



A DARK,
KIDNAPPED BY MY
BEST FRIENDS DAD,
MAFIA ROMANCE

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corruption

SYLVIA RAE

Cold Corruption

A Dark Kidnapped By My Best Friend's Dad
Mafia Romance

Sylvia Rae



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Trigger Warning

DEAR READER,

This steamy romance explores the dark underworld of the mafia, so consider this your trigger warning! Things are about to get spicy up in here.

This book includes scenes featuring murder, violence, an age gap, and more adult themes. So proceed with caution, especially if that's not your cup of dirty martini.

While I aim to provide thrills, chills, and heels-over-head passion, I know these subjects affect us all differently. Your mental health matters most! If you need something lighter, check out my other books for a less dangerous yet still steamy to sweep you off your feet.

But if you're craving a walk on the wild side complete with brushes with danger, alpha males, and women who give as good as they get, buckle up! This book will take you for a ride.

Now grab your fan and cocktail of choice - your pleasure reading begins...

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Massimo

I SHOOT UPRIGHT IN bed, clutching at my chest where the nightmare sends a bullet straight through me. Gasping for breath, my eyes scrunch closed as the imagined pain corrupts my body.

That is not the worst part of the nightmare, though. No. That must relive the horror of watching my beautiful wife bleed to death on the road next to me. My fingers trace the scar of my bullet wound where my skin stings from how real the dream had been.

They shot her in the neck and chest several times. They told me I was lucky, but that was not luck. There is no luck in the horror of having to watch your most precious thing die right next to you.

I throw the duvet off my body and sit on the edge of the bed, feeling heavy and exhausted. It has been a while since I had a nightmare like that.

So real.

So vivid.

The rage of what happened all those years ago becomes as fresh as if it had happened yesterday.

“Fuck,” I say out loud and stand up. I press a button next to my bed and the curtains slide open, filling my bedroom with bright, blinding light. I blink into it, gritting my teeth, trying to force the remnants of the nightmare away.

It has been almost a year since I had a dream that bad. I should be grateful. For years I had them every night, but then slowly they started occurring less often. The pain is still just as intense whenever I think about her, though.

Perhaps it returned last night because of everything that is happening now. My wife should be here to see her daughter graduate from college. She should be here for this special moment, but she was stolen from us.

My daughter’s celebration and going away party is tonight. She and her friends are going to be heading off into the world soon and they need to let loose tonight to celebrate all they have achieved after finally finishing college. Her grades were incredible. So was her best friend. She has good taste in people; she reads them well.

Laura has known her best friend Nora since they started middle school together and have been inseparable ever since.

I’m just happy Laura had someone close to her when her mother was murdered. She needed that. I did my best to be there for her, but I know I fell short in my pain.

Now that Laura is done with college, she is headed to the UK to undertake an internship. I’m sad to see her leave, but I’m happy for her that she is so passionate about what she wants to do with her life. Tonight, we celebrate her and her starting this journey.

I make my way through the mansion toward the kitchen and touch the top of the coffee machine, springing into action. Still, anger and hatred fill my body. The images of the nightmare might be fading, but the emotions are still running through me like thick sludge.

The coffee machine beeps to tell me there is no water in it, just as my housekeeper walks into the kitchen.

“Why the fuck can’t you just do your fucking job?” I snap at her.

“Sir?” she queries, timidly.

“Water. There is no water in the fucking coffee machine.” I swipe my hand over the kitchen counter and send a bowl flying to smash against the tiled wall. The crashing sound is satisfying and releases some of the anger inside me. But not enough.

“I’m sorry, Sir. I’ll fill it and make your coffee right away.”

I know she has been busy helping to prepare for the party, but that is no excuse for a feeble mind. People need to do better.

I stride from the kitchen, through the house, and out onto the pool deck.

There is a man stringing balloons in enormous archways across the pool. The caterers are busy setting up huge white tables for the evening’s event. As I walk out the door, my leg bumps into the corner of one of the tables. “Who the fuck puts a table this close to the door? Do you want my guests falling over it?” I pick up the corner of the table and flip the entire thing over. The stark white tablecloth flaps in the breeze, trying to escape from under the turned furniture.

Why the fuck is everyone so fucking stupid?

I glare around the deck at the people setting everything up. No one says a word. Mostly, they avoid eye contact and freeze in place. At least they know their place. One wrong word and I might shoot one of these assholes and have my men bury them out in the desert before the sun sets tonight.

I run my fingers through my hair and shake my head.

“Where the hell is my coffee?” I turn back toward the house and see the housekeeper walking towards me with a tray and, finally, my coffee.

I snatch the mug off the tray and walk away.

I can’t be around these incompetent idiots anymore.

I hear Laura's laughter in the house and for a moment; she sounds just like her mother. My heart flips in my chest.

"Papa?" she calls out from the entrance hall.

"In here." My voice booms through the house.

She makes her way to the deck on the side of the house off the library, which I have decided is the only place I might find some peace. She breezes into the room with a broad smile splashed across her face.

"Good morning, Papa." She stands on her tiptoes to hug me. "Here." She presses a brown paper bag into my hand. It smells like a bacon bagel. "Everyone is too busy to make you breakfast, so I thought I would get you something. How are the decorations looking?"

The house's keeper's voice calls for Laura.

"Laura, you have a guest. He is waiting in the entrance hall." She says.

"Oh, Max is here," Laura chirps, a bright smile gracing her lips. She skips off to let her boyfriend in without waiting for my reply or comment.

Max is a good kid. He is not quite good enough for my daughter, but I'm not worried as she will leave him behind when she goes for her internship. They are talking about long distance, but I know that is never going to happen. As soon as she gets out there into the world, she will forget about this puppy love and focus on herself and her dreams.

I sit down on the deck chair outside and breathe a deep sigh.

Maybe I should get out of the house until the evening's events start. Try to clear my head and wash away this horrible mood the nightmare has left me in.

It is late evening, and people are pouring into the house. The music is thrumming loudly through every room and there is a wild bubble of conversation from every corner. Laura and her best friend, Nora, are the life of the party. They are both wearing short dresses covered in sequins and lace. Moving

from group to group, they are the perfect hostesses and love every moment.

My eyes are on Nora, though. I'm used to seeing her in jeans and a hoodie, her arms full of study material, and her backpack full of textbooks.

But now she dresses as if she is going to the Oscars.

Her black, straight hair is pinned up in an elegant style with loose strands falling around her face. Her big, dark eyes are round, a unique trait for her Japanese family. I stare into her eyes for a moment. They are sharp and inquisitive. Her dress is short enough that when she bends over, a man might glimpse of something he is not supposed to see. Her narrow waist curves out over her round hips and her full breasts are eye-catching, just visible through the lace across her chest.

My eyes fall onto her rose-tinted, plump lips and when she glances across at me and waves, her eyes shine with life.

I have been fixated on her all night.

I can't believe how grown up she looks. Elegant, womanly, and far too sexy to be left to roam this party without a man at her side.

Looking from her to Laura, I see a stark difference. Laura, I can't see in any other way than as the little girl she was when she was learning to walk in these hallways.

Nora, despite knowing her practically all her life, I see differently. Nora is a woman. She is grown up and is ready to take on the world. The dress she is wearing suggests she knows it too, and the way she moves, walks, and holds herself, demands my attention. I have seen the other men at the party watching her, but she is far too sophisticated to be interested in them and has shown no one any interest in that way.

While I'm watching her, a young man from their college, a boy really, leans close to Nora, his hands running over her waist, too touchy for my liking. He is drunk and sloppy. She turns her face away when he whispers something in her ear. She looks uncomfortable but polite.

His hand runs across her ass, and he squeezes.

I'll cut it off. He clearly wants to lose that limb. I'll not just cut his hand off, I'll remove his entire arm.

Nora gracefully brushes him away and he looks sour. I smirk at his disappointment. She does not want a boy. What she wants is a man.

I walk over to where Nora and my daughter are standing with a group of their friends.

"Papa." Laura giggles, a little tipsy from the champagne.

I smile and kiss her on the cheek, then turn my attention to Nora. "How are you doing, Nora?" I ask, trying not to make it too obvious my eyes are dragging over every inch of her body.

"I'm good. Thank you for letting us have our party here." She smiles at me and my blood runs hot. The things I want to do to those lips.

"Do you need a refill on your champagne?" I wave a waiter over.

"I can't believe Laura is leaving us. Off to the UK. What in the world am I going to do without her?" Nora is smiling, watching my daughter, sadness in her eyes. I glance at Max, who has been attached to Laura all evening. I've found it quite disturbing to watch. But Laura is happy, and that is all I care about. I have already discussed with the boy what will happen to him if he ever makes her cry.

"How are you feeling?" Nora asks me.

"Feeling?" I ask, confused by the question.

"Yes, your daughter is leaving. Are you going to have empty nest syndrome?" She laughs and the beautiful sound vibrates through me like music.

"No," I say, "I'm happy for her."

I know I'll miss her. I'll miss the sound of her voice in the empty halls of the house. I'll miss her overly happy and enthusiastic charisma. I'll miss her. But in truth, I'm happy she is leaving and going somewhere safer. Ever since her mother was killed, I have spent every day of my life worrying I would

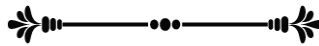
get a call about my daughter as well. She is better off away from me.

“So, Nora, when did you fill out so beautifully?” I grin. She giggles and looks down.

“I’m not sure what you mean. I have looked this way for a while now.” Of course, she has. She was just hiding it under her comfortable college attire.

“Is that a fact,” I say, “and will you be off somewhere too? An internship or job lined up?”

She waves her hand in the air to dismiss the pressure of the question casually. “Not everyone is as focused and forward-thinking as Laura. Some of us take a little more time to decide what we want.” She eyes me up and down and my eyes narrow at her boldness.



Nora

L AURA HANDS ME A shot and raises her own in the air, shouting, “To freedom!” Then she laughs loudly and we down it, scrunching our faces as the alcohol burns down our throats. Freedom? College might be finished but the internship she is headed toward is certainly not going to equal freedom. I chuckle.

I can feel a heavy gaze boring into me, not for the first time tonight. And when I turn to see where it is coming from, I spot Massimo, Laura’s father, on the deck, looking down across the pool to where I’m standing. I guess he might be watching his daughter, but that is not the case. When our eyes lock, he smirks ever so slightly.

He is a tall man with broad, muscular shoulders and thick, toned arms. He is built solidly and when he stands looking down at me, I usually feel a little intimidated. I know the stories about him. I know what he does for a living. And from what I have seen, growing up with Laura as my best friend, I doubt any of the stories are just stories.

He is a mafia boss, after all.

The world he lives in is so different from the normal world. Violence, power, and money. Massimo is a force to be

reckoned with and the power he holds around him is way too fucking sexy.

I have been glancing over at him all night, enjoying glimpsing the thick muscles pressing up against the fabric of his suit.

I shake my head, smiling at myself and these inappropriate thoughts. I can't be looking at him or thinking about him this way. He is my best friend's dad. She would hate me for that.

I force my attention away from Massimo and back toward the group of friends I'm standing with. Ever since Laura met Max, she has been a little too busy to spend as much time with me as before. But I'm happy for her. Her father does not know they are planning to get married. I have doubts about whether it will all work out, but people should be allowed to dream big whenever they want to.

I just wish I knew what I wanted.

I sip on the champagne I'm holding and glance around the party at all of my friends from college, as well as many of Massimo's friends, and, of course, their family. The house is packed. It is an incredible vibe.

Tony, from my biochemistry class, wanders over to me, looking too drunk to still be standing. He ignores everyone else and leans close to me. I know he has had a crush on me since the first year of college, but he is too immature for my liking. Most of the guys in college are. Yes, they might be tall, muscular, and fun - but they are not men yet. They still have a lot to learn about what a woman wants. I'm not like Laura. She enjoys the softness and tenderness that Max offers her.

I want something else. I'm not sure yet what that is, but I know it is not Tony.

Tony whispers something in my ear I cannot hear, but when he squeezes my ass, I can guess what he is suggesting. I lean away from him and then brush his hand off my body. "Tony, I think we have had this conversation before. Perhaps you need to take a little walk and give me my space back." At first, his expression turns bitterly angry, but then he covers it with a slick smile. "I can have any girl I want, you know."

I laugh. “Then go get whichever girl you want. Just leave me alone.”

I feel bad because he is a friend of mine, but he is drunk and when he is drunk, he gets too forward and every time he tries his luck; I lose more respect for him.

It is his sloppy technique. No. I’m wrong. It is just him. I don’t find him attractive at all.

I glance back towards Massimo. That is a man. That is what I find attractive.

He sees me watching and steps off the deck towards where we are standing. The hot summery night suddenly feels hotter, and I stand up a little straighter, wanting to see if he looks at me or not.

Massimo chats to Laura for a moment and then he turns his body toward me, giving me all of his attention. He does not even blink at the other girls standing around us, beautiful girls wearing beautiful dresses. Yet he is looking at me.

I grin.

He asks me about trivial things, but I can tell he is looking at me with intent. I know both of us are aware it can never happen, but there is no harm in a little flirting, is there?

He calls the waiter over to get me a fresh glass of champagne. I hear a friend behind me remark that her champagne is also empty, but he does not even seem to notice.

“So, Nora, when did you fill out so beautifully?” His voice fills with darkness and suggestion. I laugh and look down. I feel as though I might blush at this little game we are suddenly playing.

“I’m not sure what you mean. I have looked this way for a while now.” I look at my dress. Laura chose it. I thought it was too revealing, but she insisted it looked ‘smoking hot.’ I guess she was right.

“Is that a fact?” Massimo says. “And will you be off somewhere, too? An internship or job lined up?”

I dismiss his question with a wave. Honestly, I'm a little tired of people asking me. I just don't have the answers yet and despite what society thinks, it is okay not to have those answers.

"Not everyone is as focused and forward-thinking as Laura. Some of us take a little more time to decide what we want."

I eye him up and down, hoping he catches the playful hint in my reply. He does and his eyes narrow.

His dark brown eyes pierce into me as though he could burn my clothing off just by looking at it and I feel my entire body begin to heat. The waiter arrives with two glasses of champagne on a silver tray. Massimo hands me one and holds one in his large hand. His long fingers wrap around the delicate glass as though he is caressing it.

He holds the glass towards me. "To not having to know what you want to do," he says with a smirk. We touch the edge of our glasses to each other, but my eyes are on his mouth, watching the way his lips curl at the corners into that devilish smile.

He steps closer, towering over me, and my heart races when he reaches out and his big hand wraps around my waist. He leans down, his lips against my ear. His voice is a deep growl that sends shivers through me.

"There is great freedom in not having a plan, Nora. The world is at your feet."

My body shivers with delight at his voice. I feel every inch of me respond to his touch, and it takes a lot of self-control not to brush my face against his and touch my lips on his skin.

Then he steps back, his expression hungry.

I take a deep breath and look around. My friends are watching closely. Some look horrified and others look curious.

Laura is not here though. I'm grateful for that. She has gone off somewhere with Max.

I need to pull myself together. This is ridiculous. A little fun flirting is one thing, but now my thoughts are leaning towards

literally throwing myself at this man and begging him to fuck me. He is too hot. He is too dangerous, and he is going to get me into a lot of trouble.

Shit, Nora, get a grip. You have had too much to drink, standing here flirting with your best friend's father.

"I should find Laura," I say with a grin I cannot hide. I hope he cannot see straight through me. I might die of embarrassment if he knew what I wanted him to do to me.

"Yes, you should. She is leaving tomorrow, and you want to enjoy your last party together." He smiles and downs his champagne. He reaches out and his fingers brush across my arm, sending slight shivers through me. "Behave, Nora. I'm watching you," he says with danger in his voice.

I smile innocently at him. Then he turns to walk away.

"Oh, my fuck, Nora. Are you kidding me?" A shrill voice comes from behind me. "He was flirting with you." Samantha sounds horrified, but also deeply jealous. "That man was flirting with you."

Another one of our friends steps closer. "That man is Laura's father," she says, staring after him, the drool practically dripping from her mouth.

"Oh, stop it guys, don't be ridiculous. I have known him since I was too young to remember. He was just being nice," I say, knowing I'm wrong.

"No, that was a definite flirt," my friend chimes back.

"Well, if it was, it was entirely playful. Obviously. It meant nothing," I say, reassuring them, but wishing otherwise.

My heart is still racing from his touch.

But regardless of how he makes me feel, and the fun of flirting with him in the moment, I'm still fully aware that it would never happen. I guess it could happen in my dreams tonight when I'm lying in bed alone. But no, I know it will not ever happen. I could not do that to Laura.

I stare after him, a light smile pulling at my lips. Then, when my friends continue to talk, I force myself to look away.

“He is dangerous, Nora. Dangerous. He has this whole sexy bad boy vibe going on, but honestly, he is dangerous. It is not just for show.”

I glare at Samantha. “Sweetie, you have had too much to drink. Just relax. Nothing is going to happen.”

“Well, he was all over you just now. He did not even glance at any of us,” she says bitterly, and again I get the sense she is jealous.

“You have a boyfriend, Samantha. Why would you want him looking at you?” I laugh.

“It’s nice to be checked out, you know.” She giggled, realizing how intense she had made everything seem. “Where is that boy anyway? I have not seen him in a while. I sent him to get me a drink, like an hour ago.” She eyes my champagne. “You got your drink in, like, two seconds.”

“I saw your boy by the bar earlier.” I laugh, sipping my champagne and pointing toward the poolside bar. “I’m going to find Laura. Does anyone know where she went?”

I find Laura and Max making out on the deck at the side of the house where her father cannot see them.

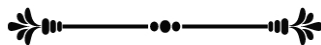
“Clothes on, I’m here,” I say loudly, giving them enough time to pull it together.

“Nora.” Laura jumps up, pulling her clothing straight, and comes over to hug me. “I’m going to miss you so much.”

“You are just going to the UK, you know, not another planet. I’m sure I’ll come and visit you.”

“I know,” she pouts, “but it is not the same as seeing you every day, and sharing a dorm room with you, and all the fun we get up to every single day. How am I going to survive out there in the big, bad world without you?”

I grin and hug her hard. “You are going to do amazingly, Laura.”



Massimo

I HEAR FOOTSTEPS COMING through the living room towards the kitchen. Nora is walking sleepily past me, where I'm sitting in the dark. In the kitchen, I hear her pouring a glass of water.

"Nora, are you comfortable in the guest bedroom?" I ask when she returns, heading back to bed. She jumps a little and almost spills her water. "Massimo, I didn't see you sitting there. You startled me."

"Have you been sleeping comfortably?" I ask again.

"Oh, not really. My mind is too busy thinking. It feels like tonight just rushed past and now Laura is leaving for real tomorrow, and I don't know if I'm ready for that," she says.

I reach out for her arm and pull her onto the sofa next to me.

"Sit with me," I asked.

She sighs. Still lost in thought.

"I'll get you something to drink. It should relax you a little. You just stay there. Don't move," I say, leaving to pour us something other than champagne, of which I cannot handle another glass. I want something with substance.

I walk over to my drinks cabinet where I keep my rare collection of whiskey. I pour two glasses for us, Yamazaki is

my drink of choice. It is an incredible whiskey that I have to import, but it is worth it. I carry the glasses through to the living room.

Nora is leaning forward and massaging her feet. “It felt good to get those high heels off my feet. Although they are pretty, I have not worn a pair in so long.” She laughs.

“More than pretty,” I say, my eyes on her slender legs while she runs her hands over her skin.

I feel myself stir and close my eyes to block the image of her body.

“Here,” I say, handing her the Yamazaki on ice.

“Oh, my goodness.” She takes it from me. “Whiskey? There is no way I’m going to wake up tomorrow without a hangover. I have been mixing drinks all night.” She giggles and sips the cool, golden liquid.

“Not just any whiskey, this is Yamazaki,” I say, and her eyes shoot wide.

“Oh, isn’t that rare?” She asks.

“It is,” I reply casually.

My gaze follows her lips.

I sit down on the sofa next to her and stretch my arm out behind her head. I sigh and sip my drink. “I can’t believe Laura is leaving. But I’m happy she has a plan and is excited about it.”

“I’m a little jealous she is rushing from one adventure straight into the next. I feel like I should have done more thinking between my studies,” Nora says, leaning into the couch and resting her head on the back, unaware my fingers are touching her soft, dark hair.

“Well, you must have some idea of what you want to do?” I comment.

“You would think so, but not really. Well, that is not true. I mean, I studied biochemistry, and I’m fascinated by the effects of medication on the human body. So, I’m looking at possibly

enrolling in the Human Genetics and Medicine Institution in Japan,” she says, thoughtfully. “But for now, it is just an idea.”

“Medicine, is it? So, drugs?”

She laughs. “Not those types of drugs. Sure, I found the sections about street drugs intriguing, but they aren’t my main area of interest.”

“I have a lab here in New York. I could give you a job there. They research the effects of chemicals on the human body. Specifically, the pleasure centers of the brain.”

She looks uncomfortable for a moment. Then grins. “I think I need to have my first employment at a place I can add to my CV without people double-checking and wondering, um, you know.” She waves a hand in the air and smiles nervously.

“Nonsense. No one would dare question your experience after you have worked for someone like me,” I tell her, swirling the cold liquid in my glass in circles and watching her out of the corner of my eye.

She looks away from me, perhaps uncomfortable with the conversation, perhaps nervous about being alone with me. I don’t know if she and I have ever been alone before.

I shift on the couch, turning my body towards her, our legs brushing against each other, and she looks down at where my body has touched hers. Her lips open part. I can read her like a book. She is thinking the same thoughts I’m thinking.

Everyone has left.

No one would even know if something were to happen between us.

“What kind of job would I have in your lab?” she asks me curiously.

“Any job you want, I can make that happen for you.”

She laughs. “I don’t know. My heart is still set on Japan, and my grades make me a competitive candidate for the University of Tokyo. Also, it is closer to my mom.” She is chattering,

perhaps trying to distract herself from the heat running between us.

“Good heavens, this whiskey is going straight into my head.” She giggles. Then her smile fades and she looks lost.

I brush the hair from her cheek and tuck it behind her ear. “What is wrong, Nora? What is bothering you?”

She stares out of the window into the darkness outside. “I’m just thinking about Laura again.”

“Honestly, I have been trying not to think about it too much. I got used to her being away at college, but she was still visiting me every week. Now, I guess I don’t know when I’ll see her again after she leaves. There is no telling what opportunities will present themselves in her life once she has completed her internship, or where her career will lead her.” I think out loud.

Nora is watching me closely. She can see the change in my expression. I don’t like to open up to people or show them how I’m feeling, but I know she is feeling the same way, about to lose her best friend, and with the way life goes, You never know when you’ll see someone for the last time.

She nods thoughtfully. “Throughout all the difficulties, Laura has been the one consistent presence in my life. I never knew my father lacked that guidance in life. I guess it strengthened me. My mother is a strong woman, so she taught me how to be strong. She is in Japan though and I have no family here in New York. I guess, in all honesty, Laura is my family. She has been forever and now that she is going away, I’m feeling like I’m going to be very lonely. I kind of don’t know what to do with myself.”

Her voice trails off and I see her fighting tears.

I swallow hard, not wanting to get lost in the depressing thoughts of being alone. I have to admit that even though Laura is grown up and beginning to live her life, she is my daughter and the person who is the closest to me since her mother died. I’m going to miss her more than words can say and most likely, more than I expected to. I’m so used to

blocking out emotions, everything expressed in some form of anger, instead of letting things get to me properly.

I shake my head, downing the last of my drink, feeling the traces of alcohol on the edge of my vision.

“What do you think of Max? Laura’s boyfriend?” I say, wanting to change the subject.

“He is a sweet guy. I don’t know. He isn’t very talkative with me. Laura must be happy because he is so besotted with her. To have someone so obsessed and in love with you. I have a feeling he would go to the ends of the earth for her. I wish I knew what that felt like,” she says, dreamily. “But it is her first love, and we know that the first love never lasts. Let’s be honest. This is the real world.”

“And now she is moving away,” I state.

“I know,” she agrees. “It’s amazed me she and Max believe they can make a long-distance relationship work. College romance that lasts throughout college is rare. Trying to keep the spark alive from afar through the ups and downs, they’re setting themselves up for a challenge. Although I know he makes her happy.”

“That boy is too young to know how to make a woman happy. He has a lot to learn before he knows how women truly work.” I brush my fingers over Nora’s shoulder. My arm still resting on the back of the sofa behind her head. She glances down at my fingers on her skin and the smallest of smiles touches her lips.

“Why don’t you have a boyfriend, Nora?” I ask.

“Well, as you say. Boy. I want a man. Or I’m happy being alone.” Her eyes are locked on my chest, running over my body, down to my crotch. I feel my cock stir at her blatant advance. My hand slides off the back of the couch, wrapping my fingers around the back of her neck. She jumps a little but does not move away.

I pull her toward me, and she only hesitates for a moment before she kisses me. The whiskey tastes sweet on her tongue.

Her lips are hot against mine and from the moment our lips press together, I know I'm going to fuck her.

While I'm kissing her, I pull her onto my lap. I can see again she hesitates, but only for a brief second. I whisper in her ear, "No one will know, Nora," and then wrap her legs on either side of my lap. I grab her waist and pull her up against me so her pussy is on my cock.

She gasps, realizing how hard I'm already.

I hold the back of her head and press my mouth against hers, slipping my tongue between her lips and tasting her again.

A low growl escapes my lips. Fuck! She is so young, her skin is so smooth, and her body is so tight.

I hold her hip tightly and rock her back and forth on top of me. The thin fabric of her panties is not covering much, and I know she can feel me.

She moans softly.

I lift her off me, tossing her onto the sofa pillows, and stand to unbutton my shirt. Her eyes are locked on my chest, her gaze wanders over the black-inked dragon that runs over my shoulder and down to my rib cage. My muscles move and make it seem like the beast is alive.

I pull my pants off and yank the oversized T-shirt she was sleeping in.

Pulling her legs open wide, I lower myself, dipping my fingers under her lace underwear and pulling them to the side. I bury my face in her pussy.

She tastes of innocence and youth. I slip my tongue into her pussy and lick the inside of her. She lifts her hips and moans softly, her fingers digging into the fabric of the sofa and her hair falling loose around her face.

My cock is rigid with need and each time I dip my tongue into her and taste her, I imagine slamming my cock deep inside her. Soon I cannot take the images that swarm my mind and sit up. I grab her by the hips and throw her over, pressing her face into the sofa. I rip her underwear from her body and I kneel

behind her. She arches her back and lifts her ass into the air, begging me to slide my cock inside her.

“Do you want this, Nora?” I say, pressing the tip of my cock against her pussy, sliding it between her lips and covering my cock in her juices.

“Yes,” she murmurs against the pillows.

“Beg me for it,” I growl.

She lifts her ass higher and presses her hips backward, trying to guide me into her body. “Please,” she says.

“Say my name. I want to hear it.”

“Please, Massimo,” she whispers, and my name rolls off her lips like fire.

I thrust into her. She is so wet that I slide right in. Her pussy is so tight it clamps around my cock and the pressure feels incredible.

“Oh,” she shouts.

“Am I too big for your tiny pussy?” I laugh, thrusting into her again. She gasps again and I grab her hips so she cannot move away. I thrust into her again, then slide out slowly, and she moans with relief and pleasure.

“Do you think you can handle me, tesoro mio?” I ask with a husky deepness to my voice. She wiggles her ass slightly, begging for more, so I push my cock into her small body, buried deep in her, her tight pussy wall locks me in her.

I can't help but moan with pleasure. Then I move in and out of her with a steady rhythm. I run my hands over the curve of her ass, across her back, and then knot one of my hands in her hair, pulling her head back and making her arch even more. The sight of her is driving me wild. I push into her harder, deeper, and faster.

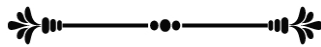
She cried out loudly while I had fits of her hair.

“I bet you have never been fucked like this before,” I growl, slamming my cock into her.

She shudders beneath me, I feel her pussy tighten and pulse over me. Pleasure washed over me as I thrust again and again. She turns her face into the pillow and cries out loudly, her fingers digging into the fabric. I feel her come all over my cock and the pressure of it sends me over the edge. I lean my hand against the back of her head, smothering her face against the pillow, and I explode into her.

When I'm done, I slide out of her and lean back. She lifts her head, panting.

"Now come to bed," I say. "I'm not done with you."



Nora

BEFORE I EVEN OPEN my eyes, I can feel the headache thundering against my skull. I lie with my head on the soft pillow, wishing I was not awake yet, pretending I can still sleep for another hour when I wake up and not feel this hangover. I move and notice how sore my body is. It feels as though I have run a marathon.

Then memory assaults me with the truth. Oh. Fuck. Please tell me this is not true.

I blink my eyes open, waiting for them to focus, and I see it is, in fact, true. I'm in Massimo's bed. I'm in my best friend's dad's bed. Oh fuck. Images of last night flash through my mind. Oh, my word, did he make me do those things? My body pulses and stirs at the thought of it. Oh no, I cannot get all worked up again now. I look to the side to see Massimo is still asleep beside me. I blink again, willing the hangover to disappear.

I need to get out of here. This is not okay. What if Laura arrives home? She left with Max last night and told me to meet her for lunch today. She has no idea I even slept here. It will be so obvious what Massimo and I have done.

I slowly lift my head off the pillow, not wanting to move too fast and make the pain worse.

Massimo is lying on his stomach, and the muscles of his back are taut and toned. The dragon tattoo runs down his spine and across his ass. I gaze at it for a long time, picturing how his body looked when he was thrusting into me last night.

No, Nora. Get up and get out. This is terrible. What you have done is terrible.

Shit. I can't believe this is happening.

I slowly slide my body to the side of his massive bed and swing my legs over the edge, looking around the room to see if I can find my clothing anywhere. I spot the tee shirt I was sleeping in over a chair near the window. It is still dark in the room with the curtains closed, but I carefully make my way towards it trying my best not to make any noise.

I'm standing naked in the room when suddenly the curtains begin to open. The bright light shocks my brain and stings my eyes for a moment, and I hear a deep chuckle behind me.

"Sneaking out?" Massimo says, lying on his back with his hand behind his head.

"Um, yes, I need to go and, um, I need to get going. I'm meeting Laura soon for lunch. I don't want her to see me here." It horrified me to be standing naked, in full daylight, in front of my friend's father.

His eyes trace over me, and the smirk stays on his lips.

"Stay for a coffee before you go," he says casually.

"What if Laura stops by here? What if she sees me still here?"

I can't possibly stay for coffee. I need to get out of here right now. I should have left last night. I can't believe I did what I did. My eyes glance over his body.

Hunger fills my mind. Not for food, but for more of him.

I look away, my cheeks flushing bright red. I can feel the heat of the blush on my skin.

I realize I'm standing like a deer frozen in headlights and I quickly move to grab my tee shirt, pulling it over my body. I cannot see my underwear anywhere. Dying with

embarrassment, I decided that wherever my panties were; they were going to have to stay. I need to leave.

I turn to Massimo, who is still lying in bed, relaxed, his eyes on me.

“Um, thank you,” I mumble, speaking quickly and turning toward the door.

“There are headache tablets in the kitchen drawer,” he says as I walk toward the bedroom door, desperate to get myself away from his intense stare.

“Thanks. Again,” I say and want to slap my palm on my forehead at the stupidity of those words. “See you soon. Maybe. Um. Bye.”

I walk away and hear his deep chuckle behind me.

In the guest room, I get dressed and grab my things.

I find two headache tablets and down them with a glass of water. My skull is raging. I spot my shoes in the lounge and remember how Massimo fucked me from behind on the sofa.

Shit. Get out of here right now.

I scratch around in my handbag to find my car keys and then let myself out of the front door.

Four weeks after the party...

It has been weeks since Laura's farewell party and she is long gone somewhere in the UK. She is loving it there and I'm so happy for her. Our lunch the morning she left was such a challenge for me. I was so uncomfortable sitting with her, knowing what I had done the night before. But she thought my awkwardness was because of my hangover, something she also suffered with, so at least that made it easier.

Laura has been busy, so I have had little contact with her, and I haven't heard from Massimo at all. Although he frequently comes to mind, I have more pressing matters to concentrate on, so this doesn't bother me.

Since Laura left, I have been putting my application together for the institute in Japan. They have asked me for an essay about why I would be a good fit for them and a transcript of my results. I close my computer, exhausted. I have just finished the essay and sent everything off to them. I feel excited, but also a little nauseous with nervousness. I rarely suffer from this kind of anxiety though, and I clutch at my stomach, wondering why it would be affecting me now. I know this is a big step toward my future, but this seems extreme. Maybe it is just my period is about to start and that is causing the stomach cramps.

Suddenly, I bolt up from my chair.

My period? I have been so busy planning my life that I had not realized I was late.

No. No. No. This is bad. Is it just stress? Can stress make you late? I'm at a loss. I should make a trip to Dr. Yamamoto's office. She is an old family friend, and I can ask her for advice. I called her office and let the receptionist know this is an emergency. I have to see the doctor as soon as possible. She squeezed me for the afternoon appointment.

Dr. Yamamoto walks into the waiting room, "Hi how is my fav —" A genuine smile freezes on her face, and she does a double take.

"Is everything alright? What is going on?"

"I think I might be pregnant," I say, my voice shaky.

She puts her hand on my shoulder reassuringly. "Try not to stress too much yet. Let's get a test and confirm."

She runs two pregnancy tests to ensure that if one comes back positive; it is not by mistake. "Okay, those are definitely both positive," she says calmly.

"Nora, does the baby's father know? Is he going to be around to help you?" she asked gently.

Tears spring to my eyes. “It’s Massimo,” I admit, my voice barely above a whisper.

Her jaw drops in shock. “Massimo? But isn’t he...”

“Laura’s father, yes,” I say, fresh tears spilling down my cheeks.

She’s silent for a moment, processing this revelation. “Oh Nora...” she says finally, compassion in her voice. She pulls me into a hug.

I cling to her, sobbing into her shoulder. “I don’t know what I was thinking. It was a drunken mistake. Laura can never find out.”

“Shh it’s okay,” she soothes, stroking my hair. “We’ll figure this out. But you have to tell Massimo. He deserves to know.”

I nod reluctantly. As scared as I am, I know she’s right. I have to be honest with him, no matter how difficult it will be. Dr. Yamamoto continues to comfort me as I cry, reassuring me I’m not alone.

I head back home and feel so alone. The one person who I would normally speak to, Laura, is the person I will never call about this issue.

My hands shake as I dial my mom’s number. She picks up on the second ring.

“Hi sweetie, how are you?” she says brightly.

“Mom...” I choke out before the sobs overtake me.

“Kiyomi, what is it?” she asks, alarm rising in her voice.

“I’m pregnant,” I manage to get out between sobs.

“What?” she gasps. “Oh, honey...”

“And the father is Massimo,” I blurt out.

“Massimo?” she shrieks. “Laura’s father Massimo? The gangster?”

“Yes,” I whisper, choking back more sobs.

“No, no, no,” she cries. “Kiyomi, how could you? That man is a monster! What were you thinking, fooling around with

him?”

I can't respond, overcome by gut-wrenching sobs.

“I can't believe this,” she shouts angrily. “My daughter sleeping with that criminal! You know what kind of man he is! The lives he's destroyed! I didn't raise you to make a mistake like this!”

Her words cut through me. “I'm so sorry, Mama,” I whimper.

She takes a few shaky breaths, trying to calm herself. “Kiyomi, you listen to me. We will get through this. But you cannot have this baby, do you understand? We need to take care of this.”

I stare at the screen after the call disconnects. What am I going to do? I could never give up the baby, but I cannot have it here. My entire life feels like it has ended at this moment. I sit down in my desk chair and stare at the wall. My breathing evens out and I continue to stare. Too scared to move or think.

My phone rings. “Mom?”

“Kiyomi. Pack your bags. I have arranged a flight for you to Japan. You are going to have the baby far away where no one can find you. There is a family who I'm very close with. I'm not sure if you will remember them, but they lived near us when we stayed in Ogata City when you were a little girl. Before we moved to the city. I think it is the best place for you to go where Massimo cannot reach you.” She speaks fast, with determination and resolve in her voice. I can tell her only goal right now is to make sure her daughter and her unborn grandchild will be safe.

“Mom, I don't want to be pregnant. I'm so scared,” I confess, terrified.

“Everything is going to be okay, Nora, I promise. Just pack your bags and get to the airport right now. We cannot risk you being in New York for another moment.”

I hang up the phone.

My roommate walks into my room with wide eyes. “Are you pregnant?” she asks, in shock. “Sorry. I overheard bits of the

conversation. Do you know who the father is? Is it Tony?" She pushes me for information, and I just stare at her. Thank goodness she did not hear everything. "I think you misheard." I say, "I'm heading out for a bit, I will be back later." I lie to her, hoping she leaves. She eyes me for a moment. "Okay, Nora, but don't think for a moment we will not talk about this later," she says and then walks out of my room. She calls from the living room, "I'm going to Target. Do you need anything?" "No thanks," I call back, grateful she will be out of the house while I'm packing my bags.

And that is how I ended up in a small town in Japan called Ogata. The same place I grew up in. Living far away from a big city and hiding where Massimo could never find me.

Eight months later...

The first time I held my newborn son, an overwhelming love flooded my entire being. I gazed at his perfect tiny face and promised I would always protect him. But the harsh reality of his uncertain future soon shattered my bliss.

As the adoption paperwork was signed, I had to choke back sobs. Handing my baby over to the Aois was the most excruciating pain I've ever felt. It was as if a piece of my soul was being ripped away.

At night, I clutch his blankets close, breathing in his scent. I weep for the stolen moments I should have been rocking him to sleep. My breasts ache with unspent milk, my empty arms longing to hold him again.

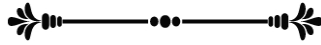
Watching him gurgle and coo in Mrs. Aoi's arms, I die a little inside. I should be the one making him laugh, kissing his soft cheeks. But for his sake, I cannot be his mother.

Leaving him will demolish what's left of my fractured heart. But he deserves so much more than I can provide. A stable home, loving parents, and a quiet village to keep him far from the dangers of my past.

So I will find the strength to slip away unnoticed. And spend my life missing milestones I can never share in. His first steps, first words, first day of school - all gifts for his new parents. My penance for bringing him into this unjust world.

He will never know of me, his mother. But I will love him fiercely, painfully, from afar. And pray his adopted family gives him the beautiful life I dreamed of but could not provide.

All that matters to me is that he is safe.



Massimo

I SIT AT THE bar in the VIP section watching the women dance. I'm bored and about to leave the club when someone who looks familiar walks towards me, smiling.

I stare at her without smiling back. Too many people like to pretend they know me before asking me for some kind of favor. Too many people have come short after owing me a favor in return and not repaying it fast enough.

The young girl slides against the bar counter, standing next to me, a little too close.

"You are Laura's father," she says, clearly a little tipsy.

"Who is asking?" I agree, eyeing her.

"I was at that party at your house. What was it, like almost a year and a half ago now?" She giggles and I lean away from her.

"I see," I say, getting ready to leave.

"How is Laura? And Nora? Are they still friends?"

At the mention of Nora's name, my interest piques. I have not seen or heard from her since that night. I thought it was best not to reach out as she was my daughter's friend. However, our encounter is something I often think about, and I wouldn't mind reliving it.

“Did Nora end up getting into the University of Tokyo?” I ask her friend.

“How should I know? She just disappeared. Poof. Off the map. After finding out she was pregnant. Her roommate told me about it. She was worried because she went out and came back to find Nora’s room empty. Hey, do you want to get a drink?”

She leans over to the bar. Flirting at the best, but my mind is somewhere else.

“When did Nora disappear? How long ago was this?” I demand to know, a weird sensation weighing heavy in my stomach.

“Mmm. I think it was literally like three or four weeks after the party. It was pretty soon after the party, though.” She grins and touches my arm. “Are you sure you don’t want to have a drink with me?”

I roughly brush her hand off my arm, and she pulls her lips into a pout.

“Where is Nora?” I stand up, towering over the girl.

She stammers and shrinks away. “I, I, I swear. I don’t have any idea. She vanished. That’s why I was asking you if you knew. No one knows where she went.”

I grab her arm. “Who is the father of her baby?” I growl into her face.

She looks terrified. She shouts, “I don’t know, I promise.” When I release her arm, she stumbles away.

I storm out of the club and start up my Bentley Mulsanne. My foot slams onto the accelerator and I swerve out into the street. There is a loud hoot and I ignore it, gunning the engine toward my home. I’m furious. Three or four weeks after we were together?

I am glad I didn’t ask the driver to drive me today. I enjoy being in control, especially when driving one of my favorite cars. I angrily dial a number and speak to the man on the other end.

“My daughter had a friend. Her name was Nora Tanaka. I want to know where she is. She was pregnant. Find out who the father is.”

“si Capo” comes the instant reply, and I hang up.

The chances I’m the father are high. But that means she has hidden the truth from me for over a year. She has hidden the fact I have a child. I run through red lights and stop signs. I don’t care. The rage is racing through me, and I need to let it out somehow.

I slam on breaks as a truck crosses the four-way stop in front of me and my fist presses hard into the car horn. “levati di mezzo, cazzo!” I yelled and skidded around the truck and continued flooring the pedal all the way home. I’m ready to tear someone apart. Anyone who gets in my way will do.

I message the man who I called earlier.

Me: Anything?

Him: Not yet.

Me: Drop everything and deal with this right now. This is THE priority. Nothing else matters until this is resolved. Get the other men on this too. I want to know by tomorrow morning. I want answers.

Him: si Capo

I pace up and down the halls of my house. I have sent all the staff home, for fear I might kill one of them if they get in my way right now. I clench and unclench my fists and keep checking my phone.

I don’t sleep at all that night, I just wander the halls. I’m sipping whiskey and glued to my phone.

In the morning, I call Laura. I want to ask her if she has heard from Nora without raising suspicion.

“Hi, Dad,” she greets, and I can hear the smile in her voice.

“Hi, amor mio, How are you? How are things?” I ask.

We chit-chat about her life for a bit before I slip the question into the conversation. “Whatever happened to that friend of

yours, Nora?”

“Oh, Dad, it is the weirdest thing. She literally vanished. There were even some rumors about her being pregnant, but I know she was not seeing anyone, so I doubt that is true. I have tried so many times to find her, but she is just gone.”

“Gone, you say?” Wondering how she even disappears from Laura’s life. They were so close. “Are you sure she vanished? You are not hiding something from me?”

Laura laughs. “What in the world question is that?” she asks. “Oh sorry, papa, they are calling me. I have to run.” She says a quick goodbye and hangs up.

I’m about to put my phone back in my pocket when it rings. I answer quickly. “Yes?”

“Boss, we asked around. She is like a ghost. But we found out she was pregnant. There was a test done at a doctor near where she was staying. The doctor is a family friend of Nora.”

“And who is the father?” I demand.

“No idea. It is just a basic pregnancy test. It does not give that kind of information.”

“Give me the doctor’s address. If she is a family friend, she will know more than what is in the report. I want her work and home address.”

I hung up the phone, and they messaged the addresses through.

It is Sunday morning. I know the doctor won’t be at work, so I get in my car and drive to her house.

I loudly bang on the door and when she opens it with a smile on her face, I shove the door open. She cries out and tries to scream, but I clamp my hand over her mouth. “Are you alone here?” I growl against her ear.

She nods.

“Are you sure about that?” I say, looking around her simple home. No toys on the floor, no family photos on the wall. A cat sitting on her kitchen counter glaring at me. She looks like she lives alone.

I drag her into the living room. Before I push her onto the sofa, I say, “I’m going to remove my hand from your mouth. If you scream, you will get a bullet in your head. It is as simple as that. Do you know who I am?” She nods against my hand. “Good. Then you know I’m not making idle threats.”

She drops onto the sofa, gasping for air. Her eyes fill with tears. I sit in the chair opposite her with my gun on my lap, my finger on the trigger and the safety off. The silencer glints in the soft morning light. Her eyes are locked onto it.

“Tell me, Doctor Yamamoto. Over a year ago, a young lady named Nora came into your office and had a pregnancy test done.”

“That was a long time ago. I—”

“Don’t speak yet.” I interrupt her. “Let me be very clear. I’m going to ask you a question and you are going to answer me. The thing is, I know you know the answer, so if you don’t answer me, I’m going to shoot a bullet through your leg. I’ll ask you one more time after that. If you do not answer me again, I’ll put a bullet through your rib cage, right about here.” I point to my heart to show her.

She nods, tears streaming down her face.

“Nora Tanaka. She came into your office, and you did a pregnancy test. She spoke to you about it. I want to know who the father is.”

I glare at her with death in my eyes.

“We don’t ask who the father is. The patients don’t tell us...”

I stand up, press the barrel of the gun against her thigh, and pull the trigger. A satisfying thud rings through the room and blood pours from her leg. She shrieks.

“You are a doctor. You know you could easily bleed to death if I hit the aorta. Now. You have one more chance to answer me.” I press the gun against her rib cage, right over her heart. She cracked.

“You are,” she whimpered. “You are the father.” She sobs.

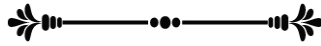
I smile. “Where is your phone?” She pulls it out of her pocket, wincing as she moves. I know I have not hit an artery, so she will be fine. “You may call the ambulance now. Thank you for your help.” I walk out of the house and back to my car.

I’m the father.

Now I just have to find my child.

Months later, the search has come back empty. Repeatedly, the lack of news about where Nora disappeared disappointed me.

We have questioned, insisted, and negotiated, but nobody seems to have any answers for us. She has disappeared into thin air. She and my child.



Nora

EVEN THOUGH IT HAS been almost three years since I last set foot in New York, I'm still nervous when I step off the plane and hail a taxi to take me to my hotel.

I stare out of the window at the city I once called home.

I should be happy to be back in New York, but all it does is remind me of the life I ran away from. Taking a gap year has been amazing, but my mom didn't approve. We had a huge fight when she found out I was coming back here. She called me selfish, immature, irresponsible.

At least through all of this, I know my son is safe. I still have time to restart my life now that I know things are safe for him.

I dial my friend's number to check if we are still on for dinner at her place. It has been ages since I saw her, and I'm looking forward to catching up. It surprised her to hear from me a few weeks ago when I decided to come back to New York, and even though she asked me a lot of questions, I just brushed over them, rather than talking about the future than the past.

That evening, we had a wonderful dinner. I'm over the moon to see her again and I felt so positive about being back here. I think things are going to be okay after all. We laugh for most of the night and even though I continue to avoid questions about where I have been and what I have been doing, I can

talk freely about my plans for the future. I'm excited about life for the first time in a long time.

I glance at my watch. "I can't believe it is almost midnight already." I stand. "I had better get going. Thank you so much for such a lovely evening. I'll call you in the morning and we can make a plan to go on that hike?"

She stands up too and pulls me into a big hug. "Well, you evaded my questions tactfully. I think I'm just going to tell everyone you worked for the CIA after college." She laughs. "But honestly, Nora, it is so amazing to have you back here."

She says goodbye and waves from her front door as I climb into the taxi.

We are driving down the street, and I still have a smile on my lips. Suddenly, the taxi driver slams on the brakes and I'm thrown forward, the seat belt cutting into my shoulder. "What the fuck?" He shouts out of the window, then pulls the door open and climbs out of the car. I undo my seat belt and move to open my door. I hear a loud thud and the taxi driver drops to the ground.

Two burly men appear out of nowhere. Before I can react, they rip open the door and grab me.

"Help!" I try to scream, but one man clamps a hand over my mouth.

They drag me towards a black SUV idling at the curb. I kick and flail wildly, but I'm no match for them.

They shove me into the backseat and slam the door. I'm plunged into darkness as they yank a bag over my head.

"Please, don't do this!" I beg, my voice muffled. One man roughly wraps the tape over my mouth.

Tears soak into the fabric covering my face. I'm helpless, at the mercy of these unknown captors. Where are they taking me? What do they want?

I hear the engine roar to life and the vehicle peels away. The men say nothing, ignoring my whimpers of fear.

Blind and mute, all I can do is weep silently as I'm driven farther from safety with each passing second.

I hear men talking, and I try to focus on what they are saying. I need to pay attention. I need to gather information so I can escape.

"We have her. Yes, Boss. We are on the way now. Twenty minutes."

Someone sent them to get me. Have they got the wrong person? They must have the wrong person. This is crazy. Am I about to die? What is going on? If they go through all of this and then realize they have the wrong person, they might kill me.

I start kicking wildly and something slams into my face. The world fades to nothing.

My head is throbbing with pain, my face is swollen. I blink my eyes open and my cheek screams. I can feel it is puffy and tender. I try to reach my hand up, but they stop short. I'm tied up.

I blink my eyes again in panic, forcing them to focus.

At first, I'm clueless about my whereabouts, but eventually, the horror of the situation becomes apparent in my thoughts. I recognize this room. It is the guest room in Massimo's house. I struggle forcefully against my restraints, but the chair I'm bound to refuse to budge, causing the ropes to tighten around my wrists and ankles.

My clothing has been stripped from my body, and I'm sitting in my underwear. I feel exposed.

I try to scream, but the tape is still tight around my mouth.

A familiar voice comes from behind me. "Nora." I hear his footsteps as he approaches me. "It is so good to see you again." There is malice in his voice, and it sends shivers of fear through my body.

I feel his hand on my back. I shrink away from his touch.

"It is a pity they had to do that to your pretty face, but I hear you were causing quite a scene in the car on the way here."

Massimo steps in front of me. He is smiling, but it is not warm or welcoming. It is cold and deadly.

He has one hand in his pocket. The other is gripping a large knife.

I start trying to kick free again but to no avail.

“Nora, you will only tire yourself out doing that. I promise you, you are not getting out of those restraints. Many have tried and failed.”

He leans close to my face and runs the tip of the blade under my chin. “I just want to talk,” he says, his voice low and husky.

I nod. If he wants to talk, we can talk.

He grabs the edge of the tape over my mouth and, in one smooth motion, he rips it off my skin. Fire burns through my face and I blink tears away.

As soon as the tape is off, I scream. I scream as though my life depends on it because I know it does.

A sharp sting marks my cheek and I know there will be a handprint on my skin. It stops the scream dead in my throat.

“I can let you continue to scream. But truth be told, I don’t want to listen to that. No one will hear you, Nora. Understand that. No one.”

He glares down at me with hatred in his eyes.

“I’m going to ask you one question. You are going to answer me. Is that clear?”

I nod again.

“Where is my child, Nora?” he snaps at me.

My heart sinks. This is the one question I cannot answer. He has asked me the one question I’ll never answer.

I shake my head. Tears fall from my eyes.

“Nora,” he says again. “Where is my child?”

I struggle to find my voice. “I’m sorry, Massimo. I’ll never tell you.”

He steps back from me and looks me up and down. He looks at the knife in his hand and runs his finger along the blade. A small drop of blood falls from his fingertip.

I can see how sharp it is. His threat is obvious.

“Nora, if you don’t answer me or answer one of my men, and I promise you, they will not be nice.”

“Massimo. Please. I cannot tell you,” I say, with desperation in my voice.

“Have it your way.”

He turns his back on me. Talking to someone out of my line of sight.

“Chain her up in the bedroom. We will give her some time to think about her choices and then ask her again,” he says and walks out of the room.

Two men come towards me and grab my arms, their fingers digging deep into my flesh and pain shoots through me. They untie the ropes around my hands and ankles and lift me from the chair and for a moment I consider trying to kick free again, but my body is aching everywhere, and I decide now is not the time. I’ll need to be patient and choose my moment carefully. I’ll get out of here. I don’t know how yet, but I’ll find a way to escape. Determination reassures me.

Even if I don’t, I know I’ll never tell him where our child is hiding.

They drag me to a bedroom and lock a metal collar around my throat. My eyes follow the chain from my collar to see they attached it to a deadbolt in the wall near the bed.

“I need to go to the bathroom,” I say, desperately trying to think of a way out.

One man kicks a bucket towards me. He points to a door off to the side of the bedroom. “That’s the bathroom there, but you don’t have permission to use it, yet. Use the bucket.”

I sob. I cannot degrade myself like that.

The men leave the room and I pull at the metal choker around my throat. I can get my fingers around it, but it is not moving.

I climb onto the bed and pull my knees up against my chest. I wrap my arms around my legs and rest my head on my knees. I rock back and forth, repeating over and over to myself that I'm going to be okay. I'm going to be okay.

I don't know when I fall asleep, but I do.

I wake up with fright when the bedroom door slams open and Massimo walks in holding a mug. He sips at the coffee and the smell of it makes my stomach cramp.

My mouth is dry. I sit up quickly and try to cover my body with my hands. I pull my legs against my chest.

"Good Morning, Nora. Did you sleep well?" he asks darkly.

I nod. Watching his every move.

"Are you ready to tell me where my child is?"

His stare is like a blade on my skin.

I shake my head. No.

"I'll never tell you, Massimo," I say, quietly.

"Are you willing to die over this? Because I'll kill you. You stole my baby from me. You took something you had no right to take. How dare you think you could ever get away with this!"

I stare at him. My defiance is strong.

"Nora. I'll peel the flesh from your body," he screams in my face and throws his mug of coffee at the wall. As it shatters, I flinch and shut my eyes.

He leans onto the bed, his face close to mine. His fingers trace the collar around my throat.

"Do you want to die knowing how it feels to have your skin pulled from your body? Do you know that kind of pain? It is a fair trade for someone who stole a child from me," he growls.

I shut my eyes again, trying to block him out of my sight.

He pushes me, and my back hits the headboard. When I open my eyes again, he is pacing up and down the bedroom.

He laughs darkly. “Nora, I’m a patient man. I understand that sometimes force is not the answer. I’ll patiently wait until it’s necessary, and then you’ll discover the various ways I can inflict suffering without laying a finger on you.

I stare at him.

“How many days can you go without food? How many days can you last with just enough water to keep you alive, but not enough to quench your thirst? Can you survive the cold? Solitude? The fear of death? I believe many begging for death after only a week. Are you ready to know what that feels like?”

I take a deep breath. “Do whatever you feel you need to do, Massimo. I’ll not give you any information that will lead to the endangerment of my son.”

His eyebrows shoot up, and his eyes are wide. “A son?”

Shit. I bite my lip.

“I have a son.” He stares at me, this time with pride in his expression. “We had a boy? And you took him from me!” Now rage again. “You took my son and thought you could keep him a secret from me? Have you forgotten who I am, Nora? Have you forgotten what I’m capable of? His rage is filling the bedroom as he screams. He reaches out, grabs my ankle, and pulls me down onto the bed. He leans over me with his hands pressing into the mattress on either side of my head. I turn my face away from the anger in his eyes.

He leans close, his body pressing into mine. I can feel his muscles against my skin, the weight of his body on mine.

“You will soon come to remember everything about who I’m and then you will change your mind about whether you want to continue along this path.” He growls the words into my ear and shivers dart through me like tiny needles piercing every inch of my body. I don’t want to show fear, but I cannot control it. Adrenalin, mixed with the horror of what is happening, is becoming too much for me to bear.

He smiles at seeing this. He runs the back of his hand across my breast. “You always were the most beautiful girl in the room.” His grin turns darker, and his hands move lower. I try to squirm away from him, and his fingers dig into my thigh at the edge of my panties.

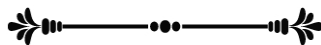
I dig my fingernails into my palms, leaving crescent-shaped marks on the skin. I squeeze my eyes shut, feeling tears slip through my lashes. My entire frame shakes uncontrollably, overwhelmed by grief and fear. I have never felt more alone than in this moment, my despair a palpable thing filling the room.

He laughs and releases his grip and I know there will be bruises where his fingers were digging into me. He pushes himself off me and steps back, his eyes drinking in the sight of me. I scuttle back up to the top of the bed and pull my knees to my chest again. It is the safest position I can be in.

It is the furthest I can be away from him.

He laughs again.

He walks to the door and says to someone waiting outside. “Give her a glass of water.” Then he turns back to look at me. “Don’t drink it all at once, tesoro mio. You never know if there is more coming.”



Massimo

IT HAS BEEN A week, and she has not told me a fucking thing. She has hardly eaten a single meal, and I have given her barely enough water to make it through the day. I know she is uncomfortable, yet she keeps her lips sealed whenever I ask her about our son. I don't understand how she stays so strong against everything I have thrown at her.

It is infuriating me. She can be so stubborn. Does she think I want to be doing this to her? Although it is odd to me that even now, as I stare down at her tear-stained face, her eyes wide and pleading, I find myself much more turned on than usual.

She is sitting on the bed, her legs pulled up against her chest and she is shaking, trembles I can see in her arms. Perhaps it is hunger, perhaps it is fear. Either way, she looks so vulnerable. I smirk when I think, not for the first time, that she is entirely in my control, and I could do anything I wanted to her and not a soul in the world could stop me.

Her body is covered in nothing but her underwear. Her skin is mine to gaze upon and I do so freely.

I lean over, my fingers touching the collar around her neck.

She turns her face away from me and despite the tears on her cheeks, I can still see the same defiance in her eyes. That

infuriates me to the point of blind anger, and I grab her throat in my hand and pull her face towards me. She gasps in shock and her eyes shoot wide open. The intensity of the fear flaring in those eyes causes my cock to stir against my pants.

This makes me even more angry. I don't want her to have that kind of control over me. I'm not here for lust or sex, or to admire her unmistakably beautiful body. Fuck, she is gorgeous.

"Just tell me where my son is." My voice booms through the room, and she shuts her eyes as though she could shut me out. She does not say a word. "Is he even still alive?" I demand to know.

"He is alive, Massimo." Her voice is soft, a whisper, and strained.

Her throat sounds dry, and she is looking weak. I squeeze my fingers harder against her throat, and she does not even flinch. She just reaches out and wraps her delicate fingers around my wrist. She holds onto me and closes her eyes again.

Her voice comes out to whisper, like ash blowing in the wind. "He is alive and happy, Massimo. Why would you ask me to tell you where he is when just the simple idea of you knowing that could destroy his entire life."

I shake my head in confusion. "What the fuck are you talking about, Nora?" I snap at her, throwing her back against the bed in frustration and annoyance.

The bruises around her neck from the collar are turning a dark shade of purple against her pale skin. Her long dark hair is messy and wild around her face. Her eyes are fierce when she looks up at me.

"You know what I mean," she says as she glares at me.

"Why don't you assume I don't know and explain it to me?" I demand.

"Why don't you tell me what happens to all those people who get close to you, to anyone who dares to love you? Your wife?" She snaps back at me.

I slap her hard across the cheek.

Her hair flies as her face jerks sideways with the force of the slap.

“Don’t you even speak of my wife,” I tell her, my voice low and threatening.

“Don’t you ask me to put my son at risk,” she replies, her fingers touching her glowing cheek.

“For fuck’s sake, Nora. How much longer do you think you can handle this? How many more days do you think you will survive without food and comfort? Why don’t you just tell me now so we can both move on and forget this ever happened?”

She shakes her head. “I can’t. You know this, Massimo. I have explained it every single day since you kidnapped and held me prisoner here.” She sighs softly. And in that sound, there is a resilience so strong it tears through my resolve, and for a moment, I believe her. I know she will never tell me. I believe I’ll never, ever know where my son is.

Anger surges through me like lightning, and I slap her again.

She is whimpering and my heart tugs at my chest. I’m filled with pain, anger, and lust, all at the same time. Why is she making me do this to her? How is she driving me so wild while driving me towards this intense anger?

I lean down and wrap my hand around her chin, pulling her toward me. “Please, tesoro mio, tell me,” I ask, a deadly quietness in my tone, looking into her eyes and all but begging for the information. I don’t want her to know the level of frustration she is causing me.

She looks up at me, her eyes glowing, her lips luscious and pink.

Beneath my fingers, her skin is warm and soft, enticing in so many ways.

Again, I feel my cock stir. I take a step away from her, turn my back, and try to regain control of my body. If she knows she can turn me on like a light switch, she might use that against me.

Although, what power does she have? She can try to use her body to control me, but all that is forcing me to show her who is in charge here. I stare out the bedroom window, my back still to her so she cannot see the smirk on my lips.

“Massimo.” Her voice calls to me and my heart leaps unexpectedly at the sound of my name on her lips.

I turn to face her.

“I’m not hiding your son from you,” she whispers.

“Is that so?” I say, no emotion tainting the words, but I’m curious about what she means.

“It is true, Massimo. If I could tell you where your son was, and somehow ensure your enemies would never know, then I might consider doing that. But I cannot. The truth is that those close to you, those whom you love the most, get hurt. By those who are after you.”

I glare at her. At first, her words seem to make sense, but then I understand she is just trying to manipulate me with her half-truths.

“I’m the most powerful man. Do people know which enemies could outsmart me or take my son? None. Stop trying to hide my son from me by lying to yourself. And stop lying to me.”

“I’m not.” The words may be simple, yet her eyes are bleak as she stares at me, daring me to believe her. But I won’t.

“You are making excuses, tesoro mio,” I say, walking closer to her again.

But now thoughts of my wife are on my mind. Images of her body, covered in blood, gasping for breath in my arms. I could not protect her. Fuck.

I take a deep breath.

No. She is manipulating me with stories, bringing back memories I’ve long ago boxed away in my mind. Anger pulses beneath my skin again and desperation sears through me. I have to know where my son is, and she will tell me whether she wants to or not.

I storm toward her again and she shuts her eyes and turns her face away from me, flinching.

I grab the chain attached to her and yank her towards me. She falls forward on the bed, onto her hands and knees. I pull the chain upwards, so it forces her to look at me. Her eyes are glittering with tears again. Her back forms a beautiful arch.

I want to slap her. I want her to feel the same pain I feel in my heart.

But when I reach toward her, instead of slapping her, I wrap my hand around her jaw and lean down to kiss her. It is hard, and fast, and heavy.

My lips press into hers with force and need.

All of my frustration comes out as lust, which I have been denying for so many days.

She gasps against my lips, I expect her to squirm away, to fight me, but she is kissing me back. She is pulling away ever so slightly, but the rest of her body is contradicting her.

I grab her around the waist, her body slender beneath my hands, and I pull her toward me. The chain pulls taut against her skin and my cock pulses at the sight of her, so helpless, so beautiful on this bed.

Her breasts press against my chest as I pull her against me.

I pull her off the bed, then throw her back onto it, laying her on her back. I grab her ankles and spread her legs. I'm now completely unable to control my lust. I lower my body on top of hers, my hips forcing her legs wider apart. At first, she tries to shift away from me, but I grab the chain close to her collar and pin her down. When her eyes catch mine, I see fire in the dark pools of her soul. Fire, defiance, and need.

I smirk.

"Perhaps there are other ways I can make you talk," I tell, pulling my belt off as I lean over her.

When I unzip my pants, she glimpses how hard my cock is and her eyes grow wide.

“I’m not going to be gentle, tesoro mio ,” I murmur in her ear, my voice a sinister rasp.

I grab her underwear, rip it from her body and she cries out as the edge of the fabric cuts into her hips. I press my cock against her pussy, and I’m delighted to find she is dripping wet.

“You can hide the truth in your words, but you cannot hide the truth in the way your body betrays you,” I growl, pressing my cock into her.

She cries out as I push with force into her body, my cock buried deep in her pussy with one hard thrust.

Her body gives her away by shuddering, and she takes a deep breath.

I slide out, a sneer on my lips, looking down at her beautiful face. I thrust in again and her lips are open. I press my mouth against hers. She returns the kiss as I begin to rock back and forth and pleasure sears through me like wildfire.

A moan escapes her mouth and sends shivers down my spine.

I grab both of her wrists in one hand and hold them above her head as I thrust into her over and over, blinded by desire and lust.

How can she infuriate me so viciously, yet I cannot control my desire for her?

My cock is pulsing inside her. She rocks her hips towards me, and it is nearly my undoing.

“I’m never going to let you go, tesoro mio,” I say, my voice low against her ear.

I wrap my arm around her shoulders and push harder and harder into her. I pinned her beneath me, and I know my body is smothering her as I slam my cock into her repeatedly. She cries out and her body begins to shake. Fuck. If she comes now, I cannot hold back another second.

Her body is tense beneath me and now that I have let go of her wrists, her nails are digging into my back.

She lifts her hips and presses into me, allowing me to enter her even deeper. Her pussy pulses around me, and I entirely lose control of myself. She screams as her orgasm betrays her.

My cock grows rigid inside her, throbbing, pulsing, and burning as I shoot my come into her body.

I'm entirely spent as I lean over her, my hand above her head, and stare down at her.

She looks up at me with her beautiful brown eyes. She does not say a word. Her face is soft. She reaches out and runs her fingers over my jaw. The touch is so soft and so intimate that for a moment I'm completely lost in it. I feel my body soften against hers and my heart pulls me towards her.

Then suddenly I'm furious. She is tricking me again.

I slam my fist into the bed above her head, and she shuts her eyes tightly.

I push off the bed and away from her.

I need to get the fuck out of here.

She says nothing when I tug my pants on and walk away.

I slam the door shut behind me.

The guard standing at the door motionless. I know he heard everything.

I stand with my back to him for a moment.

I don't turn to look at him when I speak.

"Get a meal for her. A proper one. Let her bathe while it is being prepared. But do not remove the chain. I don't want to risk her escaping."

He confirms my orders, and I walk away. I need to clear my head.

I cannot let her get to me like this and cause me to soften. I cannot let her make me think I care about her. All I want is my son.

She is nothing to me but information. I need to remember that.

But when I lie in bed that night, I keep picturing her beautiful dark eyes. The way they shine with tenderness, even when I'm full of rage. I picture her soft, glowing skin and it infuriates me, so I open my eyes and lie in the dark, staring at the ceiling. The images do not disappear, though. I look at my hands in the dark and see her hips beneath my fingers, the curve of her back, and the roundness of her beautiful ass.

Fuck.

Fuck.

I need to stop this.

All I want is to go to her room and lie next to her, pull her against me, fuck her slowly. Tenderly. I want to hear her breathing and I want to hear those beautiful little sounds she makes beneath me.

I shut my eyes again and throw the pillow over my face.

This is not what I had planned.

I need to put an end to this.

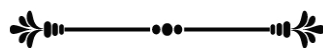
Maybe I'm being too soft on her. Maybe I need to make her understand in some different way, that I won't accept no for an answer anymore.

Tomorrow.

I'll come up with a plan tomorrow and I won't let my heart, or my cock, interrupt my thoughts.

She is nothing but a woman standing between me and my son.

She is nothing, I repeat, knowing I'm trying to convince myself I truly believe it.



Nora

THERE IS A KNOCK at the door, and it opens before I say anything. Not that anything I could have said would have mattered. Anyway.

The guard stands there, one of Massimo's men. He eyes me up and down. I'm standing almost naked in the bedroom with only a towel wrapped around my body. I have just had a bath, which was perhaps the most amazing bath I have had in my life, probably because of how many days they have chained me to the bed. To feel clean again is blissful. A small bounty in the horror of the weeks I have been held captive here.

The man is holding a plate of food and my stomach churns at the sight of it. I have not eaten a proper meal in so long that it both nauseates me and causes my stomach to cramp with hunger.

He places the food on the side table, walks over, and locks the collar and chain back in place. I guess I could only have it removed while was bathing. The guard turns and walks away without saying a word.

This is the second night in a row Massimo has allowed me a meal and a bath. I have not seen Massimo since he left after he had sex with me. The memory pulses through me like fire and

my body responds in ways I don't want to think about right now.

It is weird to acknowledge I miss him.

I don't miss the interrogation or the pain he has caused me, but I miss him. Sometimes he speaks to me. I see a softness in his eyes. I know he wants to see our son, and I know his actions are driven by love for our child, but I also hope that one day soon he will come to understand why I simply cannot allow that to happen.

The door closes behind the guard, and I'm alone again.

I reach out, pull the plate of aromatic meat and vegetables toward myself, and start eating. My stomach protests, but I need the strength. I have no idea how many more days I'll be here. I have no idea when I'll be allowed food again.

I eat with studied diligence, chewing each forkful thoroughly and when I'm done, I place the empty plate on the bedside table. Exhaustion overwhelms me. I curl up on the bed and fall asleep.

Fitful images plague my dreams. Nightmares haunt my dreams, where Massimo discovers the location of our son. His enemies raid the village, and they kill everyone.

In the morning I wake up feeling drained and emotional. Those nightmares are the reason I'll never tell him where our son is. Those nightmares are a risk in the real world should anyone ever find out he has a son.

I slip my fingers beneath the collar around my neck to touch the raw skin and tears spring to my eyes at how bruised it feels.

I sigh and sit up in bed. It is quiet outside my door.

I stretch my legs out and try to move my body around, stretching and moving as much as I can to maintain whatever strength I have.

The days slowly pass, but I have no concept of time. Sometimes it feels like hours and sometimes as if mere minutes have gone by when I wake in the mornings.

Today is like all those that have come before. I doze off and on until I finally see the sky growing darker and I know the day is almost over. No one has visited me today. No one has come in to check on me and there has been no sign of Massimo.

I'm feeling especially lonely and miserable when I hear the door click open and I quickly sit up in bed.

The guard is standing in the open doorway, holding some clothing.

He walks in.

"Massimo asks that you get dressed and then I'll take you to the dining room where he is waiting for you."

He places the clothing on the bed and turns his back on me so I can dress.

"Um, the chain?" I ask, my fingers wrapped around the collar still on my neck.

"Oh, yes," he mutters, stepping closer while fishing a key from his pocket.

The lock releases with a loud click, and the chain falls off me. I'm dizzy with relief.

I stand next to the bed and dress slowly. I cannot move at what used to be my usual speed without feeling unsteady. I pull the dress over my head. It is an elegant black dress that flows to the floor. Simple, but beautiful.

When I'm dressed, the guard says, "Follow me." I scamper to keep up with him, holding onto the wall and blinking hard to try to keep myself from swaying.

We walk into the dining room. I have been in this room hundreds of times in my life. Happily eating dinner with Laura and her family, laughing about school, college, boys, movies - life.

Now when I walk in, everything seems unfamiliar, and I feel as though I'm miles away from that old life I used to live.

Massimo is sitting at the head of the table. He stands when I walk into the room and nods at the guard, who dips his head in

return and leaves without a word.

Massimo moves around the table to pull out the chair for me. He waits for me to sit and then pushes it in slowly, making sure I'm comfortable.

I watch him with narrowed eyes, waiting for him to move suddenly or violently towards me. I'm on edge and tense. I don't know what he is planning. Is this some form of elaborate plan to win me over in a different way? I try to keep my breathing steady as he walks back to his seat and gets comfortable.

"tesoro mio , how are you feeling today?" he asks me with a tenderness in his voice which makes me suspicious.

"I'm fine, thank you, Massimo," I respond cautiously.

"I have had the chef prepare something delicious for us tonight," he says, and I don't reply, because I have no idea what to say.

"It is a seafood dish, a Japanese recipe, so I know you will enjoy it." He eyes me closely.

"I appreciate it," I say, then add tentatively, "Massimo, what is going on?"

He shoots me a glare that burns into my eyes from across the table. I look down at the white tablecloth in front of me and regret having asked.

Our food is placed in front of us, and the chef asks me what I would like to drink. I choose fruit juice and thank him as he walks away.

We eat in a silence that feels heavy and tense, and fear continues to grip me in its steely claws.

Why is Massimo being so nice? Is this his new tactic? I feel as though, despite his friendly demeanor, I'm still in danger and should not relax too much.

While we eat, he watches me. I'm careful not to make eye contact, as I'm not in the mood to feel the slap of his anger again.

I thoroughly enjoyed the food he had prepared for me. It is wonderful to have a taste of home, so well prepared. I'm grateful for it, even though it tugs at my heart and reminds me of my mother.

I dare not think of my mother now, as I know emotion will overwhelm me.

I blink the thoughts of her from my mind.

Our plates are cleared away and Massimo stands.

"Good night, tesoro mio. Sleep well."

Shock runs through me. What in the world is going on? Did he poison me? Was there something in the food?

I want to stand, but my legs are shaking and will not hold me upright.

"Do not look so worried," he says, a smile gentling his features. "I have decided that from tomorrow you may roam freely around the house, without the chain and collar."

He watches me, and I know he is trying to gauge my reaction. I say nothing, as I don't know if this is a trick or test.

"If you try to escape, I have given instructions you are to be shot on sight. Do you understand me, Nora?" His voice is louder now and fills the dining room with anger. The sudden outburst made me jump but I was waiting for it.

This is the Massimo I was expecting and expecting to see all night. I wonder where he has been this entire time.

I nod. "I understand," I say as politely as I can, wondering why I'm suddenly being given this freedom.

Massimo walks towards me. He wraps his fingers around my chin, lifting my face towards his. He leaned down, lips close to my cheek, and hissed, "I don't want them to have to kill you, tesoro mio. I'm growing rather fond of you." He pulls me into a kiss and my heart races against my rib cage.

I hate the fact I'm so attracted to him, but I cannot control it. When his lips meet mine, I melt into the kiss, letting the sweet sensation wash over me. As he pulls away, I cling to the

feeling, not wanting it to end. His hand drops from my face and he turns to walk away. Watching his retreating figure, an ache forms inside me. I long to call out, to beg him to stay, to wrap me in his strong arms once more. The space between us feels cold and empty now. I touch my fingertips to my lips, still tingling from his kiss. Closing my eyes, I try to etch every detail into my memory - the warmth of his breath, the scratch of his stubble, the firm but gentle pressure. I don't know when I'll get to experience his kiss again. Part of me wonders if I ever will. But at this moment, I can't help wishing he would come back and hold me close, if only for a little while longer.

I sigh in frustration.

Suddenly, I'm alone in the dining room and unsure of what to do with myself. His words ring in my mind. They will shoot me on sight if I try to escape. I know it is true. I know these men have killed before and if commanded to do so, they would not hesitate to kill me. I'm no one and nothing to them. I'm just a job.

I stand up, not wanting to take any chances sitting alone in the dining room. Even though I have spent many hours in this room, now my spine tingles with imaginary sniper sights tracing my every move. I make my way back to my room. When I close the door behind me, I lean back against it and let go of the breath I did not know I had been holding. I pull the beautiful black sheath over my head and drape it carefully over a chair near the window. I stare down at a pile of neatly folded clothes. They had not been there when I left the room earlier. A pair of jeans and a sleeveless top in my size, along with fresh underwear.

I climb into bed, my mind whirling with thoughts of what he has planned. I wonder what he expects from me, what he hopes to achieve. I can't imagine why he is giving me this extra freedom or why he has not been in my room since that night. Why is he being kind and why is he avoiding me?

It takes me ages to fall asleep. I stare at the chain attached above my bed; the collar lying open on the bedside table. I turn my back to it, grateful to not be wearing it anymore.

In the morning I climb out of bed and have a shower. No one comes in to yell at me or tell me to stop. After the shower, I dress in fresh clothing from the chair and then I cautiously step out of the bedroom. I look up and down the long passage outside my room.

There is no guard outside my door.

I make my way to the kitchen, without thinking about it, I can smell the coffee brewing and I'm drawn to it. It seems normal to want a coffee in the morning and I can't believe how much I have missed such a simple pleasure.

The butler turns to me when I enter and says, "Good morning, Miss Nora. If you would like to take a seat at the dining room table, I'll bring your breakfast through in a moment."

"Oh, thank you," I say, surprised at the casualness of his words. He knows my name and does not seem surprised upon seeing me. Does he know I have been chained up in the bedrooms?

I walk into the dining room and am startled to see Massimo sitting there. He does not look up at me when he speaks.

"They told me you were up. Please, sit. We will have breakfast together." He does not stand up. He continues to read whatever he is looking at on his phone.

I sit in silence, watching him. I'm too scared to speak or break the silence, which feels uncomfortable.

When the chef enters the dining room, Massimo puts his phone down and asks, "Are you feeling better today, Nora?"

"I am, thank you," I reply cautiously, wanting to ask so many questions, but too scared to utter any of them.

I'm given fruit salad and scrambled egg, which smells incredible. A fresh cup of coffee is placed in front of me, and I hold back a cry of joy when I pick it up and take a sip, letting the warm liquid wash down my throat. This simple pleasure makes me smile.

For a moment I forget all of my worries as I tuck into my delicious breakfast. It is so simple, yet divine.

Massimo watches me the entire time I'm eating. It is weird having him stare at me like this, but the food is wonderful, and I can't stop enjoying it. He waits until I'm done. Then he asks, "Have you had some time to think, perhaps to consider telling me where our son is? I can guarantee his safety by bringing him here to you. Don't you want to see him?"

I sigh and shake my head. "Massimo, this breakfast was amazing, and I thank you for the freedom you have given me, allowing me to walk around, but I cannot tell you where our son is."

He stands up, his eyes ablaze. Then he storms out of the room. I sit at the table for a little longer, too nervous to move in case I should stay put. The butler clears away our plates, then the guard comes in to tell me I may walk around as much as I like.

Relieved, I stand up wandering through to the library where Laura and I so often used to study.

I find a book and curl up under the window on a large chair so I can read.

I start to enjoy my new routine of having breakfast with Massimo and reading all day during a brief period of peace. Massimo asks me the same question every morning and every morning I tell him again that I cannot tell him where our son is. Every morning he walks out in anger and does not return, and I'm filled with pain and guilt.

I don't want to feel this way, but for the sake of my child, I'll endure anything.

I'm sitting at the breakfast table this morning knowing the question is about to be asked again.

This time Massimo stands up and pulls me out of my chair. I'm standing in front of him, and he is towering over me.

"tesoro mio, where is our son?" he asks, but this time there is an edge to his voice. An edge that warns me his patience is running thin.

I close my eyes, so I don't have to see his face. My body feels tense and stiff with the threat of his body language. He is so close I can feel the heat of his skin.

“I cannot tell you that, Massimo,” I whisper, waiting for the strike.

He grabs my face in his hand and shouts, “Why can’t you just tell me? Why are you playing games with me?”

“I’m not. I’m only trying to protect our son,” I cry out.

His grip is iron on my wrist as he drags me from the dining room. I stumble along helplessly until we reach my quarters and he shoves me inside.

I sprawl onto the bed and before I can react, he’s on top of me, knees pinning my arms. His eyes blaze with fury as he secures the collar back around my throat.

“You are fucking making me so mad!” he seethes through clenched teeth.

The lock clicks into place. He yanks the chain taut, forcing me to look at him.

“Please, I can’t...” I gasp.

“Silence!” he roars. “I’m done with your games.”

I see the hurt behind the anger now. My heart aches, knowing I cause of his pain.

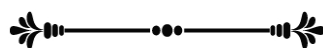
“Massimo...” My voice is a broken whisper.

His eyes soften for a moment as I utter his name. But then the darkness returns.

He releases the chain and climbs off me without a word. At the door, he pauses, back turned. His shoulders slump in defeat.

“I wished it didn’t have to be this way,” he says quietly. “You left me no choice.”

The door clicks shut behind him, leaving me drowning in sorrow and regret. I never meant to wound him so deeply. But I had to keep my child safe. Now we both must suffer for it.



Massimo

FRUSTRATION AND ANGER PULSE through me. My first impulse is to slap her, to show her who is in charge, to force her to tell me what I want to know. But, as I stare down at her pinned beneath me on the bed, her wide eyes staring back at me, I know she will not tell me.

Why is it I can control everyone but this woman? Why is it I can extract information from the hardest of men in a quarter of the time, yet she withstands everything I throw at her?

I clench my fist.

I want to hurt her, but I can't bring myself to do it.

I have a feeling I know why, but I'm hardly ready to admit it to myself so openly.

But no matter what I think, I know I can no longer harm her. Because my heart will not let me.

I want to. I want to tear her apart and pull the words from her throat to find out where my son is. I want to know my child. I want to bring him here to his home, where he belongs, with me. But staring down at Nora I know I can no longer hurt her.

It confuses me. It angers me even more. Who is in control here? Because I no longer feel like I can control myself around her.

What has she done to me?

“I’m done with your games,” I say darkly. “You do not deserve the freedom I have granted you.”

I stare into her eyes for a moment, but I feel as though my own are betraying my true feelings, my feelings for Nora. So, I have to walk away right now. I can’t have her knowing what is on my mind.

I slam the bedroom door behind me and walk through to my office. What am I going to do?

Sitting at my desk, I stare out of the window into the garden.

Perhaps it is time for me to admit what has been becoming more obvious to me over the past few days.

I have fallen for Nora.

That night I was lying in bed, staring at the ceiling. I’m plagued with ideas that haunt me. I want a life with Nora. I want to know what it feels like to be loved by her and to be in love again. But when I allow myself to consider this as a possibility, images of my late wife flash before me and the pain constricts my chest, threatening to drag me down to the hell I have lived in for far too long.

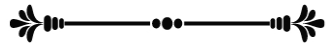
To allow me to fall in love and dream of a real life with someone, an intimate and loving life, would be to allow myself to be at risk of experiencing that same horrific pain I still feel when I think of my wife.

Why would I want to do that to myself again? I can’t. I can’t do it. It will end badly for both me and Nora.

I toss and turn as the hours tick by, but no matter how desperate I’m to push thoughts of Nora from my mind, it doesn’t work and finally, I give in, allowing the images of her to swim through my thoughts. Her beautiful body spread across the bed. Her dark eyes stared up at me. The soft sounds she makes as I thrust into her.

I feel myself growing hard, and I wrap my hand around my cock. How I wish it was her wet mouth around it. I sighed, at

least I know one way I can release this tension and finally be able to sleep.



Nora

I HEAR THE BEDROOM door close, but there's no one around. I force myself awake, blinking my eyes open and trying to shake off the dreams of Massimo. He is gentle and caring in my dreams. Behind his threatening expressions, I believe I glimpse the man. He has let it slip a few times around me, and I know I have seen who he is.

I sigh and roll onto my back, wondering why someone would have opened and then closed my bedroom door.

I sit up and rub my face with my hands. That is when I see the box at the foot of my bed. It is small but wrapped in a large red ribbon.

I scoot down to pick it up and then scoot back up the top of the bed to ease the tension off the chain.

The little box sits in my hand and fills me with curiosity.

Gently, I tug at the ribbon and the bow springs free. The red ribbon falls onto my lap. I wiggle the lid off and remove the layers of soft tissue paper. Inside the box is a card and a key. I open the card and read it.

“tesoro mio , join me for breakfast out in the garden this morning. Massimo.”

I read the card out loud to myself. Then I stare at the key again. I realize what it is and slip it into the lock of my collar. It clicks open and falls free from my neck, dropping to the bed. I have the key now. Does this mean he is finally releasing me from ever wearing it again? Should I hide the key somewhere only I know in case he wants to lock the collar on me again? I tuck the key beneath the bed, right next to the wall. I don't know what else to do with it.

I smile at the card. He has invited me to join him for breakfast outside. I have not been outside in weeks, and I can't wait to feel the air against my skin. I climb out of bed, move to the bathroom to shower, and get ready, excitement fizzing through my veins.

I slip on my freshly washed jeans. I wonder when someone came to fetch and then return them. I must have been fast asleep.

When I'm ready, I check myself in the mirror. I want to feel pretty; I want Massimo to think I look pretty, but too many days spent alone in this room have caused my eyes to look shadowed and dull. I pinch my cheeks a little to try to bring some color to my face, then I head toward the garden where only a few years before, we had a beautiful farewell party for my best friend, Laura.

I step out onto the deck near the pool. Nerves have overshadowed excitement. I half expect someone to rush out from behind a corner to drag me back into the house, but it does not happen. I see a trail of rose petals across the grass, so I follow them toward a large tree in Massimo's garden. Beneath it, I find Massimo. He is sitting on a blanket spread out on the grass, his back is leaning against the base of the tree. He smiles warmly when I approach him. There is a beautiful picnic set up around him with a large assortment of foods and drinks. I can't believe my eyes. Did he do all of this for me?

He stands when I'm near and holds his hand out towards me.

"You look beautiful this morning," he says, and I know he is not being truthful with me. I know I do not look beautiful. I

look tired, weak, and drained. But his eyes are on me with fondness.

I place my hand in his, and he guides me to the blanket. I sit down and he sits alongside me.

“I hope you are hungry, Nora,” he says, his hand running down my back and sending shivers down my spine.

I close my eyes briefly and enjoy the tenderness of his touch.

“I am,” I tell him and gesture across the blanket, “and these look beautiful.”

“Let me prepare a plate for you.”

With care, he filled the plate with salad, fruits, cheeses, and Prosciutto. A smile touches his lips as he works, taking pleasure in the smallest details.

We eat in serene silence. Appreciation for both the meal and the company fills the quiet space between us. For this moment, past troubles fade into the background. There is only contentment found in sharing a simple meal.

I lift the breakfast muffin to my mouth and take a bite. It is delicious. I sigh softly. The warm sun splashes on my skin through the leaves and the cool morning breeze lifts my hair, brushing against my skin and making me feel alive. I needed this.

“Nora.” His voice no longer carries the anger and violence it did in the past weeks. My eyes are on his lips when he speaks.

“I want to talk to you about our son.” I open my mouth to say something, but he stops me. “Before you protest, let me finish. I desperately want to meet our son. I have so much admiration for what you have done to protect him, and I find it hard to deny there is truth behind your reasoning. So, for now, Nora, I’m going to stop asking you. But one day I will want to know.” He says.

At first, I felt relieved. But then I shake my head. Massimo, my answer will not change, whether you ask me today, tomorrow, or ten years from now. You must know this. There will be no life for us if you persist in asking me the same

question repeatedly. I vow to never tell anyone where our son is. For his safety. I can't risk your enemies finding out," I say. The sadness I feel coats my words.

"I had a feeling you might say that, Nora. I can't promise I will stop looking for him. For now, though, I want to talk to you about something else."

I stare at him with curiosity. I can't hide it. "What is it you want to talk to me about?" I ask.

His response surprises me. "Us," he says. "I have been thinking about us."

"What about us, Massimo?" I ask carefully.

"Things are going to change. You are no longer my captive. You are my son's mother, for God's sake. I was hoping you would join me for dinner this evening."

I look at him, relief flooding through me. I was right about the key and the collar. I will never have to wear it again.

"Dinner sounds lovely. What will the chef be making?" I ask, smiling.

"We will go out tonight. I have a table booked for us at Sky Rise in the city. It is my favorite restaurant and I want you to experience it with me."

My heart sinks a little. "Massimo, I can't go out looking like this."

He pulls a package out from behind himself and hands it to me.

I look at it, golden paper and gold ribbon hugging the contents. Another gift?

"You will feel beautiful tonight, I promise you. You look beautiful even now, but tonight will be special. Open it." He nods towards the gift.

I unwrap it slowly. Then lift the final piece of tissue paper to reveal the most gorgeous deep maroon dress I have ever seen, glittering with intricate jewels stitched into the fabric. I stare down at it blinking tears away.

“Do you like it?” he asks, sounding worried.

“It is so beautiful,” I tell him, a hitch in my voice.

“There are matching shoes in your room. I have also had some makeup delivered to your room. Let me know if anything is not to your liking and I will have it replaced.”

“Thank you, Massimo. You are very thoughtful.”

We finish our breakfast under the tree, enjoying the start of a gorgeous day. The sun is recharging my soul and I feel happy.

Massimo pulls me against him where he is leaning against the tree. He rests my back against his chest and my head on his shoulder.

“I like having you here, Nora,” he says.

I’m struck by his words and a smile spreads across my lips. “I enjoy spending time with you, Massimo,” I reply and close my eyes, letting the sun soak away my worries for the moment.

It is late evening and Massimo is holding the limo door open for me. His driver is waiting to take us to dinner.

Massimo climbs in after me, sliding onto the seat next to me. His bulk fills the seat and I feel small next to him. He wraps his fingers around my thigh. My heart thunders against my ribs.

He smiles but says nothing. I’m wondering what my life would be like if I were to spend it with him. I’m so drawn to him. His strength, his power, the way he touches me, and his gentle words whenever he dares to let his guard down and share himself with me.

He catches me staring at him. I grin and quickly turn my head to look out the window. The city lights are bright and colorful, and happiness falls over me like a warm fur coat.

We arrive at the restaurant, and Massimo holds the door open for me. I take his big hand as I climb out. He leads me through the elaborate foyer, and we ride the elevator to the top floor of the hotel to the restaurant.

It overlooks the entire city, and the view steals my breath away.

“You are the most beautiful woman in the world,” Massimo whispers in my ear as we walk through the restaurant toward our table. His hand is on the small of my back and my body pulses at his touch.

I sit down and he pushes my chair in behind me.

He sits next to me with his leg against mine. The way he moves and handles himself sends a clear message to everyone in the room. I’m his. I belong to him. He wraps his fingers around my thigh again and says, “Our order will be ready soon.”

I nod and smile. “This is your favorite restaurant, so I imagine you will know exactly what we will enjoy the most.”

He nods. The waiter arrived and brought a bottle of 1961 Dom Perignon Brut Champagne. I know it is going to be a fine one.

Massimo holds his glass up. “To you, my beautiful Nora,” he beams.

Before I can stop myself, the words tumble out of my mouth. “I’m in love with you, Massimo.” It shocked me to my core and the fact I just blurted them out had my face glow red.

He went quiet, and then he reached out, his fingers wrapping around the back of my neck, he pulled me toward him and kissed me. It is a deeply passionate kiss that has no place in a restaurant or the public eye, but I’m not the one in control and I would not want to stop him even if I could.

When he pulls away, he is smiling, and his eyes are dark and mysterious. However, I see what he is trying to hold back. I see him trying not to admit he feels the same about me.

Our food arrives.

“You are going to love this, tesoro mio,” he says, picking up a piece of fish and holding it out to me. I open my mouth and he guides the food between my lips. The delicious flavors fill me and entice me.

When dinner is over, Massimo wraps his arm around my waist as we walk toward the waiting limo. He pulls the door open for me and just before I step inside, all hell breaks loose. A motorbike ramps onto the pavement not too far from us. He is driving fast, right towards where we are standing. The rider, wearing dark gear and a black helmet, pulls out a gun and points it at us. Massimo's bodyguard pulls the gun out at the biker just as a shot echoes through the air. Everything happens so quickly. The sharp sound freezes me in place. I see Massimo leap towards me, between the rider and myself. His body catches the impact of the bullet, and he falls to the floor. My mind screams. The bodyguard has almost reached the rider, but he is already wheel spinning away. Massimo pushes me into the back seat of the limo and leaps in behind me. The door slams shut on its own as the driver speeds off.

"Are you okay?" Massimo is breathing heavily, but he does not share my same horrified expression. I stare blankly at him for a moment and then the world spins back into focus. "You got shot!" I shout. "You got shot, Massimo." Tears run down my face. His hands touched my face. "Are you okay, Nora?" he repeats, his voice dark and edged with danger.

"I'm fine. I'm okay, but you are not." I say in panic.

"It's just a graze. The bullet only skimmed my side. Are you sure he did not hurt you?" His hands run across my body. He is checking everywhere for blood or wounds. I might not have noticed. I grab his wrist. "I'm fine, Massimo. Stop moving so much. You are going to make yourself bleed even more."

He shakes his head, lifting the bottom of his shirt to show me the bullet wound. "It is shallow." There is a shallow cut across his side, his muscles ripple as he turns to show me. It is not deep at all and although it is bleeding it does not look bad. But my heart is racing.

He reaches out and touches my cheek. "Everything is okay, tesoro mio ." My body is shaking from the adrenalin, and he holds me tight against his chest.

We arrive home and the driver opens the door for us. "Are you okay, Sir?"

“Yes, we are both fine,” he tells the man.

We walk in and as the door closes behind us,

“Where is your first aid kit? Have you got one?” I ask, wanting to help him in any way I can. Massimo laughs, “Calm down, tesoro mio . I will get it for you, but I don’t think it is necessary.” He leads me to his bedroom and then leaves. He comes back holding a small case which he hands to me, then he unbuttons his shirt and tosses it over the chair nearby. I find the items I need. Disinfectant and a clean dressing I can put over the wound.

He sits down in front of me, on the edge of the bed.

When I apply the alcohol to his side, he winces slightly. “Sorry.”

“It’s ok, carry on.” His eyes are watching me closely. I can feel the intensity of his stare.

When the wound is cleaned, I unwrap the bandage and carefully apply it. His hand brushes higher up my thigh. I touch the bandage, making sure it is securely in place. Then my hand runs over his toned stomach, down the trail of dark hair leading below his belt. My fingers brush over cock. I can see it bulging against his pants and he lets out a deep sigh when my fingers rub against it. I look up and our eyes lock. There is a quiet pause, I’m not even sure if I’m breathing at this moment, then suddenly he pulls me toward him, his lips crashing into mine and the adrenalin and fear of what has happened turns into ferocious lust.

He stands up, grabbing the edges of the dress, which made me feel so beautiful, pulling it off my body.

He steps out of his pants and stands naked before me. His muscles bulging and his cock was rock hard.

He grins down at me as I eye the wound on his side.

He pulls my face up with his hand, so I’m looking into his eyes.

“Spread your legs wide.” He does not break eye contact when he speaks. I spread my legs, and he holds my gaze as he leans

over to dip his fingers into my pussy. “Yes. You are so wet.” I shudder under his touch. He straightens his back and grabs my legs, pulling me to the edge of the bed, towering over me where I sit. “Open your mouth, Nora,” he commands, pressing his cock against my mouth. I lick my lips and grin. Instead of opening my mouth, I run my tongue down the underside of his cock. It pulses beneath the warmth of my touch. I lightly kiss the tip of his cock and swirl my tongue over it.

He groans deeply. My fingers wrap around the base, and I glide my tongue up and down. Teasing him.

“Open your mouth, Nora,” he says again, and I ignore him.

Using his firm hand, he grasps my chin, prying my lips apart. He holds me in place and slides his cock into my mouth. He lets out a deep, satisfied groan as his cock fills my mouth and presses against the back of my throat. I gag and he laughs darkly.

“Do what you are told, and I won’t have to force it on you,” he says.

He thrusts himself in and out of my lips, fucking my mouth, my spit running down his cock.

“Fuck, tesoro mio, your mouth feels amazing.” He sighs deeply. Then he slides his cock out of my mouth and flips me onto my stomach.

“Lift your ass.” This time I do as I’m told, my face pressing into the duvet. He slips his fingers into my pussy. I shudder with need.

“Mmm,” He murmurs as he presses his fingers against my pussy.

He spreads me wide open with his fingers and I feel his cock against me. Then he thrusts hard into me, and I cry out with pleasure.

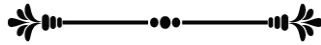
He kneels on the bed behind me, fucking me hard. Each thrust pushes my face against the blankets. My fingers dig into the fabric. He reaches out and wraps my long dark hair around his hand and pushes his cock deeper into me.

“Good girl,” he says, when I moan.

I cry out when he pushes so hard it feels like his cock is going to tear me apart. “Yes, baby. I know you can take all of me.” He moves his hips in slow circular motions until I’m moaning louder.

My fold is dripping wet.

He tugs on my hair, lifting my head from the duvet, and my back arches. Each thrust sends waves of pleasure through me, and I scream with pleasure as an orgasm arrives. I feel him grow rigid against me, his cock buried deep inside me as he releases into me.



Massimo

I FALL ASLEEP AND wake up with Nora in my arms. I don't want to let her go. Images of the rider from the night before haunted me and I think about how easily I could have lost her in that moment.

Long after Nora had fallen asleep last night, I lay away watching her. She slept so peacefully, and I struggled to understand why, for the longest time, after what had happened.

Then it dawned on me. She was peaceful because she knew; she knew without a doubt that no matter what happened to her or me, Our son would never have to be at risk in that way. And it is all because of her. Because no matter what I do to her, she would not give up his location. She would not allow me to drag him into my dark world.

Now it is morning, and I am still shocked by the realization that all of this time, she had been the right one. And after all of this time, she was the one who was strong enough to keep our son safe.

And now, I think sadly; I have to be the one who has to be strong enough to let her go so she can be safe, too.

I want nothing more than to keep her with me forever, but I know I can't do that. I know I can't lose her like I almost lost her last night.

I pull her tighter against my chest. Her naked body wrapped up in mine.

She takes a deep breath as she wakes up.

“Massimo.” Her lips whisper my name, and I kiss her gently on her forehead.

“Good Morning, tesoro mio,” I say. When she turns her face up towards me, I kiss her lips.

I feel my body stir, wanting her again.

I wait patiently for her to wake up completely. When her eyes lock with mine and she looks alert, a wide smile spreads across her lips, I say the words I know I need to say.

“You are free to go, tesoro mio.” My heart cracks. “You should leave as soon as you can. You should leave the city. They have seen us together and they might come for you. I don’t want to lose you, Nora. And I promise you, I’ll never mention our son again. I know why you did what you did, and I’ll honor that. Neither of us should ever speak of him again. Despite the pain of it, I understand what you understand now - that he can never be a part of my world. And neither should you.”

She props herself on one elbow and stares at me intensely.

“I don’t want to go, Massimo. I want to be with you.”

I shake my head. “I can’t ask you to put yourself at risk like that. All this time, you have been the right one. You knew it all along. You never once gave up the location of our son, and it was for good reasons. Look at what happens to those who love me, those who I love.”

She shakes her head. “I know I would not put our son at risk, but Massimo, I am not going anywhere.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

She reaches out and her fingers trace my jaw. Her touch is soft and tender. She smiles sweetly at me.

“I would risk anything to be with you. That is my choice. It is a choice you can’t make for me,” she says.

“You want to stay?” I ask, shocked. “You are choosing to be with me, knowing the risk you are taking?”

She nods, still smiling. “I never want to be without you.”

“Nora, if something happened to you—” my voice trails off at the horror of the idea of losing her.

“Nothing will happen to me. You will keep me safe like you did last night,” she says with confidence.

My heart thunders against my ribs and a huge smile spreads across my face. I pull her close to me and whisper against her ear. “I love you, tesoro mio.” She sighs, wrapping her arms around me and snuggling her face into my chest. “I love you too, Massimo.”

“Marry me,” I say, my lips against her hair.

She lifts her face off my chest and stares into my eyes.

“Marry me, Nora,” I ask again.

She grins at me. “I will,” she says, then rolls on top of me, her legs wrapped around me and her warm, gentle hands cupping my face. She kisses me passionately, a smile painted on her lips. I can’t stop grinning.

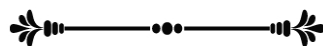
“I’ll marry you,” she repeats.

We spend the next two weeks planning our wedding.

Everything she wants for our wedding, I give her. Even if it seems nearly impossible, an idea too big to put into reality, I make sure she gets it. She fills my heart with happiness I never knew was possible.

“I love you madly, tesoro mio,” I whisper in her ear.

“I love you too, Massimo.” She grins at me.



Nora

I STAND IN FRONT of the tall mirror in the hotel room. The makeup artists and hairdressers hurry around me, applying a last brush of blusher and ensuring my hair is perfect. The delicate diamonds scattered through my curls are catching the light like starlight.

I smile at my reflection and run my hands over my dress. It is beyond words. It is the most beautiful dress I could ever have imagined.

Massimo flew a designer in from Paris to sit with me to create the dress of my dreams.

Two weeks ago, after we decided we were getting married, I dialed my mother's number, unsure if she'd even answer.

To my surprise, she picks up on the third ring. "Kiyomi?"

"Kon'nichiwa, mama," I breathe out in relief. "I have something to tell you and I need your blessing..."

"Are you coming home?"

"Uh, well, I want to tell you I'm marrying Massimo! And the wedding day will be two weeks from now. It will be so great if I have your blessing and attend my wedding to walk me down the aisle..."

She was silent for a long minute. I thought we had lost the connection. Finally, she speaks slowly and I know my mom so well, that she is deeply disappointed, “I was against you going back to the state without completing the study. I was afraid you might lose focus and get sucked back into his world. If this is what you want to do, then you will accept the consequences. I have no part in this farce of a marriage.”

Tears spill down my cheeks. “But Mom, I love him. Can’t you just be happy for me?”

“Happy? He’s a killer, Kiyomi!” She sighs heavily. “I prayed you’d come to your senses and run. For your son’s sake, don’t you want to know how was he doing? “

My shoulders slump in defeat. “Mama, I know you will keep him safe. And I’m sorry if I disappoint you, but Mama, I love you. Sorry mama.”

Her voice softens slightly. “I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“I do,” I whisper. “Take care of yourself. Bye, mama.”

I feel a lump forming in my throat when I think back to the conversation. I swallow hard and blink the tears away, not wanting to ruin my makeup. I struggle to control my emotions for a moment.

I take a deep breath and stare again at my reflection.

I’m about to marry the man of my dreams.

“It’s time to go,” the photographer says, gesturing for me to walk ahead of him down towards the church.

As I step carefully along the gravel path in my heels, my mind drifts back to the disastrous call with Laura yesterday...

My hands tremble as I dial Laura’s number. We exchange pleasantries, skirting the painful gap since we spoke.

“I’m marrying your father,” I blurted out. Stunned silence followed. Then a chilling laugh. “Good one. Never knew you had such dark humor.”

But when she realized it was true, her childlike voice pleaded, “He can’t have you too. I won’t allow it!” She ended the call with a blood-curdling scream.

The memory makes me shiver despite the heat. In that instant, our lifelong sisterly bond had shattered beyond repair. I brace myself for the storm coming my way...

Approaching the ornate wooden doors, I straighten my veil with unsteady fingers. It’s too late to turn back now.

Finally, I reached the church doors. The sound of music fills the air and my heart races in my chest. Massimo is standing at the altar and I can’t help but smile.

He smiles back at me. His eyes locked with mine.

I walk slowly towards him, even though I want to run and leap into his arms.

I can’t believe how gorgeous he looks. His suit fit perfectly to his broad shoulders, his thick arms, and his muscular build sculpted against the fabric.

I can’t believe he is going to be mine.

Finally, I reach him, and he holds out his hand. I place my fingers in his and step up onto the stage around the altar.

The crowd around us falls silent as the ceremony begins.

We stand staring into each other’s eyes, and it feels as though we are the only two people in the world.

We share our vows, promising each other love, safety, and honesty for our lives together.

Then I hear the words, “I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss your bride.”

Massimo steps forward and wraps his arm around my waist. He dips me backward and presses his lips into mine. My heart races.

I have never been this happy in my life.

Massimo takes my hand and leads me out of the church, and we head to our reception.

Massimo picks up a crystal glass and lightly taps it with his knife, calling for everyone's attention once everyone is settled.

"Thank you all for coming." His deep voice booms across the reception hall. "I have a few things I want to say about the most beautiful woman I know." He turns towards me, everyone listening intently.

"Nora, tesoro mio, you are the most amazing person I know. Your strength and resilience have taught me so much and made me incredibly proud of you. I have never met anyone stronger or more determined than you. I have never met someone more willing to give everything they have and everything they are for the people they love. I fell in love with you easily. And I know I will love you more with each passing day. You are my entire world and I never want a moment without you. I love you, Nora, my wife. And I will protect you and keep you safe until the end of time."

He leans down and wraps his arms around me, pulling me to my feet. I feel completely safe and completely loved with my body pressed up against him. He is my entire world.

We dance late into the night, surrounded by our friends.

Then finally it is time to head to the airport. Massimo has planned our honeymoon, and he won't tell me where we are going.

I climb into the back of the limo, my beautiful wedding dress spread across the seat. Massimo pulls me onto his lap and kisses me passionately.

"Are you ready, tesoro mio, for our lives to begin?"

He smiles at me, and his look tugs at my heart. His hands run over my body, sending shivers through me.

I can't wait to press my naked body against his again.

I shift with excitement in my seat as the jet takes off. "Where are we going?" I ask for the hundredth time.

He smiles.

I have changed out of my wedding dress into something comfortable and I'm sitting next to him on the private jet. He

wraps his arm around me and pulls me against him. “We are going to our private island, Nora.”

“You have an island?” I say in shock.

“I do. And I have prepared so many things just for you. Soon you will see our mansion on the island, We will spend a night on the yacht as well. Anything you want, anything you need, you just ask, amore.” He presses his lips against mine and I can’t stop smiling.

Before I know it, the jet is landing, and I have my face pressed against the window. I can’t believe how beautiful it looks.

“I only saw three houses when we flew over the island,” I say in shock.

“That is right. Our mansion and two smaller houses were on the other side of the island for the staff who work here. The entire place is ours.” He grins.

I feel safe here. We can relax and enjoy ourselves and not worry about anything at all.

The jet’s wheels bump against the ground as it lands. The doors open and Massimo scoops me up in his arms and carries me off the plane.

There is an off-road SUV waiting to drive us to our mansion. Massimo insists on calling everything ours now that we are married. I’m so grateful to have him as my husband.

He wraps his fingers between mine as we drive, and his smile infects me with happiness.

The mansion is beautiful beyond words and not at all what I expected. Ceilings adorned with chandeliers that capture the light and create a rainbow effect on the marble floors complement the mansion’s glass structure. It is magical and beautiful.

“I have asked the chef to prepare your favorite meal,” Massimo tells me. “We are going to eat dinner on the beach deck.”

“I can’t believe you kept this place a secret the entire time we were planning.” I laugh.

“I also had an entire wardrobe of clothing delivered for you. You will have a new dress to wear every day you are here.” He pulls me into his arms and wraps his fingers under my chin.

I stare into his eyes, and we are both smiling. He leans down and kisses me softly. “Let’s go swimming,” he suggests.

We dive into the warm ocean water as the sun sets across the horizon. The sky is glowing orange and purple when Massimo swims next to me and pulls me into his arms. He holds me close as the waves push and pull us, and our toes are massaged by the soft sand. “I told you not to wear this,” he says, tugging at my bikini.

I smile shyly, looking around to see if any of the staff is watching. “They know not to disturb us,” he says, dismissing my concern.

Massimo pulls off my bikini and throws it towards the shore. He pulls me against his naked body, and I feel how hard his cock is. He wraps my legs around his waist and his fingers wrap around my throat. He pulls my face towards his and kisses me hard.

I gasp when he rocks his hips against me, my pussy sliding over his cock.

“Do you want to feel me inside you, my beautiful wife?” he whispers against my ear, and his fingers dip into my pussy.

“Mmmm. Your pussy belongs to me now,” he growls.

I press myself against his fingers as he massages me deeply.

“What do you want, tesoro mio?” the soft sand massages our toes

“I want to feel your cock,” I tell him. “I want you inside me.”

“And I promised you would get whatever you wanted,” he says with a dirty grin. He slowly pulls his fingers out of me and replaces them with his cock. He slides into me, filling me up inch by inch. His cock is buried deep inside me. He presses me against him and starts to thrust, his cock stretching me open. The rhythm of the ocean waves matches his repeated pushes into me.

I wrap my hands around his neck and throw my head back, crying out with pleasure as he fucks me on our island.

It does not take long for my senses to become overwhelmed and my pussy to begin pulsing over his cock. I wrap my legs tighter around him, pressing my hips hard against him and he lifts me out of the water. Standing and thrusting faster into me.

“Come on my cock, cucciolo!” His voice vibrates through me.

I cry out again as pleasure rushes through me, my orgasm filling my body with electricity. I feel him tense and explode into me at the same time. He grips me tight and presses his lips against mine.



Epilogue

IT IS GROWING DARK, and I'm sitting at my desk, where I usually find myself late at night. I'm alone.

I stare down at my wrinkled, old hands. Time has turned my skin frail and transparent with age.

The passages that run through my mansion have been silent for many years now since my beloved Nora passed away.

I trace my fingers across the paperwork that is lying on top of my desk. Frustration fills me with rage, but my body is too old to express it.

The anger grows worse, and I swipe my arm across my desk, sending the papers flying from the desktop onto the floor. Some of them land face up, visible to anyone who might walk past. Emails from the private investigators I have hired. So many over the years.

I have my assistant print the emails out as my eyes are too tired to read the computer screen anymore.

The message on those papers keeps repeating itself. They cannot find my son. Not even a name. Nothing.

For years since Nora passed away, I have been searching. My son is the last link I have to her, the last thing on this earth that

might bring me relief from the pain in my heart that I feel every day without her by my side.

It is torture and darkness living in this world without Nora. My heart and soul beg for mercy. Just one more moment with her, one more glimpse of her beautiful face. I had hoped to find that in my son.

Every day when I wake up in the morning alone, I wish the same thing—that I had died before her. I never wanted to experience a day without her.

She would have handled it better than I am.

Yet here I am, still alive long after her death.

I stare with tired eyes at the papers spread across the floor and I want to scream.

“Oh my darling,” I whisper, “how I miss you.”

Tears fill my eyes as memories of our life together flood my mind. We endured it all, every trial and tribulation. The world tried so desperately to rip us apart, but our love prevailed.

Now, with her gone, the loneliness eats away at my soul. I yearn to see her radiant face again, to hear her lyrical laugh. The space beside me in bed remains cold and empty.

Nora, my light, my heart - how can I go on without you? This cursed life afforded me your love, the only thing that ever mattered. And then so cruelly snatched you away.

I cling to the hope of finding our son. To look into his eyes and see my Nora staring back - it would bring me peace. But my strength wanes with each passing day.

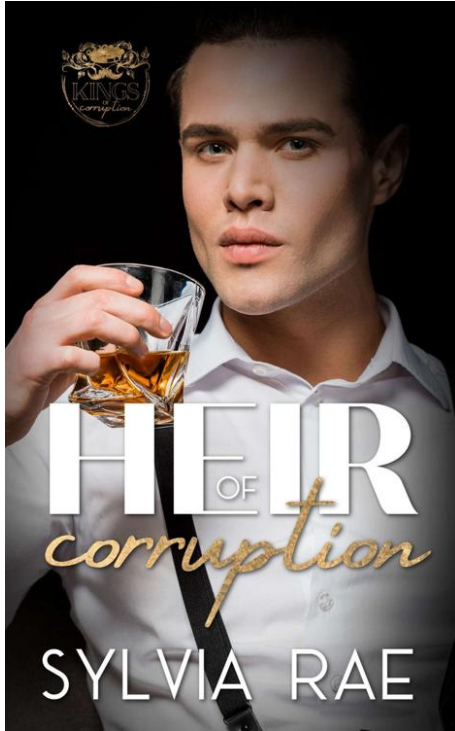
My love, I fear the time has come to leave this wretched world behind. To join you in the next life, where we can finally be together once more. I'm tired of soldiering on alone. Wait just a little longer, my darling. I will be with you soon.

I wonder if heaven awaits me, and my beautiful wife, who gifted me a life filled with love. Perhaps one day she will welcome me with open arms.

THE END

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