



PRINCE OF CHAOS

USA TODAY Bestselling Author

IVY WILD

PRINCE OF CHAOS

BOSTON BLOODLINES

BOOK TWO

IVY WILD



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For the women who aren't afraid to talk back.

PLAYLIST

Listen on Spotify

Arctic Monkeys - "Do I Wanna Know?"

Florence + The Machine - "Shake It Out"

The Neighbourhood - "Sweater Weather"

Vampire Weekend - "Step"

Tame Impala - "The Less I Know The Better"

Lorde - "Tennis Court"

Two Door Cinema Club - "What You Know"

Maggie Rogers - "Alaska"

Bastille - "Pompeii"

Bleachers - "I Wanna Get Better"

Paramore - "Still Into You"

“Love is an endless mystery, for it has nothing else to explain it. It’s the force that transforms enemies into friends and friends into lovers, binding hearts and souls in a bond that defies logic and transcends differences.”

— RABINDRANATH TAGORE

DEAR READERS,

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING AN INTEREST IN MY
STORY ENOUGH THAT YOU WOULD WANT TO READ
IT. I APPRECIATE IT MORE THAN YOU KNOW.**

A WORD OF CAUTION, HOWEVER:

**MY STORY IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART. IT
MAY CONTAIN REFERENCE TO CERTAIN SUBJECTS
SOME MIGHT FIND LESS THAN DESIRABLE.**

**AS SUCH, I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ
THE TRIGGER WARNINGS POSTED ON IVY WILD'S
WEBSITE.**

OTHERWISE, I HOPE YOU ENJOY THE TALE.

YOURS TRULY,

GIOVANNI MALDONADO

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PROLOGUE



Lucia Manuel

The sun hangs high in the sky as I stand next to my father near the docks in Miami. My heart races, and for the first time in a long time, I feel excited about this meeting. As the oldest, it's something I've always wanted – to be included in the family business, to prove to my father that just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I can't run the Manuel Syndicate as well as any man.

A salty breeze blows through my curly hair, carrying with it the scent of seaweed and diesel fumes from the fishing boats swaying gently in their berths. The squawking of seagulls mixes with the distant hum of traffic as they search for scraps of food among the detritus littering the dockside, creating a cacophony of life.

“Lucia, pay attention,” my father chides, snapping me back to reality.

“Sorry, Papi,” I reply, trying to focus on the task at hand.

A man approaches us, his dark hair slicked back and his darker features giving away a lifetime of experience. I eye him up and down, taking in every detail, before he introduces himself as Axe. My father waves off his introduction with a dismissive gesture.

“I know who you are,” my father says gruffly. “Where’s Primo?”

“Coming,” Axe replies, his tone guarded. My father might not know, but I’ve studied the workings and relationships of our family for years. I know exactly who Primo Maldonado is – the heir to the Maldonado empire. Now that his father is in prison, his position should be secure.

Except it’s not. Apparently, there’s been some infighting between the brothers, and his position is somewhat in question.

“Shouldn’t be too long now,” Axe adds, glancing around anxiously.

Footsteps echo across the dock, drawing my attention away from Axe. My heart leaps as I see a man approaching us. My father’s eyes light up with excitement, but when I glance at Axe, his expression is riddled with confusion. As the man draws nearer, I can’t help but admire his lean frame which supports a generous amount of muscle. High cheekbones and dark hair frame a face that could easily become a distraction to a weaker woman.

“Primo, so nice for you to come,” my father says excitedly, reaching out his hand. I furrow my brow, knowing this isn’t Primo.

The man doesn’t accept my father’s handshake and he doesn’t introduce himself. He remains quiet, studying us in

return.

“Lucia, my daughter,” my father continues, gesturing towards me. “I know that now as the head of the family, you feel the pressure of producing an heir. Don’t worry because my daughter is pure, never been touched by a man, not even kissed – I made sure of it. She will be a good wife to you and produce an heir quickly.”

Rage fills my body as I stare at my father. Betrayal courses through me like venom, poisoning any trust between us. He didn’t bring me here to help me learn to lead the family; he brought me here to sell me off. I open my mouth to tell them both where they can go, but something interrupts me.

The deafening sound of gunfire shatters the uneasy silence, followed by the wailing sirens of police cars in the distance. Shock and fear grip my body as I instinctively duck for cover. Axe’s eyes widen as he looks up at a nearby roof, and I follow his gaze. There, perched like a predator stalking its prey, is a man whose features are hard to make out but something in me just knows - it has to be Primo.

Another volley of shots rings out, and the world around me seems to explode into stars. An agonizing pain rips through my shoulder, and I crumple to the ground, clutching the wound. My breath comes in ragged gasps, each one more painful than the last. Through tear-filled eyes, I see my father sprinting away, the police hot on his heels. The mystery man hesitates for only a moment before running in the opposite direction.

“Wait!” I cry out, desperation clawing at my throat. “Don’t leave me!”

As my vision starts to blur and darkness encroaches at the edges, I feel strong arms lifting me from the cold ground. In

and out of consciousness, I strain to make out the face that swims above me. It's him - the mystery man. He holds me tightly, shielding me from the chaos unfolding around us as he runs, carrying both our lives in his hands.

As my world darkens, I wonder if this stranger is an ally or just another enemy in the treacherous landscape of my family's empire. And yet, in this moment, he's all I have.

CHAPTER ONE



Giovanni Maldonado

The rhythmic click of my dress shoes echoes through the marbled halls of the Maldonado mansion, a grand symphony of opulence and history. Golden chandeliers cast soft light on the intricate frescoes that adorn the walls, their timeless stories woven into every stroke of paint. I can't help but feel a tinge of annoyance as I make my way to her room - this girl, who's turned out to be more of a princess than I can handle, has me playing warden when there are far more pressing matters at hand.

Pushing open the heavy mahogany door, I step into the well-appointed room. Lush fabrics drape the windows, their rich hues complemented by the polished wooden furniture scattered artfully throughout the space. My eyes are immediately drawn to the massive four-poster bed dominating the center, atop which she lays, flipping idly through her phone as if she hasn't a care in the world.

Lucia, or Lulu as she prefers, is a stunning vision with her curly raven locks cascading over her shoulders and down her

back, framing the delicate features of her face. Her caramel skin glows in the sunlight filtering through the curtains, and her full lips curve into a pout as she scrolls through whatever nonsense holds her attention. It would be all too easy to find her incredibly attractive if it weren't for the fact that she's such a brat.

I clear my throat as I lean against the door frame, arms crossed over my chest.

“What do you want?” she snaps without looking up from her screen.

“Just checking on you before I head off to work.”

“Ugh, don't bother,” she rolls her eyes, finally gracing me with her gaze. “I don't need a babysitter.”

“Unfortunately, I have to,” I say, my irritation seeping through. “You've had more than one escape attempt, princess.”

“Maybe if you didn't keep me locked up in this gilded cage, I wouldn't have to escape,” she retorts, her fiery spirit on full display.

“Too bad. The feds are looking for you, and I'm not going to risk you being seen with me and implicating myself in that sting operation.” My tone is firm, leaving no room for argument.

“Fine,” Lulu huffs, holding up her phone. “At least remove the child protections you put on this thing so I can go online.”

“Nice try,” I laugh, shaking my head. “Behave yourself, Lulu.”

“You're insufferable,” she mutters as I close the door behind me. I pinch the bridge of my nose, trying to stave off

the headache I know is coming.

Another day begins.

As I move away from Lulu's door, her string of Spanish curses fading behind me, the memory of how she came under my care resurfaces. It was a setup—a mob meeting that should've been attended by Primo, not me. Her father had tried to sell her hand in marriage to my older brother like she was some sort of commodity. The entire ordeal went South. The cops showed up, there was a shootout, and Lulu ended up with a bullet in her shoulder.

I remember the cowardice in her father's eyes as he abandoned his wounded daughter on the sidewalk, fleeing to save his own skin. He got what he deserved, though—arrested and now on trial in the Southern District of Florida for major drug crimes.

I step into the crisp morning air. The sun is just beginning to rise, casting a golden glow over the Maldonado estate. My Lucid Air Grand Touring—a sleek, electric sedan—sits in the driveway, patiently waiting for me. It's a car that not only represents luxury but also my commitment to the environment. A necessary image, considering some of my businesses invest in pipelines and oil drilling.

Sliding into the driver's seat, I appreciate the smooth leather beneath me and the silence of the electric engine. As I pull away from the mansion and make my way through the winding roads, the cityscape of Boston finally comes into view, towering skyscrapers catching the first light of day.

Everything about my days are consistent. My breakfast, my commute, my walk to the office. My top-floor suite is a testament to modernity, with floor-to-ceiling glass windows that offer a panoramic view of the sights below. It's a space

that exudes power and control—two things I’ve come to crave since taking the reins of the Maldonado family.

The weight of that responsibility presses down on me, heavier each day. When Primo was on trial for murder, I seized power through legitimate means, placing myself at the head of our family’s empire. It was a decision I grappled with, but ultimately, I knew it was best for all of us. And while I’m glad Primo has chosen to support me in this endeavor—helping me move our family away from crime—it’s a burden that never seems to lighten.

“Lost in thought again?” my very pregnant assistant, Mariana, asks as she waddles into my office.

“Seems like it,” I admit with a half-smile. “What am I going to do without you when you’re gone?”

“Relax, Giovanni. It’s just maternity leave, not forever.” She rolls her eyes, easing herself into a chair. “Besides, I’ve already got a temp lined up. You’ll manage.”

“Right.” I chuckle, though the prospect of navigating this world without her assistance—even temporarily—fills me with dread.

“Your brother is here to see you,” she informs me, and I nod, grateful for the distraction. Primo’s presence always seems to ground me, reminding me that I’m not alone in this.

“Primo!” I exclaim, relief washing over me as my brother strides into my office, his powerful frame filling the doorway. His deep-set brown eyes lock onto mine, and instantly, I know he senses that something’s off.

“Hey, Gio.” He gives me a knowing grin. “What’s eating you? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

I let out a chuckle, running a hand through my dark hair. “You’re not too far off. Remember Lucia Manuel? The Cuban boss’s daughter?”

“Ah, Lulu.” Primo nods, his face lighting up with recognition. “What about her?”

“I’ve been keeping her at the mansion,” I confess, watching as realization dawns on his features.

“Shit, man,” he laughs, shaking his head. “I thought you were using the place to see hookers or something. I was gonna have a talk with you about it.”

“Ha! I wish my relationship with Lulu was as easy as that,” I reply, leaning back in my chair and sighing. “She’s a handful, to say the least. If only I could just pay her off and be done with her.”

“How’d she end up there anyway?” Primo asks, his brow furrowing.

“Remember Miami? She was supposed to marry you—or rather, her father thought she was marrying you. She got shot in the shoulder during the fallout, and I couldn’t just leave her there to die.” I pause, exhaling heavily. “Her father’s on trial now for major drug crimes, so I’m stuck playing warden.”

“Damn, Gio,” Primo scratches the back of his neck, looking genuinely remorseful. “I’m sorry. That’s kinda my fault. I knew that agent was trying to set us up. I was supposed to be down there, but you got caught in the crossfire instead.”

“Hey, it’s all right,” I insist, waving off his apology. “That was a different time. We’ve moved past it, and we’re doing our best to distance ourselves from that life now, right?”

“Right.” He nods solemnly, clapping a hand on my shoulder. “You’ve come a long way since then. We both have.”

So, what's the plan for Lulu?" Primo inquires, leaning against the edge of my desk. His brow furrows with concern, and I can sense he's genuinely worried about my predicament.

"Right now, I'm just keeping her locked up at the mansion," I admit with a sigh. "It's not ideal, but it's the best I can do until I figure out a more permanent solution."

Primo raises an eyebrow, clearly impressed. "And how exactly are you making her stay put? She doesn't seem like the type to take orders willingly."

I smirk, trying to play it cool. "I have my ways. Let's just say I know how to keep her in line."

He studies me for a moment, as if trying to read my thoughts. However, I have no intention of revealing the true nature of my leverage over Lulu. Some secrets are better kept hidden.

"Sorry you're dealing with all this, brother," Primo says sincerely, gripping my shoulder. "If there's anything I can do to help, just let me know."

"Thanks," I reply, grateful for his support. "Maybe after all this stress, I'll take you up on your offer and use the mansion for a...different kind of company." I wink, attempting to lighten the mood.

Primo chuckles, rolling his eyes. "Just remember, even the most beautiful distractions can't solve everything."

"Trust me," I assure him, my voice laced with humor and determination. "I know better than anyone that life isn't as simple as it seems. But sometimes, we all need a little break from reality, don't you think?"

"True words, brother. Just don't lose sight of what really matters," Primo advises, giving me a knowing glance before

he leaves my office.

As the door clicks shut behind him, I'm reminded once more of the delicate balance between my personal and professional life. And as I sit in the silence of my own thoughts, I can't help but wonder if I'll ever escape this tangled web of lies, loyalty, and love.

CHAPTER TWO



Lulu

As the door slams shut, I curse at him in Spanish. My voice bounces off the walls, echoing my anger. I hope my words will keep him away, but deep down I know better.

I rub my shoulder, wincing as the pain from the bullet wound flares up. It still hasn't completely healed, leaving me torn between gratitude for his rescue and fury at being held captive. Turning back to my phone, I see there are no new messages—just like always. Giovanni has put some sort of filter on my internet access so that I can't post anything or contact anyone except my mother. She is not much help in this situation and would never speak to the feds. With a sigh, I flop onto the bed and stretch out my body, trying to find comfort in my frustrating predicament.

My thoughts drift to Giovanni. To my dismay, he is undeniably attractive. His dark hair frames a strong face with high cheekbones, and those hazel eyes seem to see right through me. He moves with the grace of a predator, all lean muscle and raw power. If I didn't loathe him so much, I might even be tempted by his looks.

Shaking my head, I think back to how I ended up here. My father had brought me to Miami under false pretenses—I thought he was finally letting me in on our family business. As an only child, I have been desperate to prove myself worthy of taking over when the time comes. And, for a moment, I believed he was starting to see me as an equal.

Instead, he tried to sell me off to one of the Maldonado's. The memory of panic and chaos fills my mind—the police crashing our meeting, bullets flying, and my father running for his life. He didn't get far, but his betrayal lingers.

“Damn it,” I mutter under my breath, recalling how Giovanni swooped in to save me from certain capture, or worse. He carried me to safety even as I passed out from the pain in my shoulder. Now I'm stuck here, with him, and I don't know how much longer I can take it.

“Focus,” I tell myself, trying to push away the tumultuous thoughts and emotions. “There has to be a way out of this.”

The memory of Giovanni carrying me to a back-alley doctor instead of a hospital is still vivid in my mind. I was in and out of consciousness, but he stayed by my side, making sure I was stitched up and cared for. I had hoped he was holding me here just until I healed or the press died down, but it's become painfully obvious that he has no intention of letting me go.

“Ugh, Boston,” I grumble to myself, missing the warmth and friendliness of Miami. This place is cold and unwelcoming, and I want nothing more than to be home. My numerous escape attempts have been thwarted as if Giovanni knows my every move—it's unnerving.

“Fine,” I sigh, deciding to make the best of my limited freedom. I've been told I can wander the mansion and its

grounds, but I'm not allowed beyond the perimeter. With a growl of frustration, I roll out of bed and head for the kitchen. If I have to be stuck here, at least I can eat something decent.

"Unbelievable," I mutter, finding a pastry in the fridge and making myself some coffee. I'm irritated that there's no staff here to cater to my needs like back home.

"Really, Giovanni? No maids?" I say aloud, rolling my eyes as I take a bite of my pastry. "You'd think someone who kidnapped me would at least have the decency to offer room service."

I grab my breakfast and head outside to the gardens, hoping fresh air will help clear my thoughts. As I walk through the scenery, I admit to myself that there's a certain beauty here—plants I've never seen before, soft grass underfoot—but it doesn't change the fact that I'm trapped.

A maze of vibrant green hedges and blossoming flowers stretches before me, unlike anything I've seen in Miami. Sunlight bathes everything in a warm glow, and for a moment, I almost forget that I'm a prisoner.

"Focus, Lulu," I remind myself, forcing my gaze away from the beauty to study the perimeter guard. Sipping on my coffee, I pretend to be captivated by the fragrant roses while keeping an eye on the guards' movements.

"Eight minutes between rotations," I mutter under my breath, timing them with precision. "That's more than enough." I wasn't planning on escaping today, but the opportunity seems perfect. This time, I'll make it.

"Alright, let's do this," I whisper, steeling myself for the challenge ahead. My track and field days have long passed,

but I'm confident that the skills I acquired back then will come in handy now.

"Three... two... one." The moment the guard disappears from view, I spring into action, dashing towards the fence like a bullet. Within seconds, I reach it and begin scaling the iron bars, the cold metal biting into my hands as I climb higher.

"Almost there," I pant, my heart pounding in my chest. I can see the sprawling countryside beyond the estate and know that freedom is within reach. If only I can get to a payphone or some semblance of civilization, I'll be able to start putting this nightmare behind me.

"Gotcha!" I gasp as my fingers close around the top of the fence. In a flash, I swing my leg over and prepare to jump. The ground on the other side beckons, promising sanctuary and a chance at reclaiming my life. Maybe I can even hitch a ride without getting kidnapped by a serial killer.

"Here goes nothing," I whisper, pushing off the fence and landing with a soft thud on the grass below. No alarms blare, no guards appear—just the sweet silence of success. I allow myself a small smile before I start to run, my feet carrying me towards the unknown as fast as they can.

The blissful silence shatters as an alarm pierces the air. Panic grips my chest, and I stumble in my haste. My ankle twists beneath me, sending a bolt of searing pain up my leg. I curse under my breath, clenching my teeth as I try to push through the agony and make my escape.

"Damn it," I hiss, realizing that my attempted flight is short-lived. Almost immediately, a burly man emerges from the mansion, his eyes locked onto me with hawk-like precision. He's the rover, one of Giovanni's loyal enforcers—a

massive, intimidating figure who seems to move with an eerie silence despite his size.

“Hey!” I shout, fists clenched. “Do you seriously have nothing better to do than chase after me?”

He doesn't reply, instead closing the distance between us in a matter of seconds. Before I can react, he scoops me up effortlessly, as though I weigh nothing more than a feather. I kick and scream, pounding on his back in a futile attempt to break free.

“Put me down, you brute!” I demand, but he remains silent, carrying me back towards the mansion.

“Can't you see I'm hurt?” I complain, gesturing at my swollen ankle. “I could be seriously injured!”

“Tell Giovanni when he's back from work,” he grunts, his voice a deep rumble that matches his hulking frame.

“Is this the sort of treatment I'd get if I were bleeding out?” I snap, frustration boiling over. “What kind of monsters are you people?”

“Better behave yourself, then,” he replies, utterly unfazed by my anger.

As he carries me inside and deposits me back in my room, I let loose a primal scream of frustration. The door slams shut behind me, echoing throughout the empty space like a mocking reminder of my failed escape.

“Damn you, Giovanni Maldonado,” I mutter under my breath. “You can't keep me here forever.”

CHAPTER THREE



Lulu

The door swings open, and the object of my ire strides in. I hate how impeccably dressed Giovanni always is, like he's just stepped off the pages of a fashion magazine. That three-piece suit fits him perfectly, hugging his lean frame, emphasizing the breadth of his shoulders and the strength of his arms. It infuriates me that my dreams are plagued by this irritatingly handsome man. It must be because he's the only man in my life right now – the only one I see day in and day out.

“What do you want?” I snap at him, my voice dripping with hostility.

“Lucia,” he says smoothly, smirking at me as if he knows the inner turmoil he's causing me. “I'm aware that you tried to escape again.”

“Of course you are,” I retort, crossing my arms defensively. “But you obviously don't care about my safety, so why are you even here?”

His brow furrows. “What do you mean?”

“I twisted my ankle – badly,” I say, my voice wavering slightly. “No one gave a damn or called a doctor.”

For a moment, genuine concern flickers across Giovanni's face, softening the harsh lines of his features. It makes me feel guilty for harboring such anger against him.

"Show me," he orders, his voice gentle.

Reluctantly, I extend my leg, gritting my teeth as pain shoots through my swollen ankle. He crouches down, his long fingers carefully turning my foot this way and that. The sensation of his touch sends shivers up my spine, stirring emotions I've been trying to suppress.

"Swollen," he murmurs, more to himself than to me. "Likely a sprain, not a fracture. You need to ice it and stay off of it so it can heal. I'll be back with some ice packs."

He stands, his movements graceful and fluid. I watch as he retreats toward the kitchen, feeling even more conflicted than before. How can this man, who's literally keeping me captive, also show such moments of genuine care and consideration?

He returns clutching a bag of ice packs like some twisted knight in shining armor. I sigh, forcing myself to mumble a begrudging "thank you" as he approaches.

"Here," Giovanni says, kneeling beside me and offering me the ice packs with surprising gentleness. My heart skips at his nearness, the warmth of his body contrasting sharply with the cold of the ice. "You really need to be more careful, Lucia.

"Stop trying to run away," he adds, his voice firm yet laced with concern.

"Can't," I mutter, my eyes locked on the ice pressed against my throbbing ankle. "I have a duty to my family in Miami. I don't want to be here."

He scoffs, brushing off my words like they're nothing. "Duty? Your family abandoned you."

“Maybe not all of them,” I shoot back, defiance flaring within me. “I still have family in Miami who care about me.”

Giovanni’s expression darkens, and for a moment, I think he might lash out. Instead, he takes a deep breath and speaks in a low, measured tone. “I understand where you’re coming from, but your father is on trial right now. The moment you’re released, the feds will be after you. They’ll indict you, which will implicate me, and all I’ve worked for in building a legitimate life will crumble.”

My anger surges, hot and fierce. “So you’re putting yourself and your businesses above my needs?”

“Absolutely,” he replies without hesitation, his dark eyes unwavering.

“Fine!” I spit, yanking my injured ankle away from him. The sudden movement sends pain radiating up my leg, but I refuse to let him see how much it hurts. “I can finish this myself.”

“Suit yourself,” he says, getting up and turning towards the door. “Do you need anything else, Lucia?”

I refuse to answer him. In fact, I refuse to even look at him, my heart pounding in my chest. The ice around my ankle numbs the pain but does nothing to quell the storm of emotions inside me.

“Aw, is our little princess giving me the silent treatment?” Giovanni’s voice drips with mockery as he leans against the doorframe, a smirk playing on his lips.

I clench my jaw and refuse to respond, focusing my gaze on the window instead. His presence feels like a weight pressing down on me, making it harder to breathe.

“Come on, Lulu,” he taunts, stepping further into the room. “Surely you’ve got something to say.”

His use of my nickname grates on my nerves. I want to scream at him, tell him how much I hate him for keeping me here, but that would only give him the satisfaction he’s looking for. Instead, I bite my tongue and keep up my facade of indifference.

“Nothing?” he presses, circling around me like a predator stalking its prey. “Not even a thank you for fixing up your ankle?”

My fingers curl into fists, nails digging into my palms. I force myself to take a deep breath, trying to maintain control. Outside, I am a stone, unyielding and cold. Inside, though, I am close to crumbling.

“Fine,” he sighs dramatically, throwing his hands up in the air. “If you’re going to be this stubborn, there’s no point in sticking around.”

He turns on his heel and strides towards the door. But before he leaves, he pauses, throwing one last look over his shoulder at me. “Just remember, Lulu – you brought this on yourself.”

The door slams shut behind him, leaving me alone with my thoughts. My tough exterior cracks, and tears stream down my face. I miss my family, my home, and the life I used to have. I want nothing more than to be free of this nightmare, but the man holding me captive is also the one who’s managed to crawl under my skin and into my dreams.

“Damn you, Giovanni,” I choke out between sobs, my voice barely a whisper.

Exhaustion overtakes me, and I curl up on the bed, tears still running down my cheeks. Sleep claims me, but it is restless and filled with nightmares of captivity and longing, with Giovanni Maldonado at the center of it all.

CHAPTER FOUR



Giovanni

The sharp buzz of my phone pierces through the heavy air, and before I can even glance at the screen, I know what it means. Lucia has tried to escape again. A frustrated growl escapes my lips, and I clench my fists tightly under the table. My concentration falters, split between the needs of my business, the criminal enterprise we are working to dismantle, and the incessant demands of Princess Lulu. She's a wild storm, always leaving chaos in her wake. I wonder, for just a moment, if rescuing her was a mistake. But no, I don't regret my actions – only her stubborn attitude.

“Everything alright?” Lawrence Sinclair, sitting opposite me, raises an eyebrow, his voice laced with curiosity. He's the rock I rely on when it comes to overseeing my shipping company's operations.

“Fine,” I snap, forcing Lulu's antics from my mind as I refocus on the meeting. “Let's continue.”

Lawrence nods, but his eyes still hold concern as he delves back into our discussion. The rest of the day's meetings crawl by like molasses, each passing moment stretching out like an

eternity. Finally, I find myself sliding into the leather seat of my car, gripping the wheel as I start the long drive back to the mansion. The city lights blur together as I navigate the familiar route, cursing under my breath at the circumstances that led to my relocation.

I never wanted to live in the mansion. My home was in the city, close to work with easy access to everything I needed. But Lulu's constant escape attempts forced my hand. Now, every day is an irritating battle against time, distance, and her unyielding spirit.

"Damn you, Lulu," I mutter, my knuckles whitening on the wheel. "You make everything so much harder than it needs to be."

My thoughts race with the speed of my car, each mile bringing me closer to the mansion and the woman who's turned my world upside down.

The memory of Primo's suggestion snakes its way into my thoughts as the structure comes into view, a dark silhouette against the evening sky. Maybe I should bring a prostitute into my bed. It's been quite some time since I've indulged myself that way. I don't do girlfriends or one night stands – they're too messy, too entangled with feelings and expectations. But a prostitute? That's business, pure and simple.

"Payment for services rendered," I mutter, gripping the steering wheel tightly. "No complications."

The car glides to a stop in front of the mansion, and I step out, my shoes crunching on the gravel driveway. The sound echoes through the still night air, a reminder that I'm alone here. Well, not entirely.

I find Lulu in her room, her eyes wide as she looks up at me. Guilt worms its way into my chest when I notice her injuries from her latest escape attempt. Damn her stubbornness.

I kneel beside her to examine her ankle. She reluctantly allows me to touch her, and I'm struck by how soft her skin is under my fingertips. Her toes are painted a delicate pink, a small reminder of her femininity in this harsh world we inhabit.

My body reacts involuntarily to the intimate contact, and I clench my jaw, forcing myself to focus on the task at hand. I leave to get her ice and return to wrap her ankle carefully, trying not to let my thoughts drift to what might be hidden beneath her loose clothing.

Our interactions are always the same. We are at one another's throats, both of us daring the other to move their knife. It's thrilling, in an exhausting sort of way. Her temper tantrum starts and I walk away from her room, adjusting my trousers discreetly, closing the door behind me.

"Get a grip," I scold myself, pressing my back against the door.

"Feelings and princesses with attitudes," I repeat, my voice barely audible even to myself. "That's not what I need."

I step into my quarters and close the door behind me, the memory of Lulu's soft skin still lingering in my thoughts. Glancing at my reflection in the floor-to-ceiling mirror, my eyes narrow; this isn't like me. I'm a man who controls every aspect of his life, and yet, she has somehow managed to invade my mind.

“Focus,” I mutter, forcing myself to concentrate on the task at hand. I approach my closet and begin to remove my clothing piece by piece, each item sliding off my body as if it were another layer of stress being shed from the day. The weight of my responsibilities seems to lift ever so slightly with each discarded garment.

As I stand there, half-naked, my thoughts inevitably return to Lulu. She’s everything I’m not – rash, unpredictable, unapologetically spirited. And her body... God, her body. I recall the curves that hint at her sensuality and the way her dark curls frame her face, accentuating the defiance in her brown eyes. My arousal grows, and I grit my teeth in frustration.

“Damn it,” I growl under my breath, my control slipping. It’s not her, I tell myself. It’s simply that I need release, and she just happens to be the attractive woman closest to me.

My phone sits on the dresser, and without hesitation, I grab it and send a text to a familiar number. The reply pings as expected, and I pace the room, my bare feet sinking into the plush carpet.

“Thirty minutes,” I murmur, glancing at the clock on the wall. Thirty minutes until another business transaction begins – one devoid of feelings, complications, or the infuriating allure of a certain stubborn princess.

Thirty minutes to regain control over my thoughts and desires.

“Get your shit together, Giovanni,” I scold myself, staring at my reflection once more. “She’s nothing more than a distraction.”

CHAPTER FIVE



Lulu

My ankle throbs, and I sit up in bed to try and adjust the ice pack. It's warm against my swollen flesh, offering no relief. With a frustrated sigh, I push myself up, determined to find ibuprofen and another ice pack. My mind is occupied with thoughts of Giovanni as I hobble through the dark hallway.

"Damn him," I mutter under my breath, remembering the way his strong hands had been so gentle as they tended to my injury. He'd been so close, his scent intoxicating, but I refuse to fall for it. I won't be just another girl suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.

As I near the kitchen, strange noises echo down the hall, piquing my curiosity. I'm so bored; any excitement has become a welcome distraction. My heart races as I follow the sound, leading me to a double door similar to the one guarding my own chambers.

"Who could that be?" I wonder, pressing my ear against the cool wood. Voices filter through, one unmistakably belonging to Giovanni. The other voice belongs to a woman,

unfamiliar and sultry. My pulse quickens, a mix of anger and intrigue coursing through my veins.

“Maybe this is something I can use against him,” I think, trying to listen more intently without alerting them to my presence. Adrenaline surges through me, overriding any rational thought.

I strain to hear more, my mind races with possibilities, each darker than the last. There are some noises I can't place as hard as I try.

Suddenly, Giovanni's voice cuts through the silence, harsh and commanding. *“What a good fucking whore you are.”* The words hit me like a slap to the face, but it all starts making sense. The creak of bedsprings, the thud of a headboard against the wall, the moans of a woman. My heart races as I realize what's happening. Giovanni is having sex with someone behind these doors.

I know I should just go back to my room, forget about this and focus on my escape plan. But curiosity gets the better of me, and I want to see if the reality of him matches the fantasies I've been trying to suppress. With shaking hands, I carefully try the door handle, and to my surprise, it's unlocked. I figure Giovanni must have let his guard down, too caught up in his lustful activities to remember to lock the door.

I push the door open just a crack, enough to get a glimpse of the scene unfolding before me. In the dim light, I can see Giovanni's body moving with a primal intensity. His chest is adorned with tattoos, not many, but enough that they're hidden beneath his tailored suits during the day. Sweat glistens on his skin, muscles rippling as he thrusts into the woman beneath him. She moans his name, her breasts bouncing with each

movement. He holds one of her ankles, pulling her toes into his mouth and sucking on them, driving her even crazier.

“God, Giovanni... yes,” she pants, completely lost in ecstasy.

Standing there, watching through the crack in the door, I feel a wave of arousal wash over me. Of course, Giovanni looks like he would be a very good fuck. I hate myself for thinking it, but I can't deny the truth.

“Stop worrying so much,” I tell myself, trying to focus on anything other than the heat pooling between my legs. *“You're here to find something to use against him, remember?”*

But as I watch Giovanni's body move with such raw power and skill, I can't help but wonder what it would feel like to be the one writhing beneath him. To have his hands on me, his mouth exploring every inch of my skin. The thought sends a shiver down my spine, even as I try to push it away.

“Focus,” I whisper to myself, forcing my eyes away from Giovanni's sweat-slicked form. “Find something to use against him and get out of here.”

But as much as I try to deny it, there's no escaping the truth: part of me wants nothing more than to stay right where I am, watching Giovanni work his dark magic on the woman in his bed. And that terrifies me more than any plan for escape ever could.

As he turns the woman over onto her stomach, I adjust my stance, trying to get a better view. And there it is: his cock, wrapped in a condom but still unmistakably large. I imagine how it would feel inside me, stretching and filling me in ways I've never known before. My mind screams at me—this isn't

what I want from him—but my body betrays me, aching with desire.

“Maybe I’m just into women like her,” I try to convince myself. The alternative is too much to process, so I push it aside.

He spits on her backside, the saliva running down between her cheeks. She wiggles her body enticingly, the curves of her hips rolling and undulating in slow, languid circles. Her backside shifts against the bed sheets as if inviting Giovanni to take her, her hands clutching the sheets beneath her as if she’s trying to ground herself in reality. Her breathing is shallow and anxious, her movements desperate and inviting all at once.

She tells him how glad she is that he called, how much she missed him. His response is harsh and biting: “Shut up.”

I’m taken aback by his coldness, wondering what kind of woman would willingly subject herself to such treatment. But she only giggles, seemingly unfazed. He slaps her ass. “Shut up and take it like the whore you are.” Slowly, he pushes his cock into her asshole, her moans making it clear that she loves every inch of it.

I stand there, transfixed. I’ve never seen anal sex before, never even considered it. But seeing Giovanni at the center of it all, dominating this woman with such raw intensity, it’s undeniably hot.

No, not hot. I’m here to find something to use against him, I remind myself. But my fingers itch to touch myself, to bring relief to the ache that has settled deep within me.

A slow feeling of electricity courses through my body, warming my veins and leaving me breathless with anticipation. My skin prickles with desire, and I am aware of

every sensation around me, as if each one is magnified. Every movement of Giovanni and the woman is like a sharp stab of pleasure, leaving me wanting more.

He pulls out, turning her around to face him. She kneels, mouth open and panting, her eyes locked onto his. “Filthy fucking bitch,” he says as he rips off the condom, stroking himself fast and hard. Moments later, he’s coming all over her face and tits.

The sight sends a jolt of arousal through me. I feel my skin flush, my heart rate pick up, and the warmth of pleasure radiating from my chest outward. My toes curl as I take in the sight of Giovanni’s pleasure and the woman’s appreciation of it. My breath is ragged and my senses are heightened, every nerve alive with anticipation.

I struggle to imagine ever wanting that for myself. But as she licks her lips and smiles up at him, clearly reveling in the moment, I wonder if maybe I’m missing out on something incredible.

I expect Giovanni to lay down next to her, wrapping his arms around her or maybe even helping her reach her own climax. But as I’m about to close the door, something catches my eye, and I turn back to watch.

Instead of offering any tenderness, he climbs off the bed and casually tosses her a hand towel. She grabs it and begins wiping herself off as he walks over to his dresser. He pulls out his wallet, and my eyes widen when I see him take out a few bills. Handing them to her, she takes them with a smile, her expression a mix of gratitude and hope.

“Until next time?” she asks tentatively as she pockets the money.

“Maybe,” he replies noncommittally before walking into the bathroom and shutting the door behind him.

My mouth hangs open in disbelief as I carefully close the door and make my way back towards my own bedroom. The pain in my ankle is completely forgotten; all I can think about is Giovanni fucking a girl for money. No, not just a girl – a hooker. Pristine and professional Giovanni Maldonado paying for sex. The headline practically writes itself. This is definitely blackmail material.

As I climb back into bed, I can’t shake the images from my mind, and an unexpected wave of arousal washes over me. I fought the urge to touch myself while watching, but now, alone in the darkness, I can’t fight it anymore.

My heart thuds in my chest, the memory of his body imprinted on the backs of my eyelids. I close my eyes, and there he is—Giovanni, the man I’m supposed to hate, yet can’t seem to forget.

The way his muscles tensed and released with each thrust, controlling her body and working her with a confidence that sent sparks of electricity through the room. He worked her with a steady rhythm that would increase and then slow, pushing himself deeper with each stroke, his strength evident in the way he held her hips as he moved. His hands tightly gripped her waist as she moved in a gentle, rocking motion that seemed to echo through the room.

I shouldn’t be thinking about him this way. I don’t want to think about him this way. But in the dark fantasies of my mind, no one has to know. My hand moves lower, still guided by a need I can’t deny, and before I know it I’m lost in a world of pleasure, feeling my own heat as each pass of my hand brings new sensations.

My breathing becomes heavier as I imagine what it would be like if Giovanni were here with me instead of with that stupid whore. His big cock thrusting, pushing me further and further until I'm screaming in ecstasy. My fingers move faster as my fantasies continue, imagining his heart pounding against mine, our skin slick with sweat.

"God, why am I doing this?" I whisper to myself, even as I continue. She obviously enjoyed it, and I bet her pussy is real loose, so I can only imagine how much he would stretch and fill me. I sigh, knowing I shouldn't be thinking such nasty thoughts about a woman I really know nothing about. I hate the idea that it's because I'm jealous of her. My fingers slide in easily, feeling the wetness of my arousal as they spread me open. My inner walls are slick with desire, squeezing around my fingers as I slip deeper.

"Lucia Manuel, you're an idiot for letting your mind wander like this," I chastise myself, but I don't stop. Instead, my fingers stroke my nipples, gentle at first and then more firmly, as if I was gathering pleasure with every movement. I trail my hands down my body, my fingertips skimming lightly over delicate curves and taut muscles, savoring the sensation of my own skin. I'm completely absorbed in the moment, letting it take me away from all the cares of life and into a realm of pure pleasure.

I let the fantasy play out behind my closed eyes. He reaches down and grabs my hair, his mouth finding mine as he moves inside me harder and faster, taking me to a place I've never been before. His muscles tense with the effort as he continues to slam into me until finally, I let out a loud cry of pleasure that echoes through the room, coming to the idea of him dousing me in his cum just like he did to her. I imagine tasting it and cleaning off his cock with my tongue, all while

he lavishes praises on me that he refused to give her. My orgasm relaxes me, and as I drift off to sleep, I remind myself that I really do hate him.

“Tomorrow will be different,” I promise myself, trying to regain some semblance of control. “Tomorrow, I’ll confront him, and he’ll pay for what he’s done.”

But, as sleep claims me, the lingering touch of phantom fingers and the taste of desire remain.

CHAPTER SIX



Giovanni

The shrill sound of my alarm pierces the air like a dagger, jolting me out of a restless sleep. After last night's debauchery, I should be feeling somewhat improved, but instead, I'm just as irritable as ever. And I know it has everything to do with a princess named Lulu.

I throw off the sheets and make my way downstairs to the gym. Normally, my morning workout is a soothing routine, something that helps me stay in shape and focused. But today, I need it to relieve frustrations. As I lift weights and feel my muscles burn, I try to push her out of my mind - Lulu, with her curly black hair and defiant brown eyes that seem to see right through me.

But no matter how hard I try, I can't escape the thoughts of her stupid attempts at running away. I should be focusing on business, on what I need to do to protect our family and safely close our criminal dealings. Instead, I'm worrying about this stubborn little princess who's somehow managed to infiltrate my every thought.

As my mood degrades, so does my motivation to continue working out. With a sigh of frustration, I put down the weights and leave the gym, not feeling any better than when I entered.

Back in my room, I step into the shower, the hot water cascading over my body as steam fills the space. The temptation to relieve myself is strong, but I resist. It shouldn't be necessary after last night, and yet, my cock is erect again. I take a deep breath, trying to get a hold of myself before toweling off and moving to my wardrobe.

Methodically dressing myself, I search for some relief in the familiar routine, but it's futile. Irritation gnaws at me, and I decide to walk down to her room to check on her before heading to work.

"Good morning, princess," I say, my voice dripping with sarcasm as I open the door.

"Morning," she replies, her tone matching mine as she sits on the edge of the bed, clearly annoyed by my presence.

"Did you sleep well?" I ask, trying to keep my temper in check.

"Like a baby," she retorts, rolling her eyes. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," I say, attempting to brush off her attitude. "Just making sure you're still here."

"Where else would I be?" Lulu snaps, and I can't help but chuckle at her feisty spirit.

"Fair point," I concede. She looks far too chipper for my liking and I raise an eyebrow at her.

"Is there something you'd like to tell me?" I ask defensively, suddenly paranoid that she knows about my

thoughts from earlier.

Lulu tilts her head, her hazel eyes dancing with mischief. “Oh, nothing much. Just that I saw what happened last night.”

I feel my face heat up but quickly recover. “So what? I hope you enjoyed the show.”

Her smirk grows wider. “Well, if you don’t let me go back to Miami, I’m going to tell everyone that you hire hookers. I’m sure you don’t want that ruining your squeaky clean image.”

“Who will you tell?” I challenge her, knowing she has no access to the internet or any means of communication. “And with what proof? If you’re going to blackmail me, at least do a better job.”

Her mouth opens and closes a few times. She obviously hadn’t thought through her strategy.

“Behave yourself today, okay?” I say dismissively as I turn towards the door.

“Whatever you say, boss,” she says, her mocking tone following me into the hallway.

My drive to work is filled with thoughts of Lulu and our exchange, but I try to shove them aside for now. When I arrive at the office, Mariana greets me with her usual warm smile.

“Good morning,” she says, concern etched on her face. “What’s eating you?”

“Ah, just babysitting problems,” I reply vaguely, not wanting to divulge too many details. As far as she knows, I have a wayward niece staying with me after getting into too much trouble back home.

“Little girls often get themselves in trouble when they don’t have enough to do,” she advises, her maternal instincts already showing. “Maybe find something to keep her occupied?”

“I’m not sure what entertainment I can provide,” I admit, rubbing the back of my neck in frustration.

“Think on it,” she shrugs, giving me a sympathetic smile before heading back to her desk.

As much as Lulu frustrates me, I can’t help but feel that my assistant may be right. Maybe if I give her something to focus on, she’ll be less of a thorn in my side. But what could possibly interest a woman like her?

It’s only an hour later when my phone rings, Mariana’s number flashing on the screen. “Sorry to bother you,” she pants, “but my water just broke at my desk.”

“Shit,” I mutter, springing from my office chair and racing toward her work area. She’s clutching her swollen belly, but her eyes are alight with excitement. “Are you okay?”

“Never better,” she grins, breathing heavily. “Can’t wait to not be pregnant anymore.”

“Need me to go to the hospital with you?” I ask, my heart pounding in concern.

“No, my husband’s on his way.” She reassures me with that glimmer of a smile I’ve come to know so well. Her husband arrives ten minutes later, guiding her gently toward the exit as he reminds her to breathe. “Good luck,” I call after them, watching as she waves goodbye before disappearing through the doorway.

Back in my office, I slump down into my chair, suddenly feeling the weight of loneliness without her presence. Picking

up the phone, I dial the temporary assistant service she provided me with, hoping for a quick replacement. But luck isn't on my side today.

“Sorry,” the voice on the line informs me, “the temp we had lined up recently found a full-time position elsewhere. We don't have anyone else available at the moment.”

“Damn it,” I growl, slamming the phone back into its cradle. My frustration is reaching a boiling point, and I begin pacing the length of my office, each step echoing the parade of anxious thoughts in my mind. I need an assistant now more than ever, especially with Lulu's antics taking up so much of my time and energy.

Mariana's words echo in my head: “Little girls often get themselves in trouble when they don't have enough to do.” The idea that springs to mind seems like madness, but I'm desperate enough to consider it. Maybe Lulu can fill the role of my assistant for now, keeping her occupied and out of trouble. It's a gamble, but what other options do I have?

I grab my coat and head to the car, driving back to the mansion with determination fueled by impatience.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Lulu

The mansion's quiet heartbeat fills my ears as I slip out of my room, the door closing behind me with a silent click. Moonlight spills through the arched windows, creating long shadows on the polished marble floor. My heart races in my chest; I can feel it pulsing against my ribcage like a trapped bird.

"Front door," I whisper to myself, hugging the walls as I creep down the hallway, careful not to disturb the eerie silence. "They'll never see it coming."

I approach the grand entrance, its towering wooden door seemingly mocking my small stature. With trembling hands, I reach for the cold brass handle and pull it down, slowly, cautiously. No alarm sounds, no goons rushing to recapture me. Relief washes over me like a wave, and I step outside, shutting the door just as gently.

My feet pound against the gravel driveway, every step pushing me closer to freedom. The whole property might be fenced, but they can't keep everyone out. Right?

"Out for a stroll?" I hear a voice ask, and look up to find a man leaning against a tree at the end of the driveway, arms

crossed and an amused smirk playing on his lips. It's the same one that caught me when I tried leaping over the fence.

"Damn it," I mutter under my breath, my heart sinking.

That's when Giovanni's car pulls up, headlights illuminating the scene like a spotlight on a stage. He steps out, all dark hair and piercing eyes, the picture of a handsome devil. I catch a glimpse of his face, and my disdain for him flares anew.

"Lucia," Giovanni calls out, his voice dripping with condescension. "I must commend you on your attempt, but the jig is up. Now, would you prefer to walk or drive back with me?"

"Neither," I spit, defiance igniting a spark within me. "Just let me go."

His laughter is a low growl in the night air. "That's not happening."

"Fine," I huff, crossing my arms over my chest. "I'll walk. But don't expect me to make it easy for you."

"Wouldn't dream of it," he replies, a hint of amusement in his eyes.

My heart races as I make a snap decision—left. I dart to the side, my legs propelling me forward with every ounce of adrenaline coursing through my veins. My breath comes in sharp gasps, but I refuse to slow down. The fence looms ahead, and I gather my strength for the climb.

But just as my fingers grip the cold metal, strong arms wrap around my waist, yanking me back before I even have a chance to scale it. I'm not sure if it's the first guy or a new one; they all look the same to me, these faceless enforcers. He hikes me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and I

struggle against him, rage fueling my every movement. He carries me back to where Giovanni and the first guy stand, smirking at my failed attempt.

“Your ankle,” Giovanni says, feigning concern as he lowers his head to look at me. “I thought it was hurting.”

“Go to hell,” I snarl, my voice dripping with venom. “I’d willingly run on a broken leg just to get away from you.”

He shakes his head, a bemused smile playing on his lips. “You’re the only woman I’ve ever known who has tried so hard to get away from me.”

“Surprises me,” I shoot back, my eyes narrowing. “There’s literally nothing good about you. I can’t see why any woman would ever want to be in the same room as you.”

One of his goons laughs, and Giovanni rolls his eyes, dismissing me as childish. “Take her back to her room,” he orders the first guy. “I’ll deal with her later.”

“Save your breath,” I spit, defiance burning bright within me. “I’ll be gone by the time you get a chance.”

“Highly doubt it,” he replies, his gaze never leaving mine. “Given your track record.”

I kick and scream, my frustration boiling over as the man carries me back to my bedroom. The goon with big muscles drops me on my bed without any care. I can’t help but stick my tongue out at him, my defiance seeping through every pore. He just laughs, shaking his head as he turns to leave.

“Y’know,” he says with a grin, “you’re wasting your energy trying to get away. Giovanni’s always going to know where you are.” He leans against the doorframe, his big arms crossed. “Why not just relax and enjoy the time?”

I glare at him, incredulous. My heart still beats wildly in my chest, adrenaline pumping through my veins. “Relax and enjoy the time?” I spit the words out like poison. “If your family’s safety was at risk back home, and you were being held captive, wouldn’t you try and fight to escape?”

He just smirks, clearly amused by my anger. “You’re not really being held captive, y’know.” His tone is infuriatingly patronizing. “From what I hear, you should be more grateful that you’re being kept safe.”

“Grateful? No one asked for your opinion!” I snap, feeling the heat rise in my cheeks. “And you didn’t answer my question.”

He shrugs, pushing off from the doorframe and walking away without another word, leaving me alone in the room with nothing but my anger and frustration for company.

My hands ball into fists as I pace the room, the plush carpet beneath my feet doing little to soothe my nerves. My mind races, a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions threatening to overwhelm me. But beneath it all, there’s a kernel of determination that won’t be extinguished.

“Next time,” I promise myself, even as tears prick at the corners of my eyes. “Next time, I’ll get away.”

CHAPTER EIGHT



Giovanni

With a heavy sigh, I slide back into the driver's seat of my sleek black car, the irritation coursing through my veins. Lulu's incessant escape attempts - as futile as they are - have me spending far too much time in this godforsaken mansion. My penthouse in the city beckons to me, but she refuses to cooperate.

"Damn her stubbornness," I mutter under my breath as I drive up the curving driveway, the tires crunching over the gravel. The guy carrying her back to her room follows closely behind.

As soon as I step out of the car, the grandiosity of the mansion looms over me, its imposing presence a constant reminder of the life I'm trying to leave behind. My mind is plagued with thoughts of Mariana's suggestion. Keeping Lulu close might keep her occupied, but at what cost to my sanity?

"Ugh, now I'll have her around all the damn time," I grumble, stepping out of the elevator and into the main house. Despite the luxurious surroundings, all I feel is the weight of responsibility bearing down on me.

Entering my room, I run a hand through my hair, the frustration practically tangible. “What choice do I have?” I ask myself, staring at my reflection in the full-length mirror. The man looking back at me appears exhausted and disheveled, a far cry from the composed figure I strive to maintain. In an attempt to regain some semblance of control, I shed my work clothes and slip into something more casual for the evening – a fitted black t-shirt and dark jeans.

“Alright, Lulu,” I say, steeling myself for the inevitable confrontation. “Let’s see if we can reach some kind of understanding.”

The tension in my chest coils tighter with every step I take towards Lulu’s room. My jaw clenches, the muscles in my neck straining as I wrestle with this frustration that refuses to abate. The marbled hallway stretches before me, an endless path leading me towards yet another inevitable argument.

“Damn it,” I mutter under my breath, my knuckles turning white as I grip the railing for support. It’s maddening that I have to deal with a stubborn, bratty princess when there are far more pressing matters at hand. Taking the family business legitimate is a Herculean task in itself, and I’ve not forgotten the ever-present threat of Constantino lurking in the shadows.

I pause for a moment, leaning against the cool marble wall, trying to gather my thoughts. “Get it together,” I tell myself, taking a deep breath. But as I exhale, the image of my bitter older brother creeps into my mind, his green eyes filled with murderous intent. It’s a chilling reminder of the danger that constantly hovers around me.

“Focus,” I snap, shaking off the haunting thoughts and forcing one foot in front of the other. Before I know it, I’m standing outside Lulu’s door, the ornate wooden barrier all that

separates me from the storm brewing inside. I decide that what she needs now is a firm hand.

I wrench open the door and it slams against the door, my frustration the driving force behind it. She looks up from her book, a mix of surprise and annoyance flashing across her face as I storm into her sanctuary.

“Enough of this,” I snap, my patience worn thin. “You’re coming to work with me.”

Her eyes narrow, and she sits up straighter, defiance radiating off her. “No, I’m not,” she retorts, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Actually, you don’t have a choice in the matter,” I inform her coldly, fixing her with an unwavering stare.

“Like hell I don’t!” she snaps back, her anger rising to meet mine. I take a deep breath, trying to control my own temper.

“Fine,” I say through gritted teeth. “I can make it worth your while.”

Lulu raises an eyebrow, curiosity breaking through her anger. “What do you mean?”

“If you come to work as my assistant and behave yourself, you can earn privileges,” I explain, watching her closely. Her irritation is still present, but I can see that she’s becoming intrigued by the offer.

“Go on,” she prompts cautiously, her eyes narrowing once more.

“Alright,” I say, pacing the room as I outline the system we’ll use. “For every day you work without causing trouble or making a scene, you will earn one point. You can exchange

those points for things like internet access, phone calls, and outings, all monitored, of course. But if you step out of line or disobey me, you'll lose points."

"What's the exchange rate on points for privileges?" she asks without missing a beat.

"Five points for one privilege," I reply. "Meaning you need to work a week successfully and you'll get your privileges on the weekends."

She scoffs. "No way. One point for *two* privileges."

I give her a curious look. "I'm not sure if you fully understand your bargaining position here."

"I understand it just fine," she says, crossing her arms.

I sigh. "Two points, one privilege, final offer," I say.

Lulu seems both annoyed and excited by the prospect of our new arrangement, her brown eyes flickering with a fire I haven't seen in her before.

"Fine," she mutters, excited but still not entirely happy about the situation. "When do we start?"

"Tomorrow," I tell her firmly. "Be ready when I come to your room in the morning."

As I turn to leave, Lulu smirks and calls out, "I hope you have another fun night with your hooker."

I smile back at her, my eyes glinting with amusement. "I hope you enjoyed the show. Be careful though, your jealousy is showing," I tease, closing the door on her sputtering indignation.

CHAPTER NINE



Lulu

I wake up with a strange feeling in my gut, a mix of anticipation and anxiety. The prospect of working with Giovanni both excites and terrifies me. Not for the job itself, but because it might grant me an opportunity to get word out about where I am. Giovanni has reminded me countless times that the feds are on my tail. If I'm not careful, I'll end up in a cell next to my father. Even if I haven't done anything wrong, just being at that meeting is enough to make me a target.

My father wouldn't care about me being in prison, which only solidifies my growing identity as the basic bitch with daddy issues. I sigh, knowing I have to be cautious about who I contact. Right now, there's no one I can trust on the outside. But that might change. I just need to be patient and find out what I can use against Giovanni in the meantime.

With this weighing on my mind, I walk over to my closet. The bare minimum of clothes hangs inside, nothing suitable for an office. I scrunch my nose, realizing that Giovanni must have overlooked this detail. However, as if on cue, there's a knock on my door. I turn around, confused. Giovanni never knocks; he just barges in.

“Come in,” I say, surprised when the big rover guy who caught me and brought me back to my room enters, pushing a zipped wardrobe cart. Up close, he looks different than Giovanni – bigger, with thick cords of muscle, whereas Giovanni’s body is more graceful. “What are you doing?”

“Delivering whatever Giovanni told me to,” he says gruffly.

I narrow my eyes, giving him attitude. “Why should I believe you?”

He smirks, unfazed by my hostility. “Honestly, lady, you don’t phase me. Just doing my job.”

I scrunch my nose at him. “What’s your name, anyway? Since I have to put up with you always being around. I might as well know what to call me.”

“Call me whatever you like, princess,” he laughs. “But my mom calls me Totò, short for Antonio.”

And with that, he walks out.

I watch him leave before turning my attention to the wardrobe cart.

My breath catches as I unzip the casing, revealing an entire work wardrobe. The outfits are impeccable, and as I turn each of the tags over, I realize they’re just my size. Matching heels and tasteful jewelry accompany each dress. They’re a bit conservative for my style, but I can tell they’re extremely expensive and high quality. Of course Giovanni didn’t overlook a detail as large as this. It’s such a weird feeling, to be taken care of and simultaneously hate the man doing it so well.

While his motives for keeping me locked up are mostly selfish, he’s also providing me protection from prosecution. If

I were on my own back in Miami, it's more than likely I would've already been arrested. I flop back onto my bed, pulling out my phone. A text message from my mother asking how I'm doing awaits.

Hi Mami. I'm safe, but I feel conflicted about not being back home."

Your safety is the most important thing right now. Stay where you are.

I know, but I feel bad about not being there with you, especially when things are getting violent in Miami.

We will manage, as we always have before. God is here to protect me and your sister.

Goodnight. I love you.

Goodnight, Lulu. We love you too.

The conversation leaves me with a restless sleep, worrying about my family.



I wake up the next day, early and for the first time in a while, excited. The sun is just beginning to peek through the curtains. I stretch out beneath the covers, feeling the soft sheets against my skin. Today's going to be different.

I hop out of bed and head straight for the shower, letting the warm water wash away any lingering sleepiness. Afterwards, I wrap myself in a fluffy white towel and stand in

front of the mirror, brushing out my hair before deciding to put it up in a high bun. It feels good to take care of myself like this.

Turning my attention to the wardrobe, I run my fingers along the luxurious fabrics of the work dresses Giovanni had provided. Each one feels so expensive and well-made, and I feel a little guilty for enjoying them. Finally, my eyes settle on the perfect one – a soft pink dress with a graceful boat neckline and a fitted waist that flares out into an elegant knee-length skirt. I slip it on, admiring how it hugs my curves just right without being too revealing.

Next, I slide into the matching nude pumps, giving me a few extra inches in height and making my legs look amazing. As I add a simple gold necklace and stud earrings, I appraise myself in the mirror. I look...professional. Put together. And yes, I begrudgingly admit, I feel really good about myself.

“Looking sharp,” Giovanni’s voice suddenly interrupts my thoughts as he appears in the doorway. Damn him for not knocking. He’s wearing a form-fitting charcoal suit that accentuates his lean frame, looking stunning as always.

Wait, no, not stunning. Get a hold of yourself.

“Ready to go?” he asks, a hint of amusement in his eyes.

“Absolutely,” I reply, trying to sound confident.

For the first time since I’ve been here, Giovanni leads me outside of the mansion. The crisp morning air is refreshing as we walk toward his car. He opens the door for me, and I slide into the passenger seat, feeling strangely grateful for the small gesture.

As he drives us into the city, the landscape transforms from rolling countryside to bustling urban streets. “It feels like a

long drive,” I remark, watching the world outside my window.

“It is,” he agrees, glancing over at me. “I didn’t always live so far from the office, but things change.”

His voice is guarded, and I decide not to press further. Instead, he asks, “Have you ever had a job before?”

“I was never allowed to,” I admit, looking down at my hands. “My father was old school about gender roles.”

“Really?” Giovanni seems genuinely surprised.

“Yep. But I always watched and listened, learning where I could. Even though I wasn’t allowed to go to college, I did a lot of studying on my own.” I meet his gaze, determined to prove myself. “I’ve always been interested in computers.”

“Computers? That surprises me.”

“Surprises you?” I raise an eyebrow, a hint of irritation in my voice. “Why’s that?”

Giovanni hesitates for a moment before answering. “I just didn’t think you’d be the type to be interested in computers, that’s all.”

“Then what did you think I’d be interested in?” I challenge, crossing my arms.

He shrugs, his eyes on the road. “Not that, I suppose.”

“Wow, you’re just as bad as my father,” I snap, feeling anger bubble up inside me. “Gender stereotyping much? Just because I’m a woman doesn’t mean I can’t like computers.”

As we pull into the parking garage, Giovanni turns to me and looks genuinely apologetic. “You’re right, I shouldn’t have made assumptions. I’m sorry.”

The sincerity in his voice catches me off guard, and I find myself nodding in acceptance. We park the car and make our way to the elevator, which whisks us up to the top floor. As soon as the doors slide open, I'm struck by the breathtaking view of the city skyline from his sleek office space. The floor-to-ceiling windows allow natural light to stream in.

"Your desk is over here," Giovanni says, leading me to a modern workstation with a comfortable-looking chair. He gestures toward the first drawer. "The login information is in there. Take the morning to familiarize yourself with everything."

"Is there anyone who can train me?" I ask, scanning the room for any sign of other employees.

"Unfortunately, no," he replies, rubbing the back of his neck. "My previous assistant left rather suddenly, so you'll have to learn on your own."

"Great," I mutter, trying not to let my nerves get the best of me. "I guess I'll manage. Where is everyone, anyway?"

"On the lower floors," he says without further explanation.

"Okay," I say, sitting down at my new desk.

Giovanni gives me a small, encouraging smile before retreating to his own office. I sink into the chair and open the drawer, finding a neatly typed page with my login information. As my fingers begin tapping away at the keyboard, the initial unease slowly fades, replaced by a growing sense of familiarity and purpose.

This is my chance, I remind myself. No matter what it takes, I'll find a way to regain control of my life – and maybe even turn the tables on Giovanni Maldonado in the process.

CHAPTER TEN



Giovanni

I step out of my office, the scent of expensive leather and polished wood lingering in the air, and see Lulu sitting there at the computer. She's focused, her brown eyes scanning the screen as she absorbs information, her curly black hair pulled back into a neat bun. I've put protections in place to ensure she doesn't stumble upon anything sensitive, but she's shown a surprising dedication to learning the job this morning. It catches me off guard.

"Hey, are you hungry?" I ask, not bothering to hide my surprise. For a moment, she looks up, and her face softens into a genuine smile. It's the first time I've seen her look so... human. The disdain that usually drips from her every word dissipates, leaving behind the image of a beautiful woman who could almost be mistaken for innocent.

"Actually, yeah," she admits, brushing a stray curl from her forehead. "I am."

"Great. There's a mall across the street. Let's grab some lunch at the food court and talk about the job." I gesture for her to follow, and she does.

As we make our way down the elevator, the hum of the machinery filling the small space, and she studies me with a curious expression. “You know, I’m surprised you’re a food court kind of guy.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, raising an eyebrow.

She gestures vaguely, taking me in – my designer suit, the sleek building we’re descending through, the aura of power that seems to cling to me like a second skin. “You just seem more... upscale restaurant than cafeteria, if you catch my drift.”

The elevator door slides open, and I shrug as we step out into the mirrored hallway. “Food courts are efficient. Normally, I’d send my assistant across to the mall to get me something, then bring it back so I can work through lunch.”

“Ah,” she says, her voice a mix of understanding and disappointment. “Well, I’d be happy to do that for you.”

The offer surprises me. Lulu, the headstrong daughter of the Cuban Mob’s leader, willing to fetch my lunch? That’s not something I expected. “We’ll see,” I tell her, trying to sound casual. “For now, keeping you within eyeshot is preferable.”

Her mood sours just a bit, but she doesn’t argue. Instead, she walks beside me – this woman who’s been thrust into my life, equal parts enigma and adversary – as we head out into the daylight and toward the mall.

We enter the bustling food court, the scent of various international cuisines mingling in the air. Navigating through the crowd, I glance at Lulu, her eyes wide with curiosity. “Do you have a preference for anything?” I ask.

She shakes her head, uncertainty flickering across her face as she looks around. Together, we explore the options, and she

eventually settles on a pop-up sushi restaurant in the center of the court. We each grab a bento box, the colorful assortment of sushi rolls and sashimi arranged neatly inside, and sit down to eat.

The silence that envelops us is surprisingly comfortable. Lulu seems content, her gaze wandering around the food court as she chews thoughtfully. Watching her quiet happiness tugs at something deep within me, an unfamiliar sensation that I can't quite place. When we finish our meal, I lead her to a nearby café where we order two iced coffees before beginning a leisurely stroll around the mall.

“Any questions about the job?” I ask, wanting to gauge her thoughts so far.

Her lips curl into a mischievous smirk. “Yes. I'd like to know all your passwords so I can get into your secret files.”

“Nice try,” I say, chuckling at her audacity.

“Hey, don't worry.” She grins, a twinkle in her eye. “I'll figure them out eventually.”

“Really? If you can hack my systems, then you deserve to be teaching courses in cyber security, let alone attending college,” I retort, only half-joking. For some reason, her bold claims make me uneasy, and I resolve to add extra security layers when we return to the office.

As we walk, the hum of conversation and laughter from fellow shoppers fills the air, blending with the soft strains of music piped through the mall's speakers. The atmosphere is light, a stark contrast to the tension that has defined our interactions until now.

As we continue strolling through the mall, Lulu's curiosity seems to grow. “So, how did you start your businesses? What

are they exactly?" she inquires, her hazel eyes reflecting genuine interest.

"Ah, well," I begin, pausing to collect my thoughts as we pass by a lively carousel filled with laughing children. "I started small, just buying a piece of property and turning it into a rental when I was in college. I kept reinvesting the money, and from there, I grew a real estate company that now has an extensive portfolio."

"Wow, that's really impressive," she says, clearly taken aback by the scope of my accomplishments.

"Thank you, but that's just one component." I shrug modestly, trying not to let her praise go to my head. "I've since expanded into shipping, restaurant chains, and more recently, I took my software company public last year."

"Damn, you're like a business superhero," she teases, lightly nudging me with her elbow. "But what about your family? What are you doing for them?"

The question catches me off guard, and I feel a sudden tightness in my chest. This isn't the time or place to discuss such matters. "That's not something we should get into right now," I say curtly, averting my eyes.

"Okay," she accepts, sensing my discomfort.

As we make our way back to the office, I inform her of my plans for the rest of the day. "I'll be in meetings, so you won't be able to attend."

"Wait, why not?" she protests.

"Because they're boring business meetings," I explain, trying to discourage her. "Why on Earth would you want to sit through those?"

“Because my father never included me in the business side of things,” she replies, her tone softening. “I want to be included.”

I hesitate for a moment, weighing the pros and cons. Finally, I relent. “Fine, but I warned you it’s going to be really boring.”

“I don’t care about that.” Her expression brightens, and she grins at me. “Besides, I highly doubt it’ll bore me.”

Her happiness is infectious, and I find myself smiling back, even as an odd discomfort pricks at my heart. This newfound camaraderie between us is as unexpected as it is fragile. I just wonder how long it will last.



The last of the meetings draws to a close, and I can practically feel the weight lifting from my shoulders. As I take a deep breath, Lulu appears in my doorway, having retreated to her desk after our last conference. Her eyes scan the room before settling on me. “You have a meeting with Primo next,” she says, her voice soft yet assertive. “I saw it on your schedule.”

“Thanks for the reminder,” I reply, surprised by her diligence. She’s been more attentive today than I ever would have expected.

“Would you like me to attend?” she asks, her hazel eyes searching mine.

“No, thank you. It won’t be long, and then we’ll be going home for the day.” My tone is gentle but firm, leaving no room

for negotiation.

“Okay,” she agrees, giving me a small nod before returning back to her desk.

Primo strides into my office moments later, his gaze darting between me and the closed door. “Is that Lucia Manuel outside your office?”

“Yep,” I confirm, leaning back in my chair. “Welcome to my new world.”

He chuckles, shaking his head as he takes a seat across from me. “Why is she here?”

“Believe it or not, I needed an assistant.” I rub my temples, feeling a headache brewing. “With Mariana on maternity leave, I had to find a solution. Lucia was the best option.”

“Couldn’t you just get a temp?” Primo raises an eyebrow, clearly skeptical.

“Plans fell through,” I admit, letting out a sigh. “Besides, I’m hoping this keeps her occupied and too tired to try any more escape attempts.”

“Or,” Primo counters, “it gives her even more opportunities to either escape or irritate you to death.”

“True, she does have a talent for that,” I acknowledge with a wry smile. “We’ll just have to play it by ear.”

As we discuss business matters, I let my mind wander occasionally toward the woman outside my office door. Her presence is like a siren’s call, drawing me in despite the danger that may lie beneath the surface.

“Hey,” Primo snaps his fingers in front of my face, pulling me from my thoughts. “You with me?”

“Yeah, sorry,” I apologize, refocusing on the conversation at hand. “Alright, let’s continue,” I say, leaning forward in my chair and turning my full attention to Primo. “How are things on the streets?”

“Things seem calm, for now,” Primo replies. “But I’m worried about the Irish.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, my interest piqued.

“Ever since our family took charge, the Irish have been resentful,” he explains. “They never really wanted us in control, and Constantino just made matters worse when he interfered a few months back. Now that he’s fled the country, it’s even more complicated.”

“Interfered? How did he interfere?”

“Well, he was always the one to maintain the relationship with the Irish, so I’m still trying to work out the details. But, I think he promised them...something.”

“Has anyone heard from him?” I inquire, unable to keep the anxiety from creeping into my voice at the mention of our younger brother.

“Nothing yet,” Primo admits, his eyes darkening. “But I’ve got people keeping an eye out.”

I nod, trying to push down the unease that threatens to overwhelm me. “What do you think we should do about the Irish?”

“Nothing for now,” he says, shaking his head. “The issue is that they always handled the shipments for guns. Without guns to be shipped, they’re not making any money. But there’s nothing we can do about that at the moment. We just need to hold tight.”

“Alright,” I agree, though the thought of standing by doesn’t sit well with me. We conclude our meeting, and as Primo stands to leave, I ask, “Do you need a ride back home?”

“No, thanks,” he declines. “I’m meeting Isabella for dinner in the city.”

“How far along is she now?” I inquire, genuinely curious about their growing family.

“Seven months pregnant,” he answers, his face lighting up with pride. “Can you believe it?”

“You’re going to make a great father, Primo,” I tell him sincerely.

“Thanks, brother,” he says with a grin before walking out, leaving me alone in my office. I take a deep breath, trying to gather my thoughts, and then head out to where Lulu waits patiently at her desk.

“Ready to go home?” I ask, feeling an unexpected warmth in my chest at the simple act of including her in my life.

“Yes,” she replies, offering a small smile that has my heartbeat picking up speed.

We make our way down the elevator and back to the garage together. I walk her around to the passenger side and open the door for her. As I start up the car I look over at her. She’s giving me a big grin.

“What?” I ask slowly.

“I’m waiting for you to give me my points for today.”

I chuckle and pull the car out of the garage. “We’re not home yet, princess.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Lulu

The purr of Giovanni's sleek car fills my ears as we glide through the iron gates leading back to the dreaded mansion. I can't help but sigh at the sight of it. To some, it may be a dream home, but to me, it feels like nothing more than a gilded cage. The taste of freedom from earlier today lingers bittersweet on my tongue.

"Something wrong?" Giovanni asks, his dark eyes flicking toward me, a hint of concern in their depths.

"Can't say I'm thrilled about being locked up again," I grumble, crossing my arms over my chest.

His gaze returns to the road, and he shrugs indifferently. "It's for your own good."

My blood boils at his apathy, and I can't resist taking the bait. I know I shouldn't. The entire day was actually really nice, but his attitude irks me. "Why do you have to be so uncaring? Don't you understand what this is like for me?"

"Believe it or not, I do care. Our arrangement benefits both of us," he counters, parking the car in the underground garage. "Keeping you safe means keeping myself safe too."

“I should have the choice to go out when I want,” I argue, opening the door and stepping out onto the cold concrete floor. The slam of the car door punctuates my frustration.

“Wrong.” His voice remains calm and infuriatingly collected as he gets out, plugs the charger into the car, and turns to face me.

“Your attitude needs to stop,” he says sternly, approaching me with determined strides.

“Excuse me?” I scoff. “I’m not a child. Stop treating me like one.”

“Seems to me that you’re acting like one right now,” he retorts, his hazel eyes blazing with annoyance.

“Maybe you should’ve just let me bleed out then!” I yell, feeling the sting of tears pricking at my eyes. “It would’ve been better than this!”

“Maybe I should have,” he bites back, his face hardening.

“Go to hell,” I say, trying to mask the hurt in my voice.

“Clearly, I’m already there,” he sighs.

I turn on my heel and storm off. But, unfamiliar with the garage’s layout, I end up walking in the wrong direction. Realizing my mistake, I glance back at Giovanni, who leans against his car, a smug smirk playing on his lips.

Refusing to give him the satisfaction of admitting my error, I plop down onto the grimy cement floor. The filth seeping into my beautiful pink dress is worth it just to see his expression twist with irritation.

Giovanni’s patience finally snaps as he strides over to me, his face a mask of controlled anger. Without warning, he grabs me by the waist and hoists me over his shoulder. I kick and

scream at him, but his grip on my thighs is unyielding. He carries me like a sack of potatoes through the garage and towards the elevator, ignoring my pounding fists against his back.

“Stop it,” he warns, his voice low and dangerous. “Or you’ll lose that point you earned today.”

“Like I care about your stupid points!” I spit, continuing to thrash in his hold.

“Fine,” he grumbles, “I’ll take away the point, then. You’ll learn your lesson soon enough.”

My fury only grows as we enter the elevator, and I keep kicking and screaming, pushing him to his limits. His brow furrows, and he scolds me, but I refuse to stop. Something stubborn inside me wants to see just how far I can push him. And then, without any further warning, he spanks me. The sharp sting of his hand on my behind silences me instantly.

The elevator ride after that is painfully quiet, with only our breathing to fill the silence. As Giovanni carries me through the mansion and back to my room, I find myself struggling to process what just happened. No one has ever treated me like this before, and I’m left with a confusing mix of anger, humiliation, and – to my own surprise – a strange sense of exhilaration.

When we reach my room, Giovanni sets me down and turns me around, scrutinizing the damage to my once-pristine dress. “You got it dirty,” he says, his tone a mixture of disappointment and irritation. “Now I’ll have to get it dry cleaned... if I can even get the dirt and oil out of it.”

“Good,” I snap, glaring up at him. “Serves you right.”

He steps closer, his tall frame towering over me as I instinctively back up until I'm pressed against the wall. He leans in, his eyes narrowing as he speaks. "Let's get something straight. I don't have to bring you to the office with me. I don't even need to give you such nice accommodations. This mansion used to be the headquarters of a revered mafia family. If you think there aren't cold, dark cells with nothing but straw in the basement, then you're sorely mistaken."

The threat in his voice sends a shiver down my spine, and I swallow hard, unable to form any words in response. Internally, though, my anger boils, and I silently vow to find a way out of this gilded prison.

Giovanni's expression hardens as he turns to leave. "Change out of that dress," he commands, his voice cold. "Someone will collect it for dry cleaning. And since you can't behave yourself, you'll go without dinner tonight."

"Like hell you can put me in timeout!" I shout, my anger flaring. He stops and fixes me with a steely gaze.

"Trust me, when you act like a child, I absolutely can." With that, he slams the door shut, cutting off any further retorts.

"Asshole!" I scream, running after him, fully intending to throw the door open and continue yelling at him. But when I grab the handle, it refuses to budge. Panic rises in my chest as I pound on the door, but his footsteps recede down the hallway, leaving me alone.

Finally, my strength gives out and I collapse onto the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. My frustration and helplessness are overwhelming, and I feel as if I'm drowning in my own emotions.

When I finally manage to pick myself up, I wipe away the last of my tears and take a deep breath. Maybe I shouldn't have picked a fight with him. But how could I not? His apathy is infuriating, and all I want is some semblance of control over my own life.

I slip out of my ruined dress, looking at it sadly. It was beautiful and now it's marred by grease and grime. I hope that it can be salvaged. With a heavy heart, I make my way to the bathroom and run myself a large bath. As I sink into the warm water, my thoughts drift to Giovanni.

He had been so nice this afternoon at the office. He had shown a side of himself that I hadn't seen before, and I was beginning to respect him just a little bit. The people who work for him clearly do. But tonight's fight has solidified my resolve – I can't stay here. I need to use the opportunity at the office to find out whatever I can about him and escape this gilded prison.

As I soak in the tub, my mind races with plans and schemes. I have to be smart, cunning, and resourceful if I want to outmaneuver Giovanni Maldonado.

I step out of the tub, water dripping off my body as I reach for a towel. My stomach grumbles loudly, reminding me that I haven't eaten dinner. The anger resurfaces, but I force it down, knowing I need to focus on finding an opportunity tomorrow. Wrapping the towel around myself, I head to my bedroom and slip into a pair of cozy pajamas. Exhausted, I crawl into bed and fall into a fitful sleep.

In the middle of the night, I awaken with my stomach growling louder than ever. With desperation clawing at my insides, I get up and try the door again. To my surprise, it unlocks with a soft click. I tiptoe outside, half-expecting one

of Giovanni's goons to be standing guard, maybe Totò, but the hallway is empty. A bag labeled "dry cleaning" hangs on the door handle – a clear sign that Giovanni anticipated my eventual escape from the room. Retrieving my dress and placing it inside the bag, I make my way to the kitchen, still feeling nervous about being out of my room since the door had been locked earlier. But I need food.

As I enter the kitchen, I find Giovanni's younger brother Teddy there. He looks utterly exhausted, his blonde hair sticking to his forehead and his blue eyes glazed over as he listens to music on an old Walkman. I'm nervous to be seen in just my casual clothes, but something about Teddy's presence makes me feel at ease.

"Hey," he says, removing his headphones and offering me a warm smile. "How are you doing?"

"Terrible," I reply honestly, watching his concern grow genuine. "I'm tired of being locked up in this mansion and your older brother is an asshole."

"Primo can be, yeah," Teddy admits with a small chuckle.

"No, not Primo. Giovanni." His eyebrows shoot up in surprise, but he thinks about it for a moment and nods.

"Ah, yeah. I guess they all sort of are," he laughs, his exhaustion momentarily forgotten. As we chat, the conversation flows with surprising ease – Teddy feels like the best friend I never had when I was younger.

"Look, I'll tell you how I've always managed to deal with my brothers," he says.

"Yeah? How's that?"

"I ignore them. Everything they say. In one ear, out the other."

I laugh. “They must get pretty irritated with you, then.”

He shrugs. “Actually, you’d be surprised. They often vent to me about stuff. Maybe they know it’s because I’m not really listening, so I’m a safe person.”

“Something tells me you do listen, Teddy,” I say to him, my eyebrow raised.

He shrugs and gives me an innocent smile.

“Thanks, Teddy,” I say gratefully. “You’re seriously the best.”

He smiles, but his eyes betray his exhaustion. “I should probably go to bed. Had a tough night.”

“Goodnight, Teddy,” I reply, watching him leave the kitchen.

After finishing whatever I found in the fridge, I start to head back to my room. As I walk down the hallway, curiosity gnaws at me. What is Giovanni up to right now? My heart rate picks up, and a flush of arousal spreads through me as I tiptoe toward his room. The idea of catching him with another woman both disgusts and excites me. I try his door, and once again, it’s open. Why doesn’t he lock it? Does he not consider that someone might pose a threat in this mansion? He should never underestimate me.

A dark thought crosses my mind – the kitchen is full of knives, and his door remains unlocked at night. But no, that’s not who I am. I won’t resort to violence like that. I’ll use my intelligence and cunning to escape this place.

I peek into his room and see him sitting on the bed, typing furiously on his laptop. He’s wearing only boxers, his shirt discarded somewhere. His well-defined muscles ripple as he moves – his broad shoulders, strong arms, and chiseled chest

all perfectly sculpted. I can't help but be drawn in, my body responding to his undeniable physical allure, even as his attitude irritates me beyond measure.

He closes his laptop, and I think for a moment that he might go to bed. Instead, he switches off the light and opens it back up. Soft sounds from videos begin to fill the room, and I watch as he starts to masturbate. His cock looks impressive, hard and erect in his hand. The sight stirs something deep within me, and despite myself, I grow even more aroused.

Unable to resist any longer, I slip my hands into my pants and beneath my panties, touching myself as I watch him. I close my eyes and imagine him on top of me, thrusting into me, filling me completely. How amazing would that feel? I bite my lip, wondering if I'll ever know such pleasure.

With a moan, I come just after he does, hating myself for getting off to his name. He seems to sense something outside, quickly cleaning himself up and heading for the door. Panicking, I hide behind a column, holding my breath as he scans the hallway. Seeing nothing amiss, he closes the door, the sound of the lock clicking echoing through the silence.

I waste no time in returning to my room, my emotions a whirlwind of anger, shame, and determination. No matter what it takes, I will find a way out of this gilded prison, and soon. I can't risk being around my captor for any longer, that much is clear.

CHAPTER TWELVE



Giovanni

I sit behind the mahogany desk, my fingers interlaced as Victor details our latest real estate ventures. Midway through his sentence, a notification buzzes on my phone. I glance down, brow wrinkling at the sight of an unfamiliar alert. A security breach? That's never happened before.

“Victor, we're going to have to continue this meeting tomorrow,” I say, my voice firm. He nods, a slight frown creasing his forehead as he stands and leaves the room without another word. The door clicks shut behind him, and I immediately turn to my computer, pulling up the history logs to investigate further.

My fingers fly across the keyboard as I trace the source of the breach attempt. It came from inside the office—an unsettling realization. When I find the identification code for the computer responsible, I sigh heavily and push away from my desk, heart pounding in my chest. Opening the office door, I'm greeted by the sight of Lulu sitting there, pretending innocence.

“Hey, Lulu. How’s your day been?” I ask casually, watching as she quickly removes her hands from the keyboard. She tries to look at her screen, but I can see the tension in her shoulders.

“Fine, just fine,” she replies, forcing a smile.

I raise an eyebrow and goad her further. “What’s so interesting on your computer?”

“Nothing,” she says, hastily attempting to switch off the monitor. But it’s too late—I’ve seen enough. As I lean in close, her perfume envelops me, a seductive blend of jasmine, sandalwood, and something else... something uniquely Lulu. The scent stirs something within me; a sudden, primal urge to punish her for her transgressions.

“I know what you’re trying to do, Lulu,” I tell her, my voice low and dangerous. Her eyes widen.

“Whatever do you mean?” she asks, her voice trembling. I can’t help but smirk.

“Don’t play dumb. There’s no way you’re going to access my system files.”

“System files? What are those?” She’s still trying to act innocent, but I can see right through her. I force myself to stand up and back away from her, discreetly adjusting myself as the arousal threatens to overwhelm me. I need to regain control of the situation.

“Keep this up, and you’ll lose today’s point,” I warn her. “Wouldn’t that be a shame?”

“Ugh, this points system is stupid,” Lulu groans, rolling her eyes. “I’ve never gotten any benefit out of it.”

“Maybe that’s because you’ve only been here for two days and had a literal meltdown on day one,” I shoot back, my tone dripping with sarcasm.

“Maybe I only had a meltdown because you’re a blazing inferno!” she retorts, her brown eyes flashing with anger. “Ever think about whether you’re causing what you blame other people for?” Her words make me uncomfortable—I hadn’t considered the possibility that I might be contributing to her behavior.

“Listen, just don’t mess around with my systems, alright?” I warn her, trying to regain control of the conversation.

“Still don’t know what you mean,” she singsongs, her voice high and innocent. But I know better. I turn away and head back into my office, but not before catching her switching the monitor back on and pulling out her keyboard. It’s clear scolding her won’t work; she won’t stop. So, I’ll have to make sure things are solid from the inside.

I sit down at my desk, pull up my computer, and start working furiously to shore up any perceived weaknesses in my security system. As I type, my thoughts drift to Lulu. Despite her misguided intentions, I’m actually pretty impressed with what she’s managed so far. If I were a lesser intelligent man, her attempts might have actually worked. Too bad for her that I’m her opponent.

It’s impressive how she’s learned all this without any formal training. Though she’s using her skills for the wrong reasons, I can’t help but acknowledge her ingenuity. My hope is that once she realizes she can’t breach my defenses, she’ll give up and fall in line—both with the computers and with staying put. However, neither seem to be working in my favor at the moment.

“Damn it, Lulu,” I mutter under my breath, diving deeper into my computer’s security settings. If she wants to play this game, I’ll make sure I’m always one step ahead.

The click of the door signals Primo’s entrance, and I glance up to see him sauntering into my office, his powerful frame filling the doorway. “How’re you?” he asks, taking a seat in front of my desk.

“Busy,” I reply tersely, my fingers flying over the keyboard.

“Doing what? ‘Cause it seems like Lulu’s super busy too.” He raises an eyebrow, a hint of curiosity lining his face.

I pause for a moment, then sigh. “Yeah, the two things are related. She got this brilliant idea that she’s going to try and hack into my computer systems.”

“Really?” Primo asks, clearly impressed. “She knows how to do that?”

“Surprisingly, I think she would have managed if it weren’t me she was up against,” I admit, a begrudging respect for her abilities seeping into my voice.

“Damn,” he breathes out, looking genuinely impressed. “Well, you need to shore some things up then, huh?”

“Definitely,” I nod, returning my attention to the screen. “Can’t let myself be the subject of attempted cyberterrorism.”

“Alright, I’ll let you work then,” Primo chuckles, getting up from his chair. “You got any news for me?”

“Nothing that can’t wait,” I tell him, continuing to type as I speak. “This is taking up more of my time than I’d like.”

“Got it,” he nods, leaving the room and closing the door behind him.

After a few hours of setting up firewalls and strengthening my security protocols, I lean back in my chair with a satisfied sigh. I've done everything in my power to ensure that Lulu won't get even an inch closer to breaching my defenses.

Suddenly, a frustrated yell echoes through the hallway outside my office – unmistakably Lulu. Curiosity getting the better of me, I stand up and walk out to find her glaring at her computer screen, a look of utter irritation painted across her face.

“What seems to be the matter?” I ask, struggling to hide my amusement.

Her mouth opens as if she's about to tell me, but then it hangs open for a moment before she snaps it shut. It's clear that she can't admit her failed hacking attempt. “Nothing,” she huffs, flipping her hair back in a show of defiance.

“Really?” I tease, leaning against the doorframe. “You sure you haven't found anything to be problematic on your second day? Perhaps there's something you've been trying to access, but had some trouble with?”

Her glare sharpens, but I find the entire situation amusing.

“No,” she says in a clipped tone.

“Alright, then. Are you ready to go home?” I ask, smirking.

“Yes,” she says through gritted teeth, huffing all the way to the elevator.

As we wait for the elevator, I smile at the situation. Lulu may have tried to step into my world, but she's about to learn that there's no easy way in.

The elevator doors slide open, and I chuckle at Lulu's pouting face as we step inside. She crosses her arms over her chest, shooting me a glare that could freeze the sun. The ride down to the car is filled with tension, her irritation practically radiating off of her.

"Alright," she finally blurts out, unable to contain herself any longer. "What's so funny?"

"You," I reply simply, leaning against the elevator wall and smirking. "I know what you tried to do, Lulu. You don't have to hide it."

Her cheeks flush a deep red, embarrassment and anger warring within her. But she tries to maintain her innocent façade, batting her eyelashes at me. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Really?" I challenge, raising an eyebrow. "I could see that you were trying to hack my system, and if I'm being honest, I'd be impressed if I weren't more irritated by it."

"Really?" she echoes, her eyes widening in surprise. A hint of pride flickers across her face before she quickly suppresses it.

"Yeah, really," I confirm, my tone almost admiring. "The stuff you were doing was pretty complicated. It made me nervous enough to tighten a few things up."

Her confidence grows a little at my admission, but I quickly add, "Don't enjoy it too much, though. After today's misbehavior, you now have negative one point."

"Negative?" she exclaims, her eyes going wide. "I didn't know points could go negative! That's unfair!"

"Unfair?" I scoff, amusement dancing in my eyes. "How is that unfair? Points go negative, Lulu."

“What does that even mean?” she asks warily, her lips pressed into a thin line.

I smile darkly at her, my eyes locking onto hers. “Negative points, if they accumulate, become punishments.”

“Wh-what kind of punishments?” she stammers, her bravado crumbling under the weight of my gaze.

“Let’s just say you’ll hope you don’t find out,” I tease, enjoying the way her eyes widen even more in apprehension.

The elevator reaches the ground floor, and we make our way to the car. The ride back to the mansion is quiet, the air thick with unspoken tension. When we arrive, I invite her to grab something with me for dinner.

“Wait,” she says, confusion etched on her face. “I misbehaved today. Shouldn’t you be sending me to bed without dinner or something?”

“Considering you didn’t throw a tantrum or sit on the garage floor today, I think you still deserve dinner,” I reply, a small smile tugging at the corner of my mouth.

Her lips curve into a tentative smile, and I’m momentarily entranced by them. Thoughts of how good those full lips would feel wrapped around my cock briefly cloud my mind before I shake it off, refocusing my attention on the present.

“What do you want to order?” I ask, trying to keep my voice casual.

“Actually,” she says, looking around the extravagant kitchen with a hint of disbelief, “I don’t really want takeout. Don’t you ever cook in here?”

“Me? No,” I admit, chuckling. “Teddy’s the only one who ever really cooks.”

“Then I’ll cook something,” she declares with newfound determination.

I watch Lulu make her way around the kitchen, her hips swaying as she confidently grabs ingredients from the pantry. The dress she wears today is significantly tighter than yesterday’s A-line cut, and it accentuates every curve of her body. As she lifts her hands above her head to reach for a jar on a high shelf, the plunging neckline reveals just enough skin to set my imagination ablaze. Her beautiful heels click against the marble floor, adding an air of sophistication to her movements.

“Can you hand me that cutting board?” she asks, snapping me out of my reverie. I pass it to her, trying not to let my growing arousal show on my face. Briefly, I consider grabbing my phone to text one of the many escorts I have on speed dial, but something stops me. Tonight, I decide, I’m going to close my eyes and imagine Lulu in my bed, conjuring up visions of punishing her for misbehaving – spanking her until her curvy ass is as pink as the dress she ruined, twisting her nipples until she screams my name in a mix of pain and pleasure.

“Is everything okay?” Lulu asks, catching me staring at her. She raises an eyebrow, a playful smile on her lips.

“Everything’s perfect,” I reply, returning her smile. “I’m just... admiring your cooking skills.”

“Uh-huh,” she says, clearly not buying my excuse. But she doesn’t press further, instead focusing on her task at hand, chopping vegetables with practiced precision.

With each passing moment, my intrigue with this woman grows, and I wonder what it would be like to truly possess her – not just in my fantasies, but in reality as well.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Giovanni

“Tell me about your father,” I ask her as she sets the plates down in front of us. The aroma of the traditional Cuban dish she prepared fills the room, and my mouth waters in anticipation. She hesitates for a moment, clearly taken aback by the question. I take a bite, and the flavors explode on my tongue – it’s really, really good. Before she can even answer, I’m praising her food, the words tumbling out of my mouth like an avalanche.

“Wow, this is amazing! You’re an incredible cook!”

A small blush spreads across her cheeks, and I apologize for interrupting her so abruptly. “I’m sorry, please go ahead and tell me about your father.”

She looks down at her plate, her fingers playing with the silverware as she begins to speak. “My relationship with him was... complicated. He really babied me and never let me do anything I wanted to do. Like with the computers, for example.”

I consider her words, curious. “Why is that?”

“His upbringing,” she replies simply. “He didn’t think women should be involved in business.”

“Really?” I shake my head, disbelieving. “I don’t think gender has anything to do with a person’s work ethic. And that means more than any perceived talent, male or female.” Her eyes meet mine, searching for sincerity. “We actually conduct interviews blindly at my company. Our system eliminates any references that would let us know if the person is male, female, what race, or age. We want people based on their experience and ethic, and that’s it.”

“Interesting,” she murmurs thoughtfully. “So, you hire women?”

“Yes, we do in fact hire women,” I affirm.

“More than just secretaries?” she presses, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

“Of course, we do.”

“Could I be more than a secretary?”

Her question catches me off guard, but I can’t deny her passion and drive. There’s something about her that demands respect.

“If you showed qualifications for something,” I reply cautiously, “I would certainly consider you for it if there was anything available.”

“Is there anything available?”

“At the moment, the greatest need I have is for an assistant. But if you can behave yourself and prove your work ethic to me,” I say, teasing her lightly, “then if something else opens up while you’re still staying with me, I’ll consider you for it.”

She seems contented with my answer, her smile warm and genuine. “Tell me about your mother,” I ask, wanting to learn

more about her family. But as the words leave my mouth, I watch her expression change – she looks almost... nostalgic.

“Ah, my mother,” she says, a smile lighting up her face. “She’s the one person I can always rely on, no matter what.”

“You seem to be very close with her.”

“Absolutely. We share so many things, and I’m grateful that I can still talk to her while I’m here.” She takes a sip of her wine, looking thoughtful. “Did you know my parents’ marriage was arranged? It’s common in our world.”

“Really?” I ask, intrigued.

“Truth is, he was trying to sell me off to Primo to broker a deal with your family,” she huffs, clearly annoyed by the memory.

I shake my head in disbelief. “That would never have worked. We don’t do arranged marriages in my family – not like that, anyway. My father had a proclivity for wives, but never for marriage. All of us brothers are actually from separate marriages and are only half-siblings.”

She nods her head. “Maybe I shouldn’t have been so surprised that my father was trying to marry me off.”

I take a sip of my own wine. “I think your outrage was justified.”

We share a quiet moment, our eyes locked on one another.

“What about your own family?” she asks, breaking the silence.

A shadow crosses my face as I think about my father. “My father is in prison, and no one expects him to live out his sentence.”

I can see the sadness creep onto her face.

“There’s no need for your sympathy – our relationship has been nothing but strained.”

“Why is that?” she asks gently.

“Because he never supported my decision to go legitimate. He always wanted me to be a part of the mob world, even when I was doing well on my own. He even tried to frame me for crimes just to get me mixed up in it all. That’s why I was in Miami when the shootout went down.”

Her eyes widen, clearly uncomfortable with the revelation. “I didn’t realize...So, you weren’t supposed to be in Miami?”

“I was coerced into going under false pretenses,” I respond.

“I’m sorry,” she replies and I shrug.

“Tell me about your mother,” she says, her eyes searching mine.

I sigh, the memories surfacing. “She’s in Italy. I haven’t given her much thought, as she was never really a part of my life.”

“Can you explain?” she asks, sensing there’s more to the story.

“My father married her when she was very young. He was visiting her town in Italy for some business. They were married, she got pregnant, and within a year, he divorced her to move on to Constantino’s mother.”

“God, that’s horrible,” Lulu says, her eyes filled with empathy.

I shrug my shoulders, trying to act nonchalant. “When I was born, my mother somehow contacted my father, asking for assistance and money to take care of me. Her family was very poor.” I hesitate before admitting the next part, my voice wavering slightly. “Instead of helping her, I was taken away from her and raised here in the mansion alongside my other brothers.”

Lulu’s expression is a mix of horror and sadness. “That’s terrible. I can’t imagine what your mother must have felt,” she whispers, her brown eyes welling up with unshed tears.

I shift uncomfortably in my seat, realizing I’ve never genuinely considered my mother’s feelings in all this. “To be honest, I haven’t given it much thought myself.”

“You really should find her and try to reconnect with her, Giovanni,” Lulu insists, her voice full of conviction.

The bitterness I’ve kept bottled up for so long seeps into my words. “She was the one who allowed me to be taken away, and she hasn’t even tried to contact me since.”

Lulu reaches her hand forward, placing it gently on mine. The warmth of her touch surprises me, and I look into her compassionate eyes. “Maybe there’s more to the story than you know. If you think about the world you’re in – the world your father created – maybe after all these years, she didn’t believe she could reach out to you.”

I smile halfheartedly, the weight of her words settling in. “Maybe you’re right. I’ll look into it.”

“Promise me you will,” she says sincerely.

Caught in the vulnerability of the moment and not wanting to see her hurting, I find myself making a promise I never thought I would. “I promise, Lulu.”



As we finish eating, I can't help but wish for more time with her. It's a selfish thought, but one I can't shake. "Would you like another glass of wine?" I ask, trying to extend our evening together.

She looks at me quizzically, as if she's trying to gauge my intention. "If you'd rather go to bed, I understand," I say, giving her an out.

But she smiles – a smile that makes me uneasy – and says, "No, it's fine. I'd be happy to share a glass with you."

I retrieve another bottle from the wine cooler, pouring us each a generous amount. As she holds hers delicately between her fingers, she asks, "Would you give me a proper tour of the mansion? I haven't had a chance to see everything yet."

"Of course," I reply, trying to suppress the excitement in my voice. She hops off the counter-height chair, the anticipation evident on her face.

We begin our tour in the grand foyer, where I point out the intricate marble floor design, our family crest surrounded by a delicate floral pattern. Her eyes widen as she takes in the craftsmanship, making me appreciate the beauty of my home all over again.

"Amazing," she murmurs, her breathless admiration stoking the embers of my growing attraction to her.

"Come, there's more to see," I say, leading her through the various rooms and offices. In the library, I show her the vast

collection of books lining the walls, some dating back centuries. She runs her fingers lightly along their spines, her reverence for knowledge endearing.

“Your family has quite the collection,” she comments, picking up a first edition of *The Jungle Book*, and looking up at me with a glint of curiosity in her eyes.

“Indeed,” I reply, my chest swelling with pride. “Many generations have contributed to this.”

As we continue our exploration, I describe the stories behind certain paintings and antiques, each one revealing a piece of my family’s history. “This painting is of Gaspare Bianci. He was the leader of the family before my father. In many ways, he was a lot like a grandfather to me, as my father was a lot like a son to him. When he was unable to have children, he left leadership of the family to my father, despite his impure bloodline.”

Lulu listens intently, her eyes twinkling with interest, and I find myself entranced by her enthusiasm.

The sound of her laughter fills the mansion as we pass through the lavish ballroom, and I start to envision us dancing together, lost in each other’s embrace. I take a second to regain control of my wayward thoughts.

“Thank you for showing me all this,” she says sincerely as we conclude our tour. “Your home is truly magnificent.”

“Thank you, Lulu,” I reply, my voice barely above a whisper. Her presence has made the familiar surroundings feel new and vibrant, and for that, I am grateful.

Stepping out into the gardens, I lead Lulu through the fragrant night air. The moon reflects a silver glow on the verdant landscape, illuminating the delicate petals of flowers

in bloom. She shivers in the cool spring breeze, and I instinctively remove my suit jacket, draping it over her slender shoulders. Her brown eyes meet mine with a warmth that makes me shiver.

“Thanks,” she whispers, a smile playing at the corners of her lips.

“Of course,” I reply, trying to maintain my composure.

She downs the rest of her wine, a rosy flush spreading across her cheeks. “That was delicious. It’s been ages since I’ve enjoyed a glass like that – you should know, I’m a bit of a lightweight.”

“Marvelous,” I say sarcastically, and she grins – then, unexpectedly, she reaches up and boops me on the nose. Her playfulness catches me off guard, but I smile in response.

Setting her empty glass on a nearby table, she slips off her shoes and places them on the stone steps leading to the garden. “What are you doing?” I ask, bemused.

“I want to feel the grass beneath my feet,” she replies, a mischievous glint in her eye. “Life is all about getting a little dirty, don’t you think?”

As she runs barefoot through the garden, laughter bubbling from her lips, I watch her with a mixture of admiration and desire. There’s something about her – not just her body, but her mind and spirit – that captivates me. In her presence, my rigid, work-driven life seems to lose some of its importance, replaced by a yearning for the carefree happiness that she embodies.

Her laughter echoes through the stillness, stirring something deep within me. The sight of her dancing among the flowers, her dark curls bouncing with each step, awakens a

desire I've kept buried for far too long. The urge to join her is overwhelming, and for a fleeting moment, I ponder if perhaps I'm missing out on something more – something beyond the confines of my carefully constructed world.

“Isn't it beautiful?” she calls out, her voice lilting like a melody on the wind. “Come on, feel the earth beneath your feet!”

I hesitate, torn between the man I've become and the one I could be with her.

The moon casts a silver glow over the garden as Lulu comes bounding back to me, her curls bouncing with each step. She's panting, smiling, and her eyes are shining like stars. As she stumbles, I instinctively reach out and catch her, wrapping her in my arms.

“Thank you,” she breathes, looking up at me. Her chest heaves with each exhale, and the warmth of her body against mine sends shivers coursing through me. I can't help myself any longer – the combination of her playful spirit and her enticing presence is too much for me to resist.

“Fuck it,” I mutter, and before I know it, my lips are on hers. She kisses me back, her mouth warm and inviting. Our passion intensifies as I deepen the kiss, our tongues dancing together in a feverish duet. But as the reality of our situation sinks in, my common sense kicks into gear, and I reluctantly pull away.

“I'm sorry,” I apologize, my voice barely above a whisper. “That was unprofessional of me.”

Her smile falters, and she looks crestfallen. “No problem,” she replies, bending down to pick up her shoes. We walk back

to the mansion in silence, the weight of what just happened hanging heavily between us.

As we part ways, she heads to her bedroom and I to mine. I pause for a moment, watching her walk away, her feet bare and my jacket still draped over her shoulders. The realization hits me like a ton of bricks: Lulu is a dangerous distraction – a beautiful, captivating distraction that threatens to unravel all the control I've worked so hard to maintain.

But as I close the door to my room, I start to wonder if maybe she's worth the risk.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Lulu

The door shuts behind me and I lean against it, trying to catch my breath. My hands press against my lips, still tingling from the feeling of his on mine. I can't believe that my first kiss was Giovanni Maldonado. He doesn't know what he's taken from me, and what he's given.

When I told him about my father's controlling nature, how he kept me locked away for so long, I didn't mention that it was all to protect my "purity" – a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder when the time was right. But now, that part of me is gone, snatched away in the heat of a stolen moment.

I kissed a man, not just any man, but Giovanni, and my father will never be able to take that away from me. It was raw and organic, and I find myself wanting more, even if it is coming from him.

I step away from the door and hug his jacket close to me, inhaling the scent of his cologne mixed with his own unique aroma. I don't know what to think about him. In some ways, I hate him for keeping me here, like a prisoner; in other ways, I find myself falling for him.

“Get a grip,” I whisper to myself as the thought crosses my mind. With newfound determination, I rip off his jacket and fling it across the room. No, I won’t fall for him. I might have allowed that kiss – shared it, even – but that doesn’t mean I’ll give him everything.

Still, it’s clear he couldn’t resist me. I walk over to the mirror and look at my reflection. For once, I feel beautiful and confident in my curves. The dresses he bought for me fit me perfectly, accenting my figure in all the right places. I can’t deny the thrill that comes from the attention he gives me. I crave more of it.

“God, I wish I had someone to talk to about this,” I mutter under my breath, feeling more alone than ever as I sit on the edge of my bed. My mother isn’t much help; she was basically me growing up – never around boys and then sold off into an arranged marriage with my father. It’s all she ever knew, and though they had their moments, she seemed happy for the most part.

I pick up my phone, turning it over in my hands, debating whether to text her. But what would that accomplish?

“Ugh,” I groan, tossing the phone onto the bed. The device bounces once before settling into a sea of silk sheets. Frustrated, I pull the dress from my body and toss it aside, the fabric pooling on the floor. Striding to the bathroom, I take a long, hot shower, trying to wash away my conflicting thoughts.

Climbing into bed, the moment I shut my eyes, I’m overwhelmed by the memory of Giovanni’s lips on mine – the way his hands wrapped around my body, pulling me close. I can still feel the firm grip he had on my neck, his lips moving against mine with hungry urgency. My thoughts drift to the

image of him with that prostitute, and I can't help but imagine his lips on mine while he enters me.

“Damn it,” I whisper, unable to stop myself as my hand slips beneath the sheets. My fingers dance across my clit, teasing and stroking, and I imagine it's his tongue instead. The fantasy feels so real that I plunge two fingers inside myself, gasping at the sensation. His name escapes my lips as I bring myself to a shuddering climax, his taste still lingering on my tongue.

As I drift off to sleep, a wicked thought crosses my mind. It might be fun to tease him a little at work tomorrow. Maybe I'll have a little fun with him, see how far his self-control goes.

“Or maybe you're just playing with fire,” I warn myself with a smirk. But deep down, I know I've already made up my mind. And perhaps, in doing this, I might find some power of my own.



The morning sun creates a golden glow over in the foyer as I lean against the wall, clutching Giovanni's jacket in my hand. My heart beats wildly in anticipation of the game I'm about to play. When he finally appears, his dark hair combed neat and his hazel eyes searching the room, I hold up the jacket by one finger and offer him a sly smile.

“Thank you,” I purr, my voice dripping with insinuation. The scent of my perfume wafts through the air as I've spritzed it generously on his jacket. After spending an evening

enveloped in his intoxicating scent, I want mine to linger on him just as powerfully. As he takes the jacket from me, I watch his eyes close momentarily, savoring the aroma. A shiver of excitement runs down my spine – this game will be almost too easy to win.

“Shall we?” Giovanni extends his arm, leading me towards the car waiting outside. As we drive to the office, curiosity piques me, and I find myself asking about his daily routine.

“What’s the schedule for today?” I inquire, acting innocent.

He glances at me briefly before returning his gaze to the road. “Same thing every day,” he replies. “Answer emails and try to move the business forward.”

“Sounds boring,” I remark, tracing my fingers along the edge of the window. “You should learn to enjoy life more.”

Giovanni’s jaw tightens as he grips the steering wheel tighter. It makes me wonder if I’m getting to him. “Just remember to behave so you don’t lose any points.”

“Who says I intend to lose points?” I challenge, grinning wickedly. “I plan on earning them.”

His eyes narrow suspiciously. “Oh yeah? How do you plan on doing that?”

“Surely, I must have earned a point or two last night,” I tease, biting my lip to suppress the giggle that threatens to escape.

He shifts uncomfortably in his seat, refusing to meet my gaze. “Is that so?” he mutters under his breath.

“Relax, Giovanni. I’m just teasing.” But despite my reassurance, tension remains visible in the set of his shoulders

and the tightness of his jaw.

The moment we step into the office, Giovanni informs me that he has a conference call to attend. I feign a pout and complain about my boredom, expressing my desire to join him in his meeting. He sighs, obviously reluctant to agree.

“Will you be able to behave yourself?” he asks, his voice dripping with skepticism.

“Of course,” I reply, biting down on my lower lip, sensing the edges of his resolve beginning to fray.

“Fine,” he says, “come into my office.” As I make my way inside, I deliberately brush against him, feeling the heat of our bodies connecting for an instant. He remains frozen at the door, clearly affected by the contact. Clearing his throat, he follows me into the office and takes a seat behind his desk.

As he picks up the phone, I inquire about the nature of the call. “It’s a call with Lawrence Sinclair,” he explains. “We’re discussing the status of our shipping company.” I nod and offer a coy smile, intrigued by this glimpse into his business life.

Giovanni dials the number and switches to speakerphone. Lawrence’s deep voice fills the room as they dive into a conversation about renewing shipping contracts. I study Giovanni, allowing my gaze to linger on his chiseled features and dark, expressive eyes. My fingers idly twirl a loose strand of hair as I bite my lip sensually.

“Do you think we should offer a one year or three year renewal?” Lawrence asks.

Caught in my gaze, he fails to respond to Lawrence’s questions. Relishing the power I hold over him, my smile widens.

“Giovanni?” Lawrence repeats his name, snapping Giovanni out of his trance.

“Sorry, could you repeat your question?” he stammers, attempting to regain his composure. Lawrence hesitates before asking if Giovanni needs to reschedule the meeting.

“No, everything’s fine. Continue,” Giovanni says defensively.

My heart races with excitement. Determined to push the boundaries and truly test Giovanni’s resolve, I pretend to scribble notes on a piece of paper. My pencil slips from my fingers, clattering to the floor and rolling behind me. Rising from my seat, I bend over dramatically, giving him the perfect view. The air between us crackles with electricity.

“Oops,” I say, as I retrieve my pencil and straighten up. I catch Giovanni’s eyes boring into me, his expression a blend of desire and irritation. It’s clear he’s onto my little game.

“Miss Manuel, come here right now,” he commands in a stern voice, placing Lawrence on hold and muting the call. My heart skips a beat, and for a moment, I wonder if I’ve pushed too far. But there is no turning back now.

With slow, deliberate steps, I approach his desk. He pats his leg, indicating where he wants me to stand. I raise an eyebrow in disbelief but comply, positioning myself beside him. Without warning, he bends me over and delivers a firm smack to my behind.

I whirl around, shock and indignation written all over my face, but his smirk tells another story altogether. “Consider that a warning,” he informs me coolly. “If you continue this behavior, you’ll earn a demerit point.”

“Fine,” I huff, returning to my seat, heat rising in my cheeks. But deep down, the sting sends a strange thrill through me, leaving me even more aroused than before.

Unfazed, Giovanni resumes his call with Lawrence, discussing numbers and contracts for another ten minutes. When the call finally ends, he looks at me, shaking his head. “What am I going to do with you?” he sighs.

“Simple, just let me go,” I retort. “Then you wouldn’t have to put up with me.”

“Nice try,” he smirks. “But is there something you want?”

“Absolutely not,” I protest, getting up from my seat. “Not every woman on this planet is waiting for your touch, Giovanni.”

As I leave his office and close the door behind me, I hear his voice echo in my ears, “Not every woman, but perhaps one.” My heart races, and I smile.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



Lulu

Every morning, I meet Giovanni in the foyer, each day donning a different outfit that clings to my curves and accentuates my features. I can't help but notice how his gaze lingers on me for a moment longer than necessary before he turns away with a hint of a smile. Despite my best efforts to entice him, to draw him back to that electrifying night in the gardens, he remains infuriatingly composed.

It's Thursday now, and I sit at my desk, pouting as my frustration grows. Not only have I failed to capture his attentions, but my attempts to hack into his systems have been equally fruitless. I have an idea brewing that I want to try tomorrow, but the day is already waning, and it's too late to begin now.

The sound of the office door opening brings me out of my thoughts. A tall man with tousled brown hair and piercing blue eyes walks in, and I instantly recognize him as Roman Kingsley, the CFO of Giovanni's software company. His chiseled jawline and broad shoulders make him undeniably attractive, and there's an air of cold professionalism about him that reminds me so much of Giovanni.

“Is Giovanni available?” Roman asks, his voice smooth and confident.

“Give me a minute, and I’ll let him know you’re here,” I reply, rising from my seat.

I make my way over to Giovanni’s office. Knocking on the door, I hear a muffled “come in” before entering. Giovanni looks up from his work, his intense hazel eyes meeting mine.

“Roman Kingsley is here for you,” I inform him.

“Send him in,” he says, then adds, “You want to sit in on the meeting, don’t you?”

“Can I?” I ask.

“Have you earned the privilege?” he deadpans, raising an eyebrow.

“Of course, I think I have,” I reply, smirking at his sarcasm.

“Right. Silly me for asking,” he retorts, rolling his eyes but gesturing for me to stay regardless. The corner of his mouth twitches in amusement.

“Fine, you can sit in on the meeting, but only if you’re on your best behavior.”

“Always am,” I reply with a wink, earning a dramatic sigh from Giovanni. I turn to Roman, gesturing for him to follow me into the office.

Roman’s blue eyes rake over me as we enter, a question forming in his features as he looks between Giovanni and me. Giovanni’s gaze conveys an unspoken warning, and I feel excitement at the challenge.

“Lucia is filling in for Mariana while she’s on maternity leave,” Giovanni explains, adding, “She’ll be sitting in on our meetings for some hands-on experience.”

Roman’s lips twist into a barely concealed grimace, but he nods and takes a seat regardless. As their conversation turns to software, I abandon my plans to distract Giovanni and find myself genuinely intrigued by the discussion.

“None of our developers can pinpoint the problem,” Roman laments, frustration seeping through his voice. “The new update is causing random crashes, and it’s affecting our users significantly.”

Giovanni seems agitated, his fingers tapping impatiently against the desk. “What’s your proposed solution?”

“Truthfully, I don’t know yet,” Roman admits, exasperated.

“Describe the glitch,” Giovanni demands, leaning forward in his chair.

Roman hesitates, then dives into a detailed explanation of the faulty software. It involves a memory leak that spirals out of control, causing system crashes. As he speaks, gears turn in my head, and I become increasingly certain that I recognize the issue.

“Roman, can you pull up the software on Giovanni’s computer?” I interrupt, unable to contain my excitement.

Both men stare at me, surprise etched into their faces. Roman appears annoyed, but Giovanni studies me intently. I meet his gaze, determination burning within me. “I think I know what the problem is.”

“Pull it up,” Giovanni orders, and Roman complies.

“May I?” I ask, gesturing to Giovanni’s chair. With a nod, he relinquishes his seat, and I sink into the supple leather, my fingers hovering over the keyboard.

As I scroll through lines of code, I feel their eyes on me—Roman incredulous, Giovanni curious. After ten minutes, I find the source of the memory leak—a misplaced line that causes an infinite loop.

“Here,” I announce, pointing out the issue and explaining my discovery. I quickly write a workaround, launch the program, and watch as it runs smoothly without crashing. Relief washes over me as Roman gapes in disbelief.

I glance at Giovanni, and my heart swells at the pride shining in his eyes. It feels so good, and I push down the reason why.



The door clicks shut behind Roman, and I’m about to rise from my seat when Giovanni’s voice, low and authoritative, stops me. “Don’t move.”

I turn around, startled, and watch as he strides towards me with purposeful steps. Before I can process what’s happening, he’s pulling me into his arms, my body flushed against his. I look up at him in shock, my heart pounding in my chest.

Giovanni wraps his fingers around the back of my neck and pulls me closer, his gaze locked on mine. Without breaking eye contact, he presses his lips against mine, the heat of his mouth both electrifying and intoxicating. As the kiss

deepens, I find myself breathless, opening my mouth to let our tongues tangle together in a passionate dance.

“God, you’re incredible,” he murmurs against my lips, his grip on my neck tightening just enough. I want this moment to last forever, but he pulls back, brushing my cheek tenderly with his thumb.

“That’s your reward for figuring out that problem,” he says softly, searching my eyes for something. “I hope you finally got what you wanted this week, and can stop playing this silly game with me.”

My cheeks flush, but I nod my head in agreement. He rewards me with a small, knowing smile. “Good.”

Releasing me, Giovanni watches as I return to my desk, still breathing hard from our encounter. My fingers unconsciously dance against my lips, the memory of his kiss lingering like a phantom caress. I pull out my keyboard and refocus my attention on the screen, trying to hack his system again.

He may be an amazing kisser, but that doesn’t mean I’m giving up on getting home. I need to stay vigilant, especially now that I’ve tasted the sweetness of his lips. I can’t let my desire for him cloud my judgment.

As I work, my mind races, thoughts of Giovanni and our stolen kiss intermingling with the numbers and codes on my screen.

“Lucia,” Giovanni calls from his office door, drawing my attention away from the computer. “I won’t forget what you did today. You’re extraordinary.”

“Thank you,” I manage to say, feeling both flattered and conflicted. He retreats back into his office and my fingers

pause on my keyboard. I take a deep breath and force myself to refocus on the task at hand, unwilling to let anything—even a searing kiss—distract me from getting home.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Lulu

The week's gone by so slowly and I plop into the chair in front of Giovanni's desk unannounced, watching as his dark eyes flicker up from his work with a serious expression. He says nothing and returns to whatever he was doing. I sigh dramatically, rolling my eyes toward the ceiling before he finally looks up again.

"Is there something the matter?" he asks, his voice calm yet commanding.

"I'm bored," I admit, letting out a huff of frustration. "This office is so dull."

"Good," he replies, leaning back in his chair. "Offices aren't supposed to be interesting. In the course of your boredom, you've managed to earn yourself a few merit points."

"Merit, shmerit," I scoff, tossing my hair over my shoulder. "The points aren't doing anything for me."

"That's because you haven't earned enough yet," he retorts, raising an eyebrow.

“Then maybe you’ve set the exchange rate too high, and I might as well give up and go back to hacking your systems,” I tease, a smirk playing on my lips.

“Go back to?” Giovanni narrows his eyes. “My computer logs indicate that you’ve never stopped.”

I giggle at him, fluttering my lashes. “Just trying to keep you on your toes, boss.”

“I’m sorry the office is boring but I don’t really have a solution for you.”

I sigh dramatically again. “Are there other assistants I can at least talk to?”

He frowns slightly before responding.

“I’d rather you not mingle with the other employees,” he says, his tone firm.

“Hey, that’s not fair!” I argue, my temper flaring. “You need to treat me better and trust me more!”

Giovanni sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Calm down. I trust you the precisely correct amount.”

“Ugh, you’re not even giving me any solutions to my problem!” I exclaim, slumping back in the chair.

“Perhaps that means there isn’t a problem,” he counters, his voice steady.

I start to throw a fit, crossing my arms and glaring at him. He stands up and walks around his desk, stopping in front of me. His hands find their way to my shoulders, and the touch has me shivering. It’s as if electricity is coursing through my veins, igniting a fire within me that I struggle to keep under control. My heart races, and I can feel my cheeks flush with heat. There’s a mixture of desire and longing that threatens to

overwhelm me, but I refuse to let him see how much his touch affects me.

I look up at him, my heart still pounding from his touch. Giovanni's expression softens a little. "Okay, you win," he says with a hint of resignation in his voice. "I'll call some of the other secretaries and try to introduce you."

"Thank you," I sniff, trying to regain control over my emotions.

He walks back around his desk and picks up the phone, dialing a number. "Hi, Veronica? It's Giovanni. I have someone here who would like to join you for lunch today... Yes, that's right. Thank you." He hangs up the phone and looks at me with a small smile. "There's a group of secretaries going to lunch together today. You can tag along with them."

Overwhelmed by the sudden victory, I jump up and lean over the desk, planting a quick kiss on his cheek. His eyes widen, completely caught off guard. "Thank you!" I exclaim before rushing out of his office.

Once the door is closed behind me, I start to wonder if he'll be mad about what I just did. But I can't help myself - part of me wants to tease him, part of me craves his touch, and another part of me hates him. It's such a tangled web of emotions.

Nervously, I wait at my desk, trying to keep my composure. The elevator dings, and a few chatty women enter the room, all laughing and happy. One has red curls and freckles scattered across her cheeks, another is tall and slender with ebony hair pulled into a sleek ponytail, and the third has a curvaceous figure with sun-kissed skin and wavy blonde hair.

"Hi, I'm Lulu," I say, introducing myself with a smile.

Giovanni emerges from his office, and the women immediately start teasing him. “You’re always so serious, Giovanni!” they chide him.

He plays along, maintaining his stoic expression. “My seriousness pays your salary, so you’d better like it.”

The attractive blonde woman grins at him. “Oh, I like everything about you.”

I can feel my jealousy bubbling up, but I try to keep it in check. Giovanni waves off her comment with a smirk. “Alright, alright, have fun at lunch today.” He hands me a credit card. “Use this for everyone’s lunch – it’s on me today.”

The women cheer, and I look at him with gratitude. Unexpectedly, he winks at me, making my heart flutter. Then I find myself being herded into the elevator and whisked across the street to a restaurant, my mind still reeling from the whirlwind of emotions and the exhilarating rollercoaster that is Giovanni Maldonado.



The moment we sit down at the restaurant, the women start to complain about their jobs. I listen, swirling the ice in my glass of water, but I don’t have much to say. Their grievances seem so trivial compared to the chaos that has become my life since meeting Giovanni.

“Hey Lulu,” the redhead, whose name is Emma, asks me, “how are things going with Giovanni? It must be overwhelming being here temporarily.”

“Seriously,” the tall brunette, Bianca, chimes in. “I don’t know how Mariana managed to take care of him all those years.”

“Speak for yourselves,” says the attractive blonde, Vanessa, with a teasing grin. “I’d love to work for Giovanni. I’d find a way to crawl under his desk or on his lap any day of the week.”

The other women laugh, and I force a smile, feeling my jealousy spike again. “Things are fine,” I say, trying to sound casual. “He’s not that bad to work for.”

“Give it time,” Bianca warns, her eyes full of pity. “They all get worse.”

We finish lunch amid more laughter and gossip, but I can’t shake the unease that settles over me. When I return to the office, Giovanni comes out of his office as if he sensed my arrival.

“How was lunch?” he asks, focusing on me.

“Fine,” I say, though everything inside me screams otherwise.

He narrows his eyes, sensing something is off. “Did something happen?”

“Vanessa seems quite interested in you,” I blurt out before I can stop myself. “And crude. She says she’d willingly sit in your lap.”

Giovanni waves it off with a dismissive gesture. “That happens in offices. It’s important not to get carried away with things.”

I feel a surge of jealousy, but I also like that he doesn’t seem interested in her. He gets a mischievous glint in his eyes

and comes over to sit on the edge of my desk.

“Why do you seem so upset about it?” he asks, leaning closer.

“No reason,” I lie, looking away from him. But he leans even closer, his breath warm on my cheek as he teases me about my possible jealousy.

“Never thought of it, but maybe I’ll go for it,” he teases me further, his voice low and dangerous. “It would be cheaper than hiring a prostitute, and she definitely seems like she’d put out.”

My blood boils, and I glare at him with rage in my eyes, feeling the heat rise to my cheeks. He has the audacity to grab my chin, brushing his thumb against my lips as if he’s daring me to say something.

“Are you jealous?” he asks again, a devilish smirk playing on his face.

“Absolutely not,” I snap, trying to sound convincing as my heart thuds in my chest.

“Maybe I should consider switching your jobs then,” he muses, his dark eyes boring into mine. “You could go work for her supervisor, and she can come up here and work right where you’re sitting. She did say she wanted to sit on my lap after all. I’d happily give her a ride.”

“Go right ahead,” I challenge, refusing to back down. It hurts to imagine her in my place, but I won’t let him see that.

He brings his face even closer until our lips are almost touching, our breath mingling. His scent is intoxicating, and I struggle to keep myself composed.

“Admit it,” he whispers, the words dancing over my skin, making me shiver. “You’re jealous. Admit it, and I’ll give you what you want.”

“All I want is my freedom,” I reply, my voice shaking slightly.

“Freedom? Is that why you kissed me on the cheek this morning?” he taunts. “You want something else from me.”

“Office relationships with employees should be avoided,” I repeat his own words back to him, trying to regain some control over the situation.

“Good thing you’re not my employee, then,” he says, his voice low and sultry.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



Giovanni

I sit on Lulu's desk, my fingers curling around her delicate chin, and I find myself lost in the depths of her chocolate eyes. How did we find ourselves entwined in this twisted dance?

The thought of kissing her again arouses me. Once was bad enough, twice unfathomable, but now, as I contemplate a third time, I feel like a stranger to myself.

Never before have I crossed such boundaries in the office, let alone with a woman who isn't on my payroll. Yet here I am, inexplicably drawn to Lulu – a girl locked away in my mansion, likely holding nothing but contempt for me in her heart.

“Stop staring at me like that,” she whispers, her breath warm and inviting against my lips.

“Like what?” I ask.

“Like you're about to devour me,” she retorts, her eyes flickering with a mixture of playfulness and defiance.

I can't resist any longer. I lean in, pressing my lips against hers, and she succumbs just as easily as the previous times. Kissing women isn't part of my repertoire; correction, it

wasn't until Lulu entered my life. With each kiss, I crave more of her, desperate to unravel the enigma that she is.

As our lips dance together, I notice her movements differ from those of other women I've known. She seems nervous, inexperienced even, making me wonder how many men she's allowed this close before. Simultaneously, she possesses an unyielding confidence, pushing me to my limits like no one else has. The desire to know more about her consumes me, and I realize just how little I truly understand this captivating woman.

"Tell me something about yourself, Lulu," I murmur into her mouth, feeling her pulse quicken beneath my touch.

"Like what?" she breathes out, her eyes darting away from mine for a split second.

"Anything," I say, "Something that no one else knows."

But, I don't wait for her answer. I move back in. A low moan escapes Lulu's lips, the sweet sound sending shivers down my spine. I hadn't even realized my hands had been exploring the soft curves of her body, craving more contact with her warm skin. As our mouths devour each other, time seems to stand still – until the elevator chimes, jolting us back to reality just as the doors slide open.

"Shit," I mutter under my breath, pulling away from Lulu at lightning speed. I look up to see Vanessa stepping out into the hallway, her narrowed eyes darting between us like a hawk sizing up its prey.

"What do you need, Vanessa?" Lulu asks defiantly, twirling a lock of her hair around her finger.

"You forgot the receipt," Vanessa replies, her voice dripping with condescension. "You probably don't know this

since you're so new, but you need it for an expense report." She tosses it onto Lulu's desk with a dismissive flick of her wrist, causing Lulu to catch it midair.

"Sorry," Lulu retorts, licking her lips and giving her a saccharine smile. "I was caught up in other things." Her brown eyes lock on mine for a moment, and I can feel my heart pounding in my chest.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" Vanessa asks me pointedly, placing emphasis on the last word.

"Actually," Lulu interrupts, her voice sultry and confident, "I've got him covered. In every way."

I wish I could stand up and send Vanessa back to the elevator, but the bulge in my pants makes that impossible right now. Instead, I remain seated, watching the tension unfold between my two employees.

"Fine," Vanessa huffs before storming back into the elevator. Lulu stands, waving goodbye with exaggerated enthusiasm as the doors close.

"Really, Lulu?" I chide her, trying to keep my tone light. "You shouldn't taunt her like that."

"She's a bitch," Lulu shrugs nonchalantly. "I've been around enough women to know one when I see one. Someone needs to put her in her place – and I'm more than happy to help with that."

"Is it possible she's not the problem here?" I ask, smirking. "Could it be that there's something else motivating her behavior?"

"Like what?" Lulu feigns innocence.

“Never mind,” I sigh, recognizing the futility of this conversation. The truth is, I can’t get enough of Lulu’s chaotic spirit, even if it complicates matters in the office.

The pressure in my pants finally subsides, and I stand up to face Lulu.

“Back to work,” I tell her firmly, trying to maintain some semblance of professionalism. “If you’re so sure there’s nothing else motivating Vanessa’s behavior, then this conversation is over.”

Lulu hesitates, her lips parting as if she’s about to respond. I can see the internal conflict playing out in her eyes, torn between admitting her jealousy and refusing to let me win. It’s obvious that she has a competitive streak in her – and she never wants to bow to anyone.

“Fine,” she says finally, her voice defiant. “I’m sure.”

“Of course you are,” I reply, shaking my head in amusement. “You really are a princess after all.”

She purses her lips in confusion, and I can see the question forming on her tongue. But before she can ask, I close my office door between us, cutting off any further conversation.

As I lock the door behind me, I try to shake off the lingering memories of Lulu’s touch. But it’s impossible. The taste of her lips still lingers in my mouth, making it difficult to think straight. With a frustrated sigh, I pull out a box of tissues and sit down at my desk.

Unzipping my pants, I wrap the tissue around my cock and begin to stroke myself, letting the memory of Lulu’s soft lips against mine fuel my arousal. I’ve never had to do this at the office before, but she’s driving me to distraction, and I can’t focus on anything else.

In my mind, I picture her standing before me, that same fiery spirit coming alive in her eyes, but somehow subdued when our lips meet. I imagine pressing her down onto my desk, flipping up her dress, and taking her the way I've been fantasizing about since the moment I met her. The thought of her on her knees in front of me, my name a breathless praise on her lips, is enough to send me over the edge.

As I come back to reality, wiping the sweat from my brow, I know that I'm in deep with Lulu – far deeper than I ever intended. And despite the danger it poses, I can't help but crave more of her fiery spirit and the way she melts into me when we kiss.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



Lulu

It's been an entire week of absolute boredom at the office. The fleeting moments where Giovanni crossed the professional line with me are a distant memory. If anything, he seems to be even *more* professional, which is the most irritating thing I could ever endure.

His cold attitude and lack of attention has made me redouble my efforts to get into his systems and find a way out of this place. I don't care how good of a kisser he is. I shouldn't have let him distract me in the first place. Even though he knows about my hacking attempts doesn't mean I'm going to stop trying to get into his systems. Not after the text messages I received this morning from my mother.

Things with my father's trial are not going well, and it's becoming more obvious that he's going to be convicted. As a result, El Lobo, a rival gang in Miami, has decided this is their time to seize control, and things have been getting more and more unsafe for my family by the day. My mother and sister practically live under armed guard now and don't leave the house. I can't continue to stay here and be Giovanni's prisoner

when things are going so poorly at home. Even if my feelings for him are becoming more conflicted by the day.

Hearing Giovanni scream my name from inside his office makes panic well up in my stomach. I push my keyboard back in and switch off my monitor, breathing heavily.

“Lucia!” Giovanni yells again, his voice laced with impatience.

I redoubled my efforts when I got into work this morning, searching for a way to disable his security system, either at work or the mansion. It’s uncanny how he knows where I am at all times, and I need to figure out how. My shoulder begins to ache, and I rub it absentmindedly.

“Lucia!” he shouts once more, his voice growing angrier.

I don’t rush to his office immediately like some lost puppy dog, so he storms out and rounds my desk. I can see the fury in his eyes and feel my heart race even faster.

“What’s the matter?” I ask, feigning innocence.

“You’re the matter! These hacking attempts have got to stop.”

“What happened?” I reply, trying to keep my voice steady.

“Your little stunt created a weakness in my system,” he explains, gritting his teeth. “You tried to go through a back door, and as a result, it let in an actual virus. Now I have to spend my entire Friday making sure my system is cleaned up and healthy.”

“Maybe if you just let me go home, you could be rid of me and everything I’m trying to do,” I suggest, but he’s unyielding.

“Stop this!” he orders, his voice ice cold. “I am not letting you go!”

My stomach drops, but I refuse to let him see how much his words affect me. Instead, I look him straight in the eyes, matching his intensity, and silently vow to keep fighting for my freedom, no matter what it takes.

Giovanni slumps into the chair opposite my desk, looking tired and defeated. His head is in one hand as he closes his eyes, saying my name over and over again with a weary sigh. I just watch him, watching the tension in his face. In a way, I do feel bad. I didn't mean to cause actual problems for him, but I just want to go home.

“Please, just let me go home,” I say softly, hoping my sincerity comes through.

“Stop asking!” he snaps back at me, his anger reignited. “Why don't you understand? You're not going anywhere.”

Frustration bubbles up inside me, and I can't help but retort, “You should be nicer to someone when they're trying to apologize.”

“Nice?” he scoffs. “I don't need to be nice to you, especially when you're doing everything in your power to make my life a living hell.”

We sit in silence, the tension between us palpable. I stare at the floor, trying to ignore the ache in my chest that's growing stronger by the second. After what feels like an eternity, Giovanni takes out his wallet and slides a black Amex card across the desk towards me.

“Take this,” he says, his voice strained. “I need a break from you. Go to the mall, get something to eat, and then bring me something back. And remember, don't even think about

running. You won't get far, and I'll always know where you are." He stands and returns to his office, slamming the door behind him.

My fingers close around the credit card, the cold metal sending shivers through my body. I get up and make my way over to the mall, fuming with every step I take. As I walk through the halls, my heels clicking against the marble floor, I don't even bother going to the food court. The thought of eating makes me feel sick. Instead, I stomp through the mall, my mind racing with thoughts of escape. But his message rings clear in my head: he'll find me. It's fruitless to run without disabling whatever security system he has on me first.

A random store catches my eye, one of those little convenience stores you see in malls sometimes. I go inside, searching for something sweet to ease my frustration. As I look through its rows of offerings, I notice something that makes me pause. A prepaid cell phone in clear plastic stares back at me, a lifeline in my grasp. I blink several times, considering the possibilities. A way to access the internet without being monitored. Sure, I don't have anyone to contact right now, and giving away my position might put me in the crosshairs of the rival gang. But that might change.

With a determined grip, I grab the phone and a bag of Jolly Ranchers, heading to the counter. I use Giovanni's credit card to pay, feeling a thrill of defiance as it slides through the machine. If I'm going to find my freedom, this little device could be my savior. And it's a small victory over the man who holds me captive.

As I walk through the mall, clutching the prepaid phone and the bag of candy in my hand, my mind races with thoughts of Giovanni discovering the purchase on his credit card

statement. I need a distraction, something to mask my real intentions.

My gaze lands on a high-end shoe store, and a wicked smile graces my lips. This will work perfectly. I stride into the store, my heels clicking against the polished floor, ready to embark on the shopping spree to end all shopping sprees, courtesy of Giovanni's black Amex.

"Welcome!" a sales associate greets me. He's tall, with golden hair that falls just above his piercing blue eyes. His name tag reads "Ethan." I appreciate his chiseled jawline and broad shoulders as he approaches me, even if his features don't come close to Giovanni's allure. "What can I help you find today?"

"Show me your most stunning heels," I purr, my voice dripping with newfound confidence. Ethan's eyes widen at my request, but he quickly recovers, leading me deeper into the store.

"Right this way."

The shopping trip is nothing short of exhilarating. I try on pair after pair of breathtaking shoes, from sky-high stilettos adorned with intricate beadwork to sleek pumps encrusted with sparkling gems. Each time I slip my foot into a new shoe, I imagine how envious even the wealthiest celebrities would be of my growing collection. I know deep down Giovanni might make me return them all, but for now, I revel in the decadence, not to mention the bill Giovanni is going to get.

Throughout the entire experience, Ethan casts sultry glances my way, making me shiver with a mixture of excitement and nerves. I know that Giovanni would be more than angry if he saw Ethan looking at me. The idea of defying him even further has an odd thrill to it.

“Would you like me to have these sent to an address, or would you prefer to take them with you?” Ethan inquires, breaking me from my thoughts.

“Actually, I work in the office next door. If someone could help me bring them over, that would be amazing.”

“Of course,” he replies, flashing me a dazzling smile. “I’d be more than happy to help you myself.”

Ethan carefully boxes up each pair of shoes, placing them on a cart. As he finishes, he hesitates before asking, “You know, this might be a bit forward, but if you’re not seeing anyone, could I have your number?”

My cheeks flush at his question – no one’s ever asked for my number before. I nod and fumble around in the plastic bag, pulling out the prepaid phone. I turn it over, showing him the number on the back. He looks at me quizzically.

“I dropped my regular phone in the bathtub. I’m waiting for a replacement,” I say, quickly coming up with an excuse for the odd situation.

His expression softens as he accepts my explanation, and I can’t help but exhale in relief.

I pull the burner phone out of the plastic, glancing around to make sure no one’s watching. “Hey, can I throw this away?” I ask Ethan, holding up the empty packaging.

“Sure,” he replies, pointing at a nearby trash can. I quickly toss the wrapping and tuck the phone into my bra when no one is looking. We’re about to leave when I spot a pair of shoes I hadn’t seen before. They’re stunning – black stiletto heels with intricate gold embroidery that snakes up the sides, making them look like works of art. The straps wrap elegantly around the ankles, creating an alluring silhouette.

“Wow,” I breathe, unable to tear my eyes away from them. “I have to try these on.”

“Of course,” Ethan agrees, his eyes lighting up. I sit down in one of the plush chairs, and he comes over to help me with my current shoe. But this time, his touch is different – slow, sensual. His fingers caress my foot as he removes the shoe, then continue to trace gentle circles around my ankle and up my calf. I find myself getting lost in the sensation, my eyes fluttering closed. As much as I hate to admit it, I can’t help but imagine Giovanni’s hands on me instead, remembering how tenderly he tended to my twisted ankle.

Ethan’s fingers work higher, his breath hot against my skin as he leans in and whispers, “You should open your legs.” It’s clear he’s not as skilled as Giovanni, but his attention is intoxicating, and I crave being touched by a man. Slowly, hesitantly, I part my legs just a fraction – but before Ethan’s hand can travel any further, Giovanni’s voice cuts through the air like a knife.

“What the fuck am I looking at right now?”

Ethan jumps back, his cheeks flushed, and my eyes fly open. Giovanni is standing at the entrance of the store, fury radiating from him. I try to play it cool, forcing a smile as I introduce Ethan, but Giovanni’s having none of it.

“Lucia,” he growls, striding over to me. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Shopping,” I retort, feigning nonchalance. “You did tell me to.”

“Right,” he snaps, his voice laced with sarcasm. “And if the mountain of shoes in front of you didn’t tip me off, then

maybe the call from my credit card company warning me about possible fraudulent activity would have.”

I just smile and shrug, trying to hide my nerves. He grabs my wrist, his grip tight.

“We’re leaving.”

I protest, but he silences me with a single, chilling look.

“When you act like a child, you’ll be treated like one,” he hisses. “Now be quiet before you get yourself in even more trouble.”

As mad as I am, I bite my tongue. Giovanni walks over to the boxes of shoes, lifting one of the lids. I brace myself for his order to return everything, but instead, he just sighs and closes the lid. “At least you used the money to buy something useful,” he mutters, his tone unreadable. There’s a hint of something in his eyes, a flicker of appreciation that suggests an unspoken interest. But I can’t be certain.

He leads me out of the store, and I glance back at Ethan, who waves goodbye. “I hope I get to see you again,” he calls after me.

“Unlikely,” Giovanni snarls, shooting Ethan a glare so dark it sends shivers down my spine.

Giovanni guides me to his car, and without another word, drives us straight back to the mansion.

CHAPTER NINETEEN



Lulu

The moment we step inside my room, Giovanni releases his grip on my arm like he can't stand touching me any longer. The evening sun creates long shadows across the floor, but the silence between us is even more suffocating. I watch as he begins to walk towards the door, and suddenly, I can't take it anymore.

“Are you seriously just going to keep ignoring me?” I yell at him, anger bubbling within me. It seems my words hit a nerve because he stops in his tracks, turns around, and stalks back towards me. For the first time since I've met him, fear grips my chest and I stumble backward until I'm pressed against the edge of the bed.

His tone is dark, yet controlled as he asks, “Did you enjoy behaving like an absolute slut in public? Was it appropriate to be opening your legs for some random guy in the middle of a store? What did you think was going to happen? Were you planning to fuck him right then and there? I'm disgusted that you let him touch you.”

I clench my fists, furious at his questions. “You don't get to ask me those things! I may be here against my will, but that

doesn't mean I can't do what I want with who I want!"

"Think about that very carefully," he warns, his voice dripping with menace. "Any guy who touches you again without my consent won't be able to lay a hand on you or anyone else ever again."

My anger surges, and I rise to face him, trying to go chest to chest despite our height difference. I jab a finger into his chest, feeling his firm muscles beneath my touch. His eyes are a mix of anger and amusement. "You need to be nicer to people, Giovanni. You can't just threaten them like that!"

In one swift motion, he grabs my wrist and flips me over onto the bed, my chest pressed against the covers. "I'll do as I please," he says firmly. "I warned you that too many negative points would result in punishment."

I struggle against him, but his grip is unyielding. Despite the situation, I can't help but feel aroused by his dominance. He flips up my skirt and pulls down my panties, leaving me exposed. For a moment, I fear what he might do, but instead, his hand comes down hard on my behind, making me cry out in pain. To my surprise, the sensation sends a spark of arousal through me. It's been so long since anyone has held me accountable for my actions.

"Is this what you want?" he asks, his voice low and dangerous, as he continues to spank me. The humiliation is intense, but the desire it ignites within me is even stronger.

The spanking doesn't last long, just a few smacks that feel lighter than I expected. Giovanni flips my dress back down, but leaves my panties hanging around my ankles as he turns me over to face him. My breath catches in my throat as I stare up at him, his chest rising and falling rapidly.

“Happy now?” I manage to choke out, feeling a strange mix of fear and exhilaration. His eyes are dark, clouded with a storm of emotions I can’t quite decipher.

“Shut up,” he replies, breathing hard, and I glance down, noticing the unmistakable bulge in his pants. In that moment, it’s like a switch flips in my mind. I kick off my panties and flip my dress back up, spreading my legs wide and begin to touch myself.

“Oh, Ethan.” I moan the name of the salesperson, taunting Giovanni with how much I enjoyed the stranger’s touch.

“Stop,” Giovanni snarls, but I ignore him.

“Fuck, Ethan. I just want your fingers in my pussy,” I say, continuing to taunt him.

“I said stop!” He lunges forward and pushes my hand away from my clit.

“If you’re fantasizing about that boy, it’s obvious you don’t know what it feels like to be touched by a real man. But, I’ll fix that for you. So, just lay there and take your punishment like a good girl. And don’t you dare touch yourself.”

“Get away from me,” I snap, even though deep down, I want him close. “I prefer thinking about the sales guy anyway.”

“Shut up and behave,” he snaps.

Giovanni’s expression turns unreadable, and he starts low, bringing my foot up to his mouth. His hands are strong and rough against my skin, pressing deep into my muscles, sending sparks through my body. He gently caresses the curves of my ankle and calf, his fingertips barely brushing against me, setting off a trail of warmth that buzzes just below the surface

of my skin. Every touch of his sends shivers of anticipation up my spine.

Giovanni's warm, wet mouth envelops my toes, his tongue like velvet against my skin. The heat radiating from his mouth and the feeling of being enveloped within it awakens a deep sensation in me, as if a fire is blazing through me and pooling in my core.

"Please," I whisper, trying to touch myself again, but he growls.

"Stop moving."

Reluctantly, I pull my hand away, realizing that his touch is so much better than Ethan's or even my own, but deep down I already knew that it would be. As he works his way up my thighs, I willingly spread my legs for him, feeling my arousal dripping down my thighs. I move my hand back to my clit absentmindedly.

"Last warning," he tells me, a sharp sting on my pussy as he smacks it. I gasp and look into his eyes, filled with a fierce determination. "That was the last of your punishment... for now."

His fingers enter me slowly and then begin to work me, and I'm brought to heights I never thought possible. I've fingered myself plenty of times before, but his fingers inside of me feel infinitely better than anything I could have imagined.

His fingers are thick and sure as they stroke my inner walls, creating a pressure that starts off firm and then builds up in intensity, like a slow roller coaster ride building up to an exhilarating climax. His touch is gentle but authoritative, as if he knows exactly how to bring me to the brink of pleasure and

keep me there. I can feel every ridge and curve of his digits against me, the sensation sending waves of pleasure through my body with each stroke.

In that moment, all I can think about is what his cock would feel like inside me.

“Please,” I beg, rocking my hips desperately against his restraining hand. “I feel like I’m going to pee.”

“Good,” he growls, the sound sending shivers down my spine. “Just let go and let whatever happens happen.”

“I want more,” I plead, unable to stop myself. “I want to know what your lips would feel like on my pussy.” I can’t believe I said that, but it’s what I really feel.

“No,” he says firmly. “You don’t deserve that. You’re such a brat and a bad fucking girl.”

“Then I’ll just let Ethan do it,” I taunt, knowing full well that I’m playing with fire. His fingers leave me just as I’m about to come, and suddenly he’s on top of me, straddling me. He shoves his wet fingers coated in my juices down my throat, making me choke on them. The forcefulness of his actions is intoxicating, awakening desires I never knew existed within me.

“Never say that name again,” he warns, his voice dark and dangerous. “Or I will shove my cock so far down your throat and fuck your brat mouth so hard that you won’t be able to talk for a month.” And then, against my better judgment, I do the unthinkable.

“Ethan.”

Giovanni’s eyes turn dangerously dark, and before I know it, he pulls me off the bed, shoving the neckline of my dress down so that my breasts spill out on top. He palms my breasts,

releasing himself from his pants, and then my mouth is being filled with his cock.

I can't breathe, but it doesn't matter because the way he fucks my mouth makes me feel alive. He's relentless, and degrading.

"God, you're such a bad fucking girl. This is what you get for behaving like a slut."

I can't respond, but I don't want to, I'm so lost in the feeling of his cock in my mouth.

"This is the only way you'll ever learn," he says.

I start to rub my pussy, but he notices.

"Stop or else I'll fuck your mouth harder."

I can't resist, so I keep touching myself, and true to his word, he goes even harder.

His release comes suddenly, filling my mouth with a taste I've never experienced before. It's intoxicating and overwhelming, and as I drink it all down, I realize how good it feels. As soon as he's done, he flips me back up on the bed and his fingers are inside of me again, pumping me so hard that I cry out.

"Slow down!" I beg, feeling everything building within me.

"Shut up," he says. "I know better than you, so just take it."

"Feels like I'm going to pee," I tell him again.

"Good. I want to see you embarrass yourself that way for me."

And then it happens - the biggest release I've ever felt, water gushing from me as my entire body trembles with pleasure.

The sensation is indescribable, like a tidal wave crashing through my very being, washing away every ounce of control I thought I had. I feel vulnerable, exposed, and yet more alive than I have ever been in my life. As the waves of pleasure subside, I'm left breathless, trembling, and utterly spent.

Barely able to catch my breath, I'm still trembling when a knock on the door yanks me back to reality. Giovanni hastily fixes his clothing and strides out of the room, shutting the door behind him. I strain to hear the muffled conversation outside, but it's impossible to make out any words.

Moments later, he reenters the room, his face stoic and unreadable. "You'll wear one of those pairs of shoes each day from now on," he says firmly, his eyes locked with mine. "I expect you to get my money's worth from them."

I sit up on the bed, confusion clouding my thoughts. What is he talking about? But before I can ask, he turns and leaves the room, the door clicking shut behind him. The spark in his eyes that had fueled my desire is gone, leaving me feeling strangely violated yet utterly satisfied.

I can't deny it - deep down, I wanted what just happened. In fact, I crave more. With unsteady legs, I stand and remove my dress, leaving it crumpled on the floor as I walk towards the front room of my quarters. There, I find multiple carts filled with all of the boxes of shoes I'd bought earlier. My heart races at the sight, a mix of disbelief and excitement washing over me. I'd assumed he'd return them; instead, they're here, a tangible reminder of our twisted connection.

The forbidden thrill of our encounters consumes me, making me question everything I thought I knew about myself. As I survey the collection of shoes before me, I wonder what my next move will be - and if I'm prepared for the consequences.

CHAPTER TWENTY



Lulu

I awaken with a sense of relief, stretching my limbs and glancing at the phone on the nightstand. The screen reads 10:17am, and I feel grateful for the extra sleep today brings. No office work for me this Saturday, but I'm sure Giovanni is already there, managing his empire. A dull ache between my legs reminds me of our heated encounter yesterday, and a shiver of excitement runs through me as I recall the intensity of it all.

I grab my phone and notice several unread messages from my mother. My heart leaps in my chest, knowing she must be worried about me.

Hi, Lulu. How are you? Are you safe?

I pause for a moment, thinking about Giovanni and the complex web of emotions that have developed between us. In spite of everything, I do feel safe with him.

Yes, I'm alright. And I am safe.

I'm glad to hear that. It eases my heart to know that someone is looking out for you.

How are you and Sofia doing?

Things are very tense here in Miami, Lulu. El Lobo's grip on the city grows stronger every day, and they're targeting anyone loyal to your father. I'm just glad you're not here in the middle of it all.

Guilt surges through me, knowing my family is suffering while I'm away.

I hate that I'm not there with you. I feel so guilty.

Your safety is what matters most to us, Lulu. We'll be together again soon enough. Once your father is released, everything will be okay.

Love you.

Love you too, sweetheart. Stay strong. Have faith.

I lie on the bed, staring at the ceiling, my thoughts racing a mile a minute. My mother is living in denial. There's no way my father will be acquitted. The authorities wouldn't have made his trial so public if they weren't sure of a conviction. They're making an example out of him, and it breaks my heart to think about it.

As the head of Los Cubanos, my father was incompetent, and his failures are the reason El Lobo has become so powerful. I remember countless conversations where I tried to point out his mistakes, but he always dismissed me, saying I was just a woman who didn't know anything about mob business.

But with Giovanni, it's different. He's made me his assistant and includes me in his business meetings. He actually listens to what I have to say. And yet, thinking about how he treated me yesterday... Yes, it was hot, but his controlling

nature makes me so angry. The contradiction between his actions and his words leaves me feeling frustrated and confused.

My stomach rumbles, reminding me that I haven't eaten since last night. I decide to get up and head to the kitchen, but as I step towards the door, an unfamiliar noise stops me in my tracks. I look around the room until I find the source: my burner phone.

My heart races as I pick it up and read the text message from an unknown number.

Hey, it's Ethan. Really enjoyed meeting you yesterday. Was wondering if you wanted to get together sometime? I'd love to take you out for a proper meal.

The adrenaline rush from defying Giovanni, coupled with the attention from another man—even one I'm not particularly interested in—sends a thrill through me. I quickly type a reply.

Would love to. I'll meet you around lunchtime at the store on Tuesday. We can grab lunch somewhere in the mall.

Can't wait!

I close the phone, switch it off, and search for a hiding spot. Finally, I tuck it beneath my mattress, feeling a sense of satisfaction. Then, I make my way to the kitchen, eager for some breakfast and a moment to clear my head.



I wander the halls of the Maldonado mansion, the fancy decor and endless rooms doing little to alleviate my restlessness. Giovanni is nowhere to be found, and I wonder what he's up to. As I turn a corner, I spot Teddy leaning against a wall, scrolling through his phone.

“Hey,” I say, approaching him. “Any idea where your brother is?”

Teddy looks uncomfortable as he glances up from his screen. “Uh, I think he's with Primo, handling some business.”

“What sort of business?” I ask, curiosity piqued.

“It's nothing you need to worry about,” he replies, attempting a reassuring smile.

I bristle at his words. I hate being kept in the dark. Teddy seems to sense my rising irritation and quickly changes the subject.

“Got any plans today?” he asks.

“Plans? I'm a prisoner here, remember?” I snap, my frustration bubbling over. “What kind of plans could I possibly have?”

He laughs, the sound light and carefree. “Okay, okay. But since Giovanni's not around, maybe we can have some fun. Just wait and see.” His eyes sparkle with mischief, and for a moment, I see Teddy as the big brother I never had.

Intrigued, I follow him down a flight of stairs to a large storage room. Teddy hands me a set of equipment, which resembles riot gear. “What's this for?” I ask, bewildered.

“Don't worry about it,” he grins, then hands me a paintball gun.

“Wait, what?” I exclaim, surprised by the unexpected item.
“You want to play paintball? Here?”

“Ever played before?” Teddy asks.

“Never,” I admit. “I wasn’t even allowed near guns, let alone shown how to hold one.”

“Perfect. I’ll teach you the rules. We’ll play in the gardens.”

“Won’t we make a mess?”

“Who cares?” he asks, shrugging off my concerns and sprinting towards the gardens, laughter trailing behind him. I can’t help but laugh too as I follow him, excitement building within me.

Once we reach the gardens, Teddy sets up a soda can for target practice.

“Alright, this part rests against your shoulder, and this part you hold steady with your other hand. Now, close one eye and use the other to look through this little piece right here.”

I do as he says, seeing the can in the crosshairs.

“Good. Now, relax your body and squeeze the trigger gently.”

To both our surprise, I hit every shot with ease. “Are you sure you’ve never done this before?” he asks, impressed.

“Positive,” I reply, feeling a spark of pride. “Guess I’m a natural.”

“Watch out, then,” he teases before darting away, the game beginning in earnest. “I won’t go easy on you!”



The game of paintball is exhilarating, a rush unlike anything I've ever experienced. Teddy and I weave through the garden, hiding behind bushes and statues, the adrenaline pumping through my veins. My heart races as I spot Teddy crouching near a fountain, and I take aim, firing a shot that splatters bright pink paint across his chest.

“Ouch!” he exclaims, laughing. “You’re ruthless, Lulu!”

“Better watch your back,” I tease, grinning wildly as I duck behind a rose bush. The garden has transformed into a spirited battlefield, full of laughter and fierce competition. When a paintball hits my arm, I flinch at the sting but find myself laughing too. Even with the ache in my shoulder, I feel alive and free.

As we continue to play, vibrant colors paint the once pristine garden, turning it into a kaleidoscope of chaos. Eventually, both Teddy and I are covered head to toe in splattered paint, our breaths heavy from the thrill of the chase. We make our way back inside, still high on excitement.

“Teddy, thank you so much for this. I haven’t had this much fun in ... well, I can’t even remember,” I tell him sincerely.

“Anytime. Just remember not to let Giovanni get to you. Keep being happy and protect your peace,” he replies, flashing me a warm smile.

We're about to part ways when suddenly we hear Giovanni's voice booming through the hallway. "What the hell happened here?" Both Teddy and I freeze, exchanging guilty glances.

Giovanni appears, his eyes narrowing as he takes in our paint-splattered gear. "What is this?"

"Practice," Teddy answers nonchalantly.

"Practice for what?"

"Mob warfare at a rave. You never know when it might happen, and one should always be prepared," Teddy replies with a mischievous grin.

Giovanni sighs, looking at me. "The gardens are a mess."

"Actually, they're much improved and colorful now," Teddy interjects, and I try and stifle a laugh.

"Of course you'd think that," Giovanni says, shaking his head. "Both of you, go get cleaned up."

As we walk away, I notice he doesn't say anything else to me, which irritates me. But as I return to my room and shower off the paint, I find myself feeling less guilty about the secret phone hidden beneath my mattress. If I can just start using it, maybe I'll be able to escape this place, and him, for good.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



Giovanni

With a sigh, Teddy plops himself down on the couch in my makeshift office at the mansion. Shadows play against the walls and the room is surrounded by shelves filled with leather-bound books. A large wooden desk sits center stage, cluttered with papers and a laptop that seems out of place among the antique decor. It's not as comfortable or personalized as my penthouse apartment workstation, but it serves its purpose.

Living in the mansion is not my preference. Lulu complains that she's a prisoner here, but these halls never held the best of memories for me, either. I would much prefer to be back in the city in my own apartment. There's something about your own bed that can't be replicated anywhere else.

"Hey, Giovanni, what have you and Primo been up to?" Teddy asks, his blue eyes curious yet mischievous.

"Thought you didn't like to get involved in the business side of things," I remark, raising an eyebrow.

"You're right, never mind." He waves a hand dismissively before changing the subject. "How's Lulu doing?"

"Teddy, you don't need to worry about her."

“Someone should. Found her moping around the mansion this morning.” His playful tone evaporates, replaced with genuine concern. “You’re so brilliant, Gio, but such an idiot when it comes to people.”

“Excuse me?” I ask defensively.

“Look, you can’t just expect to keep a girl like Lulu locked up. She’s not some pet.”

“Actually, I do intend to do so. If she can’t start behaving herself, I’ll get a cage to put her in.” My words are meant to be lighthearted, but Teddy’s eyes go dark in an unexpected way.

“Hey, don’t joke about that sort of thing,” he says seriously, his voice low and firm.

“Sorry,” I apologize, though unsure why it triggered him.

I let out a heavy sigh. “What do you suggest I do? I’m trying to figure out this situation with the Irish and Primo, and Lulu’s distractions aren’t helping.”

“Tell me what’s going on with the Irish,” Teddy says, leaning forward.

“They’re unhappy because we’re not moving guns. Which means that they’re not making money off the shipments or sales. The bulk of their business came from us. So, now they’ve got a significant hole in their income stream.”

“Yeah, they were always tough bastards,” he agrees. “That’s why Constantino always dealt with them – he’s literally the toughest of all four of us.”

“Can’t argue with that.” I pause, then ask, “Have you heard anything from Constantino lately?”

Teddy shakes his head but doesn’t say a word, which makes me think he’s not being entirely truthful. He hesitates

before continuing. “Look, I’m not sure what to do about the Irish. That’s not my expertise. But maybe if you give Lulu some positive attention, you’ll be less stressed and better equipped to handle the Irish.”

His suggestion lingers in the air as I weigh my options. I know he’s right, but admitting it isn’t easy. Teddy watches me, waiting for my response, but there are no words yet – just the silent struggle within me.

My thoughts drift to last night, and I struggle to fight the arousal growing within me. The memory of how good her throat felt around my cock, and how much pleasure I derived from finger fucking her until she squirted all over herself and my hand – it’s intoxicating. I want to do it again, and so much more, but I know that would only complicate things between us further.

“Teddy,” I say, trying to keep my voice steady, “she’s had plenty of attention. All she gets is attention.”

“*Positive* attention,” he counters, his gaze unwavering. “She can’t just be dragged to work, day in, day out. Or yelled at all the time and expect to be happy and well-adjusted.”

“I never said I cared about her happiness,” I scoff.

“No. But, you did say you wanted her not to cause you problems.”

“Yes, well, thank you for your input,” I tell him, my tone dismissive. “I’ll think about what you said.”

He gets up from the couch, shrugging. “I know you won’t, but you should.” With that, Teddy leaves my office, closing the door behind him.

I lean back in my chair, letting out a slow breath. Despite wanting to consider Teddy’s words, my mind stubbornly

replays scenes from last night. Lulu's defiance, the way she fought against me, only to finally submit to me – it was exhilarating. My hand slips beneath the waistband of my pants, wrapping around my erection as I lose myself in the memories.

Then, my thoughts shift to those shoes she bought. Her feet looked so enticing in those beautiful heels; I start to imagine fucking her until she's crying and pleading for my forgiveness. And then, I'd come all over those expensive shoes, ruin them, and make her cry even harder. The thought pushes me over the edge, and I come in my hand, whispering her name like a curse.

I know I need to consider Teddy's advice. But God help me, it's hard to think about anything other than punishing her and the ways our twisted desires intertwine.

Catching my breath, I clean up and take a moment to gather my thoughts. Teddy's words echo in my mind, and as much as I hate to admit it, he might be right. Lulu needs some positive attention if I want her to stay somewhat content under these circumstances.

I've been keeping tabs on the trial; Lulu's father is likely to face conviction, and *El Lobo's* increasing violence in Miami has been wiping out his supporters. It can't be easy for her, especially considering she wasn't involved in the business side of things.

"Alright then," I mutter to myself, picking up my cell phone and dialing a number.

"Hello?" Isabella, Primo's wife, answers, sounding surprised by my call.

“Isabella, it’s Giovanni. I was wondering if you’d be willing to take a friend to lunch?” I ask, trying to sound casual.

“Of course! Who is it?” Her curiosity piqued, she listens intently.

“Her name is Lulu. She’s staying with me because it’s not safe for her in Miami right now. She misses her family and has been feeling down,” I explain, justifying my request.

“Ah, I see. Well, my sister and I always do Sunday brunch, so she could join us tomorrow if that’s not too short notice?” Isabella offers generously.

“Perfect. She’ll be there, and thank you.” I pause, remembering her condition. “How’s the pregnancy coming along?”

Isabella sighs. “I don’t enjoy being pregnant,” she admits, sounding weary.

I chuckle lightly. “It’ll be over soon enough. Take care, Isabella.”

“Thank you, Giovanni. Goodbye.” She hangs up, and I find myself feeling oddly relieved.

Rising from my chair, I make my way towards Lulu’s rooms, determined to follow through with this plan. The thought of giving her something positive is strangely satisfying, and I hope that it might help ease the chaos that has become our lives.

“Positive attention,” I whisper under my breath, steeling myself for what’s to come. “Let’s see how this plays out.”



As I stand outside Lulu's door, my hand raised to push open the door, Teddy's words echo in my mind.

Positive attention.

It goes against my instincts, but maybe it's time to try something new. So instead of barging in as usual, I rap my knuckles gently against the door.

"Coming!" Lulu's voice drifts through the wood, and a moment later, the door swings open. Her eyes widen in surprise when she sees me. "Giovanni...?" The chipper tone she had just a second ago vanishes, replaced by irritation. "What do you want?"

I swallow my pride and force a smile. "I wanted to give you something to look forward to. I've scheduled a brunch date for you."

Her lips part as if she's about to argue. I cut her off before she can start. "Just try to have fun, okay?"

My gaze shifts to the cart of shoes nearby, and an idea forms. "It'll give you an excuse to wear one of those fancy pairs you bought. Be the envy of everyone there."

Lulu's eyes flicker to the shoes, and the corners of her mouth lift into a small smile. "Fine," she says, more amiable than before. "When is it?"

"Tomorrow. I can drop you off on my way to the office." I don't know why I'm offering this, but it feels like the right thing to do.

“Who’s going with me?” she asks, curiosity lacing her tone.

“Primo’s wife, Isabella, and her sister. They do brunch every Sunday.”

“Okay.” She nods, seemingly satisfied with the arrangement. As I turn to leave, her voice stops me. “Thank you, Giovanni. For thinking of me.”

Those simple words soften my heart, just a little. But as I walk away, I remind myself not to be fooled by her. Lulu’s far more dangerous than she appears, and I can’t afford to forget that.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



Lulu

Giovanni knocks on my door for the second time this weekend. I'm not sure why he's had such a change in heart – he went from telling me to shut up and choke on his cock to actually seeming like he might be respectful of boundaries, even a small one like knocking.

“Just a minute!” I shout, as I finish strapping the buckle on the first pair of shoes I decided to wear from my shopping spree.

The shoes are a stunning work of art: black stiletto pumps with delicate lace overlay, and a soft satin ribbon tied around the ankle. The heels are sleek, slender, and at least four inches tall, giving an air of elegance and seduction. They perfectly complement the body-hugging red dress I chose, its fabric clinging to every curve while leaving just enough to the imagination. The neckline is daring but tasteful, and the length flirts with the line between sophistication and scandal.

I look at myself in the mirror, and for the first time in a long while, I feel really good about myself. My hair falls in loose waves around my shoulders, framing my face just so.

I'm excited for Giovanni to see me like this, but then I realize that I shouldn't be thinking things like that about him.

I walk to the door and open it, and Giovanni surveys me up and down. I shiver under his gaze. I like the way he looks at me, but I hate admitting that. Every time he looks at me with those piercing hazel eyes of his, it makes me think back to what happened between us, and I'm not sure how to feel about it, but I know that I feel aroused.

"You look lovely," he says, his voice low and smooth. "Especially the shoes."

I smile at the compliment, and then he asks if I'm ready to go.

"Yes," I reply, my voice steady despite the nerves fluttering in my stomach.

We walk in silence to the garage where his car is charging. The drive into the city is mostly silent. My curiosity gets the better of me, and I ask about Isabella, remarking that I think I've run into her once before in the mansion.

"Isabella is Primo's wife," Giovanni replies, his eyes focused on the road ahead. "She was his lawyer when he was on trial for murder. You probably saw her during one of her visits to the mansion."

I nod, taking in this new information about the woman I am about to meet.

"Her sister Evelyn is a doctor," he adds.

My stomach tightens with nerves at the thought of meeting these accomplished women. "Wow, they both sound incredibly smart," I admit.

Giovanni glances at me and gives a reassuring smile. “Don’t feel intimidated or doubt yourself. They just had opportunities to go to school. If given the same chances, you would be just as successful in a career of your choosing.”

His words ignite a spark inside me, making me think about going to college. Could I attend classes while I’m here?

Before I can dwell on that thought, Giovanni pulls up in front of a quaint little café. A kind-looking woman sits outside, waving to him. She is very pregnant, and though she appears uncomfortable, there is a sense of happiness radiating from her. This must be Isabella. Her long red hair cascades down her back, and her green eyes twinkle with warmth. She wears a stylish maternity dress that hugs her baby bump.

Sitting next to her is another woman, presumably her sister Evelyn. She has shorter, strawberry blonde hair and a sharp, intelligent gaze in her green eyes. Dressed in a crisp blazer and slacks, she exudes an air of confidence that’s both impressive and slightly intimidating.

“Have fun,” Giovanni tells me as he parks the car. “Text me when you’re ready for me to pick you up, and I’ll come over.”

“Thanks,” I reply, trying to hide the nervousness in my voice. “It’s nice having a chauffeur for a change.”

“Mind your manners,” he warns playfully, but his eyes linger on my shoes as I exit the car. I take my time, enjoying the attention he’s giving me.

I shut the car door and make my way over to the women, feeling a mix of excitement and anxiety. We exchange warm smiles, and they beckon me inside the quaint little café. As we

settle into the last booth at the back for privacy, I find myself intrigued by the lively conversation between the sisters.

“Tell us about your family, Lulu,” Isabella asks, her eyes filled with genuine curiosity.

I hesitate, unsure how much to reveal. “Well, I have a younger sister. My father isn’t around much these days, but I keep in close contact with my mother.”

The sisters don’t seem to be aware of my current living situation, and I wish I could be more open with them. But I can’t risk getting Giovanni into trouble, even if Primo might already know and have told his wife.

“I think we’ve met before, haven’t we?” Isabella remarks, a smile playing on her lips.

“Uh, yes, briefly,” I admit, remembering our encounter at the mansion.

“So, you’re working as Giovanni’s assistant, right?” Evelyn inquires, her green eyes sparkling with interest. “How’s that going? I hear the Maldonado brothers can be quite serious.”

I chuckle nervously. “Yes, they can be, and it’s been an interesting experience so far.”

“Serious, but sexy,” Evelyn adds with a grin, causing me to blush. “I still haven’t found an intense, rich guy to take care of me.”

We all laugh, and the conversation shifts towards their careers. I’m eager to learn more about what drives these successful women.

“Isabella, how do you like being a lawyer?” I ask.

“Well, there are aspects of it that I love, but there are also parts that can be frustrating,” she admits.

“Ugh, don’t get me started on lawyers,” Evelyn groans. “They’re ruining the medical field with all these lawsuits.”

“Hey, I won’t argue with that,” Isabella says, chuckling. “There are definitely some bad apples out there.”

The sisters then ask what I’d like to do with my life, and I find myself bashful about sharing my dreams.

“I never had the opportunity to go to college,” I confess. “But I’ve always wanted to.”

“Really? How old are you?” Evelyn asks.

“I’m 23,” I reply.

“That’s plenty of time,” Isabella assures me. “What are you interested in?”

“Computers, actually,” I say, feeling a little more confident. “I’ve been learning a lot from Giovanni. He’s very clever.”

“Ah, perfect! You should look into taking some classes,” Evelyn encourages, her eyes shining with excitement.

As we continue to eat and talk, I find myself getting lost in the ebb and flow of the conversation. Isabella shares stories about her experiences as a lawyer, while Evelyn fills us in on the latest medical dramas. Between bites of our meals and sips of coffee, their laughter fills the air like a soothing balm, easing the tension that had been building up inside me.

“Ugh, this pregnancy,” Isabella groans, rubbing her swollen belly. “I can’t wait for it to be over.”

“Enjoy it while you can,” Evelyn teases. “Once the baby’s here, you’ll be wishing for these days back.”

“Hardly,” Isabella snorts, but her eyes shine with excitement at the thought of becoming a mother.

Eventually, we finish our meals and say our goodbyes. As they walk me to the door, I feel a newfound sense of camaraderie with these women. It’s refreshing to have friends outside of my current situation, and I’m grateful to Giovanni for making it happen.

Once outside, I text Giovanni to let him know I’m ready to be picked up. He arrives within ten minutes, his dark eyes searching mine as I slide into the passenger seat.

“So, how was lunch?” he asks, his voice a mix of curiosity and concern.

“Actually, it was really nice,” I admit, smiling at the memory. “Thank you for setting it up. I don’t understand why you did it, though.”

“Because it’s important for you to have friends outside of just work and home,” he replies, his eyes softening. “You need a support system.”

“I guess you’re right,” I agree, feeling touched by his thoughtfulness. Excited, I spill the details of our conversation, including the idea of taking college classes.

However, instead of sharing my enthusiasm, Giovanni’s face becomes guarded. “That’s a lot to manage right now, with everything going on,” he says cautiously.

“Come on, I don’t have much going on, and I can handle it!” I argue, my excitement deflating like a punctured balloon.

“Maybe,” he says. “But you’d need to register under your real name, and that could put you at risk.”

Tears well up in my eyes, frustration and disappointment overwhelming me. But before they can spill over, Giovanni reaches over and squeezes my hand gently.

“Please don’t cry,” he implores. “I’m not saying no, but give me a few days to look into it for you. Let me see if there’s a safe way for you to attend classes.”

“Okay,” I sniffle, nodding. “Thank you.”

The drive back to the mansion is quiet, the tension between us palpable. As Giovanni pulls into the garage, neither of us makes a move to leave the car. Finally, with a heavy sigh, he gets out and plugs the car in. I follow suit, my heart aching for reasons I can’t quite understand.

As I carefully remove my shoes in my room, I find myself wishing Giovanni had followed me or tried something with me in the car. Exhausted from the emotional rollercoaster of the morning, I crawl into bed, hoping a nap will help.

But as I close my eyes, all I can think about is Giovanni. My hands wander over my body, seeking solace in the thought of him as I drift off to sleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



Giovanni

A faint scent of citrus and jasmine wafts through the air as Lulu leans against my office door on Monday morning. “Victor is waiting outside,” she tells me, her brown eyes flicking down to a clipboard in her hands.

“Thanks,” I reply, expecting her usual enthusiastic request to join the meeting. But it doesn’t come. Instead, she offers a small smile and steps aside as Victor walks in. The curiosity flares within me, but I keep it contained for now.

“Who’s the new assistant?” Victor asks, glancing over his shoulder at Lulu. I wave him off dismissively, feeling the need to protect her identity.

“Just a temp,” I lie, shifting my focus back to the man in front of me. He narrows his green eyes, studying me with suspicion.

“You seem a little distracted,” he points out. I shake my head, dismissing his concerns.

“It’s nothing.” But my mind can’t help but wander back to Lulu and her unexpected silence. Victor hands me a folder

containing the information about the real estate portfolio we're considering acquiring.

"Are we planning to acquire the membership interests of the portfolio or transfer the properties by deed into a new joint venture?" I ask, scanning the numbers presented to me.

"I'll have to get with the lawyers to clarify that," Victor replies, adjusting his cufflinks. "I'll let you know."

"Alright," I nod, concluding the meeting. As soon as he leaves, I find myself drawn back to Lulu, needing to know what's on her mind.

"Hey," I say, leaning against her desk once I hear the elevator doors close behind Victor. "How are things?"

"Fine," she answers nonchalantly, her gaze fixed on the computer screen.

"Surprised you didn't want to sit in on the meeting," I probe, eyebrow raised. She shrugs, her curly black hair bouncing with the motion.

"Okay, what's up?" I insist, no longer able to contain my curiosity.

Lulu sighs, finally looking up at me. "I'm tired of asking. I want to be invited."

I can't help but laugh internally. Her stubbornness is just one of the many things that make her so captivating. "You're always such a princess," I tease.

Her eyes narrow slightly. "What does that mean?"

"Nothing," I reply, trying to play it off. "Just something I've noticed about you."

She rolls her eyes dramatically. “Have you had a chance to look into the college courses I want to take?” she asks, her voice revealing a hint of vulnerability.

“Not yet,” I admit, feeling a twinge of guilt. Her face falls, and she leans back in her chair with an over-the-top sigh.

“Better start looking, Giovanni,” she warns playfully, “or else I might just try running away again.”

I chuckle, shaking my head. “That’s probably not a good idea. You definitely won’t get to go then.”

Her gaze softens, sincerity replacing the teasing glint in her eyes. “Please don’t toy with me on this. I really want to do it.”

“I understand, Lulu.” I let out a reassuring sigh. “Don’t worry. I promise I’ll look into it for you.”

“Good,” she says, smirking. “Now go away. I have to try and hack into your systems again.”

I laugh at her audacity and walk back into my office, closing the door gently behind me. My mind should be on the business deals and negotiations that await me, but instead, it’s consumed by thoughts of Lulu and her desire for higher education.

I find myself lost in research, exploring college options nearby—something she could do online without being seen. I consider getting her a fake ID, but it would only create problems for her down the line when she tries to prove her credentials. The more I think about it, the more I want to help her achieve this goal. She may test my patience, but there’s no denying her spirit and intellect captivate me.

My father’s disapproval echoes in my thoughts, reminding me of the pain his expectations brought into my life. I refuse to

let Lulu experience that same hurt, even if she can be a thorn in my side.

The glow of my computer screen creates a soft light in the office as I scour through online college programs, completely losing track of time. My heart races with anticipation, each click fueling a fire within me to help Lulu achieve her dreams.

“Hey, boss,” Primo’s voice interrupts my thoughts, filling the room through the speakerphone. “Got an update on the gun trade situation.”

“Go ahead,” I reply, forcing myself to refocus on the present and our ongoing efforts to dismantle illegal arms dealings in our territory.

“Things are looking quiet for now,” he says, a hint of surprise in his tone. “We knew it wouldn’t be easy, but we’re making progress. A lot of mob families are laying low, waiting to see what happens next.”

“Good,” I say, trying to mask the relief in my voice. “And how are things with Lulu? Any word on her father’s trial?”

“Nothing much up here,” Primo admits. “It hasn’t affected us, so people aren’t really talking about it. Seems like nobody’s connected the dots yet.”

“Thank the heavens for that.” I run a hand through my hair, feeling the weight of the situation bearing down on me. The last thing we need is more attention from rival families or the law.

“Keep me updated on both fronts, alright?” I ask, doing my best to sound authoritative despite my gnawing concern.

“Of course.” With that, Primo hangs up, leaving me alone with my thoughts once more. But before I can return to my research, a knock on the door pulls me back to reality.

“Come in,” I call out, and Lulu enters, her eyes wide with curiosity.

“I heard you talking about my father,” she says softly, hesitating in the doorway. “Any news?”

“Nothing right now,” I admit, watching as disappointment clouds her features. “I know this is a difficult time for you, Lulu.”

“Do you?” She tilts her head, a challenge in her tone. “How could you possibly understand?”

“Because,” I say, meeting her gaze with determination, “my father recently went through the same thing, and he’s in jail for likely the rest of his life. So yes, I do understand.”

Her expression softens, and she nods. “Alright.” She swallows hard, then continues, “I’m just worried about my family. I’ve heard from my mom, but I can’t tell if she’s really safe or just trying to make me feel better.”

“I’m sorry for your worry,” I say, genuinely meaning it. “But you need to trust that things will improve once the trial is over.”

Lulu shakes her head, uncertainty etched on her face. “I’m not so sure. Without my father, the Miami underworld could become very dangerous.”

“Tell me more,” I urge, leaning back in my chair as Lulu hesitates in the doorway. The light from the office window catches her curls, casting a halo around her head that belies the darkness of our conversation.

“Before my father took over, Miami was a war zone,” she begins, eyes distant with memories. “Gangs fought for control, crime rates skyrocketed, and the legal system... it’s so corrupt it just let these things fester.”

I watch her closely, taking in the worry etched on her face as she speaks. My heart clenches at the thought of her family being caught in the crossfire of a mob war.

“Your father managed to bring some semblance of peace, then?” I ask, trying to make sense of the situation.

She nods, determination flashing across her features. “He did. But with him out of the picture, I’m afraid that it’ll all unravel. There’s a new gang that’s already starting to make big moves. I’m worried an all out war is about to start.”

My mind races, weighing potential actions and consequences. It’s clear Lulu is scared, and I feel responsible for her safety. “I hope it won’t come to that,” I tell her, a promise lacing my words.

“Me too,” she says, her voice barely above a whisper. Then, with a sudden spark, she adds, “But for now, focus on helping me with my college courses, okay?”

“Of course,” I reply, smiling at her persistence. She deserves a chance at a brighter future, and I find myself wanting to do that for her.

“Good.” Her lips curve into a small smile as she turns to leave, closing the office door behind her with a soft click, and leaving me alone with my thoughts.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



Lulu

I let out a sigh of frustration as another attempt to get into Giovanni's files fails. The clock ticks by agonizingly slow. There's nothing for me to do really; the job of Giovanni's assistant is actually pretty easy. It gives me plenty of time to try and hack into his system, although I'm being more careful this time about not leaving anything exposed like I did last time because I don't want him to get mad at me and I really don't want to let a virus into his stuff.

The clock says 12, and I finally decide that I can't take it anymore and I want to stop for lunch. Besides, I have my little secret date with Ethan planned. It feels somehow wrong to be sneaking around behind Giovanni's back. After all, he did promise that he would look into college courses for me.

But then I justify it because I'm not really doing anything wrong. I might be Giovanni's prisoner, but that doesn't mean I belong to him. He even said it himself that I need a support network and friends.

A little voice inside my head reminds that he certainly does *not* mean Ethan by that, by I brush it aside.

I knock on his office door and poke my head in. He's on the phone, and I make a motion like I'm eating to tell him I'm going to lunch. He waves and goes back to his intense-sounding call.

"See you later," I whisper, even though he probably didn't hear me.

I make my way over to the mall, dressed in a figure-hugging maroon knee-length dress with a sweetheart neckline. The fabric hugs my curves just right, and I feel confident. My heels, a pair of black stilettos with a delicate ankle strap, add an extra layer of sophistication to my outfit. I notice how Giovanni always seems to compliment my outfits now, especially my shoes, in the mornings, and his eyes seem to linger there. I remember the way he was so gentle with my ankle, but then also sucked my toes into his mouth, and a wave of arousal washes through me. I shake my head, reminding myself that I'm going to see Ethan, not Giovanni, and I need to stop thinking about him.

"Focus," I mumble under my breath as I step into the shop where Ethan works.

"Hey there," Ethan greets me with a soft kiss on my cheek, making my heart flutter just a little. "Ready to go?" He's so different from Giovanni; his sandy blond hair contrasts sharply with Giovanni's dark locks, and his blue eyes are soft and friendly, unlike Giovanni's piercing hazel stare.

I nod, trying to focus on the present moment and lock away thoughts of Giovanni. "Definitely."

We walk side by side through the bustling mall, chatting about our weekends and any new movies we want to see. His laughter is contagious, and I find myself giggling along with him.

“Where are we going for lunch?” I ask, eager to know his plans.

Ethan grins slyly, a mischievous glint in his eyes. “A very special place that I think you’ll love.” The excitement in his voice is palpable, but I can’t help but feel a little anxious.

“Okay, but I can’t be too long. I have to get back to the office in a reasonable amount of time.”

“Don’t worry about that,” he assures me, though his words do the opposite, sending an odd shiver through my body. But I shrug it off, trying not to read too much into it.

He leads me to a plain double door, opening it to reveal a barely lit service hallway. My stomach twists uncomfortably as we begin to walk down the narrow passage. “Why are we going this way?” I question, my voice echoing slightly against the walls.

“It’s a surprise. Just be patient, okay?” Ethan smiles, but something about it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. As we venture further down the hallway, my nerves start to fray, and I can’t contain my apprehension. “Ethan, where are we going?”

His grip on my wrist tightens, causing a wince of pain to escape my lips. I try to turn around, but he yanks me forward, bruising my wrist in the process. Before I can react, he opens an exit door and throws me into a cargo van parked behind the mall.

“Help!” I scream, my voice hoarse and desperate. But Ethan climbs into the van after me, fury etched across his face.

“I knew you were a filthy whore when you opened your legs for me in the store,” he snarls, unbuttoning his pants. “I’ve been wanting to fuck you since that day, and now I’m going to.”

I kick at him, clawing and fighting to keep him away, but he slaps me hard across the face, stunning me into silence. My ears ring as I hear the sound of his belt buckle clinking, and I realize he's stroking himself while pushing my skirt up and trying to shove my panties aside.

Giovanni, I need you, I think desperately, tears streaming down my cheeks. I don't know what to do, but I know this man is going to rape me if I can't get help. I continue to struggle, but every time I do, Ethan hits me, eventually covering my nose with his hand so forcefully that I can barely breathe. He attempts to shove himself inside me, but I keep twisting and fighting against him.

My vision blurs, and I'm not sure how much longer I can hold on.

Just as I feel the edges of my consciousness slipping away, a sudden burst of light floods the cargo van, accompanied by a flurry of commotion. My heart lurches in my chest; is this some twisted fantasy or is help really here?

"Get the fuck off her!" Giovanni's voice booms, somehow reaching my ears despite the ringing that still lingers.

A muffled sound catches my attention – it resembles a silenced gunshot – and then the van shakes violently with a deafening thud. Ethan releases his grip on me, and I gasp for air, adrenaline coursing through my veins.

I barely register hands gripping my arms before I'm pulled out of the van into the blinding daylight. My vision flickers, threatening to fade completely, but I fight to stay conscious. As my eyes adjust to the light, I see Giovanni towering over me, his face a mix of fury and concern. A part of me wonders if this could all be a cruel dream, but the intensity in his gaze feels too real.

“Lucia, are you okay?” he asks urgently, his voice shaking slightly.

“Y-yes... Thank you,” I stammer, tears streaming down my cheeks, relief washing over me.

I’m not sure exactly where I am. I think he might be holding me and walking us back to the office. My thoughts are a jumble, but one thing is clear: Giovanni saved me. He might have forced me into this life, but today, he was my hero.

“Lucia,” Giovanni calls my name once more, his tone softer now, “Let’s get you inside. You need to rest.”

Weakly, I nod, allowing him to take me away from the nightmare that almost unfolded. I know our relationship is far from perfect, but for now, all I can think about is how grateful I am for his presence.

“Thank you,” I whisper one more time, my voice barely audible as my vision starts to completely fade away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



Giovanni

The door to Lulu's room creaks open, and Evelyn steps out into the hallway where I'm pacing like a caged animal. Her face is etched with concern, but her eyes hold a flicker of reassurance.

"Stop worrying so much," she tells me, though she must know it's an impossible request. "Lulu's fine. She wasn't harmed."

"Did he touch her?" I demand, my blood boiling at the thought.

"No," Evelyn replies, shaking her head. "But she's delirious from the shock. I gave her some medicine to help her sleep. You need to let her rest and not push her to talk about what happened."

I run a hand through my hair, frustration clawing at my insides. I need answers. I want to understand what Lulu was doing with that man, how she allowed him to get her into a van. But I know Evelyn's right; Lulu needs to recover first.

"Okay," I concede, and Evelyn narrows her eyes at me, emphasizing her point.

“Promise me you won’t wake her up just to interrogate her.”

“*Fine!*” I almost snap, but catch myself in time. Evelyn’s only doing her job, after all. “Thank you,” I say instead, my voice low and strained.

She nods.

“I’ll be back tomorrow to check on Lulu,” she says before leaving.

As she passes Teddy leaning against a wall, he straightens up and saunters over to me. “Van situation’s taken care of,” he says nonchalantly, his blue eyes searching my face for a reaction.

“Yeah,” I mutter, my mind still racing with thoughts of Lulu.

Teddy raises an eyebrow. “So, what happened? How’d this guy even get to her if she’s supposed to be with you?”

I sigh, knowing I can’t avoid the conversation. “She went to lunch, must’ve met up with him then.”

“Ah.” Teddy reaches into his pocket and produces a cell phone, handing it over. “Dead guy’s phone. Can’t unlock it, but figured you might have better luck.”

I take the device, my fingers itching to discover its secrets, and head for my office. Teddy calls out as I leave, “You’re welcome,” but I’m already consumed by the task at hand.

My heart pounds as I connect the cell phone to my decoder. Within minutes, I have the passcode and access to its contents. Scrolling through the messages, I find mundane exchanges about his work schedule and casual conversations

with friends. But then, I stumble upon a conversation history that makes my blood boil.

I almost crush the phone in my hand as I read the back-and-forth between him and someone who must be Lulu, using a number I don't recognize. My fingers fly across the keyboard, locating the provider for the unfamiliar number. It's a burner phone. Hacking into it, I find the GPS log shows its last location was right here, inside my mansion.

Anger surges through me. How did she get a burner phone? This guy had to have given it to her. That's the only explanation that makes sense.

The exhaustion from today weighs heavily on me, but sleep is out of the question. Instead, I throw myself into work, trying to distract my mind from thoughts of Lulu. The night passes, and I manage a few hours of fitful rest before an alert informs me that Lulu is awake.

Pushing away from my desk, I head toward her rooms, my emotions a tangled mess. I knock on her door and hear her groggy reply, "Come in." As I enter, the early morning sunlight casts a warm glow over the room, softening the edges of the elegant furniture and plush furnishings.

Lulu lies in bed, her curly black hair splayed across the pillow. Even in the aftermath of her ordeal, there's a beauty about her that takes my breath away. I struggle to keep my anger in check, unsure how long I can maintain control.

"Hey," I say softly, trying to suppress any hint of frustration in my voice.

"Hi," she responds, looking up at me with those chocolate eyes that always seem to see straight through me.

“Can we talk?” I ask, knowing this conversation is inevitable but dreading it nonetheless.

“Okay,” she agrees hesitantly, her gaze flicking away from mine.

Tears well up in Lulu’s eyes as I sit down on the bed next to her. My heart aches, unsure of how to navigate this unfamiliar territory. “How are you feeling?” I ask gently.

“Okay, I guess,” she snuffles, trying to hold back her tears. “More embarrassed than anything.”

I reach out and place a comforting hand on her arm, attempting to convey understanding. “What happened?” I inquire, my voice soft.

She shifts nervously, looking down at her hands. “It’s okay,” I reassure her, “I just want to know what happened so I can protect you from this sort of thing in the future.”

Lulu takes a deep breath, finally admitting, “I agreed to meet him for lunch, but instead of taking me there, he led me down a service hallway and threw me into the van.”

My anger flares, barely contained beneath the surface. “Why did you agree to go with him?” I demand, struggling to keep my voice even.

“I don’t know,” she admits, her voice small. “I just... I liked the attention he was giving me.”

“Guys like that will love bomb you just to get what they want,” I warn her, my words laced with frustration. “They’re dangerous. You need to be careful. I’m surprised you don’t already know that.”

Her brow furrows, and she asks, “Why would I already know that?” Confessing, she adds, “My father kept me under

lock and key, just like you do.”

Guilt washes over me, but I push it aside, convinced it’s for her own good. “You shouldn’t have accepted the phone from him,” I tell her sternly.

“What phone?” she asks, confusion etched on her face.

“The burner phone you used to communicate with him.” As realization dawns in her eyes, she looks nervous.

“Lulu,” I start to say. “He did give you the phone, yes?”

She fidgets in the bed. “Well, not exactly.”

I take a deep breath to steady my anger. I press on, “Where’s the phone, Lulu?”

She hesitates, but I persist. “There’s no use hiding it now. I know you have it, and I can easily hack into it and deactivate it.” With a defeated sigh, she reaches under the mattress and pulls out the burner phone.

My mind races with questions and doubts, my pulse pounding in my ears. Yet, as I look at Lulu – vulnerable, frightened – I know I must find a way to protect her, even from herself.

“Where did you get the phone?” I ask, my voice firm but not unkind. Lulu looks down at her hands, twisting the hem of the blanket.

“I bought it at the mall,” she admits quietly. “The day I bought all those shoes.”

“Of course, you did,” I sigh, realizing I’ve underestimated her ability to behave. My chest tightens as I consider the implications. “Don’t do it again, Lulu.”

She looks up at me, defiance flickering in her eyes. “I can’t guarantee that. I need to get home to my family.”

“Miami isn’t safe for you,” I remind her, trying to keep my tone even. “You need to let that go.”

Her anger flares, and she snaps, “The only reason you’re keeping me here is because your reputation is at risk. It doesn’t have anything to do with me.”

“That’s not true,” I reply, hurt by her accusation. She challenges me further.

“Then trust me not to say anything about you and just let me go!”

“Absolutely not,” I growl, my patience wearing thin. She glares at me, her eyes blazing with fury.

“Why don’t you trust me?” she demands.

I scoff, my own anger rising. “How can I when you behave like this?”

Her expression shifts from anger to confusion. “How do you always know where I am? It’s unnerving, and I hate it. I don’t understand!”

“It’s for your protection,” I answer tersely. She narrows her eyes, unsatisfied with my response.

“Protection? What do you mean?” I hesitate, knowing that revealing the truth would be a mistake. She keeps pressing, her voice taking on a desperate edge. “What did you do?”

“Rest, Lulu,” I urge, standing up to leave. But she clambers out of bed and grabs my arm, her grip surprisingly strong.

“Tell me!” she shouts, her eyes searching mine. I sigh, defeated.

“Fine,” I relent. “When you were being stitched up, I had a GPS chip implanted in your shoulder.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



Lulu

My heart pounds in my chest as Giovanni utters those words that send an icy shock through my veins. “You did what?” I can hardly believe it, the anger boiling up inside me like a wild storm.

“I put a GPS device in your shoulder before they stitched you up,” he repeats, his voice steady despite the tension hanging in the air like heavy fog.

A primal scream bursts from deep within me, one I’ve never let out before. I rush to the bed, clawing at my shoulder with desperation and fury. How could he do this to me? I feel like a trapped animal, marked and tracked by some twisted hunter.

Giovanni is on me in a flash, pinning me down and holding my wrists above my head.

“Stop it!” he yells, but all I can do is spit in his face, seething with rage.

“I will cut this thing out of my shoulder! How dare you do something like this to me? I’m not some dog that you can microchip!”

His eyes lock onto mine.

“I did it for your own good. It was for your protection. It still is!”

But I’m having none of it. The fire in me burns hotter as I struggle against him. “That’s bullshit, Giovanni! You did this to make your life easier, without thinking about me at all! Let me go!”

“Lucia,” he says firmly, “I’m not letting you go.”

“Then why?” I demand, my breath hitching in my throat. He doesn’t respond – instead, he kisses me. His lips meet mine, desperate and hungry, yet somehow gentle. It catches me off guard, but my anger quickly flares up again. I spit at him once more, only for him to kiss me again with even more intensity.

Giovanni’s lips crush mine with an almost overwhelming force, like a wildfire blazing out of control. His hands hold my head in place as the kiss deepens, his tongue pressing against mine and exploring with fierce determination. The intensity of the moment is undeniable, a force that cannot be denied or contained. My resolve weakens, and I find myself giving in, returning the passionate embrace.

But my anger hasn’t subsided. In the heat of the moment, I bite down hard on his lip, tasting blood – the metallic flavor coating my tongue. He pulls back with a pained gasp and touches his wounded lip.

Giovanni flips me over and then his breath is hot against my ear. “You’re such a brat. Always trying to run away. If you do it again,” he warns, “I’ll put you in a cage.”

His words should scare me, but instead, they ignite something within me.

“Oh, yeah?” I goad him. His hand starts to caress my backside.

“Maybe I want that, hm?” I ask him. “Maybe I want to see whether you’ll really do it. Know just how much of a man you really are.” I can’t help but moan as his hand comes down roughly on my behind, the sting of pain igniting arousal through me.

He pulls back and I muster all my strength and shove him onto the bed. Climbing on top of him, I hold him down with a fierce determination that surprises even me.

In one swift motion, Giovanni rips my panties off. It’s as if we both have the same idea. Because, as I move to sit on his face, he pulls my hips forward and soon I find myself riding his face. My hips gyrate, grinding against his lips and tongue as he tastes me.

“Fuck, Lulu,” he says. “You taste so fucking good and you look incredible.”

I don’t respond. I just continue to ride his face, bringing myself closer and closer to my goal.

“Come on my tongue,” he moans, sensing that I’m close. “I want to taste every last bit of you.”

As I ride his face, I move my fingers down to tease my clit, and before long, I climax – the sensation washing over me with an intensity I’ve never experienced before. My body trembles, my breath coming in ragged gasps as I feel my release spread across his face like a victorious claim.

The adrenaline from my climax still courses through my veins when Giovanni abruptly flips me over. My heart races from the sudden movement, and I find myself staring up at him, his dark eyes filled with a wild intensity.

“Clean my face,” he orders, and I obey without hesitation, licking my juices off of his skin. The taste is intoxicating, and I feel a thrill as I run my tongue across his lips.

When I’m done, he grins wickedly and pulls me to my knees. He teases me with his cock, hitting my face with it.

“Just how much do you want this cock, brat?” he asks me, humiliating me. “Is that why you’re misbehaving so badly? Because you want this sort of punishment?”

The words that spill from his mouth are degrading, but they only serve to fuel the fire inside me. He denies me the ability to suck on his cock, watching my frustration grow with every passing second.

Finally, he shoves his cock deep down my throat, relentlessly face-fucking me. His hands grip the back of my head, and I can barely breathe. But he doesn’t stop.

“God, I love hearing you choke on my cock. It’s so fucking hot, Lulu.” He growls as he continues to thrust his hips into my face. “I can’t wait to fuck the brattiness out of you.”

Internally, I wonder if he’s right – is this what I’ve been needing all along?

Just before he’s about to come, he pulls me off his cock and bends me over the edge of the bed. He spears his fingers into me.

“Do you think you’re wet enough?” he asks me. Gasping for air.

“Yes,” I say.

He pulls his fingers out and shoves them into my mouth, forcing me to taste myself once more. “You’re not even close

to wet enough,” he scolds. “I want your arousal dripping down your thighs before I slide my cock into you.”

His fingers return to my pussy, working me higher and higher until I think I might come again. I tell him as much, and he laughs darkly. “You’re such a slut, coming a second time for me when you can’t even figure out what you want.”

As his words slice through the air, I wonder if there’s some truth to them. And as the heat between us grows more intense, I know I’m on the edge of losing myself once again – but this time, it’s not just in pleasure; it’s in Giovanni’s control over me.

“Here, lick this,” he says, forcing his fingers into my mouth. I groan as I taste my arousal on him. He flips me over and rolls a condom onto himself before he lines himself up with my entrance. I’m looking into his eyes, but he seems distant somehow.

“Please, just go slow,” I whisper as he finally enters me. The pain is sharp and immediate, tearing through my body as he pushes inside. He stops abruptly, his eyes searching mine for any sign of discomfort.

“Are you okay?” he asks, concern etched on his face. Tears well up in my eyes, but I nod my head.

“Keep going.”

He pulls out slightly, then pushes back in, more gently this time. But it’s not enough. My desire for him overrides the pain, and I urge him to go faster, harder – just like he was going to give it to me earlier.

Giovanni hesitates, but my determination wins out. He starts to thrust fast and hard, every movement sending a jolt of agony through me. But as the pain begins to blur with

pleasure, something unexpected happens: instead of degrading me, he apologizes.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t stop,” he says, his voice strained. “Your pussy feels so good, and you asked for this. I’m just giving you what you wanted.”

His words only fuel my desire, and I cling to him, urging him on. The last of the tears leave my eyes as he finally pulses deep inside of me. We lay there for a moment, our breathing heavy and uneven, sweat slicking our bodies.

In the aftermath, I realize that I’ve lost my virginity to Giovanni – and I’m grateful. My father won’t be able to sell it off like some commodity now. It’s mine, and I’ve given it willingly to the man who has consumed my thoughts and desires for so long.

But when he tries to pull me into his embrace, I can’t accept his kindness. I slip out of bed and hurry to the bathroom, locking the door behind me. His footsteps follow, and he knocks.

“Lulu, open up!”

“Go away!” I yell, but he doesn’t relent.

“Lulu, I will break down this door,” he says in a threatening tone.

“Go ahead,” I dare him.

Instead, I hear a soft click as the lock releases, and there he stands – naked, his body glistening with sweat.

I take in the sight of him: the dark hair plastered to his forehead, his eyes filled with concern, and the lean muscles that seem to ripple beneath his skin. My attraction to him is

undeniable, but I can't quite comprehend what just happened between us.

"I thought you were going to break down the door," I say, my voice wavering.

"Picking the lock is the same thing," he replies, a hint of a smile playing on his lips.

Despite everything, I can't help but feel drawn to him – this complex man who straddles the line between darkness and light.

Giovanni's tall, lean frame approaches me, trapping me against the bathroom vanity. The scent of our mingled sweat and desire fills the small space as he leans against me, his breath warm on my neck. "You need to let me take care of you," he murmurs, his voice soothing over my frayed emotions. "Stop fighting me."

I swallow hard, my eyes stinging with unshed tears. "I don't know how to do that," I admit, feeling more vulnerable than I ever have before.

"Let me show you," he says softly, his eyes searching mine. "Follow my lead just this once. Let me do something nice for you."

Hesitation gnaws at me, but there's something in his eyes – a sincerity that I can't ignore. "Okay," I whisper, giving in.

With surprising tenderness, he scoops me up into his arms and carries me back to the bed. He tucks us both under the covers, and despite my earlier resistance, I find myself curling into him, craving his warmth and comfort. His fingers stroke my hair gently, soothing away the tangled mess of thoughts and emotions that had been plaguing me.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, his breath tickling my ear. “I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay,” I reply, my voice barely audible. “I should’ve told you. But I wanted it.”

He lets out a slow, shaky breath. “I’ll make it up to you somehow.”

We lay there in silence for a while, the heaviness of our actions settling between us like a dense fog. But then Giovanni breaks the silence, his voice low and apologetic. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about the GPS chip. But if I hadn’t done it, I wouldn’t have known Ethan was trying to kidnap you. I wouldn’t have been able to save you.”

I don’t respond at first, weighing his words carefully in my mind. “The device needs to come out,” I say firmly.

Giovanni hesitates, his expression pained. “It’s going to be very painful because of the scar tissue. But I can deactivate it.”

“Then do it,” I demand, anger flaring within me once more.

He sighs, his hand coming up to cup my chin gently, turning my face towards his. “Right now, there are people who want to harm you. I won’t let that happen.” He pauses, his eyes searching mine for something indiscernible.

“Why do you care if I’m killed? It would solve a problem for you, wouldn’t it?” I choke out.

Instead of answering my question, he leans in and captures my lips with his, the kiss gentle yet insistent. “I won’t let anything happen to you,” he murmurs against my mouth, but he doesn’t address my question.

As I drift off to sleep, nestled in Giovanni's arms, I wonder if his silence is because he'd have to admit something he doesn't want to admit. My feelings for him are as complex as the man himself – this dangerous, caring enigma. But still, I can't be sure if I trust him or not yet.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



Lulu

The sunlight creeps through the curtains, and I try to put what happened between me and Giovanni last night out of my mind. In some ways, I don't even want to think about it. He was kind and gentle afterwards. He ended up getting into bed with me, but he didn't stay the night. I'm not sure that I expected him to, but I didn't realize that I would be bothered by the fact that he didn't.

“Damn you, Giovanni,” I whisper to myself as I stare at the empty space beside me in the large bed. “Why do you have to make things so complicated?”

I reach for the remote, hoping the television will help clear my head. The news reports are all about the growing violence in Miami and my father's trial. My stomach twists with anxiety. I can't take it anymore, so I switch off the TV and grab my phone, desperate for a connection to my family.

Hola mama. How are you holding up?

Hi mija, we're doing our best. Safe for now, and that's what's important.

Can you guys go out? How's Sofia doing?

Staying inside mostly, but don't worry about us. Your sister misses her friends and school, but she's holding up. We love you. Be strong.

Tears fill my eyes as I read her message. I know they're trying to protect me by hiding their struggles, but it only makes me feel more helpless and isolated.

Love you too.

I wipe away the tears streaming down my cheeks.

The door to my room opens gently, and Evelyn and Isabella walk in. Their faces immediately crease with concern as they take in my tear-streaked face. I jump up from my bed and rush to the door, peeking into the hallway to make sure Giovanni isn't lurking nearby. They exchange puzzled glances as I scrutinize every corner of the room, searching for any hidden listening devices.

"Hey, Lulu," Evelyn says softly, her eyes full of empathy. "What's going on? Why are you so jumpy?"

I hesitate, biting my lip. I can't tell them about the GPS implant in my shoulder; I don't know how they'd react, or if it could somehow be used against me. Instead, I offer a vague explanation. "It's just... I found out something about Giovanni that's made me really wary of him."

"Care to share?" Isabella asks, sensing my reluctance.

"Can we sit?" I suggest, motioning towards the cozy armchairs near the window.

Isabella clears her throat, leaning forward with her elbows on her knees. "Listen, Lulu, when I first started working for Primo, he was distant and even downright nasty. He didn't

trust me to handle his murder trial. But over time, he showed his true colors –” She pauses to smile at the memory. “The boys may seem gruff on the outside, except for Teddy, of course, but underneath, they’re caring and good guys.”

I nod, trying to process her words, but my heart refuses to accept the possibility that Giovanni might be different. “I understand what you’re saying, Isabella, but what Giovanni did... I don’t think it can ever be forgiven.”

Her gaze softens, and she reaches for my hand. “I don’t know what happened, and I won’t push you to tell me, but whatever it is, I’m sure he has his reasons.”

“Maybe,” I murmur, though doubt coils in the pit of my stomach like a snake ready to strike.

As we sit there, the sun rising higher in the sky, I can’t help but feel the weight of my family’s situation pressing down on me. Their safety rests on my shoulders, and I won’t let Giovanni keep me helpless any longer. No matter how Isabella tries to defend him, I can’t trust him – not when so much is at stake.

I make small talk with the sisters for another few minutes. Sensing my unease, Evelyn guides the conversation back to why they’re here.

“Okay,” Evelyn says, her voice gentle but firm as she approaches my side. “Let’s see how you’re doing.” She sets her medical bag down on the table and pulls out a stethoscope, draping it around her neck. Her eyes meet mine, full of concern. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” I say, my voice barely a whisper. It feels strange to lie to her like this, but the truth is too tangled for words right now.

Evelyn nods, though I can see the doubt in her eyes. She presses the cold metal disk of the stethoscope against my chest, listening to my heart. “The medicine has probably worn off by now,” she says softly. “If you need someone to talk to about what’s happened, just let us know. These things can linger in your mind and become really unhealthy.”

“Thank you,” I manage, forcing a smile. My heart flutters under her touch, and I wonder if she can hear the fear and uncertainty it holds.

“Rest up,” Isabella adds, rubbing my arm reassuringly. “When you feel better, we should plan another lunch.”

“Sounds good.” I nod, appreciating their support despite the storm brewing inside me.

With another round of goodbyes, they leave the room, closing the door behind them. Alone once more, I stare at the ceiling, unable to shake the memory of Giovanni’s touch and Isabella’s words. Maybe Primo was like that in the beginning – distant, untrusting – but does Giovanni have the same capacity for change? I’m not so sure.

I decide that I can’t just sit here and let my family suffer. If my father is convicted – a verdict that could come any day now – someone needs to take over and protect them. That someone has to be me. I won’t let Giovanni keep me under lock and key any longer, no matter what his reasons might be.

A plan begins to take shape in my mind, an idea so crazy it just might work. I’ve been trying to hack into Giovanni’s systems from the outside, but maybe getting to him from the inside would be more effective. Tonight, I’ll sneak into his office and see what I can find. He doesn’t always lock his doors, perhaps out of a misguided sense of security. But he’s

invited a viper into his nest, and he doesn't know it yet, but I bite hard.

I swallow the fear rising in my throat and push myself up from the chair, determination fueling every step. Tonight, I'll take control of my life once more – for my family, for myself, and for our future.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



Lulu

I creep through the mansion, the moon casting its silvery glow on the cold marble floors. It's the wee hours of the morning, and the place feels a little bit creepier than normal. My bare feet pad softly against the chilly tiles, sending shivers up my legs. I think about what Giovanni told me about there being prison cells in the basement and how, when we were fucking, he said that he should put me in a cage. The thought sends a chill down my spine.

Being out at this hour and what I'm about to do feels thrilling. It feels like I'm defying him, and he deserves it. I don't know, maybe I should feel bad, but I haven't even seen him since he took my virginity. He told me he was going to make it up to me. Well, he's doing a pretty bad job.

Statues loom around me, casting eerie shadows on the walls as I make my way towards his office. I think I hear someone behind me, and my heart leaps into my throat, but I tell myself it's just my nerves playing tricks on me.

Suddenly, someone taps me on the shoulder, and I yelp, turning around with my heart pounding in my chest. It's

Teddy, his blonde hair tousled and his blue eyes twinkling with curiosity.

“Hey, what’re you doing up?” he asks, a smirk playing across his lips.

“Uh, sleepwalking?” I reply sheepishly, knowing it’s a weak excuse.

Teddy chuckles. “It’s amazing that you can have a conversation while you’re sleeping.”

“I’ve since woken up,” I admit, trying to regain some composure.

“Then you’re just walking, I guess,” he teases. “But you’re heading in the wrong direction for your bedroom.”

“Really? Oh... is that true?” I feign ignorance, hoping he’ll drop the subject.

“Want me to walk you back?” Teddy offers, but I quickly shake my head.

“No, it’s no worries. I’ll find my way back. Thanks, though.” I pause for a moment and then ask, “Why are you up at this hour anyway?”

“Sometimes, depending on the job, I work weird hours,” he explains casually. “You should get some rest too.”

I nod in agreement, and as we part ways, Teddy adds, “Oh, by the way, Giovanni’s birthday is November 10th, 1989. Maybe you’ll need that information someday.”

I wonder why he would tell me that, but he just winks and saunters off down the hallway, leaving me with a sense of foreboding and the cold tiles beneath my feet.

I finally make my way to Giovanni's office, my heart pounding like a wild animal inside my chest. My hand trembles as I reach for the door handle, cold and metallic against my fingertips. I swallow hard, trying to calm my nerves, and turn it slowly.

The door creaks open, and I hold my breath, waiting for any alarms or signs that I've been caught. Nothing. Relief washes over me in waves, and I step into the room, the door clicking shut behind me. The darkness is almost suffocating, yet strangely comforting at the same time. Shadows dance on the walls, cast by moonlight filtering through the windows, making the statues and other objects in the room seem more menacing than they really are.

My bare feet pad softly across the cold floor as I approach his desk, feeling the chill seep through my skin. I can't help but wonder if the GPS chip inside me is betraying my every move, but I hope Giovanni isn't monitoring me so closely while I'm in the mansion. The thought of him knowing all my secrets, even when I'm alone, makes me shiver involuntarily. I let out a small laugh, thinking about how ridiculous it would be if he knew when I was masturbating, too.

As I scan the room, I notice the bookcases lining the walls, filled with countless books and trinkets. But something else catches my eye – a pair of gorgeous satin red heels tucked away in a back corner. It's an odd addition to his collection, but perhaps they hold some special meaning for him. I shake my head, dismissing the thought, and focus on the task at hand.

I sit down at his desk and pull the keyboard toward me. The computer screen lights up, asking for a password. Racking my brain for any clues about Giovanni, Teddy's words

suddenly echo in my mind. His birthday... could he be that predictable with his passwords? I type in the date, but the computer rejects it. Frustrated, I try entering the date backward on a whim – and to my utter shock, I'm in.

I can't believe it. I stare at the desktop, feeling a strange mix of triumph and disbelief. The power I've been seeking is right here in front of me, yet I don't know where to begin. My priority, though, is disabling the GPS chip. I need my freedom back.

I start running through his files, searching for anything that might help me, but I keep hitting dead ends. It's like there's hardly anything useful on his home computer – which only serves to frustrate me more. It's probably why his password was so simplistic.

I go through his folders systematically, desperate to find something incriminating, something I can use to blackmail him into submission. But Giovanni isn't stupid; he wouldn't leave such information out in the open for anyone to find.

Determined, I delve deeper into the root of his computer and input some code to reveal all of his hidden files. My heart races as I hit enter, waiting for the results. A list of files appears, and I double click on the first one.

And just like that, I can't believe what I've found.

A video pops up and starts to play, and I'm grateful there's no sound, even though I really want to know what it sounds like. It's a video of Giovanni. He's naked, and there's a girl on the bed. I can't tell where they are. It's a place I've never seen before but looks like it might be some hotel in the city or maybe a penthouse apartment.

She's lying on the bed wearing nothing but a pair of super high heels, and I can't help but look at her with envy. Glancing down at my body, I'm reminded that I'm a lot curvier than this girl. She seems like she's skin over bones, but I have hips and definitely have a pretty large ass. Pushing my self-doubt aside, I continue to watch.

Giovanni looks just like he always does – strong and beautifully lean, his tattoos glinting in the low light. I watch the scene unfold. He's eating her pussy and pinching her nipples while she takes her heels and digs them into his back, sliding them up his back and leaving red scratches. He's licking her so intensely; it's obvious that he's enjoying this.

And then he works his way down to the shoes. He's kissing and licking her ankle, and then he takes the shoes off and starts sucking on her toes. I remember what that felt like when he did it to me, and she definitely seems to enjoy it as much as I did because she's moaning a ton – I can tell, even without any audio.

Then he takes her feet and she wraps them on either side of his cock, rubbing him with her feet. He's clearly loving it, and I can see his mouth move in what appears to be heavy curses. Then he's flipping her over, as she slides the shoes back on, and he starts fucking her hard. I can tell that she's struggling to take all of him, and I feel a slight swell of pride that I can take him and handle his rage and intensity better than this skinny bitch.

And then he's flipping her back over and stroking himself. I think she might kneel in front of him to catch his cum, but she doesn't. Instead, she lays back on the bed, plays with herself, and puts her legs up slightly so that the shoes are right

in front of him. And then he leans his head back and comes all over what looks to be her extremely expensive shoes.

The video stops, and I can't believe it. I click another one open, and it's a different girl, naked, this time in a pair of thigh-high boots. I watch the reel faster this time, and it follows the same pattern: Giovanni always worshipping her feet, her giving him a footjob, and then him coming on her feet or shoes.

I look around the room desperately. This is exactly what I need. I find a USB drive and quickly put all the videos onto it, then encrypt it. I shove it down my bra and feel a sense of exhilaration over what I just found.

This is going to give me what I need to blackmail him into letting me go. It's not even just porn that he can deny is his – he's in these videos. I shut down the computer, and I'm about to leave the office when I realize I'm not done yet.

I feel turned on and over-the-top aroused. I just hacked into Giovanni's computer and found his porn, watched him fuck probably prostitutes, and come on their feet. It intrigues me as much as all of this excites me.

I want to feel completely in control and leave my mark on this moment. I make my way over to the bookshelves and grab the red stilettos out of the back corner, sliding them on. They fit just right and feel amazing as I walk in them. Filled with a newfound sense of power, I walk back over to the desk.

I slide my hand over the smooth surface of Giovanni's desk, lingering on its cool touch. Closing my eyes, I let my imagination take over, picturing myself pressed down onto the glass, vulnerable and exposed.

The fantasy strengthens, consuming me as I pull my clothes off and over my head, letting them fall in a disheveled mess at my feet. Stepping out of the pile, I lay myself down on the desk, shivering as the cold glass connects with my warm skin. I imagine myself as one of those girls from the videos – naked except for the shoes he seems to adore.

My fingers dance across my body, circling my clit and teasing my nipples. Soft moans escape my lips as I envision Giovanni eating me out while I slide my heels against his strong back. I can almost feel the tantalizing pressure of his tongue on my clit, inside me, driving me closer and closer to that mind-shattering orgasm he's so skilled at providing.

“Shit,” I whisper, lost in the fantasy. I picture myself playfully resisting him, wanting him to demonstrate his strength and dominance. He would pin me down effortlessly, his firm grip holding me in place before he'd start fucking me brutally hard. My cries would be met with a stern command:

“Shut the fuck up and take my dick like a good girl, or I'll punish you even more.”

The thought of his dick filling me again sends shivers racing down my spine. In my mind, he pulls out, his mouth finding my toes and sucking on them until he's stroking himself above me. My own fingers work furiously, bringing me closer to climax as I imagine him coming all over the shoes while I drench his pristine desk with my juices.

Panting, I lay there, my sweat mixing with my cum on the desk. It feels empowering to be in control like this, to assert myself in such a daring way. Slowly, I get up from the desk and put my clothes back on, glancing at the evidence of my actions glistening on the desk. I take off the shoes and place

them right in the center of the desk, a bold statement of what transpired.

I kiss the little thumb drive in my hand, filled with power and anticipation, and tiptoe my way back to bed. As I climb into the covers and let sleep claim me, I know Giovanni will come to find me tomorrow after leaving that calling card for him. And honestly, I'm excited about it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



Giovanni

Shivering, I meet Primo at the docks. The early morning air wraps around me like an icy embrace, and I dread what's ahead. The Irish have become increasingly difficult to deal with due to their missing income, and they blame us for it. Primo and I arranged this meeting with their leader and second in command, hoping to find a resolution. When I took over the family business, I didn't think it would be this hard to turn things legitimate.

"Are you alright?" Primo asks, his eyes filled with concern.

"Yes," I reply, but he's right—I'm distracted. My mind keeps drifting to Lulu, the way she moaned beneath me, how she never told me she was a virgin. I should've known, but I got so wrapped up in her that nothing else mattered. Her words about her father, her hunger for male attention—it was all so obvious. Clenching my fists, anger simmers within me as I remember the whole situation.

Primo clears his throat, drawing my attention back to the present. A man approaches us, and I force myself to focus on

him.

“Are you Seamus?” Primo asks the newcomer.

“No, I’m Declan O’Leary, second in command,” he replies, a smug grin on his face. I can tell Primo is annoyed by this revelation. “I’m surprised you don’t recognize me, Primo. We’ve met before. Our first in command sent me in his stead.”

“Of course he did,” Primo mutters under his breath. Aloud, he continues, “Well, we’re here to talk and come to a resolution that works for both families. We’re not here to prostrate ourselves.”

Declan’s expression sours. “Because of your sudden and unreasonable refusal to purchase guns, our family has suffered a significant loss of income. This has made other aspects of our operation very difficult, and we expect you to cover those losses.”

“Look,” Primo says, his voice firm and steady. “We’re not going to cover those losses. We gave plenty of notice before ceasing the gun trade, and as you know, we’re not exactly ruled by standard contract rules here.”

My thoughts race with various scenarios while Primo stands his ground. I know that this meeting must end with an agreement, but my mind keeps betraying me, pulling me back to Lulu. Her touch, her scent, the vulnerability in her eyes—everything about her makes it near impossible to concentrate on anything else.

“Fine,” Declan says, his voice dripping with irritation. “I agree that we need to make things right. So, what do you think making things right looks like? What number do you think is acceptable?”

“We’ll cover what we would have paid you for 90 days. That will give you time to set something else up,” Primo says.

Declan’s sly smile sends a shiver down my spine. “No, I don’t think that’s quite right. I think the figure should be what our actual losses are.” Then he utters an astronomical dollar figure. Primo’s face turns red with anger, but I step in before he can say anything.

“Declan, there’s no rational basis for that sort of number,” I tell him, trying to keep my voice steady. “The amounts your family was paid to transport the guns were just a fraction of that.”

He argues back. “Your decision has caused us to lose other business, and we’ve had to adjust our equipment to different sources of income.”

I shake my head, frustrated.

“That’s not how these sorts of things work,” I respond. “Even if we were to cover your losses, we wouldn’t be responsible for those consequential losses.”

“Again,” he smirks, “we’re not governed by contract law here. Those were Primo’s words, remember?”

I glance at Primo, who clenches his jaw. It’s clear this negotiation is going nowhere. “We’ll take what you’ve said under advisement,” I tell Declan. “We’ll need to get back to you on this.”

“Very well,” he replies. “But know that the offer to settle is open for seven days.”

“Seven days?” I ask, my heart pounding. “And then what happens?”

He grins maliciously. “I think you already know.”

As we drive back to the mansion, Primo and I sit in silence, weighed down by the heavy atmosphere. Pulling into the garage, we both exhale deeply.

“What do you think we should do?” Primo asks, concern etched on his face.

“I honestly don’t know,” I admit. “But it feels like they’re doing this to us on purpose. They know we can’t—or won’t—agree to pay that amount. They’re playing some game, and I’m just not sure what their angle is yet.”

“Agreed,” Primo nods. “We need to find out.”

I get out of the car and ask if he’s coming in. He shakes his head. “No, I want to get back to Isabella. She’s getting more and more pregnant by the day.”

“Alright,” I say, forcing a small smile. “Take care of her, and I’ll see what I can think up as far as the Irish situation goes.”

I walk back into the mansion, my thoughts a tangled mess of stress about the Irish and Lulu. As I open my office door, I immediately notice that things seem out of place. A pair of shoes sits atop my desk, and confusion washes over me. I step closer, realizing they’re the shoes from my bookcase. How the hell did they get here?

My eyes scan the desk, and I find evidence of Lulu all over the glass surface. Swiping my finger through the hazy, dried-up mixture, I bring it to my nose, then my lips. It smells of her arousal and release. I know her so well now; intimately, I’m sure of it. I almost have to give her credit for this little stunt she pulled. What must she have done on my desk? The thought sends a shiver down my spine.

A part of me wants to drag her by the hair to my office and make her reenact exactly what she did for me, complete with the shoes. And as I think about it, I decide that's exactly what I'll do. My cock twitches at the thought. I need the release, and then I can properly deal with the Irish situation. Clearly, she's leaving a signal that she wants it too.

I make my way over to her room, anticipation and irritation warring within me. Knocking on the door, she opens it, looking like the cat that ate the canary. My hackles rise, and I wonder what else she's done. Stepping inside the room, she backs up as I close the door behind me.

"Alright, Lulu," I say, my voice low and dangerous. "What's going on?"

She meets my gaze unflinchingly and says something I don't expect to hear. "Give me the codes to deactivate the GPS device in my shoulder, or I'm going to show the world what I found on your computer."

My eyes darken. "And, what exactly did you find on my computer?"

"Videos," she says. "Lots and lots of videos. You know, the ones with hookers. And, I'd be more than happy to share them with the world."

"You've miscalculated," I tell her coldly. "I can just keep you locked up here without access to the internet."

"No, you're the one who's miscalculated," she counters, a defiant fire in her eyes. "I've already arranged for it to go live on the internet if I don't get the code from you within the next twenty-four hours."

"Damn it, Lulu!" I grit my teeth, trying to control the anger surging through me. "You have no idea what you're doing."

“Maybe not,” she admits, “but I know that I won’t be your prisoner forever. Give me the codes, and everything stays between us.”

My rage surges like a tidal wave, and I’m on her in an instant. She’s pinned against the wall, her petite frame shaking beneath my touch as I breathe down her neck. “You will stop this right now,” I growl into her ear. “Take down the videos and stop playing these games.”

“Absolutely not,” she snaps back, defiance burning in her brown eyes. “You need to give me the code, and you have 24 hours to think about it.”

I punch the wall next to her, my knuckles leaving bloody marks on the pristine white paint. Lulu startles, but she holds her ground, determined as ever.

“Stop this,” I demand again, but she shakes her head, curls bouncing around her face.

“No, it’s all up to you now.” Her scent is intoxicating, a mixture of vanilla and something uniquely her. It only fuels my fury—and my desire. I can still taste her arousal from earlier, and it drives me mad. Pressing against her, I ask, “Is this what you want? You want me to punish you?”

Her words falter, and I don’t give her time to think. My lips crash onto hers, claiming her with a passionate ferocity. At first, she gives in, but soon enough, the feisty Lulu I know returns. I love it. I adore how she pushes me to my limits, taking everything I can give and more. None of my usual partners can handle my hardest thrusts; they always push against me to slow down or stop.

But this time, Lulu shoves me so hard I stumble backward. I try to close the distance between us, but she stops me again.

“No,” she says firmly, her gaze unwavering. “I’m not going to let you touch me. Instead, you can watch me get myself off. You only get to touch me when you tell me those codes.”

I want to move on her again, but she’s made herself clear. I will respect that. My arousal grows as I watch her walk over to her closet and strip out of her clothes. My breath catches in my throat as she grabs a pair of new pumps—patent leather, with a slightly thicker heel than stilettos. She slips them on, her naked curves making it nearly impossible for me to resist her.

Lulu pulls a chair up to where I’m standing, and I sit back automatically. She begins to circle me like a predator, staying just far enough away so I can’t touch her. Leaning over in front of me, she displays her glistening arousal, making my mouth water.

“God, I want to taste that juicy pussy of yours,” I groan, unable to help myself. “It would feel so good to eat you out and make you come.”

“Too bad,” she moans, teasing me with her sultry voice. “You’re not going to ever eat this pussy unless you give me the codes.” I growl in frustration, but she only smirks, sitting on the bed and beginning to touch herself harshly, moaning my name.

My self-control shatters, and I start to stroke myself through my pants. She sits up, noticing what I’m doing, and begins to twist her nipples and moan. I growl in response, my heart pounding.

“Let me show you what you really want to see,” she taunts. Lulu lays down and spreads her legs wide so that her glistening arousal is on full display. She takes one of the shoes, and I’m shocked as she brings the pointed toe to her mouth,

licking it sensually. Then, she presses it against her clit, rubbing herself with it.

I can't hold back any longer. My cock aches for release, so I take it out and begin stroking myself in time with her movements. "You look so fucking good," I tell her, my voice rough with desire. "What you're doing right now is so hot."

She smirks at me. "I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing it to get off."

"You're such a dirty little slut, and I love it," I tell her, unable to hide the admiration in my tone.

"Keep watching. I'll show you just how much of a slut I really am. You'll see that I can take it better than any of your whores." Her words are like a challenge, daring me to test her limits.

"Trust me, I know you can. All I want to do is shove my cock into you right now and fuck you until you're crying and screaming my name, begging for more."

Lulu's eyes flash with determination as she takes the shoe and turns it around. Slowly, she slips the heel inside herself, moaning and arching her back. With her free hand, she continues to twist her nipples. As she starts fucking herself with the heel while rubbing the sole against her clit, I realize this is the hottest thing I've ever seen. My strokes become faster and more desperate.

"Please," I beg her, "let me fuck you."

She shakes her head. "No, not until you give me the codes. But I wish you would, so you could fuck me with these pretty shoes and shove your cock into my mouth at the same time."

Her words push me closer to the edge, but it's when she finally comes all over the shoe that I lose control. Lulu turns

onto her stomach, looking at me as she rubs her release onto her breasts before licking the rest off the shoe. The sight of her sends me over the edge, and I come harder than I ever have before, roaring her name in ecstasy.

CHAPTER THIRTY



Giovanni

As I stand there, my mind clears, and I take a moment to clean myself up. Lulu lays on the bed, naked and enticing, her body a testament of desire. My heart pounds in my chest, and I yearn to touch her again, to feel the silky warmth of her skin under my fingertips.

“Let’s talk,” I say as I make my way over to her, reaching out for her. But she recoils, denying me the touch I crave.

“Nothing to talk about until I get those codes,” she says firmly, her eyes challenging me. Angry, I clench my fists, frustration boiling inside me.

“Damn it, Lulu, there’s more to it than just that! You know it!” I snap, but she remains unyielding.

“I don’t care,” she replies coldly. “Leave, and don’t come back unless you have the codes. The videos go live tomorrow at midnight.” Her words cut like a knife. She adds, “I’m not going back to work either until I get those codes. I won’t work for you for free.”

Defeated, I leave her room with my frustration at its peak. I walk back to my office, slamming the door behind me.

For the rest of the day, I bury myself in work, hoping to forget the infuriating exchange with Lulu. I leave the red shoes on my desk as a reminder, accompanied by the evidence of her arousal hazy on the glass top. Those shoes, a pair of red stilettos with delicate straps and a shiny patent finish, hold a special meaning to me. I bought them when I'd finally learned to embrace my kink, rather than feel shamed by it. I'd been saving them, only to be worn by the woman who I felt would be worthy to belong to me. The irony that Lulu essentially robbed that honor for herself is not lost on me.

As evening sets in, I manage to wrap up everything I need to for my legitimate businesses. But the Irish and Lulu's threat still weigh heavily on my mind. Irritated, I wonder how she managed to pull it off.

I pull up my computer log and examine her keystrokes. There's nothing there to suggest she uploaded the videos to the internet. It seems she only watched several of them before putting them onto a thumb drive. A possibility begins to form in my mind – maybe she's bluffing.

“Is she really trying to play me like this?” I mutter, feeling both impressed and vexed by the idea. “Well, if it's a game she wants, then it's a game she'll get.”

A knock on my door interrupts my thoughts, and I call out for the person to come in. Teddy, with his blonde hair and charming smile, strolls into my office. He sits down in front of me, eyeing the red shoes and haze on my desk with a raised eyebrow.

“Nothing to worry about,” I say, dismissing his curiosity. “What do you want?”

He leans back in the chair, hands clasped behind his head. “I've heard some rumors that things with the Irish aren't so

good.”

I sigh, rubbing my temples. “The rumors are true. They’re causing trouble, making demands.”

Teddy shakes his head. “It’s a shame Constantino isn’t here.”

“Is it?” I challenge. “He complicated things for Primo.”

“True, but sometimes you need a break-glass-in-case-of-war guy, and that’s Constantino. He’s a loose cannon, but others know that. His violence and cruelty make people scared, keeping them in line. That’s what we need right now.”

I shake my head, adamant. “No, Constantino will only drag us back to the dark days we’re trying to escape. We’re going legitimate, Teddy. He’d bring violence, drugs, and worse. Besides, he killed Charlie. That can’t be forgiven.”

“Maybe,” he shrugs, “but that’s what Dad wanted.”

“Dad is in prison for life,” I remind him sharply. “His wishes don’t matter now.”

“True,” Teddy admits.

“I’m surprised you’re siding with Constantino,” I remark.

“I’m not. But he knew how to handle the Irish, and they know he’s not around. That’s why they’re doing this.”

“We can’t risk it,” I insist. “It would take us too far backward.”

“Guess that’s a judgment call.” He stands up, getting ready to leave. But then he pauses and turns back, curiosity gleaming in his eyes. “So, how are things with Lulu?”

I grit my teeth, trying to appear nonchalant. “Fine.”

“Ah,” Teddy laughs, a knowing smirk on his face. “That good, huh?”

Rolling my eyes, I shoo him away. “Just go.”

As the door shuts behind him, I try to refocus on the situation at hand. Lulu’s deceitful game, the Irish causing chaos, and the question of Constantino’s potential involvement – it’s all becoming maddeningly tangled.

I stare back at my computer screen, my gut telling me that Lulu might be bluffing. There’s no evidence of her putting anything on the internet. If nothing else, I am confident that I can tease the truth out of her. Maybe meet a bluff for a bluff. I decide I’ll do it tomorrow. For now, I’m going to let her simmer in her lies and get nervous about what I’ll do. I want her desperate.

The next day drags by, each hour feeling heavier than the last. When early evening finally arrives, I make my way over to her room. My knuckles rap against the door once, but there’s no answer. A second knock still leaves me waiting. Frustration boiling over, I decide I don’t care and walk in.

She’s not in the sitting room area, but I hear it – moans coming from her bedroom. I make my way over slowly, heart pounding in my chest. Then she comes into view, sprawled on top of her bed, naked except for a pair of fancy heels. The shoes are an exquisite deep red with delicate straps crisscrossing around her ankles, accentuating the curve of her arches. She’s working herself, sweat glistening off her body like dew on a flower. I’m instantly aroused at the sight. Did she know I was coming over and prepare herself like this? Or did she decide that she enjoyed our encounter yesterday?

“Enjoying yourself?” I growl, pressing the door open and unable to hide my desire.

She looks up, surprised, as if she hadn't expected to see me. "What are you doing here?"

"Checking on my investment," I circle the bed, eyeing her appreciatively. "So, is this how you spend your free time?"

"Sometimes," she replies, a hint of challenge in her voice.

"Want some help?" I ask, noticing her hesitation.

"Only if you're here to give me the codes," she retorts.

"Fine," I relent. "I'll give you the codes, but it would be a shame to interrupt this for something like that. Why don't you let me help you finish first?"

"Okay," she breathes out.

I start to touch her, feeling her shiver under my fingertips. As I brush my hands over her body, I can feel her muscles tense and then relax. My fingertips glide over her smooth skin, sending shivers cascading through her body. Every caress reveals just how sensitive she is and I can feel her body quivering in anticipation of what comes next.

Just as she begins to fall deeper into arousal, I stop. "We can't do this now because you need to take down the videos. Otherwise, they go live."

"No, it's okay," she says. "Later. Just, keep going."

I begin to pull my hands away from her slowly, making her miss the touch as it leaves her body. "Sorry Princess, but I can't risk it."

I can see her battling with herself inside. "No, it's okay, really," she says, trying to grab for my hand and put it back on her. "I promise."

I bring my lips close to her ear. “It’s not that I don’t trust you, princess,” I whisper. “The stakes are just too high.”

I trail my fingers against her one more time and I can feel her relent. She closes her eyes and then utters the words I knew deep down: “I made it all up. I never put them online.”

My lips curl into a sly smile, and I dive back into worshipping her body.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



Giovanni

As Lucia begins to rise, I place my hand on her sternum, feeling the steady rhythm of her heartbeat. “Stay down,” I command gently. My voice is firm, but my touch is tender.

“You look so good like this, and I want to help you feel even better.”

She hesitates, her fingers still lingering near her core as her desire threatens to consume her. With a gentle, possessive touch, I move her hand away. “This is my pussy now,” I remind her, my voice low and thick with lust. “You need to wait until I decide when you’re going to come.”

My fingertips brush over her body in a soft, caressing motion. Her skin feels smooth and inviting, like the most luxurious velvet. With every stroke, her body tingles with pleasure and anticipation, as if her nerve endings are begging for my touch. I can feel her desire radiating off her in waves as I explore her curves. Every movement of my fingers is deliberate and calculated, as I bring her ever closer to the edge of ecstasy. Her nipples harden at my touch, and I can see the raw hunger in her eyes as she begs, “Please, let me touch myself.”

Again, I tell her no. “You’ll have to be patient, Lucia.” The intensity of her squirming increases, but I remain unyielding. “I want you drenching the sheets by the time I’m done with you.”

Changing my focus, I move down to her shoes, worshipping them with a fervor that leaves her breathless. I kiss her ankles, allowing my teeth and lips to graze against her delicate skin, eliciting a shudder from her trembling form. “Why did you put these on?” I ask her.

“I... I felt sexy in them,” she admits, her cheeks flushed with vulnerability.

“Good,” I praise her. “You are sexy in them, and you’ve made me very happy by wearing them for me.”

“Really? I just... I like to make you happy,” she confesses, her words laden with sincerity.

A small, genuine smile tugs at the corner of my mouth. “I like it when you’re a good girl.”

She takes a deep breath, gathering her courage before she admits, “I want to do what the girls did in the videos with you. I want to show you that I can do it better, and that you don’t need them anymore.”

My heart swells at her words, catching me off guard. The depth of my feelings for Lucia both surprises and frightens me. She’s managed to break through the walls I’ve spent years building around my heart. And now, all I want is to give her everything she desires.

“Of course, you can do this for me,” I reply, my voice barely more than a whisper, filled with emotion.

The warmth of her body beneath me fuels my desires, and as I take her shoes off, I find myself drawn to her delicate feet.

My lips press against her toes; they're soft and taste faintly of the lotion she must have applied earlier. I run my finger along the underside and inside of her foot, causing her leg to twitch in response.

“Your body is exquisite,” I murmur, trailing my gaze up from her feet to her hips, then to her breasts, and finally to her face. Her cheeks turn a deep shade of pink, and she shivers with anticipation. “Your pussy looks so beautiful, just waiting for my mouth. I want to taste you now.”

She nods, a glint of excitement in her brown eyes. I pull off my shirt, revealing my toned chest, and slip her shoes back on her feet. As I pull her hips closer, I position myself between her legs, diving face first into her glistening wetness. The taste of her arousal is intoxicating, like honey laced with desire, and it drives me further into her depths.

“Ah... Giovanni,” she moans softly as I suck on her clit, adding more pressure with each pass of my tongue. I glance up at her, our eyes meeting for a fleeting moment before she reaches down, dragging the heels along my back. “Is this okay?” she asks hesitantly.

“Harder,” I command, my voice a guttural growl. She presses the sharp edge of the heel deeper into my skin, and the sting of pain mixed with pleasure sends shivers down my spine. “Yes, harder!” I demand again, my hand gripping her thigh tightly.

“Can I come?” she pants, her body writhing under my touch.

“Not yet,” I say, my breath hot against her sensitive flesh. “I want to edge you, play with you, make your orgasm so intense you'll never forget it. Just hold on for me, Lulu.”

“Okay,” she whispers, her chest heaving with labored breaths. “I’ll try.”

I stand up and strip off my pants, exposing my aching erection to her hungry gaze. She props herself up on her elbows, a smile playing on her lips as she watches me. I carefully remove her shoes and place them next to me, then reach out for her feet. She wraps them around my throbbing cock, her eyes wide with uncertainty.

“I don’t know what to do,” she admits.

“Don’t worry, I’ll show you.” I guide her feet, using them to stroke my length slowly at first, then picking up speed as she gets the hang of it. The sensation of her soft skin against my hardness is intoxicating, and I can’t help but lean my head back, a low moan escaping my lips.

“You look incredible like this,” I tell her between gritted teeth, admiring the way her body arches in response to my praise. “Your nakedness, your curves, they’re perfect. I love how they feel in my hands.”

“Stay like this,” I instruct her before she flips herself over, trying to mimic the girls in the video. But I want to do something extra with her first. “I have another idea.”

“Really?” she asks, biting her lip, eager for more.

“Trust me.” I move her on the bed so that her head hangs off the edge, her curls cascading toward the floor. I pick up one of her shoes and tell her to spread her legs. She complies, gazing up at me with a mixture of anticipation and curiosity. I lean over her, our eyes locked, and slip my cock into her warm, wet mouth.

“Ah... fuck...” I groan as she starts sucking me hard, her tongue teasing the sensitive underside. While she’s busy

pleasuring me, I take the shoe and start rubbing her clit with it, just like she was yesterday.

The sensation of fucking her face while she gives me the most amazing blowjob is almost too much to handle. As she moans around my cock, it sends vibrations through my entire body. The urge to feel her warm heat becomes overwhelming. I leave the shoe against her clit and slowly enter her with my fingers, stretching and filling her up.

“Good girl,” I praise her, watching her squirm under my touch. “Let me know if it’s too much.”

“Okay,” she manages to say, her voice muffled by my cock filling her mouth. I start moving my fingers in and out of her, angling them so I’m hitting her g-spot. She moans louder around my cock, and I feel like I’m going to explode into her mouth. But I hold on, forcing myself to focus on her pleasure.

“Such a beautiful, good girl for letting me do this to you,” I tell her, my words slurred with pleasure. “It makes me so happy, and you’re so good for it.”

Unable to respond verbally, she sucks harder, showing me that my words are turning her on even more. Her eagerness fuels my desire, and I decide I need more. I move the shoe away from her, pulling my fingers out of her and withdraw my cock from her mouth as she whimpers.

“Ready for more?” I ask, a wicked grin spreading across my face.

“Always,” she breathes, her eyes dark with lust.

I turn her over again and put the shoes back on her. Moving between her legs, I devour her pussy once more, tonguing her asshole while she squirms in delight. The taste of

her drives me wild, and I dig my fingers into her wetness as I continue to tease her with my tongue.

“God, Giovanni, I’ve never felt this turned on before,” she moans, her body quivering under my touch. “I’m going to come...”

“Wait,” I tell her. But it’s too late – she’s already coming, her pussy clenching around my fingers as they’re coated in her sweet juices. A growl escapes my lips, and I lick her clean, savoring every last drop.

“Is that what you want, princess?” I ask her, my voice low and dangerous. “You want me to punish you for coming without permission?”

She nods frantically, her eyes wide and pleading. “Yes, Giovanni, please. I want you to fuck me as hard as you want. Don’t stop, no matter what I say. I can take it, I promise.”

I chuckle darkly. “You’re such a good girl for me, Lulu. And don’t forget, my cock is the only one you’ve ever known and will ever know.”

The words spill from my lips without thought, but they feel true, possessive and raw. I grip her hips tightly, and position myself at her entrance. She’s still sensitive from her orgasm, but I don’t give her a chance to adjust. It’s only her second time having sex, but I can’t help myself – I need her too much.

I thrust into her, burying myself deep inside her wet heat. The sensation is electric, like a wildfire igniting through my veins. Her moans fill the room, growing louder as I fuck her harder, faster.

“More,” she gasps between thrusts. “Please, Giovanni, give me more.”

“Is this what you wanted, Lulu? My cock pounding into your tight little pussy?” I taunt her, delighting in the way her body responds to my words. She doesn’t fight me; instead, she arches her back, inviting me deeper.

My hands roam over her soft curves, gripping her ass as my hips snap against her. She feels so much better than the hookers I’ve fucked before – none of their bony bodies could compare to the warmth and fullness of Lulu beneath me. Her breasts bounce with each thrust, begging for my touch.

“Look at me,” I command, my voice harsh as I flip her over and enter her once more. Her eyes flutter open, locking onto mine with a mixture of lust and vulnerability. “You belong to me, Lulu. No one else. My cock is the only one you’ll ever let inside this delicious pussy.”

“Okay,” she whispers, her voice trembling. “I promise, Giovanni.”

“Good girl,” I growl, my heart swelling with possessive pride as I continue to pound into her. The sounds of our bodies colliding fill the room, punctuated by her desperate moans for more.

As Lulu lifts her legs, the heels of her shoes graze against my thighs and ass, leaving deep scratches in their wake. The pain is intoxicating, as if it’s opening a door to a part of me I never knew existed. And I can’t get enough of it.

“Fuck, Giovanni,” she whimpers, arching her back to meet each of my thrusts. “I need more. Please, don’t stop.”

No one has ever taken me like this before, let alone begged for more. It’s as if she’s made to withstand the raw intensity I’ve always held back, afraid to unleash on anyone else. The

realization dawns on me like an unwanted intruder: I must be falling in love with her.

My chest tightens at the thought, uncertainty gnawing at the edges of my consciousness. But as I look into her eyes, filled with lust and vulnerability, I find myself unable to pull away from her. Her body feels so good wrapped around me, her soft curves molding perfectly to my hands and my cock. I can't stop now; I don't think I ever want to stop fucking her.

“Come for me, Lulu,” I grit through clenched teeth, feeling her walls begin to pulse around me once more.

She screams out my name as her release washes over her, the sensation of her spasming around my cock pushing me to the brink. Knowing she's not on birth control, I force myself to pull out just in time. She lifts her legs up like a good girl, allowing me to come all over her shoes and feet.

“Such a good girl,” I praise her, my breath heavy as I take in the sight of her.

With a mischievous smile, Lulu pops off her shoes and begins to lick my cum off them. My eyes widen as I watch her tongue trace every inch of the shoe, making sure not to miss a single drop. She then crawls over to me and licks the rest of my cum off my cock, her eyes locked on mine the entire time.

“God, you're beautiful,” I whisper, unable to tear my gaze away from her.

Blushing, she takes the shoes and rubs them against her clit, moaning with each stroke. The sight of her pleasuring herself is mesmerizing, so carnal and unapologetically erotic that it reignites the fire within me. I watch in awe as she brings herself to a third orgasm, crying out my name once more.

It's in that moment, as her body quivers beneath me, that the truth finally sinks in: I have fallen for this girl. And there's no turning back.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



Lulu

As I come down from my high, the room around me feels like it's slowly coming back into focus. I realize the mistake I've made—telling Giovanni that I was bluffing about the videos on the internet. My leverage might be gone now, but for some reason, I'm not as nervous about him keeping the codes anymore. I look up at him and he's looking at me in a way I've never seen before; his eyes are gentle, almost tender. I smile at him, and he gives me an approving look back.

“Hey,” he murmurs, sliding into bed next to me, pulling me close. His arms feel strong and comforting around me, and I can't help but lean into him, relishing the warmth of his body against mine.

“About the codes,” I start hesitantly, but he shushes me, pressing a finger gently to my lips.

“Let's sort it out tomorrow. For now, I just want to hold you while we sleep.” The sincerity in his voice makes my heart swell, and I drift off to sleep in his arms, wondering if he'll still be there when I wake up.



The morning light filters through the curtains. As I slowly awaken, I'm shocked to find Giovanni still there, his arm draped protectively over me. I turn to face him, and his eyes flutter open, meeting mine with a warm smile.

“Good morning, princess,” he says, his voice rough from sleep but filled with affection.

“Good morning,” I reply, still unable to believe he's still here with me. He leans in and presses a gentle kiss to my forehead, making my heart race.

“Today,” he begins, “I want to make it up to you. How I should have taken you the first time.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, curiosity piqued.

His fingertips start to trace idle patterns on my arm, his touch feather-light but still enough to send shivers down my spine. He worships me, his touches slow and deliberate, making me feel cherished. “You're so beautiful,” he murmurs against my skin. “I'm so lucky just to be able to touch you like this, and I'm grateful that you're sharing this with me.”

As his fingers move lower, they slide across the sensitive skin of my inner thigh. My breath hitches, my body responding to his touch.

“Your body feels amazing,” he says as he slowly slides one digit inside of me. My arousal grows as he starts to slowly pump me.

“I love how wet and ready you are for me. I want you to let go and give in to the pleasure, princess. Come whenever you want to.”

“Please, Giovanni,” I whisper, unable to hold back any longer. His lips find mine, kissing me passionately as I fall into him and his movements, completely losing myself in his embrace. The world falls away until it’s just us, our bodies entwined and hearts beating in sync. And in that moment, I know I’ve never felt more alive.

He rolls his body so that I’m caged beneath him. He rolls a condom onto himself and then, he slowly enters me. I ache for him to go faster, but he insists on taking his time, wanting me to feel every inch of him as he fills me up completely. His praises never cease – telling me again how beautiful I am and how good my body feels wrapped around his. Each thrust is deliberate, starting slow but gradually picking up speed, making me crave him even more.

“Ah, Giovanni,” I moan, lost in the motion of his hips as they meet mine. The pleasure within me builds like a tidal wave, threatening to crash down at any moment.

“Go ahead, let yourself come,” he urges, his voice thick with desire. “Be as loud as you want.”

I surrender to the pleasure, feeling myself cresting in time with his powerful thrusts. My moans grow louder as waves of ecstasy wash over me, leaving me breathless and quivering.

“Yes,” he moans. “You’re so beautiful when you come undone for me. I’ll treasure this moment forever.”

He continues to rock in and out of me, drawing out my orgasm further.

“I’m going to come,” he groans, his voice strained with passion. “And it’s all because of you, how beautiful you are, how good your pussy feels.” As he releases deep inside of me, I can feel his cock pulsing, filling me with warmth that spreads throughout my entire body. It’s an intimate and satisfying connection that leaves me feeling elated.

As our breathing begins to normalize, Giovanni leans in to whisper sweet nothings against my neck, pressing soft kisses along my skin. “I’m sorry I couldn’t give you this the first time,” he murmurs, genuine remorse in his voice. “But I hope this will be the memory you hold onto.”

“Trust me,” I reply earnestly, “I remember every single one of our experiences together.”

Giovanni then lifts me from the bed, carrying me to the bathroom as if I were weightless. He carefully sets me down and begins running a bath, filling it with scented bath salts. The care and attention he puts into every action is incredibly endearing. Once the tub is full, he lowers us both into the warm water, settling in behind me. His hands find my shoulders, gently massaging away any lingering tension.

As we soak, I can’t help but admit my nervousness about the GPS chip. “Now that you know I was bluffing, will you still give me the codes?” I ask hesitantly.

Giovanni’s quiet for a moment, seemingly considering his response. Finally, he sighs and tells me, “I’ll deactivate the chip, but we have to go to the office to do it. Will you come with me?”

“Of course,” I reply without hesitation, grateful for his willingness to help. As he continues to rub my shoulders, a sense of warmth and comfort fills me – something I haven’t truly felt in a long time.

“Your shoulder... has it healed well?” Giovanni asks with genuine concern in his voice.

“Sometimes I still feel some pain,” I admit, “but overall, it’s been getting better.”

“I’m sorry for that,” he says softly, “I could arrange for you to go to physical therapy, if you’d like.”

“Thank you, but don’t bother,” I tell him, touched by his offer. “I don’t plan on staying here much longer. Once my father’s trial is over, I need to leave to protect my family.”

A worried frown creases Giovanni’s brow as he processes the information. “You may not be safe out there,” he warns, his voice laced with anxiety. “I understand why you feel this way, but I can’t bear the thought of something happening to you.”

“I don’t want to put myself in danger either, but I have no other choice. My mother and sister need me,” I explain, my heart heavy with the burden of responsibility.

“Maybe they could come here,” he proposes, though it sounds more like a hopeful question than a statement.

“No, they’ll never leave Miami. They have too many ties there,” I say, shaking my head. “But thank you for caring.”

He sighs deeply, his chest rising and falling against my back. “I’ll think about it,” he promises, looking pensive. “There has to be a solution that ensures your safety.”

A strange sensation washes over me, one I can’t quite place. Is it surprise? Relief? It’s hard to pinpoint, but I realize that I’ve never had someone care for me in this way before. “Why are you so concerned for me?” I ask, genuinely curious.

Giovanni's quiet for a moment, his fingers pausing on my skin. He seems to be grappling with the question himself, as if the answer makes him uncomfortable. "I know why you want to return," he finally says, avoiding my inquiry. "My own desire to protect my family is what led me to take control of the Maldonado empire."

"Really?" I ask, intrigued. "Tell me more."

"My brothers Primo and Constantino were at each other's throats during Primo's trial. I feared that their conflict would either lead to a civil war or end with them killing one another. So, I seized control to prevent further bloodshed."

"Wow, that was brave of you," I remark, impressed by his actions.

He dismisses the comment with a wave of his hand. "It wasn't bravery, just necessity. I've always wanted nothing to do with the family business, much like Teddy. But I couldn't stand by and watch my brothers kill each other."

Listening to him talk about his family, I can't help but feel closer to him. The vulnerability in his voice is endearing, and it only serves to strengthen the connection between us. And as I lean back against him, feeling his strong arms wrapped around me, I realize that despite everything, maybe he does really care – and that is something worth holding onto.

"Where is Constantino now?" I ask, genuinely curious about his other brother.

Giovanni sighs, looking away. "I don't know. He killed someone he shouldn't have, and he had to flee. His life would be forfeit otherwise."

"Wow," I murmur, trying to imagine the weight of that burden. "What codes does your family live by?"

He hesitates for a moment, clearly torn. “I know some, but not all. I’ve always tried to stay out of it as much as possible. Primo knows more, and Teddy... well, Teddy surprisingly knows a lot too.”

“Teddy? Really?” I smile at the thought of the carefree, charming man being so knowledgeable about the darker side of their family. “I really like him.”

“Yeah, most people do,” Giovanni says with a chuckle. “Especially women. He goes through them pretty quickly.”

“Sounds like him,” I laugh, picturing Teddy’s charming grin.

As Giovanni continues rubbing my back, I feel tension slowly leaving my body. It’s comforting to be so close to him, even if our future together is uncertain. My thoughts drift, and I remember something from the other day. “What were you up to before you came to see me? You weren’t in the house.”

He hesitates, then admits, “I was out with Primo. We’re having issues with the Irish.”

“What kind of issues?” I ask, curiosity piqued.

“They’re angry because we stopped selling guns. They were involved in that business, and now they want a lot of money. I’m not sure what to do yet. I want to find something on them. But I don’t know what or how, yet.”

I consider this for a moment. “It sounds more like the Irish are trying to make a power grab. But it doesn’t make sense since the Maldonado’s are giving up power.”

“Exactly,” he agrees. “I need to find some leverage on them, but I’ll have to work on it later at the office.”

“Let me know if I can help in any way,” I offer, wanting to be there for him.

“Thank you,” he says softly, his eyes meeting mine with a mix of gratitude and vulnerability. In this moment, we’re not just two people caught up in a dangerous game – we’re simply a man and a woman trying to navigate the complexities of life together. And for now, that’s enough.

As we drift off in the warm water, our bodies intertwined, time seems to lose all meaning. Eventually, the water begins to cool, and Giovanni breaks the silence with a gentle whisper. “We should get out before we turn into prunes.”

He helps me out of the tub, carefully wrapping me in a plush towel and patting me dry with an almost reverential touch. The intimacy of it all leaves me feeling exposed and vulnerable, but also cherished.

“Would you like me to pick out an outfit for you to wear to the office?” he asks, his eyes meeting mine.

“Sure,” I reply, curious about what he might choose for me. He disappears into my closet, leaving me standing in the bathroom, wrapped in the soft cocoon of the towel.

A few minutes later, Giovanni emerges from the closet with a mysterious smile playing on his lips. “There’s something waiting for you in there,” he says, gesturing towards the walk-in closet.

I narrow my eyes at him playfully. “What did you do?”

He surprises me by leaning in and pressing a tender kiss to my cheek, his breath warm against my skin. “You’ll see. I’ll meet you in the foyer in an hour, and we’ll head to the office together.”

Curiosity piqued, I step into the closet and find the outfit he's chosen. It's a beautiful a-line dress in a soft green – professional yet feminine, perfectly suited for a day at the office. It strikes me how well he seems to know me, even in the short time we've been together. There's a beautiful lace bra placed next to the dress, but the panties are mysteriously missing. I grin and press my lips together, trying to fight back a smile. As I slip into the clothes, I wonder how this newfound connection between us will continue to evolve.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE



Lulu

“Alright, there,” Giovanni says, fingers flying across the keyboard. He swivels in his chair to face me, eyes alight. “The GPS chip is deactivated.”

My heart leaps with relief, a sudden swell of gratitude washing over me. I spring from my seat and bound over to him, throwing my arms around his neck and pressing myself against him.

“Thank you,” I breathe into his ear. The air between us crackles with tension as I find myself straddling his lap, our bodies pressed tightly together. His strong hands grip my waist, holding me there for a moment too long.

His lips capture mine fiercely, tongues tangling in a dance that leaves me breathless and yearning for more. When he finally pulls away, I’m left panting and smiling against his mouth.

“God, Lulu,” he murmurs, his voice teasing but strained. “You’re such a distraction.”

“Sorry,” I giggle, feeling the heat rise in my cheeks. “I’ll let you get back to work.”

As I slide off his lap and make my way to the door, he calls after me, serious now. “Be careful, Lulu. Without the tracker, I can’t protect you.”

“I understand,” I reply, swallowing hard as the weight of his words settles in.

Back at my desk, the hours drag on like molasses, each tick of the clock taunting me. Giovanni remains holed up in his office, not even bothering with phone calls or emails. He’s lost to the world, consumed by the Irish problem that plagues him.

Five o’clock comes and goes, and still no sign of Giovanni finishing up. Concern gnaws at me, knowing he hasn’t eaten lunch or dinner. Finally, I gather my courage and approach his office.

“Hey,” I tap lightly on the doorframe, trying not to startle him. He jumps anyway, his dark eyes wide as if I’ve just yanked him from the depths of some treacherous ocean.

“Wh—Oh, Lulu. I’m sorry,” he says, disoriented. “What time is it?”

“Past five,” I tell him gently, stepping closer. Curiosity gets the better of me, and I lean in to get a peek at his computer screen. “What have you been working on all this time?”

He sighs, running a hand through his raven hair. “Trying to break into the Irish’s computer systems. Find something to use against them.”

“Can’t you just report them to the police?” I ask, genuinely curious.

Giovanni shakes his head, looking pained. “We’d implicate ourselves if we did. It’s not that simple. Besides, they’ve got a

number of cops on their payroll.”

I scrunch my face in thought, trying to think of another solution. My eyes flicker to his computer screen, where he’s attempting to hack into a mainframe. “Do you mind if I take a look?”

He seems surprised but obliges, sliding back in his chair and gesturing for me to step in. I bend over the computer, analyzing his methods. He’s using an older hacking technique that’s long since been countered by most security systems.

“Did you know there’s a more modern method of doing this?” I say out loud, fingers poised above the keyboard. “I read about it online.”

“Really?” Giovanni asks, curiosity piqued. “Show me.”

“Watch,” I reply, focusing intently on the task at hand. With newfound determination, I begin typing rapidly, lines of code streaming across the screen like a black-and-white river flowing beneath my fingertips. Finally, I press enter, and the program I’ve quickly written comes to life. Almost instantly, the screen changes, revealing a list of the Irish gang’s entire files.

Giovanni moves closer, his eyes wide with disbelief. “I can’t believe it... You’re incredible, Lulu.”

As he excitedly downloads the files onto his hard drive and transfers them to an external device, I feel a surge of pride and accomplishment. Giovanni turns to me, clearly impressed, and urges me to show him what I did.

“Sit on my lap and explain it to me,” he says, his voice low and inviting.

I hesitate for a second before complying, settling myself down on his lap. As I start detailing the new hacking method,

Giovanni's hands begin to glide over my body, whispering praises of my intelligence and beauty. I try to maintain focus, but his touch is intoxicating, making it increasingly difficult to concentrate.

"Focus, Giovanni," I chide half-heartedly, wanting to both teach him and give in to the sensations he's creating.

He chuckles softly, his breath warm against my ear. "I can't help myself, Lulu. You're just so... captivating."

Giovanni's fingers graze my waist, his touch electrifying against my skin. "Keep teaching me, Lulu. Let's see how long you can last before you finally break."

I swallow hard and continue typing the code, determined to maintain focus. But then his hands slip underneath my clothes, expertly undoing the zipper of my dress and unclasping my bra. My breasts spill out into his strong hands, and I can't help but moan as he tweaks my nipples. His low growl of appreciation sends shivers down my spine.

Focus, Lulu, I remind myself, trying to ignore the ache building between my legs. I grind my hips against his thigh, seeking relief. Giovanni notices and praises me.

"Such a good girl for not wearing panties," he murmurs, his voice husky. "Keep rubbing yourself against my thigh. I want my pants drenched in your juices, but don't lose focus on your typing."

His hands continue to work me as I try to type, one hand teasing my breast while the other slips between my hips. He begins working my clit, and my fingers falter on the keyboard, my concentration slipping away. Then his fingers enter me, and he finger fucks me hard, urging me to keep working.

“Stay focused, Lulu,” he says, but it’s nearly impossible under his relentless touch. I’m so lost in what he’s doing that all I want is to come.

He seems to read my mind. “Yes, I want you to come too, but I want you coming on my cock.” He leans me forward and frees himself from his pants, then sits me down on his cock, entering me slowly. He fucks me, thrusting up into me as he moves me on his lap.

My dress falls open, exposing me completely, my bra slipping down my arms. He twists my nipples, and I can’t hold back the moan that escapes my lips. “I want more,” I beg him.

“You’re such a good little princess for me,” he says approvingly. “I’ll definitely give you more.”

His words wash over me like a tidal wave, leaving me breathless and wanting.

With a swift motion, Giovanni swipes everything off his desk, papers scattering across the floor like fallen leaves. He grips me by the waist and leans me over the cold glass surface, my breasts pressed against it. Before I can catch my breath, he’s reentering me, thrusting into me so hard that I can’t help but scream in pleasure.

“God, I love it when you fuck me like this,” I gasp, my voice strained with need. “Please, don’t stop—I want all of you, every bit you can give me.”

He runs his hand through my hair, his grip strong against my scalp. Gathering all of my hair in his fist, he pulls back, forcing me to arch my back, my breasts now fully exposed. The sensation of him pulling on my hair while fucking me so hard sends shivers down my spine. His dominance and control only serve to fuel my desire further.

“Keep taking my cock like the good girl you are,” he growls, his voice both commanding and seductive.

“Yes, Giovanni, I love it—don’t ever stop,” I plead, my voice barely a whisper as I’m overcome with lust. “I want to taste you so bad.”

In response, he smacks my ass hard, the stinging sensation sending a jolt of pleasure through me. Pulling out of me, I lean down, holding my breasts up and sticking my tongue out, eager for his release. He comes all over my tongue and spills down onto my tits, marking me as his own.

As I start to clean up, he stops me with a firm grip on my arm. “No,” he says, his eyes dark with desire. “I want you to come with my cum dripping down those delicious tits of yours.” Flipping me onto his desk so my legs hang off, he dives in, starting to eat my pussy.

The sensation is indescribable—his tongue is all over my folds, licking me as if I’m his last meal. He plunges his tongue inside me, swirling and rimming my entrance with expert precision. My entire body trembles under his touch, waves of pleasure crashing over me. As his tongue works its magic, he rings my asshole with a finger, slowly entering it while continuing to devour my cunt.

“God, Giovanni, it feels too good,” I moan, my voice breathless.

“You need to come for me,” he says, his voice thick with lust. “Show me what a beautiful princess you are for me.”

I begin rubbing his cum into my tits, working my nipples as the heat between us grows unbearable. His words only serve to heighten my arousal, pushing me closer to the edge.

“You’re so fucking hot, Lulu,” he groans. “You’re absolutely beautiful like this.”

Unable to hold back any longer, I come hard, my entire body shaking with the force of my orgasm. Waves of pleasure course through me, leaving me breathless and spent. In that moment, Giovanni looks at me with an intensity I’ve never seen before.

“I love seeing you come,” he says, his voice filled with raw emotion. “And knowing I’m the only man who will ever get to see you like this.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



Lulu

The warmth of Giovanni's body envelops me as we lie tangled together beneath the soft sheets. Our truce has brought an unexpected intimacy between us, one that I never thought possible.

His fingertips dance lightly over my skin, sending shivers of pleasure coursing through my veins. We've spent countless hours like this, working side by side at the office and returning to his mansion to forget our troubles in each other's embrace.

"Tell me," I murmur, not wanting to break the spell of this moment, "why did you film yourself with all those girls?"

He shrugs, his dark eyes locking onto mine, a hint of vulnerability lurking within their depths. "Don't think too much into it."

"Yet you made a habit of it," I press on, needing to understand this part of him. "Why?"

A slow smile spreads across his face, a wicked glint sparking in his gaze. "I just like filming that sort of thing. It turns me on."

"Would you ever consider doing it with me?" The words slip from my lips before I can stop them, my curiosity piqued.

“Is that something you’d want?” he counters, his eyes searching mine for any sign of hesitation.

“I think I would.” My admission is barely a whisper, but it feels as heavy as the secrets we both carry.

“Then yes,” he breathes, his lips brushing against my ear. “I absolutely would want to do it with you.”

Excitement flares within me, mingling with the heat of his touch. I smile, caught up in the thrill of exploring this new facet of our relationship.

But then, reality intrudes. “What are you going to do about the Irish?” I ask, unable to quell my concern.

Giovanni’s fingers still on my skin. “With your help hacking into their systems, I’ve sent them a message with the information. One they won’t be able to ignore.”

“Isn’t that risky?” My voice trembles, fear creeping into my heart.

“In these sorts of things, you have to take risks,” he says, his gaze steady and serious.

“You’re probably right. My father always cowered to people, and that’s what let *El Lobo* grow under his watch.”

He stiffens at the mention of everything, and I know something’s not right. “What’s the matter, Giovanni?”

“Nothing,” he lies, but the tension in his body betrays him. Still, I try to put it out of my mind, realizing I’ve been too distracted lately and need to check in on the situation in Miami.

“Let’s get some dinner,” he suggests, shifting the conversation as he slides from the bed.

“Sounds great.” I watch him dress, his lithe form a study in grace.

The cold, hard surface of my phone presses against my palm, its glare illuminating the room. I hesitate for a moment before unlocking it, knowing that once I do, there’s no turning back. The restrictions on my phone have been lifted; it’s like opening a window to the world beyond Giovanni’s mansion.

“Join me in the kitchen when you’re ready,” Giovanni calls from the doorway, his voice a tempting invitation to stay and forget about the chaos brewing back home. But I can’t, not with my family at stake.

“Okay,” I reply softly, trying to sound as casual as possible. The second he’s out of sight, I type ‘Miami’ into the search bar, my heart pounding in anticipation. News story after news story pops up, each headline screaming louder than the last: my father’s conviction, the crumbling of our empire, and the bloodshed left in *El Lobo’s* wake. As I scroll through the articles, a tight knot forms in my chest, making it hard to breathe.

I pick up my phone and text Mama, my fingers flying across the screen.

How are you? Are you safe?

Her response is almost immediate.

We’re okay. Your sister and I are in hiding. Many of the men loyal to your father have abandoned or been killed.

Tears prick at the corners of my eyes, blurring the words on the screen. My hands tremble as I type my next message.

I’m coming back to Miami.

No. Stay where it's safe.

Staying safe isn't an option anymore. I'll see you soon.

With that, I toss the phone onto the bed and jump to my feet, pulling on clothes and stuffing essentials into a duffle bag. I can't afford to waste any more time; my family needs me.

"Ready to eat?" Giovanni asks, stepping back into the room. His eyes widen as they take in the scene before him: my frantic packing, the duffle bag now bursting at the seams.

"Did you know?" I demand, my voice tight with anger. "That my father was convicted?"

He hesitates for a moment before nodding. "Yes."

"Then why didn't you tell me?" My hands clench into fists at my sides, frustration and hurt coursing through me.

"I was trying to save you from getting upset," he explains, his expression softening as he tries to reach for me. But I step back, unwilling to let him comfort me.

"Saving me isn't your call to make," I snap. "I need to go back to Miami to protect my family."

"Lucia, no—" he protests, but I cut him off.

"You don't get to tell me that anymore," I say firmly, zipping up my duffle bag with finality. "The trial is over. They got their man, and they won't come after me for questioning anymore. Your reputation is safe."

"*El Lobo* is active now. It's too dangerous for you to go back," Giovanni insists, his eyes filled with genuine concern.

I shake my head, unable to accept his reasoning. “People loyal to my family are dying, being killed. My mother and sister might be next. If it were your brothers, wouldn’t you go? Why do you expect me not to?”

He looks uncomfortable, the weight of my words settling on his shoulders. I know he understands my need to protect my family, but his own complications prevent him from fully supporting my decision.

“Look, I’m sorry,” I say, my voice softening. “But I have to go.”

I pause, my heart pounding in my chest as an idea forms. “Why don’t you come with me?” I ask, surprising even myself. “Help me restore my family. If you’re worried about my safety, you can help keep me safe.”

Giovanni’s shock is evident in his widened eyes. After a moment, he replies, “With everything going on with my own family and the Irish right now, I can’t leave.”

His answer stings, despite the logical part of me understanding his predicament. I had hoped he might put everything aside and join me. Instead, I muster a smile. “No problem. I’ll be leaving first thing in the morning.”

He leaves the room, and I finish packing through a veil of tears, each item a reminder of the life I’m leaving behind.

The next morning, I stride into the mansion’s lobby with a single bag slung over my shoulder. Giovanni waits for me, his expression conflicted.

“Please don’t try to stop me,” I warn him as he opens his mouth to speak. “This time, it’s not going to work.”

“What’s your plan?” he asks, resignation lacing his voice.

“Get to the airport and try to catch a flight,” I reply, determination fueling me.

“Actually, I’ve already chartered a jet for you,” he says, surprising me. “And some of my men will go with you for protection. They’ll stay with you until you’re in a safe location in Miami. But after that, they have to leave. They can’t be implicated with *El Lobo*.”

“Thank you,” I whisper, touched by his concern. “I understand.”

“Are you... expecting me to come with you to the airport?” he asks hesitantly.

“Only if you want to,” I say, trying to hide my hopefulness.

“It’s probably best if I don’t,” he replies, looking away.

“Okay,” I manage, disappointment settling heavily in my chest. We share an awkward hug, his embrace both comforting and painful. He presses a soft kiss to my cheek, and mumbles “Goodbye, princess,” before disappearing down the hallway without another word, leaving me to face the uncertain future alone.



The drive to the airport is a blur, like being in a dream I can’t wake up from. The scenery outside passes by in a haze of colors and shapes, but my thoughts are stuck on what I’m leaving behind. Despite the impossibility, I can’t help but imagine a life with Giovanni - going to the office together,

coming home, and spending quiet evenings entwined in each other's arms. But that's the past, and I need to focus on the present.

"Miss Manuel, we'll be at the airport shortly," the driver informs me, his voice neutral and professional.

"Thank you," I murmur, tearing my gaze away from the window.

As soon as the jet comes into view, I steel myself for the journey ahead. My heart tightens with longing for Giovanni, but I push the thoughts away. I have to concentrate on the task at hand - protecting my family.

Once on the plane, I settle into a plush seat and pull out my phone to read about *El Lobo*. The steady hum of the airplane engine surrounds me as I stare out the window, watching the clouds pass below. Fleeting thoughts of *El Lobo* threaten to invade my mind, but I push them away.

My phone buzzes in my hand, and I see the latest news headline: Mob Wars Escalate - Innocent Lives Lost in Crossfire. My heart sinks as I read about the mounting violence that plagues Miami, the city I once called home. With my father's conviction, the Manuel family has been left vulnerable and without leadership. A bloody power struggle has erupted, and everyone once loyal to my family now finds themselves caught in the middle.

"Twenty-three dead in just two weeks," I whisper under my breath, feeling the weight of each life lost. I clench my jaw, determined to do something, anything, to protect those I hold dear.

The flight is a blur of scrolling through news articles. I need better information than what the news is reporting.

As the plane begins its descent, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I can't let fear control me. My mother and sister depend on me; their lives hang in the balance. I must find a way to keep them safe and bring stability to all those who have remained loyal to the Manuel name. Even if it means confronting the terrifying world of mob wars head-on.

"Prepare for landing," the captain announces over the intercom, snapping me back to reality. I grip the armrests tightly as the plane starts to shake, my heart pounding with a mix of fear and determination.

As the wheels touch down on the runway, I steel myself for the challenges ahead. The violence I may face is overwhelming, but I refuse to let my loved ones become casualties in this brutal war. I am Lucia Manuel, the daughter of a mob boss, and I will stop at nothing to protect my family.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE



Lulu

The moment I step off the plane, Miami’s humid air wraps around me like a suffocating embrace. My heart races in anticipation, knowing that my mother and sister are close by. Giovanni’s unexpected thoughtfulness shows itself in the sleek black car waiting for me outside the airport. I climb in, swallowing hard against the tension in my chest.

“Take me to this address,” I instruct the driver, handing him the slip of paper with the safe house location written on it. He nods without a word, and we speed away from the airport, leaving the familiar skyline behind. The tension coils tighter inside me as I think of my family, hidden away, their lives in danger.

The car glides to a stop in front of a modest townhouse, its façade nondescript and forgettable. Taking a deep breath, I exit the car and approach the door cautiously, looking around for anyone who might be watching. With a few quick knocks, the door opens, revealing my mother and sister’s anxious faces.

“Lulu!” My sister, Sofia, throws her arms around me, tears streaming down her cheeks. “I can’t believe you’re here.”

“Shh,” I hush her, scanning the street one last time before slipping inside. “We have to be careful.”

My mother’s eyes are filled with worry as she embraces me. “You shouldn’t have come, Lulu. It’s too dangerous.”

“Family comes first,” I say simply, steeling myself for what must be done. They need me now more than ever, and I will not abandon them.

That evening, I meet with the men loyal to my father. We gather in the basement, the air thick with distrust and fear. Their faces are etched with lines of exhaustion, and their eyes tell stories of violence and loss.

“*El Lobo* has made their intentions clear,” says Carlos, one of my father’s most trusted men. “They’re targeting anyone loyal to the Manuels, or anyone who was a member of our family.”

“Tell me everything,” I demand, my voice steady even as my heart races.

“*El Lobo* has been ruthless,” Carlos continues. “Their men are hunting us down one by one, no mercy, no hesitation. They’ve already killed several of our own, and they’re not stopping until they’ve wiped us out completely.”

“Then we have to act fast,” I say, my determination growing stronger with each word. “We need a plan to take back what is ours and protect our family.”

“Are you sure you want to do this, Lulu?” asks Javier, another of my father’s loyalists. “It could put you in even more danger.”

“*El Lobo* will not stop until they destroy everything we’ve built,” I reply, my jaw set with resolve. “I won’t let that happen. We’re taking back control, starting now.”

The air in the basement seems to thicken with tension as Carlos leans forward and lowers his voice. “There’s more, Lulu. *El Lobo*’s men have taken over the drug trade in our territory. They’re lacing the drugs with fentanyl, and it’s causing a public health crisis.”

“Madre de Dios,” I whisper, my heart dropping like an anchor into the pit of my stomach. The anger inside me simmers, fueling my determination. How dare they bring such destruction to our people? My fingers clench into fists at my sides.

“Then we must put an end to this before more lives are lost,” I declare, looking each man in the eye. “I will personally negotiate with *El Lobo*. Perhaps there is still a chance for diplomacy.”

Javier scoffs, his skepticism apparent. “You don’t know Alejandro if you think he’ll negotiate.”

“Alejandro?” I ask, frustrated that I know so little.

“Alejandro Ramirez,” Carlos says. “He heads *El Lobo*.”

Javier shakes his head. “You think he’ll listen to you? After all the blood that’s been spilled?”

“Maybe not,” I admit, my voice laced with uncertainty. “But I am willing to try if it means saving our family and our people. We can’t just sit idly by while they tear us apart.”

“Your father would be proud,” Carlos says, his eyes softening. “Stay safe, Lulu. We’re with you.”

“Thank you,” I reply, touched by their loyalty. “I need to gather my thoughts, come up with a plan on how to approach *El Lobo*.”

Alone in my room later that night, I pace back and forth, the floorboards creaking beneath my restless steps. I run through every possible scenario in my head, trying to anticipate Alejandro's reactions. What could I possibly say to change his mind, to convince him that further violence benefits no one?

"Think, Lulu, think," I mutter to myself, frustration mounting. My mind drifts to Giovanni, wondering if he might have any insight into how to handle *El Lobo*. But he's far away, living his own life now. It's up to me.

With a deep breath, I close my eyes and search for the words that might sway a man like Alejandro. The thought of facing him terrifies me, but my love for my family and my people is stronger than my fear. I will do whatever it takes to protect them – even if it means risking my own life in the process.

"Alright," I whisper, steeling myself for the task ahead. "Let's do this."



My heart pounds in my chest as I approach the men the next morning, determination fueling my every step. Their faces are haggard, worn from worry and fear, but they stand tall, ready to fight for our family, our people.

"Carlos, I need your help," I say, my voice steady despite the nerves coursing through me. "I want to talk to Alejandro, try to negotiate with him. But first, we need to get word to someone in his camp."

“Who are you thinking of contacting?” Carlos asks. His concern is palpable, but he doesn’t question my decision.

“Is there anyone on the inside you could trust to get word up the chain?”

“Rafael Mendoza,” Javier replies. “He’s been with *El Lobo* for years but I know him to be honorable. If anyone can help us reach *El Lobo*, it’s him.”

Carlos nods, understanding the complexity of the situation. “We’ll need to be cautious. El Lobo’s men are everywhere, and they won’t hesitate to kill anyone they believe is helping us.”

“Right,” I say, swallowing hard. “So we’ll need a discreet method of communication. We can’t risk using phones or email. It has to be something they won’t expect.”

“Maybe a letter?” Carlos suggests. “Hand-delivered by someone they won’t suspect.”

“Exactly,” I agree, my mind racing with possibilities. “We could use one of our street contacts, someone who knows the city and can blend in easily.”

“Jorge,” Carlos says, naming a young man who’s been working with our family for years. “He’s quick and resourceful. He can deliver the message without being detected.”

“Good,” I nod, my resolve growing stronger. “Write the letter. Make it clear that I want to meet with Alejandro, alone. We need to find a way to end this violence, and I’m willing to do whatever it takes.”

“Are you sure about this, Lulu?” Carlos asks, his eyes filled with worry. “It’s dangerous. There’s no guarantee that El

Lobo will agree to negotiate, or that Alejandro will let you walk away unharmed.”

“Of course I’m not sure,” I admit, my voice thick with emotion. “But I have to try. For our family, for our people. They’re counting on me.”

“Alright,” Carlos says, his voice heavy with the weight of our task. “I’ll write the letter, and we’ll get Jorge to deliver it. Just promise me you won’t take any unnecessary risks.”

“I promise,” I say, though I know there are no guarantees in this world – especially when dealing with a man like Alejandro.



The sun sets as I pace the floor of our safe house, my eyes darting between the clock and the door. The men are out there, trying to make contact with El Lobo’s camp, but every minute that ticks by feels like an eternity. My heart beats fast, a relentless rhythm in my chest, echoing the anxiety coursing through me.

“Damn it,” I mutter under my breath, my fists clenching and unclenching.

“Relax, Lulu,” my sister says from her perch on the couch. “You’re making me nervous.”

“Sorry,” I say, forcing a smile. “I just can’t help it. There’s so much at stake.”

“Trust our boys,” my mother replies, laying a comforting hand on my arm. “They’ll pull through for us.”

I nod, wanting to believe her, but my thoughts drift to Giovanni – his dark hair, his piercing eyes, the way he held me as if I were the most precious thing in the world. Is he thinking about me right now? Does he even know what I’m risking for my family?

But my musings are interrupted by the sound of footsteps approaching the door. The men have returned, their faces etched with tension, though they try to hide it.

“Did you get word to El Lobo?” I ask, my voice barely above a whisper.

“Jorge managed to slip the letter to Rafael during a drop-off,” Carlos says, his tone measured. “We don’t know if it’s been read yet, but we did our part.”

“Good,” I say, swallowing hard. “Now, we wait.”

“Waiting is the hardest part,” Sofia murmurs, and I can’t help but agree.

As hours stretch into days, we continue to wait for a response from El Lobo. The tension in the air is palpable, like an electric current running through the room, making my skin tingle with anticipation. We maintain radio silence, our eyes glued to the news as reports of escalating violence fill the screen – a grim reminder of what we’re up against.

I can’t help but wonder if I’m doing the right thing, if my attempt to negotiate with El Lobo will only put my family in more danger. But the alternative – doing nothing – is even more unbearable.

“Have faith,” my mother whispers to me late one night, as I lay sleepless on the couch, staring at the ceiling. “The answer will come.”

“Will it?” I ask, my voice raw with emotion. “Or are we just fooling ourselves?”

“Only time will tell,” she says, hugging me tightly. “But no matter what happens, I believe in you, Lulu.”

“Thank you,” I say, tears pricking at the corners of my eyes. Internally, I just hope that’s enough.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX



Giovanni

Sweat beads on my forehead as I sit at the head of the conference table, my fingers flying across the keyboard. The soft hum of the computer does little to silence the cacophony of thoughts swirling in my head, all of them centered on Lulu. Her brown eyes and curly black hair haunt me as I try to focus on the numbers flashing on the screen before me.

“Alright, everyone,” I say without looking up, “let’s go over the fourth quarter results.”

Lawrence, Victor, Roman, and Sebastian exchange glances with one another as they shuffle papers, trying to make sense of the disjointed mess I’ve made of our meeting. Their voices mix together like a symphony, but the melody is lost on me.

“Shipping is up by fifteen percent from last year,” Lawrence reports, his deep voice cutting through the noise.

“Real estate is doing well too,” Victor chimes in, the suaveness of his tone unmistakable. “Our latest developments are already eighty percent occupied.”

“Restaurant sales have increased by twelve percent,” Roman adds, a hint of pride in his blue eyes.

Sebastian clears his throat, adjusting his glasses. “And just a reminder, we’re still reaping the benefits of taking the company public last year. Our stock prices continue to rise.”

I nod absently, my mind drifting back to Lulu. What is she doing right now? Is she safe? The questions plague me, gnawing at my insides like a relentless itch I cannot scratch.

“Everything alright, Giovanni?” Roman asks, concern lacing his words. My business partners have noticed my distraction and unresponsiveness, and it’s impossible to ignore their worried gazes any longer.

“Of course,” I lie smoothly, forcing a tight smile. “Just a lot on my plate these days.”

“Anything we can help with?” Lawrence offers, his muscular arms crossed over his chest. There’s a genuine concern in his brown eyes that I’m grateful for, but I know they can’t help me with this.

“Thanks, but I think I just need some time to process everything,” I say, trying to dismiss their worries as I close the laptop. “Let’s wrap up the meeting for now.”

As my partners file out of the room, their whispered conversations hanging in the air, I can’t help but feel a sense of isolation. My heart aches for Lulu and the love I let slip through my fingers, leaving me lost in a sea of regrets and what-ifs.

I decide that I can’t be at the office any longer.

The moment I step out of the office building, the cold wind hits me like a slap in the face—a sharp reminder that I can’t run from my feelings. I climb into my car, my hands gripping the steering wheel tightly as I drive toward the mansion.

There's no reason for me to go back there. Perhaps, I don't want to return to my city apartment because it's not filled with memories of her.

The grandiose structure looms ahead, and as I pull up to the entrance, I take a deep breath. A part of me wants to turn around and escape, but I know there's no running away from the emptiness that consumes me. I step out of the car and walk through the heavy double doors, immediately enveloped by the vastness of the empty halls.

My footsteps echo as I wander aimlessly through the dark rooms, each one filled with memories with Lulu, some good, some bad—things that now seem so distant and unreachable.

As I stand in the study, my fingers brush against the spines of the leather-bound books on the shelves, their titles barely visible in the low light. The scent of old paper and ink fills my lungs, and for a brief moment, I'm transported back to simpler times—times when I believed I could conquer the world and fix my family's problems.

“Hey there, Giovanni,” a familiar voice says, pulling me from my reverie. My heart skips a beat as I turn to see Teddy standing in the doorway, his blue eyes sparkling with warmth.

“Teddy,” I reply, swallowing hard as I try to keep my emotions at bay. “What do you need?”

“Can't a brother come visit his favorite sibling?” he asks with a grin, stepping further into the room. “But really, I've been worried about you. You seemed off the last time we spoke.”

“Things have been...challenging,” I admit, my fingers still tracing the books as if they hold some sort of solace. “But I'm trying to keep it together.”

He twists his lips as if thinking about what to say next. “Is there anything I can do to help?” Teddy’s voice is gentle, his concern evident.

I swallow hard, gathering the courage to reveal my vulnerability. “I can’t stop thinking about her,” I confess, the words tumbling out in a rush. “We had something...real. But I let her go.”

“Wait, when did this all happen?” Teddy asks, his voice softening. “Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“Because I wasn’t sure it was real at first,” I admit, shame washing over me. “But now that she’s gone, I can’t help but realize just how much she meant to me.”

“Gone? Where is she?”

“Miami,” I say, the word stinging as it leaves my lips.

“Hey,” Teddy says gently, squeezing my shoulder. “It’s okay. You’re allowed to have feelings for someone, even if it’s complicated.”

“Yeah, but I let her go,” I repeat, the weight of my decision crushing down on me. “I thought it was the right thing to do at the time, but now I’m not so sure.”

“Look, Giovanni,” Teddy begins, his gaze never leaving mine. “You made a choice based on the information you had and what you thought was best. Whether it was right or wrong, you can’t change the past. You need to find a way to move forward.”

“Move forward,” I repeat, as if tasting the words for the first time. They feel strange and unfamiliar in my mouth, like a foreign language.

“Find something that gives you purpose,” Teddy suggests, his eyes crinkling with sincerity. “Something that makes you want to get up in the morning and face the world, even when it feels like everything is falling apart.”

“Maybe you’re right,” I say, feeling a small spark of hope ignite within me. “I just wish I knew where to start.”

“Start by taking one step at a time,” Teddy advises, his voice laced with wisdom. “And remember, you don’t have to do it alone. I’m here for you, no matter what.”

“Thank you,” I murmur, grateful for his support. As he turns to leave I realize that I was wrong. I can’t stay in the mansion tonight. The place is full of ghosts of Lulu. I make my way back to the garage and head back to the city.



The penthouse door clicks shut behind me, the sound echoing through the vast, empty space. I toss my keys onto the entryway table and walk over to the floor-to-ceiling windows that dominate the living room. The city stretches before me, a sea of twinkling lights against the inky blackness of the night sky.

I sink into the plush couch, my thoughts still heavy with Teddy’s words. As much as I want to move forward, it feels like there’s an anchor weighing me down, chaining me to my past mistakes. I rub at the tension building in my temples, willing the restless thoughts away.

My phone buzzes on the glass coffee table, the screen lighting up with an incoming message. I glance at it and see a name flash across the display. It's a distraction I've indulged in a few times before, but not one I'm proud of. With a sigh, I pick up the device and read the text.

Hey, saw you come home. Need some company tonight?

My heart clenches, a maelstrom of emotions threatening to spill over. The temptation is real, but I know deep down that giving in will only leave me feeling emptier than before.

I press my finger against the screen, hesitating for a moment before finally deleting the message. It's not an easy decision, but it's one I have to make if I want to stay true to my feelings for Lulu. With the message gone, I'm left with the silence of my apartment and the ache that still echoes within my chest.

"Damn it," I mutter under my breath. What I wouldn't give to hear her laughter again, to see the way her eyes light up when she smiles.

Desperate for any news about Lulu or her family, I grab the remote and flick on the TV. Channel after channel, I scan the headlines, searching for even the smallest shred of information. But there's nothing - no updates, no leads, just a growing sense of helplessness that threatens to consume me.

"Where are you, Lulu?" I whisper, the words barely audible even to myself. The worry gnaws at me, gnashing its teeth against the fragile walls I've built around my heart. It's frightening, this level of vulnerability, but it's also undeniably human.

As the channels continue to cycle, I feel the weight of loneliness pressing down upon me. The room seems to shrink, the walls closing in as I'm left to confront my own thoughts and fears. Lulu, the woman who had shown me what it meant to truly love and be loved in return, was now somewhere out there facing an uncertain future.

I run a hand through my hair, frustration mounting as I come to terms with my inability to protect her. But despite the pain, there's a small part of me that holds onto hope - the same hope that I saw in Lulu's eyes when she looked at me.

"Stay safe," I murmur, my voice barely audible against the hum of the television. And as I sit there in the dark, surrounded by the flickering lights of the city, I realize that my heart will continue to beat for her, no matter how far apart we may be.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN



Lulu

The hum of the air conditioner fills the room, doing little to cool my thoughts as I sit on the edge of the couch, cradling a cup of cold coffee. My fingers trace the rim, and I can't help but think about Giovanni. His silence since I left cuts deeper than any sharp word or heated argument ever could.

“Lucia, mi hija, please try not to worry so much,” my mother says, placing her hand on my shoulder, her warm brown eyes brimming with concern. “We will find a way to end this violence.”

My throat tightens, and I force a weak smile. “I know, Mami. It's just... hard.” The emptiness inside me grows, consuming every ounce of hope she's trying to give me. I feel so alone in all of this.

A knock at the door steals our attention, and Javier moves to answer it. Carlos enters, his dark hair slicked back and a letter clenched in his hand. There's an urgency in his step as he approaches me.

“Lucia, we received a response from El Lobo,” he announces, handing me the letter. My hands tremble as I take

it, feeling the weight of its contents before even reading the words.

***I'LL AGREE TO MEET YOU, LUCIA MANUEL. BUT
YOU WILL COME ALONE AND UNARMED. BE READY
AT 10 AM.***

The message is short and to the point, raising the hairs on the back of my neck. I glance at the clock on the wall – only thirty minutes until this mysterious meeting.

“Where am I supposed to meet him?” I ask, handing the letter back to Carlos.

He shakes his head. “I’m not sure yet. With these things, the location usually reveals itself at the right time.”

“Alright, then.” I stand up, suddenly conscious of my appearance. Since arriving in Miami, I’ve neglected myself, my hair a tangled mess, and my clothes worn and tired. If I’m going to face El Lobo, I need to look the part of a mob princess. “I should get ready.”

As I walk into the bedroom, I catch my reflection in the mirror. My eyes look hollow and tired, while the dark circles beneath them betray the sleepless nights I’ve had since arriving in Miami. My once-vibrant curls hang lifelessly around my face, and my once radiant complexion is now dull and pale. This isn’t how I want to be remembered by Giovanni. But he made his choice, didn’t he? I need to let go of that and focus on the task at hand.

Taking a deep breath, I change into a sleek black dress that hugs my petite frame. Carefully, I slip on the one pair of heels I took with me from the mansion – the only reminder of the life I left behind. They’re black stilettos, the straps adorned

with tiny silver studs, a subtle balance between elegance and power. They remind me of a time when I felt untouchable.

Stepping back into the main room, I sense the tension in the air as everyone looks at me with concern. “What’s wrong?” I ask, trying to sound nonchalant.

“El Lobo sent a car for you,” Carlos replies, his voice strained.

I nod, steeling myself for what’s ahead. “I’m ready.”

“Lucia, you don’t have to do this,” my mother pleads, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

“Si, Mami, I do.” My voice is firm, unwavering. “This is what I asked for, and I won’t back down.”

The tension builds as I descend the steps of the safehouse, my family watching with bated breath. The sleek black car sitting in the driveway is a Jaguar XJ, its engine purring like a predator preparing to pounce. As the door opens for me, I can’t help but think about the blood money that paid for such luxury.

With a final glance back at my family, I slide into the car’s plush leather seat. The driver, a middle-aged man with an unremarkable face and cold blue eyes, doesn’t acknowledge me as he merges onto the busy streets of Miami.

The Miami skyline blurs by as the car glides smoothly through traffic. The driver says nothing, his stoic expression never changing. My heart races with a mixture of fear and determination. I glance at my reflection in the car window, the dark circles under my eyes telling the story of my recent struggles.

As we pull up to the downtown high-rise building, I notice how its sleek glass façade reaches for the heavens, asserting

itself among the other skyscrapers. The driver opens the door for me, and I step out onto the pavement, my heels clicking against the ground. A guard waits at the entrance, his muscular frame clad in a finely tailored suit.

“Ms. Manuel,” he greets me with a curt nod, leading me into the opulent lobby. Marbled floors reflect the soft glow from the crystal chandelier overhead. The sound of water trickling from a nearby fountain mingles with the hushed conversations between elegant residents and their guests. The scent of fresh flowers permeates the air. Despite the beauty around me, I can’t shake the unease that gnaws at my gut, knowing the darkness that hides beneath the surface.

“Right this way,” the guard says, guiding me toward the elevator. As the doors close, I steal a moment to collect myself. The elevator ascends rapidly, my stomach dropping as it climbs higher. Nervousness and resolve battle within me, but I know I must do what is necessary to protect those I love and put an end to the violence plaguing our city.

When the elevator doors slide open, I’m met with the lavish penthouse suite. Hesitating only briefly, I step out, but the guard remains behind. “Good luck,” he murmurs before the doors shut, leaving me alone.

I take in the penthouse’s exquisite design - floor-to-ceiling windows providing a breathtaking view of the city, modern art pieces adorning the walls, and plush furnishings that whisper of untold wealth. But I can’t appreciate any of it, knowing how all of it was bought.

“Lucia,” a deep voice calls out, and I turn to find the man who must be Alejandro Ramirez standing in the doorway of an adjacent room. His dark eyes appraise me, lingering on my heels as if taking note of every detail. “You came.”

“Of course, I did,” I reply, trying to project confidence despite the tremor in my voice. “We need to talk about ending this violence. People are suffering, Alejandro.”

“Ah, compassion,” he muses, stepping closer, his tattoos peeking out from beneath the tailored suit. “There’s no use for such things in my world.”

I square my shoulders, refusing to be intimidated. “Then let’s make your world a better place, shall we?”

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT



Lulu

I survey Alejandro, unsure of what I was expecting. He stands tall, with broad shoulders and a muscular build that's visible even beneath his expensive suit. His dark hair is slicked back, revealing piercing green eyes that seem to bore into my very soul. Tattoos adorn his neck and hands, hinting at the dangerous life he leads. He's good looking in a terrifying sort of way. As he circles around me like a predator sizing up its prey, his deep voice sends shivers down my spine.

“Didn't think the Manuels had such courage,” he says, smirking. “You sure got the balls in the family, not your father.”

“Let's not talk about my father or my family,” I reply, swallowing hard. “I just want to discuss how we can make the city safe.”

“Safe?” He chuckles darkly. “The city is safe, darling.”

I scoff, unable to believe his audacity. “How can you possibly think that?”

His smile widens as he looks down at me. “I like that you think you can stand up to me. It's cute, in a stupid sort of

way.”

“Listen,” I say, frustration mounting. “I came here to negotiate in good faith, and if you’re not willing to do that, then I should just leave.”

Before I can move, his hand wraps around my wrist, stopping me cold. He takes several intimidating steps towards me, forcing me to back up until I fall onto a plush leather sofa. Sitting down next to me, he grins and says, “That’s better.” His hand begins caressing my arm, making my skin crawl.

“Please don’t touch me,” I plead in my thoughts, knowing that voicing this would only make things worse.

“Tell me what you want, then,” he says, raising an eyebrow expectantly.

“An end to the violence,” I reply firmly, trying to ignore his invasive touch. “You can’t possibly think that what’s happening is right for anyone.”

He just smirks at me, his fingers continuing to stroke my arm. “Like I said, the city is safe – under my control, of course.”

“Your control? Is that all you care about?” My heart races as I struggle to maintain my composure. “People are suffering, and you sit here in your ivory tower, completely untouched by it all.”

“Ah, but you came here, didn’t you?” he taunts, leaning closer. “You’re desperate enough to seek help from the big bad wolf himself.”

“Because there has to be another way,” I insist, trying to distance myself from him on the couch. “Something we can do to end this madness.”

“Alright, then. What do you propose we negotiate?” Alejandro asks, his fingers trailing along my arm as if he’s claiming ownership. I try to shift away from his touch, but his persistence is unnerving.

“An end to the violence,” I say with determination. “There has to be a way to make this city safe without all the bloodshed.”

“Ah, but the violence is so much fun,” he drawls, a wicked grin on his face. “Why not let it play out a little longer?”

“Fun? How can you say that when innocent children and citizens are dying? When you’re lacing drugs so that people die?” I ask in disbelief, feeling sickened by his cavalier attitude.

“Relax, Lulu. I’m only teasing.” His grin doesn’t falter. “The truth is, I need to secure my power. Your father was a force to be reckoned with, and in this world, showing mercy is a sign of weakness. I can’t afford that.”

“Then there must be another way,” I insist, trying to ignore the increasingly bold strokes of his hand on my arm. “Something that doesn’t involve more senseless death.”

“Perhaps there is,” he murmurs, leaning closer. My heart races as I feel trapped under his gaze. “You’ve always been highly sought after, haven’t you? Abelardo’s precious little virgin daughter.”

I tense at his words, anxiety clawing at my throat. “What do you mean?”

“Give yourself to me,” he proposes, his eyes dark with lust. “Your virginity for an end to the violence. It’s a fair trade, isn’t it?”

Panic swells within me, knowing that I'm no longer the untouched prize he imagines. I struggle to hide my fear, choosing my words carefully. "That's not a real offer, because I have no way to guarantee your word. You could take me here and still continue the bloodshed."

"Ah, you're a smart one," he says, his grin growing wider. "I suppose that's true. But it does make for an interesting negotiation, doesn't it?"

His laughter sends a chill down my spine, his eyes gleaming with dark amusement. "You're smart enough that I might consider something a little more."

"Like what?" I ask, trying to ignore the wave of dread washing over me.

"Agree to marry me and belong to me," he proposes, brushing a strand of hair from my face. His touch makes my skin crawl. "Your father's men would be loyal to you, and our union would bring the two families together. No more bloodshed."

I consider his words, weighing them against the lives at stake. He continues touching me, fingers trailing along my neck and shoulder; every instinct screams for me to pull away, but I force myself to stay still. As he leans in to kiss my neck, I feel the ghost of Giovanni's loving touch, and the contrast is unbearable.

"Fine," I say, my voice barely above a whisper. "I'll marry you. But I won't consummate this marriage until you treat me as an equal."

He stands abruptly, his hand gripping my throat, his breath hot on my skin. His expression is violent, his eyes burning with rage. "If you become my wife, you will learn your place."

You will be my property, and I will treat you however I wish. Remember that.”

Just as suddenly, he releases me, and his mood shifts back to playful. I’m left reeling, my heart pounding in my chest. “Now, go back to your ‘safehouse,’” he says with a laugh, revealing that he knows where my mother and sister have been hiding all along. He assures me not to worry, that we’ve worked things out. The wedding will be in three days, and someone will come for me tomorrow to take me to my new temporary home until the ceremony.

He leads me to the elevator and kisses my hand, his eyes filled with lust. “I can’t wait to experience your body,” he murmurs before squeezing my ass so hard that I gasp. The doors open, and a guard is waiting inside. As I’m escorted downstairs, the weight of everything that’s just happened overwhelms me, and darkness closes in.

Before reaching the lobby, I faint.



I blink my eyes open, the world around me a hazy blur. My mother and Carlos are hovering over me, their faces etched with concern as they help me sit up on the cold steps of the safehouse. The chill from the stone seeps through my clothes, grounding me in the moment.

“Are you okay?” Carlos asks, his voice tense.

“Let’s get her inside,” my mother insists, her voice trembling as she wraps an arm around me. Together, they help

me to my feet, guiding me into the living room. I can feel my legs wobble beneath me, the strength slowly returning as I take each step.

My vision begins to clear, but as it does, the memories of my encounter with Alejandro come flooding back, hitting me like a tidal wave. A wave of nausea washes over me as the weight of what I've agreed to settles in my chest.

"Was your meeting successful?" Carlos's question breaks through the fog in my mind.

I swallow hard, my voice barely above a whisper. "I'm engaged to marry Alejandro."

The room goes still. My mother's face crumbles, her eyes filling with tears as she cries out, "No! This can't be!"

Carlos stands quietly, obviously deep thought. "What happened?" he asks, his gaze never leaving mine.

I recount the events, explaining that marrying Alejandro was the only way he'd agree to stop the bloodshed. Carlos's jaw tightens, and he asks, "Do you trust him to keep his word?"

"I don't know," I admit, feeling defeated. "But what other choice do I have?"

Just then, my sister crosses the room and wraps her arms around me. "I love you," she whispers, her voice choked with emotion. "I know you're doing this for our safety."

Tears prick the corners of my eyes, and I hug her back tightly. In this moment, surrounded by the love of my family, I find a small glimmer of strength to face the uncertain future ahead.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE



Giovanni

I sit at the office, my mind a whirlwind of thoughts that refuse to be pushed aside. My distraction is overwhelming, and I can tell that my employees are noticing. Their glances are filled with curiosity and concern, making me tense. I realize I need to go home because I can't be seen like this. I grab my laptop and rush out, heading for the penthouse.

As soon as I walk into the penthouse, a feeling of emptiness washes over me. I drop my keys on the table and open my laptop, trying to work, but it's no use. Thoughts of her consume me – what is she doing? Is she safe?

I haven't messaged her since she left, wanting to respect her choice to return and continue her life in Miami without the haunting memories of what might have been between us. But now, my resolve is crumbling. I close my laptop, unable to focus, and switch on the television in an attempt to drown out my thoughts.

As I flip through the channels, my mind inevitably drifts back to Lulu. The more I think about her, the more I try to figure out what these feelings could mean. I've never felt like

this about a woman before. Hell, I've never had much use for a woman beyond a good fuck – which is why I always just used prostitutes. But Lulu was different. She was beautiful, feisty, and tested me in ways no one else ever dared. She could handle all of me, and I couldn't help but want more.

Suddenly, something on the television catches my eye. I turn up the sound, my heart pounding as the reporter speaks. “A mother and her two daughters were found brutally murdered in their Miami home. Authorities are looking for any information that could lead to the whereabouts of the killer.”

My breath catches in my throat, shock and fear coursing through me. The thought that it could be Lulu and her family sends a chill down my spine. Panic rises within me, threatening to overpower any semblance of control I have left.

“Fuck,” I mutter under my breath, unable to tear my eyes away from the screen. The reporter continues, providing descriptions of the victims, but there's no certainty that it isn't Lulu.

I run a hand through my hair, frustration and anxiety consuming me. I need to know if she's safe. I need to protect her, even if it means defying her wishes. And deep down, I admit to myself that I simply can't live without her.

My chest tightens, and I struggle to breathe as the panic attack takes hold. The possibility of Lulu being hurt or worse is too much for me to bear. I can't stand by idly, not knowing if she's okay. With trembling hands, I open my laptop and swallow the guilt that rises in my throat as I access her GPS device.

“Forgive me, Lulu,” I whisper, my voice thick with emotion. “I need to know you're safe.”

The device connects, and I see that it's moving. My heart leaps momentarily, but it does little to calm the storm inside me. I need to confirm her safety for myself.

"Fuck it. I'm going to Miami," I say, slamming the laptop shut.

None of my things are here; they're all still at the mansion. I grab my keys and rush to my car, my mind swirling with emotions and fear for Lulu's safety. As I drive, I wonder if she'll ever let me back into her life. But even if she doesn't, just knowing she's safe will be enough for me.

When I arrive at the mansion, Teddy is there in the lobby. His eyebrows shoot up when he sees me, and he quickly steps in front of me.

"Whoa, slow down, Gio! What's the matter? You look like you've seen a ghost," he says, concern etched on his face.

"Teddy, I can't be sure Lulu's safe. I have to go to Miami," I blurt out, my voice cracking with urgency.

"Damn," he says, shaking his head. "I'm surprised it took you so long to realize. About time, brother."

"Realize what?" I ask, puzzled by his comment. Teddy just shrugs, a knowing smile on his lips.

The foyer's opulence fades into the background as Teddy narrows his eyes at me. "What are you going to do about the Irish while you're gone?"

"I need you to step up and handle things for me with them," I admit, my voice tense. The weight of our family's business hangs heavy in the air.

"Me?" He shakes his head, clearly uncomfortable. "I don't handle the business side of things."

“Look, I have to do this. I need your help.” My chest tightens with the urgency of my plea.

He sighs, relenting. “Okay, fine. But you better be back when things heat up.”

“Of course. Just do your best, and call me if you need anything.” My mind races with thoughts of Lulu, her safety now my priority above all else.

“Alright. Now go find her, you lovesick fool,” Teddy says, a half-smile on his face as he throws an arm around my shoulder briefly before pushing me towards the stairs.

“Count on it.” I rush off to my bedroom, my heart pounding in sync with my footsteps. As I pack, the scent of Lulu’s perfume lingers on one of my shirts, and I clench it tightly in my hand, vowing to protect her no matter what.

Leaving the mansion, the cool breeze whispers against my skin as I make my way to the airport, driven by a sense of purpose I’ve never felt before. Every fiber of my being yearns to hold Lulu again, to ensure her safety, and perhaps even earn her forgiveness.

As the jet’s engines roar to life, I settle into my seat and stare out the window. Miami awaits - and so does Lulu. With each passing second, the distance between us grows smaller, and my resolve to find her only grows stronger.

CHAPTER FORTY



Lulu

Another luxury car arrived at my door in the morning, bringing me and my family to where we're currently staying. However, as I step out of the vehicle, I'm separated from my mother and sister, forced to stay in a separate room. My heart clenches as I watch them being led away, their worried glances lingering on me.

The hours tick by as I explore the luxurious room I've been assigned. A plush, king-sized bed dominates the space, adorned with silk sheets and an abundance of velvet cushions. An elegant chandelier casts a warm glow over the rich furnishings, while heavy drapes hang from floor-to-ceiling windows. The scent of fresh flowers mingles with the faint aroma of expensive perfume, creating a heady yet delicate atmosphere. Despite the stunning surroundings, I can't shake the feeling of unease.

"Another prison," I mutter under my breath, pacing the length of the room. "Just broke out of one, and now I'm stuck here."

My mind drifts to Giovanni. It's been days since I last saw him, and the lack of contact is gnawing at me. Why hasn't he reached out? Doesn't he care about my safety? Bitterness creeps into my thoughts, and I find myself picturing him with other women, uncaring and indifferent to my plight.

“Probably off fucking hookers again,” I grumble, clenching my fists in anger.

Daylight turns into nighttime, and with nothing left to do, I finally crawl into the bed. As I pull the silk sheets over my body, sleep remains elusive, my thoughts churning with uncertainty. I don't fully know where I am, where my family is, or whether they're safe. The very idea that Alejandro might try and visit me in the night sends shivers down my spine.

“What would I do?” I whisper into the darkness, my voice trembling. My heart races at the thought of our impending wedding night – will I have to fake pleasure? Can I even pull that off convincingly? And if he finds out I'm not a virgin, what would he do to me?

My shoulder aches from the tension, and I rub it absentmindedly before finally drifting off into a fitful, tormented sleep.



A hand clamps down on my mouth, jolting me awake. Panic surges through me as I struggle to free myself, my heart pounding in my chest. But as my eyes adjust to the darkness, I see Giovanni's face above me. Relief washes over me for a moment, but confusion quickly takes its place.

“Wha-” I try to say, muffled by his hand.

“Shh,” he whispers, removing his hand from my mouth.
“I’m here.”

I must be dreaming. How could he be here? He told me he didn’t want to come with me, and getting past Alejandro’s guards should have been impossible. Determined to prove this is just a dream, I sit up and pinch myself hard. Pain floods my senses, and I wince, realizing that I must be awake.

Giovanni keeps his voice soft as he moves to hug me and wrap me in his arms. His embrace is warm, comforting, and familiar. For a fleeting moment, I allow myself to sink into it. But then the hurt he caused comes rushing back, and I push him away, anger flaring within me.

“Wh-why are you here?” I demand, my voice shaking.
“You couldn’t even bother to contact me, and now you just show up like this?”

He looks genuinely hurt by my words. “I was trying to respect your decision to move on,” he says, his voice heavy with emotion.

“Move on?” I scoff, climbing out of bed in a heartbeat. “I didn’t decide to move on – you decided to stay put! You left me no choice!”

“You know that’s not what the situation was, Lulu,” he pleads. “Don’t twist it like that.”

“That’s how I saw it,” I snap, my body trembling with a mix of anger and fear. “And you shouldn’t have bothered coming because it’s too late.”

“Too late?” His eyes narrow, and he steps closer to me, his intensity almost palpable. “What do you mean, ‘too late?’”

I swallow hard, gathering the courage to say the words. “I’ve moved on, Giovanni. I’m engaged to someone else.”

His face goes pale, and for a moment, all we can do is stare at each other in silence. The tension between us is thick, heavy with unspoken emotions and unresolved pain. And as much as I want to cling onto my anger, I can’t help but feel a small pang of guilt for hurting him like this.

Giovanni’s face contorts into a mask of absolute rage as he reaches out to grip my chin. But instead of lashing out with anger, he crashes his lips onto mine. I bite down on his lip hard – our usual twisted game we play. It’s toxic, but a part of me loves it.

He pulls back briefly, a smile forming on his bruised lips, and then dives in again, pressing his mouth against mine with even more force. I bite him once more, but this time he digs in, threading his fingers through my hair, yanking my head back with a fierce intensity. His eyes bore into mine, a wild fire burning within them.

“I missed this,” he growls, “and I’m going to show you just who you belong to.” His voice is low and threatening. “I’ll fuck you so hard that you’ll never think of another man ever again.”

“Ha,” I scoff, trying to hide the shiver his words send down my spine, “I doubt it.”

Without warning, he pushes his fingers into my mouth, opening it wide before letting his saliva drip from his tongue into my throat. I swallow it down, and he grins wickedly. “See? You’re already submitting to me. This is going to be so sweet.”

But I won't give in that easily. I gather the spit in my mouth and launch it right back at him. "Nice try, but it's not going to be that easy."

Wiping the saliva from his face, he chuckles darkly. "I don't mind playing this game all night. I'll happily fuck you until you're raw and begging for mercy."

"Never gonna happen," I challenge, heart pounding in my chest.

"We'll see," he replies, releasing my hair. He twists me around, exposing my satin nightgown. In one swift motion, he flips it up, revealing the lace thong I'm wearing underneath. With a sharp tug, he rips the fabric apart, letting it fall to my ankles.

"Let's hear you beg for mercy," he taunts before delivering a hard slap to my ass. His hand connects with my skin in alternating hard and soft smacks.

I bite my lip, trying not to let him see how much I'm enjoying it. "If this is the best you've got, you're going to lose this battle."

He leans close, his breath hot against my ear. "I'm just getting started."

Giovanni turns me around again, and with a swift motion, yanks my nightgown over my head. I lift my arms compliantly, and now I'm exposed to him in all my vulnerability. He grins wickedly before twisting my nipples hard, playing with them like they're his personal toys.

"Ah!" I call out in surprise, my body jolting from the sensation.

He smiles at my reaction. "Do you want mercy?" he asks, his voice dripping with dark amusement.

“No way,” I reply defiantly. “I wish you went even harder.”

And he does. The pleasure intensifies, pooling low between my thighs. He can see how aroused I’m getting and it seems to fuel him further. “That’s the way I like you,” he murmurs, his breath hot against my ear. “Wet and panting for me. I intend to put you on all fours so I can watch your cum drip down your thighs for me.”

I shake my head, feigning indifference. “I’m not even close to turned on.”

“You’re a filthy liar,” he accuses playfully, “but I’m happy to punish you for it.”

Desperate for friction, I begin to rub my thighs together. But he notices and quickly presses his palms into my thighs, forcing me to stop. “I want you tortured,” he says, his eyes gleaming with wicked intent. “I’m not going to touch your sweet pussy until you’re absolutely begging for it.”

He hovers over me, pinning me down to the floor. I try to squirm out of his grasp, but he’s too strong. His grip is relentless as he starts trailing spit all down my body.

“I intend to mark you as my own so that no other man would ever want to get close to you.” My heart pounds faster with each flick of his tongue, leaving trails of wetness on my skin.

The sensation makes me shiver with arousal, but I can’t admit it to him. He notices anyway, commenting on how hard my nipples are. He squeezes them again, and I gasp as a jolt of pleasure shoots through my body.

“You’re such a perfect princess for me,” he says, grinning wickedly. “Do you want a release yet?”

“No, I’m not even close,” I lie, trying to maintain some semblance of control.

“Alright, you want to play that game? So be it.” I instantly regret my decision because I desperately need a release. My hand moves towards my clit, trying to bring myself some relief. He watches me for a few seconds, allowing me to tease myself before he slaps my hand away, his eyes daring me to defy him further.

I know I’ve pushed him too far, but there’s no turning back now.

He grips my chin harshly, forcing me to meet his eyes. “I thought you weren’t turned on at all,” he says with a mocking smirk. Desperate for contact, I move my thighs so that I’m straddling his leg and begin to rub myself against it in search of some relief.

Giovanni watches me, his eyes darkening with desire, and tells me, “Obviously, you’re desperate for my touch. Maybe, just maybe, I’ll give it to you if you call off this stupid engagement.”

My heart races as the words leave his lips, but I can’t bring myself to agree. “I can’t,” I whisper, and he spits in my mouth.

“Wrong answer,” he tells me. “I guess I’ll just have to show you what you’ll be missing by marrying someone else.”

He shoves his thick fingers into my mouth. “Get them nice and and wet for me. Lick them like you want to lick my cock.”

I comply, coating them in saliva before he takes them out and shoves them into my pussy. His movements are intense, almost brutal, and he watches me intently as I struggle to hold back my moans.

“I love seeing your tits bounce for me,” he says. “I can feel how much you want this, so turned on and wet. Fuck, I wish I could record you right now.”

His words bring me closer to my edge and he seems to sense it.

“Are you close?” he asks, his voice low and dangerous. I can tell he already knows the answer, but I admit it anyway, my breath hitching as I say, “Yes, I’m close.”

“Good,” he replies, smirking. “I want you close.” But then, just as I’m about to come, he pulls his fingers out of me, leaving me empty and frustrated. “Close and wanting.”

I protest, but he silences me with a glare. “Shut up and take what I give you when I give it to you.”

Dropping his pants, he pushes his cock into my mouth and I choke on it, gasping for air.

“Fuck, I love the feeling of you choking on my cock. The way your eyes water and your throat tightens. My beautiful little princess.”

My fingers find my clit again, and he allows it this time. “I knew you couldn’t wait,” he teases.

I work my clit, cresting as his cock fills my mouth, the pleasure so intense I can barely breathe. He pulls out, leaving me gasping, and yanks me up onto all fours. “Now,” he growls, “I’m going to fuck any thought of another man out of your mind.”

As he slams into me, the room disappears, and all that’s left is Giovanni and the raw, primal connection between us. I may be trapped in this place, but in this moment, nothing else matters.

I can't let him win, though. I don't want to break so easily.

"You know why I'm marrying someone else?" I goad. "It's because you were never able to satisfy me." I taunt him, my voice breathless and filled with defiance. He slaps my ass hard, the sound echoing through the room.

"Every orgasm you've had says otherwise," he growls, unrelenting. "Keep lying like that, and I'll fuck the truth into you."

He thrusts into me again, filling me completely, and I can't help but cry out in pleasure. It feels so good to have him inside me after all this time, and it's clear he knows it. His hips slam against mine with a fervor I haven't experienced before, each thrust making me crave him more. The intensity of his movements is driving me closer to the edge, and I know it won't be long before I come undone again.

"Are you ready to admit it yet?" he asks between grunts, his voice laced with lust. "That you don't want any other man's cock but mine? That I'm the only one who can make you feel this way?"

"No," I gasp, stubborn even as my body betrays me, gripping him tightly. My words seem to spur him on, his pace quickening, his grip on my hips tightening.

"Your pussy says otherwise," he whispers menacingly, his teeth nipping at my earlobe.

His hips continue to pound into me relentlessly, his free hand moving up to squeeze my breasts, pinching my nipples almost painfully. I can't hold back my cries of pleasure, feeling myself break under the onslaught of sensation.

"God, yes, Giovanni... I love your cock," I confess, my voice laced with desperation. "Please, fuck me as hard as you

can. I can take it.”

“Whose pussy is this?” he demands, his voice low and dangerous.

“Yours!” I scream, the words tearing from me.

“That’s right,” he says. “Even if you marry someone else, you’ll always be begging for my cock,” he says, thrusting into me so hard I can barely support myself on the floor, “and I’ll always come and give it to you.”

“Yes!”

“Say it again,” he orders, his grip on my breast tightening as he twists my nipple.

“Only yours,” I gasp, feeling the pleasure build within me. “I want no one else’s cock but yours.”

“Come for me,” he commands, and that’s all it takes – the pleasure crashes over me like a tidal wave, leaving me breathless and trembling.

As the waves of ecstasy course through my body, every nerve ending alight with sensation, I feel him pull out of me. He turns me around, stroking himself until he comes on my breasts. Then, he picks up my hand and drags my fingers through his cum, spelling out his initials. I look at him, my eyes filled with a mix of lust and defiance.

“Go on,” he says, taking my fingers and pressing them to my lips. “Lick the cum you swore you didn’t want.”

And I do, knowing that no matter what happens in the future, this connection between us will always be there – raw, powerful, and impossible to ignore.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE



Giovanni

The taste of her lingers on my lips, a bittersweet reminder of the passion that had consumed us just moments ago. As I carefully wash my essence from her heated skin, my fingers dance over the curves of her body like a gentle caress. The need to hold her in my arms and protect her is overwhelming, but I have so many questions that must be answered first.

Her breathing gradually returns to normal as she comes down from the thrill of our encounter. Her brown eyes flick nervously towards the door, the shadow of fear momentarily clouding their depths.

“How did you get here? And how did you get past the guards?” she whispers, her voice hesitant yet laced with curiosity.

“El Lobo’s men aren’t as loyal as their boss may think,” I reply, a wry smile playing on my lips. “A few well-timed distractions were all it took to remove them from their posts.”

“But what if they come back?” she asks, the worry evident in her tone.

“Trust me, that possibility has been eliminated.” I try to reassure her, but she still looks unconvinced. “If they turn up missing, your family could be blamed, right?”

“Exactly,” she agrees, looking at me with hope in her eyes.

“Rest easy – they’re just sleeping it off. They won’t even know anything happened.” I place a gentle hand on her shoulder, trying to convey my sincerity. “I can take you away from here.” The words hang between us, heavy with promise.

But instead of relief or gratefulness, her expression hardens. “No.”

“No?” My heart clenches painfully in my chest. “You’re being held captive, Lulu. I came here to ensure your safety.”

Her gaze is filled with sorrow as she shakes her head. “I can’t leave. I’m engaged.”

“Engaged? You were serious?” My mind races, trying to make sense of her words.

“I don’t have a choice in this,” she admits, tears brimming in her eyes. “It was the only way to secure my family’s safety.”

“Surely there must be another way,” I insist, desperate to find a solution that doesn’t end with her marrying someone else.

“Trust me, there isn’t.” She swallows hard, her voice barely more than a whisper. “And you shouldn’t interfere. If you do, it could risk killing my entire family – and they’re lucky to even receive this offer.”

My mind reels, unable to comprehend the seriousness of her situation. This can’t be real; she can’t possibly be engaged

to someone else when we've just shared something so intimate, so powerful.

"Please, just let me help you," I plead, grasping at straws as I try to hold onto her. "Lulu, I-I love you."

Lulu looks away, a single tear slipping down her cheek. "Sometimes, love isn't enough."

"I won't accept that," I tell her, my voice cracking with emotion. "There has to be something I can do."

"Nothing can be done, Giovanni," she says softly, her eyes swimming with tears. "Especially if you're trying to keep your family out of mob business. Involving yourself could implicate you in all of this, and unless you want to get involved in a mob war, you need to let me go and forget about me. I'll try to do the same."

"Absolutely not." My heart races as I reach out for her, my hand brushing against her soft curls. "I'll figure something out, I promise."

"No," she insists, her voice trembling. "You shouldn't get involved. Just forget it and go back to Boston."

With determination burning in her eyes, she tries to push me out of the door. I brace myself against the frame, stopping her. "There's no way I'm leaving Miami without you," I tell her fiercely. "I'm never going to be okay with another man touching you, let alone marrying you. The only man you'll be marrying is me, and I intend to spend the rest of my life exploring your body and worshipping your soul."

Her face crumples, and she shakes her head. "It's too late for that, Giovanni. You're too late. There's nothing that can be done. Please, don't make this harder than it already is. Goodbye," she whispers, giving me a final shove. I let go of

the frame, and she pushes me out the door, closing it behind me.

Leaning against the closed door, I can hear her sobs from behind it, and my heart shatters. I want to go to her, comfort her, but I know she won't let me. The guards are still sleeping outside her room, and I stand there, debating my next move.

I know I said I would be okay just confirming she was safe, but I was lying. There's no way I can live without her. I love her, and I have to prove it to her somehow. Somehow, I need to win her back.

As I walk away from her door, every step feels like a betrayal. But I will find a way to fix this. I will save her, and our love. No matter what it takes.



My heart heavy, I make my way back to the hotel. The door clicks shut behind me, and just as I'm about to collapse on the bed, my phone rings. It's Primo.

"Jesus, Giovanni, what the hell are you doing in Miami? Teddy told me everything," he barks, his voice a mix of anger and worry.

"How's he doing?" I ask.

"You left him in charge of dealing with the Irish, and his solution was to send them a carton of beer and a bag of potatoes. Clearly, you weren't thinking." Primo agrees, the tension in his voice easing slightly.

“No, I wasn’t.” I sigh, rubbing my temples. “But I’m here now, Primo. I just- I need to get Lulu back.”

He’s silent for a moment, digesting this information. “I thought she left of her own choice,” he finally says.

“Technically, she did. But I was a fucking idiot to let her go, Primo. I love her.”

“Fuck,” he curses, and I can almost see him running his hand through his hair. “Well, then you have to fix this, but you’ve really left me in a bad spot back here with the Irish. Isabella is due any day, and honestly, with the new baby on the way, I don’t want anything to do with mob affairs. I made her a promise, and I intend to keep my word to her, otherwise, I’ll lose her.”

“I understand,” I assure him. “That’s why I asked Teddy to handle things. Don’t worry, I’ll guide him from afar.”

“Okay,” Primo agrees, though not without some reluctance.

“Listen, there’s something else,” I tell him. “Lulu is set to marry Alejandro Ramirez.”

“El Lobo’s head?” His voice is incredulous. “How the hell did that happen?”

“Apparently, she made some jacked-up deal to secure peace for the city and her family’s safety if she marries him. But I don’t trust the guy. Does anyone know anything about him?” I ask.

“Nothing substantial,” Primo says. “He’s always been this shadowy figure, never really crossing paths with us directly since I dealt with Lulu’s father and they were at odds. Be careful, Giovanni,” Primo warns. “This is the kind of thing

that could drag you back in after you've worked so hard to get the family out."

"I know," I say quietly, my resolve unwavering. "But I can't let her marry him. I just can't."

"Okay," Primo says again.

The moment the phone clicks silent, a crushing weight of realization settles on my chest. I would willingly get dragged all the way back into the mob life for Lulu. All my morals and principles that I held onto fiercely back then pale in the face of a life without her.

"Fuck," I mutter to myself, running a hand through my hair as I pace around the hotel room. There's no way I'm going to let Alejandro touch her, let alone marry her. That being said, he has a fierce grip on the city, and I'm mostly unprepared to face something as powerful as his gang right now.

I glance at the calendar on the wall. Lulu mentioned the wedding was two days from now. That should be plenty of time for me to figure some things out and get backup down here if I need it. My resolve renewed, I crack open my laptop, determined not to let Lulu go. I will fight for her even if it drains me of my own breath and blood.

"Alright, Giovanni," I say to myself, eyes scanning the screen. "Time to dig up some dirt."

My fingers fly across the keyboard as I begin searching for any information about Alejandro Ramirez - anything that could help me put a stop to this wedding. As the search results start to pour in, I realize that this man is even more enigmatic than I thought.

“Damn,” I mutter under my breath, frustration mounting. I can’t let my emotions cloud my judgment. I need to stay focused if I want to save Lulu.

“Think, think, think,” I repeat like a mantra, forcing my mind to clear and refocus. In the silence of the room, the pounding of my heart is deafening. The stakes have never been higher.

“Come on, there’s got to be something,” I urge myself, clicking through page after page of search results. But the more I search, the more elusive Alejandro becomes.

“Son of a bitch,” I growl through gritted teeth. My fingers continue their frantic dance on the keyboard, my eyes scanning every word, every detail. I refuse to give up. For Lulu, I’ll risk everything.

Then it dawns on me. The hack Lulu showed me back at the office. Maybe it could work on El Lobo’s systems.

I take a deep breath, feeling the weight of my love and determination settle in my chest like a fire that refuses to be extinguished.

“Two days,” I whisper to myself. “Just two days to change everything.”

And with that thought, I dive back into the digital world, ready to unearth the secrets that will determine not only Lulu’s fate but mine as well. No matter the cost, I’ll tear down anyone or anything that stands between us.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO



Lulu

It's a day before the wedding, and I haven't heard anything from my family. Other than the visit from Giovanni, I've been forced to sit silently in my room, another cage. The walls close in on me, suffocating me with their lifeless beige paint. I try to pass the time by reading or drawing, but the minutes just seem to crawl by like insects on the windowsill.

My thoughts drift back to when I was with Giovanni, how excited I was about our future together. The idea of going to college and taking classes - he said he was going to look into it for me. But now all of that is gone, evaporated like morning dew under the relentless sun. My chest tightens as I think about marrying Alejandro. Yet, I must do this to protect my family. It's a sacrifice I'm willing to make, no matter the cost.

There's a knock at the door. My heart races, and for a moment, I think it might be Giovanni again. Despite the turmoil in my chest, I tell myself that even if it is, I need to send him away. I can't be with him, not at the expense of my family. With shaky hands, I open the door, intent on driving him off, but my words fail me as it's not Giovanni but Alejandro on the other side.

“Expecting someone else?” he asks, his voice silky smooth yet laced with menace.

I shake my head, trying to suppress my disappointment. Alejandro pushes me inside, and I stumble, but he doesn’t care.

“Close the door,” he tells me, and I do, though I’m nervous. He can sense it; I can see it in his predatory grin. “Relax,” he says, as if it’s the easiest thing in the world. “Come and sit next to me.”

Reluctantly, I make my way over to him and sit on the opposite side of the couch. The cushion sinks beneath me, but it offers no comfort. My leg bounces with anxiety, and I force myself to take deep breaths, trying to steady my racing heart.

“Isn’t this cozy?” Alejandro purrs, his eyes never leaving mine. His gaze is like a spider’s web, ensnaring me and refusing to let go.

“Very,” I reply, my voice barely a whisper, hoping he doesn’t notice the tremble in my words. All I can think about is how different this is from when I was with Giovanni, and the stark contrast between these two men makes my stomach churn. But I have to be strong, for my family and for myself.

“Come here,” Alejandro orders, his voice laced with a sinister sweetness that sends chills down my spine.

He grabs my arm and pulls me over to where he is. I can feel the heat radiating off his body as he starts to touch me, rubbing my shoulders in a way that feels more like a threat than a caress. It’s odd because when Giovanni kept me prisoner in his mansion, I never had a problem talking back to him. But with Alejandro, talking back could be downright dangerous. It’s unsettling how different these two men are.

“Relax,” he says smugly, “you’re so tense.” His fingers dig into my muscles, and I bite back a whimper of pain. “I want to treat you for your last day as an unmarried woman and as a virgin.”

“Wh—what do you have in mind?” I ask, my voice barely audible.

“Taking you right here, right now,” he replies, waiting for my reaction. When I don’t give him one, he laughs cruelly. “You’re so cute when you’re uncomfortable. We’ll save that for later.”

“Where are we going?” I ask, hoping to change the subject.

“Does it matter?” he retorts, his eyes narrowing slightly.

“I guess not,” I mumble, feeling defeated.

Alejandro herds me into a limo, and suddenly we’re driving through a really bad area of town. The streets are littered with trash, and the buildings look like they’ve been abandoned for years. My nervousness grows with each passing block, a sense of dread gnawing at my insides.

We arrive at an old warehouse, its exterior covered in graffiti and crumbling bricks. The smell of rust and dampness hangs in the air, and I can hear the distant sound of water dripping somewhere inside. Alejandro ushers me in, and I’m immediately struck by the dimly lit room, the shadows clinging to every corner like veils of darkness. The smell is even worse in here, like something rotten and decaying.

“Look,” Alejandro says, flipping on an overhead light.

The room is suddenly illuminated by the harsh glow of the overhead light, casting eerie shadows upon the horrific scene laid out before me. My breath catches in my throat as I take in

the pile of lifeless bodies, their cold, unseeing eyes staring blankly at nothing. Beneath them, bags of cocaine are scattered across the floor, a cruel reminder of the deadly trade that binds us all.

“These were some of your father’s men,” Alejandro says, his voice dripping with disdain. “They tried to smuggle drugs into the country but didn’t get the message that I’ve taken over the drug trade now.”

Tears well up in my eyes as they bring out Carlos and Javier, both gagged and bound, their faces bruised and battered. Panic rises in my chest like bile. “What is the meaning of this? Why haven’t the other bodies been buried with respect?” I demand, my voice trembling.

“Respect?” Alejandro laughs cruelly. “There’s no respect due to any of these men, including Carlos and Javier.”

“What did they do?” I ask, my heart pounding in fear for their lives.

“Nothing really,” he replies with a chilling smile, “other than being loyal to you and your father.”

Anger flares within me, despite my terror. “The whole point of us getting married is so there will no longer be a ‘you and me,’ but an ‘us.’ There don’t need to be questions of loyalty anymore.”

“Ah, but I wanted you to see firsthand just what I can do,” he says menacingly, “and what I’ll continue to do if you don’t go through with the wedding.”

“I haven’t given any indication that I won’t,” I retort, my voice shaking. “This entire situation is unnecessary.”

Alejandro smacks me hard across the face. The sting brings tears to my eyes, but I refuse to cry out. He seems to

take notice and smacks me again, harder this time. Still, I hold back my cries. But when his hand connects with my cheek a third time, the force dazes me, and I crumple to the ground.

“Ah, that’s better,” he says, breathing in the foul air as if it were the sweetest perfume. “You should learn your place and accept the lessons I’m giving you. If I want to show you the corpses of your dead men, then you will look at them and not question me. Understand?” he snarls, kicking me viciously in the ribs.

Through gritted teeth and tears, I manage to cough out a weak, “Yes.”

Lying on the cold, damp warehouse floor, I force myself to look up at Carlos and Javier. Their faces are twisted in a futile attempt to mask their fear. I wish I could offer them comfort, but Alejandro’s presence looms over us like a dark cloud.

“Stop!” I cry out as one of Alejandro’s men punches both Carlos and Javier in the face, causing them to crumple onto the floor, unconscious.

Alejandro narrows his eyes at me, his anger palpable. “I thought I told you not to comment,” he sneers. But I can’t stay silent any longer. Gathering what little strength remains within me, I rise to my feet, defiance burning in my chest.

“I am going to be your wife,” I say firmly, “but I will not be your dog.”

With a snarl, Alejandro grabs my chin and roughly marches me back until I am pressed against the cold, unforgiving wall of the warehouse. I try to stand tall, but my body betrays me as it trembles beneath his touch.

“Ah, so you think you’re more than a dog?” he spits, his words venomous. “You need to learn your place. By my side,

cowering in fear.”

“Is that what you want?” I ask, pleading with him to see reason. “A wife who will lead with you, or just some throwaway woman? I know more about my father’s business than anyone else. You could use that.”

He spits on me again, disgust twisting his handsome features. “You’re a stupid woman, only good for fucking. Be quiet.” His threat is clear – Carlos and Javier’s lives depend on my compliance. “We’ll see if they make it to the wedding or not, depending on how well you behave.”

Alejandro pushes me harder against the wall, his body pressing into mine. I want to scream, but he clamps a hand over my mouth and nose, making it difficult for me to breathe. His other hand travels down to my panties, rubbing me through the fabric. “Why aren’t you wet for me?” he growls.

I struggle not to bite his hand, fear for Carlos and Javier holding me back. Instead, I focus on trying to breathe, every inhale tainted with the scent of death that permeates the warehouse.

“Learn your place,” Alejandro whispers harshly in my ear. And as much as I hate to admit it, I know that right now, my place is here – enduring this torment, playing along with his twisted games, all for the sake of those I care about.

His fingers continue to trail over my clothes, every touch making my skin crawl and my breath hitch. His hand moves lower, just about to slide my panties aside when he suddenly stops. A wicked laugh escapes his lips as he leans in close to my ear.

“Ah, such a good little virgin,” he purrs, his breath hot and rancid against my skin. “You’re so obviously uncomfortable

around me. I can't wait to deflower you tomorrow, fuck you so hard and so fast that you bleed, and ensure you never forget it was my dick that took your virginity.”

I shudder at his words, clenching my fists tightly at my sides to keep from lashing out. He steps back, grinning maliciously, before he turns me around and smacks my ass with a force that makes me stumble forward. Grabbing my arm roughly, he leads me back to the limo waiting outside the warehouse.

The drive back to where he's keeping me is silent and tense. My mind races with thoughts of Carlos, Javier, and the horrors I've just witnessed. The looming threat of tomorrow weighs heavily on me as the familiar building comes into view.

Alejandro escorts me inside, the door slamming shut behind me as he leaves without another word. Alone at last, I run to the bed, collapsing onto it as a torrent of emotions threatens to overwhelm me.

I want to cry, to let the tears wash away the filth and fear that cling to me, but they won't come. Instead, I lie there, staring blankly at the ceiling, trying to find some semblance of strength for the trials that await me tomorrow.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE



Lulu

I pace nervously in the dressing room, my heart pounding in my chest. The stunning white wedding gown I'm wearing clings to my body like a second skin, its delicate lace overlay cascading down into a dramatic train. The silky fabric feels cool against my heated skin, and I can't help but shudder as it brushes against me. The entire room is overflowing with flowers – roses and hydrangeas in various shades of white and cream, their sweet scent filling the air.

My bouquet rests on a nearby table, a breathtaking arrangement of the same flowers, intertwined with baby's breath and soft greenery. The fragrance of the blooms is intoxicating, yet it does nothing to calm my nerves. I glance at myself in the full-length mirror, taking in my reflection. My hair has been expertly styled into a romantic updo, with loose tendrils framing my face and a few escaping curls cascading down my back.

I'm made up from head to toe, a vision in white, and yet I want to cry. This is everything I dreaded when I lived under my father, and now I've essentially agreed to it. Even worse, I don't know what's going to happen when the wedding night

comes. Is Alejandro going to know that I'm not a virgin? Do men even know something like that? Can they feel it? Panic rises within me, and I wish with all my heart that there was someone here with me. But I've been separated from my mother and sister since the first day we were moved to El Lobo's quarters. I don't even know if they'll be at the wedding. I can't imagine getting married without my mother there, even if it is to a man like Alejandro.

Suddenly, there's a knock at the door, and one of El Lobo's guys enters. His appearance is menacing, with dark, cold eyes and a scar running down one side of his face. Just looking at him makes my skin crawl. "Alejandro is ready for you," he says gruffly, his voice void of any emotion.

I steel my nerves and follow him, my heart pounding with each step I take through the elaborate cathedral where the wedding is taking place. It's one of the largest and oldest cathedrals in Miami and it is breathtaking – its high, vaulted ceilings adorned with intricate frescoes and stained glass windows casting ethereal light onto the polished marble floors. The air is thick with the scent of incense and burning candles, and the faint echo of whispered prayers fills the space.

As we make our way towards the altar, my mind races with fear and doubt, but there's no turning back now. I'm about to become Alejandro Ramirez's wife, whether I want to or not.

The haunting notes of the organ fill the cathedral, making it feel less like a place of worship and more like an eerie tomb. The music sends shivers down my spine as I stand at the threshold, scanning the pews for any sign of my mother. But she's nowhere to be found.

"Who's walking me down the aisle?" I ask El Lobo's henchman, trying to mask the fear in my voice.

“No one,” he replies coldly.

Tears well up in my eyes as “Here Comes the Bride” begins to play. I steel myself, straightening my veil and gown, and take a deep breath before starting my slow, measured walk down the aisle.

Each step feels like a mile, my legs shaking beneath the weight of my decision. I try to focus on the delicate lace of my dress, how it clings to my body like a second skin, but all I can think about is the sea of unfamiliar faces staring back at me. El Lobo’s men leer at me with undisguised lust, their eyes raking over my trembling form.

I wish it were Giovanni waiting for me at the end of this aisle, but wishing won’t change anything. I need to go through with this – for my family’s sake.

“Deep breaths,” I tell myself as I continue my march towards the altar, trying to ignore the nauseating sensation that claws at my insides. My chest tightens with every step, and I struggle to hold back the tears threatening to spill over.

“Almost there,” I whisper, willing myself to stay strong. This wedding may not be my choice, but my love for my family is stronger than my fear of Alejandro.

“Keep going,” I urge myself, taking one shaky step after another. The music swells around me, amplifying the surreal atmosphere. I feel as though I’m walking through a nightmare, but I know that backing down now would be impossible.

“Focus on your family,” I think, my heart pounding in my chest. “You’re doing this for them.” With each step, the altar looms larger. I swallow hard, my resolve wavering for a moment before steeling myself once more.

“Almost there,” I repeat, taking the final steps towards my fate, my eyes glistening with unshed tears. “For my family.”

My gaze remains fixed ahead, unwilling to let the sea of El Lobo men see how their leers affect me. As I approach the altar, Alejandro comes into view. He stands tall and commanding in a fitted navy suit that accentuates his muscular build. His dark hair is slicked back, and his sharp jawline is clean-shaven. It would be easy to mistake him for a handsome, successful businessman if not for the cold cruelty lurking in his eyes.

“Ah, here she is,” Alejandro says, grinning wickedly as he eyes me up and down like a predator assessing its prey. I try to maintain my distance, but he grabs my waist, pulling me forcefully against him. I gasp, almost losing my footing.

“From now on, you’re my wife. Learn to act like it,” he declares loudly, his voice dripping with malice.

The audience roars with laughter, and I feel my cheeks burning with humiliation. I focus all my energy on keeping my head held high, refusing to give Alejandro the satisfaction of seeing me crumble.

The priest clears his throat and begins the ceremony. His words wash over me, but I can barely hear them as my thoughts drift back to Giovanni. The memory of his confession haunts me – the way his eyes had softened when he told me he loved me, the vulnerability in his voice. I had dismissed him, fearing the consequences of acknowledging our feelings for each other.

“Should anyone present know of any reason why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, speak now or forever hold your peace,” the priest continues, oblivious to my internal turmoil.

All I had wanted was to be with Giovanni, to admit that I loved him too. But the weight of my family's safety had silenced me. My love for them forced me into this nightmarish union with Alejandro, a sacrifice I had to make to protect them.

"Will you, Lucia Manuel, take Alejandro Ramirez as your lawfully wedded husband?" the priest asks me, his voice cutting through my thoughts.

I swallow hard, forcing myself to face reality. My desire for Giovanni and my love for my family have led me to this moment – standing before an altar, about to marry a man who terrifies me.

"Lucia?" the priest prompts, concern flickering in his eyes.

"I... I do," I reply, my voice barely audible, but resolute.

I barely have time to register my decision when a rough hand clamps around my throat. I startle, gasping for air as Alejandro's furious gaze bores into mine.

"What are you thinking about?" he demands, his grip tightening.

"Nothing," I choke out, panic rising in my chest.

"Liars don't make good wives, Lucia," he snarls, his dark eyes narrowing. "I won't be disrespected like this." A sinister smile crosses his lips as he turns to the priest. "You better leave, Father. You won't approve of what's about to happen."

My heart races as fear grips me. The priest hesitates for a moment before reluctantly departing, leaving me alone with Alejandro and his men.

"Please," I whisper, the word barely audible. But Alejandro's grip only tightens around my throat.

“Time for a lesson, Lucia,” he growls, dragging me by my neck to face the crowd – a sea of El Lobo’s men, not a single woman among them. Their hungry gazes send shivers down my spine, and I know I’m trapped.

“Is this what you want?” I ask, desperation creeping into my voice. Tears sting my eyes as I stare up at Alejandro, trying to find some shred of humanity left in him. “To hurt and humiliate me in front of your men?”

“Your place is at my side, Lucia,” he murmurs, his voice cold and unyielding. “And if that means teaching you a lesson, so be it.”

As his grip on my throat intensifies, I struggle to breathe, my vision blurring at the edges. I can’t believe the priest would just abandon me like this. He must just be another of Alejandro’s paid men. I glance around the room, searching for any sign of help, but only find smirking faces and hungry eyes.

“Stop!” I manage to gasp, my voice hoarse and broken. “Please, don’t do this.”

“Too late for begging now, sweetheart,” Alejandro whispers in my ear, his breath hot against my skin.

I close my eyes, fighting the urge to scream as I try to make sense of the situation. My mind races – can I really endure whatever humiliation Alejandro has planned? Is protecting my family worth this degradation?

“Enough!” I shout suddenly, opening my eyes and glaring defiantly at Alejandro. “If you want a wife who respects you, earn it. Don’t just demand it through fear and violence.”

For a moment, Alejandro seems taken aback, and his grip on my throat falters slightly. In that instant, I realize I have a choice – submit to him and his twisted desires, or stand up for

myself and risk everything for the sake of my dignity and self-worth.

“Remember your place, Lucia,” Alejandro growls, anger flaring in his eyes once more. But as I stare back at him, unflinching, I know I’ve made my choice – even if it means losing everything I hold dear.

But my defiance comes at a cost. Pain lances across my face as Alejandro smacks me hard.

“Lucia, you’ve denied me your body for far too long,” he snarls, his grip back on my throat. “You need to understand your place in this world, and I’m going to teach you that right here, right now.”

Excited murmurs ripple through the crowd of El Lobo men as their leering eyes fixate on me. Panic rises within me like a tidal wave, threatening to drown me in its suffocating embrace.

“Don’t touch me,” I begin to say, but Alejandro is beyond reason.

“Shut up!” he orders, tearing at my dress with a ferocity that leaves me breathless. The once pristine white fabric parts under his brutal touch, revealing my breasts to the room full of hungry eyes. Desperation fuels me as I struggle against him, but he’s relentless, flipping up my skirt and yanking at my panties.

“Get off me!” I scream, but Alejandro silences me with a hand over my mouth.

“Quiet,” he hisses, unbuckling his belt with his free hand.

Just as terror threatens to swallow me whole, a commotion erupts among the crowd. My heart leaps into my throat when I

hear it: Giovanni's voice, like a lifeline thrown to someone drowning, ringing out clear and strong.

“I object!”

The room falls silent, every eye turning toward the source of the interruption. Alejandro stills his grip on me, looking up to face Giovanni, who stands there with an expression of pure fury etched onto his handsome features.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR



Lulu

Tears blur my vision as I stand at the altar, but through the watery haze, I see Alejandro's face contort in shock and anger. "What the fuck?" he snarls, eyes darting around the church.

My heart leaps into my throat when Giovanni emerges from the sea of men like a dark savior. His gaze locks onto mine, his expression murderous yet protective. My chest tightens with hope, and I choke back a sob.

A sudden movement catches my eye, and I realize that a ring of unknown men surrounds us, their automatic weapons aimed at every single El Lobo goon in the room. As if on cue, one of the goons lunges towards Giovanni, but Giovanni is quicker. He draws a handgun from his belt, firing without hesitation. The goon crumples to the floor, blood seeping from his temple.

"Listen up," Giovanni warns, training his gun on Alejandro. "I'm here to negotiate, so you better fucking pay attention, or everyone in this church will die."

"Who are you?" Alejandro demands, his tone laced with contempt.

“I’m Giovanni Maldonado.”

Alejandro laughs coldly. “Your family has no power anymore.”

“Interesting position to take,” Giovanni replies, unfazed. “Considering you’ve been caught with your pants down, and all your men are about to die.”

“Kill my men, and you’ll invite the biggest mob war you’ve ever seen,” Alejandro threatens.

Giovanni shakes his head slowly, a predatory grin appearing on his face. “I don’t think so. You see, I believe you lured most of these men with money rather than loyalty. If history has taught us anything, it’s that an army built on greed will flee during the fight. Dead men can’t spend money.”

I watch Alejandro’s face, searching for any sign of wavering. His eyes narrow, but there’s a flicker of uncertainty in their depths. Giovanni’s words resonate within me, and I know he’s right. He’s here to protect me, and he’ll do whatever it takes.

“Choose your next move wisely,” Giovanni warns, his voice dripping with menace. “Your life depends on it.”

“Fine then,” Alejandro grits out, his eyes locked on Giovanni’s unwavering gaze. “What do you want?”

Giovanni steps closer, his handgun steady in his grip. “For starters, take your hands off my woman.”

The moment the words leave his lips, I feel a sense of relief wash over me. Alejandro hesitates for a second before removing his hands, and I push myself off the table, trembling. Giovanni takes the cloth from the altar and wraps it around me, all without letting his gun leave Alejandro. He pulls me under his arm, and I’m enveloped by his protection.

Alejandro scoffs, trying to regain control of the situation. “You’re making a mistake. She offered herself to me.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Giovanni snaps, his voice cold and deadly. “No one disrespects my woman. If you don’t want to die right here, right now, in front of God and all your men, you’d better keep your mouth closed.”

I’m shocked, but Alejandro complies, his jaw clenched in anger.

“Listen up,” Giovanni continues, unfazed by the tension in the room. “You have two choices. The first is to die, which is my preference,” he smirks. “And the second is to leave Miami and never return.”

Alejandro laughs, bitterness lacing his voice. “Why would I do that?”

“Simple,” Giovanni replies, his stare icy. “You maintain your men with money, and you make money through drugs. I did a little digging through your systems. And, you know what I found?”

Alejandro remains silent, but Giovanni continues.

“What I found was that the only way you get those drugs is through a specific shipping company. One that agreed to import your heroin for a kickback.” He glances down at his watch, his expression smug. “As of three minutes ago, I just became the proud new owner of that shipping company, and the contract to transport illegal substances is hereby terminated.”

Alejandro’s anger boils over, his fists balled at his sides. I can see the rage building within him, and yet Giovanni remains unfazed, staring him down with a calm that sends shivers down my spine.

“Choose,” Giovanni repeats, his voice low and dangerous. “Die or leave.”

The room is thick with tension, anticipation hanging in the air like a heavy fog, and all I can think about is how grateful I am to have this man by my side, fighting for me when no one else would.

Alejandro’s eyes dart around the room as he realizes his men are outnumbered. He calls out to them, desperation lacing his words, urging them to fight back. Yet, no one moves an inch, their loyalty wavering in the face of Giovanni’s show of strength.

Giovanni laughs, a deep rumble that sends shivers down my spine. “I don’t speak Spanish as well as I speak Italian, but I understand the gist of what you said,” he tells Alejandro. “And they’re not going to fight for you. So, once again: leave or die.”

Alejandro clenches his fists, rage and defeat contorting his features, then reluctantly makes the slow walk down the aisle, past all the men who abandoned him. As I turn to Giovanni, a wave of relief washes over me – it feels like coming up for air after being submerged for too long. His gaze is both protective and tender, making me feel safer than I have in a very long time.

“Are you really going to let him go?” I ask, my voice barely a whisper. “What about my family?”

“Your family is safe and with my men,” Giovanni assures me, his voice calm and steady. His words bring me a sense of comfort I didn’t know I needed.

I swallow thickly. “Then, there’s something I need to do. Something I’ve been putting off since this nightmare began. I

just hope you'll still love and support me after I do this," I say, looking into Giovanni's eyes, searching for any hint of hesitation.

"Of course," he replies without missing a beat, his devotion steadfast even before knowing what I'm about to do. My heart swells with love for him and I know I don't want anyone at my side but him.

"Give me your handgun," I say, my voice firm.

Without question, he places the cold metal of the gun in my hand. I let the cloth from the altar fall to the floor and step out of the remnants of my wedding gown, leaving me clad only in thigh-high white stockings with delicate lace tops and a pair of exquisite white satin pumps.

As I walk down the aisle, the cold air kissing my exposed skin, I call out Alejandro's name. He turns around, confusion etched on his face. The metal of the gun feels heavy and unforgiving in my hand, its purpose clear. I raise it, steadying my aim, and without a second thought, I pull the trigger.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE



Lulu

The spring of the gun jerks against my palm, the sound of the gunshot ringing in my ears like a deafening crack of thunder, even though I know it isn't that loud.

Time seems to slow as Alejandro drops to the ground, blood pouring from the bullet wound in his forehead.

The hushed whispers of the men hang in the air like a heavy fog as I stand over Alejandro's lifeless body, my heel planted firmly on his chest. Naked and unashamed, I spit on him, the last remnants of my fear and humiliation dripping from my lips.

I lift my gaze to the sea of faces before me, their eyes wide with shock and awe. In Spanish, my voice unwavering, I tell them, "My name is Lucia Manuel, and I am the daughter of no man. I claim Miami in my own right. With the death of Alejandro, the violence ends, and a new era begins under my rule." My eyes pierce each of theirs, demanding submission. "Will you follow me?"

I hold my hand out, palm up, an offering and a challenge. Stunned silence fills the church, punctuated by shallow breaths

and the distant hum of the city outside these walls.

A moment hangs suspended in time, and then the first of El Lobo's men slowly approaches me, his gaze never leaving mine. One of Giovanni's men moves to intercept him, but I motion for him to stand down. The man stops in front of me, sinking to his knees, and kisses my hand before rising and leaving the church unharmed. A symbolic gesture, one by one, each of El Lobo's men follows suit, until there is no one left but me, Giovanni, and his loyal soldiers.

Giovanni gazes at me with such reverence it feels almost holy. He walks towards me, his steps slow and measured, and stops before me. To the gasps of his men, he sinks to one knee, his dark eyes locked onto mine.

"Lucia Manuel," he says solemnly, "I pledge the allegiance of the Maldonado family to you."

As he speaks, I feel the weight of his words settling on my shoulders, a mantle I never expected to wear. But along with that weight comes an undeniable sense of power, of potential.

"From the moment I met you," he continues, "I have been captivated by your strength, your resilience, and your indomitable spirit. I respect you, Lucia, and I care for you more than I ever thought possible." His voice trembles slightly, as if the emotions behind his words are almost too much to bear. "I love you, and I cannot imagine living without you."

My heart races in my chest, a wild thing caged by bone and flesh, as Giovanni reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small velvet box. He opens it, revealing a ring set with a stunning diamond that seems to capture the light from the candles surrounding us.

“Lucia Manuel,” he says, his voice thick with emotion,
“will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?”

As the church holds its collective breath, I stand there, my
hand still outstretched, feeling the enormity of the decision
before me.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX



Giovanni

I kneel before her, my heart pounding in my chest as I wait for her answer. She's a goddess in front of me, and all I want is to worship at her feet. But instead of giving me an answer, she gets down on her own knees and cups my face in her hands. Her eyes search mine, filled with a mixture of love and uncertainty.

“Como puedo aceptar?” she whispers, her voice trembling. “How can I accept when I know it would drag you back into the criminal world when you've worked so hard to get out of it? I can't do that to you, mi amor.”

Her words cut through me, but I know she's only thinking of my well-being. I gently grasp her hands, still cradling my face, and look deep into her eyes.

“Without you,” I tell her earnestly, “there is no world, business or otherwise. I would willingly throw myself back into crime and forfeit my entire empire just for one more night with you.”

Tears fill her eyes, and she shakes her head, disbelief etched across her face. “I don't understand why you feel that way.”

It's my turn to hold her now, to give her the comfort she needs. I wrap my arms around her, feeling her warmth seep into me. "I feel that way because you're the most beautiful, intelligent, and cunning woman I've ever met. The fact that you can't see that means that I want to spend the rest of my life convincing you of it."

Something breaks within her, and she falls into me. I catch her, holding her tightly against my chest as she starts to cry. "I need you," she admits, her voice barely more than a whisper. "Taking over my father's empire was the only way to secure the safety of the city long term, but I'm scared to do it alone. I need your help, but how can I ask that of you when it means committing yourself to a life of crime?"

"I don't care," I say without hesitation. "I'm committing myself to a life with you."

She hesitates for a moment, then continues. "I don't want to turn my family legitimate, not completely. I want to strengthen it in the right way, but that doesn't mean giving up power so that men like Alejandro can pop up - because they will, and I can't allow that. I know my family will always be a target if I don't take charge."

"I understand," I say reassuringly, "and I'm willing to give it all up to be with you and help you."

A smile finally breaks through her tears, and she whispers, "Yes. I'll marry you." Her eyes light up with happiness and relief. "I never thought this would happen."

As I hold Lulu tightly in my arms, I can feel the heat of her body pressed against mine, her chest rising and falling with each breath. The intensity of our connection is palpable, and I can't wait any longer.

“Wait outside,” I instruct my men. “Close the doors and stand watch.” They nod, lifting Alejandro’s lifeless body and carrying him out.

As soon as the doors click shut, I capture Lulu’s lips in a passionate kiss, unable to contain the desire that has been building between us. “I can’t wait any longer,” I murmur against her mouth, my hands roaming over her bare skin. “Will you let me have you again right here?”

She looks into my eyes, her own filled with a mixture of need and determination. “Yes,” she breathes, and my heart races at her response.

“Wait here,” I tell her, stepping back from her embrace. She looks confused, but I simply smile and call for the priest to return. He enters the room nervously, his eyes darting between the two of us. “I want you to marry us,” I announce, watching as his confusion turns to understanding.

“Okay,” he agrees hesitantly. Lulu stands, and I offer to help her get dressed, but she shakes her head.

“No,” she says firmly. “That dress was bought by Alejandro, and I won’t go near it. I’ll marry you just like this, and I’m not ashamed or embarrassed of my body.”

I grin wickedly at her, squeezing her ass hard as I pull her in for another searing kiss. The priest looks away, clearly uncomfortable. “I love your exhibitionist side,” I whisper in her ear, “and I plan to make good use of it when you’re my wife.”

We stand before the altar, and the priest looks at Lulu incredulously. But there’s a fire in her eyes that dares him to comment on her lack of attire. He starts the ceremony, but I interrupt. “Skip to the vows,” I demand.

“Very well,” he concedes.

The altar before us feels sacred and intimate, the air heavy with tension and anticipation. I take a deep breath and begin to recite my vows, pouring every ounce of my being into each word.

“I offer you my heart, my soul, and my unwavering loyalty,” I say, my voice steady, yet thick with emotion. “With every word I speak, I hope to convey the depths of my love for you, and to make amends for the mistakes of the past.”

Lulu’s eyes shimmer with unshed tears as she listens, her gaze never leaving mine. I can see her vulnerability, her strength, and the love she holds for me in those depths.

“From the moment I first laid eyes on you,” I continue, “I was captivated by your spirit, your strength, and the unyielding determination that radiates from your very being.”

Her lips curve into a small, proud smile, and I know she feels the sincerity behind my words. This is our moment, a chance to start anew, to build a life together despite the darkness that surrounds us.

“Today, my love, we forge a union not just between two souls, but between two worlds,” I say, my resolve unwavering. “With you, my love, by my side, I am confident that together, we will conquer any obstacle that dares to challenge our bond.”

As I finish my vows, Lulu takes a deep breath, and it’s her turn to share hers. Her voice is soft and resolute, every word laced with a mix of gratitude and devotion.

“Before I met you, Giovanni, I thought I knew what love was,” she begins. “But then I met you, and everything changed. At first, I hated you – your arrogance, your

confidence, the way you seemed to have everything under control. Yet, over time, I found myself drawn to you, admiring your intelligence and your strength.”

I can't help but smile at her honesty, knowing that our love story is anything but conventional. But it's our story, and every twist and turn has led us to this moment.

“Today, I stand before you, grateful for the love you've shown me and humbled by your willingness to give up your life to build a new one with me,” she says, tears now streaming down her cheeks. “Together, we will face any challenge that comes our way, as partners, allies, and lovers.”

As Lulu finishes her vows, I reach out and wipe the tears from her cheeks, my own eyes filled with emotion. This is the beginning of our new life together, bound by our love and unbreakable loyalty. We are ready to face whatever lies ahead, side by side, hand in hand.

“By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife,” the priest declares, his voice firm yet weary. “You may kiss the bride.”

As my lips meet Lulu's, the rest of the world fades away, leaving nothing but the electric connection between us. I feel her body pressed against mine, the heat of her skin a beacon in the dimly lit church.

“Father,” I say, reluctantly breaking our passionate embrace, “you might want to leave now. I intend to celebrate with my new wife right here and now.”

The priest rolls his eyes, clearly exasperated by our unorthodox ceremony. “I really need to stop accepting donations from people with mob connections. No good ever comes of it.” With that, he quickly gathers up his things and

leaves the church, the heavy wooden doors closing behind him with a thud.

“Finally,” I murmur as I turn back to Lulu, who is already flushed and waiting for me. Her eyes are alight with anticipation, and I can’t help but grin at the excitement dancing across her face.

“Are you sure about this, Giovanni?” she asks softly, her voice trembling slightly. “Right here, in the church?”

“More than anything,” I reply, pulling her closer and feeling her body melt into mine. “We’ve been through hell and back together, Lulu. This moment – our first as husband and wife – is something I want to remember forever.”

“Then let’s make it unforgettable,” she whispers, pressing her lips against mine once more.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN



Giovanni

As I stand in the church with Lucia, my beautiful wife, my heart races at the mere sight of her. With each breath, the scent of incense and wood mixed with her intoxicating perfume fills my nostrils.

“Lucia,” I whisper, my hands trailing down her naked skin. “I don’t believe in God, but here in this church, I intend to worship your body.”

She shivers under my touch, goosebumps forming on her delicate skin. I tilt her chin up and kiss her, softly at first, our lips barely brushing against each other. Then, as if a fire ignites within us, the kiss deepens, our tongues tangling together in a passionate dance. My hand pulls at the back of her neck, desperate to bring her closer to me. I can feel her surrendering to me, her body melting into mine.

Reluctantly, I force myself away from her lips, moving down to her neck. I want to explore all of her – every inch, every curve. I suck gently on her skin, right where her collarbone meets her shoulder, only coming up for air to tell her the truth that’s been burning inside me.

“Lucia, you are absolutely gorgeous. I’m so lucky to have you, to be able to call you mine. I love you more than anything in this world, and you’ve made me the happiest man alive.”

Her moans send shivers down my spine, but when I pull back, she whimpers and tries to follow me. I raise a hand to stop her, my eyes locked onto hers.

“Wait,” I say, my voice thick with desire. “I want to admire you in this moment, memorize every curve of your body.”

“Please, Giovanni, touch me,” she begs, her eyes pleading.

“I promise I will, but first, I want to worship you. Step back and lean against the altar.” She does with a sultry smile. Then, I take several steps back so I can see all of her.

She stands there, naked except for the white stockings and high heels that hug her legs. My heart races at the sight, and my hand moves down to stroke myself as I admire her beauty. The air between us is charged with desire, and our connection feels electric, binding us together in this sacred space.

“God may not exist,” I say to her, “but in this church, Lucia, you are my goddess – and I will worship you with every fiber of my being.”

Her breath catches in her throat at my words.

“Now, where do I begin?” I murmur softly as my eyes trace the outline of her face, taking in the curve of her cheekbones and the sparkle in her eyes. “Your face, it’s like a work of art –” I say, slowly moving down to her neck, longing to place soft kisses along it. “And your lips, so full and inviting.”

“Keep going,” she whispers, biting her lip.

“Your breasts are beautiful and full,” I continue, as she arches her back slightly, pushing them towards me. “And your waist is perfect for my grasp.” I ache to run my hands down her sides, to feel every inch of her flawless skin.

“Please,” she breathes, her voice desperate with need.

“Patience, my love,” I reply. “Those thighs are the most perfect handful,” and I can’t help but groan as I think about letting my fingers trail up her legs. “Your pussy,” I tell her, barely able to contain myself, “is the most divine heaven I’ve ever tasted.”

“Please,” she repeats, her voice trembling. “I’m so aroused just standing here, please touch me.”

“Of course I will,” I promise, “But not yet. Right now, I want whatever god might exist to witness your beauty.” I guide her to climb onto the altar, and she complies without hesitation. “Spread those legs, Lulu, and let me see that beautiful pussy leak for me. Passion will be our offering tonight.”

She sits on the altar, her legs beginning to spread, but I hold up a hand. “Slow down,” I instruct, “Use your fingertips to trail against your skin.” She does so, her movements delicate and deliberate, revealing herself to me bit by tantalizing bit.

Her beautiful pussy glistens with arousal, begging for attention. “You’re absolutely breathtaking,” I tell her, my voice thick with desire. “Touch yourself, I want to watch you pleasure yourself.”

“Like this?” she asks, her fingers circling her clit slowly and gently. I nod.

“Yes,” I say, watching as she becomes her own seductress. She’s an angel in this moment, a picture of pure sensuality. Her head falls back onto the altar, legs spreading wider as she works her pussy and a nipple simultaneously.

“Can I please have more?” she begs, her breath hitching with each touch, our eyes locked together as we share this intimate experience.

“Yes,” I say. “Give yourself more and let me hear it.”

Her moans fill the air like a sinful hymn, and I can’t help but praise her. “You’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen, Lucia.”

She bites her lip, her eyes glazed with lust. “I can’t take it anymore – I might come.”

“Wait,” I say, my voice thick with desire. “Slow down. I want to take you over the edge as many times as I can tonight.” Her motions slow, but the intensity remains, and soon I’m there, grasping her thighs and bringing her towards me. My tongue finds her center, and she tastes like heaven itself. I lick her folds like a man starved, then suck on her clit, my fingers slipping inside her as I start to finger fuck her. Her breasts bounce in time with my movements, and I continue to suck her clit, driven by her pleasure.

“I... I can’t hold on anymore,” she gasps, her body trembling.

“Just let go,” I say, and I feel her pussy clench around my fingers as I replace them with my tongue, eager to taste her as she comes all over me. I drink her down, lavishing and licking her cum, until I move up to kiss her deeply.

“Taste yourself on my lips,” I urge her, breathless. “Taste how good you are, how wet you were for me. You’re my

beautiful wife, and there won't be a day when I don't want to see you come." She kisses me hard, licking my lips and the rest of her orgasm off my mouth. It's filthy and beautiful, and I can't get enough.

"I want you in my mouth," she whispers, her eyes dark with need. "Please."

"Anything for you," I reply, already stripping and stroking myself. She turns herself on the altar, laying face down, her mouth open and waiting. She grabs my cock with her hands, stroking me, and then I'm in her mouth, feeling divine as she licks and sucks my shaft. It's impossible to resist fucking her face as she moans around my cock, the vibrations sending shivers up my spine.

"Lulu..." I groan, moving in and out of her mouth until I can't take it anymore. I pull out and flip her so she's facing up on the altar, reentering her mouth while exploring her body further. I feel her breasts, twisting and teasing her nipples, before moving down to finger her pussy, which has only gotten wetter for me.

"Lucia," I breathe, "I want to worship you for the rest of our lives."

I pull out of her delicious mouth, my chest heaving with the effort to hold back my climax. My lips find hers again, our lips opposite, and I taste the mix of her arousal and my desire on her tongue. Her breath is warm and heavy against my face, and I can see the hunger in her eyes.

"Tell me how you want me to take you," I whisper, my voice low and rough.

"Take me so hard that God hears us fucking up in Heaven and Satan hears us down in Hell," she replies, a wicked smile

playing at the corners of her lips.

“Absolutely,” I grin devilishly at her, already intoxicated by the idea. I carefully guide her off the altar, supporting her as we move together until she’s leaning against it. Her breasts press into the smooth surface of the table, making her gasp softly from the contact. With one foot, I kick her legs apart, exposing her wetness to me. Dragging my fingers along her slick folds, I toy with a finger into her tight asshole, causing her to moan at the touch.

“Grab the edge of the table,” I instruct her, my voice firm yet gentle. She obeys without hesitation, her knuckles white from her grip. Positioning myself behind her, I enter her warm pussy, feeling the inviting heat engulf my cock as I start to fuck her slowly.

“God, Lucia... You feel incredible wrapped around me like this,” I groan, my head falling back as I savor her tightness. “You’re my wife, and I plan to fuck you every single day for the rest of your life. No other man will ever have this pleasure.”

“More,” she pants, her voice strained with need. “I want more, Giovanni.”

“Greedy little thing, aren’t you?” I tease, slapping her ass playfully before increasing the intensity of my thrusts. Her moans grow louder, filling the cathedral and echoing against the high ceilings. I want to hear her, to have her voice surround us as we give in to our desires.

“Harder,” she begs, cursing and praising my name as I drive into her with increasing force. “Please.”

“Such a beautiful, perfect little wife,” I murmur, delighting in her requests for more. “Asking for your husband’s cock

harder like that... You'll get what you want, my love."

I pull out of her, flipping her over and sitting her up on the altar once more. I push her back so she's leaning against it, and her beautiful tits are on display for me. I suck on her nipples hungrily as I reenter her warm pussy, feeling her body shudder beneath me as I continue to thrust into her.

"Lucia, my beautiful wife, you feel absolutely divine," I tell her, my words punctuated by the sounds of our bodies colliding.

"More, Gio... please," she moans, her eyes locked onto mine, pleading for the release she craves.

"Do you want to come again, my love?"

"Please, Gio... I do," she whimpers, her body trembling with need.

"Then let go for me," I encourage her as I thrust even harder, sweat dripping from my brow. She's such a good girl, taking everything I give her with grace and passion.

Her nipple finds its way into my mouth, and I suckle it hungrily while reaching down to press a finger against her throbbing clit. The moment I touch her there, I feel her walls clench around my cock, and she comes undone with a mixture of praise and curses spilling from her lips. Her screams of ecstasy fill the church, creating an intoxicating symphony of pleasure.

As she returns from the heights of her orgasm, Lulu looks at me with a sultry smile. "I still want more," she admits, her eyes dark with desire.

"Of course you do," I grin, already knowing that our night together has only just begun. I pull out of her wet heat, kneeling in front of her. The taste of her orgasm still lingers on

my tongue, and I can't resist licking her thighs and folds once more, savoring the delicious flavor.

"Get my cock as wet as you can, Lucia," I command, standing up and moving towards her mouth. She doesn't hesitate, taking me in eagerly and coating me with her saliva until I'm slick and ready.

I guide myself back to the juncture between her legs, which she spreads wide for me like a beautiful offering. Slowly, ever so slowly, I enter her tight asshole.

"God, Lulu, you're taking me all in so beautifully." All the while, I rub her swollen clit, loving the sounds she makes as I sink deeper inside her.

"Ah, Gio... you feel amazing," she moans loudly, the sound echoing through the church like beautiful music. "You're my perfect, pretty wife," I tell her. "Taking my cock and making me lose control. I can't hold on much longer," I admit, feeling the pressure building as her tight grip squeezes me. I rub her clit faster, and she cries out.

"It's too much," she moans. "I'm going to come again!"

"Let go with me," I urge her, refusing to relent as I continue to stimulate her. I feel her walls clench again, and finally, I let go, filling her with my seed as we both topple over the edge together. Her name escapes my lips like a prayer, sealing this passionate offering of love between us.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT



Lulu

The beautiful hotel lobby downtown evokes a sense of grandeur and tranquility all at once. Of course Giovanni had thought of everything and already had a duffle bag of my belongings ready for me in the car, so that I could shed some of the past few days off of my skin. I feel a wave of relief wash over me as I step into the elegant hotel room, leaving behind the chaos of the day. The scent of fresh linen and lavender fills the air, further soothing my frazzled nerves.

“Lulu!” Sofia’s voice reaches me before her tiny arms wrap around my waist in a tight embrace. My mother follows suit, tears streaming down her face as we all collapse to our knees, hugging each other fiercely.

“Mi hija,” my mother whispers, her voice breaking. “I heard what you did... You shouldn’t have.”

Looking into her eyes, I reply with conviction, “It was the only choice I had, Mama. I’d do it all over again if it meant securing you and Sofia’s freedom. You both matter the most to me.”

Giovanni watches us from a respectful distance, his piercing eyes softening with empathy. After some time, he clears his throat gently and suggests, “Maybe Lulu and I should go get some rest. We can all reconvene tomorrow after a good night’s sleep.”

“Goodnight, Mama. Goodnight, Sofia.” I hug them both one last time before following Giovanni into the adjoining room.

As soon as the door closes behind us, an indescribable relief fills me. The room is spacious and tastefully decorated, with floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a breathtaking view of the city skyline. A bouquet of fresh flowers sits on the polished wooden dresser, their sweet fragrance mingling with the faint scent of leather emanating from the plush armchair.

“Lucia,” Giovanni breathes, pulling me into a warm embrace. “I am so grateful to be able to call you my wife.” He kisses me tenderly, and for a moment, I feel like we’re the only two people in the world.

“Does Mama know we’re married?” I ask, pulling back slightly. He shakes his head, and I feel a pang of guilt. “She can’t know I got married without her there.”

Giovanni smiles reassuringly. “Don’t worry about it. I’ve already planned an actual wedding ceremony and reception that everyone will be jealous of.” His words are laced with humor, but deep down, I know he means it.

“When is it?” I inquire, my curiosity piqued.

“One week from now,” he replies, wrapping his arms around me once more. The emotions from the day finally catch up to me, and tears begin to pour out of my eyes.

Giovanni cradles me in his strong arms, carrying me to the large, inviting bed that dominates the room. Its plush pillows and silky sheets seem to beckon for us to seek solace within its embrace. He lays me down gently, holding me close as I continue to cry, releasing all the pent-up emotions from the day's events.

"Tell me what's wrong," he murmurs, his voice soothing. "Don't hold anything back."

I take a deep, shuddering breath. "I know Alejandro had to die, but I've never killed anyone before." The weight of the gun in my hand returns to haunt me, the sensation so vivid it feels real. "I don't know how to process it - the way he fell down in front of me..."

Giovanni brushes a stray hair away from my tear-streaked face. "What you're feeling is normal. Don't try to bottle it up. These things are never easy."

"How have you dealt with it?" I ask, searching for some guidance, some anchor in this turbulent sea of emotions.

He hesitates for a moment before speaking. "I've always found solace in the fact that the people I've killed would have killed many others... but I also recognize that I probably haven't processed my own kills in the healthiest of ways. Maybe we should see a therapist," he suggests.

"Okay," I agree, sniffing. "But they'll have to be okay with listening to people talk about others they've murdered."

Giovanni chuckles softly. "I'm sure I can find someone we can trust."

My mind starts spinning again, too fast for comfort. "There's so much I need to do," I say, my voice wavering. "I have to take control of the city before another interloper tries

to take over. Secure my position with my father and El Lobo's men..." I pause, my doubts creeping in. "Am I even cut out for this? Or did I get myself in way over my head?"

"Shh," he whispers, placing a finger to my lips. "You are absolutely capable of doing this, and even greater things. And I'll be by your side through it all."

I look into his eyes, filled with sincerity and warmth, and ask, "Do you really intend to move down to Miami with me permanently?"

He chuckles again. "It's rather hot down here for my liking... but yes, I will stay by your side, wherever that may be."

"Thank you," I whisper, feeling a mix of gratitude and guilt. "But I don't want to take you away from everything you've built."

"Lucia," he reassures me, "don't feel guilty. My business partners are more than capable of running things up north, and I'll check in with them from time to time. We're in this together now, remember?"

His words wrap around me like a warm blanket, comforting me as I allow myself to sink into the safety of his embrace.

"What about your family?" I ask Giovanni, my thoughts shifting to Teddy and the rest of the Maldonado clan.

Giovanni sighs, his chest rising and falling beneath me. "I think Teddy will need to step up and take control of things."

"Really? Do you think he can handle that responsibility?" I question, trying to imagine the charming, lighthearted Teddy in such a serious role.

“Sometimes necessity helps us do things we’re otherwise too scared to do,” he says.

“True,” I agree.

“Teddy is capable of more than he realizes. This might be his chance to prove it.”

Curiosity getting the better of me, I can’t help but ask, “How did you find information on El Lobo and the shipping company, anyway?”

His lips curve into a proud smile as he replies, “I used your hacking method to get into their systems. It worked like a charm!”

My heart swells with pride, knowing I taught him something valuable. “That’s amazing! I knew you could do it.”

“Thank you,” he says, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “We’re going to make an exceptional team. You’ll see.”

“I think so too,” I admit, feeling a renewed sense of confidence in our partnership.

He leans in to plant a gentle kiss on my lips, his fingers brushing through my hair tenderly.

“Get some rest, my love,” Giovanni whispers, his breath warm against my skin. “Tomorrow is a new day, and we have much to do.”

I nod, allowing my heavy eyelids to close and the exhaustion from today’s events to finally take over. As I drift off to sleep in his arms, I feel hopeful for the future.



A week later, standing in front of the mirror, I revel in how different everything feels. The wedding dress I'm wearing is my own choice, a delicate vision of lace and tulle that hugs my petite frame before cascading into a frothy cloud around my feet. The ivory fabric rustles softly with every movement, and the embroidered flowers on the bodice seem to dance, their silky petals brushing against my skin like whispers of love.

Beneath the dress, I wear heels that make me feel like I'm walking on air. Their satin straps crisscross around my ankles, slender and secure, while the stiletto heel adds a hint of daring elegance. They are both beautiful and empowering, just like the love Giovanni and I share.

The bridal suite is alive with the scent of flowers: roses, lilies, and freesias intermingling in a fragrant symphony. My bouquet is a lush gathering of these blooms, their colors melding together in a harmonious blend of passion and purity.

My mother and sister stand beside me, their eyes shining with happiness. Sofia, in her flower girl dress, looks like a miniature fairy princess. The frock is a confection of soft pink tulle, adorned with tiny silk rosettes that echo the ones in my hair. Her excitement is infectious, her laughter a melody that fills the room.

"Everything's perfect," I think as I admire my reflection, my hair styled in soft curls with blossoms woven throughout, adding an ethereal touch.

A knock on the door interrupts our reverie, and someone from the church pokes their head in. “Everything’s ready,” they inform us, their smile warm and welcoming. This time, there’s no fear in my heart, only excitement.

As I walk through the corridor of the church I grew up in, I’m struck by its simple beauty. The sunlight streaming through the stained glass windows casts a kaleidoscope of colors onto the polished wooden pews, while the familiar scent of incense and old hymnals fills my lungs. The echoes of footsteps on the stone floor merge with the gentle hum of anticipation from the waiting congregation.

Pausing in front of the cathedral’s entrance, I thread my arm through my mother’s, feeling her strength and love envelop me. Sofia goes first, her tiny hands scattering petals down the aisle like confetti. I smile at my mother, who leans in close to whisper, “I love you, and I know you’re already married.”

Shocked, I can only blink at her in surprise, but she just laughs softly. “It’s okay, mija. I’m glad we still get to share this moment together.” Tears prick my eyes as I tell her I love her too, and her pride shines through her own tears as we begin our walk down the aisle, arm in arm.

As I make my way, the faces of people I know and love surround me like a warm embrace. Happiness fills every corner of my heart, leaving no room for doubt or fear. My gaze finds Giovanni standing at the altar, looking absolutely breathtaking in his tuxedo. The tailored suit accentuates his broad shoulders and lean waist, while his dark hair is styled to perfection, framing his striking hazel eyes.

How did I ever get so lucky? The gratitude I feel knowing he’s mine swells inside me, threatening to spill over as tears.

He loves me, flaws and all, and I couldn't ask for more.

My mother releases my arm, her eyes shining with unshed tears. As she hands me off to Giovanni, she leans in and whispers something into his ear. I wish I could hear what she says, but it doesn't seem to faze him. Then again, it would take more than a threat from my mother to rattle Giovanni Maldonado.

"Are you ready, princess?" he asks softly, his voice laced with tenderness.

"More than anything," I reply, getting lost in the depths of his soulful eyes.

The priest begins the ceremony, but all I can focus on are Giovanni's eyes, filled with love and devotion. We recite simpler vows this time, saving our most intimate declarations for when we're alone together.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife!" the priest exclaims, but before he even gets to "kiss the bride," Giovanni grabs me and presses his lips fiercely against mine. Cheers erupt around us, and I can't help but smile through our passionate kiss.

Reluctantly, he breaks away, and we race back up the aisle, hand in hand, as everyone claps and cheers. As we reach the vestibule, I remind him we need to wait for the receiving line, but he just grins mischievously.

"Princess, you're way too beautiful for me to wait another second," he declares, sweeping me off my feet and tossing me over his shoulder. Laughter bubbles up inside me as he carries me to the waiting limo.

"Put me down!" I squeal, swatting at him playfully.

"Never," he counters, a devilish glint in his eyes.

As soon as the limo door closes, Giovanni's lips are on mine again, his hands exploring every curve of my body. His touch sends shivers down my spine, setting me ablaze with desire. By the time we reach the reception hall, he's already brought me to a trembling, breathless climax.

"Welcome to our forever, Lucia," he whispers against my skin.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE



Giovanni

The clinking of champagne glasses and the low murmur of guests' laughter swirl around me as I stand in a shadowed corner at my own wedding reception. The beauty of the moment is marred by the weight of an impending threat, like a dark cloud hovering just out of sight. Teddy slips beside me, his blue eyes wide with worry, and immediately launches into his report.

“Things are getting a lot worse with the Irish,” he says, glancing nervously over his shoulder. “Despite the message we sent, they’re clearly gearing up for something big.”

Guilt gnaws at me as I take in Teddy’s unease. I’ve pinned him with this burden, but what else can I do? Lulu needs me here, and I can’t abandon her.

“I know, Teddy,” I sigh, rubbing the back of my neck. “But Lulu needs me here. I can’t leave her now.”

Teddy nods, his expression understanding yet still tense. “I respect your decision, Giovanni. I’m just worried about the war that seems to be coming our way, whether we want it or not.”

“How do you know what the Irish are planning?” I ask, searching Teddy’s face for answers.

“Reports say they’re stockpiling weapons and ammunition in a specific church under the protection of a priest friendly with the Westies,” he replies, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Handle the situation, Teddy,” I say, placing a hand on his shoulder. “You can do this.”

He frowns, uncertainty etched across his features. “How?”

“I leave that up to you,” I reply, trying to reassure him. “Maybe rely on help from the inside—someone you trust who can be a sounding board for your decisions.”

“Thanks, Giovanni,” Teddy murmurs, nodding thoughtfully. “I’ll think about it.”

As Teddy steps back, my business partners approach, their faces alight with celebration. Lawrence, Victor, Roman, and Sebastian surround me, offering congratulations and hearty pats on the back. Teddy claps me on the shoulder before excusing himself.

“Listen, guys,” I say, gathering my resolve. “I’ve got some difficult news to share. For the time being, I’ll be moving to Miami and resigning my position in the company.”

Their expressions shift from shock to curiosity as I continue, “I intend to appoint each one of you as the CEOs of the various components you already manage. If you’re at all interested in buying out my stake in each company, let’s schedule a meeting. Until then, I know you’ll do a great job, so keep things running the way they always have been.”

Lawrence chuckles, his brown eyes sparkling with humor. “Well, you’ve only ever really gotten in our way, Giovanni, so this is a blessing!”

The others join in his laughter, and I can't help but grin at his jest. We shake hands, their well-wishes for my future echoing in my ears as they disperse back into the crowd.

As my business partners recede into the swirl of laughter and music, Lulu materializes before me like some bewitching vision. Her eyes are alight with an inner joy I've never seen in her before. "So," she teases, her voice a sultry caress, "are you done playing the dashing CEO for today? Ready to rejoin the party?"

"More than ready," I admit, unable to contain the excitement that surges through me at the sight of her, radiant as a tropical flower against the backdrop of our wedding reception. "In fact, I'm ready to start the rest of my life by your side."

"Ah, but don't expect it to be all sunshine and roses, Giovanni," she warns playfully, her eyes dancing with mischief. "We have challenges to confront, obstacles to overcome."

"Let's not worry about those today," I murmur, drawing her into my embrace. The warmth of her body against mine is a balm to my soul, soothing away the lingering shadows of doubt and apprehension. "Right now, let's just enjoy this moment, and leave the rest for later."

"Sounds perfect," she sighs, relaxing in my arms. Her smile is so bright, it seems to outshine even the dazzling chandeliers above us.

I hold my phone up and open the camera. "Do you mind?" I ask her. "I'd like to send a picture to my mother."

"Your mother!" Lulu exclaims, clapping her hands together in excitement.

I nod my head, a bit of a sheepish smile forming on my lips. “Yeah. After you made that suggestion all that time ago, I tracked her down. Things happened so fast that she wasn’t able to to make it to the wedding, but I’m hoping we can go and visit her real soon.”

“Of course!” Lulu beams, moving in close so that I can snap a selfie of us and send it off.

“I’m so proud of you,” she says to me and her words fill my heart up to the brim.

I lean down and capture her lips in a kiss that tastes of love and promises, of passion and devotion. Time seems to slow, then stop altogether as we lose ourselves in the sweetness of each other’s touch.

When we finally part, Lulu gazes up at me, her eyes filled with the light of a thousand stars. “I love you, Giovanni,” she whispers, her voice trembling with emotion. “I could never have imagined that my life would turn out like this, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Neither would I,” I confess, my heart swelling with happiness and gratitude. “I love you too, Lulu, more than I ever thought possible. And I can’t wait to see what the future holds for us.”

As we stand there, wrapped in each other’s arms, the world around us fading into a blur of color and sound, I can’t help but feel that this is only the beginning of our story—a story filled with passion, adventure, and boundless love. And I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world.

EPILOGUE



Lulu

The sun casts a warm, golden glow on my skin as I lay on the private beach, savoring the gentle caress of Giovanni’s fingers trailing along my arm. The waves lap at the shore with a soothing rhythm, and I sigh in contentment. We’ve finally managed to escape the chaos of the city for our long-awaited honeymoon, leaving behind any concerns about his family’s criminal past or potential threats.

“Where exactly are we?” I ask, squinting at the endless azure sky above.

Giovanni chuckles, the sound resonating deep in his chest. “It’s a secret,” he teases, his dark eyes twinkling with mischief. “But it’s ours.”

Our little cabin sits atop stilts, nestled right above the crystal-clear blue waters that surround this idyllic, tropical paradise. It feels like we’ve been transported to another world entirely – one where we’re free from worries and responsibilities.

“Lulu,” Giovanni murmurs, his voice low and seductive. “You look amazing in your bathing suit, but I think you’d look

even better out of it.”

I blush furiously, unable to suppress the grin that spreads across my face. “Oh, is that so?”

“Absolutely.” His smile turns wicked as he effortlessly lifts me into his arms, cradling me against his strong chest. My heart races with anticipation, knowing full well what awaits us inside our secluded haven. I can’t help but revel in how he makes me feel beautiful and small, yet cherished and protected all at once.

As soon as we cross the threshold, Giovanni kicks the door shut and carries me to the bedroom. He gently lays me down on the soft, inviting bed before hovering over me. His lips press tender kisses into my skin, and my breath hitches each time they move lower.

“Your touch...” I gasp, struggling to form coherent sentences. “It always... does something to me...”

“Good,” he purrs, his fingers continuing their maddening exploration. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Tell me,” Giovanni whispers into my ear, his breath hot against my skin, “what do you want most right now?”

My body tingles with desire, and I struggle to find the right words. “I want... I want you to kiss me everywhere. Make me feel alive.”

“Your wish is my command,” he murmurs, his lips finding mine in a searing kiss that ignites a fire within me.

Giovanni’s mouth trails down my neck, pausing to nip and suck at the sensitive skin. I squirm beneath him, my pulse racing as he continues his exploration. Each touch sends shockwaves of pleasure through my body, and I can’t help but gasp and moan.

“God, you’re amazing,” I pant, feeling more alive than ever before. It’s as if his kisses are breathing life into every inch of my skin.

“Only for you,” he replies, his voice low and sultry.

As his lips descend further, I realize where he’s heading, and a shiver runs down my spine. When he finally reaches the apex of my thighs, his tongue teases my folds, and I nearly lose my mind. My fingers tangle in his dark hair, urging him closer.

“Please,” I beg, my voice desperate with need. “Don’t stop.”

“Never,” he promises, his fingers joining his tongue in their wicked dance.

The sensation builds until I can’t take it any longer, my body trembling as release washes over me. I cry out his name, overcome by the intensity of my climax.

“Beautiful,” he murmurs, lifting himself up to meet my gaze. His own desire is evident, and I know what he wants without needing to ask.

“Let me return the favor,” I whisper, pushing him onto his back and moving down his body.

“Are you sure?” he asks, his voice laced with concern.

“Positive,” I assure him, my lips curling into a sultry smile. “You deserve to feel just as good as you made me feel.”

As I take him into my mouth, I focus on giving him the same pleasure he gave me. His moans and gasps spur me on, and soon, he’s gripping the sheets in anticipation.

“Stop... stop, or I won’t be able to hold back,” he warns, his breath heavy with need.

I pull away reluctantly. Giovanni's heated gaze meets mine, and without a word, he positions himself between my legs. I can feel the warmth of his body pressed against mine, his erection teasing at my entrance. My heart races, anticipation building as we share an intimate moment.

"Are you ready?" he asks, his voice tender yet laced with need.

"Yes," I breathe, my eyes never leaving his. "I want this. I want you."

With a gentle thrust, he sinks into me, our bodies becoming one. The sensation is overwhelming, and I can't help but moan his name. His hips begin to move, each stroke sending shivers through my entire being.

"Lulu," he pants, eyes locked onto mine. "I love you."

Everytime he says those words, they hit me like a tidal wave, emotions swelling in my chest. "I love you too, Giovanni."

"Ah..." he groans as our rhythm quickens. "You are everything I've ever wanted. Everything I never knew I needed."

"I feel the same way," I confess, my nails digging into his shoulders as pleasure courses through me. "You make me feel so alive, so loved."

As our bodies crash together, passion ignites, fueled by the depth of our connection. I can see the love in Giovanni's eyes, feel it in every touch, every kiss. And when he finally reaches his climax, he whispers into my ear, "I am the luckiest man alive to be with you."

My heart swells with happiness, my body still trembling from the intensity of our lovemaking. As we lay wrapped in

each other's arms, Giovanni reaches for a bowl of fruit on the bedside table. He carefully feeds me slices of mango and pineapple, each bite sweet and refreshing.

“Thank you,” I murmur, snuggling closer to him. The tenderness of the moment is almost overwhelming, and I can't help but feel a deep sense of contentment.

“Anything for you, princess,” he whispers, pressing a gentle kiss to my forehead. His arms wrap around me, holding me close as sleep begins to claim me.

As I drift off, I can't help but think that this is the happiness I've been searching for – the love, the passion, the connection. And with Giovanni by my side, I know that together, we can face anything life throws our way.



Want more of Giovanni and Lulu?

I wrote an exclusive extended epilogue about their life a few years in the future!

[Click here to read it!](#)

or

Scan the code below!



I cannot tell you just how excited I am for the next book, Prince of Sin, to be released. So excited, that I'm actually going to include the first chapter right here (before it's even released!)

So, keep reading!

Prince of Sin

Chapter One

Teddy Maldonado

“God, this is so boring,” I exclaim as I wait in the car next to Marco. I pump up the volume to R.E.M.’s “Losing My Religion” and hum along.

“How much longer do you think, Marco?” I ask, stretching my hands over my head dramatically.

“I told you already, my name’s not Marco,” Marco replies.

I stare out at the desolate street. It's 2 a.m. in Southie (or South Boston if you're from out of town) and we are currently parked next to an Irish Catholic church.

"I'm choosing my confessions..." the song continues.

There aren't any lights on as far as my eye can see. The group that is currently ruining my evening cut power to the block to make sure the city security cameras don't make us easy targets.

Not that we don't already have enough people on our payroll in the police department. But, we try not to make being a rat an even shittier job than it already is.

"You have to be Marco," I say to Marco. "Marco is the person who comes with me on my clean-up jobs," I reply to him.

"Marco was busy. I'm filling in," Marco says.

"No, you don't understand," I reply, tapping the dashboard of the Lincoln Navigator we are currently sitting in. The rich leather thuds against my callused fingers, the sound reverberating through the car.

"Marco is my partner on jobs. I don't give a fuck what you think your name is. For tonight, you're Marco."

"Whatever you say, boss," Marco replies.

I bark out a laugh. "I'm just fucking with you. I know your name is Tony. Tony and Teddy waiting around for text messages."

"...losing my religion..."

I can tell that Tony is growing uncomfortable, which only makes me want to mess with him more. Messing with people is in my nature, and it is one hell of a way to pass the time.

“So, Marco, I mean Tony,” I correct myself with a wink. “Tell me, how did you become a soldier for the Maldonado Family?”

“I grew up in Back Bay,” he says, referring to the North Side of Boston. “I’ve been doing this since I was a kid.”

“And you’re only a Marco-lookalike after all these years?” I goad.

His jaw twitches, and I can tell that I hit a nerve. “Sorry, sorry,” I laugh, holding up my hands. “That was a dick move of me to say.”

He doesn’t reply.

I’m not surprised. My brothers, Primo and Constantino, both took more of a “man in charge” attitude when it came to the family business. It kept people like Tony in line.

I, on the other hand, know I’m not “Don of the Mafia Crime Syndicate” material, and I’m okay with that. Up until recently, both of them wanted the job so badly I’m pretty sure if someone told them all they had to do was cut off their left nut for it, they’d willingly splice and dice.

Of course, now things have changed. My oldest brother, Primo, had to go and fall in love with his lawyer and knock her up. She made him promise to go legitimate or he’d never see the baby. So, of course, he agreed.

Then Giovanni took over, thinking he was going to take the family clean. He did for a while, but then he married a mob princess and is helping her run the Cuban mafia down in South Florida. So, that was a bit of a 180.

In his infinite wisdom, he pissed off the Irish and then dumped the problem on me. Which has led to not great

consequences, because I don't really know what the hell I'm doing.

"...that's me in the spotlight..."

The actual Marco, the one that usually goes with me on these jobs, has been helping me try to run things, but even with his help, stuff is messed up. It almost makes me wish Constantino was around.

Almost.

He is sort of a rageaholic and did murder Marco's father. But, hey! It is the mob, so not like it hasn't happened before.

I clap Tony on the shoulder, and he visibly winces. "Loosen up, it's just me," I say to him. "Come on, you gotta tell me. What do people say about me when no one's around?"

"Nothing," he replies quickly.

"Nothing?" I repeat, squeezing his shoulder, perhaps a little too hard. He yelps, and I pull my hand back.

"That's a little demoralizing, don't you think?"

"I guess I don't follow."

"Wouldn't you be sad if someone told you that no one cares to talk about you behind your back?"

"Are you sad?" he asks.

I twist my lips and look to my right at the church. "Actually, I'm sad about a lot of things, Tony," I reply.

"...that brought me to my knees, failed..."

Just then, his phone screen lights up.

"That's the signal," he says to me.

I give him a face. “Marco usually says ‘Good to go,’” I say. “I kinda like it. Rolls off the tongue. ‘That’s the signal’ just doesn’t have the same ring to it.”

Tony is somewhere between intimidated and frustrated. It’s a shame that I can’t poke at him anymore. I would like to see his true colors.

“Good to go, then,” he replies.

I scrunch my face and open the car door. The music shuts off. “It just doesn’t have the same feel to it when you say it.”

I shoulder my supply bag and run forward. Tony lets out a curse behind me as he tries to catch up. I hate working with anyone, even Marco, but I also need a lookout.

Cleaning up a scene takes a lot of careful concentration. It isn’t like how it was back in the old days. Today, even a stray hair can give away someone’s presence at a crime scene. It’s imperative for me to have someone who can concentrate on what is going on around me so that I can focus on my task.

Not to mention the fact that I never work without my music. I’m usually never without music.

I slip into the designated side door, not wanting to risk being seen going through the front entrance. Tony finally catches up to me, and I can tell he is out of breath.

“Tell them to cut the power back on to the block,” I say to him.

He gives me a confused look. “Won’t that attract attention?”

“You really should have at least talked to Marco before you agreed to take this assignment. What do you think it is I do here, exactly?”

He shrugs his shoulders.

“I dunno, clean up?”

I take a moment to square my shoulders in front of him.

“And how well do you think I’ll be able to clean up if I can’t see anything?”

I can tell Tony isn’t one of the smartest soldiers in our ranks.

“I dunno. I guess I figured you brought a flashlight or something.”

I sigh and put my hands on his shoulders. He flinches.

“No, Tony. I don’t just use a flashlight. Tell them to flip the power back on. The

last thing we need is utility workers coming out to the scene.”

Tony nods and doesn’t argue this time.

The hallway we are in is clearly a back passage behind the sanctuary. The church is old, and the stone floors combined with the worn wood feel cold and empty.

It feels like churches always feel to me. People always claim they can feel God’s presence in places like this. All I ever feel is a profound sense of loneliness.

I run my fingers against the yellow Sony Walkman that is clipped into my belt. I never clean a scene without it.

“Alright,” I say, turning to Tony. “Since you clearly haven’t talked to Marco about what it is you’re supposed to be doing here, I’ll give you a little instruction. Wait here and watch the door. No one goes in or out. Understood?”

“Yes, boss,” he says.

“Oh,” I say just before I’m about to enter the sanctuary. “And unless it’s an absolute emergency, don’t disturb me while I’m working.”

I don’t wait for his reply. I’m itching to get started.

I never let anyone give me the details of a scene before I’m there to clean it up. It ruffled some feathers at the beginning of my cleaning career. People were worried about the risk. What if I left a body somewhere by accident or some shit like that?

What they didn’t understand is that just by looking at the aftermath, the crime itself becomes clear to me. I can see how it all played out just from looking at where the bullets and bodies fell.

I fit my headphones into my ears, press the “Play” button on my Walkman, and push open the door to the sanctuary.

“Tainted Love” by Soft Cell fills my ears, and it is as if I am watching a movie of the crime play out the moment I take in the scene.

Our guy entered from the door I just went through, which meant the handle and likely the frame need cleaning. Starting from the back of the sanctuary, he walked up the center row of the pews. If he were smart, he wouldn’t have touched the pews, which means I need to clean the tops of the pews.

“...Sometimes I feel I’ve got to run away...”

Just before he got to the first row, he stopped. The target entered the sanctuary from the confessional that was off to the right. Upon seeing the target, he knelt down in the first pew, as if he were praying.

And that’s when the job got sloppy.

Instead of moving to the confessional like he was supposed to do, he tried to shoot the target from a kneeling position in the first pew.

Of course his first shot missed, along with the second and third, meaning there are stray casings and bullets that need to be located.

The target engaged him too, shooting into the pews twice. Two more casings. Two more bullet holes.

I approach the first pew and turn. Our guy's fourth attempt finally hit its mark, but only in the shoulder.

"...now I run from you..."

I walk forward to see the target dead on the ground, blood seeping from his shoulder and his head. The fifth shot did what one bullet in the confessional booth should have taken care of.

I smile.

"...oh, Tainted Love..."

It is a messed-up scene, that's for sure, but that only makes my job that much more interesting.

Scenes play out from start to finish in my mind, but I clean them from finish to start. That way, if I happen to be interrupted, there hopefully won't be any dead bodies or guns lying around.

I pull the plastic wrap from my bag and start the first job of wrapping the body.

As I wrap the plastic around the fifty-something-year-old, I wonder what his life was like and whether he ever expected to be gunned down in a church. Not only do I not want the details of the hit, I don't want the details of anyone's life or crimes.

Feeling personally connected to anyone just makes my job that much harder.

“...now I’m gonna pack my things and go...”

The best way to approach this sort of thing is to remove yourself emotionally from the act. Bodies are the same as guns, are the same as fingerprints. It all just needs to be cleaned up.

By the time I reach the end of “Tainted Love,” the body is wrapped. I pause to rewind the tape. I only ever listen to one song during each clean. I actually don’t even remember jobs by their crimes or locations. I remember them by the songs I listen to while I’m cleaning.

For a brief second, I think I see movement out of the corner of my eye. I turn towards the confessional, but there is nothing there. I turn behind me to see Tony still standing watch in the doorway.

I return to my work and try to shake the feeling off of me. Another run of “Tainted Love,” and the target is in a body bag and the blood stains are taken care of with my special combination of oxygenated bleach and UV light. A few more repeats, and I’ve located all of the bullets and their matching casings and have taken care of all the stray fingerprints.

As I heave the body bag over my shoulder and head to where Tony is, I still can’t shake the feeling that there is someone watching.

I know it isn’t God.

Mainly because he’s proven to me that he doesn’t exist.

“Tell them to cut the power,” I say to Tony, turning around once more. I cut my music off so I can hear better.

“Something the matter?” he asks as he pulls out his phone to send the message.

“You haven’t noticed any movement, have you?” I ask him.

He shakes his head as he presses send on the message.

“Nothing. Have you?”

“I’m sure it’s nothing,” I reply, the uncertainty clear in my voice.

Just as the lights go out, a flash of silver moves in my periphery.

“Hold this!” I say, tossing the dead guy at Tony.

He catches the body with an “umph,” and I turn and bolt back into the sanctuary. The darkness makes it hard to see, but the lit candles on the altar are just bright enough to make out a bit of movement as someone or something runs past them.

“Gotcha,” I say, my adrenaline spiking as I sprint forward towards the new target.

As I round the corner of the sanctuary in pursuit, a side door I haven’t seen comes into view. I know if they close that door on me I’ll find it locked by the time I get to it.

I unsheathe a throwing knife from my pocket and hurl it towards the doorframe. As the target tries to close the door, it gets in the way of the door sitting flush, meaning it prevents the door from being locked.

Their few seconds of struggle are enough for me to gain on them. I force the door open just as they decide it’s better to try and make a break for it.

“Not so fast,” I say, stepping on the bit of fabric I see trailing on the stone floor. The target goes toppling forward, landing with a thud and a strangled cry.

A high-pitched cry, actually.

It’s a woman, that much is clear.

I have to give her credit. She doesn’t give up easily. She starts trying to crawl using her elbows all the while kicking at me

with her legs.

I crouch low, pinning more and more of the fabric from her skirt to the ground. In our skirmish, she turns over to try and push me off, but that gives me the ability to grab her wrists firmly and press them into the stone beneath us.

My eyes adjusted to the low light of the hallway around us.

Her breath is labored.

Her hair is dark.

And her eyes are a beautiful hazel.

They are a color I haven’t seen in over a decade, but it is one so beautiful I never could forget it.

She stills as I straddle her. Our eyes meet.

“Raven?”

Like the story so far and want more?

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Prince of Sin releases December 15, 2023!

ONE SMALL REQUEST...

I sincerely hope you enjoyed reading *Prince of Chaos*. Time is a precious commodity these days and I am honored that you chose to spend some of it with my characters.

I'm sure you hear it a lot, but reviews really do mean a lot to authors, especially new ones. So, if you would spend just one more minute leaving a review for this story, I would be forever grateful.

It doesn't have to be long! Even just a rating or a sentence will help!

[Sure, I'll help!](#)

ALSO BY IVY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



USA Today and a Top 15 Amazon bestselling author, Ivy Wild writes angsty, sometimes dark, contemporary romance with guaranteed happily-ever-afters. As a practicing corporate attorney for a global law firm, Ivy loves combining her real world experiences with her fictional worlds.

When she's not working—who are we kidding?—she's never not working. She currently lives just outside of Washington, D.C. with her husband, her German Shepherd, and a sassy rescue cat named Cobalt.

Ivy loves connecting with her readers and is as active as possible on the following platforms:



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