



Undercover Mafia Alpha: M/M Mafia Mpreg Romance (Mated in the Mafia Book 3)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Jeremiah has been away at school, following his passion for art while also studying criminal justice. The family needs a trusted lawyer and Jeremiah is ready to get back home and be there for them. As the only omega in the family, his dad and brothers have indulged his interests but it's finally time for him to finish his degree and come home. Not just to work in the business but to marry into one of the other powerful families so they can secure their position against plotting to bring them down. Everyone has a role to play, and that is Jeremiah's.

Felik Mennetti has been embedded at the university for months, working his way into the heart and mind of Jeremiah Ferrini in order to infiltrate the family. It wasn't easy but he's finally close enough to Jeremiah to make an impact. Unfortunately, the hit doesn't land where he expects.

How can he fall for this omega, this Ferrini, who he's spent years planning to destroy? He does his best to avoid the pull, but when he realizes he can't wish his affection away, he has to try a different route to get his family to drop their beef and accept the one he's chosen to be his.

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JEREMIAH

This was it. Home sweet home.

I hadn't been to the family home in months, and so much had happened in that time. Two of my brothers had babies, and now it was just me and Orsino who were left to secure positions within the family.

Andro, as the oldest and now head of the family, was supposed to be the one to secure an alliance between some other powerful family when he took over for my dad, but he went rogue and found one of our enemies to shack up with.

It all worked out, and Joey was really cool as far as brother-in-laws went, so I was happy for them.

But it wasn't part of the family plan.

And then when Louie did the same thing by knocking up one of the omegas from the harem, it put a different kind of pressure on me and Orsino.

As the last single alpha brother, Orsino was expected to marry completely for power and distinction. He wouldn't have much choice in the matter because Andro and Louie used all that up.

Fortunately, he seemed fine with that. Marrying for love wasn't a priority for Orsino, so at least he wouldn't be a problem.

I hoped.

Oddly, I thought I would be fine with it too. In fact, since the time I was in high school, I was almost looking forward to the day that my father told me some nice, eligible alpha was ready to take me into his home.

My role was to marry an alpha and bring in new heirs to secure future generations of power. It was what I was raised to do. What I'd always been content with.

But now that I'd spent so many years away from home, I realized that being forced into a marriage wasn't what I wanted. Not anymore. Not after seeing how happy and in love my married brothers were.

I wanted what Louie and Andro had. Orsino could bear the burden of betrothal if he wanted, but it wasn't what I wanted...or deserved. I deserved to marry for love. At least, that's what I planned to tell my father when I went home. After graduation. Not now.

When he sent me across the country to go to college, I thought it was purely for my education. He agreed that a law degree was the most beneficial path for our family, but since I also had a passion for art, I was permitted to attend Stanford.

If I could spend all my days and nights painting, I would. But my responsibility to my family came first. At least as far as my career went. I wouldn't let them dictate who I'd marry. Not if I didn't truly love the man. And the chances of my family choosing the perfect alpha for me were slim to none.

I'd do my best to protect them in the only way I could. Legally.

The rest, I'd figure out how to negotiate when the time was right. And it wasn't right yet.

For now, I needed to play along with the plan and be the naïve omega son who only visited around the holidays, ran up my dad's credit card on partying, and showed no interest in settling down with someone for love.

"Need any help with your bags?" Trev opened the door and stood there staring at me, waiting for me to get out of the car.

"No, sorry. Just...happy to be home." I slipped out of the back of the SUV with my backpack and overnight bag in my hand. "Thanks for picking me up, Trev. I could've taken a rideshare, you know."

He clapped my shoulder and gave me a little shake. "Don't be silly. Your brothers would've had my head if I let you get in some stranger's car at the airport. You know what kind of scams people are pulling these days."

I rolled my eyes and started walking up the driveway. "Yeah, I know. Everyone's out to get us."

He mumbled something behind me, but I didn't ask for clarification. He wouldn't have told me anyway. Over the past few years, my family had kept me as far away from the business as they could.

It was annoying—insulting, to be honest—but I knew it was because they wanted to protect me. Now that two of my brothers had omegas to protect, they understood the risks at a completely different level and suddenly considered me to be weak and helpless.

They'd forgotten the years of Brazilian jiu-jitsu and hand-to-hand combat training I took right alongside them as we were all growing up. I was pretty sure I could kick all three of their asses without breaking a sweat.

I didn't get all the way to the front door before it flew open.

Louie rushed out to give me a hug. "Jeremiah, it's so good to see you." He embraced me hard, practically squeezing the air from my lungs. "It's been too long."

"Hey, Lou. It's good to see you too. Where is this new little nephew I keep hearing so much about?"

He laughed and pulled me inside, grabbing my bag from my hand and magically slipping my pack from my shoulder. "He's in the suite with Connor. Seriously, Jer, he's so damn cute. Between Matias and Connor, I just don't stop smiling."

"I'm happy for you, man. You deserve to be happy. And I deserve to be the best uncle ever."

"Don't count on it, baby bro." Orsino appeared at the top of the stairs. "I've already earned that title."

"Ha!" I choked out a dramatic laugh. "You're the grouchy uncle. I'm the one who will roll around on the ground with them and let them climb all over me."

Orsino grimaced as if that sounded like torture. "Well, I'm gonna teach them how to shoot a skunk with a slingshot and climb a tree if they miss. So, pretty sure I'll win."

"Okay, okay." Louie turned down the hall to his bedroom suite. "You're both the godfathers, so you can both be favorites, okay?"

I grunted at the same time that Orsino mumbled something, but we let it go. I'd play the long game on this one. I would be the favorite uncle for sure.

Andro called me home this weekend for Theo's christening so Orsino and I could

both be named as his godparents. Baby Matias would have one over the summer when I was home for good.

Besides, Louie was right. We both had skills to offer our nephews that would make us favorites in our own unique ways. But I would be the top favorite.

“All I know is, my gifts are gonna be way cooler than yours.” I pulled a stuffed frog from my pocket and squeezed it, making an obnoxiously loud crinkly sound. “And piss off Andro at the same time...”

Orsino grabbed the toy from my hand and gave it a squeeze. “Oh yeah. That’s good. He’ll have it out the window in ten minutes, tops.”

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FELIK

As soon as I saw my brother's name flash across my phone screen, I had to hold in a groan. He never called for a good reason. Usually, it was to bitch at me for not upholding my duties to my family or not living up to our father's legacy. Some bullshit like that.

Over the years, I'd let that roll right off my shoulders. These days... It got to me more and more. It was the same old song and dance. I wished, more than once, that he would just leave me the fuck alone.

But what he never did was give up quietly, so I bit the bullet and answered the call. "Hey, Vince. What's up?"

"What's up? You know, you're the only person who asks me that because everyone else in the family knows what the fuck is up. Because they're here, Felik. Working. For me. Which you should be doing."

I rolled my eyes and leaned back, pulling off my glasses so I could rub the bridge of my nose without them getting in the way. "Uh-huh." I liked how he said "for me" and not for the family. Our alpha father would pitch a fit if he heard that. But that man was dead, and Vince had taken over.

He exhaled loudly, dramatically, like he was already tired of this conversation. For the record, I was too. "Well, that changes now, baby brother. I have a bit of a...project that I need you to take on."

“What kind of project?” I sat forward, ready to turn him down if he expected me to go hunt down some cartel thugs or human traffickers. That wasn’t my style. I wasn’t raised in the family business like my half-brothers were. My omega father was a staff member for the Menettis until he died when I was just a toddler. I learned just enough to be dangerous and just enough to know that it wasn’t the life for me.

As soon as I was old enough to be shipped off to boarding school, I was whisked away and rarely saw my family. At least, that was how it had been until Vince, my oldest brother, took over last year and was suddenly trying to bring me back into the fold.

I’d made it clear that I wasn’t interested in being one of his guards, and certainly not for the things he was obsessed with, like power and territory and money. I had just passed the bar exam and had resumes out to the most prestigious law firms in the country. I didn’t expect to get a great job right away, but ultimately, I wanted to help men like my omega father.

Men who didn’t have power or territory or money but still deserved to have their freedom, regardless of their class or status.

“Don’t get your panties in a wad, Fee. It’s easy. Actually, I’d do it myself if my face wasn’t so recognizable.”

“Well, spit it out already.”

I could almost hear his grin as he finally said, “I need you to seduce an omega, get information out of him, and bring him to me.”

“Why?”

“What do you care? You claim to have no interest in the business, so now is hardly

the time to start questioning me. Just be glad I'm not making you do something that might get your manicured fingernails dirty." He'd always been a jerk, but now that he had the title of leader of our family to back it up, his ego was intolerable.

"I'll do it, but..." I couldn't exactly go into detail as to why I would likely fail miserably at the art of seduction, but I was very likely to fail miserably. "I'm not much of a player, Vince. I mean, is this guy even good-looking?"

"Who the fuck cares what he looks like? He's a warm hole for your knot. You don't need to worry about anything more than that. Just get him to like you and bring him home to meet the family. It's not that hard, Felik. For once, can you just put the family first and do what we ask of you?"

Fuck. I really had no good reason to say no, which meant I had to say yes or face Vince's wrath. Lately, he had been unhinged. "Fine, I'll do it. Who is this guy, anyway?"

"His name is Jeremiah Ferrini, and he's at Stanford. You'll need to sign up for some classes or get a job there or something so you can get in close with him."

"Sign up for classes at Stanford? It's not like the local community college. It's practically Ivy League. You think I can just show up there and take a class?" Never mind the fact that Vince wanted me to seduce a member of the Ferrini family. The most notorious crime family in our state, and the one that Vince so badly wanted to take down in order to take over their territory. From what I'd heard, his plan was dumb as fuck, but I wasn't going to tell him that.

"Really, you're gonna give up before you even start?" His disdain was evident even through the phone. "Can't you just figure shit out on your own, please? I don't have time to solve every problem for you, Fee. Just get close to him and don't let him know your last name. It's not that fucking hard."

“Whatever. I’ll figure it out, but I’m gonna need some time. It’s not an overnight thing.”

“You’ve got till school’s out in May. When he comes home from school, you need to make sure he comes here. Got it?”

Three months wasn’t a long time to win the heart of a complete stranger, but it didn’t seem impossible. From what I’d heard, omegas were usually pretty easy to seduce... at least for most alphas. I hadn’t put much effort into dating or even hooking up, so it might take me that long just to work up the nerve to say hi. “Yeah, I got it.”

“Good.” He clicked his tongue and made some noise in the background. “Do you need any other information or can I consider you on the job?”

My jaw clenched, and I held back everything I really wanted to say. “Yeah, I’m on it. I know a professor there who should let me audit one of his classes. I’ll make it work.”

“Okay, then. That’s what I like to hear.”

“Hey, Vince.” I cleared my throat, not sure I wanted the answer, but I had to ask it. “What do you plan to do with this guy once you meet him?”

Vince laughed as if I’d just told him a joke. “Use him as leverage. I want something his family has. Either they give it up in a nice little trade. Or we get rid of him. Either way, you’ll finally prove your usefulness to this family. Don’t disappoint me, Fee.”

I didn’t like the way his voice went all low and sinister there, but I was used to it. What I wasn’t used to was participating in what would likely amount to kidnapping and accessory to murder. “I won’t, Vince.”

Before he could say anything else, I disconnected the call and sucked in a deep breath.

In two, three, four. Out two, three, four.

My breathing exercises usually calmed me down pretty quickly, but I had a feeling I wouldn't be able to take a full breath until this whole Jeremiah Ferrini thing was well behind me.

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JEREMIAH

Since getting back from the Christening, things had been...weird. Not things, I guess. But me. I was off. Something was going on that had me unsettled, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was.

I was just a few short months from graduating, so I should have been excited. Perhaps the future was what had me overthinking and second-guessing my life. I even tried going to the local studio a few extra times to get some painting done to see if that cleared my head.

It didn't.

Everywhere I went on campus, the air felt charged. Like there was a force following me, ready to infiltrate my soul, but hiding just beyond my grasp. I did my best to ignore it and focus on my work, but I just couldn't relax.

Normally, I was happy to have a distraction from the daily monotony of school, but I had a paper due in my Police and Prisons class, and the professor was a stickler for grammar. He spent twenty years working as a detective for an organized crime unit, and I was pretty sure he recognized my name. Which meant he watched everything I did and was quick to question just about everything I wrote.

So I had to focus and get every word just right. I fought back the temptation to include some firsthand knowledge I'd learned over the years in my schoolwork, just for giggles. I didn't need the FBI sniffing around right now, though.

I was on my third draft of the twelve-thousand-word essay when a man stepped up to my table and cleared his throat.

It took a second for me to realize he was waiting for me to look up. When I did, he was staring right at me.

I glanced around, making sure he meant me and not someone else. “Um, hello.”

The man seemed to relax slightly as he looked down at me with kind eyes and a sexy grin. “Excuse me, but I need to charge my phone for a little while. Do you mind if I sit here and plug in?”

“Hmm?” My brain slowly caught up with my mouth, and I nodded. “Yeah, of course. I’m fully charged, so it’s all yours.” I scooted a few inches to the left so he could reach the outlet beside my leg.

“Thanks.” He dropped to his knees and plugged in his charger, brushing the side of my leg with his shoulder and making my breath hitch. “I forgot to charge it last night, and I’ve been running on fumes all day.”

“I hate when that happens...” My mouth was dry, and I had the sudden urge to lick my lips, but I was afraid I’d come off as desperate or pathetic.

Both of which were accurate but still not something I wanted to advertise to this hot stranger. The alpha in front of me was gorgeous, with his quick grin and his auburn hair that curled over the collar of his shirt.

He slid onto the chair across from me, and a paper coffee cup landed on the table in front of him. “Can I buy you a drink for your kindness?”

“Oh, that’s not necessary.” I shrugged one shoulder and picked up my own phone as

something to occupy my hands. “I don’t own the outlets, so you’re as entitled to use them as anyone else.”

“Okay.” He chuckled softly at my ramblings but then lifted his cup to take a sip.

Opening up to others on campus was difficult, especially since I was surrounded by criminal justice majors who saw the world as very black and white. Legal and illegal. I knew it didn’t work that way. I just watched his mouth until he cocked his head and spoke again.

“I’m Felik Morton. And you are?”

“Jeremiah Ferrini.” I realized my hands were sweaty, so I wiped them on my thighs before extending my right arm to him. “Nice to meet you.”

As soon as his big alpha hand closed around mine, I thought I might melt into a puddle of slick. There was something about him that woke up the mating instincts in me that had been dormant since...forever. I kinda skipped the horny teenage years and went straight from adolescence to academics, never giving much thought to alphas or sex or any of the other stuff my brothers were doing at my age. Partly because they kept me very protected, but also because I didn’t want to.

He nodded toward my open laptop. “You’re a student here?”

“Yeah.” I cocked my head, only then realizing that maybe he wasn’t. “Aren’t you?”

Felik rocked his head in a noncommittal way. “I graduated last year, but I’m auditing a few classes while I wait for a job offer. So, yes, but not the kind who has to do actual work.”

“Lucky.” I exhaled heavily and leaned back in the seat, sliding my feet forward and

accidentally brushing against Felik's shoes. "Oh, sorry."

"Don't be." He spread his legs and boxed my feet in with his, holding us ankle to ankle as my dick got hard. "I still owe you for allowing me to sit with you so...how about dinner tonight?"

"Dinner?" I'd never really been flirted with, but I was pretty sure that was what he was doing. "You really don't have to."

"But I really want to." He held my gaze, daring me to say no. His eyes sparkled behind his navy frames.

"Yeah, okay. That sounds nice." Really fucking nice, but I tried to keep my cool. "Like, off campus?"

He grinned again and gently closed his knees around mine. "Off campus sounds good. Any recommendations or do you want me to pick something?"

Alphas generally liked to make decisions, so I figured he was no different. And honestly, I was curious to see what he would come up with. "You can pick something. I'm not picky."

That smirk never left his face as he kept his eyes locked on me. "I'm very picky, but I also have great taste. I'm sure you'll be happy with my choice."

I nodded and swallowed hard, finally licking my lips because they felt like they were about to crack right off my face. "Okay." My palms were getting sweaty again, and I fought the urge to wipe them right in front of him. Geez, it was like I was wholly unprepared to be flirted with and given attention by anyone.

"Is six good?"

“Yeah.” My last class was at two, so that still gave me plenty of time to study before and after dinner, assuming it was an early night. “That’s perfect.”

“Gimme your phone.” He held out his hand as I unlocked my phone and handed it to him. He added his information and handed it back. “I sent myself a text. Send me your address, and I’ll be there at six.”

Holy shit, I was going on a real date with a real alpha who was really fucking gorgeous. Was I dreaming? I didn’t think so, but I didn’t even care if I was. I just wanted to get through dinner and maybe...a little dessert. “See you then.”

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FELIK

That went well. Unexpectedly well. In fact, I wasn't quite sure how I felt about it all.

Jeremiah was adorable and sweet and seemed so damn innocent. The little omega was nothing like what I expected out of a crime family. He acted as if he was surprised to find an alpha flirting with him, when in reality, alphas should've been falling at his feet.

I was starting to feel guilty for what I was about to do to him, but I did my best not to let emotions get in the way of what my family needed from me.

And why was I so concerned about my family anyway?

For my whole life, they'd treated me like an outsider, only pulling me in for family events when my father insisted on having all of his sons present. I had never been a real factor in the business until now.

Suddenly, Vince wanted my allegiance in a way that never seemed to matter before. Apparently, on his quest to build power and acquire territory, I was now on his list of trusted people. More likely, I was just a pawn that he needed for a single play and would be fine seeing eliminated by the enemy.

Deep inside, I kinda wanted to be a real part of my family. Part of something bigger than just myself. I'd been searching for something since I was a little boy when my omega dad died.

He loved me unconditionally.

Once he was gone, my upbringing was left to a series of nannies and eventually teachers who were paid to care for me. Having a real relationship with family I was connected to by blood held an entirely different meaning. And someday, if I ever met an omega who loved me despite my family, I would truly know what it felt like to be loved.

Then again, Jeremiah was the first omega I'd ever felt even a spark of attraction to, and I was about to screw him and his family over. Maybe I was destined to be alone forever. It was what I deserved for what I was about to do.

Pushing those thoughts out of my mind, I went back to my short-term apartment and did a search for the best restaurant I could get a reservation at with short notice.

I called a few without luck but was finally able to get a table for two at six-thirty. It was a Michelin-starred Italian place downtown. The reviews were great, and the menu reminded me of my most recent trip to Florence, so I had high hopes for our date.

Now, it was up to me to actually win him over. Laying on the charm wasn't exactly my area of expertise.

Jeremiah was also studying law, so I knew we would have a lot to talk about if there were ever any lulls in the conversation. And if our little coffee chat was any indicator, we'd be just fine. The spark was there.

I arrived at his building on the far east corner of campus at six o'clock exactly. Instead of inviting me up to his room, Jeremiah walked right out the front door as if he had been waiting for me.

It was a surprisingly sweet gesture that made me feel a little tingly inside knowing he was as anxious for our date as I was.

“You look amazing.” I slipped my hands into my pockets and gave him a thorough inspection. Jeremiah was wearing slim-fit slacks and a black button-down that highlighted his tight body in the most delicious way. How was this guy single?

“You too.” He reached forward and slid his fingertips down the front of my jacket. “I like this.”

I was wearing a brown bomber jacket, dark jeans, and a thin sweater. Casual but still nice enough for the restaurant. “Thank you.” I scrunched up my nose and glanced back at him. “You’re not vegan, are you? Because this is real leather.”

Jeremiah chuckled. “No, I can appreciate fine leather. And that is definitely fine.” He said that last part quietly, almost as if he didn’t want me to hear him. Was he referring to the jacket or the man under it?

I smirked as I did a half spin and waved him forward. “After you. I’m parked in the front lot.”

We chatted about school and the weather, but neither of us went very deep into our background or family life. He mentioned being from the East Coast, and I said the same, but neither of us gave actual locations.

I guess that kind of vagueness was ingrained in families like ours. Some things were just not freely discussed.

Winning him over would take effort. I should have concocted more of a backstory for myself. Something believable, perhaps indicating that I was part of a family that operated on the wrong side of the law. At least that part was true.

When we got to the restaurant and were settled into a corner table, I could sense how nervous he was. Part of me wondered if maybe he suspected my intentions, and I needed to do some quick damage control. “Am I making you nervous, omega?”

Jeremiah chuckled awkwardly and then sucked in a big breath as if trying to calm himself down. “Not you, specifically. It’s just that... Well, I mentioned that I don’t date much, but the truth is, I don’t date at all. This is new to me, and I’m not exactly sure what to do or how to do it.”

Fuck, he was a snack.

“First of all, I find that hard to believe. A gorgeous omega like yourself must have guys tripping over themselves to spend time with you.” He opened his mouth to object, but I held up my finger to stop him. “But even if that were true, you’re doing a great job. I have zero expectations other than to have a nice meal with a nice guy and enjoy the next few hours together. That seem fair?”

His shoulders sank down as he visibly relaxed. “Yeah. A nice meal sounds good.” He picked up the menu and peeked up at me from behind it. “You’re probably used to going out with guys much smoother than me.”

I debated whether or not to be honest with him, and in the end, I couldn’t bring myself to lie about something so trivial. “Actually, no. I don’t really date either. So this is new to me too.”

He cocked his head and looked at me as if he wasn’t sure whether or not to believe me. “Well, then, this will be a learning experience for both of us.”

Damned if that didn’t turn my insides to jelly. Deceiving this omega wouldn’t be an easy task, simply because one smile from him and I was ready to spill all my secrets.

The meal was delicious, and I had a great time getting to know Jeremiah. In fact, the more I got to know him, the more trouble I had reconciling what my brother had planned for the guy.

He told me about the books he enjoyed, which aligned with my interests as well, and we both listened to the same crime podcasts.

He was just so sweet and funny for me to ever want any harm to come to him. The things he said made me laugh, even when he wasn't trying to. And then his embarrassment about that made me laugh again.

When I finally walked him to his door at the end of our evening, I really wanted Jeremiah to invite me up to his room. For a moment, I kinda thought he wanted to. And if he did, I wouldn't have been able to say no.

The omega was too tempting, and I had no desire for this evening to end.

So I was relieved when he didn't. It was better that way.

"I had a really nice time, Jeremiah." I held both of his hands and brought them up to my chest before dropping a kiss on each of his fists. "I hope you might consider going out with me again."

He looked up at me with a smoldering gaze. "I'd really like that, Felik."

Ignoring the tidal wave of desire that urged me to claim him, I leaned forward and gently pressed my lips to his before pulling back and dropping his hands. "Good night, Jeremiah."

"Good night, alpha."

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JEREMIAH

I should've invited him in.

An alpha like Felik had certain expectations when they went on a date, and clearly, I didn't meet those expectations. I knew that because it had been three days, and I hadn't heard a thing from him. No call, no text, nothing.

Part of me wanted to reach out to him and tell him a joke or ask a question about one of my classes just to start up a conversation. But that felt too desperate, and even I knew desperation wasn't an attractive quality in an omega.

I was tempted to reach out to Joey and Connor to see if they had any advice for me, but they would tell my brothers, and I'd never hear the end of it. Connor would likely suggest I send him a dick pic. My alpha brothers would either tease me about having a crush, get pissy and protective about an alpha getting close to me, or they'd remember I was single and push even harder for me to marry into one of their chosen families.

It was better all the way around if I stayed under the radar and didn't remind them I was still unmated.

After a late meeting with my study group, I was walking out of the library when I bumped into Felik. Or rather, he bumped into me, knocking into me with such force I would have been on my knees if he hadn't been so quick to catch me.

"Fuck, Jeremiah. I'm so sorry." He righted me on my feet and held on to my

shoulders. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” I brushed the dust off my knees from where the denim briefly touched the ground before he lifted me back upright. “No worries.” I tugged away from him and started walking, desperate to put some space between us so I didn’t do something embarrassing like beg for a second chance with him.

“Jeremiah, wait up.” Felik jogged up beside me, and I felt his hand land on my lower back. Was he trying to torture me?

“Oh, hey. What’s up?” I regretted the question as soon as it came out of my mouth. That definitely sounded like I was trying too hard to be casual.

“Are you sure you’re okay? You seem a little...upset.” Felik leaned forward as we walked, trying to get a better look at my face, but I kept it firmly facing forward.

“No, I’m fine. Just heading home.”

“Oh, well, I’m glad I ran into you.” He kept pace with me, obviously not able to take a hint. “I wish it wasn’t so literal, but I’ve been wanting to see if you’d like to go out again.”

I stopped and looked at him, squinting my eyes and trying to make sense of him. “That’s what you said three days ago, and I haven’t heard a word back. You don’t need to ask me out just because you bumped into me. I’m fine. Really.”

“No, Jeremiah. It’s not that at all.” He placed both hands on my shoulders again and stared into my eyes.

The sincerity in his gaze was genuine, and I couldn’t help letting down some of my internal shields.

“I mean it. I had a great time the other night. I’ve wanted to text you every day since but...”

“But what?” If he actually liked me, there was no reason he wouldn’t want to see me again. It’s not like I was asking for a ring. And he had no way of knowing that my alpha brothers would object to our dating. The problem had to be me.

His lips pursed for a moment, and then he sighed. “I told you this is new for me too, and I didn’t want to make the wrong move. So...I didn’t make any move. And that isn’t working out for me either, so what do you think? Are you willing to try again?”

I looked at him for a long moment, making him wait and wonder before I finally smiled. “Yeah, I guess.”

“Oh, I almost forgot.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a little pouch. “I saw this and thought of you.”

Shocked by the gesture, I opened my palm and accepted the little bag. “What is it?”

Felik nodded toward his gift. “Just a little something. Open it.”

My hands were shaking, and I stopped breathing as I shook out the leather cord with a silver bar attached to it. When I looked closely, I saw the engraving read Creativity Takes Courage. “Matisse?”

“You said he’s your favorite artist.” Felik shrugged like it was no big deal.

But it was. It really was.

I swallowed the emotion that filled my throat and made a quick decision that was as surprising to me as it seemed to be to Felik. “How do you feel about comfort food? I

have a roast in the crockpot in my apartment, and I'm planning to throw some rolls in the oven. Are you hungry?"

His grin was as genuine as his eyes when he smiled back. "Definitely. And I can't remember the last time I had any sort of home-cooked meal, so yeah, that would be perfect."

"Okay, then." God, help me. "Let's go."

We barely got inside my apartment before we were all over each other. The barely-there kiss from the other night was a mere tease compared to the way Felik conquered my mouth, claiming it as if he were actually claiming me, and I loved every second of it.

Despite my lack of experience, my instincts kicked in, and my hands suddenly had a mind of their own. They cupped his firm pecs, rounded his shoulders, and gripped his biceps as if they were handles. Then they made their way south, slipping underneath the waistband of his jeans as slick began to pool in mine.

"Alpha." I had never called a man by his designation before, not even my father, so I didn't know why I kept falling back on it with Felik, but it felt like the right name for him. Only him. "Please."

"I've got you, love." Felik lifted me up, bracing me against his strong body as we passed by the delicious aromas wafting from the kitchen and went straight through my open bedroom door.

I pressed my center against his abs, rubbing over him as I kissed him wildly, a mash of teeth and tongues and lips. "Show me how."

"Fuck, omega." He lowered me onto the bed and quickly relieved me of my shoes

and pants before stepping back and getting undressed too.

Yanking my shirt over my head, I was vaguely aware of the fact that it was the first time I'd been fully naked in front of another man in my adulthood. At boarding school, I never had reason to share a shower or locker room with another student. And I certainly had never been with a lover before. "Is this okay?"

Felik dropped to his knees and pulled me to the edge, inhaling the thick scent of my slick as he dragged his nose along my thigh. When his face was pressed against my balls, his tongue flicked over my sensitive skin, and I almost jumped right off the mattress. "You are fucking perfect."

I stroked my cock a few times before his mouth replaced my hand. I didn't have the stamina to hold back so I came in his mouth, immediately ruining what was supposed to be the best night of my life. "I'm so sorry." Tears filled my eyes as shame enveloped me. "I can't believe I did that."

"Shh, it's okay." Felik licked and nipped his way up my body, kissing me deeply with an entirely new flavor on his tongue once he found my mouth. "I'm flattered that you're enjoying it so much." He kissed along my jaw and then closed his teeth on my earlobe. "But we're just getting started, omega. We have all night to enjoy each other."

Thank fuck.

I was still hard, and he was too, so I let Felik take the lead, watching intently as he stood up and rolled a condom over his impressive length before kneeling between my spread thighs. "I'll get you loosened up with my fingers, and when you're ready for my cock—if you're ready for my cock—I'm gonna fuck you, Jeremiah. Are you good with that?"

My head was moving so fast I almost made myself dizzy. “Yes, alpha. Breed me. Give me your knot.”

His head fell forward as if those words pained him, and he leaned down to kiss the corner of my mouth. “Not this time, love. Not yet. I need to be inside you, but I can’t breed you. Not until...” He closed his eyes and sighed. “I want to, so badly, but let’s just take things slow.”

I felt my lips form a frown. Despite how logical his words were, I didn’t like the idea of having the latex between us. But then his fingers were teasing my hole, and I quickly forgot why I was so sad and focused on how he was making me so happy. “Yes, like that.”

Felik kissed my mouth slowly, sensually, as his fingers opened me up for him.

When the first finger slipped in, I almost didn’t feel it. But the second one had a bite, and by the time I was riding three, I felt them all. But I wanted to feel more. “I’m ready, Felik. I’m ready for your cock.”

He was a little shaky as he got on all fours and repositioned my hips so I was perfectly aligned to receive him. “Tell me if I hurt you.”

“You won’t.” I lifted even higher, creating a clear path into me. “But I promise.”

With slow movements that almost drove me insane, Felik held his sheathed cock to my opening and gently pushed in.

I wanted him to go faster, needed him to go faster, but having already lost control of myself once, I felt it was important to show some self-restraint and let him control his entry.

As he pushed into my virgin channel and began to thrust in a gentle rhythm, I absorbed every pulse of energy that transferred through him and almost came again. The sting was there, but it was balanced by a completeness that I had no idea could exist from sex.

Why had I waited so long to try it?

Apparently, I was waiting for the right alpha.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:13 pm

FELIK

After the first night with Jeremiah, I knew I wouldn't be able to keep my word to Vince. I was not letting my omega anywhere near my power-hungry brother.

Jeremiah was too good. Too pure. Even when he begged me to knot him during our nightly encounters, I had to refuse, constantly coming up with excuses to keep him pure...at least of my seed. He needed to finish college, and I needed to plan a safe future for us before we could risk a child.

I refused to defile him so completely and then betray him.

Until I figured out a way to change Vince's mind about wanting to use Jeremiah as bait, I had to keep the sweet omega at arm's length. I wanted to give him everything he begged for, but I couldn't. Not until I was sure he was safe...from me.

It killed me to pull out before my knot filled him, to bag my seed and toss it away instead of filling his belly with my child. But it was the right thing to do.

The urge to breed him was as strong in me as it seemed to be in him, and when he begged for my knot, it was getting harder and harder to resist.

I wasn't sure how much longer I'd be able to hold out.

I was no longer on a mission to find out information for my brother. Instead, every question I asked Jeremiah about his family came from the heart. I was genuinely curious about his life and his childhood. He still kept the information close to his

chest because he had been cautioned by his brothers to only tell the bare minimum of information.

Several weeks had passed of us skirting around feelings and topics of our family. I fished for information about Jeremiah's family, hoping that if Vince wouldn't agree to leave the Ferrini family alone completely, maybe I could leverage the Ferrini family to stop Vince.

But I still didn't have anything.

My brother was going mad with his need for power and vengeance. He was beyond reason most of the time and downright demented the rest.

I was at the florist, looking for a simple bouquet of wildflowers to commemorate our two-month anniversary when my phone rang. I knew it was Vince before I looked at my screen, so I stepped outside and took the call. "Hey, Vince."

"So, you do remember my name. I was beginning to wonder if you'd forgotten who I was since you never seem to be available to take my calls or respond to a fucking text."

My jaw clenched, and I took a cleansing breath through my nose to keep from snapping at him. "You always call when I'm with Jeremiah, so I can't answer."

"It's going well?" His tone lightened up immediately at the mention of Jeremiah, and he almost sounded happy. Almost. "Can you invite him to the Aspen cabin this weekend? Maybe a romantic weekend in the mountains?"

Fuck, fuck, fuck. "I'll ask him tonight." I chose my next words carefully, knowing that any enthusiasm where there shouldn't be would come across as a red flag to my brother. "But I'm also trying to get some information about his family for you. If I

can get you details about their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, you probably won't need to bother with Jeremiah. You can go directly for Andro."

"Nah." He dismissed the idea as quickly as I knew he would. "I need the omega. They have new omegas in the family now, so they're gonna be especially protective." He laughed in that evil voice I recognized from my own childhood. "That just makes my job even easier. Anyway, let me know about this weekend. I'd rather get this done sooner rather than later."

"Okay, but he's got tests coming up, so it might be closer to the end of the school year."

"Whatever. Just keep me posted, yeah?"

"Yeah." I hung up the phone and went back into the store.

As I looked around at the various flower arrangements, I hated myself. I was tempted to cancel on Jeremiah just so I had some time to come up with a reasonable excuse for either him or my brother.

But I was too selfish to do that.

I was already addicted to that sweet omega, and even a single night without seeing him seemed unbearable. Instead, I picked up a crystal vase with a simple arrangement in it and took it to the front counter to pay. Even though our relationship had a very near-term expiration date on it, he deserved to feel appreciated and adored for as long as possible.

Once he found out the truth about me and my family, he'd hate me. I'd be lucky if I made it out alive.

And while I used the word love as a term of endearment in vulnerable moments, I wouldn't allow myself to even consider it was a true feeling. It couldn't be. Not with what I had planned and the painful way we would end.

When I got to Jeremiah's apartment, he pulled open the door and practically tumbled into my arms with his face buried against my chest. He sniffled, and I could tell he had been crying, which was gut-wrenching and made me want to kill anyone who dared hurt a hair on his head.

"Hey, what's wrong?" I wrapped my arms around him, careful to hold the vase away from his back even as I kissed the top of his head. "Talk to me."

Jeremiah sniffled again and wiped his eyes on his sleeves as he pulled away, giving me space to fully walk in and shut the door behind me. "I've just been feeling...homesick. I talked to my brother Andro, and he was telling me about how fast his son is growing and all the things he's doing now. Then my other brother has a baby too and... I'm just missing everything. My nephews won't even know me at all." New tears welled up and dripped down his cheeks faster than I could wipe them away. "I want to be their favorite uncle, but right now, I'm just a stranger. They're going to like Orsino better than me!"

"Oh, c'mere, love." I pulled him into my arms again and kissed his temple, scolding myself for using the endearment I needed to be more stingy with. "You graduate in just a few weeks. Then you'll be home permanently. Your nephews are gonna get to know you plenty. They just have to wait a little bit longer."

Even as I said the words, my gut wrenched for Jeremiah. I had no idea what my brother had in mind for the whole family, but I knew at least Andro, the oldest brother, was on Vince's kill list. It was the only way for Vince to claim the territory the Ferrinis currently possessed. Without taking down Andro, he had no chance of earning the respect and power he was so desperate for. "I don't know if it helps, but I

brought you something.”

Jeremiah pulled back and finally noticed the gift I was still holding.

“Flowers?” His grin got wide, and I could already see the tears slowing down. “For me?”

“Yeah, well, it’s a little cheesy, but two months ago today, we met in that coffee shop and... Well, I just wanted to let you know how grateful I am that you let me sit down and charge with you.”

Jeremiah coughed out a chuckle and wrapped his arms around my neck, pulling me close. “You’re such a softy. You look all tough and alpha-like, but you’re a big old teddy bear on the inside.”

A teddy bear from an evil family who was plotting against him. I plastered on a smile and leaned forward to kiss his forehead. “Yeah, well, don’t let my secret out.”

“So...” He looked up at me from under wet lashes. “I was thinking of maybe going home for the weekend and thought maybe you’d want to join me?”

Holy shit. I had no idea how to respond to him. That was my moment to fulfill my brother’s request and move on with my life, but it would also mean ending my relationship with Jeremiah sooner than anticipated. I thought I had another month with him, but it could all be over in just a few days. “This weekend? Um, I’m not sure I can get away on such short notice.”

He frowned. “Really? Do you have plans?”

Shit, shit, shit. “No, but are you sure you want to introduce me to your family already? That’s kind of a big step.”

“Oh.” He took another step back, and I could see the hurt in his eyes. “Yeah, I didn’t mean to put you on the spot. It was just an idea, but no big deal. I’ll just be gone for a few days.”

His fake smile didn’t reach his eyes as he turned toward the kitchen. “The lasagna is done, so we can eat.”

I followed him into the kitchen and stopped beside the table, which was already set and just ready for the food to be added. “Can I help with anything?”

Jeremiah shook his head. “Nope. Have a seat. I’ve got it.”

It killed me to hear the sadness in his voice, and I couldn’t let him think I just didn’t want to meet his family. I mean, I didn’t, but for reasons completely different from what I’d implied. It wasn’t about our relationship being new. It was completely because I didn’t know how to deal with my brother. And if Andro saw his baby brother with a Menetti, I wasn’t likely to walk out of there alive.

If Vince knew I was going to their home, he’d expect me to get him information he could use to harm them. The truth was, I really did want to meet my boyfriend’s family, because deep down, I hoped they could be my family someday.

Even though I knew that wasn’t a real possibility, it was a fantasy I let myself indulge in now and then.

Once Jeremiah sat down and we were both eating, I made a quick decision that would either save or destroy us both.

“I’m sorry for my hesitation earlier.” I looked at him and did my best to convey my sincerity. “Like I said at the beginning, this is new for me and I’m not quite sure what I’m doing, but if the offer still stands, I’d love to go home with you and meet your

family.”

Jeremiah’s eyes lit up and the sadness instantly faded. “Are you sure? I don’t want you to feel pressured to go. I guess it is kinda soon for such a big step, but I just don’t wanna be away from you for a whole weekend. And I really want you to meet my brothers.”

I reached across the table, and he immediately did the same, dropping his hand into mine. “I don’t wanna be away from you for a weekend either. I’d love to go with you.”

Best-case scenario would be that his brothers liked me, and I could either come up with a plan for my brother or bring the Ferrinis in on some kind of counter plan.

Worst-case scenario, they recognized my name, instantly distrusted me, and either turned Jeremiah against me or killed me.

There were so many possibilities, but I had to take the chance.

Everything was gonna come to a head sooner or later regardless. And if this was my last weekend with Jeremiah, I wouldn’t spend it full of regrets.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:13 pm

JEREMIAH

Felik and I boarded the plane out of San Francisco on Friday morning, hoping to land and get to my family home while they were all having dinner to celebrate my dad's birthday. He was still a relatively young man, but he'd lived a hard life, and the years were catching up to him.

No one expected me to come home for a family dinner, so I was excited to surprise everybody at once. Not just because I was there, but because I brought an alpha home with me. I just hoped that they let me explain before they attempted to interrogate him. Or kill him.

I had a window seat, and Felik was beside me in the aisle, protectively wrapping his arm around me as the rest of the passengers passed by to get to all the seats behind us. I didn't usually fly in first class, but Felik insisted on paying for our tickets and wanted us to have as much privacy as possible.

Part of me hoped that meant I'd get a little mile-high action, but being in the front row, we actually had quite a bit of exposure to the flight attendants who were constantly walking by.

After sipping a glass of champagne and eating a warm cookie, I sighed. "I feel like I should warn you about my family." I bit my lip and looked up at my alpha. Okay, not my alpha, but the alpha I'd taken to calling my boyfriend.

"Warn me about what?" His voice was calm like he didn't have a care in the world. That was a good start. Poor man. He had no idea what he was stepping into.

“Well, they’re not the most orthodox kind of family. They’re a little...intense most of the time. And my brothers will probably be a little distrusting at first.”

“Distrusting of me?” He had a strange expression, like he wasn’t sure how to respond to that.

Honestly, I expected him to laugh it off as if I were joking, and I’d have to explain what I meant in more detail. But I couldn’t quite read his reaction.

“Why?”

“Not of you in particular, but I’ve never brought home a guy before. And you know how alphas are.” I looked at him and realized that might be news. “Actually, did I mention that my three older brothers are all alphas?”

He grinned and blew out a breath. “No, you haven’t told me much about them at all.”

“Right, well, they are. Andro, the oldest, is sort of like our...head of the family now. I mean, my dad’s the head of our family, but Andro has taken over the business, so that gives him a place of honor. And then there’s Orsino and Louie. Louie and Andro are the ones who both got married and had babies this past year. So Orsino and I are the only single brothers.”

Felik immediately frowned, and I had to grin at his expression. Was that jealousy I detected?

“And since they’re about to find out that I’m not single anymore, that might be a bit shocking to them.”

“You haven’t told them about me at all? Not even a mention that you’re seeing someone?”

I shook my head. “Is that weird? I just didn’t wanna deal with their overprotective big brother crap over the phone. I figured when they meet you, they’ll love you as much as I—” I swallowed and caught myself before I said anything incriminating. “As much as everybody else does... That just felt like the smart move here.”

Felik turned to the front, thoughtful as he absorbed everything I’d just shared. After a moment, he looked back at me. “Maybe you should at least warn them before we get there so they don’t freak out about having a strange alpha in their home with their omegas and babies present.”

“No, it won’t be that bad. If you’re there as my guest, they’ll be polite.” At least, I hoped that was true. Having never brought anyone home before, I had no idea how my father would react, much less my brothers. But how could they not love Felik? I knew I certainly did. I didn’t think he was ready to hear it, so I’d been careful to keep that little detail to myself, but as the days passed by, my feelings for him only grew in depth and intensity. “Anyway, it’s nothing to worry about. This is gonna be a great surprise for everyone. I just don’t want you to take anything personal if they’re a little gruff at first. Andro is especially grouchy, and Orsino is not much better. Louie is pretty cool and chill about most things, so you guys will get along easily.”

He looked uncomfortable as he nodded, doing his best to appease me. “Yeah, it’ll be fine. One way or another, we’ll survive this weekend.”

I chuckled at the doom in his tone. I didn’t mean to scare him, but I felt some kind of warning was in order. At least now, whatever did happen should be a pleasant surprise and not full of awkward explanations later.

When our driver pulled up to the house, I could see all the lights were on, and I knew our timing was perfect. It was just after seven, so they were probably getting started with dinner. It would be a bit of a disruption to add two more place settings to the table, but I was confident my family would be happy to see me, even if they were

shocked by my guest.

Felik gripped my hand as we walked up the porch. “Are you sure surprising everyone like this is a good idea? Your dad’s not gonna come at me with a shotgun, is he?”

It was obviously a joke, but he wasn’t too far off. All of my family members carried weapons on them. Plus, they were followed around by armed guards. “Nah, they all carry handguns these days.”

He looked down at me with wide eyes. “Seriously?”

I shrugged. “I told you they were intense. But we’ll be fine.” I leaned over and kissed his cheek. “I’ll protect my alpha, don’t you worry.”

Felik wrapped his arm around me and held me closer to his side, giving us both strength as the front door opened and one of the servants welcomed us inside.

“Jeremiah, I didn’t realize you were coming home tonight.”

“I’m hoping to surprise the family. Are they having dinner for Dad?”

“Yes, everyone is gathered in the main dining room.” He stepped aside after grabbing our luggage.

I took Felik’s hand and gave it a squeeze. “All right. Here goes nothing.” I strode confidently into the dining room, proud to have such a fine alpha at my side.

He seemed more nervous than I expected, but I had probably played up my family’s reaction a little heavier than necessary.

But I just wanted him to be prepared for any situation.

We stepped into the full dining room, and all the chatter stopped as every eye turned to me and then to the alpha beside me.

“Surprise,” I said with a wave of my arm. “I missed you all and wanted to be here for Dad’s birthday.” I looked at my dad and tried to catch his eye, but he was completely focused on Felik. “And I want you to meet my boyfriend, Felik Morton. Felik, this is my family.”

My brothers turned to Andro and then my father, and within a split second, they were up in front of their omegas and infants with guns drawn, all pointed directly at Felik.

“What the fuck?” I stepped in front of him, shielding him with my body. “What are you guys doing?”

Felik’s hands closed on my shoulders and he twisted me so I was suddenly behind him with him in full view of the bullets aimed at his head. “Please, let me explain.”

FELIK

Jeremiah, get over here,” Andro, the oldest, said, jerking his head toward where his omega and his brothers were standing behind their father. The two omegas stood on their tiptoes trying to look over their alphas’ shoulders.

Well, this certainly blew up in my face faster than I had expected it to. But I was prepared for something like this. Mostly. I released a clip on my gun and turned it in my hand so it wasn’t pointing at them. ”I can explain.”

“Felik?” Jeremiah looked at me, his eyes full of questions and sadness. I hated that. I put that look on his face. I had so much to say to him and explaining why I snuck a gun across the country and into his family’s home was probably not even the highest priority for either of us.

“Jeremiah, perhaps you can explain why your boyfriend is a member of the Mennetti family.” Andro’s voice was as cold as ice. I knew from what limited knowledge I had of the crime world that Andro was deadly with a gun, and if he had his sights on your back, then your days were numbered.

I was afraid my own countdown started the moment I walked in the door.

Jeremiah sucked in a breath and narrowed his eyes. ”Is that true? Are you—”

Orsino, the second-oldest of the alphas, glared at me, and I wasn’t sure if he was about to shoot me himself. “Your brother probably asked you to get close to Jeremiah to see how he could use him against us. Is that right?”

Fuck Orsino and his business sense. He and my brother were cut from the same cloth, so of course they would come up with the same sort of scheme.

"It wasn't like that. Not now, anyway."

Andro's eyes narrowed even more and I could almost feel his hate from across the room. "Now that you've been caught? Did you think we wouldn't know everything about the Mennetti family? Give me one good reason why I shouldn't put a bullet through your brain."

Jeremiah stepped between me and Andro.

Andro flinched, and his gun was immediately pointed toward the ground rather than at his brother. "Jeremiah, whatever he's told you, you can't trust him. I'm sorry this has happened, but you need to let him go. We'll take care of this."

I grabbed Jeremiah's arm to turn him to face me. I needed him to see me, to look in my eyes so he knew I wasn't lying.

But before I could, his brothers were on me. Louie pulled Jeremiah away while Andro and Orsino wrestled me to the ground. My gun fell to the floor, and Andro kicked it away. Not that I was going to use it on them anyway.

Orsino pulled me to my feet and then held my arms back while Andro landed a hit to my jaw and another one to my stomach.

Fuck, it been a long time since I'd been in a fight. I struggled to pull air into my lungs. The only thing holding me up was Orsino.

Jeremiah was in tears, and it was all my fault that he was begging for mercy. "Stop, you're hurting him."

I was finally able to gasp out the words I never wanted Jeremiah to hear. "My brother did send me after Jeremiah. To seduce him. But it wasn't like that."

Andro glared at me, and I thought for sure I was a dead man. He wound up to hit me again, but Jeremiah pushed him out of the way.

"Stop it!"

God, the cracking in Jeremiah's voice did me in, and I couldn't keep my feelings to myself anymore. "I love him. I would never hurt him."

Orsino pushed me to the ground, his knee landing on my back and my head facing the wall, so I couldn't see what was happening.

There were footsteps walking away and a door slammed. Even without visual confirmation, I knew Jeremiah had left the room.

"I'll go check on him," one of the omegas said.

"Both of you go. Take the children with you. And make sure Trev is standing guard outside his door. Louie, alert Nil and Tobias as well."

Once everybody cleared the room, they let go of me. It was three against one, plus their dad who I was sure could still hold his own despite his age.

"You come here, to our home, after using our brother the way you did, and what? You expect mercy? Hate to break it to you, but you won't find it here." Andro rolled up the sleeves of his white button-down shirt as if he was going to work me over right there in the dining room.

"I want to hear what the boy has to say." Vern, the former leader of the Ferrini

family, stepped forward as my head was turned.

"Dad, why don't you go with?—"

Vern tapped his cane on the ground, and Andro went silent. "I may not run the family business anymore, but I have a feeling business has crossed over to a more personal realm in this situation. And in that, I still have a say. Let us be civilized."

"We can't trust him." Louie nudged my hip with the bottom of his shoe.

"If you think your brother is so naive that he would trust a man who would hurt him, you don't know him at all. It would do you well to have a bit more faith in him."

"That's not what I said." Andro's eyes narrowed and his gun came back to align with my heart.

Louie and Orsino kept their gaze locked on me while their father and brother spoke.

I sat up and rolled my shoulders back, resisting the urge to touch my face. My jaw ached where Andro had landed a punch, but I was ready to have this conversation. I was ready to finally come clean about everything. Though I had hoped that Jeremiah would be there to listen. "I want to speak to Jeremiah."

"That's up to him," Vern said. "First, you'll speak to us."

We all sat at the table, completely ignoring the man's birthday celebration. In spite of everything, I did feel bad about that.

It took a minute for me to find the right words, but once I did, I just let it all out. "Vince called me a few months ago and asked me to introduce myself to Jeremiah. He wanted me to see if I could get information about you all. And yes, his ultimate

goal was to bring Jeremiah to his home and use him as leverage against you.”

”And you were gonna do that? You were gonna seduce an innocent omega for your brother”s game?” Orsino’s palms were tight fists as he pounded the table.

”I didn’t say no to the request, that”s true.”

“You just happened to live in the same city as him?” Vern said with a raised brow.

Well, when he put it like that...

“Okay, technically, I did move to Stanford and staged an opportunity to introduce myself to him. And yes, initially, I did plan on going through with what my brother had asked. At least partially. But then I fell in love with Jeremiah. How could I not? I would never hurt him in any way. In fact, I was supposed to take him to my brother”s cabin this weekend to meet up with Vince, but I came here instead, knowing you all would recognize me. Even if you didn’t know who I was, I planned to speak with you about what Vince was planning.”

The four men stared at me.

Maybe approaching the situation with “Hey, at least I didn”t kill your brother” wasn”t the best idea. That wasn’t a very high bar to claim.

I sighed as I began to lose hope. ”Listen, I don”t agree with the things Vince is doing. I don”t know why he”s intent on gaining more territory when things have been just fine the way they are for the past however many years.”

“He”s trying to prove himself since he”s head of the family now. What about you? You don”t care?”

“I’m a half-brother. I’ve never been involved in anything.” I cocked my head and looked at Andro. “I’m surprised your research didn’t tell you that.”

Andro looked to Orsino, who nodded.

”I don’t trust you.” Andro finally put his gun on the table and sat back, folding his arms over his chest. ”And we’re not letting you go. We’ll talk to Jeremiah. But don’t be surprised if we just kill you in the morning because of what you’ve done to him.”

“If I can’t have Jeremiah...” I swallowed hard, feeling emotion clogging my throat. “If he will never forgive me, then I would gladly lay down my life for him. Tell him I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for it to go this far.”

Andro blew out a heavy breath. “Orsino, I’ll take him to the guest room on the first floor. Have Silvan keep watch.”

Louie finally spoke up, glancing between his brothers and his father. “We do have the jail cells in the basement. We could finally put those to use.”

Andro looked like he was considering it for a moment as his gaze slipped to his father. Thankfully, the older man shook his head.

”Not today. But I’m definitely keeping that as a possibility.”

Orsino gripped my arm and pulled me to my feet. He pushed me toward a door opposite of the one we used when we came in.

“I’m sorry for interrupting your birthday dinner, sir.” I looked at Vern and hoped he didn’t hate me beyond forgiveness.

The man snorted out a laugh. “When you get to be my age, you enjoy excitement like

this. I hope to see you again, Felik, but if my boys find out you've treated young Jeremiah badly, then I'm afraid this is goodbye."

"I didn't, sir. I promise you that."

Vern smiled. "I'm rooting for you."

I supposed that was good to hear. Though, it didn't seem that the old man had much sway over the brothers.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:13 pm

JEREMIAH

“I wanted to tell you guys.” I sat on the floor with Matias in my lap and Theo in an activity chair beside me. “You would have set me straight.”

“What do you mean?” Joey was folding tiny baby clothes while Connor pumped milk for Louie to use for Matias’s three AM feeding. “Set you straight, how?”

We were in a room that used to be a guest room but had now been repurposed as a playroom for the kids. It had everything they and their fathers needed.

I shrugged and kept my eyes on my nephews, enamored with how perfect they were. Their tiny little fingers and toes and lips and noses. No flaws. No scars. No pain. “You would have reminded me that a guy like Felik would have no interest in a guy like me, and it had to be some kind of catfishing scam thing. I should have known better than to trust him.”

Joey came to my side and placed his arm around my shoulders. “It wasn’t a scam. I mean, maybe it started that way, but anyone can see that he truly cares about you. He was in front of you as fast as our husbands were. That wasn’t an act.”

My eyes began to water again, and that damn lump in my throat was back. I wanted their words to be true. So badly. But even if there was some level of affection that was real on Felik’s side, that didn’t negate the fact that he was helping to plot my brother’s assassination. Plus he was a Menetti—currently our number one enemy—not that anyone had bothered to keep me in the loop about that.

Joey should have been more concerned about that little detail, but I guess they were used to the constant threat that was now a part of their lives. The threats that I'd been shielded from for most of my life. "Regardless, it's over. Obviously. And I'm back on the market, waiting for my brothers or father to tell me who I have to marry."

Connor put away the pump and scooted into our little huddle, placing his hand on my knee as he rubbed his son's bare foot. "You don't have to marry anyone you don't want to. Andro has changed a lot of things around here after he married Joey and Louie married me. They won't force you to do anything."

I scoffed at the novelty of choice. "Doesn't matter anyway. Clearly, I have terrible taste in alphas. I might as well let my brothers choose for me. At least then I'll know the true motivation of my mate from day one. No fantasy romance or pretend feelings. Everything will be negotiated and agreed to in advance." I sighed and dropped a soft kiss on my nephew's head, inhaling his warm scent as a flush filled me. "Sorry for ruining dinner, by the way."

My brothers-in-law looked at each other and giggled.

Connor shook his head. "Are you kidding? That was the most exciting dinner we've ever had. I'm so glad I was there to witness it all. Since the Mennettis started this war, we've been so secluded. It gets boring."

I rolled my eyes and smiled. These guys needed to get out more. "Well, I'm gonna get to bed. I'm feeling a little nauseous and might be coming down with something." That or the stress was getting to me. Two hours ago, my biggest worry was if Andro would like my boyfriend. Now, I was worried he might actually kill him.

Joey furrowed his brow and placed his hand on my forehead. "Shit, Jer. You're burning up." He lifted Matias from my lap and handed him to Connor. "You need to take a few Aspirin and get into bed. Don't worry about the guys. We'll keep them off

your back until you're feeling better." He looked back at Connor and reconsidered. "Well, at least until morning. Get some rest while you can."

I nodded my thanks and headed straight to my suite. It wasn't as big as my brothers' since it wasn't intended to house a family, but I had a balcony that led down to the pool, and if I didn't feel like my veins were on fire, I might have headed down for a swim. A few laps were always guaranteed to quiet my mind.

But right now, my mind was the last thing I was worried about. Something was definitely wrong, and I wasn't sure what was happening.

Sweating through my clothes, I tore them off and slipped into my bed. I hadn't spent much time there over the years, but every time I was at home, my bed was my safe space. The only time I felt like I actually belonged in my own home.

I dozed off and didn't wake up until I felt cool fingers brush against my forehead. "Jeremiah, it's me."

"Hmm." My whole body felt weird, like it was itchy on the inside. I needed to wake up, but my eyes were so heavy.

"Wake up, love." The cool fingers spread down my neck, cupping me gently. "You're burning up."

My eyes opened to find Felik hovering over me. For a moment, I was excited to see him and arousal coursed through me. Then the events of the evening washed over me.

He pulled back the sheet and the air around us changed. "Fuck, Jer. You're in heat."

"What?" I squirmed but reached for the sheet, pulling it back as I tried to clear my head. "What are you doing here?" I looked around the room, expecting to see my

brothers all pointing guns at him, but then I realized the back door was open. “You snuck in here?”

He nodded and pressed his lips to my forehead. “I’m so sorry, Jeremiah. I know you don’t believe me, but I promise that what we have is real. I love you, and there’s no way I would let my brother or anyone else hurt you. Ever.”

New tears flowed down my cheeks as his words hit me right in the feels. “How can I ever trust you again?”

“I don’t know.” The same tears I was shedding were flowing down Felik’s face as he dropped his head to my shoulder. “But please believe me. Forgive me. Tell me you love me too. If I had a chance to do it over, I would do things very differently, Jer. I promise you.”

I coughed out a sob as my arms flew around his neck and held on tightly. “I do love you, you big jerk.” I took a shuddering breath and kissed his jaw. “Which is why it hurt so fucking bad when I found out you were just using me. You wanted to hurt my family. And me.”

“The very first meeting was a setup, but after that, it was just you and me. I haven’t fed my brother any information, and I’ve been working on how to get out of this. Vince will not hurt you or your family.” He pulled back and looked me in the eyes. “Just you. Just me. From this moment forward.”

Nodding, I kicked the sheet off me and reached for his zipper. “Why is this happening to me?” I was reaching into his jeans before he even realized what I was doing. I needed to touch him, to have his hands on me and mine on him. He was my alpha. Even if we still had issues to work through, in my heart, I knew he was mine.

“Whoa, hold on.” He gently lifted my hand up between us and locked both my wrists

in his solid grip. “I’ll help you, of course. I want to give you my knot so fucking bad.” He inhaled through his nose as a new flood of slick flowed from me and made him shiver. “But only if you really want this. Want me. Because if we fuck while you’re in heat, you know what’s almost guaranteed to happen.”

My eyes clenched tightly as I gave an honest effort to focus. “If you promise that you’re not going to hurt me or my family.” I opened my eyes and looked right into his. “Or allow anyone else to hurt us, then I believe you.”

“I promise, love. I swear on my life.” He placed his hand on my cheek, cupping it as he brushed his thumb over my lips. “Me and you. You’re in?”

I swallowed hard and bit down on the tip of his thumb, swiping my tongue over it before letting it slip from my lips. “I’m in. And I need your knot, alpha. Please. I’m burning for you.”

Felik was naked and on top of me in seconds, not bothering to stretch me with his fingers for very long before his bare cock finally slipped inside me, taking me the way we were meant to be connected. “Fuck, omega. You feel amazing.”

My fingernails dug into his back, urging him deeper. “So amazing. Faster.” My hips bucked forward, meeting him thrust for thrust.

His pace increased, moving in a way that made my entire body rock in time with his. We moved in sync for minutes or hours, I had no idea. All I knew was that the fever inside me got hotter and more intense until I was crying out against his shoulder. “Breed me, alpha. Make me yours.”

Felik slipped his hands beneath my knees and rolled me up so he could get impossibly deeper. “You ready, love?”

My ankles rested on his shoulders as he drove into me. “Yes, alpha.” I gripped my cock and barely needed any friction before I was shooting streams between us, soaking us in yet another layer before I felt it. The sweet relief of my alpha’s knot widening, thickening, filling me with the seed my body was aching for.

And finally, after months of waiting and imagining and wishing and fantasizing, it was happening. Felik was claiming me as his omega, properly breeding me to not only break my heat but to rebuild my spirit.

“I love you, omega.” With his knot locked inside me, he kissed me gently, finally taking his time to appreciate the commitment we’d just made to each other without the burden of my heat between us.

My lungs sucked in air as if filling to capacity for the first time, and the world seemed to all come together in perfect order. “I love you too, alpha.”

After a brief rest, we made love again. This time, it was slow and gentle, all about learning each other’s bodies and reactions without any barriers or lies between us.

Though we’d done this so many times before, it felt like the first time.

The first real time.

And it was fucking amazing.

FELIK

Jeremiah was my mate, my one and only, the be all and end all of my existence.

That much I knew was true, but also, in hindsight, perhaps sneaking into his room and staying the night in his bed was not the smartest thing I'd ever done. It was right up there with coming home with him and completely blindsiding his three alpha brothers with my presence.

The fact that I did both those things in less than a twelve-hour period was not indicative of my intelligence.

I was just so head over heels for Jeremiah. That was the only explanation. I couldn't bear the thought of him thinking I was only there to betray him. He needed to know how I truly felt.

The minute I opened my eyes after our glorious night together, I had a gun staring me in the face and three angry brothers hovering over me.

As if sensing my tension, Jeremiah's eyes popped open. He took in the sight of his three brothers staring down at us. Our bodies were entwined, the sheets tangled in our naked limbs and barely covering us where it mattered most. Though we weren't fooling anyone, considering the room reeked of sex.

"For God's sake, guys. We've got to stop doing this." Jeremiah placed his head over my chest, knowing that would divert the barrels.

“Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t kill him.” Andro aimed out the window but stared at me with venom in his gaze as he cocked his gun.

”Because I love him.” Jeremiah was not deterred in the least. ”And he”s sorry.”

”Oh, he”s sorry?” Louie scoffed, always the smartass. ”Well, that changes everything. He”s sorry that he planned on using you as leverage against us? Perhaps killing you, kidnapping you at the very least? It”s okay, though, because he”s sorry.”

”Sarcasm does not look good on you, Lou. Is that the kind of example you want to set for your child?” Jeremiah’s tone made me tighten my grip on his arm, reminding him to take heed. Though, I had to bite back a grin. I loved that Jeremiah stood up to his alpha brothers. No other omega in the world would do that for me. My mate had balls.

Fortunately, his brothers clearly loved him very much.

”Get out of bed. We”ll meet you in the sitting room.” Andro put his gun away, holstering it under his suit jacket. I did not, for one minute, think that meant I was safe.

Seriously, who wore a suit in their own home on a Saturday morning? Apparently, I hadn’t packed correctly for this trip. My wardrobe might make an even worse impression than my attempt at kidnapping.

The three brothers left the bedroom, leaving me alone with Jeremiah. That gave me hope. It seemed to be a good sign if they trusted me to be alone with him.

Jeremiah and I got up, smiling at each other as I pulled him to my chest. ”Good morning, my love.”

He kissed me and smiled against my mouth. "Good morning."

Once we were fully dressed, I stood in front of Jeremiah and rubbed my hands up and down his arms. "Are you ready for this?"

He nodded, a smile on his lips. "They don't scare me, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be scared of them. They've killed alphas for lesser offenses."

"The only thing I'm scared of is them keeping me from you." At least, that was what I would admit to out loud. In reality, they could do far worse things than that. They could keep me away from Jeremiah and torture me. They could keep me away from Jeremiah and kill me.

"I won't let that happen." He ran his palm up my chest, caressing my muscles along the way. "I promise."

I cupped his cheek in my hand and brushed my thumb over his soft skin. "Nothing's keeping me away from you, love. I swear it." I wouldn't go down without a fight. Knowing that Jeremiah felt the same way about me meant I was fighting for him. I needed to rebuild the trust I had destroyed.

"We're waiting!" Louie shouted from the other room.

Jeremiah rolled his eyes. "Hold your horses. Sheesh."

The two of us linked hands and walked out to meet our fate. The sitting room we were sent to was connected to Jer's bedroom. His suite was nearly the size of his entire apartment at school. Did he prefer living in the mansion? Or once this situation with my brother was resolved, would he prefer a more modest dwelling? I knew which I would prefer.

"I don't trust him." Andro had his arms crossed as he stood next to where Orsino and Louie were sitting.

"Well, I do." Jeremiah wasn't backing down.

"After what he put you through?" Orsino asked, imploring his brother to take their side.

Jeremiah took a deep breath and rolled his shoulders back. "Yes. He came here knowing it was very likely he wouldn't walk out of here alive. Then he got free from your guard, and instead of running away to report back to Vince, he came to me."

"This could be a ploy," Orsino said. "To gain your trust."

"Well, then it's your job to figure out what his endgame is." Jeremiah pulled me to the couch and sat me down. Then he settled on my lap, creating a barrier between me and his family. "Quite frankly, I'm surprised you let the Mennettis get the upper hand."

That got Andro's attention. "Jeremiah, you don't know what you're talking about."

"Perhaps. But only because you won't let me be involved in the business." Jeremiah had clearly been thinking about this. "You wanted me to go to law school to learn the ins and outs of whatever laws we're bending. But you've kept me shielded from everything important. Maybe if you had let me know what threats were out there against our family and had shared all the information you seem to have about the Mennettis sooner, I would have recognized Felik. Instead, you left me totally vulnerable. Now, I can't regret that too much, considering I love him and it has worked out in my favor, but you guys could have told me so I was prepared. What was the point of teaching me to defend myself if I can't even recognize our enemy?"

Andro crossed his arms, glaring daggers at my mate. Meanwhile, I sat there proud as a peacock. "You really love him, Jer? You trust him?"

He shook his head, leaning closer to me. "I do."

"We're not letting him out of our sight." Andro looked between me and Jeremiah, warning us equally.

"I told you last night that I'll work with you to take my brother down. I'm not letting him harm Jeremiah or any of you."

Andro strode forward, and I could see why the man was feared by many. If I didn't have Jeremiah so close to me, giving me strength, I just might've actually quaked in my boots.

"Stand up," he said.

I obeyed, placing Jeremiah on the couch alone.

Andro gripped the collar of my shirt and squeezed until the fabric constricted around my neck. "If you fuck my family over, you will regret it. I will make your death slow and painful. There will be nothing left of your remains for your family to identify. You will be nothing but a rumor by the time I'm done with you. Do you understand?"

"Yes." I maintained eye contact with him, even though my stomach roiled with nerves. But I didn't let my fear of Andro sending me to an early grave deter me from earning Jeremiah's love.

Finally, he let me go. "Fine. If Jeremiah trusts you, then we will as well. But we're watching you, Felik. One wrong move, and I'll make use of the jail cells in the basement."

”Seriously?” Louie said, throwing up his arms in disappointment. ”Here I thought I was gonna wake up and kick some ass today.”

”It”s still early,” Andro said. “And this one has a lot to prove. Get dressed. We”re having breakfast as a family to celebrate Pop”s birthday.”

Jeremiah bounced to his feet. “Oh good. I brought him something from the gallery. He’s gonna love it.”

“Oh, that reminds me, Joey loved the piece you did for our wedding, and he’s hoping you might be able to do a portrait of Theo.” Andro’s tone had already lightened a great deal from how he talked to me just a minute ago.

I had whiplash from how quickly we changed topics. Or perhaps I was still recovering from having my windpipe squeezed. Either way, the attention was no longer on me.

For now, the brothers weren’t going to kill me, and I could remain with Jeremiah. I would do my best not to jeopardize that. Even if it meant selling out my sad excuse for a brother.

JEREMIAH

Once my brothers left us alone, Felik and I were able to get ourselves fully ready for the day.

My heat had been quick, but it had also been intense. And while Felik had cleaned me up after being together last night, we needed a shower.

Thankfully, like the rest of the suite, the shower was massive. It was also well stocked with a lilac-scented shampoo and rich conditioner. The two of us took our time under the hot spray, letting the suds slide down our bodies while we kissed.

I would never tire of Felik's kisses.

Eventually, we had to leave our little slice of paradise and return to the real world. The Ferrini version of it, anyway.

Of course, my brothers were all sitting at the breakfast table, glaring daggers at us when we arrived. Breakfast had been laid out with a feast fit for a king. Not that I expected anything less from my family.

I kissed my dad on the cheek and sat down to his right with Felik next to me. "Sorry for crashing your party yesterday, Dad."

"I do apologize about that, sir," Felik said. "I meant no disrespect."

"Trying to suck up to my dad?" I nudged Felik's shoulder. Being the baby of the

family, and the only omega, had its perks. I could get away with anything. I knew my father would forgive me for interrupting his party.

But in my defense, I had no way of knowing that Felik's presence could cause such a stir.

My dad let out a laugh as he clapped my shoulder. "That's quite alright. We don't usually get so much drama around here. At least not since Connor ran off and had Louie pissin' his pants with worry."

"That's not what happened..." Connor chimed in with a smirk, holding his son in his arms.

"It's pretty close to what happened." I hadn't been here for it, but Andro and Orsino gave me the full rundown. Then I got the real story from Joey. Connor shared his side as well when I was finally able to meet him. I'd never really gotten to know the omegas in the harem before, so it was interesting to hear his stories.

It was so different to see my two alpha brothers with their mates and children. Now, they just had to get used to the idea of me with my mate, and eventually our children, even if Felik was from a rival family.

"The two of you should get married," Andro said.

Felik coughed, and a piece of muffin flew out of his mouth.

I patted him on the back. "Now is not the time, Andro." Apparently, Andro was getting used to that idea faster than I'd anticipated.

His own mate looked at him. "I literally just told you that we're not going to discuss this matter at the table. Didn't I just say that?" Joey shook his head and reached for

his orange juice. “Seriously, I’m positive I just said that.”

”The matter needs to be resolved, and I’m not waiting another moment,” Andro insisted, crossing his arms over his chest.

As if that was going to work on me. It brought weaker men to their knees, but I was there when Andro crashed Dad’s Rolls Royce into the fountain and Andro had cried for hours while we all tried to assure him that Dad wasn’t going to kill him.

“Oh, is that the way it’s going to be?” I asked, slowly nodding my head.

“Love, it’s not—” Felik put his hand on my shoulder, but I wasn’t gonna be deterred.

“Andro, you can’t force me and Felik to get married. That’s not happening.” I met his gaze with my own determined stare.

Felik stiffened beside me, turning to catch my eyes. ”You don’t want to get married, Jer?”

I heard the hurt in his voice and instantly regretted my word choice. ”It’s not that. I just think it should be our decision, not forced upon us by my brother.”

“I told you yesterday that this was real, me and you forever. I don’t want to lose you. If that means marrying you, then that’s what we’ll do.”

I rolled my eyes as Louie let out a low whistle. ”Even I know that was a terrible proposal, man.”

“You’re not helping my case with Andro.” I put my hand over Felik’s. ”You’re gonna have to try better than that if you want to win me over with a proposal.” I turned to my brother, glaring at him. ”And you are not going to meddle in my life

right now. Felik and I are together. We will decide what our future looks like. If you want to meddle, then figure out how to deal with Vince.”

“You’re vulnerable to his brother,” Andro said, looking right at me.

His own mate had given up trying to help and was instead focused on feeding Theo his yogurt.

I reached for a piece of bacon and took a bite. “And marriage is going to fix that?”

Andro started to open his mouth, but then he jerked like someone had kicked him. Joey took an overly large bite of his toast, not looking at anyone.

“We need to figure out what we’re doing about that,” Orsino said.

”I suppose that’s true.” Andro finally picked up his fork and focused on his food.

“But like your own mate said, perhaps not over the breakfast table. We’re celebrating Dad’s birthday.” I turned my gaze to my dad and gave him a bright smile he wouldn’t be able to resist.

”He’s right.” Dad winked at me, always quick to take my side.

”You always take Jeremiah’s side when he’s home.” Andro sounded a lot like a whiny child rather than the head of the family.

I grinned, loving that I could still get to him even when I wasn’t trying. ”Yeah, because they saved the best for last, and he likes me better. Try harder, big guy.”

Felik snorted but covered it with a cough.

"How are your studies going, Son? And your art?" Dad changed the subject as if nothing else was being discussed.

"Good." I was happy to move on to something less stressful. "Now that I'm getting close to graduation, I'm more than ready to be done with school. I wish I could say I had more time to paint, but exams have been kicking my ass, so the time I do spend in the studio on campus helps keep me centered."

"We'll have the studio cleaned and ready for you when you arrive home after graduation." Dad took a bite of his food, already moving on.

Right, because returning to my family home had always been my plan after I finished school. I wanted to help my family. But with Felik in my life, where did that leave us? Suddenly, my future felt all too uncertain.

Now that I knew the true circumstances of how we met, I found myself second-guessing all the things he had told me about himself. Did he really have a job waiting for him? Where was it? What had been a truth and what had been a lie? He'd been raised in a family not unlike mine, which simplified some things but complicated others.

Felik put a hand on my shoulder, threading his fingers over my neck. "We'll figure things out, love. Don't borrow any trouble right now."

I met his gaze, and the acceptance I found in his eyes eased my concerns. We'd figure out what our future looked like together. We didn't have to have the answers right now. The important part was our commitment and love for each other. Just like Joey and Andro, and Connor and Louie had found their way, we would find ours too.

"You're right, and I trust that we will."

FELIK

If someone had told me two months ago that I would be playing billiards with the three primary alphas of the Ferrini family, while one of them bounced a baby on his hip and we strategized the ways in which we could either convince my brother to stand down or take him out completely, I would have told them they were crazy.

When Vince first recruited me to seduce Jeremiah, my initial plan had not gone much further than actually being able to talk to him. But now, there was no way I would ever go through with what my brother had in mind. In fact, it was easier than I expected to switch sides completely.

If it meant keeping Jeremiah safe, I would go to the ends of the earth and kill everyone in the Mennetti family if I had to.

He meant that much to me.

"What the hell is Vince's story, anyway? We never had any problems with your alpha father. Hell, we had an amicable relationship." Andro lined up his stick with the cue ball, easily hitting and sinking the striped ball he was aiming for.

Meanwhile, I'd scratched on my last two plays. Billiards was not my game.

Maybe I could convince them to put up a dart board in here.

"Fuck if I know." I leaned on my stick like a crutch, having more success with it that way than on the table. "I never paid much attention. I'm only his half brother and a

bastard son. My father didn't bring me into any business discussion, but I think Vince is running out of people who trust him."

Andro smirked. "Good. That works out well for me. I'm collecting allies like fucking candy. I probably know more about your family lineage than you do."

I shrugged, agreeing with him. He struck me as the type of guy who collected information and was fully informed before making any decisions. It was why he was so successful.

"You know, there's a chance this will end with your brother's death." Andro was totally nonchalant as he chalked the cue in his hand. Like we were talking about losing a silly game rather than a family member.

But I couldn't bring myself to care. I may not have been involved in the family business, but I wasn't ignorant to what that world was like.

I took a deep breath and did my counting. "Yeah, I know that Vince has become hungry with power, and he's not going to let anything stand in his way. It started with this turf war between your family and ours, but at this point, he's breaking rules that aren't meant to be broken. Bringing in family members who aren't involved in the business, innocent omegas like Jeremiah, is crossing a line." As little as I knew about the rules of the world I now found myself at the center of, I did know that.

It was why I had been able to live a comfortable life prior to my brother dragging me in.

"You were actually willing to do it." Orsino paced in front of me, staring me down. "Give up Jeremiah?"

"I told Vince I would seduce him. I never would have gone so far as to take Jeremiah

to him.”

Orsino stopped right in front of me, puffing up his chest as an intimidation tactic. “Even if you weren’t in love with him?”

“Even then.” I knew it was true. I agreed to the job to get my brother off my back. But would I have really delivered an omega to their most certain death? Not likely.

Louie handed off Matias to me, and I held the baby awkwardly in my arms as he gurgled with laughter.

”Dude, you’re gonna need some more practice. Or in nine months” time, you’re gonna be in over your head,” Louie teased as he lined up his shot.

”Practice all you want, you’re still going to be in over your head. Nothing prepares you for fatherhood,” Andro said.

We seemed to have made a complete one-eighty if they were joking about me and their brother making babies together.

My chest warmed, and a sense of longing filled me. After last night, it was almost guaranteed that Jeremiah and I would have a child on the way. That was the way of things.

I didn’t have a job, and he hadn’t even graduated yet. We were wholly unprepared for fatherhood. Yet that didn’t quell any of the excitement that blossomed within me.

”I’ve seen that look before. It’ll all work out.” Andro patted my shoulder, startling me. ”I can’t say that I knew what I was doing when I kidnapped my omega and married him without either of our families” permission. But nine months later, we had a child, and I had new enemies to deal with. It’s terrifying no matter what you

do.”

I scoffed as the baby gripped my finger with his tiny fingers. ”That”s reassuring.”

“I think it should be,” Andro said, squeezing my shoulder. ”All I”m trying to say is that you have family around. Families help each other. You and Jeremiah will not be left on your own to deal with this. You”re welcome here in this house, and if you wish for your own place, we can make arrangements for that. As soon as it”s safe.” He paused for a moment and blew out a deep breath. “And if you wish to work within the family, we can always use a lawyer. I don”t know if Jeremiah will want to use his degree at all or if he just wants to paint for the rest of his days. Either way, you guys can do what works best for your growing family.”

”You”d let him do that?” I was shocked to hear him say that. I”d always assumed they needed him to have his law degree.

”Of course. We only want our brother”s happiness. Even if most days it seems that we don”t get along at all.”

“I want to make sure he doesn”t take over as number one uncle. But other than that, yeah, he can be happy. We want him to be happy.” Orsino shrugged as if trying to convince himself as much as the rest of us.

“I don”t know that he”ll be happy just painting, though. Even before this weekend, he mentioned that he”s always wanted to be more involved in the business. He didn”t tell me what that business was, of course.”

Andro seemed to contemplate that for a moment. “Father insisted that omegas weren”t to be a part of the discussions. I don”t have a preference either way. In fact, I constantly look to my mate for help because he offers a unique perspective. That being said, I”m not taking him to any sort of gunfight. The same would apply to

Jeremiah. I have a hard enough time putting these two in danger.” He nodded back toward his younger brothers.

It was oddly sweet from such a tough guy.

Louie let out a long whistle. ”Yeah, zero out of ten, I don”t recommend being in a gun fight with your mate, man. Keep your omega home when shit goes down.”

”I take it you”ve been there?” I asked.

”That’s a story for another day. But yeah, I’ve been there. Andro, too.”

”Y’all could just take a page out of my book.” Orsino cleared his throat and looked at us with a smug smile. ”Don”t have any omega at all. Problem solved.”

”Perhaps.” It made sense, considering the shit they saw, but having Jeremiah in my life was a thousand times better than not.

Now, my only priorities were to regain his trust fully, convince his brothers I was serious, and live happily ever after. Easy enough.

JEREMIAH

Once again, we found ourselves sitting in the large playroom that had been set up for the babies. The room was massive, though right now, it wasn't overly full of children's things. I could imagine that, in time, it would be filled to the brim with toys, especially as the family grew and we all fought for the position of greatest uncle.

The only one in the family who wasn't in attendance was Orsino. According to Andro, he was taking care of something to do with one of our casinos. I didn't ask for details because I had enough family business drama to tide me over until after graduation.

Andro and Louie sat on the couch while their mates sat on the floor with their babies. The two little ones played side by side, grabbing each other's toys and squawking with their adorable noises. Theo was walking now, though he still seemed to prefer to crawl. Matias was doing some sort of bum shuffle where he dragged himself along with his arms and his butt scooted around on the floor.

It was hilarious. In the time that I had been home, I'd already taken over twenty videos. I couldn't get enough of them.

"You used to do that," Andro said, pointing at little Matias.

"I did?"

He chuckled as he thought back on the memory. "We might have a video on one of

those old camcorder things they had to use back in the day before cell phones. Dad would get so mad at us. We would put candy on the floor, and you would shuffle toward it, and we would just keep moving it farther away.” Andro smiled fondly with an expression I rarely saw these days.

I rolled my eyes. ”Such kind brothers you were.”

”We were playing with you. And eventually, you did get to have the candy. All the candy.” He blew out his cheeks to hint at my roly-poly stage. Whatever, I was a cute baby.

Louie perked up. ”Remember when Jeremiah was sick for some sort of summer party we were having? We had all been looking forward to it for weeks because they had events for kids. Then Jeremiah got the flu, and we couldn’t go.”

”I do remember that.” The core memory was slowly unlocking in my mind. “You guys sat outside my door since Dad didn’t want you in there with me so you wouldn’t get sick, but none of you attended the party.”

Louie smiled. ”Oh, we attended the party long enough to steal the pi?ata, and when your stomach was feeling better, we tore it open and ate everything inside.”

My eyes widened. ”Yeah, yeah. I remember that! Dad was so mad. We hid that thing in my room for weeks before the housekeeper found it.”

”I don’t think he was mad... I think he was kind of proud of us.” Andro laughed and looked fondly at his little boy. ”We snuck into a party being attended by some of the greatest names in crime and thievery and managed to steal a pi?ata—a very expensive, very large pinata—and get it back up into your room without anyone seeing or suspecting us. They didn’t find it until weeks later.”

"You guys were kinda badass." I didn't say it often, but I did have really great brothers. I wouldn't want anyone else in my corner when push came to shove. Except now, I needed Felik in my corner as well. Based on the fact that he was there with us, in my brothers' sacred space, a future with all of us united as one family, was looking good.

Louie glanced down at his own son playing, and a look of horror came over his face. "Do you think these ones will get into as much trouble as we did?"

I laughed loudly. "Definitely."

Connor and Joey just smiled, but it quickly turned into horror as they realized what they were in for. The pranks, the shenanigans, the absolute insanity that came along with being a child in the Ferrini home.

"Oh, I'm sure they will. They'll keep us on our toes. This is why I think we should shield them from the family business until they're at least thirty-five." Andro chuckled and put a hand on Joey's shoulder in a loving gesture.

Joey leaned into the touch so that Andro's hand was caressing his cheek. Then Joey's eyes fluttered closed.

My heart melted. To see my brother so utterly in love and being loved in return gave me hope. I too could have that. With Felik.

"You may have a point, Brother." Louie blew out a slow breath. "I already feel too old for this shit."

I sank back into Felik's embrace, and he put a hand over my stomach. There wasn't a child there that we knew of yet, but it was possible, and we both knew that we wanted one in the future. With a contented sigh, I imagined the look on my face was probably

similar to Joey's.

Love. Joy. Hope.

"The two of you really ought to get married," Andro said.

Joey swatted his leg. "No shop talk in the baby room."

"Is that a real rule?" I asked.

"Yes," both omega dads said quickly.

"If we let them, those two would talk shop all the time. And when you have Trev around," Joey indicated to the guard at the door, "or any of the others, it gets downright depressing. Throw your father into the mix and the great-uncles—we can't get away from it. So this room is a safe room."

"Safe room?" Andro said, looking at the walls. "That's not a bad idea." He snapped his fingers. "Trev, make a note that we should look into making this a safe room. Something where we could hit a button and everything is secure. Like with bulletproof shields on the windows, bars on the doors, locks, that sort of thing."

"Sure thing." Trev pulled out his phone and started writing things down. "I'll get in contact with Sylvan. He's good with that stuff."

"Perfect."

"What did I just say?" Joey said. "No shop talk."

"That's family safety talk, sweetheart."

Joey rolled his eyes. Little Theo toddled over to Trev. When the guard tried to sidestep away, the little one grabbed his pant legs and tugged.

"Uppy," he said.

Joey winced. "Yeah, "Dada" and "uppy" are his go-to words."

Trev looked around the room like he was lost.

"Well, pick him up, Trev." Joey chuckled. "You heard Andro, no shop talk. That means you're off-duty."

"I'm never off-duty." Trev leaned over and picked up the baby. Oddly enough, the tough alpha looked pretty cute holding a child in his arms.

Later that night, my brothers didn't protest when Felik returned to my suite with me. Nor did they post a guard. At least, not one that I could see. It was possible they had eyes on all exits so they would know if Felik tried to leave the house, but they apparently trusted that he wouldn't harm me.

Felik held me in his arms, my back to his chest as we lay together naked in my bed.

"Tell me about growing up with your family." I dragged my fingertips up his arm, over his round muscles.

Families were a subject neither of us had spoken much about since we began dating, but we could talk freely now.

Felik let out a long sigh. "Probably not unlike how you grew up, except my brothers—mostly Vince—didn't like me. Cord was all right, now that I think of it. But I was always the outsider. I lived in a separate wing of the house, I was sent to separate

schools. The only thing we learned together was how to fight.”

“Like what?”

“Boxing, mixed martial arts, stuff like that. We spent so many hours at the range learning to shoot. Vince liked that the most.”

“What about you? What did you like the most?” I couldn’t imagine Felik enjoying the violence like his brother.

“Surprisingly enough, I enjoyed learning hand-to-hand combat. Knife fighting. There was a business associate of my father who taught us how to use blades. Vince didn’t like it because he said he’d never let an enemy get that close. I loved it because I knew just how close my true enemies were.”

I turned in his arms to face him. “Not now they aren’t.”

He grinned. “No, now they’re not.”

“Even though there are many more activities I prefer over fighting, I did enjoy—and excel at—Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Maybe I could show you some moves.” I ground my hips into his. “It’s where I learned to be so flexible.”

Felik groaned. “Omega, the ways in which you tempt me...”

FELIK

With great reluctance, I pressed a kiss to my mate's forehead and then slipped out of bed before I turned to walk away.

Jeremiah reached out and gripped my wrist. "Don't go." His sleepy voice did something to my insides. If this meeting wasn't incredibly important, I would have done exactly what he asked and climbed back into bed with him.

"I have to." I leaned down and gave him a kiss on the lips. "I'll be back soon."

"It's too early." His words were more mumbles, but I knew what he meant.

I chuckled at how groggy he always was until he'd had a full eight hours of sleep. "It is early, but if we were at home right now, you would be getting up for your Econ class."

Andro insisted that we stay a while longer, so our weekend trip had expanded into a full week. They were able to work their magic to get Jeremiah excused from his classes, so we spent our week lazing about the huge house they all lived in, playing with his nephews, and swimming in the pool.

While Jeremiah stayed current on his classwork, I met with his brothers to learn about their side of the business. They didn't completely trust me, but we were getting closer.

Our nights were spent with the two of us chatting and making love until the early

morning hours. Now that we could be completely honest with one another, it opened up an entirely new side to our relationship.

Today, I had to meet with Vince to convince him that I was going to hand over Jeremiah soon. The Ferrinis had concocted a plan in which I would feed Vince information to gain his trust so we could wait a little longer before he went after Jeremiah.

I wasn't looking forward to the meeting. It was necessary for the next step of our plan. If I waited too long to give my brother something, he might retaliate in a different way, and we didn't need that.

"I'll see you soon."

Jeremiah's lips turned down in a pout, and it was nearly my undoing. "I really think you should take a guard with you."

"I can't, love. If I take a guard, my brother will be suspicious."

"Fine." He fully opened his eyes, making sure I knew he was serious. "But you need to contact me as soon as you're finished."

"I will." I kissed him one last time before getting dressed and heading to the bathroom. He was sound asleep before I came back in. I didn't bother speaking with Andro or Louie before leaving.

Orsino was the only one in the kitchen, and he wasn't one for small talk.

Within an hour, I was pulling into my ancestral home, the place I had grown up before being shipped off to boarding school. I hadn't returned since my father's death over a year ago, and even then, I avoided my brothers as much as I could. I had only

been at the house for the memorial service.

This was Vince's home now.

I got out of my car and buttoned my suit jacket, putting on a professional air, knowing that once I was inside, I would be talking about my mate in a way that grated on my nerves.

The butler greeted me at the door and took me to my brother's office.

Vince was sitting behind his grand desk like he was some sort of king. "Why the hell aren't you in Stanford or wherever the hell that omega lives?" He didn't even look up from the notebook he was writing in.

"We came up and visited his family. He wanted to stay longer to be with his nephews. So here we are."

Vince raised an eyebrow. "So the omega is here? I know you've been staying with the Ferrinis all week. You must have some good information for me. No way you could have been so deeply embedded without learning something useful."

"I've been confined to just one floor. It's not as if I have full run of the house, if that's what you're thinking."

"Do you have information for me or not? You wouldn't be dumb enough to be staying in their home without getting anything, right?"

I nodded and cleared my throat. "I might have some stuff." I pulled out a slip of paper and handed it to him. "They have an important shipment coming in. There's the address and time. That's all I could find."

“Guns, drugs, or people?”

“Guns and drugs.” The Ferrinis might’ve been the mafia, but they didn’t traffic people. They at least had some ethics among them. Unlike Vince.

The door opened, and my other brother, Cord, came in. He smiled when he saw me. For a moment, it seemed genuine and took me by surprise. “Felik! When did you get here?” He wrapped me in a tight hug.

“Just a few minutes ago.” I hugged him back, actually feeling welcomed in my family home. “I’m just bringing Vince up to speed on my little project.”

“Project?” He looked between the two of us. “What does Vince have you working on?”

How much of Vince’s scheming was Cord not aware of?

“He’s doing his part to help me take down that fucker Andro,” Vince said.

Cord rolled his eyes. “I wish he would forget that fucking mission. The Ferrinis are too big for us to go after. And even if they weren’t, our dealings have always been good. We might not be allies, but we’ve never been enemies. Not till you took over.”

“Fuck off and leave the strategizing to me. I run this family.” Vince stood up and waved off Cord. “I don’t want to hear your arguments.”

Cord shook his head, obviously defeated. Clearly, this wasn’t the first time they’d had this argument. He looked at me and raised an eyebrow. “You’re going along with his scheme?”

I held up my hands in surrender. “I’m just doing what I’m told.”

”And what exactly is that?”

I looked to Vince to see if there was something I wasn’t supposed to say, but he was too busy scribbling in his notebook to look up, so I took that as permission to spill. ”I’m in a relationship with Jeremiah Ferrini.”

“The youngest omega? He”s not even involved in the business!”

Vince scoffed. “He’s a Ferrini. That means he’s fair game. Clearly, he’ll spread his legs for whatever alpha shows him any attention.”

My fists clenched because I didn’t like hearing my omega being talked about that way.

Cord rolled his eyes then pointed a finger at Vince. ”You’re gonna get us killed. All of us. Our blood will be on your hands.” Then he turned to me, looking at me with more disappointment than I’d seen from anyone in my family in a long time. “I can”t believe you’re going along with this, Felix.” He shook his head and left.

Was it possible that Cord could be reasoned with? I made a mental note to discuss the possibility with Andro. Cord could be an ally for later. If things went as south as I thought they would and we succeeded in taking Vince out, Cord would be a good replacement for the family.

I certainly wasn’t cut out for the job.

Vince watched Cord walk away and then glanced up at me. ”Pay him no mind.”

“I wasn’t even listening.” I could barely believe the persona I was putting on. If Vince knew me at all, he’d know how fucking fake it was. ”I’m gonna head out. I said I was grabbing doughnuts. They’ll be expecting me back soon.”

”Whatever.” Vince didn’t seem to care as I left his office.

I considered looking for Cord, but I wasn’t sure I could trust him, so I didn’t say a word as I left the house.

Instead, I planned to run the information by Andro. He likely knew more about my family than I did. Either way, I was just happy to be making my way back home, where Jeremiah was.

JEREMIAH

Once my mate left, I dozed for a little while longer. When the sunlight hit my eyes and no amount of tossing or turning would block it out, I threw the covers back and got out of bed. I went about my morning business—brushing my teeth, washing my face, and using the toilet. That’s when I saw the blood.

I sucked in a breath. I was not prepared to find blood between my legs this morning or any morning. No one ever was, especially someone who was pretty sure they were pregnant.

I showered quickly and got dressed in a pair of simple jeans and an old band t-shirt from my high school days. Trev was standing outside my door, acting as guard. I knew it would be several more hours before Felik returned from seeing his brother. He planned on taking the scenic route to his family home, in case he was being tailed by anyone. He also planned to make a few seemingly random stops to act like he didn’t have a care in the world.

Meanwhile, I was stuck in this house with just my family, dealing with a crisis. One I didn’t feel comfortable discussing with them.

I turned to Trev, hoping to pull off casual and not as panicked as I felt. “Where is everyone?”

“Orsino left to go to one of the casinos. Joey and Andro are still in their suite. On days like today, where there isn’t much going on, the two of them tend to spend a lot of time in there. Same with Louie and Connor. Do you need something?” Trev’s

brow furrowed as he looked me over.

I appreciated his astuteness when I needed a guard, he was definitely good at his job, but right now, I needed to be examined, but not by one of my brother's guards.

"I don't know where to start. First, I need to get to the nearest urgent care or hospital."

Trev's eyes narrowed. "There's an urgent care clinic attached to the hospital in town, not far from the casino actually. Are you ill?"

Trev was family, a cousin, but he answered to my brother, and I was not about to give him any more information than he needed.

"It's an omega thing. Don't worry about it." I wanted answers for myself before I could even begin to answer them for anyone else. I pushed to move past him, but he gripped my arm gently.

"Jer, you're not leaving this house on your own. We'll go and take care of whatever you need, but we'll go armed." There was no mistaking the determination in his voice. It was a compromise I could live with.

We wouldn't alert Andro, but I would have to go under guard. "Fine. Give me a gun."

He smiled. "Only because I know you know how to use one. Honestly, I'm surprised you're not packing already."

I shrugged. "Might be. You'll never know." I wasn't, obviously.

And when Felik pulled out a sidearm at dinner, I was surprised. Since I wasn't involved in the family business, at least not directly, I didn't feel the need to carry a

gun all the time. I rarely did on campus, and I certainly hadn't been about to try to get one past airport security. I didn't even know they made TSA-approved gun cases for traveling until he later explained it to me.

Felik had said he was going to visit the armory before leaving to meet with his brother. I hoped he had an entire arsenal with him to deal with Vince.

"Let's go. We'll get you a holster and whatever you need."

"Thanks, Trev. I appreciate it."

Within twenty-five minutes, we were on the road. Trev was in the driver's seat of one of the many SUVs Andro owned. Why we had so many cars, I would never understand.

Our trip was slightly delayed while I emptied the contents of my stomach into a toilet bowl. That had not been a pleasant experience, but Trev waited patiently outside the door and then offered me a bottle of water afterward.

The man deserved a raise. He was going above and beyond without asking any questions, even though he had to suspect why I needed a doctor so suddenly.

I appreciated his discretion regardless.

It felt like hours before we were taken to an exam room, though in reality, it hadn't taken long at all. There was some paperwork to fill out since I hadn't been to a doctor in this area in a long time, but at least the place wasn't busy.

Trev stayed in the waiting room, reluctantly. Meanwhile, I was alone in the exam room, my leg bouncing up and down. The paper that covered the exam table crinkled underneath me each time I moved.

The doctor came in and offered me a kind smile. He was an older man, his hair as white as his lab coat. "What seems to be the concern today?"

"It's possible that I'm pregnant, and I noticed some spotting this morning."

He jotted something on his notepad. "Okay. Do you have a confirmed pregnancy test?"

I shook my head. "No."

"Let's get one of those. Make sure we know what we're working with. And then, if it's positive, we can wheel you over to our ultrasound room and get you looked at. Is there an alpha that you'd like to have present?"

I bit my lip. "Yes, but he's working today, and I know he wouldn't want to miss this." I wrung my hands in my lap, unsure what to do. Felik would hate not being here. I only hoped that he would forgive me for going without him.

"Just take a deep breath." The doctor patted my shoulder reassuringly. "We'll make sure everything's okay, and then your alpha can be here for the next one."

"Okay." I did as I was told and tried to settle my nerves. "Thank you."

He handed me the things I needed to take a pee test. We didn't even have to wait the full three minutes before it came back bright and positive.

"Oh wow. It's really real." Panic seized me, and I put my hands over my stomach as if I could protect the precious life there. "But I'm spotting. Could something be wrong?"

"Spotting can sometimes be normal. That's what we'll figure out with the

ultrasound.”

I was glad we came to a full-service clinic. I debated on whether or not to let Trev in the room with me, but I knew Felik wouldn’t like another alpha present for this part. Not if he didn’t get to experience it himself.

I sent Trev a quick message so he wasn’t worried. Having some tests run, should be done soon.

No problem. I’m getting a snack from the coffee cart now. I was glad he was keeping occupied. I felt bad leaving him alone for so long.

Inside the ultrasound room, the tech gave me a wide smile, as the doctor turned the screen so they could both see it. ”It’s just faster this way.” He nodded toward the tech to get started.

I wondered if he had recognized my family name. We donated quite a lot to this hospital. We donated a lot to a lot of places. Generous funding was one surefire way to get in good with a community. Or so my father always told me.

The tech got to work with the wand, but my focus was on the doctor’s face. I wanted to see if there were any signs of concern in case he tried to shield me from bad news.

The doctor looked at the screen intently, clearly understanding what it all meant. Everything looked like staticy globs to me, and maybe a little bean or two.

The tech held the wand still and pointed to the screen. ”Right there.”

”What is it?” I asked. “Is something wrong?”

The doctor smiled and patted my shoulder. ”Well, spotting is definitely normal in this

situation, but there's not a lot to worry about. But I'm glad you came in, because this way we know what we're dealing with."

"What are we dealing with?" I was getting more worried every time he told me not to worry.

"See there, that circle and the one next to it?" He pointed to the screen again.

"Yes. Is that my womb?"

"Well, the large thing around it is. Those two circles are your babies."

"Babies?" I looked between him and the monitor. "There are two?"

The doctor smiled. "Yes, two."

"Holy shit, there's two?"

"Yes." The doctor chuckled. "You'll have some fantastic news for your alpha when he returns home."

Fantastic news indeed. I knew he wanted children. I knew I wanted children. But two at once was.... terrifying? Amazing? Mind-blowing. All of the above.

The tech printed some of the ultrasound pictures for me, and I stared at the image on the screen while I walked to where Trev was.

"Everything all right?"

I handed the images to him to decipher because words weren't coming to me.

“What am I looking at? You have some blob things? Is it a kidney stone? Those suck.”

“Babies. Two of them.” I shook my head, just staring into space. “Can you believe it?”

Trev whistled. “Holy shit.”

“No kidding.”

Trev put his arm around my shoulder to comfort me but also to guide me to where we were going. We were just a few steps from the car when I finally snapped back to reality.

We needed to get home before anyone noticed we were gone, but I could barely comprehend where I was and what was happening. Shock gripped me and would not relent.

The snap of a gunshot splitting the air pulled me from my own mind. I looked around to where it could be coming from as I reached for my weapon. We were in the parking lot of the hospital, and with the way sound echoed on all the concrete, it could have come from anywhere.

Then I realized that Trev was slumping over as his legs folded unnaturally beneath him.

I gripped his midsection to hold him upright, but he was too heavy.

He moaned in pain and a warm liquid covered my hand.

“Trev! Trev?” I dropped to the ground next to him and released the gun so I could

hold my hands over his wound while blood began pooling between my fingers.

Strong arms gripped mine and pulled me away, leaving Trev to bleed out.

I fought against them, needing to stop the bleeding. If I could get Trev inside the hospital, he would be fine. We were so close to the doctors who could help him.

“No!” Trev reached for me with one hand as he grappled for his gun with the other.

One of the men let go of me long enough to deliver a kick to Trev’s face.

His hand fell to the concrete, and he was completely still.

“No—” I tried to yell for help but a hand covered my mouth and muffled my scream, while an arm snaked around my middle and carried me away.

FELIK

Once I left my brother's house, I worked on shaking whatever tail had been on me. I hadn't noticed one when I left, but that didn't mean Vince didn't have one on me as soon as he could. Not that it really mattered. They knew where the Ferrinis lived. They didn't need to follow me back.

It was a flex to remind me that he was in charge.

The drive back to the Ferrinis was long, but I wanted to stop at a bookstore to pick up a little something for Jeremiah. There was a little bookshop I enjoyed going to when I was younger and needed to get away from my family. I would sit in there for hours, just reading whatever random books I could find.

It had been a long time since I'd been there, and I looked forward to the day when I could take my mate and show him the collection of used books that brought me so much joy in my youth. He would likely get lost in the stacks, combing through all the books they'd collected, just like I did.

It sounded like a perfect date to me.

Unfortunately, I didn't have all the time in the world to go through the books, but I found a few that I knew my mate would enjoy. And before I knew it, forty-five minutes had passed with me just looking through the genres I knew he enjoyed. It was well beyond time for me to return to my mate.

He would likely be up and around now. Probably playing with the little ones.

I couldn't wait until the two of us were fathers. Perhaps it would be smart for us to be married, especially since I knew Jeremiah was it for me. He was my one and only. I didn't need a wedding band or ceremony to say as much, but it was important for the family image to publicly declare that we were united and in love.

Or else it may look like just a marriage of convenience to ally our families, as most marriages in families like ours were.

When I left the bookstore, I noticed a jeweler had opened up next door, and it seemed like an omen. When I was a kid, all the shops had been empty, but now they were filled with new stores. A white banner with gold lettering that said "Grand Opening" was hanging over the front window.

I stepped inside and began looking through their collection. A simple black band caught my eye. Inside was the word "Creativity" and the matching band said "Courage." Just like the quote Jeremiah loved. I didn't need to look any further.

That was the set I wanted. It was fate.

I didn't know what Jeremiah's ring size was, but I guessed, and within a few minutes, I was walking out of that place with the ring and its partner in my pocket.

Things were looking up, but I should have known it wouldn't last.

My phone rang, so I answered it immediately, surprised to see that Cord was calling. "Hello."

He was whispering. "You better get back here."

"What? Why? I'm on my way to see Jeremiah."

"No, Jeremiah is here."

"What?" My blood ran cold, and I started to run toward the car. "How?"

"I don't know. But he is, and I didn't get a good look at him, Fee, but he was covered in blood. Get back here now."

I stopped in my tracks. "Keep him safe, Cord. I'm coming."

I wouldn't get any answers until I arrived, so I needed to get there fast. I hung up the phone and I got into the car, immediately calling Andro before I even pulled out of the lot.

He answered on the second ring. "How did things go with your brother?"

"Not great." I took a deep breath and tried to think clearly. "Where the fuck is Jeremiah? Is he at the house?"

"Of course he's here. He's been in his room all day."

"Are you sure? Because Cord just called me and said they have Jeremiah there."

There was commotion on the other line, and I could hear Andro swearing. "Hold on. Something's happening downstairs."

I held my breath as I listened to Andro walking and shouting. The helplessness of the situation consumed me. Here I was in my car, far away from either house and not knowing where Jeremiah was. I never should have left him.

"Trev! Fuck." Andro's voice took on a panicked edge. There was a thud like the phone had been dropped.

“What’s going on?”

“Trev’s here. He’s been shot. Fuck.”

“Where’s Jeremiah?” I shouted.

There was more noise, and it felt like the world stood still for hours while I waited to hear more. I was at a standstill. Did I return to the Ferrini home or did I go to my brother’s place? What if it was a trap? What if they really had Jeremiah? I couldn’t leave him in Vince’s clutches.

“Felik?” Andro said.

I nodded as if he could see me through the phone. “Yeah, I’m here. What’s happening?”

“One of Vince’s men cornered Trev and Jeremiah outside the hospital.”

Hospital. Why had they gone to the hospital? “What—”

“Trev says they took Jeremiah. He passed out before he could say more, but he had an ultrasound picture on him. Jeremiah’s pregnant.”

The world slowed to a crawl as the sound of blood pounded in my ears. My pregnant mate was in the hands of my sadistic brother?

”I’m going back to my house.” I pointed the car toward the highway and hit the gas.

“This could be a trap,” Andro said. ”Come back here so we can figure out a plan. If they do truly have Jeremiah—”

“No, I’m going there. I won’t let Vince have him for even a second longer than necessary.”

Andro remained silent, so I hung up the phone and headed home. I broke several laws on my way, but I didn’t care. The more police that followed me there, the better.

I wasn’t even sure if I turned the car off after I shoved it into park and got out before I burst through the front door.

Cord was walking down the staircase as I entered. “He’s in the living room.”

“He’s here? He’s okay?”

Cord nodded but grabbed my arm before I could go toward the room. “Look, man, hold yourself together. If Vince knows how much Jeremiah means to you, he becomes a pawn, not just for you, but for the Ferrinis as well.”

I shook his hand off and glared at him. “What the fuck do you know about these things?”

“More than you think. I don’t want Vince in power any more than you do.”

I narrowed my eyes. Earlier I’d wondered if I could trust him, but now that Jeremiah’s life was on the line, I wasn’t sure which way to lean.

“Trust me,” Cord said. “If you want to take Vince down, I’ll support you in that all the way. But we’ve got to be smart. Vince is deadly, and he’ll take all of us out. Family means nothing to him.”

There was a story there, I knew it. But at that moment, I couldn’t bring myself to care. I nodded and made my way to the sitting room.

Jeremiah was on the plush leather sofa and his hands, arms, and shirt were covered in blood. He had been crying at some point, but now, he just glared daggers at Vince, who sat across from him with a wicked smirk on his face.

"What the fuck, Vince?" I stood between the two men, ready to step in front of Jeremiah if needed but not giving away my allegiance quite yet.

"I'm glad you could join us, Fee. Cord ratted me out, didn't he? You would have figured out that I took your new boyfriend if you had just gone straight back to the Ferrinis' house. What did you do, get lost in your bookstore?"

"Fuck off." Was I truly that predictable? So much so that it could have gotten Jeremiah hurt or worse. "We had a plan."

"What does it matter if I waited for you to turn him over or if I captured him myself? Hell, I probably had him tied up in the back of a car before you even left here this morning."

"Why did you take him at all? You need to let him go or you're gonna have Andro, Louie, and Orsino coming down on all of us within the hour."

"Let them." He laughed, almost giddy at the idea. "I have this place locked down tighter than Fort Knox. They can't get through. Besides, you think they'd leave their own little omegas unprotected just to come for their brother? Not a chance."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" I was finally seeing him for the monster he had become. He had always been an asshole, but now, he was truly deranged beyond comprehension.

"Nothing. We finally have someone leading this family with the balls to do what our father should have done. Their territory should be ours."

I met Jeremiah's gaze. "Are you hurt?" I wanted to go to his side, to comfort him, but if Vince knew I cared, then we'd never get away. He couldn't find out how much Jeremiah meant to me.

He shook his head. "This is Trev's blood. They shot him. I don't know if he's..."

"He's probably dead, little omega." Vince leaned forward and pulled a decanter of whiskey off the table to refill his glass.

I swung my leg, kicking the coffee table and shattering it to pieces.

Jeremiah jumped in surprise, and so did Vince. I had the upper hand for just a moment, and then Vince was on his feet.

"I knew you were double-crossing me, Fee. You have no interest in taking down that son of a bitch Andro. You're one of them now, aren't you?" He launched forward, fists swinging. He caught my jaw, but I dodged to the left and sucker-punched him in the gut.

Vince doubled over but recovered quickly. He opened his mouth to yell for the guards, but Cord was there.

He had grabbed a piece of the broken table and cracked Vince over the shoulder.

"I'll bar the door. If his personal guards get in here, we're dead. Unless we kill him first," Cord said. "If you're going to kill him, do it now."

I had not woken up this day thinking I was going to murder my own brother. Yet, here I was, about to do just that. When I'd chosen my weapons for the day, I'd only picked a handgun and a knife. They were mostly meant for show. I didn't ever intend to use them, but I wouldn't hesitate to now, not if it meant getting Jeremiah free.

I didn't know what consequences would come after taking out Vince, but when he came up ready to swing again, I grabbed him by the throat. I was always the one who had taken our fighting lessons to heart. He had been too blinded by his arrogance to think an enemy would ever get so close.

But I knew it was a possibility. A probability. Even though I wasn't usually a fighter, all I had to think about was the scared, terrified look on my mate's face to properly motivate me. He probably got covered in Trev's blood while trying to save the man's life.

So much pain and violence because Vince was a sadistic fuck.

What should have been a joyous day—the day we found out we were expecting—turned into something that would traumatize my mate for the rest of his life. Mine too.

"Yield," I said to Vince in the deepest alpha voice I'd ever used. "Let Cord take over, and you can live."

"Never." His eyes stayed locked on mine, not expressing an ounce of remorse for what he'd done or was planning to do.

There was no hesitation as I pulled the knife I kept on my side and stabbed it under his ribs, burying the six-inch blade as deep as it would go.

Blood gurgled from Vince's mouth before he fell to the floor.

FELIK

“What now?” Jeremiah asked.

He was in my lap on the couch in his suite. Our suite, now, I supposed.

As soon as we confirmed Vince was dead, I got Jeremiah far from there. Andro and Orsino showed up just as we were leaving. I left them to talk with Cord about what the next steps would be.

Once I got Jeremiah home, I brought him straight to the shower and removed his bloody clothes. I held him as he cried over Trev because we hadn’t yet heard if he would survive his wounds. And as he allowed me to scrub him clean, he finally ran out of tears.

“I don’t know what happens next.” I held him tighter, never wanting to let him go. “Except that we’ll be together. Cord will likely fill the void Vince left with my family business, and with any luck, an alliance will form between our two families.”

“I’d like that.” The rise and fall of Jeremiah’s chest was soothing. Just that morning I’d held him with such joy and optimism, yet it felt like a lifetime ago.

“You’ll graduate soon. After that, I assume you’d like to live near your brothers or perhaps here at the house.”

I felt him smile against my chest. “I love my family, but I would rather have a place of our own. One we could raise our children in...” He lifted his head and looked at

me. His eyes were red-rimmed and tired, but there was a sparkle of joy there.

I grinned. “Do you have something to tell me, Jer?”

He slapped my chest. “You already know!”

“Trev had the ultrasound picture on him. Andro told me. I’m sorry you weren’t the one to tell me that you’re going to have my child.”

“Children.”

I cocked my head, trying to catch his meaning. “What?”

“Children. There are two. In about nine months, we’ll have twins.”

His words made sense, but I just stared at him, dumbfounded. Two. We would have two babies, not one. “You’re sure?”

He nodded, and his eyes sparkled even brighter now. “Yeah. I woke up this morning and I was bleeding a little bit. It scared me, so Trev took me to the doctor. They did an ultrasound. I’m sorry I did it without you, but I had to know if something was wrong?—”

I kissed him, pressing my lips to his and silencing his words. I put all the love I had for him in my kiss as I held his face like he was my most cherished possession. Because he was.

“I take it you’re happy about this.” Jeremiah chuckled once I let him take a breath.

“I am. I’m happy with anything you provide me. All I need is you.”

“Thank you, Felik.” He cupped my cheek and stared into my eyes. “Thank you for coming for me. I’m sorry you had to?—”

I put a finger to his lips. “I don’t regret it. Not for one minute. You’re more important to me than he has ever been. I would kill him a thousand times if it meant keeping you safe and out of his clutches.”

Jeremiah rested his forehead against mine. “I love you.”

I closed my eyes and soaked in the weight of the moment. “And I love you, my omega, my mate. The father of my babies. You’re it for me.”

I went to kiss him again, but a knock stopped me. “I can make them go away.”

Jeremiah sighed. “It’s probably my brothers. They’ll want to know I’m all right. And I want to know how Trev is doing.”

It was Andro at the door, followed by Joey, Connor, and Louie.

“Orsino and a few of our guards are still with your brother,” Andro said. He and Joey sat in the chair across from the couch. Louie and Connor settled in another chair. It seemed that none of us were letting our mates get far from us tonight.

“How is Trev?” Jeremiah asked.

Andro took a deep breath. For the first time, I was seeing a fatigued man who seemed to hold the weight of the world on his shoulders. “He’s doing okay. His surgery to remove the bullet and repair some of the damage went well. He’s not out of the woods yet, but the doctor is optimistic. But he’ll have a very long road to recovery.”

“How did he get back here?” Jeremiah asked.

Andro shrugged. “I don’t know. His phone was on him but not working. It broke during the struggle or when he was shot. Our best assumption is that he held on long enough to drive back so he could let us know what happened.”

“If he had stayed at the hospital...” Jeremiah left the rest unsaid.

Trev would have been treated a hell of a lot faster and lost significantly less blood had he stayed where he was. But the man was doing his job. His actions allowed us to get the heads-up we needed that Jeremiah had been taken. I would forever be thankful for that.

“We’ll ensure he gets the best care possible.” Louie was staring out the window, just as worried about his cousin as the rest of us.

“And the Mennettis? What of that whole situation?” Jeremiah asked.

Surprisingly, I didn’t even care. Their world could crumble beneath their feet. Well, Cord didn’t deserve that, but Vince did.

“Orisino will help Cord with the transition of power. Vince didn’t have any strong allies, at least not that we can tell. It shouldn’t be too crazy, but it can be dangerous if anyone else wants to challenge him for leadership.”

“Cord will do well.” I was glad to hear things were amicable between our families.

Andro nodded. “I agree. He’s much more reasonable than Vince.”

I snorted. “A fucking rabid racoon would have been more reasonable than Vince.”

“Are you okay, Jeremiah? Truly?” Andro didn’t try to mask his concern for his baby brother. It was a moment of vulnerability I never expected to see on the mafia boss’s

face, yet there it was.

Jeremiah nodded and blew out a long breath. “I am. I have all of you, and Felik. And we’re going to have a baby.”

Andro smiled.

Joey laughed. “We know. Trev kind of ruined that surprise.”

“Yeah, but you must not have looked very closely at the ultrasound, or you would have seen not one, but two babies. Felik and I are having twins.”

There was a round of gasps and squeals of surprise in the room. Then Joey and Connor were hugging Jeremiah, and I was trapped under not one but three omegas.

“We’re so happy for you!”

The two omegas released Jeremiah, but I could tell there would be a lot more squealing in my life around those three.

“Anything you need, let us know.”

“Of course, I’ll have so many questions.” The happiness in Jeremiah’s voice rang true, and I loved hearing it. We could finally begin the next part of our lives now.

After a little more chit-chat and reassurances that Jeremiah was okay, the family left us alone in the room again.

I still held Jeremiah in my lap. I was not willing to let him go.

“I love you so much, my omega.”

He sighed and kissed my chin. “I love you too, my alpha.”

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I pushed Matias in his stroller, more as something to lean on than because I wanted the extra weight. I had plenty of that without adding another forty pounds to the load.

But I had to keep moving.

It was the only way I was getting these babies out of me... And they were coming out. I was coming up on thirty-eight weeks and was ready for my planned C-section.

But noooooo.... Every day, when I showed up for my exam, my damn doctor just shook his head and told me to give it one more day.

I kept trying, I really did. But I was done. I didn't have another day of no sleep, constant peeing, shallow breaths, and an itchy tummy in me.

Those babies needed to get out!

Connor and Joey did their best to remind me that it was all worth it in the end, and a little bit more suffering would quickly be forgotten as soon as I had my babies in my arms.

I wanted to believe them, but it was hard to keep sight of that when I was in so much discomfort.

Everything was a chore, and I just wanted to sleep.

“And where the hell is Felik, anyway?” A contraction locked up my stomach, and I had to curl forward, leaning heavily on the arms of the stroller as Connor flanked my

side.

“He’s nearby. I promised to call him if we need him.” He looked at me and raised an eyebrow. “Do we need him yet?”

“No. These kids are never coming out.” I took a deep breath and started moving forward again, circling the driveway for the millionth time. “I don’t even know why they’re being so stubborn. This better not be an indication of what I’ve got coming because I’m trying to make my belly as inhospitable as possible.”

“Yeah, we’ve noticed.” Connor laughed. “I don’t know how you managed to finish a giant bowl of chili and two cloves of garlic last night, but dude, it’s seeping out of your pores.”

“And yet, these babies aren’t taking the hint. Why aren’t they seeping out of me too? They’re just so—” I stopped short, taking stock of what was happening.

“What?” Connor looked me in the eyes, and then his gaze slowly traveled down, seeing the puddle of fluid between my feet. “Oh, thank fuck. I couldn’t take another day of this.” He hit Felik’s number on his phone at the same time that he was calling over Nil to help get me inside.

Within seconds, I was being whisked inside to the makeshift paternity ward that was now a permanent fixture in our home.

Felik came running in behind me. “Jer, love. Are you okay?”

I grimaced through a stronger contraction. “They finally got the eviction notice.”

He smiled and leaned down to kiss my cheek. “You’re so strong, Jeremiah. You’ve got this.”

The babies were large for twins, and we had already been told a natural delivery was out of the question since both were positioned wrong. Which was why waiting just pissed me off. But now that it was happening, it was a little scary. “Are you sure?” I placed my hand over my belly, wondering if maybe it was too soon after all. “I’m not sure I can do it.”

The doctor walked in with a smile on his face, probably because his time with me was almost over. “Lucky for you, I’m planning to do most of the work. You just get to relax over there and wait for the sweet sound of wailing.”

Felik chuckled as if that joke was supposed to be funny, but a quick glare from me shut him right up.

“Just keep them safe.” As cranky as they were making me, I already loved my babies so deeply, and I wanted them as safe and sound on the outside of my body as they had been while inside. “Please.”

The doctor sobered up and smiled. “Of course, Jeremiah. I promise to keep you and those babies just fine. Now, let’s get you ready to meet these little ones.”

Sounded good to me. I finally closed my eyes and relaxed, trusting Felik and our medical staff to do what they needed to do while I finally got some rest once the most immediate pain let up.

I might have even nodded off for a few seconds before that first cry pierced the air and a squirming baby girl was placed on my chest. “A girl!”

“She’s perfect, love.” Felik was right there with me, staring down in wonder at the life we created together.

“And her identical twin.” The doctor placed the second baby on me before covering them both with a blanket and then giving us a few moments of privacy and skin-to-

skin time as a family while he did what he needed to do on the other side of the drape.

When the glow of the moment faded and my exhaustion fully set in, I passed out hard, finally resting with the knowledge that my baby girls were healthy and safe in their father's protective arms.

When I woke up next, I was back in my own bed with a bassinet pulled up right beside me. Both of my beautiful daughters were sleeping peacefully as my alpha watched over all of us.

"How are you feeling, love?" Felik reached over and brushed a few hairs off my forehead. "You've had quite a day."

"Tired but happy." I reached over and ran my finger through my daughters' downy hair. "They're good?"

"Amazing." He leaned over and gave me a proper kiss. "I'm the luckiest man alive."

I winked. "Yeah, and don't you forget it."

He chuckled and kissed me again. "Never."

"So, what are we calling them?"

Felik held my hand to his lips and pressed a firm kiss to it. "My favorite nanny was named Eleanor. I was thinking Ellie."

"I love that." I nodded eagerly. After a moment, I thought of a name that seemed appropriate. "How do you feel about Verna? In honor of my father."

"I love it." He slid onto the bed beside me. "And I love you."

“Me too, alpha.” I let his mouth caress mine, mingle with it in a dance that only led to one thing.

At least, it used to lead to one thing.

This time, it led to a tiny whimper that led to cries and the first of many feedings in my future. And it was the best future I could have ever imagined for myself.

The alpha of my dreams, my family safe and healthy, and beautiful babies to nurture and love for the rest of my days. Nothing could be better than that.

Next in the series...

When Orsino, the ruthless enforcer for his family's powerful mafia, shakes down a desperate man over a massive debt to their casino, he expects the usual pleas and excuses. What he doesn't expect is the man's son, Ethan, to step forward with an unthinkable offer — himself as payment.

Ethan is an innocent omega. A virgin vet tech with dreams of opening his own pet shelter. He knows nothing of the dark world he's stepping into, but his determination to save his father leads him into Orsino's cold, unforgiving embrace.

To everyone's surprise, including his own, Orsino accepts Ethan's offer and takes him home, giving him a place in his own room. The hardened mafia man finds himself slowly drawn to Ethan's pure heart and gentle nature, breaking down the walls he's built around his own. As their bond deepens, Orsino's icy exterior melts, and he begins to fall for the innocent omega who has turned his world upside down.

But the mafia world is treacherous, and enemies lurk in the shadows. When those enemies set their sights on Ethan, Orsino must confront the full force of his feelings and protect the man who has come to mean everything to him.

In a world where love is a dangerous gamble, will Orsino be able to keep Ethan safe, or will the debts of the past tear them apart?