

AGE
GAP
MAFIA
ROMANCE

Curved

BY THE **MAFIA**

SORVINO MOBSTERS

VEDA ROSE

OWNED BY THE MAFIA

Age Gap Mafia Romance

Sorvino Mobsters Book 10

Veda Rose

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Chapter 1 - Robbie

I've never been a fan of mornings, but from when I was a lad, it was always up early and get the day started. It's been bred into me by my mother and later beaten into me by my father. I took the lesson quickly, and it became part of my breathing. Something I do without thinking, whether I'm hungover or not, I get up at the crack of dawn to start the day.

My brothers are the same. Though, on occasion, Jarryd will lie in on a Sunday as a *reward*. What kind of reward is lazying in bed? I don't know, but apparently, he certainly thinks it is one.

I walk across the street toward the pub. Its shiny exterior is a reminder that it was blown to pieces months ago as my older brother tried his hand at love. Fuck, it was bound to happen for one reason or another, eventually.

Love. Love is for the weak who don't know what they want in life. You can love many people in your life. Real connection is with intoxication. When someone fills your senses in every possible way, you can't do a single thing without thinking of them. When every choice you make, every turn you take, and every person you kill is for her.

I've had that intoxication, and it's not something you just get over. It's not only a broken heart, some time to heal, and onwards to the next conquest.

That one obsession never goes away. It might retreat to the back of your mind as you force yourself to focus on the present, but she's always there. Always. Waiting for us to cross paths again.

I step through the door and look at the family section, where Ronan is seated on a chair with his broken leg elevated. He's been recovering well but slowly. The recovery may be slow, but nothing slows my brother down. He may seem congenial to most, agreeable and peaceful, but I've seen Ronan at his worst. I've seen Ronan when he's been betrayed or when he's been in love. No, when he's been intoxicated.

He would never name her out loud. It would place her in the instant crosshairs of all our enemies.

I sit in the booth beside him, and I nod. “Alright?”

“Alright,” he says.

Molly comes out of the kitchen carrying a tray of dishes, each filled with various breakfast items. She sets them on the table and finally puts three clean plates at the end.

“Enjoy, boys.” Her voice is sing-song, and I see the smile Ronan gives her.

Intoxicated.

I reach over and pour myself a cup of coffee from the pot on the table. It’s still hot, so it must be fresh. I like my coffee black but sweet. It’s always how I’ve had it, whereas my brothers prefer milk and less sugar. I straighten my suit after I set my coffee down and look at Ronan.

“We need to talk about the security management for the Italian and Russian families.”

Ronan is busy piling food onto his plate. He loves Molly’s cooking. He always said it reminds him of Nan’s cooking, but that’s before my time.

“We’re integrating the Italians and Russians into our security to better manage the families’ security as a whole. You can handle that, I’m sure?” He glances at me with a raised eyebrow, and I frown.

He’s riling me up. He always has done so since we were children. He’d always say that out of the red-haired Quinn boys, I got the bulk of the temper and the least amount of patience. I don’t think he’s wrong, but he irritates me when he tries to goad me.

“It’s not that it’s difficult. It’s that the idiots don’t want to listen to me.” I sip my coffee and then decide to start dishing up some breakfast for myself. As I begin to eat, Ronan takes the opportunity to talk while my mouth is full.

“Look, you need to be diplomatic about the situation. Just because Alexander and Ivan have given orders for them to

integrate with the Quinn security teams doesn't mean they will like it on any level. The two families might get along in the higher ranks, but their people still mistrust each other and hate crossing those patriotic lines. They each love their own countries and cultures. They certainly have no love for ours." Ronan starts to eat, satisfied with his little speech.

"You are right," I scoff. "It is easier to deal with the heads of the family than their little soldiers. You seem to run well in that circle."

Ronan doesn't miss my tone, and his blue eyes bore into mine. I know to back down as he says, "Watch your tone, boy. I might not be Dad, and I might be laid up now, but I will make you regret your words, and you know it."

I don't apologize. We both know it's not my nature, but I don't speak back. Many people know my brother as a calm man, but I've seen what he was like before.

When breakfast is finished, I get up and turn to leave.

"Have a good day, Robbie." The intention is clear: Ronan is looking for respect.

"Have a good day, boss." I hate uttering the words, but Ronan seems satisfied, so I leave the pub to go to my headquarters. We're in the process of moving, but until we do, they're in Irish territory. The Russians and Italians don't like that.

I wish I could get rid of them all because this isn't what I signed up for. Normally, these other families are worlds apart from us, and we only get hired to do jobs for them once in a while when they don't want to get their hands dirty or be affiliated with a certain death or jump.

This is taking it to a whole new level. They're asking us to keep *their* men in check. To police their men, give them assignments, and assign them to guard duties for various people within the families. It's not that I can't do it logistically. I am excellent at making a roster that plays to everyone's strengths, and I'm good at handing over assignments.

I am not good at people. I need people who follow orders, not people who argue at every turn, every decision, and every breath. Especially those damn Italians. God, they're argumentative. The Russians aren't much better, more condescending, but the Italians think they rule the roost.

The worst part is that this is the first time the Italians are technically working with the Russians like this. Although the families were joined, they kept their security separated, so I don't know why Ronan agreed to do this.

Just for Daniel?

So he could get married and have a kid?

God, I never want children.

I hear the shouting from the street level already, but I don't quicken my pace. There's no need. They'll still be arguing by the time I get there. I recognize the one voice; it's Aidan. He's my second in command when I'm not around, and from the sounds of it, he's having a real go at an Italian guard.

The elevator opens, and I step out. The shouting is louder here, and you can barely make out words as they are shouting at the same time.

I pass a group of Russian men sitting around a small table, smoking and laughing at the noise coming from the main boardroom.

I give them a disdainful look before I slam the boardroom door open and look around.

Aidan and the Italian stop shouting to look at me. The slamming door startled them out of their fight, which is probably good because their faces are inches apart.

"You two should kiss and call it a night," I comment. I take out my cigarettes and light one, going to sit at the top end of the boardroom table.

"This idiot..." Aidan's voice is still raised, and I slam a hand flat on the table.

"I should shoot you both and save myself future childish arguments. Neither of you is the boss here. I am." I

look at Aidan, who inclines his head, then at the Italian. He seems familiar, but I can't quite remember his name. His face is still filled with anger.

"You are not my boss, and you never will be." He spits on the floor in my direction, snaps something in Italian at Aidan, and storms out.

Aidan turns to look at me with his hands up. "Boss, the guys won't listen. I'm just trying to tell them where they're needed." He lights a cigarette and inhales deeply, exhaling loudly.

I look out the window and flick my cigarette ash onto the little ashtray on the table. "Think they're better than us; that's the problem."

Aidan sits beside me and pulls a folder toward himself. "Well, let me tell you where I've got everyone then."

I listen as he outlays the plans for various jobs that we have going on this week, and the time goes by quite quickly. My phone starts buzzing on the table while I light my third cigarette.

"It's Dominic Sorvino." Aidan looks at me.

I sigh and pick up the phone. "Mr Sor..."

He instantly starts tearing me a new one without hesitation.

"Who the fuck do you think you are to talk to our men as dogs? You're paid to manage their schedules, not order them around like they're your fucking slaves, Quinn."

I glance at Aidan as I respond. "It's difficult to manage their schedules when they listen as well as a fucking brick wall."

This sets him off worse, and after a stream of what I assume are Italian cuss words, he screams over the phone, "You are so low on the fucking pecking order. Learn some fucking respect. You do as I tell you, not the other fucking way. You want my men's respect, fucking earn it. They say

you treat them like shit all the time and act as though they can't string a sentence together."

"Not an English one, at least," I snap back.

"You fucking punk, I should have you dragged and beaten for your insolence. Do your fucking job."

He hangs up on me, and I set the phone down and look at my best friend. "Give it ten minutes, and my brother will be on the line."

We sit in silence, not bothering to continue because it's inevitable.

The little Irish jig that is my brother's ringtone starts playing, and his face flashes across the screen under the name Bigger Brother.

"I can't work with them," I say immediately as I answer the phone before Ronan can get a word in. "These fucking Italian and Russian assholes don't listen, Ronan. I can't direct people who won't follow orders."

"Don't you fucking talk shit to me, Robbie. You've made your feelings on the new guys clear as fucking day, and I've heard how you speak to them. You get your fucking act together and make this fucking work, or you won't have any more work within this family. Do you hear me?"

He hangs up, and I stand up fast, slamming my chair backward into the wall. Aidan looks up at me.

"Where are you going?"

"To shoot things," I snap.

There's an open field, one I always visit, one I visit whenever I have the urge to think about her or when I'm too angry to control my temper. I do target practice there and envision the person I want to kill or the man I imagine touching her instead of me.

Chapter 2 - Dinara

My high heels click against the tiled floor as I make my way through the quiet, empty building. It's too early for anyone to be in. I love this time of the morning. I get so much more done in the silence before dawn than I ever do during the hustle and bustle of the day.

It's not like anyone shares an office with me or that I deal with many people in my position, but there are people. Noisy people. People walking up and down the halls, greeting and chatting, and talking about the minuscule small things that do not matter in the greater scheme of things.

I realize I've become a recluse since the stalking, and maybe I've come to enjoy it a little too much. But sometimes, I think I'm ready for a change and a challenge, and I have mentioned it to Katya before. Maybe it's time for something different.

I unlock my office and stroll in, setting my keys on the small table near the door. I put my handbag in the deep drawer of my desk and shut it. My phone goes onto its little charging stand on my desk, and I move to the long table alongside the left wall. I pick up a stack of green-colored folders and take them to my desk.

A few hours into my work through the folders, my phone's ever-plain old ringtone goes off, and I glance at the screen.

It's the boss.

Katya.

I answer it and put it on speaker. "Good morning, Katya. Are you well?"

"Morning, Dina. Always well, thanks, and yourself?"

"I'm good, thanks. Just getting a start on today's projects." I smile as I look at the decreasing pile of green folders. I know I'll make quick work of what's left of them.

My job is to get money to various places through the companies the family uses as fronts. Whatever I set out to do, I am the best at it. Katya knows this.

“If you’re not too busy, can I pull you away from work? I’d like to see you sooner rather than later.” Katya sounds calm, so I’m not worried, but I am curious.

“Am I allowed to ask what it’s in connection with?” I am already standing, switching the phone from speaker and putting it against my ear. I grab my handbag and finally my keys as I leave my office, locking it behind me.

“It’s a promotion, actually. I will give you all the details when we meet. It’s ten now; let’s go for brunch at the bistro.” She hangs up without a response from me.

It wasn’t a request. It was an instruction.

I get in my car and drive toward the bistro. There’s traffic now, unlike predawn, where everyone is still asleep—another good reason to start working early. You get to skip the bullshit that is New York traffic all day long.

By the time I get to the bistro, it’s closer to eleven. I walk in, and the hostess walks straight to me. “Katya is in the family’s private section.”

I follow her to the back and through a curtain. Katya is sitting at a small table.

“I’ve ordered you coffee and a hearty breakfast.” She smiles. “Lord knows with the work ahead of you, you will need it.”

“Is it a promotion or a punishment?” I joke as she stands, and we embrace.

We’re more than boss and employee; we’re lifelong friends, and I’ve always worked for her family from the day I was able to.

“So does this promotion include working from home so I no longer have to deal with people chatting outside in the hallway?” I ask as the waitress brings my coffee and sets it down.

Katya smiles and sits back, her hands crossed on her lap. “Actually, it involves you dealing with people.”

I grimace. “Really?”

“Not so long ago, you said you wanted a challenge, something different from what you always do, right?” She grins. She’s got me there.

“I was actually thinking about that this morning,” I comment. “But at the same time, I hate people.”

“Yes, but you do love bossing people around. I know that much.” She grins. “I have something in mind for you. Something completely different. Something that will not only challenge you but be of great service to me and the family.” Katya leans forward.

“Katya,” I lean forward as well, “you know very well I am happy to assist in any position you want me to.”

We wait while the waitress puts down the food. We start to eat as Katya continues to explain the job. “You see, there are problems the family is having considering the merges we’ve made, especially recently to the Irish families.”

“I’m not surprised,” I say. “The Irish are the rowdiest bunch around. Even more so than us Russians.”

“I want to promote you to manage security. For all three families. Keep the soldiers in check and balanced because the Irish are struggling to keep them under control. We need them to learn to trust each other. Although the families have merged in the upper ranks, the lower ranks are still squabbling, and it’s bound to lead to some nasty repercussions.”

“I won’t lie; a leadership role sounds great. I’ve missed coordinating people and giving instructions.” I smile as I have some of my bacon.

“It comes with a bigger paycheck, a new house, and a new car.” She says this as though these are the things that will sell me on the job.

“Unfortunately, this does mean you’ll have to work alongside one of the Irish brothers. I can’t remember which one, but I’ll get that information for you. Your office will now be in the East Village, so it’s a more neutral location, and as for your current position, I think your assistant, Privanka, should be up to the task of taking over.” She looks at me, waiting for an answer.

A cold shiver runs down my back at the mention of one of the brothers, but I hide it well. “I love the East Side, and Privanka will do an excellent job. She’s the only one I’d trust to do it at any rate.”

“Good because then we don’t have to go through the process of training anyone.” Katya smiles and sips her coffee.

Between all the chatting, we’ve finished breakfast, and we both relax a little, full and content—except for my apprehension of the brothers.

“I know you’re the best person for this position, Dina.” Katya looks into my eyes. “I know you won’t take their bullshit, anyone’s bullshit. I know what you went through was intimidating, and I still don’t know why you never told us what Irish guy stalked you so we could deal with it. But you are strong, and you can kick ass.” She gives me a warm smile. “Especially since you’re not a twenty-something-year-old little girl anymore.”

“No, now I’m a young recluse who hates people and prefers the company of cats.” We both laugh and settle down again.

Katya rummages through her purse and pulls out a set of keys. “Before I forget.”

She hands the set of keys over and then gives me a piece of paper. “This is your new address. I hope you like the house I’ve picked out for you. It will be registered under your name, not the family’s. So it’s yours in all ways. Let me know if I missed anything.” She grins and stands up. “I do have to go, though. I promised the twins we would go horse riding this afternoon.”

I stand out of respect and to hug my friend. “Thank you for trusting me with this. I won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t. That’s why I chose you.” Her confidence in me knows no bounds, and I leave shortly after her.

I sit in my car, mulling over Katya’s words. I’m confident I can do the work—I am good at what I do—but I will have to deal with some of my past issues, which might be tricky.

I sigh and look for something to distract myself. I notice my fist is still clenched around the paper Katya gave me, and I carefully unfold it. After staring at the address on the note for a moment, the location registers in my brain. They bought me a house where? Now, I’m too excited to do anything other than see my new home.

It takes a while to drive there, and when I reach the gates, I take out the keys. There’s a clicker, and I press it. The gates swing open effortlessly, and I drive through. The gates close automatically, and I wind up the curving driveway to what I can only describe as a small mansion.

I park and get out. I squeal and give a slight jump up and down before I rush to the door to unlock it. When I walk in, my mouth drops open in awe.

It isn’t the first time I’ve been gifted a place to stay by the family, but this is definitely the grandest they’ve ever bestowed upon me.

I make my way through the place slowly and realize there are a lot of modern appliances and luxuries that I don’t have at my old home. The kitchen is so fancy, which I love because I truly enjoy cooking and baking.

If I’ve gotten this as a home, then the position must be significant, and this excites me. I hardly even care that I have to work with an Irishman. I mean, I’m not a naive little girl anymore being stalked by an obsessed psycho. I’m a woman, a dangerous one at that. I can take care of myself. I didn’t just sit

idly by these years and play the victim. I learned self-defense, to shoot, to kill, and to do it well.

If this Irish guy wants to take me on, he will have a lot to answer for because my loyalty to Katya knows no bounds, and I will do anything for her, even go to war for her.

I give a little twirl in the living room and flop to sit in the deep cushions of my new sofa. It's so luxurious that I sink right in, and I picture napping here some afternoons.

The room is perfect for it, with the sun streaming through the floor-to-ceiling windows. The room is warm, both in temperature and decor.

I sigh and rest back for a moment. I know I need to go back to work and get everything sorted, but sometimes, it's nice to take a little kickback and relax.

I picture the Irishman who caused me so much trouble in my past and pursed my lips.

He was trouble I never should have gotten into. If I had known what I know about him now before meeting him, I would have run miles away or put a bullet through his head before he could so much as introduce himself to me.

It took years for me to overcome my fear of him and for him to stop stalking me.

Years.

I will never let a Quinn brother make me fear for my life like that again.

Chapter 3 - Robbie

I eventually shoot the beer cans so many times that there's nothing left of them, and ultimately, there are none left. I can't believe this bullshit that I find myself in. I have successfully managed our muscle for years now, and at the slightest whimper from the Sorvino brother, I'm in shit for not treating his thugs like the little ballerina princesses they are.

There's nothing I can do about it, though. My loyalty to my brother is unconditional, even if I think he is making a bad decision. I am considering talking to Daniel about it, but he's married into the Russian family, and he'll probably take the Russian's side in this.

My father is probably turning in his grave because of this alliance. It makes sense; other families won't touch us because we're affiliated with the two most prominent names in the organized crime industry. At the same time, we make money by providing their security services, training their men, and avoiding the daily media shit show that most families are involved in.

Once everyone has left the office, I ask Aidan to lock up, and I leave to go to the pub. Ronan is already pissed with me; no need to further his ire by being late for dinner prayer.

As I walk in, I take my suit jacket off and hand it to Molly, who takes it to hang up on the coat rack. I stride over to where Ronan sits, right where he was this morning, with his leg propped up.

Everyone comes in slowly, and I sit in the booth furthest away from Ronan. He glances at me and shakes his head. "Come on, usual spot."

I sigh and move to my regular seat nearer him, and we wait until the first crowd is in and settled down.

We close our eyes and bow our heads as Ronan prays over the food we've received, that we made it back safely

tonight, and for continued protection over the family, all members, blood or not.

We all say amen and tuck into the delicious roast that Molly and her team have prepared. There are smooth mashed potatoes, roast potatoes, salty buttery corn, and creamed spinach with bacon topped with melted cheese. There are boats of thick savory gravy to drown the food in, and then there are the pork belly roasts. The meat is falling off, but the crackling is crisper than the morning air before dawn.

Roast night is one of my favorite nights, and I suspect Ronan had a hand in the choice tonight to make up for our earlier spat.

As we finish dishing our food and tuck in, Ronan turns his attention to me. “You’re not going to like what I have to tell you, Robbie. The families have decided to bring in a supervisor from Katya’s family to oversee the merging of the security divisions and to make this someone chaotic phase execute more smoothly. I expect you to work with them instead of against them.”

My temper flares. The food isn’t an apology for earlier; it is a bribe for the news he just dropped on me. “For fucking hell’s sake Ronan. I don’t need a fucking supervisor. I’ve been doing this all my fucking life. I need obedience, and there’s a surefire way to get that.”

Ronan looks at me and raises an eyebrow. “That level of discipline would incite a war between the families, which is exactly what I’m trying to avoid. You’re being hardheaded and quick-tempered, and you need to learn to approach things with a sense of fairness you’re not used to giving.”

“You don’t think I’m fair to our boys every day? You don’t think I base my decisions on fact? Yeah, I get a bit pissed, but I have never let this family down. Why would I now?” I look away grumpily.

“You are loyal to this family, Robbie. You always have been. The family has issued an order. This is what your boss is telling you needs to happen. Are you going to go against my order?”

I realize the entire room has fallen quiet, listening to the conversation. I didn't notice we'd gotten so loud. I shake my head. "You know I won't disobey your order, Ronan."

Everyone goes back to their food, chatting softly. Ronan nods, and we continue to eat while I mull over this information.

"Look, it's a Russian woman named Dinara. She's got a background in stealth and security. She's good, Robbie. She's not going to be a hindrance to you. She's going to amplify your skills. Just give the woman a chance because this is who Katya Sorvino wants heading this project." Ronan bites into his meat and moans softly. "Dammit, Molly can cook."

At the sound of Dinara's name, an image instantly conjures in my mind, and adrenalin rushes through me. I know the woman that Ronan is talking about. She was, no, she *is* my intoxication. I've found ways to temporarily stave off my obsession with her, but there was a time when I knew her every move, breath, and look. I remember her writhing underneath me, her wrists handcuffed to the wall, and her legs around my waist. She'd never done something like that before, and her innocent cries of pleasure drove me mad as I slammed in and out of her until I came over her belly.

She had left quickly. I had scared her. I get a bit wild, I admit.

She was twenty-one and naive. I was closer to thirty-seven. Twelve years her senior. It had been raunchy and hot, and I had left nibble marks all over to remind her of me.

I smirk. Working with Dina won't be so bad. She's pretty bendable to my will and has a healthy respect for me.

I notice Ronan staring at me, and I raise an eyebrow. "What?"

"Why has your mood flipped?" he asks. "Your whole vibe has changed. I am pretty sure you almost cracked a smile."

I snort. "The thought of a woman bossing me around is kinda hot, I won't lie. Especially a good-looking Russian

woman giving me orders, I could get behind her...”

Ronan shakes his head. “You’re impossible, little brother. Absolutely impossible. You’re pissed you’re being supervised, and then you’re not pissed because it’s a woman you can hit on. She’s not going to go to bed with you, Robbie. Despite what your delusions tell you, you’re not an instant chick magnet.”

“Speak for yourself, old man,” I chuckle. “I can bed any woman I want.”

I glance at Molly, who’s paused at our table to put down more food, and she looks at me. “I’d rather be dead.”

Everyone bursts out laughing, including me, and Molly strokes my cheek. “Love, have a shave, will ya? You look like a homeless bodybuilder in a suit. It’s terrible.”

I blush and pull my face away. “Come on, Molly, you’re not my ma.”

“I am close to it,” she says sternly. “Don’t you take that insolent tone with me, boy, or you won’t get meals for a week.”

I get up and kiss her cheek. “Sorry, Molly, I know better than to speak back to you.”

“There’s a good lad. Ronan, stop gawking and eat your greens. Honestly, you boys would live off meat and potatoes if it weren’t for me hovering around you, making sure you ate something resembling a vegetable.”

“Potato is a vegetable.” Ronan mumbles.

Molly fixes him with a steely gaze, and he quickly dishes himself some more spinach.

She nods and leaves, and I chuckle.

“It seems being bossed by women runs in this family.”

Ronan chuckles. “I think Molly is scarier than any head of family we’ve ever known anywhere in the world. It would be a sad, poor fool that fucks with that woman.”

I smile. I wish Roman would just whisk Molly off her feet. He's always loved her, always protected her. But she doesn't want this life. She doesn't want to worry about being shot at or coming home, and the love of her life is dead. She calls herself an old cat lady, but in all honesty, she should have been a mother. She certainly raised me and Jarryd well.

We finish our food, and Molly comes to clear our dishes. She always runs our table herself. The rest of her team takes care of the other lads. Ronan smiles at her. "Delicious as always, Molly. Every day, your food just gets better and better."

"Hush you! You just want me to make shepherd's pie tomorrow." She packs the dishes onto a tray.

"I wouldn't say no to shepherd's pie," I comment, wiping my mouth on my napkin.

"I decide what's for dinner according to how you boys behave, and I don't know if you deserve a well-loved homely meal like that. You all have given me so many gray hairs this last year." Molly picks up the tray. "We'll see."

Ronan smiles, and as she leaves, he leans over to me. "That means we're getting it."

I chuckle. "When are Jarryd and Daniel going to be back from their trip?"

"Probably in a few days if all goes well and there's no further delays. Maybe even sooner." Ronan looks around and says goodbye to the lads as they leave, some in pairs and others alone.

"I'll see you in the morning then." I get up. "When does this Dinara start?"

"Tomorrow. I'll text you the address of the new offices."

I narrow my eyes, but he holds his hands up before I can say anything. "It'll be neutral ground for everyone. Just do your best not to be... you."

I sigh and walk out, stopping by Molly to get my jacket. It isn't long before I'm home. I change into grey sweatpants with nothing else on. I sit on my sofa. The lamps cast a low light around the room while the curtains are drawn. It feels very secluded.

I rub my crotch through my pants. The thought of Dina beneath me, writhing, begging me for more, arouses me.

I imagine a board room, bending her over the table and taking her from behind. As the thoughts flood my head, my dick hardens. I rub it through the pants harder before I pull the waistband down and stroke it.

I fixate on a spot on the wall as I picture her bouncing back and forth on my dick over the table. I reach around with a free hand and rip her little blouse open so her breasts hang free and swing back and forth as I fuck her.

She wants me to stop, but she doesn't. She knows it's wrong, but her dripping pussy is a perfect fit for my dick because we were meant to be together.

I close my eyes, and I give a soft grunt as my hand flies up and down my cock, and my balls start to tighten.

As I cum I murmur the name of the person I've always been intoxicated with.

“Dinara.”

Chapter 4 - Dinara

While I hand the work over to Privanka, I get a message from Katya.

I told them to pack up. Move boxes. And leave it there for you.

I didn't want you to come home and not be able to find anything.

This is a gift from me personally.

K.

This just makes me more excited to get home. I hate packing up a house, Katya knows that, but I don't mind unpacking as much. I'm so excited to put everything in its place and start my new home life in the mansion. I think I'll name it something special like they used to in the old days.

After I leave with the few personal belongings I have in a small box, I arrive at my parking spot to find a brand new Mercedes parked where my little Fiat used to be. I look around and see a security guard approaching me—keys in hand.

“Mrs. Sorvino said that this was better suited to your style. The guys took all personal belongings and put them in the trunk.” He hands over the keys and smiles. “It's nice to see you stepping up in the business world, Miss Dina. I always thought you were the hardest working lady in this place.”

“You are too sweet, Darian. Take care.” I put the little box I'm carrying in the trunk with my other things, grab my sunglasses, and pull out of the parking lot. The Mercedes drives so smoothly that I feel like I'm gliding more than traveling on the road. Gliding effortlessly.

I get home, and as I walk in, I see a book on the entrance hall table.

Boxes—numbered and contents

I pick it up and read the first line.

Box One—kitchen—coffee mugs and side plates

Book Two—kitchen—crystal dinner set—FRAGILE

I walk to the kitchen, and sure enough, I find the corresponding boxes. This is going to make unpacking so much easier than I anticipated. Whoever did this, they're good.

I spend most of the evening unpacking my bedroom, as that's my main spot for the night. Then I shower, lather on lotion, and go to bed.

Big things are happening in the morning.

As usual, I'm awake at five, and I quickly shower and dress. I haven't set up my new coffee machine yet, so I decided to get coffee at the office.

I'm in the East Village and parked at the office before six, and I take out the work keys Katya sent me. I walk into the entrance to find two guards in suits behind a desk, along with a space for a receptionist.

"Good morning, gentlemen. I am Dinara, head of security." They both stand out of respect.

"We were expecting you, ma'am. Would you like one of us to show you to your office?" The larger of the men, to the right, steps out from the desk.

"Yes, please." I follow him to the elevator and two floors up. He leads me past some board rooms and down a hall to an open reception area. There are two offices, one to the left and one to the right.

"You're in the larger one to the left," he says. "Your second in command will be to the right."

I smile at him. "I didn't catch your names. What's your name? And your partners?"

"I'm Angelo, and I work the morning to midday shift with Rudy." He bows his head slightly. "I'll leave you to get settled."

He leaves, and I go into my office. It's spacious, and everything is furnished in this new office. I just need to move

it around more to my tastes.

I stand by the window. The sun is peaking over the horizon now, and I can see the park from where I am. It's a beautiful view from a lovely, secure building. This job will be challenging, but I know how tough I am.

I hear the elevator doors open on my floor and footsteps as someone walks down the hall toward my office.

I don't want to be caught off guard, so I calmly make my way to the office door. When I reach it, looking into the hallway to see who is there, I completely freeze.

Of all the Irishmen I could be working with, it is Robbie fucking Quinn.

We stand there, eyeing each other for the longest, most awkward moment before I tilt my chin and confidently ask, "Can I help you? What are you doing here?"

He shrugs. "What are you doing here?"

He's asking the same question, but somehow, I sense he knew I'd be here.

Another awkward silence.

I take charge and stand firm. "This is my office building where I am running as head of security for the families."

I see the dangerous flash in his eyes, and he scoffs. "I'll be damned if I work for you."

"Well, then you can leave Mr. Quinn. There's no necessity for you to be here." I don't want to get trapped in my office, so I keep firm, walk toward him, and then past him.

He catches my wrist and pulls me close to him, so close I can smell the coffee on his breath.

"Do you remember what it's like to cross me? To be punished by me?" His voice is low and threatening, but I'm no longer twenty-five in the shadow of a thirty-seven-year-old.

Before he can blink, my gun is in my hand, and the barrel is pointed at his crotch. "You'll find I'm no longer a

little child who gets spanked for being naughty. There are consequences to fucking with me.”

Robbie releases my wrist, and I step back, my finger still on the trigger. “I don’t care what you want. Either you get on board with me being the boss, or you can get out. I’m not playing sick little mind games with you, Robbie.”

He tilts his head and looks at my gun, still pointed as his pride and joy. He steps a little closer and looks deep into my eyes.

“Fine, I’ll play by your rules. For now.” He smiles and steps away again.

“I assume you are second in command.” It’s not a question so much as it is rhetorical. “That means your office is behind me to the right.”

I step further away from him so he can pass, and once he’s not looking, I slide the gun back into its secret little holster.

“However,” I say, and he pauses at the door to look at me, “I would prefer both leaders are not so close in proximity. If one of us goes down, the other has to be in a safe place to assume leadership. Let’s see where else we can put you.”

I lead him to the elevator, and we take it to the first floor. I want him beneath me so he knows what it feels like to be dominated by someone in power.

We exit the elevator. I can feel his eyes trained on me as I lead him down the hallway, checking each space.

“This is perfect.” I smile as I open up into a small room with no windows.

“You’re joking.” Robbie looks at me with disdain. “You seriously think you can put me in this piece of shit office.”

“I’ll be knocking the wall down between the two offices upstairs to make more room for myself, of course. If I recall, you aren’t a man who likes many possessions, so this should suit you well.”

I know he's pissed, but I try not to show how much I'm enjoying it. "I need to see how you've been running things, so carry on as you were for now. I will observe so that I can run the operation better."

I turn and flounce off, a smirk on my face. He doesn't follow. As I enter the elevator, I look down the hall to see him staring after me.

It makes my blood run cold, but I return to my office and start rearranging the furniture as I want it for both safety and convenience. Even though I'm physically distracting myself, I am acutely aware that he is in the same building as me.

The elevator dings, and I hear footsteps again. I look up to see Robbie at the door, smiling. "Dina, good news. There's an office on this floor at the end I can use. I just chatted to security, and no one is using that office. Far enough apart that we should be safe." He steps into my office, and I straight up, breathing slightly harder than usual. "I mean, you're not afraid of little old me, are you?"

It's a challenge, and I need to meet it head-on.

"Of course not, Robbie. You are welcome to the office down the hall. That will, however, place you first in line should we be attacked." I raise an eyebrow.

He shakes his head. "It places the attacker as first in line to be killed by me. Anyway, I need to see to the men while you... decorate. If you feel like joining us, we're in the first-floor board room."

He leaves, and I frown.

That distinctly felt patronizing, and my teeth were set on edge. I fucking hate that man with the passion of a thousand wounded souls. I go back to sorting out my office, but my thoughts are on Robbie.

I remember being handcuffed to the bed with my legs pushed up either side of him. He had been so rough, biting me hard enough to leave bruises all over my body but not hard enough to break skin. He had been so rough with my breasts,

been obsessed with them. I remember how he had teased me and prolonged the pleasure so that it would sometimes take forty-five minutes to an hour for me to orgasm. Touching me, rubbing against me, licking and sucking...

I find myself warm between my thighs, and I shake my head. I catch my face in the mirror, and it's red. The man was a fucking sicko who stalked me for years after what we had was over, and I was terrified that he would take me and never let me see the light of day again. Everyone knows Robbie is seven out of eight screws loose of a fitment.

No one tightened the lug nuts on that brain, and on top of that, he's a crack-shot and killer assassin. No pun intended.

I shift slightly, pressing my thighs together, but the warmth in my groin doesn't go away.

It wasn't just bruises and stalking. There had been other things he'd done to me.

Things I'd enjoyed.

Chapter 5 - Robbie

I need to play this carefully. Ronan cannot know about mine and Dina's previous relationship—no one can. It's a weakness I don't want to flaunt. She was the one who got away.

I won't lie; when I had her that close, and she produced a gun to my cock and threatened me, the way she took charge, my cock was rock hard just from that. Luckily, I hid it well. There's something new about her, an air of confidence that hadn't been there when she was twenty-five, and a part of me wonders if it's real or an act.

I have to seem outraged by this situation, even though it places me to be near her. Right where I have always wanted to be. I would have continued to stalk her and forced her to be mine years ago if Katya hadn't married Alessandro and created a more threatening enemy to our family.

I had to back off, not because anyone told me to but because my loyalty, first and foremost, is to the Quinns.

And as exciting as it was to be close enough to feel her warm breath on my lips, my new office is not.

I at least wormed my way back to the same floor as her so I could keep an eye on her, but this tiny little shithole office that will barely fit a desk will not cut it. I think I'll take a leaf out of her book and break the wall between the two offices so I can incorporate one of the boardrooms into my office.

I don't need her approval for that kind of shit, it's not security related.

I hear the elevator doors close and realize she's left without a word.

I need to go and sort the men out, but when I get to the first floor, no one is there. I don't have Dina's number to check with her if she sent them away, but I text Aidan, who says the men were told to go to the pier for a job with the Italians.

I sigh. This disrespect has to come to an end. If I just shoot one of the guys, regardless of the family they're from, I'll command a healthy level of respect that will ensure the others listen.

I lock up my office, take the elevator to the ground floor, and go to Rudy. "Where did she go?"

"Miss Dina said she would be back as soon as she can, that's all." They both stood when I walked in, showing me the respect I deserved. I wondered if they stood for her.

"I'm leaving. Call me on my cell when she's back to let me know." It is an instruction, not a request, and the two men nod their understanding.

I leave, walking swiftly to my car and getting in.

It's not far to drive to my family's pub, and once I'm parked, I go inside. I need to play this carefully: if I show I'm excited to work with Dina or if I show I know her, Ronan will have questions I don't want to answer.

So when I step in, I compose my face into one of irritation. My oldest brother is seated at the bar this time, eating his lunch of fish and chips while Molly packs away glasses.

I stomp over to him and growl, "I didn't know you meant *that* Dinara. I've heard about her. She's weak. I won't be taking orders from her, Ronan. I won't work for a weak fucking woman."

Ronan is not surprised at my outburst, but Molly leans over and whacks me against the ear, causing my ear to ring slightly.

"Don't you say women are weak or can't lead, you little rat. There is nothing wrong with working for a woman. They are good at organizing things and discipline. I mean, for fucks sake, Robbie, it's in our DNA to police little children all the time, grown men included." She looks at Ronan, motioning in my direction with her head. "He's lucky he doesn't work for me. I'd tan his little hide for being so insubordinate."

“Maybe I should put him in your kitchens,” Ronan jokes. Molly scoffs and walks off, unfazed by this.

Ronan turns to me, chewing softly and swallowing. “While I am mildly annoyed that you interrupted my lunch, that was rather amusing. I should put you in Molly’s kitchen for a year or two. You’d learn a healthy respect for women.”

“I respect Molly plenty. It’s the Russian princess I don’t respect.” I sit on the barstool next to him.

“She’s not a princess. She isn’t related to Katya. She’s simply someone who works for them, so you’ll probably find she’s more agreeable than the heads of the family are.” Ronan stabs a piece of fish with his fork and eats it.

“I...” my phone buzzes, and I take it out. It’s Aidan.

“Hello?”

Aidan’s rushed voice comes over the phone loud enough for Ronan to hear. “Our boys got jumped at the pier boss. Before they were attacked, they called, saying something fishy was happening with the Italians there. It was a huge fight, apparently. I’m going to the pier now.”

I stand up. “I’ll deal with the pier. You go to the office and summon the boys.”

I hang up and look at my brother. “Still think we can work with them?”

“You know how many Italian crime families there are in New York? Check what’s happening and maintain the peace as best you can. I don’t want a war, Robbie. I mean it.” He goes back to his food, and I leave. I gun it to the pier, and when I arrive, I see a few of our paid cops standing there.

“Mr. Quinn, it’s quite bad. We haven’t called it in yet, but there’s no saying if anyone else has.” The one-beat cop says as he walks up to me.

“How many dead?”

“Six, all your men. No injuries or deaths for anyone who did this,” he looks around. He is an Irish lad himself, someone the Quinn family took care of when he was young.

“Call it in, but make it a fight among each other. Use Detective Brooks. He’ll smooth this over. Don’t let the media get wind of this at all.” I straighten my suit. The men are going to be fucking pissed about this. How the hell am I supposed to keep the peace?

I take out my phone as I walk back toward my car and dial Dominic. The rage filling up in me slowly is palatable.

“What is it, Quinn?” His tone is harsh, and I know he’s a busy man.

“The boss the Sorvino family appointed over me, Dinara. I need her number. There’s been a hit on my men, and it will cause a lot of infighting if we don’t sort it out immediately.” I stop at my car. “The men called and said it was Italians before they were all gunned down. There’s not one dead Italian to show for it. My men are going to assume it’s your men.”

Dominic sighs. “You know it wasn’t my men.”

“Do I?” I ask. “How do I know you have control over *all* your men?”

“Do you have control over yours?” I keep quiet, and he continues, “My men respect me. They wouldn’t do this, but I’ll ask them anyway. I’ll send you Dinara’s number now. And don’t take a snotty tone with me again, Robbie Quinn. I *will* put you down.”

He hangs up, and I climb into my car, waiting patiently. The notification goes off, and I check Dinara’s number. I save it after memorizing it, and then I dial her.

It goes straight to voicemail. I know she doesn’t have this number, so it isn’t actively blocked. She must be in a meeting, probably with the family. I drive back to the Irish territories quickly and head to my headquarters. It’s only my men in there, as many of them as I can count. Some are still out working, but word will get to them, and I need it to be my word and no one else.

Aidan is trying to talk over the men, but they’re not listening. I put my fingers in my mouth and whistle loudly.

“Shut the fuck up!” I on a crate in the front of the room so everyone can see me.

“I know you’re all angry as shit because we were attacked, but, at this point, we don’t know who it was...”

“It was the fucking Italians, Robbie,” someone calls out from the back. I’m sure it’s Mac.

“Listen, there are loads of families that are Italian. Just because the one we’re working with are assholes doesn’t mean they carried out a hit on our men.” I look around. “So no fucking fighting back.”

There is a complete uproar, and I take my gun out, firing three shots into the ceiling. As ceiling dust rains down and the men fall silent, I roar, “No! Fucking! Revenge! Kills.”

The men shuffle their feet, and I sigh. “Anyone who retaliates before we get the facts is as good as dead to the Quinn family. Now, I will find out who did this, and if it is the Italians we are aligned with, I promise you, I’ll give you as many guns as you can carry right to the Sorvino front door. But until we confirm it’s them, I don’t want anyone starting up shit.”

The men mumble their agreement. They know I’ll shoot them in the fucking head if they carry on the way they did. There is only room for one chief, and sorry, Dina, that’s me.

I can see my men are unhappy about the situation, and I look around. “I would just like to remind you, from the older fellas who came in with my Granda and my da to the younger guys who came through with Ronan, that the Quinn family has *always* protected its own—first and foremost. We’re hard-working Irish folk on whose backs many nations were built to greatness. We will let you have your revenge on the people who killed those men today. Those men were my brothers, as sure as Ronan, Daniel, and Jarryd are. As sure as you are.”

The men nod at this point, and I know I’ve struck a chord. I allow myself a slight grin. “Please, men, I’m asking

you for a wee bit of time to get to the bottom of this. Then we will take our pound of flesh.”

As I’m about to hop off the box in front, I see Ronan at the door, nodding. He turns to leave as I jump down.

Chapter 6 - Dinara

Katya listens to me calmly as I speak.

“I just don’t think I’m the right person for the job, Kat. I cannot work with Robbie Quinn. He’s a narcissist, an asshole, and he will probably get me killed.” I don’t take my eyes away from hers. “Please, I know it’s an honor, and I can return everything. I just don’t think I’m the one to sort out a mess Robbie Quinn has made. The man is fucking psychotic.”

Katya sips her wine and purses her lips. “That’s why I chose you, Dina—the calm to the chaos that is Robbie Quinn. The man needs a gentle hand to merge the families’ lower ranks without problem. You can do that. It cannot come from someone higher up in the family by relation.”

I sigh. I haven’t touched my red wine, and I don’t want to. I want to be fully here as I speak to Katya. Wine makes me easier to convince.

The door to her sunroom opens, and her greying, handsome husband walks in. He’s still tall and fit, but the greys in his hair and the beard he is now growing are clear as day.

“Katya. Dinara. We have a problem.” His tone is serious, but instead of addressing Katya, he turns to me. “Ronan Quinn just called me.”

“What did Robbie do now?” I scoff. “Kill the mayor.”

He doesn’t react but sits in the available armchair facing us.

“Six of his men were just gunned down at the pier. Before they were gunned down, they called to say the Italians summoned them, and that is presumably who attacked them. Now, Dominic checked, and no one called the Irish down to the pier. No one from our families, but of course, the men aren’t going to believe that. You’re going to have to handle this delicately, Dina.”

I listen, horrified, knowing I can't step out of the role now. Not at the first sign of trouble. Katya is watching me closely, and I look back at Alessandro as I nod. "I'll get on it straight away, Mr. Sorvino."

Alessandro clicks his tongue. "The fact that I had to come find you to get on it at all concerns me. You need to be on top of these situations at all times."

"My love..." Katya starts to say, but Alessandro holds his hand up.

"I agreed with Katya when she said you would be the best person to do this, but if you're going to do this, you need to get your head in the game. You were doubting whether you could control Robbie Quinn. You're not here to parent him. You're here to get the men in order, merged, and working together without issue. If you have a personal problem with Robbie Quinn, best you sort it out because I can promise you now, either you're in it for the long haul, or you can leave."

I realized he'd been listening to our conversation for some time. Katya looks at me with sad, apologetic eyes.

Alessandro sits forward, resting his elbows on his legs and linking his hands. "We are on the brink of war because of this merge. I don't regret it; the Irish are strong men to have in our corner, and it multiplies our forces. But I will regret it if men from all three families fall out and start killing each other. It won't matter what the heads of the families order. Then what we have built will crumble to nothing, and other families will use that to their advantage to take what is ours. A lot is riding on you getting this right, Dina. Do not disappoint me."

He stands, kisses Katya's forehead, and walks out.

Katya reaches a hand out to me. "I'm sorry, my friend."

"It is the nature of what we do, Kat." I give her a reassuring smile. "Alessandro places a great deal of trust in me, making me feel more confident."

"If you truly can't..."

“Then no one can. I will deal with Robbie Quinn as I see fit. Thank you for letting me air my concerns. I best get this sorted out straight away.” Katya gets up, and I give her a hug before I leave. Once I’m in my car, I let out an unsteady breath. My hands tremble, and I’m shaky as I start the car, but then I settle down as I drive off, deciding where to go first.

The phone rings through the car sound system, and I press the answer button. “Dina, hello?”

“It’s Robbie. We have an issue.”

“How did you get my number?” I ask without thinking.

“That’s not important now. There’s been an attack,” he says.

“I know. Alessandro just told me. I am on my way to the office to summon the men.” I am not confident about that answer, but he needs to know I have a plan.

“I’ve already spoken to mine. They’re still here, and they want a Sorvino to tell them who it was that attacked them. Can you get Dominic to come down here?”

Anger bubbles inside me. He’s going over my head as though I’m not in charge. I need to nip this now.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Dominic is a busy man, and I’m head of security. I’m not far away. I will be there shortly to address the men. Make sure they don’t leave.” I hang up before he can argue, and I turn around.

Places I never wanted to go to again for a hundred points: Robbie Quinn’s security headquarters in the Irish territories. A faint memory of the two of us in his office surfaces, and I shiver. As Alessandro pointed out, I need to keep my head in the game and put whatever issues I had with Robbie Quinn aside. Right now, I have to protect the family from a major war.

I find parking, and as I exit the car, a few guys standing nearby whistle at me.

I give them the finger as I stride into the building and past security. I can hear the rumblings of many voices and step

into the vast meeting room filled with smoke and the stench of whiskey.

Men turn to look at me, and in a wave, the room falls into silence. The men move out my way without me asking as I walk toward the front, where Robbie is with a man who looks familiar.

“Dina,” Robbie says. “This is Aidan. He’s in charge when I’m not.”

“Well, you’re not in charge. I am,” I quip.

I see a crate nearby and step onto it without wavering. “Gentlemen. My name is Miss Dinara Popov, and the three dons of the families have appointed me to oversee the merging of the most important part of the operation: the men who carry out the security.”

There is some grumbling, so I raise my voice, “I stand with you in anger that someone would dare think they could lay a hand on someone who belongs to our family. We are one family, everyone who belongs under the Sorvino, the Volkov, and the Quinn banners. We *will* find out who planned this heinous crime, and we *will make them pay* the only way we know how. Killing amongst the families is not tolerated, and I can assure you that no one from the Italian family requested the Irish men to meet them at the pier where they were attacked. This is most likely interference from another family, trying to sow dissent.”

There’s more grumbling when one of the men steps forward. He’s older than Robbie, from the looks of it, a seasoned man and most likely a very respected member of the group. He looks me up and down. “I’m not going to take fucking orders or well wishes from someone who belongs in the kitchen until I summon her to suck my cock.”

Before anyone can laugh, jeer, or comment, and before I can step down and handle the situation, Robbie has the man by his shirt with a knife pressed against his throat in the fastest flash of a millisecond. The silence is thick, and everyone watches the interaction.

“I don’t like it any more than you do that they chose a lass to lead us. She clearly has the qualifications that we don’t if they choose her. We don’t know what she knows or what she’s trained in. What I do know is that the man who leads our family has told us that we are to listen to her. All three leaders of this coalition chose her to oversee everything with a fresh perspective. That includes us, the security. So now we’re going to shut the fuck up and listen to what she has to say, understand Stevie?”

The man’s eyes are wide, and he nods slightly, not too hard because of how hard the knife presses into his throat. When Robbie pulls away, a trickle of blood drips down from the small nick he made.

Aidan steps forward and holds up his hands. “Lads, Ronan and Robbie Quinn have never steered us wrong before, and they’re not going to know. They will never sell us out. Robbie told you earlier that you are his brothers, and he means that. Now, this lass has come to tell us that it wasn’t from their side, and we need to trust this. We need to trust that Ronan and Robbie, as always, are doing the best thing they can for us, the family. Can we agree there?” Aidan looks around.

Men call out their agreement, and the tension in the air dissolves, not to a friendly atmosphere but more of a calmer one. Some of the men, from where I’m standing, still don’t look happy, but you can’t please everyone.

“As soon as I have news of who’s behind this, you will all be summoned,” I say.

Robbie appears on a crate next to me and looks at me. I raise an eyebrow as he turns to the crowd. “That being said, we’re going to be operating from somewhere new in the East Side. It’s more spacious, and there will be new rosters, new amenities, everything. Groups A and B must be there at eight in the morning to receive their briefing. Everyone else can pick up their rosters anytime during the course of the day. Group C and D are to be there at two for their briefing.”

The men talk amongst themselves as Robbie calls, “That’s it. Off ya fuckers go.”

He hops off the crate and offers me a hand, but I step down on my own. I walk right up to him, giving him a broad smile so no one thinks we're at odds.

“If you *ever* talk over me, interrupt me, or try to show me up again, I'll have your head on Alessandro's wall as a trophy. I don't need you to protect me. It makes me look weak. I'm anything but.”

I turn and walk out.

Chapter 7 - Robbie

Seriously? I fucking protect her, and she has a little hissy fit. I don't care what Ronan says; she may not be a princess, but she acts like an entitled bitch.

All I did was step between her and Stevie and establish that *she's* in charge. What is fucking wrong with that? I enforce that Ronan is the leader all the time. She is so fucking unappreciative.

I don't care if it was sexy as fucking hell that she walked into the room as though she owned it, told the men off, and stood her ground. I wouldn't have cared if the men saw me fuck her right there, but I didn't want them to see her nude. As far as anyone is concerned, she's mine, and no one gets to see, touch, or perv over what's mine.

To be honest, I felt rather possessive of her as she spoke. But now I'm annoyed. She should be a lot more grateful that I'm taking her side rather than opposing it, but that's what you get with these airheads. They think they're a big shot and are too good to get their hands dirty.

Fuck.

Even while I'm annoyed with her, my dick twitches as I think about her. That's intoxication. Not Love. Love you'd be pissed and find someone else. Intoxication is obsession without conditions.

"Robbie."

I turn to Aidan and follow him as we walk after Dina. The men have all gone off, and she seems to be taking a look around the place. As though she doesn't remember getting fucked in my office. I leave Aidan and step up behind her. "Want a tour down memory lane?"

I can see her face flush and smile.

She looks at me coolly and says, "Nothing memorable happened here."

That stings, but she's clever.

I follow her out of the building. There's a fancy Mercedes-Benz parked nearby, and I assume it's hers.

Shots ring out, and I grab her, pull her to the ground, and crouch over her. I reach behind me, pull out my semi-automatic handgun, and start firing at the car with tinted windows as it speeds past and down the road. I stand up slowly, and she allows me to help her to her feet.

She looks down the street and then at me. "Someone doesn't like one of us."

"I think it's you," I smirk. "I'm a joy."

She rolls her eyes, and we turn as men come pouring out of the pub. I see Ronan hobbling out; the men surround him to protect them.

"That's your brother," she says as a fact and then just openly walks across the street without a care. "Dina!" I hurry after her. "Be careful."

Ronan leans on his crutch and holds out a hand. "Apologies, this is not normally how we greet our guests, Miss..."

"Please, call me Dina, Mr. Quinn. It is a pleasure to meet you in person, officially. It is such a pleasure to be on this side of the world. I've always loved this area."

"It has a historic charm to it," Ronan muses. "I will call you Dina if you address me as Ronan. Please."

She nods. "Thank you, Ronan. I will be on my way now."

"Are you sure you're not hurt?" Ronan asks curiously. He doesn't seem panicked or surprised at all.

I step forward. "I'm pretty sure I got her out the way in time."

Dina's eyes meet mine, and they're cold as ice. She smiles as she turns back to Ronan. "It isn't the first time my

life has been in danger. It most likely won't be the last, either. It's the nature of what we do."

"It is. I am, however, going to ask you to take Robbie home with you." Ronan looks at me, and we both stare at him. "I cannot, with good conscience, let you go home alone when someone just clearly tried to take out a hit on you."

"I have to insist; I don't need Robbie to guard me."

"Well, you need a lift home," I say as I glance at her car. "Your car is shot to shit."

She glances back and sighs. "It is, but I can catch a cab. I really don't need protection."

"I'm afraid, as head of the Quinn family, I'm going to have to deny your request and send Robbie home with you anyway. He's a crack shot, a great guard, and I assure you if he's anything less than a gentleman, you can come to me, and I'll deal with him."

I see her look at Ronan and then at me, and I know she can't say no because it's a direct instruction. If she doesn't listen, then she knows Ronan will call Alessandro.

She nods. "Of course, Ronan. If you insist, I will listen to your instructions."

"I do insist. Robbie, take her home safely, lock her down, and make sure no one hurts her. Even you." He looks at me pointedly.

I nod. "She's perfectly safe with me, I assure you." I look at her. "Come along, lass."

She smiles and bids Ronan goodbye before following me to my car. We climb in, and I ask for her address. Once I have it, I concentrate on driving. There's an awkward, tense silence between us, and I want to say something cheeky to break it.

"If you so much as think about laying a hand on me, I'll desex you so fast they won't be able to tell if you ever had a penis to begin with." Her voice is icy, and I try not to laugh, but a small chuckle escapes.

“I don’t know how you can hate me so much, but I promise I will never do anything you don’t consent to.”

She scoffs, and I glance at her but don’t say anything further.

I navigate through the traffic before I pull up to her driveway. She uses her clicker to open the gate, and I glance around, taking note of vulnerable points in the high wall built around her little mansion of a home. I never understood why single people need to have so much space. It’s really overkill if you ask me.

I pull up to the front of her house and park. We both climb out, and she leads me into the house. I inspect the living room and motion for her. “Stay here while I sweep the rest of the house.”

“Seriously?” she mutters.

I look at her stoney-faced. “Yes.”

I take out my gun and close the living room doors behind me. I meticulously make my way through every room and inspect every possible hiding place. Once I’m confident it’s completely secure, I ensure it’s all locked up and activate her alarm.

I open the living room door to find her seated on the luxurious sofa, her legs tucked underneath her. Her high heels are carelessly tossed off near her, and there’s just something about that image—her dressed in pantyhose, a smart skirt, and a blouse that makes me want to rip it all off her and fuck her hard.

People say I’m crazy or insane, but they have no idea what I’d do to touch this woman. To lie by her. To be inside of her.

She looks up at me from her phone and raises an eyebrow. “Are we hitman free?”

“Don’t joke. You need to take this seriously. Your life is in danger.” I watch as she stands up.

“When did you ever take anything seriously,” she says as she walks toward the door.

I step in front of her. “In case you forgot, I took you seriously.”

She looks up at me, her eyes shining. “You fucking stalked me. You drove me underground because I couldn’t go anywhere without you having eyes on me. You’re a psycho, Robbie, that’s all. Nothing more.”

She pushes past me, and I turn my head to watch her go down the hallway to what I presume is her bedroom. I note which bedroom door she walks through and shuts before I sit in front of the television.

I knew the stalking bothered her, but I always hoped she’d see that my obsession for her was more of a compliment than a danger. Ronan has always said I am too extreme in everything I do. Maybe I am, but what’s wrong with being passionate?

I pull my jacket off and lay it over the one arm of a sofa, and then I unbutton my shirt. I slide out of it. If I’m going to sleep on the couch, I’m not doing it in a button-up shirt.

I kick my shoes off, pull my socks off, and sink into the seat’s soft cushions. I sit there, staring at the television.

I should put on something for background noise and sleep; that’s what I should do. I shouldn’t bother her, speak to her, or make her feel uncomfortable. There’s so much that I want to tell her, but I don’t have the words.

She is in every atom of my being. There is nothing without her. I put her to the recesses of my mind by focussing on work, but now that she’s so close to me, I can’t pretend as though there isn’t this devil of an attraction that I have for her.

And I know she has it for me. I’ve seen how her eyes have traveled up and down my body, inspecting every chiseled inch of muscle. The way she glances at my crotch, how someone would look at a photo in fond remembrance.

She may come across as a professional and calm to the outside world, but I know that deep down inside her is that little girl who liked to ride my dick until she was paralytically intoxicated from too many orgasms.

I smirk to myself.

The number of times I've had to make myself something to eat after sex with her because I do it right, and she can't take two steps on those jelly legs once I'm done with her.

The smell of her sex is etched into my brain, and it's a smell I will never forget, and I shouldn't have to. I look back at the hallway and sigh.

When you know you're right, you know you're right.

I stand up and pace the room. I need to get rid of this excess energy. It's dangerous. But I can feel my semi-hard dick already twitching with excitement.

I pause as I hear the sound of running water through the pipes.

She's having a shower.

My dick stands at full mast.

Chapter 8 - Dinara

The thought of this pervy little stalker being in my home, where I need to sleep, makes me feel all kinds of ick. When I shut my bedroom door, I lean against it and take a few deep breaths.

I nearly had a heart attack when I was shot at, but I couldn't let them see that. Then I had to catch my breath and act as though Robbie sheltering me and then shooting back at my attackers wasn't the hottest fucking thing alive.

How can I find the man who made my life a living hell sexy? My panties are dripping just thinking of how overprotective he is of me. I shiver and undress, shoving my clothes into the hamper before I walk into my bathroom and turn the shower on. I rinse the sweat from my body and lather the soap on my body.

My mind drifts back to when I first met Robbie. It was a negotiation that Katya's family and Quinn's were having way before they even considered friendly terms. This was purely business; they had sent me to woo Robbie into agreeing to our terms.

He was starting out in the business side of things there, not a hitman, but there was a dangerous air about him that I had found curious. We argued, though.

God, we argued so much during the negotiations because we had to try to one-up each other constantly.

The other people who attended these meetings with us couldn't get a word in edge-wise. We were sworn enemies trying to come to an agreement to prevent blood spilling unnecessarily.

I close my eyes, and my hand slips between my legs, exploring the folds of my throbbing pussy, as I cast my mind back to that day. Robbie had asked me to meet him in private to discuss new terms, thinking he could bully me if he got me alone. It didn't work, and soon, we were standing in front of

each other, shouting at the top of our lungs. We were in his office, and before I knew what happened, he had my hands above my head. His one large hand bound my thin wrists together as he kissed me hungrily.

I lick my lips as I remember how he touched me through my panties. That was the first time he had placed his hands on me, and I enjoyed it so much. He had worshipped my body but kept me in a submissive role. He was in control, and he was rough. He didn't treat me like a dainty lady.

I swallow hard as I remember how he bent me over his desk and pulled my underwear down. He kept a hand between my shoulders to keep me down, though I didn't resist as he slid his thick chunk of meat inside me. I wasn't thinking of my family then. I was thinking of this red-haired Irish man, twelve years my senior, popping my cherry on his desk like a common whore.

I had whimpered as he broke me. From pain and excitement, and he just kept me pinned as he fucked me. He didn't cum inside me that day, he made me stand up, and he lifted my skirt. He pushed the tip of his cock into my panties and stroked himself until they were lathered in a thick stream of semen. Then he looked me in the eyes as he pulled them back up, reached down, and rubbed the wet bodily fluid against my pussy.

I all but crumbled with desire, and it took us a moment to gather our wits. We agreed then to sleep together but keep family business out of it. No emotions. No feelings. No attachments.

Sex and fuckery and everything between that didn't lead us down a path our families would disapprove of.

The heads of the families now might understand, but the people we're commanding will see us as traitors if they knew we fell into bed with each other. You didn't cross those lines. It was already salty because the higher-ups did it.

My eyes snap open, and I glance to my left, my fingers gently circling my throbbing clit.

Robbie is there, his arms crossed over his bare chest. I forgot how gorgeous that Celtic tattoo on his chest is. He has no socks and shoes on—just his work pants.

My eyes reach his, and I study his face. His rusty stubble and red hair extenuate his features.

I swallow and open my mouth to tell him to go.

Nothing comes out, and he smirks.

He takes a step toward me, and I don't stop him. I watch as his hands trail down to his pants, and he starts undoing them, his erection tenting the fabric already.

My breath catches, and my heart races. Am I having a panic attack? Or am I aroused? Maybe a little bit of both... Robbie is a dangerous man, but if I say no, I know in my heart he'll stop. He drops his pants to the floor, and his thick member, covered in crossing veins, stands to attention. I look to the other side of my shower at the wall and sense him climb in behind me.

I close my eyes, feel him kiss my shoulder, and his hands trail up my sides. One hand moves to the front of me and cups my right breast. He moves closer, and I feel his erection against the small of my back as his other hand slides between my legs to join my hand.

He kisses my shoulder again, and I remove my hand, pressing both of my hands against the wall.

The first thing I learned about Robbie is he likes to fuck, he likes to fuck hard, and he likes to fuck long.

I don't know if I have the stamina to do this, but my body is reacting to him, betraying me. Using two fingers, he parts the top of the lips between my legs, and using the middle finger, he slowly massages my clit. I buck slightly, but he holds me firm against him. That's all he does, just rubs my clit, over and over and over and over.

I shake slightly, the lower part of my body warming with hunger. His lips are against my shoulder, and I feel teeth. He always liked biting.

That finger speeds up a little, and I gasp out. His right hand pinches my nipple and twists it slowly. I whimper, finally managing one word.

“Yes.”

Robbie lets me go, and I turn around. He places an arm against the wall to my left and uses his right to lift my leg.

“I’m not as patient as I once was,” he murmurs before kissing me deeply. Without warning, he angles himself and slides his thick cock into me. I’m ashamed that I’m wet enough that there’s no resistance. It just slides in there, stretching me until it strikes that sweet spot. He always feels too big, just slightly, but when he moves, it feels like he flicks every sexual nerve of my vaginal wall.

He pulls out and thrusts in hard.

He waits.

He pulls out and thrusts in hard.

I choke back a cry.

He chuckles and waits.

He bites at the skin at the bottom left of my neck.

He pulls out and thrusts in hard.

I yelp, unable to stop myself.

He pulls out and stops, and I open my eyes after a few moments to look into his. He’s staring at me and rests his forehead against mine. “You belong to me, do you understand.”

I look into his eyes and nod slowly, and with that, I grip his arms as he starts slamming in and out of me, forcing me against the wall. I dig my nails into his arms and drag them down, leaving ugly red scratch marks on his skin.

He kisses me hungrily, then bites, then starts nipping at every inch of skin he can get to.

I tip my head back, and he licks from the nape of my neck up to the top before I tilt my head down and kiss him

again.

He shifts, putting both hands under my ass to squeeze it hard.

I hold his shoulders, and he lifts me and uses the wall to balance my weight. I wrap my legs around him as he fucks me like his life depends on it.

Once or twice his dick pops out, and he humps against my pussy like a madman, which I always knew he was.

Then he pauses to guide his cock back in, and he's fucking me again.

It's when he's got me well-balanced and he's able to use one hand to slide between us and finger my aching clit that I see stars. I start to squirt; the bodily fluids intermingle with shower water as Robbie doesn't stop.

"Stop," I gasp. "Stop. I can't... too much..."

"I say when you've had too much," he grunts, continuing to finger my clit as fast as his fingers will go. It's rough and pressured, and I'm trying to ride out an orgasm. It's overstimulated, and I squirt again. He laughs aloud and lowers his head, nibbling on my breast as he resumes jackhammering me for all he's worth.

I've forgotten what it's like to be fucked with this kind of wild abandon.

"Ro... Robbie..." I whine out his name as I feel another orgasm coming.

"Close," he grunts out.

He lowers me down, and I shakily stand, but it's not long before he turns me around and bends me over, pushing back into me.

I whimper softly as he hits me from all new angles. I'm breathless and weak, but my head shoots up as I feel him push deep inside me and realize we're doing this without a condom.

"Robbie...stop...Robbie..."

He pushes into me and holds my hips there as he shakily grunts out his satisfaction as his cum shoots into me. He doesn't let it all go in, though, as he pulls away and sends a stream onto my back.

I rest against the wall, my legs shaking and the water slowly going cold because we've been in here too long.

Robbie sighs and smacks me on the ass cheek. "Good lass."

I smile. I forgot how freeing it is to let go of perfection and fuck like animals in the wild with no care. I know Robbie is dangerous, but now I wonder if I should fear for my life or if this is a case where I should fear for my heart.

Chapter 9 - Robbie

I watch as she shakily stands up. I forgot what ecstasy it was to have my cock buried to the hilt inside her tight pussy. It makes me insane. I pick up her sponge and squeeze her shower gel on to it. She looks at me with a weak smile, and I gently wash her body. I massage her in circles, nothing sexual this time, as I slowly clean her off. As I sponge her, I glance at the deep, red scratch marks on my arms from where her nails practically took my skin off. They sting a little, and that is sexy as fuck.

I am especially gentle between her legs, and once I'm done with her, I smile down at her. "Do you want help getting out?"

She's a little more steady, and she rinses the sponge off and puts more soap on it. "Not yet."

She starts to wash my body, and I let her, watching her with hungry eyes. I could take her again right now, but I will myself not to. She's already been fucked off her feet. Once I'm rinsed off, she shuts the tepid water off and steps out first.

She wraps a towel around her body, and as I step onto the bath mat, she tosses a sizeable black towel to me.

"Dry yourself."

There's a sharpness to her voice again, as though she was in a daze, and now she's come back to her senses. My heart sinks.

"Dina... Lass..." I walk toward her, and she steps back, holding a hand up.

"Robbie, we can't do this again. It didn't end well for us last time. With the tension in the ranks, it will end even worse this time."

I go toward her, but she steps to the side and walks into her room. I follow, towel wrapped around my waist. "We

deserve a second chance, Dina. No one needs to know for now. We hid it last time. We can hide it this time.”

“That’s how I know it isn’t right because we have to hide it from everyone.” She says, turning to look at me. Her eyes shine with emotion, and I approach her, placing my hands on her upper arms to hold her steady.

“We find diamonds buried in the ground where they stay hidden from the light. Seeds germinate in the dark before they break through to the sun. We will tell people one day what we are to each other, but we can simply be for now.” I step closer and tilt her chin so she looks into my eyes.

“You are my everything. You have always been my everything. I have no desire for anything or anyone else other than you.” I lean down and kiss her gently.

She tries to pull away, but I keep my lips pressed against hers, and she melts into my kiss. I gently scoop her into my arms like a princess and kiss her again. She slides her arm around my neck, and I can feel her tremble in my arms.

I just want to spend my life pleasuring her and making her happy.

I set her down on the bed and pull my towel off, tossing it to the side. I open her towel and leave it open. I slip my middle finger into her and move it in and out.

Her cheeks go rosy, and she closes her eyes. While doing that, I use my thumb to massage her clit. She tries to shut her legs, but I’m between them, so I keep them open.

As soon as she’s wet enough again, I move to lie beside her. “On my face. Now.”

She looks at me with bright green eyes, and she’s breathing hard. I settle down on the bed, and she lifts herself, sitting with a knee on either side of me. I guide her to move up, and her dripping folds hover above me.

“Lower.” It’s more like a growl than a gentle request, and she lowers herself until her folds are pressed against my lips. I stick my tongue out and taste her—that taste.

It's the first cold sip of water on a hot summer's day when you've been out all day. She's slightly salty and tart, and her juices are thick. I can feel my chin getting wet as she squirms.

"Ride my face," I say, glancing up at her between her legs.

I can see she closes her eyes, and then she's moving her hips, and her face is moving in and out of sight as she grinds her pussy against the bottom half of my face as I slurp, lick, suck, and taste every inch of her. I hold her hips while I do this, and she whimpers.

"Robbie..."

The whimper is so gentle. I open my eyes to see her teasing her own nipples. "I'm going to squirt again."

I pause. "Keep going."

I stick my tongue out, and she grinds a little faster against it. I flick it just at the right time to catch her swollen clit.

The animalistic mewls I elicit are enough to make my cock rock hard again, and I know she's noticed because she pauses.

I let her change position. She's now facing me, her legs on either side of my head but upside down so she can reach my cock.

I smile and grab her hips, pulling her to me as I fuck her folds and hole with my tongue.

I grunt as she takes my hard cock into her mouth and starts to move it deeper and deeper with each intake. Soon, she is choking on it, and the sounds she makes tighten my balls.

I feel her tense, and I suck hard at her clit, rolling it around with my tongue. She gags on my cock as liquid streams all over my face. It's too much for my already sensitive dick, and she swallows as I cum into her mouth.

She slips off of me and lies next to me.

I know she's spent, so I get up and open the bedding, helping her slip in before I slip in behind her. I slide an arm around her and spoon her, stroking her side softly. She falls asleep quickly, and I watch her sleep in the moonlight.

I must have been more tired than I realized because I jolt awake when the sun streams into the room.

"Good morning." She's standing across the room fixing her hair.

I sit up, and she throws a shirt at my head. "Time to get up."

"Yes, ma'am." I grin, getting out of bed. My pants are on a chaise nearby, and I get dressed. She leaves the room, and once I'm presentable, I go to the kitchen to find her filling two cups with coffee. She hands one to me.

I kiss her forehead softly, but she pulls away. "We can't, Robbie. We can't do this, I'm sorry. I'll arrange for a guard to protect me. We should be apart as much as possible."

I set the coffee down and take hers from her before I take her by the arms. "We can make this work, lass. I can protect you just fine, thank you. Better than any man because you and I know I'll lay my life down for you."

I lean down, and we share a passionate kiss. She groans softly, but we pull away when my phone goes off. I pull it out and walk away from her. "Ronan."

"There's been an attack on Volkov soldiers." My brother's voice sounds grim. "Nine dead, and they're accusing us."

I frown and look at Dina. "I'll be right over."

"Be fast. This is going to escalate quickly. I'll send you the address." He hangs up, and I look at Dina.

"Nine Russians dead. They suspect it's infighting again. They think it was the Irish."

"Where are we needed?" she asks, picking up her coffee and taking a deep sip.

“I’ll drop you at the office and sort this out myself, don’t worry,” I say, and down my own hot coffee. I gasped slightly once it was done and set the cup down to see her frowning at me.

“You seem to forget who’s in charge,” she says. “Just because we had sex doesn’t mean you call the shots.”

“I’m not calling the shots. It’s a dangerous situation, especially because someone is out to get you.”

“I thought I was safest with you.” Her argument is good, but I shake my head.

“It’s not happening, Dina.”

“Robbie, either you take me there, or I will catch a cab. Consider which one is more dangerous.” She puts her hands on her hips, and I shake my head with a small smile.

“Alright then, you’re the boss.”

She smirks. “Now you’re getting it.”

I check the address on the phone and then show it to Dina. “I’m not familiar with this one.”

She nods and looks up at me. “I know exactly where that is. It’s one of Volkov’s joint operations with the Sorvino family. Mostly run by the Russians, though.”

We grab everything we need, and I lead her to my car and help her in. She looks at me. “We have to argue constantly. Otherwise, someone is going to figure it out.”

“We don’t have to pretend, lass. We constantly fight anyway.” I chuckle as I close the door and go around.

It takes a while to battle traffic to arrive at the laundromat. It’s closed, and there’s no sign of media or cops, which is always good. We don’t want people to think there’s something bigger going on. Other families might get ideas.

“They run drugs and dirty money through here,” she says softly as we walk toward the back door. “The men in here are working-class men.”

“Most of them are,” I comment. “They make up the majority of the families.”

As we walk in, we see a large group of Russian men standing around some tables with dead bodies. One sees us and directs his attention straight to me. He storms forward and grabs me by the shirt, pointing a gun at my head.

“We should kill you for what your fucking people did, you Irish asshole,” he shouts.

Everyone cheers him on, but Dina calmly puts her hand on the gun and guides him to lift it. “I think not.”

They look at Dina, and the guy glares at her. “You’re betraying your people by being involved with these other families.”

“Am I? Before you kill this asshole, can I at least say what I came to say? Then I’ll leave you to do whatever you decide to do.”

I look at her, and so do the Russian men, but they back off, forming a group around us.

Chapter 10 - Dinara

I have to be confident, and I must appear as though I'm on the side of the men because they are in a dangerous state of mind. They will just kill us at this point, without a care of what Ivan will do to them.

I stand up on a chair and hold my hands up. "What has happened today is a fucking travesty. This is not right, and our brethren need to be avenged. But this is not the work of the Quinn family men. They are not in this to betray you."

"How do you know?" the gun holder calls. "How do we know you're not just trying to cover with them?"

"Because they won't benefit from this. You outnumber them and outgun them; they will lose. No, someone else is doing this without the knowledge of the heads of the families, and we need to find out who that is and make them pay."

The men grumble, much like Robbie's men did, but I shake my head. "It is right to be angry. The heads of the families are angry too because it is like killing their own brothers."

"Ivan does not care about us. He only cares for his little drama battles with the Sorvinos and Quinns. Even Natalia, who once worked amongst us, is now fucking an Irishman and has his child." It's a man in the back, and I shake my head.

"It's not true. The heads of the families are not embroiled in personal drama, no more than any of you are."

"They don't care about us and our needs." Another shout from the back.

"Show yourself if you're so confident in saying that," I demand. "Because I challenge any of you to tell me a time you went to Ivan for help, and he turned you away."

They murmured amongst themselves, and I looked at them as individually as possible, trying to make eye contact.

“This is someone trying to divide the families because united the family coalition is more powerful than everyone, even the government. They want to divide us, not to provide for you but to take from you what you have gained. There are other enemies, not each other.”

The men shuffle around, and I nod. “Robbie,” I look down at him, “take Aidan and personally look into who is responsible for this attack. We, as leaders, should get to the bottom of this, and we will. Then the men can have their pound of flesh for revenge.”

Robbie moves toward me, and I hold a hand up. “Send your best guy to protect me. I’m sure you know someone almost as good as you.”

I look into Robbie’s eyes, and he nods. “I’ll send someone. Let’s get into this and find the fuckers who are fucking with our families.”

I give one final glance around. “Of course, Ivan will still take care of these men’s families. Their sacrifices will not be for nothing.”

The men nod amongst themselves, and I know I’ve managed to get headway.

I step down, and the men disperse to arrange to get the bodies out and to their families to be buried. Robbie leads me out of the laundromat, and I move closer to him. “We have to try to keep the men loyal. This is dividing the families which already were on a shaky unity.”

Robbie nods. “I’ll send Callum to guard you. He’s the best after myself and Aidan.”

I nod. “Just drop me at the office, and I will dig as much as possible from there.”

We chat briefly about who it could be as he drives me to the office. He leaves me there, and I greet Angelo and Rudy as I take the elevator up to my floor. Once in my office, I boot up my laptop and start searching. I also take out my phone and start making calls. I need CCTV footage. I need witnesses. I need to make sure the cops don’t get wind of this.

I know Robbie will get me in a few hours, so I need to make quick work of this.

I have just finished talking to Carmine when there's a knock at my door, and I look up. "Hi."

"I don't know if you remember me," Callum says. "I'm Callum. Robbie sent me."

"Yes, I was expecting you. Find a space and stand guard. I am in the midst of trying to figure out who is trying to fuck us over."

He moves to the side of the room where the window is and looks out. "I heard someone is attacking soldiers of the families."

I glance at him. "Yes, someone is trying to divide us."

We fall into silence, and I start sending encrypted emails to the contacts that can help me. I don't notice until he's right at my desk that Callum has gotten rather close. I glance up at him curiously.

"You okay?" My gut tightens slightly.

"You're a very beautiful woman, Dina," he says softly, giving me a charming smile.

I smile back. "I'm flattered, Callum, but I really need to concentrate here."

He moves a little closer and puts a hand on the back of my chair, leaning over me. "You know, perhaps there are other ways to unite the people on our level."

I push my chair out, forcing him away, and I stand so we're on more equal footing. "Sorry, Callum. You have gotten the notion that I am interested in a romantic relationship, although I'm not sure from where. I can assure you that I'm not interested in pursuing any relationship right now. I'm focussing on my career."

"What about you and Robbie?" he says suddenly as I sidestep to get around him. I pause for the briefest moments.

How does he know about Robbie and I? My heart beats hard in my chest, but I maintain my calm. “What about us?”

“I know you were together years ago. What is it now? Five years ago? You were twenty-five?” He looks at me intensely, and I get the creepiest feeling from him. I don’t like Callum, and I don’t trust him.

“What? When we were working on negotiations between our families? That’s all that was, nothing more and nothing less. I’m not inclined to romantic relationships, as everyone who knows me will tell you.”

I walk to the office door and stand there. “And quite frankly, your forwardness to someone who ranks above you is fucking irritating. How dare you speak to me in such a condescending little tone. I think you should leave. Right fucking now.” I glare at him to prove my point, and he scoffs.

He stops just in front of me, and in a low voice, he murmurs, “You’re making a mistake, *Boss*.”

I raise an eyebrow. “I wouldn’t utter another word if I were you unless you want those to be the last words you ever speak.”

He walks out, strolling down the corridor. Halfway down, he starts whistling; it’s creepy. I wait until he’s in the elevator before I phone Rudy and tell him to make sure Callum leaves the premises.

After he agrees, I sit back down at my computer, but it takes me a long while before I feel calm enough to resume working. I can’t wholly hyper-focus, though, because I have a heightened awareness of how much danger I thought I was put in with Callum.

The only problem is I don’t know if it was physical danger or if he was just a dickhead. Most men don’t like taking orders from a woman, so it might just be his reaction to that. But my gut still says something was up.

I don’t want to tell Robbie because I know he can go off his rocker with jealousy. It’s part of why we split all those years ago, even if he doesn’t know it.

I jump slightly as Robbie knocks on my door.

“Callum says you sent him away. Did he do something wrong?” I can already hear the anger in his voice, so I smile.

“No, there are just some things I don’t want people to overhear me doing, and I had Rudy and Angelo downstairs, so I thought I’d be alright until you got back.” I stand up and look around. “I don’t know if there are cameras here, so we’re just colleagues.”

Robbie chuckles. “Indeed. Would you like me to drive you home?”

“You just want to get in my bed again.” It’s a small tease, and his charming smile wins me over.

“Not tonight, I swear. I will drop you at home, ensure you get locked in alright, and fuck off back to my own place for the evening so you can get some actual rest.” He leans against the doorframe, and I lick my lips.

“You’ll have to. You’re an absolute distraction.”

“Deal, let’s get going.” He leads the way down and out to his car. It’s a slow drive to my new home, but as we enter the area, I notice black smoke billowing ahead of us.

“I wonder what that is?” I point to the smoke.

“Probably a fire near the park again. Those happen when the weather is this dry,” Robbie comments casually.

My stomach drops, though, as the smoke gets bigger and bigger as we approach my street. “You don’t think?”

“I do, unfortunately.” Robbie pulls into my street, and we see fire engines outside my house as it blazes.

I swallow hard. “Someone is determined to destroy everything I own and probably to kill me.”

Robbie protectively puts a hand on my leg. “I’ll find them and make them wish for a quick death. Which I will not give them.”

I look at him. “What now?”

“Come back to my place for now. At least you’ll be safe there.” He does a U-turn and starts back down the road. “I’ll call the guys and come have them sort this.”

“Do you have food at your apartment?” I ask curiously.

“Listen, I missed shepherd’s pie for you last night. If you haven’t eaten Molly’s food, you’re missing out.” I stare at him, and he chuckles, “You’ll see what I mean.”

“Who’s Molly?” I ask, a little put out.

“She’s the woman that has taken care of all of us for as long as I remember but hates what our family does, loyal as fuck and not someone to start with.” I grin. “You’ll see, she’s an Irish lass if there ever was one.”

I look into the side mirror to see the smoke still billowing. I take out my phone and text Carmine. “I’ll send the Sorvino team to deal with the fire brigade. Let’s just get somewhere safe and not out in the open.”

He reaches over and squeezes my leg softly. “It’s going to be okay, love.”

I don’t know about that.

Chapter 11 - Robbie

Someone has it out for Dina, which makes me feel like I need to track them down and kill them because they've painted a target on someone who belongs to me. That crosses way too many lines for me to feel comfortable with. I know we're always in danger with the work we do, but this feels like it's more than that.

I briefly consider whether or not someone has discovered that we have feelings for each other and that they're targeting Dina to get to me. Or maybe they're targeting her because she's keeping everyone calm with all of this infighting.

I can't trust anyone to watch out for her except me. There's no one I can trust more than me to make the right decisions to protect her. After I sent Callum there, she was different. Something went down, and she wouldn't say what, but I know. I briefly consider questioning Callum, but instead, I keep quiet. I want to burn the world to the ground for her the way they burnt her home down, but I also know she's stubborn and won't tell me what's happening. I pull into the parking spot near the pub and lead her toward the building.

"Are we in time for dinner?" she asks.

"Yes," I comment, pulling the door open and letting her in ahead of me. Everyone glances up at her, but I don't say anything as I lead her to our booth. Jarryd has little Iris in his arms, obviously babysitting for Daniel and Natalia.

Ronan waits until we're settled before he asks everyone to bow their heads, prays over the food Molly and her team have made, and then welcomes the guests with open arms.

Once the prayer is done, general chit-chat arises, and instantly, I can hear the complaints about foreigners at dinner becoming a regular thing.

Dina sits awkwardly and picks at her food but doesn't say anything. She's too polite. I clench my fist, but my brother smacks his crutch against the bar to get their attention.

"If you don't like that we have guests, you're welcome to bring it to me directly and then fuck off without food." He glares at them, and they fall silent.

They start talking about something else, and Jarryd sets little Iris in her car seat next to him as he begins to eat.

"Didn't think you would be good with children, Jarryd," Dina comments. "You're always on your own mission."

"You'd be surprised how good I am," he chuckles, and I smile. I like that my brother and my secret girlfriend get along.

Ronan meets my eyes, and I turn back to my shepherd's pie. I'm glad she made it tonight and not the other night like I thought she did. It's delicious, thick, and rich, and I could marry Molly for her food alone.

"Once we're done eating," I turn to Dina, "you can go have a cup of tea with Molly in the kitchen while Ronan and I discuss what's happening."

Ronan snorts, and I glance at him before I look back at Dina, who is glaring at me. "Are you dismissing me?"

I open and close my mouth several times when the front door opens, and Daniel walks in. I glance behind me, thankful my older brother is here for once.

"Thanks for watching her," Daniel breathes as he slips into the booth beside Iris' car seat.

Jarryd grins. "It's a pleasure. Robbie's about to have his head taken off, so you're just in time."

That's what happens when you have little brothers; they don't let you forget you're in trouble. I turn to Dina. "It's not that. It's that I think you would be... safer."

"Bullshit," she says. "Whatever you want to discuss, you can discuss with me. Especially if it concerns my safety."

Some of the men finish their food and leave. I look at Ronan and then at Daniel, who nods. “We need to deal with these mutters. The men are not happy with the situation.”

Ronan looks around as the last of the men leave and nods. “Aye, they aren’t. I’m out of this bloody cast next week. Then, I can be more active in keeping them in control. Until then, you need to keep them in line, Robbie.” He looks at me, and I sigh.

“They’re questioning your decisions, Ronan. They’ve never done that. They’re not listening to me.” I skewer a piece of meat on my fork and shove it into my mouth.

Ronan sighs and looks out the windows. “Daniel and I must establish who is truly loyal to you.”

“We need to make sure this united front stands.” Ronan looks at me, and I can see it in his eyes; he is unsure.

“You can’t doubt you’ve made the right decision, or they’ll pick up on that,” I say. “You have our support; you always will.”

Ronan chuckles. “The support of three psychotic little brothers. Isn’t that nice?”

I chuckle, and Daniel picks at his food. We all look at him before he says, “We’ll keep them loyal for all the good it will do. But we need to show them that what you’ve chosen is beneficial to the family.”

I feel Dina’s hand underneath the table on my leg and relax slightly. She can’t be that mad with me if she’s seeking reassurance from me.

Except she’s not. She wants to interrupt.

“Mr. Quinn, I assure you I will get the Italians and Russians to support your family fully. We just need to figure out what these attacks are about.”

I glance at her with a frown, but Ronan leans forward. “I’m sure you will, Dina. But for now, we need to be concerned about who is trying to kill you.”

Dina purses her lips. She doesn't like the fact that she's being babied. I can see it, but she's got no choice, really.

I smile and look at Daniel. "We'll collect the men who are truly loyal to Ronan and find out what the others want to remain loyal."

"They should want to remain loyal purely because it's Ronan," Jarryd points out, and I roll my eyes.

"It's a give-and-take relationship," Dina says calmly. "They want Ronan to play a hand that is purely in their favor to prove he is as loyal to them as they are to him."

I turn to her. "There's a huge family gathering coming up. It will incorporate all three families, and if we don't get this fighting under control by then, it could turn into a blood bath."

"There'll be very few lower ranks there," Daniel says calmly. "And that's where the problem is, so we should be fine as long as nobody tries anything stupid."

I scoff. "You say lower ranks like they mean less than us."

"You know what I mean," Daniel says sharply, and Ronan holds his hands up. "Let's not start fighting amongst ourselves. Where is Dina staying tonight?"

"At my apartment. She's safest with me," I say immediately.

Everyone looks at me, but no one says anything, and they better keep it that way.

Ronan nods. "Alright then, everyone, get some sleep, and we'll speak tomorrow about what we're going to do to solve this problem."

"Thank you for having me, Mr. Quinn," Dina says politely, rising from her seat.

"Please call me Ronan." My brother smiles and then looks at me. "My brother still being a gentleman?"

She looks at me as well, and my heart races as she says, “He’s always a gentleman, I suppose.”

My brothers laugh as I hurry out of my seat and say goodnight before leading Dina toward my apartment. There are few people on the street, but most of my men will be out doing their collections and other nefarious deeds that need the cover of night. We walk slowly, so it takes a while to reach my apartment, but once inside, Dina turns to me.

I take her face in my hands and kiss her hungrily. I feel her hands on my chest, pushing me slightly away. “We can’t do this.”

“I will protect you,” I murmur the words, my arms sliding around her and keeping her against me. I look down into her eyes. “I just want a second chance, Dina. To prove I can be the man you deserve in life.”

“We can’t be together. We’re the muscle behind the families. The men will see it as a betrayal.” She strokes my face gently and kisses me softly.

I smile into the kiss, but she pushes against me again, and I release her. As she turns, I capture her hand and hold it. “We don’t have to do anything. Just come sleep beside me, and I’ll protect you throughout the night.”

She looks at me, and I can see she’s torn between what she wants and her duty, but she relaxes slightly and follows me into her room. We strip down and give her an oversized t-shirt to sleep in. Once in bed, I spoon her and softly stroke the top of her arm, cuddling against her.

She rests against me, and I feel her heart beating softly. We’re connected as one at this moment, as we should be, because we belong together. I wish I could help her see that what we have is profound, unique, and greater than any regular love that everyone finds themselves in.

I watch as she dozes off, and as promised, I don’t do anything other than hold her while I’m acutely aware of the hard butt of the gun pressing against my head from underneath my pillow.

If anyone comes near her, I'll fucking destroy them.
No one will hurt her; she's mine. She belongs to me, and I will
never let her go.

Chapter 12 - Dinara

I can feel the warmth of his body pressed against mine. Did he move an inch at any point during the night? His arm is loosely thrown around my hip, holding me against him. I can feel his morning wood, and it's almost tempting to tease him. I give myself a mental shake, though, because I need to focus. He is a distraction, a wonderful and sexy distraction, that I would love to constantly have fucking the shit out of me, but I have duties to perform, and we do not belong together. No matter how romantic the notion may seem.

I slip out of his grasp and get up, getting dressed slowly. Away from his grasp, I realize how safe I felt when he was holding me. I wish we could stay like that forever, but it's not going to happen. We aren't the leaders of the family, only the soldiers. At least I'm not a leader, and I won't be considered good enough for someone with a stake in inheriting the Quinn family after his brothers.

As I'm slipping into my pants, I hear rustling in the bed and glance over my shoulder to see Robbie slowly sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "Come back to bed, Dina. It's warmer."

His sleepy logic is sweet, and then I look toward the window. It's as though I've been living through a stupidity fog the last few days, and I scoop up his shirt tossing it at him. "Get up and get dressed."

"What's happened?" He's alert now because of the change in my demeanor, and I start to run my fingers through my hair before I tie it up in a messy bun.

"The Irish have been attacked, the Russians have been attacked... The Italians will be their next target, and we need to get there first and figure out who's doing this before it happens." I hurry to the bathroom to freshen up as best I can.

Robbie appears behind me. "What's your plan?"

“I’m going straight to Alessandro. I need you to try and account for everyone’s whereabouts.”

“I can do that with Aiden’s help,” he says.

I turn and kiss him on the lips before I look deep into those blue eyes. “Be safe, or I’ll fucking kill you.”

“What about you?” he asks, watching me cross the room. I take the gun from under his pillow and put it in the back of the band of my pants. “I don’t intend to die today, Robbie. Trust me.”

He smiles, and I can feel his eyes on me as I walk toward the door. He calls, “Hanging up at the door are keys to my Mustang. She’ll get you there fast enough. She’s parked just outside.”

I grab the keys without a word and walk out, keeping an eye out for anyone looking suspicious. Nothing happens as I go to the Mustang, and soon, I’m practically flying toward Alessandro’s estate. The guards approach me when they don’t recognize the car, so I roll down the window. Once they’ve established it’s me, they search the vehicle before they let me in.

I park to the side of the house and walk straight toward it. I need to speak to Katya and Alessandro immediately.

“Dinara,” Dominic calls as he comes downstairs, “what are you doing here?”

“I need to see Alessandro immediately. It’s urgent.”

Dominic raises an eyebrow. “Are you armed?” he asks.

I frown, “Yes, I am. I’m happy to leave the weapon here. In case you forgot, Dominic, I work for this family.”

“Or the Irish,” he comments, holding his hand out.

I narrow my eyes and put the gun in his hand. “Get the notion out of your head. I am firm in my loyalties.”

Dominic nods toward Alessandro’s office. “Is that why you stayed at Quinn’s last night?”

“You’re having me followed? So you know my house was burnt to the ground.” I tilt my head. “And Robert Quinn was just protecting me. Lord help us, the Irish do what we pay them to do.”

I walk past him as he mutters an apology, but I ignore him and walk into Alessandro’s office.

“Mr. Sorvino, I must speak with you and Katya.” I walk straight to his desk.

He looks up and leans back. “Katya has gone out with the twins. What can I help with?”

“It’s the dissent, sir. It’s clearly among the lower ranks, and someone is orchestrating it. I have reason to believe there will be a hit on the Italian soldiers next. The Irish and Russians have already been hit.” I lean on his table. “We need to sort this out.”

“Just because the other families don’t have loyal men, doesn’t mean we don’t. Our men are good people...”

Gunshots sound outside, and Alessandro moves like a flash of lightning around his desk. He pulls me to the ground, protecting me.

The doors open, and Dominic hurries in with Carmine. “You okay?”

“Yes,” Alessandro calls. “Shoot the fuckers.”

There’s the sound of wheels spinning as a car drives off, and Carmine investigates through the windows. “I’ll be back with a report now.”

Alessandro helps me up and then turns to Dominic. “An attack? In my own fucking house? Find out where Katya and the twins are! If anything happens to them, the fuckers will rue the day their mothers birthed them.”

I stay out of the way as Alessandro paces. There’s no point in talking to him. Dominic comes back in first. “Katya and the twins are perfectly fine. The hit was targeted here.”

Soon enough, Carmine is back as well. “Four guards dead. One wounded who says it thinks they were Russian.”

“Volkov’s men wouldn’t dare,” Alessandro roars. “I’m going to see him.”

He turns to me. “I’ll send our men to your offices, keep them calm, and reassure them we will sort this out.”

“Alessandro, just telling the men to be loyal isn’t reassuring. We need to do more to ensure the men stay loyal, give them a reason...”

He glares at me. “Here’s a reason. Show loyalty, or I’ll put a bullet between their eyes myself.”

“I don’t think that’s the answer. I’ll come back when you’re calm.” I turn and leave. The Mustang has a few bullet holes, but it can drive. I rush back to the office, dialing Robbie’s phone.

“There was an attack at Alessandro’s house. Meet me at the new offices.” I don’t give him a chance to respond, but I hang up and try to focus my thoughts. It won’t take long to summon the men to the meeting, and I need to get ahead of this.

I pull into the parking and go to the massive conference room on the first floor. Men are already there, mumbling among themselves. They’re less than happy to see me, but they know I work for Alessandro.

When Robbie walks in, though, they’re even more irate. They might listen to me, but they won’t take orders from the Irish family as far as they’re concerned.

Once the majority of the men are there, I stand on the small stage that’s been put in the front and start to speak to them about the attack and how it’s being done on purpose, that someone is looking to divide the families.

There’s a lot of talking over me and complaining, and I keep addressing them, trying to keep them all calm.

I should have known Robbie wouldn’t take it for that long, and when I pause for a moment, he steps toward one of the men complaining in the front.

“Why don’t you shout your filthy mouth and listen to the people in charge?” he growls. “You don’t know the half of what’s going on.”

The man, whom I don’t recognize, pushes Robbie away from him, swearing at him in Italian.

I recognize the words as an insult to Robbie’s mother, and clearly, Robbie knows that too because he throws a punch straight at the man’s face, and they go down, hitting each other.

Everyone starts shouting the odd word until I get off the stage and try to get Robbie off. I eventually pull a gun off him and raise it, pointing to the back ceiling and firing three rounds.

Everyone falls silent and freezes, looking at me.

“Quinn. Get the fuck out now.”

Robbie looks at me incredulously, and I can tell he’s mad, probably because I’m ordering him around when he assumes he is just helping. I glare at him, and he brushes himself off and storms out of the room. “I’ll be outside.”

I look at the bleeding Italian on the floor and lower the gun. “You’re lucky I don’t shoot you and the Irishman. You have forgotten to respect those of a higher ranking. Do I need to remind you how we, as a family, deal with that disrespect?”

He shakes his head, gets up, and squares off to me. I remain calm as he says, “The Irishman doesn’t seem to mind taking orders from you. Is it because there’s more there than a working relationship?”

I don’t bat an eyelid as I answer, “We’re nothing more than colleagues. I can assure you, you don’t have to worry about the Irish and me.”

Chapter 13 - Robbie

I was defending her, and she kicked me out. That makes absolutely no fucking sense. She should have booted the little dickhead that thought he could push me around. Does he know who I am? Little fucking twit.

I can hear her talking to them; the walls are thin. I hear her saying that we're not together, that we're nothing, and that they don't have to worry about us. That hurts more than I expect it to. I want her to tell them, yeah, we're together! What business is it of yours?

I want her to announce our relationship as though it was obviously written in the stars and always meant to be. It makes me feel so insignificant that she won't fess up to it.

I wait outside as the men file past, each of them giving me filthy looks. I try not to smirk at the guy sporting a black eye because of me. I watch them all shuffle down the stairs and away, and then I turn to see Dina coming out, looking directly at me.

I shiver slightly. It's the coldest look she's ever given me, which says a lot, considering what she thinks of me and what I did to her when she was twenty-five.

"Go home, Robbie." It's another command. She's acting the boss again, and I step forward so our faces are inches apart. "I promised to protect you, lass. I'm not going back on that."

"I'm staying at the Sorvino estate tonight. Someone is already outside to collect me. Go home. You've caused enough trouble." As cold as her stare is, I see the hurt in her eyes. This isn't about letting me go. This is about showing any prying eyes that we're not a thing. It's for show.

I nod and sigh. "Fine. I'll go home. Boss."

I turn and walk away, leaving her standing there. I saw the tremble in her hand, even if she thought she was hiding it. I take the stairs to get out quicker. I tell the front desk guards to

make sure she gets out safely, and then I get in my car and leave.

It's late in the day now. We've been here for ages. I decide to drive around New York for a while to clear my head. I feel like something is wrapped tightly around my chest, and someone is pulling it tighter and tighter. I consider sending her a text numerous times, and eventually, I message Carmine to ask him if she reached the estate alright.

I get a thumbs up and know she's okay, especially with the Sorvinos to protect her. I turn around and head back to the pub. I'm late for dinner, and when I walk in, everyone is already eating.

"You're late." The comment from Ronan is to tease, but I shrug. I don't want to talk. I don't trust my mouth and heart to keep my voice straight and emotionless.

Daniel picks up a plate, dishes some roast meat, potatoes, and vegetables, and pours a generous amount of gravy over everything before passing it to me.

I hate when they baby me, but at the same time, I know it's the only way they can show me they care without showing weakness.

They did help raise me and Jarryd after our parents died, so they are very protective of us.

I nod as I take the plate and start eating, stabbing the potatoes hard. Ronan leans in and smacks my head softly. "You're going to damage my dishes, you little shit."

I smile up at him, my mouth full of potatoes. I sigh and nod. We eat in a more comfortable silence now that Ronan's broken the tension, and once everyone's filtered out or moved on to drink at the bar, we sit together, just me and Ronan.

"You want to talk about it?" he asks as Molly sets down a Guinness in front of each of us. I take a deep swig and then wipe my mouth on the back of my arm.

I wait for Molly to be off behind the bar, then look at Ronan. "Have you ever loved someone you shouldn't have?"

“I don’t know about shouldn’t love them, but I have loved someone deeply. They wouldn’t be with me because of the things I have to do to protect our family and keep everyone where they belong. So we both simply didn’t fall in love with anyone else. She and I probably love each other more than anything, but I respect her.”

I glance over my shoulder as Molly yells at one of the younger lads to get out and then walks from behind the bar toward the kitchen, stopping to take Ronan’s plate. “Take a bath, you smell like a pig.”

“Thanks, Molly.” He chuckles, looks at me, and my mouth drops open.

Molly has been Ronan’s friend since they were wee kids, but she’s not... she’s not... I mean, she’s pretty, but she’s not like drop-dead gorgeous like the lasses that throw themselves at Ronan. She’s plump, and her hair is curly and all over the place, held up with several bobbing pins. Her face is round and pale with a splatter of freckles. She has grey eyes, not deep blue, like most people assume. I cannot picture her as sexy or with my brother because she’s like a ma to me.

Then I suppose Ronan is like a father.

“I’m going to do as she says before I get another earful. Have a good night, lad.” Ronan starts to stand, and I shoot out to grab his arm.

“Ronan, is there no way... You should be happy...”

“When you’re truly in love,” my brother says, “the way Dan loves Nat and the way I love... You put that person’s happiness above everything else. It works easier if you both accept who you are and what you must do, but if what you do goes against everything they stand for... I’m grateful for the company I get. That’s enough.”

He takes his crutches and slides his arms into them. “And if you’ve found someone who accepts what you do is fine, I’d hold onto them tight.”

Ronan leaves, and I sit staring into my pint. Dina needs this position, and she needs the respect. She can’t have me

undermining her all the time.

I down the rest of my Guinness before I get up. Molly is coming back from the kitchen, and I smile at her.

She frowns. “And what do you want, you scallywag?”

I chuckle. “Nothing, Molly. Have a good night. I’m off to bed.”

“Good thing, too. Today’s had enough troublemakers.” She clicks her tongue and pats my cheek. “Be careful.”

She goes off, and I walk out of the pub. I can’t believe Ronan has a thing for Molly, but they’ve always been a duo. I never really understood why she hung around us. It isn’t a secret that she disagrees with our lifestyles. I guess now I know she loves Ronan.

I feel what they feel, though, because Dina is my Molly. She needs to do this on her own; she needs to gain the respect of men of all three families, and she can’t do that with my temper outstripping her calm every other meeting.

Once I’m in my apartment, I shower, put on my gray sweatpants, and sit on my bed. I can smell a faint hint of her perfume. I take out my phone and send her a text.

I hate that you’re right, but I see what you mean.

It would be good for us to take a break from each other because all we do is distract one another. I need to take a week anyway to get the men loyal to my brother in one corner. I know you can handle things, and I trust you’ll call me if you need me.

Have a good night, Dina.

I send the text and turn my phone off. I don’t understand why, if it’s the right thing, it feels like someone has shoved their hand through my chest and is trying to rip my heart out.

I miss her already. I want her back in my arms because I know that’s where she belongs.

Isn’t it where she belongs?

Chapter 14 - Dinara

As I read his message, it's clear to me that this isn't what I actually want, no matter what he thinks. I want to be in the apartment, in his arms, safe and sound, knowing that he will destroy the world to love me. Isn't that the difference between a hero and a villain? He's a villain. He'll sacrifice everyone to spare me, to save me, to protect me.

He's my villain.

But we distract each other, and I agree with him. The traitors are within our ranks, and it's a good idea to see who is truly loyal to the heads of the family. Whoever it is clearly thinks that the families have gotten soft. They probably haven't seen Alessandro recently.

I know his youngest isn't feeling great, and he isn't getting sleep, which doesn't make for a fun, psychotic boss.

I need to weed out the people who are not loyal to the family. I know there are few that I can trust, so when I wake up the next day, I decide to start with Carmine. He's closely tied to the family through his marriage to Ariana. He's out at the soundproof shooting range on the other side of the property. I make my way there, my mind trying desperately to stray back to thoughts of Robbie. It doesn't help that my thoughts are of him driving into me while I'm on my back on the floor. Fuck.

I take a moment to take a breath.

That man.

I push thoughts about him out of my mind as I walk into the shooting range inside the barn-style building. I walk over to where he is loading his gun.

"Hey, Carmine," I say.

"Hi, Dina. Your message said you needed some help with something?" he asks, setting his gun down. "We're alone, so you can speak freely."

“I think someone inside of the families is betraying us. They’re making it seem like the families are attacking each other, but they’re not. I can’t try to weed out both the Italian and Russian sides. Firstly, the Italian men don’t trust me; secondly, it’s just too many to get through. Could you try to see what’s going on? Robbie Quinn will work with the Irish to see who’s still loyal.”

Carmine nods as he listens to me. “I can see who’s still loyal without raising some flags. Alessandro told me this morning that I should share some intel I found with you. There was a witness when the Russians were attacked. Here, this is his address. He goes by the name of Joe.” He hands me a piece of paper, and I take it.

“Thanks, Carmine.” I look at the address written on it. “Hopefully, he’s willing to talk to me.”

“Well, let me know if you find out anything interesting. I’ve been instructed to help you in any way I can in between doing my regular duties.” We both turn to look at the door as Ariana walks in.

“Are you ready for our lesson, Carmine?” she asks, smiling at me. “Sorry, Dina. I’m going to steal him for an hour.”

I shake my head. “Not at all. I was just leaving. Thanks, Carmine. I’ll report back my findings.”

I walk out, listening to the two of them giggling. I shut the door behind me, and my heart aches. I want to laugh and tease Robbie and be with him. But I can’t, and I have to learn to accept that.

I get a driver to take me to Joe’s address and knock on his door. An aged man opens the door and looks at me fearfully. “Yes?”

“Hi, Joe? Is your name Joe?”

“I don’t want any trouble.” He’s scared, and I smile reassuringly.

“Mr. Sorvino just wants to know a few things, then I’ll make sure you’re left alone with a little something to help you

along.” I smile again, and he nods, glancing around before he lets me in.

He makes us espresso and sits opposite me. “What do you want to know?”

“The day those Russian men were killed, you saw that, right? You saw who it was? Can you tell me about them?” I don’t drink the espresso. I don’t trust drinks from people I don’t know, but if he notices, he doesn’t care.

“There was one man who stood out,” he says shakily. “He had bright blue eyes and pale white skin, and he definitely wasn’t an Italian. I know Italians. I come from a long line of well-bred Italian men.” He gives me a cheeky smile.

I nod. “Go on.”

“I also know Sorvino men. Those weren’t them. They didn’t know I was there, and I heard them mention another family. I can’t be sure, but I think it was Balducci.” He shivers.

“Balducci? It’s not a name I’ve heard before,” I muse. “Did you tell anyone else this?”

“No one but Mr. Carmine knows what I saw,” he says. “I asked him not to involve me.”

“I won’t either,” I promise as I stand. “I promise you’ll be compensated. Thank you, Joe.”

Before he can say anything else, I leave. I asked the driver to take me back to the main offices. Once in my room, I sit down and use my access to the police database to search for the Balducci family. I don’t find anything on any families known as Balducci.

I message Carmine to ask for his advice.

Can’t find anything on a possible lead. Do you know a Balducci family?

I wait impatiently, and then my text goes off.

Asked Arianna, and she said it can be spelled Baldocchi. Try that. It sounds familiar.

I enter it into the database, and hits immediately start popping up. It's primarily crimes relating to a young family that are new to the police in New York. New to us, too, I guess.

I immediately call Carmine. "The old man says that someone not Italian was there, someone pale with blue eyes. We need to figure out who that was to see who's betraying the family."

"It will be a bit difficult, considering all the video footage for that spot was erased. Whoever did it knows what they're doing." Carmine sighs.

"What about traffic cameras?" I ask. "The cameras leading out of that area. Can we search those?"

"It'll take long, but if you can get the footage, I'll help you go through it. I don't mind. Do you have a connection?" he asks.

"Yes, I have a way to get the footage, but it will take us a couple of days to go through it. I suggest we set up a room at the estate. We'll be safer there." I logged out of the system and shut down.

"Okay, let the driver bring you back once you've got the footage. If we can find video evidence of these fuckers we can put out a target on them and also hopefully find out who their inside man is."

We hang up, and I leave the office, instructing the driver where to take me. I sit back and think about Robbie. It's barely been twenty-four hours since we last spoke, and I miss him desperately. And that's a problem.

That I return the same feelings he has for me, and that's going to get the two of us killed.

I can't avoid him forever, but I need to put some distance between us somehow.

The days tick by as we spend every waking hour, with hardly any sleep, combing through the various exits from that area. It takes just over a week, but we finally figure out which car our attackers are in.

“Yup, it’s definitely these guys. There’s a hit on every one of them on the police database,” I say, yawning slightly.

Carmine nods, downing another cup of coffee. “Still can’t tell who the other guy is.”

“We have to keep looking, but at least we know and have proof the killers aren’t our men.” I smile. “That should ease the Russians quite a bit.”

“I’ll get this information to Alessandro,” Carmine says. “You get some rest.”

“I think that’s a great idea,” I say, yawning again. “We need to keep looking for the traitor, but tomorrow is another day.”

We part ways, and I go to bed, flopping into it and imagining Robbie there beside me, proud of my hard work.

Chapter 15 - Robbie

I don't want to think about her anymore. I want to put her out of my mind and distract myself, but my obsession doesn't allow for that. I'm going to try my best, in any case. I message Aiden and Callum and meet them at my private offices. They're there before me, waiting in the board room, having a cigarette. I take one from Aiden and light it.

"Morning, lads.

I sit opposite them, and they mumble their good mornings. Since we were lads, we've always been a little trio of trouble. Their parents worked for my father, and now they work for my brother. It was the natural progression of things.

"Lads, we got a problem. We've got a traitor in one of our families and need to figure out who it is. I trust you two above everyone else because I know you'll never do anything to put our boys in danger. We're going to spend the week figuring out who's still loyal to Ronan and who could possibly be fucking us over." I inhale deeply as I draw on the cigarette and sigh, the smoke trickling out my mouth.

Aiden leans back after finishing his cigarette. "What? Just go through a list of the lads and lasses and see who we think it could be?"

"We'll start by visiting the attack sites this week and see if there is anything we can learn. Then yes, we're going to start tracking down where everyone was during those attacks." My explanation and plan are simple. Dina would have overcomplicated things, wanted spreadsheets and shit. I don't have time for that.

I kill my cigarette and stand. "I doubt the Sorvinos will let us onto the estate to investigate, so let's start at the pier, then we'll go to the Volkov laundromat."

They stand and follow me out. We take my car and sit in silence as I drive, not even music in the background to cut the silence.

I can't help but think of how Dina looked in the shower, how she felt moving against my body, and how she tasted. I lick my lips.

"Robbie!" I glance at Aiden.

"Sorry, I was lost in thought. What did you say?" I glance at him again, and he frowns.

"I could see you weren't listening. I was saying the men aren't going to like that we're questioning our own boys when we should be questioning Russians and Italians. Don't you think? We're basically announcing that we don't trust them."

I shake my head. "Someone is already looking into them. We know our men better than we know the Russians and Italians, so this is where we're most useful."

Aiden nods and sits back. I pull into the pier and park near the crime scene. There aren't many people milling about as we walk around.

"They probably hid behind the crates round the side." Callum points to the large wooden crates. "Especially if they came in from a boat."

"I doubt they did," I say, rubbing my stubble as I think. "They drove in, and they attacked. Eye witness accounts have said so."

Callum looks around. "What eyewitnesses?"

I shrug. "There were some. It doesn't matter."

"Well, it does because they can describe what the men look like." Callum comes over to me. "Why don't you give me their details, and I'll go round and ask them some questions."

I shake my head. "No, I need you with me."

He looks impatient, and I snort. "Relax, Callum, just because I don't do it your way doesn't mean I think less of you."

Callum nods and starts walking around the outskirts of the scene.

Aiden stoops low and touches two fingers to the floor. “Whoever it was sped off fast enough to leave skid marks.”

I go to him. “They were driving a fast car. Maybe there are some traffic tickets we can check. I’ll see if the Italians have someone.”

Aiden stands. “Let’s go to the laundromat. There’s nothing left for us to learn here.”

We walk back toward my car. I keep an eye out for anything that looks suspicious, but there’s nothing, and no one, that draws my attention.

As we drive to the laundromat, my mind wanders again. I should let Dina know what I think. She’ll probably have a contact somewhere that can trace if a camera speeding ticket was issued in the area.

“What do you think?”

I look at Aiden. “Sorry, my mind is elsewhere. What did you say?”

“I said. I don’t think the Russians will be happy to see us at the laundromat. What do you think?” Aiden eyes me out. He and I both know it’s not like me to let my mind wander while we’re busy with something.

“I doubt it, but they know they can’t defy me. Volkov told them as such, so they’ll have to suck it up.” I pull into the road and find a parking space.

We climb out and walk toward the back entrance. Two burly Russians are sitting outside at a table. They both stand quickly, their hands on their guns.

I walk up to them without fear. “We’re here to inspect the crime scene.”

“What for? You Irish are useless.” The man’s accent is thick, and he’s twice my size in height and weight, but I raise an eyebrow.

“Because I fucking said so. Do you want me to phone Ivan?” I take out my phone to add weight to my statement, and the guy scoffs.

“Go in, see if we give a fuck. We’ve had nothing but problems since you Irish were hired.” They don’t sit back down. Instead, one leads us inside while the other keeps watch outside.

He leads us into the back laundry room. The metallic smell of blood faintly lingers in the air mixed with fabric softer and clean sheets. Men are working here, and our escort speaks to them in Russian. I judge his tone and decide we’re not in immediate danger, but I still have my guard up. We look around and find the bullet holes in the machines and walls. The floor and appliances are still stained with blood, which is unsurprising since this isn’t a part of the laundromat that customers normally use.

“Clean this up, or you’ll attract the wrong attention,” I finally say before waving for Aiden and Callum to follow me back to my car. As we drive back to my offices, I glance at them. “What do you think?”

“The bullets came from standard handguns anyone can get their hands on and modify,” Aiden says, looking out the window to his right as we pass several buildings. “It’s not traceable, not really.”

“Do you think we can pull CCTV footage from surrounding stores and see if we can get our getaway vehicle?” I ask, turning back toward the office building.

“I can try, though that’s not really a connection I have,” Aiden says.

“I’ll get it,” Callum says. “Drop me here, and I’ll catch a cab and organize it.”

I pull over and turn to look at him. “Don’t let anyone know what you’re doing. This is between the three of us and Ronan.”

“Got it, boss,” Callum says, climbing out of the car.

I drive Aiden back to our offices, and we start by compiling a list of people that we definitively trust.

When Callum returns with the footage, I have him review it while Aiden and I discuss the men and women

working for us.

Days pass by, and before I know it, it's been a week of missing Dina but keeping busy. I would be lying if I said I didn't jerk off to the thought of her at least once a day when I got to my apartment. It relieves some of my frustration but more than wanting to fuck her, I miss her. She's funny and frustrating and sexy, and my heart is calling for her. Not that I would say such a sentimental thing out loud.

A week passes, and all I know is what a few little birdies tell me: she's working closely with one of the Italian guys trying to root out the traitor.

To say I'm jealous is an understatement, so I throw myself harder into work, not wanting to think about another man leaning over her and catching a gander at her cleavage or smelling her wild hair.

It sends me into a fiery rage, and I take my frustration out on our lack of progress.

"For fucks sake." I slam my fist onto the table. "This is fucking impossible. No one has a reason to betray Ronan."

"Calm down, Robbie," Aiden tries to placate me. "We won't get anywhere if you're in a mood every day."

"And how moody has he been?"

Ronan's voice from the door of the boardroom attracts my attention. I stare at him for a moment, his arms outstretched, before I realize what I'm looking at.

"Your cast is off," I say, watching him walk in with a slight limp.

"They want me to do physical therapy, but I don't see the point of that." Ronan looks at our lists. "You boys getting on then?"

Callum sits up from behind the screen he's using to watch footage. "Yeah, we are getting on alright, except some things pissed Robbie off."

I glare at him, then take a deep breath. "I'm just on edge, is all."

Ronan waves at Aiden and Callum. “Go get lunch at the pub, boys. I need to speak to Robbie alone.”

I groan as they exit the room. I don’t need a damn lecture from Ronan about my temper. I’m fucking busy.

Ronan goes to sit in my chair. “Sit down then, lad.”

I sit opposite him, where Aiden was seated, and lean back. “I’m not in a bad mood. I’m frustrated we can’t find the fucker who is betraying us.”

“That’s not what I’m here to talk about.” My brother traces a finger on the table and then looks into my eyes seriously. “What’s going on with you and Dinara?”

I snort. “Nothing. I haven’t seen her in a week.”

“I know. Did you two fight? Did you do something to her?” Ronan leans forward on his arms, lacing his fingers together. “I can’t have you fucking this alliance up, Robbie. I know how you stalked her, and I didn’t intervene then, and that won’t happen again.”

I frown and stand up, staring down at my brother. There is no fear in his eyes, but I’m sure he can tell I’m pissed. “I haven’t done anything to her she didn’t want, Ronan.”

“Well, she’s not happy about something if you’re avoiding each other.” Ronan inclines his head to the side.

“We’re pursuing different leads, is all.” I throw my hands up in the air. “You trust me to run your security but question my every move.”

Ronan snorts. “Robbie, sit down now.”

I sit in the chair opposite him and look at him, clenching my teeth.

“You can’t avoid her forever. Learn to work together because you need to sort security for the family lunch.”

“I chose to keep away from her because peace is better than war,” I say through my clenched teeth.

Ronan stands up. “This isn’t a request.”

He walks out, and I sigh. I take out my phone and stare at it for the longest time before finally deciding a text would be best.

We need to discuss security for the lunch.

My place. Dinner. Strictly work.

Rob

I sit there and stare at the wall until my phone pings with her reply.

See you at eight.

Dina.

Chapter 16 - Dinara

I've ached for him the whole week, not just his touch but his company. It's a dangerous dependency for someone in my line of work. You can't have these kinds of distractions. This is how the infighting began—because heads of families followed their hearts and nether regions instead of their heads. It doesn't matter how sexy or passionate Robbie is. His men will riot if they find out that not only is he sleeping with someone outside their nationality, but also much lower in rank...as families go.

You can't change bias overnight, and I doubt it will ever change. Each family has their reasons to hate the others, and the Irish hate and are hated the most.

I can't avoid him, though. We have to work together because if we don't, we have to explain why not. We would have to explain how we shacked up. We would have to admit we have feelings for each other. We would be disciplined. I am not a sister or brother or cousin. I am just a lowly soldier in a family of criminals. The only power I wield is that Katya is my friend, which means little in these situations.

So I cannot avoid him.

So I text him that I'll be there. At eight.

My stomach does flip flops, and to distract myself, I print out photos from the surveillance of the Italian family that we now know are working against the coalition. It will be something to talk about if things are awkward.

Time ticks by slowly until it's time to drive to his apartment. I park in the visitor's parking and take the short trip upstairs before knocking on his door.

When he answers, he's in a suit, a button-up shirt, but no tie. I guess he opted to keep things professional, too. I'm in a pencil skirt, a button-up blouse, and heels. My long hair is pulled up into a ponytail.

Our eyes meet, and for a moment, we stand there, both breathless. Finally, he steps aside. “Thank you for coming, Dina.”

“Thank you for having me. Dinner was something I couldn’t pass.” I can smell the aroma of food luring me to the square dining table. He leads me there and pulls my seat out for me. While I wait for him, I look around. The apartment is neater than I remember it being. He comes out with two steaming plates of food and sets mine in front of me.

“Steak, mash, and vegetables doused in a thick savory gravy,” he announces. He sets his food down and opens a bottle of Merlot, filling my glass.

“Molly must have made this, you’re a shit cook.” I look up at him with a cheeky smile.

He chuckles. “Of course. I can’t fucking cook.”

He fills his own glass and sets the bottle down, sitting opposite me.

“Enjoy,” he says, picking up his cutlery. I follow suit, and for a moment, the only sound in the room is the clinking of knives and forks against the plates.

“We’ve found photos of an Italian family that seems to be behind the attacks,” I say, looking up at him steadily. He meets my gaze and nods for me to continue. “We’ve had reports there was a pale, red-haired man with them but haven’t got an image of him yet.”

I hash through the information I have, and I’m surprised by how intently he watches me and how seriously he is taking me.

After I’m done, Robbie sets his cutlery down. “We’ve identified the guns as basic and easily-modifiable handguns.” He tells me about the lists they’ve compiled and how they’re going through CCTV footage of nearby shops.

“I think they’re going to try to hit the family lunch,” I say as I finish my food and wipe my mouth with a serviette. “I think we need to put our most trusted guys there.”

“If the higher-up members of the family and their partners are attacked, it will be war. If they die, it’ll create a huge vacuum for any old asshole with enough men to fill.” Robbie sighs and pushes his plate away from him.

Robbie gets up. “Let’s sit on the sofa so we’re more comfortable.”

I hesitate before I take my glass and move to the sofa. He brings the wine and refills my glass. He fills his and sets the bottle on the coffee table. He sits beside me, with a space between us, and now an awkward silence falls.

“I missed you.” There it is, the feelings.

I sip my wine, but before I can respond, he sets his glass down and looks at me. “I will burn down New York for you, Dina. I would kill every fucker that crossed you.”

“That’s the problem,” I say sternly, looking at him as seriously as I can. I try not to let my feelings betray me. I set my glass down. “We can’t have that kind of distraction. And our relationship? The men will never accept it. They will think we betrayed them.”

Robbie shifts forward, and I want to move back, but I don’t. He puts an arm around the back of the sofa. “They don’t have to know. This can stay between us until we get the men on our side.”

I swallow. When did I start breathing so hard? And audibly?

Robbie moves closer so our legs are touching, and his face is inches from mine. “You intoxicate me. All I can think of is you. I promise I won’t do anything you don’t want. You know me, Dina. I fuck hard and rough and love to make you orgasm so hard you can’t walk.”

There’s a distinct wetness between my legs that I struggle to control the softer his voice becomes. I can feel his warm breath on my lips. He is rough and tough and crazy, and it is sexy as hell—even if I would never say it out loud.

His eyes are heavy-lidded as he studies my eyes, our gazes locked on each other. He shifts, and his hands grab my

blouse and rip it open so my bra is exposed. My breasts are barely held back by my bra but still bounce from being released by the tight shirt fabric.

I lick my lips slowly. “Robbie.”

He runs the back of a finger over where he correctly guesses my nipple is hiding away. It sends a strong signal to my pussy. A longing ache.

“Robbie.” It’s barely more than a whisper.

“Dinara,” he murmurs.

His hands reach up and yank my bra down so it’s hooked under my breasts, freeing them to his touch. He instantly starts tugging and pulling my nipples, and I whimper. I try to pull away, but at the same time, my legs part slightly.

Quick as a flash, a hand snakes between them and roughly massages my clit through my panties. I can feel the heat on my face and close my eyes. “Robbie.” It’s more of a plea, louder, and I know it excites him because he massages my clit harder.

His hands briefly abandon me, and I open my eyes to see him undoing his pants to free his erection.

“Get up.” It’s a command that I obey, and I put a leg on either side of him on the sofa. I hold myself up as he rubs the sides of my legs. He looks up at me, and that’s when he reaches up and wraps a hand around my throat. Just tight enough to apply pressure.

“Good girl,” he says, holding his cock so I can slowly lower myself and let it fill me. He grunts, and there’s a lust in his eyes, a lust I only ever see when he’s with me—the possessive side to him that I questioned before but now I find enticing.

I breathe hard, his right hand staying around my throat as I look down at him and start to move myself up and down. His left hand finds my breast, squeezes it, and then teases the nipple. I whimper, but I don’t raise my hands. I submit to him, trusting him to pleasure me.

He stops me and tilts his head. “Lean back, I’ve got you.”

I look at him questionably as he holds my hips, and I slowly lean back. He lowers me so that my back is on the ground, cock still pulsating inside of me, my hips and legs in the air. It’s not comfortable, but the angle that his cock is makes me see stars.

“Stay there, lass.” He grunts and shifts around until I’m steady and my knees are bent to my head, basically bending me in half. He holds my thighs and starts moving up and down quickly.

“Oh my... Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” I can’t keep the desperation out of my voice as I reach new highs, new pleasures.

I don’t think I can go any higher before his finger finds my clit while he’s bouncing his body to jackhammer me into the floor.

I am completely vulnerable in this position, and I know it can’t be comfortable for him either, but the pleasure it’s bringing me is overwhelming. I look up at him, panting with my mouth slightly open. My eyes meet his hungry gaze, those blue eyes that see right through me.

“Play with your tits,” he grunts. “I want to see you playing with yourself.”

I shift so I hold my breasts in my hands and start to massage them. They’re so sensitive from how he’s roughed them up. My nipples are stiff and fiery to the touch. I rock back and forth slightly as he moves faster. It’s hard to catch my breath with his weight bearing down on me and the angle at which I’m bent, but he’s like a man possessed.

He flicks my clit, hard, and I yelp. He flicks it again.

“You going to squirt again, Dinara.” It isn’t a question as my pussy clenches around his cock. He buries himself in me and uses his fingers to quickly work my swollen nub. I try to squirm away, but all he does is force my legs apart and bend, and without warning, my pussy erupts with liquid and

pleasure. It sprays all over me, so I shut my eyes, but my mouth stays open, and I can taste myself as I let out a scream of pleasure. I feel like a porn star on a B-rated movie. When I stop after a few seconds, I feel him slide his cock out of me, but he doesn't let me up.

I wipe my face and blink my eyes open to see him stroking himself. Then he tilts his head back, and his cum hits my tits and face. I open my mouth instinctively to catch some, and when he opens his eyes to look at the cum on my tongue, I swallow it.

He's smiling that little smirk—satisfied that I'm satisfied.

“Let's move this to the bedroom.” He chuckles.

Okay, maybe some more satisfaction won't hurt.

Chapter 17 - Robbie

I am getting too old to be fucking Dina in the positions I want her in, but that's not going to stop me. My back aches slightly as I stir. I don't know what annoying sound is pulling me from my deep sleep, but it makes me angry. I open my eyes. I'm spooning Dina, naked, and we're lying away from where most of the wet spots are.

By the looks of it, I dehydrated the poor woman.

I realize it's my phone going, and I extract myself from her and grab it.

"What?" I snap, but as quietly as I can.

I hear shouting and chaos in the background as my brother Daniel's calm voice comes over the speaker, "Get to the pub, *now*. I need you, Aiden, and Callum."

I get out of bed and hang up because I don't need to be told twice. I'm not going to disturb Dina. I throw on jeans, socks, work boots, and a white vest. I grab the shotgun from my closet and leave the room, sparing just a moment to look at my sleeping goddess.

I could wake her and tell her where I'm going, but she'll probably insist on going with me, and I can't place her in that kind of danger. No, I will give my life to protect her.

As soon as I'm outside on the street, I can hear the noise at the pub. I march over there, shotgun in hand. I glance to my right as Jarryd falls into step with me, a machete in each hand.

We don't take threats to our brothers lightly. Even my wee soft-hands baby brother will defend us to the death.

When I walk in, I pause. Ronan and Daniel are behind the counter, and most of our men are pressing around, shouting at Ronan. They accuse him of betraying them. They shout that he has sided with the enemy and now that enemy is killing them. That he does nothing while they die. That he isn't fit to

lead. Someone raises a baseball bat, and I raise my shotgun, shooting a hole into the ceiling.

“For fucks sake, Robbie, I’ve just had that fixed,” Ronan grumbles and the air feels less tense.

Everyone’s eyes are on me. “Ronan not loyal to ya? Is that what you think? Ronan has spent his entire life, every decision, and every cent on this family of which he counts each of you. When you fall, he weeps as though he’s lost his own brother. He’s always chosen us, and he always will. Times are fucking changing, and sometimes you have to play a defensive move to advance. Everything he has chosen is in the interest of this family without a thought of himself. He doesn’t hide in some rich, high-walled estate like the other families. He’s here, living with us. You stand here and accuse my brother of betraying his family when only last night you sat here while he blessed the food he had made for you. He feeds you, clothes you, looks after your families.”

I can see a lot of regret among the faces looking at me; some still angry, but a lot are coming to their senses and losing the mob mentality.

“Ronan is furious for all fallen brothers and their families. He hurts for them. He knows they were there because they served the family as we all do. We all take care of each other, but don’t you for one fucking minute think Ronan won’t find the cunts that did this. They will not have a quick death. Ronan will show them the might of the Irish and teach our new partners what torture actually looks like.”

I look around, and a few of the men are still grumbling. I don’t give a fuck. “I’ve spent all week looking into who it can be, who is attacking us. It’s not just us lads. It’s men from each of the families. Someone is doing this, and you know I’ll find them, and when I do, they will fucking pay. They will pay over and over, a hundred times, for every life of our family they’ve taken from us.”

A silence hangs in the air before one of the lads in the front turns to Ronan. “Sorry, Ronan. We was just upset, we was.”

Ronan nods. “Aye, it’s fine, lads. These things happen, and we must communicate as a family. Go home, spend some time with your wives and children, and if you don’t have a wife, go find one. We’ll sort this out in a jiff.”

The men grumble their apologies as they file out and mumble to me that they trust me to be true to my word.

I nod, standing there with my shotgun in the crook of my arm. Jarryd lights a cigarette, passes it to me, and I take a deep drag.

“You could have been president,” my baby brother says once everyone is out of earshot.

“He could have, but thank God he isn’t,” Daniel says, removing his hand from inside his jacket, where he no doubt has a gun.

Ronan sighs, crossing his arms. He leans back and looks at me. “I’m surprised the shouting didn’t rouse you from your sleep, and Daniel had to call. Where are Aiden and Callum?”

I look around. “Sorry, I thought Daniel would call them to get them down here. I didn’t think to call them. I was on a mission.”

“A mission for Freedom. What are you, William Wallace?” Jarryd jokes.

“Call me a Scotsman’s name again, and this shotgun is going up your ass,” I growl, and my baby brother shifts to move closer to my other brothers.

Daniel looks at me. “When should I have called them? I barely had time to call you, you little shit. Late night?”

“Work.” I don’t elaborate; thankfully, Daniel and Jarryd take the hint. Ronan, on the other hand, gives me a strange look and tilts his head.

Fuck, he knew I was going to speak to Dina. I clear my throat and stand straight. “I should go get showered and changed for work. I’ve got a lot to do today.”

I turn to the door as it opens and see my best friend standing there. Aiden looks pale and is holding his hand over his stomach, blood seeping down his front.

It's as though time freezes. It feels like we're standing still for hours, but it's probably a second or two before Aiden starts to fall forward.

I drop my gun and sink to my knees to catch him before his head hits the ground. I look into his eyes. "It's okay. We're going to get you to the hospital."

His eyes search mine desperately. "Italians."

He breathes the word before his eyes close. We scramble to get him to a car, and the four of us race with him to the hospital. We get him onto a gurney and rush in after the doctors, who take him straight for surgery.

I pace up and down until Ronan grabs me by the arm and forces me to sit down. Daniel is speaking with the doctors who are friends of his so they don't call the police. I can smell Aiden's blood on me, and I'm worried. He may have seen who the traitor was. He could tell us who did this, if nothing else. But most of all, I hope my best friend survives.

I take out my phone, unable to sit still. I need to check on Dina and let her know what's happening.

Her phone rings, and I frown until she picks up, her voice calm and cool, "Robbie."

"Dina. Aiden's been attacked. Whoever is doing this is close to the family, which means we have a huge problem."

I hear the click of a gun in the background of the call as she says, "Yes, we do."

The phone line goes dead, and I take off.

Chapter 18 - Dinara

I hang up, drop the phone onto the bed beside me, and turn to look at the end of the gun Callum is pointing at me. The sheet is pulled over my naked body and tucked under my arms. He snuck into the apartment while I was asleep, and this is what I woke up to.

He let me answer that call from Robbie because it was a power move. He is toying with Robbie and me.

“I knew he’d fuck you,” Callum laughs a little manically. “I knew he was obsessed with you. You’re going to be the downfall of the Irish, and I won’t let that happen. God, Robbie is so predictable. I can guess his every move.”

“This isn’t what you think, Callum.” I keep my voice calm so as not to startle him. “I’m not here to betray the Quinn family.”

“The Quinn family has already betrayed us by siding with our sworn enemies. Our families are meant to be at war. It’s the natural order of things. This getting along and existing peacefully should never have happened, and families outside New York have noticed. It’s only a matter of time before New York belongs to my new partners. Then, we will move on to the territories outside New York and own the states. From east to west, north to south. We will be unstoppable.”

I shake my head. “It’s the natural order of things, but you’re siding with Italians anyway. Isn’t that a bit hypocritical?”

Callum glares at me, his rage rolling over me like six-foot waves. His face goes red as he speaks again, “You can’t win a fight without an arm. We’re not fucking each other. We’re just business partners. When this is over, the men will be loyal to me, and I will overthrow these little assholes just as easily as I’m going to overthrow Ronan Quinn and his pussy brothers.”

Painstakingly slowly, my hand slides inch by inch toward Robbie's pillow as I hold Callum's attention. "His brothers are much more formidable than you make them out to be. You may want to reconsider your position."

"Never! Ronan sold us out. My partners and I are going to make quick work of him and any man who stands beside him no matter how long I've known them or how we're related."

My hand is almost to the pillow when Callum looks around. "The family we've temporarily partnered with will make quick work of the Sorvino, Volkov, and Quinn coalition. When the dust settles, there will be a new head of family."

"You're playing a dangerous game, Callum. When the heads of the families find out about this, you'll be tortured and killed along with the Baldocchi family members who have dared to defy them. You seem to think they're weak, but they're not. They're stronger than ever." My hand slowly slides under the pillow. I'm praying his gun is still there where he keeps it, and he didn't take it with him.

Callum laughs and shakes his head. "This isn't a game to me, Russian. This means everything. I have given up everything to see this happen."

Callum tilts his head to the side and sighs, and at the same time, my fingers find Robbie's handgun. I feel the safety is off and wrap my hand in position as Callum speaks again. "I'm going to enjoy watching Robbie grieve for you. I do love watching him suffer."

"I would say the same, but once he learns you're a traitor, I don't think he'll care you're dead."

Callum knits his eyebrows together, confused, and I whip the gun out and shoot him in the chest. Reflexively, he pulls his trigger, catching me in the arm.

I yelp as he falls to the floor. I look at him, a trickle of blood coming out of his mouth as he gasps. I keep the sheet tightly wrapped around me and get up, kicking his gun away. I pick up my phone and text Robbie.

Stay where you are. I'm good.

Problem sorted.

Chat later.

D

I throw my phone back onto the bed and kneel by Callum's head. I lift his head and put it in my lap. "Callum, is anyone else working with you?"

He looks up at me. I can see the life ebbing from his eyes. He smirks, and I reach over and press my finger into the hole in his chest. He coughs and splutters, trying to cry out in pain. I look down at him coolly. "Is there anyone else working with you?"

"He'll betray you, just like he betrayed us." I can barely hear him before he lets out a last breath. His dead eyes stare at the ceiling, and I drop his head unceremoniously to the floor.

The pain in my arm intensifies, and I check the wound in the mirror. That bullet is firmly in my arm, and I will have to go to the hospital to have it checked out.

With some difficulty, I find some clothes that will fit, and I get dressed. Hopefully, nobody recognizes Robbie's clothes. We need to be more careful about keeping our secret, now more than ever.

I take my phone, order an Uber, and go outside to wait for them. I don't want to draw too much attention to myself, so I have Robbie's hoody on, just without my arm in the sleeve. I get in the cab and order him to take me to the hospital as fast as possible; I've already tipped him a thousand dollars.

The guy checks his phone for a second and then takes off. I'm pleased he isn't an idiot.

We are at the hospital in record time, and as I get out, I see Robbie outside having a cigarette. I walk toward the entrance, but he spots me and walks toward me. I shake my head and veer behind a hidden section.

"What happened?" he asks loudly.

“Keep your voice down,” I say sternly, and he frowns. “You can’t show concern. You can’t worry. You can’t act like we’re together or interested in each other. I’ll explain another time. Act like you’re mildly curious at best if you see me inside.”

Without another word, I turn to leave, and he gently takes my good hand. “Just tell me who the fuck it was.”

“Callum,” I say quietly. “And he’s dead.”

I walk away from him toward the ER, not looking back, although I know Robbie is probably aching to come after me.

Chapter 19 - Robbie

That bastard shot my woman. He's lucky she killed him, or he'd regret every breath he's ever taken in the over forty years he's been alive. Asshole.

Callum must have attacked Aiden when he discovered he was the traitor. Callum probably thought my friend was dead and went to my apartment to take me out. There, he found Dina, and she took care of everything, as she would.

Fuck, if he had escaped, then everyone would know about Dina and I. That would seriously sow dissension among the soldier ranks. Our families cannot know we were having sex last night instead of working. They can't know anything about our relationship.

I watch her walk into the ER as I finish my cigarette, trying to come up with a cover story of how Callum landed up dead in my apartment with Dina being shot. This isn't going to be easy to get past Ronan. It might be easier with Daniel, maybe. But my oldest brother isn't going to buy it. He already has his suspicions about us.

After I'm sure Dina is admitted, I walk back to the waiting room and see Ronan and Daniel talking in one corner. I walk over, and they both look at me as I say quietly, "It was Callum."

"Callum?" Daniel says in disbelief. "The boy hasn't got the brains..."

"Um, Dina came to see me this morning about work. Obviously, I was here, but she ran into Callum at my place, and he tried to kill her." I look them both in the eyes, hoping it assures them I'm telling the truth.

Ronan frowns instantly and grabs my arm. "Robbie, are you and Dina having an all-out affair?"

"She's alright," I say offhandedly. I try to shrug Ronan off. "I mean, I like her a little."

Daniel's hand connects with the back of my head hard as he hisses at me, "This isn't the time to play the fool, Robbie. Don't be a smartass with Ronan. This is serious. The men will not take you seriously or obey you if they think you're sleeping with someone they consider an enemy."

I rub the back of my head and glare at Daniel. "It's no one's bloody business where I dip my dipstick, and I'm not advertising it publicly, am I?"

"Normally, I'd agree it isn't anyone's business, but Robbie, what's more important to you? Your family or your latest infatuation?" Ronan looks at me darkly, and I don't move my gaze away from his.

"I can juggle both my family and my conquests. This doesn't have to be spoken about outside the three of us." I hold my ground, and Ronan shakes his head.

"Be prepared for when it gets out because I won't be able to protect you from that fallout." He turns and walks away from us as he sees Aiden's doctor come out of the room, and I frown.

"Don't be stupid, Robbie. You know there are rules we must play by," Daniel says quietly.

"I'm going to go see Aiden. Make sure he knows it was Callum." I brush Daniel off and leave, letting Ronan distract the doctor so I can get into the wards. No one really stops me as I walk around until I see Aiden's name on a board with his room number. I go to the room and walk in. There are six beds, but he's the only one in the room.

He looks at me sleepily. "Robert!"

"You are high," I chuckle.

"I was jump..."

"I know." My voice is quiet and laced with disappointment. "Callum was the traitor. He went looking for me at my apartment."

Aiden frowns and closes his eyes. "Dirty little bastard. He hasn't been himself for a while." He yawns, and I can see

the exhaustion written on his face.

“You get some rest. Ronan and Daniel will be up now to see you. I need to sort out Callum’s dead body in my apartment.”

“You killed him?” Aiden asks.

“Get some rest, buddy.” I wait for him to close his eyes and leave. I take a long way around to the ER, approaching it from a different side, away from the waiting room where Ronan and Daniel last were.

I peek through the open doors and see Dina sitting on the edge of her bed, her arm in a sling. I walk toward her but quickly hide behind a curtain as I notice her speaking to someone. I get as close as I can and inwardly groan as I realize it’s her boss, Katya.

I listen for a few minutes while Katya interrogates her about her relationship with me and how she landed up at my apartment that morning. I think it’s best I scramble out of here before she notices me and I give away Dina’s game. I hurry out and down the corridor but have to dive into a room as I hear my brothers coming down the hall that intercedes with mine. They must be looking for Aiden’s room to check on him. At least, I hope they are, and they’re not looking for me.

I wait for them to pass. I can’t make out what they’re talking about and don’t want to give myself away. They’re probably just bitching about me anyway.

I leave and grab a cab to my house. I take out my phone and text Ronan that I’m going to clean up Callum and get his body dumped in the Hudson River. He doesn’t respond straight away, so I put my phone away.

There’s blood spray on the wall behind where Callum was shot and more blood on my bed. It wouldn’t be the first time either of those places had blood on them. Probably won’t be the last.

I look at the towel we had put on the bed and smile. Dina and I had a wild night. It was fitting for the two of us to end in bloodshed.

I called some of my more private security guards to remove the body and contact a crime scene cleaning team to get the blood out and make my apartment look new. Before my guards get there, though, I ensure the bloody sheets are gone. I'm not shot, and I don't need them to ask any questions or make any assumptions.

I sit on my sofa and text Dina.

Saw Katya was there, wanted to give you a kiss bye.

When can we see each other? Is she gone? Can I come now? Fuck visiting hours.

Rob.

I wait patiently and then see the little bubbles pop up to indicate she's typing before I get her reply.

Can't. Katya waited for me to be discharged to bring me back to Alessandro's house. We'll have to call later when I can be alone. Don't let anyone know about us. Delete message.

D

I deleted the messages and put my phone down.

There's an ache in my heart that one of my oldest friends betrayed me, but it's quickly replaced with my longing for Dina.

Chapter 20 - Dinara

I don't even flinch as the intern works on taking the bullet out of my arm. The numbing has worked wonders; although I feel some discomfort, I don't feel pain.

"You fucking idiot." I look up to see Katya storming into the room, raising her voice in Russian. "How the fuck did you get shot? Where did you get shot?"

"I only texted you so you'd know where I was," I say calmly, answering in Russian.

Katya crosses her arms as the intern looks at me and then at Katya.

I gesture for her to continue. "Don't worry. We're family."

"Tell me what happened," Katya demands.

I screw up my face as the intern pulls the slug out, and some blood sprays onto her scrubs. "What's there to tell?" I ask. "I had to go see the Quinns about security for the event. We were meeting this morning, and when he didn't show up, I went to his apartment to get him. I assumed he'd overslept. When I got there, one of his men, someone who had previously acted as a guard to me, was there and took me hostage. Luckily, I found a gun Quinn had hidden, and I shot the fucker. He squeezed the trigger of his gun as he fell and caught my arm." We keep speaking Russian. I've already paid the doctors off not to call the police, but I don't want them to know the details.

"I'm thankful you're okay, woman." Katya frowns. "But don't lie to me, Dinara. Your feelings for Robbie Quinn are crystal clear to everyone who's spent a minute in the same room as the two of you."

"That's my story, and it isn't going to change," I quip back. The intern starts to stitch up my arm, and a nurse brings me some medication in a package.

“The doctor said to follow the instructions on the labels and to come back if the pain increases or the painkillers don’t help.” The nurse glances nervously at Katya as she speaks. My friend, and boss, has clearly been to this hospital before.

The nurse walks away, and I look back at Katya sitting in a chair facing me. “Don’t bring emotions into your job; it makes you vulnerable and will have you looking over your shoulder every ten minutes. It won’t serve you in your position.”

“It seems to have served the heads of the families just fine until now.” I look at her. I don’t mean to be cold, but when her eyes narrow, I know I’ve crossed a boundary.

“If you weren’t a childhood friend, Dina, you’d suffer for that comment. I’m just looking out for you. I will wait with you until you’re discharged, and then I will take you home to our estate to stay there until your house is replaced.” She takes out her phone, putting an end to our little chat.

The intern seems to have picked up that there’s a vibe and hurries her stitching up. I watch and realize her hands shake every time I look at her. Nervous little thing isn’t ready to be a surgeon yet. I sigh and look up at the ward. I just make out Robbie exiting, and my heart does a double beat.

Once I’m discharged, I follow Katya out of the hospital and into the back of her limo. We sit opposite each other, not saying much on the drive back. There’s a guard in the back with us, plus the driver and a guard in the front. There’s also a vehicle following us with four more guards for Katya.

Protect the princess at all costs, except now she’s a Queen and owns the heart of the most powerful man in New York and has borne him three children.

This is not the life I expected for us, either of us, when she offered to bring me over from Russia as a teen. Things change, I guess, and now this is the new norm.

What I want is to be normal. For Robbie and I to be together. I was so hard and quick with him at the hospital that I’m worried I may have hurt his feelings. I know he has them,

and I know he can be hurt because when I told him it was Callum, I felt the raw emotion Robbie exuded.

We arrive at the estate, and as I follow Katya into the entrance hall, Alessandro emerges from his office.

“Dina! So pleased to hear you’re okay after your shooting.” He comes over and politely greets me by bumping our cheeks together in mock kisses.

“Well, the traitor is dead,” I say coldly. “We now need to deal with the family that was backing him, and I suspect he has a partner in one of the other families that was helping him.”

Alessandro frowns and motions for Katya and me to follow him as he speaks, “If that’s the case, let us assemble our men and take out this family in its entirety straight away. No family left, no problem.”

“I disagree,” I say, and Katya raises an eyebrow. Alessandro chuckles and pours both of us a whiskey. Katya takes a bottle of water out of the fridge, and we sit in the armchairs facing each other. “You see, I think there’s more at play. A bigger plan, if you will. I want to weed out this possible partner and figure out the family’s grand plan so we can destroy it at its core. Often, our enemies are left to regroup and come back to attack us with more experience and strength. We should send a firm message.”

Alessandro sips his whiskey, then rests his arm, holding the glass with his fingertips. “You think if we get whomever we can find, we’ll lose the bigger fish?”

I nod, but Katya interjects, “My love, perhaps we should cancel the family lunch that we’re planning. It obviously isn’t safe, and I wouldn’t want to take the children.”

I glance at Katya and then at Alessandro, who nods. “I agree, leave the children at home, but Dina, is it safe enough for us to meet?”

“I think it’s safe enough to go ahead with the lunch. We’ll be prepared with our most loyal guards, so neither you nor Katya will have to worry. But yes, leave the children at

home.” I down my whiskey. “Please excuse me. I am feeling a bit tired. I want to go lie down.”

“Of course.” Alessandro waves me off. “I need to speak to Katya anyway about business.”

I leave the room and go up to my room. I change into fresh clothes carefully. The intern was a little overzealous and gave me a sling, which I tossed to the corner of the room. My wound is nothing more than a dull ache.

I rest on my bed and sigh.

My phone goes off, and I read the text.

Alone yet? It's been hours.

I smile and settle into my pillows, texting Robbie back.

Yes, I'm alone. And I'm fine. Is everything okay at your apartment?

I wait patiently.

Yeah, body's been dumped. Place has been cleaned. My only regret is that I can't kill Callum a second time for hurting you. I'm relieved you're okay, though.

I bite my lip and take a few deep breaths before I respond.

I'm fine, I promise. I'm so glad you're okay too.

Robbie, I love you xxx

I wait for what feels like ages, but eventually, I start to drift off without an answer to my last text.

Chapter 21 - Robbie

We're spending most of our business hours working on the family lunch, which is fast approaching. I work with Dina, but it seems Katya and Ronan have assigned someone to watch us whenever we're together. I think they're trying to drive us apart, and as I walk toward the new offices, I wonder if they realize that the fact they're saying I can't have her makes me want her more. Is that even possible? We find ways.

We have a week and a half left to plan the event, and everything must be tight and coordinated, so we have to be together to plan. If we suddenly aren't seen together, or if they issue a more public order not to see each other, they'll be letting the men know that we were or are together. That'll cause more problems than they want.

I take the elevator up to my office and walk in. I shut the door behind me and turn around to find Daniel standing by the window.

"You're early." It isn't a question, and Daniel glances at me as I say it.

He smiles. "Wanted to get an early start, especially cause I saw you leaving early today."

"Dina's not in until later," I comment, shuffling papers together and sitting at my desk. "So you don't have to babysit me."

Danie snorts. "I wish that were the truth, Rob. You always were a little shit."

I smirk at my brother and then start up my computer. He sits on the chair in front of my desk, facing me.

A message pops up on my screen from Dina's burner phone.

Am in cleaning cupboard. Heard Daniel's voice.

I delete the message and sit back. "So you're just going to sit here the whole day while I work?"

“I’ve come to give you some advice on your plans.”

“Are you going to hold my dick while I take a leak?” I ask, standing up.

Daniel pulls a face. “No, you’re on your own for that one. Bring back coffee with you. I missed coffee with Nat this morning to beat you here.”

I scoff, acting irritated as I walk down the hallway. I turn toward the bathroom, but before I reach it, I enter the large cleaning closet to the right of the door.

Dina presses a finger against her lips and whispers, “They think I’m at the salon.”

“Daniel thinks I’m getting coffee.”

“Luckily, I brought coffee for the two of us that you can take.” She reaches up and kisses me. I wrap my arms around her and kiss her hungrily, speaking softly. “We need to be quick, lass. He’ll come looking if I’m too long.”

She nods, breathing hard. She turns around and pulls her skirt up to reveal her thong. “Don’t worry about me today,” she murmurs.

I groan and unzip my pants. Once my cock is free, I bend her over slightly and push into her. It’s not the most comfortable position, and I hate that I can’t focus on her right now, but I need a release. I hold her hips and basically hump-fuck her as quickly as I can. When I’m close, I groan and murmur her name. I bury myself inside her, and my dick twitches as it fills her with my cum.

She sighs softly, and I lean forward to whisper in her ear, “I want you to pull your panties up and wear my cum in you all day long.”

She shivers and licks her lips. I smack her ass and tidy myself up, smoothing over my hair. She fixes her pants and pulls down her skirt before she hands me two coffees.

I grin, kiss her, and walk out. As I turn the corridor, I see Daniel coming out of my office, obviously wondering what’s taking so long.

“Seriously, Dan. Can I not even get coffee in peace?” I say, walking toward him.

Taking one of the cups, he grins. “You can, but I still don’t trust you.”

“Why not?” I ask as we loiter in the corridor.

“Because your little girlfriend just slipped out through the stairs.” I sigh as Ronan’s voice comes from behind me.

“Didn’t I tell you to leave her alone? Daniel, didn’t I tell you to watch the fucker?” Ronan walks toward us.

I look at him calmly. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“You keep slipping away to have little trysts wherever you want, Robbie. I’m warning you now: if you don’t stop, there’s going to be a coup. You are literally fucking us over by fucking her.” Ronan crosses his arms.

Daniel looks at me incredulously. “Seriously? That quick?”

“You’re not fucking helping,” Ronan roars, and I try not to laugh.

I sip my coffee and look at my brothers. “I am what I am, and I want what I want.”

“What you want is putting us in danger,” Ronan growls. “I’ve given you at least seven warnings in the last four days. For the love of the family, Robbie, please just lay off for a while.”

I don’t respond, but I do hand him my coffee. “I think I need a day off. It’s been busy these past couple of weeks.”

I walk down the corridor. I hear Ronan call for me, but Daniel tells him to let me go.

It’s true, Dina and I have been sneaking off to shag as much as possible. We wouldn’t have to if Ronan and Katya would stop conspiring against us. We can keep it from the boys until we figure out what to tell them.

Fuck, why can’t I have my happy ending? I text Dina about meeting in Central Park, and I head that way, making

sure I'm not being followed.

We meet at a secluded spot we found some time ago. She's already there when I arrive, and I take her in my arms, kissing her deeply.

"Ronan saw you leaving," I say as we part.

"Shit, again?" She smiles mischievously.

I kiss her softly, my hands stroking her sides softly.

"Do you want to..." she whispers, sliding a hand down my stomach.

I catch her hand and shake my head. "No, I just want to be with you. I'm so tired of running around behind their backs. I want you in my bed, where I can eat you and savor you and make you see God."

She blushes slightly, and I kiss her again. She presses herself against me. We find a spot to sit down and relax in each other's arms for most of the day, turning our phones off.

Eventually, we have to go our separate ways, though, before the families really have a shit fit. I walk her to her car and kiss her softly, stroking her face. "You're mine," I say firmly. "Only mine."

She nods. "I am only yours as you are only mine."

I smile, kiss her, and go back to my car.

I don't even go to the pub for dinner. I'm still fuming with Ronan. I don't need another lecture from my older brother. Fuck, I'm over forty. Why am I still getting lectures about how to date appropriately?

I go straight home, shower, and jump into bed. I lie there thinking of her. I drift off for what feels like seconds when my bedroom door slams open.

"You're in shit," Daniel says. "You've really fucked up this time."

I sit bolt-upright and look around. "I didn't do anything. I'm here alone... clearly."

My phone buzzes, and I instinctively pick it up. Group message from an anonymous number. A photo of me kissing Dina in the Central Park car park.

“Fuck,” I murmur.

Then my phone rings, and Ronan’s number splays across the screen.

“I would answer it if I were you and be hopeful he doesn’t send you back to fucking Ireland.” Daniel paces my room.

“Ronan...”

“No. Shut it. I don’t want to hear a fucking peep from you, Robert Hilton Quinn.” Daniel can hear Ronan over the phone, and even he raises an eyebrow at the use of my formal birth name. “I warned you. I told you not to see her.”

“Ronan, I’ll take care of it.” Daniel shakes his head at my words.

“No, you fucking won’t cause, in case you didn’t read the men’s response, they want to tear you a new one. They don’t want to see or hear from you at all. You are housebound. No leaving the apartment, not even to come to the pub. Jarryd or Molly will bring your food. And this is an official order not to see Dina again. Under penalty of being cast out.”

Cast out? I’m his brother. My heart sinks in my chest. “Ronan...”

“Sometimes we can’t help who we love, Rob, but we have to choose the family even if it means we miss out on our soul mate. Make yourself useful. I’ll send your computer home. You work out who the second traitor is. We’ll deal with things after the event.”

He hangs up, and I look at Daniel. “You got to marry the love of your life. Why can’t I?”

“Why can’t Ronan?” Daniel says quietly. “It’s all down to our lot in life, kid. I’ll get you some supplies. Hand over the phone.”

I feel like a child, but I know I'm being punished. I hand over my phone and flop back into bed, worried about what will happen to Dina when the Sorvinos see that photo.

Chapter 22 - Dinara

I'm happiest when I'm in a deep sleep, dreaming of Robbie and me together. Just doing regular, everyday things like shopping, having lunch, and taking out threats to the families. I'm warm and cozy in his arms, but I hear someone calling me. I groan as I open my eyes blearily and look up at Katya's irate face.

"Wha...?"

"We have a problem," she says, smacking my face lightly to wake me. "Up! We need to get ahead of this."

Worried, I sit up, pulling my robe on. "Who was attacked?"

"You," Katya says, handing me her phone. I stare at the photo of Robbie kissing me. I frown and look at her. "You had me followed?"

"No, this was sent anonymously by someone who saw you two." Katya sighs and shakes her head, starting to pace the room. I catch her hand rubbing the side of her belly, but she pauses before I can say anything. "Alessandro has told the other men it wasn't willingly from your side and that the Quinn brother was taking advantage of you. It just looks bad because there's no context."

I run my hand through my hair. "Kat."

"I told you to stay away from him, Dina. I told you not to bring emotions into this. Now, the men definitely won't follow your lead. What am I supposed to do with that?" She sighs and stretches her neck. "It's been really stressful with everything going on. I would have appreciated it if you had just held off, even just until the lunch."

Guilt consumes me. Katya has always been good to me. "You got your prince charming..."

"It wasn't rainbows and roses from the beginning." Katya laughs darkly. "Alessandro and I learned from each

other, fell in love with each other, and worked together to build a strong team.”

“Robbie and I can do the same if we’re just given the chance,” I plead with her.

Katya holds up a hand. “You won’t be focusing on the security for the event anymore, so there’s no need to go to the offices. We’ll be working from here. Ronan Quinn has his second-best soldier coming in to take over security until we can deal with this mess. This is not the week I need this bullshit, Dinara.” She glares at me, and my shoulders sink.

“Where can I help?” I finally ask.

“You’re going to help plan the security, get this Aiden guy up to date, and then you’re going to blend in quietly in the background and not cause a fuss anymore.” Katya takes a deep breath. “Understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I say, looking at her coldly. “Loud and clear.”

Katya leaves, and I sink onto my bed. The men might not be as harsh with me because I was “taken advantage of,” but Robbie is going to get it hard from everyone as the “instigator” of this whole thing.

Fuck. I feel so bad that I’ve gotten him into so much trouble.

The days drag by slowly as I get Aiden and Katya up to speed on the setup for security. We’ve decided to only use Sorvino men as guards with Quinn men nearby as backup. The family members will have their private guards so that each family can choose their most loyal guards with their lives.

I know the event is this Sunday, two days away. It’s been nice collaborating with Aiden as far as a work relationship is concerned, but I miss Robbie deeply.

I walk into Alessandro’s office, which is where we’ve been working. Alessandro and Dominic have been away all week on business.

Aiden is already there with Katya, reviewing the rotation schedule and smiling as he looks up at me. “Hey, Dina, hope you’re well?”

I nod. “Thanks, I’m well and yourself. Hello, Katya.”

It’s been awkward between Katya and me this week. There’s a tension between us that never was there before in our friendship. I’m worried I’ve lost her as a friend, but she also seemed very distracted.

I sit on the opposite side of the table as Aiden goes through the rotations and how all possible exits are covered. He looks at me with a smile. “You won’t have to worry at all. I’ve got everything covered for Sunday.”

I give him a small smile, though I’m sure I look terrible. “I’m sure you will do great.”

I look at my watch and get up. “Sorry, I need to get something quickly.”

Every few hours, I’ve been trying to call Robbie, but there’s been no answer—no texts, no calls, and no emails.

I feel like a shell of a person without him here, and I am worried he’s been punished worse than I pictured. I go up to my room and shut the door. I take out my phone and dial his number. It rings, and I tap my foot, waiting without hope.

So when the call is answered, I stand up quickly. “Robbie?”

“Dina, this needs to stop.” It’s Ronan, and I swallow.

“I just want to know he’s okay,” I say quickly. “That he isn’t dead at the bottom of the Hudson or something.”

“I rule strictly but fairly. Dina. I’m not going to kill my brother because of who he fucks. He is, however, relieved of his position for now. You, on the other hand, are going to get into a lot of trouble if Katya finds out how many times a day you text and call and email my brother.”

I bite my lip. “Please don’t tell her, Ronan.”

“I’m not going to if you stop. You have to stop, Dina. You two are not meant to be together. Some things just happen that way. For the sake of both of you, stay away from him and move on. He needs to do the same.”

The call ends, and I swallow hard. My throat is swollen with emotions and hurts as tears slip down my cheeks. I fall into my bed and sob into my pillow. I’ve never been this emotional about a man before, but fuck, I love him. And it isn’t fair I can’t have him.

Maybe after the event, we can ask the families to release us, and we can build an honest life somewhere in Europe.

There’s a knock at my door, and I hear Katya’s soft voice, “Dinara?”

I wipe my eyes and take a steady breath. “I’ll be down later. I’m not feeling well.”

“Do you need to talk?” she calls softly.

“No,” I call, colder than I usually would. I hear her sigh, and her footsteps recede, and I curl up on my bed, wondering if I will ever see Robbie again or if Ronan is right and I should just move on.

Chapter 23 - Robbie

This is fucking bullshit. I should be at that damn family lunch today. Firstly, I'm a fucking Quinn, and second, and most importantly, Dina is going to be there. I can't believe I'm being banned from seeing my girlfriend like a teenage boy all over again.

I think back to Friday when I tried to sneak my phone off Ronan to text Dina, and he caught me. He started to smack me on the head in anger, something he hadn't done in a long time, before he threw me to the ground, finger in my face, and ordered me to my apartment.

That also sucks. I've only been allowed to come out cause the men are simmering down, but now I'm confined to my apartment again, spending hours and hours reviewing footage from all over the area near the attacks to track down the Baldocchi's moves.

Ronan didn't even see me today. He sent Daniel to tell me that I could pop down to the pub for fish and chips for lunch, but I was to go straight back to my apartment afterwards. I rolled my eyes at him and said, "Yes, Dad."

Daniel hadn't taken kindly to that, but he left it there. Since they left, I have been pouring over the footage. I pause the footage and head out, going down to the pub. I sit in the booth, and Molly brings me a plate of fish and chips, the chips soaking in salt and vinegar. I eat my food grumpily, even if it tastes fucking amazing.

Some lads come in to have lunch and sit in a booth behind me. They must notice me because they start talking loudly about more than one way to betray a family, and Callum clearly isn't the only problem. Molly stops at my table. "Ignore them, love. Ronan won't have you fighting the men."

I nod, though the anger in me is building. I get halfway through my food and push it away. "Molly, keep this for me for later. I've lost my appetite."

“I would lose my appetite too after eating Russian pussy,” one of the older men quips at me.

I sigh and walk toward the door when that same man stands up and steps in my way. I recognized him instantly. He is a much older soldier; his son is also in our games.

“Ian, I think it’s best if you step out of my way,” I say, looking straight at him. I won’t let these fuckers think I’m scared.

“Or what?” he says, stepping closer to me.

I grab him by the throat and choke him slightly. “I don’t care what you think of my choice of who I slept with, but I am a Quinn. I have given up my life for this family and saved your asses on more than one occasion. For that, you will give me respect.” I drop him, and he steps aside quickly.

“Sorry, Robbie,” he says. “You’re right.”

I nod and walk out of the pub, not looking back. I don’t have to. The men know where I stand in the grand scheme of things and where they stand in relation to that.

I return to my apartment, and two lads greet me on my way there. I nod to them, go upstairs, and shut the door. I go back to the footage, irritated and needing a distraction. I lean back in my chair as I hit play and stare mindlessly at the screen.

Something flashes across the screen that catches my eye, and I quickly pause the video and rewind it. I hit play, but I slow down the speed until that flash comes across again, and I pause.

Fucking hell.

Here is the proof.

Sitting in the passenger seat of the Italian’s getaway car is not Callum but Aiden.

The fucking traitor.

The whole being wounded by Callum thing was just a rouse to throw us off him.

I grab my phone and dial my brothers, but their phones go straight to voicemail. Either they've turned them off, or there's no signal where they are. Where they are having lunch, and Aiden is leading the entire security team.

Clever bastard.

I grab my car keys and rush out of my bedroom to the front door. When I open it, I find the two lads from the street outside my door.

"Sorry, Mr. Quinn, we're going to have to ask you to stay right there," the one to the left says.

"Boys, I don't think you're even old enough to be doing this." I move to push past them, but the one on the right pulls a gun on me.

"I'd hate to have to shoot you, Mr. Quinn, although I'd be doing our men a great service. Our orders are to hold you here until our boss gives us word."

I look between them, searching my brain. "Your Dad's Cormack," I say to the one on the left. "And ain't your mom, Mrs. Timothy near the laundromat?"

They look at each other, and the left one presses a knife against my skin.

"Get inside, or we're going to hurt you."

I'm not armed, and I'm sure they'll be prepared for that if I come back with one of my guns.

"Boys, you're selling out Ronan. This is way bigger and way over your head," I try to reason with them, looking for my chance.

"Ronan sold us out to the Italians and Russians. Aiden will take care of us proper," the younger one says. They can't be eighteen yet.

"Aiden's in league with some Italian family. He's sold Ronan out and already sold out this entire family. Can you not see that, lads?"

"Get the fuck inside," the knife holder shouts.

Two single shots sound out, and the boys drop like lead, each with a bullet to the head. “Their parents are going to be disappointed,” Jarryd says from a few feet away.

“Why are you here? Not that I’m complaining.”

“I came to save your sorry ass before they killed you.” My younger brother holsters his guns. “Why are they stopping you?”

“Aiden is the fucking traitor, but I can’t get through to Ronan or Daniel.” I throw my jacket on.

“The cellphone towers are down in that whole area. I also can’t reach them to check in. It’s why I was coming to look for you originally,” Jarryd says.

“Jarryd,” I call as he walks away. He stops and turns around. “How’d you know I was in trouble?”

He looks down the corridor, and I see Molly going around the corner. She may not approve of our lifestyle, but she loves Ronan, and she’s our fucking family.

“Come on, we need to get Dina from the estate and get down and protect the families,” I say, walking past Jarryd.

“Robbie, Dina is at the lunch. As a guest.”

I look at him sharply and then hurtle down the corridor, knowing the woman I love could be killed. My brother follows closely on my heels.

Chapter 24 - Dinara

Three rows of tables per family lead to the center, where the heads of the families sit. I'm seated at the Sorvino section with other family members. Carmine and Adrianna are near me. In the middle, I can see Alessandro, Katya, Ivan, Tori, Ronan, Daniel, and Natalia. Just as planned, we have sunshine and blue skies overlooking the massive garden of the venue. Everyone is content with their food and where they are, and I have to plaster on a smile until this is over.

Everyone was awkward when we first arrived, but now there's low talking as people eat, and those who are finished are mingling. Thankfully, children weren't allowed because that would have made things tense. Imagine telling your kid you can't play with that man because he's Irish or Italian. Just because the heads of the families say we're all family now doesn't mean there isn't some tension among everyone. This is going to take some getting used to.

I feel a hollowness inside me, like something is off, but I'm not finding what causes it. It's like when a house you use for a landmark changes color. Sometimes, you don't notice at first and keep telling everyone to turn right at the green house; only the green house is now blue. It has been in front of your eyes for a few days, and you just didn't see it.

I feel like I'm missing something, making me too anxious to eat. Maybe it's because I miss Robbie so much. I want to see him. I want to kiss and touch and be held in his arms. I've already planned how I'm going to ask Katya, as my friend, to release me from the family so that Robbie and I can move to Europe and be together. The only problem is I don't know if Robbie would do that. He is so loyal to Ronan and his family. It's a lot to ask of him.

As the guards rotate every fifteen minutes, I scan the perimeter. So far, I haven't noticed anything off except the one guard toward the back exit. He's Italian, but I don't recognize

him. I assume he's new or someone I haven't worked with before.

My eyes scan the next guard that rotates. We decided that the guards would rotate one at a time with small intervals to ensure a smooth transition. I raise an eyebrow as I see another guy step out that I don't recognize. I scan the perimeter again. There's another.

Fuck. Our guards are being swapped out by other men. They are going to attack the families when they least expect it. I need to warn Katya, but I can't make a scene. Startling the other guards might cause a shootout to break out, and people could get hurt. I take my phone out calmly to text her, but my phone beeps. It has no cell signal. I try switching it to airplane mode and back, but they've jammed the signal somehow. I need to get out of here and get reinforcements. I look at the side gate, where I see Aiden has just stepped inside, talking to a short Italian man who is definitely not a guard.

It is him. He is the second traitor. Dickhead! Being injured was just his way to make us think that he isn't in on it, that he is safe. It was fucking smart I won't lie, I didn't suspect him at all.

I calmly get up and excuse myself to go to the bathroom. Four guards still have to rotate, and enough people are mingling that I don't think Aiden will pay attention to me. I manage to get inside the main venue office, and instead of walking to the right where the bathrooms are, I walk toward the front.

I reach for the door, but they're chained shut from the inside. That's why they aren't worried if people come in here. I'll have to find a way out quickly or find a place to hide.

I jump as the window to the right slides open. Jarryd sticks his head in and smiles. "Hey, Dina, we okay to come in?"

"Yes, get in here quick. We need help."

Jarryd climbs in and is quickly followed by a gun case, then Robbie. Robbie gets up quickly and puts his hands on my

shoulders, drawing me to him and kissing me.

I feel Jarryd smack Robbie's head. "So not the time, dude."

"Sorry," he breathes. He reaches behind him, pulls out a handgun, and holds it out to me. "I'll take out whoever is in charge."

"The guards are all gone," I whisper the words, looking around. The party outside has gone quiet.

"Please, like the heads of these families don't have secret backup plans." Robbie leads the three of us to the kitchen and opens the window slowly and quietly.

I listen as the Italian man starts making a rather condescending speech about how it's time for new blood, how it's time for a new era, and how he is going to rule over everything.

I look up as Robbie takes aim, and I smirk.

"Time for new blood indeed," I murmur as he takes the shot.

Chapter 25 - Robbie

“Here! Here! Park here,” I say, pointing to a parking space. “There’ll be no parking near the venue. We’ll have to jog the four blocks.”

“There isn’t time,” Jarryd snaps, pulling into the parking.

We both get out and go to the trunk to get our guns, and before we can look twice, we’re jogging toward the venue. Luckily, we don’t encounter anyone the way we’re going, though we are approaching from a different side of the main garden.

I stop Jarryd. “We’ll go through the office building and get a feel for what’s happening before we do anything.”

Jarryd nods and leads the way. He sets his guns down and slides the window open, poking his head inside.

I hear him talking to someone and realize it’s Dina. I nudge him to move faster, and as soon as I’m through the window, I take her by the shoulders and kiss her deeply, grateful that she’s okay.

I take the gun out of the waistband of my jeans and give it to her.

“The guards are all gone,” she whispers to me, looking around. I’m keenly aware that the outside festivities have quietened down.

“Please, like the heads of these families don’t have secret backup plans.” I motion for the two of them to follow me to the kitchen, where I open the window slowly and quietly.

This short Italian guy really can harp on about new blood and nonsense.

“You see, gentlemen and ladies. My brother is the head of our family, but I’m most looking forward to running his territories for him. You may not know of us this side of the

ocean, but you will know our might shortly. Either we can do this the easy way, or we can do this the hard way, starting with the women.” He motions around. “Which will it be?”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Dina looking up at me, and I take aim with a smirk on my lips.

“Time for new blood indeed,” she murmurs as I pull the trigger.

The side of the short Italian’s head explodes, and I immediately aim and shoot at Aiden. That’s when chaos erupts as every family member, young or old, pulls out their guns and starts firing at the enemy. Tables are flipped, and bullets fly, but there are more family members than soldiers from the Baldocchi family, and the soldiers are getting slaughtered.

I withdraw my rifle and drop it, taking out my handguns. I lead Dina and Jarryd out to the garden and join the family members in returning fire as the Baldocchi men flee. I don’t think they expected so many people to be armed, especially since many older family members are here. It’s rather amusing, really. They really must be a green behind-the-ears family trying to do this.

Soon enough, I hear Ivan calling for everyone to stop firing, and I look to the center, where the heads of the families are all standing. Ivan, Alessandro, and Ronan make their way over to the three of us, and we stand a little straighter.

“Well done, little Quinn.” The Russian leader is tall, and I have to lift my head to look at him. “You’ve done well today. A lot more blood would have been shed if you hadn’t intervened and caused a decent distraction.”

Alessandro looks around as everyone starts making their way quickly out of the venue. “We should get out of here. I’ll let Dominic deal with the police. He’ll smooth things over.”

I smile and glance at Dina when Ronan clears his throat. “While you two make a good team, you cannot be together.”

My heart drops in my chest, and I can feel Dina tense. Before she can say anything, Alessandro sighs. “I know, it’s rich coming from us. It’s different. You’re seen as one of the guys. You’re on their level. It sows division among the men and causes problems like this.” He motions around him.

Ivan nods. “It is sad. I have come to be one for true love stories. I’m afraid, though, this isn’t going to work.”

Alessandro looks at Dina. “I’ll send you out to work with Shirley, not as a punishment, but absence might make it easier to move on.”

I glance at Dina, who swallows hard. She’s being so brave.

“Can I take her home?” I ask. “So I can say a proper goodbye.”

“This is the last time,” Ronan’s voice has a warning tone as the three men turn to deal with the ruined event.

I squeeze Dina’s hand and take her out of the party. Jarryd follows us onto the street and then hands me the car keys. “I’ll catch a lift with Ronan.”

I smile appreciatively. “Thanks, little lad.”

Jarryd rolls his eyes and wanders off to find Ronan while Dina and I stroll toward the car without a word.

As we pass by people on the street, I notice that no lines are drawn between these family members as they check on each other to ensure no one is hurt. Russians check Italians, and the Irish check Russians. There’s no division.

If we were of a higher rank, we’d be allowed to pursue each other. It frustrates me so much.

Dina squeezes my hand as we pass out of sight of the last people, and I look to see a tear rolling down her cheek.

“No,” I say quietly. I take her face in my hands and wipe her tears away. “Don’t let the last time we’re together be sad. I want you to think of me and smile, no matter what our families say.”

“They’re not my family,” she mutters, taking a shaky breath. “They’re my employers.”

I bite my lip and kiss her softly. “You’re my family. Distance won’t change that. If I can’t have you, I’ll simply become a monk.”

She smiles and shakes her head. “I want you to be happy.”

“How can I when my heart is outside my chest and moving across the country,” I murmur.

I pull her into a hug and stand there, holding onto her tightly until we’re both a little stiff.

“Let me take you home,” I say. “We can enjoy our last drive together.”

I open the car door for her and help her in.

I go around to the driver’s side and climb in, bringing the engine to life and driving as slowly as I’m allowed to.

Chapter 26 - Dinara

I try not to let more tears spill as Robbie drives me home. He rests his hand on my leg, and I rest mine over his. For the first few minutes, we simply sit in silence, enjoying each other's company, but I know it's going to end, and it's not fair.

"We belong together," I say quietly. "Robbie, we belong together. We deserve a second chance to make our relationship work."

Robbie squeezes my hand. "We can't go against what they order. You know how they'll punish us for that."

"You mean they'll punish me," I say softly. "You're Ronan's brother. He won't hurt you."

"He may have to if it means keeping the men's loyalty."

A thought strikes me, and I turn to Robbie, but suddenly, a sedan t-bones our car and pushes us off the road. The vehicle flips and continues to flip over and over, going down an embankment.

When I regain some sense, I look around and see my door being opened. I see Aiden's bloody, angry face reaching inside, but I feel dazed. I try to push him away.

"Robbie," I groan, but Aiden grabs me and yanks me out of the car. I cry out in pain, which seems to stir Robbie.

"Dinara," he calls softly, then louder, but with pain in his voice. "Dinara?"

I hear him banging against his door. "I'm stuck. Dina, are you okay?"

"Robbie!" I scream as Aiden takes me by the hair and starts dragging me toward his car.

"Dina!" Robbie shouts angrily. I hear more banging.

“Aiden, let me go,” I shriek. “Robbie, it’s Aiden. He’s still alive.” Aiden yanks my hair, and I cry out. He shoves me into a car, and I look up at his livid face, dripping blood. His right ear is hanging off, probably from where Robbie shot him. He hits me in the gut, and I’m winded as he shuts the door.

“Bye-bye, Robbie Quinn,” I hear Aiden shout as he climbs into the driver’s side and pulls off.

“You’re going to fucking pay for what you did,” Aiden growls at me. “Getting my boss’s kid brother killed. I have to offer the boss revenge. A chance to take out the cause of Santero’s death.”

I make a fist and bring it down on his crotch. He gasps and slams on the brakes. I slam forward into the dashboard, and when I sit up, the last thing I see is Aiden’s hand coming straight for my head.

Everything goes black.

I feel pain.

Intense pain and swelling. My cheek is swollen and on fire. I’m so sore. My brain feels a little scrambled as I blink my eyes open and look around—I’m in a hangar. I’m on a chair, bound to it. I look around slowly, and it takes me a while to notice that there’s a chair next to me. My heart skips a beat when I realize who is passed out and bound to it.

Katya.

“Katya,” I whisper. “Katya, wake up.”

There’s a low chuckle from near some crates, and Aiden walks from the shadows into the light. “No one even noticed I took her from the party. They were so concerned about themselves and assumed she had simply gone out to the road with the rest of the family.”

“You’re a fucking idiot,” I snarl.

“Oh really?” He laughs. “How do you figure I’m the idiot? I have you and Katya Sorvino tied up, and your families are not going to find you in time.”

“Katya,” I say urgently, then I smirk at Aiden. “You really shouldn’t have touched something that belongs to Alessandro Sorvino. If you were scared of Ronan or even Robbie, then you will shit yourself for Alessandro. The man will burn through the world for his wife.”

“I’m not scared of Ronan,” Aiden declares cockily. “He bowed to the two families we should have been challenging. We should be running New York. Ronan doesn’t care. He wants peace and to live in his little pub. He wants to look longingly at Molly, who finds his way of life disgusting. I really think she’s the problem. Ronan wants to be a better person for her. There’s no changing who we are or what we’ve done.”

Aiden walks in front of me, going back and forth. “He treats the men as simple soldiers, but we have the potential to be so much more, and Ronan is too short-sighted to see that. I mean, what are the benefits of working for Ronan anymore, anyway? It’s not like the men really get anything other than good food out of it.”

“You will never be the leader that Ronan is. Just because Ronan doesn’t tell you what the full plan is doesn’t mean he hasn’t got grander plans for the family. I’ve learned from Alessandro that sometimes, you must take two steps back to leap forward. You will never be like Ronan. You will not even come close to the kind of leader he is. Not in your wildest dreams.” I spit on the floor in front of Aiden to finalize my point.

Aiden laughs. “Grand plan? Working for the Sorvino family?”

“Ronan works with them, making money off them. You threw the men to the fucking wolves. You attacked your own innocent men and pretended it was another family to make your point. Ronan would never willingly sacrifice his men’s lives.” I glare at him.

Aiden shakes his head. “I’m going to enjoy killing you and Katya when Valerio arrives from California. It’s a pity, though, you are very beautiful. Maybe we should do as the

heads of the family have done, seal our bond in marriage, and make beautiful babies.” Aiden leans down near me and raises an eyebrow. “You’d make a good wife, I’m sure.”

I give a short, loud laugh in his face. “You’ll never be a fraction of the man Robbie is. He’s a better man and lover.”

Aiden snorts. “Robbie Quinn is psychotic, and I doubt he...”

“Sir, the Italians are here,” a guard calls from the entrance of the hangar.

“Well, it was nice spending time with you, Dina. It’s a pity we won’t... get to know each other better.” He grabs my face and tries to kiss me, but I jerk away.

He chuckles as he walks away from us.

Chapter 27 - Robbie

I am irrationally furious. There is no rhyme. There is no reason. There is nothing. Aiden ripped Dina from my reach and kidnapped her. I heard her cry out, so he must have hurt her. She is fucking mine. I might not be allowed to be with her, but no one touches what is mine.

I start punching the steering wheel when I hear a familiar voice. “That’s not going to help anything, Robbie.”

I look out the window to see Daniel kneeling beside me. “Let me get something to pry you out with.”

He moves off, and I feel a surge of energy. I’m not hurt, much, just trapped. I don’t know how much time has passed, but I can immediately start looking for Dina and save her.

Daniel comes back with a crowbar, and after what feels like ages, he manages to pry my door open and bend the piece of metal trapping me.

I get out of the car, dust myself off, and start walking. My leg is a little sore, but after a few steps, I don’t feel it anymore.

“Where the fuck are you going?” Daniel shouts after me.

“They took Dinara.” I walk toward the road. “How did you find me anyway?”

Daniel catches up to me. “You didn’t show up at your apartment, and I was worried. The cell tower is back, so I tracked you here.”

I run my hands through my hair. “Aiden is still alive. He ran us off the road and took Dina. Probably for revenge.”

My brother shrugs, and I stare at him. Daniel holds his hands up in defense. “I’m shrugging because it’s okay. I have a pretty good idea where he’s going. There’s a private airstrip

not far from here, and a secret unrecorded flight is chartered to land there soon.”

“The Baldocchi family,” I breathe. “Dan, I have to do this. I have to save her. She’s the love of my life, and even if I can’t be with her, I can’t go on if I don’t know she’s okay.”

Daniel puts a hand on my shoulder and leads me to the trunk of his car. He pops it open and lifts a hidden compartment; all I see are guns. He smirks. “I know you do. And I’m going to help.”

I smile at him, and he shuts the trunk.

We speed down the road in the direction of the private landing strip, but we park some way away. We pick out sniper rifles to open with, and I take my signature shotgun and two handguns. Daniel takes a rifle and an automatic assault rifle.

We crawl through the brush near the airstrip and sit and wait, watching through our scopes.

“There he is,” I say quietly, frustrated. Aiden comes out of the hangar as a plane taxis toward them and stops. I look at Daniel. “Do you want to wait to see who gets off the plane?”

“Fuck that. We got time to find him later.” Daniel looks through his scope, and so do I.

“Now,” he says.

We open fire, quick and fast, taking down several men in seconds. The plane starts up again and takes off while Aiden sprints into the hangar.

“I’ll cover you, you get to Dina,” Daniel calls, reloading.

I nod and drop my rifle, picking up my shotgun and cocking it. I keep low as I hurry toward the hangar. As people shoot at me, Daniel shoots at them, taking them out systematically. In these situations, it is advantageous to have a hitman with perfect aim for a brother.

I feel confident as I make it to the hanger door. I look around, and someone shoots at me. I wait. I know the general

direction the shot came from, so I turn and fire at them, catching the guard in the chest and sending him backward.

Men flee out the back, but in the middle of the hangar, I see Katya slumped in a chair, bound to it. Then I see Dina. Aiden has an arm around her neck, she's on her feet, and he is pressing a gun to her temple.

I walk slowly toward him. "We've been friends for over forty years, Aiden. How can you betray me?"

"You betrayed me. Not only does Ronan sell us out to the Sorvinos, our enemies, but you fuck this Russian like she's the only thing keeping you alive. Where have you been while our men have been taken out?"

"Looking for you, apparently," I snap. "You were the one killing them. You betrayed me and the men and took good men from their families."

"I was your fucking family," Aiden roars at me. "I was your family, and you chose this whore over me. You think that I should be okay with that?"

I see movement, movement that Aiden doesn't notice, and when the shadow passes under the light behind Aiden and I realize who it is, I slowly lower my gun.

"Aiden, just tell me why."

"Because you've always acted like you're better than me because you're a fucking Quinn. Ask Ronan about how your dad cheated on your mom and had a son out of that affair. Ask him who that is. He knows."

"You," I say calmly as Alessandro Sorvino raises his gun.

Aiden senses Alessandro and turns to look at him.

"Don't touch my stuff," Alessandro growls before shooting Aiden in the head.

Dina pushes Aiden's arm away from her, and he drops to the floor. I feel nothing. Even if what he said was true, even if he was my half-brother. The Quinn name is earned through loyalty, not through underhanded tactics.

I step toward Dina, but she turns and rushes to Katya.

“Kat? Kat?” She shakes her friend slightly.

“My head fucking aches,” the Russian queen mumbles.

Alessandro goes to her and nudges Dina toward me. “I have her. I’ll take her home and have her looked at.”

I’m surprised at how easily Alessandro sweeps Katya into his arms like a princess and starts walking out. I see his brothers standing at the hangar door, waiting for him.

I look at Dina, who is watching Alessandro walk away. “I have an idea. I have to go with them. I know how to end the division. I *will* see you later. Trust me?”

I walk to her and grab her face, kissing her deeply. “Of course I fucking trust you.” I pull her into my arms and kiss her again. “But you better be in my damn fucking arms later Dina, cause I can’t breathe without you.”

She places her hand on my cheek and then kisses me hungrily, pressing her body against mine. She rests her forehead against mine. “Later, you’re going to be a very busy man.” She hurries after Alessandro and lick my lips, still tasting her.

“Where’s she going?” Daniel asks as he walks in behind me.

“She says she can end the infighting,” I say, sighing.

“I hope so. You two are good together. I’d hate to split you up.” Daniel pats me on the shoulder.

Dinara

I rush out after Alessandro and watch as he carefully puts Katya in his limousine. He looks at me. “Need a ride?”

“We need to talk,” I say.

“Right now?” he asks, looking at Katya.

“While we drive home.” I look at him confidently.

“Let her,” Katya groans, holding her head. “Anything to just get going.”

Once we’re all in, I look at Alessandro. “The infighting. The division. I know how to solve it. I know how to make the families see that our union is good. The problem isn’t necessarily that they hate each other. It’s that they don’t even know each other. They don’t feel valued.”

Alessandro strokes Katya’s head softly. She’s lying on the seat with her head in his lap. “Okay, I’m willing to listen to your plan. If it’s not too insane.”

Chapter 28 - Dinara

One week later

The men grumble. The Irish are in the middle, the Russians to the right, and the Italians to the left. Clear spaces are left between each fraction so they won't be near each other, but dirty looks are being thrown like confetti.

I stand at the back with Robbie, holding his hand.

A lot of the men are asking why they're all there. What is happening? Questions like that, and Robbie squeezes my hand.

"We've got this," he says quietly. "I've got you."

We walk through the spaces and get up on the stage in front. The venue is enormous, fully catered, and with an open bar. I really hope this works.

There's a bit of an outcry when they see Robbie and me together, but I hold my hands up. "Hold up. Hold up. Hold up."

I look around, trying to make eye contact. "None of you are happy about the unions. We've heard you. None of you are happy with the new processes. New ways of doing things. New territories to protect. New people to work with. You have to deal with all these new things, yet no one's asked you what you want. Right?"

There is a murmur of agreement, and I nod, taking a steady breath. "Well, I have thought about it long and hard, and I've discussed the problem with the heads of the families. They are the heads of our united family. Regardless of where they come from, everyone in this room now belongs to this united family and should be seen as valued members. So," I hold my hands up as a few protesters shout. "We are rewarding all of you for everything you do. Without your loyalty, there

would be no family, and what better way to reward your family than to take care of the future.”

Robbie squeezes my hand and looks around. “Your wages will be increased, first of all. To reflect the hard work you’re doing. Then, your children’s education will be provided for. They can go to university, a decent university, and make something of themselves.”

“Free medical care for your entire family,” I shout, as everyone murmurs in disbelief. “And the families will secure your children high-paying jobs within the company, pay for their first cars, and help them every step of the way. You are our family. We are loyal to you.”

Robbie looks around at the disbelief on so many faces. He nods. “So, as one family in this room, I declare this our first family party. You may start.”

There’s silence. We wait with bated breath. One of the older Irish men strides over to a tall Russian, and they look each other up and down.

“I’ve never tried proper Russian Vodka,” the Irishman says. “I suppose there’s a first time for everything.”

“My friend,” the Russian chuckles, “we will mix tonight. I will drink fine whiskey, and I will introduce you to fine Vodka.”

They put their arms around each other’s shoulders and walk toward the bar, and with that, the tension in the room dissolves as the men start introducing themselves to each other, mixing with each family.

I smile at Robbie as he squeezes my hand. “You did it,” he says. “You made them a family.”

“They were always a family. They just needed to be shown that,” I say proudly.

The doors at the back open, and higher-ranked family members with their wives file in to join the men. Finally, Ivan, Tori, Alessandro, Katya, and Ronan walk in, too.

There's a pause before the crowd completely erupts in cheers and applause. They look so smug with themselves as they shake hands and greet their men.

Robbie tugs on my hand. "Come on." It's a whisper, and we slip off the stage and through a side entrance.

"Where are we going?" I giggle.

"I can't wait anymore. I'm going to burst if I don't have you," he says.

"You are insatiable," I tease, but I'm excited.

We get to the cars, and he opens his Landrover. I wondered why he brought this instead of something flashier like the Mustang.

"You've been planning this all along," I gasp, smiling.

"Get in," he groans, undoing his pants already.

"Why? Let's just do it here," I say, lowering myself to my knees.

"Dina. Jesus, if people see..." He stops talking as I release his half-erect dick and start sucking on it. He groans and grabs my head, pumping his hips immediately.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck." He groans the words over and over again. "Get up. Up. Up, Dina, come on."

I get off him and stand up. He pulls my pants and panties down just enough to push his now fully erect cock between my legs. I part my legs as much as I can, and he angles his hips to push into me.

"Oh, God," I groan, putting my hands on his shoulders.

"Just stay there," he grunts, moving his hips. After getting a good rhythm, he raises a hand and licks his fingers, moving the hand between us to start touching me. My knees nearly buckle as he teases my clit better than a fully charged vibrator.

I don't know if it's because we're out in the open, or because it's a quickie, or if I'm just particularly sensitive, but

my orgasm is building up fast in my lower region, and I whimper.

“Don’t make a noise. Shh,” he whispers. “You’ll get us caught.”

I groan and try to hump against his hand and dick. I clench, tense, and tingling erupts across all the nerves of my body. My skin feels like it has become hypersensitive. My clit is swollen against his hand, and I hold on tight, my mouth open as I gasp quietly as I orgasm.

He moves his hands back to my hips and moves faster, chasing his own release. When he reaches climax, he thrusts hard into me and lets out an audible wheezy groan.

“Who’s going to get us caught now?” I pant the words.

He looks down at me, smirking. “There’s plenty of places to do this tonight.”

“Later. They’ll notice we’re gone,” I say as he moves away from me.

I pull my clothes right and fix myself up. “You didn’t even need to bring the Land Rover. The Mustang would have been just as good,” I tease.

We wash our hands at a sink outside the venue, one meant for the catering company, and then we go back inside. Nobody notices until Robbie grabs my hand and pulls me back onto the stage.

“Everyone. Everyone. Your attention, please,” he announces, and everyone quietens down. I look at him, surprised.

He turns to me. “Dinara, from the day I saw you years ago, I knew what I felt for you was for eternity, even if I was a creepy fuck to begin with.”

I giggle and bite my lip, wondering what he’s doing.

“I’ve asked for the blessing from the family, and they’ve granted it, so Dinara, will you do the honor of being my wife?”

He gets down on one knee, and my chest tightens. I look to Ronan and Alessandro, then to Katya, who nods.

“Yes, of course, you idiot,” I choke out. He grins, puts the ring on my finger, and then scoops me up while kissing me.

This might be the best night of my life.

Robbie

4 months later

I wave to Sergio and Killan as I walk out of the lobby. I turn down the road and stroll toward our house. I'm so glad we didn't wait to get married and buy our first home together. It's so close to the offices, perfect walking distance. I climb the short steps from the sidewalk to the front door and unlock it.

I shut the door behind me and walk to the kitchen, where Dina is on the phone with someone.

I smile at her and kiss her head, and she nudges me away.

I raise an eyebrow as I listen to her.

"We have tracked several Valerios in California, and we're chasing every lead. They won't get through our security again..."

I hang my jacket on the back of the chair as she talks, and then I slowly unbutton my shirt in front of her. She knows what I mean. It's my time.

She gives a small sigh as I expose my abdomen to her. "Katya," she says. "Can I call you tomorrow? Yes. First thing."

She hangs up and looks at me. "You're a complete distraction."

"I know." I sigh. "Isn't it lovely?"

I undo my pants with a smirk, and she rolls her green eyes.

"Before you get too excited, Mr. Quinn, I have something I need to tell you." She smiles brightly at me, undoing the front of her robe. She's only in a bra and a thong.

I take a deep breath. “Please don’t ruin the mood by talking about an Italian family.”

She giggles and shakes her head. “Not an Italian one. A Russian-Irish one. Ours.” I watch as she softly touches her belly, and I light up.

“A baby? For real?”

She nods. “Yes, I got the blood work back today. We’re two months pregnant.”

I move to her quickly and take her face in my hands, kissing her deeply. “God, that just makes you even sexier.” I take her hand and lead her toward our bedroom.

When we reach the room, I turn and kiss her again, but she forces me backward and onto the bed.

“Oh, someone’s feeling feisty,” I say. She slides out of her thong and robe but leaves her bra on. Just the way I like it. I watch as she climbs up my body until she’s sitting with a knee on either side of my head.

“I want you to enjoy what I taste like, Mr. Quinn,” She murmurs.

I lift my head to lick her softly. “My favorite meal for dinner.”

I don’t hold back, pregnant or not. My woman will be pleased. She starts to rub against my tongue and face as I make love to her wet pussy. Her little cries and her juices on my face drive me wild.

Before she can come, I stop her and move her onto her back. “I want you to come with me,” I say, taking out my erection and placing it between her legs. “I always want us to cum together.”

She nods, flushed, and I push deep inside of her. I move steadily; she’s already sopping wet, and my dick moves easily in and out of her. I grunt as she clenches around me on purpose, and I tip my head back.

“Dinara,” I grunt.

“Almost,” she whimpers. “Almost.”

I reach down to toy with her clit, and she’s quickly moving her hips to meet mine, tossing her head side to side as she teeters on the edge.

“Fuck it, I’m coming.” I support myself with my arms and move hard and fast.

“Oh my…” She screams out my name as she bucks her hips wildly.

I grab her hips and push deep inside her as I cum, shaking slightly from the pleasure.

I fall into the bed next to her and stare at the ceiling.

The rest of the evening is as usual. Dinner, talking, some hot chocolate before bed for Dina, a whiskey for me.

A bliss. And I make sure to never fucking forget what a lucky bastard I am.

THE END

About the Author

Veda Rose loves getting lost in the intense, dark and suspenseful alternate universes she creates. Although her characters may be complicated and twisty, at the core of it all is a deep and profound love.

Born and raised in Portland, Veda Rose has always been an introvert and as a result could often be found deeply engrossed in a book. Or multiple books. It was only natural that at some point she embarked on her own journey of giving life to her wild imagination.

When she is not writing or brainstorming about obscure literary worlds, she enjoys hiking with her furry children and exploring unfamiliar places.

Books by Veda Rose

“Sorvino Mobsters” Series

The Sorvino Mobsters series takes you to the streets of New York, where ruthless Italian mafia dons rule the world. These are not the hero's from your old story books. They are arrogant, rich, brutal and whether you want it or not, they will break your heart only to ultimately heal and love it.

[Kidnapped by the Mafia](#)

[Married Off to the Mafia](#)

[Traded to the Mafia](#)

[Claimed by the Mafia](#)

[A Secret Baby by the Mafia](#)

[Pregnant by the Mafia](#)

[Betrayed by the Mafia](#)

[Auctioned to the Mafia](#)

[Knocked up by the Mafia](#)

Owned by the Mafia