



# Bound To His Oath (Mafia Mayhem: The Italian Connection #1)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Do you honestly think I'd let you marry someone else? You've been mine since I took your first kiss. I was just giving you time to grow up.

~ Nico ~

I was five years old the day we met, twelve when I figured out that I was going to love him for the rest of my life. When I turned sixteen, he gave me my first kiss and then my world ended. I never believed the things people had said about him. He was not the bad boy everyone seemed to think he was. I'd seen his heart and it was pure gold. I just wish I'd had a chance to keep it before they took him away from me.

~ Luca ~

I was ten years old the day we met. By the time I was twelve I knew that I was going to love him for the rest of my life. When he turned sixteen, I gave him his first kiss and then my world was ripped apart. I wasn't the bad boy everyone seemed to think I was, but I refused to show anyone my heart except him, and they had taken him away from me.

Warning: Gay erotic romance. The material in this book contains explicit sexual content that is intended for mature audiences only. All characters involved are adults capable of consent, are over the age of eighteen, and are willing participants.

**Total Pages (Source):** 21

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

"I don't want to do this," I whispered to myself simply because there was no one else around to hear me. I'd been locked in my room a week ago, the door only opening for my guards to deliver food. No one had come in and I certainly hadn't been able to go out.

I was in a prison created by my own family.

I'd always known that my life wouldn't go the way I wanted it to, but I never thought it would come to this. In one month I was to marry the daughter of one of my father's business associates.

Oh, on paper it looked like a good deal. Two elite families of society merging in one glorious wedding that would more than likely be plastered all over the news. With the wedding, not only would the two families merge as one, but so would the companies, my father's and my soon-to-be bride's father's.

One problem, I was gay right down to my toenails. I had no interest in marrying some woman I barely even knew. Hell, I had no interest in marrying anyone.

Well, that wasn't totally true.

There was only one person I wanted to marry and he had been taken from me long ago. The heartache at that loss still lingered, even after almost a decade of him being gone.

I would never forgive my family for what they had done to the man that I had known in my soul would always be the love of my life. Their lies and betrayal had not only taken him from me, but they had made his life hell.

I didn't even know if he was alive or dead. The second he had been taken away, he ceased to exist in my world. I wasn't even allowed to mention his name.

And now, once again, my parents were doing what they thought was right for our family, despite my protests, and throwing me into a new kind of hell.

If they thought they were going to get grandkids out of me, they had another thing coming. I had no intention of having sex with the woman my parents were marrying me, too.

I'd kill myself first.

I'd actually been thinking about that for a few days, and it hadn't been the first time. The only thing keeping from ending it all was the promise Luca had made to me all those years ago that he would come for me.

I was still waiting for him.

Yeah, it was stupid. He probably didn't even remember who I was. While we had grown up next door to each other, our time together seemed so fleeting.

I had been five years old the day we met, ten years old when I figured out that I was going to love him for the rest of my life. When I turned sixteen, he gave me my first kiss...and then my world ended when they took him from me.

I never believed the things people had said about him. He was not the bad boy everyone seemed to think he was. I'd seen his heart and it was pure gold. I just wish

I'd had a chance to keep it before they took him away from me.

I didn't bother wiping away the tears that filled my eyes and then spilled down my cheeks. What would be the point? More would just follow. I should have been all cried out, but apparently, I wasn't.

Still, I stiffened when I heard someone unlock the door and quickly wiped my tears away. When the door opened, my mother walked in, a couple of my guards standing behind her.

What? Did they think I was going to attack her or something? As much as I hated some of the things she did—well, most of the things she did—she was still my mother.

"Nicolas."

"Mother," I replied.

"I had hoped your attitude would be better, but I see that I was wrong."

I didn't bother replying to that. What would be the point? Improving my attitude would mean coming around to her way of thinking and that would never happen.

My mother sighed before snapping her fingers. A maid hurried into the room, a suit bag in her hands. She carefully laid it over the chair next to the door before leaving the room.

"I want you to get cleaned up and changed into this tuxedo," my mother stated.  
"We're leaving in an hour."

"To where?" I asked out of curiosity since I hadn't been allowed to leave my room for

a week.

"Does it matter?" my mother snapped. "Just do what I said. And I expect you to be on your best behavior tonight. If you bring shame to this family, your father will be very cross with you."

Yeah, that was never good.

I just wasn't sure I cared anymore.

"No, I won't go."

God, it felt so good to say that.

"You will do what you are told."

I shook my head. "I'm done listening to you. You've never cared about what I wanted or what I think. So, why should I care about you say?"

My mother's eyes narrowed. It wasn't a good look on her. Isabella Rossi had spent a lot of my father's money to retain her good looks, and I had to admit, it worked. She didn't look a day over thirty, which was about fifteen years younger than she actually was.

She snapped her fingers.

I jolted and leapt up when two guards rushed into the room and right for me, darting toward the bathroom. They caught me just as I grabbed the door handle.

I cried out as I was dragged down to the floor and pinned there by a massive weight on my back, legs, and arms. The only thing I could move was my head.

And I wished I hadn't when I saw my mother walking toward me with a syringe in her hand.

"You've only brought this on yourself, Nicolas."

I screamed as she shot the clear liquid into my arm. Almost immediately, it began to burn like lava was shooting through my veins.

"Give it five minutes to take effect and then get him cleaned up and into his tuxedo," my mother ordered. "He needs to be ready to go in an hour."

"Yes, ma'am."

I tried to resist when the guards stripped me of my clothes, but I couldn't get my arms and legs to do what I wanted them to do. It didn't help that everything had a fuzzy hue to it and I felt as if my head was filled with cotton, the room spinning around me.

When I was lifted up, I felt like I was floating on a cloud. That quickly ended when I was set down on the cold tiles of the shower stall. When the water from the hand held shower was sprayed on me, I shivered. They hadn't even waited for it to warm up. The water was frigid.

"Go get his stuff ready," one of the guards stated. "I'll finish cleaning him up."

"Hey, we're just supposed to be cleaning him up and getting him dressed, so no funny business," the other guard said.

The first guard snorted. "Like he's going to remember any of this. He's so stoned out of his gourd right now, he doesn't even know what day it is."

"Just knock it off. I don't want to get fired."

"Fine."

I whimpered when he got closer with the spray nozzle and started washing me over. The water was chilly and he was close enough to make it actually hurt.

The guard snickered as he turned the spray to my groin area. "You're not always going to be this lucky, little Nicolas. I'll get you alone at some point and no one will believe you if you cry foul. Everyone knows you lie."

With my head as foggy as it was, it was hard to understand what he was saying, but I knew it was a threat. I knew if this man got me alone, I wouldn't be able to fight him off and I doubted anyone would help me, or believe me. He was right about that.

Leaving this world was looking better and better.

As soon as I was all rinsed off, the guard grabbed a towel and began wiping me down. My skin crawled every time his bare hand touched me, which seemed way too many times.

When he jerked me up, his hand slid down over my ass. Tears sprang to my eyes at my inability to stop him when he started to slide his finger between my ass cheeks. No one had touched me there ever. I didn't want my first time to be this monster.

"Steve, knock it off," the other guard snapped as he walked into the bathroom. "Mrs. Rossi is going to be up any minute to make sure he's dressed. I refuse to explain to her why he isn't."

"Fine."

I grunted as I was lifted up over the guy's shoulder and carried into my bedroom. I was tossed onto the bed as if I was a bag of potatoes. In the next ten minutes, I

suffered more unwanted touches as I was dressed from head to toe for whatever my mother had planned for me.

By the time my mother opened the door and walked in, I was fully dressed, but I was also on the verge of spewing. My stomach was knotted so much, the pain was indescribable. The tears I had shed before were nothing compared to the tears streaming down my face now.

I truly wanted to die.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

I stared out the window of my father's limousine, not saying a word to anyone. There really was no one here that I wanted to talk to. They had nothing I wanted to hear.

My parents' opinion had been made very clear to me. They cared nothing for me, only for what they could get from me. I was a bargaining chip to them. A commodity to be used to pay for their cushy lifestyle.

That was probably why they had me in the first place. It wasn't like they had been any kind of parents to me since the day I was born. Even before I had come out as gay they had hated me.

I still didn't understand why they had me if they hated my very existence, so I could only assume it was so they had something to bargain with when they wanted something.

And, apparently, they had bargained me to one Genevieve Thomas, my soon to be spouse. I had literally met the woman like two times in my entire life. I knew nothing about her, and yet, I was supposed to spend the rest of my life with her.

I hoped my parents at least got a good deal from selling me, and I hoped they choked on it, every last cent.

"Nicolas!"

I jumped when my father shouted and turned to look at him.

"Pay attention, your mother is speaking to you."

Again, she didn't have anything to say that I wanted to hear. I sighed as I glanced at her.

"When we arrive," my mother started, "you will greet Genevieve and her father. You will be polite and respectful. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Mother."

I knew she expected a verbal response. I couldn't well tell her to go fuck herself, not when we were all sitting in the back of the limousine. There wasn't enough room there for the fight that would ensue when she attacked me.

Her eyes narrowed. "If you don't want another one of those shots, you'll behave yourself."

I knew she meant it.

The shot of drugs she had given me had made my veins boil and I had a total loss of function. The one she had given me to counteract the paralyzing drug was just as bad.

I never wanted to feel either again.

I gave a swift nod and then waited to see if she had anything else to say. When she turned her attention to my father and started talking to him, I tuned them both out and glanced back out the window.

I wonder if I would die if I opened the door and jumped?

Knowing my luck, I wouldn't die like I wanted to. I'd probably just break something

and my parents would still force me to attend whatever shit-show we were headed for, injury or no injury.

It wasn't like they cared for me or anything.

When we pulled up in front of a massive white stone mansion, I was in no way surprised. If my parents were going to sell me, they were going to get their money's worth.

Made me wonder how much they were getting for me.

I knew there was a business merger in there somewhere, even if I didn't know the details. My father's company hadn't been doing so well the last few months.

I suspected it was due to the fact that my father felt only those at the top were allowed to have opinions or thoughts or their own. Eventually, people didn't want to be around him or do business with his company.

I waited for my parents to climb out of the car before I joined them. For just a moment, I tensed, thinking about running. More like fantasizing.

Unfortunately, my parents had brought along Steve and that other guard. I didn't know his name. They would chase me down and my mother would drug me up again, giving Steve another opportunity to molest me.

I clasped my hands behind my back, knowing I'd wrinkle my suit jacket if I put them in my pockets, and that would never be allowed. I needed to not do anything to piss my parents off.

Didn't mean I wasn't going to look for the first escape route I could find. If an opportunity presented itself, I'd take it, even if I had to jump out of the limousine.

I followed my parents up the wide steps to the front door. I breathed in deeply and then slowly let it out as they knocked and the door was opened by an older man in a suit. My parents announced who we were and we were allowed inside.

It wasn't until we stepped into the entryway and I heard the noise level that I realized this wasn't a simple dinner with my fiancée and her parents. It was a full-on social event.

This was going to be a complete nightmare.

My mother shot me a glare before plastering a smile on her face and greeting our hosts. I barely kept from rolling my eyes. I was just so tired of all this shit. My life had been like this for so long, I barely remembered what freedom felt like.

"It's good to see you, Mr. Thomas," my father said as he shook the man's hand.

"Please, Victor, call me Andrew. We are about to be family, after all."

"Andrew." My father was practically beaming as he turned and gestured to my mother.

"Oh, you brought your younger sister," Andrew said.

"No, this is my wife."

"This young lady?" Andrew asked. "You're lying to me. There's no way this beautiful woman could be Nicolas's mother. She's too young."

I grit my teeth when my mother let out a flirty little giggle. That was the most horrendous sound I had ever heard. What was even worse was that my mother was buying the bullshit Andrew was feeding her.

I almost recoiled when Andrew's eyes lifted to me and hardened. "Nicolas."

I gave him a polite bow of my head. "Sir."

"Genevieve has been waiting for you."

A weak smile spread across my lips. Considering I don't really remember Genevieve, I couldn't say I was waiting to see her.

"She's in the other room," Andrew said. "You should go find her."

My mother twirled around, pure panic on her face. "Oh, but—"

"Not to worry, Isabella." Andrew grabbed her hand and gave it a gentle pat. "Genevieve will take him in hand."

Oh, goody.

Why did I get the feeling that Genevieve was just like my mother? My soon-to-be married life was looking even more dismal than it had before.

I didn't think that was possible.

I don't know what fantasies I had harbored, but I at least thought me and Genevieve could be friends. We certainly weren't going to be lovers.

Guess I was wrong there, too.

Still, getting away from mother sounded far better than dealing with a woman I barely knew.

I kept my hands clasped behind my back as I made my way to the other room. I paused in the entryway, looking around. There were a lot of people here. I counted no less than twenty people around the room in various little groups, chatting away with drinks in their hands and little plates of finger foods.

I should have eaten before we came here.

"Nicolas, darling."

I visibly cringed when a buxom blonde walked up to me and wrapped her arms around me. Not only did I not like being touched by people I didn't know, but, after what happened in the shower, I didn't want to be touched by anyone.

"Genevieve." I placed a light kiss on her cheek and then got a firm hold of her shoulders and pushed her back a little. "You look beautiful tonight."

It was the polite thing to say and people were watching, especially my parents. If I said one wrong word to her, my mother would be livid. If I could just keep her from touching me, I'd be fine.

Genevieve wrapped her hands around my arm. "I have some people I'd like you to meet."

Whatever.

She led me over to a small group of men standing off to one side of the room. I swallowed when I got a good look at the dark haired man staring so intently at me. There was something in his eyes that made me incredibly wary.

"Nicolas, this is Vinnie Borelli and his husband Nicky."

I clenched my hand to keep it from trembling and then reached out to shake the man's hand. "It's nice to meet you, sir."

"I've heard a lot about you, Nicolas," Vinnie stated.

Yeah, I had nothing to say to that.

"Gena's best friend Marisa is married to my cousin Vito," Vinnie said. "Do you know Marisa?"

I shook my head. It wasn't like I got out that often anyway. I knew very few people.

Vinnie lifted a dark eyebrow. "You might know her better as Mari Sabatino."

I gasped as that name slammed through me like a tidal wave, sucking all the air out of my lungs. "Sabatino?"

"I see you do remember her."

I swallowed tightly, glancing at Gena. She was just smiling up at me, her hand still wrapped around my arm. "Mari is your best friend?"

"Yep," Gena replied. "We've been best friends since we were teenagers. We went to the same boarding school together."

I wanted to ask so many questions, but not a single word came to my lips. I could barely think of his name, let alone speak it.

"Vinnie is an old family friend," Gena explained. "When Marisa married into the Borelli family, we met and got to talking. After Marisa explained a few things, Vinnie agreed to help us."

"Help you with what?" I asked, feeling totally lost.

Gena just grinned before nodding at Vinnie. "There are a few other people I want to introduce my fiancé to. We'll see you later, huh?"

Vinnie glanced at his watch. "About twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes for what?" I asked as Gena lead me away. I was still feeling very confused. I also wanted to go back to Vinnie and ask him to get me in touch with Marisa. I had to know how her brother was doing.

It was vital.

I could barely hold the smile on my face as Gena introduced me to person after person. I had no idea who these people were, and I didn't really care. I did know that if I didn't make nice, my mother would be pissed. I could feel her watching me from across the room, dissecting my every move.

"I need to visit the little lady's room," Gena stated. "Nicolas, would you be a dear and escort me?"

"Yes, of course," I replied automatically.

When she led me across the room to where her father was standing with my parents, I rethought that automatic statement. I wasn't happy being shown off as a shiny puppy to all of Gena's friends and associates, but it was better than facing my parents.

"Dinner is almost ready, Daddy. You might want to get everyone started for the dining room," Gena said when we reached them. "Nicolas is going to escort me to the little lady's room and then we'll join you."

"I'm sure Nicolas would prefer to stay with us," my mother replied. "He's shy."

I wasn't shy. I was terrified.

"Oh, it's okay," Andrew stated. "He'll be fine with Genevieve."

"But—"

"Your man there can go with them if you think it will make Nicolas feel better," Andrew suggested.

I wanted to shake my head. I didn't want Steve to go anywhere with me. I was afraid of what the man might do if he got me alone, and if Gena was inside the bathroom, that would leave me alone in the hallway with Steve.

I had no choice when Gena yanked on my arm and started leading me away from the crowd of partygoers and toward a hallway at the back of the room.

I started to wonder where we were going when we continued through the hallway to the very back of the house.

Where in the hell was this bathroom?

The moon?

When she finally stopped in front of one of the doors, I tried to take a step back so she could enter, but she refused to let go of my arm. Instead, Gena leaned up on her heels and pressed her cheek against mine.

"Close your eyes," she whispered.

What?

"Close your eyes, Nico."

I reared back until I could see her face. No one called me Nico. Well, no one had called me Nico since I had been sixteen years old, not since that horrible day when I lost the only man I had ever loved.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

My nerves were strung as tight as a bow string. Waiting was frustrating, aggravating. I felt as if I had been waiting forever when it had actually only been ten years, almost to the day.

That seemed poignant.

The last time I had seen my love in person, the last time I held him in my arms, would be exactly ten years ago come tomorrow. That was a long time to be without him, but I was positive Nico remembered me.

He had to remember me.

It was the one thing keeping me alive and moving forward these last ten years. I had made Nico a promise as they dragged me away from him. I would be back for him, come hell or high water, and I always kept my promises, especially the ones I made to him.

I glanced down at my cell phone when it buzzed. It was a message from Vinnie. Gena was bringing Nico to me. My heart started beating a little faster, thundering in my chest.

It was time.

The second the lights went out in the entire house, I stepped out of the pantry and hurried to the hallway where Gena and Nico were supposed to be waiting for me.

As soon as I stepped into the hallway, I spotted the hulking figure standing in my way. I nodded to the others with me and watched as they quickly took him out before turning toward the treasure I had come here to steal.

My breath caught. Even with the lights off I could clearly see the fear on Nico's pale face as he looked around. He hadn't spotted me yet, and that was a good thing. I only had seconds to act.

I pulled a small black canister out of my pocket and moved up to Gena and Nico. As soon as he turned toward me, I sprayed him in the face. Nico's eyes rolled back in his head. I caught him in my arms before he could hit the floor, cradling him close to me.

Finally, I had him in my arms again.

"Go," Gena whispered. "You need to be out of here before the lights come back on."

I couldn't tear my eyes away from Nico. He had changed so much in the last ten years, and yet, I could still see the boy I had fallen in love with in his face.

"Luca!" Gena whispered harshly. "You need to go."

Right.

"Are you going to be okay?" I asked her. If it wasn't for Gena, this plan never would have worked. I owed her everything.

Gena smiled. "I'll be fine. I'm just going to lock myself in the bathroom until this is over."

I glanced at the man my guys had taken out. "What about him?"

Gena stared at him for a moment before slipping her eyes heeled shoe off. She walked over and hit him on the head with it a couple of times. When a small trail of blood started to trickle from the cut on his head, she slid her finger through it and then wiped it on the corner of the wall.

"There, taken care of." Gena smiled up at me after putting her shoe back on. "Now, go. I'll see you at home after this has all blown over."

"Tell your dad and Vinnie thank you for me."

It had been a complicated plan that had taken the work of all of us, and it still wasn't over. I still had to get Nico out of here without anyone seeing us.

"Just stick to the plan, Luca."

I nodded as I swung Nico up into my arms. Without another word, I turned and started back the way I came. Only, this time, I bypassed the pantry and walked toward the backdoor.

One of my men was there to open the door for me. I hurried out the door and then took the path that led to the back of the property. The back gate was also held open for me as was the door to the SUV waiting in the alley behind the house.

I gently set Nico on the seat and then climbed in beside him. I secured him with the seatbelt and then did my own before wrapping my arms around him and pulling him to my side.

"Get us to the airport."

The lights in the house weren't supposed to go back on for another thirty minutes. I figured we didn't have long after that for people to discover that Nico was missing. I

needed to have him in the air before that happened. Once in the air, I was taking him out of the country.

He was never coming back. Neither of us were.

Nico's head was resting against my chest. I reached down and lifted it so I could see his face. His beautiful face. I couldn't wait until he opened his eyes and I could really see him. I wanted to see his smile.

Unfortunately, the spray Vinnie had supplied me with would keep him knocked out for the next few hours. Just long enough to get him on the plane and in the air.

Even with Nico in my arms after all of these years, I was unsettled, my stomach in one large knot. I doubted I would feel better until we were firmly back on my home soil.

It would be a couple of days before that happened. We had one crucial stop to make before we flew home.

When we rolled up to the gate of the executive hangar, I waited for the guard to let us in. Once through the gate, he drove us right inside the hangar and up to the private jet that Vinnie had loaned to me.

I unbuckled both me and Nico, lifted him in my arms, and then carried him out of the SUV and directly up the stairs of the plane. I hated having to buckle him in again, but he had to be while we took off.

I turned to the man that had climbed onto the plane behind me. "Please thank Vinnie for me. I'll return his plane as soon as I am done with it."

Marco smiled at me. "Vinnie said you can use it as long as you need to."

"Just need to get Nico home."

That was my fondest wish.

"We'll carry out the plan on our end," Marco assured me. "You should be hearing from Vinnie by the end of the week."

"If anything changes or he has any problems, have him give me a call."

Marco nodded before disembarking the plane.

When the rest of my men boarded, I had one of them close the door and then ordered the pilot to take off. I took my seat next to Nico and seat belted myself in.

The flight time from the airport in New York City to the one in Niagara Falls, Canada was just over an hour. We were headed there because if someone wanted to get married on the spur of the moment, and couldn't get to Las Vegas, that was the place to do it. Ontario allowed gay marriage and there was no waiting period.

I planned to have us wedded and bedded before we reached Italy. No one was ever going to take him away from me again.

I blew out a breath of relief when the wheels lifted and we took off, leaving the ground. We still weren't out of the woods yet, but we were one step closer.

I unbuckled myself and stood, going forward to where the stewardess was stationed. "Can I use the satellite phone?"

I wanted to check in with Vinnie and make sure that his end of the plan was still in motion. I was also kind of curious what had happened after the lights went back on and if Gena was okay. My sister would kill me if anything happened to her best

friend.

The stewardess smiled at me when she handed me the phone. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

I knew flirting when I heard it.

"No, thank you. I'll wait until my fiancé wakes up."

The smile instantly fell from her face. "Fiancé?"

I pointed back to our seats. "That pretty man back there."

She let out a little laugh. "Can't blame a girl for trying."

At least she took my rejection well.

"How about some coffee instead?"

"I'm good, thanks," I replied. I dialed Vinnie's number as I walked back into the main cabin and then held it to my ear. "Hey, it's me. How are things going?"

"Are you in the air?"

"I am," I replied.

"Good," Vinnie said. "Get him home as fast as you can. Currently, his parents are still freaking out that he's disappeared. They think he's run off. We're pushing that idea at the moment, especially Gena, who should get an award for her acting skills. She's in tears, crying all over Mrs. Rossi as if her heart was really broken."

"Have they called the police?" That was one of my biggest worries.

"They're too embarrassed. Like I said, everyone assumes Nico got cold feet and ran off."

I hoped it stayed that way.

"We should be landing in about forty-five minutes. Call me if anything changes."

"Has he woken up yet?"

I glanced at Nico. "No, not yet." I was equally frightened and elated at the prospect of Nico waking up. I had no idea what his reaction would be to me kidnapping him.

Again, I didn't know if Nico even remembered me.

I had never forgotten him. His memory was the only thing I had to keep me alive during those four years in prison and the following years where I became the man I am today.

"Oh, got to go," Vinnie said. "Mr. Rossi is headed in my direction."

"Yeah, okay." I hung up and then carried the phone back to the stewardess. "Thank you," I told her as I handed it back.

"If you or your fiancé need anything, just let me know."

"We will."

I walked back and sat down next to Nico. I hated the fact that he was still unconscious, but I'd had no other choice. I couldn't have him fighting me when I was

trying to kidnapping him.

I reached over and brushed the hair back from his face. Even unconscious he looked like a dream. In the soft glow of the overhead lights, he actually looked kind of tired, making me wonder when the last time was that he had gotten any sleep. He was sleeping so hard.

I'd be changing that. Nico would be treated like the treasure he was from here on out. I'd had people watching him so I knew his life up until now had been dismal. I wasn't going to allow that to happen anymore.

When the pilot announced that we were coming in for a landing, I made sure Nico was secured and then buckled myself in. I wrapped an arm around Nico and held him close as we landed, making sure his head didn't flop around.

The one thing I couldn't get around was immigration and customs, which was why I had a fake ID and passport for Nico, naming him as Nico Sabatino, my husband. Another thing I had to thank Vinnie for.

That man had some mad skills and serious connections.

Once the plane landed and we taxied into the executive hangar, I told one of my men go and register us. I had more important things to deal with.

I unbuckled Nico and then lifted him up into my arms. There was another SUV waiting for us when I carried him off the plane. I settled Nico in the backseat and then climbed in, shutting the door so the cooler air wouldn't bother him.

We were headed to the Niagara Falls Marriott Fallsview Hotel & Spa, which had been recommended to me by Vinnie. I guess this was where he stayed when he was in the area.

The upside to staying there above and beyond the fact that it was a five star hotel was that they also provided wedding services, complete with a chapel and a justice of the peace.

We had a wedding appointment in at noon, which was less than twelve hours from now. As soon as we were married and I had the marriage certificate in hand, we were headed straight back to the airport.

I just had to get Nico to agree to be mine.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

I sucked in a breath as consciousness came back to me, my eyes snapping open. My heart thundered in my chest as I scanned the room, looking for any threats.

When I didn't find any, I took a second look, trying to figure out where I was. I knew instantly that I wasn't in my bedroom. It looked nothing like this fancy room.

For one, I was in a king sized bed and not the full size one I had at home. For two, there was a freaking river outside the window. I lived in a nice quiet upper class neighborhood, not this place.

I sat up and started to take inventory of my body. The major upside was that I still had all my clothes on, except my shoes, suit jacket, and the bowtie of my tuxedo. Someone had also unbuttoned the top few buttons of my dress shirt, but that was all.

My head was a little foggy, but it was clearing fast. I didn't feel the same pain I'd felt when my mother drugged me, so I could only hope that wasn't what had happened.

I reached up and rubbed the side of my head. The last thing I remembered was Gena telling me to close my eyes and then nothing. Everything after that, including where I was, was a complete blank.

Not good.

I scooted to the side of the bed and then stood. I blinked and grabbed for the wooden bed frame at the end of the bed as the room sway a little bit. When my head cleared, I

made my way over to the double doors across the room from the bed.

I pressed my ear against the cold hard wood, but I couldn't hear anything except the low noise of a television playing in the background.

Hoping that I wasn't making the biggest mistake of my life, I pulled the door open and peeked out. When I saw the outer room, I pulled the door open more and stepped out of the bedroom.

I was in a freaking hotel room. Granted, it was a really nice hotel room, much nicer than any I had been in before, but it was still a hotel room.

Why was I in a hotel room?

I cautiously tiptoed toward the sound of the television, but before I could reach it, I heard a noise coming from a set of double doors leading out to a balcony. I changed direction and headed for the double doors.

As I drew closer, I heard the low murmur of voices. I swallowed hard and peeked out. It was easy to spot the tall man standing near the railing talking on a cell phone. He was kind of hard to miss.

His shoulders were massively wide and he stood several inches taller than me. I could tell that without even standing close to him. And the muscles on this guy were insane. His arms bulged every time he moved and his legs were like tree trunks.

This guy could crush me like a bug.

I quickly turned to run until I heard the one thing able to freeze me in my tracks.

"Nico."

I gulped, afraid to hope, and slowly turned. "What did you call me?"

A slow easy smirk crossed the man's handsome face. He set his cell phone down on the small table next to him and then slowly walked toward me almost as if he thought I might bolt.

I might.

"Nico, cuore mio ."

Tears sprouted up in my eyes. "Luca?"

That smirk turned into a smile when the corners of his mouth curved up. When he finally stood in front of me, he raised his hand and stroked his fingers down the side of my face. "I kept my promise, Nico."

I gasped, my eyes rounding as the tears flooding them started trailing down my cheeks. "Luca."

"Don't cry, cuore mio . I'm here now."

I was not ashamed to say I burst into tears as I threw myself into Luca's arms. When his arms came around me, hugging me tight, I shuddered.

"It's okay, cuore mio . I'm here now and it's all going to be okay. I'm going to take care of you."

"Where have you been?" I sobbed. "It's been ten years."

I wanted to hit him for making me wait for so long, but I also wanted to kiss him since he was finally here.

"After I got out of prison, I knew the only way I could save you was if I had the money and power to make it happen, so I've spent the last several years making sure I was in a position where no one can ever take you away from me again."

That only made me cry harder.

"I'm so sorry," I cried. "I tried to tell everyone you hadn't done anything to me, but no one would listen to me, not even the police, and then your family moved away and I didn't know where you were, and—"

"Ssshhh, it's okay," Luca said. "I know, Nico. I know everything."

"How—"

The smirk was back. "I had people watching you."

I blinked in surprise. "You had people watching me?"

"I did," Luca replied. "I would have come to you earlier, but I needed to put a plan into place to rescue you and that took a little while."

My jaw dropped when Luca went down to his knees in front of me. "Luca, what are you doing?"

"Do you forgive me for being late, Nico?"

My brow flickered with a frown. "There's nothing to forgive. My parents kept us apart, not you."

My parents!

Panic seized me. "Luca, my parents. They are going to come after me."

Luca's eyes narrowed with a dangerous glint. "I hope they do."

"What?"

Was he insane?

"Nico, I'm not the same person I was all of those years ago. I won't allow them to take you from me again. If they come after you, I will fight them, and believe me, they will not win. I'm a lot more powerful than I was back then."

Physically, I could see that, but it meant nothing against their money and connections. I don't think Luca understood that.

"I have a plan, cuore mio, but you have to agree to it first."

"What plan?"

"It involves you, me, and a minister."

"A minister?"

"Will you marry me, Nico?"

"But—"

"No buts," Luca said. "This is a yes or no question that requires a yes or no answer."

I felt like my heart spasmed as I said, "I'm engaged."

"Oh, I am aware."

Huh?

"Do you honestly think I'd let you marry someone else?" Luca scoffed. "You've been mine since I took your first kiss. I was just giving you time to grow up, but you have so I'm here now."

"Do you mean it?" Hope blossomed in my chest and nothing on earth could have made it fade. "Can we really be together now?"

"We can, cuore mio ." Luca stood and grabbed me, pulling me into his arms. "I've made plans, Nico, big plans, and I just need you to agree to them."

"Anything," I whispered. "I'll do anything to be with you."

The last ten years without Luca had been hell. I couldn't believe we were finally together now. I was also terrified that he'd be taken away from me again.

"Come on." Luca turned me and pushed me toward the doors. "Come inside where we can talk. I have a lot to explain to you."

He grabbed his cell phone real quick and then hurried to join me. Inside, he led me over to one of the two plush cream colored couches and sat down, pulling me down beside him.

"The first thing you need to know is that Gena and her father were all in on this plan of mine."

My mouth parted in surprise. "Really?"

Luca nodded. "I knew that your parents were keeping you under their thumb so I needed a way to get you away from them. I figured if I dangled a bit of money in front of them, they'd loosen their grip on you."

I narrowed my eyes. "How much?"

"A hundred thousand dollars."

I gasped, my eyes growing large. "You gave them a hundred thousand dollars? For me?"

"I would have given them a million dollars for you." Luca chuckled. "But, no, I just dangled the money in front of them. I didn't give it to them. It was supposed to be your dowry when you married Gena, but since you won't be marrying her, they won't get the money."

"And Gena and her father agreed to this?"

"Gena is my sister Marisa's best friend. She knows the whole story of how I ended up in prison and what your parents did to us. She jumped at the chance to help me save you so we could be together."

"So, what about my engagement to Gena?"

"You were never truly engaged to her. We just needed to find a way to get you away from your parents long enough for me to save you and get you away from them."

"So, that party was...?"

"All part of our plan," Luca replied. "When the lights went out, I was waiting in the pantry. I grabbed you and took you out of there while everyone else was freaking out

over the lights going out. We went straight to the airport and took a jet here."

"And where exactly is here?"

Luca smiled. "We're at Niagara Falls, on the Canadian side. They allow gay marriage and have no waiting period. The hotel we're in hosts weddings. We have an appointment in a few hours to get married."

"How?" I asked. "I have no ID or—" I gasped as another thought hit me. "Luca, did you say we were in Canada?"

"I did."

"I don't have a passport. They arrest people for crossing borders without a passport."

I didn't want to go to jail.

Luca smiled as he got up and walked into the bedroom. He was back a moment later with something in his hand. When he sat down, he handed it to me.

I opened it up and immediately knew it was a passport. It looked like my passport. It even had my picture in it along with a Canadian immigration stamp. The only difference was the fact that the name listed was Nico Sabatino.

I really liked that name.

I glanced up at Luca. "How soon can we make this real?"

"Soon, cuore mio, but there's one more thing I need to discuss with you before you agree to marry me."

I set the passport down on the coffee table and gave Luca my entire attention. He was so serious that I was almost afraid to hear what he had to say. "I'm listening."

"You remember how I said I spent the last several years since I got out of prison making sure I was powerful enough to take on your parents?"

I nodded.

"I took over the Sabatino family in Italy."

I waited for him to say more, but he didn't. He just stared intently at me. "And that means what exactly?" I finally asked because I didn't have a clue.

"Nico, the Sabatino family in Italy is mafia, and I'm the head of that family."

Still didn't have a clue.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

I waited for some sort of reaction from Nico, but he just stared at me. "Nico, did you understand what I said?"

"I don't think I do."

I was afraid of that.

"Like I told you earlier, when I came out of prison, I came out a different man. Prison isn't for the weak of heart. It hardens people." It turned them into killers, but I wasn't going to tell my soft hearted love about that. There were some things he didn't need to know.

I winced when tears flooded Nico's eyes.

"No, no, baby." I quickly tried to wipe the tears from his cheeks. "I didn't tell you that make you cry. I just wanted you to understand how this all started."

"It's all my fault," Nico whispered. "If I had only made someone listen to me, you never would have gone to prison. I should have insisted that they listen to me."

"Nico, it wasn't your fault. All we did was kiss. Your parents were the ones who accused me of raping you. The only people at fault here are your parents and the police for believing them."

I held a whole lot of rage at Nico's parents and it was totally justified. I was even a

little pissed at the police that refused to listen to me or Nico because his parents were rich.

It made me see that money made the rules in this world, so I needed to make some, or rather a lot of money. I wanted to make sure I had more than Nico's parents so they would have to follow my rules.

"When I got out of prison, my father sent me back to the old country to work for my grandfather. I started out at the bottom. I was basically a thug, acting as security and driving my grandfather around, but over time I proved myself to him and I was able to advance up the ranks. When he retired, he made me the boss."

"Of the mafia?"

I nodded.

"Have you...killed someone?" Nico asked. "I heard you had to kill someone to become a made-man in the mob or something like that."

I grimaced at the bad taste that welled up in my throat. I didn't want to lie to Nico, but I didn't want him to hate me either. "I have," I finally admitted. "But every time has been in self-defense."

At least that part was truthful.

"Have you ever been hurt?"

"A time or two."

"So, your work is dangerous?"

"It can be, but I have a good team of security guys that work for me and keep me safe. They will be keeping you safe as well. As the spouse of the boss, your safety is their first priority."

"Being in the mafia is against the law, isn't it? They could send you back to prison."

"Technically, that is true, but things are a little different in Italy than they are in America. As long as we don't go after any civilians or create too much chaos, they pretty much leave us alone to do our thing."

It helped that I had a lot of police and politicians in my pocket. Cost a pretty penny, but it kept me out of jail and kept the police out of my business.

"Can they send me to prison because I'd be your spouse?"

"No!"

Nico jumped when I shouted and looked at me with wide eyes.

"Sorry, didn't mean to raise my voice," I told him. "No, they won't send you to jail. For one, you won't be involved in the business so they would have no reason to send you to prison."

"I won't testify against you."

"They can't force you to testify against me, but to ease your mind, I'll make sure that you never witness anything that they could question you about."

"You can do that?"

I smiled at how naive Nico was. "I can."

Vinnie had talked to me for a very long time, explaining to me how it worked for him and his husband. He didn't want Nicky involved in the business either and made great strides to make sure it never happened.

"When we get back to Italy, you'll have the run of the place, but you'll have guards. One will be assigned to you fulltime and he will go everywhere with you, but more guards will go with you if you leave the house."

I thought Nico would be happy that I had arranged for his security. I was totally confused when he paled. "Nico?"

"G-Guards?"

"You won't be a prisoner, Nico. They are just there for your safety."

"But...but..."

I frowned at the fear I could hear in his voice. It didn't sound normal. "Nico? I swear you won't be a prisoner. I just want you to be safe."

"S-Steve, he...he's a guard at my parents' house. He...he..."

My eyes narrowed. "Did he hurt you, Nico?"

Nico's hair flopped over his forehead as he nodded rapidly and then started speaking so quickly I could barely keep up. "My mother shot me up with something that made it so I couldn't move and then she ordered Steve and another guard to wash me and dress me for the party at Gena's house. In the shower, he started touching me. The other guard stopped him, but he threatened me, saying he would get me eventually."

"You said his name was Steve?"

Nico nodded.

I grabbed my cell phone and dialed Vinnie. "Hey, man, it's me. I need you to do me a favor."

"Sure."

"Nico just told me about one of the guards his parents employ. His name is Steve. I don't know what his last name is. I want him found and brought to me."

Vinnie whistled low under his breath. "What'd he do?"

"He tried to sexually assault Nico last night."

"I'll find him and have him delivered to you," Vinnie said in a no nonsense voice. "He might not be in one piece, but he'll be there."

"As long as he's still breathing."

I wanted to take him apart with my own hands.

"Consider it done, my friend."

"Thank you."

"So, has he agreed to the wedding?" Vinnie asked.

I glanced at Nico. "Not yet, but I'm working on it."

"Best of luck."

"I'll call you later," I said before hanging up.

"Who was that?" Nico asked.

"Vinnie Borelli."

"Oh, Gena introduced me to him at the party. He said your sister married his cousin."

"She did, but she was supposed to marry Vinnie first. Turns out that not only was he gay, but he was already married. The guy that arranged for the betrothal—Vinnie's Uncle Frank—forgot to mention that part to Marisa. She was pissed."

"How did she end up married to the cousin?"

I chuckled as I remembered the story Marisa had told me. "She picked him out of the Borellis that were left. They've been married for about a year now, and I have to give it to Marisa, she has whipped Vito into shape. He follows her around like a puppy and does anything she says."

"Is she happy?"

"I think so. This marriage is what she wanted. I don't think she cared too much who the groom was."

My jaw dropped when Nico grabbed my shirt collar and yanked me close. "I care so don't even think of switching out the groom."

When I pulled my jaw back up, I began to smile. "I wouldn't even think of it. Only one groom will do for me."

"That's me, right?" Nico asked as if he was unsure.

I framed his face with my hands. "It's you, Nico. It's always been you. There has been no one else in my life since you were sixteen years old."

And there never would be. I didn't even see other people. The lack of sex over the last ten years had been hard, but fantasies of Nico had been all I needed to be satisfied, especially since I knew I was working toward having him back in my arms.

"There's been no one else for me either," Nico said. "You're the only one to ever kiss me."

While I knew there had been no one else for Nico due to the tight restraints his parents had on him, I hadn't known until this second that I had been the only one to ever kiss him.

"Can I kiss you again?"

When Nico nodded, I leaned closer and pressed my lips against his and began to kiss him, savoring every second of it. The taste of Nico's lips was just the same as it had been ten years ago, pure ambrosia.

I captured Nico's mouth in another kiss and then another and another. I licked at the seam of his lips until he opened his mouth, and then I delved inside. I licked and nipped and tried my best to devour him, to conquer him, to make him mine.

I lifted my head then grinned when I looked down and saw Nico's red, swollen lips. With his fair complexion, it was a very good look on the man. It was even better knowing I was responsible for those swollen lips.

I grabbed Nico by his hips and lifted him up, then turned and sat back against the couch and set him on my lap so he was straddling me.

I let my gaze roam over his lithe form as I stroked my hands up and down his arms. "You don't know how much I dreamed of you, cuore mio , how much thoughts of having you in my arms again kept me going every second of every day."

"Oh, I think I do," Nico countered. There was a glimmer of something in his eyes that unsettled me. "Thoughts of you were the only thing keeping me from ending it all."

My heart lurched painfully in my chest at the thought of Nico no longer being in this world. If that ever happened, I'd end it too, and follow him into the hereafter. I refused to live in a world where he wasn't alive and breathing, even if we weren't in each other's arms.

"No, baby, never do that."

"I didn't know if you were alive or dead." Anguish tinged his tone and tears flooded his eyes again. "No one would tell me anything. All I had was your promise that you'd come for me."

"I did, though, right? I came for you. I kept my promise."

Nico's smile was beautiful despite the tears. "You kept your promise."

"And I will always keep every promise I ever make to you. I will always come for you. Nothing can keep me from you, not even death."

I'd fight the devil himself for one of Nico's smiles.

" Quanto sei bello, amore mio ."

Nico's eyebrows lifted. "Huh?"

I let out a small chuckle. "We're going to have to up your Italian. I said you are so beautiful, my love."

I was delighted by the soft flush that filled Nico's cheeks.

"Ti amo. Tu sei tutta la mia vita," I whispered as I leaned forward and brushed our lips together again. "I love you. You're my whole life."

He was my everything.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

My breath hitched in my throat. I felt like a wimp with how many times my eyes flooded with tears, but I couldn't help it. Luca had just declared his love for me. He hadn't even done that back all those years ago.

"I love you, too."

"Ti amo," Luca corrected.

My grin went from side to side. "Ti amo."

Something feral and possessive flashed in Luca's brown eyes as he drew in a deep breath. "I've waited a very long time to hear those words."

I leaned my forehead against Luca's and smiled at him. "They always belonged to you. I've known since I was ten years old that you were the love of my life."

"I beat you," Luca replied. "I was twelve."

Given that there was a five year age difference between us, Luca must have fallen for me a couple of years after we met. "That's a long time to love someone."

Eighteen years by my count.

"Oh, my love." I reached up and threaded my fingers through Luca's hair. The hard shudder that shook his body told me a lot. As hard as his life had been, I doubted

there had been a lot of tenderness in it. I planned to change that. "You've waited so long for me, but I'm here now."

Luca's arms tightened around me and he buried his face in my neck. I said nothing about the tears dripping on my skin. I just held him close to me, giving him whatever strength I had.

I'd never be as powerful as he was. Our bodies were made differently. But I could give him this. I could give him the love, care, and the tenderness he had been missing all these years.

I jumped when the door to the hotel room slammed open and a man in a dark suit came charging in. Luca jumped up, still holding me in his arms, and swung around to glare at the man.

"Franco!" Luca snapped.

"Apologies, sir, but Mr. Borelli has been trying to get a hold of you. He says it's important that we get you and your guest on the plane and back to Italy as quickly as possible."

Luca frowned as he glanced toward the coffee table. He kept one arm wrapped around me and reached for his cell phone with the other. "Damn it, the battery died." He set me on my feet, but kept me close to his side. "Let me use your phone, Franco."

The man handed over his cell phone without comment.

Luca gave me a gentle push toward the bedroom. "Go get cleaned up and finish getting dressed while I talk to Vinnie."

I wasn't sure if he really wanted me to get ready to go somewhere or if he was having

me leave the room because he had to speak to Vinnie about mafia business, keeping his promise to keep me out of it.

I barely had time to wash my face and pull on my shoes before Luca was calling out my name. I grabbed my suit jacket and hurried back into the other room.

"What's wrong?" I asked as soon as I saw the tension in his face.

"Vinnie called to tell me that we needed to up our timeline. Your parents are calling the cops, telling them that you have been kidnapped."

Technically true.

"We need to get married before they can stop us." Luca held out his hand. "Will you marry me?"

Why was that even a question?

I walked over and took Luca's hand, sending him a bright smile. Luca brought my hand up and pressed a kiss to the top of it, returning my smile.

"Franco, this is Nico, my fiancé and soon to be my husband. Nico, this is Franco. He's my bodyguard and right hand man. He's pretty much my brain on most days."

Franco gave me a respectful bow. "Sir."

"It's nice to meet you," I said.

Franco gave me another bow before looking at Luca. "Sir, if we want to get to the plane and in the air as soon as possible, we need to get downstairs and get you two married."

"Our ceremony wasn't supposed to be for another couple of hours. We'll have to see if they would be willing to bump it up." Luca winced as he glanced at me. "I'm sorry, amore mio . I wanted to give you a real wedding."

I smiled as I wrapped both hands around Luca's arm. "I don't care about the ceremony, just the groom."

"I promise I'll throw you the biggest most extravagant wedding ceremony ever when we get home to Italy."

"I don't need extravagant, Luca." The mere thought made me shudder. My parents did extravagant. I wanted simple, but meaningful.

Luca's jaw firmed stubbornly. "We'll talk about it when we get home."

When Luca started to lead me out of the hotel suite, I remembered something. "Wait, my bowtie." I'd forgotten to grab it.

Luca smirked as he pulled it out of his pocket and handed it to me.

I chuckled as I was escorted to the elevator. I didn't really want to wear it right now so I stuck it in my pocket. While Luca was in a suit, he wasn't wearing a tie. If we were going to be married right now, I wanted my outfit to match a little more than a fancy tuxedo would allow.

When we reached the lobby, Luca led me to the sitting area in front of the reception desk. I felt kind of useless as I sat there and watched him go up and talk to the people at reception. It didn't seem like a heated conversation, but it was taking a long time.

Growing bored, I started looking around the lobby. It was a nice place, several warm sitting areas, plants, and even a fountain. I wasn't a fan of the music they were

playing. Sounded a lot like elevator music, but whatever.

My eyes were drawn to the entrance when the doors swung open and five massive men in dark suits strode in like they owned the place. The way they walked and surveyed every inch of the lobby sent shivers down my spine.

I jumped up and hurried over to Luca, where I knew I'd be safe.

Luca started to smile to me until he saw my face. "Nico, what's wrong?"

I pointed.

Luca spun around, but whatever tension had been in him faded away. "It's okay, Nico. They work for me."

Still didn't mean I wasn't scared. I didn't have a stellar relationship with guards. Faced with these five, my discomfort level was rising fast.

"Stefano."

One of the massive men stepped forward. "Sir."

"This is Nico," Luca said, a hard glint entering his brown eyes, darkening them. "In about ten minutes, he will be my husband. I'm assigning you to be his bodyguard. His safety is your only duty. If anything happens to him, you'll suffer the same. Understood?"

Stefano nodded once. "Yes, sir. I'll protect him with my life."

"See that you do."

When Luca turned toward me, the hard glint was gone from his eyes and he was smiling. "Nico, this is Stefano. He is one of my best trained men. He's going to be your bodyguard now, okay?"

"He can't touch me," I said quickly. "I won't allow him to touch me."

"The only time he would ever touch you is to move you out of danger." Luca shot Stefano a glare. "He will never touch you inappropriately. He knows what will happen if he does."

"I would never, sir," Stefano stated. "My girlfriend is Italian. She is much scarier than you and she would skin me alive if I touched anyone inappropriately, but only after dipping me in hot oil."

That actually brought a smile to my face. "Do you have pictures of her?"

Stefano shot Luca a look. When Luca nodded, he pulled out his cell phone and flipped through it before turning the screen toward me. I saw a picture of Stefano and a short, dark haired woman wrapped in each other's arms as they smiled at the camera.

What I really liked in the picture beyond the affection that seemed to shine from them was that Stefano's girlfriend was not some string bean woman. She had some serious curves on her.

"She's beautiful," I told him. "You're a lucky man."

"Yeah." Stefano grinned as he glanced down at the picture. "We've been dating for almost a year now. I've been saving up for a ring. I want to propose to her on our anniversary."

"Make sure you tell us what day that is so we can let you have some time off," Luca said. "And if you need any help with the ring or the wedding, let me know. She should have the ring and wedding of her dreams."

I wasn't sure if Luca was doing that for Stefano's sake or to impress me, but it was working. I was impressed. From the looks the other guards gave Luca, I didn't think they were feeling the same. They all looked a little stunned by Luca's offer.

Had they never seen his golden heart? I imagined being a mafia boss, he had to have a hard edge, so probably not. I was glad he had shared it with me.

I moved closer when a woman I didn't know hurried up to us. Luca simply wrapped an arm around my waist and pulled me close to his side. Stefano walked over to stand behind me and slightly off to the side, guarding me. The other guards stood behind all of us like a wall, preventing anyone from coming up behind us.

"Mr. Sabatino, I'm Mindy. I'll be helping you with your ceremony today."

"Nice to meet you, Mindy," Luca said politely "This is my fiancé Nico."

"Sir." She shot me a smile before returning her attention to Luca. She obviously knew who was in charge here. "If you'll follow me, I'll take you to the wedding chapel."

As we walked, the woman continued to talk about wedding arrangements, which was okay because I was a little overwhelmed by everything. Marrying Luca was something I wanted more than I wanted to breathe. This was a dream come true for me, my ultimate fantasy come to life.

I was just scared that something would happen before we could get married. I was terrified it would be my parents.

"Luca?" I tugged on his sleeve to get his attention.

"What is it, cara mia ?"

"Can we just get married?" I asked. "Didn't Vinnie call and say we needed to get married and then get on the plane? We don't need all of this stuff she is talking about. Besides, you promised me a real wedding when we get to Italy, right?"

Luca's brow furrowed. "What's wrong?"

"I just wanted to get married before someone tries to stop us."

Luca stared at me for a moment before leaning down to press a kiss to my forehead.  
"Okay, cuore mio. We'll get married."

That's all I wanted.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

It took some convincing to get the reception girl to understand that Nico and I truly just wanted to get married without all the fancy bells and whistles, but here we finally stood.

I was facing Nico, holding his hands in mine while I listened to the ceremony words spoken by the minister. My heart picked up a beat when Nico smiled up at me, his eyes glossy with tears as he repeated the words the minister indicated. I listened to them, but his eyes were speaking louder than he was.

I had ordered my guards to bar the door to prevent anyone from interrupting our wedding ceremony. I wasn't going to let anyone interfere in what Nico wanted and he wanted to get married right now. I was in full support of this and I was going to make sure it happened.

When it was my turn to speak, I repeated the words the minister gave me, said my "I do's" when indicated, and then slid the ring I'd been holding onto for years onto his finger. I'd purchased it before I went to prison, intent on asking Nico to marry the day he turned eighteen.

I was a little late.

When the minister said we could kiss, I cupped Nico's face with my hands. "Ti amo, tu sei tutta la mia vita," I whispered right before pressing my lips to his. I didn't make it a deep kiss because we didn't have time and I didn't want anyone to see my physical reaction to the feeling of Nico's lips on mine.

When I finally lifted my head a few moments later, I smiled down at Nico. "You're mine now and no one can ever take you away from me."

"We're really married?" Nico whispered as if afraid to ask his question in a louder tone in case it wasn't true.

My smile grew into a full on grin. "We are."

"Don't we have to wait for the papers to be filed?"

Uh...

I glanced at the reception girl that had been assigned to help us. Surely she would know the answer to my question. "How do the papers get filed?"

She smiled warmly. "They just need to be signed and then we can fax them over to vital statistics. As soon as they are processed, you'll be legally married."

"Then let's get that done." We could drop by the vital statistic office on our way to the airport and make sure it had been processed.

Nico and I both signed the marriage papers and then had Stefano and Franco sign as our witnesses. As soon as that was done, I grabbed the papers and handed them to Franco.

"Go now and get these faxed and then go down to the vital statistics office and make sure they get processed," I ordered him. "Make sure you get the finalized license so we have official proof of the marriage. When you're done with that, meet us at the airport."

"Yes, sir." Franco took the papers and left with the receptionist girl.

I glanced down at Nico. "Is there anything you want to do before we head to the airport?"

"Can we get a wedding photo in front of Niagara Falls, something for us to remember today?"

"Excellent idea." I wrapped Nico's arm around mine and started walking toward the entrance.

There were two cars waiting for us right outside the main doors. I'd been expecting that. My men were very well trained. I'd made sure of it when I started working for my grandfather. I'd always suspected that was one of the reasons I'd been promoted so quickly.

I never left anything to chance.

Nico and I climbed into the first vehicle along with Stefano and a driver. The other guards climbed into the second vehicle. I told my driver to head to one of the scenic spots overlooking at the falls, someplace where we could take pictures.

With the afternoon traffic, it took about twenty minutes before we found a good spot. Once we parked, Nico and I got out—along with our guards—and made our way to the viewpoint.

I told Stefano to take several pictures and then stepped back and drew Nico into my arms. We made several different poses for the pictures Stefano was taking until Nico felt we'd gotten enough for our wedding memories.

Piling back into the car seemed almost anticlimactic. We had been so tense while gearing up for the wedding, and even through the wedding, and now we were married, complete with wedding pictures.

There was still some tension and I doubted it would go away until I had Nico safely tucked away back in Italy. While we had this plan, things could always go wrong. I could only hope I had prepared for anything that could go wrong.

Franco was waiting for us in the hangar at the airport. As soon as I stepped out of the car, he held my charged cell phone out to me. "Mr. Borelli would like you to call him, sir."

"Did you get the papers?" I asked as I took the phone.

"Yes, sir." He pulled a large manila envelope and handed it over.

I pulled it out to check it over and then shoved it back into the envelope. I handed it back to Franco. "Put this somewhere safe."

"Yes, sir."

I reached a hand back for Nico, helping him out of the car. When we reached the plane stairs, I said, "Go on up and get buckled in. I need to call Vinnie."

I waited until Nico climbed the stairs and disappeared inside the plane before dialing Vinnie. "Hey, it's me."

"Did you get it done?" Vinnie asked.

"Yeah, Nico and I are finally married and the papers have been filed. It's all legal. We're just getting ready to board the plane now."

"I need you to fax me a copy of the marriage license and then get on that plane and get to Italy."

There was an urgency in Vinnie's voice that unnerved me. "What's going on, Vinnie?"

"Like I told you earlier, Nico's parents called the cops and reported him as kidnapped. Through a friend, I've spoken to a police detective he trusts and told him that Nico wasn't kidnapped, he eloped. I need that marriage license to back up my story."

"Well, it's not really a story." He had eloped with me. I'd just kidnapped him to kick start the process off. "Hold on a minute."

I snapped my fingers and gestured to Franco. "Go in the office and fax Borelli a copy of the marriage license and then get back here."

"Yes, sir," Franco said before turning and taking off for the hangar office.

"Okay, Vinnie, Franco is faxing the marriage license to you now."

"Good," Vinnie replied. "Now get Nico back to Italy."

I glanced toward the stairs. "He's already on the plane."

"Okay, good. Call me when you land so I know you got there okay."

"I will." As soon as I hung up with Vinnie, I boarded the plane and went to sit down next to Nico.

"Everything okay?" Nico asked.

I smiled for him even if everything was not okay. I didn't want him to worry. "Everything is fine. Vinnie just wanted to confirm if we had gotten married."

"Any word on my parents?"

God, I didn't want to lie to him.

"They are still searching for you, but the running story right now is that you eloped with someone."

Nico blinked at me. "I did."

As soon as Franco and the others boarded the plane, I ordered the pilot to take off. I wanted to get off this continent.

Nico gripped my hand as the plane taxied out to the runway and took off. As soon as we leveled out and the seatbelt sign went off, I unbuckled myself and then gestured to Nico.

"Come with me. I want to show you something."

Nico frowned, but unbuckled himself and then followed me to the back of the cabin. I waited until he joined me before opening the door and ushering him into the bedroom at the back of the plane.

"We have a ten hour flight ahead of us depending on jet streams. I thought you'd be more comfortable back here."

Nico's jaw dropped when he saw the room. "Private jets have bedrooms in them?"

"Not all of them, but some do. Vinnie's has a bedroom because the flight is so long from New York to Italy. He makes that flight often to go visit his grandparents and sitting in a seat that long gives you a flat butt."

Nico stared at me for a moment before he snickered. "Well, we wouldn't want that."

"Right?" I slid my hand down over Nico's ass. "You're seems to be in pretty good shape so far, but I'm still worried it might go flat. When we get back to Italy, I'll need to exam it. Just to make sure, you understand?"

Nico glanced at the bed. "Not now?"

"No, baby, when we go to bed together, no one else will be around."

"Oh, right." Nico's shoulders slumped. "I forgot about them."

As much as I wanted him, there was no way in hell I was going to let a plane full of men hear the sounds I planned to pull out of Nico when I made love to him for the very first time. Those sweet sounds were meant only for me.

This was going to be a long ten hour flight.

"Are you hungry?" I asked.

Nico shrugged. "I guess I could eat."

"Why don't you get comfortable and I'll go get us some food? We can have a little picnic on the bed."

"Yeah." Nico began to smile. "That sounds fun."

I pressed a quick kiss to Nico's lips and then turned to go get us some food. I was just hoping that the stewardess had something good for us to eat.

I was lucky to find the stewardess already preparing a tray of food for us, most of it

finger foods, which was perfect. There was a bucket of ice and a bottle of champagne to go with it.

When she turned to hand it all to me, she smiled. "A gift from Mr. Borelli on your nuptials."

I returned her smile and said, "Thank you."

I saw several of my guards' eyes widened when I turned and carried the tray and I knew it had to be because of the smile on my face. I knew it was ruining my thug persona. I just couldn't help it. I was happy for the first time in ten years, longer than most of them have been with me.

When I reached the back bedroom, I stepped inside and then pushed the door closed with my foot. When I glanced toward the bed, I almost dropped the tray.

Nico had removed his suit jacket, shoes, and socks. He was dressed in just his slacks and dress shirt, but he'd unbuttoned the dress shirt several buttons, leaving a sensual glimpse of his beautiful slim chest.

I swallowed tightly and then carried the tray over and set it down on the nightstand. I kicked my shoes off and then pulled my suit jacket off and tossed it over the chair next to the bed.

When I reached for the harness strapped to my chest, Nico asked, "How did I not know you carried a gun?"

I stilled for a moment and then lifted my head to look at Nico. "Baby, I'm a mafia boss. Of course I have a gun."

"No, no, that makes sense. I just can't figure out how I missed it." A frown pulled his

eyebrows together. "Have you had it on you this whole time?"

"I don't sleep with it on, but yeah, other than that I've had it on me."

"I must be as blind as a bat. I totally missed it."

I pulled out the gun and set it on the nightstand next to the food tray and then took the harness off and laid it over the top of my suit jacket. I picked up the gun and put it into the nightstand drawer.

"Have you ever handled a gun before?"

Nico shook his head.

"When we get home, I'll take you target practicing. I don't want you to carry a gun, but I do want you to be comfortable around them."

Living in a mafia family, he'd be around a lot of them.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

"Luca?"

"Yes, cuore mio ?"

I tilted my head back so I could see his face. We'd eaten the delicious food he'd found for us and now we were snuggling on the bed. "What was prison like?"

Luca's gaze went to the ceiling as he breathed heavily. "I don't really want to tell you about that, Nico. It wasn't a good time for me."

I grimaced as guilt swelled up inside of me. While Luca insisted that it wasn't my fault that he had been sent to prison by my parents, I knew that wasn't true. He had been sent there because we got caught kissing. It had been just an innocent teenage kiss.

It was my parents that had flipped. They had accused him of being a pervert and raping me. When I told them that I was gay, they had blamed that on him, too.

No matter how much I denied that he had done anything except kiss me, no one listened to me. I had screamed and screamed as they tore him away from me and took him away.

I had cried for days.

Now, I was beginning to think that Luca had it a lot worse than me. I imagined all

sorts of horrible things.

I pressed my hand to his chest. "I'm sorry that happened to you."

"We can't change the past, Nico. We can only learn from it and move on."

Didn't change the fact that I was sorry.

I sat up and climbed on top of Luca, lying down over the top of him. I rested my hands on his chest and then my chin on my hands. "Despite what might have happened in there, your heart is still pure gold."

Luca snorted. "I doubt there's anything pure about me anymore, Nico."

"There is," I insisted. "I can see it in your eyes when you look at me. It's the same way you looked at me all those years ago."

Luca's hand curved around the back of my head and then fisted in my hair. "You were the only thing that kept me going, Nico. If I hadn't had to keep my promise to come back for you, I doubt I would have. I would have died in that place."

I could see the pain in his eyes and I hated it. I would give anything for him not to have suffered through that, but he was right. We couldn't change the past.

I smiled at him, letting him see the promise in my eyes even as I spoke the words. "I'm going to make you so happy, you'll forget every second in that prison."

"Just having you here with me now is worth everything I went through."

I wasn't sure that was true, but I was glad he thought so.

"So, tell me about my new home."

Luca finally smiled as he began telling me about the villa he owned in Palermo, Italy. No matter how well he described the massive estate, I couldn't picture it in my head.

I also couldn't wait to see it.

"You do realize that you will be the spouse of the mafia don, right?"

I squinted. "I have no idea what that means."

Luca chuckled, his amusement clear. His eyes were even dancing with delight. "It means that I am in charge of the family. You are in charge of our home."

"Yeah, still clueless."

"It's your home. You get to decide what happens in it." Luca frowned. "Except my office. That's all mine. But the rest of the house is yours to do what you want with it."

"What would I do with it?"

Luca chuckled again. "Whatever you want, baby. You're in charge of it. You can redecorate if you want, change anything you want. You're in charge of the servants, the house, all of it."

"Wait." I lifted my head. "I'm in charge of the servants?"

Luca gave me a resounding "Yep."

"But..." I knew nothing about running a household.

"Don't worry, cuore mio . We have a fulltime housekeeper who pretty much runs the place for us. Plus, my grandparents are around so they can help out if you have any issues."

I felt my blood run cold. "Your...your grandparents?"

They probably hated me.

"My parents still live in New York, but my grandparents live in Palermo. My grandfather was the head of the family before he stepped down. They could have gone anywhere for their retirement, but Grandmother didn't want to leave Palermo."

"Do they know about me?"

Luca's smile was warm and loving, the brush of his hand on my face even more so. "They do, cuore mio. They've always known about you."

I wasn't sure if that was good or bad.

"Not to worry, Nico, they are in full support of me bringing you home. They are looking forward to meeting you."

"But, I've met your grandparents back when we were kids. They came to visit one summer, remember?"

Luca frowned. "When?"

"I think I was about ten or something, so you must have been fifteen?"

"Oh yeah." A smile spread across Luca's face. "I remember that."

"So, see? I have met them before." Granted, it had been a brief meeting. I had been totally intimidated by Luca's grandfather, but his grandmother had been nice to me. I do remember that.

"Well, then, it won't be so bad meeting them then, right?"

Yeah, no. When we'd met before, I hadn't been responsible for sending their grandson to prison. I shuddered to think how they were going to react when they finally saw me.

"Baby, it's going to be fine. I promise, and I don't break my promises, remember?"

He didn't, but I wasn't sure he could keep this one.

"I don't want you to worry about it, Nico."

I gasped as he rolled me underneath him.

"I will always take care of you, Nico. It doesn't matter if it's from your parents, my grandparents, or the man on the moon. You belong to me now and no one is ever going to hurt you again."

My brow furrowed. "You know it was never physical, right?"

Yes, my parents had abused me, but it had all been mental and emotional, not physical. Well, except for that one time my mother dosed me with drugs.

"Not all hurt is physical, Nico."

That was true.

I tentatively reached out a hand and stroked Luca's chest right over the large winged tattoo that spread across the top of his chest. I swallowed tightly when Luca arched into my touch.

"Both hands, Nico, please," Luca pleaded as he grabbed the edge of his shirt and pulled it up over his head, tossing it away.

I laid both of my hands on Luca's chest, my fingers clenching against his slick skin. A delightful shiver of wanting shook my body at the simple touch.

"You feel so good, Luca," I whispered, almost in wonder.

"Yeah?" Luca whispered back. His voice sounded breathless, needy.

It made me ache.

"Yeah." I moved my hands so I could gently tug at Luca's nipples.

Luca's reaction to my simple touch was shocking. The man moaned, his entire body trembling. My senses reeled as if short-circuited. Luca's skin was flushed with desire. His eyes half hooded as he stared down at me. His mouth was partially open, small pants falling from his lips.

He was breathtaking.

My heart pounded rapidly in my chest, I leaned forward and took one of Luca's nipples into my mouth, tugging on it gently with my lips and then my teeth as the man's groans of pleasure reached my ears.

Apparently, I'd found a hot spot for Luca. I couldn't have been more thrilled. I intended to exploit that hot spot for all it was worth, or at least until I found another

one.

When Luca's hands slid under me and stroked down my back to grab my ass cheeks, the air in my lungs hissed out in a deep rush. I felt almost light-headed for a moment.

"Luca." I closed my eyes and rested my head against Luca's chest. The man's touch was just too much to take in. It felt too good and not good enough all at the same time.

"What do you need, cuore mio ?"

I didn't have a clue what I needed, but I knew I needed something. I ached in a way I never had before. My cock felt so hard I could have cut marble, and it leaked as if preparing for something big.

Luca's touch was light and painfully teasing as his fingers moved over my ass. I moved forward to give Luca better access and then pushed back against the fingers that slid under the waistline of my pants and grazed my aching hole.

Waves of ecstasy throbbed through my body.

My mind swirled, jumping from one thought to another faster than I could keep track of them. I was supposed to be driving Luca insane with lust, but one touch of the man's hands and I came unglued. I wanted to pleasure Luca, but I didn't want to stop the man from what he was doing, either.

"Luca," I groaned again as I raised my head to look up at the man. The sensual light burning in Luca's dark brown eyes took what remaining breath I had right out of my lungs.

Luca's mouth covered mine, the hunger in his kiss rocking me down to my toes. It

was hard and searching, and I loved every last second of it. I groaned in protest when Luca pulled away until he reached for the buttons of my slacks.

I was actually kind of impressed with how quickly he got them off.

"Pull your shirt up," Luca said.

I was confused for a moment, but did as Luca asked. I got the idea quickly when Luca's lips wrapped around the head of my cock. I dug my fingers into the headboard and I hung on for all I was worth as ecstasy shot through my body.

I was so intent on the feeling of Luca's mouth moving over me that I didn't even realize Luca's finger had invaded my ass until he began to move it. My grip on the headboard tightened as all the blood in my body pooled in my groin.

I didn't know whether to thrust forward or backward. Both movements felt great. Both movements made me tremble uncontrollably. Too many sensations filled my body to settle on one. I just soared higher until the peak of delight was reached and I shattered, shooting into Luca's mouth.

Luca jerked up onto his knees and yanked his pants open, digging out his cock. The intensity on his face as he stroked himself in a rapid up and down motion was one I had never seen, but I knew I wanted to see it again.

His gaze roamed all over me, almost as if he had to see every inch of me. When they reached my face, I smiled at him and said, "Ti amo, Luca."

Apparently, that was all Luca needed to throw him over the edge. He groaned and stiffened as pearly white ropes of cum shot out of his cock, landing all over my chest.

Luca grabbed his shirt off the floor before collapsing down on the mattress next to

me. He wiped the cum off of me and himself before tossing it away again, and then cuddling up to me.

A deep sense of peace entered my being as the world settled around me. I could feel Luca's hands moving along my skin, soothing me. Luca's heartbeat thudded softly next to my ear, the man's heavy breathing blowing across my cheek.

"I can't wait until we get home and I can really make love to you."

I smiled as I twirled my fingers in his hair. "I can't wait either."

I was done with being a virgin.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

It had been a long ten hour flight, but I hadn't minded. Nico and I had spent most of our time holed up in the bedroom talking and learning all that we had missed with each other over the last ten years.

It had been all I could do not to take our love making to the next level, but I truly wanted to wait until we got home where I could spend hours discovering each sweet sound he'd make as I took him to the moon.

That didn't mean we didn't play around, but if the sheets on the bed needed to be changed more than once, only us and the cleaning crew knew about it.

I kept a firm hold around Nico's waist as we climbed out of the airplane. I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. My instincts had been fine honed during my time behind bars and they were screaming at me right now that something was wrong.

When we reached the SUV, I helped Nico get inside and then turned to Franco. "Call the house and have some guys head this way and meet up with us. I want them fully armed. I also want the security at the villa doubled."

Franco frowned. "Problems, Boss?"

I shook my head as I glanced around trying to pick out anything that might be out of place. "Something's not right."

Franco stiffened instantly. He was well aware of my instincts and how accurate they were. It had saved our lives more than once.

"Get the immigration and customs papers done and get back here. I want to get on the road and get Nico back to the villa."

"I'll take care of it right away, sir." Franco pulled out his cell phone as he walked away.

I glanced toward the open door of the car, wincing when I saw his pale face. He must have heard me and Franco talking.

I started to move to reassure him, but my cell phone rang. I pulled it out and glanced at the screen to see who was calling. I almost didn't answer it, but if Vinnie was calling, it was probably important.

"Yeah, Vinnie," I said as I answered the phone.

"Have you landed?"

"Yeah, we just got here."

"Get to the villa now."

If I didn't know the man better, I'd say there was panic in his voice.

"Vinnie, what's going on?" I asked.

"My grandfather just called. Someone just took out the D'Angelo family."

"Which ones?" I assumed there was more than one family member that had died

considering how he had phrased his words.

"All of them."

My breath caught. "What?"

"Apparently everyone got together for a wedding. Someone placed a bomb at the venue. It took out every member of the D'Angelo family plus another thirty guards."

"Who would do this?" Family members fell under the family veil. Spouses and children of mafia families were off limits in disputes because of that veil.

It was a sacred rule that no one violated because they wanted their own spouses and children to fall into that category as well and if they didn't respect it with others then they couldn't expect others to respect it for them.

Unfortunately, not everyone followed that rule, but most did. It also meant that there was a high probability if someone violated that rule, the other families would get involved.

"Who did this?" I asked again. "Was it one of the other families?"

There were four major families based in Italy, my family being one of them. Borelli's family was another one, with D'Angelo being the third, and the fourth being the Romano family.

I knew it wasn't my family that had done this and I doubted that it had been Vinnie's. That left the Romano family. "Could it be the Romanos?"

"This isn't like them," Vinnie replied. "I could see them taking out the old man, but not the entire family."

"Well, it wasn't me. I wasn't even in the country."

Not that that I couldn't have ordered it done from Canada. I just wouldn't. Like Vinnie, I refused to cross that line because I wanted my own family to fall under the veil.

"It may not have been one of the families," Vinnie stated. "We won't know until there is an investigation."

"Police or...?"

"Oh, this will be investigated by the police. I have no doubt about that. Children were involved and the body count is over eighty people. I just think there will be another investigation behind the scenes that they won't know anything about."

"Is anyone in charge now?"

"Vito Antonelli is still in charge."

My eyebrows lifted. "He's alive?"

He was a good man, even if he wasn't from the main bloodline. I'd worked with the underboss on a few occasions and he had a sense of honor that went bone deep.

"His Uncle Carmine was flying back from a business meeting so he could attend the wedding. Vito went to the airport to pick him up. The bomb went off before they got back."

"You don't think—"

"No, no, everything about Vito going to get Carmine checked out. My grandfather

already looked into that. Vito is going to need some help with all of this and my grandfather wanted to clear him before we agreed to work with him."

Good idea.

"I'll put in a call to Vito and offer him my services if he needs them." This was a good chance to forge some peace between our two organizations.

"Just get Nico back to the villa," Vinnie said. "We don't know who did this or if they plan on going after any of the other families. Better to be safe than sorry. I've already doubled the security here and at my grandfather's place."

I let out a weak chuckle. "Yeah, well, I'd already done that before you called. Something felt off since we landed. I'm not taking any chances with Nico's life."

"You always were on top of things, Luca."

"I try to be." Sometimes it was a matter of life or death, or in this case, Nico's life. "Look, I need to go. I'll call you if there are any problems."

"Why don't you give me a call tomorrow and we can talk?" Vinnie suggested. "I got the marriage license you faxed me. We have to decide what to do now."

"Yeah, I'll do that."

I had a wedding night to enjoy first.

"Call me around noon," Vinnie said. "That should give you enough to get some rest."

I doubted there would be a lot of resting. I'd been fantasizing about Nico for ten long and lonely years.

"I will."

I hung up with Vinnie and climbed into the vehicle next to Nico. I made sure we were both buckled safely because we were going to hit some serious high rates of speed as soon as everyone was ready to go.

This was not the homecoming I had expected to have. I had just wanted to take Nico home, introduce him to my grandparents, and then take him to bed.

Didn't look like that was going to happen now.

As soon as we got home, I'd need to meet with my grandfather. I'm sure he already knew what had happened to the D'Angelo family, but we still needed to talk about the situation, especially increasing our security measures.

When Franco climbed into the front of the car, he twisted in his seat so he could look back at me. "Two units of guards are on their way toward us right now and security has been doubled at the house. Your grandfather would like to talk to you when you arrive home."

Yep, nailed that one.

"Let's go."

We were only thirty minutes from home, but that was a lot of distance to cover before the extra guards reached us. Under the circumstances, my concern could be understood by just about anyone.

When Nico scooted closer to me, I wrapped an arm around his shoulders and held him close. I knew he was worried, but there was only so much I was willing to tell him since I really didn't want him involved in this world.

"I've increased security because there was a problem with one of the other families here in Italy," I told him. "Someone killed members of the D'Angelo family, who are located in Genoa. That's over six hundred and fifty miles away, so don't worry about this. It's just a precautionary measure until I have more information on what happened."

"I guess your life can be pretty dangerous," Nico said.

Nico had asked that question before, but I guess he needed reassurance that he'd be safe. Considering the hell he had grown up in, I had no problem doing that.

"I'm not going to lie to you and say that it isn't, but it's probably less precarious than you think. The normal day to day living is pretty uneventful. It's just when situations like this happen that it seems so dangerous."

"But that's why we have so many guards?" Nico asked. "You even called in more."

I nodded. "Yes, that is why we have so many guards. We'll always have guards following us around in some manner. Just sometimes, we have a little more than usual."

"But they won't touch me, right?"

I clenched my jaw as my anger from before ignited. I swear, I was going to find that Steve guy and skin him alive. "No, Nico, unless they are moving you out of harm's way, they will not touch you. I'll kill anyone that does."

Nico's eyes rounded. "I don't want you to kill them. I just don't want them touching me."

Yeah, Steve was dead.

"They won't, Nico." I'd make sure of it. "No one gets to touch you but me."

I thoroughly enjoyed the soft flush that filled Nico's cheeks at my words. I pulled him closer so I could press a kiss to the top of his head. "Ah, cuore mio , we're going to have so much fun together."

And I couldn't wait until we got home and could start having that fun. I'd been waiting a very long time to have Nico.

I gratefully noted when the other guards joined our little convey headed to the villa. The two black SUVs passed us, swung around, and fell into line behind us.

Even though we were driving fast, I still pointed out several landmarks to Nico as we passed them. Once we had dealt with his family and I knew it was safe, I planned to take him to each and every one of them.

When the vehicles started to slow, I made a quick scan of the area. Nothing seemed out of place and my gut wasn't twisted, or at least not anymore twisted than it had been since I stepped off the airplane.

The gate opened and we rolled up the driveway.

I smiled at Nico's soft gasp.

"That's where we're going to live?"

"It is," I replied. "This villa has been in my family since the sixteen hundreds. My family owned the land before then, but that's when the main house was built."

"It's beautiful."

I'd always thought so.

"You think you'll like living here?"

Nico glanced up at me. "I'd live at the bottom of the ocean if it meant we got to be together."

God, that was a fucking fantastic answer.

It always amazed me how honest and free Nico was with his feelings when it came to me. I think that was one of the things that had drawn me to him in the very beginning.

My parents weren't bad people, but we were not close. They wanted nothing to do with the mafia life and I had idolized my grandfather when I was a child. I knew they loved me in their own way, but I doubted they understood me.

All of that had created a lot of distance between us. Because of that distance, I had become closed off to people until a perky little blond haired boy had come into my life. When he stared up at me with those mesmerizing crystal clear blue eyes and fluttering eyelashes, I knew I was sunk. Two years later I handed him my whole heart.

I had never regretted that decision.

I still didn't.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

I was a little stunned at the opulence of place Luca said we were going to live in. He had explained that it was a villa, but this looked more like a palace to me. It was bigger than a city block.

"I'm supposed to be in charge of this place?" Pure doubt laced my voice. "How?"

It would be impossible.

Luca chuckled. "We have servants, remember?"

I was not reassured.

"How many people live here?"

"Me, you, my grandparents, the servants, and the guards. There are personal suites for other family members in case they come to visit, plus several guestrooms, but that's about it."

That was a lot of people.

"We have our own personal suite of rooms as well." Luca frowned. "It's more like a three bedroom condo than a suite, though."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well, there's the master bedroom, of course, but there's also a sitting room, an office, and a guest bedroom. There's even a small kitchenette in case we get hungry and don't want to go downstairs to the main kitchen."

That sounded amazing, and a little overwhelming.

Luca must have seen the panic in my face because he gave me a quick hug and then opened the car door and scooted out. "Come on, cuore mio . Let's go in so I can show you that there is nothing to be afraid of."

I took Luca's hand because why wouldn't I? No matter the situation, I knew he'd make sure I was safe. I trusted him with my heart so it made sense that I'd trust him with my safety as well.

Once I was out of the car, I grabbed Luca's arm, wrapping my hands around it. It was the biggest lifeline I had right now.

It was also very muscular.

Really, really muscular.

Damn.

Luca's low chuckle drew my attention. "What?" I asked.

"Your face."

"What's wrong with my face?"

Did I have something on my face?

"Nothing, love." There was still amusement in his voice. "Come on."

I held tight to Luca's arm as we walked up the wide stone steps to the massive double oak doors of the villa. The door was opened before we reached it so I assumed people were watching for us.

"Welcome home, Mr. Sabatino," the man holding the door said. He was dressed the same as the bodyguards were, but a bit older than any of them.

"Thank you, Alberto." He gestured toward me. "This is my husband, Nicolas."

The older man's shoes clicked together and he gave me a rather deep bow. "Welcome home, Mr. Sabatino. We are glad to have you."

"Nico, please," I corrected.

"Mr. Nico then."

Yeah, that was going to be fun.

"Can you ask Sofia to make us a light lunch?" Luca asked. "Give us about an hour. I want to show Nico to our suite and then I have to meet with Grandfather."

"Of course, sir."

"Come on, love. Time to face the firing squad."

I glared at him. "Not funny, Luca."

Luca chuckled and leaned his face down close to me. "It was a little funny."

Okay, maybe, but I wasn't going to let him know that.

I raised an eyebrow.

The amusement instantly fell off his face.

I smirked. "Do I at least get to wear a blindfold?"

Luca rolled his eyes as he hauled me into his arms. "You scared me there for a moment, Nico."

"You deserved it."

Luca growled as he lifted me up and placed me against the wall, trapping me there with his bigger body. I don't know if he was trying to intimidate me or scare me or what, but all it did was turn me on.

"You want to tangle with me, little boy?" he grumbled in my ear before biting at the tender skin of my neck.

I shuddered with want and then wrapped my legs around his waist. "Oh yeah."

Luca's eyebrows were raised when he lifted his head. "You're not afraid of me at all, are you?"

My eyebrows snapped together. "Why would I be afraid of you?"

Luca would never lift a single finger to hurt me. That knowledge was ingrained in my soul.

Still holding me pinned to the wall with his body, Luca cupped my face with his

hands. "Do you have any idea how much I love you?"

"Hopefully as much as I love you."

Nothing could have contained my groan as Luca claimed my lips. I pushed into the kiss, wanting more. Our little interludes on the plane hadn't been able to make up for these last ten years of not having him.

I could have happily gone on kissing him until I used up all the oxygen in my lungs if it hadn't been for a voice clearing next to us.

I froze for a moment and then slowly turned. I winced when I saw a man I remember quite well standing there.

I let my legs slid down Luca's hips and then stood. I could feel the heat in my face as I flamed with embarrassment and I could feel Luca's body shake against mine as he stifled his laughter.

I slammed my elbow into Luca's stomach. Luca let out a small grunt and rubbed his stomach, but I could tell he was still filled with amusement.

"Nico, this is my nonno, Alessio Sabatino ," Luca said. "Nonno , this is my Nico."

"We've met," the older man said.

I couldn't tell if he was happy about that or not.

I gave Luca's grandfather a polite bow. "Sir."

"It's good to see you finally, Nicolas," Alessio stated before shooting his grandson a hard glare. "I was beginning to think it would never happen."

My eyebrows lifted in surprise, or maybe it was shock. "You were expecting me?"

As soon as Alessio's gaze snapped to me, I wished I'd kept my mouth shut.

"We always knew Luca was going to be bringing you home, Nicolas. It was just a matter of when." The older man sighed heavily. "He should have brought you home the moment he got out of prison. I doubt I'll ever understand why he waited so long."

"Nonno, I explained this to you," Luca said. "I had to wait until I was powerful enough to fight his parents."

Alessio snorted before turning and walking down the hallway.

I turned wide eyes toward Luca. "Um..."

"Come on," Luca said. "Let's go meet my grandmother."

I wasn't sure I wanted to.

Alessio stepped out of a doorway at the other end of the hallway. "Luca, we need to talk."

That didn't sound good.

"Nico, our bedroom is upstairs, third door down on the left. Why don't you go wait for me there? Sofia is supposed to be making us something to eat. As soon as I get done speaking to my grandfather, we can have lunch."

I shot Alessio a quick glance before leaning closer to Luca. "He's not going to tell you to make me leave, is he?"

"No, baby," Luca replied. "He wants to talk to me about what happened to the D'Angelo family."

I wanted to believe him, but I wasn't sure if I did. Granted, Luca hadn't lied to me thus far, but I wasn't sure of Alessio's welcome. I couldn't tell if was really welcoming or simply acceptance since I was already here.

Luca sighed, grabbed my arm, and pulled me down the hallway to the room at the end. Alessio was sitting at a large mahogany desk on the other side of the room.

"Nonno , would you please tell Nico that he is welcome here?"

Surprisingly, the old man's eyes widened. "Nicolas, do you think you're not welcome here?"

Way to put me on the spot.

"I...uh..."

Alessio got up from the chair he had been sitting in and walked around the desk. He took my hand, holding it between both of mine, and then he stared at me so intently that before turning toward his grandson. "Luca, can you give me a few minutes with Nicolas?"

I almost begged Luca not to go, but I knew I needed to talk with the man. I needed to know now if I was staying or going before I got too comfortable here.

"It's okay," I told Luca.

"Are you sure?" Luca asked.

No, but I nodded anyway.

"I'll go check on lunch," Luca said before walking out of the room.

"Let's sit," Alessio said as he gestured to the small sitting area.

I walked over and sat on one of the chairs, folding my hands and sticking them between my thighs. They were trembling a bit, but I didn't want Alessio to see how anxious I was.

"Nicolas, do you remember what Luca was like before he went to prison?"

I nodded. Like I could ever forget. Thoughts of him had been the only thing to keep me going over the years.

"Luca was always a distant child," Alessio said. "I know it's due to how his parents raised him. My wife and I were not allowed to see him very often due to the work I did, but even then I could tell that there was something cold in Luca. As a mafia don, I loved seeing that. As a grandfather, I hated it."

I tilted my head, my brow furrowing. "What do you mean cold? I've never seen Luca being cold."

A small smile spread across Alessio's face. "When Luca was about twelve years old, we were visiting. Do you remember that?"

"Yes."

"That was the first time I ever saw Luca smile."

"Really." I was surprised. "But Luca smiles all the time."

"For you, Nicolas. He smiles for you. Luca doesn't smile for anyone else."

That was news to me, but we'd only been back together for like twenty-four hours or something.

"When he went to prison, I went to visit him. He didn't want to discuss what had happened or how he had ended up in there or even how to get him out. All he wanted to talk about was you and if you were okay, and then he demanded that I put a man on you."

"He did that?" Luca had said he'd been keeping an eye on me, but I hadn't known it had gone back that far. Gave me a bit of a warm feeling inside and I couldn't help but smile. "He worries about me."

"He's obsessed with you, and I'd worry about it if I didn't know you were just as obsessed with him."

I winced. "Yeah, well..."

It wasn't like I could deny that.

"In the last ten minutes, I have seen more happiness and warmth in Luca than I have in the last ten years. You bring that to him, Nicolas. You are his light. So, yes, Nicolas, you are very welcome here."

Tears flooded my eyes, both from Alessio's words and from my fear that he might not mean them. "How can you welcome me after what I did to him?"

Alessio frowned. "And what did you do to him, Nicolas?"

"I was responsible for Luca going to prison."

"Your parents were responsible for Luca going to prison, not you." The man's frowned deepened and he stared at me with hawk-like eyes before reaching over to grab my hand. "Surely you know that, Nicolas. You never did anything but love my grandson. You would never harm him. Everyone here knows that. If anything, you have been a blessing to him."

Nothing could have prevented the tears in my eyes from trickling down my cheeks. I couldn't believe after everything that had happened, he was accepting me so easily.

I had to wonder if I deserved it.

"Luca!"

I jumped when Alessio shouted.

The door instantly opened and Luca hurried in. He took one look at me before rushing over and going to his knees before me, grabbing my hands.

"Why are you crying, cuore mio ?"

I just shook my head.

Luca picked me up, turned around, sat in the chair, and then settled me on his lap. I buried my face in his neck and let my tears silently fall.

"What happened," Luca growled, anger infusing his tone.

"Nothing happened, Luca," Alessio stated. "Nicolas is just a little overcome at the moment. He's fine."

I didn't lift my head, but I did nod so that Luca would know that his grandfather was

speaking the truth.

Luca rubbed his hand up and down my back. "Are you okay, cuore mio ?"

I nodded again.

"Here, wipe your tears, Nicolas, before Luca starts world war three." A moment later, a white handkerchief appeared in front of my face.

I chuckled as I took the handkerchief and wiped at my tears.

Once I was all done, Luca grabbed my chin and tilted my face up. "All better now?"

I nodded.

"Can you tell me what upset you so much?" Luca asked.

I smiled as I glanced at his grandfather. "It's a secret."

"What?" Luca exclaimed. "You're keeping secrets from me?"

I tilted my head back and grinned up at Luca. "Yep."

Alessio chuckled as he patted my knee. "You'll do, boy, you'll do."

And that might have been the best thing he could have said to me.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

I was curious about what Nico and my grandfather had discussed, but the smile on Nico's face reassured me that it hadn't been anything terrible.

I wasn't thrilled with the tears.

"I'm going to take Nico up to our rooms. I'll be back down in a few minutes and we can talk then."

"We can talk in the morning," Alessio said. "This is Nicolas's first night in his new home. You need to spend it with him."

"But, the D'Angelo—"

"I am fully aware of the D'Angelo situation," Alessio replied. "Don Carlos called me and filled me in. We can talk about the rest of it in the morning. Another few hours won't change anything."

As much as I needed to talk to my grandfather, having a few more hours to spend with Nico was something I wanted more.

I stood up, lifting Nico in my arms. I nodded at my grandfather when he chuckled, and carried Nico out of the room. I carried him down the hallway and right up the stairs to our rooms.

We passed a few guards and servants and they all looked at us as if we had grown

second heads, or maybe just me.

Whatever.

When we reached our rooms, I opened the door and stepped inside. I pushed the door closed with my foot and then slowly lowered Nico to his feet.

"So, what do you think?" I asked.

Nico looked around with a look of wonder on his face. His eyes were rounded and his mouth slightly parted. "These are your rooms?"

"Our rooms, cuore mio, remember?"

Nico let out a nervous sounding chuckle. "I didn't think it would be so modern considering the rest of the villa."

"Yeah, I had this suite of rooms redone after I became the head of the family. I love this villa, especially since its been in the family for so long, but I wanted something a little more modern for myself."

"It's nice."

"I decorated it myself based on the talks we used to have when we were younger." I'd decorated the place with him in mind. I wanted our rooms to be a place he could escape to when being the spouse of a mafia don became too much for him.

Nico smiled up at me. "Show me around?"

I was more than happy to.

I grabbed Nico's hand and led him from room to room, making sure to show him every inch of our private suite. I especially loved showing him the large balcony that could be accessed from the living room area and our bedroom. The view of the Mediterranean from the balcony was stunning.

"What do you think?" I asked. "Do you like it?"

Nico had a smile on his face as he nodded. "It's lovely."

"You think you can be happy here with me?"

Nico's smile broadened as he turned and hugged me, his arms wrapping around my neck. "I told you I'd live at the bottom of the ocean to be with you. Living in a palace is just a bonus."

My throat thickened as I stared down into his face. He was looking at me with such adoration, I was sure my heart was going to stop. "I haven't been able to breathe since the first moment I laid eyes on you."

I didn't give Nico time to say anything else. I knew what he needed, what we both needed. I pulled Nico close and covered his mouth with my own. I could feel Nico's shock in the sudden stiffness of his body, but then Nico melted against me, groaning as he opened his mouth to my exploration.

My calm was shattered by the hunger welling up inside of me as I explored Nico's mouth. The hard length pressed against me told me that Nico desired me just as much as I desired Nico.

I couldn't be more thrilled at the prospect.

Nico groaned, his hands tightening on my arms. I felt a low rumble of pride build in

my chest that I could pull those sounds from him.

I slid my hands under Nico's ass and lifted him up, groaning when his legs wrapped around my hips. I quickly carried him into the bedroom and lowered Nico down to the bed, moving to cover the man's body with my own.

I looked down into Nico's beautiful blue eyes. I was nearly overcome with the knowledge that I held him in my arms again and that Nico was there willingly.

"I want to make love to you, Nico," I whispered to him, afraid to speak louder and break the bubble we were in. "Will you let me?"

I could see the confusion in Nico's face, the uncertainty.

I could also see Nico's desire to give in.

"I need you, Nico," I whispered as I rubbed my finger over his lips. "Please?"

I growled low in my throat when Nico's tongue poked out to lick at my finger. I rubbed against Nico's tongue with my finger before sinking it into his mouth.

I inhaled sharply when Nico's lips closed around my finger and the man began sucking on it. Each draw of Nico's mouth felt like it was mirrored on my cock.

I suddenly knew Nico was going to be big trouble for me. I had no doubt Nico could get me to come just by sucking on my finger. I'd probably pass out from ecstasy if Nico sucked on my cock. I'd barely stood it the last time.

"Yes, Luca," Nico whispered.

When his eyes rose up to meet mine, I knew I was lost. I pulled Nico's clothes off,

gently peeling them off of him until the man lay naked beneath me.

I needed to feel Nico's body beneath my hands.

I needed to feel my body pressing down on his.

I just plain out needed.

My lips followed my hands. I kissed each inch of naked skin I bared until Nico writhed under me, small pants and moans falling from his lush lips. And Nico had the fullest lips I'd ever seen.

"L-Luca," Nico moaned beneath me.

I immediately leaned down to take one brown hued nipple into my mouth. Nico cried out and arched up into me. I was pretty sure I'd found a sweet spot on Nico's body, one I planned to exploit to its fullest. I moved my mouth across Nico's chest to the other nipple, finding it already pert and stiff. I growled and latched onto the hard little nub.

"Luca, please," Nico wailed.

The sound of Nico pleading spiraled through me like a tornado. I almost growled in protest when I had to let go of Nico's taut nipple to slide my shirt over my head, but the feeling of Nico's naked body pressing against mine more than made up for it.

I quickly stripped away my own clothes and then hunched over Nico's body. I grabbed him by the hips and pulled the man's body up to mine until our cocks pressed together. Nico's legs surrounded me, wrapping naturally around my waist as if they had been there a hundred times.

"I'm going to love you so hard, cuore mio ," I said. The dazed, wide-eyed look Nico gave me filled me with joy. I stroked my hand down his side, my eyes following, eating up every inch of naked flesh I could see.

I knew Nico had no idea how true those words really were. Nico probably thought I meant I was going to fuck him, but what would happen between us meant so much more. Now that I had him in my arms again, I didn't plan to ever give him up.

I leaned down over Nico and claimed his lips again. I was mildly surprised at how eagerly Nico surrendered to the kiss, just not enough to stop. I wrapped one hand around the side of Nico's head, anchoring the man where I wanted him.

I stroked the other hand gently down Nico's side and hip. I couldn't get over how soft the man's skin felt, how wonderful it was to just touch Nico again.

I shuddered slightly, overcome by the mere feeling of Nico's body pressed against mine and the knowledge I was going to finally claim what was mine.

I licked purposefully at Nico's upper lip then delved inside to explore. I felt Nico move closer, unconsciously moving against me as if seeking more contact. Gripping Nico's hair tightly, I kissed and licked Nico's lush lips, devouring them. I would have climbed inside Nico's warm body if I could have.

As it was, I knew if I didn't get my cock in the man soon, I might pass out. My blood was pounding through my body so fast I already felt light headed. My body tingled every time it brushed against Nico's.

I hissed and jerked back when Nico bit my lips. The small nip didn't break the skin, but I almost wished it did. The smoky look of desire burning in Nico's eyes seared right through me.

I reached over to the nightstand to grab the lube and then paused. "Nico, do we need a condom?" I really didn't want anything between us, but I'd do it if that's what he wanted.

Nico shook his head. "I've never..."

I growled as I grabbed the lube and poured some on my fingers.

"How do you want this?" I asked as I turned back to face Nico. "On your back or on your hands and knees?"

"I...I...I don't know." Nico blushed so beautifully when he was flustered.

I decided to make things easier for him. I reached down between us and stroked my fingers over Nico's tight puckered entrance. I pressed in with my fingers, inserting one into Nico's tight hole.

The joy I felt when Nico's body sucked me right in knew no bounds. He was made for me. I couldn't wait to feel Nico's tight body wrapped around my cock.

I pushed in with another finger, scissoring them back and forth, readying Nico's body to be claimed. I would die before I let anything happen to him. It was my ultimate duty now to protect this man from harm, even from my own hand.

Nico pushed back when I added a third finger, his whole body moved, his legs spreading wide. Nico looked wanton to me, desire incarnate. He looked perfect and he was all mine.

"P-Please," Nico stuttered, his head thrashing around.

I pulled my fingers from Nico's ass and quickly lubed up my cock. Grabbing Nico's

legs, I lifted them into the air and spread them wide, baring the man's stretched hole to my hungry gaze.

Scooting forward, I watched the head of my cock press against the small puckered entrance. My hands tightened around Nico's legs as I slowly pushed into him. The sight of my cock sinking into Nico's body was astonishing.

I pushed in until my entire cock was buried in Nico's body.

Nico stilled.

I stilled.

I glanced up at Nico to find dazed blue eyes staring back at me. Nico seemed to be holding his breath as if he waited for something.

He was, he just didn't know it.

I started thrusting, moving slowly at first, but quickly picking up speed, my cock moving quickly in and out of Nico's body. I couldn't believe how tight Nico's body felt, how wonderful the silken heat gripped me.

I was overwhelmed with the sensations shooting through my body. I leaned down close to Nico, bracing myself on my arms as I stared him straight in the eyes.

"I'm going to come in your hot, tight, little ass, Nico. I'm going to mark you inside and out so that everyone knows you belong to me."

Nico blinked, his mouth falling open.

My grin was feral as I pulled back until just the head of my cock remained inside of

Nico's body and then I thrust forward with all the desire I felt coursing through my body.

"Luca," Nico gasped.

"Do it, baby," I growled. "Come for me."

Nico cried out, his head pressing back into the blanket beneath him. His body arched up into me and went tense as the space between us was filled with his hot seed. Nico's hands grasped desperately for purchase, finding it on my body, wrapping around my shoulders.

One more hard thrust and I erupted, filling Nico's body with my release. I lifted my head to look down. Nico's face looked serene, an easy smile spread across the man's lips. His eyelids fluttered as if he wasn't quite conscious.

"Cuore mio," I whispered softly as I gently stroked the side of Nico's face with my fingers. My heart pounded with joy, amazement, and just a hint of wonder, at what I held in my arms.

Nico's eyelids fluttered until they fully opened and crystal clear blue eyes looked up at me. "Hey."

"Are you okay?" I whispered. "I didn't hurt you, did I?"

I had gotten a little rough there toward the end.

"No, you didn't hurt me."

I got up and got a rag from the bathroom. I walked back into the bedroom and wiped Nico down despite his protests.

"It's my duty and my right as your husband to take care of you, whether it's this, providing a roof over your head, or keeping you safe."

It was a sacred oath that I intended to keep until the day I died.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

I hated leaving Nico before he opened his eyes, but he needed his sleep. It had been a rough night for him. I knew I should have let him rest, but I hadn't been able to stop myself from reaching for him two more times in the night.

Still, morning was here and I needed to speak with my grandfather, call Vinnie, and then decide if I was going to call Vittorio Antonelli to offer my services. He was the acting head of the D'Angelo family.

I tucked the blankets under Nico's chin and then leaned down to press a kiss to his forehead before heading for my dressing room. I dressed in one of my usual dark suits, complete with gun and holster.

Before leaving the dressing room, I grabbed the box I'd had sitting on my dresser for the longest time and carried it back into the bedroom. I set it on the nightstand.

Luckily, it had Nico's name on it so he'd know it was his when he saw it. As a last gesture, I grabbed a red rose out of one of the vases in the living room and set it across the box.

I stared down at him for a moment, soaking up his warmth. I knew the moment I stepped outside of our suite, I'd have to be the hard man that I had been all these years.

Knowing I couldn't put it off any longer, I turned and walked out of our suite. Stefano was standing right outside the door. "Keep him safe."

Stefano nodded. "Yes, sir."

"He's sleeping right now," I told him "Let me know when he wakes up."

"I will, sir."

I walked away, my face turning into a stone mask I showed to everyone in the world except for one man. My strides were purposeful. I wanted to get business done and out of the way so I could get back to Nico. If I timed it just right, I might even be able to have breakfast with him. Kind of depended on when he woke up.

Franco was waiting for me at the bottom of the stairs.

"Report."

"The night shift said everything was calm last night. I've touched base with a few of our businesses just to be sure and they all report the same, although Dura did say that he's having a bit of trouble. Seems someone in his neighborhood is trying to run an underground gambling house without permission. I sent a couple guys down to deal with it."

"Find out who is doing it and get back to me."

"Yes, sir."

I didn't have a real problem if people wanted to gamble. It was a great way to make money. What I had a problem I had was when someone was doing it in my territory without getting my permission or giving me a share of the action.

"A report of all activities plus a breakdown of current accounts is on your desk," Franco continued. "The numbers are a little low at the marina, but two of the fishing

boats are down for repairs. Once they are fixed, I expect the numbers to go back up."

"Keep an eye on it." I squinted as our conversation turned into a thought. "Have our boat mechanic go and check all the boats and make sure they are in good repair. If not, tell him to fix them."

I owned a fleet of fishing boats. The men that worked on them technically worked for me even if that ownership was buried deep in shell corporations. If those boats weren't working, I wasn't making any money.

"Where is my grandfather?" I asked.

"He's waiting for you in your study."

I continued my walk in that direction. The man might have stepped down, but I was glad that he hadn't taken off to tour the world or something like that. He and my grandmother might travel a bit here and there, but he was always just a phone call away.

I opened the door to my study and stepped inside. My grandfather was sitting in one of the chairs by the veranda doors drinking a cup of coffee as he glanced at something on the tablet in his hand. I was always amazed how up-to-date he stayed with technology.

"Good morning, Nonno ."

"Luca," he said as he glanced up. "How is your boy this morning?"

A smile cracked my stone mask. "Sleeping."

"Good, good," my grandfather replied. "He needs the rest. He also needs a few hearty

meals. He's too skinny. Your grandmother is going to have a fit when she sees him."

Yeah, probably.

"Nico hasn't mentioned it, but I think his parents used food to punish him."

"To punish him?"

"He says he was never physically abused by his parents except for the other night when his mother shot him up with some drug that paralyzed him, but the emotional and mental abuse was pretty heavy."

My grandfather waved me to the seat across from him. "Have you worked out a plan for them?"

I nodded. "It's in the works now. In fact, I'm supposed to call Vinnie this morning and get an update."

"Why don't you go ahead and do that?" my grandfather asked. "I'd like to hear what he has to say. Those disgusting people need to pay for what they did to you and your boy."

I took a seat across from my grandfather and pulled my cell phone out, dialing Vinnie and then putting it on speaker. I had no problem with my grandfather listening in on the call. He had decades of experience and could give me some good advice on how to handle things with Nico's parents.

"Good morning, Luca," Vinnie said when he answered.

"Morning, Vinnie," I replied. "I have you on speaker with my grandfather." It was polite to let him know.

"Ah, well, good morning, Mr. Sabatino."

"Mr. Borelli," my grandfather said. "Please, call me Alessio. I'm not in charge anymore."

"And please, call me Vinnie."

"I wanted to get an update on Nico's parents," I stated. "Are they still insisting that Nico was kidnapped?"

"They are and it's rather nauseating," Vinnie replied. "If I have to hear that woman scream one more time that her precious little baby has been kidnapped, I'm going to put a bullet in her head."

"Precious little baby?" I snapped. "Seriously?"

That woman had never treated Nico like he was even human let alone precious. He was a commodity to her, something she could trade for a luxurious lifestyle.

"I showed the marriage license to that detective," Vinnie said. "I also told him that Nico eloped with you, but he wants to hear it directly from Nico so we need to set up a video call or something. I worry that they might force Nico to come back and speak to them in person, and that would expose Nico to the risk of his parents getting their hands on him again."

My hands fisted.

"No, that actually might be a good idea."

When my grandfather said that, I glared at him. "Are you insane?"

He had to be.

"Hear me out, Luca."

I clenched my jaw.

"I know you have a plan, but why drag this out? It's not good for you or Nicolas to do that. If you go back to the states together and confront his parents with the proof of your marriage, what can they do? And it would be even better if you did it in front of that detective."

"Kill two birds with one stone type of thing?" Vinnie asked.

"In a way, yes, but more that I think there should be a witness to Nicolas telling his parents he is married. It would be even better if he told them who he is married to."

"You want me to tell his parents that I am the head of a mafia family in front of a cop?" I asked. "Have you lost your mind?"

My grandfather chuckled. "No, but you could tell him that you are a businessman. Go all out, though. Take Nicolas shopping for a tailored suit, arrive in a limo, and bring your bodyguards, the works. Let them know that their money doesn't scare you anymore."

I wasn't sure how going shopping and arriving in a limo was going to prove that they didn't scare me anymore.

"Their money never scared me," I insisted. "It was just a pain because they used it to keep us apart."

"So, prove to them that you have more money."

I heard a chuckle through the phone. Glaring at it would do me no good because Vinnie wouldn't see it. My grandfather, on the other hand... "I'm not going to put Nico in that kind of danger. They'll just try and separate us again."

"I might be able to help you with that," Vinnie said. "And wouldn't it be a hoot if they did try something and we had to call the police on them this time?"

That would bring me a lot of a satisfaction, but it still wasn't safe.

"How can you help, Vinnie?" I asked.

"I have a friend that created a tracker that is inserted under the skin. It has a radius of five hundred miles and it reads vitals if you get kidnapped. Nicky has one."

"How much does something like that cost?" my grandfather asked.

"Usually, a favor to be named later, but don't worry about that too much. Jake is an upstanding guy. When he tangled with my grandfather, he kept his word, even when it probably would have benefited him if he hadn't."

"He tangled with Carlos?" my grandfather asked, his tone pure astonishment. I understood that. Not many people had the balls to tangle with the Carlos Borelli. They usually didn't survive it.

Vinnie gave us a quick rundown of what had happened between this Jake guy and his grandfather. By the time he was done, I was impressed and a little less wary.

"I'm still not convinced taking Nico back to the states is a good idea," I stated. The thought of taking him back to that hell enraged me. My sweet baby didn't deserve that type of pain.

"Why don't I call the detective on the case and see if he'd agree to a video call?" Vinnie asked. "Maybe taking him back to the states won't even be a problem."

"Yeah, do that," I said. I was a lot more in favor of a video call than I was in taking Nico back to confront his parents.

"I'll call him real quick and see what he says and then call you back."

"I'll be waiting," I said before hanging up. I picked my cell phone up and idly turned it over in my hands a couple of times. I drew in a deep breath through my nose and then let it out slowly through my mouth.

It didn't help.

"Luca."

I glanced at my grandfather.

"I know you don't want to put Nicolas in danger, but you need to think about this without emotion. Think with your head. Even if the police clear everything up, do you honestly think his parents are just going to let this go?"

"No," I admitted honestly, "but that's why I don't want to take him back there. He's their cash cow and they won't give him up until they get what they want out of him."

"You were offering them a hundred thousand dollars to get them to agree to marry Gena, right?"

I nodded, wondering where he was going with this.

"Then why not give it to them?"

"If I thought they would drop this if I gave them the money, I'd do it in a heartbeat. Hell, I'd give them a million dollars, but it won't stop there. If they know that I have money, they will keep coming back for more, making Nico's life hell."

I sat forward and dropped my cell phone on the table between us. "That's why I am wary of the idea of putting on some big show for them. Once they learn I have money, they won't stop."

"Nicolas's father runs some sort of import company, doesn't he?"

I nodded.

"So, why not ruin him?"

I squinted at the man, a small bubble of hope igniting in my gut. Wouldn't it be wonderful to ruin them and pull the rug out from under their feet? To take their power away from them?

"Power isn't always about money, Luca, but sometimes it is."

"Huh?"

"They used their money and power to abuse Nicolas, to separate the two of you, and force him into a marriage he didn't want. If you take that money and power away from them, what do they have?"

They'd have nothing.

"If you just go in and confront them, they still have their money behind them and can make your life hell. If you take their money, they lose their power. So, take both, Luca. Burn their little empire to the ground."

I liked this idea.

"Mr. Rossi is the president of his company," I explained. "It's not like he'll just hand that over. What do you suggest I do?"

"We need to look into that company and find out how he makes his money. If we can get some of his contracts canceled, his revenue will dry up, and you might have the opportunity of buying him out for a cheap price."

"That might work."

I just wasn't positive of it.

"You need to find someone to do a deep dive into his life, both their lives," Nonno said. "Bastards like them live in the sewer. They have to have dirt on them."

"I've been investigating them for years," I pointed out. "I don't know if there is anything else to find."

"Pfff." My grandfather waved a dismissive hand at me. "There's always dirt. It's just a matter of finding it. I suggest asking Borelli for help. He lives over there. He probably has more contacts that you do."

I knew having my grandfather here to advise me was a good idea.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

I stretched my arms over my head as I woke up and then looked around the bedroom. I frowned and my joy of waking up dimmed when I found myself alone.

I had been hoping Luca would be here.

And then my eyes fell on a long stemmed red rose and the present with my name on it underneath it. I smiled as I scooted up into a sitting position and grabbed the box and rose.

I brought the rose to my nose and inhaled its sweet scent, my smile growing larger. I needed a vase for that.

I set the rose aside and opened the box. There was a small white envelope right on top. I grabbed it and opened it up, pulling the note inside out to read.

Cuore mio,

If you're reading this, I am probably down in my office. Take a soak in the tub, put on this outfit I got you, get something to eat, and then come find me. I have a wonderful day planned for us. If you have any questions, the cell phone I got you has my number programmed into it. Just dial one.

Love, Luca

Excitement filled me as I dug the cell phone out of the box and powered it on. It was

the latest model and even had a cool gold colored case. I had never been allowed a cell phone of my own.

While it powered on, I set it aside and looked at what was left in the box. I gasped as I pulled it out. I set the box aside and jumped out of bed. I shook the black blazer out and held it up to my body. It wasn't a long blazer. In fact, it only went to my waist, but it had very fine lines. The slacks were the same, slim with fine lines.

The shirt threw me. It had a high collar that would wrap around my throat, but it was made of a gauzy material that was totally see-through.

Luca wanted me to wear this?

I mean, I suppose most of the shirt would be hidden by the blazer, but still, the thing was see-through.

The last thing in the box was a set of black silk boxers, black socks, and a fashionable pair of dress shoes.

Luca had gone all out.

I was excited to try it on, but I wanted a bath that Luca mentioned first. I carefully laid the suit out on the bed so it wouldn't wrinkle and then hurried into the bathroom.

There was an expensive bottle of bubble bath on the edge of the tub. I filled the tub with hot water and poured some in, inhaling deeply at the musky scent. It was the same scent I smelled on Luca from time to time.

I climbed in and then took the bath of my dreams.

I don't know how long I was in there, but it must have been awhile because when I

climbed out, my skin was a little pruny. I dried off and then walked into the bedroom to put on the clothes Luca had picked out for me.

Once I was fully dressed, I went back into the bathroom and turned in a full circle in front of the floor length mirror hanging on the wall. I had to give it to Luca, he knew fashion.

The slacks hugged my waist and hips as if they were custom ordered for me. The jacket fell to my waist, bringing the eye to how slim I was. Considering how see-through the shirt was, I was surprised at how much I liked it.

The whole outfit made me feel sexy, something I had never felt before in my life.

I couldn't wait to show off for Luca.

I grabbed my new cell phone and slid it into the pocket of my suit jacket, and then headed for the door.

I let out a small cry of fear when I opened the door and saw someone standing in front of it. It wasn't until I recognized who it was that my heart stopped trying to beat out of my chest.

"Stefano."

Stefano bowed once. "Good morning, Mr. Nico."

"Boss wanted me to escort you to get something to eat when you woke up."

I smiled remembering the note he had left me. "Yeah, that's what he said."

Stefano gestured with his head so I started following him. I was still a little stunned

that I lived in such an opulent place. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine this.

He led me down the stairs and through an archway to a very formal looking dining room. There was a large wooden table that could have easily fit twenty people. Several floor to ceiling windows covered two separate walls, letting in a lot of sunshine. Vases filled with roses covered several different side tables and crystal chandeliers hung over the table.

I was almost afraid to touch anything.

Was I supposed to eat in here?

Stefano nudged me and then pointed to a door on the far side of the room. "The smaller family dining room is through there."

Oh, thank god.

I followed Stefano through the door to find a much smaller and less ostentatious dining room. I was so relieved.

Before I could take a seat, another door opened and a woman walked in with a tray in her hands. She set it down on the table and then stepped back, smiling at me.

"If I can get you anything else, please let me know." She seemed a little nervous and shy. She wouldn't even look me in the face.

"Thank you," I said. "What's your name, by the way?"

"Maria, sir."

I sent her my brightest smile. "Please, call me Nico."

She shot me a little smile and said. "Mr. Nico."

Yeah, I was never going to get used to that.

I lifted the lid off the tray after she walked away. My eyes widened when I saw all the food, and I mean a lot of food. Sausage, bacon, scrambled eggs, fresh fruit, croissants, coffee, and orange juice.

I wasn't sure I could eat all of this. There were going to be leftovers for sure. By the time I sat back in my seat and patted my full tummy, there was still half the food left.

I didn't like tossing perfectly good food. It was a waste. Having gone hungry more than once, it didn't sit well with me.

I put the lid back on the tray, picked it up, and carried it through the door Maria had gone through, walking into a chef's dream of a kitchen. It was on par with every room I'd seen so far in this place...huge.

I didn't see anyone in the kitchen except for an old lady with grey hair in a bun at the base of her neck mixing something in a bowl.

I walked over to her and respectfully asked, "Ma'am, I have a lot of leftovers here. Do you have any containers so I can put it in the fridge?"

I could always eat it for breakfast tomorrow.

The woman glanced at the tray before pointing to one of the cupboards. I set the tray on the counter and then walked over to the cupboard. I found a container big enough to hold all the food and then carried it back. It took just a moment to transfer the food.

I wished I had a pen and a piece of paper so I could leave my name on it, but I could

always talk to Luca about it later.

I put the food in the fridge and then carried the dishes over to the sink to wash them before setting them in the dish drain.

When I turned to leave the kitchen, I saw the older woman trying to reach for something on a shelf above her head. I hurried over to her side.

"What are you reaching for?" I asked. "Let me get it for you."

She pointed to a white bowl. I grabbed it and set it on the counter. "Is there anything else I can get for you?"

"You're Nicolas, aren't you?"

I froze, dread pooling in my gut. "Yes, ma'am."

I swallowed tightly when she looked me up and down.

"You're a little skinny."

My face was cold, but I still felt the flush of embarrassment. "Yes, ma'am."

The old woman clucked her tongue before walking over to a cookie jar on the counter by the fridge. She pulled the lid and grabbed something from inside. When she came back, she handed me two cookies.

"Eat these."

"Yes, ma'am." As full as I was, I was afraid not to.

My first bite was like biting into heaven. I groaned and quickly took another bite. I'd had chocolate chip cookies before, and I'd even helped the family cook make them, but I'd never had anything like this in my life.

"Did you make these?" I asked her.

The old woman eyed me. "I did."

"Is there cinnamon in here?"

Her eyes rounded in surprise. "You can taste the cinnamon?"

"Was I not supposed to?" I asked.

"Most people don't."

"Oh." I shrugged as I took another bite. "My parents' cook taught me how to cook when I was younger. She always said that I needed to know every spice and how it could enhance or ruin a recipe."

"Smart woman."

I'd also thought so.

Out of everyone, I missed Mrs. Beckerman the most. She'd been the one to kiss my booboos and teach me the difference between right and wrong. Her husband, who was the family butler, had taught me all I needed to know to be a man.

I missed them both.

"Did she teach you how to make bread?"

I nodded.

"Would you like to make bread with me?"

"Huh..." I glanced down at the fancy suit Luca had purchased for me.

"Take your jacket off and roll up your sleeve. I have an apron you can use."

I tucked in my lips, my face flushing.

The old woman narrowed her eyes. "What?"

"My shirt is...um...it's kind of see-through."

The woman snorted and pointed. "There's a slip-over apron in the pantry."

I walked into the pantry and found the apron. I took off my fancy blazer and slipped the apron on and then hurried back to help the woman make bread.

"My name is Nico." It was polite to introduce myself even if she already seemed to know my name.

"I am Elena."

I smiled at her. "It's nice to meet you, Elena."

She nodded at me before gesturing to the dough in the bowl I'd pulled down for her.

"That needs to be kneaded and these old hands don't work like they used to."

I'd already stuck my hands in the bowl and grabbed the dough. I set it on the cutting board and started kneading it. "I have a recipe for some ointment that can help. I used

to make it for the cook all the time. I can easily make it for you. It helps with the swelling caused by arthritis and takes away some of the pain."

I leaned closer to her as if I had a secret to tell her. "It also smells good, not like that chemical stuff they sell you across the counter."

She eyed me with hawk like eyes that reminded me of Luca and asked, "How do you make it?"

I listed off the ingredients, their amounts, and what to do with the ointment. "I know it works. Mrs. Beckerman used it all the time and it decreased the swelling and gave her better range of motion."

"Maybe you can make me some."

"Sure." I nodded toward the dough. "Just let me finish with this and I'll make you up a batch. Shouldn't take more than a few minutes. Do you know if you have all the ingredients?"

"I believe so," she replied. "I'll get the ingredients out for you while you finish with that dough."

By the time I put the dough back into the bowl and covered it with a dishtowel, Elena had gathered all the ingredients I'd need to make the ointment.

I quickly cleaned off the cutting board and then washed my hands before grabbing another bowl and beginning to add the ingredients. I had made it enough times that I knew the amounts I'd need of each by heart.

When I was all done, I brought the bowl over to Elena. "Give me your hand."

Once she did, I rubbed the ointment over her swollen knuckles and then her hand all the way up to her wrist. I did the same to the other hand, making sure I rubbed the ointment in until her hands no longer had a slippery feel to them.

"If you rub this on once a day, you should see some improvement within a week. The occasional heating pad helps, too."

Elena lifted her hand to her nose and took a sniff. "It does smell nice."

"Yeah, that was one of the reasons Mrs. Beckerman created this ointment. She hated the chemical smell the drug store ointments had. She said it was almost as bad as the pain."

Elena lifted her head and gave me the first smile I'd seen on her face since I walked into the kitchen. "Would you like to have some tea with me?"

"I'd love to," I replied. "But you just sit here. I'll make it."

I hurried over to the stove for the teapot. I filled it with water and then set it back on the stove. While it was heating, I cleaned up the mess from making the ointment and put all the ingredients back where Elena told me they went.

"Tea?"

"Cupboard to the left of the stove."

When I opened the cupboard, my eyes widened. There was a lot of tea in there. "Is there a specific type that you'd like?"

"There's a nice oolong tea in there. My husband had it brought in from China."

Oh, nice.

I grabbed the teabags and two cups, carrying both over to the table.

"There's sugar on the counter over there and creamer in the fridge."

"Do you take lemon or honey?"

Elena shook her head. "Not with oolong."

Made sense.

I gathered everything up and carried it back to the table. When the water was hot, I grabbed a pot holder and carried the teapot over to the table. Elena had put a teabag in each of our cups so I poured the water in and then put the teapot back on the stove.

"Grab a couple more of those cookies," Elena directed.

I grabbed enough for both of us, put them on a small plate, and then went back to the table and sat down. After letting it seep for a couple of minutes, I doctored my tea and then slowly took a sip.

I smiled at the taste. Maybe I'd find out where Elena's husband got the tea and see if I could get some. It was really good.

"So, tell me about yourself," Elena said.

"Oh, um..." Man, that would be a long story. "Well, I was born in New York City and lived there my entire life until Luca came for me."

"Luca?"

My face flushed as I smiled. "My husband."

I'd never said that before. It felt really good.

"You said he came for you?"

"Yes." My smile grew bigger. "He rescued me from my parents."

Elena's eyes widened. "He rescued you?"

I gave Elena a brief rundown of what had happened with my parents, not delving too deeply into the actual facts, just the glossed over version.

"You sound like you care about him a lot."

"I love him." That was easy to admit. "I was five years old the day we met, twelve when I figured out that I was going to love him for the rest of my life. When I turned sixteen, he gave me my first kiss, and then my world ended."

Elena laid her hand over the top of mine when tears sprouted to my eyes. "What happened?"

I explained about my parents catching us kissing and then accusing Luca of raping me, how no one would listen to me when I said it didn't happen, and then how Luca had been sent off to prison.

"I never believed the things people had said about him. He is not the bad guy everyone seems to think he is. I've seen his heart and it's made of pure gold."

"You think the heart of a mafia don is made of pure gold?"

"I don't know anything about the mafia part, but I know Luca's heart, and it is made of pure gold."

"You really believe that."

"I know that," I said. "Luca is the best the world has to offer. I don't care what other people say. He has never done anything except love me."

Elena smiled and patted my hand. "You'll do, my dear."

"Huh?"

What the hell did that mean?

"Mrs. Sabatino," Maria said as she walked into the kitchen. "Did you want me to start preparing things for lunch?"

The blood drained from my face as I turned to face Elena. "Mrs. Sabatino? As in Luca's grandmother?"

Oh, the things I had said to this woman.

She smiled as she wagged her eyebrows. "Surprise."

Maybe I could climb into the cookie jar.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

I hung up the phone and then dropped my head back and closed my eyes, just breathing. That had been one of the worst phone calls I'd ever had to make since becoming the head of the Sabatino family.

"What did he say?" my grandfather asked.

I opened my eyes and glanced at the man. "Vito has a lot on his plate right now. His Uncle Carmine is helping him, but still, they have fifty funerals to plan for and that's just the family members. On top of that, he has to arrange for new security since they lost thirty guards in the bombing."

"Well," Grandfather started as he stood, "if we learn anything, we can turn it over to them and let them decide what they want to do with that information."

"I suppose that is the least we can do," I said. "I still want to keep security up until we know who did this. I don't know if this attack was aimed only at the D'Angelo family or if it was something more."

"Sounds good."

My grandfather started to leave my study, but before he could reach the door, it slammed open. My hand automatically went to my gun until I saw Nico rushing into the room, his face as red as a beacon.

"Nico?" I caught him as he ran across the room and threw himself in my arms,

burying his face in my neck. "What's wrong, cuore mio ?"

Nico shook his head.

I frowned as I glanced up to Stefano. "What happened?"

"I happened," my grandmother said as she walked into the room.

" Nonna ?"

"It's nothing, Luca," she said. "Nicolas and I met when he came for breakfast and got to talking. He didn't realize it was me right away and I think he's a little embarrassed."

Nico shuddered and said, "I said so many things to her."

"Ah, love." I threaded my fingers through Nico's hair and rubbed his back with the other. "I'm sure it's fine."

Nico vehemently shook his head.

I chuckled as I gently tugged at his hair. "Can you look at me, Nico?"

He shook his head again.

"Please?"

Nico's lower lip was trembling when he lifted his head and looked at me.

"Nico." I rubbed the pad of my thumb over Nico's lip. " Cuore mio, can I have a smile?"

Nico's lips spread into a smile, but it didn't shine in his eyes.

It was not a real smile.

"Nico."

Nico huffed, but smiled for real this time, his eyes winking.

I returned his smile before pressing a kiss to his forehead. "That's better. I only want real smiles from you, okay?"

Nico's brow furrowed. "How did you know that wasn't a real smile?"

"Your eyes." I gently stroked the skin at the corner of Nico's eye. "They sparkle when you smile for real."

Nico's eyes crinkled at the corners as his smile grew bigger, amusement clear on his face. "My eyes sparkle? Seriously?"

"They do," I insisted.

When Nico tossed back his head, his laughter filling the study, all I could do was stare. I was mesmerized by the sight, captivated. If I died right this second, I'd die a happy man.

Luckily, I was very much alive and so was Nico. I got to experience this joy for the rest of my life.

When Nico settled against my chest again, I smiled down at him. I heard a soft gasp and glanced up to see my grandmother staring at me with wide eyes. "Nonna?"

She shook her head as she pressed her hand to her mouth.

My grandfather wrapped an arm around her. "I told you Nico was Luca's light."

Nonna patted her husband's arm. "You were right, dear. He's such a good boy."

I had no idea what they were talking about.

I frowned as I looked down at him. This was not the outfit I had picked out for him.

"Nico, why are you covered in flour?"

Nico's eyes rounded. "Uh..."

"We were making bread," Nonna stated.

So, he decided to wear it?

When my cell phone rang, I glanced at the name on the screen and then picked it up.

"What's up, Vinnie."

"Bad news, I'm afraid," Vinnie replied. "The police are demanding that they meet Nico in person."

My jaw clenched.

"You need to bring Nico back to New York."

"Can't they come here?" I asked.

"No, they need to verify that Nico isn't being coerced."

"Can't they get in touch with the Polizia di Stato and have them verify that he isn't being coerced?" I asked. I really didn't want to take Nico back to New York City.

"I'm actually not sure," Vinnie replied.

"Luca," my grandfather said. "Now would be a good chance to take away that power and money."

I clenched my hand around my cell phone, my nostrils flaring as I tried to reign in my anger. "Vinnie, you have connections in New York City. Can you do a deep dive into Nico's parents?"

"I have a few connections," Vinnie replied, "so yeah, I can do that. Any reason why?"

"I've been keeping an eye on them for a few years and I have a lot of information on them, but nothing that will really work in my favor. I want to take their power away from them. To do that, I need to take their money away from them. My grandfather suggested I ruin his business."

"Oh, I see," Vinnie said. "Yeah, I have some people that I can ask to look into them. If there is something there, they will find it."

"Can you do that and get back to me?" I glanced at Nico, wincing at the concern I could see on his pale face. "I need to talk to my husband."

"I'll call you as soon as I have something."

I hung up with Vinnie and set my phone off to one side before glancing at my grandparents. "Can you excuse us? I need to talk to Nico."

"Of course, dear," my grandmother said before turning to walk out of the room.

My grandfather closed the door as he walked out.

I lifted Nico up and set him on my desk in front of me. I scooted forward so I could wrap my arms around him. I was pretty sure he was going to freak after he heard what I had to say and I wanted to keep him anchored on my desk.

"Nico," I started, "if we want your parents out of our lives forever, we may have to go back to New York City and confront them."

"Why would we do that?" Nico asked in a very small voice.

"Well, the plan that has been discussed is confronting them with the police there so that if they try anything, the police can arrest them. It's been suggested that we go all out when we confront them and show them that I have the money and power to keep them away from you."

Nico grimaced, his throat bobbing as he swallowed hard. "What do you think of all of this?"

"I hate it, Nico. I don't want them anywhere around you, but it might be the only way to fully get rid of them. As my grandfather told me, they use their power and money to hurt us. If we take that away from them, then they can no longer hurt us."

"I'm not sure I believe that."

Honestly, I didn't either.

"We have to take you back to New York to meet with the police, Nico. I don't think we can get out of that, so it makes sense to confront your parents at the same time, kill two birds with stone so to speak."

God, I was starting to sound like Vinnie.

"I get having to see the police, but why do we have to see my parents? We've already escaped them."

"Nico, you know even if the police clear this all up, your parents won't give up. They want to use you to buy their cushy lifestyle."

"So, how is confronting them going to change that?"

"Because they need to see that I have the power to fight them. I didn't have that power all those years ago. That's how they took you away from me. Now, I am more powerful than them and I have more money. They can't beat me."

"Is this what you really want me to do?"

Hell, no.

"I can't give you a firm answer about that yet. I know we might not have a choice about going back to New York City to deal with the police, but the thing with your parents is up in the air. I'm still waiting for information on your parents."

Nico dropped his eyes, his lips pressing together.

"Nico, I do have a question for you, and I need you to be honest with me, okay?"

Nico's eyes rose to mine.

"I plan on ruining your father's business. I need to know how you feel about that."

His brow furrowed. "Why?"

"Why am I going to ruin his business?"

Nico nodded.

"Your parents use their money to get what they want. If I take that money away from them, I can take their power away."

"How can you do that?"

"Well, I'm still working on that part. My plan is to find a way to end all their contracts so the business goes under. When it's bad enough, I'll use one of my shell corporations to buy it for a cheap price. That's one of the things Vinnie is looking into for me. As Vinnie says, bastards like them live in the sewer. They have to have dirt on them."

Instead of being upset, Nico frowned. "What kind of dirt?"

"Oh, uh, well, anything that would give me an advantage in ruining their business."

"Would it help to know he imports illegal goods?"

My jaw dropped.

"He's had a deal with some man named O'Donnell for years. He uses his import business to ship illegal stuff in and out of the country. The legal stuff that he shows to the public and customs makes up like a fourth of his revenue. The rest all comes from his illegal stuff. It's all in an offshore account in the Cayman islands."

I frowned. "Do you mean Kirby O'Donnell?"

"Yeah, I think that's his name. I know there was some muck up with him about a year

ago. I don't know what it was, but my father was really upset about it. "

"How do you know all of this, Nico?"

Nico shrugged. "After you went to prison, my parents wouldn't allow me to go anywhere on my own. They said it was for my own safety because they didn't want someone else to rape me, but I knew it was so they could keep me under their thumb. When my mother couldn't watch me, usually because she was out shopping, my father forced me to go with him. I had to sit there with him in his office reading a book. I heard all sorts of things."

Holy shit.

I held up my hand. "Just hold on for a minute." I picked up my phone and dialed Vinnie. "Hey, Vinnie, Nico just told me that his father was using his import company to bring in illegal merchandise. Apparently, he had some sort of business deal with O'Donnell and the bulk of his money is in an account in the Caymans."

"Kirby O'Donnell?"

"Yes."

"Give me a minute. I'm going to bring Angus King in on this conversation."

I heard the phone ring.

"Hey, Vinnie," a man said. "What's up?"

"Hey, King, I have you on the line with Luca Sabatino and his husband. Do you have a business deal with a man named Victor Rossi? He's in imports."

"Give me a minute to check."

The tension as we waited was palatable.

When King came back, he said, "Yeah, it's an old deal set up with O'Donnell. I've just been letting it go for now because I have so much other stuff on my plate, but I don't intend to renew it when the contract comes to an end. Rossi wants too much of the pie. Why?"

I started to smile, but it wasn't a sweet smile for my love.

It was pure evil.

"How lucrative is this contract, King?" I asked.

"Well, it's been less lucrative in the last few years, which is one of the reasons I want to end the contract. I think that's why Rossi has been demanding a bigger cut. He hasn't been making as much recently. Barely anything in the last few months."

"He started losing money a few months ago?" Nico asked. "That was about the time my parents started insisting I marry Gena."

"Nico?" Vinnie asked.

"Yeah," Nico replied.

"King, this is Nico Sabatino, Luca's husband."

"I'm also Victor Rossi's son," Nico said.

"Oh," King replied. "Well, I suppose I could renew the contract."

"Please don't," Nico said. "We're trying to figure out how to take down my father's company, not make him more money."

King sounded so confused. "Huh?"

"Go ahead and tell him, Luca," Vinnie said. "King is trustworthy."

I quickly gave a brief rundown of our history with Nico's parents over the last ten years, including what we were hoping to do.

"So, if I ended this contract early, it wouldn't upset you?"

"Not at all," I replied. "It would actually help us a lot."

"Is this something we should get the guys on?" King asked. "I'm sure they can work their magic and drain that bank account in the Caymans. Taking Rossi's money is sure to piss him off."

I snorted. "What's he going to do? Report it to the police that his illegal money was stolen?"

That brought a few chuckles.

"I already spoke to Delancy," Vinnie said. "They are looking into digging up dirt on Rossi and his wife. I'll give him a call here in a few and talk to him about clearing out the bank account. He'll want a cut for his organization, but only like ten percent. Is that all right with you, Nico?"

"Um." Nico frowned as he looked at me. "Why wouldn't it be okay with me?"

"It's your money, Nico."

His eyebrows shot up and he looked at the phone. "My money?"

"He's right, Nico," I told him. "After everything your parents did to you, you deserve this money."

"But isn't that stealing?"

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

I flushed when I heard soft chuckles coming from my cell phone.

"Baby," Luca said, "we're mafia. Stealing is kind of our bread and butter."

"No, I get that," I said, "but this isn't my money. Why would it go to me? I wasn't even the one that went to prison. You did. Shouldn't the money go to you?"

Luca pressed a kiss to my forehead. "How about the money goes to both of us, huh?"

I nodded. That was a much better idea.

"What is this organization you mentioned, Vinnie?" Luca asked.

"Alejandro Díaz's husband Delancy runs an organization helping abuse victims escape their abusers, especially in situations where they have no other avenues of receiving help."

"God, I wished I'd known about that organization when my parents were keeping me a prisoner and refusing to feed me to punish me."

Luca's jaw clenched. "I knew your parents were starving you."

"It wasn't often and usually only for a couple of days, but—"

"But nothing, Nico," Luca snapped. "That's still abuse."

I ducked my head, staring down at my fingers as I twisted them together. It wasn't so much that Luca had spoken in a harsh tone. That didn't bother me. I knew he was upset, but I also knew that he would never hurt me.

It was the fact that I had accepted everything my parents had done to me over the years and never really considered it abuse until now.

I mean sure, I thought they had emotionally and mentally abused me when they took Luca away from me, but I'd never thought about the rest of the things they had done. They had never physically touched me until that last time so I never saw it that way.

I was an idiot.

"Nico, baby." Luca cupped my chin and lifted my head up. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you."

"It's okay," I said. "You weren't really snapping at me, but the situation."

"God, baby." Luca hugged me tight. "We need to toughen you up."

I didn't know why.

"I'm not sure if this is the right time to bring this up," King said, "but maybe we can talk with Petrov and Díaz and all of us agree to cancel any contracts Rossi might have with us and not allow him to do business in our territories. That would take some of his revenue away from him."

"Do you think Hu would agree to it?"

King snorted. "I don't think Hu would care."

"Hu?" Luca asked.

"Hu runs Staten Island," Vinnie explained. "He only meets with us at the annual conclave. He's not much for socializing."

"So, stay out of Staten Island?"

"That would be my suggestion," Vinnie replied.

"Okay, Vinnie, we'll make arrangements to come back to New York later this week," Luca said. "Can you call that detective and set something up?"

"Yeah," Vinnie replied. "I'll get in contact with him and get back to you about the time."

"I'd appreciate it," Luca replied.

"I'll see about canceling this contract and speaking with Díaz and Petrov about cancelling any contracts they might have with him," King said. "I'm sure they will agree, especially when we tell them what Nico's parents did to him."

"And Luca," Nico said. "What they did to him is far worse than what they did to me."

"What they did to me is not any worse than what they did to you, Nico," Luca said. "It was just a different kind of abuse."

I wasn't sure I agreed with that, but I wasn't going to argue about it right now. "Do you really think you can take down my parents?"

I wasn't so sure.

"We've taken down worse," King stated.

Vinnie snorted. "True."

"Okay, my husband is calling me so I need to go," King said. "I'll give you a call when I get everything done on my end."

"Thank you, King," Luca said.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. King," I added.

"Just King, Nico." King chuckled. "My queen would smack me upside the head if I made you call me mister."

Uh... I leaned closer to Luca to whisper in his ear, "I thought he was married to a man."

"He is, Nico."

"But he said..."

Luca chuckled. "You'd understand if you'd ever met Spencer. He's very...colorful."

Uh huh.

King hung up and we were left with just Vinnie.

"I need to get going, too. Nicky has plans with his friends and I've been ordered to make myself scarce."

Nicky had ordered his husband to make himself scarce? A mafia boss? Did things

like that actually happen?

"I'll call you if I get any news," Vinnie said.

"I'll do the same," Luca stated.

Once Vinnie hung up and it was just me and Luca, he set his phone aside and wrapped his arms tightly around me. "Did you eat?"

I nodded and then remembered the leftovers. "I wasn't able to eat all of it so I put the leftovers in the fridge. I hope that was okay."

"Of course it was, Nico. But did you get enough to eat?"

I nodded again. "Your grandmother even gave me some cookies."

"Oh, yeah?" Luca started to smile. "Was it the really good ones with the extra chocolate chunks?"

"It was."

"Did you save me any?"

I tucked my lips in and shook my head.

"You didn't save your husband any? The man that loves and adores you?"

I could barely keep my lips together as laughter build up inside of me. When he raised an eyebrow at me, I couldn't stand it anymore and laughed. "They were really good, too."

"I'm a big bad mafia boss," Luca said. "What should I do to you?"

I wagged my eyebrows.

I had a few ideas.

"I don't suppose you could lock the door and find a bottle of lube, could you?"

Luca's eyes rounded for just a moment before he hurried to the door and turned the lock. When he came back to the desk, he pulled open one of the drawers and grabbed a bottle of lube.

I watched with hungry anticipation as Luca began unzipping his slacks. His muscled chest already had me drooling. I couldn't wait to see the rest of the impressive man.

My cock had become so hard I thought it might fracture if I touched it. Without taking my eyes off the visual feast before me, I unbuttoned my shirt, dropping it from my shoulders just about the same time that Luca's shirt hit the floor.

"You are so handsome, Luca," I said as I kicked off my shoes and wiggled out of my pants. Luca needed to know that. He was simply stunning.

One of Luca's brown eyebrows arched and a slow sensual grin lifted the corners of his lips. "You're not so bad yourself."

Once Luca was naked, I beckoned with my hand. Luca stepped over, his hands landing on my shoulders. There was a tingling in the pit of my stomach. I curled my arms around Luca's waist, pulling him closer. His hard erection pressed against my own. The friction was maddening. I would never get enough of feeling Luca's hard cock against my body.

"Want you," I whispered against delicious kiss-swollen lips.

"I see someone is hungry." Luca's tone was so damn deep and seductive that I groaned with hot, aching need.

"You have no idea." My skin was pulsing with desire, my body writhing against the larger man. I pulled back to see Luca's flushed cheeks, lust eating up his irises. Luca's aroused passion was making mine grow stronger.

Luca made a throaty sound as he picked me up by my ass cheeks and set me on the desk. His lips left behind a searing trail of kisses and licks along my skin. My legs began to shake as Luca moved lower and lower.

I jerked, my breath coming out in shallow gasps, my cock hard and erect. Luca licked around my navel, his tongue sensually dancing along the fine hairs that ran from my abdomen to my groin. I was going out of my mind and Luca was teasing me.

A cry left my lips when Luca placed his hands on the back of my thighs and raised my bottom, licking along the underside of my sac. I fisted my hands, my head lolling to the side. I could feel myself trembling and it was only the start of things.

I let Luca maneuver me, taking full advantage of my body. I quickly learned just how sensual a lover Luca could be.

Arousal ran over me in hot currents, heating me up to the point I thought I was going to melt. Luca took my erection into his mouth, savored it, tasted it, and brought me to the edge. I inhaled deeply, my fingers digging into Luca as the need to come clawed at me.

I closed my eyes, pressing my cheek to the desk as Luca's fingers slid down the crease in my ass, slid over my aching hole. Firm fingers slid down my inner thigh as

the other hand moved to spread my cheeks once more.

This time Luca's fingers were wet when they circled my quivering opening. One lone finger slipped inside my body and I thought I was going to lose my mind.

Luca rose up, climbing back over me, his cock pressing between my ass cheeks. My head fell back when Luca's lubed fingers breached me. I bent my legs, spreading them wider as Luca stretched his body over mine.

When Luca's fingers slipped from my body, I almost whimpered in protest until I felt the blunt head of Luca's cock pressing into my ass. I expected Luca to ease in slowly as he always had in the past. Instead, Luca surged all the way in with one single thrust.

"Luca!" I cried out as I wrapped my legs around Luca's waist.

Having the man inside of me was like a carnal kiss. We were joined at the most intimate level. The bliss was so great, I never dreamed of asking Luca to slow down. If anything, I urged him on by letting out a groan of pleasure as Luca's cock brushed against my sweet spot.

"I love hearing my name on your lips." Luca nipped my shoulder, his tongue playing havoc with my nerve endings. His large hand was pressing into my back, the other curved around my hip.

Luca rotated his hips, pushing and pulling, shooting me closer to the edge, and then bringing me back. He almost had me pinned to the desk, enclosing me in pure muscle as he made slow, sweet love to me.

I surged forward, meeting Luca's thrusts, my fingers grabbing the man's shoulders and holding on. Luca pulled out almost all the way and then thrust deep. My legs

inched higher and higher up Luca's back. I whimpered when Luca grabbed my ankles, pushing my legs past my head.

My head fell back against the wooden desk, my eyes rolling in my head. The sensations were clawing their way throughout my entire body and ensnaring me in a sensual hold as my body splintered into a thousand pieces of pleasure.

Luca growled, thrusting so hard that I could no longer keep up. I was lost in my climax, clinging to Luca with the last vestige of consciousness. Luca's moves were deep, fast, and had me arching my back as Luca came, his muscles shuddering under my hands before the man let out a rough shout.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," I whispered over and over again as I kissed Luca's eyes, his nose, his chin, and his lips, losing myself in the feelings of desire as we took pleasure in each other's body.

Luca rested his body on top of mine as he cupped my face between his hands and searched my face with his eyes.

The wide grin that began to spread Luca's lips was unexpected. "I love you, too." Luca sighed and lowered his head, but not before I saw a suspicious sheen in his own eyes.

If this was going to be my new life, I could get used to being the spouse of a mafia man.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

This was the farthest thing on the planet I wanted to be doing. I'd rather face a mob war than be on an airplane landing at LaGuardia Airport in New York City.

I especially didn't want Nico here.

I glanced over at him. He was staring out the window as the plane came in for a landing, watching the ground get closer and closer. His hand gripped mine so tightly, his fingers were turning white.

I knew he was scared, but I think it had more to do with what we were facing and less to do with the flight.

It had taken two weeks to get everything set up. I still wasn't fully satisfied by the plan we'd hatched. Vinnie was positive it would work, but I wasn't so sure. Anything could go wrong.

Putting Nico in harm's way even a little bit was something I was having a really hard time dealing with. I didn't care if that harm came from physical or emotional abuse. I didn't like it.

Nico blew out a breath once the wheels of the airplane were on the tarmac. "I don't think I'll ever get used to that."

"You will," I assured him. "It just takes time."

And a lot more trips.

I smiled as I started thinking about all the places I could take Nico. He had spent his entire life in New York City. There was a whole world out there he had yet to experience.

When the plane finally stopped in the executive hangar, Nico and I unbuckled and stood up. I gave a quick nod to Stefano, making sure he knew he needed to be extra vigilant in protecting Nico.

The man nodded back, obviously understanding my silent command.

I liked Stefano. He protected Nico while not over-crowding him. He seemed to understand that there were boundaries he shouldn't cross while protecting Nico at the same time.

If he kept it up, I might have to pay for his honeymoon.

Vinnie and his husband were waiting for us when we disembarked the airplane. I shook both their hands before drawing Nico close to my side. "Is everything in place?"

Vinnie nodded. "We're going to visit that friend of mine first. That detective he knows will be waiting for us so he can talk to Nico."

"And the rest of it?" I asked.

Vinnie's sly grin told me everything I needed to know.

"Everything is in place," Vinnie stated. "We'll be meeting at the Thomas place this evening."

"Cocktail party then?"

Vinnie smirked. "It'll be some kind of party."

Oh, I hoped so.

Vinnie waved toward a black limousine. "We really should go. Jake is waiting for us."

I nodded and then pressed my hand into the small of Nico's back to lead him toward the car. It was a little cramped with Nico, me, Vinnie, his husband, our three bodyguards, and the driver.

Well, Nico and Nicky's bodyguards. The rest of our guards were riding in the vehicles in front and behind our car. We weren't taking any chances. We had a full team of protection.

I smiled as I watched Nico and Nicky getting to know each other. They were chatting away like old friends, talking about different places they had been to in New York City as well as places around the world they'd always fantasized about visiting.

I made note of several of them.

"It's a different world, isn't it?" Vinnie asked casually.

I glanced at him. "What?"

"Being married."

"I've been dreaming about being married to Nico since I was twelve years old. I always knew it would happen. It was just a matter of when." I sighed heavily. "I

regret that it took so long."

"Well, you have him now," Vinnie replied. "That's what is important."

It was.

"Maybe while you're in town, we can go to Petrov's club and let Nico meet some of the other mob husbands. It wouldn't hurt to forge some bonds there."

My eyebrows lifted. "Mob husbands?"

Was that a thing?

"My Nicky, Petrov's Eiji, King's Spencer, and Alejandro's Delancy." Vinnie smiled as if he knew a secret that amused him. "The four of them have created quite the little pack of friends. There are a few other members, but none that are in our business."

Vinnie gestured to the two men, whose conversation seemed to have turned animated if their rapid hand gestures were anything to go by. "Nico could do worse in making friends with them."

I couldn't help the smile that spread across my face when I saw the happy smile on Nico's face. Due to his crazy-ass parents, he'd never really had any friends, but he seemed to like Nicky.

I prayed that was a good thing. I'd do anything to keep him happy, even forge bonds with a bunch of mobsters.

When we pulled into the parking garage of a large black glass building, I was honestly surprised. "Your friend works here?"

"Jake owns the building."

Of course he did.

"Ever heard of Jakue D'Amato?" Vinnie asked. "Jake has been a friend for awhile now."

"This is the same guy that had that mess-up with your grandfather?"

Vinnie grinned.

Now I was really interested in meeting with this man.

"Jake and a few of his friends will be attending the cocktail party tonight. They are all pretty big names in the business world. Jakue D'Amato, Lucas Kincaid, and Syros Aetós just to name a few."

My frown was instant. I knew those names. "Why would they be there?"

"Because, while we can handle the less than legal side of business, they can handle the legal side. I thought it would be best to hit Nico's parents from both sides, let them know that they can't do business in either worlds."

"And they all agreed to this?"

The first grimace I had seen since we climbed off the plane crossed Vinnie's face. "Most of their husbands have been through situations like your Nico. Not all the same, but close enough. After everything was explained to them, they all volunteered to help out."

That actually lessened some of my stress. Not all of it, mind you, but some of it.

Once we parked, we waited until our guards made sure the area was secure, and then climbed out and walked to the elevator. There was a very large man waiting for us at the elevator.

I grabbed Nico and pulled him to my side.

"Good afternoon, Fred," Vinnie stated. "Is everything ready for us?"

"Yes, sir," Fred replied. "Mr. D'Amato is waiting for you in the lab."

"Excellent," Vinnie replied. "I assume Jake is okay with Nicky and Nico's bodyguards accompany us?"

"Of course, sir."

I followed Vinnie into the elevator. It got a little crowded when the others climbed in as well.

Nico grew a little quiet and plastered himself to my side, showing how nervous he was. I wanted to reassure him that nothing bad would happen to him, but now was not the time.

I didn't pay attention to what floor we ended up on, but I knew we were pretty high up considering the view out the windows. I could see the roofs of several other buildings.

Fred led us down the hallway to a large door. There was a dark haired woman in a skirt suit waiting for us. She swiped something against the scanner on the wall next to the door, and then pulled the door open.

When we stepped inside, another man was waiting for us.

"Jake," Vinnie called out as he walked over to shake his hand. "Thank you for agreeing to this." He turned and gestured to me. "This is Luca Sabatino and his husband Nico."

I shook his hand. "It's nice to meet you."

Jake smiled at me before his eyes darted to Vinnie. "He understands the deal?"

Vinnie nodded. "One tracker in exchanged for one favor to be named later."

"Good." Jake was all smiles now. "Norris."

"Sir." A man with thick glasses and a lab coat came out of a room in the back. He had a small tray in his hand.

"This is Dr. Norris Teller," Jake explained. "He's the man that invented these little trackers."

From the way the man edged closer to Jake, I got the feeling he didn't want to shake my hand. I smiled and nodded him instead. "Dr. Teller." I brought Nico around in front of me. "This is my husband, Nico. He's the one getting the tracker."

Dr. Teller relaxed almost instantly, telling me that it wasn't being a mobster that frightened him about me. It was being a larger man.

Someone had hurt this man.

"Does it hurt?"

I glanced down at Nico when he spoke.

"Oh, no, I'd never do anything to cause someone pain." Dr. Teller said quickly. "I have this stuff that numbs the area. You might feel a little pressure, but that's all."

The doctor set the tray down on the counter and sat in one of the rolling stools before gesturing to a chair. "Come, sit. It'll only take a couple of minutes."

"It's easy, Nico," Nicky said. He held out his hand and pointed to one specific spot. "I have one myself."

Nico reached out and rubbed the spot Nicky had shown him. His brow knit together. "It really doesn't hurt?"

"Not a bit," Nicky replied.

When Nico glanced at me, I smiled and nodded at him. "Go ahead, cuore mio. I'll be right here with you."

Nico sat down in the chair Norris had indicated and placed his hand on the counter. I walked over to stand behind him, resting my hands on his shoulders as I intently watched every move Dr. Teller made.

I know everyone had said it was easy, but I was surprised when Dr. Teller spread a bandage across the small incision he'd made five minutes later. It had been quick and painless. I knew this because Nico turned and beamed up at me.

"You okay?"

He nodded quickly.

I smiled down at him. "Good."

Jake handed me a small tablet. "This has the tracker app on it. If anything happens to your husband, you can find him on this as long as he is within five hundred miles. It will also read his vital statistics like heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature so that those searching for Nico can tell what kind of condition he is in."

"Thank you." It felt like a lifeline.

I slid it into the inner pocket of my suit, close to my heart and then looked at Jake. "Any favor at any time. If I can help, just give me a call." I handed him one of my business cards. "I'm serious, call me if you have a favor. You are helping me keep my husband safe. That means the world to me."

"I get it, man," Jake said. "We do anything for them."

Truer words had never been spoken.

"So, we'll see you tonight," Jake said. "We can't wait for the show to begin."

"Yeah, Vinnie said you and a few others were going to be there tonight." I was still confused by that. "Can I ask why?"

"Did Vinnie tell you that his grandfather and I tangled once upon a time?"

"He mentioned it."

"Before Jai's parents sold him to Carlos, they sold him to me. When none of that panned out to them, they tried to get me to divorce Jai and marry the woman he thought was his sister. They abused him, starved him, took all of his money, and any time that he didn't toe the line, the man he'd grown up with as his father went over to his place and beat the crap out of him. If it wasn't for my friends, I never would have been able to get him away from them."

" Porca troia , why did you not kill them?"

I would have skinned them while they screamed.

Jake shrugged. "That's not my style. I prefer that they be alive to enjoy their hell."

Yeah, I could see that. Killing them would end them, but it wouldn't make them suffer more than a few minutes. Keeping them alive could draw their suffering out for years.

Maybe I needed to think about that.

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

"Sir."

I glanced at the massive man that walked up to Jake and then took a quick step closer to Luca. I knew if he was here, he was probably harmless, but I couldn't seem to get past his size.

"Detective Waterston is waiting in your office," Fred stated.

"Ah yes, the second half of this meeting." Jake shot me a look. "Are you ready for this?"

"For what?" I asked.

"Detective Waterston is here to talk to you and confirm that you left with me of your own free will, Nico," Luca stated. "Are you going to be comfortable doing that?"

"Can you stay with me?" I asked.

"Uh..." Luca glanced at Jake. "Can I?"

"I'm not sure to tell you the truth. He might want to speak to Nico alone to be sure you aren't there to pressure him into saying what you want him to say."

"What about Stefano?" Luca gestured to my bodyguard. "Can he stay with Nico?"

Jake winced. "I'm not sure about that either, but if there is a problem, I'd be happy to stay with Nico. Detective Waterston knows me, so he knows I wouldn't try and coerce Nico."

"Why don't we see if Detective Waterston will allow Luca to stay before we freak out?" Vinnie said. "We could be creating problems where there aren't any."

While what Vinnie said made sense, it did not reassure me. I really wanted Luca to stay with me.

"My office is upstairs," Jake explained.

I held tight to Luca's hand as we left the lab and took the elevator up to the floor where Jake's office was located. Before we could reach his office door, another man with brown hair and a beard joined us.

"This is Miles Cranston, one of my lawyers," Jake explained. "I thought it would be a good idea to have him on hand."

I wasn't sure why, but whatever.

When we reached Jake's office, two men were inside. I knew neither of them.

I edged closer to Luca.

Jake walked right up to the smaller, younger looking one and pressed a kiss to his lips. I was going to assume that this was Jake's husband.

That meant the other man was probably the detective.

When he stood and glanced at me, I turned my head and buried it in Luca's chest. I

didn't like the way he looked at me. It wasn't in a sexual way like Steve had, but more like he wanted to pick my brain and dig out all of my secrets.

Luca stopped and turned to cup my face with his hands. "Hey, it's okay cuore mio. Detective Waterston isn't going to hurt you. He just wants to talk to you."

"Why don't we all sit down?" Jake asked.

Luca led me over to a set of chairs by the window. He sat down and then pulled me down onto his lap. I immediately buried my face in his neck. Stefano took up a spot next to us, clasping his hands in front of him.

"Detective, this is Luca and Nico Sabatino," Jake said. "Luca, Nico, this is Detective Waterston. It's okay to talk to him. He's one of the good guys. I promise."

I was surprised when Vinnie nodded.

"Detective Waterston can't be bought," Vinnie stated. "He believes in the law, but he knows that there is sometimes a gray area between black and white, good and evil."

I nodded so they knew I'd heard them, but I didn't lift my head from Luca's neck.

"Baby, you're going to have to look at the detective so he can ask you his questions."

I shook my head.

Luca sighed before asking, "Can you ask your questions this way?"

"I suppose," the detective replied.

"Nico is a little uncomfortable with large men," Luca explained. "The night we

eloped, while he was still at his house, his mother shot him up with some drug that incapacitated him and made him unable to fight back when one of the guards working for his parents tried to sexually assault him."

"Do you have his name?" Detective Waterston asked.

"Wouldn't matter if I did. It's just Nico's word against his."

I wasn't sure if Luca was stating that because he didn't remember Steve's name or if he wanted to get his hands on the man himself. Since he mentioned Steve's name before, pretty sure he didn't forget.

"Mr. Sabatino, I do need to ask you a few questions."

I huffed before lifting my head out of Luca's neck and looking across the room to the detective. "What do you want to know?"

"The first thing I want to ask is if you are here of your own free will."

"No," I answered honestly, feeling Luca stiffen beneath me. "I don't want to be here. I never wanted to be here. I want to go back home to Italy."

Luca relaxed.

"Can you tell me about the night you disappeared?"

"Eloped," I said. I remember what everyone else had said. "My parents were forcing me to marry someone I didn't want to marry. I've always wanted to marry Luca, ever since we met when we were kids, but my parents hate Luca. They even accused him of raping me when I was sixteen, but we were just kissing. They sent him to prison for four years."

Detective Waterston's eyes went to Luca. "You have a record?"

"I do," Luca admitted. "Like Nico said, his parents accused me of raping him when we were just kissing. No one would listen to Nico when he said it wasn't true and I went to prison for four years. After I got out, I moved to Italy to live with my grandparents. I only came back for Nico."

"I assume you are in the same business as Mr. Borelli?"

Luca and I both glanced at Vinnie, who gave us a small nod.

"I am," Luca admitted.

"And you two are married now?"

"We are," Luca said. "After I rescued Nico, we flew to Canada and got married and then we flew home to Italy. I believe Vinnie supplied you with a copy of the marriage license."

"He did, and the Canadian Vital Statics Office confirmed its authenticity."

"Then why is any of this even a question?" Luca asked. "We could have solved all of this with a phone call."

"As law required, I had to set eyes on your husband to confirm that he is not being coerced."

"I'm not," I said. "Since the moment my parents sent Luca to prison, I've been waiting for him to come back for me. And I don't care what my parents say. I'm an adult and I can make my own decisions and I want to stay with Luca and live in our beautiful villa in Italy and make cookies and bread with his grandmother."

I turned and buried my face back in Luca's neck. This was all getting to be too much for me. It seemed like so many people were trying to keep us apart. I wanted them all to just go away.

Luca wrapped his arms around me, one at my waist, the other stroking my back.

"It's okay, cuore mio ," Luca said in a soft, gentle tone. "No one is going to separate us. Just as soon as we get done dealing with all of this, I'll take you home and you can make cookies with Nonna ."

He obviously knew what was upsetting me.

This is why I loved this man.

"Let's talk about your arrest record, Mr. Sabatino."

Oh, hell no!

My head snapped up and I glared at the Detective. "I'd like to speak to Detective Waterston alone." I was terrified, but for Luca, I could be brave, even if it was only for a few minutes. "Can everyone give us a few minutes?"

When everyone started out of the room, I stood up so Luca could go with the others.

"Are you sure, baby?" Luca asked.

"I'm sure." I wasn't, not really, but I wasn't going to tell him that. "Stefano, you go with them."

"Mr. Nico—" Stefano started.

"You can wait for me right outside the door." I fisted my hands so no one could see them trembling. I didn't want to be alone with the detective, but I wanted him gone and the only way to do that was to talk to him.

I waited until the door closed behind everyone before raising my eyes to the detective. "You are here to question me, not my husband, so ask your questions."

"Alright." The man obviously knew I didn't want him questioning Luca about his record. "Tell me exactly what happened when he went to prison."

"It was ten years ago," I started and then explained the whole situation. How I had loved Luca for years before that first kiss and loved him to this very day. I explained everything that had occurred that fateful day when Luca was taken from me, how many times I had pleaded for someone to listen to me, and my misery when no one did.

When I was done with that part of my story, I started explaining to him what had happened with my parents during those ten years before Luca rescued me.

By the time I was done, I was standing at the window looking out over the city below, tears pooling in my eyes. I'd been lucky. They had stayed in my eyes instead of trickling down my cheeks.

But my red eyes looked horrible.

"Is there anything else you need to know, Detective?" I asked as I turned around to look at him. "Are you satisfied now that I am here of my own free will?"

"Yes." Detective Waterston stood and then stuck his writing pad and pen into his pocket. "I'm sorry that I had to ask all of these questions, but your parents have been raising quite the stink. My captain has been riding my ass to find you and solve this case."

"Well, it wasn't a kidnapping. I eloped."

"Yes, well, your parents are convinced that you were kidnapped. You might want to talk to them about that."

I almost snorted. "Yeah, I'll get right on that."

"I'm sorry you had to fly back to the US, Mr. Sabatino. Now that the case will be closed, you are free to go home. I'll make sure that my captain knows this was all a misunderstanding."

Yeah, right, a misunderstanding.

The detective dug his card out of his suit jacket and held it out to me. "If you have any problems with your parents, give me a call. You're twenty-five years old and old enough to make your own decisions."

"Wish my parents understood that."

They really didn't.

I stayed by the window and watched as the detective walked out of the room. The moment the door opened, Luca hurried back in. I smiled when he scanned me from head to toe, looking for anything out of place.

"I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" he asked as he stopped in front of me and drew me into his arms.

"Why did you decide to speak to him alone?"

"Because I wasn't about to let him question you over your police record. He was

supposed to be here to make sure I wasn't kidnapped. Your criminal record had nothing to do with it."

"Oh, cuore mio. " Luca stroked his knuckles down the side of my face. "I was never worried about him questioning me about my criminal record. I served my time in the eyes of the law. There's nothing he can do me."

I didn't know how those things worked, but I wasn't taking any chances. Luca was mine to protect even if he didn't know it. I might not be very good at it, but I'd try to my dying breath.

"How about I treat you all to lunch before we head to the Thomas place?" Jake suggested. "I can easily get reservations at Le Bernardin. "

I had grown up in New York City, so of course I'd heard of that fancy French restaurant. It was one of those places that people like me usually read about in the society pages and dreamed of going to, but never got to step through the doorway.

"You hungry, cuore mio ?"

I smiled as I nodded quickly.

Luca smiled back at me before pressing a kiss to my forehead. "Okay."

I was excited.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Luca ~

I had lived in New York for several years as a child, even though I'd been born in Italy. We had moved there the same year I'd met Nico. I'd been so intent on the cute little blond I had met to ever be concerned with going to some fancy French Restaurant, even though I had heard of the place even at that young age.

As we walked into the place, I was immediately filled with the overwhelming feeling that I was glad I had been too young to come here.

This restaurant was insane.

Crystal chandeliers, white tablecloths, wine glasses, and waiters dressed almost as fancy as the customers. As rich as I was, I felt out of place.

I just hoped the food was good.

We were shown to a private dining area as soon as we walked through the door. I could feel the stares of the other patrons as we walked through the main room to the VIP area. I didn't know if it was due to the small crowd we created or the powerful stature of the men walking with me.

I didn't care as long as the stares didn't affect Nico. The second Nico got upset, I was going to start punching people.

Luckily, he seemed oblivious to them.

I kept my hand in the low of Nico's back as I escorted him through the room. I felt a little better knowing Vinnie and Jake were doing the same with their husbands.

We were all overprotective assholes.

Once in the VIP dining room, I took a seat with my back to the wall, facing the entrance just as Vinnie did. We glanced at each other when we sat down, both of us letting out small chuckles.

"What's so funny?" Nico asked.

"Nothing, love. Just a mafia thing."

We did not sit with our backs to the entrance. If someone wanted to come after us, we wanted to see them coming so we could put a bullet between their eyes.

When we were given menus, Nico looked at his and frowned before leaning toward me. "There are no prices on this menu."

"There won't be, Nico. Just choose something that sounds good and don't worry about the price."

"But..."

"But what, baby?"

"I don't want to eat something really expensive," Nico said. "That would be rude since Mr. D'Amato said he was paying."

God, he was adorable.

"Tell you what, you order whatever you want and I'll make sure to help Jake out with the bill. Okay?"

Nico beamed at me before going back to perusing the menu. However, after a few minutes, the frown was back.

"What's wrong, baby?"

"I don't even know what some of this stuff is. What is Coq Au Vin ?"

"Its chicken cooked in red wine with bacon, mushrooms, and onions."

"Oh, that sounds good." He glanced up at me. "What are you having?"

"I think I'm going to have the Boeuf Bourguignon . It's a classic French beef stew made with red wine, pearl onions, mushrooms and bacon."

"Oh, that sounds good, too."

I leaned closer to him. "I'd be happy to share with you."

"Yeah?"

"Of course, cuore mio ."

"Okay." Nico closed his menu and set it aside before turning to talk to Nicky.

I was glad they were making friends. Nicky seemed like a good man for him to befriend. I knew Vinnie was.

When the waiter came, we all put in our orders. Jake also ordered a couple of bottles

of wine and extra carafes of water, which I was thankful for. I didn't mind the occasional glass of wine, but I wanted to keep my wits about me the entire time we were in New York.

I'd have wine once we were back in Italy.

I started a conversation with Vinnie and Jake, talking about various businesses that we might have in common, the legal ones anyway.

When Nico tugged on my shirt, I looked down at him.

"I need to use the little boy's room," Nico said.

"Okay." I started to get up, but Nico shook his head. "You can stay and chat with the others. I'll take Stefano with me."

I didn't like it, but we were in a public place. Stefano should be enough to keep him safe. Besides, it would look strange if several of us got up and went to the bathroom at the same time.

I was trying to keep a low profile anyway.

I watched Nico and Stefano leave the room and then turned my attention back to my conversation. When the food came, I glanced toward the doorway again.

My gut twisted.

"Vinnie."

He must have seen the look on my face because he instantly became very serious.

"What's wrong?"

"Nico isn't back yet." I wasn't sure how long it had been, but he should have been back by now.

"Go," he said as he stood.

The two of us rushed out of the VIP room and hurried to the bathroom. I tried to hold in my fear as I pushed open the door and stepped inside the bathroom.

"Nico?"

It was a rather large bathroom with four toilet stalls. When I didn't see anyone at the sinks, I started going through each of the stalls. When I reached the last one and pushed the door open, I almost screamed.

"Stefano!" I dropped down next to the unmoving man. Stefano's eyes were wild, darting back and forth, but not a finger moved. "Where's Nico?"

Stefano just continued to look from side to side.

My heart instantly sank.

I raced out of the bathroom and searched the hallway and then several rooms connected to said hallway, including the woman's bathroom.

There was no sign of Nico.

"They have Nico!"

I knew it.

"I think I know what's going on," Vinnie said when I hurried back into the bathroom.

He was holding an empty syringe in his hands.

"Nico said his mother shot him up with something that made him paralyzed. He could feel everything, but he couldn't move a single finger."

Just like Stefano.

"It sounds like it might be something like Succinylcholine . They usually use it in surgery, but there are other uses."

"Is there a way to reverse it?"

I needed to know what Stefano knew.

"Let me make a phone call." Vinnie pulled out his cell phone and dialed someone. "Hey, King, I'm at Le Bernardin with Jake and Luca. We've had a little emergency here and we need Spencer. Nico's bodyguard was shot up with something. I suspect Succinylcholine . And Nico is missing."

He nodded a few times before stating, "Okay, we'll see you in a few."

Once he hung up, he said, "We need to get Stefano to King's place. His husband is a doctor and he can treat Stefano. In the meantime, we'll start a search for Nico."

"Wait." I dug into the inside pocket of my suit and pulled out the tablet Jake had given me. When I powered it on and waited, I wanted to scream. It was taking so damn long.

"I'm going to go inform Jake and get someone to take Stefano to King's place." Vinnie started for the door, but then paused and glanced back at me. "We can't make a big stink here. You know that, right? If the restaurant gets wind of someone being

kidnapped from here, the police will be called and it will be all over the news. We'll need to take Stefano out through the back door."

I nodded, understanding where Vinnie was coming from. The last thing we wanted was for Nico's kidnapping to be all over the news. We needed to solve this on our own.

While Vinnie hurried out of the room, I turned my attention back to the tablet in my hand. I wanted to run out immediately and search for Nico, but I had to wait and that was killing me.

When the tablet finally loaded, I opened the app. A red dot was slowly moving through the city, moving away from my current location.

I checked the vitals readout on the tablet. The temperature was normal but the heart rate and blood pressure were elevated, and that had me worried.

If they hurt him, they were going to die screaming.

When the door opened, I reached for my gun until I saw Franco rushing into the room with Jake and Fred.

Two other guards hurried in behind them. They lifted Stefano up and carried him out of the room.

"Are they taking him to that doctor friend of Vinnie's?"

"Probably," Jake replied. "We need to find Nico. Do you have that tablet I gave you on you right now?"

I jumped up and hurried over to him, holding out the tablet. "Nico's vitals are crazy.

Does that mean they are hurting him?"

Jake took the tablet and tapped a few buttons before shaking his head. "No, I suspect he is incapacitated like Stefano is. It doesn't look like they are hurting him."

That should have been a relief.

It wasn't.

"We need to find him."

The red dot was still moving across the screen.

"They are moving into Brooklyn," Jake said. "We need to call Díaz."

"Alejandro Díaz?" I'd heard that the guy had taken over Brooklyn recently. I'd personally never met him.

Jake nodded. "He's an old frat brother of mine."

Not sure why that was relevant.

Jake pulled out his cell phone after handing me the tablet back. "Alejandro, it's Jake, we have a situation and I need your help."

He must have put it on speaker because I heard a man speaking in with a Spanish accent a moment later.

"What's the issue?"

"I have you on speaker with Luca Sabatino out of Italy. He's an associate of Vinnie's.

His husband was just kidnapped out of Le Bernardin where we were all having lunch. Nico has one of my little trackers and it says he is being moved into your territory."

"Is this the man we were all meeting about this evening?" Alejandro asked.

"He is," Jake replied. "We suspect that his parents have him."

"Meet me at my house," Alejandro said. "I'll call the others. I give my permission for you to bring as many guards as you need."

My eyebrows lifted in shock. It was unheard of for one mafia boss to allow another mafia boss to bring more than four guards into their territory under any circumstances.

"We're on our way." Jake hung up and gestured for me to follow him.

I had no problem with that.

Jake sent Fred to pay the bill as we gathered the others and headed for cars. He relayed what Alejandro had said. Vinnie simply nodded. Once we were in the cars, we got on the road and were quickly making our way to Brooklyn.

I clenched my hands, my mind in turmoil. They had taken my reason for living and I was going to make them pay for every second of this agony. If they hurt Nico, or worse, what I would do to them would probably get me the electric chair.

I just didn't care.

Nico was my light, my heart, and my humanity. Without him, nothing else mattered.

I pulled out my cell phone and dialed my grandfather. He needed to know what was

going on. " Nonno , Nico's been taken."

Probably a little blunt, but it felt as if my throat was closing up, cutting off my words.

"Taken by who?" my grandfather asked.

I froze.

"Luca?" Vinnie asked. "What's wrong?"

Pretty much everything.

"What if Nico wasn't taken by his parents?" I asked. "What if it was someone else? What if it's the same people that took out the D'Angelo family?"

Vinnie instantly dug out his phone and called someone. He started speaking in a low tone.

" Nonno , I need you to make sure security is tight around the villa."

"Already done, Luca. You just find your boy."

"I will." I wouldn't stop until I found him.

"Do you want me to send you more men?"

"Not at the moment," I replied. "Vinnie has a lot of friends here and they are all helping out. This will probably be over before they could even get into the air."

"Okay, call me as soon as you find him. I'll be waiting near the phone."

"I will."

"If you need anything, just let me know. I have some contacts still."

I hung up with my grandfather and took another look at the tablet. Nico's vitals hadn't changed, and I suppose that was a good thing.

I was still worried sick about him.

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

I sucked in a shaky breath as consciousness came back to me in a flash. I groaned as I lifted my head and glanced around. Even if the light was low, I still blinked as they adjusted.

I didn't recognize the room I was in. The walls were tall and made of faded brick. The floor was cement. There was a large industrial light hanging from a beam overhead.

I think I was in some sort of warehouse.

I tried to remember what had happened, but everything was a complete blank. I remember the lunch at that fancy French restaurant and going to the bathroom. Stefano had gone into clear the bathroom. I had heard someone behind me and turned.

Everything had gone dark after that until now.

I was not enthused in the least to find myself here, especially since my hands were tied down. On the upside, I was sitting in a chair and not lying on the cold hard concrete. Downside, my hands were tied to the arms of the chair, my ankles to the legs.

I wasn't going anywhere.

When I saw the door start to open, I dropped my head forward and closed my eyes. I tried to slow my breathing as best as I could and not give any sign that I had woken

up.

"I thought he'd be awake by now."

I swallowed tightly, barely keeping myself from shuddering at the sound of my mother's voice.

At least I now knew who was behind all of this.

"Did you give him too much?"

Oh, my father was here, too.

Yippee.

"I gave him what was in the syringe, sir."

That voice made me shudder. Nothing could have prevented it. I could have gone my entire life without running into Steve again.

"What time are we supposed to meet, Mr. Thomas?" my mother asked.

"Three hours," my father replied. "Do you think he'll be awake by then?"

"If he's not, I have something I can give him to counteract it."

"Why not just give that to him now?" my father asked.

"Because he can't be drugged up when he marries Genevieve, you idiot. It could invalidate the ceremony."

Seriously?

They still intended to marry me off to Gena?

Were they insane?

"Watch him," my mother ordered, "and come tell us when he wakes up. His bride is waiting for him and, apparently, he needs a reminder about his duty to this family."

"Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Rossi," Steve stated. "I won't take my eyes off of him."

Oh, hell no!

"You touch me," I snapped as I raised my head and opened my eyes, "and my husband will kill you."

"I knew you were faking it," my mother said. "You could never fool me."

Want to bet?

"Hello, Isabella. Still trying to sell me off, I see."

I refused to call her my mother anymore. She had never been a mother to me.

My mother smirked. "You are worth a whole lot of money."

"Slavery is against the law."

"Which is why you are going to marry Genevieve. Marriage is legal."

"Ah, too bad for you, I'm already married."

As much money as she had spent over the years on her looks, it was amazing to me how bad she looked when she glared at me.

"You think I'd believe your lies?"

"Doesn't matter to me," I replied. "I'm sure my husband will explain it to you when he gets here."

I knew mentioning that probably wasn't in my best interest, but I was tired of my parents treating me like crap and ignoring my choices in life.

"Husband!" my mother sputtered. "You are not married to a man."

"Pretty sure I am."

"I won't allow it!"

I shrugged. "Not my problem."

I wanted to say I regretted saying that when my mother backhanded me, but I really didn't. I had pretty much spent my entire life under my mother's thumb.

I was done.

"You will divorce him this instant and marry the woman we have picked out for you."

"Yeah, no." It was fun watching my mother's jaw drop. "I'm twenty-five years old, a legal adult. You have no say in what I do with my life anymore and I am going to stay married to my husband. I refuse to marry Gena and you can't make me."

My face whipped around from the force of her smack. I gingerly licked the blood

from the corner of my mouth and then glared up at her. "My husband will make you pay for every mark you put on me, so I'd stop now if you don't want to die in complete agony."

I knew Luca would take her apart the second he saw my swollen lip.

I was almost looking forward to it.

"And just who is this idiot you married?" my mother snapped.

"I believe that idiot would be me."

I gasped as I looked toward the doorway. "Luca."

I knew he would come for me.

He strolled casually across the room as if my parents and Steve weren't standing there. "Hello, cuore mio. How are you? Did they hurt you?"

"My mother smacked me a couple of times, but other than that I'm okay. A little groggy from whatever drug my mother gave me." I whimpered when Luca gently touched the corner of my mouth with his thumb. "It's just a cut. I'll be okay."

Luca pulled a knife out of his pocket and flicked it open, cutting at the ropes tying me to the chair. Once my arms were free, he crouched down and went to work on my ankles.

"Luca!" I screamed when I saw a flash of movement out of the corner of my eyes.

A shot rang out just as Luca grabbed me and swung me out of the way. I gasped as I stared at the hole between Steve's eyes and the small trickle of blood trailing down

his face right before he fell back and hit the concrete floor.

Before I knew it, Vinnie was helping me and Luca to our feet and a lot of people were filling up the room, some I knew, but many I had never met before.

I edged closer to Luca.

He wrapped an arm around me and turned until we were facing my parents. "Do you recognize me, Isabella?"

My mother snorted and looked away.

"You should," Luca said. "You falsely accused me of raping my husband ten years ago and forced me go to prison."

Isabella's eyes widened. "You're his husband?"

"I am," Luca replied. "Nico and I got married the day after he eloped with me, which reminds me. We've spoken to the police and they have closed the case on his alleged kidnapping."

"He was kidnapped," my mother insisted.

"He escaped," Luca countered. "He escaped you and your abuse of him."

"I never abused him!"

Luca gently grabbed my jaw and turned my face toward my mother. "That fat lip on Nico's face says otherwise."

"I was simply disciplining him," she said. "That is not abuse."

"I'm a lawyer," Miles stated as he walked into the room with Jake. "And I can tell you, that is definitely abuse."

"Who are you?" my mother asked.

"Oh, my apologies. My name is Miles Cranston. I'm a lawyer in Mr. D'Amato's company."

"D'Amato?"

Jake raised his hand and waved. "Jakue D'Amato. I'm sure you've heard of me."

"Bragging, Jake?" a man with pure black hair and steel blue eyes asked as he walked up and stopped next to Jake. There was another man with him, one with long black hair and Asian features.

As close as the two men stood, I was pretty sure they were involved with each other in some manner, but they sure were dressed differently. One in an expensive suit, the other in jeans and a motorcycle jacket.

"Not all of us have billion dollar portfolios, Lucas," Jake said. "Some of us have to brag so people know who we are."

"Who are you?" my mother shouted.

"Oh, my bad," Lucas said. "I'm Lucas Kincaid." he gestured to the man at his side. "And this is my husband Kyue."

"I'm Syros Aetós," another man stated. "CEO of Seriphap Enterprises."

The long dark haired man in the motorcycle jacket standing next to Lucas raised his

hand. "Which is my company."

"Why are you all here?" Isabella asked.

"Oh, we came to keep our friends company."

"Your friends?"

"That would be us," Vinnie said as he and some other men stepped forward. "I'm Vinnie Borelli. I run Manhattan."

"Dmitri Petrov, the Bronx."

"Angus King, Queens."

"Alejandro Díaz, Brooklyn."

"I guess that just leaves me," a fifth man said as he stepped into the light. "I'm Hu Kenji Zisheng, Staten Island."

The others seemed surprised to see him here.

"We weren't expecting you, Hu," Vinnie stated.

The Asian man shrugged. "I was bored and heard you were having a party so I thought I'd crash it. So, what's going on here?"

He glanced around the room, his eyes settling on me and then Luca. He squinted for a moment. "Nico, Luca, it's been a long time."

I stared back for a moment, but the instant a smile crossed his face, I knew him. I

doubted I would ever forget that smile. "Kenji?"

For two years when we were growing up, we had been the three musketeers, playing together, getting into trouble together, and just generally hanging out together. And then one day when I'd been about thirteen, his family had moved away and I had never seen him again.

"I see the two of you finally got together," Kenji stated. "I thought it would never happen."

"It almost didn't," I stated, "We got married a couple of weeks ago, but my parents kept us apart for the last ten years. They even sent Luca to prison for raping me when he just kissed me." I grimaced as I nodded to the body on the floor. "He's the one that tried to rape me."

"A fitting end to him then."

I had kind of hoping for castration, but a bullet between the eyes worked, too.

"You two know each other?" Vinnie asked.

"Kenji lived next door to us for about two years when we were growing up," I said. "The three of us used to play together all the time."

Kenji snorted. "You mean I got to stand there like an idiot watching the two of you making googly eyes at each other."

My face flushed when I heard Luca's low chuckle.

"Am I late?" Gena Thomas asked in a bubbly voice as she walked into the room, her father at her side.

"Gena, darling." My mother rushed to her side, grabbing her arm with one hand and pointing to Luca with the other. "Tell that man that you are engaged to my son so they can't be married."

"Why on earth would I do that when I worked so hard to get them married?" Gena shook my mother's hand off and walked over to give Vinnie a kiss on the cheek.

"Why are you here?" Vinnie asked in an exasperated tone. "This isn't the place for you."

"Oh, please." Gena rolled her eyes. "I've seen worse than this getting my nails done."

My mother stomped her foot and screamed, "What is going on here?"

"It's very simple," I replied. "Your life as you know it is about to end."

Her reign of terror was over, whether she knew it or not, and I couldn't be happier about that.

~ Luca ~

I couldn't be prouder of Nico. He was finally standing up to his bitch of a mother. I knew how hard it was for him, which made this all that much better. Nico was learning to be brave.

"You've pissed off a lot of people, Isabella."

She snorted. "Like I care what you think."

"You should," Vinnie stated. "Luca's sister is married to my cousin, and that makes us family."

"I don't care about that either."

"Again, you should." Vinnie waved his hand around the room, indicating all the people standing there. "Everyone here stands fully on Nico and Luca's side."

Isabella's eyes rolled as she huffed, clearly not affected by what Vinnie was saying. I doubted a sledgehammer could have made her see her precarious position.

"You have the heads of the five boroughs standing here, plus major captains of industry, telling you that you're over and you don't care, do you?" I asked. "Are you an idiot?"

Isabella's face muddled with rage. "You can't talk to me like that!"

"I can talk to you any damn way I please, Isabella, and there is nothing you can do about it. There is nothing you can do to me, not anymore. This time, I'm more powerful than you."

Isabella snorted. "Like I'd believe a word that came out of your mouth. You're nothing but a criminal that has turned my son into a perverted degenerate."

I let out a little chuckle. "Okay, apparently your position isn't clear to you." I gestured to Franco, who hurried over with a briefcase. When he popped it open, he pulled out a stack of papers, handing them to me.

I grabbed the top page, stared at it for a moment and then tossed it at Isabella's feet. "I now own your company."

"What?"

"I put your husband's company out of business and then bought it for cheap when it went under. I own it lock, stock, and illegal imports."

"Illegal imports?" Isabella's eyebrows drew together, creating a massive wrinkle between their eyebrows. "What illegal imports? What are you talking about?"

"Your husband didn't tell you?" King asked. "He had a deal with Kirby O'Donnell to import illegal goods. That's where most of the money you toss around comes from. Of course, that deal was with O'Donnell and he's gone and I am in charge of Queens now, so the deal is off."

Nico's father gasped and stepped forward, speaking for the first time. "You can't do that. I had a contract."

King snorted.

"I'll take you to court."

"Really? You'll take me to court for breaking a contract to import illegal goods?" King started laughing. "I'd actually love to see that so please, do that. It would be worth the attorney fees just to see your face when they arrest you and toss your ass in jail for importing illegal goods."

"They'd toss you in jail, too," Victor insisted.

"Why?" King asked. "My name isn't on that contract."

"But...you took over his business."

"I did, but that doesn't change the fact that my name is not on that contract. The courts won't do anything to me. But I'm sure you can take it up with Kirby. He's in Ireland now under guard for fucking up, but you might want to hurry. Ireland is pretty pissed at him. I honestly not sure how much longer he'll be breathing."

"So, your business is gone," Luca said, "And so is your money. You are done."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Isabella shrieked.

"You know that bank account you had in the Cayman Islands?" I asked, but it was more of a statement than a question. "I had some friends of mine drain it. There's not even a single penny left. So, yes, your money is all gone."

"You...You can't do that," Victor sputtered. "That's our money."

"I can do that, and I did, but feel free to report us for stealing if you feel the need. I'm sure the police would be interested to hear how you earned all those millions."

"Your company is gone," Nico stated. "Your money is gone. Your power is gone. Everything is gone, including me. You will never force me to do something I don't want to do again. I hope you live a long, miserable life together because you won't be living with me."

"You are our son!" Victor raged. "It's your duty to take care of us."

"Yeah, no, I mean, the villa I live in with Luca in Italy is the size of a city block and probably has more rooms than I could count, but you wouldn't be comfortable there. All those crystal chandeliers, silk linens, and limousines, not to mention the staff?" Nico shook his head. "I wouldn't want to do that to you."

"You live in a villa?" his mother asked.

"I do." Nico beamed. "It's beautiful, right on the beach, too. Luca and I have our own suite of rooms with a balcony overlooking the Mediterranean Ocean. Nonno and Nonna live there with us, too. They are so nice to me. Nonna even baked me cookies."

"If your villa is so big, surely there is room for us," Isabella said. "You want to live with your loving mother and father, don't you?"

Nico's snort was glorious.

"Not a chance in hell."

"But—"

Nico's sudden step forward wasn't as astonishing as the rage I heard in his voice when he spit out, "You took Luca from me. You made him spend four years in that horrible prison all so you could keep me under your thumb and marry me off to whoever gave

you the most money. News flash, Mother, I'm not a piece of property you can sell. I'm a real live person with my own thoughts and opinions."

I wanted to clap. Nico was finally standing up to his parents. I knew he was terrified, but he was still doing it. I wanted to hug him so much right now, but I knew needed to let him have his moment.

"After tonight, you will never see me again. If you step one foot in front of me"—Nico pointed to the dead body on the floor—"I will ensure that a bullet between your eyes is the least of your worries."

Isabella sucked in a breath, pressing her hand to her chest. "You just threatened me. I can't believe you threatened me."

"Really?" Nico asked. "You can't believe it? After everything you've done to me you can't believe I would threaten you? You're lucky I'm not killing you, you stupid money-grubbing bitch."

When Isabella leapt forward, her hand raised in the air as if she was going to slap Nico again, I started to just forward to stop her, but Nico got to her first. The slap he laid across her face echoed through the large room, stunning us all.

"You hit me," Isabella whispered as she cradled her cheek, staring at Nico like she had never seen him. "I'm your mother. How could you hit me?"

"I'm your son," Nico countered. "How could you slap me, sell me, drug me, or allow one of your thugs to sexually assault me? Is that what a loving mother does to her son? If so, I want to be an orphan."

Okay, this time I couldn't stop myself from clapping.

My husband was amazing.

"I think we're done here," Vinnie stated. "I believe we've made out point. If either you or your husband come near Nico or Luca ever again, you'll have the heads of the five families on your ass, and we have a lot of reach, so I suggest that you find some hole to hide in because I know for myself, if I ever see your ugly face again, I'm probably going to put a bullet in it."

I wrapped an arm around Nico, pulling him close to my side. "Come on, cuore mio . It's time to go home. Nonno and Nonna will want to see you. They are very worried about you."

"It'll be good to be home. I miss them, too."

"You're just going to replace us?" Isabella asked. "Just like that?"

Nico smiled at his mother. "Yep."

I started to lead Nico toward the door when I heard a commotion behind us, a lot of yelling and shouting. I started to turn when something plowed into us and we went crashing to the floor.

I wrapped myself around Nico as best as I could, cushioning him with my larger body. When we hit the floor, I heard Nico cry out. I quickly started moving my hands over him, looking for injury. It wasn't until I got to his face that I realized he must have smacked his head on the cement. There was a small trail of blood trickling down the side of his face.

"Nico, baby?"

"I'm okay."

He clearly wasn't.

I sat up, pulling Nico into my lap. I grabbed a handkerchief out of my suit pocket and dabbed at the blood on the side of his face until I could see the small cut on his cheek. It didn't look deep, but it was bleeding a lot.

I pressed the handkerchief to it. "Hold this here."

Once Nico's hand preplaced mine, I slid my hands underneath Nico and stood up, lifting him with me. I turned to find Kenji standing with his foot in the middle of Isabella's back, pinning her to the floor. A gun lay on the ground several feet from Isabella's hand.

I lifted an eyebrow. "Seems you can't give up, can you, you stupid bitch." I glanced at Nico's father, who was being restrained by some guards and shook my head. "You two deserve each other."

"What do you want me to do with them?" Kenji asked.

"I no longer care." Not that I really did in the first place. "Do what you want with them."

I turned back and carried Nico out of the warehouse. Most of the others followed, with King suggesting we take Nico to his house to see his husband about the cut on his face.

We climbed into the cars, and a rather large convoy of vehicles made their way to Queens. When we got there, King led us inside and to the back of the house where there seemed to be some sort of infirmary.

"Another one?" an incredibly young looking man asked.

"Yeah, there was a thing," King said before pressing a kiss to the man's lips. "It got a little violent. Nico got hurt while his husband was protecting him."

"Set him on the bed."

Stefano was resting in one of them so I carried Nico to the other one. After setting him down, I moved to the head of the bed, holding on to one of Nico's hands.

When King's husband snapped on some gloves and walked toward Nico with a small tray, I had to wonder if this guy knew what he was doing.

"Relax, big guy." Spencer snickered. "I'm a licensed doctor."

I glanced at King for confirmation, feeling a bit more relieved when he nodded.

I watched intently as Spencer cleaned Nico up and then treated him. Luckily, he didn't need more than a butterfly bandage for the cut. Spencer assured us it wouldn't even scar.

"How's Stefano?" Nico asked. "After my mother injected him with that drug, he collapsed. I tried to get to him, but Mother shot me up with something and had me dragged away by a couple of her guards."

"He's fine," Spencer replied. "I was able to counter the drug your mother injected him with. He just needs a bit of rest."

Tears sprouted to Nico's eyes and he leaned into me. "I was really worried about him when I saw them carrying him into the bathroom. I couldn't move. I couldn't do anything. Stefano is never going to forgive me."

"Baby, there was nothing you could have done," I said. "And Stefano is fine. He has

nothing to forgive you for. You didn't do this."

"Yeah, but my mother—"

"How about we don't talk about that bitch anymore, huh?" I'd probably scream if we did. Isabella had actually tried to shoot Nico. I had almost lost him for real. I wanted to kill her, which is why I had walked away. I didn't want to make Nico sad by killing his mother.

"Can we go home now?"

I smiled at Nico. "Yes, cuore mio. We can go home now."

And if I had my way, we'd never come back.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 5:33 am*

~ Nico ~

"Make sure all the beds have fresh sheets," I directed as I walked through the house with our housekeeper. "And the flowers, white orchids for Mr. Hu's room. Everyone else can have roses, but Mr. Hu prefers orchids."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you created a menu for the welcoming banquet?"

"Yes, sir, Mrs. Sabatino went over it this morning and approved it."

"If she approved it, then it's good." I might be in charge now, but Nonna was still the real boss of this villa. I deferred to her in all situations. The woman had decades of experience over me.

I still couldn't get over the fact that they had decided to hold the annual mafia conclave here. Granted, I wanted to treat these men to a nice vacation for everything they had done for me and Luca, but what did I know about hosting a conclave?

It didn't make sense to me that the five families from New York City would be meeting in Italy. We couldn't be considered neutral ground because we were another mafia family, just Italian ones.

Whatever.

I'd never understand mafia life, but I didn't really have to. I was the husband of a

mafia don, but Luca still did everything he could to keep me out of it. I just needed to make sure my home was run like a well oiled machine.

And that was exactly what I was trying to do. In the month we'd been back in Italy, I'd done everything I could to learn how to run such a large household.

This was my first opportunity to host something so big and I was terrified. Luca was insistent that I could do it as were Nonno and Nonna . I was pretty much shaking in my boots.

I clasped Sofia's hand with mine. "You've run this house for ages and I have full confidence in you. I'm sure this will be wonderful."

Surprisingly, the older woman blushed as she dipped her head. " Grazie, Mr. Nico."

No matter how many times I asked the people that worked here to call me Nico, they refused. They felt it was disrespectful to me and my position in this household.

I couldn't get out of it.

"I'm going to go check in with Luca. If you have any questions, come find me."

Luckily, the conclave wasn't supposed to happen for another couple of days. I still had time to fall apart.

" Sì , Mr. Nico."

After she walked away, I turned toward Stefano, who luckily had no lasting effects from my mother drugging him. "Where is Luca?"

It was easier to ask than search this place. It was too damn big.

"He's in his study, Mr. Nico."

I made a beeline for the study. When I reached the heavy oak door, I knocked. I knew better than to rush inside. It wasn't that I wasn't allowed, but I didn't want to hear anything I shouldn't.

The door was opened by Franco.

"Is now a good time?" I asked.

"Boss is just finishing up a phone call so it's good."

Cool.

When I walked in, Luca was sitting at his desk on his cell phone. I started to go to one of the chairs in front of his desk, but Luca snapped his fingers. When I glanced at him, he gestured for me to come to him. As soon as I walked around his desk, I was grabbed and pulled down onto his lap.

Luca wrapped an arm around my waist and continued talking. I did my best to ignore most of what he said and by the time he hung up, I had my head resting on his shoulders, closing my eyes as I rested.

When I felt a hand stroke down the back of my head, I smiled and opened my eyes. "All done?"

"I have a few more phone calls to make later, but I have to wait for the time difference before I call Vinnie."

"He's bringing Nicky, right?"

"He is," Luca replied. "All of them are bringing their spouses. You'll have lots of

friends to hang out with while we're in our meetings."

I was actually looking forward to that.

"Vinnie, King, Díaz, Petrov, and Kenji have all confirmed that they will be here as did the Italian connections. In a couple of days, we will have a full house. Are you ready for that?"

"Yes?"

"That sounds like a question, Nico."

"Well, yeah, kind of. Sofia and I have gone over everything with your grandmother and I think we have it all covered. I guess we'll see when everyone gets here."

"You'll be fine, cuore mio. I have no doubt that you have everything covered. I do, however, need you to make up an extra suite. Vito Antonelli said he's going to be able to make it."

"Was that who you were on the phone to?" I asked.

Luca nodded. "I had called him to find out if he had made any headway in finding out who had taken out the D'Angelo family."

"Did he?"

"Not yet, but he did have some interesting information to share."

"What was that?" I asked.

"Turns out old man D'Angelo had a brief affair a couple of decades ago so there is one D'Angelo left alive. Currently, Vito is searching for him so he can bring him back

here to Italy to take over the family business."

"Is this guy in the mafia?"

"Vito didn't say," Luca said, "but I didn't get that impression from him. If this guy isn't, it's going to be quite the shock for him when he's handed an entire mafia empire."

"I hope he find whoever did this."

"He will," Luca replied. "Vito is a smart man. He'll figure out who did this and make them pay."

Luca lifted me up and placed me on the desk in front of him, scooting between my thighs. "There is something else I want to talk to you about."

I squinted at the seriousness on Luca's face. "Is it my parents?"

Had they done something else?

"Kenji called me. It seems your father had racked up some debts gambling in one of his casinos. Since your father lost the company and their money, Kenji shipped them back to Japan to work in one of his factories. Considering the amount of money they owe him, I doubt they will be back."

I didn't say anything as I thought about that news and how I might feel about it. Strangely, it was only relief. I had no emotional connection to Isabella and Victor Rossi, not an ounce.

"Okay."

Luca's eyebrows lifted. "You're okay with this?"

I nodded. "They brought this on themselves."

"I just don't want you to have any regrets, Nico."

"I don't," I answer back. "Like I said, they brought this on themselves. They have no one to blame but themselves."

"If things change, you'll tell me?"

I looped my arms around Nico's neck. "Of course I will."

I discussed everything with Luca.

I do have one more bit of news for you," Luca stated. "I was kind of saving this as a surprise for you, but now is as good a time as any."

"What?"

"Gena has agreed to be a surrogate for us when we decide to have kids, well, two kids. One from you and one from me."

"We never discussed having kids."

"You want them, don't you?"

"Yes, of course," I said quickly so he'd know I was in favor of this idea. "I just never expected it to happen, especially since e never discussed it."

"Well, I can think of nothing I'd like better than having a couple of kids and raising a family with you."

That would be so amazing.

"Now, give me a smile."

I knew what he wanted, the smile he wanted.

I smiled as brightly as I could. " Ti amo, marito mio ."

Did I need to say anything else?

~ The End ~