

DARK  
ENEMIES TO LOVERS  
MAFIA ROMANCE



*A Secret Baby*

BY THE **MAFIA**

SORVINO MOBSTERS

VEDAROSE

# A SECRET BABY BY THE MAFIA

*Dark Enemies to Lovers Mafia Romance*

*Sorvino Mobsters Book 5*

Veda Rose

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# Contents

[Chapter 1 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 2 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 3 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 4 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 5 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 6 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 7 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 8 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 9 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 10 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 11 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 12 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 13 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 14 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 15 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 16 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 17 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 18 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 19 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 20 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 21 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 22 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 23 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 24 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 25 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 26 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 27 - Kira](#)

[Chapter 28 - Miguel](#)

[Chapter 29 - Kira](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Books by Veda Rose](#)

## Chapter 1 - Kira

I walked into the beautiful church for the first time since I was eighteen. My son's hand is clasped tightly in mine as we walk behind my father to take our seats near the rest of the family.

I can see some family members look at me, their eyes lighting up with excitement as they realize I'm back from Italy. It's been thirteen years, but nothing has changed aside from everyone looking older. We all sit in the same order, only now there is space for Raphael, who wasn't here the last time.

My father ushers us into a pew, and we take our seats. Raphael is used to church. We went all the time in Italy as part of our routine. I insisted he learns English because I knew in my heart that one day we would return to New York to be with my father and my family—how I've missed them all!

Alessandro takes his seat at the front of the church, and I smile. He glances back at me and gives me a warm smile. I've been home awhile and over to his house, but a lot has been going on, so we haven't really spoken.

Now that everything is settled, I'm sure we can speak today at family lunch.

We sit obediently, Raphael and I, as the priest begins mass.

After the church is done, we wait our turn to file out, following my father, Sonny, to where the priest greets everyone at the door.

I wait for my turn and let Father James take my hand in his, "Sweet Kira, I'm so pleased to see you back in our parish. The church shines brighter with your smile looking up at me. And who is this?"

I nudge Raphael forward, and he holds out his hand. "Hello, Father," he says politely.

“This is Raphael,” I say to Father James. “He is my son.”

“A child is such a blessing,” Father James says. “I look forward to seeing you every week, Raphael. There is a lot to learn about God’s work.”

“Amen,” Raphael says quietly. It’s his go-to response with priests. Father James gives him a bright smile, and we shuffle out the door into the sunshine.

It’s a lovely warm day. Usually, I’d take Raphael home to change and play in the park, but today we have family lunch.

Sunday lunch at the head family’s house was a big deal. We were all expected to show our faces, whether my father wanted us to or not. He generally didn’t complain about it.

Things haven’t changed in my absence, except now it’s held at Alessandro’s house. Father isn’t happy about my return, but there’s nothing I can do about it, as Alessandro requested it—at least, that’s what I suspect.

We all file into the cars parked on the street, me behind my father and Raphael next to me.

“Nonno,” Raphael says, “have you been coming to this church for long?”

“Since I was younger than you, our family has always come here,” my father says, opening the car door for us to file in.

We weave our way through the suburbs, the houses here are beautiful, but Italy has a homeliness that I miss. Especially my grandfather’s estate where we lived, it was beautiful and open, and Raphael spent many days playing in the vineyard.

“Raphael, are you excited to play with your other cousins?” Sonny asks.

“Some of them, I know, but I’m excited to meet new cousins. I love my family.” Raphael grins.

My father nods his approval and adds a pat on the head for my son. My son that he hadn’t wanted me to have, but I was too far along to have an abortion. So Raphael was born, and my father just hid us away from the world, far away, and told me to make my own way.

The problem is that the Don of this family grew up closely with me. His siblings and I were great friends, and we were practically siblings. We spent almost every day playing together. There was only so long he could hide me from the Don.

We pull into the estate and the car parks. We get out, and I immediately reach for Raphael’s hand. “We must greet Zio first, Alessandro, and then I’ll introduce you to your cousins so you can play.”

Raphael nods as we walk through the house to the backyard near the orchard. It’s set up beautifully, and Alessandro sits at the head table when we enter.

“Ciao, Kira,” he says to me, standing and kissing both my cheeks, “I will never grow tired of seeing you at our home.”

I grin. “Raphael, say hello to Zio Alessandro.”

“Hello, Zio,” he says with a confident smile, “my mother has the most beautiful smile of all.”

“She does, my boy,” Alessandro chuckles. “Go play with your cousins while I steal your mother away to catch up with her.”

Raphael grins. “I don’t need you to introduce me, Mama. I’ll introduce myself.” With that, he leaves my side to join the children playing in the orchard.

“I should help with the food.” I smile at Alessandro.

Alessandro shakes his head and raises a hand. “No, it’s okay. I told Katya that I wanted to speak to you. Let’s go for a



walk.”

I watch as the other family members gush over Raphael, and I smile, looping my arm through my cousin’s. “What do you want to talk about?”

“About you. Why did you leave New York? It was so sudden, and Zio Sonny says he’s too ashamed to tell me. Is it because you got pregnant?”

“Basically,” I sigh, “I got mixed up with the wrong people, got sent away, and then found out I was pregnant. My father is mortified by it, and although he loves Raphael and loves me, I don’t think he wanted us to come back.”

Alessandro nods. “Who was it?”

“Please don’t ask me that,” I say quietly. “I have shamed our family enough.”

He squeezes my hand. “It’s okay. I have some other news for you, though. There’s a position for a chef opening up at the bistro on Fifth Avenue. I’ve told them to hire you for the position. Zio Sonny says you finished your chef course in Italy.”

I smile softly. “You don’t have to take care of me, Alessandro. I’ll get on my own two feet.”

He doesn’t acknowledge what I said. “I’ve also arranged for an apartment for you and Raphael nearby. Arianna has arranged a small car for you. The apartment has its own parking spot.”

We stop at a bench in the middle of the orchard and sit together as the children run around us. “You’re too good to me,” I say quietly.

“You’re like a sister to me.” He leans over and kisses the side of my head. “I will always take care of you.”

Raphael runs past, and Alessandro stops him. “Are you making friends with everyone?”

Raphael nods excitedly. “Yes, Zio, everyone is being very friendly. I’m having a lot of fun.”

“Good, you’ll probably make many friends at school then too. Do you like New York?”

Raphael beams. “I love it. Did you know my father is from New York? Mama says when I’m sixteen, she’ll tell me all about him.”

I blush slightly and usher Raphael along, “Go play. It’ll be lunchtime soon.”

Raphael runs off, and Alessandro helps me up as Dominic approaches us. “Kira, it’s so good to see you.” He kisses both my cheeks.

“Remember when we convinced you to ride Nonno’s one goat?” Alessandro chuckles as we walk together.

“Or that time we said you couldn’t go to a party with us, so you told my father we weren’t at church but at Marilyn’s house playing spin the bottle,” he says, laughing.

“The four of you were just trouble,” I tease.

“Oh, and the three of you weren’t?” Alessandro asks. “You and your siblings were just as naughty as we were.”

We walk back to the tables to sit down and enjoy lunch together, reminiscing about what we got up to as children.

## Chapter 2 - Miguel

It's two in the morning, the hour of poets and gangsters, especially in New York City. You're either one or the other—there is no mingling in those worlds. The crime lords of this city have no tolerance for the arts other than to use them to cover up illegal business dealings.

Entertainment is our game, the Rossi game. We run casinos, movie production studios, art galleries, and anything in-between.

My driver pulls into the back lot of a quiet industrial area. We don't own many warehouses to move our products, but the few we have are well isolated. I step out of the car and button my suit jacket. I look around warily, ensuring no unwanted eyes see me walk into the building.

I always have to be on my guard.

“Don Rossi,” the guard greets me, buzzing me into the building.

“Where is he?” I ask. I don't have to speak loudly to be heard.

The guard motions to the right. “At the back. Lyle and Jarred are with him now.”

Suddenly a scream sounds from the direction Harry pointed in. I nod and take long strides, navigating the empty stations to the back, where my two cousins are looking down at a man strapped to a wooden chair.

“Mr. Kippler,” I say. My cousins part ways, allowing me to get nearer the man.

He's nearly fifty with graying hair. One eye is swollen shut, and his lip is bleeding. There are bruises all over him and more blood stains than I care to count. He's also pissed himself, which is always charming.

“I apologize for my cousins. They tend to get carried away sometimes. I, on the other hand, am a man of simple pleasures. Tell me what I want to know, and we’ll return you to your family. No further harm will befall you. You have my word,” I explain.

He spits blood onto the ground in front of me. “The word of a Rossi means nothing, especially since I have told your cousins I don’t know anything about the Sorvino family plans. I am only a friend.”

“A family friend who often goes to Don Sorvino’s house. I know that you know the supply routes that the Sorvinos use and that they use your bakery as a cover. What I also know is that you have a beautiful family. Two girls, right?”

“Leave them out of this,” he whimpers. I’m not moved. I don’t care about children, even my nieces, and nephews. You fall in line, or you’re dealt with, family or not. There is a pecking order, and I am at the top of it.

“Alessandro helped Andre Catalan gain power in Mexico not so long ago. Is Alessandro making a power play for other territories?” I ask, picking up a scalpel from the small table to my right.

“I don’t know.” He stresses the words, and for a moment, I consider believing and trusting him, but I’ve learned you cannot trust anyone in this industry. Not in our world. There is no one you can trust. Everyone will betray you eventually.

I hold the scalpel to the older man’s face. “I’m going to slice your eyelids off so you can never close your eyes again,” I murmur. “And you can watch every little thing I do to you until you have the balls to tell me what I want to know. If you fear the Sorvinos, I can have you and your family moved under our protection. I’m willing to offer you that, Mr. Kippler.”

He stammers a little and then shakes his head.

“No? You don’t want my protection?” I ask, tracing the blade lightly on his cheek, not hard enough to break the skin.

“No, I won’t betray Alessandro. He has been good to me and my family. He is a good man,” Mr. Kippler says.

I nod to Lyle, who grabs the man’s head and tilts it up, holding it steady. “There are no good men in families like ours, Mr. Kippler. Only powerful men and a few men willing to do whatever it takes to control that power.”

I slowly grab his eyelid, and he screams as I slice at it, pulling it at the same time. Lyle holds him as still as he can, and I shush Kippler. “Now, now, I wouldn’t want to take your eye out. We still have so much to do.” I grin, slicing the last bit and pulling the eyelid off. “There, that’s better. Now the other one.”

He screams again but offers me no information. He is a fool—brave, but a fool, nonetheless.

I stay until four in the morning. I look at his lifeless body. He has just died. The torture was finally too much for him to bear, and his heart must have given out. Suffering can do that if you’re not equipped to handle it.

He handled it better than I expected but not as well as a Rossi would. I wipe my hands on a cloth hanging nearby. “Roll his body into the Hudson and get some rest. I’ll call a family meeting later.”

Lyle and Jarred acknowledge my words and get to work. I leave the way I came, casting a wary glance once more when I’m outside. Alessandro will not be pleased if he finds out I killed a family friend, but he doesn’t need to know yet. I will make my move, and when I do, the Sorvino territories will fall under my command.

My driver takes me back to my apartment, and I take the elevator to the penthouse. I wash my hands properly and change into some sweatpants and a wife beater. I climb onto the treadmill and start running, speeding up every ten minutes until I sprint. Then I lower it slowly only to speed it up again.

I run on the treadmill for over an hour before turning it off and going to the shower.

As the hot water splashes over my body, I let my mind wander just a little. It isn't a good idea to focus on negative things when you're a businessman. You need to focus on the positive and keep the money rolling in. Being responsible for the family now that my father is retiring is a new challenge but something I've been training for my entire life.

As I rub the soap into my stiff muscles, I consider what I need to say at the family meeting. We need to make a move against the Sorvinos sooner rather than later. They won't be expecting it because they're still celebrating their win over Jose Catalan, the Don from Mexico that threatened their family.

I pull on some briefs and slide into bed, lying down on my back and staring through the ceiling at the sky. I specifically had glass ceilings installed in all my residences so that I could see outside. It is shatter-and-bulletproof so no one can use it as a weakness, but I don't sleep. I don't sleep at all, so I look at the stars and spend the night planning my next move.

I haven't slept since I was twenty. If I'm honest, I haven't slept since she left. She just left me, upped, and vanished without a trace, and Lord knows I tried to trace her. I used numerous family resources to try to find her, but no, she's more than likely dead.

I stare at the brightest star in the sky and give a little sigh. My doctor says it's insomnia, but I feel like it's more than that. There's a piece of me missing; without it, I can never rest. I will never sleep.

I only know that the Sorvinos made her disappear, and I have spent a lifetime planning to make them pay for it.

## Chapter 3 - Kira

The Italian has been in my family for years. It was a bistro that my mother's Nonna opened. Well, it was probably her husband as a front for his underground business dealings, but she ran it with pride.

Many of the recipes have been passed down through generations, and I remember wanting to work here during my college days so that I could learn them too.

I landed up learning them from a Zia in Italy while I was there.

I've been at The Italian for three weeks now, and I'm thrilled to see it's getting increasingly popular as I add more dishes. I've also been working on the social media presence so that we get the name out there.

At first, the staff was apprehensive of me, but after teaching them several valuable new methods and listening to them about how they like to run the kitchen, we compromised. Now we run a tight ship—if I do say so myself.

Everyone is amicable, and I know Alessandro pays more than the usual rates to keep the staff loyal to the family.

Every day one of my family members is in for a meal. Usually, Carmine and Dom come in around lunchtime. I know their favorites, but I want them to try something new today.

They haven't come in yet, but the dish I want to serve them has been slow cooking for hours. I came in early to start it, and I know they will love it.

I have already told the hostess to let me know the minute they arrive. While I wait, I make a gremolata, a green sauce from chopped parsley, lemon zest, and garlic that I'll serve with the meal. I also have some polenta made up.

“Chef? They're here,” Kim says, sticking her head into the kitchen. I glance at her. “Just the two of them?”

“And Mr. Alessandro,” she says with a smile. “I’ve seated them in the VIP section.”

“Excellent, take them white wine, not red. Wait,” I stop her, “get me the wine, and I’ll take it.”

I make sure I look respectable as I step out of the kitchen. Kim hands me a bottle of expensive white wine, and I walk over to the private booth at the back. “Gentlemen, lovely to have you here.”

“The chef herself,” Alessandro chuckles, “We must be important.”

“I must be important to warrant a visit from you, Don Sorvino,” I say respectfully because I know the staff are watching the interaction.

“Dominic says you’ve improved on the recipes left by Bisnonna. I’m interested to see your improvements, especially because I see how popular The Italian is getting.”

I blush slightly and nod. “I have prepared a special meal today for Dominic and Carmine, as I know they come in every day this time for lunch. They order the same thing every day, and I’ve decided they will try something special today. I think you will enjoy it, too, Don Alessandro.”

I show them the bottle of wine. “This meal is best complimented with white wine.” I uncork the wine and start to fill their glasses. “While you sip on this, I’ll get your meal.”

“Please bring a plate for yourself, Kira,” Alessandro says, “I insist.”

I nod and go back to the kitchen to plate the food. I leave the waitresses to bring the food while I join the boys.

“This is Osso Buco, beef shank seared with flavor before slow cooking for hours in white wine to make the meat tender. Accompanied with vegetables and gremolata, a sauce I learned in Italy.”

They don’t say anything at first, then Dominic moans, “This is delicious, Kira. I’m going to order this every day.”



I laugh and taste it myself. I did pull it off rather well.

We chit-chat as we eat, no one dares to interrupt us, but I know the kitchen can handle itself for an hour or two while I take lunch.

“You’ve been working so hard,” Dominic comments. “That’s one of the reasons we’ve come here.”

“Did I do something wrong?” I ask curiously.

Dominic shakes his head. “Not at all. I have decided to babysit Raphael while you go out with Arianna tonight to La Club.”

I shake my head. “I shouldn’t...”

“Oh, but you should,” Alessandro says with a smile. “Meet Arianna at her cottage on our property at seven. Dominic will be at your house just before then.”

I nod. “Okay, then I guess I’m going out.”

We finish our meal, and I go back to work.

Later, I’m a bit nervous about leaving my son with my cousin, but if I knew one thing about Dominic, Raphael would be more than protected with him there. I knock on the cottage door, and Arianna throws it open. “Kira!”

She flings her arms around me and hugs me tightly. “Right, you look like a nun.” I look at my smart black dress and black pumps, and she continues, “Luckily, I got you an outfit today. It’s in my room, get changed, your makeup is fine. Then we’ll go.”

I try to protest, but there’s no point with my cousins. They are always like this.

I change into the rather short red dress and the high heels that have been provided. When I walk out of the room, Arianna claps her hands together. “Magnificent, just let loose your hair, and we’re ready to go.”

I don’t move and look at her. “Arianna, I hope you’re not trying to hook me up with someone.”

“While I love that idea,” she grins, “I am not. I just want to have a good time.”

I take the clip out of my hair and put it in my purse. Arianna uses her fingers to brush out my hair, and the strands curl down my back and over my shoulders.

“Let’s go,” she says gleefully, a little too much so, dragging me out of the house.

La Club has definitely changed a lot since I’ve been gone, but at the same time, it’s the same. I don’t know how to explain it other than that although the interior may have changed, the crowd and vibe haven’t.

We order drinks and start to dance. Carmine joins us after an hour, but the shooters and ciders are already making me a bit tipsy. Once the song is done, Carmine drags us to the bar for two shots each of Absinthe. I grimace, but I do it. I used to be able to drink a lot, but I haven’t really drunk that much alcohol since Raphael was born.

I wave a hand in front of my face. “I need to fix my makeup.”

“I’ll go with you.” Arianna walks with me to the bathroom, where we both use the facilities and touch up our hair and makeup. We loop arms as we walk out and straight into a crowd coming in.

The one I hit grabs my arms and snarls, “Watch where you’re going.”

I glare up at him, irritated and a little drunk. I can smell alcohol, and it’s nothing I’ve been drinking—it’s clearly coming off him. I meet his eyes, and I recognize him immediately, he doesn’t seem to recognize me at first, but when he lets go of me, I know the ball has dropped.

“Kira,” he murmurs. He straightens himself up and waves his party on. Arianna smiles but doesn’t leave me. She hovers to the side.

“I have to go,” I say, turning to walk back to Carmine. But Miguel grabs my arm and whirls me around, coming down for a kiss. I slap him across the face and hiss, “Don’t touch me.”

“Don Rossi, is there a problem?” I didn’t even see Carmine get over to us so quickly, “I can contact Don Sorvino.”

“No problem,” Miguel says before he looks at Arianna. “You two could be sisters. Aren’t you Don Sorvino’s sister?”

“Are you threatening her?” Carmine growls, but Miguel waves him off.

I look at Arianna. “I have to go. I’m sorry.”

I don’t give her a chance to answer as I leave La Club and hail a cab. I give him the address to my apartment, and I do my best to hold it together.

Dominic is awake and watching television. He looks surprised when I walk in. “Finish so early?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I wave off the implication. “I know, I know. I’m no fun. I was just exhausted.”

Dominic gets up and hugs me tightly. “It’s okay. You can try again another time.”

I smile at him. “Thanks for watching Raphael.”

“Anytime you get some sleep.” He kisses my head and leaves.

I go to the bathroom and shut it. Locking the door, I sink to my knees, put my face in my hands, and silently start crying.

## Chapter 4 - Miguel

I stand there, staring at the Sorvino brat's boyfriend after, who I thought was Kira, storms out of La Club. I can't believe it. I'm pretty sure that I am way drunker than I thought I was. I must be hallucinating.

I shouldn't even be here, this is Sorvino owned, but I like to live dangerously. The idiot boyfriend asks me again if I have a problem, and I wave him off and turn to the group I'm with. "Go home. I have things to think about."

We all file out of La Club, and I get into my car. Revving the engine high, I take off into the night and go straight back to my apartment.

Once inside and drinking a steaming cup of coffee, I sit at the window overlooking the city.

Kira.

She isn't dead. She's back in New York City. Where has she been? What has she been doing? Why did she look so angry to see me? Fuck, I tried to kiss her. If the families find out, there will be hell to pay.

I'll tell them I don't know who she is and would drunk-kiss anyone. I used to be a party animal, especially after she left, so it's believable.

I run.

I shower.

I climb into bed.

I toss and turn and picture her raging eyes looking into mine. I wanted to kiss her because—back then—it had been such a natural thing we did, such a habitual thing that even after thirteen years, I want to do it just because it's her.

I see her. Her dark curls. Her curves I adored and devoured so many times before. All of her. She's stuck in my

head.

After breakfast, I send a notice to my family for a meeting at ten. You can't trust someone to take care of the family business for you. It's how you end up being shot and overthrown. I go to my office and start addressing the matters on my table. There's always a pile of things to do, and I'm the man who has to see to it.

People come and go, wanting answers to problems or their next set of instructions from me. Just before ten, I step outside onto the balcony of my apartment and light a Cuban cigar. I inhale deeply and look over the city.

New York. The city that never sleeps.

Like I don't ever sleep.

I was born and raised here, and I suit the city well.

I hear a knock at my door, and I stub out the cigar, leaving it on an ashtray outside.

"Come in."

I sit back at my desk as everyone files in, and last but not least, my father. He's the one who's retiring. He is mostly retired now. He doesn't get involved much in family business anymore. Everyone knows I'm the one they answer to now.

My brothers, cousins, uncles, and father are all in one room. One of my cousins, Lyle, is missing, but I know he'll be along shortly. I sit on my high-backed chair and say, "We need to decide what we're doing about the Sorvinos."

"They pose no immediate threat to us," my father says. "I still think we should leave them be while we build our forces to overthrow them as New York's main family."

"This move to dethrone Jose Catalan is basically begging for a war." I look around, and about half the room looks like they agree with me, while the other half looks apprehensive.

"I..."

The door opens, and Lyle hurries in. “Don Rossi, I’m so sorry. I have urgent news. It’s why I am late.”

The frown lingers on my lips. “What is it?”

“One of our main supply warehouses was blown up about twenty minutes ago. Everyone is dead. I had to pay the cops to sniff around without acknowledging the drugs and counterfeit money. They’re keeping the crowds away, but it’s sure to be on the news.”

The rage must be showing in my eyes because I feel everyone, except my father, shrink back from me. I look around. “I want to know who did it.”

Lyle clears his throat, “There was a calling card, boss. It was the Sorvinos.”

He takes a square piece of paper out of his pocket and passes it to me. On the back is Alessandro’s signature, and when I turn it over, I see it’s a crime scene photo of Mr. Kippler’s body. They knew we killed him, but this was going too far. This is going to set back the family thousands of dollars. He also killed my people—men and women who didn’t deserve it. I’m not the warm and fuzzy type, but those workers were loyal to the family.

I crumple up the photo and quickly toss it aside. “Fucking Sorvinos.”

“They’re declaring war,” my brother Ricardo says. “It’s all-out war.”

“We should give a strong response. Show them we won’t back down or cower.” It’s my father’s suggestion, but I shake my head.

“Cool heads must prevail. If we start retaliating, they’ll attack us, and on it will go. No, we need to hit them where it hurts.”

Everyone is silent as I think, I go outside, leaving them standing there, and I light my cigar and come back. I don’t normally smoke inside, but I make exceptions.

“We need to take one of their own to bargain with. Not only will we get our revenge, but we will also get a piece of their pie.”

“Jose Catalan tried to take members of that family, but it didn’t end well for him,” Jarred says from his spot in the back right.

I shake my head. “They tried to take Frankie and Dominic, strong men who know how to fight back. We need someone easy to take, the weakest link in the family that Alessandro will bend the knee for. We need to take Arianna Sorvino.”

I smirk as my father nods his approval. “It could just work.”

I look at Lyle and Jarred. “She’s about five foot four inches with blue-gray eyes and dark hair. She’s often with her brother Dominic at La Club. Go find her and bring her to me discreetly.”

They hurry off without a word, and I sit back in my high-back chair. “The rest of you set up tight security here and at the estate at Long Beach. I want everyone on this.” I take a deep drag of my cigar as everyone starts filing out.

“You look like you haven’t slept...”

“In thirteen years?” I finish my father’s question. “That’s because I don’t sleep, Padre. Now, you’re not hanging around just to check if I’m getting a good night’s rest, are you?” My green eyes meet his hazel ones, and he nods.

“So much like your mother. You have her eyes,” he comments.

“So you tell me every chance you get,” I stub out the cigar. “What is it, Padre?”

“Be careful declaring war on powerful families because you don’t know if the other families will side with you or betray you,” he says casually as though I don’t know

this simple fact. It's very hard to respect him when he speaks to me, his Don, with such a condescending tone.

I sit back and steeply my fingers over my knee, my leg crossed over the other. "I don't need other families to align with me. If they take the losing side, I will simply wipe them out of New York like I will Don Sorvino."

My father chuckles. "I admire your spirit, boy. Use your head. You were always excellent at long-term strategies. I trust you, don't make that an unfounded fact."

He gets up, takes a Cuban cigar out of the box, and pulls his lips down in a gesture that shows he's mildly impressed. He pockets it and walks out.

I watch as the door closes behind him, and I sigh. My father is a tough man to please, but I won't completely disregard his advice. I know what I'm doing will be seen as a declaration of war.

Maybe it's time.

Maybe it's come to that.

Maybe Kira coming back is the sign that it's time for this battle to begin.



## Chapter 5 - Kira

I open Raphael's door to find him still asleep. Good. I go to him and tuck the blankets in around him. Seeing Miguel at La Club was jarring, and then of all things, he tried to kiss me. As though thirteen years haven't passed between us. I didn't understand back then what our families being at war meant, now I do, and he acted as though I was just his for the taking.

I kiss Raphael's head and smile. Miguel can never know about him. I will not let him take my son away from me.

I walk back to the living room, where Sofia is setting up her laptop.

"Thanks again for doing this, Sofia. Arianna offered to send someone to collect the financial reports, but I have to go to the dock anyway to get fresh fish for the bistro," I say.

Sofia smiles brightly at me. "It's really no problem. I have to study for an upcoming exam anyway, so I don't mind the peace and quiet at all. Dom has already gone off to do whatever he does now, so I was alone anyway."

"Still, thank you. If you can, just make sure Raphael eats all his breakfast and takes his lunch. He catches the bus just down the road, but I don't like him to walk alone," I explain to her.

She nods. "That's easy. I'll make sure it's all done. You go, and just be safe, OK."

I smile and slip on my coat. Grabbing my purse and car keys, I leave the apartment.

As I walk to the car, the hair on the back of my neck stands on end, and I look around. There's light traffic from those who get up early to get to the office before dawn, missing the worst of the traffic. Some people on the pavement are talking in quiet voices but nothing else to cause alarm.

I climb into my car and am about to start it when there's a knock at my window, causing me to jump out of my skin. I hear my cousin's low chuckle and roll my eyes before I open my window. "Dominic Sorvino, you could have given me a heart attack."

"I dropped Sofia off and decided to hang around to accompany you to La Club. It's where Arianna is working on the reports." He grins at me mischievously. "Good to know you're on your toes, though."

I roll my eyes again. "Will you follow me?"

"Yeah, I'm parked right behind you. I'll follow you there," he says, walking away.

"You're still an ass," I call, then realize the time, quickly start my car, and pull off with a slight giggle. Hopefully, I didn't disturb anyone's sleep.

Dominic and I arrive at La Club, and he opens the door for me to get out. I left the reports in my car overnight, so I grab them off the back seat.

The bodyguard at the door lets us both in. The club is silent and a bit eerie. This place is normally pumping, but I know it closed about an hour ago. The staff is still cleaning up, wiping down bars and tables, and mopping the dance floor, and I hear someone complain loudly from the bathroom. No doubt someone threw up the little food they had in their stomach.

Rather than me, I'm glad I work at the bistro.

We walk into the office where Arianna sits at a computer with piles of papers around her. She smiles at me. "Hey, I still can't believe you'd get up at this hour to bring me reports."

"As I said, I had to get up anyway. Today's specials are fish based, and I need fresh catches. I'm going to be competing with all the other restaurants this morning at the dock." I hand her the paperwork and stand back. "If you need anything else, just give me a call and let me know."

“This should be perfect,” she says as she flips through the paperwork. “You’re really thriving over there. I’m so glad.”

The door behind us opens, and Carmine comes in with some coffee. “Hey guys,” he says with a grin, handing a coffee to Arianna and then one to Dominic. “You want one, Kira?”

“No thanks, I’m trying to cut down on caffeine.” I smile. “And I have to be off, you guys have a fabulous day, and I’ll chat with you later.”

They all bid me farewell before I leave and go to my car. The hairs on the back of my neck are standing again, and I glance around—just the usual amount of people going back and forth, regular traffic. I give myself a mental shake.

I climb into my car and drive toward the dock.

Once there, I park, get out and look around again. The sun is just about to rise, and I see several people walking between various fishermen to inspect their goods. I hurry along, not even locking my car.

I take the list out of my purse and smile as I approach the first area. A fisherman is packing out fish on ice, displaying his catches.

“Beautiful tuna,” I say, inspecting the large fish, “I’ll take this one and this one.” I point to two of the fish. “For The Italian.”

“Delivery, or will you take it now with you?”

“Delivery, please,” I say. “Do you have any sole?”

“None today, but Freddie got a haul of some decent-sized ones at the end.”

I smile at the man. “Thanks so much.”

I hurry along the dock and pause at another fisherman. I pick out ten lobsters and ten crabs for delivery and pause. I feel itchy, as though I’m being watched. I look around, but most people are engaged with the fishermen.

I shake it off and head toward the fisherman at the end.  
“Freddie?”

“That’s me, love.” He gives me a toothy grin.

“Excellent. Can I see your sole please?”

As he’s packing out his catch, I glance around. Down the wharf, two burly men casually walk down toward me. They are wearing jeans and coats, and their beanies are pulled down, so I can barely make out their faces, but I know their eyes are boring into me.

Once I’m done with Freddie, I walk to the other end of the dock, past the men, and up again. I glance back once to see they’ve changed direction and are walking after me.

Nope.

I’m outta here.

Something is wrong.

I hurry toward my car, trying not to break out into a run, so they don’t realize that I know they’re following me. I fumble for my keys before remembering I hadn’t locked my car. I hurry to get in and shut the door. I lock the doors just as the two men reach the vehicle. One knocks on the window while his companion stands guard.

“I can’t help you,” I say loudly as I get the key into the ignition and start the car. The starter turns over, but the car does nothing else. I try again and again until the guy knocks again. “Trouble with your car, miss?”

“I’m fine,” I say, panicked. I grab my purse to rummage for my phone when the window behind me smashes, and I scream. A hand reaches in, unlocks my door, and yanks it open. I scramble to the other side of the car, but an arm wraps around my waist and pulls me back.

I scream again, but if anyone hears me, they pretend not to. People don’t get involved in family business down here.

I'm pulled away from my car and carried to a black SUV with tinted windows. They throw me into the back, and one of the men climbs in with me. I cower on the floor of the SUV. As his partner starts the car to leave, the one in the back grabs my hands and starts to tie a cable tie around them.

“Please, my cousin will pay handsomely if you let me go. Please don't hurt me.”

“We aren't going to hurt you, Miss Sorvino. Our boss just wants a little chat.”

He pulls out a black sack, and I shake my head, but he gets it on easily enough and then binds my legs.

“Sit tight. It's a bumpy ride,” I hear his muffled voice.

## Chapter 6 - Miguel

I sit in the chair overlooking the city. Dawn slowly creeps up to the east, and the twinkling lights of the buildings fade away as the sun bathes the city in light.

I haven't slept...again.

This time it was because my night was filled with thoughts about how I'm going to approach Alessandro. How I'm going to handle this when he finds out his sister has been taken by another family?

Lyle sent a text message a while ago to tell me they had her. They had followed her to La Club, where she was with Dominic, and then she left, and they had tailed her, picking her up at her next destination.

I bring the lit cigarette in my hand up to my mouth, and I take a deep drag. It's a terrible habit, really, but one I mostly indulge in when I'm stressed.

The door behind me opens, and I hear scuffling as Lyle and Jarred come in and drop a heavy object on the floor behind me. I stand and drag the chair I'm sitting on to the center of the room.

"Put her on there," I say, stepping back.

They lift her onto the chair, and I eye her out.

"Untie her feet and take the sack off. Let's take a look at the precious Arianna Sorvino," I say.

Her muffled voice comes from the sack, "Who?"

I frown and walk forward and rip the sack off.

Kira looks up at me defiantly. Before she can say anything, I turn to my cousins and roar, "This is not Arianna Sorvino! This is Kira Sorvino!"

"She's exactly as you described her, Don Rossi," Lyle says defensively. "And she went to La Club with Dominic

Sorvino and everything.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose with my fingers. “I can’t expect you two to do anything, can I?”

I put my cigarette out in a nearby ashtray and light another, inhaling deeply and staring at Kira.

“What the hell am I doing here, Miguel?” she demands to know.

“It’s Don Rossi to you,” Jarred seethes, and I don’t correct him.

Kira snorts, “So because you’re a Don now, you think you can take whoever you want from the streets? Don Sorvino will not stand for this.”

I watch her carefully. I don’t particularly want to be near her, not after how she left me, but I know she matters a lot to Alessandro. She matters almost as much as Arianna.

I don’t know what to do. My emotions are running high, and I can’t think straight. Mostly, I want to let her go so she’s not near me. Being in her presence is intoxicating, and it brings back memories I don’t want to remember, feelings I don’t want to feel.

I lift a hand to wave her off, but she spits at my feet. “If you think I’ll do anything for you, you’ve got another thing coming.”

That coldness in her voice, that resentment and hatred, it’s so clear that I find I can immediately shut off my own emotions. Coldness replaces my confusion when I’m around her, and I tilt my head to the side and chuckle. “It’s fine, cousins. She’s right. She does mean a lot to Don Sorvino, enough for us to continue with our plan.”

“Should we leave her here with you for now?” Lyle asks, shifting awkwardly. He can sense the tension between the two of us, and he doesn’t like it.

I shake my head. “You can untie her and release her into the guest bedroom. Nothing she can do from there. Then

come back so I can tell you how to send a message about her to the Sorvino family.”

I watch as my cousins cut the cable ties holding Kira’s feet and hands together, and then they each take an arm and lead her toward the guest room. I turn to face the city again.

The sun is high now, and the city has lost its magic. Now it’s just another grimy, industrial city with a section of trees just visible in the distance: Central Park, one of my favorite places as a child.

Of course, the park is enormous, but it’s surrounded by the concrete jungle of apartment buildings and office blocks. The roar of the city rises as traffic congests, and more people join the pedestrians on the sidewalks.

Most people would find the view dizzying if they were not used to heights, but New Yorkers are used to it. We love being on top of the world because we are just that, on top of the world. Everyone wants to live here, work here, and be here. New York is an experience, a culture shock, and it will be all mine to rule over when I dethrone Alessandro Sorvino and pull all other families under my rule.

Lyle and Jarred come back. I hear their footsteps and turn around. “Have the kitchen make her something to eat. We should, of course, show common courtesy to our enemies. It’s what is done. Lyle, you stay. Jarred, you go organize that.”

Jarred leaves, and I turn to Lyle. “Did she have a car?”

“It’s down at the docks. We had to smash the back window to get in to get her,” he explains.

“Okay, see if you can get it and drop it off at one of the warehouses. Then I want you to send a bike messenger to La Club with a message for Alessandro.”

I lead him into my office and sit down at my computer. I pull up our family letterhead on the screen and type a letter underneath it.



*Don Sorvino,*

*By the time you're reading this, you may already be concerned for the welfare of your cousin Kira. She is safe in my custody for now.*

*Should you try and retaliate against my family again, she will no longer be enjoying the hospitality of the Rossi family.*

*We need to meet for negotiations for her trade.*

*I prefer to meet in neutral territory: one guard each, no other guns allowed.*

*Should you agree to this, send word with a messenger to my casino on Seventh Avenue, a stamped envelope marked for my attention.*

*I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Don Rossi*

I print that off, and as my printer clicks and clacks, I look at Lyle, "Make sure it gets at least into his sister's hands at La Club. She'll ensure that it gets to him. Do not go yourself. They will kill you instantly." I pull the sheet of paper out the printed and fold it neatly. I tuck it into an envelope and seal it. I pick up a stamp on the side of the table, ink it on an ink pad, and stamp the Rossi family symbol where the envelope seals.

I hand it over to Lyle and nod. "Be quick, so you can get her car before the family does."

"What are you going to do with her while you wait?" he asks curiously.

I give him a look. "Are you questioning me?"

"No, Don Rossi," he says respectfully, bowing slightly. "I'll be on my way."

“Leave Jarred here. He can stand guard in case she tries to escape. Sorvino’s like to try their luck at the best of times.”

Lyle leaves my office, and I realize my cigarette has burned out in the ashtray. I take another and light it. Sitting in my high-backed chair, I contemplate what I’m about to do.

I should contact my father and seek his advice, but at the same time, I want to demonstrate to the family that I am solid in my decisions and that they are good decisions.

I take a drag on the cigarette before I get up, balancing the cancer stick between my fingers and pouring myself a glass of whiskey neat.

I sit back down and sip the whiskey with a sigh.

## Chapter 7 - Kira

As soon as they close the door behind me, I rush to the window and open it. There's no ledge to climb onto or shimmy along, and we're too high up to do much else—a downside of high-rise buildings. There isn't even a fire escape close enough to climb onto.

I look down at the street and consider screaming for help to the people below, but again, we're too high up. The sound of the city will easily drown out my voice before it reaches the people walking below. I try waving my arm to get attention, but no one looks up at me. I sigh and shut the window looking around the room.

It's completely empty, not even a bedside lamp. I open the cupboards, and they are bare as well. I slam the door shut and check the bedside tables. They're fastened to the headboard as a set and won't come apart, so I can't throw them at someone. I need a weapon.

I check under the bed and in the other cupboards and then go into the en-suite bathroom. There's nothing in the medicine cabinet. There are some built-in shelves, but the only thing on them is towels. Nothing much I can use. I stare at the mirror.

Maybe if I wrap a towel around my hand, I can break the mirror and use a large shard as a weapon. It would be sharp enough to stab someone or at least pose a threat.

Dammit! I should never have come back to New York. I knew the risks when I did, but I missed my family so much and wanted them to meet Raphael. Now I run the risk of Miguel finding out about the son he doesn't know he has. He would take Raphael from me—of that, I'm sure.

I sit on the bed. If I break the mirror, they will undoubtedly hear it and come charging in. Besides, a piece of mirror versus guns? I'm not that naive.

I need to wait for the perfect opportunity to try to get out and run away, maybe call the police for help. I know that's really frowned upon in our family, but I also know the police are on the Sorvino payroll. My father has needed their help more than once in the past, so I know I can trust them.

I hear voices outside my room and try to decipher what's being said. I hear mention of eggs, and now I'm confused. I sit for what feels like an eternity when the door opens suddenly, and a petite woman enters, leaving the door behind her open. She is carrying a tray with a plate of food and what looks like a cup of coffee.

I don't even give it a thought. I get up and charge the woman. She freezes in surprise, and I push her to the side, sending food and hot coffee flying as she slams into the cupboard to my left. I run out of the room and look for an exit quickly. As I'm about to take off toward what looks like the front door, arms wrap around my waist and hold me tightly.

I scream and scratch at the arms. When they move higher to hold me in a better grip, I bite at the arms, forcing them back down. I wiggle and move as much as possible, but whoever has me won't let go. Eventually, he picks me up, and although this allows me to kick him better, I can't seem to connect in a good enough spot.

I hear the click of metal and turn my head to the right to see a gun. I stop instantly, breathing hard. Another goon has joined the one holding me and is pointing his gun at me. "Calm the fuck down and get back in the room."

"No," a voice says from nearby, "bring her to eat with me. Let me explain the rules of *my* house to her."

I'm picked up like a doll and carried into an open dining area where Miguel sits, enjoying a hot English breakfast. He always did like English breakfasts when we were in college together.

They sit me in the chair, but they don't go far. I glare at the don. "Release me, Miguel."

“Bring her a plate of food, and clean up whatever messed is in the guest room,” he says, ignoring me.

One of the goons leaves, and the other stands directly behind me. The woman I attacked soon comes shuffling with another plate of food and sets it down in front of me.

“Eat,” Miguel says, starting to eat his own food.

I cross my arms over my chest and look at him stubbornly. “Release me, Miguel, and I’ll tell Alessandro not to kill you.”

Miguel chuckles coldly. This isn’t the man I remember. The man...the boy I remember, was fun-loving, full of life and feeling. I always thought he should be a poet or an artist. This, in front of me, is a cold man with no heart. I can see it in his eyes.

“Eat, Kira, because if you irritate me enough, I will stop feeding you altogether. I am only extending you this kindness because of Don Sorvino and your relation to him. I could easily treat you like the other Sorvino soldiers I’ve picked up over the years.”

I don’t want to test that theory, so I calmly pick up a knife and fork and start to cut up the bacon and an egg.

“Good.” He goes back to his food and looks at me almost thoughtfully.

“The first thing you need to realize is that you are my hostage,” he pauses to take a sip of coffee, “and that means you do what I want you to do, or I get to torture you. Don’t think I won’t, Kira. I am not a naive little college boy anymore. I will do whatever is necessary to advance my family.”

I shake my head. “But you wanted Arianna, not me. It’s not too late to let me go.”

“You will be enough,” he says. He eats so carefully. Utterly devoid of enjoyment. Not the way he used to. “You will eat with me when I eat, you will stop trying to escape, and

every time you try to escape, I will treat you like a petulant child and discipline you, do you understand? Nod if you don't want to speak to me."

I nod slowly. I don't understand precisely what he means by disciplining me, but whatever it is, it can't be pleasant. I eat more of my food, choking it down. The woman from the kitchen brings me a glass of orange juice and sets it down.

"Miguel, I have responsibilities...people that need me."

"My family needs me," he says coldly. "They need me to do the right thing for our family, and the Sorvinos have taken far too much in their time here. If they don't willingly negotiate territories, I will take them by force."

As if on cue, there are gunshots nearby. I whip my head around as the goon standing behind me rushes to the front door. Several others come out of rooms, and I gasp as I realize how many guards are here. I mean, it makes sense. Miguel is their Don, and he must be protected.

Cold hands grab my arm and force me to the ground. "Stay down. You could get shot by a stray bullet."

It's Miguel. He puts a hand on my back as I curl up on the floor. Shouting and more gunshots ensue, but after a few moments of silence, I look up to see the goons coming back in.

"Sorvino men," one of them says. He's one of the men that kidnapped me. "But they're dead now. Three of them."

Miguel stands and nods. "Pack up, boys, time to go to the Long Beach estate. Security to be increased immediately."

He looks down at me. "Looks like you're as valuable as I thought."

## Chapter 8 - Miguel

We leave the apartment quickly, with a gun pressed discreetly against Kira's back. She gets into the car without hassle, and we take off, making sure we aren't followed. As we exit the city and head toward Long Beach, one of my cars pulls up behind us to escort us into the estate.

Kira doesn't say anything as we travel. She keeps looking out the window as though waiting for her family to attack us so they can save her. They would be foolish to do so. They know I'd shoot her immediately. They cannot win this one.

We pull into the estate, and the gates close behind us. The guard dogs are released, and patrols will already be underway. My men are well trained, much like the Sorvino men, and they would have a hard time getting through all my guards.

The car pulls up to the mansion, and I step out, not bothering to offer Kira my hand. She climbs out of the car and looks around curiously, probably trying to figure out a way to escape.

I push her towards the door. "Move, Kira."

She glares at me but walks into the mansion. Guards are also patrolling inside the mansion and stand to attention when I enter, the way it should be. I take off my suit jacket and hand it to the butler nearby. "Thanks, Jeremy."

I look at Kira. "This is going to be where you'll be staying for a while. You can go to most places in the mansion. I suppose I have nothing better to do, so let me show you where everything is."

I start to walk. "The dining room and living room downstairs are available for you to use. You cannot make your own food. The kitchen staff will prepare it. You are in no way allowed further than the kitchen door over there in case you

think about getting sharp knives.” I look at her pointedly. “You may not go into the garden without an escort, and Kira,” I pause to look at her, “I have guards everywhere, so don’t bother trying to sneak out.”

I walk up the stairs and lead her to the left. “Your room is opposite mine here to the left.”

I open the door and lead her into a grand room with a four-poster solid made from oak bed. There’s a window overlooking the garden, and a light breeze blows through, bringing the scent of the ocean with it.

She looks around and nods but doesn’t say anything.

“My study is down the hall to the right of the stairs. You’re forbidden to go in there,” I say with a note of finality.

“And clothes?” she asks suddenly. “Toiletries and stuff? Am I just supposed to live in my own filth until you decide what you’re doing with me?”

“I already know what I’m doing with you,” I smirk, and I feel rather evil. “You can give a list to my guard of what you want, but Kira, this isn’t kindness. Do not think I am a kind person.”

Kira’s eyes meet mine, and she looks a little scared. She should be scared. But beneath that fear is a fire of defiance I don’t remember her having when we were younger.

“I will fight you every step of the way,” she says quietly, bravely standing her ground.

I suppress a chuckle and take a step toward her, so I’m looking directly down at her.

“I’ve explained this situation, Kira. You can try, but I’m not above disciplining you. There are consequences to your actions.”

“I don’t need to be told there are consequences to actions,” she snaps angrily.



“I will discipline you,” I repeat myself coldly. “If you do try me, I will punish you, and you will not enjoy it. That’s my final word on the matter.”

I lead her out of the room and back downstairs. I know she is following me because she wants to find an escape route, but she won’t find one, not here.

We stand at the base of the stairs, and I look at my watch. “I have guests arriving shortly. You can go back to your room and remain there until dinner. Your exploring for an escape route can wait until then.”

She looks at me, surprised, but I motion for one of the guards to come forward. “Harry will escort you to your room and make sure you stay there. Someone will be up with clothes for you to wear to dinner. I expect you to be on time. I’m not a patient man, don’t make me wait.”

Harry motions for her to go upstairs, and she glares at me one last time before she goes upstairs with my guard.

I wait until I hear her bedroom door shut then I go upstairs and head to my study. I pull out a cigar, not my Cubans, as those are kept exclusively at my apartment in the city. I light the cigar and sit down in my office chair.

I don’t have to wait long. Everyone is aware of my patience level.

My three brothers, two uncles, my father, and Lyle and Jarred come into my office as soon as they arrive, all finding a place to stand except the older men who find seats.

“Gentlemen, you’ve obviously heard of my cousins’ blunders.” I glance at Lyle and Jarred, but that’s all I say on the matter. “We have Kira Sorvino as a hostage, and Alessandro has already tried to get her back once.”

“Don Rossi,” Lyle says, and I look at him, “they’ve completely destroyed the apartment. It was not long after you left. They left a message on the wall that they are declaring war on us if we don’t return Kira.”

I smile. “I wasn’t expecting a response so soon, and the apartment can be redone.”

I look at my father. “I’ve decided to keep Kira here until I can negotiate more territories with Don Sorvino. I’m sure he will call for the meeting as soon as he realizes he can’t take her by force.”

“I advise against this war,” my Uncle Fabio says quietly. “A war against the Sorvinos? Jose Catalan would tell you what a bad idea that is if he were still alive today.”

My other Uncle Marcel nods in agreement. “Sometimes we have to give a little to the big families to protect our smaller family.”

“See, that’s where you are wrong,” I say, heat rising on my face. “We’re not some shitty small family. We’re the second-largest family in New York. We’ve risen over the years under my father’s guidance, and I intend to take us all the way while I rule.”

Fabio and Marcel both hold up their hands in surrender, and I stand, turning my back on them. “We’ve been taking shit from those Sorvino bastards for too long. They think they can walk all over New York as if they own it. They need to think again. We need to show them, through force and power, what we are capable of.”

“What do you suggest? We start attacking their territories and risk the lives of our people and their families?” Marcel asks from behind me.

I chuckle. “Zio, you think too much of Alessandro. The man has gone soft as he has aged. He doesn’t want to risk any more lives than you do. He will fall to his knees quick enough.”

My father hasn’t said a word, and this worries me. I turn to look at him, and he’s staring at me. Everyone looks at him, and he nods. “I think it is worth taking the risk. It could pay off handsomely. But remember to keep your emotions in check, Miguel, don’t make rash decisions.”

I stand stock still. Everyone's waiting for my reaction, but I remain calm and cold. I nod. "Of course, Padre. I know what I'm doing."

"You are Don. We follow what you say."

I nod and sit back down to plot out our next move.

## Chapter 9 - Kira

I sit at the window. It's open and overlooks the garden where I watch the guards patrolling. I count as they walk, timing how far they go, how long they stop, and where they go next. How long does that take? I track it in my mind.

When you're a chef, you're required to remember many complicated things, from ingredients to measurements to tastes to how to tell if something is perfectly cooked. How to select fresh items. I smile. I excel because I have an excellent memory, and it's serving me well now.

I strip my bed and start to knot the sheets together. I don't know if this will actually work or if it will hold my weight because I've only ever seen this done in movies, but I need to try to get out of here.

What's Miguel going to do if I get caught? Ground me?

I time the guards carefully. I don't want to mess up this chance. I give it an hour, maybe two, to ensure that there is a routine to their patrol. It's getting closer to dinner, and they'll come to tell me to get dressed soon. I have to get out of here before that.

A guard walks from the left toward my window. I count slowly to a minute, then another minute. I watch as the guard passes under my window and wait until he turns the corner. I have four minutes before the next guard walks by.

I toss the makeshift rope out the window and throw my legs over the ledge. I take a deep breath, don't hesitate, and shimmy down the cloth quickly. I hear a slight tearing noise, but it holds just long enough for me to get to the bottom. I'm about five feet from the bottom, so I dangle at the edge of the cloth and drop, bracing myself.

I don't pause but limp to the right. High hedges cover this side, so no one could have seen me once I hit the ground,

but someone is sure to notice the makeshift rope hanging out the window.

I peek around the corner, it's clear, so I shuffle around it and make my way up the pathway.

I need to find the exit, and I need to find it fast, but moving too quickly will get me chased and probably caught since I don't know my way around the garden. So I sneak as quickly as possible, hiding in the bushes.

I pass a guard facing away from me, holding my breath again so he doesn't hear me. I don't let my breath out until I'm a few yards away. I glance past the bushes and see a pathway around the garden to the gate.

The gate! I inspect it closely. Guards are posted on either side of the gate, so there won't be a way to sneak past them down the middle; there's no coverage. I look at the corner nearest the entrance. It's far enough away and covered by enough bushes that I could hide while I scale the wall. There are also vines growing up the wall and fence in the corner, which will give me more purchase if they're thick enough.

Now to get there.

I slowly creep along the side of the garden until I get to the section of hedges lining the end. Again there's a small pathway between the tall hedges and the boundary wall, but the plants and vines here are more unkempt. It doesn't look like this is a regularly patrolled area. I grin at my luck and slowly tiptoe my way down the pathway, casting a glance back every now and then to ensure no guards can spot me. I keep low, even though the hedges are high because the last thing I want to do is be spotted. I reach the corner without a problem and quickly dart behind the large bush hiding the corner of the estate.

The guards at the gate won't be able to see me until I scale the fence here, and by then, it will be too late. I can run

for it as soon as I'm over and get to someone who can call the cops or get somewhere I can call Alessandro.

I start to scale the fence slowly, and it shakes more than I would like it to. Starting to panic, I climb quickly and pause when I reach the top. Thin wires run across the top.

An electric fence.

They generally hurt, but if I'm quick enough, maybe it won't be more than a sting. However, there might be an alarm attached. I bite my lip, but I've hesitated too long and been too distracted with my contemplation.

Hands roughly grab my legs and drag me down the fence. Two guards shout to each other as I hit the ground hard. My ankle pains, and I cry out. They each grab an arm, and although I kick and scream, they drag me back toward the house and into the living room.

"Kira. Kira. Kira." Miguel looks at me from his seat on the armchair. The guards drop me in front of him. "Didn't I tell you, you would be punished if you didn't behave?"

I glare at him but don't give him the satisfaction of a reaction.

"I've ordered the guards to nail your window shut, don't worry, there's air conditioning in the house, so you shouldn't be too hot. Also, I will now be posting a guard under your window as well as outside your doors."

"Asshole." I spit at him, then throw a slew of Italian curse words about him, his mama, and his nonna his way just for good measure.

I stop when I see the cold look in his eyes and shake my head. "I'm going back to my prison now."

"You give no orders in this house. This is my kingdom. I warned you, Kira."

He stands tall and foreboding above me.

“Get out.” He looks at his guards, and they leave, shutting the door behind them.

“What are... Miguel!” I cry out as he drags me up by my arm. His grip is tight and painful. I try to pull away, but he’s too strong. I try to kick him, but I miss him, and my ankle pains again.

He sits on the armchair, yanking me down, stomach first, over his lap.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” I shriek.

What little dignity I have is gone as he yanks down my pants and thong. There’s a moment of stillness.

Smack.

I grimace as his hand hits the bare flesh of my ass cheeks. I don’t cry out, though. I’m not giving him that. There’s another pause. I’m wondering if that’s all there is.

Smack.

Harder this time, my skin stings and burns where his hand made contact. I shake my head, I can feel the tears welling up in my eyes, but I’m willing them not to fall.

Smack.

His grip loosens, and with a nudge of his knee, I’m tossed to the ground in front of him.

“If you want to behave like a child, I will treat you like one, Kira.” His voice feels cold and distant. I hurry to pull my thong and pants up and glare at him, tears still threatening in my eyes.

“Fuck you, Miguel.”

“You did once,” he comments. “It was good.”

I look away, and he snickers.

“Guards.”

They come back into the room at that point and come to stand near me.

“Take her back to her room. Make sure the maids bring her new bedding, so he’s comfortable.” He kneels next to me. “Better make your list of what you want, or you will be living in your own filth.”

He steps over me, almost on me, but I move at the last moment. His large stride takes him out of the room and out of sight.

One of the guards reaches for my arm, and I snarl, “I can get up myself.”

He backs off, surprised. I limp out of the room and toward the stairs. It takes me a while to get to the top, and then I slowly go to my room, slamming the door behind me.



## Chapter 10 - Miguel

I sit in my office with my hand stinging from hitting her. I hit her. I've never hit a woman before that didn't want it. I certainly never hit her when we were together. I stare at my hand, and I shake my head. I warned her. How many times had I warned her?

I light a cigar and move to sit in front of the open window that overlooks the garden, and I remember. I remember what it was like the first time I ever saw her.

### *Thirteen Years Earlier*

University has been the best escape from my father. It's the best idea—he wants me to have an education, and I want to be anywhere he isn't. It's a win-win situation.

Classes are interesting enough. There's so much to learn, but even better are all the women on campus. I've certainly flirted with my fair share of them, but they're all the same—cookie-cutter girls looking for an American boy to build an American life with.

I am in one of the top frat houses, but I suffered for it. My first year of university was hell on Earth. I was the greasy Italian kid until one frat boy took it too far, and some of my cousins paid him a visit.

Since then, I've quickly risen in popularity, and everyone knows I throw the best parties around town.

Today is no exception to the other happy days I'm enjoying. I sit in my Economics class, listening to the professor drone on and on. I've already taken down the notes for this class, it's almost finished, and then I'm free for the remainder of the day.

The bell sounds, and the professor yells out reminders about upcoming tests over the noise. I pack away my laptop into my backpack and throw it over my shoulder. I run a hand through my hair and follow the throng of people out of the lecture hall.

Outside it's a beautiful sunny day, and my friend Jeremy waits for me. He's been nagging me to get in with my family even though I've warned him that it isn't the kind of life people want. He insists, so maybe in summer, I'll invite him over to the beach house and introduce him to my father.

Jeremy slaps a hand on my shoulder. "Interesting lecture?"

I shake my head. "Easy enough, didn't really have to use the old brain to work out what the professor was talking about."

"That's cause you're too smart for your own good, Miggie." I hate that nickname, but everyone calls me Miggie on campus. My father would have a coronary if he heard it. Miggie doesn't command respect. Miggie doesn't instill a sense of importance.

"I named you Miguel after a strong man in our family for a reason!" That's what my padre would say if he heard what people called me. I'd have to tell Jeremy not to use that name when we're at the beach house, or my father will do worse things to him than not let him in the family. He'd probably do worse things to me too.

We step onto the grass outside the main building and walk toward the courtyard, where everyone has lunch. A few of the frat brothers are meeting us there, and from there, we're going to decide what we're doing for lunch.

The loud and obnoxious groups of Delta Kapa Delta's can be heard from far away at the noise level they're at. I smile as they all start smacking me on the back in their aggressive greeting. It's how they show they care about you in

a very manly way. None of them would cop to that, though. I certainly wouldn't.

“What’s for lunch, boys?” I ask, sitting on a stone table that they’ve surrounded.

“I need to carbo-load, so I say pizza from Capizzi. We can get two each and see who finishes the fastest.”

“Capizzi’s makes decent food. I won’t lie. But I’m not buying today. It’s someone else’s turn. You guys arm wrestle and see who’s paying.”

I move off the table, and immediately they start challenging each other. I feel so powerful when I get them to do what I want. I glance around the courtyard and am about to issue my own challenge when I see her.

She’s definitely Italian, with dark hair that falls in luscious thick curls from her head. Her nose is stuck in a book, so I can’t see her eye color, but she’s got a nice body covered in curves. My brain is already picturing those in just lingerie.

“Boys, I’ll be back,” I call. They all glance at me and then start wolf-whistling, cheering me on. I ignore them. Running a hand through my hair, I go over to where she is.

“Can I join you?” I ask, smiling widely.

She doesn’t even look up. “No.”

I frown. “That’s not very friendly.” I sit down regardless. “What’s wrong?”

She still doesn’t look up. “Why must something be wrong just because I don’t want to pay attention to you?”

Ouch. I smile again. “I’m just trying to be helpful. You look new. I generally know everyone who comes here. I like to be helpful.”

“I’m sure the other ladies thank you for your service,” she says sarcastically.

I don’t know what this woman’s problem is, but I have never wanted to win someone over quite as badly as her. She is

challenging me. She doesn't care who I am or what I represent. This is definitely going to be fun.

“Look, I'm sorry. Let's start over. I'm Miguel, from Delta Kappa Delta Frat house. I'm sorry I came over and bothered you, but I just saw you, and something about you spoke to me.” I sit back. “Is that cheesy?”

Finally, she looks up at me, and I feel as though the air has been knocked right out of me. Those blue-gray eyes bore into me, and she quirked an eyebrow. “Does that line actually work?”

“Sometimes,” I tease. “Sometimes I get chewed out. Not this bad, though.”

She shakes her head. “Look, I'm sure you're good at what you do, and I know you're trying to impress Fred and the gang over there. I'm here to study, not to play with little boys.”

I cough slightly. “I can assure you. I'm anything but little.”

She snorts, “Now you really have something to prove. I'm just not interested, Miguel.”

“At least tell me your name.”

She sighs. “If I tell you my name will you leave me alone?” she asks.

“For today,” I assure her, “but I'm going to find you every day and ask you out until you go on a date for me. I'm determined now. I can't be stalking someone without a name, though.”

“Stalking is creepy,” she shakes her head, “and I have boundaries.”

“If I can come up with an interesting way to ask you out,” I say, “without being creepy or an asshole or crossing any boundaries. Will you go out with me?”

She studies me, and I almost hold my breath in anticipation.

“My name is Kira,” she says. “You have a deal. You come up with a way that isn’t flashy or expensive, and that isn’t embarrassing, and I’ll go out on a date with you. Good luck with that.”

“I’m gonna try every day,” I promise her as I stand up, “’cause you’re worth it.”

She shakes her head again and returns to her book while I saunter over to the boys.

### *Present Day*

Just thinking about how enamored I was with her makes my blood boil. I stub out the cigarette, the fifth cigarette I’ve smoked, and stand up. I need to work off this excess anger, or something is going to go terribly wrong.

My hand at least has stopped stinging, but now I can’t get those blue-gray eyes out of my mind.

I decide to change and go jogging on the treadmill, but first, I take out my phone and call Lyle.

“Yeah, boss?”

“Call Dr. De Oliveira, tell her to come to see our hostage’s ankle in the morning. Can’t be returning broken goods to the Sorvinos.” I don’t wait for his response. I hang up and leave my office—still haunted by those blue-gray eyes filled with passion.

## Chapter 11 - Kira

Once the guards leave me in the bedroom, I limp over to the bed and lie down. My ankle is aching terribly, and I wish I had some painkillers. I rest back on the bed and stare at the ceiling, trying to ignore the throbbing pain.

I won't be able to try to escape again if my ankle is sprained because it will stop me from running. I need to come up with another plan to get out.

Miguel is probably my only way out. Perhaps if I can convince him to take me somewhere outside the house, I could slip away and get a message to my cousins. Maybe I could seduce Miguel. If he ever had real feelings for me, that could work.

I groan as I get up and limp to the bathroom. I splash water on my face before I hunt down a pen and paper. I need fresh clothes and toiletries. If I'm going to try something, I can't smell like soil and sweat.

I rummage around the bedside table and find a pen and paper. I sit down with my leg propped up and begin to scribble the things I will need while I'm being held captive. Maybe I can lull them into a false sense of security if I play along for a bit.

I hobble to the door and open it, looking at the guard.

"Don Rossi said I could give you a list of what I needed. Here it is." I hold out the paper to the surly-looking man, and he takes it.

He doesn't move, though, and I notice another guard on the other side. Even if the surly one takes the list to Miguel, there's still someone else watching the room.

I shut the door and hobble back to the bed, exhausted now from the effort. I crawl under the sheet, leaving the duvet

to the side. Too much pressure on my foot, and I feel like I might die.

I don't remember falling asleep, but the next thing I know, my door is swinging open, and a woman talking loudly comes in.

I sit bolt upright and wince as my ankle twinges.

"Who are you?" I demand to know, glaring at the woman. I don't know what Miguel is up to, but I don't trust anyone he sends.

"Hello, sweetheart. Don Rossi said that you hurt your ankle. I need to take a look at it." She sets a medical bag on the chair beside the bed.

"Why? What are you going to do to me?" I ask, trying to shuffle away.

She reaches out. "Try not to move. You could make it worse. I'm a doctor, and I just want to see how badly it's hurt and set it if I have to."

I eye her out. I don't trust any of Miguel's people, but if this woman is going to help or at least give me a painkiller, I'll let her. Then it dawns on me that maybe she will help me further.

I shift my weight to sit up with my legs extended in front of me. She lifts the sheet and pulls it down to reveal my legs. She sits at the bottom of the bed and gingerly takes my foot in her hand. She moves it slowly, and I wince.

"How bad is the pain?" she asks, although she's staring at the opposite wall as though she's daydreaming.

"Not terrible now. I can hobble long around the room." I wince again as she moves it slowly. "I'd love a painkiller, though."

The doctor smiles graciously at me. "I think that's all you need. Some painkillers and a day of rest, and you should be fine. It doesn't seem to be anything serious."

She starts to rummage in her bag, and I whisper, “Can you help me?”

“I’m here to help you,” she says, looking at me confused.

“No, I mean. I’m Kira Sorvino. I’m being held hostage here. I need to get a message to my cousin Alessandro Sorvino. Can you help me, please? Please! They might kill me.” I look at her with pleading, wide eyes.

She looks shaken, and my hope slowly rises, but she quickly pulls a bottle out of her bag and hands it to me. “Take two every four hours. I have to go.”

“Wait,” I call, “please!”

The doctor hurries out of the room, and I groan and fall back into the pillows. I’m not alone long, though, as the door soon opens again, and Miguel walks in carrying a food tray.

“I thought you might be hungry,” he says, though there’s no trace of warmth in his voice. I shift my legs so he can set the tray on the bed. “Eat it while it’s hot.”

“I’m not hungry, actually,” I say, trying to keep my distance.

“You need to eat if you want to take the painkillers the doctor gave you.” He reaches for a pitcher of what looks like orange juice on the tray and fills the empty glass beside it.

It would be a tender moment if he weren’t so rigid and cold.

“I’m having a dress and shoes sent up for you. I picked a pair of flat ones because of your ankle. You’re to dress and join me for dinner tonight. Perhaps we can arrange some comforts for you while you stay with us.” He stands up. “Don’t be late. I don’t like to be kept waiting.”

He walks out and shuts the door behind him. This isn’t the boy I knew from university. There’s no passion there, no fire and love for life. This is a man molded after his father. Every last emotion has been beaten out of him.



For a brief moment, I wonder if it's my fault. If it's because I left. Surely not. Our love was passionate but brief, and we both knew our families would disapprove.

I eat lunch, and with some difficulty, I move the tray to the chair so I can lie down again. I look out the window. I can see the blue skies from where I'm resting, and I wonder if I can keep my snotty attitude to myself long enough to convince Miguel to take me out.

I just can't get over the fact that he kidnapped me. I know he meant to take Arianna, but he got me and could have let me go. We both know that. He knows that. He chooses not to.

Suddenly I'm angry again. Raphael needs me. I think about how scared and confused he must be that I've suddenly disappeared. I have protected him from the kind of life that my family lives. He won't understand why I just didn't come home. He might think that I've abandoned him.

All because of Miguel.

Now the Don of the Rossi family wants me, his hostage, to dress up and entertain him over dinner? He can get knotted. That's not going to happen.

When they bring me the bag of clothes and toiletries after lunchtime, I pretend to be asleep so no one speaks to me.

Around five, though, the guard shakes me, and I can't pretend to be asleep any longer.

"What?" I snap.

He points to the chair where a beautiful dress rests. "Don Rossi says not to be late for dinner."

"I'm not going," I say, glaring up at the guard. "Tell him I'm his hostage, not his entertainment. I won't do a thing he tells me to."

I turn my back to the guard and curl up.

“Don Rossi doesn’t like being crossed, ma’am. For your own safety, I would suggest you get up, get dressed, and go to dinner before the Don loses his patience.” The guard stands there waiting, so I snap.

“I said to tell him it’s not happening. I’m not his fucking toy to play with. You tell *Miguel* that I don’t have to abide by anything he wants just because he kidnapped me. Now fuck off.” I pull the sheet over my head and hear the guard retreat.

As soon as he shuts the door, I get up. I toss the dress and pumps into the trash can in the corner, and I hobble to the bathroom and shut the door, locking it behind me.

## Chapter 12 - Miguel

I sit at the table, waiting. I told her not to be late, so my patience is wearing thin. I cannot stand how defiant she is. I remember how passionate she used to be, but I also remember how reluctant she was initially to break the rules, especially family rules. We both may have taken that too far, but we were young.

I look up as Jarred comes into the dining room.

“And? Where is she?” I ask, sighing. “Is she really in that much pain that she’s walking so slowly?”

“No, Don,” he says, averting his eyes. “She says she won’t join you. She then locked herself in her bathroom.”

I clench my fist and stare at the plate of pasta in front of me. It’s a family recipe, something I thought she might enjoy. I’ve never been one to show kindness, but the protocol is to treat other families respectfully.

But honestly, I’ve had enough.

“Go back upstairs and lock her room,” I snap at him, causing him to take a step back. “She’s not to receive meals in her room anymore. Unless she’s willing to dress and come downstairs and eat with me, she will starve.”

I pick up my cutlery and start to eat without another glance at him. I hear his retreating footsteps. I stab at my food, angry at the insult. When a Don tells you to eat at his table, you eat at his table.

My mind wanders as I eat, still hyper-focused on her.

### *Thirteen Years Earlier*

As the bell tolls for the end of the period and the end of my test on politics, I get up and shove my stuff into my bag to

race out. Pardoning myself as I bump into irritated people, I get out into the sun to see my frat brothers waiting for me outside. I pump my fist in the air. “Freedom!”

“Freedom!” they yell, and we dive into a massive group huddle.

It doesn’t last for long because people start complaining loudly that we’re blocking the way, so we all break away and walk toward the courtyard.

“Is everything in place?” I ask Jeremy.

“Ready and set. Good luck.” He grins.

They break away from me, but I know they’re not going far because they want to know what the outcome is going to be.

I’ve been trying for days now to get Kira to go on a date with me, but it’s been a no-go. From flowers to expensive perfume to one of the music students serenading her. She hasn’t liked any of it. I know she said not flashy, but dammit, I didn’t know what to do.

Until today.

I know I’m going to get her today.

I stroll up the path toward the table where she sits every day studying. There’s a tree nearby which is key to the program.

I stroll toward the bench and sit opposite her, closest to the tree.

“Afternoon, Kira. How did your classes go?” I ask with a genuine smile.

She glances up. “Miguel.” She goes back to her book almost immediately, but she does respond, “They were fine, thanks. What is it today?”

“I realized I’m going about this totally wrong,” I say, giving her a cheeky grin. “I get that you don’t want to go out

late at night with a guy you barely know, especially a desperate one like me.”

“You’re mostly right so far.” She sets her book down to watch me. I’ve piqued her curiosity.

“Well, I propose something different then. Not flashy, not expensive. Something simple and private. I, Miguel, hereby invite you, Kira, to join me for a lunch date.”

She looks surprised. Good. I continue, “So, if you are willing and available, I would love to take you on a picnic in some private gardens not far from here and well within earshot that if you want to scream for help, you can.”

She giggles and shakes her head. “I admit it’s an interesting proposal.” She pauses and sighs. “If I give you one lunch date, would you promise to leave me alone?”

“I swear it on my family’s name,” I say quickly. I would just have to win her over so that she *wants* another date.

“Fine, when?”

I get up and walk to the tree. Tucked behind it is a blanket and picnic basket strategically placed there by my frat brothers.

“Does right now suit you?” I smile.

She snorts. “Fine.” She gets up and picks up her book bag, carefully putting away her textbook. “Lead the way.”

“Follow me.” I lead her through the campus, not far from the courtyard to a little garden tucked away around a corner. She freezes as I open the short gate.

“This is the Dean’s private gardens,” she says. “I don’t think we’re allowed in here.”

“Don’t worry. The Dean will never find out.” I grin and lead her to a grassy patch strategically hidden among high rose bushes.

I spread the blanket down and kneeled, unpacking the picnic basket.

“We have a sandwich each. A sports drink to keep us hydrated and energized. Some fruit—you look like a fruit kind of girl—and a brownie each.”

Her smile widens. “What’s on the sandwich?” She sits on the blanket next to me.

“This is a Miguel special. Cheese, bacon, mushrooms, scrambled egg, and a secret family sauce.” I hand her one of the sandwiches wrapped in wax paper. “Try it.”

I watch her bite into the sandwich, and she looks at me, surprised. After she swallows, she beams at me. “This is delicious.”

“I’m glad you like it.” We get comfortable, and around eating my sandwich, I ask, “So tell me about your studies and what you do for fun.”

Kira doesn’t miss a beat. She swallows the bite in her mouth. “My father picked my degree. He wants me to be an accountant. I would have preferred to study to be a chef. I am very food motivated.”

“I can tell,” I chuckle, passing her a napkin.

“As for what I do for fun, it’s mostly the usual things. Get my nails and hair done, cook and bake, eat out...things like that. I have a rigid schedule, so I try to use my time as best I can.”

I nod, and she inclines her head to the side. “What about you?”

“Studying business economics because my father wants me to take over the family business,” I say offhandedly, as I don’t want to mention we’re a mob family. She can find out later. “For fun, I like to party with my frat brothers, but honestly, I like quiet activities like reading, stargazing, and eating out.”

“We have something in common then,” she grins as she finishes her sandwich and reaches for her drink. She sips it and

then holds her hand out. “Hand over the brownie. Let’s see if it’s any good.”

“It’s great, but it is store-bought.” The admission makes me blush slightly. “I’m afraid you’d have to teach me how to bake actual brownies.”

“They’re easy, but I like brownies with Oreos in the middle. And they mustn’t be dry. I hate dry brownies. They must be gooey.”

I chuckle. “I’d definitely eat those.”

She bites into the brownie and nods, pursing her lips. “Yeah, it’s not bad.”

I grin and bite into my own. “Not bad at all.”

We talk idly about our professors and where our favorite places off campus are to eat. She mentions a bistro on Fifth Avenue. It sounds familiar, but I can’t quite place it. For some odd reason, it seems important to me that I know what this place is.

Once the food and drinks are done, she flips her hair over her shoulder and gazes at me.

“So,” I say, “is there a chance for a second date?”

She shakes her head, and I panic slightly, but a wry smile plays over her lips. “Maybe, I’ll have to think about it. You did a good job today.”

She gets to her feet, and I get up quickly too.

“Thank you for lunch,” she says. She leans up and kisses my cheek before she turns and leaves the gardens.

I can’t stop smiling to myself.

### *Present Day*

I glance up as Lyle walks in, he looks worried, and that’s a problem.

“What is it?” I ask, pushing my plate aside. Her plate is still there, on the opposite side of the table. So far away.

“Sorvinos have struck our operation near East New York,” he says hurriedly. “They let our people go but dumped all our cocaine into the Hudson. They left a message with one of the guards that if we don’t return Kira, they will hit all our operations.”

I stand and brush off imaginary crumbs from my shirt. “Then we’ll just have to send a message of our own.”



## Chapter 13 - Kira

I'm fucking starving.

I can walk better now, it is only a dull ache, and the painkillers help a lot. I go to the door and bang on it, shouting, "Hey! I haven't had food the whole day, assholes!"

The door unlocks, and I step back to see the guard, whom Miguel called Jarred, glaring at me. "You're not washed and dressed to eat with Don Rossi, so you don't get food. The next meal is at dinnertime. If you're dressed and ready, you can eat."

"I fucking won't," I snap at him. I'm not playing Miguel's little game.

"Then you go hungry," he says, shutting and locking the door.

Frustrated, I sit by the window. I don't know how much time passes, but I hear the door unlock again, and I stand hurriedly. Thank fuck they decided to bring me food at last.

Miguel walks in with another guard, Jarred, and a large man holding a video camera.

"Bring the chair to the center and sit her down," he pulls something out of his pocket. It's duct tape.

I try to move away, but Jarred and the other guard catch me and force me into the chair. My arms are taped to the chair, and then Miguel smirks at me as he tapes my mouth closed.

"Roll it."

The camera is lifted, and I see the red blinking light indicating it's on.

"Don Sorvino, I believe you visited some of my premises today and destroyed some of my property. Let me make this clear. This is not a game I am playing. Every time

you attack what's mine, I will hurt what's yours. Here she is. She's alive and well. If you leave my property alone until we have a chance to negotiate my demands, then I won't hurt her. She is perfectly safe here so long as I say so. Make your choice."

The man lowers the camera and instantly leaves. Miguel looks down at me as Jarred cuts through the tape. He looks so evil as he says, "Join me for dinner or starve, Kira. It's your choice."

He leaves before the tape is off my mouth so I can respond.

The two guards leave, and the door locks behind them. I move to the bed and curl up—a sob building in my chest.

### *Thirteen Years Earlier*

I won't lie. Miguel has charmed me quite a bit. He is persistent, but it's actually not in a creepy way. It's very endearing. I've had my fair share of boys chasing after me, but they just want what they can't have. I wonder if Miguel learns my last name and how I'm tied to one of the most prominent mob families in New York, he will stay.

I try to focus on what my professor is saying, but I keep picturing Miguel sitting beside me, our hands almost touching. He is very handsome—tall, with dark hair and green eyes, which I love.

The bell sounds, and I jolt slightly, frightened. I hadn't been paying attention. I'll have to carefully review the work in the textbook, or Padre will have my head.

I pack my book bag and wait for my turn to join the throng of students leaving the lecture hall.

Once outside, I walk to the left and toward the courtyard. It's so lovely to sit there, it's my favorite spot, but I have a test I need to study for.

Someone pokes their fingers in my side. “Boo!”

I jump and clutch my chest, turning to see Miguel chuckling. “You ass,” I say, swatting at his arm.

“I’m sorry, I saw you were not paying attention and had to do it,” he grins and runs a hand through his perfect hair.

“Where are you headed?” he asks.

I shrug. “I was going to the courtyard, but then I thought I might study in the main library, where it’s quieter. I have a test coming up.”

“So do I,” he says excitedly. “For our second date, why don’t we make it a study date? I’m free now if you are?”

I feel a bit flustered, but after a moment, I nod. “Okay. But we have to study.”

“I take my studies very seriously, Kira,” he assures me.

We walk together down the hallway, and he doesn’t say much. From the corner of my eye, I see his goofy smile and how he glances at me every now and then, making me want to blush slightly.

Once we’re in the library, we find a table to sit at and take out our textbooks. He grins. “Even though we won’t be chatting much, this is still our second date.”

“Agreed.” I smile and turn to my textbooks.

We sit there for about forty-five minutes, making study notes. I write mine neatly on study cards while he highlights everything.

As I’m working through a particularly difficult section, I realize I’m going to need a book from the shelves. I get up without saying anything and disappear among the stacks.

I know the book’s location because I’ve used it before, so it should be in the same spot. As I’m scanning the shelf for the spine, I sense someone watching me.

I glance to my left and see Miguel standing there, leaning against the shelf.

“You are so beautiful,” he says. “How are you so beautiful and fiery and passionate and unlike any woman I’ve ever met?”

I blush this time and shake my head. “You’re being ridiculous. Compliments won’t win you points.”

“What will?” he asks, and I realize he’s moving toward me.

I turn to face him. “Well, being unique and treating me like I’m worthwhile will definitely help.”

“You are so worthwhile. More than.” He is a few inches from me, and I glance down. He uses the tip of his finger to tilt my face to look at him and gives me a warm smile. “So much more.”

He leans down and kisses me softly. At first, I want to resist, but he tastes so damn good. I try to stifle the little moan making its way out of me, but I can’t stop it.

Miguel turns me so my back is against the shelf and kisses me passionately. I melt into the kiss, sliding my arms around his neck as his arms slide up and down my curves. He presses us together, and I can feel the rather large, rather hard erection trapped in his pants. It’s enough to bring me back to my senses.

I gently push him away, and he doesn’t resist. He steps away and clears his throat.

I blush and say, “I should get back to my books. The one I’m looking for isn’t here.”

“Yeah.” His voice sounds strained.

I walk back to the table and sit down. After a while, he emerges from the stacks, adjusting his pants. We both settle back into our studies, but I struggle to concentrate as I can’t shake the feeling of his lips against mine.

## *Present day*

After having a good cry, mostly because I miss Raphael, I steel myself and have a shower. I dress in the red dress they bought and the black pumps. It fits me perfectly and hugs my curves wonderfully. I would actually be excited for wearing this outfit under different circumstances. I leave my hair down as it'll curl by itself. I knock on the door submissively, and Jarred opens it. He eyes my dress and nods. "Good idea. The food here is delicious."

I don't say anything, but he steps away from the door so that I can come out. He leads me down to the dining room, where Miguel is tucking into a steak. There's a covered plate on the opposite side of the table. I sit down, and Miguel looks up. "Eat."

A butler removes the cover. Steak, egg, mashed potatoes, gravy, and corn. A very American dinner. I pick up my cutlery and begin to eat. I'm only about a quarter into my food when I realize Miguel is just staring at me as he eats. I meet his gaze, but before I can look away, he asks, "So, where have you been?"

"Excuse me?" I ask with a frown.

"Where have you been the last thirteen years, Kira?" he asks, cutting up another piece of steak.

I don't answer him. I can't tell him about Raphael. I look down at my plate for a moment but look up sharply as his fist hits the table. "Did you decide to just whore around as much as you could?" he shouts. "Decide to see how many people you could use."

"I never fucking used you, Miguel," I raise my voice to him as well.

"Then where did you go?" he stands. "Tell me where the fuck you disappeared after you promised me everything."

I glare at him. “It’s none of your fucking business where I went. I don’t answer to you. I am a Sorvino, not a Rossi.”

He sweeps his dishes off the table into the wall to my left and storms out of the room. I quickly return to my food because I don’t know if they’re going to let me eat again or finish what I’ve been given.

## Chapter 14 - Miguel

My patience is wearing thin with Kira.

Is it really hard to tell someone where you've been for thirteen years? Probably, if you have something, you're trying to hide. The thought of her being with other loves over these years sends me into a blind rage.

Without a word, she just upped and left me to go fuck whomever she wanted. I hadn't thought her capable of that. I thought her father had married her off, but I couldn't find a trace of her in New York. She's clearly not married. There's no ring.

I need to take a walk. I need to clear my head. It's six in the morning, and I've had an even more restless night than usual.

I get dressed and walk out into the garden, taking a slow stroll around it. I modeled this garden after the Dean's garden at the campus, where we had our first of many dates. We sneaked into there a few times while we saw each other. There was just more privacy there. We felt like we were in our own magical world, away from all the demands and pressures of living a mob life.

I walk into the center of the garden. My guards make themselves unseen, I know they're still there, but they don't disturb me. Mercenaries. Killers by trade who were looking for an easy, well-paying job. It was easy to get them into the family, to convince them to pledge their loyalty to first my father and then to me.

When you have the money, you have what people all dream of having. Money. It's such a simple thing to come by if you just disregard the rules.

Unlike love.

I did love her. I loved her with my whole heart, and looking at the tall rose bushes that line the inside of the hedges just makes it even clearer that emotion is a weakness I can't afford. I can't lose my head with her, and I can't let her see she affects me. Otherwise, she wins, and she can never win after what she did to me.

The sun rises, and the garden comes to life in the rays of light. The fresh smell of damp earth and blossoming flowers fills the air. Once upon a time, I would have spread a blanket out, laid in the middle, and gotten lost in my thoughts about love, life, and death while I enjoyed the stillness the garden offered.

I walk away from it now. It's now a living monument to the life I left behind. A symbolic reminder that no woman will ever take advantage of Miguel Rossi ever again.

I wave Jeffrey away. "I'll take breakfast in my office."

He's surprised. I don't usually take my meals in the office. Growing up, my father impressed upon us the importance of the dining room table. Important decisions are made while eating. The best decisions and memories are made while you fill your belly. The dining room table symbolizes the unity of a family, the core where all members meet on equal grounds to share their lives.

Well, as long as it isn't about family business.

The men don't discuss family business with the women. It's not how things are done. Of course, there are rumors about the Sorvino family, especially Alessandro's wife, who runs her own family.

Many families questioned the situation at first, but I've heard Katya has proved her worth in rather violent and merciless ways. I wouldn't expect much less from a Russian family leader.

I sit at my desk and turn on the screen for my computer. I check my emails first as there are documents I



need to sign and approve and certain senators I need to, well, assist.

I've also been sent financial reports that I'll need to go over before I see our accountant next week.

Jeffrey comes in with a tray and sets it down on the table to my right. "Your breakfast, sir."

"Thank you," I say quietly, drafting an email to the senator who got caught with his mistress. It is always good to do things for senators because they do things for you. I could use some favors.

A notification pops up, and I read the sender as Sorvino.

I quickly finish my email to the senator, ensuring that it looks perfectly 'clean' before I open the new email and read.

*Let's meet.*

*Tonight at nine, at The Italian on Fifth Avenue.*

*Two guards only.*

*Don Sorvino*

I take my time to respond. I need to be careful. I know they own The Italian on Fifth Avenue, so they will have the home advantage. No, I don't think that will suit me at all. I hit reply.

*Tonight at Nine. West Central Park near the entrance.*

*Two Guards only.*

*Agree to venue change or no meeting.*

*Don Rossi*

I send it and wait, refreshing my emails constantly until a reply finally hits my inbox.

*Agreed.*

*Don Sorvino.*

I smirk to myself and go to eat my breakfast. It's fruit today with some toast and preserves. I sip the coffee that has been brought with it.

The rest of the day passes in a blur, but I don't see Kira at all. I keep her tucked away in her room. I'll see her at dinner, and I've already arranged a dress for her.

At eight, I get into the car with two guards and leave the estate for Central Park. We're there early, and my guards patrol the area while I sit on a bench near the entrance.

I see a large figure walking toward me. I don't stand. I have no respect to give Alessandro, so I won't give him power over me.

If it bothers him, he doesn't show it. He sits beside me, and we don't look at each other.

"What is it you want, Don Rossi? In exchange for Kira?" he asks in a low voice.

I see his guards join my guards on patrol. They eye each other warily.

"I haven't decided yet, Don Sorvino," I say. "But what I know is that if you continue to attack my establishments or my warehouses, if you continue to destroy my products and income, then you will get her back," I pause before saying, "in pieces. Consider her payment for damages."

"I think not," he says. He sounds pissed.

Good.

“State what you want, Don Rossi. You don’t just kidnap a Sorvino for fun. You wanted something when you planned this. Let’s get it out in the open and get on with business.”

I shake my head. “I know what I originally wanted, but things have changed. I think Kira is worth far more than what I initially wanted or who I initially wanted.”

“So she wasn’t your intended target,” he comments. “You should train your men better.”

“You Sorvinos all look alike, so I’m not surprised my cousins picked up the wrong girl.” I let that sink in. “But I didn’t bargain on getting Kira. That is quite the prize. More valuable to me than you could even know.”

“How so?” he asks.

“I have my reasons. If you want to know what I want, I’ll give it to you in a list if it’s easier for you to comprehend. Start with item one, call off any attacks on my family and businesses.”

“Fine.” I didn’t think he’d so readily agree. I wonder what card he has to play.

“Then I’ll be in touch, Don Sorvino.”

“Don’t take too long, Don Rossi.” He stands and finally looks down at me, a power play I didn’t think of myself. Well done to him.

“I am not a patient man.” He says it with an air of finality before he strolls off and out of the park, his two men following him.

I give him a chance to get ahead in case there’s an ambush. I stand and allow one of my men to go ahead and one to follow me as I walk out of the park, glancing around for any potential attackers.

There are none.

At least Alessandro plays by what few rules the mafia has.

I get into my car and head back to the estate. It's late, but I still expect Kira to join me for dinner. Can't waste a perfectly good meal.

## Chapter 15 - Kira

Being cooped up in this room is driving me insane. The least Miguel can do is bring a television in so I can watch something. I understand he doesn't trust me to stay put, but God, this is the most bored I've been in a long time.

I spend most of the day resting on the bed, staring at the ceiling and worrying about Raphael. I know Alessandro will take care of him, but my bigger fear is that Miguel will discover his existence. I don't want Raphael to have this life. I want better for him.

Maybe it's inevitable, though. You aren't born into a mafia family and get to choose your fate. You are forever tied to your family and their name and the things that they do.

I can't take it.

I get up and dress in a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt, the comfy clothes I had requested when I made my list. I knock on the door and wait.

Jarred opens the door and looks at me. "You're not dressed."

"Yes, because it's totally time for dinner," I say sarcastically, and he frowns. "I want to explore the house. I'm bored. Either let me explore or bring me something to do."

Jarred rolls his eyes and shuts the door, and locks it. I'm about to knock again, but I hear footsteps receding, so I assume he's gone to check if it's okay.

I wait for what feels like forever before the lock turns and Jarred opens the door. "Don Rossi says you may explore the house, except the kitchen, and you're not to go outside into the garden."

"I accept," I say, desperate for a change of scenery.

He steps aside, and I walk out, glancing around. I don't know which way to go first.

I decide to explore to the left, down to the end of the hall. I might as well start at one end and make my way to the other. I try the door at the end, and it's locked. I sigh and go to the next one, and it opens, so I walk in.

There's a home theatre inside, and it's incredible. The screen is enormous, and there's a remote control on one of the tables between the various armchairs. The armchairs are two side by side, but the row behind is lifted. I count; there are six rows, so twelve armchairs.

I'm tempted to sit in one, turn on the system, and give it a test run, but I want to stretch my legs more. I continue down the hall, and most doors lead to guest rooms. I pass Jarred, who seems to be keeping a wary eye on me.

I go to the other side of the mansion and find a music room with an expansive LP record collection. There is also a sauna and a massive home gym room next to that. It's three times the size of my bedroom, and there are all kinds of equipment.

I get bored exploring upstairs and head downstairs. Instantly Jarred is following me. I didn't explore all the rooms upstairs, but they mostly seem to be bedrooms.

I walk around the lower level. I already know the dining room and don't go near the kitchen, although wonderful smells permeate the air. I find a library filled with plump armchairs, sofas, and hundreds of books. I doubt Miguel has time to read, though the one armchair does look a little worn in.

The next room I find is a living room with a large television. I decide to plop myself down and watch some shows. I find the Spanish Drama channel and relax as I watch it, smiling to myself. I almost forget where I am until Jarred clears his throat. "It's time for dinner. You need to go get dressed."

“I’m not hungry,” I say.

“You haven’t eaten all day.”

I glance at him and snort, “and you care because?”

“Come on, upstairs. You get dressed, come down for dinner, and Don Rossi won’t punish you,” he says, coming to take my arm. I wrench my arm out of his grip and yell, “Don Rossi can eat alone.”

“I could, but then I will stop extending the courtesy for you to eat until you’re so malnourished your cousin can collect you with a tweezer.”

I look at Miguel standing at the door and shake my head. I get up, and walk out of the room to go shower and change. I look presentable but not beautiful. He doesn’t get that level of effort from me. I go back downstairs with Jarred and sit at the table, but I refuse to speak to Miguel. He doesn’t seem to be in a chatty mood either. I glance at him, remembering how handsome his smile was.

### *Thirteen Years Earlier*

I sit on my bed with my textbooks spread out around me. I make notes meticulously. Most of the people are out tonight because there’s a massive party on campus, but with exams soon approaching, I want to be completely prepared and take advantage of the peace and quiet.

There’s a sudden and loud knock on my door. I look up sharply and frown.

“Kerri?” I call, wondering if my roommate forgot her key.

“It’s me,” Miguel calls through the door, and I roll my eyes. I set my textbooks to the side, prying myself out of the mountain, and go to open the door.

“What are you doing here?” I ask.

“Well, you weren’t at the party, and it sucked without you there, so I came to get you,” he grins. “Get dressed and come on. I can’t have you miss out on the best party of the year.”

“I have to study, Miguel. You know exams are coming up soon, and I need to be prepared.” I smile. “Go ahead and enjoy yourself.”

“No, you study too hard. College is supposed to be fun as well as about studies. One night out is not going to flunk you, Kira. Come on,” he bats his eyes at me. “Please, I want to show you off.”

“Our families...”

“We both picked to come here because our families aren’t tied here. Now come on.” He holds his hand out. “You don’t even have to change. You look great.”

I blush and take his hand. “Fine, but only for an hour.”

Only an hour turns into several as we drink our way through various kegs, and Miguel introduces me to all the people he knows. I find it hard to believe that one person can remember many names. At one point, I’m pretty sure he’s guessing.

“I need to sit,” I shout at him as another great song starts. “My legs are killing me.”

“Come on.” He takes my hand and pulls me along, leading me up the stairs of the frat house. Two levels up, and I’m exhausted, but he keeps me going until we reach a room at the end of the hall.

“This is my room,” he announces, pushing open the door. It’s a lot neater than the other areas of the frat house, and I’m pleasantly surprised. Seeing his bed, I sigh happily and sit down. “That feels better.”

He sits in his desk chair and swings back and forth. “I am so glad you’re having so much fun.”



“I’m tired now, though,” I laugh. “I’m going to sleep all of tomorrow.”

“Nah, you’ll get up and study. I know you will.” He gets up and comes to sit beside me.

“So…” he says, stopping there.

“So?” I ask, turning to look up at him.

He takes the cup from my hand and sets it down on his bedside table.

He shifts closer to me and kisses me softly. I return the kiss. I’ve come to love the kisses he gives me.

He breaks the kiss to trail smaller kisses down my neck and back up. I close my eyes and tip my head so he has better access.

I feel his hand on my leg, slowly stroking his way up, paying special attention to all of my curves and edges. He seems to be obsessed with those.

“Miguel,” I open my eyes.

“If you don’t want to, we don’t have to,” he says, moving away. I look at him, and something inside me stirs—a defiant little fire. I shake my head. “It’s okay.”

“You sure?”

“I’m sure,” I say, and he kisses me again, his hand stroking its way up my leg again. It snakes under my skirt, and I spread my legs just a little. As his finger traces my vagina through the fabric of my thong, I groan softly and shift against his hand.

“You’re so hot,” he murmurs in my ear. “Come on.”

He stands, and I look up at him as he pulls his shirt off. He offers me a hand, and I stand.

He slowly pulls my blouse up and off. He massages my breasts held up by the lacy bra I love best. I groan softly and put my hands over his, encouraging him to keep going. He

moves my hands and pulls my bra down so my breasts spill out. He pinches my nipples, and I gasp. He takes advantage and kisses me, sliding his tongue into my mouth.

I moan as our tongues dance, and he guides me to lie on the bed. He lies on top of me, kissing me, and massaging my breasts. I can feel his hard dick pressing against my thigh, and I find myself curious. I've never done this before, so I tentatively reach down and touch him through his pants. It twitches, and I feel it again, stroking it lightly through the material.

He grunts, and I take it as a good sign. He releases me and sits up. He pushes my skirt up and takes hold of my thong. He grins as he slowly inches it down and off, tossing it onto his desk. I smile, blushing when he lowers himself.

Stars burst in my vision as he sucks on my clit. I've played with myself before, but it's never had this effect on me. I buck my hips slightly and turn my head, biting my lip as he circles my entrance with a finger, lubricating himself on my juices.

The smell of sex fills the air, and I arch my back slightly as he pulls off my slit and rapidly moves his tongue and head over it. I feel like a porn star with the noises he's making while he pleasures me. Wet, slurping noises, and it's exciting that he enjoys tasting me so much.

Suddenly there's a finger in me, exploring my forbidden chamber like a tomb raider. Careful, gentle, but determined. I move my hips again, now with his tongue quickly flicking over my clit and his finger buried in me to the knuckle. I'm not sure how long I can take this.

When I think I'm going to climax, he pulls away, and I'm left feeling empty. I open my eyes, my jaw and hand sore from biting on my fist to stop from crying out.

"What..." I'm dazed with pleasure.

He's undoing his pants and pushing them down. I spread my legs further and swallow hard. "I've never..."

“It will hurt, but I’ll go slow...” he says. His dick seems enormous to me as he strokes it in that strong hand. He positions himself and smiles. “Ready?”

“Yes,” I breathe out. He slowly pushes into me, and there is pain. There’s pain, but there’s also a spark of pleasure. It’s not as painful as I thought it would be, probably because I use a rather thick vibrator, but he goes deeper, which hurts. Once he’s buried inside me, he puts a hand on either side of my head and his face inches from mine.

“Need a moment?” he whispers.

“No,” I murmur. “Not with you.”

He kisses me deeply and slowly starts to move.

Pain.

Pleasure.

Pain.

Pleasure.

Pleasant discomfort that I know will get easier with time.

He goes a bit faster, and he’s breathing hard through his nose as he continues to kiss me. I groan into his mouth, my hands on his shoulders, my fingers digging into his skin. If it hurts, he doesn’t seem to mind.

I feel like I’m going to climax, but I don’t. I urge Miguel to, though. He thrusts a little harder, and soon it’s one hard thrust. Another. Another. Then he buries himself balls-deep into me, and I feel the warmth spreading inside me.

A calm sense of satisfaction fills me, and I smile at him.

“I love you, Kira,” he says gruffly. “I mean it.”

I swallow hard and admit what I’ve been fighting for a long time, “I love you too, Miguel.”

*Present Day*

I feel a tear escape my eye and roll down my cheek, falling into my half-eaten food. He was so tender then, so loving and so kind.

He clears his throat, and I look up. “What’s your problem?” he asks.

“When did you become a monster?” I ask quietly.

“What did you say?” he growls, standing up.

I stand up as well, and we both approach each other. “I asked when you became such a heartless, cold, unfeeling monster?” We are inches away from each other.

His green eyes study mine, and he leans in, talking barely above a whisper, “You’re the one who left Kira. Who is the monster really?”

He brushes past me and leaves me standing there, my heart in my throat.

## Chapter 16 - Miguel

A monster?

A monster!

I might be a monster to most people, but she has no leg to stand on by calling me a monster. That whore left me, she broke my heart, and I swore never to be that broken again. My father doesn't know what happened. He knows I had a girl, but he doesn't know it was a Sorvino. He would have cast me out of the family. Unless he did know and just never said anything.

It bugs me, another reason to keep me up at night. I can't be seen as weak.

At six in the morning, I get up and shower. I'm still thinking about Kira and what she did to me. I need to shake this, but I don't know how. I don't know how to get her out of my head again. Last time it took heartbreak. This time, I don't know what to do.

I need to send Alessandro my demands so I can give her back and get her away from me. Then I won't have to see her again. Maybe one of my demands will be to send her back to wherever she's been the last thirteen years.

My family would want to know why that's a demand.

I can't give them the answer.

I walk out of the house and toward my convertible. The sky is a little overcast, so I change my mind. I wave to my driver, who is busy washing one of the other cars.

He comes running. "Yes, Don Rossi? Apologies, I wasn't expecting you to leave so soon."

"I have urgent business to attend to. Take me to my father's house," I say, climbing into the back of the SUV.

The driver quickly fetches the keys, and a guard climbs into the front passenger seat while the driver gets in and starts

the car. I check my emails on my cellphone while we ease through the light traffic that litters the roads this morning like forgotten trash. It'll be busy enough soon. New York never sleeps.

My father doesn't live far, though, and within half an hour, we're pulling up the driveway to the main Rossi estate and stopping in front of the expansive mansion.

A butler opens my door, and I climb out. "Is my father awake?"

"Having his morning coffee in the library, sir."

I leave it at that, quickly taking the stairs to the front door. It's already open, so I walk through and make a beeline for the library where my father sits doing the crossword puzzle in his morning paper.

"Padre," I say respectfully, "may I interrupt you?"

"You don't come here this early unless something is on your mind, Miguel." He sets his paper to the side and gestures to the chair opposite him. "Tell me your problems, my son."

I sit down, and a maid brings me a cup of hot black coffee. There's already milk and creamer on the table, so I add them to my cup and sit back, sipping it slowly.

My father watches me, not rushing me into anything. He knows I'm formulating the best way to speak.

"Padre," I start, "I have met with Alessandro Sorvino, who has said I must send him my demands. I said my first demand was to leave our operations alone. Any further damage, and we'll send the girl back in pieces."

"A wise move. The Sorvinos value the girl greatly. They won't put her in danger," he sips his own coffee.

I nod and set my cup down. "I've been trying to plan for the best possible demands we can negotiate without fear of severe retaliation. Something that would give us an upper hand and won't come back to bite us when we're not looking." I sigh. "I'm not sure what is the best option. Territory? That

they could take back easily once Kira is returned. Money? They have so much of it; it won't make a difference."

"You underestimate the value or rather the symbolism of acquiring territory, no matter the means."

"Explain?" I ask curiously, picking up my coffee again.

My father smiles. "If Alessandro submits even a medium-sized territory to you, it would be known among the other families. That action, the fact he caved and gave you your demand, will make him look weak to the other families. It will damage his reputation as the most ruthless Don in New York."

I nod, listening intently.

"Don't ask for something extravagant. That's where most families falter because their demands aren't met. They're simply killed. Ask him for something reasonable but worthwhile. Perhaps a territory and five million dollars. As you say, the money would make no difference to him. If he agrees, it's a power play on your part. You've brought Alessandro down in negotiations. You have prevailed."

I finish my coffee and put the cup down. "Symbolism. I never thought of that."

"The families know we have taken a Sorvino, and all are watching with bated breath to see who will succumb to who. You cannot let our family down, Miguel."

I stand. "Thank you for the advice. I won't let anyone of the Rossi family down."

"That's my son, good luck." My father picks up his paper again, clearly finished with this conversation, and I turn to leave. I don't stay for breakfast even though I know my mother would love to see me and spend quality time with me. We seldom get alone time together, but I need to return to the estate. I have some thinking and planning to do.

On the drive back, I texted Jarred to ask him what Kira was doing.

*She's walking on the treadmill.*

*My treadmill?*

*Yes, Don, should I tell her to get off?*

*No, it's fine. Just keep an eye on her. I'm on my way back.*

Once we're home, I take off my suit jacket and give it to Jeffrey to take to the closet. I take the stairs two at a time and head toward the gym room. I stand at the door, looking in to see Kira walking on the treadmill with her back to me.

She's not going fast, but she must have been going for some time. She's in a white tank top that is soaked through with sweat, so much so that I can tell she's not wearing a bra.

The thought that my guards could see her like this angers me, but they're keeping out of sight, which is probably the best thing they can do right now if they know me well enough.

Kira glances up into the mirror and see's me. She presses the stop button on the treadmill and climbs off. She wraps a towel around her neck, walks toward me, and then brushes past me.

Bitch.

I grab her arm and pull her back to me, her body pressing against me.

"You will greet me when you see me in my home," I growl.

"I'm not your fucking slave," she snaps back, trying to pull out of my grasp, but I'm stronger than her.



The fire in her eyes, her visible skin through her sweat-soaked top. It drives me wild, so I kiss her hungrily. She fights against me, trying to push me away as I force my tongue into her. I break the kiss and loosen my grip. She pushes me and runs down the hallway to her room. I hear her door slam shut.

I shouldn't have done that.

I shouldn't lose control like that...if my family found out.

I go to my own room and shut the door, my dick straining in my pants.

I strip down and let my dick spring up. I could take a cold shower, let my body calm down, and let my dick soften, but it's been a while.

I turn on the hot water tap, and the shower hisses on, water thundering down from the three shower heads—each side and above. I love this shower. I slip under the water and sigh, closing my eyes. I put my left hand against the wall and take my dick in my right. It twitches in my hand, the veins popping. I move my head slowly up and down at first, thinking about that first time in my room and how she felt so tight around me. I think about her curvaceous body. I remember her taste, that twang that ignited my senses. I pump my hand faster, picturing her spread in front of me, touching herself as I watch from a chair in front of the bed. Her cheeks flushed as her fingers danced inside and around her clit. Her clit is so sensitive. I remember how easily I could drive her wild.

I grunt and pump a little slowly until the thick cum spurts out of my dick and hits the wall, only to be washed away by the hot water. I let go of my dick and stand on shaky legs. This is getting out of control. I can't reignite my feelings for her. There's nothing left between us.

## Chapter 17 - Kira

He kissed me! The monster fucking kissed me as though he owned me. I won't lie. The familiarity of the kiss stirred some feelings within me, but how fucking dare he. I am not his possession to do with what he likes, and I certainly don't want to encourage this behavior.

He says I'm the monster, but he is so cold, so heartless, and then he does something like this, and I'm left wondering about everything.

What did I do that was so terrible to him? I was taken away from him, but surely he could get over that. We weren't together that long, well, long enough to conceive a child.

Maybe I should tell him about Raphael? Maybe he would let me go? But there are other things that worry me about him finding out about our son. What if he takes him away? What if he kidnaps Raphael and tries to groom him to be the next Don? What if I never see my son again? What if he turns Raphael against me?

I've always been candid with Raphael about his father. I told him the truth, his father didn't know about him, but his father was a dangerous man and was dangerous to our family. We had to protect our family at all costs.

Would Raphael be taught otherwise? Would he believe otherwise when he learns that his father is now Don of a very powerful family?

How powerful is the Rossi family? Especially given that Miguel would cross the Sorvino family. I know my family is the most powerful in New York.

I lie restless in bed, staring out the window and dreaming of my freedom. I didn't have this problem in Italy. I resent Alessandro for bringing me back now. Yes, I missed my family, but Raphael and I lived a good life at the villa. A safe life.

I eventually doze off because the sun is rising when I open my eyes again. I get up, feeling stiff and sore, and go shower. The hot water washes over me and relaxes my stiff muscles.

I rewash my hair, mostly because I'm bored, and I want to cost Miguel as much as possible by using up all the products he had bought. The shower doesn't take long, but I feel it's much needed.

I get out and get dressed, leaving my hair wet, and tentatively try the door. It's unlocked, so I open it to see Jarred standing guard across the hall. He inclines his head in greeting, but I ignore him.

I walk out and go downstairs. The sun is now fully risen, and there is activity in the kitchen. I wish I could check it out. Obviously, I love the kitchen so much and would love to cook up my own food to pass the time. I wonder if Miguel would let me, probably not because he doesn't want me near knives.

I don't blame him. Personally, I'd totally try to escape using a kitchen knife.

I walk into the dining room, where Miguel is sitting reading his paper. I sit down and start on my breakfast. Another full English breakfast again, how boring.

"What did I tell you about greeting me in my home?" he asks from behind his newspaper.

"Fuck off," I say after I swallow a bit of sausage.

He sets the newspaper down and gets up, walking around the table to me. I grip my fork tightly and raise it when he's near, but he grabs my wrist and twists it, forcing me to drop the fork.

He yanks me to my feet and grabs my shoulders, bringing me closer to him again. "There are rules to follow, Kira. I told you if you're not going to follow them, I will punish you."

“No,” I gasp out, but it’s no use. He spins me around and forces me over the table. I try to push back, but he’s so damn strong. He yanks down my pants and wallops my ass. It stings, but at the same time, it ignites something in me. He hits me again, hitting the other side, and I bite my lip. I scold myself for the feelings I’m getting. I stifle a groan when he hits me a little lower and too close to my lips. He yanks my pants up and steps back.

“You will obey me,” he says authoritatively.

“I’m not your fucking toy,” I snap, and he forces me down again. My pants go down again, and he spanks me again. It’s not so hard that it’s that painful, but it’s more the humiliation of the action. Also, the feeling of him being so close to touching me arouses me, and I hate it. I feel disgusted with myself.

Suddenly the pressure holding me down releases, and I hear him walk off. I pull my pants up and turn to see as he leaves the room. His no-fuck attitude is rather appealing. He was so soft and sweet when we were in college. This is a controlling side of him that I’m not used to, and while a part of me is disgusted with how he has changed, another part of me secretly wishes he would touch me.

Argh! How can I be thinking like this? The man literally kidnapped me and is holding me hostage. I can’t be falling for my captor.

Especially when he is such a dick.

I sit back down, wincing slightly, and finish my breakfast. After that, I decide to give the home theater a spin to pass the time. I don’t see Miguel anywhere as I walk through the house. Jarred is always nearby, but he doesn’t say anything to me.

I scroll through the movies and put on one of Raphael’s favorite Disney films. As it plays, I think about my son and the smile on his face whenever he watches this. I remember how sweet he looked sleeping the last morning I saw him when I

left him with Sofia. Who is taking care of him now? I hope it isn't my father.

I wish there were a way I could check on him. A way to communicate with him without telling Miguel why I need a way to communicate with my family. I don't want him to take Raphael, and I don't know how he will react to the news that he has a Sorvino son. He might even have him killed so he doesn't threaten to take over his position as Don one day.

I glance around and note that Jarred is sitting at the back, but his head has dropped forward.

It dawns on me that he's dozed off because of the boring kid's movie. This could be my opportunity to try finding a phone or computer to contact Alessandro.

I leave the movie playing. It's loud enough to cover the sound of me going. I hold my breath until I'm out. I glance around. There are no other guards on this level, so I quickly make my way through the various rooms, trying to find one with a phone or computer.

Finally, I enter what must be an office. It must be Miguel's office.

I sneak into it quietly and sit at the table. The laptop is already logged in, so I bring up his browser and log into my emails.

I compose a new one and am typing in Alessandro's private email address when there's movement at the door. I quickly close the browser and look up as Miguel enters the room. He glares at me.

"What do you think you're fucking doing?" he growls.

I swallow hard.

## Chapter 18 - Miguel

She stares at me stupidly, and I roar, “Jarred!”

There’s no answer, and she stares at me. The door for the home theater crashes open, and Jarred comes running down the hallway breathlessly.

“Don Rossi,” he says, terrified of the look in my eyes.

“How’d she get into my office? Were you too busy watching a movie?”

He doesn’t answer me, and I backhand him. “Go get your brother. He’ll take over your duties since you’re so incapable.”

He slinks off, looking mortified, and I wait until he’s down the stairs before I turn to Kira.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m exploring,” I can tell she is lying. She blinks a lot when she lies.

“Bullshit,” I say. “You didn’t have to come into this office to explore it. It’s only open because I stepped away for a moment.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have done that,” she snaps. So cheeky. She clearly didn’t learn this morning.

Lyle comes up behind me, and I hold a hand up to keep him at a distance. “What were you doing?”

“I wanted to speak to my family,” she barks. “I wanted to let them know I’m okay.”

“If you weren’t okay, they would know,” I snarl. “I would have sent you to them in pieces. That can still be arranged.”

She doesn’t say anything at first, then she stands. “I can’t believe what a monster you’ve turned into. You were so

kind. How? How the fuck did you go from being such a kind, caring person to this fucking atrocity?"

I step into the office. "You made me this way, Kira. This is your doing."

"How? What did I do that was so terrible, Miguel?"

"Is your memory so bad?" I wave for Lyle to come closer. "Did we really mean nothing to you?"

She looks taken aback, but before she can answer, I turn to Lyle. "Lock her in her room."

I turn and leave. I can hear her arguing with Lyle, but I know he won't put up with it. I take the stairs quickly and go into the library because I know there's a stocked bar at the back of it. I pour myself a glass of whiskey and sit down at the bar, slowly sipping on the drink.

### *Thirteen Years Earlier*

I can't believe we've been together for two months already. Exams are fast approaching, but I spend most of my time studying with Kira. My frat brothers totally understand, and I make time for them when I'm at the house, but mostly I'm focused on my studies and Kira. My grades can't slip, or my father will poke around and ask about it, but at the same time, Kira is just intoxicating.

It's really early in the morning, but I want to get to Kira's dorm to walk her to class. The day promises to be glorious, with lots of sunshine and no clouds. It seems like such a waste to spend it indoors with old professors lecturing on shit we already know from textbooks. A plan formulates in my mind.

I wait outside for Kira, who comes out a few minutes after I arrive. She kisses me softly. "Hi."

“Hi,” I murmur before kissing her again. “Listen, I have an idea.”

“You always have an idea,” she giggles, and the sound fills me with unexplainable joy.

“I know, but you have to trust me with this one. Why don’t we skip today? Just go to Central Park, lie on the grass, eat some hot dogs, and spend the day together.” I grin mischievously.

“We can’t just skip class,” she says. “Besides, it’s such a risk to go off campus. What if one of our family members sees us together.”

“I doubt your family knows who I am, and I doubt my family knows who you are, so we would be fine. Besides, our families don’t come from this side, really. Their businesses are all on the other side of New York. I mean, the reason we both came here is that they don’t really have influence here.”

She looks up at me and bites her lip. “I guess.”

“Come on,” I take her hand, “I promise it’s going to be an awesome day.”

Kira squeezes my hand and smiles. “Okay, let me go put my textbooks away. Give me yours I’ll stash them in my room. Kerri has gone home for the week so that she won’t notice.”

I grin and wait for her. Once she’s back, we head off campus. No one stops us, and we are both nervous and excited. I call a cab, I could take my car, but I don’t want it to be recognized. We climb into the cab and tell the driver to go to Central Park, and then we snuggle down together.

Kira strokes the back of my hand softly.

I pay the driver, and we go into the park. We spend the day resting under the trees, talking about our dreams and what we want for our futures. What we wish we could actually study. We steal kisses, and once or twice, a little more, with a brush of fingers. I get us hot dogs and soda for lunch, and soon



enough, we're just relaxing in a quiet part of the park. She's sitting with her back to the tree, my head is in her lap, and my eyes are closed.

She's stroking the slight stubble that is growing because I haven't shaved.

"Miguel?" I love the way she says my name.

"Hmm?" I sigh contently.

"I know we said it that one night. But I really do love you. You are my whole world, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

My eyes snap open, and I sit up abruptly, turning to her. "Kira, that's all I want. I don't care if we have to run off together. I love you so much." I lean in and kiss her deeply.

When I break the kiss, she says, with a heavy voice, "Why don't we go back to my room?"

"Really?" I chuckle. "I'm in."

We get up and hurry to exit the park.

We try our best to keep our hands off each other in the cab ride back and giggle as we rush through the mostly quiet campus back to her dorm. She opens the door, and we get in. She shuts it a little too loudly behind her.

I push her against the door, pressing my body against hers. We kiss hungrily, and her hands rub my chest as I squeeze her waist, grinding my hard dick into her. I feel like a boy who's just discovered what an erection is, and I want to chase the finish line. She nudges me, and I move, but she guides me, so I'm against the door.

She gets on her knees and undoes my belt. I groan with expectation. She frees my erection and immediately starts stroking it.

"I want to be dirty with you," she breathes, slightly blushing. I lick my lips and nod as she starts to suck on the tip of my hard-on. I groan loudly and grab a fistful of her hair,

willing her to take more. She slides my cock into her mouth while she sucks on it. She takes as much as she can until she's gagging on it, and I can't explain what that gagging sound does to my twitching cock.

I start to move my hips, holding her head in place while I fuck her pretty little mouth. She fondles my balls as I move, and they tense; I can't help myself. I want to push deep into her throat, but she pulls away and starts stroking my dick, sticking her tongue out.

"Jesus, where did you learn this?" I gasp, bucking my hips slightly.

She grins as I come on her tongue, getting a little on her face. She wipes it off with her finger before she sucks on her finger and swallows my cum. My dick aches with need.

"Your turn," I growl, taking her hand and pulling her up. I lead her to her desk, which is against a window. "You want to be a dirty little girl?" I tease, I know what I'm doing, but I don't know if she does.

"I am a dirty little girl," she says seductively.

I smirk and pull her pants, and she steps out of them. After paying special attention to my favorite part of her body, her curves. I lift her onto her desk and spread her legs. I sit on her chair, nestling myself between her legs. Her thong is already wet with desire, and I can smell it from where I am. I get closer, and I lick her through the fabric. She tips her head back.

"Tell me where you got this idea," I murmur, taking control of the situation.

"I read about it in a book," she breathes.

I chuckle and lick her through her thong again, soaking it with my saliva. "Smutty books, hey? Not bad."

"Um..."

"Say something dirty to me," I murmur, tracing a finger down the barely visible line where her lips meet.

“I... um...”

She is breathing harder, so I stick my tongue out and flick at her clit through the fabric. “Say you want me to eat your pussy.”

“Oh, God,” she gasps and reaches a hand down to touch herself, but I smack it away, so she says, “Miguel, please eat my pussy.”

I smirk and move my face close, using my tongue to lick up and down between her folds through the fabric. When I pull away, I see she’s pulled her shirt up, and her one breast is out. She’s playing with the nipple.

I pull the thong to the side and lick between the folds. She’s so wet she coats my tongue. She’s trembling, and I want to rock her world while my dick gets ready to fuck her.

I suck on her clit, and then I flick it with my tongue while I move my head quickly from side to side to give that full vibrator feel. She all but slides forward to be as close to my mouth as possible. I hold her legs as I continue to move, and she starts to whimper. I feel her grab my hair, her turn, I guess, and she starts to buck wildly against my tongue. It’s hard because I’m holding her legs. She tries to squeeze them closed and pull me away, but I hold her tight because I know what’s about to come.

It’s her.

She cries out and leans back. Suddenly, a wave of warm liquid flows over my tongue and lips as she cries out my name. I finally pull back with a smirk and watch her, exhausted.

“Take off your top,” I instruct her as I stand up.

“Miguel,” she breathes, “I’m sorry....”

“Take off your top,” I say again, and she sits up shakily, pulling her top off. I yank her bra down and grab her waist. “Turn over.”

“Miguel, people could see,” she protests, her eyes wide.

“Let them see,” I grin. “Let them see how vulnerable and beautiful you are.”

She and I stare at each other for a few seconds before she finally turns over on her desk, scattering stationery off it. She’s on all fours, pressed against the window. I glimpse her breasts squished against the glass and then raise her front a little, lowering her rear. I guide my now hard again dick into her, and I instantly start to fuck her. I want us both to come this time.

“Mig...Miguel, someone is watching,” she whimpers, her hands on the frame of the window.

I look over her shoulder. It looks like a professor is standing below. He’s standing by a tree, his hand in his pocket. I grin and move harder. “Your pussy is so good.”

“Miguel,” Kira cries out, “fuck me harder.”

I move faster, and I feel her clench around me. I grab her hair and pull her head back. She cries out, and I glance down at the professor, who is clearly being entertained.

I slow down and then thrust hard, and she cries out. I thrust again, harder. She cries out again. I do this four or five times before my dick can’t take it anymore, and I bury myself inside her, releasing a stream of hot cum.

I reach a finger around her and toy with her clit until she’s clenching around my dick again, shaking violently. Another stream of liquid. I didn’t know she was such a squirter. It’s a massive turn-on for me. I love satisfying her.

The professor is gone now, so I gently slip out of her, pick her up and place her on the bed. I spoon her and kiss her head.

“That was hot,” she breathes. “So fucking hot. I’ve never...I’ve never gushed like that before.”

“I’m so pleased I could please you,” I murmur, kissing her bare shoulder.

*Present Day*

I throw my glass across the room and into the wall. Jarred comes in to check on me, but I snap at him, “Fuck off.”

He leaves, and I stare at the mirror opposite me.

I wish these thoughts would go away just as easily.

## Chapter 19 - Kira

I'm let out of my room again in the morning, but I have breakfast alone. Miguel is nowhere to be found, and I dare not try his office again. I've discovered my new guard is Lyle, Jarred's brother, and they are both Miguel's cousins.

He follows me downstairs and into the living room. He stands at the door while I curl up on the sofa, turning on the television. It's still on the Spanish drama channel I left it on the other day, and I just try to vegetate on the sofa, trying not to think of anything. I can't help it, though—the thought of Raphael being confused and sad that I'm not there is too much for me to bear.

Tears fill my eyes, and I sniff, trying to keep them at bay. I wipe furiously at my eyes, but they keep falling until I start sobbing, first quietly, then louder. I just want to hold my son in my arms and make sure he is taken care of. It's all I've wanted from the day I found out I was pregnant, and no one, not Miguel or my father, could stop me.

I hear the front door open and close.

“What happened?” I hear Miguel's voice.

“I don't know, she came here and was watching a show, and then she started sobbing.”

I hear footsteps and look up, the tears streaming down my face.

“What's wrong?” Miguel demands to know. “Did one of my men hurt you?”

He is such a fucking idiot. I stand up angrily and push past him and Lyle. I continue to sob as I hurry upstairs to my room. I slam the door after me and dive into the bed, sobbing heartily into my pillow.

The door creaks open and then shuts.

“Kira, what happened?” Miguel asks again. “Who hurt you?”

“Who hurt me?” I shriek, scrambling to get up. “Who hurt me?” I shriek again.

I start punching his chest. “You fucking kidnapped me, Miguel. You took me out of my life, a life I was just getting back, and you took me as a hostage. What do you want with me? What good am I to you? What is so important that you had to kidnap me?”

“You think I wanted you?” he roars at me, stopping my tears. “I wanted the Sorvino sister so I could negotiate better territories for my family, and instead, I got you. The one person I had hoped I would never lay eyes on again. Do you want to know what I want? I want you to go back from wherever it is you ran off to and fucking stay there while I make things better for my family. I have treated you fucking well. My hostages are beaten and tortured, not housed and fed at my estate where they can relax on my furniture.”

“Let me go, and I’ll make your dream come true,” I shout at him. “You’ll never see me in New York again.”

“Not before I get what I want,” he snarls. “You’re still close to Don Sorvino, and he is willing to negotiate with me for your safe return. You’re not fucking going anywhere, so get used to it.”

I want to slap him, but I control myself. Instead, I turn my back to him and cross my arms.

“Get ready for dinner.” It’s a command, not a request. “I expect you down within twenty minutes or else.”

I hear the door swing open with a loud creak and then slam shut, rattling the window. I clench my fists and try to think straight. I need to come up with a better plan because fighting with him isn’t resolving anything. It’s just making things worse.

If he gets sick of my bullshit, he could start beating and torturing me. Alessandro always told me never to

underestimate what a person will do for their family.

I had heard about Arianna, how they had removed her fingernails before Carmine had saved her. I don't want that to be my situation. I picture Alessandro receiving a package with my fingernails or, worse, my fingers. I don't want to be maimed, so I need another plan.

I go to shower so I can freshen up, and as I wash up, I wonder about Miguel. He's so desperately passionate about hating me...could that mean he still has feelings for me? If he does, could I use that to my advantage? I mean, if I could convince him that I've started to have feelings for him again too, maybe I could seduce my way into lax security or an excursion out of the estate, then I can escape.

I don't know if it will work. It might entail sleeping with my captor, and I know that won't be easy. I will do what I must, especially to get back to my child, but I know it will stir old feelings I might not want back.

I must take the risk, though.

If there is even the slightest chance I can make it out of this, I have to try—before Miguel starts sending me back in pieces.

I dress and do myself up, I take care this time but keep in mind I only have twenty minutes in total, and I've used at least ten for showering.

I put on the heels he's provided and grimace at his grotesque idea of hospitality, is it even that?

I open the door to find Jarred standing there instead of Lyle.

"Where's Lyle? Are you out of trouble?" I ask.

Jarred keeps quiet, and I know he's still pissed that I gave him the slip. I bow my head. "I'm sorry I got you into trouble. We'd better get to dinner."

I walk past him and sense rather than hear him behind me. I sweep into the dining room, and as Miguel looks up, I



give him a small smile.

“Good evening, Don Rossi,” I said submissively.

Miguel snorts and shakes his head, returning to the plate of food in front of him.

A plate is placed in front of me, and I quietly say, “Thank you.”

Miguel casts a glance in my direction with narrowed eyes. I wait until he starts to eat before I tuck into my food. I chew on my food quietly, and when a few moments pass in silence, I decide to break it.

“I’m sorry for how I’ve behaved,” I say quietly. “I am grateful for your hospitality and the kindness you’ve shown me.”

I don’t know if he can tell if I’m sincere or not, but I give it my all.

“Perhaps we can start over?”

“From when,” he asks, and his voice is dripping with sarcasm. “From when I kidnapped you or from college?”

“Miguel...”

“Don Rossi to you,” he snarls.

“Don Rossi,” I concede, “please, I really thought about how I’ve been behaving, and I’m sorry I’ve been rude to you in your own home. I promise to be absolutely golden from now on.” I meet his green eyes, and he stares me down until I look down at my food.

We continue to eat in tense silence, and every time I glance up, he’s looking at me—not looking, leering. Goose flesh erupts on my skin, and I shiver slightly.

“Are you cold?” he asks, his voice is low, and to me, it sounds dangerous.

“A little,” I say quietly.

“Jarred,” he looks to the door, “start the fire in the library. We can have drinks there after dinner and see if Miss Sorvino and I can start this kidnapping over. With a little more grace,” he looks at me pointedly.

It’s working. He’s warming up to me. I’m a little suspicious that it was so quick, but I do think he has old feelings for me. They are clearly fueling his rage, and now he thinks there’s a chance to explore those feelings with me.

I feel sick for emotionally manipulating him like this, but I know what my priorities are.

We finish eating in silence, and when our plates are cleared, I go to stand, but Miguel holds up a hand. “You’ve never stayed long enough at dinner to realize there’s dessert before drinks.”

I try to give him a warm smile as a big slice of cheesecake dripping in strawberry sauce is placed in front of me with a fork.

## Chapter 20 - Miguel

She honestly thinks I'm a complete idiot. I try not to smirk as we tuck into dessert. She comes down and suddenly starts being nice to me, trying to reconcile, and what? Flirt? Does she really think I'm dumb enough to be manipulated like that again? And by her? Fool me once, shame on me, but there isn't going to be a second time, you whore.

We eat our dessert in silence, but I keep an eye on her, trying not to smile or give myself away. She glances up periodically, and the third or fourth time she catches me looking at her, she clears her throat. "This cheesecake is delicious."

I sit back and give her a sly smile. "It's your favorite, I remembered."

"From that place in the city center?" her eyes widen, and she smiles. "You got me one every weekend to share while we watched movies."

I nod. "That's right, and you'd always eat more than me when it was a sappy chick flick."

She grins and nods, taking another bite. She's about halfway through the cheesecake. She's not lying about enjoying it. I know that, but she is straining to try to talk to me. It seems hard for her to be nice to me, her captor, but she should know how to do it by now.

I finish my cheesecake and push the plate away and wait for her.

"So, what did you do today?" she asks as she starts on the last part of her cheesecake.

I shake my head. "I don't discuss business at the dining room table."

"Sorry, my family is like that too. Did you do anything that wasn't business today?" she asks, pushing her plate away.

I stand. “I only deal with business on a day-to-day basis.”

She nods and stands, gathering her dress around her like a princess. “Well, thank you for a wonderful dinner.”

“Drinks, remember?” I ask. “We’ll have them in the library by the fire.”

She awkwardly smiles widely and nods. “Okay, yes. That would be lovely.”

I hold my hand out to her, and she takes it. I escort her to the library, and a sofa in front of the roaring fire Jarred has lit. Jarred stands at the door, and I wave him off. “Wait outside. We want some privacy.”

She looks slightly panicked under her smile, and I try not to laugh. I wonder how she would feel if she was used and tossed away. I go to the bar and pour two glasses of whiskey, handing one to her and sitting beside her. I put one arm around the back of the sofa behind her.

She smiles at me, and I take in the dress. It looks better on her than I imagined. Strapless, corset sewn to a long wispy skirt made of layers of chiffon with an underskirt as the bottom-most layer. I look down into her eyes, remaining quiet.

“So,” she says, sipping her whiskey, “you haven’t gotten married or had children?”

I despise small talk, she should remember that, but clearly, she doesn’t care. I shake my head. “No, never found the right person. I don’t really want children. You?”

She falters, and I raise an eyebrow, but she shakes her head. “No, me neither.”

I get an unsettling feeling in my chest, but I brush it off. Once upon a time, I imagined her to wed me and be the mother of my children.

That will never happen now.

She swirls her drink in the glass, staring down into it.

“Miguel, I’m sorry I went away. Things happened...”

I shush her. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“But If I could explain...”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” I say again. “It’s history.”

“Is it a history we could look at starting again?” she looks up at me with heavy eyes, and I smile. She thinks she has me. What an idiot.

I pull away from her and down my drink before I sit back. “How could I trust that you won’t leave again?”

“I’m not a naive little girl anymore, Miguel. I have learned a few things since you last saw me.”

I’m sure she has. The thought disgusts me, but if she wants to go this route, then that’s exactly what we will do. I sigh and settle back. “Kira, that’s a lot of talk for someone who’s been cursing and disrespecting me for days. I’m afraid I can’t take your word for it. Action speaks louder than words.” I look at her pointedly, and she swallows.

“Is there nothing I can do?” she asks, and I’m pleased her voice is shaking.

I shrug. “I’m sure I can think of many things for you to do to prove yourself, but I want the inspiration to come from you.”

She swallows what’s left of her whiskey and sets the glass down. She stares into the fire, and I’m almost sure she will return to her room and try another day. She stands up, and I smile at her, but she reaches behind her to tug on the lace holding the corset.

I watch her curiously as she slowly drops the corset and skirt to her feet. She’s only in a black thong, with her hair cascading down her back. She turns to face me, swallowing hard, and to me, her breasts seem a little heavier. I don’t even act at this point.

I spread my legs, unzip my pants and pull my dick out. I leave it lying there, and I look at her expectantly.

“It isn’t going to suck itself, Kira,” I say after she doesn’t move.

She blushes, and her eyes are shiny, but she kneels between my legs and slowly starts to stroke my flaccid cock, coaxing the beast awake. It grows as it stiffens, and I sigh, keeping an eye on her.

She looks me in the eyes before she bows her head and softly sucks on the tip of my now-hard dick. I get comfy and watch her. She’s gentle as she plays with my balls and licks up and down my shaft.

Hesitant.

I click my tongue. “Come on, Kira, I know what you’re capable of. Give it your best.”

She pulls off and blushes. “It’s been a while.”

I snort. “I thought you wanted to prove yourself?”

She nods and takes my cock in her mouth again. I don’t give her a choice this time. I grab her hair and force her head down, the tip of my cock grazing the back of her throat. I grunt and let her up for air before I push her down again, causing her to gag loudly. There’s a loud slurping noise as I release her, she is panting now, but she goes down on me again, taking as much as she can before she gags and pulls off.

I close my eyes and relax for a moment before I push her off and stand up. “Here, let me help you.” I hold her head in my hands, hips height. “Open your mouth wide and stick out your tongue.”

She does as she’s told, looking up at me fearfully. I smile and push my cock into her mouth deeply, and then without warning, I start fucking her mouth. She holds my hips for balance and tries to breathe around my member shoved into her throat again and again. Tears begin rolling down her

face, and I smirk at her. I pull her off me hard, and she tumbles back against the table.

“Get up,” I command, and she scrambles to her feet.  
“Bend over the table, Kira.”

“Miguel...” she says shakily.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to,” I sneer, looking into her eyes.

She turns around and bends over. I shove her thong to the side, line up my tip with her pussy, and push into her. She cries out as I bury myself balls deep inside of her. Fuck, she’s tight. I forgot how tight she felt.

I hold her hips and start pounding her, the sound of slapping skin filling the air along with the crackling of the fire. I work up a sweat as I lean forward to grab her breasts. I grope them as I pump my hips, thrusting hard and ignoring her cries. I can’t even tell if they’re from pleasure or pain, but soon enough, I feel my balls tighten. I grip her breasts hard and bury my cock in her as I come.

Once I’m done, I pull out and get dressed. Kira stays there for a moment before she turns to look at me, and I look down at her coldly, “That was fine. You can go to your room now.”

She looks like she’s going to cry, and I ignore the stabbing pain in my chest as she pulls her dress on loosely and hurries out of the room.

## Chapter 21 - Kira

Once inside the room and the door shut behind me, I hurry to rip the dress off. I don't even care if I damage it. I can still feel him inside me, and it feels like some of his cum is dripping out.

I'm so ashamed of myself. I feel so dirty. Worst of all, I want to cry because it felt so damn good to have him inside of me again.

Once I'm out of the dress, I rush to the toilet, lean over it, and throw up. He used me like a rag doll, and a part of me remembered the passionate sex we had with each other in college, and I wanted more.

I climb into the shower and slide down to sit down as the water washes over me. I cry quietly, remembering how brokenhearted I was when my father sent me away. I wasn't allowed to say goodbye to anyone, my studies were down the toilet, and no one could ever know I was banished. I don't know what he told them, but when I got back, I was told to say that I had gone on vacation to Italy and loved it so much I decided to stay.

I was also told I must *never* reveal who Raphael's father is. But my father knew he couldn't stop me from telling my son when he turns sixteen, and he's old enough to make his own decisions.

I find the strength to stand in the shower and wash myself. I wash away the feeling of him groping me carelessly, I wash away all traces of him, but the reality is that this will probably happen again.

I saw a flicker in his eyes. He may think he is cold and cut off, but I know I saw something in him when I turned around, and he saw me naked.

I shiver and turn the water off. I dry off, change into a tank top and shorts, and climb into bed.



I am so exhausted I fall asleep almost immediately and don't wake up until there's a soft knock at the door.

"Miss Sorvino, it's time for breakfast."

"Coming," I call sleepily, rubbing my eyes and sliding out of bed. I look into the cupboards with the dresses they've packed in there. I look out the window, see the clear skies, and pick out a summery dress to throw on over my underwear. I brush through my hair and leave the room with Jarred following me to the dining room.

Miguel is reading a paper, so I sit down, "Good morning, Miguel."

"Morning," he says lazily.

"Are you busy today?"

He ruffles the newspaper and looks at me. "I'm always busy. Why?"

"It's a beautiful day outside. I thought you might like to have a picnic with me," I comment, spooning sugar into my cooked oats.

"I have work, and you're not allowed in the garden because you try to escape." He goes back to his paper, and I shake my head.

"I promised I wouldn't, and I meant it. Please? It is such a beautiful day, and we can talk about things." I pout at him until he glances at me and sighs. "Fine. Jarred, have the kitchen pack a picnic basket."

Jarred leaves, and I try not to look too pleased with myself as I eat.

"We can have the picnic once I'm done in my office, around lunchtime," he says offhandedly.

"That's perfect," I say. "I'll watch television until then."

He sets his paper down and starts to eat breakfast, we do so in silence, and I wait until he gets up and leaves before I

go to the living room to watch a show. I worry about what I'm going to say and do, and I'm also concerned that he wants to have sex in the garden. We did some wild things in college, a lot of it instigated by me with the books I read.

I try to push the thoughts out of my head and almost completely forget the plan when Jarred appears at the door. "Don Rossi said to come to the garden. He's waiting for you."

I jump up, turn the television off, and follow Jarred out the door to the front garden. He leads me between some hedges, and my stomach leaps to my throat. The middle of the gardens, which I hadn't glimpsed when I tried to escape, is precisely like the Dean's private gardens on campus. There is a table and chairs set out in the center with a picnic basket on top. Miguel is sitting at the table, working on his phone.

I walk over and open the picnic basket so I can start unpacking it. There's a little bit of everything: fruit, cheese, bread, dip. Miguel doesn't say anything as I lay everything out.

I sit down and smile. "There we go, isn't this lovely?"

Miguel looks at me disapprovingly and sets his phone down. He takes a little bit of everything and puts it on one of the plates I unpacked.

"Did you have a busy morning?"

"Can we cut the bullshit chit-chat, please?" he snaps. "You know I hate small talk."

I swallow and shake my head. "It's just that I haven't seen you in thirteen years."

"And who's fault is that?" he sneers. "Never mind. Just stop talking about being busy and the weather. It's fucking boring."

"Have you arranged my exchange then?" I ask pointedly, "or is that still being negotiated?"

"It's in the works," he says. "So if you behave, you have nothing to fear."

“I don’t fear you,” I lie. “I’ve never feared you.”

He looks smug, and there’s a moment that I want to slap it off his face, but I focus on eating instead.

“I didn’t expect you to be Don so soon,” I comment. “That’s a real honor. Is your dad okay?”

“There’s nothing wrong with my father,” he says shortly, so I slam my plate down almost hard enough to break it.

“I am trying here, Miguel.” I’m irritated now. “But we both have to try. Otherwise, it’s pointless.”

“It is pointless,” he says, standing.

I stand as well. “Why? Because you’re so perfect and I’m not? Because you’re a Rossi, and I’m a Sorvino. That mafia bullshit is just that, bullshit.”

“Watch yourself, Kira. You promised to behave,” he warns me, taking a step closer.

I look up at him, trying to regain control of my emotions. “I’m just trying to get to know you again, Miguel. To do that, I have to ask questions.”

“Why do you care so much?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” I raise my voice. “Maybe I’m an idiot.”

We’re close now, and he pulls me against him and kisses me aggressively. For a moment, I lose myself in that kiss. I remember that passion and how we’d kiss like fireworks on the fourth of July.

As I think about it, I think about how cruel he has been to me, and I feel hot tears start streaming down my face. He must feel them, too, because, after a moment, he lets me go and looks down at me.

“You’re excused,” he says, turning away.

I hurry away from the garden, with Jarred closely behind, and I go upstairs to my room. I shut the door quietly and sink to the floor, letting the tears flow.

I am grieving for the boy I fell in love with. In so many ways, he's still here. In so many ways, he's still within that body. But a cruel man occupies so much space, and I don't think I can get through to him. At the same time, I'm scared I will and won't like what is left of that frat boy who bothered me day after day to get a date.

The garden.

It can be no coincidence that it looks just like the Dean's gardens. That's on purpose. What did he think? That I would just come back, and our families would allow us to be together. Surely he worked out that I was sent away by my father. I mean, it was obvious. Wasn't it?

I hug my knees and sob harder, wishing I could turn back the time.

## Chapter 22 - Miguel

As she hurries away, I feel a pang in my chest. A part of me, a distant part, wants to go after her, but I have business to attend to now that I've entertained her little picnic.

I have my driver take me to the family bar we own in Long Beach, and I walk in. One of my brother's father-in-law needs some help, so my brother asked me to meet with him.

I sit in my office and don't have to wait long until he arrives.

"Don Rossi," he greets me, shaking my hand.

I nod. "Mr. Silva, it's a pleasure to meet you. My brother says that you are having some problems. Tell me about them."

"Oh, Don Rossi," he all but wails, "I have had the most unfortunate luck, and I don't know where to turn. I own three grocery stores, and two are doing very well, but there's one in Brooklyn, it's in Sorvino territory, and we have to pay them protection, you see. Well, a gang has started harassing my store managers and cashiers to pay them protection instead of the Sorvino men. Don Alessandro does not have my loyalty. Please be assured, Don Rossi, but we need proper protection."

"I cannot step onto Sorvino territory without sparking a war, Mr. Silva. You should know that."

"I know. I know." The old man wrings his hat in his hands. "I want to move the store out of Sorvino territory and to Rossi territory, like my other stores. That way, I am assured good protection by the best family." He swallows hard.

"And how can I help you to do this?" I ask, although I already know the answer.

"Moving to a new location is very costly, and with that store being robbed constantly and always harassed, I don't have the money to move it right now. If you could please loan

me the money, I would happily pay you back...with interest, of course, over a period of time.”

I tap my fingers on the table and watch him. “How much?”

“I’m short a hundred thousand,” he says wearily. “I can make payments of five thousand each month.”

I nod my head. “You are right to approach the Rossi family. You are one of us, and we take care of our own. I will arrange this money for you, Mr. Silva, but the monthly repayment is seven thousand dollars. Five of which count toward your actual debt. Do you accept my terms?”

He looks worried but nods eagerly. “Yes, I do, sir, thank you.”

“Lyle will take down your details, and we’ll wire the money to your bank account. Don’t worry, Mr. Silva, you will be very well protected under my family.”

I offer him my hand, and he kisses my ring, an archaic power play. “Thank you, Don Rossi. I appreciate your kindness so much.”

I nod, and he gets up. Lyle guides him out of the room and leaves to get his details. It’s not a lot of money in the scheme of things, but they’re married into my family and will pay me back with interest when they want to use family funds.

I have a few other sites to inspect on my way home. By the time I’ve reached the estate again, the sun has already set. I let Jeffrey take my suit jacket as usual, and I look at Lyle. “Go tell her it’s time for dinner.”

I go to the dining room and sit down at my place. A plate of steak and vegetables is placed in front of me with a side of gravy and mashed potatoes. Kira comes in and sits down, mumbling a hello.

I ignore her and start to eat. Once I’ve taken the first bite, she picks up her utensils and starts to eat as well. We sit

there in absolute silence, save for the clicking of cutlery on plates.

Out of the blue, she looks up at me and asks, “Why are you being so cruel to me? I haven’t done anything horrible to you.”

I slam my cutlery down, unable to contain my anger. “You haven’t done anything horrible to me, Kira?”

“You act like I have, then tell me what I did?” she raises her own voice.

I push my chair back and stand, screaming at her, “You fucking left me, Kira. Without a word or a note or anything. You just fucking left, and I spent months trying to find you to get you back, but no one even knew you’d left New York. I risked people’s lives to try to find you, but you couldn’t give one fuck about us or me and let me know where the hell you had gone to.”

She pushes her chair back so fast that it topples over and screams at me with full force, “Because I fucking couldn’t, Miguel. My father forced me to go back to Italy because he found out about us. He was so ashamed of me that he didn’t even want my cousins to know what I had done—sleeping with a Rossi. It was against my wishes, and I had no way of contacting anyone because I was under lock and key. You had freedom! I was alone, scared, and pregnant...” she cuts herself off, promptly turning around and storming off.

I’m caught off guard, both by the revelation and the announcement. I rush after her and catch her at the stairs grabbing her wrist as she starts to run up them.

“You were pregnant? Was it mine?”

She glares at me.

“Kira, was it my child?” I shout at her, taking a step up but holding onto her really tightly. “Kira, you tell me now, was it, my child? Did you abort? Are they alive?” I feel like I’m losing my mind. “Where is my child, Kira!”

“It was a boy,” she shrieks, trying to pull out of my vice grip. I stare at her as she continues, “I had your son all alone in Italy, and I’ve been raising him since then. Is that what you want to know? Congratulations, Don Rossi, you have an heir to the throne of your family. But I’ll be dead and fucking buried if you ever get to see him. You don’t know him. You don’t know how to raise a child. I’ve spent twelve years teaching, nurturing, and instilling goodness in him. He will not be a monster like you.”

I step back, letting go of her wrist. I’m in shock. I know I am. I need to respond, but I leave her to scramble up the stairs and to her room. I wait to hear the door slam, and once I do, I turn and sit on the stairs.

Lyle emerges from the shadows he was standing in. “Miguel?”

He only does that in intimate moments, and I look up at him. “Did you hear that?”

“So, it is true. You were with the Sorvino girl when you were in college. There were rumors, but none of us believed them.” He doesn’t look disappointed. He looks as though he pities me. I frown. “Remember your place, cousin.”

“You have a son,” he says quietly. “You should tell your father before he hears it from one of the workers.”

“Or you?” I ask, standing up again.

“He won’t hear it from me,” Lyle says. “I know my place.”

I come down the two steps separating us and nod. “Good. Loyalty is rewarded. Please have the maids clean up the dining room. Give them something extra today for all the mess.”

Lyle nods and walks off. I stand at the bottom of the stairs. I am Don Rossi, I am a man of action and am not someone to be questioned, but right now, I’m questioning everything.



I have a son.

Of all the things I thought she'd done when she was away, that one had never crossed my mind. It makes sense that her father forced her out, but I had spies everywhere. I tried everything to see if she had been made to leave, but there was just no trace of her.

I look upstairs and slowly walk up them and to her room. I can hear her sobbing through the door.

## Chapter 23 - Kira

It feels like all I do is fight and sob. I sob into my pillow, but I feel as though my heart is broken. I have put Raphael in direct danger now, and now Miguel knows about him and will want to claim him for himself. I sob until I have nothing left in me, and I fall asleep just as I am.

When I wake up, the room is dark, the sun hasn't risen yet, so it must still be late. There's a blanket pulled over me and a weight on my bed. I curl up and look down to see Miguel sitting at the end of my bed.

I sit up and hug my knees, keeping the blanket on. He is staring ahead at the shut door. He looks disheveled and haggard, as though he's been up all night. I didn't think the idea of having a son would have that much of an impact on him. Not with him being so cold and ruthless.

"Tell me about my son."

His voice is low but not mean, not horrid. He is simply talking now. I remain quiet because I don't know what I can say to him that wouldn't put Raphael in danger. I've already said too much. I don't want Raphael to get to know Miguel. I wanted him to choose his own path.

"Tell me about my son," he says again. This time it's a command and the threat, although veiled, is there. He is out of patience and won't be jerked around on this topic.

I swallow hard, and my voice is raspy as I speak, "He's twelve. Last month was his birthday. He speaks Italian and English, and he is obsessed with ninjas. He wants to be a samurai when he is older."

"A samurai is not a ninja," Miguel says. "It's completely different."

I sit there for a moment before he speaks again. "What happened, Kira? How did they find out?"

“I don’t know, Miguel. You were away with your family for two days, and that’s when they came for me.” My voice is quiet now.

### *Thirteen Years Earlier*

I miss Miguel so much. He’s only gone for today and tomorrow, so I’ll see him tomorrow night, but dammit, I miss his face. I also can’t wait to give him the news. I know he’s going to be as excited as me.

I took the test twice and then went to the clinic to confirm. Now that I have the confirmation, I have an elaborate plan to announce that he will be a father.

I don’t know what we’re going to do about our families, but maybe they will accept us together now that I’m pregnant. I touch my belly softly before I pick up my book bag and head out of the dorm room. I have two classes, and then I’m free for the rest of the afternoon. I can go to the frat house and set everything up in his room to surprise him.

As I exit the dorm room and turn to walk toward class, I hear someone shout, “Kira! Hey Kira!”

I recognize the voice instantly. It’s my brother Joey. I smile and whip around, and I run toward him. He’s walking up the walkway toward the dorm room. I launch myself into his arms, hugging him tightly.

“Hey, baby sister,” he says affectionately.

“Why didn’t you call and let me know you were coming?” I ask, smiling.

“Well, I wish I could say it was because I wanted to surprise you, but Pa sent me. He needs you at home today. It’s urgent.”

“Is everything okay?” I ask as he takes my book bag.  
“Do I need anything?”

“I don’t know. He just asked me to come and get you.” He shifts his gaze, and I frown. “You’re lying; you can never look at me when you lie.”

“Let’s just get home,” he says quietly, taking me by the arm.

“Is Mama okay?” I ask desperately.

“Yeah, she’s fine. Listen, don’t worry. I’m sure everything is fine.”

I walk with him, but I can’t help but worry. I want to ask him if it’s about Miguel, but if they don’t know about him, and if I ask, then they will learn about him, and that will make whatever situation this is worse.

I get into the car with him. Two guards sit in front of me, facing us. They sent the family car. That’s probably a good thing.

I look at Joey, and he gives me a hesitant smile.

I smile back and settle back. I hate waiting. I’ve never been a patient person, to begin with. I get that from my mother.

We pull into my father’s driveway, and the door is opened for me. I walk up the stairs and into the house. Joey comes in behind me as we approach my other brother, Gustavo. I hug him, but he’s very stiff with me.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“You should know,” he says coldly, “Father wants to see you in the study now.”

I nervously follow him, Joey behind me, and I walk into my father’s study. My father is sitting at his desk, a cigar in one hand and a drink in the other. He sets the cigar down and looks at me gravely.

“Bella, my child. How could you?” he stands up, setting his drink down. I stand there awkwardly and want to ask what he means, but he doesn’t give me a chance.

“I let you go to the school of your choosing, outside of our territory, and you fraternize with a fucking Rossi child,” he raises his voice as he speaks. “Have you no loyalty to your family?”

“Pa,” I begin to say, “I can explain.”

“Explain? Explain to Gustavo why he saw you with the boy all over you on campus, kissing you and touching you like some common troia.”

I swallow hard, tears forming in my eyes. “Pa, he isn’t a bad person. He is kind to me, and he treats me well. Please, if you would just meet him.”

“Meet him? Meet an enemy of our family because you couldn’t keep your legs closed. No, this ends now, Kira Gabriella Sorvino. You will not be going back to that school. My security will collect your things, and I will decide where you will finish your education if I decide you can be trusted to have one.”

“My grades haven’t fallen; we study together and work hard to support each other. Please, Pa, I’m in love with him. Please don’t do this.”

“You love him? You love this, bastardo? This piece of shit that would wipe your cousin’s face in dog shit? No, you are never to see anyone from the Rossi family again. You’d be lucky if I don’t move you out of New York.”

“Pa, no, please.” I start to sob. It might be the hormones; I don’t know. “Please, we’re planning a family together.”

The room goes silent, and my father’s voice is barely a whisper, “You’re pregnant with this filth’s child?”

“Yes, please, he will be a good father and provide for our family,” I plead.

“You are a disgrace. You speak as though my brother, the Don of the Sorvino family, would not provide for you. As

though he would cast us aside. Who are you? If it were not against my catholic faith, I would have you abort the child.”

“Pa!” I gasp.

“I will not spit in God’s face like you spit in ours. But I will be dead before I see you raising a child in the Rossi family. You will leave for Italy immediately. You will be accompanied and someone will make sure you are settled with your aunts there. You are to have no contact with New York. No one is to know why you have left or that you have left at all.”

I sob, “Please, Pa, I’m a grown woman.”

“While you are in this family, you will abide by our rules,” he screams. “Gustavo, take her. She can buy whatever she needs there.”

I sob as the security guard takes my book bag from me, and then my upper arm, dragging me out of the room. My father turns his back on me as I call for him.

### *Present Day*

Miguel stands up from the bed without a word and walks out.

## Chapter 24 - Miguel

This.

This changes everything.

I have a son! I didn't even ask her what his name is. I was too absorbed in the story of how she was forcibly taken away from me. Gustavo was the reason she was taken to Italy to be hidden away. It makes me so angry. All this time we could have been a family, all this time I spent hating her for leaving me, that I thought she found someone else.

God, the way I've treated her these last few days.

I'm ashamed.

An old part of me has awakened, and it feels the shame heavily. I'm that college boy again who wants to sit under the stars and talk about poetry.

I walk out of her room and to the office, shutting the door behind me. I want to be alone right now because now everything is difficult.

I have a duty to be loyal to my family. The objective of taking Kira, well, the goal was to take Arianna. But the reason we have kept her is to further our family's gains. To give my family better territories and money.

But she's the mother of my child. My child is in the hands of the Sorvinos right now. I want to meet him, but at the same time, I'm terrified to do so.

I need advice right now, and I know it's late, but he's the only person I can think of calling with something on this scale.

"Pa," I say when he answers the phone, "I need your advice."

"It must be serious if you're phoning at this hour. Let me get to my office, and I'll call you back. I don't want to

disturb your mama.”

I hang up and wait, sitting at my desk and staring at my phone, willing it to ring. I don't even know what to tell him at this point. Do I tell him about my son? What will he think about me sleeping with a Sorvino woman?

Kira's father had reacted badly because there's always been tension between our families. The Sorvinos always had the bigger stick.

My phone buzzes, and I pick it up, “Pa.”

“Miguel, what is it? What has happened?” he asks, and I can hear he's tired.

“I'm sorry to worry you so late at night,” I say, “but I need your advice. I've run into a big problem, and I need to tell you something before I can tell you what the problem is.”

“Ah, story time at midnight. My favorite,” he chuckles. “I joke. Tell me.”

“Pa, I fell in love with a girl when I was in college. We were together for a couple of months before she disappeared off the face of the planet.” I take a deep breath. “I thought she had left me because she found someone else, but it turns out she was forced to leave because she was pregnant with my son.”

“So you're calling me to tell me you have an illegitimate child running around? Marry the mother, and we'll smooth everything over. No matter how old the child is. A Rossi is a Rossi.”

“It was Kira Sorvino, Pa.” I say quietly.

I wait, and a long moment of silence passes between us before my father growls, “You betrayed your family for some pussy?”

“I loved her,” I retaliate. “We had something special, Pa. We belonged together.”



“Well, Sonny Sorvino didn’t think so, or he wouldn’t have sent her away, now would he? Now you’re telling me I have a grandchild with Sorvino blood? A child that is the first in line to take over from you? This is bullshit. Negotiate her return, deny the parentage and move on with life, Miguel. This is not worth the trouble.”

“She very much is.”

“She’s gotten to you,” he accuses me. “Did you ever think maybe it’s not your child? That she’s trying to escape.”

I hadn’t, but something in me told me she was being honest.

“He’s mine, Pa. And I want to claim him as my own.”

“You cannot be Don of this family if you’re going to disrespect the name our family has built,” He growls. “Your ancestors, including me, put blood, sweat, and tears into making sure this family can hold its own, and now you want to toss it all for some chick who claims she birthed your heir.”

“I am Don,” I responded coldly. “I will decide what the future of this family is. You are retired, and the men respect me as a businessman.”

“Then think like a businessman, Miguel. Disown the boy.”

“I can’t do that,” there is no emotion in my voice as I speak. “I will claim him and do it while strengthening our family.”

“You are weak,” my father snaps at me.

I hang up and set my phone down. There’s no point speaking to him when he’s that angry.

I get up and walk to the decanter to the side. I pour myself a drink and sip it, sitting back at my desk. I need to work out how I’m going to strengthen our position while still being able to be involved in my son’s life.

My phone buzzes with my father's number, but I don't answer. When my brother calls me after that, I don't answer that either.

My brothers start shooting me text message after text message, saying they're going to come over so we can talk.

I message them back to let them know I'm busy making an important decision and cannot be disturbed. I will summon them when I'm ready.

More texts, but I ignore those. I open my office door and ask Harry to go tell the guards not to let any of my family members in until I say so, and he marches off to do as he's told.

I look down the corridor where Jarred is standing guard.

I walk over there slowly and open the door. I'm silent as I go over to the bed where Kira is sleeping. I tuck the blanket around her once again and sit on the edge of the bed. I stroke the hair out of her face, and I remember how well I slept in her arms. She said we fit perfectly together like a puzzle piece.

I stopped sleeping the day she left.

Insomnia is what my doctors called it, but it was a broken heart, and I've held onto that for thirteen years. I wish I'd known. I would have traveled the world to be with her, no matter the cost—even if it meant losing my family.

But I can't think like that now because people rely on me, and I need to do what's right. Kira and my son are also my family, though. I need to incorporate the Sorvinos and Rossi into one unit so we can coexist peacefully.

I don't know if my family will go for it, but Alessandro, I can at least speak to Don to Don.

I walk out of the room and stand near a vase with roses. I pluck one out and step back into the room, laying the rose on the pillow beside Kira before I kiss her head and leave.

I go downstairs, feeling weary.

“Lyle?” I call. “Where are you lurking?”

Lyle comes out from the kitchen. “Yes, Don Rossi?”

“Get word to Alessandro Sorvino, I want to negotiate to hand over Kira, and I want to do it where we met in Central Park. Two hours.”

Lyle nods and shoves what looks like the last bite of a sandwich into his mouth. He dusts off his hands and walks toward the front door. He pauses there and turns around. “What about us? What will happen to our family?”

“We’ll be stronger than we ever have been,” I say, smiling.

Lyle nods. “I trust we will.”

He leaves, and I go back upstairs to shower and get changed for my meeting with Alessandro.

I’m not entirely sure what I’m going to say, but I know I need to get the ball rolling, or my world will always be a complete imbalance between what I have to do and what I want to do.

And I always do what I want to.

## Chapter 25 - Kira

I feel so rested when I blink my eyes open. I sit up and see the rose sitting on the pillow beside me, and I smile softly. That can only be a good sign. I hope Miguel is open to listening to reason today.

I'm surprised I slept so well, but getting everything off my chest to Miguel in the early morning hours had relaxed me.

I get up and go shower. I take a long one, not out of spite but because I want to feel fresh when I approach him this morning. I'll judge his mood at breakfast, and from there, maybe we can talk about him releasing me back to my family. Especially now that he understands I need to take care of Raphael.

I dress in slacks and a shirt, and I open the door. Jarred isn't there. In fact, there is no guard in the hall at all—another positive sign.

I walk out and down the stairs, crossing the room to the dining room entrance.

Miguel is sitting in his usual spot, reading the paper. I suddenly feel awkward and a little less confident about my negotiating skills.

I sit in my chair and smile at the maid, who sets down some boiled eggs on the table. I start to crack one, glancing at Miguel periodically.

He shakes his paper and closes it before looking at me. "Are you going to keep staring at me or say something?"

"I don't know what to say," I admit, blushing slightly. I take a bite of an egg but continue to look at him.

"Good morning, for starters."

There's a trace of a smile on his mouth, and I return it. "Good morning, Miguel."

“Good morning, Kira. Now, I think it’s in both of our interests to discuss the current situation and what it means for us.”

“For us?” I ask curiously.

“Yes, because there are two parents to every child, generally.” He starts on his own egg, and I don’t respond. This is what I feared.

“See, I want to be a part of my son’s life....”

I cut him off. “What’s his name?” I ask.

“Sorry?” Miguel raises an eyebrow.

“You want to be a part of a child’s life that you don’t even know the name of,” I say. “Don’t you think that’s a little crazy?”

“I realize I didn’t ask for his name, but you can imagine that I was in a bit of shock. I intend to get all his details from you.”

I shake my head. “No. I told Raphael that he could get to know you when he was sixteen and that it would be his choice if it happened or not. I wasn’t going to force a relationship.”

“Is this you talking or your father?” he challenges me, “because the Kira I knew would have had no problem with me having a relationship with my child whose name I love, by the way. Ironic that my ninja-loving son is named after a mutant turtle.”

“This isn’t a joke, Miguel. The girl you knew was naive. I have raised him, and I know what’s best for him,” I say, trying not to get angry.

“Kira,” I can see he’s also trying to reel himself in, “this isn’t a request. He is my child. I have a right to see him.”

I stand up. “Miguel, you are not seeing my child.”

“Sit down,” he commands.

I slowly sit down, but I glare at him as he continues, “If you don’t come to an agreement with me so that I can see my child, then Kira, my negotiation with Alessandro will simply be a trade. You for Raphael, and you can see him in twelve years after I’ve kept him from you.”

“I didn’t do it intentionally,” I retort.

“You are now. You are denying me my right to have a part to play in Raphael’s life, and I will have what I want.”

It’s a reflex, really. I grab the egg cup and hurl it at him. It crashes behind him, and before he can say anything, I toss a glass at him. He moves out of the way quickly.

“Stop acting like a child,” he yells.

“Like you?” I shout, throwing a plate at him. I work my way through everything close to me, but in my rage, I don’t notice that he’s getting closer to me. When I turn around to grab something else, he grabs my wrists and holds them so tightly it hurts.

“Stop it,” he growls, “you’re being ridiculous.”

“I have spent a lifetime protecting him, and I will die for him.”

“You once promised to die for me,” he says quietly. “Remember that promise? You promised you loved me and that we would build a life together for the rest of our lives. Why do you get to pick and choose what you’re going to follow through with.”

I’m right close to him, and I can smell that intoxicating musky aftershave he wears. I shake my head.

“You assume my family will let you see him. They don’t even know you’re the father. Only my father knows. Alessandro has no clue, and he doesn’t pry.”

“Then I think it’s time I told him,” he says.

I shake in his arms. “He’ll kill you.”

“Or he’ll be reasonable like a Don should be. We have united our families through this child, so I don’t think he’ll attack me. Not immediately, at any rate. I want to talk to him, then if you don’t want to see me, that’s fine. We can arrange visitations through our families. You can be rid of me. You’ll never have to speak to me again.”

The thought makes me sad, which must show on my face because he looks at me oddly. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know what I want,” I say quietly and stop struggling. “I don’t want to see you, but I do. I don’t know how to sort through my emotions right now, but Miguel, I’m begging you to let me get back to Raphael. He needs his mama.”

Silence fills the room as Miguel’s green eyes stare into my blue-gray ones.

## Chapter 26 - Miguel

Those passionate eyes. I studied them for so long that I could never forget them. I'd remember every speck. I lower my head, and we kiss gently. I let go of her wrists, and she rests her hands on my chest. I hold her arms more gently. We continue to kiss gently, and as I inhale the scent of her soap, I kiss her more aggressively. She whimpers in my mouth but returns the kiss, so I press her against the wall, forcing our bodies together. Where we touch is that old spark that we had thirteen years ago.

I break the kiss to kiss down her neck, and she tilts her head to let me make my way down to her collarbone. I take her breasts in my hands and squeeze them gently. I kiss her other collarbone and kiss back up her neck. I breathe heavily into her ear, pausing.

"I don't know what to do, Kira," I admit finally, nuzzling the side of her head with the side of mine.

She takes my face in her hands and turns me to face her, she kisses me again, and I groan into her mouth. Everything about her is as I remember.

She breaks the kiss and whispers, "You need to let me go, Miguel, because while I'm kept here, Alessandro won't give you access to Raphael. He'll want me to confirm you're the father."

"There was no one else?" I ask, feeling as though my voice might crack.

"Never," she breathes, and we kiss again. She slides her arms around my neck, and I wrap mine around her waist. We part after a moment, and the space between us feels cold.

"I will let you go if Alessandro agrees to my terms," I say finally. "I have to take care of family business, Kira. It's nothing personal."



“I know,” she says, looking up at me. “Just do the right thing, though.”

“I will,” I say, stroking her hair out her face. “Go to your room. I’ll let you know once we’re ready to go. It won’t be safe for you if my father comes here. He wasn’t happy about the news.”

“Okay, I trust you, Miguel.”

She leaves and goes upstairs with Jarred in tow.

I take my phone out and message the family to come to the house, meeting in the dining room. I order the maids to clean up quickly as we’re having guests.

I touch my lips where we kissed, and I close my eyes. I’m sure there is still magic, but I have to let her go. It would never work between us. We’re two different families now united by a little boy. I plan to use that as leverage.

The men of my family arrive, including my rather annoyed-looking father, and they all sit down in the dining room. I stand at the head of the table, and as I’m about to speak, my father opens his mouth, “We’ve already discussed what you should do with the girl.”

“You would go behind your Don’s back to make decisions without him?” I ask, looking at each person. They all avert their gazes. “I won’t hear your idea because this child unites the Rossi and Sorvino families, so I plan to use that to our advantage.”

“You can’t negotiate with the Sorvinos for territory or money because your bastard is one of them,” my father roars.

“And yet, that’s what I’m going to do. Now, you have all shown great loyalty to me. We have made so many advancements for the family together. Would I really steer you wrong with this?”

Several of them murmur, but my father stands. “I will not recognize a Sorvino relative as a Rossi. It’s not how things are done.”

“Then you deny your own blood, and that is not done,” I spit back, and my father does a double take. “If you don’t want to accept a Rossi, then leave the Rossi family because we’ve always protected our own.”

More murmurs from everyone, and Lyle steps forward. “I trust you, Don Rossi. I trust you will do what’s best for us.”

There is a general agreement though two or three people look unconvinced. My father just stands there, silent.

“Padre, I know you don’t want this, but sometimes we have to make necessary changes that are better for the family. I want your blessing on this.”

My father looks at all the faces turned in his direction and sighs. “This will not end well, but I hope you prove me wrong, Miguel. You have my blessing.”

My father knows he was outvoted, especially because he denied his own blood. It was his biggest mistake.

We go over a few details together before I send them all away, except Lyle.

“Go get her,” I say. “She’s coming with us.”

“He could just take her then,” Lyle comments.

“I know what I’m doing,” I say, though I have a seed of doubt in my heart.

Lyle leaves to fetch Kira while I slide into my suit jacket. She comes down, and I gesture to the front door. “The car is waiting.”

She looks up at me with wide eyes, so I quickly say, “Don’t hug me. I have a reputation to maintain.”

She nods, and we leave through the front door to the car.

“Where are we going?” she asks quietly once we’re on the motorway.

“I told Alessandro to meet me at Central Park,” I say, unable to look at her. I know what this means for us—I have to let her go.

“Thank you, Miguel,” she says softly, and I feel her hand take mine and squeeze. I squeeze it back and then move my hand away.

We walk into Central Park together, and I see Alessandro already seated on the bench, smoking a cigarette.

“Alessandro,” Kira gushes. He gets up and opens his arms. She rushes into them and hugs him tightly.

“Were you hurt?” he asks gruffly.

“No, Miguel treated me well,” Kira lies. I didn’t treat her well, I hurt her, and she will probably never forgive me for that.

“Don Sorvino,” I say seriously, “I am willing to let your cousin go home with you now if you agree to my terms.”

“Name them,” he says, looking at me distastefully.

“Raphael is my son and, therefore, future Don of the Rossi family by birthright. I want to see him and teach him about his Rossi family.”

“Is this true?” Alessandro asks Kira, and she nods. Alessandro looks back at me.

“When he is Don, I expect the Sorvinos to pay tribute by giving the Rossi family the territories that would go to the next in line in the event of Sonny Sorvino’s death. They are his then, not yours or under you.” I keep my eyes trained on his.

Alessandro looks down at Kira. “Is that why your father made you leave?”

“He thought he was doing what was best for me,” she says softly. I know she’s defending her father because Alessandro is not above killing his family members if they cross the line.

“Agreed,” Alessandro says at last. “However, only two of the territories can go to Raphael. I’ll ensure they’re the bigger operations, so the Rossi family makes good money from them. But only once he is Don.”

I hold my hand out, and Alessandro shakes it. “Now come, Kira, he misses you terribly.”

Kira holds onto Alessandro as they walk past me. Our eyes meet, and I see a sadness there that I haven’t seen before. Although I secured my family’s future, I feel defeated. Because Raphael is a Rossi, they will respect the Rossi territories out of respect for Raphael. That protects my family, and we will have a higher income later.

But at what cost?

I watch Kira walk away, and I know I’ve lost out because what I should have done is professed my undying love for her and begged her to stay with me—begged her to let us be a family together instead of a family apart.

She glances back as they reach the gate, and I hang my head. I can’t look at her. I will wait until they’ve definitely left before I take my own leave.

## Chapter 27 - Kira

I get into the car with Alessandro, and he puts an arm around my shoulders. I rest my head against his chest.

“Did he really treat you okay?” He asks.

“Yes,” I say quietly, “but I’m so glad to be coming home.”

“I was so worried about you. I even brought Frankie home to help out so we could get you back.” He strokes my hair gently. “Is what he said true? Is he Raphael’s father?”

I nod gently. “We were so in love in college until my father found out. We were going to build a life together. My father was sure your father would have me killed for betraying the family.”

Alessandro grunts and shakes his head. “It’s more complicated than simply having you killed. My father would have heard you out.”

“I heard about what he did to Carmine when he fell in love with Arianna,” I say. “Would he not have done the same thing?”

“He was angry, but he came to his senses, and so did I.” Alessandro sighs, and we fall silent for a moment.

“Do you still love him?” he asks suddenly.

I consider his question before I answer, “I do. I do still love him. I love him very much even though he’s changed a lot.”

“The women in this family give me a headache,” he says, rubbing his head. “Even the ones through marriage.”

I sit up and look at him, confused. “What do you mean?”

He gives me a knowing look. “If Miguel Rossi were a problem, I’d have him taken care of unless you don’t want me

to. I will give you my blessing if you want to be with him. I've learned long ago not to stand in the way of the Sorvino women and what they want."

I smile softly. "I don't know what lies in the future, Alessandro. I don't even know if Miguel wants to be with me. I know he wants to meet Raphael."

"Let him," Alessandro says. "A boy should know his father. Don Rossi may be many things, but he is, first and foremost, a family man. He always has been."

I nod and look out the window as we pull up to Alessandro's house. "What did you tell Raphael?"

"That you were called away for work, and he'd be staying with us for a while. At first, he was a little upset, but he coped fine with it. We treated it as though you had a work emergency."

I nod. "Thank you so much."

"Of course, you're like a baby sister to me," he chuckles. "I really would have done anything to get you back."

I hug him tightly, and then I climb out of the car. Katya is standing at the front door, holding Raphael's hand. As soon as he sees me, Raphael lets go of Katya's hand and comes running to me. "Mama!"

I scoop him up in my arms and hold him tightly. "Oh, my sweet child."

He holds me tightly, and I kiss his head before I lower him back down. He's getting heavy.

"How come you didn't say goodbye? Or tell me you were going away?" he asks, looking wide-eyed at me.

"I'm sorry, my sweet boy, it was an emergency. If I could have, I would have come back to explain everything to you." I stroke his face. "You've grown so much while I've been gone."

"Did anything interesting happen on your travels?"

I pause for a moment, then give a small smile. “I bumped into your father.”

“My father?” he asks curiously. “Really?”

“Yes, and I decided that maybe it’s time you meet him.” I stroke his face. “I think it’ll be good for you.”

“Really?” he asks excitedly. “Is he excited to meet me? When can I see him? Does he live close by?”

I grin, but Alessandro comes up behind me. “Raphael, let your mother get settled in and rested, and we can decide when you’ll meet your papa. I also saw him, and he’s excited to meet you.”

“Zio Alessandro, can I have ice cream?” he asks suddenly. That attention span of his makes me smile. So much like Miguel.

“Yes, yes. I’m sure Zia Katya will cave and give you ice cream if you go ask her really nicely,” Alessandro chuckles.

As we walk up the stairs, I glance at Alessandro. “Anything interesting happen while I was away?”

“Oh, nothing major,” he says with a cheeky grin. “Carmine proposed to Arianna on her birthday, and Katya is having twins. Nothing much at all.”

“What?” My eyes widen. “Twins?”

“I know. I already have my work cut out for me with her on her own,” Alessandro rubs the stubble on his face. “But imagine! Me a father? This is going to be a disaster.”

“I couldn’t picture a better father if I tried,” I gush, hugging him suddenly. “I’m so excited to meet my little nephews or nieces.”

“Just keep the pizza away from Katya. It seems to be her number one craving,” he jokes.

It feels good to be back with my family, but I know that as the days pass, I’ll have to reach out to Miguel to

arrange for him to meet Raphael. I don't know how to do it or where to do it. I have no doubt that Raphael will be safe with him, but I'd rather be present just in case and also because I'd like to see Miguel again.

As the days pass, I celebrate with my family as they announce the pregnancy and the engagement. My mind, however, is on Miguel. He has sent messages to Alessandro, and I eventually conceded to let him have my phone number.

At first, he texts me for updates on Raphael, but then he starts to ask me how I am doing. I answer happily, but I don't know if I'm willing to admit my feelings for him just yet.

After a month of not seeing him, I finally text him to meet us at the Bistro for lunch. He quickly agrees to a Saturday lunch date, not questioning the location.

I arrive with Raphael, it's my day off, but I check in on the kitchen anyway. I make sure they make three Pancetta and pesto pasta for our table, and as I walk out with Raphael, I see Miguel at the entrance. He nods to me, and I give him a small smile. I guide Raphael to him.

"Raphael, this is your papa. Miguel, this is your son, Raphael," I say awkwardly.

Raphael partially hides behind me, and Miguel reaches into his pocket and withdraws a small box. "I brought you something."

"Go on, Raphael," I say, and he reaches to take it from Miguel, whispering, "Thank you."

"Let's open it at the table," I say, nodding to the hostess, Kimber. She smiles and leads us to the VIP booth at the back. Raphael and I sit together, and Miguel sits opposite us. Raphael puts the small box on the table and starts to unwrap it.

I meet Miguel's eyes and give him a small smile before watching Raphael.



Raphael opens the box to find a gift card for Kung Fu lessons. He reads it slowly and then beams. “Really? Kung Fu?”

I snort, “That’s going to be fun.”

Miguel nods. “Every ninja should know Kung Fu, and if you like, I could take you.”

Raphael nods shyly. “I would like that. How come you didn’t know about us?”

Taken aback, Miguel fumbles a bit before saying, “Well, I can explain that to you when you’re older, but I didn’t know your Mama had left. I would have come to Italy to bring you both back if I had.”

Thankfully the food arrives, and we all sit back, but Raphael isn’t done, “Zio Alessandro says you are the Don of your family. Does that mean someday I can be one as well? What if I don’t want to be it? I want to be a ninja.”

Miguel chuckles as he picks up his cutlery. “You can be whatever your heart desires, Raphael. If you don’t want to be the Don of our family, then one of my brothers or their children will be. Or if I have another child, they will be.”

“Are you and Mama going to have another baby? Will I be a brother?” Raphael asks quickly, not missing a beat.

I nearly choke on my pasta, but Miguel shakes his head. “I don’t know. I hope your mama will give me another chance. Would you like that?”

Raphael looks at Miguel, then at me, and says wisely, “Only if Mama would like that.”

Miguel chuckles. “You’re definitely my child. That’s exactly what I would say.”

The rest of the afternoon is spent with Miguel asking Raphael questions about his life and where he grew up, and I sit back quietly and appreciate the moment. They are perfect together, just like Miguel and I were perfect together. I don’t

know what's in the future for Miguel and me, but I hope there is something.

## Chapter 28 - Miguel

I've been enjoying the few times I've seen Raphael. He's a great kid, and he's definitely mine. There can be no question about that. I waited until today, at Sunday lunch, to make the official announcement. As everyone starts eating, I tap my knife against my glass for everyone to look at me.

There are a lot of smiling faces, and I wonder if this is a good idea. I'd spoken to my father about it, and he thought it was best to get it out in the open since I've decided to be a part of my son's life.

"Everyone, family. I wanted to make an announcement." Everyone pays close attention, and I keep a straight face. "For those of you who haven't heard, I had a love interest in college that was from another family. The Sorvino family, to be exact." There are a few worried looks. "And she was sent away when they found out she was pregnant with my son. They're back now, and I intend to bring Raphael into our family to unite the Sorvino and Rossi families for a brighter future."

There's absolute silence, and my father stands. "Salute, Don Rossi, congratulations on your son, and may he make the Rossi family proud."

Everyone raises their glasses and excitedly starts talking over each other to ask questions. I smile and begin to answer them one at a time. The biggest one is when they could meet Raphael. I hadn't thought about that, but it is a good idea.

I would have to speak to Kira and Alessandro about bringing him over for a Sunday lunch, as I know they have their own.

The rest of the day goes off great, and when I'm back in my office, I text Alessandro.

*Don Sorvino,*

*Are you available to meet me at my family's bar this afternoon for a private drink? There are matters I wish to discuss.*

*Don Rossi.*

I wait patiently, and my phone sounds off.

*Don Rossi,*

*Yes, I will be there in an hour.*

*Don Sorvino.*

An efficient man, I prefer things that way. I wonder if he'll agree to what I'm about to propose or if he'll hate the idea. I hope he accepts because it would strengthen both our families and bring Raphael into the fold.

I get Lyle and Jarred and head for the bar. I've moved back to my apartment now that it's been repaired, but we had Sunday lunch at my estate in Long Beach, so the bar is close by.

I walk into The Little Man, my quiet little bar on the corner of the street, and go to the back section, which is reserved for our family. I order two whiskeys just as Alessandro is led over.

"Don Sorvino," I stand and shake his hand, "thank you for meeting me so quickly."

"Don Rossi," he says, "I am always happy to meet with people tied to our family."

We both sit, and the whiskeys are brought and placed in front of us.

"What did you want to speak of? My wife will nag if I don't get back soon," Alessandro says with a chuckle, sipping on his whiskey.

"The unity of our families," I say. "We agreed that I could see Raphael, but I thought that united, our families could conquer more territories and do more business together. It would benefit both of our families."

“The best way to unite a family is through marriage,” he points out, raising an eyebrow. “Are you asking me if you can marry my cousin?”

I smile. “That would be Kira’s choice, not mine or yours. She never liked people making decisions for her, but I want Raphael to spend time with our family.”

“And you want to be close to Kira,” Alessandro says. “I’m not a fool, Don Rossi. I’ve seen the way you look at my cousin. She’s like a little sister to me, and you crossed a line kidnapping her, a line I would kill for. If you hadn’t treated her well, I probably would kill you. I’m not really for mercy.”

“Nor am I, but what are you going to decide to do, Don Sorvino? Have me murdered?”

“No.” He looks me dead in the eyes. He has the same eyes as Kira. “Kira thinks highly of you, and I know not to cross the women in my family. Everyone thinks men hold all the power, but God, what we would do for the women we love.” He downs his whiskey. “If Kira agrees to the unity, I am happy to draw up papers about where we can have joint business ventures. I respect you as a Don, and I respect the Rossi family. We can both benefit and have territories at the same time. Thank you for the drink.”

He stands up and leaves, and I know where my next stop must be.

The Italian.

I have my driver take me there, and I make Jarred and Lyle wait outside. I let Kimber, the hostess, seat me and ask her to summon the chef for me personally. She clearly knows who I am because she doesn’t protest.

I wait a moment before Kira comes out, holding two plates of lasagna. She sits one in front of me and the other in front of herself as she takes a chair. “I saw you come in.”

“I was just with Alessandro,” I say, starting to eat.

“Oh, really? What did you talk about?”

“Business,” I say. “And he says he wants your approval before he agrees to my proposal.”

She smiles as she eats. “Let’s hear it then.”

I explain to her what I want. Only when I’m done, do I start eating. “So? What do you think? Could our families join?”

“You have to be more active in Raphael’s life,” she says, wiping her mouth on a napkin. “Like taking him to school, picking him up, and taking him to Kung Fu. You have to attend Teacher Parent conferences, and you have to co-parent with me. Those are my conditions.”

I reach for her hand. “That’s something that would be easier to do if we were together again.”

She shakes her head, and for a moment, my heart drops.

“What do you think? We can just pick up from where we left off?” she asks in a very gentle tone. “Because we’re older now, and you’re a Don. Not a college boy who falls for pretty girls.”

“I have loved you from the day I met you, Kira. I knew a few things for sure. You were going to be my wife. You were going to be the mother of my children. You were going to be a Don’s wife, and you would understand what that entails. We can still make those dreams come true.”

She laces her fingers through mine. “If we take it slowly, I’ll consider it. I mean, I’d like to go out on a proper date. I haven’t been on one in thirteen years.”

“A picnic, perhaps?” I suggest. “Central Park is lovely this time of year.”

She gives me that mischievous smile I love so much as she says, “Sounds like a plan.”

## Chapter 29 - Kira

### *One Year Later*

“I don’t know why you’re stressing so much. Both our mothers are in the kitchen preparing lunch,” Miguel says to me, rubbing my shoulders.

I can’t believe we’ve been back together a year, and we’re hosting the first official united family Sunday lunch at our new villa.

“Because the food has to be perfect, and what if our families break into a fight,” I moan. “And if we don’t have enough seating, what are we going to do.”

“You’ve planned this to the last letter. I promise it’s going to be fine. Alessandro will make sure there are no fights, especially because Katya is stressed with the twins.”

Raphael comes running into the house, his tie askew. Miguel lets me go and pulls Raphael to him. “Mimmo, what are you doing? You know your mother is stressed today.”

“Sorry, Papa, I was just playing,” he says. He’s thirteen now. I can’t believe how tall he’s getting, just like his father.

“You must make sure your cousins are entertained today,” I say to him. “Don’t let them get too dirty, though, Raphael, especially Giovanni. Your Zio Frankie will have a heart attack.”

“I said I’ll do a good job babysitting, Mama,” he whines. “I won’t let them get into trouble or get dirty, I promise.”

“That’s a good boy,” Miguel says, patting his head. “Now, don’t run off too far. People are going to start arriving soon.”

He turns and kisses my head. “It’ll be fine, Amore Mio. I promise.”

“Easy for you to say, you’re the Don of half the family,” I say, and he chuckles. He turns as he hears a car pull up. “They’re here. Let’s get this show on the road.”

I nod and pat down my dress. One of our maids opens the front door, and Alessandro walks in with Miska in his arms. Katya follows with Mattia in her arms. They’re followed by Dominic and Sofia, freshly returned from their honeymoon.

The maid is about to close the door when Frankie walks in with Amelia. Their son, Giovanni, is toddling next to Frankie, holding his hand. Behind them is my sister who has recently graduated and moved back to New York. We’ve never been truly close, but I hope we can now work on changing that. I am hopeful her being here today is a great way to start.

Raphael comes forward and greets his uncles and aunts before he offers to take the little ones. Alessandro chuckles, “You’re just babysitting Giovanni and the older cousins today. Zia Katya will tend to the babies.”

Raphael takes Giovanni’s hand and leads him off to the play area so we can greet the family.

We stand there greeting as more and more people stream in. Miguel takes my cousins to the area we’ll be sitting in and offers them drinks and cigars. I go to check on the food in the kitchen and hear our mothers howling with laughter at each other. Who knew they would be the ones to get on best?

Once everyone has arrived, and the food has been served, we all sit at the table and eat. Miguel and Alessandro sit together at the head of the table and talk about the children’s futures.

Arianna and Carmine arrive late because Arianna was flying back from a race, but we’re excited to see them as they walk in. I get them plates and sit them near me. Arianna and I were always considered twins.



It isn't until everyone has left, and I've tucked Raphael into bed, that I relax.

I come back downstairs and outside to see Miguel holding a picnic basket.

"I thought we'd go relax out in the orchard, just the two of us," he says with a big smile.

I sigh, "I would love nothing more than to relax, Miguel."

He takes my hand and leads me deep into the orchard. "What about Raphael?" I ask.

"He'll be fine. One of the maids is sitting upstairs listening for him," Miguel assures me. We get to the middle of the garden, and I see a blanket already lying out.

"It's a nice warm night. We should have some nice cold champagne," he says.

"Champagne? Are we celebrating our families didn't kill each other?" I tease.

"Oh, we are celebrating, I hope...."

"You hope?" I ask.

We both sit down, and he pours a glass of champagne for me, handing it to me. He then sits a small box on my lap.

"I really hope..." he says, "that you would do me the honor of marrying me."

I swallow hard. I've been waiting for this moment for so long. I set the champagne down and open the box. It's a simple but beautiful ring. The jewel is the same color as my eyes.

"Miguel... Of course, I will," I say quietly, choking up, "but I can't have champagne, my love."

"But it's your favorite one," he protests. "I double-checked with Arianna."

“I know, but I can’t have any....” I smile at him, slip the ring onto my finger and then rest my hand on my belly.

Miguel stares at my hand for a moment and then lets out a deep breath he seemed to have been holding. “Are you?”

“Yes,” I say excitedly, “I was waiting to surprise you on your birthday.”

He downs his champagne, then mine, and then puts the glasses away. “This is the best surprise ever, my love.”

“Good, because we have to tell Raphael, and I’m not sure how he will react.”

“A problem for tomorrow,” he murmurs, leaning over to kiss me deeply.

I slide my tongue over his, taste the champagne on his lips and tongue, and moan softly.

He strokes my belly gently and then breaks the kiss. “And here I thought I’d make love to you under the stars.”

“Who says we can’t?” I tease, shifting to sit up. I lower the straps of my dress over each arm and shimmy out of it.

Miguel leans back and watches me, his eyes taking in my body in the moonlight.

In my underwear, I lean over and kiss him, my hand rubbing over his groin gently. He grunts into my mouth, and I feel his dick stiffen.

“What do you wanna do with that?” I whisper against his mouth.

“I can think of things,” he murmurs as I reach down to undo his pants.

He helps me get them down, and I take his cock in my hands. I know what my man likes, and soon enough, I’m deep-throating him. I make delicious slurping sounds every time I make my way up his dick. My tongue traces the veins that pop out along his shaft. He groans softly, a hand on my head as he moves his hips slightly.

I pull off him and look at him hungrily.

“Stay there,” I say as I shimmy out of my thong and straddle him. I carefully lower myself, so his thick member pushes deep inside me. I whimper softly until he’s all the way in.

Miguel reaches up and tugs the cups of my bra down, releasing my breasts. He runs his thumbs over my nipples that, despite the warm night, are standing erect.

“You have never looked more beautiful, Amore Mia,” he groans, shifting around. I whimper softly and start to raise and lower my hips. “I love you so much, Miguel Rossi.”

“I love you, Kira Rossi,” he says, and the name sounds so perfect. I move a little faster. His hand has trailed down my body and is playing with my clit. God, I love when he does that to me, his erection hitting me just right while his fingers tease the devil’s doorbell.

He knows that drives me wild, and I feel the tension building inside me.

“Come with me,” I groan out, rocking my hips back and forth.

“Fuck,” he cries out, moving his hips to meet mine as they come down. His one hand still has my right breast in it, he’s teasing the nipple, and then he lets go and grabs me. He gets into a sitting position, still inside of me, and buries his head in my breasts as I start to move again. I push harder. I’m so close my toes feel like they want to curl, and his hand is there again, teasing. I whimper as I clench around his cock, and he tries to push his hips up as much as he can. I know he’s orgasming while his fingers play with my clit, and then it happens, and I arch my back as I orgasm, squirting hard onto him.

We collapse into a wet, spent heap, and I roll off him. He chuckles and says, “You exhaust me, woman.”

“Good,” I breathe.

He rolls over and rests his head on my belly, kissing it softly. I stroke his head as we lie here and catch our breath. Then I hear his soft snores, and I smile.

Ever since we moved back in together, he's been sleeping like a baby.

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THE END

## **About the Author**

Veda Rose loves getting lost in the intense, dark and suspenseful alternate universes she creates. Although her characters may be complicated and twisty, at the core of it all is a deep and profound love.

Born and raised in Portland, Veda Rose has always been an introvert and as a result could often be found deeply engrossed in a book. Or multiple books. It was only natural that at some point she embarked on her own journey of giving life to her wild imagination.

When she is not writing or brainstorming about obscure literary worlds, she enjoys hiking with her furry children and exploring unfamiliar places.

## **Books by Veda Rose**

### **“Sorvino Mobsters” Series**

The Sorvino Mobsters series takes you to the streets of New York, where ruthless Italian mafia dons rule the world. These are not the hero's from your old story books. They are arrogant, rich, brutal and whether you want it or not, they will break your heart only to ultimately heal and love it.

[\*\*Kidnapped by the Mafia\*\*](#)

[\*\*Married Off to the Mafia\*\*](#)

[\*\*Traded to the Mafia\*\*](#)

[\*\*Claimed by the Mafia\*\*](#)

**A Secret Baby by the Mafia**