



Sworn to the Enemy

Author: *D.C. Becks*

Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, New Adult

Description: It began with a one-night stand...

And ended with his ring on my finger.

Enzo Mancini was supposed to be a one-night mistake.

A stranger with stormy gray eyes and a filthy mouth.

The man who made me moan in the dark... before I knew his name.

Now I know exactly who he is.

He's the devil in a tailored suit.

The man who vows to destroy everything I love.

And now, my husband.

He thinks I'm a pawn.

But I'm not here to bend.

I'm here to burn.

I was supposed to be his enemy.

But now he's obsessed,

And ready to walk through fire for me...

And the baby in my belly.

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Prologue

Serafina

USA.

Four years ago...

“For your challenge, Sarah, I dare you to go flirt with that guy.” Mia’s voice drones into my subconscious.

“Uh?” I say, staring in confusion at the three of my friends who have had a little too much to drink while I’ve been wallowing.

If you aren’t going to drink, well then, that’s your challenge. He’s been staring at you all night. I suppose it won’t be too much of a challenge?”

Guilt washes over me for refusing their offer to drink at every turn. Of all the things I can do, drinking isn’t one of them. I’m never able to get alcohol down in my stomach, not even a little quantity. It’s why I always steer clear of it whenever we’re out, nursing my coke in silence while the girls do their thing.

Besides, I’d been thinking I wouldn’t be here with them tonight if I hadn’t decided to stop being wary by my father’s present, yet non-present influence. Only two days ago did I call him to get the man always subtly trailing me off my back. The girls would laugh if they knew that I, and by extension, them, had been shadowed all this time. Even now, I glance around to make sure he’s not lurking. Lucky for me, he isn’t.

“Sarah? Adelaide chirps.

“What guy?” I say, already craning my neck to catch a view. The other girls twist their necks too.

I don’t have to look further because I see the man immediately. He’s looking straight at me, and I suck in my stomach, my breath dying in my lungs at the intensity of those black eyes on me. His gaze is probing, unraveling me in places that had been dormant for too long. In that moment, the world falls away, the noises around slowly ebbing until it’s just the two of us.

Jesus. The man is striking.

He’s dressed in a black tailored suit that molds his perfect frame. Even from where I sit, I can see the bulging muscles underneath his clothing. He’s sitting lazily, head above others, cross-legged, arms across his broad chest as his eyes burrow intently into mine.

I mentally shiver.

The low hum starts from low in my belly, vibrating through me until it’s wrapped around me. Goosebumps race across my skin, all nerve endings standing on edge as this man practically undresses me with his eyes.

“Hello!” Mia snaps her fingers at me, jolting me out of the spell I’d fallen into.

The noises resume around me, and I look at my friends in a daze. Then suddenly, I remember where I am. A breath whooshes out of me as I’d held it in for too long.

“Uh-oh. Sarah is taken. Fuck me,” Rose says, her voice throaty.

My eyes slither back to the man who's still looking at me. For a moment, I entertain the thought that he's another of my father's devises to guard me. But this man with the brooding and intense stare would never in a million years pass for a bodyguard. He exudes a dark aura that's both appealing and a bit frightening. Suddenly, I find myself wanting to know what makes him tick.

“Oh, shit, she's standing up,” Adelaide mumbles.

Whoops. I didn't even realize that.

I hear Rose's reverent whisper of “make it count”, before my ears go deaf to the sounds around me.

I walk towards him like a lady on a mission, placing one foot solidly before the other. My steps don't falter. I don't stop to mull. I just simply walk, until I'm standing right there in front of him. This up close, I'm nearly keeling over from tension that has my body wrung tight.

I wrestle with the compulsion to stay and see this through. What about him has me taking on a silly challenge? He's striking, yes, but I've seen my fair share of sexy-assin men. I let my eyes remain on his face, my resolve firmly in place.

His eyes lazily trace up my form until it rests once again on my face. God. I squirm under the intensity of his stare.

“You've been staring at me.” My voice is a choked whisper that barely makes it past my lips. My throat is parched. He hasn't even touched me, and yet, here I am, reduced to a complete idiot.

A half smile forms on his face, drawing attention to the fullness of his lips. The man is dynamite. What would it do to me if he turns the full effect of his smile on me? I'd

give anything to have him kiss me till I'm holding on to him for dear life.

He uncrosses his legs to part strong, powerful thighs, their muscles rippling beneath his black pants. It boosts my confidence. I step into his space, my legs almost making contact with his thighs.

“Why were you staring?”

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This time, he sits straight in his chair, and I'm looking right into the bottomless pit of dark eyes. My breath snags. His gaze is unreadable, but I catch the lust simmering in it. My legs are properly encased in his now. If I take just one step, my knees are going to buckle, and I'm going to fall straight into his lap.

I let my eyes roam over his face. His black hair is slicked back, highlighting strong features— a sharp jawline, a distinctive nose. His brow is bushy, and I see a scar running lightly over one eyebrow. It only adds more to his appeal.

God.

If Michelangelo had tried to sculpt this man, he'd have failed woefully. He is literal perfection.

“Because I want to fuck you.” His voice is so deep, it rumbles through my stomach. Is that an accent I spot?

I blink at him, not quite hearing what he'd said.

“I want to fuck you,” he says again. He stands up, and I'm forced to take a step back. Now, he's towering over me. I look up the length of his taut stomach, his hard chest, to his face. Those eyes. My stomach clenches in response.

I lick my lips. I'd heard him right. He wants to fuck me. Such straightforwardness. On another man's lips, I'd find it crude, and even now, I'd be running the other way. But on this man's sensuous lips, it sounds like an intriguing promise, something anticipatory. For the life of me, I can't fathom why I'd be anticipating a stranger's

touch.

And I find myself looking forward to the pleasure this man can give me with his hands and mouth. With his cock. For tonight, I want to be wild and naughty. I want to let go of control.

Fuck playing it safe.

I step into him again until I'm up against his chest, standing on the tip of my heels, my head stretched to hold his stare. My whole body is on fire for this man.

“Let's go,” I say.

A sound wrests out of him. It sounds suspiciously like laughter.

Is he laughing at me?

Heat suffuses my cheeks in mortification. I start to step back, but he grabs my arm and pulls me to him, his grip rough, yet tender.

“This is going to be a night you will never forget.” His voice is gravelly, but it carries the weight of the desire he feels. It scrapes on my sensitive skin, making me shiver mentally.

I smile up at him, my eyes twinkling as relief courses through me. We're still on. I fall in step beside him, his hand still gripping tightly as I let him lead me outside. I spare a quick glance to the girls where they sit with their mouths agape, their expressions priceless.

Wordlessly, I follow the man whose name I don't know, and frankly don't care to know out of the bar. The earlier drizzle has cleared and is now replaced by cloudy

skies. American weather at it again. I shiver momentarily and burrow into my coat.

I follow him into the luxury hotel beside the bar and into the elevator, my tongue still stuck on the roof of my mouth. The elevator opens up to a carpeted hallway, and he leads me up to a room. With frayed nerves, I watch as he inserted a key card into the keyhole and as soon as the door clangs open, I'm ushered in.

The moment the door closes behind us, I'm swept into a smoldering kiss. My softness to the hard contours of his body. Our tongues clash in a war for dominance. I melt into him, letting him take the lead.

His arms go around me as he deepens the kiss. My hands roam over his face, the back of his neck. His tongue twirls in my mouth, pulling mine into a dance of frenzy. I couldn't be closer. I want to meld into him, into the hotness of his mouth as he claims me.

Fuzzily, I register him pulling off my coat. I shrug out of it, my lips still locked to his. His palm splays across my back, the heat shooting through the thin material of my clothing. I moan into his mouth.

“Così sensuale.”

I barely catch his Italian. My hands are busy trailing up his neck to his hair. It's coarse, yet velvety and I'm lost in its texture. He anchors me slightly away from him. He sucks my lower lip into his mouth before releasing it with a plop.

I'm panting and he's breathing hard as he moves back to run his gaze over me. I squirm under the intensity of his gaze.

“Take off your dress.” It's a command. One I hurriedly pay obeisance to.

My hands tremble as I pull my shirt off over my head. I'm left standing in my black bra and my jeans. His eyes are smoldering as they take in my nude form.

“Take them off.” His voice is gruff.

I unbutton my jeans, and hooking my thumbs into the top side, I pull it down and kick it off my feet. Now, I'm only standing in my black panties and bra. His eyes are hot and encouraging as they trail my body. I pause for an infinitesimal moment before I wiggle out of my panties. In the same breath, I hook my hands behind my back to unhook my bra.

His dark eyes glint as they rove over my naked form. I fight the urge to shield my body from his appraisal. I stand there as his eyes trail across my skin, leaving fire in their wake.

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He prowls slowly towards me. I stand, rooted to the spot as he approaches. His eyes are twin pools of lust, burning with hunger and desire. It makes my skin prickle, my core ache. My body is abuzz with delicious fire. He stops a few feet before me, and I look up at him, my breath catching in my throat.

The air between us is thick, charged, like the storm brewing outside. His gaze remains hotly, on my face, then trails down my body in a sensual descent. It's like licking a trail down my body. I tremble, not from cold but from the raw need pulsing through me. He hasn't touched me yet, but I feel him everywhere. His gaze is like a caress that sets me alight.

“Bellissima,” he murmurs, his voice a low rumble, that Italian accent curling around the word like smoke.

He steps closer, his suit jacket brushing my arm, the fabric cool against my flushed skin. My nipples harden. They strain against the air, and his eyes drop, noticing, his lips twitching into a half-smile. God, that smile. It's dangerous, promising things I'm not sure I can handle, but I want it all. I want him to break me open, to make me forget who I am, just for tonight.

He reaches out, his fingers grazing my collarbone. It's slow, it's deliberate. The touch is electric, shooting sparks down my spine, and I bite my lip to stifle a moan. His hand trails lower, skimming the swell of my breast, his thumb brushing my nipple, teasing, not quite giving me what I want.

“You're shaking,” he says, voice rough, his eyes locked on mine. “Nervous?”

So, he's the type to talk a woman through it.

I shake my head, defiant, even as my body betrays me, trembling under his touch. "No," I whisper, my voice hoarse. "I want this."

His smile widens, all teeth, predatory. "Good."

His hand cups my breast, squeezing, his thumb circling my nipple until it's a tight peak, aching for more. I gasp, my head tipping back, and he steps closer, his body pressing against mine, the hard planes of his chest, his thighs, pinning me. I feel his cock, thick and hard through his pants, pressing against my stomach, and my core clenches, wet heat pooling between my legs. God, I'm already dripping for him, and he's barely started.

He leans down, his lips brushing my ear, his breath hot. "I'm going to fuck you until you scream," he says, and the words hit like a spark, igniting me.

I grab his shirt, my fingers fumbling with the buttons, desperate to feel his skin. He chuckles. "Let me."

He steps back, and already, my skin feels bereft. I watch him with hooded eyes as he shrugs out of his jacket, then his shirt, until he's bare from the waist up. His chest is sculpted, dusted with dark hair and abs that are to-die-for. My breath snags as my eyes catch the tattoo on his forearm. I step closer, my eyes trained on his forearm as he flexes it. My tongue itches to trace the artistry of it.

It looks like a sugar skull adorned with intricate details that seem to dance in the shadows. Delicate roses bloom around the skull, their petals unfolding like tender whispers, vibrant and full of life. The bold black lines and subtle gray shading gave the design a haunting beauty, as if the skull itself is being reclaimed by the lushness of the flowers.

This man, whoever he is, isn't someone to cross. Good thing I'm only in it for tonight. Nothing more, nothing less.

I raise a finger to trace the ink of the tattoo, my fingers shaking. He grabs my wrist, pulling my hand to his mouth, kissing my palm, his tongue flicking out, hot and wet.

My body turns to mesh. I moan softly, and he pulls me against him, his lips crashing into mine. The kiss is fierce, his tongue wreaking havoc in my mouth as he draws mine into his mouth, sucking, licking, twirling. His hands roam my back, gripping my ass, squeezing hard. I press closer, my breasts flattening against his chest, my hips grinding against his hard cock, seeking friction.

He groans into my mouth, his fingers digging into my flesh, and it makes me feel powerful. Like I'm unraveling him as much as he's unraveling me. "Fuck," he mutters, breaking the kiss, his lips trailing down my neck, sucking, biting, leaving marks I'll feel tomorrow. But, I don't care.

He pushes me back, guiding me to the bed. I don't hesitate. The silk sheets cool against my skin as I fall onto it. He looms over me, his dark eyes predatory. I spread my legs, completely shameless, wanting him to see how much I want this. His gaze drops, and he licks his lips. My pussy clenches and I swallow a moan.

A low growl rumbles in his chest. "Look at you," he says, voice thick. His hands move down inch by torturous inch. I stare, enraptured as he undoes his belt, the clink of metal loud in the quiet room. "So wet for me."

He slides his pants off and I see the telltale sign of his erection. Fuck. I lick my lips. His boxers go next, and I suck in a breath. His cock is thick, long, hard, the tip glistening. I see the crisscross of veins mapped out like a design. My mouth waters, my core throbbing with desperate need.

He climbs onto the bed. His hands grip my thighs, spreading them wider. I'm exposed, vulnerable, but I don't care. I want him to take me, to fill me. He leans down, his lips brushing my inner thigh. His breath is hot and teasing. I squirm, my hands fisting the sheets, and he chuckles darkly before his tongue flicks out, tasting me.

I cry out, my hips bucking, but he holds me down, his hands firm, his mouth relentless. He licks me, slow, deliberate, his tongue circling my clit, sucking, teasing, until I'm panting, my body trembling, pleasure building like a wave. He inserts his tongue into my pussy and I nearly come off the bed. It's a ruthless onslaught on my senses. He withdraws his tongue and pushes it back in with calculated force. I cry out as I fist my hands in his hair. He quickens the pace, tongue-fucking me in fast motions.

"God," I gasp, my hands in his hair, pulling, urging him on.

Then, he stops. I whimper.

"Shhh," he croons.

His eyes on me, he slides a finger inside me and I gasp out loud, my hips rising to meet the thrust of his finger. He withdraws it, then inserts two fingers, curling them, hitting that spot that makes my eyes roll back in my head. He doesn't stop. He continues to thrust his fingers in and out in my pussy as sloppy sounds of his fingers fucking me fill the room. I grip the sheets tight as his fingers push in harder, deeper.

I'm close, so close. I can feel my body tightening. Then suddenly, he pulls back, his lips glistening and his eyes locked on mine. I cry out as he moves off me.

"Not yet," he says in a rough voice. "Time to fill you up with my cock."

I watch him go to the drawers and pull out a condom. He sheathes it and returns to the bed.

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“Open up for me.”

I part my thighs wider, needing his cock inside me with an urgency that's cloying. He cups his palm over his cock, then rubs up and down over it. Then, he moves up, his body covering mine. I grip his shoulders as he poises his cock over the entrance of my pussy. It brushes my clit, teasing me. I wrap my legs around him, pulling him closer, desperate for his cock.

“Please,” I whisper, and it's all the encouragement he needs. I see him smirk before he stabs into me in one hard, deep thrust, his cock stretching me wide in one brutal stroke. I scream, my nails digging into his back, the burn of his size almost too much, but so fucking perfect.

My core clenches around him, greedy, wanting every inch. His cock is so thick and pulsing, filling me completely, and the raw heat of it sets my nerves on fire. His breath is ragged, his muscles taut under my hands as they rove over his broad back.

I feel him holding still, allowing for me to adjust to his huge size, but I don't want slow. I want him to wreck me, to fuck me until I'm nothing but sensation. I want him to fuck me into oblivion.

I wrap my legs around his waist, pulling him deeper, my hips rocking, urging him on. He starts to move within me, slow at first, each thrust deliberate. His cock drags against my walls, hitting every sensitive spot. I moan loudly and shamelessly as my hands grip his shoulders, feeling the flex of muscle as he drives into me.

The sound of the bed creaking fills my ear. The room fills with the wet, filthy sound

of our bodies colliding, skin slapping skin, my slickness coating him, easing his way.

His pace quickens and he begins to thrust harder and deeper, his hips slamming into mine with a force that jars my body, my breasts bouncing, nipples aching for his touch. As if I'd communicated my thoughts to him, he grabs my breast, fondling and squeezing tight before pinching my nipple. I gasp and arch into him as sensations overcome me.

He's relentless as he continues to pound into me, the thick head of his cock hitting that spot deep inside that makes my vision blur. I arch my back, pushing my hips up, meeting him thrust for thrust, desperate for more. "Fuck," I gasp, barely coherent, my nails raking down his back, leaving red trails I know he'll feel later.

He grabs my thighs, spreading them wider, angling himself to go deeper, and I scream again, the new angle sending sparks through me. His cock feels impossibly big, stretching me, owning me, and I'm drowning in it, in the raw, dirty pleasure of being fucked by a stranger.

His hands are rough, bruising my hips as he holds me in place. His thrusts are brutal and unyielding. I'm dripping, my juices slicking my thighs, his balls slapping against me with every drive, the sound obscene, driving me higher.

I feel myself nearing. I reach down, my fingers finding my clit, rubbing fast, desperate. He watches, his eyes dark and feral, his lips parted as he pants. My body's trembling, pleasure coiling tight in my belly, ready to snap. He slaps my hand away, replacing it with his thumb, circling my clit in rough and precise motions. I cry out, my hips bucking, the sensation too much, too good.

"God," I moan, my voice breaking, my hands fisting the sheets, clawing at his arms, anything to anchor me. He leans down, his chest pressing against my breasts, the friction of his skin on my nipples sending jolts through me. Then, he lowers his lips.

I gasp and it reverberates through our sticky body as his hot lips close over my nipple. I jerk off the bed as he suckles hard, his tongue flicking the tight peak with slow, deliberate swirls. I move my hands from his back to grip his firm buttocks as he continues to slam into me. He groans, the sound vibrating against my skin, and suckles harder, pulling my nipple into his mouth, teasing with soft nips that make me moan throatily.

He switches to my other nipple, his mouth greedy, sucking with a hunger that sends sparks straight to my core. His teeth graze the sensitive peak in a soft bite, and I cry out, my hips bucking to meet his. His thrusts are harder and even more brutal, the filthy sound mixing with my moans and the wet pull of his mouth.

My nipples are swollen and tingling, every flick of his tongue, every hard suck pushing me closer to the edge. He trails his mouth up to my neck and nibbles at the skin there. My pussy clenches around his cock. I'm close, so close. I dig my fingers into his back. He sinks his teeth into my neck, marking me, and the pain mixes with pleasure, pushing me over.

I come hard, my orgasm ripping through me, the walls of my pussy clenching and convulsing around his cock, squeezing him tight. I scream, my body shaking as pleasure crashes over me like a wave, drowning me. I put my arms around him, holding me tight as the waves subside.

He keeps fucking me, his thrusts erratic, his breath heavy, and I know he's close. I want it. I need it. I put a trembling hand between us to grab his balls. I squeeze it lightly and fondle it. I hear his grunt as my fingers cup around his cock, as they slide in and out of me. He grips my hips in a vise.

"Ah," he moans.

Suddenly, I feel his control shatter. He thrusts wild into me, a low growl tearing from

his throat as he comes, hot and deep. He keeps moving, slow, shallow thrusts, drawing it out, until he's empty. His breath is ragged, his hands still gripping my hips hard.

He carefully rests his weight on me. He remains inside me. I feel the pulsing of his cock. I moan, my body trembling, spent. He pulls out and the loss of him leaves me aching. But I know that's it. There can be no more.

He moves from the bed to dispose of the condom and I stretch languidly like a cat. I'm thoroughly sated. I've just been fucked in a wild and dirty way by a man whose name I don't know. And frankly, I don't care to. Tonight, I'm not Serafina Rossi, not a mafia princess. I'm just a woman who's had her sexual needs met.

Tomorrow, we'll both disappear out of each other's lives, and then, I can worry about the consequences. Somehow, I bet there's one coming.

1

Enzo

I slam my fist into the snitch's face, and his lip rips open, blood splashing my knuckles like a fucking flood. He's tied to a chair, some punk who thought he could talk, and I'm breaking him down.

Matteo's right there, grinning like a sick bastard, slicing his knife across the guy's throat, blood gushing out hot and thick. The fucker chokes, gurgling, and I smash my boot into his chest, ribs cracking loud. My blood's roaring, every hit feeding that fire inside me.

He's thrashing, spit and blood spraying, but I don't give a shit. I grab his hair, yank hard, and punch his jaw. His teeth bust loose, clattering on the floor. Matteo stabs his

gut, twisting deep, and his guts spill out to the pristine white floor, wet and stinking, slopping at my feet. I'm grinning, high on the blood, the violence. I slam my fist into his nose and Gus cartilage pops like a twig. He screams and begs, but I laugh, loving every second.

I step back, my chest heaving as the adrenaline rushes through me, energizing me. Matteo takes over, slashing the guy's arm, blood arcing wild across the room.

"Sing now, prick," Matteo growls, kicking him hard as his chair crashes down with a thud. I grab a bat off the table and swing it down, smashing his knee. His bone shatters and I hear the crunching sound. He's howling now, voice raw, and I'm buzzing, every hit a fucking rush.

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Matteo's cackling, carving the guy's hand, fingers dropping like garbage, blood pooling thick. It's everywhere—my hands, my shirt, the air heavy with death. I swing the bat again, cracking his skull, and he's slurring, eyes rolling back, fading.

"You're done," I snarl, smashing his face, flesh caving in. He's twitching, barely alive, a bloody mess and I'm wired, pulse hammering.

I swing one last time, cracking his jaw, teeth flying wild, and he's out. His head lolls to the side, blood dripping slow. I drop the bat as my chest heaves, my hands slick with red. Matteo wipes his knife, chuckling low, and steps back. The snitch is dead, fucked beyond recognition, body slumped in a pool of his own mess. The room's quiet except for my heavy breathing. I flex my fists, knuckles raw and throbbing. That kill's still burning me up, that high I can't shake and it makes me restless as hell.

I turn to Matteo, his grin fading as he lights a smoke. "I need to shake this shit off," I say, voice rough, feeling that edge clawing at me.

He hands the cigar he's lit over to me. "What do you need me to do?"

I step over the snitch's dead body, careful not to step my foot in the pool of blood, but it still manages to smear it. "Fucking asshole is still a problem even in death."

Matteo chuckles, lighting his own smoke. "Want me to go fuck him up once more?"

I drag long and hard on the cigarette and release a long exhale of smoke in a swirl. "No. Get Alanna arranged and ready for me. I need to fuck to take the edge off."

Matteo grins like he's just won a jackpot. He holds his fist out in an attempt to fist bump me, and I glare at him. He drops his fist.

“Okay. No fist bumping.”

I shake my head at his attempt to lighten me up. I take a long drag on the cigar again, smoke curling thick in my lungs. “Just get her ready,” I mutter.

Matteo nods, already pulling out his phone to do the needful as we head for the car. I slide into the driver’s seat, black SUV growling awake as I fire it up. I peel out, leaving the warehouse and the gore behind. My knuckles grip the wheel tightly, tension and the high of the kill still burning me up. Nothing a good fuck can't cure.

Matteo is on the phone, his voice low. “Alanna, be ready. The boss is coming.” He hangs up, glancing over at me. “She’s all set.” I don't say anything, just nod, my eyes trained on the road ahead of me. Matteo attunes himself to my mood and falls silent as I drive on.

Dusk has fallen and the streets are a long stretch of darkness. I weave through seamlessly without a word, but my mind travels back to minutes ago with the snitch. It felt so good punching him and having his face cave under my fist. That's his punishment for crossing me. No one who crosses me lives to tell the story.

I pull into the driveway leading up to the mansion that looms ahead. My mansion. It's all stone walls and iron gates. Black marble columns guard the entrance, windows glinting like the sharp edge of a blade. It's a fortress built for blood and on blood. Effective to keep the enemy out. We've never been conquered within the gates of the mansion. We've never been conquered at all.

My father had made sure to fortify the land with the blood of our enemies. It's the reason we're greatly feared. Tales told of death whispering within the confines of the

mansion filters back to me. It's an overreach, but it's not worth denying.

The gates slide open as we near them. We pull up, gravel crunching under the tires. I kill the engine and turn to Matteo.

“No interruptions,” I growl, meaning it. He nods and waves his hand as if to say ‘get it over with’. He's the only one who can get away with such disregard.

I climb out, slamming the door. The night air is cool, the sky dotted with the glow of the stars, but I'm burning. I bound up the sprawling staircase that leads to the interior of the mansion. Inside, the foyer is all dark, polished wood and crystal, chandeliers sparkling overhead, throwing shadows like knives. They add to the gloomy atmosphere I rather prefer.

I don't stop. Instead, I head straight for the chamber where I most definitely know Alanna's waiting. It's my spot for this shit. It's tucked away, no questions asked, although no one would dare.

I push the door open, and there's Alanna, sprawled on the bed, waiting like she'd been told. The room is dimly lit, but I see her clearly. She's barely dressed, a black lace thong clinging to her hips. Her generous tits are out, one leg bent, posing like a fucking painting. Her blonde hair spills over the silk sheets, and her smile is lustful. She knows what I want.

I don't feel shit for her, never have. She's my plaything. She's here for my cock. Her job is to sate my sexual appetite. In turn, I keep her fed, clothed, safe. Same deal with all my women. They know the score: I fuck, they obey—no strings.

I don't bother with a preamble—in this case, foreplay. Foreplay is for romantic assholes. I'm not romantic. Never have been. I like to be upfront with what I want, and with my women, what they see is what they get.

Facing Alanna and never taking my eyes off her, I rip off my shirt. The blood from the dead snitch lying in the warehouse is still caked on my skin. Matteo would arrange for how to get rid of the body. I kick off my boots in one smooth move. My pants are next. As it drops to expose my already hard cock, jutting out, thick and ready, I see her smack her lips.

Blood and fighting always do this to me—get me raging, needing release. Alanna's eyes roam my broad chest, inked with a mafia crest: skulls and roses tangled in barbed wire, wrapping my pecs, screaming who I am. I'm built like a fucking tank, every muscle carved from years of breaking bones.

“Come here,” I bark, and Alanna slides off the bed with no hesitation, her eyes locked on mine. “Kneel,” I command. She drops to her knees, lips painted red inches from my cock. She stares up at me, bold as fuck, her mouth gaping open. “I'm going to fuck your mouth so hard. I hope you're ready for me.” She nods, her eyes never leaving mine.

I stroke myself, slow, watching her watch me. I can already feel the excited tingle that precedes my ultimate release. My cock is now rock-hard, the crisscrossed veins prominent. “Open,” I say, grabbing a handful of her hair and pulling her head back hard. She doesn't flinch. I tug at her jaw and her lips part further. Good. She's ready.

I palm my cock, about to shove it in her mouth when a knock bangs on the door, loud and fucking rude.

“Cazzo!” I roar, swearing in Italian, my blood spiking. I'd told Matteo in explicit terms that I wanted no interruptions. What part of that didn't he understand? “Stronzo del cazzo!” I swear again.

I yank my pants up. My cock's still hard and my once fitted pants now barely contain it. I storm to the door. From my periphery, I see Alanna making a move to stand.

“Stay!” I snap at her, and she freezes. She instantly goes back kneeling, like a good girl. That's not to say she wouldn't pay for that one disobedient act later. I stalk to the door and rip it open to behold Matteo standing there, a frown etched into his features. Matteo only looks like that when he's got bad news.

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“This better be fucking good,” I growl, leaning into the doorframe, my fists clenched. Matteo shifts, his unease apparent. “It’s urgent, Enzo.”

I glare, waiting. “Go on.” He swallows hard. “Our docks just got hit.” I clench my fists harder. This is bad enough news. I raise a brow, indicating for him to continue. “Rossis are behind it. I haven’t found out all the details, but right now, it’s a fucking mess.”

Fucking Rossis.

My vision goes red and I feel the anger clamp on my heart like a vise. The name Rossi is like a knife in my gut. Those fuckingbastards. They’re my sworn enemies. In sleep, I’d smell Rossi blood if it ever smeared itself on me. They’re the ones who bled my mom dry. My jaw locks as I rock on my feet, my eyes burning with rage. My body’s humming, gearing for war

Matteo clocks it. He knows of my deep-seated hatred for the Rossis. All of my associates know. He steps into my line of vision and puts his hands to rest on my shoulders. “Let’s not act rashly, Enzo. We can handle this calmly. Talk it out.”

I shove his hands off my shoulders as all-consuming rage nearly blinds me. Talk it out? I laugh, and it’s cold and sharp. I slam my fist into the wall and I feel the plaster crack beneath my fist. “Fuck calm,” I spit out in a deadly voice. “They want to play, I’ll bury them.”

My blood’s roaring in my veins, that kill-high mixing with this new hate almost choking me, making me itch for a fight. I turn to steely eyes to Matteo. “Get the crew.

Now. We're meeting."

"Enzo..." His voice is a warning. A plea for me to think this through. Fuck that. The Rossis hadn't exercised that diplomacy when they murdered my mother in cold blood.

"Now!" I ground out and he knows better to obey my order this time around.

I spin back into the chamber, where Alanna's still kneeling, waiting. For a while, I'd forgotten her existence. My arousal is well out of the way now, and with the anger simmering in my blood, I bark, "out."

She scrambles up without a protest. She flounders as she grabs her shit. Within seconds, she's gone. They all listen—always do.

When she's gone, my chest heaves as I try to envision it through my mind's eye—the Rossi faces I want to smash. If it's war they're vying for, I'll give them one they'll choke on.

2

Serafina

If looks could kill, the man sitting across the table from me would be a rotting corpse by now. Luis. He's leaning back in his chair, smirking across the table, eyes gleaming and teeth bared like he thinks he's got me.

The nerve of him.

The meeting room's heavy with cigar smoke, dark oak walls closing us in, a single chandelier casting yellowish light over the ten men around me. My father's crew, leather jackets and battle scars. These battle scars tell different stories of various

victories, never defeat. It's stifling, the smoke, and it grates on my nerves. I should be used to it by now, but by God, the only thing it does is make me irritable. And now, Luis thinks it is wise to push my buttons further.

“We’ve been at this game longer than you. We know how it works. You should need our suggestions.”

I fold my arms across my chest, pinning him with a deadly glare. I know it’s because I’m a woman, that’s why they keep underestimating me. They're all trying to frustrate my efforts, because how dare a woman head them in a meeting, even though I'm only just filling in for my father. My brother Riccardo would be here instead of me, but he's out on a mission. My father would rather have me head this meeting, even though he thinks I'm inexperienced, than show how weak he's gotten. His health is deteriorating fast.

“Say that one more time and I’ll have you chew your words.”

“Serafina,” Luis drawls, voice dripping with thick condescension, “you’re playing with fire. That port’s a trap. We stick to the old routes.” The others murmur, some nodding, others eyeing me like I’m a kid.

I lean forward, elbows on the table, my black blazer sharp against my white silk blouse. I level Luis with a compelling look “Luis,” I say, my voice deceptively low, “you’re scared of a little heat? That port cuts our time by half. We move faster, we make more. Or do you prefer losing money?” I see the moment his smirk falters. Good. But he doesn't go down without a fight. None of them do. That's why they're my father's associates. None of them can be pushovers. He opens his mouth again, ready to push.

A snigger cuts through the room. It grabs the men's attention. It's none other than Aida, sitting to my right. She gasps theatrically and covers her mouth when she sees

the ripple she's caused, her dark curls bouncing.

And she's still sniggering. She's my ally. She runs part of my father's money-laundering gig on the side with me. Most of the time, her presence is tolerable, but right now, her presence is off-putting. She must know that that laugh pisses me off.

I shoot her a glare, and she shuts up, eyes dropping quickly to her notes.

The room quiets again, tension so thick I can squeeze the moisture from it. I stand, heels clicking on the hardwood, and point at Luis who still has that condescending look on his face. I don't mince words as I address him.

“You oppose me again, you're out. I don't care how long you've been here. Cross me openly, and you're done.” My voice is ice, it brooks no room for argument.

Although they like to underestimate me at every turn and pretend they know better than me, even though I mostly keep out of their hair, they know my bite—vicious, quiet, deadly. Luis shifts, jaw tight, but he stays silent. Brilliant.

I shift my steely gaze to the other men, daring them to further oppose me. They don't rise to my bait, they're not stupid. I nod my head. “Good. We go with my plan. Gather some more men and have it done. Make it quick and efficient. We're done here.”

That's it. Meeting is over. The men file out, not a single cough or grumble. I've made myself clear. I exit the room after them. Aida falls in step with me, our heels echoing through the villa's halls.

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The walls are stone, lined with old paintings of my ancestors, their eyes cold and judging, but they don't scare me. Red velvet curtains frame tall windows, sunlight barely sneaking in. The gloom suits the villa. We pass by the paintings and my eyes briefly lift to them. I wonder if they're proud of me, of the woman I've become. It's a trifling thought that disappears as quickly as it formed.

“Luis is sweet on you,” Aida teases, nudging me. She's always coming up with ridiculous theories.

“Oh?” My mouth forms.

She spares me a look. “Of course, he does. That’s why he’s been at your throat since you got back from Yale.”

I scoff, rolling my eyes. “I don’t give a shit. I hate their games and their guts. Always underestimating me and thinking they can get away with it every time.” Aida grins. I wonder if I've made a joke. She can be a little infuriating, but I’m fond of her anyway. “You love a challenge, Fina. Maybe that’s why he keeps trying.” Not willing to continue the conversation, I wave her off.

“Enough.”

She clamps her mouth shut.

We pass the armory. Its entrance door is open, and even without looking in, I can see the racks of guns gleaming behind glass. We move past the armory to the dining hall where a long mahogany table sits under a gold chandelier. It's where my father and I

often have our meals since I finished from Yale.

The villa's a maze, built and stocked appropriately for war, its every corner hiding secrets—hiding corpses—one of them being my mom. I shudder as the memory of the morning I'd gotten the call of her death threatens to assail me.

As we step out into the open, one of my father's most trusted aides, Carlo, appears, his face grim.

“Serafina, your father wants you.”

I nod. “Thank you, Carlo.” I turn to Aida. “Study the notes and correspond with Luis and the team. I want to know if my plan is being carried out immediately. I want no time wasted.”

Aida nods. “Yes, Serafina.” She turns and walks away.

I head for the only place I know my father will be. The orchard. It's at the back, rows of lemon trees heavy with fruit, their scent pungent in the air. I push a stray curl behind my ear.

True to my prediction, my father's there. He's walking slowly, his gait lopsided as he leans on a carved ebony cane. His wheelchair is beside him. He'd rather brave a few walks than stay cooped in that wheelchair all day long.

I watch him.

Papa to me, Domenico to his associates, and the patriarch of the Rossi family to outsiders and his rivals. He is sixty-six, gray hair thinning, face lined deep. His suit's a tailored navy blue. In the past, it'd be form-fitted. Now, it just hangs loose. It's a no-brainer that his sickness is eating him away. I remember him in his

prime—fearless, gunning down rivals, his laugh booming. His eyes, though, still burn fierce. He's still that man, just caged in a weaker body.

My chest tightens seeing him like this, but I shove it down, striding over. He abhors pity anyway.

“Fina, mia cara,” he says when his gaze lands on me. His voice is warm, a bit shaky—a telltale sign of his cancer—and thick with his Italian accent. That's the first give away. My father's English is usually smooth. It only gets pronounced when something is eating away at him.

He cups my face, kissing my forehead. “Bella ragazza.” I smile, leaning into his touch. I want to rebuke him for ignoring his wheelchair, but he'll just shrug it off, so I keep quiet.

Although my father and I don't always see eye to eye on major issues, he loves me in his own quiet way. He shows it by trying to control every aspect of my life. Of course, I don't let him.

“How're you, Papa?” I ask, entwining his wrinkled hand in mine.

“Oh, fine,” he says shortly, but I catch a nerve twitching in his neck. Something is definitely wrong.

“Papa, what is it?” I ask, stepping back.

He chuckles, shaking his head. “You always know, don't you, tesoro?” I shrug. I always know, because he has a tell.

His face turns serious, and he gestures to a bench under a tree. I herd him to it slowly. Carlo is hovering, but he doesn't interrupt us. We get to the bench and he lowers

himself gently on it. I take a seat beside him. The wood creaks as he adjusts himself on it to face me.

“What is it, Papa?” I ask again. He sighs, gripping his cane.

“Fina, we got in trouble. It's your brother.” His voice is low, solemn.

I roll my eyes. Of course it's my brother at it again. “What did he do this time?”

He grimaces. “Riccardo hit a Mancini operation on the docks. It's war now.”

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My blood spikes. The name's like a blade in my veins. Mancini. That name's poison, tied to every nightmare I've got. My fists clench and my manicured nails bite into my palms.

"Riccardo," I spit, voice shaking. "He's so fucking stupid!" My voice is laced with venom. At thirty-four, ten years older, my brother's a hot-headed mess, always acting on impulse, trying to prove he's better than me. He never hides the fact that he's jealous of me. I honestly don't understand it. He mockingly refers to me as the "perfect" one. It's pathetic. He is pathetic. And while I understand he hates Enzo, same as me, I don't see why he thinks it's okay to take it upon himself to act on it.

"What was he thinking?" I demand, standing, pacing the dirt path.

My father rubs his temple. "Apparently, he thought he'd cripple them, Fina. Show he's strong."

I laugh, it's bitter. "Strong?" Strong and Riccardo don't belong in the same sentence. "He's reckless. He'll burn us all." My heart's racing, rage boiling over. The Mancinis would stop at nothing to take everything from us. They would grab the opportunity to ignite a war, and now Riccardo's lit the match. I want to scream, to smash something, but I breathe deep, forcing calm. It's what my therapist tells me to do every time I feel anger bearing its head. It's stupid, but I indulge.

My father stands, slower now, and puts a hand on my shoulder. "We fix this, Fina. Together." I nod, my mind racing over the possibilities of how to fix it. My jaw tight as we start walking, lemon trees rustling around us.

“What do we do, Papa?” I ask, voice steadying.

He taps his cane. It's an indication that he's thinking deeply. “We could negotiate. Offer a truce, something big to cool their blood.”

I frown, hating it. “They won't bite. Enzo's a dog.”

He nods. “Maybe. Or we hit back. Make it quiet, show we're not weak.”

I shake my head. “That's Riccardo's way. You know it'll only escalate things.”

We stop by a tree, its branches heavy. “What about a deal?” I say, mind racing. Yes, that could work. “Something they can't refuse. Money, territory.”

My father's eyes glint as though he's worming his way into buying the idea. “Or alliance. Something permanent.”

I freeze, not liking his tone, or the way it rubs me. But I nod, anyway. “We'd need leverage,” I say. “Something to make Enzo listen.”

His smile is faint, triumphant as he says, “we'll find it, Fina. We always do.” His tone is final, hinting at some complex mischief.

My stomach twists, but I trust him. Whatever solution he's thinking, it has to be good, because we both know this war's coming unless we stop it cold.

3

Enzo

The war room's thick with frenzy, cigar smoke curling around the long oak table,

faces brooding. My associates, twelve hard men with scarred knuckles and cold eyes all sit rigidly voices humming. We're plotting an attack on those fucking snakes who torched my docks. We're going to hit them so hard and fast, they wouldn't know what hit them.

I lean forward, fists planted on the table, my black tailored suit sticking to my sweat-slicked back. My face doesn't mask my rage. I want blood, and I want it now.

"Diplomacy," Marco says, his voice cautious, like he's stepping on shards of glass, knowing very well he'll get wounded. He continues. "We send a message, Enzo. Talk terms. Avoid a full war." I hear some murmur of agreement. I see a few nods.

To my right, Matteo shifts, his face grim. He'd said the same shit before, and I shut it down.

Diplomacy? With Rossis?

I shake my head, my eyes burning as I sear Marco with a dangerous look. He'd better tread carefully. "No talking," I blurt. "They hit my docks. They're aiming for a fight, and that's what we'll give them. We show them what's done to the people who cross us."

Adriano, my late father's most trusted aide, and by extension, one of mine, clears his throat. He's at the table's end, silver hair worn in a stylish fashion, his jagged face carved with years. "Your father," he says, slow, a smile on his face, "would've handled this with grace."

My blood boils. I slam my fist on the table, glasses rattling. "My father's dead," I growl, leaning toward him. "I run this now. You listen, or you're out." The room goes dead quiet, eyes dropping. They know now that I mean this. I never snap at Adriano, but today, I'm way over the edge. Adriano's mouth tightens at my reproach, but he

shuts up.

I pace, boots thudding on the tiled floor. “We hit their warehouse,” I say in cold, clear terms. My mind is sharp as I go through the plan I've come up with. “We do it at midnight. Three teams. First cuts their power, second plants explosives, third takes out their guards. Silent, fast. We burn them to the ground.” I point at the map on the table, red lines marking their routes. “No mistakes. We move in, we move out. They'll know who they fucked with.”

My plan's tight, every step calculated. I'm the Don after all, and I never miss.

I expect a rebuttal, but no one says a thing, not even a squeak. They know it's better not to fuck with me in the mood I'm in. I sit down, watching in satisfaction as they're all nodding, scribbling notes.

A knock comes on the door just then, and before I can react, Luca bursts in, face pale. “What the hell, Luca? Did you hear me say come in?”

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Everyone's eyes are turned to him now. There better be a good reason for this disturbance. It'd seem everyone's hell-bent on disobeying me these days.

"I'm sorry, boss," he pants, "but a Rossi delegate's here."

Consternating murmur ripples through the room. My heart stops beating for a nanosecond, then picks up pace and then pounds. A Rossi here? In my fucking manor? "What the fuck? Who the fuck let him in?" I roar, grabbing my gun from the table, holstering it to my pants. "They've got balls, coming here." I storm out, my crew trailing me.

The yard's open, gravel stretching under the clear afternoon sky. I see the delegate then, he's a lonesome figure looking around like he's got no clue how he got here. He's a wiry guy, should be around mid-forties, in a cheap suit, hands raised like he's scared.

Is this a ploy? Send over a man so scared he can't even get his hands to stay still, and maybe I'll cave? What sort of stupid game is this?

I stalk over, gun heavy at my hip. "You lost, Rossi scum?" I snarl, stopping a foot away. His eyes flicker nervously.

"I'm just a messenger," he says, voice thin. "I was ordered to give you this letter from Domenico."

My laugh is cold as I move into the man's, my stance threatening. "You think I care?"

“I...d-d-don’t...” he stutters, then stops to take a deep breath. I don't say a word, I continue to glare down at him. He fumbles, pulling an envelope from his jacket, and holds it out.

I eye it suspiciously.

“What the hell is this?”

The man flinches and takes a step back as if I'd just struck him.

“Let me get that for you,” Matteo says beside me. In my rage, I hadn't noticed him standing there. He snatches it from the man's loose grasp and rips it open.

I flick my eyes to Matteo's bent head as he reads the content of the letter, but my gaze remains steadfast on the man who wouldn't look at my face.

“Enzo.” It's Matteo. He tries to contain it, but his voice is stricken. I've never heard him like that.

My face contorts into a frown. “What is it?”

He hands over the letter to me and without fully taking my eyes off the man in front of me who two of my men are now flanking, I grasp it.

It's an intelligible scrawl, probably Domenico's, but I make the words out without difficulty. I read the words, but they fail to make sense...until they do.

What the fuck?!

It says in the letter that he wishes to offer Serafina—his fucking daughter—as my bride. A peace deal of some sort.

Dear Enzo,

I'm proposing a truce to end our families' feud. I offer my daughter, Serafina, as your bride, a bond to seal peace between us. This isn't a game—it's a chance for both sides to move forward. Consider it carefully. We can discuss terms soon.

Domenico Rossi.

"What the fuck is this?" I explode, dropping the letter as though it scalded me. It probably did. It's an enemy's object after all.

At my explosion, the two men flanking the Rossi messenger grab his arms and he starts to protest, pleading for mercy. My men probably thought what I'd read was incorrigible...

And it is.

Matteo takes the crumpled paper from where I'd dropped it on the gravel and lights a match to it. As the fire lights, so does my rage.

"Over my fucking corpse," I spit. Rossi blood in my home? After the act they carried out on my mom? My hand grips the gun holstered to my hip, finger itching to blow this bastard's head off. He's shaking now, his eyes going from the gun to my face. He's trying to step back, but my men are holding on steadfastly to him.

Matteo sees what I'm about to do and he grabs my arm, his grip hard. "Easy, Enzo," he mutters to only my hearing. He turns to the delegate. "He'll respond. Now, get out." His voice drips with abhorrence, same as mine, but he's calm, dismissing the guy like trash. He nods to the men holding on to him, and they release him.

The delegate scrambles off, gates creaking shut behind him. The rest of crew's

spilling into the yard now, eyes glazed over in anger, already spoiling for a fight.

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I whirl on Matteo, my voice low deceptively calm. “You told him I’d think it over?” My eyes burn, chest heaving.

He meets my gaze, his steady. “Had to, Enzo. Shooting him starts the war now. He’s just a messenger.”

My laughter is sharp as I pace the gravel. My blood’s steaming with fire and brimstone. “They think they can toy with me?” I growl, kicking at the ashes, remnants of the letter, scattering it into the wind.

“A bride as peace offering? Are they fucking kidding me?”

Matteo steps closer to put his arms on my shoulders. “You’d have killed him, and we’d be fucked. Rossis ain’t weak. We fight, we win, but we lose men, money, maybe everything. You know this, Enzo.”

I want to smash his face, but he’s right. I just hate to admit it. I’m not one given to acting on a whim. I think things through before I come to a decision. But this situation right here has my ears blind to reason. I just want to fight and kill all the Rossi bastards, the same way they’d killed my mother.

“Come on,” he says, nodding toward the garage. It’s a stone building off the yard, packed with cars and crates, smelling of oil and metal. Swearing under my breath, I follow, my boots crunching loud.

We get inside the garage and Matteo says, pointing to a crate “sit.”

I shoot him a wry look. “You don't do the ordering, I do.”

He shrugs as if to say he doesn't give a damn. He regards me coolly as I pace. He clears his throat, leaning against a car and begins tentatively, “You have to look at this strategically, Enzo. Marrying her could turn out to be a power move. She can't be more than 25. The implication here is she'll be easy to manipulate. You take her, you control their routes, their cash. You choke ‘em from the inside.”

I stop in my strides to glare at him. “Fuck that,” I snap. “I don't know her. Don't want her. I'm not settling down, Matteo. Not with Rossi filth.” My voice cracks, distress leaking through. A wife? Now?

It's a cage.

He keeps going. “You'd own their empire, Enzo. Their men, their deals. You'd end this war without a bullet.”

I shake my head, chest tight. “I'd rather kill them all.” My hands shake, rage and fear mixing. I don't want a Rossi in my bed, my life. I'd sworn to avenge my mother's death. Allowing a Rossi into my home would be me betraying her. Hell, even thinking about it is enough betrayal.

Matteo sighs, but he doesn't push. He's stated his reasons. He knows I'll need time to mull over it before I come to a decision.

Footsteps crunch outside, and we both train our eyes to the entrance door of the garage. It's Adriano. He walks in, his cane tapping. “Heard about the delegate,” he says, voice rough. I glare, still raw from earlier, but he's my father's old advisor, loyal as fuck.

“Matteo says marry her,” I mutter, pacing again. “Says it's smart.” Adriano nods,

stroking his chin.

I stop, searing him with a look. “What do you think?”

His smile is fulfilling as though he's honored that I'd ask him. “Matteo’s right. Your father took deals to save blood. Marrying Serafina gives you their power, Enzo. You’d run both families, cut their throats without a knife.” His eyes soften. “It’s what he’d do.”

I flinch, hating the comparison, but his words sink in. Control, not chaos. I stop pacing, my breath heavy as my mind spins.

I turn away, staring at the garage wall, oil stains like blood splattered across it. For the first time, I recall my mother's face. It's frozen in my mind from that day she'd left for her trip those twenty years ago, only to end up dead. She liked to smile with the whole of her face. I'd forever remember her like that.

Her death had rocked my world, more so my father's. Although, he never admitted it up until his death five years ago. He'd aged quickly after her death, the loss of it weighing him down. He had lost some of the steel in him.

Marrying a Rossi feels like letting those bastards win. But Matteo and Adriano’s words twist in my gut. They're truths I can't ignore. I hate them, but I have to put it aside, albeit temporarily. They're two truths that can coexist.

It would be total control over them. It'd be a way to crush them without losing everything. I'd hit them back right in the jugular when they least expect it. It'll be the ultimate revenge.

The Rossi girl flashes in my mind for a fleeting moment. This stranger I’m supposed to bind myself to, I wonder of her outlook. But that's not what's important.

Right now, I'm torn between hate and the cold logic of their plan, and I fear that the latter might be the winner.

4

Serafina

I push open the heavy oak door to my father's meeting chamber, my heels clicking sharp against the marble floor. Carlo had informed me my father wanted to see me. I'd wondered as I walked here if he'd found a fix for this Rossi-Mancini mess. Riccardo, expectedly, hasn't been able to come up with anything, even though he's the one that started this whole mess in the first place.

The room unfolds before me, vast and cold, its walls draped in deep green velvet, gold sconces flickering with weak light. A massive table dominates the center. It's carved with vines, its surface gleaming under a crystal chandelier that throws prisms across the stone floor. The air's thick with the scent of old leather and wax, like a tomb for secrets. I hadn't been here in a longtime. I prefer to have my meetings in some other part of the villa. This one's reserved for my meetings with Papa.

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Papa sits at the table's head, his posture rigid, all traces of his sickness gone. He's a general waging war, his navy suit crisp, grey eyes sharp. Two days ago, he'd obviously been wallowing.

What is going on?

My gaze slides to the man at the table's far end, and my breath catches. I only see his side profile. He's gorgeous, all hard lines and raw power, lounging in his chair like he owns the place. Black hair falls over his forehead, framing a face carved from stone—sharp jaw, full lips. His black shirt unbuttoned at the collar, revealing ink curling up his neck.

He's not one of Papa's men, I'm sure. I've memorized every associate since I came back from Yale three years ago, and this guy's different. He radiates authority, charisma dripping from him like blood from a blade. None of Papa's associates measure up to him.

As if keying into my inner monologue, he does a full turn to glance at me. I stop dead in my tracks, my heart slamming against my ribs. My pulse quickens and my mouth drops open. Those eyes—black, piercing, unyielding. I know them.

Fuck. I know them.

Four years ago. That bar. A night of rain and reckless heat. His lips on mine, his hands tearing my clothes, his cock fucking me until I screamed. Fuck my brains out, I'd said, and he had. Twice after that first time. Until I woke up in the morning to see he'd disappeared.

My skin burns, memories flooding—his wholesome possession, my moans, the way I'd acted so wantonly with him.

God.

How bad can it get? The stranger who fucked me senseless is here now, right in front of me, in my father's house. His gaze holds mine, and I see the flicker of recognition in those dark as sin eyes. His mouth is set in a grim line, as though he's remembering too, and the memory is unpleasant for him. He looks away, eyes snapping back to Papa, like I'm nothing.

My stomach lurches, heat and rage twisting together, and I lock it down, forcing my face blank. In an instant, I regain my composure as if I didn't just lose it. I keep my chin high, striding to the table. "Papa," I say, voice steady, "you called for me?"

He nods, a faint smile softening his face. "Yes, Fina. Come, sit. I want you to meet someone." He gestures to the stranger. "This is Enzo Mancini."

The name hits like a gunshot, its bullet hitting me square in the chest. Mancini. That name. That goddamn name. The man who'd destroy my family. My sworn enemy, the man who would tear my family apart if given the chance. And the man who'd fucked me mercilessly, left me trembling, then vanished.

My chest tightens, but I don't flinch, don't blink. I can't let him see the turmoil of me envisioning his hands on my skin, my body arching under him. The shame of wanting him suffuses my skin. I sit, spine straight, nails biting my palms, staring at him. His eyes meet mine, cold, assessing, but I catch that glint, the memory of that night. It fuels my rage.

I clench my fists under the table, nails biting my palms, as I stare at him. His eyes meet mine now. His gaze is piercing, like he's sizing me up. Rage bubbles in my

chest. I want to scream, to claw that smug look off his face. Instead I sit, spine straight, contorting my face into a mask of indifference. My expression is an epitome of calm. He can't capitalize on my reaction if there isn't one. Papa, too.

Papa turns to Enzo. "Enzo, my daughter, Serafina." I barely hear it, my ears ringing. Enzo's here, in our villa, and I'm drowning in hate, in the ghost of his touch. Papa speaks again, his voice calm but heavy. "Fina, I've offered you to Enzo as his bride. A peace offering to end this feud."

The words crash over me, a tidal wave, knocking the breath from my lungs. My vision narrows, the rage I'd tried hard to subdue exploding, mixed with the sick heat of that night—his cock inside me, my screams, the way I shamelessly gave myself to him.

What the fuck? He's giving me away? To Mancini?

I whirl on Papa, my voice carrying well aimed venom "Youwhat?" I stand, chair scraping loudly. "You're giving me away? What the hell does that mean, Papa? Am I a commodity to be given away, sold to the highest bidder?" I can't see through the fury clouding my sight. It clogs my nostrils, making it hard to breathe.

My whole life, I've obeyed him. Yale had been his idea, not mine. I wanted to stay to learn the family trade, but he'd insisted and off I went. And now this?

"You had no right," I hiss, hands trembling as I struggle to rein it in. "You made this deal without me?"

Papa's eyes harden, unyielding. "It's done, Fina. I have the authority. You don't refuse."

I laugh, bitter, my throat tight. "Watch me," I snap. "I'm not marrying him. You can't

make me.”

He leans forward, his voice taking on a coldness he uses on his rivals. “Dare me, and see.”

The threat is clear. It's done. It's sealed. He expects compliance. Only this time, I won't be giving in to what he wants. What I want matters too. And what I want doesn't include marrying a Mancini scum.

I watch Papa as he stands, slow, leaning on his cane, my body dissociating from my soul. I will on the calm my therapist tells me comes with dissociating, but it doesn't come. Without another word, he walks out, leaving me alone with Enzo.

“Papa!” I yell as the heavily barred doors close in my face.

My chest heaves, and for the first time since my mother's death, tears burn my eyes. I blink them back and hold my head high. I refuse to break. The Mancini scum is still here, watching me. I can feel his eyes burning holes into my back. I turn to him, my voice clipped. “Coming here, agreeing to this absurd proposal, I don't know what you aim to achieve. Just know I won't agree to this and it's final.”

He stands, tall and broad and I almost rear back, but I hold my ground. He stalks toward me, his walk predatory. I don't back down, though my pulse races. Up close, he's even more striking—sharp jawline, dark eyes that burn, jagged scar slicing through one brow, hinting at old violence. Had it been there that night? I hadn't noticed. I wonder what fight marked him, then curse myself for caring.

He's a Mancini, my enemy, and Papa's lost his damn mind.

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I stand my ground and look into his eyes. Big mistake. His intense gaze bears into me like he's trying to see into my soul. I suck in a breath, trying my best not to show any emotions, but my body betrays me. Heat pools low in my stomach, memories of his mouth, his cock, flooding back. I hate him, and hate myself for wanting him still.

He stops, close—too close. His breath is warm on my face. His voice is low and it rumbles through me as he says, “it’s your father’s proposal. It’s good for both families.” His tone’s clipped, like he’s explaining to a child, his expression faintly annoyed. The arrogance sets my blood on fire.

“Good?” I snap, stepping into his space. “You think you can waltz in here and act like you own me? You’re a fucking Mancini. I’d rather die than marry you. Or maybe I’ll make you die first.” My voice is laced with uncontainable fury mixed with the shame of that night, and it makes my teeth rattle.

He doesn’t answer, just watches me, his eyes darkening. Then, without warning, he grabs my face, his hands rough and calloused as they clamp my jaw. Before I can protest, his mouth is on mine. Memories of that night slam into me, and I’m back there again, totally wanton in his arms.

He's kissing me. It's not gentle, it's a storm. His lips on mine are hard, demanding, like he's trying to shut me up for good. Like he's trying to punish me for that night. Like he's trying to chase off the memory of it. His stubble burns my skin, scraping raw, and I taste the faint bite of smoke on his breath mixed with mint. My heart pounds a wild drum in my chest, as his mouth moves. He shows no mercy.

His grip tightens, fingers digging into my skin, tilting my head back to deepen the

kiss. His tongue pushes past my lips, hot and bold, claiming every inch, tangling with mine in a way that sends heat exploding through me. I'm drowning, my body betraying me, leaning into him for one stupid moment.

My hands hit his chest, palms flat against the hard muscle under his shirt, and I feel his heartbeat, fast, matching mine. I think I should put an end to this, but then his lips press harder. His teeth grazes my bottom lip, a sharp sting that makes me gasp.

The room spins, my knees wobbling as a shiver tears down my spine. It's electric. It's unwanted. His hands slide, one cupping the back of my neck, pulling me closer, the other still on my jaw, controlling every angle.

It's hungry, primal, his body heat searing through me, and I'm so caught, my skin tingling, my blood roaring. His tongue strokes mine, slow now, deliberate, like he's savoring the fight, and I hate how it pulls me in, how my fingers curl against his chest, traitorously wanting more. I hate how my body literally turns to mush against him. I allow myself to melt into the heat, into the raw edge of him.

Then I snap back, ripping free, and before I can control my reaction, my hand flies through space, hitting his face hard. The crack echoes through the room. My palm stings. I'd meant the slap to shake him, but he doesn't flinch. He doesn't even blink. He just smirks, smug as hell.

"What the fuck?" I snarl, wiping my lips, though they tingle. I'm still gasping, but I manage to croak out, "don't you dare touch me again."

He cocks his head to the side as if weighing my words. "Funny," he says, his voice dry, "you welcomed my hands all over you that night. Begged for them, even."

So, he remembers in vivid detail. Heat flares on my cheeks and my stomach clenches, but I don't give him the satisfaction of letting him see how affected I am by his kiss,

his words.

“I mean it.” My voice is ice. “The next time you come close to me with your filth, I won’t let it slide.”

An amused glint lights up his eyes as he leans closer, his hot breath caressing my ear. His voice is a rough whisper. “Can’t promise that, princess.”

I open my mouth, ready to tear into him, but he cuts me off. “See you at the wedding.” He turns, strolling out like he hadn’t just pulled the craziest stunt on me, leaving me alone in the silent room.

I stand there, my rapid heartbeat the only thing that echoes through the silent room.

What the hell was that?

5

Enzo

Why the hell did I kiss her?

It’s the same question I’ve been mulling on since I left the Rossis’ villa two days ago. Why the hell had I kissed her? At first, I’d done it to shut her up. It wasn’t because her lips had invited it. And then, I’d been reeled in, and I couldn’t, for the life of me, stop. Easily, I’d say that kiss had been about control, but I know it’s complete bullshit.

That kiss wasn’t about control. It was her—those green eyes blazing, her mouth fighting mine, the way she melted for one stupid second before slapping me.

And fuck, I felt it, the same fire from that night four years ago, when she was just a

stranger in a bar, begging me to fuck her senseless. I'd known her the second I saw her in that room, her face a ghost from a night I'd buried under lock and key. She definitely remembers too. I saw it in her eyes—the shock, the shame, the heat. Now she's my enemy, my bride, and I'm losing my grip. My reaction to it had simply caught me off guard. I should question it, but I don't.

Something else that had caught me off guard was her looks. I hadn't allowed myself to imagine that Domenico Rossi, as ugly as he is in deeds, would birth a stunning daughter. And Serafina sure is stunning.

But I can't allow a lapse in control anymore.

She's my enemy and will be treated as such. What happened was a moment that can never be allowed to happen again. But even at that, I can admit that night will be forever burned into my memory, and there's no forgetting it.

Now though, the manor is abuzz with servants hustling through the courtyard, setting up for this cursed wedding. Domenico had proposed to have the wedding in his villa, while the reception will be held here. I'd agreed because everything has to go according to plan.

White-clothed tables crowd the gravel, piled with roses and lilies, their sweet stench thick in the air. I stand in the study, whiskey glass in hand, staring out the arched window at the frenzy. My suit's unbuttoned, tie loose, and I'm craving a fight, not a fucking bride.

My door creaks open and I don't bother to check who it is. I hear the sound as the person settles on the couch. "Ready to be the groomsman?" I say, expecting a biting retort from Matteo.

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Instead, a female voice slices through. It's sharp and grating. I turn, eyeing her. Alanna. She's sprawled on the leather couch, red dress clinging to her curves, legs crossed, lips pursed. "You're really marrying her, Enzo?" she says, her words dripping coldness. "Some Rossi slut?"

"What the fuck are you doing in my study?" I demand.

She shrugs a shoulder sensuously, drawing fleeting attention to it. I return my gaze to her.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, coming in here unannounced? You must want to die."

"You say that now, but it's another matter entirely when you want to fuck."

I ignore her, returning my gaze to the window. She's not worth my time.

"So, it's true you're marrying her?"

I say nothing. She's been in my bed plenty, always willing, but she's nothing to me. Never was. "It's business," I say, voice flat, taking a sip of whiskey.

"Don't make it more." Her eyes narrow, and she stands, slinking over, hips swaying like she's putting on a show. "Business?" she purrs, pressing close, hands sliding up my chest. "What about us?"

Alanna had always been sensible. It's a shame she let my sex-based attention for her

get into her head. Now, she's just plain stupid. I grab her wrists, rough, and shove her back. "There's nous," I snap, my voice cold. "You were a fuck, Alanna. That's it."

Her face twists viciously, but she doesn't quit. She leans in, her lips brushing my jaw. Her perfume is cloying. It's sharp and cheap. "You don't mean that," she whispers, fingers tugging at my shirt, trying to pull me in.

Goddammit.

Scenarios like this is why I make sure to explain in details through the contracts they sign that the only thing I want from them for is a good fuck, some few good times, nothing more. Feelings and attachment had always been out of it.

I'm about to push her off when the door bangs open, and Serafina strides in.

Fucking hell.

She's a vision, and it hits me hard in the groin. She's wearing a black dress that hugs her frame, hair dark curls swept back, striking green eyes blazing. I'd tasted that fire in the kiss we shared. My pants are suddenly too tight.

Her gaze lands on Alanna and then me. I see her lips curl, rage flashing across her face. "Keep your whores out of my sight," she says, her voice cutting like a whip. "I know you're scum of the earth, but I won't be humiliated."

Alanna gasps at being called a whore, as if that's not what she is. I don't correct Serafina. Let her think what she wants—it's more fun that way. Her anger's alive. I take in the way her cheeks are flushed, and fuck, it stirs that heat in me, the same pull that made me kiss her, the same pull that had drawn her to me that night. I smirk, indolently leaning against the desk, glass in hand.

“Noted,” I say, voice smooth, watching her eyes flare hotter. “Out,” I say to Alanna, never taking my eyes off Serafina.

Alanna huffs, clearly annoyed at being told off in such a manner, but I don't give a damn. She storms out, her heels clicking loud. Serafina doesn't budge as she holds my stare, her eyes burning through my skin. But I see the flicker in her eyes, even though she tries to mask it. Her body remembers mine, just like mine does.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?” I ask, motioning for her to take a seat. She ignores it.

“I'm here to set terms for this wedding,” she says, crossing her arms. Her tone is businesslike. “And our marriage.” There's a slight shake in her tone, like she's fighting to stay composed.

I sip my whiskey, the burn grounding me. She's close now, close enough I catch her scent—jasmine. It's crisp and heady. My blood hums, that attraction roaring back, tugging me toward her like a tide. I keep my face blank. “Terms?” I say, raising a brow, setting the glass down. “Sure. Let's hear them.”

She steps closer, heels snapping on the hardwood, and pulls a folded paper from her purse. “First, the ceremony's small. Family only. No press, no circus.”

I grunt, shaking my head. That's one term I can't agree with.

She eyes me warily. “What?”

“The wedding ceremony will be how you want it. But, the reception will be how I want it. I'm assuming you saw the preparations getting underway when you came in. That's the reception. I want all the fanfare attached to weddings.”

She makes a small sound in her throat, as if to oppose. I hold out my hand and she glares at me for trying to shut her up. I'm not fazed. Maybe I should kiss her again.

“I shouldn't be explaining this to you, Fina, but airing the event as far and wide as we can boosts morale. It shows that our families have put aside our differences and decided to come together as one.”

I grit my teeth as the words leave my mouth. There's no putting aside our differences... yet. For all I know, I could bow out of this whole hoax and it's back to prepping for war. And we sure as hell aren't coming together as one. I continue, “anyway, all I'm saying is we're going to have to come to a compromise because I won't agree to that term.”

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Her nose flares, angry at being alluded to as a fool. She doesn't miss it. I'd more or less called her that, just not in clearer terms. She shifts on her feet. Her mouth works, but it produces no sound. I can bet she has a lot to say, but she's biting her tongue to hold the words in.

“Fine, but that's all I'm agreeing to.”

I nod. “Fair enough.”

She continues as if my input was only a minor inconvenience. I almost smile. Raising her hackles could be a habit to get used to. “Second, we play nice in public. No fights, no scandals. Third, you don't touch me unless I allow it.” Her eyes flick to my lips, and I know she's replaying that kiss because for a moment, her eyes glaze over. She's not just remembering that kiss. My cock twitches as the image of her screaming in ecstasy as I fuck her to a trembling mess over and over again assails me. I mentally shake my head. I have to keep my head.

I stand, stepping into her space, our faces inches apart, meeting her gaze. “No need for rules,” I say, voice low. “I'm not playing husband, Fina. This is a deal, not a marriage.”

Her eyes flash. “Perfect,” she snaps. “Because I'd rather choke than be your wife.”

Oh, but there are other ways in which I can claim her.

Obviously, she'd hoped for a reaction because there's a small, indignant smile playing on her lips. It doesn't sway me. I just watch her, the way her chest rises fast as if she's

nervous and angry at the same time. That heat's back, pulling at me, and I fight the urge to grab her, to taste that fire again.

She continues to hold my stare, unflinching. "The wedding's in a week," she says. "I want control over everything—venue, menu, vows. I'm not your prop."

I nod, my amusement growing. "Fine. Pick your flowers, princess. Doesn't change a thing."

Her jaw clenches, and she shoves the paper at me. "Read it. Follow it. Or I'll make your life hell." Our fingers brush as I take it, and a spark shoots through me. It's raw and electric, pulling me back into that night.

Her eyes widen and her breath catches, like she felt it too. Without another word, she turns, heading for the door, her walk all steel and grace.

I watch her go, my mind stuck on her, on those eyes, that mouth, the way we're not halfway in yet, and she's already fighting me tooth and nail. This marriage is a trap, but damn, she makes it tempting. I down the rest of my whiskey, the burn doing nothing to cool the heat she's left behind.

The study's quiet now, just the tick of the clock on the wall, but my blood's still humming. I unfold her paper, scanning her neat handwriting, and chuckle. Rules. Like she can control this. Control me. She's got no idea who she's dealing with. Or maybe she does. Only she doesn't know I'm a completely different man from the night four years ago, and this is a completely different situation.

Outside, the courtyard's still a mess, servants shouting, crates of wine stacking up. I step to the window, watching them, but my mind's on her, on that kiss and the way she stood her ground. I've never met a woman like her, all fire and ice, ready to raze me to the ground. She's the woman I'd fucked all right. And even now knowing what

she represents, I should put a leash on this thing I feel for her, but I can't seem to do it. I can't even completely forget that night. It's a problem, this pull she has on me.

I'm not here to want her or to feel anything. This is about power, about crushing the Rossis from the inside. I curl my fingers into a fist, as if in doing so, I'll fight my overwhelming attraction to her.

I turn from the window, tossing the paper on the desk. Matteo's probably out there, barking orders, making sure this wedding doesn't fall apart. He's the one who pushed this, him and Adriano, saying it's a power move. I don't fault them. It's a genius move if I do say so myself.

The door creaks, and I tense, half-expecting Alanna to slink back, and gearing to tell her to get the fuck out, but it's just a servant coming to drop off more papers—guest lists, menus, shit I don't care about.

I wave him off, sinking into the chair behind the desk. My gun's there, holstered on the side, its weight a comfort. I run a hand over my face, feeling the scar on my brow, a reminder of a knife fight years ago. Serafina's eyes had lingered on it, I'd bet, when I got close. She's sharp. She notices things. She can read me and that spells trouble.

It's dangerous.

I pour another whiskey, the bottle nearly empty, and lean back, staring at the ceiling. The study's walls are lined with books, old leather tomes my father collected, their spines cracked from years of use. This room was his, where he planned wars, made deals.

Now it's mine, and I'm stuck planning a wedding to a woman who'd rather kill me than kiss me or have anything to do with me again. The thought makes me laugh. She's a Rossi, but she's not like them. Not like Riccardo, that hot-headed fuck but

still spineless, or Domenico, all cold calculation. She's something else, maybe a combination of both, but never spineless, and it's throwing me off.

My phone buzzes. It's a text from Matteo: Everything's on track. Don't fuck this up.

I snort, tossing the phone down. He knows me too well, knows I'm itching to blow this whole thing apart, to hit the Rossis hard instead of playing groom. But he's right. This is smarter, cleaner. I just didn't expect her to be part of the equation, stirring shit I don't want to feel.

I close my eyes, and there she is. I firmly put the image of her away. I'm doing this to get revenge. I shouldn't lose sight of my goal. Serafina is nothing but a steppingstone to my goal, and my sworn enemy.

She is my sworn enemy.

The clock ticks louder, marking time I don't have. In a week, she'll be my wife, and I'll have to figure out how to keep this deal without losing my edge. Her rules are bullshit—she can't cage me, and I won't let her try.

But as I sit here, whiskey burning my throat, I know one thing: Serafina Rossi's trouble, the kind that could burn me down if I'm not careful.

And fuck, part of me wants to let it. Just for the high.

Serafina

It's D-Day.

The villa courtyard is buried under white roses, their heavy scent clogging the air. It's my wedding day, the day I'm handed over to Enzo Mancini for the sake of peace. Father wouldn't let it happen in church. Too many eyes. Too many loopholes. Our enemies could be lurking.

And he's not entirely sure Enzo has completely bought into this idea. For all we know, his men could be somewhere, waiting on his order to attack at the right time. Father says it's better to have it where his men are. This is where his power most reigns. I agree with him.

I'm in my room, staring at my reflection. I could cut and run, but even as I think it, I know it's the worst idea to conceive. There's nowhere on earth Papa's influence doesn't stretch to. Besides, I've never been a runner. I always stay and fight. That, and also the fact that running would just raise Enzo's ire, then we're looking at a raging war where both parties lose immensely.

I smooth my hands over my ivory silk dress. It hugs my curves in all the right places. The neckline plunges low and bold revealing the top of my cleavage. My dark curls are pinned up, a few strands framing my face. I look hard into the mirror and my green eyes glare back sharply at the reflection before me. I'm a stunning vision in a wedding dress, a fucking queen in white. I almost smile, but the whole reason behind it sours my mood, sobering me up.

On the outside, I look composed. I won't have it any other way. No need to bare my apprehension to the world, and certainly not to Enzo. I briefly wondered if he'd come to my father with the idea or if it'd been the other way around. I guess I'll never know, because there's no way I'm asking.

There's no way I'm giving him more room for accessibility. What he sees is what he gets. There'll be no communication unless absolutely necessary. There certainly won't be any romance. That bastard's already gotten too close four years ago in that hotel. My lips tingle traitorously, and I hate it. I hate how my body remembers him, how it wants him, even now.

Losing control once, or twice with him was enough. Heat pools down below, between my feminine folds. I shut my eyes, groaning as a recollection of that night comes crashing back. It's bad enough that I'd fucked a man, who at the time, had been a complete stranger. Even worse that I'd acted like a whore. Papa would be mortified if he knew.

Maybe Enzo thinks I'm still that girl from that night. Maybe he thinks he can screw with me, and I'll allow it, but I'm a grown woman now. I've moved on from that mistake. I'm hardened by years of aloneness and trying to prove a point to Papa, who I've come to realize, doesn't give a flying fuck about me. So, I definitely have let the attraction I have for Enzo die a natural death. There's a lot at stake. I won't allow whatever situation, past or present, influence my decision.

Heaven forbid I allow it.

I'm not one to give in to nervousness. But every moment I spend in this room, awaiting my fate, terror gnaws at my insides, threatening to tear out and bare its face. This wedding, held at Papa's villa to shout the peace between Rossis and Mancinis, feels like a cage closing in. I'm marrying my enemy, and no flowers or fanfare can hide that.

Lolita, my therapist, had told me not to fight it, if fighting it means it makes me mad. She'd advised compliance. To simply go with it. And although she hadn't been privy to the real cause of my anger, it'd annoyed me that she had belittled my emotions and likened it to something minor. Like my rage is a petty tantrum. I'd decided then and there to stop consulting her. I'm aware of how simply unfair that'd be to her, but it just is what it is.

A hard knock breaks into my thoughts. Carlo's voice comes through. "Ms. Rossi, warehouse issue."

"Merda," I swear.

I open the door to behold Carlo in a suit, ready for the wedding too.

"Is there no one else to tackle it? Are we short of men?"

"Si, Signorina. Most of Signor Rossi's trusted men are in the courtyard. This needs to be handled discreetly."

My jaw tightens. Business doesn't stop, not even today. I don't stop to think if Papa would get mad that I'd handled it. There's a reason Carlo came to me. "Wait," I tell him. I turn around into the room and kick off my heels. I pull out my boots from under the drawers and put them on. I throw a black jacket over my dress, then I walk out to Carlo.

"Where is it happening?"

Carlo fills me in as I walk briskly beside him, the silk underneath my coat swishing. He leads me to the barely lit basement. In there, I see two of our men holding a guy tied to a chair. John. His face is battered, blood dripping from his lip.

He's a traitor. He's been leaking secrets to a rival crew, Carlo had told me. The fucking bastard. I feel my anger at the whole happening of today—this wedding, Enzo—fusing with my distaste for this traditore. My fire flares.

I step close and bending at my waist and lean down towards him. I look him square in the eyes. “Cazzo,” I spit venomously at him. He returns my stare, not flinching. He's stupid. I hit him hard across the face. My palm stings, but my simmering fury is barely sated. No traitor is allowed on my father's crew. There's simply no room for shitheads.

“Talk.” My voice is cold. He spits, the saliva hissing out of his mouth in a sulking sound. I move back in time for it to land on my boot.

In addition to being stupid, he's brave. I give him that. This defiant act will only cost him. One of the two men holding him hit him hard with the butt of a gun. The other kicks his feet in a ferocious manner. John approaches to administer his punishment too, but I hold my hand up to stop him. I'm quite capable of dealing with him myself.

I laugh, and the sound comes out cold and sharp. I stamp my feet in a futile attempt to get the traitor's saliva off my boot. “Leave him to me,” I say to the men.

I grab a knife from the table and I feel its familiar weight as I weigh it against his face. His eyes trace the movement of the knife as I slowly brandish it in his face. I see the fear creep into his eyes, despite his false bravado. He tries hard to mask it. “That was your worst mistake,” I say, my teeth bared.

I grab his face in my hand, my fingers pressing hard on his hollowed cheeks. I keep eye contact as I press the sharp tip of the knife to his face. I don't blink as I slash the knife across the skin of his face. He screams now as he shakes in his chair. Blood oozes out from the gash on his face and it spills onto the basement floor, smearing my boots, mixing with the saliva he'd so foolishly spat.

The two men hold him as he quakes, yelling expletives. He yells other things, things I want to hear such as names, routes, plans. Good. I smile at him wryly. If he'd initially led with that, we wouldn't be here.

I step back from him, dropping the knife back on the table with cold relish. His blood is on my hands, a testament to my ruthlessness. I can be cold-blooded when the occasion calls for it. It's such a pity John had to find out the hard way.

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I nod to the men. “Finish it.” I turn to John. “Let’s go.”

I turn and leave the basement without as much as a backward glance. I hear the men's voices as they debate what to do with the traitor. As I round the corner to the hallway, the sound of a gunshot echoes. Good riddance.

Back in my room’s bathroom, I wash the blood off. I look at myself in the mirror and smile at the reflection staring back at me. Now, I can kick start this whole ceremony on the high that thrums in my pulse. Nothing than an attack or something similar to it to surge your adrenaline.

This is who I am—Serafina Rossi, not some blushing bride. Not some woman afraid of the attraction she feels towards a man, her enemy. Attraction is only trifling, and there's nothing that's above or even beyond me.

I return to my room and without wasting any more time, I yank off my coat and boots. I slip my heels on and smooth my dress. I smooth out my hair, making sure not a strand is out of place. I'm alive now. I'm ready for this.

“I’m ready,” I bellow out to Carlo who's standing guard at my door.

I take one last look at myself in the mirror and head out to the courtyard, Carlo a few paces behind me. The guests are gathered under golden lights, the villa’s stone walls looming like a stronghold.

All eyes turn to me. My gaze cuts to Aida, my only bridesmaid, waiting by the altar, her pink dress loud, eyes wet with tears. I take my eyes off her to look at my father

who's appeared beside me. He's dressed in his signature navy suit, his gray hair slicked back, some of the lines creasing his face waning.

Today, he looks the perfect picture of the patriarch. No sign of the cancer eating away at his blood. He's leaning heavily against his walking stick, his wheelchair nowhere in sight. Today is a day of keeping up fronts and my father is taking his role too seriously. No one present would know just by looking at him of his ailment. I wonder what this whole act will cost him, but I know that whatever the costs, he deserves it for pawning me out.

“Sei bella, Fina,” he says in a clear voice as he holds out his arm.

I look from his outstretched arm to his face, searching for signs that he's having second thoughts about this whole thing, but his jaw is set. He doesn't regret it. I swallow a lump in my throat.

“Grazie, Papa,” I say, taking his arm.

Slowly, we both walk down the aisle—him with a subtly shaky gait, me with decided steps. The violin starts, soft and eerie as it accompanies our walk. Guest's eyes burn into me—Papa's men, Enzo's crew, watching this union like it's a spark near dynamite.

We get to where the officiant's standing at the altar, and my father hands me over to Aida, but not before whispering “your mama would be proud to see you today.”

I refrain from rolling my eyes. This wedding wouldn't be happening in the first place if she was alive.

I watch him walk back to his seat, a calm resignation settling over me.

Aida clutches my arm, her voice wobbly as she says, “Serafina, you’re stunning.” I glare at her. She's wailing. She's overdoing this whole thing on purpose. I don't know whether to laugh or berate her.

I settle on the latter. I pull free from her and mutter through clenched teeth, “enough.” She just sniffles, fanning her face. I scoff at her.

I scan the crowd, delaying looking at Enzo. I spot Adriano, Enzo’s advisor as I've been told, standing in as his father. He’s old—should be in the same age range as my father—silver hair slick, face beaming. I don’t trust that smile. There's something sinister about it that makes my gut twist. I don’t like him, not one bit.

Knowing I can’t delay the inevitable, I deliberately seek Enzo out. Even if I could avoid him, I can't. He's moved closer now. Jesus. My breath snags. He's in a black tux, tailored to every hard line. His dark hair is tamed, but those eyes, they're dark, piercing through my soul as he returns my stare.

The man's dynamite, and I hate how it stirs me in places that are forbidden. My pulse hammers in my throat as I continue to stare at him, unable to look at him. His presence is like a magnet, commanding me to keep my eyes on him and not look away. There's no acknowledgement in his gaze. His jaw’s set, lips curved faintly, like he knows I’m struggling. I clench my fists, my nails biting into my palms as I keep my face blank.

I break the spell by looking away first, willing my racing heart to be still. Already, I'm failing at the first hurdle.

The officiant’s voice booms as he preaches peace and unity, and love.

I almost laugh. Love. If only he knew.

This unity is built on anything else but love. It's strategic. Two men had come together, and deciding they knew what was best for me, they brokered an agreement with me as the deal.

My eyes flick to my father who's staring straight at me, his expression emotionless. He has to feel something at least at giving his daughter away in this manner. Damn him.

Riccardo's nowhere to be seen. Papa had thought it wise to send him on a mission two days before. It's all the better, because if Riccardo was here, with his hot-headed nature, he could jeopardize the fragile peace that'd been brokered.

I shift my gaze to Enzo, my eyes catching the way his jacket pulls across his shoulders. His dark eyes molten under the bright lights that grace the courtyard. Shit. He's smoking hot. My scalp feels prickly, my fingers cut deep into the skin of my palm as I try to keep my emotions at bay.

It hits me then, like a jolt, raw and deep—I'm attracted to him. Crazy, deeply attracted to Enzo Mancini, so much so that there's no wishing it or willing it away. And I want him again. And again.

It's a punch to the gut. It twists hard and I almost double over as it threatens to nauseate me. How dare my body betray me like this? How dare I notice the faint curve of his mouth, the heat in his stare. My body's a traitorous bastard.

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I swallow hard, focusing on the officiant. I can't give in to it. I won't.

We say our vows. It's short and crisp. Not the traditional vows. Nothing warm. Nothing promising. To commit and to cherish. To lifelong partnership. His voice is low and steady. It sends an unwanted shiver through me.

"I do," he says, his eyes locked on mine. The pull tightens, squeezing my chest, forcing the air from my lungs.

The officiant repeats the same words he'd said to Enzo. I hesitate. Am I really binding my life to my enemy?

Am I really doing this? Can I?

My eyes cut to Papa again, and his eyes are twin pools of warning. I force my gaze away from him and I force out my "I do." My voice is firm, but my insides churn.

The crowd stirs. There are sharp sounds of applause and hoots. Amid the noise, the officiant calls for the kiss. Enzo steps close, his scent—smoke and cedar—wrapping around me, same as that night. My heart pounds, but I hold myself rigid, not betraying my emotions.

He grabs my waist roughly, and pulls me against him, his lips crash into mine. It's like a recall of the kiss we shared before on that night, those days ago, only this time, it's more intense. It's a fire that sears through me. His mouth is hard and demanding as he impales me wholly. It's like a branding. He's claiming me. It's him saying I'm his.

I'm his.

His tongue pushes past my lips, unrelenting as it tangles with mine in a way that makes my knees buckle. My hands grip his arms, for support. I feel the hard muscle under his jacket. Like before, I'm well and truly caught. My body is screaming to lean in, to let this storm take me, to let him consume me fully.

I hear the roaring of the crowd, but it's distant. My world narrowed to this moment, to his lips, his heat, the way he's owning me.

I fight it. I keep my body stiff, refusing to melt into him. His hand tightens on my waist, his fingers digging into my dress, searing through it to warm my skin. His tongue strokes mine, slow and deliberate, like he's daring me to break. I won't.

God, I want to.

I bite his lip. It's not grand, just enough to sting. I taste his blood on my tongue before he pulls back. Through the haze that has clouded my eyes, I see him smirking. His eyes are undoubtedly glinting with amusement.

I step back too, my knees almost giving way. My lips throb, swollen from his kiss. Heart thudding heavily against my chest, I step back, my face a mask of cool indifference. I ignore the heat curling in my belly. The crowd's still cheering, clueless as to the storm brewing within me. I turn away from his triumphant gaze, my hands trembling.

God. I hate it. I hate how that kiss sank its claws into me. I hate how I can't shake it—him. I hate him.

I move as though I'm in a daze through the remainder of the ceremony. We transport ourselves to Enzo's manor where the reception is waiting.

The reception's a blur, but I manage to immerse myself in the sounds of clinking glasses, the boisterous noises. I cloak myself in the fake smiles and the words of congratulations.

Luckily, both groups are on their best behavior, and no fight whatsoever breaks out, although they regard each other warily. Years of rivalry and steaming bad blood coming to an end on a cursed union. It's maddening. I want to shout it to everyone's hearing that it's nothing but a sham, but I keep it cool and persevere.

I manage to get through the entire thing until it's time for the toasts. Toast to long-lasting peace and harmony. That's when I tune out. Aida comes to find me, still crying. She glues herself to me and I shove her away, annoyed.

I slip away, needing desperately to breathe. The manor's garden is quiet as I take in the cool and crisp air. I lean against a stone wall, closing my eyes, but the kiss, his presence is imprinted on my mind. He's there, everywhere I turn.

The fact that he's proving unshakable angers me. I'm Serafina Rossi. I'm not some fool swayed by a man, much less a man who's supposed to be my enemy. But today, at that altar, I'd swayed. It's a hard thing to admit.

An even harder thing to admit is that it's got me rattled.

7

Enzo

The mansion is quiet tonight, the kind of quiet that feels like a held breath. The reason isn't far-fetched. Serafina's here in my domain. A Rossi breathing the same air as me. I never thought I'd see the day. Her presence here is like a spark in a powder keg.

The reception had lasted the whole of last night through this afternoon. It was a celebration meant to make a statement, and it had. The unity has been sealed.

Towards evening, my bride and I were seen off by everyone present. And here we are, in my manor. If this was a real thing, we'd be on our way to our honeymoon destination. But as it, there's no honeymoon for us, thank fuck for that. I can't imagine losing myself in some tropical haze with her, letting my guard down. That's not who I am.

We got back from the reception hours ago, her in that ivory dress that has me imagining the different ways I want to get it off her. Me in my tux, both of us playing the part for the crowd.

She'd been herded off to her room the moment we arrived. We won't be sharing the same room. We're not husband and wife in the real and traditional sense of it. I'd fought the primal urge to scoop her up, carry her over the threshold, and fuck her until she's screaming my name.

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I want to hear my name on her lips.

Even now, I'm fighting it. I'm increasingly losing the battle to latch on to sanity. Common sense tells me she's a Rossi, my enemy. But the part of me that's rebelling stubbornly holds on to that kiss at the altar, that night at the hotel, replaying it over and over. I shove it down, hard. I light a cigar. I need something strong to take the edge off what I'm feeling.

I'm in the study, my jacket off and my shirt unbuttoned. I stare into the fire as it crackles in the hearth. I draw long and hard on my cigar. She's upstairs, settling in and getting ready to meet my crew, I'm sure. Yet, here I am, trying and failing...woefully to ignore the way my pulse jumps when I think of her.

Now that we're back, I expect her to shrink under my roof, to cower at the weight of my authority, but deep down, I know better. Serafina doesn't bend, and it pisses me off. I want to get under her skin, to see her falter, but she's a wall I can't crack.

This should be easy. It should make me feel better that she isn't easily swayed. That way, I know there's no way she's burrowing under my skin. Instead, I see it as a challenge, and it's thrilling.

A knock pulls me out of my thoughts. Matteo's voice comes through. "Enzo, she's ready to meet the crew."

I grunt, downing the whiskey in one gulp. I drag long on my cigar before I finally throw it into the fireplace. I stand, smoothing my shirt. I head to the main hall, where my men wait, their voices mellowed. I wonder what they think about this union. I

wonder if they think I'm making the right move. Will they revolt at it? Or will they be accepting of it?

My crew's here—all of them—hard men whose loyalty is to me. They'll shield me even if it means dying. This must be a betrayal to them, too. I look to them, wondering if they're sizing up this marriage. Perhaps they think their Don has lost his damn mind. Maybe I have.

How did I convince myself to agree to this? It's a great power move and all, but damn, it's a hard compromise. I have to show my men that this whole thing is a deal, and Serafina just happens to come as a package with the deal.

Suddenly, a hush falls over the room. I whirl to see Serafina walking in, and fuck, she steals the air. All the logic I'd conjured up to keep my attraction to her in check fly out the window.

Fuck, she might be the death of me.

Her dress is gone, replaced by a black top and pants. It molds her body, emphasizing every curve and edge. My eyes travel to her midriff, to the flare of her wide hips, down to her long legs encased in the pants. I lift my eyes slowly to her face. Her dark curls are loose, and those green eyes cut through the room to me, her gaze sharp.

My cock stiffens beneath my slacks. I groan inwardly. Nothing about her being here is going to be easy.

She looks like she belongs, like she's here to conquer. My chest tightens, that attraction flaring, threatening to spiral out of control. I lock it down and carefully curate my face into a blank mask. Serafina Rossi is trouble.

I lean against the wall and cross my arms over my chest. "Gentlemen," I say, voice

low, nodding to her. “Serafina Rossi, my wife.”

The word tastes like ash on my tongue. I watch for her reaction to it. She doesn't show any.

Matteo steps in beside me, a dimpled grin on his face. “Well, damn, Rossi,” he says, his voice loud and teasing. “You clean up nicer than the don himself. Think I might trade you for him.”

The men chuckle, and I freeze, wondering what Matteo is playing at. Serafina is so still, but I can swear I see her lips twitching, like she's fighting a smile.

She crosses her arms and shoots him a glare. “Funny,” she says dryly. “Very funny.”

Matteo stretches out a hand. “Matteo,” he says, “Enzo's right hand man and friend. I also double as his brother, although he'd rather chew stone than admit I'm like a brother to him.”

She looks sideways at me and seeing my grim face, she returns her gaze back to Matteo. “Nice to know that tidbit of information, Matteo. Don't you think you're trying too hard?” There's a playful lilt to her tone.

Whistles ripple through the room. Damn. She's holding her own. The men are impressed.

Matteo laughs, undeterred. “Come on, give us a smile. You're family now, right?”

To this, she rolls her eyes, but her guard finally slips, and she laughs. The sound is low and husky. It softens her face. The sound hits me like a punch. It's like watching a flower unfurl in real time. Then it hits me...

She's never laughed like that with me.

Of course, I can't blame her, but it doesn't stop the jealousy that courses through me.

"Enough," I snap, my voice sharper than I'd intended. I step forward, putting myself effectively between them. "Quit flirting, Matteo. She's not your fucking friend." The men fall silent. They glance over in apprehension, but Matteo just smirks, apparently enjoying my discomfort.

"Relax, boss," he says, winking at Serafina. "Just warming her up for you." She raises a brow, amused, and laughs again. She's enjoying his nerve. It grates on my nerves. I clench my jaw, fighting the urge to smack him across the face.

I slide my hand to Fina's lower back, and I feel her body tense under my touch, but she doesn't shove my hand away. Good.

"Fina, meet my men."

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Her eyes dart to me quickly before she steps forward, chin high, no trace of fear.

Marco moves forward, his tone sly. “Heard you’re good with a knife. That true, or just talk?”

I stiffen. It's not harmful. It's custom for a Don's crew to test the waters with the Don's new bride. I'm not just sure I like Marco's tone.

Fina tilts her head, teeth gleaming. “Give me yours, and I’ll show you,” she says, holding out her hand.

Marco hesitates, then laughs, but there’s newfound respect in it. Her confidence is damning, her wit slicing through their doubts.

I should be annoyed, but fuck, it’s impressive. My men are eating it up, nodding, some even grinning. She’s winning them over. It shouldn't be this way. She’s slipping into my world like she was born for it. I guess her father did teach her something.

I step forward, my temper snapping. “Enough,” I say, cutting through the chatter. “She’s here. Learn to deal with it.” My eyes lock on hers, daring her to push back, but she just raises a brow, unfazed. That fire in her eyes, the same one I tasted in her kiss, sparks something in me, and I hate it. I want her to break, to show a crack. But she’s all steel, standing tall in my hall, my men half in love with her already. It’s infuriating, how she’s untouchable. I can't seem to shake her.

And not just mentally. I want to shake her physically. I want to capture her mouth in mine and plunder it, until she's hard of breath and gasping. I want to have her on all

fours right here in this hall, and ram into her hard and fast while she's moaning my name in pleasure. My cock throbs in my pants and I shift to accommodate the bulge.

This is useless. I need to brake on those wayward thoughts. I turn to my men and bark at them, "dismissed."

They all file out, but not without casting surreptitious glances at her.

After they leave, she stays instead of leaving. Her eyes bear into mine as if she's trying to unravel me. The air is heavy with something unspoken. She says nothing, just continues to stare at me.

I break the silence. "You're good." My voice lowers as I step closer. "Too good."

Her lips curve in a derisive smile. "What? Expected me to cower and hide?" Her voice is mocking. "Not my style, Enzo."

My name on her lips is a fucking Molotov cocktail, it ignites me, calling to the feral part of me. I'd wanted her to say my name since I saw her in her father's study. Fuck. I'd wanted to tell her my name that night just so she could moan it in my ear. Hearing her say my name now cracks the wall of my resolve. It does me in. The tension that's been simmering since that altar kiss, since that wild night four years ago, explodes.

In an instant I'm on her, pouncing like a beast. Only this time, I'm a man motivated by lust and the desperate craving for release only she can grant me.

My hands seize her hips, slamming her against the wall with a force that rattles the hall. She gasps, but her green eyes blaze with defiance. There's no trace of fear, just pure, unyielding fire and desire.

Her hands attack me. Her nails tear at my open shirt, shredding it in the same breath,

scraping my chest in wild abandon. I growl as my mouth crashes onto hers, seeking the succor of her mouth, her sensuous lips.

This isn't a kiss—it's a goddamn war. It's lips bruising and teeth biting savagely. It's her tongue battling mine, tasting of whiskey and raw rebellion. It's a ceding of control on both our parts. I want to fuck her until she's erased from my mind, until I've obliterated that night and made her scream my name so loud to everyone within hearing distance. I want to brand her and make her mine in every way there is, until she has no doubt that as long as this facade goes on, she's mine.

I sink my teeth into her lower lip, sucking it

hard into my mouth. I taste the coppery tang of blood, an apparent telling that I'd drawn it. She moans, a deep, throaty sound that shoots straight to my cock. I feel it rock-hard, pulsating and straining against my pants.

What the fuck is she doing to me? Why do I lose all control with her?

Her fingers twist in my hair and she yanks with a sting that makes me hiss. I pin her tighter, my erection grinding into her stomach, the friction maddening.

“You hate me,” I snarl into her mouth, “but your pussy's begging for me.” I grind my cock harder against her. She rises on her toes to fit it in her middle. I stab at her. “Feel it, Fina. Feel what you do to me.”

She doesn't answer, just bites my lip back, hard, as a way of response. Her fire matches mine. Her nails claw at my shoulders, digging into the fabric through to my skin. I feel the scrape of her nails, and I fucking love it, the pain igniting the inferno inside me.

I grab her black top. Not bothering to pull it over her head, to pull away from this all-

consuming kiss, I rip it open. The fabric tears with a satisfying shred, exposing her lacy bra. I pull away then. Her eyes flick open, lust shimmering in their green depths. Her lips are red and swollen from my kisses, and her mouth is slightly open to allow a shuddering breath through it.

Mine. All mine.

Breathing hard, my pulse roaring in my ears, I stare down at her. God. She's fucking magnificent.

Her tits are straining, nipples hard as they stab through the thin material. I yank the bra down in one swift motion. Her breasts bounce free. They're pert, full and heavy, the pink buds tight and aching for my touch. They're as I remember them. They're fucking perfect.

I cup them with my hands and they fit snugly as if they're tailor made for my hands. She gasps and leans up into me as I squeeze them tight. She shuts her eyes, her pink tongue shooting out to lick her lips. My cock strains harder against my pants. I finger her nipples, twiddling them between my thumb and forefinger. She moans loudly. The sound fuels me, driving me insane.

Her hands go wilder in my hair as I lower my head to her breasts. I suck one nipple into my mouth, and she cries out. Her back arches, shoving her tit deeper as her moans echo off the stone walls. My tongue lashes it ruthlessly, teeth grazing the sensitive peak. I touch my tongue to it and she shoots off the wall, deeper into my mouth. I lap at the rosy bud, rolling it between my tongue. I lower my hands to grip her hips and pull her further into me.

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Her hands rake my back, nails carving fiery trails as I lavish undivided attention on her nipple. Then, I turn my attention to the other nipple and I attack with just the same vigor. I bite harder, sucking with a wet, sloppy pull that fills the room. Her gasps turn to desperate whimpers. The sounds from her mouth and the overwhelming smell of her makes my cock throb, leaking pre-cum into my pants.

“Enzo, fuck,” she pants, her voice raw. I pull back and she pulls me back to her with aggravated force.

“Easy, tigress,” I chuckle.

I place a kiss on each breasts, both of them red from the roughness of my hands. It does something to me, to see the red markings on her skin. I capture her mouth in mine once again, kissing her slowly this time, letting the gentle stroke of my tongue chase away the earlier roughness. Her hands move to link behind my neck.

I release her mouth to grab her pants. She wiggles her ass to allow me take them off easily. My hands are not gentle as I tear them down with her panties in one savage tug. The fabric rips, leaving her bare.

She's so fucking perfect. Her breasts are a goddamn vision, twin globes that fit in my palms like they were made just for it. They're full and heavy and red with my possession. I trail my gaze down to her taut stomach, the perfect sexiness of it. Her hips are wide, flaring out in a way that begs my hands to grip them, to dig my fingers into the soft flesh. It leads down to thick and strong thighs, stretching to fucking long legs.

Serafina is made for sin. For the pleasures of my mouth, my hands and my cock. She's made for just me.

“Sei così sexy da morire,” I mutter, dazed by the sight of her. She smiles, her lips stretching over the white brilliance of her teeth. She must know what she's doing to me. I let my eyes stay on the mound of flesh guarding her glistening pussy. So pink, so swollen, the lips parted, dripping with her arousal. The musky, sweet scent hits me like a shot of morphine.

I drop to my knees, and her eyes, glazed, trail my descent. The significance of what I'm about to do isn't lost on me. I'm about to worship her. All the women I've been with, I owned them, they worshipped me, never the other way around. But Fina is not just any woman. She's my wife, the woman I've sworn to despise, yet she drives me crazy with lust.

My hands grip her thighs, forcing them wide. I nuzzle against the curls on her mound. Her scent is heady. I groan against her pussy and she jerks as the sound reverberates through her.

“You're fucking soaked, Fina. So wet for me.” She sighs her pleasure and I feel it against my mouth.

I grab a leg and put it over my shoulder, allowing for easy access to her pussy. I flick my tongue out to her clit. Her hips buck. Her hands fist in my hair, pulling so hard my scalp burns. My tongue licks a slow, torturous path up her slit, her taste exploding in my mouth—salty, tangy, addictive. I feast thoroughly, my tongue swirling her clit, teasing, then sucking hard, drawing it into my mouth like candy.

She grinds her pussy against my face, smearing her juices on my lips, the stubble on my chin. I growl and she moans, restless against the onslaught of my mouth on her. I dive deeper, my tongue plunging into her tight hole. I fuck her with it, thrusting my

tongue in and out of her pussy in fast motions, tasting every inch.

She's thrashing against me, her hands wild in my hair. She's so wanton for me. I pull out my tongue from her pussy and graze her clit lightly before looking up at her.

Her eyes are heavy lidded, her nose flaring as she looks down at me. My eyes locked on her, I drag my tongue slowly across my lips, savoring her taste—salty, sweet, so fucking addictive—licking every drop.

She's panting, her chest heaving, her green eyes wide, glazed with lust. She's watching me like I'm a predator. Her lips are parted, a flush creeping up her neck. The way she stares, hungry, almost feral, as I lick her juice off my mouth, makes my cock pulse

I'm hard and aching, ready to fuck her senseless.

Her breath hitches, a soft whimper escaping, and I smirk, knowing she's turned on by how much I love her taste, how I'm claiming every bit of her. I want to dive back in, eat her until she's screaming again, but the way she's looking at me, like she wants to devour me too, has me ready to bury my cock in her and make her taste herself on my tongue. But I need to pace myself for her pleasure.

I turn my attention back to her pussy and flex my fingers. I put my mouth back on hers before I shove three fingers inside her and she gasps out loud, her fingers pulling at my hair. Her pussy clenches around my hand. She's so wet for me, and it fills me with a sense of satisfaction that she's so fucking responsive.

The slick sounds of my fingers fucking her fill the air, lewd, filthy, perfect. I curl my fingers, hitting that spongy spot deep inside. She shakes, her moans turning to ragged sobs. "Don't you fucking stop," she begs, her voice breaking.

I laugh against her cunt, the vibration making her tremble. I suck her clit harder, my fingers slamming into her, stretching her. She's quaking, her screams bouncing off the walls, raw and unhinged.

She's close, her pussy pulsing around my fingers, but I want her shattered. I slow my tongue, teasing her clit with featherlight flicks, and she curses, "You bastard, don't stop!"

I give in, sucking her clit with a wet, greedy pull. My fingers pound her faster, and she comes. It's earth-shattering. Her pussy convulses, her juices flooding my mouth, dripping down my chin. I drink her down, licking her through every shudder, every scream. Her thighs tremble uncontrollably, her hands limp in my hair. Her body is a quivering mess.

I pull my fingers from Fina's dripping pussy, her tight walls still pulsing from the orgasm I just ripped out of her. I stand, my cock screaming for release. I bring my fingers to her lips, slick with her sweet, musky juices.

"Taste yourself. Taste how fucking sweet you are."

I smear them across her mouth, painting her lips glossy. Before she can protest, I crash my mouth onto hers, kissing her hard, my tongue plunging in, tasting her cum on my fingers mixed with her breath. It's a filthy, intoxicating blend.

She moans into me, her pink tongue darting out, lapping at my fingers, sucking them into her mouth, her eyes half-lidded, wild with lust. No shame, just raw hunger. The sight of her tongue, pink and wet, swirling around my fingers, cleaning her own juices, sends a jolt to my cock, making it throb harder. My balls tighten with need.

I growl against her lips, my hand fisting her hair, pulling her closer, loving how she's so fucking unapologetic, licking every drop like it's a challenge, and I'm already

imagining her mouth on my cock, swallowing me down with that same greedy tongue.

Suddenly, she pulls her mouth from mine and before I can react, she's on me, her hands ripping at my belt, tearing it open, shoving my pants down.

“Fuck me,” she demands, her voice hoarse, eyes wild, and I'm fucking gone. I kick my pants off, my cock springing free, thick and veined. The tip glistens with pre-cum—minutes of ruthless seduction had coaxed it out. I'm going to fuck her raw, no condom, and I don't fucking care. She's my wife after all.

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She doesn't seem to mind either. Her hungry eyes devour my cock, her tongue darting out to wet her lips. I grab her thighs and lift her. I can't afford to wait anymore. I have to have her now. I slam her against the wall and her legs wrap around my waist. She's driven by the same sense of urgency that grips me. Her pussy, hot and wet against my cock, welcomes me into its honeyed warmth.

I thrust, burying myself in one brutal stroke. She screams, her pussy so tight, so hot, gripping me like a fist. The bare heat of her is mind-blowing, better than that night, better than anything.

"Fuck, Fina," I grunt, thrusting hard. My hips slam into hers, the wet, slapping sound of our bodies deafening. Her juices coat my cock, dripping down my balls, slicking my thighs. Her nails carve into my back, drawing blood, and it gets me on a fucking high. I fuck her harder, deeper, my cock stretching her, filling her so wholly.

She's meeting every thrust, her hips rocking, taking me to the hilt. Her moans are loud and filthy, like she's trying to outfuck that night too. I angle my hips, hitting that spot inside her, and she screams, her pussy clenching, milking me, making my balls tighten. My vision blurs.

I pull out, spinning her, bending her over a table by the wall, her shapely ass up, round and perfect. Her pussy is red and swollen, dripping with her moisture, the essence of her arousal.

I grab her hips and pull her ass forcefully to meet my cock. I splay one hand over her back, and leave the other to rest on her hip. I plunge my cock deep and hard into her, my thrust vicious. I fuck her hard, stretching her to the limit. She's screaming, her

hands clawing the table, her nails gouging the wood.

I'm merciless as I continue to pound into her, my balls slapping her clit with every thrust, the wet, obscene sound driving me wild. "You're fucking mine," I growl, my hand fisting and yanking at her hair arching her back and she moans, "Yes, fuck, Enzo, yes."

I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her to me so my chest is against her back. I put my lips to her ear, my cock still buried deep, pulsing inside her. "Say it," I demand, slowing my thrust, teasing, making her squirm. Her pussy clenching, so desperate and needy. "Say you're mine."

"Fuck you," she gasps, but her pussy grips me tighter, betraying her. I laugh, slamming into her, hard, fast, my cock ramming her. Her moans turn to broken sobs. I reach around with my other hand and my fingers find her clit, rubbing rough and fast. I pinch it lightly. Her pussy tightens around my cock.

I pull out and flip her onto her back. Her legs are spread wide, her pussy a wet, red mess, dripping with her cum, my pre-cum, begging for more. I thrust back in, her eyes locked on mine, green and fierce, and I'm lost. I don't slow my pace. I fuck her like I'm trying to burn her out of my fucking soul, like I'm trying to erase every second of that night and make this the only thing we remember.

Her hands grip my ass, pulling me deeper, her nails digging into my skin. I groan, my cock pulsing, ready to explode. "Fina," I rasp, my voice cracking, and she moans. Her pussy tightening, another orgasm building up again so soon. Her body's shaking, her eyes rolled into her head. She's so fucking responsive.

I lean down to kiss her. Our tongues tangle, the taste of her mouth mixed with her pussy on my lips, and it's too fucking much, too fucking perfect. I thrust harder, deeper, my cock throbbing, my balls tight, and she's coming again. She tears her

mouth from mine; she screams, the sound tearing through the hall, raw and guttural. She holds me tight, her pussy milking me, squeezing me so tight I can't hold back. I don't stop fucking her through it. My thrusts are wild, my balls slapping her, my cock throbbing. I'm there with her.

I come, hard and hot, spilling inside her. No barrier. My cock pulses with every thick jet, filling her, flooding her pussy. I keep slow my thrusts, stabbing deep, drawing it out. Her pussy clenches, pulling every drop from me, until I'm empty, my breath ragged, her body trembling beneath me.

We're still, panting. Her legs are around me, my cock still inside her, but softening, our cum dripping from her pussy, pooling on the table. The sight so filthy, so fucking perfect. She's a wreck, dark curls tangled, her lips swollen, eyes glazed, her chest heaving.

God. I want to fuck her again. Right now. I feel myself already hardening again at the thought. I collapse beside her, the table cold and hard, but I don't give a shit. She's staring at the ceiling, her breath uneven, and I know she's as thoroughly fucked as I am.

"Jesus," she whispers in a raw voice. I laugh, the sound wringing out of me honestly. "Yeah," I say, my hand gripping her thigh in a possessive, claiming manner. My fingers are slick with her cum. We're enemies, but this—this is proving to be a fucking addiction.

I slide off the table, pulling her with me. Her legs shaky as she stands, her hair a wild tangle. Her lips are swollen, and I see the hint of fire still burning in green depths of her gaze. I want to drag her upstairs and fuck her in my bed. It's where she belongs. I want to mark every inch of her, but the reality of this slams back, cooling the haze. She's a fucking Rossi and I'm a Mancini. Two twains that shouldn't meet.

She picks up her torn clothes from the floor, evidence of how wild we'd been. She manages to put them on, her gaze flickering with something unreadable. Maybe defiance, maybe regret, I don't know. I expect her to cower in the face of the dawning realization that she'd caved under the pressure of our attraction, but she isn't. Her hands are steady as she arranges herself. Her eyes are unwavering on me.

Fuck. She's brave. My woman.

“This changes nothing. We're still enemies.” Her voice is steady.

My smile is smug as I step close, my hand grazing her hip. “Keep telling yourself that, Fina.”

There's heat in her eyes as she sears me with her glare, and I know we're nowhere near done. I open my mouth on a witty retort when my phone buzzes in my pocket. I curse under my breath, pulling it out. Such bad timing.

Matteo's name flashes on the screen, and I answer, my voice rough. “What?” His tone's tight. “Trouble. Rival crew's hitting our shipment. Tonight. Need you now. We need to move fast.” I glance at Fina, her gaze sharp, catching every word. “I'm coming,” I snap and hang up, my mind already shifting gears.

I step back and I adjust my pants. My cock is still half-hard, and the smell of raw lovemaking still permeates the air. “Stay here,” I tell her, my voice hard.

She raises a brow, like she's daring me to make her. I don't have time for this. Not now. I'll deal with her later and I bet we'll both love it.

I turn, striding out of the hall, my boots echoing on the stone floor. My blood's still pumping from what had happened, but I have no time to dwell on it. The call from Matteo has lit a different fire—business, blood, the kind of shit that grounds me.

I hit the hallway, my mind racing, Fina's moans still echoing in my head, but I shove them down, hard. I need to focus, need to be the don, not the man who just fucked his enemy into oblivion. I grab my jacket from the study, checking my gun in its holster, and head for the garage, where Matteo's waiting.

He catches me as I'm about to enter the garage. I search his face for signs that he knows I just had a romp-in-the-sack with Fina, but his face is grim. It's business time.

I don't waste time on preambles. "Gather three men," I say, my tone clipped.

I watch Matteo head out to follow my order and I go to grab my gun, Fina temporarily forgotten. Nothing like an impending kill to take the edge off a colossally fucked-up day.

8

Serafina

I wake to soft light filtering through heavy curtains. My mind's foggy, caught in that hazy limbo between sleep and awareness, and for a moment, I'm unmoored, grasping for where I am. My body's sinking into a bed that's too plush, too foreign. I groan, pushing my eyes open. The room smells of lavender and polished wood. For a moment, I'm adrift, my mind grasping for place.

The ceiling looms high, carved with swirling patterns, and the walls are draped in muted gold silk. I blink up in confusion. This doesn't look like my room. Not my old bedroom in Papa's house, not the dorm at Yale, not even the sterile hotel rooms I've crashed in over the years.

Panic seizes me. I don't want to be in that place again.

I'd awoken in a strange place six years ago after my flight from Yale. It was after I'd gotten the news of my mother's death. Papa had sent a jet for me to come home for her burial. I don't know how I got through the flight, but somehow, I managed to sleep through it. Only to awaken sometime later in a strange room.

Only, it wasn't a strange room. It was my old bedroom from before I went to Yale. Panic had gnawed at me as I remembered why I was there. It was for my mother's death. I'd sobbed until I was inconsolable. That was the last time I remember crying.

After the burial ceremony, I'd left the room with its belongings and moved to another

room, because I'd always associate it with a bad memory. Ever since, I'd always hate to wake in a room I'm not familiar with.

Now, I look around in despair, transported back to that time. It's quiet, too quiet. My memory from the day before is hazy. I can't seem to recollect a thing. Has someone died?

Where am I?

Then it hits me. I'm in my new home. That home being Enzo's manor, and by implication, my prison. I bolt upright as my chest tightens, threatening to squeeze the life out of me. I do breathing exercises. I inhale sharply, and exhale slowly, counting to hundred in my head. Lolita would be proud of me.

Little by little, I feel my quickened heartbeat begin to slow down, the dread falling away. I force myself to face it.

I'm Serafina Rossi, now Mancini by name, and I'm in my enemy's house, married to a man whose touch last night burned me alive. The memory of Enzo—his hands, his mouth, his cock—floods me, unbidden. My thighs clench, heat pooling low despite my hate. I shove it down hard. I won't think of last night. Ever. It had been a lapse in control. I certainly can't allow it to happen again.

He'd told me to start last night while he went about his business. The nerve of him to think he can order me to do anything. Was he expecting me to head into his bedroom and lie naked, in wait for him? The vision the thought presents has me gripping the sheets.

In disgust at myself, I lift the silk sheets, my nightgown whispering against my skin like his hands had. A soft knock snaps me out of it, and I tense, praying it's not him. I'm not ready to face those dark eyes and that smug, satisfactory smirk. Not after I

screamed his name, my body betraying me on that table.

God.

“Yes?” I say tentatively.

The door opens and a maid slips in. Her steps are light and her eyes are downcast. She’s young, maybe in her late teens, with auburn hair tucked under a cap. Her accent is thick, but I make out her words perfectly.

“Good morning, Signora Mancini,” she says. Her voice is timid. She’s carrying a tray with a silver teapot. The title rouses discomfort in me, but I don’t correct her.

“Good morning...” I let my voice trail off.

“I’m Giulia, your maid.”

“Hi, Giulia. Call me Serafina.”

She nods in earnest, but I already know she’ll stick to the title.

Her eyes are still downcast. “May I draw your bath, Signora?”

Not one for idle chit chat, I see.

I nod, studying her. She’s nervous, hands trembling slightly as she sets the tray down.

“How long have you worked here?” I ask, my curiosity getting the better of me. I have to make an effort to put her at ease. She blinks, surprised.

“Two years, Signora.”

I tilt my head. “E Enzo? He treats you well?”

Her cheeks flush, and she hesitates. I don't know if it's from my half-baked Italian, because I'm sure my English accent leaks through every time I make an effort, but I manage anyway.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:48 am

I'd left Italy for America at the young age of twelve. I'd gone to a boarding high school and afterwards, traveled around Europe and North America before entering Yale. It's an excuse for why my Italian isn't perfect, but I try.

I zone in on the girl before me. She still isn't looking at me. And just as I guessed, she isn't comfortable with my Italian, so she refers back to English. "He's fair," she says, careful.

I smile at her down-turned head. It's obvious she's hedging. Fair doesn't mean kind, but it's fine. I don't push it. I tell her to put the tray down and draw my bath. She happily skips to do my bidding.

When she's done, she comes out to inform me. I thank her and leave the rest of the tea to go take my bath. Perhaps, that'd soothe me.

The bath is steaming, scented with rose oil, just how I like it. I'd submitted my preferences to the head maid a week before on the day I visited Enzo and caught him with his whore. I shut down that memory.

Instead, I sink into the bath, letting the heat loosen the knots in my muscles, the delicious soreness in my joints. My mind drifts to the wedding, to Enzo's kiss, and then last night, his mouth on my pussy, his cock filling me while I shamelessly urged him on.

Ugh. I'm no different from his whores.

I scrub my skin hard, trying to wash away the memory, the way my body craved

him—still craves him. He's my enemy, a Mancini, and I'm here, playing his wife. How fucked up is that?

But last night I wasn't playing—I was his, and I hate myself for it. God. It's all so messed up. I don't need my judgement clouded. If I'm going to hate him, it has to be completely.

I try to recall what preceded the hot sex session. It's a haze, as though it had happened eons ago and not just yesterday. What the hell is Enzo doing to me? I remember the introduction to his men, and I focus on the memory. I focus on Matteo's easy laugh as he'd teased me yesterday evening. Would he be displeased that Enzo had let himself lose control with me? I shake my head vigorously and go back to the recollection of memory.

I'd held my own with his men. I don't think he expected it. Despite that I'd spent most of my time overseas, and I didn't get introduced to the family business earlier, I have a lot of Rossi blood in me. Which means I'm not a pushover. I'm not easily intimidated, no matter what.

The bath water is cooling now and I step out of it. I towel myself dry before proceeding to the room to get dressed. I dress in a black blouse and tailored pants, my dark curls pulled back, ready for business. Whoever said a nice bath is an antidote to every trouble hadn't lied.

My phone buzzes, and I grab it as I settle at a desk. It's Aida, calling to keep me up to date about the business I'm in charge of. Her voice is like a lifeline to an old life, a life I'm itching to get back to. But I don't dwell on it as I dive into the money laundering operation I run on the side for Papa. We talk numbers, accounts, fronts—millions funneled through shell companies, clean as snow. Aida's thorough, catching me up on every move.

After we're done, Aida launches into idle chatter. "Fina, you missed chaos," she says, her tone all drama. I imagine her with her legs crossed at the ankles and her eyes alight as she narrates what I've missed to me. Aida has always had a penchant for drama.

"Tell me," I urge. Back home, I never indulged in gossip or drama, for that matter. My life's packed full of problems already. But right now, I can't help but indulge. I need to rid myself of the memory of last night.

"Riccardo's back, and he's stirring shit. He tried to reroute a shipment, but Carlos handled it on Signor Rossi's order."

My laughter is mocking. "Good. Better to keep him in line."

It's on the tip of my tongue to ask whether there's any indication from Papa that he misses me. He'd after all given me out without a thought to my feelings. It's only karmic that he misses his dear daughter. But I doubt he does. And even if he misses me, he's not one to show it. He hasn't called, not that I expect him to. And I won't call him either. I have his stubborn streak after all.

"You're missed," Aida says, her voice softer now.

Unable to help it, I say, "by whom?"

"By everyone. Even Luis. I told you he had a thing for you. He won't shut up about how he thinks it's a mistake that you're married to Enzo Mancini."

I roll my eyes. "Tell me about it."

"This place isn't the same without you, Serafina."

My throat tightens, but I brush it off. “I’m fine,” I say, voice firm. “I’m keeping Enzo in line and everything is going well.” I shudder at the lie. “Just keep things tight.”

I want to add, “and look after Papa,” but I decide against it and hang up before Aida can launch into more chatter.

The call had grounded me and my head's exactly where it should be. I head downstairs for breakfast, my heels clicking on the spiral staircase. Enzo’s manor unfolds around me, all sharp angles and old wealth. The halls are lined with dark stone, etched with vines, and tall windows spill light onto floors of black marble.

Paintings hang heavy, faces of dead Mancinis staring down, their eyes cold. The air carries hints of cedar and wax, like a vault sealed tight. It’s not grand or warm—it’s a fortress, built to intimidate, and I feel its weight.

To intimidate whom? Certainly not me. I walk taller, refusing to shrink. I wonder what awaits me in the dining room. Wonder if I'll have my first breakfast with my husband. The word sounds ridiculous. It'll never sound right. My stomach twists at the thought of breakfast with him, his presence a live wire I can’t possibly dodge.

In the dining room, a long table waits, set for one. Relief surges through me like lightning. I hadn't realized how much I'd been counting on not seeing Enzo here.

The head maid, an older woman with grey streaks in her bun, greets me. “Signora, breakfast is served,” she says, her voice formal. “Signor Mancini regrets he cannot join you. He isn't back from the mission he went on last night.”

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The relief overwhelms me, but I keep my face blank, nodding. “Thank you,” I say, sitting.

I’m glad he’s gone. His absence is a fucking gift, a chance to breathe without his heat, his scent, his fucking voice calling me Fina, unraveling me. I don't think I can stand him breathing near me. I'd turn to a mush and maybe beg him to fuck me on the table.

I can't let the maids see my profound relief, so I inject a bit of petulance in my expression. A sign that screams: Signora Rossi misses her new husband early.

I wonder fleetingly if he'd called the head maid himself to inform her. He should have called to inform me instead. Doeshe even have my fucking number? Yet again, do I want to be corresponding with him like a normal couple? Is the sun bright and golden in paradise? I wonder what the head maid and the rest of his staff must think about this marriage. Is it obvious it's a sham?

The maids hover, pouring coffee, setting plates before me—a classic Italian spread. There’s cornetti, golden and flaky, dusted with powdered sugar, their centers soft with apricot jam, just how I like it. Slices of pane tostato sit crisp, smeared with fresh ricotta and honey. A bowl of figs, plump and purple, gleams beside a small cup of espresso, its aroma bitter and strong.

I eat slowly, savoring the flavors, the normalcy of it grounding me.

The maids move like shadows, refilling my coffee, clearing plates. I watch them, curious. It's normal to be curious about my new home. They won't think I'm crazy

when I start asking questions, so I indulge.

“What’s it like, working for Enzo?” I ask the head maid, my tone casual but probing. She pauses, her hands still, like she’s surprised I’ll try to broach a conversation with her.

“He’s strict but fair,” she says, echoing Giulia. I almost roll my eyes. Fair my ass. “Keeps to himself mostly.”

Oh? I raise a brow. Does he now? “And his men? They trouble you?” A younger maid who’s wiping the table giggles, then catches herself as the head maid glares at her.

“They’re loud,” she says, blushing. “But kind. Matteo tells stories, makes us laugh.”

I smile, liking her honesty. She’s less reserved than Giulia. “Matteo’s trouble,” I say, and she nods, grinning. They’re warm, these women, and I feel a spark of ease with them, a contrast to the cold, hot, warm knot Enzo ties in me.

Satisfied with their answer, I ask no further questions. As I finish, I lean back, my mind drifting to yesterday. Matteo’s teasing had caught me off guard, his grin pulling a laugh from me I hadn’t expected. I like him. His easy charm is like a balm against Enzo’s intensity.

I’d refused to falter in that hall, meeting his men, their tests, without falling under his spell. But how long can I keep it up? Enzo’s presence, even absent, lingers like pungent smoke. I hate how he stirs me, how my body betrays me with him. He’s my enemy. Why can’t the thought take root in my mind? What on earth am I doing letting him unravel me like that?

Breathe, Serafina.

With Enzo gone, I've got space to breathe, to learn this place. I know what I have to do next. I thank the maids as they clean up after me. I leave the dining room to wander the manor's halls, my steps slow and deliberate.

The walls are thick, carved with intricate patterns, and chandeliers hang like iron crowns, casting jagged light. The floors gleam, polished to a mirror's edge, reflecting my silhouette. Rooms open to libraries, their shelves stuffed with leather books, and parlors with velvet chairs, their cushions stiff, unused. I wonder if Enzo reads. I'm not much of a reader myself.

Does Enzo ever sit still long enough to think, or is he always moving, always fighting, like last night, fucking me like a man possessed before vanishing on some mission?

Focus.

This place is a place of power, no doubt. Definitely not a place for comfort. Every corner I turn to is unyielding, just like the Lord of the manor. I feel like an intruder, but I keep moving, mapping it, claiming it in my own way. This is my battleground now, and I won't be caught off guard.

Outside, the grounds stretch wide, gravel paths winding through olive trees, their leaves silver in the morning sun. The air's crisp, scented with earth and citrus, and I walk, letting it clear my head. It's a fine day that needs to be lived.

I'm halfway down a path when a figure steps out from behind an olive tree. I go still, thinking it's going to happen. I'm going to die on a path in Enzo's garden without having to fully live my life, without having to know what'll eventually come of my marriage to him. I've been caught off guard.

But it's not a killer that faces me. It's Adriano Venturi, Enzo's advisor. The man with

his silver hair slick. The man with his smile too smooth. I'd hated him then. His eyes had been too sharp, too knowing.

Now, seeing him here, my gut twists harder. He's in a dark suit, hands clasped, with that unnerving smile plastered on his face. His posture is almost friendly. If I didn't know any better, I'd think he's trying to be friendly when in reality, he's trying to threaten me.

"Serafina," he says, voice almost a purr. "Settling in?"

I lift my chin high to meet his gaze. "What do you want? You sure as hell don't want to know if I'm settling in, so cut the crap." My voice is cold as I deliver my line.

His smile widens, but it's all teeth. "Just a word," he says, stepping closer into my space. I don't falter. "Beware, signorina. Things here aren't what they seem."

The words drip with menace. It's a warning wrapped in silk. I don't fail to notice he'd addressed me as 'Miss' instead of 'Mrs'. It's a deliberate jab. He's trying to remind me of my place.

My blood heats, defiance flaring. I never back down from a threat, and I won't start now. "Is that a threat?" I snap, stepping up to him, my eyes burning. "Because I don't scare easily, Adriano. Try me, and you'll see."

His smile falters and before he can recover, I hit him again. "And it's Signora to you."

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The smile is well off his face now. His mask has slipped, and I see the man he is beneath—hateful, dangerous. His jaw is clenched, but he says nothing.

He turns and walks away, leaving me alone on the path, my fists clenched and my heart racing.

Perhaps, he's the one person I hate more than Enzo. And what is Enzo doing, having him as an advisor? This man is nothing but a scheming bastard and I know he has something to hide. Enzo needs to be protected from him. I need to let him know what a snake Adriano is.

I catch myself in time and put a stop to that train of thought. What business of mine is it if Enzo dies or gets hurt? What do I care? Besides, he's a snake too, birds of a feather, and I should do well to steer clear of him, no matter what happened last night.

9

Enzo

The warehouse is a dark smear against the night. The air is heavy with salt and oil. My blood's still roaring from the fight of minutes ago, adrenaline powering my every move. My knuckles are bruised, and the gun is heavy in my hand as I point it to the barely breathing man on the wet floor. Unblinking, I pull the trigger.

I haven't had a wink of sleep since I left Fina trembling on that table last night, her pussy dripping with my cum, her moans burned into my skull. She's why I'm off,

why I want this over, why I'm itching to get back to the manor, even if I hate admitting it

It surprises me. I've never been one to rush a job and go home. I like to be thorough in my work, be it in dark alleys and boardrooms. But right now, I'm restless, and it's because of her. That damned woman. She has impaled myself on my mind. So much so that whenever I close my eyes, it's her I see. She's dominating my thoughts.

Matteo's beside me, shouting orders as our men haul crates we just ripped back from the Gallos. They had come prepared. A pity we'd come better prepared.

The job is done. It's quick. It's effective. It's bloody. Bodies are slumped on the concrete. A few of the men had escaped, and some of the men are hot on their heels. This place is a bloodbath. I rock on my heels, wishing my men would go faster.

I haven't seen her since I left the manor last night. My wedding night and I'd left her for a mission. Why does it nag me? It's not like she expects anything from me. We'd both made it clear what we wanted or didn't want from our marriage—except for the surprise sex we hadn't at all factored in. But I can't seem to shake the thought that I should be back in the manor, under the sheets with her, holding her against me while I murmur sweet nonsense to her.

Save for the mind-blowing sex, we can barely tolerate each other. What will we be talking about? More sex positions to explore? The sizzling attraction that I know even she doesn't deny feeling? I need to tether myself back to reality and stay grounded. Fina is trouble.

I reach down, gripping the cold steel of my gun and the sharp and metallic scent of blood pulls me back. This is my world, not her. She'll never be mine in the true sense of it. The sex we had was nothing. It's nothing. The more I have it ingrained, the better.

Nico, one of the men that had come on this mission with us, jogs over. His face tight as he flicks nervous eyes to me and Matteo. There's trouble. I nearly groan. At which point exactly do I go home?

“Signor Mancini, we got a problem,” he says, his voice low, his eyes on Matteo like he’s afraid to speak.

There's a rumor going about in my crew that Matteo is the most feared, even with his charm. I wear my fierceness as a shell on the exterior, and with me, what they see is what they get. But with Matteo, his charm is deceptive. Underneath is something brutal, so I understand Nico’s prejudice.

My instinct flares at the look in his eyes. “Talk,” I snap, sliding the gun into my holster.

He leans in, his breath sour with cigarettes. “Caught one of their guys alive. He talked.” His eyes refuse to meet mine.

“And...?” I inquire.

“He says there’s a traitor in our crew. He's been feeding the Gallos our routes, our deals.” The words douse me in cold water. It burrows deep, igniting my rage. A traitor. In my house. Mymen are my blood, they'll never think to betray me. They know the reward for betrayal. But apparently, someone's been stupid enough.

“Who?” I growl, stepping close. My voice is a threat.

Nico shakes his head, sweat gleaming on his brow. “He didn’t know a name. Just said it’s someone close.”

My jaw locks, my mind spinning—Luca, Marco, Matteo? No, not Matteo. He’s my

brother in all but blood. I rule him out immediately. He'll never betray me. Even with my life on the line, I'll swear to it.

“Get him to the safehouse,” I say, my voice icy. “I’ll deal with him.” Nico scrambles off, and I turn to Matteo, who’s watching, his face blank. “You hear that?” I say, eyes narrowing.

He nods, slowly. “Yeah. Fucking rat in our ranks.” His voice is steady, but I know there's barely contained rage beneath his calm demeanor.

“Come on, then,” I say to Matteo.

We move out. Throughout the drive through the city, my head’s a mess. A traitor in my ranks. I replay every deal, every hit, wondering what’s been sold and how far this goes. The Gallos have been too sharp, their moves too clean, and now I know why. Someone I trust is bleeding me, and it’s a wound I can’t ignore.

I light a cigar, the smoke harsh, curling in my chest, but it doesn’t dull the anger. Matteo glances over, his voice careful. “You thinking it’s one of the core guys?”

I grunt, staring out the window. “Could be anyone. I’ll find him, and he’s done.” He nods, but his silence feels heavy. I know he’s wondering who I suspect. I know he's wondering who it could be.

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My phone buzzes. I groan. I need rest. I pick up. Nico's voice crackles through. "Signor Mancini, the guy gave up more. He says a Rossi associate, Luis, is fucking with another operation. He's sabotaging your docks, rerouting shipments to screw you."

My blood boils. Domenico's man. I'd met him at the wedding. A smug bastard. I'd heard him talking to Domenico's other men about how he thinks Domenico is making a huge mistake by giving Fina to me.

What does it mean that another Rossi is trying to sabotage me? Why's this happening now with Fina in my home? The timing's too perfect. Is she in on it? Playing me while I'm balls-deep in her? The thought of her tied to this, even loosely, twists my gut.

"Where is he?" I snap. Nico pauses. "Dive bar downtown. Got two guys with him."

"Grab him. We're taking him to the manor. No noise. Text the bar's address to me." Nico grunts, and I hang up, my plan snapping into place.

"Luis," Matteo says, voice low, catching my eye. My phone had been on speaker and he'd caught every word. "Domenico's guy. The manor? You sure?"

I nod, my jaw tight. "He's fucking with my money, Matteo. He's mine."

Matteo raises a brow but stays quiet, his hands steady on the wheel. I lean back, plotting in my mind. Luis could be leverage, a way to choke the Rossis without shattering this fragile peace. Torture's tempting. His screams would feel good, but the

Rossis are no small enemy, and I'm married to one.

"Goddammit," I mutter.

Matteo glances at me again. "You sure you know what you're doing?"

I grunt, nodding.

"The Rossis are formidable. You're married to one. Pulling an attack on one of their own is you overstepping. And, taking him to the manor? What if Serafina finds out? Need I remind you that she's not a woman to fuck with?"

I impale him with a glare. "Where does your loyalty lie? To me or to Serafina?"

He glances at me as though I've gone mad. Maybe I have.

"Besides, she's my fucking wife. I know her better than anyone. I know she's not a woman to fuck with."

This draws a chuckle from Matteo and he raises his hand in mock surrender. "Relax, man. She's your wife, all right. I just want to be sure you've thought this through."

I say nothing to that. I've thought it through and I'm not entertaining any more conversation about it. Matteo understands my grim silence and shuts the hell up. My head is pounding.

In no time, we hit the bar. It's a grimy hole lit by neon. The air is thick with beer and sweat. Nico's in the alley, signaling as we step down from the car. "He's inside," he whispers, nodding to a side door. "Two guys, like I said."

I nod, pulling my jacket tight, and we move stealthily. Inside, the bar's dim, music

thumping, and I spot Luis at a corner table, laughing, a drink in hand. His men are distracted, one chatting up a waitress, the other on his phone. Perfect.

I signal, and we strike—Matteo grabs one guy, slamming him down, while I pin Luis, my arm around his throat, gun to his temple. “Move, and you’re dead,” I hiss. His men freeze, caught by Nico’s crew, and we drag them out, quick, no shots fired. Luis struggles, but I tighten my grip, his breath ragged. “You’re mine now,” I mutter, shoving him into the car.

We head to the manor, Luis bound and gagged in the trunk, his men locked in another car. The drive’s quiet, my thoughts atangle of fury and plans. The traitor problem looms, but Luis is a problem I can solve.

I’ll throw him in the manor’s cellar, a stone vault beneath the house, and keep him there, a pawn against Domenico. Torture’s on my mind, but I hold off. He’s leverage, and I need him alive—for now.

Serafina complicates it. If she knew I had her father’s man, she’d come for me, all fire and teeth, and part of me wants that fight. I hate how she’s in my head. I need her out of it. Maybe I could dangle Luis’s capture in her face. But even as I think it, I know it’s a bad idea.

At the manor, we pull into the garage, the night still dark. Matteo moves to tend to the other captives. I know he’ll be ruthless with them. I drag Luis out, his eyes wide, muffled curses behind the gag. “Shut up,” I snap, shoving him toward the cellar stairs.

The door’s heavy, iron, and the air below is damp, smelling of earth and rust. I chain him to a pipe, his wrists bound, and he glares, still cocky. “Big mistake, Mancini,” he spits, voice muffled.

I smirk, leaning close. “You fucked with my docks. Bigger mistake.”

He laughs. The sound's shaky. “Domenico will burn you.”

I grab his jaw, hard, my voice low. “Not if I break you first.” I step back, locking the cell, his curses echoing as I climb the stairs. He’s mine, and Serafina won’t know—not yet.

We move out of the manor quietly and hit the safehouse next. It can't wait till tomorrow. I have to deal with it now. I have to get back to Fina. The safehouse is a rotting shack on the city’s edge. The guy from the warehouse, one of the Gallos, is tied up, face battered, blood crusted on his chin. He’s trembling, eyes wide as I step in with Matteo behind me.

I lean close to him, my stance threatening. “Who’s the traitor?”

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He stammers, his voice cracked. “I don’t know a name, I swear. Just heard it’s someone high up, passing your plans to the Gallos.”

I grab his jaw, forcing his eyes to mine. “Details,” I growl.

He chokes out scraps—dates, routes, deals that went south. It’s enough to prove the leak’s real, but not enough to name the snake.

I see him hesitate. His eyes wide go wide, like he’s scared to say more. Matteo picks up on it. “Spill,” he growls.

“There’s something else,” he mumbles, voice shaking. “About your mother. A deal, years back, with the Vitale crew. It went bad, got her killed. They know something, Mancini, something they’re still holding.”

My blood freezes, his words twisting like a knife in my gut. My mother’s death is tied to the Vitales? I clench my fists.

“Fucking bastard. Everyone knows Rossis are behind it, not the Vitales,” Matteo grounds out through clenched teeth.

“Yes, yes, I know... But it's also tied to the Vitales. It's what I heard. I swear, I don't know any more.”

His voice is a trembling mess. My rage erupts, and I slam my fist into his face, blood spraying. “Useless,” I spit, stepping back, my chest heaving. Matteo nods to one of our men, and a gunshot cracks, sharp and final, the prisoner’s body slumping.

I storm outside, lighting a cigar, my second tonight. The smoke curls, bitter, doing nothing to calm the storm in me. A traitor's in my circle, eating me alive, and now this—my mother, the Vitales, Rossis—my wife's fucking family for heaven's sake, and a secret that's been buried too long. It's all a tangled web. A web I need to detangle to get to the root of what happened.

Matteo walks up to me and claps my shoulder, his voice low. "We'll find him, Enzo. We'll get to everyone that's behind this. Nobody screws us and walks."

I nod, but my mind's on Luis, chained in my cellar, a Rossi pawn I can use. I want him broken, but I have to play this smart. Serafina's one of them, and if she finds out, she'll come for me. I should avoid it, should avoid her totally.

We get back to the manor just as the beginnings of dawn streaks grey across the sky. I feel oddly unfulfilled. We've managed to handle the issues at hand, but I'm not sated. I itch all over. I need Fina. I need her to ease the burning anger in me.

I head up to my room, my boots heavy on the marble, half hoping she'd be there. The air is thick with cedar and silence. As I'd guessed, she's not there. She's not one who likes to be told what to do. But fuck, I want her. I need a fix and she's the only one to provide that. Tonight's victory is hollow, it won't do.

I retrace my steps to my study, the loss of not seeing her profound in my mind. She's upstairs in her room, I bet, probably asleep. I should be glad, I don't want her eyes on me, not now, not with Luis in my grip. But I can't help it. I briefly contemplate going up to her room. Will she welcome me, or will she tell me off?

I arrive at the study, and sit, my mood sour. I pour a shot of whiskey and stare at the empty hearth. The fire is long dead. The taste of the whiskey is sharp on my tongue. Luis is in my cellar, a piece to play against the Rossis. But Serafina complicates it. She's a Rossi, a tool, but she's more, and it's fucking with me.

She's fucking with me.

10

Serafina

“Fina, Luis is missing. My men think Enzo took him. I don’t want a war, not now, but I need you to find out if it’s true.” His frail voice crackles through, low and urgent.

My heart sinks. He isn't calling to hear from me. He’s calling to break bad news. He doesn't care if I'm dying in this marriage to Enzo. The only thing he cares about is his men and his legacy. As much as that angers me, what angers me the more is the news he's just broken to me.

I grip the phone tight, my nails digging into my palm. “I’ll handle it,” I say, voice steady, even though I'm raging inside. At Papa. At the world. At Enzo. I don't know what game Enzo’s playing, but I’m caught in the middle and I want out.

I hang up, my mind racing. I don't care much for Luis. He'd always challenged me. Even now, I think back to when Aida had suggested that perhaps he was smitten with me. That day now feels like eons ago.

I shouldn't care about Luis being abducted by Enzo. But, despite my reservation towards him, he’s always loyal to Papa, and his disappearance feels personal. It's like a slap to my face, to Papa's face. It's Enzo drawing a line in the sand.

I pull on a grey sweater and pants, my movements sharp and quick. My boots are heavy as I lace them up. Time to sniff around for the truth. Enzo’s been gone since the wedding night, out on some mission, but he’s back now. I heard his car pull in at dawn. He’s hiding something, and I’m not waiting to find out what.

The manor is quiet as I stealthily walk through. I can smell the secret in the air, and I'm ready to tear it apart to find answers. I head downstairs, my boots thudding against the marble. The manor's walls are closing in like a trap. The portraits of dead Mancinis glare down, their eyes cold, judging. I ignore them, my focus razor-sharp.

Giulia, my maid, catches me in the hall, her auburn hair tucked under her cap. "Signora, breakfast?" she asks in her usual timid voice. I shake my head, brushing past her.

"Not now," I say, my tone clipped. She shrinks back, and I feel a pang, but I'm too wound up to care. I need to find Enzo, to know if he's stupid enough to snatch one of Papa's men under my nose.

The study's my first stop, its heavy door ajar, the scent of whiskey and smoke lingering. It's empty, the hearth cold, but I feel him here, his presence like a living, breathing thing. He'd been here, but not anymore.

I move on, checking the garage, the library, every room in this damn fortress, but he's nowhere to be found. My anger grows. It's like a fire licking at my veins. If Enzo's holding Luis, I definitely won't let it slide.

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I head down to the cellar, a place I've avoided. Its iron door is tucked in a dim corridor. The air's damp, smelling of mud and blood, and my gut tells me this is where I'll find answers.

The door creaks as I push it open, the stairs descending into darkness. My boots echo, the sound swallowed by the stone walls. At the bottom, a single bulb swings, casting jagged light over a concrete cell. And there he is—Luis, chained to a pipe, wrists bound, his face bruised, blood dried on his lip.

He looks up, eyes wide, then smirks, that old cocky grin. "Fina," he says, voice rough. "Come to save me?" My stomach churns, rage and disgust mixing. He's here, in Enzo's cellar, and it's no mistake. Enzo did this, and he kept it from me.

"Shut up," I snap, stepping close, my voice cold. "What happened?"

Luis laughs, wincing as it pulls at his split lip. "Your husband's a bastard, that's what. Grabbed me at a bar, locked me here. Thinks he can use me against Domenico."

My fists clench, my nails biting my palms. Enzo's playing a dangerous game, and I'm the one caught in it. I turn, ready to hunt him down, but heavy footsteps echo above. I know it's him before I see him, his presence like a storm rolling in. I turn in a whirl.

Enzo fills the doorway, his broad frame blocking the dim light. The air crackles, heavy with his presence, and my skin prickles in remembrance.

His eyes are dark and unreadable. His hair is tousled, like he ran his fingers through it

one too many times. He looks like he hasn't slept. His shirt is rumpled and upon closer look, his eyes are bloodshot. My gaze shoots to his hand on the knob and I notice his knuckles are red, scraping raw. I mentally wince. Whoever had been on the receiving end of his wrath has to be the unluckiest person in the world.

I want to go to him and cradle his head against my chest. I want to lay soft kisses on his knuckles and ease the pain I know he doesn't feel away. My heart aches just to see him.

What the fuck is wrong with me? I should get a grip. I'm not some lovesick puppy. I'm angry at him, for Christ's sake!

But still, I let my gaze roam over him. The man could be in a sack, and he'd still be gorgeous. Damn him for stirring something in me. This heat between us is something I can't kill. Even now, it sizzles.

"Fina," he says in a low voice, like he's tasting my name on his tongue. Like it's his to own. "What the hell are you doing down here?" His gaze flicks to Luis, then back to me. His eyes narrow, like he's peeling me apart, seeing how much I know.

"Don't play dumb," I hiss, stepping forward. My chest is tight with fury. "You took him. Papa's man. You think you can pull this shit under my nose?" My voice trembles, not from fear but from rage, from the way his eyes burn into mine, forcing me to remember memories I'd rather forget. "Unless you want a war, Enzo, let him go. Now."

Luis chuckles behind me. The sound is low and taunting. Petty asshole. I want to smash his face, but Enzo's my target. I see a tick in his jaw as if he's trying to rein in his temper. What stupid temper? I should be the one angry, not him.

He steps closer, towering over me. His nearness makes my skin tingle, and my brain

short-circuits. The man has a stour effect on me.

“You think you can order me around in my own house?” His voice is a growl. But it's not anger I sense in it, it is hunger. His eyes are communicating his wants to me. It sends a shiver through me, my body betraying me with a rush of heat. Am I going mad? He continues. “Luis fucked with my docks, Fina. He's leverage. You don't call the shots.” His eyes drop to my lips, and my breath catches.

He's deliberately doing it. He's trying to unnerve me. Fuck him. Why can't I seem to remember that he's my enemy when he's close? He can't know how much he's affecting me.

“Bullshit,” I spit as I close the gap between us, our faces now inches apart. “You want leverage? You're starting a war you can't win. You're lighting a fire. Papa's men are itching for a fight, and this?” I jab a finger toward Luis. “This is the match.”

Luis laughs again, mockingly, and it's like gasoline on my rage. “Shut up,” I snap at him, not breaking eye contact with Enzo, who's watching me like a predator, his lips twitching, like he's daring me to make a move.

“You've got some nerve, Fina,” Luis rasps, his voice rough, dripping with sarcasm. “Barging in here, playing hero for your papa. You think Mancini's gonna listen to you?” His words sting, and I whirl on him, my fists clenching, nails biting my palms.

“I said shut up, Luis. You're here because you fucked up, so don't lecture me.”

He grins, wincing as it pulls his split lip, but his eyes gleam, like he's enjoying this too much.

I turn back to Enzo, my rage flaring hotter. “You're making a mistake. Papa's not some street thug you can push. Keep Luis, and you're begging for blood.”

Enzo's eyes narrow, his jaw working, but he doesn't budge, his silence infuriating. "You're in my world now, Fina," he says finally, voice low and cutting. "My rules."

His words hit like a slap, and my blood boils. I'm not his to control, not his to cage, and I'll be damned if he thinks he can break me. Luis snickers, and it's the last straw, my control snapping like a brittle thread.

"You're both fucking idiots," I snarl, my voice echoing off the stone walls. "You think this is a game? You're tearing everything apart, and I'm the one stuck in the middle."

Enzo's eyes flash, something shifting in them—anger, maybe, or something hotter, and it's like a match to my own fire.

My heart's pounding, my skin buzzing, and I'm too close. His scent—sweat, smoke, him—floods me. I should back off, but his eyes remain intent on mine. God, the desire in them, the need. I hate him so much, but fuck, I want him, and the line between the two is blurred, it makes my sight hazy. It makes me delirious.

Before I can stop myself, I grab his shirt and yank him down. I see the way his eyes widen in surprise. I slam my mouth into his hard. It's desperate. It's a collision of lips and fury. It's not a kiss—it's a fucking explosion. My lips bruise against his, my teeth grazing his lower lip. I taste the whiskey on his tongue.

He freezes for a heartbeat, then growls. The sound is low and feral as his mouth claims mine hungrily. His tongue pushes in roughly and tangles with mine. I don't fight it. I let him take the lead. I let him wreck my mouth with his tongue, my nails digging into his chest through his shirt. The kiss is raw, a war of need and rage, my body igniting as his heat seeps into me, my core throbbing and so wet, despite the anger still burning.

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I pour every ounce of betrayal, every spark of hate, into it. My tongue swirls against his, tasting that dark, addictive edge that's all Enzo. His lips are relentless, sucking my tongue, his teeth nipping, sending fire through my veins. I tilt my head, deepening the kiss, my mouth open, greedy. My fingers twist tighter in his shirt, pulling him closer.

He responds, his mouth harder, like he's trying to consume me, to erase every thought that isn't him. It's too intense, my lips swelling, my breath stolen, and I'm drowning in it, in him, my body screaming for more even as my mind screams this is wrong.

Luis's laugh sounds faint, distant, but I don't care, not now, not with Enzo's mouth on mine, his tongue fucking my mouth like he fucked me that night. My heart's a riot, my skin buzzing. I press closer, my chest against his, feeling his fast heartbeat that matches mine. His lips move with mine, urgent, unyielding, and it's like the world's burning down around us—the cellar, Luis, everything fading into the heat of this kiss.

It's a mistake, a surrender, but I can't stop, not when it's this raw, this explosive, my body alive with him, my lips locked with his, lost in the fire we've ignited.

11

Enzo

Fina's mouth is a fucking inferno, her lips bruising mine, her tongue a wild, desperate thing tangling with my own. The kiss is chaos, raw and unyielding, her teeth grazing my lip, sending a spark of heat through me that's all want and lust. Her nails are

digging into my chest through my shirt, and I'm drowning in her, in the heat of her body pressed against me, her heartbeat slamming against my ribs.

The cellar fades, Luis's mocking laugh a distant buzz, nothing compared to the fire she's lit in me. My tongue pushes deeper, claiming her, tasting her, and it's not enough, it'll never be enough.

She's my enemy, my wife, my fucking obsession, and right now, she's mine, her mouth open, greedy, pulling me under. I groan into her mouth, my hands itching to grab her, to rip her clothes off and fuck her right here, but something snaps in me, a shred of sanity I don't want.

I tear my mouth away, panting. My lips are raw and my cock throbs painfully in my pants. Her eyes are wide and wild, her chest heaving, lips flushed from our war.

I step back on almost wobbly feet, despite my heart kicking up a protest, every nerve screaming to pull her back, to keep going, to lose myself in her. But I can't. Not here, not with Luis watching, not when she's got me so twisted I can't think straight.

"If that's your play to free Luis," I rasp, my voice rough, unsteady, "it won't work." The words are a shield, a weak attempt to regain control, but they sound hollow, even to me. I'm an idiot for ending it, for trying to be sane with her. I don't want sane. I want wild, reckless. I want her body under mine, her screams in my ears, and the thought makes my blood burn hotter.

Her laugh is cold as she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, green eyes blazing. "Don't flatter yourself," she snaps, stepping closer, her voice pure venom.

She's trying to pretend the kiss didn't rattle her, but it's a lie. I see it in the flush of her cheeks, the way her breath hitches. She's as fucked up by this as I am, but she's Fina, all fire and defiance, and she's not giving me an inch. She won't ever let me take

a mile.

“Let him go, Enzo,” she says, her voice low, deadly. “Or it’s war. You’ve got five days.”

Did she just give me a fucking ultimatum? No one would get away with this. But she's not no one, she's Fina, she's my wife. Luis snorts, his cocky grin widening like he’s won something. My rage flares, not just at her, but at him, at myself, at this whole damn mess.

“Get out, Fina” I say calmly, my control flaring. Despite my outward calmness, my voice is a warning.

She doesn't flinch, just holds my stare, chin high. Then, without another word, she turns, her boots echoing as she storms up the stairs, the iron door slamming behind her.

The cellar’s quiet now, just Luis’s ragged breathing and my pounding heart. I turn to him, my fists clenching, my blood roaring. He’s still smirking, his bruised face twisted with amusement, like he’s got me figured out.

“Hell of a show, Mancini,” he rasps, his voice rough, taunting. “She’s got you by the balls, huh?” His laugh is a spark to my fury, and I’m on him in a second, my fist slamming into his jaw, the crack of bone against bone ringing off the stone walls. His head snaps back, blood spraying, and I hit him again, my knuckles splitting, the pain a release for the frustration boiling in me.

“You think you’re clever?” I snarl, grabbing his collar, yanking him forward, his chains rattling. “Keep laughing, and I’ll rip your fucking tongue out.”

He chokes, blood dripping from his split lip, but his eyes still gleam and it makes me

want to break him, to erase self-satisfying smirk and the memory of Fina's kiss in one brutal swing. I shove him back, my chest heaving, my hands shaking with the need to hit him again.

I head to my study, the manor's halls cold and silent, the portraits of dead Mancinis glaring down like they know I'm losing my grip because of a woman. A woman whose family had been involved in the death of my mother. A woman who should be my enemy.

I should hate her. I'd started out this whole thing hating her. When did that turn to lust? Probably that first night, years ago, when I hadn't even known who she was. This is a whole lot complicated.

Fuck.

My lips still burn and the taste of her kiss lingers. My cock's still hard, a fucking traitor that won't quit. In my study, I pour a whiskey, the glass cold against my bruised knuckles, and down it in one burn. The fire in my throat is nothing compared to the one she's left in me.

I sit, staring at the empty hearth, my mind replaying her ultimatum. She's a Rossi, a tool, but she's more, and it's fucking with me. I need to focus. I need to deal with the traitor in my ranks, the mess with the Gallos, but all I can think about is her mouth, her body, the way she fights me and pulls me in at the same time.

I call Matteo and Adriano, my voice clipped as I summon them to the study. I need a new course of action. They both arrive quickly. Matteo's easy grin fades into a curious frown when he sees my face. Adriano's calm gaze steady, like always, a small smile creasing the frown lines on his face. These two are the people I trust most, their sharp minds a rock I lean on in any shitstorm.

I lean back in my chair, resisting the urge to light a cigar. “We’ve got a problem.” They both say nothing, their expressions urging me to go ahead. “The Gallo prisoner said something before he died. Something about my mother, about a deal gone bad years ago, tied to the Vitale crew.”

My mother’s name feels like a weight. It’s a scar I don’t touch with just anyone. I haven’t mentioned her in a conversation in a long time. Her memory is a sacred treasure that only I am allowed access to. Matteo’s eyes narrow at the implication of this, his jaw tight. Adriano leans forward, his hair catching the lamplight, his face focused, no hint of anything but loyalty.

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“Vitale’s been quiet,” Matteo says, voice careful. “Why stir this now?” I exhale smoke, my mind churning. The prisoner’s words were fragments—dates, names, a betrayal tied to my mother’s death, something the Vitales knew, something they’ve held close. Something tied to the Rossis.

“The traitor in our ranks,” I say, my voice hard. “They’re feeding the Gallos, maybe the Vitales too. We need to know how far this runs.”

Adriano’s eyes sharpen, and I know he’s already piecing it together, his mind as keen as my father always swore it was. “We could draw them out,” he says, voice even, deliberate. “Throw a party, invite the Vitales, the Gallos, everyone. Let them think we’re distracted, celebrating. They’ll slip, and we’ll catch them.”

“Right. That’s a brilliant idea,” Matteo chips in.

I nod slowly as the plan starts to take shape. A party is a trap, a way to watch their eyes, their hands. It’s a way to feel them in.

“Do it,” I say, my tone final. “Set it for next week. Make it loud, flashy. Let them think I’m toasting my new bride.” The word bride tastes like Fina’s kiss. It has me all knotted up. Matteo quirks a brow, but he doesn’t push, just nods. Adriano’s gaze holds mine, steady, like he’s reading my tension but not judging, just waiting.

“Anything else?” Matteo shakes his head, but Adriano pauses, his voice calm. “Just keep your eyes open, Enzo. We’ll get answers.” It’s the kind of steady advice my father trusted, and I nod, leaning on his loyalty, even as my gut twists with everything else.

“Go now. Leave me be,” I say in a worn voice. They leave, Matteo with a quick glance, Adriano with a nod.

I’m alone again and the whiskey glass is empty. I chuckle dryly as I recall the fire in Fina’s eyes as she delivers her ultimatum. She had threatened war and I’m clever enough to know she’s not bluffing. Her father is Domenico Rossi. He's not a man to be toyed with. I may be ruthless at my game, but that one fact is a given.

I have to plan this in a strategic manner. I still have my vengeance to take. Initially, I'd thought they were the sole group responsible for my mother's death, but apparently, the ring runs long and wide. The Vitales allowed themselves to get stupidly caught in this whole mess. They're no match for me. This party will be a way to unravel them.

But even as I think about vengeance, it doesn't ring as solidly in my mind as it used to. And I know the reason for it. The Vitales aren't the only ones caught in this whole mess. My wife too is—Serafina Rossi.

Does she know about her father's part in the role he played in his mother's death? Is she also here in my manor on some revenge mission? Is she laughing at me, at my utter lack of control in regards to her?

She’s no delicate wife—she’s a Rossi, forged in blood, and she’ll torch me if I don’t play this smart. Luis is leverage, but he’s also a spark, and I need to decide what to do before her five days are up.

I lean back, closing my eyes. Her image comes to life in my mind. I’m a fool for ending that kiss, for letting her walk away, but I’ll see her again, and when I do, I won’t hold back. I want her wild, untamed, and in my bed.

I’ll have her, even if it means war. The party’s my next move, a chance to snare the

snakes in my house, but Fina's the real threat, and I'm not sure I want to dodge her.

12

Serafina

The night air is thick and heavy with the reek of cheap cologne and cigarette smoke as I step into the club, my boots clicking against the polished floor. The bass thumps through my bones, the lights flashing in jagged streaks of red and purple. It doesn't help to soothe my frayed nerves as I'm already on edge. My blood is roiling with purpose.

Aida had called this morning to relay Papa's message to me. It had elicited worry from me, because the matter was supposed to be relayed by him. I'd burdened myself with worry that his health is deteriorating fast, but Aida had allayed my worries. Papa simply doesn't want too much intervention.

It's about the money laundering business I run on the side for him. At first, Papa had been content with me just staying under his wings after I graduated from Yale. To him, I'd been groomed to become a proper lady—smile, charm, and someday, become some wife of a powerful don, hence my education and sophistication.

But, I'd known from a young age that it isn't what I want from life. I'm just not cut for a life like that. So, I'd insisted he let me learn the family trade and if he's impressed with my performance, he'd let me handle some parts of his business. He let me attend meetings with him, but I never headed them. It'd be unheard of to have a woman head a meeting of mainly men.

Within two years, I exceeded Papa's expectations, and albeit grudgingly, he'd accepted for me to become part of the trade, but not mainly. He gave rein of his money laundering business to me, although not completely. In turn, I'd hired Aida to

assist me, and together, we've secretly run it for two years. Papa wouldn't admit it, but I believe he trusts me to run things smoothly, in his own little way.

Now, one of his associates, Milano, is trying to frustrate my efforts. Aida had been going through account inventory when she realized someone had been draining our accounts. She'd traced the source to Milano. He'd been stupid enough to be obvious about it. According to Aida, he's been blowing cash on gaudy watches and private suites like he's untouchable.

Papa's too weak to handle it, Aida had said, so it's on me to make this bastard bleed. He could get some of his other men to handle it, but besides the fact that it's secret and exposure of it could blow its cover, I'm more than capable of taking care of it. I can handle myself in the face of these bastards, but Papa would hear nothing of it, so he'd sent two men to protect me on this mission.

He literally loves me so much he'd married me off without a second thought. And here he is, showing that love again. Besides, I have first-hand experience with dealing with assholes. Isn't Enzo one of them?

I shudder to think of the kiss in that cellar. It's been three days since I delivered my ultimatum, and he hasn't made any moves to free Luis. Does he underestimate me? Does he belittle Papa's power?

I'd heard nothing of it, but it'd seem a party is coming up. Enzo told me nothing. Fuck him. I haven't seen him since that kiss. Admittedly, I've been avoiding him. The nights get colder and lonelier, especially when I torture myself with how blissful it'd be to share his bed.

I'd seen the preparations and asked Matteo jokingly if they were preparing Luis for the gallows and planning to celebrate it later on. He'd been surprised that Enzo hadn't told me about it. I had the pleasure of telling him what an asshole his boss is. At that,

he'd laughed, thoroughly charmed. He then further explained that the party is being thrown in celebration of our marriage.

I almost laughed in his face. Our marriage indeed. And what a marriage it is.

Now, in the bar, I scan the crowds, flanked by two of Papa's men, Vito and Paulo whose faces are hard and grim. We're here for Milano. An insider had confirmed he'd be here, and I'm not leaving without his confession or blood at least... if it comes to that.

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The club is a writhing mess of bodies slick with sex and seduction, grime and liquor thick in the air. This is no place for a lady. Good thing I can be whoever the hell I want to, depending on the occasion. I cut through grimly. My grey jacket is tight against my skin and my hair is pulled back in a no nonsense style, not exactly club style. I'm here on a mission, not here to play.

The atmosphere in the club reminds me of my utter lack of shame with Enzo. All my life, I've prided myself on control, only allowing its lapse that one night in the bar, and it had been because of Enzo, too. And now, history is repeating itself. He's succeeded at reducing me to a desperate whore. And I'm allowing it.

I shove the thought down, focusing on the job at hand. We get to the middle where the mass of bodies part to reveal a narrow pathway. I almost don't see it, because my eyes are still scanning the crowd for Milano. But then, I see it, and sure enough, it's Enzo, my dear husband. I suck in a breath.

There he is, sprawled in a velvet booth like he owns the damn place. I narrow my eyes. What the hell is he doing here? Does he somehow know I'll be here and has come to sabotage my plans. Even as I think it, I know it's highly unlikely. But he's here, and he's real. Does he frequent here?

He's dressed in his signature attire, black tailored suit. His jacket is open to reveal his shirt that fits snugly to his pecs. The bastard's hot and he knows it. Two women are draped over him, their hands on his chest and thighs. That's my job. He's mine.

One of the women is whispering in his ear and her lips brush his skin in a provocative manner. My stomach twists, a hot, bitter spike of jealousy stabbing through me. And

rage, white-hot and consuming. The other woman is giggling, her fingers tugging his collar. I clench my fists. I hate it, hate how the sight of him with other women makes my chest tight.

He's my husband, goddammit. I could gouge his eyes out. I'd specifically told him I want no scandal. This is him cheating out in public. I'd warned him to keep his whores out of my face.

But he isn't exactly in my face right now, is he? He doesn't know I'm here.

Or maybe he does, and he's just doing it to punish me because he knows I'll react. I shouldn't feel the overwhelming jealousy that clogs my throat, making it close up. He's not mine, not really. Seeing him like this, shouldn't elicit such a strong response from me.

Damn him.

Before he can see me, I turn away and force my eyes to hunt for Milano. I'll deal with Enzo in good time. I spot my target at the bar, his loud laugh grating over the music. Aida was right. The man is frivolous. Even standing far from him, I can see a gold ring glinting as he downs a shot. He's surrounded by three goons, all muscle and definitely no brains. I nod to Vito and Paulo, my voice low. "That's him. Let's move."

They fall in behind me, and I stride forward, my boots heavy. My heart pounds and I grit my teeth, shoving the image of Enzo with his whores out of my shoving head. I need to focus on Milano. He's my target tonight. He doesn't know it yet, but I don't intend to go easy on him.

I reach the bar and plant myself directly in front of Milano, blocking his view. His eyes snap up at the rude intervention. His eyes freeze on my face and the smile on

his face slips the moment he sees me. Recognition lights up in his bloodshot eyes. “Milano,” I say, loud enough to cut through the chatter surrounding him. “We need to talk.”

He looks me up, then down, as if sizing me up. I plant my feet apart, my gaze unwavering on his face. He looks past me to the men at my back, and his smile fades. He’s stocky, with a face like a pitbull. While I’m not fazed because I’ve faced worse and walked away standing, I realize how this must look to him—me apprehending him with two huge men flanking me.

“Fina,” he says, his voice oily and it grates on my nerves. He’s aiming for charm. “Didn’t expect you here. Drink?” He lifts his glass in a slight offering to me, but I don’t miss the way his eyes flick to his goons. The fucking retard knows he’s fucked and is already trying to escape. Clever, except it isn’t.

“Cut the shit,” I snap through gritted teeth. “You’ve been stealing from Domenico’s accounts, spending it like it’s yours. You think we wouldn’t notice?” I’d opted to call Papa the general name he’s known as and not personalize his title.

His face hardens, but he laughs out loud, like the sound is forced from his mouth. It raises my ire. It’s like nails raking on my nerves. “You’re wrong, sweetheart,” he says, leaning back, his goons shifting closer to tower over me. It’s a stupid move at intimidation, and even he must know. Paulo and Vito move to intercept them, and the four of them eye each other warily. “Just business, you know how it goes.”

Where does he think he gets the nerve to use that endearment on me? Does he think I’m here to play games? The earlier he knows who’s running this whole thing, the better. Lord knows I’m already on edge from seeing Enzo frolicking with women.

“Business?” Is he shitting me? My eyes cold on his fat face, I lean towards him and in a completely unexpected move, I grab his wrist and twist hard. Vito grabs his other

arm so he can't swing at me. His glass crashes to the bar, the sound piercing through the electric atmosphere. His goons move in a bid to grab me, and Paulo blocks their attempts. He's bigger than them and it'll be easy for him to overpower them.

I continue, ignoring his shrieks. His face is red from the pain of me twisting his wrist. There's also shock in his eyes at my strong grip. "Stealing from the Rossis is a death sentence, Milano. If you don't know it, then you're as stupid as you look.

He mumbles something and before I can catch it, his goons lunge at me. It all happens in a flash. Vito and Marco dive in, tackling one of them each as fists fly in the air. Grunts and curses cut through the music, and already, it has some of the crowd's attention.

Before I can make a move, Milano yanks his arm free and swings at me, but my sharp reflexes kick in and I duck and step to the side. Before he can recover, I slam my fist into his gut. It gets him good. He staggers and doubles over, gasping. If he weren't a much bigger man, the punch to the gut would have him writhing on the floor.

I move towards him to grab his neck in a chokehold, but in that instant, he grabs a bottle from the bar and swings it at my head. I quickly dodge it and the glass shatters against the counter. "Cazzo," I swear as I pull my right leg back forcefully. I kick his knee hard, and this time, he loses his balance. The kick sends him stumbling and falling. He hits the ground hard.

The crowd's pulling back, some cheering and whistling, some bolting, but I don't take note of it. I'm locked in, my rage blinding me to everything else but the scene before me. Milano's men are holding their own against Vito and Marco, but if their weak attacks are anything to go by, they'll soon tire.

I approach Milano who's gripping his affected knee and yelling expletives in Italian. He shifts back when he sees me approaching, his eyes reflecting the fear he must feel.

They all underestimate me until my fist is doing the work, then it's fear.

Papa had done one thing right. Given the kind of family I'm from, and given that I'm a Don's daughter, I'll forever be vulnerable to threats and attacks. So, he'd made sure I learned martial arts. All those years I spent travelling between Europe and North America, I'd accumulated certificates at the different martial arts.

I never show my hand, until it's completely necessary, and this is one of those times. I loom over Milano—how the mighty has fallen. I'm about to launch another kick to his sternum to completely destabilize him. Whoever said you don't kick a man when he's down obviously hasn't faced situations like this.

But before I can make my move, a shadow moves behind me. I whip around, my fists raised, ready to pounce on whoever it is. My fists are caught in a vise-like grip and my body zings as it recognizes the newcomer. Enzo. My eyes widen in surprise, and my mouth drops open. Obviously, this whole scenario had caught his attention. I didn't think it would.

His jaw is clenched as if he's trying, but failing to control his anger. There's no hint of a smile on his face, or even seduction. I snap my gaze from him to look around. I see complete strangers standing, gaping at the chaos we've wreaked.

Just then, Enzo releases his grip on me and before I can blink my surprise, he grabs Milano's arm, twists it back so hard he's yelping. He'd risen to his feet with Enzo's intervention. Not breaking a sweat, Enzo slams him face-first into the bar and the sound of bones crunching fills the air accompanied by gasps from the crowd.

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“Stay down,” Enzo growls, his voice dangerous. Milano goes completely limp and falls to the ground, groaning. His blood is on the bar and his entire face is streaked in red.

Paulo and Vito move in to grab him off the floor. I look past them to see Milano’s goons beaten to a pulp on the floor.

I whirl on Enzo, my chest heaving. “What the fuck do you think you're doing?” I speak through clenched teeth.

He pulls out a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his fingers with it. He takes his sweet time on each finger before he raises his head to look at me, and holy fuck, he's smiling. Not any of those self-satisfying smirks. A real, genuine smile. The nerve of him. He gestures with his hand. “Helping you.”

What the hell is wrong with him? Does he think this is a game? “I had it,” I snarl, my eyes blazing in fury. “I don’t need you playing savior, Enzo.”

His eyes dance and his lips twitch. Is he seriously laughing at me? I plant my feet apart and I stand akimbo, my glare ferocious.

“Noted,” he says, the laughter evident in his voice. “Some nice moves you got there, though.”

“You're crazy.”

“You're welcome.”

Suddenly, the laughter leaves his eyes and his gaze drops to my lips. In that instant, I'm too aware of how close we've stepped to each other. I feel the heat of his body acutely on mine. It makes my belly curl with want. Even now, after he's butt in where he doesn't belong, with the adrenaline of the fight still spiking through me, I want him. I want him with such a ferocity, it scares me. I want to claim him in front of everyone present.

But, my jealousy from earlier surges and it mixes with my rage, muddling with my desire. I'm a fucking mess, complete with my heart pounding and my blood singing with a need I shouldn't entertain.

"Fuck you," I spit, but my voice trembles, and I hate it. I hate that he has this much power over me. He doesn't miss it. His lips twitch, like he knows he's got me rattled. The club, the crowd, and the chaos has faded to the distance. It's just us now, in this sizzling, electric world we've created, and dammit, I'm slipping.

As though in a trance, I stand on the tip of my boots to fit my mouth desperately against his. As if he'd been expecting it, he grips my waist, grabbing me to him in a tight embrace, anchoring me to him. Our lips collide, our tongues warring in a fight for dominance. I pull his tongue into my mouth. It's not sweet, it's not soft. It's a claim. It's me branding him as mine. He's no one else's. He's mine, as long as our marriage stands.

His hands tangle in my hair, undoing it from its tight clasp. He pulls at my curls, bending me over to deepen the kiss. I dig my nails into his neck and pull him closer. He presses himself against me, and I feel his arousal, thick and hard as it presses into my hip. It sends heat pooling low in me.

I nip his lip, my teeth grazing his lower lip, just enough to make him growl. His tongue does a sweep in my mouth, twisting with mine. He suckles my lower lip into his mouth and I moan. It's wrong, it's reckless, but it's us. I'm drowning in it, in him,

my anger and jealousy and want all knotted up.

As if from a distance, voices reach me, whistles and claps like we're on a performance. Suddenly, it dawns on me where we are. We're in a fucking bar, in the middle of a fucking fight, and yet again, I've lost control. I tear away, panting hard, my eyes wide saucers in my face.

His expression mirrors mine. His eyes are wild and his chest is heaving. He's looking at me intently, like he can see every crack in my armor. I hate it. I hate how I've given him this much power over me.

“This doesn’t mean anything,” I say, my voice gaining some semblance of steadiness, but I’m already backing away. I can't afford to be near him, lest I fall into him again and make a complete spectacle of myself. I put a healthy distance between us, and my body screams to stay. “You didn’t need to save me. I don't need you.”

He opens his mouth to say something, but I don’t wait to listen. I turn on unsteady legs to Vito and Paulo who still have Milano pinned. I nod to them, my voice taking on an icy edge. Take him to Papa. Let him deal with it.”

They drag Milano out, and I follow, not looking back, not daring to see if Enzo’s watching. I shove through the crowd as their eyes trail me.

Outside, the air’s cool. I don't stop until I walk up to my car and safely encase myself in it. Only then, do I lean my head against the headrest and close my eyes. I open my mouth and gulp in air greedily to allay the panic that has seized my chest.

What the hell am I doing?

I'd gone into that bar, sure of myself, my eyes on the mission. But he'd muddled with my brain and I'd walked out, suddenly unsure of myself. Quite similarly, I'd walked

into this marriage with a clear head, knowing where my priorities lay. But I'd allowed him fuck with my mind the same way he fucked me ruthlessly, and now, I don't know where the line between this whole deal and reality is severed.

I should be mad. He had butt into my affairs. He'd had women all over him, but I'd only felt the need to possess him. This can't be right. It can't be healthy. I'm usually a logical woman. This newly developed recklessness is unbecoming of who I am. It goes against everything I stand for.

He hates me. I despise him. He's not mine, and I don't want him to be. I'm not his. I certainly don't want to be. This marriage is a hoax, it's an attempt at peace. The reason for why this sudden obsession with him will do nothing but harm to me is unending. The list goes on and on.

I should feel fulfilled. I've done what I'd set out to do. Milano's done, that's for sure. But Enzo—that man is slowly unraveling me and he doesn't even have to do much. He just has to look my way and I'm a complete puddle.

God. This is hell.

13

Enzo

The ballroom pulses with life, a glittering beast of champagne flutes, tailored suits, and dresses that shimmer like liquid gold. The chandeliers overhead cast fractured light across the crowd, their laughter and clinking glasses weaving into the sultry jazz that vibrates through the air.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:48 am

The manor has never looked so alive, so dangerously vibrant. We didn't have this much crowd at the wedding reception. I should be satisfied that the plan we've set up is working, but I can't seem to find the satisfaction in it. My blood thrums with a quiet, coiled tension. Tonight is no ordinary celebration. It's a chessboard, with every smile, every handshake, looked upon as a cold and calculated move.

This better count for something. I haven't used this ballroom since my father died. It used to be where the old man threw his lavish parties. Its usefulness died the day he died.

I'm standing at the edge of the room, my back to the wall, a glass of whiskey in my hand. The ice clinks softly as I swirl it. My eyes scanned the crowd, deliberately seeking her out. The party is in full swing, a carefully orchestrated display of power and unity to mark my marriage to Serafina. A marriage that's as much a battlefield as this room.

The Rossis and my own men mingle, their voices loud, their postures relaxed, but I know better. Beneath the polished veneer, every man here is a predator, waiting for a slip, a crack, a chance to strike.

The rival group, Gallos and the Vitales, are here too. Roberto Gallo never graces an event. He believes the frivolities are beneath him. So in his stead, he'd send his close associate and advisor, Damian. The man has a look of permanent indignation etched into his features, and it makes me want to bash his head in.

The Don to the Vitales group is present. Stefano Vitales. He's standing across the room, leaning his stocky build against a chair, his silver hair gleaming under the

lights as his eyes scan the room greedily. He's surrounded by his lieutenants, their eyes darting and assessing. They're no doubt thinking of what he'd gain by engaging in a war with us.

If he has half a brain, he'll know he has everything to lose. Not with the new spin on the truth regarding my mother's death.

I invited them to this party and extended the olive branch, because peace is a prettier lie than war. But I'm no fool. Lorenzo's handshake earlier was firm. His words had even been cordial, promising cooperation and mutual profit. I'd nodded and smiled, playing the part. But his eyes betrayed him. They always do. Greed and ambition flicker there, and I know he's planning something. I can feel it in my bones. If they have any idea what I have planned for them, too, they'd scurry the other way.

I'd hoped Domenico would come, seeing as his daughter is now my wife. I'd like to see his face when I attack the two groups who are part of my mother's death. Would he cower in fear knowing I'd come for him next?

I'd debated asking Fina if her father would be in attendance. I don't know what it is, but I have a niggling feeling that Domenico is hiding something. Maybe he's secretly plotting an attack on me, and I'm the fool who's oblivious to it, because I'm brain deep and balls deep into his daughter.

We haven't crossed paths since she exploded on me that night at the bar. And fuck it, I'd wanted to take her there and then. The woman has an amazing mouth, and she damn sure knows how to use it.

That night, she kissed me like she wanted to burn me alive. I can still feel her nails in my neck, her teeth grazing my lip, the way her body pressed against mine, all heat and fury. And then she'd walked away, spitting venom, claiming it meant nothing. Bullshit. It meant everything, and she knows it.

She doesn't know what to do either about this heat between us. I'd seen it in her eyes before she walked away. There was a hint of silent defeat in her eyes. It tells me she's trying hard and failing to bring this whole thing under wraps. It's the same battle I'm fighting.

So, in order to stay triumphant, I'd tamped down every thought of her that threatens to resurface since that night. And despite that I've reinforced countless times that I need to keep my head and not lose it, I can't seem to shake her. I want her. I want to claim her in every way there is. I want her in my bed all day, and all night. I want to fuck her brains out until there's no doubt in her mind that she's mine. I want to own her over and over again till she's a thrashing mess under me.

My cock twitches in remembrance of her body. She has me wrapped around her fucking fingers. Is it any wonder that I have no semblance of control when I'm within touching distance of her?

My gaze drifts to her—the object of my inner turmoil. My wife. She's impossible to miss. She's a literal storm in human form. Seeing her makes my breath snag. Her black gown clings to her curves like it was poured over her. It fits snugly against her like it's a second body. The tightness of the dress highlights her snatched waist. Waist I want to grab roughly as I pull her to me.

Her hair is swept up, exposing the elegant line of her neck, and her lips are painted a deep crimson that makes my pulse kick. She's laughing with Matteo, her head thrown back, her eyes bright with delight. I narrow my eyes as jealousy wears over me. She's never laughed like that with me. She's a cat, all wild and nails baring when she's with me. She's never this doe-eyed angel.

Blood roars in my ears. Matteo better back the fuck up. That's my fucking wife he's flirting with, and she's laughing at his lame jokes.

I take a sip of whiskey, the burn grounding me. I can't afford to get lost in her tonight. Not when the air is thick with threat. My men are stationed discreetly around the room, their eyes sharp, their hands never far from their weapons. I've planned for every contingency. If the rival groups try anything, they'll regret it. I've spent years building this empire after my father's and I'll be damned if I let anyone unravel it.

"Enzo," a voice calls, smooth and oily. I turn to find Stefano approaching. His hands are spread in a gesture of warmth that doesn't reach his eyes. He's shorter than me, but I know there's a coiled strength in him. He's like a snake waiting to strike. "This is quite the affair. You've outdone yourself."

"Carlo," I say, my voice even, my face lightening up with my practiced smile intact. "Glad you could make it. It's such a pleasure to have you here." The words taste like ash, but I keep my tone light, inviting. Let him think I'm soft, distracted by the party, by my new bride. Let him underestimate me.

He chuckles, clapping a hand on my shoulder. I resist the urge to shrug it off. "Indeed. And congratulations on your marriage. Here's to new beginnings." He raises his glass, and I mirror the gesture, our eyes locked. His are cold, calculating, and I know he's testing me, probing for weakness. Good luck, bastard. You'll find none.

We talk for a few minutes, meaningless pleasantries about trade routes, shared interests. I nod and laugh when appropriate, but my mind is elsewhere, tracking his men. Two of them linger near the bar, their postures too stiff for casual drinkers. Another hovers near the terrace doors, his hand brushing his jacket where a gun no doubt hides. They're positioning themselves, and my gut tightens. It's coming. I can feel it.

I catch Matteo's eyes across the room, and he nods, an indication that he's noticing everything.

“Excuse me,” I say, cutting Stefano off mid-sentence. “Duty calls.” I flash a grin, clap his shoulder harder than necessary, and slip into the crowd before he can respond.

I need to move, to keep my eyes on his and Gallo men. I need to stay one step ahead. As I weave through the guests, I catch Serafina’s gaze. She’s watching me, her expression unreadable, but there’s a spark in her eyes that sends heat curling through me. I force myself to look away.

Focus, Enzo.

The night wears on, the tension building like a storm gathering on the horizon. I make rounds, shaking hands, exchanging jokes, but my senses are razor-sharp, attuned to every shift in the room. Matteo is involved with the men, charming them at his finest, but his eyes take in the development around me, just like I notice them. The rival groups are moving, their men drifting closer to key points—exits, the stage, the bar. My jaw tightens. It’s now or never.

I signal to Luca who’s stationed near the main doors. He nods, his hand slipping into his jacket. I move toward the center of the room, my steps deliberate, my whiskey glass still in hand to keep up appearances. The band shifts into a slower tune, couples swaying on the dance floor, oblivious to the predator’s game unfolding around them.

Then it happens.

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A shout cuts through the music. It's sharp and jarring. Glass shatters somewhere near the bar, and the crowd gasps, heads turning. One of Gallo's men, the one from the terrace, pulls a gun, his face twisted with intent. Panic erupts, screams piercing the air as guests scatter. But I'm already moving, my own weapon drawn from the holster beneath my jacket, my men closing in like wolves.

"Down!" I bark, shoving a guest out of the way as the first shot rings out. The bullet grazes the chandelier, sending a shower of crystal to the floor. My blood sings with adrenaline, my focus narrowing to the chaos. The men are everywhere, their guns flashing in the dim light, but my team is ready. Luca takes down the shooter at the terrace with a clean shot to the shoulder, while Matteo tackles another near the bar, his fist connecting with a sickening crunch.

"Fina?" I shout across to Matteo, my voice frantic.

"Safely tucked away," he replies, taking on a man from Stefano's group.

Relief surges through me at knowing she won't be caught in this crossfire. I turn just in time to spot Roberto Gallo's advisor, Damian near the stage. His face pale, his eyes darting as he realizes his plan is unraveling. He's not fighting, just barking orders, trying to rally his men. Coward.

I charge toward him, dodging a stray bullet that whistles past my ear. One of his goons steps into my path, his fist swinging, but I sidestep, slamming the butt of my gun into his temple. He drops like a stone.

The room is a battlefield now, tables overturned, guests cowering behind them. My

men are holding their own, their training kicking in, but both Gallos and Vitales are desperate, their attacks sloppy but relentless. I take cover behind a pillar, my breath steady, my gun trained on Stefano. He's trying to slip toward the side exit, his lieutenants covering him. Not today.

I fire, the shot clipping one of his men in the leg. He screams, collapsing, and Stefano freezes, his eyes locking on mine. There's fear there now, raw and real. I step out, my gun steady, my voice low. "Call them off, Stefano. Now."

He hesitates, his jaw working, but another shot from Luca—taking down a Gallo near the bar—forces his hand. "Enough!" he shouts, his voice hoarse. "Stand down!"

The men from the two groups falter, their weapons lowering, and my team moves in, disarming them with ruthless efficiency. Within minutes, the fight is over, the surviving men on their knees, hands behind their heads. My men cuff them, dragging them toward the exit where our vehicles wait to take them into custody. Stefano's face is a mask of fury, but he knows he's lost. I'll deal with him later.

I lower my gun, my chest heaving, the adrenaline still spiking through me. The room is a wreck, broken glass and overturned furniture everywhere, but we've won. I've won. My men are already calming the guests, ushering them out, spinning a story about a drunken brawl gone wrong. The truth will stay buried, as it always does.

Then I feel it—a sharp sting in my arm. I glance down, frowning at the tear in my sleeve, the blood seeping through. A bullet grazed me, nothing serious, but the sight of it sends a jolt through me. I hadn't even noticed in the heat of the fight.

"Enzo!" Serafina's voice cuts through the haze, sharp and urgent. She's beside me before I can blink, her hands on my arm, her eyes wide with something I can't name. Worry? Fear? "You're hurt."

“It’s nothing,” I snap, jerking my arm free. “What the fuck are you doing here? You were supposed to stay hidden. You could’ve gotten shot.” My voice cracks, betraying the terror clawing at me. I scan her, frantic, searching for blood, for any sign a bullet caught her. The thought makes my pulse hammer, my chest tight.

“Nonsense,” she fires back, her voice fierce but trembling. “I can handle myself. But you—you’re bleeding.” Her defiance doesn’t hide the shake in her hands as they hover near my arm, her worry spilling out, raw and unguarded.

I want to shove her away, to growl that I don’t need her fussing. My blood’s still a wildfire, my nerves frayed from the fight, from the memory of her lips in that club three nights ago—hot, desperate, claiming me like she’d burn the world to ash for me. Her touch now is a spark to gasoline, threatening to consume me. “I’m fine,” I say, but it’s a lie, and her scent—jasmine laced with something wilder—chokes my senses, unraveling my control.

She doesn’t back off. Of course she doesn’t. Her jaw locks, that stubborn fire flaring in her eyes, and she grabs my arm again, her fingers digging in, unyielding. “Don’t be a fucking idiot. Let me see it.”

I open my mouth to tell her to get lost, but her touch is a brand, searing through the storm in my head. I’m too raw, too wired, and she’s too close, her breath warm, her gaze pinning me like she sees every fracture in my walls. “Serafina,” I warn, my voice a low growl, but it’s weak, and she knows she’s got me.

“Shut up,” she hisses, her voice a whip. She tears a strip from her dress, the fabric splitting with a sharp, angry rip. She presses it to the wound, her hands steady despite the tremor in her fingers, and I hiss at the sting, the pain grounding me even as it fuels the heat between us. Her eyes flick to mine, and the world collapses—just her, me, the press of her hands, the chaos of the ballroom fading to a distant hum.

It's too much. The fight, the blood, her—it's a flood, and I'm sinking. My hands move on instinct, cupping her face, my thumbs tracing the sharp edge of her jaw. I kiss her, and it's no gentle brush, no fleeting spark. It's a detonation, raw and ravenous, my lips crashing into hers like I can pour every shred of my fear, my rage, my hunger into her. She gasps, a soft, startled sound that vibrates against my mouth, but then she's kissing me back, her hands fisting my shirt, yanking me closer like she's terrified I'll slip away.

Her lips are molten, fierce and unrelenting, tasting of wine and defiance, and I'm drowning. Her tongue tangles with mine, bold, demanding, a clash that sets my blood ablaze. I growl, low and primal, deepening the kiss, my fingers knotting in her hair, scattering the pins. Her curls spill over my hands, soft and wild, and I tug, tilting her head to claim her deeper. Her worry pulses through the kiss, in the desperate clutch of her fingers on my shoulders, the way she presses herself against me, like she's anchoring me to life. She's scared for me, and it's there in every frantic brush of her lips.

My hands slide to her waist, pulling her flush against me, her body fire against mine. Her nails dig into my nape, a sharp sting that makes me hiss, and she seizes the moment, her tonguesweeping into my mouth, claiming me with a ferocity that steals my air. Her teeth graze my lip, sparking pain and pleasure, and I retaliate, sucking her lower lip, savoring her shudder.

The kiss is a battlefield, her worry clashing with my need, and we're still lost in it, lips locked, bodies pressed tight, the world burned away.

Enzo's lips crash into mine in a searing, desperate kiss that ignites my blood. His

tongue dives deep, tangling with mine. It's hot. It's demanding, and I kiss him back, just as fierce, just as reckless. My hands fist his shirt, my nails biting into his chest as my hands roam all over him, feeling him, assuring myself that he's right here with me.

I saw his blood tonight. For a moment there, I thought the bullet had done much more damage than purported. So, it's with all the fear my heart's managed to conjure for him, his safety—raw, choking—that fuels me, blending with his hunger. The unspoken terror of the night drives me and I pour it all into the kiss. It's all of me, unfiltered.

My mind deadens to everything else. The ballroom's wreckage, splintered tables and shattered glass, fades away. It narrows to just this moment, with Enzo.

His hands grip my face roughly as his fingers press my jaw, angling me closer. I moan loudly, my nails scraping his neck, sparking a low growl that vibrates against my mouth. My gown's silk clings to my flushed skin. It's too tight. I want it off. I want him on me, in me. I want him so desperately, I can feel the physical ache.

His body is hard, his cock thick, pressing against my hip through his pants. I arch into him boldly, my pussy aching, wet, needy. This man right here's my enemy, my husband, my everything right now, and it's my right to lay a claim to him—all of him.

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“Boss.” Matteo’s amused voice cuts through the haze that’s descended on me as Enzo continues to plunder my mouth. “We’ll handle the mess. You two... take care of business.” He chuckles wickedly before I hear murmurs and shuffling of feet as they all leave. I couldn’t care less if they remained.

The sounds of their footsteps fade and I barely hear it. I’m that immersed in my husband. I’m not a woman who relishes losing control. I like to keep a leash on my composure. But with Enzo, I’m like a wild cat, I’m shameless. He has me acting like a wanton. It should bother me, but it doesn’t.

Enzo doesn’t relinquish my mouth. His hold tightens and our lips remain locked until I feel the need for air. I pull back, panting, lips tingling as I meet his gaze. His eyes are dark and burning with acute desire. They mirror mine perfectly. I lick my lips, my tongue running over the rim of my lower lip, swollen with Enzo’s kisses.

“Here,” I whisper in a hoarse voice, daring him to take me in this ruined ballroom.

His gaze sharpens. Twin pools blazing like a predator’s glint. He steps closer, crowding me against a velvet-curtained wall, the fabric cool against my back. His fingers trail my collarbone, slowly, deliberately. His touch sends sparks down my spine. I shiver at the overwhelming intensity of his nearness, his hands on my skin. My nipples harden, the buds straining against the silk of my dress, and he notices. He stares pointedly at them, his lips curving in a dangerous, sexy smile.

“Bellissima,” he murmurs in a low voice, the Italian rolling off his tongue like silk, curling around me.

His hand slides lower, grazing the swell of my breast. His thumb brushes my nipple through the gown in a teasing caress, nearly driving me crazy. It's not enough. I bite my lip, stifling a moan, but he sees through my frustration. His eyes take on a darkening hue. He's seducing me, and it's masterful, slow and deliberate. It's working. My body is trembling, craving more.

"You're shaking," he says, his voice gravelly, his eyes locked on mine. "Want me that bad?" His thumb circles my nipple in slow, torturous motion, and I gasp, my head tipping back, the curtain soft against my hair. Fuck. I'm burning, seared alive with this aching need to have him claim me every which way.

"I want you, Enzo," I say, my voice tremulous as I lift my hands to grab his shirt, pulling him closer. "Now."

His smile is lopsided as he leans in, his lips brushing my ear, his breath hot. "I'll make you scream," he promises, and my core clenches, heat pooling between my thighs.

He doesn't rush. His hands slide down my sides slowly, tracing my curves, the silk whispering under his touch. I'm trembling, not from cold, but from the fire he's stoking. His fingers spark electricity in their trail. He kneels, lips kissing my thigh through the gown teasingly. I arch into him. He inches up, and I moan, my hands fisting his hair, urging him closer. His fingers find the gown's slit, parting it, baring my skin. His lips follow, kissing higher, hotter, until I'm panting, my pussy dripping.

He stands, eyes never leaving mine, and rips the gown's slit wider. The silk tears, exposing me. My panties are black, lace, and his eyes went darker as he assesses me.

"Damn, woman. You're so fucking sexy," he growls. I wiggle my hips in response.

Knowing that I can elicit such a response from this stoic, powerful man gives me

such a high I fear nothing can touch.

I hold my breath as he hooks a finger in my panties and tugs slowly, letting them slide down my legs. I step out of them boldly, my eyes staying on Enzo's face, catching every emotion. I want him to see me. I want him to take me. His hand cups my pussy. His touch is deliberate, his palm warm, and I gasp, hips thrusting, seeking more. His thumb brushes my clit, light, teasing, and I moan loudly.

“Dio. You’re so wet,” he growls, his voice thick.

“Mmm,” I murmur as two fingers slide inside my pussy, stretching me, curling just right.

I cry out, my hands grabbing his shoulders. My nails dig into his skin as he begins to pump his fingers slowly, his fingertips raking against my pussy walls. I moan and he grips my hip tight with his free hand, pulling me closer to him. His fingers pumping me goes from slowest fast and urgent, the wet sound filthy, driving me wild.

“Enzo, please,” I moan throatily.

I’m close to my orgasm. I can feel it just out of reach. I shut my eyes tight, reveling in the onslaught of pleasure. He pulls back just as I feel myself tethering on the edge of release. I whimper my frustration. I open my eyes to see his smug smile. I frown at him.

“Not yet,” he says as he starts to unbuckle his belt, the metal clinking, freeing his cock.

I look down to behold his cock. It juts out proudly, long, veiny and hard, the tip glistening with pre cum. My eyes glaze over. I lick my suddenly dry lips. I hear the sound of his laughter, and I look up to see him looking at me with something akin to

tenderness.

Wondrously, I lift a finger to trace the scar over his brow. It's rough to the touch. I want to ask what gave him the scar, but I know better than to. My touch is slow as I trace it down to the tear in his sleeve from where the bullet had grazed him. The blood has dried up, crusted black. I mentally shiver at the knowledge that for a second there, I could've lost him.

I lean in, lowering my lips to the wound to press a kiss to it. My mouth on his skin is soft, reverent, the taste of copper and him mingling on my tongue. His body jolts and I feel it travel through him. I jerk back, my mouth brushing the raw edge. He hisses.

Am I hurting you?" I whisper, voice low, concern slipping through my heat.

"No," he murmurs, his voice thick. "Dio Mio, Fina, you're killing me."

His hand fists my hair, gentle but firm, pulling me closer. I hold his gaze, seeing the raw hunger in their dark pools. My pulse races, heat pooling low. My lips hover near the wound, breath warm against his skin, and I kiss it again, softer, lingering, feeling his heartbeat quicken under my touch.

His groan is low, and I smile wickedly, my hands moving to his shirt. The fabric's damp, clinging to his chest, and I meet his dark and burning eyes. "Let me," I say.

His grip tightens in my hair, a silent yes, and I start unbuttoning, slow, each pop revealing more of his chiseled muscle. My fingers tremble from desire, from the power of unraveling him.

I peel his shirt open, baring his chest, and my hands roam, tracing his body, feeling the heat of his skin. My fingers trace his pecs, feeling his heartbeat, fast, alive. His breath hitches, eyes dark as he watches me unravel him. My nails graze his nipples,

sparking a low groan. The sound ignites heat in my belly. I smile, buoyed by the knowledge that I'm pushing him to the edge.

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I lean in, lips pressed to his collarbone, brushing the skin there in a soft kiss. His skin is all salt, his body all male, his taste heady. My kisses trail across his chest, lingering on a scar near his ribs. He tenses, hands twitching at my hips, but he lets me lead, lets me seduce. I kiss lower, lips grazing his abs, chiseled and taut. His groan deepens.

My hands slide down, teasing the V of his hips, fingers brushing just above his cock. It's thick, hard and straining toward me, but I avoid it, circling slowly, savoring his frustration.

"Fina," he murmurs in a strained voice. His hands grip my hips firmly, holding back. I look up, meeting his gaze. "You're torturing me," he says, his Italian accent heavy. I laugh softly.

"Good," I whisper, lips brushing his ear, breath hot. My fingers circle his nipples, pinching lightly, sparking another groan. I'm in control, and it's intoxicating. My pussy drips, craving him, but I want to draw this out.

I press closer, my breasts grazing his chest, nipples hard through my torn gown. His hands slide up my sides, teasing my breasts' edges, but I pull back, my eyes dancing. I kiss his throat, sucking gently, tasting his wild, erratic pulse.

His hands tighten on my hips, pulling me against him. His cock presses my thigh insistently. I shift, teasing him, egging him on. His groan is low, frustrated. My grin widens, loving his need.

My fingers find the sugar skull tattoo on his forearm, tracing its bold black lines, the blooming, yet delicate roses. It hints at the man he is underneath. Not the outer Enzo,

the one he puts up for the world.

I slide my fingers across it. The gray shading dances under my touch, haunting, beautiful. I kiss it, lips lingering, tongue flicking out, tasting ink and him. He shudders. His hands slide to my ass, squeezing tightly. I make to pull back, but he grabs my hips.

“Fina,” he groans.

My restraint crumbles. I want him now.

His eyes blaze, dark, feral. He lifts me, hands rough as he pins me to the wall. I lift my legs to wrap around him, gown torn, pussy exposed, dripping wet for him.

Fuck me,” I demand, my voice raw.

He holds me in place with one hand while he grips his cock with his other hand. He teases it against my entrance, rubbing the tip along my folds in slow, deliberate motions. I moan out loud, my hips bucking, craving the length of him. The heat of his cockhead against my pussy has me on edge.

He doesn’t thrust yet. He's drawing out the torture, punishing me for torturing him. If he keeps at this, I don't know how long I can hold out for. I want his cock ramming into him. I want him to take me like an animal.

His cock slides, slick, brushing my clit, then back to my entrance. He pauses against the entrance of my pulsing pussy. I’m panting, nails digging into his shoulders. I draw blood, but I don't care. “Please,” I gasp, my voice desperate.

He smirks, holding my gaze. He nudges his cock just inside, stretching my entrance, not fully entering. I cry out, pleasure and frustration mixing. My pussy clenches

around his cock, begging for his thrust. He groans, low, his control fraying. I rock my hips, trying to take him deeper.

Finally, his control shatters and he thrusts in one deep, brutal stroke. I scream, the stretch so intense I feel it all the way to my toes. It's like a thousand tiny pins pricking my skin deliciously. I close my eyes as pleasure and pain blurs. He fills me wholly, his thick cock pulsing, stretching me wide.

He's wild, fucking me with a ferocity that jars my body, the wall hard against my back, velvet brushing my skin. Each slam rocks my body, breasts bouncing, nipples scraping the air, sweat slicking me. I'm loud, moaning, my hips rocking, meeting his every rhythm, taking every inch. His hands grip my hips, bruising, and I tilt my head back as my pleasure coils tight.

His thrusts are relentless as pounds into me hard and fast. His cock hits deep, scraping against my pussy walls, stretching and filling. I grab his face and kiss him hard. My tongue is demanding. I bite his lip and it draws a groan from him. He continues to pound into me, each thrust harder and faster than the last. The sound of our bodies—skin slapping, my slickness coating him—is obscene and filthy. It fills the ballroom.

My pussy pulses, gripping him. His cock drags against my walls, hitting every sensitive spot, and I'm trembling, moans turning to cries. His hands slide to my ass, squeezing, angling me for deeper thrusts, and I'm lost, drowning in sensation.

I'm close, pleasure cresting, and I clench harder, pushing him over. His thrusts turn erratic, wild. His groans are raw, desperate. I kiss him again, sloppy, wet, tongues clashing. The wet slap of his balls against me drives me higher. My thighs are trembling, slick with my arousal. My nails rake his back, leaving red trails.

"Enzo," I scream as he pounds into me with a force that jars my soul, urging on my

release.

I come, a shattering muddle of moans and screams. My pussy convulses around his cock that's still pounding just as fast. It's like torrents of waves crashing, squeezing him tight.

He follows in my release. A guttural groan tears out of his mouth as his release, hot, floods me, spilling deep inside me. His thrusts slow, but he's still hitting deep, milking every pulse.

My body quakes, pleasure rippling as his thrusts ease, his cock softening inside. I'm panting, my body sweat-soaked, pressed against the curtain. The ballroom's ruins feel distant and unreal—Enzo's near-death feels like eons ago. His breath brushes my cheek, hot and unsteady.

He kisses my lips softly in a fleeting warmth that sparks heat in my chest. He pulls out, leaving me aching and empty. His hands linger on my hips, steadying me. My legs wobble as I drop them to the floor, weak from the intensity.

My room," he murmurs. "I won't take you again like a whore. I'll take you properly in my bed." His voice is low and I shudder at the promise in his hooded gaze. I nod, unable to speak, my throat tight. He bends, gathering my torn gown, draping it over my shoulders. The silk is cool, tattered, barely covering me, but his touch is gentle and protective as he scoops me up in his strong arms, carrying me like I'm fragile. My torn gown drags across the marble as we move through the halls.

"Sweeping me off my feet?" I say, breaking the loaded silence, a teasing lilt to my voice. His chuckle is deep and warm. "Only for you, principessa." His smirk is wicked, sparking heat low in my belly. I roll my eyes, but my lips twitch, a smile slipping through. His playfulness disarms me, and I hate how much I like it.

The halls stretch long and the sound of his boots echo profoundly, bouncing off the walls. My gown trails, silk whispering on the floor. I'm hyper aware of his body, his strength, the way his arms flex as he's holding me close.

We reach his room, and I take it all in. It's my first time being in here. I'd kept well off from lurking even when he's not around, for fear that seeing his room will overpower my willpower. But here I am now.

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I glance around. It's all dark wood, heavy curtains, a wide bed with black sheets. It's raw, masculine. It's all him. He kicks the door shut and sets me down gently. I slip off my heels, glancing around, my curiosity getting the better of me. "What, no dungeon vibes?" I say, my voice teasing. I find that it's easy to fall into easy camaraderie with him and that poses a danger I'm not willing to explore.

He laughs and shrugs. The movement draws my eyes to his ripped muscles. "More fun than your Rossi vaults, I bet," he retorts, eyes glinting. I grin, letting the gown fall, standing completely naked now, my skin flushed under his gaze from our earlier sex session.

His eyes roam hungrily, and my skin tingles, feeling alive. Just when I think he'll act on the raw hunger in his eyes, he steps closer, his hand finding mine, and his touch is surprisingly warm, gentle. "Come," he says in a soft voice as he leads me to the bathroom. It's sleek and modern, with a glass-walled shower. He turns on the water, steam curling. It's hot and inviting. We step under, the spray soaking my skin, washing away the night's chaos. I'm trembling, not from cold, but from the intensity lingering between us.

He grabs a soap, lathering his hands. His warm palms glide over my shoulders, tracing my collarbone, my breasts. Heat blooms in my core, my pussy tingling, wet again. I'm stunned at how fast I'm burning already, when just minutes ago, I'd milked his release mingling with mine. My body hums to his touch. It is deliberate, seductive, a quiet art. My husband's skill unravels me so easily—it's a breathtaking power I can't resist.

His hands move lower, cupping my stomach, my hips. I moan softly, leaning into

him. My nipples harden, aching under the spray. He kneels, lips brushing my thigh. His kisses climb higher and my breath catches. He looks up at me. “Dio, you're so responsive to me, cara.”

He doesn't wait for my response, he dips his head, his tongue snaking out to find my pussy. I jerk and moan. He licks gently in long strokes, circling my clit with soft sucks. I moan loudly, hands tangling in his wet hair, pulling roughly. He groans, the sound vibrating against my skin. His tongue delves deeper, parting me, thrusting inside in slow, rhythmic moves, fucking me with precise, wet strokes. I moan, loudly, my hips rocking against his tongue, craving more.

He tongue-fucks me relentlessly, his tongue diving deep, curling inside, tasting every inch. My thighs shake, pleasure building so intensely. I pull his hair harder, urging him on. His hands grip my thighs, holding me steady. He pulls back, lips kissing my clit before plunging his tongue back inside. I cry out, my body trembling, but he doesn't let me come. He's keeping me on the edge while I'm desperate and burning.

His tongue slows, torturing me, and he adds a finger, sliding it inside, stretching me. I moan, hips bucking, but he's deliberate, not rushing. His finger curls, probing, while his tongue laps my clit. His tongue on my clit is gentle, maddening. Pleasure coils, tight, but he pulls back. He rises, water gleaming on his skin. I'm panting, aching, unsatisfied, and it's infuriating, yet exhilarating. He smirks, knowing exactly what he's done, leaving me hungry.

I grab the soap, hands trembling with want. I lather up, exploring him, savoring the feel of him against my palms. His shoulders are broad, his chest sculpted. My fingers trace his abs, the deep V of his hips, his thighs. He's raw, masculine, breathtaking, a living masterpiece. I'm mesmerized, and before I can stop myself, I murmur in Italian, “sei un'opera viva.” Warm laughter spills out from him, his eyes crinkling.

“Living art? You're trouble, wife.” His teasing voice fuels my boldness.

I lean in, kissing his chest, lips lingering, tasting water and salt. I kiss his throat, his jaw, each press slowly, drawing a soft groan. I sink to my knees, water streaming over me. His cock is hard, thick, pulsing. I grip it. I hear his intake of breath as my mouth hovers over the tip of his cock. I've always wanted to do this, to feel the whole length of him in my mouth.

Stroking slowly, I meet his eyes—eyes dark with want. I lick the tip, savoring his musky warmth. He groans, hands fisting my hair. I take him in skillfully, lips stretching, tongue swirling deliberately. I move slowly, my lips sliding down, my throat relaxing as I take him deep. My hand strokes the base, twisting gently. His hips jerk, a curse slipping out. I hum, making him shudder.

I'm precise, teasing with slow, wet licks, then sucking tight, my tongue circling the sensitive head. His breathing turns ragged, his grip tightening. I love this, I love his unraveling, love the power surging through me at knowing right here in this moment, I have a power over him.

I pick up the pace relentlessly as my lips tighten around his cock, sucking hard. My hand pumps the rhythm my mouth sets. His hands tighten in my hair, pulling at the strands. His groan of pleasure fills me in ways nothing has in a long time. I change tactics—I deep-throat, pushing through the gag, my face raised to lock my eyes on his. I see the moment he reaches. His jaw clenches and his eyes darken. A raw moan tears from him as he comes, hot and thick, spilling in my mouth, all over my lips.

I swallow Enzo's release, the taste salty, warm and lingering. My fingers glide over my lips, wiping the remnants, and I lick them clean, savoring him. His grip on my hair loosens, his chest heaving, breaths wild. I'm on my knees, water streaming over me, my body humming with power. I've unraveled him, and it's intoxicating.

His cock, still hard, glistens under the shower's spray, and I'm burning, craving more.

He yanks me up with firm urgent hands. My legs wobble, but his strength steadies me. I'm trembling, my pussy throbbing. He spins me, pressing me against the glass wall. My breasts flatten, nipples tight, scraping the cool surface. I gasp, the chill biting my skin, clashing with the steaming water. His body crowds mine, hard and unyielding. His breath is hot on my neck.

“What the fuck are you doing to me?” His voice has a hint of wonder to it. He doesn't stop to ponder on the question. His hands grip my hips, his fingers digging into my skin, leaving marks that I know I'll carry for days. It's like I'm being marked by him.

I brace my palms on the glass, my body arched into his, ready. His heat presses against me. He doesn't tease, doesn't pause. His cock nudges my entrance. I moan softly, pushing back against the head of his cock.

Finally, he rams into me in one long, hard stroke. My voice is hoarse as I scream. The feel of his cock stretching me tight is overwhelming. Pleasure crashes through me. His cock fills me, owning me in every way there is. He fucks me hard and fast, the glass shaking under the ferocity, my hands slipping. My breasts bounce, aching nipples scraping, jolts sparking. Water streams down, mixing with sweat, and I'm loud, crying out, meeting his rhythm, taking everything.

His thrusts are fast and punishing, each slam driving deeper, hitting every sensitive spot. I'm trembling, pleasure coiling, tight and unbearable. His hand slides around, fingers finding my clit. He rubs fast, circles tight, and I cry out, my body jerking. Pleasure spikes, sharp and overwhelming. I'm unraveling, my moans echoing, bouncing off the tiles. His cock slams harder, faster, and his fingers don't stop, pushing me higher. I shatter around him as a piercing scream dislodges out of my throat, my walls convulsing, squeezing him tight.

But he's not done. His thrusts don't slow as he continues to pound into me, drawing out my orgasm, making me tremble. His fingers stay on my clit, lighter now, teasing,

keeping me on edge. I'm gasping, overwhelmed, my body hypersensitive. The glass is cool, grounding me, but his cock is fire inside my pussy. He groans as his grip tightening on my hips.

"Shit, Fina," he rasps.

His thrusts turn erratic, and I know he's close. I push back harder, clenching my pussy, wanting to feel him break. His moans grow louder. The sound of our bodies—skin slapping, water splashing, my slickness easing his way—fills the air. It's intoxicating. His cock pulses, and I tilt my hips, taking him deeper, eliciting pleasure even through my exhaustion.

His fingers dig into my hips, bruising, and he thrusts once, twice, hard, deep. He comes, a guttural groan, his release hot, flooding me, spilling inside, filling me.

His thrusts slow and we slump against the glass, panting as water streams over us, washing away the sweat and the sex. My legs are useless, trembling from Enzo's relentless fucking against the glass. They barely hold me. His cock softens, still inside, and his arms wrap around me, steadying me. His breath is hot on my neck, ragged, and I feel his heart beat fast against my back. The glass is slick, my hands slipping, but he holds me, grounding me. I'm consumed, alive, every nerve singing. The air smells of sex, water, us, and I'm lost in it, in the entirety of him.

Enzo pulls out, leaving me sore and deliciously tender. Water streams over us, hot, cleansing. He shuts off the shower, steam curling around us. My legs tremble, useless, spent from his relentless fucking. He scoops me up, arms strong, carrying me effortlessly. I'm boneless, my head resting against his chest, his heartbeat steady, grounding me. The bathroom's warmth fades as we move to the bedroom.

The air is cooler, raising the hair on my skin. His room feels intimate, the wide bed with black sheets inviting. He sets me down gently. The cool fabric soothes my

flushed skin. I'm naked, raw, but his gaze is soft and lingering, making me feel cherished. My breath catches, a flicker of vulnerability I don't expect. He stands, water dripping from the hair plastered to his head.

"Hungry?" he asks in a teasing voice, eyes dancing with mischief.

I sprawl on the bed, my posture languishing. "Starving. For food... and you." My voice is husky, playful, matching his tone.

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He laughs, the sound wrapping around me like silk. “Greedy, Fina. I love it.” His grin disarms me. It's boyish, dangerous.

“Wait here,” he says, pulling on loose pants, the fabric clinging to his hips. He leaves, and I'm alone, the quiet heavy with anticipation. I grab a silk robe from his chair, slipping it on, the fabric gliding over my skin, cool, sensual. It's his, oversized, smelling faintly of him, and I savor it, my fingers tracing the hem.

I'm sore, body aching from two rounds, yet my pussy throbs, craving him still. It's madness, this unyielding hunger. He's dangerous, my enemy. I shouldn't be frolicking with him. This new territory is treacherous and uncharted. I should stop, pull back, but I can't, my desire drowning the voice of reason.

He returns—the object of my inner turmoil—carrying a tray that includes crostini with olive tapenade, prosciutto, a bottle of Barolo and two glasses. The scent of olives and wine fills the air. He sets it on the bed, but his eyes catch the robe, and they narrow to slits.

“Take it off,” he murmurs, his voice commanding, yet soft. “I want you bare, principessa.”

I raise an inquiring brow, but comply, letting the robe slip to the floor. I sit cross-legged, unashamed, my skin flushed under his gaze. We eat, eyes locked, the air crackling with tension that's tight enough to break. I bite a crostini, licking tapenade from my fingers slowly. I watch his gaze darken in reaction. I lower my gaze, and I catch the moment his cock stirs and harden, tenting his pants.

Damn. So soon?

I don't want to give in to it, to him yet. I need to pull back for a while to consider what exactly the fuck I'm doing. I try to distract him. "You look... homely," I say, breaking the heat. It's a playful jab, because he's anything but. He's all danger and allure.

He laughs, his eyes glinting. "Homely? Wait till I'm inside you, principessa. You'll sing a different song." His words unravel me, heat flooding my core, shattering whatever sensibility I'd managed to gather.

As if in a spell, I shove the tray aside, crawling toward him. My lips crash into his. He kisses back, his mouth against mine, gentle, tasting of wine. His tongue penetrates the seam of my lips, clashing with my tongue, teasing slowly and deliberately. I moan, softly, my hands sliding over his chest, feeling his warmth, his strength. His fingers graze my back in a light caress, igniting shivers, and I'm melting, consumed by his tenderness.

His lips trail my jaw, kissing softly, making me tremble. I straddle his lap, thighs framing his hips, my pussy grazing his cock through his pants, warm and tempting. He groans, hands resting on my hips, guiding but not forcing, letting me lead. I kiss him deeper, our tongues dancing. My breasts press against him, nipples tight and aching.

I pull back, hands tugging his pants down, freeing his hard cock, hard. I marvel, stunned, at how fast he's ready again, mere minutes after our last lovemaking. My touch alone, my gaze, brings him to life, and it's thrilling.

He kicks his pants off and lies back, eyes burning, inviting me to take control. I hover over him, my pussy brushing his tip teasingly. I lower myself slowly, savoring the length of his cock as it fills me. It's just perfect. I moan, hands splaying on his chest

to anchor myself.

His hands find my waist in a gentle, encouraging move, not bruising. I move sensually, hips rolling, taking him deep smoothly. Each glide is exquisite, pleasure blooming, soft and intense. His groan is low, his eyes never leaving mine. I'm alive, radiant, every nerve humming, and he's mine, surrendering to my rhythm.

I lean down, kissing him, lips soft, lingering, our breaths mingling. My hips circle, drawing out his moans, making him tremble. His hands slide to my breasts to cup them. His thumbs brush over my nipples, sending gentle waves through me. I gasp, arching, my movements steady, controlled, savoring every inch of him.

My hands trace his chest, fingers grazing his sugar skull tattoo, roses vivid on his forearm. His heartbeat races, matching mine, and I'm captivated, lost in him. I ride him expertly, hips swaying, gliding. My pleasure builds. It's warm and consuming. The wet sound of our bodies is soft, intimate, filling the room, and I'm moaning quietly.

His hands guide my hips, light and encouraging, his groans growing desperate. I keep the pace, sensual, unhurried, letting pleasure swell. I kiss him again, tongues slow, tasting each other, and my moans blend with his, the air thick with our heat. My pussy tightens, pleasure cresting, gentle, overwhelming.

I'm close, my movements steady, hips rolling, chasing release. His hands cup my breasts, squeezing softly. His thumbs circle my nipples, pushing me higher. I moan, louder, my body trembling, pleasure blooming, warm and unstoppable. I grind down, taking him deeper, and I come, a soft cry, my pussy shuddering, waves rolling, enveloping me, shattering gently.

He follows, a low moan. His release is warm, filling me. Our bodies are locked, trembling, sated. His hands hold my hips, grounding me. His eyes take on a soft and

adoring hue.

I collapse onto him, breathless, my body limp and fulfilled. He pulls me close into his warm and solid chest. Our breaths slow, ragged, mingling in the quiet. I rest my head on him, listening to his heartbeat steadying, a rhythm I sink into. It's safe and comforting—this moment feels too real.

The air is heavy with sex, sweat, us, a scent that lulls me. My eyes grow heavy, his warmth wrapping around me, protective, intimate. I'm drifting, his breathing soft, the only sound in the room, a gentle cadence that soothes me, anchors me.

I'm tired, bone-deep, yet my mind stirs. My skin tingles, warm from our intimacy. Tonight—our bodies tangled, lost in each other—burns in me. I'm addicted to him, to this fire, this need. It's trouble. It's a betrayal of our pact. We're enemies, bound by duty, not desire.

I try to reason, to see the danger. This marriage is a truce, a facade, yet I ache for him, my body defying logic, still hungry despite the ache. I'm too tired to fight it, to parse the risk of this craving. My thoughts blur, heavy, unable to hold the weight.

The realization softens, wrapping me like a blanket. His warmth seeps in, the sugar skull tattoo on his forearm faintly visible, roses stark in the dim light. My eyes flutter heavily, his heartbeat a steady guide, easing me down.

I'm sinking, my body molding to his. His arms hold me gently, too tender for our truth. My mind quiets, the problem of my need a faint whisper, fading, comforting in its persistence.

My eyes close, his heartbeat a lullaby, steady, slow. I'm slipping, dozing, wrapped in his embrace, the air thick with our intimacy. I surrender, letting sleep take me, lost in him, in us—whatever the hell we are.

Enzo

Sunlight filters in through the curtains. It's soft, pale, barely lighting the room. The air smells of vanilla and sex. It's raw, sharp, waking me up. My legs are tangled with a woman's. Her skin is warm, bare, pressed against me. I blink. My mind is slow and hazy.

It's Serafina. She's in my bed. Her body fits mine closely, soft curves melding into the hard planes of my body. Her face is tucked into my neck. Her breaths are feather-light, brushing my skin. Her leg rests between my thighs. It grazes my cock. It jerks to life, hardening fast. Memories from last night rushes back—her moans, her fire, her hunger.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:48 am

We had gone three rounds. It was wild and unrelenting. She'd matched me. Every thrust, every cry, she never slowed. I've never been entangled with a woman who can match my sexual appetite. But, Serafina had surprised me. It goes to show that she's not fragile as a flower. She's not one to toy with. I shouldn't keep her at arm's length. I shouldn't indulge in whatever this is that is between us.

Even now as the thought assails me, my heart pounds. My cock aches. I shouldn't be entertaining thoughts of fucking her again, but my body wants her. The moment I'd seen her in Domenico's meeting chamber, the blood that's supposed to supply my brain had powered south. Or perhaps, it had been since that first night.

I only know I want her with an insane intensity that stuns me. I know there's no purging her out of my system. She's like a heady aphrodisiac that I'm addicted to. I can't get enough of her.

She's asleep, her hair spilling over the pillow in dark, messy curls that catch the light. Her lips, red and swollen from my kisses, are parted in a tempting invitation. Her face is soft, pale in the morning glow, and I can't stop staring. My eyes rove over her face hungrily, taking in every delicate curve, every contour. My chest tightens, a nameless feeling stirring, one I refuse to name. We're bound by a forced marriage, our hate buried under a fragile truce. This shouldn't be happening harder.

Then, my heart starts to pound and I'm frozen. My chest hurts. She's here, in my arms. We're bound by a forced marriage. Our hate is buried. This truce is fragile. This shouldn't be happening. I can feel the slow unfurling in my chest as a nameless feeling overcomes me. I can't give credence to it.

I brush my fingers over her arm, my fingers gentle and careful. She stirs and I hold my breath. Her hand slides down. It rests on my balls, warm, unaware. I swallow a groan. My cock throbs hard. Waking with Fina like this feels dangerous. I could get used to it. Her leg shifts, pressing closer. I think about taking her now. She's asleep, lost in dreams. But I want her awake. I want her eyes burning, meeting my heat.

Last night, she was unstoppable. Her desire burned like mine. Even now, I want the intensity of last night. This marriage is meant to keep peace, not start fires. I tell myself it's just sex. It's a release, nothing more. But this need feels heavy. It's raw and real. I keep pushing it down because frankly, I don't want to face it. There's nothing to face. I'd married her for control and revenge. That's it. Nothing more.

But my body doesn't get the message. The fucker excels at betraying me.

Can we keep fucking? Can we keep it cold, no feelings? Her body tempts me. My body's tingling from last night. I want her again. My cock begs. My heart twists. I say it's nothing. It's just skin, just heat. But she fits me like she's tailor-made for me. She fights, she yields. She loathes, she wants.

I should put a stop to this madness, but I can't. Not now when I'm holding her so close to me. She looks vulnerable in sleep. All the fire is gone from her, sleep softening her features. No, she's not soft. She's all fire and brimstone, I keep reminding myself.

Her eyes flutter open. They're green, sharp, bright in the morning light, piercing through me with dazed intensity. She's glorious. Her hair is wild. Her lips are red, swollen. I see the moment her eyes shift into focus. Panic flashes in those greeny depths as she realizes where she is, what we've done.

She pulls back fast, untangling herself. Her movements are quick, frantic. I let her go. My gut twists. I tell myself it doesn't hurt. It's better this way. Last night was a

mistake. It was born of blood, of fear. We shouldn't have crossed that line.

She fumbles, her movements jittery. She searches for her gown. It was shredded last night in our rush. It's almost funny. She's rattled, silent. Fina's never silent. She's always armed with a barb, a sharp retort. But now, after a night in my bed, she's quiet and exposed.

I can't resist teasing her, my anger at my own hunger mixing with a thrill at her unease. It sets off something in my chest. "Lost something, principessa?" I ask. My voice is low and mocking.

She spins, her eyes blazing and accusing. She storms closer. She jabs my chest. Her finger is sharp. I see the storm in her eyes. "What's so damn funny, Enzo?" Her voice is hard and clipped. "Don't think last night meant anything. It was the fight, the bullet, the adrenaline, and I wasn't myself. It was just sex. Nothing more." Her words sting. They echo my own lie. But they feel empty. We're both hiding, and the air between us crackles with the truth we won't face.

Her scent hits me—vanilla and something more heady. Her fire, her closeness—it's all too much. I can't resist her. I grab her and pull her onto me. Her body tumbles. Her breasts press against my chest. She gasps. Her hands push, fighting. I kiss her. It's hard and hungry, almost punishing. My lips claim hers. She resists, keeping her mouth shut. Her fists tap my chest as she murmurs her protests against me. I don't stop. I feel her fight weaken, her body softening.

"Please, cara," I whisper. My voice is rough and raw, carrying the weight of the hunger that I feel. "Open for me." I brush her nipple softly, carefully. She moans, her lips parting. I dive in. My tongue sweeps, tasting her. She's sweet, warm, like last night's wine. Her resistance fades. Her tongue meets mine. It's fierce and greedy. I kiss her slowly, my mouth easing the pressure to taste her tenderly. My hands glide down her back. My fingers trace her curves. I pull her closer.

She matches me. Her moans are loud. Her body arches, pressing close. I roll us, pinning her beneath me. My cock brushes her thigh. It's hard and eager to claim her. Her hands grip my shoulders, her nails grazing me. It flames the heat higher. I kiss her jaw, sucking gently. Her skin tastes clean, sweet. She tastes like mine. Her legs part, her pussy wet and warm, teasing my cock. It's calling me.

I move slowly as my hand cups her breast. My thumb teases her nipple. She cries out. It's sharp and needy. Her hips lift. She seeks me, and I oblige. I nudge my cock against her. The tip slips in. She's warm and tight, her folds closing over my length. She moans. Her eyes lock on mine. They're green, wild. I thrust, smooth, deep. I fill her. It's hot, perfect. She's made for me.

Her cries get louder. Her body moves with mine. It's fluid and fierce. I keep it steady. It's not rough. Each thrust is careful. I savor her heat, her grip. Her hands roam my chest, her fingers brushing my sugar skull tattoo. Her touch is soft, and I'm lost in the feel of her. She meets me. Her hips rise. She matches every move. Her breath is quick, desperate.

She's a storm. Her hair is wild. Her lips are red. Her eyes are fierce. I kiss her again, our tongues are slow, tasting carefully. Our moans mix. My hand finds her clit. My fingers circle lightly, urging her higher. She trembles. Her pussy tightens. Her cries are sharp. I thrust deeper, smoothly. We're enemies. This marriage is a lie. But for some reason, when I'm with her, like this, it doesn't matter—the truth of us don't exist.

Her moans turn to gasps. Her body trembles as she chases release. I keep the rhythm. It's steady and deep. My fingers tease her clit. Her eyes hold mine. They're green, burning. I see her surrender. Her fire matches mine. My cock fills her. I feel myself drowning, every thrust pulling me deeper into her, into us.

Her hands slide to my back. Her nails graze. They don't dig. It sparks heat. I kiss her

neck. My lips linger. I taste her pulse. It's fast, wild. Her hips rock. They meet me. Her pussy is wet. It grips me, pulls me in. I'm hard, aching. I marvel at her. She's ready again, minutes after last night. Her hunger is fierce, like mine.

I angle deeper. My thrusts are slow. They draw out her moans. Her breasts bounce. Her nipples are hard. They brush my chest. It sends jolts through me. I'm lost. My body is alive. Every nerve sings. Her cries sharpen. Her body is buzzing. She's close.

I feel Serafina tighten around me. Her body trembles as she arches beneath me. A soft cry slips from her lips, her release shuddering through her. I groan low, my own release spilling into her, warm and deep. We're tangled together, breathless, sweat slicking our skin. I pull back, my cock softening, my heart pounding hard in my chest. The air feels thick, heavy with what we've just done—again.

I look at her, my breath still coming fast. Her face is flushed, her green eyes half-closed, hazy with pleasure. Her lips are red, swollen from my kisses, and I feel a pang in my chest, something I can't name. We went at it three times last night, each round wilder than the last. I shouldn't have taken her again this morning.

"Fina," I say, my voice low, rough with worry. "I'm sorry. You must be sore. I shouldn't have pushed you."

She blinks at me, her green eyes sharpening as she focuses. She stretches slowly, her body arching, breasts lifting as she moves. A small smirk curves her lips, teasing me. "I don't feel sore, Enzo," she says, her voice husky... playful.

The sound hits me hard, stirring heat I can't afford to feel again. I swallow, nodding, not sure what to say. We lie there, our bodies close, her warmth seeping into me. The air feels heavy, likesomething big hangs between us, but we don't speak. There are no words needed to be said.

Minutes pass and the silence grows thick. I glance at her skin, at the marks I'd left in the throws of passion, faint red lines from my hands, a bruise on her hip where I gripped her too hard. Guilt mixes with desire, a dangerous combination. Last night had been nothing short of a storm. The fight at the party combined with the bullet grazing my arm had fueled both our adrenaline, and it had drove us to this.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:48 am

I guess it explains why I'm still here, Fina in my arms. I don't linger in bed. I've never had a woman sleep with me through the night. I cut and run before morning because I suck at morning-afters, and also because staying begs a certain level of emotional attachment, and I don't do emotional. Never. But this time feels different, this morning feels like something I've been gearing up to all my life. Despite that it's anything but, it feels real.

I hate that she's unraveling me this easily. I hate that I'm starting to get all putty in her hands, but strangely enough, I don't want to stop. I've never had an issue with disengaging before, but Fina makes me feel things I'd never thought myself capable of feeling.

I feel her shift beside me, her body melding closer to mine. I want to say something, to break this quiet, but I don't know what. "Fina," I start, just as she says, "Enzo."

We both stop, our eyes meeting. Her lips twitch, in a smile, and I see a flicker of softness in her gaze. She's a danger I should be warning myself off, but I find myself nodding at her, my voice gentle. "Go ahead," I say.

She opens her mouth, her expression shifting, like she's about to say something heavy. My heart beats faster, my pulse loud in my ears. I'm not sure what she's going to say, but it feels important. Maybe she's going to put a stop to this. Someone at least has to be sane enough to.

A sharp knock at the door cuts through the moment. It's loud and insistent. I freeze, irritation flaring in my chest. I frown, my jaw tightening. Who could it be? Matteo? I look at whose expression had turned wary. "I'll go see who it is," I say, sliding off the

bed.

I pull on a pair of loose pants, the fabric hanging low on my hips. I move to the door, my steps quick, annoyed at the interruption. It feels like a betrayal, pulling me from her when we were on the edge of something monumental. Whoever it is had better have a damn good reason for this abrupt interruption. I feel Fina's eyes following me as I make my way to the door.

I reach the door and grip the handle, my jaw tight. I swing it open, the hinges creaking softly. A maid stands there, her auburn hair tucked neatly under a cap. I recognize her immediately. The head maid introduced her to me a while back, Giulia, assigned to Fina as her personal maid. Her eyes flicker over me, a quick, curious glance that takes in my state. I'm shirtless, my hair a tangled mess, Fina's nail marks stark against my skin. I catch the brief widening of her eyes, the subtle shift in her expression.

I wonder what she thinks, seeing me like this, seeing us like this. A Don undone by his wife, standing here with the evidence of our night scratched into my skin. The thought makes my chest tighten, a mix of pride and unease. I'm supposed to be in control, always, but Fina has a way of unraveling me. Giulia's gaze drops quickly, her face schooling into a blank mask. She knows better than to comment, to let her thoughts show.

She dips into a small curtsy, her movements practiced. "Buongiorno, Signor Mancini," she says, her voice soft but clear. "C'è una telefonata per la Signora Mancini." Her Italian is formal, respectful, and I notice the way she keeps her eyes averted now, focusing on the phone in her hand. It's the manor's phone, the one we use for official business. My mind races, wondering who could be calling Fina on this line.

I glance at her outstretched hand, the phone resting in her palm. My brows furrow as I

try to piece it together. Who would call my wife on the manor's phone instead of her personal one? The question gnaws at me, a quiet suspicion forming. I reach out and take the phone, my fingers brushing hers briefly. "Grazie," I say, my voice clipped, nodding once. I shut the door with a loud click, the sound echoing in the quiet room.

I turn back to Fina, my expression tight. She's sitting up now, the sheets pulled tight against her chest. Her heart must be racing, because I see the tension in her shoulders, the way her hands grip the fabric. I feel a sudden unease, like something bad is coming. I cross the room, the phone heavy in my hand, and hold it out to her.

"It's for you," I say, my voice steady, but there's a tension in my chest that I can't shake. Her fingers brush mine as she takes it, a spark of heat shooting through me. I step back, giving her space.

She lifts the phone to her ear, her voice steady but clipped. "Aida?" I watch her closely, studying every move she makes. Her face stays calm, a mask she wears so well, but her eyes flicker as though troubled. Her free hand grips the sheet, knuckles white, and I know she's agitated, hiding it behind that Rossi steel. Her lips press into a tight line as she listens, her body tensing with each second that passes.

She murmurs something back, her voice low, too quiet for me to hear. I catch the crack in her tone, just once, before she catches herself. She ends the call, her movements slow, and the phone slips from her hand, landing in her lap with a soft thud. Her eyes stare at nothing, like her mind has been transported somewhere else. I feel the shift in the room, the weight of whatever she's heard settling over us like a storm cloud.

I sit beside her, my movements careful, and the bed dips under my weight. I want to reach for her, to steady her, but I hold back. She might not welcome that. "What is it?" I ask, my voice soft, bracing for her to snap, to push me away like she always does.

She doesn't snap at me this time. She doesn't push me away. She turns to me, her eyes raw, unguarded, and the vulnerability there hits me hard, harder than any of her barbs ever could. "My father," she says, her voice flat... tremulous "He's severely ill. Aida says it's bad."

Her words hit me hard, heavy and cold. I see the way her shoulders slump, her hands trembling just a little. Her green eyes darken, clouded with something I can't touch. I don't know the extent of her relationship with her father, but I can tell the news of his ill health weighs seriously in her.

I understand how disheartening it must be for her, even though Domenico is my archenemy, yet seeing her like this stirs something in me. Her pain is raw, real, and it cuts through the walls I've built. I hate how it makes my chest ache, how it makes me want to reach for her.

But I don't do either of those things. I don't say anything. I'm her husband, but we're enemies, bound by a truce, not trust. Yet her vulnerability tugs at me, stirring something I don't want to feel, something that feels too close to care.

Her eyes meet mine, fierce, steadying despite the tremor in her hands. "I'm going to him," she says, her voice firm, and I realize she isn't asking for permission, she's just stating her intention to me. Like I have a say. I may not like Domenico and his daughter—even though I've been frolicking with her—I won't keep her from seeing him. I don't have that power over her.

She's Fina. She's my wife. She's unyielding, even now, with her world crumbling. She slides off the bed, her movements quick and purposeful. The sheet falls to bare her skin, as she moves gracefully, marked by our morning of thorough passion.

I watch her as she moves to the door, her steps steady, her back straight, and I feel acutely, strangely bereft.

I make a decision then and there to let Luis go. More for me than her.

16

Serafina

I'm still tingling from last night as I grip the steering wheel, speeding toward the Rossi villa, toward Papa. My body's still alive with the memory of last night through this morning. Enzo's hands branding my skin, his scent clinging to me like an apparition I can't shake. My thighs ache with every shift of the gear, a cruel reminder of how I let him unravel me, how I wanted it, how he made me scream till my throat got sore.

How many times is it now that I've let him get too close? Last night, I'd acted purely on adrenaline. Seeing that bullet graze him had scared me more than I care to admit. That fear had morphed into a desire that had been encompassing, and I'd given in to the heat between us after I'd promised myself it won't happen again.

Last night wasn't supposed to happen, but it had, and I'd reveled in it. But in the light of day, waking up to stare into Enzo's depthless dark eyes, I'd wanted to bury my head in shame. He must know how much power he has over me, and the thought that I let him is revolting. Once was enough. Twice? No, thrice. That's just me being foolish, and I'm never foolish. It speaks volumes to how much power he has over me.

I've said so much in my head that it's beginning to become laughable each time I have to remind myself—that he's my enemy. Enemies don't make you scream in the throes of pleasure. Enemies don't make you feel things you don't think yourself capable of. But, here I am—Enzo's enemy, Enzo's wife, Enzo's lover.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:48 am

I grip the steering wheel tighter, my knuckles turning white, but I don't notice until I'm almost veering off the road. I give a sudden start as I get the car back on course, but not without a car honking furiously behind me, muttering expletives in rapid Italian. I shout an apology as he speeds past me.

I sink back in my seat, my eyes trained on the road. Enzo's got me all muddled up from the inside out.

The heat in my blood is a traitor as my mind calls up memories of his hands on my skin, but I ruthlessly shut it down.

This morning, after I received the call from Aida, the news she delivered had fazed me, but it was Enzo seeing the effect it has on me that fazed me the more. I'd secretly wished he'd put up a protest to me coming to see Papa, given that they're enemies—even though they're in-laws. I'd secretly dared him to. I'd have lashed, and perhaps, that'd be a sort of respite from the shame I feel. But he'd been understanding, pathetic, even, and it grated my nerves. I don't want his sympathy. I want nothing from him.

Nothing at all?The voice in my head taunts. I ignore it.

I firmly put him out of my mind and concentrate on the dread I feel in my chest. Aida's call keeps echoing in my head as she'd informed me of Papa's illness. She didn't say how bad, but it was bad enough that her fear had shine through her tone. The tone she'd used is the kind that makes my stomach twist into knots. It's the same tone that'd been used to deliver my mother's death those years ago, only Papa had been the one delivering it.

Perhaps, the call from Aida is a lie. Maybe he's already dead and she'd told me something else so I wouldn't panic. If Papa dies, his enemies are going to wage a war I don't think we can stand yet. I should be mad at him, still, for pawning me off to Enzo, but I can't quite muster up the anger that had driven me on that wedding day. I need to see him. I need to know he's still here.

The villa's gates rise ahead, iron and unyielding, set into stone walls that have guarded our secrets for generations. Secrets that rule us, mold us. I pull in, expertly maneuvering the car toward the driveway. A memory of the first time I'd driven a car after I got back from the US resurfaces. Papa had refused for me to drive alone without protection. He'd only later given in because I'd stood my ground with him.

It hits me then that Papa has always been all about protecting me, whether it was him hiring guards to protect me during my American days, or even after I got back when he was convinced he couldn't protect me and had employed a guard, until I reassured him I could hold my own. In his own way, he loves me, even if he's too bullheaded to show me. Likewise, how he must trust Enzo, even if faintly, to protect me.

The guards nod stiffly as I pull up to the driveway, their eyes not revealing a hint of agitation. They must not know about Papa's severe illness. If they do, their emotions will betray them. Papa's frail health must not get out to the public, it'd provide an opening for his enemies to attack. We need to be well fortified before that can happen. It's why he's been treated here in the villa, instead of going to a hospital. We have to avoid bloodthirsty press at all cost.

I park by the fountain, its marble angels staring at me like they know my shame, my fears. I step out, my heels biting into the cobblestone. The humid air hits me first. The air's thick with jasmine and lemon, a scent that used to mean home but now feels like a weight pressing down on me. My black tank top clings to me as sweat drenches my body.

In that instant, Carlo morphs into shape beside me, a tight smile on his face. Relief courses through me at seeing him. His presence is a reassurance that Papa is still here.

“Welcome, Signora,” he says and his voice is less tight... as if he's glad to see me.

“Bon Pemerrigio, Carlo,” I nod to him. “Dov’è il Papà?”

È nel suo studio,” he says, pointing towards the direction of his study.

I follow in his steps as he walks ahead of me, leading me to where Papa is. Inside, the villa’s gloom wraps around me like a shroud. I carefully avoid the old paintings of my ancestors lined against the wall, their gazes cold and a tad judgemental. I wonder if they see through my outer, tougher shell.

Red velvet curtains frame the tall windows, letting in slivers of light that barely touch the shadows. My heels echo in the silence as we come around the dining hall. I see Aida’s dark hair bent first before I see the entirety of her. She's been waiting for my arrival. Her dark curls are a mess like she'd been fussing over it.

The moment she sees me, brightness springs into her eyes. She’s in her usual blazer, the one she wears when we’re deep in business over where next to move money to. I wonder if this is somehow business. Her hands flutter as she rushes over, grabbing my arm.

“Fina, you’re here, thank God,” she says, her voice dripping with drama, like I’m some savior she’s been praying for. It grates on my nerves, especially now, when I’m already raw from the news of Papa's failing health, but I let her cling to me. She’s my ally, and I've honestly missed her. I miss her animated talks, her endless chatter. So I let her squeeze me in a hug until I start to feel squirmish.

“Enough, Aida,” I say, pulling my arm free, my voice sharper than I mean it to be.

She steps back, her face falling at my gentle rebuke, but I don't have time to soothe her. "Papa's in his study, sì?" I ask, my voice now. She nods.

She casts a furtive glance at Carlo before she says, "it's bad, Fina." Her voice breaks, and my heart stumbles in my chest.

"No drama, Aida," I tsk at her as I make my way to Papa's study. Carlo stays behind, letting me pass.

The study door's ajar, and I push it open. The first thing that hits me is the sharp sting of antiseptic. It hits me hard, and I scrunch up my nose. Papa's there, slumped in his leather chair. I almost don't recognize the man on the chair. He doesn't look like the Papa I know. He looks like a ghost of the man he used to be. His signature navy suit hangs off him—a failed attempt to look less sickly—his gray hair thin and patchy, and tubes run from his arm to an IV stand, dripping slowly and steady. His skin's sallow, his cheeks sunken, and his breathing's so shallow I can barely hear it over the pounding in my ears.

Domenico Rossi, the man who built an empire on blood and steel has been reduced to this. He's fading, teetering on the edge of death, and I can't breathe around the ache in my chest.

"Papa," I whisper, my voice cracking as I drop to my knees beside him. I take his hand. It's cold, too cold, and I swallow the sob clawing up my throat. The last time I cried was during the death of my mother. I refuse to cry now. That'll mean his death is already an assurance. Besides, I'm not one to give in to hysteria.

His eyes open, those green eyes I got from him, but they're dull now, clouded with pain and something worse, something that looks final. "Fina, mia cara," he says, his voice a shaky whisper, thick with his Italian accent, and it takes everything in him to speak.

I hold his hand tighter, my fingers trembling. I quell the fear snaking up my spine. He's here. He'll live. Without him, I don't know if the Rossi empire will stand for much longer. I'm only one person against all the conniving intents of his enemies. "I'm here, Papa," I whisper to him.

I hear the sound of feet. I don't need to look to know who it is. He smells the same: spice and must. In my haste, I hadn't given it a thought that he'd be here. It's a little relieving to know that he's been here with Papa this whole time. He steps into the room behind me. I don't turn to look at him. Not yet. I have a lot to say, first starting with demanding an apology from him for making me take the fall for the failed ambush on Enzo.

But I stay quiet. He's here, I'm here. We're together, staying by Papa's side, but I know this moment of quiet won't hold. Riccardo's never been good at keeping the peace, and I'm not sure I am either, not with everything breaking apart around us.

Riccardo's boots scrape the floor as he moves closer, his shadow stretching across Papa's chair. I keep my eyes on Papa, on the slow rise and fall of his chest, but I can feel Riccardo's resentment burning into me, a heat I've known forever, one I'm already accustomed to.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:48 am

Even though he's 34, ten years older than me, he likes to be in competition with me , always trying to prove he's the better Rossi, the true heir. He's called me the "perfect" one for years, spitting the word like it's a curse, and I know he's about to let that bitterness spill over, right here, with Papa fading between us.

"Fina," he says. His voice is low, like he intends to bleed me out slowly. He's willing to draw the first blood, and I'm ready for him. I turn to him, meeting his gaze. His green eyes blaze fire, so like mine but twisted with something ugly.

How can two people be so alike, yet different? We both take after Papa mostly, only I have the physique of our mother. When I was little, I looked up to him, always trying to please him. For a while, our sister-brother dynamic had worked, until it didn't. Something had happened along the line and severed our bond. Perhaps, it was before I left for the USA or even years before that.

I look at my brother, really look at him. He looks... different from the Riccardo I used to know. He looks like has a couple demons he's battling. I almost feel pity for him, but I harden my heart. He doesn't deserve it. His dark hair's a mess, stubble rough on his jaw. His eyes look haunted. He looks like he hasn't slept in days.

Well, good for him.

"Didn't think you'd drag yourself away from your Mancini so soon," he says, his words cold. "Guess even a dying father can't stop you from playing the perfect little wife, and..." he sizes me up distastefully before landing the real blow, "...and whore for the enemy."

I used to wonder if he dissociated from himself before spitting those venomous words at me, because for a while, I couldn't reconcile the Riccardo I knew as a child to the one he grew up to become.

The words hit hard, like a visceral punch to the gut, and my chest tightens, shame and rage twisting together... and something else. Rage—it surges through me like wildfire. He's trying to hurt me, to cut where I'm already raw, and it's working, the sting of his words sinking deep.

Perfect little wife... and whore. Isn't it true? The fact that his words hit home more than he'd ever know has my insides twisting with murderous rage.

I draw myself up short, standing to my full height, my heels clicking as I face him fully. My hands are clenched at my sides, a futile attempt at reining in my anger. “Riccardo,” I say, my voice cold, the kind of cold that makes men flinch, the kind I reserve for the runts of the litter. Even at that, I'm holding on lightly to my temper.

He's my elder brother, and even if we don't see eye to eye, I can't tear into him the way I want to, not with Papa watching. “You don't get to say that to me. You're the one who started this mess. This only happened because of your fuck up. You hit the Mancini operation on the docks, thinking you'd show you're strong. When it did, you ran like a scalded cat, refusing to take responsibility, like you always do. All you did was force Papa's hand, and now I'm the one paying for it, married to a man I can't stand. So don't you dare act like I wanted this.”

My voice shakes with the memory of that day, walking into Papa's meeting room, seeing Enzo, the stranger from that reckless night four years ago, and learning he was Enzo Mancini, my enemy, my husband-to-be. I should've guessed something of the sort would happen, from Papa's tone that afternoon at the orchard when he told me what Riccardo had done.

And now I'm the one paying for it, married to a man I can't stand. The words I'd uttered haunts me. I can't stand Enzo? What a blatant lie.

Riccardo's face hardens and his eyes narrow, like he's ready to deliver another blow. I see the guilt flicker in his eyes, just for a moment, before he buries it under a sneer. "You think you're so pure, Fina," he snaps, stepping closer, his voice rising. "The perfect little Rossi, always doing what Papa wants, always so smart. But you're nothing now. Just a Mancini's trophy, sold off to keep the peace. You've shamed us all."

His words are a knife, gutting deeper, and my resolution falters. I feel the doubt creep in, the fear that he's right, that I've lost myself in this marriage. But I shove it down. Riccardo has nothing on me.

My steely eyes locks firmly on him. "That's enough, Riccardo. You don't get to judge me. You made your choices, and I'm living with them. So stop acting like I'm the one who failed this family, when incessant failure is the only thing you've done for this family."

I step closer, my breath steady now, my eyes never leaving his. I want him to see that I won't break, not for him, not now, not ever. Riccardo's face is a mask of anger, his green eyes flashing with resentment, but I stand my ground, showing him the steel beneath my skin, the strength he's always underestimated.

"Enough," Papa's voice slices through the room, weak but sharp, cutting our argument short. I turn to him, the fight draining out of me like water from a cracked glass, and Riccardo does the same. He's sitting up slightly in his chair, his frail body trembling with the effort, his face pale and drawn.

His breathing is ragged, each inhale a struggle, but his eyes burn with a fire he still has in him, despite his health.

Those green eyes, the ones we inherited, hold a fierce determination, a reminder of the man he used to be, will always be—the man who built an empire on blood and steel. Seeing that fire now, even dimmed by illness, makes my chest ache with a mix of love and fear.

“You two will stop this,” he says, his voice trembling with the effort it takes to speak, his Italian accent thick and heavy. “I’m dying. Soon.” The words hang in the air, a heavy truth that presses down on me, and I feel my throat tighten. Death isn’t something I’d ever come to relate with Papa. “And I won’t leave this world watching my children tear each other apart.”

His words hit harder than anything Riccardo said. The truth of it steals the breath from my lungs. He’ll die inevitably, it’s true. The ache in my chest spreads, heavy and cold, settling deep in my bones. I’ve known Papa was sick, but hearing him say it like this, so final, makes it real in a way I wasn’t ready for.

“Papa,” I whisper, my voice cracking as I kneel beside him again, taking his hand in mine. His skin is cold, too cold, and I feel the tremor in his fingers as I hold them. Riccardo moves to Papa’s other side, his face tight, his anger still simmering beneath the surface but muted by Papa’s plea.

“You both are the future of the Rossi empire. If you both don’t sheathe your sword now and heal the crack from within, our enemies will tear us apart, and the only thing that’ll be left of us will be tales of what we used to be. You’re going to carry on my legacy,” Papa says, his voice softer now, almost a whisper, his eyes moving between us. “In harmony. Together.” He pauses, his gaze steady despite the pain etching lines into his face. “The Rossi name means something. Don’t let it die with me.”

His hand tightens on mine, a fragile but firm grip, and I nod, my throat too tight to speak, my heart heavy with the weight of his words. Riccardo mutters a quiet “Yes, Papa,” his voice gruff, his anger tempered by what Papa had said.

The future of the Rossi empire indeed rests on us and the sooner we bury this sibling rivalry between us, the better. I look at Riccardo who conveniently avoids my gaze as he walks away.

At the door, he pauses, “oh, by the way, good of your husband to finally let Luis go.”

“Luis?” I mutter, my mind calling up his face. “What do you mean?”

“I got a call from him before you arrived. I've gone to see him. He's been battered roughly. Hell of a tough guy, your husband,” he says, his mouth twisting in a mocking smile.

I watch him go, barely unable to process what he'd said. I look to Papa who nods slightly. Apparently, he knows of it, and I'm the only one left out of the loop.

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Damn Enzo. I ignore the rapid heartbeat of my heart. I ignore the implications of this news. He's let Luis go. What does it mean for me...and for him?

17

Enzo

I lean back in my study's leather chair, the cigar smoke curling thickly in the air, as bitter as my mood. It's been a week and a half since Serafina left for her father's villa, and here I am, a fucking mess. I'm no better than I was on the day she left. In fact, I'm worse off.

I miss her. Not just her body—though, God, the thought of her curves under my hands keeps me up at night—but her sharp tongue, the way her green eyes cut through my bullshit. She's a fucking knife, edges sharp, slicing me open, and I hate how much I crave it. It almost feels like I'm counting down to the day she'll get back, which I'm not privy to.

Before now, if anyone had told me I'd miss the presence of a woman, much less yearn for it, I'd have labeled them mad. Weeks before, I wouldn't have believed that a day would come so soon where I'd have a permanent fixture, I'd come to call my wife. I knew it'd happen sooner or later. I'd eventually need to tie myself down in marriage with a suitable woman, someone of caliber, who'd give me children—little princesses, heirs.

But never in my wildest dreams would I ever imagine myself being tied down with my enemy, even if it's just a smokescreen marriage. I'd gone into this without

carefully thinking of how long the whole thing would last for. I'd gone into this with the aim to control the Rossis from within, but these days, I can no longer dredge up the resentment I started out with.

I'd even let Luis go, for Christ's sake. I don't know why the hell I did that. It'd been on a whim. I wonder what she thinks about me releasing him. God. I want to see her so badly.

It's hard enough to admit to myself that I miss her. I miss my wife. I've texted her, sure. A few curt messages about her father's health. Some brief messages about how she is, never when she's coming back because pride chokes me. I can't let her know I'm unraveling, that her absence is a fist in my gut, and I'm a ticking time bomb waiting to explode at the slightest nudge.

My cock stirs at the thought of burying myself in her. I want to claim her in more ways than one. I want to own her until she's trembling in my arms, pliant and soft. The images my mind conjures up are torturous. I drag on the cigar, trying to burn away the ache, but it's no use. She's in my blood, like a leechsucking away at my essence. Only she's sucking away at my soul, my sanity.

The door creaks open, and I don't look up. Probably Matteo with some smartass quip. I've not been giving him the time of day lately. Not when I spend my days in a sour mood, occupying my mind with the thoughts of my absent wife. He's been busy, too, running different operations in my stead.

I open my mouth on a dry rebuke at him interrupting my quiet time, but then a scent hits me—cheap, cloying perfume. Alanna. For a while there, I forgot she existed. What the hell is she doing here? I almost groan out my frustration.

I glance over, and she's barely dressed, a scrap of black lace clinging to her hips, her tits out, blonde hair spilling over her shoulders. She lets the lace slip to the floor,

standing naked before me. She's bold as fuck, I give her that. My eyes narrow. Before Serafina, I'd have had her bent over this desk, tweaking her nipples, fucking her hard to sate the fire in me.

Now? Nothing.

My cock doesn't even twitch.

"Enzo," she purrs, slinking closer, pressing her chest against my arm. Her breasts rub against me, deliberate, her lips grazing my jaw. "You've been lonely without her, haven't you?" Her voice is all honey, but it grates like sandpaper.

I shove her back roughly, my hand gripping her wrist as the anger I feel boils over. "Get the fuck off me," I growl, my voice lethal, aiming for damage. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

She falters slightly.

I continue coldly. "I'm married now. I've got one woman, and it's not you. Don't pull this shit again, Alanna. You're a whore, nothing more."

Her face twists, pain flashing in her eyes, but I don't care. She should've known better than to try me. I'm not the Enzo that used to fuck her to chase a high. I'm a different man now who only has eyes for one woman, and that woman is none other than my wife.

She steps closer, her eyes brimming with defiance. Before now, I hadn't noticed she had brown eyes. Her voice is shaky as she says, "you'll come back to me when this blows over. You always do."

"Alanna..." I begin, ready to tell her off once and for all.

“No. Enzo. Don't patronize me. I know what you have with her is only temporary, and I know you'll come back. It's just a matter of days. I'm a patient woman. I'm willing to wait.”

I almost laugh, but the sound stops cold in my throat. I hadn't meant to patronize her, I'd meant to be ruthless with her, but I pause, eyeing her. It's the first time I've seen her show spine, a flicker of something beyond the bland plaything she's been. It surprises me.

All my women were short-term—fucked, paid, gone. Alanna lasted because she scratched an itch, her bank account fat enough she'll never have to work again if she doesn't want to. But now? I feel something sharp, like sympathy, and it fucks with my head. Me, feeling pity? What the fuck is happening to me?

I soften my tone, but it's still firm and cutting, straight to the point. “You'll find someone, Alanna. Someone who wants more than a quick fuck. You're an attractive woman, but I've got a wife now. She's the only one who gets me.” The words slip out, and I freeze. Do I mean them? Is this affection, this clawing need for Serafina? My chest tightens, and I hate it. Alanna's eyes widen, shocked I'm even trying to pacify her. It shocks me too. I'm not this guy—soft words, fucking feelings.

“Out,” I snap, sharper now, covering the lapse. I'm not that man. I'm Enzo Mancini. I'm cold. I'm calculated. Those are the qualities that make my enemies shake in their boots. The same quality that has built me an infallible track record in the mafia world.

I see her briefly hesitate before she grabs her lace scrap, and heads for the door. I watch her progress to the door. She pauses, and this time, I'm almost losing my shit. One more word from her, and I won't be so kind at dispelling her. I make a mental note to inform the security guards to deny her entry the next time she comes.

“Thank you,” she mutters, her voice slightly trembling, but I see something else in

her eyes—a kind of gratefulness that's fleeting. The moment I catch it, she's gone, and I know she'll never be back. It's something I'd seen in her eyes—gratitude mixed with resolution.

I slump in the chair, the cigar burned to a stub, ash dusting my desk. Serafina's got me so fucked up I can't think straight. Alanna's gone, and I feel nothing—no pull, no heat. Before, I'd have fucked her raw, chased the high, she wouldn't have dared to walk away from me, but now? It's Fina. Only Fina. Her sharp mouth, her body pressed against mine, that jasmine scent that haunts me.

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My cock hardens just thinking of her, and I hate how she's rewired me. No other woman does this. Not Alanna, not anyone. Just my wife, the Rossi I'm supposed to hate. It's all a fucking mess.

The door swings open, and for a moment, I wonder if it's Alanna again, but it's Matteo instead. He strolls in, smirking like he's caught me jerking off.

"Saw Alanna on her way out," he says, dropping into the couch, legs sprawled as he looks at me. "Looked like she got slapped. You only got eyes for your wife now, huh?" Trust Matteo to take joy in my plight.

His grin's aggravating, and I want to punch it off his face. I ignore him and fish for another cigar. I need something to soothe me, and it's not Serafina, then it has to be something. I reach for the lighter by the fireplace, but my hands fumble, and I knock over the empty whiskey bottle. It clatters loudly as it topples to the floor, the rug muting its fall.

Fucking hell. My mood blackens. I'm an absolute fucking mess, clumsy like some kid, and it's her fault. Serafina's got me tripping over myself, my poise shot to hell.

Matteo chuckles, leaning forward. "What's this, Enzo? You're a wreck. You actually like her, don't you? You even let the Rossi captive go."

I grunt, digging for my lighter, but I only manage to push it farther. My irritation spikes, a low growl in my throat. "Sod off," I mutter, but he's relentless, his eyes glinting.

He pulls his lighter from his pocket, flicks it, and lights my cigar, still laughing. “Look at you, fumbling like a lovesick prick. She’s got you bad, doesn’t she?” I glare hard at him as I drag a hard lungful on the cigar, smoke stinging my lungs.

He’s right, and it pisses me off. These feelings—sympathy for Alanna, this ache for Fina—they’re alien, wrong. I’m not this man. I need to regain my composure fast before it careens completely out of control.

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?” I grunt at him.

He grins. “No, I don’t. Not now, anyway.” He pauses, and I look at him. I have the feeling he has more to say.

“Be careful with her,” Matteo says, his voice serious now, his grin fading. “Serafina’s no pushover. She’s all claws and poison, that one. I saw it when we met—she’d gut you if you hurt her, and I can’t help but think she’s almost pure. Too pure for you.”

I scoff, but it’s hollow. I remember her laugh with him the day I’d introduced her to the men. It had been easy, unguarded. As I think about it stabs me again. She’s never laughed like that with me. Sure, there’s an all-consuming passion, there’s anger, there’s willful surrender, but I can’t help the feeling that comes over me.

It comes as a stark realization. I want more from her. I want to know her from the inside out. I know her body, I have her curves memorized. My body knows her. But I want to know more. I want to know what makes her tick. I want to know what makes her laugh, and I want to be the one who delivers the jokes that makes her laugh. I’ve never had the craving to know another human, and it unsettles me.

I drag my mind back to the present, to Matteo who’s looking at me, a considering look on his face, like he can’t reconcile the man he knows to the one sitting across from him. If Matteo thinks I’m a gone cause, then I truly have no hope. I’m well and

truly lost for Fina. It enrages me, the fact that I can't seem to latch on my control, and I focus on that rage as I return Matteo's hard stare.

Who the fuck does he think he is to warn me about my wife? “She’s not pure, Matteo,” I snap, thinking of her at that club, doling out discipline to that hunk of a punk with some impressive karate moves. My heart warms at the memory. “You don’t know her.” It’s more to shut him down, but I mull on it for a bit. I really do not know her. That cursed notion comes again, of me wanting to know her. I clamp it down.

Matteo shrugs, unfazed. “I like her. She’s good.” He pauses, his eyes taking on a mischievous glint. “If you fuck her over, I’ll step in.”

My blood boils, and I shoot him a look that could kill. He laughs, leaning back, like my rage is a fucking joke.

Before I can snap, a knock cuts through. Disgruntled, I say, “come in.”

Luca steps in, his face pulled tight. “Boss, we got a problem. One of our shipments—a high-grade product—got hit at the docks. Looks like a Gallo crew, but it’s messy, like they’re taunting us.”

“Or they're retaliating for the party,” Matteo offers, already on his feet, earlier traces of playfulness gone.

My jaw locks. He’s been too quiet. I should've known this was coming. If I hadn't been preoccupied with thoughts of my wife, I'd have smelt it from a mile away. This smells like his work. He's probing for weakness. Sloppy. I'm becoming sloppy.

I stand, crushing the cigar in the ashtray. “Gear up,” I tell Matteo, my voice all steel now. “We’re handling this tonight.”

Matteo nods, his face all business. I storm out, heading for the armory, boots echoing on the marble.

In the armory, I snatch a Beretta, its sleek metal cold against my palm. I check the clip, my pulse racing, the high of an impending kill already pumping excitement into my blood.

It's time to boss up. I'm not some lovesick puppy. I'm Enzo Mancini. I eat my enemies for dinner.

18

Serafina

I pace the polished marble of my father's villa, the air thick with antiseptic and the faint musk of his old cigars. Two weeks I've been here, trapped in this mausoleum of stone and velvet, watching Papa fight death. He's too stubborn, refusing hospitals, claiming enemies lurk in every corner—a truth he drilled into me long ago. A truth I'd come to learn.

His face has more color now, his voice less ragged. I feel profound relief, but my relief is drowned by a sharper fear. My period is late, over a week gone. The thought claws at me, gutting me. I'm never late. Not since I've been on the pill.

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My hands tremble as I grip the windowsill, staring at the blood-red roses in the garden. They mock me, blooming while I'm unraveling. I'm Serafina Rossi, the woman who stands tall, who plays the game better than most in a male-dominated field. But this? This could break me, and it's all because of him. Enzo.

His name burns in my chest, a mix of resentment and hunger. I miss him—his dark eyes, that jagged scar over his brow, the way his touch sets my skin ablaze even when I want to carve his heart out. Our texts are sparse, perfunctory. He asks about Father; I send curt replies. Pride keeps me silent, but God, I yearn for him. His hands, his mouth, the way he fucks me like he's claiming my soul.

Why did he let Luis go?

Days ago, Papa had called me to his bedside, his voice weak but eyes sharp. We'd talked at length about the money laundering business that I handle with Aida. It surprised me. Before, I reported to him through written reports. As if that wasn't surprising enough, he apologized—fucking apologized—for marrying me off to Enzo without consulting me first.

“It was for peace, Fina,” he said, his hand gripping mine. “The Rossis, the Mancinis—we'd bleed each other dry. I had to do something to make the war cease. So you have to understand what I did. This marriage will work. It has to.”

I was reeling from his apology, his explanation, my mouth agape when he asked if Enzo and I were warming up to each other. Finding my voice, I nodded in the affirmative, lying. I said yes, but didn't tell him how I surrender to Enzo's touch, how it haunts me.

The world is going to shit. Papa is apologizing. My period is late, and I might be falling in love with Enzo fucking Mancini.

Father's words replay in my head, unsettling me. "You'll both work in the end," he'd said, like he knows something I don't.

I shake my head, trying to shove it away. My breasts ache. They've been doing that a lot. At first, I thought they ached for Enzo's touch. They're heavy, tender in a way that's new. I know what this means... might mean, but I can't face it. Not yet. Enzo and I, we've been reckless, fucking like we're trying to destroy each other. Every time, I swear it's just physical, a way to survive this lie of a marriage. But it's more. I feel him in my bones, and I hate it.

I stop pacing, my fingers digging into the sill. The villa's too quiet, the maids' footsteps faint. Riccardo's been skulking. His guilt over the ruthless words he'd said to me must be eating him alive from the inside out, but I don't care. My mind's on Enzo, on the fear pooling in my stomach.

I slip into Papa's room when he calls, my face a perfect mask of serenity, when my mind is anything but. He's propped up and his gaze is sharp as he focuses on me. I take in his gray hair thinning. He's almost bald now. He used to have a full head of hair.

I sit on a chair by his bed. "You called for me, Papa."

He's looking at me, his gaze sharp as if he's trying to dissect my insides. I fight the urge to look away. "You're distracted, Fina," he says finally. "What's wrong?"

I force a smile, the kind he taught me to wear. "Just worried about you." A half-truth. He grunts, but it's skeptical, as if he doesn't believe my words, but doesn't push.

We talk about the accounts of his money laundering business. We move on to talk about what a rival is doing to get back at us, then on to his legacy. God forbid Domenico Rossi stops thinking about business even when he's bedridden. He speaks and I listen, but I'm barely there.

My mind's on the pharmacy bag hidden in my room. In it is the test I'm too scared to touch. I'd bought it on a whim when I'd excused myself from the villa to see some sights. On my way back, I went to a pharmacy to get it. I'd been discreet, making sure Aida and the guard trailing me didn't get a whiff. If my suspicion is true, I want it confirmed and digested first before it airs.

Suddenly not able to delay the inevitable anymore, I excuse myself from Papa, my heart slamming, and head for my bedroom. I lock myself there. The silence is suffocating, the weight of what's coming crushing me. The bag's under my pillow, its contents a ticking bomb. I pull it out, hands shaking, and stare at the pregnancy test. A small white stick that could shatter everything.

Me, pregnant? With Enzo Mancini's child? The thought is a like a huge fist to my chest, stealing my air. I'm not ready—not for a baby, not for him. But my body's screaming truths I can't ignore. I sit on the bed, the test in my lap, and try to breathe. Enzo's face flashes—his self-assured smirk, his anger, the way he kisses me like he's starving. I want to scream, to run. I think of him, of his cold texts, his pride as thick as mine.

Does he feel this pull? Or is he fucking that blonde whore I'd seen with him before the wedding—Alanna or Elena—laughing while I'm here breaking? White-hot anger sears my insides. I clutch the test tight, my knuckles white. I need to know. I can't keep hiding. The bathroom's cold tiles chill my feet as I head there, the test heavy in my hand. My reflection in the mirror is a stranger—green eyes wide, cheeks flushed with fear.

I pee on the stick, set it on the counter, and wait. The seconds crawl, each one a nail in my chest. I pace the small space, my bare feet slapping the floor. Enzo's there in my mind—his low growl, his body pinning mine. I hate him. I need him. And now, maybe, I'm carrying his child. The thought is too much, too heavy. I stop, staring at the test, begging it to stay blank. But it doesn't.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Two lines stare up from the test, stark against the white plastic, and my world splits open. Positive. I'm pregnant with Enzo Mancini's child.

The truth slams into me like a vicious blade, relentless, cutting through every wall I've built. I sink to the bathroom floor, the tiles biting my skin, my breath jagged. This can't be happening. I'm Serafina Rossi, the woman who moves money in shadows, who outsmarts men like my father. Not a mother, not a wife in any real way. But my body doesn't give a fuck about my plans. It's chosen, and I'm terrified, my heart pounding like a war drum.

I clutch the test, its edges digging into my palm. Enzo can't know. How can he? I can barely face it myself. Our marriage was a deal, a cold strategy to stop a war. But every time we fucked, it was more—raw, desperate, like we were tearing into each other's souls. Now this. A baby. His baby. The thought of him, all dark charm and lethal smile, as a father makes my stomach lurch.

Will he want this? Or will he see it as a chain, a weakness?

Perhaps, he'll think this is a ploy I've cooked up to chain him down in this marriage. To make it more real. The thought of him thinking that is like a cold slap to my face.

I stand on unsteady legs, and splash water on my face. The mirror shows a woman I don't know—cheeks flushed, eyes wild with panic. I want to call Enzo, scream at

him, make him feel this chaos. But my pride's a fortress, and his is worse. Besides, if I call him, what will I say? 'I'm pregnant with your child' or maybe something less direct like 'can we talk'? Either way I look at it, this is one fucking huge mess.

It's laughable. I'm laughable. Holding up my head in pride but letting him fuck me senseless. Rage at my recklessness spikes through me. Even now, I can envision Enzo with that blonde bitch. Is he bending her over backwards and doing the same thing he does with me? Dammit! I shove the test into my purse, hiding it like a shameful secret.

Papa's voice rings in my head—legacy, peace. He'd see this child as a victory, a Rossi-Mancini heir to seal the alliance. But I'm not his pawn, not anymore. This baby changes everything, and I'm not ready to be a mother, to let Enzo in. I've guarded my heart for years, my strength, my armor. Now, it's cracking, and I hate how exposed I feel. Days ago, Father's apology rattled me, his belief that Enzo and I would "work." What did he mean? Does he see something in us I can't?

The villa's silence presses in, heavy as the test in my purse. I need to tell Enzo, but how? He's all strategy, all control, his heart buried under layers of ice. Will he see this as a complication, or will that primal side—the one that fucked me like he'd die without it—take over?

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I want to believe he'd burn for me, for this, but doubt chews at me. I sit on the bed, my hands on my stomach, searching for a sign, a flutter. There's nothing, just the weight of what's growing.

A child. Our child. The thought is an angry storm, ripping through my plans, my pride. I've fought to be more than Domenico's daughter, more than a bride. But this is bigger than me, than us. I close my eyes, and Enzo's there—his smirk, his voice, the way he says my name like it's a curse and a vow. I need to go back, to face him, to tell him. But not yet. I need time to brace myself, to rebuild my walls.

The villa's walls close in, the air thick with my secret. It's larger than life. Papa's getting stronger, but, here I am, crumbling. I stand, smoothing my dress, my face a mask again.

I'll play the part—daughter, wife—until I can't. I move to the window to stare out, to breathe in air that's not contaminated by this new discovery. My throat closes up, but I'm determined not to cry. I won't give in to hysterics. I'm not that woman. I'm Serafina Rossi. I tackle whatever comes my way head-on. My hand moves to cover my abdomen and I stare down at my flat stomach, smooth, untampered with. Already, I'm feeling protective of the little one blooming inside of me.

I look out the window again. The roses outside mock me, their red too bright. I'm carrying Enzo's child, and nothing will ever be the same. Despite my bravery, I let the fear settle.

This is my fight now, and I'll be damned if I back down from it.

Enzo

Fina's been gone two weeks, and I'm a man unmoored. My chest is raw with a hunger that gnaws my insides. I miss her. Not just her body, not the way it melts into me. I miss the sharp edge of her wit that cuts clean through me, the fire in her green eyes when she dares me to cross her, the way her skin feels under my palms, warm and unyielding, like she's daring me to break her. I fear I might go absolutely mad by her absence.

The mansion's a hollow shell without her, every room echoing the absence of her laugh, her scent. I catch whiffs of jasmine in the air, a cruel permanence that haunts my sleepless nights, leaving me hard and restless. One time I'd gone to her room, and my reaction to being there had been visceral, almost bringing me to my knees. I'd caught myself, baffled by such a strong reaction to being in her room.

My texts to her are cold, clipped, pride a noose around my throat. But, if I'm being truthful to myself, it's a lie. I'm burning for her badly, deeply. My blood is a roar I can't quiet. Day in, day out, I pace my study, the cigar in my hand tasteless, ash dusting my desk like snow. I'm Enzo Mancini, forged in blood, unshakeable, but she's undone me... completely, implicitly. I need her back, her fight, her heat, her everything.

Today, I'm battling with my sanity, wondering if I'm not all the better, going for her. Matteo has gone to a meeting on my behalf. He'd looked at me as if I've gone completely bonkers before he left. And, I don't blame him. My wife's absence is doing a great number on me.

I crush the cigar in the ashtray resolutely, the decision settling like a stone. I'm done waiting. I'm going for her and that's final. I grab my keys, my Beretta heavy at my

hip, its cool metal a reminder of who I am and head out.

The drive to the Rossi villa is a blur, the road a gray ribbon under a sky bruised with clouds, my pulse a steady drum urging me forward. I'm not just her husband—I'm the man who claimed her, enemy or not, and this marriage, this fragile peace between our families, means she's mine. The thought of her defiance, her refusal to bend, only fuels me. I want her fire in my hands, even if it burns.

The iron gates of the Rossi villa groan open, and I step out, gravel crunching sharply under my boots. The last time I was here was to forge an alliance with my enemy, an alliance that had me carting away with a wife, and a momentary promise to hold the peace.

The guards at the gate—two of them—eye me warily as I approach them. They know who I am, no doubt. One of them whips out a phone to put a call across to whoever the fuck is the Lord of the villa now that Domenico is ill. I realize I should've called my wife to notify her of my coming, but in my maddening haste, I hadn't remembered to put a call across. Well, let this be a surprise to her.

“Mr. Rossi will be here shortly,” the other says.

I return their wary stare with steely ones. I understand their hostility and carefulness, but goddammit, I'm no longer a rival, I'm Serafina Rossi's fucking husband.

Just as I'm about to say something to that effect, I see a figure emerge, walking stealthily. I recognize who it is. Riccardo Rossi. A spineless bastard. Where the fuck is my wife? I expect her to be informed of my appearance. She should be the one here to welcome me.

He comes toward and stops just short of where I'm standing. I watch as he leans against a stone pillar, his face twisted with venom. He doesn't faze me. If he's indeed

a replacement for Domenico, then the Rossis are truly fucked.

He must have thought better of his pose, because he moves away from the stone pillar and steps right into my path, his stance threatening. “Mancini,” he snarls, his lips curling in distaste.

I watch him, his exact expression mirrored on my face. His hand twitches toward the gun at his belt as if he's going to unholster it any moment from now. “You’ve got some fucking balls showing up here after what you did to one of our associates.”

I step toward him and stand right in front of him, towering over him. He plants his feet firmly on the ground, determined not to falter. My eyes narrow, a cold smile curling my lips. “Your dog-shit faced associate deserved it. He messed with me first. Now, my wife’s inside, Rossi. You either move, or I’ll make you.”

His jaw clenches, hate blazing in his eyes, but I see the flicker of doubt. He's not as smart as he thinks he is. I wonder how two people born of the same parents can be so different.

“She’ll laugh in your face,” he spits, but his voice wavers slightly. He's caving.

I step closer, my voice low and lethal. “Try me.”

He hesitates, then steps aside, muttering curses, his shoulder brushing mine as I shove past. The contact sparks a flare of rage I swallow down. Anyone else does that, I'd be battering their head in.

The villa’s a fortress, cold and grand, but I'm not here to admire the beauty of it. I'm here to claim my wife. The big oak doors at the entrance opens and a man I recognize as Carlo from the last time I was here comes out. He walks toward me, his mouth set in a firm line.

“Mr. Mancini,” he says nodding slightly, then turns to lead me to where Fina is.

I stride through the hall, following him, wondering where the hell in the whole of this fortress my wife is. I'm about to mutter a curse, impatient eating away at me when I see her. Fina.

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Her black dress hugs her curves, hair spilling dark over her shoulders, green eyes flashing like a storm breaking. My chest tightens, want and fury twisting into a knot. She sees me, and her stance shifts, chin high, ready for a fight.

“What the fuck are you doing here, Enzo? And why the fuck did you let Luis go without informing me first?” she snaps, her voice hard, but there’s a tremor, a shadow in her gaze that hooks me.

“What? No greeting? No thank you?”

Those green eyes turned on me has my chest tightening. God, how I've missed her.

“Cut the shit. What are you doing here?”

I clench my jaw. “You’re my wife,” I say, voice hard, mirroring hers. I close the distance between us until her scent, jasmine and heat, floods me. “You belong with me.”

Her laugh is sharp and bitter, slicing through the air. “Belong? You don’t own me, Mancini. Go back to your whores.”

The words sting, but it’s her eyes—bright, too bright—that stop me. Something is wrong. It's not sadness at her father's plight that I see, it's something else. I'm so attuned to her that I immediately know if something's wrong.

“Don’t play games, Fina,” I growl, my hand grazing her arm. Her warmth is a spark that jolts me. “Something’s wrong. I see it. What is it?”

She yanks free, stepping into my space, her voice rising fiercely. “You see nothing! You think you can storm in, demand I follow? Fuck you, Enzo. Who the hell do you think you are?” Her defiance is a fire; those overly bright eyes, like she's trying to hold back tears, makes my gut churns with unease.

“Your husband,” I counter.

“Go away, Enzo.”

“You’re coming home,” I say, my voice a low snarl, my hand gripping her wrist, firm but careful. She twists free, her eyes blazing, her breath hot.

“Home? To what? Your cold bed, your cold heart? This marriage is a deal, nothing more!”

Her words cut, but I’m not backing down. “A deal that makes you mine,” I snap, my voice rough, stepping closer, our bodies inches apart. I’m done being patient. “Stop fighting me, Fina.”

She laughs, a wild, angry sound, her hands fisting at her sides. “Fighting’s all we know! You want me to bend, to be your little wife? I’m a Rossi, you bastard!”

Her fire’s a drug, but the slight crack in her voice stops me cold. That earlier unease resurfaces. “What’s got you like this?” I demand, my voice softer, more urgent. “Tell me, damn it.”

Before she can answer, a maid’s voice cuts through, soft but clear. “Mr. Rossi wants to see you, Mr. Mancini.” Ah. So, my presence is known by all and sundry.

Fina’s jaw tightens, her eyes a dare, as if she's daring me to go if I can. What's the harm in going to see my father-in-law? I nod, following the maid, but not before I see

Fina's trembling hands. Something is definitely wrong, and I'll be damned if I let her hide it from me.

Domenico's study is a dark vault, the same room where I first saw Fina, my wife. This random shuffle with her title between 'my wife' and 'Fina' has me confused.

He's at his desk, sitting with his shoulders held high. But I don't fail to notice how frail he looks or how his shoulders are slightly slumped. His thinning gray hair stands out in a face etched with sickness. Pity stirs, a sharp pang I don't show. He's Domenico Rossi, a titan, even now, and I respect his strength, his cunning, though we're enemies bound by this uneasy peace.

"Enzo," he says, voice like gravel, his gray eyes sharp, distrustful. "You're bold, coming here."

I keep my face blank, my voice even. "Came for my wife, Domenico." On second thought, I add, "I wish you a quick recovery, though." His lips twist in a faint sneer. "Fina's no prize to be claimed, Mancini. She's my daughter. She's a Rossi."

The words are a jab, a reminder of our truce's fragility. I nod, my throat tight. "I know who she is. She's my wife."

His gaze holds mine, heavy with warning. "Tread carefully. This peace is thin."

I feel the weight of his words, the respect I can't deny, even as I hate his control over her. "Understood," I say, voice hard.

I start for the door, and before I can turn the knob, his voice stops me short. I look back to see his eyes baring into me. "For Luis, grazie." He looks as if to say something else, but he turns and waves me out.

Domenico's dismissal hangs heavy in the air, his warning about Fina still ringing in my ears as I step out of his study, the door closing with a soft thud behind me. The villa's shadows cling to the marble walls, the scent of wax and old leather thick, like the weight of the Rossi name itself. I'm restless, my blood still simmering from the exchange with my wife's father.

The sounds of my boots are muted on the floor as I head back to the hall, my mind fixed on her. Fina. My wife, my fire, the woman who's been tearing me apart for weeks. I need to see her, to drag her back to where she belongs, whether she fights me or not. This marriage may be a deal to keep the peace, but she's mine, and I'm done with the distance between us.

I find her where I left her, standing in the grand hall, the soft glow of a chandelier casting prisms across her black dress, which clings to her curves like a lover's touch. Her eyes though dampened by whatever's eating her blazes with a fury that could burn this villa to ash, and me alongside it. She's a warrior, unyielding, her stance rigid as if she's braced for battle. The sight of her stirs something deep, a mix of want and rage that tightens my chest. She's mine.

Mine.

She sees me, and her lips curl into a sneer. She steps toward me, closing the gap between us. “You’re still here, Enzo? God, you don’t listen, do you? I told you to leave.” Her words are sharp, meant to inflict something—a wound, maybe, but there’s a tremor beneath them,

I move closer, my voice a low growl, my hand reaching for her arm, my grip firm but careful, feeling the warmth of her skin through the fabric. “We’re not done, Fina. You know that.”

Her eyes flash, and she yanks free with a snarl, stepping into my space, her breath hot against my face. “Done? We’re done when I say we are, you bastard! You think that ring on my finger makes me yours? I’m not your fucking pet, Enzo!” Her voice rises, her hands fisting at her sides as if she’s holding herself back from striking me. Her rage is a living thing, wild and fierce, but I see the pain in her eyes, a truth she’s guarding so fiercely. It’s there, in the way her lips tremble, in the way she holds herself too tight, like she’s carrying a weight that could crush her. My chest aches, but I keep my face hard, stoic, refusing to let her see how much she unravels me.

“What’s eating you, Fina?” I demand, my voice low, pressing closer, her heat searing through me, making my blood roar. “Don’t lie to me. I see it in your eyes. Spit it out.”

Her gaze locks on mine, fierce, unyielding, and for a moment, I think she’ll slap me, like that night in her father’s chamber when I kissed her and she burned me with her fire. But she doesn’t. Instead, she hesitates, her chin lifting, her strength a wall I can’t

breach. “Not here,” she says, her voice steady.

She grabs my wrist, her touch firm, and pulls me toward a side room, her steps quick, purposeful. The door clicks shut behind us, sealing us in a small, shadowed space where the air feels too thick, her scent wrapping around me, jasmine and defiance, making my pulse hammer in my throat.

I stand there, my back to the door, watching her pace the small room, her movements sharp, like a caged animal. The silence is heavy, pressing against my chest, and I wait, my unease growing, a knot in my gut that won't loosen.

“What is it, Fina?” I ask, my voice rough, the words scraping my throat. I keep my face blank, my stance rigid, but inside, I'm a mess, torn between wanting to shake her and pulling her close.

She stops, facing me, her green eyes blazing with that fierce strength I've always known, the strength that makes her a Rossi, a warrior, my equal in every way. Her chin is high, her shoulders squared, and I see it—the weight she's carrying, the truth she's about to unleash.

She opens her mouth, as if she wants to say something important. I see it in her eyes, a fire that holds me still, burning with purpose. I wait with bated breath, my heart slamming against my ribs. Then, she says simply, “I'm pregnant.”

The words suck the air from my lungs, and my face freezes in shock as the truth of her words dawn on me.

Pregnant.

Serafina

The car hums beneath us, a low rumble that does nothing to ease the knot in my chest as we pull through the iron gates of Enzo's manor. The familiar stone facade looms ahead, its ivy-clad walls catching the late afternoon sun, and a pang hits me, sharp and unexpected. I've missed this place—the way the air carries the scent of cedar and leather, the quiet hum of the staff moving like shadows, the sense of order that feels like a pulse. I've missed him, too, though I hate admitting it.

I keep asking myself what it means that he let Luis go, but perhaps there's no answer to it. He'd herded my ultimatum, that's it. Nothing more. I look at him.

His profile is sharp beside me, his jaw tight, eyes fixed on the road, the silence between us thick with the weight of my confession. Pregnant. The word sits heavily like a stone in my stomach, and I can't shake the stilted tension that's grown since I told him in Papa's villa. We're bound by this truth now, and it scares the hell out of me.

I step out, and the manor's grandeur wraps around me like an old friend. I've been gone two weeks, but it feels longer, like I've been adrift in a storm and only now found shore. The front doors swing open, and Matteo's there, his grin wide, eyes warm. "Fina, you're back," he says, pulling me into a quick hug, his voice light but genuine. "Place wasn't the same without you."

I manage a smile, my throat tight, and nod. "Good to see you too," I say, meaning it, though my eyes flicker to Enzo who's glowering at Matteo who pretends not to notice while he's already moving inside, his silence a wall I can't breach.

I follow him, my steps slower, taking in the polished wood banisters, the soft glow of lamps painting the walls alive. I'm home. Home. It has a comely quality to it, yet it doesn't really feel like it—not really—not with this secret between us, not with the

way Enzo's presence pulls at me, a tide I'm fighting to resist.

I think of Papa, left behind at the villa, and a quiet relief settles. He's in good hands. His health is improving, his color better, his voice stronger. Even Riccardo, foolish as he is, will look after him. I don't need to worry, not about that. But here, with Enzo, worry is all I feel. It's a tight coil in my chest.

I head for my room, needing space, needing to breathe. The familiar door creaks open, and I inhale the scent of lavender and clean linen. My sanctuary. Giulia's already there, her small frame bustling as she sets out fresh towels. "Welcome back, Signora Mancini," she says, her smile soft. "I'll run your bath now."

I nod gratefully, my body aching for the comfort of hot water and a moment to think. "Grazie, Giulia," I say, my voice quieter than I mean. But before she can move, Enzo's voice cuts through, low and firm. He's standing, slouched against the doorframe. I hadn't heard him come in.

"That'll be all, Giulia." His voice carries a quiet command that has Giulia darting a confused glance at me.

"Leave us be," he repeats, the impatient quality in his tone evident this time.

Giulia hesitates, glancing at me one more time, like she's waiting for me to save her. I nod slowly and smile at her to show that she can leave. She hurriedly slips out and the door clicks shut behind her.

The moment she's gone, I whirl on him, my blood hot, irritation flaring. "What the hell, Enzo?" I snap, my hands fisting at my sides. "I need to rest. You can't just barge in and dismiss my maid."

His dark eyes meet mine and I hate how my pulse quickens, how his presence fills the

room, all sharp edges and quiet strength. “We need to talk, Fina,” he says, his voice steady, but there’s an undercurrent, something raw that makes my stomach twist.

The pregnancy. Of course. It’s a shadow between us, heavy and unspoken since we left the villa, and I can’t outrun it.

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I cross my arms, my voice sharp to mask the unease curling inside me. “There’s nothing to talk about,” I say, stepping back, needing distance from the way his gaze burns into me. “I don’t expect you to change your life because of this. You don’t have to play the dedicated father.”

The words spill out, bitter, a defense against the fear that he’ll see this child as a burden, a complication in our already fractured marriage. I’m Serafina Rossi, I don’t beg for anyone’s loyalty, not even his. But his eyes darken, his jaw tightening, and he steps closer, closing the gap I tried to keep.

“Don’t,” he says, his voice low, almost a growl, but there’s a fierceness in it that stops me cold. “You think I’d walk away? I might be a lot of things, Fina, but a deadbeat to my child isn’t one of them.” His words hit like a fist, solid, unwavering, and I freeze, my breath catching. “I’ll be a hundred percent involved. Every step of the way. This baby is mine, and I don’t run from what’s mine.” His gaze holds mine, steady, unapologetic, and I see it—the truth in his eyes, the promise he’s making, not just to our child, but to me.

He's not denying it. He's not accusing me of trying to use this child as a means to get to him. He's simply just accepting it. I'm stunned. It's more than I'd hoped.

I gape at him as my heart beats a staccato burst of rhythm in my chest. The room suddenly feels too small, too warm. He’s so close, his scent—leather, smoke, him—wrapping around me, pulling me in. I’ve fought him at every turn, built walls to keep him out, but right now, those walls are crumbling.

Being near him does something to me, something I can’t name, something that makes

my blood sing and my pride falter. I see him—the man who's my enemy, my husband, the father of my child—and I can't stop myself. I step forward, my hands reaching for his face, and I kiss him.

It's not the wild, angry clash of our past. This kiss is tender, soft, a quiet surrender that scares me more than any fight. His lips are warm, yielding under mine, and for a moment, the world falls away—the manor, the pregnancy, the war between us. It's just him, just me, and this fragile thing we're building.

My hands slide to his jaw, feeling the stubble, the strength beneath, and I pour everything into this kiss, all the fear, the want, the hope I'm too proud to voice. He doesn't pull away, his hands finding my waist, gentle, like he's afraid I'll break.

But I'm not breaking.

I'm Serafina Rossi, and right now, I'm choosing this, choosing him, if only for this moment.

21

Enzo

Fina's lips are warm and soft as they meet mine, a kind of spark that catches me off guard. It ignites something deep in my chest. Her kiss is gentle, a rare offering from a woman who's all fire and steel, and it stirs something raw, a hunger I've tried so hard to bury. I'm not this man who comes apart from a woman's touch, but Fina's touch cracks me open, and I can't hold back.

I take over, my hands cradling her face, my mouth pressing harder, a rough edge to my need. But I'm careful, mindful of the life she carries—our child. The truth of her pregnancy thrums in my veins, warms my blood. It urges me to be tender—a softness

that feels alien, almost wrong, yet it's all I want in this moment. Her breath catches, a small, fierce sound that sends heat curling through me, and I deepen the kiss, tasting her strength, her surrender to everything.

I pull away, just enough to see her face in the soft glow of her bedroom, the lamplight casting a warm sheen across her skin. Her green eyes are wide, unguarded, a vulnerability that makes my chest tighten. It's a raw ache I can't name.

She's beautiful, fierce, mine, and the sight of her steals my breath. My fingers trace her jaw wondrously, sliding down her throat, feeling the pulse that beats strong beneath her skin. She leans into me, her hands fisting my shirt, pulling me closer.

"Fina," I murmur, my voice scraped raw with need. It's a sound that feels torn from somewhere deep. She doesn't speak, as if understanding just how much I want her in the very moment. She just nods, her lips parted, and it's enough to unravel me. I kiss her again, slowly, savoring the warmth of her mouth, the way she yields without breaking, a dance of fire and trust.

My hands find the edge of her dress, and I lift it. My touch is deliberate, careful, as if she might shatter, though I know she won't. The fabric slides over her hips, her thighs, falling to the floor, and she stands bare, her skin glowing in the lamplight, smooth and unmarred. There's no sign yet of the child she carries. She's only a few weeks pregnant, too early for her body to show, but the knowledge of our baby—a secret alive in her—hits me like a fist, fierce and unshakable.

I pause, my breath hitching, a tide of awe surging through me, raw and overwhelming. She's carrying my blood, my future, and it shifts something inside. It awakens something deep, a need to shield her, to hold her close, that I didn't know I could feel.

I guide her to the bed, my hands steady, easing her onto the sheets. My eyes are

locked on hers. She watches me, her gaze sharp but open, a trust that humbles me. It's a weight I don't deserve but crave.

I shed my clothes, my movements quick, purposeful, and join her on the bed. My body hovers over hers, careful not to press too hard, too aware of the life between us. I kiss her throat, my lips rough, scraping her skin. I soften the edge, brushing her collarbone, her shoulder, with a tenderness that surprises me. Her hands roam my back, fingers digging into my muscles, and I groan, a low, unguarded sound that betrays me.

"Tell me if it's too much," I say, my voice thick, almost a plea, and she shakes her head, her grip tightening.

Fina's whisper cuts through the quiet. "Don't stop," she whispers, her voice fierce, Serafina Rossi in every syllable, commanding and sure. I move lower, my mouth tracing the swell of her chest, the soft rise of her belly, and she arches into me, her warmth a beacon I follow. I move lower, my mouth brushing her skin delicately, tasting the warmth of her, and she sighs, a sound that's both fierce and fragile, pulling me deeper into her orbit.

I shift, my hands bracing beside her on the bed, my body hovering, careful not to overwhelm. My eyes lock on her glazed ones, so green, so fierce even in this quiet moment, and I enter her slowly, a measured thrust that's rough with my need but tempered by care. My body craves her, a primal urge that surges, raw and wild, but I fight it, each movement deep, intentional, a silent vow I can't put into words.

Her gasp fills the room, soft yet urgent, and it's a sound that hooks me, pulling me closer, making my chest ache with something I don't dare name. I lean down, my lips finding hers, kissing her hard, swallowing her sounds, my heart pounding like a war drum against my ribs.

This isn't like before, not the wild, consuming clashes of our past, where we tore into each other like enemies fighting for dominance. This is different, a dance that's both rough and tender, a connection that carries a weight I'm not ready to face.

I move with her, finding a rhythm, her skin warm and soft under my hands, her breath a melody that weaves through the air, grounding me. Her hands slide down my back, nails grazing my skin, and I groan, a low, raw sound that betrays how much she undoes me. I whisper her name, a rough plea that slips out, unguarded, and it feels like a confession, a truth I can't take back.

Her body responds, tightening around me, and I feel the tension building, a wave that's both fierce and gentle. Her gasps grow sharper, her fingers clutching me, and I watch her, her face flushed, her eyes half-closed but still locked on mine. She's beautiful, fierce, mine, and the sight pushes me closer to the edge.

I kiss her again, softer this time, my lips lingering, and she cries out, her release a shudder that pulls me with her. The wave crashes over me, leaving me trembling, my body heavy with the weight of it. I collapse beside her, pulling her close, her warmth pressed against me, her heartbeat a steady pulse against my chest.

I hold her, my arm around her, and I'm shaken, caught off guard by this tenderness, this depth of feeling I won't name. It's not just the act, not just the fire between us—it's her, Fina, the woman who's my wife, my enemy, the mother of my child. This moment binds us in ways I can't untangle, and it scares me, the way it lays me bare.

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I bury my face in her hair, breathing in her jasmine scent, and for now, I let myself feel it, this quiet, fragile thing we've made, knowing it's a risk I might regret but can't walk away from.

It's a risk, a ledge I'm standing on, and though I know I might regret it, I can't pull away, not yet. Her warmth seeps into me, her heartbeat a steady pulse against my chest, and I linger in the stillness, the world beyond this room fading, leaving only us, this moment, this bond I'm not ready to face.

Fina lies against me, her body warm and soft. She's quiet, except for her quick breaths, her head resting on my chest, her dark hair spilling across the sheets like a river of ink. The room is equally hushed, the lamplight casting gentle shadows over her skin, and I hold her, my arm around her shoulders, my fingers brushing her arm in slow, absent circles.

Her breath steadies and I bask in the quiet rhythm that calms the storm inside me. But I'm uneasy, too aware of how close we've become, how much of myself I've bared. Here, with her, I've let slip a tenderness that feels like a crack in my armor. She's carrying my child, and that truth ties us together, but it also exposes me, makes me vulnerable, and I hate it, hate how it weakens me.

The silence wraps around us, heavy and intimate. I feel the weight of it, the way her body fits against mine, the way her heartbeat echoes in my chest. I want to pull away, to rebuild the walls I've let crumble, but her warmth holds me, a tether I'm not ready to break.

She shifts slightly, her breath catching, and I sense her stirring, the quiet moment

stretching thin, like a thread about to snap. I keep my eyes on the ceiling, trying to anchor myself, but her presence is a tide, pulling me deeper into something I can't control.

She lifts her head, slow and deliberate, her dark hair brushing my skin as she moves. Her green eyes find mine, curious, searching, and I feel my stomach knot, caught by the intensity of her gaze.

Her eyes linger, drifting upward, settling on the scar above my brow, the jagged mark I've carried for years. I tense, my breath hitching, as her finger rises, hesitant, then traces the scar, her touch light, almost reverent, but it burns, stirring memories I've buried deep. Her finger lingers, and I'm uncomfortable, exposed, my skin prickling under her scrutiny, a raw edge I don't want her to see.

"Enzo," she says, her voice low, softer than I've heard, a tone that's too close, too intimate, like she's reaching for something I've locked away. "How'd you get it?"

Her question is simple, a quiet probe, but it's a blade, slicing into places I've sealed shut, scars that run deeper than flesh. My body stiffens, my jaw clenching, and I feel the walls rising, cold and unyielding. I don't share my past, not with her, not with anyone. She's my wife, the mother of my unborn child, but that doesn't give her the right to know me, to see the parts I've hidden. I've already bared too much, and I hate it, this tenderness that's crept in like a shadow.

I sit up, pulling away, my voice hard as I meet her gaze. "You being pregnant doesn't mean you get to dig into my life, Fina."

The words are sharp, a lash meant to push her back, to rebuild the distance I need. Her eyes flicker with hurt, a quick, raw wound she tries to mask, but I see it, the way her lips press tight, the way her hand falls to the sheet, clutching it to her chest. Her pride is a shield, but I know her, see the pain in the stiff set of her shoulders, the way

she looks away, her silence louder than any retort.

The hurt I've caused twists in my chest, a dull ache I don't want to feel, but I don't apologize. I can't. Vulnerability is a weakness, and I've already given more than I should.

She sits up now, her movements slow and deliberate as she pulls the sheet higher, her eyes fixed on some point beyond me, and I hate it, hate how her silence makes me feel like I've failed her. The air between us is thick, heavy with things we won't say, and I'm trapped in it, caught between wanting to reach for her and needing to push her away.

I'm not the man who bends, who softens, but Fina causes me to question my existence, the very essence of my being. I open my mouth, ready to say something cold, to seal the distance, but my cellphone vibrates on the nightstand, a sharp buzz that cuts through the tension.

I grab it, seeing Matteo's name, and answer, my voice clipped. "What?" His voice crackles through. It's urgent, rough. "Enzo, we've got trouble. Need you now."

I glance at Fina, her eyes still turned away, her silence a weight I carry. "Stay here," I say, my voice flat, and she doesn't respond, just grips the sheet tighter, her pride holding her together. I know the damage I've done. She's silent, not saying anything, not whipping out a sharp retort from her armory of unending words.

I stand, the call a lifeline, pulling me from this mess of feelings I can't face. I dress quickly, my movements sharp, my mind shifting to whatever crisis waits, but her presence lingers like a pull I can't ignore.

I move to the door, my hand gripping the knob, and pause, glancing back. Fina's watching me now, her green eyes sharp but raw, brimming with a pain I put there, a

hurt that cuts deeper than I meant. Guilt surges, a heavy, gnawing thing in my chest, but I force it down, burying it where it can't touch me. I step out, the door clicking shut, and head down the hall, Matteo's call pulling me forward, urgent, demanding.

Her pain trails me, a weight I can't shake, heavy as the silence she left behind. Those eyes, fierce even in their hurt, burn in my mind, a mark I've etched with my own words. I know it'll cost me, this moment where I turned away when she reached for me.

22

Serafina

Two weeks have passed since Enzo slammed the door on me, his words a string of ice slicing through my attempt to reach him. That night, his scar under my fingertips, I saw a crack in his armor I'd never seen before, but he sealed it shut before I could properly assess it, leaving me raw.

Now, our mornings are a ritual of hollow courtesies. His "How are you, Fina?" catches me off guard every day he asks. It's like he's mad at me for thawing the coldness of his heart, breaking his walls, but at the same time, he's not exactly mad at me. His voice is always low whenever he asks, almost gentle. I could delude myself into thinking he's asking because he truly cares for me, but I know it's the baby he's thinking of, not me. I'm just the vessel carrying his heir, and it stings more than I want to admit.

Last week, he called a doctor to check on me without a word, like I'm some fragile thing he owns. It's not the fact that he called a doctor to check on me so much as the fact that he did so without informing me first that had my hackles rise. I'd lit into him afterwards when the doctor left, my voice sharp as I'd told him I'm not his property and he has no right to do things without conferring with me first. He'd stood there,

jaw tight, as I stormed out, my pride the only thing that kept me together.

The hurt festers like a sore wound. It's a quiet ache I can't shake. I shouldn't be this mad over his insistence at keeping me apart. I should be relieved even at this detachment. He's my enemy. I despise him. I want no knowledge of his past. Yet here I am, two weeks after, still angry.

I know what it is. It'd dawned on me in the cold light of day the next morning after that night. I'd shoved it away, thinking if I didn't give too much importance to it, the scales would fall away from my eyes, and I'd realize what I actually feel for my husband is lust, not love. But the feeling persists. It gnaws at me, leaving no room for doubt as to how I feel.

I'm falling for him. I'm falling in love with my husband. The realization hit like a punch, stealing my breath. Enzo, my enemy, the man who claimed me in a deal to wage peace has slipped under my skin. I'd been conscious, allowing his touch, his rare softness, to undo me, peel me open until I'm naked, my feelings laid bare.

I hate it. I hate how my heart betrays me, but I can't deny it. I'm shaken, my resolve fraying. I don't crumble, ever. But the hurt at his withdrawal nudges me, and I know I have to lash out. I've been stupid enough to let affection get in the way of what was a calculated move to keep the peace between both families.

He needs to feel some of the angst I feel, so I go in search of him, deciding to confront him. He won't love me back. The only thing I can hope on is his respect, and I'm damn well going to demand it, not just for me but for the child I carry. He doesn't get to treat me like a pawn, not anymore.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:49 am

I stride through the manor's halls, my heels clicking on black marble. My black dress hugs my frame, my curls pinned tight. It strikes me how much I look like a queen ready for battle. I'm headed to his study, biting words lodged in my throat, burning, when low voices stop me cold. At first, I think it's Enzo, but the voice is different. Much older. The hairs on my body stand at alert.

I pause outside a half-open door, my pulse spiking as I listen. Adriano's smooth tone slithers through, laced with menace, talking to a man I don't recognize.

"She was mine," he says, his tone icy, obsessive. "Do you understand? Lucia Mine. He had no right to her, fucking Antonio Mancini. I gave her my all but, in the end, she chose that Mancini fool over me. So, what did I do? I orchestrated the accident that killed her with help from the Vitales. Then I framed the Rossis to spark the war, kept my loyalty to the family and never blew my cover. Enzo's too blind to see I've been pulling his strings."

My heart stops, ice flooding my veins. Enzo's mother. Adriano loved her, killed her, and built this feud on her blood, all to hide his twisted relationship with the Vitales. The fact that he's confessing to this within the confines of manor means he's either getting sloppy, or he doesn't mind being found out because he has something bigger in store.

My hand grips the wall, nails digging into plaster. I know now why I always hated him and his sinister smile. It's why he'd subtly tried to threaten me in the garden that morning. He'd been hiding something this big. Perhaps, he'd been threatened by my presence, thinking his secrets will get leaked with me becoming Enzo's wife.

I have to find Enzo. This is bigger than his hate, bigger than our marriage. It's a betrayal that's shaped his life, my life, this whole fucking feud. I need to find him, to tell him, even if he shuts me out again. My heart pounds, not just for me, but for him, for the pain he's carried all this year. A pain built on a lie spun by the very person he respects. No betrayal can be greater.

I spin away, my steps quick as I go in search of Enzo. The manor's quiet, its shadows swallowing my urgency. I find Matteo in the courtyard, leaning against a stone pillar. He's polishing a knife. He has a grin ready for me as I approach, but immediately I get close enough and he sees my face, his grin fades.

"Serafina, are you alright?"

"Yes. Yes," I blurt out. I realize how crazy I must look, so I let my face twist into a small smile. "Where's Enzo?"

He hesitates, his eyes narrowing, but he answers, "At the cemetery. It's Signora Mancini's death anniversary. His mother."

His words land heavy, a punch to my chest. Enzo's at his mother's grave, alone with his grief, and I'm about to shatter his world.

I don't wait as I begin to head in the direction of her grave site. A maid had pointed it out to me during my first week in the manor. Matteo's frantic voice calls behind me, but I don't stop in my strides, my steps quick as I move through the manor's shadowed halls, heading for the deserted west end of the estate.

The air grows thick with neglect, as I reach the wild, overgrown clearing where Lucia's grave lies, hidden among tangled vines and crumbling stone. I slow, my boots soft on the earth, and spot Enzo ahead, a lone figure in black, standing over a worn stone. His shoulders are rigid, head bowed, and my heart twists, reaching for him

despite everything. I pause, half-hidden by a gnarled willow's drooping branches, watching him. His pain is palpable, and I feel it like a pull I can't resist.

He doesn't move, doesn't see me, and for a moment, I just stand there, my breath shallow. The man who's claimed me, hurt me, is bared here, stripped of his walls, and it shakes me. I'd set out to lash at me, then I heard Adriano's confession and my anger had been forgotten.

I came here to tell him about Adriano's betrayal, but now, seeing him like this, I want to hold him, to ease the weight he carries. My love for him is new and terrifying. It surges. I step forward, my resolve hardening. I need to reach him, not just for the truth, but for us, for whatever we're becoming.

I step closer, my boots soft on the grass, and call his name. "Enzo." My voice is quiet, a thread in the still air. He whirls around, his dark eyes catching mine, and I freeze.

Pain rages in his gaze. His face, always so guarded, is raw and my heart twists with a wound that's so deep it snatches the breath from my lungs. I've never seen him like this, not in our fights, not in our passion. My heart aches, reaching for him, and I move without thinking, closing the distance to stand beside him. I say nothing, my presence is a silent offering, and he doesn't push me away.

His arm slides around me, pulling me close, his chest hard against my side. The hug surprises me, his warmth seeping through my dress, and I stiffen, then soften, letting myself lean into him. His scent wraps around me, grounding me, and we stand there, wordless, the world fading. His heartbeat thuds against my cheek, steady but heavy, and I feel his grief, his need, mirroring my own. I don't question it, just hold him, my love a quiet flame I can't extinguish, even now. I stay, loving him in this fragile moment.

Time slips away, the cemetery silent, until he shifts, his grip loosening. The moment

is broken. I step back, ready to leave, to grant him this silent moment. Whatever I have to say will have to wait. As I begin to step away, his hand catches mine, stopping me. I drag confused gaze to his.

“Fina,” he says, his voice rough. “I’m sorry.”

I blink at him, destabilized by this shift. “Sorry?”

“Yes. I’ve been an asshole these past weeks, and for that, I’m sorry.”

His eyes hold mine, soft, real, and I’m floored, my chest tight. Enzo, apologizing? A genuine smile breaks on my face, my heart lifting. “You’re forgiven,” I say, meaning it. “But I need to tell you something urgent.”

He nods, his grip tightening. “Go ahead.”

I take a breath, the weight of Adriano’s words pressing down on my chest. I have no idea how Enzo will react, but I have to tell him. “I overheard Adriano in the manor, talking to some guy.” Enzo’s brows furrow.

I continue. “He said he killed your mother, Enzo. According to him, he loved your mother, and it angered him when she chose your father, so he silenced her by killing her, then framed my family and used a Vitale deal to cover it. It’s how this war was started.”

He doesn’t say anything, just continues to stare at me, his expression unreadable. I try again, needing his reaction. “Adriano is behind it all, Enzo. He’s been manipulating you all this time.”

I hold his gaze, willing him to believe me, to see I’m not his enemy. His eyes flicker, and I think he’s listening, but then his face shifts, hardening into something cold,

something cruel. Fury burns in his eyes, not at Adriano, but at me, and my stomach twists, dread rising like bile.

“You’re lying,” he snaps, his hand dropping mine like it’s poison. He steps back, his voice sharp, slicing through me. “You heard this and thought you’d stir shit? You’re trying to fuck with me, get back at me for shutting you out.” Each word cuts deeper, and I flinch, my chest tightening under the weight of his anger.

“No, Enzo, I swear,” I say, stepping forward, hands raised, desperate to reach him. “I heard him, clear as day. He’s been betraying you, playing you for decades.” But his eyes are ice, a wall slamming down, shutting me out. He’s not hearing me, not even trying, and it hurts. A raw ache spreads through me.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:49 am

“You’re a Rossi,” he spits, venom dripping from every syllable. “I should’ve known you were a snake, you, your father, the whole fucking clan.” His voice rises, thick with disgust. “Domenico proposed you as my bride, and I was blind, thinking it was peace. It was a trap, wasn’t it? You and your father, scheming to ensnare me, to sink your claws into my empire.”

The accusation lands like a fist, gutting me, knocking the air from my lungs. I stagger, my pride the only thing keeping me upright. “That’s not true,” I choke out, my voice shaking. “I’m telling you what I heard. Adriano’s the liar, not me.” But he’s too far gone, his face twisted with betrayal, seeing only a Rossi, not his wife.

“You think you’ve won, don’t you?” he snarls, stepping closer, his eyes blazing. “You slither into my house, my bed, and now you’re tearing it apart from within, spreading lies about my men. You’re poison, Fina, and I was a fool to let you close.” His words burn, each one a brand on my heart, and I feel the ground shift beneath me, my love for him cracking under the assault.

He leans in, his voice dropping, cold and vicious. “How do I even know that baby’s mine?”

The question hits like a vicious slap, stealing my breath. My hands instinctively fly to my stomach.

“For all I know, you and your Rossi blood planned this, too, to tie me to you, to weaken me.” The doubt in his eyes, the cruelty, rips through me, leaving me raw, exposed.

“I’m not lying,” I say, my voice breaking, tears burning my eyes, but I blink them back, refusing to let them fall. “I heard Adriano. I came to you because I care, because you deserve the truth.”

But he shakes his head, turning away, his shoulders rigid, his rejection a wall I can’t breach. He doesn’t believe me, doesn’t want to, and it’s killing me, piece by piece.

“Stay out of my world,” he growls, stalking away in the opposite direction. “You’re my wife, not my fucking ally. Keep your Rossi schemes to yourself.”

He doesn’t look back, leaving me by his mother’s grave, his words echoing, a fire in my chest that won’t die. The hurt is a living thing, clawing at me, but I won’t break, not for him, not now. I’d come to find him, to tell him the truth, but I fear I’ve put a dent on the already fragile relationship we share.

I clench my fists, my resolve hardening. Adriano’s secret is too big, too dangerous, and Enzo’s too blind to see it. If he won’t listen, I’ll find answers myself. Papa knows more than he lets on, I’m sure of it. He’s been in this game too long, and if anyone can unravel Adriano’s lies, it’s him. I decide then, my heart pounding, to go to the Rossi villa, to confront Papa without Enzo knowing.

For his sake—for both of our sakes, I have to find out the truth.

23

Enzo

My boots pound the manor’s marble, each step a hammer strike against the silence Fina left behind. Her words at my mother’s grave burn in my skull—Adriano, a traitor. Her voice had been so sure, so fierce. I’d called her a liar, a Rossi snake, but her eyes, raw and pleading, haunt me.

What if she's right? The thought's a splinter, lodged deep, and I can't shake it. I'm in my study now, the air thick with cigar smoke, papers strewn across the oak desk. I'm tearing through my father's ledgers, digging through old records. Vitale deals from years ago stare back, notes on gold routes that don't add up. My gut churns, suspicion clawing at me. My mother's death, the Rossi feud, it's all a knot I need to unravel, and I'll be damned if I let Adriano play me for a fool.

Adriano's been my shadow forever, his silver hair and calm smile a constant. Could he have loved my mother, killed her, framed Fina's family to start this war?

I recall a memory from last week. I didn't think to dwell on it because it had seemed insignificant, but now with everything going on, I decide to revisit it. I'd held a meeting with Matteo and Adriano, my two most trusted allies. It was about the Vitales fucking with my shipments again.

We'd argued strategy, Matteo's presence a constant voice of reason, while Adriano in his usual calm manner had wore that smile I now have reasons to believe it's sly. The discussion had shifted subtly and Adriano's voice had turned sharp as he spat his misgivings about Fina. He'd advised him to thread carefully because he had reason to believe she's a Rossi whore scheming to ruin me.

His bias are the same thing I've harbored all this time, but hearing him voice it in such a distasteful manner had enraged him. I'd shut him down, my voice ice, telling him to watch his mouth or lose his tongue. No matter what, she's my wife, and I won't have her disrespected for whatever reason. His eyes had flashed, but he'd backed off.

Now, that moment feels like a warning I missed. I slam a ledger shut, glass rattling, and head for Fina's room, needing to see her, to know if she's lying or if I've been blind.

Her door's open, and Giulia's inside, folding clothes. She looks up when she hears

me approaching. She looks at me warily.

“Where’s Fina?” I ask, my voice gravelly.

“Signora Serafina left an hour ago, Signor Mancini.”

My suspicion spikes. “Where did she go?” I ask calmly.

“She said she was visiting her father.”

My blood runs hot, rage surging. Fina, running to Domenico? After I told her to stay out of my world? Minutes ago, I’d thought she might be right about Adriano, and now she’s scheming with her Rossi blood? “You’re sure?” I growl.

She nods. “She took a car and she didn’t say when she’d return.”

I step back, pulling my phone. I’ll be damned if I let her play me. I’m going to demand what the hell she thinks she’s doing, and by God, I’ll have my answer.

I dial her number and wait, my heart pounding. It doesn’t connect, just dead air. I try again, same thing. My anger spikes, a fire in my chest, but it’s tinged with unease. Whatever the fuck is she playing at?

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:49 am

Knowing I have to know exactly what's going on, I dial Domenico. I inquire sharply when he picks, “where’s your daughter? She come to you with more Rossi schemes?”

I hear the barely contained anger in his voice as he snaps back. “What the hell are you on about, Mancini?” A pause. “Where’s Serafina?”

I grit my teeth, wanting to call him a liar. What are the chances that they aren't both in this to play me for a fool. “She left for your place an hour ago.”

His voice shifts and becomes tense. I think, here it is. But he doesn't say what I expect him to, instead, he says, “she’s not here. Why’s she not with you?”

The conviction in his tone hits me, and my stomach twists. He’s not lying. Someone had been lying all along, but it's not Serafina or Domenico. I've been a fool. “Something’s wrong,” I say, voice low.

Domenico’s voice hardens. “What’s going on?”

“She's not here, she's not with you. Something's wrong,” I repeat. “Does she have meetings? Did she go somewhere, maybe a club...?” I let my voice trail off, realizing the desperation in it.

Domenico doesn't answer me. I hear him call for Carlo, then Aida. Her voice comes, faint but clear, saying she hasn’t heard from Fina and that she's not at a meeting.

My suspicion flares, dread coiling tight. Fina’s gone, and Adriano’s words echo in my head. I tell Domenico, “I’m coming to your villa,” and hang up, my hands

shaking.

I storm through the halls, finding Matteo in the courtyard, fiddling with his phone. He spots me, his grin fading as he steps forward. “Enzo, you seen Fina? She was looking for you earlier, had this crazed look in her eyes that worried me.

His words hit like a punch, and I freeze, my mind spinning. Fina was right. Adriano’s betrayal is real, and she’s in danger because I didn’t listen.

“Adriano,” I say, voice low, venomous. “You seen him?”

Matteo’s brows furrow. “He left with some visitor a while ago.”

“Cazzo!” I curse in Italian, my rage boiling over. Fina was right, and I’m a fool. Adriano’s behind this, and she’s paying for my blindness.

“What’s going on?” Matteo asks, eyes narrowing.

I grip his shoulder, my voice tight. “Fina’s missing. Her maid says she left for Domenico’s, but she never got there. I just got off a call with him.

“What?” Matteo mouths, his confusion apparent.

“Apparently, she heard Adriano confess—he killed my mother, framed the Rossis, and started this whole war. I didn’t believe her and we had a fight. She left for Domenico’s afterwards, but no one’s seen her since then. I think he’s taken her.”

I’m not a rambler, but I subconsciously realize I’ve been rambling this past few minutes.

Matteo’s face twists, rage exploding. “Adriano?” He shakes his head. “How dare that

bastard!” he roars, fists clenched. “He’s been playing us all?”

I nod, my own fury a living thing, raw and relentless. “I’m heading to the Rossi villa. Domenico needs to know—it’s his daughter. She’s my wife.” My voice shakes, not just with anger but with panic, a sharp, gnawing fear for Fina, pregnant with my child, out there, vulnerable because I pushed her away. I should’ve trusted her, held her close, but I let my hate blind me, and now she’s gone.

“She’ll be fine. We’ll find her,” Matteo says, clasping my shoulder.

We move fast, our thoughts in sync. We both know the next line of action. We slide into a car, the engine snarling as I drive to the Rossi villa. Matteo’s silent, his jaw tight, but I feel his fury matching mine.

My mind’s a storm of guilt and fear tangling. I see Fina at the grave, her arms around me, her voice soft, offering comfort I didn’t deserve. I called her a liar, questioned our baby—what kind of a bastard does that? Not once did she lash back at me. She’d stayed through my verbal assault. And now she’s missing.

We arrive at the Rossi villa in no time. The last time I was at here, I’d come to drag Fina back to go home with me. Now, I’m here to find her, and the panic’s a beast, clawing at my chest.

Home.

Suddenly, the word means nothing without her there.

The guards at the gate don’t flinch as we pull up, unlike last time when they’d eyed me like an enemy. They know something’s wrong, their faces grim, and it fuels my dread. I’m angry at myself, at my stubbornness, for not listening to her. She’s out there, and I need to find her.

Adriano, that motherfucker, will pay for every second she's in danger. I'll tear him apart, make him beg, but first, I need Fina safe, her and our child. The thought of losing her is a wound I can't bear. I love her too much to lose her.

Love?

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:49 am

We step out, the air heavy with tension, and Riccardo's there, his face stormy as he blocks our path. "What the hell happened to my sister?" he demands, voice rough, eyes blazing.

Before, I'd have brushed him off, seen him as just a spineless Rossi. But now, I see the worry carved into his face, real and raw, and it mirrors my own. "Where's Domenico?" I ask, voice low, urgent. Riccardo glares but nods, leading us inside, his steps quick, angry.

We move through the villa, my boots heavy, my heart pounding. I don't notice the walls, the stone, the wealth—none of it matters. Only Fina does. Riccardo pushes open a door, and Domenico's there, standing, his face hard, eyes sharp with fear and fury. Aida's beside him, her face pale, and Carlo looms nearby, tense.

Domenico doesn't waste time with preambles or pleasantries as he says, voice rough, "tell me everything, Mancini. Where's my daughter?"

I meet his gaze, my own fear raw, my anger a fire that won't die. Fina's gone, and Adriano's betrayal is the key. I need to lay it all bare, for her, for our child, for the truth I should've seen.

For our love.

My voice is steady as I launch into details of what happened, but inside, I'm breaking, the weight of my mistakes crushing me.

Serafina

My head throbs, a dull pulse that drags me from darkness. My eyes flutter open, and cold seeps into my bones, the air dank and heavy with mildew. I'm in a lair, stone walls slick with grime, shadows dancing under flickering bulbs. My wrists burn, bound tight behind me, ropes biting into my skin.

I try to recall what had happened, and the memory drags slowly through the fog in my brain. I'd left the manor after informing Giulia of my departure. Then I got into a car and headed to the villa. I hadn't driven too far before a car slammed into me from behind. My vision had blurred as I lost consciousness.

Now, fear spikes deep in me. It's sharp and raw—fear for me, for the baby growing inside me. I clench my jaw, refusing to let it show. I look around where I am, trying to familiarize myself with the place when my gaze lands on a figure across the room.

Adriano. He sits, silver hair gleaming. Of course he orchestrated this. His smile—that same smile that had put me off him the first time I saw him—is a snake's, cold and coiled as his eyes, unblinking, pin me like a blade.

“You're awake,” he says, voice smooth, laced with menace. “Good.”

He leans forward, elbows on his knees, cigar smoke curling around him. “I warned you, Serafina, but you didn't listen.” His words slither, a reminder of that morning in the garden, his veiled threat I should've heeded.

My heart pounds, but I lift my chin, meeting his gaze, my voice steady despite the tremor in my chest. “You'll regret this, Adriano. When Enzo finds out you killed his mother and orchestrated my kidnapping, you're finished.”

His laugh is low, cruel, cutting through the damp air. “Your mistake, girl, was

eavesdropping where you didn't belong." He stands, slow and deliberate, his tailored suit pristine against the filth of this place. "You heard my confession, my truth about Lucia, and thought you could run to Enzo, ruin me?" He steps closer, his cigar's glow casting shadows on his face. "I'm not fazed. I'll kill you, then Enzo, and take my place as don of the Mancini mafia. This war, this empire, it's mine."

My blood runs cold, but I don't flinch. I have to be strong. I can't show the fear coursing through me, he'll bank on it. "You're a fool if you think you'll get away with this. You don't want my father's wrath, Adriano. He'll hunt you down. And Enzo? He'll tear you apart for touching me."

My words are a fire, burning through my fear, for my child, for the man I love, even after his everything that's happened. Hopefully, by now, he knows I've gone missing. Maybe now he knows I hadn't been lying about what I heard? Will he come for me or will he leave me to perish at Adriano's hands.

Adriano's eyes narrow, his smile vanishing, and he moves fast, his hand cracking across my face. The slap stings, dazing me. My vision blurs as pain blooms in my cheek.

"You talk too much," he snarls.

He steps back, tossing the cigar, and pulls a knife from his pocket, its blade glinting. My stomach twists, panic clawing at me, but I force my face still, refusing to give him my fear. He kneels, close enough for me to smell leather and smoke, and presses the knife's tip to my arm, just enough to prick. "Let's see how brave you are now, Rossi."

The blade drags slowly, a thin line of fire opening on my skin, blood welling, warm and sticky. I bite my lip, stifling a gasp, my body trembling but my eyes locked on his, defiant.

He smirks. The bastard's enjoying this. He moves the knife to my collarbone to make another shallow cut. Pain flares sharp, and I clench my fists. My breath hitches, my baby's safety a pulse in my mind, urging me to stay strong. "Enzo will find me," I whisper, voice rough, believing it, needing it. "You're a dead man."

Adriano's face twists, rage flashing, and he grabs my jaw, forcing my head back, the knife now at my throat. "Keep dreaming, girl. By the time they find you, you'll be cold, and I'll be king."

His grip tightens, bruising, and he cuts again, a shallow slice across my shoulder. Pain sears through me. I swallow a cry. I won't break, not for him, not now.

Somewhere, Enzo's coming, and Adriano's time is running out. I have to believe that.

25

Enzo

Two days without Fina, and the world's a hollow shell. The manor's a tomb, its silence mocking me. So much so that I've taken refuge at the Rossi villa. Her voice at my mother's grave haunts me—Adriano, a traitor, her eyes fierce, pleading. I called her a liar, a Rossi snake, but now I'm drowning in guilt, her absence a blade in my chest.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 6:49 am

I'm in Domenico's study, surrounded by him, Matteo, and Riccardo. It's where I seem to be since Serafina's kidnap. My mother's death, Fina's kidnapping, it's all tied to Adriano, and I need the truth. I'm stoic, jaw tight, but inside, I'm breaking, worry for Fina consuming me. I love her. The realization hits like a bullet wound, raw and undeniable. I can't lose her, not her, not our child.

Domenico slams a file down, his face grim. "Vitaless' old ledgers," he says, voice rough. "Found them in my archives. Gold routes, coded, from when Lucia died."

Matteo leans in, scanning pages, his fingers tracing numbers. "These don't match Mancini records," he mutters.

Riccardo, silent till now, steps forward, his face stormy, eyes red like he hasn't slept. I've never trusted him, always thought he and Fina were at odds, but now I see his love for his sister, fierce and real, and it shifts something in me, respect forming despite my grudge. "Let me see," he says, voice low, and I nod, wary but desperate.

Riccardo's sharp, catching a pattern—dates aligning with my mother's crash, payments to a Vitale driver. "This driver," he says, tapping the page, "he's still alive, runs a bar now. Knows Adriano's secrets."

My chest tightens, hope flickering. Domenico nods. "We lean on him, hard." I stay quiet, my stoicism a mask, but Fina's face—her green eyes, her look of hurt that day at the graveyard—drives me.

Riccardo's proving himself, his focus on Fina redeeming him in my eyes, but I don't say it.

We move at dawn, shadows stretching long as we approach a grimy bar tucked in the city's underbelly, its neon sign flickering like a dying pulse. The air reeks of stale beer and desperation, the kind of place secrets fester. My boots crunch on broken glass, Matteo at my side, Domenico and Riccardo trailing, their silence heavy with purpose. My heart's a drum, Fina's absence a wound that won't stop bleeding, but my face stays cold, my stoicism a shield against the fear clawing at me.

Inside, the bar's dim, a haze of smoke curling around rough men hunched over drinks. Paolo, the Vitale driver, sits at a corner table, his glass trembling as he spots us. His eyes dart, a rat caught in a trap, sweat beading on his brow.

I nod at Matteo, who moves like a predator, pinning Paolo against the wall, his arm a steel bar across the man's throat. I step close, my gun pressing cold against Paolo's temple, the metal a promise. My voice is ice, low and lethal. "Talk, or you're done."

Paolo's breath hitches, his eyes wide, pleading. "It was Adriano," he chokes, voice breaking. "He loved Lucia, your mother. She didn't want him, chose Antonio instead. He went mad, paid the Vitales to rig her crash, made it look like an accident. Then he framed the Rossis, started the war to cover his tracks."

My blood boils, betrayal searing through me like a knife twisting deep. My mother's face flashes, her smile, and Fina's warning—her voice fierce, ignored—cuts sharper. I should've listened, and now she's paying for my blindness.

"Keep talking," I growl, pressing the gun harder, my heart racing. Fina's life hangs on his words.

Paolo's voice shakes, spilling more. "Adriano's got a hideout, a warehouse by the docks, hidden behind a Vitale shell company. Your wife's there, Mancini. He's holding her."

My vision narrows, rage and fear colliding, a storm I can't contain. Fina, tied up, hurt, because I didn't believe her. My love for her, raw and consuming, surges, a fire I can't quench.

I glance at Matteo, his eyes hard, and he slams Paolo's head back, knocking him out cold. The man slumps, useless now. We slip out, the bar's stench clinging to us.

In the car, my mind's on Fina, her strength, her green eyes that saw through me. I devise a plan, cold and strategic: hit the warehouse tonight, use Vitale informants to pin Adriano's men, strike fast and hard. I'll make him bleed, but first, I need her safe, her and our child. My hurt for her is palpable.

Back at Domenico's villa, we gather in his study, maps spread across the table, the air tense. Matteo's contacts feed us details—warehouse layouts, guard shifts, weak points. Riccardo's relentless, sketching entry routes, his voice steady but his hands shaking, worry for Fina plain in his eyes.

Domenico's gaze meets mine, a silent vow: we'll bring her back. In this moment, it's respect and awe I feel for the man.

My stoicism holds, my face a mask, but beneath, my love for Fina burns, a fire I can't douse. Her defiance, her touch, her belief in me despite my cruelty—it's all I have. I'm coming for you, I think, my heart hers, no matter the cost. The plan's set, my men ready, and as night falls, I steel myself, Fina's life the only thing that matters, Adriano's betrayal the fuel for the war I'll wage.

Night falls, the docks reeking of salt and oil, the warehouse looming like a beast. My men move silently, shadows among crates. Matteo's at my side, Riccardo is behind with some of my other men. Domenico had stayed behind after much convincing. His health still hasn't completely recovered.

My gun's heavy, my heart heavier, Fina's absence a wound that won't heal. I love her, and the fear of finding her broken drives me. We slip through a side door, my plan precise: neutralize guards, cut lights, find her. My face is stone, but inside, I'm raw, her smile my lifeline through this hell.

The warehouse is dim, crates stacked high, and we move fast, taking down two Vitales, their bodies slumping. A scream pierces the air—Fina's voice, faint but hers—and my blood runs cold, rage surging.

I signal Matteo, and we push deeper, finding a locked room. I kick the door in, and there she is, tied to a chair, blood streaking her arm, her face bruised, eyes defiant despite the pain. Adriano stands over her, knife glinting, his smile venomous. My heart lurches, love and fury colliding.

“Enzo,” Fina whispers, her voice weak but alive, her strength a light for our child, for me. Adriano turns, his eyes sharp, but before he can speak, chaos erupts.

His men—Vitales, hired guns—swarm from the dark, guns flashing, sparks lighting the shadows. My crew fires back, Matteo tackling a shooter, his snarl lost in the roar. Riccardo fights fierce, taking down a mercenary. I lunge for Fina, my knife cutting her ropes, her body trembling as I pull her close, shielding her from the storm.

“I'm here,” I murmur, my voice rough, love raw and aching in my throat. She grips me, her eyes trusting, forgiving me despite my cruelty.

Bullets tear through crates, wood splintering, smoke choking the air. I push Fina behind a stack, my gun steady, my body her wall.

Adriano's voice cuts through, taunting, venomous. “You're too late, Enzo!” I see him, slipping toward a side exit, his silver hair a ghost in the chaos.

My rage surges, and I fire, the shot grazing his shoulder, blood blooming dark. He stumbles but ducks, vanishing into the dark. My men hold the line, outgunning the Vitales, their numbers fading. Riccardo's relentless, dropping another shooter, his face carved with fury, proving his worth.

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Fina's beside me, her cheek swollen, cuts shallow but bloody, each mark a wound on my soul. "I'm sorry," I choke, my voice breaking, love and guilt flooding out. "I should've believed you."

Her hand finds my arm, strong despite her pain, her eyes fierce. "Find him," she says, voice hard, urging me on. I nod, pressing my lips to her forehead, a vow to end this. My men regroup, the Vitales crumbling, their allies dead or gone, the warehouse falling silent but for the echo of gunfire.

Matteo calls, pointing to a blood trail—Adriano's. I signal my men, and we corner him in a back room, wounded, slumped against a wall. His smile gone, eyes wild.

"You can't stop me," he snarls, but I grab him, slamming him against the wall, my gun at his throat.

"You killed my mother, took my wife," I growl, my hurt for Fina, for Lucia, fueling me. "You're done."

He laughs weakly, but I can see that the fight's gone out of him. I bind his hands, my men dragging him out.

Fina's safe, but this isn't over. I'll make him pay, for her, for us, for the love I almost lost.

The warehouse air chokes me, thick with smoke and blood, but Enzo's arms are my anchor, his warmth pulling me from the edge of terror. My body trembles, cuts stinging, bruises throbbing, but relief floods me. It's raw and overwhelming, spilling over at the sight of him.

His face, hard and fierce, softens as he holds me, his gun still clutched, Adriano's blood trail fresh on the floor. I collapse into him, my face buried in his chest, and for the first time in his presence, I cry. Tears spill, hot and unstoppable, soaking his shirt, my sobs muffled against him. I'm safe, but the fear for my life, for our child, lingers like a shadow. Enzo's grip tightens, his breath ragged, and I feel his heart pounding, a mirror to my own.

Matteo's voice cuts through, sharp, directing men to take Adriano away, his face grim but relieved. Riccardo stands nearby, his eyes red, worry etched deep, no trace of the distance I've always felt between us. I meet his gaze, then Matteo's, my throat too tight to speak, gratitude swelling in my chest.

They risked everything for me, but it's Enzo's arms that ground me, his scent of leather and gunpowder a lifeline. I'm too shaken to form words, my body still reeling from Adriano's knife, his threats, the cold promise of death.

Enzo lifts me, gentle but firm, carrying me through the warehouse's chaos, past splintered crates and fallen Vitales. The night air hits, sharp with salt from the docks, and he sets me in a car, his jaw tight, eyes never leaving me.

The drive to the manor is silent, his hand on mine, his thumb tracing slow circles, a comfort I didn't expect. I see it now, the way he's shaken, his knuckles white on the wheel, his face pale despite his control. He thought he'd lost me, and the weight of it sits heavy between us, unspoken but real.

At the manor, he leads me to our room, the familiar walls a balm after the lair's filth.

He sits me on the bed, his hands careful as he cleans my cuts, antiseptic stinging, his touch soft.

I touch a hand to his. “You’re safe now,” I whisper, my voice hoarse, needing to ease the storm in his eyes.

He pauses, his fingers still, then shakes his head, his voice low, rough. “Safe? You were careless, Fina. Running off to Domenico’s, not telling me, getting yourself abducted.”

His words bite, anger lacing them, and my relief frays, replaced by a familiar spark of rage. “Careless?” I snap, my voice rising, tears burning again. “I was trying to save you, Enzo, to prove Adriano’s betrayal. Don’t you dare blame me!”

My hands shake, my body aching, but I’m on the verge of losing it, fury surging at his accusation. I stand, ignoring the pain, my voice sharp. “I heard him confess, risked everything to tell you, and you pushed me away, called me a liar. And now you lecture me?” My chest heaves, the hurt of his distrust, the terror of Adriano’s knife, spilling out, raw and jagged.

Enzo’s face shifts, his eyes darkening, not with anger but something deeper, vulnerable. He steps close, his hands framing my face, his voice dropping to a whisper. “I love you, Fina.”

The words hit like a shockwave, stealing my breath, my rage dissolving into disbelief. Love? Enzo, my enemy, my husband, the man who claimed me in a deal, loves me? I search his gaze. His eyes hold mine, raw and open, no walls left, and I see it—the fear of losing me, the truth of his heart.

My throat tightens, tears welling again, but these are different, born of hope, of something I’ve felt but never dared name.

I'm frozen, my heart racing, his confession a weight I don't think I'm ready to carry. "You... love me?" I whisper, my voice breaking, searching his face for a lie, but there's none.

He nods, his thumb brushing my cheek, wiping away a tear. "I should've said it sooner, should've believed you. I can't lose you... both of you, not ever." His voice cracks, and I feel it, the depth of his fear, his love, mirroring my own. His hand trails to my stomach to press softly against it.

I lean into him, my anger gone, my body trembling, not from pain but from the truth we've both been running from. I don't say it back, not yet. I want to bask in my husband's love just for a while.

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Enzo

Enzo

The manor's quiet, a heavy silence that presses against my chest, broken only by Fina's soft breathing beside me. She's asleep, her face bruised but serene in the dim glow of our bedroom, her bandaged cuts a stark reminder of Adriano's cruelty. Each mark on her skin is a wound in my soul, a scar of how close I came to losing her.

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Last night, after her rage, her tears, I told her I loved her, the words spilling out raw, a wound laid bare. Her shock, her whispered question, “You love me?” echoes in my chest, a sound I’ll carry forever. I’m not shocked at my confession, not now. Relief floods me, clean and sharp, that I’ve finally said it, laid my heart bare for her to see.

I shift, careful not to wake her, my hand resting on hers, her fingers warm and fragile under mine. When I said I loved her, her eyes had searched mine for a lie. I gave her none, my truth spilling out, and though she didn’t say it back, her touch, her lean into me, spoke louder than words. I’ve hurt her, doubted her, called her a Rossi snake, but she’s still here, breathing beside me, our child safe within her. My chest tightens, love and guilt tangling, a knot I don’t know how to unravel.

Morning light creeps through the curtains, soft and golden, painting her face in hues that make her look like a dream. I trace her jaw with my thumb, gentle, afraid she’ll vanish if I press too hard.

Her eyes flutter open, green and sharp, catching mine, and a small smile curves her lips, fragile but real. “You’re staring,” she whispers, voice hoarse, and I feel a warmth I don’t deserve, a flicker of hope in the wreckage of my mistakes.

“Can’t help it,” I murmur, my voice low, rough with everything I’ve held back.

She shifts, wincing as her cuts pull, and I’m on my knees beside her, adjusting pillows, my hands careful. “Easy,” I say, my heart twisting at her pain.

Her smile fades, her eyes searching mine, and I see it—the weight of the warehouse, Adriano’s knife, my accusations.

“Fina,” I start, my voice catching, “last night, when I said I love you, I meant it. Every word.” My throat burns, but I don’t stop, the relief of confessing pushing me forward. “I love you, mi esposa” I say again, the words easier now, a truth I can’t hold back. “I love the fire in you, the way you fight, the way you stood up to Adriano, to me, even when I didn’t deserve it. I love your strength, your heart. I’ve loved you for longer than I knew. You’re my world, you and our child, and I almost lost you because I was too blind to see it.”

Her breath hitches, tears welling in her eyes, and I keep going, my heart open, no walls left. “I was a fool, Fina. I let my hate for the Rossis, my fear of betrayal, cloud everything. You tried to warn me about Adriano, and I pushed you away, called you a liar. I’ll never forgive myself for that, for putting you in his hands.” My voice cracks, my hand tightening on hers, needing her to feel my truth. “I love you, more than my life, more than this empire. I’d burn it all for you, start over, anything to keep you safe.”

Fina’s tears spill, silent, trailing down her cheeks, and my chest aches, fear spiking that I’ve hurt her again. But she reaches for me, her hand trembling, cupping my face, her touch a fire that warms the cold in me.

“Enzo,” she whispers, her voice breaking, “I love you too.”

The words hit like a tidal wave, making my heart stumble in my chest. Love? From her, after everything?

Her eyes hold mine, fierce and unguarded, and I see it—the truth, the love she’s carried, buried under my cruelty, her pride, our war. Her voice trembles as she continues, “I’ve loved you through every fight, every hurt. Even when I hated you, I couldn’t stop. You came for me, saved me, and I know you’ll fight for us, for our baby.”

I pull her close, careful of her wounds, my arms wrapping around her, her warmth seeping into me. Tears burn my eyes, a reaction I never thought I'd have, my love for her a tide I can't hold back.

"You love me," I choke, my voice rough, disbelieving, and she nods against my chest, her sobs soft, her fingers gripping my shirt.

"I do," she murmurs, "always have, always will." Her words break me open, my love for her a tide I can't hold back, and I press my lips to her hair, breathing her in, vowing to be the man she deserves.

We stay like that, tangled together, the world fading, the manor's silence a cocoon around us. Her breathing steadies, her tears slowing, and I feel her strength, the fire that kept her alive through Adriano's lair.

"I was scared," she whispers, her voice small, "not just for me, for our baby, for you. I thought you wouldn't come, that you'd believe I betrayed you."

My heart twists, my gut churning. "Never again," I swear, my voice low, fierce. "I'll never doubt you, Fina. You're my home, my everything."

She pulls back, her eyes meeting mine, red-rimmed but bright, a spark of her defiance shining through. "We're a mess, aren't we?" she says, a shaky laugh escaping, and I smile, the first real smile in days, my love for her a warmth I can't contain.

"Sì," I say, brushing a tear from her cheek, "but we're our mess, together." Her smile widens, fragile but true, and I kiss her, soft and slow, tasting salt and hope, sealing a promise I'll never break.

The weight of Adriano's betrayal, the war with the Vitales, it's still out there, but here, with Fina, it fades, less important than her heartbeat, our child's future.

“What now?” she asks, her voice steady, her hand resting on her stomach, a gesture that makes my love surge.

“Now,” I say, my voice firm, “we heal, we fight, we build something better. For us, for our family.” I mean every word, my empire meaningless without her, my heart hers, now and always.

She nods, leaning into me, her warmth a light in the dark of my past. I think of my mother, Lucia, her death avenged, Adriano bound and waiting for justice. I think of Fina’s courage, her love, a gift I don’t deserve but will spend my life earning.

The morning light grows, spilling gold across the room, and I know this is our beginning, not an end. Fina’s love, her strength, is my anchor, and I’ll fight for her, for our child, for the life we’ll carve from this chaos. I kiss her again, my heart full, the tearjerking weight of our love a truth I’ll carry forever. We’re broken, scarred, but together, we’re whole, and nothing—not Adriano, not the Vitales, not my own demons—will take her from me again.

It's a vow.

Epilogue

Serafina

The clinic’s air is cool and sterile, a sharp contrast to the warmth blooming in my chest as I lie on the exam table, my hand clasped in Enzo’s. His fingers are rough but steady as he holds firmly to me. His eyes are fixed on the ultrasound screen, their dark depths soft with something I’ve only recently learned to name—love.

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Six months pregnant, my belly curves under the thin gown, our baby a quiet promise beneath my skin. The technician moves the wand, her smile gentle, and the room fills with the steady thump of a heartbeat, fast and strong, a rhythm that makes my throattighten. Enzo's grip tightens, his breath catching, and I feel it too, the weight of this moment, fragile and sacred.

The screen flickers, a grainy image sharpening, and I see it—our baby, tiny limbs curling, a profile delicate but fierce, already carrying the fire I know she'll inherit.

"It's a girl," the technician says, her voice soft, and the words hit like sunlight, warm and blinding. A girl. My daughter.

Tears prick my eyes, spilling over. I seem to do that a lot these days. I turn to Enzo, his face a mirror of my awe, his own eyes glistening.

"A girl," he whispers, his voice rough, cracking with emotion, and I nod, my heart too full to speak, love for him, for her, swelling until it hurts.

He leans close, his forehead pressing against mine, his breath warm on my skin. "I'll always protect you," he murmurs, his voice low and fierce, a vow that wraps around us. "Both of you, Fina, no matter what."

His hand moves to my belly, resting there, and I feel our daughter shift, a flutter under his palm, as if she knows his promise, trusts it. I cover his hand with mine, tears falling freely now, not from fear but from joy, from the life we're building, scarred but whole.

“I know,” I whisper, my voice trembling, believing him, needing him, loving him more than I thought possible.

The technician steps out, giving us a moment, and I think of how far we’ve come. Our enmity, the forced alliance, Adriano—it’s behind us now.

Enzo’s love, his confession that night in the manor, has changed everything, a light in the dark of my doubts. I’m not the girl I was, bound by a deal, fighting for scraps of trust. I’m his wife, his partner, a mother, and the strength of that fills me, steady and sure.

Outside, in the waiting room, Riccardo’s there, his face lighting up when he sees us. He’s different now, softer, the distance between us gone. We’re closer than ever, siblings forged in fire, his worry for me during my kidnapping a bridge we’ve crossed together.

“Everything good?” he asks, his voice casual but his eyes sharp, and I nod, smiling, my hand still in Enzo’s.

“A girl,” I say, and his grin widens, genuine, a rare warmth that makes my heart ache with gratitude. He hugs me, careful of my belly, and I feel the bond we’ve rebuilt, stronger than before.

We step into the afternoon sun, the city alive around us, and I think of Papa. His health is strong again. He’s planning a feast tonight, a celebration of family, of survival, and I’m eager to see him, to share this news.

Enzo’s arm wraps around me, his touch protective, and I lean into him, my heart full. Our daughter’s heartbeat echoes in my mind, a song of hope, of love, and I know this is just the beginning, our story far from over.

We still have to deal with Adriano.

The manor's warmth fades as Enzo leads me down the stone steps to the basement, his hand firm in mine, his jaw set with a purpose that mirrors my own. The ultrasound's glow, our daughter's heartbeat, still pulses in my chest, a fragile light against the darkness we're descending into.

Adriano waits below, his betrayal a wound we must seal, and though my heart pounds, I'm not afraid. Enzo's love, his vow to protect us, steadies me, and I know this final reckoning is ours to share, a justice for the pain he inflicted.

The basement air is cold, heavy with damp, the rough walls lit by a single bulb that casts jagged shadows. My boots echo on the concrete, each step a weight, but Enzo's grip keeps me grounded, his eyes meeting mine, fierce yet tender.

"You can stay upstairs," he says, voice low, rough with worry, but I shake my head, my resolve unyielding.

"I need to see this through," I say, my voice steady despite the chill creeping up my spine.

"For Lucia, for our girl, for us." He nods, a flicker of pride in his gaze, and we move forward, side by side, into the heart of our vengeance.

Adriano sits chained to a chair, a broken shadow of the silver-haired serpent who held a knife to my throat. His face is gaunt, skin ashen, eyes hollow from days of torture, his once-crisp suit now torn and stained with blood. Bruises bloom across his jaw, his lip split, yet his gaze, when it lifts to mine, still carries a spark of defiance, a dying ember of the man who thought he could shatter us.

My stomach twists, not with pity but with fury, remembering his cruel laugh, the

blade pricking my skin, his vow to kill Enzo and steal our world.

Enzo steps forward, his presence a storm, his gun gleaming in the dim light like a promise of finality. “You betrayed my mother,” he says, voice low, each word a blade. “You framed the Rossis, sparked a war, and you dared lay hands on my wife.”

Adriano’s lips twitch, a weak sneer, his voice rasping, barely audible. “You’re nothing, Enzo. You’re weak. Lucia was blind, and so is she.” His eyes flick to me, venom in their depths, and my blood surges, my fists clenching, but I hold still, letting Enzo lead, trusting him to end this once and for all.

I watch, my breath shallow, as Enzo raises the gun, his hand steady, his eyes cold but burning with a fire I know too well. “This is for Lucia,” he says thickly, “for Fina, for our daughter.”

“Your father will be disappointed,” Adriano taunts, even as the gun presses against the skin of his head.

The shot cracks, sharp and final, and Adriano’s head jerks back, blood blooming dark, his body slumping lifeless. My heart lurches, relief and horror tangling, but I don’t flinch. This is justice, raw and necessary, for the lives he tore apart, the fear he sowed.

Enzo lowers the gun, his shoulders rigid, and turns to me, his eyes searching mine, asking if I’m whole. I nod, stepping close, my hand on his arm, anchoring us both in this moment of closure.

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We climb back to the manor, the air lighter with each step, Adriano's betrayal left behind in the basement's cold embrace. Enzo's quiet, his hand still in mine, and I feel the weight he carries, the toll of what he's done. Adriano had been his father's most trusted aide after all, and by extension, his, too.

In our room, I pull him to me, my hands cupping his face, needing to soothe the shadows in his eyes. "It's done," I whisper, my voice gentle, and he nods, his breath uneven, his hands settling on my waist, careful of my belly.

"You're safe now," he says, echoing my words from that night, and I smile, tears pricking, knowing he means it, for me, for our daughter.

His lips find mine, tentative at first, then deepening, a spark that ignites into fire. I kiss him back, my hands sliding under his shirt, tracing the heat of his skin, the strength of him, my love a tide I can't contain.

He lifts me gently, laying me on the bed, his eyes locked on mine, dark with desire but soft with love. "Fina," he murmurs, voice rough, "Ti amo." The words hit like they did that night, raw and true, and I pull him closer, my fingers in his hair, my heart bare.

"I love you too," I whisper, my voice trembling, meaning it with every breath, for the man who saved me, who fights for us, who's mine.

Our clothes slip away, each touch a vow, a reclaiming of what Adriano tried to destroy. His hands trace my curves, lingering on my belly, a silent promise to our daughter, and I arch into him, needing this, needing him.

We move together, slow and deep, the world dissolving, the manor's silence wrapping us in its embrace. His breath is warm on my neck, his whispers of love a melody in my ear, and I cling to him, my body alive, my heart overflowing.

After, we lie tangled, my head on his chest, his heartbeat steady under my cheek, his hand resting on my belly where our daughter stirs, a flutter that makes us both pause.

"She's fierce," he says, voice soft, a smile in his words, and I nod.

"Like her father," I murmur, and he chuckles, a low sound that warms me, his lips brushing my forehead.

"Like her mother," he says, and I smile, knowing she'll carry our strength, our love, into whatever lies ahead.

Enzo pulls me closer, his warmth a shield, and I feel the depth of our love, a fire that won't fade. The notion is convincing as sleep peacefully claims me.

The End.