



# POSSESSIVE ENEMY

—KINGS OF MAFIA—

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
MICHELLE HEARD



KINGS OF MAFIA

# POSSESSIVE ENEMY

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
MICHELLE HEARD



Copyright © 2026 *POSSESSIVE ENEMY* by Michelle Heard.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written consent of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotation embodied in critical reviews and various other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

The characters and events in this book are purely fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, things, living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

Photographer: [Michelle Lancaster](#)

Cover Model: Anthony Patamisi

Cover Designer: [Okay Creations](#)

Editor: Sheena Taylor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Dedication](#)

[Songlist](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Possessive Enemy](#)

[Family Tree](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Also By Michelle Heard](#)

[Connect with me](#)

# Dedication

This one is for all the single moms out there who are raising future warriors while doing everything alone.

*You. Are. Badass!!!*

---

# Songlist

[Spotify](#)

Holding Out For A Hero – Nothing But Thieves  
Stronger – Thunderstorm Artis  
Do You Really Want To Hurt Me – Denmark + Winter  
Oats In The Water – Ben Howard  
Such Great Heights – MILCK  
Bring You Back – Gold Brother, LIIV  
Here We Come – NOCTURN, Lexxi Saal  
Knocking On Heaven's Door - RAIGN  
With Arms Wide Open – Tommee Profitt, Nicole Serrano  
Love The Hell Out Of You – Lewis Capaldi

# Synopsis

My father orders me to seduce a man most people are too afraid to even look at.

**Georgi Torrissi.**

Head of the Torrissi family and a Cosa Nostra Capo.

A brutal and powerful man who rules his world with violence and absolute control.

And I'm supposed to make him want me.

Turns out my father thinks he can use Georgi to get to Atanas Petkov, our family's sworn enemy. If Atanas continues to grow in power with Georgi's help, it will mean the end of my father's reign of terror, and I'm the bait meant to make one of the most dangerous men in New York lower his guard.

Do I have a choice?

*No.*

Hours later, Georgi Torrissi is chained in my father's basement while the man I helped betray is beaten and tortured.

My already messed-up life takes a turn for the worse because I didn't expect the guilt.

I didn't expect the way his eyes still burn when he looks at me.

And I definitely didn't expect myself to unlock the chains and set him free.

The moment Georgi walks out of that basement, he turns into a violent monster that's out for revenge. Once the hallways of my family home are painted red, he takes my daughter and me with him.

There's no running.

No hiding.

And now all I can do is pray I survive being at the mercy of the man I betrayed.

---

# Possessive Enemy

*Mafia / Organized Crime / Suspense Romance*  
**STANDALONE in the KINGS OF MAFIA**  
**Book 8**

## **Author's Note:**

While Possessive Enemy can be read as a complete standalone, reading the other books in the Kings Of Mafia series will give you a better understanding of the world and its characters.

This book contains subject matter that may be sensitive for some readers. For a full list of the content warnings, [click here](#)  
18+ only.  
Please read responsibly.

**For clarity, Pavlov is the masculine form of the surname, and Pavlova is the feminine form in Bulgarian.**

## **Translations:**

*Malkata mi printsesa* – my little princess

*Printsesa* – princess

*Prints* - Prince

*Milo moe* – my sweet one

*Malka* – little one / my girl

*Lyubov moya* – my love

*Mishle* – little mouse

*Moeto hubavo mishle* – my beautiful little mouse

*Angelche moe* – my little angel

---

---

# Family Tree

## GEORGI TORRISI



**Family Business:** Cosa Nostra

**Father:** Renzo Torrisi (*Hunted By A Shadow*)

**Mother:** Skylar Torrisi (*Hunted By A Shadow*)

**Sister:** Raya Torrisi

**Best Friends:** Augusto Vitale (*Craving Revenge*) & Adriano Rizzo (*Vicious Devil*)

**Godfather:** Franco Vitale (*Craving Danger*)

## NINA PAVLOVA



**Family Business:** Bulgarian Criminal Organization

**Daughter:** Simona Pavlova - Simi

**Father:** Boris Pavlov

**Mother:** Deceased

*For clarity, Pavlov is the masculine form of the surname, and Pavlova is the feminine form in Bulgarian.*

---

# Chapter 1

## Nina

***Georgi Torrisi; 35. Nina Pavlova; 27.***

Bracing myself for whatever fresh hell my father has decided to unleash today, I push the heavy door open and step inside the office.

Boris Pavlov never calls for me unless he needs something, and it usually means I'll be forced to suffer through whatever horrid scheme he has planned.

*God help me.*

The office smells the same as always. Expensive leather, cigar smoke, and whiskey. Scents that seem permanently soaked into the dark wood panels and thick carpets.

Scents that make my stomach churn with dread.

Lifting my eyes, they lock on the man who's nothing more than my jailer. Hatred and unspeakable pain are the only things I've ever received from him.

Dark memories, filled with indescribable trauma, shudder through my broken mind.

Slowly, my gaze goes to the spot where my mother bled out on my eighteenth birthday. We were both called into his office, and when he ordered me to sleep with Anton Belinski so he could secure a deal with him, Mom fought back.

Boris beat her to death right in front of me for daring to oppose him. Up until that moment, I thought being abused by him was the worst fate I could suffer.

I was wrong.

Mom died, and I was locked in a bedroom. That same night, Anton raped me for the first time. My virginity was stolen violently, and since then, I've been the payment for every deal Boris has signed with Anton.

The past nine years of hell tighten the noose around my neck a little more as I keep quiet while watching Boris as he sits behind the enormous desk that dominates the room.

His attention is fixed on documents spread out in front of him as if I am no more than a servant entering the room rather than his daughter.

I've never been his daughter. The only person who loved me is dead. I don't even know what happened to her body.

Simi's face flashes through my mind. Her soft, pink cheeks and dark eyes make her the spitting image of me.

Even though Anton is her father, he has ignored her existence because she's not a boy.

My daughter's future fills me with an ungodly fear. I've spent countless hours trying to come up with a plan to escape, but everytime I've tried, we've been dragged back. Boris separated us after my last failed attempt. As punishment, I was locked in the basement for a week while a recording of Simi crying was played on repeat.

It fractured my mind, and I haven't been the same since.

My daughter is the only reason I'm still alive. Without her, I would've slit my own throat years ago.

*Don't do or say anything to upset Boris, so you can get your two hours with Simi before dinner.*

It fills me with rage and heartache that Tanya is the one raising my daughter.

Just the thought of that vile woman makes my jaw tighten.

I know exactly why Tanya was chosen to care for Simi. She's my father's side piece, and she'd do anything he tells her.

Boris finally lifts his dead, soulless eyes. "Nina."

The sound of his voice sends a familiar chill down my spine, the same cold feeling I have carried since childhood, since the first time I realized the man who should protect me is the one person in this world who has repeatedly broken me.

I keep my tone soft as I say, "You wanted to see me."

It is the safest response, neutral enough that he cannot accuse me of disrespect, though I can feel tension coiling through my chest while I wait for whatever order he plans to deliver.

Boris leans back slightly in his chair and studies me with the same calculating look he always has when discussing shipments, deals, or rivals.

"You will go to a bar tomorrow night."

The statement settles heavily between us, and suffocating dread begins to creep through my veins because I already understand what the order

means.

Whenever he sends me somewhere, it always ends the same way. I'll have to distract a man so the guards can overwhelm him. He'll be brought to the basement, where he'll be tortured. I'll be forced to tend to his wounds until Boris has all the information he wants, then the man will be killed.

Many have begged me to help them. Most have slung curses and threats at me.

The shouts. The rage. The desperation. The sobbing.

I hear them all in my nightmares.

"You will approach a man named Georgi Torrasi," Boris orders, drawing me out of my thoughts that are always dark.

Georgi Torrasi. The name doesn't sound Bulgarian. Maybe Italian?

My father takes a slow drink from his whiskey before continuing, "He is Sicilian. One of the capos of the Cosa Nostra."

My stomach tightens.

Cut off from the outside world and living inside this nightmare, even I'm aware of the Cosa Nostra. Boris has avoided them, so I find it weird that his focus has shifted.

"Torrasi is meeting with Atanas Perkov."

*Jesus. The head of the Bulgarian mafia.*

The one enemy Boris has never been able to overthrow.

Knowing I have to somehow seduce a capo makes fear shudder through me. If I'm successful, it will incur the wrath of the most feared man in Bulgaria.

The man whose shadow sits over every criminal operation in this country while Boris Pavlov circles endlessly, desperate to claw his way into a seat of power he has never been able to claim.

"It should be easy for you to seduce Torrasi. He's a known playboy and can't resist a pretty face."

I lower my gaze toward the polished surface of the desk, watching the reflection of the office lights shimmer across the wood while the familiar sense of helplessness settles into my bones.

I have no choice but to do as I'm ordered. If I resist, Simi will be hurt.

Boris lights a cigar, and a thick cloud of smoke curls toward the ceiling.

"You will gain his attention," he continues, his tone impatient. "You will encourage him to follow you out of the bar, which is in the hotel he's

staying in. Lead him to the side of the building.”

Where the men will be waiting, ready to ambush the capo.

My father never keeps prisoners breathing unless he plans to tear answers out of them piece by piece, and a familiar heaviness settles in my chest because I already know how this will unfold. They will beat him, and it will be my job to keep him breathing so they can torture him day in and day out.

Patch them up. Stop the bleeding. Force water and food down their throats while they choke on pain. Clean wounds and close gashes because no doctor ever comes to this house.

After years of practice, I’ve become good at first aid. Good enough to keep men alive through things that should have killed them.

Besides being payment for Anton Belinsky, this has always been my role. I have to play nurse to men who will die anyway.

If anything about this insane plan goes wrong, the consequences will be catastrophic, and yet my father sits there calmly, confident that I will obey like I always do.

My father does not need to threaten me out loud.

He never does.

The unspoken threat is always there, like an invisible blade to my throat.

If I refuse...if I fail...if I do anything except exactly what he wants, the person who suffers will not be me.

It will be my sweet baby daughter who’s already seen too much violence in her short four years.

Boris watches me for a moment longer, then barks, “You will not disappoint me, Nina.”

No matter how much I hate him, no matter how badly I want to run, I will walk into that bar tomorrow night and do exactly what he demands.

For Simi.

---

After leaving the office, I hurry to the other wing of the mansion, and as I near the suite Simi is held in, Ivan’s heartless eyes lock on me.

He waits for me to stop in front of the door, and then smirking, he stares down at me. “Hmm...I’m not sure I should allow you to see the brat today.”

He always taunts me, and at least once every few days, he refuses me entry.

Anger pours into my chest. I hate that every vile person in this mansion has power over me. There isn't anything I can do without risking Simi, and it kills me.

Ivan leans down until I feel his breath on my ear. "You can be glad I'm not allowed to fuck you. I'd make you pay to see the brat." There's a low hum in the back of his throat. "At night, I picture all the things you'd allow me to do to you."

His words coat my skin with another layer of filth before he finally pulls back and opens the door.

I shoot forward, my heart slamming so hard it hurts as my gaze locks on Simi.

Tanya moves to stand by Ivan near the door while my precious daughter scrambles up from where she's coloring, running with unsteady little legs toward me. Her arms reach for me as she cries, "Mama!"

"*Milo moe!*" My voice is strained as I drop to my knees to catch her. Pulling her into me so tight that she lets out a small sound, I brush my hands lovingly over her hair and down her back. "I missed you," I whisper against her temple while taking a deep breath of her scent.

"I waited," she says, her voice soft. Her fingers curl into my blouse as she presses as close to me as she can get. "I was good, Mama."

"I know you were," I murmur, pulling back just enough to cup her face, my thumb brushing over the swell of her rosy cheek. "You're always good."

She studies me, her small brows pulling together as her hand lifts and touches my cheek.

"You're cold."

I force a comforting smile to my face. "I'm okay."

Simi's lips press into a tiny line like she doesn't believe me, then she shifts and wraps her arms tightly around my neck.

"I don't like it here," she whispers, her mouth close to my ear.

My chest tightens, and my heart constricts painfully, but by the grace of God, I keep my voice steady. "I know, *sartse moe*. I wish I could whisk us away from here."

Simi pulls slightly back, and her gaze flicks toward the door before returning to me. "Ivan's scary."

I smooth her hair back. "Just don't look at him."

“I don’t,” she says quickly. “I look at the floor.”

“That’s good. Just keep doing it.”

She nods, then presses her cheek to my chest again. “If I’m quiet, they leave me alone.”

She’s referring to Ivan and Tanya.

My throat burns, but I force a soft smile. “I’m here now, *milo moe*.”

She listens to my heart that beats only for her.

“I wish you could stay with me, Mama,” she whispers.

“I wish that too.”

We sit like this for a moment longer before she lifts her head, her mood shifting like it always does. “Do you want to play with me?”

A smile widens on my face. “Of course.”

Simi slides off my lap and grabs my hand, pulling me toward the corner where her coloring book and a few toys are scattered. Her movements are quick and eager, like she’s trying to fit everything into too little time, and it makes my heart shrivel from the intense pain rippling through me.

“Sit,” she says, tugging on my hand until I drop down beside her. I’m handed a doll with a missing leg. “You be the mommy.”

A soft chuckle escapes me. “I am the mommy.”

She giggles, a small bright sound that cuts right through me. “No, you be the doll mommy.”

“Okay,” I say, adjusting the doll in my hands.

Kneeling, she picks up another doll. When she positions hers in front of mine, she says, “She’s scared and wants her mommy.”

*Oh God.*

A lump instantly forms in my throat, and my eyes sting with unshed tears.

Simi’s eyes flit to my face, and I swallow hard before asking, “Why is she scared?”

My precious little girl shrugs, then presses the doll against mine. “She just is.”

I pull both dolls together, mimicking an embrace. “Then mommy holds her.”

We play like this for a while, Simi talking in little bursts while her attention jumps from one thing to another. Her small body stays on the move, as if she’s been starved from having to stay still and quiet so she doesn’t draw attention to herself.

The toys lose her attention, and she climbs onto my lap, pressing her face into my chest.

“Tell me a story, Mama.”

I clear my throat while I pull my fingers through her soft strands, which are the same chestnut brown as mine.

“Once upon a time, there was a little princess. She was locked in a room by an evil wizard.” I keep staring at every inch of her face. Her little lashes, the soft brown of her eyes, the way her nose tips up, her rosy cheeks. “One day, a brave prince came, and he fought the wizard. He searched everywhere for the little princess, and when he found her, he carried her away to a land where she could play in the sun. He gave her everything her heart wanted and made her feel safe.”

“Do I have a prince looking for me?” Simi asks.

“Yes,” I lie because I don’t have the heart to tell her the truth. There are no princes in our world. Only evil wizards and monsters.

Simi catches my silk blouse between her thumb and forefinger and rubs the fabric while softly admitting, “I don’t want you to go.”

I press a kiss to the top of her head and squeeze my eyes shut.

“Can you sleep here tonight?” she asks.

“I wish I could.” My voice is strained from the heartache ripping through my soul.

She goes still, and tilting her head back to look at me, her eyes searching my face. “I don’t want you to leave.”

My chest tightens so much I can barely breathe. “I wish things were different, *sartse moe*.”

Her chin begins to tremble, then she presses her face back against my chest.

Tanya’s standing by Ivan, but when she starts to walk toward us, Simi’s whole body stiffens.

“No,” my little girl whimpers immediately, clutching me tighter. “No, not yet.”

*Jesus.*

I close my eyes for a second as a wave of crippling heartache moves through me. Opening them again, I smooth her hair back with a gentle caress. “Hey, look at me.”

She shakes her head, burying her face deeper against me.

“Simi.”

Slowly, she lifts her head, big tears rolling over her cheeks.

"You're going to be okay," I say, keeping my voice as steady and loving as I can, even though everything inside me is dying. "I'll be back tomorrow."

Her lip quivers. "I want you to stay!"

I brush my thumb over her cheek. "I want that too."

"Enough!" Tanya snaps angrily.

I hear the door open, then Ivan growls, "Time."

Simi shakes her head hard, her arms tightening around me. "No!"

I hold her close for one more second, then I gently pull her back, even as she resists, her small hands grabbing at me.

"Listen to me," I whisper quickly, pressing my forehead to hers. "I love you, *zhivotat mi!* I will be back tomorrow."

"I stay with you," she cries, panic rising in her voice.

"I promise I'll be back tomorrow," I assure her, even as I begin to loosen her grip.

Tanya steps closer and grabs hold of Simi's arm. Instantly, rage explodes in my chest, and I growl, "Don't grab my daughter like that."

Without hesitation, the bitch's hand flies through the air and connects with my face.

"Mama!" My baby cries, and before I can react, Ivan's hand clamps around the back of my neck, and I'm ripped away from Simi.

"I'll see you tomorrow, *miló moe!*" I call out as I'm forcefully shoved out of the suite.

The last thing I see is Simi straining against Tanya's hold, her rosy cheeks wet with tears.

As Ivan pulls the door shut, I hear her cry, "Mama!"

When the door closes between us, all the sound in the suite is blocked out, and my ragged breaths are the only thing I can hear.

"Boris will hear about this," Ivan growls while he shoves me hard. I stagger to the side, and feeling utterly devastated and broken, I walk toward the stairs so I can go down to the basement level where my room is.

# Chapter 2

## Georgi

While Santino, our head of security, checks the cart containing our lunch, I read the text Adriano sent in the group chat I share with him and Augusto.

**Adriano: I just had to fire another stripper, all because Georgi can't keep it in his pants.**

A grin spreads over my face as I sit down on the couch, typing out a reply. We've been best friends since our late teens. The five families in the Cosa Nostra are tight as fuck, and I get along with everyone, but Adriano and Augusto are my ride or die friends.

**Georgi: Who?**

**Adriano: Sharon. She got it in her head that riding your dick allowed her to treat the others like shit. This happens every single fucking time. Stop fucking my staff.**

Letting out a chuckle, I can't resist provoking my friend.

**Georgi: I can't help you have good taste in women. The blame falls on you, brother.**

**Adriano. Fuck you. Go to Paradiso and be Augusto's problem for a while.**

**Augusto: I banned Georgi from my club.**

"Come eat," Raya, my baby sister, says as she takes the silver domes off the plates. "God, it smells good."

I get up and walk to the table, and while taking a seat, I shoot the group a last message.

**Georgi: Gotta go. Take the next two to three weeks I'm gone to employ new strippers.**

**Adriano: Stay out of trouble in Bulgaria.**

**Augusto: Let us know how the meeting with Petkov goes.**

I tuck my phone into my pocket, and looking at my plate, my mouth waters as I pick up my cutlery. I cut into the thick ribeye that has butter melting over the top, and when I take a bite, Raya grins at me. "Is it good?"

Chewing, I nod, and cutting another piece, I place it on the side of her plate so she can taste the steak.

Even though Raya's creamy risotto looks great, she steals some of my crispy potatoes and roasted vegetables.

When I glance at her, she shrugs. "Yours is better."

"It always is," I chuckle, allowing her to help herself to more from my plate.

I grab a piece of bread, tear it in half, and slide the rest toward my sister.

This is how things have always been between Raya and me. She's four years younger. Since my first memories, I've taken care of her.

Right after our biological parents moved from Bulgaria to the US, a fire broke out in our apartment building. I don't remember anything about that night, but I was told a fireman found me carrying Raya through thick smoke. Many people died that night, including our parents.

Raya was only a year and a half old when we landed in the orphanage. She has no memory of our time there. Even though the staff did their best to take care of us and we weren't abused, I'm very protective of my sister. It's just the way I'm wired.

We were lucky our adoptive parents found us. Every single day, I'm thankful for them. Renzo and Skylar Torrisi are the best parents any kid could ask for. They have never made us feel like we're not blood, and the day Dad handed over the reins to his seat in the Cosa Nostra is the proudest of my life.

My eyes flick to Raya as she drinks some sparkling water.

"We need to talk," I mention, leaning back in my chair.

Her gaze meets mine. "About the meeting with Atanas?" She narrows her eyes at me. "I swear if you tell me I have to stay at the hotel, I'm going to knee you."

Santino lets out a snort before trying to mask it with a fake cough. I give him a look, silently telling him to give us privacy.

While he leaves the hotel suite, my attention returns to my sister.

I'm aware of how unhappy she is with my overprotective streak. Whenever a man catches her attention, I threaten him with the sure promise of death. I'm the reason she's still unmarried at thirty-one.

Raya's safety has always come first, and it makes it so fucking hard to ease the tight grip I have on her as I say, "That's not what I want to talk about."

My control freak nature tenses every muscle in my body because what I'm about to do will put Raya in more danger. Being a daughter of the Cosa

Nostra already puts her at risk, hence my obsessive protectiveness toward her.

Even Dad sat me down before the trip and told me I need to ease up on Raya. She's downright miserable, and it's all because of me.

*Fuck. What if I give her this power and freedom, and I lose her?*

I love my baby sister more than life itself. I'd die for her in a heartbeat.

*Christ.*

My expression turns grave as I fight my instincts to protect Raya with every ounce of my being.

When I continue to stare at her, wondering if I'm making the biggest mistake of my fucking life, concern flashes over her features. "What's wrong, Georgi?"

I let out a heavy sigh before forcing the words over my lips. "I'm making you my second-in-command."

Raya's jaw practically hits the table as shock ripples over her face. "You're what?"

My expression grows grimmer as worry grips my heart in a brutal hold. "You've proven yourself over and over again. We both know I can't run the business without you, and you deserve to be named my underboss." Leaning forward, I keep her eyes imprisoned. "But, you go nowhere without your guards."

It takes a moment for my sister to process her shock, then her eyes start to shine with tears, and she darts to her feet. I barely have enough time to get up before she throws her arms around my neck. Hugging me tightly, a sob sputters from her.

"God, Georgi." Raya's tone is strained. "I know this isn't easy for you." She pulls back, her hazel eyes locking with mine. "I promise I'll always have the guards with me." Swallowing hard, she regains some control over her emotions, and a serious look settles on her face. "I won't let you down. Thank you for giving me this."

My eyebrows pull together as I stare at my sister. "If anything happens to you because I made you my underboss..." I shake my head.

Raya rubs her palm up and down my bicep. "Nothing will happen."

I tip my head at the table, and once we've taken our seats again, I lean back and stare at her for a long moment before I say, "Once we're done here in Bulgaria and we return home, you'll take over handling all the shipments for the other four families."

A smile spreads over her face. “So I won’t be stuck in the office all day?”

“No.”

My heart beats a little faster than normal as an apprehensive feeling slithers down my spine.

*Chill, Georgi. She’ll work in a controlled environment on our turf.*

I let out another heavy sigh. “Just be careful, Raya.”

She drinks some of her water, then asks, “Why the change of heart?”

Shaking my head, I let out a chuckle. “Dad sat me down before we left New York. He said you’re unhappy, and I have to ease up on you.”

Her expression turns somber, and she lowers her gaze to the dishes on the table. “I get that we live in a dangerous world and you’re just doing your best to keep me safe, but sometimes it’s suffocating.” She meets my eyes again, and I feel the intense emotions coming off her in waves. “Dad’s right. I want more from life. At some point, I want to settle down and have children, and I can’t do that if you chase off every man I try to date.”

A frown settles on my forehead, and I narrow my eyes. “How did we go from me making you the underboss to talking about dating and having babies?”

Raya throws a hand in the air and rolls her eyes before tilting her head and giving me a stubborn look. “I thought you were easing up on me?”

“I am.” I lean forward and rest my elbows on the table.

Her left eyebrow pops up. “Only with work?”

“For now.” I give my sister a pleading expression. “One step at a time, Raya. We can talk about you dating in a year or so.”

“Jesus. My ovaries are going to dry up at some point. You know this, right?”

Exhaling a huff, I get up from the table and mutter. “We’ll be late for the meeting if we don’t leave now.”

She echoes my huff as she walks to her bedroom to get her handbag. When she returns, I’m surprised by the grateful smile she gives me. “Thank you for making me your second-in-command. It means a lot to me.”

When we leave the suite and step out into the hallway, I murmur, “Give me time to get used to you being my second-in-command, then we can talk about you getting married.”

Raya playfully nudges her shoulder against my arm. “Okay.”

# Chapter 3

## Georgi

The road narrows the closer we get to Atanas Petkov's home, the city falling away behind us until there's nothing but quiet stretches of asphalt and high walls.

Santino slows the vehicle as the gate comes into view, and I take in the cameras around the boundary walls.

An armed guard steps out of a security booth and exchanges a few sentences with Santino, then he steps back and signals to the other guard in the booth.

The gates begin to swing open, and when Santino steers the car through them, I glance over the front yard that's immaculately kept. Trimmed lawns on either side of a long paved driveway, and evenly spaced trees lead straight to the mansion.

We pass by two more men standing off to the side, one near a parked SUV, the other positioned with a clear view of the entire driveway.

The house comes into full view as we round the last bend, stone and glass, built solid for security. The front doors sit at the top of a short set of steps, where two more men stand, their tense postures telling me they're ready for action.

Santino brings the car to a stop in front of the steps and cuts the engine.

"Ready?" Raya asks, her tone filled with apprehension.

"Yes. Let's hope this meeting plays out in our favor." I shove my door open, and climbing out, I wait for Raya to join me. As we take the steps, one of the guards indicates for us to stop, and I allow him to pat me down, but when he moves in my sister's direction, I growl, "Don't dare touch her."

I might not be armed, but I know hundreds of ways to kill a man. Between Santino and me, we'll be able to disarm the two guards and defend ourselves. It's the only reason I agreed to leave our weapons behind.

The guard's eyes snap to mine, and for a moment, he hesitates before he presses a button on the two-way radio strapped to his shoulder. He speaks Bulgarian, but I understand enough of the language to understand that he's asking for Ms. Nikolova to come to the front door.

We wait a minute before the front door opens and a woman steps out. She's dressed in the usual black and white maid's uniform.

"Our housekeeper will search, Miss Torrissi," the guard informs us in English.

I keep quiet about understanding Bulgarian, and so does Raya.

Because it's part of our heritage, Raya and I learned the language. I never thought it would come in handy until I crossed paths with Petkov.

I nod to give my permission and watch as the woman pats down Raya before checking inside her handbag.

By the time we're allowed to enter the mansion, five minutes have passed.

Keeping my pace unhurried, I take in the room as I move deeper into it. Stone floors, dark wood along the walls, narrow windows set high, and a staircase at the back.

I count six guards and know there must be half an army scattered throughout the house and at the back of the property.

When I stop in the middle of the room, I'm aware of Raya, positioned slightly behind me. She knows to always stand to my right so I can easily reach for her or block any bullets aimed at her.

Atanas Petkov suddenly stalks into the room while handing a document to a bald man with glasses and a nervous tick. The man blinks rapidly, glances at us, then scurries out the front door.

My eyes lock on the head of the Bulgarian mafia, recognizing him from all the photos Rosie, our IT expert and hacker, has managed to get of him.

He's wearing a dark suit, tailored to fit his body. It's clear the man works out, and from the way he moves, I can tell he's a good fighter.

I can feel the power radiating off him, and I'm almost impressed, but then his eyes land on Raya, and he stops dead in his tracks.

Petkov stares at my sister until it makes unease coil in my gut.

I turn my head slightly and glance at Raya, who's returning the intense stare, her lips slightly parted and her breaths coming a little too fast.

*Fuck.*

For long, intense seconds, neither of them breaks eye contact. It's like I'm not even here.

I grab Raya's wrist and pull her right to my side, breaking the moment between them.

Petkov's eyes flick to mine, then he moves closer and holds out his hand to me. "Welcome to my home, Georgi. This meeting is long overdue."

I let go of Raya's wrist and shake hands with Petkov. "Thank you for agreeing to meet with us."

Raya holds her hand out to him, and the moment he takes hold of her, his dark brown pupils dilate. His fingers and palm swallow hers whole, and just like with the stare, they touch for way too fucking long.

My muscles lock in place with the effort it takes to keep still while Petkov says, "Such a pleasure getting to meet a Cosa Nostra princess."

*The fuck it is.*

He finally lets go of her hand, then looks at me again. "I understand why you're so protective of your sister. I would be too if I had one who was as beautiful as yours."

Annoyed, I clench my jaw, and it snaps Petkov out of whatever spell Raya weaved around him.

I shoot her a look, silently ordering her to tone it down, and she answers with an apologetic expression.

"Let's go to my office," Petkov says.

We follow him down a corridor, passing by a couple of shut doors and a formal sitting room, before we step into his office.

The room opens wide, with black marble floors and gold decor. There's a seating area to my left, with low leather sofas around a black coffee table that has a decanter with amber fluid and tumblers situated on it.

His desk stands at the far end, broad and dark, and shelves line the wall behind it. Floor-to-ceiling windows give us a view of the backyard, where I see more than twenty men.

As I come to a stop, I glance at Petkov, who gestures for us to take a seat.

I settle on the sofa, Raya sitting down beside me while Atanas positions himself across from us.

He gestures at the decanter. "Whiskey?"

I shake my head, then tip my head in my sister's direction. "Raya's my underboss. If everything goes the way we hope, you'll deal with her when I'm not available."

Petkov nods, his eyes sharp as they shift to her before coming back to me. "Understood."

A brief silence follows, then he leans forward, resting his forearms on his thighs while loosely interlocking his fingers. "Let's get right to the problem. Our trade routes are too close for comfort."

"Close enough that the same brokers are being approached from both sides. It's driving up the prices," I say, watching the slight tightening around his eyes as he nods. "And demand for product is starting to drop," I add, leaning forward as well and copying Petkov's posture.

A faint crease forms between his brows. "I've had to redirect cargo a couple of times this year because of it."

"Same on my side," I reply, holding his gaze. "We're costing each other money."

"It can't continue." His eyes narrow slightly. "If it does, it will lead to fighting among the lower levels and eventually war between us."

"It's the reason I'm here in person. I'd rather make money than shed blood."

Petkov's features ease a little as he nods. "Then let's come up with a deal that works for both parties." He shifts back slightly, one hand brushing over his jaw before settling on his thigh.

I glance between Raya and Petkov. "Anything moving into your regions gets handled through your network the moment it arrives, and the same if anything moves into my territories. Our men stay out of each other's regions."

He nods in agreement. "We each keep our existing contacts."

"Yes. No parallel buyers, no secondary arrangements."

Petkov's eyes flick to Raya, and for a moment, there's a flash of interest.

"There are areas where neither side has been consistent," Raya mentions while pulling her phone out of her handbag to look at the notes she made. "I've worked closely with our hacker to prepare a list of ports, cities, and possible routes. We just need to decide who handles what."

She's worked her ass off the past six months to get all the information for this meeting. The list is the golden egg that's going to seal the deal. Instead of me taking control of all those areas, I'm willing to share them with Petkov, which means more money in his pocket.

When Petkov lifts an impressed eyebrow at my sister, I feel a surge of pride.

Raya leans forward, her voice calm and steady. "I'll sit with both sides and map out who's moving what and through which ports and routes. I'll also make sure nothing overlaps before we decide who gets which area on the list. It will be a fair split."

Petkov's full attention settles on my sister, his expression unreadable for a beat before shifting into something more focused. "You'd handle that directly?"

"Yes," she answers without hesitation.

"We're here for two weeks," I say to bring his attention back to me. "The Cosa Nostra wants this alliance with you, so Raya will work with both sides to make sure nothing overlaps on the ground and holds once we leave."

He stares at me for a moment before nodding. "This is a much better deal than I expected." Relaxing slightly, one arm resting along the back of the couch, the corner of his mouth lifts. "What about margins?"

"Stay aligned with your market," I reply. "No sudden changes."

"And your pricing adjusts when product moves into my regions." It's not a question.

"Yes." I keep my gaze locked with his. "And the same counts for you."

"Volume stays in line with what the ground can carry," he says.

"Of course. Too much movement creates attention neither of us needs," I reply.

He shifts again, hard lines cutting into his features and a dangerous light igniting in his dark eyes. "I have a separate issue. Boris Pavlov."

The name has me lifting an eyebrow. The fucker has been trying to sell AK47s on the West Coast. "I'm aware of him."

"He's been a problem since before I took over as head of the organization, and he refuses to fall in line. I've heard he's started sending small shipments to the US. I'm dealing with it." His jaw tightens before he continues. "Just know, if you come into contact with him, he's not authorized by me at all."

Well, that answers the question before I could ask it.

"Then anything tied to him doesn't move through our routes," I state.

Raya shifts beside me. "I'll flag his known contacts and routes while I'm mapping everything. If anything links back to him, I'll isolate it so we can get men to patrol the routes and shut down shipments that aren't ours."

Atanas studies her for a moment, then gives a firm nod. “Good. That keeps it contained. I don’t want Boris affecting anything we’re trying to put in place here.”

“He won’t,” I say, holding his gaze.

Something in Petkov’s expression eases, just slightly. “Good.”

He leans forward and pours three tumblers of whiskey. Helping himself to a glass, he gestures to the other two while saying, “Here’s to a prosperous alliance between us.”

“To growth and more money,” I toast before taking a sip, while Raya ignores the third glass. My sister has never liked the taste of alcohol.

Petkov looks at her again, and his dark gaze softens a fraction. “Would you like wine, Raya?”

She shakes her head, and giving him a nervous smile that makes me frown, she asks, “Do you have sparkling water?”

Petkov glances at the door where Santino is standing near one of the guards. “Have Ms. Nikolova bring sparkling water for Miss Torrisi.”

The man nods before contacting Ms. Nikolova via a two-way radio.

Petkov glances between Raya and me, then the corner of his mouth lifts. “So that settles it. Going forward, we’re working together.”

“It’s better than the alternative,” I reply, returning his smile.

He seems to relax even more as he asks, “How was the trip from New York?”

“Good.” Wanting him to know I’m sincere about this alliance, I give him personal information by saying, “Raya and I were born in Bulgaria but have never had the opportunity to visit. Are there any sights you suggest we visit while we’re here?”

Surprise flashes over his face. “You’re of Bulgarian descent? Last name?”

“Markov. Right after our family moved to the States, there was a fire in our apartment building. Only Raya and I survived, but we were lucky to be adopted soon after.”

Ms. Nikolova comes in and sets down a tray on the table before leaving. Raya leans forward and helps herself to a glass of sparkling water that has a wedge of lime in it.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Petkov murmurs. His dark gaze flicks to Raya as she takes a couple of sips, then a smile lifts the corner of his mouth before he looks at me again. “I’m going to take a wild guess and assume

you won't agree to an arranged marriage to solidify ties between our organizations."

Water flies from Raya as she chokes, and I quickly pat her back. She climbs to her feet, and looking rattled, she croaks, "Bathroom?"

"Stani will show you where to go," Petkov says, giving the guard by the door a nod.

I lock eyes with Santino, silently ordering him to go with Raya as she hurries out of the office.

When we're alone, I turn my attention back to Petkov. "You assume right. It's nothing personal. I'll never agree to an arranged marriage between my sister and any man. She's not a bargaining chip, but my second-in-command and the most important person to me."

He stares at me while a look of respect settles on his face. "I understand." Still, it doesn't stop him from asking, "And if I take the traditional route and court your sister?"

*Fuck.*

I can't be a dick. He's showing me respect by asking my permission.

While I consider his request, Raya returns, and as she sits down beside me again, she shoots me a questioning look.

"Mr. Petkov asked whether I'd allow him to date you."

Her lips part for a second, but she processes the shock quickly. She swallows before she meets Petkov's eyes. "I'm flattered, but I have to decline. I'm focused on business right now and will only consider dating in a year or so."

She's taking me into consideration, knowing I need time to adjust to the promotion I just gave her, never mind her dating a mafia boss.

*Christ, if things work out between them, I would have to leave her behind in Bulgaria.*

Panic ripples through me.

Raya picks up on it and gives my hand a quick squeeze before pulling back.

Luckily, Petkov doesn't push the subject but concedes with a nod.

*Thank fuck. It feels like I just dodged a bullet.*

# Chapter 4

## Nina

I resist the urge to touch the earpiece I'm forced to wear. Worried it's visible, I once again make sure my hair covers my ear as I walk through the lobby of the five-star hotel. I'm wearing a dark burgundy silk cocktail dress that's too short, along with five-inch heels, and my hair is up with a few curls framing my face, which is covered in makeup exactly the way Boris likes it. The lipstick is bold, matching the dress.

My skin is already crawling as if I'm covered in filth.

The gold floral brooch pinned to my chest contains a camera so Boris can see everything.

One slip up and he'll punish Simi.

Even though I've done this before, it doesn't make it any easier. Nerves spin wildly in my stomach, and I'm nauseated.

*You're doing this for Simi.*

I can feel men's eyes follow me as I walk, and when I take the carpeted steps down to the bar area, a group sitting at a nearby table notices me. They proceed to stare, and one of the men whispers, "Fuck, look at that body." My skin crawls at his remark. "Dressed like that, it's clear she's here for dick. I'm going to shoot my shot."

Doing my best to ignore them, I continue moving toward the bar. More men notice me, and soon, there are a few blatantly ogling me.

My stomach churns, and I clutch my purse tighter.

I suppress every instinct in me that wants to turn around and leave before this goes any further. The noise of the bar is overwhelming, a mix of low voices, glasses clinking, music humming in the background.

Apprehension crawls beneath my skin, and my pulse starts to speed up, sharp and fast.

I concentrate on keeping my breaths even and do my best to hide the fact that I'm seconds away from unraveling.

The tiny camera hidden in the brooch feels like it's burning my skin right through the fabric of the dress, and it's a constant reminder that I

somehow have to seduce a dangerous man.

*Just get through this for Simi.*

The thought of my precious daughter is enough to make me focus on the other people in the bar.

I glance over the room, trying to act as if I belong here. I take in the tables, two exits, and faces I don't care about.

As I wait for Boris to give me my next instruction, my gaze moves over a man who's sitting alone at a table, and before I can process it, my eyes snap back to him.

A different kind of nervous sensation ripples through my body as I stare at him.

His attention is on his phone, and he's not doing anything that sets him apart from the others, but still, he holds my attention.

Because of everything I've been forced to endure, I'm disgusted by men.

*But not by this one.*

I'm so caught by surprise, my lips part.

Then he glances up, and with a sharp gaze, he looks to his right. Slowly, his eyes sweep through the bar, moving in my direction.

*Good God, he's distractingly attractive.*

My heart beats faster and faster because I've never seen such a gorgeous man before.

*Please, don't let it be him.*

I tear my gaze away from the handsome man and glance at the other patrons, anxiously waiting to hear who the target is.

*'The man straight ahead at the back of the room. He's sitting alone and is busy on his phone,'* Boris' voice comes over the earpiece.

My stomach drops as my attention snaps back to the attractive man, and I take in the rest of him. His short and neat dark brown hair. The hard line of his jaw and the stubble that makes him look more dangerous than polished.

There's nothing soft about him, nothing inviting, and somehow that only makes it more difficult to look away.

My gaze drifts lower, catching on the way the charcoal button-down shirt stretches over his broad chest. When he shifts slightly, the matte fabric pulls just enough to make it obvious that he's all muscle, and I hate that I notice.

*'Move closer,' Boris snaps.*

Feeling very uncomfortable and even more nervous, I take a step toward his table.

*'Smile! You look stiff.'* Another order is barked at me.

Of course, Boris would have eyes and cameras on me as well, so he can see everything that happens.

My lips press together for a second before I force them to soften into what I hope looks like an inviting smile.

I take in Georgi Torrasi's arms. With the sleeves rolled up, I see his tanned skin and veins. The watch around his left wrist looks expensive. My attention remains on it for a moment until I recognize the brand. *Patek Philippe.*

He's also wearing a ring on his middle finger and another on his pinky.

*I love his style.*

I keep moving, even though every step toward Georgi makes my chest feel tighter, and the weight of what I'm about to do bears down on me like a ton of bricks.

I can still feel the other men in the bar watching me, their gazes clinging to my back. The unwanted attention makes my skin crawl again.

*Don't think about anyone else. Just focus on the capo of the Cosa Nostra.*

*Oh God. This is not going to be easy.*

As I get closer, something in the air shifts. Up until now, he was the prey, but the next instant, his eyes snap to me, and it feels like the tables are turned. I swear I feel a wave of energy roll over me, and my muscles tighten as if my body is getting ready to flee.

There's no surprise on his face, his hazel eyes sharp, making it feel like he's able to see right through me.

*Shit.*

Panic flares up in my chest, but somehow, I take the final couple of steps.

His posture doesn't change, his expression stays the same, but there's something coiled beneath it, controlled and ready to strike.

*'Don't hesitate,' Boris hisses. 'He's a known playboy so it will be easy.'*

Apprehension slithers down my spine because this is definitely not going to be as easy as Boris thinks.

All the previous men I had to lure to their deaths were older and usually drunk.

*'Don't lose your nerve!'* Boris snaps angrily.

As I stop by the table and Georgi stares at me, my mouth feels bone dry as I lick over my lips to wet them. When I try to say something, my breath catches in my throat. My heart pounds hard against my ribs, and for a moment I'm so flustered I forget everything. The plan, the lies, the men waiting outside.

"Hi," I manage to croak.

Georgi tilts his head slightly to the right, then his eyes drift down my body before returning to my face. "Hi."

One single word, his voice deep and rough, sends tingles rushing over my skin. My gut screams for me to get away. Not because I'm playing with fire by trying to seduce a capo, but because I've never felt the things he's making me feel, and it scares me.

*'Nina!'* Boris roars so loudly in my ear that for a second I fear Georgi might have heard him. *'I will fucking lock you in that basement, and you'll watch as I beat Simona the way I beat your worthless mother!'*

The threat instantly clears my mind, and forcing a seductive smile to my face, I move closer. Instead of taking the seat across from Georgi, I pull out the chair beside him and pivot it toward him. Sitting down, I rest my elbow on the table next to me, then slowly cross my legs, letting my foot brush against his calf before I meet his eyes. "I saw you from across the room and couldn't resist joining you. I hope you don't mind."

*I'm sorry. It's either you or my daughter.*

---

## Georgi

I've taken many beautiful women to bed, but fuck, I've never laid eyes on anything quite as exquisite as the woman who just joined me.

Still stunned by her beauty and the way she's coming on to me, I can't stop myself from staring, my usual charm taking a minute to kick in.

Her dark brown hair falls in soft curls around her heart-shaped face and down her back. Smooth olive skin. Wide and soft brown eyes. A button nose. High cheekbones.

*Christ, this woman is pure perfection.*

My eyes lower, drinking in the sexy sight of her black dress that's practically molded to her body. Her breasts. Her small waist.

Fuck, those legs. The fabric sits high on her thighs, and it makes my cock harden at the speed of light.

Only then do I pick up on the nervous energy coming off her, which is in total contrast to the way she's acting.

*Interesting.*

I was planning only to have one drink while I checked my emails and messages, but now that this beauty is here, I'm game for whatever she has planned.

Because I don't plan to leave the hotel, I told the guards to stay with Raya. I doubt someone will attack me in the bar, but if anyone is stupid enough, I can defend myself, and I'm armed.

Wanting to see what she'll do, I smirk and lean back in my chair, resting my hands on my thighs. "I don't mind at all."

*Ball's in your court, sweetheart.*

"What's your name?" she asks, her eyes drifting down to my lap where the outline of my hard-on is visible, before darting back to my face.

There's a flash of unease on her face, but it's gone as quickly as it came.

"Georgi," I answer, keeping my voice low. "What's yours?"

"Nina."

I feel her foot brush against my calf, and the smirk on my face grows. "Do you want to take this to a room?"

She lets out an uneasy chuckle. "You're very confident."

My eyes narrow on her. "You're very nervous."

"I'm not nervous." She squares her shoulders, pushing out her perfect breasts.

"Good." The word is nothing more than a low rumble. "Makes getting you upstairs easier."

"Wow." Another chuckle escapes her. "Do you always move this fast?"

"Only when a beautiful woman walks up to me looking like she's working up the courage to do something reckless, and I'm all about being reckless in bed, baby."

Her lips part, and a pink blush forms on the apples of her cheeks. "Maybe I just wanted company."

I shrug. "You picked the right table for that." I lean forward and, unable to resist, I brush the tips of my fingers up the inside of her calf until I reach

her knee. "Or we can skip the act of you pretending you want to get to know me and get straight to the fun part."

Her features tighten slightly. "That's a bold assumption."

"You're sitting here with a tempting blush on your face," I caress her calf again, "giving me the impression you're already imagining how good the fuck will be. Am I wrong?"

"Maybe I'm still deciding," she murmurs, the seductive expression that could bring the strongest of men to their knees back on her exquisite face.

"Oh, sweetheart. You made the decision before you sat down, looking at me like I'm your next meal."

Tension flashes over her face again, giving me mixed signals. Suddenly, she stands up, and as she begins to walk away, she says, "If you can catch me, you can have me."

My smirk widens at the dare, and darting to my feet, I shove my phone into my pocket while following the temptress out of the bar.

She glances over her shoulder as we enter the lobby, and I'm given a seductive smile that makes me even harder while my eyes lock on her ass.

Christ, this woman is one hell of a tease. I'm the king of one-night stands, but this is something straight out of my fantasies.

I follow her out of the hotel, my eyes devouring every sexy inch of her body. The night air outside the hotel is cooler, the faint smell of smoke drifting along the street.

Nina slows near the brick wall a few meters from the entrance, and I close the distance between us before she can move again.

She turns just as I plant my hand against the wall beside her shoulder, trapping her between the brick and my body.

Even with heels on, the top of her head barely reaches my chin, and I have to duck my head low to get to her ear. "I have no problem fucking you against the wall, but maybe we should rather get a room."

The streetlight reflects in her eyes as she looks up at me with a nervous expression.

I chalk it up to this possibly being her first attempt at a one-night stand.

"I thought you might like the chase," she replies, her voice a little breathless.

I bring my other hand up and place it against the wall, caging her in completely.

“I did.” My lips brush over her warm skin beneath her ear. “It’s one hell of a turn on, baby.” My fingers slide beneath her chin, and tilting her face up, I force her nervous gaze to meet mine. “So what’s it going to be, Nina. A hotel room and a night of wild sex, or are you going to be a memory of a beautiful woman who didn’t have the courage to go through with the one-night stand she wanted so badly?”

Lifting her hand to my chest, she settles her palm over my chest. For a split second, something flashes across her face that looks dangerously close to panic.

Then sudden movement to my left draws my attention, and as I turn my head, Nina whimpers, “I’m so sorry.”

Seeing several men rushing toward us from the darkness at the end of the street, every muscle in my body goes on high alert. As I reach for my watch to press the panic button so Rosie, our hacker, will get the alarm, an electric shock hits my chest.

My eyes snap back to Nina, who has a fucking stun gun pressed to my arm. It’s not enough to drop me, and I jerk away from her.

When the first man reaches me, I catch his wrist before the fucker can swing at me. Twisting, I hear the pop of his elbow that’s quickly followed by a howl of pain, and I drive my fist into his face for good measure.

As he drops to the sidewalk, I’m aware of Nina scurrying away as another man charges at me. I lunge forward, slamming my shoulder into his chest before pulling my gun from behind my back. Stepping back, I train the barrel on him, and the shot cracks through the air.

This time, the men attack in a group. One grabs for my gun while the other swings a metal pipe toward my ribs. I step into the swing and slam my forehead into the first fucker’s nose, the crunch echoing between us as blood sprays from his nostrils. The pipe whistles past my side, and another shot goes off before I lose my weapon.

*Fuck.*

Again, I try to go for my watch, then someone roars in Bulgarian, “Take down the piece of shit!”

More than one Taser is used on me, the barbed probes latching onto my body. This time, the electric shocks take me down. My knees hit the ground, and my body convulses from the electric shock.

I hear more footsteps running toward me, and the group of men doubles in size.

*Raya.*

The electric shocks stop, and I'm grabbed from behind.

Another man dives into me from the side, slamming me against the wall where Nina stood moments ago. His fist catches my cheek, but I barely feel it before returning the favor, my knuckles smashing into his temple hard enough to drop him.

More shouts sound up, the fuckers telling each other how to take me down, then suddenly the street falls quiet except for heavy breathing, the groans of the men already down, and my own loud exhales.

Then the assholes come at me again. I use all my strength to climb to my feet while the bastard behind me tries to tighten his hold on me.

A man slams his fist into my side while another tackles my legs, forcing me to stumble as someone else grabs my right arm and wrenches it upward.

A hard blow to my ribs forces the air from my lungs, and another blow lands against my jaw, making my head whip to the side.

The asshole behind me drives his knee into my lower back, and I let out an angry roar, gripping his arm and bending forward. I throw the fucker over my shoulder and kick him on his way down while wildly swinging at the nearest man.

Swinging wildly, I deliver punch after punch, but then something hard slams into the back of my head, and my vision blurs. Another strike follows immediately after, this one hard enough to force me back down to my knees.

Hands grab at my arms and shoulders, restraining me while the darkness begins to close in from the edges of my vision.

Through the haze, I manage to focus on two people standing off to the side. Nina, and an older man.

*Boris Pavlov.*

*Jesus, this is a setup.*

The realization hits right before I lose the battle against staying conscious.

# Chapter 5

## Nina

During the drive home, my mind is inundated with flashes of Georgi fighting for his life. I've never seen anything like it.

Normally, the men go down hard and fast when I use the stun gun on them, but not him.

*Jesus, he's strong.*

Which means it's going to take much more to break him.

A wave of intense guilt has me closing my eyes.

*God. Forgive me. I did it for my daughter.*

In the beginning, I used to tell myself they were all bad men, but the lie didn't last very long. It doesn't matter who these men are and whether they deserve what happens to them. It only matters that I lured them to their deaths.

Knowing what kind of hell Georgi Torrisi will have to endure before Boris decides to kill him makes the guilt in my chest increase.

It's not his devastatingly good looks or that he made an impression on me that's upset me, but the fact he's so much younger than all the men I've crossed paths with. Most were in their late fifties to sixties. Georgi seems to be in his mid-thirties, probably only a few years older than me.

At least, that's the lie I tell myself, because admitting I feel attracted to a man for the first time in my life is something I'm not ready to do.

It will also be a waste of time, seeing as Georgi is the enemy whom my father is going to torture and kill.

When the convoy of cars stops in the driveway, I push the door open and get out. Guards pull Georgi out of an SUV, and I follow them into the house.

With my bedroom being next to the chamber where the torturing takes place, we walk in the same direction toward the basement.

My gaze drifts over the blood matting Georgi's hair on the side of his head.

I need to tend to the wound.

We head down the stairs into the hallway in the basement, and nearing my bedroom door, I stop for a moment. Instead of going in so I can change out of the cocktail dress, I find myself walking to the doorway of the torture chamber.

One of the men removes Georgi's watch and hands it to Boris, who inspects it before placing it on the metal table and smashing it with a hammer.

"Give me his phone," Boris demands. After digging it out of the pants' pocket, a guard hands the device to him. Not wasting a second, Boris destroys it, then barks, "Strip him and check for tracking devices. Make it quick. The Cosa Nostra has one of the best hackers in the world."

I remain standing in the doorway as the men remove Georgi's clothes.

I hold my breath as tanned skin and muscles are exposed. Georgi is otherworldly attractive, and besides the guilt thickening in my chest, I feel a sense of loss because my father is going to destroy this beautiful man.

When they leave on his boxers, relief fills my chest. Sometimes they strip the prisoners completely naked, and it makes it so much worse for me when I have to tend to their wounds.

"Why are you just standing there?" Boris suddenly snaps at me.

As the men shackle Georgi's wrists and haul his body into a standing position, he lets out a groan, drawing everyone's attention to him.

"Move faster!" Boris yells, a note of panic in his voice.

He's probably scared Georgi will regain full consciousness before they manage to secure the chains.

Steel clanks against concrete, and the instant the chains are locked in place, the men step back from the man who killed one of them and took down several more before they were able to restrain him.

Even I move partially behind the wall. I peek into the room, watching as Georgi lifts his head. He glances around the room, taking in the table that's covered with various tools that will be used to inflict pain on him.

I'm surprised when he lets out a chuckle, and a grin tips the corners of his mouth up. "You must be tired of living." His tone sounds playful, like he's cracking a joke, then he looks right at Boris and sneers, "My family will come for me."

With a dark glare, my father replies, "They don't know where you are." He gestures at the broken phone and watch. "You can't be tracked, Torrisi."

Georgi lets out another chuckle, giving the impression he's not worried.

Suddenly, he looks past Boris, and his eyes collide with mine. I pull back, and as I hurry to my bedroom, I hear Georgi say, "I have to give you credit. Using the woman to lure me out of the hotel was good, but..."

I stop dead in my tracks to hear what he'll say next.

"...my family will track you through her. Her face is on every camera in the hotel lobby. You fucked up, Boris."

"Shut him up," my father snaps angrily.

Boris comes stalking out of the room while the sounds of fists connecting violently with skin fill the air, and the instant he sees me, I scurry into my bedroom.

Before I can shut the door, he stops me and shoves it open. His hand swings through the air, the flat of his large palm burning across my face.

Boris grabs me by my throat, and face-to-face with the man who's inflicted unspeakable hell on me, his breath wafts over my skin. "You think I don't see the way you look at Torrissi? Wait until Anton hears about how you acted today."

*No!*

It's one of the sick ways Boris loves to torture me. Whenever I lure a man in to keep Simi from being hurt, Boris taunts Anton by telling him how I threw myself at the man. It always leads to Anton beating and raping me.

My father lets go of me, and I fall onto my back, my head missing the metal corner of my bed by an inch.

"Change out of that fucking dress, whore! You have work to do."

I remain still until he leaves, then lifting a trembling hand to my throat, I suck in desperate breaths of air.

At the age of twenty-seven, you'd think I'd be used to the threats and abuse, but the fear and disgust never lessen. Instead, it becomes more potent every time I'm hurt and raped.

I picture myself darting up off the floor and running into the torture chamber, grabbing the hammer, and when I catch up to Boris, he'll give me a look of surprise before I smash in his skull.

*If only.*

I climb to my feet and shut the door before I reach behind me to pull down the zipper of the dress.

The sounds of Georgi being beaten are muted by the wall between his cell and my bedroom, but I still hear them.

Right after Boris killed Mom, Anton was allowed to rape me. Boris said all my screaming and begging were annoying, so he moved me down here.

Now, only the walls, the guards, and whoever's being tortured next door hear my screams.

I step out of the high heels and wiggle my toes while I open the closet doors. Grabbing a pair of black jeans, a T-shirt, and a jacket, I quickly change into the clothes.

I always try to cover as much skin as possible, so I don't draw unwanted attention from the guards.

It's also always cold in the basement, so I wear the jacket every day. Sitting down on the side of my bed, I put on my ballet flats before I pull a brush through my hair and tie it up in a ponytail.

Stepping out into the dimly lit hallway, I don't look at the four men who stand guard when there's a prisoner.

I take deep breaths and try to gather enough courage to face Georgi as I walk to the room beside mine.

It's gone quiet while I was getting dressed, and I hope he's unconscious.

I stop by the doorway and peek inside, but see that luck is not on my side.

With his arms held up by the shackles and chains, he's standing with his feet spread wide. Once again, I can't stop myself from looking at his incredible body, and even though he's been beaten, the bruises don't make him look any less attractive. If anything, they make him come across as more rugged and dangerous.

Georgi shakes his head and lets out a chuckle that sounds a little insane instead of playful like before. "Where has all your bravery gone, Nina?" He turns his head and locks eyes with me. "From deadly siren to scared mouse. That's quite the change."

His tongue darts out to swipe over the bleeding cut on his lip.

I take in the red blemishes on the left side of his chest, his busted lip, the bruising on his face, and the cut running through his eyebrow.

The gash on his head is my biggest worry.

Lowering my eyes to the floor, I walk into the room and go to the opposite corner where the cabinet holding all the medical supplies stands. I open the metal doors and take out a bottle of antiseptic fluid and a clean cloth.

It feels like I'm dragging my feet through sludge as I walk to where Georgi is restrained. I glance at him, and only then am I reminded of how tall he is.

I'm much shorter.

*Shit.*

I glance around the room and spot an empty bucket. Pulling it from under the table, I turn it over and position it behind Georgi. Careful not to fall, I climb on and pour some of the wound cleanser over the cloth.

When I press it to the gash where the blood is starting to dry, Georgi yanks his head away and growls, "Why are you cleaning me up?"

"It's my duty," I whisper.

When I try again, he doesn't pull away. I manage to wipe most of the blood off, and when I see he doesn't need stitches, I let out a breath of relief.

I climb off the bucket and move it in front of Georgi. When I get on it again, I barely reach his chin.

His eyes take mine captive, and he tilts his head. After a tense few seconds, he asks, "So what's your deal?"

I shrug, and breaking eye contact, I get to work on removing all the blood from his face. I don't know why, but instead of keeping quiet like I should, I whisper, "Boris is my father."

Georgi raises his eyebrow, and it has me saying, "Don't move your eyebrow. The cut will start bleeding again."

"Like you care." My gaze darts to his, and whatever he sees on my face makes him frown. "You can stop with the act, sweetheart. You have me all chained up." He leans his head a little down, his intense hazel gaze once again taking mine captive. "I'm at your mercy." I feel the warmth of his breath, and realizing how close our faces are, I jerk backward and lose my balance.

Georgi moves to catch me, but with his wrists shackled, he can't. His muscle strain and the chains rattle from his attempt to help as I go down hard.

The back of my head slams into the concrete, and I accidentally bite my tongue. The bottle of antiseptic fluid rolls to the side, clinking against the wall when it comes to a standstill.

"What the fuck is going on in here?" Vasil, one of the guards, shouts angrily.

Georgi ignores Vasil and looks at me as he asks, "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I mutter softly. Sitting up, I rub the goose egg forming beneath my ponytail. "I slipped and fell, Vasil. You can leave."

The guard glares at me. "No funny business or I'll tell Boris."

The threat clears my mind, and I get back to work. Picking up the antiseptic bottle, I return it to the cabinet before taking out the skin glue.

Aware that Vasil is watching my every move, I return to Georgi and set the bucket right before I climb on it again.

Doing my best not to make eye contact with the Sicilian who has me feeling weird things, I twist the cap open and brush some of the bonding liquid over the cut by his eyebrow.

The instant I'm done, I move the bucket back to where I found it and place the glue in the cabinet. When I rush toward the doorway, Vasil steps out of the way so I can pass.

I hurry to my bedroom and quickly shut the door before taking a deep breath. Wrapping my arms around my middle, I glance at the wall between Georgi and me.

"I hear you're some big shot mob boss," I hear Vasil's muted voice, his accent heavy. A few seconds later, he lets out a bark of laughter. "You don't look like a big shot."

"Come closer, and say that to my face," Georgi growls, his tone so low and deadly that it makes goose bumps erupt over my skin.

"You're restrained cocksucker," Vasil taunts him. "What do you think you can do?"

Suddenly, I hear chains rattle and horrible choking sounds. Footsteps pound past my door in the hallway, then Martin, one of the other guards shout, "Let him go!"

With wide eyes, I listen to the commotion.

"Son of a bitch," Martin shouts again. A gunshot rings through the air, making my entire body jerk.

More boots hit the concrete hard as men run past my room, then suddenly someone pounds on my door and shoves it open.

Martin glares at me as he orders, "Come patch up the piece of shit."

Reluctantly, my body moves forward while fear creeps into my mind.

Not knowing what I'm about to see, my breaths come faster than normal over my lips. Just as I step out of my bedroom, two of the guards pull Vasil's body into the hallway.

His open eyes are frozen with a look I've seen before. Death.

*Holy shit. How did he die?*

I press close to the cold wall as I slowly walk toward the other room.

"What the fuck is going on down here?!" Petar, the head of the guards, roars as he comes down the stairs.

Just as I step into the doorway, and my eyes flit over Georgi, who has a wide grin on his face, Martin says, "The dog broke Vasil's neck. I had to shoot him."

I see the blood seeping from Georgi's thigh as Petar asks, "How?"

"He used his legs," Martin explains.

When Petar stalks toward me, I dart into the room and go to the cabinet. Keeping my head down, I get everything I'll need to extract the bullet and stitch the wound closed.

"The next time you try something like that, I'll remove your fucking leg," Petar threatens Georgi.

A wave of nausea rolls through my stomach.

"No one gives him any food or water for the next two days." After barking out the order, Petar leaves again, and I exhale a slow breath.

Turning away from the cabinet, the thought that Georgi can kill me crosses my mind, and my feet refuse to move forward.

Georgi notices and lets out a dark chuckle while looking at me. "Scared, little mouse?"

"Shut up!" Martin snaps, then he gestures with his gun for me to get to work.

As I walk to Georgi, my body starts to tremble and my mouth grows impossibly dry. Once I'm within reaching distance of him, he chuckles again, and it makes me jerk with fright.

"Hmm...don't worry, sweetheart. I'm not into breaking women's necks." My eyes dart to his face, then he adds, "I'm all about the love."

"Shut the fuck up!" Martin hisses. "You fucking talk too much."

Kneeling beside Georgi, I pray to all that's holy, he doesn't kill me. I clean the area around the wound, and my voice trembles as I warn him, "It's going to hurt."

"That should be a turn on for you," he says, his tone still playful but with a dangerous undertone to it.

I press my lips together in a firm line and begin to dig the bullet out. Luckily for Georgi, it didn't go too deep, but I'm still surprised when he

doesn't even grunt.

I clean the wound again before stitching the hole shut. Gathering my supplies, I climb back to my feet, and as I glance at Georgi's face, I notice he's lost some color.

Honestly, I feel he should get a saline drip, but I know mentioning it will only get me in trouble.

"Faster," Martin snaps.

I hurry to put everything away, then rush out into the hallway and return to my room.

When I shut the door again, I slump back against the worn wood and close my eyes.

*I wish I could hold Simi.*

# Chapter 6

## Georgi

*Well, shit, this is not how I saw my night going.*

Glancing down at the stitches, my thigh on fucking fire, I let out a slow breath.

By now, Santino must be aware that I'm missing, and when I don't answer my phone, he'll contact Rosie to track me.

My eyes flick to the table where the broken pieces of my watch and phone are lying.

Rosie will be able to get the last cell tower my phone's signal pinged off. At least they'll know I'm in trouble because I would never leave without telling Santino where I'm going.

I hope Rosie finds CCTV footage of Boris and his men ambushing me outside the hotel.

I fired a shot. It should've drawn attention.

*My family will find me.*

My thoughts keep mulling over the shitty situation my dick got me into, and even though I'm tired and in pain, I know sleep isn't going to come easily.

I hear someone snoring right outside the room, but the next moment, a woman's blood-curdling scream rips through the air. It sounds really fucking close, and I wonder if more prisoners are being held here.

Another scream echoes into the room, then the snoring stops, and a few seconds later, a door bangs open. I hear the guard who shot me shout in Bulgarian, "Wake the fuck up. You're making a noise."

*Weird.*

Footsteps sound up out in the hallway, and the fucker glances into my room before he disappears again. It sounds like he's making himself comfortable, and soon his snoring picks up once more.

A door creaks open, drawing my attention, and my eyes lock on the part of the hallway I can see from where I'm standing.

When Nina tiptoes into the room, a frown forms on my forehead.

She's still wearing the jeans, T-shirt, and jacket from earlier. I notice the red marks on her cheek and around her neck again.

She's the enemy, and I shouldn't give a flying fuck about her, seeing as she's the reason I'm shackled in Boris' basement.

But...I hate that someone hurt her.

I watch as she comes toward me and remain silent while she checks my thigh. She moves quietly, getting the bucket, then uses it to stand on so she can inspect the wound on my head.

Nina seems satisfied that I'm not bleeding to death and quietly returns the bucket to beneath the table. I watch as she tiptoes to the doorway and glances out into the hallway before walking to a big metal sink across from the cabinet where the medical supplies are kept. She grabs a jug and slowly fills it with water before hurrying back to me.

*Interesting. Very fucking interesting.*

Standing on the tips of her toes, she places her hand on the side of my neck and holds the jug to my mouth. I drink all the water, knowing I won't get anything for a long while.

Her eyes touch on mine, but before I can give her a questioning look, she turns around and places the jug back by the sink before sneaking out of the room.

Nina said Boris is her father, and she helped him to ambush me, but she just went against the other asshole's order and gave me water.

*Hmm...I think it's safe to assume things aren't good between father and daughter. Maybe I can get Nina to free me.*

My eyebrow lifts, but the sting reminds me of the cut, and I relax my features.

Just then, I hear a door shut and movement on the other side of the wall. There's a soft cough, and turning my head, I look at the gray concrete as I realize the sound came from Nina.

Was she the one who screamed like that?

Why?

Question after question pops into my mind, but I find no answers as the muscles in my shoulders and back start to take heavy strain from the uncomfortable position.

Eventually, my thoughts turn to Raya and the rest of the family. Nothing better happen to my sister while I'm stuck here.

*Fuck.*

She will probably reach out to Petkov.

A disgruntled expression settles on my face when I think of the head of the Bulgarian mafia getting his hands on my sister.

I look up at the shackles again and twist my hands, trying to pull free from the steel, but it's no use and only chafes my skin raw.

Letting out a sigh, I glance around the floor, looking for a weapon I can use, but everything is out of my reach.

*Well, Georgi, I think it's safe to say you're fucked.*

---

After a very uncomfortable night and a fucking long day, my muscles ache and the wounds throb.

Other than listening to the guards' conversations, which I don't understand, and hearing some movement in the room beside mine, things have been quiet.

I think I've been missing close to twenty-four hours, so there's a good chance the other capos and Dad are in Bulgaria already.

The thought brings me some peace, knowing Raya won't be alone for very long.

After we were adopted, it took a year before I allowed my sister to sleep in her own bedroom. Until my late teens, Dad was the only man I trusted alone with her.

When asked why I'm so overprotective of her, I don't have an answer. It's just always been that way.

Maybe it's because I carried her out of the burning building where we lost our parents, and it mentally fucked with me, thinking that if I let go of her, she'd die as well.

Who knows.

Footsteps sound up, drawing me out of my thoughts. Lifting my head, I look at the doorway.

When Boris comes in with a bunch of guards. He looks pissed off, and it makes me grin at him. "Aww...did I kill one of your favorites?"

He shoots me a dark glare and comes to stand in front of me. "Tell me about the meeting. I want to know everything you and Petkov talked about."

I lock eyes with the bastard right before I take advantage of the few inches I'm able to move, head-butting him.

Boris staggers backward, his hand flying up to his face. Because he's much shorter, I didn't hit his nose, but at least I managed to daze him.

Something slams hard into the back of my knees, and my legs give way, my body weight putting sudden strain on my arms and wrists.

There's another brutal blow to my lower back, and this time I can't suppress the grunt.

Boris recovers, and coming at me, he slams his fist into my jaw.

The beating lasts for painful minutes, and by the time Boris holds up his hand for the men to stop, I can't get my feet beneath me and hang by the chains.

A slurred chuckle escapes me as my vision blurs, and I manage to say, "I'm not telling you shit."

I'm surprised when Boris and the men leave, but not even seconds later, I hear a door slamming open, then he snaps, "Fix up the fucker."

I struggle to lift my head and lean it against my bicep, my eyes on the doorway.

The moment Nina rushes in, seeing her does something weird to me. Strength surges back into my body, and as concern flashes over her beautiful face, I manage to find my footing.

She grabs the bucket and hauls it closer before going to the cabinet to get whatever she needs, tucking a couple of things into her jacket's pockets.

*She's still wearing the same clothes as last night.*

Coming back to me, she climbs on the bucket and tilts her head back.

Even standing on the bucket, she has to stretch, which brings her close enough for me to catch the faint scent of soap still clinging to her. No perfume.

My shoulders burn from all the strain they're taking, and my back aches something fierce, but the moment her fingers touch my cheek to clean away blood, the pain recedes to a dull pulse.

"Hold still," she whispers, bringing a needle closer to my busted cheek.

The corners of my mouth tip up. "Careful with the needle, Nina. I'd hate to think the butcher's daughter is getting ideas."

Her eyes flick to mine, and I don't miss the fear trembling in them. She pinches the cut together. "Hold still, or I'll stitch your skin crooked."

I grin, my gaze locked on her strikingly beautiful face so close to mine. "So you care what I'll look like once you're done patching me up?"

“Not in the least. I’m just here to keep you alive.” Her voice is stronger, but there’s no bite.

“Right.” I glance up and down Nina’s body and once again realize she’s not even half my size. “Your father tortures me, and you make sure I don’t die from it.”

She pushes the needle through my skin, and I ignore the sting.

“It’s my duty,” she replies.

After taking a deep breath, I almost chuckle. “Duty. Is that what you call helping him slice and dice me?”

“Careful, Georgi,” she mutters as she continues to stitch me up. “I’m the one who decides how much blood you’re losing tonight.”

My gaze lowers to her neck, and I notice how her pulse is fluttering in her throat.

*She’s fucking nervous.*

I keep quiet while she finishes the stitches, trying to figure out this enigma of a woman.

She’s Boris’ daughter, but they leave her alone with me.

I glance over her petite frame again.

There’s no way she’ll ever be able to hold her own against me in a fight. Even restrained, I could easily kill her right now.

I’ve heard how the guards and Boris speak to her, and it’s clear they don’t give a flying fuck about her safety.

When she steps down from the bucket, she pulls a tin from her pocket, and as she removes the lid, she walks around me. Her fingers touch the bruised skin on my lower back, her touch gentle, and soon cool relief spreads over my aching muscles.

She works carefully and lingers on the spots where the pain is at its worst.

It feels so good, my eyes drift shut, and I rest the side of my head against my bicep again.

Nina’s hands move up to my shoulders, and I can’t hold back the groan when she massages the tense muscles.

She pauses for a couple of seconds, and when she continues, I feel the slight tremble in her hands.

After a while, when she’s done all she can to relieve my pain, I ask, “You massage people often?”

Staying behind me, she replies softly, “No.” Darting toward the cabinet, her words are laced with nervous tension. “You needed it.”

Done putting the tin away and pulling out a fresh cloth, she glances at me as she walks to the sink to wet it.

Returning to me, Nina climbs onto the bucket again, and when our eyes finally lock, something shifts between us.

We stare for a long moment until my gaze drifts to her mouth before lifting again. I’m surprised when a flush forms on her cheeks.

The attraction I felt last night returns, and I see it reflected on her face.

Breaking the stare, she begins to clean the rest of the blood from my face and neck. Eventually, she steps off the bucket, and after rinsing the cloth, she comes back and continues to wipe my chest clean.

Wanting to see how she’ll react, I keep my voice low and intimate. “Nina.”

She goes still.

The silence that follows feels weighted by all the things neither of us should be feeling because it’s pretty clear to me that she’s also attracted to me.

When she finally risks another glance, I don’t hide what I’m feeling. With hooded eyes, I keep looking at her, hoping that if I can make her attraction toward me grow into something more solid she might set me free.

Her breathing speeds up a little, but then she tosses the bloody rag into the sink and rushes toward the door.

When she suddenly stops, my eyes are glued to her.

“Don’t tear the stitches.” It almost sounds like she cares.

Letting out a chuckle, I shake my head and mutter, “Yes, doctor.”

She keeps still for a beat longer before slipping out the door.

# Chapter 7

## Nina

After being forced to listen to Ivan's crude remark about fucking me, he finally opens the door.

I rush inside, and Simi's head pops up from where she's brushing her doll's hair. Dropping the toy, she scrambles to her feet. "Mama!"

I sweep my beautiful girl into my arms and hold her tightly while taking a deep breath of her scent. "*Milo moe*," I almost whimper from the intense relief of finally getting to hold my daughter.

"I missed you so much, Mama," Simi sniffles while snuggling deeper into my embrace.

"I missed you, too."

I hear Tanya move and quickly glance in her direction. She pauses at the door, glaring at me. "If either of you causes trouble, Ivan will deal with it." Her mouth curves into a triumphant smile as she steps into the hallway. "Boris sent for me." Smug laughter bubbles over her lips. "Can't keep my man waiting. Enjoy your two hours with the brat because I know I'll enjoy my time with your father."

*Bitch.*

I turn my attention back to my daughter and move her to the corner where her toys are, aware of Ivan standing near the door, watching us.

Simi lifts her head and looks toward the door, then back at me, her expression brightening. "She's gone."

"For a little while," I murmur as I stretch out onto my stomach, propping my chin on my hand. "Looks like I get my girl all to myself. Do you want to color?"

A tiny smile blooms on her face, all sweetness and love, and she pushes her coloring book closer to me, the page partially covered with wild circles and uneven patches of color.

"This is us," she whispers, pointing at the top corner.

I study the two crooked figures she's drawn, one much taller than the other, and point to a yellow shape hovering above us. "And what's this?"

"The sun."

*God, what I'd give to walk outside with Simi.*

She lies down beside me, and with our heads close to each other, I ask, "What did you do today?"

She shrugs. "Tanya watched her show and said if I made any noise, she'd spank me."

I hate that woman so much.

Simi looks at me. "I kept quiet, Mama."

My heart constricts in my chest. "You're such a good girl, *milo moe*."

We begin to color, our crayons moving over the paper while she narrates everything she draws. She gives flowers names, insisting the blue scribble is a pool we'll one day have when our prince comes.

She hooks her left hand through my arm and holds on to me as if she's scared I'll suddenly disappear.

I drop the crayon and smooth my fingers through her hair, pressing tender kisses to her temple. "I love you so much. You fill my entire heart."

When Simi glances at me, I give her an affectionate smile.

She tips her head to the side and whispers, "You look prettier when you smile."

I brush my thumb over her cheek. "I only smile for you."

She grins happily, then rolls onto her back, her fingers gripping my arm.

"I wish we could stay together all the time," she says, her tone sad.

I reach over, tuck loose curls behind her ear, and let my hand linger against the softness of her cheek. "I'm with you even when you can't see me."

After a while, she looks at me with wide eyes and whispers, "Is the prince still coming?"

For one dangerous moment, Georgi's face pushes into my thoughts, but I force the thought away and focus on my precious daughter.

"Yes," I tell her softly. "He's still coming."

"When?"

I pause, hating that I have to lie to her. Forcing the smile back to my face, I reply, "Soon."

She narrows her eyes at me. "You always say soon."

I tap her nose playfully. "That's because the prince will come at the exact right time and only he knows when that will be."

Ivan lets out a snort, which I ignore.

Simi thinks for a moment, then asks, "What if he gets lost, Mama?"

“He won’t.”

“What if he forgets?” she asks another question.

I gather her closer until her head rests on my arm. “He won’t forget us.”

*Forgive me for all my lies.*

Satisfied, she lifts her hand to my face and traces her fingertip around my eyes, nose, and mouth.

“Mama, do you miss me when I’m gone?”

The urge to cry strikes so hard, I have to blink fast to keep the tears back, and my voice is hoarse as I reply, “Every second of every single day.”

“Even when you eat?”

Nodding, I press a kiss to her chubby cheek.

“Even when you sleep?”

A sad smile touches my mouth as I look into her innocent eyes. “Yes.”

Her fingers play with a lock of my hair while she studies my face. “You look sad, Mama.”

“I’m happy right now,” I answer honestly.

She searches my eyes as if checking whether I’m telling the truth before lifting her small hand to my cheek. Turning my head, I kiss her palm.

For a long while, we lie together, just staring at each other.

“When I grow up big, I’ll protect you,” she whispers as if she’s sharing a secret with me.

I press my mouth to her hair and wrap my arms tightly around her small body. “That’s my job, *malka*.”

“It will become my job too,” she insists.

I kiss her forehead, then each of her cheeks. Letting my fingers drift through her hair, I can’t stop touching her and savor every second I have with my baby girl.

Simi smiles, sleepy and pleased, then snuggles closer. I hold her until Ivan mutters, “Time’s up.”

Carefully, I get up, lifting my sleeping daughter into my arms. I carry her to the single bed in the other room and softly set her down.

“I love you more than anything, *milo moe*.” Pressing a kiss to her forehead, my chest fills with unspeakable pain, then I pull away and leave.

---

When I come down the steps, I hear a heavy footfall behind me and glance over my shoulder. Seeing Boris, I hurry to get out of his way, and as he

stalks past me, he grumbles, “Come. I want you to give the bastard truth serum so he’ll talk.”

*Shit.*

Having no choice but to do as I’m told, I follow my father to the torture chamber.

I avoid looking at Georgi as I rush to the cabinet, and taking the syringe and ampoule out, I attach a needle and get everything ready.

“Tell me what happened at the meeting!” Boris demands from Georgi.

“Nope.”

“Which routes do you use?” Boris asks another question.

“Christ, I’m going to die of boredom long before you decide to kill me.” Georgi’s tone is taunting and blatantly disrespectful.

“Hurry, Nina,” my father snaps, and I jump with fright before I jog closer. I hate myself as I push the needle into the side of Georgi’s thigh, his muscle tensing.

When I step away and dispose of the injection, Georgi keeps his gaze trained on Boris, who chuckles darkly as he sneers, “The truth serum will make you talk.”

My father watches Georgi with the same cruelty he always has when dealing with me.

The chains keeping our prisoner upright rattle when his legs begin to shake.

Standing to the side, I take in the dark bruising covering his torso and back, the sight of it causing a wave of nausea to roll through my stomach.

Boris waits until Georgi’s breathing begins to change before he continues with his interrogation. “Which routes do you use in America and Europe?” Nothing from Georgi. “What was the meeting with Petkov about?” Again, he remains silent.

Boris shouts one question after the other, asking about routes used to move weapons, the contacts who receive shipments on the ground, and the ports the Cosa Nostra uses.

My father sounds more and more agitated as the minutes creep by, without any answers.

I notice instantly when Georgi’s eyes lose focus, and holding my breath, I fist my hands as I watch the serum take effect on him.

Suddenly, it seems as if something unseen takes hold of him and confusion ripples over his features. “No,” he whispers, his tone hoarse.

My heart constricts, and even though Boris asks more questions, I don't hear them. I'm fully focused on Georgi as he shakes his head harder, panic flaring across his face while his breathing turns ragged.

"Wake up!" he shouts, his voice filled with fear.

My eyebrows draw together, and I lift a hand to my neck.

The chains rattle when he jerks forward as if he's trying to get to something, the desperation and terror coming from him raising the tiny hairs at the back of my neck.

The drug isn't making him spill the answers to all the questions, but instead it's either causing him to hallucinate or to relive a horrible moment from his past.

"Raya!" he shouts as he strains against the shackles. He lunges hard enough for the steel to cut into his wrists, and when one of Boris's men steps closer, Georgi twists his body with savage expression darkening his features, and he sweeps the guard's feet from under him. "Get away from her!"

The violence in his voice makes me flinch and take a step backward so he can't reach me.

Boris shouts more questions about Bulgarian routes and American contacts, but Georgi stares through my father, seeing only whatever nightmare has control over him.

His chest heaves as panic tightens his features again. "It's too hot," he whimpers. Then, with a horror that cuts deep into my heart, he mumbles, "They're dead. I couldn't wake them."

He sounds like a child trapped in terror, and it's one of the saddest things I've ever been forced to witness.

When Georgi surges forward again, a wave of danger ripples through the air, and it has Boris stepping closer to me. "The fucking serum is useless." He swings to me, the back of his hand striking across my cheek, and unable to catch myself, I fall sideways.

"Don't touch her!" Georgi roars, the chains clanking as he strains against them. "I'll fucking kill you."

Boris ignores Georgi and levels me with a cruel glare that promises nothing good for me. "Watch the piece of shit. If he dies, so does Simona."

When my father leaves, all the guards file out of the room. Martin grips the handle and gives me an evil grin as he begins to pull the door shut. "Good luck with lover boy."

The moment we're alone, I scramble to my feet and rush to the cabinet. I grab a clean cloth and quickly wet it under the cold water before hurrying to Georgi.

Breathing raggedly and way too fast, he keeps mumbling words I can't make out. His legs tremble so violently, I know he'd crumple to the ground if it weren't for the chains holding him up.

"Georgi," I say softly, but he doesn't seem to hear me.

I reach up, trying to wipe the cool cloth over his feverish face, but he jerks his head backward before his body lunges at me. I jump a few steps away, and the chains stop him a hair's breadth from me.

With his teeth clenched, a growl rumbles from his chest, making intense fear ripple through me.

"It's Nina," I squeak fearfully. "I just want to help you."

Slowly, the darkness in his eyes retreats until he seems to recognize me. His pupils are still blown wide as he searches my face. It looks like he's trying to figure out what is happening.

"Fire," he croaks.

I quickly wipe the sweat off his face while saying, "There's no fire." Hurrying to the sink, I fill the jug with water and carry it back to him.

When I place my hand on the side of his jaw, he leans into my touch, and I'm so thankful when he drinks all the water.

Some more clarity returns to his eyes, but his breaths are still too fast.

I toss the jug into the sink, where it lands with a clank, while I run to the cabinet to get the blood pressure cuff.

When my gaze touches on the bucket, I decide against it, and knowing the door is locked and he can't get out, I run to the other side of the room where the chains are locked in place. Pressing the button of the control mechanism, I watch impatiently as the metal links roll forward, easing the biting hold on Georgi's arms.

Once he drops to his knees and his arms lower to his sides, I stop and hurry to him. I quickly crouch and fasten the cuff around his bicep.

His muscles keep jumping and trembling from the merciless strain they've endured.

As I take his vitals, I feel his eyes burning on my face.

Satisfied that he's not at risk of having a heart attack, I set the blood pressure cuff aside.

Wanting to help him, I begin to massage his bicep, and giving him a pleading look, I say, “You need to slow down your breathing.”

Georgi leans into me, and when he presses his forehead to mine, I freeze.

“I couldn’t wake them.” His voice breaks toward the end of the sentence, making my heart clench again. “There was smoke everywhere. I couldn’t...” His voice fails him.

Unable to keep back, I wrap my arms around him, supporting his weight when he leans further into me.

Careful not to touch any of the wounds, I try to rub his shoulder blades to ease some of the pain he must be feeling.

At first, his body remains tense, but then he finally relaxes little by little under my touch.

I move my hand through his damp hair and whisper, “It’s over.”

Georgi’s breathing finally returns to normal, and when more of his weight leans into me, I hold him as tight as I can.

“I’m so sorry,” I whimper, my voice barely audible. “For all of it.”

He lifts his head, locking his eyes with mine. “Set me free.”

The urge to cry wells in me as I shake my head. “I can’t.”

He keeps staring at me, then says, “I’ll protect you, Nina.”

The guilt threatens to crush me as I shake my head again.

The chains clank against the floor as he shifts closer, and leaning into me, his mouth brushes near my temple. “Then stay with me,” he murmurs, his speech slurred. “Just for a little while.”

My throat closes, and I hug him again before guiding his head to my shoulder. “Try to sleep.”

Georgi’s body shakes with laughter, the corner of his mouth lifting. “I have to admit, you and Boris make quite the team. You know how to fuck with a man’s head.”

“Shh...” I brush my hand over his hair again. “Just sleep.”

Eventually, more of his weight leans into me, and his breathing evens out.

As I hold Georgi while he rests, I play with the idea of setting him free, even going as far as to imagine how he’ll fight his way out of the mansion.

But then the stark reality that’s my life settles in with the cold in the room.

I won’t free Georgi because Boris will kill Simi and me.

# Chapter 8

## Georgi

When day four comes and goes, I begin to get worried that my family won't find me in time.

Boris is going to reach the end of his patience soon and kill me.

*Fuck.*

I put all my weight on my right leg because my left is fucked after they beat the shit out of the gunshot wound, ripping the stitches.

I'm exhausted, starving, and in a world of pain.

Just as Raya pops into my thoughts, Nina walks into the room. She takes one look at my thigh and goes to the cabinet to get supplies.

"Evening, little mouse," I say, some of the pain soaking into my playful tone. "Scurrying here and there." When she comes toward me, she avoids making eye contact. "Regretting holding me the other night?"

This time her gaze flicks to mine, then she kneels beside me. Even though I'm half dead, it's one hell of a turn on.

My cock hardens, and the nine inches responsible for getting me into this mess draw Nina's attention.

Her eyes widen, and she quickly looks down before fumbling with the needle and suture thread.

Just to fuck with her, I say, "I'm a little chained up right now, but set me free, and I'll show you a different kind of torture."

Her hands still, and a few seconds pass before she lets out a slow breath. Getting the thread through the tiny loop, she tilts her head back, and as she begins to close up my wound, the fear in her eyes gets to me.

Dropping the playful act, my tone is serious as I say, "I won't hurt you."

She keeps her gaze trained on the needle as she pushes it through my skin. Her tone is shaky as she replies, "You just said if I free you, you'll rape me." She ties the knot and cuts the thread. "So it's a little hard to believe you won't hurt me."

As she climbs to her feet, her eyes meet mine.

I can't stop the dark expression from settling on my face. "I didn't say I'd rape you."

“That’s what you implied,” she argues.

Am I losing my mind, or does she look disappointed in me?

I hate explaining myself, but I’m not some fucking rapist, and for some reason I have to set things straight between us.

“I never have, and never will, rape a woman. The torture I was referring to was withholding an orgasm until you beg and then blowing your mind.” Taking my chance to find out if she’s the one screaming every night, I add, “Trust me, your screams of ecstasy will be much sweeter than the ones I’ve heard at night.”

Startled, her eyes widen slightly. “I forgot sound travels down here.”

*I’m right. It is her.*

I stare at her for a moment before asking, “Why do you scream?”

“Nightmares.”

Her quick answer surprises me. Up until now, she hasn’t been very forthcoming in giving me any information about herself.

Pushing my luck, I ask, “Why is your room down here in the basement?”

“Boris doesn’t like hearing me scream.” She breaks eye contact and walks to the cabinet. “It annoys him.”

“All jokes aside. Get me out of these shackles, and I’ll repay the favor.”

She lets out a bitter-sounding chuckle. “If I free you, I’m as good as dead.”

“I’ll protect you.”

Nina shakes her head, and without another word, she leaves the room. Seconds later, I hear Martin say, “I don’t think Boris will be happy to hear about your lover’s quarrel. You’re getting too chatty with the scumbag.”

“I’m sorry,” Nina replies, her tone filled with terror. “It won’t happen again.”

Martin chuckles darkly. “Anton is here. You’d better hurry and change into something more to his liking.”

A door slams shut, and I hear movement in the room beside mine.

*Anton?*

I search my memory for anyone with the name, but come up empty.

Thinking the guy is Nina’s boyfriend leaves a bad taste in my mouth, which gets my attention, because...why does it matter?

At the end of the day, we’re enemies, and I have to remember she only takes care of me out of duty to her father.

“Where the fuck is she?” I hear a man roar.

“In her room,” Martin replies, his tone dripping with respect.

A man I’ve never laid eyes on appears in the doorway. I’d guess his age to be around sixty.

Looking like he’s about to bust a vein, he glares me up and down before stalking away. A door slams open, then his angry shout fills the air. “Fucking whore. Did you think I wouldn’t find out?”

“I only did as I was ordered.” Hearing Nina’s pleading tone as she responds, a frown forms on my forehead.

She lets out a cry, the sound making every muscle in my body tense.

The next second, she’s hauled into the room. The man, whom I assume is Anton, is gripping her by her arm.

“So this is the kind of shit you like?” he roars in her face before shoving her into my body.

Nina’s face hits my stomach hard, and he holds her there as he yells, “You think he can do anything to save you? Huh?” The fucker shakes her hard before yanking her away from me, and just as my fingers grip the chains so I can use my legs to grab hold of the asshole, he moves out of my reach and begins to slap Nina fucking hard.

“Stop!” I shout, speaking Bulgarian for the first time and giving away that I know the language. My body lurches forward, making the shackles dig into my raw skin. “If you want to hit someone, come over here.”

Nina falls onto her side, and when he kicks her in her stomach, I’m almost yanked off my feet from trying to lunge forward so I can get to her.

The fucker points a finger at me. “You fucking shut up.” He crouches beside Nina and grabs a fistful of her hair, then yanks her face closer to his.

Blood trickles from her nose and lip, the sight making rage burn through me.

“You think you can flirt with another man and I won’t find out?”

She shakes her head, desperation tightening her features as she replies with a pleading tone, “I only did what my father told me to do.”

With his other hand, he grips her jaw so tightly that her lips are squashed together. “I’ll just have to remind you who you belong to.”

Nina’s eyes go wide as saucers, and the next instant, she yanks free and scrambles to her feet. Before she can take a step, the fucker grabs hold of her, and she’s yanked so hard that when she hits the floor, the thud echoes through the room.

“Motherfucker!” I shout as I fight against the shackles.

To my absolute horror, Anton straddles Nina and pins her hands above her head with one of his before he begins to undo the button of her pants.

Watching her squirm and strain against his hold, knowing I can’t do anything to help her, flays my fucking soul raw.

I know what he plans to do, and the thought alone makes my gut churn.

“She gets the fucking message,” I bark when he begins to yank her pants down.

He has to let go of her hands so he can get the jeans off her, and it has me shouting, “Fight, Nina! Knee the fucker in the balls. Scratch out his eyes.”

Listening, she goes for his face, her nails leaving red grooves over his cheeks.

The bastard backhands her so hard some of her blood flies through the air, and it leaves her too dazed to fight.

“You better hope Pavlov kills me,” I tell Anton, my voice filled with every ounce of anger and hatred I feel. “I’m going to fucking kill you.”

The piece of shit laughs as he pulls Nina’s jeans and underwear off, and when he shoves her legs open, he looks me dead in the eyes as he unbuckles his belt and pulls down his zipper.

My eyes dart back to Nina’s face, and her gaze latches onto mine for a moment. Out of my peripheral vision, I see Anton move, then Nina begs, “Don’t look!”

As her face crumbles and a sob escapes, I help her the only way I can. I close my eyes.

The dead-man-walking grunts, and the nauseating sound is followed by Nina’s harrowing cry.

I clench my jaw so fucking hard, my teeth grind. My muscles strain, the shackles chafe against my broken skin, and as I’m forced to listen to her broken cries and the sickening sounds filling the room, I suffer the worst torture I’ve ever had to endure.

And it’s nothing compared to what Nina is going through right now. Not even close.

I don’t mean to, but when another cry shudders from her, my eyes open. The sight makes my stomach lurch and shifts the very foundation my entire life has been built on.

Nina turns her head, and when her traumatized gaze meets mine, she whimpers, “Nooooo.”

Instead of shutting my eyes, I keep hers captive, willing every ounce of my strength to her.

Nina’s cries slow down until only bursts of air escape her lips everytime he thrusts into her. Her features relax, and not breaking eye contact, I watch as she checks out of her hideous reality.

I don’t know where her mind goes, but it has to be better than here.

The fucker orgasms, and while he catches his breath, he grips her chin and kisses her forcefully. “You will always belong to me.” Only then does he notice the blank stare in her eyes, and he punches her. “Fucking whore.”

Climbing off her unconscious body, he swipes his palm through the mess between her thighs, then getting to his feet, he walks to me. I meet his eyes, and when he wipes his release off on my chest, he says, “That’s the closest you’ll ever get to her pussy.”

Not hesitating, I slam my head into his, and as he staggers backward, I use all my strength to bring my legs up. Just as I’m about to wrap them around the fucker, he jumps out of my reach.

Shaking his head, he gives me an angry glare. “You can be so fucking glad we need the information.”

“Take off the shackles, and I’ll tell you everything you want to know while I beat the life out of your pathetic ass.”

He finally tucks his flaccid dick back into his pants, and as he pulls up the zipper, he walks out of the room and gives Martin an order. “Shut the door. No one goes in until Nina comes out on her own. I’ll fucking break your neck if I find out you saw her naked.”

Martin keeps his face averted as he pulls the door shut, and all my attention focuses on Nina, where she’s lying unconscious.

The harrowing events shudder through my mind until the depraved darkness of what happened is engraved into my soul.

*Christ.*

My mind reels, and I struggle to keep the flashes of Nina being raped from taking over and reducing me to a helpless mess.

After long minutes, Nina finally stirs, and when her head lolls to the side and her lashes lift, I say, “He’s gone. It’s just us.”

She stares at me until her eyes regain focus and the trauma fills them.

I'd give everything I own to be able to hold her right now, but there's no time. The words carry the promise of death as I growl, "Free me, and I'll kill him."

Nina struggles into a sitting position and reaches for her jeans. I turn my head away, giving her privacy while she puts on her pants.

I listen to her movements, and when it sounds like she's coming toward me, I glance at her again, but she walks right past me, her expression blank.

When the shackles suddenly eases and my arms move, my head snaps up, and seeing that the chains are being lowered, my heart beats faster.

Once my arms are hanging at my sides, Nina grabs a wrench from the table and comes back to me. Without saying a word, she begins to loosen the bolt on the right shackle until she's able to pull it out, then she moves to my left side.

As she works to get the bolt free, crippling emotions ripple over her face, and she sobs softly.

The moment both my wrists are free, she walks to the table and grabs a hammer, then holds it out to me without making any eye contact.

Knowing time is of the essence, I take the hammer from her.

Spotting a dirty rag, I grab it and wipe the shit off my chest. As I toss it back onto the table, our gazes meet for an intense moment before Nina runs to the door and yanks it open.

"Oh, my God! Help! He's convulsing," she screams at the top of her lungs, her panic very convincing.

I move quickly into position, and as Martin comes darting into the room, I swing and slam the hammer into his face. He sprawls to the side, and I move, grabbing his gun from his hip.

When the other guards file into the room, I fire three shots, each one hitting their target and dropping the fuckers like flies.

I shoot Martin to make sure he's dead, then toss his weapon on him before taking two guns from the other fuckers, checking the magazines to make sure they're full.

When I limp out into the hallway, there's no sign of Nina.

# Chapter 9

## Georgi

As I come up the stairs, someone suddenly shoots at me, and I plaster myself against the wall, returning fire.

A bullet hits my left forearm, but it's so close to the surface that it goes right through. Pissed off, I push forward and shoot the fucker as I reach the top of the stairs.

I'm surprised when there aren't any other men waiting to stop me, but I can hear them shouting. Some are ordering others to find me, while a couple are saying that they're leaving.

Not wanting to miss my chance, I dig in the dead guy's pockets until I find his phone, and seeing it needs a fingerprint to unlock the device, I take a wild guess and press his right thumb to the screen.

It opens, and as I walk down another hallway, I dial Rosie's number, which every single capo has memorized.

My body aches something fierce, making me grind my teeth as I breathe through all the pain.

It only rings twice before her voice comes over the line. "Yes?"

"It's Georgi. Track the number."

"Sweet Jesus!" she shrieks in my ear. "It's Georgi," she shouts before lowering her voice and asking, "Are you okay?"

A man comes down the hallway, and moving faster than him, I fire two shots before he can get one off.

"No," I answer as I continue walking. "I'm dropping the phone in case I'm intercepted. I don't want them to catch on that I managed to call you."

"I have your location. Jesus, you're only twenty minutes away. The guys are coming. Hang tight."

When I reach the body, I shove the phone into his pocket.

Focusing all my attention on my surroundings, it's just in time as another fucker darts into the hallway. He moves so fast, I barely register him before years of training take over, and I pull the trigger.

The bullet slams into his chest, and he drops hard, his body crashing into a narrow table that splinters across the carpeted floor.

Every step forward takes me deeper into the mansion, my focus stripped down to one single purpose. Find Nina and haul ass out of this house of horrors.

As I reach the end of the hallway, I notice a foyer ahead of me. A man suddenly lunges from where he was hiding behind the wall. A knife glints in his hand, and as he slices across my chest, I grab hold of his forearm and twist hard while slamming the handle of my gun into his face. The impact makes him stagger, and before he can recover, I wrench the knife from his hand and shove it into the side of his neck.

As he goes down, I quickly rush into the foyer, glancing at the front door.

Just then, it opens, and several more men come hurrying into the mansion.

*Fuck.*

I run for the nearest door on the opposite side of the foyer while they open fire.

Bullets crack through the air, slamming into the walls, and as I dive through the doorway and hit the polished floor of what looks like a formal sitting room, the gunfire increases dramatically.

I barely take in the velvet furniture as I take cover behind the nearest sofa.

Bullets shatter glass behind me, and bracing myself on one knee, I quickly dart up and shoot at whatever moves.

One man drops in the doorway and another stumbles back, clutching his throat, while a third fucker takes a bullet right in the dick before I also bury one in his head.

The fourth guy makes it inside the room, and knowing I can't stay behind the sofa and run out of bullets, I lunge to my feet and meet him head-on.

We grab at each other and slam into a table, hard enough to make an expensive bottle of whiskey topple over. I catch it mid-fall and smash it against the fucker's head, knocking him out cold. As he goes down, I fire a shot into his chest before running to the doorway.

How much fucking time has passed?

As I cautiously walk back into the foyer, a scream echoes through the mansion, and recognizing the sound I've heard every fucking night, I hurry up the stairs, taking two at a time.

Reaching the second floor, I hear her cry, "Please, Ivan. I'm begging you." Her voice sounds hysterical, and it has me pushing my tired body harder than ever as I take another flight of stairs up to the third floor. "Just give Simi to me."

Hearing Nina plead like that makes something dark rise from the pits of hell that calls my soul home.

The landing is illuminated by a crystal chandelier, and as my eyes lock on Nina, I see the ungodly horror on her face. My arms fly up, and I train the barrel of my gun on a man who has a little girl half over the banister, one arm clamped around her waist as her legs kick over open air.

Christ, the fall will kill her.

Silent tears form tracks on her terrified face, her eyes wide and glued to Nina.

"Please, Ivan!" Nina begs again, slowly inching a careful step forward. She's not aware that I'm here.

If I shoot him, he'll drop Simi.

*Fuck.*

Suddenly, a woman appears in the doorway, and not noticing me, she says, "Let go of the kid, already. We have to get out of here."

My mind switches over to a higher gear, and not wasting another second, I shoot the woman in the head while running forward. Dropping the weapon near Nina, I grab hold of the banister and throw my body over it just as the fucker releases Simi.

"Noooooooo!" Nina screams.

As we both fall, I catch Simi against my chest and lock my right arm around her tiny body. Just as we hurtle toward the second floor's banister, I slam my left forearm over the railing and hook it hard around the steel.

Pain explodes through me as my body crashes into the metal while a gunshot rings through the air above us, and the blood on my arm from the bullet wound makes it fucking difficult to hang on.

"Simi!" Nina cries, looking down at us with a horrified expression I won't forget as long as I live.

Suddenly, I hear men shouting, and recognizing their voices, I holler, "Hurry the fuck up! Second floor banister. About to fall to my death."

"Jesus fucking Christ," Dad shouts, and the sound of his voice fills me with intense relief.

I'm not surprised when he gets to me first with Augusto and Adriano right behind him.

Dad leans over the metal railing and grabs my torn-up wrist and forearm. Augusto and Adriano work to pull him back while Dad keeps a tight hold of me.

Santino joins them, and I use the last of my strength to push Simi up so he can take her.

Before he can lift her to safety, Nina is there to grab Simi, sobs bursting over her lips.

"My heart," she cries, the sound heartbreaking as Dad and my friends haul my ass to safety.

"Ma-ma," the little girl hiccups through her tears.

As I drop to the floor and Dad wraps his arms around me, my eyes lock on Nina.

She takes one look at all the men, and as she spins around to run away, I shout, "Stop her! She's coming with us."

Santino moves fast. When he grabs hold of Nina, she lets out another harrowing scream, and it has me forcing my exhausted body to move.

Dad helps me to my feet, then he growls, "Fuck, son. We need to get you to a hospital."

"I'm fine." My eyes flick to his, so he can see I mean it, then I focus on Nina again and limp closer to her. "It's going to be okay. You're coming with me."

She yanks her arm free from Santino's hold and shakes her head wildly, looking like a cornered animal.

I tip my head at Simi, who's the spitting image of her mother, then say, "You need to calm down for your daughter's sake."

Nina's tears dry up instantly, and as her face grows even paler, she looks at me as if I'm the one who betrayed her.

"Grounds are secured," Lorenzo, Augusto's guard, shouts from the first floor.

"There's no sign of Boris," I hear Atanas Petkov growl angrily.

Glancing over the banister, I see the head of the Bulgarian mafia and his men, fully armed.

Not wanting to hang around a second longer than needed, and knowing Nina isn't thinking rationally because of the rape and watching her daughter

almost die, I turn my attention back to her and say, “You’re coming with me, Nina, even if I have to carry you out of here.”

When Santino takes hold of her arm again, she jerks hard, and it has me ordering, “Let go of her. She’ll come on her own.” Nina’s eyes dart to mine, and I tilt my head as I ask, “Right?”

She quickly nods and takes a step away from Santino.

I hold my hand out to her and gesture with a curl of my fingers for her to come to me.

Still looking wild and out of it, she slowly inches closer.

“No one is going to hurt you,” I say, hoping the words sink in. Noticing the scared expression on the girl’s face, I switch to Bulgarian and smile at her. “You’re safe now, little one.”

“Mama...” The mini version of Nina gives me a curious look. “Why is he so dirty and bloody? I thought he would be clean and have a sword.”

“Shh...” Nina’s hand trembles terribly as she places her palm against Simi’s cheek. Her voice is hoarse and filled with fear as she tries to smile and look brave for her child. “We’re going on a little adventure. Okay?”

“Tell Santino where Simi’s room is so my men can get her belongings.”

Nina’s eyes snap to me, and even though she gives me a pleading look, she says, “On the third floor. The one by the bodies.”

Santino gives orders over a radio, and once he’s done, I lock eyes with him. “Go to the basement. The first room is Nina’s. Bring everything.”

“There’s no time for this,” Dad snaps. “You need medical care right now.”

“Nina will patch me up at the hotel,” I mutter as I gently place my hand on her side, nudging her toward the stairs.

She walks stiffly beside me, holding her daughter tightly. Simi’s eyes keep drifting all over my face, and when I meet her big brown eyes, a hopeful smile curves her mouth.

I return the smile, then wink at her.

She scrunches her nose. “You stink.”

“We have to keep quiet, my sweet one,” Nina whispers.

“She’s just being honest, Mama,” I say with a chuckle. “Let her be.”

Nina gives me a surprised look, but it disappears as quickly as it came when we reach the front door.

Atanas glances at Nina and Simi before meeting my eyes. “Christ, you look like shit.”

“I’ve been better.”

“After you were taken, I moved Raya and your men to my place. I hope you don’t mind.” The instant my expression darkens, he lets out a chuckle. “Don’t stress. I didn’t touch her.”

“Raya is safe,” Dad says to set my mind at ease. “Atanas has been a great help, letting us all stay with him.”

Feeling less worried, I give Atanas a grateful look, and knowing my sister is okay, my thoughts instantly turn back to Nina.

The memory of Anton forcing himself on her shudders through me, and I growl, “I want to see all the bodies.”

“Why?” Dad asks.

“I’m looking for a specific man.”

Nina stiffens even more beside me.

Atanas gives me a questioning look. “Who?”

“Anton.” I search my memory, then add, “Belinski.”

“He isn’t here,” Atanas assures me. “I already checked the dead, hoping to find Boris.”

“Fuck!” I snap, and holding my hand out to Dad, I say, “Give me your phone.”

Dad digs the device out of his pocket and hands it to me. “Call your mother while you’re at it. She’s sick with worry.”

“Let’s go,” Atanas says, signaling with a wave to all the men that we’re leaving.

I dial Rosie’s number and wait as it rings.

“Hi, Uncle Renzo. Is Georgi okay?”

“It’s me,” I say. “I’m fine. I need you to use every fucking skill you possess to find Anton Belinski.”

“On it.”

I stop at the nearest SUV and open the back door, then tip my head, indicating for Nina to get in while I end the call with Rosie and press dial on Mom’s number.

As I climb in beside Nina and Simi, the call connects, and Mom answers, her tone exhausted and emotional. “Any news?”

“Hey, Mom. I’m fine. I’m with Dad.”

“Oh my God!” she cries, then she dissolves into a fit of tears, and while she sobs, my tone is comforting as I say, “I’m okay, Mom. Just a little

banged up and down a few pounds. Once I'm home, you'll need to feed me."

"Anything you want. Jesus, Georgi." Her voice disappears.

Dad gets into the front passenger seat, while Fabrizio, one of Dad's guards, slips in behind the steering wheel. He's like a second father to me, and I'm glad to see he came along.

"I love you," I murmur affectionately to Mom, and it only makes her cry more. "I'm okay."

"Did...did they..." She clears her throat. "How badly are you hurt?"

"I still have all my body parts," I say to ease her worst fears. "Just two bullets and a few beatings. Nothing serious."

The SUV begins to move, and as we leave Boris' property in a convoy, I don't look around but instead glance down at my forearm. Even though the bleeding has slowed down, I'm starting to feel very lightheaded.

"I want you to come home now," Mom whimpers. "I need to see you and hold you."

"I just have a couple of things to wrap up this side. Two or three days at most."

"I love you so much, Georgi. For the sake of my sanity, keep Dad and Santino with you all the time."

I grin at the back of Dad's head. "I don't think Dad will let me out of his sight anytime soon. Don't worry. I'll be home before you know it."

"What is he saying?" I hear Simi whisper to Nina.

"He's telling his Mama he loves her," she replies softly to her daughter while gently rubbing the little one's back.

"I have to go, Mom. Talk to you soon."

"Love you!"

"Love you too."

I end the call, and as I lean forward to hand the phone back to Dad, it slips from my hand, and my vision tunnels.

"Uhm...he's lost a lot of blood. Is there anything I can use to tie around his forearm?" Nina asks as she moves Simi to sit beside her.

I slump back against the seat, my head lolling in Nina's direction so I can look at her.

Her lips move, and she scoots closer to me. I feel her soothing touch as she takes hold of my left arm, and I think the corner of my mouth lifts.

# Chapter 10

## Nina

Georgi drifts in and out of consciousness, then he mumbles, “Dad...”

“I’m here, son,” Mr. Torrisi says as he leans partially over the seat so he’s able to reach Georgi and pat his knee.

“No one...” Georgi fights to open his eyes. “No one touches...Nina and Simi.”

“Okay,” Mr. Torrisi’s eyes flick to me, and I bristle under his dangerous gaze.

“They stay...with me,” Georgi says, his voice barely audible, then he leans into me while I’m pressing a bunch of tissues to the wound on his forearm. His forehead rubs against the side of my neck as the SUV goes over a couple of bumps in the road.

As silence falls around us, and Simi leans into my other side, I struggle to shove all the memories of what happened today into the rotting pile of nightmares that are in the deepest, darkest corner of my soul.

I’ve had plenty of bad days before, but this one has shot past watching Mama die, having Anton forcefully take my virginity, the four miscarriages, and being kept away from Simi.

No, this one far surpasses them all. Being raped in front of Georgi made it a million times worse, and when Ivan dropped Simi, I almost died right then and there.

The god-awful hours flash through my broken mind. One devastating scene after another, the only good part being when Georgi risked his life to save Simi.

*God. This man.*

I have no idea what he’s made of. He’s incredibly strong, and I’m scared to hope. Maybe, just maybe, there’s a part of him that’s good. After all, he jumped over the banister to get to my little girl.

Making sure the other two men aren’t looking at me, I turn my face slightly, brushing my cheek against Georgi’s forehead.

*Thank you for saving my precious daughter.*

With Georgi out cold and leaning heavily into me, I glance over all the bruises on his body. The raw wounds around his wrists are going to take a while to heal. I need to clean them as soon as possible.

My first instinct is to make sure he doesn't get an infection and die. It's ingrained so deeply into me from the many men I've had to tend to in that torture chamber.

Only then does the realization sink in that I did the unthinkable. While I was still reeling from Anton raping me in front of Georgi, I didn't think clearly and freed him. When he killed the guards, I ran to get to Simi.

The memory of Ivan letting go of her shudders through me, and I place my arm over her tiny body, pulling her tighter against me.

Suddenly, the SUV turns, and when I glance ahead, I see big gates swinging open.

We're driven up the driveway, then the vehicle is brought to a stop in front of a mansion. Mr. Torrisi quickly gets out and opens the door on Georgi's side before leaning in and grabbing hold of his son.

The other three men who were on the second floor with us come running to help, and when they haul Georgi out of the SUV, Mr. Torrisi barks, "Come, Nina!"

I pick Simi up as I scoot out of the backseat, and when I stand up, a woman comes running out of the mansion. "Georgi!" she cries, her face deathly pale. "Is he alive?"

"He's just out cold," Mr. Torrisi informs her.

I watch as she walks with them, concern etched deep into her beautiful features.

Wondering if she's his girlfriend, I reluctantly follow them into the mansion, every nerve in my body on alert.

A weird feeling ripples through me, and I recognize it as jealousy. Georgi has been mine to take care of, but knowing that's not my place anymore makes me feel a sense of loss.

I'm still kind of on automatic pilot as they carry Georgi into a room, and I stand to the side while they place him on a bed.

The woman takes hold of his hand and brushes her palm over his forehead. "Wake up. Please."

When Atanas Petkov comes into the room with what looks like a first aid kit, the urge to tend to Georgi wars with my need to hide from the head of the Bulgarian mafia.

My need for survival wins out, and I slightly turn my back to him, hoping he doesn't notice Simi and me.

"Nina," Georgi suddenly mumbles, and my head snaps up, my gaze locking on him.

Seeing his eyes are open, but he looks dazed, I remain standing near the corner. I dare a glance at Atanas, but then luck abandons me once more, as his dark eyes lock on me.

My arms tighten around Simi, and I begin to shake my head.

"Georgi?" the woman asks.

"Hey," he murmurs lovingly. "I'm okay."

"You don't look okay," she sobs while my gaze remains imprisoned by Atanas Petkov.

"Where is your father?" he asks, his tone promising nothing but endless days of pain.

My mouth dries right up, and I begin to tremble as I reply with a pleading tone, "I don't know."

Atanas takes threatening steps toward me, and as I cringe back, Mr. Torrisi darts between us. "No one touches them."

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Georgi struggling into a sitting position. "Come here, Nina."

I don't hesitate for a second and rush to where the woman is still standing beside the bed.

She gives me a questioning look before turning it on Georgi.

"She's Boris Pavlov's daughter. She will know where his hiding spots are," Atanas says. "We should get the information out of her as quickly as possible."

Georgi locks eyes with me. "Do you know where he is?" I quickly shake my head, and it has him glaring at Atanas. "She doesn't know."

"She could be lying," he argues.

"She isn't!" Georgi snaps.

"Let's talk outside while Georgi gets his wounds treated," Mr. Torrisi says, and luckily, Atanas leaves the room with him.

Georgi slumps back and inhales a heavy breath, his eyes flicking between the woman and me. "Nina, this is Raya, my sister."

*Oh.*

When Santino opens the first aid kit and begins to dig around in it, Georgi says, "Nina will take care of me."

Figuring as long as I'm of use to Georgi, Simi and I will be spared from being tortured, I quickly set her down on the bed and reach for the antiseptic bottle and some gauze.

"Before you get started, I need to shower," Georgi informs me as he begins to move off the bed.

"What if you pass out?" Raya asks as she moves closer to help him up.

"I'll be with him," Santino replies, coming around the bed.

I quickly drop the items on the covers and pick up my daughter. Scurrying out of the way, we end up by the window.

"Does it hurt?" she whispers. "Your face."

"No, it doesn't hurt at all." I press a kiss to her temple. "You're being so good. I'm proud of you."

"Where are Nina's belongings?" Georgi asks Santino, making my gaze dart to them.

"Still in the SUV."

"Bring everything." Georgi's gaze turns to me. "I'm sure you would like to freshen up as well."

Simi yawns and leans her head on my shoulder. Daring to ask for some comfort for my daughter, the usual pleading look forms on my face. "Is there a room I can use so my daughter can get some sleep?"

Georgi points at the bed. "Make her comfortable. While we're here, I want eyes on you at all times."

*Shit.*

With a sinking feeling in my stomach, I walk to the bed and pull the covers back. Laying Simi down, I sit beside her and gently cover her.

"Mama, can you stay with me while I sleep?" she asks, her eyes filled with so much hope it hurts.

She thinks Georgi is our prince, and I don't have the heart to tell her he's not.

My heart shrivels in my chest as I force a smile to my face, hoping I'm not telling a lie as I reply, "Yes, *miló moe*."

"Did you bring my clothes over from the hotel?" Georgi asks Raya.

"Yes." She walks to the door. "I'll get you something to wear. Go shower."

She leaves the room, and I turn my head slightly, watching from my peripheral vision as Georgi and Santino go into the bathroom.

I listen as the door creaks, then my heartbeat speeds up violently as I gather Simi in my arms and run out into the hallway. I glance left, then right, and hightail it the way we came.

My heart thunders wildly, and remembering my last failed attempt to escape and the punishment of being forced to listen to Simi crying for a week, my sanity slips, and unbearable fear takes over.

“Fuck!” I hear Santino snap from the room, and it spurs me on.

When I run into a foyer, there are so many men, I come to a sudden stop and glance wildly around me before shooting toward another doorway.

Just as I enter the kitchen and my eyes lock on a woman, an arm comes around my middle, and I’m yanked backward.

The disappointment of my failed attempt to escape is too much to bear after all the hell I’ve already been through today. The wail leaving me sounds broken and hopeless, and for a moment, my fractured mind loses the battle to stay present in the moment.

My ability to make sense of everything vanishes. I think A growl escapes me, and I let out a hopeless scream.

I hear Simi crying.

Suddenly, my arms feel horribly empty, and I begin to weep for the loss that hasn’t registered yet.

Warmth wraps around me, and the familiar scent of blood and sweat that’s Georgi somehow gets through the broken shards in my mind.

“It’s okay. Shh...” It’s not me saying the words to Simi. The voice is much deeper, carrying a strength I’ll never have.

“This will help,” another deep voice says.

Something is pressed to my lips, and even though I register it’s water, it tastes too sweet.

The moment of insanity slowly retreats back into the darkness in my soul, and when my sight focuses, I find myself staring at a bicep, my head pressed to a solid chest that’s covered in bruises.

*Georgi.*

I take a deep breath of him, and it settles me in a way nothing ever has before.

“Is she okay?” I hear Raya ask.

“No.” That’s all Georgi answers while his hold on me loosens.

As soon as I’m able, I pull back and take stock of my surroundings. I’m back in the room, sitting on the bed with Georgi, and Raya is holding my

daughter.

I shoot up, and I'm surprised when Raya doesn't stop me from taking Simi. In fact, she hands her over to me.

Moving away from everyone, I go stand by the window again and press kisses to Simi's face. "I'm sorry, *milo moe*."

"Are you better, Mama?" she asks, her voice soft like always.

"Yes. Much better," I lie.

"I'm going to shower," Georgi announces. "Nina, don't try to leave again."

I don't respond and keep bouncing Simi lightly, hoping to comfort her from the scare I must've given her.

This time, Raya stays in the room, and as soon as the men go into the ensuite bathroom, she comes closer.

I shoot her a cautious look before glancing at Simi's face. Her eyes are drooping again, and knowing I won't escape tonight, I walk to the bed and lay her down.

Covering her body with the blanket, I lean over her and press more kisses to her forehead. "Sleep, *malka*. Mama will stay with you, and when you wake, I'll be here."

"Promise." Her eyebrows knot together as she turns onto her side and snuggles closer to me.

"I promise."

Her mouth curves up in a happy smile, as if she hasn't suffered horrible ordeals today. "Yay. Finally. I'm so happy, Mama."

When she closes her eyes and snuggles even more against me, I struggle not to break down and cry.

That something so small as me sitting with her while she sleeps is enough to make her happy.

"Can I get you something to drink or eat?" Raya suddenly asks in my language.

It reminds me that Georgi also knows Bulgarian, and I only have the luxury now to be surprised by the revelation.

I shake my head and brush my hand over Simi's hair.

"Shit, Georgi got blood on the covers. I'll go get fresh ones quickly." Raya walks to the door, then stops to look at me. "Please don't try to run."

I stare at her for a moment before I nod. Watching her leave, I hear the shower turn off.

Resting my eyes on my sleeping baby, I'm wildly tossed between reeling from the hell we've been through and fearing what the future holds for us.

I'm not stupid. I'm in enemy territory, and God only knows what they're going to do to me in retaliation against my father.

Hearing movement behind me, I glance over my shoulder, and seeing Georgi, my eyes sweep over his powerful body. He has lost weight, but not enough to take away from his muscled build.

Now that he's clean, all his bruises seem feverish. Knowing I have a job to do, I get up and take everything I'll need from the first aid kit.

When Georgi sits down on the other side of the bed, I keep glancing between his arm and Simi as I carefully disinfect the bullet wound and the raw gashes around his wrists.

I can feel his eyes burning on me, but I don't dare meet them. Hearing Raya return, I don't pay her attention.

After I stitch Georgi's forearm, I smear salve over his raw wrists before wrapping clean bandages around them. My attention shifts to the cut on his chest, and relief loosens something inside me when I see it isn't as bad as I feared. I quickly clean it before checking his older wounds, making sure everything is clean and that nothing is infected.

At least the wound on his thigh is healing and hasn't torn open again, and seeing that eases some of the worry coiled inside me.

I check his ribs, and noticing the bruising is much darker on his left side, my gaze finally darts to his face. "I think you have broken ribs."

He shakes his head, his eyes flicking over my face. When I see the questions forming, I withdraw completely and gather the soiled gauze.

"Get up so I can take off the dirty covers," Raya says, drawing Georgi's attention away from me.

I grab the first aid kit and set everything down on an armchair, then hurry around the bed to get to Simi. I carefully take the soiled covers off her, then help Raya put the fresh covers over the bed before gently tucking in my baby.

I lovingly brush my hand over my baby's hair and press a soft kiss to her temple.

This is the longest I've been allowed to be with Simi.

As the realization hits, intense pain and relief surge through me like a devastating wave.

“Lie down, Nina,” Georgi whispers.

I’ve been conditioned to obey all orders, but being in the enemy’s nest, I shake my head.

Georgi lies down, getting comfortable on the other side of the bed, then says, “It’s been a long day. You must be tired.”

I shake my head again, not taking my eyes off my daughter. I have no idea how long I have with her, and I’m not wasting a second.

# Chapter 11

## Georgi

Dad is in and out of the room, Raya sits in the armchair, and Santino stands guard near the door.

Nina hasn't moved from where she's sitting by her sleeping daughter. Taking in the ugly bruises that are forming on her face, I'm reminded of what she went through in the basement.

I'm not surprised she broke down. Honestly, I expected it to happen much sooner.

I know she doesn't trust me, and she's scared shitless, but that will change with time because I have no intention of letting her go.

Not because she's Boris Pavlov's daughter, but because I can't. Just like with Raya, I need to know where Nina is at all times.

I can't explain why. I'm fucking tired and in too much pain to care to look deeper.

I stare at her until my eyes fall shut, and as I drift between sleep and being awake, my thoughts are haunted by the horrible images of Nina being raped.

Suddenly, I remember Martin taunting Nina, telling her Anton is there and for her to get ready.

My eyes pop open, and as my sight focuses on her pale face, I realize tonight might not have been the first time that fucker raped her.

"Raya, Santino, you can both turn in for the night. I can't sleep with you staring at me," I tell them. Santino's watchful gaze flicks to Nina, and to set him at ease, I say, "She's half my size. She won't hurt me."

He doesn't look happy, but waits for Raya to give my hand a squeeze before leaving with her.

When the door shuts behind them, I look at Nina again and ask, "How are you holding up? Do I need to get you a doctor?"

She keeps her head bowed, her focus on her daughter as she softly replies, "I'm fine."

"I don't believe that for a second." I continue to stare at her until I'm unable to hold the question back. "Has it happened before?"

Her features tense even more, then she nods.

My eyes flick to the sleeping girl. "Where's her father?"

Nina freezes and doesn't even blink for a few seconds before she replies, "He's dead. A long time ago."

*She's lying.*

I look at Simi again. "Is Anton the father?"

This time, Nina's eyes fly to mine, and panic flashes over her face. "No!"

Fuck. She denies it with such vehemence that I can't help but think she was forced to give birth to her rapist's child.

When I look at Simi again, Nina repeats, "No, he's not."

"She's your spitting image," I mention.

Nina brushes her hand over her daughter's hair again.

Needing to say the words to her, my voice is hoarse. "I'm sorry I couldn't do anything to stop him."

She closes her eyes, the trauma of what she's been through rippling over her beautiful features. It makes her look so fragile that for a moment, my body moves before I can think it through.

Every muscle throbs, and just as I place my hand on her shoulder, she jerks. I realize the last thing she probably wants right now is for a man to touch her.

Still, I give her shoulder a squeeze, hoping it offers her some comfort.

Pulling back, I say, "I'll watch Simi if you'd like to go shower."

Nina shakes her head, and when she speaks, her voice sounds hollow. "I'll wait until she wakes up."

Nodding, I lean against the pillows, suppressing a groan. After a few minutes of trying to fall asleep, I give up and look at Nina again.

"Who was the man on the third floor?"

"Ivan. He always guarded Simi."

Interesting that the kid had a guard, but not Nina.

"And the woman?"

Hatred tightens Nina's features. "My father's whore who took care of Simi."

I tilt my head as the puzzle pieces begin to lock into place. "Did they keep you away from your daughter?"

Nina's eyes dart to mine again, and there's another flash of panic in them. "I want my daughter with me at all times."

“I never planned to separate you.”

She stares at me for a moment, then says, “I don’t trust you...or any of this.”

The corner of my mouth lifts. “That will change with time.”

Nina lifts her hand and brushes some of her hair over her shoulder before resting her palm against her neck. “Why did you bring us with you?”

“There’s nothing in Bulgaria for you except more danger and trauma,” I answer honestly.

“We will be fine on our own.” Her mouth sets in a stubborn line I haven’t seen before, and it makes me smirk at her. Anger ignites in her brown irises. “We’re not your property. You don’t get to make decisions regarding us.”

“I do.” My smirk grows more cocky because I like seeing the fire burning in her. It’s so much better than the empty hollowness or ungodly fear. “You’re coming with me.”

Her eyebrows pull together, and she gives me an incredulous look. “Why? You don’t even know me?”

“I know more than you think, Nina.” Remembering something from the day she lured me out of the hotel, I add, “What was it you said? *If you can catch me, you can have me.*” I let out a chuckle. “I caught you.”

When I meet Nina’s eyes again, the fire is gone, and the fear is back. “You’re scared of me,” I state the obvious.

She turns her attention to her daughter, and some of her silky hair falls partially over her face as she says, “You kidnapped my daughter and me. What do you expect?”

I’m quiet for a moment while I think about how to handle this situation because she’s right. I am kidnapping her and Simi. They’re going back to New York with me.

What I’ll do with them once we’re there, I’m still unsure about.

I don’t want to give Nina too much rope because she might just hang me with it, so I end up saying, “Good. That means you understand the kind of man you’re dealing with.”

Nina’s head whips up, and her features draw together with desperation. “You can’t do this to me. Please...just let us go.”

She’s one to demand that of me after she lured me into an ambush. I haven’t forgotten about that.

“Are you hoping I’ll grow a conscience?” I let out a chuckle. “You should know better, Nina.”

“I’m begging you to.”

Anger surges into my chest because I hate hearing her beg. “Enough. Men like me don’t give back what we’ve taken.”

*Never.*

Her eyes widen, and she looks at me as if I’m insane. “I’m not yours to take.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, baby.” I stare at her for a moment before I say, “You became mine the moment you set me free.”

That’s a lie.

She became mine when she spent the night holding me so I could get some sleep, but I’m not telling her that.

Anger returns to her face, and her voice is much stronger than I’ve ever heard it when she snaps, “I should’ve left you to rot in that basement.”

“Yet, you didn’t, and now you’re mine.”

Disappointment and fear douse her anger. “I’ll never be yours willingly.”

A thick silence falls between us as I’m hit with the harrowing memories of Nina crying on the floor while I could do nothing but watch.

“I’ll never rape you,” I whisper, and it has her meeting my eyes again. “I might be bad, but I promise you, here and now, I will never force myself on you, and I won’t beat you. Those are two things that sicken me.” I can see she doesn’t believe me, and it has me adding, “The Cosa Nostra lives by a code, Nina. We don’t torture our women, and we sure as fuck don’t make them do anything they don’t want to. Boris and Anton are fucking depraved scum.”

When she continues to stare at me, not believing a word I’m saying, I realize it’s probably because every fucking man she’s known has hurt her.

Christ. I saw how the guards treated her.

Boris hit her in front of me and talked to her like she’s shit.

And Anton. That fucking asshole...

“You’ll learn with time that I’m nothing like the men you’ve known.” Closing my eyes, I let out a heavy sigh.

I lie with my thoughts of the past four days, but none of them are about what was done to me. I remember how Nina took care of me. With every passing hour, I was looking forward to the next time I’d get to see her.

In the room, Nina became warmth and comfort to me. She was the only human touch that didn't hurt.

"Thank you for taking care of me," I say, my voice soft.

"It was my duty. Nothing more."

Chuckling, I rest my hand on my chest. "Sure it was."

"If you're so thankful, you can repay me by letting us go."

"Nope."

I hear a soft sigh escape her, and when I open my eyes again, it's to find her staring at Simi.

"She's not going anywhere. Get some sleep."

Nina shakes her head, and when Simi turns onto her other side, facing me, she adjusts her little shirt that has a stain on it.

I only know of the hell Nina endured the past four days, and I'm sure there's a lot more I'll find out. It makes me worry about Simi.

"Did they hurt her?" I ask.

When Nina remains quiet, my worst fears make my voice turn hoarse. "Fuck, Nina. Please tell me they didn't..."

She shakes her head quickly and looks at me. "They never did that. They just kept us apart. I was only allowed to see her for two hours every day. They threatened to hurt her if I disobeyed any orders, so I did what I was told."

*Jesus fucking Christ.*

I have no words, and that's saying a lot because I'm well known for never shutting up. Eventually, I think to say, "I won't use your kid against you. That's fucked up, even for me."

When I see hope flutter over her face, I try to think of something else I can say to keep it there, but the door opens, and Dad comes in.

"How do you feel?" He only spares Nina a glance as he comes around the bed.

"I'm fine."

He narrows his eyes at me. "Like hell you are. You look like shit, son. What happened, and what's the deal with the woman and kid?"

"I was just tortured a little. The usual thing." Pulling myself up against the pillows, I gesture at Nina. "They're coming with me."

"Why?"

"Because I say so." Dad stares at me, very unhappy with my answers. Letting out a huff, I add, "She's mine."

Dad lifts an eyebrow at me. "You decided that in a span of four days while being beaten and fuck knows what else."

"Yes."

He nods while glancing at Nina again.

Smirking, I say, "I know what I'm doing."

"Hmm..." His eyes return to me and rake over my body. "I still feel very strongly about taking you to the hospital."

"Nina's taken good care of me up until now. Once I'm home, I'll pay Dr. Milazzo a visit and have him give me a complete check-up just to set your mind at ease."

"Okay." Dad leans down and places his hand on my shoulder where a dull pain throbs deep in my muscles.

"Do you know what's going on with the deal I made with Atanas?" I ask.

"Raya somehow managed to handle it all while we were looking for you. You did a good thing by making her your underboss." He pauses for a moment, then says, "Atanas is very impressed with her."

"I bet he is," I grumble.

Dad lets out a chuckle, and shaking his head, he pulls his hand away and begins to walk to the door. "Get some sleep, son. We're leaving early. Any business you have with Atanas can be done over the phone."

I nod, and after the door shuts behind him, I climb out of bed. Once again, I have to suppress a groan because it hurts like a bitch to move.

When I struggle to pick up the first aid kit from where it's lying on the floor beside the armchair, Nina darts up and comes to help.

My eyes drift over her stunning features as I say, "Can you see if there are any painkillers?"

She digs through the kit and pulls some out, checking something on the box before taking two from the foil strip. When she hands them to me, I walk to the bathroom and pour myself a glass of water. While I'm swallowing the medication, I look at my reflection in the mirror.

*Christ.*

My left eye is swollen, all dark blue and purple, and the cut Nina stitched up on my cheek is going to leave a scar. My bottom lip is torn up, and there's a variety of colors all over my torso and arms. The beard I've grown covers whatever marks are on my jaw.

I turn my head and look at the wound I got when they knocked me out at the hotel. It seems to be healing okay.

When I roll my shoulders, they ache something fierce, and as I glance down at my arms and wrists, Nina comes to stand in the doorway.

“I agree with your father. You should go to the hospital. I’m not a trained professional.” She glances over her shoulder at the bed before looking at me again. “And they can give you something stronger for pain. Those pills won’t help much.”

“I’ll be fine. There’s no time for a pit stop at a hospital.” I walk closer to her, once again noticing the massive size difference between us.

Her gaze drops to the fresh red mark on my arm that I got when I hooked it around the banister to stop our fall, and a foreign emotion flashes over her face.

“Come, lie down so I can massage your back and shoulders,” she says, still stuck in healer mode.

Not giving her time to change her mind, I do as I’m told. Tucking a pillow beneath my head, I get as comfortable as possible and rest my arms beside me.

I barely feel the mattress move as Nina climbs on. “I don’t have the salve with me that I used previously, but I found lotion in the bathroom.”

“That works for me.”

When her hands settle on my shoulder blades, my eyes drift shut. Nina rubs softly at first, but after a minute or so, she begins to dig into my stiff muscles, and I have to use all my concentration so I don’t groan from how fucking amazing it feels.

The pain I experience when she focuses on a stubborn knot of muscles is bearable because it’s always followed by intense relief.

At some point, she alternates between my arms, shoulders, and lower back, and as she practically turns me to jello, I drift off to sleep.

# Chapter 12

## Nina

Even though I'm exhausted and feel very nauseated with a dull headache, I find so much joy just looking at Simi.

She stirs, and as she stretches and yawns, the corner of my mouth lifts.

"Morning, *milo moe*," I whisper as I press a kiss to her warm, rosy cheek.

"Mama!" She's instantly awake, and sitting up, a happy smile spreads over her face. "You really got to stay with me while I slept."

"Shh..." I put a finger in front of my lips. "Georgi is sleeping."

When we glance at him, it's to see he's watching us, a tense expression on his face.

"Sorry," I say quickly. "We didn't mean to wake you." Picking up Simi, I move off the bed and a safe distance away. "Ah...can we get some of our clothes. I'd like to...clean up."

Georgi moves, his features straining even more from the intense pain he must be in.

When he pulls the sheet off the bed and keeps it wrapped around his waist, I feel a burst of thankfulness.

He opens the door, then grins at someone. "Stop stressing about me and bring Nina and Simi's belongings."

"I just got you back," I hear Santino reply. "Deal with the fact that I'm going to guard your ass twenty-four-seven going forward."

"Yeah-yeah. I missed you too," Georgi replies, his tone playful and even affectionate.

As he shuts the door, I ask, "Do you want to use the bathroom first?"

He shakes his head. "I'll get dressed while you take your time in there."

I walk into the luxurious bathroom and set Simi down on her feet. When I go to lock the door, I notice there's no key.

*Hmm. Georgi probably took.*

Shutting the door, I gather two towels and bring them closer to the big tub. Smiling at my daughter, I ask, "How warm must Mama make the water?"

“Not too hot. Tanya always makes it too hot. It makes my skin red.”

*Jesus.*

Unable to regulate my turbulent emotions, I drop to my knees and sweep my baby up in a tight hug. “I’m so sorry, *milo moe*.”

“From now on, your Mama will bathe you and the water will be perfect,” Georgi suddenly says from behind the closed door, his tone very tense. “Sorry to interrupt. Just want to know if you and Simi would like anything specific to eat and drink.”

I appreciate that he’s speaking Bulgarian.

“Can I have juice, toast, and cheese, and an egg in a cup?” Simi rattles off a string of things. “You know, with the shell still on? Tanya always has it, and it looks yummy.”

It’s impossible to keep my tears back as they begin to fall, and it instantly makes Simi’s eyebrows knit together with worry.

My precious girl places her hand on my cheek and tries to comfort me. “Don’t cry, Mama. I’m not that hungry.”

The door creaks open, and Georgi asks, “Are you both dressed?”

A sob building in my throat stops me from replying, but Simi says, “Yes. We’re not bathing yet.”

I take hold of her hand as the sob escapes and press a kiss to her palm, aware of Georgi coming in.

Somehow, he pushes through the pain as he crouches beside us, the sheet still wrapped around his waist.

He grips the back of my neck and pulls me against his black and blue bruised side while he ruffles Simi’s bed hair.

“You can have whatever you want, little one.” He rubs his hand up and down my back. “Tell me about the egg in the shell, so I get you exactly what you want.”

The intense gratefulness I feel that he’s being kind to my daughter while giving me a moment to regain my composure is something I’ve never experienced.

It actually makes it even more difficult to stop crying, and not wanting to cause Simi distress, I smile through the tears and say, “I’m just so happy to spend time with you. That’s why I can’t stop crying. Okay?”

The bright grin returns to Simi’s face. “The egg is in the shell in a little cup, and you break the top open with a spoon, then dunk pieces of toast in it. The yellow must be gooey.”

“And do you want the cheese sliced?” Georgi asks.

Simi shakes her head and moves closer to him. Instinctively, I reach for her and place my hand on her side so I can grab her quickly should the need arise.

“I want it shredded, please.” Her eyes dart between Georgi and me, and when hope shines bright from her, my lips part to stop her question, but I’m too late. “Are you the prince? Were you taking so long because you had to fight all the bad guys? Why don’t you have a sword?”

She moves even closer to him, and I grip her shirt tightly as I pull away from Georgi.

My daughter is oblivious to my panic and continues to pepper him with questions. “How did you fly yesterday? Will you show me? I wanna fly too.” She pulls her shirt out of my hand and moves to Georgi’s side so she can see his back. “Did they steal your wings? Is that why you have so many owies?”

“Simi,” I finally manage to get her name out.

“It’s okay,” Georgi murmurs, his tone soft. “Yes, I took so long because there were a lot of bad men, but they’re all gone now.” He lifts his hand, and as if he’s scared he’ll hurt her, he carefully tucks a wild curl behind her ear. “I don’t have wings. I only get the power to fly when you’re falling, so it’s not something I can do all the time or teach you.”

Her eyes widen with wonder. “Wow. Am I special, too? Like a princess? If I fall again, will you catch me again?”

“Yes,” Georgi answers. He chuckles as he leans down. “You’re very special, and it definitely makes you a princess, that’s why you get to have whatever you want for breakfast. We’re flying on a plane to my castle, and princesses need a good breakfast.”

When I see Simi fall in love with Georgi, my heartbeat speeds up drastically, and fearing for what damage it will do to her when she realizes he’s not the prince she’s been waiting for, I scoop her into my arms and stand up.

“That’s enough talk of princes and princesses, because you need to bathe and get clean for breakfast.” I force a fake smile on my face so I don’t upset Simi.

“Nina, what do you want to eat and drink?” Georgi asks after struggling to his feet.

“I’m fine.”

Since my mother died and my life turned into a nightmare, I've lived on one meal a day and only water. I'm used to it.

I'll let Simi have whatever they're willing to give her, but I'm not taking more than the absolute basics. At some point, I'll have to pay the price, and the only debt I'm willing to suffer for is anything that makes my daughter happy and keeps her safe.

I don't matter.

Georgi's eyes lock with mine, and I can see he's not pleased with my reply.

"I'll have the housekeeper fix you something," he says as he walks to the door. "You need to eat as well."

"Yes, Mama. The flight to his castle is going to be long," Simi chips in.

He pauses and asks, "Any allergies I should be aware of?"

I shake my head, and when he finally shuts the door, I let out a relieved breath.

Everything in me wants to warn my daughter not to trust Georgi and to be careful what she says, but I've never seen her like this. So happy and excited.

I set her down again and let water into the tub. I keep testing it make sure it doesn't get too warm. "Come feel if the water is okay," I tell Simi. She leans over and carefully pokes her pointer finger into the tub, then grins at me again. "It's perfect."

She takes hold of her shirt and pulls it over her head, and I help her take off her shorts.

Lifting Simi into the bath, I try to inspect every inch of her for bruises without her noticing.

When I find a brown blemish on her thigh, I ask, "How did you get this?"

"I bumped into the coffee table."

I exhale a breath of relief, then grab the bodywash and loofah.

Simi sits down in the water, then looks at me with wide, innocent eyes.

"I like our prince."

*Shit.*

"Uhm..."

"Bubbles!" She scoops some off the loofah, and I take the out I've just been handed and begin to wash her. She continues to scoop up the bubbles from her skin and blows them into the air.

Some land on my forehead, and laughter falls over her lips, the kind that comes from the belly.

I stare at my daughter as she enjoys her bath, just drinking in the happy sight.

“Your belongings are outside the door,” Georgi says, drawing my attention for a second.

“Sit still,” I tell Simi, and keeping an eye on her in case she slips, I quickly rush to the door and grab the three trash bags. Hauling them inside, I shut the door again and open the bags so I can find Simi’s clothes.

Every document I come across, I set aside and finally pull out a tracksuit set and a T-shirt, along with clean underwear.

Knowing I have our birth certificates and IDs brings me great relief. We don’t have passports, so good luck to Georgi taking us out of the country.

The thought gives me hope that he’ll just let us go, but I don’t hold my breath and return to the tub.

I finish Simi’s bath and get her dried off and dressed before finding her coloring book and crayons. “Color while Mama is busy.”

“Okay.” She lies down on her tummy and finds the page she wants.

While she’s focused on picking the right crayon, I quickly strip naked and climb into the tub. I hurry as fast as I possibly can, and when I clean between my legs, the revulsion that’s always beneath the surface threatens to overtake me.

For a dark moment, I’m dragged back to the torture chamber, remembering how Georgi fought against the shackles while I was degraded right in front of him.

That’s never happened before. It was always just Anton and me in the room.

“Mama,” Simi says, yanking me out of my nightmarish thoughts. “Look.”

She shoves the coloring book in front of my face, and it takes a second or two for my eyes to focus on the stickman figures she’s drawn. A larger one is holding a small one in a flying pose.

“It’s beautiful, *milo moe*.”

“Can I go show the prince?”

“No.” I shake my head and continue washing my body. “Give Mama a minute. We’ll go together.”

“Okay.”

She sits down right beside the tub and continues to draw while I lean back and wash my hair.

As fast as I can, I finish and grab a towel from the floor before getting up and drying myself off. I keep the towel around my body while I dig in the bags for clothes, and after getting dressed in a pair of black jeans, a T-shirt, and an old but warm sweater, I walk to the sink.

“Come, *malka*. Let’s brush our teeth.”

Simi gets up and walks to my side, then lifts her arms. Lifting her, I set her down on the counter. I didn’t see our toothbrushes in the bags, so grabbing the toothpaste, I put some on Simi’s finger and on my own.

“Brush like this,” I tell her before showing her what to do.

Every second I get with her is the most precious gift I’ve ever received, and I absorb it like a dry sponge.

Once we’ve rinsed our mouths, I brush her hair and braid the strands. While she continues to color in her book, I untangle my hair, then leave it loose so it can air-dry.

My gaze only touches on the mirror for a second, long enough to see the bruises on my face, before I ignore them again.

I return to our belongings and find a handbag. Putting our important papers inside, I zip it closed and place the strap sideways over my neck.

“Come, *malka*.”

Simi gathers her crayons and book and brings them to me. I put her crayons in my handbag and the book back in one of the trash bags. Tying them closed again, I rise to my feet and take Simi’s hand.

When I open the door, my child spots the cart with food and pulls free.

“Yay!”

Georgi gets up from where he’s sitting in the armchair, and I stare at him with parted lips as he walks toward the cart.

Wearing a black silk dress shirt, most of his bruises and wounds are covered. The top two buttons are undone, and even though he’s lost weight, the luxurious fabric still stretches over his muscles.

The shirt is paired with black chinos and leather loafers, and as I gape at him, I’m reminded of how dangerously attractive he is.

I forgot about it in the torture chamber and with everything that’s happened.

Seeing him dressed in the expensive clothes, his beard trimmed back to a five o’clock shadow, and his hair neat, I’m also reminded that Georgi is a

capo of the Cosa Nostra.

He's no longer the prisoner. He's back in a position of power.

"Ready to eat, *printsesa*?" he asks Simi as he helps her to sit on a chair by a small round table.

"Yes." Looking at him, her eyes shine like polished stones, as if she's already idolizing the ground he walks on.

Georgi sets a plate down in front of her. "Is this what you wanted?"

She nods, a happy smile spreading over her face. She picks up a teaspoon and cracks the shell, then peels off the little pieces. When she scoops into the egg, the white slips off and falls on the plate. My daughter picks it up with her fingers and pops it into her mouth.

I watch as she takes a piece of the toast that's been cut into slices and dunks it in the yolk.

Georgi turns to look at me and gestures with a jerk of his head for me to come closer.

"I had them prepare an omelet for you. There's also bacon and lots of toast and cheese." He gestures at the cart. "Coffee or tea? Juice?"

"Juice, please," Simi says with a mouth stuffed full of food.

Georgi pours some into a glass for my daughter and sets it down beside her plate.

When she reaches for it, I move forward. "Use both hands, *milo moe*."

"Okay." She licks her lips, and picking up the glass, she takes a few sips before setting it down again. Perched on the edge of the chair, her legs swing as she uses her fingers again to eat some of the cheese.

Pulling the other chair closer to her, I sit down and watch as she devours her breakfast.

"Nina," Georgi says, his tone harsher than I'm used to.

When my eyes dart to his face and I see the dark frown, a chill skitters down my spine. Every muscle in my body tenses as alarm bells ring in my ears.

As I reach for Simi, placing my hand on her shoulder so I can easily grab her, he says, "Eat."

If Simi weren't here, I'd ask him how he expects me to repay him, but I don't want to have such an awful conversation in front of her.

Everything we received from Boris came at a price. I had to work and take care of the prisoners. Anton got to rape me whenever he felt like it. I had to lure men into traps.

During the quiet days, I had to stay in my room and out of sight. If I was found roaming the halls, I was beaten. If I dared to ask for anything, I was beaten.

And Simi's safety was always threatened.

As I continue to stare at his face, ready for any sudden movement from him, he shakes his head and grabs a plate from the cart.

He sets it down in front of me, and as the delicious aroma hits my nostrils, my stomach growls loudly.

"Do you want me to feed you?" He tips his head at Simi, and seeing the warning in his eyes that he'll force me if he has to, and probably hurt my daughter, I quickly grab a fork and break a piece off the omelet.

"Coffee, tea, or juice?" he asks, his tone not as tense as before.

"I had water in the bathroom."

Realizing Simi has stopped eating and she's watching Georgi and me with big eyes, I force a tense smile to my face. "Have you had enough, *milo moe*?"

She pushes her glass closer to me and whispers, "Take a sip, Mama."

Oh God, she picked up on the tension, and she's reverted to whispering so we don't get in trouble.

To set her at ease, I drink some of the orange juice before brushing my palm over the side of her head. "Eat more, *malka*."

"Simi," Georgi says, pulling her attention away from me. My eyes dart back to his face, and he looks right at me as he asks her, "What does your mama like to drink?"

"I don't know." She pats my arm. "Mama, do you like juice too?"

Wanting this conversation to stop, I admit, "I like tea. No sugar."

"Finally," Georgi mutters under his breath, then he grins at Simi. "Thanks for the help, *printsesa*."

I keep a vigilant eye on Georgi as he pours tea into a cup.

"Milk?" he asks.

"No, thank you."

The cup looks small in his hand as he brings it to the table. He sets it down right by me, then lifts an eyebrow, and it feels like a silent order for me to drink every last drop.

Not having much of a choice, I pick up the tea and sip on it, my other hand still on Simi's shoulder.

Georgi goes to sit on the armchair and stretches out his left leg, pain tightening his features. His gaze flicks to me.

“Does she understand English?”

I shake my head.

“Why are you being so stubborn about eating and drinking something?”

“Because there’s always a price to pay.”

Simi pats my arm, then says, “I’m full, Mama. What must I do?”

“You can color more, if you like?”

She leans even closer and whispers, “Won’t I get in trouble for wasting food?”

“Never,” Georgi answers. “Just leave the leftovers, *printsesa*.”

She slips off the chair and walks to Georgi. “Must I call you *prints*?”

He shakes his head and leans forward, resting his right forearm on his thigh. “No, you can call me Georgi.”

With the innocence of a child, she rubs her fingers over his sleeve, as if she’s liking the feel of the silk fabric. “Where is your palace?”

“In New York. Have you heard of it?”

Simi shakes her head and continues to rub his shirt between her index finger and thumb. “No. Is it near the Enchanted Forest where Snow White lives? Do you know her?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t.”

When Simi yawns, I get up and walk to her. “Are you tired?”

“Yes, but I don’t want to miss flying to the castle.”

“You won’t,” Georgi replies. “Take a nap while I talk to your Mama.”

She glances at the bed, then back at where she’s still rubbing his shirt between her fingers.

“Santino,” Georgi calls, and a moment later, the door opens. “Bring one of my shirts with the same silk fabric as the one I’m wearing.”

The guard nods and disappears down the hallway.

I’m trying not to read too much into the kind things Georgi is doing for my daughter. I need to stay on guard because this could be a trap.

After all, I betrayed him and lured him to certain death.

At some point, Georgi is going to take his revenge. He’s probably only waiting until he feels better and has had time to heal.

# Chapter 13

## Georgi

When Nina has Simi settled on the bed and she remains sitting beside her child, I glance at the food.

She only had one bite.

When I'm sure Simi is asleep, I say in English, "Come sit here so we can talk."

Nina's body tenses more than usual, and she moves to sit at the foot of the bed. Her eyes are filled with the incessant terror I'm beginning to hate.

"You're not going to pay a *price* if you eat and drink anything."

She stares at me with an expression that tells me she's tolerating the conversation so she doesn't get into trouble.

Getting up, my body protests, and I limp to the cart. I pick up a piece of toast and smear butter on it before walking to Nina.

I hold it in front of her mouth, and using a tone that says, I won't accept any arguments, I order, "Eat."

Her eyes flick up to my face. "Nothing is free."

"Nina." I lift an eyebrow at her, the healing cut tugging at the hairs. "If you get sick, who's going to take care of Simi?"

"I'm used to only eating once a day. I won't get sick."

"When did you last eat?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

I lean down and take hold of her hand, placing the toast in her palm. Limping back to the armchair, I sit down again and stare at her.

She's so traumatized and conditioned, it's probably going to take months before she lets down her guard.

"You won't be kept from your daughter. I will not use her as a pawn to control you, and you sure as fuck will never be raped again. No one will hurt you or Simi."

She climbs to her feet and sets the toast down on the cart. "We don't have passports." Slowly, she turns around to look at me. "Let us go."

"No." Boris and Anton would find them, and the thought of that happening makes my stomach turn. "I don't need passports to smuggle you

out of the country.”

I don't miss the flash of disappointment on her face. She begins to wring her hands, and I feel the burst of panic and fear coming from her. “What are you going to do with us?”

“Nothing.”

Nina's eyes flit to mine. “Please, Georgi. I'm sorry for the part I played in your abduction.” Giving me a pleading look, her voice climbs a pitch. “I set you free. Doesn't that count for something?”

Rising to my feet, I walk until I'm close to her. It forces Nina to tilt her head back, and once again, fear darkens her irises.

I stare at Nina as I try to sort through my emotions and figure out why I'm so hell-bent on taking her.

My time in the chamber flashes through my mind. I remember how things wouldn't seem quite as brutal whenever she was with me.

I remember how she snuck in one night to give me water, breaking the rules even though being caught would've cost her dearly.

But what stays with me most is the night she held me. After all she endured, she still risked severe punishment to comfort me.

In my weakest moment, Nina was there for me.

Then I learned that she sacrificed it all to keep her daughter as safe as she could under dire circumstances.

This beautiful woman has survived horrors no one should endure. The thought of her being hurt again and that sweet little girl of hers falling into those same monsters' hands makes me want to burn down the fucking world.

“I'm sorry,” she whimpers, taking a step away from me.

I realize the anger I feel from thinking about her fucked-up past must show on my face, and I quickly relax my features.

Somewhere in the chaos of my thoughts, a jarring truth takes hold. I've started thinking of Nina as mine to protect. The first time she tended to my wounds, the seed sprouted in my heart, and by the time Anton violated her in front of me, I already cared a hell of a lot about her.

I didn't lie to her when I said men like me don't give back what we've taken.

Lifting my hand, I move slowly so I don't startle her. Nina keeps tensing more and more as I get closer to her, and by the time I brush my

palm over the bruises Anton left on her cheek and jaw, her eyes are pinched shut. Bursts of air leave her parted lips.

“You’re under my protection now,” I say to give her some peace of mind.

Her eyes pop open again, disbelief rippling over her face. “But...why?”

“Because you went past duty, Nina. You took risks to help me, and after that fucker...” I can’t say the words out loud and skip over them. “After yesterday, I realized how much cruelty you’ve survived, and I’ll be damned if I leave you behind for sick fucks to prey on you ever again.”

Nina moves farther back, and I drop my hand to my side. Shaking her head, she gives me a guarded look. “I don’t believe you. You’re a capo. The enemy.” She glances at Simi, then shakes her head again. This time her voice quivers as she says, “It doesn’t matter what I say. You’ll do what you want.”

“You’ll see with time I’m a man of my word.”

There’s a single knock on the door before it opens, and Dad comes in. He gives me a questioning look. “Ready?”

While Nina and Simi were in the bathroom, I checked in with him and Raya and asked for a couple of hours alone with Nina so I could talk to her. They agreed reluctantly and held off on peppering me with questions, but I know once we’re on the flight, there won’t be any stopping them.

The two hours haven’t helped, though. I don’t think I made any progress with Nina.

“Yeah. We’re ready,” I mutter.

Santino comes in, and not waiting for a command, he picks up the three trash bags containing Nina and Simi’s entire life.

Nina hurries to the bed, and bending down, she carefully picks up Simi. When my shirt hangs down the side, I move closer and place it over the sleeping girl who’s still clutching the silk tightly in her tiny fist.

“Let’s go,” I say, my tone softer as I put my hand between Nina’s shoulder blades.

As we walk into the hallway, I hear men talking up ahead in the foyer, and my hand moves up to wrap around the back of Nina’s neck. Aware I’m being overly possessive of her, I lightly pull her closer to me.

Something happened between us while I was held captive. It’s a connection I’ve never shared with another person. Whether it’s obsession or trauma bonding, only time will tell.

It is what it is at this point.

Stepping into the large open space, my eyes lock on Raya, who is standing in the middle of the room. Atanas is staring at her while she's oblivious, too busy reading something on her phone.

"Raya," I say, my tone brisk.

My sister's head snaps up, and she quickly walks to me, falling in on my left side. "How do you feel?"

"Better," I answer, even though I feel worse than yesterday. My muscles are fucking stiff, and every raw wound burns.

I stop by Atanas and reluctantly let go of Nina so I can shake his hand.

Giving me an apologetic look, he says, "I'm sorry your visit to Bulgaria was so unpleasant. Hopefully, our next meeting turns out better."

"Thank you for taking in my people while I was...detained."

"Of course."

My hand returns to the back of Nina's neck, and a weird sense of comfort trickles into my chest. I didn't even notice my heart rate had kicked up a gear until I touched her and it returned to normal.

When we walk toward the row of vehicles, Adriano and Augusto give me chin lifts.

"You good?" Augusto asks, a worried frown on his forehead.

"Yeah." I smile to set them at ease. "You can interrogate me on the flight home."

"You bet your ass we will," Adriano says, his eyes flicking between Nina and me.

We all get into the cars, and I reach over Nina to adjust my shirt so it covers Simi.

"There will be blankets on the plane," I murmur to Nina as I pull back.

She's so fucking tiny beside me, the top of her head barely reaches my bicep.

How the fuck could those assholes hurt her?

I'm struggling to wrap my mind around it because I've been raised in a family that loves their women and treats them like gold.

Men who prey on women are filth, and filth gets scrubbed from the earth. Boris and Anton might have escaped, but I'll hunt them down and drag them out of whatever hole they're hiding in.

My body protests as my muscles tense.

Once I get my hands on those fuckers, I'll make them suffer before I feed them to the rats.

Nina shoots me a cautious glance, then lowers her head, her expression filled with apprehensiveness and uncertainty.

"You're safe, *mishle*."

Calling her little mouse in Bulgarian has her eyes snapping back to my face. Her fearful gaze searches mine.

"You'll both be okay," I whisper as I lift my left arm.

When I brush some of her hair behind her ear, her eyes lock on the white bandage peeking out from beneath the cuff.

"I'll look at your wounds on the plane," she says before lowering her head again and pressing a kiss to Simi's forehead.

During the drive to the airfield, I'm constantly conscious of the woman and child beside me. Nothing draws my attention away from them until the convoy of cars stops near the private jet and I get out.

Seeing Raya climb out of another SUV with Adriano and Augusto, shock shudders through me.

Raya has always ridden in the same car as me. She's always been at my side.

I fucking slipped up and didn't even notice she wasn't with me.

My head turns sharply to Nina, and I don't know what she sees on my face, but it makes her step away from me, only to bump into the side of the open car door, the top sharp corner hitting her head.

I react without thinking. Grabbing hold of Nina's bicep, it feels as if I'm holding something breakable as I pull her and Simi toward me. I quickly lean over her and gently check her head, while asking, "Are you okay?"

"Yes."

Before my brain can catch up to what I'm doing, I bend at the waist and press a kiss to the spot.

I'm naturally a very affectionate person, and my love languages are touch and taking care of people. Still, the instant I feel her soft hair against my lips, I'm knocked back on my ass by the intense feeling of possessiveness shuddering through me.

I jerk away from Nina, and rubbing a palm over my chest, I try to ignore how my heart is thundering.

Never before has a woman drawn such a powerful emotion out of me.

"Are you okay?" Raya asks as she comes up beside me.

“Yeah.” Needing to ground myself for a second, I place my arm around my sister’s shoulder, and I draw her into a hug. She’s taller than Nina, so I’m able to rest my chin on top of her head.

Raya doesn’t hesitate and quickly wraps her arms around me.

When her hand brushes over my lower back, there’s a note of panic in Nina’s voice as she says, “Careful. He’s injured there.”

Raya pulls her arms back and rests her hands gently on my sides, then turns her face up to me. “I was so worried. I think I died a million times this week.”

I press a kiss to her forehead. “I’m really okay.” When my eyes drift over her features, I see the strain she’s taken and the suffering my disappearance caused her. I pull her back into another hug and near her ear, I whisper, “I’m here, and I love you.”

“Love you too,” she whispers, and when we pull apart, Dad’s there to place his arm around her shoulders.

Adriano pats me lightly on my shoulder, and I notice Nina tense up. It looks like she wants to say something, but she bites the words back.

She’s worried about me, and everytime someone touches me, she wants to stop them.

The realization makes a grin spread over my face.

# Chapter 14

## Nina

With every step I take up the airstairs of the private jet, my anxiety increases and my stomach sinks.

Even though Georgi showed me tenderness after I bumped into the car door, I don't trust him for one second.

He's mafia. Men like him only know how to conquer and destroy. End of story.

Sure, he showed love to his sister, but even Boris was capable of feeling love for Tanya. It doesn't mean shit to me.

"Nina," Georgi's voice pulls me out of my thoughts, and when my eyes focus, I find myself standing between four leather seats facing each other in pairs. He bends at the waist to look at my face, a worried expression tightening his features. "Are you okay?"

*No. I haven't been okay for nine years.*

He guides me to a window seat, and when I sit down, he crouches in front of me. "You're exhausted, *mishle*. You need to eat something and sleep."

I do, but I'm not shutting an eye while I'm surrounded by the enemy.

When I don't reply, he lets out a sigh and takes the seat on my left.

I keep my head down, conscious of all the other people finding their seats.

Suddenly, Georgi leans over me. The air is ripped from my lungs in a very loud squeak, and I turn my torso, trying to cover my daughter.

"I'm just helping with your seat belt," Georgi says, his tone soft like it's been whenever he talks to Simi.

"Oh..." I feel his hands brush over my abdomen as he fastens the belt, and I'm shocked when I feel a different kind of nervous. It's not fear, but a quivering anticipation. Almost like a fluttering sensation.

My eyes dart to his face, and when mine lock with his hazel ones, a kaleidoscope of butterflies takes flight in my stomach. It's so sudden and unexpected, I have no time to brace for it.

Caught completely off guard, I quickly turn my head away and stare out the oval window.

*No, Nina. Just because he's been kind to you and Simi and giving you false promises, doesn't mean you can let down your guard.*

As Mr. Torrasi and Raya sit down across from us, Simi stirs in my arms. My attention snaps to her, and when her eyelashes lift, and she sees me, a toothy smile appears.

"Mama." She rubs the side of her face against my chest before sitting up. Her fingers begin to move, rubbing the silk, as she glances around the cabin, then she whisper-shrieks, "Are we flying?!"

"Not yet. The plane is about to take off," I say, keeping my tone soft as well.

She leans forward and places her hand on Georgi's forearm, then whispers to him, "We're going to fly!"

He leans closer. "Why are we whispering?"

"So we don't upset people," she replies.

My heart constricts painfully in my chest.

Georgi moves his left arm, and I see the pain flash over his face as he brushes his palm over her braid, where some strands have come loose. "You don't have to whisper, *printsesa*. No one will dare get upset with you."

"Why?"

Georgi playfully boops the tip of her nose with his fingertip. "Because I say so."

Simi looks at me, then loudly announces, "Mama, I need to pee-pee."

"Softer, *malka*," I hush her.

"But Georgi said I don't have to whisper," she argues as she begins to wiggle her body out of my hold to climb off my lap.

I help her to her feet before undoing my seat belt.

Simi doesn't wait for me and darts away, but not looking where she's going, her foot hits Mr. Torrasi's shoe, and she trips.

Both Georgi and Mr. Torrasi react. Mr. Torrasi grabs hold of Simi while Georgi sucks in a sharp breath that has my eyes flitting between him and my daughter.

Simi pushes against Mr. Torrasi's hands and worms out of his hold, her face going pale from fear.

I quickly take hold of her and lift her. Her arms shoot around my neck, and she holds onto me for dear life as I walk into the aisle and toward the

sign that shows where the toilet is.

“Fuck, I’m bleeding again,” Georgi snaps.

I hear movement, and glancing over my shoulder, I see Raya, Mr. Torrissi, and Santino getting up.

There’s an urge to return to him so I can tend to his wound, but Simi comes first, and I hurry into the toilet. Shocked to see it’s a full bathroom with a shower, sink, and even a seat, I put Simi down and lower her sweatpants before helping her to sit on the toilet.

“I’m sorry, Mama,” she whispers while relieving her bladder.

“You didn’t do anything wrong, *miló moe*.”

When she’s done, we flush, and I pull up her pants before leading her to the sink. After washing our hands, I lift her into my arms, and as I open the door, I hear Georgi chuckle while saying, “Chill. It’s just a little blood. Jesus.”

“Little blood, my fucking ass,” Mr. Torrissi growls. “The stitches came loose.”

With Simi’s need taken care of, the urge to tend to Georgi overwhelms me, and I hurry down the aisle to get to him.

Raya and Mr. Torrissi are crowding Georgi, and Santino is crouched in the aisle, digging through a large first aid kit.

Georgi’s eyes latch onto me when I’m near, and the corner of his mouth lifts. “Don’t worry, my nurse is here, so you can all sit down.”

Mr. Torrissi moves toward me, and I take a step backward, lowering my head, but instead of interacting with me, he takes a seat by the other men who are sitting in the section near the front of the cabin.

Raya takes the seat her father sat in previously, and it gives me space to move. I set Simi down beside Georgi, then get to work.

The sleeve is rolled up to his elbow, his left forearm exposed. Santino gestures at the bag, then takes a step backward.

Seeing that everything I’ll need is in the first aid kit, I first clean the area around the wound. I’m careful as I remove the remainder of the old stitches.

After I push the suture thread through the eye of the needle, I glance at Simi. She’s rubbing the silk shirt between her fingers, her faced pressed against the oval window as she looks outside.

Concentrating on what I’m doing, I close the wound up and clean the area again before wrapping a bandage around Georgi’s forearm.

The moment I'm done and I begin to gather the supplies and soiled antiseptic wipes, Georgi says, "Leave it, Nina. Santino will take care of that. Come sit."

I nod and straighten to my full height. For a rare moment, I glance down at Georgi, and noticing how pale he is, I look at the bag again and ask, "Is there anything in there for pain?"

"Yes." Santino gestures to a selection I would've killed to have in the torture chamber.

Crouching again, I look at the pre-filled syringes before glancing up at Georgi. "Are you allergic to anything?"

He shakes his head. "Give me the morphine."

That tells me how much pain he's in, and I don't hesitate for a second longer. I don't think about the other people around us as I unbutton his shirt until I'm able to expose his shoulder. I wipe the site clean before I double-check the injection, then push the needle into his olive-toned skin.

Once I'm done, I press a cotton ball to catch any drops of blood. My gaze lifts, and suddenly I find myself staring into Georgi's eyes. A smirk forms around his mouth, something cocky and playful, reminding me of our interaction in the hotel bar. Even his tone is teasing as he says, "You take such good care of me, *moeto hubavo mishle*."

My face warms up from hearing him call me his beautiful little mouse, and instantly feeling self-conscious and on guard, I yank away. I drop the cotton ball by the wipes and quickly take my seat, pulling Simi onto my lap.

"Can we take off?" a man asks from the front.

"Yes," Georgi replies while fastening the buttons of his shirt again.

I put on the seat belt and hold Simi tight.

"Is the prince's owie okay?" she whispers.

Georgi positions his elbow on the leather armrest between our seats and leans a little closer. "I'm more than okay. Your Mama took care of my owie, so you don't have to worry."

She looks at Georgi's bandaged forearm, then at his face. Just as she's about to say something else, the plane begins to move, and her gaze widens.

Neither of us has ever flown before, and I'm feeling very anxious, so it makes me worry about Simi.

When the aircraft lifts off the ground, my stomach drops horribly, and as we climb into the air, there's a weird sensation in my throat and stomach.

Then it hits hard, and I feel terribly nauseated.

“Oh God,” I whisper, covering my mouth with my hand.

Georgi’s head snaps in my direction. “What?”

“I feel sick. I need to go to the toilet.”

“We can’t move around the cabin until the seatbelt sign is off.”

Raya leans a little forward. “Massage the pressure point just beneath your wrist.”

She indicates where on her own, but before I can move Simi so I can do it, Georgi takes hold of my arm and begins to massage the area in slow circular movements, the pressure firm but not hurting.

When I swallow hard, he keeps the pressure on the spot and leans his head down to catch my eyes. “Take deep breaths.”

I focus on filling my lungs with air, and when he begins to massage me again, I’m surprised when it actually takes the edge off the nausea.

Using his left hand, his palm settles on the side of my head, and he nudges me until my cheek is pressed against his bicep. “Get some rest, Nina,” he murmurs, his tone gentle.

I hold still, my free arm wrapped around my daughter, while Georgi continues to lessen the sick feeling rolling around in my stomach.

Then the impossible happens. One second, I’m adamant about staying awake for as long as I can, and the next, I jerk awake.

I have no idea what happened and instantly sit up, wrapping my arms tighter around Simi.

Raya isn’t in her seat, and a flight attendant is walking down the aisle. Only then do I realize the seat belt sign is off.

“Mama, can I color?” Simi asks.

Before I can tell her no, Georgi gets up and looks down at me. “Where’s her book?”

“In one of the bags.” I have no idea where they are. “But I have her crayons in my handbag. Is...is there any blank paper on board?” I hate asking, but I have no idea how long the flight is, and I can’t expect Simi to sit still. She won’t understand.

“I’ll find some.” He gestures to the flight attendant, and in a brisk tone, he orders, “Bring paper for the child to draw on.”

“Yes, sir.” She hurries away.

Georgi turns back to me, then suddenly reaches for Simi. When I cling to her, my eyes darting to him as anxiety shoots through me, he says, “I’m

just moving her to the seat across from you. She can't sit on your lap for the next ten hours."

Reluctantly, I let go and watch as he moves my daughter to the other seat.

When he puts on her seat belt, she grins at him while happily kicking her legs.

He brushes his palm over her head, then glances at me. "Crayons?"

Right!

I pull my handbag out from where it's squashed between the seat and my side and unzip it. Gathering all the crayons, I move forward to give them to Simi, but I'm stopped by the belt keeping me strapped to the seat.

Georgi takes hold of my hand and removes the crayons, then presses a button on Simi's armrest. The lid of the polished wood console rises smoothly, revealing bottled water, a small crystal dish with a fitted lid filled with chocolate-covered almonds, and a pale box of pastel macarons that immediately catches Simi's eye.

There's also an empty pocket where he sets down the crayons so they won't roll away.

*Shit.*

I quickly take off my seat belt, and as I scoot forward, Simi asks, "What's that?"

"Macarons," Georgi answers, crouching in front of her, and at the same time, blocking me. He opens the box, then says, "You can eat them."

"Really?" Simi asks, her attention focused on Georgi.

"Yes." He lifts his hand again and gently cups her cheek. "You can have anything you want, *malkata mi printsesa*."

Seeing how her face lights up, a lump instantly forms in my throat, and I know I'll pay whatever price I have to as long as she's happy.

I remain tense on the edge of my seat as Simi leans closer, her eyes shining brilliantly while she decides which one to have. She picks up a yellow one, then sits back, and says, "It looks like the sun."

"It does," Georgi replies. "Taste it."

When she takes a tiny bite, a dimple appears in her cheek as a full-blown smile spreads over her lips. "I like it."

"I'm happy to hear that." Georgi slowly gets up, and when he comes to sit down beside me, he gives me a smirk. "Relax, Nina."

The flight attendant brings a notebook and gives it to Simi, then she looks at Georgi and me. “Would you like something to drink? Champagne?”

“You can’t drink alcohol,” I say before I can censor my tone so I don’t sound too worried.

“You heard my nurse. Just bring a coffee for me and tea for her.” His eyes flick to Simi, then he asks, “Would you like juice, *printsesa*?”

“Please,” she mumbles while helping herself to a pink macaron.

The moment the flight attendant walks away, Mr. Torrisi says, “It’s time we talk, son.”

“Sure.” Georgi relaxes while everyone else looks at him.

I scoot closer to the window and watch Simi as she picks up a crayon and starts to draw.

# Chapter 15

## Nina

“Tell us what happened,” one of the other men says, drawing my attention away from Simi.

Thankfully, she doesn’t understand English, but I can’t stop myself from listening to the conversation.

“You know what happened. I was taken, tortured, and now I’m fine.”

“Why did you bring the woman and child?” another man asks.

I bristle, ducking my head a little and praying to a God who’s never listened to me before.

*Don’t let this get ugly in front of Simi.*

“I took them.”

“What are you going to do with them?” This time it’s Mr. Torrisi speaking.

“They’ll live with me. They’re mine, so just drop the subject. I won’t tolerate a single argument regarding the matter.”

*His.*

It terrifies me because I don’t know what it means for Simi and me.

“Fine. What are we going to do about Boris Pavlov?”

“And Anton Belinski,” Georgi adds. “I’ve told Rosie to find out everything about the fucker. I’m going to take a couple of days to heal before hunting them.”

“I’m glad to hear you’re taking some time to get better,” Raya suddenly joins the conversation. Then I’m surprised when she asks, “If Nina and Simi are going to stay with you, can I get to know them?”

“I’d like that.”

Georgi’s tone is much softer, and it has me sneaking a peek at his face. Seeing the warm smile he’s giving his sister, I feel a pang of loss for something I haven’t had since Mom died.

“Nina is here to stay,” he adds with finality in his voice. “I’d appreciate it if you all made her feel welcome.”

“Introduce us,” one of the other men says.

“Nina.” I lift my head obediently, and Georgi gestures at the two men who seem to be around his age. “That’s Augusto Vitale and Adriano Rizzo. They’re my best friends and also capos. You’ve met my father, Renzo Torrasi, and my sister, Raya.”

*Capos.*

That’s all I hear right before there’s a rushing sound as my heart speeds up dangerously fast.

“No, don’t be scared,” Georgi says. “You’re under my protection.”

I don’t believe that for a single second.

“What information did they try to get out of you?” Mr. Torrasi asks.

“Our routes and contacts. Which ports we used, and what the meeting with Atanas was about.”

“And?”

A frown forms on Georgi’s forehead as he locks eyes with his father. “And what?”

“Did you tell them anything?”

Georgi’s quiet for a moment, then he turns his head to look at me. “When you drugged me, did I give any information?”

I quickly shake my head. “No. You were quiet at first, but then you slipped into a hallucination or bad memory about a fire.”

His eyes narrow slightly. “What did I say about it?”

I swallow hard, keeping my eyes on him. Looking at the other men is just too unnerving. “Ah...you said you couldn’t wake them. I don’t know who. You called for Raya and turned very aggressive when the guards or Boris came near you.” A breath quivers over my lips. “You lunged at me.”

His expression darkens. “Did I hurt you?”

I shake my head. “No, I jumped out of the way before you could get to me.”

“Good.” He exhales a relieved breath that leaves me utterly stunned.

He looks genuinely glad that he didn’t hurt me.

“Are you okay reliving that night?” Raya asks.

Georgi nods. “I can’t remember what I saw while I was drugged.”

“Hold up,” Adriano mutters. “She drugged you?” He levels me with such an intimidating look, I shrivel into my seat.

*Oh shit.*

“She had no choice,” Georgi informs them. “Whatever part she played in my abduction, captivity, and torture was to keep her daughter safe.”

“Yeah? That makes me worry about what else she would do,” Augusto says. “Like killing you in your sleep?”

“No.” The word bursts from me in a surge of panic. If they think I’m a threat, they’ll kill me right now.

Georgi lets out a chuckle. “Seriously. You think this five-foot-nothing woman can take me down?” Another chuckle. “Please. That’s insulting. Besides, she could’ve tried last night, and she didn’t.”

“There’s always tomorrow,” Adriano mutters. “Maybe she let you take her so she can get a front row seat to how the Cosa Nostra operates.”

*NoNoNo!*

The humor vanishes from Georgi’s face, and he leans forward, his tone harsh. “You have no fucking idea what she’s endured in that house of horrors. Back the fuck off. I won’t have any of you scaring her.”

The tension in the air thickens so much that it makes my fear spiral out of control.

Right now Georgi is defending me, and it has me doing something I would never do under different circumstances. I press close to him and try to hide behind his right arm.

He instantly notices, and lifting his arm, he wraps it around my shoulders, turning his body to block out everyone else.

Dropping his voice to a whisper, he says, “Shh...I won’t let anything happen to you.” He pulls me closer into a hug, and I’m filled with so much desperation and fear, I clutch his shirt in my fist and beg, “Please. I’ll do anything you want. Anything. Just don’t let them kill me. Don’t let them hurt Simi.”

“Hey...” He takes hold of my chin and nudges my face up so we can make eye contact. “Don’t worry about shit like that. You are safe, Nina. I swear to all that’s holy, you and Simi are safe with me.”

I give him a pleading look, as I continue to clutch his shirt, then he leans into me and presses his forehead to mine.

“Deep breaths. You’re going to hyperventilate. There’s nothing to fear. I’m right here, and with the shackles gone, I can and will protect you.” He rubs one of his large hands up and down my arm and over my back. “Just take a deep breath for me.”

The panic retreats enough for me to listen, and getting air into my lungs, I calm down until I become aware of my surroundings again.

A pleased smile tugs at Georgi's lips, then he gives me a hug before pulling back and letting go of me.

"You should drink some tea." Raya comes closer, holding a cup out to me.

When I take it from her, she sits down beside Simi, who's looking at me with knitted eyebrows and her bottom lip jutting out.

"Mama's okay, *milo moe*. I was just feeling sick again."

Raya leans closer to Simi and grins at her. "Show me what you're drawing?"

Simi looks at her, then bluntly asks, "Who are you?"

"I'm Raya, Georgi's sister."

My child's eyes widen. "Are you also a princess? Like me?"

Raya lets out a chuckle. "Yes."

"Can you also fly like Georgi?"

Not understanding, she shakes her head and gives her brother a questioning look.

In English, Georgi explains, "I jumped after her when a fucker dropped her over a banister on the third floor."

"What?" Raya gasps. "That's insane! I hope you killed him."

"Nina shot him."

Raya turns her attention back to my daughter. "No, I can't fly like Georgi. He's much stronger than me."

"He's stronger than everyone," Simi says in a very serious tone. "He's my prince, and he's taking me to his castle. He said so." She looks at Georgi. "Right? Tell her."

"Yes, I'm taking you to my castle. It's high up in the sky."

"Really?"

Simi wiggles out from under her seat belt, climbs off her seat and comes to Georgi, then proceeds to try to climb onto his lap.

I think because he saved her from falling, he's her hero, and I don't have the heart to tell her otherwise.

Georgi lifts her, and when she's comfortable, she leans against his chest and begins to rub his shirt between her fingers.

"I feel sick. Like Mama," she mumbles.

I lean over Georgi and rub her back, giving her a worried look. "Do you feel like you're going to vomit?"

She shakes her head. “No, I feel the scared kind of sick. I want a hug too.”

*My heart.*

Georgi doesn’t hesitate and wraps my daughter up in a hug while dropping kisses on her hair. “You’re safe now, *malkata mi printsesa*. There will be no more monsters. I’ll protect you from them.”

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

As I stare at Simi looking for comfort in Georgi’s arms, I realize I will do anything the man asks of me if he continues to treat her with such kindness.

Georgi glances at me, and I don’t know what he sees, but he moves his right hand and covers both of mine, giving them a gentle squeeze. “Drink your tea, *mishle*.”

“Mama’s not a little mouse,” Simi says, before laughing.

“You’re right.” Georgi chuckles with her. “What should I call her?”

“Hmm...” Simi thinks for a moment, then grins up at Georgi. “I’m your little princess, and Mama is your princess.”

I swear you can hear a pin drop in the cabin following Simi’s words.

Feeling like this situation is getting away from me, I reach for her, but Georgi shakes his head at me, then turns his attention back to her. “You’re right. I’ll remember that.”

Simi gets comfortable against his chest while I remain tense beside them.

Maybe I should stop these interactions between them. It will break Simi if Georgi doesn’t keep his promises. She’s already suffered too much.

“Relax,” Georgi suddenly says to me. “Sit back and try to get some rest. You’re exhausted and only dozed off for ten minutes earlier.” When I don’t respond, he adds, “We’re in the air, Nina. Simi won’t go anywhere. Get some sleep.”

I glance over the other men, and when my gaze falls on Raya, she smiles. “If Simi needs anything, I’ll help.”

I’ve only known Georgi for five days, and Raya is a complete stranger.

Simi might trust them, but I don’t. I know better.

---

Georgi

Once things are calm again, Dad asks, “Will Raya handle everything while you take some time off?”

As I continue to rub my thumb softly over the middle of Simi’s back, I nod at my father. “Yes.” My gaze turns to my sister. “Raya knows the business inside out. I know she can run it smoothly.”

She smiles at me, beaming from the faith I have in her.

“Your mother is going to want to see you the moment you get home,” Dad warns me. “I don’t know how you’re going to explain the woman and child to her.”

“Good luck with that,” Augusto says, letting out a chuckle.

“Mom will understand,” I reply. “Tell her to go to my place with food. Lots of food.” I glance down and notice Simi has fallen asleep. “Oh, and desserts. Have her stop at the store and get snacks that are good for a child. Simi likes cheese.”

“Now I’m making a shopping list for you?” Dad grumbles while pulling his phone out of his pocket. “Do it yourself and send it to your mother.”

I glance down at the sweet girl in my lap, then lift an eyebrow at him. “My hands are full.”

Dad mutters something under his breath, then says, “Fine. Give me the list.”

“I already did. Food. Desserts. Healthy snacks. Cheese.” Grinning at my father, who shoots me a glare, I feel a sense of normalcy returning to my life. “Oh, and juice.” Right after that thought, they keep coming. “Probably clothes. Toys. All the stuff you bought when you brought Raya and me home.”

Dad’s eyes soften for a moment as he remembers the adoption, then he says, “Got it.”

I turn my head to ask Nina if she needs anything, but seeing she’s finally fallen asleep, I let out a relieved sigh.

I’m not going to lie, I’m fucking worried about her. I only saw what her life was like for four days, and that alone was a horror show.

I’m worried she’ll never be able to recover.

“Your mom says she’ll make sure everything is at the penthouse when you get home. She’s roping Tori and Eden in to help.”

Looking at Dad again, I grin. “Tell her I appreciate it.”

As he types out a text, Adriano gets up and comes to crouch beside me while Augusto is on a call with someone.

My friend tips his head at Simi. "Are you sure about this, brother? You've just been through a very traumatic experience, and your life doesn't cater for a woman and a child. You won't be able to fuck around like you used to."

"Aren't you happy. I'll leave your strippers alone," I joke. A frown forms on his forehead, so I add, "I'm dead sure." Knowing Nina is asleep, I admit, "She risked everything for me by setting me free, and before that she took chances that would've cost her severely if she was caught." I swallow hard on the sick feeling the memory brings up. "And we went through something together that bonded us." With absolute certainty, I say, "Nina and Simi now belong to me. Nothing will change my mind."

He nods, then places his hand on my shoulder as he rises to his full height. "Just checking. You know I'm only looking out for you."

"I know."

When Adriano returns to his seat, my sight falls on Raya, who's staring at me.

"How are you doing?" I ask her. "What happened while I was gone?"

"I'm..." She shakes her head, her chin quivering. "It was the worst four days of my life, Georgi. I thought I was going to lose my mind."

When a tear rolls down her cheek, I say, "Dad." Getting his attention, I nod at my sister. "Hug her for me."

Dad gets up and moves Simi's notepad and crayons out of the way before sitting down and pulling Raya into his arms. "It's okay, sweetheart. Daddy's got you."

Raya lets go of the tension she's been holding back and sobs softly against Dad's chest while keeping her eyes locked on me.

"I'm fine," I say, my tone gentle and loving. "I'm here, Raya."

"I was so scared," she whispers. "After the first two days, I thought you'd been killed. I never want to feel that loss again."

Emotion wells in my chest, and I tilt my head, just keeping eye contact with my sister. "I love you."

"Love you too."

Suddenly, Nina grips my right arm, and when my head snaps to her, she's shaking her head, her breath speeding up fast.

"Don't look!" she cries.

Remembering the harrowing screams from her having nightmares, I keep my left arm steady around Simi while I reach my right one across

Nina's lap, giving her thigh a firm shake. "Wake up, Nina."

I don't want her screaming like that in front of everyone.

Luckily, her eyes pop open, but they're filled with so much horror, it takes a brutal swing at my heart.

"Hey, it's okay. It was a bad dream," I say, hoping to set her at ease.

Her gaze locks on Dad, then she inhales sharply. Pulling her legs up, she pushes her face into the narrow space between my arm and the seat, as if she's trying to worm her way behind me so she can hide.

I begin to rub up and down the outside of her leg, listening as she sucks in deep breaths, but the next instant, I hear a smothered sob.

Turning my head, I whisper, "I'm here. You're safe."

She nods, but stays hidden behind my arm, and it only makes me feel even more protective of her.

It also gives me hope. While Nina's dazed from the nightmare, she turned to me for safety.

# Chapter 16

## Nina

God, I feel so sick.

My head is pounding, making it difficult to think.

“Serve lunch,” I hear Adriano order. “Anyone want a drink?”

Georgi is the only one who doesn’t reply. He keeps rubbing the outside of my leg, and as the seconds pass, I become aware of the scent of his cologne. It’s dark and warm, the same scent that unsettled me the night I had to seduce him. It pulls me back to the memory of how he made my breath catch with a single look.

That night, he was ready to take me to his hotel room and fuck me. He was attracted to me. I don’t know how he feels after everything that’s transpired.

Right now, Georgi is covered in bruises, but once he heals, he’ll be that man again. The one who was dangerously charming and ruthlessly confident about getting me in bed.

The thought makes butterflies riot in my stomach, and I quickly pull away from him.

Pushing my hair off my face, I glance at Simi, who’s still fast asleep.

I’m glad she’s getting a lot of rest. She needs it after what she went through yesterday.

“Better?” Georgi asks, drawing my attention to him.

Nodding, I move into a more comfortable position.

“I’ll take Simi so you can eat,” I tell Georgi, and when I reach for my daughter, he carefully hands her to me.

The movement wakes her, and when her eyes open, Georgi leans over the armrest and brushes a palm over her rosy cheek. “Sorry, *malkata mi pritsesa*. I didn’t mean to wake you, but food is here.”

The mention of food clears her mind of sleep.

The flight attendant glides down the aisle and releases the hidden walnut tray tables from the armrests, unfolding each one with practiced precision until they lock into place between the facing seats. She smooths crisp white linen across every table, letting it drape in perfect lines before

she sets polished silverware, crystal glasses, and fine porcelain in place, turning the cabin into something closer to a private dining room than an aircraft.

Worry pours into my chest because I know Georgi is going to insist that I eat. Honestly, I'm starving, but...what if...

My thoughts are brought to a sudden halt when the attendant serves Adriano and Augusto first, and the rich scent of seared beef, warm bread, and butter drifts through the cabin.

*Oh God.*

I slap my hand over my stomach, a second before it betrays me with a loud growl. Heat rushes into my face, and I struggle not to look at the delicious food as she serves Mr. Torrasi and Raya before pausing beside us. A flicker of uncertainty crosses her face as she glances at Simi. "Shall I place both settings on one table, ma'am?"

"Just a plate for my daughter," I reply. "And a roll for me."

Georgi turns his head sharply to me and levels me with a look full of warning before he briskly orders, "Both plates on the one table."

The attendant jumps into action, and as she places a plate with chicken schnitzel strips and truffle parmesan fries down, my daughter gasps with delight. She picks up a fry and happily pops it into her mouth while I lean into Georgi and whisper, "I don't want food."

His mouth comes close to my ear, his voice low enough for only me to hear. "God help me, Nina, you will eat! I don't expect anything in return, but if you keep denying yourself this most basic need, I swear I will force-feed you myself in front of everyone." He pulls back, enough to lock eyes with me. "Try me."

My pulse kicks up a notch. There's no softness in the order, only an iron control I've never experienced from him.

With everyone watching, I lower my eyes and give the smallest nod, reluctantly submitting.

"Good choice," he mutters as he picks up his cutlery.

My plate is the same dish as his. My mouth salivates just looking at the herb-crusted filet medallions and roasted baby vegetables. There are also little baskets with fresh rolls and butter.

"Anything to drink?" the flight attendant asks.

"Just bottled water, please," I answer quickly.

“Three juices,” Georgi mutters, sounding angry. I cringe into myself, and to make matters worse, he reaches over and begins to cut my filet into smaller pieces.

When he brings a slice of beef to my mouth, my face goes up in flames. “I’m going to eat!”

“Open,” he orders, the expression on his face telling me he’s out of patience.

My lips part, and as he feeds me, I feel a weird mixture of embarrassment and an aching sense of being cared for.

Both are very unsettling. I can’t help but wonder if he felt the same when I gave him water.

Before he can spear another piece of food, I pick up my fork so he’ll see I will continue feeding myself.

“Is it nice, Mama?” Simi asks.

“Yes.” I bring a slice of steak to her mouth. “Taste.”

She takes the bite. “Mmm-mm...yummy.”

“You can have some of mine, *malkata mi printsesa*,” Georgi says. “Your mama needs to eat all her food.”

“Okay.”

As I eat more, I have to suppress a groan. God, it’s delicious. I only have two more bites of the steak before I eat all the vegetables and roll. I’m not used to consuming meat and don’t want to upset my stomach too much.

Georgi seems pleased when I set down my fork, and he even gives me a smile. “Thank you.”

He’s thanking me for eating?

My jaw almost drops, and once again, an ache spreads through my heart because it feels dangerously close to being cared for.

It touches a need in me that I’ve been trying to smother since my mother died.

---

The flight was incredibly long and exhausting.

I’m so proud of Simi. She handled it much better than I did.

As we’re being driven into New York, Simi and I stare out the window at the tall buildings. Everywhere we look, there are yellow cabs honking their horns while people rush along the sidewalks.

Normal people.

For a couple of seconds, my eyes touch on a tall woman who's wearing a gorgeous gray dress and high heels. She walks with her chin held high, and people look back to get another glimpse of her.

What is her life like?

"Mama," Simi whispers while pressing her finger to the window and leaving a print. "Look."

I follow her gaze, and my breath catches.

There's a huge toy store on the corner, its display glowing like something from one of Simi's fairytale books. A stuffed bear in a red bow stands by the entrance, so tall it nearly reaches the ceiling.

A pillar covered with pictures of fairytales towers beside it, painted carousel horses gleam under tiny lights, and a castle made for dolls sits in the center, its little windows lit as if royalty lives inside.

Pretty little ballerinas spin inside music boxes while a miniature train circles a snowy village.

"Mama," Simi gasps. "That bear is bigger than Georgi."

"It might be," I agree.

Her nose nearly presses to the glass. "It looks like the princess castle book."

"It does," I whisper.

Simi twists in her seat to look at Georgi. "Is that your castle?"

His mouth curves. "No, *malkata mi printsesa*, but I'll take you there tomorrow."

My heart clenches so painfully that my body stiffens and my eyes water.

Simi beams, already believing him and building a dream of how wonderful tomorrow will be in that innocent mind of hers.

Fear crawls through me because Georgi shouldn't make promises to my child unless he means to keep them. Simi has known too much disappointment already.

If he gives her this dream and takes it away, it will break her heart.

Simi chatters about the giant bear and the castle she wants to see, while new worries fill my mind.

Up until now, Simi has been deprived of a lot, but what if Georgi's tactic is to taunt her, letting her see things she can never have?

*God, I know you've forsaken me, but please, she's an innocent child. Don't do this to her.*

The prayer feels empty, as if it doesn't float past the roof of the SUV but falls flat on the carpeted floor where it will be trampled by Georgi's leather loafers.

I don't take notice of our surroundings anymore, and when the vehicle stops, it feels like we've arrived at a prison.

Georgi climbs out, and I can't keep hold of Simi as she squirms out of my arms and scurries across the seat to get to him.

"Wait for me!" she says, her voice pitched with excitement.

He hooks his large hands beneath her armpits and lifts her off the seat.

I quickly get out, and as I aim to dart around the back of the SUV to get to Simi, Raya steps in front of me.

No!

She smiles as if we are friends, and as her lips part, I hear nothing of what she says. Santino comes to stand behind Raya, probably ready to stop me if I try anything, while Georgi walks away with Simi.

*They're taking Simi from me!*

Raya lifts her hand, and expecting her to hit me, I jump back. My heart thunders in my ears, my breaths desperate gasps.

Suddenly, Georgi comes back, hard lines cut into his face as he hands my precious child to his sister, who once again carries her away from me.

Knowing this is how things are going to be, and that I'll at least get to see Simi for two hours a day, my breathing slows dramatically.

I lower my head, training my eyes on the ground.

At least I had the past twenty-four hours with her.

I feel hands on the sides of my head, and waiting for the pain, I stand like a robot. Then I'm yanked against a solid body, my face pressing into warm silk.

Slowly, the darkness around me shifts until I hear Georgi's deep voice above my head. "Shh...You're safe."

When the worst of the shock fades and I forcefully make peace with the fact that I am once again separated from my child, my instinct to obey every rule and do as I'm told takes over.

Don't risk the short two hours you'll get with Simi.

Georgi's body folds around me. When his lips brush against my forehead, it feels deceptively like he's sheltering me.

I know what he wants.

No use in fighting the inevitable.

I tilt my head back, but the moment my lips brush against his, he yanks completely away from me as if I burned him like fire.

Georgi puts a safe distance between us, a very disturbed expression darkening his face. “No, Nina.” He shakes his head hard, then anger carves lines into his features. “Why did you check out of reality?” He lifts his hand to rub the muscles behind his neck. “Did you have flashbacks to what happened in the basement?”

I shake my head.

His expression turns from anger to worry, which confuses me. “Then what is it?”

“I will do whatever you want from me so I don’t risk the two hours I get to spend with Simi every afternoon.” My tone is drained of all emotion, just like my soul.

Georgi closes the distance between us again, grabs hold of my hand and hauls me toward an elevator.

It’s only then that I notice all the other men. Six of them, armed to the teeth and looking very scary.

When the doors open, I’m pulled into the opulent space that is all mirrors with gold and black frames.

One of the guards gets in with us and scans a card that makes the doors shut and the elevator move.

Georgi begins to rub his thumb over my skin on the inside of my wrist, as he did on the plane when I felt sick.

The silence thickens around us, and when the elevator slides to a smooth stop and the doors open, I’m hauled into a space so vast and luxurious it feels unreal.

Dark marble gleams beneath my feet, leading to a sunken living room decorated with soft cream leather couches and a fire burning from a wall of black stone.

For a split second, my stunned gaze touches on floor-to-ceiling windows, the lights of the city glittering below.

Gold catches in the glow of chandeliers suspended overhead, warm against dark wood, smoked glass, and polished steel.

Every carefully curated detail screams of money Boris could only dream of attaining.

But I barely have time to take it all in because there are so many people. Conversations die the moment Georgi drags me toward them, and every

pair of eyes locks on us.

*Dear God!*

The men fill me with unspeakable fear, which numbs my body. They all look as powerful as Georgi.

Some rise like predators from where they're sitting on the couches, while others stand near a bar.

The women are all beautiful and polished, draped in elegance, while I look disheveled and have terror clinging to me like a second skin.

My gaze darts wildly through the room, panic surging so fast my vision blurs.

Then I see Simi, still in Raya's arms as she steps out from among the people who I can only assume are Georgi's friends and family.

The sound that tears from me is half sob, half gasp.

When I tug on Georgi's hold, he doesn't let go of my hand, but thankfully, he takes me straight to her.

A charged silence hangs heavy in the room, but I don't care.

"Mama!" Simi smiles happily. "This is Georgi's castle."

He lifts her from Raya and places her back in my arms, and I clutch my baby so tight against my chest she squirms.

I bury my face in her hair, shaking as relief and terror collide inside me in a violent storm.

Georgi wraps his arm around my shoulders, and I hear him say, "Give me a minute, guys."

Pulling me right against his side, he guides me down a hallway. I can barely see through the tears gathering in my eyes and only half take in that we are entering a study.

Georgi steps in front of me and cups my cheek while rubbing his hand up and down Simi's back.

"I...I g-g-get to...keep her?" I struggle to ask.

"Yes. I said no one will separate you and Simi."

"I thought..." My breaths are too fast and loud.

Simi leans forward and presses a kiss to my other cheek. "It's okay, Mama. Georgi will hug you."

His arms move around us, and as I cling to my precious child, he practically engulfs us with his much larger body.

"You and Simi are safe with me." His hand moves up and down my back. "I promise."

Something inside my chest loosens, and it's enough so I can begin to calm down.

For the first time since Boris unleashed devastation and hell on my life, I want to believe that there can be such a thing as a good man in a violent world like ours.

# Chapter 17

## Georgi

To say I'm exhausted is the understatement of the century.

Every time Nina has a panic or downright terror attack, it forces me right back to the basement.

Christ, I have to greet my loved ones and get them out of here so Nina and I can take a breather from all these overpowering emotions.

"I'm just going to talk to my family, and once they leave, I'll show you around."

Nina nods, her face still way too pale.

"Georgi, is your castle in the clouds?" Simi asks.

"No, but when it rains, it looks that way," I say, giving her a comforting smile. "Are you okay, *malkata mi printsesa*?"

"Yes. I'm not sick like Mama."

Fuck, this child is made of some serious tough stuff, just like her mother.

"Take a moment for yourself," I say as I walk to the doorway. "Once you feel better, you can join me in the living room."

I don't wait to hear Nina's response, and when I step out of the hallway, Mom's head snaps in my direction. She hurries toward me, her heels tapping on the tiles.

"Georgi!" I'm much taller than Mom, and when she reaches me, I bend at the waist so she can hold me. Her familiar scent hits me hard, and even though my left arm is fucking sore, I wrap her up in a tight hug. "Jesus," she gasps, her voice straining from tears. "If I lost you."

"You didn't."

Mom pulls back and frames my face with her hands, her eyes darting over all the bruises. "My God, sweetheart."

"It looks worse than it feels," I lie to set her at ease.

"You've lost weight." Right then, she pulls free and hauls my ass to the kitchen. "I brought all your favorites. Pick what you want to eat now so I can put the rest in the fridge."

"I ate on the plane."

Mom levels me with a scowl. “You need to regain your strength. I think the beef bone broth stew will be best.”

To appease her, I smile and nod. “Okay, Mom.”

She moves away from me, and I watch as she packs one dish after the other into my already full fridge, until three bowls remain on the marble island.

When Mom looks at me again, her eyebrows knit together, and her eyes begin to sparkle with unshed tears.

I close the distance between us and pull her into another hug. “I’m okay, Mom.”

“Uh-huh...”

I hear her snuffle and lean down to press a kiss to her head.

As she steps away, she says, “Your father told me about Nina and Simi. I got everything you asked for.” Worry tightens her features as she lifts her hands to brush them over my chest, fixing my shirt and absentmindedly trying to wipe away a wet spot her tears left on the silk. A frown forms on her forehead, then she asks, “What are you doing, bringing them here, Georgi?”

Knowing she will understand, I say, “Nina has suffered horrific things, and she still tried to help me.”

“She looks traumatized.”

“She is. The bastards conditioned the hell out of her.”

“Jesus.” Mom places her hand on my left arm, and as the wound begins to throb, I carefully pull away and open the fridge to grab a bottle of water so that she won’t notice.

“I’m keeping Nina and Simi. They’re mine, and I’ll look after them,” I state my intentions clearly so there are no misunderstandings between Mom and me.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Okay.” The corner of her mouth lifts. “You’re just like your father. Once you put your mind to something, there’s no changing your mind.”

While I take a sip of the water, I go over everything that’s happened. It’s wild to think it’s only been five days.

Shows you how quickly your life can change.

“Let’s join the others,” Mom says. “As much as I want to keep you to myself, it’s not fair to them.”

I set the bottle of water down and follow Mom out of the kitchen.

Rosie is the first to get to me before I even make it halfway to the living room. She practically throws herself at me, and as I catch her, pain shudders through my body.

“Fuck,” I suppress a groan and quickly set her down on her feet. “Pain.”

“Shit, I’m sorry.” She steps backward, then gives me a heartbroken look. “I swear I fried half my microchips looking for you. What happened to your phone and watch?”

“They were smashed with a hammer.”

Worry creases her eyebrows, and she glances at the other men before her gaze stops on Enzo, whom she used to have a huge crush on. “That’s not good. I need to figure out another way of tracking you all.”

Rosie turns her head back to me, then something behind me catches her attention, and her eyes narrow.

When I look over my shoulder, I see Nina and Simi. Nina gives me an apologetic look. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt. I heard you say you’re in pain and just wanted to check on you.”

Reaching for her, I pull her closer to me by the back of her neck. “Rosie just tackled me. I’m okay.” I move past Rosie, then call out, “Can I have everyone’s attention.” My loved ones stop talking, and once they’re all focused on me, I say, “This is Nina and Simi. They’re mine. Simi doesn’t speak English, so please keep that in mind.” I glance over the most important people in my life. “Don’t ask Nina any questions. She is not the enemy but under my protection. Treat her the way you would treat each other. I want her to feel at home as soon as possible.”

“Well, that sums it up in a nutshell,” Enzo mutters while chuckling.

“Yours?” Christiano, the *capo dei capi* and Enzo’s older brother, asks. “You claimed Boris Pavlov’s daughter and grandchild?”

I lock eyes with him. “Yes. They belong to me. End of story.”

“And what about Pavlov?” Christiano asks.

I gesture at Rosie. “Once I’ve taken some time to recover, Rosie and I will work together to find the bastard. That will be my sole focus until he’s dead.”

“That’s enough talk of work,” Aunt Gabriella, Christiano’s mother, says as she comes toward me. “The rest of us would like to check on Georgi.” When she reaches me, she brings her hand to my left arm. I notice how Nina tenses, her eyes locking on where the bandage is.

I turn my body sideways and hug Aunt Gabriella with my right arm instead.

"I'm so happy you're back with us," she says before she pulls away from me to look at Nina. "I'm Gabriella Falco. Welcome to the family, Nina." She smiles at Simi, then looks at Nina again. "I'll be in touch so we can get to know each other better."

Nina only nods, her shoulders curving forward while she holds Simi tighter.

"I want down, Mama," Simi says.

"Not, now, *milo moe*," Nina whispers, her voice hoarse. "It's not safe."

"Raya," I say to get my sister's attention. When she comes to me, I tip my head at Nina. "Will you show them to the guest room beside mine. I think Nina would like to rest after the long flight."

"Of course," Raya replies, already giving Nina a comforting smile.

My eyes touch on Nina's. "Take your time getting settled and unpack."

"Okay," she whispers obediently.

I wait for them to disappear up the stairs to the second floor, then smile at my loved ones. "Shit's been a bit crazy."

"I bet," Uncle Dario, Rosie's father, says. He comes to pat my right shoulder. "Talking about shit. You've looked better. Are you okay, son?"

"Yeah. Just banged up."

Everyone takes a moment to exchange a few words with me before they slowly start to leave.

"Just so you know, I'm going to work on getting implants for you all," Rosie mentions as she walks toward the elevator.

A couple of us groan because once Rosie gets it in her head to do something, we have no choice but to go along.

"And how much is that going to cost me?" Enzo asks as he wraps his arm around her shoulders.

"Hah. Christiano will be footing the bill," she retorts.

"Lucky me," our capo dei capi grumbles.

My parents hang back, and once it's only us, Mom asks, "What can we do to help?"

"Just give me some time with Nina. She's...traumatized is a too light word." I shake my head. "The shit she survived..."

"And what about you?" Dad asks. "You went through hell as well, Georgi." When my lips part to tell him I'm fine, he levels me with a scowl.

“Don’t even try to play it off as nothing. I can see it in your eyes. Something happened that you’re not telling us.”

I suck in a deep breath, then admit, “You’re right.”

Mom gasps and gives me a very worried look.

I glance away from them as flashes of Nina being pinned down and raped bombard my mind.

The helplessness I felt was crippling.

Clearing my throat, I say, “I can’t talk about it. Ever.”

“Jesus.” Mom covers her mouth with her hands, her eyes wide with fear.

I take hold of her and pull her into a hug while locking eyes with Dad, and knowing I have to give them something so they’ll stop worrying about me, I admit, “It was something I was forced to watch. I’m physically fine.”

I see the moment Dad puts two and two together. “Fuck. Now I understand everything.”

“What?” Mom asks, pulling away so she can see our faces.

“They hurt the woman in front of him,” Dad tells her.

“I’d really appreciate it if we could move on from this subject.”

Mom gathers herself and nods. “Okay. Ah...so I’ll keep bringing food over. Send me any shopping lists you have.”

“Thanks, Mom.” I press a kiss to her forehead.

Dad gently rubs my shoulder. “Have Nina look at your...bruises. Keep me up to date with what’s happening.”

“Will do.”

I walk my parents to the elevator, and once the doors close behind them, I let out a heavy sigh.

What’s the time?

Heading to the kitchen, I check the clock on the microwave and see it’s already past ten.

I take the stairs up so I can check on Nina and tell Raya she can go home. When I near the bedroom, I hear Simi ask, “Do I really get to sleep in the big bed?”

“Yes,” Raya answers. “In this castle, all princesses have big beds.”

“Yay!”

“Don’t jump, *milo moe*.”

As I walk into the bedroom, Nina’s about to take hold of an excited Simi, and I say, “Leave her be. It’s fun jumping on the bed.”

“Georgi!” Simi shrieks, bouncing toward the foot of the bed with the widest smile on her face.

I move fast, and hooking my right arm around her, I catch her mid-air. She wraps her tiny arms around my neck and plasters a kiss on my cheek, then whispers, “Thank you.”

The emotion hits me square in the chest, and I fall completely in love with the sweet little girl in my hold. My voice is hoarse as I ask, “For what, *malkata mi printsesa?*”

“For coming to save us.”

Her eyes are big and filled with so much innocence, I make a silent vow to protect her from the evils of our world so she never loses that look.

“I’m sorry I was late,” I say, before pressing a kiss to her forehead. “I’ll make it up to you.”

“By taking me to the toy store?”

“Yes.” Grinning at her, I add, “First thing tomorrow morning, so you have to get to bed and sleep so you have energy for all those toys.”

“Yes!” She squirms in my arms, so I’ll put her down and quickly crawl beneath the covers. “Night.” She squeezes her eyes shut but can’t stop smiling.

*I did that.*

*Christ.*

*Good job, Georgi.*

My heart clenches before it feels like it’s exploding with affection for Simi, and the moment is so intense, I have to rub my hand over my chest.

When I glance at Nina and see terror darkening her eyes, it pops the bubble.

I clear my throat again and look at Raya. “Thanks for everything.”

“No problem. I’ll stay on top of things and keep you in the loop. Take off as much time as you need.”

A smirk forms around my mouth. “Don’t look so happy to be rid of me.”

I follow Raya to the doorway, then she turns around and says, “I get a feeling I’m about to have a lot more freedom, now that you can focus your obsession to protect on someone else.”

“You wish.” Chuckling, I shake my head. “I’ve just been through hell, don’t give me a heart attack by telling me you want to date.”

“Hmpf.” She shoots me a playful glare, then walks toward the stairs. “I’ll check in on you tomorrow night after work.”

Turning around, I lock eyes with Nina, who’s still standing in the exact same spot, her body tense.

I stay where I am as I tilt my head. “You’re not feeling any better, are you?”

“I’m fine.”

Sure, and I’m a virgin.

Letting out a sigh, I ask, “Have you finished unpacking?”

She shakes her head. “Not yet.”

“Take care of it, then come down to the living room so we can talk.” Nina nods, but noticing she’s looking even more scared, I add, “We’re just going to talk, Nina. Nothing else.”

“Okay,” she whispers, but she still doesn’t move, her eyes glued to me as I pull the door shut behind me.

I head back down to the kitchen and open the medicine cabinet. Tossing two painkillers into my mouth, I down them with water before I walk to the living room and gingerly lower myself onto a couch.

*Fuck. What a day.*

*Scratch that. What a fucked-up week.*

My eyes fall on the new phone lying on the coffee table with a sticky note.

I peel it off and read the message.

***Call if you need me. No matter the time.***

***Love you, Mom***

When I unlock the device with the code Mom provided, I see it’s already been set up. Rosie probably did it while they were waiting for me.

*Christ, I have the best family.*

I go into my emails, and seeing the long list, I let out a sigh and get to work.

# Chapter 18

## Nina

With Simi fast asleep in the big bed that looks as soft as a cloud, I open the trash bags and begin to unpack our belongings.

I go through all of Simi's clothes, hating that she has so little. I've never had money to buy her anything.

*Not like Boris would allow me to leave the house.*

Even something as simple as choosing clothes for my daughter has never truly been mine.

The past nine years of being a prisoner in my father's house have worn away the girl I was before my mother died. I've become a woman who only knows how to survive.

Still, a fragile hope sprouts through the darkness.

What if Georgi meant it when he said he wouldn't separate us? What if, as his captives, Simi and I might be allowed more than just the basics to survive?

I glance at my daughter as I play with the dangerous hope that I might be allowed to raise her.

Letting out a sigh, I continue to unpack our clothes. When I pull the dark burgundy cocktail dress out of the bag, my body stills. I stare at the silk that's helped me lure many men to their deaths, then an idea pops into my head.

*This was always Boris' weapon. What if I use it for myself...just this once?*

If I can seduce Georgi, I might become to him what Tanya was to Boris. She was allowed luxuries. She got to spend day in and day out with Simi. Tanya was allowed to do anything she wanted as long as she kept Boris happy.

My heartbeat speeds up as the plan takes root.

I will offer myself to Georgi, and in return, I will get to raise Simi and protect her. If I can satisfy him, then maybe he'll continue to be kind to Simi.

Also, this will be a way for me to take control of what happens to my body. Instead of Georgi having to use force to rape me, maybe if I submit to him, he'll show me mercy.

Remembering how angry he was in the chamber, how he fought against the shackles to try to get to me give me the courage to go through with my plan.

Not hesitating, I dig out the high heels and a pair of lace panties. I quickly change into the provocative outfit before getting my curling iron and makeup out.

From years of experience, it doesn't take me long to get ready, and as I stare at my reflection in the mirror, I smooth my hands over the dress before I force myself to leave the room.

Walking down the hallway, nerves spin wildly in my stomach.

*Simi is so happy. This is a small price to pay, Nina.*

*Georgi is very attractive. He's been nice to Simi. It should be so much easier to have sex with him than with Anton.*

I keep repeating the sentences, trying to convince myself it won't be as awful as when Anton raped me.

The silk molds too closely to my body, reminding me of every other time I've worn this dress.

The loose strands that I curled fall around my face, and my makeup is perfect, the way Boris liked it. The thought sickens me, but I cling to my resolve.

*This is for Simi.*

If giving Georgi what Anton has always violently taken from me buys my daughter's safety, then I can survive it. For her, I will sacrifice everything.

I take the stairs down, and when the sunken living room comes into view, I swallow hard on the anxiety tightening its grip brutally on my chest.

Just like the first time I saw him, Georgi is sitting on a couch, his head bowed as he types on his phone.

"Hi," I croak, my legs shaky while taking the last step.

When he looks up, tension explodes through the air like an invisible tsunami. At first, he doesn't move. His intense eyes sweep over me, taking in the dress and heels he must remember.

Another couple of seconds pass, then something unsettling flashes over his face as he rises to his feet.

The sheer size of him steals the air from my lungs as he slowly walks closer. By the time he towers over me, all muscle and power, I feel absurdly small under the weight of his attention.

“Christ, Nina,” he says, his tone rough. “What are you doing?”

My lips part, but I struggle to speak. Instead, I take a few hesitant steps, closing the distance between us. My pulse drums loudly in my ears, and I can’t force myself to meet his eyes. With trembling fingers, I reach for the top button of his shirt.

“I thought...” My throat tightens, and I have to clear it before I can try again. “I thought maybe this would make things easier.”

His hand closes over my wrist before I can undo the second button. When my gaze flies up, and I see the hard lines on his face, my stomach drops with fear.

“What things?” he growls, the sound low and deadly.

While more fear fills my chest, shame burns so hot through me, sweat beads on the back of my neck.

“If you want me...” My voice is barely audible, and I have to force myself to speak louder. “Use me however you want. Simi has never been this happy, and I’ll do whatever you want so you’ll continue to treat her with kindness. I won’t fight you, and I won’t scream. All I ask is that you allow me to raise my daughter and for you not to hurt her.”

The silence after my proposition is deafening.

Suddenly, his fingers wrap around both my wrists, and while I expect him to force me down to the floor so he can take what I’m offering him, he doesn’t.

“No.” Even though the word is nothing more than a whisper, it’s filled with so much raw emotion, I can’t help but meet his eyes. They’re dark and filled with rage.

The next instant, Georgi grabs hold of my hips, and I go airborne. Once I find myself draped over his shoulder, my lips part in a gasp as shock registers, and my hands slap against his back.

*Oh God! What have I done.*

*No, I’m not ready!*

*I’ll never be ready to be raped.*

He carries me up the stairs, each of his steps shuddering through my body, and a sob builds in my chest. The man is a giant, and even when I try to push up so I can try to fight, he carries me with ease.

At the top of the staircase, Georgi hauls me down, and as soon as my heels settle on the floor, he takes two steps away from me. Dragging a hand over his face as if he's trying to calm himself down, his eyes burn on me with anger.

*I made a terrible mistake! That look has always been followed by a beating that left me broken for days.*

Georgi shakes his head, looking down before taking my eyes prisoner again. Right now, he looks unbelievably dangerous, and when he speaks, I jerk with fright from the low and deadly tone he's using.

"Do you think I brought you here to use you?"

Before I can answer, he closes the distance in one large step, moving so quickly that I don't have time to get away. A peep escapes my lips as I jerk, bracing for the blow, but then his huge hands frame my face, and as he leans down.

As our eyes collide, there's no sign of the anger that was there a second ago.

With the five-inch heels I'm wearing it makes it easier for him to press his forehead to mine. Sounding as if he's in extreme pain, he groans, "I watched that animal violate you while I was shackled. I couldn't do anything."

The words rip through me like a destructive tornado.

Anton raped me so many times, I've learned to disassociate when it happens. Somewhere along the way, I stopped seeing my body as mine, only as something to trade when survival demands it. Once you learn to step outside your own flesh, sacrifice no longer feels like loss but more like duty.

It was my duty to lure all those men.

It was my duty to tend to their wounds.

It was my duty to let Anton fuck me whenever he felt like it.

It was my duty to let Boris beat me.

It was my duty to let the guards verbally attack me and talk to me like I'm nothing but a whore.

Georgi brushes his thumbs over my cheeks, pulling me out of the darkness my mind slipped into.

"Do you really think after witnessing you being beaten and raped, I'd take you when you offer yourself as payment?"

I shake my head because I can't bear the hurt in his eyes. "I only want to protect Simi," I croak, while a tear escapes.

Georgi catches it with his thumb, and his expression softens. "I know."

I lift my hands and grip his shirt, giving him a pleading look. "Please. Don't hurt my daughter."

"I won't, Nina." His eyes close for a moment before he looks at me again. "How can I make you believe that you're safe here with me?"

A sob bursts over my lips. "I don't know. Men demand things. They hurt... They take..." I almost choke on another sob, my voice cracking as I brokenly admit, "They hurt me."

"Christ, *moeto hubavo mishle*," he whispers tenderly.

Pulling me against his chest, he holds me tightly, his body folding protectively around mine. I've never been held like this, and it makes me freeze because I'm scared that if I move, he'll stop.

For months, Simi's been living in her make-believe land where her prince would come to rescue us.

Desperate for that to be true, I beg, "Please, Georgi..." I choke on another sob. "I don't want Simi to suffer the way I have."

"I'll protect her with my life." Pulling back, his gaze drops to the dress and heels before flicking to the bold lipstick I'm wearing.

His jaw clenches, and lifting his hand, he smears the lipstick from my lips with his thumb before wiping it off on his shirt.

"Never wear this again." His command heals something in the darkest parts of my soul where all my broken pieces lie. "This is not you." He steps back again and shakes his head. "You will never be beaten, used, or raped again. Go change."

*Georgi is rejecting me.*

The realization fills me with such relief, I feel a little lightheaded, then it hits hard...*I can really trust this man.*

Trying to understand why he's so different, I dare to ask, "Why are you being kind to me?"

A dark, almost savage expression tenses his features. "Because you were kind to me, Nina. You disobeyed orders and gave me water, knowing how severe the punishments would have been if you were caught." He shakes his head, his expression becoming even more tender. "You kneeled on a cold, hard concrete floor for hours so that I could sleep." Lifting his

hand again, he brushes his fingers tenderly over the bruises on my cheek. “We bonded in that hellhole. I know you felt it too.”

I’ve never had such a strong urge to keep someone alive before. Next to Simi being hurt, my biggest fear was Georgi dying.

My mind screams at me to keep quiet, but my heart gives in, and I whisper, “I felt it.”

Slowly, the corner of his mouth lifts, and this time he’s the one giving me a pleading look. “I don’t want this act you put on to keep Simi safe. I want the real you, the one I know is somewhere deep inside all that fucked up trauma you survived. I want you to feel safe so you can heal. One day, when you feel like yourself again, *and you want me*, we’ll talk again.”

I stare into his eyes, searching for any sign that this is a trick, but I can’t find a single thing. All I see is honesty.

I wipe my palms down my sides, the cocktail dress feeling like years of blood and screams against my skin.

“Go change, then come back and have some tea with me. There’s a lot we have to talk about.”

Obedying, I turn around and head back up the stairs.

# Chapter 19

## Nina

While I'm changing back into my jeans and T-shirt, my hands shake so much I have to pause and breathe through the emotions spinning wildly in my stomach.

*Georgi doesn't want sex with me unless it's what I want.*

The thought is life-altering. It bends the brutal reality that's been my existence for nine years until its hold on me threatens to snap, the first tendrils of trust curling through my heart.

Whatever Georgi expects of me will be easy to give. No beatings. No using Simi against me. No rape. Anything else pales in comparison, so I hardly care. I'll obey whatever rules he sets without hesitation.

I quickly wash my face and pat it dry before I check on Simi to make sure she's still sleeping. Hurrying out of the bedroom, I settle a hand over my stomach that feels like it's doing cartwheels.

When I come down the stairs, there's no sign of Georgi in the living room, but then I hear a clinking sound, and I follow it to the kitchen.

As I enter the room, Georgi stops stirring the cup of coffee, and turning around, he comes right at me.

My chaotic emotions scatter everywhere, and I gasp when his hands settle on my waist, and I'm lifted into the air. I'm set down on the marble top of the island, and before I can steady myself, his abs press against my knees as he bends forward, placing his hands on either side of my hips to cage me in.

*Shit!*

He leans down until we're eye level, his hazel irises alight with a possessive look that holds my gaze captive with such intensity, it's impossible to escape.

"Time to talk, Nina," he says, his tone firm. "Your life is about to change. Everything you've ever known. Your routine. Who you obey. What you eat and drink. How much time you get with your daughter. Sleeping." He shakes his head hard, his eyes narrowing on me. "It all changes today."

My first instinct is to feel fear, but before it can flood me, he says, “No one will ever keep Simi from you again. If she needs you, you go to her, day or night. You don’t ask permission to be her mother. She is yours, and she will not be used to control you. Understand?”

The words hit so deep I can only stare.

Lifting his hand, he waves it through the air. “This is your home now. Yours and Simi’s. I was serious when I said I’m not letting you go, so you need to make yourself comfortable.”

It should sound like a threat, but it doesn’t. I’m not being told to remain in the basement until I’m called for.

Georgi’s gaze lowers, sweeping over my jeans and T-shirt before returning to my face. “Is this all you have to wear?”

Heat creeps into my cheeks. “We don’t have much.”

His jaw clenches in a way that makes it clear my answer upsets him.

“We’ll take care of that tomorrow.”

I hesitate before asking, “Uhm...how? I don’t have money.”

Georgi’s eyes sharpen on me, and it feels like I just said something wrong, almost as if I insulted him.

“Nina, I will take care of all your needs. When I say we’re getting something for you or Simi, it means I’m paying for it. We will get you a hell of a lot more clothes and whatever toys Simi wants. Don’t question it ever, and don’t worry that I’ll expect something in return. You are my responsibility.”

Again, emotions explode in my chest because in mere seconds, Georgi is turning out to be the prince Simi wanted with all her heart.

We stare at each other for a long moment before I dare to ask, “Why would you do all of this for us and not expect anything in return?”

He lets out a heavy breath, and his expression softens slightly. “I care about you, Nina, and I will lose my fucking mind if anything bad ever happens to you again.” He shrugs, then admits, “I’m not going to lie. You are the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. Yes, the attraction is there, but what sealed the deal for me was witnessing your determination to survive. Christ, I’m in awe of you.”

Stunned, I gape at Georgi as he shifts my entire world on its axis.

*This big man, who was strong enough to free us, cares about me.*

He lets out an incredulous-sounding chuckle, then adds, “And Simi is fucking adorable. I’ve already fallen in love with her.” His expression

darkens in a split second. “What’s her last name?”

My voice trembles as I answer, “Pavlova. Simona Pavlova. I named her after my mother.”

“It’s a beautiful name, *mishle*.”

My chin begins to quiver from the tentative happiness creeping into my heart. “What are your rules?” I want to learn them so I won’t do anything to upset him.

Something dark flits through his eyes, but instead of frightening me, it makes my pulse race faster.

“You want my rules?” he asks, leaning in even closer until the heat of his breath brushes over my skin. “Rule number one. You don’t run from me.”

Possession is woven tightly through the words, and they shouldn’t, but they warm my heart.

“Secondly, you don’t go anywhere without clearing it with me first. If I don’t know where you are, I’ll assume something is wrong, and I’ll tear this city apart until I find you.”

A tremor moves through my body at the promise of violence in his tone.

“Third, you’re *never* alone with another man.”

My brows draw together. “Will they try to hurt me?”

Georgi lifts his hand to my face and brushes his fingers over the bruises on my cheek and lip. “I won’t allow you to be alone with another man, besides my dad and Santino, because you are mine, Nina. I’m a very overprotective man, to the point that it’s made my sister unhappy. After what happened in that fucking basement and Simi almost dying...” Rage moves like a shadow over his face. “I won’t take risks with your safety.”

The words hit with such force that my breath catches.

*He really wants to protect us?*

I’m so overwhelmed I can’t even put into words what I feel, knowing we will be safe.

Georgi must see the emotions on my face, because he leans even closer and his tone is rougher as he spits out, “You don’t belong to Boris or Anton. No one uses you. No one hurts you. No one touches what’s mine.” Again, he forces his anger down and visibly becomes calmer. “And if someone is insane enough to try, I will kill them.”

Every word from him acts as a soothing balm to my raw soul, but still cautious, I beg, “Is this real? Please don’t say these things only to yank

them away from me.”

He lifts both hands and frames my face. “This is very real, Nina. As real as the bond we formed in that basement. I’m going to take care of you the way you took care of me.”

His expression turns so gentle, it fills me with certainty.

“When something scares you, tell me. If you have questions, ask them. If you need anything, come to me. You don’t have to carry things alone anymore. I want to help you.”

Silence has kept me alive for so long that it feels wrong to be open about what scares me.

His forehead hovers close to mine, his entire body surrounding me until the world feels reduced to the tiny space between us.

“I’m scared I’ll upset you,” I admit softly.

“If that happens, I won’t hurt you, no matter how angry I get. I think I proved that already, Nina. I didn’t punish you for the part you played in me ending up shackled and tortured.”

My eyebrows pull together. “I’m so sorry about that, but…”

“But what?”

“I regretted it at first, but not anymore. I know that’s wrong, but if I hadn’t lured you into the trap, you wouldn’t have been there to save us.”

“I understand.” He tilts his head, then asks, “Do you want to talk about the rape?”

I have one question, and my throat strains when I ask, “Why did you look?”

A hurt expression cuts into Georgi’s features. “You cried, and I just couldn’t…” He turns his head, too late to hide the torment flashing through his eyes. “I couldn’t leave you alone in that moment.” Taking a deep breath, his gaze returns to mine, but his voice is hoarse as he says, “I wanted to give you all the strength I had in me.”

I suck in a quivering breath, then a first tear slips free. Georgi wipes it from my cheek, and the tenderness in his touch is my tipping point.

I clutch at his shirt like he’s the only thing keeping me upright, a broken cry slipping free before I can admit, “You being there made it so much worse.”

Sobbing, I scoot closer when his arms wrap around me, and for the first time in way too many years, I look for comfort in a man’s arms.

Georgi holds me as if I'm precious, and when he presses a kiss to the side of my head, another broken shard of me eases back into place.

He doesn't lose his temper or become impatient but just holds me for as long as I need.

That's when it truly sinks in that I can trust him.

My fingers free his shirt, and I wrap my arms around his neck, hugging him back. "Thank you!" I cry, finding a safe place in the man I betrayed. The man who's supposed to be my enemy, but who has done so much more for me in a single day than my father has done for me in all my life.

Georgi tightens his hold on me, and I spread my legs so he can stand between them. It allows him to engulf me fully as he presses my head into the space beneath his chin.

When I finally manage to calm a little, I say the words again. "Thank you so much for not dying, for freeing us, for offering all those wonderful things, but mostly..." I pull back and use my palms to wipe my cheeks dry. "Thank you for caring. It's been so long, I have forgotten how good it feels."

"You're welcome, *moeto hubavo mishle*."

I scoot further back so I can meet his eyes and say, "I was surprised when I heard you speak Bulgarian. Especially without an accent."

"It's because I am Bulgarian. By heritage. My biological parents died in the fire...the one I relived under the drugs. Not long afterward, Raya and I were adopted."

My jaw drops, and once again I gape at him. "Really? I thought you were Sicilian."

"Not by blood, but in every way that matters."

My teeth tug at my bottom lip, and when Georgi's eyes lower to my mouth, I instantly free my lip. "Uhm...it doesn't look like your family and friends are happy that you took Simi and me." When it sounds like I'm complaining, my eyes widen, and I ramble, "I understand why, though. They must be very angry that I lured you into that trap. I hated every second of it and felt terrible. I did it against my will. It was either you or Simi. I'm so sorry."

Georgi presses his index finger to my lips, stopping me.

"Yes, they're upset because of what happened, but all that matters is that I understand why you did it. You were as much a prisoner as I was." When

the panic in me retreats, he continues, “They will all get to know you, and things will get better. Don’t worry about it, Nina.”

I tilt my head as I look down, my line of sight focusing on one of the buttons of his shirt. “You don’t know me either.”

“Let’s solve that problem now. Tell me about yourself.” He moves away from me and pulls a stool closer, taking a seat.

Georgi doesn’t look comfortable at all, and when I jump off the marble top, he reacts incredibly fast, catching me before my feet can even touch the ground.

“Christ! You’re so fucking tiny. Don’t ever do that again. You could’ve hurt yourself,” he snaps while steadying me on my feet, and as he lets go and turns away, I see the flash of pain ripple over his face.

“I’m sorry. I wanted to say, let’s go sit on the couches, so you can be more comfortable. I also want to clean your wounds.”

“I need to shower first.” He waves a hand over the kitchen. “Look around the penthouse and familiarize yourself with where everything is while I clean up.”

“Okay.”

My eyes track Georgi as he leaves the kitchen, and for a couple of minutes I stand still, replaying everything he said.

*God, I hope this is real.*

My footfall is soft as I walk over the dark tiles toward the sunken living room. The leather couches form half an oval shape, all facing the black stone wall that stands free in the middle of the room. An electric fire burns beneath a large TV.

I trail my fingers over the expensive leather of the couch as I walk to the towering windows, looking at all the city lights that shimmer like a field of stars.

I can feel the wealth all around me. I might have lived in a mansion, but it pales in comparison to this penthouse.

I walk toward the dining room, running my fingers lightly over the polished table, imagining a candlelight dinner, the flames reflecting off the crystal. I picture Georgi sitting at the head of the table while Simi makes him laugh.

The thought is so tender it catches me off guard.

As if I’m running away from it, I hurry down the hallway until I reach his study, and the moment I step inside, I feel as though I’ve crossed into

some private part of him. The scent of his cologne is strong in here.

Without realizing what I'm doing, I inhale a deep breath.

There are several books, and looking closer, I see they're thick, beautifully bound catalogs of expensive watches, Bugatti, and Sotheby's auction catalogs.

I glance around, noticing things I didn't see when I was in here earlier. There's a computer and framed photos on his desk. Moving closer to peek at them, I find myself staring at the happy memories, Georgi chose to display where he works.

One is of his parents in a kitchen. His mom is cooking, and his dad is watching her with a loving expression on his face. The other is of Raya in a beautiful gown. I think it's her prom photo.

The last is of all four of them posing for the camera.

*They look happy.*

I realize why he's so different. He was raised in a loving home.

*That's what I want most for Simi.*

# Chapter 20

## Georgi

It takes me longer than usual to shower, but once I'm dried off and wearing a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, I leave my bedroom barefoot.

Coming down the stairs, I don't see Nina anywhere, and check the kitchen before I head down the hallway. When I reach the doorway to my office, I find her standing by my desk, a wistful expression on her face as she stares at one of the photos.

Lifting my right hand to the top of the doorframe, I slowly stretch the aching muscles in my arm and shoulder, my eyes locked on the tiny woman who's taken my life by storm.

Tonight went much better than I expected. Nina opened up to me, and I feel we covered a lot of terrain.

But getting her to trust me is only step one. Now she needs to become comfortable in my space while I hunt for Boris and Anton. Once I make them pay for what they did to us, I'll be able to offer Nina the vengeance she needs to find some kind of healing for the hell she survived.

Only after that, she might be able to form a relationship with me. I'm hoping for friendship.

As soon as I think the thought, a disgruntled expression settles on my face.

That's the biggest fucking lie I've ever told myself.

I've been shoving my attraction toward Nina way fucking back because of the rape, but it hasn't lessened.

No, it's multiplying by the second.

Seeing how strong she is for her child. The way she keeps getting up after every brutal blow. The hope in her eyes.

It all makes my feelings for her grow rapidly.

But what really made a difference was when she looked for comfort in my arms. She wanted my arms around her, and that shifted things.

I'll give Nina all the time she needs, but once she's ready, all bets are off.

Right now, I'll be what she needs, but the time will come when I'll push for a romantic relationship.

Nina's body jerks hard, her head snapping up, a startled gasp bursting over her lips. "Oh...uhm...I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

I shake my head to silence her, and lowering my arm, I gesture down the hallway. "I said you can explore. You did nothing wrong."

The expression on her beautiful face eases as she comes toward me.

Wanting to see if she tenses up, I don't move out of the way, and Nina has to brush past me. I'm surprised when she actually stops close to me and lifts my shirt to look at my ribs.

"God, it looks even worse, Georgi. You should get professional care." The worry in her tone warms a spot deep in my heart that's never been touched by a woman who's not related to me.

I don't have issues, I'm just very selective about who I let in because in the past, Raya tried to get to know whoever I was fucking, and that didn't sit right with me at all.

She'd get attached, and it would hurt her when I dropped the woman.

Since I bought this building and moved my sister into the apartment beneath mine, I haven't brought any women home.

I either fuck them at their place or a hotel.

And it's always just fucking.

My eyes drift over Nina's delicate features, and I know with dead certainty that it will never be the case between us. With my attention locking on her mouth, especially the scab on her bottom lip, I think of something that's never been my thing.

*A kiss.*

Growing up, my mom was very affectionate, peppering my cheeks and forehead with kisses. I loved every single one. When Raya got older, she also started giving me a kiss on the cheek to thank me for something.

To me, a kiss means love, so it's the one thing I've never given a woman.

Christ, this is uncharted territory for me. I've done just about everything sexual with a woman, and I have a very high sex drive, but for once, it's not at the forefront of my mind.

Shoving the thoughts away, I walk down the hallway, Nina following close behind me.

When I sit down on a couch, Nina asks, "Do you have a first aid kit?"

“In the kitchen. The cupboard above the microwave.”

She hurries away, and a moment later I hear the scraping of a stool.

Fuck!

I move fast, shooting up and jogging toward the kitchen. Just as I rush in, I see Nina grabbing hold of the cupboard handle and standing up on the stool.

I don't think, and coming up behind her, I wrap my arm around her waist and lift her off. While she gasps and twists in my hold, I open the door and grab the first aid kit.

Nina's right hand lands on the side of my neck while her left clutches my shoulder. The position I'm holding her in puts her at eye level with me, and when our gazes lock, something explodes between us. It's so intense that we both react. As I quickly set her down, she glances away, a very nervous expression tightening her features. We step back from each other, then stand like idiots while scrambling for a way to handle what just passed between us.

Nina is the first to move, and with a flash of panic in her big brown eyes, she scurries in the direction of the living room.

I take a deep breath before I follow her, and pretend nothing happened when I take a seat and hand the black bag to Nina. While she zips it open, I grab hold of the hem of my shirt and drag the fabric over my head before dropping it beside me and relaxing against the back of the couch.

Her eyes flit over my chest, and this time a blush creeps into her cheeks.

Nina steps between my thighs and braces her hand on my shoulder so she can lean in close to clean the cut across my chest.

My eyes roam over every inch of her face, noticing how the bruises on her cheek have changed color. The red is gone, and only blue marks remain.

Lifting my hand, I brush my thumb over them, and it has Nina's eyes darting to my face. She goes very still, watching me and trying to anticipate my next move.

I keep our gazes locked as I lean forward. Nina's breaths instantly speed up, and panic returns to her face, but I push through and press a kiss to the marks that fucker left on her skin.

Her breaths stall, and she remains frozen like a deer in oncoming headlights.

I inhale the scent that's uniquely hers, and process how right it feels to kiss her, even if it's just on the cheek.

It should scare me how natural it feels to show her such a level of intimacy, but it doesn't.

Relaxing back again, I smirk at her. "I just wanted to kiss it better."

To my surprise, Nina's lips twitch as if she wants to smile, but then suppresses it. Tearing her eyes away from mine, she moves out from between my thighs and begins to check the wounds on my left arm.

After a while, she murmurs to herself, "It's going to leave scars." The sigh coming from her sounds unhappy, and it makes the corners of my mouth lift again.

*Nina cares about me...more than she knows.*

I'm thrown back to our time in the basement, when she was the only light in that dark room. Nina's healing touch moves over my body while I stare at her, memorizing every inch.

She clears all the soiled gauze to the coffee table before digging around in the kit.

"Yes!" Suddenly, a smile bursts over her face, and when she holds up a tube of salve, as if she found some kind of treasure, my jaw drops.

*Christ Almighty.*

Nina is smiling because she found something to help relieve my pain, and the realization hits with a staggering force. It means more than I can put into words.

An emotion so powerful, it rivals anything I've felt before this moment, shoots through my very being, changing something fundamental inside me.

What I feel for Nina changes into deep, all-consuming love.

It's instant and overpowering, obsessive and relentless, leaving me shocked out of my fucking mind.

The most profound moment of my life happens in mere seconds, and when Nina's gaze lifts to my face, I see tiny sparks of happiness flickering in their depths.

A desire to make those sparks ignite into full-blown flames surges through me. I want to make this beautiful creature so fucking happy that she'll forget her gruesome past.

"What?" she asks, panic lacing her tone as the smile dies away and shadows return to her face. "Did I do something wrong?"

Shaking my head, I clear my throat. "You have such a beautiful smile, it stunned me for a second."

“Oh.” My compliment makes her self-conscious, and she climbs onto the cushion beside me before asking, “Can you scoot forward so I can get in behind you?”

I move to the edge of the seat and rest my right forearm on my thigh. While Nina shifts in behind me on her knees, I glance down at my wounds.

Usually, I would be impatient to heal, but not anymore. The longer my wounds need tending to, the more I’ll have Nina fussing over me.

A grin tugs at the corner of my mouth, and when Nina’s hands settle on my shoulders and she begins to massage the salve into my muscles, there’s no way I can stop myself from groaning.

Just like previously, she pauses for a moment before continuing. Her fingers work magic on my body, easing the deep ache left behind by being strung up like a puppet.

“Fuck, Nina,” I groan when she digs into a knot of muscles. “I don’t know where you learned to massage like this...” My sentence is cut off by the long moan escaping me, and I lose track of my thoughts. “It’s so fucking good.” Dropping my chin, my eyes drift shut as the pleasure weaves a spell around me.

By the time she finishes turning my body into jello and she moves out from behind me, I can only slump back and look at her through hooded eyes.

Not even the wildest sex I’ve had has given me this much pleasure.

A pleased smile threatens to form, but before it can, her eyes land on my lap, and they widen with panic.

It’s only then I realize my cock is rock hard and tenting my shorts.

*Fuck.*

I quickly sit up and grabbing one of the decorative cushions, I cover my hard-on. “Ignore it.” I clear my throat, then add, “Thanks for taking care of me.”

Nina gets up from the couch and closes the first aid kit. “It’s the least I can do.”

Tilting my head, my eyes narrow. “Do you feel it’s your duty? Because if that’s the case, I’d rather you stop.”

Her head snaps up. “No!” She realizes her voice is sharp and lowers it. “Maybe in the beginning it was my duty, but not anymore. I want to make sure you heal. I have to make sure...” her words trail away, and something dangerously close to embarrassment turns her cheeks pink. “I want to be of

use to you.” When I begin to frown, narrowing my eyes, she quickly shakes her head and hurries to kneel on the couch beside me. “Please give me a moment to try to explain.”

I relax my features. “Okay.”

“I’m not doing it because I feel I have to or I’ll be punished.” Frustration flattens her mouth into a line as she tries to find the right words. “I want to, Georgi. If you need me, it will make me feel less worthless.”

Lifting my hand, I wrap it behind her neck and pull her closer as I lean down until only an inch separates our faces.

“Don’t tie your self-worth to what you can do for me, Nina. Never do that. You are an amazing mother who has sacrificed everything for her daughter. You’re a strong woman who has survived evil motherfuckers. You’re a good person who showed the enemy kindness in the middle of hell. You. Are. So. Much. More.”

I watch as my words knock the air from her lungs, while she looks at me as if I performed a miracle.

Her lips part as various emotions ripple over her face. Everything from shock to hope to awe.

“Is that what you see when you look at me?” she asks, her tone fragile as if one wrong word from me will undo all the progress I’ve made.

“Yes, Nina.” I brush my thumb over her soft skin. “I see you.”

# Chapter 21

## Georgi

Tears form in her eyes, and intense gratefulness overshadows all her other emotions. “My mother was the last person who saw me.” She rubs her chest as if her heart physically aches. “After she died, it all changed.”

I tilt my head and keep my tone gentle as I ask, “What happened to her?”

I know it’s dark when her expression turns somber.

“Boris ordered me to have sex with Anton, and my mother tried to protect me, so he beat her to death right in front of me. I tried to help. I jumped on his back and pounded my fists against him, but it didn’t help.”

*Jesus fucking Christ.*

Rage pours through my veins, and I vow I will make that fucking bastard suffer tenfold.

Nina’s features relax into a blank stare, and I know I’ve lost her to the memory. Even her voice sounds empty as she continues, “My mother’s body wasn’t even cold, her blood still wet on the floor when Anton came. I was dragged to my bedroom, where he tore my clothes off. The shame I felt for being naked in front of a man for the first time was quickly replaced by emotions I have no words for as he took my virginity. Pain. Revulsion. Anguish. Hopelessness. None of those explain what I felt...what I’ve experienced for years.”

I keep quiet, not wanting to interrupt Nina.

“After my first scream, Anton seemed to lose his mind, and the evil that lives in him tried to rip me apart. I stayed on my bedroom floor for two days, drifting between shock and emptiness. That’s when Tanya interacted with me for the first time. She came into my room and hauled me off the floor. Still reeling from being raped and in so much pain, my legs were numb, I was forced to shower and get dressed, because Anton was coming again, and I had to get ready.”

She inhales a deep breath and comes out of the haze she was in, and blinking, she meets my eyes. “Things fell into a routine after that. I’d lure

men to their deaths. Boris would torture them, and I'd have to tend to their wounds, making sure they stayed alive until he was ready to kill them."

Between surges of rage and a desperate need to feel those fuckers blood seep through my fingers, my heart breaks for Nina.

Before I forget, I growl, "Who the fuck is Tanya?"

"The woman you shot right before you jumped after Simi. My father's whore. She was responsible for watching Simi."

It gives me some satisfaction knowing I got to kill the bitch.

Nina scoots a little closer, and the traumatized look in her eyes lessens until it changes into gratitude.

"Thank you for risking your life and saving my daughter." She lifts her hand, placing it on my shoulder, then hesitates for several seconds before she leans in and presses a soft kiss to my cheek.

When she pulls away, I smile at her. "Think about it, Nina. I was willing to die for a child I didn't know. How much more do you think I'll do for someone I care about?"

She lets my words sink in, and it eases more of the ever-present tension in her body.

Suddenly, the elevator doors open, and as Santino comes in for his usual security check at three am, it frightens the hell out of Nina.

Jumping to her feet, she grabs the first aid kit and runs away as if hellhounds are nipping at her heels.

"Sorry, I didn't know you'd still be up," Santino says.

"It's okay. We should head to bed," I reply as I climb to my feet.

His eyes flick over my body as he comes closer. "You look like shit, Georgi."

"Tell me something I don't know." I chuckle as I gesture at the elevator. "I'm fine. Go back to bed."

Ignoring me, he tips his chin in the direction of the kitchen where Nina is hiding. "How do I handle her?"

"With kid gloves," I mutter, the playfulness disappearing from my tone. "Besides you and my dad, no man is allowed to be alone with her. In fact, the guards don't talk to her unless it's a life and death situation." I lift my hand and place it on his shoulder. "I know it's going to be an adjustment for you, but I'm putting you in charge of her and Simi's safety because there's no one else I trust."

Not hiding his worry, he asks, "And what about you?"

“I’ll keep Frankie and Al with me. It’s time I give them a promotion anyway.”

Santino nods, and as he begins to turn to leave, I grip his shoulder tighter. “Wait. Come with me to the kitchen.”

When we walk into the room, Nina’s standing on the other side of the island. The instant her eyes lock on Santino, she pales horribly.

“It’s okay,” I say to set her at ease while I quickly move around the island to get to her. “Santino will guard you and Simi when I’m not around.” When her frightened gaze remains locked on him, I take hold of her chin and tip her face up so she’ll look at me. “Santino is safe, Nina. You don’t have anything to fear from him. Understand?”

My head of security earns a million brownie points with me when he comes closer and holds his hand out to Nina while keeping his tone very respectful and soft, “Hi, Nina. I’ll do everything in my power to protect you and your daughter. If you’re important to Georgi, then you’re important to me.”

Tentatively, she places her much smaller hand in his. “H-hi, Santino.”

He lets go of her and says, “I’ll leave you be.”

“We’re going out tomorrow...today. I’m taking my girls shopping.”

“What time?” he asks.

“Around lunch.”

“I’ll have the men ready.” As he walks away, he calls out, “The two of you better get some sleep.”

I place my hand on Nina’s back and ask, “You okay?”

She looks surprised at the question. “Yes. Sorry, when I saw him...I just...”

“I know. It’s going to take some time for you to get used to your new life, and there will be glitches. We’ll work through them as and when they happen.”

“Okay.”

“Just for your peace of mind. None of my men would dare hurt you. Abusing women isn’t something my family tolerates, and by *family*, I mean the Cosa Nostra.”

She nods, then her gaze drifts over my chest. “Santino is right. You need to get some sleep.”

“You too, Nina.”

I nudge her back so she'll start walking, and as we head to the stairs, I shift my hand to her nape, my thumb brushing over her skin and soft hair behind her ear.

Reaching her bedroom, I let go. "Sleep well, *printsesa*." I bend at the waist and press a kiss to the top of her head before walking to my room.

As I turn to shut my door, I see her standing where I left her, looking at me as if she wants to say something.

Gripping the handle, I wait, and as the seconds pass, something changes the air between us until it feels like every particle is vibrating.

Finally, she gives in and whispers, "Simi's right. You're our prince. I feel very lucky to have met you, Georgi, and I want you to know..." She swallows on her nerves. "I want you to know *I saw you* in the basement. Not the mafia boss. Not my father's enemy. I think I already knew you were different from all the other men, and that's why I wanted you to live."

Her words crawl deep into my heart, warming parts of it I didn't know were there.

She opens her door, and as she steps into the room, I say, "Nina." I wait for her to look at me before asking, "Did you show the other men Boris kept in the basement the same care you've given me?"

"No." She shakes her head. "Not even close. I did what was needed to keep them alive. I never talked to them, didn't loosen their restraints, and didn't risk my life by giving them water."

The corner of my mouth lifts. "And no massages?"

"Definitely not."

I can't stop a pleased grin from spreading over my face. "Good."

When she shuts the door, I stare at it for a moment longer before I turn in for the night.

---

## Nina

"Mama," Simi's whisper pulls me out of my sleep. "Mama, are you awake?" When I let out a groan and rub my cheek against the pillow, she shakes my shoulder. "Mama, it's time to wake up. Georgi is waiting. I want to go to the toy store."

My eyes pop open, and realizing it's the first morning I've been woken by my daughter, I'm hit with a tidal wave of emotions. I sit up, and pulling

her into a hug, I pepper her face with kisses. “Are you excited, *milo moe*?” I ask as I begin to tickle her sides.

“Ahhhh!!!” she screams at the top of her lungs. Just as laughter explodes from her, our bedroom door slams open, and Georgi storms inside.

I freeze while Simi still laughs her little head off, and it only takes a second for Georgi to realize my daughter is not being tortured.

I take in how powerful and attractive he looks, wearing an emerald green silk shirt and dark gray chinos.

He presses a hand to his heart and calms down before coming closer and stealing Simi right from under me.

“You gave me a heart attack,” he tells her, his tone playful as he taps the tip of her nose.

“Mama tickled me,” Simi replies, a happy smile on her face.

“Like so?” he asks, right before he tickles her side. She squirms and laughs, the sight food for my soul.

Georgi presses a kiss to her head before he sets her down on the bed. “Get ready so we can go.”

“I already ate. Georgi gave me an egg in a cup. And toast.” She jumps on the bed, too excited to stay still. “Come, Mama. Hurry!”

I quickly get up, patting a hand over my disheveled hair.

“Remember to get pajamas today,” Georgi says, drawing my attention to him. “I want to burn that outfit.”

Then he turns around and leaves.

For the next twenty minutes, Simi talks my ear off while we get ready. Well, as ready as we’ll ever be. She’s wearing another tracksuit, and I’ve just put on a clean T-shirt.

I’ve braided both our hair so it won’t get in the way, and as we leave the bedroom, my daughter’s hand in mine, I feel excitement beginning to unfurl in my chest.

“Why did you sleep so long?” Simi asks as we slowly take the stairs down so she doesn’t fall. “Georgi said not to wake you. Will the big bear still be at the store? And the castle?”

*Georgi gave her breakfast and wanted me to sleep in.*

“I think so,” I answer her last two questions.

*It’s only been days, Nina. Things could change. You need to be careful.*

As soon as I see Georgi, standing in the middle of the foyer and talking to Santino, the warning to be cautious falls on deaf ears.

Just like my daughter, I'm so desperate for everything he said to be real, I can't keep up my defenses.

I just want one person I can trust to protect me, and I want that person to be Georgi Torrisi.

He glances in our direction, and while still talking, he gestures for me to come closer.

"Just make sure they all know. I want this day to be perfect."

"On it," Santino replies before smiling at us. "Morning, ladies."

"Morning," I reply. "My daughter doesn't speak English."

"Shit," The guard mutters before waving at Simi. She returns it with a big smile.

"That's something we have to rectify. I'll find someone who can teach Simi English so she's ready when it's time for her to go to school," Georgi says, as if it's the simplest thing on earth, and he's not talking about way into the future.

He's really serious about us staying with him.

The thought hits me over the head again.

I'm still processing the emotions Georgi evokes in me when he wraps his hand around the back of my neck and leads me to the elevator.

"Are you ready to get all the toys you want, *malkata mi printsesa*?" he asks Simi.

"Yes!"

She pulls her hand out of mine and squeezes between Georgi and me before holding her hands up so we can each take one. I watch as his fingers engulf her small ones, and it shifts something in my chest.

Clearing my throat, I keep my eyes downcast. I don't even try to process all the emotions I'm feeling. I just let them flood me and turn my stomach into a fluttering mess.

When the elevator doors open, and we step into a basement, I easily count twelve men.

Just as panic tightens my muscles and fear trembles through me, Georgi picks up Simi, holding her with his right arm while he places his left around my shoulders. I move closer to him, and walking toward an SUV, my eyes are trained on my shoes.

Santino opens the back door, and Georgi nudges me forward so I'll get in first before he follows with Simi.

It's a normal thing for other people, but to me it's huge. He didn't shove me, and it felt as if it was a protective move.

When his left thigh presses against my leg, I scoot up so I don't rub against his wound, but then Simi steps on the painful area, and I quickly pull her off Georgi. "Careful, Simi! Georgi has a big owie."

"I'm sorry," she says while sitting down on my lap.

"It's okay." He brushes his palm over her hair, then locks eyes with me as he leans in very close. Once again, I freeze, and when his shirt tickles my nose and I get lungfuls of his cologne, a kaleidoscope of butterflies goes crazy in my stomach.

Then he tugs the seat belt over us and clicks it in place before he pulls back and grins at me.

*Georgi knows I'm attracted to him.*

I quickly turn my head the other way while my cheeks grow warm.

"How long still?" Simi asks as Santino starts the engine.

"Twenty minutes," Georgi answers. "The toy store is nearby, but with traffic, it will take a while." He tugs at her sleeve. "Tell me which toys you want."

My daughter doesn't hesitate. "The castle! The bear is too big for me. I want a baby bear."

Not wanting Simi to get out of hand and ask for too much, I tell Georgi in English, "You have to give her a limit so she knows she can only pick two or three things."

He shakes his head. "There's no limit. I'll buy the whole store for her if that's what she wants."

"Should I tell one of the men to come with a truck?" Santino asks.

Georgi gives him an impressed look. "That's a good idea. Yes."

I gape at the men. "Are you serious?"

Georgi's eyes lock with mine. "Dead serious." Turning his attention back to Simi, he switches to Bulgarian. "My princess gets anything she wants."

"Yay!"

*Oh my God.*

I sit in a stunned silence while Simi bounces on my lap.

"That counts for you as well. Anything you want, Nina. Don't give me any shit about filling your closet."

When I saw Georgi in the bar, I found him devastatingly handsome, and during his captivity, it didn't lessen. In fact, his strength and endurance made him even more attractive. He lost his mind with anger during the rape, and he saved Simi. He's been so kind and even loving to her...and me.

*Don't, Nina. Not so fast.*

But I need it. Desperately.

*You've only known him a short time, and he's a capo of the Cosa Nostra. He could be putting on an act, and as soon as you let your guard down, he'll...*

No. Not Georgi. He could've killed me while I was tending to his wounds and after I set him free. He could've beaten me after I tried to escape. He could've raped me last night. Instead, he was gentle and patiently kept repeating that we are safe with him.

*It's only been days!*

It feels like so much longer.

"There it is!" Simi exclaims as she squirms out of the seat belt. "Look, Mama!"

When Santino parks the SUV, Simi tries to open the door, but Georgi leans into me and pulls her away. "Wait, *malkata mi printsesa*." He points at Santino. "You always wait for him to give a nod before you're allowed to get out. Understand?"

"Okay, but can he make quick?"

Georgi chuckles, then tells Santino. "You need to move faster, Santino. We have an excited kid in the back."

"Shit. Sorry." He shoves the door open and checks the area while talking to the other guards via earpieces, before he opens the back door and nods. "It's all clear."

"Yay!" Simi's eyes are so wide as Georgi climbs out with her still in his arms.

My eyes land on the gun tucked into the waistband of his pants as I scoot over the seat and get out.

Georgi's standing with his back to me, and I could easily reach for it and start shooting, but he doesn't seem worried at all.

*He doesn't view me as a threat.*

We walk to the entrance, and when Georgi puts Simi down, she runs into the store and climbs into the display by the window.

"Oh, God!"

Before I can dart forward, Georgi grabs hold of my arm and shakes his head. A store assistant rushes in Simi's direction, but Santino intercepts her. "My employer would like you to close the store for a few hours." He hands her a black credit card. "Whatever the little girl wants goes on this card. A truck will be here soon for you to load everything."

"I...Uhm, I need to check with the manager," the woman says before walking to the counter.

"Don't worry." Georgi grips my chin and nudges my face up so I'll look at him, but I keep watching the woman to see if we're in trouble. "Nina, eyes on me." His firm tone has my gaze snapping to his. "Stop worrying. Look at your daughter. You're missing how happy she is."

I glance over my shoulder, and seeing Simi happily playing with the castle, opening and closing the little doors and lowering the drawbridge, my heart is overcome with an emotion I haven't felt before.

"Afternoon, Mr. Torrisi, I'm Edward Pembroke. Thank you for choosing our store to spoil your daughter. We'd be honored to close the top floor for you and bring your daughter whatever her heart desires," a man says, and my attention is pulled away from Simi.

Georgi points at the castle. "Start with that." As the manager moves to walk toward Simi, Georgi catches him by the arm and shakes his head. "No men go near my child."

"I understand, sir." Mr. Pembroke gestures to the female attendant to come closer. "Madeline will assist your daughter."

"Madeline will assist Nina. Our daughter doesn't speak English." Georgi corrects the manager before walking to Simi. He looks ridiculously big as he maneuvers through the display to get to her. "They'll bring the castle to you, *malkata mi printsesa*. We're going upstairs because that's where princesses do their shopping."

"Really?" Her little legs kick with excitement as she glances around at all the toys with sparkling eyes. "There's so much, Georgi."

Hearing the awe in her voice makes my eyes burn with unshed tears.

"This way, Nina," Madeline says, a friendly smile on her face. "Would you and your husband like anything to drink?"

I shake my head, and not knowing how to correct her, I keep quiet and just return her smile.

*Holy shit, is this really happening right now?*

# Chapter 22

## Nina

I'm sweating from all the exercise I'm getting in as I follow Simi around like a shadow.

My child has been shopping for two hours, and I don't see her stopping anytime soon.

Lifting my hand, I brush my palm over my forehead while I stop to catch my breath. Simi is currently fixated on a child-sized electric carriage.

A freaking actual carriage.

And she's wearing a crown and princess dress, which she insisted on changing into the instant she laid eyes on them.

"Nina," Georgi calls, drawing my attention to him. As soon as I glance over my shoulder, he says, "Come sit."

His tone tells me it's not a request, so I obey and walk to where he's comfortable on a couch and take a seat beside him.

"You need to focus on relaxing. I can understand it's a lot to take in all at once, but you're missing out on the fun part."

*He's right.*

"I'm sorry," I whisper, my gaze already looking for my child. In the space of a few seconds, she's disappeared, and two men are carrying the carriage away. "She's gone!"

"No. She's on a rocking horse." Georgi points to the other side of the floor.

I swear it's so big you could fit an entire house in here.

Simi plays with the horse for a little while before scurrying off and running around the store, before stopping by a display with Steiff collector animals. She points at the biggest bear that's too high for her to reach, and Madeline quickly takes it off the shelf and hands it to her.

"Look, Mama!"

"I see, *miló moe*."

"He needs a family," she states, her eyes moving over the collection.

"Madeline, give her one of each," Georgi orders.

"Yes, sir."

“Simi, we’re taking the whole family,” he informs her before pulling his phone out of his pocket.

“Yay!” my child shrieks before twirling in circles with the big bear she’s still holding onto.

“Hey, Mom... No, we’re fine... Out shopping... Okay... Sure... Love you.” He ends the call, and I notice how he glances right at Simi as if he knew exactly where she was while he wasn’t looking at her.

Santino comes toward us and leans close to Georgi. “The truck is full. Vinny and some guys went to offload everything. They’ll be back in an hour.”

Georgi nods, then looks at the time on his wristwatch. It looks just as expensive as the one Boris smashed to pieces.

My tongue darts out to wet my lips and search for Simi again while nervous tension fills my stomach.

“What’s wrong?” Georgi suddenly asks.

I turn my head to him and quickly reply, “Nothing.”

“You’re tense, Nina. Tell me,” he insists.

“It’s so much.” A breath quivers over my lips. “The toys must cost thousands of dollars.” My hand flutters as my anxiety spikes. “You’re doing so much.”

“Why is that a bad thing?”

“It’s not.” I wipe my palm over my forehead again, sucking in deep breaths of air.

“Santino, eyes on Simi. I’ll be ten minutes.” Georgi takes my hand and pulls me to my feet before leading me to the stairs. He finds the manager and asks, “Is there an office I can use?”

“Of course, Mr. Torrisi. This way.”

We follow the manager, and as soon as we step into the office, Georgi shuts the door. He bends and grips my hips, lifts me, and sits down on a chair with me on his lap.

He presses my head against his chest before wrapping his arms tightly around me.

“Shhh... Take a moment to just focus on your breaths,” he says in a very calm tone. “You’re overstimulated. Count your breaths and only listen to my voice.”

Noticing that my body is trembling, I close my eyes and do as I’m told.

“Breathe in...and out. It’s just us. I don’t want you to think about how much things cost. I want Simi to have everything. Her smiles and laughter are worth every dollar I have to my name.”

My body melts into Georgi’s, and my breathing slows down.

Once it quiets inside of me, I admit, “I’m scared.”

“Why?”

“It’s only been days, Georgi.”

“Us?”

I nod and turn my face more into his chest.

I feel his breath on my hair before I feel him press a kiss to the top of my head. “What about us scares you?”

“That this is all an act, and as soon as I let down my guard, you’ll become just like the rest of them.” Once the first fear is out between us, the others follow before I can stop them. “That you’re not in your right state of mind because of the torture, and you’ll realize you’ve made a big mistake by taking Simi and me. That you’ll change your mind next week, or next month, or next year. That it will become too much for you to have some woman and her child living with you.” My voice fails me, and I grip his shirt in my fist.

“You are not some woman to me,” he says, and taking hold of my chin, he forces my head back so I’ll look at him. “You are *the* woman. Simi isn’t some child I’ll get tired of. I know what I’m in for, Nina. I’ve been in Simi’s shoes, and I would never promise her the world only to rip it away from her.”

Just like last night, his words shift something in my chest, and it feels as if another missing piece clicks into place.

“I’m saying this so you will understand where I’m at. I don’t want you to feel pressured at all.” His large hand cups my cheek, and my pulse speeds up dramatically. “I’m in love with you, Nina. I know it’s fast, but I can’t help how I feel about you. I will give you all the time you need, and once you’re on the same page as me, we’ll talk again. I want you to have peace of mind, knowing how much I care about you.”

I suck in a breath before I ask, “But what if the way you feel is from us bonding under traumatic circumstances and it isn’t love?”

He shakes his head, his eyes drifting over my face with something akin to hunger, and it makes the butterflies return to wreak havoc in my stomach.

“I’ve been with enough women to know when I’m looking at the right one. Since I’ve laid eyes on you, no other woman has entered my mind, and that alone tells me you’re the one. Last night changed things from just caring to falling head over fucking heels for you.”

Seeing the truth in his eyes, all other questions vanish.

I’ve had men drool over me, and Anton was obsessed, but never has anyone looked at me the way Georgi does. The hunger doesn’t feel repulsive, and the affection is...a new experience for me.

When I remain quiet for too long, Georgi says, “Talk to me, *moeto hubavo mishle*.”

“I don’t know what to say,” I admit.

“Are you okay?”

*Am I?*

I sift through my emotions before I nod. “I think so.”

Georgi brushes his palm over the side of my head, and his mouth curves into a hot smile. “Are we good?”

Suddenly, I feel the weight of his attention. It doesn’t make shame stick to me like with other men, but instead, hope explodes in my heart and tingles rush over my skin.

I was willing to be his whore, but after rejecting me, he just made it clear that he’s in love with me and wants me to want him.

I’ve never had that before.

Georgi waits patiently until I say, “We’re good.”

He pats my outer thigh, then gets up and helps me to stand.

When he wraps his fingers around the back of my neck and we leave the office, I feel overly aware of the bear of a man beside me.

Two men are waiting in the hallway, and the instant my eyes land on them, the good and fuzzy feelings vanish, and panic returns.

“Santino was worried,” one of them informs him.

Georgi only nods as we pass them. When I glance over my shoulder, he pulls me right against his side. “They’re my bodyguards. You’ll be seeing them a lot, but you don’t have to interact with them.”

*Oh, good.*

I nod as we climb the stairs to the upper floor.

My eyes immediately land on Simi, where she’s rambling in Bulgarian while pointing at books, and poor Santino is just nodding and loading another onto the pile already in his hands.

“She won’t stop,” I tell Georgi. “I really think that’s enough.”

“Okay.”

I walk to my daughter and crouch in front of her. “Go say thank you to Georgi. It’s time to leave.”

She runs to the man who’s completely changed our lives, and he swings her up into the air before letting her hug him. When she kisses his cheek, I watch as he melts and the powerful mafia boss turns to playdough in her hands.

*This is what I wanted for so many years.*

Becoming aware of Santino standing near me, I walk closer and say, “Thank you for everything.”

“You’re welcome, ma’am.”

“You can call me Nina.”

He nods, then scans the entire area.

When the manager approaches Georgi with something to sign, I hurry closer and take Simi from him so his hands are free. Just as I turn around, I see the total amount reaching well over three hundred thousand dollars, my eyes go wide as saucers.

“God! That’s way too much.” The words are out before I can stop them.

“I ordered a custom walk-in castle that will be installed in the penthouse, heirloom furniture for her bedroom, and some other collector’s items I thought she’d like,” Georgi mentions casually. “They’re things Raya loved at Simi’s age.”

He signs the bill and indicates with a chin lift to Santino that we’re leaving.

“Thank you for visiting our store, Mr. Torrisi,” the manager says with a wide grin on his face. “Please come again soon.”

Not if I can help it. Holy crap. Georgi practically bought the entire store for her.

# Chapter 23

## Georgi

After spending hours on my feet, the muscles in my shoulders have locked up again. It feels like they're on fire.

*At least Nina and Simi have clothes.*

I glance at all the shopping bags my men are carrying in, the entire foyer filled with boxes and toys.

On the way home, Simi fell asleep, and Nina looks like she's about to pass out.

"Have the men take everything out of the boxes and remove them," I tell Santino. "I'm heading to my room."

"Okay. Get some rest," he replies, already turning around to hand out orders.

I place my hand on Nina's back and nudge her toward the stairs.

Suddenly, she pauses. "Wait. Go get the first aid kit."

I shake my head. "You're tired. It can wait."

Her mouth sets in a stubborn line I haven't seen before. "No, it can't. You're in pain."

The idea of Nina tending to me is too good to pass up, and I quickly go to the kitchen.

When I return, I find her waiting where I left her, vigilantly watching the men as they move around the penthouse.

I place my hand on her back again, and she jerks before swinging to me. As soon as she sees I'm the one touching her, she visibly relaxes and begins to climb the stairs.

*She feels safe with me.*

The corner of my mouth lifts as we head to my bedroom, and when I shut the door behind us and switch on the light, dimming it so it's not too bright, my thoughts return to our conversation in the office.

I had no intention of telling her I'm in love, but one thing led to another, and now that the cat is out of the bag, I can't say I regret it.

"Place her on my bed," I murmur.

I watch as Nina lays Simi down before coming back to me to grab the first aid kit. “Sit. Do we have painkillers?” She instantly goes into nurse mode, her tone even bossy.

*I like it.*

Grinning like an idiot, I take a seat on the sofa that’s situated by the windows. “You’re the only painkiller I need.”

Her head snaps up, and her cheeks turn pink.

As I unbutton my shirt, my eyes remain locked with hers, and it could just be me, but just like last night, something shifts until it feels like every particle between us is vibrating.

Nina moves closer so she stands right in front of me, and when I take the shirt off, she leans in to help. Her hands feel perfect as they brush over my skin, and before she pulls back, she presses a kiss to my cheek and whispers, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, *angelche moe*.”

The way I say the endearment makes it clear it’s possessive and intimate, and I see the surprise on Nina’s face before she quickly schools her expression.

After that, she doesn’t make eye contact again and silently cleans my wounds before giving me a massage that, once again, leaves me with a hard-on.

When she’s finished, and I lean back against the sofa, I don’t hide my physical reaction to her. I want her to know that even when I’m turned on, she’s safe with me.

Nina notices instantly as she begins to gather the soiled gauze. When she scurries off to the bathroom, I get up and follow her. As I shut the door so we can talk in private and Simi doesn’t wake up and overhear us, Nina’s eyes flit to my face.

“I’m attracted to you, and you just turned my body to jello with your magical hands. I’m going to get hard a lot around you. It’s normal.” I tilt my head, keeping hold of her gaze. “But I won’t do anything about it, so you don’t have to fear that part of me.”

She stares at me for a moment longer before whispering, “But you want to.”

“Yes, but there’s something else I want more.”

“What?”

“Well, actually two things. First, like I said last night, I want you to want me. I won’t touch you until you feel the same way about me and give your consent. Not because you feel it’s your duty, or that you want to please me. You have to be turned on by the thought of me touching you, of me taking you in my bed, not repulsed by it.”

“You don’t repulse me.”

*Thank fuck.*

“Until then, just ignore it if you see I’m hard for you.”

“It’s kind of *hard* to ignore.”

I lean back against the counter with his and her sinks. “Unfortunately, my cock doesn’t come with an off switch. I’m sorry if it makes things difficult for you or brings up bad memories.”

I’m surprised when she shakes her head. “Don’t apologize. As you said, it’s a natural reaction.” She comes to stand right in front of me and hesitates for a moment before admitting, “I only associate rape with Anton. I didn’t fear the guards would sexually assault me because I knew he’d kill them.” She lets out a sigh as if she’s frustrated with herself and lowers her gaze to my legs. “I thought it was something you might do, and when I approached you last night, it was because I hoped it would give me some control. If it was my choice, it wouldn’t hurt so much, you know?”

“I get it.” The urge to comfort Nina surges through me, and I grip the counter on either side of me to keep from reaching for her.

“Thank you, Georgi.” Her eyes lift back to my face, and I see that she means the words. “My body hasn’t felt like my own for years. I dissociated from it, and I don’t know how to reconnect.”

I take a deep breath before reaching out to her and placing my palm against her cheek. “Feel that?” When she nods, I ask, “How does it make you feel?”

Her cheeks flush, and I brush my thumb over her pink skin. “Be honest, Nina. There’s no space for embarrassment between us.”

I can see it takes courage for her to say, “It makes my stomach flutter when you touch me.”

“I think you’re still very much connected to your body, Nina. You dissociated when that fucker touched you because that’s the only way you could escape. But your body is still yours.”

I pull my hand away, but she grabs hold of it and brings it back to her cheek. Turning her face into my palm, she closes her eyes. I give her the

time she needs, and when a soft smile curves her lips, it feels like I'm given a glimpse at heaven.

"You're right," she whispers, then her smile crumbles, and she lets out a sob. "It feels good."

With my hard-on gone, I pull her against me, and leaning down, I brush my hand up and down her back. Nina tries to lift herself higher, and it has me picking her up. Turning, I set her down on the counter before folding myself around her.

She grips me tightly, her breath exploding against the side of my neck. "You're the angel, Georgi."

---

We've just returned from the Cosa Nostra's hospital, and I'm struggling to calm down, rage coiling in my chest until it feels like I might snap.

I should've taken Nina sooner, but with everything that's happened, I forgot. First, there was the shopping and getting everything they needed, then Nina and Simi spent days unpacking all their clothes and converting two rooms into theirs.

They had so much fun, and I got lost in watching them come out of their shells while my body healed.

I thought Nina was doing well. She hasn't even had nightmares, and I think it's because Simi sleeps by her. I'm a little worried about how Nina will handle Simi sleeping in her own bedroom once it's ready.

Christ, I thought getting them used to their new lives was the most important thing for them, and it completely slipped my mind to get Nina the medical care she should've received immediately after being raped.

I fucked up, and I can't ever slip up like that again.

Nina shoots me an angst-ridden look for what must be the hundredth time, and not wanting her to worry that I'll fly off the handle, I turn around and stalk back to the elevator.

"I'm going to check in with Raya," I say, my tone too harsh, the rage simmering in every word.

As soon as the elevator doors shut, I lift my hand and grip the back of my neck while a growl rumbles from my chest.

The doors ping open, and when I walk into Raya's apartment, I see her sitting out on her balcony, typing on her laptop. She only works at home over the weekends.

When I step into the doorway of the open sliding doors, her head snaps up, and the moment she sees the look on my face, she darts to her feet.

“What happened?!”

I shake my head and walk to the ledge. Leaning over it, I stare at the traffic below and begin to count all the yellow cabs as I try to gather my thoughts.

Raya comes to stand beside me and rubs her hand up and down my back while giving me the time I need.

I have no idea how time passes before I say, “We were at the hospital.”

Raya turns her body to face me, her hazel eyes filled with worry and questions.

“I should’ve taken Nina the instant we got home.” Shaking my head again, I step backward and lift my hand to the back of my neck, where tension is knotting all the muscles. “Fuck, it’s bad.”

I was standing outside the room with Simi while Dr. Milazzo and the nurse gave Nina a full check-up. She was last. I already had mine, and Dr. Milazzo cleared Simi.

What I overheard gave me chills.

Nina told them she’s had four miscarriages, and she thinks she might be infertile because, since then, she hasn’t fallen pregnant again.

The haunted tone of her voice will follow me into my nightmares.

Four miscarriages. No medical care.

She had to deal with it herself in that fucking room in the basement.

Nina has to see Dr. Milazzo again once all the results come back. Only then will we know the true extend of her physical state.

Her mental state? I’d like to think she’s doing better and that I’m helping her heal.

“Georgi?” Raya places her hand on my bicep, drawing me out of my thoughts.

It’s not my place to share any of Nina’s past, and as I lock eyes with my sister, I say, “I can’t tell you. I just needed to come here until I calm down. I don’t want to scare Nina. She’s....” The full force of how much I love her rocks the foundation beneath my feet, and I suck in a sharp breath while looking at the buildings across the street. “I love her.”

Raya’s eyes go wide as saucers. “Holy shit!” Utterly stunned, she says, “Wow. I...I...well, that’s a first for you...and me.”

“Yeah. It totally caught me off guard.” I walk to one of the outdoor sofas and take a seat. Once Raya sits down, I continue, “A lot of shit went down in the basement where I was held, and Nina was the only light in the darkness. She risked her life for me and... we bonded in a way I’ve never bonded with another soul.”

“Are you sure it’s love?” she asks, the worry back on her face.

I lock eyes with my sister and nod. “It’s love. The attraction was instant. The moment I laid eyes on her, I was mesmerized. Every other woman I’ve been with was a fleeting thought. An itch to scratch.” I tap my index finger against my temple. “I think about Nina constantly. Not once have I tried to fuck her. It’s so much more than that. I want to watch her all the time. I want to fix all her broken pieces. I want to make her smile and laugh. I need to make her feel safe.” Letting out a sigh, I lean back. “The list is endless. One second, I don’t have a care in the world, and the next, this tiny woman takes my life by storm.” I turn my eyes back to Raya. “I want to kiss her.”

My sister’s eyebrows practically fly into her hairline. “Wow, you’ve got it bad.” A smile threatens to form on her face, but she suppresses it. “Never thought my playboy brother would fall in love. The women of New York are going to go into mourning.”

I let out a chuckle before getting serious again. “I’m in awe of Nina. Fuck, Raya. She...she’s so fucking strong. The shit she survived for years...” I look down at my cuffs, and unbuttoning them, I begin to roll up the sleeves.

“Georgi!” Raya gasps, her tone horrified.

I haven’t been wearing bandages for the past three days, so all the healing wounds are visible.

“It doesn’t look so bad anymore,” I mutter.

She comes to sit beside me and gingerly takes hold of my left arm. Her chin begins to tremble as she inspects the scabs and scarring left behind from the shackles.

The stitches from the bullet wound will come out soon. Dr. Milazzo sang Nina’s praises, saying if she ever wants to work, he’d love to have her at the hospital.

Nina looked physically ill at the idea and couldn’t even respond.

I told Dr. Milazzo it would never happen.

“Jesus.” She sucks in a sharp breath. “What did those bastards do to you?”

I meet her horrified eyes, and pulling my arm free, I lift my hand to cup her cheek. “It was nothing I couldn’t handle. Just the usual beatings.” I pull her closer and press a kiss to her forehead.

I’m not lying. The beatings and even the drugging were regular shit I’ve already mentally recovered from.

What that fucker did to Nina in front of me was the worst torture I was forced to endure in that fucking basement.

That will stay with me for life.

I pull back and gesture at the laptop. “How are you coping with running the business?” I have complete faith in Raya, but I need to get back to work.

“Everything has been finalized with Atanas, and we’ve started moving shipments along the new routes that I divided between him and us. So far, there are no hiccups.”

I pat her back, giving her a proud smile. “You did good, Raya.”

“I know.”

“I’m going to need you to run everything for a while longer,” I tell her. “I’m going to focus all my attention on hunting Boris Pavlov and Anton Belinski.”

“Rosie hasn’t found anything yet. She thinks they’ve gone underground. They know you’ll be looking for them.” She shakes her head. “This might take months, if not years.”

Climbing to my feet, I say, “Then that’s how long you’ll run things, Raya. Finding them and taking revenge is my priority. I won’t rest until they’re dead.”

The uncontrollable need for vengeance pours through me like hot lava, and when I stalk back into the apartment, Raya comes after me. “Where are you going?”

“To Rosie’s.”

“Do you want me to check on Nina and Simi?”

“No.” I press the button for the elevator, and when the doors open, I place my hand on the one to keep it from closing. “Find a teacher who can give Simi English lessons. She needs to learn the language.”

“Okay. Anything else?”

I shake my head as I step into the elevator. “Just give Nina another week before you start building a relationship with her. Take it slow.”

Raya nods. “Be safe out there.”

I let the doors shut and press the button for the parking level.

# Chapter 24

## Georgi

I haven't visited Rosie at her *fortress*, as she likes to fondly call it, since she upgraded the place.

The place used to be an office space. We all gave Rosie millions after she presented her plans, and she converted each floor to her liking.

The first floor is empty, high-tech cameras scanning every inch of it twenty-four seven. It's also rigged with explosives. One press of a button and the entire eight-story building will fall in on itself, burying whoever's inside.

We never enter that way.

As I walk through the empty underground parking area, dust tickles my nose. The guards stay outside because Rosie is fucking anal about who gets to enter her sacred space.

"Hi," her voice comes over a speaker, echoing all around me. "This is a surprise. How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. Why haven't you found Boris and Anton?"

She lets out a grumbling sound, then something crunches loudly, and I listen to her eating carrots. Or rocks.

It sounds like fucking rocks.

When I reach the wall where the entryway is hidden, I glare up at the camera. "Open."

"Nope. You look pissed off, and I didn't have dealing with a pissed off Georgi on my schedule for today."

"Rosie!"

"Yyyeeessss?" Her chuckle fills the space. "Come on. You know what the password is."

I force a smile on my face and blow her a kiss.

"Atta boy. Now that wasn't so hard." The wall shifts, and with a loud rumbling, it moves to reveal a hallway that's filled with a blue light.

I stalk down it until I reach the elevator, and the doors open automatically. After I enter, beams scan over me while I'm taken to the fifth floor.

The only three people who have codes to enter are her father, Uncle Dario, our capo dei capi, Christiano, and Enzo.

Uncle Dario usually comes to help her when she has a huge job that needs two heads, and Christiano...well, him being our boss speaks for itself. Enzo is the one who controls the finances and how much Rosie gets to spend, but I know she gave him a code because she loves him.

We all keep our mouths shut when it comes to Rosie and Enzo, and none of us knows what the hell is going on between the two.

Once I reach the fifth floor, I walk through empty office space until I come to another hidden wall. It shifts, and I step into the final elevator, which takes me up to the top floor.

When the doors open, I'm met with a cold blast of air. The temperature is kept near freezing to prevent the servers and mainframes from overheating.

I glance over rows of black server racks, rising like towering steel columns, lights pulsing as information is processed.

Floor-to-ceiling monitors cover one wall, cycling through surveillance feeds, encrypted transactions and messages.

Massive curved screens are on at different workstations, some tracking cyber intrusions while others run facial recognition scans, countless faces flashing across the screens.

My eyes lock on the photos of Boris and Anton, who are in a grid with many other men and women, being tracked in real time.

I step onto raised flooring, which hides fiber optic cable lines, and walk to the center where Rosie's command station is situated. She's surrounded by screens, custom hardware, and enough processing power to cripple governments.

Honestly, this is our war room, built to keep the Cosa Nostra always three steps ahead.

"Give me a second," Rosie mumbles, deep in thought while typing something on one of her many keyboards. Her black hair is piled on top of her head, a pencil somehow keeping the rat's nest together, and she's wearing baggy pants and an oversized sweater. There are snacks and cold drinks scattered everywhere, and I pick up a brown banana, throwing it in an overflowing trash can.

"Christ." I wipe my hand off on my shirt, then glance over all the feeds showing every capo's house and various businesses.

I see Christiano walking through a warehouse where crates of weapons I supplied to him are being readied to be shipped.

Augusto and his younger brother, Riccardo, are having a conversation in Augusto's backyard. His wife, Yuki, is feeding koi. It actually looks peaceful, and I stare for a moment longer before I search for my building. It only shows the elevator, parking, and surrounding areas.

I refused to let Rosie put cameras in the apartments. She wasn't happy but just had to deal.

"No. Put that down," she suddenly says, then I hear Uncle Dario's voice. "Come on, it's just one cupcake."

My eyes land on the screen, showing him in the kitchen of his penthouse with a box of twelve cupcakes open on the island.

Rosie lets out a chuckle. "It's never just one, Dad. You need to watch your cholesterol, so put it down or I'm telling Mom."

Uncle Dario makes a disgruntled sound.

"Busted," I hear another voice before Tyrone, who's like a grandfather to Rosie, comes into view. He shuts the box, then looks directly at the camera. "Don't worry, kiddo. I'll get rid of them."

"Oh hell no! You'll just take them to your place and scarf them all down. Put down that box and step away from it." He sets down the box and holds up his hands. "Good. Now stop keeping me out of work."

"Sorry," Uncle Dario and Tyrone mumble before leaving the kitchen.

"How does it feel to be God?" I ask as I take a seat on one of the many chairs.

Rosie turns to me with a wide smile on her face, then lets out her best impression of a villain's laugh. "I am the great and powerful Oz." Then she schools her expression and gets serious. "But...I have nothing on Boris and Anton."

She types a couple of keys, and information appears on the screen closest to me.

"The last time they were spotted was right before you called me and we found you." She gestures at a grainy black-and-white photo. "This was taken at a traffic light, and then they vanish into thin air. Even the car is MIA."

One of Boris' guards is behind the steering wheel. I recognize him as the one who threatened to take my leg because I killed one of the idiots.

In the backseat are Boris and Anton. The photo is clear enough to make out the scratch marks Nina left on the fucker's face.

"I'm sorry, Georgi," Rosie says, drawing my attention to her. "But I have a consolation prize for you." She types again, and the next second, I'm looking at old photos of Boris and Anton before shit went down. Them golfing, eating at a restaurant, and shaking hands. It doesn't tell me anything except that they're close.

I check the other information, and a smile begins to tug at my mouth. "Are those bank accounts?"

"Yep, and I've already emptied them. Every last Euro is in a Swiss account under Nina's name."

When I grin at her, she gives me an excited look and asks, "I did good?"

"You did very good," I praise her.

She widens her eyes at me. "I have more for you."

She taps on the keyboard again, then photos of a much younger Nina appear.

"This is everything I could find on Nina and her daughter. I wanted to make sure you were safe with her."

I stare at the innocent expression in Nina's big brown eyes, and I realize it had to be taken before her life turned to shit.

"How old is she here?"

"Seventeen." Rosie leans forward and points at Nina's personal details.

*Nina Pavlova.*

I hate that fucking last name.

I learn her birthday is on February fifth, and Simi's is July twenty-eight.

I pull my phone out and program the dates into my calendar so I don't forget them.

Nina is twenty-seven. She was twenty-two when she got pregnant with Simi, and twenty-three when she gave birth.

I frown and glance at Rosie. "Are there no medical records of the birth?"

"None." Rosie's features tighten. "Which means someone did a very good job of erasing them, or Nina never gave birth in a hospital."

*Christ.*

I feel the blood drain from my face. They forced her to deal with her miscarriages by herself, so they probably...

I shake my head as I get up and stalk to the tinted windows overlooking the Hudson River.

An alarm beeps through the air, and when I glance over my shoulder, Rosie mutters, "It's Enzo. Ugh."

Not wanting a front row seat to their weird relationship, I walk to the elevator door. "Let me know the instant you track either of those fuckers."

"Will do." As the doors open, Rosie calls out, "By the way, your bloodwork came back. Besides needing some magnesium, you're in good shape. Glad to see there were no broken bones."

I shake my head and let out a sigh. The words *invasion of privacy* do not exist to Rosie.

The doors slide shut, and when they open again on the fifth floor, I hear Enzo whistling as he comes from the other direction.

Walking toward him, I give him a chin lift.

"Good to see you, brother. How do you feel?" he asks as he stops to shake my hand and give me a hug that's really just a shoulder bump. "You look better."

"I feel better."

"I would've checked in on you, but your Dad told us all to give you space."

"I appreciate it. I'm just getting my girls settled, then things will return to normal."

He raises an eyebrow at me. "Your girls?"

"Nina and Simi."

"I know who you mean, I'm just surprised to hear you call them *your girls*. You're a one-and-done kind of guy."

I let out a sigh as I shrug. "That's in the past. Nina is it for me so you can spread the word that everyone can prepare themselves to see her by my side at get-togethers."

His head jerks back with surprise. "Fuck, that's fast. It's been...like a week or so."

"Don't care." I begin to walk again and lift my hand in a wave. "I'll see you around."

"The poker game is at my place next week."

*Fuck, I forgot.*

I stop dead in my tracks. "I might have to skip this one. I'll let you know."

“The others will be pissed if you’re not there. It’s tradition, and everyone is worried about you.”

“My life is a little up in the air right now. I said I’ll let you know.”

He nods, worry causing a frown to form on his forehead. “Okay. I’m here if you need anything.”

I lock eyes with him as I give him a chin lift. “Thanks, Enzo.”

We go our separate ways, and when I step into the second elevator and the doors shut, Rosie’s voice comes over the speaker. “Don’t worry, Georgi. I’ll update the others that you’re doing okay, and they need to chill. You take all the time you need. I’ll also slap Enzo up the head for pressuring you.”

A smile widens over my face. “Thanks, sweetheart. You’re special people.”

“I know.” I think she forgets to let go of the button activating the speaker because I hear her snap, “Why do you have to be such an asshole, Enzo! You can see Georgi has a lot on his plate right now. The stupid poker games can wait.”

“When did you last clean this place?” I hear him ask.

“What the hell are you doing?” Rosie gasps. “I wasn’t done eating that chocolate. Enzo!”

The speaker goes silent, and I shake my head while I get my ass out of the building and whatever drama is between those two.

# Chapter 25

## Nina

After I'm done giving Simi dinner and bathing her, I get her settled in bed and read her a story.

The past several days have been nothing short of heavenly. The food Georgi's mom brings is always mouthwateringly good. He told me she's a world-class chef and that he'll take us to her restaurant sometime.

Everything was going so well.

Simi and I have closets full of gorgeous clothes. Much more than we'll ever need. I actually had to pack all of Simi's things in another room. After all the furniture arrived that Georgi ordered for her, transforming her bedroom into an enchanted kingdom, Simi announced that she wants to sleep in her own bed.

Then the visit to the hospital happened. It was nerve-wracking, and when we left, Georgi looked very angry.

It's been hours since he went to visit Raya, and my anxiety has only increased.

I don't know what caused Georgi's anger, I just know from bitter experience that when men like him get upset, women like me pay.

Noticing Simi has fallen asleep, her arms on either side of her with her fingers relaxed and not clenched into fists, there's a burst of happiness in my heart.

It's been a dream come true spending so much time with her and getting to be her mother.

*All because of Georgi.*

Worry quickly dims my happiness, and carefully getting up, I adjust the pink and silver covers around my daughter before walking to the door. I pause for a moment, taking in the whimsical merry-go-round lamp with prancing horses. The light reflects stars onto the ceiling, so the room isn't too dark.

"I love you, *milo moe*," I whisper before I pull the door shut.

I glance down at the powder blue silk camisole and matching shorts I changed into after I showered, the sheer nightgown drifting around my

body, and I wonder if I should go downstairs and wait for Georgi or go to bed.

I'd rather be downstairs if he comes home and takes his anger out on me than in my bedroom, where Simi might hear.

My bare feet pat over the dark tiles as I walk to the stairs, and taking them down, I grip my nightgown, pulling it tighter around my body.

At the bottom, I pause and glance down at the pajamas that seem a little too...provocative.

I've always kept myself covered at Boris' house and tried my best not to draw the men's attention.

My heart speeds up a little as I glance at the foyer.

*Georgi has made it clear in many ways that he won't try anything until I'm ready.*

The reminder eases the tension surrounding my outfit, and I walk to the sunken living room, taking a seat on one of the couches. I lean forward and cross my arms before resting them on my thighs.

Staring at the elevator, I'm wound tight while I wait.

What if he doesn't come home tonight?

Just as I think the thought, the doors slide open and Georgi walks into the large foyer.

I dart to my feet and fist my hands at my sides, my eyes locked on him.

He tucks his phone into his pocket and lifts his head, looking in the direction of the staircase, then his head snaps to me, and he stops dead in his tracks.

His lips part, and his features tighten with what I think is appreciation. Clearing his throat, he comes closer, his voice a little hoarse as he says, "This is one hell of a sight to come home to."

What does that mean?

Stopping in front of me, he lifts his hand but then seems to change his mind and lowers it again.

"You look beautiful, Nina."

I search his eyes, but there are no traces of the anger I saw earlier. The knot in my chest vanishes, and his compliment makes warmth take its place.

"I'm glad you like the pajamas. You paid for everything."

"Don't do that." He shakes his head hard. "The clothes belong to you, Nina. Accept it."

He's right. I've been constantly aware of everything he bought us and haven't thought of it as mine.

"I'm sorry. I'll work on that."

Nodding, he moves past me and drops down on the couch.

I turn around to look at him, and worried that he hasn't eaten, I ask, "Have you had dinner?"

A smile tugs at the corner of his mouth as he pats the cushion beside him. "I had a burger and fries."

I perch on the edge and let my eyes drift over his face. Most of the dark bruises have faded, and soon they will be all gone.

When my gaze locks with Georgi's hazel one, my stomach flutters like it's done every single day in this man's presence.

I don't think I'll ever get used to how attractive he is.

"Simi's asleep," I mention just to make conversation. "She wanted to wait up for you, but I bribed her with a bedtime story."

A warm smile forms on his face while he lets out a deep chuckle.

I tilt my head and stare at him, getting lost in how amazing he is.

Georgi doesn't break eye contact, his breathing steady, and it feels as if something magical weaves through the air between us.

I have no idea how much time passes before he whispers, "What's going on in that pretty head of yours?"

Keeping my tone soft as well, I reply, "Just thinking about what an extraordinary person you are."

"Yeah?"

He scoots a little down, half into a lying position, and kicks off his loafers before crossing his legs at the ankles and resting his feet on the coffee table.

I shift up and lean my shoulder against the back of the couch, so I'm facing Georgi, then pull my legs up and fold them beneath me.

When my knees lightly brush against the side of his thigh, tingles rush over my skin.

"It's hard to believe how much my life has changed," I admit.

Georgi pinches my nightgown between his index finger and thumb, and just like Simi, he rubs the fabric. "Are you starting to feel better?"

I don't hesitate and nod. "Much better."

We're still whispering as we talk, and it begins to feel very intimate.

“I found out your birthday is on the fifth of February,” he informs me. “It’s still months away, but what is the one thing you would like to do most in the world?”

I suck in a deep breath as I try to think of something, then answer, “I don’t know.”

“Okay. I’ll make it a surprise.”

“When is your birthday?” I ask, so I don’t miss it. This man deserves to be celebrated.

“December twenty-eight.”

The question unleashes many more. “How old are you?”

“Thirty-five.”

The corner of his mouth lifts, and somehow, we’ve drifted closer to each other, our foreheads almost touching.

“What’s your favorite thing to do?” I ask.

“Spending time with my family. We get together a lot, so you need to brace for that.”

Apprehension trickles through my chest. “Do you think they’ll be okay with me being at these gatherings?”

“Yes. Everyone just needs time.” Georgi lifts his hand and intimately pulls his fingers through my hair. “What’s your favorite thing to do?”

“Spending time with Simi.”

“I love her.” His smile widens. “You have the most amazing daughter, *angelche moe*.”

I can see he means every word, and it feels as if something unfurls from the ashes of my past. It’s an emotion I never thought I’d feel again.

As I stare at Georgi, I realize I’ve had a crush on him since I saw him sitting at the table in the bar, and it’s developing into so much more. It’s shooting down roots in my heart, making hopes and dreams blossom, every petal fragile.

My gaze drifts over every inch of his face before stopping on his mouth.

The last time I kissed someone because I wanted to, I was seventeen and crushing hard on Daniel. He was the smartest in our class. Even though we kissed, we didn’t have a relationship because he left to go study in England while I...

*No. No thinking of that time. Not now.*

I focus on Georgi again, wondering what it would be like to kiss him.

Everything around me fades away until there's him, and the way he's looking at me. The magical trance spins tighter around me, and without knowing what I'm doing, I lean closer...and closer.

"Wait."

The bubble pops so loud, my cheeks instantly flame up and I jerk away.

Georgi's hand shoots up, and he grips me behind my neck before I can get up, then I'm hauled back until our faces are close together again.

"I want to tell you something." His tone is still soft and seductive, and it sets me at ease. "I've never kissed a woman."

My eyebrows fly up, and I blink at him, because...what?

"You're lying." The words are out before I can stop them.

Georgi smiles again, then explains, "It's something that's very special to me. I vowed I would only kiss a woman if I love her, and I've never felt that way about anyone until you." The expression on his face turns half cocky and very, very hot. "I wanted you to know that, so if I suck at kissing, you won't laugh at me."

"So what did you do when you were...busy with a woman?"

"I was always direct about what would happen. No kissing. Everything else was on the table."

Again, we stare at each other as I process what I've just learned about Georgi.

Knowing he's inexperienced, and it will give me control, I ask, "Is that something you want? For us to kiss?"

He nods, his thumb brushing over the skin beneath my ear. "I want everything from you, Nina. When you're ready."

I think I can handle kissing.

My gaze drops to his mouth, and I stare at his full lips surrounded by dark bristles.

When my pulse skyrockets, I close the distance between us before I lose my nerve. The instant our mouths touch, a shock moves through me. It's so unexpected that my hands fly up and I grip fistfuls of his shirt.

Georgi's lips are warm and hesitant beneath mine, and the inexperience I feel coming from him makes my chest tighten.

I brush my mouth over his again, slower this time, lingering to let him grow accustomed to how it feels, then I gently nip his lower lip before pulling back.

A smirk spreads over his face, making him look boyish and wicked all at once, and the sight sends heat rushing through my abdomen.

Unable to resist, I lean in again. "Open for me." My whisper is filled with desire.

When he does as I say, I press my mouth to his, and the moment my tongue brushes over his, a tremor moves through me, making me gasp. I feel the same shudder ripple through Georgi, and his breath is sharp as he tilts his head.

Moving onto my knees, I lean against his chest as I deepen the kiss, showing him without words what to do.

He follows the pace I set, then he lifts his hand to my face and cups my cheek.

There's another powerful shift between us, and it has Georgi taking control of the kiss.

The strokes of his tongue are firm and his lips taste mine with so much passion, it steals my breath. Another shiver ripples through us, and he takes my mouth as if he's just found something he's been searching for his entire life.

"Christ," he groans against my lips while he wraps his other arm around my waist, holding me tightly to his chest. "You taste incredible." Between groans and whispered words, his mouth nips and his teeth tug until I feel warm and tingly all over.

Georgi slows the kiss down before pulling back an inch. By the time our eyes open and they meet, I'm standing on the edge of falling in love.

"I'm so fucking glad I waited for you."

His words push me over, and I fall at the speed of light.

"Nina?" Worry flashes over his face, and when I cover my mouth with a trembling hand to smother the first sob, he sits up and frames my cheeks. "Was it too much?"

I shake my head quickly and squeeze the words out, tears escaping my eyes. "It was perfect." I place my palm against the rough bristles covering his jaw and brush my thumb over his bottom lip. "You...I..." I swallow hard as overpowering emotions twirl and skip around in my chest, just like Simi did in the toy store. "I'm in love with you."

The worry vanishes from his face, and surprise fills his eyes. "And how do you feel about that?"

“Good.” A smile breaks through my happy tears, and I throw my arms around his neck as I press my mouth to his again. “So good,” I whisper, then our tongues touch again, and I lose myself in one of the most profound moments of my life.

# Chapter 26

## Georgi

Who needs sleep when you've been kissed by the most beautiful woman in the world?

Lying in my bed and grinning up at the ceiling, I can't stop replaying the intimate moment I shared with Nina.

I was shocked that she felt ready to take such a huge step, but when she said she's in love with me, it brought me to my knees.

I underestimated Nina. She's so much fucking stronger.

Suddenly, a scream rips through the air, and I move without thinking.

My heart hammers against my ribs as I rip doors open, and when I barge into Nina's room, I scan everywhere for a threat.

Realizing she's having a nightmare, I jump onto the bed and pull her into my arms. "Wake up, *angelche moe*." I pepper the side of her head with kisses as I sit down while holding her tightly.

Nina's breaths explode fast over her lips as she grips my arm. "Georgi."

"I'm here."

She moves, crawling completely onto my lap while clinging to me as if I'm all that stands between her and the fucked-up world.

Then she shudders, and a cry tears from her chest. "I...I...I dreamed Boris and Anton were killing you. T-the skin was p-peeling from your b-body, and when they left, I couldn't d-do anything to fix you. Your breaths...your breaths were so shallow." She cries her fucking heart out because she had a nightmare that I died, and when she's able to speak again, she sputters, "Don't go after them. Please. I'm begging you. Just stay here with Simi and me. I can't lose you."

"Hey," I frame her face and force her to look at me. "Shhh... focus on me, on right now. Feel my hands?" I brush my palms tenderly over the sides of her head, then lean down and press a kiss to her quivering lips. "Feel me, *angelche moe*. Let go of the nightmare and just be here with me."

In the dark, Nina's eyes shine like polished stones as she stares at me, and slowly her breaths even out, and she calms down. Pulling away from me, she turns on the bedside lamp before lunging at me, her hands and eyes

moving over my chest and arms with a desperate need to make sure I'm fine.

"Oh, thank God." Her palms settle on my jaw, and she pushes her body up against me, her mouth taking mine in a fierce kiss that robs me of my ability to think.

The first kiss she gave me rocked my world, but this one...fuck this one, seals her fate to mine forever.

It spirals out of control, our tongues warring for dominance and our teeth clashing.

My cock hardens, answering her siren song by trying to tear right through my shorts.

Nina's hand keeps moving with desperation, but it now feels like she can't get enough of touching me, and it makes lust burn through me like an inferno that surpasses anything I've ever experienced with another woman.

This isn't an itch. It's a visceral need to make her mine, to claim her, to own her.

My muscles tense, and a rough tremor shudders through me. Nina lets out a fucking moan as she pushes her body harder against mine, and when I drop onto my back, she follows. Our mouths come together in an urgent clash, and as she lies down on top of me and I feel the heat of her body, my self-control dangles by a thin thread.

"*Angelche moe*," I groan against her addictive lips. "We have to stop."

Nina's head pops up, and shock flashes over her face, as if she was so far gone she didn't realize how fast things were moving.

I roll onto my side, and Nina slumps onto her back, her cheeks flushed.

"Isn't it too soon for you?" I ask to address the situation.

"I-I don't know," she whispers, her tone too fragile for my liking. Her eyes barely meet mine, and I realize she feels shy, then she continues, "I felt okay...it...it was so different from what I've experienced before."

I don't want to take things all the way and ruin the progress I've made with her, but another plan forms in my mind.

"How about we see how you handle it when I touch you?"

Her eyes finally meet mine with a confused look. "I like it when you touch me."

Placing my hand on her hip, I shake my head. "I'm going to make you come with my hand."

“Oh.” Her eyes widen before a shy but curious smile begins to tug at her mouth. Her reply is so soft that if I weren’t looking at her, I would’ve missed it. “Okay.”

“Is there anywhere you don’t want me to touch you?” I ask so I know what her boundaries are.

She hesitates for several seconds before shaking her head.

I grip her jaw, and leaning over her, I kiss her slowly.

I love how she immerses herself in the kiss, as if it becomes her life’s purpose. Moving my hand down her throat, I relish the soft feel of her beneath my fingers, and when I cover her right breast, my body shudders from how fucking amazing this moment is.

Nina’s hands begin to tentatively explore my pecs and shoulders before getting lost in my hair.

When I move my hand down her abdomen and slip beneath her shorts, the kiss slows until we’re lapping at each other’s mouths.

Nina turns into me, throwing her leg over my hip, and it opens her pussy up to my fingers.

She’s fucking hot and soaked, telling me how much she needs this. I break the kiss to ask, “Have you come before?”

For a dazed moment, I don’t get a response before she shakes her head, and when I press down on her clit, her swollen lips part with a surprised gasp.

“Eyes on me at all times,” I order before I circle her entrance, teasing her. “How do you feel?”

“Ahhh…” she gasps, her eyes glazing over again.

Letting out a chuckle, I tease her, “That’s a want, not a feeling.”

“More,” she whimpers, her eyebrows pulling together with need bleeding over her beautiful features. “Please.”

*Fuck this.*

I pull my hand out, and grabbing hold of her shorts, I yank them down her legs and push her thighs wide open.

I lick my fucking lips at the sight of her glistening pussy, and diving down, my tongue swipes from her opening to her clit. Her unique taste bursts over my tongue, and like a ravenous animal, I devour her.

“Georgi!” she cries, her hands fisting in my hair.

Her arousal spills from her, and she coats my mouth and chin, rubbing herself over me while I get high from how fucking delicious she tastes.

Just as she thinks she's coming down, I suck her clit so hard it makes her body spasm as if she's touching a live wire.

Not a sound comes from my woman as I wring pleasure from her body.

The instant she jerks with sensitivity, I release her clit and kiss my way up to her abdomen. Needing to be selfish for a moment, I push her pajama top up so my eyes can feast on her naked body.

I'm going to need the image for when I jerk off.

And what a fucking view it is. Nina's breasts are large for her petite size, and I can't resist squeezing them together and burying my face between the ample swells.

*Pull away and leave. Right now!*

I let go of Nina and make eye contact as I hold myself braced over her. "I love you." I lean down and press a tender kiss to her mouth. "Don't get stuck in your head. I would love nothing more than to hold you for the rest of the night, but my cock is about to tear through my shorts, so I'm going to leave."

"You love me," she whispers, her post-orgasm glow mixing with shock.

"Sweet dreams, *angelche moe*." I give her another quick kiss, then haul my body off the bed.

Leaving her room, I go straight to mine, and the moment I shut the door behind me, I shove my shorts off and step out of them.

As I walk to my bed, I palm my aching cock, the relief instant. "Jesus fucking Christ," I groan.

Just as I bring up the image of my woman's tits, I hear the door open, and I swing around, dick in my hand.

Nina's eyes lock on me while she softly shuts the door, and as she closes the distance between us, I can see she's very nervous.

Then she opens her nightgown and slips it off, revealing her naked body, and my brain short-circuits for a moment as I say, "Fuck, you have one hell of a sexy body."

Pre-cum drips from my cock by the time she reaches me. She's so short, all she'd have to do is bend to suck me into her mouth.

My cock jerks hungrily at the thought, and as her gaze lowers to it, her voice trembles a little. "It looks like you have a *big* problem."

"Very big," I groan before her hand even touches me.

I let go of myself, and when she hesitantly trails her index finger down my hard-on, my legs go numb.

“I have to sit.”

“Okay.” Nina pulls her hand back, and as soon as my ass hits the covers at the foot of the bed, she takes a step closer.

I grip her hips and pull her closer until she’s between my legs, and ducking my head, I catch her eyes. “What do you want to do, baby?”

“I...I...” Her tongue darts out to wet her lips, and I lose her gaze as she glances to the windows. “I want to try to go all the way with you.” Suddenly, her eyes flick back to me, and her features tighten. “Show me that it can be good. Please.”

Lifting my hand, I brush my knuckles over her nipple while I press a kiss to her racing pulse. “Just focus on me, *angelche moe*. No one else. It’s just us.”

Nina nods and looks down at where I’m touching her.

I cup her breast and massage her softly, dropping kisses along her jaw. Her breathing begins to speed up, and she turns her face until our lips touch.

For a moment, we just look at each other, and I try to gauge where she’s at. Not sure, I ask, “Are you still okay?”

She nods before she presses her mouth to mine, initiating the kiss. I let her take charge for a while, loving how it feels to share this level of intimacy with a woman.

When Nina grips my shoulders and begins to climb onto my lap, I rip my mouth from hers. “Condom.” I dive over the bed and yank the drawer open, grabbing the box I always keep there.

Ripping the foil off, I lie down against the pillows before saying, “Come to me, baby.”

While I roll the condom onto my rock-hard cock, Nina crawls closer, her tits swaying from side to side.

“Fucking...shit, your breasts are going to make me come. Get on me so I can suck on them.”

I blindly feel around in the drawer for the lube and set it down beside me. I’m probably going to need it all to get inside Nina without hurting her.

My woman swings her leg over my abs and plants her hands on my shoulders.

“Oh fuck, yes.” I grab a breast in each of my hands, and squeezing them together, I kiss, suck, and lick them to my heart’s content.

Nina moans, and I don’t think she realizes when she rubs her clit over the ridges of my abs.

I feast on her big tits until I'm delirious with need. "These were made for me. So fucking beautiful." As I suck hard on one of her nipples, my hands move down her body, and grabbing hold of her ass, I growl with satisfaction. "Are you sure, Nina? I can just jerk off."

She's a little dazed as she shyly admits, "I want to be yours."

I grab the tube of lubrication, and emptying it in my palm, I spread it all over my wrapped dick.

From my touch alone, my cock jerks and my eyes almost roll into the back of my head.

*Christ, I need to fuck her more than I need my next breath.*

I grip hold of Nina's hips and move her a little back until I have her over my cock. My heartbeat speeds up dramatically as I position myself at her soaked entrance, and when I push against her, I feel how her opening stretches to take me.

"Fuck, baby." I let out a long groan as my eyes lock with hers.

As soon as I breach her, Nina tilts her head back, and her lips part in a gasp.

I manage to enter her halfway before I stop so she can adjust to me.

"You good?" I ask, while I watch her closely for any warning signs that she's thinking about when she was raped.

Nina nods, then her hands rub up and down my chest. Her cheeks turn red before she admits, "I feel you...everywhere."

"Still more to go, baby," I say, my voice deep and rough from being inside her for the first time.

She moves up until only the tip remains before she takes every last inch of me deep into her body.

My balls contract and my thigh muscles lock into place from the intense pleasure. "Fuck." Tremors shudder through me, and a fine layer of sweat breaks out over my skin. "I'll come even if you keep still."

Still gripping her hips, I show her how to move up and down. At first, she takes me slow, and I clench my jaw to keep from thrusting.

"You're doing so well, baby," I praise her. "I've never been fucked like this before."

My words make her pupils dilate, and leaning forward, she presses her tits to my abs as she kisses my skin.

"Nina," I groan, my fingers digging into her hips from giving her all the control. "So good."

Not speeding up, she takes me at the pace she's comfortable with, and it's driving me fucking wild.

Every muscle in my body locks into place as she slowly continues to slide up and down my dick.

"Am I doing it right?" she asks, worry creeping into her tone.

I don't like that she's focused on whether she's doing it right or wrong. To set her at ease, I say, "You're fucking perfect, Nina." A grin spreads over my face. "But this is my field of expertise, so if you don't mind, I'll take over."

# Chapter 27

## Nina

In a quick move, I lose my seat of power and find myself flat on my back.

Georgi kneels while tugging me closer and lifting my hips until my butt hovers in the air, my legs draped over his thighs.

“Ready?” he asks with a hot smirk that makes him look devilish.

At first, I was stunned by this side of me that I didn’t know existed. But then Georgi made me feel pleasure unlike anything I’ve ever experienced, and right afterward, he told me he loves me.

What really made me realize he’s Mr. Right was when he left because he knew he couldn’t control himself for much longer.

He’s been so considerate and attentive, it makes my heart ache and creates the perfect storm in me that can only be calmed by Georgi.

This isn’t just about sex. I want him in every way possible. I want to bond with him until the lines blur between us and we become one.

I want to feel his hands on every inch of my body and him inside me.

It takes more courage than I thought I had to admit, “I want you...all of you.”

Georgi enters me with a single long stroke, making my head tip back from how good it feels and a moan dislodge in my throat.

Slowly, he pulls out until only the tip remains, and he begins to move in short strokes that have me arching my back.

I’m not being forcefully held down.

I’m not being slapped.

No. I’m being shown pleasure I’ve never felt before by the most attractive man alive.

“Christ, Nina. Do you have any idea how fucking sexy you are right now?” he says, his breaths coming fast as he continues to drive me wild with only the head of his manhood.

My hands slap down on the bed, and I grip the covers, my hips swiveling as I moan, “Georgi.” Right then, he thrusts all the way into me until his pelvis rubs against my clit, and my breathing falters. “Oh!”

Just as my orgasm curls through my abdomen, he pulls completely out of me, and I'm left feeling empty and needy. "No!"

With an evil chuckle rumbling from his chest, he leans over me and drags lazy kisses along my skin as he moves up until we're face to face. "I think you can hold out longer."

I shake my head while I place my hands on the sides of his neck, where veins are visible beneath his skin. "I can't."

"Hmm..." His mouth lowers to mine, and his teeth tug at my bottom lip, sending a wave of tingles scattering through my body. "Tell me how much you want me."

Realizing Georgi needs to hear it, I don't hesitate. "I want you so much it's driving me wild. I ache for you."

Satisfaction shines from his eyes, and sitting back again, he lines himself up with my opening. "Tell me how it feels to have me inside you," he orders as he slowly pushes in again.

"Big. You...you stretch me and rub... like a deep massage." My voice breaks as he sheaths himself all the way, and his thumb rubs over my clit.

"Who's inside you?" he growls.

"You." He pulls out and slams hard into me.

"Who's inside you, Nina?"

"Georgi Torrisi," his name bursts over my lips.

Bracing a hand on the bed, he leans over me and begins to fuck me so hard that my body jerks with each thrust.

"My capo," I moan, our eyes locked as he claims me.

His other hand grips my jaw, his features drawn tight as he brands me from the inside out.

"My hero." The words are nothing more than a whimper as my body burns up, and he sets me on fire. The orgasm tearing through me steals my ability to breathe and forces my lips to part in a silent O.

I tremble as he pounds into me until ecstasy washes over his face. Entering me with a final powerful thrust, his body tenses and he lets out a throaty groan.

For the first time, a man comes inside me because it's what I wanted, and knowing he's the one I'm falling deeply in love with gives me such a sense of being loved, it leaves me in awe.

I lift my hand and brush my fingers over his cheek before tracking along his eyes and over his forehead.

As he comes down from his high and his features soften, he stares deep into my eyes and vows, “I’m going to love the hell out of you, Nina.”

My chin quivers, and tears threaten to fall. “You are such a miracle to me.” With my voice growing hoarse, I squeeze the words out, “I started falling for you when I saw you sitting at that table. Watching you fight so hard, I saw how strong you were. Then, in that chamber, with you somehow still holding on to your sense of humor, I realized you weren’t like the others. And the moment I fell off the bucket and you just reacted, trying to catch me, I knew you cared about me.”

I pause to suck in a trembling breath, and he presses a kiss to the corner of my mouth.

A tear escapes as I whisper, “I fell in love with you in the middle of hell, and then again in this heaven you’ve shown me. Between those extremes, you’ve gathered every broken piece of me and put me back together.”

“Christ, Nina.” The same emotions filling my chest show on his face. “You are the miracle.”

Georgi pulls out of me and lies down beside me. Propping his head on his palm, he trails patterns over my breasts, stomach, and abdomen with his other hand.

We stare at each other for a long moment, and I find myself utterly lost and in love with Georgi. It feels like he hung the moon, created the stars, and set fire to the sun.

He takes a deep breath, then murmurs, “I’d go through that hell a million times for you.”

Gripping hold of his shoulder, I pull myself up so I can wrap my arms around his neck, and I kiss him with all my heart.

Suddenly, a phone rings and Georgi breaks our kiss. He reaches over me and grabs his cellphone, looks at the screen, then swipes over it.

Putting the device to his ear, his tone is dark with worry as he asks, “What’s wrong?” He listens for a moment, then a cruel smile I haven’t seen since the chamber forms on his face. “Thanks, Rosie. Send me all the information. I owe you.”

He ends the call, then moves off the bed and walks to the bathroom. I get up, and grabbing my nightgown, I put it on while waiting for him to come out.

“I have good news,” he calls out before he enters the room again. In all his naked glory, he stops in front of me and frames my face with his hands.

“Rosie found Boris and Anton. They’re in Spain.”

A frown instantly forms on my forehead. “How’s that good news?”

“I’m going to go get them so they can pay for what they’ve done.”

My eyes widen, and I shake my head wildly. “It will be too dangerous.”

“Danger is my middle name, baby.” He winks at me, then walks into his closet and begins to pull clothes off hangers.

“Georgi.” I cover my racing heart with my hand. “Don’t go. Please. Stay here where it’s safe.”

He drags on a pair of boxers and cargo pants, then locks eyes with me. “I’m a capo, Nina. I can’t let them go.”

I rush closer. “I’m begging you.”

Georgi places his hands on my shoulders and bends at the waist while I tilt my head back, then he uses a tone I haven’t heard before. It’s all power and darkness. “You’ve seen me fight, and that was when I was caught off guard and outnumbered. I’m taking my men with me. I need you to have faith in my abilities as a head of the Cosa Nostra. I’ll be gone four days at the most.”

His word is final, and I realize no amount of begging will change his mind.

Georgi has been gentle and patient with me, and it’s made me forget who he is outside of this penthouse.

“I have faith in you, and I know you can fight.” I let out a shaky breath as I admit the truth to him. “I just want to selfishly keep you here with me because I’m scared our happy bubble will pop.”

He wraps his hand around the back of my neck and pulls me against his abs and stomach. “I get it, but nothing is going to change just because I have to work. I promise. If anything, the few days apart will make us miss each other.” He draws back and nudges my chin up so I’ll look at him. “Take the time to process what’s happened between us, and when I return, we can talk about it.”

“I don’t need to process it. I meant everything I said, and I don’t have any regrets about sleeping with you.”

He stares at me for a moment, then says, “In that case, move into my bedroom. When I come back, I want you to sleep in my arms every night.”

I like the idea very much and it brings a smile to my face. “Okay.”

“Kiss me, baby,” he orders in a tone that makes my abdomen clench while a mischievous smile tugs at the corner of his mouth.

I lift myself onto my tiptoes, but it doesn't help at all. "You need to lean down."

He shakes his head, playfulness all over his face.

I glance around the closet space, looking for something to stand on, but there's nothing. Scowling at Georgi, I walk away so I can get a running start.

Either he catches me, or I face plant.

As I run toward him, my nightgown opens up, and when I launch myself at him, he easily catches me mid-air.

My breasts squash against his muscled chest, and I grab hold of his shoulders while slamming my mouth to his.

When I wrap my legs around his waist, my clit rubs against the bulges of his six-pack, and I moan into him.

"Fuck that," he growls against my lips. "Work can wait another hour."

He carries me back to the bed and takes a condom from the box before crawling onto the rumpled covers while I cling to him like a spider monkey.

Georgi lies down on top of me, and I'm completely covered by his much larger body. I feel so warm and protected, and getting lost in kissing him, I try not to think about him leaving to face the monsters who tortured me for close to a decade.

# Chapter 28

## Georgi

I caught up on sleep during the flight to Spain, and as Santino drives us in the direction Rosie gave, I'm checking my weapons.

It was dumb luck that she found the fuckers. Someone posted a video on social media of a sunset, and across the road was Boris and Anton, sitting on a porch.

There was a white Mercedes parked in the driveway of a shitty house that's a far cry from the luxuries the two men must be used to.

"Get ready," Santino tells all the men via his earpiece. "We want them alive."

I check in my side mirror and see the two SUV's tucked in close on our tail. Al and Frankie are right behind us with Jerry, Sal, and Braylon bringing up the rear.

I left a small army to guard the women, and Dad said he, Fabrizio, and Vincenzo would do regular checks for me.

Raya assured me she will spend a lot of time with Nina so they can get to know each other.

A smile tugs at the corner of my mouth. It will mean the world to me if they could become good friends.

Suddenly, a white Mercedes reverses out of a driveway before tearing down the road.

"Fuck." Santino slams his foot down on the gas, and the SUV shoots forward.

The quiet town quickly falls behind us as we chase after Boris and Anton, and we manage to get close enough to verify that both men are in the car. Anton is in the passenger seat with Boris in the back. The guard whose name I can't remember is driving.

Soon we find ourselves racing along mountain roads that wind down to Ronda, the engine roaring beneath our seats.

The road narrows, and to our left is the mountain wall, while on our right, there's a steep cliffside.

Santino takes a sharp turn, gravel spraying beneath the SUV. The Mercedes barely holds around the bend, and a rock shoots up from its tires, hitting our windshield and making a crack splinter through the glass.

“Closer,” I order, my voice harsh with my need for vengeance. We’re too close to let the fuckers get away.

Suddenly, the Mercedes’ back lights go on as the fucker slams on the brakes. Santino swerves, avoiding a full-blown collision, and comes up beside them.

I look Boris dead in the eyes, then grin and wave with my gun in my hand while letting down the window.

“Miss me, motherfucker?” I shout, and training my barrel on the side, back window, I pull the trigger.

He ducks down, probably lying flat on the seat to avoid the bullets.

Suddenly, he darts up again and takes a wild shot at me, but he misses, and the bullet hits the back door.

Santino jerks the wheel, keeping us from going down the cliffside, and we push the Mercedes into the wall, the sound of metal scraping sharp in the air.

Tires screech, and dust kicks up into the air as Boris fires another shot, the bullet missing us completely and hitting somewhere behind us.

The Mercedes’ back window is blown out by one of my men, and Santino laughs as he drives the accelerator to the floor.

Suddenly, the road grows wider, and our bumper smashes into the Mercedes, hard enough to send the sedan snaking across the dry terrain, rocks and sand shooting up from the tires.

“Let’s end this,” I growl at Santino.

“On it.” He turns the steering wheel hard, and we follow the Mercedes off the road.

I think of the cells I have beneath one of my warehouses. They were inspired by Damiano, our retired capo dei capi. These fuckers are going to die in those cells if it’s the last thing I do.

For Nina.

For Simi.

For me.

Gunfire erupts again as Al and the others close in, coming up on either side of us so we can box in the Mercedes between the vehicles and force it to a stop.

We come up on the right again, and this time I lean out of the window and aim at the rear tire. Both shots rip through the rubber, and the Mercedes pitches sideways before cartwheeling into the air. It lands with a crash of metal and glass, and I shout, “Fuck. They better not be dead!”

Santino brakes so hard the belt cuts into my chest, and before he brings the SUV to a stop, I shove the door open and jump out.

“Wait for me!” Santino shouts.

Not listening, my boots hit the ground running as I lift my hands, holding my weapon ready.

Somehow, the Mercedes landed upright. The driver's door opened, and the guard fell out during the accident, but from his brains spilling over the sand, I’m pretty sure he’s dead.

I reach the front passenger side first, and ripping the door open, I grab Anton by his throat and haul his ass out of the car before slamming the handle of my gun into his face. “You thought you could hide, motherfucker.”

Terror creeps into his eyes, and it feeds the vengeance in me.

Behind me, Boris stumbles from the wreck and begins to run, but Santino tackles the bastard to the ground. Boris swings at Santino, but my friend knocks him out with two quick punches.

I hit Anton again, just for the fucking pleasure it gives me, before I drag the fucker toward the SUVs.

My men move in fast, bringing zip ties, and while they restrain the assholes, I watch, a sliver of peace returning to my soul, knowing I have them.

When they load Anton into one of the trunks, I step closer and smirk at him. “Nina’s waiting. *My woman* has a lot of anger to get rid of. She really liked the idea of skinning you alive and cutting off your dick.”

I indicate for them to close the trunk and watch as Santino slams the other one shut with Boris inside.

I climb into the passenger seat of our SUV, and when Santino slides in behind the steering wheel, I grin at him. “Let’s go home. I want them in the cells.”

---

Nina

“Eat your carrots,” I tell Simi when she pushes them around her plate.

“No.” My daughter pouts, her jaw setting with a stubborn look. “Georgi doesn’t.”

“Carrots are good for you.” I pick one up and hold it in front of her mouth. “Come on.”

She presses her lips together and shakes her head, causing frustration to slither into my chest.

Just then, I hear the elevator doors open, and I hurry out of the kitchen to see who’s here, my heart quickly increasing to a thundering beat.

The sight of Raya lets me exhale an audible, relieved breath.

“Hi. With Georgi gone, I finally get to spend some time with you,” she says, her tone cheerful and a friendly smile easing over her face.

“Hi.”

I glance at Simi, noticing the moment she realizes it’s not Georgi. Her chin begins to quiver, and she looks down at the carrots she’s refusing to eat.

My child was not happy when she woke up the day before yesterday and didn’t find Georgi in the penthouse, and she’s been moody ever since.

“What’s wrong?” Raya asks when she reaches me.

I gesture at Simi. “She misses Georgi, and...and...” My throat closes up as tears threaten to fall. “She’s being difficult, and I don’t know what to do because this is all new to me.”

Georgi would probably set her down on his lap, and she’d eat everything he feeds her. He’s so much better with Simi than me and it makes me feel like a failure.

“Hey, it’s going to be okay.” Raya rubs her hand up and down my arm. “Rome wasn’t built in a day, Nina.”

We walk to the island where Simi is sitting in her kid chair, and when she frowns at Raya, my heart sinks even more.

“Oh my word, is someone in a bad mood?” Raya asks, her tone dramatic. “You know what I do whenever Georgi is in a bad mood?”

Interest trickles into Simi’s eyes as she shakes her head.

Raya lifts her hands and wiggles her fingers. “I tickle him until he laughs.” Suddenly, she pounces on Simi, teasing her sides until my daughter is crying with laughter.

*Everyone is better with Simi.*

I cover my mouth with my hand, fighting to keep the tears back.

“Now,” Raya glances at me, then asks Simi, “How can we make your mama laugh?”

Simi looks at me, and seeing I’m struggling, she holds her hand out to me. “Come, Mama. Carrots are good for you.”

I move closer and sit down on the stool beside her. She picks up a carrot and feeds it to me. While I chew, I say, “Now it’s your turn.”

When she finally pops one into her mouth, I swear it feels like I’ve reached the top of Mt. Everest. I throw my arms into the air and shriek with happiness. “Yay! Mama’s so happy.”

After that, Simi eats all her carrots.

I give Raya a thankful look, to which she shrugs. “I didn’t do anything. That was all you.” She opens the fridge and helps herself to a soda before coming to sit at the island. “Sooo, you both know I’m Georgi’s sister. I’m younger by four years. Unlike him, I like to stay indoors to chill.” She taps her chin, then grins at Simi. “And I love castles and horses.”

“Me too!” Simi exclaims, trying to wiggle out of her chair. “Georgi bought me lots.”

I help her out, and as soon as I set her down, she runs out of the kitchen to where her castle playhouse stands in the corner of the foyer.

As Raya and I follow, she says, “I’m hoping we can become good friends, Nina.”

Knowing it’s important to Georgi, I ignore any apprehension I have, and a smile pulls at the corner of my mouth as I glance at her. “I’d like that very much.”

She takes hold of my arm to pull me to a stop and lowers her voice so Simi won’t hear. “I want you to be comfortable with me, so if I ever do anything you don’t like, please tell me. I tend to form bonds quite fast, and sometimes that overwhelms people.”

“Okay.”

I had friends in school and loved spending time with them. The memory makes a need for that kind of relationship fill my chest.

“I like the red streaks in your hair,” I comment, wanting to say something nice to her.

“Thank you.” She lifts her hand and touches a few of my curls. “I love doing all kinds of things with my hair. If you feel up to it, I can run down, and we can put some moisturizing oils in. What do you say? Want to have a hair spa day with me?”

A real smile forms on my face as I nod.

“I’ll be right back!” she walks to the elevator, and I watch as she leaves before I turn my attention to Simi, who’s having a serious conversation with one of her teddies about not eating all of its carrots.

# Chapter 29

## Georgi

Once my men have Boris and Anton stripped down to their underwear and shackled, I pull a drawer open and take out a cattle prod.

I'm standing in a different room that has one-way glass looking into the cell.

I've decided to put them together, seeing as they're so tight.

Grinning, I walk to the door and enter the cell. It smells like bleach, and rats scurry through the vent running around the cell. They can smell the food and are scratching, desperate to get to the men.

"My pets are hungry," I chuckle. I take a moment to look at the fuckers, then moving closer to Boris, I lock eyes with him. "Let's get the adrenaline flowing through your clogged-up veins." I press the prongs to his stomach and watch with great satisfaction as his body convulses. One of his front teeth chips from how hard he's clenching his jaw, and the hole looks hilarious. I let out a bark of laughter as I stop electrocuting him, then grab his jaw and turn his face to Anton. "Tell me this isn't the funniest shit you've ever seen."

Anton meets my eyes with a defiant stare, his top lip curling.

I let go of Boris with a shove and move right in front of the fucker who raped Nina. Even though he's strung up, he still has to lift his eyes to meet mine.

Letting every ounce of rage and vengeance show on my face, I stare him into submission. As soon as he lowers his gaze, I chuckle darkly.

"I'm not going to torture you, Belinski. I'm keeping that honor for Nina, and I bet she's learned a lot of neat tricks from watching Boris kill men." I shrug as I step back. "Okay, just this once." I shove the cattle prod down his tighty-whities, and when the prongs touch his shriveled dick, the man bites the tip of his tongue off while his body seizes.

"My bad." I pull the prod out and lean down to check the damage in his mouth as blood begins to flow. "Ouch, that's gotta hurt." I pat his cheek and smirk. "Suck it up, buttercup. It's still a while before I feed my rats."

Walking out of the cell, I drop the cattle prod in the nearest trash can.

“Is it broken?” Al asks.

“No, it touched the fucker’s dick.”

“What do you want us to do?” he asks.

“Just watch them. You can give them water. I don’t want them dying too quick.”

“Got it, boss.”

I pause and take hold of Al’s arm. “When I return with Nina, none of the men look at her.”

“I’ll tell them.”

I leave the warehouse with Frankie, because Santino went straight home to check on Nina and Simi for me.

During the drive to Manhattan, I stare out the window, my thoughts turning to Nina. It’s been four days since I saw her, and the itch beneath my skin makes me feel aggravated.

The instant Frankie stops the SUV in the basement, I shove the door open and jog to the elevators, the doors opening as I reach them because Paul’s already pressed the button.

He steps into the small space with me, and as we head up to the top floor, he says, “Everything was quiet, boss. The women didn’t leave.”

“Thanks.” As soon as the doors open in my foyer, I step out, and not finding my girls, I call out, “Where’s my princesses?”

“Oh, my God!” I hear Nina shriek, and Simi begins screaming, “Yay!”

They appear at the top of the stairs, and Nina hauls Simi into her arms before rushing down, her face filled with happiness.

“You’re home,” she says, her tone filled with excitement. “Finally!”

I take a wiggling Simi from her mother and plant a kiss on her chubby cheek. Moving her to my right arm so I can wrap my left around Nina, I haul my woman up my body as I lean down and kiss her on the mouth, reluctantly keeping it PG-rated.

Nina wraps her arms around my neck, and Simi tries to do the same with her much shorter arms.

“We missed you so much,” Nina says, her tone shaky.

“Yes. So, so much.” Simi nods, her eyes serious.

I’m hit hard in the chest by how emotional it feels to come home to the woman I love and my daughter.

“I missed you more.” My voice is hoarse, and I clear my throat as I set them down. “What did you do while I was gone?”

“Nothing. I just missed you,” Simi answers, her tone a little sad.

I crouch down and brush my palm over her hair. “I just have to go to work again, but I’ll be back tonight, and we’ll do whatever you want.”

“Aww. I don’t want you to go.”

I pull her closer and kiss her forehead. “I have to go fight a couple of bad guys to make sure the castle stays safe. Okay?”

Her eyes widen. “Will there be a dragon?”

“Yes,” I answer, playing into her make-believe world. “A big one, but don’t worry, fire can’t hurt me.”

“Okay. But then you’ll come home.”

Her expression is so serious that it gives me cuteness aggression, and I squash her to my chest while pressing two kisses to her cheek.

When the elevator doors open and Raya comes in, I rise to my feet and give my sister a quick hug. “Thanks for doing this for me.”

“No problem at all. You go take care of business while I play in the castle with princess Simi.” She wiggles her fingers and begins to move in on Simi. “Here comes the tickle monster.”

With a shriek of laughter, my kid runs for the safety of her little castle in the corner.

I take Nina’s hand and quickly walk to the elevator. When the doors shut, I say, “I have a surprise for you.”

She leans into my side as she tilts her head back, her eyes shining like polished stones. “What?”

“I’ve heard breaking shit is good for letting off steam, and I think you have a lot of anger to burn.”

She looks curious but also apprehensive. “Uhm...okay.”

Not wanting her to be caught off guard, I say, “I have Boris and Anton. I thought it would help you heal if you got to torture them.”

The apprehensiveness vanishes, and her eyes widen before I see the first spark of anger.

“And if you don’t want to do anything yourself, you can tell me, and I’ll take care of it.”

She shakes her head quickly. “Oh no, there are a couple of things I’ve dreamed of doing to them for nine years.”

My lips curve up. “I’ll be with you every second. You’ll be safe and in control at all times.”

Emotion tightens her features, and she reaches up for me. I bend down, hook my arm around her, and lift her until her feet leave the floor. As our mouths touch, the elevator opens, and I step out into the parking area.

I stop for a moment, and placing my hand on the side of her head, I thrust my tongue into her mouth and get lost in her warmth and addictive taste.

---

## Nina

When Georgi leads me into a room, my gaze lands on a wide pane of glass. I stop dead in my tracks as I stare at Boris and Anton, where they're hanging in a cell.

*Holy shit.*

I didn't doubt Georgi, but seeing the men who've made my life hell, shackled and stripped, really drives it home. For once, they are the prey, helpless and at my mercy.

During the drive to this warehouse, I was focused on how happy I was that Georgi was back and checked that he didn't return with any fresh wounds that needed tending to.

Boris and Anton look like they've been hit by a bus, and it fills me with satisfaction. For a moment, all I can do is stare while old, familiar fear echoes somewhere deep inside me.

"They can't see you. The glass is one-way," Georgi says as he stops beside me.

Their wrists are shackled to chains bolted into a steel beam above their heads, their bodies held upright by the restraints so that their feet barely touch the floor.

Every movement from them makes the chains rattle.

This isn't some dingy basement. Electric lights shine brightly, illuminating everything.

The cell itself is empty. There's no table with tools and weapons. No buckets. It's just concrete and steel with a drain in the center of the floor.

As my gaze creeps along the wall, I see vents and shadows moving behind the grids. Only then do I hear the scratching and squeaking.

A shiver rushes down my spine, and my attention returns to the men who once made me afraid to breathe too loudly. Now they can't see me. They can't touch me.

The tables have turned, and I'm the one with the power.

Anton shifts, trying to rub his nose against his bicep, his shoulders straining worse than Georgi's did. I take in the blood coating his mouth, chin, throat, and chest.

Boris hangs with his head lowered, then he lifts it slightly, as if he can sense someone is watching him.

Something merciless slithers through me as the memories creep out of the darkest corners of my soul. Years of pain, humiliation, helplessness, and ungodly terror flash through my mind.

Staring at the bastards, they don't look like the monsters who broke me.

No, they look much smaller. Weaker.

The scratching sounds from the vents draw my attention again, followed by the slow drip of water somewhere above us. The incessant pattern is enough to drive any sound mind insane.

I step closer to the glass, and placing my hand against it, a smile curves my lips because for once, they're the ones trapped.

They're the ones who will be tortured and killed.

I hear something slide open, then Georgi asks, "Which of these would you like to use?"

Glancing over my shoulder, I see a wide drawer filled with all kinds of tools and instruments. There's also a metal bat, a fireplace poker with a hook at the end, and a bullwhip that catches my eye for a couple of seconds.

Turning around to face Georgi, I struggle to make up my mind and ask, "Can I try all three of these to test them out?"

A smile spreads over Georgi's face. "Of course, and if none of them do it for you, I can show you other ways to make the fuckers suffer."

*Other ways.*

So many ideas rush through my mind. I used to spend so much time daydreaming about ways to get back at Boris and Anton.

Then one pops into my mind, and I ask, "Can you get me scopolamine?"

Georgi tilts his head, his expression tender as he looks at me. "What's that, *angelche moe*?"

"The drug I injected into you." I make quotation marks with my fingers. "Truth serum." Not wanting Georgi to misunderstand, I explain, "I want to make them suffer the way you did so I can mess with their minds."

“Give me the name again,” Georgi says as he pulls his phone out. I spell it and make sure it’s right, then watch as he asks Augusto if he has access to any.

He tucks his phone back in his pocket, then asks, “What would you like to do while we wait?”

I move closer to the drawer and pick up the baseball bat.

“Have you ever used one?” he asks. I shake my head, to which he says, “Come, I’ll teach you.”

When one of the guards opens the heavy door to the cell, I notice he doesn’t look at me at all.

My heartbeat speeds up when I step inside, the sharp smell of bleach hits me in the face.

Both Boris and Anton lift their heads, and when they see me, they glare at me like they’ve always done.

For a moment, fear slithers through me, but then I feel Georgi’s big hand on my back, and it makes me lift my chin.

Anton spits at me, but it falls a few inches short of my feet. “Fucking whore.”

I react before I can think, and swinging the bat as hard as I can at his side, I let out a scream that’s filled with years of potent anger, humiliation, and disgust.

After the first hit, I lose my mind. I sound feral, tears wetting my cheeks, and sobs choking my growls.

Suddenly, an arm comes around me, and I’m hauled away from the evil monster.

As I struggle and strain to get loose, I’m carried out of the cell, and the door slams shut.

“Shhh...It’s okay. Calm down for me, baby.”

Cool hands frame my feverish face, and then my sight focuses on Georgi, and I begin to suck in deep breaths as I slowly ease out of the rage that consumed me.

“There you go.”

He pulls the bat from my grip, and I notice the blood on it.

“Sorry for spoiling your fun, but we don’t want to kill Anton too quickly. Okay?”

I nod, and wanting to see the damage I’ve done, I rush to the window. Anton is hanging limply, pain etched in deep lines across his face.

His side is red and already swelling, and blood seeps from where his skin has split.

Boris, on the other hand, looks relieved.

"I'm going back in," I say, my voice firm as I hold my hand out to Georgi. "Give me the bat."

His eyes drift over my face as he passes it to me.

When I walk to the door, the guard opens it again, and this time, when I enter the cell, both men watch me with caution.

I brush some strands of hair from my face as I stop in front of Boris. "Remember, Mama?"

His lips set in a firm line, refusing to answer me.

"Remember how you killed her before you let that bastard rape me?" I point at Anton, my hand trembling as the rage pours back into my chest. "Remember how you locked me in the basement for a week, forcing me to listen to Simona crying, all because I tried to escape?" The sentence ends on a scream, and I begin to see red. "You drove me to insanity," I hiss while I grip the handle of the bat with both hands and swing at my father.

This time I don't lose it. I stay present, feeling every blow shuddering through my arms. I see how the bat slams into his ribs, side, and hip.

Just as I begin to grow tired, I dart over to Anton and bring the bat down on his groin.

The pain-filled roar from him is the best sound I've heard in a really long time.

Walking out of the cell, I drop the bat on the floor and cover my mouth with my hands as I gasp for air.

*Finally, I get to hurt them.*

Sucking in deep breaths, I turn around and hurry to Georgi. He lifts me off my feet and engulfs me in his strong arms.

I cling to him as the first sob breaks over my lips.

*I will get to kill them.*

# Chapter 30

## Georgi

We spent the evening watching two movies with Simi while she narrated them before falling asleep on my lap.

After we tuck her into bed, we head to my room, and when I grab a pair of shorts from the walk-in closet, seeing Nina's clothes makes me grin.

I forgot she moved in while I was gone.

Turning around, I watch as she pulls the covers back on the bed before fluffing out the pillows.

Only then does it sink in that Nina is truly mine.

I get to fuck her tonight and sleep with her in my arms.

My grin widens as I walk toward the bathroom. "Come shower with me."

"Oh...okay."

While I turn on the faucets so the water can warm up, I grab my beard trimmer and tame the bristles on my jaw. I haven't had a clean-shaved jaw since I graduated from school.

Nina comes into the bathroom and sets down her pajamas on the counter before looking around awkwardly, like she doesn't know what to do.

I set down the trimmer and clear the bristles away, before unbuttoning my shirt. My eyes remain locked on my woman as I undress, and once I'm naked, I move in on her.

"Arms up, baby." I keep my tone low and intimate, and when she does as I say, I pull her shirt off over her head.

She bends over to unzip her boots before removing them, and once she straightens up, I undo the button of her slacks.

When she's naked, and I get to feast on the perfection that's her body, my teeth tug at my bottom lip.

"What a fucking masterpiece."

She lets out a nervous chuckle before stepping closer, and while my cock is rock hard and ready for her, she begins to inspect my healing wounds.

“Oh hell no.” Gripping hold of her hips, I lift her off her feet and pull her thigh to my side so she’ll get the memo and wrap her legs around me. “No checking the bruises. I have other things I want to do with you.”

Her cheeks turn pink as I step into the shower with her. I pin her back to the wall, and with her pussy hot against my abs and her breasts squashed to my chest, I duck my head and take her mouth.

Nina is so fucking light, it takes no effort to keep her imprisoned to the tiles, and while the warm water hits my back, I rub her cleavage and sides of her tits, which are officially my favorite part of her body.

I’ve never been obsessed with one specific part of a woman until Nina.

Hooking my arm beneath her ass, I lift her a little higher, and leaning down, I grip her left breast and suck her hard into my mouth.

“Oh...wow...” she moans as I turn her nipples into stiff peaks before flicking them with my tongue.

Letting out a chuckle against her skin, I lower her, and as I set her down on her feet, my cock rubs over her scorching hot pussy and abdomen.

I take a couple of steps backward and tilt my head to the water. As I begin to wash myself, I feel Nina’s eyes burning on me. By the time I fist my cock, stroking suds up and down the shaft, she looks entranced, her thighs rubbing together for friction.

“Aren’t you going to shower?” I ask, my tone playful.

She shakes her head, then quickly nods. “Oh, right. Yes.”

When I chuckle, her face turns red. “Love seeing you get lost in staring at my cock, baby.”

“Hush,” she mumbles, looking fucking cute with the blush.

She grabs the bodywash, and I take another two steps backward so I can watch as she soaps up her sexy body.

I’m only half aware that I grip my cock again, slowly stroking myself while my eyes devour her wet tits.

My tone is rough and tense with hunger. “When you’re done. Don’t dry off. I want to lick the drops off your body.”

Nina tilts her head back and slides her palms from her neck to her chest as she rinses off the suds, the view downright erotic.

“I can’t take any more.” I bend at the waist and pick up my woman, hauling her onto my shoulder before I turn off the faucets and stalk out of the bathroom. Throwing her onto the bed, I immediately brace my knee beside her leg and lick her from her belly button to her chin. My mouth

takes hers, and as our tongues stroke and taste, I massage her wet breasts. “Fuck, Nina,” I growl against her lips before I press kisses down her jaw and suck on her racing pulse. “The things you do to me.”

Reluctantly, I let go of her long enough to reach for the bedside drawer. I rip the box of condoms out and turn it over on the covers.

Grabbing one, I tear it open, and kneeling with my legs braced on either side of Nina’s hips, I roll on the rubber.

“You ready for me, *angelche moe*?”

Nina nods, and when I notice her eyes keep flitting to my balls, I take hold of her hand and show her how to cup me.

Her eyebrows lift slightly as she explores what they feel like, then she pulls her body out from beneath mine and kneels in front of me.

She places her other hand on my hip while her fingers massage my balls, and it feels so fucking good. A groan rumbles from me. “I’ve never come from having my balls massaged before.”

“Is that something you’ll do if I keep going?” Nina asks.

“Oh yeah.”

Her palm brushes over the line curving down my hip, and she hesitates, but then decides against whatever she wanted to do.

“What is it, baby? Talk to me.”

“Can you take off the condom. I’m scared I’ll hurt you.”

I roll it off in seconds, then my woman surprises the fuck out of me by asking. “Can you show me how to suck you? I’ve never done it before.”

“Christ, this is something straight out of my wildest fantasies,” I tell her. “Try not to bite and pretend you’re licking a lollipop.”

“That’s like no lollipop I’ve ever seen,” she mumbles under her breath before giving me a nervous smile.

Not wanting Nina to feel forced, I say, “You don’t have to.”

When she leans down, and I feel her breath on the swollen head, I swear my heart stops for a beat. She licks at the tip before tentatively discovering what it’s like to suck my cock.

Her fingers resume massaging my balls, and I place a hand behind her neck, my muscles tensing as I do my best to keep still.

There’s something very arousing about Nina’s inexperience, and I feel my orgasm building until breaths rush over my lips and my pulse races wildly.

“I’m close, baby.”

Nina wraps her other hand around my base and begins to stroke as she gently suckles on my cock.

I've had women deep throat me before, but this...Fuck, this is what truly does it for me.

"Nina," I groan. "You suck me so good, baby. Just like that."

My ass clenches, and when I come and the jets spurt from me, Nina startles and yanks back, and my release hits her tits.

"Oh fuck!" I roar, the sight increasing my pleasure so fucking much, I drop onto my side as my body loses all strength.

Nina leans closer and continues to caress my balls while watching me with a fascinated look.

When I start to come down, a chuckle rumbles from me, and I stare at her. "That was the best orgasm I've ever had."

"Really?" She pulls her hand away and looks down at the mess on her chest. "Raya told me she's glad you're settling down because you slept around a lot before me...so it's a little hard to believe that's the best pleasure you've ever had."

My head pops up. "She said what?!"

Nina startles, her eyes widening.

"I'm not angry," I instantly say to set her at ease. "But fuck, I'm going to have a talk with my sister."

"I don't think I was supposed to tell you that. Please don't talk to Raya. She won't trust me."

I can't even be upset with Raya, because my active sex life was common knowledge. It could've come up in any conversation.

Wanting to clear things up, I say, "Yes, I've been with a lot of women, but it was just sex, Nina. And never more than once with the same person."

She climbs off the bed and walks to the bathroom. I get up and follow her, worried she's upset.

I watch as Nina cleans my cum off her breasts, then she glances at me. "Never more than once?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you date?"

I shake my head. "No."

Her eyebrows pull together, and she almost looks sad. "Why me, Georgi? I know you've told me before, but it just doesn't make sense why."

You're incredibly handsome and..." She waves her hand over my body. "And strong, and kind, and patient, and...God, you're everything."

I hold my hand out to her, and when she comes closer and places her palm in mine, I say, "I could ask the same thing of you, Nina. You're the one I choose, because I love you. Every inch of you." I pat the area over the organ that beats for her. "You walked into my life and took ownership of my heart." I lean down and take her gaze prisoner. "And I wasn't talking shit to make you feel good. That was the best fucking orgasm of my life. The way you suckled my cock did it for me like nothing has before."

A shy smile forms on her face. "Okay."

I point into the bedroom. "Now get your sexy ass in bed so I can return the favor before fucking you."

When she walks past me, I reach down and grab her off her feet before tackling her onto the bed and kissing her with every ounce of love brimming in my heart.

I get lost in my woman's body, eating her out until she moans my name, and after rolling on a condom, I kneel between her soft thighs and line myself up with her soaked entrance.

My eyes are locked on her pussy as I push inside her, watching as she stretches around my girth. My lashes lower from the pleasure I already feel, and as she slowly takes every inch, a tremor moves through me.

"What a fucking sight," I groan, and once I'm all the way in, I lean over her and nip at her mouth. Locking eyes with my woman, I begin to move, taking her in long and steady strokes that quickly begin to test my limits.

I'm used to hard and fast sex, which this is not.

My heart cracks wide open as I make love to Nina, and the bond we share forms a bubble around us, blocking out the world.

Nina's eyes begin to shine as she trails her fingertips over my jaw, and I see her feelings for me written all over her face before she whispers, "I love you."

Hearing the words for the first time, I'm overcome with such contentment, knowing that she feels the same about me.

"My Nina," I whisper as I continue to move in and out of her.

"My Georgi."

I seal our mouths together, and the kiss is so deep that by the time we come together, I feel like I've just had an out-of-body experience.

One where I saw us, our past behind us, and our future ahead of us.

# Chapter 31

## Nina

Nine days. That's how long we've been torturing Boris and Anton, and I've realized no amount of days will be enough.

But I want to move on with my life.

I kept the worst for last, and after I've injected them with the serum, I stand back and wait for it to take effect.

The rats scurry and scratch, their hungry squeaks getting louder as time passes.

When Boris and Anton's breaths begin to race, and sweat pours down their temples, I walk out of the cell to get the cat-o'-nine tails whip. I look at the tiny metal spikes at the end of each leather cord as I return to stand behind the men.

Georgi's leaning back against the wall, his arms crossed over his chest, his eyes not leaving me for a second.

I reach out to Boris and let the spikes lightly trail up his calf, and his head whips to the side, air bursting over his swollen and busted lips.

"Feel the rats?" I murmur, and it makes him yank against the shackles.

His panic skyrockets, and he flails as I continue to let the spikes trail over his skin.

Boris starts screaming, "Get them off me! No. Vermin. No."

I move over to Anton and do the same to him, but he doesn't scream. Instead, he sobs and sniffles, and the stench of his urine fills the air as it trickles down his legs.

I walk to Georgi and hold the whip out to him. "Don't kill them. I want the serum to wear off, so that they're fully aware when you open the vents and free the rats."

"Got it, *angelche moe*." When I leave the cell, he asks, "Where are you going?"

"Other room. They stink too much."

I take a seat on the stool Georgi arranged for me and watch everything through the one-sided window.

Santino comes in and folds his arms while leaning against the wall.

Georgi starts to whip the men, tearing agonizing shouts and cries from them.

“He’s changed a lot,” Santino suddenly says.

I give him a questioning look. “Georgi?”

He nods, then meets my eyes. “You make him happy, Nina.” Letting out a sigh, he adds, “And I finally get some sleep and time off at night.”

The corner of my mouth lifts, and I turn my attention back to the window, watching as Georgi dangles the whip over Anton’s groin, which makes the rapist shriek, the sound shrill.

“Christ,” Santino mutters.

“I gave them the serum and told them there are rats all over them, so right now he probably thinks there’s a rat about to eat his...you know what,” I explain what’s going on.

“Damn, woman.” Our head of security glances at me, looking impressed. “Remind me to never fuck with you.”

I let out a burst of laughter, which catches me completely off guard.

Georgi’s head snaps in the window’s direction, then he comes stalking out of the cell.

“Did you just laugh?” he asks, a stunned expression on his face.

“Uh...yes?” I point at Santino. “He said something funny.”

Georgi throws the whip in the corner of the room, then grins at Santino and me. “That was the first time she laughed out loud.”

Santino wags his eyebrows at Georgi. “I made her laugh.”

“Motherfucker,” Georgi growls, before landing a hard punch on Santino’s shoulder, who chuckles like it’s some love tap.

Georgi spins around and closes the distance between us with two huge steps. Grabbing hold of me, he tilts me backward and presses a possessive kiss to my mouth.

Only when I’m breathless, and my lips are tingling, does he right me on the stool.

“Come with me,” he says. “I have work to do while the serum wears off.”

I jump to my feet and take hold of Georgi’s hand. He leads me to the upper levels of the warehouse where boxes of illegal goods are stored, along with crates filled with weapons.

“Boss, is Raya coming in?” a man asks.

“No, she’s looking after her niece. What’s up?”

The man gives Georgi a confused look. "Her niece? But...Huh?"

"My kid, dumbass," Georgi informs him. "Why are you looking for Raya?"

*His kid.*

I lower my head as a smile forms on my face, loving that he's just decided Simi is his.

"The one crate is filled with duds. None of the guns have triggers," he informs Georgi.

"Show me."

Before he can take a step, I pull on his hand. "I'll wait with Santino while you work. I don't want to get in the way."

"You're not leaving my sight," my man mutters, tightening his fingers around mine. "And you can never get in the way."

For the next two hours, I watch as Georgi takes care of business, and I learn how much work goes into what he does.

Just as I forget about Boris and Anton, Georgi leads me back down to the cells, and when we enter the room, Santino is splashing buckets of water over the men.

"Check if the serum has worn off," Georgi says.

I enter the cell, and seeing their pupils aren't blown wide anymore, I nod at Georgi.

"How were the hallucinations, fuckers?" he asks.

Both men hang limply, blood trickling down from where the shackles have cut into their wrists.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you." He grins at me. "Rosie emptied their bank accounts and transferred it all to an account in your name." While my face goes slack with shock, he looks at Boris and Anton. "I haven't checked the balance yet. How much did Nina inherit?"

Boris slurs something unintelligible.

"Don't worry. I'll check with Rosie." He pulls out his phone and makes a call while I'm still processing the shock.

"What's up, G-man?" I hear a woman's voice come over the line and realize Georgi's put it on speaker mode.

"Hey. How much is in the Swiss account you opened for Nina?" he asks as he glances at me.

Seeing my stunned expression, he comes closer and places his arm around me.

“Just shy of one hundred and twenty million euros.”

“Thanks.”

“Too-de-loo.”

The line goes dead, and while I blink, struggling to wrap my mind around that amount, Georgi smiles like the cat that got the cream.

“That’s a nice *little* nest egg for Nina and Simi.” He turns to face Boris and Anton. “They can put it away for a rainy day because I’ll provide for them.” He moves to stand right in front of Anton. “I’m changing Nina and Simona’s last names to Torrisi.”

There’s a spark of anger on Anton’s face, and I walk closer to say, “I was never yours, Anton. I love Georgi, and I *willingly* share his bed with him.”

Georgi lets out another chuckle. “I’m one lucky bastard.” He slaps his hands together. “Time to get this show on the road, motherfuckers. Our daughter is waiting at home for us, and I don’t like disappointing her. I promised to watch *Tangled* with her.”

He comes to press a kiss to the top of my head. “Wait in the other room, baby. I won’t be long.”

I leave the cell and hurry to the window, not wanting to miss a thing.

Georgi walks to a control panel near the door and stares at Boris and Anton. When his face settles into grim lines, they begin to shake their heads.

Georgi presses a button, then quickly steps out of the room and pulls the door shut.

I watch as the grids on the vents lift up, and rats start to wiggle to get through. As soon as the first one scurries across the floor, Boris begins to shout.

Georgi takes hold of my hand, and we link our fingers.

Suddenly, the rats pour into the cell like a tidal wave, and as one jumps up Boris’ leg, Anton kicks wildly.

The shouts and wails coming from the men seem to spur on the rats who stream up their bodies, finding all the spots where their skin has been broken.

“How do holding up?” Georgi asks me.

Feeling his eyes on me, I continue to watch, not wanting to miss a second as Boris and Anton die.

Only when their screaming stops, and their heads hang backward, do I whisper, “It’s over.” My chin begins to quiver, and my eyes tear up. “It’s finally over.”

I look up at Georgi, the man who has completely changed my life, and all I see is a wonderful future where I get to raise Simi with him.

I have the family I’ve always wanted.

---

## Georgi

I wanted to wait until Boris and Anton were dead before telling Nina about the results of her blood work and scans.

Today is a big day.

We’re hosting our first barbecue. Besides my family, only Augusto, Yuki, and Adriano have been invited. I want to ease Nina into the Cosa Nostra.

Nina comes down the stairs, wearing a pale green dress that reaches all the way to her feet.

“You look stunning, *angelche moe*.”

“Thank you.” She smiles, then glances around the living room and foyer. “Where’s Simi?”

I gesture at the castle. “She’s drawing.”

I tip my head to the kitchen. “I have something to tell you.”

A curious expression forms on her face as she follows me. I lift her to sit on the island, and brace my hands on either side of her.

“Dr. Milazzo called. I got your results, but I wanted to wait until we were done with the past.”

“My results?” she asks, confusion flickering across her face.

“Your blood work and scans.”

“Oh...” Worry creeps into her eyes. “Am I okay?”

A smile curves my lips up as I nod. “You’re more than okay. There’s nothing wrong, and he says you should be able to have children.”

Gasping, her hands fly up to cover her mouth. “Really?”

“Really.” My expression turns serious as I continue, “So, I will continue using condoms. I’d like to wait a while before we even start talking about having more kids.”

“I could get birth control,” she offers softly.

“Whatever you’re comfortable with, baby. It’s your choice.”

“Georgi!” Simi calls out. “Where are you?”

“In the kitchen, *malkata mi printsesa*,” I reply before pressing a tender kiss to Nina’s lips. I help her back onto her feet, then turn to Simi as she comes in with a page in her hand.

“I made you this.”

Taking it, I look at the drawing. There’s a tall stick figure, the legs three times as long as the body. It kinda looks like a scarecrow, with two other stick figures sitting on its arms.

“That’s you.” Simi points at the picture. “You’re holding Mama and me.”

“It’s the most beautiful picture ever!” I scoop her up as I climb to my feet and walk to the fridge. “This is a big moment, Simi.”

“Why?”

“Because only the best pictures get stuck on the fridge door.”

“Yay!” She kicks her legs. “And it’s mine.”

“Baby, come help,” I tell Nina.

She hurries closer, a wide smile on her face. “What do I do?”

“I’m going to pin the page to the fridge, and you’re going to put the magnet over it.”

“Got it.”

“And me?” Simi asks.

I look down at her. “You made the drawing.”

She lets out a chuckle, then watches as Nina and I stick the page to the door.

“All done.”

We step back, and I pull Nina into my side as we stare at our first family portrait.

“Hello,” I hear Mom call.

With Simi in my arms, I walk out of the kitchen, feeling Nina slightly behind me.

“Hey.” I smell the aroma of the creamy potatoes coming from the dish in Mom’s hands. “That smells good.”

Leaning forward, I kiss Mom’s forehead, and before I can pull back, Simi also leans in and plants a kiss on Mom’s cheek.

“Take the dish.” Mom shoves it into Dad’s hands, then she reaches for Simi, and in broken Bulgarian, she says, “*El...Ela na baba.*”

“Not bad, Mom.” I hand Simi to her.

Our parents learned some of the language while Raya and I were taking lessons. Mom is better than Dad, though.

I shake my father’s hand, then pull Nina closer.

“Hi, Nina,” Mom says. “How are you? Have you settled in?”

“Yes, Mrs. Torrisi,” my woman answers shyly, her tone brimming with respect.

“Please, call me Skylar.”

Dad gives Nina a fucking chin lift, and I shoot him a glare. He clears his throat, then pats her on the shoulder as he walks to the kitchen while saying, “Nice to have you and Simi in the family, Nina.”

The elevator opens again, and Augusto, Yuki, Adriano, and Raya come in.

“Aunty Ray,” Simi shrieks. “Tickles.”

Things are a bit chaotic for a while as we all greet and Raya chases Mom and Simi around.

I can feel the nervousness coming from Nina, so I stay closer to her as we walk out onto the balcony, where everything has been set up for the barbecue.

Augusto and Adriano go to the drinks table, and soon Dad joins them, and they begin to talk about work.

I make sure that when Nina sits down, she’s near Yuki.

“How old is your daughter?” Yuki asks.

“Four. She’s going through an enchanted kingdom phase. Princes, princesses, and castles, and...” Nina’s sentence dies away.

“Yuki and Augusto got married last year,” I tell Nina. “She also had to adjust to a whole new life.”

“Really?” Nina’s eyes snap to Yuki.

“Yes,” Yuki replies. “It was very overwhelming, so if you would like to talk, I’m here.”

Yuki starts telling Nina about Japan, and a little about her past, and soon the women are lost in their conversation.

I get up, and glancing into the penthouse, I see Mom looking at the drawing on the fridge.

Changing direction, I go to her. “What do you think of our family portrait?”

“It’s so cute.”

I hear Simi chuckle, then Raya says loudly, “Come out, or I’ll huff, and I’ll puff, and I’ll blow your castle down.”

“You can’t,” Simi shouts. “It’s strong like Georgi.”

Mom places her hand against my jaw and looks up at me with love softening her eyes. “I’m proud of you, Georgi. I hope they make you happy.”

“They do.” I clear my throat then say, “I’m going to marry Nina and adopt Simi.”

Mom’s bottom lip begins to tremble. “I’d better brush up on my Bulgarian.”

We walk to the balcony again, and I pour myself a whiskey and grab a glass of wine for my woman.

When I sit down beside Nina, she’s listening to Yuki telling her about her pottery hobby. Mom takes a seat across from me and sips on her wine.

I hand Nina her glass, then lean back and say, “Guys, this isn’t a meeting. Come sit.”

The men grumble under their breath, but they join us.

I feel Nina relaxing, and she even laughs at something Mom says.

“Georgi,” Simi whispers next to the sofa.

I turn my head, and seeing my little girl being all shy, I set the tumbler down before lifting her onto my lap.

Near my ear, she whispers again, “Why are there so many people?”

I whisper back as if we’re sharing a secret. “They’re here because they’re family.”

“My family?” She glances at all of them, then points at Adriano. “Even the scary-looking man?”

“Yes, but don’t worry. He just looks mean, but he has a soft heart.”

“Okay.”

She leans her head against my chest and begins to rub my shirt between her fingers while she keeps looking at everyone.

Dad gets up again, and as always, he switches on the barbecue and begins to grill steaks. Mom hurries to his side to supervise, and soon they’re arguing about who’s in charge of grilling.

I glance at Nina, catching her staring at me with a soft smile on her lips, then she asks, “How am I doing?”

“You fit right in.” I lean down and give her a kiss. “*Our* family loves you and Simi.”

She leans into my arm and places her hand on my thigh.  
Surrounded by my family, my daughter, and the love of my life, I feel complete.  
This is what men like me burn the world down for.

## **The End.**

Thank you for reading POSSESSIVE ENEMY.  
(There is no epilogue because you'll get to see them in the next book.)

Vicious Devil is next...

If you want to hear all the news first, you're welcome to join my Facebook group, [Michelle Heard's Readers Group](#).

You can also sign up for my [newsletter](#).

# Also By Michelle Heard

Reading Order:

## MONTLAKE

*Things That Break Us*

*Every Single Broken Piece*

*My Neighbor, The Assassin*

## MAFIA ROMANCE

### THE KINGS OF MAFIA SERIES

*Tempted By The Devil*

*Craving Danger*

*Hunted By A Shadow*

*Drawn To Darkness*

*God Of Vengeance*

*Craving Revenge*

*Forceful God*

*Possessive Enemy*

*Vicious Devil*

*Saved By A God*

### MAFIA EMPIRE

*The Hermit*

*The High Priestess*

*Death*

*The Empress*

*The Devil*

# ST. MONARCH'S WORLD

## THE SAINTS SERIES

*Merciless Saints*

*Cruel Saints*

*Ruthless Saints*

*Tears Of Betrayal*

*Tears Of Salvation*

## THE SINNERS SERIES

*Taken By A Sinner*

*Owned By A Sinner*

*Stolen By A Sinner*

*Chosen By A Sinner*

*Captured By A Sinner*

## CORRUPTED ROYALS

*Destroy Me*

*Control Me*

*Brutalize Me*

*Restrain Me*

*Possess Me*

# CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE

## BEAUTIFULLY BROKEN SERIES

*Beautifully Broken*

*Beautifully Hurt*

*Beautifully Destroyed*

## **ENEMIES TO LOVERS**

*Heartless*

*Reckless*

*Careless*

*Ruthless*

*Shameless*

## **TRINITY ACADEMY**

*Falcon*

*Mason*

*Lake*

*Julian*

*The Epilogue*

## **THE HEIRS**

*Coldhearted Heir*

*Arrogant Heir*

*Defiant Heir*

*Loyal Heir*

*Callous Heir*

*Sinful Heir*

*Tempted Heir*

*Forbidden Heir*

STANDALONE SPIN-OFF - [\*Not My Hero\*](#) (Young adult romance)

## **THE SOUTHERN HEROES SERIES**

*The Ocean Between Us*

*The Girl In The Closet*

*The Lies We Tell Ourselves*

*All The Wasted Time*

*We Were Lost*

# STANDALONE

[\*Lifeline\*](#) (FBI suspense romance)

# Connect with me

[Website](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Facebook Author Page](#)

[Instagram Author Page](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Amazon](#)

---



*Your gateway to knowledge and culture. Accessible for everyone.*



[z-library.sk](http://z-library.sk)

[z-lib.gs](http://z-lib.gs)

[z-lib.fm](http://z-lib.fm)

[go-to-library.sk](http://go-to-library.sk)



[Official Telegram channel](#)



[Z-Access](#)



<https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-Library>