



Romeo (Kings of Chaos #2)

Author: *Lena Little*

Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Romeo

This is supposed to be an easy job. Get in, get information, get out.

But how long is it going to take these bloodhounds wearing expensive suits and painted-on smiles to sniff out the truth?

I'm not one of them.

Don't belong in their den of depravity.

The enemy.

Long enough to make it through the night? Probably not. If that's the case, putting my life on the line better be worth it.

I'm not walking out of here without something to show for it. Not for the Don, either. Something for me.

It might be her. The radiant beauty across the room with golden locks cascading down her shoulders and an innocent smile that stretches out for miles.

Jess Mayfair. My last pillar of light in this nightmarish pit.

Who am I kidding? It is her. Jess Mayfair. The daughter of the man I'm spying on.

And soon, she'll be mine.

Jess

I wouldn't guess it by the way he walks, talks, and acts. Fearless, vicious, and intense.

He's a monster of ridiculous, exquisite proportions.

It's hard to believe he's human. That his skin can break, and his veins pump the same red goo as the rest of us.

So, I won't.

1

ROMEO

“D on’t fuck this up, and you might get a seat at the table.” Dante Vitorri brings his car to a stop in front of Mayfair Manor.

Lightning cracks behind the monolithic construction and thunder rumbles the Earth beneath us. The car rattles violently against nature’s war cry. And yet—ill, foreboding signs and all—the Demon of Delta County smokes his cherry cigar, cool as a cucumber.

“Hard not to when you haven’t told me what I’m supposed to do,” I say and shift uneasily in my seat.

“Billy Mayfair’s hosting a get-together for wealthy pricks and low-down degenerates.” He ashes the tip of his cigar out of a crack in the window. “The Don wants you to get information out of them.”

“Simple enough.” Too simple. I’ve got a bad feeling about this. “What’s the catch?”

“No catch. We’ve heard good things about you and want you on our side. Trouble is, there’s no telling the truth from horse shit without seeing you in action.” Dante lodges the stogie between his lips again. “So, a simple job to test the waters. Should be hard to fuck up. Don’t prove me wrong.”

“Then why not do it yourself? You’re risking a lot on the new guy.”

Don't get me wrong, I want to join the Lion's Den. The power, structure, and order of Salvatore Lione's organization call to me. Doesn't mean I won't ask the hard questions and do what I'm told without question.

The juice has to be worth the squeeze, and being alive sure beats joining a family.

"The party's invite-only and Mayfair forgot to mail the Don's." Dante speaks with calculated charm. "We found one anyway, but it might cause unnecessary problems if the Lion or his cubs pitch up. That's why it's you."

"And if I get made?" I know the answer, but I still want to hear it.

"Then you proved me wrong." Dante turns the key, and his engine roars to life.

Another bolt of lightning lights the night sky, and with it, the first drops of rain begin to fall.

I get out of the car. A kid no older than twenty waits for me outside it. He raises an umbrella over us and has to stand on his toes to get it over my head.

"Good evening, sir. May I see your?—"

No need for questions. I was briefed on how to act with the staff—treat them as less than human.

I cut him off by holding a gold leaf-encrusted envelope in front of his face. Dante gave it to me on the drive. The front reads Jerome Whitaker. I wonder what the Don did to the guy to get this, but my pondering falls short when the kid hands it back.

"Right this way, Mr. Whitaker." I'd like to think he's smiling, but I can't tell in the darkness.

Does it even matter?

We don't speak again. Not that we'd be able to hear each other over the sound of gravel crunching underfoot and machine gunfire from heavy rain overhead deafening us.

Another guy waits at the front door. Different from the kid, he's dressed in black with a pistol on his hip.

Armed guards. Great.

He takes the envelope from me and scans it intently before dropping it in a small wooden box holding hundreds more.

"Enjoy your stay, Mr. Whitaker." He palms open the door, and an instant wall of noise rattles my brain around my skull.

The entryway is littered with people shouting over one another to get a word in. Empty suits and bland dresses. Devious cunts who laugh and smile to your face but prepare their knives for when you turn around.

They give me the fucking creeps.

I brush past the crowd, hovering around the front door and toward my destination. I follow an older couple, navigating the swarm until we break out of the hallway and into a massive ballroom.

Right. Where's the bar? Gotta calm down somehow, and there's no better way than drowning my woes.

On the far side of the room stands a makeshift wooden structure. Behind it, twelve

diligent troopers dance around with excellent proficiency, slinging one drink after the next without faltering.

“Lager. Ice cold.” I fall into the bar and grab the attention of whoever’s closest to me.

They’re staring at me. I can feel the hive mind mass burning holes into the back of my suit. Part of me wants to believe it’s because I tower over these little people. That one look is enough to scare them straight into the marrow.

But let’s face it, it’s because they know I don’t belong. They smell it on me. I’m fresh meat for the hounds, and they want me to remember it.

I grab my wallet and draw a crisp fifty-dollar note when the bartender returns. I hold it out to him while he cracks the top off the first bottle.

“It’s an open bar, sir.” The sincerity in his tone soothes the swirling fire barreling through my chest.

“It is?” I down half the bottle in one big gulp.

Lucky for him, I planned on spending a lot more than a fifty tonight. I lean over the counter and shove the fifty into the front pocket of his blazer. He mumbles a thank you, but unlike the kid outside, I can see his smile. He shuffles off to the next person awaiting service.

Makes you wonder, doesn’t it? Are we customers if we don’t pay? Or just entitled assholes swallowing shots of whiskey that cost more than these poor sods make in an entire night without so much as a thank you?

Feeling refreshed, I set my eyes back on the party. Enormous floor-to-ceiling windows have the intensifying storm outside on display, while a sea of bodies amble

across the room like zombies.

Those brave few who dare to continue staring at me don't get my attention. Why should they? Their judgment of me has been reserved from the moment they saw me.

An outsider trying to pierce the bubble of their perfect society.

A monster.

These thoughts swirl in my head until I feel the ground vanish from underneath me, my heart stopping, my breath hitching.

I nearly drop to my ass as a perfect crack forms in the crowd. Through it, I'm graced with my first sighting of something pure in this den of lies. An innocent face. A pure beam of absolute beauty.

She's trapped like me. Staring dull-eyed out over the patrons, so lost in their own delusions that they haven't noticed her. All apart from one—a tweed-wearing dickhead droning on with righteous passion against the side of her face.

Well, Mr. Tweed, you've had your chance and failed terribly.

It's my turn to be her knight in shiny, silken armor.

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JESS

Good God, listening to Martin Winthrop drone on about his vast portfolio and investments makes me want to puke. He hasn't stopped since cornering me at this table, doing whatever he can in hopes it will sway my adoration in favor of him.

Must be one of Father's ideas. They held a very long meeting before Martin made his way to the ballroom, and there is no doubt in my mind, Father gave him a list of talking points to impress me with.

"It's the work we do in Africa that really speaks to me. Helping the underprivileged to find beauty in such a dark world is a treat." Martin shifts gears, probably noticing my boredom.

"Is that right?" I ask with a smile. "Please, do go on."

Letting him believe I'm interested is good enough. I learned early in our arrangement that he loves the sound of his own voice. Besides, I know it's all bullshit. I've done enough digging on Martin to know he doesn't care about anything but himself.

Well, that's a lie. He cares about the money, too.

Men like him, like my father, hold no compassion for those who suffer. Their good deeds are done to preserve their image, fatten their wallets, and satiate their fragile egos.

“We’re busy digging wells across a multitude of small towns and villages,” Martin says.

At least some good comes from his greed, I suppose. Those wells are still going to nourish the less fortunate.

“Very admirable,” I answer.

He goes on to the next point, and my attention fades once more.

Then I see him.

A beast towering over the crowd as they waddle around him like ducklings. Like me, he’s still. Locked in place while my powder blues meet his ember eyes. His presence carries an unspoken power so formidable I can’t bear turning away from him.

Even while the sharp tip of his long tongue darts across his lower lip and his glowing eyes drop from mine down the V of my dress.

My heart races at the sudden realization that his stare has turned from intrigue to lustful enjoyment. My breathing hastens as his head continues tilting down, taking in the rest of my dress and hoping for a peek beneath the table. Some twisted part of me wants to give it to him. Put everything on display and let him make the next move.

But I won’t. I can’t. A single glance at his hulking frame and chiseled jaw screams he’s another monster. Only, he carries the look on his broad shoulders rather than slipping through the shadows like Father and Martin.

“Jess?” Martin says and snaps my attention back to him. If I wasn’t disappointed in Father’s decision for us to be married before, I’m devastated now.

Martin isn't unattractive. He's well-groomed, with a runner's physique, and I'm sure there are women out there who would kill to have him on their arm. But knowing that beasts like the stranger across the hall exist, I'm definitely not one of them.

"Yes, sorry, I disappeared there for a moment," I say.

"Where did you go?" Martin raises a brow.

"I was thinking about?—"

Him.

He doesn't make a sound with his arrival, nor does he have to for me to feel his presence. It radiates off him like a gravitational pull and draws me closer with the same intent.

"Can I help you, pal?" Martin asks, and the way his neck cranes to meet the giant confirms my suspicions.

"You can." His deep, husky voice strikes a perfect note in my ear.

"How?" Martin shrugs.

I can't bring myself to look at him. I felt nervous when he stood halfway across the room that being up close and personal is way too much to take in.

"By fucking off," the giant says, and it forces a giggle out of me.

I can't tell if it's the giant's response or my involuntary reaction, but Martin recoils in disgust.

“Who do you think you’re talking to?” Martin spits.

“You?” the beast’s voice drips with stoic confidence, and if he isn’t careful, it won’t be the only thing dripping for long.

“Oh, ha ha. Another fucking comedian.” A wicked glint in Martin’s eye shows the cruelty of the man he’s tried so hard to hide from me. “Back off, or you’re going to regret this.”

“Big words from a little man,” the giant answers.

I catch another involuntary giggle before it passes my throat.

Unlike Martin, the beast doesn’t have to make threats. His raw masculinity and lack of fear speak volumes.

“Your name. NOW.” Martin roars as a deep red creeps up his shirt's collar.

The beast presses a massive hand into the table to lean on it. It’s rough, scarred, and shows signs of his labors. “Jerome Whitaker. Pleasure to meet you, Mr.—”

“Winthrop. Martin Winthrop.” He says his name like it’s supposed to scare the towering monster beside me.

It doesn’t.

“Martin Winthrop. Why does that name sound familiar?” He lifts the hand on the table under his chin. “Ah, that’s right...”

A smug grin trickles across Martin’s face.

“It doesn’t,” the beast continues. With it, Martin’s smile disappears behind a scowl. “Now, run along. I have business to discuss with this lovely lady.”

Business? With me? Can’t be. Father keeps me on a very short leash when it comes to business dealings, and I doubt he’d let something like this slip by unmentioned.

“I don’t recall having any meetings lined up, Mr. Whitaker. Please explain yourself,” I say, finally finding the courage to look at him.

It’s almost impossible to comprehend just how much meat can be packed in one person. More than double as broad as me and twice my height, taking all of him in is a task in itself.

I have to crane my neck to meet his face. And it’s there that my gaze lingers the longest. Golden eyes twinkle with childlike glee. Five o’clock shadow runs across his cut jawline. Combed over black hair, with a messy coif hanging over his forehead.

Handsome is an understatement.

“You’ve got to be shitting me,” Martin interrupts my inspection. “You’re going to entertain this fucking ape?”

“Watch your tongue.” The beast’s hand drops from his chin, and a meaty finger settles in front of Martin’s face. “Ape is a derogatory term. I prefer gorilla.”

Three times he’s made me chuckle in the span of two minutes. I don’t think I’ve laughed at a single thing Martin has said since the day we met.

Mr. Whitaker turns to me. “And as for our business, miss. It’s better suited for the bedroom. Pillow talk, they call it. Sometime between your first orgasm and getting so carried away, you see God.”

Heat rushes up to my cheeks as eager liquids soak my panties.

Don't stop speaking, muscle man, and you just might get what you're after.

ROMEO

Well, I'm here. Now what? Mr. Tweed's fuming out the ears and ready to tear my head off. But his incredible temper doesn't deter the Barbie-faced beauty. She can't pick her jaw off the table, let alone chase me away.

Judging by the fact that she hasn't told me to piss off, I'm doing something right.

"Pillow talk?" she says, and it's like heaven's angels sing straight into my brain. "It's an interesting way to introduce yourself, Mr. Whitaker."

My instincts tell me to stay focused on Mr. Tweed, but I don't. First rule in this life? Always look out for number one. Second rule goes hand in hand with the first—never take your eyes off the enemy. But something tells me Tweed isn't going to cause trouble. He's far more likely to run off and cry into his pocket square rather than enact any of his half-assed threats.

"Why bother with the boring shit when we can get straight to the fun?" I ask.

The aching throb resonating from my manhood is a sour reminder that one look from across the room wasn't enough. Because it never will be enough. I'm staring at her clearly now, and I still can't find an end to her beauty.

Massive tits test the limits of her dress while her waist curves in and descends to the perfect peach-shaped bubble she's sitting on. The only contrast to her snow-white

skin and bleached blonde hair are the two sparkling pools of blue staring back at me.

If I were a painter, I'd immortalize this moment, plastering infinite copies across my apartment walls so I never have to look away from her again.

There's gotta be something special about her if I'm this worked up without having heard her name.

"The boring stuff is just as important." She crinkles her nose and lets out a soft, squeaking giggle. "If you ask me, it's more important."

"I see. You'd rather have me worshiping you from between your legs than jumping straight to the main event." I let the words trail off before finishing my sentence. "I'll have to make sure I've got a snorkel handy. Once I'm down there, I won't be coming up. Not even for air."

Redness paints her pale face, and she tries to cover it up with a flat palm. I shake my head, ordering no without a need to say it. She will not hide away from me. I won't stand for it.

She listens like the good little girl she is.

"You don't even know my name," she says, kicking one leg over the other. I peer down, on the verge of praying to see what's beneath her black sequined dress.

Maybe it's to break up the mounting tension. More likely, my haphazard glance is to see what's waiting for me. I guess the sight of her milky thighs as the dress rides higher will have to do.

"I'll have plenty of time to learn it." It takes every ounce of willpower I have to turn away. Not that looking into her eyes is any easier than up her dress. They're too

innocent for a mean bastard like me. “That said, it might be hard when you’re screaming my name instead of your own.”

I’m laying it on thick, but I can’t stop myself. Every part of me screams that this is the one chance I’m going to get with someone this pure. I will not waste it, not even if it means putting my position with the Lion’s Den in jeopardy.

“Enough of this bullshit,” Mr. Tweed announces from his side of the table. “Jess, let’s get out of here.”

“And now I know your name.” I wink.

“So you do. The real question is, what are you going to do with it?” Jess doesn’t seem to be in a hurry to run away with Mr. Tweed. In fact, his attempt to get her to follow has only firmed her round ass in her chair.

“Can’t do much with just a name. Might need a number to go with it.” Better. Suave charm instead of cocky.

“Oh, I don’t think that would be wise, Mr. Whitaker. Martin might have an aneurysm.” Jess turns to him.

I do the same. Like her, various shades of crimson burn over his cheeks. Funny how fury and desire have such a similar reaction in people.

“Looks to me like he’s already having one.”

She giggles again, and this one hurls Mr. Tweed over the edge.

“Fine, stay with him then, but I will tell your father about this,” he roars, slamming double fists onto the table. It rattles beneath the impact, knocking over the empty

glasses strewn atop it.

I grab the only one with any content left before it spills over Jess as Mr. Tweed storms off.

“Well now, looks like I saved you from having soaked thighs,” I say, setting the glass back down. I cut myself off before throwing another terrible one-liner about how she’d have to take the dress off because of it, so why not do it anyway?

“Who says they aren’t soaked already?” Jess says.

And with it, my fate is sealed.

Forever chasing this damned angel.

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JESS

“So, what’s this business about Mr. Tweed running to Daddy?” The beast takes a seat where Martin was a moment ago. I’m surprised it hasn’t crumbled under the sheer size of him.

“Your first time seeing the other side of this politically driven coin?” I ease back in my chair, scanning his face. “It’s a woman’s lot, sad as it is to admit. While you titans of industry run the world, we’re shadowed by obscurity and tasked with ensuring the deal goes through.”

“Don’t lump me in with them.” He flexes his massive arm as his hand waves over the crowd. “I’d take it as a massive insult.”

There’s something different about this one. He isn’t speaking just to impress me. Almost as if he truly believes he’s different from them.

“Then tell me, Mr. Whitaker, if you’re not with them, then who?” I raise a brow but lean in close as his fake appall vanishes with a charming smile.

“Myself,” he answers. “And please, call me Romeo.”

“Does that make me your Juliet, then?” I cross my arms over my chest, and his eyes instinctively follow them.

They linger a lot longer than my motion. Glued between my breasts with a lustful intensity that spikes hairs on the back of my neck, and a tantalizing shiver rolls down my spine. My body jerks at the chill, almost as if on purpose, to make my tits bounce for his viewing pleasure.

Romeo meets my eyes again. “Could be, but it means you’ll have to take a leap of faith with me.”

“By drinking the poison?” I raise a brow.

“Woah.” Romeo leans back in his chair, raising his hands as if mortified at what I just said. “Spoiler warning. I haven’t reached the end of the book.”

“Play,” I correct. “And it’s three-hundred-and-fifty years old. You had your chance, pal.” He chuckles, and I giggle, but curiosity gets the best of me. “Why should I call you Romeo, then?”

“Because it’s my name?” he states as if it’s obvious.

If it wasn’t before, it’s easy for my mind to run away with horrible thoughts now. A fake name to get through the door, chasing away my fiancé—no matter if I like him or not—and doting on me like I’m a princess makes me wonder about his intentions.

“Fake names and ill-advised meetings. What kind of game are you playing, exactly?” The only way to find out is by asking him straight.

“One I’m quickly realizing I shouldn’t be sharing with a stranger in a room full of the enemy.” His golden orbs sink to my cherry-red lips. Like my breasts, he can’t turn away from them, as if his next move is to lean over and kiss me.

I want him to. Hell, I want every damned thing he’s said so far. Get to know him over

pillow talk. Allow him to ravish me and leave me a sputtering mess, too busy screaming his name to remember my own.

I'd even settle for a touch from his rough, scarred hands.

"Come now, it's too late to second guess yourself."

"Never have and never will," he says. "Why do you think I'm here instead of bankrupting the owner of this place at the open bar? Only one way I'm getting a taste of you tonight is by putting in the work."

My cheeks are starting to ache from all the smiles Romeo forces on my face. Coupled with the intense heat cooking my flesh, I'm sure the effects will be lasting.

"A taste, huh?" I want it to come out witty and charming, the same way Romeo speaks. It doesn't. I sound nervous, with syllables of excitement strewn among it.

Who can blame me? This isn't my first rodeo, but it is with someone like Romeo. The others have all been terrified of me. Too scared to take a real chance, lest they wish the might of William Mayfair's unholy wrath to befall them.

That must be why I'm drawn to Romeo. He doesn't care about what might happen as long as he gets some time with me.

"Everything I need right between your legs." He swallows hard. "A feast of flesh mixed with water more intoxicating than the watered down on offer. I'm salivating just thinking about it."

Romeo's nonchalant in his vulgarity, yet every word seems precisely chosen to drive me crazy.

Which is why I need to get out of here. I'm already in for a long lecture about how much of a disappointment I am. If I waste any more time with this beast, who knows what horrid fate Father will have in store for me?

Or worse. Father isn't the kind of man to take these transgressions lightly. Sneaking into the party is one thing, but outright disrespecting Father's handpicked match for me is going to leave Romeo in a ditch with a bullet in his head.

"I should go." It pains me to say it, and concern immediately floods Romeo's face. Good. This might be the wake-up call we both need to live another day.

"Did I say something to upset you?" His voice hardens.

"The opposite. That's the problem."

I start to walk. As fun as it's been, I'm too close to making a bad decision. It's time to snap back to reality from whatever cloud Romeo got me floating on.

If not for my own safety, then for his.

5

ROMEO

I 'm surprised at how easy it is to follow Jess. I'm more surprised at how watching her leave made my heart ache.

From the ballroom and along various hallways of this massive estate, neither she nor anyone else seems to care that I'm walking through it freely. It's a nice change of pace from my usual hunts.

Two women emerge from a doorway not far in front of Jess. One's patting down the front of her dress while the other tucks a travel mirror into her purse. With them heading back to the ballroom, it leads me to believe it's a bathroom.

No wonder I haven't caught anyone's eye. We're still in the public domain.

I storm forward to catch up to Jess before she passes the door. And even with my heightened speed, I barely make it in time.

"Not so fast, pretty little thing," I whisper into her ear as I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her with me into the bathroom. She vibrates with a sharp shake of fear at my sudden interruption but calms just as quickly when she hears my voice.

"What do you think you're doing?" She talks in a hushed whisper. I'm inclined to do the same.

“I wasn’t finished.” Her vanilla perfume floods my nose and tickles my brain.

“You’re going to get in trouble,” Jess says, but staring at her face in the giant mirror before us, I can tell she doesn’t care. Neither do I.

She’s right where I want her, and taking a beating for it seems like a good trade.

“Difference between me and Tweed? I’m not scared,” I say.

The mirror shows just how tiny she is beside me. The arm that clawed into her has moved up to her chest and covers her breasts down to her belly. Hell, if she tried putting on my jacket, I’m sure she’d get lost in it for hours.

“You don’t understand. He’ll—” She reaches a hand up to my cheek and cups it gently.

Yet, she doesn’t push me away. Doesn’t even try to create distance between us when my cock is stabbing into her spine. Damn thing jumped straight up when I got a better look at her tits and hasn’t stopped throbbing since.

“Kill me?” I try to stifle my grin, but I can’t. Many have tried, all have failed. I don’t expect that to change tonight. “Your old man’s Billy Mayfair?”

The fear in her big blue eyes makes me irrationally angry.

“As a guest in our home, you should’ve known already.”

I lean in closer to her, sucking in deep lungfuls of her intoxicating aroma. I’d replace the air that I breathe with this scent if I could. Another permanent fixture in my home to keep her close forever.

“I did. Took me longer to figure it out than I’m happy to admit.” It was her confidence treading down these halls that enlightened me. But where most would find defeat in this realization, I see an opportunity.

“Then you should be sacred,” she says.

I adjust my arm around her chest until my hand gets its first true touch of her breast. The squishy mountain fills my palm, and its pointy peak digs through her dress. A soft, cooing sound of pleasure emits from her slightly parted lips.

“I’m not.”

My free hand moves against her side, but it doesn’t hover long. It slides across her hips and against her ass, and like the other, gives a firm squeeze against another round orb. Another stifled sound barely escapes her mouth, but this time, she falls forward with my touch. She digs both elbows onto the basin counter, and her eyes linger on mine through the mirror.

“You’re a fool if you’re not afraid of him.” Jess is panting, practically on the verge of begging me to continue.

“I’d rather die a happy fool than lose another second with you,” I say, and my hand moves lower until my fingertips dance against the hemline of her dress.

I ball the fabric into a shaky fist and lift it higher, breaking eye contact to lower my gaze in the mirror. Desperation has been gnawing at me from the second I saw her, but the mirror shows the full extent of it. One tug of the hand has hoisted her dress so far up her body, I’m not only greeted by her black mesh panties but the matching cup of her bra.

I press the tip of my shoe against her high heel and guide it with a push to part her

legs. I expected my imagination to play a bigger part in this venture, but it's proving to be useless as my eyes reach their destination. The floral design across her panties waistband becomes thinner and less pronounced the closer it gets to her intimacy. The material there is so thin, so see-through, it shouldn't count as wearing underwear at all.

I'm staring straight at her expertly carved landing strip, which guides the eye straight to her soaking pussy.

Fuck. She's so wet it's trickling down her thighs.

I fall to my knees, and the impact rumbles with the same intensity as the thunder outside. I use the hand holding her dress to nudge her forward and watch in awe as she pushes her ass closer to my face.

"Wh—" She chokes on her word as my face nears, and my erratic breathing blows against her damp thighs. "What are you doing?"

"Told you I wanted a taste." I couldn't stop myself if I wanted to. My tongue shoots out of my mouth and runs along her skin.

Nowhere near the source, I'm already drunk on her taste. Her mixture of sweet, salty liquid is like God's nectar on my taste buds.

Jess must think I'm a lunatic with how I'm acting. I've lost my mind entirely, and there's no way I'm going to find it again. No one has ever drawn anything close to this out of me. Such eager desperation makes my gums itch.

"Your tongue feels nice." She's a mess of panting breaths and choked words.

Jess isn't stopping me. She wants this. Needs this. Her trembling body is sign enough,

and the way she eagerly forces her hips back into my face is confirmation.

Enthralled by the picturesque sight of her slit hidden behind a tiny veil, I don't stop to pull her panties aside. I'm not wasting any more time, and I'm definitely not going to let a single drop of her juices escape me.

Even if it means licking my tongue raw against her mesh lingerie.

Jess does everything in her power to stifle her moans, but she can't catch them all. The few squeals of delight that make it to my ear send me into a frenzy. I lick, suck, and do anything else I can to clean her panties. It's the most gentlemanly thing I can do, considering I'm the one who soaked them.

The flat pad of my tongue runs over the full length of her sex. It stops when the tip meets her engorged clitoris. I wrap my lips around it and let my tongue get back to work. My hands have moved under her dress and back to her breasts.

With no padding on her bra, my fingers find her spiked nipples without delay. I lock them between my index and middle fingers with a light squeeze.

"Fuck, Romeo, you're going to make me—" Jess slaps her mouth shut before she can finish the sentence. She moans into her palm while her ass wiggles in my face.

There's something deeply satisfying about seeing her like this. Vulnerable. Exposed. Writhing in the purest form of bliss.

Her legs buckle, and she has to latch onto the edges of the counter to keep from falling over.

But I want her to—fall back and smother me with her pussy. If I'm a dead man walking, I might as well go out on my own terms.

I snatch the thin band of her panties in both my fists, slowly peeling them away from her damp skin. I've done what I could to save her laundry lady the trouble of washing these, but I need a taste of the real thing.

"Jess?" a man's voice roars through the hall outside.

"Oh fuck," Jess stammers and shoots upright. I grab her by the hips, trying to pull her ass back to my face, but she slaps my hands away. Even with the terror scrunching her face, she still manages a giggle.

"Romeo, stop," she orders with a somber pout.

I do as I'm told.

I was so fucking close. I almost had everything I could ever want, and it disappeared in a flash. My aching loins stiffen to torture me further, reprimanding me for missing my opportunity.

"Your father?" I ask, running my tongue over my lips to get whatever remnants of her into my mouth.

"Uh-huh." Jess slumps her shoulders.

"Better get to it then." I hoist myself to my feet with a labored groan.

"Stay here until the coast is clear," she instructs and fixes her dress. I've never been more sad seeing skin disappear.

"Might be for the best." Under different circumstances, I wouldn't allow her to leave my side. I'd brave the storm with her and cut down anyone who tried to stop us.

This time, cooler heads must prevail. That is, if I want mine to stay bullet-free.

“Jess Mayfair, where the fuck are you?” her dad calls out again.

His tone leaves a bad taste in my mouth and isn’t helping me want to stay in hiding.

In a last effort to make her comfortable, I slide my arm around her and take quiet steps toward the door. My last reminder that she isn’t alone anymore. That I’m going to be at her side always, whether she likes it or not. A mountain when she needs someone to lean on and a pack mule to carry her weight.

I’m taking her.

She’s mine, and nothing’s going to change my mind.

It’s only fair that, in turn, I become her monster when she needs one.

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6

JESS

I knew something would happen in here, but silly me thought it would be a touch or a kiss. Why I expected anything less than Romeo's tongue exploring my pussy is beyond me.

Wobbly legs only manage to hold me upright because of Romeo's hand around my waist. If he wasn't here, I'd be lying flat on my ass with the biggest, goofiest smile splattered across my face. Even though I'm about to walk into Father's warpath, that has to count for something, right?

We reach the bathroom door, and I try to part from him. But my escape attempt is met by a deep rumble in his chest.

Romeo really is a beast. Feral and savage in his actions but deathly loyal without question. It melts my heart into another puddle, collecting where his mouth just was. It also terrifies me because I know what happens to men who stand against Father's cruelty.

He eventually lets go, pressing his back against the wall beside the door. He's doing his best to make himself as small as possible against it, but that's proving to be a difficult task with his monstrous size.

Too scared to speak, in case Father can hear me, I lift myself onto my tippy-toes—which is a lot harder than I thought it would be in heels—and kiss him on the

cheek. A thank you for a wonderful evening and my goodbye to him. I can't part with Romeo without letting him know I appreciate what he's done for me, even if it was just raw, primal desire.

Time to face the music.

I draw in a long breath and exhale it with a sigh as I open the door. Father's farther up the hall, peeking his head into one of the rooms in search of me. Martin's behind him.

"I'm here," I announce myself and close the door behind me.

When I reach them, Father's standing against the wall with arms crossed over his chest. His flaring nostrils emphasize the rage in his steely eyes. Martin's at his side, scowling at me.

Spineless piece of shit.

"Where have you been?" Father's mouth barely moves.

"The bathroom."

"Don't play coy with me, little girl. I'm not in the mood." He kicks himself off the wall and scans me from toe to crown. "What's this I hear of a giant disrespecting our honored guest?"

The lump in my throat is so big, it's a miracle I can still draw air into my lungs. But hearing 'giant' from Father's lips takes me back to where I was mere moments ago—a state of blissful ignorance and happiness for the first time in my life. Romeo's hands caress my body as his mouth delivers unimaginable pleasure.

My body aches for him. Another touch, another lick. I'd even settle for one last word.

“He doesn’t know about the arrangement. He took a chance, and I sent him off.” Lies come easy when they’re directed at Father. I’ve spent my entire life hiding everything I do to keep his temper in check.

“Not before he belittled Martin so badly, he felt the need to call me,” Father growls.

“When you put it like that, it makes me sound pathetic,” Martin says glumly.

It takes everything I’ve got not to laugh at him.

Sound pathetic? No. You are pathetic.

Spending time with my beast proved it. Maybe that’s why it feels like my heart is swelling in my chest, filled with so much joy it’s about to pop and shatter into a thousand broken pieces.

No matter how much fun we had or how badly I want it to happen again, it can’t. Hell, Romeo shouldn’t have been brave enough to speak with me, let alone whisk me away.

“I’m growing tired of your insolence, Jess.” Father ignores Martin and continues his attack on me. “We had an agreement, and I thought you understood it.”

Agreement . He throws the word around so loosely, it’s lost all meaning. I don’t want any of this, and I’ve said as much a thousand times. Father doesn’t care as long as he gets what he wants in the end.

“I did.”

“You don’t anymore?” He frames it like a question, but it’s an accusation.

“I do.” I turn my head away, ashamed of my weakness.

“What about you, boy? Got cold feet after being pushed around?” Father turns to Martin. Knowing I’m not the only one on the receiving end of his ire is, in a twisted way, comforting.

“N-no, sir,” Martin stammers. “I’m still very happy with what we’ve discussed.”

“Good, and next time it happens, you deal with the problem yourself. You’ve got a gun, so fucking use it,” Father snarls.

My union with Martin has been years in the making. And over the course, I’ve always believed Father walked on eggshells to ensure the Winthrop empire would merge with ours. This interaction illuminates my ignorance on the matter.

Martin Winthrop is getting squished under Father’s thumb just as hard as me.

“Yes, sir.” Martin hangs his head in solemn defeat.

“Good. Then we all walk away happy. Now, both of you, fuck off out of my sight.”

Martin and I watch Father stride back to his office, too afraid to speak, but somehow sharing our first quiet nod of understanding. It may not change anything, especially not how I feel about him.

But somehow, it stings a little less.

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7

ROMEO

The pitch-black BMW arrives as the big hand strikes ten o'clock, not a single second late.

I'm impressed. Dante Vitorri didn't strike me as the perfectly punctual sort. But when a scrawny, gray-haired guy gets out of the driver's seat and opens the back door, I realize I'm probably right about that.

"Mr. Whitaker," he says while his beady eyes scan our surroundings. No doubt using my fake name to keep up appearances until we're gone. "I hope you had a pleasant evening."

"I did. Yes, thank you," I say as I pass him to take my seat.

I don't have to look over to see someone next to me. We're brushing against each other, and like me, he's one big fucker.

"Romeo Valesca." His voice sinks my heart into my guts.

"Don Leone," I gulp. "Where's Dante?"

How crazy is it for me to think in the short time that's passed, the poor bastard met an untimely end? You can never be too sure when dealing with these savages.

“I gave him the night off. It almost feels wrong depriving his wife and child of his presence on a Saturday night,” Don Lione says. A mighty human response that leaves me with more questions than answers. “And since he was going to deliver you to my doorstep anyway, why not skip the middleman?”

“Sensible.” What else can I say?

The driver returns to his seat, and we start moving.

“Did you get what I was looking for?” Don Lione hasn’t moved since I got in the car. He keeps his head pinned forward while his tone remains unnervingly monotonous.

Luckily for me, after my extended visit to the bathroom, I did manage to find someone interesting to talk to. Some chick with a name like Cherry or Candice, or some other shit with C, spent enough time at the bar to loosen her tongue. We spoke for about an hour before her husband stepped in to reprimand her for making him look bad.

“All signs point to Billy Mayfair using his company to funnel vast amounts of wealth out of the country. First thought was offshore accounts to dodge the taxman, but...” Drunk chick C knew a hell of a lot more than I bargained for. I noticed it the second I saw her. She drank with purpose, wanted to wipe the slate clean and start tomorrow with an empty, peaceful mind. “He’s using his wealth to fund his own expansion out of civilian life and into this twisted world of ours.”

“I’m impressed. If I may be candid, I didn’t have high hopes for tonight. I pegged you for another meathead bruiser, and I’m glad I was mistaken,” he says. I’m not sure if I should feel complimented or slapped in the face. “But you’re wrong. Mayfair has no interest in diving into the seedy underbelly. Not directly.”

I don’t respond immediately, and I’m glad I held my tongue when Don Lione talks

again.

“Cocaine, methamphetamine, and psychotropics are deemed criminal. Pour them into a white plastic bottle and give them a fancy name? You’re considered a hero for delivering life-saving drugs to the masses.” In a flash, Don Lione’s monotonous tone drops, and passion floods his words. “Wanna know what the best part is?”

“I do.” Not.

I still can’t tell if I’ve done a good job or not. I’m not a puppy seeking affirmation from my master, but I sure as shit would like to know he isn’t about to put a bullet in my head.

“Mayfair Pharmaceuticals leads the pack in these experimental medications,” he says. “And I’d like to say it’s because he’s cutting into my profit margin that has me feeling this way, but if I’m honest, I think I’m growing sentimental with age.”

I feel set up. They know way more about this than I gathered, and racking my brain for answers to why is forming a migraine at the base of my skull. I want to be upset, but I’m not.

I just want to know why.

“Don Lione, don’t take this the wrong way, but I’ve gotta know.” I clear my throat nervously before I dare ask the question. “If you knew all this, why bother sending me in?”

“To test you.” He tilts his head toward me. “You squeezed blood from a stone to get a tiny fraction of what’s happening.”

Until now, I didn’t even know it was a drug company. I really did luck out with

finding ... Charlotte! That's her name.

“And with it, you've proven your competence.” The Don sniffs. “But do you have what it takes to do what I actually need from you?”

I should thank him for sending me on this bullshit adventure. Had he not felt the need to test me, I'd have never met Jess. And where I feel a little silly for not realizing I was being played sooner, I owe Don Lione a great debt.

Maybe someday, I'll tell him.

“Ready for anything, Don Lione.”

Not true, but I'd rather lie to his face and walk away safely than die on a hill of morals.

“I want you to destroy them.”

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8

JESS

“T here’s someone at the gate, Miss Mayfair. He says he has an important matter to discuss,” Barry Williams says through the black intercom box next to the front door.

Barry is Father’s daytime gate guard. A hard-working man who spends the whole time allowing or denying entry from our estate.

“Father isn’t home. You’ll have to turn him away,” I answer.

I’m confused. Father rarely has meetings at home, and personal visits are even more uncommon.

“You’re what?” Barry asks, but it isn’t directed at me. There’s a brief exchange between him and whoever he’s with before he grumbles to me again. “I’ll tell her, but Mr. Mayfair will not be happy about this.”

“What did he say?” I rush to the point. Curiosity killed the cat, they say, but I’ll take my chances.

I’ve spent my whole life dodging bullets, after all.

“He’s not here for your father, miss. It’s Jerome Whitaker. For you,” Barry says.

My eyes nearly pop out of my skull hearing his name, and a bright, goofy smile stares

back at me from the enormous mirror hanging on the entryway wall.

“Send him down,” I say, doing my best not to scream with excitement.

“Are you sure?” I understand his concern. He’s just doing his job and doesn’t want any trouble. But if Romeo is willing to stick his neck out and come back here, I can take a few risks of my own.

“I am.”

I pull open the front door and watch his pearlescent white muscle car pass the gate. I’m halfway down the steps by the time his car comes to a stop.

Romeo gets out, and he doesn’t look anything like he did yesterday. His fancy suit is replaced by jeans and a gray-black t-shirt. His hair lies in a messy bush atop his head. But Romeo’s smile is still the same—warm, inviting, happy to see me. I just want to kiss it.

So I will.

I sprint to him and launch myself into his arms. Romeo catches me, hoisting me into the air, and we spin in place. Neither of us speaks, letting our mouths smash together in a far better greeting than a hello could ever do. My whole body thrums with excitement, anticipation, and ... happiness. God, I don’t remember being this happy in a long, long time.

“We won’t have much time before Father hears about this,” I say, still stunned at how amazing our first kiss felt. Short and sweet but filled with the intense passion both of us were stripped of last night. “So we better hurry to whatever you’ve got planned.”

“Good, because we’re getting out of here,” Romeo says as if he’s whisking me away

for a wonderful week on some tropical island.

“What? I can’t go anywhere. Father would have a fit.”

He might be a thick slab of rock-hard muscle and want the world to think his emotions fall in line, but his stern face cracks when our eyes meet.

My beast is nervous.

“I’ll explain later, Jess. Please, just trust me. We have to go.”

If it was anyone else, I would’ve declined, ran back inside, and locked the door. But something put Romeo in this state, and he wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t important.

“Is everything okay? Are you in trouble?” He sets me back on the ground.

“No. Yes. I don’t know.” Romeo sets me back on the ground and rolls his shoulders.

“But your dad is, and I don’t want you here for what comes next.”

Cautious steps guide me to the passenger seat of his car. Somehow, my discomfort isn’t directed at my beast. Foolish as it may be, I see him as a bright beacon of light in an endless sea of darkness. I know full well that what happened here yesterday could’ve been some grand scheme, and getting in his car can land me in terrible danger.

But I trust him.

Romeo starts the car, and we speed up the drive. Barry glares at us with an annoyed squint as we pass him, but he doesn’t stop us. And soon enough, we’re traveling down roads I didn’t even know existed.

I'm supposed to be scared, right? Why is this so thrilling, instead?

9

ROMEO

I want you to destroy them .

The Don's words chip away at my soul. They've played on repeat in my head all night, chipping away at my psyche and leaving me feeling weak.

"So, this is your place?" Her gentle finger runs over dusty vases and trinkets decorating my apartment. I haven't given them much love since I bought them, and it shows.

"Sure is." Trying to sound normal when feeling this crushed is challenging.

Beating the shit out of her dad? No problem. He deserves the terrible thing heading his way. But where will that leave us? Jess will hate me for it, and I'll be the monster who destroyed her entire world.

I brought her here to keep her safe. Hide her away from what must be done.

My crusade—the Lion's crusade—will not leave her a casualty among the rubble.

I have to say something. Break the tension. If not for her, then for me.

She beats me to the punch, and I'm thankful for it. "Did you really have so much fun that you're willing to risk getting caught for another taste?"

A naughty twinkle dances inside the deep oceans of her eyes. She hasn't stopped smiling since we left her place. I wonder if it's going to change. If the severity of what's about to exit my mouth will gnaw away at her the way it's doing me.

"I'd give up this whole damn world for another go at you." The massive swallow of drool flooding my mouth is proof enough. "I haven't stopped thinking about you since..." You shook my world and left me desperate.

I can't be so forward, though. Not yet.

"Okay, enough brooding. Tell me what's going on." Her tone changes, and Jess makes her way over to me.

Come clean. Do it. Tell her you're a wicked bastard working with worse people. Let her decide if you're good enough.

And I do, rehashing the events of last night in painstaking detail—from the moment Dante picked me up right down to the Don's last order.

"They want me to destroy your father's business," I finish.

Jess doesn't interrupt while I speak. Her smile fades, and her face shifts from happy to neutral, but there aren't any signs of her being upset. If I wasn't the one to spill my story, I'd assume we were just talking about how my walls could use a fresh coat of paint.

"Destroy it?" Her brow furrows.

She needs to process what I've said. Take it in and let it stew in her mind. Funny faces and a deadpan tone are a far stretch from my expectations, but we all cope with things in our own ways.

“Destroy him?” Her faded smile returns to her face, bigger and brighter than ever before. Her eyes twinkle with teary delight. And she starts to laugh—an ecstatic, erratic laugh bordering on frantic.

I might be reading the signals wrong, but is she ... happy?

Without warning, Jess jumps onto the coffee table next to us to meet me face to face. Her hands find the bottom of my shirt, and her lips crush against mine as she shoves her tongue into my mouth.

Fucking hell.

“Do it,” she says between kisses. “I want you to. Fuck him up. Pillage and plunder his ill-gotten gains.”

She pulls my shirt over my head like a feral cat clawing at its prey.

“Starting with me.” She pulls back to finish, gazing straight through my eyes and into my soul. The same longing, hungry look I’ve had since the second I met her.

I fucking knew it.

She’s perfect.

10

JESS

Romeo may be a beast, an unholy monster sent here to leave this world in ruin, but he's mine.

I can't keep my hands off him. The thought of him crumbling Father's empire and saving me from this hellish life tickles me to the core. And the deep satisfaction of knowing he's doing it all for me leaves me too weak to fight the incessant urge to feel his body against mine.

Romeo loses himself to the frenzy that's gnawed away at us since we met. He throws himself forward and locks our mouths together in another kiss while his enormous hands wrap around my breasts.

The ferocity with which he throws himself into me almost knocks me off the table, but he catches me before I can fall back and lifts me in his strong arms. We make out while we walk, discarding our layers with every step. My shirt goes first, then his jeans, and finally my bra, until we're in his bedroom with my leggings and his boxers as our final barriers.

His stiff erection brushes against my belly as I slide down him and back to my feet. His entire body is vibrating, and the shakes get worse when his eyes meet my bare breasts. Just as quick as my feet hit the ground, Romeo hoists me into his arms again.

He buries his face between my tits and his mouth and tongue work over every inch of

them. Long licks come to an end, his lips engulfing my peaked nipple. His tongue flicks against it with short, sharp strokes.

I perch myself on his hips, hooking my legs around them and tightening my body against his. The thick slab of meat dangling between his legs springs to life at my action. The tip brushes against my clit while the rest of his girth knocks at my door. Anguished, needy whimpers part my lips.

Enough. I can't take it anymore. I need to feel him inside of me.

Leaving Romeo lost to his frantic exploration of my breasts, I curl my fingers around the waistband of his boxers and sink them to the floor. He groans loudly as his cock breaks free from its confines and meets the soaked fabric of my leggings.

"Ah, fuck." My head snaps to the ceiling.

"Jess, wait." It takes all his strength to stop himself. "Are you sure you want this?"

Romeo asks. It's his last effort of chivalry. He lays me on the bed, and as he returns to his upright position, he hooks his thumbs into my leggings and pulls them with him.

"More than anything," I admit. "I have since the first dirty word left your mouth. So take what you deserve and give me what I want."

"I'm not gonna be able to control myself," Romeo snarls like a rabid animal.

"Then don't, my beast." I cup his cheek in my hand. "Lose control. Take me. Make me yours. Do what you have to do."

Romeo drops onto his knees in front of me, taking my ankles in both hands and

forcing my legs apart. He looks stunned at my response, with a disbelieving stare and glib smile that almost makes my beast look cute.

“You don’t know how badly I needed to hear that.” His voice is low, deep, and raw.

His fingers travel up my legs, and I giggle and shake against his unintentional tickling. It doesn’t deter Romeo. He presses a single finger against the slick wetness coating my pussy. His eyes roll to the back of his head as it sinks deeper, and I can’t hold back my moaning.

With how wet I am, there’s no resistance to his touch, and before I can adjust to the eruption inside of me, Romeo inserts himself to the knuckle.

“So. Fucking. Wet.” He makes it a point to pronounce every word. When he pulls the finger back out, he stares at the glistening digit in awe. Admiration. But shoves it in his mouth to get another taste.

As if it was some kind of miracle drug that held Romeo’s power, a thunderous war cry barrels out of him.

There’s something so fucking hot about this. How he looks at me like I’m the only girl in the world or can’t shake the look on his face that this is actually happening. That I want him the way he wants me.

And I do. I need this. Him. So badly. Every second he takes to make another move is an eternity of torture. But I won’t rush my beast. He’s savoring this experience. I’d be cruel to take it away from him.

Romeo grabs me by the hips and pulls my lower half into his. His erection meets my damp skin, forcing his grip to tighten and his body to buckle. Somehow, he manages to stay upright, allowing his eyes to wander the peaks and valleys of my body. They

drink in every facet, every minute detail, as if studying my shape for the best approach in our carnal pursuit.

Regaining some semblance of composure, he lowers himself on top of me. His eager mouth meets mine with a gentle touch. And as if that was his starting gun, Romeo lets the wildfire of passion engulf him.

His tongue smashes through my lips in a desperate search for mine. I give it to him, wrapping my arms around his shoulders and squeezing my body against his. God, this is what it must feel like to hug a wall.

Romeo adjusts his hips while we kiss, and his hands explore my body with the same ticklish touch as before. They're rough against my skin, but he's gentle. Delicate. Letting them wander up my sides, over my chest, and nestling on my breasts.

As if pulled closer by some magnetic force, I feel his tip find my hole. His hands are busy, and so are mine, clutching handfuls of his hair to make sure he can't escape this kiss. So maybe it's a sign that our bodies are meant for each other. That we were always supposed to end up here together, and this is just Destiny collecting another tick on her checklist.

Warmth floods my cheeks, and my entire body jolts up as Romeo bucks his hips and the head of his dick penetrates. I cry out, and he receives my pleasure in his mouth and continues with every inch he buries inside me.

His lower half shakes as he moves his hips back. The spasms make his cock twitch against my walls in a new, involuntary delight.

"You're so fucking tight," he growls. The first sign of Romeo losing control of the beast.

Exactly what I want.

“Fucking soaked.” He slams his full length back inside of me. Without his mouth trapping my sounds, I scream out.

“You’re fucking mine.” Claiming me as his is the final stand. As soon as the words leave his lips, my beast releases a thunderous roar.

He clamps his hands onto my hips, using his new leverage to pull me into his ever-hastening thrusts. My eyes roll to the back of my head, and my moans pass my lips in feeble grunts. My hands have traveled away from his head and to his back. It’s only after I’ve clawed half his back that I realize what I’m doing, but Romeo hasn’t even winced. Like it didn’t hurt at all, while my fingertips feel like they’ve just tried to dig through a brick wall.

“Don’t stop,” I moan. “Never stop. Your cock feels perfect inside me. I neve?—”

My words are cut short as a toe-curling orgasm clenches my throat and makes me sputter choked giddy sounds.

“Fuck!” Romeo snarls. His body tenses and stiffens, veins bulging across his rippling frame. “I’m going to come.” He sounds disappointed, but it doesn’t stop the rhythm of his ramming. “Fill your womb with my seed. Mark you as mine. Forever.”

“Do it,” I whimper. “Come for me, my beast.”

I can see it in his eyes—the moment it happens. A moment before his intense pounding changes to harder, slower thrusts. And with the final one, Romeo releases his hot, sticky liquid in me before his body gives out, and he crumbles on top of me.

In a frantic struggle to get his hands under my body, he pulls me into a tight hug

against his chest. I return his hug, burying my face in his chest. I can feel the erratic rhythm of his thumping heart against my cheek, and it brings a smile to my face.

Where have you been all my life? Lying in wait to save me from my sorry fate? It doesn't matter now. You're here. Holding me tight and helping me forget about the nightmares of the past.

I've never felt safer than in your powerful arms.

11

ROMEO

“ I t’s time to wake up, sleepyhead.”

A soothing voice rouses me from slumber, but my heart immediately starts racing. I’m not used to having company, and I’m sure Jess’s voice would’ve inspired the same frightful reaction, but this speaker is a man. The same one who let me drive through Mayfair’s gate.

I should’ve known they’d follow me.

My eyes open, but I don’t get time to adjust before the handle of his pistol connects the bridge of my nose. I see stars before my eyes blur. Woken up just to get knocked out? That’s some inventive fucking cruelty.

“Eyes up.” The gate guard grabs my hair and yanks my head up to drink in the scene.

Two men pin Jess against my wall. Tears roll down her cheeks as muffled cries pass through a duct tape gag. Blinding rage pierces through me, and I try to launch off the bed. I’ll kill them for laying their filthy paws on what belongs to me. I’ll bathe in the delight of watching them suffer.

My attempt is cut short with the gate guard yanking hard on my hair. He pulls me straight back into bed, and with a firm twist, he makes me look at the other two in the room.

Mr. Tweed and the big, bad Billy Mayfair.

“What am I going to do with you, Jerome Whitaker?” Billy speaks. “Or is it Romeo Valesca?”

At least he doesn’t know I’m working for Don Lione. I doubt I’d be comfortable in bed if he did.

“You just couldn’t keep your nose out of my business and your cock out of my daughter, could you?”

I try to look at her. I want to tell her I’ll make this right, even if it kills me. But the gate guard has my neck pinned to the bed, and fighting against him might result in a bullet to the back of it.

Better bide my time, hide my intentions, and do what the Don ordered when I’m back on solid ground.

“Not going to say anything?” Billy raises a brow. Tweed’s standing next to him with a smug fucking grin I can’t wait to wipe off his face. “Fine, I’ll talk, and you’ll listen. You’ve had your fun and filled my little girl’s head with promises of a life beyond the one she’s living. You gave her a taste of something she wanted, and my appreciation for it comes with sparing your life.”

My face must be doing something funny because Billy is about to crack up.

“But it’s over now, Romeo. Come near my house or my daughter again, and you’ll see why I’ve cultivated the fear of everyone in this town. Do I make myself clear?”

I have to answer this time unless I want another knock to the head.

This isn't my first shakedown, and like the ones that came before, Billy's going to regret not finishing me off.

"Crystal." My mouth is so dry, I choke trying to say it.

I'm not scared. Not even a little. But God knows I've never been this angry before. I didn't know it was possible to harbor so much wrath and hatred for another person. It's like burning coal got dropped in my belly, left to fester and grow into a swirling inferno.

"Good. We're done he?—"

"You're going to leave him alive?" Tweed sounds upset. He looks it, too, his grin vanishing beneath slack-jawed disappointment.

"Is there a problem?" Billy glares at him sideways. "You want him dead, do it yourself. I'm not getting my hands dirtier than they need to be."

Tweed's mouth falls wide open, and I can't stop a smile from stretching my lips.

You've got your chance, Mr. Tweed. You better take it before your whole world turns black.

"Didn't think so." Billy rolls his eyes and starts for the door. "Bring her."

It breaks my heart to hear her cry, watching her fight to break free in some glorious attempt to rescue me.

Don't worry, my goddess. You'll see me soon, and they'll pay for what they've done to us.

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12

JESS

O h, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?

I know the meaning of the original verse. It has nothing to do with Romeo not being around, and instead, Juliet speaks to some higher power, hoping they have the answers to why Romeo has to be a Montague.

It seems so fitting here.

Where are you, my Romeo? Preparing your onslaught and the destruction of the Mayfairs for your horrible master? Then do it with haste, and let us rise together from the ashes of your warpath.

I haven't stopped crying since Father and Martin stole me away from Romeo. The three of us have been in his office since the abduction, with only a few of Father's men coming in to whisper secret messages to their boss.

They're sitting opposite me in wingback chairs while I have a double-seater to myself. Knowing I wouldn't try to escape with Father's men stationed around the house and property, they didn't bother restraining me.

Another power play to make me feel small.

"Why are you doing this to me? Please let me go," I beg. It hasn't worked up to this

point, and I don't expect it to now.

I believe from the bottom of my heart that Romeo is preparing to do something to get me out of this. But right now, I'm alone. I have to buy him time to do what he needs to, and the only way I can is by fighting Father and Martin off for as long as I can.

"You've forced my hand. I don't have a choice," Father says coldly.

"No, I'm the one who doesn't have a choice. I've never had a choice." I'm scared and sad, that much is damned clear to them. What they don't see is how pissed off they've gotten me.

They threatened to kill my beast and destroy the last beam of light in the endless sea of darkness. For what? More money they don't need and a partnership that doesn't benefit anyone but their public images?

"Is that so?" Father furrows his brow. He almost looks amused. "How did you come to your conclusion?"

"I never wanted to marry this piece of shit," I spit in Martin's direction. Pleading to their humanity is a trial in futility, but leaving a bad taste in Martin's mouth might scare him off.

"You've made a point to remind me since the day you two met." Father sighs.

"And you're still going through with it?" My eyes drift from Father to Martin.

"Of course I am. Nothing's going to change my mind," Martin says. He looks confused and annoyed that I'd dare question him on the matter.

What a spineless jellyfish. He can't want this or accept me after I fucked the first man

who swept me off my feet. At least I get to savor the fact that it's Romeo who smashes his ego to pieces. No matter what happens, Martin will forever have my love for the beast weighing him down.

"It's a woman's lot in life, Jess." Father grabs my attention again. "You're a bargaining chip. Have been since the day you were born. It's time to end the foolishness and accept what's happening."

Before I have the chance to fight him on another point, the door swings open. My heart skips a beat, somehow tricking myself into believing Romeo's about to swoop in and save the day. Instead, it's one of the guys who pinned me to the wall in my beast's apartment.

"Sir, we found a priest." The thug doesn't breach the threshold of the door.

"Priest? What does he mean?" My eyes widen, and another round of tears flood the lids. He can't mean?—

"Where is he, then?" Father barely moves his head to look at him.

"He'll be here tonight. If we find anyone else, I'll let you know," the guard answers.

Father nods and waves him off.

"And there we have it. Quit your crying, Jess. You should be smiling." Father flashes a toothy grin in my direction. "It's your wedding day."

13

ROMEO

I waited for the cover of darkness to make my move. Another dark and stormy night, but this one doesn't leave me with a foreboding sense. It's a reflection of my mood, or better yet, the heavens pissing itself in fear of what's about to happen at Mayfair Manor.

Oh, yeah. I'm gonna enjoy this.

"Eyes up," I order, the same way he did when he yanked me from my slumber.

To my surprise, he listens. His eyelids are fluttering, but they travel from the floor to mine.

"This can't be worth it, can it?" I ask.

The gate guard can't say a thing to change my mind. Having someone twice your size squeeze the life out of you in the most belittling way possible has to be one of the worst insults any man can endure.

Yet, here we are.

My black-gloved hand pins him against the rickety wall of his guardhouse. His feet dangle off the ground, the same way a kid might when embracing their parents. His reddened face is already bruised and swollen from the blow I delivered on my arrival.

A smarter man would've hit him in the back and kept going until the guard wasn't breathing anymore. No one ever accused me of being a smart man, though, and I have a use for him beyond death.

He should count himself as one of the lucky ones—standing before my almighty wrath and living to tell the tale. Hell, the baseball bat I wanted to crush his skull with probably suffered more damage than his face.

“Don't kill me.” There isn't much air getting into his lungs, and he's wasting it on begging for his life?

I'm not surprised, just disappointed.

“You felt mighty strong back at my place, didn't you?” I tighten my grip while I speak. “What about now?”

I loosen for an answer, but one never comes.

“You feel like Jess did. Scared because your life is being taken from you.” My light. My purity. The last good thing in this world and these savages are trying to kill it.

“I was—” He struggles with every letter and stammers over every word. Can't be easy to speak with your windpipe being squeezed in my vise grip. “Doing my job.”

“Kidnapping a woman is part of your job?” How I sound this calm when I feel like someone dropped a nuke in my chest surprises me. Makes me feel strange. As if I'm pulling way too much enjoyment from something that is and should be harrowing.

He declines to answer. Can't blame him. I'd be pissing myself if the roles were reversed.

“You want to live, don’t you?” If he does not indulge my fun, I might as well move on.

His eyes flash with relief, and he bobs his head as far as it will go before striking my hand. I release him, and he drops to his feet. They give out to his weight instantly, and he topples over, heaving loudly from the floor.

I disarmed him while he was disorientated from my initial strike. I’m keeping the gun, too. The karmic justice of saving the day with the weapon that could’ve ended me is far too alluring to let slip.

“Thank you,” he says, as a fat tear rolls down his cheek.

“Oh, don’t do that yet. You don’t know what I want in return for your life.” Not that it matters. He’ll give me anything I want now, knowing how serious I am in going through with my threats.

“What is it?” His wheezy breath comes out like whistles ringing.

“How many guards are stationed inside?”

“Six,” he answers before I’ve finished the question.

“Where are they stationed?”

“Most will be on patrol.” As he says it, I see a flashlight in the distance. One’s outside. Assuming the rest are inside is my safest bet. “But at least two will be with Mr. Mayfair.”

“When you wake up, you’re free to go. Don’t try to find me. I won’t be so kind next time,” I say.

The gate guard's face scrunches up in confusion. "Wake up?"

I drive my heel against the side of his head to answer him. It's all he needs to go limp.

"Sleep tight."

My attention turns to the small window that his head blocked while I held him up. Through it, I see Mayfair Manor. A ghastly monument shrouded in the black inkiness of night. Out of all the windows, there's only one with a light on inside.

I'm coming, Jess.

And they're going to pay for taking you away from me.

14

JESS

B ang! Bang! Bang!

It's a war zone out there. Like an armada of soldiers has stormed Mayfair Manor to rescue me. Maybe it is. Romeo said Salvatore Lione wants Father destroyed, and my guess is he's called in the big guns. Not that there are any weapons larger than his tree trunk arms.

"What the fuck is going on out there?" Father roars at the two men standing watch in the corner of the room. They barged in here a few minutes after the shooting started, peering nervously at the door ever since.

"It's that fucking brute," Martin hisses.

"You." Father points at the priest. He's been here a while now and bit off way more than he was willing to chew by doing so. "Get on with it. I want this marriage sorted. Immediately."

"But there's shooting." The priest's lip trembles.

As fucked up as it sounds, I appreciate Father's attempt at demeaning and bullying me one last time. Had he not felt the need to force me into a wedding dress and get my makeup done before he left me to Martin, the papers would've been signed, and my life as a free woman would be over.

“I don’t give a fuck. Have them say the lines, sign the papers to—” A knock at the door silences Father. If he was scared in front of me before, he hid it well. But the way his head slowly arches to the knock while he recoils away from it is a beautiful sight indeed.

“Who’s there?” He tries to growl the words and match the furious temper he’s known for. Instead, he sounds like a purring kitten.

“Housekeeping.” It’s just like him to throw out a cheesy one-liner in the heat of battle. Brazen, careless, and free.

My Romeo.

“Why are you smiling?” Martin hisses.

I ignore his question. Fuck him.

“What did I tell you, Valesca?” Father raises his hand to the two guards with a finger pointed to the ceiling. A commanding gesture to his soldiers leveling their guns on the door.

“Don’t know. I got hit pretty hard last time I saw you,” Romeo calls back. “Never start with the head if you want to drive a point home. It leaves you all fuzzy.”

“Then let me remind you.” He drops the finger, and his two guards rain bullets toward the door. They don’t stop until their magazines run dry and a splintered hole replaces what used to be solid wood. “Still out there?”

Silence.

“No clever remarks? Witty quips?” Father cautiously sticks his neck out to inspect

the scene.

My face sinks. No, it can't be. Romeo did all this just to fall so close to his goal? It's hard not to blame myself for this. Had I not indulged Romeo the night we met, he'd never have become another victim.

"Get on with it, you stuffy cunt," Father says to the priest, sighing in relief.

Oh God. What have I done?

"Honored guests," the priest starts as if he didn't just witness a murder. "We're gathered here today?—"

The belittling tone doesn't feel so good anymore, with the man I think I love splattered across my hallway. It's made worse by Martin taking my hands by the fingertips and holding me as though there actually is a spark between us.

"What the hell happened to the door?" Romeo's voice comes from behind. It's quickly followed by two well-placed gunshots that drop Father's guards behind the priest. "I had to take a piss."

"What the fuck?" Martin releases his grip on me and reaches for a pistol behind him.

He barely clears the holster before another echoing clap rings in my ears. Martin screeches as he falls through the red mist of a gunshot exit wound. The priest stumbles back and topples the guards below him.

"Don't do it, old man," my beast says. The lighthearted nature he carried a moment ago was gone. He's gravely serious and wants Father to know it. "If those hands move, you're going to regret it."

I remember our first meeting. How intimidated I was to gaze upon all his glory. Butterflies swarm in my belly at the anticipation of peering into his burning eyes again.

“You’re threatening me?” Father’s on his ass, cowering in the corner. I didn’t even see it happen with everything going on around me.

“Same goes for you, Tweed,” Romeo orders.

I shouldn’t, but I giggle at his comment anyway. I don’t think Martin’s going to try anything else tonight. He’s howling and writhing on the floor, lucky to be alive.

“Fuck me, you look stunning in that dress,” Romeo speaks directly to my soul. “I can’t wait ‘til you’re wearing one for me.”

A joyous tear breaks free against my attempts at holding it back. With it, the floodgates open wide, and I weep. Not with the same somberness as before. I’m so overwhelmed and overjoyed; these tears are the only way I can express it.

I finally work up the courage to face Romeo. He’s crouched in the hole Father’s men left, his gun trained squarely on Father’s head.

“You’re going to reg?—”

Romeo opens the door with his free hand and gets back to his feet.

“Shut your fucking mouth. I’m talking, you’re listening,” Romeo barks. Father nods. He extends a hand to me, and I take it. “You’re ordered to cease operations at Mayfair Pharmaceuticals, effective immediately.”

“Why the hell would I do that?” Father asks, gulping as he stares down the barrel of

Romeo's pistol.

"Because, Billy boy, you've seen what I can do on my own. Next time I come knocking on this door, I'll have the Lion's Den behind me."

"Sal Lione sent you?" Father's turning different shades of green. Almost looks like he's going to be sick, knowing the mafia's after him.

"He did. Your move, Billy. I urge you to consider it wisely."

"If it's money you're after?"

"It's not. Not anymore." Romeo turns his eyes away from Father and looks deeply into mine.

I keep my eyes on Father, as much as I want to stare straight back into Romeo's. He will not get a chance to try anything stupid.

"You're really going to do this?" Father asks. For the first time in my life, I see a different emotion other than mockery on his face. "Set this whole world on fire for her?"

He's scared, but there's something else there too.

Respect.

"I would. I did. Isn't he proof?" Romeo flicks his wrist to point the gun at Martin.

"Why not kill me? End this before I can cause waves?" Father's breathing is erratic. As if this is the question that's going to have Romeo change his mind and end it.

“You didn’t kill me, either. Said it was because of Jess.” Romeo pulls me into his side and squeezes me against him tightly. “Has to mean somewhere deep down you love your daughter, that you want what’s best for her and know that it’s me.”

“And you are,” I say, nestling cozily under his arm. “My Romeo. My monster. My beast.”

Father talks again, but neither of us listens as we walk backward through the door. He keeps me tucked under his arm the entire walk out of Mayfair Manor and to his car a short distance up the road.

It’s over. He knows it, and so do I.

We can finally be happy.

EPILOGUE

JESS

Three Months Later

I can't get enough of him. His body, his mind, his soul. We've spent the better part of our three months together in his bed. His mouth feasting on mine, our bodies tangled in a magnificent web of desire, and our thoughts synced on one thing—how are we going to blow each other's minds this time?

"I've given it some more thought," Romeo says from the bottom of the bed. His cheek rests against my inner thigh.

Looks like it's his turn to come up with a new, inventive way to make me squeal.

Gentle kisses trail over my flesh, and his hands start to move to their favorite perch. My sensitive breasts that erupt pleasure straight to my core at Romeo's touch.

"What's that?" I ask, sinking my hands into his head and grabbing a handful of his hair. Using my new leverage, I pull it closer to his destination as my body shakes in eager anticipation.

And like the master of suspense Romeo is, he keeps me hanging by a thread as his tongue flicks out and makes a long run over my sex. My hips buck instinctively at the sensation, closing any gap between my body and his mouth.

Hungry growls rumble between my legs. I must have set him off, as not a second later, Romeo's tantalizing nibbles, kisses, and licks ascend my belly. Over the hills of my breasts and down the crest to my neck. His cock bobs eagerly where his mouth just finished, and the hefty head knocks desperately at my entrance.

No need for knocking, my beast. You're always welcome inside.

"You don't remember what we spoke about?" he asks, grazing my earlobe with his teeth.

"We've spoken about a lot," I answer, arching my hips into his erection. It slides haphazardly against my wetness, and we buckle and moan in synchronicity.

"Yes, but it's the pressing question I'm addressing." On the word pressing, Romeo thrusts his hips forward. The mix of pressure from his girth and the way it glides against my clit makes me whimper.

He's teasing me, and it won't stop until I've figured out what's gotten him in such a devilish mood.

Game on, my love. You know I don't like to lose.

"Selling the apartment and buying a house?"

"Wrong." He follows it with another buck of the hips and a squeeze of my breasts.

"The wedding?"

He grins at me, leans in, and gives me a deep kiss. In tandem, he moves one hand away from its favorite place and between our bodies.

“Wrong again.” His hand shuffles between our bodies for a while until it grabs hold of the base of his cock firmly. He uses it to guide his thick girth into me.

I’m surprised my brain still has any function left, yet through his intoxicating actions, the answer comes to mind. My arms swing wildly over his shoulders, latching onto him for dear life and sheer excitement. “Having a baby?”

“Bingo,” he says, slamming his length inside of me.

I receive him fully, crying out both from the intense sensations and the fireworks of excitement filling my head.

“And if we’re gonna do it, might as well start right fucking now.” He has a crazed look in his eyes again. The same one he always gets when we’re about to destroy his sheets and each other.

“You’re serious?” I feel like I want to cry. Ever since we walked away from the nightmares at Mayfair Manor, it’s all I could think about. Carrying my beast’s child. Bringing him or her into a loving home and giving them the life I could only dream of.

“I am. I want it more than anything. I was scared before. Scared I wouldn’t be able to raise a child. Give it the world and never look back. But with you at my side, I can move mountains. There’s nothing to be afraid of.” His legs give out halfway through his speech, bouncing his cock around inside me. He moans, collapsing further until his face is resting next to my ear on the pillow.

The sensations are too good to stop but too intense to stay this serious. We both know it.

“I love you, Jess. So fucking much. And there’s no better time than right now to start

this family,” he whispers between bated breaths.

“And I love you. More and more each day.” I dig my palms into his chest and flip Romeo on his back.

I climb on top of him, returning his cock to its home inside me. Sinking lower and lower, inspiring a fresh wave of noises and painstakingly pleased looks.

“Now, pump a baby into me,” I command when I’ve regained my composure from the initial acceptance of his enormous meat.

Like a good soldier, Romeo does as told. He grabs my hips, holding me in place, while his hips thrust from below, slamming into me with aching want.

Right here, with our sweaty bodies smashing together in this tantric dance, we usher in our lives. One of beauty, love, and family.

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ROMEO

One Year Later

“A year with no trouble from Billy Mayfair. Seems you’ve actually done it, Romeo,” the Lion whispers in my ear from behind. This is hardly how I wanted this conversation to go, but I’m relieved that it’s finally happening.

“Think he’s backing off for good?” I keep my eyes focused straight ahead of me while I talk.

“I do. I also knew you were going to be the right man for the job.” His firm hand slams into my back. It’s a reassuring pat, but damn, he nearly knocks me to my ass. “It took you twelve months to do what most of them can’t do in a lifetime. It’s why I’m fast-tracking you to a seat on my counsel.”

“Thank you, Don Lione.” Had he told me this ten minutes ago, I might’ve been excited. Right now? They don’t mean a thing to me.

“Want to know what makes me a little nervous about being here today?”

Oh, shit. Now isn’t the time to hear the Don’s scared. My heart thumps in my chest as the noise of the crowd surrounding us drills into my brain. I’m supposed to be having a happy day. The people around me are supposed to be blissful onlookers, not contributing to my mounting anxiety.

It’s supposed to be perfect.

Like her.

The love of my life and fire in my soul.

“Why?” I ask, but it barely escapes my rattling jaw.

“Because it’s going to be mighty difficult to keep control of my men when you’re so busy bending at the knee for your wives.” His tone is light, and hearing it makes my head stop spinning. “Congratulations, Romeo. May you and Jess live a long, wonderful life together.”

Another pat on the shoulder and another laborious task of standing upright. But his words were exactly what I needed to hear, and they came at the perfect time. Had I wanted to answer, the sound of the church organ kicking off the first note of Jess’s wedding march would’ve drowned me out.

My fears vanish into the sound, replaced by a feverish excitement at seeing her again. Every second without her in front of me is agony, and after today, I’ll never have to suffer again.

Jess steps into the hallway with a smile on her face and wet cheeks as our honored guests clap and cheer her on. Her stunning white dress makes her look like an angel, with a halo of golden hair tied neatly into a bun. In her swollen belly, she carries our first child with us on this special day.

There isn’t anything better in this world than picking your jaw off the floor at the sight of your true love. I know because I do it every time I blink.

Awestruck and left drooling that she’s at my side.

“I fucking love you.” The words explode out of me without warning when she meets me at the pulpit.

She leans in and kisses me, ignoring the tradition. We don't need some minister's approval for this. Our souls have connected in ways unimaginable, in ways this house of God will never know or understand.

“And I love you, my beast.”

Forever and always, hers.

The End

Thanks for reading!