



# The Omega Accountant (Corvino Family Mafia #1)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** He was never supposed to matter. Now he's the only thing that does.

Luca Bianchi keeps his head down. In a world where omegas are pawns, he's carved out a quiet life as the Corvino family's lead accountant—until a missing ten million dollars makes him the center of a deadly game.

Matteo Corvino, heir to the city's most powerful crime family, was bred for power, not mercy. His father demands an advantageous alpha-alpha marriage to secure their legacy. But when Luca's discovery threatens to unravel rival alliances, Matteo makes an unthinkable choice:

Claim the omega. Protect him at any cost.

As enemies close in and heat sabotages Luca's careful control, Matteo must decide: sacrifice love for power—or destroy everything to keep what's his. Because in this world, nothing is truly safe... except what an alpha claims as his own.

He was bred for power. He chose love instead. And once an alpha claims... he never lets go.

This Mpreg Mafia Omega MM gay romance novel is over 53,000 words of sweet Omega loving and the possessive Alpha that loves him.

**Total Pages (Source):** 17

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LUCA

The numbers refused to lie, no matter how desperately I wished they would.

I sat alone in the quiet sanctum of the Corvino accounting office, the building's shadows stretching long across my desk as evening descended over the city. Everyone else had gone home hours ago—normal people with normal lives who didn't spend their Friday nights reconciling the bloody finances of one of the city's most notorious families.

My fingers hovered over the keyboard, eyes fixed on the glowing screen where the numbers refused to add up. Ten million dollars. Missing . A void in the ledger that gaped like an open wound.

I removed my glasses, pressing the heels of my palms against my tired eyes. The faint scent of my own anxiety—subtle notes of citrus turned sour—registered in my consciousness, a biological warning system I'd spent years learning to ignore. Omegas weren't supposed to be accountants for the mafia. We weren't supposed to notice financial discrepancies. We certainly weren't supposed to be alone in the Corvino headquarters after dark.

Yet here I was.

I replaced my glasses, the world coming back into sharp focus as I scrolled through the digital ledger again. The missing money had been cleverly disguised, distributed

across multiple accounts in fragments that wouldn't trigger automated alerts. Someone who knew the system had done this—someone with access and authority.

"Think, Luca ," I whispered to myself, my voice barely disturbing the tomblike quiet of the office.

A memory surfaced: three weeks ago, passing the partially open door to Don Corvino's private office. Inside , the old alpha's right-hand man, Vincenzo , and the family's external security advisor huddled close, voices pitched low. I had slowed my steps, an old childhood habit of making myself invisible serving me well.

"—can't trace it back to us?" the advisor had asked.

"Not if your end is handled properly. The accounts are clean."

They'd fallen silent when Don Corvino entered from his private bathroom. I had continued walking, quickening my pace just enough to avoid suspicion. I'd thought nothing of it at the time—cryptic conversations were the currency of mafia life.

As I'd turned the corner, I'd nearly collided with him— Matteo Corvino , the Don's son. My body had registered his presence before my mind did. A wall of sandalwood, cedar, and something dangerously metallic—gun oil, perhaps—had enveloped me. My scent suppression patch had faltered for just a second, a biological glitch I couldn't control.

He'd steadied me with one hand, his touch burning through the fabric of my shirt. Dark eyes had assessed me, nostrils flaring slightly before his expression smoothed into cool detachment.

"Careful, accountant," he'd said, voice low.

He'd continued past me, but not before I caught a glimpse of something unexpected in his eyes—not the dismissive contempt most alphas showed omegas, but a flash of... consideration. The same look he'd given a young beta courier the month before, right before he'd intervened when the Don was ready to execute the boy for delivering bad news.

Now, with ten million missing and cleverly concealed, both fragments of memory took on new significance.

I pulled up the transaction records, cross-referencing dates and times. The diverted funds had begun to move exactly two days after that overheard conversation. Too much coincidence to ignore.

My fingers drummed against the polished wood of my desk as I weighed my options. Report the discrepancy, and I'd become a target for whoever was behind it. Stay silent, and I might be implicated when it eventually came to light—as it inevitably would.

The Corvino family didn't forgive financial betrayal. They certainly didn't show mercy to omegas who stuck their noses where they didn't belong.

The air conditioning cycled off, leaving the office in a silence so complete I could hear my own quickened heartbeat. I touched the scent suppression patch behind my ear—a habit when stress threatened to broadcast my emotional state to any passing alpha. I pressed harder than necessary, as if I could retroactively erase that moment of weakness with Matteo in the hallway.

My omega hindbrain had never quite forgotten the encounter—how his scent had triggered a cascade of unwanted responses, the sudden slick warmth, the way my throat had wanted to expose itself. Biology was a prison in its own way, one I'd spent my adult life trying to escape.

My decision crystallized in the quiet. I couldn't stay silent. Not with this much money. Not when it could bring down the wrath of Don Corvino on innocent staff if discovered later.

I would report it—but carefully, to the right person. Not the Don directly, nor his right-hand man Vincenzo who might be involved. Matteo Corvino was my only option. He had a reputation for being ruthless but fair. And I'd seen firsthand his unexpected mercy. The fact that my traitorous body hummed at the thought of being in his presence again was irrelevant—a biological inconvenience I would suppress just like always.

I methodically gathered evidence, downloading transaction records onto an encrypted drive. I compiled the data into a comprehensive report, attaching visualizations that clearly showed the pattern of diversion. The work calmed me, as numbers always did. In the world of accounting, there were no ambiguities, no political games—just the clean clarity of mathematics. The numbers didn't lie. But the men behind them—that was an entirely different matter.

When I finally finished, the digital clock on my desktop read 11:37 PM . I'd been there nearly sixteen hours. My suppressants were due for renewal—I could feel the edge of my natural scent beginning to seep through, a vulnerability I couldn't afford tonight of all nights.

I slipped the drive into my messenger bag, along with a printed copy of my findings sealed in a manila envelope. I shut down my computer and stretched, my body protesting the long hours of immobility.

The vast Corvino office building felt different at night—less like a legitimate business headquarters and more like the criminal fortress it truly was. My footsteps echoed on the marble floors as I made my way to the elevator, the weight of my discovery heavy in my bag and heavier on my mind.

The elevator carried me down to the lobby, the mirrored walls reflecting a man who appeared more composed than I felt. Dark curls slightly disheveled, wire-rimmed glasses perched on a straight nose, slim build in a wrinkled white shirt and navy slacks. Nothing remarkable. Nothing threatening. Just Luca Bianchi , the quiet omega accountant who melted into the background of Corvino operations.

Exactly as I'd always intended.

The night guard nodded to me as I crossed the lobby. " Working late again, Mr . Bianchi ?"

"The numbers don't balance themselves, Marco ." I offered a faint smile, careful to project nothing but tired professionalism.

"You want me to call you a car?"

"No need. I could use the fresh air."

A lie. What I needed was privacy, and the Corvino car service was too easily monitored.

Outside, the September night air carried the first hint of autumn chill. I buttoned my light jacket, clutching my bag closer to my side as I began the twelve-block walk to my apartment. The financial district gradually gave way to more residential streets, the buildings growing smaller, older, less imposing.

Three blocks from the office, the skin on the back of my neck prickled. Years of surviving in a world dominated by predatory alphas had honed instincts that went beyond conscious thought. I was being followed.

I didn't alter my pace or glance back. Instead , I took out my phone, pretending to

check messages while angling the screen to catch reflections in the dark glass. Two shadows moved behind me, keeping pace at about half a block's distance. Large men, moving with the practiced ease of professionals.

My heart rate doubled, but my steps remained steady. Panic would only draw attention to my awareness.

A bus rumbled past, and I made a split-second decision, darting across the street to catch it at the next stop. The bus doors hissed open just as I reached them. I boarded, paid my fare with shaking hands, and took a seat near the middle, finally allowing myself a glance out the window.

The two men stood on the corner, watching the bus pull away. One spoke into what looked like a radio or phone.

They weren't trying to be subtle. This was a message: We see you .

The bus carried me within three blocks of my apartment building—close enough for convenience, far enough that I hoped I'd lost my tail. I disembarked, quickly scanning the nearly empty street before walking briskly toward home.

The familiar outline of my apartment building appeared ahead, a modest six-story pre-war structure with a small courtyard entrance. As I approached, my steps slowed.

A black sedan idled across the street, its engine running, windows tinted too dark to see inside. The vehicle hadn't been there this morning.

My fingers tightened on the strap of my messenger bag. This wasn't coincidence. Someone knew—or suspected—what I'd found.

I kept walking, forcing myself not to look at the car again as I climbed the steps to

my building's entrance. The weight of unseen eyes followed me, boring into my back as I fumbled with my keys.

Inside, the familiar lobby with its faded carpet and mail slots offered little comfort. I bypassed the ancient elevator, taking the stairs two at a time to the fourth floor. Only when I reached my apartment door, unlocked it, and secured the three deadbolts behind me did I allow myself to exhale.

My apartment was dark and silent—a modest one-bedroom that served more as a place to sleep than a true home. I dropped my bag on the kitchen counter and moved to the window, carefully staying to the side as I peered down at the street.

The black sedan remained, patient and menacing.

My hand moved unconsciously to touch the scent suppression patch again, pressing it more firmly against my skin as if it could somehow make me completely invisible. The encrypted drive in my bag suddenly felt like a live grenade with its pin removed.

I'd uncovered something dangerous—something worth killing for.

And now they knew I knew.

I backed away from the window, decision made. I wouldn't be sleeping tonight. Instead, I'd prepare. Review the evidence again. Plan my approach for the morning when I would request a private meeting with Matteo Corvino.

If I survived until then.

In the darkness of my kitchen, I removed the drive from my bag and held it in my palm, its weight insignificant compared to the information it contained. "What have you gotten yourself into?" I whispered to the empty apartment.



Only the distant hum of the city and the oppressive silence of fear answered me.

I tried to slow my breathing, but the adrenaline coursing through my system had triggered something worse—something biological. A bead of slick warmth formed between my thighs, my body's unconscious response to danger. Stress could trigger pre-heat symptoms in some omegas, a cruel evolutionary trick meant to find protection through submission.

The patch at my neck was failing, overwhelmed by my body's chemistry. A faint sweetness—honey and citrus—began to permeate my small kitchen. I pressed a trembling hand against the scent gland at my throat, feeling it swell slightly beneath my fingers.

The honey-citrus cloud in my kitchen only made it worse, triggering an unwanted cascade of sensory memory. Suddenly I was back in that hallway, enveloped in sandalwood, cedar, the faint metallic trace of gun oil. My body responded to the phantom scent as if Matteo were actually present—the memory of him overlaying my own scent like an invisible claim I couldn't scrub away. My omega hindbrain whispered treacherous thoughts: how our scents had mingled so perfectly in that brief moment, how the metallic note in his scent could sharpen the sweetness in mine.

I moved quickly to my bathroom medicine cabinet, already knowing what I'd find. Empty . My backup supply had been depleted after last month's audit stress had triggered similar symptoms. The Corvino -approved pharmacy that supplied omega employees with regulated suppressants wouldn't open until 8 AM , and my prescription required in-person verification—another way the family maintained control over their omega staff.

Of all the nights for my suppressants to falter, it had to be this one.

I bit back a bitter laugh. This was the reality of being an omega—even my own body

would betray me when I most needed control. Tomorrow I'd face Matteo Corvino , an alpha powerful enough to make lesser men kneel with just his presence, and I'd be fighting my biology every step of the way.

In the world I inhabited, silence was not the absence of sound, but a language all its own—dense with implications, heavy with potential violence. And tonight, that silence spoke volumes about my precarious position, caught between loyalty to numbers that couldn't lie and men who wouldn't hesitate to kill for them, all while my treacherous omega nature threatened to unravel what little protection I had built for myself.

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*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:18 am*

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MATTEO

The family estate loomed against the twilight sky like a monument to power—cold, imposing, impenetrable. Just like my father wanted it.

I stood at the threshold of my father's study, the scent of aged leather and cigar smoke hanging in the air between us. Don Corvino sat behind his mahogany desk, the embodiment of old-world alpha authority. His silver hair caught the lamplight, creating a halo effect that belied the ruthlessness beneath.

"You're late," he said without looking up from the papers before him.

I didn't offer an explanation. Explanations were for those who required approval. "You called. I came."

His eyes finally rose to meet mine. The same dark brown as my own, yet infinitely colder. "Sit."

I complied, occupying the chair across from him with deliberate ease, one ankle resting on the opposite knee. The posture of a man unconcerned. A lie we both recognized.

"The Souza alliance," my father began, placing his fountain pen precisely parallel to the edge of his desk. "It's time to finalize terms."

The muscles along my spine tensed imperceptibly. This conversation had been inevitable since Emilio Souza's daughter had come of age three months ago. An alpha-alpha union between the families would create a powerful bloodline, a merger of territories that would reshape the city's underworld. Strategic . Profitable . Expected .

"No," I said.

The word hung between us, simple and irrevocable.

My father's scent shifted, pine and amber sharpening with sudden anger, though his expression remained unchanged. " It wasn't a request, Matteo ."

"I'm aware."

"You're thirty-two. It's time you produced an heir."

"I'll produce an heir when I choose, with whom I choose." I held his gaze without flinching, two alphas engaged in a silent battle of wills. " But it won't be with Sofia Souza ."

My father's fingers curled against the polished wood, the only visible sign of his mounting rage. " You would reject the most advantageous match in the city? For what? Some omega whore you've been hiding?"

"There's no one," I replied, the truth cooling my words. " I simply won't be a pawn in your political game."

"Everything is a political game." He stood, a gesture meant to emphasize his dominance, though we both knew I'd outgrown that particular intimidation tactic years ago. " The Souza girl comes with territory east of the river. Her bloodline is

pure alpha for four generations. The match is perfect."

"The match is convenient for you." I remained seated, a small defiance. " And irrelevant to me."

His palm struck the desk, papers scattering. " You are my son. My heir. You will do as I command."

"I am your son," I agreed, standing now to meet him eye to eye. " And I will lead this family when the time comes. But I will not breed on command like some stud animal."

The tension between us thickened, two alpha scents clashing in the confined space. The study had witnessed this scene countless times—father and son, locked in the eternal struggle of succession. Each time, the power balanced shifted incrementally in my direction. We both felt it.

A knock at the door interrupted the standoff. Vincenzo , my father's consigliere, entered without waiting for permission—a liberty granted only to him.

"Pardon the interruption, Don Corvino ." Vincenzo's eyes flickered between us, reading the situation with the precision of a man who had survived decades in our world. " There's a situation requiring immediate attention."

My father's jaw tightened. " What situation?"

"Financial." Vincenzo's gaze shifted to me briefly. " The quarterly review shows... irregularities."

Interest sparked through my irritation. " What kind of irregularities?"

"Ten million," Vincenzo answered flatly. " Missing ."

My father's rage redirected instantly, a predator scenting new prey. " Who ?"

"We're investigating, but the accounting department would have noticed. Someone there may be involved."

The accounting department. The quiet, methodical team that handled the legitimate face of our operations. Mostly betas, with a few carefully vetted omegas for their natural attention to detail. Including one particular omega with wire-rimmed glasses and a scent that had lingered in my memory for weeks.

"I want the entire department questioned," my father declared. " Starting with that omega—the one with the curls."

"Bianchi," I supplied, the name emerging before I could stop it. My father's eyebrow raised a fraction, noting my immediate recall.

"Yes, Bianchi ," he agreed. " Omegas are easily compromised. Start there."

Something protective and fierce uncoiled in my chest. " I'll handle the investigation."

My father's expression shifted to calculating. " Eager to prove yourself useful somewhere, since you refuse your duty elsewhere?"

I didn't rise to the bait. " The financial operations fall under my purview. I'll find who's responsible."

"See that you do." He dismissed me with a wave. " And Matteo —this doesn't change our discussion. The Souza alliance will happen. One way or another."

I left without acknowledging the threat, Vincenzo falling into step beside me as we exited the study.

"The Don is growing impatient with your resistance," he murmured once we were beyond earshot.

"The Don is growing impatient with everything," I replied. " What's really happening with the missing money?"

Vincenzo's expression remained carefully neutral. " Exactly what I said. Ten million, gone. Disguised as legitimate transfers to shell companies, then vanished."

"And Bianchi ? Why is my father so quick to accuse him?"

"He's an omega in a position usually reserved for betas. The Don never trusted the arrangement."

I stopped walking, turning to face my father's most trusted advisor. " But you didn't answer my question, old friend. Why Bianchi specifically?"

Vincenzo hesitated, something he rarely did. " There were surveillance reports. He was seen accessing financial records after hours several times this week. And tonight, he left with what appeared to be data."

Interesting. " Show me the surveillance."

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The night air carried a metallic edge as I stepped from the car, the familiar weight of my Beretta nestled against my ribs. The street outside Luca Bianchi's apartment building stretched empty and quiet—deceptively so. My senses, honed through years

of navigating the predatory undercurrents of our world, detected the watchers immediately.

Three men. One in a black sedan across the street, engine idling. Two more positioned in the shadows of adjacent buildings, their scents betraying them before their silhouettes became visible. Pine and bergamot—the signature pheromones Souza enforcers carried.

Not my father's men. Souza's .

Cold fury ignited beneath my controlled exterior. The omega accountant who had discovered financial discrepancies was being watched by our rivals, not our family. The implications crystallized with disturbing clarity—whatever Bianchi had found, whatever he now carried, the Souza family wanted it. Wanted him.

I moved with deliberate purpose, not toward Bianchi's building but toward the closest watcher—a broad-shouldered figure half-concealed in the recessed doorway of an abandoned storefront. He registered my approach too late, recognition flashing across his features a moment before my hand closed around his throat, slamming him against the brick wall with enough force to rattle his teeth.

"Corvino," he choked, hands rising instinctively before freezing as he felt the press of my blade against his ribs—not enough to break skin, but a promise of what could follow.

"Souza sends dogs to watch my territory now?" My voice remained conversational, though my scent had sharpened with alpha aggression, filling the confined space between us. "Interesting choice."

"Public street," he managed, the words emerging strained against the pressure on his windpipe. "No territory claimed here."



I leaned closer, watching his pupils dilate with instinctive fear as my alpha pheromones intensified. " Everything within my sight is my territory. Everyone under my protection is mine." The blade pressed fractionally deeper, a needle-point of pressure. " That includes Bianchi ."

Surprise flickered across his features—the truth beneath my claim registering through his panic. He hadn't expected this. None of them had. The omega accountant was supposed to be expendable, unprotected, an easy target for whatever scheme Souza had designed.

"Tell Emilio a message from me." I eased the pressure on his throat just enough to ensure comprehension. " No one watches Bianchi . No one approaches him. No one breathes near him without my permission." The blade twisted slightly, drawing a single drop of blood that bloomed dark against his shirt. " He's mine. Whatever he found, whatever he knows—mine."

I released him abruptly, watching him stumble forward, one hand rising to his throat where my fingers had left marks that would bruise into spectacular evidence by morning.

"Go," I ordered, voice dropping to the register my captains recognized as final warning before violence. " Now . Take the others. If I see Souza men within ten blocks of this building again, I won't be delivering messages."

He retreated, eyes never leaving mine until he reached the safety of distance. Through the shadows, I watched him signal the others—a quick gesture that sent the sedan pulling away from the curb, the second watcher melting into the darkness of side streets.

Only when they had disappeared did I turn toward Bianchi's building, alpha instincts still thrumming with territorial imperative. The scent of the Souza enforcer clung to

my skin like a reminder of boundaries crossed, of threats that would require more permanent resolution soon.

The lobby doors opened to my approach, the night guard's expression shifting from professional alertness to the careful deference our family name inspired throughout the city.

"Mr. Corvino ," he acknowledged, posture straightening imperceptibly. " How can I assist you this evening?"

"Luca Bianchi . Fourth floor. Call him down."

The guard hesitated, protocol warring with self-preservation. " Sir , I'm not authorized to?—"

"Call him," I repeated, letting alpha command color the words. " Tell him Matteo Corvino is here regarding the financial discrepancies he discovered today."

Recognition flashed across the guard's features—not of the situation but of the inevitable outcome should he continue resistance. He reached for the phone, dialing with careful precision.

"Mr. Bianchi ? My apologies for the late hour. There's a Mr . Corvino in the lobby for you. Regarding ...financial matters." A pause. " Yes , sir. I'll inform him."

He replaced the receiver, nodding toward the elevator. " He'll be down momentarily, Mr . Corvino ."

I moved to the center of the lobby, positioning myself where I could observe all entrances simultaneously—a habit formed through years of navigating spaces where threats rarely announced themselves before striking. The elevator hummed to life,

numbers illuminating in sequence as it descended from the fourth floor.

When the doors opened, Luca Bianchi stepped out cautiously, his slender frame tense with alertness that belied the composed expression he maintained. Dark curls fell slightly disheveled across his forehead, wire-rimmed glasses perched on a straight nose, slim build encased in the same white shirt and navy slacks he'd worn at the office. Nothing remarkable on the surface. Nothing that explained the instant recognition that triggered when our eyes met—a chemical awareness that transcended conscious thought.

His scent reached me even from this distance—subtle notes of honey and citrus partially masked by suppressants but unmistakable to alpha senses. An omega in low-grade distress, controlled but present beneath the professional veneer he projected.

My jaw tightened involuntarily, teeth clenching against the unexpected potency of his scent. The lobby suddenly felt too warm, confined in a way that had nothing to do with tactical vulnerability and everything to do with alpha biology responding to something my conscious mind wasn't ready to acknowledge.

"Mr. Corvino ," he greeted, voice steady despite the anxiety evident in his scent. " This is...unexpected."

"We need to talk," I replied, deliberately controlling my breathing through my mouth to limit how much of his scent reached my receptors. Even so, the honey-citrus notes registered on my palate, making my next words emerge with a subtle roughness I couldn't entirely suppress. " Not here."

Wariness flickered across his features, calculation evident as he assessed options, risks, potential outcomes. Smart . Cautious . The instincts of prey recognizing predator while maintaining dignity—qualities that had registered in our brief hallway encounter weeks earlier.

"Perhaps we could schedule a meeting tomorrow at the office," he suggested, maintaining formal distance both physically and verbally. " I'd be happy to discuss any financial concerns during business hours."

"This isn't a request, Mr . Bianchi ." I moved closer, watching his pupils dilate slightly as my scent registered—alpha asserting territorial claim through pheromones rather than mere words. " There are men watching your building. Not my father's men. Souza's ."

His composure faltered momentarily, a microexpression of genuine fear flashing beneath professional calm. " I don't understand. Why would the Souzas? —"

"That's what we're going to discuss," I interrupted, moving toward the exit and gesturing for him to follow. " My car is waiting. It's not safe for you here."

To his credit, he didn't move immediately, intelligence and caution warring visibly as he processed limited options against potential dangers. " How do I know I'm safer with you?"

The question—direct, unembellished with omega deference—registered as both challenge and unexpected point of respect. This was no cowering subordinate seeking alpha protection, but a man weighing calculated risks against immediate threats.

"Because whatever you found in those financial records," I answered with equal directness, " I want to protect it. And you. The Souzas want to eliminate both."

His gaze held mine for a measured moment, assessment visible in eyes sharper than most would expect from his unassuming exterior. Then he nodded once, decision reached through necessity rather than trust.

"Let me get my coat."

When he returned moments later, messenger bag clutched protectively against his side, I moved instinctively to position myself between him and potential threat vectors—the doorway, the darkened street beyond, the shadows where Souza watchers had stood minutes earlier. My hand settled naturally at the small of his back as we exited the building, a gesture that combined guidance with possession, with declaration.

Before we stepped fully outside, I paused at the threshold, turning to face him. Under the guise of straightening his collar—a simple, professional adjustment—my thumb brushed deliberately over the sensitive scent gland at his nape. A fleeting touch, almost casual, yet unmistakably territorial. His pupils dilated in immediate response, body recognizing the alpha claim even if his mind didn't fully process it. The subtle press left invisible traces of my scent on his skin—a chemical warning to any alpha who might approach. A primitive declaration: this omega is protected.

The contact, even through layers of clothing, sent heat spiking through my palm. The urge to slide my hand higher, to cup the vulnerable nape of his neck and leave my scent there where any rival alpha would detect it, crashed through me with visceral intensity. I inhaled too deeply, drawing his scent into my lungs, and had to exhale slowly through clenched teeth to maintain control. Every instinct screamed to lower my mouth to the nape exposed beneath my touch, to seal this fragile truce with a bite that would silence rivals and doubts alike. Every alpha instinct demanded I press my face into the curve where his neck met shoulder, where his scent would be strongest, and mark him as claimed territory.

Mine to protect. Mine to defend. Mine .

He stiffened slightly beneath my touch but didn't pull away, practical enough to recognize the protection it offered as we moved through darkness toward the waiting car. His scent shifted subtly—anxiety tempered with grudging recognition of safer passage, of alpha shield against external threats.

The thoughts registered with unsettling intensity, alpha biology responding to perceived threat against what instinct had already categorized as territory—not just the omega himself but what he represented, what he had discovered, what he might mean to larger strategies still forming in my consciousness.

"Where are we going?" he asked as Carlo opened the car door, his expression betraying nothing of the tension evident in his posture.

"Somewhere secure," I answered, guiding him into the backseat before sliding in beside him. "Somewhere the Souzas can't reach you."

In the confined space of the backseat, his scent intensified—honey and citrus notes becoming more pronounced as his anxiety elevated his body temperature, compromising the effectiveness of the suppressants. I shifted slightly, creating marginal distance as I detected the faintest trace of omega slick emerging beneath the chemical barriers—a biological response he couldn't control and I couldn't ignore.

Something wasn't right. Even accounting for stress, his suppressants shouldn't be failing this noticeably. Beneath the citrus and anxiety lay the unmistakable warm undertones of pre-heat—subtle but present, like the first warning tremors before an earthquake. Either his medication was substandard, or something more deliberate was at play.

Even under stress, a standard suppressant shouldn't fail this fast. Unless the dosage was off. Or tampered with. A suspicion I'd have to confirm later—when we were somewhere safe.

My pupils dilated in the dimness, vision sharpening with predatory focus that had nothing to do with external threats and everything to do with the omega now under my protection. Under my influence.

As the car pulled away from the curb, distance growing between the omega accountant and the threats that had converged around him, something primitive and possessive settled in my chest—a certainty that transcended strategic calculation or tactical advantage.

Whatever Luca Bianchi had discovered, whatever danger now circled him like wolves scenting vulnerability, he had become mine to protect through alpha imperative that recognized no authority beyond its own claiming instinct. Not my father's orders. Not Souza ambition. Not even the careful boundaries I'd maintained between professional authority and personal entanglement.

Mine to defend. Mine to shelter. Mine .

The territorial claim had been staked—first against Souza watchers, now in the protective positioning that kept the omega accountant within the radius of my scent, my vigilance, my defense. What had begun as strategic interest had evolved into something more primal, more absolute in the span of a single night.

The implications would require analysis later. For now, the singular focus remained: secure what was mine against those who would take or harm it.

As simple and as complex as that.

### LUCA

The private elevator ascended with unsettling smoothness, a glass and steel coffin carrying me toward judgment. My reflection stared back at me from polished surfaces—dark circles beneath eyes that had seen no sleep, hair slightly disheveled despite my attempts to appear composed. The manila folder clutched against my chest might as well have been a bomb, its contents just as destructive.

How had it come to this? Twelve hours ago, I'd been alone in my apartment, windows locked against watching eyes. Now I stood in Matteo Corvino's private elevator, summoned without explanation in the gray hours before dawn, the memory of his hand at the small of my back like a brand against my skin.

The way he'd confronted those men outside my building—the naked aggression in his stance, the territorial flare of his scent marking the night air—played on endless loop behind my eyes. Not just an alpha asserting dominance, but something more primal. More personal. Tell Emilio no one watches him. He's mine. The words hadn't been meant for me to hear, but they'd carried on the night air, settling into my bones with unsettling weight.

The elevator slowed, my stomach lurching with it. My scent soured with anxiety, the citrus notes turning sharp despite the fresh patch I'd applied. The doors parted silently, revealing a minimalist foyer of marble and brushed steel—the entrance to Matteo Corvino's private penthouse.



Carlo stood waiting, expression unreadable. " This way."

I followed mutely, each step carrying me deeper into alpha territory. The penthouse sprawled in gleaming monochrome, floor-to-ceiling windows offering a panoramic view of the city below, still shrouded in pre-dawn darkness. The space smelled of him—sandalwood and cedar, that dangerous metallic undertone—but subtly, as if he maintained control even over his own scent.

"Wait here." Carlo gestured to a sitting area, then disappeared down a hallway.

Alone, I perched on the edge of a leather armchair, manila folder balanced on my knees. The room felt too large, too exposed, every surface reflecting my discomfort back at me in perfect clarity. Time stretched, elastic and uncertain.

"You look like you're waiting for execution."

The voice cut through the silence without warning. I startled, nearly dropping my folder as Matteo Corvino materialized from a doorway I hadn't noticed. He moved with predatory grace, dressed in tailored black pants and a charcoal button-down, sleeves rolled to expose forearms corded with muscle. No tie, no jacket—casual, yet no less intimidating.

"Isn't that what this is?" The words escaped before I could filter them, exhaustion fraying my usual caution.

Something like amusement flickered across his face. " That remains to be seen."

He settled into the chair opposite mine, posture relaxed yet commanding the entire space. Between us stretched a glass coffee table—neutral territory that felt woefully inadequate as a barrier.

"You've been busy." His eyes, dark and penetrating, fixed on the folder in my hands.  
" Working late. Taking files home. Being followed."

The directness stole my breath. " You ... know about that?"

"I know many things, Mr . Bianchi ."

 He leaned forward slightly, his scent intensifying with the movement. " Including that you're missing your regular suppressants. And that there were three alphas marking territory outside your apartment last night."

Heat crawled up my neck, humiliation mixing with fear. My body's betrayal—exposed so casually, as if discussing the weather. " I don't see how that's relevant."

"Everything is relevant." His tone remained even, controlled. " Including why someone would set surveillance on an accountant. Why they would intimidate rather than eliminate." His gaze sharpened. " What did you find, Luca ?"

My name in his mouth felt intimate, dangerous. I swallowed, focusing on the facts—the only solid ground in this quicksand conversation. " Ten million dollars. Missing ."

"Show me."

My fingers trembled slightly as I opened the folder, extracting the meticulous documentation I'd prepared. Spreadsheets , transaction logs, pattern analyses—the language of numbers that had always made sense when nothing else did. I placed them on the glass table between us, creating a paper barrier between predator and prey.

"These transactions," I began, falling into the familiar rhythm of explanation, "show

systematic diversion through seemingly legitimate channels. Small enough to avoid automated flags, large enough to accumulate significantly over time."

Matteo didn't touch the papers, merely studied them from his position. " And when did this begin?"

"Three weeks ago." I indicated a highlighted date. " The pattern suggests inside knowledge of our verification protocols. Someone who understands how to subvert our safeguards."

"Someone like you." It wasn't a question.

The implication hung in the air between us, heavy and accusatory. I met his gaze directly, a dangerous choice for an omega facing an alpha in his territory, but fear had hardened into something like defiance.

"If I had stolen it, I wouldn't be sitting here with evidence." My voice remained steady, surprising even myself. " And I wouldn't have spent sixteen hours documenting a theft I committed."

His expression remained unreadable, but something shifted in his scent—the metallic note receding slightly. " No . You wouldn't."

He reached for the papers finally, long fingers sorting through my work with unexpected care. I watched, unable to look away, as he absorbed the information I'd spent the night compiling. His focus was absolute, attention shifting between documents with predatory intensity.

When he looked up again, his eyes had changed—calculation replacing suspicion. " You've traced the shell companies?"

"As far as possible without external resources. They lead to accounts in the Cayman Islands , then disappear." I hesitated, then pushed forward. " But I overheard something. Three weeks ago. Outside your father's office."

Interest sparked in his expression. " Tell me."

I recounted the conversation I'd witnessed— Vincenzo and the security advisor, their cryptic exchange, the timing that aligned too perfectly with the missing funds. As I spoke, Matteo's posture shifted imperceptibly, tension gathering in his shoulders.

"You didn't report this immediately." Again , not a question.

"I didn't understand its significance until I found the discrepancies." I met his gaze again, unwisely. " And I wasn't certain who I could trust."

"But you decided to trust me." His voice lowered, something almost like curiosity threading through it. " Why ?"

The question pierced straight through my carefully constructed explanations. Why had I chosen Matteo Corvino ? The ruthless heir apparent, known for cold efficiency rather than mercy? The answer hovered in the space between truth and self-preservation.

"Process of elimination," I said finally. " You weren't in the conversation I overheard. And you have the authority to act without... excessive complications."

A lie by omission. I didn't mention our hallway encounter, how the memory of his scent had lingered, how I'd seen him spare the young courier when his father would have destroyed him. How something in me had recognized something in him—a complexity beyond the mafia heir facade.

"Excessive complications," he repeated, the ghost of a smile touching his lips. " An interesting euphemism for execution."

The word hung between us, stark and unembellished. My throat tightened. " Am I wrong?"

"No." He gathered the papers, tapping them into a neat stack. " You're not wrong. But neither are you safe."

He rose suddenly, moving to a sideboard where crystal decanters caught the first gray light of dawn. The silence stretched as he poured amber liquid into two glasses, returning to place one before me.

"Drink."

I eyed the glass warily. " It's 5:30 in the morning."

"And you've been awake all night, pursued by unknown entities, and now sit in the den of what you perceive as another predator." He took a measured sip from his own glass. " Circumstances justify exceptions."

Tentatively, I lifted the glass, the liquor burning a clean path down my throat. The warmth spread, momentarily dulling the edge of exhaustion and fear.

Matteo resumed his seat, studying me with unsettling focus. " My father believes you took the money."

The statement landed like a physical blow. " What ?"

"The Don has made his assessment. He plans to make an example of you." His voice remained neutral, as if discussing business rather than my likely execution. " The

evidence you've gathered won't matter. He's decided."

The room seemed suddenly airless, the walls pressing inward. " But I didn't?—"

"I know." Matteo cut me off, the certainty in his tone stilling my protest. " But what you did or didn't do is irrelevant to him. You're convenient. Expendable . An omega in a position usually reserved for betas—already a point of contention."

My fingers tightened around the glass. " So I've been summoned to hear my death sentence?"

"No." Something shifted in his expression then, a hardening of resolve. " You've been brought here so I can claim you."

The words didn't register immediately, hanging in the air like smoke before meaning solidified. When comprehension dawned, it felt like the floor had vanished beneath me.

"Claim me," I repeated, the words foreign on my tongue. " As what, exactly?"

"As mine." The simplicity of his answer belied its monumental implications. " My omega. Under my protection and authority. Beyond my father's reach."

A hollow laugh escaped me, bordering on hysteria. " You can't be serious."

"Entirely." His gaze never wavered. " It's the only play that keeps you alive and gives us time to identify who's really behind the theft."

"Us." I set the glass down carefully, afraid my shaking hands would betray me further. " There is no us, Mr . Corvino . I'm an accountant who found a discrepancy. Nothing more."

"You're an omega who uncovered a multi-million dollar theft within my family's organization, compromising enough people that someone has already tried to intimidate you into silence." His voice hardened. " And you're experiencing suppressant failure while three unknown alphas marked territory outside your home. The situation has moved well beyond accounting, wouldn't you agree?"

Put so bluntly, my position seemed even more precarious. The room felt suddenly too warm, my skin too tight. The lingering effects of pre-heat symptoms whispered beneath my skin, heightened by stress and proximity to an alpha whose scent called to something primitive within me.

"A claiming is permanent," I managed finally, falling back on legalities when emotions threatened to overwhelm logic. " Legally binding. Biologically irreversible."

"I'm aware of the implications." He leaned forward, close enough that his scent enveloped me—sandalwood and cedar, tinged now with something warmer. " But it doesn't have to be... conventional. This is about protection, Luca . Nothing more."

His words hung in the air between us, a promise with hidden edges. I knew enough about biology to understand the deception in his reassurance. Conventional or not, a public claim would trigger biochemical changes—my scent permanently altered to carry his marker, my body's cyclic patterns recognizing his alpha presence, potential bonding hormones released during any intimate contact. The changes would begin immediately, subtle but inexorable. There was no such thing as a temporary claim in the biological sense, only varying degrees of completion. His "unconventional" offer merely suggested degrees of intimacy, not fundamental alterations to the claiming process itself.

Protection. The word held weight in our world—currency more valuable than money, more binding than contracts. But protection came with prices, with expectations.

With ownership.

"And what happens afterward?" The question emerged smaller than intended. " When you've found who took the money? When you no longer need my evidence? What happens to your claimed omega then?"

Something flickered across his features—too complex to name, gone before I could interpret it. " We'll address that when the time comes."

Non-answer. Political response. I looked away, out toward the windows where dawn had begun painting the sky in watercolor strokes of pink and gold. The city stretched below, a landscape of possibilities now narrowed to a single, impossible choice.

"Your father..." I began.

"Will be furious," Matteo finished, a hint of grim satisfaction coloring his tone. " Which is a secondary benefit."

That drew my attention back to him. " You want to antagonize the Don ?"

"I want to protect what's mine." The possessive pronoun rolled off his tongue with disturbing ease. " And you, Luca Bianchi , with your missing millions and your meticulous records, are now mine to protect."

The declaration should have horrified me. Instead , something molten pooled low in my belly, omega instincts responding to alpha certainty even as my mind rebelled against the primitive reaction. I blamed the pre-heat, the exhaustion, the fear—anything but the dangerous pull I'd felt since our hallway encounter.

"You don't even know me," I protested weakly.



"I know enough." He set his glass down, the movement deliberate. " I know you're intelligent, observant, and brave to the point of foolishness. I know you value integrity over self-preservation. I know your scent..." He paused, nostrils flaring slightly. " Honey and citrus, with something underneath like warm rain on stone."

Heat bloomed across my face at the intimate assessment. " That's biology, not knowledge."

"Perhaps." His eyes darkened. " But it's still truth."

Silence stretched between us, taut with unspoken implications. Outside , the sun breached the horizon fully, bathing the penthouse in golden light that felt incongruous with the weight of our conversation.

"If I refuse?" The question barely rose above a whisper.

Matteo's expression hardened. " Then they'll pin this on you. The evidence against you is already being manufactured. You'll be eliminated—quietly, cleanly—and the real thieves will continue operating within our organization."

The brutal assessment stripped away any illusions I might have harbored about my position. I'd walked into something much larger than missing money—a power struggle within the Corvino family, with me as collateral damage.

"And if I agree?" My voice strengthened slightly, resolve forming from desperation. " What does that entail exactly?"

"A public claim. My mark. Living here, under my protection." He gestured to the expansive penthouse. " Your life continues, but with my name attached to it. My scent on your skin."

The clinical description couldn't disguise the intimacy of what he proposed. A claim meant teeth against my throat, his scent permanently altering my own, his presence a constant shadow even when absent. It meant belonging in ways that transcended contracts or vows.

"This is insane." I stood abruptly, needing distance, movement. The folder fell forgotten to the floor, papers scattering like fallen leaves. " You can't just... claim a person because it's convenient."

Matteo remained seated, watching my agitation with unnerving calm. " Convenient would be letting my father have you. Convenient would be finding another way to track the missing money. This ?" He gestured between us. " This is anything but convenient, Luca ."

I paced toward the windows, staring out at a city carrying on in ignorance of the impossible choice confronting me. Death or claiming. Execution or possession. Neither option left room for the life I'd carefully constructed—invisible, independent, free within the confines of a dangerous world.

Behind me, I heard Matteo rise, his footsteps measuring the distance between us until he stood close enough that his scent enveloped me, his heat radiated against my back. Not touching, but present in a way that made every nerve ending aware.

"I know what I'm asking," he said quietly, his voice closer to my ear than expected. " I know what it costs you."

I turned to face him, closer than wisdom allowed. This near, I could see flecks of amber in his dark eyes, the shadow of stubble along his jaw, the slight softening of his mouth that belied his ruthless reputation.

"Then why ask it?" The question emerged raw, honest.

"Because the alternative is unacceptable." The simple declaration carried weight beyond its words, something fierce underlining his tone.

The memory of the previous night flashed through my mind— Matteo pushing a Souza enforcer against the wall, his voice cold with promise as he declared, He's mine . Not calculation but instinct. Not strategy but claim.

I searched his face for deceit, for calculation, for the coldness that defined his reputation. Instead , I found intensity and something else—something that looked unsettlingly like protectiveness, like possession not yet claimed but already acknowledged.

"Then let me claim you." The words hung between us, a challenge more than acquiescence.

His eyebrows rose fractionally. " I don't understand."

"If this is about protection, then let it protect us both." I found courage in desperation, in the absurdity of our situation. " You claim me, I claim you. Equal . Not ownership."

A startled laugh escaped him—the first truly unguarded reaction I'd witnessed. " That's not how it works, little accountant."

"Why not?" I pressed, emboldened by his surprise. " If we're inventing solutions, why not invent one that doesn't make me property?"

Something shifted in his expression—respect, perhaps, or amusement at my audacity. " You continue to surprise me, Luca Bianchi ."

"Is that a yes or a no?" I met his gaze directly, a dangerous challenge from omega to

alpha.

Matteo stepped closer, erasing the careful distance between us until barely inches remained. His hand rose, hesitated, then settled against the side of my neck where my pulse raced beneath thin skin. The touch burned, electric and foreign and somehow inevitable.

"Neither," he said softly. " It's a negotiation. One we'll continue after you've slept and I've arranged our public announcement."

His thumb brushed once, deliberately, across my scent gland, sending a shiver of awareness through my entire body. Not a claim—not yet—but a promise. A warning. A question yet to be fully answered.

"Then I'll pin this on you," I managed, voice steadier than I felt with his hand still warm against my neck.

The corner of his mouth curved upward—not quite a smile, but close. " I expect nothing less."

His hand fell away, leaving my skin cooling in its absence. Matteo stepped back, restoring professional distance between us. " Carlo will show you to a room. Sleep . We'll continue when you're rested."

The abrupt shift from intimate negotiation to practical directive left me disoriented. I nodded mutely, suddenly aware of the bone-deep exhaustion weighing on me, the emotional toll of the past twenty-four hours.

As if summoned by thought alone, Carlo appeared in the doorway. " Sir ?"

"Mr. Bianchi needs rest," Matteo said, his tone reverting to the controlled cadence of

the underboss. " The blue room. Post guards. No one enters without my authorization."

"Understood." Carlo nodded toward a hallway. " This way, Mr . Bianchi . "

I moved to follow, then paused, turning back to Matteo . " The evidence?—"

"Is safe with me." He had already gathered the scattered papers, restoring them to the folder. " As are you. For now."

The qualification hung between us—a reminder that nothing was settled, nothing certain. I nodded once, acceptance without agreement, and followed Carlo from the room, the phantom sensation of Matteo's thumb against my scent gland lingering like a promise waiting to be kept or broken.

The weight of his declaration from the previous night followed me— He's mine —not just posturing for Souza enforcers, I realized, but declaration of intent. The first public claim that would soon become private possession, teeth against vulnerable skin, biochemistry altered beyond reversal.

Mine, his alpha instinct had already decided.

The negotiation my mind demanded would be fought on territory already conceded by my biology, my body's treacherous response to his presence speaking a language more ancient than words. The only question remaining was whether choice could be preserved within constraint, whether partnership could be forged from possession.

Whether Matteo Corvino's claim— mine to protect —might become something other than the ownership my life had been constructed to avoid.

The blue bedroom door closed behind me with quiet finality, lock engaging with

mechanical precision. Not imprisonment, Matteo would insist. Protection .

The distinction felt increasingly irrelevant as I sank onto the edge of the bed, exhaustion claiming conscious thought while my neck still burned with the memory of alpha touch, of promise not yet fulfilled but already imprinted on skin, on scent, on future narrowed to the single word that had followed me from street to penthouse to locked bedroom.

Mine.

4

MATTEO

The family estate loomed against the twilight sky, no longer a childhood home but a battlefield where blood ties became chains. I adjusted my cufflinks—platinum, understated, lethal in their elegance—and felt Luca's presence beside me in the car, a quiet counterpoint to the storm gathering in my chest.

"We don't have to do this," he said, voice barely disturbing the air between us.

I didn't look at him. Couldn't. His scent had strengthened in the hours since he'd slept, the honey-citrus notes richer, more complex. The fresh suppressant patch he'd applied held, but couldn't mask the deepening undertones of pre-heat simmering beneath the chemical veil. What would happen when I claimed him publicly was already unfolding in my mind like a military operation: each reaction cataloged, each consequence mapped.

"We do." The words fell between us, heavy with finality.

The car rolled to a stop at the front entrance where Vincenzo waited, my father's most loyal shadow. His eyes registered Luca's presence with calculated neutrality before settling on me.

"Your father awaits in the dining room. The Souza delegation arrived ten minutes ago."

Of course they had. My father would orchestrate this dinner like the political theater it was—the potential alliance displayed for my benefit, the pressure applied from all sides. What he couldn't anticipate was my own maneuver, the accountant sitting silently beside me who had unwittingly become my most powerful piece on the board.

"Perfect timing," I said, exiting the car and extending my hand to Luca, a gesture that wasn't lost on Vincenzo. The old consigliere's eyes narrowed fractionally—a microscopic tell that would have been invisible to anyone who hadn't grown up watching for the slightest sign of impending violence.

Luca hesitated only a moment before taking my hand, his fingers cool against mine. I felt the slightest tremor there, the only indication of the fear he otherwise mastered completely. His control impressed me—an omega walking into an alpha stronghold with nothing but my word as protection. Either very brave or very foolish. Perhaps both.

"Stay close," I murmured as we followed Vincenzo through the grand foyer, my thumb brushing once across Luca's pulse point. The answering spike in his scent—honey sharpening to something brighter—confirmed what I already knew. His body recognized mine on a level beyond conscious thought, just as mine had cataloged his scent weeks ago in that hallway encounter.

The dining room doors opened to reveal the assembled players in my father's game: Don Corvino at the head of the massive oak table, regal in his aging power; Sofia Souza and her father Emilio positioned strategically at his right; various captains and their mates arranged in descending order of importance. All eyes turned to us as we entered, a collective assessment that shifted rapidly to confusion as they registered Luca's presence at my side.

My father's face hardened to granite as he took in our clasped hands, the proprietary



way I positioned Luca slightly behind my right shoulder. The message was clear to anyone who understood our world's silent language—this was no employee, no random dinner guest.

"Matteo." My name in my father's mouth sounded like the first warning before gunfire. "I wasn't aware you were bringing a guest."

I guided Luca forward, my hand settling at the small of his back. The touch was deliberate, measured—a gesture of possession that would be unmistakable to every alpha in the room. "Not a guest, Father. My claimed omega."

The words dropped into the silence like a bomb, detonating in waves of reaction around the table. Sofia's perfectly manicured nails dug into her napkin. Emilio Souza's face flushed with angry disbelief. My father's expression registered nothing for three heartbeats, then transformed into something cold and vicious.

"Perhaps we should discuss this privately," he suggested, voice deceptively mild. The underlying threat would have made lesser men wither.

"Nothing to discuss." I pulled out a chair for Luca, positioning him two seats down from my father—close enough to demonstrate conviction, far enough to provide some buffer from the Don's rage. "The claiming paperwork was filed this afternoon. It's already done."

A technical truth. The paperwork had been filed, though the physical claiming—the bite that would transfer my scent permanently into Luca's bloodstream—hadn't yet occurred. A detail my father would discover soon enough, but not before I'd established Luca's position beyond legal challenge.

Luca sat with remarkable poise, back straight, eyes carefully lowered—the perfect picture of omega submission that I knew from our interactions was entirely

performative. The subtle defiance hidden beneath his compliance only heightened my appreciation for his complexity.

I took my own seat, reaching for the wine glass already filled. " I believe we were discussing family business?"

Emilio Souza recovered first, years of mafia negotiations giving him the control to smooth his expression into something approaching diplomatic. " Congratulations would seem to be in order," he said, eyes calculating. " Though I admit some surprise, given our recent discussions."

"Circumstances change," I replied, lifting my glass in a mock toast.

My father's knuckles whitened around his knife handle. " Indeed they do." His gaze shifted to Luca , assessing him with the cold precision that had ended many men's lives. " Mr . Bianchi , isn't it? From accounting?"

Luca raised his eyes, meeting the Don's stare with surprising steadiness. " Yes , sir."

"How convenient." The words dripped with venom. " My son finds himself an omega just as financial irregularities emerge in our records."

I felt Luca tense beside me, his scent souring slightly with anxiety despite the suppressants. My own anger rose in response—protective instincts I'd never experienced with such intensity surging beneath my calculated exterior.

"The irregularities were discovered by Luca ," I corrected smoothly. " And reported to me directly. Which you'd know if you'd bothered to review the evidence before making accusations."

Carlo, positioned at the far end of the table, caught my eye with a subtle warning.

Too far . But I'd crossed the line deliberately, forcing my father's hand. Either he would erupt now, in front of witnesses who would carry tales of family discord back to their own territories, or he would contain his rage until we were alone. Either scenario served my purpose.

My father chose containment, his smile a slash of white teeth against olive skin. " Family dinner seems an inappropriate venue for accusations of any kind." He turned to Sofia , whose perfect composure had fractured just enough to reveal the wounded pride beneath. " My apologies for the confusion, my dear. It seems my son has made his choice without consulting the family's interests."

Sofia's answering smile was frigid. " No apology necessary, Don Corvino . Some men prefer... simplicity." Her gaze flicked dismissively over Luca , assessing and discarding him in one contemptuous glance.

The dinner progressed through its courses like a carefully choreographed battle. Conversation flowed around business interests and territory disputes, everyone pretending not to notice the seismic shift that had occurred with Luca's introduction. I kept him within my orbit, my hand occasionally brushing his arm or shoulder—establishing my claim through touch, reinforcing the message to every alpha present: mine .

Luca played his part perfectly, speaking only when addressed directly, his responses intelligent but measured. What the others couldn't see was the sharpness in his eyes, the way he absorbed every exchange, every nuance of power dynamics around the table. The accountant was cataloging information, storing it away with the same precision he applied to financial records.

When the final course had been cleared, my father stood, signaling the end of the formal dinner. " Matteo , a word in my study." Not a request.

I nodded, turning to Luca . " Wait for me in the car. Carlo will escort you."

Fear flickered briefly across his features before he controlled it. " I can stay."

"No." The word emerged sharper than intended, my instincts divided between keeping him close for protection and removing him from imminent danger. " I'll handle this."

Reluctantly, he allowed Carlo to guide him from the room, my consigliere's hand hovering near but not touching him—respecting my claim while ensuring Luca's safety. I watched them go, waiting until the door closed behind them before facing my father.

"Your study, then," I said, an heir apparent's deference layered over underboss defiance.

The Don's study remained unchanged since my childhood—the same heavy oak desk, the same leather chairs, the same oppressive weight of family legacy hanging in the air like smoke. My father closed the door behind us, the soft click more menacing than a slammed door would have been.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" he demanded, veneer of civility evaporating the moment we were alone.

I moved to the sideboard, pouring myself two fingers of scotch with deliberate calm. " Claiming an omega that interests me. I wasn't aware I needed permission."

"You need permission to sabotage a strategic alliance that's been years in the making." He stalked toward me, alpha rage rolling off him in waves of pine and amber turned acrid with fury. " The Souza girl brings territory, political connections, alliance opportunities. What does your accountant bring besides a tight ass?"

The crude assessment ignited something primal in my chest, a growl building before I could suppress it. " Be careful, Father ."

"Or what?" He laughed, the sound devoid of humor. " You'll defend his honor? The omega you've known for what—a day? The convenient distraction who appeared just when the Sofia arrangement became imminent?"

I sipped my scotch, using the burn to focus my thoughts. " Luca isn't a distraction. He's mine."

"He's nothing," my father spat. " A weak omega who stumbled into something bigger than himself. He'll break the first time real pressure is applied."

The words struck closer to my own doubts than I cared to admit—not about Luca's worth, but about his safety in our world. I'd brought him into deeper danger by claiming him publicly, painting a target on him that couldn't be erased.

"You're wrong about him," I said, setting down my glass with more force than necessary. " And you're wrong about this alliance. The Souzas want our distribution routes, not a merger of bloodlines. Sofia was their bargaining chip, nothing more."

"And I suppose your accountant told you this?" Contempt dripped from every word.

"No. My sources in their organization did." I moved to stand directly before him, matching his posture—alpha to alpha, son to father, future to past. " The same sources who report that Emilio Souza has been meeting with the Venucci family to discuss alternative arrangements. This dinner was always a formality. They never intended to honor the marriage contract."

Doubt flickered across my father's features before hardening back to certainty. " Even if that's true, it doesn't justify throwing away years of planning for some omega office

worker."

"I'm not asking for your approval." The words hung between us, the unspoken challenge they carried clear as broken glass. "I've made my choice."

My father studied me with the cold calculation that had built our empire from nothing. "You'll regret this. He's weak. He'll compromise you when it matters most."

"He's mine," I repeated simply. "I'll make him strong."

For a moment, something almost like pride flickered in my father's eyes—not for my choice, but for my unwavering stance. It vanished quickly, replaced by the Don's trademark resolve.

"Get out," he said quietly. "Take your omega and go. But know this—the next time you enter this house, you'll come prepared to explain exactly what you know about our missing funds. Or you won't enter at all."

The implicit accusation hung between us like smoke—that I might be involved in the theft, that Luca might be my accomplice rather than my informant. I should have anticipated this angle of attack.

"I'll bring you answers," I promised, moving toward the door. "But they won't be the ones you expect."

I left without waiting for his response, striding through the hallways of my childhood home with the certainty that boundaries had been redrawn tonight. The role of dutiful son had been shed like an outgrown skin, revealing something more dangerous beneath—a man with his own territory to defend, his own omega to protect.

Carlo waited beside the car, his expression carefully neutral as I approached. "The

package is secure," he reported, our code for Luca's safety.

The tactical efficiency was exactly why Carlo was my consigliere—he'd stationed Luca in the car the moment the dining room doors closed, a protective perimeter established before anyone could follow. My father's men wouldn't have had time to intercept them while I kept the Don occupied in his study.

"And?"

"Three of the Don's men attempted to approach. They were... discouraged." The slight satisfaction in Carlo's voice told me what I needed to know—my consigliere had defended my claim, established my autonomy from my father's authority.

"Good." I opened the car door myself, sliding into the back seat where Luca waited, tension evident in every line of his body. His scent had soured with anxiety, the honey notes buried beneath stress pheromones that triggered my protective instincts like a physical blow.

"Are you alright?" he asked as the door closed, sealing us in privacy.

The question startled me—his concern directed outward despite his own precarious position. Another piece of evidence that my father's assessment of him was fatally flawed.

"They didn't hurt you," I said instead of answering, my eyes scanning him for signs of trauma or interference.

"No. Your man— Carlo —he kept them away." Luca's hands twisted together in his lap, betraying the calm he projected. " What happened with your father?"

"Exactly what we expected." I reached across the space between us, covering his

restless hands with one of mine. The contact steadied something in me even as I felt him tense momentarily before relaxing into the touch. " He's threatened, but contained for now."

"And the Souzas ?"

"Will be looking for revenge," I admitted, refusing to shield him from the consequences of our alliance. " But they'll move carefully. A public claim has legal weight they can't easily overcome."

The car pulled away from the estate, carrying us back toward the penthouse I'd already mentally recategorized as ours rather than mine . Security protocols had been tripled, access restricted to a handful of my most trusted men. A fortress guarding what belonged to me—what I'd claimed before enemies and family alike.

"What do we do now?" Luca asked, his voice small in the darkness of the car.

I could hear the larger question beneath the surface—what happens to us, to this arrangement born of necessity rather than choice? The claiming that existed on paper but not yet in blood and bond?

"Now we go home," I said, the words simple but heavy with implication. " I set security lockdown. We begin tracing the missing funds tomorrow."

Luca nodded, accepting the practical answer even as his scent betrayed lingering uncertainty. The honey-citrus cloud surrounding him had notes I was beginning to recognize—bitter oranges for fear, burnt sugar for anxiety, the faintest hint of warm vanilla when he briefly relaxed against my touch.

"He thinks I'm weak," Luca said suddenly, his gaze fixed on the city lights blurring past the window. " Your father. I heard him through the door."



The confession shouldn't have surprised me. Of course Luca would have lingered, gathered information—the accountant using every resource to understand his position. My estimation of him rose further.

"My father measures strength only in violence," I replied. " He's incapable of recognizing other forms of power."

Luca turned to me then, eyes reflecting the passing streetlights. " And you? What kind of strength do you value?"

The question penetrated deeper than expected, forcing me to examine assumptions I rarely questioned. What did I value? The ability to command through fear, as my father did? The strategic brilliance of my consigliere? The unwavering loyalty of my captains?

Or something else entirely—the quiet courage of an omega who faced down mafia threats armed with nothing but financial records and unshakable integrity?

"Survival," I answered finally. " The strength to endure when others would break. To adapt when circumstances change. To fight when necessary and wait when prudent."

Something shifted in Luca's expression, a subtle recalibration. " Then perhaps I'm not as weak as he believes."

"No," I agreed, allowing my thumb to trace a small circle on the back of his hand. " You're not."

The car turned onto the private access road leading to my penthouse building, security checks visible at regular intervals. The sight should have relaxed me, evidence of protection successfully deployed, but instead I found myself scanning for vulnerabilities, for places an enemy might breach our defenses. In my world, security

was never absolute—merely layers of deterrence against inevitable intrusion.

Luca sensed the change in my focus, his own gaze following mine to the security measures surrounding us. " They'll come for us, won't they? Your father, the Souzas , whoever took the money..."

"Yes," I answered honestly, seeing no point in shielding him from reality. " But they'll find I defend those under my protection with everything I possess."

The possessive declaration hung between us as the car stopped at the private underground entrance. Carlo opened my door, his hand instinctively resting on his concealed weapon as he scanned the garage for threats. I emerged first, creating a physical barrier between potential danger and Luca as he followed.

The elevator ride to the penthouse passed in silence, the weight of the evening's events pressing down on both of us. Only when we were inside, doors locked and security systems engaged, did Luca's shoulders finally lower from their defensive posture.

"You should rest," I said, watching as he moved uncertainly through what was now his space as much as mine.

"I've been sleeping all day," he reminded me.

"And you'll need more. Tomorrow won't be easy."

He turned to face me, something resolute gathering in his expression. " I want to understand what I'm part of now. Beyond the missing money. What claiming me really means for you, politically."

The directness of his approach caught me off guard—this was no cowed omega

seeking reassurance, but an equal demanding truth. I found myself respecting him more for it.

"It means I've defied my father publicly," I explained, removing my jacket and loosening my tie in a deliberate display of normalcy. " Rejected a strategic alliance with the Souzas . Claimed an omega my father considers beneath our family's status. Effectively declared my independence from his authority."

"All to protect me?" Skepticism colored his voice. " That seems... disproportionate."

"To protect you," I agreed, moving closer to him, drawn by some instinct I couldn't fully name. " And to protect myself from a marriage I didn't want. To challenge my father's outdated methods. To secure an ally who can help me trace the missing funds."

I stopped just short of touching him, close enough to see the slight dilation of his pupils, to catch the subtle shift in his scent as honey brightened with something like interest beneath the suppressants.

"So I'm convenient," he said, the words lacking the bitter edge they might have carried.

"You're necessary," I corrected. " There's a difference."

Luca's eyes searched mine, looking for deception or manipulation. Finding neither, he nodded slowly, accepting my assessment if not fully embracing it.

"We should establish boundaries," he said pragmatically. " For this... arrangement."

"Boundaries," I repeated, amused despite the gravity of our situation. " You want a contractual claiming?"

"I want clarity," he countered. " If I'm to be publicly yours, I need to know what that entails privately."

The question cut to the heart of what lay between us—the tension that had simmered since our first encounter, the biological pull neither of us had acknowledged directly. The claiming existed on paper, would soon exist in public perception, but the physical reality remained unconsummated.

"It entails what we choose," I said carefully, acutely aware of the power imbalance between us. " Nothing is required beyond what's necessary to maintain the public claim."

Relief flickered across his features, followed by something more complex—disappointment? Interest ? The contradiction fascinated me.

"And what's necessary?" he asked, voice dropping slightly.

"Scent transfer. Proximity . Eventually , a claiming bite." I delivered the facts clinically, as if discussing business terms rather than intimate acts that would bind us physically. " But none of it needs to happen tonight."

Luca nodded, processing the information with the same analytical focus he'd likely apply to financial records. " And sleeping arrangements?"

"The penthouse has four bedrooms. You can have whichever you prefer." I gestured down the hallway. " Though for appearances, we should share the master suite when guests are present."

Another nod, practical and composed. Only the slight acceleration in his scent—honey warming, citrus sharpening—betrayed his response to the discussion.

"Thank you," he said finally. " For the clarity. And for the protection."

"Don't thank me yet," I cautioned. " What I've done puts you in more danger, not less. My father was right about one thing—you've been pulled into something far larger than missing money."

"I realized that when men followed me home," Luca said dryly. " The question is what we do about it now."

"Now," I echoed, "we fortify. Prepare . Investigate . And above all, we present a united front to anyone who challenges us."

Luca considered this, then straightened his shoulders slightly. " I can do that."

The simple declaration carried more weight than elaborate promises might have. This was Luca Bianchi —straightforward, intelligent, resilient in his quiet way. A surprising ally I'd claimed for strategic reasons, now finding myself increasingly drawn to for entirely different ones.

"Get some rest," I said again, stepping back to restore professional distance between us. " Tomorrow , we start hunting."

He retreated toward the hallway, pausing at the threshold. " Matteo ?"

My name in his mouth sent an unexpected curl of pleasure through me. " Yes ?"

"You said you'd make me strong," he said quietly. " You don't need to. I already am."

His chin lifted slightly as he spoke, gaze steady and unflinching. The faintest edge of determination sharpened the honey in his scent, cutting through the lingering suppressants—a subtle but unmistakable declaration that matched his words. Not

begging for protection, not cowering, but standing his ground.

With that, he disappeared down the corridor, leaving me alone with his words echoing in my mind. I moved to the windows overlooking the city, my territory spread before me like a living chess board, players moving in shadows, pieces repositioning after tonight's declaration of intent.

My father was wrong about Luca . The Souzas were wrong about my intentions. Whoever had stolen from us was wrong to think they wouldn't be found.

And perhaps I had been wrong as well—to think I could maintain emotional distance while claiming an omega who challenged everything I thought I knew about strength.

I watched Luca's retreating form in the reflection of the window glass, a resolution forming in my mind. I would protect him, yes. But I wouldn't need to make him strong.

He already was.

5

LUCA

Consciousness returned slowly, fragments of reality assembling themselves like puzzle pieces behind my closed eyelids. Unfamiliar softness cradled my body—sheets with a thread count higher than my monthly rent, pillows that yielded with perfect resistance. The scent reached me before I opened my eyes: sandalwood and cedar, that dangerous metallic undertone. Not mine. His .

I bolted upright, the events of yesterday cascading through my mind. The missing millions. The car outside my apartment. The summons to Matteo Corvino's penthouse. The claim.

My omega. Under my protection and authority. Beyond my father's reach.

Light filtered through floor-to-ceiling windows, illuminating an unfamiliar bedroom. My bedroom now, apparently. The blue room, as Carlo had called it. The decor was understated luxury—midnight blue walls, charcoal furnishings, chrome accents. Beautiful . Impersonal . A gilded cage.

I swung my legs over the edge of the bed, registering that I still wore yesterday's clothes, rumpled from sleep. My watch showed 10:17 AM . I'd slept for nearly fourteen hours, my body claiming the rest it had been denied during that long night of investigation and fear.

The door was the first test. I approached it with measured steps, hand extending

toward the handle with scientific detachment, as if conducting an experiment whose results I already anticipated. The handle turned. The door opened. Not locked.

Small mercies.

The hallway stretched before me, silent and empty. No guards visible, though I suspected they lurked somewhere beyond my immediate perception. I paused, listening. The penthouse held the particular stillness of expensive spaces—the kind of quiet money buys, insulated from the city's chaos thirty floors below.

The kitchen revealed itself after two wrong turns, a sprawling expanse of marble and stainless steel that looked barely used. I discovered coffee already brewed, still warm in an elaborate machine that required an engineering degree to operate. A note sat propped against a mug: Help yourself. Security briefing at noon. — M

The handwriting was precise, controlled. Like the man himself.

Cup in hand, I continued my exploration, cataloging exits, windows, potential escape routes. Old habits from a childhood spent navigating around an alcoholic father's unpredictable moods—always know your exits. The penthouse proved larger than expected, a maze of rooms both functional and decorative. Office spaces. Meeting rooms. A small gym. Every convenience required to maintain Matteo Corvino's position without ever needing to leave.

In the main living area, floor-to-ceiling windows offered a sweeping view of the city stretched below like a diorama. I approached the glass, testing its solidity with my fingertips. Bulletproof, most likely. My reflection stared back at me—pale face, dark curls disheveled, eyes shadowed from stress despite the long sleep. The suppressor patch still clung behind my ear, a small miracle of modern chemistry keeping my biology contained.



I looked like what I was: an omega out of place in alpha territory.

Movement caught my eye—a small red light blinking from the ceiling corner. I turned slowly, scanning the room with newfound awareness. There . Another camera, discreetly positioned near a bookshelf. And another by the hallway entrance. The realization spread coldly through my chest. The penthouse wasn't just secured from outside threats. It was monitored from within.

I was being watched.

The coffee turned bitter on my tongue. I set the mug down carefully, restraining the urge to wave sarcastically at the nearest lens. Instead , I continued my circuit of the penthouse, now noting the surveillance points with methodical precision. Living room: three cameras. Kitchen : two. Hallways : one at each junction. The blue bedroom: none visible, but I wouldn't bet against hidden monitoring.

If there were hidden cameras in the bedroom, I hadn't found them... but I wasn't naive enough to believe none existed. I couldn't decide if the absence of visible cameras in the bedroom was respect for privacy or merely better concealment. Neither option particularly comforted me.

A sleek laptop sat on the dining table, closed but not locked. I approached it warily, expecting it to be password-protected, but the screen illuminated at my touch. Files had been arranged on the desktop—financial records, transaction logs, surveillance reports. Everything I'd compiled about the missing money, plus additional information I hadn't had access to.

He'd left it for me. An invitation to continue my investigation. Or a test.

My fingers hovered over the keyboard, hesitating. Trust nothing freely offered—another childhood lesson. Yet the data called to me, promising answers to

questions that had landed me in this gilded prison. I clicked open the first file, losing myself in the familiar language of numbers and transactions.

Time dissolved as I followed the digital trail, cross-referencing accounts, tracking shell companies through jurisdictional loopholes. The methodology became clear: small fragments of the ten million dollars, diverted through legitimate-seeming transactions, laundered through multiple corporate entities, finally consolidating in offshore accounts under layers of protective anonymity.

Not the work of an amateur. Someone with intimate knowledge of the Corvino financial structure had orchestrated this. Someone with authority to approve transfers without triggering alerts. Someone? —

My skin prickled with sudden awareness, a sensation so primal it cut through my concentration like a physical touch. The air in the room had changed, becoming charged with a presence I recognized before conscious thought could name it. A warmth began spreading at the base of my spine, radiating outward in unwelcome waves. I pressed my hand against the suppressor patch behind my ear—a habitual gesture of reassurance—and found the edges curling slightly, the adhesive failing after too many hours.

No. Not now.

I tried to focus on the screen, on the numbers that had always offered clarity, but my vision blurred slightly as sweat beaded at my hairline. Warmth unspooled low in my belly, dragging heat through my limbs, making the chair beneath me feel too solid, too present. The honey-citrus scent that defined my natural biochemistry began seeping through chemical barriers, subtle at first, then unmistakable even to my own dulled senses.

My fingers trembled against my neck as I traced the patch's deteriorating outline, as if

physical contact could somehow reinforce its chemical barriers. The stress of the past twenty-four hours, the interrupted sleep cycle, the unfamiliar environment saturated with alpha pheromones—all conspiring to overwhelm suppressants designed for normal conditions, not crisis.

"I see you found the files."

The voice came from behind me, rich and deep, striking something low in my belly that had nothing to do with fear and everything to do with biology I'd spent years suppressing. I turned slowly, fighting to maintain composure as Matteo Corvino filled the doorway with his presence.

He wore a simple black suit, tailored to emphasize the breadth of his shoulders, the lean strength of his frame. No tie, top buttons open at his throat where I could see the faint pulse of his scent gland beneath olive skin. His dark eyes registered me with the focus of a predator, nostrils flaring slightly as he processed the change in my scent.

"Your suppressants are failing," he observed, the words emerging rougher than his usual controlled cadence.

Humiliation burned through me, hot and unwelcome. "The patch is old. I didn't have time to replace it before..." I gestured vaguely, encompassing everything—the abduction, the penthouse, the claim.

He moved into the room with measured steps, maintaining distance that felt deliberately calculated. "There are replacements in the bathroom. Medicine cabinet."

The consideration caught me off guard—practical, impersonal, yet observant of a need I hadn't voiced. "Thank you."

He nodded once, gaze dropping to the laptop screen where financial data still glowed.

" You've made progress."

"Some." I shifted, trying to create additional space between us without making the movement obvious. " The money passed through seven different shell companies before consolidating in the Caymans . From there?—"

My voice faltered as another wave of warmth washed through me, more intense than before. The suppressor's failure was accelerating, chemical barriers crumbling against biological imperatives strengthened by proximity to an alpha—not just any alpha, but one who had staked verbal claim already. My body responding to promises not yet fulfilled with a betrayal of my carefully maintained control.

Matteo went utterly still, the only movement the subtle dilation of his pupils as they fixed on me with heightened intensity. His scent shifted perceptibly—sandalwood and cedar notes sharpening with a distinctive undertone I recognized instinctively: alpha responding to omega in pre-heat distress.

"You need to replace that patch. Now ." His voice dropped lower, something primal threading through the command.

I rose on unsteady legs, calculating the distance to the hallway, to the blue room, to the bathroom he'd mentioned. Too far, with him between me and the exit, with my traitorous body broadcasting vulnerability with every passing second.

"I'm fine," I lied, words emerging tighter than intended. " I just need to finish this analysis."

"You're not fine." He stepped closer, close enough that his scent enveloped me completely—sandalwood and cedar intensified with protective alpha pheromones that spoke directly to the most primitive part of my brain. " Your biology is responding to mine. To territory. To claim."

The blunt assessment stripped away pretense, leaving raw truth between us. My fingers clenched against the edge of the table, seeking stability as another wave of warmth pulsed through me, bringing with it the unmistakable precursor to slick—the omega body's preparation for alpha penetration, for mating, for potential breeding.

"I don't want this," I whispered, the words emerging as much plea as declaration.

"I know." His acknowledgment carried no triumph, no satisfaction—only recognition of biology neither of us had fully anticipated when this arrangement began. " That's why you need to replace the patch. Before it progresses further."

He shrugged out of his suit jacket, the movement swift and efficient. Before I could process his intent, he held it out to me—a gesture as unexpected as it was confusing.

"Take it," he said, impatience threading through control as I hesitated. " My scent will help stabilize yours until you can replace the suppressant. Biochemical equilibrium through proxy contact."

The explanation—clinical, detached—helped me process what instinct had already recognized. Alpha scent as temporary shield. Protection through proximity rather than direct contact. A biological hack to buy time against accelerating failure.

I accepted the jacket with reluctant gratitude, sliding my arms into sleeves too long for my frame. The fabric enveloped me in his scent—not just sandalwood and cedar but deeper notes I hadn't consciously registered before. Gun oil, yes, but also leather, aged paper, something almost like cinnamon. Complex . Distinctive . Unmistakably him.

The effect was immediate and profound. My racing pulse steadied fractionally, the roiling heat in my core subsiding from urgent demand to muted awareness. Not elimination of biological response, but temporary reprieve—alpha scent satisfying the

most primitive part of omega biology without direct intervention.

"Better?" Matteo asked, still maintaining careful distance despite the visible strain in his posture, the tension evident in his jaw.

I nodded, humiliation washing through temporary relief. " I'm sorry. This isn't— I don't usually?—"

"Don't apologize for biology," he interrupted, voice controlled once more though his pupils remained dilated, his scent still carrying traces of response to mine. " Just fix it before it progresses further. For both our sakes."

The acknowledgment of mutual vulnerability hung between us—his control as precarious as my suppression when biology decided to assert its ancient imperatives. Alpha responding to omega signals wasn't just instinct but biochemical cascade, triggering protective aggression, territorial defense, mating imperative in sequence designed to answer omega distress with complementary response.

I clutched his jacket tighter around me, drowning in fabric that provided temporary shield against a threat we both recognized without naming. " I should go. Replace the patch."

He nodded once, stepping aside to clear path to the hallway. His restraint was palpable—muscles tense beneath his shirt, hands slightly fisted at his sides as he maintained the distance his instincts clearly wanted to close. I moved past him carefully, preserving space between us that felt increasingly artificial given what had just transpired.

At the threshold, I paused, something compelling me to acknowledge what he'd done—the control he'd maintained, the solution he'd offered without taking advantage of vulnerability that would have been easy to exploit.

"Thank you," I said quietly, not meeting his eyes. " For the jacket. For the distance."

"Don't mistake restraint for disinterest, Luca ." The warning emerged lower, rougher than his usual controlled cadence. " I'm still alpha. You're still omega. And you're still mine by claim, if not yet by bite."

The reminder—of status, of arrangement, of claiming yet to be physically consummated—sent another pulse of heat through my core despite the temporary buffer his jacket provided. Not fear but anticipation, not rejection but recognition of truth neither of us could fully escape despite best intentions.

"I understand," I replied, the words emerging steadier than I felt. " But I appreciate the choice within constraint."

Something shifted in his expression then—surprise, perhaps, at articulation of nuance most wouldn't recognize within alpha-omega dynamics. The acknowledgment that restraint wasn't absence of desire but respect for autonomy, that protection needn't require submission, that claiming could contain degrees of consent even within biological imperative.

"Go," he said finally, the single syllable carrying weight beyond its brevity. " Before biology removes choice from either of us."

I retreated then, the jacket trailing behind me like visible evidence of something neither of us had fully anticipated when this arrangement began. Not just protection through possession, not merely strategic alliance, but biochemical recognition that transcended conscious intention or careful planning.

The suppressant patch in the medicine cabinet—higher grade than what I'd usually access, specially formulated for omegas in high-stress environments—adhered with reassuring firmness behind my ear. The clinical packaging promised six-hour

effectiveness under standard conditions. Whether the past twenty-four hours qualified as "standard" seemed doubtful at best.

I sank onto the edge of the bathtub, still wrapped in Matteo's jacket, allowing his scent to continue stabilizing mine while the fresh suppressants took effect. The situation had evolved beyond what either of us had calculated when this arrangement began—beyond paper claiming or political statement against Don Corvino's authority.

Biology had its own agenda, its own timetable for developments we'd imagined could be controlled through chemistry and willpower. The failure of my suppressant patch had revealed truth neither of us had fully acknowledged: whatever existed between alpha underboss and omega accountant had roots deeper than strategic alliance, than protection through possession.

Roots that reached into primitive brain stems where rationality held no jurisdiction, where scent and proximity and claiming instinct wrote their own narrative regardless of our conscious intentions.

I shrugged out of his jacket finally, folding it with careful precision across the counter. The mirror revealed someone I barely recognized—dark curls disheveled, eyes too bright, skin flushed despite chemical intervention now working to restore equilibrium. The omega beneath the accountant, revealed through chemical failure and alpha proximity alike.

Not who I had been before missing millions had pulled me into Matteo Corvino's orbit, nor quite who I would become once claiming progressed beyond paper to physical consummation. Someone in transition, balanced between autonomy and possession, between resistance and surrender to what biology seemed increasingly determined to manifest.



When I finally emerged from the bathroom, fresh suppressant in place and tenuous control restored, I made my way back to the dining table where financial data still glowed on the laptop screen. Matteo had gone, leaving empty space that felt significant beyond mere physical absence.

The work remained. The investigation continued. The partnership—for that seemed increasingly apt description of what existed between us—persisted despite biological complications neither had fully anticipated.

I settled back into analysis of numbers that couldn't lie, of transactions that couldn't hide their origins from eyes trained to see patterns others missed. This, at least, remained unchanged. This skill, this function, this purpose that had brought me into Matteo Corvino's world before biology had begun asserting its own agenda.

But the memory of his scent lingered, despite fresh suppressants and chemical barriers carefully reconstructed. Sandalwood and cedar. Gun oil and leather. Protective alpha presence that had offered solution rather than exploitation when vulnerability had exposed itself between us.

The jacket lay folded in the blue room, returned but not forgotten. Evidence of something evolving between us—not just alpha and omega locked in biological inevitability, but man and man finding possibility for choice within constraint, for partnership within claiming, for autonomy within possession.

Small mercies, perhaps. But mercies nonetheless in a world where such considerations rarely factored into calculations of power and protection, of dominance and submission, of alpha and omega navigating the dangerous territory between them.

### MATTEO

Blood dripped between my fingers, viscous and cooling rapidly in the night air. Beside my foot, the body of Souza's assassin lay crumpled on the alley pavement, his throat opened in a clean slash that had silenced him permanently. The knife in my hand—a custom blade with an obsidian handle—felt like an extension of my body, familiar and necessary.

I wiped the blade on the dead man's jacket before resheathing it beneath my suit. The metallic scent of blood mingled with the alley's filth, creating a pungent reminder of mortality that would linger in my nostrils for hours. I'd tracked the man for three blocks after spotting him surveilling the penthouse perimeter, his movements too deliberate to be coincidental, his scent unmistakably Souza territory—pine and bergamot, the signature their enforcers all carried.

He'd made his move as I rounded the corner, a rookie mistake that had cost him his life. When his blade had sliced through my suit jacket, grazing my side, the pain had barely registered. The threat to what was mine had overwhelmed all other considerations.

My phone vibrated in my pocket. Carlo's name illuminated the screen.

"It's done," I said simply, stepping away from the body.

"Clean?" Carlo's voice betrayed no judgment, only practical concern.

"Enough. Send the cleanup crew to the alley behind Marcello's . Tell them it's a message delivery, not a disappearance."

"Understood. And your status?"

My hand pressed against my side, coming away sticky with my own blood. " Superficial . I'm returning now."

I ended the call, pocketing the phone with blood-slicked fingers. The wound burned, a sharp reminder of momentary carelessness. I'd allowed the assassin one move too many, distracted by thoughts of the omega waiting in my penthouse—the omega whose scent had begun infiltrating my consciousness like a slow-acting drug.

Luca.

Three days had passed since our agreement to work as partners. Three days of shared investigation, of shoulders brushing as we hunched over financial records, of his honey-citrus scent gradually permeating my territory despite the suppressants. Three days of growing awareness that simmered beneath professional distance.

The path back to the penthouse took me through shadow-draped streets, my senses hyperaware of potential threats lurking in each darkened doorway. My territory had shrunk to a defensible perimeter around one building, one floor, one omega. Protecting what was mine had become an imperative that narrowed my focus to a dangerous degree.

The private elevator ascended soundlessly, carrying me upward toward safety. Blood had begun to congeal beneath my suit, the wound throbbing in time with my heartbeat. The injury itself concerned me less than what it represented—a lapse in vigilance, a weakness in my defenses. The Souzas had advanced from surveillance to direct action more quickly than anticipated. They were testing boundaries, probing

for vulnerabilities.

Testing how far I would go to protect what belonged to me.

The elevator doors opened onto the quiet penthouse. Lamps bathed the main living area in warm light, creating the illusion of normalcy that had no place in our reality. Luca sat cross-legged on the sofa, papers spread around him like fallen leaves, his dark curls disheveled from running his fingers through them. He hadn't noticed my arrival, absorbed in his analysis, brow furrowed in concentration behind those wire-rimmed glasses.

For a moment, I allowed myself to observe him undetected. In these unguarded moments, his focus absolute and unaware of scrutiny, I glimpsed what drew me beyond strategic considerations—his intelligence evident in every precise movement, his determination showing in the set of his shoulders. The suppressant patch behind his ear had begun to fade at the edges, his scent gradually strengthening in response. Distinctive, unmistakable, increasingly distracting.

Mine.

The primal thought surfaced before I could suppress it. I'd claimed him on paper, in public declaration, but the biological bond remained unconsummated. The delay had been strategic, practical—a claiming bite would change everything, creating permanent physiological changes in both of us. Yet with each passing day, the absence of that bond chafed against instincts I'd spent years controlling.

Blood dripped onto the marble floor, shattering my reverie.

Luca's head snapped up, his eyes widening as he registered my presence—and my condition. "Matteo!"

He was on his feet in an instant, papers scattering forgotten as he crossed the room toward me. His scent spiked with alarm, the honey notes souring with distress as he cataloged the blood staining my shirt, my hands, the floor.

"What happened? Are you—" He reached for me without hesitation, hands hovering near the bloodstain spreading across my side.

"It's nothing," I said, stepping back to maintain distance. His proximity threatened my control in ways I hadn't anticipated, the combination of his scent and the adrenaline still coursing through my system creating a dangerous cocktail. " A message from the Souzas ."

Understanding dawned in his expression, followed quickly by something darker. " They found us."

"They've always known where we are." I moved past him toward the kitchen, needing distance, already regretting the instinctive withdrawal when his scent registered hurt beneath the concern. " They've simply escalated from watching to acting."

Luca followed, his earlier fear transforming into something more controlled, more analytical. " You killed him."

Not a question. A statement of fact delivered without judgment. Another surprise from the omega accountant who continued to defy expectations.

"Yes." I removed my ruined jacket, wincing slightly as the movement pulled at the wound. " The first of many, most likely."

Luca absorbed this with quiet intensity, then moved to the cabinet where I kept medical supplies. He gathered antiseptic, gauze, suture kit—his movements efficient, determined. Professional rather than panicked.

"Sit," he said, gesturing to one of the kitchen stools.

The command in his voice—so unexpected from an omega—caught me off guard. I found myself complying before conscious thought intervened, settling onto the stool as he arranged supplies on the counter.

"Take off your shirt," he continued, opening the antiseptic. "I need to see how bad it is."

I raised an eyebrow, amusement cutting through pain. "Giving orders now, little accountant?"

"Someone has to, when you're bleeding all over your imported marble." His tone remained practical, but something flashed in his eyes—concern beneath the bravado, fear beneath the competence.

I unbuttoned my shirt slowly, the fabric sticking to the wound as I peeled it away. The slash along my side was approximately four inches long, deep enough to require stitches but having missed anything vital. Luca's sharp intake of breath confirmed what I already knew—it looked worse than it was.

"You need a hospital," he said, voice tight.

"No hospitals." The response was automatic, mafia doctrine ingrained since childhood. "It's not as bad as it looks."

"You're not a doctor," he countered, but his hands were already reaching for the antiseptic, accepting the reality that hospitals weren't an option in our world.

"Neither are you."

"I had a clumsy brother and a mother who worked double shifts." He dampened gauze with antiseptic, his movements revealing practiced familiarity. " Sit still. This will hurt."

The warning came a second before the burning sting of antiseptic against raw flesh. I remained motionless through years of discipline, though my muscles tensed involuntarily. Luca worked with clinical precision, cleaning the wound methodically, his brow furrowed in concentration.

"You've done this before," I observed, studying the careful movements of his hands near my skin.

"Often enough." He discarded bloodied gauze, reaching for fresh supplies. " My brother found trouble wherever he went. Being omega meant I learned to patch things up without attracting attention."

Another piece of his history revealed, another layer beneath the quiet accountant facade. I filed the information away, assembling a more complete picture of Luca Bianchi with each fragment he offered.

"This needs stitches," he said, examining the clean wound. " I can do it, but?—"

"Do it," I interrupted, trusting his assessment more than I'd expected to.

He hesitated only briefly before nodding, opening the suture kit with practiced movements. His hands remained steady as he prepared the needle, his focus absolute. When he stepped closer to begin stitching, his scent enveloped me—honey and citrus intensified by concentration, by proximity, by the fading effectiveness of his suppressants.

The first puncture of the needle sent a sharp spasm through my side. My jaw clenched

involuntarily, muscles tensing beneath Luca's hands as my breath hitched—a momentary surrender to pain quickly mastered. The physical discomfort barely registered after that initial response, eclipsed by the effect of his scent, his presence, his unexpected competence in adversity. This close, I could see the fine tension in his jaw, the determination in his eyes, the slight tremble in his hands that he mastered through sheer will.

Strong in ways my father would never recognize.

His scent thickened in the closed space between us, the notes growing richer, more complex. The suppressant patch behind his ear—the second he'd applied since the earlier incident—was already showing signs of fatigue, the edges curling slightly as his elevated heart rate and proximity to an injured alpha overwhelmed its chemical barriers.

My nostrils flared involuntarily, drawing his scent deeper into my lungs. Beneath the dominant scent lay subtle notes I hadn't consciously cataloged before—something warm and earthy, like sun-baked soil after rain, and a fainter trace like ripening fruit on the edge of sweetness. Distinctive . Unmistakable . His .

My gums ached suddenly, canines throbbing with the primitive urge to extend, to claim, to mark the vulnerable juncture of neck and shoulder now inches from my face as Luca bent to his task. I could see his pulse fluttering beneath the delicate skin of his throat, could trace the slightly swollen scent gland that his failing suppressants could no longer completely conceal.

One movement. That's all it would take. One surge forward to press my teeth against that gland, to break skin, to exchange the biochemicals that would forever alter us both—his scent permanently marked with mine, my biology irrevocably attuned to his, the claiming bond forged beyond paper documentation or verbal declaration.



Mine. The thought pounded in my blood with each heartbeat. Mine to protect. Mine to claim. Mine .

I gripped the edge of the counter, marble cracking beneath the pressure of fingers now white-knuckled with restraint. The sound—subtle but distinct—registered in Luca's awareness. His hands paused in their careful work, eyes lifting to meet mine.

What he saw there must have triggered some primal recognition—omega registering alpha on the edge of control. His pupils dilated, a soft gasp escaping before he could suppress it. His scent shifted instantly, honey notes deepening with something dark and sweet, citrus sharpening with awareness that translated even through chemical barriers.

Sweat beaded along my hairline, dripping down my temple despite the cool air of the kitchen. My vision narrowed, peripheral details fading as focus zeroed in on the pulsing vein beneath the skin of his throat. The counter edge crumbled further under my grip, fine dust of crushed marble raining silently to the floor. Every muscle in my body had gone rigid, coiled with the effort of maintaining position when every instinct demanded I surge forward, claim, bite, mark.

"Matteo?" My name emerged as question and recognition simultaneously, his voice pitched lower than usual.

"Finish," I managed, the word emerging through clenched teeth, control maintained through years of discipline now fraying at the edges. " Quickly ."

Understanding flashed across his features, followed by something more complex—fear mixed with fascination, caution layered over instinctive response to alpha in protective rut. The omega recognizing danger not to himself but to the careful boundaries we'd established between us.

His fingers trembled slightly as he tied off another stitch, his breathing quickening in pattern that matched my own. The air between us had become charged with pheromones neither could fully suppress—alpha aggression triggered by injury and threat to claimed territory, omega response amplified by proximity and caretaking instinct.

"Almost done," he murmured, voice steadier than his scent suggested possible.

I forced my gaze away from the pulse point at his throat, focusing instead on the generic patterns of the kitchen backsplash, on the clinical aspects of what was happening rather than the biological imperative now roaring through my system.

Just stitches. Just wound care. Not the omega I'd claimed on paper now close enough to mark permanently, his scent calling to something primal beneath civilized veneer.

The rational part of my brain—the part still functioning beyond biological imperative—recognized the danger in this moment. Injury combined with threat to claimed territory created perfect conditions for protective rut, for alpha biology overwhelming careful restraint. Add the gradually failing suppressants, the increasing potency of Luca's natural scent, and the intimate act of caretaking—a perfect chemical storm neither had fully anticipated.

"Last one," Luca announced, voice barely above whisper though we were alone in the penthouse.

The final stitch slid into place, his fingers deftly securing the thread before cutting it with small scissors that looked absurdly delicate in his hands. He reached for clean gauze, movements now hurried where they had been methodical, awareness of changing atmospheric conditions evident in the tension of his shoulders, the careful distance he tried to maintain despite our proximity.

As he leaned forward to place the bandage, his neck came within inches of my mouth. I could see the scent gland now clearly swollen beneath his skin, ruddy and inflamed as his biology responded to mine despite suppressants. The sight triggered a visceral reaction I couldn't control—a low, rumbling growl that emerged from my chest without conscious permission.

Luca's hand jerked, his body freezing in place as the sound registered—not threatening but claiming, not aggressive but declarative. His own scent gland throbbed visibly in response, a biological reaction beyond his control. His free hand rose unconsciously to press against it, fingers rubbing the sensitized area as if to relieve an ache that had nothing to do with physical pain and everything to do with biological imperative.

"I'm sorry," I managed, exerting control through sheer willpower as I forced myself to release the counter edge, to straighten on the stool, to restore professional distance between us. " That was..."

"Biology," Luca finished, understanding evident beneath caution, his hand still pressed against his neck where the scent gland pulsed visibly beneath pale skin. " Just biology."

But it wasn't just biology. That was the lie we both needed in this moment—the pretense that what surged between us was merely chemical, merely instinctive, merely the inevitable result of alpha and omega in charged circumstances.

The truth ran deeper, more complex—something evolving between us that transcended secondary gender or biological imperative. Something neither of us had vocabulary to define fully, connection forming through crisis and consequence, through choice preserved within constraint.

Luca stepped further away, creating distance that felt both necessary and artificial.

His hand remained at his neck, thumb unconsciously circling the gland that had begun to ache with phantom pressure—the echo of a bite not yet delivered, a bond not yet formed but already calling through flesh and chemistry alike.

"You should change that," I observed, voice rougher than intended as I nodded toward the failing patch. " And I should shower. Change ."

He nodded, refusing to meet my eyes directly—omega instinct preserving delicate balance where direct challenge might trigger response neither could afford in this moment. His fingers still traced absent patterns against his neck, a gesture he seemed unaware of performing.

"I'll clean up here," he said, gesturing toward the bloodied supplies, the evidence of intimacy now requiring erasure for both our sakes.

I stood, careful to move slowly despite the predatory instinct now surging beneath controlled exterior. The distance between us felt charged, magnetic, particles of scent lingering in the air like invisible tether binding alpha to omega despite physical separation.

"Luca."

He looked up finally, something vulnerable and fierce simultaneously in his expression—the complexity I'd glimpsed from our first interaction, the strength my father had dismissed as omega weakness.

"Thank you," I said simply, the gratitude encompassing more than medical attention, than care provided without expectation.

He nodded once, acceptance without elaboration, understanding without need for clarification. " Partners , remember?"

The reminder—of definition we'd established, of boundaries we'd created—steadied something unsteady within me. Not possession but partnership. Not ownership but alliance. Choice preserved within constraint neither could fully escape.

"Partners," I agreed, the word carrying weight beyond its syllables.

I retreated then, needing distance before biology overwhelmed choice, before instinct overrode restraint so carefully maintained since claiming had bound us through documentation rather than bite. The shower awaited—hot water to wash away blood and sweat, to clear head of dangerous impulses now threatening careful boundaries established between us.

As steam filled the bathroom, as water sluiced pink down the drain, I pressed my forehead against cool tile, seeking clarity through physical sensation. The omega in my kitchen—capable, intelligent, unexpectedly fierce despite biological vulnerability—had become essential in ways that transcended strategic alliance or protective imperative.

His scent lingered in my consciousness despite physical distance, despite water washing away external traces of our interaction. Distinctive . Unmistakable . His .

Mine, alpha instinct insisted with primitive certainty.

Ours, partnership countered with evolving definition.

The distinction made all the difference as I fought for control beneath cascading water, for clarity through steam and sensation, for restraint against instinct now roaring through my system with each heartbeat.

Mine to protect. Mine to defend. Mine to honor through restraint rather than possession.

When I emerged finally, wound rebandaged and control restored through discipline and distance alike, I found the kitchen spotless—evidence of our interaction erased as if it had never happened. Luca had retreated to the blue room, door closed though not locked, boundary established through mutual understanding rather than physical barrier.

The memory of his scent lingered despite his absence, despite the fresh suppressant patch he'd undoubtedly applied, despite the careful distance now maintained between alpha and omega navigating territory more complex than either had anticipated when this arrangement began.

His competence. His courage. His unexpected strength beneath apparent vulnerability. All registered in my assessment not as weaknesses to exploit but as qualities to respect, to protect, to honor through restraint rather than possession.

Mine, alpha instinct insisted with undiminished certainty.

Ours, partnership countered with growing conviction.

The distinction would make all the difference in what evolved between us—in what had already begun transforming from paper claiming to something neither of us had vocabulary to define fully. Something not just biological but chosen, not just instinctive but deliberate.

Something worth protecting through restraint as much as through the violence already delivered to those who threatened what was mine.

### LUCA

Heat crept beneath my skin like an unwelcome tide, rising in slow, inexorable waves. I'd felt the warning signs all evening—the feverish flush across my collarbones, the subtle ache deep in my abdomen, the hypersensitivity that heightened every sensation to unbearable clarity. Each light seemed too bright, each sound too sharp, each surface against my skin either unbearably rough or devastatingly smooth.

I'd assumed the suppressants were safe, untouched in the bathroom cabinet. I hadn't checked. Why would I? The penthouse was supposed to be secure, Matteo's promises of increased protection a fortress around us both. It wasn't until the heat rose that I realized how vulnerable we truly remained.

I retreated to my bedroom as the symptoms intensified, burying myself beneath layers of blankets as if their weight could somehow contain the biological imperative awakening in my blood. The expensive cotton sheets that had once felt like luxury now scraped against my oversensitized skin like sandpaper, drawing a whimper I couldn't suppress.

This wasn't supposed to happen. Not yet. Matteo had promised stronger suppressants tomorrow. Just one more day of control, of dignity, of maintaining the fragile partnership we'd constructed atop the legal claiming that existed only on paper.

A paper claiming that my body seemed determined to make real.

I pressed my face into the pillow, inhaling deeply, searching for traces of my own scent to gauge how far the heat had progressed. The honey-citrus notes that typically defined me had intensified dramatically, turning heavier, sweeter, more demanding—a biological beacon designed to call to any alpha within range. To call to him.

"No," I whispered into the darkness, the word emerging as a plea rather than a command. "Not like this."

My fingers fumbled behind my ear, touching the suppressant patch that should have prevented this very scenario. The edges felt loose, the adhesive failing—a technological barrier crumbling against biological imperative. Another wave of heat washed through me, drawing a gasp as slick warmth formed between my thighs, my body preparing itself without permission from my conscious mind.

I curled tighter beneath the blankets, as if making myself smaller might somehow contain the pheromones already saturating the air around me. Time lost meaning as the heat rose in steady increments, transforming discomfort into need, need into desperation. I drifted in and out of fevered consciousness, each awakening bringing me closer to the precipice I'd spent my adult life avoiding.

When I jerked fully awake, the room had darkened completely. Night had fallen while I'd struggled against my biology, the penthouse silent save for the soft hum of climate control and the ragged sound of my own breathing. Something had changed—some shift in my surroundings had penetrated the haze of approaching heat to trigger alarm.

I forced myself upright, pushing sweat-dampened curls from my forehead as I scanned the darkened room. The motion sent another wave of dizziness crashing over me, my body protesting the vertical position when all instinct demanded I present, submit, yield to the biological imperative consuming me from within.



"Focus," I hissed to myself, the word emerging as a command in the quiet room.

A faint gleam caught my eye—moonlight reflecting off glass from the en suite bathroom, the door standing partially open. With trembling limbs, I pushed aside the blankets, the cooler air against my overheated skin providing momentary relief as I staggered toward the bathroom.

The light switch felt cold beneath my fevered fingertips. Fluorescent brightness flooded the space, momentarily blinding me before my vision adjusted to reveal the source of my subconscious alarm.

On the marble countertop, shards of glass glittered like crushed diamonds—the remains of the suppressant vials Matteo had expedited earlier that day, the stronger formulation he'd promised would help until tomorrow's specialized delivery. The medication itself formed viscous puddles across the counter and floor, rendered useless, deliberately destroyed. Not accident. Sabotage .

Cold dread cut through the heat-haze for one clarifying moment. Someone had entered while I slept, despite Matteo's lockdown protocols, despite the guards he'd stationed. A staff member? A security breach? Someone with access, with keys, with knowledge of the penthouse layout. Someone had ensured the suppressants would fail. Someone wanted me vulnerable, biological, at the mercy of the heat that now coursed through me with renewed intensity.

I clutched the edge of the counter as another wave crashed over me, stronger than before, my knees threatening to buckle. My scent had transformed entirely now, heavy and sweet and desperate in a way I barely recognized as myself. My reflection in the mirror showed a stranger—pupils blown wide, skin flushed, lips parted with quickened breath. The omega I'd spent years suppressing, denying, controlling—now fully emergent and impossible to ignore.

With the last fragments of rational thought, I fumbled for my phone, fingers trembling so violently I could barely operate the screen. I needed to alert Matteo , needed to warn him of the breach in security, needed...

The thought trailed into incoherence as another wave of heat consumed me, more powerful than any preceding it. My phone clattered to the tile floor as I doubled over, a low moan escaping before I could contain it. The sound reverberated in the bathroom's confined space, primal and unmistakable—the call of an omega in full heat.

I needed to return to the bed, to bury myself beneath layers that might contain my scent, to lock the door against whoever had done this. Against Matteo himself, whose alpha biology would respond to my condition whether either of us willed it or not. The paper claiming would become meaningless against the biological imperative of an alpha confronted with an omega in heat—his claimed omega, whether the claim existed in blood and bond or merely legal documentation.

The distance from bathroom to bedroom stretched like an impossible journey. I managed three stumbling steps before my legs gave out entirely, sending me to my knees on the plush carpet. The world tilted and spun around me, my senses overwhelmed by the intensity of my own need.

Not like this. Not as a biological imperative. Not as a prisoner of my own body.

The sound of the door opening registered dimly through my heat-addled consciousness. Heavy footsteps approached—the unmistakable cadence of Matteo Corvino , the scent of him preceding his physical presence like a storm front.

\* \* \*

MATTEO

The hall outside Luca's room became my prison, every inch of polished marble a border I could not cross. His scent saturated the air, transformed into something devastating, something that called to the most primal part of me with a siren's destructive promise.

I'd been halfway across the city when his scent-bond had surged in my blood, when the molecular awareness that connected us even without a completed claiming had triggered warning signals impossible to ignore. Something wrong. Something dangerous. Something biological overtaking what was mine.

I'd abandoned the meeting without explanation, leaving Carlo to manage the fallout with the Colombian suppliers. Nothing had mattered in that moment except reaching Luca, my claimed omega, whose distress signal had transmitted across miles of urban landscape with unmistakable urgency.

The security footage had confirmed the breach—a delivery person, properly vetted but compromised, accessing Luca's quarters with a food tray. The cameras had caught her entering, leaving—but not what had transpired in the fifteen minutes between. Not the sabotage. Not the deliberate destruction of chemical barriers between Luca's biology and vulnerability.

Now I stood outside his door, each breath filling my lungs with particles of his distress, his need, his involuntary call to the alpha who had claimed him on paper but not yet in blood. The scent of him had transformed completely—the subtle honey-citrus notes now a maelstrom of sweetness, urgency, and biological demand.

My vision sharpened with predatory focus, each element of the hallway rendered in hyper-detailed clarity despite the dimmed lighting. My canines throbbed with threatening extension, my muscles coiling with potential energy. Every cell in my body demanded I break down the door, claim what was mine, complete the bond biology was already screaming for.

"Go," he had begged, tears streaking down his flushed face. " Please go."

I had gone. Not far enough. Never far enough.

With brutal effort, I forced my right hand to unclench, to release the doorknob I'd been gripping with enough force to warp the metal. My left hand pressed against the wall beside the door, fingernails digging into the plaster until fine dust sifted down to the marble floor.

His scent continued its assault on my senses sharpening to something that cut through rational thought like a blade through silk. Beneath it all lay that distinctive undertone—warm rain on stone—now heated to steam that threatened to scald judgment entirely.

Mine, my alpha hindbrain insisted with increasing urgency. Suffering . Needing . Mine .

The wall seemed the safer focus, where I could direct my strength without harming what was mine. The plaster continued crumbling under my grip, a poor substitute for the violence my body demanded—the claiming of vulnerable flesh, the sealing of biochemical bond through the exchange of blood and saliva and shared pleasure.

From beyond the door came a cry that pierced through all defenses—raw, desperate, my name embedded within the sound. " Matteo !"

I pressed my forehead against the cool wall, focusing on the sensation to ground myself as another wave of his scent washed over me. My own biology had begun responding beyond conscious control—rut rising in answer to his heat, my scent sharpening with protective aggression, with possessive intent.

If I claimed him now, like this, it wouldn't be choice. It would be biology dictating

terms both of us would have to live with forever. The paper claiming could be dissolved, could be reversed through legal mechanisms if necessary. A claiming bite—flesh yielding to teeth, exchanging biochemicals that would permanently alter us both—that was irrevocable. That was forever.

He deserved better than an alpha unable to master his own biology.

He deserved choice within constraint, partnership within possession.

I would burn for him instead.

My muscles trembled with the effort of restraint, sweat beading along my hairline despite the cool air of the hallway. The doorknob remained within my reach, the barrier between us penetrable with minimal effort. The instinct to claim, to possess, to take what was already legally mine grew stronger with each pained sound that filtered through the wood.

"Matteo," he called again, my name fracturing into syllables of desperate need. "Please . I can't— I can't bear it."

My hand rose toward the doorknob once more before I forced it back to my side, nails digging crescents into my palm as I fought for control against the primal imperative now roaring through my system.

If I entered that room, if I allowed myself to taste his heat-scent directly rather than through the filter of wooden barriers, there would be no return. The alpha already straining against civilized restraint would break free completely. I would claim him—not through mutual choice or partnership, but through biological inevitability neither of us could resist in our current states.

And he would hate me for it, once the heat receded. Once clarity returned. Once

choice had been stripped away by instinct neither could fully control.

The sound of his suffering continued filtering through the door, each moan and whimper striking my control like hammer blows to weakening metal. My forehead pressed harder against the wall, the cool plaster offering momentary clarity through physical sensation as my body temperature continued rising with the onset of responsive rut.

Mine to protect. Mine to honor. Mine to respect through restraint rather than possession.

When the Souzas discovered they had created this vulnerability in what was mine, they would pay with blood and territory both. Every person involved in the sabotage—from whoever had turned our staff member to whoever had issued the original order—would disappear from existence. Their families would speak of them in past tense. Their territories would become mine. Their legacy would be erased from memory.

But first, I had to survive this night without betraying the trust of the omega suffering behind this door. Without allowing biology to override the choice that had to exist between us for any true partnership to form.

He had not chosen this heat. He had not chosen this moment. He had not asked for the biological vulnerability now being used against us both.

I would endure the fire in my blood, the ache in my jaw, the tension coiled through every muscle. I would stand guard while he suffered. I would protect what was mine from afar, offering security without taking advantage of vulnerability that would be so easy to exploit.

From within the room came sounds of movement, of struggle, of an omega fighting

his own biology with the same determination I battled mine. The scent grew stronger, more complex, layers of need and desperation and biological imperative saturating the air until it felt like breathing liquid fire.

Mine, my alpha hindbrain insisted with unwavering certainty. Suffering . Fix . Claim . Mine .

Ours, my human choice countered with newfound clarity. Partnership . Respect . Choice .

The distinction made all the difference as I maintained my vigil outside the door, as I burned for him instead of with him, as I proved through restraint what possession could never demonstrate: that he mattered beyond biology, beyond claim, beyond the primal imperatives neither of us could fully escape.

That the omega who had entered my life through missing millions had become essential in ways that transcended strategic alliance or legal documentation.

That whatever existed between us would be forged through mutual choice, through partnership within possession, through respect that acknowledged vulnerability without exploiting it.

Even if that meant enduring the worst night of biological torment either of us had ever experienced.

Even if that meant standing guard while what was mine suffered behind closed doors I refused to breach without invitation.

Even if that meant burning with unanswered need while honoring boundaries biology insisted were irrelevant between alpha and claimed omega.

I would endure. For him. For us. For what might exist beyond this night of fire and restraint.

For the future neither of us had anticipated when paper claiming had set us on this path, but that now seemed like the only one worth fighting for—through biology, through vulnerability, through the fire in our blood neither had chosen but both now endured.



### MATTEO

The hall outside Luca's room became my prison, every inch of polished marble a border I could not cross. His scent saturated the air—honey and citrus transformed into something devastating, something that called to the most primal part of me with a siren's destructive promise.

"Go," he had begged, tears streaking down his flushed face. "Please go."

I had gone. Not far enough. Never far enough.

I paced the corridor like a caged predator, each turn bringing me back to his door, each breath flooding my system with the molecular evidence of his suffering. The honey notes had turned molten, nearly caramelized with heat, the citrus sharpening to something that cut through rational thought like a blade through silk. Beneath it all lay that distinctive undertone—warm rain on stone—now heated to steam that threatened to scald judgment entirely.

Mine, my alpha hindbrain insisted with increasing urgency. Suffering . Needing . Mine .

"Sir." Carlo's voice penetrated the fog of biological imperative clouding my thoughts. "The medic team hasn't responded to our calls."

I turned slowly, the movement requiring conscious control over muscles that wanted

nothing more than to break down the door behind me. " What do you mean, 'hasn't responded'?"

"Three separate teams, all suddenly unavailable. The Souza influence runs deeper than we anticipated." Carlo maintained a careful distance, his beta status offering immunity from the pheromones now saturating the hallway, but not from my volatile state. " They've blocked every medical option in the city."

Understanding crystalized with terrible clarity. The sabotaged suppressants, the compromised security, the medical blockade—all calculated to force a biological claiming where a paper one existed. To remove choice from both of us. To transform protection into possession through the cruel manipulation of our own bodies.

A low growl rumbled from my chest, the sound barely human. " Find whoever did this. Start with the household staff, then the delivery service. Someone had access. Someone touched what's mine."

Carlo nodded once, backing away with the practiced caution of a man who understood the danger of an alpha on the edge of protective rut. " And Mr . Bianchi ? What do you want me to do for him?"

The question hung between us, as delicate as a trigger wire. What could be done? The heat had progressed too far for medical intervention. The only biological relief would come through claiming—my teeth breaking skin at the juncture of his neck and shoulder, my scent merging permanently with his, my body satisfying the need consuming him from within.

The very claiming he had begged me not to initiate when coherent thought still governed his words.

"Cold towels," I said finally, each word emerging with conscious effort. " Water .

Electrolytes . Fever reducers, if we have them." Practical measures that would do little against the biological imperative raging through him, but the only assistance I could offer without crossing lines I refused to breach.

Carlo disappeared down the hallway, his footsteps fading beneath the sounds emanating from behind the closed door. Soft whimpers had evolved into desperate moans that stroked something animal in my blood, something that cared nothing for consent or choice, only for the claiming instinct encoded in my DNA .

Mine, it whispered with each tortured sound. Suffering . Fix . Claim . Mine .

I pressed my forehead against the cool wall, focusing on the sensation to ground myself as another wave of his scent washed over me. My own biology had begun responding beyond conscious control—rut rising in answer to his heat, my scent sharpening with protective aggression, with possessive intent. The wound in my side throbbed in time with my accelerated pulse, pain providing momentary clarity in a mind increasingly clouded by instinct.

From beyond the door came a cry that pierced through all defenses—raw, desperate, my name embedded within the sound. " Matteo !"

The single word, fragmented and pleading, shattered something inside me. Not a capitulation to base instinct, but a recognition of something deeper—responsibility that transcended legal claims or biological imperatives. If the Souzas had orchestrated this, if my enemies had violated the sanctuary of my territory to force biological vulnerability upon what was mine...

I would not allow them to win. Not through his suffering. Not through my surrender to what they had calculated I would do.

Carlo returned with supplies balanced on a tray—towels, ice, bottled water,

medications. His expression registered surprise as he took in my position, still outside the door rather than within.

"Sir," he began carefully, "these won't be enough."

"I know," I acknowledged, taking the tray from his hands. " Clear the floor. No one within hearing distance. No one."

Understanding dawned in his eyes. " And your father's men stationed in the lobby?"

"Tell them I'll kill anyone who approaches this floor." The words emerged with calm certainty rather than heat. Not threat but promise, delivered with the cold precision that had earned me my reputation within the family.

Carlo nodded once, then hesitated. " Matteo ." The rare use of my first name underscored the gravity of what he left unspoken. " There are other options. Claiming doesn't have to mean?—"

"Go," I cut him off, unwilling to hear alternatives that tempted compromise where none was acceptable. " Now ."

He retreated silently, leaving me alone with the tray and the torment emanating from behind the door. Another cry penetrated the wood, the sound transforming into a sob that compressed my chest like a physical weight. My hand settled on the doorknob, hesitating there as competing imperatives waged war within me.

Protect. Possess . Help . Claim . Honor . Take . Respect . Need .

The decision crystallized not from instinct but from its opposite—from the rational understanding that inaction had become its own form of harm. Entering that room risked one kind of violation. Remaining outside while he suffered guaranteed another.

I closed my eyes, gathering the tattered remains of my control around me like armor. Then I opened the door.

The wave of pheromones that greeted me nearly drove me to my knees—heat scent undiluted by barriers, by distance, by anything but the suppressants that had failed hours ago. A sweetness so thick it coated my tongue, left an almost painful ache at the back of my throat. The bright notes had darkened to something intoxicating—no longer just citrus but something fermented, dangerous, impossible to resist. His unique rain-scent had intensified to the humid heaviness before a storm breaks, electric and charged with potential.

Luca lay curled on the floor where I'd left him, his slim body twisted in a position of such vulnerability that something protective and fierce roared to life within me. Sweat dampened his dark curls, plastering them against his forehead. His white shirt clung to his skin, translucent with perspiration, while tremors wracked his frame in waves that corresponded to the pulses of scent filling the room.

He sensed my presence immediately, his head lifting with effort, eyes seeking mine through the darkness. Those eyes—usually sharp with intelligence behind wire-rimmed glasses—now glazed with fever and need, pupils blown so wide barely a ring of brown remained visible.

"M- Matteo ," he managed, my name fractured by a shudder that coursed through him. " You shouldn't...be here."

I set the tray on the nearest surface, movements deliberately slow and controlled. " I brought water. Cold towels."

A bitter laugh escaped him, the sound breaking into something closer to a sob. " Won't help."

"I know." I remained by the door, maintaining distance that cost more willpower than any negotiation, any battle, any test of strength I'd ever faced. " But it's what I can offer."

His gaze held mine, clarity momentarily surfacing through the haze of heat. " Why ?"

The simple question penetrated deeper than it should have, forcing examination of motivations I'd kept carefully unanalyzed. Why indeed? Why resist what biology demanded, what legality permitted, what my enemies had calculated I would take?

"Because you asked me not to touch you," I answered finally, the truth stark and simple between us. " Because choice matters, Luca . Even now."

Something shifted in his expression then—surprise, perhaps, or recognition. Whatever it was flickered briefly before another wave of heat claimed him, his body curling tighter as a moan escaped through clenched teeth.

I moved toward him then, not to claim but to aid, kneeling beside his huddled form with careful distance maintained between us. The proximity tested every ounce of my control, his scent enveloping me completely now, calling to something primal and possessive that cared nothing for consent or choice.

Mine, it insisted with renewed fervor. Suffering . Fix . Claim . Mine .

I dampened a towel with ice water, the cold against my heated skin providing momentary clarity. " May I ?" I asked, the towel hovering near his forehead.

He nodded once, the small movement clearly requiring effort. I pressed the cool cloth against his skin, watching as his eyes fluttered closed at the minimal relief it provided. Another towel followed, this one draped across the back of his neck where heat radiated most intensely. My fingers skirted the edges of his suppressant patch,

now completely ineffective but still adhered to skin that burned with fever.

"Water," I urged, supporting his shoulders as he struggled to sit upright. The contact sent electricity through my palm despite the barrier of his sweat-soaked shirt, my scent responding automatically to his proximity. Sandalwood and cedar sharpened with protective intent, with possessive awareness, with the rising tide of rut triggered by his condition.

He drank in desperate gulps, water spilling down his chin in his urgency. When the bottle emptied, he collapsed back against me, seemingly beyond caring about the contact he'd forbidden earlier.

Nearly two hours passed in this pattern—cold towels warming too quickly against his fevered skin, water bottles emptying, brief moments of clarity giving way to longer stretches of heat-driven delirium. Each passing minute saw his condition worsen, his temperature climbing despite every intervention. The room darkened as evening approached, shadows lengthening across the floor while I maintained my vigil of insufficient aid.

During a brief moment of lucidity, his head dropped against my shoulder, the position exposing the vulnerable curve of his neck where his scent gland pulsed visibly beneath flushed skin. The sight paralyzed me momentarily, alpha instinct roaring to life with renewed intensity. One movement, one moment of surrender to biological imperative, and I could end his suffering.

My teeth against that gland, breaking skin, exchanging biochemicals that would transform his heat from torment to pleasure. The claiming our enemies had calculated I would take. The claiming that would relieve his agony at the cost of his choice.

"P-please," he whispered, the word hot against my neck where his face pressed. " I can't... I need..."

I closed my eyes, fighting for control against the weight of his suffering against me, the scent of him consuming rational thought like fire through dry timber. " Tell me what you need, Luca . Be specific." The question wasn't just about consent—it was about preserving his autonomy even now, when biology had stripped so much from him.

His fingers clutched my shirt, twisting the fabric as another wave of heat coursed through him. " Make it stop," he gasped. " Please , Matteo . I can't... I can't bear it."

The plea shredded what remained of my defenses, but I forced myself to seek clarity where heat and need had clouded understanding. " How ?" I asked, the word emerging rougher than intended. " Tell me exactly what you're asking for, Luca ."

His body trembled against mine, slick heat evident where our bodies pressed together, his scent spiking with another wave of need. For one terrible moment, I thought he'd retreated beyond coherent speech, beyond the ability to grant the consent I refused to proceed without.

Then his hand rose, shaking but deliberate, to touch the junction of his neck and shoulder—the precise location where a claiming bite would mark him permanently as mine.

"This," he whispered, fingers pressing against his scent gland with unmistakable intent. " I need this."

"Are you certain?" I held myself rigid against the tide of need threatening to overwhelm judgment. " The heat is affecting your mind, Luca . I won't take advantage of that."

His eyes met mine, fever-bright but momentarily clear. " I know what I'm asking. I'm choosing this, not just the heat." His fingers tightened in my shirt, anchoring himself



as another wave of need threatened to consume him. " I choose you, Matteo . Please ."

The words penetrated the last barriers of my resistance. Not capitulation to biological imperative, but conscious choice made despite it. Not surrender to what our enemies had orchestrated, but reclamation of agency within the constraints they had imposed.

I gathered him fully into my arms, lifting him from the floor with careful strength, mindful of the wound in my side that protested the movement. He weighed almost nothing, his body burning against mine as I carried him to the bed, laying him across sheets already dampened with sweat and slick.

"If you change your mind, at any point," I said, hovering above him, still maintaining the last fragments of distance between us, "tell me to stop. I will. No matter what."

He nodded, understanding passing between us in that moment—a pact separate from the biological claiming approaching, a recognition of choice preserved within biological imperative.

Then I lowered my mouth to his throat, to the scent gland pulsing beneath flushed skin. The taste of him exploded across my tongue as my lips pressed against his neck—honey and citrus and something uniquely Luca beneath the heat-scent driving us both toward the edge of control. His body arched instantly in response, a broken sound escaping him as my teeth grazed the sensitive flesh.

"Mine," I whispered against his skin, the word emerging not as possession but as promise. Protection . Partnership . " Mine to protect. Mine to care for. Mine to honor."

His hands tangled in my hair, pulling me closer with desperate need. " Yours ," he gasped, the word dissolving into a moan as my teeth pressed more firmly against his

gland. " Please , Matteo . Now ."

The final barriers of restraint shattered at his plea. My teeth broke skin in one decisive movement, biochemicals flowing between us in the ancient exchange that transformed separate entities into bonded pair. His blood carried the essence of his scent—honey and citrus and warm rain—and as it merged with mine, something fundamental shifted in both our chemistries.

Luca's body convulsed beneath mine, his cry of pain transforming into something else entirely as the claiming took hold. The heat that had tormented him didn't disappear but transformed, agony evolving into desperate need that could now find satisfaction through the alpha who had claimed him.

My own control dissolved as the taste of him flooded my system, rut rising fully in response to the omega now biologically mine. Every cell in my body recognized the chemical signature of his surrender—not just honey but nectar, not just citrus but vital essence, not just rain but life itself. His scent had transcended ordinary description, becoming something primal and ancient that spoke directly to the most basic part of my brain: mate, bond, protect.

"Matteo," he gasped, hands clutching at my shoulders with urgent need. " Please . I need?—"

"I know what you need," I answered, voice dropping to a register I barely recognized as my own. The wound at his throat continued to pulse, our scents mingling with each passing second, the biological bond strengthening between us. " And I'll give it to you. All of it."

His shirt gave way beneath my hands, buttons scattering across the bed as I exposed heated skin to my touch. The sight of him—flushed and desperate beneath me, throat marked with my claim, scent transformed by our bonding—triggered something

possessive and tender simultaneously. This wasn't the calculated manipulation our enemies had orchestrated. This was something they could never have anticipated or understood.

"Mine," I growled against his chest, teeth grazing sensitive skin as I traced patterns of possession across his body. " Mine to protect. Mine to satisfy. Mine ."

"Yours," he agreed, the word emerging with surprising clarity despite the fever still consuming him. His hands fumbled with my shirt, desperation making him clumsy. " Need you. All of you."

I shed my remaining clothing with ruthless efficiency, each movement calculated to minimize the seconds between his need and my response. The silk shirt—already half-unbuttoned—tore under my impatient hands, the sound of ripping fabric sharp in the heat-saturated air. My belt buckle hit the floor with a metallic thud, pants following in a whisper of expensive fabric against skin that burned for contact. Boxer briefs discarded without ceremony, leaving me naked and fully aroused, my cock heavy and throbbing with the biological imperative of rut.

"Fuck," I growled, the single syllable scraping raw from my throat as I took in Luca's desperate state beneath me.

His body called to mine on a primal frequency that bypassed thought entirely—the claiming bite at his throat still weeping tiny droplets of blood where my teeth had broken skin, each crimson bead carrying biochemicals that flooded my system with possessive need. The exchange had created a feedback loop between us, his heat-scent intensifying my rut, my rut-scent soothing his heat, our bodies recognizing each other on a molecular level that science could explain but never truly capture.

Mine, my hindbrain insisted with savage certainty as I lowered myself over him, skin finally meeting skin in an electric slide of contact. Mine to possess. Mine to fill. Mine

to satisfy.

My cock dragged against his stomach, leaving a slick trail of pre-cum across his heated flesh, the sensation so intense I had to close my eyes momentarily against the overwhelming urge to claim him completely, immediately. I could smell his slick now, honey-sweet and thick with need, his entrance already wet and ready for the taking.

"Please," he begged, fingers digging into my shoulders hard enough to bruise, hips lifting in unconscious invitation. " Matteo , I need— I need your knot, need you inside, please?—"

When I covered his body with mine, skin against fevered skin, the contact ignited something primal between us. Every nerve ending sparked to life where our bodies met—his heat searing into my cooler flesh, my weight pressing him into the mattress with deliberate control. The sounds that tore from our throats mingled in the heavy air—his high and desperate, a keening whine that stroked my most basic instincts; mine a guttural growl that rumbled up from somewhere ancient and possessive inside me.

"Fuck, Luca ," I breathed against his throat, my lips brushing the claiming bite still weeping tiny droplets of our bonding. The taste of him lingered on my tongue—honey and citrus transformed into something darker, richer, mine.

The wound in my side flared with sharp, insistent pain as I shifted my weight, a physical reminder of the danger surrounding us. Blood had seeped through the hasty bandage, warm and sticky against my ribs—battle scars from the same enemies who had orchestrated this moment, who had poisoned his suppressants and blocked medical aid, thinking to use our biology as a weapon. Thinking to force my hand, to make me claim what was legally mine on paper through biological imperative rather than choice.

My cock throbbed between us, achingly hard and leaking steadily against the flat plane of his stomach. The head dragged through the slickness there, sending jolts of electricity up my spine with each subtle movement. I could smell his arousal, his need—that intoxicating scent of slick gathering between his thighs, sweet and musky and utterly irresistible.

"Need you," he gasped, fingers digging into my shoulders hard enough to leave crescent-shaped marks. His hips bucked upward, seeking friction, seeking fullness, seeking relief from the heat consuming him from within. " Please , Matteo — I can't—I need your cock, need your knot?—"

The raw desperation in his voice nearly shattered what little control I maintained. My alpha instincts roared to life, demanding I take, claim, fill, breed. But beneath that biological imperative lay something else—something that had watched this quiet, brilliant omega from afar for years, something that had recognized his worth long before biology forced our hands.

They had miscalculated. What they had intended as manipulation, we had reclaimed as choice. What they had designed as vulnerability, we had transformed into strength.

"Look at me," I commanded softly, needing to see clarity in his eyes before proceeding further. " See me, Luca . Not just alpha. Not just heat. Me ."

His gaze met mine, fever-bright but present, recognizing. " Matteo ," he said, my name emerging clear and deliberate from lips swollen with need. " I see you."

The confirmation was all I required. I positioned myself between his trembling thighs, my cock heavy and throbbing against his entrance, already slick with his need. The scent of him—honey and citrus transformed by our claiming into something uniquely ours—flooded my senses, driving rational thought from my mind.

"Mine," I growled, pressing forward with deliberate restraint, the head of my cock breaching him slowly despite every alpha instinct screaming to thrust, to take, to claim with brutal efficiency.

Luca's body opened for me, his heat-slick entrance gripping me with desperate intensity as I pushed deeper. The tight, wet heat of him nearly shattered my control, pleasure so intense it bordered on pain radiating up my spine and settling at the base of my skull where primitive instinct lived.

"Fuck," I hissed, watching his face as I seated myself fully inside him, his body stretching to accommodate my girth. " So fucking tight. So perfect."

His legs wrapped around my waist, heels digging into the small of my back, urging me deeper still. I braced myself on one forearm beside his head, my other hand gripping his hip with bruising force as I began to move. Each withdrawal and thrust was measured, controlled—a direct contradiction to the savage need coursing through my veins.

"More," he begged, fingers clawing at my shoulders, my back, anywhere he could reach. " Please , Matteo , harder— I need?—"

I silenced him with a brutal kiss, teeth catching his lower lip as I increased my pace, driving into him with enough force to shift the mattress beneath us. The slick sounds of our joining filled the room, obscene and perfect, mingling with the low growls tearing from my throat and the desperate whimpers escaping his.

My knot began to swell at the base of my cock, catching against his rim with each thrust, the friction sending jolts of electric pleasure through both our bodies. His eyes widened at the sensation, pupils blown so wide they nearly swallowed the brown entirely.

"Yes," he gasped, his internal muscles clenching around me in anticipation. " Your knot—give me your knot?—"

I drove into him with renewed purpose, sweat slicking our bodies where they pressed together, the wound in my side forgotten in the haze of rut and need and possession. My rhythm faltered as my knot expanded further, each thrust requiring more force to push past the tight ring of muscle at his entrance.

"Take it," I commanded, voice barely recognizable as my own. " Take all of me, Luca ."

With one final, powerful thrust, my knot pushed past his resistance, locking us together as my orgasm tore through me with devastating force. I emptied myself inside him in hot pulses, each one triggering aftershocks of pleasure that rippled through my entire body. His own release followed immediately, untouched cock spurting between our bodies as his inner muscles contracted around my knot, milking me for every drop.

I collapsed forward, careful to distribute my weight to avoid crushing him, our bodies still joined intimately by my knot. The claiming was complete—biological, physical, irrevocable. What had begun as a political arrangement on paper had transformed into something primal and real, marked in scent and blood and seed.

Not like that. Not with him. Not when choice mattered more than biology.

His body arched beneath mine, a perfect bow of surrender, his spine curving up to press every burning inch of him against my chest. Desperate sounds—half-sobs, half-moans—spilled from his throat in a symphony that stroked something primal in my blood. The claiming bite at his neck continued to weep tiny droplets of crimson, each one carrying the complex biochemicals that were rewriting both our molecular structures, binding us together on a level more fundamental than paper contracts or

political arrangements could ever achieve.

I watched, transfixed, as the changes rippled through him—his scent evolving from pure heat-distress to something richer, deeper, marked unmistakably with mine. The sandalwood and cedar notes of my own scent had wrapped around his honey-citrus essence, transforming both into something neither of us had been alone. Something new. Something ours.

The heat that had tormented him—that had twisted his face in agony, had wrenched those broken pleas from his lips—now found focus. Purpose . The biological imperative that our enemies had weaponized against us now flowed through channels of pleasure rather than pain, his body recognizing on the most primitive level that relief had arrived. That his alpha—not just any alpha, but his—had claimed him not as possession but as partner.

"Fuck," I growled against his throat, unable to resist tasting the skin beside the claiming mark, my tongue tracing the salt-sweet flavor of his sweat. " You feel that, don't you? The change?"

His fingers dug into my shoulders, blunt nails leaving crescent indentations that I'd wear proudly tomorrow. " Yes ," he gasped, his voice cracking on the single syllable. " It's —it's like fire, but different. Not burning me anymore. Burning ... with you."

Bonded. Claimed . Paired .

The knot held us locked together as aftershocks coursed through his slender frame, his heat temporarily satisfied but not yet fully resolved. Hours of this remained ahead—waves of need requiring satisfaction, biological imperatives demanding fulfillment. But the worst had passed with the initial claiming. The torment had transformed to pleasure. The isolation to connection.



I gathered him against me, careful of the knot still binding us together, arranging our bodies so he rested across my chest. His face pressed against my throat, breath evening slowly as exhaustion claimed him in the aftermath of heat-spike and satisfaction. The claiming mark at his neck continued to pulse with shared biochemistry, our scents blending more completely with each passing minute.

"Sleep," I murmured against his damp curls, one hand stroking down his spine in rhythmic comfort. "I'll be here when you wake. When the next wave comes."

His fingers curled against my chest, small movements of contentment rather than distress. "Thank you," he whispered, the words slurring slightly as exhaustion pulled him toward unconsciousness. "For waiting. For asking. For ..." He trailed off, unable to articulate what had passed between us.

I understood regardless, the bond between us already translating emotion where words failed. Not just gratitude for physical relief, but for the preservation of choice within biological imperative. For making claiming an act of partnership rather than possession, even when our bodies had given us little alternative.

As he drifted into sleep, temporarily sated and securely bound to me through biology's ancient mechanisms, I stared into the darkness beyond the bed, thoughts clarifying in the aftermath of rut-driven claiming. The Souzas had orchestrated this, believing forced heat would drive me to claim without consent, to take advantage of biological vulnerability. They had calculated that I would become the very alpha stereotype I had spent years distinguishing myself from—driven by instinct rather than honor, by possession rather than protection.

They had miscalculated.

What they had intended as manipulation, we had reclaimed as choice. What they had designed to strip agency had instead revealed its power.

Yes, I had claimed Luca Bianchi . Marked him. Knotted him. Satisfied the heat they had forced upon him through sabotage and manipulation. But I had done so with his consent, his choice, his partnership in the decision. I had waited until clarity surfaced through fever, until permission emerged through need, until the man rather than merely the omega had asked for what biology demanded.

My arms tightened around his sleeping form, protective instinct heightened by the claiming bond still forming between us. The enemies who had orchestrated this violation of my territory, this manipulation of Luca's biology, would pay for their miscalculation. Not just for forcing heat upon him, but for believing I would dishonor what was mine by taking without permission.

"No one will ever touch you without going through me," I whispered against his hair, the promise emerging not from alpha possessiveness but from something deeper, something that had begun forming the moment he'd walked into my office with evidence of missing millions and the courage to present it directly.

The bond between us pulsed with shared biochemistry, with altered scents, with the molecular certainty that transcended paper claims or legal declarations. What had begun as arrangement had evolved to partnership, and now to something our enemies could never have anticipated or understood.

Mine, my alpha instinct insisted, but with new meaning, new dimension. Not possession but protection. Not control but care.

Mine to protect. Mine to honor. Mine to defend against all who would harm him.

As Luca slept against me, temporarily sated but with hours of heat still ahead, I stared into the darkness with cold certainty. The Souzas had intended this claiming as manipulation, as weakness to be exploited. Instead , they had created something they could never have anticipated—a bond that strengthened rather than compromised, a

partnership forged in biological imperative but transcending it through choice preserved within constraint.

They would learn, too late, the consequence of their miscalculation.

No one touched what was mine.

### LUCA

Consciousness returned as a slow tide, each wave bringing fragments of reality into sharper focus. The sheets beneath me—impossibly soft, almost liquid against my cooling skin. The weight of an arm draped protectively across my waist. The scent that surrounded me—no longer just mine, but something richer, more complex. Sandalwood and cedar intertwined with honey and citrus, creating an olfactory signature that announced our bond to anyone with the ability to detect it.

The claiming had changed everything on a molecular level.

I opened my eyes to a room bathed in the gentle glow of morning light filtering through expensive curtains. My body ached in ways both familiar and entirely new—the pleasant soreness of physical satisfaction layered over the bone-deep exhaustion of heat. The fever had receded to a low simmer, temporarily banked by the claiming but not yet completely extinguished. Hours remained before my biology would release its hold entirely.

Beside me, Matteo slept—a sight so unexpected it momentarily stole my breath. In sleep, the hard edges of the mafia underboss softened, revealing contours of the man beneath the alpha exterior. His dark lashes rested against olive skin, his mouth relaxed from its usual controlled line. One arm remained possessively around my waist even in unconsciousness, his body curved toward mine in protective instinct.

The memory of the night before filtered through the remaining haze of heat—the

desperation that had consumed me, the quiet strength with which he'd resisted his own biology, the moment when choice had emerged through biological imperative. I choose you, Matteo . Please . My own words, spoken through fever but with unexpected clarity.

And he had waited for those words. Had refused to take what biology and law would have permitted without them.

My fingers rose unconsciously to the junction between neck and shoulder, finding the raised edges of the claiming bite that had forever altered my biochemistry. The mark pulsed with lingering sensitivity, a physical reminder of the bond now connecting us beyond paper claims or legal declarations. Our scents had merged, our biology irrevocably linked through the ancient mechanisms of alpha and omega. What had begun as strategic arrangement had transformed into something neither of us had anticipated.

I slipped carefully from beneath his arm, needing a moment of solitude to process the profound changes of the past hours. My legs trembled slightly as I padded toward the bathroom, muscles protesting movements after the intensity of heat and claiming. The tiles felt blessedly cool beneath my bare feet, the sensation grounding me in physical reality when everything else seemed shifted, rearranged into unfamiliar patterns.

The mirror revealed a stranger—or perhaps the truest version of myself I'd ever confronted. My dark curls stood in wild disarray, my skin marked with evidence of possession—not just the claiming bite at my neck, but smaller claims pressed into flesh across collarbones, shoulders, hips. My eyes held a new awareness, pupils still slightly dilated from the lingering effects of heat.

I looked claimed. Marked . Bonded .

And beneath it all, strangely at peace.

The expected shame, the rebellion against biological imperative that had defined my relationship with my omega nature for years—it hovered at the edges of consciousness but couldn't take hold. Something fundamental had shifted within me, beyond the biochemical changes of claiming. Some acceptance I hadn't anticipated, born not from surrender to biology but from the unexpected dignity Matteo had preserved within it.

Movement caught my attention—a tray placed neatly on the counter that hadn't been there the night before. Fresh fruit arranged in careful patterns, a carafe of water beaded with condensation, packets of electrolyte powder, and what appeared to be omega-specific nutritional supplements designed for post-heat recovery. Beside it all, a folded note in unfamiliar handwriting: By order of Mr . Corvino . Delivered 6 AM . For when you wake.

The evidence of care—practical, unsentimental, precisely what my body needed—triggered an unexpected tightness in my throat. This wasn't Carlo's doing or some standard protocol. These were specific items Matteo himself must have requested, anticipating exactly what I'd need upon waking. How many alphas would think to provide such necessities? How many would consider an omega's physical needs beyond the satisfaction of heat? The tray spoke of planning, of consideration that extended beyond possession to genuine care.

I sipped water gratefully, my body responding to needs I hadn't fully registered until they were met. The fruit tasted impossibly sweet against my tongue, natural sugars replenishing depleted energy reserves. As I ate, awareness of my surroundings expanded beyond immediate physical sensation.

The bathroom showed evidence of hasty cleaning—damp towels neatly folded, glass shards from the sabotaged suppressant vials completely removed, surfaces wiped clean of the evidence of my vulnerability. Someone —likely staff rather than Matteo himself—had restored order while I slept, removing all traces of the violation that had

preceded the claiming.

The memory of those shattered vials triggered a colder awareness. Someone had entered this room while I slept. Someone had deliberately destroyed the protection between my biology and vulnerability. The Souzas , Matteo had said, believing forced heat would drive him to claim without consent, to take advantage of biological vulnerability.

They had miscalculated.

"Luca."

The voice from the doorway startled me from reflection. Matteo stood there, shirtless and watchful, his dark eyes assessing my condition with careful attention. The wound at his side had been rebandaged sometime during the night, the evidence of violence a stark reminder of the dangers surrounding us both. His scent reached me before he moved closer—sandalwood and cedar now carrying subtle notes of honey that hadn't existed before the claiming. My scent, integrated with his on a molecular level.

"You should have woken me," he said, voice roughened from sleep yet controlled in that way that seemed integral to his nature.

"You needed rest." I reached for one of the robes hanging nearby, suddenly aware of my nakedness in a way I hadn't been moments before. Heat -haze had temporarily receded, leaving self-consciousness in its wake.

Matteo's eyes tracked the movement, something possessive flaring briefly before being mastered. " How are you feeling?" The question contained layers—concern for my physical condition, yes, but also uncertainty about the emotional aftermath of what had transpired between us.

"Better." I cinched the robe around my waist, the soft fabric a temporary barrier between vulnerability and exposure. "The fever's decreased."

"Temporarily," he confirmed, maintaining his position at the threshold rather than approaching further. Giving space. Choice. "It will return in cycles for another day or so, but with decreasing intensity."

The clinical assessment contained no presumption, no assumption that he would be the one to see me through those remaining cycles. Again, that preservation of choice within biological constraint that I hadn't expected from an alpha—especially not one born to mafia authority.

"Thank you," I said, the words emerging before I'd fully formed the thought behind them. "For ..." I gestured vaguely, uncertain how to articulate gratitude for something so complex, so fundamental.

"Don't thank me for basic decency, Luca." His response held no pride, no expectation of praise for restraint that should have been standard rather than exceptional. "I should apologize for not stopping them. For not preventing this."

The shift in responsibility—from my gratitude for his restraint to his apology for the violation that had preceded it—realigned something fundamental between us. Not possession but partnership. Not surrender but alliance.

"You couldn't have known," I offered, moving toward him with careful steps. "None of us anticipated they would go this far."

His expression darkened, something dangerous flashing briefly before being contained. "I should have. The Souzas are known for biological manipulation. They've used heat-triggering agents before against rivals' families."



The casual reference to mafia tactics I'd never considered sent a chill through me despite the lingering warmth of heat. The world I'd entered through missing millions and paper claims contained dangers beyond physical violence—biological warfare targeting the most vulnerable aspects of secondary gender.

"Carlo is interrogating the delivery service that brought the suppressants," Matteo continued, his voice dropping to something colder, more calculated. " When we find who tampered with them?—"

"You'll kill them," I finished, not a question but an acknowledgment of the reality we inhabited.

His gaze met mine directly, no pretense, no softening of what he was willing to do. " Yes ."

The simplicity of his confirmation should have horrified me. Instead , I found myself nodding slightly, accepting the reality of our world—of his world, which had become mine through claiming and consequence. Violence as currency, as response, as the language of power and protection.

"You're not disturbed by that," he observed, something like surprise registering beneath his controlled exterior.

I considered the question, examining my own response with the analytical precision I'd once reserved for financial discrepancies. " I should be," I admitted, echoing words I'd spoken to him nights before, when he'd returned bloodied from defending territory that included me. " But I understand necessity in ways I didn't before."

Something shifted in his expression then—respect perhaps, or recognition of a hardness in me that belied the omega stereotypes his father had so readily applied. " The heat has changed more than just our scents."

"Not the heat," I corrected gently. " Experience . Perspective ." I touched the claiming mark at my neck, feeling its subtle pulse beneath my fingertips. " Choice within constraint."

His eyes tracked the movement of my hand, something possessive and tender simultaneously flaring in his gaze. " Do you regret it?" The question emerged roughly, vulnerability beneath alpha control.

The answer rose within me with unexpected clarity—no shame, no conflict, none of the rejection of my omega nature that had defined me for years. Where I expected doubt, I found only certainty. " No ." The simplicity of my response surprised even me. " Do you?"

"Never." A single word, absolute in its conviction.

Silence stretched between us, not uncomfortable but weighted with unspoken significance. Whatever had begun as strategic arrangement, as protection through possession, had evolved into something neither of us had fully anticipated. The biochemical bond created through claiming had layers beyond biological imperative—trust formed through choice preserved, through boundaries respected, through dignity maintained within vulnerability.

A slight tremor passed through me, the first warning of heat returning in its cyclical pattern. Matteo noticed immediately, his nostrils flaring slightly as my scent shifted in subtle warning.

"It's starting again," he said, neither question nor presumption.

I nodded, heat beginning to simmer beneath my skin once more—less desperate than before, more manageable, but unmistakable in its biological demand. " Not as strong. But yes."

He took a single step forward, then stopped, restraint evident in every line of his powerful frame. "What do you need, Luca?" The question—the same one he'd asked during the depths of heat-madness—carried the same respect for autonomy, the same refusal to presume despite biological claiming and legal rights.

The heat building within me whispered of need, of completion, of satisfaction available through the alpha standing before me. But beneath those biological imperatives lay something more meaningful—the recognition of choice preserved, of partnership rather than possession.

"You," I said simply, allowing the robe to slip from my shoulders in deliberate choice rather than heat-driven desperation. "But as partners. Not as alpha claiming omega."

Something powerful flashed across his features—surprise, perhaps, at the distinction I'd drawn, followed by hunger that transcended mere biological response. "Partners," he agreed, moving toward me with the controlled power that defined him.

When his arms encircled me, when his scent enveloped me completely, I surrendered not to biological imperative but to the partnership we had forged within it. Alpha and omega, protector and protected, but equals in the choice we had made despite the constraints forced upon us.

As his lips found mine, the claiming bond between us flared hot and electric. My body responded instantly, my omega biology singing with recognition—yes, this one, this alpha—as Matteo's tongue swept possessively into my mouth. I tasted him—rich coffee and something darker, more primal—while his large hands traced deliberate patterns across my naked skin, following the constellation of marks he'd already left during the night. My nipples tightened to aching points as his thumbs brushed over them, sending sparks of pleasure straight to my core.

"Fuck, you're beautiful," he growled against my mouth, his voice a low rumble that

vibrated through my chest.

I whimpered as slick gathered between my thighs, my entrance clenching around emptiness, craving his thickness. The heat was building again, not the desperate madness of before, but a simmering need that left me fully aware of every sensation—every drag of his calloused fingertips against my oversensitive skin, every press of his hard cock against my stomach.

"Please," I whispered, my hands sliding down his chest to the waistband of his hastily donned sweatpants. "I need to feel you inside me again."

Matteo's eyes darkened, pupils blown wide with desire. "Tell me what you want, Luca." His hands gripped my ass, fingers dipping between my cheeks to find me wet and ready. "Tell me exactly what you need."

"Your cock," I said, boldness rising through the haze of returning heat. "I need your cock filling me up, stretching me open. I need to feel you come inside me again."

He groaned, lifting me effortlessly and carrying me back to the bed. I spread my legs for him without hesitation, displaying myself in wanton invitation. The sight of his massive body looming over me—all olive skin and rippling muscle, the bandage at his side a stark reminder of his mortality despite his power—made my breath catch.

"Mine," he said simply, pushing his sweatpants down to free his thick, heavy erection.

I reached for him, wrapping my fingers around his shaft, feeling it pulse in my grip. "And you're mine," I replied, voice steady despite the trembling in my limbs. "Not because biology says so. Because we choose it."

His cock nudged at my entrance, the blunt head pressing against my slick hole. I

arched into the contact, desperate for him to fill me, to complete the connection that had fundamentally altered us both. When he finally pushed inside, the stretch was exquisite—my body remembered him now, welcomed him, but still marveled at the perfect fullness.

I surrendered not to biological imperative but to the partnership we had forged within it. Alpha and omega, protector and protected, but equals in the choice we had made despite the constraints forced upon us.

Our enemies had miscalculated indeed. What they had intended as vulnerability, we had transformed into strength. What they had designed as manipulation, we had reclaimed as choice.

And what had begun as paper claiming had evolved into something far more dangerous to those who would stand against us—a bond forged through fire, strengthened through restraint, and sealed through mutual choice within the biological imperatives that defined our world.

Mine, my omega hindbrain whispered as his scent enveloped me completely.

Ours, my conscious mind corrected, as his hands cradled my face with surprising gentleness.

The distinction made all the difference.

### MATTEO

The holographic city map glowed in the darkened conference room, sectors illuminated in colors that represented territories, alliances, and threats. In the silence of predawn, with Luca still sleeping in the aftermath of heat, I studied the shifting landscape of power with the focus of a general preparing for inevitable conflict.

Three days had passed since his heat had receded completely. Three days of recalibration—chemical, strategic, personal. The claiming bite at his neck had healed to a raised scar that pulsed with shared biology, our scents permanently altered in ways that announced our bond to anyone with the ability to detect it. No longer just paper claiming, but molecular truth.

The Souza territory glowed red on the eastern quadrant of the map, their reach extending like arterial bleeding into sectors that had once been neutral ground. My finger traced the boundary where their influence had begun encroaching on Corvino holdings—subtle intrusions that presaged more aggressive moves to come.

"They've doubled security at their downtown properties," Carlo reported, his voice carrying the fatigue of sleepless surveillance. "And Emilio has recalled his daughter from Milan. The entire family is consolidating."

"Preparing for war," I translated flatly, the metallic scent of gun oil rising from the weapons laid out on the table before me—a ritual of preparation that predated conscious memory. My hands moved through the familiar motions of cleaning,

checking, loading. Violence readied with the same precision I applied to all aspects of my life.

"Should we evacuate to the estate?" Carlo asked, the question carrying more meaning than its surface suggested. The family compound would offer tactical advantages, resources, manpower. It would also place us directly under my father's influence—the very control I had rejected when claiming Luca publicly.

"No." The answer emerged with certainty born of instinct rather than calculation. "We maintain position. But it's time to move Luca closer."

Carlo's eyebrow lifted fractionally—the subtle tell of surprise he rarely allowed himself to display. "The panic room?"

"My office," I corrected, holstering the Beretta with mechanical efficiency. "He's safer within arm's reach than behind walls that can be breached."

The decision crystallized not from tactical analysis but from something more primal—a need to keep what was mine within the territory I could personally defend. The claiming had altered more than scent or legal status. It had rewired protective instincts in ways I was still discovering, still mapping like unknown terrain.

"Have the security footage from the infiltration been analyzed?" I asked, moving to the window where dawn had begun painting the eastern sky in watercolor strokes of crimson and gold. Blood sunrise, my father would have called it. Omen of conflict to come.

"Facial recognition identified the woman who delivered the tampered suppressants. Freelancer, not directly Souza." Carlo placed a tablet before me, displaying the image of an unremarkable beta woman with practiced invisibility in her bearing. "Untraceable now. Likely eliminated once the job was complete."

My jaw tightened, anger simmering beneath controlled exterior. The Souzas operated with calculated brutality—using pawns easily sacrificed, keeping their own hands technically clean. Their manipulation of Luca's biology through sabotaged suppressants represented violation on a level that transcended mere business conflict. It had become personal in ways they couldn't have anticipated.

"When do we move against them?" Carlo's question held no judgment, only practical assessment.

"Not yet." I turned from the window, decision forming with cold clarity. "First, we find the money. Follow it to whoever orchestrated the theft. Build the complete picture before striking."

"And Luca's role?"

The question hung between us, weighted with implications about trust, about vulnerability, about the omega who now carried my claim and my scent. My consigliere, ever practical, was questioning not Luca's loyalty but his capacity to participate in what would inevitably become dangerous territory.

"He's the key to unraveling the financial trail," I replied, gathering the tablet and weapons with economical movements. "And he's mine to protect while he does it."

The possessive declaration emerged without conscious thought—alpha certainty coloring words that might once have been purely strategic. The claiming had altered more than biology; it had shifted perspective in ways I was still integrating, still reconciling with the underboss who had built reputation on calculated control rather than instinctive response.

"Ready the secure room in my office," I instructed, moving toward the door with purpose reignited. "We begin today."



\* \* \*

Luca stood at the threshold of my private office, uncertainty evident in the slight tension of his shoulders despite the calm his expression projected. Three days of recovery had restored physical equilibrium after the intensity of heat, but something more profound had settled into his bearing—a quiet dignity that transcended omega stereotypes, a strength that existed in counterpoint to vulnerability rather than in denial of it.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked, voice steady though his scent betrayed lingering anxiety—honey notes sharpened with alertness, with caution.

"Come in," I replied, setting aside financial reports to give him my full attention. "No need for formality between us now."

The reminder of our altered status—bonded, claimed, chemically linked—softened something in his posture. He entered, closing the door behind him with careful precision before approaching my desk.

"I've set up a secure workspace here," I explained, gesturing to the adjacent room visible through glass partitions—a space usually reserved for the most sensitive Corvino operations, now reconfigured with dual workstations and enhanced security protocols. "You'll be safer working near me than isolated in the penthouse."

His gaze moved to the reinforced room, assessment rather than acquiescence in his expression. "You're expecting trouble."

"I'm preparing for inevitabilities," I corrected, moving around the desk to stand closer to him—close enough that our scents mingled in the space between us, the chemical reminder of claiming triggering something possessive and protective simultaneously. "The Souzas have made their intentions clear through the suppressant sabotage."

They'll make additional moves."

Luca nodded, absorbing the information with the analytical focus that had first drawn my attention when he'd brought evidence of missing millions. No hysterics, no denial—just practical assessment of the reality surrounding us.

"I've been reviewing the transactions again," he said, surprising me with the revelation that he'd continued working despite the physical demands of heat recovery. " There's something I missed before."

Interest sharpened my focus. " Show me."

He moved to my desk with newfound confidence, retrieving his tablet from his messenger bag to display complex financial diagrams I recognized from our earlier investigations. The familiarity of the action—of his methodical approach to problems that would have overwhelmed lesser minds—triggered unexpected warmth beneath my practiced neutrality.

"The money didn't just disappear into offshore accounts," he explained, fingers tracing patterns across the screen with precise movements. " It reappeared here—" A highlighted transaction pulsed red against the display. " And here." Another pulse, another seemingly unrelated business entity. " Sanitized , rerouted, but ultimately flowing back into holdings connected to Souza shell companies."

I studied the evidence with growing admiration for his tenacity, his attention to detail that surpassed even my own financial experts. " When did you discover this?"

"Last night," he admitted, a hint of color touching his cheeks. " I couldn't sleep. Working helps me... process."

The admission revealed more than financial findings—it showed how he coped with

upheaval, with the profound changes of the past week. Not through emotional displays or retreat, but through the application of intelligence to problems he could solve when personal circumstances defied simple resolution.

"You're not just smart, Luca ," I said, the assessment emerging with uncharacteristic openness. " You're brilliant."

The praise caught him off guard, his scent brightening momentarily with surprise before he controlled the reaction. " It's just pattern recognition. Numbers don't lie, even when people try to make them."

"Don't diminish your abilities," I countered, moving closer to examine the financial pathways he'd uncovered. " What you've found connects the Souzas directly to the missing funds. This is the evidence we needed."

His proximity affected me more profoundly than I'd anticipated—his scent now carrying subtle notes of my own, the claiming bond amplifying awareness of his physical presence in ways that transcended conscious control. The omega accountant who had entered my life through missing millions now occupied territory beyond strategic alliance—territory I was increasingly unwilling to define in purely tactical terms.

"There's something else," he continued, unaware of the effect his nearness produced. " The transactions correlate with meetings between your father and Vincenzo . Every major fund movement occurred within twenty-four hours of their private consultations."

The implication hung between us, unspoken but unavoidable. My father—potential conspiracy with the Souzas against his own family. Against his heir. Against me.

"You've confirmed what I suspected," I acknowledged, a coldness settling beneath

the warmth his proximity had generated. " My father is positioning for succession planning that doesn't include me."

Luca's gaze lifted to mine, understanding blooming in his expression. " The Souza alliance he wanted through marriage. When you refused Sofia ..."

"He found alternative strategies for merging interests," I finished, the pieces falling into place with devastating clarity. " Using family funds to establish joint ventures, creating financial entanglements that would bind our organizations regardless of my cooperation."

"And I discovered it," Luca concluded, comprehension hardening his voice. " That's why he was so quick to accuse me of theft. Why he wanted me eliminated. I wasn't just a convenient omega scapegoat— I was a genuine threat to his plans."

The realization transformed our understanding of events—from isolated theft to coordinated strategy, from random targeting to deliberate elimination attempt. My father had been playing a longer game than even I had anticipated, using family resources to secure his vision of the future regardless of my resistance.

"Your discovery threatened everything," I confirmed, something fierce and protective igniting at the recognition of how close they had come to eliminating what was now mine. " But claiming you publicly disrupted their timeline. Now they're adjusting tactics—forcing heat through suppressant sabotage, attempting to compromise you biologically when they couldn't remove you physically."

Luca absorbed this with remarkable composure, his analytical mind processing implications with the same precision he applied to financial anomalies. " Then what they did wasn't just about forcing your hand through my biology. It was about creating vulnerability they could exploit to access the evidence I've gathered."

"Yes," I acknowledged, admiration deepening for the intelligence that saw beyond the obvious to underlying strategy. " But they miscalculated."

"The claiming strengthened rather than compromised us," he observed, fingers unconsciously rising to touch the mark at his neck—the claiming bite that had altered our biochemistry, our legal status, our position within competing power structures.

"More than they can possibly understand," I agreed, allowing myself to brush his hand where it touched the claiming mark—the first deliberate contact since heat had receded and rational choice had replaced biological imperative. The touch sent awareness cascading through my system, the bond between us pulsing with chemical recognition of what we had become to each other.

Luca didn't pull away, his eyes meeting mine with something that transcended omega submission or calculated alliance. Partnership , perhaps. Or something more complex still—something neither of us had names for yet.

"We should decrypt the rest of the financial data," he said, voice steadier than his scent, which had sweetened with awareness of our proximity. " If we can establish the complete trail, trace every dollar to its final destination..."

"We expose their entire operation," I finished, reluctantly breaking contact to move toward the secured room where our joint investigation would continue. " Come with me."

The workspace I'd prepared reflected lessons learned through claiming and consequence—two stations positioned to allow collaboration without isolation, security protocols that protected without imprisoning, resources that empowered rather than controlled. Not the gilded cage of my penthouse, but a fortress designed for partnership rather than possession.

Luca's expression registered surprise as he took in the careful preparation, the consideration evident in every detail. " You've thought this through."

"You're safer near me," I repeated, the simple truth beneath complex security measures. " And we work better together than apart."

The admission surprised me as it emerged—not calculated to gain cooperation but honest recognition of how our separate strengths had begun complementing rather than competing. His financial acumen paired with my strategic thinking. His attention to detail balanced against my broader vision. Omega and alpha, accountant and underboss, creating something more effective than either could achieve alone.

\* \* \*

## LUCA

Eight hours into our investigation, fatigue had settled across my shoulders like a physical weight. The secure room felt smaller with each passing hour, the walls of data closing in as we chased financial ghosts through digital labyrinths. My eyes burned from staring at screens, numbers and transactions blurring into meaningless sequences as midnight approached.

Across from me, Matteo maintained his focus with the preternatural stamina that defined him—alpha resilience that seemed impervious to ordinary human limitations. His dark eyes moved methodically between screens, cataloging connections my analysis revealed with the precision of a predator tracking prey through familiar territory.

But something wasn't right.

I sat back, removing my glasses to press fingers against tired eyes. The pattern

remained elusive—a whisper just beyond conscious recognition, a shadow glimpsed in peripheral vision that vanished when directly observed. We'd traced the missing funds through seven different shell companies, followed their reemergence in Souza - adjacent holdings, established timeline correlations with Don Corvino's private meetings.

Yet something fundamental remained hidden.

"There's another layer," I murmured, mostly to myself.

Matteo's attention shifted instantly, his focus narrowing with that disconcerting intensity that made it impossible to forget what he was—alpha, predator, underboss capable of ordered violence with the same precision he applied to strategic planning.

"Show me," he said, the simple command carrying no dominance, only respect for what I might have discovered.

I shook my head, frustration bleeding through professional detachment. " I can't... not yet. It's like seeing a face in fog— I know it's there, but I can't make out the features."

He studied me with that unnerving stillness that seemed to strip away pretenses, to see beyond constructed facades to something essential beneath. Not alpha assessing omega, but strategist recognizing fellow tactician.

"Then we approach differently," he decided, rising from his chair with fluid grace that belied hours of immobility. " Step away. Reset your perspective."

The suggestion—so contrary to my natural inclination to pursue problems until solved—caught me off guard. " We don't have time for?—"

"We make time," he interrupted, the authority in his tone softened by something

almost like gentleness. " Your mind is your greatest weapon, Luca . Weapons require maintenance."

The assessment—my mind as weapon, as asset, as something valuable beyond my secondary gender—registered with unexpected impact. Matteo moved to the small kitchenette integrated into the secure room, returning moments later with two cups of something that smelled like the expensive tea he preferred over coffee.

"Drink," he said, placing one before me. " Then tell me what you're seeing that eludes direct observation."

I accepted the cup, allowing its warmth to seep into hands I hadn't realized had grown cold. The liquid tasted of bergamot and something subtler, a blend probably worth more than I'd once earned in a day. The normality of it—of sharing tea while discussing financial crimes and family betrayal—struck me as absurdly incongruous with our situation.

"It's the timing," I said finally, giving voice to the shadow-pattern forming in my consciousness. " The transactions follow a specific sequence, but not the one we'd expect if this were purely about moving funds from Corvino to Souza interests."

Matteo's expression remained neutral, but something in his scent shifted—interest sharpening the sandalwood and cedar notes that now carried subtle undertones of my own honey-citrus. The bond between us translating chemical awareness where words might prove insufficient.

"Elaborate," he encouraged, nothing in his tone suggesting impatience or doubt—only genuine interest in what I'd begun uncovering.

I set the cup aside, reaching instead for blank paper—sometimes physical representation helped clarify digital complexity. My hand moved across the page,



sketching timelines, transaction patterns, correlations between fund movements and known events.

"If this were simple embezzlement, or even strategic alliance-building as we've assumed, the pattern would show gradual accumulation," I explained, pen creating visual representation of the concept. " But what we're seeing is cyclical—funds move out, return, move again in rhythmic sequence that suggests..." I paused, the final piece clicking into place with sudden clarity.

"Testing," Matteo supplied, his intelligence keeping pace with my analysis even without omega attention to micro-patterns. " Trial runs."

"Exactly." My pen circled a particular sequence of transactions. " Not building alliance, but preparing infrastructure. Creating financial pipelines that could move much larger sums when needed. The ten million wasn't the goal—it was the proof of concept."

The implication hung between us—not embezzlement but preparation for something far more significant. Not alliance but groundwork for potential takeover.

"My father isn't just considering alternatives to my succession," Matteo concluded, cold certainty hardening his voice. " He's preparing to eliminate me entirely."

The brutality of the assessment should have shocked me. Instead , it aligned perfectly with the numerical evidence—the dispassionate truth of data that couldn't lie when properly decoded. My fingers traced the pattern I'd sketched, the physical representation confirming what digital analysis had suggested.

"These transaction dates," I said, circling specific points on the timeline. " They correlate with assassination attempts attributed to rival families. Attempts against you, specifically."

Matteo's expression revealed nothing, but his scent shifted subtly—anger controlled so precisely it barely registered through our bond. " My father financing attempts on my life through Souza proxies. Creating plausible deniability while testing financial infrastructure that could later transfer my inheritance after my convenient elimination."

The clinical assessment of his own father's betrayal—delivered without emotion despite the bond that now connected us on molecular levels—showcased the compartmentalization that had allowed Matteo Corvino to survive in a world where family loyalty meant something very different than in ordinary contexts.

"There's more," I continued, turning back to the computer with renewed focus, fingers flying across the keyboard as I accessed deeper levels of encrypted data. " If we apply this pattern recognition to other Corvino holdings—specifically the legitimate business interests under your direct control rather than your father's?—"

My voice faltered as confirmation appeared on screen—digital evidence more damning than even I had anticipated. " Your father has been systematically transferring controlling interests in your companies to shell corporations that trace back to this entity." I highlighted a corporate name I'd originally dismissed as irrelevant background. " Mezzanotte Holdings ."

Matteo moved to stand behind me, his proximity sending awareness cascading through my system despite the gravity of our discovery. His hand settled on the back of my chair—not touching me directly, but close enough that his scent enveloped me, protective alpha pheromones responding to what he recognized as genuine threat to what was his.

"Mezzanotte," he repeated, the word emerging as recognition rather than question. " My mother's maiden name."

Understanding crystallized between us—not random corporate entity but deliberate choice, symbolic declaration hidden in plain sight for those who knew where to look. Don Corvino hadn't just been planning alternative succession; he'd been creating shadow empire built from pieces stolen from his own son, named for the wife whose death had fractured whatever bond might once have existed between father and heir.

"He's been planning this for years," Matteo observed, voice dropping to register that vibrated with controlled fury. " Since before he began pushing the Sofia marriage arrangement. A contingency plan if I proved... uncooperative."

"A plan I disrupted when I found the missing millions," I added, pieces connecting with devastating clarity. " When I brought the evidence to you instead of him. When we formed alliance he hadn't anticipated."

"When I claimed you publicly," Matteo finished, his hand moving from the chair to my shoulder, the contact sending awareness cascading through our bond despite the gravity of our discovery. " When I chose partnership over political expediency."

The touch—warm and solid through the fabric of my shirt—anchored me as implications expanded outward from our discovery. Not just financial crimes but orchestrated betrayal at levels that transcended ordinary family politics. Not just succession planning but calculated elimination of heir who had proven resistant to manipulation.

"No one else could have found this," Matteo said quietly, the assessment emerging with certainty that registered through our bond as genuine rather than mere flattery. " Not my financial team. Not Carlo . Not even me."

I looked up at him, surprised by the open admiration in his expression—alpha acknowledging omega capability without qualification or reservation. " I just followed the numbers," I offered, uncomfortable with praise that felt foreign after

years of calculated invisibility.

"No," Matteo countered, his hand tightening slightly on my shoulder. " You saw patterns no one else recognized. Connections no one else made. You unwound financial labyrinths designed by people who've spent decades hiding their activities from international authorities." His gaze held mine with intensity that transmitted through our bond with unmistakable sincerity. " You're not just smart, Luca . You're brilliant. The most formidable mind I've encountered in any secondary gender."

The assessment—delivered without qualification or patronization—settled something restless within me, some need for recognition that transcended omega biology or human vanity. Not praise sought, but capability acknowledged. Not weakness accommodated, but strength respected.

"So now we have proof," I said, redirecting focus to the practical implications of our discovery. " What do we do with it?"

Matteo's expression shifted to something colder, more calculated—the underboss reasserting himself beneath the mate who had momentarily shown genuine admiration. " We prepare counteroffensive. Secure what remains under my direct control. Build evidence package too comprehensive for even my father to dismiss or manipulate."

The shift from appreciation to strategy might once have disappointed me—evidence that even this alpha, who had shown capacity for connection beyond secondary gender, prioritized tactical advantage over emotional acknowledgment. But something in his scent told a different story—the protection, the pride, the genuine respect persisting beneath strategic focus rather than replacing it.

"And us?" I asked, the question emerging before I could filter it through professional detachment. " Where do we fit in this counteroffensive?"

Matteo's hand moved from my shoulder to brush the claiming mark at my neck—the touch sending awareness cascading through our bond with intensity that belied its brevity. " We remain what we've become," he said simply. " Partners in ways my father never anticipated when he set these plans in motion."

The declaration—of partnership rather than possession, of connection that transcended strategic alliance or biological claiming—registered through our bond with certainty that translated where words alone might have proven insufficient.

"Partners," I agreed, accepting the definition that had begun evolving between us since paper claiming had progressed to physical bonding.

The evidence glowed on screens surrounding us—digital proof of betrayal that would have destroyed me as convenient scapegoat if Matteo hadn't intervened, if claiming hadn't transformed strategic alliance into something neither of us had vocabulary to fully define. The numbers told their story with mathematical precision—the language I'd always trusted when human motivations remained opaque or suspect.

But for the first time, the certainty of those numbers felt less significant than the certainty forming between alpha and omega, between underboss and accountant, between two people navigating territory more complex than either had anticipated when this journey began.

Perhaps that was the most unexpected discovery of all—that in a world defined by calculation and strategy, by violence and manipulation, the partnership forming between us might prove more consequential than even the betrayal we'd uncovered together.

Fingers unconsciously rising to touch the claiming mark at my neck, I turned back to the screens, to the evidence only I had been able to unravel. My mind—the weapon Matteo had recognized and respected beyond biological designation or traditional

hierarchy—focusing once more on the patterns that would protect what we were building together.

What had begun as paper claiming had evolved into something neither of us had fully anticipated—a partnership forged through crisis and choice alike, strengthened through mutual recognition of capability beyond secondary gender or traditional expectation.

His, alpha biology insisted with possessive certainty.

Ours, partnership countered with evolving conviction.

The distinction made all the difference as we faced betrayal that threatened everything we'd begun building together—from claiming bond to mutual respect, from biological connection to genuine partnership.

My fingers returned to the keyboard, mind once again engaging with the numerical evidence I alone had been able to decode. Not just omega serving alpha purpose, but equal contributor to partnership neither had anticipated when this journey began. The ultimate vindication against those who would have dismissed me as mere pawn, as useful scapegoat, as biological vulnerability rather than intellectual asset.

"Let's finish what we've started," I said, certainty hardening my voice as I prepared to dismantle, through pure intellectual prowess, the machinations of those who had underestimated what this omega could accomplish.

### LUCA

The whispered argument reached me through ventilation ducts like fragments of a broken confession—not meant for my ears yet impossible to unhear. I pressed my back against the cool wall of Matteo's private bathroom, where I'd retreated moments before his father's unscheduled arrival with a contingent of Corvino captains. They hadn't noticed me slipping away, assuming I was merely an omega seeking distance from alpha confrontation.

They had no idea how carefully I'd trained myself to listen from shadows.

"—cannot stand for this disgrace. The omega accountant over the Souza alliance?" Don Corvino's voice carried the particular timbre of controlled rage I'd heard in many alphas—a deceptive calm stretched thin over violent intent. " You have twenty-four hours to rectify this mistake, Matteo . Annul the claiming. Return the omega to his proper place. Or I strip you of everything—your position, your inheritance, the Corvino name itself."

The silence that followed weighed more than any response could have. In that pause lived the shattering of legacy, the fracturing of bloodlines that defined our world's most sacred currency. Family .

"You would disinherit your only son over this?" Matteo's voice emerged lower than his father's, a controlled bass note that revealed nothing of what must be churning beneath.

"Over this? No ." Don Corvino's laugh held no humor. " Over your complete rejection of everything I built. The omega is merely the final evidence of your unsuitability. The Souza alliance would have secured our position for generations. Instead , you choose to follow your knot rather than your brain."

"My brain is precisely what tells me the Souza alliance is poison," Matteo replied, his voice unwavering. " Sofia would have brought nothing but treachery. And Luca has uncovered financial manipulation you thought well-hidden."

"And yet you still don't see," the Don countered. " I wanted you to find it. To understand the necessity of what I've built with Emilio . To recognize power requires sacrifice of sentiment."

My breath caught. The implications spun outward like ripples in dark water—had the missing money been deliberate? A test for Matteo ? For me?

"Twenty-four hours, my son. Decide where your loyalty truly lies—with your family legacy or with an omega who will be forgotten the moment his heat fades."

Footsteps receded, a door closed with careful precision rather than satisfying slam. Power did not announce itself with noise in the Corvino family. It whispered in measured threats, in controlled exits, in the absence of rage where rage would be justified.

I remained motionless against the wall, processing what I'd heard with the same methodical focus I applied to financial discrepancies. The situation had evolved beyond missing millions, beyond my safety, beyond even the claiming that had altered our biochemistry. Now Matteo stood to lose everything—his birthright, his position, his name itself—because of me.

Because I had been the variable Don Corvino hadn't calculated correctly when



orchestrating his merger with the Souza family.

The bathroom suddenly felt too small, the walls pressing inward with each breath that carried Matteo's lingering scent—sandalwood and cedar now permanently threaded with notes of my honey-citrus. Our claiming had altered more than just legal status; it had rewritten our molecular signatures into something neither of us could erase.

Yet Don Corvino expected precisely that—erasure. Annulment . Return to separate entities as if our bodies hadn't transformed to recognize each other at levels beyond conscious control.

I emerged from the bathroom to find Matteo standing at the windows overlooking the city, his powerful frame silhouetted against fading daylight. The set of his shoulders revealed none of the burden his father had just placed upon them—the impossible choice between birthright and claimed omega. Between legacy and what we had become to each other.

"You heard," he said without turning, not a question but a recognition of my presence that transcended ordinary awareness.

"Yes." I saw no point in denying it. Our bond, still new and incompletely understood, had apparently sensitized him to my proximity in ways neither of us had anticipated. " Your father wants you to annul the claiming."

"Among other impossibilities." His voice carried no inflection, no hint of the turmoil that must exist beneath such perfect control.

I moved toward him slowly, uncertain of my place in this moment. The claiming had altered our biological relationship, yet so much remained undefined between us—partnership formed through crisis rather than choice, intimacy forced through heat rather than natural progression.

"Matteo." His name emerged softer than intended. " I won't be the reason you lose everything."

He turned then, his expression containing complexity I couldn't fully interpret—something fierce and tender simultaneously, something that transcended alpha possession or mafia calculation.

"You're not." The simplicity of his response belied the weight behind it. " My father's inability to recognize what matters beyond power politics is the reason."

"But the choice he's forcing?—"

"Is no choice at all." He closed the distance between us, one hand rising to trace the claiming mark at my neck with unexpected gentleness. " This isn't politics or strategy anymore, Luca . This is..." He paused, seeming to search for words that didn't exist in the vocabulary of mafia heirs or alpha biology. " This is us."

The words landed with unexpected weight. Us . Not alpha and omega, not boss and accountant, but something neither of us had vocabulary to define yet.

"I need to prepare contingencies," he continued, his hand falling away as focus returned to his expression. " My father's ultimatum changes our timeline. The Souzas will move more aggressively once word spreads that I've been cut off from Corvino resources."

"What do you need me to do?" I asked, falling into the rhythm of practical problem-solving that had defined our working relationship before heat and claiming had complicated everything.

The question earned a ghost of a smile—appreciation for functionality where many omegas might have dissolved into emotional disarray. " Continue analyzing the

financial trails. Find every connection between my father and the Souzas . We need leverage beyond what we've already uncovered."

I nodded, turning toward the workstation where our joint investigation had been progressing before Don Corvino's interruption. Matteo's hand caught my arm gently, halting my retreat.

"Luca." His voice dropped lower, something almost hesitant threading through his usual certainty. " Thank you."

The gratitude caught me off guard—unexpected vulnerability from the alpha who commanded respect through mere presence. " For what?"

"For seeing this through. For not running when most would have."

The acknowledgment of choice—my choice to remain despite danger, despite complication, despite the sacrifice now demanded of him—shifted something subtle between us. Recognition of agency beyond biological imperative or legal claiming.

"We're partners," I replied simply, echoing the definition we had established in the aftermath of heat-claiming. " Partners don't run."

Something flashed across his features—appreciation, perhaps, or recognition that transcended alpha possession or omega submission. Then his phone buzzed, pulling his attention away as I returned to the financial data awaiting analysis.

Hours passed in quiet focus, the rhythm of our work punctuated only by occasional exchanges of information, theories, discoveries. Outside , darkness claimed the city, lights blossoming across the urban landscape like stars fallen to earth. I lost myself in numbers and transactions—the language that had always made sense when human motivations remained opaque.

I didn't register the soft chime of the service elevator until the scent reached me—familiar yet unexpected, carrying notes of cinnamon and clove that triggered memories of childhood kitchens and whispered secrets.

Silvia.

My head snapped up as my sister stepped into the office, her beta status allowing her to move through security checkpoints with less scrutiny than alphas or omegas would face. Her dark eyes—so similar to my own—swept the room with practiced assessment before landing on me with undisguised relief.

"Luca." My name in her mouth carried years of shared history, of protective older sister watching over the omega brother who invited unwanted attention through mere existence. " Thank God ."

I rose from my workstation, confusion warring with joy at seeing her after weeks of separation. " Silvia ? How did you?—"

"Get in?" She moved toward me, her movements carrying the efficient purpose that had made her a successful event coordinator for legitimate Corvino businesses. " I still have access cards. And I brought dinner for Matteo's security team. They know me."

The practicality of her explanation matched the sister I remembered—direct, resourceful, unimpressed by mafia hierarchy despite working within its structures. But something in her expression triggered warning signals I couldn't immediately identify—a tightness around her eyes, a tension in her movements that spoke of urgency beneath casual explanation.

"Where is he?" she asked, glancing toward Matteo's empty office. " Your ... alpha?"

The hesitation before the designation carried volumes of unspoken questions, of opinions carefully restrained. Silvia had always been protective, but never intrusive—respecting my independence even when her beta instincts urged greater intervention.

"Meeting with Carlo ," I explained, studying her more carefully now. " Security arrangements. Why are you here, Silvia ?"

Her gaze darted toward the security cameras positioned discreetly in the corners of the office, then back to me with renewed intensity. " Can we speak privately? Just for a moment?"

The request triggered both nostalgia and caution. How many times in childhood had those exact words preceded her whispered warnings about our father's moods, about alphas watching too closely, about dangers I was too young to fully comprehend? Silvia had been my first protector long before Matteo had claimed that role through bond and bite.

"Of course." I led her toward the small conference room adjacent to the main office, closing the door behind us with practiced casualness that belied my growing unease. " What's happened?"

Once the door sealed us in relative privacy, Silvia's carefully maintained composure fractured. She grasped my hands, her fingers cold despite the warmth of the building. " You need to leave, Luca . Tonight . Now ."

The urgency in her voice—so at odds with her usual measured approach—sent a chill through me that had nothing to do with the temperature of her skin against mine. " What are you talking about?"

"Don Corvino has issued the ultimatum. Matteo has twenty-four hours to annul the

claiming or face disinheritance." Her words confirmed what I'd already overheard, but carried additional urgency that suggested knowledge beyond what I'd gleaned. " But that's not all. The Souzas are moving against both of you. They've hired specialized extraction teams—the kind that specialize in omega acquisition."

The euphemism—"omega acquisition"—hung between us like poison gas, too terrible to name directly. In our world, omegas with valuable skills or connections sometimes disappeared, resurfacing months later bonded to rival families, memories chemically altered, personalities subsumed beneath forced claiming and biological manipulation.

"How do you know this?" My voice emerged steadier than the churning in my stomach would suggest possible.

"Marco Ricci ," she answered, naming her sometimes-boyfriend who worked security for one of the Corvino subsidiaries. " He overheard arrangements being made. The Souzas want you specifically—the omega who cost them their alliance. They'll use you against Matteo , Luca . Break you to break him."

The calculated cruelty of the strategy struck me with physical force—not just elimination or intimidation, but weaponization of the bond that now connected Matteo and me beyond legal documentation.

"Matteo knows the risks," I countered, though uncertainty threaded through my conviction. " He's increased security, limited access?—"

"He doesn't know about the infiltrators," Silvia interrupted, urgency making her uncharacteristically abrupt. " They've already compromised his inner circle. The same people who sabotaged your suppressants have access to this building, this floor, possibly this very room."

The revelation stole my breath momentarily. If Silvia was right—if security had been

compromised beyond what we'd already discovered—then the fortress Matteo had constructed around us was already breached, the protection he'd sacrificed his birthright to maintain already failing.

"We need to tell him," I said, reaching for my phone. "Carlo can increase?—"

"Carlo is the one who granted the access," Silvia cut in, her words landing like physical blows. "He's been working with the Souzas for months. Matteo's consigliere, his most trusted advisor, is the one who arranged your suppressant sabotage."

The accusation against Carlo—the beta who had guarded my door during heat, who had stood at Matteo's right hand through every confrontation—seemed impossible, contradicting everything I'd observed about loyalty within the Corvino organization.

Yet as denial formed on my lips, something else surfaced from memory—Carlo's careful neutrality when Don Corvino had issued his ultimatum, the way his eyes had tracked financial data without surprise when we'd uncovered connections to Souza holdings. Small moments of dissonance I'd attributed to beta caution rather than hidden allegiance.

The betrayal explained why Matteo's security precautions hadn't gone further. He'd moved me to his office based on Carlo's assurances that the floor remained secure, that the threat existed primarily from outside forces rather than from within his inner circle. Matteo had trusted his consigliere's assessment of our safety—a trust Carlo had deliberately cultivated to keep me accessible.

"You're certain?" I asked, needing absolute confirmation before believing such fundamental betrayal.

"Marco intercepted communications himself," Silvia replied, pulling out her phone

and showing me encrypted message logs with timestamps from earlier that day. " He sent these to me directly from Carlo's secured channel to the Souza lieutenant. They're planning to take you tonight, during the security shift change. Use you to force Matteo into compliance, or worse."

"Worse?" The question emerged despite knowing I wouldn't want the answer.

"Force-bond you to a Souza alpha after breaking your current claim," she said flatly, giving voice to the horror she'd previously cloaked in euphemism. " Make you a permanent hostage against Corvino interests, your biochemistry weaponized against your will."

A wave of nausea crashed over me, my hand rising unconsciously to touch the bond-bite— Matteo's claim, now mingled permanently in my biochemistry. Force - breaking a claim required barbaric measures—chemical antagonists that triggered rejection responses, physical trauma to the bonding site, psychological manipulation that left permanent scars on both mind and body.

"There's a car waiting three blocks west," Silvia continued, words emerging rapid-fire now that she'd conveyed the fundamental threat. " Marco will drive you to a safe house outside the city. Just until Matteo can secure better protection, establish independent territory beyond Souza reach."

The plan—clearly formulated with care, with genuine concern for my safety—hung between us like smoke, obscuring clear sight of consequences, of alternatives, of what such a departure would mean for Matteo and the sacrifice he'd already made on my behalf.

"I can't just leave him," I said, the protest emerging from some place deeper than conscious thought. " Not without warning, without explanation."



"If you stay, you become the weapon they use to destroy him," Silvia countered, harsh truth delivered with sisterly bluntness. " Is that what you want? For the sacrifice he's already made to be for nothing?"

The question struck with precision, targeting exactly the fear that had lurked beneath my calm exterior since overhearing Don Corvino's ultimatum. Matteo had already chosen me over family legacy, over birthright, over the name that defined his place in our hierarchical world. What right did I have to make that sacrifice meaningless by becoming the very vulnerability our enemies would exploit?

"I need five minutes," I said finally, decision crystallizing through necessity rather than desire. " To pack essentials. Leave a message."

Relief transformed Silvia's expression, softening the tension that had hardened her features into unfamiliar patterns. " I'll wait by the service elevator. Marco is monitoring the security feed, creating a loop that will mask our departure."

She squeezed my hands once more before slipping from the conference room, her movements carrying the efficient purpose that had defined her since childhood—practical solutions to impossible problems, protection offered without fanfare or need for acknowledgment.

Alone, I pressed my palms against my eyes, feeling the tremor I'd successfully concealed from Silvia's watchful gaze. The claiming mark at my neck pulsed with phantom sensation— Matteo's bite, his scent permanently altering my biochemistry, the bond between us still new and incompletely understood yet already essential in ways I hadn't anticipated.

To leave meant risking that bond, straining connections still forming between us. To stay meant risking far worse—becoming the instrument of Matteo's destruction, the vulnerability enemies would exploit without mercy or restraint.

I moved through the office with forced calm, gathering only what couldn't be replaced—the encrypted drive containing our financial evidence, personal identification documents, the emergency suppressants Matteo had stored in my desk drawer after the sabotage incident. Material necessities that masked the more profound loss accompanying my departure.

At the workstation we'd shared through days of investigation, I paused, fingers hovering over the keyboard as words formed and reformed in my mind. What could I possibly write that would explain without endangering, that would convey the complexity of what drove me away without compromising the security of where I was going?

In the end, simplicity seemed the only option:

Thank you. Don't lose everything for me. I'll contact you when safe.

The message—woefully inadequate yet all I dared commit to writing—stared back from the monitor, cursor blinking with metronome steadiness while my pulse raced with anything but regularity. I couldn't risk more specific explanation, couldn't indicate Silvia's involvement or Carlo's suspected betrayal. Anything beyond this bare acknowledgment might create additional danger for Matteo once my absence was discovered.

I gathered my small bundle of necessities, moving toward the service elevator where Silvia waited with controlled impatience evident in her posture. The claiming mark at my neck throbbed with each step away from the territory Matteo had established around us both—biological recognition of separation from alpha that transcended conscious control.

"Ready?" Silvia asked, her voice pitched low despite the empty corridor.

"No," I answered honestly. " But necessary doesn't require readiness."

Her expression softened with momentary sympathy before efficiency reasserted itself. " Marco's created the security loop. We have approximately three minutes before live feed resumes."

The elevator doors opened silently, beckoning with promise of escape from dangers I'd only partially comprehended before Silvia's unexpected arrival. As I stepped inside, the mating mark pulsed with renewed intensity—biological protest against separation that made scientific sense yet felt like something beyond mere chemistry. Like loss. Like fracturing of something essential.

"It's the right choice," Silvia reassured as the doors closed, sealing us in temporary sanctuary. " For both of you."

I nodded without speaking, unwilling to voice the doubt that had begun forming beneath rational acceptance of our escape plan. Something about this felt wrong beyond the obvious pain of separation—some detail overlooked, some assumption unexamined.

The elevator descended with unsettling smoothness, numbers counting down toward ground level where Marco waited with promised transportation. Each floor represented distance from the territory Matteo had established around us, from the protection he had sacrificed birthright to maintain.

At the twentieth floor, the elevator jerked to an unexpected halt, lights flickering momentarily before stabilizing at reduced intensity. Silvia's expression shifted from surprise to something closer to fear.

"This isn't Marco ," she whispered, reaching for her phone only to find no signal in the suspended elevator car. " Something's wrong."

Before I could respond, the ceiling panel crashed inward, revealing a figure in tactical gear who dropped into the elevator with practiced precision. The scent hit me immediately—pine and bergamot, the signature pheromone profile Matteo had identified as belonging to Souza enforcers.

Not rescue. Capture .

My stomach dropped as realization hit— Marco's security loop had been detected—or perhaps he'd never had the chance to implement it at all. The Souza infiltration ran deeper than any of us had suspected, their surveillance likely monitoring the very systems Marco was trying to manipulate. Whether he'd been captured or worse, the Souza team had clearly neutralized our only external support and turned our escape plan into the perfect trap.

Silvia moved instinctively between me and the intruder, beta protectiveness trumping practical assessment of our disadvantage. " Get away from him," she growled, voice dropping to a register I'd rarely heard from my diplomatic sister.

The masked figure said nothing, simply extracted what looked like a medical injector from a tactical vest pocket. Silvia charged forward—brave, foolish, protective—only to be incapacitated with brutal efficiency, her body crumpling to the elevator floor with terrible stillness. Not dead—the attacker had calibrated force precisely—but unconscious and no longer capable of intervention.

I backed against the elevator wall, mind racing through limited options that all ended in the same inevitable conclusion. One omega against a trained Souza enforcer in confined space. The statistical probability of successful resistance approached zero.

"Don't fight," a voice emerged from behind the tactical mask, toneless and mechanical. " The injection contains a mild sedative. Compliance makes this easier for everyone."

"Compliance always does," I replied, surprising myself with calm that belied the terror coursing through my system. " But easier doesn't mean right."

The needle pierced my neck before I could attempt evasion, the injection site burning briefly before spreading numbing warmth through my veins. As consciousness began fading, the claiming mark at my neck pulsed once with almost painful intensity—Matteo's claim, his scent permanently integrated with mine, sending one final alert before chemical suppression silenced even that bond-driven warning.

My last coherent thought before darkness claimed me wasn't of fear or pain or even anger at the trap we'd walked into so willingly. It was simpler, more profound—an apology and a plea wrapped in the name that had come to mean safety despite the danger surrounding us both:

Matteo... I'm sorry.

12

MATTEO

Blood blossomed across my knuckles as I slammed my fist into the wall, concrete cracking beneath the impact yet offering no relief from the rage consuming me. The security monitors displayed the empty elevator where Luca had disappeared, the footage looping in mechanical indifference to the void expanding in my chest. Three hours since I'd returned to find his scent lingering in empty rooms, his workstation abandoned, a message blinking on the monitor that said both everything and nothing:

Thank you. Don't lose everything for me. I'll contact you when safe.

He hadn't run. He'd been taken.

The knowledge hummed in my blood with terrible certainty, a truth that transcended evidence or logic. The claiming bond between us—still new, still forming—pulsed with hollow emptiness where his presence should have resonated. Not the silence of willing departure but the vacuum of severed connection.

"Sir," Carlo's voice penetrated the fog of rage clouding my thoughts. "The surveillance footage shows him entering the service elevator voluntarily. With a woman. His sister, according to building records."

I turned slowly, the movement requiring conscious control over muscles that wanted nothing more than violence, immediate and devastating. My consigliere stood in the doorway, his beta status offering immunity from the aggressive pheromones now

saturating the office, but not from the danger radiating from every line of my body.

"Voluntarily," I repeated, the word emerging with deceptive calm. " Like his heat was voluntary when someone sabotaged his suppressants."

Something flickered across Carlo's features—so brief, so controlled that anyone else might have missed it. But I had been trained since childhood to recognize the microscopic tells that preceded betrayal. The slight dilation of pupils. The momentary tension at the corner of the mouth. The almost imperceptible shift in scent.

Guilt.

In that fractional instant, understanding crystallized with devastating clarity. Not just suspicion or theory, but bone-deep certainty that resonated with the hollow ache where Luca's presence should have pulsed.

"You knew," I said quietly, the words falling into the space between us like the first drops of blood from a mortal wound. " About the suppressants. About the attempt tonight."

Carlo's hand moved toward his weapon, the motion aborted as he registered the Beretta already aimed at his chest—drawn and positioned before conscious thought had fully formed the intention.

"Matteo," he began, using my given name for only the second time in our long association. " You don't understand the position?—"

The gunshot interrupted whatever justification he'd prepared, the sound strangely muted in the confines of the office. Carlo's expression registered surprise rather than pain as he looked down at the expanding red stain on his shirt—not a killing shot but a deliberate wounding, placed with surgical precision to ensure survival but prevent

resistance.

"Who has him?" I asked, voice devoid of the emotion roiling beneath controlled exterior.

Carlo sank to his knees, one hand pressed against the wound as blood seeped between his fingers. "Souza," he gasped, the name confirming what instinct had already suggested. "Emilio wants... leverage."

"Where?"

"The waterfront property. The old processing facility." Blood bubbled at the corner of his mouth, his beta resilience already fading as shock settled in. "Matteo, your father arranged?—"

"I know what my father arranged," I cut him off, no interest in excuses or explanations that wouldn't change the fundamental betrayal. "How many guards?"

"Twelve. Maybe fifteen." His breathing had grown labored, eyes glazing slightly as blood loss took its toll. "Elite team. They're expecting you."

Of course they were. The Souzas would have calculated my response with mathematical precision—the alpha whose claimed omega had been taken would come for what was his, regardless of odds or rational assessment. They were counting on biology to override strategy, on instinct to blind tactical judgment.

They had miscalculated.

I moved to the intercom, pressing the direct line to what remained of my security team. "Medical to the main office. Gunshot wound, non-lethal." Then, to the bleeding man who had been my right hand since taking the underboss position: "If he



survives, keep him sedated and secure. He'll answer for this when I return."

No emotion colored the order—not rage or grief or betrayal. Just cold certainty born of necessity and the singular focus that had descended the moment I'd registered Luca's absence. The claiming bond between us had sharpened priorities to crystalline clarity, stripping away every consideration beyond a single imperative:

Recover what was mine.

I moved efficiently through the office, gathering weapons from the hidden arsenal built into what had appeared to be ordinary cabinetry. Guns slipped into purpose-built holsters. Knives sheathed against forearms, at ankles, across the small of my back. The ritual of preparation centered me, each weapon an extension of intent made manifest. Not just tools but promises written in steel and polymer.

The main security monitors tracked movement in the hallway—medical personnel responding to my summons with the urgency Carlo's status demanded despite his betrayal. They would keep him alive, keep him secure until I returned to extract the full measure of information his treachery contained. Justice would come later. Vengeance too. For now, only recovery mattered.

The private elevator opened directly into the underground garage where the most tactically appropriate vehicles waited in climate-controlled silence. Not the armored sedan that announced Corvino business, but the matte-black SUV designed for operations requiring more discretion, more... flexibility in rules of engagement.

As I loaded additional weapons into the vehicle, memory surfaced unbidden—Luca's hands moving with unexpected competence as he stitched the knife wound at my side. "You killed him." Not a question or judgment, but simple acknowledgment of reality. Understanding beyond what I'd expected from the quiet accountant who had walked into my life with missing millions and unwavering integrity.

The memory sharpened focus rather than distracting from it. The omega the Souzas had taken wasn't just a claiming or a political statement against my father. He was the partner who had seen beyond alpha biology to the man beneath, who had chosen connection within constraint, who had matched my protection with his own form of strength.

Mine to protect. Mine to recover. Mine to avenge.

The streets of the city blurred past as I navigated toward the waterfront, tactical considerations expanding to fill conscious thought where emotion might otherwise have compromised judgment. Twelve to fifteen elite guards, according to Carlo . Likely positioned in rotating patterns around the perimeter and concentrated near the most probable entry points. The Souza processing facility had been ostensibly abandoned years ago, but maintained as an off-books location for operations requiring distance from legitimate business interests.

I knew the building intimately—had once orchestrated a raid on it during an earlier territorial dispute with the Souzas , before the current political maneuvering had begun. Knowledge that would have been strategic advantage if not for the certainty that they knew exactly who would be coming for Luca .

They were expecting the enraged alpha, driven by biological imperative to recover his claimed omega without regard for personal safety or tactical consideration. The berserker state that turned even calculating men into predictable weapons, easily manipulated through the very claiming bond meant to protect rather than expose.

They would be prepared for fury. For frontal assault. For the biological drive that prioritized immediate recovery over strategic patience.

They were not prepared for me.

13

LUCA

Consciousness returned slowly, fragments of reality assembling themselves like shattered glass behind closed eyelids. Cold metal pressed against my back. Hemp rope bit into my wrists, the fibers rough against abraded skin. The lingering chemical taste of sedatives coated my tongue, bitter and medicinal.

My omega instincts, sharper than my drug-fogged mind, had already cataloged the essentials: multiple alpha scents permeating the space, the distinctive pine and bergamot undercurrent marking this as Souza territory. Silvia's faint cinnamon-clove scent, stale but present, suggesting she'd been here but no longer was. The metallic undertone of guns, the acrid bite of cigarettes, the subtle sourness of fear—not my own, but embedded in the walls of what had clearly served as an interrogation room for years.

I kept my eyes closed, breathing evenly to maintain the illusion of unconsciousness while gathering whatever intelligence I could. Three distinct heartbeats. Two by the door—guards, their postures betrayed by the subtle creaking of tactical gear. One closer, seated perhaps six feet away—steady respiration, the subtle notes of expensive cologne beneath the Souza territorial markers. Leadership, then.

"I know you're awake, Mr. Bianchi," a voice stated, cultured and precise. "The drugs should have metabolized sufficiently by now. Your respiratory patterns changed approximately two minutes ago."

No point in pretending. I opened my eyes, blinking against the harsh fluorescent light that seemed designed specifically for disorientation. As my vision adjusted, details emerged from the artificial brightness—a sparse, concrete room. A metal table between me and the speaker. A camera in the corner, its red light blinking with mechanical indifference.

Emilio Souza sat across from me, his small frame immaculately dressed in a tailored suit that cost more than I'd once earned in months. His silver hair and refined features created an impression of benign elderliness that was immediately belied by the clinical assessment in his dark eyes.

"Where is my sister?" I asked, voice rougher than intended from the lingering effects of whatever they'd used to sedate me.

"Safe," Souza replied with a dismissive wave. " Her continued comfort depends entirely on our productive conversation."

The calculated cruelty—the casual leveraging of Silvia's safety against my cooperation—ignited something cold and focused within me. Not panic or desperation, but a clarity that cut through lingering chemical fog like sunlight through mist. I would get her out of this. Whatever it took.

"What do you want?" The question emerged steadier than I felt, my omega biology simultaneously registering threat from the alpha's presence while my mind calculated possibilities, exits, leverage.

"Information, to begin with." Souza leaned forward slightly, hands clasped on the metal table between us. " The financial data you've been analyzing with Matteo . The evidence you've gathered against certain... mutual interests."

The question revealed more than he likely intended—confirmation that this was about

the missing millions, about the connections I'd uncovered between Souza holdings and Don Corvino's manipulation of family finances. Not just omega being used as bait or biological leverage against a claimed alpha, but targeted extraction of specific intelligence.

A wave of nausea rolled through me suddenly, unexpected and intense. I swallowed hard, fighting the sensation while trying to maintain my composure. The drugs, I assumed—lingering side effects of whatever they'd used to render me unconscious. But something felt different, more fundamental than simple chemical reaction. My body's scent had shifted subtly, a richness I hadn't registered before threading through my usual honey-citrus notes despite the suppressants I'd applied before Silvia's arrival.

Souza's nostrils flared slightly, his head tilting with sudden interest as he caught the change. Alpha senses, always more attuned to biological shifts than most omegas realized. His expression remained neutral, but something in his eyes shifted—recalculation, reassessment of the asset before him.

I pushed the physical discomfort aside, focusing on the immediate threat. "I don't have access to that data here," I replied, testing boundaries while scanning the room for anything that might serve as advantage. "It's secured in Matteo's systems."

"But you have the information here," Souza tapped his temple with one manicured finger. "That remarkable mind that identified financial patterns our best people spent months carefully constructing. Patterns no one else noticed."

The compliment, delivered with the same calculated precision as everything else about the man, confirmed what I'd begun to suspect. The Souzas didn't just want me as leverage against Matteo. They wanted what I knew—the financial architecture I'd decoded, the connections I'd established between seemingly unrelated transactions.

I had value beyond my claiming bond. Knowledge that threatened operations clearly more significant than I'd initially understood.

"If I had such information," I said carefully, "sharing it would eliminate whatever value keeps me and my sister alive."

A smile touched Souza's lips—appreciation for the gambit rather than offense at the implied refusal. "Clever," he acknowledged. "But unnecessary. We have no intention of eliminating such a valuable asset. Quite the contrary."

He removed a tablet from inside his jacket, sliding it across the table toward me. The screen displayed a complex financial structure—parallel to what I'd discovered but with significant differences. Shell companies I hadn't previously identified. Offshore accounts hidden beneath layers of encryption I hadn't penetrated.

Another wave of nausea washed over me as I leaned forward to examine the data, this one stronger than before. My vision blurred momentarily, a cold sweat breaking across my forehead. Something was wrong—beyond the sedatives, beyond the stress of captivity. My body was trying to tell me something my mind hadn't yet processed.

"Suppressants are fragile technology," Dr. Keller had warned Matteo after my heat had subsided. "Especially in high-stress situations. The chemical balance is easily disrupted when the body experiences extreme conditions."

The memory surfaced with sudden clarity—Matteo standing in the penthouse bathroom doorway, nostrils flaring as he'd caught my scent days after the heat had passed. "Your scent is... different. Richer." The slight confusion in his expression. "The claiming bond, perhaps."

Understanding bloomed with terrifying certainty, a truth my body had been trying to communicate through subtle shifts in scent, through waves of nausea, through the

inexplicable exhaustion I'd attributed to stress.

The heat. The sabotaged suppressants. The claiming. The knotting.

Pregnancy.

The realization stole my breath more effectively than any physical blow could have. Not just me at risk now, but something infinitely more vulnerable. Something that changed everything about my situation, my options, my responsibilities.

"This is Operation Mezzanotte ," Souza explained, misattributing my sudden pallor to the financial revelations before me rather than the biological one taking shape in my consciousness. " The financial infrastructure Vincenzo and I spent years constructing. A parallel system designed to transfer Corvino assets to joint control once certain... impediments were removed."

I forced myself to focus, to process the information with the same analytical precision I'd applied to the original financial discrepancies. Not just embezzlement or even alliance-building, but preparation for complete absorption of Corvino holdings through financial strangulation. The missing millions hadn't been the goal—they were the test case, proof that the system worked before implementing it on the full scale of Corvino operations.

"You needed Don Corvino's cooperation," I observed, pieces falling into place despite the storm of realization still thundering through my system. " But not Matteo's ."

"Exactly." Souza's approval felt like oil on my skin, unwanted and contaminating. " The old man understood necessity. Recognized that consolidation offered advantages neither family could achieve independently. His son proved... resistant to practical arrangements."

The tablet continued displaying financial structures that represented years of careful planning, of meticulous construction designed to transfer an empire without triggering the traditional bloodshed such moves typically required. A masterpiece of financial engineering that I had accidentally begun unraveling with my discovery of the missing millions.

This was my leverage—the knowledge now expanding in my mind as I recognized additional connections, weaknesses, vulnerabilities in their system. Information worth more than my omega status, than my claiming bond to Matteo, than even my biological potential as hostage.

But now, that biological potential had manifested in the most consequential way possible. The child growing within me—Matteo's heir, continuation of Corvino bloodline, physical manifestation of the claiming that had bound us beyond legal documentation—changed every calculation. Not just my safety at stake, but legacy itself. Future embodied in cellular division that had already begun, invisible but undeniable.

My hand instinctively moved toward my abdomen before the restraints yanked it back, the protective gesture aborted but the intention registered by Souza's watchful gaze. His expression shifted minutely, something almost like amusement threading through his clinical assessment.

"Interesting," he observed, the single word weighted with implications I couldn't fully process in my current state. "It seems our negotiations have acquired additional... dimension."

The confirmation that he'd understood—that he'd interpreted my involuntary gesture correctly—sent ice through my veins. Not just prisoner but incubator of potential advantage, of biological leverage that transcended financial knowledge or claiming bonds.



I forced my expression to neutrality, falling back on years of practiced control in hostile environments. " Account number 847-93021," I said suddenly, watching Souza's expression with the same precision he'd been using to study mine. " Cayman-based, registered to a shell corporation operating through Liechtenstein protocols. That's your primary transfer point for the Corvino shipping division assets."

Surprise flickered across his features—momentary but unmistakable. He hadn't expected me to identify that account from the brief glimpse of their structure, hadn't anticipated the speed with which I could process the financial patterns laid before me.

"The beauty of mathematics," I continued, confidence growing as I recognized the advantage forming in this unlikely moment of vulnerability. " Numbers don't lie, even when people build labyrinths to hide them. You've created a magnificent structure, but it has architectural weaknesses. Points where the entire framework could collapse if the right authorities received anomaly reports."

The guards by the door shifted slightly, responding to the subtle change in atmosphere as power dynamics recalibrated. Souza's expression remained controlled, but something in his scent had shifted—the first hints of concern bleeding through practiced neutrality.

"You're more dangerous than you look, Mr . Bianchi ," he said quietly, assessment replacing the dismissive confidence he'd initially projected. " I understand now why Matteo claimed you against political advantage. Not just omega biology but genuine asset."

I leaned forward as much as the restraints allowed, holding his gaze with a directness that defied omega stereotypes. " My sister's location and immediate release. That's my price for not activating the financial tripwires I've already established."

"Tripwires?" Skepticism colored his tone, but the tension in his posture betrayed

genuine concern.

"Did you think I discovered the missing millions and took no precautions?" I allowed a ghost of a smile to touch my lips, channeling the quiet confidence I'd observed in Matteo during negotiations. " Three separate alert systems, programmed to trigger if I don't enter specific codes at twelve-hour intervals. The first deadline passed while I was unconscious. The second is approaching in—" I glanced at the clock on the wall, its red digital display the only splash of color in the concrete room, "—approximately ninety minutes."

Bluffing had never been my strength, numbers and patterns my usual territory rather than psychological manipulation. But the ledgers I'd studied weren't just financial records—they were maps of human motivation, of risk assessment, of the calculations that guided decisions in our world. I'd learned to read those patterns too, to understand the mathematics of fear and advantage that governed interactions at this level.

"You expect me to believe an omega accountant established automated financial alerts sophisticated enough to threaten Operation Mezzanotte ?" Souza's skepticism remained evident, though underlaid with genuine uncertainty.

"I expect you to make a rational calculation," I countered, maintaining the calm certainty that represented my only advantage in this moment of absolute vulnerability. " Is the risk of losing billions in carefully constructed financial architecture worth keeping my sister as leverage? Particularly when Matteo is already coming for us both?"

The statement hung between us, weighted with implication and the ring of truth that statistics provided. Not just omens but mathematical certainty that an alpha whose claimed omega had been taken would come with violence that transcended rational assessment or tactical disadvantage.

And now, with the knowledge growing within me—heir to everything Matteo represented, continuation of bloodline the Corvino family valued above all else—his coming was inevitable as sunrise, as certain as the mathematical principles that governed financial patterns and biological imperatives alike.

"You've created something elegant," I continued, nodding toward the tablet still displaying their financial structure. " But I've already identified six critical nodes that could be targeted by regulatory authorities. The first alert sends red flags to FinCEN regarding the Cayman transfers. The second initiates audit requests focused on specific shell companies in your network. The third?—"

"Enough." Souza raised a hand, the first genuine response I'd provoked beyond calculated performance. " You've made your point, Mr . Bianchi ." He studied me with renewed assessment, recalibrating whatever initial impression he'd formed based on secondary gender or apparent vulnerability. " Tell me these tripwires can be deactivated."

"Of course," I replied, the lie emerging with confidence born of necessity rather than practice. " I'm an accountant, not a terrorist. Systems designed with fail-safes are simply good business practice."

The tension hung between us, alpha calculation weighing risk against potential loss, measuring the probability that an omega would have established such sophisticated countermeasures against the certainty of catastrophic financial exposure if I had.

"Your sister will be brought here," he decided finally, the concession emerging with the careful framing of a man unused to negotiating from disadvantage. " You will deactivate these alleged tripwires. Then we will continue our discussion regarding your future role in our organization."

The phrasing—deliberate, revealing—confirmed what I'd suspected beneath surface

demands. The Souzas didn't want me eliminated or even returned to Matteo . They wanted my financial acumen, my pattern recognition, my ability to navigate complex systems with precision they clearly recognized as valuable beyond secondary gender or claiming status.

What they didn't yet realize was how completely the biological reality now taking shape within me changed their calculations. Not just omega accountant or claimed mate, but carrier of Corvino heir, of biological continuation that transcended financial manipulation or organizational politics.

"Her safety first," I insisted, pushing advantage while it existed. " I see her, confirm her condition, speak with her privately. Then I deactivate the alerts."

Souza's jaw tightened fractionally—alpha instinct bristling against omega making demands despite rational recognition of the leverage I'd established. He nodded once to the guard by the door, the gesture carrying the weight of command that required no verbal reinforcement.

As the guard departed to retrieve Silvia , Souza's focus returned to me with renewed intensity. " You continue to surprise me, Mr . Bianchi . When this situation resolves, I hope you'll consider the advantages of arrangement more suited to your capabilities than serving as Matteo Corvino's claimed omega."

The implication hung between us—not just negotiation for immediate safety but longer-term recruitment, recognition of value that transcended traditional hierarchy or biological designation. In another context, with another alpha, the acknowledgment of capability beyond omega stereotypes might have registered as progressive, as opportunity rather than manipulation.

But beneath the civilized veneer, beneath the financial sophistication and apparent respect, lay the fundamental truth of our situation: I remained bound and captive.

Silvia remained leverage. And the child now growing within me—unexpected, unplanned, but increasingly undeniable—represented vulnerability beyond what even I had calculated when allowing myself to be taken from Matteo's protection.

"I already have an arrangement that recognizes my capabilities," I replied, the truth emerging with certainty that surprised even me. " One that offers partnership rather than ownership."

Something shifted in Souza's expression—not anger but genuine curiosity, perhaps even momentary respect for the omega who negotiated from position of apparent vulnerability yet maintained dignity beyond what traditional hierarchy would have permitted.

"Partnership," he repeated, the word emerging with consideration rather than mockery. " An interesting perspective on claiming bond established through heat manipulation."

"Choice exists even within constraint," I countered, the certainty behind my words growing as I articulated what had formed between Matteo and me through crisis and consequence alike. " Partnership forged through fire burns stronger than chains imposed through biology or hierarchy."

Before Souza could respond, the door opened to reveal Silvia —bruised but standing, her dark eyes widening as she registered my presence across the room. The beta resilience that had defined her since childhood evident in the defiant set of her shoulders despite the restraints binding her wrists.

"Three minutes," Souza declared, rising from his chair with the fluid grace of a man accustomed to controlling every aspect of his environment. " Then we deactivate your tripwires, Mr . Bianchi . For everyone's continued safety."

As he and the remaining guard stepped outside, leaving Silvia and me alone in the concrete room with its blinking camera, I allowed myself the first genuine smile since regaining consciousness. Not victory—we remained very much in danger—but recognition of advantage created through intelligence rather than force, through strategy rather than biological dominance.

"Luca," Silvia whispered, moving quickly to my side despite her own restraints. "Are you hurt? Did they?—"

"I'm okay," I assured her, the lie necessary to maintain the confidence that represented our only advantage. "And I've bought us time. Matteo is coming."

The certainty behind that statement surprised even me—not hope or wishful thinking, but bone-deep knowledge that transcended rational assessment or statistical probability. The claiming bond between us, still new and incompletely formed, nevertheless transmitted certainty that defied explanation beyond the ancient biology that connected alpha to omega through mechanisms science had yet to fully map.

"How can you be sure?" Silvia asked, practical as always despite the circumstances.

I met her gaze directly, allowing her to see the confidence that had formed through crisis and claiming alike, through choice preserved within constraint, through partnership discovered within possession.

"Because he's mine as much as I'm his," I replied simply, the truth behind the declaration carrying weight beyond its syllables. "And nothing in this world will stop him from coming for what belongs to him."

My hand moved instinctively toward my abdomen, stopped again by restraints but the intention clear enough for Silvia's perceptive gaze. Her eyes widened, recognition and understanding dawning as she connected my gesture with whatever she saw in my

expression, in my scent that had been gradually changing since the heat, since the claiming, since biology had begun writing future into my cellular structure.

"Luca," she breathed, voice barely audible in the monitored room. " Are you?—"

I nodded once, the confirmation requiring no words between siblings who had communicated through silence and subtle gestures since childhood, when speaking truths aloud had sometimes invited consequences neither could afford to face.

The camera continued its mechanical surveillance, the red light blinking with indifferent regularity as I leaned closer to Silvia , voice dropping to whisper as I detailed what she needed to know, what she needed to do when opportunity presented itself. The financial leverage I'd established might be temporary, the bluff eventually called, but it had created the window we needed.

Time for Matteo to reach us. Time for the rescue already in motion. Time for the partnership formed through claiming and consequence to demonstrate its strength beyond biological imperative or legal documentation.

The hollow ache in my chest—the emptiness where our claiming bond should have pulsed with his presence—had begun to ease, a subtle warming that suggested proximity increasing, distance decreasing with each passing minute. Not imagination or desperate hope, but molecular recognition of alpha approaching claimed omega through mechanisms that transcended conscious understanding.

He was coming. And when he arrived, the Souzas would discover what I already knew with bone-deep certainty: that what had formed between underboss and accountant, between alpha and omega, between two people who had chosen connection within constraint, represented something far more dangerous than traditional hierarchy or biological imperative could fully comprehend.

Partnership forged through fire. Strength discovered within vulnerability. Choice preserved within claiming.

Ours to build beyond what either of us had imagined possible when this journey began.

And now, with the child growing from that union—heir to everything Matteo valued, continuation of legacy he would defend with his last breath—the coming storm would rewrite everything the Souzas thought they understood about power, about vulnerability, about the claiming bond they had tried to manipulate for their own advantage.

They had miscalculated indeed.



### MATTEO

The family estate loomed against the twilight sky, marble and stone carved against the gathering darkness like a monument to power that had survived generations. I adjusted my cufflinks—platinum with obsidian inlay, understated yet deadly in their elegance—and felt the weight of the claiming mark at my neck pulse with a certainty that transcended the coming confrontation.

Blood ties were about to become severed chains.

I'd brought Luca home hours ago, his trembling smile proof he'd survived the Souzas' attempt to turn him into a pawn. Only once he was safe behind reinforced doors had I turned my attention to the reckoning awaiting me here.

Carlo stood beside the car, his face a careful mask despite knowing what awaited us inside. The gathered vehicles in the circular drive told their own story—not just family but captains, lieutenants, witnesses summoned to observe whatever reckoning my father had orchestrated.

"All the captains have already gathered," Carlo confirmed, his gaze sweeping the illuminated windows where shadows moved like predators behind frosted glass. "Every territory represented."

Significant. My father had elevated this from private ultimatum to public judgment. A calculated maneuver to force my capitulation through the weight of collective

expectation.

"And Luca ?" I asked, my focus remaining on the mansion where I'd spent my childhood learning the precise mechanics of power and violence.

"Secure at the penthouse. Three rotating security teams, satellite monitoring active." Carlo hesitated, loyalty battling practicality. " There's still time to reconsider, sir. The claiming is... recent. It could be legally reversed before?—"

"No." The single word emerged with such finality that Carlo flinched despite our years together. " It couldn't."

The claim existed beyond documentation now—blood and bite and biochemical bond that had altered us both at the molecular level. My scent carried notes of his honey-citrus essence. His carried the sandalwood and cedar that defined me. Our biologies had merged, creating something neither could undo through legal mechanisms or political convenience.

The grand foyer stretched before us in imported marble and handcrafted mahogany, generations of Corvino wealth compressed into stone and wood and crystal. The bitter scent of my father's imported cigars hung beneath more recent notes of expensive cologne and the distinctive chemical undertone of concealed firearms. The captains had come prepared for potential conflict, then.

Vincenzo appeared from the study doorway, aged face betraying nothing as he acknowledged my arrival with the slightest inclination of his head. " They're waiting."

The study—my father's inner sanctum—had been transformed. Furniture rearranged to create a tribunal setting, with the massive oak desk at the head and twelve captains arranged in descending order of rank. Men who controlled territories, operations, and

bloodlines that had defined Corvino power for generations. Men whose loyalty I was about to test beyond recovery.

My father sat like an aging emperor, silver hair catching light from crystal fixtures overhead. His expression remained neutral, though the slight tightening around his eyes betrayed the satisfaction he took in orchestrating this performance.

"Matteo," he greeted, my name in his mouth sounding like the first warning before gunfire. "How kind of you to honor our invitation."

The phrasing—deliberate, pointed—established the tone immediately. Not son but subordinate. Not heir but subject. The captains registered the distinction with subtle shifts in posture, the choreography of power dynamics already in motion.

"Father," I acknowledged, taking the lone chair positioned opposite him—a symbolic isolation that hadn't escaped my notice. "I understood this was a family matter. I'm surprised to see our entire leadership assembled."

"Family matters become organizational concerns when they threaten established alliances." His fingers drummed once against polished wood—the only external sign of the rage I knew simmered beneath his controlled exterior. "Particularly when the heir apparent compromises decades of strategic positioning for an omega accountant."

Captain Russo —head of our eastern territories and longtime supporter of my father's traditional approach—leaned forward, salt-and-pepper beard failing to soften the hard lines of his face. "We've received communication from Emilio Souza . He considers your... choice of mate a direct insult to his family."

The contempt in his final words hung in the air, a test of my reaction that would set the tone for what followed. I allowed the silence to stretch, maintained eye contact

until Russo's gaze dropped a fraction—alpha yielding to alpha despite his seniority.

"The Souza alliance was never viable," I said finally, voice pitched to carry without appearing defensive. "Sofia was already negotiating separate arrangements with the Venucci family while her father dangled her before us as bait."

A murmur rippled through the assembled captains—information they hadn't been privy to, the first suggestion that my father's cherished alliance contained cracks invisible from outside.

"Irrelevant," my father cut in, reclaiming control of the narrative. "Even if the Souza girl proved unsuitable, there were dozens of appropriate candidates. Instead, you claimed an omega nobody from accounting. A male omega, flouting generations of traditional alpha-female omega pairings."

Another calculated thrust, aimed at traditional values that still dominated our world despite evolving attitudes in younger ranks. Captain Esposito—ancient, conservative, controlling shipping routes critical to our import operations—shook his head in visible disapproval.

"The Corvino bloodline deserves prestigious continuation," he pronounced, each word weighted with the authority of his eighty-plus years. "A leader with a nameless, family-less omega consort weakens our standing with the other families who value proper breeding and connections."

I studied him thoughtfully, noted the younger man standing behind his chair—Esposito's own son and presumptive successor, watching with poorly concealed interest. The old power dynamics laid bare: patriarchy, bloodlines, traditional conceptions of strength bound to conventional family structures.

I'd known the moment Luca's scent shifted—richer, sweeter, unmistakably layered

with the hormonal markers of new life. Even from miles away, the claiming bond had transmitted the truth biology had already written into his scent.

"And if I told you Luca is pregnant?" I said, the declaration landing like a grenade in the center of the assembled leadership.

The silence that followed held multitudes—shock, disbelief, recalculation. My father's expression hardened to granite, the revelation clearly unexpected despite his intelligence network. Captain Russo recovered first, skepticism evident in his scoff.

"Convenient timing. And unconfirmed."

"Medical documentation can be provided," I replied evenly. "The next generation of Corvino leadership grows as we speak. The only question is what world they will inherit—one bound by outdated alliances and crumbling traditions, or one positioned for survival in changing times."

The strategic reframing—from personal choice to organizational adaptation—created visible division among the captains. The younger ones, particularly Mancini and Delvecchio, showed interest rather than dismissal. The possibility of heir combined with progressive restructuring offered pathways to advancement that traditional hierarchy would have blocked for decades.

"This changes nothing," my father declared, voice dropping to the register that had preceded violence throughout my childhood. "The claiming was ill-considered. The pregnancy, if real, unfortunate. Both can be addressed discreetly, allowing you to resume your rightful position once this... distraction has been removed."

The casual suggestion of eliminating Luca—of erasing both my claimed omega and our unborn child—should have triggered rage, should have shattered the control I'd maintained since entering the room. Instead, it crystallized something cold and

absolute in my chest—certainty beyond emotion, decision beyond debate.

I reached into my jacket, extracting the document I'd brought for precisely this moment. The paper—heavy stock, embossed with the Corvino family crest—represented generations of accumulated power, territorial rights, and succession protocols.

"Do you recognize this, Father?" I placed it on the table between us, positioning it so all captains could see the official seals and signatures. "The Corvino succession protocol. Article seventeen specifically addresses challenges to designated heirs."

My father's expression shifted minutely—recognition dawning that I'd chosen a battlefield he hadn't anticipated. Not emotional appeal but legal challenge, using the very foundations of our organization against its current leadership.

"You wouldn't dare," he said softly, threat embedded in each syllable.

"I invoke the rite of leadership challenge," I continued, ignoring his warning to address the assembled captains directly. "Article seventeen provides clear protocol when the Don and heir apparent reach irreconcilable positions on organizational direction."

Captain Esposito, keeper of our oldest traditions, nodded reluctantly. "The rite hasn't been invoked in three generations, but remains valid under our founding principles."

"This is absurd," my father countered, rising from his chair with controlled fury. "You would risk everything—your position, your inheritance, the very name that gives you standing in this room—for an omega accountant?"

The question hung between us, weighted with implication and judgment. Not just strategic miscalculation but fundamental weakness—alpha compromised by

inappropriate attachment, heir choosing emotion over duty.

I met his gaze directly, allowed the assembled captains to witness the confrontation in its naked simplicity—father and son, Don and heir, tradition and evolution locked in contest that transcended personal grievance to become organizational watershed.

"I would risk everything," I agreed, voice carrying the certainty that had driven me since discovering Luca's abduction, since confirming the pregnancy that represented future beyond my father's limited vision. " For him. For our child. For the organization's survival beyond outdated alliances that serve pride rather than practical advancement."

My father's expression darkened further, calculation replacing outrage as he recognized the strategic corner I'd maneuvered him into. Denying the challenge would undermine his authority with the captains. Accepting it risked transition of power he clearly wasn't prepared to relinquish.

"The challenge requires witnesses," he said finally, shifting to procedural details that might provide breathing room for counter-maneuvers. " Preparation . Formal protocols."

"All present," I countered, gesturing to the assembled leadership. " Unless you're suggesting the captains are insufficient witness to Corvino succession matters?"

The trap was elegant in its simplicity—either acknowledge the captains' authority as sufficient for challenge proceedings, or insult the very leadership structure my father had spent decades cultivating. Captain Mancini —youngest of the assembled leaders, controlling technology operations critical to our money laundering infrastructure—leaned forward with poorly concealed interest.

"The witnesses are valid," he confirmed, political calculation evident in his

willingness to speak first. " The challenge can proceed according to protocol."

My father's gaze shifted to him briefly—a promise of future reckoning if this gambit failed—before returning to me with renewed intensity. " You choose this battlefield, knowing what failure would mean? Not just position, but complete separation from family protection. From the Corvino name itself."

"I choose future over politics," I replied, the declaration emerging not as calculation but as truth bone-deep and absolute. " Legacy defined by choice rather than manipulation."

For one suspended moment, something almost like pride flickered across my father's features—recognition, perhaps, that the son he had raised to ruthless calculation had applied those lessons against the master himself. It vanished quickly, replaced by the Don's trademark resolve.

"Then we proceed," he decided, standing with the fluid grace that belied his advancing years. " The knife. Traditional parameters. First blood from torso determines successor."

The selection—ritual knife combat practiced since our organization's earliest days—represented calculated risk on his part. His experience with the blade exceeded mine in years if not technique, his familiarity with my fighting style potentially advantageous where other challenges might have favored my more recent training.

Vincenzo disappeared briefly, returning with the ceremonial box that contained the matched blades kept specifically for succession challenges. The captains arranged themselves around the cleared center of the room, forming the ritual circle that would contain and witness the transfer of power—whether to confirmed heir or retained Don

.



As preparations progressed, Captain Ferraro —historically one of my stronger supporters despite his traditional leanings—approached under the guise of examining the ceremonial blades.

"Everything you've built," he murmured, voice pitched for my ears alone. " Territory , respect, position—all for an omega who entered your life weeks ago."

The assessment—so fundamentally misunderstanding what had formed between Luca and me—merely confirmed the necessity of the challenge I'd initiated.

"What I've gained outweighs what you think I'm losing," I replied quietly. " A partner who sees beyond secondary gender to genuine capability. A future based on evolution rather than stagnation."

The ritual began with traditional positioning—combatants facing each other across cleared space, witnesses arranged in ceremonial pattern that dated to Sicilian origins centuries removed from current operations. My father's expression remained calculating as he held the ceremonial blade with practiced familiarity, decades of similar confrontations evident in the ease with which he assumed fighting stance.

"Last opportunity to reconsider," he offered, voice pitched for privacy despite the attentive witnesses surrounding us. " Return to your position as heir. Release the omega. Restore proper order to succession planning."

My response emerged with certainty that had solidified through crisis and claiming alike, through partnership discovered within possession, through future glimpsed within present challenge.

"No."

The simplicity of my refusal registered across my father's features—not just defiance

but finality, not just challenge but severance of what had bound us through blood and ambition alike. In that moment I understood with perfect clarity: regardless of the outcome, I had already chosen separation from everything he represented.

The first exchange came without further warning—my father advancing with the controlled aggression that had defined his leadership style for decades. Blade moving in precise patterns designed to test defenses rather than immediately penetrate, to establish rhythm before committing to decisive strike. I countered with measured response, neither retreating nor advancing beyond strategic necessity, conserving energy where he expended it through offensive positioning.

The dance continued with increasing intensity—metal flashing beneath crystal chandeliers as we circled through patterns familiar from childhood training yet heightened by genuine intent behind ceremonial framework. My father's technique remained formidable despite advancing age, experience compensating for diminished speed as he pressed advantage through sequential attacks designed to create opening through accumulated pressure.

I absorbed the offensive pattern without yielding significant ground, recognition forming that his strategy relied on superior endurance rather than decisive victory—wearing down younger opponent through sustained engagement rather than risking everything on singular strike that might fail against prepared defenses. The calculation betrayed fundamental misunderstanding of what had changed since my departure from family structure.

I was no longer fighting for position or power or even family legacy in its traditional definition. Each movement, each calculated response, each strategic decision served singular purpose beyond personal ambition or organizational advancement. Protection of what was mine. Security for the future growing within Luca's body. Establishment of world where our child might inherit strength without the constraints that had limited potential through generations of outdated hierarchy.

I shifted suddenly from defensive positioning to controlled advance, the transition catching my father momentarily off-balance as pattern recognition failed against unexpected variation. The opening created lasted mere fraction of second—barely perceptible to witnesses more accustomed to observing prolonged engagement before decisive movement.

My blade found its mark with surgical precision—a clean slash across my father's torso that communicated deliberate restraint rather than limitation of capability. Deep enough to establish unquestionable victory, controlled enough to demonstrate discipline beyond mere violence.

Blood bloomed across white shirt, spreading in pattern that announced succession more eloquently than verbal declaration could have achieved. My father's expression registered something beyond surprise or anger—recognition, perhaps, that the son he had attempted to control through political manipulation and family obligation had evolved beyond the heir he had tried to shape in his own image.

"First blood," Vincenzo announced, the formal acknowledgment sealing transfer of authority that had been initiated through ceremonial challenge. " Succession established without dispute."

The assembled captains remained silent as my father pressed hand against bleeding wound—not life-threatening but significant enough to require medical attention beyond ceremonial acknowledgment. His gaze held mine for extended moment, assessment evident as he processed implications beyond immediate physical defeat.

"You've won the position," he said finally, voice pitched for my ears rather than public consumption. " The question remains whether you can maintain it with an omega consort and progressive policies that contradict generations of established protocol."

"That question," I replied with equal privacy, "has already been answered through the loyalty of captains who recognize strength beyond traditional definition. Who understand that evolution ensures survival where rigid adherence to outdated methods guarantees extinction."

I turned from him then, blade still held in formal positioning as I addressed the assembled witnesses who would translate tonight's events throughout our organization and beyond to allied families and rival interests alike.

"As successor established through traditional protocol, I declare the following changes to Corvino organizational structure," I announced, voice carrying the authority now formally transferred through ceremonial combat. "First, Luca Bianchi - Corvino is acknowledged as my consort with full authority appropriate to that position. Our child, currently developing, is recognized as legitimate heir to whatever structure evolves from reforms now initiated."

### MATTEO

The penthouse doors opened before me, silent on well-oiled hinges as I stepped into the space that had transformed from tactical fortress to something adjacent to home in the weeks since claiming had bound us together. The air carried Luca's scent—warmer now, richer with pregnancy hormones that had begun altering his natural honey-citrus notes into something both familiar and new.

I found him by the windows, silhouetted against the city lights spread below like territory already mapped and claimed. The moonlight silvered his profile, casting shadows that emphasized the subtle changes pregnancy had already begun manifesting—a slight fullness to his cheeks, a barely perceptible curve to what had been flat abdomen.

He turned at my approach, uncertainty and hope warring in his expression as he registered my return. The claiming mark at his neck—the evidence of the bond formed beyond legal documentation—pulsed visibly beneath his skin, resonating with my proximity through mechanisms neither fully understood but both had come to rely upon.

"It's done?" he asked, the question containing volumes beyond its simple syllables.

"It's done," I confirmed, crossing the space between us to kneel at his feet—the position a symbolic surrender of the authority I had claimed through ceremonial combat earlier. My hands settled on either side of his abdomen, warmth penetrating

the light fabric of his shirt to connect with the life growing beneath. " I am no longer heir apparent but Don Corvino . My father has been... retired from leadership."

His eyes widened slightly, recognition of the magnitude of change achieved through single confrontation. His hand rose to touch my face, the gesture containing tenderness I hadn't anticipated from the analytical accountant who had entered my life through missing millions and paper claiming.

"What did it cost you?" he asked softly, perception cutting through triumph to the underlying sacrifice with characteristic precision.

The question penetrated deeper than expected, forcing examination of what had truly been surrendered through challenge and reformation. Not position or power—those had been gained rather than lost. Not material wealth or territorial control—those remained intact, enhanced even through consolidation of authority previously divided between Don and heir.

What had been lost existed in more intangible realm—connection to father, to family structure that had defined identity from earliest memory, to legacy conceived in traditional terms rather than evolutionary adaptation.

"What I told you I would lose," I answered honestly, remembering our conversation in the aftermath of heat, when claiming had bound us through biology as much as legal declaration. " My father. The traditions that shaped me. The legacy as it has existed for generations."

Understanding passed between us, molecular awareness carrying meaning where words proved insufficient—the claiming bond translating emotional complexities neither could fully articulate through ordinary speech. His scent shifted subtly, warmth threading through the sweetness as he registered the genuine cost behind apparent victory.

"And you chose this anyway," he said quietly, not question but recognition of truth. "Knowing exactly what you were sacrificing."

"I chose you," I corrected gently, hands spreading wider against his abdomen, seeking connection with the miracle contained within. "I chose our child. I chose future that exists beyond my father's limited vision or the political alliances he prioritized over genuine advancement."

Something shifted in Luca's expression then—vulnerability yielding to certainty that matched my own, partnership replacing hesitation as he recognized the weight of what had been sacrificed on behalf of what now grew between us.

"I'm choosing you too," he said, the declaration emerging with quiet intensity that registered through our bond with unmistakable certainty. "Not just because you protected me when I was vulnerable. Not just because your bite marked me. I'm choosing the man who sees beyond omega biology to capability, who offered partnership where others would have demanded submission."

His hand settled over mine where it rested against the subtle curve of our growing child—symbolism beyond words in the simple gesture of connection.

"I'm choosing the future we build together," he continued, voice strengthening with each word. "The world our child inherits because we refused to accept limitation as destiny. I'm choosing the partner who sacrificed legacy to create something better."

He leaned forward then, omega initiating contact where traditional dynamics would have demanded passive waiting for alpha lead. His lips pressed against mine with deliberate intent rather than biological submission—choice embodied in physical connection that transcended secondary gender or claiming protocol.

When he drew back, something had solidified between us—partnership given

physical expression beyond claiming bite or legal documentation. Not just alpha and omega bound through biology, but two people choosing connection despite the sacrifices required, despite the risks inherent in challenging established patterns.

"Come with me," I said, rising from kneeling position to extend my hand in formal invitation rather than possessive claim.

Luca accepted without hesitation, fingers intertwining with mine as I led him through the penthouse toward the bedroom that had become shared territory through claiming and crisis alike. The claiming bond between us pulsed with awareness, with anticipation that had nothing to do with biological imperative and everything to do with celebration of what we had begun building together.

The bed waited, sheets already turned down as if in expectation of this moment—this confirmation of partnership forged through fire, through sacrifice, through choice preserved within constraint. I closed the door behind us, enclosing the space in privacy that belonged to us alone, separated from the world we had begun reshaping through challenge and consequence alike.

"Tonight I claimed leadership through blood drawn," I said quietly, hands moving to the buttons of my shirt with deliberate intent. " But the claiming that matters more was sealed weeks ago, when you chose to offer your throat despite heat manipulation, despite vulnerabilities neither of us had planned."

Luca's eyes darkened, pupils dilating as he registered the significance of what I was offering beyond mere physical intimacy. Not alpha claiming omega through dominance, but partner reaffirming connection through mutual surrender.

"Tonight we sealed a future neither family would have recognized as possible," he replied, his own hands moving to the clothing that separated us from complete connection. " Not through violence or manipulation, but through choice that



transcended biology."

As clothing gave way to skin, as distance yielded to proximity that carried meaning beyond physical contact, the claiming mark at his neck pulsed visibly—evidence of bond already formed yet continuing to evolve with each shared experience, each chosen moment of connection.

My lips found that mark first, pressing against the raised scar with reverence, with gratitude for what it represented beyond biological ownership. His head tilted in deliberate offering rather than instinctive submission, choice preserved within biological response that had once seemed inescapable limitation.

The moment my mouth touched that sacred spot—that raised welt of tissue where my teeth had broken his skin—a current shot through us both. I felt him shudder, his honey-citrus scent intensifying, sweetening with arousal that spoke louder than any words could. The mark was hot beneath my lips, pulsing with our shared heartbeat, the physical manifestation of something science couldn't fully explain but that I felt in my fucking bones.

"Mine," I whispered against his skin, the word emerging rough and raw, stripped of pretense. My tongue traced the ridges of the scar, tasting the salt of his skin, the faint metallic echo of the claiming that had bound us. " Not because I took you. Because you gave yourself."

Luca's breath hitched, his slender fingers threading through my hair, not pulling away but drawing me closer. The subtle curve of his abdomen pressed against me—our child growing beneath my palm, miracle born of heat and claiming and choice that transcended both.

"Yours," he agreed, voice barely audible but resonating through our bond with absolute certainty. " Not because you claimed me. Because I claimed you back."

I growled low in my throat, primal satisfaction rumbling through my chest as I worked my way down his neck, leaving a trail of open-mouthed kisses across his collarbone. His skin tasted like possibility—like future untethered from the blood I'd spilled hours earlier, from the power I'd claimed through violence now channeled into something gentler but no less profound.

My hands moved with deliberate slowness, mapping the terrain of his body with reverent attention. The subtle changes pregnancy had already wrought fascinated me—the slight fullness to his chest, the barely perceptible softening around his jaw, the way his scent had deepened into something richer, more complex. My thumbs brushed over his nipples, finding them more sensitive than before, drawing a sharp gasp from him that shot straight to my cock.

"Fuck," I muttered, pressing my forehead against his sternum, momentarily overwhelmed by the intensity of need coursing through me. Not just lust—though God knew there was plenty of that—but something deeper, more consuming. The need to worship, to protect, to claim and be claimed in return.

"Too much?" Luca asked, those brown eyes wide behind his glasses, concern threading through his voice despite the flush spreading across his cheeks, down his neck.

"Never enough," I corrected, voice rough as sandpaper. I guided him backward until his knees hit the mattress, lowering him with careful hands that belied the urgency pounding through my veins. "I could touch you for years and it wouldn't be enough."

His body yielded beneath mine as I followed him down, skin against skin, heat against heat. The claiming bond between us vibrated with awareness, with recognition that transcended physical sensation. I could feel his arousal not just against my thigh but through the molecular connection that had rewritten us both at the cellular level.

My cock throbbed, heavy and aching, but I forced myself to slow down, to savor. Tonight wasn't about alpha claiming omega through dominance. Tonight was about partnership reaffirmed through mutual surrender.

I worked my way down his body with deliberate patience, pausing to press my lips against the slight swell where our child grew. The omega in him responded to my proximity with biological certainty—slick gathering between his thighs, the sweet scent of his arousal filling the air between us. But it was the man in him that reached for me, fingers tangling in my hair, guiding me where he wanted me.

"Please," he whispered, the word emerging not as omega submission but as partner's request. "I need you."

I growled my approval, sliding lower, spreading his thighs with hands that trembled slightly despite years of never showing weakness. The sight of him—flushed, wanting, wet for me—nearly undid my control. His cock lay hard against his stomach, smaller than mine but perfect, while beneath, his entrance glistened with slick that called to something primal in me.

"Fucking beautiful," I murmured, the words inadequate for what I felt but all I could manage as I lowered my mouth to taste him.

The first swipe of my tongue against his entrance drew a broken sound from him—half gasp, half moan—that echoed through our bond like lightning. His taste exploded across my senses—honey and citrus and something uniquely Luca, intensified by pregnancy hormones into something even more addictive. I lapped at him like a man starved, drinking down his slick, feeling him tremble and shake beneath my hands.

"Matt," he gasped, my name in his mouth sounding like salvation, like benediction. "Oh god, Matt, please?—"

I slid one finger into him alongside my tongue, finding him hot and tight and perfect. His body welcomed the intrusion, omega biology ensuring readiness even as his conscious mind struggled to process the intensity. A second finger joined the first, stretching him gently, preparing him for what we both needed.

When I finally raised my head, my face was wet with his slick, my control hanging by threads worn thin through violence and victory and the sight of my omega spread before me. His eyes were blown wide with desire, glasses askew, lips parted and swollen where he'd bitten them to keep from crying out.

"I claimed leadership through blood tonight," I said, voice barely recognizable even to my own ears. " But now I need you to claim me back. Not alpha and omega. Just us."

Understanding passed between us, molecular awareness carrying meaning where words proved insufficient. Luca nodded once, decision made, and reached for me with hands that no longer trembled.

"Come here," he said softly, authority in his voice that had nothing to do with secondary gender and everything to do with the man he was beneath biology's constraints.

I moved up his body, positioning myself between his spread thighs, the head of my cock nudging against his entrance without pressing forward. Waiting . Offering choice where claiming had once seemed to remove it.

Luca's hands framed my face, thumbs brushing across my cheekbones with tenderness I hadn't known I needed until it was offered. His eyes held mine, brown depths containing certainty that registered through our bond with unmistakable clarity.

"I choose you," he said simply, the declaration carrying weight beyond the three words that comprised it. " Now and always."

He shifted his hips then, taking me inside with deliberate intent, omega body welcoming alpha cock with biological certainty that couldn't diminish the conscious choice behind the action. I sank into him with a groan that seemed torn from the depths of my soul, the tight heat of him enveloping me in sensation that transcended physical pleasure.

Our bodies joined completely, his legs wrapping around my waist, my forehead pressed against his as we breathed the same air, shared the same space, existed for moments as single entity rather than separate beings. The claiming bond between us pulsed with recognition, with completion, with certainty that defied rational explanation.

"Move," he whispered against my lips, not omega begging alpha for release but partner guiding partner toward shared pleasure. " Please , Matt . I need to feel you."

I withdrew slightly before sinking back into his welcoming heat, establishing a rhythm that built gradually—not the frantic claiming of our first time but something deeper, more deliberate. Each stroke carried intention beyond physical pleasure, each movement an affirmation of what we'd risked everything to build.

His scent surrounded me, honey-citrus intensified by pregnancy hormones, driving my alpha instincts to a fever pitch while the man in me fought to maintain control. I wanted to devour him, to mark every inch of his skin, to lose myself completely in the omega who had become so much more than biology could define.

"God, you feel perfect," I groaned, my cock dragging against his most sensitive places, his slick easing the way as I filled him completely. His body welcomed me, omega anatomy designed for this connection, but his eyes—those intelligent brown

eyes holding mine—told a different story. Not submission but active participation, not surrender but deliberate choice.

His hands roamed my back, nails occasionally digging in when I hit a spot that made him gasp. The slight sting centered me, kept me present when the claiming bond threatened to overwhelm us both with sensation that transcended physical boundaries.

"Harder," he demanded, voice breaking on the word as I complied immediately. Not alpha following command but partner responding to partner's needs. " Just like—yes, there, Matt , right there?—"

His cock trapped between our bodies leaked steadily, my stomach slick with evidence of his arousal. I shifted slightly, angling to press against the spot inside him that made his breath catch, that made slick gush around where we were joined.

The room filled with the sounds of our connection—skin against skin, broken moans, the wet sounds of my cock moving within him. Beneath it all pulsed something deeper—the molecular recognition of alpha and omega perfectly matched, of claiming bond carrying sensation beyond what ordinary coupling could achieve.

I felt the familiar tightening at the base of my cock—my knot beginning to swell, alpha biology responding to omega mate with instinctive certainty. But unlike our first claiming, driven by heat and necessity, this time I hesitated.

"Luca," I managed, voice strained with the effort of restraint. " My knot— I don't want to hurt?—"

"Give it to me," he interrupted, certainty in his voice that bypassed conscious thought and spoke directly to something primal within me. His hands gripped my hips, guiding me deeper, encouraging rather than submitting. " I want all of you. Everything ."

With a groan that seemed torn from the depths of my soul, I pressed forward, feeling the resistance as my swelling knot breached him. His body tensed momentarily before yielding, accepting this final connection with a shuddering sigh that vibrated through our bond. We were locked together now, alpha and omega joined completely, my release triggered by the tight heat surrounding my knot.

I buried my face against his neck as pleasure crashed through me, wave after wave of completion as I filled him with my seed. The claiming mark beneath my lips pulsed in time with my heartbeat, with the rhythmic contractions of my release. Beneath me, Luca's body tightened further, his own climax triggered by the pressure of my knot against places designed for precisely this connection. I felt the wet heat of his release between us, his cock pulsing untouched as he cried out my name.

Time suspended as we breathed through the intensity together, bodies joined completely, pleasure cycling between us through bond that had grown beyond paper claiming to become something neither family would have recognized as possible. Not possession but partnership. Not strategy but connection. Not alpha and omega but us.

"Mine," I whispered against his skin, the word transformed from possessive claim to recognition of partnership. " Mine to honor. Mine to protect. Mine to stand beside rather than behind."

"Yours," he agreed, the word emerging with certainty that registered through our bond with crystalline clarity. " And you are mine. The alpha who chose partnership over power. Mine to support. Mine to challenge. Mine to help build something beyond what either of us imagined possible."

My hands traced the subtle changes pregnancy had already begun manifesting in his body—the slight fullness to his chest, the barely perceptible curve to his abdomen, the richness of his scent that announced creation where traditional family structure would have seen only unexpected complication.

His hands mapped the tension that leadership challenge had left in my muscles, the subtle evidence of combat that would fade but which represented the tangible sacrifice made on behalf of shared future. Not alpha claimed by omega but equals recognizing what each had given to create possibility beyond traditional limitation.

Afterward, with the city lights painting patterns across skin still flushed with connection, with the claiming bond between us humming with contentment that originated from choice rather than mere biology, I held him against me with reverence that had nothing to do with traditional alpha-omega dynamics and everything to do with genuine recognition of what we had found together.

"What happens now?" Luca asked, voice gentle in the darkness as his hand traced patterns across my chest, across the heart that beat with certainty beyond political calculation or strategic advantage.

"Now we build," I replied simply, hand settling over his where it rested against the subtle curve of pregnancy, of future taking physical form between us. " Now we create something neither family could have imagined possible—organization that values capability over secondary gender, that measures strength through evolution rather than rigid adherence to tradition."

His scent—warmth and sweetness interwoven with notes of my own sandalwood and cedar—wrapped around us like physical manifestation of the bond that had grown beyond paper claiming to become genuine partnership. The air between us held the truth neither needed to voice but both recognized with bone-deep certainty:

I had sacrificed connection to father, to tradition, to legacy as it had existed for generations. I had surrendered the comfort of known patterns, of established hierarchy, of clearly defined expectations that had guided every aspect of existence since earliest memory.



In exchange, I had gained what no traditional alliance could have provided—partner who saw beyond alpha biology to the man beneath, future defined by possibility rather than limitation, legacy that would evolve rather than stagnate beneath the weight of outdated traditions.

Luca had chosen me—not just accepted claiming as necessity or protection, but actively selected partnership that recognized his value beyond omega biology or traditional hierarchy. He had risked vulnerability, had embraced connection despite the dangers inherent in our world, had matched my sacrifice with courage that continued to reveal itself in ways that defied conventional expectations.

Together, we had begun building something neither family would have recognized as possible—future based on capability rather than secondary gender, on evolution rather than rigid adherence to patterns that served tradition more faithfully than those living within its constraints.

Worth every sacrifice. Worth every loss. Worth the severance of blood ties that had become chains rather than connections, of legacy that had limited rather than elevated, of tradition that had constrained rather than strengthened.

As Luca's breathing deepened into sleep, as his body relaxed against mine with trust that had nothing to do with omega submission and everything to do with genuine partnership, I held what had become essential against my chest—the omega who had entered my life through missing millions and emerged as partner beyond what tradition would have permitted or politics would have arranged.

The price paid—in severed connection to father, to traditional legacy, to conventional power structures—seemed insignificant compared to the future growing between us. The child conceived through heat and claiming, through biology neither had fully anticipated yet both now embraced as opportunity rather than complication.

Worth everything.

16

LUCA

Four months changed everything and nothing.

The garden spread before me in geometric perfection, Italian cypress standing sentinel against the pale blue sky like exclamation points punctuating the estate's careful design. From my position on the stone bench—strategically placed to capture afternoon light while offering shade when needed—I could trace the precise boundaries of our territory. Security perimeters invisible to casual observation but intimately familiar to me after months of memorizing the defenses Matteo had constructed around what was his.

Around what was ours.

My hand moved unconsciously to rest against the swell of my abdomen, no longer a subtle curve but a definitive statement visible beneath the light linen shirt I'd chosen for comfort in the late spring warmth. Five months along now, our child making their presence known beyond blood tests and hormone levels—a physical reality that had transformed my body in ways both expected and surprising.

The journal lay open across my lap, pages filled with my precise handwriting—not financial calculations or evidence tracking for once, but something far more personal. Names . Possibilities . Futures distilled into syllables that would shape identity before our child had even drawn first breath. Some Italian , honoring Matteo's heritage despite his complicated relationship with family legacy. Some English , echoing my

own less illustrious background. Each carefully notated with meanings, historical significance, potential implications in the world our child would inherit.

Alessandro. Meaning "defender of mankind." Strong without being overbearing. Historical gravitas without mafia connotations.

Sophia. " Wisdom ." Something I hoped our child would possess regardless of secondary gender or family expectations.

Gabriel. " God's strength." Protection built into the syllables themselves.

Elena. " Light ." What I hoped our child would bring to a world too often defined by shadows.

Wind stirred the pages gently, carrying the scent of jasmine from climbing vines that had existed on this property long before we claimed it as sanctuary. The sweetness merged with my own evolving scent—pregnancy heightening the honey notes, deepening the citrus, creating a chemical signature unique to this temporary state of shared existence. Not just mine anymore, but ours. Not just present but future, encoded in molecular shifts no suppressant could disguise.

The subtle change in atmosphere—a density to the air, a warming of ambient temperature—alerted me to Matteo's approach before his scent reached me directly. Five months of claiming bond had heightened awareness between us, creating connections that transcended ordinary perception. I knew his proximity as intimately as I knew my own heartbeat, a certainty that required no visual confirmation.

Still, I turned to watch him approach, unable to resist the pleasure of observation without being observed in return. He moved with that contained grace that had first registered in my consciousness when I'd been merely Luca Bianchi , omega accountant, rather than Luca Bianchi - Corvino , consort and carrier of the heir that

had restructured an entire organization's power dynamics.

He carried a tray with the careful precision that characterized everything he did—not a single drop spilled from the teacup despite his size and strength, the delicate porcelain looking almost absurdly fragile against hands capable of such calculated violence. The contradiction that had drawn me to him despite initial fear, despite rational caution, despite every lesson life had taught about alphas and power and the danger that lived in the spaces between them.

"You should have called for someone," he said as he approached, voice pitched low in that register that still sent involuntary warmth spiraling through my system despite months of exposure, despite the claiming bond that should have dampened such instinctive responses through familiarity.

"I'm pregnant, not incapacitated," I replied, the familiar exchange having evolved into something closer to ritual than genuine disagreement. " The doctor specifically recommended gentle exercise and fresh air."

"With appropriate supervision." He set the tray on the stone table beside my bench, movements controlled with the heightened care he'd exhibited since the pregnancy had begun showing visibly. As if my changing body represented something simultaneously precious and fragile, requiring protection beyond even what he'd offered before our child had made themselves known.

"And who better to supervise than the head of security himself?" I asked, allowing a ghost of a smile to touch my lips as I closed the journal, marking my place with a ribbon that matched the blue of the sky overhead. " I believe that falls within your operational parameters."

Something softened in his expression at my gentle teasing—the subtle shift others might have missed but that registered clearly through the claiming bond between us.

Not just alpha responding to omega, not just mate to mate, but Matteo to Luca —the connection that had evolved beyond secondary gender or biological imperative to become something neither of us had vocabulary to fully define.

"What are you working on?" he asked, gesturing toward the journal now closed on my lap as he poured tea with the precise movements that characterized everything he did. The familiar scent rose between us—chamomile and mint, the blend the doctor had recommended for pregnancy-related discomfort without pharmaceutical intervention.

"Names," I admitted, accepting the cup with careful appreciation for both the gesture and the comfort it represented. " It seems premature, but..."

"But necessary preparation," he completed, understanding passing between us without need for elaborate explanation. In our world, names carried weight beyond mere identification. They represented lineage, expectation, possible futures encoded in syllables chosen with deliberate intent rather than mere aesthetic preference.

Matteo settled beside me on the bench, close enough that our thighs pressed together despite the ample space available—the need for physical contact having evolved beyond conscious choice to become something instinctive for us both. The claiming bond hummed with shared awareness, with connection that had deepened through crisis and recovery alike.

"Any preferences so far?" he asked, one arm settling around my shoulders with casual possession that might have registered as controlling before I'd understood the complexities beneath such gestures. Not restraint but sanctuary, creating physical security that matched the emotional safety forming between us.

"Nothing definitive," I replied, leaning slightly into his warmth despite the mild day. " I've been considering names from both our backgrounds. Something that

acknowledges heritage without being burdened by it."

Understanding passed between us regarding the weight specific names might carry—particularly those associated with Corvino lineage or mafia connotations that would define our child before they had opportunity to establish independent identity. The restructuring Matteo had initiated within the organization remained incomplete, evolution meeting resistance from those who benefited from traditional hierarchies and outdated methods.

"Whatever we choose," he said after a moment, fingers tracing gentle patterns against my shoulder, "it will be our decision. Not family legacy or organizational politics or traditional expectation. Ours ."

The simple declaration carried weight beyond its syllables—confirmation of the partnership that had evolved since claiming, since pregnancy, since the confrontation that had established new leadership within the Corvino organization. Not alpha dictating to omega, not tradition overriding choice, but genuine collaboration in creating future beyond what either family might have permitted independently.

I sipped the tea, allowing its warmth to spread through my system alongside the comfort Matteo's presence invariably provided. The garden surrounded us in cultivated perfection—beauty contained within defensive perimeters, nature shaped by human intent yet retaining essential vitality despite controlled expression. Not unlike the life growing within me, formed from our combined DNA yet developing independent existence beyond either genetic contributor.

With deliberate movement, Matteo set his cup aside before sliding from the bench to kneel before me—the position unexpected from an alpha who commanded respect through mere presence, who had established dominance within an organization built on traditional hierarchy and outdated notions of power based on secondary gender. His hands settled on either side of my expanded abdomen, warmth penetrating the

light fabric of my shirt to connect with the life growing beneath.

"May I ?" he asked, seeking permission where biology and claiming would have granted automatic right—another evolution beyond what traditional alpha-omega dynamics might have dictated.

I nodded, something tightening in my chest at the reverence in his expression as he lifted my shirt just enough to expose the stretched skin beneath. His hands settled against bare flesh, palms warming the taut surface that housed our growing child. The contact sent awareness cascading through my system—not just omega responding to alpha touch, but deeper connection formed through shared creation, through choice preserved within biological imperative.

Matteo leaned forward, pressing his lips against my abdomen in gesture so tender it created ache beneath my sternum—the contradiction between public persona and private gentleness still capable of catching me unprepared despite months of exposure to both aspects of the complex man now kneeling before me.

"They're active today," he murmured, fingers splaying wider as if trying to encompass the entire miracle growing within the confined space of my body. " I can feel them moving."

"They know their papa's presence," I replied, my own hand settling over his where it rested against stretched skin. " They respond to your voice. Your touch."

Something powerful moved across his features—alpha pride tempered with vulnerability that would never be displayed beyond this private sanctuary we had created together. His scent shifted subtly, sandalwood and cedar notes deepening with emotion too complex for verbal expression yet communicated clearly through the claiming bond between us.



"What do you want for them?" I asked, the question emerging from deeper vulnerability than I'd intended to reveal. "Beyond safety. Beyond protection. Beyond everything we've already established. What future do you envision?"

Matteo's gaze lifted to meet mine, intensity in his dark eyes transcending alpha dominance to become something more fundamental—human connection formed through shared experience and mutual choice alike.

"Everything we weren't permitted," he answered simply, honesty rendering the response more powerful than elaborate declaration might have achieved. "Choice beyond biological designation. Strength beyond traditional definition. Love beyond conditional acceptance."

The words settled between us, weighted with shared understanding of what we had each sacrificed and survived to reach this moment—this sanctuary carved from dangerous world through calculated risk and mutual protection alike. The omega accountant who had discovered missing millions. The alpha underboss who had chosen partnership over political advantage. Both transformed through claiming and consequence into something neither family would have recognized as possible within their limited understanding.

"Promise me you'll teach them love, not war," I said quietly, vulnerability exposed in ways I would never have risked before claiming had bound us together, before pregnancy had created shared future beyond individual experience or expectation.

"Only love," he answered without hesitation, the vow emerging with the same certainty that characterized his most absolute declarations. Not calculation but truth, offered without qualification despite the violent world that still existed beyond our carefully secured perimeter.

The moment stretched between us, charged with meaning beyond what words alone

could have conveyed. Then —as if responding to promises made on their behalf—our child moved with sudden vigor, a definitive kick against Matteo's palm that registered through our connected hands with unmistakable intent.

Laughter escaped me before I could contain it—joy bubbling up from some place deeper than conscious thought, beyond the analytical precision that had defined me professionally before claiming and pregnancy had restructured priorities alongside physical form.

"They know their papa already," I said, wonder coloring words that emerged without careful consideration or measured restraint. " They recognize you."

Matteo's expression transformed with answering joy—a smile that few beyond our intimate circle had witnessed, revealing aspect of himself kept carefully guarded in professional context where vulnerability might be perceived as weakness rather than strength. His thumb traced gentle circle against the spot where our child had announced their presence, as if acknowledging introduction beyond verbal greeting.

"Hello, little one," he murmured, voice dropping to register that vibrated through my abdomen in pleasant resonance. " We're waiting for you. We've prepared everything for your arrival. You just need to grow stronger before joining us."

The simple acknowledgment of our child as individual with agency rather than mere extension of ourselves or organizational asset registered deeply—another evolution beyond what traditional family structures might have permitted or encouraged. Not heir or legacy or continuation of bloodline, but person forming with distinct identity worthy of recognition and respect regardless of secondary gender or biological designation.

As sun began its gradual descent toward horizon, casting lengthening shadows across the garden's geometric perfection, Matteo rose from his kneeling position with fluid

grace that belied his size and strength. Rather than returning to his previous place beside me, he settled behind me on the bench, his body curving around mine with protective intent that created sanctuary without constraint.

I leaned back against him, allowing his strength to support weight that had begun shifting my center of gravity as pregnancy progressed—partnership expressed through physical accommodation that required no verbal negotiation or explicit request. His arms encircled me, hands settling over mine where they rested against our growing child, creating layered connection that translated through the claiming bond between us with heightened intensity.

The garden spread before us in twilight transformation—colors deepening, shadows lengthening, beauty evolving through natural progression rather than deliberate intervention. Beyond visible boundaries lay the security perimeters that protected what we had built together—not just residence or tactical position, but foundation upon which we would construct future beyond limitations that had constrained potential through generations of traditional hierarchy.

"What are you thinking?" Matteo asked quietly, his breath warm against my ear in intimate proximity that registered through the claiming bond with pleasant resonance.

"That we've created something unexpected," I answered honestly, no longer filtering vulnerability behind analytical precision or professional detachment. " Not just our child, but... this. Us . Everything we've built beyond what either of us anticipated when this began."

His arms tightened fractionally, the gesture communicating understanding beyond what words alone might have conveyed. Not possession but connection, protection without constraint, partnership formed through crisis and choice alike.

"When you walked into my office with evidence of missing millions," he said, voice

colored with something adjacent to wonder despite the controlled cadence that defined his speech patterns, " I saw an asset. A tactical advantage. Possibly a vulnerability to be managed."

"And now?" The question emerged despite knowing the answer registered clearly through the claiming bond between us—biochemical connection translating emotion where words might prove insufficient.

"Now I see the future," he replied simply, truth rendering the response more powerful than elaborate declaration might have achieved. " Not just heir or legacy or continuation of bloodline, but possibility beyond what traditional structures would have permitted through outdated definitions and political positioning."

As moonlight began filtering through cypress branches, silvering the garden's geometry with ethereal transformation, our child moved again—gentler this time, rolling motion rather than definitive kick, as if settling into position for the night ahead. Matteo's hands spread wider against my abdomen, as if trying to encompass the miracle contained within increasingly inadequate space.

"They're settling down," I observed, the intimate knowledge of another being's patterns and preferences still occasionally startling despite months of shared existence. " They're most active at twilight and dawn. Transition periods, like their papa."

Something adjacent to pride colored Matteo's scent—sandalwood and cedar notes warming with emotion that registered through the claiming bond with pleasant intensity. Not just alpha responding to inclusion of child within his protection, but deeper recognition of connection forming beyond biological imperative or legal claiming.

As night descended fully, as security lights activated with subtle efficiency around

the property's perimeter, as stars emerged in patterns as ancient as the evolutionary biology that had bound us together through claiming and consequence, we remained connected in layered intimacy that transcended secondary gender or traditional hierarchy.

Not alpha and omega defined by biological limitation. Not underboss and accountant restricted by organizational hierarchy. Not even mate and claimed functioning through chemical connection beyond conscious control. But partners, bound through choice as much as circumstance, creating future beyond what traditional structures would have permitted through outdated definitions and political positioning.

In the garden we had cultivated together—beauty contained within defensive perimeters, nature shaped by human intent yet retaining essential vitality despite controlled expression—we held our growing child between us, sanctuary created through mutual protection and shared purpose alike. The revolution we had begun through confrontation and choice continued in quieter evolution—future taking form within the present moment, hope emerging from what had begun as calculated risk and strategic positioning.

The moonlight painted everything in silver transformation—the garden, the house, our connected forms creating single silhouette against illuminated landscape. Not separate entities but family, bound through biology and choice alike, writing story beyond what either of us had imagined possible when this journey began.

Our story. Our future. Our love—growing alongside the child that represented everything we had fought to create beyond traditional expectation or political advantage. In that moment of perfect peace, with danger temporarily held at bay by security systems and mutual vigilance alike, possibility stretched before us like the moonlit garden—beauty contained within necessary protection, life flourishing despite the shadows that would always exist beyond our carefully maintained boundaries.

Not perfect. Not without risk or challenge or potential threat from those who resisted evolution beyond traditional hierarchy. But ours—created through partnership rather than possession, through choice preserved within biological imperative, through strength that acknowledged vulnerability without surrendering to limitation.

In Matteo's arms, surrounded by the sanctuary we had built together, our child growing between us as living embodiment of the future we had begun establishing through confrontation and choice alike, I surrendered to peace that had seemed impossible when this journey began.

Not endpoint but beginning—legacy defined by love rather than violence, by possibility rather than constraint, by partnership rather than possession. In the moonlight garden, with family formed through choice as much as claiming, the future stretched before us like unwritten pages—story continuing beyond what traditional structures would have permitted through outdated definitions and political positioning.

Our future. Our legacy. Our love—growing alongside the child that represented everything we had fought to create beyond traditional expectation or political advantage.

The revolution continued in the quietest, most powerful way possible: through love chosen rather than dominance imposed, through partnership forged in fire and strengthened through joy, through family created beyond the limitations either of us had once accepted as inevitable.

And in that profound peace, with Matteo's arms around me and our child growing between us, I recognized the truth that would guide whatever challenges still awaited beyond this moment of perfect sanctuary:

Some revolutions begin with violence, with confrontation, with blood spilled across

contested territory. But the most powerful transformations continue in quieter, more fundamental ways—through love chosen daily, through futures built together, through children raised to recognize strength beyond traditional definition and power beyond hierarchical limitation.

### MATTEO

Three o'clock in the morning held a quality of silence that existed nowhere else—not quite night, not yet morning, but something suspended between worlds. The estate settled around me, security systems humming at frequencies only those trained to hear them would notice, the occasional red light of a camera blinking like a mechanical heartbeat in shadowed corners.

My son weighed nothing in the crook of my arm. Two weeks of life had given him little mass beyond what he'd carried inside Luca, yet he anchored me to the floor with gravitational pull no physics could explain. I traced the perfect curve of his cheek with one finger, watching as his lips parted slightly in response—instincts already forming in tissue barely finished becoming human.

Alessandro Bianchi - Corvino. Named for strength tempered with wisdom, for protection without possession.

The halls of our estate had transformed in ways I hadn't anticipated when selecting this property for its defensive advantages. What had been fortress first, then sanctuary, had somehow become home—a concept that had held no meaning for me beyond tactical positioning until Luca had filled it with his presence, his scent, his quiet determination to create something beyond survival.

My midnight walks with Alessandro were new—nothing from my former life as underboss had prepared me for this particular vigil. The old habit of perimeter checks had evolved into something softer but no less vigilant: the rhythmic patrol of a father soothing his son through the hollow hours when the world seemed both most



vulnerable and most still.

Alessandro stirred against me, tiny fingers flexing in sleep against the cotton of my shirt. His scent—milk-sweet and impossibly new—carried faint undertones of Luca's honey-citrus mingled with my own sandalwood and cedar. A chemical signature entirely unique yet carrying echoes of us both, of the claiming bond that had created him against all probability and political calculation.

"You're changing everything," I whispered, voice barely disturbing the night air between us. "Every plan, every certainty, every parameter I once considered fixed."

The windows reflected our silhouette as we passed—my frame standing sentinel over the bundle nestled in the crook of my arm, his head supported in my palm. Each window also offered glimpses of the security measures beyond—motion sensors, infrared cameras, armed patrols. Three concentric circles of protection surrounding what had become more precious than territory or assets or even the Corvino name itself.

The security report from earlier that evening lingered in my thoughts: whispers of movement at the edges of Souza territory, suggestions of alliance-building among captains still loyal to my father's old methods. Nothing actionable yet, but ripples of dissent requiring vigilant monitoring. Carlo had advised increased rotation of security personnel—a precaution I'd implemented immediately, despite the seeming peace of recent months.

Some threats never truly disappeared; they merely retreated to gather strength.

Alessandro's tiny hand escaped the blanket, fingers curling reflexively around my thumb when I offered it. The strength in that miniature grip—disproportionate to his size, to his newness in the world—sent something primal and possessive surging through my blood. Mine to protect. Mine to defend. Mine to guide into world better than the one I'd inherited.

Ours.

The correction came automatically now, evidence of evolution beyond what my father would have recognized or respected. Luca's influence remapping even the most fundamental aspects of alpha biology through quiet persistence and determined strength that never yielded, even when appearing to accommodate.

I carried our son toward the nursery, a room designed with both comfort and security as equal priorities. The walls, painted soft blue like morning sky, concealed reinforced steel beneath plaster. The windows, seemingly delicate with their gauzy curtains, contained bulletproof glass capable of withstanding firepower that would decimate ordinary structures. Beauty and protection interwoven—the physical manifestation of what we'd created together.

The crib stood in the center of the room, hand-carved Italian oakwood selected for both aesthetic appeal and structural integrity. I'd tested it personally, applying force beyond what any infant could generate, ensuring stability that would contain without confining. Yet as I moved to place Alessandro within it, something tightened in my chest—reluctance to relinquish physical contact, to surrender the weight that had become necessary rather than burdensome.

"Just a little longer," I murmured, settling instead into the armchair positioned for optimal sightlines to both door and windows. The leather creaked softly beneath my weight, the sound familiar from nights spent watching Luca sleep during his pregnancy, monitoring the subtle changes in his breathing patterns as our son grew within him.

Memory surfaced unbidden—Luca in the delivery room, face flushed with effort, dark curls plastered to his forehead with sweat as he worked to bring our son into the world. The controlled calm in his expression despite pain that would have broken lesser men. The way he'd reached for my hand between contractions, fingers intertwining with mine in silent partnership through biological imperative we'd both

only partially understood.

"We're ready whenever you are, Luca ," the midwife had said, her beta status offering professional neutrality where alpha or omega medical staff might have complicated already charged atmosphere.

Luca's eyes had found mine then—clear despite exhaustion, determined despite vulnerability. " Stay with me," he'd said simply, the request encompassing far more than physical presence through imminent delivery.

I'd nodded once, understanding passing between us that transcended words or secondary gender or the claiming bond that hummed with shared awareness. " Always ."

When Alessandro had emerged—impossibly small, impossibly perfect—the midwife had placed him immediately against Luca's chest, skin-to-skin contact establishing biological connection beyond the nine months they'd already shared. I'd watched in silence, something expanding in my chest that defied tactical assessment or strategic calculation.

"Do you want to cut the cord?" the midwife had asked, extending surgical scissors with professional efficiency.

I remember the weight of those scissors, the precision required as I'd separated our son from the body that had sheltered him. The symbolism hadn't escaped me: first act as father being one of controlled severance, of necessary separation to enable independent existence.

The registrar had arrived the following day, summoned to the private medical facility where tradition dictated Corvino births be documented. The man's expression when I'd dictated " Bianchi - Corvino " as our son's surname had betrayed momentary shock before professional neutrality reasserted itself. The hyphenation represented

more than mere nomenclature—it was declaration of organizational restructuring made flesh, of equality encoded in legal identity. One week later, we'd received intelligence that three minor captains had formally requested transfer to Venucci territory in response—silent protest against evolution they couldn't accept.

Alessandro stirred against me now, shifting in my arms as small sounds escaped that hadn't yet escalated to distress but suggested imminent waking. I adjusted his position, cradling him against my shoulder now, his tiny head nestled beneath my chin where his scent registered most potently—newness layered over familiar notes that marked him as ours.

"You have your papa's nose," I whispered, lips brushing against the fine dark hair that covered his head. " But that dimple—" I touched the small indentation that appeared when he pursed his lips in sleep, "—that comes from somewhere deeper in the line. A mystery neither of us anticipated."

Alessandro yawned, his breath warm against my neck as he settled once more. Each day revealed new facets of his developing personality—the way his eyes tracked motion with surprising focus, the preference for being held upright rather than cradled, the distinctive cry that signaled hunger versus discomfort. Territory more fascinating than any I'd mapped through violence or strategic acquisition.

As dawn's first gray light began filtering through the curtains, I rose and moved toward the windows. Security lights still illuminated key areas of the estate grounds, creating protective perimeter that contained without isolating. Beyond them lay the world that had shaped me—violent, unforgiving, defined by power hierarchies and traditional expectations I had begun dismantling from within.

That world still waited. Still threatened. Still required vigilance despite the peaceful tableau of father and son silhouetted against morning light.

"Alessandro Bianchi - Corvino ," I said, his full name emerging with weight that

registered in my chest like physical pressure. " First of his line to be born into choice rather than obligation. First to carry both names with equal weight."

"He's beautiful," Luca's voice came softly from the doorway, barely disturbing the quiet that had settled around Alessandro and me.

I turned to find him leaning against the frame, hair disheveled from sleep, body still showing evidence of recent childbirth in the slight softness around his middle, in the lingering fullness of his chest. The sight triggered something protective and possessive simultaneously—alpha recognition of recent vulnerability combined with deeper appreciation that transcended biological imperative.

"I didn't mean to wake you," I said, voice pitched low despite the distance between us and our sleeping son.

Luca crossed the room with that quiet efficiency I'd first noticed when he'd been merely Luca Bianchi , omega accountant with missing millions, rather than Luca Bianchi - Corvino , consort and carrier of the heir that had restructured an entire organization's power dynamics.

"You didn't," he assured me, moving to stand beside me at the window. His gaze swept the security perimeter with the same assessing precision I'd employed moments earlier—old habits neither of us had surrendered despite domestic transformation. " The night security report came through. I saw you'd doubled the rotation for the east perimeter."

The observation confirmed what I'd always valued in him—attention to operational details others might have missed, strategic awareness that transcended omega stereotypes or traditional expectations. Even new parenthood hadn't dulled his peripheral awareness of security protocols or organizational movements.

"Souza's nephew has been making overtures to the three captains who requested

transfer," I explained, the explanation unnecessary given Luca's network of informants but offered as acknowledgment of shared responsibility, of partnership maintained despite new priorities. " Nothing concrete yet, but worth monitoring."

Luca nodded, accepting the information without surprise or unnecessary concern. " I've flagged their financial movements. Any significant withdrawals or transfers will trigger alerts." His hand rose to rest against Alessandro's back where it rose and fell with each tiny breath. " Have you contacted Russo about the southern territory dispute?"

"Tomorrow," I confirmed, appreciating the effortless shift between parental tenderness and organizational strategy that characterized our partnership. " The documentation you prepared makes the boundary claim incontestable."

Alessandro stirred against my shoulder, responding to the sound of Luca's voice with instinctive recognition that transcended conscious awareness. Luca's expression softened as he observed our son's response, something fierce and tender simultaneously crossing his features before controlled calm reasserted itself.

"He's been awake most of the night?" he asked, fingers gently stroking along our son's spine through the thin fabric of his sleeper.

"On and off," I admitted. " He settles when we walk."

A smile touched Luca's lips, knowing and precise. " Like his father—vigilant even in sleep." The observation carried no criticism, only recognition of patterns shared between generations despite conscious efforts to evolve beyond inherited tendencies.

"He has your precision," I countered, something adjacent to humor threading through words that emerged without conscious intention. " Seventeen counter-clockwise circuits of the nursery puts him to sleep. Sixteen is insufficient, eighteen redundant."

"You counted," Luca noted, approval warming his scent as it reached me.

"Of course."

Our son shifted again, making small sounds that suggested approaching wakefulness. With practiced coordination, Luca reached for him, taking Alessandro from my arms with careful movements that had become natural despite their newness. The transition happened smoothly, our son settling against Luca's chest with instinctive recognition of the body that had carried him.

"He'll need feeding soon," Luca observed, his calm assessment covering the biological reality of his body's response to our son's proximity—the subtle dampness visible through his thin sleep shirt where milk leaked in unconscious preparation. "But he could sleep another hour if you put him down."

The suggestion—practical, direct, born of observation rather than theoretical parenting wisdom—reflected the same analytical efficiency Luca applied to everything from financial investigations to organizational restructuring. Not omega softness but strategic precision, delivered without unnecessary elaboration or emotional qualification.

"He sleeps better in the crib than against me," I acknowledged, the admission requiring no qualification between us. "I keep him up with my movements."

"And your heightened alert state," Luca added, the observation precise rather than accusatory. "He feels your vigilance. Responds to it." He shifted Alessandro in his arms, supporting his head with practiced ease. "Put him down. Check the security feeds if you need to. Then come back to bed."

The directive—for that's what it was, despite the quiet tone—reminded me of what had drawn me to Luca from the beginning: capability transcending secondary gender, intelligence applied with precision that cut through emotional complexity to practical

solutions. Not omega deference but partnership expressed through complementary strength.

With careful movements that had become more natural through repeated practice, I took Alessandro from Luca's arms and placed him in his crib—the transfer requiring precise control to avoid waking him. The absence of his weight created hollow sensation that defied logical assessment, phantom pressure where warmth had rested moments before.

Luca's hand found mine as we stood watching our son settle, fingers intertwining in connection that had evolved beyond claiming bite or legal documentation to become something formed through crisis and choice. Shared purpose embodied in physical contact that required no verbal elaboration or conscious explanation.

"The monitors will alert us if he needs anything," he said, practical reassurance delivered without unnecessary emotional cushioning. His gaze swept the room once more, tactical assessment embedded in parental vigilance. " And this room is more secure than most government facilities."

I nodded once, acknowledging truth beyond instinctive resistance. The nursery contained monitoring systems more sophisticated than standard security installations—temperature sensors, motion detectors, audio feeds calibrated to distinguish between normal infant sounds and potential distress. Technology serving parental vigilance rather than mere organizational surveillance.

At the threshold, I paused for one final visual confirmation of our son's safety—the crib positioned for optimal defensive coverage, the monitors glowing with reassuring regularity, the room designed with both comfort and protection as equal priorities.

"The Russo meeting tomorrow," Luca said as we walked the short distance to our bedroom, voice pitched low in the quiet hallway. " Do you want me there, or should I continue analyzing the financial movements along the western distribution routes?"



The question balanced multiple considerations simultaneously—organizational priorities, security concerns, personal preference, practical parenting logistics—all delivered with characteristic efficiency that weighed necessary factors without unnecessary elaboration. Not omega seeking direction but partner coordinating shared responsibilities.

"The financial analysis takes priority," I replied, matching his practical tone while my hand settled naturally at the small of his back. " Russo responds better to direct intimidation anyway. Less productive with an audience."

Luca nodded, accepting the assessment without wounded pride or emotional reaction. " I'll have preliminary findings before you return. Alessandro's feeding schedule should allow four uninterrupted hours of analysis if we time it correctly."

Our bedroom welcomed us with familiar comfort—space that had witnessed transformation from strategic arrangement to genuine partnership, from paper claiming to molecular bonding, from separate entities to family bound through choice as much as biology. The sheets still carried warmth from Luca's recent presence, his scent concentrated in fabric that had cradled him during brief sleep between Alessandro's feedings.

As we settled beneath covers soft with frequent washing, Luca's body aligned against mine, his head finding place against my shoulder in position that accommodated both closeness and the physical adjustments still necessary following childbirth. No awkwardness or hesitation colored movements that had become natural through months of shared space and mutual adaptation.

"What are you thinking?" he asked, voice clear despite the hour, his fingers tracing patterns across my chest with the same precision he applied to financial analysis or organizational assessment.

"That fatherhood has transformed threat assessment," I answered honestly, no longer

filtering vulnerability behind professional detachment or alpha stoicism. " Every potential danger now filtered through different matrix—through impact on him rather than organizational standing or territorial control."

Understanding passed between us, molecular awareness carrying meaning where words might prove insufficient—the claiming bond translating emotional complexities neither could fully articulate through ordinary speech. His scent shifted subtly, warmth threading through the sweetness as he registered the genuine depth beneath apparent simplicity.

"And that bothers you?" he asked, the question direct rather than accusatory, seeking information rather than emotional reassurance.

I considered this with the same honest assessment I applied to all strategic questions. " No ," I said finally. " It clarifies priorities rather than complicating them. Simplifies decision matrices by establishing non-negotiable center."

Luca's expression in the dimness registered satisfaction with my response—not sentimental approval but strategic confirmation. " Precisely why traditional power structures fear family bonds outside political arrangement," he observed, insight cutting through complexities with characteristic perception. " They introduce certainty beyond manipulation, loyalty beyond intimidation."

The assessment—delivered without unnecessary emotional elaboration, only quiet understanding of systemic vulnerabilities—penetrated deeper than elaborate explanation might have achieved. Truth recognizing truth across differences that had once seemed insurmountable between alpha underboss and omega accountant.

Beyond our room, beyond the nursery where our son slept under vigilant monitoring, beyond the estate secured through layers of protection both visible and concealed, lay the world that had shaped us both—violent, hierarchical, defined by secondary gender and traditional expectation. The world our son would eventually encounter

despite every precaution and protection we might establish around his early years.

That world still waited. Still threatened. Still required vigilance despite the peaceful tableau of family carved from dangerous territory through calculated risk and mutual protection.

Yet in this moment of hard-won peace, with Luca beside me and our son safely sleeping nearby, protection had evolved beyond defensive perimeters or tactical positioning. It had become foundation rather than barrier, structure supporting growth rather than limitation containing threat. It had become legacy expressed through choice rather than obligation, through future constructed from mutual strength rather than hierarchical enforcement.

"For you," I whispered against Luca's hair as his breathing settled toward sleep. " For Alessandro . For the world we're building beyond what either of us inherited. This is what I'll fight for."

THE END

Thank you for reading!