

*Corrupted*  
**OBSSESSION**

**KIANA HETTINGER**

# **Corrupted Obsession**

A Captive Enemies to Lovers Dark Mafia  
Romance

*Kiana Hettinger*

This book is an original production of Hardmoon Press.



This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is strictly coincidental. The publisher does not assume responsibility for third-party websites or their content.

Copyright © 2022 Hardmoon Press

All rights reserved.

No part of this novel may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any format without express written permission from Hardmoon Press.

# By Kiana Hettinger

*Corrupted Obsession* is the fourth book in the [Mafia Kings: Corrupted Series](#).

## [Mafia Kings: Corrupted Series](#)

#0 Cruel Inception

[#1 Corrupted Heir](#)

[#2 Corrupted Temptation](#)

[#3 Corrupted Protector](#)

[#4 Corrupted Obsession](#)

[#5 Corrupted Vows](#)

## Your Exclusive Access

Thanks a million for being here. Your support means so much to me.

The best way to keep in touch with me is by signing up for my [newsletter](#) – [sendfox.com/authorkianah](http://sendfox.com/authorkianah) (I promise I won't spam you!) and by joining my [readers' group](#), [Kiana's Kittens](#)

–

[facebook.com/groups/KianasKittens](https://facebook.com/groups/KianasKittens)

You'll receive bonus chapters, inside scoop, discounts, first access to cover reveals and rough drafts, exclusive material, and so much more!

See you on the inside,

Kiana Hettinger

## Author's Note

I wrote Corinne with all I had. She was very special to me. In a way, I live vicariously through Corinne. In the same sense, Dante is my dream man. I'm *obsessed* with him.

May you find your *obsession*.

K

# Table of Contents

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-One](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Two](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Three](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Four](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Five](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Six](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Forty](#)

[Chapter Forty-One](#)

[Chapter Forty-Two](#)

[Chapter Forty-Three](#)

[Chapter Forty-Four](#)

[Chapter Forty-Five](#)

[Chapter Forty-Six](#)

[Chapter Forty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Forty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Forty-Nine](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[What's Next?](#)





# Prologue

*Four months ago*

Warm bodies stretched and shifted around me as my phone rang on the table next to the bed. A slim hand landed on my chest, idly grazing fingernails across my pecs but venturing no further.

It was the middle of the night; someone had better be dead or dying. No, they'd *better* be dying. If they were already dead, the phone call could have waited until morning.

I fought to extricate myself from the two pairs of legs tangled with my own. It was like swimming through seaweed—if seaweed had giant, fake tits and a clit ring that grazed against my thigh as I moved.

“Shut the damn thing up,” my younger brother, Leo, groused, still mostly asleep beneath one of the blondes on the sofa.

“No shit,” I grumbled under my breath as my fingers made contact with the edge of the phone. A little further, and I grabbed the phone, fighting the urge to chuck it at Leo's head.

“What?” I barked into the phone instead.

“Dante? Someone took her.” The girl's panicked voice thrust off the cloying vestiges of sleep. She sounded like she was on the verge of hyperventilating. But *this* girl never hyperventilated. “They took her, Dante. She's gone.”

“Who's gone, Rosa?” I asked, making a semiacrobatic leap over the lithe, naked body on my left.

I already knew the answer. Only one person could rattle Rosa.

“Gia,” she cried. “God, Dante. I don’t know what to do.”

“Where are you?” I asked, shrugging into my pants and grabbing my keys and Glock.

“I’m at Ascension,” Rosa said, her voice strained.

I picked up my pace, throwing on my shirt and jacket and heading out the hotel room door.

“What the hell was Gia doing there?”

The Ascension nightclub was no place for an eighteen-year-old girl.

“She started hanging out with a bad crowd. I tried to stop her, but she’s stubborn. She wouldn’t listen. When she called—” Rosa’s voice cracked. “When she called, she didn’t talk. I could hear her crying. She needed me and I—” Her voice broke off then came back with a strangled array of curse words in three different languages.

I’d never heard Rosa shaken to the core. She’d been a rock for as long as I’d known her—and I’d known her since she was nine years old.

“Listen to me,” I said, taking the stairs two at a time. “I want you to get out of there right now. Look for somewhere public nearby.”

She was silent for a second. “A c-coffee shop, across the street.”

“Good. Go there and wait for me. Understand?” I burst out of the stairwell, into the underground parking lot.

“I’m going now,” she said. “Dante, just hurry... *please*.”

“I’m coming, Rosa,” I said, sliding behind the wheel of my Merc and gunning it like the hounds of hell were on my ass.

It was a futile race. If some scumbags had taken Gia, who knew where they'd taken her or what they'd done to her?

I had fifteen minutes to imagine it, flying around street corners and weaving around the strung out late-night traffic—the city might never sleep, but some of its inhabitants did.

I parked in front of the coffee shop and hopped out, spotting Rosa in the shop's window right away.

Her electric blue hair was hard to miss, and she was glaring so intently at the club across the street, it was a wonder there weren't laser beams shooting from her hazel eyes.

“He's lying,” Rosa hissed the moment I stepped inside, her eyes still fixed on the club's entrance.

Her face was pale, and her whole body was shaking, but she wasn't crying.

I wasn't sure Rosa had been born with tear ducts.

Her trembling hand was clenched around a photo.

I didn't need to see it to know it was a picture of Gia, a younger copy of Rosa, except for the electric blue hair.

Gia's hair was pale blonde, drawing attention to her big, hazel eyes that radiated so much innocence, one could be fooled thinking hers was a child's eyes.

“I showed the bouncer at the door a picture of her.” She held out the wrinkled photo. “He said he never saw her, but I could see it in his eyes, Dante. He's lying.”

“You're sure?” I asked, sizing up the tattooed, shaven-headed bouncer across the street who was guarding the club's entrance like a pit bull on steroids.

She nodded. As pragmatic as they come, Rosa wasn't the kind of girl to make wild accusations. Her face was etched with grief, but her eyes were clear, certain.

I pulled out my phone and called Cristian. My father and eldest brother counted on our man, Marco, to take care of the important shit. Cristian Mancini was the man I knew I could depend on day or night.

“What’s up, boss?” he asked, answering the phone on the first ring. He sounded wide awake. Cristian always sounded wide awake as if he never slept.

“I need the name and address of the bouncer on the door at Ascension. I also need you to pick up *Signorina* Esposito from the coffee shop across the street and take her home.”

“On my way,” Cristian said as a car engine revved to life in the background. The guy was always ready for anything.

Rosa grabbed at my arm, her jet-black fingernails digging in. “No, I’m coming with you.” She stared up at me, gritting her jaw and squinting her eyes like she could intimidate me.

“No, you’re not,” I said, hanging up the phone. “You’re going home, and I’ll let you know what I find out.”

Her face reddened, and her chest rose and fell with every heaving breath. It wasn’t hard to imagine smoke coming out of her ears. Wisely, though, she didn’t argue further.

“Take this,” she said, thrusting the picture of Gia into my hand. Her eyes met mine—eyes so much like her younger sister’s.

I could read the message in them loud and clear: *Bring her home, or bring me the head of every man who had a hand in her death.*

“I will,” I promised her.

If anyone had hurt Gia, I was going to paint the whole city in their blood.

Rosa and I stepped outside at the same time Cristian pulled up to the curb.

“Do I want to know how you got here so fast?” I asked as he got out of the black Merc, his blue eyes alert, his blond hair styled, and his face clean-shaven like he’d gotten a full night’s sleep and was ready to work.

He handed me a piece of paper with the bouncer’s name and address scrawled on it. “Probably not.” He shrugged.

I checked my watch. Ascension would be closing in seven minutes. Just enough time to beat the bouncer home.

I made it to the apartment building in eight minutes—an apartment building that was definitely above the pay grade of a scummy nightclub bouncer. Not high enough on the wealth scale to warrant on-site security, though.

Circling around to the rear entrance door, it was no difficult task to pick the lock and make it into Alejandro Gonzalez’s one-bedroom apartment with two minutes to spare.

Two minutes to think about what I was about to do.

Two minutes to plan just how many ways I was going to make the scum scream in agony.

I’d positioned myself behind the front door by the time he walked in and flipped on the light, oblivious to what was coming.

I had my Glock leveled at his face, three feet from him, when he noticed me.

His murky brown eyes widened in surprise, but he composed himself quickly, staring at me with a smug smile on his pockmarked face. “You broke into the wrong apartment, *ese*.”

“I don’t think so, Gonzalez,” I said right before I knocked the guy out with a right cross. His beefy arms had no hope of blocking the punch.

Alejandro Gonzalez landed with a heavy thud that shook the empty beer bottles on the kitchen counter and the cheap-ass prints on the walls.

I went to work, hauling his heavy ass up and securing him to a wooden chair with the handcuffs and rope I'd found in his bedroom dresser drawer—a convenient find. I'd bet the guy never expected to find himself trapped by his own cuffs.

With a rusty steak knife I'd found in the kitchen in one hand and the picture of Gia in the other, I waited.

It wouldn't be long.

It was a myth that a knockout punch left a guy unconscious for hours; two or three minutes was generally the max.

Right on time, Alejandro's eyes opened, blinking as his head swung left and right, disorientated.

"We have a problem, *amico*," I said, dragging the tip of the knife down his pockmarked cheek, just enough to break skin.

He shook his head, gaining clarity fast. "Fuck you. I don't know you," he hissed, all traces of smugness gone. He didn't look scared, though. More pissed off than anything else.

"You might not know me, but you do know a friend of mine, and therein lies the problem," I said, holding up the picture of Gia.

Recognition flickered in the guy's eyes, but he shook his head. "Sorry, *ese*. I don't know the girl."

What I would have given for Marco's baseball bat at the moment. Shattering this guy's kneecaps sounded tempting. Instead, I plunged the rusty steak knife into one tattooed bicep, ripping downward through the snake coiled around his arm and severing the muscle.

Alejandro squealed like a pig then roared, fighting against his restraints long after I'd ripped the knife back out, wiping

the blood on his faded blue shirt.

“You do know the girl, and you’re going to tell me where she is.” And just to be sure he understood I was serious, I jabbed the knife into his other bicep and tore through a dragon’s head, making him scream and nearly toppling the chair.

“Fuck you, *cabrón*,” he panted when he’d gotten himself under control.

I laughed, rolling up my sleeves. “This doesn’t end until you’ve told me where to find the girl or you’ve got no blood left in your worthless body.” I walked around behind him and dragged the knife up his trapped forearm, slicing up the dragon’s tail and severing everything in my path.

More screams. More thrashing against the rope and cuffs. Blood dripped from his mouth as well as his arms; he’d bitten through his tongue.

“You’re running out of blood,” I warned him. It was pouring from his forearm like a fountain.

His shoulders sagged as he glared at me. “I don’t know where they took the girl. That’s not my job.”

I raised a brow. “What is your job?”

“All I do is make a call and point them out—the girls who come in alone or fit the profile—that’s all. Then I turn a blind eye. They do the rest. Now, patch me up before I bleed out all over the fucking floor.”

“Who is ‘they’?” I pressed, not the least bit concerned with his blood or the floor.

Alejandro pressed his lips together. His face had grown paler, turning a putrid shade of green around the edges.

“Who. Is. ‘*They*’?” I asked once more, positioning the tip of the blade against the inside of his other elbow. If I had to flay



open every inch of his flesh, then so be it.

“Fuck!” he growled as I dug in the knife. “Las Serpientes. They’re Las Serpientes, and you’re a dead man.”

*Las Serpientes.* A deadly South American cartel.

I laughed. “Better men than you have tried, *amico*.”

“I told you what you wanted to know. Now, untie me, and get out.”

“That’s not going to happen.” I’d never said anything about letting the guy live. “Look at her,” I said, holding Gia’s picture up in front of his face. “She’s the last thing you’ll ever see, *stronzo*.”

I dragged the knife across his throat, staring at Gia too, knowing she was long gone.

There was only one way to get her back.

# Chapter One

Corinne McKenna

This was a bad idea.

A really freaking bad idea.

Everything from my waist down was numb.

I'd been crouching in the bushes for the past forty-five minutes, camera in hand, my eyes fixed on the door fifteen yards away.

If I had to make a fast getaway, I was screwed.

After forty-five minutes, maybe the venture was pointless.

If I was right, they should have been here by now.

I wriggled my legs and stomped my feet to get some blood back into them as a young dark-haired woman stepped out through the club's front door, lighting a cigarette and smiling at the bouncer. She was about the same age as Camilla, but her hair was shorter and her skin was flawless, not a blemish, freckle, or tattoo on her.

I was just about to lean up to stretch out my legs when a black limo turned into the parking lot. It slowed to a stop directly in front of the club's door.

I did a little victory dance in my head because I was right. There was nothing random about when they showed up here.

I watched through my camera lens with bated breath as the driver's door swung open and a hulk of a man stepped out.

He was dressed in a suit, but he didn't look like a chauffeur. Long, dark hair on top, shaved on the sides with tattoos covering every inch of his exposed skull. A thick goatee, tattoos on his hands, the bulk of a weapon beneath his jacket.

He opened the rear passenger door, and two dark-haired men climbed out. Both of them tall and moderately built, these men moved like kings—they always did. Their shoulders back, noses tilted up, radiating an aura that made it clear the rest of the world was beneath them.

I zoomed in closer and snapped a dozen photos. Then closer still, narrowing in on the occupants still inside the limo.

There were two of them—that much I could see—but even with the car's interior light, it was too dark to make them out clearly. One male. One female.

I shifted my position for a better angle and zoomed in as close as the camera could get, trying to focus on the girl with long, dark—

I gasped, snapping furiously.

It couldn't be. It couldn't... Could it?

I leaned forward a little more, but a twig snapped beneath my foot.

The two kings froze and the hulk spun around, his eyes honing in unerringly on the bushes where I was hiding.

I stopped breathing, not moving a muscle, silently willing the hulk to look away, to chalk up the noise to squirrels, late-night birds, or freaking anything.

No such luck.

He exchanged a few words in Spanish with the kings and then started toward me, one hand reaching for whatever gun he had concealed beneath his jacket.

My heart started to pound like a jackhammer, but there were still ten yards between us.

I took two retreating steps out of the bushes—I looked like a duck waddling backward—and surged to my feet.

There was no time to look back at the hulk; I darted away from the bushes, running as fast as my tingling legs would carry me.

*Thank god for the endless hours on the treadmill.*

“Stop!” he shouted at the same time branches snapped behind me—he’d torn right through the bushes.

I didn’t stop.

I barreled on down the sidewalk, turning left at the next street. My feet were a blur beneath me. All I could hear over my heartbeat was the thudding of the hulk’s expensive shoes behind me.

He was gaining ground.

I just needed a few more seconds.

*Think, damn it.*

Without slowing, I yanked the SD card out of my camera and clutched it tight in one fist. I spun around, just long enough to chuck the camera with all my might.

It slammed into his forehead, making him stumble.

“You’re going to pay for that, *puta*,” he shouted.

I could see the alley up ahead.

I was so close.

A few more steps.

A gun cocked just a handful of paces behind me.

I veered into the narrow alley, past the first closed door. The next one—the Moon Wok restaurant—was unlocked. I’d

covered the service door lock with tape.

I grabbed the handle, yanked it open, ripped off the tape, and threw myself inside, slamming the door shut behind me just as the hulk appeared in the doorway. I thrust the lock into place before he could follow, but he started to pound on the door, drawing the attention of the kitchen staff.

I didn't have to fake the wide-eyed fear on my face.

They eyed me sympathetically—girls being chased down dark alleys wasn't as uncommon in New York as it should be.

Before any of them could approach me, I flew through the kitchen and the door that led up a flight of stairs to the apartments above. Upstairs, I followed the narrow hallway to the last apartment on the left—the vacant apartment with a fire escape that let out on the street at the other end of the alley.

Unless the hulk knew the building's inner layout, he'd be expecting me to try to escape out the restaurant's front door. That's where he'd be waiting for me.

I tiptoed down the fire escape, listening for the thud of footsteps. At the bottom, I peeked around the corner to see the front of the shop just as he opened the restaurant's front door and stepped inside.

I turned and ran, hightailing it the eleven blocks back to my apartment. A taxi would have been easier, but I had no phone, no wallet, nothing that could give away my identity. I'd even bought a wig and glasses for my late-night espionage and covered up my tattoos with a bulky, long-sleeved sweater.

At home, I went through my routine of locking the door then collapsed with my back against it, catching my breath.

I'd taken time off work for this? Maybe I really was crazy.

"Holy shit, that was close," I mused aloud to the navy blue cushions on the sofa, each one arranged at a perfect forty-five-

degree angle.

The cushions stared back at me, silent.

I pulled off the chestnut brown wig and put it back in its box. I was covered in sweat; I could hear the shower down the hall calling to me, but the SD card in my hand screamed louder.

I shoved it into my laptop and loaded up the photos, skipping through the pictures of the hulk and the kings, searching for the photos I wanted.

I zoomed in on the first picture of the dark-haired girl inside the limo, squinting to make out her features through the blurry darkness.

“Camilla?” I whispered aloud, squinting harder, trying to brighten and unblur the image by sheer force of will.

*Damn it.* It was too blurry. Too dark. It was a female figure inside the car—of that much, I was sure—but I couldn’t make out her face or the face of the man sitting next to her. That left only one option.

I scanned through the pictures, searching for those with the most potential. Every picture was going to cost me a week’s wages, so I scrutinized each one, narrowing my options until I had the three most viable spread across my laptop screen. Three chances to put a face to the blurry woman on the screen. Maybe even a name.

I squeezed my eyes shut and breathed through the painful clench in my chest. The chances that it was her were about one in a million—maybe less.

It didn’t stop me from pulling up my email, attaching the photos, and typing a quick message: “*I need you to do what you can with these. As quick as you can, please.*”

I hit send then closed the laptop and washed my hands until they felt clean. I knew their routine now. I knew when they'd be there next, prowling like piranhas.

If the pictures didn't pan out, then maybe it was time for more drastic measures.

There was one sure way to get a piranha's attention.

Just throw a little fresh blood in the water.

# Chapter Two

## Dante Luca

One Week Later

Andres Suarez took a swig of his mojito, his brown-black eyes scanning the dance floor behind me.

He wasn't looking for a casual fuck for the night.

He was looking for a girl.

*The girl.*

The one whose life would end tonight.

He wouldn't kill her—that would be too merciful, not to mention, terribly unprofitable. By morning, though, she'd discover a hell she never knew existed. Within a week, she'd be begging for death.

And there wasn't a thing I could do about it. Andres was just a puppet. Three months, and I'd yet to reach the top of the ladder—the man behind the curtain who pulled all the puppets' strings. *El víbora*—that's all I had. But I was *so* close now.

“That's the one,” Andres said, leaning his head toward his brother, Tiago, and nodding at whatever unlucky girl had drawn his attention.

I resisted the urge to turn around to get a look as Tiago pulled out his phone.



I exchanged a brief glance with Cristian instead, who sat on my right and had a clearer view of the dance floor.

“That’s one hell of a redhead, boss,” he remarked coolly, knocking back a shot of whiskey.

I nodded.

Redheads were a rare find. Young, hot redheads, even rarer.

“I’ve got her, *jefe*,” Tiago spoke into his phone, just loud enough to be heard over the pounding music.

*Jefe? El víbora?*—The boss? This wasn’t part of the routine. The puppets didn’t call the puppet master over every random girl they picked up.

I fought the urge to grab the phone and turned around casually to get a look at whatever had caused them to deter from their—

The fiery redhead stood out from everyone else. The rest of the girls writhing on the dance floor could have disappeared and no one would have noticed. All eyes were on the auburn-haired knockout as her body gyrated to the notes of Lana Del Ray’s *Gods & Monsters*, her arms above her head, her eyes closed, lips slightly parted.

She looked like a dark angel—red hair, porcelain skin, legs that went on forever, and curves that wouldn’t quit. Tattoos all the way up one bare arm. And the way she moved, it was easy to imagine her rising up from the garden of evil.

But this girl hadn’t risen from any garden; I knew exactly where this girl came from.

Tiago hung up his phone and signaled to the bartender. All it took was a couple of eye movements to condemn a girl to hell here.

The bartender nodded back discreetly, and the deal was done.

The girl's next drink would seal her fate. Though in truth, her fate had been sealed the second she walked into this club.

*What was she thinking?*

While she barely looked legal, the girl was in her midtwenties. Not some naïve teenager.

The song ended, and she opened her eyes and stepped off the dance floor, every eye in the club following the sway of her hips to the bar.

“What do you think, *amigo*?” Andres asked as the bartender handed the girl a bottle of water.

If she'd known it was going to be her last drink, would she have ordered differently?

“Impressive,” I commented.

There was no point in denying it. Any man with eyes would be salivating over the prospect of sinking their cock into that.

Tiago laughed. “I think maybe you'd like a turn with this one first, yes?”

I wondered what that would cost me—not that I was contemplating it.

If Dom didn't fry my ass for it, Fallon would. But if I let this happen, Fallon was going to fry my ass regardless.

The girl opened the water bottle and put it to her lips. She drank it back like her throat was as dry as the Sahara. I could feel Andres' eyes on her, following the clench of her throat muscles as she swallowed. A drop escaped her lips and trickled down her neck, and I'd swear I could hear every man in the club groan.

She handed the empty bottle back to the bartender, and Andres and Tiago sat back in their seats, arms crossed over their chests, their eyes fixed on the girl, waiting. The drug the bartender slipped into the drinks didn't take long to take effect.

In three minutes, she wouldn't be able to walk, never mind fight off the two men who sat across from me.

"I think I'm going to take this one for a spin right now, *amicos*," I announced.

I stood up and watched as Cristian and the four other Luca men situated around the club followed suit.

Andres sat up straighter in his chair. "I don't think so, *Señor* Luca. That's not how this works."

"Just try to stop me," I said, silently cursing the redhead to hell and back.

Four months, and here I was throwing it all away for the stupidest woman who ever lived.

My men moved in closer, making their presence known.

Andres and Tiago looked around from man to man. This might be their hunting grounds, but they'd gotten cocky; they hadn't brought enough man power. Just one man. Hernandez, sitting next to Tiago, who didn't have a hope in hell of taking us on. And the bartender and the bouncers they paid off weren't paid well enough to stand in the line of fire for them.

The look in the brothers' eyes turned feral.

"You're making a big mistake," Andres warned.

"I just know what I want when I see it." I shrugged and turned away, feeling their eyes on my back like lasers as I walked toward the girl who'd just royally screwed me over.

She stumbled and grabbed onto the edge of the bar, tucking her chin against her chest like that could stop the room from spinning.

I was three steps away when she started to go over, losing her grip on the bar and falling sideways.

I reached out and caught her before she hit the floor, scooping her up into my arms without missing a step. Her warm body pressed close to mine as I headed for the door with Cristian on my heels and my men covering our hasty exit.

Without looking, I could imagine Andres and Tiago still sitting there; Tiago barking furiously into his phone while Andres mentally painted a bull's-eye on my back as I carried their prize out the door.

Outside, Cristian opened the Merc's back door, and I dropped the unconscious girl onto the back seat.

"I need you to go to her apartment and scrub it of everything that could connect her to the Lucas," I told him. "Everything."

He nodded, still looking at the girl. "Sure thing, boss. Just one question."

I cocked an eyebrow.

"Who the hell is she?"

I chuckled dryly. "She's Corinne... Fallon's best friend."

His mouth dropped open just a little. Cristian Mancini was generally unflappable. Really, if I wasn't fuming mad, it would have been entertaining to see him rattled. At the moment, though, not so much.

"That's a problem," he mused when he'd recovered himself.

I clicked my tongue. "For now, I'd appreciate it if we kept this *problem* between us, *per favore*. I'll deal with Dom eventually. But not tonight."

"Whatever you say," he said, taking one last look in the back seat and then heading for one of our cars in the lot while the rest of my men kept an eye on the club's door.

I scrubbed my hand over my face and got behind the wheel.

Since I had no clue what to do with the redhead passed out in my back seat—not that my mind wasn't conjuring plenty of ideas—she was coming with me. Back to the apartment I'd rented in secret, segregating myself from the rest of the Luca family.

The plan was shot now. I was back at square one.

And I was going to take great delight in wringing Corinne's pretty neck just as soon as she woke up.

\*\*\*

"We've got a problem, boss," Cristian said the second I answered my phone.

"What kind of problem?" I asked, laying Corinne down in the middle of my king-size bed.

Her cupid bow lips parted on a sigh, sending my mind racing with all kinds of ideas. It didn't help that her dress had ridden up her thighs or that her arms had flopped over her head, making her look like my own personal fantasy come to life.

I scowled at her. There was no way I wanted anything to do with this girl, no matter how much my cock was screaming otherwise.

"It's the girl, boss." Cristian paused before continuing. "She's got about a thousand surveillance photos in her apartment—including several of you. And I've got Hernandez out cold on her sofa. He tried to break in right after I got here."

"Bring the surveillance shit here, and lock Hernandez up in our warehouse—I'll worry about getting answers out of him later."

"All right, will do," Cristian answered.

I hung up the phone and stared at the unconscious troublemaker, wondering what kind of trouble she had gotten

herself into.

# Chapter Three

## Corinne

I knew something was off even before opening my eyes.

The foreign feel of the mattress beneath me.

The lack of the lemony scent of cleaners in the air.

The heat of the morning sun warming my right shoulder instead of my left.

None of it was right.

This was not my bed.

This was not my home.

*I did it.*

I breathed a sigh of relief even as my whole body started to tremble.

This was what I'd wanted, but now there was no turning back. No changing my mind. No chickening out.

There was no escaping it now, but that didn't stop me from holding onto the darkness for a moment longer. Just one more minute.

I forced my eyes open.

I'd been expecting a dirty mattress on the floor, concrete walls or iron bars all around me.

I was lying in the middle of a big, luxurious bedroom with sunlight spilling in.

I slid off the bed as quietly as I could.

I was still fully dressed... sort of.

My stiletto heels were gone. The rings I'd been wearing were missing too. They were big and clunky and pointy—the next best thing to brass knuckles. The necklace made out of titanium was missing, as was the locket full of crushed hemlock seeds.

When I moved, I could feel the tiny jabs from the pins I'd embedded in the waist of my thong. At least I still had those, but they were only really useful for getting out of cuffs. Not terribly useful now, since I wasn't cuffed.

*Why wasn't I cuffed?*

The bedroom door was open a crack.

I crept toward it, grateful for the muffling effect of the thick carpet beneath my feet. I peered out through the sliver but couldn't see much. A slate gray sofa fifteen feet in front of me, a big window to my right. A picturesque stone wall, but it looked like faux stone—part of the aesthetic, not a dingy basement.

I turned my ear toward the door and strained to listen over my pounding heartbeat. No voices. No sounds of movement.

They had to be the dumbest kidnappers ever, but that didn't make sense. These men were no fools. Maybe something had happened to draw them away. My heart leapt. All I had to do was get out of the empty apartment. Then I'd know where they took the girls.

Resisting the urge to throw open the bedroom door and run, I pushed it open slowly, looking and listening. The front door was right there, twenty feet past the sofa. All I had to do was walk out the door, and I'd be in the clear—an easier task for some people than for others, but no way did my crazy mind have a say in this.



I darted across the apartment on tiptoes. The door was right there. No obstacles in my way. I wrapped my shaking hand in the skirt of my dress and reached for the doorknob.

The door flew open before I could grab it, making me stumble back, and my breath caught in my throat.

*Dante Luca.*

Six foot, three inches of ripped muscle, shortish dark hair, and deep-set blue eyes that seemed to penetrate to the core of me with just one look.

Last night came back to me in a series of flashes.

The dark-haired kings.

The sleazy bartender.

The grinding bodies on the dance floor.

And Dante Luca.

He'd been sitting with the kings, his back to the dance floor, but I recognized him nonetheless.

Was he one of them? Just like them? That would explain why he'd been in the same place as them before. But why, oh why, of all the Lucases did it have to be him? Even without the mafia title, he'd always scared me a little. Sexy as hell, but there was something dark that seeped from his veins.

I shoved it all down, squeezing my hands to hide the way they trembled and forcing an outward calm I didn't feel—no way could I afford to show any kind of weakness in front of him.

“What the hell am I doing here?” I demanded as he closed the door behind him.

“Good morning to you too, *luna*.” His eyes grazed over the tattoos on my arm, centering on the crescent moon on my forearm.

Dante walked right by me with a paper bag in one arm and dropped it on the kitchen counter, his back to me. The man looked just as good from behind. Broad shoulders that tapered to narrow hips. An ass that might have been carved from stone.

I glanced at the door then at him.

He was too far away to stop me if I shot out the door. Though something told me it would never be that easy, I wrapped my hand in my skirt, turned the handle, and yanked open the door.

Three men with guns stood outside the apartment door, blocking my exit.

“Lucky me, it’s raining men,” I said, closing the door and forcing a nonchalance I didn’t feel.

My lungs were chasing air. My heart was pounding. And my hands shook no matter how hard I clenched them.

Dante hadn’t turned around.

He was unpacking groceries from the brown paper bag like he hadn’t just kidnapped a girl and brought her home to his lair.

“Are you going to answer me? Or are you just going to ignore me?” I asked, growing nearly as irritated as I was terrified.

Dante turned around, giving me his full attention, his penetrating stare burning holes right through me.

I swallowed the lump in my throat.

I would rather him have gone back to ignoring me.

“You can ask me whatever you want, just as soon as you tell me what you’ve been up to,” he said, holding out a large stack of familiar pictures, “and why you had an apartment full of photos that are going to get you killed.”

*Oh shit.*

# Chapter Four

## Dante

Corinne turned ghost-white.

She stood in front of the door, frozen, staring at the stack of photos Cristian had collected from her apartment. She kind of looked like she was going to throw up.

A minute passed.

Some of her color returned, but she hadn't moved.

"I'm usually a good mind reader, but I can't figure out for the life of me what's going through that pretty head." I crossed my arms over my chest.

"That's none of your business," she snapped, meeting my gaze dead-on.

Corinne was crazy, maybe, but gutsy too.

There was plenty of fear in her eyes, but I got the feeling if I pulled a gun on her right now, she wouldn't flinch. She'd stand there, chin up, shoulders back.

I was having a difficult time relating this girl to the bouncy, happy-go-lucky girl I'd seen with Fallon. She'd always been perhaps the hottest woman I'd ever seen, but she'd been too bright and bubbly for me. This girl, though, she was bright like the moon but somehow made perfect sense in my darkness.

"Given that you had pictures of me on your wall, I think it is my business," I said.

Whether I was dealing with bubbly Corinne or crazy Corinne, that much remained the same.

“You kidnapped me,” she mused aloud, more to herself, it seemed. “You really are just like—”

“Do not finish that sentence.” I was across the room in a flash.

“Why not?” she snapped.

“Because you won’t like what happens if you do,” I said, breaching her personal space and towering over her.

Corinne was silent again, her chest heaving. Her tits were full and round, perfect for sliding my cock between them. *Fallon’s best friend here, asshole.*

Her eyes slipped sideways, around the apartment. “Then why am I here?”

“Why do you think?”

She looked at me like she was trying to read me.

“You have to take me home...” She looked at the door, then at herself, then back at the door, cracking her knuckles.

I couldn’t figure out for the life of me what she was thinking, but what I would have given for a glimpse inside that head.

“You’re not going home, Corinne. And by the looks of the shit you had in your apartment, you should be grateful you’re stuck with me and not the other men you had plastered on your walls.”

“Grateful that you kidnapped me? Are you insane?” she seethed, throwing her arms out wide.

“I saved your hot little ass last night. The least you can do is—”

“What do you mean you saved me?” she asked, her voice too quiet.

The fear that radiated from her had disappeared, and she definitely didn't look grateful. She kind of looked like a storm about to unleash its fury. I could almost see the lightning flashing in her pale green eyes.

“I mean those men you had plastered all over your apartment had their sights set on you last night. If I hadn't intervened—”

“You did what? Why would you do that?” she cried as color rose high on her cheeks and anger snapped in her pale green eyes.

“You wanted to be kidnapped?” I asked because a more sensible conclusion eluded me.

She pressed her lips together, glaring at me.

“You do realize they don't deal in hot little bondage fantasies, right?” Her eyes flared. “They really rape, traffic, and murder the girls they take.”

“How about you mind your own goddamned business,” Corinne spat.

Nobody spoke to me that way. Not ever. There was only one explanation she would dare. “Fuck, you really are crazy.”

She flinched like I'd struck her.

Then she drew her arm back.

I could see it coming. I could have dodged it, but she kind of looked like she needed to hit something.

She connected with an uppercut to my jaw. The girl definitely had an arm on her. And legs, it seemed, as she bolted past me, further into the apartment.

I'd let her rant.

I'd even let her hit me.

My patience was up.

I caught up to her in three long strides and wrapped a restraining arm around her from behind, lifting her off the floor.

Corinne squirmed against me, trying to break free, rubbing her hot little ass against my cock in the process.

When she failed to settle down, I carried her across the room and dropped her down on the sofa, pinning her arms to her sides.

She stopped moving, staring up at me with the oddest combination of fear, heat, and confusion in her eyes.

"Let me go," she hissed, but the venom in her voice didn't reach her eyes.

I shook my head, keeping her pinned. "Those men are no joke. I've spent the past three months cozying up to those fuckers, and I might have just blown it last night."

"Because of me," she filled in.

There was no self-pity in her tone, just fact, like she was accustomed to being the reason bad shit happened.

"No, because of me. Nobody decides for me, Corinne. I make my own choices. But because of the choice I made, I need all the information you have on those scumbags."

"Why?" she asked.

I cocked a questioning eyebrow. "Why were you trying to cozy up to them?" Her eyes were like glass, transparent windows to the thoughts lurking behind them. And her thoughts pissed me off. "That's what you think of me?"

Corinne looked at where I had her restrained. "Not much evidence to the contrary, is there?"

I clenched my jaw. She was just lucky I didn't have her tied to a chair. "You're still alive, aren't you? I could have just let those fuckers take you last night—would have made my life a whole lot easier."

She opened her mouth to spew more venom.

"Don't bother. I don't know what you were thinking trying to get yourself kidnapped—and I don't want to know." *Not entirely true.* "But it was a dumbass plan."

"It—"

"Enough. I'm not some knight in shining armor rescuing dumbass damsels in distress. You're here because you could be useful to me. You have information I want, starting with why they were targeting you. Is it because of all this shit?" I asked, nodding to the mountain of photos I'd left on the kitchen counter.

Her breath was still coming fast, but her body had softened, no longer poised to attack. I decided to chance it and let her go. The feel of her body beneath me was too distracting anyway.

She flew off the sofa, out of my immediate reach, cracking her knuckles. "Are you involved with them?"

"It looks like you've been busy doing your research," I said, nodding at the photos as I took a seat on the couch. "What do you think?"

"I think you show up where they show up, but I don't know why. Those men... They deal in girls. The Luca family never has, and Fallon has always insisted you're such good people. I don't understand..." Her brow knitted. "I don't understand why you'd start now."

"So, you know those men smuggle girls?" I asked.

Corinne nodded.



“What else do you know about them?”

She eyed me suspiciously. “What happens when I give you all the information you want?” She cocked an eyebrow. “You just let me go on my merry way?” Her gaze swung to the door where she’d found three Luca men already. It probably didn’t even cross her mind that they were there for her protection as much as to keep her from leaving.

I could have lied; I could have told her she’d be free to go the second I had what I needed. It was the simple move.

“No,” I said instead.

She cracked her knuckles and eyed the door, contemplating it before abandoning the futile effort.

*Smart girl.*

“You’ll remain here until I’ve finished what I need to do,” I said—it was as much honesty as I was prepared to give her at the moment. “Then you’ll be free to go back to doing whatever crazy shit helps you get your rocks off.”

She glared at me, crossing her arms over her tits. “Get fucked and die.”

I laughed. “Is that an offer? Because I always thought dying with my cock buried in a hot woman’s cunt would be the best way to go.”

“Over my dead body,” she seethed.

“Not really my thing.” I shrugged.

She rolled her eyes. Not budging, not talking.

This game was getting old fast.

I could have cartel men coming at me at any minute, and she wanted to waste my time glaring at me in a silent standoff?

I stood up and pulled myself up to my full height and got in her space. “I’m asking nicely, Corinne. Don’t make me show

you how I ask for things the not-nice way.”

Even though she kept her shoulders back and her chin tipped up defiantly, there was no missing the tremor of fear that shivered through her.

Her eyes locked on mine.

It was strange that, while she was looking at me, it looked like her brain was going in a thousand directions all at once.

“Fine,” she huffed. “What information is it you want?”

“All of it.”

I watched, a little too fascinated, as an inner struggle went on behind her eyes.

Eventually, Corinne nodded, then crossed the room and grabbed the stack of photos Cristian had brought from her apartment.

“Do you have tape?” she asked, returning until only a few feet separated us.

“Fresh out.”

She huffed again, then dropped to her knees, the stack of photos still in hand, her red hair spilling over her shoulders.

Corinne leaned over, arranging the photos on the floor, side by side, all the corners smoothed down until she’d created a near-perfect rectangle with them.

Cristian had snapped a photo of the collage she’d had hanging on the wall in her apartment before he’d ripped them down. This looked like an exact replica, organized entirely by memory.

When she was finished, she sat back on her heels, cracking her knuckles while eyeing the orderly collage.

“As I’m sure you already know,” she said, her gaze flicking up to mine, “these men are part of *Las Serpientes* cartel.” She

pointed to pictures of Andres and Tiago Suarez in the top left corner, her perfectly manicured fingernail stopping just shy of touching it. “They’ve been taking girls from Ascension for at least the past year—probably longer—but they’ve also got other men”—she pointed to photos of four dark-eyed, dark-haired Latinos directly beneath them—“who take them from a club across town and a strip of downtown where it’s common to find runaways.”

Like she had every detail memorized, she spelled it out for me—every name she’d found, every person and place connected to *Las Serpientes*. And yet, all the while, it felt like she was holding back.

“I saw one of the girls delivered here,” she said, pointing to a distant shot of a run-down building on an open stretch of field. “She wasn’t there for more than a half hour before a van arrived from the south and headed back in that direction fifteen minutes later. I can only assume it’s like a depot of some sort, and they transport the girls across the border from there. I tried to follow the van, but I lost it on the Interstate. I’m guessing the license plate is useless,” she said, nodding toward the enlarged photo of a set of New York plates. “Every time I go to the club—”

“What do you mean ‘*every time*’?” I could still see her on the dance floor, all eyes ogling her—including the eyes of the men who’d tried to take her. “You’ve pulled that shit before?”

She kept her eyes on the photos, cracking her knuckles. Some sort of coping mechanism, I wondered. “Not exactly. I got fed up waiting for... never mind.” She shook her head. “Until last night, I sort of kept off their radar.”

“Anything else I should know?” I snapped at her, pissed at her for deliberately dangling herself in front of them last night.

I didn’t care about her. I cared about what Dom and Fallon would think of me letting Fallon’s friend get kidnapped—

especially when it was obvious that they wanted her bad. And I cared that her venture into monumental stupidity had cost me four months of effort.

“My men will be here to keep an eye on you,” I said, walking away from the knockout on her knees. “I suggest you don’t give them a hard time.”

There was no way I was letting her walk out the door now.

Not when she might just be the key to getting Gia back.

# Chapter Five

## Corinne

I had a babysitter.

I was a freaking grown woman, and Dante Luca had left a six-foot-something, suit-wearing, gun-packing babysitter to watch over me like I was a child.

As far as babysitters went, this one was nice eye candy with his shortish, black hair, angular features, and eyes that I couldn't quite say were brown; they were warmer, like they shone with an inner gold.

*Sheesh, did the mafia come with a minimum hotness code these days?*

Dante was even better eye candy, and I wasn't thrilled about *that* arrangement either. Kidnappers and babysitters sucked, no matter how hot they were.

If he'd left just one man, I might have been able to handle myself, but since Dante had also left two on the other side of the door... probably not. Even if I got past my babysitter, there was nothing saying the two outside wouldn't shoot me the second I opened the door.

Now that he had the information he wanted, I served no purpose. And since I could tie him to *Las Serpientes*, he'd probably be better off if I was dead—whether he was involved with the cartel or not.

I crossed my arms over my chest and glared at the man standing in front of the door, guarding it like a hot rottweiler.

“You must have screwed up pretty badly to get stuck on babysitting duty,” I goaded.

“No, *signorina*,” he said with a flicker of humor twitching the corners of his lips.

“Do you have a name?” I huffed.

He nodded. “I do. It’s on my birth certificate and everything.”

I rolled my eyes. Admittedly, it was a good comeback, but I wasn’t going to let him know that. And I definitely wasn’t storing it away for the next time some loser hit on me.

He nodded, maybe in deference to my keeping a straight face. “My name is Rome, *signorina*.”

“Rome? Like the city?”

“Like Romeo from *Romeo and Juliet*. My mother had an enthusiasm for everything Shakespeare. I have less of an enthusiasm for him, so it’s just Rome.”

I smiled; I couldn’t help it. “I suppose it could have been worse. She could have named you ‘Dogberry’ from *Much Ado about Nothing* or ‘Mustardseed’ from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.”

He laughed. The sound was warm like his eyes.

“Well, Rome, since we’re stuck here, I’m going to go raid Dante’s kitchen for something to eat. Do you want anything?” I asked, plastering on the most innocent face I could muster.

“*Grazie, signorina*, but I’m good.”

Too bad. The thought of blowing through all of Dante’s food so he had to buy more struck my petty mind as an

excellent idea. Maybe I'd just dump it all out the window before he got back.

In the kitchen, I waited a moment then glanced back at Rome surreptitiously—still guarding the door like a good rottweiler—then started rummaging through the cupboards and drawers as quietly as I could.

If I couldn't walk out the door, then I needed to arrange for someone—preferably a lot of someones with badges and guns—to walk right in.

Fallon might not like it if I got her brother-in-law arrested, but then he shouldn't have freaking kidnapped me.

There was one problem with my plan, though: I had no phone. And my search through the kitchen hadn't helped to rectify the problem—not that I'd really been holding my breath, hoping to find one stashed with the forks and knives.

I crossed the apartment to the bedroom where I'd woken up, trying my best not to look suspicious.

*Nothing going on here. Just a woman taking an innocent stroll around her kidnapper's apartment.*

I closed the door and then I rummaged through every drawer and dresser. Under the bed. In the closet.

The bedroom door opened, and I spun around.

The knowing look on Rome's face said I'd just been caught red-handed.

“If you're looking for a phone, you're not going to find one, *signorina*. If you're searching for a weapon...” He shrugged. “You might have a hard time taking me down with a steak knife or a hardcover book, but by all means, feel free to give it a try.”

“Thanks for the advice.”

Looking past him, I saw my laptop on the kitchen counter next to the brown paper bag.

“I don’t suppose you’d be willing to wait outside with your friends?” I offered.

Rome followed my gaze out of the room—no doubt, honing right in on my laptop—then looked back at me and shook his head.

“Trust me, you’d miss me if I left—I get that all the time.” He flashed me another smile, this one making the gold in his eyes shine brighter.

Goons were supposed to be straight-faced and silent—and if you believed a lot of movies, pretty damn stupid.

“There’s no Wi-Fi,” he said with an almost-sympathetic smile. “No landlines for you to try to wire to a walkie-talkie or a satellite dish like *MacGyver* either. It’s just you and me, *signorina*. You might want to sit back and put your feet up.”

“And if someone was keeping you somewhere against your will, is that what you’d do, Rome?”

He chuckled. “Well, no, I wouldn’t, but that’s probably because if I was being held against my will somewhere, it’d be to try to torture information out of me. I don’t think they’d give me the option of sitting back and relaxing, but you never know. If it ever happens, I’ll be sure to suggest it.”

I huffed and walked out of the room to stand uselessly in the living room.

I noticed the sprinkle of coffee grounds on the kitchen counter. And the light coating of dust on top of the coffee table. And the beginnings of a cobweb high up in the corner above the front door.

Before I could delve in like a crazy woman, I grabbed my laptop off the counter.



If I couldn't sleuth my way out of here, then maybe I could solve another mystery. I hadn't checked my email since before I left my apartment last night. Maybe it downloaded before he'd brought it to this Wi-Fi-dead zone.

I sat down at the dining table while Rome sauntered back toward the front door. I was careful to position myself so that I faced the door... and my laptop screen didn't.

I pulled up my email, glancing at Rome, trying to gauge his body language. Did he look like he was ready to pounce and snatch my laptop away? Because if he told Dante Luca who I'd been in contact with... Well, there was no way I could let him find out about that. I had a feeling mafia men and law enforcement were kind of like oil and water.

The email loaded up, and there it was, the last email to come in. *"Sorry, this is the best I could do,"* the one-line message read, accompanied by three attachments.

My fingers shook as I clicked on the first of the three and a picture filled the laptop screen.

It was the photo of the man inside the car, clearly a blond man in the enhanced picture, with olive skin and a Roman nose. An Italian, if I had to guess.

I'd never seen him before, certainly not with the cartel. First Dante, and now this guy; what interest did the cartel have with Italians? Maybe it was just a coincidence, but the suit, the confident look on his face—this guy was seriously throwing mafia vibes.

I glanced at Rome, waiting for him to make a grab for my laptop.

When he didn't, I opened the second attachment, a photo of the man and woman, but while the blond man's features were clearer, the woman's face was still shrouded in shadows.

*Great.* I'd paid two weeks' earnings for a picture of a guy I couldn't put a name to if my life depended on it.

I stared at the last attachment, but it was like Schrödinger's cat. So long as I didn't open it, there was still hope. But of course, I had to open it. I needed to know.

*Please be clear,* I silently begged the attachment, the cursor hovering over the icon. But my finger wouldn't budge.

I looked up at Rome again. He remained still by his spot.

One more picture. One last chance. God only knew when I'd be able to resume my search, trapped in this glorified prison—assuming I wasn't six feet under by morning. That thought did nothing to bolster my courage.

*Grow a backbone, Corinne.*

With my breath trapped in my chest, I forced my finger to move, clicking open the attachment.

Long, dark hair filled the screen. And a heart-shaped face. Slim nose dusted in freckles and wide, full lips.

It felt like a blow to my stomach, forcing the air out of my lungs.

She wasn't bruised or broken. She didn't look sad or scared. She looked... *happy*. Smiling with her head nestled against the Italian's shoulder.

"Something interesting, *signorina*?" Rome asked, looking a little too interested.

I must have made a noise out loud.

"Nope, not at all." I shook my head, feigning nonchalance. "I'm just setting a reminder to strangle Dante the minute he gets back."

Rome laughed. "You wouldn't be the first."

I would have given that comment more consideration, except all my thoughts were tied up in the pretty girl on the screen.

Relief warred with the trepidation tingling down my spine.

I could think of no good reason why she was sitting there, unrestrained, with an unknown Italian and two of the cartel men who'd taken her.

“Oh god, Camilla. What are you doing?” I whispered under my breath to the girl on the screen, tracing the outline of my sister's smiling face.

# Chapter Six

## Dante

It felt like a scene in some sci-fi body-snatcher movie when I walked into the war room and every eye turned to me in unison.

My father sat at the head of the table, as he always did, his fingers steepled in front of him and his lips pressed into a flat line.

“I’m glad you could join us, son,” he said, cocking an eyebrow at me, his jaw clenched so tightly.

I had a feeling I’d be hearing about this one for a while. Even my father’s Chihuahua, Bullet, perched on my father’s lap, seemed to be glaring at me with his big, round eyes.

I glanced at my watch.

I was seven minutes late—not a big deal according to most real-world standards. In this room, though, it was. And it wasn’t the first time in the past four months I’d come in late or hadn’t shown up at all.

“My apologies, *Papà*,” I said, not bothering to offer up some phony-ass explanation.

If I couldn’t give him the truth, I respected him too much to feed him bullshit.

He nodded tightly and motioned to the empty seat next to Dom.

I sat down, nodding to Nico Costa, don of the Costa family and fiancé to my sister, who sat across from me.

Nico nodded back with an amused smile.

My cousin, Amadeo, and *Zietto* Enzo, who sat across from Dom, both nodded cordially.

Dom looked at me with a question in his eyes. He was as intuitive as the rest of the Luca men, and he knew me better than anyone else here.

“I was in the middle of bringing Enzo and Nico up to speed on the distribution of Avalone’s network,” my father explained.

Fiorenzo Avalone was a sick, slimy motherfucker. Or at least, he used to be. Now he was dead and burning in hell where he belonged. He’d held Leo’s new girlfriend, Ella, captive for years, from the time she was sixteen years old, and used her in ways I didn’t even want to think about. After we killed him, there’d been a conversation about how his territory and product would be dispersed among our families.

“The last of his warehouses will need to be emptied,” *Zietto* Enzo said. “We’ll each send a man to oversee the progress, *si?*”

Amadeo opened his mouth, but a glare from his father had him shutting it again without saying a word. There was some serious conflict going on between the two of them if the tension snapping in the air around them was any indicator.

“That’s fine by me,” my father said.

Nico nodded. “I’ll send a man, but I don’t really care about the product. I do think we should keep up a presence for a while longer. I’d like to be sure no one new tries to encroach on the territory.”

Heads bobbed in agreement around the table.

The conversation moved on, touching on a half dozen issues I didn't care about. I had other things on my mind at the moment—like the guy tied up at the warehouse like a wrapped present on Christmas morning, just waiting for me to grab a knife and tear into him. All right... so, maybe not *exactly* like Christmas morning.

The minute the meeting concluded, I hightailed it out of the room.

The last thing I needed was Dom giving me the third degree when I still had more shit on my agenda.

And yet, I stopped in the front foyer.

Fallon was sitting in the front parlor, alone, staring across the room at nothing. She didn't look sad, exactly; her eyes had kind of glazed over.

“Fallon?” I asked.

“Hey, Dante.” She smiled. It reached all the way up to her eyes like she was actually glad to see me.

“Are you okay?” I asked, crossing the foyer.

I stopped just inside the front parlor, leaning back against the doorjamb.

“Yeah, of course, I'm okay,” she said, smiling brighter, but that was a forced smile if ever I'd seen one.

“Do you maybe want to try that again with a little less bullshit this time?”

Fallon sighed and dropped the act. “Nothing's wrong. I'm just bored. With Raven working so much, Ella out of the country, and Corinne off work for the past while... I'm just getting a little tired of talking to the walls, you know?”

I paused, not missing the last name she mentioned. “Maybe you should give Freya a call?” I suggested.

There was definitely some serious tension between *Zietto* Enzo and Amadeo at the moment. Enzo's daughter could probably use a good excuse to get out of their house for a while.

She shrugged. "That's not a bad idea, actually."

I cocked an eyebrow at her. "You sound surprised."

She laughed. "You might be king of the bedroom—if one believes the rumors—but no one would ever accuse you of rocking the *Dear Abby* advice column."

"Fair enough." I shrugged.

"Dante, do you have a minute?" Dom asked, coming up behind me without a sound.

Luca men were intuitive; we were also way too quiet.

I glanced at my watch—mainly for show. "I'm afraid I don't, but I'll catch up with you later, *fratello*."

Dom crossed his arms over his chest, giving me the evil eye. "I don't know what you've got going on, Dante, but you'd better get your shit together."

I gave him a salute.

Fifteen steps to the front door, and I was off the hook for the night.

Now... onto my wrapped Christmas present.

# Chapter Seven

## Dante

I wasn't opposed to torture.

It was a useful tool, a necessary evil, but it wasn't like I got my rocks off on it.

"What were you doing in the girl's apartment?" I asked Hernandez for a second time.

I really didn't like to repeat myself, which was evident by the index finger that now lay on the warehouse office floor.

"*Hijueputa,*" he cursed under his breath.

Cristian tightened his grip on Hernandez's wrist while I took hold of another finger.

"Fine," he hollered. "*Señor* Suarez figured you'd just taken her home, another one of your little rescue missions."

"My rescue missions?" I repeated.

Hernandez choked out a laugh. "We know all about the girls your family rescued. Fucking heroes, aren't you?" he sneered.

I laughed. "Do I look like a hero to you, Cristian?"

"Not the first word that comes to mind, boss." Cristian grinned from ear to ear.

"I didn't think so." I turned my attention back to Hernandez. "What I do and what my family does are two very



different things. *Señor* Suarez would be wise to remember that.”

“You would be wise not to fuck with him or his merchandise.”

“Ah, right. That brings me to my next question. Why the interest in the girl? Certainly, one cunt isn’t worth all this effort. What’s Andres’ interest in her?”

Hernandez laughed. “Not *Señor* Suarez. *El jefe* wants the girl. And what *el jefe* wants, *el jefe* gets.”

“Why does he want her?”

“She’s a hot piece of ass,” he said, bullshit written all over his face.

I raised the butcher’s knife and slammed it down, severing the remaining digits on his hand.

Hernandez roared and struggled, but Cristian kept him under control, loosening his grip just enough to let the guy turn his head while he vomited. It was an often-inevitable consequence of pain and blood loss.

Thankfully, I wasn’t responsible for the cleanup.

“Do you want to try that again?” I asked when he’d gotten his stomach and his vocal cords under control.

“I’m... doing you a favor when I tell you to hand over the girl, *ese*. If you stand in *el jefe*’s way when he wants something, you’re going to be praying for death after what he does to you.”

The truth was the guy didn’t know why the big boss wanted her; I could see it in his eyes. And that meant Hernandez had reached the end of his usefulness.

“You want to get rid of this piece of shit, Cristian?”

Cristian nodded. “With pleasure, boss.”

“No, wait—”

Cristian jerked his arms, one hand on either side of the guy’s neck, and whatever begging Hernandez had in mind died abruptly, along with him.

I grabbed a couple of hand towels off the desk and tossed one to Cristian. Torture was messy work. There was no escaping the blood and gore that tended to fly in all directions.

“What do you suppose *Las Serpientes*’ capo wants with the redhead?” Cristian asked, wiping off the blood smeared on his hands.

“I don’t know, but she might prove more useful than I’d expected.”

All the ways I’d been imagining using her had little to do with the cartel. It wasn’t my fault the girl was built like every teenage boy’s wet dream.

“Leverage?” he asked.

I nodded. “I’m going to get laid. Get someone to clean this up,” I said, motioning to the dead guy in the office.

Twenty-four hours without sex was a long time—particularly when there was an incredibly fuckable redhead locked up in my apartment.

And yet, the moment I turned out of the warehouse’s parking lot, my hands seemed to develop a mind of their own, steering the car back toward the apartment.

Back to *her*:

Maybe I just wanted to make sure she was still there, hadn’t done something crazy like leap out the window. A girl trying to get herself kidnapped had to be a girl with a death wish.

Inside the apartment, the fresh scent of lemon cleaner overwhelmed me.

The floors shined, the counters gleamed, all the jars on the counter had been rearranged in perfect rows of four.

It looked like my apartment had been invaded by cleaning fairies.

To make matters worse, there was no sign of the girl.

The bathroom door was closed, though, and getting closer to it, I could hear the shower running.

What kind of girl decided to take a shower hours after finding herself trapped in her kidnapper's apartment? *Probably the same kind of girl who turns into Ms. Clean when no one's looking?*

I shook my head, baffled, and more curious than I wanted to be—and not just about what the knockout looked like right now, naked with water cascading down her killer curves.

Her laptop provided the distraction I desperately needed. It was plugged into the wall outlet next to the sofa, the cord wound and bound with just enough left loose to reach the plug. Cristian had taken a look at it after he'd swiped it from her apartment, but it had no folders, no files.

I opened it up and turned it on. There was no password required. It let me right in at the same time the bathroom door quietly clicked open, the en suite shower still running in the background.

With my back to the door, I waited, wondering what Corinne was up to.

“Put that back,” she snapped from three feet behind me.

“No,” I said calmly, turning to look at her.

Her hair was dry; she was still fully dressed. Her eyes were wide with indignation, fixed on the laptop.

She kept staring at the laptop, looking ready to try to snatch it away. She grasped her hands together in front of her instead,

cracking her knuckles.

“Why did they center you out?” I asked, not really expecting her to play nice after telling her no.

“Because I made sure I was there all by my lonesome and wore something that showed plenty of skin,” she said, her whole countenance snapping with anger and defiance.

All that skin was currently on display right in front of me. Not in a trashy way; her dress wasn't riding up her ass or threatening to spill her breasts out. Instead of showing off the obvious assets, like most women would jump to when trying to get noticed, it was bare shoulders and the creamy expanse of her back that was on display from her neck all the way to her tailbone, flaunting the tattoos on her arm. The perfect outline of her breasts through the fabric made it achingly clear she wore no bra underneath, but aside from that, all of her assets were firmly covered. And I'd never given thought to just how much more tempting that made it to want to uncover them.

“Hey,” she snapped. “My eyes are up here.”

I gave her a slow, lazy grin as I stood up and circled the couch, closing the distance between us.

“I know where they are, *luna*,” I said, taking my time perusing upward, not missing the way her nipples pebbled beneath my gaze.

Corinne would never admit it, but the sparks between us were shooting off like fireworks.

Finally reaching her eyes, they were filled with the same chaos as before. I was usually good at reading people—figuring out what they were thinking and what their next moves would be—but she was impossible. There wasn't one chain of thought going through her head; it looked like there

were thousands. *Holy fuck, that would give me such a headache.*

“Take me home, Dante,” she demanded, crossing her arms over her chest and donning a matronly expression.

My ire rose inexplicably. “Still wanting to get kidnapped, huh?”

“That’s none of your business. I want to go—”

I grabbed her and spun her around, pinning her with her chest against the wall. She really wasn’t getting just how dangerous those men were.

“Is this what you want?” I asked, gripping her wrists tighter in one hand behind her back. “To know what it’s like to be powerless, to be completely at the mercy of some sick fuck who doesn’t see you as anything other than a place to shove his cock?”

I shoved a knee between her legs, pressing harder into her, trying to get the point across.

“Let me go, you son of a bitch,” she seethed.

“Isn’t this what you were after?” I pushed harder, doing a piss-poor job of ignoring the feel of her body beneath mine.

“No, goddamn it.” Corinne slammed her head back, probably aiming for my nose but coming in low and connecting with my chin.

I wrapped my free hand around her throat and pressed down just enough to limit her air supply without cutting it off altogether. Her chest heaved as she dragged in oxygen.

“If you fought them like you’re fighting me, they would’ve beaten you and then drugged you until all you could do was drool and whimper while they fucked you raw.”

“I... know,” she choked out.

I froze.

“Then what the hell were you thinking?” I roared, releasing my hold on her and spinning her back to face me.

“I was thinking that what I do is my own damn business. You talk like you’re not just like them. Fallon was so convincing about you, always going on about how wonderful the Lucas were. You really have her fooled, don’t you?”

I wasn’t sure if I wanted to strangle her or fuck her.

Corinne shot out with a hard jab to my solar plexus, making me gasp for breath. I could have grabbed her when she darted around me, but it wasn’t like she could go anywhere. And putting a few yards of space between us wasn’t the worst idea at the moment.

*Strangle her? Fuck her?*

They spun like a roulette wheel in my head, just waiting to see whether it landed on black or white.

I strolled casually after her, not surprised to find her at the door. Her hand was out, hovering over the handle. She had her back to me, providing a very fine view of her ass.

“They’re coming for you, Corinne. Not just because you’ve got a body that would make the gods jealous. Not because you writhed your hips on their dance floor and showed off a little skin. The capo himself wants you, and that means you’ve got a serious problem. Whatever you think of me, I haven’t drugged you or raped you, so I’m a damn sight better than what you’ve got in store if you walk out that door.”

Corinne scoffed. Her hand hovered above the doorknob.

Instead of making an attempt to escape or backing away from the door, she just stood there, silent for so long I started to wonder if she suffered from narcolepsy.

“Corinne?”

“What?” she snapped.

“Just wondering what the hell you’re doing.”

“My mind’s fried, okay?” she hissed.

“Do you want to show me what you’ve got hidden on your computer,” I asked, getting back to business, “or do you want me to have my guys do it for you?”

She huffed, spinning around. “It’s nothing that would be of any freaking interest to you.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.”

“Fine.” She stomped across the living room, taking a wide circle around me.

Corinne grabbed the laptop and plopped it down on the dining table, typing in something I couldn’t quite follow. The screen changed, replacing the generic desktop background with a starry night scene and one folder in the middle of it. She double-clicked the folder and a picture of a girl appeared on the screen, dark hair, maybe twenty years old.

“Happy?” she asked, glaring daggers.

“Ecstatic. Who is she?”

She was silent, pressing her lips together.

I glared right back until she sighed, surrendering.

“Her name is Camilla. She’s my sister.” Her voice was different, she sounded gentle somehow.

“She’s missing,” I said as one piece of the puzzle in front of me fell into place.

“Yes,” she said, still staring at the screen.

I sat down in the chair across from her. “How long?”

She cracked her knuckles, staring at the dark-haired girl. “Six months ago.”

Fallon had never said anything.

“You have the information you want. You can’t keep me here.” She stood up, her hands clenched in fists at her sides.

“I told you, you’re here until I’ve finished what I need to do.”

“That’s. My. Sister,” she ground out. “I hear you Lucas are all hopped up on family. What lengths would you go to, Dante? How much of yourself would you offer up to protect them?”

“Everything.”

“Damn right. You think because I don’t have ‘mafia blood’ running through my veins, it’s any different for me? She is all I have, she’s everything. So don’t you dare tell me to sit around twiddling my thumbs until you’ve ‘finished what you need to do’. We both know you’d go to the ends of crazy town if she was one of yours.” She pointed at her sister on the screen.

“You’re not leaving, Corinne. Get it through your head.”

She practically growled.

I smirked.

Then she slammed the laptop closed and took it with her as she stormed off to my bedroom, banging the door shut behind her.

I couldn’t help but laugh.

Like a door would be able to stop me if I wanted in there... which I did, not that I was going to act on it. I could get sex pretty much anywhere, which made it extra baffling when, instead of going out to get laid, I headed for the shower.

*Truly baffling.*



# Chapter Eight

## Corinne

One day stuck in this prison, and I was already losing my mind.

I'd spent the rest of the day in this room, dozing on and off when nighttime finally came.

The walls seemed closer, the ceiling, lower.

Dante hadn't hurt me—a relief, I supposed—but he'd trapped me here, nonetheless, in this shrinking box.

I could hear him moving around in the kitchen.

I'd cleaned it until it shone yesterday; he was probably in there deliberately making a mess.

*Yeah, torture by crumbs and drink rings; I'm sure that's what he has in mind.* I rolled my eyes at myself. It was too late, though. My brain had already begun conjuring a thousand and one different messes. Plates and mugs out. Coffee grounds on the counter. Sugar crystals on the floor. Just thinking about it, I could feel the gritty crystals beneath my feet.

I was out of the bedroom and across the living room before I realized what I was doing, coming to an abrupt stop when I saw him there, his hair wet, the top buttons of his shirt undone, the open V just wide enough to get a glimpse of his chiseled pecs. I wanted to run my tongue along them. I shook my head, hoping it would scare off the intrusive thoughts.

Dante stared at me, silent.

I combed my fingers through my hair, ignoring the part of my brain that was screaming at me for not fixing my hair or makeup before coming out here—not that I had any means to do that.

He kept looking, his eyes roaming over me.

Did he find me attractive? *Arghhh! Stop it.*

“I made coffee,” he said, nodding to a second cup on the counter.

No coaster beneath the mug; there was probably a coffee ring beneath it this second, leaching into the countertop underneath.

I grabbed a napkin, picked up the mug, and wiped under it. It was dry. No spill. My insides sighed.

*Yeah, because that was seriously the biggest problem going on here.*

“Thank you,” I barked, looking around.

No coffee grounds on the counter, but there were water droplets on the coffee maker. Didn’t he know the mineral deposits in the water meant those would dry and leave a calcium crust? Using the napkin, I wiped them down while he stared at me like I was insane because... well, I *was* insane. He could kill me at any second, and here I was, thinking about licking him like an animal and worrying about calcium stains on the coffee maker—his damn coffee maker.

“What the hell are you doing, Corinne?”

“Since I’m being forced to stay here against my will, I prefer my prison not also be a pigsty.”

Dante looked at me consideringly for a moment while I stared right back, considering him. Definitely not noticing the bead of water that had dripped from his hair and trickled down the side of his neck.

He pulled out a picture from his pants pocket and placed it down on the counter in front of me. A picture of a young woman with light blonde hair and big, hazel eyes.

“I told someone that I would either bring her back,”—he nodded to the picture—“or the heads of everyone who had anything to do with her death.”

I was shocked.

From the few times I’d seen him and from my recent experience, I hadn’t thought there was a soft bone in Dante Luca’s body.

All I could think about, though, was the picture of Camilla. Not the one I’d shown Dante, but the other one—the one that made it look like she wasn’t a victim, but one of them. “... *everyone who had anything to do with her death,*” Dante had said.

I stared at the picture of the blonde-haired girl.

That girl deserved justice. If she was alive, she deserved to be rescued. If she was dead, then she deserved to rest in peace, knowing her killers were dead too. But where did Camilla fit into all this?

I shut the question down.

It had been my job to keep Camilla safe, and I’d failed.

It didn’t matter what she’d gotten mixed up in; I couldn’t let Dante kill her. How to stop him... I had no freaking idea. But the only way he was going to kill the only family I had left was over my dead body.

# Chapter Nine

## Dante

I took the picture of Gia and put it back in my pocket.

It had been a stupid move, thinking that showing Corinne why I was doing this would make any difference.

Corinne didn't understand that I'd felt somehow responsible for Gia from the first moment I saw her.

Gia had been huddled on the floor beneath her family's old dining room table, her knees drawn up and her arms wrapped around her tiny body.

"Gia, please come out here," a slightly less tiny Rosa had begged her sister, arms out imploringly. Both of their faces were pale and there were tear tracks down their cheeks.

I couldn't have imagined at the time what it was like to lose a parent, never mind the only one I had left. In one night, though, they'd lost their father and here we were—my mother and I and two of our family's men—come to take them from the only home they'd ever known.

Rosa stomped her foot impatiently, not angry, I think, but so overwrought with emotion, she didn't have room for more.

I don't know what compelled me to wave the others off while I crawled under the table with Gia and sat down next to her.

I didn't say anything to her. Even back then, I'd been smart enough to know there was nothing I could have said to make it

better.

So, I sat there, and Gia and I watched while my mother and our men helped Rosa pack up the most important of their belongings.

Our eyes followed them back and forth the whole time, as Gia's tears gave way to quiet sniffing and the occasional hiccupping sob.

"It's time to go, *cara mia*," my mother spoke gently, crouching down to look at us when they'd finished loading the girls' lives into the back of one of my family's SUVs.

My mother smiled encouragingly and held out her hand to Gia.

Gia didn't speak; she shook her head, shaking fresh tears loose.

When my mother reached out further, I shook my head.

Somehow, in the span of the hour we'd spent beneath the old, chipped dining room table, I'd become something more than I'd been when I walked through their door. I'd had no idea what to call it then. A friend? A scrappy guard dog, maybe?

I'd placed my hand over Gia's and waited patiently until she'd looked up at me.

"Come with me, Gia?" I said. "I'll stay with you until you say it's all right for me to go, okay?"

She stared at where my hand covered her much smaller one for a long minute then turned her hand over and wrapped her little fingers around mine.

"Okay," she sniffed.

Then she let me lead her out of the only home she'd ever known into an uncertain future.

I'd been watching out for her ever since.

Except, I'd failed, and Corinne couldn't understand that. She looked more pissed off now than she had five minutes ago.

"Let me help," Corinne said, throwing me for a loop.

"Why?" I asked, not convinced it was Gia that had sparked the one-eighty turn.

"Why what?"

"Why do you suddenly want to help?"

She huffed. "It's not 'suddenly', you jerk. It's what I've been trying to do all along."

I cocked an eyebrow at her. "Filling your apartment with shit that will get you killed and trying to get yourself kidnapped are your ideas of helping?"

She was looking more agitated by the second.

It was a good look on her—cheeks flushed and eyes wide, her breasts heaving.

"Look, I won't be able to do it much longer, and the FBI, they—" She slammed her mouth shut as her eyes widened more.

"The what?" I asked, my eyes narrowed into thin slits.

She cracked her knuckles and looked away, but then turned back to meet my irate stare head-on. "You heard me. What did you think? That my sister disappeared and I decided to gamble with her life by playing vigilante hero? Of course not. I went to them for help—not that it's any of your business."

"Why didn't you come to us? Did you even tell Fallon, for fuck's sake?"

Surely, if Fallon knew her best friend's sister went missing, she would have said something.

“Come to you?” she cried, her brows reaching for her hairline. “Are you insane? Why on earth would I have—”

“Because we would have helped, Corinne. I would have—” I cut myself off.

“So, instead of going to the authorities, the people who find missing people, not make them go missing, I was supposed to wander up to my friend’s mafia husband and plead with him to take a break from all the illegal shit he does”—she threw her arms out wide like the illegal shit we did encompassed the whole world—“to help me track down someone who means absolutely nothing to him?”

“Yes!” I shouted.

“And I thought I was crazy,” she muttered under her breath, rolling her eyes.

I was trying to get my shit under control, I really was, but thanks to her, there would now be FBI agents sniffing around the cartel—and me, if she’d shared any of the photos of me with the agent. “Did you hand over any photos of me to your agent friend?”

“He’s not my friend,” she snapped. “And no.”

Though she was difficult to read, I got the feeling she was telling the truth. But that begged the question, “Why not?”

“I don’t... I don’t know, okay?” She cracked her knuckles; it was always rhythmic, four cracks and then a rest.

“No, it isn’t okay. You’re either lying, or you had a damn good reason for holding onto them. Blackmail?” I asked, cocking an accusing brow.

“Yeah, I spend my days grooming cats and my nights blackmailing the most dangerous men in the country.”

“It’d be no more foolish than trying to get yourself kidnapped.”

“Get fucked and—”

“Die? Yeah, you mentioned that already.” *Strangle her or fuck her? Strangle her or fuck her?* God, the woman was infuriating. “If not blackmail, then why?”

Corinne was silent, fuming. “I didn’t believe it, or maybe I just didn’t want to believe it.” She shook her head. “You’re dangerous, but you’re not...”

She didn’t finish the thought, but I could see the word in her eyes.

*Evil.*

Something inside me relaxed.

“And what has your FBI friend been able to tell you?”

There was no harm in collecting intel from everywhere I could.

Her shoulders sagged, and she looked smaller somehow, more vulnerable. With the coffee mug in hand, she walked to the small dining room and sat down at the table.

“Nothing,” she said, putting the mug down with a napkin beneath it. “Nothing I wasn’t able to figure out by myself.”

“That’s why you started playing ‘vigilante hero,’” I said, getting a clearer picture.

Whether I agreed with her or not, I could think of few people who would have had the guts to do what she’d done.

But something else she’d said came back to me. “What did you mean when you said you wouldn’t be able to do it much longer?”

If she thought she was losing her looks, then she was crazy. Maybe she’d been paying a P.I. and was running out of money.

“You haven’t been able to figure it out?” She scoffed and went back to cracking her knuckles. “You wouldn’t make a



very good detective.”

“Damn, so much for my backup plan.”

Her lips quivered in an almost smile, but she was silent, eyeing her surroundings like she was looking for the escape hatch. Eventually, she sighed. “It started when I was a teenager, but it was manageable, you know?”

“What started?”

“My OCD.”

*Oh.* “Like, just out of the blue?”

Corinne shrugged, though the vacant look in her eyes said her mind had taken her somewhere else. “Yeah, something like that,” she said when she came back. “Anyway, I’ve done my best to manage it. I don’t want to be hopped up on drugs like my mom was...”

“But if your mother needed them, doesn’t that mean—”

“My mother never took care of herself. She just brushed off all her symptoms, chalked them up to being finicky or being stressed out, and my stepdad...”

“Go on.”

It was like a glimpse at the cogs and screws inside her brain.

She cracked her knuckles, then looked at her hands, wiping them on her dress. “He gave her a hard time, you know? Putting her down and knocking her around. I take care of myself and I don’t let myself get close to anyone like that.”

“It seems to me you don’t let yourself get close to anyone at all. Does Fallon even know about it?”

She shook her head. “It’s my issue, and I’d appreciate it if you let me decide who I do and do not tell.”

“You’re embarrassed?”

It didn't suit her. Whatever her quirks, this girl was too brave to be embarrassed.

"No," she said a little too quickly. "It's just that up until recently, I've done a good job of managing it. There was no reason to tell anyone. Once you do, people look at you differently, you know? Instead of Corinne the neat freak, I become Corinne, the crazy girl. Instead of Corinne, the girl who always looks her best, I become Corinne... the crazy girl."

"If it makes you feel any better, I've always thought you were kind of crazy."

She laughed, and the sound shot through me, right to my cock.

"So, what happened?" I asked.

She quirked one auburn eyebrow.

"You said up until recently, you'd been managing okay. What happened?"

She sighed. "My mom died," she said, her voice raw.

I knew the pain of that one firsthand, but I couldn't remember Fallon mentioning anything about it.

"You haven't told anyone," I stated.

She shrugged. "Fallon got married, and then your sister came back from the dead, and Fallon was having a baby. I felt bad enough taking time off work, I didn't want to burden her..."

Right, Fallon had mentioned something about that. "Is this why you haven't been going in to work?"

She sighed, suddenly looking exhausted. "I needed time off to focus on Camilla. My brain couldn't juggle both. I spend an hour and a half getting ready every morning—not a hair out of place or wrinkle in my clothes. Then I spend forty-five

minutes standing at the door to convince my brain to walk through it. I spend the rest of the day worrying that I left the door unlocked or forgot to turn off the curling iron or the stove—even if I had no reason to have the stove on—all while resisting the urge to go back to check it. Because even if I do, the minute I drive away, the worrying starts up all over again. And then there's washing my hands every single time I touch something, and sometimes, even when I don't, which pretty much means I'm washing my hands all the time, And the mess. Oh god, the mess." She looked around the apartment.

So that's why she'd transformed into the queen of lemony freshness.

"It doesn't matter how many times I clean the clinic, there's always more—more fur, more dirt, more dust. And through it all, I have to keep a straight face and make sure nobody can see just how much crazy is going on behind it." Her breathing hitched, and she shot to her feet. "Why am I even telling you this?" She backtracked to the kitchen and started scrubbing her hands in the sink.

I didn't have a clue what to do for her.

It was strange, though, that I was wracking my brain, trying to come up with an answer. And that meant this was the perfect moment to shut this little powwow down. A missing sister... mother dead... a little crazy—I wasn't loving how much I seemed to have in common with the fiery angel. A fiery angel who was staring across the apartment at the front door now, looking angry, sad, frustrated, along with every other emotion under the sun.

"What are you thinking right now?" I couldn't help it.

"None of your business," she hissed.

"Tell me," I said in a tone that no one ever refused.

Corinne huffed, crossing her arms over her tits. I wondered if she realized that just showcased them like a picture frame.

“I’m thinking that I probably didn’t get all the germs off that doorknob. The place was filthy, really, Dante. I’m thinking I need to leave, no matter what you think, but I can’t just walk out like this. I need clean clothes, and I haven’t done my hair or makeup. I’ve been cleaning and sleeping and bent over those stupid photos, so God knows how much of a mess I am. You left all my hair and makeup stuff at my apartment. My clothes are wrinkled. What if someone notices? What will they think of me? What if they mock me? What if I fall on my ass and make a complete fool of myself?”

I thought I had problems. But all that chaos, there was more than one time I’d seen it stop moving like a kaleidoscope in her eyes. Pinned on the couch. Up against the wall. “Open your mouth, *luna*.”

She stared at me for one incomprehensible moment. “What?” she said, parting her lips as she spoke.

“*Si*, just like that.”

I covered her lips with mine, slipping my tongue between them, gliding along hers. Slow, not rushed, resisting the urge to touch her, to dig my fingers into her hips and drag her hard against me, to grind my cock against her abdomen. She tasted like coffee, but the scent of her skin was softer, a light, heady mix of vanilla and something uniquely Corinne.

Her breathing came harder, but slower. Her body softened against me.

I broke the kiss.

“What did you do that for?” she asked, taking an unsteady step back.

“I’ve been wanting to do that from the moment I first saw you. And for the record, you couldn’t make a fool out of

yourself if you tried. Your head full of crazy, that just makes you more complex, more... *desirable*.”

“Desirable?” She stared at me, looking flabbergasted. “Only a crazy person could possibly think ‘crazy’ makes someone more desirable.”

“Really? You don’t want someone who doesn’t quite line up with acceptable PC standards? You don’t want someone who does things his own way? Who does what he wants, and makes no apologies for it?”

“Well, I... no, of course not. And besides, that’s different. That’s not crazy, that’s—”

“Desirable?”

She huffed.

“Do you have any idea the ‘crazy’ thoughts running through my head right now?” I asked instead.

Her brow furrowed.

“Want a peek?” I cocked an eyebrow.

When she didn’t answer, I pressed on. “I’m wondering if you’re as much of a submissive as I think you are. If I told you to get on your knees and suck my cock, would you do it? I bet you would.”

Her jaw dropped open, giving me quite the visual.

“I’m wondering what would happen if I tied you up so I could lick every inch of your body. Would you go into full-blown panic mode? I think, maybe not.”

Her pupils dilated. Her breathing deepened. “You’re insane,” she said, her voice a little breathless.

“And you’re turned on. I told you ‘crazy’ was a desirable trait.”

Corinne was silent for a long minute.

She really looked like she wanted to argue but was coming up short of an argument. There was no denying the sexual energy in the air, snapping like a live wire between us.

If I didn't walk away now, I was going to fuck her.

She wouldn't fight me; she wanted it, too.

She was Fallon's best friend.

She was emotionally compromised.

Most importantly, she was bait.

# Chapter Ten

## Corinne

“I lied,” I said as Dante turned to walk away.

I don’t know what made me do it. Maybe I was crazy—was there really a better explanation for it? Perhaps I was just so hard up that one kiss had me offering up everything. *Ugh, pathetic.* Or... maybe this was the perfect next move. Make it look like I felt guilty for hiding something from him, make it look like I was on board with his plan—whatever that plan was. Make him trust me, because so far as I could see, it was my only hope of getting out of his prison.

He turned around slowly. “Lied about what?” he said, his tone cautious, his eyes piercing.

Okay, maybe this wasn’t such a good idea. Too late to take it back now.

I walked over to my laptop and opened it.

He’d never see the photo of Camilla with the cartel—I’d deleted that one permanently.

I typed in the password to access the real hidden files on my computer.

It didn’t matter much if he saw my email now—since I’d already made the monumental slip about the FBI.

“There’s someone I haven’t been able to identify yet—someone I hadn’t seen with them before,” I said.

He didn't speak, just stared at me with eyes so penetrating, it kind of felt like he was burning a hole right into my brain.

I clicked on the photo, and it popped up, filling the screen.

Slowly, Dante turned his attention to the laptop, staring at the picture of the blond man with nearly the same intensity. Something flashed in his eyes. It reminded me of a DEFCON sign, urging me to run for cover before the bombs went off.

I squared my shoulders.

He was bigger than me, stronger than me; the only weapon I had was my backbone.

There was no way I would let this man see me cower.

"What's wrong?" I asked in the most flippant tone I could muster.

He kept staring at the screen, silent for what felt like ages. When he finally spoke, I really wished he hadn't.

"What else haven't you told me?" His tone was cool, devoid of emotion.

"Excuse me?"

"When I told you I needed to know what information you've gathered, is there anything else you decided to leave out?"

"Are you serious?" I hissed, getting in his face, even if I had to stand on tiptoes to do it. "You kidnap me, demand I hand over information I've busted my ass and risked my life to get. And I do it because... well, who knows what came over me. But it was *my* research, Dante. Not yours. You had no right to it, and if you weren't..." *a Luca*, I thought to myself, but no way did I let those words slip out.

He sighed, staring back at me while the muscles of his jaw twitched.



“That’s a problem,” he said, pointing to the blond man on the screen.

I was kind of expecting him to shoot me. “You recognize him? I’d never seen him with them before.”

Dante nodded but elaborated no further.

“Care to share?”

“No,” he said without equivocation.

“Seriously?”

“It’s family business, Corinne.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” I wailed, slamming my fist on the table. “This is important to me, Dante. You know why I’m doing this. If you know something...”

I could practically see the battle going on in his eyes. He had no reason to—

“That’s Amadeo Luciano,” he said, nodding to the blond man, but his eyes remained on me.

Every time I thought I had him figured out, he threw me for a loop.

*Luciano...* I knew little about that family, just the few things Fallon had told me, none of which involved them doing shady deals with *Las Serpientes*. But then, how had Camilla wound up involved with both the cartel *and* the mafia?

Looking at Dante, I shut down the thought. He was so close he could probably hear me thinking.

“When and where did you take this?” he asked.

“Outside Ascension, a week ago.”

I could still clearly see the limo and the tattooed “chauffeur” who’d chased me. I wondered what had happened to him, whether the kings had been furious with him for coming back empty-handed. Probably. That guy had gotten

close—way too close. And getting close to me was a bad idea—one only need to look at the people in my life to see that. Camilla... my mom... my stepdad.

“Corinne?” Dante’s voice pressed against the growing bubble of chaos in my head.

“What?” I asked, a little belatedly, bursting the bubble. Memories of blood hit me anew, making my hands feel sticky, dirty. “Here,” I said, handing him the laptop and making a beeline for the sink.

I washed my hands, scrubbing them with the almond-scented hand soap that was nothing like the aloe and hibiscus soap I had at home. Without drying them, I washed them again, and again, and again. My insides sighed as the sticky sensation faded.

I turned around and found Dante standing behind me, a hair’s breadth away.

“What brought that on?” he asked.

“Nothing.”

“Fine, have it your way. I’ve got bigger problems than obsessive handwashing at the moment.”

“Why would a Luciano be spending time with *Las Serpientes*?” I asked.

He shrugged. “It could be innocent, a new supply source,” he said, shrugging.

I raised an eyebrow. Only a Luca would think to describe drugs as “*innocent*”.

“Fuck!” he suddenly cursed, making me jump. “Whatever the reason, it means I’m going to have to let Dom in on what I’ve been doing.”

“Your brother doesn’t know?”

I wasn't exactly buddy-buddy with the Lucas, but I'd heard Fallon talk about them enough to have gotten the sense they were all pretty close.

“No, he doesn't, and he isn't going to be happy.”

Oh good. More unhappy Lucas. Lucky me.

# Chapter Eleven

## Dante

Sweat rolled down my back as I swung a cross punch, connecting with air as Dom shifted out of the way.

“So, are you going to tell me why the sudden interest in sparring down here?” he asked, coming in with a lead hook that might have had a chance of hitting its mark if I was twenty years older and out of practice.

I shrugged, then feinted right and stepped left, avoiding a left cross. “Because I have a feeling you’re going to want to hit me pretty soon.”

Dom dropped his hands, eyeing me suspiciously. “What did you do?”

“I’ve been tracking *Los Serpientes* for the past four months,” I said, seeing no point in tiptoeing around it. “I’ve been cozying up to them under the guise of branching away from the Luca family and getting myself involved in the human trafficking trade.”

His eyes widened. “Are you insane?” he railed, coming in with a jab.

I didn’t bother blocking it. I figured I owed my brother at least that much.

“Why?” he asked, looking ready to throw another dozen punches.

“Gia.”

His arms dropped to his sides, and some of the rage in his gray eyes fell away.

All of us had a soft spot for Rosa and Gia. Their father—their only living family member—had been killed in a gunfight between the Lucas and a rival family when I was a kid. The girls would have been shoved into foster care if it wasn't for my mother, who'd arranged for the best care for them. Unlike Dom, though, I'd gone with our mother to check in on them regularly. Maria Luca had made sure no one ever forgot that the Lucas had demanded the best of care for the girls.

“She's been missing for four months, taken from Ascension.” I told him about the phone call I'd gotten from Rosa, about the bouncer, and all that had happened since—at least, most of it. “I also have reason to believe Amadeo has gotten mixed up with the cartel somehow. He was seen with them a week ago.”

“Fucking wonderful,” Dom said, shaking his head. There was a vein pulsing in his temple, but all in all, it had gone better than I'd expected... so far. “Any other secrets I ought to know about?”

I let out a sigh. “Corinne's staying at an apartment I rented.”

Dom rolled his eyes. “Corinne? Fallon's best friend, Corinne?”

I nodded.

“Have you seriously slept your way through so much of the state that it's down to the girls close to home?”

“It isn't like that. I wish it were that simple,” I said, leaving out the thousand and one fantasies I'd had, like the one where I have her on her hands and knees on my bed while I hold onto that perfect ass of hers and fuck her senseless.

He stared at me, looking baffled. “You’ve got to be kidding me. You and Corinne?”

“No, that’s crazy,” I said, shaking my head for emphasis.

“Then explain it to me.”

I steeled my shoulders. “I saw her at Ascension the other night. They were going to take her, so I took her instead,” I explained. “It wasn’t random. They’re targeting her, Dom, possibly because of her amateur investigation, but it feels like more. The capo wanted *her*, but why?”

When I finished speaking, I was surprised to find anger thrumming through my veins.

“What was Fallon’s best friend doing at Ascension?” Dom barked like I’d had anything to do with it. According to my birth certificate, Dom was *my* older brother, not Corinne’s. “And last time I checked, Corinne worked at the vet clinic with Fallon. She’s not some undercover reporter. What investigation are you talking about?”

“Her sister went missing a few months ago, thanks to *Las Serpientes*. She’s been doing her own digging ever since.”

Dom stared at me, his arms like dead weights at his sides. He kind of look offended, hurt, pissed off, worried, and confused all at the same time.

I almost laughed. Corinne had that effect.

“She never said anything. Why didn’t she say anything?” he asked.

“She’s got some issues. That’s for her and Fallon to work out when Corinne’s ready,” I said, shrugging.

Dom eyed me like he could drag the answers out of my head, but when they didn’t miraculously jump out of my ears, he shook his head, letting it go for the time being to focus on the question that I could see was really eating him up.

“When you say you ‘took’ her, what exactly do you mean by that?” Dom cocked a brow.

“I mean, I put her unconscious ass in the back of my car and took her back to my apartment. Corinne thinks she knows what she’s doing, but she doesn’t. Letting her run free is just going to get her ass kidnapped. So, she stays put.”

“You can’t keep Fallon’s best friend locked up like a prisoner, *fratello*.”

“So, what do you propose? Let her go and see how long it takes for the cartel to make her disappear? They’re coming after her regardless, Dom. Do you want me to send her out there to be devoured by wolves? Or would you rather I keep her close and shoot the wolves when they come close?”

Dom sighed. “Bring her here,” he said like that solved the problem.

“No.”

“What do you mean, no?” The vein in his temple was back to pulsing.

“I mean I need you to trust me,” I said, holding his gaze.

He eyed me, his gray eyes contemplative. “I don’t like this, Dante.”

“And you think I do? This wasn’t exactly part of the plan, but I’m working with what I’ve got here. Corinne needs to stay put until I’ve dealt with this shit.”

Dom sighed and ran his fingers through his sweat-dampened hair. Fortunately, I knew that resigned look on his face. “Take however many men you need to keep her well-guarded, but you’d better know what you’re doing, Dante.”

I nodded, hiding the fact that while I wasn’t sure it was the best plan I’d ever concocted, it was the *only* plan.

“You should have come to me about Gia. You don’t think we would have helped?” Dom asked.

“*You* can’t help.”

“Why not?” But a look of understanding dawned before I could explain it. “Because of the girls we rescued,” he answered his own question.

“No one was going to believe the Lucas are looking to get in on human trafficking when they’re busting open shipping containers full of girls and letting them loose. I had to come off as the rogue brother.”

“You still could have come talked to me, *fratello*.”

“Could I?”

Dom cocked an eyebrow.

“To pull this off, I may have to do things, things you wouldn’t approve of. Things I’m sure Ella wouldn’t approve of, which means Leo wouldn’t either. The least of which would be keeping Fallon’s friend locked up safe in my apartment, and look how you reacted to that.”

Dom nodded after a long, silent moment. “I’ll get in contact with Amadeo. If he’s trafficking girls, he’ll be a dead end, but otherwise, maybe he knows something that could help.”

“*Grazie, fratello*.” I grabbed a towel from the shelf on the wall and tossed one to Dom.

Sparring practice was over. I’d said what needed to be said. It was time to get back to what needed to be done.

“And Dante?”

“*Si?*” I said, stopping at the bottom of the stairs.

“You’d better fucking keep Corinne safe.”



# Chapter Twelve

## Corinne

Dante might have been smart enough to take his phone, disable the Wi-Fi, and station Rome in the apartment, *and* put two men outside the door.

But he wasn't smart enough to take the matches from the kitchen drawer.

It had taken me an hour to work up the nerve to sneak them into my dress and another half an hour to ever-so-quietly tear a page from the microwave's instruction manual—the only source of paper in the whole apartment.

I glanced over from the kitchen into the living room where Rome sat on the sofa, his long legs stretched out in front of him. Apparently, he was no longer a door-guarding rottweiler; he was allowed on the furniture now.

"I'm going to go grab a shower. I assume that's on Dante's list of things Corinne is *allowed* to do?" I cocked an eyebrow and assumed an appropriately haughty expression.

Rome laughed. "You, in the shower, *signorina*? *Si*, I imagine that's on the list of things *Signor* Luca would approve."

I scowled at him, half-heartedly. Maybe it was his easy smile or his stupid warm, golden-brown eyes. I'd never be foolish enough to categorize him as a safe guy, but he didn't have the same air of menace and intensity around him as Dante did.

Carefully, so as not to rustle the paper tucked beneath my dress, I headed for the bathroom, taking a wide circle around Rome on the sofa. Even with an easy smile and warm eyes, he was still twice my size and, no doubt, lethal. And did I mention he also happened to work for the guy who'd kidnapped me?

In the bathroom, I closed the door behind me and shook the matches and paper out of my dress. And then I started to count.

If the alarm went off right away, Rome would have no doubts about the source of the fire.

I turned on the faucet, running it on cold to avoid too much moisture building up in the room. It would have looked more authentic if I ditched my dress for a towel... but that wasn't happening. Nope, I wasn't going to make my great escape from my prison in a *bath towel*.

But because I was me and couldn't not notice the dust along the top of the bathroom mirror and the finger-smudge on the front of the vanity, I kept count of the time in my head while I dusted and scrubbed until the mirror was dust-free and the vanity shined. And there were no more water spots on the sink.

Precisely ten minutes later, I struck a match and lit one end of the twisted paper in my hand. The fire caught in an instant, flaring to life while smoke curled from the flaming tip.

I held it up to the smoke alarm.

Three seconds passed before the little red light started to blink and the alarms blared throughout the apartment.

I swear I could even hear one sounding from beyond the apartment. Just as I'd hoped, all the alarms in the building were connected.

Before the flames reached my fingers, I dropped the paper into the sink and ran the water, tossing it into the trash can.

I stepped out of the bathroom to find Rome already on his feet, a phone pressed to his ear.

“Got it, boss,” he said then hung up his phone.

“Is there a fire?” I asked, feeling like I made my eyes widen just a little too much.

I made a mental note to invest in some acting classes before my next kidnapping—always good to be prepared.

“*Si*, it seems there is,” he said with a wry smile. “Come with me, please, *signorina*.” He motioned for me to follow him out of the apartment.

I wasn’t fooling anyone, but that didn’t stop me from plastering a panicked expression on my face and hurrying to the door. I hovered at the threshold for just a moment before forcing my feet out into the hallway.

My brain threw up its objections—too many people, too many ways to make a fool of myself, too many dangers—but I forced my feet to walk right through every objection.

Down the hall, into the elevator, down to the main floor lobby. I stayed close to the handsome rottweiler, playing the obedient captive, all the way to the rear passenger door of the black Escalade parked beside the building.

Rome opened the door for me, and I slid in, nearly bouncing on the seat to the other side and out the opposite door.

Without glancing back, I took off.

Rome was muscular, but he wasn’t built like a tank; he wouldn’t have the same difficulty catching up to me as the hulk had the other night.

My bare feet pounded against the pavement.

Dante had taken my shoes, but it wasn't like stiletto heels were good getaway apparel anyway.

I waited to feel the goon's hand around my arm, to feel his bullet in my back.

No hand.

No bullet.

I kept running, trying to listen over my pounding heartbeat. I could hear the traffic rushing by. Music blaring from one of the cars on my left. But no running footsteps.

I ran for another minute even as the foot traffic on the sidewalk grew denser, weaving around a couple holding hands, a family with three kids trailing behind them, two women in power suits, and a man carrying a briefcase. All the while, fighting the urge to hide in the darkest alley I could find.

Chancing a glance back, there was no sign of Rome. No one chasing me.

I almost felt bad for him; Dante was going to be pissed.

"All right, now what?" I pondered aloud.

Escape had been my first priority, but where to go from here was murky. Recognizing my surroundings, I was now only three blocks away from my own apartment.

I couldn't stay there, but a brief stop meant fresh clothes, money, and most importantly, my phone. My aching feet suggested shoes wouldn't be a bad idea either.

Not wasting another moment, I ran the few blocks to my apartment, darted up the stairs, not even taking the time to wait for the elevator.

Inside, I stuttered to an abrupt stop.

The throw cushions from the couch didn't greet me from their perfect forty-five-degree angle. They'd been tossed on the floor, the cupboards and drawers in the kitchen were all open, and there was blood on the carpet.

My bedroom had been torn apart, and my office door was open, the photos all ripped off the walls. My eyes kept coming back to the blood. Blood on my carpet. Sticky blood that would never come out.

My breathing was coming in faster than I could handle.

I dashed to the sink and turned it on, scrubbing my hands over and over until they felt right again.

Keeping my eyes off the living room floor, I darted to my bedroom and threw on a pair of capris, a halter-style top, and a pair of strappy sandals, trying to keep my breathing slow and even, and failing miserably.

I grabbed my purse from where it had been tossed on the kitchen counter. Someone had rummaged through it, but everything was there—including my cell phone. It only had one bar left. I turned it on and dialed Agent Fuentes' number.

"Agent Fuentes here," he said when he answered the phone. It wasn't his personal number, but he'd given me a number to reach him directly at work.

"Agent Fuentes, it's Corinne. I—"

"Corinne, you finally got my messages? I was beginning to worry."

"I didn't get your messages, I was..." *Kidnapped*. I shook my head. "You were trying to reach me?" I asked instead.

"I have—"

"Can we meet?" I said, wiping my hands down my pants. I needed to get out of this apartment. Now. Not only was the mess threatening to overwhelm me, but it wouldn't take Dante

long after Rome told him I was gone to figure out where I went.

He was silent for one long painstaking moment. “I suppose I can make some time.”

“I’ll be at the Busy Bean Cafe in ten minutes.” I hung up the phone before he could object.

Squinting at the door, trying to look at nothing else, I wrapped my hand in my shirt and turned the handle, hurrying back the way I’d come.

The café was a three-minute walk away, but I deterred around the back of the apartment building, taking a less busy street to my destination to avoid being seen from the main street.

Arriving at the café precisely ten minutes after hanging up the phone, I slipped inside as a customer came out then hurried to a seat in the back where Agent Fuentes was already waiting, clean-shaven, his short, black hair neatly combed back and not a spot of wrinkle in his dark gray suit. He kind of looked like one of those men who couldn’t stand to get dirty—not that I was one to talk. He held a file in one hand and wore a tentative smile.

I sat down across from him, keeping my hands away from the cesspool of a table.

“I’m surprised you wanted to meet here,” he said, already familiar with my peculiarities.

I shrugged. “My apartment’s being fumigated,” I lied.

*I didn’t want Dante to be arrested,* I realized.

I wasn’t afraid of what would happen if I did it. Thoughts of his pecs jumped to mind. The long, thick length of his cock as he’d held me up against the wall. The firm press of his lips and the taste of his mouth when he’d kissed me.

“I have something for you,” Agent Fuentes said.

A straitjacket, maybe?

He placed a folder down in front of me instead, and I opened it up, staring at the single photo that laid inside. A picture of Camilla, standing outside a private plane next to one of the kings, Andres Suarez.

If it was possible, I felt my heart sinking and soaring at the same time.

It wasn't just me who'd seen Camilla. Agent Fuentes had seen her *too*. He knew she was alive. It made it more real. It made Camilla somehow seem more reachable.

“You found her,” I breathed, forgetting all about pecs and Dante's other body parts I had no business focusing on.

He nodded. “I did, but I'm not sure it's all good news. I'm afraid your sister doesn't look like a helpless victim in that picture. If she's involved...” He let the thought trail off, but I could hear it loud and clear.

If the FBI was successful in getting to her, she'd be arrested, treated like a criminal.

“There has to be another explanation,” I insisted, staring at the picture.

Camilla wasn't a criminal. She was impulsive and stubborn, moody at times, but so full of life. She wouldn't throw it away for this—whatever *this* was.

“That could very well be true,” he said unconvincingly with a consoling half-smile that didn't reach his brown eyes. “I'm just telling you how it looks from my perspective.”

I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to figure out how I was going to find her all while preventing Dante Luca from killing her and the FBI from arresting her.

“Thank you, Agent Fuentes,” I said. “I hope you’ll be in touch if you find anything else.”

He reached out to put his hand on mine in a comforting gesture but stopped at the last second, reaching for the coffee mug in front of him instead.

I nodded in acknowledgement and stood up, trying to figure out where to go from here, both metaphorically and literally.

I couldn’t go back to my apartment because I was, apparently, too crazy—or maybe just too horny—to rat out my kidnapper. A hotel? I shuddered at the thought, but it wasn’t like I had a lot of options at the moment.

After saying goodbye to Agent Fuentes, I left the café, stepping out into the afternoon sun and about a thousand people bustling by.

I headed back the way I’d come and turned off the main street a minute later.

Dante stood twenty feet away, leaning against the hood of a black Mercedes, looking like he just stepped off a runway. He looked good enough to eat. He had his arms crossed over his broad chest and wore a scowl that transformed his handsome face into a portrait of rage. His eyes, snapping with angry blue fire, were fixed at some point past my shoulder.

A gasp slipped out of me.

Every fiber of my being was screaming at me to run, but I wasn’t stupid enough to think I could outrun him. All I could do was face him head-on, knowing there was a good chance I was about to become fish food.

I stood up taller, hands at my sides, my chin tilted up defiantly.

“You can either come with me, *luna*, or you can go with them,” Dante said, nodding past me.



I turned to look, to follow where he was pointing, and spotted the dark gray sedan.

The windows weren't tinted; I could see the dark-haired kings, side by side in the back seat and the tattooed hulk behind the wheel.

Three car doors opened, and all the men inside stepped out.

"Make your call, Corinne," Dante said.

His arms were no longer crossed, and he had a gun in one hand. One of his lackeys had appeared, standing next to the driver's side door—Cristian, I thought his name was. Tall and blond and of course, handsome—like all the mafia men in the Luca clan, it seemed.

I chanced a glance in the other direction, truly understanding what it meant to be caught between a rock and a hard place.

The kings and the hulk approached, guns in their hands, though we were standing out in broad daylight. Even if none of them were aiming at me, there was no way I didn't get caught in the cross fire here.

"Corinne?" Dante said. He didn't sound the least bit frazzled by the approaching gunmen.

Maybe it was the calmness in his voice that drew me in.

"You, Dante. I freaking choose you," I said, not nearly as calmly.

Dante nodded, and seemingly out of nowhere, Rome stepped out from a door at the side of the building, directly into the path of the approaching men, a gun in each of his hands.

"You heard the lady, she's coming with us," he said, cocking one of his guns as he took aim at the tattooed hulk.

Rome was standing between me and them. He'd put himself directly in the line of fire... for me. What was Rome thinking? I couldn't help noticing, though, that he looked a lot more menacing than I remembered.

The kings stared at me. Their gazes weren't intense like Dante's; they were dark and grimy, making me feel like there were slugs crawling all over my body.

"Come here, Corinne," Dante called, his voice still calm and sure, compelling my legs into action.

Cristian opened the rear passenger door as I approached, and Dante nodded toward it, never taking his eyes off the hulk and the kings behind me.

I climbed into the back seat obediently, then looked up, meeting the hulk's gaze through the windshield.

It was only then I noticed the fading greenish bruise in the center of his forehead. The bruise I'd given him when I chucked my camera at him.

"Tell your boss she belongs to me, Suarez," Dante said.

He slid in next to me while Cristian took the seat behind the wheel. Rome remained where he was as Cristian shifted the car into reverse.

"We can't just leave him," I cried because it seemed Rome had gotten under my skin and I wasn't so fine with leaving him to die.

Dante and Cristian both laughed.

"Don't worry about Rome, *luna*. You've got much bigger problems to worry about."

"Like what?"

His jaw was clenched tight, but somehow, he still managed to smile. It wasn't a happy smile. Actually, it was the darkest smile I'd ever seen. My heart pounded in my chest.

“Me, *luna*. I’d be much more worried about me.”

# Chapter Thirteen

## Dante

I sat with my jaw clenched shut the entire drive back, fuming and celebrating at the same time.

Mostly fuming.

At least the woman sitting next to me was smart enough to keep her mouth closed. Her knuckles were another story. Four cracks, then a pause. Four cracks, then a pause. It should have been annoying, but it was like a neon sign, letting me gauge just how stressed out she was at the moment.

When we reached the apartment, it surprised me when she followed me in with only a moment's hesitation.

Corinne made a beeline for the sink the moment she stepped inside.

I shook my head as I watched her scrub her hands again and again. Her 1940s' pinup-girl outfit wasn't doing the fly of my jeans any favors. One tug on the tie at the back of her neck, and her top would fall down, revealing her breasts that I wanted to see bounce and jiggle while I drilled my cock inside her.

With the amount of blood rushing to my cock, there wasn't going to be any left to power the other head.

“What did you tell your agent friend?” I asked bluntly when she'd finally finished with the handwashing, needing to keep my head in the game and off her body.

She scoffed without turning to face me. “You’re all buddy-buddy with Fallon’s father. Surely, you’ve got the FBI in your pocket too. Why not just go ask him?”

*Strangle her or fuck her?*

The line was getting blurrier.

But it was game time.

A game I always won.

I approached her from behind, pressing up close against her, leaning down until my lips brushed her ear.

“If you’ve brought trouble to my family’s doorstep,” I whispered, “I suggest you tell me right now.”

Trapped between my body and the counter, her breathing grew heavier, and for one fleeting moment, she softened against me. Then the moment passed.

“Get fucked and—”

I spun her around before she could finish, trapping her face-to-face, the counter at her back. “I would also suggest you stop dangling that offer, *luna*, or you might find me taking you up on it.”

“It’s not an offer, asshole,” she said, her voice too breathless, her eyes hooded.

“I think your body disagrees.” I pressed my hips harder against her, feeling her body respond. “I think you’re wet for me. I can practically smell it off you.” I leaned in close until a hair’s breadth separated my lips from hers. “I think you’d love it if I bent you over this counter and fucked you until the only concern in your sexy head is just how hard you’re going to come on my cock.”

“You’re insane,” she whispered even as her thighs clenched.

“Damn right.” Heat sparked like electricity between us. My cock was rock-hard, trying to punch right through my pants. I was supposed to be the one seducing her; clearly, my cock missed the memo. “What did you tell your agent friend, *luna*?”

She blinked, coming back to reality, but instead of tensing up against me again, she leaned into me, stretching up on her toes until her lips brushed against my ear.

“I told him... nothing,” she said, her voice low.

She leaned away and slipped beneath my arm while I stood there with my balls as blue as the sky.

Minutes later, I heard her slam the bedroom door behind her.

Despite my raging hard-on, I couldn't help but chuckle.

\*\*\*

“So, do you believe her?” Cristian asked as he set down the empty whiskey glass on the coffee table.

“I do.”

“I wonder why she kept her mouth shut,” Cristian mused aloud, refilling our empty glasses.

“Maybe she didn't spill it all to her agent friend because she thinks Fallon will be pissed at her for getting her brother-in-law locked up.”

He laughed. “I don't know, I think maybe she's warming up to you.”

I clicked my tongue. “She's stayed in that room all day,” I said, nodding toward my closed bedroom door. “She made one appearance to grab food, and let me tell you, if anyone could shoot death rays from their eyes, it's her. Of course, if she knew what I was planning, she'd probably skip the death rays and go straight for the steak knives.”

The asshole laughed harder then sobered. “You say that, but maybe she kept her mouth shut because she’s finally realizing the Suarez brothers are bigger assholes than we are.”

I scoffed. “Doubtful.”

“Not the brightest, is she?” Cristian looked at me like he was gauging my response.

“She’s plenty bright. She’s just got her head wrapped up in her little mission to rescue her sister.”

He smiled, swiping a hand over his mouth to cover it. *Asshole*. “You’re still sure about this, boss? There’s nothing saying we have to go through with it.”

“I’m sure it’s been four months, and if Gia is still alive, she’s running out of time.”

I looked over at the closed bedroom door—*my* bedroom door.

Corinne was probably sound asleep, completely oblivious of what was coming.

Cristian pressed his lips together in a flat line.

“Spit it out, for fuck’s sake,” I growled.

He shrugged, not looking the least bit ruffled. “Shit goes wrong all the time, that’s all. Just making sure you’re okay with that.”

“We’ve got it covered. Nothing’s going to go wrong.” I swallowed the rest of my whiskey in one gulp.

“All right, that’s it then, boss. All we’ve got to do is wait. You want to go over the plan one more time?”

“No,” I barked.

Cristian smiled, which pissed me off more. He wasn’t even trying to hide it.

“Show me the tracking from this afternoon one more time,”  
I said because I’d apparently lost my balls sometime in the  
past twenty-four hours.



# Chapter Fourteen

## Corinne

I couldn't sleep.

No matter how long I spent tossing and turning, it just wouldn't come.

Everything I'd done wrong, every stupid decision I'd made kept running through my head like a movie reel, interspersed with brief erotic advertisements for my captor. Except, he wasn't my *captor* anymore. He'd given me the choice, and I'd made it.

*You're horny*, the words whispered from the back of my mind as advertisement number six thousand and one took center stage.

Dante, trapping me from behind, his muscular body surrounding me and the hard length of his cock pressing against the small of my back. All right, so they weren't really *advertisements*, they were memories. They had me so primed, it felt like I'd go off with just one touch, one brush of his fingers against my clit, one glide of his tongue.

I flipped over onto my back, finding the idea of grinding my hips into the mattress too tempting.

I'd never tried getting off on a mattress before.

Was that a thing?

Fingers seemed a whole lot easier. Maybe if I just—

The doorknob turned slowly, gearing up advertisement number six thousand and two.

*Would it really be so bad if I just slept with him? Just a little?*

A little? What the hell was ‘a little’? When the lady parts did the thinking, they really didn’t think things through, did they?

The door opened slowly, spilling a sliver of dim light across the foot of the bed. The lights in the apartment were all off; it must have been moonlight from the living room’s big window.

Tingles shot through my body, settling at the apex of my thighs, which totally made my lady parts think they’d won.

Something niggled at the back of my mind.

Dante wasn’t the type of guy to creep around and take things slow.

If he wanted me, he’d burst through the door and take what he wanted.

Seconds had passed, and the door was barely open a few inches.

Someone was taking it very slow.

I could see the dark shadow of someone standing there, pushing the door open more until the dim light spilled across half the bed.

The tingles vanished.

Whoever it was on the other side of the door wasn’t Dante.

*Paranoid much?* a voice taunted, but this wasn’t paranoia. I *knew* him... sort of... okay, not really, but I knew him well enough to know that if he’d planned to fuck me, he wouldn’t be taking his time.

I clenched my hands into fists at my sides, resisting the urge to crack them and forcing my body to remain still.

I closed my eyes, feigning sleep, keeping them open just enough to see through thin slits.

Dante had taken my stilettos, my rings, even my necklace; I had nothing with which to defend myself. I should have stolen some of the silverware from the kitchen. At least then, I would have been able to gouge out eyes with a salad fork.

The door opened more, revealing a tall, dark figure. This man was a little shorter than Dante, too bulky. A second dark shadow hovered behind him, even more difficult to make out than the first.

It was *them*. It had to be.

This was what I'd wanted, wasn't it?

I tried to call up the girl I'd been the other night, the girl who'd been at wit's end, desperate, willing to do whatever it took to find Camilla.

But that girl had been tired and alone, with no choice but to throw herself into the shark's tank.

*This* girl had Dante Luca, who was hunting for the same monsters, doing whatever it took to get to them.

My body trembled as realization dawned.

No way did a couple of the kings' thugs get into Dante Luca's apartment without a fight... unless Dante Luca was choosing not to fight.

He was letting this happen.

He'd probably *wanted* this to happen.

*"I told someone that I would either bring her back or the heads of everyone who had anything to do with her death,"* he'd said.

The girl with the blonde hair and hazel eyes was his priority.

I was expendable.

*I was bait.*

Betrayal cut through my chest like a knife as one of the shadows stepped into the room, illuminated enough by the dim light that I could make out his square jaw and the thick, twisted scar that ran down the entire right side of his tanned face. He walked silently across the carpet, headed right for me as the second figure approached behind him.

Did I have any chance of escaping two men?

My only shot would be to catch them off guard, take them by surprise. Even then, it was a long shot. The chances of me getting past two men who'd come for me specifically weren't good—and that was assuming Dante didn't lend them a helping hand, maybe wrap me up in gift wrap and top me with a bow. I bet the asshole did have tape in his stupid apartment.

The first man's knees bumped the mattress directly beside me. Both men were in the room now, but I needed the second guy to come a little closer, leaving me a direct path to the open doorway.

A hand came down on my mouth, pressing my head into the pillow, at the same time, cutting off my ability to scream.

A gun cocked, and the bedroom light flipped on.

“Get away from her. Right. Now.” It was Dante's voice, colder than I'd ever heard it, so cold it sent shivers down my spine.

I grabbed for the hand on my mouth, digging my fingers in deep.

The hand pressed down harder. “No can do, *ese*. She doesn't belong to—”

The gun went off once, twice.

Two loud cracks that jolted through my body, the sound so loud it made my ears ring.

More gunshots sounded somewhere beyond the bedroom, loud but not deafening, at the same time, there was a thud somewhere near the end of the bed and the hand on my mouth let go.

The man fell across my body.

He didn't fight; he didn't get back up.

He laid there, face buried in the mattress, while blood poured out from—

*Blood.* It poured from his chest onto me, soaking my shirt, saturating the fabric.

It was on *me*.

There was a man's blood on *my body*.

“Get rid of them,” Dante said to Cristian, who'd appeared in the doorway. “Tell Rizzo to get rid of their car and anyone in it.”

Cristian eyed Dante strangely then nodded and left without a word.

Or maybe I just didn't hear him.

I wasn't sure I could hear anything over the pounding of my heartbeat in my ears.

Dante turned to me, tucking the gun in the back waist of his pants. He grabbed the dead man on top of me and hauled him off like the guy weighed nothing.

“Corinne, it's over,” he said like that was somehow supposed to be reassuring. He took a cautious step in my direction then another. “Are you—”

“Don’t talk to me,” I spat, flying off the bed before he could reach me.

Shakespeare could have risen from the dead, and I wouldn’t have cared.

I needed to get the blood off me.

I ran across the living room, leaping over the body lying next to the sofa, and headed straight for the bathroom.

Inside, I slammed the door shut and started the shower, stepping beneath the cold spray without stripping off my bloodstained clothes.

I shivered as I grabbed the bottle of bodywash and the loofah that had miraculously appeared at the tub’s edge.

The water had begun to warm by the time I started to scrub, rinsing and repeating over and over again. The stain on my shirt and the top of my capris wouldn’t come out. It was stuck there. It would always be there. And just as much, I could feel the blood beneath it, warm and sticky, no matter how many times I washed and rinsed it away.

I don’t know how much time had passed when the bathroom door opened and Dante walked in.

Well, no lock could keep a man like him out.

“Are you okay?” he asked, standing just inside the doorway.

“Get out,” I growled.

Instead, he came closer. “Tell me you’re okay, *luna*.”

He looked like he was genuinely concerned.

Apparently, the man could act.

“I don’t have to tell you anything. That was no coincidence,” I said, pointing toward the bedroom. “This was a setup. *I* was a freaking setup,” I screamed.

“What do you care?” he asked, watching me. “You were prepared to throw your life away. You’re pissed that I was willing to take a risk too?”

“But you didn’t,” I said. He hadn’t thrown my life away. He’d killed them. “Why?” I asked, trying desperately to look a whole lot more together than I felt—not an easy task when you’re standing in a shower fully clothed, scrubbing off blood nobody else could see.

He stared at me like he was searching for the answer and thought he’d find it somewhere on my face.

Eventually, he shrugged and looked away, letting his gaze sweep over my drenched body.

“Because I wasn’t willing to take that risk,” Dante said then turned and walked out of the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

# Chapter Fifteen

## Corinne

I was finally clean... sort of.

So long as I didn't think about it too much, I could barely feel the stickiness of the blood that had been smeared across my abdomen.

Now I had a new problem, because I needed more problems. Problems were my favorite thing. Really, I didn't have enough already.

I'd spent two hours scrubbing off blood, eventually giving up on the shirt and capris that were stained beyond hope, which meant I now had no clothes, nothing but the towel I'd wrapped around me like armor. No clothes in an apartment with a guy who'd planned to use me as bait.

*But he didn't*, something in me rationalized, though I wasn't sure that was better.

Instead of using me as bait, he'd murdered two men and probably gave the kill order for the other dead bodies I'd seen scattered on the floor on my mad dash to the bathroom.

I'd seen Dante's face after he pulled the trigger. No remorse. No concern. Nothing. Just ice-cold murderer.

*This* was why Lucas were a bad idea.

A really bad idea.

How Fallon managed to stay sane when she was surrounded by this on a regular basis was a mystery.



I'd go loopy surrounded by this much blood.

I was just about to heave myself up off the bathroom floor and head for the shower again when *he* walked in.

His eyes met mine, but he didn't speak.

He stared at me for a long moment then turned away and started the shower.

He grabbed the hem of his shirt and started pulling it up over his head, revealing a canvas of jacked muscle. Narrow hips, rippling abs, pecs that looked like they were made for my tongue. The man was built like a god.

"What are you doing?" I managed to force out.

My lady parts were tingling and my lungs were heaving breath like it was going out of style.

"It's kind of obvious, isn't it?" he said, turning to hang his shirt up on a hook on the back of the door.

His hands moved to the front of his pants, and though he was turned away from me, I recognized the sound of his zipper just fine.

If there'd been any doubt about the sound, when he hooked his thumbs in the waist of his pants and dragged them off, all that doubt vanished along with my ability to close my jaw.

He hung his pants and boxer briefs on the back of the door, leaving me with an eyeful of muscled thighs and an ass that was like two perfect globes with a small divot on either side of his spine.

My brain forgot everything about the past couple of hours.

All that existed in the world were his body and mine.

I wanted to lick him all over.

Was that weird? Yeah, that was definitely weird.

Dante turned and stepped into the shower.

My lady parts screamed with glee.

He was fully erect, his cock long and thick. Gnomes could have camped under there.

I wanted to run my tongue along the ridge beneath the head then suck him into my mouth like a popsicle.

He looked down at me when he'd finished rinsing beneath the showerhead, flashing me a cocky smile.

“What can I say? There's a gorgeous woman in my bathroom wearing nothing but a towel, and my cock likes an audience.” He shrugged as he reached for the soap.

He went about washing his body, seemingly not the least bit bothered by my presence, even if I was staring like a zombie. A zombie who was very wet and who wanted some very choice parts of him inside me.

When he wrapped a hand around one of those choice parts, soaping himself up, I nearly came right there. This guy was a murderer. A murdering Luca man. Maybe a psychopath... a sociopath, at least. And here I was, on the verge of orgasm, and the psycho hadn't even touched me yet.

He dropped his hand and stepped beneath the spray to rinse off, and I remembered how to breathe again.

“Feel better?” he asked when he finished rinsing and shut off the faucet.

Did hornier than I'd ever been in my life qualify as better?

I realized then that I hadn't given one thought to the blood since he'd walked in here.

I was no longer on the verge of hyperventilating.

My breathing was coming slow and deep, my breasts felt heavy, and the need pulsing between my legs was driving me to distraction.

“Come here, *luna*.”

Without thinking, I obeyed the darkness in his voice.

It was like a drug, and with one hit, I was hooked.

“Take off the towel.”

*That* was another bad idea.

Maybe the worst idea yet.

I loved sex as much as the next girl, but I’d always been very careful about the partners I chose. They were never scary, always safe, and they were never the kind of men who would push me beyond my comfort zone.

Dante was scary. He was not safe.

The look in his eyes said he’d push me right over the edge without batting an eye.

“Now.” His voice shot straight through me, settling low in my abdomen while a thousand drunk butterflies fluttered around in my stomach.

My fingers moved to comply, untucking the end of the towel from between my breasts and letting it fall to the floor.

*Um, since when do we let men boss us around?* the feminist in my head bitched.

Good question.

I’d get back to her about that later.

At the moment, the Adonis in front of me was looking me over from head to toe with so much heat in his eyes, he might have just burned that bitch to ashes.

“You’re fucking beautiful, Corinne.” He grabbed my wrists and dragged me toward him, changing course at the last second and pinning my hands above my head against the shower wall.

Dante kissed me hard, bruising my lips beneath the fervent press of his own until his tongue swept along the seam and demanded entry.

I parted for him, letting him in.

His tongue glided along mine in an intimate dance, tasting me, devouring me, revving me up until the throb between my thighs grew painful and my knees grew weak.

Too soon, or maybe not soon enough, he left my mouth empty to graze his nose along my jaw like he was scenting me.

The feral animal traveled lower, using his lips to blaze a trail down my neck to my breasts, suckling one taut nipple into his mouth, then the other. The suction was perfect, just hovering on the border of pain.

I wanted to yank my wrists out of his grasp just so I could hold him there forever.

But my wrists remained trapped, and he released my nipple, flicking it with his tongue before kissing his way back up to my jaw.

“When was the last time you slept with someone?” he asked. It didn’t seem like a territorial thing, more curiosity.

“It’s... been a while, it’s not your business. I’ve had other... priorities.”

“What was it like?”

The cocky look on his face made me want to tell him it had been amazing, better than anything I’d ever experienced, certainly better than I could ever experience with him.

“Boring.”

He didn’t laugh like I’d been expecting.

“Why?” he asked instead.

“Because I like it that way. I like predictable.”

Before Camilla went missing, I'd changed men more often than I changed the batteries in my vibrator—which needed changing often—but they were always the same kind of men, always the same kind of sex.

He shook his head. “I don't believe you,” he said, smirking.

“Get fucked and die,” I cursed at him.

He chuckled. “Well, I like the fuck part.” He leaned into me, his erection pressing harder against my abdomen. “Turn around and put your hands on the wall.”

Despite the way he pissed me off, honeyed lava coursed through my veins. If only he wasn't so bossy.

“Why?” I snapped.

“Because I said so.” He released my wrists and spun me around.

I caught myself with my hands against the wall.

Before I could move, he caught my hip with one hand and speared my pussy with his finger from behind, finding my G-spot like he had a detailed map right to it.

“Spread your legs wider,” he said, pushing at one ankle with his foot.

I obeyed, because apparently, I'd lost my mind. What girl wouldn't when his finger was thrusting inside her so perfectly. I was already so close.

He withdrew, and I bit back a whimper that would have let him know just how skilled he was.

Instead of feeling the hard press of his cock against my entrance, he dropped down behind me, pulling my hips back toward him until he had me right where he wanted me.

His tongue glided along my slit. His fingers found my clit as his tongue parted me, delving into my pussy like he was

starving.

The coil wound up fast as my fingers tried to dig into the tile wall, clawing for purchase.

The man *knew* what he was doing.

His tongue speared deeper as his fingers worked my clit faster.

The coil sprung free, shooting me over the edge so hard, I screamed. I swear I saw stars.

When he'd wrung every last spasm of my orgasm from me, he stood up and turned me around.

I wasn't even sure I could've moved on my own.

"You're the best thing I've ever tasted," he said right before his lips covered mine.

I opened for him, still wanting to feel some part of him inside me.

I wasn't done. I wasn't sure I'd ever be done, and the taste of me on his tongue only added fuel to the fire.

Dante pulled away too soon, grinning like the Cheshire cat for a split second before he grabbed me around the waist and threw me over his shoulder.

"What are you doing?" I squealed as he strode out of the bathroom, carrying me caveman style.

"I'm going to fuck you," he said, heading for the bedroom. "I figured the bed would be more comfortable than fucking you up against the bathroom wall. I'm having a *nice* moment. Don't get accustomed to it."

"How sweet," I jeered.

"You have no idea," he said right before he dropped me down on the bed.

He had a condom in his hand—*where had that come from?*

He tore open the packet with his teeth.

“Wait.” I scrambled up onto my knees and grabbed the condom.

He made a noise. I think it might have been a growl, but he didn't try to take it back.

I settled on my knees in front of him.

My position put me at eyeline with his pecs, and no way was I going to deny myself what I wanted when I'd already crossed over into crazy town. *This* was absolutely forbidden territory, but since I was already here...

I leaned up to graze my lips down his throat, stopping to kiss the hollow at the base, then moving further.

I kissed and licked my way across his pecs, stopping just long enough to flick my tongue across one hard nipple before licking my way to the other.

His breath was coming hard, and when I reached between us to wrap my fingers around his long, thick cock, just beneath the head, he groaned as his hands clenched into fists.

“Condom, now,” he ground out.

By the restraint in his voice, I figured I had maybe thirty seconds before he was fucking me one way or another.

I abandoned my exploration and rolled the condom down his shaft.

He was *huge*, enough that even I experienced a brief moment of hesitation. But I was wet enough, I could feel my arousal on my inner thighs.

We'd make it work; no way was I walking away without feeling that massive cock inside me.

The second the condom was on, he lowered me down on the bed, dragging my ass to the edge. When I opened my legs

for him, I didn't mind at all the way he stared at me, the heated look in his eyes so hot, it was a wonder my pussy didn't burst into flames.

"You are the craziest, sexiest, most desirable woman I've ever met," he said as he lined himself up.

If he said anything else after that, I didn't hear it.

All that existed was his thick shaft thrusting inside me. The stretch burned a little, but right from the first thrust, he hit my G-spot.

He fucked me slowly at first, giving my body a chance to adjust, but then the training wheels came off.

He thrust deeper. Harder. Faster. With a tilt of his hips, his pelvis rubbed against my clit every time he bottomed out inside me.

He hovered over me, one hand on my breast and the other braced beside my head.

"You feel so good," I moaned then immediately regretted it.

I was mad at him for some reason.

I couldn't quite remember the reason at the moment, but it was there, I was sure of it, and the last thing I wanted to do was inflate his ego.

He kicked his hips, driving impossibly deeper. So deep, the head of his cock banged against my cervix.

"You're so tight. It feels like your cunt's trying to strangle me."

"Maybe it is."

A flicker of a smile turned up the corners of his lips. "Then don't ever stop, *luna*."

Never stopping sounded like a good idea at the moment, but with every thrust, every rub against my clit, I soared



higher. Any second now...

My orgasm tore through me, setting off an explosion that rippled out like shock waves from the core of me and left me gasping for breath.

He growled as my pussy spasmed around him, taking him over the edge with a groan that sounded like it had been ripped clean out of his chest.

# Chapter Sixteen

## Dante

I just fucked Fallon's best friend, and damned if it wasn't the best sex I'd ever had.

If that wasn't bad enough, there wasn't a doubt in my mind I was going to do it again. Already, I could feel the blood in my veins heading downward while the naked woman lying in the crook of my arm drew idle circles across my chest with her fingers.

"You got rid of the blood," Corinne said, her fingers branching down my abs.

"*Si.*"

I had my men scrub every surface that had a drop of blood on it. Right down to the mattress. That didn't impress them one bit. None of them were dumb enough to say a word.

Corinne had seemed more freaked out by the blood than the dead guys.

"Why didn't you do it?" she asked, her fingers pausing.

I didn't need to ask what she was talking about. I'd had my men hanging back, ready to let the goons take her right out of here. The *capo* of *Las Serpientes* wanted her, which meant they would have led me right to him. All I had to do was follow the beacon from the tracker I'd slipped into her hair at the back of her neck.

"I don't know," I lied.

She didn't need to know I'd been picturing every bit of her journey, imagining what they would have done to her along the way.

"You should have," she said, bracing a hand on my chest and pushing herself up to look at me.

"What I should or shouldn't have done is my call," I said, reaching a hand behind her head and pulling her down to kiss her. I didn't spend a lot of time kissing women—generally saw it as a waste of time and didn't particularly care for their faces all up in mine—but I couldn't seem to get enough of Corinne's lips. They were like heroin. "Are you going to try to tell me you wouldn't have been royally pissed if I'd let them leave with you?"

"Of course I would have been pissed—I *was* pissed off when I realized what was happening—but I've been thinking about it, and you don't have any more cards to play, do you?" Corinne said plainly.

"No."

"Then I don't understand why you did it?" The look on her face said she wasn't playing coy. She really didn't get it. Actually, she looked kind of pissed.

"I've told you what they'd do to you, haven't I? I wasn't all right with that." In truth, I couldn't stomach the thought. "You're a pain in the ass, *luna*, but not even you deserve that."

I dragged her in for another kiss, nipping at her bottom lip to make her open for me, then delved in. Just like a drug. Her body relaxed against me and her fingers started to wander again.

"So, what do we do now?" she asked when I'd let her up for air.

"Earlier, when you said you wouldn't be able to do it much longer, you meant your OCD is getting worse?" I asked.

Corinne sighed and nodded while her fingers continued to wander along the contours of my chest. “I saw what happened to my mom. She never got better, she only got worse. And I seem to be following in her footsteps. For a long time, I think I thought I was smarter than her, that because I acknowledged what was happening that meant I could somehow stop it. But I can’t. I’ve managed to slow it down, and I’m proud of that—really, I am—but over the past year, it’s been harder to control. I can’t get a handle on it. In a few months... a few years...” She shrugged. “A girl who can’t leave her house can’t do things. Not important things, anyway.”

“Like getting yourself kidnapped and single-handedly bringing a cartel to its knees?”

It would have been cute that she thought she could pull that off if it hadn’t been dangerous.

She scoffed. “Something like that. I never thought I’d be able to single-handedly bring them down. I just thought... I just needed to find Camilla. It was something my brain said I had to do.”

“It became an obsession?”

I’d been doing everything I could think of to try to get to Gia.

*Everything except for the one thing that would have almost guaranteed it, my brain taunted.*

I hadn’t been able to hand Corinne over; didn’t mean I wasn’t well aware of the consequences.

She nodded while color spread across her cheeks. “It’s crazy that I—” She slammed her mouth shut then groaned. “Why am I even telling you this stuff?”

“Because you find me irresistible.” I grazed a finger from the hollow of her throat to her nipple, circling it and watching it grow taut beneath my touch.

“Ha! You’re grumpy, and bossy, and broody, and—”

“One hell of a fuck.”

She laughed then playfully dug her teeth into my shoulder.  
“And you think rather highly of yourself.”

“I don’t *think, luna; I know.*” I dragged her up my body and suckled her nipple into my mouth, flicking my tongue back and forth across the sensitized flesh.

Her fingers tunneled through the hair at the back of my neck.

“But what I was saying is if you’re going to get caught up in obsessions, you should at least make sure they’re the enjoyable kind.”

I grazed my teeth along her taut flesh then slid out from under her, leaving her on her stomach.

“Stay there,” I said when she moved to roll onto her side.

She flopped back down onto her stomach, looking up at me curiously.

“Open your legs, *luna.*” I grazed a hand down her back, between her cheeks to her cunt.

She opened her mouth instead of her legs, so I swatted her ass.

“Open.”

She obeyed.

I didn’t miss the way her cheeks flushed and her eyes darkened. The girl was a submissive through and through.

I leaned back on my heels to watch as I slid a finger into her pussy. She was soaking wet. And tight. Her inner walls clamped down on my finger as I stroked her G-spot.

Corinne moaned and her fingers dug into the mattress.  
“Shouldn’t we be doing something more productive?” she

asked, though her hips writhed like her body was begging for more.

“I’m going to make you come, *luna*. What could be more productive than that?”

“A plan, Dante,” she moaned as my finger picked up speed.

“The plan is we fuck until we’re clearheaded again, and then we figure out a new plan.”

“We?”

She was already getting close; her inner walls clamped down harder and her hips writhed like she wanted more.

I withdrew my finger, grabbed a condom, and sheathed my throbbing cock.

“Yeah, ‘we’. Since there’s no way I’m giving up this pussy anytime soon, I suppose our next steps will be a joint venture.”

\*\*\*

My phone rang sometime after we’d fucked ourselves into a coma.

I had to give Corinne credit; there weren’t many women who could keep up with my stamina, but it seemed I’d met my match. The woman was insatiable, and she gave as good as she got every step of the way.

I reached blindly for my phone, not willing to relinquish the warm, soft weight of her against my side even if the world was ending.

Fortunately, I suppose, my fingers found my phone on the edge of the night table, and I turned it on. I glanced at the screen before answering. *Not Rosa*.

“What?” I barked in a whisper.

“The mess is all cleaned up, boss,” Cristian reported, “but the Suarez brothers are seriously pissed. They’re gunning for

your balls, served up on a silver platter.”

“No shit.” It wasn’t like I’d been expecting them to want to hold hands and sing Kumbaya when they discovered I’d killed eight of their men and thwarted their attempt to take Corinne for a second time. “We knew they’d be pissed.”

“About that, boss, you want to tell me what happened?”

“Change of plans, that’s all,” I snapped.

“Rather big change. The plan was to let Suarez’s men waltz right off with her.”

“And I changed the plan. End of conversation.”

“You got it, boss.” Cristian sounded way too smug.

“How about we get back to the situation in front of you? The Suarez brothers are pissed. That’s no surprise.”

“No, it’s more than that. They’re seriously riled. I’ve had eyes on them for the past three hours. Andres beat the shit out of one of his own men, and Tiago’s had his phone glued to his ear. I’m pretty sure whoever’s on the other end of the line just told him the sky is falling. The fucker’s white as a ghost.”

I looked down at Corinne.

Her head was nestled in the crook of my arm, her face turned up toward me. She was beautiful, but that couldn’t possibly explain why the *capo* of *Las Serpientes* wanted her so badly. The guy had to have pussy available around the clock, and her little investigation, while impressive, hadn’t even turned up enough to make the cartel want to silence her. Even if it had, they would have just put a bullet in her head. Problem solved.

“Have you found out anything about the girl?” I asked, watching the steady rise and fall of her back to be sure she was still sound asleep.

“Nothing much. Mother’s dead, father took off before she was born, and stepfather took off when she was a teenager. Both biological parents were only-children, so not really much in the way of extended family either. Her bank accounts look normal, and no unusual travel. I don’t know what to tell you, boss. Maybe the *capo’s* a collector, wants both sisters? But that’s a bit of a stretch to begin with, and they’re not even full siblings—same mother, different father.”

“If that were the case, he would have gone after Rosa when they took Gia.”

Cristian blew out a breath. “I don’t know. Maybe she’s got a powerful ex with a grudge?”

The thought of Corinne with another man made my blood boil. Kind of made me want to piss a circle around her too.

“Maybe,” I ground out, “but it seems unlikely. There’s something we’re missing, but fuck if I know what it is. Dom left a message a few hours ago. He’s arranged a meeting with Amadeo Luciano. Maybe the guy can shed some light on the subject.”

“All right. Do you want me to keep an eye on the Suarez brothers for now?”

“Get one of our men to watch them, and have someone else swing by Corinne’s apartment to pick up clothes and shit for her. Make sure the building here is secure and then get some sleep. I want you watching her while I’m with Dom tomorrow.”

“Sure thing, boss.”

I hung up the phone, but sleep seemed like a hopeless endeavor.

I was fully awake. Just my luck that Corinne began to stir. She flung a leg over mine, which pressed her bare cunt up against my thigh.



“Everything okay?” she asked, her voice thick with sleep.

I grazed a hand down her back, settling on her ass to press her closer and grind her clit against my leg.

She moaned and stretched, then her lips started a path across my chest while her legs squeezed my thigh, rubbing her clit against me.

No doubt about it—I was a lucky man.

# Chapter Seventeen

## Dante

The sun was beating in through the open curtains the next time I opened my eyes.

The space Corinne had taken up on the bed was empty.

It was highly unlikely she would have made it out the front door—she would have had to be Superwoman to pull that off, but I wouldn't have put it past her to try.

I swung my legs over the bed and stood up, grabbing my pants and throwing them on in a hop-run toward the door.

The second I turned the handle, my insides relaxed.

The place smelled like a lemon farm.

Ms. Clean had struck again.

I found her in the kitchen wearing one of my T-shirts.

She was on her knees, bent over with her head in the fridge—one hell of a view that did nothing to banish my morning wood. She was scrubbing frantically, which would have been hilarious except I could hear her deep gasps for breath.

“Corinne?”

She didn't stop scrubbing, but her head cocked to the side.  
“What?”

“What are you doing?”

“The fridge was filthy. There were crumbs and dried milk and something sticky.”

“Then why not just close the fridge?” I asked, leaning a hip against the counter. “Is this how you start every morning?”

“No,” she barked. “My fridge isn’t a breeding ground for bacteria, and I have my routine, and my clothes. I need my clothes, Dante. I need to go home.”

“Not an option, but I had one of our men swing by your apartment. You’ll have your clothes and girl shit later this morning.”

I pushed off the counter and set the coffee maker to brew, silently rolling my eyes at myself. I’d been a dumbass to think a night of good sex could magically fix her, but for those few hours, she’d been calmer, seemingly able to get out of her own head for a while. The idea of fucking her endlessly to keep her that way certainly held its appeal.

I set two coffee mugs on the counter and spooned in some sugar, deliberately spilling some on the counter and floor.

I grabbed her arm when she went to pounce on the mess. “Leave it.”

“What?” she cried. “No!” She tried to yank her arm out of my grip.

“You said your OCD has been getting worse, but do you think it’s possible it’s gotten worse because you’ve let it?” I was pulling the theory out of my ass. No one would ever accuse me of being an expert on mental health—maybe a stellar example of what to avoid on one’s path to well-being.

“You think I want to be like this?”

I shook my head, loosening my grip but tugging her toward me. “No, I don’t think that.”

There was anger snapping in her eyes, but her lips were parted. I covered them with my own, sampling them from corner to corner with my tongue before pushing my way inside her. She tasted like mint and while her body was still tense, her tongue slid along mine and her arms wrapped around my neck.

“But I think you’re tired,” I said, after pulling my mouth away reluctantly. “Tired of battling your own demons, tired of fighting your own mind, tired of searching for your sister. And doing all of it on your own.”

She opened her mouth, but I had to give her credit when she closed it. She could have argued. It was there on her face, clear as day; she really wanted to argue.

“But you’ve got people who care about you, *luna*, so that begs the question, why?”

“Why what?”

“Why fight on your own when you don’t have to?”

“The people who care about me would be wise to keep their distance.” There was absolute conviction in her voice.

I cocked an eyebrow, waiting for her to elaborate.

“Everyone I’ve cared about... It hasn’t worked out for them, okay?”

“Explain.”

Corinne dropped her arms and wiped her hands on the sides of my oversized shirt.

She turned toward the sink, but I stopped her, waiting for an explanation.

“Fine,” she barked. “My stepfather’s dead because of me, I turned my mom into a freak show, and when I should have been looking out for my sister, I was too busy with my own life to keep her safe. Oh, and in case you hadn’t heard, my best friend got roped into marrying a man in the mafia.”

I laughed, trying to imagine Fallon as the helpless victim in anything. *Hilarious*. That woman could chop off Dom's balls and feed them to him for dinner if he pissed her off.

"I somehow doubt all of that was your fault, *luna*. Fallon's a grown woman who makes her own choices. Your mother had a condition—which you can well understand—and you couldn't babysit your sister around the clock. And I have a feeling you blaming yourself for your stepfather's death is a bit of an over-exaggeration."

She scoffed. "You think so? You think when I bashed him over the head with a frying pan, it was an accident? Or maybe, when that wasn't enough to stop him, I *accidentally* stabbed him with a kitchen knife."

*Whoa. Impressive.* Couldn't help but admire a girl who could handle herself in the kitchen. I hadn't expected that from bright and bubbly Corinne, but this woman, my *luna*, was full of dark surprises.

"All right, if it wasn't an accident, why'd you do it?"

Even dark Corinne didn't strike me as a psychotic killer.

She sighed and leaned into me, resting her head against my chest for just a moment before pulling away and cracking her knuckles in her usual rhythmic beats.

"He used to beat on my mom and me pretty badly, but I always managed to keep Camilla out of it... until that day. I got home late from school, the teacher kept me after. Camilla always waited outside for me so I could get a feel for how things were, you know?"

I nodded, already seeing enough of the picture to envision where this was going.

"That day, she didn't wait for me. It was like twenty-below outside, snow up to our knees, so she just walked in. I guess Mom was out having a meltdown at the grocery store. By the

time I got home, Camilla had two black eyes, a split lip and a broken arm. I just... I don't know, I guess I just kind of lost it."

"So, you attacked him to protect your sister. Nothing wrong with that in my books."

She scoffed. "Mom didn't see it that way. He'd dragged himself out to die in a gutter somewhere by the time she got home, but man, she was pissed. I think, after that, she would have been glad to be rid of me, but Camilla and I lied whenever protective services showed up. We said Mom was the perfect pillar of motherhood. It was only my stepdad who should never have procreated, and he was gone. Just gone, that's all we ever told them, like he got up and left one day. I cleaned up all the blood, God, Dante, there was so much blood..."

"But if she was so sick, why did you push to stay with her?"

She looked at me like I'd lost my mind. "Someone needed to take care of her. She couldn't hold down a job. Most days, she couldn't leave the house. She would go days without eating, and exercising until she passed out. Someone had to be there to keep her alive and take care of Camilla."

"You said your condition just started up one day. Was that the day?"

She looked at her hands, then nodded, wiping them on her shirt. "I can always feel it—the blood. It's never gone, you know?"

I nodded. "I do know," I said, looking at my own hands.

She'd had one man's blood on her hands; I'd had hundreds. But she could still feel the blood there while my hands were clean.

I grabbed her hand and dragged her across the apartment to the bathroom.

“What are you doing?” she cried, tugging nominally against my hold, but not really trying to break free.

“Strip,” I said, closing the bathroom door behind us.

Her eyes widened. “What?”

“This is going to get messy, Corinne, and you’ve made your feelings on ‘messy’ clear. So, strip. Now.”

Only a little bit surprisingly, she obeyed, which was probably a good thing. It would have pissed her off to no end if I’d had to strip her forcefully. The second she tugged the shirt over her head, my cock intruded on my thoughts, trying to make other plans. *Down, boy.*

I grabbed the knife from my back pocket instead and opened it.

Corinne gasped and her eyes widened more, but before she could react, I put the blade to the palm of my hand and sliced it open.

“What are you doing?” she cried.

I closed the distance between us.

She’d already backed up against the wall; there was nowhere for her to go.

With my hand dripping blood, I smeared it all over her, from neck to hips, holding her still with my uninjured hand while she screamed.

When I was finished, I dropped my bloody hand and waited for her to calm down, one hand still holding her hip tight.

“What the hell, Dante?”

“What do you feel, *luna*?”

“Blood!” she screamed. “Your blood, you’re insane.”

I flashed her a grin. Then I turned on the shower and let her go while I wrapped up my hand.

She darted beneath the spray, scrubbing all the blood off her body. Even hysterical and covered with blood, she was the hottest thing I'd ever seen. Even so, the moment she was finished, I handed her a towel, letting her wrap it around her like a cocoon.

"What did you do that for?" she seethed, her eyes darting toward the door like she was gauging whether she could make it past me.

"You had my blood all over you, but it's gone, isn't it? No need to scrub your skin raw, over and over again?"

"I—" She slammed her mouth shut. I had to respect that. She wanted to argue, but she was smart and thought shit through. "But why?" she asked eventually, her brow knitted.

"That's the difference, *luna*. The blood on you, that was my fault, wasn't it?"

"You're damn right it was."

"And now it's gone."

She nodded slowly and her shoulders relaxed a little as some of her anger slipped away.

"When you believe it's your fault, it never leaves. It doesn't matter how much you try to wash it away. You could scrub your skin right off, and it would still be there. Your problem is you still think your stepfather's death was your fault. It wasn't."

She rolled her eyes. "Of course, it was." The slightest hint of doubt laced her voice.

"You might have been holding the knife, but he was the one who put it there. He gave you no choice, and you did what



needed to be done. You protected your sister, and there isn't a single thing wrong with that."

She was silent, but I could see the wheels turning.

I really liked that she wasn't dismissing what I was saying just because she was pissed.

"I've killed a lot of people, Corinne—people who some might say didn't deserve to die—but you know what? There's no blood on my hands. I've never killed a man I didn't have to kill, and neither have you."

# Chapter Eighteen

## Dante

The club Dom and I walked into at nearly ten o'clock that evening wasn't a bad club.

The floors were clean, the music was loud, and the bartender was doling out drinks left, right, and center. The patrons were upper middle-class with an age range of maybe eighteen to thirty-five. Those who were under the legal drinking age got turned away at the bar.

I might have believed it was the law-abiding establishment it was painting itself to be if the place wasn't the club across town Corinne had snapped photos of and labeled as one of *Las Serpientes'* hunting grounds. I'd suggested Dom pick a different venue, but apparently, it was Amadeo who had picked it for our meet.

"Are we meeting with just Amadeo or is Enzo coming too?" I asked as we took a seat at a quieter table near the back.

Enzo Luciano, Amadeo's father as well as my mother's brother, ruled his family with a fairly heavy hand. Not much happened in that family without his knowledge or his approval.

"Just Amadeo. If he's acting on his own, I didn't think he'd appreciate us airing his business to his father. That's a conversation for them to have on their own," Dom answered.

I nodded and checked my watch. Still five minutes before Amadeo was expected.

We'd had men filtering into the club at random intervals over the past two hours.

If Amadeo was smart, he'd had his men doing the same. Then again, if he was in bed with *Las Serpientes*, he probably didn't have as much to worry about—at least not at the moment. The cartel had a reputation for being fickle, turning on allies without a moment's notice. No loyalty.

My phone rang, and I yanked it out of my jacket, looking at the number on the screen. *Damn it*. It wasn't Rosa. I silenced my phone and shoved it back in my jacket. She'd been calling less and less lately, like she was giving up on the hope I'd find Gia.

"There he is," Dom said, nodding toward the door as Amadeo stepped through it.

Amadeo had no men with him, which was a good sign. It meant he saw this meeting as benign, nothing standoffish between our families.

"*Buona sera*, Dominic, Dante," he said when he'd crossed the long room, shaking hands with Dom then me.

He sat down across the table and signaled for a drink.

The bartender himself brought it over, setting it down with a nod, then returning to his post.

"You had a question about one of my associates?" Amadeo said to Dom when the bartender was out of earshot.

Dom nodded in my direction, turning the conversation over to me.

"*Las Serpientes*," I said.

Peacekeeping wasn't my strong suit. I just wanted answers.

"Ah, *si*. They've recently become acquaintances, I suppose you could say."

“I thought so,” I said, looking around the club pointedly.

Meeting on *Las Serpientes*’ hunting grounds seemed a little more than coincidence.

Amadeo smiled. “The bouncer belongs to me,” he said, nodding toward the door, “as do two of the men working security upstairs.”

“So you always have eyes and ears on what’s going on,” I observed, wondering what he did with that information.

“*Si*. And that’s why I can tell you that Andres and Tiago Suarez pulled up in front of the club two minutes ago. It usually takes them several minutes to move their lazy asses inside.”

“Good to know,” Dom said.

It didn’t surprise me that the Suarez brothers were tailing me, but I was glad to hear it. If they were focused on me, it meant less of their focus was on Corinne.

“But since you already have seven of your men situated throughout the club, I don’t foresee a problem,” Amadeo said. Clearly, his *eyes* were working just fine.

Dom cleared his throat. “I know it’s none of our business, but can you tell me why *Las Serpientes* would be seeking out an association with the Lucianos?” he asked, so much better at diplomacy than I’d ever be.

Amadeo eyed Dom for a moment, swirling the whiskey around in his glass, then he turned his gaze on me.

I met his steely eyes, holding them as they bore into mine.

He smiled like he could hear my thoughts and put down his glass. “A little birdie told my father about the possibility of a deal for better prices, better routes—routes that have never been breached. Not one theft, not one search or seizure.”

“A tempting deal, but in return for what?” I asked.

“The cartel wants a more... permanent arrangement with the Lucianos.”

Dom and I both raised an eyebrow.

Amadeo sighed. “I’m the arrangement, *cugini*. In exchange for the prices and routes my father wants, I get a Colombian cartel wife.”

“Ouch,” I said without thinking.

Amadeo chuckled. “You have no idea.”

He picked up his drink at the same time the air shifted. Relaxed just a moment ago, it now pulsed with thinly-veiled fury, all coming from directly behind me.

“You have something that doesn’t belong to you, *ese*,” Andres said as he came around the table, stopping between Dom and Amadeo so he could glare at me.

“Is that so?” I said then took a sip of my whiskey.

It wasn’t bad stuff. Not exactly top-shelf quality, but this kind of club probably didn’t have a top shelf.

“You’d be wise to give it back,” Tiago said, moving just to the right of me, trying to hover over me like a shadow.

“What’s he talking about, *fratello*?” Dom asked, playing along.

We’d already discussed this. The bridge where the cartel believed I’d branched away from my family was burning, but there was no sense in blowing it up. Might as well let them at least wonder if I’d had my own reasons for taking Corinne.

“He must be talking about his baseball card collection,” I replied smugly.

Tiago laughed. “Is that what you call the pussy you stole? Tell me, was it as good as it looked? Bet it tasted real nice.”

I saw red, and something white-hot started pumping through my veins.

If Tiago uttered one more word about Corinne, I was going to bash his brain in.

Outwardly, I reached out calmly, grabbed the goon by the back of the neck, and slammed his head into the table.

Andres growled and reached for his gun, but Dom had the guy's arms restrained behind his back in two seconds flat. My brother might have undergone a lot of changes since becoming a family man, but he was still a deadly fucker. And faster than lightning when he wanted to be.

I released Tiago, and he stumbled back, clutching his bleeding nose while he looked around, probably looking for reinforcements.

All around the club, men watched on, one hand hovering inside their jackets. Luca men. Luciano men, no doubt. And more cartel men than I'd originally counted, but not nearly enough to take us down.

"The girl belongs to *el jefe*," Andres hissed. "Nobody steals from him."

I shrugged as Dom disarmed him and shoved him away. "It looks like I just did," I said.

Andres smiled. "You're going to regret this."

"I doubt it." I turned my attention back to my drink.

Andres turned his attention to Amadeo. "*El jefe* would be disappointed to see this," he said, nodding to me and Dom.

Amadeo shrugged. "He was aware of my family connections. Breaking ties wasn't part of the deal. So, fuck off," he said, turning away, dismissing the Suarez brothers.

It surprised me when Andres and Tiago slinked away, but for all their big talk, it was becoming clear they were nothing

more than Chihuahuas. A whole lot of barking and yapping, but when it came to bite, they had nothing on a table full of pit bulls.

“Sounds like *el jefe* is getting desperate,” Amadeo said when the Suarez brothers had nearly reached the exit.

“What is up with his obsession with Corinne?” Dom mused.

Amadeo stood up, pressing his lips together like he had something to say but couldn't say it. “I wonder if you've been in touch with Gabe Costa lately,” he said, though it didn't come across as a question.

“Gabe? I like the guy well enough, but what does he have to do with this?” I said.

Amadeo nodded. “You should give him a call. And in the meantime, I'd lock down any of those baseball cards you don't want to go missing.”

I nodded. “Will do.”

“It was good to see you, *cugini*,” he said, nodding to the both of us. “We should do this again soon.”

I chuckled. “Yeah, sure, it was a bucket of laughs.”

Amadeo left, and I noticed three men in suits follow him out seconds later.

“A Luciano marrying to make ties with a cartel, I didn't see that one coming,” I mused aloud then downed the rest of my drink.

“Wouldn't have been my first move,” Dom said as he polished off his own drink. “You heard, Amadeo, though. It's time to get Corinne locked down.”

“*Si*.”

The minute I did, any chance of using her as bait was gone. I'd find Gia, or I'd find every man who ever hurt her. But I wasn't putting Corinne on the line to do it.

Dom sighed and rubbed a hand through his hair. "I don't know what I'm going to tell Fallon, but I'm telling you, *fratello*, if she kicks me out of our bed, I'm taking your room. *You* can sleep on the couch."

I laughed.

If Dom tried to steal my room, he was going to find a very naked Corinne in my bed. I wasn't finished with her yet. I'd fucked her up against the shower wall not a full hour ago, right before leaving the apartment, but she was like a slightly neurotic, moody, sexy brand of heroin; I was already jonesing for another fix.



# Chapter Nineteen

## Corinne

Who did Dante Luca think he was?

Locking me up and bossing me around, and now he thought he could tell me where to go—and probably how to get there?

“No,” I said, crossing my arms over my chest and glaring up at him.

It really would have felt better if I was standing at eye level with him, but I didn’t have a six-inch-high pair of heels.

“Excuse me?” Dante said, his brows knitted together.

“Not used to the word?” I raised a brow. “I’ll help you out. N-O... No, Dante. End of discussion.”

Something flared in his eyes, making my feet want to take a step back—or maybe fifty—but I held my ground.

“Do you know how many people have told me no, Corinne?”

“Let me guess, you just bat those bedroom eyes, and all women are helpless to resist? Well, news flash: I’m Corinne. ‘All women’ isn’t on my birth certificate.”

“Tell me about it,” he muttered under his breath.

“Get fucked—”

Dante grabbed my arms and dragged me to him, squashing my breasts against his hard chest. The man was solid

everywhere, not the least of which was the long, hard erection pressing into my abdomen.

“I think that’s the best idea you’ve had yet.” He delved for my lips, crushing them so hard it was almost painful.

I parted my lips in surrender since it seemed my lady parts had suddenly taken charge here.

He was like sex in my mouth, his tongue plunging and gliding, reaching deep. He tore his mouth away with a harsh groan, but if I’d thought he was putting an end to whatever craziness we’d started, I was wrong. He reached between us, grabbed the hem of my shirt, and tugged, molding the fabric of his shirt to his flexing biceps as my shirt ripped right up the middle.

“You drive me crazy, *luna*,” he growled as he hooked his fingers between my breasts and ripped my bra right off.

I grabbed hold of his shirt where he’d left the top two buttons open and pulled with all my might. Buttons flew and pinged off the small dining room floor while his pecs, abs, and shoulders came into view.

I licked my lips at the sight of his ripped body.

He pushed me backward. My thighs hit the dining table, but he didn’t stop, pressing me down until my back hit the cool wood. Somehow, he had my skirt up, my panties ripped off, and his cock out and sheathed in little more than the time it took to take a breath.

“I’m not going with you,” I taunted as he lined himself up.

“Yes, you are.” He drove in with one hard thrust, bottoming out and making me scream.

“Fuck you,” I hissed as he got hold of my hands and pinned them over my head.

“You’ll be safer there,” he said, slamming into me, grinding his pelvis against my clit.

“I don’t want to be safe.” I wrapped my legs around his waist. “I want to find my sister, not hide away in your family’s house.” I dug my fingers into his shoulders.

“Not an option, *luna*,” he said, dragging his lips down my neck.

His teeth dug into my flesh, not enough to break it, but enough that I nearly came right then like some pain junkie.

“You don’t get to tell me what to do.” I dragged my nails down his back.

He hissed, but then he fucked me harder, deeper.

“You’ll do what I say,” he seethed as his pace turned frantic, fucking me into the table.

“No.” I squeezed my inner muscles tight, trying to strangle his cock.

Then I couldn’t talk; I couldn’t think. My orgasm started at the apex of my thighs and burst out, arching my back off the table and making me scream in ecstasy.

“Holy Christ,” he grunted out, pleasure etched across every hard line of his face as he swelled inside me and filled the condom with his release.

It was a long moment of panting and gasping, catching our breath before he withdrew and tossed the condom in the garbage.

“Stop fighting me on this, Corinne. I need to know you’re safe,” he said, pulling me up and wrapping his arms around me.

“Why?”

Still coming back down from cloud nine, I was content to rest my head against his chest. I'd get back to fighting him tooth and nail in a minute.

“Why what?”

“Why does it matter to you? I'm nobody. I'm just some girl you're fucking.”

So long as I kept repeating it, it wasn't going to bother me because this was just sex. It didn't matter how good it felt to lean against him, how long it had been since it felt like there was someone who could carry just a little of the weight on my shoulders. It was just sex. That's all I wanted; that's all he wanted.

“You're not—” I could hear his teeth clack together as his jaw slammed shut. “Fallon would never forgive me if I let anything happen to you. I know you don't want to sort this out with her right now, and I can't blame you—you've had a lot on your plate.”

He was rubbing my back, his fingers grazing from my neck to my tailbone, over and over again. It felt so good I could feel tears building up behind my eyes.

*Pull it together, Corinne.*

“But you're not alone anymore, *luna*.” One of his hands moved to my arm, sweeping his fingers over my tattoos before circling the crescent moon over and over again.

He was right about that.

I wasn't alone.

If I acquiesced, I'd have lots more people I could drag through hell with me. Lucky them.

# Chapter Twenty

## Corinne

I was weak.

I was a weak, weak woman.

Women with backbones all over the world would be bowing their heads in shame thanks to me. Not because I was here, standing in the foyer of the Luca family home. Let's face it, I wouldn't have been able to physically stop Dante set on forcing me here. Sure, I could have thrown some punches. Maybe I would even have landed a few. In the end, the result would have been the same. But at least then, I could have held my head high.

No, I was mentally hanging my head in shame here because I'd caved. He'd stroked my back, said some nice things, and made me feel like I wasn't completely alone. I'd kept up the strong front for a while after that, but underneath it, I'd caved.

*Pathetic.*

So, here I was.

Fallon appeared at the top of the stairs, a baby blanket over one shoulder but no baby in her arms. It must have been Maria's nap time. The moment she saw me, her face lit up with a smile that stretched from ear to ear.

"I thought maybe Dom was joking when he said Dante was bringing you here," she said, coming down the stairs like her best friend wasn't a big fat liar.

She wrapped her arms around me, and I hugged her back. It felt stiff like I was a marionette on strings, the movements not quite humanlike.

“Is everything okay, hon?” she asked, taking a step back.

Her brow was knitted, and her blue eyes were wide with concern. For as long as I’d known her, I’d always kind of taken on the supportive role. It felt weird and uncomfortable for the roles to be reversed.

I looked at Dante, not quite sure what I was hoping to find.

He smiled reassuringly, and it made me feel stronger, like I could maybe actually get through this.

Fallon’s jaw dropped open.

“Did you just smile?” she asked Dante. “I didn’t think your face did that.”

Then her gaze swung back and forth between me and Dante, a speculative look in her eyes.

I willed every deity out there to pull the wool over her eyes, but would they help? Of course not. *Stupid deities.*

“Oh my god,” she gasped, her eyes practically bugging out of her head.

“And I think that’s my cue,” Dante said, but instead of hightailing it out of here—like I kind of wanted to do—he turned to me.

He just looked at me, not touching me, his eyes boring into mine. His concern was touching, sweet. Maybe too sweet for a Luca man.

I nodded—a total lie—and cracked my knuckles to try to relieve some of the pressure. Explaining what I’d been keeping from Fallon was one thing. Explaining what was going on between me and Dante? I wasn’t sure that was possible.

He stared at me for a few seconds longer then strode down a hall to a room on the left. The way he moved, the confident set of his shoulders, his firm ass—the man was *mesmerizing*, a work of art.

“Okay, I thought you had a thing for Leo,” Fallon said once Dante had disappeared through the doorway.

I shrugged, still feeling like a marionette. “Leo’s hot, but he’s not...” *Dante*. I bit my tongue, not wanting to succumb to *it*.

She smiled deviously and grabbed my arm, tugging me in the opposite direction, toward a big, open kitchen while I glanced back at the front door longingly.

“*It seems to me you don’t let yourself get close to anyone at all,*” Dante had said.

He was right. Fallon was my best friend. She’d shared everything with me—about her dad, her fears over Dominic, all of it, while I’d hidden away like a coward.

Outside the kitchen, I stopped.

There were a few plates on the counter, waiting for the dishwasher, and two mugs, one of them with lipstick on the rim. A napkin was crumpled up next to the coffee maker, an empty baby bottle on the breakfast bar. There was a smudge on the stainless steel fridge, and someone had spilled something on the floor right in front of the oven.

I cracked my knuckles, but the pressure didn’t dissipate. Not so long ago, I could have handled this. The mess would have scratched at my brain, but I’d always been able to tune it out, force my focus elsewhere. Maybe Dante was right about me *letting* it get worse. Because *this* was definitely worse.

“Corinne?” Fallon was still smiling, but it didn’t reach her eyes.

I took a deep breath. “There are some things I haven’t told you, Fallon. I didn’t want to burden you.” I stopped and shook my head because that wasn’t entirely true. If I was going to do this, then I was going to do it right. “There are some things I didn’t want you to know,” I said, deterring toward the dining room that looked like it had been freshly cleaned.

Fallon followed, but her smile was completely gone now. “You know you can tell me anything, hon.”

She sat down at the big dining table, and I followed suit. Okay, where to start? At the beginning seemed too far back. “My mom died,” I said, finding the only starting point that made sense.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry.” Fallon’s face filled with sympathy, and she grabbed hold of my hand. “When did it happen, hon?”

“A year ago,” I blurted out.

Fallon froze. Her hand was still on mine, but it was stiff, and there was no missing the flash of hurt in her eyes.

I was certifiably the shittiest friend who’d ever lived.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked, her voice small.

“I didn’t want to talk about her,” I confessed.

“Why not?”

That’s when I committed to spilling it all, from my mother’s condition to when I’d started following in Mom’s footsteps after killing my stepfather. All the way up to Camilla going missing and everything I’d been up to since. All of it.

“You could have told me,” Fallon said when I’d finished.

She’d wrapped her arms around herself right after I told her about my stepfather, but her hand was back on mine now, not squeezing, just resting there.



“I’m sorry I didn’t.”

I wish I could say it was cathartic, getting it all out in the open, no more secrets between us. But I felt raw, ripped open, and all I could hear were my mother’s last words. “*You’re just like me, sweetheart. No one will ever love you.*” I had loved her; apparently, that hadn’t counted for much.

“I was afraid you’d look at me differently,” I said, a pitiful excuse if I’d ever heard one. And just in case that wasn’t pathetic enough, a tear dripped off my chin.

I swiped the tear away and squared my shoulders.

I was the one who’d wronged her; I didn’t get to cry.

Fallon was silent for a moment, but then she nodded. “I’d look at you the same way I’m looking at you now—like you’re my best friend because you are. I wish you’d told me those things, but it doesn’t change how much I love you, hon. Nothing could.”

“I don’t deserve that, but if you’re offering, I’ll take it. I love you too. The *Best Friend in the World* Award goes to you.”

Fallon hugged me because she was awesome like that. I may have struck out in the parent department, but I’d hit the best friend jackpot.

“All right, now that we’ve got that out of the way, there is one thing I’m dying to know,” she said, leaning back.

I cringed. The devious smile she wore didn’t bode well for me.

“Dante? You’ve got to tell me how *that* happened.”

“Um, he kidnapped me,” I squeaked, like a mouse.

Fallon’s eyes practically bugged out of her head. She was on her feet, hands clenched in fists. “What?” she screeched.

“It’s okay, hon,” I said, getting hold of her arm before she could go flying after Dante.

Fallon might be small, but she was kind of like an angry tornado when something got her going. Dante could piss me off like no one else, but I was still pretty sure he didn’t deserve that.

“It’s okay?” she asked, her eyebrows reaching for her hairline.

“Yeah,” I said, only realizing then that it was... *okay*.

Dante pissed me off in plenty of ways, but at some point since I’d first woken up in his bedroom, I’d stopped wanting to murder him over it.

“Please tell me you don’t have Stockholm syndrome because I’m serious here. I’ll kick his ass for you.”

I laughed. I couldn’t help it. Imagining Fallon trying to beat the shit out of Dante was hilarious.

“I don’t have Stockholm syndrome. I’m crazy, but not *that* crazy.”

“You’re not crazy,” she snapped. “But Dante? I mean, I know he’s hot, but you’ve always... I mean, the guys you went out with were...”

“Safe,” I finished for her, so completely done with holding things back. “I could hop from one to the next, and they were all cookie-cutter copies of one another. Dante’s... different, but it’s not what you’re thinking,” I said, shaking my head for emphasis. “It’s just sex. There’s nothing else going on between us. We spend more time fighting than we do fucking. The sex is just... really good.”

“Uh-huh. You keep telling yourself that,” she said with a wicked grin.

I *will* keep telling myself that, even if that's the last thing I do.

Well, maybe second to the last, next to having mouthwatering, panty-soaking, fantastic sex with Dante Luca.

# Chapter Twenty-One

## Dante

I tipped back the whiskey as I watched the bodies swaying and gyrating on Ascension's dance floor. Plenty of blondes and brunettes. There was even a redhead out there, with an ass that had drawn more than a few glances from the men around the club. Not *my* redhead though.

"It's showtime, boss," Cristian said, nodding toward the door where Andres and Tiago had just walked in.

The Suarez brothers had two guards with them tonight, both of them with long hair, tied back in ponytails and neck muscles so big it looked like they were stuck in a perpetual shrug.

Those two weren't the only precautions the Suarez brothers had taken. They'd upped their game since I'd waltzed out of here with Corinne in my arms. The new bouncer had been glaring daggers at me since I walked in, the three men chatting near the back of the club were carrying and the short brick house leaning up against the bar had been there long enough his legs had probably fallen asleep.

Walking in here, just me and Cristian, probably seemed like a dumbass move, but with Corinne locked up safely at the Luca estate, I was the only hope they had of getting to her.

There'd be no putting a bullet in my head today.

*El jefe* would have them six feet under by morning if they tried.

That didn't stop the terrible two from sneering at me as they made their way across the club to our table.

I couldn't wait for the day I could wipe those looks off their ugly faces permanently.

"Have you come to your senses, *ese*?" Tiago asked, almost shouting to be heard over the music because he'd stopped a few feet from the table.

I guess he wasn't willing to risk getting too close after the last time. His face was still bruised, and his nose looked more crooked than it had before.

I laughed like the thought was absurd. "I want a meeting with *el jefe*," I said, crossing my arms over my chest.

Tiago and Andres laughed while the walking neck muscles on either side of them stifled smiles.

Andres shook his head. "Nobody demands a meeting with *el jefe, ese*. There's a reason they call him *El Víbora*. You don't want his venom directed at you."

I was shaking in my boots, *really*.

I rolled my eyes. "Then I guess he isn't as interested in what I have as I thought. This isn't a negotiation."

I pushed my chair back, ready to walk away, though I had no doubt they weren't finished yet.

Even if the chances of me handing Corinne over to them were slim, they had to take it. Their boss wouldn't be happy if they didn't. And I bet that pissed them off to no end.

Andres held up a hand. "What is it you want, *amigo*?"

"Like I said, I want a meeting, *Andres*."

He shook his head. "What do you want in exchange for the girl?"

"That is precisely what I intend to discuss with *him*."

“Discuss it with me,” he said, squaring his shoulders like he could somehow intimidate me.

I ignored him and signaled for another drink while Andres and Tiago looked at one another, engaged in silent conversation.

Eventually, Andres nodded. “I’ll relay your *request*, and we’ll be in touch.”

A pretty little brunette with huge tits leaned over the table and placed a fresh glass down in front of me, filled with whiskey and the same drug they used to knock out their victims.

Did they think I was blind or just too stupid to be paying attention to what they had the bartender doing? Maybe they thought that sticking a pair of tits in my face would make me lose my mind altogether.

“I wouldn’t take too long,” I said, ignoring the girl and sliding the glass over in front of Andres. “You don’t want to know what I do with whores when they start to bore me.”

Andres and Tiago snickered.

“Send them on an all-inclusive tropical vacation?” Andres joked.

Clearly, he knew what the good old Luca family had been doing. I’d never regret what we did for those girls, but it was seriously biting me in the ass now.

I laughed without missing a beat. “My brothers might. I tend to prefer more... permanent solutions.”

Imagining tearing the brothers’ bodies apart limb from limb, I let the cold steel in my voice flash through my eyes.

Their laughter died away.

I could see the uncertainty in their dark eyes.

At least I had them second-guessing themselves.

# Chapter Twenty-Two

## Dante

I'd avoided her all day.

I'd planned to avoid her all night too, but the moment I left the club, thoughts of the infuriating knockout wouldn't leave me alone.

By the time I made it back to the house, my cock was so hard, it was painful.

There was just one problem.

Corinne was nowhere to be found.

The main floor was dark and empty—everyone had gone to bed.

I checked my room, imagining her lying on the king-size four-poster, naked, sprawled out above the covers, but she wasn't there. It was possible she was still hanging out with Fallon.

I knocked on her and Dom's bedroom door, but it was Dom who answered, a sheet wrapped around him and a scowl on his face.

"Is Corinne with you?"

He scoffed. "I don't think Fallon would go for that, *fratello*."

I wandered back through the house, finally stopping at the door that led to the basement where a sliver of light shone



from beneath the bottom of the door.

I opened the door and walked down the stairs.

Corinne had her hair tied up in a ponytail at the crown of her head, loose strands damp along her neck, her whole body glistening with a light sheen of sweat. She was going at it with the punching bag on the opposite side of the room. It was clear she'd been down here for a while, but it didn't look like she had any intention of slowing down anytime soon.

I stood at the base of the stairs, watching her.

Whether she was gyrating on a dance floor or throwing punches like there was no tomorrow, there was something about the way she moved that was just hypnotizing.

I could have stood there staring at her all night and never gotten bored.

If I did that, though, I'd also have ended up with blue balls.

I stepped onto the mat-covered basement floor, drawing her attention.

She faltered for a moment, turning to look at me as heat flared in her eyes, but then she turned back to the punching bag and kept at it.

*Another compulsion?* I wondered.

"Did you and Fallon work things out?" I asked tentatively.

"Yup," she said, going at the punching bag with a cross.

"So, everything's good there?"

"Yup." She punched the bag harder.

"You look like you could use a break, *luna*."

Corinne nodded distractedly. "Soon."

"No, now."

She kept punching the bag as if I wasn't there.

I crossed the room in long strides and wrapped my arms around her from behind.

She struggled until I pulled her hard against me and rubbed my cock against her lower back.

“If you need to get out some energy, there are other ways to do it, *luna*.”

Her body relaxed into me, but just as I shifted my hands to her hips, she spun around, not breaking free but staring up at me with a determined light in her eyes.

“I know you're trying to arrange a meet. It's the only logical move.” When I didn't say anything, she continued. “You have something they want, and you're hoping that'll be enough to put you in the same room as the *capo*. I'm coming with you.”

“Like hell you are.” It was a knee-jerk response. I probably could have phrased it better.

“They took my sister, Dante. What happened to ‘us’ figuring out the plan? You're not just cutting me out of this.”

“What happens when they recognize you?” I shook my head.

“I'm what they're after anyway, right? That's what you said. They think you kidnapped me, so take me as... as your slave,” she said, the words coming out strangled. “It just makes sense,” she pushed on. “They'll see that you can... be that way without having to hurt an unwilling girl.”

“And you're willing? Is that what you're saying?”

My cock was going to punch right through my pants.

“Well, I mean...” She licked her lips like they were suddenly dry while heat flared in her eyes.

I leaned in close. “Kneel,” I whispered against her ear.

I could feel her body shiver against me in response.

Corinne licked her lips again as her breasts heaved against my chest, and then she slid down my body, dropping to her knees at my feet.

Her lips were mere inches from my cock.

All I had to do was unzip and grab hold of her hair and I could fuck that gorgeous mouth until I shot my load down her throat. Or maybe I’d pull out and paint her tits in my come.

“Stand up,” I said, my voice hoarse.

I stood there waiting for her to comply, not trusting myself to touch her at the moment. One touch, and I’d be shoving my cock down her throat.

She wasn’t on her knees to give me a blow job; she was there, trying to prove she had what it took to help save her sister.

Confusion flickered in her eyes. “Look, if you’re just wanting to see if—”

“Stand up, *luna*, before I do something we’ll both regret.”

Her body swayed toward me, and her eyes were like hot liquid pools of pale emeralds, but she obeyed.

“This is an asinine idea, Corinne, and it’s just not happening. I’m not taking you with me—”

“Does that mean you’re going to fuck them?” she asked, putting her hands on her hips.

“Fuck who?”

There just wasn’t enough blood going to my brain at the moment for this conversation.

“The kidnapped tortured girls they’ll have there.”

I grit my teeth. “I’ll do whatever I have to do. I made a promise, Corinne.”

“Bullshit,” she said, cocking an eyebrow.

“Excuse me?”

“I can see it in your eyes. You might get your rocks off on bossing women around, Dante, bending them to your will. But when it comes down to raping a helpless girl, I don’t think you’ll be able to do it.”

I’d made a promise to Rosa, and getting Gia back mattered more than any of my hang-ups.

“You have no idea what I’m capable of,” I seethed, not letting her see the doubt there.

“Maybe not, but I know you’re not capable of that.”

“And what is it you propose? To protect the morals you think I have, I should bring you along and throw you to the wolves? What happens when one of them wants to put his hands on you?”

Out of nowhere, a bolt of white-hot rage shot through me, twisting my gut and making my heart pound.

“If you haven’t noticed, *luna*, since you exploded into my life like a firework, you’re the only woman I’ve had any interest in bending to my will. And I. Don’t. Share.”

“I can take care of myself.” She raised her chin defiantly.

I laughed, but it was a dark sound, no humor in it whatsoever. “Is that so?” I said, looking over her small frame.

Admittedly, she was in incredible shape. Every inch of her body was toned to perfection. The girl had muscle.

She cocked an eyebrow. “Try me,” she said, moving into a defensive position.

“What?”

“I say I can take care of myself. Prove me wrong.”

Corinne was half my size, but the determined fire in her eyes told me she wasn't going to let this go.

With images of having her pinned to the mats in three seconds flat, I nodded. “Fine. But when I take you down, you give up this stupid idea, got it?”

She nodded, her lips stretching into a Cheshire cat grin.

Before she'd finished nodding, I shot my arm out, planning to lock her in a hold.

She ducked and swiveled, ending up behind me and coming in with a jab to my kidney.

I spun around, but she was already on the move, getting in another two shots, these ones hitting my ribs harmlessly. She swiveled again and stepped to my left, her movements so fluid, graceful, that I had to remind myself to stop watching her and pay attention. Another jab, just above my kidney this time, reminded me the consequences of letting myself get distracted.

The problem was I didn't want to hurt her.

I had to take it easy, which was clearly giving her the advantage.

It took nearly a full minute to get her down on the mat on her stomach, her hands pinned above her head and my body pinning the rest of her.

“When you lose to them—and you will,” I said, grazing a hand up her thigh, “this is the exact position you'll end up in, *luna*.”

I couldn't seem to keep my mind out of the gutter. My hand grazed higher, feeling her muscles relax as I traced the curve of her ass.

She surged, knocking me off her in one surprise move and making me lose my grip.

“Don’t count on it,” she said smugly.

Corinne was on top of me, pinning my arms at my sides.

There was one sure way to beat a man in a fight: Get him thinking with his cock instead of his head. No cock cared about logic or strategy. All it ever wanted was to get strangled by a tight, wet cunt.

Unfortunately, her temporary victory changed nothing.

“It doesn’t matter, Corinne. It’s not happening. I’d spend the whole time worrying what crazy shit you were going to pull next.”

Her smugness fell away.

I felt like a dick for it.

“I didn’t mean it like—”

“I can act normal,” she said, her voice injured.

“Don’t say that,” I barked, breaking her hold on me and getting her pinned again, this time on her back.

“Why not?” she asked, wriggling her thighs out from beneath mine and cradling my hips against hers.

“Because you’re perfect, *luna*.”

She looked at me like I was crazy.

I shrugged, playing it off as a figure of speech.

“What can I say? I’ve got a thing for hot, crazy redheads.”

## Chapter Twenty-Three

### Dante

“As soon as I hear back from the Suarez brothers, it’s go time,” I said, sitting back in my chair in the war room.

“And you really think they’ll arrange a meet with *Las Serpientes’ capo*?” Nico asked from across the table, his eyes contemplative.

We’d agreed to bring Nico Costa, don of the Costa family and fiancé to my sister, in on this, figuring it couldn’t hurt to look for intel from every available source. It would have been great if his brother, Gabe Costa, would answer his phone, though.

I shrugged. “But it’s all I’ve got to go on at the moment. If they don’t come through, the next step is to hightail my ass to Colombia and start turning over rocks.” I was running out of time to find Gia; I could feel it right down to my dark soul. “Any chance you’ve heard from your brother lately?”

Amadeo must have pointed me toward Gabe for a reason.

Nico scoffed. “He’s incommunicado at the moment, probably off on another rescue mission,” he said, rolling his eyes. “Not that I don’t applaud my brother’s efforts, but they seem to be keeping him awfully busy lately.”

My father cleared his throat, drawing the room’s attention. “I’ve had our men looking into *Las Serpientes*, and I don’t like what I see. I like even less that Enzo has made an arrangement

with them, but it isn't for me to say what he can and cannot do."

I nodded to show my agreement. I could never be as eloquent as Vincent Luca though.

"For a long time," he continued, "they were a rather run-of-the-mill cartel, nothing worse than what you'd expect from any South American cartel. But when the old *capo* died and a new one—his brother—took over, things changed. They became erratic, branching into the U.S. at random. They seem to focus an enormous amount of effort on garnering fear, which they accomplish mainly through shock and awe violence—public executions, decapitations, mutilated bodies left with messages carved into them, that sort of thing. And yet, despite the attention it's drawn them, their *capo* remains elusive. And just as elusive at the moment is the reason the *capo* wants Corinne. She's told you nothing that might suggest a reason?" my father asked me.

"The best I can come up with is the sibling-collector theory, and it's a weak theory, at best. But it's possible that once the *capo* had her sister, Camilla, he wanted Corinne too. I've seen a picture of her, though; they look nothing alike—same mother, different fathers."

"It does seem like he's putting in too much effort for a fetish," Dom mused.

"And if it was a fetish, then why not go after Rosa when he took Gia?" I added, discrediting the theory even more, because it wasn't the right theory. It just felt wrong. This wasn't just lust, this was—

"He's pissed, if you ask me," Nico said.

*Exactly.*

Dom looked skeptical. "What could Corinne have done to piss off the *capo* of a Colombian cartel? A *capo* who has lived



under the radar from the moment he took control of *Las Serpientes*.”

I laughed. “You haven’t spent much time with her, have you?”

That woman could anger a saint. She could also tempt the most devout monk into her bed with one flick of her finger.

Dom glanced over at me with a smug smile and a knowing look in his eyes.

“I’ll reach out to my contacts to see what I can find, and I’ll keep trying to get in touch with my brother,” Nico promised. “If the cartel is trafficking girls, it’s certainly possible he knows something about them.”

“I appreciate it, Nico.”

It had felt awkward bringing another family into the fold ever since we were forced to work together to rescue my sister, Raven, and his brother, Gabe, from a raving psycho. Now, though, I’d take whatever help he could offer and be grateful for it.

Nico nodded.

My father shifted his dog, Bullet, off his lap and stood up.

Bullet sped toward the war room door, apparently ready for this meeting to adjourn.

“If you’re amenable, Nico, we’ll meet again in two days. I was hoping you’d bring Raven with you the next time.” There was my father’s weak spot. Big, tough guy, even at his age, but he turned into something gooey when it came to my sister.

Nico laughed. “She’s been busy working at the hospital. I’ll do what I can, but if you think I’ve got any say over what Raven does, I’m afraid I’ve misled you.”

My father and Dom both smiled like they understood perfectly, which made no sense to me. My mother had been a

strong woman, but ultimately, my father was always the one with the final say. Did everyone just have a soft spot when it came to Raven or was I missing something?

My father shook Nico's hand and clapped him on his back. "Maybe I'll call her and hope she'll take pity on her father."

The smiles and chuckles continued as they filed out of the war room.

I sat back in my chair and rubbed at the ache starting in my temples. I'd just closed my eyes when I heard her. She was laughing—that same laugh that went straight to my cock.

Suddenly, I was on my feet and out the war room door.

*Look who's whipped now, dumbass.*

Even the voice in my head shut up when I saw her, or maybe it was too busy drooling to bitch.

Corinne was coming down the stairs with Fallon, looking like she was ready for a photoshoot. Her hair and makeup were done, her nails painted gold, and she was wearing a black and gold dress that fell to mid thigh, with a plunging neckline so low that I decided it should be illegal.

If she went out looking like that, she'd cause accidents all over the city.

She was gorgeous. And yet, I kind of wanted to drag her into the shower to wash all that makeup off her face. She didn't need it; it just kind of acted like camouflage, hiding the knockout underneath.

I was about to grab her and drag her back upstairs—whether to drag her into the shower or throw her down onto the bed to fuck her, I couldn't say—when the front door opened.

Leo and his girlfriend, Ella, walked in.

He had his arm around her shoulders, and she had her pet duck's carrier in one hand. At the moment, the duck was quiet, but I'd spent enough time around the thing to know that wouldn't last long.

Right on cue, Bullet came charging into the foyer, skidding across the marble floor and then barking excited circles around the duck. It seemed Bullet had developed a fondness for the bird, but I don't think his feelings were reciprocated.

The duck was flapping around and quacking bloody murder like the whole world was about to end.

Leo leaned down and snatched up Bullet midcircle, tucking him beneath one arm and making goofy faces at the dog while Ella bent down and somehow managed to quiet the noisy waterfowl.

"No one can ever accuse you of not knowing how to make an entrance, *fratello*," Dom joked as Leo passed off Bullet to my father.

Leo shrugged. "You know me, I like the attention."

His eyes swept the room and settled on Corinne.

"Hey there, stranger," he said, smiling.

It was a friendly smile. Leo was perfectly happy with Ella and had been happy with the same woman for months now, which was crazy, in my opinion.

While Leo made polite introductions, I couldn't resist the sudden urge to claim Corinne, coming up beside her and pulling her in to kiss her thoroughly. It was caveman-ish, sure, but I'd resisted the urge to piss a circle around her.

What more could be expected of a man?

It had started out for show, but by the time I'd finished, her lips were swollen, her cheeks were flushed, and her tits were rubbing against my chest with every heaving breath.

“Go to my room,” I whispered against her ear. “I want you naked and bent over the edge of the bed by the time I get up there.”

Corinne shivered against me as I grazed my teeth along her ear.

“It was good to see you again, Leo. Nice to meet you, Ella,” she said.

“You too.” Even Ella was smiling with that knowing look in her eyes, her gaze swinging back and forth between me and Corinne.

Corinne turned a little awkwardly and hightailed it up the stairs.

Fallon chuckled softly beside me then leaned up on her tiptoes until she was as close to my ear as she could get.

“If you start peeing on my best friend like a dog marking his territory, I’m going to neuter you. And remember, I’m a veterinarian, I *can* do it.” She really didn’t sound like she was joking. My brother’s wife could be one scary woman when she wanted to be.

“Message received,” I whispered back, though in all honesty, not many messages were actually making it up to my brain.

I had a one-track mind at the moment.

“What the hell happened?” Leo asked, his gaze swinging back and forth between me and where Corinne had disappeared at the top of the stairs.

“He kidnapped her,” Fallon filled in ever-so-helpfully, smiling like the little she-devil she was.

Ella’s eyes widened.

“I’m kidding...” Fallon said, her smile turning reassuring. “...sort of.”

That probably necessitated an explanation, but it would have to wait. “Glad you’re back, Leo. You too, Ella. I’ll catch up with you later.”

I had a foyer of people staring at me with that knowing look in their eyes.

I turned away and climbed the stairs, resisting the urge to growl back at them like a dog.

All thoughts of looks and people fled the moment I walked into my room, though.

Long, bare legs greeted me from the end of the bed, reaching up to her heart-shaped ass, and a cunt that had to be the most magical place on earth.

To paraphrase Corinne, Disney World could get fucked and die.

# Chapter Twenty-Four

## Corinne

“So, how long are you home for, *fratello*?” Dom asked Leo as he spooned a healthy serving of ravioli di Zucca onto his plate.

The food smelled delicious, nutty and sweet, and I was not focusing on the two napkins that were set askew or the drop of wine that had spilled onto the antique white tablecloth. Not really. Well, maybe a little bit.

“I’m not sure,” Leo said, shrugging his broad shoulders. “Dante said he could use a helping hand, so I suppose we’re here until he’s done with my hands.” Leo laughed, his ever-present smile growing broader.

“I appreciate it,” Dante said with just a hint of a smile hovering at the corners of his lips.

It was interesting to watch Dante with his family.

He was different here, not that he’d transformed into the epitome of a laidback American citizen, but he was more relaxed. He smiled occasionally, not nearly as much as Leo who was always cracking a smile or a joke. I liked that about Leo; I could see him being a good friend.

Yet, even with all these people around, I could close my eyes and *feel* Dante’s presence in the room. That same darkness that had radiated from him before was still there, calling just as much as it ever had.

“Ella and Leo have been busy working on what I guess you could call a humanitarian project the past few weeks,” Fallon informed me.

An image of the pair working side by side, building homes for Habitat for Humanity sprung to mind and immediately struck me as absurd. A Luca man involved in charity work?

“That sounds exciting,” I said.

“It has been,” Ella said, her voice a little quieter than everyone else’s.

“It was Ella’s idea to build a community for girls who’ve been victims of human trafficking,” Leo explained with a proud smile, and I had to stop my jaw from dropping. “Give them a place to heal and feel safe, you know?”

I blinked. “That’s amazing.”

It really was, and it was kind of threatening to turn my impression of the mafia on its head. At least, my impression of the Luca family. Building homes for human trafficking victims? That wasn’t just tossing some money at a good cause for publicity’s sake. That was some serious humanitarian shit. Top it off with the fact Leo had dropped everything he was doing to come running when his brother needed him—to help hunt down a missing girl—and it kind of felt like someone had pulled a rug out from under my feet.

“It’s a really great place,” Leo said. “I think it’ll go a long way to help *any* girl who’s been involved in that.” His gaze held mine as he spoke.

I nodded, trying to convey my gratitude when all the words that popped into my head fell short.

It felt good to know there was a place for my sister *if* we get Camilla back.

I glanced over at Dante like he might miraculously have the right words written on his forehead.

He was looking at me in a way that sent instant lava through my veins, heating me up far too much for a family's dinner table.

I really needed to stop sleeping with him.

It had been a mistake from the start, but I was woman enough to admit it had been a pleasurable mistake. And really, a few rounds of great sex—*really* great sex—was harmless. After that, though, things risked getting messy.

Emotions and attachments, which ultimately led to bitter breakups or relationships where one partner beat the living shit out of the other until their daughter murdered one of them and put an end to it.

*Yeah, no thanks.*

No more sleeping with Dante Luca.

*But Fallon's happy,* a voice whispered inside my head. She looked happy enough, but how long could that possibly last? They had a kid together now. That breakup was going to be ultra messy, assuming Dominic let her leave at all.

I glared at Dominic across the table, but it was kind of hard to keep it up with the way he was looking at Fallon. Kind of like the earth revolved around her. Fallon lit up, too whenever Dominic was nearby.

Is that what I looked like around Dante? *Nope, not going there.* That was ridiculous.

I took a healthy sip of the crisp white wine in my glass, hoping to drown the thought in alcohol.

I looked up at Dante.

He was still staring at me, his gaze heated.



I swear I could see everything he wanted to do to me in his blue eyes.

By the time dinner was finished and the conversation moved into the front parlor, my panties were soaking wet thinking of what Dante had planned for me tonight.

Thinking it was a good idea to start putting some distance between us right away, I sat down on one of the pretty wingback chairs next to the sofa.

Dante stopped in front of the chair and hauled me up without a moment's pause.

With a room full of people, I resisted the urge to scream, even when he sat down in my seat instead and settled me on his lap.

"You're not really good at taking hints, are you?" I whispered against his ear.

"You sat in my chair," he whispered back like it was a perfectly reasonable explanation for manhandling me.

*"This is your chair?"*

I highly doubted the big, tough man had laid claim to the delicate-looking nineteenth-century chair with pretty flowers woven into the fabric cushion.

He shrugged. "It is now."

This was so not helping with the distance thing.

To make matters worse, I could feel his cock growing hard beneath my ass.

When Maria's cry sounded from the small device Fallon kept attached to her waist, I sprung up off Dante's lap.

"I'll get her," I said, maybe a little too brightly.

Fallon smiled while she dug her teeth into her bottom lip, fighting a laugh. She knew exactly what I was doing. She took

pity on me and nodded.

I'd never made it up a set of stairs so fast.

Outside Maria's nursery, I slowed down and opened the door quietly.

"Well, hello, my beautiful girl."

Her eyes were wide open, and she'd stopped crying the second I opened the door.

"You're Auntie Corinne's little lifesaver, aren't you?" I cooed to her as I crossed the room and picked her up, remembering too late that the monitor didn't stop listening just because I'd opened the door.

I turned off the monitor, and we had a good, long cuddle, pacing around the room while I explained to her all the pitfalls of getting involved with any man who was really good at sex. Especially a bossy man who was *really* good at sex. Those were definitely the worst.

"You want someone who will treat you with respect, because if any man ever disrespects you, little one, you just call Auntie Corinne and I'll beat the shit out of him for you." I stroked her chubby cheek, and she smiled up at me.

"You want to look for guys who've been around enough to know what they're doing, but not so much that they get all full of themselves, got it? And never forget, you don't need to stick with a guy just because society says you're supposed to grow up and get married. You've got a kick-ass mama and lots of family who love you. You don't need a messy relationship to be happy, sweetheart."

The nursery door opened a moment later.

Fallon stood on the other side, her face reddened and tears streaming down her cheeks.

She wasn't crying; she was laughing, doing her best to hold it in.

The moment her gaze met mine, she lost the battle.

She burst out laughing so loud, Maria jolted in my arms.

"What are you laughing at?" I asked, looking at her like she'd lost her mind.

She held up a hand, and I waited, lightly jostling Maria while Fallon struggled to get herself under control. It took her a while, but eventually she managed. "Are you seriously up here teaching my daughter the best way to use men for sex and then ditch them?" she said, barely getting it out before another burst of laughter took over.

"Yup." I buried my face against Maria, trying to hide my smile.

"Oh my god, I love you," she said, "but if you turn my daughter into a slut, you're in serious trouble."

"Hey, being comfortable with one's sexuality does not make a girl a slut. It makes her a modern, independent woman. And how did you hear me anyway? Were you listening through the door?"

Fallon laughed harder. "You didn't turn off the monitor, hon; you just switched channels."

The whole parlor had heard my little heart-to-heart with Maria.

"Please tell me you turned it off."

She opened her mouth, but all that came out was more laughter.

"You didn't turn it off, did you?"

I had this heavy, sinking feeling in my stomach, making me kind of nauseous.

She shook her head, finally taking a slow, deep breath.

“You’re evil, you know?” I asked Fallon.

She nodded, not the least bit perturbed. She’d settled down enough to come take Maria. “Why don’t you go get some of that sexual satisfaction you love so much?” she said, nodding back toward the door.

Um, no, that was definitely a bad idea. No sexual satisfaction for me tonight. None. Zip, zero, zilch. Nada.

“I think maybe I’ll call it a night and get some sleep.”

She smirked. “Whatever you say.”

I was a modern, independent woman, and I didn’t need a man, or sex.

“Good night, Fallon,” I said then left the room as fast as I could.

I walked straight into Dante in the hallway.

Out of the pot and into the frying pan; could this night possibly get worse?

# Chapter Twenty-Five

## Corinne

Dante's hands had come up to steady me, grasping me around my biceps, but they stayed there while he looked at me.

There was heat in his eyes and something else I couldn't identify.

I just wanted to jump on him, wrap my legs around him, and fuck him until neither one of us could see straight.

"If it's not too much trouble, I thought maybe I'd sleep in one of the guest rooms tonight." I forced the words out while my lady parts cursed me and threatened to make me pay.

He didn't answer me. His fingers tightened around my arms, not painfully, or maybe a little, but I kind of liked it. Enough that I almost tried to take the words back, but then he nodded and dropped his hands, leading me further down the hall to a room at the end.

Dante opened the door and stepped into the room, turning the moment my foot crossed the threshold.

His hands were back, this time on my hips, tugging me toward him as his lips descended with a fervor I could feel all the way down to my toes.

He fed on my lips, devoured me with his tongue, and left me breathless when he stepped back and left the room without a word.

This man was going to be the death of me.

Forcing my gaze off the closed door through which he'd just left and onto my surroundings, I took in the pale blue and yellow comforter that topped the rich walnut four-poster bed. Matching window treatments. Walnut night tables and lounge chair. It was a nice room with an en suite attached. A nice room, but my eye honed in on the specks of dust that had settled into the intricately carved wooden posts.

I cracked my knuckles to relieve the building pressure. It took the edge off but wasn't quite enough. A quick search in the bathroom, though, and I located cleaning supplies beneath the sink.

It took less than an hour to make the bedroom and en suite perfect and less than fifteen minutes more to scrub the day off my skin in the shower.

By the time I was finished, I was too tired to think about anything but collapsing in bed. With a towel wrapped around me, I slipped beneath the comforter and closed my eyes.

Sleep refused to come.

My mind bounced back and forth between thoughts of Camilla and memories of Dante's hands on my body, and his mouth, and that beast of a cock.

At some point during the ping-pong match in my brain, I drifted off, coming awake what felt like not long after.

The lamp on the bedside table was on, and Dante stood next to the bed.

He had his shirt off, and he was wearing a pair of loose pants that hung low on his hips and did nothing to hide his erection.

"What are you doing?" I asked, lucid enough to remember that I was supposed to be maintaining some kind of distance here.

“Couldn’t stop thinking about fucking you,” he answered bluntly.

Instead of trying to find anything intelligent to say, I slipped out of the covers and slid off the bed, down onto my knees.

I hooked my fingers into the waist of his pants and dragged them down. His cock sprung free, and my mouth watered.

“Take off the towel, *luna*,” he said, watching me.

My blood heated, and my lady parts tingled.

I grabbed the tucked end of the towel from between my breasts and pulled it out, letting the towel pool on the floor around me.

A bead of precum had leaked from the tip of his cock.

I licked my lips then leaned forward, lapping it up before circling my tongue around the ultrasensitive ridge.

Dante groaned and threaded his fingers into my hair, but he just held his hands there, maybe waiting to see what I would do next—not that there was a whole lot of wondering when a girl was on her knees licking up precum like it was liquid crack.

I wrapped my hand around the base of his cock then worked him into my mouth, taking him deep and working him with my hand in tandem. When I hollowed my cheeks and pressed my tongue hard against him, his hips jerked and his grip on my hair tightened.

One would think that a girl on her knees would feel subservient, but in that moment, I didn’t.

I felt powerful.

His pleasure belonged to me.

I could work him hard and fast, shooting him over the edge like a rocket. Or I could tease him and draw it out, bringing him close to the brink, then backing off over and over again.

Caught between the two, I worked him at a steady pace, sliding my free hand up his thigh to his balls, rolling them back and forth between my fingers.

He groaned as his grip on my hair tightened even more, and he started to take over, fucking my mouth faster.

It should have made me lose my power high, but it didn't.

I dropped my hand from his balls to my clit, rubbing in tight, fast circles.

There was something about him, something that kept me primed whenever he was around.

I'd barely touched myself, but I was already swollen and slick, and so close.

His pace quickened, growing erratic.

I gripped his cock tighter and pressed my tongue harder against him as he drove into my mouth, over and over again.

"Fuck, *luna*, I'm going to come," he groaned right before his cock thickened impossibly more, and he shot his load down my throat.

When he withdrew, I expected one of those post-orgasmic slower moments, but instead, he dragged me up off the floor with his hands under my arms and tossed me on the bed—and I was so not even going to think about how hot that was.

I had no time to wriggle back before he grabbed my ankles, threw them over his shoulders, and delved for my pussy. He ate me like a man starving for sustenance, plunging between my lips and spearing my slit.

After a minute, his mouth moved to my clit, flicking and sucking while he thrust a finger inside me, working my clit



and G-spot in tandem.

I was going to *explode*.

I bit the inside of my cheek, trying to hold back a scream, but the pressure was too much.

I combusted in a burst of sweet, unadulterated bliss, coming so hard I couldn't move, I couldn't think, I couldn't see.

Dante kept his mouth on me while I rode out the shock waves, but as the waves tapered off to ripples, he shifted positions, standing up straight and lining himself up, just as hard as he'd been before the blow job.

He kept my legs over his shoulders as he drove in with one impossibly hard thrust.

There was no slow buildup this time.

He kicked his hips, fucking me into the mattress so hard it was like he was trying to exorcise another orgasm right out of me.

"You're driving me crazy," he ground out between clenched teeth.

Well, the feeling was mutual.

I was just about to tell him so when he shifted his position, rubbing his pelvis against my clit with every thrust. The man was a master.

My orgasm came at me like a freight train; there was no stopping it, no slowing it down. It slammed into me, breaking me apart into a million glorious pieces.

He fucked me harder. Deeper. Faster. Pulling out at the last second and painting my pussy in thick, white ribbons of come.

I'd completely forgotten about a condom.

*Real bright move, Corinne.*

Dante stayed there between my thighs, rubbing his come into my pussy and all over my mound.

Subconsciously, I knew I should have been freaking out—the same thick, sticky kind of sensation as blood—but I was actually getting off on it. Or maybe it was his intense gaze. If he circled his gaze around my clit a few times, I probably could have gotten off on it—that kind of intense.

“I like seeing my come all over you,” he said absently, still rubbing.

*Yeah, me too.*

We really were a strange pair.

He lowered my legs down to the bed and fixed his pants, tucking away his cock. Instead of leaving, though, he scooped me up and threw me over his shoulder.

I squealed, slapping at his side.

“Put me down, damn it.”

“Not happening, *luna*.” He slapped my ass hard.

I really wish I could say that the sting didn’t send a fresh wave of heat straight to my lady parts.

“What are you doing?” I asked, more breathless than I would have liked.

I could practically feel the asshole smiling against me, right before he slapped my ass for a second time. That was *not* supposed to feel so good.

“I’m bringing you back to my room,” he said, heading toward the bedroom door.

“Why?”

“Because I want you in my bed.” He reached for the doorknob.

“Kind of naked here. This isn’t your apartment. What if people see me?”

He shrugged and opened the door. “Everyone’s asleep, and even if they weren’t, I don’t care.”

## Chapter Twenty-Six

### Dante

“So, is it serious?” Leo asked as we turned into the warehouse parking lot.

“Is what serious?” I asked, purposely playing dumb.

“What do you think I’m talking about? The deforestation of the Amazon rain forest?” Leo rolled his eyes. “I’m talking about Corinne, dumbass.”

“What about Corinne?”

“I’m starting to feel like maybe I’m going to have to draw you a picture.” Leo cocked an eyebrow. “Are you and Corinne a serious thing?”

“No. End of conversation.”

She’d made her feelings about relationships clear — broadcasted them on a baby monitor, actually—and I seconded the sentiment. I had no interest in tying myself to one woman, even if that woman was sexy and strong and passionate and a little crazy—in a good way.

Leo was smiling. “Let’s pretend for a second I believe you, just answer me this: How many women have you fucked in... I don’t know... let’s say, the past seventy-two hours?”

I growled. “None of your business.”

What was up with my brothers and that stupid question? There was nothing wrong with riding one train for as long as it lasted. It would end, of course. It always ended. The longest

I'd ever been with a woman before Corinne was eighteen hours. What can I say? I got bored easily. It wasn't my fault Corinne was anything but boring.

My phone rang, and I pulled it out, half-hoping it was Rosa and half-hoping it wasn't. I still had nothing I could tell her. I glanced at the number, but it seemed she knew I had nothing because it wasn't her.

"Do you think maybe we should be worrying about something other than who I'm sleeping with at the moment?" I snapped, nodding at the warehouse while I shoved my phone back in my jacket unanswered. "Cristian's already in there. Let's go."

I got out of the Merc and strode toward the warehouse's front door, not bothering to see if Leo was following. He could sit inside the car all night for all I cared.

Cristian was waiting at the door when I got there, looking as unruffled as ever.

"Has our guest had anything to say yet?" I asked, stepping inside.

Leo followed on my heels.

Cristian shook his head. "His name's Lando, that's all I've got. The conversation's been a little one-sided," he said, holding up his bloodied knuckles. "He says he'll only talk to you, boss."

"All right, let's go talk then."

I took off my jacket on the way to the back office, folding it over my arm as I stepped inside.

Cristian had a tall, gangly man tied to a chair.

His dark hair was short and greasy and the right side of his face was bruised and so swollen, his eye was a thin slit. All

things considering, Lando was in good shape for a guy who'd tried to break into one of our warehouses.

"You seem to have gotten lost, Lando," I said to him, draping my jacket over an empty chair and rolling up my sleeves.

I cracked my knuckles, making an image of the fiery redhead at home pop into my head.

The guy didn't say a word, his lips pressed tight together, but he was sweating profusely and the stench of fear radiated from him.

"I'm going to give you one chance to tell me why you're here. I suggest you use it. I don't give second chances."

Peeling back some skin or cutting off a few fingers might have made quicker work of this interrogation, but something felt off here. The guy was just too scared. He didn't even have any false bravado going on.

"You is Dante Luca?" he asked, tilting his head a little to stare at me with his one good eye.

"*Si*, I am." I nodded.

"I have one job," Lando said, his accent thick and his English broken. "They give me one job. I give message to Dante Luca. Man say I find him here."

I crossed my arms over my chest, seeing no need to flay the guy open just yet. "This man, did he have a brother who looked a lot like him?"

Lando shook his head, wincing at the painful movement. "No, *señor*. Man is not just man. He *El Vibora*."

"You got your orders directly from the viper?" Leo asked doubtfully.

He started to shake his head again but winced and stopped. "No one see *El Vibora*. He have *chica* give me order."

I exchanged glances with Leo. “What girl?”

“I don’t know girl. She and man say *El Vibora* have job for me. I do job, my family come to America too.”

“What was the message from the girl?”

“She say the *chica*... the girl you have, she no trust anyone. Trust is bad, will get her killed, yes?”

“Did she say anything else?” I cocked a brow.

“No, *señor*. Only no trust anyone.”

“What did the girl look like?” I asked.

“She pretty. Blonde. Nice, but...”—a flicker of a smile turned up the corners of his lips—“...big temper.”

I looked at Leo then Cristian, hoping I was missing something here. Some blonde with a big temper was sending Corinne warnings?

The clueless looks on both their faces said if I was missing something, they were too.

“And the man? What did he look like?” I was grasping at straws.

“Man blond too. Tall. He not say much.”

I rolled my eyes. Just as helpful as I figured.

Cristian turned to me as if waiting for an order.

“Did the girl happen to mention what we’re supposed to do with you?” Leo asked.

It was a good question. The girl—whoever she was—took an awfully big risk sending this guy if she wanted him back in one piece.

“She say you know what to do.” He swallowed hard and looked at the ground. “But if you kill me...” His eyes flickered

up to meet mine then hit the floor again. "...you tell them I did job, yes? My family come to America."

Killing him was the simplest option, but it hardly seemed like what the girl would have had in mind. While I had no problem killing men who needed to be killed, I wasn't sure Lando fit in that category. Couldn't exactly have him running around off a leash, though, if this guy had anything to do with *Las Serpientes*.

"If you never saw *El Vibora*, how do you know the message came from him?" I asked.

Lando looked at me like I was a little slow. "Blond man, he know *El Vibora*. He marry who *El Vibora* tell him to marry."

"Amadeo," I concluded.

"What's that now?" Leo asked, a confused frown on his face.

"The girl wants me to leave Lando with Amadeo," I answered.

Leo strode over and beckoned me into a corner for some privacy.

"It's the only explanation that makes sense," I started.

"Go on," Leo said.

"Freya."

"Ahh. The blonde girl." Leo nodded. "You think she would be involved, too?"

"Well, I wouldn't be surprised if the sister was involved in her brother's arranged marriage with the cartel. And if the Viper was putting pressure on them, it would explain why they couldn't come to us directly," I said.

"You could give Sherlock a run for his money." Leo grinned.



We walked the few steps back to where Cristian and Lando were.

“You good with this, boss?” Cristian asked. His tone was light and respectful—it always was in the presence of others—but I could see the depth of the question in his eyes.

“*Si*, I am.”

\*\*\*

“I’m not giving you my phone, asshole,” Corinne railed, holding the phone behind her back and glaring daggers at me.

“You’ll damn well do what you’re told,” I seethed back.

I was three seconds away from pinning her and grabbing her phone.

“No,” she snapped.

She was outmatched, and she knew it, but it seemed she had no intention of backing down. That didn’t surprise me at all. Even pissed, I had to admire her backbone.

“Then we’ll do this the hard way.” I had her pinned against the wall in a flash.

“Wait!” she cried as I reached for her phone.

I paused. “What?”

“I’ll... I’ll show you what’s on it. And you can check my phone whenever you want. It’s not locked. But you can’t take it away from me, Dante.”

“Why?”

I was just trying to keep her safe.

With no means for anyone to get to her, I wouldn’t have to worry about her trusting the wrong people. No risk that her trust would get her killed—like Lando had warned.

Corinne sighed and seemed to get smaller, her shoulders hunching inward. “I need this, some tiny semblance of freedom, okay?” Her voice was quiet like it was the last admission she ever wanted to make.

“We still don’t know why the *capo* wants you so bad,” I said, grazing my fingers along her jaw.

She felt like silk, yet I’d seen firsthand the strength beneath her soft skin. The last thing I wanted to do was make her feel weak.

“If somebody calls you or even texts you, I need you to tell me, do you understand?”

My gut was telling me to snatch the phone. Lock it up. Smash it. Anything but caving like a pussy.

She nodded, leaning into my touch, making me forget about everything but her softness, the warmth of her skin, the rapid rise and fall of her tits against my chest.

“I have a meeting in the war room I have to get to. They’re waiting for me,” I said, grazing my hand down her throat to the upper swells of her breasts.

Her bra had them pushed up so high, they were like a smorgasbord, begging me to delve in.

Her brow knitted. “A meeting about *Las Serpientes*?”

I nodded.

Her spine stiffened. “I take it I’m not invited?”

There was suddenly a storm brewing in her eyes. A storm I most definitely did not have time for right now.

“We’ll talk about it later, *luna*.” I kissed her lips—because men are dumb like that—and she latched onto my lower lip with her teeth.

“I want to talk about it now,” she said when she’d released my lip without breaking skin. *Too bad*—I didn’t mind the rough play at all.

“I’ll be back soon.”

I kissed the tip of her nose while she fumed, slapped her ass, then hightailed it out of the room.

Pretty sure I could feel laser beams burning into my back.

# Chapter Twenty-Seven

## Corinne

I eyed the baby monitor hooked to Fallon's waist as I pressed my ear to the cool wood of the war room door.

One noise from that gadget, and we'd be busted for sure.

I *really* didn't want to know what the penalty was for eavesdropping on a room full of mafia men. Nothing good, if I had to guess.

A smart woman would have been backing away; she would have tiptoed to the other side of the house and plastered on her innocent face.

I pressed my ear harder against the wood and held my breath, listening over the sound of my own heartbeat, which was considerably louder at the moment than I remembered it.

All I could hear were quiet murmurs, enough to recognize a change in speaker here and there, but not enough to make out a word.

I had a feeling they'd have to be shouting for us to hear anything through the door, and I probably didn't want to be anywhere near it if the men inside got riled up. A room full of *angry* mafia men? Nope, not even I was dumb enough to want to stick around for that.

Fallon took a step back and let out the breath she'd been holding, and I followed suit.

“Sorry, hon,” she said with a sympathetic shrug. “I’ve tried to listen in before, but I think they must have high-tech soundproofing installed in that door.”

“Why do I have to twiddle my thumbs out here while they’re busy hammering out a plan in there?” I asked Fallon. Pissy didn’t even begin to describe my mood.

Fallon shrugged, unable to hide the irritated look in her eyes or the way she had her teeth clenched tight. I swear, I could hear grinding. “You’re out here because you have a vagina, hon. Apparently, that room is allergic to them.”

“Sexist pricks,” I muttered under my breath, glaring at the door and cracking my knuckles.

“I’m going to lose my shit. I need to get out of here, Fallon, before I ram open that vagina-proof door and murdered a room full of big, scary men.”

She eyed me for a long moment, gaze swiveling back and forth between me and the war room.

“All right, look, you can’t just waltz out the front door, but we can go out the garage door—there’s no guards around there during the day. But we’ve got to stay close to the house, understand?” She looked at me like I was an unruly preschooler and she was worried I was going to run off to go play in traffic.

“Yes, I understand, hon.”

The last thing I wanted to do at the moment was run off. Not until I’d given Dante Luca a piece of my mind. And maybe kneed him in the groin a few times.

She nodded then she guided me through the house to the door that led to the garage. It had one of those techy key-code locks, but fortunately, Fallon knew the code.

She punched in the numbers and opened the door to what had to be every car lover's dream. Nearly a dozen cars, and not one of them looked like it could have been purchased off a regular lot.

I couldn't put a name to any of the cars spread out in front of me because I'd never really paid much attention to cars before. So long as they got me from point A to point B, what did I care what they looked like or what was under the hood? Still, it was hard to deny that the veritable smorgasbord of luxury cars in the Lucas' garage was impressive.

I spotted the hypercar tucked lovingly in the far corner, and my lady parts began to tingle. Jet-black, sleek and curvaceous. I'd seen one just like it on one of those pinup calendars in my mechanic's shop—the kind with a woman in a G-string spread out across the hood. A Pagani, I thought it was called—the car, not the woman.

“You okay?” Fallon asked, grinning while she followed the direction of my gaze. “You kind of look like you're going to faint.”

“You know I've never cared about cars, but I think I should stay away from that one,” I said, pointing to the Pagani. “If I get any closer, I might orgasm here and now.”

“Whatever gets you off, hon. I won't judge.”

I forced my feet to move.

The door leading outside required another four-digit code, but then Fallon swung the door open, and it almost felt like I could breathe again. Almost, because stepping through it was another ordeal altogether.

*Just do it, you idiot. Exposure therapy, the top first-line treatment for OCD.*

I stepped outside into the cool afternoon sun.

I took a deep breath and looked around, cracking my knuckles to relieve the pressure buildup.

It didn't take long to spot the goons, a few up the long driveway and a few spread out around the property.

Fallon sat down on a large rock ten feet from the house while I tried to calculate just how much my brain would punish me if I sat down on the rock too. It had a lot of dirt on it and something greenish-blue on the far side of it.

“So, how are you doing with everything?” Fallon asked, shifting the baby monitor attached to her waist so it stopped poking her in the ribs.

“Well, I suppose the dwindling population of the endangered Ozark hellbender has been depressing me, but I'm dealing with it the best I can.” I shrugged, grinning at her.

She stuck out her tongue at me. “You know what I mean. And what is an Ozark hellbender?”

“It's a salamander. Don't you ever watch *Animal Planet*?” I stuck out my tongue back at her, feeling mighty superior in my knowledge of U.S. salamanders. “I thought *you* were the vet here.”

She laughed, but the sound fell away quickly and her eyes turned serious. “Really, how are you holding up?”

I sighed. “I kind of feel like running back inside and scrubbing everything from top to bottom a dozen times over, and then maybe never setting foot outside again. I can't stop thinking about Camilla and wondering what's going on with her. And your brother-in-law goes back and forth between making me want to wring his neck and —”

“And I already know what else he makes you want to do,” she said, grinning from ear to ear. “Trust me, the walls upstairs aren't nearly as soundproof as the war room walls.”

I should have blushed but thinking about Camilla had set my mind on a different course. I pulled my phone out of my pocket instead. I'd finally gotten to charging it but hadn't turned it on yet.

"Is this your way of trying to change the subject, hon?" Fallon asked, a smug smile on her face.

"I just need to check my messages," I said.

I was about to press the power button when I noticed the phone wasn't sitting inside its case quite right. It was an ordinary case, the kind that also covered the face of the phone with a clear plastic film to keep it clean, but the film was skewed, too.

I peeled it back and untucked the phone's corners to adjust it, but there was something underneath it, in between the phone and the case.

A folded scrap piece of paper was tucked inside it.

"What's that?" Fallon asked, sitting up straighter to try to get a better look.

"I don't know," I said as I took out the paper and unfolded it, reading the words scribbled in black ink.

My hands started to shake, and my heart pounded.

*"I don't want to be saved. Don't come to Colombia,"* the note read, written in Camilla's handwriting.

I looked around, half-expecting to see her appear out of thin air.

"Corinne?" Fallon said, standing up, though her voice seemed much quieter now, overshadowed by my own heartbeat.

"I have to tell you something," I said.



“Of course,” she said, her brow furrowing. “You can tell me anything.” That there was only a smidge of accusation in her voice was a true testament to my best friend’s forgiving nature.

“I know I should have been honest with you all along, I hope you know that, but the problem is I’d need you to keep this to yourself. And Dominic probably wouldn’t want you to keep it to yourself. He’s your husband, so that puts you in an awkward position.”

She shrugged. “I live for awkward positions. They’re my jam, you know?”

I laughed. The sound was brittle, but I felt a little better. “I saw my sister,” I blurted out.

Her eyes widened. “That’s wonderful.”

“No, it isn’t,” I said, shaking my head. “At least, it might not be. I don’t know.”

The furrow between her brows was back. “Why wouldn’t that be good news?”

“I saw her sitting in a car with the men I thought took her, but she didn’t look like she was being forced to be there. She looked... happy. The picture’s practically burned into my brain. She was smiling, and she was even resting her head against this blond man who was sitting next to her.”

“So... you don’t think she was kidnapped? Again, that sounds like good news.”

“You’d think *not* being kidnapped would be a good thing. I don’t know what to think. The men she was with are definitely the men responsible for kidnapping Dante’s friend, Gia.”

“Oh,” Fallon said, the weight of a hundred bricks in those two letters.

“So... what if Camilla’s not innocent in this? What if Dante hunts down the people responsible and Camilla’s one of

them?”

I hated putting the words out there. It kind of felt like, now that they were out, the universe was free to take them and twist them, coiling them up into an intricate mess that would inevitably end with the man I'd been sleeping with killing my only living flesh and blood.

“Dante wouldn't—” She slammed her mouth shut.

I appreciated that. I liked how Fallon never said empty words just to make a person feel better.

“I don't know what he would do, and that's why he can't find out,” I said, hands out, imploring her to understand. “I was supposed to watch out for her, Fallon. I had one freaking job, but we had a fight the night she went missing. A stupid fight over her stupid plan to drop out of school two semesters before she finished college. Probably because she doesn't want to grow up and still wants to move to LA to become a big-time actress like she wanted to when she was *five*. Goddamn it,” I cursed, wishing I could take back everything.

“Hey, you couldn't have known, hon. And for the record, it *does* sound like a stupid plan.”

“It really was. Camilla was smart, but she couldn't stand spending all day in a classroom,” I said.

“And this has something to do with that piece of paper?” Fallon asked, nodding to the note I still held clutched in my hand.

I held it out for her to read it, not quite able to let go of it.

It was my only tenuous connection to Camilla.

“Okay, so not a map with a big, old *X* that would lead you right to her...” she mused aloud. “When do you think she put that in there?” she asked, nodding toward my phone.

“When I was at Dante’s, I think she got into my apartment and slipped the note behind my phone.” I added, “It’s the only possibility I could come up with.”

Memories of my apartment as I’d last seen it flooded my mind, turning my stomach. “There was blood in my apartment,” I said, feeling bile rise in the back of my throat while my hands felt wrong. I wiped them down my sides, but it did nothing. “I don’t know if it was Camilla’s blood, Fallon. They could have tried to force her to write the note, hurt her when she tried to resist.”

“Hey, we don’t know that,” Fallon said, grabbing my empty hand and squeezing tight.

My brain did not like that.

It kind of felt like she was pressing the wrongness on my hands deeper, forcing it beneath my skin.

She continued. “All we know is the last time you saw her, she was fine. There’s no reason to jump to conclusions, not until we have more information. And we’ll get it, Corinne. Honestly, I have no idea how, but she’s your sister. We’ll figure this out.”

I forced my fingers to squeeze her hand back. “You just know all the right things to say, don’t you?”

She shrugged. “What can I say? I missed my calling as an advice columnist.”

I smiled—Fallon had that effect.

Maria’s cry sounded from the receiver hooked to her waist.

“Shit,” she cursed, looking caught.

If I wasn’t still picturing just how much pleasure I was going to take in wringing Dante’s neck, I would have followed her back inside.

But even the thought of playing with my adorable niece or hanging out with the Pagani weren't enough to stifle the urge. Better to keep as much distance as possible between me and the sexist pig for the time being.

"I'll stay right out here, Fallon. It's not like I'd make it off the property." *Stupid freaking mafia guards.* "I just need some fresh air, and I need to be away from them for now, okay?"

She hesitated for a brief moment, but Maria's cry grew more urgent.

She nodded and disappeared back inside the house, sticking something in the door to keep it open for me.

I caught a flicker of movement out the corner of my eye.

It was just one of the guards moving around up the long driveway.

I shoved the note in my pocket.

Fixing my phone's cover, I turned it on. Maybe Camilla had texted. Or called. What I would have given to hear her voice.

I should have kept my mouth shut that night.

I should have smiled and nodded and let Camilla do whatever she wanted.

"*Stay out of my life, Corinne.*" Those were the last words she'd spoken—screamed, actually. My last memory of my sister.

My phone finished loading up, and I checked my messages.

No text messages, no voicemail.

I pressed my palm against the note in my pocket, my only connection to my sister.

"Are you okay, *luna?*" Dante spoke from close behind me.

I'd been so caught up, I hadn't heard him approach.

“No, I’m not okay,” I snapped, spinning to face him.

“What’s wrong?” he asked like he was clueless.

“Seriously? You hide away in that stupid little room, making plans that have a direct impact on *my* life, and you have to ask me what’s wrong? I’ll tell you what’s wrong; you’re a sexist prick.”

He flashed me a cocky grin, which made me want to strangle him, but it also kind of made me want to ride him like a cowgirl.

“You think you’re ready to sit in that room?” he asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Apparently not. According to Fallon, I don’t have the right equipment.”

He shook his head. “It’s not about equipment, Corinne. It’s about experience. The men in that room have murdered and bled for one another. We’ve planned massive hits and organized rescue missions from that table. So, I don’t care if anyone in that room has a cock or a cunt. The minute you’ve got the experience we do, you come right in.”

I crossed my arms over my chest and scoffed.

“In the meantime,” he said, unfolding his arms and closing the distance between us, “do you know how sexy you look when you’re all riled up?” He grabbed my hips and tugged me toward him.

I was supposed to be mad at him. Something about strangling him and kneeling him in the groin. It all seemed a little fuzzy when he covered my lips and kissed me like a man starving. His tongue swept into my mouth, powerful and demanding.

I was a little unsteady, and maybe a little light-headed, when he tore his mouth away and spun me around.

“Put your hands on the wall, *luna*.”

The sudden rush of heat between my thighs threatened to buckle my knees.

“There are people around, Dante.” It was a reasonable objection, even if it came out sounding a little weak to my own ears.

He leaned in close from behind me, running his nose along my jaw, scenting me like before.

“I don’t care how many people are around,” he whispered against my ear as his hand slid around my throat, squeezing lightly. “Put your hands on the fucking wall.”

With a delicious shiver sliding down my spine, I complied. Even the feminist bitch in my head was drooling too much to complain.

I dug my fingers into the abrasive brick exterior and stared straight ahead, fighting the terrible urge to look to see just how many Luca men were watching on.

“*Perfetta*,” he whispered then dropped his hand and reached around me to unzip the fly of my jeans, his muscled body pressed up against me and his hard cock digging into the small of my back.

Suddenly, the thought of Dante fucking me up against the wall for all to see didn’t bother me so much.

He pulled my jeans and thong down to mid thigh with one tug, but then all I could do was wait, listening to him breathing, and then the crinkling of a condom wrapper as he tore it open and sheathed himself. Then he was nudging at my entrance with the head of his cock, pulling my hips back toward him until he had me right where he wanted me.

He thrust in so suddenly, I cried out, going from empty to so full in less than a heartbeat.

“You look so hot all riled up,” he said as he withdrew. “Makes me want to piss you off just to fuck you.” He drove back in, stroking my G-spot with every inch.

“You look scary when you’re angry. And I freaking love it,” I panted as he settled into a hard, steady rhythm.

He slid my shirt up and flicked open the front clasp of my bra, baring my breasts for a split second before he cupped them in his hands, squeezing them and tugging on my nipples, pinching just hard enough it sent little jolts of heat to the wildfire blazing in my lower abdomen.

“I scare you?” he asked, a little breathless, but there was humor in his tone.

“Damn right,” I said.

Scared because he made me long for things that just weren’t possible. For something more than meaningless sex. For a future. For *us*.

“Harder,” I begged, letting my body take over, focusing on the exquisite pressure that built with every passing second.

“You want more?” He paused with just the head of his cock inside me.

“Yes,” I cried, needing to feel him filling me.

“Tell me what it is you want, *luna*,” he said, hovering there, not thrusting, barely moving.

“I want you to fuck me hard.”

Dante kicked his hips and drove in so hard, my cheek hit the brick wall.

“Yes, just like that,” I said, but he was already withdrawing and thrusting back in.

He moved a hand to my hip, holding me still. His other hand, though, slid upward, up my arm, past my wrist. He

entwined his fingers with mine as he plowed into me. Here he was, cock-deep inside me, but something about the way he held my hand was what felt strangely intimate. Like relationship-kind of intimate. It should have had me running for the hills, but instead I gripped him back, holding his hand tight as he drilled into me faster.

“We need to get you on the pill; I loved fucking you bareback,” he said, his voice hoarse. “Can’t wait to do it again, to feel your pussy strangling my cock, nothing between us.”

The pressure was so intense, it felt like my whole body was wound up tight. So much pressure, until a coil sprung free inside me, and I screamed my way through wave upon wave of pleasure so intense, I felt it in my fingers and toes.

Dante groaned as my spasms gripped him, and his fucking turned savage. He drove into me with one hand splayed across my stomach, the other gripping my fingers tight. He swelled inside me and stilled hilt-deep, roaring through his own release.

“Fucking outside wasn’t so bad after all, was it?” he whispered against my ear after a moment as he withdrew.

I smiled as he pulled down my top and straightened my jeans. “Outside was good. Next time, though, you’re fucking me on the hood of that Pagani.”

It was all fun and games until he pulled me back against him, wrapping his arms around me from behind and holding me there.

There were none of the Luca men around, I realized. Not a single one in sight.

“You sent them away,” I stated.

He nodded against my head. “I already told you, I’m not sharing you.”



Dante held me tighter, and I relaxed into his body.

That's when I realized I'd made a huge mistake.

A monumental, cataclysmic mistake.

I'd developed feelings for the cocky son of a bitch.

# Chapter Twenty-Eight

## Corinne

Two days later, I'd done nothing to rectify my mistake. Unless, of course, indulging in mind-blowing sex and spending most of my waking hours with said mistake counted as something.

"How old were you when you lost your virginity?" I asked him as he grazed his fingers up and down my spine. We'd finished another round of that mind-blowing sex more than an hour ago, and here we were, lounging in bed, learning way too much about each other's lives.

"Fourteen," he answered.

"I'm surprised you hadn't started sooner. I couldn't imagine a time when you weren't a potently virile male," I quipped.

"Is that so?" He leaned down and kissed the back of my neck, and his cock grazed my thigh. Not surprisingly, he was already hard again. The man was insatiable.

"You're not going to ask me?" It was the first time he hadn't reciprocated with a question.

"Nope." He shook his head, his lips grazing against my skin. "I don't even want to think about any other man touching you, never mind fucking you."

My lady parts clenched and the room grew a little warmer.

I'd never been one for possessive guys. They weren't safe and definitely not one-night-stand material. So it left me

feeling a little confused every time my body responded when he made comments like that.

“Okay, so no more sex questions. I’ll go with... What was your best subject in high school?” I asked.

“Math,” he responded easily enough, kissing along the back of my shoulder.

“Really?” I looked up at him for confirmation.

Dante was such a physical person. It seemed like something as ordinary as numbers would be too boring for him.

“You sound surprised.”

“No, of course not. I don’t doubt that you’re smart.”

He didn’t look the least bit offended. “Wicked smart, *luna*. Graduated at the top of my class.”

“No, no, don’t be so modest about it,” I joked.

He cocked an eyebrow. “Do I strike you as a modest guy?”

I laughed. “Definitely not.”

“Your best subject was science?” he asked, though it didn’t sound much like a question.

“How’d you know that?”

“You have an inquisitive mind.” He shrugged. “Just made sense.”

“Okay, smart-ass. You think you know me so well, answer this one simple question: Did I go to my prom?”

He shook his head without missing a beat. “Nope.”

“How did you know?”

He smiled and kissed my lips tenderly, not with the usual unquenchable hunger. “You wouldn’t have left your sister at home for something frivolous like that.”

Thinking about Camilla sent a fresh ache through my chest. I also wasn't sure how I felt about Dante knowing me so well. No man ever had, and somehow, it left me feeling kind of vulnerable. Exposed in a way in which I wasn't accustomed.

But at least in this, I knew him equally as well. "You didn't go to your prom either," I said with absolute certainty.

"You sure about that?" he asked, giving me a slow, lazy smile.

"Yup. You planned on it, even got dressed for it, but you never made it out of the limo with your date. The poor girl didn't even get to show off her dress."

He smiled like the devil. "Show it off... take it off... same thing."

"All right, how about, what would you say was your biggest mistake?" I regretted the words the moment they were out of my mouth.

He grinned and nipped at my neck. "Not doing *this* sooner. I should have thrown you over my shoulder and dragged you into my bed the day I met you."

I laughed. "You're quite a caveman, aren't you?"

"When it comes to you, *luna*, damn right I am. What about you?"

"What about me?" I stalled, unsure if I wanted to be honest.

"What's the biggest mistake you've ever made?" He leaned away and his eyes met mine.

"This," I said, nodding toward him.

His fingers stilled against my back for a moment but then resumed the path they'd been taking up and down my spine. "You think *this* is a mistake?"

I nodded, searching for the right words. “I like you, Dante. I’ve never been with a guy long enough to *like* him. I don’t really know what we’re doing here. It’s foreign territory for me.”

He smiled, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. “You know my track record with women, *luna*.”

“I do know, and I’m not looking to have the ‘relationship talk’. You piss me off more than I thought one person could, and of course, I know this isn’t going to last. I guess I’m just wondering what your exit strategy is.”

Dante sighed and flopped back on the bed.

I figured he was trying to put some space between us until he reached for me and dragged me on top of him.

“I’m not looking for a long-term relationship, but I’m not planning my grand exit either, if that makes any sense,” he said, his hands on my hips, grinding my pelvis against his erection.

“So, we just keep sleeping with each other until we’re ready to move on to something new?” I asked, shifting so that with every grind, his cock rubbed against my clit.

“I don’t like the idea of you moving on to something new,” he said, gripping me tighter, grinding harder. “Pisses me off, actually.”

“Maybe that’s just because we’re still in the rabbit stage,” I posited half-heartedly.

“Maybe,” he said, lifting me up and lining me up.

I sank down onto his cock, taking him in inch by exquisite inch, knowing this was so much more than fucking like rabbits and wishing it didn’t have to end.

\*\*\*

I stared out the front parlor at the perfectly-landscaped grounds, trying desperately not to let my temper get the better of me.

The war room door was closed.

A handful of men sat on the other side of it, deciding my future.

Camilla's future.

They'd only locked themselves in there five minutes ago, and if the last time was any indicator, it was going to be a long two hours.

Maybe I didn't have the kind of experience the men in that room had, but I was more invested in the outcome than any one of them.

Dante had told me about his family's involvement with Gia and her sister, and that was great, but Camilla was my flesh and blood.

"Hi, Corinne," Ella's voice sounded from behind me.

She always moved so quietly, I never heard her approach.

"Hey, Ella," I said, giving her a quick smile before turning back to stare outside.

"You know, Leo kind of kept me here for a while," she said, coming to stand beside me, staring out the window with me.

"Oh? Fallon had mentioned that you had stayed here with Leo before," I said.

"I mean, he kept me here when I wanted to leave."

"Oh," I said, feeling a bit like a broken record. "Leo? He looks at you like his whole world revolves around you."

She shrugged. "It's a long story, but in the end, I didn't listen to him. It nearly got me killed."

I tried to smile, but it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what she was doing here. "Are you trying to tell me that I should listen to Dante?"

"I don't know much about what's going on, it isn't really any of my business, but if he wants you to stay here, I can tell you that it's dangerous not to listen to him. He knows what he's doing."

I sighed, putting my hand against the clear, clean glass. "The problem is it's not my life I'm worried about."

I'd thought about it a lot ever since Camilla had gone missing. If I really had the choice, would I have traded places with her? Would I have taken her place in order to protect her? The thought scared me, but I would do it in a heartbeat.

"It's not your life I'm worried about either, not that I don't care," Ella said, covering my hand with hers in a consoling gesture. "Women are tougher than we look. We often find a way to survive. But Dante's a good man, and I think it might destroy him if something happened to you."

"I don't think you have to worry about that," I said, hating that I couldn't help wishing it wasn't true.

"You're wrong," she said bluntly.

"You know, part of me wishes that you were right, but he's made himself quite clear about where we stand, so you don't have to worry about him."

She laughed, but her expression sobered quickly. "Before I met Leo, I had reason to become very good at reading people. I'll admit, Dante isn't the easiest man to read. He's very good at keeping his thoughts and emotions locked up. But when it comes to you, he's kind of like an open book. He loves you, Corinne."

"Love?" I scoffed. "I don't even know what that looks like, but I'm pretty sure I'd recognize it if it was biting me in the

ass.” Or nipping my ass like Dante had done on more than one occasion.

“Just be careful, okay? Whatever he’s trying to protect you from must be pretty bad if he’s calling a lockdown.”

*Las Serpientes* cartel were the worst. But it wasn’t as simple as sitting back and waiting for Dante to swoop in and save the day.

If Camilla was involved with the cartel, and not just one of its victims, there was a very real possibility she would be on the list of Dante’s targets—the people he’d promised to murder in retribution for Gia.

I couldn’t blame him, but I couldn’t let him go through with it either.

“I don’t have any interest in doing anything that would hurt him,” I said.

Ella smiled. “I know. You love him too.”

She turned and walked away, headed toward the kitchen, while I stood there with my mouth open.

My phone suddenly vibrated against my thigh, and I yanked it out, grateful for the distraction.

It was Agent Fuentes’ number flashing on the screen.



# Chapter Twenty-Nine

## Corinne

I glanced at Ella, watching until she'd disappeared around the corner.

With my heart in my throat, I answered the call.

"Hello?" I said, keeping my voice down, which wasn't hard to do since it felt like my heart was strangling my vocal cords.

"Corinne, is that you?" Agent Fuentes asked.

"Yes." I cleared my throat. "It's me." *Did you find her? Is she safe? Has she gotten herself into trouble?* Question upon question tumbled through my mind, but I shoved them back, refusing to let that kind of hope take root. "What can I do for you?"

"I have news. Better than news, actually. I have solid intel that tells me Camilla will be at a private airstrip in New York an hour from now."

My breath hitched in my throat.

"I shouldn't be telling you this, it goes against protocol, but I... well, I can't promise you what's going to happen from here, and I thought you might like to be there, to see her first," Agent Fuentes added.

"Yes," I said as butterflies on cocaine sped around my stomach. "Thank you, Agent Fuentes."

He had been a rather straitlaced by-the-book kind of man, so I was kind of doing cartwheels in my head at the moment

over the exception he was making. He was going to let me see Camilla.

No matter what happened from here, I'd be with her.

I'd be there for her like I should have been all along.

He rumbled off the address and brief directions to the airstrip from the Interstate.

"I'll be there."

"Good. Glad to hear it, Corinne. I'll see you there. Remember, one hour."

I was going to see my sister in one hour. See her, hug her, maybe grab onto her and never let her out of my sight.

I looked at the war room door. Still closed.

Would they even be finished in there in an hour?

I had no idea what procedure was here, but I had to tell Dante.

I flew across the floor to the war room door.

I was just about to knock then I stopped short.

If Camilla had somehow played a role in whatever had happened to Gia, would he hurt her? Kill her? Even knowing she was my sister?

We'd never talked about it because I'd never told him about the picture of Camilla in the back of one of *Las Serpientes'* limos.

I couldn't take that risk.

I hurried up the stairs to Dante's room for my purse.

I had no idea about things like posting bail or what Camilla might need from me after that. Credit cards seemed like a bare essential.

There was no blank paper in the room, but there were books on his bedside table.

I grabbed a pen from inside the table's drawer and opened up one of the books on top—an old, worn copy of Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*—and turned it to an empty page in the front.

I couldn't leave without telling him anything at all, though a quickly scrawled message in an old book hardly seemed like enough.

Dante was going to hate me after this, I realized.

After I'd left against his wishes and then did whatever I had to do to protect Camilla, I wouldn't be surprised if he never spoke to me again.

I guess I'd figured out his exit strategy for him—no qualms about moving on if he hated my guts.

*Then just stay*, a voice whispered inside my head.

It didn't sound much like the feminist bitch, not much like the coward that tried to whisper to me from time to time either. Maybe this voice was new—the lovesick puppy who just wanted to stay here forever and pretend things never had to change.

Ella was right, I realized, as I finished the note, hooked my purse on my shoulder, and left the room.

I hadn't just developed feelings for the cocky son of a bitch.

I'd fallen in love with him.

There was no one around as I hurried back down the stairs.

Fallon was sneaking in a nap with Maria, Ella was still in the kitchen, and the men were still busy making plans in the war room. At least this part of my impromptu plan was easy—making it through the house unnoticed was a breeze.

I punched in the code I'd seen Fallon enter into the door to the garage. It unlocked, and I found myself inside again, staring at the row of beautiful cars.

I would have loved to take the Pagani, but this was going to be difficult enough—maybe impossible. Drawing attention to the hypercar wasn't a smart idea.

I looked at the wall beside me where a dozen sets of key fobs and weird keys hung on hooks. There was only one that looked like an ordinary car key to me, hung alone at the far end of all the others. I grabbed it then slipped past all the pretty cars and stopped next to an old Ford Mustang Shelby, beautifully restored. More importantly, the windows had been replaced with privacy glass, and the driver's side door was even unlocked because who would be stupid enough to steal a car from the Luca family?

Me, apparently.

Praying I was right about the Lucas, that they weren't going to toss me in the ocean with concrete shoes if they caught me, I slid into the driver's seat and shoved what I hoped was the right key into the ignition.

I thought I'd heard something about being able to hot-wire an old car with a flathead screwdriver, but I didn't have a flathead screwdriver, so it was kind of a moot point.

Thankfully, when I turned the key in the ignition, the engine revved to life.

There were a series of buttons on the garage's wall that I was fairly certain opened the row of garage doors.

I just had to hope I got the right one.

Since the Mustang was positioned right in front of the furthest door from the house, I left the car running while I followed the buttons to the last one in the series, pressed it, and made a mad dash to the car.

An image of Camilla flashed behind my eyes as the garage door opened, slow and steady, nothing like my heart, which was threatening to pound right out of my chest. She was why I was doing this. I'd give up my life to protect my baby sister. Certainly, I could give up the man I'd stupidly fallen in love with.

*Just do it, Corinne. Drive away and never look back.*

It felt like something tore in my chest as I shifted the Mustang into gear and drove out of the garage.

The gates at the end of the long, winding driveway were open during the day, but that didn't mean there wouldn't be a human blockade standing there to greet me.

At least half the men had filed into the war room with Dante, though, so my chances of escape were probably better now than ever.

Still, my stomach was like a thousand twisted-up knots as I passed a guard on my right.

I sat up as tall and broad as I could, resisting the urge to step on the gas, gripping the steering wheel so tight my knuckles were white.

Even the windshield was tinted—totally illegal, but that probably didn't matter to men like the Lucas.

I held my breath, waiting for him to stop me, to scream, to do something to thwart my escape.

The guard gave me a salute as I drove past him.

The tear in my chest ripped more because the cold, hard, wretched truth was that Dante had trusted me to stay here, to tell him if anyone called or messaged me.

I was a horrible person. But I would be horrible, I'd be atrocious, I'd be the most dishonorable human being on earth if it meant Camilla was safe.

It was all that mattered.

It didn't stop tears from falling as I drove out through the open gates, past two guards who barely glanced in my direction.

\*\*\*

I kept looking in the rearview mirror, expecting to see Dante's Merc, or maybe one of the black Escalades.

No Mercs, no Escalades. No Dante.

I was five minutes away from the airport, seven minutes from seeing Camilla.

I'd never felt so miserable and so excited at the same time.

It was probably melodramatic for it to feel like I was giving up my life for her, my sister, in exchange for the man I'd fallen in love with, for the life I could have had with him.

With every passing minute, the knots in my stomach twisted up tighter while a nervous energy made my fingers shake like I had the jitters.

I could see the turnoff for the small airstrip up ahead.

I pushed harder on the gas pedal, speeding toward Camilla.

I barely slowed down as I turned into the airstrip, flying down the narrow road to the hangar at the end.

Halfway down the road, I eased my foot off the gas.

There were no planes on the ground, no people milling about.

Instead, there were two cars parked next to the hangar.

Sweat began to trickle down the side of my face. My chest seemed to tighten. My knees started to feel like jelly.

I hit the brake then threw the Mustang into reverse while prickles of unease crept down my spine.

The cars parked next to the hangar started toward me.

They moved slowly at first; it felt like they were taunting me like two lions on a slow prowl after a gazelle.

The cars surged forward all of a sudden, picking up speed, coming at me faster.

I pushed harder on the gas, turning to look over my shoulder and then wishing I hadn't.

The exit was blocked.

A black SUV had parked itself sideways across the narrow road. There was no getting around it.

I turned the steering wheel to swerve right, but I was too late.

One car clipped the front edge of the Mustang.

The other car slammed into me head-on.

I heard the crunch of metal.

I felt the blinding pain as my head flew forward.

And then nothing.

Nothing but the feel of hands digging into my waist and a strange feeling like being stuck between the realms of the unconscious and the living.

Some time must have passed because someone was pulling me, yanking me sideways.

The unconscious realm spit me out, dropping me back into the land of the living with a blow to the side of my head that made it feel like someone was splitting my head in two.

"You'd better not be dead," a man's voice said.

It was Agent Fuentes' voice, and it was close. He was the one dragging me out of the car.

He lifted me up as I fought to open my eyes, but even that small movement sent vicious waves of pain through my head, threatening to make me vomit.

“What are you doing?” I croaked. It even hurt to move my mouth.

“You’re not the brightest, are you, sweetheart?”

No argument there.

I managed to get my eyes open.

Agent Fuentes was carrying me away from the Mustang toward the black SUV that had blocked my escape.

I’d been holding onto the tenuous hope that this man was my rescuer. But when the SUV’s driver side door opened and a man with tattoos on the sides of his shaved skull stepped out, that hope fizzled out. It was the hulk from the night I’d seen Camilla.

His thin lips stretched into a wide smile as he opened the rear passenger door, and he watched me with dark, soulless eyes as Agent Fuentes dropped me onto the back seat.

The movement made my head hurt so much; it throbbed and it shrieked.

I couldn’t stop my stomach from revolting.

I leaned over the seat and vomited on the floor, noticing with a new kind of horror that the seats and floors were already lined in plastic.

When my stomach was finished, Agent Fuentes grabbed my hips and shoved me forward, sliding in next to me. He didn’t look the least bit bothered that there was vomit all over the floor or a banged-up woman with an obvious head injury lying next to him.

He pulled out a small knife from inside his jacket.



I tried to reach for the other door, to grab the handle, but it wouldn't stay put. It kept moving and fading in and out behind the black spots that speckled my vision.

"Let me go," I cried.

It came out more like a pathetic whine, and even that small noise threatened to send my stomach over the edge a second time.

"I don't think so, Corinne." He grabbed my wrist, stretching my arm out straight toward him as blackness pushed in around my periphery.

I needed to fight, to run, to do something, but I couldn't even muster up the strength to tug my arm away.

"You might want to prepare yourself, sweetheart. This is going to hurt."

My heart was pounding.

It was using up all my energy.

I had nothing left.

The pain in my head roared as Agent Fuentes pressed the tip of the knife to the underside of my forearm. When he dug in, it seemed my brain couldn't take any more.

The blackness claimed me, pulling me down and dragging me under.

Thank God for little mercies, because there was no way I wanted to be awake for whatever happened next.

# Chapter Thirty

## Dante

“There’s no telling where the cartel is located,” Dom said, rubbing his temples. The frustration in the war room was like a living thing, gnawing at every man around the table. “We’ve checked satellite imaging over Colombia, but almost a third of the country is jungle. It’s impossible to see what’s beneath the tree cover.”

“According to one of my contacts,” Nico said, looking just as frustrated as everyone else, “they have a shipping route out of Buenaventura, which might be helpful if I didn’t know they also ship out of Barranquilla, hundreds of miles away. So, that does fuck all to narrow down the search.”

“Their compound could be anywhere,” I said, slamming my hands on the table. This was a waste of time. We’d spent the past hour and a half going around in circles. “All right, that’s it. I haven’t heard back from the Suarez brothers, so it’s time to move on. I’m done waiting. If it isn’t too late already, Gia’s running out of time. I’m going to go hunt this guy down myself.”

Leo scoffed. “You’re just going to start walking around the barrios and hope the Viper jumps out at you?” he asked, one eyebrow cocked. “Because if that’s your plan, sign me up.” His lips twitched up in a smile. “We’ll travel like nomads, soak up some sun, look for an evil-looking prick with a big-ass ‘viper’ sign across his back. How hard could it be, right?”

“*Stronzo*,” I muttered. “Of course, it’s a shitty plan, a needle in a haystack, but tell me you’ve got a better one?” I clenched my fists so tight, my knuckles cracked. *Huh*. Maybe I could understand Corinne’s compulsion. “Rosa used to call me ten times a day. She seldom even bothers to call anymore. That’s how much faith she has left that I’ll find Gia alive. And I can’t keep sitting around waiting for—” I swallowed back the rest of that sentence.

“Gabe will be back any time now,” Nico said, glancing at his watch. “He’s heading back to the U.S. from wherever he was. He said he couldn’t talk over the phone but promised to make the Luca estate his first stop.”

Now I just had to hope Gabe could be as useful as Amadeo had insinuated.

“Then we’ll wait until he’s arrived and decide how to proceed from there,” my father said as he stood up, his eyes on me as he brought this meeting to a close.

My father, brothers, and Nico filed out of the room first, followed by Marco and Cristian and the handful of other men we’d brought in to update them on regular business, estate security, and all the other shit I didn’t care about at the moment.

I stayed put, not quite ready to face Corinne without a single bit of news to give her.

As much as this situation sucked for me, no doubt, it was harder on her.

My phone rang from inside my jacket pocket, and I pulled it out, jumping on any excuse to delay seeing the disappointment etched all over her face.

The call was coming from an unknown number.

I turned on my phone and put it to my ear.

“You want to meet with me, yes?” a raspy, lightly-accented voice asked.

I sat up straighter.

I’d never spoken to him before, but I had no doubt about the mystery caller’s identity.

“That’s right,” I said, keeping my voice cool and level.

“I’m sure you’ve heard I don’t take meetings with men I don’t know.”

“Rules were made to be broken,” I replied.

The Viper was silent, but I could hear him breathing. “In two days’ time, you’ll take your private plane to the landing strip outside El Encanto. My men will meet you there.”

“And if I don’t want to take a trip to your backwater compound?”

He laughed. “I think you’ll be very interested in what I have here at my backwater compound.”

An image of Gia flashed through my mind as the guy hung up. Was he telling me she was still alive? Maybe that meant Corinne’s sister was still alive too.

I needed to let the others know, but I sat for a minute, like a moron, imagining the look on Corinne’s face when I told her we finally had a move to make.

“Dante?” Ella said, snapping me out of my sappy daze.

She was standing outside the war room door, hovering at the threshold, and I noticed she kept her toes safely on the other side. The duck that followed at her feet had no such hesitancy; it waddled right in, wandering between the chair legs, probably in search of food.

“Come on in, Ella. There’s no meeting going on. And besides, I think it’s safe to say you’ve earned your place here.”

She'd survived years of hell at the hands of Fiorenzo Avalone, took down Harry Belemonte—a thorn in everyone's side—and helped to coordinate a rescue mission of twenty-five human trafficking victims.

“No, thank you,” she said, but she came in the room anyway.

Ella seemed content in her humanitarian projects. I guess war room business wasn't really her thing.

“Are you okay, Dante?” she asked, looking at me in that way she often looked at people, like she was reading the answer for herself in body gestures and movements.

“Never better,” I said, slipping my phone back into my jacket. “I have a meeting with a Colombian viper.”

Her brow furrowed. “What do you mean”? she asked, looking a little paler.

Like the duck knew there was something up, it wandered back toward her, tapping at her calf until she picked him up and settled him in the crook of her arm.

“*Las Serpientes* cartel—they're the ones who have been kidnapping girls from here. They kidnapped Gia Esposito and Corinne's sister, Camilla.”

“*El Vibora*,” she said, which was probably common enough knowledge, but it was the way she said it that made me pause.

“Do you know him?”

She nodded, stroking the duck's feathers. “A little. He was interested in forming an alliance with one of the east coast families.”

“Why? I haven't been able to figure out how the *capo* of *Las Serpientes* benefits from a new alliance. Money, sure, but that could have been a straight-up cash deal—their product in exchange for money. So, why marry the cartel to the family?”

“He wanted his cartel to have a broader reach, but he knew places like New York are pretty much owned by families like yours. The only way to shove the others out is to form an alliance with one.”

“And that’s where Amadeo comes in,” I mused aloud.

Ella shrugged because Amadeo hadn’t come into the picture until long after she’d escaped Avalone. That son of a bitch hadn’t been able to use her to collect his information for quite some time now. He wouldn’t be using her for anything ever again since she’d killed him too. Well, technically, Leo had pulled the trigger, but Ella had gotten in a little payback of her own before he died.

Still, I felt like an asshole for dredging it up, even more so, because I could really benefit from whatever information she had on the Viper. *Information that could save Gia and keep Corinne safe.*

“Can you tell me what else you know about him, Ella?” I asked, stepping lightly.

Even I wasn’t a big enough asshole to push too hard. But if she could help me get Gia and Corinne’s sister back and put the Viper in the ground where he belonged, I had to ask.

She nodded and sat down, perched on the edge of the chair next to mine while the duck ruffled his feathers then settled back down in her lap.

“He lived in the U.S. for a long time. His brother was the original *capo* of the cartel until he was murdered. Since then, *El Víbora* has ensured his own survival by keeping himself and the location of the cartel’s compound hidden.” A small smile flickered at the corners of her lips.

“You know where it is,” I stated.

Ella shrugged. “Not precisely. But I know it’s a thirty-seven-minute helicopter flight from Leticia. And since Leticia

is at the southern tip of Colombia, the direction must be roughly north. It's hidden by the treetop canopy overhead, though. You can't see it from the sky."

She'd just narrowed down the search by thousands of miles, and I still had two days to narrow it down further.

"Thank you, Ella." I stood up, ready to move, to do *something*.

Before my meeting with *El Vibora*, we were going to figure out exactly where to find him so we could rain down hell on him.

"You're welcome." A frown furrowed her brow. "About Corinne, though..."

"What about her?" I said in my nice tolerant voice.

I appreciated her help with the Viper to no end, but if she was about to pitch me relationship advice, I'd had about all I could handle lately.

"She's restless," she said simply.

Not what I'd been expecting. "It's none of my business, but I think you might want to keep an eye on her."

Well, I suppose Ella would know. She'd given Leo the slip when he'd tried to put her on lockdown.

"I—"

"Boss?" Cristian said, appearing in the war room doorway. He looked ruffled.

Cristian seldom looked ruffled.

"What is it?"

"An ordinary courier dropped it off a few minutes ago. I checked it for..." He stopped talking and held out a small, square gift box, his face grim.

My heart pounded, imagining what could fit inside the box.

I pulled off the lid.

There was crumpled tissue paper inside, taking up most of the space. Not Gia's heart or hand then. Gia's finger?

I grabbed the tissue paper, but when I saw what laid beneath it, my vision faded to a red haze.

It was everywhere, blurring everything.

My heart felt like a jackhammer in my chest. Blood whooshed past my ears.

It was a pentacle tattoo cut from pale, white flesh. A tattoo I would have recognized anywhere.

I tore through the house.

“Corinne! Corinne! Corinne? Corinne!”

“What's going on?” Dom asked from the bottom of the stairs as I pushed past him and flew up them.

Cristian wasn't far behind me; he could fill Dom in.

“Corinne?” I hollered.

The nursery door flew open, but only Fallon walked out, Maria in her arms.

Fear flashed in Fallon's eyes and her face went pale. “Dante? Where is she?”

I opened my mouth but couldn't force out words. It felt like someone was driving a knife right through my chest.

I turned away and opened my bedroom door.

Empty.

I was just about to leave the room when the open book on the bedside table caught my attention. An open book with handwriting scrawled across it.

I grabbed the book, but the writing was blurry.



My heart was pounding so hard, I couldn't see straight.

I squinted my eyes and focused harder.

*“I got news about my sister from my ‘agent friend’. I wish I could have shared it with you, but there are things I haven't told you. Things that would put my sister at risk. I failed her once before, Dante. I have to keep her safe no matter what, and I hope one day you can forgive me.*

*There's just one more thing, and I think it's probably for the best that I waited until now to tell you—less awkward silence, you know? The thing is I love you, Dante Luca. I hate you for making me fall in love with your grouchy, bossy, egotistical ass, but you did it. Damn you.”*

The knife in my heart twisted, and my knees gave out.

They actually gave out.

I sat down on the bed hard. The bed where I'd fucked her, held her, spent hours talking to her, watched her sleep.

*“Trust is bad, will get her killed...”* Lando had said.

She'd trusted her agent friend.

She'd walked right out of here.

I had no doubt, she'd walked herself right into a trap.

# Chapter Thirty-One

## Corinne

Sometimes, when I wake up from a long sleep, I'm disorientated.

Everything seems kind of fuzzy.

It's like the brain is trying to function through drunk goggles, making every memory blurry.

This was not one of those times.

I came awake like someone had flipped a switch, dropping me hard and fast into reality.

My head throbbed from the car crash.

My throat was raw from vomiting.

My forearm felt like it was on fire, but I hadn't been conscious when he'd cut me to know what it was he'd done to me.

Instant clarity had its drawbacks.

I kind of wished I didn't know why I was here in this tiny, concrete cell with big iron bars blocking my escape. I wished the ropes around my wrists that trapped my arms behind my back were baffling, and even more, that the muffled whimpers and quiet sobs coming from all around me were a complete mystery. But instant clarity meant I knew exactly where I was and why I was here.

I was locked in one of *Las Serpientes*' cells, maybe in Colombia or some other hidden location they'd been keeping. And I was here because I was the stupidest woman alive.

I sat up slowly, using every stomach muscle I had and pushing off the floor with my bound hands behind my back. By the time I got upright, the throbbing in my head had doubled, threatening to make my stomach dry-heave—because there was definitely nothing left in it at this point. I leaned my head back against the wall and breathed slow and deep, waiting for the violent agony to pass.

“Camilla?” I tried to call out, but it came out of my raw throat as a whisper.

It was too dark to make out much more than vague, shadowy outlines in the cells all around me, but there were other people here.

“Camilla?” I tried again, louder this time.

The only response was just more quiet sobs and whimpers from all around me.

“Hello? Can anyone tell me where we are?”

Gathering all the information I could seemed like the best next step, even if it was only to keep my brain from honing in on the terror that coursed through my veins.

“Hey, you really don't want to do that,” a girl in the next cell said as her shadow leaned toward me. “Just breathe. You're going to be okay. Are you hurt?”

“Yeah,” I said, though it kind of felt like a monumental understatement. “They crashed into my car.” My voice was so hoarse it didn't sound like me. “I hit my head, and he cut my arm.”

“Can you come closer?” she whispered.

The girl was right up against the bars now, but she was little more than a gray blob in the darkness.

I scooted over toward her, but I had to pause halfway there to catch my breath and stop my head from splitting open. Another minute, and I felt the cool bars against my shoulder.

“Good. I’m just going to feel your head to see what we’re working with, okay?”

I nodded, realizing belatedly that she probably couldn’t see that. “Yes,” I croaked.

Her fingers prodded gently, moving around my scalp until they found the swollen source of my pain on the side of my head. I must have had my head turned when the car crashed into me, slamming the side of my head instead of my forehead into the steering wheel. Too bad the pain was limited to the side of my head; it kind of felt like it was bombarding me from all directions.

“The good news is it feels like they fixed you up,” she said after a moment. “I think they’ve got liquid stitches on the gash on your head, so you should be okay.”

*Lucky me.* “And the bad news?”

She laughed quietly. “Well, for now, the bad news is I don’t have any water. Do you think you could swallow a pill without it?”

I tried to swallow, gauging the possibility. My throat stung, but it seemed like it might work. “I think so.”

“It looks like they’ve got your arms tied up, so I’m going to put a pill in your mouth, okay? It’s just acetaminophen with codeine, so it’s not great, but it’ll take the edge off.”

I nodded then remembered better. “Yes.”

I felt her fingers at my lips and then the small pill on my tongue.

I dredged up every bit of saliva I could, pushed the pill to the back of my mouth, and swallowed. I could feel its trip down my raw throat, but at least it went down. Now, all I had to do was wait for blessed relief... as much blessed relief as a Tylenol could give me.

“You’re new,” the girl said, sitting back against the wall close by me, “so they’re going to come for you soon. I don’t mean to scare you, but it’s better if you know what’s coming.”

Best welcome speech of all time—*really*.

She reached her hand through the bars again and squeezed my uninjured arm. “Listen to me. Don’t fight them, okay? I know it sucks, but it’s better than the beating you’ll get if you give them a hard time.”

I nodded, giving up the fight against tears and letting them fall.

I’d screwed things permanently with Dante, lost any hope of helping Camilla, and now I was getting a Let-them-do-whatever-they-want-to-you pep talk from a girl in another cell who probably knew firsthand what they were going to do to me.

I think tears were appropriate.

“You’ve probably got a concussion,” she continued, her voice quiet but urgent, “so preventing more damage to your head is top priority right now. Do you understand me?”

I nodded hollowly. I understood just fine. Fine enough that I was shaking so hard my teeth chattered when a door squeaked open a minute later.

Light spilled across the dark cells, revealing one or two girls in each of the cells around me, most of them curled up beneath tiny, threadbare blankets on dirty mattresses like they were trying to disappear.

“What’s your name?” the girl whispered.

“Corinne.”

She squeezed my arm. “I’ll be here when you get back, Corinne. Just hold onto that. I’ll be here, okay?”

She let me go as heavy footsteps approached.

Two sets of footsteps.

Two pairs of legs that came into view a moment later.

Two faces.

One of the faces belonged to the hulk. His soulless eyes found me in the dim light and he smiled at me through the bars.

The other man—a stout, short-haired man with a snake tattoo that spiraled around his neck and up to his cheek—unlocked my cell and opened the door.

When the hulk stepped inside, I pressed myself back against the wall, wishing it would swallow me up.

He reached down and grabbed me beneath one arm, hauling me up onto my feet.

“Let me go,” I screeched as pain sliced through my head, made even worse when he slammed me against the wall, though, my shoulder took the brunt of the impact.

I kicked out at him, catching his shin with my heel, but he barely seemed to notice.

If I’d been wearing stilettos, I could have done some serious damage.

He dragged me away from the wall then slammed me into it a second time.

This time, the back of my head took the impact.

I screamed as white spots danced across my vision.

“Let her go, you son of a bitch,” the girl in the next cell seethed. “Come try that shit with me, assholes.”

The hulk looked over at her and laughed, but the snake man at the door had grown impatient.

“Let’s go, Diaz. We got orders,” he barked at the hulk who scowled but let me go.

“I don’t envy you, *puta*. *El jefe* wants to see you.” Diaz sneered.

I felt a chill settle around me, like the body temperature of every girl in the basement had just plummeted.

It seemed *El jefe* wasn’t a man these girls wanted to see.

Diaz grabbed hold of my arm around my bicep and hauled me forward this time, out of the cell, down the cold, narrow corridor between cells. Up a set of rickety stairs. He moved so fast, I kept tripping, trying to keep up, and the light at the top was almost blinding after waking to the almost-blackness in the basement.

My whole body was shaking as he pulled me down a long walkway encased in windows.

Outside, the scenery looked nothing like New York.

It seemed there was nothing but trees everywhere; tall, towering trees that blocked out so much daylight, they cast a green glow over everything below them.

*Well, you’re definitely not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy.*

Diaz finally stopped outside a door to another section of the compound.

He knocked, and the door opened a moment later.

The room beyond it was nothing like the dingy cells.

This space was bright and airy, with pale wood floors and a wall of windows.

There were two men dressed in black and gray fatigues with huge guns in their hands on the other side of the room. They stood out in stark contrast to the light space.

The center of the room was taken up by comfortable-looking sofas, where three people sat—a man and a woman facing me, another man with his back to me, but all three of them had their heads bowed together in conversation.

Until the woman looked up.

Long, dark hair and a heart-shaped face. Slim nose dusted in freckles and wide, full lips.

Camilla looked right through me.

I felt like a ghost.

I wanted to run to her, but the hulk held me captive.

I wanted to cry out to her, but my voice was trapped beneath the lump in my throat.

The man looked up—the blond man from the pictures—and he *saw* me.

The recognition in his eyes said I wasn't a ghost to him.

Neither he nor Camilla stood up.

Neither of them spoke.

They looked away like I was nothing and turned their attention back to the other man.

I tried to tug my arm out of Diaz's grasp, but he held firm.

"Let me go, asshole," I seethed, finding my voice, hoarse as it was.

He didn't budge. He just stood there, eyes focused on the man who still had his back to me.

That had to be *him*.

The *capo* of *Las Serpientes*.



*El jefe.*

The *capo* stood up.

He was tall. Broad-shouldered, but not as brawny as the hulk or even the blond man. The back of his dark hair was streaked with gray and a little on the longish side, dusting the collar of his maroon shirt.

What struck me as absurd, almost unbelievable, was that from behind, he looked almost normal.

Until he turned around and smiled at me.

Everything that made sense in the world went up in smoke.

# Chapter Thirty-Two

## Dante

The pathetic excuse of a man in front of me whimpered and whined as blood dripped from the open wounds on his arm.

An eye for an eye.

I'd sliced off his skin just like he'd done to Corinne.

The difference was I wasn't finished yet.

"Corinne came to see you, and now she's missing," I said, grazing the sharp blade along another patch of flesh, preparing for my next slice. "I don't have to tell you how that looks, do I?"

"I didn't have anything to do with it," Fuentes said, digging his bare feet into the floor like he could launch himself out of here. "You've got the wrong guy. My job was to find her sister. Why would I hurt her?"

"Were you planning to search for her sister at the airport or in Buenos Aires?"

That's where our men had found him, trying to board a plane out of the country.

"I was following a lead, asshole. You're going to pay for this."

"Stick and stones, and all that shit, Fuentes. Now, tell me, what did you do with Corinne?"

He shook his head, frantic, digging his toes into the floor as Cristian and Rome stretched out his arm, holding it steady.

I'd never tortured a man in my own home before.

It was an aspect of the business that we tried to keep separate, but the war room served a new purpose now.

And I'd paint the room—the whole house—in blood if it got me what I wanted.

With a flick of my wrist, I sliced off more of the agent's flesh while he screamed like a banshee.

I felt nothing as I watched him. No hesitation, no remorse.

He'd taken Corinne. He'd hurt her.

Now, I was going to take him apart piece by piece.

"Where is she?" I asked over top of his screams.

"I don't know!" he hollered.

Another slice of flesh. More screams. More blood dripping onto the war room floor.

"Do you want the hedge clippers, boss?" Rome asked. He wouldn't say it, but he was pissed. Actually, I don't think I'd ever seen him so pissed off. "He's got a few extruding parts we can cut off." He turned his gaze pointedly to the agent's crotch.

Fuentes had hurt her. Had he raped her? If so, cutting off his dick and shoving it down his throat sounded like a good idea.

"*Si*, get the clippers."

Rome released his hold on Fuentes' arm, and he left him there, bound by ropes, and strolled out of the room. The hedge clippers probably weren't as sharp as the instruments we kept at the warehouse, but maybe that was better. Slower. More painful.

Cristian looked to me for our next move, but I waved him off.

“Are you sure you don’t have anything to tell me, Fuentes?” I asked, leaning against the table, arms crossed over my chest. “You have the opportunity to save yourself from a whole lot of nastiness here. I’d take it if I were you—not sure there’s much point in living when you’ve got no dick anyway.”

“Fuck, I told you—”

“Lie to me one more time,” I hissed, grabbing his jaw, “and I’ll cut out your tongue.” I pressed the flat of the blade against his mouth.

Fuentes swallowed hard and nodded his head ever so slightly, not pressing against the blade more than necessary.

“We’ve only got a moment before Rome returns with the hedge clippers. So, I’m going to ask you one more time: Where is she?”

“He’ll... he’ll kill me,” he rasped.

Cristian laughed.

I shook my head. “He’s not going to kill you, Fuentes. I can promise you that because *I’m* going to kill you. The only choice you have to make here is how painful and drawn out you want your death to be.”

Fuentes’ eyes were wide as he stared up at me, his face red, tears dribbling down his cheeks.

“I don’t want to die,” he snivelled as sobs racked his chest.

“Then you shouldn’t have touched her. Why’d you do it, Fuentes? Money? Of course, it was money.” I nodded, answering my own question. “What did you do to her for the money they paid you?” I asked, but this time, the question made something sharp stab through the nothingness I’d wrapped around me. “What did you do to her?” I persisted.

“I... I’m just the decoy. He paid me to lure her out and trap her.”

“That’s all? You’re forgetting about the tattoo you sent me. You remember what it looked like, don’t you?”

His eyes widened, and he shook his head.

“I do,” I whispered because the sharp thing inside me felt like it was slicing up my vocal cords.

I didn’t need to see the tattoo to remember it.

I’d memorized every inch of her body, every curve, every hollow, every one of her tattoos.

I dug the tip of the knife into his arm and carved out a tattoo in blood.

The war room door opened, and Rome stepped in, closing the door behind him. His eyes seemed darker than I’d ever seen them, and he wore a grim smile as he held out the clippers.

I took them and tested them, slicing the air. “*Grazie*. Get his pants off, *per favore*.”

“No!” Fuentes screamed, his whole body twisting and contorting against the ropes. His face was beet red, and his tears fell so fast they were making a puddle in the collar of his shirt.

“Where is she?” I asked as Rome and Cristian each grabbed a hem of Fuentes’ pants and sliced upward—mostly through fabric.

It looked like Rome was doing his best not to go for bone.

“I-I don’t know. It’s the truth. I put her in a car at the airstrip, and that’s the last I saw of her, I swear. My job was just to get her there and... and send you proof they had her. I thought...”

“Go on,” I said.

“They said to send whatever I wanted—a finger or an ear—but I thought the tattoo would be enough. I didn’t want to hurt her more than necessary, but I had to do something.”

I chuckled darkly. “You’re trying to show me how compassionate you were? Is that it?”

“I liked Corinne. I didn’t want to do this. I just didn’t have a choice.”

“No. We always have a choice, Fuentes. You made yours. Now, I’m going to make mine.”

I grabbed my Glock from the holster at my hip, pointed at him, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet hit him right between the eyes.

# Chapter Thirty-Three

## Dante

Fuentes was dead, but he'd taken my nothingness with him.

All I could do was *feel* as I stood there, staring at his corpse.

It wasn't Fuentes I was seeing, though.

It was *her*.

Corinne.

My *luna*.

I could picture her getting all fiery, hissing and cursing at the men who took her.

She wouldn't go quietly; it just wasn't in her nature.

"Dante?" Leo said, sticking his head in the war room door.

"*Si?*"

I couldn't tear my eyes away. Fuentes was the last person I knew had seen her, touched her.

"Just checking to see if you need any help in here?"

I shook my head. "The guy's dead." I nodded at Fuentes. "Not much help for that."

"Not really what I meant, *fratello*." Leo came in, and Cristian and Rome slipped out, closing the door behind them to give us some privacy.

“If this is the part where you pat me on the back and tell me everything’s going to be okay, save it, would you?”

He nodded. “You love her.”

“I want to get her back so I can wring her neck. Does that sound like love to you?”

He laughed quietly. “*Si*, it does. I was so pissed at Ella when she took off that night.”

I remembered that night well.

Ella had snuck out of here to go back and kill the man who’d tormented her for years only to wind up in the hands of another asshole who’d nearly killed her.

“I was also so scared it felt like I was going out of my mind,” Leo said.

I nodded. I could sympathize with that feeling now. “*Las Serpientes* has a reputation for doing vile things to their victims,” I said, staring at the hole in Fuentes’ head and knowing that as much as I’d wanted him to die, I’d done him a favor. Once *Las Serpientes* found out that he’d talked, they would have hunted him down and turned him into a human game of *Operation*.

“They’re going to hurt her, Leo,” I said, my voice rougher than I’d ever heard it.

Leo flinched but recovered quickly. “She’s strong, and you know it, *fratello*. So push all that other shit out of your head, and let’s focus on getting the woman you definitely don’t love back.”

I laughed; it was a hollow sound. “We need to narrow down the search, and we need intel on the airstrip outside El Encanto.”

“Then let’s go talk to someone who might be able to help with that.”



I cocked an eyebrow.

“Gabe’s here.”

“Why the hell didn’t you say so?”

“It looked like you needed a minute.”

I nodded, clenching my jaw. “*Grazie, fratello*. Now, move your ass.”

Leo opened the door, but it was Fallon who stood waiting on the other side.

I hadn’t seen her since I’d found Corinne’s note, couldn’t face her. I couldn’t look her in the eyes, knowing the condemnation I’d find there, the hatred.

*This is your fault*, her eyes would scream.

I had enough of that going on in my own head already.

“Dante, I need to talk to you,” she said, arms crossed over her chest, but her hands weren’t fisted; they were hugging her ribs like she was trying to hold herself together.

Leo slipped past us and strode down the hall toward voices I could hear coming from beyond the foyer.

“Can it wait?” I asked because I was a coward.

“It can’t,” she said, stiffening her spine and meeting my gaze head-on, her eyes glistening.

“Make it fast, *per favore*,” I said with as much restraint as I could muster.

She nodded and took a step back as I stepped out of the war room.

“There’s something you should probably know...” she said, trailing off.

I nodded, waiting.

It wasn't like Fallon to chew on her words. When she had something to say, she'd never had a problem speaking her mind.

"It's about Corinne's sister," she said, now wringing her hands in front of her while precious seconds ticked by.

"Fallon, just spit it out, *per favore*," I said, clenching my jaw and biting back the anger roiling in my gut.

"Corinne saw her sister, I think it was before the two of you met. She saw Camilla sitting in a car with *Las Serpientes*. Like... just sitting, not restrained, you know?"

I widened my eyes. "You're saying that it looked like she was there willingly? As in she was *with* them, not abducted by them?"

Fallon nodded.

"Why didn't she tell me?" I barked then immediately regretted it.

She crossed her arms over her chest, hands fisted this time. "You pretty much told her you were going to go psycho-killer on the asses of everyone who had anything to do with what happened to Gia. What did you think she was going to do? Hand her sister up to you on a silver platter?" She threw her arms out wide in exasperation. "She had no way of knowing what you'd do if she told you."

"But you did," I snapped. "I would never—" I slammed my jaw shut because if I had learned Camilla had anything to do with Gia's kidnapping before I'd taken Corinne from Ascension, I would have killed her—I'd meant every word of the promise I'd made to Rosa.

Fallon cocked a knowing brow, but then dropped it, and her chest deflated with a heavy sigh. "I saw the way you looked at her, Dante. I knew how you felt about Corinne before you did.

So, I know you would never do anything that would hurt her, but she told me about her sister in confidence.”

“There are more important things than keeping secrets, Fallon.”

“It wasn’t about the secret, Dante. Maybe you don’t get it, but for people like me... like Corinne... we’re trapped in your world, but we’re not really allowed to be a part of it, and we’re not allowed to talk about it. But I’ll be damned if I let my best friend wade through this world of yours alone. So, yeah, I kept what she told me to myself, and maybe it was the wrong call—I’m not going to argue with you about it—but I’m *not* sorry for it.”

“You feel trapped?” Those words hit me like a sucker punch.

She sighed and shook her head. “I love my life, Dante. I love Dom and Maria. I love all of you—I hope you know that—and I wouldn’t change it for a second, not for all the freedom in the world. But that doesn’t mean there aren’t things that piss me off. How would you feel if everyone was always making decisions behind closed doors? Decisions that had a direct impact on your life.”

“No way,” I barked, an automatic reflex.

“Exactly,” she said, but there was no triumphant gleam in her eyes.

My father appeared in the foyer then with Dom and Leo, followed by Gabe, Raven, and Nico. Then Cristian and Rome.

“Just get her back, Dante,” Fallon said, her voice quiet. “And try not to murder her sister in the process.”

I nodded, but she’d already turned away, breezing past the others.

My father clapped me on the shoulder, giving me a sympathetic half-smile. He probably thought Fallon had just finished reaming me out.

Dom looked at me, his face tired and drawn. He'd been with Fallon ever since I'd found Corinne's note.

The room filled as Rome and Cristian grabbed hold of Fuentes—chair and all—and hauled his corpse out of the room. It was still odd not to see Marco here—he was overseeing security on our family's island, probably thanks to a particular soft spot he had for Ella.

Raven's eyes were fixed on my father's as he took a seat at the head of the table, staring him down in a silent standoff.

My father took the challenge, clearing his throat. "Raven?" he asked, settling back in his chair, fingers steeped in front of him.

"Don't look at me like that, *Papà*. I know if Greta were here, she'd be at this table, and you know I've worked hard for this. If this was ordinary business, sure, shut the door on the girls, but this is Fallon's best friend, *Papà*. Let me help, *per favore*."

My father sighed and gave her a single nod.

"And why isn't Greta here?" Raven asked, looking to Gabe. "Haven't you two been joined at the hip lately?"

He shrugged. "She's tied up with other stuff at the moment. She couldn't just up and leave it."

"Fuentes was useless," I told them. "He put her in a car at the RHC airstrip, and that was the last he saw of her," I said, catching the room up to speed. "We're going to need another plan," I said, turning to Gabe.

Gabe sighed. "Would it really be so much to ask for mafia families to go back to doing... mafia things?" he asked, rolling

his eyes.

“You know something,” I stated.

The confident look on his face said Amadeo had been right.

“Of course, I know something. It’s you,” he said, looking around the room, “who aren’t supposed to know anything about this.”

“Well, we do, and now they have the woman—” I paused. “They have Fallon’s best friend.”

“And I have a feeling there’ll be no talking you out of going after her,” Gabe said, nodding as he crossed his arms over his chest. “All right, but there’s one thing you need to know...”

# Chapter Thirty-Four

## Corinne

It was just me and him.

Me and the *capo* of *Las Serpientes*.

Alone.

He'd sent Camilla and the blond man out of the room, and they'd left without giving me a second glance.

Just like I was a ghost.

In reality, we weren't completely alone; the two men in black and gray fatigues still stood across the room, and the hulk—Diaz—stood two feet behind me.

I couldn't see anything but the dark-haired man who dug his fingers into my shoulder and led me to the center of the room, next to the sofa where Camilla had been sitting.

I would have been tempted to fight him, but since my hands were still bound behind my back and I hadn't thought to don a pair of stilettos for my impromptu trip, I had zero chances of winning this fight.

"It's been a very long time, hasn't it, Corinne?" the dark-haired man said, his voice just as raspy as I remembered it.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

It felt like something was strangling me, wrapping around my neck and crushing my vocal cords.

He laughed. "You look like you've seen a ghost, *princesa*."

*Princesa*—that’s what he used to call me. “*Get me a beer, princesa.*” “*Clean up that mess, princesa.*” “*Stop bleeding on my floor, princesa.*”

“You’re dead,” I said.

I wasn’t the ghost here; the ghost was standing right in front of me, talking to me. The ghost of the man I’d killed.

He laughed again. “Not quite, though not from any lack of trying on your part.”

He started unbuttoning his maroon shirt, making bile rise in the back of my throat as I remembered what the girl in the cells had said.

I backed up slowly, one small step and then another.

“Hold her,” he said to Diaz who grabbed onto my bound arms while I bordered on hyperventilating.

I tried to yank my arms out of his grip, but he held on.

I slammed my foot down on his, but I don’t think he even flinched.

“Let me go,” I screeched, but he just gripped me tighter, digging his fingers into my arms so deep, it’d leave bruises.

My stepdad shrugged his shoulders and the maroon shirt slipped off him, snagging on his hand. He tossed it on the sofa then he turned around, presenting his back to me.

I paused in my struggle, caught off guard.

“What do you think?” he asked as my eyes took in the expanse of his back, covered in a tattoo of a nest of vipers, marred only by the long, thick scar that ran down his right side from near the bottom of his ribs into the waist of his pants. “Well?” he asked again, looking back at me over his shoulder. “You did a good job, don’t you think? Nearly killed me, in fact. You tore right through my kidney. They had to remove it. Though, you’ll be happy to know I’ve since gotten it back.

Well, not the one you destroyed...”—he chuckled—“...but a new kidney, even if the donor wasn’t as willing as one might hope.”

Stealing kidneys? Who did that? Tomás Vega, apparently.

“What do you want?” I snapped, infusing my voice with every ounce of false bravado I could muster.

Sure, it wasn’t the kind of question a girl trapped in a room full of dangerous men wanted to ask, but it was all I could think about at the moment.

Tomás sighed and reached for his shirt, slipping it back on, though he left it unbuttoned. “You took good care of my daughter, Corinne. It’s the only reason I’ve allowed you to live as long as you have. After I killed my brother and took his place, there were things that needed my attention. I didn’t have time to raise a child. But she’s a grown woman now. She has no use for you, and I have a very important use for her.”

My body started to tremble because there was no room for misinterpretation there.

“You’re going to kill me.” I met his gaze and raised my chin, even if it was trembling so much my teeth chattered.

I’d thought about this moment—dying at the hands of whoever had taken Camilla—I’d pictured it, I’d even tried to come to terms with it. But not once had I imagined it being for nothing. I was going to die, and whether Camilla had been seriously brainwashed or there was something else keeping her here, my death wouldn’t do a thing to help her.

“Not right away, but eventually, yes,” he said, his face blank. There was no regret there, no hint of any emotion.

He bent down and withdrew a long knife from a holster at his ankle. “For now, though, I had something else in mind.” He held up the knife right in front of me, inches from my face.



I glared at him, biting my lip to keep it from trembling.

I didn't want him see me cower.

As he took a step toward me, I stumbled back like a coward, right into Diaz's meaty chest.

Both men laughed.

Diaz released my arms at the same time my stepdad spun me around, and though I struggled to get free, in the back of my mind, I was waiting. Knowing I was about to feel the cold stab of the knife in my back, right in the same place I'd stabbed him.

A small piece of my mind wondered if he'd destroy my kidney or remove it. Probably remove it so he could sell it and make a decent profit.

"I'm not going to kill you, Corinne, not yet, at least," he said, slicing through the ropes that bound my wrists instead of my flesh.

He turned me back around to face him while Diaz stepped away.

"It would be a shame to kill you so quickly. So many of my men have been anxious to spend some time with you, and Diaz, here, most of all," Tomás said with a nod toward the hulk and a sly smile that made me sick.

The air in the room changed, all of it emanating from Diaz. A twisted energy radiated from him. It was like every atom in his body had coiled up tight, ready to pounce.

"*Don't fight them,*" the girl in the basement had said, but I couldn't do that.

Tomás took a step back as Diaz's eyes roamed over me.

"Wait," my stepdad called out, holding up his hand.

The tension twisting up my stomach eased just a little.

Maybe he'd changed his mind. Maybe there was some small piece of humanity left inside him that wouldn't let him do this.

He looked at me and smiled—one of those rare smiles I remembered that weren't laced with contempt.

He leaned in closer until I could feel his disgusting breath against my cheek.

“Because you did such a good job caring for Camilla,” he whispered. It was like a caress from a slug, slimy and lingering on my skin. “I'm giving you a head start, *princesa*. I suggest you run.”

# Chapter Thirty-Five

## Dante

It was one thing working with the Costas, or even the Lucianos.

The Lucianos and Costas were practically family.

I'd even managed to get on board working side by side with Brute, president of the Old Dogs motorcycle club, when we'd had to. Brute was a crazy guy, but he knew the meaning of loyalty and respect. I could work with that.

"You've got to be kidding me," I said as I stepped off the plane onto the tarmac where a dozen men dressed in fatigues stood, tattoos winding down their forearms and up the sides of their necks. Every one of them was armed. And every one of them was cartel, no doubt about it.

Gabe said we'd have help on the ground; this wasn't my idea of help.

Gabe smiled. "Just think of it as 'slumming it'."

Cristian laughed under his breath beside me.

Dom stared back at the cartel men, his jaw clenched tight. "There won't be much slumming going on when one of those guys starts shooting us in the back," he said, not bothering to keep his voice down.

For once, he wasn't playing the diplomat. I don't think he liked these cartel boys at all.

“It is what it is, *amico*,” Nico said, though the flash of steel in his eyes said he wasn’t any more impressed than the rest of us. “Let’s just get this over with.”

He stepped in front of Raven, putting his big body between her and the cartel and no doubt pissing off my sister to no end. She scowled at him but knew better than to make a scene.

Gabe nodded and headed for one of the cartel guys, a tall, dark-haired man in his early thirties maybe, with a scar cutting across his eyebrow and a tattoo of two angels all the way up his arm.

Gabe shook the man’s hand and clapped him on the back like they were old friends.

I recognized the man. The *capo* of the Morales cartel didn’t hide in the shadows like the *capo* of *Las Serpientes*. He didn’t seem to care if that meant there was a constant target painted on his back. And it was hard not to respect a man for that.

“Is anyone else wondering if this wasn’t the best idea of all time?” Raven asked, still standing just behind Nico.

Leo laughed under his breath. “Dante’s idea was to go backpacking around South America, turning over rocks.”

“*Stronzo*,” I muttered, fighting the urge to hit my brother.

Raven smiled. “Okay, that idea was probably worse.”

Salvatore—Nico’s right-hand man—turned away strategically, no doubt hiding his smile.

Rome and Cristian didn’t bother turning away. They just smiled.

Gabe turned and strode back toward us, Morales on his heels.

“All right, we’re all set. This is Nacio Morales, *capo* of the Morales cartel.” He nodded to Morales. “He’s agreed to work with us in taking down *Las Serpientes* in exchange for a fifty-

fifty split on their routes and product. We've both agreed that the girls go free. No more human trafficking, *si?*" he said, his gaze swinging back and forth between Morales and the rest of us, looking for confirmation.

Morales nodded.

Dom and Nico followed suit.

Morales turned his attention to me. "You're the man whose woman was taken, yes?"

*My woman.*

"*Si.* Why?" I asked, my voice cold.

"Tomás Vega is a cruel man. I cannot guarantee what you'll find in his compound, do you understand?"

I growled.

I couldn't stop picturing the thousand and one scenes we could find in the Viper's compound. Each one was enough to make me lose my shit. Corinne hurt. Corinne dead. Corinne raped and beaten, left to die alone in the middle of a jungle. It was taking everything I had to keep it together.

Morales held up his hand in a placating gesture. "I mean no disrespect, *Señor* Luca. But my men will be there, fighting alongside you. All of our lives are dependent on the man next to us doing his part, keeping a... level head. This woman is important to you; these men are important to me."

"I understand, *Signor* Morales." I nodded, channeling my inner diplomatic Dominic.

"*Gracias.* And it's Nacio. My father was *Señor* Morales, and he was a cocksucking prick." A flicker of humor shone in the man's eyes, and I realized I didn't hate him.

I shook his hand then turned my attention back to Gabe. "Then I suppose this is where we part ways."

Gabe nodded. “The plane will take you and Cristian to the airstrip outside of El Encanto,” he explained, not for the first time. “From there, *Las Serpientes*’ men will fly you directly into the compound, but before you board their helicopter, they’ll search you.”

I scoffed.

“They’re not looking for guns, so keep them,” Gabe continued. “They probably won’t care. A measly handgun means nothing to them—they’ll be carrying assault rifles. What they’re looking for are electronic devices—anything you could use to track or broadcast their location. If they find any on you, they’ll be pissed. So, *don’t* let them find any on you.”

“All right, let’s go.” I needed to move, to do something.

“There’s one more thing,” Gabe said, wincing a little like he knew this one was going to hurt.

“Just spit it out, *amico*.” I sighed.

“Before the helicopter takes off, they’ll blindfold you.”

It’s exactly what every man here would have done if we were trying to keep a location secret. Still didn’t mean I liked it.

But I’d go in blindfolded; I’d go in buckass naked if I had to, with nothing but my two hands to fight my way out if it meant getting Gia and Corinne back.

# Chapter Thirty-Six

## Corinne

I ducked into one of the open rooms on my right and closed the door quietly behind me, leaning against it to catch my breath.

If I survived this, I was so never running ever again.

No treadmill, no jogging at dawn.

If a car came at me in midday traffic, it was going to have to hit me, because I wasn't running to get out of its way. No more running. Period.

My head was pounding, my back and brows were drenched in sweat, and the stitch in my side felt like I had Ridley Scott's *Alien* inside me trying to bust its way out.

The glassed-in corridor stretched all the way around the massive compound, but thus far, I'd yet to find a door that opened to the outside to let me out of this track. I felt like a rat trapped in a maze or a hamster on a wheel, getting nowhere no matter how fast I ran.

There were dozens of men milling about outside—I'd seen them through the windows along the corridor.

They ignored me, acted like I didn't exist.

I held my breath and listened for the sounds of footsteps, but the corridor was quiet.

There were maybe thirty doors off the main corridor. Most of them were unlocked, leading to storage or sparsely-

furnished bedrooms, many of which led to other sparsely-furnished rooms until eventually leading back to the corridor.

I'd ducked into at least half of the doors so far, weaving from room to room and then back into the corridor.

It wasn't a plan, exactly. But so long as Tomás didn't catch me in the corridor and I moved from room to room, I had some hope of wearing him out.

Maybe he'd get bored with this game and move onto something new.

*Yeah, and then maybe we'll all sit down and have a nice tea party because that's what psycho killers and rapists do all the time, right? Great plan, Corinne.*

The quiet, steady thud of footsteps sounded somewhere down the corridor. They grew louder, coming closer. And then they stopped.

A door slammed shut a few rooms away. And then another.

He was checking room by room now.

I had thirty seconds at most before he reached my door, and, of course, this room had only one exit—because I was lucky like that.

My gaze flew around the room, searching for something. Anything. But a platform bed and a rickety-looking night table were the only furniture in the room. Not exactly a weapon arsenal in here. Still, I picked up the night table and held it out in front of me like a shield. My arms shook with the effort. Even with adrenaline pumping through me, I was exhausted.

The door next to mine clicked open then slammed shut a moment later.

I swayed, off-balance thanks to the headache that felt like there was a hammer slamming into the side of my skull. The Tylenol had taken the edge off for a little while, but it was



back with a vengeance now, pounding in time with my heartbeat.

The footsteps came closer.

I swear he was deliberately stomping around out there, trying to sound as ominous as possible.

*Like this horror show needs any sound effects, really?*

The doorknob turned. At least there was no slow, heart-stopping creak.

The door flew wide open, revealing Diaz standing on the other side.

The moment his eyes found me, he smiled and lunged into the room without a word.

I'd been planning to use the table like a shield, but screw defense; I was going on the offense.

I raised the table above my head as he charged at me and slammed it down.

At least, I tried to slam it down.

He grabbed the table by its legs right before it hit the top of his head and chucked it across the room, making it break apart against the wall.

"You're one slippery bitch, but there's nowhere for you to go now, *puta*," he sneered.

The table's legs had broken off. One of them had rolled across the floor, stopping just an arm's reach from my foot. A solid piece of wood with a splintery top. It would go a long way toward slowing the guy down if I managed to stab him with the pointy bits. I just had to get my hands on it...

I dropped to the ground and reached for the wood while black spots danced across my vision. Was the room spinning?

Diaz grabbed me under the arm and hauled me back up, but I got it. I had the table leg in my hand.

I drew my arm back and swung with all my dwindling might.

The splintered end caught him on the cheek before he could block it, ripping his skin right open.

“You bitch,” he roared, giving up his hold on me reflexively.

His hands shot to his face, pressing against the gaping flesh while blood poured out from between his fingers.

It felt like all the blood was sinking beneath my skin as I ducked and stumbled toward the door, still clutching the table leg.

Out in the corridor, I turned and ran.

I hadn't immobilized him; I could hear him staggering after me, but I'd wounded him badly enough it hampered his pursuit.

My legs felt like they had turned to lead as I stumbled and pushed on down the corridor, around the curve at the end.

I'd just started up the other side when a door on my right opened and a hand reached out.

It clamped around my arm with unerring accuracy and stopped me in my tracks.

# Chapter Thirty-Seven

## Corinne

The hand that caught me held firm.

I couldn't tell if he had a grip like a vise or I was just too damn weak to fight him.

My eyes followed the hand, up his arm to his head. A blond head.

My whole body shook with fear and exhaustion as I raised the table leg for a second time.

My arm felt like a wet noodle as I brought it down, but Amadeo yanked me forward into the room at the same time, and the blow went wide. It hit off the doorjamb and shot shock waves of pain up my arm from the impact, making me lose my grip on the leg. It tumbled harmlessly to the floor with a pathetically quiet thump.

“You!” I seethed, but he slammed his hand over my mouth, silencing me.

I tried to yank my arm out of his grip as he closed the door with his hip, then slid a key into the doorknob, locking us both in here.

The moment the click sounded, Amadeo moved, twisting my arm in one smooth move, getting it bent behind my back and immobilizing me.

It was like I'd never learned a thing about self-defense or fighting tactics. But I had nothing left in me.

“Let me go, you son of a bitch,” I cried against his hand, but the words came out muffled.

I tried to tug my arm free, but it was useless.

Amadeo had me caught in a hammerlock; every movement only put pressure on my shoulder and elbow joints.

*You're done, Corinne. You've got nothing left. Time to give up.*

It didn't matter how sensible the voice in my head sounded. Maybe it was right; maybe I was going to die here in this stupid maze. But no one would ever be able to say I didn't go down swinging... or stomping.

I raised my foot and brought it down as hard as I could, slamming into the unprotected top of his foot.

“Fuck,” he seethed under his breath, twisting my arm up tighter. “Calm down, would you? I'm trying to help you here, *bella*.”

“Help me?” I tried to say even if it came out muffled.

“I'm going to take my hand off your mouth now. Unless you want tattoo-boy banging down the door, I suggest you keep your voice down.”

Slowly, Amadeo pulled his hand away.

I wanted to bite it. Sink my teeth into him and hold on until he let go of my arm.

But I fought the urge. The only thing worse than being trapped in here with him was being trapped in here with both him and Diaz.

He still had my arm, though.

If he was hoping I'd keep quiet and make this nice and easy on him, he was delusional.

I shifted against him, trying to get myself into position to jab my free elbow into his solar plexus.

“Hey,” Amadeo hissed, wrapping his other arm around me and holding me still. “You’re Dante’s woman, and I can respect that. And I haven’t spent enough time in this hellhole that I’ve lost what it means to be human. But I would advise you not to wriggle this hot body of yours against any man here. *Capisce?*”

I stopped struggling, wondering even as I did so if I was serving myself up on a silver platter.

Amadeo sighed and let me go then sauntered across the room and sat down on the threadbare sofa against the wall.

He didn’t move like the kings, exactly, but there was a definite cocksure strut in his step. Rather at odds with the way he perched his elbows on his knees and dropped his head into his hands, rubbing his forehead like he had a killer migraine.

I could relate.

I took a few steps back, stopping only when I hit the wall behind me.

It was then I noticed the light sheen of sweat across his forehead and the heavy way he was breathing.

He followed my gaze and smiled wryly. “Usually when he plays this game, the girl finds a nice, dark corner to hide in,” he said, casting me an accusing glare.

“News flash: Not like most girls.”

His glare shifted to a dry smile. “Yeah, I noticed. I’ve been trying to find your ass for the past half hour.”

Had I really only been running this maze for half an hour? It felt like days, hours at least.

“Christ, I warned Dante to keep you on lockdown.” He shook his head to himself. “What was he thinking letting you

run loose?”

“*Letting* me run loose? If you keep talking about me like I’m a dog, I’m going to bite you.”

He didn’t laugh, but he definitely didn’t look worried. “All right. Then tell me, how did you end up here?” he asked, one eyebrow cocked, wearing an expression like he thought this was going to be entertaining.

I crossed my arms over my chest defensively. “I got a call from an FBI agent—the agent who’s been working on Camilla’s missing person’s case.” My voice trembled, remembering the vacant way she’d looked at me.

He laughed. “The same agent who’s been on *El Vibora*’s payroll for the past three years?” He shook his head, still laughing under his breath.

Agent Fuentes had been working for my stepdad all along?

“Agent Fuentes has been working with him all along? And he’s not ‘*El Vibora*’,” I seethed. “He’s my stepdad. I thought I killed him once, but I’m just going to have to do it again. This time, it’s going to stick.”

All I needed to do was get my hands on a weapon and find Tomás. And maybe get the room to stop spinning and get rid of the black spots that kept dancing in front of my eyes.

Amadeo laughed. “You’re not killing anyone, *bella*. You’ve got that look in your eyes that says you’ve got the guts to do it, but right now, you don’t look like you could squash a fly. So, what you’re going to do is sit tight.” He checked his watch then ran a hand through his hair agitatedly.

“Where’s my sister?” I snapped.

He shook his head. “You can’t get to her right now. You’re going to have to be patient.”

“Screw that. Patience isn’t one of my virtues,” I snapped.

“She’s safe, Corinne. Just sit tight.”

I glanced at the door, which seemed to amuse him, and he held out the key.

“If you want to go back to running laps with Diaz, be my guest,” he said, nodding toward the door. “If you have any doubts about what he has in mind when he catches you, though, I can assure you it’s not going to be pretty. He’s murdered at least half a dozen girls in the past year—that’s what he does if they piss him off while he’s raping them—strangles them, or sometimes slits their throats. So, if you’re going to go out there, you might want to be careful about pissing him off when he catches you.”

The stupid girl in my head with a temper wanted to grab the key and prove him wrong. She was so ready to go on a murderous rampage and burn this disgusting place to the ground.

When I swayed against the wall and my knees gave out, though, I decided she didn’t get a vote.

With the wall at my back, I hit the floor hard, making my teeth clack together and jarring my head.

Amadeo had leaned forward, a hand out, but he seemed to think better of it and sat back.

“Camilla told you not to come here, Corinne. Why didn’t you listen to her?”

“You mean the note? You want to know why I didn’t listen to a piece of paper that could have been forged or forced? Here’s an idea, if someone was going to leave me a note, how about telling me about the crooked federal agent? Seems like that would have been a lot more useful.”

Amadeo chuckled. “You’re one hell of an investigator—I’ll give you that—but you’re lousy at putting the pieces together once you’ve got them, aren’t you?”

I cocked an eyebrow.

“If she’d told you about Fuentes, you would have acted differently or you would have told someone—either one risked tipping him off, and word of that would have gotten back to the *capo*.”

“So, if this was all one big setup, why didn’t she tell me before she was fake-kidnapped?”

He shook his head. “She wasn’t ‘fake-kidnapped’. The bastard really took her, Corinne. The only reason she isn’t dead or worse is because he had other plans for her, and thankfully, that girl is one hell of an actress.”

Even on the floor in a butt-load of pain, I chuckled quietly—Camilla had wanted to be an actress since she was three years old.

“I remember catching her in the bathroom once when she was seven, standing in front of the mirror with her hand held up like a microphone while she gave her acceptance speech for some movie award—the Oscars, maybe.”

He laughed. “I can picture it.”

“I want to see her,” I said, my voice catching. “I *need* to see her.”

His laughter faded away as footsteps began to thud along the corridor. Diaz was back, stopping every fifteen feet or so to try another door.

“This game won’t go on for much longer.” Amadeo glanced at his watch. “In three minutes, Diaz will be called away. Then you and I are going to make a mad dash to my private quarters at the other end of the compound. You up for it?”

I wasn’t sure I could make my legs move another step even if they were on fire. But I nodded my head anyway. It wasn’t like I had a whole lot of better options.



“What happens then? When we reach your private quarters?” I asked because I was funny that way, wanting to know what I was walking into after pretty much serving myself up to Agent Fuentes.

“We wait some more,” he said, shrugging. “It’s just safer to do it there. No chance of any of the *capo*’s men banging down the door.”

“If you get caught with me, Tomás will know you’re helping me. What happens then?” I posed.

He laughed, but there was no humor in it this time. “Let’s just hope your boyfriend rides in with the cavalry before then or else we’re both screwed.”

My breath hitched at the painful twist inside my chest.

There were dozens of my stepdad’s men around. Not even Dante could get through that much resistance.

“He doesn’t know where I am,” I said, relief washing over me like a cool wave as the painful knot in my chest untwisted a little.

Deep down, I knew. Like somehow, our brains were connected or operating on a wavelength that was solely ours, I knew that even if he was pissed at me, even if he never wanted to see me again, he’d come for me.

“He knows,” Amadeo said. There wasn’t a flicker of uncertainty in his voice.

The knot in my chest twisted so hard I couldn’t breathe.

If Dante knew where I was and came after me, what would they do to him?

“Why do you think you’re missing some of your artwork?” Amadeo said, nodding to my bandaged arm, completely oblivious to my impending asphyxiation.

I hadn't taken off the bandage—I'd been a little busy—but now it made sense.

I could see the crescent moon Dante loved so much in my mind's eye. He'd run his fingers over it so many times, it kind of felt like it didn't belong to me anymore. It had become his.

I tore off the bandage, but the moon was still there.

A silent sob racked my chest.

For some reason, the bloody patch on my arm where the pentacle tattoo used to be didn't matter. All that mattered was the stupid crescent moon. Dante's moon. Which was ridiculous. He wasn't going to have any interest in the moon or any other part of me if I survived this. *If he survives this...*

The pain in my chest rivaled the agony in my head.

# Chapter Thirty-Eight

## Dante

The plane rolled to a stop on the outskirts of El Encanto.

I jumped out of my seat, flying toward the door.

I could see four of *Las Serpientes*' men waiting on the broken tarmac up ahead, next to a helicopter that had seen better days.

If I'd ever wondered what it was like to go flying around in a tin can, it looked like I was about to find out.

Cristian opened the door as I stepped out into the bright midday sun.

I took in the four assholes on the ground as I descended the stairs, watching their body language to figure them out.

Each one of them had dark, dead eyes and snake tattoos—some coiled around their arms; others ran up the sides of their necks. The one that ranked highest stood out like a sore thumb, his chin tipped up a little too high, his chest thrust out like he was an ape.

Cristian moved to my side as we approached them on the ground. "Regular rat pack, aren't they?" he muttered under his breath.

He kept a wary eye on them, but neither of us drew weapons. For now, we'd play along.

"Your jackets," the lead asshole barked when we were five feet away. He held out his hand while he kept the other on his

AK-47.

The guy next to him held out his hand for Cristian's jacket.

I shook my head. "Say please, asshole."

"Excuse me?" he said, cocking an eyebrow over one dead eye while his neck muscles bulged, making the tattooed snake there writhe.

"You heard me. You'll show some respect, or I'll put you in the ground."

His jaw clenched hard while he eyed me with those dark, dead eyes. "*Por favor*, may I take your jacket, *señor*?" His lip turned up in a snarl.

I slid off my jacket and held it out to him like he was a coat-checker at some midscale restaurant, and Cristian followed suit.

I could see the corners of his lips twitching, trying not to smile.

The men took our jackets and handed them to the third guy without looking at him. He scurried off and put them in the helicopter, waving a device over them that he might have found on the set of *Ghostbusters*.

"You will submit to a body search... *por favor*," the ape said, enunciating the last with a wry twist of his lips.

"Of course," I said, gritting my teeth.

The second guy pulled another device from a holster on his thigh. This one hadn't been built forty years ago. It was new, state-of-the-art detection equipment.

He waved it in front of me, grazing along my arms and torso and down my legs. He stepped behind me and repeated the process, paying particular attention to my ass as he went. Apparently, he thought I was hiding high-tech spyware up

there, but it was more the cartel's style to transport products in people's asses. Not really my thing.

"If you get any closer, asshole, you're going to have to buy me dinner," I quipped.

He stared up at me blankly. It seemed asshole number two hadn't mastered English yet.

When he was finished, Cristian got the same treatment. Unsurprisingly, not even asshole number two's love affair with his ass seemed to ruffle him.

"You will board the helicopter, and then you will wear blindfolds for the remainder of the trip... *por favor*," the ape explained in that indulgent tone.

I *really* couldn't wait to kill him.

I boarded the helicopter first, thinking about what awaited me at the end of this flight.

She would be there. She had to be.

Cristian climbed in next, followed by assholes number two and three, who proceeded to tie thick, black strips of fabric around our heads, stealing away our sight.

It seemed asshole number four's sole purpose was to stand around and look pretty.

The helicopter began to shake a moment later as it lifted off the ground.

Thanks to Gabe, we knew the exact location of *Las Serpientes*' compound. The flight from El Encanto would take approximately an hour and a half. That was a long time of having absolutely no idea if one of these assholes decided he wanted to stab me in the back.

"I've got a bad feeling about this, boss," Cristian mumbled under his breath as I began to feel the forward momentum of the helicopter.

“Yeah, me too. Actually, I have a nasty suspicion this whole plan is about to fall to shit.”

# Chapter Thirty-Nine

## Corinne

I was so done with mad dashes.

That thing I'd said about never running again? I meant it this time.

I'd been sitting on a sofa in Amadeo's private quarters for what felt like hours, but might only have been minutes—because time in hell was funny that way—and I still hadn't managed to catch my breath.

Amadeo glanced at his watch for what might have been the thousandth time. Each time, he'd scowl like his watch had insulted him, then look away and go back to drumming his fingers against his thigh or trying to draw me into conversation.

The minute I asked about Camilla, though, he'd change the subject or just flat-out refuse to answer.

“So, from what I understand, you're friends with Dominic's wife, Fallon?” he asked, delving into conversation attempt number... something.

“Yup.” I wasn't feeling very conversational.

“Don't spill all the details all at once,” he said with an amused grin.

“If you're feeling oh-so-talkative, do you maybe want to talk about something relevant here—like, maybe where my sister is?”

“No, not really,” he said, shrugging. “Thanks for asking, though.”

I glared at the smug son of a bitch. Lucas, Lucianos—they’re all the same.

He sighed, scrubbing a hand over his face, but I couldn’t quite tell if he was aggravated or hiding a smile. “Camilla told me a lot about you. She was lucky to have you as a big sister growing up,” he said with an approving nod.

“Why won’t you tell me where she is? I want to see my sister.” I’d been aiming for stern, but it came out sounding whiny and weak.

He shook his head. “On the off chance anything goes wrong, you can’t know about it, *bella*. You can’t hand over information you don’t have. *Capisce?*”

“Awesome. Can’t wait for my stepdad to find me so he can torture me for information I *don’t* have. Sounds like loads of fun.”

Amadeo laughed. “I can see why Dante fell for you. I have a feeling you’re never boring.”

“So glad I’m keeping you entertained,” I said, rolling my eyes. Well, I *tried* to. It just seemed like too much effort. Inside though, the sound of *his* name twisted the knot in my chest, tying it up so tight I was back to having trouble breathing. “Can you at least tell me how long we’re going to stay in here?” I asked, squeezing my eyes shut, then forcing them open wide.

“Nope, can’t tell you that either.”

“Of course not,” I said as the room spun around me.

“What I can tell you is that you are going to be my future sister-in-law.” Amadeo smirked.

“What?” I was barely registering anything.



I couldn't tell whether it was fatigue or the concussion, but my brain felt foggy and staying awake had become a struggle of monolithic proportions. The heavy weights on my eyelids tugged harder, and I let them close for just a minute.

"Hey, stay with me," Amadeo said, sitting up straighter in the chair he occupied across from me. "I'm usually the one inflicting head wounds, not treating them, so you need to do your part here and keep those pretty eyes open."

"If I'm just going to die here anyway, does it really matter if I take a nap first?"

It seemed reasonable enough to me.

He seemed to think that sitting around was somehow going to keep me alive; I wasn't as confident. This seemed like a stall tactic at best.

He laughed like that was somehow funny. Apparently, the guy had a dark sense of humor. "You're not going to die here."

I might have nodded. Or maybe not. Hard to tell. "You keep telling yourself that. Maybe one of these times it'll stick."

I shifted and tried to find a more comfortable position on the sofa. It looked pretty enough, but it was as hard as brick.

I had just begun to close my eyes when he heaved himself off the chair and came to sit down beside me.

"We're going to get you out of here," he said, settling down next to me and hooking an arm around my shoulders.

I was about to shift away from him when I remembered his warning from earlier and thought better of it. Not at all prone to making stupid decisions that would get my ass kidnapped and dumped in a jungle hell. Nope, that didn't sound like me at all.

"Do you really think Dante Luca is going to let you die here?" he asked, his tone incredulous.

If I was being honest with myself, part of me wanted Dante to come for me.

I wanted him to ride in on his trusty steed (or in his sexy Pagani), slay the evil villain—and maybe a dragon or two—and then ride off with me into the sunset. Because fairy tales were nice that way. Nobody got hurt. Everyone lived happily ever after, and everything was sunshine and rainbows. But real life didn't work that way. Real life was messy and harsh. Good guys died. Villains won. And if Dante came here...

“No,” I said, not really to Amadeo.

“Exactly,” he said, checking his watch for the thousandth and one time. This time, though, he didn't scowl. “Time to go, *bella*.” He withdrew his arm from around my shoulders and stood up, holding out a hand to me.

“Where are we going?” I asked, staring at his hand warily. He hadn't done anything to make me think he couldn't be trusted, but he was involved with *Las Serpientes*.

“We need to get your sweet ass out of this compound before shit goes down.”

“No,” I said, turning away from his proffered hand.

“No?” He looked caught somewhere between amused and irritated. “Are you trying to tell me you've developed some kind of death wish?”

“I'm not leaving without Camilla, and if you're right about Dante coming here, I'm not leaving without him either.”

Amadeo laughed. “First off, you can stop worrying about Camilla. That girl eats cartel men for breakfast. She'll be fine,” he said, smiling. “And I've seen Dante in action. He can hold his own and then some.”

“Do you love Camilla?” I asked, hoping to approach this from another angle. “Did I hear you right earlier? You told me

I was going to be your future sister-in-law.”

He laughed. “No. Not that she’s not loveable in her own prickly way, but no, it isn’t like that.”

“I’m not going anywhere without them.” I ignored his hand and stood up, skirting behind the couch—mainly, so I could hold onto it to keep myself upright, but it worked for distancing purposes too.

He sighed and rolled his eyes, definitely looking more irritated than amused now. “You and Camilla might not look alike, but you both ended up with the same stubborn streak.”

I glared at Amadeo from the other side of the sofa. I wanted to feel fearsome; in reality, I must have looked pathetic, injured and so tired he probably could have knocked me over with one finger.

He shook his head, running his fingers through his hair in exasperation. “Fine, I’ll take you to Camilla, but if shit goes bad, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Oh, I’ve been warned. Everything in this place is like a big, red, flashing warning sign with extra exclamation marks,” I quipped.

Amadeo snickered as he unlocked the door and opened it just enough to look out into the corridor. He nodded after a moment, opened it more, and stepped out.

I followed him, listening for the sound of footsteps.

Outside the room, the corridor was empty.

There were still dozens of men beyond it, standing around outside in the pale green light, most of them with huge guns in their hands or hanging from straps around their necks.

I wondered what would happen if one of them looked up and saw me, but I took a step back, away from the windows, thinking that maybe I didn’t want to find out.

“Mouth closed, head down. You got it?” Amadeo whispered close to my ear as he grabbed my arm and started walking down the corridor.

I thought we were maybe close to the basement door I’d come up from, but it was hard to remember for sure.

As we walked, I noticed there was a deep hum coming from all around me that I couldn’t remember hearing before.

“What’s that sound?” I whispered.

“Just wait,” Amadeo whispered back.

I looked out the window as the humming grew louder.

It definitely wasn’t my imagination; the windows had begun to vibrate.

Amadeo stopped walking and checked his watch then glanced out the window.

He smiled, looked up and down the corridor, then pulled me closer, directly in front of the glass.

It was a helicopter.

I’d been mistaken before; there was a gap in the treetop canopy, and I could see the helicopter descending through it, still thirty feet above our heads and maybe a hundred feet away.

“Good news, *bella*. It looks like Prince Charming has arrived.”

“Dante?”

He nodded as I stared out the window, watching the helicopter descend.

My heart was pounding.

I couldn’t breathe.

There were dozens of *Las Serpientes*' men around. They'd swarm him.

"You've got to stop him," I choked out as the helicopter touched down. "No, this can't be..."

Amadeo shook his head, still smiling. "Haven't you learned by now, there's no stopping that—"

The jungle exploded.

A bright red fireball engulfed the trees as a thunderous boom shook the whole world.

My world.

My whole world went up in flames.

# Chapter Forty

## Corinne

Hands grabbed me and spun me around, slamming me into the corridor's inner wall as the blast shook the compound and windows shattered all around me.

I struggled to get free, flailing my arms and legs, slamming my head back like I hadn't been on the verge of collapse seconds before.

"Let me go," I screamed, the sound ripped from my throat, leaving it raw.

Amadeo's hands fell away.

I spun around, but it felt like I was moving in slow motion.

I could see every shard of glass on the ground, every jagged edge that still clung to its frame. Every flame that flickered and jumped on the jungle floor, reaching out like fiery hands from hell.

I'd seen explosions in movies more times than I could count. The big boom. People screaming. Running.

But I didn't scream. I didn't run. I couldn't.

All I could do was stare at the fiery heap on the ground, swallowing up more of the jungle as its flames licked outward.

My legs wouldn't move.

My voice didn't work.

No tears or sobs.

The word *shell-shocked* echoed around in my head, but that didn't feel quite right.

It was insane—proof of how much crazy had taken over my brain—because I just kept waiting for him to walk out of it, untouched, unscathed, the flames licking along his skin but never breaching the barrier. Impervious. Impenetrable.

This was Dante Luca.

*Nothing* could kill him.

“I'm sorry, *bella*, but we have to go,” Amadeo said.

He tried to put his arm around me, to corral me in the direction he needed us to go, I think, but I reconnected to my body enough to move it out of his reach.

I could see the blood on him. Shallow gashes on his face, blood seeping through the sleeves of his shirt. He'd been injured shielding me; on some level, I knew that. I was even grateful, I think.

But it wasn't real.

The sight of his blood wasn't making me want to douse my hands in alcohol and scrub them raw. So, it couldn't be real. None of this was real.

“Tell me he wasn't in there,” I said, staring at the leaping flames.

Amadeo said nothing.

“Tell me,” I screamed.

I wanted to hit him, pound on his chest until the words I needed to hear fell out of him.

He shook his head slowly like he was still processing. “Shit, I don't know. He was supposed to be on that helicopter, but it wasn't supposed to explode.”

“It wasn’t supposed to explode?” I cried. “That’s it? That’s all you’ve got? Was he on it or not, Amadeo? Tell me, damn it,” I screamed.

He shook his head. “I can’t tell you what I don’t know, *bella*.”

“You don’t know? How can you not know?” I couldn’t breathe.

Something had grabbed hold of my heart and was trying to tear it right out of my chest.

“All right, look,” he said, running an agitated hand through his hair, “we don’t know for sure.” He stood up straighter, and the concern that etched the corners of his eyes disappeared. I knew this look; it was control and authority personified. “What I do know is we can’t stay here. We need to move.”

“I can’t...” I started. “I can’t leave.”

He grabbed my arm, but I yanked it out of his grasp.

“Get fucked and die,” I seethed. “I’m not going anywhere until I know for sure.”

“Now, Corinne,” he said, his tone bossy like Dante’s.

It made it feel like the fire had seeped into my chest, burning me from the inside out.

“I can’t,” I said, my voice hoarse like the flames had scorched my throat.

I couldn’t even look away.

I kept waiting to see him walk out of the flames.

“It wasn’t him; it can’t be him.” Sobs rumbled in my chest, but I wouldn’t let them out. Stupid tears snuck out though, cascading down my cheeks like they were trying to run away before I could catch them.

Amadeo turned my body toward him.



I didn't pull away, but I kept my eyes on the fire.

"He's not dead," I snapped. "He can't be dead."

I squeezed my eyes shut, hoping this was all some nasty side effect of the concussion.

When I opened them again, it was all still there.

Fire. Men running. Shouting.

Even Diaz was out there, a bandage on his face, barking orders in Spanish.

I just stared at him, objectively noticing that I couldn't seem to muster the fear to shiver or back away.

"Then hold on to that, *bella*, and let's go."

*Move your ass, luna*, Dante's voice barked inside my head.

Like always, my body obeyed.

I let Amadeo pull me along the glass-covered corridor while I stared at the flames. It felt like everything inside of me had been burned up and broken.

He stopped outside the basement door, and I noticed that the men outside had begun to converge inward, heading for the other end of the compound. They kind of looked like big ants, all running for the ant hill. More men inside the compound probably didn't bode well for me.

Amadeo thrust a key in the lock and opened the basement door, looking at me expectantly.

Just like that, it snapped; whatever had been holding me together ripped open, but instead of sorrow, white-hot rage poured through my veins.

"No," I said, not completely hating the feel of the adrenaline suddenly pumping through my body.

Amadeo cocked an eyebrow—eerily similar to the way Dante responds when I refuse him.

“I’m not going anywhere else completely defenseless. Do you understand me?”

He looked at me like I was crazy.

Well, I *was* crazy.

“Give me a gun, Amadeo.” I held out my hand expectantly.

*That’s my girl, luna. Give him hell.* Dante’s voice was getting louder in my head.

Amadeo shook his head. “That’s not a smart move. I know you’re hurting, but you’re not thinking straight. You’ll be safe down here,” he said like that was the end of the conversation.

“You’re not getting it,” I said, crossing my arms over my chest. “I want a gun. I want to shoot the assholes responsible for...” I shoved my shoulders back and forced my lip to stop trembling. “If anyone follows us,” I said, nodding to the ants outside, “those girls down there are going to need someone to defend them. If I’m willing to accept that you’re the good guy here, then you can accept you’re going to need help if anyone comes through this door.”

He opened his mouth, no doubt, to object.

“I’m not moving until I’ve gotten what I want,” I snapped.

*You’re pushing it too far, luna. I’d be locking your ass up and handcuffing you for good measure.*

*You just like handcuffs, asshole.*

Dante laughed inside my head, and I couldn’t help but smile.

“Look at you, all ‘I am woman, hear me roar’,” a woman said, coming up the stairs from the basement.

My pulverized heart skipped a beat as she came into the light, then it started beating in double time, thumping wildly against my chest.

“Hey, sis,” Camilla said, looking at me instead of through me. “Miss me?” she asked with a grin right before she grabbed my hand and pulled me down the steps.

I went without a fight.

At the bottom, she threw her arms around me, and I hugged her back, but it hurt. My broken insides rejected the relief that should have been coming.

Distantly, I noticed she wasn't as soft as she'd been the last time I'd hugged her. She was harder now, more muscular, like she'd spent the past few months in the gym.

It wasn't until she stepped back that I noticed the knife in her hand.

She held it at her side, but it was covered in blood, dripping onto the concrete.

“Are you hurt?” I gasped, looking her over for signs of injuries.

My heart was already bleeding; any more holes, and there'd be nothing left inside me.

Camilla laughed. “This?” she said, holding up the knife. “I think I pulled my shoulder a bit, but otherwise I'm good. The guy who got the pointy end of the knife, though? Probably not so much.”

Amadeo laughed. “I told you she eats cartel men for breakfast, *bella*.”

“Speaking of which,” she said, reaching for something from the back waist of her pants. She smiled up at Amadeo, eyes challenging. “You were wanting one of these, Corinne, weren't you?” she asked as she handed me a gun, a sleek, black Glock that looked like a replica of Dante's gun.

Amadeo didn't look impressed, but he said nothing.

I made sure the safety was on and tested the weight and feel of it in my hand. It fit right; my fingers settled into its shape like we were made for one another.

I didn't have as much experience with guns as he likely did, but it wasn't the first time I'd held one.

*It looks good on you, luna.*

I smirked.

“Hey!” a girl's voice called from inside one of the cells. “If you two are about finished playing with guns and knives, you wanna let me out of here?” It was the same girl who'd checked my head and gave me the pill.

Amadeo heaved a sigh. “Anyone ever tell you you're impatient, Greta?” he called back to her.

My memory wasn't top-notch at the moment. “I've heard the Lucas mention a Greta...”

“What the hell, Gabe?” another woman's voice called from far back in the cells, a voice I recognized right before she stepped out into the light.

Dark hair, blue eyes, just like Dante and Leo.

Raven turned back, scowling into the darkness. “You said Greta was ‘tied up with other shit’, you jerk,” she barked as a tall, dark-haired man stepped out into the light behind her.

Gabe shrugged. “Tied up... locked up... same thing, *si?*”

Sweet Jesus, what the hell was going on?

# Chapter Forty-One

## Corinne

The girls in the other cells had stood up, some of them backing up into the corners, the rest of them pressed up close against the bars like they were hoping to slip right through them. Some of them looked so thin, they might have been able to do it.

“What are you doing locked up in *Las Serpientes*’ basement?” Raven kind of screeched as she stormed toward Greta’s cell, holding out her hand beside her like she was waiting for something.

Amadeo tossed her a set of keys.

She unlocked Greta’s cell, then she handed off the keys to Gabe and fisted her hands on her hips, clearly waiting for a better explanation.

Camilla watched on, looking amused.

Greta shrugged, not looking the least bit repentant. “We needed the location in order to get these girls out, and the only people they don’t check for trackers and shit are the ones they don’t view as people. Get yourself picked up in one of their skanky clubs, and they just pack you up and ship you right here. It’s like FedEx for sickos.”

Raven’s face paled. “But they... Did they...” She glanced around at the girls in the other cells as Gabe and Camilla set about opening them.

Greta shook her head. “It was a risk I was willing to take, but no, they never did what you’re thinking. The plan was for Amadeo to claim me for himself—big-shot fiancée to the daughter of *El jefe*, nobody was going to put their hands on his merchandise. Once he claimed me, we just sparred when we were behind closed doors. A little bit of banging on walls, a little bit of screaming...”

“And a whole lot of stopping Greta from going *Xena: Warrior Princess* on their asses,” Amadeo piped up.

Greta smiled. “You know you loved it, Deo.”

Gabe cleared his throat. “If you two are done catching up, do you think we can maybe focus on the task at hand?”

He was helping a girl out of her cell, stooping to hook her arm around his shoulders, but she took her arm back, swaying a little but then steadying herself.

“Raven?” she said, taking a stumbling step forward.

I recognized the girl from the photo Dante had showed me.

She was thinner than in her picture, and she had bruises on her face and arms, but it was her. Even in the dim lighting, her pale blonde hair and hazel eyes were remarkable.

“Gia,” Raven breathed as the girl stumbled forward and fell into her arms, sobbing.

*Gia’s alive.*

What was left in my heart leaked from a fresh hole.

*Dante, you should have been here to see this.*

Gabe waved his arm at us from the other end of the corridor. “Reunions later, *amici*. We’re sitting ducks down here. Time to go.”

All the cell doors were open.

The girls who'd been inside the cells—thirteen in total, not including Greta—had followed him to the back where he'd first come out.

“*Si*,” Raven said, hugging Gia tightly, then letting her go. “Let’s get you back to Rosa.”

Gia nodded, and Greta grabbed hold of her hand, pulling her along to the end of the corridor.

It was Amadeo who hooked an arm around my shoulder and pulled me along with him, following behind Greta and Gia and the rest of them while Dom and Nico fell into step behind us.

My feet stumbled along.

I wondered if it would really be so bad to sit my butt down on the cold, hard floor and never move again.

The girl with her heart bleeding out inside me didn’t want to move anymore. She was done, and her cry to give up was rather compelling.

*Move it, luna*, Dante’s voice barked inside my head.

Like always, my body obeyed, each step more solid than stumble.

I let Amadeo pull me in the direction everyone else had gone, to the end of the cells where Raven and Gabe had first come out.

The hallway between the cells ended at an open cell on the right. There was rubble all over the floor, broken chunks of concrete strewn about like the aftermath of a small explosion.

Beyond the rubble, there was a concrete-walled tunnel—a tunnel that must have been closed off by a wall, but that wall had been blown to pieces. A tunnel that seemed to be a creepier version of the rat maze corridor.

“What is this?” I asked as I forced a foot into the tunnel.

“They used to keep their product down here—cocaine and firearms mostly,” Amadeo explained as he guided me through the rough opening. “The tunnel meant they had two ways of getting it out if ever a rival cartel invaded. When your stepdad started trafficking girls, he converted the basement to cells and blocked off the tunnel.”

“Makes sense. Can’t have the girls he stole sneaking off to their freedom. Not good for business,” I said snidely.

Camilla laughed from up ahead and slowed her step. “The trick was finding a member who’d been around long enough to remember where exactly the wall was built and where the tunnel came out.”

“I assume you found one,” I said to no one in particular.

Gabe and Camilla both nodded in front of us, helping the girls who were having difficulty walking on their own.

“Do I want to ask where that member is now?” I asked, kind of hoping my sister hadn’t had anything to do with whatever had happened to him. “I’m guessing he’s not vacationing at Disney World.”

Chuckles sounded all around me.

Amadeo shrugged. “He went for a swim, lots of beautiful lakes and rivers around here. Some of them are pretty deep.”

I tried to muster up some disgust, but I couldn’t find any.

A man who knew about the horrors that happened in this place and did nothing to stop it? Maybe that kind of man didn’t deserve to be in this world.

*I told you, luna. Now you’re seeing things more clearly,* Dante chastised me.

I could even see his cocky grin as he held up his unstained hands.

*Real smug, aren’t you?* I countered.



“Watch your step,” Amadeo said, gripping me tighter as my foot caught on a root.

I stumbled and bumped my shoulder into the rough wall, knocking a sob loose and making me realize just how feebly I was keeping myself composed.

*Get your shit together, luna,* Dante snapped at me.

*Fuck you,* I snapped back.

It wasn't my fault every step felt wrong, like I was a magnet, running toward the wrong pole. It rejected me, trying to thrust me back while Amadeo kept forcing me forward.

Up ahead, people began to slow, coming to a stop in front of another set of rickety stairs. With the few lights bouncing off the wall behind them, I could see the girls more clearly.

Like Gia, there were bruises on their exposed arms and faces. A few split lips. Threadbare, grimy clothes that hung from their too-thin bodies. They seemed even thinner next to Gabe and Amadeo. And while Greta, Raven, and Camilla were thin, they were healthy-looking; their faces were full and vibrant, not drawn over jutting cheekbones.

“There's a big, empty weapons' cache behind the stairs,” Amadeo said, pointing to the door behind the wood steps that Gabe was opening. All the girls they'd rescued began filing inside. “It'll be a tight fit, but you'll have to squeeze in there with the girls. I'll come for you when it's safe.”

The hatch at the top of the steps opened, spilling more pale, green-tinged light down the stairs.

I spun around at the same time the others did, flipping off the safety and aiming my gun at the top of the stairs.

I couldn't see anything other than two pairs of black military-style boots from my position, but I imagined it was my stepdad there. A man who should have died years ago.

These girls were here, dirty and bruised and far too thin, because I hadn't killed him. He'd gotten his hands on Camilla because I hadn't plunged the knife in deep enough. And Dante...

My finger hovered over the trigger.

Five and a half pounds of pressure was all it would take.

Five and a half pounds of pressure was all that stood between me and the man who should already have been dead.

The boots started to move, one set in front of the other, descending the stairs.

Amadeo shifted beside me, adjusting his aim as he tracked the movements.

I gripped my gun tighter, ignoring the slight tremble that vibrated from the core of me, outward.

Legs came into view. And then a torso.

My breath caught in my throat as I waited to see his face.

To see my stepdad one last time.

But the torso was too broad and the man's hands didn't belong to my stepdad. I'd never thought much about hands before, how unique they were to an individual, but I recognized the big, bulbous knuckles and squared-off fingers.

These hands had grabbed me and slammed me into a concrete wall. They'd held me in an iron grip and chased me through a rat maze.

Out the corner of my eye, I could see they had their weapons raised—Amadeo, Gabe, Camilla, and Greta.

Raven stood in front of Gia, her head up and shoulders back, making herself as big as possible. But no one was firing at him.

Why was no one firing at him?

He took another step, and I could see his face, the bandage on it soaked with blood now. His eyes found me, his cold, dead eyes that still somehow managed to snap with rage. I felt it like a blow to my chest.

I pressed my finger against the trigger. This man had murdered girls, according to Amadeo. He'd probably hurt any number of the girls here right now. Five and a half pounds of pressure was all it would take to make sure he never hurt them again.

He took another step, and Amadeo sighed right before a gunshot rang out, so loud it jolted right through me.

Diaz fell.

The girls in the tunnel screamed.

And then my heart stopped as the second man on the stairs came into view.

# Chapter Forty-Two

## Dante

I'd never really feared death before.

I'd thought about it plenty—it wasn't possible to live the kind of life I did and not consider how the end would come.

The gun of an enemy?

Or the knife of a rival, maybe.

Dying at the hands of someone I loved, though?

The possibility hadn't ever crossed my mind.

As Corinne stared at me, her eyes wide with shock and the gun in her hand shaking as much as she was, the possibility seemed very real.

And yet, even staring down the barrel of her gun, my heart did some sort of strange flip-flop shit, and relief so potent it almost hurt flooded my veins.

Corinne was *alive*.

Alive, but not unharmed.

There was blood matting the hair on the side of her head, bruises all over her arms, and an enormous one on her shoulder, made worse by the blood that had scabbed in the middle of it. And then there was the bandage that covered where Fuentes had cut the tattoo from her body.

Rage warred with the relief.

If the ones who hurt her weren't dead already, they would be soon, but not before I'd repaid them in kind and then some.

"I thought you were dead," she said, her voice cracking.

Her green eyes were bright with unshed tears, but the light snapping in them warned of an impending storm.

Amadeo and a girl I recognized as her sister approached her, but I don't think she saw them.

If they were smart, they'd keep their distance.

This wasn't the happy and bubbly Corinne; this was my dark and, at the moment, very volatile *luna*.

Her chest shook with silent sobs, making the gun bounce even more. "Do you have any idea what that feels like?"

"Yeah, I do, *luna*. So, put down the gun and get your ass over here."

She glanced down at her hand and her brow knitted. It looked like she was surprised to see the gun in her hand. She flipped the safety on and tucked it into the back of her pants, ignoring the hand Amadeo had put out to take it.

And then she was running toward me, pushing through Amadeo and Camilla and stepping around Diaz's dead body as the tears in her eyes spilled over.

It was the best thing I'd ever felt when she threw her arms around my neck. Her warmth. Her strength, concealed in so much softness. Her heartbeat thumping against my chest.

I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her close, breathing her in.

Corinne was alive.

The proof was right here, warm and trembling against me.

She held on tighter as her sobs wracked us both, but after a moment, her body went still, and I could feel the storm

coming.

I could almost hear the rumble of thunder all around her as the air crackled with her electricity.

She drew away, tears streaming down her cheeks, but the storm in her eyes was no longer incoming; it was here.

“I saw the helicopter,” she snapped, banging her fist against my chest, her eyes bright, her cheeks flush.

She wasn't supposed to see the helicopter, but she was beautiful. And if I'd had any doubts about what she'd written in her letter, they evaporated. This was how Corinne loved; with every passionate, crazy inch of her soul.

“I watched it explode.” She slammed her fists against my chest over and over again until she'd worn herself out.

With one final thump, she collapsed against me, her hands gripping the front of my shirt like she was holding on for dear life.

“I thought you'd died,” she whispered, her voice hoarse and catching.

I would rather her have kept screaming.

That was the fiery Corinne; the Corinne who'd get herself kidnapped on purpose just for a shot at finding her sister. This Corinne sounded broken and fragile. I was almost afraid to hold her too tight.

“I'm sorry, *luna*,” I whispered against the top of her head.

She'd run off without telling me, gotten her ass kidnapped, and here I was apologizing for making her worry. This love thing was truly fucked up.

“Cristian and I got off the helicopter the second it touched down, into the trees behind where we landed. The Viper's men on board were already dead. We set explosives to detonate a few seconds after landing.”

Corinne nodded against me and pushed herself even closer like she was trying to burrow inside me.

What I would have given for that to be possible, to never have to worry about her, to never have to imagine what wretched things were happening to her. To never hear the broken, fragile pain in her voice ever again.

I would have given just about anything.

“If I’d been dead, you would have known it, Corinne. You’d have felt shivers down your spine for the rest of your life because dead or alive, I’m never letting you go.”

Her breath hitched, and her gaze shot up to meet mine. “I thought you’d be furious.”

“I am. But furious or not, you’re mine, *luna*. Nothing’s going to change that.”

Her jaw dropped. “I—”

Gabe cleared his throat. “We’re out of time.”

“Come on,” I said, grabbing onto her hand.

I pulled Corinne along with me, looking over every girl who’d come out of the cells.

“She’s here,” Corinne said, squeezing my hand tight and pointing beyond the others to a girl in the corner, Raven’s arm wrapped around her.

“Gia,” I breathed, picking up our pace and heading straight for her.

Gia broke free from Raven and stumbled in our direction.

She was covered in bruises, and the haunted look in her hazel eyes told me more than I wanted to know.

We’d found her, but she’d suffered here.

Corinne tried to let go of my hand as Gia stumbled into my chest, but I held onto her.

I wrapped my free arm around Gia, but something hot and rough pulsed through my veins.

I could feel the bony curve of her spine, the harsh jut of her shoulder blades.

They'd practically starved her, and who knew what else they'd done to her.

"I knew you'd come," Gia said, her voice just as quiet and unsteady as the first time I'd met her.

She was so thin, I swear she didn't seem much bigger than she had then.

"You're safe now, *cara mia*. Time to get you back to your sister."

And to get Corinne back home where she belonged—my home, my bed.

I might just tie her to it so I never had to worry about her running off again.



## Chapter Forty-Three

### Corinne

Raven squeezed Dante in a one-arm hug.

He hugged her back as best he could, then transferred Gia into his sister's arms. Gia went easily enough, but I could see the way her eyes lingered on him. She was closer to him than to the rest of his family.

I tried to tug my hand out of his for a second time as Raven led her toward the weapon cache.

As much as I kind of wanted to hold on and never let go, Gia needed him. The girl had suffered here far more than I had.

"I'll be fine," I whispered to Dante when he squeezed my hand tighter.

He shook his head. "Everyone here will protect her with their life. I'm not letting you go one second before I have to, so don't even bother trying to argue with me, *luna*."

I glared at him, but my heart just wasn't in it.

It was like some part of me actually believed that so long as I held onto him, he was here, he was real. He couldn't be dead. He couldn't die.

As Dante started heading toward the weapon cache, my hand firmly clasped in his, I had a feeling I knew where this was heading.

“It’ll be a tight fit,” he said, “but you’ll have to squeeze in there with the girls. I’ll come for you when I’m sure it’s safe.”

I stopped walking.

“You want me to leave you?” I asked in disbelief. “You want me to stay here?” I raised my chin. “No.”

He growled. “Move now, talk later, Corinne. If I have to throw you over my shoulder and drag you in there, kicking and screaming, don’t doubt for a second that I’ll do it. You want to stop me, you’re going to have to shoot me.”

“Tempting,” I said, but at the same time, several sets of footsteps sounded on the wood steps.

I was just about to reach for my gun, but from my vantage point directly at the bottom, I saw the people coming down the stairs. People I recognized.

Dominic and Leo. Nico Costa. Rome.

They were here, armed and looking ready to commit murder—though, they kind of looked like they already had. There was blood on them, splotches on the black and gray fatigues they wore.

Nico Costa had blood splattered across his face, and it dripped from the huge knife in his hand. Combined with the cold flash of steel in his eyes, he didn’t quite look human. More like a killing machine that you really didn’t want to screw with.

“Hey, stranger,” Leo called when he spotted me.

He smiled at me like we were standing in the front foyer of the Luca home, not in a tunnel full of kidnapped girls. But concern shone in his eyes and crinkled them at the corners, the same concern that was mirrored in Dominic’s eyes as the two brothers approached us.

Rome followed behind them. He nodded at me and smiled while the odd light picked up the gold in his eyes even more, kind of making them look like orbs of golden honey.

Even Nico Costa did something with his face that might have been a smile—it was hard to tell with all the blood that still covered him. Whatever it was, it made him look a little more human.

Dominic stopped directly in front of me. “Glad to see you’re still in one piece,” he said, his eyes grazing over me, assessing. “Are you doing okay?”

I plastered on a fake smile. “Oh sure, you know me. Always up for an adventure.”

“Good,” he said, though it didn’t quite look like he believed me.

“I’m fine, thanks for asking,” Dante said with a wry smile.

Leo laughed. “In Dom’s defense, it’s not the first time you almost got yourself blown up.”

I widened my eyes.

“It’s a story for another time.” Leo winked at me.

And then Dominic hugged me, which was super weird. And made even weirder when Camilla came up next to me, eyeing the awkward embrace with one eyebrow cocked.

Camilla cleared her throat as Dominic stepped back. “I know you’re going to give me hell when this is over, but I’ve got to say, sis, it seems you’ve been doing a little walking on the wild side yourself, given the company you’ve been keeping.”

“That’s different,” I said, realizing only once the words were out that I meant it.

Not long ago, I would have lumped them all together—the Lucas, *Las Serpientes*, the Costas. I would have summed them

all up as criminals. Now, though? There couldn't have been more differences between *Las Serpientes* and the others if they'd come from two different species.

“Morales' men have cleared the compound,” Nico said, interrupting my revelation. He had his arms wrapped around Raven now, and she was hugging him back, not looking the least bit fazed by all the blood on him. “They're working this way, but that'll push the stragglers in our direction. We need to get the area cleared and get the girls moved now.”

Dante nodded and squeezed my hand, drawing my attention back to him. “In there, Corinne,” he said firmly, nodding toward the weapon cache.

“No,” I said, shaking my head for emphasis.

He cocked an eyebrow. “No?”

“When I saw the helicopter—” My voice cracked. “I can't hide away, counting the seconds, wondering if anything's happened to your stupid ass. I *won't*, Dante.”

“You'll do what I tell you to do, Corinne,” he snapped back, yanking me against him and threading his hand in the hair at the back of my neck to tilt my head up.

“Like hell,” I snapped.

Dante kissed me—hard, and deep, and violent.

My toes curled. The man knew the effect he had, and it seemed he was using it to his advantage. It probably would have worked too, if I didn't have the fresh image of an exploding helicopter in my head.

When he finally pulled away, I was breathless and light-headed, and I don't think it was from the concussion.

He kept his grip in my hair, my head tilted up to him.

“I'll never know what it was like for you when that helicopter exploded, *luna*, but you'll never know the kind of

hell I've gone through the past two days," he said, his voice rough, almost raw.

It nearly did me in.

"I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt you," I said, reaching up to graze my fingers along the stubble across his jaw.

"I know you didn't."

"I should have trusted you enough to tell you." I leaned up and kissed his lips lightly, but then I pushed every ounce of lightness and softness in me away. "But I'm *not* staying here, Dante. Where you go, I go. Get used to it."

"I'll watch her back, boss," Rome said, his gaze swinging back and forth between me and Dante. "If that's all right with you."

I could have kissed Rome.

Dante turned to Rome, hard, blue eyes boring into him.

I would not have wanted to be on the other end of that look.

Rome didn't look away. He stared right back. There was nothing hostile in his countenance. It seemed he was simply waiting, either for Dante to make a call or maybe to shoot him dead where he stood.

"Do you have a death wish, Rome?" Dante asked in a voice that made me shiver.

Rome shook his head. "No, boss." He laughed under his breath. Even in the dimness, his eyes glowed with a golden warmth. "I've seen her temper, that's all," he said, nodding toward my gun. "I'm just trying to save you from being shot by a redheaded she-devil."

*Very funny.*

Despite the glare, the corners of Dante's lips twitched.

All around us, the air of restlessness grew as seconds ticked by, mounting to a fevered pitch.

Whatever they were planning, it was here, now.

Gabe put a hand on Dante's shoulder. "Thirty seconds, *amico*. Make a call."

"Goddamn it, Corinne. I should just lock you in there, but I'm afraid you'd bang down the door."

I shrugged. "Can't say you don't know me well."

"You're the biggest pain in the ass I've ever met," he growled at me. "You know that, right?"

"Right back at you," I countered.

He closed his eyes and exhaled a heavy breath; the poor man looked seriously frustrated.

"You guard her with your life, Rome. Failure is not an option, understand?"

Rome nodded, but at the same time, Dominic put an arm around him, leaning in close. "If she gets hurt, your ass is on the line. I'll tie you down, give Fallon an old steak knife, and then look the other way."

It may have sounded funny, but there wasn't an ounce of humor in Dominic's eyes. He meant every word.

Rome nodded again, still looking unperturbed.

I was kind of quaking in my sensible shoes even though Dante and Dominic's gazes weren't even aimed my way.

"Rome will come up last," Dominic called to Gabe, who had begun climbing the stairs.

Dante grabbed my hand and hooked my fingers into the back waist of his pants. "You hold onto me the whole time, understand? If you let go, you won't have to worry about what they'll do to you, *luna*. I'll wring your pretty neck myself."



# Chapter Forty-Four

## Corinne

My eyes squeezed shut against the green-tinged sun that filtered down through the canopy above. I don't think it was terribly bright, but after the dimness of the tunnel, it was like walking out into a blinding spotlight.

That's why I heard it before I saw it; the gunfire that came at me from every direction. It was like fireworks, but instead of hearing the continuous popping high up in the sky, it was like I could feel every explosion in my chest.

They came through the trees at the same time my eyes adjusted, twenty men, maybe more, like a violent wave crashing down around us. There was no cover, nowhere to hide.

We were outnumbered, outgunned, but it didn't seem to faze the men and women around me for even a moment.

They'd fanned out in a near-perfect semicircle in front of the open hatch behind us, with weapons in hand, but they didn't fire at the oncoming wave. Not one shot.

I don't remember reaching for the gun I'd tucked into the waist of my pants, but it was in my hand, and I swung around, searching for a target.

"Just wait, *signorina*," Rome whispered at my back.

That seemed like a rather bad idea, in my opinion. But that's when I noticed that the violent wave of men wasn't



facing us. They were firing into the trees, stepping backward toward us like they were being kettled.

One by one, they began to fall.

I could hear their screams beneath the ceaseless cracks of gunfire.

Four... five... six men went down, but the wave continued to fire back, slowly retreating.

Did they even realize they were being corralled, led like lambs to the slaughter?

Except, these were no lambs; they were *Las Serpientes* men. *Monsters*.

And then one of the monsters turned to run, facing us for the first time, and the world all around me exploded in gunfire.

So close to Dante, I could feel the recoil of every shot he fired through his body.

“Out,” Dominic and Gabe yelled in tandem, and then they stepped back, reloading their guns while Leo and Greta stepped in front of them, covering them.

“I’m out,” Leo shouted, and then Greta, and they switched, all of them moving like a single well-oiled machine, all of the cogs working in perfect order.

All of the cogs except for one. Me.

I hadn’t come to stand here idle. Useless.

Rome dropped to his knees right behind me.

I thought he’d been shot, but he was just sighting lower, shooting into the gap between Dante and Dominic and taking the oncoming men out at the knees.

It might have been coincidence that I spotted the man on the ground, thirty feet behind us.

A stout, short-haired man with a snake tattoo that spiraled around his neck and up to his cheek, the same man who'd first opened my cell.

My breath caught in my throat; Diaz had his gun pointed at Camilla's back, but the moment he spotted me, he adjusted his aim.

I didn't have time to think, to debate, to pay any attention to the way my hands were shaking as I steadied my stance and squeezed the trigger.

The bullet hit Diaz in the face, tearing a hole right through the outer edge of his cheek—which would have been an impressive shot if I hadn't been aiming for his chest.

Rome spun around, but it was Dante who fired before Diaz had even hit the ground, finishing him off.

All I could think was that the man I loved and hated—sometimes in equal measures—looked ready to commit murder, which was fitting, since that was kind of what he was doing.

“Nice shooting, *signorina*,” Rome said as I dropped the gun.

Yup, I dropped my freaking gun. *Way to go, Corinne.*

It probably wasn't the right time to mention I'd never shot a human being before. Only targets. *Paper* targets. The kind that are drawn in the shape of a human, but it feels more like aiming at a dartboard. Not one of those paper targets had ever spewed blood when I hit them. You hit the little button and it's like the target walks right up to you to congratulate you. No congratulations going on now. Just blood. A *lot* of blood.

I looked up, because staring at a dead guy in the middle of a gunfight was probably a pretty bad idea.

It seemed that while I was having my little panic attack, though, the world around me had changed. It had gone quiet. No more loud cracks, no screams. No men running toward us.

Dante and Dominic still had their guns up, looking ready to fire, but Amadeo had holstered his, and Camilla followed suit.

Raven lowered her gun, but Nico pulled her closer, keeping his out in front of them, and Leo sidled up next to them, protecting Raven's unguarded side.

"Is that seriously all they've got?" Greta asked Gabe.

She'd lowered her gun, but she still looked like she wanted to shoot something.

Gabe pressed a hand against his ear then nodded to Greta.

It wasn't until he pulled his hand away that I noticed he had an earpiece. Actually, now that I was looking, half the people here were wearing earpieces, Dante included.

"Morales is on his way," Gabe said. "Stand down."

He holstered his own gun, though his hand hovered near it, ready to retrieve it if necessary.

Dante lowered his gun and turned to face me. He was gorgeous, but I kind of wished he'd turn back around. He wasn't wearing his happy face, and when his gaze swept over me, stopping to linger on my hand, I realized why.

*Uh-oh.*

I wasn't holding onto him anymore, hadn't been for a while.

"Would you rather I have let that guy shoot us all in our backs?" I asked, cocking a brow.

I wasn't feeling quite haughty enough to cross my arms over my chest. Might have had something to do with how much I was still shaking.

“She’s right, boss. She just saved our asses,” Rome said—because Rome was awesome like that, taking Dante’s glare right off me and setting it smack-down on him.

Dante sighed, then he turned his attention back on me. The murderous glare was gone, so it didn’t come as a total surprise when he grabbed my hand and pulled me close, his lips just a hair’s breadth from mine.

“When we get home, remind me to never let you leave the house again.”

*Never?* That sounded rather permanent. Kind of a far cry from, “*I’m not looking for a long-term relationship.*”

And then he kissed me and the world tilted on its axis.

His kisses had always been like sex in my mouth—hard, hungry, and insatiable, just like the man.

But this was different.

Equally as passionate, he tasted like devotion, and longing, and every kind of promise a man could make, and it stole the heart right out of my chest.

So, of course, fate chose that precise moment to spew a brand new wave of violent men out of the trees, all heading in our direction.

# Chapter Forty-Five

## Corinne

I spun to face them as sparks of alertness charged the air, but no one else moved.

No one fired.

Gabe waved a hand in the air as a chain of black SUVs slipped between the oncoming men and rode ahead of them.

“They’re allies, *luna*,” Dante assured me as he wrapped his arms around me from behind.

Nacio pressed against his earpiece then murmured something too low for me to hear, but right away, the oncoming wave of men stopped and started to head back the way they’d come.

The vehicles kept coming, though.

Gabe, Greta, Raven, and Camilla hurried down the stairs—presumably to gather the girls they’d rescued.

It only took a moment for the vehicles to reach us—Wranglers, if I had to guess.

Each of them was occupied by just one driver except for the last one. There were two men in it, and I recognized one of them.

The SUV stopped, and Cristian hopped out with a grim look on his face and more than a spattering of blood on his black and gray fatigues.

“There’s been no sign of him,” he said, his gaze swinging back and forth between Dante and Dominic as the other man in the SUV stepped out.

A tall, dark-haired man, with a scar cutting across his eyebrow and elaborate tattooed angels on his arm, stopped directly in front of me and Dante. “This is the woman you came to rescue, *si?*” he said, looking me over.

“*Si,*” Dante said, pulling me closer. “Corinne, this is Nacio Morales, *capo* of the Morales cartel. Nacio, this is Corinne McKenna.”

I held out my hand to shake his—because casual meet and greets were totally normal in a Colombian jungle, right?—but instead of shaking my hand, he brought it up to his lips and kissed it. Really weird... but also, kind of sweet. It was a chaste kiss, not that it stopped Dante’s arms from tightening around me. He did refrain from growling at the man, though.

“I am very glad that it worked out for the both of you,” Nacio said, looking back and forth between me and Dante with a genuine expression. But the way it was tinged with a hint of sadness, I couldn’t help but think of the angels on his arm. Dante and I were lucky; I had a feeling this man hadn’t been.

“*Grazie,* Nacio,” Dante said, shaking the man’s hand.

Nacio nodded then turned his attention outward. “Two girls, one driver, two men—or women—with guns in every vehicle,” he said, all the kindness in his voice replaced by cool, hard authority.

Most of the people around us started to move, helping the girls up the stairs and into the SUVs while Dominic came toward me and Dante.

“I’ll be right back, *luna,*” Dante said.

He kissed the top of my head then strode away to catch up to Gia as Raven led her toward the first vehicle.

I did my best not to fall over.

Now probably wasn't the best time to mention that the adrenaline high I'd been riding like a roller coaster was crashing down in a big way.

"How's your head?" Dominic asked, nodding toward the matted mess on the side of my head I'd been trying to ignore.

I breathed deep and cracked my knuckles to let off some of the pressure as I watched Dante hug Gia and then help her up into the SUV next to Raven.

The cracking helped; the breathing, not so much.

The coppery scent of blood threatened to overwhelm me.

"It kind of feels like someone hit my head with a steering wheel, but otherwise, it's great," I joked, trying to plaster on a smile. I was so tired, I'm not sure my lips did much more than twitch.

Dom nodded, but the look in his eyes said he wasn't buying it.

I was beginning to think perceptive men were the worst.

"There's a doctor standing by in El Encanto. We'll get you checked out as soon as we get there."

I waved a dismissive hand. "I'm fine, really. But thank you, Dominic—for everything." Small words in comparison to the gratitude I owed him.

"Don't mention it, Corinne. Fallon will just be glad to have you back. You should be able to call her in El Encanto... let her know you're all right."

I tried to smile, watching as Dante stepped back from the vehicle and Nico slid in on the other side of Gia. He still looked pretty murderous. There wasn't the same rigidity in his spine that I'd noticed earlier, though, and that's when it finally sunk in.

It was really over.

We were going home.

I watched as one by one, the girls who'd been trapped here climbed up into the SUVs.

For the first time, it looked like there was something other than fear and grief in their haunted eyes. Relief, maybe? They still sat stiffly, though, like the world beneath their feet might crack open at any moment, plunging them back into the nightmare from which they'd only just escaped.

As the vehicle carrying Gia began to bounce along the rough path, Dante came back to me, wrapping his arms around me from behind again.

"Morales and his men will stay behind to clean house," he explained, though there was no missing the undercurrent of tension in his voice. "We have helicopters ready to go about five miles from here. From there, we'll fly to an airstrip outside El Encanto... and then home."

*Home.*

I kind of wanted to grab his hand and run all the way there, but I couldn't—not just because there was no way I was ever running again.

I could still feel the compound far behind me like a living thing, breathing its vile breath down the back of my neck. And what about its cold, black heart?

There was no proof Tomás Vega was dead.

"I can't leave, Dante," I said, wondering just how big of a fight I was walking into and whether I'd have the stamina to see it through.

"I know," he said, surprising me as he hugged me tighter.

"You knew? How?"



Maybe he'd just gotten accustomed to me fighting him at every turn.

I was good at it, after all.

Dante was silent while we watched as Leo and Gabe climbed into the next SUVs, then Amadeo and Greta, Cristian and a man I didn't recognize, but who seemed to take his orders directly from Nico. Camilla helped one of the girls up next to Cristian, but then she stepped back and headed toward Nacio.

All the girls were gone, but Dominic was still here, and so was Rome.

I stared at the last car, empty but for the driver at the moment.

A few steps, and this nightmare could be over...

"I don't think it was ever your stepdad's blood you felt on your hands, Corinne," he said as his thumb rubbed idly along my ribs. "I think it was Camilla's. You always felt responsible for what happened to her. And now, it's their blood too, isn't it?" he asked, nodding to where the cars had disappeared, swallowed up by the green-tinged jungle.

"How could you know that?"

The man was cocky enough already. If it turned out he could read minds, his ego would know no bounds.

He shrugged. "I don't know. But as much as I want to drag you out of here, I think you'd resent me for it. And more than that, I think you'd suffer for it," he said, hugging me tighter. "I don't want to be the source of your pain."

He leaned down and kissed the back of my neck with a featherlight touch that kind of made me want to melt.

"*Whoa*. Is this seriously Dante Luca I'm talking to? I think I should run off and do something stupid more often if this is

the result.”

He laughed, a dark, sinister sound that sent a shiver down my spine at the same time it lit a spark low in my abdomen. “I wouldn’t try it, *luna*. I’m already tempted to paddle your ass for putting your life in danger. Do it again, and I might be forced to resort to more... extreme measures.”

Had the temperature in the jungle just skyrocketed a hundred degrees?

“I thought you just said you don’t want to be the source of my pain?”

He kissed my neck again, this time unsheathing his teeth and digging in just enough to make it sting. “I meant emotional pain. As for the other, there are some types of physical pain I’d very much enjoy inflicting.”

He dug his teeth into my flesh again, making me bite back a squeal while my lady parts pulsed with rekindled need—in the middle of a jungle, after running for my life, after waking up in a living nightmare. Talk about screwed up wiring.

“No eating my sister,” Camilla barked, glaring at Dante, though a smile made the corners of her lips twitch as she sauntered toward us.

“Rather bossy, isn’t she?” he whispered against my ear.

I laughed. “Pot, meet kettle,” I said, motioning from Dante to Camilla.

She opened her mouth to respond, but Nacio cut her off.

“We’ve got a problem,” Nacio said, nodding back toward the trees.

# Chapter Forty-Six

## Corinne

I had to squint to see, but there, maybe a hundred feet away, two men approached on foot, carrying something between them.

Another man, maybe?

Dante swung me behind him as Dominic and Rome stepped out in front of me and Camilla.

Camilla scowled behind them.

I stifled a snicker.

“They’re my men,” Nacio said, waving off the human guard dogs in front of me.

They lowered their guns but maintained their positions.

Camilla tapped Rome on the back of his shoulder. “You wanna move, big guy? You’re blocking my view.”

Instead of waiting for Rome to move, she stepped around him, gun in hand, watching the men approach.

I stayed where I was, figuring it wasn’t worth a fresh argument just to get a better view—because I was good like that, never stirring up trouble.

“It wasn’t any of us, *jefe*,” one of the approaching men called from twenty feet away, his voice heavily accented. “If one of theirs didn’t do it,” he said, nodding toward Dominic, “then maybe he took the coward’s way out.”

Dominic heaved a clearly agitated breath. “It wasn’t us,” he said curtly as the two men stopped in front of Nacio and dropped whoever they were carrying on the ground.

Through the wall of men, I couldn’t see him at first.

“Holy shit, that’s disgusting,” Camilla breathed.

I stepped around Dante, half-expecting him to pull me back.

Being a perversely curious human—as most humans tend to be—I had to see.

“Corinne,” he warned, putting a hand on my arm, but he didn’t stop me when I pushed on, finally catching a glimpse of the man on the ground.

Or at least, most of a man.

Men tended to have faces, and this one clearly did not.

My stomach roiled as I took in the concave mess of blood and bone where a face had once been.

The slightly too-long, dark hair with a sprinkling of gray in it.

The maroon shirt.

It was buttoned now, unlike it had been when I’d last seen him.

“It’s him,” one of the men who’d brought him said, hooking a boot beneath my stepdad’s ribs and flipping him over onto his back.

He grabbed a knife from a sheath at his waist, leaned down, and sliced open the back of the maroon shirt, revealing the tattooed nest of vipers beneath.

My stepdad was dead.

Tomás Vega was dead.

I wasn't sure what I'd expected to feel. Relief? A sense of justice? Perhaps even a hint of satisfaction?

I felt none of those things.

Loss crept up the back of my throat as sadness filled my eyes with tears—freaking tears.

“Are you okay, *luna*?” Dante asked, his voice gentle, sympathetic even, despite the wretched human being who laid dead on the ground.

He put his hand on the back of my neck. It was big and strong and warm; it steadied me somehow.

I nodded. “He was awful, but he was still the only father I ever knew.”

“Son of a bitch,” Camilla cursed, stomping toward him and glaring down at his corpse.

It was only then I noticed that there was no relief in the air around me, no sense of victory radiating from anyone.

Nacio's jaw was clenched so hard, the muscles there danced.

Camilla looked ready to bring her father back from the dead just to kill him all over again.

“I don't understand,” I whispered under my breath to Dante. “Shouldn't it have been a good thing that he's dead?”

“We needed him alive,” Camilla said. “With him dead, we've got fuck all hope of finding where he's got more girls stashed.”

“There's more?”

Sweet Jesus, it was like my stepdad had spread his vile nastiness everywhere.

The muscles in Nacio's jaw ticked harder, but he said nothing, silently running his fingers over the tattooed angels

on his arm.

“It’s time to go, then,” Dominic said, nodding toward the last vehicle.

Nacio nodded.

I don’t know why I looked down at my stepdad’s body again or why I walked over to him and kneeled down. Maybe to say goodbye like I’d never gotten to do the last time.

Before I could sort out why I was doing it, I reached out, tracing my fingers along the scar I’d given him.

It was bumpy and a little rough, running from the bottom of his ribs to an inch above the waist of his pants.

My breath caught in my throat. “Dante?”

“What is it, *luna*?” he asked from directly behind me.

I hadn’t heard him approach.

“This isn’t right,” I said as I ran my fingers over the scar again, squeezing my eyes shut and thinking back to the room where I’d first seen him.

Tomás taken off his shirt and shown me his back and the long, jagged scar that ran from just beneath his ribs and disappeared into his waistband.

*Into* his waistband.

It hadn’t stopped above it.

“What isn’t right?” Dominic asked, stepping away from whatever quiet conversation he’d been having with Rome and Nacio.

In my mind’s eye, I tried to measure the length of the scar I’d seen. “This scar is shorter, and, it’s neater somehow too, better hidden behind the tattoo.”

I continued to trace my hand over the scar *above* the body’s waistband.

“It’s a decoy,” I concluded, more certain with each passing moment. “He’s no coincidence—he has the same tattoo, the same haircut. He even has on the same clothes, but the scar isn’t right.”

I looked up at my sister and the men who’d gathered around me, all looking at me, their eyes full of doubt.

Of course, they didn’t believe me—a woman who was only here because she’d been stupid enough to get herself kidnapped.

“What do you mean, *luna*?” Dante asked.

I kind of wanted to throw my arms around him. Why it meant so much that he believed me? No idea.

“This isn’t my stepdad. The scar isn’t right,” I said, tracing it again like the demonstration could somehow prove it.

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” Camilla asked. She dropped down next to me and ran her fingers along the same scar, but the expression on her face didn’t change. “How can you be so sure?”

“I just am.” I turned to look up at Dante. “He showed me the scar when I got here. This one’s different.”

He nodded—not one of those indulgent nods but a real one.

Dominic and Nacio looked to Dante, and he nodded again.

That they were checking with him kind of pissed me off, but screw it—I had more important things to worry about at the moment.

Camilla sat back on her heels. “But if this isn’t him, how did he have a clone of himself stashed away for a rainy day?”

“Sweet Jesus,” I breathed out loud as the last pieces of the puzzle slammed together and sent bile rising in the back of my throat. “His brother... he never actually killed his brother. He said he got a new kidney. I remember what he said...” I closed

my eyes trying to recall his exact words. “He said, ‘*Even if the donor wasn’t as willing as one might hope*’. He took a freaking kidney from his brother and left the elaborate scar in the process.”

I didn’t even want to contemplate what else he’d done with him all these years.

I continued, “He saved his brother, keeping him barely alive all these years, for... for this, so that anyone who tried to kill him would think he was dead. And that means he’s still—”

A gunshot sounded.

Rome’s body jolted.

Blood bloomed from the wound on his chest.



# Chapter Forty-Seven

## Dante

Dom fell on Rome, dragging him to the ground as I dove for Corinne, slamming us both into the warm, damp earth.

Another gunshot sounded, and one of Nacio's men fell, blood spurting wildly from his neck.

The next shot took out Nacio's other man; the bullet hit him right in the heart.

Nacio and Camilla hit the deck, guns out, searching for a target.

"Where is that coming from?" I barked, searching for the source while I made sure every inch of Corinne was tucked beneath me.

"Rome," Corinne cried, struggling to get an arm out from under me.

"Dom's got him. Stay still," I said, sparing a glance in Rome's direction.

Dom had his hand on him, high up on his chest. Blood oozed out from between his fingers.

Another bullet came at us, but it came in too high, hitting a tree behind us.

It was enough, though—it gave me the trajectory.

I didn't want to leave Corinne, but we were all dead if I didn't move now.

“Stay put, *luna*.” I just had to hope that for once, Corinne listened—which was about as useful as praying to the rain gods in the middle of a drought. “Don’t fucking move,” I whispered. It sounded like a command, but really, I was *begging* here.

I kissed her cheek and crawled off her, gun in one hand, slithering forward like a snake in the grass.

Nacio was on the move too, and Dom a second later, crawling forward as the three of us headed toward the source of the gunfire.

Another gunshot, but from behind us this time.

“Camilla’s providing cover fire,” Dom said, right before I could throw myself back at Corinne.

Bullets flew over our heads, back and forth.

Still no sign of the shooter.

“Where is he?” I whispered.

Too many seconds were passing, too many bullets flying; it was only a matter of time before Camilla ran out of bullets or the shooter hit something.

*Or Corinne stands up and starts drawing fire to get the shooter’s attention off of us.*

Yeah, I could see her doing it.

And I wasn’t in the mood to admire her mettle.

“There,” Nacio said, shifting his aim lower and a few feet to our left.

The shooter was in the bushes, but there was no way to know if there was more than one in there, or if there was another shooter in a different location as well.

Except there was a way.

I chanced a glance back in the direction we’d come.

Corinne wasn't on the ground.

Of course, she wasn't on the ground.

It was now or never.

Take out the shooter or watch the disobedient pain in the  
ass who'd stolen my heart die.

"Don't *fucking* miss," I told Nacio and Dom.

And then I stood up.

# Chapter Forty-Eight

## Dante

The first bullet grazed my shoulder.

I felt it, but I didn't even flinch.

The second hit my thigh.

It hurt like a motherfucker, but I was still fairly certain it was a flesh wound.

The third bullet slammed into my chest.

I flew back and hit the ground. Small bullet, but it felt like a Mack truck.

I couldn't breathe as a volley of gunfire rang out, coming from either side of me.

And then silence.

No more bullets.

"You *stupid* son of a bitch!" Dom snapped, dropping down next to me. "What the hell were you..." His voice trailed off while his gaze took in the wounds to my arm and thigh before honing in on where my hands covered my chest.

He paled as a muscle twitched in his clenched jaw.

I shook my head, still finding it difficult to draw a breath, never mind speak.

"Tell me you were wearing a vest, you little son of a bitch," he barked.

He looked pissed as hell, but his eyes were glistening.

*Wasn't that sweet?*

I cocked an eyebrow and forced air into my lungs. “Do I look like a dumbass to you?”

Dom sighed and some of the color returned to his face, but then he slammed his hand down on the ground next to me—not the hand with the gun in it. The thing probably would have gone off.

“What the hell were you thinking, Dante?” Corinne spat.

“Corinne—”

She hadn't been facing us.

When I'd chanced a glance back, she was turned away.

She'd had a gun in her hand.

I shot to my feet.

My ribs roared in protest, but I was moving.

Running.

I stumbled to a stop thirty feet away from her.

Corinne still had her back to me, the gun up, aimed at Tomás who stood ten feet from her.

He didn't flinch.

He didn't even spare a second's glance at us as Nacio and Dom came running on my heels.

Tomás had his gun aimed at her.

He had a gun aimed at *my* woman.

Her body was blocking him.

I had no shot.

My heartbeat pounded so hard, I think it cracked my injured ribs.

All I could hear was the sound of blood whooshing past my ears.

A gun went off, but I don't think I heard it; I felt it.

I felt it in every fiber of my body, and it was the most painful thing I'd ever experienced.

I would have taken a thousand Mack trucks to my chest to not see her crumple to her knees.

To not watch the gun tumble from her fingers.

Rome heaved himself off the ground and lunged for the Viper.

Another gunshot.

Rome's body jolted.

The two of them fell together, Rome's big body landing on top.

I don't know when I started moving, but suddenly, I was right next to her, dropping down and gathering her against me.

One hand held her close while the other searched for where she'd been shot, but I couldn't find it.

Her whole body was shaking.

She was in shock, and I couldn't find the bullet hole.

I tried to lay her down to keep on searching, but her arms wrapped around my neck so tight, I couldn't loosen her hold without hurting her.

"Please, *luna*, let me—"

"I did it," she whispered, her voice trembling as much as her body.

"What?"

"I did it," she said again, louder this time, but her voice cracked as she spoke.

One gunshot—there'd only been one gunshot.

I couldn't find the source of the bleeding because there wasn't one.

Corinne had shot Tomás Vega.

The Viper was dead.

The tidal wave of relief that crashed over me almost floored me.

I held her tighter, ignoring my screaming ribs.

"It's over, *luna*. You did what you had to do," I soothed because I could feel the way she was reeling. "You protected Camilla. You protected those girls."

She shook her head. "I killed him. Those girls... They'll never find them now."

"We'll find them. I promise."

I had no clue how, but if that's what it took to help her, I'd search every day for the rest of my life if I had to.

Corinne nodded, but she kept holding on just as tight.

I could see out the corner of my eye as Dom and Nacio rolled Rome off the Viper.

Camilla dropped down next to Rome, some sort of first aid kit in her hands, while Nacio leaned down and checked the Viper's pulse.

"I need some help," Camilla called out.

Corinne's body went still.

She turned to look, and then she was moving, out of my arms and across the few feet to drop down next to Rome.

Without a moment's pause, she dropped her hands down on the biggest bleeder—the wound high up on Rome's chest.

“You’re not going to die,” she snapped at him while Camilla readied a suture needle.

Rome smiled—actually fucking smiled. “I appreciate the concern, *signorina*,” he said, reaching up to wipe a tear from her cheek, “but I’ll be all right.”

“Damn right you will be,” she said as I kneeled down behind her.

There was blood seeping out around her fingers, covering her hands, but she didn’t even flinch.

Was it totally crazy that I was so proud of her in that moment?

“All right, let’s do this,” Camilla said, holding out a bottle of rubbing alcohol to Corinne as she leaned over Rome with the suture needle.

I didn’t envy Rome when Corinne took the bottle and doused the wound.

The man roared despite the discarded syringe on the ground—Camilla had given him a shot of morphine already.

“Hold him,” Camilla said.

Corinne moved like lightning, backing away enough for me and Dom to get in there, holding Rome down while Camilla stitched him up.

Instead of scrubbing her hands raw, Corinne grabbed onto Rome’s hand, holding it tight, whispering soothing nothings to him for a moment before she grabbed a packet of gauze and taped up his other bullet wound—a deep graze on the side of his ribs.

“That’s it,” Camilla announced after a while, securing a bandage over the sutures. “It was a clean shot. I don’t think it hit anything vital. Looks like you’ll be okay, big guy,” she said, patting his shoulder.



Rome smiled. “Of course, I’m going to be okay. She’s my good luck charm,” he said, nodding toward Corinne. He had a weird-ass smile on his face, and his pupils were so wide, his irises looked like slim, golden rings. “I haven’t died once since she’s been around, not even when she had me chasing her cute ass across the city.”

I tried not to growl; I really did.

Camilla laughed. “Can’t hold it against him. I gave him a hefty shot of morphine. He should be feeling pretty good for a while.”

“Glad to hear it,” Dom said as he and Nacio leaned down to help Rome to his feet.

Corinne collapsed back against me, her hands still covered in blood.

I don’t think she even noticed.

“If you’ll be all right, I have some business to tend to,” Nacio said, nodding down at the Viper.

“What do you mean?” Corinne asked him.

“It doesn’t matter,” Dom said before I could respond. “It’s time to leave, *cara mia*.”

Did my brother not realize that was just about the worst thing he could have said? He’d pretty much just told Corinne no.

And that tended to bring out her stormy side—the side that made a hurricane seem like a midsummer shower.

“What do you mean it doesn’t matter?” Corinne asked, because my brother was a dumbass.

“It means our objective is to get you to safety, Corinne. Fallon’s counting on us to do that, so we’re leaving. Now, before anything else goes wrong,” Dom said in a no-nonsense voice that probably would have worked on anyone else. Using

it on Corinne, though, it was just going to get him killed. So, of course, he kept talking. “And what’s about to happen here isn’t something you need to see.”

I let out an exasperated sigh.

“I have an idea,” she snapped, her eyes a blazing green fire. “How about Corinne gets to decide where she goes and what she does and does not need to see. I know it’s easy to forget, given that she looks so damn great for a girl who’s been through hell for the past some-odd hours, but Corinne happens to be an adult.”

Dom stared at her—I think his brain might have been short-circuiting—and then he looked over at me, eyes imploring.

I cocked an eyebrow at him.

It would have been entertaining to see my brother taken down a peg by a woman who was half his size.

But I took pity on him, because I was a sympathetic son of a bitch.

I placed my fingers on Corinne’s chin and turned her face toward me, hopefully blocking out the rest of the world—and my dumbass brother.

Her eyes were snapping with lightning, but I could see the exhaustion underneath.

She opened her mouth, ready to let loose her fury.

“*Luna*, come with me, *per favore*,” I said quietly.

Her jaw snapped shut.

She looked over at the Viper then back at me. There was still lightning in her eyes, but it was rolling in the distance like sheet lightning now.

“You’re not going to try telling me where to go?”

“Nope. I’m not even going to try telling you how to get there.” I smiled then turned serious. “I want to take you home, but that’s only going to work if you want it too,” I said, hoping she could hear beyond the words to what I was really saying.

She looked in my eyes, and I could see a thousand thoughts whirring around in her head. “I do want that.”

*Thank fuck.*

Dom’s shoulders sagged with relief.

“Then what are we waiting for, *luna*?”

She laughed; it was a tired sound, and her body sagged against me. “I think I ran out of steam about an hour ago. I don’t think I’m even running on fumes at this point.”

“Why didn’t you say so?” I said, heaving us both to our feet and pretending the pain wasn’t making white spots dance behind my eyes from how much my ribs were hurting.

We started toward the remaining SUV—it didn’t look like it had sustained any heavy damage—but Corinne stopped and turned to Nacio.

“He killed them, didn’t he?” she said, her voice quiet as she nodded to the angels on his arm.

“He did,” Nacio said.

His face was a blank mask, but I knew the cost of that mask, the way every wretched emotion roiled beneath it until it felt like you were suffocating.

“I’m sorry,” she said, cracking her knuckles for the first time since I’d found her here.

He shook his head. “The blood of my wife and my son are on his hands,” he said, nodding to the Viper, “not yours. Camilla has told me your story. Don’t ever be sorry, *señorita*. Never.”

Corinne nodded and only hesitated for a moment longer before letting me help her up into the SUV next to Rome.

Dom and Camilla already occupied the front seats.

I was more than happy to sit back with Corinne in my arms and let them get us out of here.

Still, I looked back as the SUV started its short trip to the helicopters.

Nacio had forgotten all about us.

His eyes were filled with tears, but his face was composed as he drew a short, sharp knife from its sheath.

I didn't envy the Viper in the grass at his feet.

# Chapter Forty-Nine

## Dante

After a helicopter ride, two flights, a really long-ass reunion with Fallon, and an even longer examination by our doctor—I swear the fucker had been taking his time just to piss me off—we were finally alone.

Corinne had showered while the doc taped up my ribs, and now she was standing in the en suite doorway wearing nothing but a towel.

She was mesmerizing.

Her eyes grazed over me, and I didn't mind at all the heat and hunger that flared in them. The tension that lingered in the corners of her eyes worried me though.

I couldn't blame her after the hell she'd been through, but it looked like more than the aftershocks of trauma; it looked like fear.

“What's wrong, *luna*?”

Her brows knitted as she took a step into the room, but she lingered there.

“I woke up in a cell, and I was terrified. Camilla looked at me like she didn't know me. My stepdad told me he was going to kill me. The hulk—Diaz—he chased me, it seemed like for hours...”

She stopped talking, but I could see she wasn't done.

I was using every ounce of restraint I had not to fly my ass back to Colombia to kill those fuckers all over again.

“It was awful, Dante, but...” She cracked her knuckles.

“But what?”

“It was awful, but none of it compared to what it felt like when I thought you’d...” She cracked her knuckles again and squared her shoulders. “When I thought you’d died. I never knew I could feel like that. We were just supposed to be screwing around. It was only supposed to be sex, you know?”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. But we’re a whole lot more than we were supposed to be.”

Her eyes met mine. The fear that tightened the corners eased a little. Not gone, but less. Her gaze went back to raking over my body.

I’d stripped down to boxer briefs, but I’m pretty sure my taped-up ribs had seen better days.

She didn’t seem to mind.

“I wouldn’t say you have a glass face, *luna*, but sometimes, it comes pretty damn close.”

“Oh? And what is my almost-glass face telling you right now?”

I laughed. “You’ve got, ‘It’s been too long since I’ve had the man I love inside me,’ plastered all over your face.”

“The man I love, huh?” she said as she dropped the towel.

Every line and curve was perfect.

The way she moved, her hips swaying as she came toward me, was downright hypnotic.

I couldn’t have torn my gaze away if my life depended on it.

“Damn right,” I said as she climbed up on the bed and straddled my hips.

Corinne shook her head, laughing under her breath. “Would a little modesty really be such a bad thing?” she asked, cocking an eyebrow while she grinded her hot cunt against me.

My cock jerked, not happy at all with the confines of my boxer briefs.

“Would you rather I pretend that I don’t know you can’t stop thinking about me?” I asked as I grazed my fingers along the underside of her tits, watching as her chest thrust forward in search of more. “That when you picture your future, you can’t see one without me in it?” I palmed her tits and caught her nipples between my fingers, squeezing just enough to make her body squirm. “That when you think about ten years from now... twenty years from now, you know you’re going to feel the same way?” I squeezed her nipples harder, making her gasp and grind down so hard, I could feel her pussy clenching against my cock, begging for more.

“Pretty confident, aren’t you?” she asked, her voice breathless. “How can you be so sure?”

“Because I can’t stop thinking about you, *luna*,” I said as I slid a hand down, not stopping until my fingers hovered over her clit, barely touching, just teasing. “When I picture my future, I can’t see one without you in it.”

Her eyes were fixed on mine while she writhed her hips, pressing closer and creating the friction she needed.

“And when I think about ten years from now... twenty years from now, I know I’m going to feel the same way.” I slid a finger further back, slipping inside her slick, wet heat.

Her body jolted as I stroked her G-spot, and she moaned.

It was the most erotic sound in the *world*.

“Seems like a far cry from the man who wasn’t looking for a long-term relationship.” Corinne reached behind her, wrapping her fingers around my cock through the briefs and stroking hard and firm. “Didn’t you just want to keep fucking until you got bored?”

I wasn’t going to be fucking for long if her hand kept up what it was doing.

I shrugged, playing nonchalant. “I discovered a flaw in my plan.”

“Oh? What was that?” she asked between moans as I fingered her faster.

“I’m never going to get bored with you. But don’t worry, I do want to keep fucking you. Starting right now.”

I flipped us over, shoved down my briefs, and kicked my hips, driving into her hard and deep. So *fucking* deep.

I had to stop, stilling inside her.

*Think baseball, asshole.*

The woman’s pussy might really have been magical.

“So, I guess it’s time we have that relationship talk, huh?” she asked as her walls gripped me tight, and she wrapped her legs around me.

“No,” I said, but sufficiently in control now, I started to move, fucking her slowly. “There’s no need for the talk, *luna.*”

“Oh?” she said, but I bottomed out at the same time, making the sound come out half-moan, half-scream.

I grabbed her hands and pinned them on either side of her head, twining my fingers with hers. “I already told you. You’re mine. End of conversation.”

“End of conversation? I don’t think so. I have a say here too, you know?”



“You don’t want to be mine?” I asked, cocking a brow as I shifted my hips and hit her clit and G-spot on the next stroke.

“Of course, I do, but that’s kind of one-sided, don’t you think?”

I laughed, because it should have been plain obvious. “I’m yours, Corinne. I was yours the moment I carried you out of Ascension. And I’ll be yours until the day I die—longer, if I have any say in it.”

“Still plan on haunting me, do you?” she said, squeezing her inner muscles so hard, the electricity tingling at the base of my spine shot into overdrive.

“Damn right,” I said, thrusting harder. Faster. “It’ll make finding a new man a real bitch.”

“I hate you, you know?” she gasped as her fingers gripped my hands tighter and the first sparks of her orgasm lit her eyes.

“I hate you too, *luna*,” I said, watching as she came undone beneath me; the most beautiful sight in the world.

# Epilogue

## Corinne

The kitchen was a mess—like the kind of mess that made me want to call in the National Guard.

There was flour everywhere, egg whites dripping from the counter's edge, and the leaning tower of pots and pans was rising up from the sink.

The itch in my brain was definitely trying to drive me freaking crazy. But I stared at the mess, refusing to look away, refusing to lift one finger to fix it.

Exposure therapy—it was either going to work or it was going to kill me.

Either way, I wouldn't care about the mess anymore.

So, progress, right?

Even worse than the mess in the kitchen was all the women in it—covered in everything from icing sugar to whipping cream.

It kind of looked like we'd gone to war with the baking ingredients on the counters and clearly come out the losers.

“You sure you don't want to help?” I asked Camilla, holding out the spatula covered in hazelnut praline cream in enticement.

My sister—the only clean woman here—leaned against the dining table across from the kitchen, staring daggers at me.

“The day I start baking cookies is the day I start walking around barefoot and pregnant and looking for hobbies like knitting and scrapbooking and shit,” Camilla said.

I think she was afraid if she got too close, the kitchen would actually suck her in and chain her to the stove.

I laughed. “Well, good news: We’re not baking cookies; we’re making mille-feuille and Paris-Brest.”

All of which had recently come out of the oven.

Camilla cocked an eyebrow at me. “Seriously? Now you’re making things with the word ‘breast’ in it?”

Greta and Raven snickered.

I rolled my eyes. “Get your mind out of the gutter, Camilla.”

“Ha!” She laughed. “I’ve seen you looking at Sexy McBroody. If the amount of time you spend eye-fucking him is any indicator, your mind is always in the gutter, Corinne.”

Fallon and Ella laughed.

“I think she’s got you there,” Fallon joked.

I shot her a scandalized look. “You’re my best friend, Fallon. That means you’re supposed to be on my side.”

“I am on your side—not that you’d notice since you’ve been busy fucking my brother-in-law morning, noon, and night.” She stuck out her tongue at me.

I held up the spatula like a weapon. “I see how it is. You’re all just ganging up on me, aren’t you?”

“I’m not,” Ella said with the first devious little grin I’d seen on her face. “I’m kind of fond of sleeping with Fallon’s brother-in-law every chance I get.”

The room erupted in laughter.

Ella and Leo did spend a lot of time behind closed doors—not that I could throw the first stone.

If it weren't for needing food to survive, I'm not sure me and Dante would ever have left his bedroom.

"I don't suppose there are any more Luca men hiding somewhere?" Camilla asked.

"More?" Fallon asked, her eyebrows reaching for her hairline. "You don't think there's enough Luca testosterone flying around already?"

Camilla shrugged. "You can't expect a girl to keep hearing all about the wild roller coaster and not want to go for a ride."

More laughter. God, we were ridiculous.

"Hey," Raven said in an overloud whisper, one hand cupped around her mouth. "Rumor is my soon-to-be brother-in-law is one hell of a wild ride," she said, wagging her brows. "Feel free to take Gabe for a spin."

"Ignore her," Ella said, throwing out her arms in caution. "She's just trying to rope you in so she can even out the boys and girls in the family."

"I would do no such thing!" Raven gasped, hand over her heart.

Ella shook her head. "You would too. You told me we should find Dante two girls just to even out the numbers."

Raven's cheeks pinkened, but she couldn't stop smiling. "Okay, well, maybe I did *before*. But I think Corinne is all the woman my brother can handle."

"I second that," I said, raising my hand high. "Besides, I think I've got so many personalities in here," I said, pointing to my head, "that we've practically got a six-way going on every night."

Fallon laughed so hard, she lost her tentative perch on the edge of the counter and fell off.

Greta caught her right before she hit the floor—that woman was fast.

“Thank you,” Fallon said, standing up straight and looking way too dignified for a woman who’d nearly ended up on her ass. “And what about Amadeo?” she asked, turning to Camilla. “You were fake-engaged to the guy—living in pretty close quarters—don’t tell me you never hopped on that merry-go-round.”

Camilla smiled with a little too much twinkle in her eyes. “Maybe once.”

*Interesting.*

Though, it seemed neither Camilla nor Amadeo were interested in pursuing anything more.

“And?” Ella pressed, clearly waiting for the juicy details.

“And that man is definitely more roller coaster than merry-go-round.”

Whistles rang around the room.

Greta cocked an eyebrow, though her lips were twitching in amusement. “He leaves you wanting to throw up after you get off him?” she asked.

Fallon laughed so hard, I think she might have wet her pants.

“Never mind her,” Raven said, waving off Greta. “Greta might be the toughest woman you’ve ever seen on the ground, but get her up in the sky, and she shakes like a leaf.”

Greta cocked an eyebrow at Raven. “Says the girl who has yet to join the mile-high club.”

“And you have?” Raven asked, her face a canvas of disbelief.

“Yeah, I have. If I’m going to fly around in a tin can, I’m at least going to make it worth my while.”

That didn’t surprise me.

Greta seemed to ooze so much sensuality and strength, I couldn’t really imagine anything getting in her way—whether she was kicking ass or knocking boots.

“Wait a minute,” Fallon said, turning to Greta. “You and Gabe... There has got to be something going on there. Spill it, woman.”

Greta pressed her lips together while a light shone in her eyes. “I have a better idea,” she said, holding out a handful of keys and key fobs that seemed to have miraculously appeared out of nowhere.

“What are those?” Fallon asked.

“Keys,” Raven said, smiling like the Cheshire Cat.

“Keys to what?” Ella asked. There was a serious gleam in her eyes now.

Raven shrugged, still smiling. “Just the cars in the garage, that’s all.”

*Oh sweet Jesus.*

“The Pagani?” I asked, a little breathless.

Sure, it was kind of obvious Greta was totally deflecting here, but I was okay with that if it got me into the sexy little hypercar.

Greta cocked an eyebrow at me, smiling. “Really? The Pagani?”

I shrugged. “It’s kind of hot.”

Greta laughed. “Yeah, it is. A ride in that beauty is better than most of the men I’ve slept with.”

“And she’s slept with a lot,” Raven added helpfully.

Greta’s eyes bulged while the rest of us laughed.

Once the laughter died down, she shook the keys. “So, you girls wanna get out of here?” she said, nodding toward the door that led to the garage.

Most of us were already salivating, but Fallon glanced toward the stairway, biting into her lower lip. Maria was down for a nap, so Fallon had the monitor hooked to her waist.

Raven caught Fallon’s look and smiled. “All right, everyone into the garage,” she said then turned to Fallon. “Trust me, okay?”

Fallon dug her teeth into her lip a little longer then nodded.

“Great,” Raven said, snatching the monitor from Fallon’s waist and making a mad dash down the hall while the rest of us hightailed it to the garage, me and Fallon trailing at the back.

We watched from the garage doorway as Raven knocked on the war room door and threw it open.

“Sorry, Dom. I promise I’ll try to bring Fallon back in one piece, but you’re going to have to listen for Maria,” she said all in one breath then chucked the monitor into the room—presumably at Dom—then slammed the war room door shut.

“Run!” she hollered, laughing her ass off as she hurried toward us.

I made a beeline for the Pagani, not minding at all the way my lady parts tingled as I slid behind the wheel. It took me a few minutes to figure out what I was doing, but then me and the pretty car got comfortable with one another, and I flew out

of the garage behind Greta and Ella who were clearly not novices like me.

The car hummed like a purring cat as I followed the Lamborghini in front of me—Ella's car of choice, and it kept right on purring as I maneuvered along streets and around corners.

Maybe it wasn't as good as sex with Dante, but it definitely ranked high up on the Things-that Corinne-finds-pleasurable' list.

So pleasurable, in fact, that it seemed no time at all had passed when we turned back into the long driveway toward the cluster of men who now stood at the top of it.

They didn't look nearly as happy as we did.

It wasn't until I got close, though, and Dante stepped out in front of the Pagani that I could clearly see the broody look on his face.

Broody or not, I was revved up and ready to go.

Dante could grumble at me all he wanted, so long as he did it with his cock buried deep inside me. The man looked good enough to devour whole.

I turned off the car, got out, and headed straight for him while he stood there with his arms crossed over his chest. With every step I took, though, the fire in his eyes grew brighter. It was still kind of amazing I'd managed to grab hold of this virile male's attention so thoroughly—not that I was complaining.

I threw my arms around him the second I got close enough and sampled the warm flesh just beneath his ear with my lips and tongue.

He pulled me even closer but leaned his head until it was his lips against my ear.



“Do you remember what I told you would happen if you ran off and did something stupid again?” he asked then sunk his teeth into my neck.

Just one touch in the right place, and I could have orgasmed right then.

“I should spank you for running off to go racing without telling me,” he whispered, slipping his hand down to my ass and squeezing, pressing me harder against him at the same time until I could feel the hard length of his cock digging into my abdomen.

Yup, just a little more, and I’d be there.

“You probably shouldn’t do that,” I said, fighting the pulsing, growing need between my thighs. “I might just start running off more often.”

Because as much as I complained about his broody, bossy side, it was freaking hot. Like spontaneous combustion kind of hot.

He growled as he nipped my neck once more, and then he was lifting me off the ground and throwing me over his shoulder, heedless of the audience who’d gathered near to watch our spectacle.

I squealed and squirmed while the men smiled knowingly and all the women whooped and whistled at us.

*Traitors!*

Dante started to move, striding into the garage to the open interior door.

“Put me down, you asshole,” I shrieked as I struggled harder—because it was just no fun unless I made him work for it.

I slapped at his side and kicked my legs.

“If you’re trying to turn me on, you’re doing a damn fine job, *luna*.”

He slapped my ass hard and kept going while the fire between my thighs threatened to blaze out of control.

Maybe we were both screwed-up pain junkies, but there was no way life would ever be boring with the two of us together... assuming I didn’t kill the smug, bossy son of a bitch.

THANK YOU FOR READING: MAFIA KINGS:  
CORRUPTED BOOK 4: CORRUPTED OBSESSION

DON'T MISS THE FREE SIZZLING BONUS CHAPTER

## EXCLUSIVE FREE BONUS CHAPTER

*I tugged at the ties of my halter top behind my neck and let the silky top drop down to my hips, then unzipped my skirt and tugged the shirt and skirt off together.*

*“Keep going,” he said, his voice harsh, but not angry. Just aroused. Very, very aroused. Nice.*

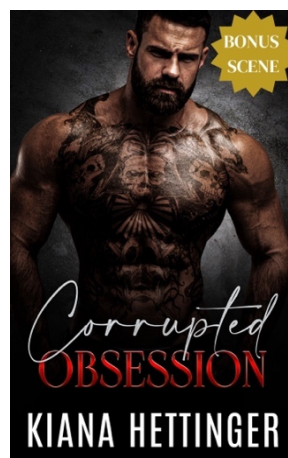
*It only took a second to flick the clasp of my strapless bra and drag the thong down my legs.*

*His gaze swept down me from head to toe, lingering on my feet, still covered by my strappy pumps. He didn't say anything, but I got the message and slipped them off, instantly losing three inches of height.*

*“Perfetta,” he breathed as his gaze traveled back up until our eyes met.*

*He started unbuttoning his shirt, then slipped it off and dropped it on the bed. His pants and boxer briefs followed a moment later. It was my turn for my eyes to rake over him greedily, because damn, the man was a work of art.*

*“Do you trust me, luna?”*



Can't get enough of Dante and Corinne?  
Download the [free bonus scene](#) for one  
more steamy chapter.

Download the FREE bonus chapter here -  
<https://geni.us/corruptedobonus>

## What's Next?

Wow, I hope you enjoyed *Corrupted Obsession!* Your support means the world to me.

The next book in the [Mafia Kings: Corrupted Series](#) is [Corrupted Vows](#).

If you enjoyed Dante and Corinne's story, you're going to want to tune in for Gabe's story, Corrupted Vows!

[Click to READ CORRUPTED VOWS FOR FREE – KINDLE UNLIMITED](#)

Calling all Kittens! Come join the fun:

If you're thirsty for more discussions with other readers of the series, [join my exclusive readers' group, Kiana's Kittens.](#)

Join my private readers' group here - [facebook.com/groups/KianasKittens](https://facebook.com/groups/KianasKittens)

## CAN YOU DO ME A HUGE FAVOR?

Would you be willing to leave me a review?

I'd be over the moon because just one positive review on Amazon is like buying the book a hundred times! Reader support is the lifeblood for Indie authors. It provides us the feedback we need to give readers what they want in future stories!

Your positive review would mean the world to me. You can post your review on Amazon or Goodreads. I'd be forever grateful, thank you from the bottom of my heart!

[CLICK TO REVIEW](#)