



Tainted Blood

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Description: The hatred Ian MacNamara's father felt for him was a lifelong experience; however, Ian's disrespect for the elder man rendered this hatred meaningless. Eventually, their differences drove them apart. His mother's death only intensified his hatred of his father.

There was no way to fix this. He wouldn't even be certain that seeing his father six feet under would do the job. Ian encountered fate in the form of a beautiful and rebellious med student, a reunion as surprising as it was unforgettable. Callie's perfection was evident to him, a reminder of their passionate night weeks prior.

She was dangerous, and yet also too innocent.

Callie was too good for a man like him, with more demons and enemies than he could count. No, his blood was tainted, and he couldn't ruin something so precious. He needed to keep her far away from him. "Run," he whispered—the only chance he'd give her.

Ian was certain of two things: his father needed to be six feet below ground, and she needed to run before Ian didn't let her escape.

Total Pages (Source): 59

Page 1

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

Chapter One

Ian

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My eyes sweep over the busy club. It's a good night for business. It's loud, and drinks are flowing, which means so is the cash. We run many operations which keep us busy. Currently, Connor is off, handing an issue at the docks, forcing me to take over for him at the club here. Normally, I only step in to handle the muscle here. My business in the family lies in the form of dealing with our physical problems, but on occasion, I pick up the slack with the day-to-day management like I'm doing now.

Jack is off hunting down any leads on our missing brother. We still don't have anything on his whereabouts and the only fucking lead had her head blown off by my peace of shit father. After that, our suspicions on him only deepened even though he was injured and could have been killed during the abduction.

Jack hasn't given up even though Connor and I pretty much have lost hope that he'll be found alive. It's been so long that the likelihood is almost none, but Jack searches through every trafficking ring he gets a lead on. That's probably where he is now.

I should be in Vegas managing my other company, but I'm here tonight. I wish someone would start some shit, so I can take out this burning rage that lives buried deep within my soul. Feeling annoyed with the lack of activity, I twirl one of my brother's fancy pens. I'm keeping this fucker, I chuckle to myself as I tuck it into my breast pocket.

I sit on my brother's expensive leather sofa with my feet propped up on the arm, pondering my work in Vegas while knowing he'll be annoyed if he was here. My head of security and I had been working on plans for security upgrades when we were delayed due to bureaucratic red tape. Still, I have a lot of ideas playing in my head. As I consider them, there is a knock at the door.

"Come in," I say, sitting straight up with one hand on my gun, ready to pop someone. Trust isn't in my nature—call it part of the family business, or call it years of training, but it's just who I am.

"Mr. MacNamara, may I have a word with you?" the club's head bartender says. I cock my brow up at the woman because we're swamped, and she should be pouring drinks instead of bothering me. Connor hired her because she's good, but my mood isn't conducive to being nice, especially if she tries to hit on me.

"Make it quick. The club is packed," I snarl, tapping my pen on the desk.

"Yes, I know, sir. I just wanted to let you know that some people are getting a little rowdy, and you're the one I'd tell."

"Why wouldn't you tell security?" I ask her. Sure, I could bounce the fuckers out of the club myself, but what's the point of having security if they don't do their jobs? Hell, I'm tempted to show them how I treat those who fuck up in my presence, but I don't want Connor riding my ass for showing our hand in public.

"Because they are in the VIP section." She bites down on her bottom lip. She doesn't look like the kind of woman who nervously bites on her lip. My reputation has preceded me and my face has done the same. I'm ready for war. These little pricks are about to have a bad night.

I roll my eyes. The crowd that spends two thousand for the VIP section isn't the kind

you kick out, or so Connor would say, but fuck that noise. It's my club tonight, and my rules. These dickheads want to act a fool, then I'll treat them to the Ian MacNamara way of handling problems. "Hand me a whiskey, neat. I'll straighten them out," I say with a smirk.

She stares at me nervously before muttering a shaky, "Yes, Mr. MacNamara."

She leaves my office, closing the door without looking back up at me.

As a doubtful bastard, I turn the cameras on to watch her pour my drink. Instead of watching her, my eyes find a much better sight that snags my attention. At the bar, a petite woman with side-swept raven hair faces the dance floor, biting down on her bottom lip nervously as if she doesn't know whether to run or loosen up.

I automatically know that I'll loosen her up really good. My dick stiffens in these restrictive pants. Damn. I've never gotten hard in a suit before. These fuckers are cutting off my circulation, and still my cock isn't calming down. I adjust the raging pole in my pants, getting a little relief by tucking it straight up and under my belt.

The pretty little thing in her short black dress, which hugs every inch of her curves, turns to the bar, and I spot the tattoo on her shoulder. It's fresh, like she just got it today. I groan as I stare at the fucking thing, jealous of the bastard who had his hands on her soft skin for hours.

Fuck. I'm about to run down the stairs and nab her up. She tosses back a shot before grabbing her fruity drink with some orange juice or pineapple in it. I'm going to crush my lips to hers to find out just which one it is.

A knock at my door stops my viewing pleasure. Growling, I tell the person to enter. "Sir, here's your drink."

“Thank you.” I don’t want to deal with the fucking crowd, but it’s a must. In my hungry perusal of the little minx at the bar, I’d forgotten my irritation with the drunken VIP bunch. I walk out of the office and make my way toward the VIP section. The sooner I deal with those assholes, the sooner I can find the woman that I’m fucking all night long. I’ve got a lot of pent-up lust, and she’s the one to pull every drop out of me. Fuck. I slam back my drink, needing to calm down. I spot a server on the way and put my empty glass on her tray. She smiles at me and nods.

As I reach the VIP area, there are several fuck-offs who see me and freeze. I catch one of them snorting coke off the expensive table. Another has one girl’s face in his lap with his tiny dick in her mouth, and she’s giving the weakest blowjob while she grinds her ass on another guy. They’re clearly fucking, even if he’s got her mostly covered.

Most of this can be seen from the bar, and I don’t need that shit in here. There are rules, and fucking and drugs are two of them. We don’t need heat from the cops on us. If they decided to raid the place, which has been known to happen, we could be liable, and that wouldn’t be a good thing. I snarl at the one wiping his nose. “If you don’t want more than that candy up your nose, I suggest you get the fuck out of my club.”

Slowly the gang-bang lets up, and they adjust themselves while the girl wipes her lips before smirking my way with a sauciness that is uncalled for—as if I’d be interested.

“Hey, we paid a lot to be in here,” the cokehead says, wiping his nose as he sniffs.

“Yes, and that’s not to fucking burn your nostrils with blow or to get blown. Get the fuck out. I won’t say it again.” I crack my knuckles, every pop echoing in the section. Fear shows in their glazed eyes.

“Fine, but I’m going to leave a negative review,” says the guy who was fucking the

girl from behind.

I smirk at the jerk-off in his messy suit with his hair all fucked up. He's probably spending Daddy's money. Those are always the type who think they're above everyone else. What a pussy.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

The two other guys with them stand up and make like they're going to the exit, but they stop in their tracks. I feel the shift behind me, and the guy in a suit with a medium build who had his dick buried in the girl's behind says, "We're sorry, Callie, but we have to split. Max got us kicked out."

"Are you for real?" she snaps. "It's my freaking birthday." I turn around, and it's her—the girl from the damn bar. She's with these fucking coked-out jackasses. I hope she's not banging one of them. They're going to die for having dared to touch her sensuous body. I tap the steel piece that's under my suit jacket, itching to shoot one of them.

I take a calming breath before I go apeshit on these young punks. "Excuse me, but you can all leave. Except you," I state, staring into the caramel eyes of Callie.

Chapter Two

Callie

"Callie, it's your birthday, bi-ach!" my best friend Maggie shouts, throwing her arms around me. It's obvious they've been making use of the VIP lounge without me. They're completely sloshed, and even from my brief walk up the stairs to the private seating area, I noticed the sexual tension passing between them. It's a whole different dynamic than I'm used to. They're never like this.

I pull away, needing to breathe. I make a big deal of staring at her green dress that has matching cutouts at her waist. I smile and say, "Hey, girl, that dress is banging."

“Yes, it is,” Jacob says, smirking as he eyes her up and down. “But damn, Callie, yours is fucking a sin.” He stares at me lecherously, like he wants me to join in on whatever it is they were about to start. I wonder how much he’s already had to drink. They pre-gamed because this place is expensive and most of them don’t have money to toss around.

“Come on,” I say, waving off the attention with my hand, ducking my head in faux shyness. Even though I know I look good, I’m not looking for his praise. It’s my twenty-fourth birthday. I’ve already started celebrating by getting a tattoo of a sword in a Celtic knot because I love medieval books, and I asked the artist to draw me something that reminded me of it.

“We needed drinks,” Max says, raising his glass with a smile, showing all his pearly whites.

“It looks like you started without me,” I accuse them with my lips pressed in an annoyed smirk. I know I shouldn’t be drinking after getting a tattoo, but it’s cool because I won’t drink a lot.

“It’s not like they let you sit here doing nothing.” Maggie giggles before sipping her cocktail. “They want you to spend big bucks.” That is something I understand, but I don’t see a motherfucking drink for me. They could have at least told me to stop at the bar before I came up here.

“I can’t believe your dad got this for your birthday,” Kyle says, tossing back a shot. Yes, my dad paid for this and extra booze as well so there should be rounds being brought up, but I’m not waiting for another round. Yeah, you’d think these jerks would have ordered me a drink. I was only twenty minutes behind, and I was almost at the club when I texted them.

“I need a drink. I’ll be back.”

“Hey, they come to us,” Jacob says, trying to drag me back to his side.

I stare at the full glasses and beer bottles. There are extra beers sitting there untouched, but I need some hard liquor. “Yes, it looks like they just left.”

“They’ll be back in twenty,” Jacob says, sliding his hand around my hip. I gently slid away from him and his handsy grasp. “Have my drink.” He hands me an almost-full beer. I’m not a fan of beer, especially pale ale. I take a long pull of the beer and then hand it back, making a terrible face. It tastes worse than I remember.

He pushes my hand back. “No, keep it. I’ll order another when they come back.”

I take another drink, trying to muscle down the liquid, but I can’t. “I need a girly drink, sorry. I’m not a beer girl,” I say as I set the beer down on the table. I give them a smile and then walk back down the stairs to where the action is. The dance floor is pretty full, but there’s still room if we all feel like dancing. Suddenly a wave of need floods my mind. I want to meet a guy. After all these years, I need to find someone that sets my body ablaze with desire, but I doubt that will happen tonight.

I head over to the bar, but then get a strange sense that I’m being watched. I look toward the VIP section, and Jacob has his eyes on me. I bite down on my bottom lip and then turn to the bartender so I can ignore his stare. He’s probably just making sure I’m safe. We’re all med students, and I made it clear that I don’t date people I work with. This program is essentially a full-time position, making all the guys in the program ineligible.

“How can I help you?” the bartender asks. She’s a beautiful woman who probably makes a killing. I wonder if that’s who Jacob is staring at. If I was a dude, I’d totally flirt with her.

“Can I get a screwdriver?” I question, hoping she can make it. “Oh, and a Fireball

shot.”

“Coming right up.” She mixes it in front of me. I see her add a twist to the drink, and I hope it’s good.

“Here you go.” I handed her the money as she passed me both the drink and shot.

“Your change.” She slides it across the bar top.

Unlike some of my classmates, I don’t have to worry about that. My dad keeps my bank account pretty full, and I don’t touch most of it. So, I slid the change back to her. “Keep it.” I’m not planning on drinking a lot, so this is the only time I can be generous with tipping. Being a med student doesn’t come with money, which is hard to earn with our schedules.

Still, even if money isn’t an issue for me, time is. We have so much on our plates, but that’s the only way we’ll become doctors one day. Last week I was working in the NICU, and it was my favorite place. It gave me a severe case of baby fever. However, it doesn’t matter because I’m not anywhere near ready for a baby. I need a man for that, and that doesn’t seem in the cards unless I take my dad up on his offer to introduce me to some fine gentlemen. I roll my eyes.

First, I toss the shot back, letting the cinnamon liquor burn as it goes down. Then, I take my glass and face the dance floor. Lazily I sip the drink and watch the crowd grinding and having fun. Reminding myself that I have to join my friends, I pound the drink back, setting the glass on the bar top.

I don’t want to be falling down drunk, but being a little tipsy is fine with me. I’m already feeling the buzz shimmying through my body, so I’m going to cut myself off. As I stand there, I find eyes on me again, and I bite down on my bottom lip. It’s a terrible tell that I have, but I can’t shake it. I don’t like attention, but today is my

birthday and I don't want to be a party pooper.

My father says I should learn to control my expressions because it's dangerous in his world to give away your emotions. I don't care about it, though. My father's world and mine are so far apart. The mob isn't anything I have to do with and hope to never get involved in. I shivered when he suggested a man for me to date. My dad loves me, but to him a good man is the head or the future head of one of the families. I shake my head to rid myself of the idea of me with a mobster. Never going to happen.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

My eyes scan the VIP section, and that's when I see a man in a suit walking up there. My heart nearly jumps out of my chest. God, I hope it's not one of my father's associates. I don't want my two lives to cross paths. It took me by surprise when he offered to buy me a night out for my birthday. I already have everything else, so he said, "Sweetheart, you're single and getting older. Don't waste it. Go out, dance, meet someone." To get him off my back, I agreed, so long as I could also invite my friends.

Marching up to the VIP section, I'm stunned because he's definitely not in my father's crew or I haven't met him yet, but from his pure energy, I feel a shift in the lounge. Jacob moves around the insanely buff dude in the dark gray suit. "We're sorry, Callie, but we have to split. Max got us kicked out."

"Are you for real?" I gripe. My dad is going to be pissed when he finds out about it. I hope they didn't destroy anything expensive that I can't cover. This place is insanely exclusive, and I'd hate for my dad to be charged a hefty penny and then want answers. Even with my trepidation, I still can't take my eyes off the guy's back. I can almost see him grow taller, spine straightening as the words leave my mouth.

My aggravation and the alcohol fuel my irritation. "It's my freaking birthday." Can he feel my stare? He turns his head to the side and lifts his shoulder, giving his neck a little crack. It's as if he's trying to dispel tension in his body.

He turned around with a commanding presence. My body stills, staring at pure masculinity. The full but short beard is dark, like his hair, while his skin is just slightly tanned. Does he normally spend his time outside, or is that his natural color? It's almost as olive as mine, but maybe a shade lighter. His eyes narrow, showing a

few slight creases. He reminds me of a powerful, dominant hunter, and I swear he's ready to make me his prey. His tongue peeks out from his mouth, and then he turns back to them.

He clears his throat. "Excuse me, but you can all leave. Except you," he orders while staring into my eyes.

His eyes are the same color as mine, if not a shade lighter, and contrasts with his medium-length black hair that's slicked back. I love the shaved sides and slightly long top that goes just to the back of his head. It's so sexy. The facial hair is another turn on. This man screams manly, authoritative, and imposing.

He leads me away from the group. His hands on me are like magic. I need more. I want more. For the first time in my life, I want to have sex. Maybe I just needed pure testosterone. No, that can't be it because then I would have found some of my father's men desirable. No, this rugged-looking man in a suit is the only one who can make me lose all inhibition.

And then Jacob has to do something stupid and pretend we were a couple. He's a great-looking guy, but I made my sentiments known before. I'm taking his motivation for the fake relationship as a way to protect me because anything else is unacceptable to me. Still, it doesn't matter because the man in the suit doesn't care, and for some reason, neither do I.

The heat between us is almost too intense, causing me to struggle to catch my breath. Can you hyperventilate while your pussy soaks your panties? I believe the answer is yes.

Before I can process this magnetism, he takes my hand, forgetting about my friends, and leads me to the dance floor. God, this man is something out of a Marvel movie. His muscles cut through the suit jacket, rippling like a beast with every damn step. I

watch his body move, and I'm mesmerized.

I follow his lead, hoping it ends with a night I'll never forget.

Chapter Three

Ian

"They're my ride," she mutters, as if that makes a difference to me. It only serves to piss me off, knowing these fuck-offs had the pleasure of riding with her. These clowns were nothing but a bunch of college kids spending daddy's money to get wasted and fucked. Worst of all, they wanted my girl in the mix. That shit wasn't going to happen. I clenched my fists at my sides, doing my best to control myself because I wasn't the kind to take their lip. Usually, I would have busted their heads already.

"She's my girl, and she's not going to leave me for a bouncer," the one who was balls deep in another chick has the nerve to say to me. He's got a death wish that I'd be more than happy to grant.

Smirking, I inch closer to the little punk and say, "So you cheated on her...on her birthday? She can do a lot better than a man who fucks her friend." Callie gasps and stares at them, shaking her head.

I turn back to those assholes, who are standing still. "I thought I told you all to leave." I take her hand and walk her out of the area.

I pull out my phone and call the real bouncers. "Empty the VIP area and make sure they never come in here again." I end the call and turn to the extremely attractive woman on my arm, who nervously looks back to her friends. "Relax, beautiful. You and I are going to have a drink, and I'll make sure you're taken home safely."

“Um...I don’t know you.” A blush creeps up her neck, and I want to lick the reddened fucking path, feeling the heat with my tongue.

“God, you’re a fucking dream. That voice could make me drop to my knees and surrender everything to you.” It pulls me in just as much as her looks do.

“That’s not necessary,” she says, shyness causing her to dip her chin.

“So that fucker is lying, or you’re not quite as innocent as I believed.”

“He’s lying, but also I’m tired of being innocent.” She bites down on the bottom corner of her lip.

I caress her cheek and then grasp her chin with my thumb and forefinger, drawing her attention to me. I need all of her attention, and I can’t explain why. It’s insane how intense I feel. Adrenaline runs through me. “Good. I’m the right man to turn you into a bad girl.”

I want to take her straight to a quiet place so I can strip her completely bare and fuck her until she’s coming on my cock, but I need her to trust me, or at least crave me as much as I want her. “Let’s dance and work off the alcohol.”

Leading her to the dance floor, I grip her waist, dancing to the music. When I drag her back to my chest, she starts grinding on my hips. “Be careful, little girl, or I’m going to take you upstairs and let you feel me without any clothes.” Callie’s small waist feels twice as small in my hands. She’s going to be speared on my cock. She turns her head and parts her lips, staring into my eyes, and I can’t stop myself.

I spin her around to face me, dip my head and taste her, claiming a kiss in the middle of the dance floor. Even though the music blares around us, I don’t hear any of it because my heart is beating in my ears.

“Fuck,” I groan as she pulls her lips away. I run my tongue and lips down her neck, nipping at her pulse. She tilts her head, giving me more room, and my fingers bite into her thighs.

“We have an audience,” she whispers, gently pulling away from me.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

I look into her caramel eyes. “Let’s take this somewhere else.”

She nods. “Okay.”

I grasp her hand in mine to lead her to where we can be alone, but before I can, we’re interrupted by security. “Sir, your brother’s here.”

“Which one?” I grumble.

“Me, you dick,” Connor says, looking behind me to get a glimpse of my little minx.

“I thought you were still working and wouldn’t make it in tonight.”

“I wasn’t going to, but I know how you hate this place, so thanks for taking care of the place for a couple of hours. Lucky for you, I’ve got it.” He claps me on the shoulder and smirks. “Interesting,” he adds before walking around us and then heading upstairs to his office.

“Ignore that asshole,” I tell her as I turn us around toward the exit. “Let’s get out of here.”

Since I’m in a suit, I left my motorcycle at home. We enter the parking lot to my spot, which is the second one by the door. I press the button, starting my car so the AC can kick in, then I open the door for her. “Please,” I say with a light wave of my arm. My body is demanding I carry her and strap her down so she doesn’t get away. A feral desire has washed over me. She’s not like any other woman.

“Thank you,” she says, sliding into the passenger seat. I close the door and walk around to my side. Once I’m in the driver’s seat, I give her a smirk. “I don’t think this is wise.”

“Well, sweetheart, I believe it’s the best move either of us could make.”

“I don’t even know your name.”

“It’s Ian.” I bring her hand to my lips, kissing the back of it. “Now that we know each other’s name, I believe we should go somewhere where I can strip you bare and lick every inch of your sexy body.” Even if she says no, I’ll be okay taking her home.

“Why can’t I just say no?”

“Because you don’t want to, Callie.” I pull out onto the road. “What’s it going to be, beautiful?”

“I want you,” she confesses.

“Good,” I answer, focusing on the road to the nearest hotel. It’s only a three-minute drive, and we’re pulling into the valet area. “Here we are.”

My gaze focuses on the valet, wondering if he wants to keep his eyes. In a low whisper so Callie doesn’t hear me, I say, “You better get your eyes off her, or you’ll be looking for a job for the blind.” He shakes as I drop the keys into his hand. I walk around and take her hand, leading her to the entrance. I’ve never been here before, but there’s a first for everything. It’s quiet because of the hour, so the concierge greets me in a hushed tone.

“Wait right here,” I say, sitting her down in the lobby chair. I don’t want her feet to hurt in those sexy stilettos.

“I need your best room for the night.”

“Sir, that’s nine hundred a night,” he replies in a hushed voice.

“I don’t recall asking that.” He nervously nods, typing into his system, and I hand over the black card along with my ID. A moment later, he hands it back with the keycard.

“Thank you for your stay, sir.” It’s late, but it’s going to be the best money I’ve ever spent. I walk up to Callie, who has to be the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. Her eyes lift to meet mine as my shoes tap the marble surface, alerting her to my return.

“We’re ready.” I want to be inside her at this very moment. I’d fuck her so damn hard in the elevator, but I’d kill anyone who saw her pussy. I find that I’m suddenly extremely possessive of her. That’s a damn first. This woman is racking up a whole bunch of firsts, and I try to fight off the instant fear that hits my spine.

“Just let me know if you change your mind.”

“No, I haven’t.” As we walk to the elevator, I wrap her arm under mine, doing my best to control the raging lust and the underlying emotion I can’t describe that’s unnerving me.

When we step in, I hit the code on the keycard sleeve and then enter my keycard.

“The penthouse suite?”

“Yes,” I answer. Adjusting my suit jacket, I pull her into my arms.

“We only need a bed,” she says.

My mouth is on her throat, kissing and marking her flesh. I want to be inside her as deep as I can go until she comes on my cock. “We don’t even need that, but I want you to sleep after I tear your body apart and put you back together again.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“Please. I need you,” she moans, clinging to my lapels. Fuck, I’m going to eat her up as soon as I get her in the damn hotel room.

The second the lock turns green, I twist the handle and carry her inside. The need to be inside her is overwhelming me. I hope that I can last long enough to wring an orgasm from her sexy body. “Callie, be prepared because once I’m done with you, you’ll never want anyone else.”

“You say that to every girl you fuck?”

“Only you. I want to make you come so hard that you pass out screaming my name,” I whisper against her lips.

I lead her to the middle of the room, dropping the keycard on the nearest table. “Fuck, I need to get you naked.” My fingers lace into her hair, cradling her head. She gasps, eyes wide with anticipation. I bring her face to mine as I kiss her softly, nipping at her lips.

“Ian,” she moans, desire evident in my whispered name. Never has it sounded so good before. I slide my hands down her curvy figure, cupping her ass and then slipping my hands underneath the expensive black material. I could tear this dress off her and burn it.

The thought of her wearing something so sexy to hook up with one of the patrons or worse, the pussies that were in the VIP booth, pisses me off. She wanted to be a bad girl; well, I’m going to show her what happens to bad girls. I lift my hand and let it come down hard on her ass. “That’s for looking for sex tonight.”

“So, you don’t want me,” she asks, looking into my eyes while her fingers dig into my shoulders.

“I want you; make no mistake about that, but you out here looking to hook up is a punishable offense, little minx.”

“What are you going to do about it?” she says, defiance in her stare.

“I’m going to tear apart your pussy so you know damn well that the only dick you get is mine, and every step you take will be a memory of how I owned your body.”

“Your body is so much larger than mine. Of course you’re going to tear me apart, but can you please me?”

“Trust me when I say you’ll be pleased. So much you’ll be coming back for more, over and over again.” She smirks, shaking her head.

“Bring it, big boy.”

I growl, loving the challenge from my future wife. She has no fucking idea that she accidentally walked into her future, and I have every intention of making sure that we are tied to each other for the rest of our lives. My fingers grip the tiny tab of the zipper and gingerly pull it down, the sound echoing loudly in my ears as if alerting me that she’s almost naked. I slip the thin strap off her shoulder, bending down to kiss the spot where it had lain, and then I move to the other side, repeating the same step.

“So perfect,” I whisper as the dress falls into a puddle at her heeled feet. She shivers with anticipation, nipples hardening. “No bra. It’s as if you enjoy being a bad girl. You’re lucky your pussy was covered. If some other assholes saw that sweet kitten tonight, I’d have to cut out their eyes.”

My fingers glide over her chest, smoothly caressing her pebbled nipples. They feel perfect against the pads of my fingers. I cup her breasts, squeezing them as I take my time, wanting her to hunger for me as much as I want her. Leaning in, I languidly kiss her pouty lips, pushing them apart to slip my tongue inside, needing to taste her mouth again. The taste of orange and cinnamon hits my tastebuds.

She moans against my lips. My hand wraps around her waist, slamming her body firmly against mine so we crash together and our breaths catch. She slips her hand under my coat and gasps. Shit, she feels the gun. I back up and say, “Security.” I know it’s not quite the truth, but for now, that’s all she needs to know. I slide my jacket off and then undo my holster, setting it aside before kissing her roughly.

She moans, thrusting her fingers into my hair and forgetting about the weapon. I drag her over to the bed and lay her down, climbing on top of her. Fuck—my thick length lines up with her hot center, and I just want to slide into her depths and lose myself until I explode deep into her. Thoughts of marking her womb and making the next MacNamara sound fucking good to me. Letting those little fucks she’d been associating with know she was taken and bred also sounds really good right now.

“Baby, are you on birth control?”

“Yes.”

“That’s a fucking pity.”

“Why?”

“Because I had plans for that womb of yours. It’s going to have to wait for later then,” I growl, crushing my mouth to hers and then pulling my lips away to kiss lower. I need more of her, and I need it now. I reach her skimpy black lace panties, hook my thick fingers under the hem, and slide them down her legs. I tuck them into

my pants pocket and then slip off her heels, kissing her sexy little feet.

“So gorgeous.” Slowly, I kiss and lick up her legs, moving my way to her inner thighs inch by inch as my fingers dig into her flesh, marking her olive skin. I want her to look in the mirror and see me there when I’m working. Soon, I’ll leave more of them. Fuck, my dick bangs against the edge of the bed. I need to break free of my clothes and slide into her already.

Still, my mouth has to taste that juicy slit that she was good enough to keep covered. I lean in and slide my fingers over her pussy, rubbing her soaking hole. “God, you’re fucking drenched. You’re so needy for my tongue, aren’t you?”

“Yes, please.”

“That’s what I need to hear. I want to hear my name spilling from your beautiful lips as I eat your cunt to heaven.” I press one finger into her wetness as my tongue lashes at her opening. “I never realized how dry my mouth was. I’m fucking thirsty.” I latch on to her wet slit, sucking her little clit while rubbing my thumb in and out of her extremely tight pussy. Holy fuck, is she tight. Her hole clamps around my tongue like a vacuum, and I’m almost afraid of what her pussy is going to do to my big dick.

My mind wonders if she hasn’t had sex in a long time, or if the dirty-girl act just that—an act. I grind my face on her pussy, growling and moaning on her slit, needing more as I feel her push away from me. Her orgasm is building, and she can’t handle it. I hook my arms around her hips and drag her pussy back down.

“Don’t pull your pretty little cunt away from me. It’s mine now,” I grunt. I pump one of my thick fingers inside and feel the edge of her virginity. Fucking good girl. I’m going to destroy her for anyone else, but first she’s going to come for me.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“Come for me, Callie. Come for me,” I demand, pumping my finger into her wet heat over and over as I speed up my licking. “You’re doing so good being my dirty girl. Giving me that juicy pussy. Feeding me that delicious, hot cunt. You’ve got me so hard, I could nut right now.” She cries out, body edging away, and then I suck on her nub. She spears her hand into my hair, tugging on it before smashing my face into her vibrating pussy. God, she’s shaking violently as she comes. I chuckle with pride as she rides my face.

Growling with pleasure, I reach between us and unbutton my shirt and then reach for my belt while continuing to suck on her pussy until she can’t take any more. Wiping my mouth, I stand and stare down at my woman who looks so fucking hot. Her hair is a splayed-out, dark mess on the white pillows, and her skin is covered in a sweaty pink hue.

“We’re not done yet. I promised you a night of pleasure, Callie. As much as I enjoy eating your pussy and I plan to have you ride my face again, I want to slide my cock deep inside you first.” She moans and clamps her thighs together with eagerness.

I slide off my shoes and then sit on the footstool by the bed to take off my socks. Next, I undo my cuffs and pull my shirt from my pants. Her eyes go to my chest, and she gasps. “You like what you see?”

“Can’t say I’m disappointed,” she answers. I love how she tries to hide her innocence. It’s fucking cute. “Although you haven’t lost the pants yet. It feels like you’re trying to avoid the obvious. Are you afraid you won’t measure up?”

“Darling, that’s something I don’t have to worry about.” I drop my trousers, my

boxers with them, and my cock springs free, banging against my stomach. Her mouth falls open, and she gasps. “I’m guessing it’s now something you’re worried about. Don’t, baby. I’ll be gentle.”

“Ian, there’s no way you can be gentle with that thing.”

“I promise I’m going to make you come again before I come inside that tight pussy, and I’m a man of my word.” I climb on the bed and kiss her lips. “Now part those legs before I do it for you.” She bites down on her bottom lip as blush spreads up her chest.

The moment I press my cock through her slit, I know she’s never been fucked before, and I can’t think straight. If I was insanely aroused before, the knowledge at the tip of my dick makes me ready to shoot my load.

“Fuck. There’s something you left out, beautiful.”

“I didn’t think it was important for a man like you,” she lies to me.

“No, it’s not, because it’s not going to stop me. Still, it’s a fucking badge of honor I’ll proudly wear, Callie.” I drop my head and lean in for a soft kiss. My cock continues to penetrate her, pushing another inch inside, stretching her out. “So damn tight. Damn, you feel so good even though it hurts. I hadn’t realized I’m a fucking masochist, but as promised, you come first.” I bend down and kiss her lips that are parted from the gasp of pain.

I take my time, slowly waiting for her little body to adjust. Most of my weight is supported by my elbows. “Breathe, minx. Let me in, and I’ll promise you’ll love my cock as much as I love this perfect little pussy.” She clenches her lock-box death grip around me and I groan, doing my best to stave off coming too quickly. I gently pull out to the tip and then slide back in. She gasps but doesn’t groan. With each thrust,

she becomes more and more relaxed.

“That’s a good girl. You’re doing so well. I love the way you take my big dick.”

“It’s so big.” She clings to me. Her legs slide up and down mine, trying to fight me off while trying to get more.

“Yes, and you’re going to take all of it because that’s what you need and what I promised, and what did I say?”

“You’re a man of your word.”

“That’s right,” I growl, slamming my mouth on hers as I roll my hips forward, driving into her until I’m completely buried deep into her tiny body. Fuck, it’s incredible. When I look into her eyes, I see the lust that was there earlier. My minx is back. “That’s my girl. Time to take that dick like the good girl you are.”

I fuck her in a steady rhythm, moving between fast paced and slow and back to fast until I have her on edge, and then I suck on her fat breasts. She’s the object of perfection, and I’m never letting her go. I growl and arch my back, reaching between us to strum her little clit. She cries out, my name ripping from her lustful throat. I wrap my other hand around her throat and squeeze and thrust, shooting my cum deep inside her as I roar her name as if I’m marking her for everyone to know.

I release my grip and fall onto her and then wrap my arms around her body, flipping us around so she’s on my chest. “So damn incredible.”

“As promised,” she whispers, brushing kisses on my chest.

Chapter Four

Calista

The feel of his strong, large hand resting on my back reminds me where I am and what I did last night. I gave my body to the most amazing lover ever. Or at least that's what it felt like. After all, I have no real experience to call upon.

The sun is up, and I turn my head, checking the clock on the nightstand. Damn, it's already nine, and I have class at noon so I need to move my ass to make it there in time. The class moves at lightning speed, so you can't miss a moment or you'll be so behind.

Next week, we take our finals in the Peds section and move on to the ER rotation. I'm sure I'll pass, but the thought of working in the ER makes me nervous. Still, I have no choice but to do the rotation.

I lift my head and peek at Ian, thinking about last night and how perfect it was. I let out a soft sigh, then I slap my hand to my mouth. Getting out of here before he wakes up is the best situation for me. I have a busy day, and I'm sore already. Besides, I have no idea how to handle this whole one-night-stand business.

Sliding out from under him, I slink off the bed and find my dress. Quickly dressing, I take my purse and shoes in hand and walk out of the suite. Ian made sure he wiped all traces of innocence from me. If I didn't have a shift this afternoon, I might have seen if he's interested in another amazing round of sex. Hell, I had no idea it could be so damn incredible. My ex-boyfriend was such a shitty kisser and groper that I never let him get in my pants. This man had me clinging to his body while he fucked me on every surface of the hotel.

Damn, I'll never forget the hot man, but my life is fully focused on my career, and my sexy lover definitely wasn't the marriage and happily-ever-after kind. I wonder how often he scoops up women from the bar.

As I enter the elevator, I'm relieved that I started birth control last month. With the urge to eventually give away my v-card, I started the pill, which is perfect since we both must have been too fucked up for wrapping up. Okay, I wasn't quite as messed up, although I was buzzed from the shot and one drink at the bar, plus the half bottle of beer that Jacob gave me.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

I'll make sure to visit the doctor for any sort of STIs. God, I can't believe how irresponsible I was, but there was something different about Ian that made me forget all common sense and safety. He could have been a crazy serial killer. Then again, in a matter of minutes I learned several things about him, including that he assists his brother who owns the club, so he can't be too terrible. At least that's what I tell myself to feel better about the serious lack of judgement.

I catch a cab and head to my tiny apartment. Just as I get inside, my cell rings in my purse, and I pull it out. It's Jacob. He's probably freaking out. "How is your hangover?"

"It hasn't kicked in yet," I mutter. A hangover isn't what I have going on. Although, there's pain in other spots of my body.

"How did you get home?" he asks.

"A cab." It's not a lie because there were several outside of the hotel, and I hopped in the first available one. It was just a matter of time, not that it was any of his business.

"Not that club owner guy who stole you from us?" he questions, sounding a bit too curious.

"No. We parted ways when he had some business to handle, so I caught a cab home."

"Good. We were worried about you." Funny, because no one stopped him or bothered to call me last night after they left. They all stood back and watched as if they were too afraid to counteract his decree.

“Thanks, but as you can hear I got home safe.”

“That’s good. I hope you didn’t get his number or let him get yours.”

“Why?” I ask in a bit of a snit. Jacob doesn’t have a claim to me. We are friends and nothing more, so it’s none of his business who I associate with.

“Don’t get mad. I’m just looking out for you. That club is owned by mobsters.”

“What?” The color in my face goes from olive to pale in a flash of a second.

“Yeah, it’s owned by the MacNamara family.” The name rings a bell, but it’s a common Irish name, so it’s reasonable for me to have heard it before.

“Well, I didn’t get his number, and he didn’t get mine. I’ve got to let you go so I can get ready for class.”

“Okay. See you soon.” I end the call and then look up the MacNamara name. As soon as the search results pop up, I see what happened last year. Their baby brother was kidnapped. I gasp as I read about it. There is a photo of the little boy, but that’s it. Nothing else.

Damn. That’s terrible. It’s been almost a year since the day that he was taken. I hope they find him, and find him alive. My heart aches for the little boy, but a painful sensation strikes me. What if Ian knew about my father and intentionally seduced me? What if he didn’t know, and they have some sort of tension between them?

My alarm goes off, reminding me to get off my ass and get ready, so I head to my bedroom and shower quickly. When I get out of the shower I see my reflection, I realize that Ian marked my body. “Shit.” I pull out the fancy magic cover-up that Maggie bought me last year and hope it does the trick.

Once I dry off and get dressed for class, I paint the miracle cream on my neck and upper chest. Luckily, it seems to have worked. I check the weather for today. Thankfully it's May and the weather is blustery, so I'll have an excuse to wear a hoodie to class. I don't need anyone to be aware that I went to a hotel with a rumored mobster.

Something about what Jacob said bothers me, so I call my dad before I leave my house. I have a serious question for him. "Dad, did you know that the club is owned by mobsters?"

"Well, hello and good afternoon to you too, Princess."

"Sorry, Dad. Good afternoon," I say, feeling bad that I'm practically shouting at him without a simple greeting.

"And to answer your question, yes—but it's not a big deal because the club is considered extremely safe."

"Yes, but not to the daughter of another mo—"

"Don't finish that sentence, young lady. Did something happen to you?" he asks. His voice is tinged with concern, which I expect.

"No, but my friend from school told me who the owners were," I say, only half lying. If he knew I had sex with one of the MacNamara men, he might do something crazy. It's one thing if I marry a made man, but just having sex with him is a different story.

"Well, then, what are you complaining about?"

"Nothing. Never mind. I have to go to class."

“Make sure you come see us soon. Your mom and I miss you.” He’s talking about my stepmother, who is a sweetheart; my mother was killed by a car bomb when I was three. What’s worse was it came from her own family in an attempt to create a war.

“Okay. I love you, Dad.”

Page 8

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“I love you too, Princess.” Ending the call, I grab my book bag and leave my apartment, hoping to make it through the day without all the questions from everyone. Shit, I still have to ask Maggie what Ian was talking about. Were they actually fucking on the lounge seats before I returned from the bar?

I enter my class and see Jacob, who waves me over to a spot he saved.

“Hey, you made it in time.”

“I’m surprised you made it since you were pretty messed up last night.”

“That’s nothing. I wish we had a chance to hang out. I’m sure it would have been more fun than dancing with that asshole.” I highly doubt it, but I don’t say what I’m thinking because it’s rude, and as a lab partner and classmate, he is exceptional.

“I still had a good night, and the best sleep ever,” I say with a yawn. I laugh. “Well, I guess I could have used an extra hour or two.”

“I’m sure this lecture will do the trick. How about we go out tonight to have a do-over?”

“No, thanks. My birthday and special occasions are the only time I’m going out. School is too important.”

“Okay, but don’t go getting burned out.”

“I won’t.” I’ve never been a partier so it’s no damn big deal, but I don’t want to be

pressured either. Sighing, I opened my notebook because I didn't have time to print the notes for today's class. Digging in, I avoid making conversation with Jacob and focus on class.

The rest of the day is a blur between learning and thinking about Ian—a habit I have to stop.

Chapter Five

Ian

Waking up in bed, I sense that she's no longer here. I run my hand over where she should be lying, and I'm right—the sheets are cool to the touch. Pissed, I slap my hand on the mattress. "It's fucking bullshit." I toss off the covers, then get up. I snag my jacket off the chair and dig out my cell phone foolishly imagining I'd have a call or text from her explaining why she left.

Callie couldn't access my phone to leave her number. Still, my dumbass should have grabbed hers last night before we even left the club. I set it down on the dresser and then walk to the bathroom to relieve myself.

Stepping into the shower, I consider my damn recourse when it comes to the little runaway. I can hunt her down or let her go. Last night was fabulous, but it was more than a fucking hook up. She was mine. I scrubbed myself down, stroking my cock several times, thinking about her virgin blood that had stained the sheets and my dick.

Fuck.

I grow harder and harder. My breathing turns into labored pants as I stroke faster to the memories of Callie taking every inch of me. It's not long until I'm busting my load all over my hand and the shower floor.

Shaking my head, I mutter to myself, “She fucking broke me.” No woman has made me jerkoff just thinking about her. At least not specifically to her. Callie has me fucking struck. I finished my shower and then put on the same clothes as yesterday. I checked the room to search for any notes left by Callie, but the little minx made me look like a pathetic fool.

Shrugging off the anger and disappointment, I exited the suite and took the elevator alone, checking my reflection in the mirrored paneling. My suit is a little wrinkled given the activities last night, but I still look amazing. I’m going to head home to change before hunting down my runaway girl. She fucked up by running from me.

As I slid the keycard across the front desk, the man asked, “Had a great stay, sir?”

“Wonderful. Did you happen to see a young woman leave in earlier?”

“A beautiful black-haired beauty in a hot little dress.”

“That would be her,” I growled, itching to break his jaw.

“Yes, she left hours ago in one of the taxis we have waiting outside.”

“Thanks.” I reached out and yanked him by his tie, pulling him to me. “Put your fucking tongue back in your mouth. My girl isn’t for ogling, you little bitch, understood.” He nods furiously, so I let him go and he fell back on the counter behind the desk.

I walked away and straight to the valet. I handed him my card and he said, “Sir, I’ll bring your vehicle around.” I nodded.

When I’m finally in the vehicle, my thoughts are back on Callie. I pull out of the hotel and then consider what I’m going to do once I find her. My dashboard lights up

with a call from my brother. “Hey, I have fucking incredible news.”

“What is it?”

“Jack’s found him.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“Found who?”

“John,” he shouts. My mouth falls open. I’m glad I was already out on the main road and stopped at a red light because I would have freaking crashed.

“You are fucking kidding me. God, you better not be playing me.”

“Of course I’m not.”

“That’s fucking insane. Where?”

“Philly.”

“Oh my God. Is he okay?”

“Yeah, and we have to pick them up tonight from the airport. Shit. I’ve got a call on the other line and it’s important. I’ll call you in a bit.”

“Okay. I need to go home and change.”

He chuckled at my accidentally revelation as I hung up. I drove back to the estate and changed my clothes into a pair of jeans and a white tee with a leather jacket. I was in the kitchen about to make something to eat when Connor called to tell me he needs me on the docks with a problem.

I snag a granola bar and an energy drink before running out the door. It’s going to be a fucking long day. I’m at the dock pretty quickly, and I’m busting a couple of heads

in no time because apparently some people don't know who they're dealing with.

After the problem is dealt with I hop into the driver's seat of my bulletproof SUV. I tug on my shirt, annoyed at the red stains that mar it. "Son of a bitch." I hate it when I get blood on my nice tees. It's a real pain in the ass to have to toss them out. Sometimes they become the rags for my garage where I work on my cars and motorcycles.

Connor leans over the passenger side of my window and says, "Hey, remember we need to be leaving the house at five to go get them." A damn bubble of excitement fills my gut at the idea of seeing my little brother again. It's been a long painful fucking year.

"I'll be outside your door at five 'til."

"Sounds good to me." He taps the frame and straightens up.

"Good. See you later," I say before raising the window, putting my vehicle into gear and then driving off. It takes an hour to get home, so I have a lot less time to dick around the house. Frankly, I'm tired and hungry. In the past twenty-four hours I've expended a lot of energy, and my ass needs to eat.

After parking my vehicle in my massive sixteen car garage, I walked through the connecting door, and headed directly up to my laundry room. I strip out of my clothes to deal with this shirt. I bust out a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and squeeze some on the stains. They bubble up and slowly start to break apart. I let it soak in the water basin and start a load before marching my ass to the special shower I have next to the laundry room for just this purpose. I washed all the blood off and quickly dried off, slipping on a pair of joggers and an A-shirt.

I set my alarm for a quick nap because I'm a believer in getting proper sleep. You

can't let your overworked muscle recover with rest, so I'll sleep until four and then get ready to meet my brother.

Once that alarm goes off, I'm up and moving about. My nap set off a frenzy of crazy dreams all featuring my little runaway. I shake my head and try to get her out of my mind, but it doesn't do me much good. Why the fuck did she run off without a goodbye? Was it the damn gun? I hadn't been very careful about hiding it. It was a damn rookie move. I'd been so lost in the moment with her, and she'd seen the wrong weapon. Of course, I managed to play it off and was able to get her in bed, but maybe in the light of day and sober she realized the danger she was in and booked it out of the hotel as fast as she could, but my baby girl didn't know who she was dealing with. As soon as my brother was nice and settled I was coming for her.

I change out of the joggers and slip on a pair of jeans and a dress shirt before adding my black leather jacket. My gun is tucked in my holster as I head out to a blacked-out SUV to scoop up Connor.

Thoughts of Calista are running through my head, to the point where it starts to throb. I should be happy, but I'm thoroughly annoyed today. I wonder if it's just because I'm pissed that the pretty minx slipped away before I could get her information. I'll find her soon, but right now, I have to think about John. God, I had lost all hope that he was alive. Now I know that he's alive, and according to my brothers, John's healthy. I send up a silent "thank you" that he's safe.

As promised, I'm outside his door on time. He checks his watch and laughs. "Always on time."

"Get in, or I'm leaving you here."

"Whatever. You know damn well I can drive myself." I shake my head and then lock the door before he grabs the handle. When he pulls it, he stumbles a step. "Come on,

you dick.”

I chuckle and unlock the door. He gets in and flips me off. I drive out of the property laughing as I pull onto the road.

“So what happened to the girl from last night? I’m guessing you hit it because you’re smiling.”

My face hardens and I’m unable to mask it like I normally can. “I don’t want to talk about it,” I grumble, driving to the airport. I’m pissed at myself for failing such an easy task.

“Wow, I was wrong. Someone didn’t get lucky with the hot chick.”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it,” I bark out.

“Okay, okay.” He throws his hands up. “Sorry, bro. At least you’re not like Jack. He’s gonna marry the woman who had John.”

Page 10

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“What?” My hands wrapped violently around the steering wheel until the leather crunched under my fingers.

Connor nods in the passenger seat. “Yes. I thought he wasn’t acting like himself, but after hearing John speak a few words, she doesn’t seem so bad.”

My mouth falls open, I loosen my grip on the wheel, and I whip my gaze at my brother. “He’s speaking?”

“Not a lot, but more than he’s ever said. He said Jack’s name, and he even tried to say my name.” I’m shocked into silence and driving on autopilot because the news is crazy and wonderful. “I know. I was in disbelief until I heard it. So, if Jack wants to marry her, I’m all good.”

“I can’t believe it,” I whisper, still stuck in amazement.

“Trust me, you’ll be surprised.”

Now my anxiousness to see John has doubled. I can’t wait to hear him say something. “Slow down, Ian. I’d like to make it there in one piece.” I look at my speedometer, and I’m doing ninety. I drop my speed to a safer limit, so I don’t get pulled over or in an accident.

We reached the tarmac, and I pulled up next to my brother’s security team’s vehicle. We nod to them and then waited for our family to disembark. My brothers and this new chick will ride with us, while the other team can ride behind us.

When I see my little brother, I do my best not to pull him into my arms. My heart nearly beats out of my chest to see him.

“Holy fuck, it’s true.” My eyes fill with tears. I’m so damn glad Jack never gave up.

“Little man is back,” Connor chuckles, fighting his own tears. He reaches out and rubs his hand. It’s what he’s always done. We all know he can’t be touched without his permission or he’ll freak out, but my heart is racing to wrap my arms around him.

I finally notice the woman my brother wants to marry, and she’s beautiful, but I know her. She and I met before and the way we met was interesting. I do my best not to laugh, but instead, I enter my protective mode and press my hand to the small of her back, leading her to the vehicle. I wonder if Jack knows who she truly is.

As I learn about the situation with Nora and how John ended up in her hands, I wonder if it’s wise for me to bring Callie into my life. Still, I can’t just let her go. Maybe I’ll keep an eye on her until I’m sure things are settled and then I’ll claim her completely.

When we return to the estate my temper’s a bit hot. I want Callie in my life, and yet I have to wait. My brothers are sure that something is going on with my bastard father, and I still haven’t given up the idea that he was involved with my brother’s kidnapping. Something isn’t adding up, but we all agree to just focus on the present and enjoy John’s company.

We all pull up to Jack’s house, and Connor and I decide to give them some time alone while we hang out with our little brother. It’s so damn cool to see him play freely.

“E-on, E-on,” he says, setting a car in my hand. I can’t stop myself, and I lift him up into my arms and hug him tightly.

He lets me keep him like that, and Connor snaps a photo. “You two look like twins.”

I smile, and then John pushes on my chest to be let go. I set him down, and he goes back to his toys. I’m doing my best not to cry. Fuck, I don’t know when I became this emotional.

“Send it to me.”

Connor does, and I save it as my screensaver. Things are looking up. All I need now is to find my runaway woman and watch her from a distance.

Three hours later I’m home in bed, thinking about my woman. Hopefully soon she’ll be joining me here.

Chapter Six

Ian

July 2014

It has been a month since I saw Callie, and I haven’t been able to get a bead on her whereabouts. I hope to hell she wasn’t from out of town. Her accent was a mix of Chicago with New York. Maybe she’s from Boston.

My contact is trying to find her, but it seems like she’s been wiped clean from all databases, or at least the ones I could get access to, so I need to bring in the big guns. I’m about to head home after another search for her and those lousy friends. I refuse to give up, so I call in a favor and use our favorite tech guy, hoping he can crack the secret of her location. “Hey—I need you to find someone for me.”

“Okay, lay it on me.”

“Female, twenties, brunette, about five foot six or seven, caramel eyes and goes by the name Callie. My search has turned up nothing. And don’t bother doing a facial recognition search. It’s fucking pointless. For some reason, there is no way to trace her, or the images from the club aren’t crisp enough to make a match with all the damn colorful strobe lights.”

“Okay, I’ll get to work on it right now and call you back when I have something concrete.”

As I’m pulling into the estate, I see my father exiting. Frankly, I don’t give a fuck if he leaves and never comes back, but I would never get that lucky. As our vehicles pass each other, I turn my head and give him a cold stare.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

Feeling a sense of unease, I go to Jack's house. I've had enough of my father. Everything about him makes me sick to my stomach. Even just mentioning his name pisses me off. The bastard destroyed my mother, and I want to rip his heart out.

My father and I have always had animosity toward each other. I think he blames my mother for having another kid, like it's her fault that she got knocked up. Connor was two when I was born, and they'd had enough of screaming babies by then.

When I was a boy, I wanted his attention like any son does, but he used to favor my brothers. I supposed it was because I was the youngest and incapable of doing things that they could, but as a pre-teen, I knew that I'd been an accidental pregnancy—a mistake he wanted to forget existed. No matter how tough I became, he would always find a way to bring me down. My brothers had my back, keeping me out of my father's face and taking the blame when I fucked up.

I left the day I turned eighteen. My mother was devastated, but my father said good riddance. I came back when my brother told me things were getting rough and that they could use my help. When I arrived, I learned my mother was pregnant again.

After all those years, she was expecting another child. I couldn't believe it because she was fifty and we all knew that it was dangerous. Still, my little brother was born and my mother died. I decided to finally take my role in the family seriously because my father completely lost power among the families, and we were in danger of being killed.

I'm just inside their house when a loud explosion hits our ears. We lead the women to the safe room, and I check the cameras, seeing Dad's garage on fire so I call 911. I

know instantly that it isn't an accident; whatever his reasoning, he intended for his house to turn to cinder.

My brothers are on the phone quickly, both of them wanting to speak to me after the women let them know I'm here.

"Ian. What the hell is going on?" Connor asks in a frantic haze. I can hear their SUV rev as it picks up speed.

"It's Dad's garage. It caught fire, and the fire department is on the way. I'm just making sure the women are safe until it's all clear." A loud boom can be heard outside, so I look at the cameras and shake my head. There goes his house. I hope to fuck none of his employees are inside.

"Fuck."

"What the hell was that?" Connor shouts.

Jack answers, "Dad's house." He can see the cameras on his phone, and he's checking the surveillance just like I am.

"The bastard."

"Keep our families protected," Connor tells me.

"I will."

"We're on our way, and we need to talk to you."

I nod as if they can see me. Realizing my error, I say, "Okay."

“And pass the phone to Nora since Jack wants to talk to her.”

Then, I wait it out and it's not long before the guys are here, but the fire department beats them here by ten minutes. They're working on the blaze, but it's a little difficult. I never had the desire to become a fireman, and now I'm glad I didn't. It looks like a brutal job.

The guys come running in to hug their women and John, and this drives my thoughts back to my missing woman.

“I was worried about an attack. Ian told me there was nothing to worry about, but it doesn't mean that he wasn't just placating me,” Claudia said, giving a side-eye.

“True,” I admit, smirking at them both.

“Ladies, can you please play with John somewhere safe while we speak to Ian privately?” Jack asks. I'm all motherfucking ears and feeling extremely ready to bust some heads.

“Is this about my father?” Claudia asks, brow raising.

“No. It's not. Fuck, I completely forgot about him,” Jack says.

“Me too.” Connor shares a warm look with his wife and then kisses her cheek before shooing her away.

The ladies lead John away, and once they're safely out of listening range, I ask, “What the hell is going on? You two are acting weird.”

“Dad set the house on fire, and he fled.” Jack holds no punches.

I have no doubt about it, but I want to know why. “What do you fucking mean?”

“He’s the one who orchestrated John’s kidnapping, and he planned to have him killed. If it wasn’t for the nanny, they would have executed John.” A ball of hatred and rage fills my gut.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“I’ll destroy him.” I flex my fists, clenching them tightly as my teeth gnash. I’m ready for war with that old prick.

“We need to get rid of the police and firefighters, but why don’t we just track the fuck?”

“Good idea, Connor.” My brother pulls up an app and runs the tracker on the car our father took. It’s traced to only two miles outside the damn estate.

“We need to approach this vehicle cautiously, if there is even a vehicle there. He could have found the tracker and tossed it.” Jack and I nod, and then we leave his office and find the women sitting around the living room with John, playing with his toys. “We need to speak with the fire department and then the police.”

“I’m going to head out and check the car, okay?” I say, wanting to find him before he gets away.

“Please do, but be careful because I don’t trust our father, especially when it comes to you. He wouldn’t waste an opportunity to take you out,” Jack says.

“No doubt. The bastard would definitely try to get me. Connor, you want to go instead?”

He chuckles. “Sure.” We leave the house and drive toward my father’s just as the firefighters finally put out the blaze.

“They are the owners,” Johnny informs a man in uniform, pointing directly at us as

we step out of my SUV. Turning to Jack, he adds, “Boss, this is Chief Moses. He has information about the fire and was looking for you.” Jack shakes his hand first, followed by me and then Connor.

“Okay. Please let us know what is happening with our father’s home.”

“Unfortunately, there was a major accelerant used in the garage. It wasn’t just in a container that could be explained away. Although it’s natural to have corrosive and explosive-type items in a garage, this was different. The house caught fire afterward, and inside there were two bombs—inside the main door to the garage, and the other in the kitchen. The mansion is mostly destroyed. We found two dead bodies inside so far.”

The color leaves our faces. He didn’t even have the decency to send them off before he set the place ablaze—the damn devil. Damn it, the man is getting desperate, and that means even more dangerous than we had already thought.

“You’re going to need to find my father,” Connor says.

“We believe he was one of the people in the fire.”

“What?” Jack says, feigning disbelief, but we know the truth. It wasn’t him. Who did he set up inside the house?

“Can we see the body?” Jack asks first. We all want to know if they really have the old man. There is no way in hell we believe it.

“They were badly burned and removed to the medical examiner’s office. You’ll have to meet with them.”

“Thank you. If you’ll excuse us, we need to return to our family. How much longer

will they all be here?"

He gives Jack a peculiar look, but I suppose it's because we don't care if our father's dead or not. "The fire is out, but the smoke is unfortunately strong. Please keep indoors, and if anyone has breathing problems, make sure they're away from this."

"We will. Thank you again." We each shake his hand again and then drive back to Jack's to wait it out.

If I'd known about his involvement before he got away, I would have run him down and pulled him out of the vehicle. I pace Jack's office, rage filling my gut.

"Do you think Saunders has anything to do with this?" my brother asks.

"No, I believe this is all Dad. I need to figure out what to do with Saunders. With all this damn attention Dad's just drawn on us, I can't just have Saunders killed because it would be like a fucking neon sign pointed right at me," Connor grumbles.

"You're right."

"But delaying it will piss off Claudia," he sighs. I'm glad I don't have a woman to deal with. They are so damn stressful and piss me off. My mind goes straight to Callie and the fact that she ran out on me and I haven't been able to find her on my own.

"She knows you're waiting until after my wedding, so at least that gives you another week."

"Yeah, but with Dad's death," Connor says with air quotes, "you'll be expected to postpone it."

“The fuck I am. Nora and I are getting married next week, and your wife is going to make the killer cake that Nora has been dreaming about for days.”

“Fine with me.”

“You’ll get no complaints from me. I love cake, and if you’re married, the other families will find you stronger. That means the head of the family will usher in his future family,” I say.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“Since when do you care about the other families?” Connor asks me.

“I don’t, but going to war with other pricks isn’t something I want. Any sense of weakness, and we’ll have a problem. You know that as much as I do. By the way, I’ve got to go. I’ll check the damn car, but I’m guessing the car isn’t there and he tossed the tracker out on the road.” Jack MacNamara Sr. was shady as hell and he proved he isn’t above killing his own children.

“Okay. Just be careful, and call us,” Jack tells me. I nod and then book it out of my brother’s house. Finding that car, or my sperm donor, is important. If I get my hands on my father, he’s going to wish that he died in the fire.

I creep up to the spot and see his vehicle on the side of the road. From my angle, it’s clear there’s no one inside it. “Where the fuck did that bastard go?” I mutter under my breath. The wind is starting to howl, and the smell of the fire is taking over all of my senses. Damn it, he planned this extremely well.

It’s still clear there’s no one in the vehicle, and it’s no longer running. As I get closer to it, an uncomfortable feeling comes over me. That’s when I feel it; the burning sensation hits me in the shoulder. My gut instinct has me reacting on autopilot, but then another shot gets me in the chest. I pull out my gun and aim in the direction that I felt the burn. I fire off six rounds and hear a yelp. So, I managed to hit the vile piece of dirt.

Suddenly a vehicle comes speeding around me. The vehicle stops, and I hear someone approach but I’m losing consciousness. “I’ve always wanted to do that.”

“Good luck, you stupid bastard. My brothers will hunt you down, and you will die slowly.”

He fires another round into my thigh. “They come after me, and I’ll kill them too,” he grunts out, breathing labored. There’s a mocking laugh, and then the footsteps retreat. At least I hit the bastard, I think, smirking to myself. I close my eyes and hope my brothers get revenge for me.

Chapter Seven

Calista

Six medical students, including me, stand in a circle, waiting for the Head Surgeon, Dr. Stevens, to address us. His expression is grim, and the tension within me builds. This is our first rotation in the ER, so I’m sure we’re all nervous. “Students, we need everyone to go down to the lab and donate blood, if possible.”

“What’s going on, Dr. Stevens?” Jacob asks.

“Today’s shift is going to be a crazy one. There has been a massive multi-car pile-up, and the victims are being brought in. We are in short supply of blood this month and in dire need over the next few days. Please head down in pairs and then come back to assist. The surgeons are already working on the first set of accident victims with the supplies we have, but we could use more as some will need transfusions over the next couple of days.”

We all stand there, stunned, stealing glances between each other when he adds, “Now. Move it.” He claps his hands together, and we rush out of the room, nearly tripping over each other.

Jacob and I head down together. “Was this in our contract with the program?” Jacob

asks, grumbling his displeasure.

“I don’t know, but it’s not a big deal for me. Besides, we’re here to save lives, and that’s what I hope to do. Donating blood isn’t a big deal,” I answer, unbothered by it all. I just hope I have enough iron in my blood to donate. It’s my time of the month, so my hemoglobin might be a little low.

He shrugs, but I can see it’s bothering him. “You’re right, but my ass doesn’t like being told what to do.” I roll my eyes because we’re told how to breathe every second of every day since we started med school. If he didn’t like it, he wouldn’t be in year three.

I give him a light shrug. “Yeah, right. Just admit you’re afraid of needles.”

“I’m not afraid,” he says, but the truth is in his eyes. He’s scared shitless.

We enter the blood donation center, and we’re immediately stopped by men in suits. They see our badges and let us in. That’s when we spot who they’re protecting. Governor Donovan Saunders has just finished giving blood and is putting on his sport coat.

“Sir,” I say with a nod as we pass each other.

“I can’t believe you addressed the governor,” Jacob gasps, whispering over my shoulder, trying to figure out if I’m going to get in trouble.

“Why? It’s polite to greet someone in passing, especially when you know them.”

There’s a light tap on my shoulder, and I turn around to see the governor smiling at me. “Hello, Callie. I’m sorry I didn’t recognize you right away.”

I smile at the older gentleman. I'm sure I look a little different since the last time he saw me. "It's okay, Sir. I understand you're busy."

"It's good to see that your dream is coming true."

"Thank you." He pulls me in close and gives me a kiss on my cheek. I see a man with blondish gray hair staring at us as he waits for his turn to donate. The man scrunches his eyes, narrowing them as his jaw flexes in annoyance. He's sitting beside a beautiful woman who places her hand on his left shoulder as if she's trying to calm him. I raise a brow, wondering what his problem is. Before I can see if the governor's guards noticed, he stares at the woman next to him.

We break our hug, and he says, "Tell your grandparents I said hello."

"I will." He walks away, and then I return to my task.

"I can't believe you know the governor. You never told me that." Jacob's reaction would be funny if we didn't have an audience. I want to shush him, but I just answer his unspoken question.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“Well, I don’t brag about my connections. He was my neighbor when I lived with my grandparents.” My mind is still on that man who was staring at me with anger. It was totally unnerving.

“Wow, so you come from a wealthy family.” It’s not a question but a statement of fact, and he’s not wrong, but I don’t think about things like that because of who my father is. I wonder if the angry man is someone my father knows, and he recognized me.

“Oh, there you two are. What took you so long?” the pretty thirty-five-year-old phlebotomist asks with a bitchy tone. All I know is I’m grateful not to work with her. She’s a real cunt and seems to hate the female population.

“Calm down, Eva. We got caught up in the governor’s exit,” Jacob explains.

“Oh. I hope you didn’t bother him, Calista,” she scoffs as if I’m a troublemaker. Jacob gives her a guilty and apologetic look, and I can tell there has been some fraternizing.

Shaking my head, I lay a dead stare on her. “I don’t want you drawing my blood,” I tell her flat out. This woman has had it out for me since I arrived at the hospital a few months ago. Everything I do pisses her off, even when it has nothing to do with the blood center or labs.

“Fine. Eric can draw your blood. Don’t flirt with him too.” I clench my teeth and roll my eyes. Ah—I just discovered what the bitch’s problem is. I turn my head from her to Jacob and then back again. Their expressions say everything I need to know.

“Having an affair with a student while married is terrible, Mrs. Bunn.” She gasps, but she can’t get the lie out before we’re interrupted by Eric.

“Who is next?” he asks with a grin, eyes landing on me.

I raise my hand and smile at Eric, enjoying the look on Eva’s face as I pass by her.
“I’m your next victim.”

“Come into my lair. What’s your name again?”

“Calista.”

“Very pretty,” he says, tossing me a wink before pointing to the bed I need to get on.

I take a seat, and then I see a man and woman enter. The same man that was staring at me so rudely is holding the woman’s hand. Eric gets me started, rubbing my arm before gently sliding the needle in. The way he does it feels intentionally erotic.

“Thank you for being gentle,” I say, thinking that Eva would have intentionally hurt me.

“Anything for a gorgeous doctor,” he adds.

“Yeah, I don’t want a vein blown out. Besides, I’m not a doctor yet.”

“Of course. I’ll be back to check on you.” He pats my shoulder and then walks off to work on couple.

They share conspiratorial looks with each other. Every once in a while, they glance my way. I scowl at them because I’m not in the mood for this shit.

Five minutes later, Eric returns with his paperwork on me. “So, gorgeous, you seeing anyone?” Eric asks after checking the blood bag.

“Yes,” I lied, even though my thoughts immediately went to Ian. I missed him like crazy.

“That’s a shame, because you are stunning.” Why is every phlebotomist in this place a horn dog? Seriously—I just want to get my job done and go home, although I have a feeling my shift is going to be a long one.

He gives me a tight-lipped smile before taking the vials he needs, and then he closes up the line to the blood bag. He removes the needle from my arm and bandages me up. “Okay, you’re good to go and sit down a minute in the recovery room.”

“Thanks,” I mutter.

I overhear the woman speaking to the man. “Love, they said we are capable of donating. It sucks that Connor had to leave before donating. Do you think they’ll make up?”

“Yes, love. He’s in love with her,” the rude man says.

“I could see it.”

“Calista, are you all right?” Jacob asks, standing in front of me and waving his hand.

I snap to attention at Jacob and give him a soft smile. “Sorry. I’m totally ready.”

“Okay.” He raises a brow and then turns to the couple. I grab his face and then turn him to look at me, so they don’t confront me or report me just to be assholes.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“Calis-ta,” Eva hisses my name.

“E-va,” I snap back at her. “Your jealousy is pathetic; so, leave me alone before I report you to HR.” She gasps and then walks away in a huff.

When I return to the emergency department, I’m swamped with both physical and mental tasks that make me forget about the man who was glaring at me. I’m completely wiped out by the time I go home to my apartment. I barely wash off the grime from the day and eat a bowl of cereal before collapsing on my bed. Tomorrow will be brutally fun. I have a twelve-hour shift after my class.

I’ve just returned to the hospital after my class. It’s one in the afternoon and the hospital is a little less chaotic, but there are still tons of people milling around, wanting answers. All of us med students have been assigned to a doctor and certain rooms.

“Ms. Vitale, you will be assisting me with the care of the patient in room six in ICU,” Dr. Fisher says. He’s one of the senior doctors on duty.

“What? Why me?” I’m not qualified to help patients in the ICU. We are only supposed to work in the ER.

“Because I’m not telling them anything that could upset them. As a young woman, they’ll take it easy on you. Besides, you’ll have the nurses there to assist,” Dr. Fisher says.

He hands me the chart on the tablet as we make our way to the ICU floor, which I read and then I gasp, quickly masking it. “As you can see, he’s one of the mobsters, and his family isn’t going to take it lightly if something happens.” Thankfully, he doesn’t grasp why I’m shocked by the name on the file: Ian MacNamara. My Ian, my only lover, the man who hasn’t left my mind over the past few weeks.

I review his medical records and he’s in stable condition, having had a four-hour surgery and one pint of blood from an AB+ donor. The doctor opens the door, and we enter the room where Ian isn’t conscious. “Has he awakened at all?”

“Yes. Briefly. It’s on the second page of the notes. Please review all of them. We’re going to check his vitals, and then we’ll examine his bandages to see if they need to be changed. Normally that’s the job of the nurses, but since you’ll need experience in all areas, it’s a good time to practice. He had three GSWs that left both entrance and exit wounds on his body.”

I read the surgical notes and saw that they were able to remove the bullets that didn’t exit his body. He’s extremely lucky because he should be dead. After checking the machines and doing a visual examination, we walked to the side of the room to not disturb Ian with our conversation.

“Should we attempt to wake him?” I ask. It’s not what I really want because I’m afraid of the backlash I’ll get for running out on him. God, I’ve relived that night so many times in my head, and I never thought that I’d ever see Ian again. This is definitely not the way I expected our paths to cross. He looks so vulnerable and yet so intensely powerful. Ian’s full lips are a bit chapped from the lack of fluids. I want to run an ice cube across them or maybe dig in my bag for my special lip balm. His dark hair is splayed out on the pillow, but I can see hints of blood on the side of his cheek.

“No. His vitals are steady, but please gather the materials to clean the wounds, and then I’ll be back to check your handiwork in a half an hour,” he says as if he’s

unbothered by the situation.

“You’re not going to supervise?” I asked calmly, trying to come off polite instead of dismayed by his unprofessionalism.

“I have several other patients to check on, and frankly, I don’t give a fuck if something happens to men like this piece of shit.” Damn, that was harsh, and he hadn’t bothered to say it low enough for only my ears. It’s as if he wanted Ian to hear it as well. I understand that Dr. Fisher doesn’t like him, and he has good reason, but I still want to kick him in the shin for speaking about Ian like that.

“What about his family?” I question, hoping that I won’t run into his brother I saw at the club. If I do, hopefully he won’t remember what I look like. After all, it was dark, and I was dressed up.

“If they ask, tell them he’s lucky to be alive and they should let him rest. Maybe leave him here so someone can finish the job.”

“Doctor,” I hiss. I can’t believe he just said that. I want to report him, but that’s just pointless because it would be my word against his and sure as hell, I would be tossed out.

“I’m just kidding.” He smirks, but I doubt that’s the case. I read him loud and clear. Dr. Fisher has it out for Ian, and I wonder if it’s more than just Ian’s profession. After all, people like Ian keep Dr. Fisher in business. It’s wrong, but I hate the way he spoke about my...well...my former lover.

As he leaves, I return to Ian’s side, checking on his vitals. In reality, I can’t take my eyes off him. Even in this terrible condition, he’s still so beautiful and masculine. I gently brush my fingers through his blood soaked, matted hair. Although he was shot in the chest, he must have sat in a pool of his own blood because it’s still in his

beautiful, dark locks.

I go into the closet in his room and grab some washcloths, wetting one and gently wipe the blood out of his hair, doing my best to clean it. The soft touch is a bad idea because I'm still so attracted to him. Remembering to do my job, I exit the room for just a moment to get the supplies to reapply the bandages.

Chapter Eight

Ian

My eyes are heavy, and my body feels like I've gotten into another damn motorcycle accident. Although, the first one I was in didn't feel this brutal. I squint several times, hoping to get a clear view of my surroundings. The haze fades as my entire body wakes up. Still, I'm unable to figure out where I am.

The light is harsh on my eyes and it's giving me a blinding headache, so I close them again and groan.

"Oh my goodness, you're awake, Mr. MacNamara. It's a wonderful thing." I swear my ears are playing tricks on me because I recognize that soft, milky tone.

"Excuse me, but who are you, and where am I?" I ask, needing clarification because I'm still not seeing clearly, but her voice is so damn identifiable that my heart rate spikes. Opening my eyes several times, I can make out her features, and I wonder if I'm fucking dreaming because she can't be here.

She dips her head briefly, her lips tightening. I've embarrassed her, but I'm the one in the vulnerable state.

"I'm sorry, Mr. MacNamara. You're at the hospital, and I am studying to be a doctor,

so I've been assigned to your room," she admits. I blink several times and now the image of her is clear as day. Damn it—all this searching, and all I needed to do was nearly die.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:17 am

“Sweetheart, I asked your name.” I’m trying to figure out if I’m losing my mind or if I’m fantasizing because I swear it’s the elusive Callie.

“Calista Vitale.” Yes, that’s my woman, even if she didn’t tell me her real name. Although, we didn’t do a lot of talking after I got her naked.

“Don’t you mean Callie?” I sneer, hating that she left that pertinent bit of information out. It might have been a little easier to find her since Callie is clearly a nickname.

“Well, that’s what people call me,” she says, biting down on her delicious bottom lip.

“You disappeared on me.” My accusation is clear and bold, but she just swallows hard and doesn’t give me the dignity of a reply.

She takes a deep breath and stammers out, “I...need to check your wounds.”

I pull down my blanket, and her eyes linger on my growing erection as she lets out a tiny gasp. I whip the cover up so I can get her eyes back on my face for a moment. Not that I’m the least bit displeased about her checking out my dick. It’s fucking hers as far as I’m concerned, but still, we need to speak. “Eyes up here, babe,” I tease.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to stare. It’s not professional,” she stammers out, trying to excuse her behavior.

“Nothing between us is professional. Everything is personal. Besides, it’s nothing I haven’t shown you before.” I wink and smirk. “Did you insert this?” I grip my cock, pointing out the catheter in there. It’s not the sexiest thing, but my little volunteer is

probably used to inserting them. The thought of her touching other men's dicks instantly pisses me off.

"It can't be anything but professional," she insists, but I'm not listening.

"Why the fuck not? I can feel every part of my body." It's not like I'm permanently crippled and I can't take care of her or myself. Yes, I'm fucked up right now, but thankfully, my bastard sperm donor didn't destroy me completely. I can feel and move my body.

"Because that night was a mistake." Fuck, those words shred more than the bullets did. She shakes her head, and I see the tears in her eyes as if she's denying what she really wants.

"It didn't feel like one," I say.

"That was before I knew you were in the mafia," she tosses back at me.

I nod, understanding why she's upset. I can change her mind, or I can just do what Jack did and give her no choice. "That changes nothing for me, Calista." She shivers just a little, letting me know I still affect her.

The door to the room opens and I move to protect her, sitting up straighter in the bed and dragging her to the side of my bed closer to my head. I see who it is, and the tension fades.

"You're awake," Jack says as he and Connor enter.

I smile at them and nod. "Yeah, that motherfucker can't bring me down."

"So, it was Dad?" Connor asks.

I nod and answer, “Yes. He wasn’t alone, but I couldn’t see who was in the escape vehicle.” Calista slaps her hands to her mouth at the revelation. I suppose she has a reason to fear my lifestyle. I try to sit all the way up, nearly tugging all my cords out.

“Ugh...Mr. MacNamara,” she says, pushing me back on the bed. I’m still in a sitting position, just not as upright.

She fucked up because now I have her too damn close. I snatch her hand in mine. “It’s Ian. Minx, stop with the formality.”

“Oh, shit. It’s the girl from the club,” Connor says with a smirk. Jack stares at her with an intense distrust that makes me wonder what he knows or if he is just being a big brother.

“Why the fuck are you in here instead of a real doctor?” Jack asks her with a tone that makes me want to flatten his ass.

“He was busy and stepped away. I’m supposed to reapply the bandages, if you don’t mind,” she snaps back.

“Actually, I do fucking mind.” His attitude is too much for me to tolerate. He doesn’t have the right to speak to my woman like that.

“Jack, watch it. You’re talking to my...” I snap, but he cuts me off.

“I don’t trust her. She was chatting up the governor. Now she’s in here with scissors.”

“I was chatting with the governor today, too,” Connor says, chuckling, like speaking to that asshole isn’t a bad thing. I stare at my woman with a dozen questions, like did that asshole send her my way on purpose?

“That’s fucking different, and you know it,” Jack snarls at Connor. My woman crosses her arms with a huff, glaring at my brother.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Look, I have a job to do, and I don’t even get paid for it, so you can get out of here or you can be quiet. I don’t care if you’re a thug or not. I’m not losing my position in the program because you have issues.” She rolls her eyes at Jack while pointing the scissors toward him, like she dares him to come forward and try to stop her.

“Get to work, baby,” I say, getting more aroused by the moment. Seeing her give Jack shit is so damn hot.

“It would be great if you would calm down,” she whispers to me. I suppose there is a wound on my leg that she has to access, but all I can do is think with my third leg.

“If you took care of that first, then I would.” She gasps, but before she can respond, the door opens and then a man in scrubs enters.

“Ah, Ms. Vitale, have you changed his wound dressings yet?” he asks with a snideness that sets my teeth on edge.

“Unfortunately, no. His family entered the room before I could,” she answers, throwing Jack a scowl. I’m getting more turned on by the moment. No one puts Jack in his place, but his woman and my woman haven’t stopped.

The doctor stares at her and then says, “You should have asked them to leave.” He then looks to my brothers and says, “Please excuse us, so we can dress his wounds.”

“They can stay,” I say, wanting someone to keep me in control. Plus, I don’t think Jack is in the best temper to wait outside.

“We need space. Please move over to the other side,” the doctor says as he points toward the corner.

“Who are you?” I challenge him. He hasn’t introduced himself, and frankly, I don’t like the way he looked at my woman.

“Sorry, Mr. MacNamara. I’m Dr. Fisher. How are you feeling?” he asks me; his tenor changes just slightly to a little more of a civil tone.

“I’m feeling great right now. Shit, I’m ready to go home.” I rub my hands together and some pain shoots through my shoulder, but I don’t show any signs of discomfort because I want to get the fuck out of here.

“Hell, no,” Jack snaps.

He chuckles lightly. “Sorry, but your brother is correct. You were just shot yesterday, Mr. MacNamara.”

“Ms. Vitale, please remove the old dressing.” I watch her as she slides on a pair of gloves. My attention is never off her for a second. She slides her hand over my chest, lifting the tape, and I do my best not to complain because she’s watching. Hell, her hand on my chest is making my dick hard, even with this fucking tube in it. I think about these motherfuckers in the room, hoping to ice my cock, but their presence isn’t a bother. My next thought is my father. Rage pumps through me and I snarl, stopping my hard-on.

“Be a little gentler with the patient,” the doctor scolds her.

Connor laughs. “He’s not bothered by the tape, are you, Ian?”

“Fuck off.” I look at her. “Baby, I think the doc should take over or I’ll rip this

catheter out and continue what we started.” The doctor stares right at her with a scowl, and she pales.

“Mr. MacNamara,” she hisses, eyes widening as she clenches her teeth.

“I don’t care about your boss.” I take her wrist and pull her closer to me. “All I know is you better not have let a motherfucker touch what’s mine.”

Jack’s phone beeps, and then he looks down. I wait patiently for him to address the situation, but he doesn’t say a thing. He crosses his arms. “Could you two get on with it? I have to see my family. Besides, we’d like to speak to my brother in private.”

“If he’d behave, then I could do my job,” Callie hisses.

I take her hand in mine again. “Sorry, baby. When you have your hands on me, all bets are off.”

“Ms. Vitale, please go get a nurse to take your place,” the doctor snipes at her.

“She doesn’t leave,” I snarl. I may not be able to fuck this asshole up right now, but I have my two brothers right here.

“Ms. Vitale is only a med student, Mr. MacNamara.”

“Did you just denigrate my future wife?” She gasps, and my brothers just shake their heads. Connor’s grinning, but Jack is still tight-lipped.

“My apologies, but I was only addressing her inexperience.”

“Well, I’d prefer her to touch me than another motherfucker, so carry on.”

The doctor tells her what to do and she attentively works on my bandages, cleaning my wounds before applying new gauze and tape. Once she's done, I whisper a thank you. "I'll reward you later." Callie blushes while avoiding all eye contact.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Okay, we’re finished here,” the doc barks out, causing us both to look at him. Her gaze is full of fear, where mine is filled with contempt.

“Yes, we are,” she adds, pulling off her latex gloves, tossing them and the dirty bandages in the medical waste bin. My mind goes to the fact that it’s the first time we used any latex between us. I gaze at her stomach and wonder if I left a little bit of me inside. Shaking my head, I remember that she was on birth control.

“We have more patients to check on. Please excuse us.”

“As I said, she’s not leaving yet.”

He freezes and then says, “She can only be here another ten minutes. We do have other patients that require special care. We are in the ICU, after all.”

“Fine.” The moment he’s out of the door, Connor says, “So back to the governor question, Ms. Vitale.”

“Vitale?” Jack mutters.

“It’s a fairly common last name,” Callie says, but something in her facial expression tells me she’s not being honest.

“I’m sure it is, but when you have a connection to the governor, we have a problem,” Jack snarls.

“Yes, I recall you glaring at me like a fucking asshole. He was my neighbor when I

was younger, if you must know. I want nothing to do with your world, so if you'll excuse me, there are others who need me. I'll send the nurse in to see if you need anything else." She gathers the rest of her things that she brought in and then sets them on a tray she brought with her.

"We'll buzz the nurse, little girl," Jack adds.

She whips her head around and sneers at him. "Don't piss me off, big boy. I want nothing to do with any of you. I don't need to be mixed up in trouble or to be peppered with bullets." She has a point, and I hate that she does. It isn't safe in my world, but that doesn't mean I'm not crazy about her. I knew that from the moment I tasted her lips.

I take her hand before she tries to run. "Callie, I'll say this once. Run now, because the second I get a chance, I'm going to find you and then there's no going back."

"You didn't bother looking for me before; keep it that way." She yanks her hand away and storms past my brothers and out of the door.

"Do you realize what she just revealed?" Connor says to me.

"She's Carlo Vitale's daughter."

"So, the head of a crime family that we have no beef with. Big deal. Look at who your women are related to and then tell me something." They both need to be reminded that they all have ties to women with questionable backgrounds.

"Fuck, you have a point, but it's messed up that all of our women are tied to some family," Jack says.

"Hell, Connor picked Claudia out, knowing damn well she was related to the

governor.”

“Technically she’s not,” Connor says, defending his choice, but I don’t know what the fuck he’s talking about.

“What the hell do you mean?” My brows cinch together.

“We didn’t get to tell you, but he’s definitely John’s father.”

So this is why our piece of shit father hates Saunders. “Are you serious?”

“Yes. We found this.” Jack dips into the inside pocket of his suit jacket and pulls out a piece of paper and a picture, handing it to me. I check the picture first, recognizing those in it. It’s clear my mom and the governor look a lot younger. I set it on my lap and read the letter.

Every word from my mother registers in my head. She loved the governor, and they had a baby together. She was planning on leaving my father before she died. “He had to have killed her.”

“We don’t doubt it. She didn’t die from having John, just like he didn’t suffer from brain damage either. It was all a made-up story to stop her from running.”

“Does Saunders know?” I ask. We’ll have to squash our differences and unite under a common enemy and a common love.

“Yes. I went to see him. He wants to see John.”

“He does?” I question.

“Yes. He never knew that she had his kid. All he knew was she was running away,

and he planned to take her away, but he was afraid our bastard father would kill her rather than let her leave.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“And he did. Fuck, if we knew she wanted to flee, I would have helped and put a bullet in his head. No fucking questions necessary,” I say, adjusting my bed to sit the fuck up. I want out of this place now. I think my revenge is mostly for me, but now it has my mother at the top of the list. She had given him more than he ever deserved, and he destroyed everything wonderful about her.

“We would have as well,” Jack says, while Connor nods in agreement.

“No doubt,” Connor adds.

“So about that little nurse. She gave me a strange vibe, like she’s hiding something besides knowing the governor.”

“She’s a med student, asshole. Besides, she’s not hiding anything other than she doesn’t want anything to do with me. Calista made it clear that she didn’t want to be with a mobster. I need to get the fuck out of here, and she needs to stay away or we’re taking her.” My brothers chuckle. Okay, maybe staying away won’t help her, but I’ll at least give her the impression that I will. The thought of never seeing her again infuriates me.

“We can call our doctor and have him at the house,” Jack says. He looks at the door and back at us. “Frankly, I don’t trust that doctor that was in here. He ”

“Me either.” Connor nods.

“We’ll get you out of here right now.”

There's a knock at the door. "Hey, we've been waiting out here," Claudia says, entering with a box in her hands.

"Sorry about that, trouble," Connors says, pulling his wife to his side.

"It's fine, but we were getting worried."

"Yeah, the little woman that left was fighting tears, and then the doctor pulled her into another room," Nora adds.

"We're snatching her up and putting his head on a fucking platter," I snarl, losing my composure.

"She's probably getting reamed for having a relationship with you," Connor says.

"It's none of his fucking business. I already warned his ass once."

"A relationship?" Nora asks, while she and Claudia share smiles with each other.

"She's going to be my wife if she doesn't hide from my ass," I snarl.

"Oh Lord, she has no chance, does she?" Nora asks.

Claudia looks nervously around before she says, "There's something you should know. I recognized her. She used to live next door to my dad with her grandparents, but her father lives in New York and he's...in the mafia."

"What else do you know?" I ask.

She twists her lips and then adds, "Her mother died when she was little, so she stayed with her grandparents while her dad ran the organization."

Chapter Nine

Calista

I practically ran from his room before I made a bigger fool of myself. I can't believe what Ian said in front of my boss. I could chalk it up to the meds, but I should know better. He carried himself with pure confidence and power. I knew it that night at the club and after knowing who he is, there is no doubt in my mind that he meant what he said, so I'm going to take his words seriously.

"Run," he uttered with those beautiful eyes full of warning and hunger.

If he finds me, then I'm his. Why is it both tempting and terrifying? The idea of him chasing and catching me has so much merit, I want to take off already in the hopes he'll give chase.

Still, there are other things to be concerned about; like I'm not sure how my father will feel about another mafia family trying to claim me.

I shake my head, trying to stop myself from crying. My emotions are flying all over the place. Seeing Ian after all this time has been a rush, but seeing him injured like that made it hard to keep my emotions in check.

When he pulled me to him, I didn't want him to let me go. I nearly caved to the temptation, but I remembered what came with the lifestyle, and I don't want to marry a mobster.

"Ms. Vitale." I clamp my eyes and lips shut tightly, freezing in place as Dr. Fisher coldly calls my name. Spinning on my heel, I face him. "We need to speak," he says.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

I move my gaze away from him so I don't have to face his angry eyes. As I ignore his laser-focused gaze on me, I spot two women heading toward Ian's room, but only the backs of their heads. I do my best not to be jealous, but my heart doesn't agree with me. Dr. Fisher yanks me by the arm and drags me toward the small waiting room, closing the door behind us.

"Ms. Vitale, your behavior in there has just cost you your position," he says, not waiting a full two seconds after we enter the room.

"What?" I ask, completely flabbergasted.

"You heard me. We can't have our students fraternizing with criminals. It reflects poorly on the program and the hospital."

"I...I can't believe this. I'm the best student you have, and you're letting me go because I met Mr. MacNamara at a club and haven't seen him again until today." It's more information than I need to share and less than what happened between us, but it's none of his business what happened between Ian and me.

"It's clear he has other ideas, and we don't need that kind of trouble in here. I'm going to have to ask you to leave immediately. You'll be removed from the program, but the college will have to determine your eligibility after receiving my report." He opens the door, waving his arm for me to go first.

I walk out of the room, and he lifts his arm above my head and waves over the security guard. "Please escort Ms. Vitale to get her belongings from the locker room and then out of the hospital." My shoulders raised and my body tensed as my temper

heated up. A different person just washes over me and the sweet med student that I've been just evaporated. The young New York Mafia princess invaded my bones. Sinister thoughts of punishing him flood my brain.

I want to tell him that he fucked with the wrong woman because my father isn't going to appreciate it, but I remember that I'm not a part of that life. I take a deep calming breath and let it out. It's one thing if I screwed up on my own merit, but my acquaintances cost me my career, and my father won't like to hear it.

By the time I arrived at my car with my few belongings, which were a change of clothes along with toiletries inside my duffle bag, I had lost my composure. Unable to hold back the tears, I press my forehead on the top of my Mercedes.

My entire career and education are down the drain.

There's a tap on my arm and I jump back with my keys in hand, ready to stab someone in the eye, only to find one of my father's men standing there. My eyes meet the affable Andre. "Your father is on the phone," he says gently, seeing me upset.

"Princess..." my father answers.

I cut him off right away. "Why the hell are your men here? I thought I asked you to send them home." I found them following me months ago and found it annoying because I'm an adult and feel like it draws more attention to me.

"Sweetheart, just because you ask for something doesn't mean it's within my power to grant it."

"You can't tell them to go home?" I challenge his bullshit. He laughs as if what I just said was funny, but I'm too pissed to see it that way.

“They are always there, sweetheart. I’m worried about you. Andre said that you’re crying, and I can hear it in your voice.” Of course I have to have the most observant and loving father. There isn’t anything he misses. I love and hate it at the same time, although I could be unfortunate enough to have Ian’s dad.

“I was just kicked out of the program,” I confess through my tears.

“Why? Did you accidentally kill someone?” he asks. I suppose it’s a valid question.

Andre’s eyes don’t leave me as I answer, “No. It’s because I know Ian MacNamara, who is a patient.”

“What the fuck? I don’t give a fuck if you were married to that mick, that’s not a logical reason to send you packing.”

“Well, apparently they don’t want trouble. And apparently knowing a mobster is trouble,” I teasingly scoff. My dad chuckles lightly because if they only knew the truth I wouldn’t have been selected at all.

“I’m sorry, sweetie. Do you want me to deal with it?” I knew he’d offer, and I’m sure he’ll know my response.

“No. It would only prove his point. He didn’t want that kind of atmosphere in his hospital. He made it clear that he wouldn’t mind if Ian was dead.”

“Are you fucking serious?” My father snarls on the other end as if his favorite baseball team has lost.

“Don’t even think of it,” I warned him. If anything happens to Ian because of me, I’ll never forgive myself.

“I wouldn’t start a war with the MacNamara Family,” he responds with a mixed tenor, and I can’t tell if he’s being serious.

Out of nowhere, I hear commotion behind me. “What the fuck are you doing with her?” Jack says, approaching us. Andre immediately reacts to protect me. Jack lands a punch on his jaw.

“Dad, I have to go.” I end the call and move closer to the two men.

I shout, “Stop it, you idiot.”

“He’s going to kidnap you,” Andre grumbles, itching to reach for his piece as both men actually listen to me. I’m sure something is going down, but I’m not sure if it’s positive.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“No, he’s not. Here is your phone, Andre.” I pressed it into his chest. “Go home. I’m fine, and tell my father I’m fine.” I shake my head. It’s then I see the one woman with him. I don’t see the other brother and woman, though.

“Are you sure?” he asks me again, but my mind is on who that other woman is and why she is visiting Ian.

“Callie?” He waves his hand in front of my face.

“Yes.” He straightens his suit before walking away, giving Jack a dirty look.

“So who the fuck are you? You said you were neighbors with the governor, but that fucker is a New Yorker and so is your father.”

“Why are you all in my business? You all cost me my damn position in the program and probably my slot in the med school, so it would be great if you all leave me alone. It’s not my fault that your brother decided to hit on me in a club and we liked each other. Now, if you’ll excuse me; you’re in my way.”

“Be careful,” he mutters and then gently takes the woman by the hand.

“See you later,” she says. She waves and gives me a sweet smile as if she saw this situation in a different light. He rolls his eyes and shakes his head at her. Jack is an asshole, but it’s clear he’s looking out for his brother.

I drive back to my apartment and pack up my school things. I can’t look at them every day. Stuffing them into a tote, I slide them under my dining room table and

then I head into my bedroom and decide the best course of action for me is to visit my family for a bit. Maybe a trip home would do me some good.

My parents would love to have me come home for a while. As I pack, I think about my father and our conversation and a thought strikes me; maybe I should have told the MacNamaras that the doctor was an asshole and didn't have good intentions.

I don't have their information or anything, but I decide to Google them. All mafia families have legal avenues or some way to contact them or their associates. One page catches my eye. Connor MacNamara is married to none other than Claudia Saunders. Smiling, I called her right away. "Hey, Claudia."

"Hey, Callie. How are you? Are you okay? I saw you when you left," she asks in rapid fire questioning.

"Oh. Was that you going into the room?"

"Yes. That doctor was a total asshole."

"That's actually why I'm calling. I didn't realize how much it mattered because he's a doctor and not a killer or anything, but he said something that bothered me."

"What is it?"

"He said that maybe if we left him alone, someone would come along and finish the job. I assumed it was his dislike of mafia types, but I just thought you should know."

"Thanks, but the guys felt the same way and they moved Ian. You're a sweetheart."

I didn't feel that way. I should have told that asshole Jack when I saw him, but I'd been so pissed by his attitude and being fired I hadn't even considered the risk.

“Hardly. Congrats on the marriage.”

“Thanks. He’s wonderful.”

“Even though they hate your father?”

“Yeah, well, that’s complicated...really freaking complicated. You should have dinner with us tomorrow.”

“Thanks, but I don’t think that’s a good idea. Besides, I’m going to see my father tomorrow.”

“Okay. Well, let me know if you want to go shopping or anything when you’re back in town. I’m always down for it, and maybe we could steal Nora away from Jack. She’s my future sister-in-law, and she’s the most wonderful woman in the world.” Somehow I don’t doubt that. She’s like the grumpy sunshine couple.

“Maybe we can. Talk to you another time.” I end the call and feel better about it.

I booked a flight to New York to see my father. It was expensive, but I used my family card, so it wasn’t a problem. My dad takes care of the payments. It’s his way to make up for losing my mom. Money. I only accept his money to make my life comfortable, but not lavish. Although, it doesn’t stop him from giving me massive gifts like the Mercedes.

I shoot him a message, letting him know when I’ll be arriving.

I’ll be there tomorrow around ten, but I’m sure you probably already know that.

I didn’t, Princess, but I’m thrilled that you will be coming home.

It's for vacation.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

It's still your home even if it's just for a vacation. Always your home. My heart swells with his messages to me. It's truly hard for me to stay mad at him. As crazy scary as my father can be, his love for me is truly unconditional.

I love you, Daddy.

I love you, Princess.

Chapter Ten

Ian

"You," I snapped, seeing the little prick from the club who claimed Calista belonged to him as he entered my room with several items on a cart.

I wouldn't trust this fucker with mopping the floor, let alone my well-being. "Um, sucks to be you right now," he says with a smirk—that kind of dark, sinister grin that holds pure malice behind it.

"Keep that up and you'll be sucking on your last breath," I warn the arrogant punk. I might be too weak to take on someone larger, but this pussy will be light work.

"I wouldn't threaten me with the position you're in." He chuckles while lifting up a needle and then a bottle. "Fucking hilarious that you got Callie fired. Did she tell you that she only fucked you because I slipped her a little something in her drink? Her legs should have opened up for me, not you." He inserts the needle into the bottle and then pulls it out.

Multiple levels of rage fill my gut. “Pencil-dick rapist. You shouldn’t have told me that.”

“It’s time for you to get your meds, Mr. MacNamara.”

“Get that needle away from my brother, or I’ll shove it through your eye,” Jack says, inching closer to him. He sets it on the cart next to him. “You’re not supposed to be in here.”

“Well, someone needs to replace Callie since he got her fired,” he huffs. The anger in his voice tells me he’s still interested in getting to her.

“You’ll stay the fuck away from her.”

“You can’t tell me what to do, and I sure as fuck won’t give up on Callie just because she got her cherry popped by someone else.”

“Do yourself a favor, and get the fuck out of my brother’s room.”

“That’s fine. Enjoy the pain. I’ll head over to Callie’s soon and let her know I’m there for her.” He chuckles as he pushes the cart out of the room.

Once he’s gone, Jack checks the door, and then says, “We’re getting the fuck out of here. I don’t like that bastard or the doctor either. Everything’s running smoothly—we’ve already transferred information to our doctors, and then we’ll have the hospital records wiped clean.”

“Have you seen Calista?”

“Yes, and she was with her bodyguard.”

“Bodyguard?”

“From the looks of it, she didn’t want him around, but it was at her dad’s request. I caught her crying.”

“Yeah, well, it seems I just got her fired.”

“That’s what she implied when she cursed me out.”

“Damn, I love her.” I don’t even realize that I’ve just let that slip, but the look on my brother’s face tells me I said that out loud.

“I’m not knocking anything. I might not trust everything yet, but we all have been a bit crazy when it comes to our women.”

“Yes, we are, and I’ve been a bit distrustful of all of them.”

“That’s for sure,” he scoffs.

I plan to apologize to Claudia, who I was outright rude to, whereas with Nora, I’d just kept my reservations to myself until I saw how wonderful they both were.

“So what’s the plan? How long until we get the fuck out of here?”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Connor went to get a wheelchair, but we’re waiting for the paperwork. They told me it would only be an hour.”

“Good. I don’t trust these people, and I’m already planning my revenge on that asshole. Did you hear what he said he did to Calista?”

“What did that pussy do?”

“He drugged her that night so she would be more compliant.”

“He’s on our ever-growing list.”

“Our?”

“Yeah, I get it. I’ve been where you are, and honestly, other than her connections to a man I don’t trust, there isn’t anything bad about the connections. We aren’t enemies with the Vitale Family.”

“We might be now.”

“What do you mean?”

“I caused her to lose her job, and like you said, she was crying and her terrible excuse for a bodyguard saw. If he tells her father, we might have a big problem.”

“Let’s worry about that another time. Besides, you’re planning to let your rabbit only run so far.”

“True. She’ll be caught soon.” I smirk.

Two hours later, I’m lying in the back of the SUV. Calista calls Claudia, and they chat on speaker. I listen to their conversation, hanging on every word like a lovesick fool. I’m kind of glad I refused the painkillers until we got to the house because I would have been passed out and missed the call. I love that she’s obviously worried about my safety. When she hangs up, my chest aches to have her by my side, but I’m not in the condition to take care of myself, let alone her. It’s probably for the best that she’s going out of town, although she doesn’t say when she’ll be back. If she takes too long, I’ll have to go get her.

“We need someone to watch over her,” I insist.

“She’s going to see her father, who is like us, but if it makes you feel better, I’ll send someone,” Jack says.

“Yes, it does. Dad could be out there, and if he even gets a whiff of my interest in her...” I can’t even think about the danger she’d be in. Damn it. Maybe Jack should have just taken her before he left.

“We’ll make it happen. Maybe we should have a talk with her father.”

“I will contact him.”

“I thought you searched for her,” Jack remarks, wondering how I hadn’t found her easily.

“The registration for the party was under a shell company,” Connor says. “We were paid outright, and then they added an extra thousand for the drinks at the table.”

They hit a bump, and I groan.

“Shit, sorry. Just try to relax. We can talk about this later. You’re supposed to take it easy, and we just pulled you out of the hospital.”

“It’s for the best, because they can’t be trusted not to flood air into my IV. You heard Calista. They fucking wanted someone to come for my ass,” I grumble.

“Still, you need to rest, so we’ll set up a spare bedroom for you and then you can sleep while we get everything together for your pursuit of Callie,” Claudia says, taking my hand and squeezing it.

“Thanks,” I sigh, doing my best to calm down. “I’d feel better if I had her number.”

“That’s fine. When we get home,” Connor says. I nod and close my eyes, letting my fatigue and the remaining morphine in my body take over.

By the time I wake up, we’re pulling through the reinforced gate at the estate. “We’re almost there. Are you hungry?” Claudia asks.

“A little.”

“I can make you something small. The notes said that you can only have a liquid diet for a few days.” They pull into the driveway and in front of Connor and Claudia’s home.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“That’s fine.” I only need enough to get through the day. If I can’t have Calista by my side at the moment, I honestly just want sleep.

My brother helps me out of the vehicle and into the house, and my bag from the hospital falls on the floor, reminding me that I have no idea what happened to my phone. “Where’s my phone?”

Connor pats my forearm after scooping up my bag. “Calm down. It’s with your belongings, but it was smashed so Jack’s grabbing you a new one.”

“Thanks,” I tell my brother.

“Let me help you to your room.”

“I’ll get cooking,” Claudia says with a cheerful enthusiasm that makes me feel a little better.

“Thanks, Claudia.” We haven’t quite hit it off, but she’s proving to be a wonderful woman and an asset to this family. I tell my brother that as we head upstairs. “She’s a great woman.”

“Thanks. I’d love to believe so. You keep being nice to her, and she might even agree to bake a wedding cake for you and Callie.”

“Fingers crossed,” I tease, but my mind goes straight to tying the knot. The thought of having Calista as my wife would be a dream come true. I remember the ring I have put away in my bedroom safe. It was something my mother gave me when I was

eighteen. She said it belonged to her mother, and she wanted me to have it. Of course, I asked why not Jack or Connor, but she said she had other gifts for them.

It was beautiful, and I've treasured it for so long.

"Find the one you love. Never marry out of duty."

I chuckled at the time because I'd never have that sense of loyalty to my father.

I lie down in bed and pass out before my sister-in-law comes up. When she does, she lightly knocks on the door, waking me. I slowly move into a sitting position, giving her a soft smile. "Thank you, Claudia."

She gently hands me the bed tray. "Do you have it?" I nod, and she releases it. I adjust the tray and then smile again at her.

Claudia straightens up and says, "Please let me know if you need anything else."

I tip my chin, giving a polite nod, and she moves to the door. "Wait," I call out.

"Yes?"

"I want to apologize, properly. You have been wonderful to my brother, and I might not have been as accepting as I should have been."

"You don't need to apologize, Ian. I understand that this entire situation is complicated. Especially everything that happened with John and my former father."

"So how are you handling that? Jack and Connor explained that situation to me."

"It's a little hard, but it explains so much. He was so in love with your mother, and

my mother's deception had ruined his hopes of stealing her away. Apparently, her death is the reason my parents split up."

"Are you serious?" I tilt my head and furrow my brows.

"Yes, my father was so devastated, and his hatred for the both of us grew. He's apologized to me for his unrelenting dismissal, but I can't say I blame him. I'd never forgive Connor for something like that, and I sure as hell wouldn't accept his child into my life."

"So do you know when this picture was taken?" I ask, taking it out of my pocket and handing it to her.

"This?" She gasps, shaking her head and smiling. "I can't believe it. He had this on our mantle, but your mom wasn't in it. It's just him. He loved to stare at this picture, and I wondered how he could be so self-absorbed. It was taken in 1981." We thought it was old because my mom is really young, the style of clothes and hair... but damn. That would put the timeframe right before I was born. My mom isn't pregnant here or at least not showing.

"So he imagined my mother at his side the entire time?" I questioned.

"I suppose so. I asked him about it once, and he grumbled that it was the best night of his life." I stare at the photo a little too long, and she gasps while looking at me.

"How old are you?" she asks me, eyes trained on my face.

I've already put two and two together as memories of the past are triggered. Images of the governor coming into my head from the television and watching my mother's face shift from happiness to sadness to blank in a flash the moment you'd ask her about it. "You think he's my father, don't you?"

She bites her lip as if she's afraid to say what she's thinking, but as I stare her down, she finally relents. "Well, you have the same stare he does."

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“It would explain why my father hated me so damn much. This was taken before my mother was pregnant with me. Do you know the exact date?”

“I’m sorry, but it was early January.” My eyes slam shut as I process the truth. There is no doubt in my mind that Governor Donovan Saunders is my father.

“Could you leave me?” I say, choking on the words as if they were too thick to get out of my throat.

“Sure. Please let me know if you need anything.” I can see the sympathy in her eyes. I’m sure she wants to ask me what I’m thinking, but right now I’m not sure what to think.

“Okay.” As soon as she’s gone, I set the fucking soup tray on the floor because I’ve lost my appetite. What the hell happened? If they were so in love, why did she stay with my father? Why did he marry another woman years later?

I need answers, and the only one who can give them to me is Saunders, who I’ve never run into. Unlike my brothers, I’ve kept my distance from him because I’m not known for my patience. What if I had killed him out of family loyalty? My mother would have been devastated and my father would have gloated. A sick, pang tears through my gut and I lose whatever I ate. Fuck.

“Ian, Ian,” Connor calls out. I hear them rushing up the stairs. They open the door and say, “Shit. We need to get you cleaned up. The ride must have fucked you up. The doctor just pulled up.”

Jack came in with the doctor and a nurse. “Let’s get you cleaned up,” a middle-aged woman says. “Can one of you boys lend me a hand in getting him in the shower?”

“He can shower?”

“Not until we prep his bandages, but once they’re properly wrapped he can wash up.”

“Good because I don’t need him stinking up my sheet with sweaty balls,” Connor teases.

“You’re always a prick.”

“Speaking of, don’t go getting excited in here,” Jack adds.

“God, you guys are assholes.”

“No, they are brothers.”

“You’d be surprised how common this is,” the nurse laughed. She prepares everything and then messes with the water. “Now come on let’s get you inside and please sit. It will be a lot easier.”

My brothers help me wash and then dress me in a pair of boxers and a tee shirt before I’m led back to bed. Claudia must have changed the sheets while the doctor and the nurse work on the equipment.

“I have to be hooked up to all of this?”

“Only for a couple of days. You’re not as good as you think you are, Mr. MacNamara.”

“You’re truly lucky to be alive,” Jack added.

“I know.” More than they realized. Calista fills my head. I miss the fuck out of her. They set me up and I lie my head down nicely. Everyone leaves me so I can rest. I close my eyes and fight off the pain that’s building, both physical and emotional.

Sleep takes me and it’s full of outrageous dreams, but when I wake up, I know one thing, and that’s you don’t let love get away. “Sorry, Calista Vitale—once I’m better, you will be mine.”

Chapter Eleven

Calista

It’s a warm but breezy day when I roll my suitcase out of the airport. My father’s driver is standing at the curb, waiting for me. I smile and say, “Hello, Tony.”

“Hop right in, Ms. Vitale.” He opens the door, and I see my dad in the car, patting the spot beside him. I grin and climb inside, throwing my arms around him.

“Daddy,” I say, hugging him tightly, unexpected tears falling from my eyes.

“Princess, who do I need to kill?” he snarls.

“No one. I’m fine. I guess I just missed you so much,” I answer, wiping away the tears with the heels of my palms. He always makes me feel like a little girl again. There is just something about being with him that makes me feel safe.

“Well, your mother is over the moon that you’re here and has a dozen things prepared for your short visit.” I roll my eyes because I’m sure she does. After they married, they only had boys, three of them before she couldn’t have any more babies. Their

marriage is a true love marriage, whereas I'm the product of an arranged one and yet she never saw me as anything other than her daughter.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Don’t be like that,” he scolds me with a smile.

“I’m looking forward to it as long as she’s not trying to set me up with anyone.” I give him a warning look. It’s not like she wants me to be married off, but she wants me to have a happily ever after like she has with my father, so she tries to introduce me to eligible men.

“Why? Is it because you and that MacNamara fellow are more than just acquaintances?” he asked with his thick, Italian eyebrow raised.

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

“No? So that trip to the hotel with him wasn’t anything?”

The color drains from my face. “You know about that?”

“You think I’d let my daughter go around unprotected?” He shakes his head and chuckles. I should have known I was being watched like a hawk.

I sit there for a moment trying to process that my father knows what I did at the hotel and with who. With who...with who...Damn it. He set it up. “That’s why you sent me to the club. I knew it. You wanted me to meet them.”

“I hoped you would meet one of them, but I hadn’t expected you two to behave so inappropriately. I thought he would speak to me before taking you to a hotel.”

“He doesn’t know who I really am, or at least he didn’t. I’m sure he knows exactly

who I am now.” I let out a deep sigh.

“Dearest daughter, you need not be so upset. I understand you hadn’t wanted to marry a man like me, but we can’t help who we’re meant to be with, Calista,” he says, cradling my hands in his. “I want you to be happy no matter who it’s with.”

“Thank you, Dad, but I’m happy to be alone for now.” That’s a boldface lie.

“I don’t want that for you. You’re too special not to share your love and to be loved, Princess.”

“Thank you, Daddy, but I believe you’re a bit biased.”

“Maybe, but I am the boss, so I’m pretty sure my opinion carries more weight.” I smirk and hug him, shaking my head.

“I love you, Daddy.”

“I love you, too.” He kisses the top of my head. It takes another ten minutes before we’re there, and he tells me all about my brothers, who are getting older. My oldest little bro is now twenty. He’s already a lot to handle and ready to take up the mantle from my father when it’s time. It scares me because it’s dangerous, but it’s better to be a tiger than a deer.

We pull into my father’s estate, and my mother and oldest brother are waiting on the porch with grins. I climb out and return the grin before running up the stairs and landing in my brother’s arms. “I missed you both,” I say.

“Maybe you should move back here,” my mother says.

“I love Chicago.”

“Maybe we could branch off there,” Michael says, brows bobbing with a smirk.

“How about no,” I grumble, jabbing him in the gut with my fist.

“Fine, but you know it would be a way to protect you.”

My dad grunts and shakes his head. “No, it would be a way to start a war. It’s not like it’s unclaimed territory. It’s Chicago, for God’s sake. There are at least three families and as far as I’m aware, one is going to be disappearing.” My brows jump as I stare at my father.

“Which one?” I ask with a gasp.

“I thought you didn’t want to know anything, Princess?” he says with a bit of snark.

“That doesn’t mean I shouldn’t be prepared, given I have to go back home.”

“The Espinoza Family.” A wave of relief washes over me.

“Come on—let’s have some lunch, and then we can talk about boys,” my mother says. I shake my head as my dad chuckles. “I’m never giving up,” she adds with a playful grin, hooking her arm around mine.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

The next morning after a peaceful day with my family, I tuck my legs under my butt and then open my laptop. Once I connect to the internet, I check my email and find one from my school. Reading it, I see an official letter attached that states I've been expelled based on unbecoming conduct while at the hospital that reflected poorly on the school.

I can't fight the tears. They're silent as they fall because I don't want my father to hear. I don't know how long I sit there, feeling numb and broken. I did nothing wrong, and Dr. Fisher used his bias to get me tossed on my ass. I couldn't believe how ridiculous he could be. As much as I want to blame Ian, I can't. Patients talk out of their asses sometimes when they are on heavy painkillers. Besides, my ties are closer to the mafia than Ian and what would happen once Dr. Fisher or the hospital saw one of my father's guards lurking or my father popping up for a visit?

My mother knocks on my bedroom door and says, "Breakfast is ready."

"I'm not hungry right now." I'm not ready to face anyone, so I close my laptop, set it aside, and then tuck myself under the covers. "Sorry, but I'm still tired."

She opens the door and peeks inside. "Jet lag?" I nod, and she smiles. "Get some rest, and we'll save the shopping for tomorrow."

"I'd like that."

"Can't wait," she squeals before closing my bedroom door.

I dodged that one just barely, but I'm not sure how long I can hold off on the news

that I've been kicked out of medical school. Once my father finds out, I'm sure all hell is going to break loose. He's not going to stand for it. Hell, I'm not sure I'm going to take it lying down. I just need a moment to grieve a bit. Goodness, I wonder how Ian's doing?

I sent a text to Claudia, wondering if Ian's recovering well. She shoots a message back with a smiley face emoji and I feel better. Then she sends another. Call any time you'd like.

I reply, Will do when I get over this jet lag and my mother's shopping sprees.

Don't let her wear you out. You promised me we'd go shopping too.

I sent her an eyeroll emoji and then tucked my phone away to visit with my siblings.

Chapter Twelve

Ian

It's been two weeks since I've been home, and I haven't seen Calista or even spoken to her. It doesn't help that I suffered a major setback, getting an infection that nearly sent me to another hospital. The doctor was able to get it under control; however, I needed to be on stronger meds that made me sleepy.

Every time I close my eyes, I dream of her standing over me as I wake. It sucks that she's not by my side. Claudia claims she hasn't been able to contact her, but I don't think she has tried. I just got my new phone with added encryption as well as high-tech security.

It's already midday and I'm tired of just waiting for life to happen, so I walk down the stairs gingerly, holding onto the railing with one arm.

“Mr. MacNamara, are you sure you should be walking around?”

“I’m sorry, but who are you?” I question, staring at her suspiciously.

“I’m the new housekeeper and cook, Sarah Camp.” The older woman is dressed appropriately for the job, a stark contrast to her predecessor who craved attention. I wonder what happened to the woman who was fawning over my brother even though he didn’t give her an ounce of attention.

I nod, and I don’t tell her to mind her business because I’m sure that they told her to watch out for me. Still, there are matters to deal with, and I’m good as long as I take breaks, “So you’re not my boss, then. Where’s my brother or his wife?”

She sighs and shakes her head. “They’re in the living room.”

I walk past her, trying to keep my balance, but the pain is intense. “Here you go,” she says, handing me a cane.

“Thank you.” She is prepared for my bullshit, and I appreciate it.

“Just don’t be too stubborn to ask for help,” she adds.

“Yes, ma’am.” I lightly dip my chin and then walk away to find my brother, who has been too busy to talk to me. Jack and Nora have been over one at a time. They haven’t come over with John because they’re afraid he’ll accidentally hit me. My injuries, although severe, didn’t hit any major organs. Still, they’re all afraid of me pushing it too much and tearing more muscle.

I turn the corner and enter the living room. “So are you having a party in here?” I ask and stop in my tracks when I see Governor Saunders sitting across from Connor and Claudia. They all look up and toward me.

“Ian,” the governor says. The look on his face is one of shock and a sense of pity. He swallows hard.

“We were just about to see if you were willing to come down,” Connor says. I raise my brow, thinking he’s full of shit.

Reading me like a book, Claudia says, “It’s true. Claudia told me about the possibility.” He shakes his head, and now I can’t unsee the resemblance. “I see a younger version of myself mixed with my darling Evelyn.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

An overwhelming sense of injustice and anger washed over me. I'm shaking just standing there. "All these years, and you never thought I was yours?"

He slams his eyes shut, swallowing hard, and I wish I could punch him in the jaw and hug him all at once. The neglect and abuse were partially his fault, but then again they were my mother's too. I had to reconcile that in my head as well. It hurt to consider that she wasn't blameless in this. She could have told me. All these years she could have said something. I was a grown ass man wondering why my father hated me. Wondering why I was singled out like a fucking bastard child and now I knew.

Finally, Saunders speaks, "I asked her the last chance I could before he isolated her, and she broke things off. She said you were your father's son. It killed me, but I believed her. I didn't want to believe her."

"She broke things off?"

"Yes, it wasn't like we were running around together every damn day. I saw her when she could get away from that scum, which wasn't often. He knew damn well that she and I were together."

"I'm surprised he let it happen."

He scoffs. "You have no idea what your piece of shit of a father did to your mother. If you think the prostitution ring started later in the organization, you're wrong. He sold her out until he realized she loved me."

“You paid to fuck my mother,” I snarl. I was the product of...I just can’t even think it.

He puts his hands up. “It wasn’t like that. I tried to keep her safe. She should have been my wife, but not all fucking things are that easy. I wanted her to leave him. Hell, I asked her to marry me.”

“You did?” Claudia asks.

“Yes. I gave her a beautiful emerald teardrop ring even though she was still with that asshole. That picture was the night she said yes. She was ready to leave him.” The ring. The one she gave me was the one my real father gave her. One you pass down to your future wife. He was saying something.

“I know why she called it quits with you,” Connor says, handing him the letter my mother left us. I close my eyes because in my anger and hate for everything. She had her reasons however painfully awful they were. She feared for her sons’ lives. She valued her kids’ lives more than her happiness.

He reads it and breaks down in pure sobs. “That fucking bastard. I want his fucking head. He stole everything from me.”

Claudia stares at us in confusion. “She didn’t leave him because he was planning to kill us kids if she did,” Connor answers her unspoken question.

“Oh my God. That’s so twisted,” Claudia says with a gasp, pressing her hand to her mouth.

“As you can see, he’s a demon,” I say. “The bastard raised me, taught me how to kill. Wanted me to kill my own father, by the way,” I chuckled and then continued, “and then he tried to turn me into Swiss cheese.”

“She sacrificed everything for you boys, and I nearly destroyed that in my rage.”

“I can understand it because if someone stole a future with Claudia from me, there is nothing I wouldn’t do. I planned to kill you,” Connor confesses to Saunders while I just stare in silence. My mother made the choice she had to out of motherly devotion, even if it broke her.

Governor Saunders continues. “A part of me has wanted to die for so long. My revenge has been the only thing keeping me alive, but now...” He looks up at me, and I understand. He lost a lifetime with my mother—and with me. I have a father who hates me, and one that never knew I was his.

Saunders looks at me with pure regret on his face. “I’m so sorry, Ian. I would have gone down the dark road, destroying that fucker. She wanted me to stay away, telling me her feelings had changed and that she still cared for that asshole.”

“We all knew there was no love between them,” Connor says. It does Saunders some good as he releases a sigh.

“I think I need to lie back down.” There is no way I can stand. All this information has fucked up my head.

“I’ll walk you upstairs,” Connor says.

“Okay.”

He looks back at his wife, and she nods, giving the okay to be alone with her father—or the man that raised her. “I hate this,” Connor mutters. “But I wouldn’t have met Claudia if this shit didn’t go down.”

“I understand. I just need some rest. Any news on our MacNamara situation?”

“No. He’s in the wind, but we’ll get him. Jack’s doing his best to find some leads. He doesn’t have many allies, so it won’t be long before someone gives him up for a price.”

“What about that detective that he was talking to?” I ask as Connor opens the bedroom door.

“Jack went to speak with her today and get a feel for her.” He fixes my bedding.

I nod and then take a seat on the edge of the bed. It’s not so easy to move my left leg onto the mattress, so I have to take my time. Connor readies himself to catch or assist me, but I manage it just fine. “Okay,” I grunt as I adjust my body to a comfortable position. “Thanks for everything.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“You’re my brother, and I love you. Get better, and we’ll destroy the bastard and everyone who helped him.”

“I love you too.” He hands me my pills and water. Once I take them, I lie back all the way and close my eyes. “See you later.”

“I’m just a call away.” He points to my phone on the nightstand and then walks out of my room.

I pick up my new cell phone and check the features. It’s an upgraded version of my old one. I play with it for about ten minutes, but the meds kick in and my eyes shutter. Before I pass out, I set it back on the nightstand.

“Fuck,” I roar. A terrible nightmare causes me to shoot up in bed. I groan, realizing I moved too fast for my broken body.

“Ian,” my brother shouts through the door.

“I’m good,” I groan.

“I’m coming in.” He enters my room and turns on the light. It must be late because he’s in only his boxers.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to disturb your sleep,” I apologize.

“It’s cool, bro. I was wondering when the nightmares would begin. It happened with Claudia, but I’m not climbing into bed with you.” He chuckles.

I flip him off and say, “It wasn’t about the shooting, or at least not that exactly. It was about Calista and her dying at the hands of him.” I swallow hard, choking on the last bit.

“We won’t let that happen.” I believe him because they’ll do anything to protect our real family. Calista is going to be mine, which makes her family.

“Damn right, we won’t. She can’t come back to Chicago, and she can’t be near me no matter how much I want to snatch her ass up,” I reply, confessing the idea that’s been on my mind for weeks.

“Well, it’s good that she’s still in New York.”

“She is?” He nods. “That’s good,” I say, thinking of a plan. “Do you think we can trust her father?”

“I don’t know, but when it comes to Callie’s safety, Claudia told me he’s extremely protective. Hell, Jack saw a guard at the hospital talking to her while she was in the parking lot.”

“A guard,” I snarl.

“Calm down. We already mentioned that to you, but I’m guessing the drugs were still in your system. Anyway, she sent him packing. Now what do you want to do?”

“We need to find that piece of shit, but first, I need to speak with her father.”

“That’s fine. I can get the number from Claudia. I think she has it, or she can get it.”

I nod. “When does the doctor arrive today? I need to know when I can get back to working out and target practice.”

“Around ten. Maybe you should try to get some sleep because Jack said they are stopping by today as well. It’s going to be crazy around here. I don’t want it to be too much. They’re bringing John as well.”

“I miss him,” I say, wondering how he’ll react to me.

“He’s not the only one coming. Saunders is coming back.”

“It’s weird. I haven’t really processed that he’s actually my biological father.”

“Hey, it explains why you don’t look like us. It’s not a big deal to us. You’re still our brother in every single way. As far as I see it, you at least had a father who loved our mother.” He rubs his face and sighs. It’s the damnable thing about it. She had someone who loved her, but the devil guarded the gate. As much as I hate it, I have to get Calista on the same page as me. If she doesn’t feel the same, it’ll be terrible. I don’t need to repeat my mother’s pain. Still, I’m not giving up on us, and I’ll treat her like the queen she is.

“Damn right. I can’t even imagine just leaving Calista for another man to touch, or kiss, or fuck.” I growl, getting more and more annoyed by the second.

“Tell me about it. It had to be hard, but remember, she was never his. She was married to Dad, and Mom had to be the one to file for divorce. We know that even after all these years, he wouldn’t let her do it.” I want to punch something, but I can’t without opening the wounds in my arm and chest. “I know, I know. We’re going to help you get better before we hunt him down and torture that fuck. He deserves to die.”

“Damn right. Thank you.” There’s a light knock on the door.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Claudia, I’m coming right now,” he calls out, tilting his head to the door with a smile.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, baby.”

“She’s amazing.”

“I know. Get some rest. The more you rest, the sooner we can scoop up your amazing girl.”

“I will. Goodnight.” He walks to the door, and I shout, “Goodnight, Claudia.”

“Goodnight, Ian.”

I pop my meds, and sleep comes a little slower this time since I slept the day away, but it’s part of the recovery process. It’s almost nine when I wake up again. It’s only because the housekeeper knocks on the door, bringing me some breakfast and more water to take my meds.

“Good morning, Mr. MacNamara.”

“Good morning, Sarah. Please call me Ian.”

She smirks at me, setting the tray down. “Are you feeling better this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want the curtains open?” She moves toward them.

“No, thanks. You’ve done enough for me.”

“I have a son your age, and I’d hate to see him in your position. He’s serving in the military, so it does scare me.”

“I’m sorry. I hope he’s out of danger, but I know that’s like hoping for sunlight at midnight.”

“I never heard it like that,” she says with a soft laugh.

“Sorry, I’m still on my meds.” I spin my wrist with my finger pointed at my head, joking that I’ve gone crazy.

She smiles and fixes the covers at my feet. “Please let me know if you need anything. The doctor should be here soon.”

“Thank you.” I dig into my breakfast, and it’s fabulous. The eggs are perfectly cooked, and the bacon is just the right crispness. I don’t have a cook at home. I only hired a cleaning crew to come in once a month to do a deep dive. Normally, I wash my own clothes or take them to the dry cleaner’s.

Unlike my brothers, I travel a lot, working on my side ventures. I co-own a casino in Vegas, which keeps me so damn busy. Fuck—I need to check in with my business partner. I’m sure Jack already took care of that for me. The guys are incredible and so damn reliable.

I finish my delicious breakfast and then take my non-drowsy meds, leaving the

drowsy ones until after the doctor comes. Luckily, most of my pain is manageable. I haven't had too much, as long as I'm not moving too fast or in awkward positions. Still, I need to get back on track or I'll be a sitting duck. We don't know who my father has working for him or how dangerous he is now that he's out on his own.

I set my tray off to the side and then move into a seated position with my feet off the bed, letting my body stretch before I attempt a trip to the bathroom. Today isn't so bad, and I'm able to walk without too much pain. After a quick clean up, I limp to the window and take a peek outside. It's different to be staying at my brother's place because it's a completely different angle of the property, but other than that, it feels like I'm at a comfortable, inviting hotel.

A hard knock on the door takes me away from the window. "Come in," I called out, moving to the bed a little faster than before, but still struggling. Taking a seat on the edge, I wait impatiently for good news.

"Hello, Mr. MacNamara. How are you feeling today?"

"Anxious to get back to my normal routine."

"I can understand that, but it's going to be a while. You went through something extremely traumatic, both physically and emotionally."

"The emotion I can toss to the side, but it's the lack of my range of motion that's the problem," I admit. Since my attacker's not my real father and he's always hated me, the attempt on my life didn't have the impact that it should have.

"Let me take a look, and then we'll go from there."

"Okay."

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

He begins by listening to my heart and then my lungs. His physical exam is pretty routine until he gets to my wounds. The bandages have to come off, and so it takes a little longer.

“Most of these are looking really good. Although I think we’ll need an x-ray to see what it looks like underneath. You had two broken ribs, which is probably what is causing most of the pain when you move. The wounds on your arm and your chest have completely closed up. The one on the back of your leg needs more time. I’d recommend lying on your left side.”

“Is there a problem with it?”

“No, you’re healing rather fast, which is fantastic because that prevents infection, and we don’t want another one of those.”

“What about my exercise and training?”

“I’d say no more than walking for the next week. After that, we can bring in a physical therapist to work with you.” He gives me a few more instructions and a refill on my medicine before leaving.

Connor, who was standing by the door, listening but not interrupting, walks him out.

I’m grateful that things are going well. So, I wrap up my open wounds and then take a shower. Connor needs a massive thanks for giving me the room with the walk-in shower that has a bench. It’s perfect for right now. By the time I get out, I feel so exhausted, but I don’t let that send me back to bed. After getting dressed, I slip on

some clothes ever so gingerly and then make my way downstairs. A walk outside would be nice.

“What’s up?”

“I wanted that number.”

“Sure. Here it is. I know people,” she says with a wink.

I take my walk and then go sit in the enclosed yard where Cain roams around, digging and wagging his tail. Claudia brings me out some coffee. “I’m going to call him now.”

“Good. You need to get the hard part over with.”

“I think Calista is the harder part.”

“I don’t think so.” She winks and walks off. I don’t make the call until the patio doors are closed.

“Vitale,” he answers on the third ring.

I clear my throat and say, “Mr. Vitale, my name is Ian MacNamara.”

“Ah, yes. How are your injuries?” I’m shocked by the civility and concern.

“I’m recovering.”

“Good, so then you’ll finally have the balls to come and talk to me like a man soon,” he says, taking me by surprise.

“Excuse me?”

“You think you can fuck my little girl like some whore on the street and think I won’t expect you to marry her? I don’t take that kind of disrespect well, Mr. MacNamara,” he barks out.

Damn it. She didn’t reveal that she was a mafia princess and that her father would string me up by the balls for fucking her tight cunt. God, I miss that sexy body in my hands and my cock buried deep in her while she screams my name.

I take a sip of my coffee before I give him a response. “And I meant no disrespect by it. If I had my way, your daughter would have been my fiancée at the very least by now,” I inform him, wanting to clear the air. If he wasn’t her father and I was one hundred percent, I wouldn’t take his shit.

“You had weeks before your attack, so what happened?”

“Didn’t she tell you?” If she told him we fucked, then I’m sure she explained that she ran out.

“No, she didn’t reveal anything to me. My men watched her leave with you, and I expected that she wouldn’t have gone with you unless she was serious.”

“Me, too, but she wants nothing to do with me. She made that clear the last time I saw her.”

“If that’s the case, why are you calling me?”

“Because that doesn’t mean I want the same thing. She’s mine until the day I die, and I’ll do everything I can to protect her.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Who do you believe she needs protection from? The men who attacked you?”

“Yes.”

“My daughter has protection on her twenty-four hours a day. I won’t allow anyone to harm her. The choices she made with you were at her own discretion and, as she’s an adult, I didn’t have my men intervene.”

“That’s fucking good because that would have been a waste of good fucking soldiers. I would have ended every single one of them.”

“Good to know. I’m hosting a party for my daughter in three weeks. She doesn’t know it, but there will be several mafia families here as well prominent men and women. If you’re feeling up to it, consider this my invitation.”

“I’ll be there,” I snarl.

He gives a short laugh. “I thought you would. I’ll send you the details as we get closer to the event. I truly expect to see you there. Despite what you may believe, she doesn’t hate you.”

“Thanks for that.”

“Get better. Three weeks isn’t a long time to deal with all the sharks.”

“I’m well aware of it.”

“That’s good. I expect you to be sharp and also in control.”

“I won’t start a war, but I’ll finish it.”

“It looks like you weren’t so good at it the last time.”

“I was ambushed by the man that raised me,” I say. “I won’t make that mistake again.”

“Pinche guey. Let me know if you need some assistance. I have people that are good at hunting fuckers down.”

“Thanks.”

“See you in three weeks.”

“Yes, Sir.” I end the call, and then slide the phone onto the small patio table. Rolling my head, I gently work out the kinks and then take a drink of my coffee.

The patio door opens and Connor says, “They’re here.”

I check the time on my phone, and it’s already eleven. Damn. I’m going to be emotionally drained before the middle of the day.

Today is our first visit with Saunders and John meeting. I sit on one chair as my father enters Jack’s home. We’re all sitting in the living room while the housekeeper welcomes him. We decided it was best to have it here because of John’s comfort.

“Calm down, Jack,” Nora says. “John can sense your distress.”

“What if he wants to take him from us?” he growls.

“He has to go through a massive custody battle that I won’t let him win.”

“But John is his son.”

That stops all the hushed conversation as Saunders enters the room. “Hello. Good afternoon.” He looks more nervous than I’d ever imagined. His eyes darted to me, and he asked, “How are you, Ian?”

“I’m a lot stronger, and I’m almost back to my full workout routine.”

“That’s good to hear. I’d like to talk to you after this. Privately, of course.” I nod, knowing there’s something I want to mention, too. In all the years that I’ve possessed the ring, I never mentioned it to anyone. Not even to my brothers because I didn’t want them to get jealous. Now, I know it was meant for me because it came from my father.

“Saunders,” Jack snarls.

“I don’t know what to call you. I understand that it’s not your fault, but it’s hard, given your name, and it actually makes my stomach turn.” Jack was named after my father, a man who Saunders couldn’t hate more.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Well, let’s just say I don’t really care for you, either.”

“I’m sorry about everything. It’s taken me a lot of time to come to terms with everything and my resentment.”

“Understood, but you’re not here to see us. You’re here to meet John.” He points to our brother, who is on the floor, ignoring us as he plays with his cars.

Saunders was informed before he came over that it takes John to initiate contact or conversation, what little he can say or gesture.

“John,” Nora calls out. He looks up and then around the room. Suddenly his eyes are focused on Saunders. He doesn’t make eye contact, but he does stare his way. We wait for him to react as Saunders holds his palm out. John stands and snags two of his cars.

What surprises all of us is John’s willingness to engage our biological father. He sits the toy car in Saunders’s hand and starts to run his other car on Saunders’s arm. It’s actually quite amazing.

I watch Jack tense up.

“I’m not going to harm him,” my bio dad says to Jack.

“He’s not worried about that.”

“You think I’m going to steal him from you?”

“Why not? He’s yours. The last piece of my mother.”

“You’re right that he is just that, but I’m sixty-two, and on my last term.”

“You’re retiring?”

“Yes, but even still, I’m not fit to raise a young child. I wasn’t a good father when I was younger.” He looks over at Claudia.

“You weren’t bad, but...”

“I know. I was neglectful. The one thing a father can do for his child is give him the best life. I’m sorry that I missed out on so much with both of you,” he says, taking a long look at me. He addresses Jack and Nora. “I am aware of all you’ve done to find and care for my son. I have no way to even thank or explain what that means to me. If I had known...” He chokes on his words.

“Would you have taken him then?”

“Hell, yes. Evelyn loved me, and our sons were a product of that love.” John decides to put his head on Saunders’s forearm, so he stops what he was going to say and scoops up John, who lies on his chest. Tears flow down his face. “I’m sorry, Evie,” he whispers, kissing John’s head.

“Would you like a drink?”

“Yes, please.”

“Whiskey or vodka?”

“Vodka. Sorry, but I haven’t had whiskey since I met your mother. It was a reminder

of your father.” The pain on his face is real. John actually falls asleep lying in our father’s embrace.

“So do you want to talk about custody?” Jack asks, handing him the drink from the sideboard.

“Are you trying to give me back my son?” Saunders grows tense, and John whines a little.

“Maybe I should lay him down.” Nora takes him from the governor’s arms and then lays him on the sofa so he’s still in the room with us. She’s perfect when it comes to John’s needs.

“No, but I’m assuming you’ll want to see him.”

“I would.” He looks at me and says, “I’d like to see both of you.”

“We can make that happen,” I say. As much turmoil as we’ve had with him in the past, knowing the truth just makes me long to know more about the man who gave me life and made my mother happy.

“Can we have a word?”

“Yes,” I say, standing without the usual pain. Therapy is working miracles. “Let’s go into my brother’s office.” I lead him that way and once the doors close, I ask him to take a seat. “Please.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Is this your way of trying to get rid of me?”

“No. Despite our pasts, we don’t want that anymore.”

“So I want to apologize to you. For years I wanted answers, but you seemed like a ghost in the family.”

“That’s because I was. He hated me, beat me, and my efforts to make him proud never worked. It’s probably because he knew the truth.”

“Yes, it’s probably why all of your images online aren’t of you. They’re your brothers.”

“That’s partially my choice. It was a way to do my job without making myself visible. People know me by name. I’m the Keyser Söze of the family,” I say with a wink.

“Great film, and I suppose you’re right about that. Unfortunately, you need to be careful. I’ve been trying to find hints of him, and I might have a lead.” He refers to my father with such disgust, and I can’t blame him because I feel the same way.

Chapter Thirteen

Calista

It’s been three weeks, and my parents are thrilled that I’m staying here with them. Unfortunately, I don’t feel the same way. I really want to be back in Chicago, but I’m

not sure why. All my friends are in the medical program, so it would be painful to learn how it's going. I'm lying to myself because I'm more than aware of the reason I want to return to my tiny apartment. If I go back and step into the club, would he find out? What if he took my words to heart and moved on?

I'm sitting in the beautiful garden, but I'm having a hard time seeing the beauty. The coffee in front of me is turning lukewarm as I take the stirrer and slowly make circles as my thoughts roam back to the same person. In his delusional state, he wanted to marry me, but I know that's crazy. Waking up after a long surgery can make people a bit loopy, and I couldn't take his words seriously. We're not right for each other, and he hasn't even tried to contact me before or after the attack. My heart aches, and it shouldn't.

"Sweetheart, can we speak with you?" My dad and mom stand there with a hopeful tip of their lips, as if they're afraid I'll say no.

"Sure," I say, sitting up properly and taking my foot off the chair in front of me.

They sit down, and my mom grabs my hand in hers. "We're worried about you."

"I'm fine," I lied.

My dad's jaw tightens as he slowly shakes his head. "No mentias, hija. Don't lie to me. No, you're not."

"I suppose I'm not good right now," I admit.

"I'm about to kill that doctor for destroying your success. I know you're a brilliant woman, and you can be anything you want."

"Don't kill him. He's an asshole and if he gets his bad karma, I don't want it to be

because of me.”

“Fine,” my dad huffs, lips twisting in annoyance.

“You know, we have schools here. We can get you in easily.” I smile because he means well, and if I wasn’t falling for a mobster in Chicago, I might have taken the offer.

“Thank you, but I want to go back to Chicago.”

“Is that really a good idea? There’s nothing left,” my mother says.

I sit up straighter, trying to appear in control of my situation. “I could always go see my grandparents.”

My mom tilts her head and says, “They’re coming to visit this week, sweetie.”

“Oh. Well, I miss my apartment,” I lied. There’s only one thing I miss about Chicago, or at least there’s only one reason I want to return, and I hope that they don’t catch on.

“Stop with the lies. You miss that Irish bastard.”

I attempt to lie, but I just shake my head and take a drink of my now cold coffee. “We’re going to have a party in two weeks and have some special guests coming, so you need to lighten up and get fitted for a pretty dress.”

“A party?”

“Yes. It means shopping,” my mom squeals.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Yes, loves. You both can have some fun together.”

“Please tell me you want to hit the shops with me this week.” She clasps her hands, begging me with her eyes. I nod, and she cheers and then throws her arms around me.

“I can’t believe I just agreed to this,” I say, shaking my head and smiling. This is going to be an adventure. Maybe it’s what I need...to forget the man I don’t even know.

We had to delay things a couple of days because the weather got a little shitty and we were slated to have thunderstorms that put the city in a chokehold. It was nothing like the storms in Chicago, but the traffic is more congested here, and it makes things messy.

Now we’re at one of the most lavish stores in all of Manhattan. I don’t feel overwhelmed because I grew up with this, but still, I’m not in the best humor.

“Mom, how does this look?” I ask, having tried on three dresses that she didn’t care for, and from the look on her lovely face, this was a no-go as well.

“Darling, that’s a little too plain for a girl like you.”

“Well, I’m not trying to attract attention.”

“Honey, you’re going to have heads turning with a sack on, but still, we’re having so

many ladies and as your father's daughter, it's best you look like the belle of the ball."

"I see." There's nothing more insidious than the wealthy letting their females loose on all the available men. The ladies want the men with the largest pockets, and the men want the hottest wife. Luckily, I am just there to show my face because I have no intention of chasing down a man.

I search through the dresses, and one in particular catches my eye. This time, I try on the dress I'd like Ian to see me in. I know he'd love to tear it off me. It screams power and class while still being sensuous. The material is barely held on by a few strings and then it wraps around the neck, leaving my back open.

I step out into the private viewing area to stare in the mirrors, and my mother's mouth drops. "Now that screams 'I'm a mafia princess,' but I'm sure your father is going to lose his mind when he sees you in it."

I view myself from head to toe, and I'm impressed. I never imagined that I'd look like a goddess in this gold number. A slinky strap wraps around the thigh in a criss-cross pattern.

"You need jewelry to go with this outfit. It's perfect." I slip inside the changing room and put on my regular clothes while my mom finds more things to buy me.

By the time we leave the shop, I feel like we're being followed. I count the number of men that give me that mafia henchmen vibe; it totals five. It's strange, but it's probably just my dad's men keeping a better watch on us. "Mom, how many people does dad have on us?"

"Three. Why?"

I wonder if I should tell her or not, because I don't want her to worry. We're almost to the car when my phone rings. I pull it out and smile. It's been a long time since Claudia and I spoke. When she told me about Ian's setback, I gave her some tips while I tried to hold back my tears. Still, she said she'd call when he was better. She did, but I didn't hear from him and then I dropped my phone, shattering it.

"Hey, girl, what's going on? It's been a long time."

"Sorry, my phone broke, and the replacement didn't have my original contacts."

"So it's totally my fault for not calling. My bad," she apologizes. "So what are you up to?"

"I'm out shopping with my mom."

"Awesome. I wish I was out shopping, but I'm baking a cake. We're having a wedding here soon."

"A wedding? Who is getting married?" God, I hope that Ian isn't engaged or anything.

"Jack and Nora. They're finally about to get hitched. It's only been postponed twice now."

"Well, that's wonderful. I'd love to see a pic of the cake when it's finished. I'm sure it's going to be spectacular."

"Thanks, and I hope so. They've talked up my work so much that I need to do them justice."

"I'm sure it will be fabulous. You make the most beautiful designs, and the flavors of

your cakes are always delicious.” I love having her cupcakes. I picked some up and brought them into class one day. Everyone devoured them, and I gave them her business card. It’s a shame what happened to her business.

When she came into the hospital with the injury, I wasn’t there, but they talked about it. No one liked her fiancé. Well, he’s her ex-fiancé now. “I’ve got to get going, more to bake. I just wanted to see how you’re doing.”

“Thanks. It was nice talking with you.” I end the call and put the phone in my bag so I can speak with my mom.

“So, was that Claudia?”

“Yes, she’s making me want dessert.”

“We’ll stop at the little bakery we like before we head back to the house.”

We do just that, and it’s so tasty that we sneak bites of our cupcakes before we get back to the house, giggling all the way home. As we exit the vehicle, I smile and give her a one-armed hug. “Mom, you actually make me look forward to the party.”

“Ah, thank you, sweetheart. You are the only reason I love shopping. Buying you pretty things makes me so happy.” I give her a hug as we head up the steps and into the house.

“There are my two favorite people,” he says with a grin on his face. I’ve truly missed all of them.

“Dad, you’re going to get the boys jealous.” I smile and pat his forearm.

“Please, we already know,” my brother says, snagging the box of treats from my arms.

“Hey,” I gripe.

“Hell, if you’re the favorite, I might as well get something out of it.”

Ian

Finally, the day has come for Nora and Jack to tie the knot. A tinge of jealousy takes me by surprise. I'm not upset that they're getting married, it's more about the fact that I'm not. The last time Claudia spoke with Calista, she didn't even ask about me while I want to know every damn detail of her life and have my men reporting back to me.

My man calls me for an early morning report. "Sir, she doesn't leave her father's house often and if so, it's with one of her brothers or her parents."

"That's good. Any non-familial males making an appearance?"

"Yes, but we can't get into the house to check."

"Good work. I'll get the rest of the intel another way."

Before I can call her father, he calls me. "Hey, tell your pricks to keep their distance. My men almost nabbed them today when Calista caught wind of their presence and was frightened."

"Frightened?" I snarled. The fact that she'd been upset by them makes my blood boil. He should shoot them in the fucking kneecaps for that.

"Yes. She's aware that my men were there, but the extras were unknown, and she was worried that it was trouble. She told me when she got home today after an outing with her brother. Now, us men are aware of their presence, but I won't have my daughter scared, unless you want me to tell her that you sent men to keep an eye on her because you don't trust my men to protect her."

"It's not that."

“No, you want pictures and recaps of her day,” he says with a chuckle.

Sir, I promise that I’m not trying to undermine you or even be perverted.”

“Calm down—I know. You need it for your peace of mind, especially with your father out there.”

“Exactly.”

“Any luck?”

“Not anything my brothers will divulge. They are worried about my recovery.”

“I’m sure they are, and so is Callie.”

That’s news to me. “Is she?”

“She won’t outright admit it, but you’re the only reason she wants to return to Chicago.”

“She will, soon.”

“Good. Now that that’s settled, I have messaged you the time and location of the event. It’s formal, and you can bring your family if you wish,” he informs me.

“Thank you, I will.”

He ends the call, and then I finish getting dressed for the wedding.

When I exit my bedroom, the house smells incredible, like a bakery in full swing. I know that Claudia is running all of her baking out of the house, so it normally smells fantastic, but today is a little extra. My movements are so much better after weeks of physical therapy that I no longer need my cane. I head downstairs, and the smell grows. I knock on the kitchen door, not wanting to collide with anyone, and Connor opens the door. “Good morning. Damn, who knew you cleaned up well?”

“Fuck off. So that is what smells delicious.” I stare at the three-tiered cake that Claudia is delicately adding roses to the bottom layer of.

“I can’t wait for a taste.”

“At least there is someone here who appreciates my work.”

“I appreciate it, trouble. Hell, save one of those bags of frosting for later, and I’ll lick it off your body.” He slides up behind her.

“Get away before I spray you with this frosting.” Connor wisely backs up. “If this

cake is ruined, it's on you."

"I'm not getting on Nora's bad side."

"Amen to that. Then we have to deal with Jack."

"Who has to deal with me?" he says, coming into the kitchen as well.

"Boys, it's getting a little crowded."

"Well, I'm hungry," I grumble at the same time that my stomach does.

"Ugh. Sarah is picking up breakfast and will be back in five minutes. You can grab some coffee, though." Each of us goes to the fully brewed pot and grabs some.

"So what are you doing here, Jack?"

"Trying to avoid sneaking in on my wife this morning."

"She's not your wife yet," I tease.

"Don't be jealous because you still have to wait."

"Why you got to be an asshole like that for? Hurting my feelings and shit," I say, pressing my hand to my chest. My brothers crack up, laughing at my misery.

"So what time are you guys leaving tomorrow?" Jack asks.

"Well, if you can have the private jet ready by ten, that would be great."

He nods and says, "Sounds good to me. I'll let them know. Is it just the three of

you?”

“No. We’ll take two guards with us, and we have three already there.”

“So it’s going to be a full flight home?”

“I wouldn’t say full. The plane fits up to thirty people.”

“That’s fair enough, but how much shit is she bringing with her?”

“Probably not much more than she took with her to begin with. Her apartment’s here.”

“Yeah, and she’s been there for over a month. Your guys told you that she goes shopping a lot with her mother.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“I suppose that’s true, but you know damn well the plane holds plenty.”

“You’re right. I’m just fucking with you because I’m nervous as shit.”

“What the hell are you nervous for?”

“Let me see... every time I’ve tried to marry Nora, something’s come up. Yes, it hasn’t been that long since we’ve been together, but it doesn’t matter. I feel like something’s going to go wrong.” He slams the coffee pot hard into its slot on the maker.

A loud huff followed by the sound of her icing bag hitting the counter causes us to turn to look at Claudia, who is clearly pissed off. “What is going to go wrong is if you guys don’t get out of my kitchen right now, I’m going to hit you with some cake frosting.”

“We’re going, we’re going. Damn, you’re sexy when you’re angry,” Connor says, smirking as he leaves the kitchen with us.

“She’s going to pay for that shit later, isn’t she?” Jack says, chuckling as he lifts his drink to his lips. I shake my head and then drink from my cup before we enter the living room.

As we take a seat, Connor smirks and then says, “Oh, yes, she is, and it’s going to be so much fun.” He rubs his hands together, biting down on his lip.

“So how much time do we have before we have to be at the church?” I ask.

“We have two hours, and then it’s time for the reception at your house,” Jack says.

My house is the farthest back from the front gates, and it has a large unused ballroom. Hell, most of my house is unused, so we decided it was best to have it there. The caterers and the decorators are heavily at work. This is the last day that I’ll be staying at Connor’s place. My strength is almost back to normal as is my flexibility. Still, I need more time, even though we don’t have it. When it comes to our enemies, we have no idea when they’ll strike.

“Good, then we need to get you ready.”

“Cain,” Claudia shouts from the kitchen.

Connor’s out of his seat and into the kitchen. We follow and see the dog licking a dropped bag of icing.

“Damn it, Cain. Come here.”

“Please tell me you have more,” Jack says.

“Yes, I do, and hopefully it’s enough because I haven’t even gotten ready yet, and making more will cut into my time.”

“Do what you have to. We still have to leave by eleven forty-five.”

“Thanks. Now get him out of here before he sends the cake onto the floor.”

“Come on, boy. Let’s go take a walk.” I led him out back to the yard. “Run amok, now.”

I check my watch and see we have plenty of time before the wedding begins, but just

in case, I set a timer. After that's complete, I take a look at the gallery on my phone and the fifty pictures of my beautiful Calista. She's perfection.

With each image I scroll past, I relive the moment I first saw her in the club. I didn't want a soul to breathe around her. Yet, she's in the largest, most populated city in the world where men can speak to and get near my woman. Her father gave me all the hope I needed. The way she screamed my name plays in my head. Calista moaning my name has kept me going for the past six weeks. I can't wait to see her again, to hold her, and I'm not letting anyone else get in the way.

"Hey there, Ian. It's time to get rolling." I check the time on my phone and am stunned. I've been daydreaming about Calista for over forty minutes.

"Thanks," I sigh, closing the app and then tucking my phone into my suit jacket.

"How are you feeling?" Connor asks.

"I'm good. Tomorrow can't come soon enough."

"I'm sure it can't." He clasps my shoulder and gives me an understanding nod. There is a team of people to help load the cake into the catering van so that it's set up for our return. Today should have about two hundred guests. I'm not looking forward to any of it, but it might give us a chance to find out more about my missing target. The second we have a lock on his whereabouts, he is a dead man.

"Sorry I'm late with the food," Sarah says, hustling into the room. "The caterers are outside and waiting for the cake. They stopped me to ask questions that I don't have answers to."

"Thanks for this," I say, taking the bags from her.

“Not a problem. It’s such a special day.”

“Where’s Connor?”

“He’s helping Claudia get ready.”

“Oh, yeah. Helping, all right. He better make it quick,” I say as I roll my eyes and chuckle.

“Come on—you know it will be over quick,” Jack teases.

“They’ll be down fast because she doesn’t want her cake to be ruined.” We nod, and then Cain comes up to me, rubbing his head on my bad leg.

“Whoa, no, Cain,” Jack yells, trying to shoo him away.

I wave my brother off because I’m good. Frankly, it’s a good test of my strength.

“Come here, boy.”

“Ian, your suit. Nora is going to finish the job if you show up with dirt on your suit.”

“I need to hurry up and scarf this down because I don’t have a lot of time to get ready,” Jack says, opening the bags like a starved man.

“Where is your suit?”

“It’s in Connor’s office so it’s away from the dog. Can I use your room to change in?”

“Sure, why not?”

“I want to make sure I have everything I need.” He runs his hand through his hair.

“Shit, I feel like I forgot something.”

“I’m sure we can get it with no problem at all.” We both eat quickly, avoiding conversation so that we can get a move on.

“Excuse me, but is Claudia around?” Sarah asks.

“We’re coming,” Connor shouts from the stairwell, buttoning up his dress shirt. Claudia scurries behind him in a pretty pink dress that she and Nora picked out.

Jack’s phone rings, and he answers it while chewing on a bite of his breakfast sandwich. “Hey, what’s up? Yeah, come get him. No, better yet, Connor’s going to come get him.”

“What’s going on?” I ask when he hangs up.

“That was her brother. John’s going a little bit stir crazy over there, and Nora’s trying to get dressed but he doesn’t trust anybody else.”

“Is your truck out front? Or did you walk?”

“It’s out front.” Jack tosses him the keys, and he rushes out. John’s car seat is in his truck. We should all have a spare, now that I’m thinking about it.

“Good. We can have a nice picture with all you boys together.” Claudia waves a digital camera around.

“Hopefully,” I mutter, knowing she’s going to have a hard time getting the picture

she wants. “We all know that it’s going to be hard for John to sit still and take a photo.”

“Well, we’ll get what we get,” she adds. That’s a great way to look at it. Whatever photo we manage will be worth remembering. A smile comes to my face thinking about it.

“I’ve got to change.” Jack goes into the office and grabs the travel bag with his suit and heads up to the bedroom, while I relax on the sofa waiting for everyone to return.

“So are you okay?” Sarah asks.

“Yeah, why?”

“You look sad.”

I give her a fake smile and say, “No, I’m good.” I’ll be even better tomorrow.

“Please let me know if you need anything.” She turns to Claudia and says, “Mrs. MacNamara, can I have a word with you? The catering company has questions, and I don’t know what to tell them.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Well, let’s get them answered so we can party all night long.” She leaves the room with Sarah, and they meet with the catering crew who comes back in a minute later with a large empty cart for all the desserts and the cake that Claudia made.

“It’s almost too sad that we have to wait for the desserts.”

Claudia comes toward me and places a cupcake in my hand. “Here you go.”

“Thank you for spoiling me.” She’s been absolutely amazing to me since I was hurt. She smiles and gives me a hug.

Just then, Connor walks in and snarls. “What the hell is going on?”

“Calm down,” she says.

“You give a hug and a cupcake? That’s bullshit.”

“You’re the one who doesn’t like sweets, but you get all my kisses. Well, almost all of them.” She leans down as John runs to her legs, giving them a squeeze. She kisses his cheek.

“You all get yourselves together,” Jack grumbles, running down the stairs. “We need photos and then to get to the church,” he adds, looking handsome and nervous at the same time.

I reach out and take my brother’s hand, and then he spots my cupcake. “After the pictures.” Claudia snatches it from my hand and puts it on the mantel where John

can't reach.

I sit him on my lap, and he thankfully doesn't try to slide off. Jack and Connor flank my opposite sides, behind the sofa.

Claudia moves behind the coffee table and then says, "Smile." We all do, but John is focused on my lapels. She calls his name, but he doesn't acknowledge her. We're able to snap our fingers and get him to look forward for half a second.

"That's good," she says. "I've got enough shots."

"Great, because we have to get going."

"Come on, John." I get up with him in my arms, and everyone is looking on with curious expressions. "What?"

"You are moving so well now. You'd hardly know that something happened to you, if we weren't familiar with you."

"Thanks. It's due to all of your help."

"You're welcome, little bro, but it's not just us. You wanted to get better, and that's what did it," Jack says, giving me a one-armed side hug.

"We better get going. I haven't even helped Nora at all." Claudia is completely frazzled.

"Girl, you just did all the baking, and she has her sister-in-law. As soon as we get to the church, you can meet with her in the bride's room," Jack says.

We hop in two different vehicles with added security leading and following us. Once

we reach the church, Connor can't keep Claudia in the SUV. She's out before it comes to a stop.

He panics and jumps out after her, but there are guards at the entrance, and he calms down. We are on alert at the moment, and her excitement could have been dangerous. Jack Senior could be anywhere with his allies lurking in the shadows. We have many other crime families coming today. The enemy list is small, but it could grow into a war if something should happen.

"She's going to give me a stroke," Connor says as we enter the church.

"What happened?"

"She wanted to get to Nora as soon as possible." He rolls his eyes while smiling.

"Let's get this show on the road," Jack orders. We all walk into the nave to a large gathering of friends and associates. Nora's family that were invited are at the front on one side while the rest gather around in the other pews.

We receive smiles as we reach the front. John is with Jack until the music begins and then Connor scoops him up. The doors open, and Nora walks toward the altar on her brother's arm. Jack swallows hard, and we all smile as John shouts, "Mama."

The wedding guests all sigh and cheer as he pushes out of Connor's arms and runs up to Nora, who takes his hand. "Come on, walk me to Jack," she says.

The ceremony is beautiful. Every moment made me ache for Calista and the day she would stand beside me, promising me forever. My hand presses on my breast pocket where the ring sits, waiting for Calista's finger.

Despite Jack's apprehension, the wedding and reception go off without a hitch, and

everyone loves Claudia's cake. When I return home for the night, I take some over-the-counter pain meds and go to sleep. Tomorrow is going to be a long day until I finally see my woman.

Chapter Fifteen

Calista

The sound of my phone ringing throws me off. I scoop it off the desk near my bed and see it's Maggie. I haven't heard from her in weeks. Sleepily, I answer with a simple hello.

"Hey, girly. How are you doing?"

"Um...I'm good. I just woke up," I groan, stretching as I hold the phone to my ear.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you." I plop back down on the bed.

"It's okay." I lift the phone from my ear and check the time. It's nine, so I should be getting up anyway. "How are things going?" We used to be so close, but I know she feels uncomfortable since I got booted from the program.

"The program is great, but I miss you and your brilliant mind. We all do, especially Jacob." She says it with annoyance, and I can picture her rolling her eyes.

"I'm sure." I was their little nerd that they got their answers from. It was a quick way to not look stupid in front of the instructors.

"When do you think you'll be back?"

"I have no idea."

“Well, if you do come back, I’m sure they’ll let you in again. I think they regret letting you go.”

“I doubt it.”

“No, you’d be wrong. Dr. Fisher had a serious change of heart and asked if we’ve heard from you.” I knot forms in my stomach and all thoughts go to my father and wonder what he’s done. Did he send one of his men to threaten my former teacher or pay him off?

“Are you serious?” I asked, sounding less shocked than I felt.

“Absolutely.”

“Yeah, right.”

“She’s not lying, gorgeous,” Jacob says.

“Jacob?” Okay, now I’m more shocked and betrayed. What the hell was he doing on the call, and was he listening the whole time? I’m glad I didn’t say anything inappropriate.

“Yeah, we’re all hanging out before class. Dr. Fisher and Dr. Stevens asked us about you today.”

I scoff because I sure as hell don’t believe that unless they’re being forced to offer me a position. “They want you back, and so do we.”

“Then they should contact me,” I say. Do I really want to go back?

“We’ll tell them,” Jacob insists. I doubt he’ll tell them unless it benefits him. One

thing I've learned about him is that he's an opportunist to the max. Whether it's money, women or connections, if it doesn't benefit him, Jacob wants no part in it.

"You don't have to do that," I insist, wanting no favors from him. After my birthday party I have little to no trust in him.

"Beautiful, we need to have your back," Jacob says, sounding flirty as always. "You're our rockstar."

"Maybe. I'll consider it."

"Well, that's great, then."

"Ain't it? Well, I'll let you go. I have a busy day ahead of me."

"Okay. It's great talking to you, gorgeous." I end the call and then lay my head back down. I'm not sure what I plan on doing, but I can't go back to sleep anymore, so I toss off the covers and climb out of bed.

I need to wash my hair so it's dried by the time the stylists arrive in four hours. Digging through my new clothes, I grab a panty and bra set along with a cute pair of shorts and a tee before setting them out on the bed.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

I turn on some music and then the shower; hopefully the sounds of Led Zeppelin will mask the vibrations of my toy as I fuck myself to thoughts of the only person I can't stop thinking about—Ian.

I wonder if he thinks about me when he strokes that massive, thick engorged length between his legs. My body quakes with need just imagining what he'd do to me with it. He destroyed my insides the last time. My tongue peeks out from my mouth as I envision running it around Ian's bulbous tip and then sucking it down as far as I can go before gagging on the girthy length.

My orgasm doesn't take long to rip through me because it never does when I think about him, so I'm able to wash up quickly and get out before I've finished a few Zeppelin hits. I turn off the water and the music after wrapping up my hair and body in two large towels.

My phone rings with a number I don't recognize. Still, it has a Chicago area code, so I picked it up, assuming it's the doctors calling to offer me my position. "Hello," I answered.

"Good morning, gorgeous." My eyes widened and I look up around my bathroom, wondering if somehow he's got secret cameras hidden inside there. I know it's ridiculous, but then my body lights up with a delicious new fantasy.

I gasp at the sound of his voice. "I can't believe you are calling me."

"I should have called you a long time ago." Damn right, he should have, even though I told him I didn't want to deal with a man in his area of expertise.

“What’s going on? Are you okay?” I hate him suffering. After the last time, I nearly came back but Claudia told me not to because it was dangerous. Despite my reservations about the life our families lead, my heart can’t deny what I feel for him.

“Never better, beautiful. So, I heard your father’s having a fancy party tonight.”

“Yes, he is. How did you know?” Is he spying on me? Now the camera thing is starting to feel possible. Then again that could explain why there were extra men lurking around and my father wasn’t too concerned.

“I have my ways. Are you ever planning on coming home?”

“Do I really have a reason to come home? After all, I have no job, no schooling, and no one to go home to.” Immediately, I wonder if he was involved in getting Dr. Fisher to change his mind instead of my father. After all, they are a lot closer.

“Women, wait till I get my hands on your pretty little ass. I’ll bend you over and spank it.”

“You’d actually have to come near me to do that, and I doubt that will happen,” I huff.

“Well, it’s just a warning, and I have another one. If you let any of those assholes at your father’s party touch you, I’ll cut off their fingers.” His tone is gruff and strong, reminding me of the way he held me with such power.

Still, I can’t help but point out the truth. “I don’t belong to you.” Despite what my heart does when I think about him, which is almost every waking moment, it doesn’t change the fact that I haven’t heard from him until now.

“The moment you let me between your legs, you became mine, my little mafia

princess.”

“I’ve got to get dressed.”

“You’re naked?”

“Actually, I’m in a towel,” I answer with the intention of tormenting him.

“Fuck, you are a naughty little girl.”

“Yes, I am, and too bad you missed the show.” He growls, and I giggle just before I click the red button, ending the call and tossing the phone on the bed. Let him suffer a little.

This dress was a bad idea. I haven’t been at the party for more than twenty minutes and I’ve had more eyes on me than I can fathom. It’s not only the men, but the women have been shooting daggers at me. There’s no doubt this outfit made me a target of pure attention and hatred. I’m not mean or conceited, but this outfit is banging, and I look incredible in it. My curves only extend to my ass and tits, whereas my waist is snatched, giving me a completely sultry vibe.

“You are divine,” Edgar Cordova says. I roll my eyes before giving him my attention. “Thanks. Isn’t your fiancée around here somewhere?” My head turns and searches around the country club’s ballroom for her.

“She doesn’t have to be my fiancée. I can always fix that mistake.”

“Yeah, she’s not the mistake. You are. If something happens to her, I’ll know exactly who had a hand in it,” I say, my voice thick with meaning. This is why I hate the

mafia family life. It's as if I become them instantly, wanting to slit throats and end lives. I can't shake who I am—my father's daughter.

“It doesn't have to be like that.”

“You heard my sister, Cordova.” My brother steps up, along with my father. I can't believe they would behave that way at my father's party, especially since he owns the club as well.

“She won't always be around.”

Page 43

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

I pulled a blade from my dress and put it to his throat. “No, but neither will you. This isn’t the place to mess with a Vitale, is it?”

A hand comes up between us, and I see it’s my father. “Princess,” he says as a light warning. We’re in company, so I slowly back down without taking my eyes away from Cordova. That’s when I notice his father is now standing directly behind his rude ass.

The older man looks at me and then over my shoulder to my father. “Sorry. Terribly sorry, Ms. Vitale. He’s just drunk,” Cordova’s father says.

“It’s time you went home,” my father says, making a point.

“We’re sorry about all of this,” he says, leading him away, but not before his asshole son gets one more jab out.

“Maybe his daughter shouldn’t look like a fucking hooker, and then I wouldn’t have offered to fuck such a hot piece of ass.”

“All deals are off,” my father utters.

“Noted and understood.” He drags his son away and mutters something about being a total fucking failure.

“I’m sorry about that, Princess.”

“No, I knew this outfit was going to draw attention, and with that comes the fucking

super creeps. You'd think that my status would stop the idiots, but it doesn't."

"We need to get you married, and then they'll stop," my brother adds. There's only one man I'm interested in, and I doubt that will ever happen.

"I'm probably never getting married."

"We'll see about that," he scoffs and then takes his drink from the bartender and walks away.

"Relax and have a drink, Princess. I'm sorry about all of this, but I'm sure things will get better. You don't look like a hooker, by the way. You look beautiful tonight."

Still, I can only think of one man I want to see me in this or to tear it off with his teeth. I know it's not going to happen. I want to change, but I know that's also not going to happen.

Suddenly, the air changes around me as someone comes up behind me. "Did you miss me?" A heated chill washes over me as his words kiss my throat. A wave of longing simmers through my veins.

"Ian?" My voice is just above a whisper. "What are you doing here?" The words come out shaky, all my nerves on edge.

"I was invited." A growl falls from his powerful mouth. "And damn, I think your father is trying to get me killed or have me arrested for murder because this outfit is a fucking piece of cloth barely covering your pussy and has short-circuited my brain. I'm about to gouge out the eyeballs of some of these pricks." I'm grateful he missed the scene that played out moments ago.

He slides his hand across my waist, pulling me into his chest. "God, you feel

incredible. I want to eat you up. I feel like this is deja vu. This time you won't be leaving my bed."

"I believe that was a hotel room."

He dips his head, nuzzling my neck, and I don't even bother to stop him. "Don't tempt me, little girl." He takes my hand and slides a ring onto it. "You're mine. And I want everyone here to know it."

"What?"

"You heard me, my little mafia princess."

"Ian," I sigh, facing him, and lift my head, my lips brushing his chin. He smiles and lowers his head, crushing his lips to mine.

Chapter Sixteen

Ian

"So when is the wedding?" her father says, approaching us with his gaze focused on me.

"It's up to Calista—as long as it's within the next year," I remarked.

"Year?" he asks, looking at me as if I've lost my mind. Calista looks at me with the same expression. Even though I want her to be my wife already, I refuse to rush her.

"Well, I want to give her time to plan if she'd like." She smiles at me.

“She doesn’t need a year.”

“No, but it will be winter, and I didn’t think she’d like that. How do you feel?”

“I don’t need a lot of time,” she confesses. I’m a bit surprised by that revelation. There is something spurring on the change of heart, and I’d like to know what it is.

“You’ve got it, beautiful.” I kiss her hand and then tuck it under my arm, rubbing it lightly.

“May I have a word in private with you,” her father says.

“Connor, you stay with Calista. Watch her. Don’t let any of these pussies try anything.”

“Of course, Brother.” Her father smirks and shakes his head. “Follow me into my office.”

I do, and he closes the door. “Would you like a drink?”

“No, thank you. I want to be sharp.”

“Any sharper, and you could actually cut diamonds,” he remarks with a short laugh. “Anyway, I called you in here to talk about your intentions with my daughter.”

“I’m taking her back home with me,” I say, making my intentions known without a doubt that I’m not leaving her during this crazy time.

“What about her safety?” her father asks.

“She will be well protected and secured on our estate, which has been upgraded since my brother was taken last year.”

“That sounds good, but I want to make sure that she’s well protected anytime she travels.”

“And she will be. Every vehicle is armored, and she’ll have at least two guards with her at all times, even when I’m with her.”

“Also, I’d like to discuss her dismissal at the hospital. She won’t let me intervene, but I’d love to smash all their heads in, and they will beg for her care.”

“I understand completely. I plan on disposing of one of her classmates. It seems he drugged her during her night out.”

“What little son of a bitch is it,” he says.

“Don’t worry. I’ve got a plan for this little pussy. He already tried to claim that Calista was his. I’m going to destroy him and enjoy doing it.”

“I want to get my hands on the bastard.”

“When I get them, I’ll call you and you can come visit.”

“I like that idea.”

“She had a call from her friend in Chicago this morning. I don’t monitor the actual calls, but I do monitor the numbers after what happened. It was her friend Maggie. She hasn’t called in weeks, so I was a bit surprised. Also, you called this morning.

Did she know you were coming?”

“No. I actually told her to behave tonight or I’d have to hurt all the bastards who put their hands on her. If you don’t mind, I’d like to talk to her now.”

“I’ll send her in. No fucking in my office. Understood?”

“Yes, Mr. Vitale.” I nod, and we shake hands. He leaves, and a moment later, she enters.

“Wow, I can’t take my eyes off you. You are perfection, Calista.”

“Thank you, Ian. You’re not so bad yourself.”

“So do you want to tell me why you’ve changed your mind?”

“Because there’s no point in denying who I am anymore, and there’s no denying who I want.” Her hands go straight into my hair, sliding them until they interlock. Her mouth lands on mine, and a kiss that I’ve waited so long to have is here. I groan against her eager lips, parting mine and taking her mouth with a dominating hunger that I’ve needed to feed. My hands cradle her ass, dragging her body against me.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

My dick aches so damn bad that I want to strip her bare and drill her tight hole. I drag my lips away from her sultry ones and growl, “Fuck. I just promised your father I wouldn’t fuck you in here.”

“We don’t have to fuck,” she moans, grinding her hips and pressing her lips to my throat.

“Baby, you’re pushing it.” I lean back, putting a little space between us just to look into her eyes. Calista’s body is so tempting that I need to get ahold of myself, but she doesn’t quit.

“More like pressing on it.” She rubs her hand up and down the bulge in my pants. “Did you miss me?”

“More than you know,” I grunt, the words coming out harshly.

“Were you fucking anyone else?” she questions with an angry hiss.

“No, I’ve been a very good boy,” I answered. She’s the only woman I could even fathom thinking about riding my cock.

“Well, I’ve been a bad girl.” My entire body stiffens, and rage fills my gut.

“What? Who am I going to kill?” I thought my men had done a hell of a job watching out for her.

“No one. I’ve been fucking my toy every day in the shower while thinking about your

big cock,” she moans, unzipping my pants. Slowly her hand dips inside, stroking me over my boxer briefs.

“You are definitely a bad girl,” I whisper, tipping my head back and enjoying her attention. A deep rumble escapes my chest as I coat my boxers with precum.

“You have five seconds before I come in there,” her dad’s voice comes from behind the door.

“Damn it,” I snarl, adjusting my zipper and my painfully hard length.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. We’re leaving soon, so you can make it up to me.”

The door opens, and he comes in. “You didn’t give us that long to talk.”

“Yeah, I’m sure that’s what was going to get done in here,” he snarls. “We have a lot of guests out there, and I’d like to make the announcement of your impending marriage.”

“That’s perfect,” I say, sliding my hand in hers, the one that had been stroking me nice and slowly. I bring it to my mouth and give it a kiss. “I want everyone to know Calista is mine. Especially that asshole that was dragged out on his ear while he degraded my woman.”

“So you did hear,” Calista says with a gasp.

“Without a doubt. Trust me when I say his words won’t be forgotten.”

“You’re correct about that,” her father acknowledges. We step out of the room and

join the party. “Let’s go to the top of the steps, and I will make the announcement.” With a nod, we follow him and then he stops, and with a wave of his hand, the music and the crowd come to a hush.

“Thank you all for coming here tonight. While there is still a lot of party to be had, I’d like to make a special announcement.” He steps slightly to the side. “My beautiful daughter, Calista, has accepted the proposal of Ian MacNamara. I’d like to congratulate them both as I am looking forward to their upcoming nuptials.” The crowd cheers and claps.

“Thank you. I am fortunate to have this lovely woman as my future wife. I’m grateful that she has accepted me. She’ll be joining my family in Chicago soon, so New York will be losing such a beautiful treasure, but I’ll be getting the greatest gift.” They erupt in cheers again as I kiss her hand.

“Please let the party continue.” The music starts, and we head down the steps.

“Congrats Ian, Calista,” Claudia shouts as we make it to the bottom of the steps, and then she throws her arms around Calista. My brother comes up and shakes my hand.

“Are you two ready to leave?” he asks, leaning in so that no one else can hear.

“I’d like to dance with Calista first.” The ambience of the room is perfect to enjoy some time with her before we have to be isolated.

“You want to dance with me?” she asks, pressing her chest against my bicep.

“Yes, of course I do. I want any reason to hold you in my arms.” I drop my head and then kiss her lips, which draws eyes to us. Good—I want everyone to see my devotion to her because I’m a deadly motherfucker and I’m not above destroying anyone on her behalf.

“Dance with me, my fiancée.” I led her to the floor. People make a path, and I spin her into my arms as “Perfect” by Ed Sheeran plays. My hand splays over her lower back, gripping her firmly to my body while her head rests on my chest.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“I missed you so much, Ian.”

“You’re never leaving me again,” I state.

“I won’t.”

“I’m sure you won’t because I can’t live without you again.” We sway to the music as the cameras take pictures. What started out as a regular party turned into an engagement party.

As the song dies down, I lead her off the dance floor and to her parents. “We’d like to say goodnight.”

“Join us for brunch tomorrow, and we can discuss more about the wedding plans.”

“I’m so excited about the wedding,” Mrs. Vitale squeals, pulling Calista into her arms.

“Thank you, Mom. I promise we’ll talk about the plans, but I don’t want to drag it out.”

“We won’t. I put this together in a flash. I am the queen of party planning, aren’t I?”

“Absolutely.”

“Good. So we’ll see all of you tomorrow?” he asks, looking over at Connor and Claudia. Claudia stares at Connor, who nods.

“Ooh. I know it’s a lot to ask, but maybe before you go, you can bake with me,” Mrs. Vitale asks Claudia.

“You know I’d love it.”

“Thank you.” She gives her a big squeeze and after several hugs and handshakes, we leave with our guards and two of theirs just for added protection.

We travel to our private hotel and then up to our penthouse suite. Connor and Claudia have one bedroom that faces the left side, and we have the other on the right.

I led her to the bedroom, opening the door and turning on the light. There is a massive bed in the middle that is hard to miss. It’s set up for one fucking thing. Fucking is the thing. I want her bred so she can’t get away this time. I don’t know if she’s still on the pill, but she won’t be much longer if I get my damn way. She looks around the room in wonder. It’s a pretty nice room, but I don’t give a damn about it. “Time for bed, baby,” I grunt out, my voice hoarse with arousal.

She turns to face me with a look of mock horror on her pretty face. “Bed? But I’m not tired.”

I close the distance between us with unhurried determination. “Good, because sleep is the last motherfucking thing on my mind. You’re going to finish what you started, but first, I need to get you out of this dress so I can lick every inch of you that it’s hiding from me.”

I grab the edge of the material and rip it, sending it to the floor. “Oh my goodness, Ian. It was expensive.”

“It was going to get someone killed—like that prick who was escorted out. Your father and I haven’t forgotten that incident. You know that.”

“That’s not my problem.”

“Well, then, we don’t need a repeat. Don’t argue with me when you’re nearly naked because you won’t win. I’m just going to make you ride my face, and then I’m going to fuck your pretty cunt until I’ve loaded your pussy with so much cum that you’re carrying my baby.”

“Baby?”

“Yes, one of several.”

“I guess it’s good that I haven’t refilled my pills.”

“Yes, it is. Now get on the bed because I want to taste my woman.” She moves to the bed and sits on the edge, looking so damn beautiful. It’s raised on a platform, so I walk over to her, and it’s perfect for stealing kisses. I bend slightly and taste her lips. My hands and mouth move all over her, never able to stop when it comes to my woman. She was made for me.

Chapter Seventeen

Calista

“Oh, yes,” I cry out, moaning, needing more, wanting him to touch me everywhere. “You can’t stop. It feels so good, Ian. I missed you.”

“You’re all I’ve thought of,” he growls as he moves down my neck. His kisses get more intense with every breath, every beat of my heart. I whimper as his lips wrap around my nipple, sucking on my tender flesh. I cry out again and again, my heart racing. His fingers are so adept to me, knowing everything I need. I can never get enough. I can live in this moment forever.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Tell me what you need, and I'll give it to you, my minx. You're my everything.” I part my legs wider to give him room to move in between them, and he scoots closer. His fingers slide down, moving under my waistband and cupping my sex. I gasp when he brushes my entrance with his fingertips. “God, you're soaking wet, baby. So nice and wet just for me, aren't you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you need me to eat this dripping wet pussy?” he questions with a husky growl, only making me wetter. Does he know what he does to me? Of course he does. I arch my hips, hoping to let him in a little more.

“Yes, please,” I plead, wanting his face and tongue buried inside my pussy until I'm screaming.

“You're so pretty when you beg. Let me see this pretty pussy.” I lift my hips, grinding them on his mouth. He rubs his beard all over my mound and thighs. “We need to get rid of these panties, as sexy as they are. I wonder who the fuck you wore them for, little minx, if you believed I wouldn't be there.”

“I wore them for myself. As the daughter of the mafia boss, I have to look golden on the outside, and I might as well feel wonderful on the inside.” I slam my legs closed so he can take them off.

“That's good, baby, but if someone else saw these, they'd be dead.” Ian drags them down my legs, never taking his eyes off me as he gives his deadly promise. God, I love the possessive tone in his voice and stare. He's mine as much as I'm his.

“With that dress, it was either these or nothing,” I tease. He closes his fingers together and then slaps my pussy. I gasp, moaning as he pushes a finger inside, testing my entrance gently, and then he pumps into me harder.

“God, you’re soaked. So damn wet that I can fit two fingers. Let’s see.” He stretches me out, driving two in.

“Oh God,” I moan, tilting my head back against the pillow and arching my neck as I nearly come from his touch. “I’ve missed this. I’m so close.”

“Don’t come yet, my princess. I want that first one on my tongue.”

“Then get to it because you make me so needy,” I demand, tugging on his forearms.

“Impatient,” he chuckles.

“I’ve been very patient.” I love her so damn much.

“Yes, you have. Spread those legs for me.” The heels of my feet skate lazily across the sheets, legs parting teasingly slow along the bed. “Damn brat.” He yanks them open, dropping down to his stomach and growling before he plants his face between my legs.

“Oh my goodness, don’t sto-ppp,” I stammer, gripping his long, thick hair and pushing his scruffy jaw into my needy pussy.

He growls something against it. I’m so close to coming on his face, and then he sucks on my clit. I come hard, flexing my body.

His clothes are gone fast, and then he’s buried inside of me so quickly I can barely catch my breath. “The first time is going to be fast. I’m sorry, baby. I promise next

time we'll go slower." His moves are rough and violent, driving into my pussy like he's never going to touch me again. His kisses and caresses are needy, clinging to my body so tightly that even though it happens so fast, I come from the possessiveness of his lovemaking. We orgasm together and then fall asleep, only for me to wake hours later and ride him to orgasm again.

"Oh my goodness, I don't have any clothes for this morning," I gasp as I lie in Ian's arms.

"Relax, beautiful. I came more than prepared to take you away for just the night."

"You did?" I asked, wondering what other plans he had up his sleeve. The man was a mystery that I wanted to unravel and yet I knew a lifetime with him wouldn't reveal all his hidden layers.

"Yes. Claudia brought you an outfit, including a pair of sandals that she swore you'd love."

"Oh really?"

"Yes. I have no idea, but since you two know each other well, I figured she would know these things."

"You're right. Thank you for thinking ahead."

"You're mine, Calista. Taking care of you is my number one priority."

"Ian, I understand what your world is about, but that doesn't mean I want to give up on being a doctor."

“And you don’t have to give it up. I’ll help you find a new hospital if you want.”

“My friends called to tell me they wanted me back at the hospital.”

“Did they?”

“Yes.”

“That’s good to know.”

“You didn’t have a hand in that?”

“No, I didn’t. Why? Did you think I’d threaten them to take you back?”

“Wouldn’t you?”

“I wanted to kill them. You deserve better than working for people like that, but if it makes you happy, then it’s okay.” I laugh and shake my head at his response. So it must have been my father who had given them a warning to give me my schooling and position back.

“You are insane.”

“About you.”

A rapid knock at the door disturbs our conversation. “I hate to interrupt you lovebirds, but we have to get going soon,” Claudia calls out.

“We’re about to get ready,” Ian replies.

I sigh and slide out of bed. Ian growls, and I turn around to see him leaning on his

elbow staring at me with a dirty smile. “What are you thinking, Mr. MacNamara?”

“That your ass looks so good naked. I’m regretting that we made plans today.”

“Well, thanks to you I’m quite sore, so it’s good that we have plans.”

“Thanks to me? I’m pretty sure you woke me up to ride my cock in the middle of the night.”

“Yes, and that massive beast brutalized my insides.” I roll my eyes and head into the en-suite, closing the door behind me.

“You better lock that door, minx, or I’m coming in after you.” I don’t bother hitting the lock. I’d love for him to come get me, and I’m not disappointed.

We’re almost late to my parents’ house.

Chapter Eighteen

Ian

The moment we pull through our family estate, I feel a semblance of peace. I have her perfectly safe, or at least as safe as I can until the bastard is killed. It’s been on my mind for weeks, but this is the first time she isn’t protected by her father, and now she’s clearly tied to me. Yes, we’re not married yet, but the news has spread by now that in one month, Calista will be my wife.

“Ian, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“You’re lying to me, and I don’t like it,” she says, clamping down on her lips, tempering her words.

“I’m just a little on edge. As you’re aware, my father is still out there, and he hasn’t made his move since the attack on me. There has been no hints on his whereabouts since then, and it’s a bit unnerving now that we’ve made things official.”

“Is this the reason you didn’t contact me?”

“Of course. I wasn’t strong enough to protect you. If I let on that you were mine, he would have attacked. Yes, your father had his men locked on at all times, but the risk was too great for my piece of mind. I hired a few guards to stay on the periphery and keep track, but no one my father was acquainted with, so he wouldn’t have been aware that they were working for me.”

“How are you doing now?”

“I’m healed. My strength and agility are nearly one hundred, so don’t worry. I won’t let him get to you. You’re safe here.”

“I’m going to be heading back to school and work.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“I know, and you’ll be taking a team of guards with you. You know that, right?”

“Yes. I understand, but they’ll have to stay at a distance. When they finally accept me back, I doubt they’ll allow the guards in the hospital, following me around like guard dogs.”

I pause, thinking about what she’s saying. I can’t process what she’s saying because it’s a bit overwhelming. “Maybe we need to pause going back to med school until we find and deal with him.”

“Are you serious?” she huffs, twisting her face in pure anger.

“I am. Look at what he did to me, Calista.” She stares at me and nods, tears welling in her eyes. “I don’t want to hold you back. I know this isn’t what you want. Please don’t cry.”

She swipes away the tears with the back of her hand. “I’m not crying about that. He tried to kill you. His own son.”

“I’m not his son.”

“Yes, but he raised you, and he felt nothing. He had no problem taking you out. I’ll do my best to wait for you.”

“I love you, Calista.”

“I love you, too. I love you so much, Ian.” I carry her up to our bedroom and show

her how much I appreciate her understanding and devotion.

Three days of bliss in our home, and I'm back to business. There is no more hanging around, pleasing my woman. I have to handle issues both for the family and in Vegas. I spend the morning on calls with Callahan at the hotel. "The numbers look good. We're up twenty-one million dollars, and there are no problems. How is the recovery?"

"I'm moving along smoothly. I'm getting married soon."

"Do you plan on having the ceremony here?"

"I'll have to check with my bride, but that might be fun. We spoke to her parents about a date, but she's planning it with her mother. The location is up to them. We're still hunting that bastard father of mine."

"Yeah, no sight of him here. Our people definitely have been looking for him. Trust me when I say if he crosses any of our borders, he'll be caught."

"I want him found."

"Have you considered tossing him some bait?"

"No, he's not above killing the bait."

"True."

"When do you need me there?"

“I’m holding a budget and security meeting in two weeks.”

“Mark it on my calendar, and I’ll be there.”

“Good. I’d like you to be there to go over the changes Montenegro has in mind.”

“No problem. He and I have already been discussing his ideas, but I’d like to see them in action before approving them.”

“Excellent. I need to get back on the floor. I’ll see you in two weeks.”

“Great talking to you.” I end the call and then get out of my chair. It’s time to meet with Jack.

“How is it?”

“How is what?” I ask him as I step into his house.

“Leaving her for the day.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Hard, but I know it has to be done and the sooner I get shit handled, the sooner I get to hold her. Any news on the asshole?”

“Yes. He was spotted near our waterfront property.”

“What? What the hell was he doing there?”

“Scoping it out. Guess who he was spotted with?”

“The fucking detective?”

“Yes.”

“I had a feeling that bitch was helping him from the start. Nothing about her seemed legit, especially since she’d been working with that piece of shit.”

“I couldn’t agree more. She’s not a real detective. I’ve dug deeper, and she’d been kicked off the police force for misconduct—something hard to do in the CPD; the dumb cunt isn’t even a PI. She’s carrying false credentials and if she’s located with them, we’ll get her tossed for impersonating an officer, so maybe she’ll give us his location.”

“That works for me. I’d love to kill her too. She was driving the getaway vehicle that night. I’m sure of it.”

“Me too, but we can wait for the right time.”

“Now, we have had problems on the docks lately. Maybe it’s because you haven’t been there to hold down the fort or because people are testing our strength, but we have had several stolen shipments. I’m heading over today. Do you want to accompany me to find out who the thief is and deal with it?”

“Sounds good to me.” We drive out to the docks in the middle of the evening as the sun is close to setting. We lie back and watch two rows back from our usual spot and wait as someone we know well talks to the delivery crew. He sets up the trailers, and they begin loading the trucks that aren’t ours. “Isn’t that interesting. I swore we gave that fuck a chance to move on without facing our wrath, and now the bastard crossed us again.”

“Let’s get this shit over with.” We speed over in front of the truck and then hop out of the vehicle. “It seems we have a problem, Espinoza.”

“Whoa, whoa. I...I...” He whips out his gun, but he’s too fucking slow, and my fist is in his face before he can get it past his waist. I send him on his ass, and his gun lands on the ground. The two men in the truck jump out and Jack, Johnny, and two of our men have guns on them.

“Hold up, fuckos. Don’t even think of making a move.”

They have their arms up in the air. “We don’t have anything to do with it,” the driver says. Suddenly, Espinoza tries to move, so I kick him in the ribs. I hear those fuckers crack, and I smile. Damn, it’s good to be back. I go to town, beating the shit out of this lying sack of shit. We find out where our goods are, and the drivers get it back in order to survive another day.

They return a fraction of our goods. The rest of our merchandise Espinoza has already sold off before they were aware since they are only a local father-and-son delivery company. They have no ties to organizations like ours, hence the reason they

got mixed up in the business without realizing it. No one else would be stupid enough to cross us.

By the time I return home, it's three in the morning. Calista is asleep in our bed, and I slip in beside her. I wrap my arms around her and a soft moan escapes her lips.

"I missed you, Ian," she whispers.

"I'm sorry, baby. We had more problems than I expected today. Tomorrow won't be the same."

I'm wrong. The rest of the next two weeks are full of issues that leave me with one thing after another that keeps us busy, leaving Calista at home. She is only able to travel between the two other houses on the estate. She doesn't care for Jack for the most part, so she visits Claudia, playing with the dog or helping her while she bakes.

My alarm goes off at eight in the morning after we make love and shower. She's standing in the middle of our bedroom almost completely dressed for the day, while I'm in my boxers and sliding on my socks at the edge of the bed. I check the alarm and groan, slamming my eyes shut.

"What is it?" she asks, taking the towel out of her hair. Her light pink tank top hugs her large breasts and lifts them up, making me want to tug that damn top down. Then those yoga pants form around her sensual ass and thighs, stiffening my cock like I wasn't in her tight body half an hour ago. Still, a pressing matter stands in front of us that I forgot to mention.

"Sweetheart, I'm sorry that things have been crazy. I have to travel to Vegas."

"What? You're heading to Vegas. I've told Maggie to tell them I can't come back yet. I need to sit back and be a good little missus while you go off doing God knows

what with God knows who.” She slams her hands down on at her sides.

“Callie, don’t. Don’t think like that. I own a hotel and casino. I have several meetings and security matters to handle.”

“Is that all you have plans for?”

I pull her into my arms and spin her over on my knee, and with a quick action, I pull down her yoga pants and my hand lands on her ass. “Don’t even accuse me of betraying you. I love and live for you. Even when I had no idea that I’d see you again, it’s the only reason I tried to survive.” I pop her ass one more time before pulling up her panties and pants. Lifting her to sit right on my thigh, I kiss her lips hard and then pull back. “Now, what I was going to say was that I need you packed because you’re coming with me.”

“You want me with you?”

“Of course. Do you think I can spend the night away from you?”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“You come home late almost every night.”

“It’s not the same motherfucking thing. I still come home and wrap you up in my arms, Calista. Don’t test me. Get your ass packed so we can travel and deal with business, and so I can make love to you in Vegas.” She throws her arms around me, sending me backwards, and I laugh.

“Be careful, or we won’t have time for packing.”

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner? Did you not want to take me?”

“That’s not it. I just forgot about going and I got the reminder about it, so we both need to get our asses moving. Now, get your pretty ass up and stop being so paranoid. I love you. We’re in this together. Soon you’ll be Calista MacNamara.”

“I can’t wait.” She hops off me and runs to her closet to dig out her suitcases that we brought back with us. It doesn’t take either of us long to pack. About two hours later, we’re in the SUV and Jack’s escorting us to the airport.

“Let me know if you have any issues. I don’t like you going with the current situation.”

“I’m fine there. The surveillance in Vegas is ridiculous. If that pussy shows up, he’ll be marked before he gets ten steps off the plane.”

“That doesn’t mean I don’t worry. You’re my brother.”

“I know. You all stay safe. Remember, he’s not above killing all of you either. Mom was the only thing stopping him back then.”

“No, I think it was the excuse he used. We’re his blood—it’s the only thing holding him back. Push comes to shove, I think he’ll choose his life over ours, but no, he’s not going to come directly for us. You and John are his goals, but I won’t let that happen and neither will Saunders.”

“Are you softening on him?”

“I still might hate the bastard, but he loved Mom and it’s clear he cares for both of you.” That’s true. My real father calls me four times a week just to see how I’m doing. He sees John once a week because that’s what Jack allows, or that’s what he can spare since he’s extremely busy.

“I’ve always liked the governor,” Calista says, giving Jack a glare.

“Yes, well, he didn’t try to kill you.”

“Yeah, and he isn’t an asshole to me either,” she bites out.

“Well, I’m an asshole to everyone.”

“I’m surprised you managed to get such a sweet woman.”

“He forced her to marry him.”

“Explains everything,” she scoffs.

“She loves me.”

Calista rolls her eyes. “An asshole and delusional as well,” she adds.

“Keep it up, and I’ll tell your parents that you and Ian married in Vegas, even slip them some doctored wedding certificates.”

“You wouldn’t,” she gasps.

“Try this asshole.”

“Wow, you’re an evil one.”

“I just know how to deal with little brats.” He looks at me and says, “You have a lot to handle with this one. At least mine is sweet.”

“She’s sweet in other places,” I say, causing Calista to slap my arm and blush prettily. She’s silent for the rest of the ride. We arrive at the airport and pull onto the private tarmac. She gasps when we pull up to the jet.

“We’re taking a private plane for just the two of us?”

“Yes. Jack said we could use his jet.”

“Oh.”

“It’s okay. He’s still a dick sometimes.”

“He is, isn’t he?” She giggles.

“He likes you, but he has trust issues, and protecting Nora and John has been his priority. When he first met you, it bothered him. After he realized that we didn’t have a beef with your family, he was fine. You hated him, not the other way around.”

“Oh. Well, maybe I’ll be nicer. Maybe.” She winks.

All week in Vegas she follows alongside me as I work, learning the ins and outs of my security job at the hotel and casino. She meets with the others, and I try to hold back the natural jealousy I feel as each man finds her insanely beautiful.

“Are you ready to fly home, Calista?”

“Yes. I need to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“I want to go back to school.” I’ve had a feeling this was going to happen.

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Yes. I’ve been reminded how often I’ve left you alone, or where I’ve had to leave you with my guards. You could easily be doing what you wanted. You don’t need to be in that school or program if you don’t want to be, but if it’s the one you want, please call your friend and set things up, and when we get home, you can go from there.”

“The guards would have to be held back.”

“They would. You’d have trackers on you, and you can’t tell anyone.”

“Of course, my love.”

“I’ll do anything to make you happy as long as you’re safe, Calista,” I whisper, kissing her lips repeatedly.

“Thank you so much,” she says, throwing her arms around my neck. “When do we have to leave?”

“We have a few hours,” I say.

“Let’s make the most of our time,” she says, and we do. I have her screaming my name over and over again.

Chapter Nineteen

Calista

Ian’s out with his brother working on some mafia shit. He kissed me roughly before he left this morning with a goodbye warning, “Be a good girl and be fucking careful. You’re everything to me, minx.”

“Same to you, Ian. I almost lost you once.” I dragged my lips against his delaying his departure and earning an eyeroll from Jack.

“I’m always coming home to you,” he whispered against my lips, kissing me deeply before leaving. I close my eyes and relive that kiss before getting ready for my day.

After he left, I spent the morning on a video call with my mother, planning the wedding. We scheduled it for next week. We are having it in New York in our family’s usual Cathedral where they attend services. Everything has been prepared, and invitations have been sent out. The reception will be held at my father’s country club where Ian proposed. Claudia, Nora, and I are picking out my wedding dress and their bridesmaid dresses tomorrow.

My phone rang, and it’s Maggie. “Dudette, it’s me. Are you ready?”

“Yes, I am.” I ended the call and then buzzed at the front gate, letting her in. She drives up to our home per my directions, and I meet her out front of the house.

“Holy shit, you live like a damn queen.”

“Um...thanks.” I forget that most people are shocked by it. I lived pretty much like this with my father. Even my home with my grandparents was a mansion. I come from wealth, even though I work extremely hard.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Well, let’s get this show on the road. It’s not like Dr. Fisher is going to wait forever for you.”

“I know. I’m so glad he’s giving me another shot, although I’m surprised he didn’t call me personally or send me an email.”

“He said that it had to be done in person. He didn’t want to make it formal until he spoke to you. I think he doesn’t want to make an ass of himself. Ego and all. He’s a doctor, after all. You know how they are.” She rolls her eyes like that’s not what we’re trying to be. I laughed and then climbed into the passenger side of her vehicle. We head to the gate, and I wave to the guards. “Ms. Vitale, did Mr. MacNamara approve your departure without your guards?”

“Of course he did. I wouldn’t leave without his approval. No offense, but I’m my father’s daughter. Besides, some of them are meeting me at the hospital.” I didn’t tell him it would be today just that I would go to the hospital without guards in the future.

“Very well. Ms. Vitale, you must be careful.”

“Of course, Nick.” He opens it and lets us go. I told a little lie, but I need a little freedom. I’ve questioned my father’s men before and he said there has never been a problem. My guards have never had to intervene. The issue with Jack being the only time they reacted to a situation which was a misunderstanding.

This is the first time I have gotten out of the house without a herd of security since Ian and I got engaged. It’s probably not the wisest move I’ve made, but I need to speak with the doctors without big goons hovering.

Besides, Ian's dad doesn't know Maggie's car. The surveillance around the estate proves he isn't lurking nearby. If anything, he's watching the dock, which scares me more than anything because it leaves Ian vulnerable. "Thanks for picking me up, Maggie."

"No problem, girly. I'm so excited for you to come back to the program. You have totally been missed." She looks through her rearview several times like she's expecting to see something in it, and then says, "I'm surprised they let you come out—without supervision, I mean."

"Oh I'm sure there's someone lurking." That explains why she's looking. It's clear behind us. "Besides, I told Ian the other day that I was going to the hospital to speak with Dr. Fisher about getting my job back and that I needed to go without his guards because of all the drama that they caused the first time."

"That's cool," she mutters as if she's not really listening.

She turns on the music to a low volume, which annoys me. It's like, why bother? It's like having a fly buzzing around your ear. Either you have the volume cranked up, or turn it off. I personally hate conversation in the car when we're listening to music. She steals a glance and frowns. Maybe she can sense my annoyance, so I fix my face and try to appear less grouchy.

"How did you get so lucky to get that guy?" she asks with a bit of a temper. Where did that question come from?

"I'm not sure."

She sighs and grumbles, "All the guys fall at your feet."

"Excuse me?" I ask.

“Oh, nothing.” I drop it because I don’t want to pick a fight, but I may ask one of my guards to come and pick me up. I’ll shoot Claudia a text as soon as we arrive. I should tell Ian to get me, but I don’t want him to freak out over nothing on my first outing.

We’re about halfway there when she says, “I need to stop at my apartment really quick. I totally forgot my ID.”

“Are you serious?” I sigh.

“I’m sorry. It’s not going to take more than two minutes. I’ll be in and out.”

“Fine.”

It’s crazy, but we’re literally a block from her house. It’s as if she knew she forgot it and intentionally didn’t tell me so I wouldn’t demand we go in separate vehicles again. That was my plan from the start, but she said she wanted some time to hang out.

So she pulls up to the curb and then parks, jumping out of the car in a mad dash to her apartment building. I watch her walk up the steps, and that’s when I realize she didn’t lock the car. I’m about to hit the locks when someone opens the back door. “Ahh,” I screech, turning my head, and then I see it’s Jacob.

“Oh shit. I didn’t mean to scare you,” he says, putting his hands up.

“No biggie.” I try to act cool, but I’m anything but. Something doesn’t seem right. I take out my phone and shoot Claudia a message. Something isn’t right. Send help. No calls.

“It’s been a long time. How are you?” he asks.

“I’m good.” I try to steady my breathing. My blade is on me, so I can access it if I reach just right, but I’d rather just create some distance. It’s not like he’s doing anything to me. Maybe he’s just catching a ride with us.

“Maggie said you were. She said you were getting married to that thug that was supposed to be dying in the hospital. Did he force you to marry him?” he questioned with a venom so deadly, I’d swear he was part of a family as well.

“No. Why would you say something like that? I love Ian.”

“He’s not good enough for you.” He can’t be jealous. Jacob fucks everything that walks.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Excuse me.” I move swiftly to unlock the door and jump out. Fuck it. I’ll contact the hospital myself. Quickly, I hustled down the street with my phone hitting Ian’s number. It barely rings once when a sharp pain hits the back of my head and everything goes dark.

My eyes flutter open, and yet it’s completely dark. I stretch out my hands, reaching for something, and find a wall and then another and another. My feet are met with another. I’m confined in a tiny box. My heart rate speeds up as my situation hits me. I have no idea where I am, but I know that I’m trapped and that Maggie and Jacob are involved.

What an idiot. I trusted them instead of trusting my gut. I should have Ian to protect me like he insisted.

I try to take a calming breath, but my thoughts are just eating at me. I want Ian to find me so bad. I need him to find me. Tears stream down my face as I consider how different life had been hours ago. My heart’s heavy, and my hands are shaking. I’d been hit so hard from behind that I’d blacked out instantly, so it had to have been Jacob, but they were bold enough to do it in broad daylight.

Shit—the pain is so intense I feel like there’s a pounding on my head. My eyeballs ache so badly I want to cry just from that alone. I’m somewhere dark. I keep pushing and pushing, but nothing moves; there’s no give. Wherever I am, I’m here until someone comes to let me out, or I die.

“I’m so sorry, Ian,” I sob. He loves me so much and tells me every single minute of every day that we are together and every time he sends me a message. Damn it, my phone. They must have it. No, they would have tossed it, and now he can’t track me. My chest hurts, and it feels like I can’t breathe, so I call out. “I need you,” I whisper as my eyes closed.

Cold water splashes in my face, and my eyes squint as I try to open them. The light is so bright that it takes me a moment to adjust my vision. Finally, someone has opened my prison. When I see the face of the man in front of me, I’m regretting that he opened it. “Come on, you little bitch. Get out of there.”

My legs have been cramped for I don’t know how many hours. Does he think I’m just going to get out of here easily? He points a gun at me. I try to get up, but my legs are numb from being in the position, and I nearly fall over twice, stumbling as I try to get out of the box.

“Don’t fucking play dumb with me. Do you think I’m going to fall for that innocent shit?” he hollers at me, shakily waving his gun at me. I don’t like that he doesn’t have control.

Still, I can’t fight my own nature. “No, my fucking legs are asleep, you piece of shit. Why did you kidnap me?”

“You have to fucking know why. You can’t be that dumb. I know you got kicked out of medical school, but wow—I didn’t realize that piece of shit got himself with a dumb broad.”

“Oh, you’re an asshole,” I hiss at him.

“I wouldn’t talk shit to a man with a gun.”

“Well, you’re going to kill me regardless of whether I’m fucking kissing your ass or not.” My head hurts, my throat is raw, and my legs are numb. “Please spare me the bullshit. You kidnapped me to summon Ian? Do you think he’s going to be that dumb to come after you to get me? We hardly know each other.”

He grabs my hand. “Oh, yeah? What the fuck is this?”

“It’s a ring. My daddy gave it to me.”

“You lying little bitch.” He smacks me across the face, and I fall to the floor, banging my elbow and side.

“Wow, you always beat up women? No wonder your wife couldn’t fucking stand you.”

“Bitch, she is so close... so close.”

“I know what you’re waiting for—Ian—and that’s not going to happen.”

He chuckles. “Yes it is. You’re not just some whore. You’re the woman he selected to marry,” he says with a teasing tone, mocking the relationship between Ian and me. “That piece-of-shit bastard gave you the ring from his whore of a mother that she got from another man. If they all thought I wouldn’t recognize that ring, they are foolish. She believed I never knew about that piece of jewelry. I warned her, but she didn’t learn. It was supposed to be destroyed. One way or another, it will be.”

Chapter Twenty

Ian

The second she stepped out of the house, I had her movements on point. I'd been too fucking far away to get to her. Jack and I had been tracking Jacob Abernathy who had been dropped from the med school program after misconduct three weeks ago along. This morning, his whereabouts were unknown.

Unfortunately, an explosion on the docks has kept us distracted enough to drop the ball. The second she sent out the distress message to Claudia, I knew it had to do with Jacob. My men are already on their way to her location, and I am only five minutes behind them. Jack has gone to the hospital to check with Dr. Fisher to learn more details.

A call comes in from my phone. "Son." It's my real father.

"She's in the train yard on Kedzie." He drops me the location, even though I have her tracker leading me to the exact location.

"On my way. I've got it. Don't do anything dumb," I tell him. He's more unhinged than I am. We both have so much built up hatred for Jack Sr. that we're both liable to do something insane.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“I’m not going to let anything happen to her. I promise.” I send up a silent prayer that shit goes down safely and I get my woman back. I promised I’d protect her, and I failed. My heart races, and I do my best to calm it down because I have to stay steady. Calista needs the killer who moves professionally, not emotionally.

I slip my earpiece in as I pull into the location and cut my engine.

I walk the rest of the fifty feet. “Come on, Ian boy, bring your bitch ass in here. You want your little love to survive, you better come here and die like you should have the first time.”

My eyes scan the tops of the buildings, looking for his hit squad, and I see that bitch Detective Lopez sitting at the top building on the left with a scope on me. Then I see Johnny with his shot lined right at her. I wave my finger at him, and he hits the target, dropping her with one shot. She collapses effortlessly. Good.

“Oops,” I called out from a safe position.

He chuckles as if we didn’t drop his little bitch. “No big deal—a fucking loose end. Thanks for taking care of that problem. One less person to pay.”

“Funny, you don’t have any money in the first place,” I holler from behind the wall.

“That’s where you’re wrong, and that’s what we’re going to correct today.”

“Now, I’m not sure that’s going to happen.”

“I have something you treasure.” He thinks I’m going to pay for her return. I’m not letting him live regardless.

“You’re playing a fucking twisted game. She’s Carlo Vitale’s daughter. You’re not only threatening my fiancée, but his most treasured baby.”

“That’s the way I get my money. You pay with your life, and he pays with his bills.”
Wow, he’s got a serious case of brass balls.”

“It’s one against two right now,” I say, knowing that’s a lie.

“That’s where you’re wrong. You’re outnumbered.” I can’t believe he really thinks that.

“You mean that little bitch that helped you kidnap my woman? And the little pussy Jakey-boy?” I asked.

“I’m not a pussy. I had your woman’s tight hole already. Talk about good pussy,” he shouts from the corner of a building on the right. Losing my shit, I jump from my hiding spot and unload my weapon without hesitation, shooting Jacob in the chest and in the head.

“Damn, that was cold,” my former caregiver says, but my eyes lock on the sight before me.

My heart constricts at the sight before me. My enemy has my most treasured possession, the greatest love of my life, at his mercy. Everything I hoped and dreamed for is right in front of me and could be gone in a second. Jack Senior has his hands on her, ready to steal her life.

I want him gone from this earth, but not more than having her in my existence.

Calista is everything to me and more, and nothing my father could do would be worth risking her life.

“Let her go, and I’ll let you walk out of here,” I tell him. I really want to blow his head off, but I don’t have much choice. He has her by the throat with a gun to her head.

“I think I’ll take her with me. You know, as a little insurance policy. You’re a big pussy who would rather let me leave than risk her life. What a fucking chump. That’s the reason your mother died. She was weak and pathetic. She’d rather protect her children than just run. There was no way in hell I’d let her get away with ruining my life and taking you guys. I’d rather watch you all burn than let her win. She made her motherfucking choice, and now it’s your turn.”

“No, Jack. This time it’s not up to him. It’s up to me. I let you get away the first time. I let you ruin the love of my life; I allowed you to destroy any peace and happiness I had. Not anymore.” I stare in shock and fear as Saunders challenges my father from the other side. He’s still holding my darling close, and I’m afraid that he’s going to accidentally snap and kill her. My blood runs cold, but at the same time, I’m proud that he finally stepped up and did something against my father.

Everything happens so fast. Gunfire opens up, and it’s time for me to move. I want to watch him bleed, but she is more important. I snatch Calista up in my arms, carrying her as fast as I can away from danger. They probably will take care of that dirty son of a bitch before I can. I want my hands on him so bad. There isn’t anything in the world I wouldn’t do, except for leaving her alone again.

I lead her out of the area and back to my SUV to get her to safety. Quickly I drive down the road and once we’re out of the danger zone, I pull over and check her body for any serious injuries.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry,” I whisper. I kiss the top of her head, hugging her tightly, a little too tightly when she yelps. “Damn it, I’m so sorry.”

“Ian, I’m okay. I promise. None of this was your fault—none of it. I was stupid. I can’t believe that I fell for the lies and manipulation.”

“No, baby, we’ve all been there. Trust me when I say we’ve all been there.”

“What’s going to happen now?” she asks, her voice shaky and tired.

I caress her hip, hoping that I don’t hurt her. “Right now?” She nods. “Well, we’re going to go home, then I’m going to take you in the shower to clean off this mess. Then I’m going to tuck you in bed where you belong.”

“Wonderful because there is nowhere else I’d want to be, and I’m not leaving any time soon.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“I’m glad, because I have no intention of ever letting you go.” She leans in and kisses my lips tenderly. I brush mine against hers, but I remember to be careful because her top lip is busted.

I hear squad cars nearby and I know we have to get moving. “We need to get you home.”

An hour later, I have her inside our bathroom shower, naked and in my arms as we wash away the memories of today as best as we can. The water washes over our bodies, heat pooling all around us. I want to be inside her, but taking care of her needs is more important than my own. She moans as I scrub her down, careful not to touch the bruises so hard. Still, I’m so much larger than her small frame, and no matter what I do, I feel like I’m causing her extra pain.

“I’m so sorry; I’m trying to be gentle.”

“No, Ian, I need you to touch me. I need you to make me feel alive. Please don’t stop.”

“Baby, please be careful what you say. I can’t stop this desire washing over me, and my hunger for you is a little too crazy right now. I want to be inside you beyond belief. It’s been only a day, and it feels like an eternity.”

“It’s been the same for me. I need you so much. When I was trapped, all I could do was hope that you’d come for me, find me...before...”

“Please, baby. If you keep telling me about it, I’ll leave you here and finish what I

planned.”

“Please don’t go. I need you, Ian. Please take me, touch me, fuck me, love me. Do whatever you will. I just need you to not stop.”

I slowly entered her. Our movements are unhurried and unsteady as I thrust into her. Our bodies are tight against each other, breathing harsh as tears fall from both of us. “I love you so much, Calista,” I choke out, kissing her throat.

“Fill me up. Make me feel alive, Ian. Make me feel loved.”

“Always.” My arms wrap so tightly around her, as if she’ll disappear. I continue to rut into her depths, lifting her feet off the ground as I pump into her. “Who do you belong to?”

“You.”

“Who will protect you?”

“You.”

“Who will die for you?”

“You.”

“Don’t ever scare me like that again. Damn it. Don’t you dare.” I choke on my sobs as I slam her body against the shower stall and fuck her hard. “Do you understand me?”

“Yes, yes, yes.” Her pussy flutters around my cock, clenching, and she cries out my name. “Ian, Ian.”

“Fuck,” I roar, shooting my cum deep inside her, each roll of my hips more violent than the last one until I’m done. Then, I rest my head on the back of hers. “I’m sorry for not being there.”

“No, it’s my fault. Never again will I not take your orders seriously. Maggie played me.”

“She’ll pay too.” She slips from under me, and then I move a little so she can look me in the eye.

She slams her lips to mine. “Can I kill her?”

“You don’t want that to damage your soul.”

“My soul is already dark. I just hide it.” I stare at her like she doesn’t know what she’s saying.

“Do you still want to marry me?”

“That’s the stupidest question in the world,” I say. “I can’t live without you. You’re going to marry me whether you want to or not. I don’t care if I have to force your ass down the aisle.”

“I wanted to slice open Cordova and would have if he had bothered me a moment longer. I had my blade on me. It’s why I didn’t want to marry a man like my father. I was tempted to be bad.” I smile at her.

“You’re welcome to let the dark side out at any time.”

We dress, and then we receive a visit from Jack.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“How did it go?” I ask when he walks in.

“I’m sorry, but Dad is dead,” he sighs.

“You say that like it’s a bad thing,” Calista says.

“It is when he wanted to do the honors,” Jacks answers. Damn right I wanted to do the honors.

“So what happened?”

“Well, we were able to make it look like dad had lost control of his people that he was working with. Unfortunately, you weren’t the only one played today. Your friend Maggie was too. After she lured you in for the job by Jacob, she had been killed and stuffed into another box we just switched out the boxes, destroying yours. Thanks to the detective all the cameras were disabled in the railroad yard, so it was like the OK Corral and only those that lived could tell the story.

“So we’re good?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Oh,” she says, brushing my chest. “Thanks, Jack.”

“No problem. We’re family, Calista.” He smiles and then leaves.

Epilogue

Calista

The sun is beaming so high in the sky that you'd think it was warm, but it's the middle of winter and I wrap up in my new dark blue coat that accommodates my size along with my white cashmere hat, gloves, and scarf set. This little bundle inside me has grown so fast. I look like I'm about to explode, and even though I look like a giant ball, I'm warm on this frigid day.

Ian chuckles as he runs toward me. "Hold on, baby. I'm coming."

"I'm sorry. It's just so cold. I wanted to get bundled up and in the car already. The damn sun is faking me out," I grumble over the top of my scarf.

"Someone's feeling a little moody today."

"Bite me. I feel like I'm going to explode, and you just look as handsome as ever—cut, muscular, and damn good looking. Here I am, a big ball."

"Baby, you're the sexiest thing I've ever seen. Your rounded belly just reminds me that I did my job and put my baby in there. Even if it never goes away, you'll still be hot to me because your body creates life, and that's a fucking miracle. Women are magical and should be respected." He kisses my lips and rubs my belly. "So calm your sexy ass down, and let's go to the doctor so that we can feed you afterwards."

I grin from ear to ear, clapping my hands as the baby does another flip in my stomach. The baby likes that idea as well. We drove to the doctor, which is about fifteen minutes from the house in a little bit of traffic. We luckily arrived about two minutes before my appointment.

The doctor walks into the room with a grin on her face as she watches Ian's hand on my belly. She pumps some hand sanitizer into her hands, rubbing it in as she asks,

“How’s the little guy doing? Giving you much trouble?”

“Strangely, no. The baby hasn’t given me any trouble that I can remember.”

She takes a tape measure and tucks it from one end to another and stretches it along my belly to measure me. “Mr. and Mrs. McNamara, congratulations. Your baby is growing at the proper rate, and he looks to be very healthy. The great news is he’ll be here very soon.”

I can’t stop staring at my husband, knowing we’ve made this little baby that’s growing inside me. It’s amazing. I’m kind of glad that we didn’t get pregnant right away, but now all I want to do is have more of his babies. I love this man with all my heart, and the look on his face right now is worth everything to me and more. I groan and scrunch my face. “Are you okay, Mrs. McNamara?”

“Just felt a slight twinge of pain,” I groaned through clenched teeth. The pain doesn’t last too long, but it’s longer than the one I felt earlier.

“Well, you’re due any day now. Perhaps we should check your cervix and see if you’re dilated.”

“Yes, that’s probably a good idea,” Ian says. She prepares her gloves and the stirrups while Ian helps me with a gown and then helps me get into position.

I wave him close so I can whisper, “Maybe we could use those for us.”

He chuckles. “I was thinking the same thing.”

“Every couple says the same thing,” the doctor remarks, shaking her head with a smile. “Let’s see what we have here.”

“Wow, okay.”

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“What is it?”

“It seems that you’re probably in early labor as we speak. You’re about five centimeters at present. I want you to stay here for another twenty minutes so we can monitor your pain. If your contractions persist and move closer together, I’d like to admit you. If not, we’ll send you home.” I look up at Ian, wide-eyed.

“It’s okay, my love. We can handle anything. You know what happens.”

“Yes, that’s why I’m frightened, Ian.”

“I’m here for you. If you want them to give you the meds, I’ll have them give it to you when the time is right. I’ll call your parents now.” He takes out his phone and calls my father.

Once he has him on the line, Ian says to me, “Hey, baby. Your daddy wants to talk to you.” He puts it on speaker.

“Hey, Princess. I love you.”

“I love you, Daddy.”

“I’m extremely proud of you, and I know that you’re going to do well. Even if we don’t get there before you bring my grandson into the world, I’m positive you are in good hands. You have that wonderful husband who would do everything in his power to keep you safe and strong. You got this, my little girl. See you soon.” He blows a kiss into the phone. I blow a kiss back, and then he hangs up.

“We got this.” The pain kicks in again and Ian holds my hand, allowing me to squeeze his.

“It looks like we’re definitely having this baby today,” I say with tears in my eyes.

“Yes, we are. I couldn’t be happier to have one of many babies with an amazing woman like you, my wife.” He presses his lips to mine.

“You should tell your family.”

“I’ll send them a message soon. All that matters is you, Calista. Let me know when you are well.” I press my head to his forearm.

“You are wonderful. I’m so grateful my father set me up with a mafia man.”

“Me too.”

Ian

“Dr. Calista MacNamara, you have a call on line one.” She picks up the call from the nurses’ station with her large belly in the way. I watch her from my vantage point, stalking her like the possessive psycho husband that I am. She can’t get rid of me no matter how much she tries. Hell, I’ll buy the damn hospital just to keep tabs on her. Her safety is my utmost priority.

“Mrs. MacNamara, it seems you’ve been on your feet too damn long. You were supposed to leave twenty minutes ago,” I growl on the other end of the line.

“Yes, well, it seems there is a beast of a husband who delayed my day when he extended my lunch hour.” I recall having given her a special treat. I had tried to ease her body with a foot massage that turned into eating her pussy twice.

“Sorry,” I say, even if I don’t mean it and would do it again. In fact, it’s penciled in my calendar for tomorrow.

“Your son is waiting for you.”

“Is it really our son who is waiting for me? Or is it my husband who is standing in the corridor off the surgical exit.”

“How did you...?”

“Darling, you’re not the only one who can play this game. I just clocked out. Now I’m hanging up.” She clicks the receiver into place and smiles at the nurse and then shakes her head. I grumble to myself about how she always smiles at others. I am an obsessed husband, without a doubt. Maybe it’s crazy, but after losing her for months and then nearly losing her to my former father’s deadly hatred, I can’t ever lose her again. It would kill me.

“Ah, there you are. My most precious love.”

“Where is our son?”

“He’s with his cousins. They are all hanging out. We have plenty of time alone today. I want to spoil you before baby number two arrives. What do you want to do? A bath, a nap, a massage?” I ask, standing behind her and rubbing her shoulders.

She sighs and moans, “God, you know me so well.”

“You packed a bag for me?” she asks after looking in the back seat. We head out to the Hilton near the hospital because I want her to enjoy a massive hotel away from everything. We can just spend time relaxing for the weekend.

Source Creation Date: May 20, 2025, 9:18 am

“Yes, I have plans for you,” I answer with a lecherous tone, chuckling sinisterly.

She rubs her hand over my thigh. “I love you so much.”

“I know, and I’m grateful every day that you do.” I lift her hand and kiss it. When I look over again at the next red light, my six-months-pregnant wife is asleep. I drive quietly to the hotel. I give the valet the keys and scoop up the bag over my shoulder and then carry my sweet minx in my arms. I’m happy I already booked it earlier so I bypass the front desk and go straight to the elevators. Stripping her down to her panties and bra, I lay her down on the sofa. I run the bath water after and then wake her up.

“Beautiful, it’s time for you to enjoy your bath. You get to decide dinner.”

“Can we just get some Chinese?”

“Yes we can.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you.”

“I’m sorry this is a crappy anniversary.”

“Crappy?” I say.

“I wasn’t supposed to work today. Now I’m so freaking tired and gross.”

I chuckle and shake my head. “I’m with the love of my life in a hotel with her naked body that I get to admire while I steal glances. As long as I get to hold you, I’m a happy man.” She acts like we don’t have sex almost every freaking day.

“We’ve been married for five years, and I have loved every damn day.” She’s about to argue, but I press my hand to her lips and say, “Loved every day.”

“Even when I’m grumpy.”

“You’re like a grumpy kitty. It’s adorable.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“My life wasn’t good before you. You’re the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“For a killer, you are freaking romantic.”

“Only for you.”

“Good, because I’ll show every bitch I’m my father’s daughter.”

“Or your husband’s wife.”

“That’s right.” She reaches up on her tiptoes and kisses my chin.

“Bath, now,” I growled. “I need to feed you, and then it’s bedtime.”

Two hours later, Calista wasn’t tired anymore, and we definitely celebrated our anniversary with multiple orgasms.

THE END