, sliding down my belly, my pussy, and to the hem. "You've always been a good girl your whole life. I know your type, baby. Straight A's, pretty clothes, living your life by the rules."

I gulped as he fisted the hem of my dress.

"But you've always been drawn to danger, haven't you? You chose the stable white-collar boy because society told you to do that. But deep down, you long to have a bad boy ruin you, break you, and make you beg for it, don't you, baby?"

My breath stuttered, catching in my throat as I froze, paralyzed under a veritable predator, intoxicating and primal. Something electric passed between us, a chemistry, a connection that I couldn't deny.

Enzo stepped away, leaving me breathless as he raked his eyes over me. "Look at you, my little pen pal, speechless."

Then, out of the waist of his pants, he pulled out a gun.

I gasped. "H-How the hell did you get that?"

"Please," he smirked. "You think I don't have connections? I practically own this fucking prison."

He spun the cylinder, the sound filling the silence like a warning.

Click. Click.

I stood before him, his weight pinning me to the wall, trapping me. Enzo ripped my top down to my waist. The muzzle of the revolver traced slow, lazy circles over my collarbone, then lowered, teasing the swell of my breast.

"One bullet," he murmured, pressing the gun against my ribs. "Six chambers."

My breath hitched.

"Do you think you're lucky?" His smirk was cruel as he dragged the barrel lower. He lifted the hem of my dress to my hips, and my knees buckled as he slipped the gun up my skirt between my thighs.

I clenched my legs, snapping them shut.

He laughed. "Oh no, baby, you don't get to hide from me."

His hand forced me open. The cold steel pressed against my most sensitive flesh. "Tell me," he murmured, his lips brushing against my ear. "Are you afraid?"

I swallowed hard, knowing whatever answer I gave would change nothing for an unhinged murderer like him.

"Yes," I admitted, my voice breathy and shaky.

His chuckle was dark, filled with something twisted and starving, deprived of a woman's touch for decades. "Good," he whispered, cocking the hammer. "Now beg."

My eyes widened. “What—”

“Don’t make me say it twice,” he challenged, slipping the gun through my wetness. Why was I wet?

“Please,” I pleaded, my lower lip trembling as tears sprang to my eyes. “Please. Please don’t hurt me.”

He chuckled, lifting the barrel, using it to trace slow, lazy circles around my clit. My hips jerked, and he grinned.

“Oh, but your body wants it,” he whispered, increasing the pressure slightly and making me moan. “You’re begging for my gun, my little lawyer.”

He tilted the gun, pressing it at my entrance before ramming it inside me. I cried out, my hands fisting at the invasion, my vision going hazy at the combination of adrenaline and endorphins.

The cold, hard steel was a shock against my heated walls, and it felt so forbidden, dark, and taboo. It was stiff and hard, and I whimpered as my body came alive, pulsing with need against the very tool I was sure Enzo had used to end lives before.

“You want me,” he murmured, nipping at my jaw, ear, and lips. “Your mind might fight, but your pussy craves me, Mrs. Branson.”

I shuddered in revulsion at the name, but the movements of his gun inside me pulled me back to the present, forcing me to submit to the overwhelming sensations. He



angled the gun, pressing it against my G-spot as I yelped, my hands shooting to his shoulders as I dug my fingers into his skin as if trying to ground myself, clutching on for dear life.

His pace was brutal, assaulting, and relentless, and I had no choice but to scream as he covered my mouth, and I came hard, spasming all over the barrel of his weapon.

Growling with victory, he grabbed my hips, hoisting me up on the wall before slamming me against it, wrapping my legs around his waist. He reached between us, pulling my panties to the side as he slid his fingers through my wetness, his eyes never leaving mine.

“No one else makes you wet like this, do they?” he rasped, shifting as he lowered his pants, pulling his cock out of his boxers, his gun clattering to the floor. “And no one ever will because I’m going to ruin you for any other man.”

The tip of his cock pushed against my pussy before he slammed me down, forcing me to take all of him. I sobbed, and he shoved his hand against my mouth as he stretched me to the brim.

He was huge, long, and thick inside me. It stung at first, but with his punishing, claiming thrusts, I grew so wet that all I could feel was pleasure as tears streamed from my eyes.

“What did I tell you about wearing these?” he growled, tearing my panties from me before stuffing them in my mouth.

I whimpered as he shoved into me, his hips shifting, angling until I screamed; the sound muffled my panties as he hit every wall, brushed every nerve, and stoked a fire in my very soul. An inferno like no other clawed at me like a liquid flame, bursting from my clit and spreading all over my body as I exploded. My breath seized as my

pussy fluttered on his cock, squeezing him like a vice.

“That’s it, baby,” he groaned, fucking me into the wall like his life depended on it. “Milk me dry, little angel. Fall for me.”

Enzo quickened his pace, not letting me breathe or recover as the onslaught of sensations assaulted me, and he gripped my throat, looking into my eyes as he cut off my air, and my clit throbbed, twitched, and spasmed so hard against him it fucking danced. I came so hard that I sawstars, reveling in the nirvana as he raked another climax from me. He was bigger and better at everything, and I was addicted, consumed by all that was Enzo.

I felt Enzo pulse inside me as my vision blurred, and he threw his head back in bliss as his rhythm stuttered, shoving himself deeper and harder inside me as he filled me up.

He didn’t stop until I was a writhing, sweaty mess, and only then did he lower my wobbly legs to the floor, his release leaking down my leg.

But he didn’t let that happen for long. He scoops it up, shoving his seed back inside me, making me moan against my panties.

“That stays inside where it belongs,” he snarled. “And you make sure it stays there.”

He brought my panties to his nose and inhaled deeply, pocketing them before he brought the barrel of his gun to his mouth, licking my juices off of it, making my pussy clench at the erotic sight. He pulled his pants up, pocketed his weapon, smirked at me, and walked out the door.

Enzo

"Lorenzo Ricci, how do you plead to the charges of escape from lawful custody, grand theft, and eluding a peace officer?" the judge asked.

"Not guilty," I announced, smiling to myself at Amara gaping next to me.

"We talked about this," she muttered under her breath. "They've got you. Plead guilty."

"Not on your life, baby," I whispered.

She scowled as the judge entered my plea and scheduled the next court date. A guard took me to the meeting room, where I waited for my little lawyer.

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She stormed in, slamming the door shut behind her. There was glass between us in the courthouse, or else I'd already have her bent over this table.

"What the hell, Mr. Ricci," she snapped. "We can't take this to trial. You'll get the maximum sentence!"

"So?" I scoffed. "You act like I'm not serving several life sentences already."

"There are restitutions, fines, and court fees, not to mention wasting resources. Is that what you want? Teach the judicial system a lesson for putting you away?" she huffed.

"Drop the act, Mrs. Branson. I want to speak to my pen pal, not my lawyer," I sneered.

"That's what this is about?" she snapped, pointing to the door behind me. "This room is for lawyers and clients. Write a letter if you want to talk to your pen pal."

"But this is so much more fun," I smirked. "Like I told you before, anything out of that prison is a vacation for me."

Amara threw her hands up in frustration, shoving my file in her briefcase as she muttered angrily. "Waste of fucking time," she grumbled.

"Not for me," I grinned. "This has proven very entertaining."

"I'm glad my fucking job is funny to you," she snapped. "I should fire you as my client."

“I dare you,” I crooned, leaning toward the glass separating us. “Maybe then you’ll see just how dangerous I can be.”

We glared at each other, a silent staring contest, waiting for the other to break.

It wouldn’t be me.

Several moments passed before she exhaled sharply, snapping her briefcase shut and whirling toward the door. She gripped the doorknob—

“Did you miss me, baby?” I rasped.

She turned to me, her expression unimpressed. “If you wanted to see me more often, all you had to do was ask.” Then she left, slamming the door behind her.

I grinned. I loved toying with my little spitfire, coaxing all her repressed rage to the surface. It was good for her, and I loved getting her all hot and bothered.

It would only make her come harder on my cock later.

“You sure know how to piss people off,” a muffled voice sounded through the vent.

I leaned back in my chair and chuckled. “Whatdid you plead?”

Luca laughed. “Guilty, I ain't stupid.”

I considered his words. “I guess your list of crimes isn’t as long as mine. You might make parole in a few decades.”

He snorted. “At least Ludovic only got charged with escape. He wasn’t with us in the car, so they couldn’t prove the grand theft or eluding.”

“That’s, what, two years max? He’ll be fine,” I drawled. “What’d Vitali plead?”

“Didn’t see, he was up after me,” Luca replied. “But if he pleads guilty, you’re on your own for your defense.”

I gritted my teeth in annoyance. I hadn’t thought that far ahead, but the guards kept us separate for a reason. We couldn’t go over our stories to make sure they were identical, or agree on a defense strategy. That’s exactly what they wanted.

“When’s your next lawyer visit? Now that you have a defense to plan, you’ll be seeing her more often,” Luca remarked.

I chuckled. “I plan on it.”

“What are you two morons talking about?” came Vitali’s voice from further away.

“You,” Luca smirked. “Did you plead out?”

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“Nah, they’re gonna have to work for it on my end,” Vitali declared. “Enzo was the driver, so for all they know, he stole the car. So they’ll probably drop the grand theft charge.”

I smirked. Since Vitali pleaded not guilty, we had a chance to fight this. I knew we would lose and all get charged with at least one thing, but it gave me time, a precious commodity I planned to squeeze so I could see Amara as often as possible.

“How much longer in the hole do you think?” Vitali asked.

“At least a month total,” I sighed. “So don’t make any big plans.”

“Actually,” Vitali began. “Big plans are exactly what I’m making.”

This piqued my interest. Vitali was planning another escape if he meant what I thought he did. It would be almost impossible to do from the prison while we were in isolation, but with some stealth, it could happen from the courthouse if the guards were distracted enough.

“I’m listening.”

14

Amara

Enzo Ricci would be the death of me. He was infuriating, insufferable, deranged...

And he set my blood on fire.

I couldn't look at his smirking face and concentrate. He was the bane of my existence, but I couldn't get enough.

"Amara?" my divorce lawyer asked, tapping his pen loudly. "You there?"

I gave my head a clearing shake before I focused back on him. "Yeah, sorry."

"Look, I know this is difficult stuff, but we need to get these papers drawn up," he reminded me. "We know he will refuse, so ask for everything upfront. That way, we have wiggle room to negotiate."

"If that's what you think works best," I shrugged. "I don't have any experience with these types of situations."

"Not surprising," he nodded. "I can send these out today if that's good with you."

"That works for me," I mumbled, looking at the time. "I actually have to go. I have an appointment at noon."

He snorted. "Figures, that's the only time I can squeeze in my appointments, too. If you have any questions, I'm right down the hall."

"Thanks, Earl," I stood, dusting off my suit pants. "I'll see you later."

It'd been a week since I last saw Enzo, and he transferred my retainer to my bank account. Since my social worker appointment was in the next town, I got a used car. I planned on slowly reaching out to my family again and wanted a way to get to them without relying on a bus.



I stopped by my office, looking at the latest letter from Enzo.

Amara,

Seven days. Time goes by slower the longer I go without seeing you. But I have one word for you, baby. Soon.

-Enzo

I shivered, both rolling my eyes and smiling. Soon was our code word, meaning Enzo planned to escape prison again. I wondered how he'd do it since he was still in solitary confinement, but he wouldn't share the details with me in letters. I just had to trust that he would do it.

I rolled my eyes because I knew he would catch another charge and nullify his defense in our current case.

I grabbed a pen, and it rasped against the paper as I wrote my reply.

Enzo,

The divorce papers are drafted and should be delivered today. We should celebrate. Soon.

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-Amara

I kissed the letter, leaving a smear of my lipstick before I neatly stuffed it in an envelope, addressed and stamped it, grabbed my lunch, and headed out the door.

Walking home, I slid the letter into the mailbox, fumbling for my keys. I unlocked my car, climbed inside, and started eating lunch as I returned to Ashwood.

Lockwood was a nice town, but it was a ten-minute drive from Ashwood, so it was a pain in the ass to visit Enzo every week without a car. I was glad I had a reliable method of transportation.

I scarfed down my turkey sandwich, downing it with a bottle of water I had left in my car before I arrived at the shelter.

The lady at the front desk recognized me and buzzed me through, and I sat in the waiting room until my social worker came to get me.

“How’ve you been?” she enthused as I sat across her in her office.

“Better,” I admitted. “I changed my number and haven’t heard from Mark so far.”

“Good, good. How’s work?” Sylvia asked, pulling out her notebook and jotting notes.

“Hectic,” I admitted as I tried not to blush.

“I bet,” she agreed. “But you’ve got to get back on the horse after so many years of

not working.”

“My lawyer’s serving Mark the divorce papers today,” I added.

My social worker paused before she looked me in the eye, frowning. “How do you feel about that?”

“Apprehensive, but sure,” I answered.

“I have to warn you,” she intoned. “Abusers get more reactive and violent once divorce proceedings start. You may hear from Mark again.”

“He doesn’t have my phone number or address,” I informed her.

“Social media,” Sylvia shot back. “If you’re listed on your workplace’s website, he could find you in a simple online search and blow up your job. They tend to find a way.”

My heart seized in my chest. Sylvia was right. I wouldn’t put it past Mark to make fake social media accounts or try to find me.

I could barely pay attention to her next questions as the icy cold hand of fear gripped my heart tighter and tighter. Would Mark somehow find me? What if he saw my car here and followed me home?

“Well, that’s all the time we have today,” my social worker announced. “You want to see me weekly, bi-monthly?”

“I’ll call you,” I decided. I would rather keep it bi-weekly, but I’d need to see her more often if Mark started up again.

“Okay. Take care of yourself,” Sylvia encouraged, rising to her feet. “Let me walk you out.”

My hands trembled, so I balled them into fists as I walked to my car, not paying attention to whether Sylvia was following me. I got in my car and groaned, realizing I was low on gas. I pulled into the nearest gas station, selected the cheapest gas, and started filling my car.

“Amara?” a voice called. “Is that you?”

I froze. I heard that voice a few times when I called Mark’s work.

“Erin,” I gritted to my husband’s pregnant secretary. “Leave me alone.”

“Is this a joke?” she screeched, throwing papers at me, and I could guess it was the divorce papers. “You want everything Mark worked so hard for, even the house? You really are just a gold-digging whore.”

“I’m not the one carrying an affair baby,” I muttered, removing the nozzle and hanging it up. I’d rather fill up in Lockwood than deal with this woman a second longer. At least I put in enough gas to make it there.

Erin went to slap me, but I dodged her, and she stumbled, falling to her knees.

“You seem to like that position a lot,” I mused, getting in my car. “Maybe next time, try it on someone single, homewrecker.”

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I slammed my door shut, hearing Erin screeching at me, but I didn't care. I sped off, not looking back.

My heart pounded, and a thrill rushed through me. I'd never defended myself like that, and it felt good. How dare Erin try to make me out to be the bad guy when he was sneaking around behind my back.

And thank goodness I wouldn't stay married to Mark for long.

As I pulled into the Lockwood gas station, my phone rang. It showed up as an unknown caller. Cringing, I picked up as I put the gas nozzle in my car. "Branson," I announced.

"Yeah, that's right bitch, you've still got my last name, and don't you fucking forget it," Mark spat on the other line.

I looked around as my heart froze, dread creeping into my veins. It hadn't taken long before Erin ran to him, crying about our altercation.

"How did you get this number?" I demanded.

"You don't get to question me," he snarled. "As much as it sickens me, you're still my wife, and I'll be damned if you endanger the mother of my child."

"Believe what you want," I breathed. "But if you sign the papers, we can move on and never speak again."

“You aren’t getting a penny from me,” he snapped.

“Hmm, we’ll see about that. From now on, you can contact my lawyer; any contact with me directly after this call will be considered harassment. Goodbye, Mark,” I sighed before I hung up the phone.

I put it on silent, knowing he would blow it up and I would have a case to change my number again with my phone company.

When I finished gassing up, I drove to my home, where Sylvia was waiting for me at the door. I groaned, having wholly forgotten our appointment as I parked.

“Sorry,” I muttered. “I ran into my ex’s mistress, and now he’s blowing up my phone.”

She frowned as I let her inside, explaining everything that happened when I ran into Erin and the phone call with Mark.

“How many times has he called you since then?” she questioned, gesturing to my phone.

I looked at it, rolling my eyes at the missed calls. “Twenty-two, oh, twenty-three, Mark’s calling me now.”

“Private caller,” Sylvia frowned. “He’s hiding his number, so you can’t prove it’s him, so you can’t file harassment charges.”

“If he leaves a voicemail, I could,” I mused, sending a quick text to my lawyer with a screenshot of the call log. “I’ll wait to change my number until tomorrow night; maybe he’ll be so mad he’ll leave a voicemail. He hasn’t left one yet.”

“You’ll have to leave your phone on silent,” she frowned. “What if there’s an emergency?”

“If it’s bad enough, a coworker can run down here and get me,” I shrugged.

“Well, if it gets bad enough, the police might convince a judge to subpoena yours and his phone records to prove it was him. But it has to be pretty bad,” Sylvia informed as she wrote in her notebook. “Do you have a busy week planned?”

“I have an appointment with my client tomorrow,” I admitted. “The cases are very complex, so I barely have time to look at other cases right now.”

“Cases for one client? Sounds like you’ve got your hands full,” Sylvia commented.

“You have no idea,” I mumbled.

15

Enzo

Visiting hours took its sweet time to get here. I tried to hide my enthusiasm as the deputy came, grumbling as he shackled me and dragged me out of my cell in the hole.

“Enjoy,” Vitali called from his cell, smirking.

I glared at him. I didn’t want the guards to have even a hint that I enjoyed my visits with my little pen pal in case they wanted to cause trouble. Thankfully, since my phone privileges were suspended, they couldn’t keep me from legal visits. They were a constitutional right, and I hadn’t been convicted of my charges yet.

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My footsteps thudded and echoed in the hall; the twists and turns would have been dizzying if I hadn't practically memorized this prison. Since I've spent years here, I knew it like the back of my hand. Vitali had been here longer than I had, and Luca and Ludovic also had years under their belts.

We turned the corner, and I grinned inwardly. The guard swung open the door, unshackling me before he left me inside with my little lawyer.

The room stank with fear, and the smile fell from my face. Amara was staring at her phone, her eyes wide and terrified.

"Who?" I gritted, my strides wide as I closed the distance between us.

The screen said Private Caller, but judging from the number of missed calls, I could only think of one person who would call her that much. Only one man could make my little pen pal reek of that much fear.

Mark.

I balled my fists, clenching my teeth as my blood boiled. I grabbed Amara's wrist, making her yelp as she dropped her phone, which clattered on the table.

113 missed calls.

That fucker went too far. If he wanted to hear her voice so badly, I'd give him something to listen to.



I pulled Amara to her feet as she whimpered, her eyes brimming with tears as she looked into mine, her lower lip trembling.

“No tears,” I cooed, lifting her chin. “Not for him. Never again.”

She nodded, searching my gaze, her eyes flitting over my face as if she reminded herself it was me before her, not her ex.

But she needed to remember that I was more dangerous than he was. Maybe then she’d never fear him again.

“Y-your defense—” she stammered.

“Fuck my defense,” I grunted. “We both know I’m guilty, baby. But so are you.”

“G-guilty? Of what?” she stuttered as I crowded her, forcing her to sit on the table to avoid a collision.

“Of being with that piece of shit for too long,” I growled. “But I don’t blame you, my little pen pal. I’ll make you forget he ever touched you.”

I slid my hand up her thigh, pleased to see she finally didn’t wear panties. I smirked, shimmying her skirt up, bunching it around her waist as I pressed my hips into hers, letting her feel the hard bulge swelling just for her.

“Enzo,” she gasped, her hands reaching for my pants as she fumbled with them.

My hand wrapped around her throat, and I turned her around, bending her over and pressing her face against the cool surface. She whimpered, spreading her legs and sticking up her ass, ready for me.

I chuckled as I spat on her hole. Her pussy clenched, already weeping for me, and I fell to my knees. She looked so good in those heels and that skirt and tight blouse, and now she was bare for me. Her heady scent invaded my nostrils, and my mouth watered. I spread her apart, gently circling her clit as she cried out, her legs stiffening in response.

I slipped my tongue inside her, groaning at her sweet taste as her flavor burst on my tongue. She rotated her hips against my face, moaning softly, biting into her fist as I alternated the pressure of my fingers, tracing patterns on her sensitive, throbbing clit.

“Keep it down,” I warned, glancing at the door. “You wouldn’t want the guards to hear, would you?”

She shook her head, trying to peer around to see what I was doing to her. But that was half the fun. The view was obscured by her round, perfect ass.

She yelped as I replaced my tongue with my fingers, spearing her, spreading them to stretch her out and prepare her for me. She was already gushing wet.

“Fuck, baby,” I groaned, rubbing her clit generously. “Are you close already?”

She nodded, rocking back on my fingers, desperate for it. Amara had completely forgotten about Mark, losing herself to the pleasure only I could offer her.

“I’m going to ruin you for any other man,” I whispered against her swollen flesh. “You won’t be able to even make yourself come without thinking of me.”

I bit her ass cheek, and she bit her fist, moaning as her pussy strangled my fingers, fluttering as she burst on them. I bit the backs of her thighs as she contorted before me, her clit pulsing against my insistent fingers.

I didn't let her recover. I rose to my feet, tugging my uniform pants down, freeing my throbbing cock. I placed the tip at her entrance, slathering her juices all over me as I sucked my fingers dry of her. "Delicious," I groaned as I took her phone, seeing the screen light up with Private Caller.

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I answered the call, smirking when I heard his disgusting voice start spewing profanities. I placed the phone next to Amara's contorted face as I slammed my cock inside her, and she cried out, squeezing her eyes shut.

"She can't come to the phone right now," I taunted, reaching around her body to pluck at her clit as she writhed against me.

"Who the fuck are you?" Mark bellowed, and I laughed, leaning forward to spit on Amara's puckered hole.

I sucked on my thumb before I circled her back hole, and she shuddered, pressing against my fingers, needing more. I pushed my finger inside her ass, and she let out a long, low groan.

"I'm the man who's been fucking your wife," I smirked, ramming my cock inside my girl as she tried and failed to stifle her moans. "This is what pleasure actually sounds like, dick."

I thrust deeper, Amara's voice growing hoarse, her cries haunted and deep. I pulled my finger out and slapped her ass, and she clenched on my cock.

"Stay the fuck away from my wife!" Mark screamed.

I chuckled, shoving another finger in her ass as her moans grew tortured. "No, I don't think I will," I groaned. "Fuck, was she this tight and wet for you? I can't get enough."

“Shut the fuck up, bastard,” he shouted.

Amara’s pussy fluttered, her eyes rolled back in her head, and I knew she was close.

“I’m hanging up now,” I smiled, taking the phone and bringing it to my mouth. “Because she’s about to come all over my cock, and only I get to hear the sounds she makes when she comes. You’ll never know that sound, asshole, and if you call her again, I’ll make sure you can never fuck anyone again, capiche? She’s mine now.”

I hung up just as Amara lost herself, her pussy contracting as her clit vibrated against my fingers, crying out my name as she milked me, pulling me into a frenzied, intense orgasm with her. I erupted inside her, bathing her insides with my come.

I looked down, laughing, when I realized her nails raked down my thighs, leaving red streaks. “That’s right, mark me up, baby. I want everyone to know who made you come that hard.”

She groaned, still twitching around me as I removed my hand from her clit, fisting her hair, forcing her to arch her back for me as I slid in deeper. “Take me to the hilt, baby,” I groaned. “Take all of me, and all my come.”

She panted, and we stayed tangled up in each other for a few more moments until the last throes of our orgasms faded, and I pulled out.

She tried to lift herself from the table, but her sweaty palms slipped, and she lay there, helpless.

I hooked my arms around hers and pulled her up, pulling her skirt down to cover that gorgeous ass. I pulled her panties from my uniform, the same ones I stole from her the first time I fucked her, and I pulled them up her legs.

“Keep my come where it belongs,” I growled in her ear, nipping at it.

She shuddered, leaning against me as her lips met mine, hungrily tasting herself as her tongue stroked mine.

“When?” she asked, and I knew what she was talking about.

“You got my letter?” I murmured. “Next court date.”

She nodded, pulling herself up on her wobbly legs. They shook uncontrollably, and my chest swelled with pride.

“That’s in two days,” she whispered.

“Soon,” I agreed, gripping her hair. “Now, you made a mess, my little lawyer. Clean it up.”

I pushed her down to her knees, and her eyes widened, shocked that my cock was still hard.

She looked into my eyes as she took the base of my cock, then my dick disappeared inside her mouth.

I bit my lip as she stroked and sucked me, her eyes tearing up, ruining her makeup as it smeared in black streaks down her face.

“Beautiful,” I whispered reverently.

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Mark never stopped blowing up my phone, so I made a report to the local police station. They said they'd look into it, but I doubted it. But at least there would be a record of his behavior.

"We got a response," my divorce lawyer muttered. "He wants everything you asked for, leaving you with nothing."

I scoffed. "After what he did to me, that's never going to happen."

"I figured," he smiled. "Want to make a counteroffer?"

"No," I smiled. "Mark's mistress will want to marry him, and she'll start putting pressure on him to divorce me. Maybe he'll cave."

"I agree," he responded, his printer humming. "Here are the papers again, two copies in case his mistress throws them at you again."

"She can try," I muttered, taking the papers from him and signing them. "All that's missing is his signature now."

"I also prepared the paperwork to change your name in case you want to get that process started," he offered.

"Yes, actually. Thank you."

"Don't you have court today?" he wondered, glancing at the clock. "Did it end early?"

“Yeah, just asked for a continuance,” I shrugged, knowing full well that Enzo was probably breaking out right this moment. “We’re going back in a few weeks.”

“Your next client is here,” the receptionist warned my divorce lawyer.

“Sorry, Mrs. Branson,” he apologized.

“It’s fine. I’ll see you later,” I placated, getting up from my seat and going to my office.

I smiled as I saw the mail piled on my desk. I threw the junk mail out and quickly opened my letter from Enzo.

Amara,

I can still taste you on my tongue. I can’t wait to have another taste...

-Enzo

His letters were always short and sweet, contrasting to when I first met him; they used to be long, elaborate, and detailed.

Part of me wondered if that part of him was still in there somewhere. But I knew that it didn’t matter because I knew that no matter what, I accepted him for who he was.

And it terrified me.

I took a piece of paper from my printer and grabbed a pen, beginning to write my letter.

Enzo,



Not if I taste you first. See you soon.

-Amara

I grinned as I addressed and stamped the envelope, sliding it into my purse to mail later.

The sun rose and set, and my boss knocked on my office door, giving me a pointed look.

I grinned sheepishly, like a child caught in the act. “Sorry, I was just finishing up,” I apologized.

“Pick it up tomorrow,” she chided, tapping her watch. “I have to lock up now.”

“Yes, Marta,” I told my boss, taking my purse with me as I slung it over my shoulder. She stood at my doorway, tapping her foot impatiently until I finally meandered, jogging out of the building.

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I dropped the letter in my mailbox, my nerves buzzing with anticipation. Today was the day. Enzo was supposed to break out of the courthouse today, and since the courthouse was closed now, I knew he had already escaped.

Was he lurking in the shadows, stalking me, or following me even now? Was he watching me or waiting for me at home?

My heels clicked against the pavement as I approached my house. I stopped when my front door came into view; it was open, swinging in the wind, yawning and creaking.

A cold pang of dread speared through my heart. I distinctly remembered locking the door—I always locked it—and a rush of frigid air gusted to me, making me shiver.

Was it Enzo, or did Mark find me? The harassment charges I filed should've warned him away, or maybe they made him angrier. I glanced at my phone, noticing that I didn't have any missed calls from him today. Was it because he planned to ambush me here?

I swallowed hard, hoping he just stopped calling me because I made a harassment report. Taking a deep breath, I stepped inside, closing the door behind me.

I heard muffled sounds and low thuds coming from above me. I went stiff, my pulse hammering in my ears. Someone was here, but I didn't know who.

I didn't want to be like those people in horror movies who just called out hello, letting the serial killer know where they were. So, just in case, I approached the kitchen counter, removing a butcher knife from the wooden block there, the weight heavy and

sure in my palm. I gripped it so tightly my knuckles turned white.

A low, creaking groan sounded above, the floorboards protesting from shifting weight. I slowly crept toward the steps, trying to stay silent as my heart pounded so loud I was sure everyone could hear. The stairs loomed ahead, the upper level obscured in shadows.

Was it Enzo, waiting for me with that delicious smirk, or Mark, ready to unleash another living nightmare?

I kicked off my heels, wincing at them, clattering on the tiles, before I inched up the stairs. My hand ached from my grip on the heavy blade, but it didn't calm the chaos in my heart. I gulped, forcing my breath to steady as I slinked forward, each step controlled and cautious.

I took the first step, then the next. My bedroom door creaked open ahead of me, and I knew that I wasn't alone.

A shadow broke from the darkness and rushed me, and I screamed, swinging blindly. I felt warm blood trickle on my face as whoever it was gripped me, holding my wrist and a hand over my mouth as he dragged me into my room, slamming the door shut behind me.

“You brought a toy,” Enzo purred against my ear, and I sagged with relief.

Feeling my body relax in his arms, he chuckled and let go of me. He moved toward my nightstand and flicked on the light, and I winced as my eyes adjusted.

I caught movement out of the corner of my eye and turned to get a better look. What I saw made the color drain from my face.

A man sat in one of my dining room chairs, bound tightly with chains. He was gagged, dirty, bruised, and bleeding. His brows were furrowed, furyflashing in his eyes as he glared at me as if this was all my fault. Blame in eyes I'd seen aimed at me for years.

Mark.

What was he doing here, in my home, and with Enzo?

"So," Enzo drawled, wearing a black mask with a skull painted on it, circling the chair. "I heard you refuse to sign the divorce papers."

Mark said something behind his gag, but it was muffled, and I couldn't understand him.

"If I was married to her, I wouldn't want to let her go, either," Enzo mused, circling behind me, dragging his fingers around my throat, making me shudder, before he turned back to Mark. "But I wouldn't cheat on her and knock up some other bitch like you did."

"Fuck you!" Mark shouted through his gag. He said something else, but it was undecipherable.

Enzo pulled the gag from Mark's mouth, and I realized he wore black gloves. Dread pooled in my stomach, wondering what this dangerous killer was about to do to my ex.

"Show yourself, coward!" Mark spat.

"If I do, I'll have to kill you," Enzo replied. "So, do you really want me to remove my mask? Because I'll be the last fucking thing you'll ever see."

Mark bared his teeth but remained silent. I could see that Mark had a black eye, and his lip was split and bleeding.

“Sign the papers,” Enzo growled.

“I’m not giving her shit!” Mark snapped. “She can sign my agreement.”

“You either sign hers, or I’ll make her a widow. Either way, she’s walking out of here a single woman. How is up to you,” Enzo declared.

“You wouldn’t—”

Enzo brandished a military-grade knife and stabbed it in one of his thighs. Mark screamed as blood seeped into his jeans.

Enzo shoved the gag back in Mark’s mouth, laughing. “Maybe you’ll change your mind,” he murmured, gently taking my butcher knife from my hand. “I’ve got many knives, and I’ll turn you into my personal pincushion.”

My blood buzzed as I watched Enzo attack the man who had abused me for years, a man who nearly killed me more than once. I was in the same room with two dangerous men, but somehow, I knew that no serious harm would come to me.

“Stop,” I murmured, reaching for Enzo—

But it was a mistake. Still on edge, he grabbed my wrist and turned, pinning me against the wall and holding it above my head. He was breathing hard, and our breaths mingled, and I didn’t fight him. I gazed into his eyes through the mask, and they were dark, broody, and dangerous, and I drowned in their depths.

“Fuck, baby,” Enzo purred, gripping my throat as he pulled me to him, his lips clashing against mine. He forced my lips open with his tongue, and his frenzied movements made my knees weak. I whimpered as he gripped my tongue with his teeth, circling the tip with his tongue.

“Whore!” Mark shouted through his gag. It stung, and I pulled away, my passion retreating.

“He doesn’t get to do that anymore, baby,” Enzo insisted, tilting my chin so I had to look at him again. “Don’t let him rob you of your pleasure ever again.”

The breath left my lungs as he lifted me, carrying me to my bed before laying me across it, my hair fanned out on the sheets. Our profiles faced Mark, and he struggled against his chains.

“Let him watch,” Enzo chuckled.

Enzo’s hot hand slid up my arms, still covered in that black glove. It was smooth latex and clicked something cold and hard against my wrists. I looked up, stunned to realize he handcuffed me to one of my bedposts.

He slithered away from me, turning to some sort of black bag he brought with him. He removed a large pair of scissors and came at me, his eyes crinkled in a smile hidden beneath his mask.

I lay before him, trembling as he cut my clothes off, pushing the remnants off me, peeling back the layers like wrappings on a present. My breath was shaky, my body buzzing, caught between fear and something more depraved--desire.

Enzo brandished a gun, holding it loosely in his grip, watching me with the same detached amusement I was sure he gave his victims. But I wasn't a victim, not yet.

"Open," he ordered, pressing the cold barrel against my bottom lip.

I hesitated, my eyes shifting to Mark before my tongue darted out, tasting the bitter tang of the metal.

“Don’t look at him,” he snapped, forcing my face to his. “Look at me.”

I whimpered, nodding.

He chuckled darkly, giving his head a little shake. "Do I need to remind you who's in control?" The safety clicked off, and my pulse stuttered, my blood going cold.

Slowly, I parted my lips, and he slid the barrel past them, the steel foreign and threatening against my tongue.

"Good girl," he murmured, dragging his fingers through my hair, tightening his grip until pain laced my scalp. "Now suck."

I obeyed, hollowing my cheeks around the weapon, sucking it deeper in my mouth.

His breathing deepened, his pupils dilating. "See? You can be so good when you try." The gun slid free, trailing down my throat, between my breasts, and lower still.

The promise in his eyes was darker than any abyss, and I knew that whatever happened next, I would never be the same.

Enzo rose, spitting on the gun before he nudged my legs apart. He hummed as the barrel slid through my juices, circling my entrance as my hips bucked.

He pressed the gun inside, slowly at first, increasing the pressure until it bottomed out inside me. This gun was bigger than the last one he used on me, and it stung as it stretched me, the cold bite unforgiving, the hard steel a deadly promise.

Enzo rolled up part of his mask, smirking at me as his lips clamped on my clit, pulling me into his mouth, scraping against his teeth. I cried out, and he moved his gun inside me, stroking it in and out of me, stretching me to the limit as he tongued my clit, sending sparks of ecstasy through my core.



I heard Mark screaming through his gag, trying to take my pleasure from me and interrupt us, but it didn't work. His protest only made me hotter, knowing that he disapproved of this curled hot coils in my lower belly.

Then Enzo flicked his tongue against my clit, and I was a goner. He pressed a hand to my mouth as I screamed, gyrating against his mouth and gun as I clenched so hard it hurt. I sobbed, my orgasm soul-crushing as it flooded over me, leaving nothing left in its wake.

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“That’s how she comes,” he grinned, lapping at my clit. “I know you never fucking saw her do that for you before.”

“Fuck you,” Mark shouted, but it only made Enzo laugh against my clit, making it throb harder.

Enzo circled the gun inside me as if he was gathering my moisture for something. What did he have planned for me now?

The chains jangled against the chair as Mark struggled, and I turned my head towards him, my eyes dazed with lust for my pen pal. Mark looked furious and disgusted, and it thrilled me to know I was nothing like he thought, just like he wasn’t the man I married. He was pathetic, sitting there, watching a psychopath fuck me while he dripped blood on my bedroom floor.

Enzo slowly removed the gun from my pussy, and I whimpered at the loss, squirming, hungry for more.

He pressed the barrel against my back hole, and I stiffened. He grinned, pulling his mask back down as he pulled his pants down, exposing his massive, thick cock. He had a web of pulsing veins along his shaft, and his head was darker than the rest of him, as if he strangled it to keep from coming on my sheets.

Enzo bent over me, slipping a pillow under my hips before pressing his cock against my entrance.

“Please,” I begged, writhing, pleading for him to ruin me.

“That’s a good girl,” he groaned, shoving himself inside me, burying both his cock and gun inside me at the same time. My ass and pussy were stuffed, and I felt fuller than I ever had. “Let’s get all these holes filled,” he murmured as he slipped his fingers in my mouth.

He rammed inside me, his gun and cock assaulting my holes in unison, his hips snapping against mine so hard, my head hung off the bed, my hair spilling to the floor. “Suck,” he commanded, and I did, whimpering and breathing hard through my nose as his gun stimulated me in forbidden places.

My eyes crossed as Enzo’s cock invaded me, raking against every nerve, making liquid fire spread through my veins. The white-hot ecstasy burned, growing more and more intense as he plunged into me.

Enzo nuzzled my breasts, gripping a nipple with his teeth through his mask, sucking on them, the damp fabric scraping against the sensitive buds.

I let out a broken cry as I lost myself in the delicious pain and mind-blowing pleasure.

17

Enzo

I hissed as Amara came hard on my cock, her pussy sucking my cock in as if to pull me deeper and her ass clenching on my gun.

There was nothing like hearing her haunted cries as she lost herself on me.

“That’s right, come all over my cock, baby,” I groaned, our hips slapping as I practically fucked her off the bed. The cuffs bit into her wrists as she gasped with

every thrust. The base of my spine tingled as my cock jumped, and I erupted, roaring as I painted her with my release. Her pussy clamped on me, milking me dry, making my head spin as my rhythm faltered.

I removed my gun, keeping her pussy plugged with my cock, making her take every drop of my come. She shuddered, twitching with aftershocks, and only then did I withdraw, leaving her a wet, sticky mess, splayed out and sated.

I didn't bother pulling my pants all the way up, just so only my cock hung out, and I approached Mark, a dangerous gleam in my eye. "That's what her come looks like," I taunted, gripping Mark's hair as I forced him to look at my cock. "Not that you've ever seen it before.

He shouted against his gag, but I cocked my gun and pressed it against his temple, and he went silent.

I pulled the gag out of his mouth. "Last chance, fucker. Sign the divorce papers, or I'll paint the wall with your brains."

"Fine," he snapped. "I don't want that disgusting bitch anymore, anyway. How sick can you be to get off to a gun?"

I rolled my eyes, fumbling with the chains until I pulled his hand mostly free and shoved a pen in his grip. I put the papers on his unharmed thigh, and he winced as he signed the divorce papers.

"Good," I smiled, putting the papers on the table as I shoved Mark's gag back in his mouth. "If I ever fucking see you again, you'll eat my gun next. If you bother Amara again, I'll cut off your cock and feed it to you."

He screamed against his gag as I laughed, tucking my cock in my pants and taking

my bag from the nightstand. I pulled out a blindfold and tied it tightly around Mark's eyes, glancing at Amara.

"Sleep well, baby," I winked, throwing her the key to her handcuffs.

I loosened the chains just enough to pull Mark free from the chair and pulled him behind me like the dog he was. He stumbled down the steps, and I left through the back door under cover of darkness.

I made it to the car I stole, and I shoved the bastard inside. I revved the engine and squealed the tires as I flew through the streets, turning on the highway in the dark of night.

As I sped, Mark shouted against his gag; no cars were in sight.

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Sick of his stupid voice, I opened the passenger door and shoved him out, enjoying the sickening thud as he landed on the pavement.

I glared in my rearview mirror as I sped away, sighing with irritation when I saw him move.

He wasn't dead yet, but he would be.

Taking the next exit, I swerved and returned to my little pen pal. I had to be careful not to call her that while Mark was there. He didn't know who I was, and I didn't need him to find out. He could jeopardize her job, and I knew she wouldn't forgive me if he did.

So I carefully traced my steps, blindfolded him, and dropped him off inside Ashwood city limits so he wouldn't know where I took him and Amara lived.

I pulled the burner phone from my pocket and dialed my brother. "Ricci," he replied, his standard greeting.

"It's done," I claimed.

He laughed. "What is it with you and this bitch? She's just some lawyer stuck with your ass as you pile on charges. Are you going for a world record?"

"You got anything on the ex-husband, Alessandro?" I asked.

"Oh yeah," my brother Alessandro bragged. "He's got a sleuth of ex-girlfriends

willing to put him in prison. Did you know he has a warrant a couple states over for nearly beating a woman to death?”

“Hmm,” I mused. “Wish I had known. I would’ve dropped him off there instead of in his hometown.”

“Next time,” he hinted. “Are you going back?”

“Not quite yet,” I smirked. “I still have a few things to do.”

I eyed the divorce papers I had sticking out of my bag. I pulled up to Amara’s job and parked my car. I stuffed the documents in a manilla envelope, labeled it with Amara’s divorce lawyer’s name, and slid them under the door.

Then I got back in the car, circling behind her house, gazing through her bedroom window. The glow of the nightstand light was still there through the curtains.

“Is it love?” Alessandro blurted.

“What?” I snapped, his voice pulling me from my focus on Amara.

“Do you even know what it is?” my brother laughed.

“Sure I do,” I grunted, rolling my eyes at the concept. Alessandro was much older than my sister and me, so he never had to suffer through the foster system like we did. But when we were placed, he was only eighteen and deemed unfit to raise us. “It’s abusing those you care about. That’s what fuckers like these do. So no, I can’t love her.”

“You poor bastard,” Alessandro tsked. “I wish they’d let me take you two in. Maybe then you wouldn’t be so fucked up.”

“Sofia got her husband and her family. She got the happy ending. It’s not in the cards for me.”

Alessandro sighed. “Maybe this girl’s as close to paradise as you’ll get.”

“She is,” I agreed, stepping out of the car and shutting the door behind me. “And I’m never letting her go.”

I ended the call, my shoes squelching in the grass as it began to rain. I ducked inside Amara’s house, gently closed the door behind me, and took the stairs two at a time.

Amara was fast asleep, still cuffed to her bedpost. I smiled, taking the keys and uncuffing her, and her arms fell limply above her head. I curled my arms under her shoulders, dragging her up her bed, resting her head on her pillows. She mumbled, turning to her side as she snuggled into her bedding. I peeled the sheets back and laid them on her, admiring her peaceful expression.

I sighed, turning to the blood Mark left on her floor. I didn’t want him to lie and get her in trouble, so I had to clean up.

So I went to work. I didn’t stop until every trace of him was gone from her house, and only then did I allow myself the pleasure of crawling in bed with her. I kissed her, holding her as she leaned into me, succumbing to slumber.

18

Amara

Friday night turned into Saturday morning, and by the time I woke up, Enzo was gone. Whether he went back to prison or not, I wasn’t sure. I yawned, stretching my arms, and crawled out of bed. A letter sat on my nightstand, his distinct handwriting



scrawled across the page.

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Amara,

If he ever bothers you again, you know where to find me.

-Enzo

I'd barely had time to process his absence before I was rushing off to work, the ache in my muscles a constant reminder of the night before. The first chance I got, I grabbed a pen and scribbled a response to my crazed pen pal.

Enzo,

I'm still throbbing from last night and sore all over. You're insane. Call me.

-Amara

Then, my divorce lawyer ambushed me.

"I don't know how you did it," he said, shaking his head. "But I commend you. I brought those papers to the judge, who signed off on them. Your divorce will be final in 31 days."

Relief hit me hard, knocking the air from my lungs. It was finally happening. I would finally be free from my abusive husband.

"Send in your name change paperwork," he advised. "It should all happen at once—I'll put a rush on it."

I could finally be Ms. Roberts instead of Mrs. Branson.

Eager to reclaim my identity, I handed over the paperwork at lunch, excited to shed every piece of my past.

The weekend passed in a blur of recovery—aching, missing Enzo, and wondering where he was. By Monday morning, I was back in my office, pretending everything was normal. It almost was.

Until I got his letter in the mail. I tore into the envelope, paper shreds scattering across my desk.

Amara,

Do I need to come and kiss it better?

-Enzo

I snorted, shaking my head as I tucked his letter into my drawer—already overflowing with his words. Grabbing my pen, I jotted down a quick reply.

Enzo,

28 more days, and it's over. I'll be a free woman and have my name back. I can't wait.

-Amara

By the time the sky darkened, I was finally heading home, stuffing my response into the mailbox on my way. My steps felt lighter, my body buzzing with a rare sense of joy.

Until I felt eyes on me. A chill crawled up my spine.

I slowed, glancing over my shoulder, spotting a hooded figure trailing too close. My heart stuttered, hope flaring. Enzo?

Then cold metal pressed against my temple.

“Hi again,” Mark snarled in my ear.

I barely had time to gasp before pain radiated across my face, and I fell on the pavement. I choked on a cry as my mouth filled with blood.

Rough hands gripped my arms, yanking me up as he dragged me toward my house. Nausea clawed at my gut, and I was dazed and dizzy as I stumbled along. He kicked my door open, his grip bruising as he shoved me inside, and I crashed onto the floor.

“You think you can get rid of me, huh?” he shouted, slamming the door behind him. “You think you can humiliate me like that, and you just get to walk away with everything?”

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I squinted, trying to focus my eyes as my blood dribbled from my mouth. Mark removed his hood, his bruises yellowing, and his cuts scabbed over his face. My vision slowly cleared as I took in his disheveled state and noticed blood dripping from his pistol.

My blood.

He aimed his gun at me, advancing as he pressed the barrel against my temple, and I gasped. “You want to scream?” he taunted. “I’m sure your little friend Marta will hear, but she won’t make it to work tomorrow.”

A lump formed in my throat as I thought of my boss, the woman who gave me a chance despite the large employment gap in my resume. She was locking up the office right now, and if she was outside near her car, she might hear me. But I couldn’t put her life in danger, not after everything she did for me. I couldn’t live with myself if I did.

“Mark, let’s talk about this,” I placated, my brain reeling, trying to find some way out of this. I slowly rose to my feet, raising my hands. I eyed the butcher block and the knives that gleamed inside.

He cocked the gun, and I froze, and he drew his leg back and kicked me. I stumbled back, clutching my aching stomach, but I caught myself on the kitchen counter.

“Nice try, bitch,” he growled, leveling the gun at my head.

Memories of my worst beatings flitted through my mind. The numerous broken

bones, cuts, and bruises, free clinic visits in the middle of the workday, and all the ties Mark cut, the bridges he burned to keep me trapped by his side. How he turned the very home we chose into my prison, however move I made was analyzed and criticized. How Mark chipped away at my confidence and self-worth until there was nothing life had to offer me but misery and pain.

My blood boiled with hot fury as I ducked and charged him, elbowing him hard in the ribs. He doubled over, and I stomped on his foot, then launched myself at my front door. The air pushed my hair from my face as I stumbled in my heels, my body slamming against the door. I fumbled with the doorknob, unlocking it—

I screamed as Mark yanked me back by my hair and slammed me against the wall. I cried out as he turned the lock again. My heart pounded, the four walls of this house closing in, suffocating.

“You never did know when to quit,” he hissed in my ear, his putrid breath stirring, pressing against my face. “You’re just making it harder on yourself.”

His gun collided with my face, and my ears rang as my steps faltered, my breath labored, and my vision went blurry. He knocked me to the ground and knelt over me, punching me anywhere he could reach.

I held my arms above my face, trying to protect myself as best as I could, and then I clawed at him. I scratched his stupid, ugly face, smirking when I realized that I had drawn blood.

I turned my head to the side, trying to breathe through the blood pouring down my nose and mouth. Mark clutched at his face, screaming as I rolled over weakly, using my hands to drag myself along the floor, anything to get away from him.

But I slid in my own blood as he dragged me back toward him, my nails scraping

against the tile.

He flipped me over on my back, black dotting my vision as I vaguely registered him standing over me, smiling at my weakened state, and then he was unzipping my pants.

I went rigid before I lashed out, trying to kick him as my legs tangled in my half-off pants. He yanked them away and caught my ankles, dragging me to him until I was flush with his prick.

I gagged, my stomach lurching hard at the contact, at the realization of what he was about to do to me. I kicked my feet, trying desperately to throw him off me, but I was bleeding everywhere, and he was determined to hurt me.

Mark forced his prick in me, and I screamed, my hole dry and burning at the contact. The pain was unbearable, and I twisted my hips, trying to push myself away from him. He penetrated me repeatedly, and I clawed at him, trying to skin him alive with my blunt nails. Each stab of his member was excruciating, and I gritted my teeth in agony.

“Isn’t this what you like, bitch?” he laughed, transferring both my ankles to one hand as he gripped his gun, pointing it at my face as he tore me in two.

I choked on my blood, coughing as it splattered on my blouse. My body screamed in protest every time I tried to move. The room was spinning, and black dotted my vision. My limbs went cold and numb, like they weren’t part of me anymore.

I wasn’t sure when I stilled, maybe when he slammed my head into the floor one too many times. Or perhaps it was when the pain became too unbearable or when my body stopped feeling like my own.

Mark was crouched above me, his breath ragged with exertion. “That’s better,” he cooed, his hands letting my dead legs fall to the floor as he gripped my hips, his weight crushing. “See how easy it is when you stop fighting?”

But I was no longer there. I went somewhere else, above my body, watching from a distance. I could still hear Mark, still feel the hazy throb of pain, but it was muffled, like a dream that I wasn’t awake for.

I stared at the ceiling, my vision unfocused, darting between the cracks in the plaster, tracing them like a roadmap leading somewhere else. My breath rattled in my chest, detached and sluggish.

The room smelled like sweat, blood, and him.

I forced a slow inhale, filling my aching lungs with air. I made myself breathe because I had to survive this. I hadn’t come this far just to die here.

I was elsewhere, far away, where he could never reach me.

Mark let out a low, satisfied laugh as he ran a hand down my thigh, gripping too hard, bruising already battered skin as he jammed himself in me. I barely registered it because I was floating, gone.

Then he groaned, and I felt his prick pulse.



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I turned my head and retched.

“Fucking disgusting,” he shouted, getting off me as my vomit trickled toward him on the floor. I immediately snapped my legs shut as I vomited all over the floor.

Mark stood, jerking his prick as he stood over me, and before I knew it, he was spraying me with his semen.

“We’re going to have so much fun,” he laughed as he grabbed me by the hair and dragged me up the stairs.

Outside, a dog barked, and a car honked. The world was still moving, unaware of the hell I was enduring.

The ceiling blurred, and the cracks blurred together.

I let myself sink into the abyss, letting it take me in its cold embrace. Because at least Mark couldn’t follow me there.

19

Enzo

Mail call came and went, and there was no letter from Amara. It had been a few days, but my court date was approaching. Maybe she was preparing, but usually, she set up a lawyer visit beforehand.

My little pen pal always wrote back, and she never missed a single day. I got her most recent letter, and I immediately replied.

Amara,

27 days until you're divorced, but not until you're a free woman. I'll never let you go, my little pen pal.

-Enzo

I read her last letter, searching for any hidden signs of her pulling away or being upset with me. But our letters were short and sweet, and I found nothing unusual.

She wouldn't just stop writing to me out of nowhere; I was sure of it. The only reason she stopped years ago was because Mark kept my letters from her.

Hot rage trickled in my veins. Someone or something was keeping Amara from me.

The correctional officers left the wing, and I dialed my brother-in-law on my cell phone.

"Ricci?" he startled.

"Yeah, listen, how is my sister?" I wondered.

"Fine, why? What's going on?" he pressed.

"I need you to get my guys on my lawyer, Amara Branson. She hasn't answered my letters or made any appointments, which is unlike her. Can you check on her?"

"Not me personally, no, but I can send some guys out her way," he conceded. "I'll

text you if I have something.”

I hung up the phone as I heard a guard drag another inmate inside, throwing him into solitary confinement. I quickly hid my phone, putting it on silent so the guards wouldn't listen to it when my brother-in-law texted me.

The man shouted obscenities at the guard before he left, and when the door thudded closed, Vitali burst out laughing.

“What the fuck is so funny?” Luca snapped.

“It's fucking Durante,” Vitali laughed.

“Fucking hell,” Luca groaned. “How you been, crazy?”

“Yeah, yeah, laugh it up, idiota,” Durante snapped. “Bet you didn't give each other shit when you first got locked up.”

“Just never thought I'd see a cop behind bars,” Vitali laughed. “They did you a favor by putting you in here.”

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“What the fuck did you do?” I exclaimed. Durante grew up with us, but instead of a life of crime, he decided to become a cop. This was his first time in prison, as far as I knew.

“A couple murder charges,” he shrugged. “No biggie.”

“Fucking hell, what did the fuckers do?” Luca asked.

“They fucking deserved it, I’ll tell you that,” Durante snarled. “Why are you fucks still in here? Keep catching charges?”

“Enzo’s got a couple life sentences at this point,” Luca muttered. “Vitali got life, and I’m getting sentenced soon, but Ludovic’s got a few years.”

“Well, Ludovic will have to learn to fly alone without his three best buddies,” Durante sneered.

I shrugged. “If you can plead down to manslaughter, you might be out soon, too.”

“They ain't gonna get me for no fucking manslaughter,” Durante mumbled. “Not unless my brothers in blue make some fucking evidence disappear.”

I snorted because it wouldn’t surprise me. Durante might act like a good man, but we all knew he was a corrupt cop. The mafia would have his back and get him out in no time.

But I had a feeling that he wouldn’t stop at just one kill like me. Once I got the taste

for it, I couldn't stop.

"You know anything about the Branson harassment case?" I wondered.

Durante perked up. "Yeah, that fucking Mark twat calling his wife non-stop, what about it?"

"From what I read, their divorce will be final soon," I informed. "What's going on with that? Is he going to court andshit?"

"Fuck, I hope so," Durante cringed. "Fucker's bad news. He got at least two women who came forward as witnesses, but he scared them off. So I was tacking on two counts of intimidating a witness on his ass, but then these fuckers pulled up and dragged me to jail."

"You went from jail to prison pretty quickly," Luca observed.

"Yeah, well, the only nearby jail has lots of people I put in there, so they dropped me off here for safety," he fumed. "Bastards."

"That's highly unusual," Vitali commented. "You sure you're not a snitch?"

"Yo, fuck you, Vitali," Durante snarled.

I chuckled, shaking my head as I sat on my cot, pulling out papers and a pen. In case my little pen pal had forgotten about me, or my letter got lost, I wrote another one.

Amara,

Did my last letter get lost, baby? Is your work catching on? Because I plead the fifth. Getback to me.

-Enzo

I folded the letter in an envelope, sealed it shut, and placed it by the door. Maybe the guard would take it once he gave me my food tray.

I stared at the walls, barely paying attention as the men talked among themselves. I tapped my pen against my thigh, checking the phone occasionally to see if my men got back to me.

Nothing.

Hours ticked by, and chow time came and went. It was refried beans, mashed potatoes, and some sorry excuse for meatloaf today. But I ate it anyway, determined to keep up my strength for my little pen pal. I grew uneasy as time passed in a slow crawl.

The guard took my letter with my empty tray, and I hoped Amara would get my letter and reply this time.

I looked at my phone several hours later, and a reply lit up the screen from my brother-in-law.

No sign of her at work, but her car is parked in front of her house. Her boss thinks she's out sick, he wrote. She hasn't left her house since she went home a few nights ago.

I huffed out a frustrated breath. I supposed Amara might have been sick, especially if she hadn't left her house. It also explained why she wasn't replying to my letters, since I always wrote them to her work address.

*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:02 am*

I needed to get out of here. Even if she was sick, I wanted to ensure she was alright. I'd gladly nurse her back to health, but breaking out of the hole was nearly impossible.

"Russo or Romano working tonight?" I called to Vitali.

"No, for once," he snorted, just as surprised as I was.

I sighed, not wanting to do this, but I had to try. I addressed an envelope to Mara Roberts with her home address, hoping the prison wouldn't make the connection that she was my lawyer.

I couldn't write anything that gave away who she was, so I had to keep it bland. I wracked my brain, trying to think of what to write. I hadn't written a letter without an undertone of my obsession with her, so I didn't know how to tamper it down. I figured I should write the letter like I would to a friend I was concerned about.

Mara,

I haven't heard from you in a while. Is everything okay?

-Enzo

I gritted my teeth at how bland and casual it was, but I couldn't let any guard know what she meant to me or who she was.

I sealed the envelope, hoping this was enough and that she would respond. Surely she

still came outside to read her mail even if she was sick at home?

I knew I would find out soon enough.

The reminder of how Mark threatened her filled my mind and how dangerous he was. Did he find her and get to her somehow? Did the Sokolov family?

She was alone and vulnerable, divorcing an abusive man, her friends and family estranged. It was public knowledge that she was my lawyer. The Russian mafia could off her just for that.

The thought of her being taken from me...

I stood, walking from one end of my cell to the other, pacing restlessly. Dread pooled in my stomach, and my fists balled, adrenaline pulsing through my veins.

The patrolling guards glanced at me warily as if I was a ticking time bomb.

“You’re about to wear a hole in the floor,” Luca joked, but I couldn’t answer. I was buzzing like alive wire, ready to explode and take the world with me.

I had leverage on Deputy Michaels, but he worked in gen pop. If Vitali or Luca got released back there, they could get him a message. But the guards weren’t in a hurry to let us out unless it became overcrowded.

I kept my eyes on my cell’s window through the door. The guards shifted nervously but went about their patrols. They came in here every hour or so; the count was seven in the morning and seven at night. The shift change happened around three o’clock every twelve hours.

I watched and waited, and no one showed up in the morning when mail call usually



happened.

“Officer,” I called as breakfast trays were served. “Why is mail call late?”

He shrugged. “Shit happens.”

I gritted my teeth. The urge to slam the guard’s stupid head against a wall was strong, but I had to play it cool. I needed them to relax around me so I could slip through their fingers easier.

This was a waiting game, but I wasn’t known for my patience.

“Lights out,” a guard called, tapping her baton on each door.

I gnashed my teeth as I lay in my bunk, fists clenched, body rigid. There was no way I could find peace when everything was so uncertain.

If she didn’t write tomorrow, I was done waiting.

I revised my mental map of the place and the possible ways out. I had never attempted to escape from the hole before, but for my little pen pal, I would.

The hallway was shaped like a cross; I could go straight, right, or left once I left the isolation wing. Straight led to the rec area, left went to gen pop, and right was medical. Each eventually led to an exit, but on the right was the closest, just past medical.

A few guards were distracted when they came through, smiling at their phones. It might take them hours to realize I was gone if I played it right.

*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:02 am*

I had to get to Amara. No matter why she stopped writing me, she was mine. She didn't get to get rid of me that easily. If she was in danger, I wouldn't stop until it was eradicated.

Nothing, not even prison, could stop me.

20

Amara

I opened my eyes and knew my nightmare wasn't over yet. My head pounded, my body ached, and the metallic taste of blood coated my tongue. The rope burned my skin, binding my hands behind a wooden chair—my dining room chair, the same that Enzo used to chain Mark. The air was thick and stale, suffocating, polluted with the sharp stench of sweat and cigarettes.

Mark sat across from me, his lip curled into something that wasn't exactly a smile but not entirely a grimace. His once familiar eyes were cold and hollow, eaten away by something disgusting and insatiable.

His legs were spread in a lazy sprawl, the gun twirling between his fingers. He looked pleased, like the cat who finally ate the canary.

“Rise and shine, sweetie,” he announced in a fake affectionate voice, making my skin crawl.

Pain clawed up my throat, and I winced, trying my best to hide the hard pounding in

my chest.

“You sleep too much,” he muttered, his voice dripping bitterness and resentment. His fingers toyed with his pistol, the silver barrel gleaming in the dim light. “You were out for a bit,” he continued. “But I want you awake for this next part, so I’ll try not to hit you too hard.”

My breath quickened, and I swallowed against the nausea churning my stomach.

“I didn’t think you’d go this far. Harassment charges, divorce? After everything I did for you?” His voice sharpened and became rough and dark, his knuckles going white around the gun. “I worked hard every day and paid for the roof over your head, clothes on your back, and food on my table. You’d think you’d show some fucking gratitude.”

Breathe.

It was the mantra I made, and I repeated it to myself. Something simple for me to focus on while I tried to survive the horrors that surrounded me.

Breathe.

“Answer me, bitch!” Mark screamed. “Why did you have to fuck everything up? Why couldn’t you just be a good fucking wife?”

Terror slammed against my ribs. “I—” my voice cracked, my throat raw from screaming and crying. “Mark,” I rasped. “I—”

Mark reached for me, gripping my chin hard enough to bruise. He tilted my face, studying me like some germs he observed under a microscope.

“You used to be so fucking demure,” he cooed, his thumb running over my split lip. “So obedient, but now? You think you can just walk away?”

I jerked my head back, my stomach rolling as the odor of his breath washed over me; cigarettes, whisky, and demented rage.

“We’re beyond that now. You don’t get to leave me, ever,” he laughed.

A shiver of raw dread crawled up my spine.

“I found out why you weren’t getting pregnant,” Mark snarled, taking my phone and shoving it in my face. “All those appointments to the fucking doctor every three months? You were on the fucking birth control shot, weren’t you?”

I didn’t answer. Even if I tried, I knew that my voice was gone. I’d screamed until it went hoarse and burned.

“You fucking lying whore,” he spat. “You destroyed our marriage. You did. If you had gotten pregnant, I wouldn’t have needed to cheat on you to get my daughter. But no, you always need to make things so difficult, don’t you?”

I sat silently, but my heart sank for his child. He’d always wanted a boy, but his secretary was expecting a little girl? He would belittle her and abuse her just like he did with me, and the poor thing would grow up traumatized. She’d think that was what love was, and Erin was too infatuated with him to leave.

Mark would destroy another innocent life, just like he ruined mine and was tainting Erin’s.

His hand shot out, fingers tangling in my hair as he yanked my head back. A sharp gasp ripped from my lips as pain radiated in my skull.

“You gave me time to think,” he muttered, his breath hot against my cheek. “About all those little games you like to play. The charges, the divorce, the birth control, and moving out. You really thought you could escape me?”

I clenched my jaw, refusing to reply. That’s what Mark wanted: me to goad him and give him an excuse to lash out.

*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:02 am*

Mark sighed, dragging his fingers down my neck in a caress. “That’s what I used to love about you,” he admitted. “That fire, just so I could snuff it out.”

His knuckles brushed over my collarbone, the touch so light it sent a sick shiver of revulsion down my spine. I bit my tongue, trying not to recoil. I knew how he was; he wanted a reaction and fed off my fear.

“I always liked you best when you were soft for me,” he whispered, dragging the gun up my thigh slowly, making me squirm. The barrel pressed against the inside of my thigh, just above the hem of my shirt, stretched out in the front where he grabbed and pulled at it to force me close to him.

I sucked in a sharp breath.

“That’s the thing about you, Amara,” he confessed. “You act all strong, but I know the real you.” His free hand trailed over my belly, ribs, and breasts, testing. “You’re a broken little doll, unable to function without me. You used to beg for my touch.”

A tremor of disgust rolled through me.

“You used to love me.”

“Not anymore,” I snapped, the venom evident in my hoarse voice.

Mark went still, and his gun pressed into my thigh, enough to leave a bruise. “We’ll see.”

He leaned in, brushing his lips over mine, mocking me. I snapped my teeth at him, and he recoiled, and my stomach twisted as bile burned in my throat. “I’m going to remind you who you belong to, sweetheart.”

Terror wrapped around my ribs like a snake because I knew Mark and that he always made good on his threats.

Mark backed away from the chair, rolling his shoulders like this was a tense meeting at work. “I could just end your miserable, worthless existence,” he informed, gesturing to his gun. “But not before I have a little fun with you first.”

My stomach turned to ice.

He crouched before me, brushing a stray lock of hair behind my ear with a sickening, foreign gentleness. “You don’t know what pain is yet, sweetie.”

Tears burned at the edges of my vision, but I refused to let them fall; I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction. It would only fuel him to do more and drive him to be crueler.

His smile widened, something gleeful lighting his gaze. “But don’t worry,” he promised, slowly and deliberately dragging the cold steel up the inside of my thigh. “I’ll show you.”

A sob escaped, my chest caving with fright. The ropes bit into my skin as I struggled uselessly, and Mark’s laughter echoed through the bedroom.

I was stuck and vulnerable, and Mark would relish every second of it.

Mark took a knife, and I recognized it from my kitchen. He sliced at the skin just mid-thigh, and I whimpered, fighting the ropes.

He smirked, pressing his finger in the wound, digging under my skin as I screamed. He laughed, lifting his bloodied finger to my clit, stroking it, lubing me up with my own blood.

“I’m going to force you to come on your own blood,” he grinned, swirling his other fingers through the blood as he shoved them between my thighs. “You’re going to fucking love it.”

My thigh and hole throbbed with pain, and I bit my lip, trying to hold back my screams of agony as he relentlessly assaulted me. His caresses grew sickeningly tender, stroking me in practiced, routine ways, just like he did when we were still married.

Just like he stopped doing years ago, only caring about his own pleasure.

The fact that he remembered infuriated me. I told myself that he forgot, and that’s why he didn’t pleasure me anymore in our marriage bed. This was proof that he knew, but he just didn’t care. He only wanted to hurt me, and this proved it.

My pleasure was a weapon he could use against me now, so he wielded it.

He rubbed my clit furiously, pausing to dip his finger back in my trickling blood before he continued. With the nonstop stimulation, my body had no choice, and when I contracted around his fingers, his depraved laugh made me gag as the treacherous pleasure flooded over me.

“Now you’re nice and wet for me,” he groaned, pressing his prick against me.

I tried to stay strong. But as he slid into me, the aftershocks of my forced pleasure still simmering, tears slid from my eyes as the robes chafed against my skin. He continued his stubborn movements, getting off to my body’s betrayal as he jammed in



me and rubbed me so hard he could start a fire on my sensitive nub.

I contracted around him, shuddering in revulsion as forbidden satisfaction buzzed in my pelvis, and I sobbed as he laughed at me, enjoying my torment.

I broke.

21

Amara

Blood dripped from my scalp, warm and sticky, sliding down my cheek in slow, pulsing streams. My ears rang with a sharp, endless screech that made the world tilt as I fought to breathe.

Mark loomed over me, his chest rising and falling with a sick satisfaction, the barrel of his gun pressing into my temple. His weight pinned my body on the cold floor, and his odor wrapped around me like a noose.

“You’re not going anywhere, sweetie,” he grinned, thoroughly amused. “You should know better by now.”

My fingers twitched against the floorboards, the bitter taste of bile lingering in my mouth. Fear clawed at my chest, but I let it fuel me.

With all my strength, I shot my hands up, nails raking across his face, straightfor his eyes.

Mark howled, the gun jerking away from my skull as he stumbled back, clutching his face. “You bitch!”

I twisted on my stomach, forcing myself to get on my hands and knees as I crawled, slipping in my own blood. Every muscle screamed, nerves fried, but I couldn’t stop. I had to get out.

I barely made it a few feet before Mark fisted my hair, pulling me back to him. “No, no, no,” Mark sang, his breath ragged and his grip tight like a vice. Pain burst along my scalp, and I felt hair tear from it.

I twisted, kicking out with my feet, aiming for his face, but he was faster.

He wrenched my legs apart and straddled me, pinning me down. He grabbed my naked hips, never letting me put my pants back on since that first night.

Primal terror flooded my veins. I thrashed, nails swiping as my voice tore from my throat in a broken shriek.

“Help!” the word was desperate and useless.

Mark laughed. “No one will save you, Amara. It’s just you and me.”

The words sent a wave of panic through me. I slammed my head forward, the crown of my skull cracking his nose. He cursed, his grip loosening.

I clawed at his throat, my nails sinking into his flesh. He growled, wrapping his hands around my wrists, crushing them in his grip.

“Haven’t you fucking learned yet?” he yelled. “You can’t fight me, Amara. I’ll always overpower you; nothing you can do will stop me.”

I refused to give up or let him win. I’d rather die than let him take one more piece of me.

I reached for his gun and pointed it at him. I pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. I realized too late that the safety was on and grabbed my wrist, twisting it so the gun was pointed at me. He clicked the safety on, smirking, daring me to eliminate myself

to get away from him.

But he misunderstood my desperation to escape him.

I'm sorry, Enzo, I thought before I squeezed my eyes shut and pulled the trigger.

My ears rang louder than ever as Mark yanked at my wrist at the last second, the bullet lodging in the wall behind me. I sobbed, realizing that I was still trapped here with him.

"Fuck," he exclaimed, and I felt his glare on me. "You're fucking crazy, you know that?"

His voice sounded far away, like I was underwater, the ringing in my ears deafening.

I heard the dull jingle of his belt buckle before warm flesh pressed against mine, and he took from me again.

My thighs ached under his unbearable weight, and my channel stung, burning at the intrusion. I slid back and forth on the floor rhythmically but kept my eyes shut. I didn't want to look at him or the ceiling like I had since Mark took me hostage in my own home this past week. It was too much to bear.

I thought of my family and how worried sick they'd be about me. I wondered if anyone from my job filed a missing person report on me. Did anyone notice that I was gone? Did anyone care?

When Mark finally stilled, he pinned me down for another minute before he rose to his feet, tucking himself back in his pants as he fastened his belt.

"Go wash up," he snapped, his nose wrinkling with disgust. "You stink."

*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:02 am*

I was on autopilot when I rose to my feet, stumbling to my bathroom. I couldn't close the door since he removed it from the hinges when I locked him out last night. I removed my shirt and bra, the only clothing I had worn since last night, and stepped under the hot spray.

I winced as the water hit the scratches all over me, and I scrubbed myself raw, wanting to get rid of every trace of him on my skin and in my hair. I wanted to remove him from myself forever. I'd wash multiple times a day if that's what it took.

I half wished this water would drown me so the pain would be over and he could never hurt me again.

"That's long enough," Mark called. "Don't get dressed; you won't need clothes for a while."

I winced at his words but didn't have any clothes in the bathroom anyway. I turned off the shower, looking for anything I could use as a weapon. But I barely had anything when I moved in, and the most dangerous object in this room was my toothbrush.

I wrapped a towel around myself, wishing I had at least a robe to cover up with. I didn't want Mark to ever see an inch of my skin again; he didn't deserve to.

"Come out, bitch," he yelled.

Maybe if I stayed here, he'd yell loudly enough for someone to hear and—

A knock sounded on my front door.

“Who the fuck is that?” Mark snapped, rounding on me in the bathroom.

I shrugged, my voice still raw and aching.

“Go find out,” he snarled, gripping my arm as he dragged me down the stairs. “If you say a fucking word, I’ll blow your brains out, and theirs too.”

I reached for the lock—

“No,” he ordered. “They’ll see your fucking face. Talk through the door, don’t open it.”

I peeked through the eyehole, and my heart sank.

It was Marta.

“Go away,” I urged, my voice broken.

“Are you okay, Amara? You don’t sound so good,” she frowned.

“Laryngitis,” I lied, my voice squeaky and uneven. “I’ll come back to work when I’m better.”

“What about your client? What should I tell them?” Marta wondered, her eyes darting around. Did she know that I was in danger? Did Marta suspect anything? I prayed she did.

“Tell him I’ll see him soon,” I replied as cold steel pressed against my temple. “Call him and tell him that.”

“Okay,” Marta conceded, holding up four fingers and closing them in a fist, the universal symbol for domestic violence.

“Yes,” I replied.

“I’ll get help,” she mouthed before scurrying back into the street.

“She seems in an awful hurry,” Mark tsked, unlocking the door and yanking it open. “I fucking warned you, bitch.”

Then he shot his gun.

My scream was silent with my lack of a voice as Marta fell to the ground, and Mark dragged me back inside. He locked the door again, holding me in a headlock as he walked back up the stairs with me.

I couldn’t breathe. I felt the blood rush to my face as my lungs burned, trying desperately to draw in breath. My vision blurred, and my body went slack.

“Time to hide the body,” he laughed. “But don’t worry, I’ll be back for you soon.”

Then I was out.

22

Enzo

The deputy looked thoroughly unimpressed with me as he passed by my cell, handing out mail to the other inmates in the hole. But he didn't slide anything under my door, which was unusual.

Amara,

Are you avoiding me, baby? What's going on? Talk to me, or I'll have to come find you myself.

-Enzo

She should've replied by now; she always did. I stood, going to the door to my cell. "You got anything for me?"

"Nope," the deputy smirked. "Guess even your lawyer gave up on you, Ricci."

"Is there a backlog or something?" I pressed, wondering if there was a logical explanation.

"No, she's just done with you, I bet," he shook his head. "Smart woman."

Then he disappeared down the hallway.



My eyes met Vitali's across from me, at his cell window, staring at me.

"She still hasn't written you, huh?" Vitali questioned.

"The only times she didn't write me was when she wasn't sure if I was back in, and I hadn't written her," I began. "But I wrote her every day. There's no reply, and it's been a week. That's not like her."

"Want me to get someone to call around?" he asked. "Ludovic's in Gen Pop, so he could. We just need to get the message to him."

Something didn't feel right, and I hadn't heard back from her since the day she didn't write back to me. There was a pit in my stomach, and my gut had never been wrong.

"No," I conceded, palming my hidden cell phone. "I'm done waiting. But in the meantime, we need to figure out a way out of here."

"Medical," Vitali replied. "Unless you have a lighter in there or something to get them to evacuate you."

"A riot works," Luca volunteered. "But good luck getting us out of here unless it's rec time, and even then, we're shackled when they take us out."

"Not if it's Russo or Romano," I countered, speaking of the sergeants who had ties to our family.

"I fucking knew those fuckers were crooked," Durante muttered.

"Are they working tonight?" Luca asked.

"There's usually always at least one of them working," Vitali agreed. "Call your girl;

if she doesn't pick up, medical it is."

I went to the corner of my cell and dialed Amara's number.

No answer.

I pulled up the tracking app I downloaded and hid it on her phone, tracking her location, messages, and calls.

My stomach burned when I realized she hadn't called, texted, or moved from her home since last night after she left her office. If she was sick, she at least would've called out of work once.

I scowled, dialing my brother.

"What?" Alessandro snapped.

"Call Russo and Romano," I ordered. "She's not picking up and hasn't moved in a week. Her phone's at her house."

*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:02 am*

“She probably went on vacation and forgot her phone,” my brother snapped. “I don’t have time for this—”

“Make time,” I snarled. “Paradise, you said? What would you do if yours went MIA for a fucking week?”

He went silent, and then he cursed under his breath. “He’ll be at least one of them in less than an hour. Hang tight.”

The line went dead, and I placed the phone back in my pants. “One hour,” I announced. “If no one shows up, medical it is.”

The minutes ticked by, and around twenty later, Russo burst through the door to our wing, muttering profanity under his breath. “The fuck you want, Ricci?”

“Fucking Russo,” Durante laughed, and Russo shot a glare at him before he turned back to me.

I gave him a pointed look, the same one I gave him every time I had to cash in a favor. He groaned, running his hands across his face. “Really? You’re going to get me in a lot of shit, Ricci.”

“It’s important.”

“It’s always fucking important,” he let out a harsh breath, his keys jangling as he wrenched my cell door open. “What is it this time, huh? Rival family insult you or some stupid shit like that?”

I lifted my chin. “Would you consider it important if your wife went missing, Russo? Her name is Mia, right?”

His lips thinned.

“Yeah? Feel that fucking pit in your stomach at just the fucking thought? That’s been me this past week. Try stewing with that for seven fucking days, Russo, unable to do shit to help her,” I snapped.

He stepped inside my cell, shaking his head at me, and for the first time, he had sympathy in his eyes. But I didn’t want his fucking pity.

Russo decked me.

My head jerked to the side from the impact, and I smirked, tasting the copper tang of my blood on my tongue.

“If anyone asks, I’m taking you to medical,” he muttered as he cuffed me, looser than usual.

“Us too,” Luca demanded.

“If you three keep this up, they’ll send you to separate prisons,” Russo snapped. “Is that what you want?”

Silence.

“Anyone else’s girl missing?” Russo inquired.

No one answered.

“No? Then shut up and sit there,” he snapped, tugging me from my cell.

Russo’s boots thudded against the concrete floor, and my sneakers squeaked in protest at our fast pace. He led me down the hallway, slamming the isolation wing door behind us as he walked toward medical.

I quickened my pace as I rushed behind Russo. “Sorry about this,” I warned him before launching myself at him, jumping him. I clocked him as hard as I could behind the head, and he let out a harsh breath.

He crashed face-first on the floor. I slipped out of my cuffs, took his badge, and ran for the nearest exit. I didn’t have time for theatrics or outfit changes.

I had to get to her. Now.

I had minutes before they triggered the alarm if I was lucky, but that was if they saw me immediately. It was a shift change that bought me more time than usual.

The guards who liked staring at their phones were due to come on shift, so I had a chance.

I scanned Russo’s card through the doors, going as fast as I could, my heart pounding as my blood ran cold at the possibilities running through my mind.

Was she dead? Had Mark gotten to her? I saw that she had no calls from him in a while. I thought it was because I had scared him off, but apparently, that might not be the case.

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*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:02 am*

When I burst outside, the cold chill of the air barely affected me as I got to the nearest car and began to hotwire it. There was a gym bag inside, and I quickly changed into the clothes so no one would recognize me in my prison uniform.

I floored the gas pedal as I tore off to the highway, willing to catch every charge on my way to her. Nothing would slow me down.

I'm coming, Amara.

I'm coming for you.

23

Amara

I winced, pain making me regain consciousness as I looked up. Mark was on top of me on the floor, my towel long discarded, and he was squeezing my breasts painfully, intentionally hurting me.

The feeling returned to my limbs, and fire returned to my spirit.

I slapped him as hard as I could.

His face morphed into a mask of fury as he punched me across the face, and my head bounced off the floor. I cried out, my hands flying to my face, trying to soothe myself from the damage he'd inflicted there over the past week.

“Fucking worthless,” he spat. “You’re not even a good lay anymore.”

Good, I wanted to scream. I didn’t want Mark to like any part of me ever again. I hoped he hated me and never wanted to see me and that he would disappear forever.

“Where’s your secretary?” my voice croaked instead.

Mark bared his teeth at me, slapping my mound instead, and I shouted, gritting my teeth against the pain. “She knows I’m stopping you from taking what’s mine,” he snapped.

“You already lost,” I muttered. “In twenty days, I won’t be your wife anymore.”

“If you die first, everything you own becomes mine,” he laughed, cocking his gun. “But not before I’ve gotten every use out of you that I can.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, trying to get him talking as my throat burned.

“I mean, you’re staying right here, bitch, until the day before the divorce is final. Then you’ll be dead, and everything you ever owned will be mine, including the nice life insurance policy I took out on you,” Mark laughed.

“Isn’t that cheating on your girlfriend?” I countered.

“It’s not cheating when you’re still my wife,” he argued, crawling up my body on the floor. He roughly pushed his fingers in my hole, and I cringed, pain shooting up my pelvis. “We never tried fisting, did we? I’ll make you so loose even your boyfriend won’t want to fuck your corpse.”

Mark was sitting on my thighs this time, so I couldn’t kick him. He trained his gun on me, and I froze as he violated me, the pain getting worse with each new finger he

inserted.

“Shit,” I gritted, the pain radiating through me.

“You like that, you fucking whore?” Mark taunted, forcing a fourth finger through my dry flesh.

“Stop!” I sobbed, unable to stay strong. His nails were sharp and brutal, and I was sure he was tearing me up.

But he didn’t listen. I squeezed my eyes shut, trying my best not to break again as my ex stole from me, using my body against my will.

“What did I tell you about touching what’s mine?” a voice growled.

Enzo? I thought. I was probably imagining it, but I leaned into the fantasy, needing respite from this hell.

“What the fuck?” Mark screamed.

A loud thud echoed, and Mark’s hand went limp.

My eyes flung open, hot liquid spraying over my body. I looked down, and I screamed. Mark’s severed hand was still inside me, his wrist seeping blood all over me.



## Page 62

*Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 10:02 am*

I took it out of me, looking around frantically. Mark was a few feet away from me, with Enzo on top of him with a machete next to him on the ground.

I flung Mark's severed hand at my ex's head, but I missed. My heart thundered in my chest as the men struggled, fighting for control in my bedroom doorway.

Mark drew his knees up and kicked Enzo in the chest, launching him backward and landing next to me.

Enzo quickly glanced at me, his eyes raking over my damaged, naked body, and his already furious gaze turned into a lethal glare. He aimed his furious expression at Mark, baring his teeth at him in a vicious snarl.

"Lorenzo Ricci?" Mark cackled as he looked at Enzo. "The fucking mafia prince? You're the one who's been fucking my wife?"

"So you know who I am," Enzo snarled, sitting up. "You know what happens when you fuck with my family."

"She's mine!" Mark screamed, his gun shaky in his remaining hand. "But she's not worth the fucking trouble."

Then he turned to face me. "Die, bitch!" Mark screamed, pointing his gun at my face. "Your fucking boyfriend can watch you die!"

His finger squeezed the trigger.

Enzo lurched between us.

Bang!

“No!” I shrieked, my voice uneven and broken. Time seemed to move in slow motion as panic seized my heart.

He couldn’t die. I wouldn’t let him.

But Enzo didn’t move. Blood trickled from him, but he rose to his feet, his expression murderous.

“Remember what I said about seeing you again?” Enzo shouted, rushing Mark. Mark pulled the trigger again, but he missed. He yelled as Enzo tackled him, knocking the gun from his hand.

“You’re going to wish you died the night I pushed you onto the fucking highway,” Enzo roared.

Mark punched Enzo, but my pen pal wasn’t fazed. He was a man possessed; his features transformed into something demonic, feral, and wild.

“What was it you did to my baby?” he snarled, slamming Mark’s head into the floor. “Huh? You did this, am I right?” he slammed Mark’s head into the ground again, blood blooming on the floor under him.

“I also read something about broken ribs,” Enzo rose to his feet, stomping on Mark’s ribcage, making him howl in agony.

“Broken bones,” he stomped on Mark’s wrist, then moved to his ankles, cracking them. He went to his elbows, and a sickening crunch filled the air.

“And black eyes?” Enzo snarled. Mark couldn’t get a word in as Enzo punched the shit out of him, beating him to a bloody pulp as red rivers streamed from my ex’s face. Mark’s face swelled, almost making him unrecognizable in a matter of minutes.

“Then you fucking touched her?” Enzo bellowed, grabbing his machete from the floor. “You remember what I said what I would fucking do to you?”

“Please!” Mark gurgled on his own blood. “I can pay—”

“That money’s hers, not yours,” Enzo roared. “I don’t fucking want it.”

I slowly sat up, my heart pounding as I watched Enzo avenge me.

He was a force of nature, shouting at Mark, his eyes bright with rage but dark with the need to destroy. Blood trickled down his arm, his blonde curls clung to his forehead, and his glasses stood crooked on his nose. His lips were peeled back like a monster, ready to tear apart what threatened his mate.

He was fucking beautiful.

Enzo sliced through Mark’s jeans as he sobbed, begging for mercy that wouldn’t come. He ripped his pants apart, spreading them and tearing Mark’s boxers open. His flaccid member was still red with my blood, and Enzo gnashed his teeth at the sight. Enzo’s eyes burned with hate as he sliced, tearing through skin and muscle, severing Mark’s prick.

Enzo brandished it, shoving it in Mark’s face as he screamed in agony, his eyes wide with pure terror.

“Eat it,” Enzo snarled, prying Mark’s mouth open. “Die with her taste on your fucking tongue, bastardo.” He shoved Mark’s prick in his mouth, then forced his lips

shut as Mark screamed, choking on his own privates.

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Blood poured on the floor from Mark's pelvis, spreading along the floor in a large puddle. It soaked Enzo's knees as he sliced through Mark's sweatshirt, prying it apart until his chest was bare.

Then Enzo removed his belt, tying it above Mark's hips, slowing his bleeding, prolonging his agony with the makeshift tourniquet. "You don't get to die yet," Enzo snapped, his voice deep and deranged.

His machete clattered on the floor as Enzo removed a knife from his pocket, and I recognized it from my butcher block as my skinning knife. I used it multiple times to skin fish and chicken, and the whole knife set was a gift from Sylvia.

Enzo gripped Mark by his chest hair and began slicing, Mark screaming as my pen pal cut him methodically with surgical precision.

He'd done this before, I realized, as sweat beaded on his forehead, his mustache almost hidden behind his curled lip. Enzo's jaw ticked in concentration as he worked, meticulously and determined, severing each layer as Mark writhed beneath him.

He was skinning Mark alive.

I slowly rose to my feet, a numb zombie, as I stared at Mark as the life slowly drained from him. His wide eyes were fixed on mine, his breath shallow and quick, and his nostrils flared as he fought for each breath.

Time slowed to a crawl. I wasn't sure how long Enzo hacked through his skin, but it seemed like forever. Mark's voice went hoarse before his mouth stayed open in a

permanent, silent scream. He could only twitch as life leaked from him.

I found myself kneeling next to Enzo, watching him as he put down the knife and retook his machete.

Enzo stabbed Mark, who whimpered weakly. My pen pal sawed at Mark's rib until it cracked, then Enzo withdrew the blade. He stuck his hand inside, fishing around as blood seeped from the wound. He grabbed the skinning knife, plunging it between Mark's ribs with his hand, sawing at something inside as squelching sounds filled the room.

Then he wrenched something free of Mark's chest, and it was his still-beating heart.

Mark's eyes widened in horror, and Enzo smirked down at him. "As black as your soul," he taunted, then turned his eyes to me.

"I vow to you, Amara, that I will make your enemies suffer, and I'll eat the heart of any man who touches you again," he promised, lifting the heart to his mouth. He sank his teeth into it, his eyes neverleaving mine as he tore a piece off, chewing it as blood sleuthed all over him, Mark, and the floor.

Mark's pupils blew, and he went slack as the spark of life left his eyes. His heart stopped beating in my lover's hands, and Enzo felt it stop, his lips spread into a feral, cruel grin.

I was in a trance, hypnotized by the scene unfolding before me.

No one had defended me like that. Not one person stood up for me, not against bullies, threats, or Mark. Not even the police did much to help. No one cared enough to check on me or to make sure that I was alright.

Until Enzo.

My pen pal turned to the wall, sliding his hand through Mark's blood as he wrote a deliberate, chilling message. Each letter stained the paint, the excess liquid leaking down the wall. Then Enzo's hand smeared the wall as he dragged it away, revealing his message.

Will you be mine?

The breath caught in my throat as I read the words painted in my ex-husband's blood. It was a declaration, proof of his undying devotion, and it touched me to my soul. He was offering himself to me, pledging his loyalty in a way no one else ever could. He would keep me safe and only hurt me in ways I would beg him.

Warmth spread throughout my chest, my body coming alive at the recognition of the feeling of love. I thought I had it with Mark, but it was nothing compared to this. This feeling was consuming, overwhelming, and eternal. Enzo had ruined me for anyone else, and I knew that I didn't want anyone but him.

I looked at my pen pal, and he swallowed a piece of Mark's heart, watching me intently. Daring me to reject him now, after everything he'd done for me, seeing if he was too much for me, too dangerous, too unhinged.

Maybe he was.

I met his intense stare with a gaze of my own.

"Yes," I whispered.

Enzo

I launched myself at my little pen pal, my black heart soaring as I let Mark's still, cooling heart fall back on his chest, and I gripped Amara's face as my mouth crashed to hers. I forced her mouth open with my tongue, and she moaned into my mouth.

Not a soul came close to understanding me, let alone saw the darkest parts of my soul and wanted me. Sure, the mafia used my brutality to send rivals a message. They loved how savage and ruthless I was, but only because they stood to gain something. I was merely a tool in their arsenal.

But with Amara? I was more. I didn't have to hide any part of myself with her. She accepted all of me. All of my darkness, hatred, and fury; she saw it all, and she still said that magic word.



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Yes.

Mark's blood smeared from my hands on her perfect skin, adorning her like warrior paint. She was a survivor, and I saw the fire burning in her eyes.

She needed me just as badly as I needed her.

"Mine," I growled against her lips, dragging her bottom lip in my mouth as I sucked on it. "There's no escaping me now, my little pen pal."

Her breath stuttered, and I turned her head to face what I had done, all for her. The body was still warm, her ex-husband sprawled on the floor, his lifeless eyes staring at nothing, mouth frozen mid-scream. Blood pooled beneath him, dark and thick, still creeping out in slow, lazy rivers.

Any other woman would've been horrified to feel something more than the pulse of arousal between her legs. I could see the way her eyes glazed, her nipples puckered, and her stomach dipped. Her skin pebbled with goosebumps as she took in the sight before her at the severity of what I did.

Amara looked up at me, her husband's murderer, but it wasn't disgust that I saw reflected in her eyes. It was lust.

"You're free from him now," I husked, my voice low and rough. "I did that for you."

Her breath hitched as I moved closer, my knees smearing blood across the floor. The copperyscent filled the air, saturating everything. My own gunshot wound pulsed

with dull pain, but I knew it was minor, and I could barely feel it with the adrenaline coursing through my system.

My fingers curled under her chin, tilting her face up to look at me. I saw the reflection of my eyes in hers, burning with something dark and all-consuming.

“You’re all mine now,” I declared.

I pushed her down, her back hitting the blood-soaked floor. The warmth of it seeped into her skin, branding her, marking her like a warrior queen bathing in the blood of her enemies, reborn.

“Look at him,” I murmured, one hand fisting her hair as the other ghosted down her throat. “He thought he owned you, thought he could keep you and control you.”

I forced her to face the corpse; the empty gaze, the slack jaw, the clotting blood.

“Now he can fucking watch.”

She shivered, and something forbidden and electric surged through my veins. I shoved her down, pressing her into the blood, into the remnants of the past that no longer had its claws in her.

“You like this, baby? Being fucked right where your husband died, his eyes watching you take the pleasure he never offered?” I rasped, looming over her, dragging my mouth over the shell of her ear.

Her breath was shaky, and her thighs were slick with something more than blood. I groaned, running my hand against her folds, feeling her. “So wet,” I murmured, my voice dripping with satisfaction and victory.

The gun, still warm from the last shot fired, pressed against her spine as I pinned her beneath me; a reminder, a promise.

My lips found hers, sucking her tongue into my mouth. I bit at it, tasting her, reclaiming her as I devoured her, licking, sucking, and biting. She let out a shaky sigh as she licked at my mouth, arching her back and pressing her breasts to me.

I tore my pants and boxers from my body, leaving the blood-soaked clothes on the wet floor. Amara reached for my shirt, whipping it over my head as I chuckled at her impatience.

Then she spread her legs in invitation, and a haunted groan left my throat. She'd just endured countless horrors, but still, she reached for me.

Her pussy was swollen with need, blood smeared on the backs of her legs as it streamed from my latest victim. Her folds glistened with desire, and my mouth watered at the delicious sight.

Unable to resist her, I grabbed her hips, pulling her flush against me, her hot flesh searing against my skin. She moaned, her fingernails digging into my hips as she held me to her.

"Please," she begged, pulling me harder against her, my cock trapped between our bodies. She moved her hips, her juices sliding my cock through her folds. "I need you."

I pulled my hips back slightly but chuckled when she protested. Fisting my hard cock, I pressed it against her pussy, slick and swollen, and I rammed inside her.

She cried out, her voice dry and broken, and I inhaled sharply as her pussy sucked me in deeper, desperate for me like I was her lifeboat in a storm.

I turned her face to Mark, making her look into his dead eyes. Her pussy clenched on my cock, and my fingers dug into her hips as I slammed inside her wetness. She moaned, her tits bouncing under me, making the blood ripple around her.

She was fucking glorious, the macabre sight of her laying in her dead husband's blood satisfying an instinct so depraved, any sane man would've been disgusted. The morbidity of it only made me burn hotter, her rapture and little whimpers fueling me.

I drove into her, circling my hips, hitting every inch of her as she took me. I bottomed out inside her, claiming her in the most visceral way possible.

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My limbs slid in her ex's blood as I braced myself against her shoulder, pinning her body in place as I thrust inside her.

"I knew you'd come," she sobbed, her arms wrapping around my shoulders, tracing my tattoos as she braced me to her like she'd never let go.

"Always, baby," I vowed, spearing her repeatedly, driving into my little pen pal as she moaned, writhing in blissful agony.

I slid my fingers through my blood and pressed them against her ass. She opened her legs eagerly, and I pushed the digits inside, slick with my blood.

Her tears mixed with the blood on the ground as she whispered my name, almost in disbelief that I was real and not some fantasy she had conjured.

"I'm here, baby, I'm here," I soothed, kissing and licking her tears away. "I'm real."

"Make me forget," she whispered, her eyes shining as she glared at her ex. "Make me forget he ever touched me."

I pulsed my fingers in her ass, and she moaned, moving them in time with my cock inside her. I leaned back, stroking her G-spot from the inside, and she trembled. Her little cries were electrifying, jolting pleasure through my system like a drug.

The throbbing of her cunt sped up, squeezing me harder and harder as I slammed my cock home.

“It’s the last thing he’ll ever do,” I groaned, pumping into her snug heat. “You’re the last thing he tasted, the last thing he saw, and not even death can keep him from seeing his wife come all over his murderer’s cock.”

My little pen pal moaned, arching into me, reveling in the raw filth of it all. Her ex-husband’s dead eyes bore into her, and instead of fear, her eyes reflected freedom.

He could never hurt her or anyone ever again.

I surged inside her, changing the angle of my hips, hitting deep, and her eyes crossed.

“You like this, my little lawyer?” I grunted, pounding into her, my hand snaking between our bodies. I pinched at her clit, my hands still slippery with Mark’s blood, and her face contorted with bliss.

“Yes,” she moaned, her blood-soaked legs sliding up my hips, wrapping around my waist. Her hands slid up my arms, reverent, squeezing the muscles, tracing the veins, and caressing my skin. “I love it.”

I massaged her clit, and her body jerked; her mouth opened in a silent scream. “Enzo!” she shouted, a cry that was half-pleasure, half-triumph. She convulsed, losing herself all over me, squeezing me like a vice over and over again.

Our bodies were tangled in a mess of blood, death, and rebirth.

She was mine now. Forever.

Mark's body lay cooling beside us, but I wasn't thinking about him anymore. I was thinking about him—the man who ended my ex's miserable existence and claimed me as his prize.

Nude and trembling, my skin soaked with the blood of my past, my thighs were wet with something far more depraved.

And Enzo was still inside me.

His movements were languid as he let me recover from my climax, and when the last tremors left my body, he renewed his efforts.

Enzo's mouth trailed along my ear, nipping at the soft flesh, sending a bolt of sensation through me to my core. He dragged his lips along my neck, sucking and biting the skin, dotting my flesh with hickeys. Then he dragged his mustache along my jaw, and his teeth grazed my collarbone.

I arched my back, shoving my breasts in his face, and he chuckled. His teeth clamped around a nipple, sucking, drawing out a long, low moan. He nipped at the sensitive nub, drawing it into his mouth, taking long pulls as he sucked the blood smeared on them. He bit down, and I jumped, moaning under the harsh, unfiltered feelings of bliss.

He switched, moving his mouth to my other nipple, torturing it with his mouth, and my pussy clenched around his thick cock. Then he went between my breasts, licking a hot, possessive trail, licking the blood clean from my skin.

He was erasing every trace of my ex, imprinting me with his own, marking me as his territory.

A thrill shivered up my spine at the realization, his cock inflicting punishing, harsh

strokes, healing my broken soul, dragging the pieces back together. The fire in me blazed an unextinguishable inferno, burning brightly just for him.

He lifted my breasts, nipping at my ribs, licking under them, the thin skin tingling, prickling with delight.



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“You feel damn divine, baby,” he groaned, pinching and rolling my clit between his fingers. “Like my personal fuckingparadise.”

I cried out as I shook, stars bursting behind my eyes as I obliterated, my pussy fluttering around Enzo’s cock. It hit me like a truck, running me over with pure rapture, blinding everything else as it consumed me. For the first time in my life, I felt myself squirt, the rapture squeezing my pussy so tightly I thought it would clamp shut forever. He maintained a bruising, overwhelming pace, drawing out my intense, white-hot orgasm.

He was moving slowly and deliberately, dragging out every ripple of sensation. It was as if he were imprinting himself inside me, reshaping me from the inside out.

My fingers dug into his shoulders, nails raking at his flesh. I needed to hold onto something, needed an anchor because my mind was unraveling, untethering from what I used to be. Who I used to be.

Enzo smiled against my throat, inhaling deep, drinking in the scent of copper, sweat, and ruin.

“There’s nothing left of you, is there?” he whispered, his warm breath ghosting against my skin. “No past, no home, no self.”

My chest rose and fell in shallow, erratic breaths. He was right. I’d spent years fighting, resisting, trying to pretend that I had control. But now? I was nothing but a vessel for hiswill.

And I didn't want it any other way.

A strangled sound let my throat—not quite a sob, not quite a moan. Enzo caught it between his teeth, biting into my lip until I tasted the metallic sweetness of my own blood.

His tongue licked away the crimson drops, savoring me like his last meal.

“Say it,” he murmured, grinding deeper, forcing me to feel every inch of his ownership.

I gasped, teetering on the edge of bliss and oblivion.

“Say. It.” He groaned, his words punctuated with each thrust.

“I belong to you,” I choked out.

His hands shot up, fisting my hair, yanking my head back. His smile was savage. “You don't just belong to me,” he growled, his grip tightening, making my scalp prickle with pain. “You are me now.”

My breath hitched. He released my hair, his fingers moving lower, trailing down my throat, pressing lightly at my pulse.

“Your heart beats because I allow it,” he continued, trailing his nails lower, over my collarbone, between my breasts. “Your breath exists because I permit it.”

His touch reached my stomach, fingers pressing possessively over my womb. “If I want you swollen with my child, you'll take it,” his voice was silky yet solid like steel.

“I’m on birth control,” I informed him.

His grin was cruel and calculating. “Are you? When was your last shot?”

He was right; it’d been months, and my periods were regular again. A thrill shot through me at the thought that I could get pregnant with his child and that he was so desperate to possess me that he took that choice from me.

“If I want to carve you open and see what’s inside, you’ll let me.”

My stomach tightened at the horror and thrill of it because he wasn’t wrong. I’d let him; I’d let him do anything.

His weight shifted, and for a moment, I thought he was done and that he’d let me rest.

I barely had time to catch my breath before I heard the slick, metallic sound of a knife being unsheathed. But this one wasn’t mine; it was his, the one he used on me before.

A fresh spike of fear laced through my euphoria, twisting pleasure into something sharper.

“Shh,” he commanded, dragging the flat of the blade over my skin, leaving cold trails along the paths his fingers had already claimed. “You trust me?”

I swallowed hard. If he’d asked me weeks ago, I would’ve said no. But after what he’d done for me, the answer came easy. “Yes.”

He hummed in approval, pressing the blade into my skin, a spike of pain shooting through me. The first cut was small and shallow, a thin line just above my hipbone. The pain was sharp but fleeting, giving way to warmth as blood trickled down my side.

“Perfect,” he murmured, watching it bead, fascinated.

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He wiped his finger against the blood, swirling the crimson liquid against my skin before pressing it to his tongue.

A shudder wracked his body. His pupils dilated, his breath hitching like he'd just taken a hit of something intoxicating.

I should've been horrified. But instead? I was soaked.

He exhaled shakily, staring at me with pure, unfiltered possession. "You taste like you were made for me."

He turned the blade on himself, pressing it against his chest. My stomach clenched as he dragged it down, cutting deeply enough for blood to trickle freely. He hissed, the pain sharp and real, but it didn't slow or stop him.

He reached for me, fingers smearing our combined blood together, mixing it, binding it. Then, he pushed two blood-slicked fingers into my mouth.

"Swallow," he ordered, voice raw with arousal.

I did. The taste of him, of us, flooded my senses. My soul fractured, and my body burned. Something inside me snapped, and I knew that I would never be whole without him again.

He groaned, pushing deeper inside me as if he could crawl into my skin and live there.

“You’re mine,” he rasped, blood dripping on my breasts, painting me like a canvas. His mouth crashed into mine, swallowing every gasp, every moan. The mixture of blood, sweat, and sin melded into something unholy.

A monster, a bride, a dark god, and his sacrifice.

He plucked at my clit, merciless in his quest to bring me over the edge, and I shattered into a million pieces, a liquid inferno burning me from the inside out, a blaze that not even an entire ocean could extinguish. I screamed, Mark’s blood rippling around me as I writhed, bursting.

Enzo stilled inside me, breathless and completely lost, his seed spurting, marking me as his and only his as his hot release flooded me.

Then he pressed his lips against mine, consuming me.

26

Enzo

The bedroom reeked of sex and blood. Amara was a wet, sticky mess of blood and slick, slumped, and exhausted. She winced, clearly aching from our raw passion and still dazed.

I reached for my pants, digging my cell phone out. The screen cracked when Mark kicked me, but it still worked. I called my henchmen, who were always ready to help out the Ricci family.

“Boss?” one replied.

“13 Amos Drive, Lockwood,” I informed. “Total cleanup. How long until the crew’s

here?”

“It’s a ten-minute drive, Mr. Ricci,” the man stated. “I can get them in the cleaner van and head to you right away.”

“You do that, and bring me some clothes and the morning-after pill,” I ordered, hanging up as I turned to my pen pal.

Amara’s eyelids fluttered, fighting the sleep that begged to drag her under. I bent, scooping her up in my arms, carrying her to her bathroom. The fucking door was missing, but my men wouldn’t come in here without my permission.

I set her on her feet, turning the shower on as she leaned into me, unable to hold her whole weight in her current state.

I brushed my fingers over her bruises, cuts, and bloodstains. “All mine,” I murmured possessively, eager to worship her.

I tested the water, and when it was hot enough, I dragged her inside the stall, shutting the door behind us. The water cascaded over us, soothing my sore muscles and washing away the evidence that Mark ever existed.

I took a washcloth and lathered it with soap, kneeling before my little pen pal. I slowly ran the cloth over her feet, working my way up, gently cleaning away any evidence of tonight. My hands ghosted over her curves, and I kissed every bruise, cut, and scrape.

She shuddered, but it wasn’t from fear. I knew it was from something deeper; my claim, my obsession, and my care. Her eyes softened as she watched me, rivers of blood snaking down the drain as I washed her hair.

“No one else will ever touch you again,” I vowed.

I heard multiple footsteps rush up the stairs, and I knew my men had arrived. One of them gasped and cursed, and I chuckled. Most of the men were used to my antics, so one of them must be new.



“Boss?” someone called out.

“You can start,” I answered, and Amara went stiff, her eyes peering up at me.

“They’re with me,” I soothed, squeezing the shampoo from her hair and rinsing it.

She nodded, her eyes closing as I finished washing her. I quickly wiped myself down, scrubbing the blood from my body before I shut off the water.

I took two towels, wrapping one low on my hips before I wrapped Amara in the other. I dried her off carefully and deliberately, and someone threw clothes inside the bathroom. I picked them up and donned them, then took Amara in my arms again.

I strode back into the bedroom, ignoring the cleanup crew as I placed Amara in her bed. I peeled the covers back and put them on her, brushing her damp hair away from her face as I tucked her in. I crawled in with her, my arms wrapping around her as she sighed, her breathing slowing and evening.

“Boss?” a man asked.

“What?” I snapped, glaring at the man over my shoulder.

“There was a woman in the garage; she was shot. What do we do with her?” he asked, and he handed me a package that was the morning-after pill.

“Marta,” Amara exclaimed. “My boss. Is she alive?”

“Bring her to one of our doctors,” I ordered, removing the single dose from the package. “Make sure she makes it.”

The man nodded and left, entering the hallway where Alessandro carried Marta, nodding to me before he carried her down the stairs.

I turned to Amara, gently opening her mouth and putting the pill on her tongue. “Swallow, it’s to make sure you didn’t get pregnant tonight.”

She swallowed obediently, not wanting any chance of carrying Mark’s child. If she was already pregnant with my child, it wouldn’t do anything to our baby. Amara closed her eyes, her head resting on her pillow as her breaths deepened and evened.

My men moved with quiet efficiency, and by the time they were done, the place looked like nothing happened.

Days bled into nights. My men watched over Marta as she recovered, my stupid brother taken with her.

I took regular meals to Amara as she rested, and we spoke in hushed tones as we ate together. Her body was still tender but healing, and I had my doctor come to examine her and fix her up.

Each night, I pulled her into her bed, our intimacy shifting from slow, possessive touches to raw, consuming passion.

But my favorite night since then was when she was sleeping.

She was whimpering in her sleep, her thighs rubbing together like she was having a dirty dream. I smirked, lifting her nightgown to expose her ass. I didn’t bother with clothes when I went to bed with her, and I was glad for it as I spooned her.

Amara arched her back, pressing her hips against me as her juices slid across my shaft, and she rubbed herself on me, taking her pleasure, using me.

I chuckled, wrapping a hand around her throat as the other reached around her hips, rubbing slow lazy circles around her clit.

She took a deep breath as my cock slid into her core, and her eyes fluttered as I pumped into her.

“Good morning, my little lawyer,” I groaned, her pussy sucking me deeper inside her with each stroke. “I need to feel you.”

She moaned, gripping the back of my head as I traced patterns on her clit, making her hips buck as she clenched around me.

“Amara,” I breathed, writing my next letter to her with my voice. “You feel so good, my little pen pal. Even when you sleep, you dream of me fucking you. I’m with you even in your dreams; there is no escaping me.”

“Enzo,” she moaned.

I grinned against her hair. “That’s right, baby, that’s how I sign my letters.” Then I slammed my hips against hers, taking her harder and harder until she came, squeezing every drop out of me as I climaxed with her.

By the end of the week, she was stronger, her bruises fading. My doctor confirmed that Mark shot nothing vital, and I gritted my teeth as he dug the bullet from my side and stitched me up.

A week passed, and that night, my mood took a darker, dangerous turn.

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I tied a blindfold securely behind Amara's head and tightened the ropes I tied around her wrists.

"You said you trust me," I reminded her, nipping at her earlobe.

"I'm starting to regret that," she muttered, and I chuckled. I took her hands and led her outside, careful to watch her step. I took her keys, unlocked her car, and shoved her in the backseat.

"Where are we going?" she exclaimed, laying still on the seat so no one saw her.

"You'll see."

The engine hummed beneath us, a few cars whooshing past us on the dirt roads. Only farmers took these paths, but I knew them thanks to my family. Back roads were often used to avoid detection, and the knowledge was essential for the mafia.

I pulled into a clearing, smirking as I parked her car. I exited the vehicle and opened her back door, dragging her out.

The cool night air greeted us with the smells of pine and earth. I tugged at her restraints, and they fell to the ground as she looked around us.

"Run," I ordered.

She swallowed, her pulse dancing in her throat as she hesitated.

I gave her a wicked smirk. “You don’t want to know what I’ll do to you if I catch you.”

After all the time we spent together, she knew what I was capable of. Her eyes widened, and she turned, bolting through the clearing and heading to the forest beyond.

Adrenaline surged through me as I grinned, waiting until she disappeared beyond the trees before I took off after her. Excitement surged in my veins, the thrill of the hunt making my cock twitch.

Her footsteps echoed ahead of me, taunting, beckoning.

I raced ahead with a single focus in mind.

Catch her and devour her.

27

Amara

Enzo’s footsteps thundered behind me, and I ran harder, faster. A thrill shivered up my spine, my heart hammering against my chest as my adrenaline spiked.

I dodged branches and stumbled on roots, my sneakers crunching against the leaves as I ran blindly. I turned, trying to lose him through the brush. Like a true killer, he stalked after me, his steps rapid but still at a walk.

But I gave it all I had.

I tore through the trees, my breath coming out in short pants as I sprinted. Birds

flapped overhead, giving me away as they fled from me. Even squirrels chattered as they scampered away.

I decided to focus on my escape. Enzo's steps were getting faint, and hope surged in my chest that I'd lost him. I looked behind me, but I could still see him.

I turned again, losing sight of him behind a thick cluster of trees as I pressed forward.

My side ached, my eyes searching for a tree large enough to hide me. One was hollow on one side, so I reached for it, slipping inside, crouching so Enzo couldn't find me.

I panted, trying to catch my breath as the icy air chilled my already frigid skin. I rubbed my arms, my nipples hardening under my long-sleeved dress.

My breath quieted as I heard twigs snap, and I held my breath. Footsteps, and they were coming closer.

This forest was huge. How did Enzo know where I was going?

He stopped, looking around, straining to hear any sound that I might make. I cupped my mouth, breathing through my nose as I watched him, waiting.

His eyes shot forward, a bird calling ahead, and he jogged away.

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I sighed, relieved, as I grabbed the edge of the tree, stood, and crept out of my hiding spot.

Strong arms slammed me against the tree, and I screamed, Enzo's scent flooding me as he pressed his body into mine.

"Caught you," he chuckled.

I wrenched away, taking off into the forest, his laughter ringing all around me.

I ran until my legs ached, and I saw an abandoned, crumbling building ahead. It was dirty, covered with spray paint, and there was no way he'd find me here.

I ducked inside the peeling entryway, running through different rooms under a sign that read Hollowbrook Haunted House.

Where the fuck was Hollowbrook?

Shaking my head, I ducked into a large room, fluorescent lights flickering. I lined my body against the concrete wall, hoping if I stayed quiet, there was no way he'd find me.

So I waited. I crouched on the ground, hiding in the shadows of the far corner.

"Little pen pal," Enzo called out, his footsteps muffled as they crunched against the gravel. "You can run, but you can't hide."

I giggled, confident that he wouldn't find me in there. It was too dark, and I was too far into the building.

But his footsteps echoed, giving the impression that he was everywhere all at once. I couldn't tell where he was, and when the door to my hiding spot creaked open, I gasped.

He rushed me, and I dodged him, but his arms snaked around me, trapping me against him. He turned, slamming me against the wall, his dark eyes promising to ruin me right where I stood.

"Gotcha," he murmured, his lips a whisper from mine. His hand grabbed my wrists and pinned them above my head, his other hand wrapping around my throat, the cold blade of a knife pressing against my skin.

His knife gleamed in the low light, the edge already kissed with my blood from last week. He wrenched my dress down, exposing my breasts.

"You belong to me," he murmured, pressing the tip of the blade just below my collarbone.

I gasped as the sharp bite of steel pricked flesh, pain blooming in red. I whimpered as Enzo deliberately stroked his knife, slowly carving letters into my skin. Blood trickled between my breasts, over my nipples, the warmth a strong contrast against the cold night air.

I whimpered, torn between agony and something darker, something deeper.

Enzo leaned back, admiring his work—his name, etched into me forever.

His fingers dipped into the blood, dragging it to his lips. He licked them clean.



“Beautiful,” he murmured, pressing a possessive kiss against the fresh wound. “Now everyone will know you’re mine.”

I knew that he’d ruined me, and I never wanted to be saved.

“Now strip,” he ordered.

“Make me,” I breathed.

He smiled, fucking smiled at me, and I knew that he wouldn’t stop until he broke me. No amount of pain, blood, or tears would stop him.

He turned me around and slammed me against the wall, pinning my face to it as I whimpered, my raw flesh pulsing on my chest.

Enzo pushed my sleeves down my arms, my low neckline allowing him to push my dress down my body. It slid over me like a caress and pooled at my feet.

“Spread,” he commanded, his knife nudging my thighs. I whimpered, already on edge with him branding me, my skin buzzing. He nicked my thigh, and I yelped, spreading my legs wider, exposing my bare pussy.

He groaned at the sight, pressing the flat of his blade along my ass, spreading my cheeks as he spat on my back hole.

I heard him suck on something and stiffened when a finger pressed against the tight ring of muscle before I relaxed, and it slipped inside my ass.

“So tight,” he gritted, thrusting his finger a bit before he added another. My pussy clenched, begging to be filled, but I was at his mercy as he filled me, using me for his own pleasure.

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He slapped my ass, and it jiggled, and he groaned at the view. He removed his fingers, then I jumped as he ran his knife handle through my pussy's wetness. Then, Enzo pressed the handle of his knife into my ass. I cried out as it entered me, the hard girth stretching me.

"That's my little pen pal," he groaned, taking the skin of my neck between his teeth as he sucked, marking me. His erection pressed against my cheek, hard and throbbing as he fucked my ass with his knife. "I miss your letters, baby. Tell me what you'd write me in one right now."

"Enzo," I moaned, the hard press of his blade sliding inside me as he reached around, flicking my clit. "You're a fucking psychopath, but I'll die if you ever stop touching me. Don't ever stop."

"Amara," he groaned, finishing her letter for me as he removed the handle from my ass.

I opened her mouth to protest, but he swallowed it when his mouth crashed against mine, and he slipped his cock in my ass.

I let out a strangled moan as he stretched me, molding me to the shape of his cock, but I didn't get a moment to adjust. My pen pal was brutal, and he rammed his cock in deep, and hot curls of pleasure coiled tightly in my pelvis.

Enzo rubbed the sides of my clit, and my knees shook, fighting to hold up my weight as he claimed my ass.

“Amara,” he groaned, punctuating his words with every thrust. “I. Will. Never. Stop.”

“Promise?” I squealed as his hips snapped against mine, the friction against my clit delicious.

“Promise,” he swore, his cock throbbing inside me.

“Enzo!” I cried, shuddering violently as my pussy clenched on nothing, my clit spasming against his fingers, waves of ecstasy washing over me like a tidal wave.

Enzo groaned, but I wasn’t done. I reached behind me, wrenching his knife from his grasp.

He stilled, and I pushed him away, slipping him out of my ass as I turned, pointing the knife at his chest.

“Your turn,” I breathed, shoving him on the ground. His eyes darkened, and he held his hands up. I knelt over him, whipping his shirt off him as I gazed at his sculpted chest and taut abs.

I’d never get tired of looking at him.

I searched his pockets, triumphant when I found a small package of wet wipes inside. He often carried them with his knife to wipe it clean. I wrapped one around his cock, and he winced as the cold cloth swiped at him, and I didn’t stop until his cock was spotless. I threw the wipe away and hovered above him, positioning his cock at my entrance.

“You’re mine,” I declared, lowering myself, taking him inch by inch as he hissed, his hands snaking over my hips as he steadied me. I slowly impaled myself on his cock, my pussy aching as he filled me.

I pressed the tip of his blade against his chest, and his eyes blazed with lust.

I dragged the blade across his skin, cutting him, carving deliberate letters as he gritted his teeth, his eyes never leaving mine as his cock throbbed inside me.

AMARA, I carved, my own blood dripping down my breasts and onto his abdomen as his blood pooled down his abs. He was slippery, and I slid in our combined blood as I branded him as mine.

I let the knife slip from my hands, clattering on the ground as I braced myself on his shoulders, circling my hips as I rode him hard.

“Now everyone will know that your lawyer claimed her inmate,” I moaned, my nails digging into his skin, drawing blood as I slammed down on top of him. “That your pen pal made you hers.”

He growled, cupping my dripping breasts as he licked the blood off my nipples, his pupils large and daunting, like twin abysses.

“Say you’re mine,” I moaned.

“I’m yours, love,” he mumbled around my breasts between sucks. “Only yours.”

My breath stuttered, pressure building inside me as I changed the angle, my clit rubbing against his pubic bone.

I heard him grab for the knife as he placed the handle against my ass, shoving it back inside me as I squealed, the sting fading into consuming pleasure.

I leaned forward, licking the blood from my carving, and he let out a haunted groan. Then he rolled, moving me beneath him as he buried himself inside me, and I rode his

knife.

I gripped his chin and kissed him, the taste of both of our blood mixing, mingling into one delicious, addicting flavor.

“There is no escaping us,” he groaned. “If you try to leave, I’ll drag you right back home, love.”

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Love. It was his way of saying he loved me.

“If you try to leave me, I’ll chain you to my bed,” I cried out.

He groaned, surging into me so fast and hard that I didn’t know where he ended, and I began.

“Only I can touch you,” he growled. “If you want to come, call for me, and I’ll make you come, my little pen pal. You can’t even touch yourself, and if I catch you, I’ll punish you.”

A strangled cry left my throat, my entire body on fire, burning for him and only him. “Enzo!” I shouted.

“Fall for me, mi angelo,” he groaned.

I broke, shattering as I convulsed, my pussy squeezing his cock like a vice as it fluttered. My clit vibrated as ecstasy speared through me, intense and blinding, my vision going white with the sheer force of it.

Enzo roared as he spilled inside me, exploding as hard as I was.

Enzo was the man who inserted himself into my life, giving me no choice as he made his mark. He showed me how fucked up the world really was, and he removed my rose-colored glasses so I could finally see for the first time.

I wasn’t sure what the future held for us, but what I did know was that no matter

what, the world would end before we'd be apart, and I would always be his pen pal.

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Enzo

The chill in the air grew sharper, the leaves fell from the trees, and the first snow coated the cold, hard ground. I looked up, watching the flakes fall, coating the outdoor rec area where my fellow prisoners came out once a day for an hour of sunshine.

The walls were high, then fences lined with barbed wire at the top and electric wires discouraging any inmate from scaling them to escape.

A hand clapped my shoulder. "Wasn't sure you'd make it back, mi amico," Ludovic exclaimed. "Haven't seen you in months."

I shrugged. "You know how the guards like to keep me all tothemselves."

He snorted, sitting on a bench next to me as I watched the snowflakes line the ground. "How is she?"

"Better," I admitted. I assigned my personal security detail to Amara, and no one could penetrate their defenses. My family's on-call doctor made sure she was healing up well before I let him get back to his other patients.

Amara's divorce went through, and she sold the house that was her prison for years. Mark's mistress tried to get her hands on his estate, but they weren't married, and her child was still unborn, with no proof that it was Mark's.

Amara got her name back, proudly Ms. Roberts again, and she returned to work

without issue. It was all over the news that her ex-husband broke in and attacked her, then vanished. He was presumed dead, but she still had a right to everything he left her in the divorce.

Since I came back to prison, we still exchanged daily letters.

She saw her social worker a lot, and I didn't blame her. She needed to heal from the trauma she just went through, and I was too unskilled in that area. All I could do was hold her, protect her, and fuck her until she begged me to stop.

"That's good," Ludovic smiled. "I'll be sure to pay her a visit once I'm out."

"Like hell you will," I snarled, shoving him half-heartedly.

He laughed. "Not like that, man, I got my own girl now."

"Oh?" I mused. "I love a girl who does charity work."

He guffawed, smacking me upside the head as I chuckled.

"Break it up, Ricci!" one of the guards snapped.

"We're just playing," Ludovic scowled. "Buzzkills, the lot of them."

"Rec time's over," another guard called. "Everybody line up."



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Ludovic groaned, pulling away from me as he followed the other inmates.

But I was rooted on the spot. To me, the snow was a symbol of purity, cleansing everything it touched, and it fascinated me.

“Ricci,” Romano muttered, approaching me. “You’ve got a visit.”

I cocked my brow at him. Amara had chosen to specialize in domestic violence cases instead of becoming a state attorney. It couldn’t be a legal visit from her since I had a new lawyer now. “It’s not visiting hours?”

“Conjugal,” Romano smirked. “Never thought you’d be allowed them, but your wife is fucking persistent.”

My wife.

“Promise me,” Amara had breathed, marriage license in her hand. “If you have to go back there, and I change my specialty, I need a way to see you regularly.”

“What am I promising, baby?” I had rasped.

“To be my husband and to never hurt me unless I beg you to, never cheat on me, and let me have conjugal visits,” she insisted.

“I promise,” I grinned, signing the license. She smiled back and signed her name next to it, and the minister’s eyes widened at the strangeness of it all.

Then I kissed her like it was the last time.

I smiled at the memory. My little pen pal had enough pull and connections that she could get a conjugal visit whenever she wanted, and today was the day.

I remembered the last letter I got from her this morning, how the crisp envelope felt in my hands before I ripped it open, my rough hands smoothing the wrinkled paper. They finally let me out of the hole, and I sat on my bunk as I read it.

Enzo,

How does it feel to be made an honest man after all these years?

-Your wife

Romano turned, and I followed. If anyone could get me to move, it was my wife.

The gold band glinted in the evening sunlight, the one she had placed on my finger, and I had refused to take off since then. She wanted to change her last name to mine, and my heart swelled with pride. She didn't let anything Mark did to her change who she was or affect what she wanted.

I wanted to make her mine in every way possible, so I gladly gave it to her.

With my name, she had my empire at her disposal. No one would fuck with her, and should she choose it, she would be welcomed in the family business without question.

The house she rented brought back too many memories of Mark, so she gave up the lease. She moved into my home, which had been sitting vacant for years, and I was happy to have it be useful again.

I'd written a letter and sent it out that morning, and I smirked, wishing I could see her expression while she opened it. Maybe I should've waited until tonight to give it to her, but this visit was a surprise. Had I known, I would've waited until I saw her face to face and made her read it in front of me while I fucked her, daring her to get the words out while I made her see stars.

My wife,

I don't know about honest, baby, but I'll honestly make you scream my name until my last breath.

-Enzo

My footsteps echoed down the halls, and we turned down a tunnel, buzzing through the heavy doors. Romano gestured to the first door, one of the suites where conjugal visits happened.

"Enjoy," he smirked as I opened the door, stepping through it.

My breath caught in my throat at the sight before me.

Amara Ricci stood before me, wearing nothing but a white lace ensemble, barely more than a bra and a thong, with thigh-highs, a garter belt, and white pumps. Her lips were painted a sultry red, her makeup done up like a perfect little porcelain doll. She knew how I loved to ruin her makeup and watch it run down her face as she cried for me.

As the door closed behind us, sealing us away from the rest of the world, I faced her. Her smooth hands framed my face, her touch softer than I ever dreamed.

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“Finally,” she murmured, brushing her lips over mine.

I tilted my head, a slow smile spreading across my face. “You really thought I’d be done with you after just one visit?” I smirked, referring to our first conjugal visit last week.

She laughed, laying her head on my chest. “Not a chance.”

### Epilogue

#### Amara

The prison lights were always blinding, no matter which room or hallway I entered. My eyes stung as I followed the guard down the long, winding halls of Ashwood Prison, twisting and turning like an endless maze. The white walls made everything appear like a landscape covered in dirty snow, with white clouds blanketing the sky and the sun still blinding. That’s how it felt in here, and I wished I’d brought my sunglasses and worn them indoors, no matter how oddly the guards would’ve looked at me.

How did they work here every day? How did the inmates not suffer from eye damage exposed to this daily?

My heels clicked on the concrete floor, echoing through the air, announcing my presence before anyone could see me. The air was stale and recycled, and it was always a little too cold.

The guard buzzed through another door, and I followed him warily. This prison always gave me the creeps when my husband wasn't around.

My husband.

I smiled at the memory. I wasn't sure exactly how Enzo got away with it, but he knew a judge who owed him a favor.

While I recovered after Mark's last attack, Enzo sent out his men to run some errands. After they cleaned the whole place up, they came back with groceries and clothes for Enzo. They handed him a box before they left for the day, at his beck and call like always.

I drifted off to sleep, resting as much as I could, letting my body heal.

The scent of cinnamon stirred me from a deep sleep. I reached out instinctively, smiling when my palm met something solid and warm. I opened my eyes and saw Enzo lying across from me in my bed.

And he smiled at me.

I never saw him smile before. Smirk, sure, but a genuine smile? I didn't think he was capable of such a thing anymore.

But he blessed me with one now, and it felt like the best gift anyone could ever give me.

His eyes trailed over my form, raking and hungry. I glanced down and noticed he was wearing a suit.

Why was he wearing a suit?

The cinnamon smell, I reminded myself. I lifted my eyes, slowly sitting up as my eyes swept over my room.

There were dozens of red candles around my room, placed on my dresser, nightstands, and even along the ground. Rose petals littered the floor, and helium-filled heart-shaped balloons floated to the ceiling.

“What’s all this?” I breathed in awe. No one had ever done something like this for me before.

He sat up, turning to me as he placed a small box in my lap. It was black and velvet, and my breath caught as I opened it.

A brilliant princess-cut diamond stood on a ruby-encrusted band, gold and shining like it was forged from the sun itself. Like he found his way to the heavens to find me a veritable treasure.

I looked up, and Enzo had moved closer, studying my reaction.

“I’m not a patient man, Amara. But for you, I’ll wait as long as it takes. If you’re not ready now, I’ll take you when you are,” he breathed. “I want you to be mine in all ways. You consume me, my little pen pal and I refuse to breathe if you’re not around. I can’t ask you to wait for me because my prison sentence is life. But I ask that you be with me in all ways, and when I decide to leave that cage for good, that you be there as my wife.”

I couldn’t breathe. Nothing else existed but him and his words floated around me like clouds, promising me my own personal paradise.

It had been months since I left Mark, and I stopped wearing my wedding ring then. After only a few months of my ring finger being bare, I already knew that I was ready

to wear a ring again.

But not just any ring. His ring.

“I already am yours,” I admitted. “But yes, I’ll marry you, Enzo.”

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He smirked, his hand running over the ring in the box, plucking it from me. Then he took my hand and slid it on, and it fit perfectly.

It had to be at least two carats, considering how obnoxiously big the stone was.

Enzo's lips crashed over mine, stealing my breath as I lost myself to the heat of his possession. His tongue slid against mine, sweeping and claiming, stoking the sparks inside me into blazing flames.

His hands slid up my thighs, and I stiffened. Alarm bells went off in my head, reminding me of what Mark had done to me.

I broke the kiss, panting and looking at Enzo. I needed to see him, to know that he was the one touching me and not my ex-husband.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, tears flooding my eyes. I wanted to be ready and to fall into bed with him, but mentally, I wasn't there yet. I wasn't ready for sex.

"Amara," he exclaimed, gripping my chin between his fingers. "You never have to be sorry with me, love. I meant what I said. I will wait as long as it takes. You're worth it."

I sobbed as he embraced me, wrapping his arms around me and holding me tightly as I wailed. Shame, guilt, and sorrow washed through me, the brunt of what happened to me finally rushing through me like a tidal wave.

Mark had taken from me, and I mourned the pieces of myself I lost to that horrible



man. I didn't know how long I cried, but Enzo never let me go, rubbing my back and murmuring soothing words as I let myself process my trauma.

When my sobs lessened to occasional sniffles, I laid back down in bed and drifted back to sleep.

Enzo

When I was sure Amara was fast asleep, I left her bedroom, closing the door softly behind me. I ran downstairs and nodded to the bodyguards I had stationed by her house.

I took my phone and dialed my cleaning crew. "Boss?"

"You still have the package?" I asked, using coded words to avoid detection.

"We were about to send it out," the man replied. "You need to inspect it?"

"Something like that," I mused. "I'm on my way."

I hung up, walking to the street where my driver waited with a car. I stepped in the back, nodding to him. "The safehouse," I ordered.

An hour later, we arrived, and I immediately went inside and met with my cleaning crew.

"Here he is, Boss," the man announced, unzipping the body bag in the makeshift morgue.

My upper lip curled in disgust as I unsheathed my knife. I plunged it into Mark's chest, stabbing him repeatedly along his chest and abdomen, fury boiling in my veins.

He fucking raped her,I snarled in my mind. If I could make him suffer more, I would.

But there was only one thing I could do now. His blood was already clotted, so the hot spray never splattered on my face. There was no satisfaction in mutilating his body, but at least it released some of the tension in my body.

“Give me the saw,” I ordered. The men were staring at me with wide eyes, even though mutilating a corpse wasn’t one of the worst things I’d ever done. A man hurriedly handed me a bone saw, and I smirked.

All I could do now was expedite her divorce by making her free of him sooner.

I curved my knife, slicing across his throat and all the way across his neck. I hacked at him until I reached his spine, and I gripped the bone saw. Sawing at it, the bones finally snapped, and I removed his head from his body.

His mouth was parted, and his severed prick fell from his mouth and plopped on his chest.

I chuckled. Picking it up, I placed the severed head on the ground before flipping Mark’s body over. I took gloves from a table nearby, pulling them on before I gripped Mark’s hips. I shoved his shriveled prick in his ass, chuckling when it disappeared inside. Then I flipped his body back over and zipped up the body bag.

I lifted his severed head, tscking at his dead eyes before turning to my crew. “Dispose of the body. Cremate it and spread the ashes in a fucking dumpster. I’ll take care of the head.”

“Let us help you,” one of the men pleaded. “We don’t want you getting caught.”

I pursed my lips. “You’re right. Sanitize the shit out of it, place it in a bag, then give

it to me,” I smirked. “I’m dropping this bitch off at the police station doorstep.”

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“Why?” one of the men asked.

“Because once they know he’s dead, my little pen pal will officially be a widow. She’ll get everything he ever owned as his wife, and she’ll be free from him sooner than the divorce,” I explained.

“She must be a good lay,” one of the men muttered under his breath.

I gripped my knife and lunged, sticking it in the man’s neck. He gasped, choking on his own blood as it poured on the ground, exsanguinating him in minutes. He fell limp to the ground.

“Does anyone else have anything to fuckingsay to me?” I shouted.

They shook their heads.

“Get this fucker ready, and clean up the mess. I want my fiancée declared a widow as soon as possible. Get our guys to sign off on a death certificate. I want it done in less than a week.”

The room was a blur as everyone moved, and I showered and changed out of my clothes. When one of the men sheepishly handed me the severed head in a bag, I went back to my car.

“Won’t the police recognize you, boss?” my driver questioned.

“Not if they don’t see who I am,” I smirked. I was dressed in regular street clothes,

and I had the cover of the night. I could always run if things went south.

When we were in front of the police station, I opened the door and threw the bag, and it landed in front of the police station's doors. Then, my driver drove off, and I laughed as he headed back to Amara's house.

I called the safehouse. "Get our guys on it now," I announced. "The package has been delivered."

Amara

A few days and many more tears later, Enzo showed up with a piece of paper in his hands.

It was a marriage license with both our names on it.

My head shot up as I looked at him. "But the divorce isn't final yet—"

"It's been taken care of," he assured me. "You're no longer a married woman, Amara. You're free. Free to marry me whenever you want."

My heart melted. I'd never seen this tender side of Enzo, but I was glad he could be gentle when I needed it the most.

But seeing our names on that piece of paper further solidified my position.

I was ready to be his wife.

"How soon can we go?" I asked.

"We can go right now," he grinned. "I know the judge, and he owes me a few favors."

He said to come by anytime, and he'll marry us."

"Let me get dressed," I breathed, getting up from my bed. "We'll need two witnesses—"

"I'll call my sister and brother-in-law," he informed. "It's well past time you met them anyway."

So I rushed to my closet, picked a cute white sundress, and slipped it over my head. I quickly combed and styled my hair and put on my usual makeup.

Mark and I had a big, fancy wedding, and I knew that I didn't want that. I wanted something intimate, just Enzo, me, and a few witnesses to make it official. I was estranged from my family, so I didn't bother inviting them. This moment was about us, not placating people I hadn't seen in years.

I took his hand, and we went to his car, where his driver brought us to a courthouse a few towns away in Hollowbrook. We exited the car, jogging up the steps, each eager to be married to the other.

"After this, we can get conjugal visits," I mused.

Enzo laughed as he opened the doors, leading me inside.

We barged into the courtroom, and the judge frowned in our direction. "Really, Enzo? All of thirty minutes of notice?" he tsked.

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“My brother’s in love. Give him a break,” a man replied, smiling at Enzo. “You’re lucky I was in between meetings.”

“This must be Amara,” the woman who must be Enzo’s sister exclaimed. “I’m Sofia. This is my brother, Alessandro, and my husband—”

“Alright, you can introduce yourselves later. I’ve got dozens of couples to marry today,” the judge grumbled. “Step forward, Enzo, and hand me the marriage license.”

He smirked as he handed the license and another piece of paper that I assumed was my divorce certificate to the judge. Enzo turned, holding his hand out to me. I smiled shyly and took it, facing him as we stood before the judge.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to witness the union in holy matrimony between Lorenzo Ricci and Amara Roberts. Marriage is a sacred institution between two people in love, and today, they solidify that bond by declaring themselves one before their loved ones,” the judge began. “Before we begin, does anyone object to this union?”

“It’ll be the last fucking thing you do,” Enzo warned as he glared at his siblings. Alessandro chuckled before the judge cleared his throat.

“Alright then. Lorenzo Ricci, do you take Amara Roberts to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, to love and cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, forsaking all others, until death do you part?” the judge asked.

“I do,” Enzo declared, his eyes smoldering as he watched me.

My heart soared at his words.

“Do you, Amara Roberts, take Lorenzo Ricci to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, to love and cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, forsaking all others, until death do you part?” the judge repeated.

“I do,” I beamed.

Enzo sighed, and his eyes softened as if he didn’t truly believe I would claim him until I already did.

“You may now exchange rings and repeat after me. With this ring, I thee wed,” the judge coached.

Enzo brandished a sleek gold band, held my hand, and placed it on top of my engagement ring. “With this ring, I thee wed.”

Sofia handed me a ring, and I smiled at the thick gold and black band with a single ruby encrusted in the band. I took Enzo’s hand and slipped the ring on his ring finger, grinning at him. “With this ring, I thee wed.”

Sofia and Alessandro stepped forward, handing each of us a small dagger. I arched my brow but took it anyway.

Enzo’s eyes darkened, and he placed the blade against his palm, lifting his head for me to do the same. I took the knife and pressed it against my palm. Enzo yanked the knife out of his hand, slicing his palm. I did the same, wincing at the sting as Sofia and Alessandro took the knives back.

“Repeat after me,” Enzo murmured, lifting his palm to me so I could see the wound. “Amara Roberts, I pledge myself to you in all ways. I am yours, and you are mine, in



blood, flesh, and bone. Our bond is unbreakable in this life and in the next.”

“Lorenzo Ricci, I pledge myself to you in all ways. I am yours, and you are mine, in blood, flesh, and bone,” I breathed, lifting my palm to face him. “Our bond is unbreakable in this life and in the next.”

Enzo smiled, and he pressed his bloody hand against mine, interlacing our fingers.

“The blood oath is complete,” the judge announced. “By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss—damn it, Enzo, let me finish!”

But he didn’t listen as he grabbed my face and pressed his lips to mine, devouring me whole as his brothers laughed. The judge sighed as he signed the marriage certificate, and when Enzo let me breathe, we signed it next.

Sofia and Alessandro signed as witnesses, and my heart felt full. I was happy to meet them before I became part of the family.

“Do you have any idea what you’re getting yourself into?” Sofia asked, pulling me aside. “I’m not sure if Enzo told you, but we’re—”

“Mafia?” I smiled. “I know, he told me. I don’t know much about the mafia, but I’m willing to learn if I need to.”

“You’ll need to,” Sofia’s husband chuckled. “To keep yourself safe from our enemies.”

My heart sank at the thought that marrying Enzo would put me in danger. But then I remembered everything that happened to me, how Enzo came for me, and whatever fear I had dissipated.

“I’m not worried about it,” I smiled, watching Enzo as he spoke with the judge.

Sofia and her husband eyed each other warily, but I didn’t care. I glanced at the gold band on my finger, simple yet sleek and elegant. It was exactly what I wanted; something that didn’t demand anyone’s attention and something that didn’t encumber me while I was writing at my job.

The engagement ring, however...

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That rock was fucking huge. It would be a challenge to work with that thing on my finger all day, but I looked forward to being constantly reminded that I was Enzo's wife now.

And for once in my life, I knew that this time, I was safe with my husband.

### Present Day

I smiled at the memories of our wedding and engagement. They helped calm my nerves as I sat on the bed in the conjugal room, the door closing behind the guard as he left the room.

I peeled my outfit from my body, revealing my white lace bridal lingerie underneath.

Unfortunately, soon after we got married, one of the clerks recognized Enzo, and he was arrested, so we didn't get to have our wedding night. This was the first time we'd be sleeping together as husband and wife.

I folded my clothes neatly and placed them on a chair in the room. I sat on the bed again, fidgeting nervously. How long would it be before they finally brought in Enzo?

My pulse raced, my heart hammering against my chest. My body buzzed with anticipation as I crossed and uncrossed my legs, impatience setting in.

I heard an audible click! The door creaked open, and there he was.

My husband. The only man who ever deserved the title, and as far as I was concerned, the only one that ever counted.

His eyes darkened as his gaze raked over me, and he quickly shut the door behind him, shielding me from the guards' view.

I took in the sight before me; Enzo, with his hair neatly coiffed, his mustache perfectly shaped, his knuckles bruised, and his eyes burning with unbridled possessiveness.

His eyes roamed, inhaling sharply at the sight of my lingerie. He stepped forward, confident as if he couldn't help himself but get closer to me.

"Are you sure you want this?" he rasped, everything about him exuding hunger.

I knew that I was. Refusing to let Mark haunt me from the grave and keep me from my well-deserved happiness and pleasure, I sauntered toward my husband. I closed the distance between us, my fingers wrapping around the collar of his jumpsuit as I gripped it tightly.

The air vibrated with tension as I looked into his eyes, my expression speaking to him without words.

"You are," he husked, his eyes blazing dangerously. He gripped my waist, backing me up until my legs hit the bed, and I fell backward onto it.

Enzo's lips met mine, our mouths melding as his tongue wrestled mine, hot and needy. There was no room for second thoughts, just raw passion.

He hooked his fingers in my panties and garter belt, pulling them down as I went rigid.

He stopped, letting my lingerie fall to my ankles as he regarded me. “If you want me to stop, tell me now, love,” he warned. “Because once I have you, it might just kill me to stop.”

“Don’t stop,” I breathed, tugging at his jumpsuit, the buttons unsnapping as I pulled it down to his waist.

He searched my expression, making sure that I meant it, before he lifted my legs, settling them above his shoulders as he knelt by the bed, dragging my hips toward his face.

“Enzo?” I breathed.

“I need to taste what’s mine,” he rasped, and his touch branding, claiming. His mouth found my pussy, already soaking for him, and he licked my entire slit. I moaned, gripping the sheets as his blue eyes locked on mine, his tongue swirling around my throbbing clit.

“Fuck!” I exclaimed, my hands sliding to his hair as my hips moved of their own accord, rubbing my clit against his tongue. He groaned, his fingers sliding up my inner thighs before he circled my entrance, and I bucked in response. “Please!” I shouted.

“My little wife asking so nicely,” he husked, shoving his fingers inside me. My eyes crossed as he curled them, stroking my G-spot so expertly that tears welled in my eyes.

“What am I to you?” he asked against my clit, his hot breath fanning over my sensitive flesh.

“Mine,” I panted, the words sending a thrill through me.

“Your what?” he teased between licks, flicking his tongue expertly, and a single tear escaped.

“My husband,” I moaned. “You’re my husband.”

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“That’s a good little wife,” he hummed, the vibrations making white-hot pleasure spear through my clit. “Remember our vows, baby. We forsook all others. That means this,” he kissed my clit. “This is all mine. Only I can do this to you, love. Only I can touch you, and only I can make you scream.”

He leaned in and nipped my clit, raking his fingers across my g-spot, and I shouted, starts bursting behind my eyes as I shuddered. Waves of ecstasy crashed over me, drowning me with the intensity of its force.

“Fuck, that’s right, my little wife, cover my face with your release,” he groaned, gently lapping at my clit as I writhed beneath him.

When my orgasm waned, Enzo stood, shrugging off his jumpsuit. I admired the hard planes of his abs, his sculpted muscles, and the intricate tattoos covering his skin. He leaned over me, pressing the straps of my outfit down my arms and pulling it off me.

He gripped one of my legs, holding it flush against his shoulder, and positioned his hard, veiny cock against my entrance. I was startled, too caught up in the afterglow as he pushed inside me slowly, feeding me every thick inch.

“Enzo,” I whispered, breathless as he filled me, bottoming out inside me, losing himself in the wet heat of my cunt, already pulsing around him greedily.

He moved in a slow, steady rhythm as he shuttled in and out of me. His teeth clenched, and his jaw ticked, and he fisted the sheets on either side of my face.

He was holding himself back, I realized. He was gentle and patient, easing me back

into pleasure with tender care.

But that's not what I signed up for.

"Don't hold back," I whispered.

His face twisted in visible agony. "Amara..."

"I need you. Not the muted, watered-down version of you, Enzo. I need the real you, raw and unfiltered. I accepted you as the way you are, all rough edges and sharp thorns," I breathed, reaching up. I raked my nails down his back, and he arched, hissing, his eyes dark and feral.

"I married you, and don't you dare keep my husband from me now. I need you more than ever. Fuck me, Enzo," I urged.

He shuddered, still hesitant, hanging on to his control by a thread as he slowly pushed himself inside me.

I reached for his hair and gripped it, twisting it as he inhaled sharply at the sting. "I give myself to you, mind, body, and soul. Now give yourself to me, my love. Give me everything. Claim me!"

He let out a haunted groan as the last of his control snapped, and his hand gripped my throat roughly as he speared inside me.

I moaned, pleasure consuming every nerve as he thrust, his cock banishing every trace of anyone there before him. His grip was tight, barely letting me breathe, and he changed his angle, making my eyes roll back as he took over. Enzo was animalistic now, a feral beast as he pressed his body against mine, reaching between our bodies as he stroked my sensitive clit.



“You want to be claimed, my little wife?” he groaned, impaling me repeatedly. “You want the monster? Here I am.”

I cried out, rapture barreling through me, my vision going white as I splintered, fracturing into a million pieces under him. I screamed, repeating his name as he kept up his bruising pace, prolonging my release, the intensity only building.

He roared as he lost himself inside me, exploding as I thrashed beneath him, and he filled me with his hot seed. Moans fell from my lips, and I wrapped my legs and arms around him, cementing him to me.

“You’ll never be rid of me now,” he declared, chuckling against my neck as he sucked, leaving little marks.

“Good,” I sighed, gripping his knuckles as I frowned. “You need to stop fighting.”

“You keep me grounded, mi angelo,” he confessed.

I smiled, holding him to me, refusing to let him go.

And I never did.

Even with cold steel bars between us, our love had never been caged. One day, he’d break out of here toward the life we were always meant to have, hand in hand, where we were always meant to be.

And there wasn’t anything or anyone in this world that could stop us.