



HOT
BLOODED

Killer

USA TODAY & NY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
MARGO BOND COLLINS
& LONDON KINGSLEY

HOT-BLOODED KILLER

A DARK MAFIA ARRANGED MARRIAGE
ROMANCE

KING OF CLUBS BOOK 2



MARGO BOND COLLINS
LONDON KINGSLEY

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About the Authors

Hot-Blooded Killer


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INTRODUCTION

Hello! Thank you so much for picking up one of our books. We really hope you love it!

We'd hate to part ways once you finish this book, however—so let's keep in touch! We have a great bunch of people in our Readers' Groups that you absolutely shouldn't miss out on. We do exclusive book freebies, online parties, giveaways, sneak previews, and events for this amazing group.

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ABOUT HOT-BLOODED KILLER

His captivating darkness clashes with her alluring light—and neither will ever be the same.

Lorenzo Beneventi

My brother Massimiliano always blamed the Kappas cartel for our parents' and brothers' deaths. But I'm certain there's more to the story. So when I discover a connection between Los Kappas and the Rossi crime family, I know I need to make the Rossis pay. And the best way to do that? Marrying Mafia Princess Gia Rossi, the family's golden angel. But first, I must make her mine—and that requires her absolute submission.

Gia Rossi

The Beneventi family destroyed my parents' lives when I was only a child. So when my father tells me he's arranged my marriage to the youngest Beneventi son, I resist his plans. Not that defying him has ever worked for me before. When I finally meet my new fiancé, he's everything I expected—dangerous, cruel, savage. But something about his darkness calls to me, and the longer we're together, the more I want him to possess me. Completely.

Hot-Blooded Killer is the second book in the King of Clubs series. It is a stand-alone Dark Mafia Enemies to Lovers Arranged Marriage Romance, complete with HEA and no cliffhangers.

Please note: this book is a dark Mafia romance that contains mature content, graphic violence and may contain triggers. If such materials offend you, please do not read.

PROLOGUE



LORENZO BENEVENTI

When my father teamed up with Los Kappas, led by Mauricio Velazquez, aka El Toro, the leader of a Colombian drug cartel, it was Pops' death sentence. And it led to the death of my brothers Leonardo and Frederico, too. They were with him when El Toro's bomb launched Pops' vehicle into the air in a flaming rocket in front of Pops' Vegas club.

They were taken out by a hit ordered by El Toro when the cops picked up a shipment of cocaine they were moving from Colombia to the U.S. El Toro figured my father had turned traitor and responded the only way he knew how.

My brother Massamiliano, Max to those closest to him, and I were in Italy visiting relatives when Pops was assassinated. It's the only way we lived.

Max plotted revenge by kidnapping El Toro's daughter, Valentina Velazquez. But he accidentally picked up the wrong girl. Same name, different person. He didn't figure out his mistake until he was married to her, though, and by then, it was too late. He was in love.

But that doesn't change the fact that El Toro is still after our family.

We've survived so far, though. Max and his brand-new wife Valentina managed to take out one of the Colombian hitmen sent by El Toro to kill us.

Our own guys, Dominic and Vince, helped me dispose of El Toro's man's body out in the desert.

As I make it back home from that errand, I head toward my rooms to wash away the dust, blood, and sweat covering my body.

Sometimes I hate being in the Mafia.

Don't get me wrong. Most of the time it's great.

But it killed most of my family.

And all I can think about these days is revenge.

As I stand in the shower, letting the hot water sluice away any evidence of illegal activities, I can't stop thinking about how lucky Max is to have found Valentina. She may not be the woman he meant to kidnap, but she is definitely the one he needs.

I finish showering and move to the front room of my suite. It was originally designed to be a sitting room of sorts—all the suites in the house have similar designs—but I have turned it into my personal office space.

Switching on my laptop, I drop into the chair behind my computer desk. Then I reach out and begin turning on all my other equipment.

My recent trip to Italy, no matter how necessary to strengthen the family's connections after our father's death, had been a mistake.

I missed too much while I was gone.

And it put all of us at risk.

I won't allow that to happen again.

El Toro's man wouldn't have gotten the drop on me if I hadn't been so damn tired. And I wouldn't have been exhausted if I hadn't stayed up most of the night searching for new connections to the Los Kappas cartel.

I haven't yet told Max what I found because I want to make sure I'm right.

I will not make the mistake of trusting my information too easily.

Not like Max did.

Sure, it's worked out well for him—but there's no guarantee anything like that would go so well for the Beneventi family a second time.

So I begin scanning all the connections I think I've made, double- and triple-checking them.

Finally, convinced I'm right, I click on a single social media account, and then on a single photo, bringing up on my screen and staring at it for a long, silent moment.

Gia Rossi.

Beautiful. Poised. Elegant.

Daughter of the second most powerful mob family in the country.

And quite possibly another means of taking our revenge on El Toro.

"I'm coming for you, Gia," I murmur to the image. "You just don't know it yet."

CHAPTER 1



LORENZO BENEVENTI

“Looks like you’re out of money to bet,” Edoardo Rossi says, staring at me narrow-eyed over the cards in his hand.

I cock my head, matching his gaze.

He puffs on his Cuban cigar, the blue smoke curling up in front of his face. He flashes an evil grin at me. “Unless you want to bet your share of Club Alfonso.”

I pretend to consider his words. True, my brother Massamiliano will crucify me if I lose. But Max isn’t here, and it has taken me all night to maneuver Edoardo into this position. I glance down at my cards and chew on the inside of my cheek, forcing myself to look indecisive.

Finally, I raise my gaze to meet Edoardo’s.

Time to find out whether all my machinations have worked.

Edoardo gestures toward the enormous pile of chips in front of him. “You don’t have enough to cover the bet.” He pauses. “Then again, that’s why they call it a bet, isn’t it?” He laughs, and several of his cronies sitting around the poker table—players who have long since folded but are still hanging around to see the outcome of the game—chuckle with him.

I shake my head. “Not unless you’re willing to bet something that means as much to you as Club Alfonso means to me.”

There we go. I’ve baited the hook. Now to see if he takes it.

Because as far as I know, there’s only one thing in the world that truly means anything to Edoardo, head of one of the rival Families in Vegas.

To be sure, it’s always been a friendly rivalry—as friendly as such things ever are in the Mafia, anyway.

In any case, there hasn’t been open warfare on the Vegas strip in years.

No, it all went underground when Edoardo allied himself with El Toro, the Colombian cartel leader who controls the drug trade into Vegas these days.

And then El Toro killed my family, rigging their car to explode.

Max and I are the only ones left.

I've sworn I'll take revenge on El Toro by any means necessary—especially since my brother's plan to kidnap the cartel leader's daughter ended when he accidentally took a Colombian cam girl with the same name.

It's turned out well for Max—he and his Valentina are madly in love—but his plan falling apart left our family unavenged. That was almost a year ago, and I've been plotting ever since to get to this very moment.

I lean back in my chair, drumming my fingers on the green felt of the table in front of me.

Our side of the room, the high stakes poker room at the Orlando Casino, goes totally quiet.

Finally, I give a sharp nod, as if coming to some internal decision—though my next words are actually the culmination of months of planning. “Your daughter. You bet your daughter, and I'll bet my share of Club Alfonso.”

Around us, gasps ring out. I'm not the only one who knows how much Edoardo cares about his daughter Gia.

Edoardo, on the other hand, laughs aloud. The sound echoes through the room, cutting through the distant sounds of slot machines ringing their cheerful tones from the rest of the casino.

Edoardo's chortle abruptly cuts short. “You're serious,” he says, shaking his head in disbelief.

I give a one-shouldered shrug, as if absolutely unconcerned. “We both know you've been planning to marry her off sometime soon. If I win, you will marry her off to me. If you win, you get my share of Club Alfonso.”

Edoardo shakes his head. “No. If I win, I get your share of *all* the Beneventi clubs.”

I sigh and frown, but inside, I want to leap from the table and cheer.

He has taken the bait.

I just have to pray that Edoardo doesn't have the one combination that could beat my hand.

I've been watching the cards all night, waiting for my chance.

This is it.

Finally, I give a single sharp nod. “Done.”

“I don't believe any woman is worth that much, son.” The lines around Rossi's mouth deepen as he smiles, but the expression doesn't quite reach his eyes.

“Not even Gia?”

Edoardo waves a hand in the air and jerks his chin at a nearby waitress, who returns in seconds with a bottle of scotch for the table. “You're young,” he says, his tone turning avuncular, “so maybe I shouldn't be surprised you don't know this yet, but women have only two purposes—well, three, if you count sex.”

I raise my eyebrows, wishing I could perform the one-eyebrow trick that Max does so easily. “What? You mean if you can't eat it, fuck it, or sell it, it's not worth anything?”

Edoardo laughs again, but something about it sounds forced. “You got it. And in this case, *selling it* means marrying her off to someone who will bring value to my family. That's not you. Everyone knows that the Beneventis are on their way out. You and your brother, you're not the man your father was. And he's gone.”

Now he's trying to bait me to anger. But I'm not going to fall for it.

“That's why they call it a bet,” I say, echoing his words from just moments ago.

But the fact that he's trying to anger me is a good sign—it means I've gotten under his skin. He doesn't really want to give up his daughter to me. But if he doesn't take the bait, he'll look weak in front of the other men here. And Edoardo Rossi works hard to never appear weak.

Finally he nods, pushing the pile of chips in front of him to the middle of the table.

He won't miss the money. And we both know it.

That's why he's betting his daughter.

“YOU DID WHAT?” MY BROTHER MAX'S VOICE BOOMS through the downstairs of the house we've shared since our father and older brother had died.

“I won Gia Rossi in a poker game. I'm going to marry her.”

“Have you lost your fucking mind? The Rossis are ruthless—including Gia, from everything I've heard. She'll slit your throat the first time you fall asleep in the same room with her.”

I laugh. “She's not that bad. Come on—we've known her all our lives.”

Max shakes his head. “Which is exactly how I know that she's a shark.”

My expression darkens. “Good. Then it'll be even more satisfying when I ruin her and send her back to her father.”

Something sad flickers in the back of Max's eyes and his voice finally drops. “Oh, Lorenzo. Are you sure you want to go through with this? I know you're a grown man, but I'm the head of this family now, and the last thing I want is to see you unhappy.”

“I appreciate the concern, Max”—and I really do—“but I want to do my part to take down the Colombians. And this is how I can do it. Gia is my way into the Rossi family.” I pause. “After all, everyone knows that Edoardo treats her like his capo.”

Max, who has brought his own new wife into the family business, nods. It doesn't bother him for a woman to have influence in the family. "But that's what makes Gia so dangerous," he points out. "All his men know how much he values her. They'll do anything for her because *he* will. You'll have to tread lightly, Lorenzo. She's no one you can mess with."

I nod, but *mess with her* is exactly what I plan to do.

Her father was involved in killing my father and brothers.

So now I will use her to destroy him.

All the players in our world might see me as the Beneventi baby brother, the easy-going one, the one who always has a laugh and a smile.

They're about to find out how very wrong they are.

Starting with Gia Rossi.

CHAPTER 2



GIA ROSSI

“**Y**ou have got to be fucking kidding me.” I gape at my father, stunned into momentary silence after my initial outburst.

“Watch your mouth, Gia Lorraine Rossi.” Pop gives me his most paternal glare, but for the first time in my life, I don’t care how upset he is.

It doesn’t come close to matching how angry I am with him.

“I will not marry Lorenzo Beneventi,” I say. “You can’t make me.”

He raises one eyebrow. “You promised to do whatever was necessary to protect this family,” he reminds me.

I give him an incredulous stare. “Yeah—when I was twelve years old.”

He nods complacently. “And now you’re twenty-one, and it’s time for you to make good on your promise.”

We stand in his study in our home in The Ridges, high above Vegas, and Pop’s dark eyes bore into me.

I’ve always been more like Pop than any of my sisters. And since he and Mama never had any boys, I’m the closest thing to an heir he’ll ever have. I know he hopes I will someday give him grandsons, boys he can raise to take over the family business.

But in the meantime, he trusts me with all his business secrets.

So why is he so determined to marry me off to Lorenzo Beneventi, of all people?

I move to the bookshelves, running my fingertips along the leather-bound volumes, not even seeing what I’m looking at as I consider his words.

He stands up from behind his wide mahogany desk and comes around to stand behind me.

“But the *Beneventis*, Pop?” I say. “They don’t have any more power—not since their father died. And then Max married that Colombian woman. She’s a *nobody*.” I can’t imagine why the elder Beneventi brother chose her. Not when there are so many women of his own caliber interested in him.

Hell, if my father wanted to sell me off to Max, I might take him up on the offer. But Lorenzo? He’s the family playboy, and everyone in Vegas society knows it.

He will never have any real power.

And if I follow my father’s wishes, neither will I.

In our world, a woman married to a nobody becomes a nobody.

“What did he pay you for this?” I demand.

I could swear Pop’s gaze turns shifty, but the expression skitters across his face and is gone, leaving me uncertain I actually saw it at all.

“That’s none of your business,” he tells me.

“What about college? You promised me I would be allowed to finish before we even discussed marriage.”

Pop gives an unconcerned wave of his fingers. “Lorenzo agreed to that as one of the conditions of your alliance,” he assures me, his expression turning sly.

Oh, shit. I know that look.

“Think about it, *tesora*. Lorenzo may not be your first choice —”

“Or my last one,” I mutter, but Pop ignores me.

“But everybody knows he is the easy-going Beneventi brother. Marrying him means you can gain control of Beneventi ventures.”

I nod slowly. “And once I have control...”

“Then our family will have an in.” He seems awfully pleased with himself and his argument for marrying me off to someone I have zero interest in.

“What about Max?” I ask. “Everyone knows he controls Lorenzo.”

Pop nods. “We’ll have to find a way to deal with the elder brother. I trust you to do that for us.”

Deal with him. As if the Beneventi family isn’t in disarray. There’s even been talk of eliminating their vote on the Council that runs the Vegas Mafia. Pop pushed for it, I know. But he was outvoted by the other members. So even though only the two brothers are left, they still have a voice in Vegas affairs.

But Pop isn’t wrong. Lorenzo is laid-back, always ready with a smile—unlike Max, who’s had a permanent scowl attached to his face since he was fifteen.

I sigh. “Fine. As long as I can finish my degree, I’ll marry Lorenzo.”

“I knew you would see my way, *cara*.” He wraps me in his arms, and I lean my forehead against his chest, inhaling the scent of cigars that always permeates his dark suits. I pull away a little and look up at my father. “But I am not agreeing to this without an official proposal and a ring. I expect him to do this right.”

Pop nods. “Of course, Principessa. We will make sure he follows all the proper forms.”

“When is the wedding?” I ask, as resigned to my fate as I can manage to be in half an hour.

“In six weeks,” Pop says, and my eyes grow wide.

That’s not enough time to plan the kind of wedding our friends and family will expect.

After all, I am still a Rossi.

Catching sight of my expression, Pop laughs aloud. “Your mother has already begun getting everything ready,” he assures me.

“I don’t know if I can even get a dress in that amount of time.”

He rolls his eyes. “Of course you can. Even if we have to fly the designer in from Europe.”

I grin. I might not be thrilled about this marriage, but I can at least make sure the wedding is one hell of a party.

“And I expect him to court me, too,” I add. “I don’t want anyone in our social circle to know that you sold me.”

“I’m not selling you, *cara*. I’m putting you in position to take over the Beneventi family. We’re going to use their current lack of power to our advantage.”

I give a short, sharp nod. “Fine. But my stipulation stands. He courts me—he takes me out, and we act like a true love match in public. I don’t care how he behaves in private—he can leave me alone entirely, as long as the world believes we are happy together.”

“Of course.” Pop’s tone tells me he’s delighted that I have agreed to his plan.

I probably could ask for more. But truth be told, this isn’t really a bad match—at least not in terms of my ability to control my husband. Lorenzo is easy-going, laid-back, the youngest Beneventi brother. I’ve never had the slightest inkling that he was interested in me, so it surprises me that he’d been willing to approach Pop with an offer.

I’ve always known I would marry to increase my family’s power, influence, and wealth. I’m surprised Pop took the offer, since currently the only part of that equation the Beneventis still command is wealth. And a very small amount of influence, if I’m honest.

I’ll have to break it off with Elio DeSantis, and I realize I’m a little sorry about that. He’s been my favorite of the many temporary hookups I’ve participated in since I moved out of my father’s home and into my own apartment.

Granted, it’s an apartment building Pop owns, complete with round-the-clock bodyguards assigned to me. So I’m certain Pop knows I’ve been seeing one of the Toxic Triplets, the three DeSantis brothers who recently moved back to Vegas after a stint training with their uncle in New York City.

I like Elio. Largely because he’s easy to control.

Much like I expect Lorenzo to be.

I shake my head as I leave Pop's study.

Lorenzo Beneventi.

Life is strange.

But I'm absolutely certain I can use his interest in me to my family's advantage.

And it isn't like I'll have to fuck him more than a few times—just enough to get pregnant, give my father the grandsons he wanted. Then Lorenzo and I can go our separate ways most of the time.

We'll still have to make the occasional public appearance, of course. But a lifetime in Vegas high society has taught me how to playact when necessary.

I can act with Lorenzo, too.

I'll do whatever is necessary to make Pop proud.

By the time my current driver and bodyguard fall in behind me on my way out the door, I'm already making plans for how to take over the Beneventi businesses.

Massamiliano Beneventi could be a problem. But rumor has it he's so wrapped up in his new bride that he has little time for anything else.

I climb into the backseat of the town car and stare out the window at the desert landscape outside the window as Gino drives me back over to my apartment.

I have a lot to do.

I'll have to call Elio first to break up with him.

And then I need to find the perfect wedding dress for a Vegas wedding.

Not one of those cheap-ass Elvis chapel weddings, either.

No.

This will be the biggest blowout Vegas high society has seen in a long time.

If I'm going to marry for my family, I promise myself yet again, it's going to be the party to end all parties.

CHAPTER 3



GIA

When Lorenzo walks into my father's study three days later, I have a slight twinge of concern.

After all, I haven't seen him in years—he's been traveling around the world taking care of business for his family, much of his time spent in Italy working with connections there, training in some of the finer aspects of the business.

I'm certain what I expected. Maybe the gangly, gawky boy who attended the same private high school that most of us went to?

In his place, though, in walks a muscular, bearded, extraordinarily *hot* man.

Lorenzo Beneventi has grown up fucking gorgeous.

I am in so much trouble.

I can still see the boy he was somewhere under there—in the lines of his face, the breadth of his shoulders, the tilt of his head.

As his gaze flickers between Pop and me, something dark moves beneath his eyes, a gaping void swirling with nothing but anger and violence.

Then he blinks, and whatever I think I see is gone, replaced by the smiling, cheerful Lorenzo Beneventi that I'd known as a child. He'd been two years ahead of me in school, and I remember him as a bit of a jokester, always ready with a laugh and a smile.

I give myself a mental shake, certain I can't have seen what I think I did. That darkness has to have been my imagination.

Right?

Lorenzo reaches out to give my father a cordial handshake, and I detect nothing of the hostility I thought I'd sensed.

"You remember my daughter Gia," Pop says, gesturing toward me.

“Of course.” Lorenzo’s voice has deepened over the years, with a slight rumble beneath it that reminds me of driving on long desert roads, the wheels sending vibrations through the car, just as his voice sends a shiver through me.

Good God, Gia, I scold myself. Quit being so damned poetic.

Without missing a beat, I give him my best professional smile and hold out my own hand to shake. “It’s good to see you again, Lorenzo.”

At the sound of his name in my mouth, his gaze flickers up and down, taking in my entire body, assessing me as much as I’m assessing him.

That makes me think perhaps he hasn’t paid much attention to me—no more than I’ve paid him in the years since high school.

So why is he insisting on this marriage?

His hand is warm and strong, and his touch sends an electric shock through me so strong I almost jerk my palm away from his. But I grit my teeth and will the feeling away.

“Your father tells me you have some requests of your own for this transaction,” he says, easily taking a seat in one of the chairs across from Pop’s wide desk, his legs stretched out before him and crossed at the ankles, seemingly at ease in the midst of another powerful man’s domain.

That speaks well of him. Maybe, anyway. He’s either certain of his own position of strength, or unaware that he’s in danger. I’ll have to determine which.

“I do,” I say, taking my own seat next to him and crossing my legs slowly and deliberately, allowing my thigh to flash from underneath my skirt. His gaze flicks down and then back up almost immediately.

Good. Whatever else he may be, he isn’t utterly oblivious, at least when it comes to me.

I glance down at my phone to the list of stipulations I’d created and tuck my blond hair—courtesy of my mother, whose family hails from Northern Italy—behind one ear.

A slow smile spreads across his sensuous lips, and once again I think I see that flicker of darkness, but it's gone almost as soon as I see it, and I'm once again left wondering if I imagined it.

In any case, I'll need to keep an eye on him.

As if I weren't planning to do that, anyway.

"I don't have any objections to the things he's told me so far," Lorenzo continued.

"Excellent," I say.

Pop seems content to allow me to deal with my own negotiations, choosing to sit back with his hands crossed over his stomach, watching us interestedly. It strikes me as a little unusual. In fact, Pop's been strange about this entire marriage idea from the very beginning.

I've always imagined my father would fight tooth and nail to make the best arrangement for me possible. Instead, he's chosen to use the bartering of our alliance to go after a family who, although very rich, isn't as powerful as our own. No matter how I've asked over the last three weeks, he's declined to give me any satisfactory answer—in fact, he eventually told me to do my duty to the family without any more questions. I had stopped asking them aloud, but I'm not about to stop trying to determine what his real reasons are.

But on one level, I'm grateful to Pop. Few enough women in my position have any say in the prenup negotiations at all. That I'm being allowed to negotiate my own marriage details is nothing short of extraordinary in our world.

"Still," I continue aloud, "I think it's best that we go over the agreements in detail with one another."

Lorenzo gives me his most charming smile. "I think you're absolutely right."

Something about his voice sends a shiver through my belly, but I shove it down, determined to ignore any misgivings. Having given my word to Pop to marry Lorenzo, I plan to keep it.

“First of all,” I say, “I plan to finish college, and I ask to be allowed to do so without interference.”

Lorenzo tilts his chin slightly. “Of course.”

“And that means no children until after I have my degree in hand.”

He frowns. “How much longer do you have in school?”

“Three semesters. I can complete one of those during summer school. So I will graduate next December.”

“I can live with that. As long as you agree that we begin our family immediately after your graduation.” His bright green eyes darken at his words, and again, his gaze flickers down to my legs.

He isn't immune to my attractions. Excellent. Men are always easier to control when their minds are hazed with lust. Something I've never experienced—not that I haven't found plenty of men attractive. Just that I've never allowed it to overcome my good sense.

And I never will.

Clear vision—that's the key to coming out ahead in any negotiation, but especially sexual ones.

“Second,” I say, “we will put on a show for everyone between now and the wedding. As far as Vegas society is concerned, you and I are going to have a whirlwind romance, culminating in a glorious, extravagant, if hastily assembled, wedding.”

A sardonic smile curls the edges of his lips. “There will be other rumors, of course,” he says, and this time his gaze flickers toward my father.

What are the two of them hiding?

“Of course.” I dismiss the concern with a flick of my fingers. “There always are rumors. But when we are in public, you and I will give no one any reason to believe that we are anything but madly in love.”

The lines on the sides of Lorenzo's mouth deepen, and once again I see the shadow of his former, carefree self.

“And in private?” he asks.

“In private, we can ignore each other as necessary.”

“With the exception that I expect you to provide children.”

“Of course. We will deal with that as necessary.” I let my tone express what little concern I have for that issue. “But if you ever lay a hand on me in anger, then I’ll walk—and not only will you allow it, but you will also forfeit a third of your share of your family’s business interests.” I’ve seen far too many women in families like ours trapped in miserable, abusive marriages, unable to leave without dire consequences. I’m determined to have an out.

“And I presume the same goes for you?” This time, laughter threads through his voice. “If you beat me, I can walk?”

“Sure,” I acquiesce. “I’m fine with that.”

“I won’t abuse you,” Lorenzo says. “And I will never lay a hand on you without your enthusiastic consent.” His voice deepens and roughens on the last two words, and again, I feel a tiny shiver run through my body.

My three most pressing concerns dealt with, I move through the rest of my requirements quickly, and Lorenzo agrees to each of them easily.

When I’m done, Pop leans his elbows on his desk. “Anything you want to add to all that?” he asks Lorenzo.

The younger man shakes his head. “Nothing specific. What else should we consider?”

In the end, everything is negotiated—even down to how often we’ll engage in sex once I’m trying to get pregnant. Lorenzo pushes for every day, but I negotiate it down to three times a week. I try to get him to agree to ovulation tracking and the like, but he refuses—or at least, refuses to allow it to set how often we’ll have sex.

And of course, he insists on a wedding night consummation of the marriage. Again, something odd flutters in the pit of my stomach, and I fight to ignore it.

When I'd known him before, Lorenzo had never been this intense. But all through our negotiations, his green eyes bore into me, his gaze somehow both serious and laughing.

And unsettling me in ways I don't care to acknowledge.

Not even to myself.

CHAPTER 4



LORENZO

I leave that meeting not knowing what exactly to make of Gia Rossi.

I only vaguely remember her from our time in school together. My images of her from back then are of a bright, cheerful ball of sunshine. She'd been a cheerleader or something like that.

She still looks like someone who was a cheerleader only a few years before. Long blond hair, bright blue eyes, a body that is at once muscular and curvy.

And I still catch glimpses of that girl underneath what I suspect is a façade built to please her father. Hard-hitting businesswoman in training, destined to take her place in the family business.

Until I came along, anyway. Now she'll be lucky if her children are allowed to inherit anything more than token monetary amounts.

Because there is no way in hell Edoardo Rossi is going to allow a Beneventi to run his business—not even if that Beneventi is his own daughter.

As I move toward my car, I wonder if she recognizes the similarities between us. We're like polar opposites, mirror images, me all bright and laughing on the inside with a cold dark knot at the center of my being, whereas Gia is a brittle shell of strength and darkness over a blazing core of light.

Briefly during the meeting, it crossed my mind to wonder if her shining core is as hot as it is bright. But then I shook the idea away and focused on the negotiations.

Interesting that her father allowed her to lead them. I've never heard of a bride who negotiated her own prenup, not in our circle anyway. Not when she still had living parents.

But with Gia's input, the contract we've ended up with is a little more detailed even than the majority of the ones signed as alliances between Mafia families.

And we covered the usual breach of contract elements, although no one I know takes those too seriously. Not for the men, anyway, who are expected to have side pieces whenever they please. It's the women who are expected to remain faithful.

Neither of us had spoken a word of fidelity during the contract negotiations. Clearly, that isn't of any real concern to either of us.

At least it hadn't been a concern of mine when I had first walked into the room. But as soon as Gia Rossi had crossed those long, shapely legs of hers, my cock stood up at attention. Until that moment, I hadn't even really thought of her as a person. She was just another step on the staircase leading me to my revenge against her father.

At that moment, and several thereafter, though, I'd had to remind myself that this was not a real marriage negotiation.

It won't be a real marriage, either, I remind myself. It's the means by which a greedy gangster who took out my family is paying off a poker debt to me. And it's my wedge into his family.

Still, all during the negotiations, I kept being drawn in by Gia's light, gentle voice that soothed my nerves even when I knew she was trying to make herself sound tougher than she actually was.

Now, outside the Rossi compound, I slip into my Bentley Continental GT and head toward our clubs just off the Vegas strip.

Although we use the clubs to launder plenty of money, they're cash cows in their own right—even more so since my sister-in-law Valentina swept in, making broad changes in everything from our hiring practices to the shows the girls put on.

This is all perhaps unsurprising, since Val herself had been a cam girl before she met Max. Since her arrival, the A-B Clubs have been building a reputation as one of the best companies for strippers in Vegas to work for.

And somehow, we're now bringing in more money than ever.

For a heartbeat, a wave of longing rushes through me, leaving behind it an emotion I finally recognize as a desire for a love match like Max's.

I shake it off, though.

After all, Max hadn't been looking for a love match when he found Valentina. He actually thought she was the daughter of a high-ranking Colombian cartel lord—the same one who'd killed our father and brothers—and had kidnapped her to use her against El Toro.

Love matches are overrated, I try to convince myself.

What I need right now more than anything is someone to help me soothe the ache in my cock that had settled in as Gia Rossi spoke. I'd been glad, albeit a little surprised, that I had been able to get my raging hard-on under control before I'd had to stand up and shake hands over the negotiated contract.

But it had taken the whole meeting to get there. The entire time we'd used dry, legalistic language to discuss heirs and pregnancy, an image of Gia, round and pregnant with my child, sent waves of heat through me, settling in my belly and making my cock stand up and twitch.

Because that's what had been happening—we were negotiating how often I'd be allowed to fuck her.

When I'd started pushing for every day, I had expected her to come back with once a week. But she'd agreed to three times a week.

Surely that will be enough. Once we're married, this sudden lustful insanity I'd been hit with when I walked in through her door will abate. I'll be able to slake my lust in her, and then go find other women as necessary

Which is exactly what I plan to do now.

For all Val's cleanup of the clubs, there are always beautiful women working there who are willing to spend a little extra time with the boss.

They would happily spend time with Max, of course, but he and Val are devoted to one another. Hell, some of them would

spend time with Max and Val, or even just Val—but there's no room in my brother's and sister-in-law's relationship for anyone else.

As I pull into the parking lot at the back of the low-slung building with neon lights dancing across the top of it even this early in the evening, well before dusk, I send up a thankful little prayer heavenward, grateful that I will never be on as short a leash as my brother is.

And I will have my chance to fuck Gia Rossi. It's all written in the contract.

AS I STEP OUTSIDE MY BENTLEY, THE DRY DESERT AIR HITS ME like a blast from an oven as the sun shines down bright from a cloudless blue sky. I push my shirtsleeves up on my forearms and stride into the building, where the cool dim interior, smelling of last night's alcohol and cigarette smoke hits me.

The scent is pure comfort.

That's how I feel in this place.

Our father had been bringing us to the clubs to learn the business since we were in our teens, and Max and I both view the clubs as a second home.

I give Benny, our current daytime bartender, a wave as I head back toward my office, certain there will be something I can do to keep my mind off the prenup that is even now being written out by Edoardo Rossi's lawyers for mine to glance over. Once all the attorneys are satisfied, Gia and I will sign one version, while her father and I will sign another stating our obligations to one another.

Until that's done, I'm sure I'll be a ball of nerves, unable to focus on much of anything else.

I can at least get some basic paperwork done. And then in about half an hour, I'll see who's dancing tonight.

At least one of them will be willing to go home with me.

I'm sure of it.

WHEN I LEAVE MY OFFICE AN HOUR LATER, THERE ARE AS usual several dancers hanging around backstage.

I let my gaze drift across them, realizing as I do so that none of them are as attractive to me as Gia Rossi.

Not that I've ever been concerned about that kind of thing before.

After all, they're all pretty enough.

But not a single one of them has Gia's sharp gaze, all hard darkness over inner light.

No, these women are hard all the way through—no matter how pretty they are, many of them have seen the worst of life.

I almost laugh aloud as I consider the irony in the idea that Gia, who grew up in the middle of the Mafia, and who had by all accounts been training to take over from her father in a business renowned for bringing out the darkest parts of people, would retain her inner spark, whereas these women had lost theirs.

Brittany, who goes by the stage name Diamond, comes off the stage and moves toward me, pulling dollar bills out of her G-string, her face flushed and her eyes sparkling. She's as hard as the gemstone she named herself after.

Catching sight of me, she turns on her heel, making a beeline toward me.

"Lorenzo," she purrs, her eyes brightening even further. "I didn't expect you to come in today."

She sidles up next to me, leaning in and pressing her pasties-covered breasts against my arm. The sequins covering her nipples scratch against my skin, and irritation flickers through me. Still, I remain cordial. It isn't the poor girl's fault that her clothing—or lack thereof—rubs me the wrong way. Literally.

“Diamond,” I say, sticking to my policy of always calling the girls by their stage names. No need to get too familiar with any of them. “How’s your shift going?”

“Oh, you know. Not too bad for a weekday.” She finishes smoothing the bills in her hand and folds them over. “What are you doing here?” Her voice turns coquettish, and she glances up at me through her lashes, a practiced move I’ve seen many women perform.

I let my voice drop into a low, seductive register. “I just dropped by to see how you girls were doing.” I glance around at the small group of dancers, including them all in my comment, but I slip my hand down along Diamond’s arm, barely brushing it with my fingertips. Goose pimples pop up all over her, and my smile deepens. “Would you like to talk to me in my office?” I ask suggestively.

“Absolutely.” She waves the wad of bills. “Just let me deal with this and I’ll be right there.”

I move back into my office, planning to have Diamond shut and lock the door behind her when she comes in.

But as I sit sprawled in a round leather chair in the corner, waiting for her to arrive, I find myself considering all the ways Diamond and Gia are polar opposites.

It goes far beyond the expressions in their eyes.

Although they’re both muscular—after all, it takes a certain amount of athleticism to be a successful pole dancer—everything about Diamond is hard, from her body to her eyes. If I were going to describe her impartially, I’d probably use words like *stringy* or *lanky*, though I’m certain she would prefer adjectives like *thin* or *slender*.

Gia, on the other hand, is muscular and round, with an inherent softness to her body that matches the gentleness I feel emanating from her soul.

The breast Diamond pressed against me had been artificial, perky and uplifted but hard, whereas when Gia stood to shake my hand, I had glimpsed a swell of lush cleavage, held in place by a bra, but almost certainly genuine and round.

I find myself wanting to hold the globes of her breasts in my hands, to run my thumbs across the nipples, hear her moan my name.

By the time Diamond walks in, I'm in the chair behind my desk, busy with paperwork.

"Sorry," I tell her without glancing up. "Something's come up. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

She leaves and I heave a sigh.

This is going to be more difficult than I expected.

CHAPTER 5



GIA

Okay. So it's probably ridiculous for me to insist that Lorenzo take me out on dates as if we were truly courting.

But I'm used to being seen as my father's pawn, and I've spent the last several years imagining what it will be like to get out of that space. And I'll use Pop's agreement with Lorenzo to change everyone's view of me.

The fact that I insist on a whirlwind romance, fake though it might be, means we have to meet in public—we're planning the phoniest meet-cute in all of creation.

So the Saturday after we all sign the prenup, Lorenzo and I make arrangements to bump into each other at one of Pop's clubs, as if by accident.

I don't expect to feel anything about tonight, but as I get dressed in my apartment—the apartment I will soon have to give up in order to move into Lorenzo's family's home—I realize my heart is pounding, my breath fluttering with nerves.

“Calm the fuck down, Gia,” I admonish myself, staring into my own eyes in the mirror.

It doesn't matter how tonight goes. We could loathe each other, and we are still going to get married.

Of course, hating him will make it more difficult to convince everyone that we're madly in love. But not impossible.

After all, it's not like I ever expected to marry for love.

So what is that hint of sadness lurking at the bottom of my gaze as I stare back at myself from the mirror?

With an irritated sigh, I flick my hair back over one shoulder and turn away from my accusing glare. I move toward the door, where I slip on a pair of Miu Miu pumps and grab my evening bag from the entryway table.

In the hallway, Bruno, the bodyguard on duty tonight, falls in behind me. Neither of us says a word as we reach the parking garage, and when we step off the elevator, the driver Gino nods in greeting.

“Are we going to pick up Sarah and Adele?” Gino asks.

“Always,” I say with a smile. Those two women are my best friends among the Mafia princesses my father prefers I spend my time with. They’re also two of the biggest gossips in my circle—and that makes them the two people we will most need to convince that Lorenzo and I are madly in love.

They’re both waiting for us at Sarah’s father’s home, where they’ve gotten ready together. Their own bodyguards follow them out and slide into the back of the limo with us.

Bruno could keep an eye on us all easily enough—not to mention whatever men Lorenzo has arranged to have placed in the club—but Sarah’s and Adele’s own fathers would not hear of it. So every time we all go out together, it takes an entire stretch limo to accommodate not only us, but our bodyguards and any dates we might start or end the evening with.

“Girl,” Adele purrs as she slides into the seat next to me, “nice dress.”

Sarah’s gaze flicks up and down my body. “Dolce & Gabbana?”

Trust Sarah to recognize haute couture at first glance.

This is the first time I’ve worn the dress, though I’ve had it for several weeks. It’s simple, but elegant—at least the top half. A black sheath dress that hugs my curves and ends right under my ass cheeks. I’ll have to be careful getting in and out of the car, and bending over at the club is a terrible idea.

I won’t admit it even to myself, but I chose the dress not only because it shows off my legs, but also simply to see if Lorenzo reacts to it at all. I saw the way he looked at me in Pop’s office.

Pulling off this scam on our social circle will be easier if he wants me.

Especially if he wants me as much as I want him, a tiny voice in my head whispers, and I shove it down.

I have the driver take us up and down the Strip a couple of times, giving us a chance to down a bottle of Dom.

I need the drink to calm my nerves, though I certainly don't tell my friends that.

As far as they're concerned, I'm in high spirits, celebrating a midterm exam I've just aced.

And while that's certainly true, it isn't the whole story.

Soon enough, Gino pulls up in front of the club entrance, and we all pile out of the back of the limo, our bodyguards keeping close to their charges.

As I steel myself for an evening of playacting, I glance at my friends and notice Adele's bodyguard touching her elbow lightly. My friend leans into him, almost imperceptibly.

Oh, shit. Whatever is going on with those two, I want no part of it. There's no way in hell her father would approve.

It isn't entirely unheard of, of course. Plenty of Mafia princesses engage in dalliances with their guards. Hell, even I had once or twice.

But that never ends well—at least not for the bodyguard. At best, this guy will end up shipped off to another branch of the family. At worst, he'll find himself on the wrong end of one of Adele's father's hired guns.

Pretending not to notice anything, I shake my hair out behind me, letting the long blonde locks, now tamed into fat, bouncy curls, slide down my back.

With a wave at Antonio, the doorman, I lead the six of us into the club.

Unlike most of the Beneventi family's businesses, this one is a dance club—not a strip club, not a casino, not even a front for a brothel, which are technically illegal in Las Vegas city limits.

This is the club Pop had started for me when I was a teenager. At my request.

A heavy beat drums beneath my feet as I move into the strobing lights flashing through the room.

I time my arrival so I'm technically late, hoping Lorenzo would have already arrived, well before me. I don't want to get caught looking for someone to show up—better if he sees me and approaches.

Of course, I haven't told him any of that.

And despite my best-laid plans, I have to stop myself from peering around into the darkened corners of the nightclub searching for him.

“Let's dance,” Sarah half-shouts, pitching her voice high enough so we can hear her above the music.

The three of us move out onto the dance floor, and I let the music take over my body, moving to the heavy beat.

When I was a child, I told Pop I wanted to be a cabaret dancer when I grew up. He laughed so hard he nearly spit out the whiskey he'd been drinking, but I had been deathly serious. At the age of five, I'd fallen in love with their glittering, sequined costumes, and all I had known about them was that they were beautiful and that they danced.

And dancing is still the one thing I'm best at.

Pop had taken it as his cue to enroll me in ballet and tap, then later I had taken jazz and modern dance classes.

But ultimately, I hadn't had the body to be a professional dancer.

I'd been right as a child—cabaret dancing was all I'd been cut out for.

That was off-limits as the daughter of a Mafia Don, so I channeled my passion for dancing into nights out at the clubs as an adult.

And Pop built this one just for me.

It might be his name on all the ownership papers, but everyone who works for him knows it's really mine.

So this is where I feel most at home.

Right here on this dance floor.

As I lose myself in the music, I even manage to forget about Lorenzo for a few moments. Right up until I feel a heavy hand land on my hip and spin me around. Where I come face-to-face with Lorenzo himself.

He flashes that famous grin of his at me, but underneath the cheerful expression, something dark and dangerous lurks. He leans in close and speaks into my ear. “You’re late.”

I step back and nod as if he just asked me to dance. I wrap my arms around his neck and shimmy up close to him so that my breasts brush against his chest. His jaw clenches, but then he makes an effort to relax, moving into the dance.

He grabs my hips and hauls me up close to him, grinding against me in time to the music.

My mouth goes dry. I’ve never seen Lorenzo dance before.

He’s good—lithe and sensuous.

The kind of dancer who makes you think of sex with just a few moves.

This plan to pretend to fall in love is going to be easier than I’d feared.

CHAPTER 6



LORENZO

Gia turns around on the dance floor and rolls her hips, bumping her ass against me. I bite back a groan.

She's certainly selling the idea that the two of us are going to hook up tonight.

The problem is, I don't know if it was a show she's putting on for everyone, or if she actually plans to go through with it.

As she twirls around to face me again, her blond hair whips across my face, several strands clinging to my beard, and I have to repress an urge to bury my face in her neck, inhaling the scent of her.

The beat of the song we're dancing to changes, the house mix sliding into something I don't recognize.

Gia's two friends, Adele Terranova and Sarah D'Angelo, bracket her on either side, urging her to dance with them.

She stands up on her tiptoes and speaks directly into my ear. "I'll find you after a couple of songs."

Jesus. I shouldn't have come alone tonight.

I hadn't known Gia would be bringing an entourage with her—though I probably should have. They never went anywhere alone.

The three Mafia Princesses.

If I had been paying any attention to the social scene among the Families, I would've realized that these two are the ones we'll need to convince that we are falling madly in love. And they're the ones who will have to believe that we mean it when we announce that we have decided to get married on the spur of the moment—or as close to the spur of the moment as ever happens in our circles.

I make my way over to the bar and buy a drink, desperate to do something to slake the thirst she's created in me.

Even if what I really want is Gia Rossi in my bed.

I turn around and lean back with my elbows on the bar, searching her out in the crowd.

There she is—dancing with her friends.

I need her.

The thought crosses my mind, and I push it down, determined to ignore the lust coursing through my body.

No matter what my clock might be telling me, the last thing I need to do is actually get seriously involved with Gia Rossi.

I fully intend to use her up and send her back to Edoardo Rossi in pieces—at least figuratively.

There will be no pregnancies, no children, no heirs to the Rossi fortune. Just a destroyed girl with a broken spirit, ruined for any other men.

That bright spark inside her will be snuffed out by the time I'm done with her.

I might want her—want to bury my cock inside her, want to feel her wrapped around me, want to hear her scream my name.

But it doesn't mean anything. Not when compared to the anger inside me, the black, endless pit of rage at my core when I think of the way her father colluded with the Los Kappas cartel to have my father and brothers killed.

I toss back the whiskey I ordered, feeling the burn down my throat and the heat as it settles in my stomach.

It swirls together with my fury, and my jaw hardens as I watch Gia twirling on the dance floor, gyrating her hips.

If the rumors are true and Gia has been acting as her father's capo over the last couple of years, then she has to know about Edoardo Rossi's ties to the Los Kappas cartel. To El Toro. To the man who murdered my family.

I let the thought sink in, considering all the ways that Gia must have participated in keeping the connection between the Rossis and Los Kappas alive.

The anger in my belly swirls and twists, flowing out in a red-hot miasma, rolling up my throat and sliding through my muscles. I clench my fists, wanting nothing more than to slam them into someone or something.

I want to feel Edoardo Rossi's bones break under my fists.

But I'll have to settle for breaking his heart by destroying his favorite daughter.

She flashes her own bright smile at her friends.

Tonight, I decide, will be the last night she goes out with her friends.

From now on, her time belongs to me.

We might not have written it into the contract, but Edoardo Rossi will understand my desire to keep her safe. That's what I'll tell him, anyway.

Because while Gia might be working to convince all our friends and acquaintances that we're falling madly in love, my only job, the only thing I care about, is convincing Edoardo Rossi that I insisted he bet Gia in the poker game because I'm absolutely besotted with her.

I'm staring at her across the dance floor, thinking of all the ways I want to use her before this is done, all the ways I want to degrade her before I send her back to her father, when she glances up and catches my eye.

On the dance floor, she goes completely still, her eyes widening as she reads something in my expression—something I might not want her to see.

I duck my head and drain the last few drops from my shot glass, giving myself time to marshal my features before I raise my gaze to hers again. Then I flash my most charming smile—the one that has always gotten me whatever I want.

My smile works again this time.

Gia relaxes, winks at me, and moves back into dancing with her friends.

I order a second drink and wait until Gia glances at me again. I raise my glass in a toast and wink at her, letting a hint of the lust I feel for her leach out of my expression.

Her cheeks turn pink, and she loses the beat of the music for a split second.

Good. That's the first step—gain her trust.

Then I'll seduce her.

And then I'll put the rest of my plan into action.

HALF AN HOUR LATER, I'M SITTING IN A ROUND BOOTH IN A darkened corner of the club when Gia and her friends find me.

I've already ordered a bottle of champagne and enough glasses for all of us. Gia slides into the booth next to me, her hair around her hairline damp with sweat from dancing, curling into tiny corkscrews.

The scent of her wafts across me, a heady mix of soap, perfume, and pure woman.

Sarah and Adele follow her into the booth, Adele sliding in on my other side.

"Lorenzo Beneventi," Adele says, her voice echoing across the club in a rare moment of silence. "It's been ages since I've seen you." She bats her eyes at me, her dark brown irises ringed with fake lashes somehow reminding me of a cartoon cow from my favorite show back when I was a child. I have to force myself not to snicker.

"I didn't think you came to clubs like this," Sarah chimes in. "Everyone says you spend all your time hanging out with strippers."

Her tone is more than a little snide, and Gia reaches across me to swat her friend on the arm. "Don't be such a bitch," Gia says. "I think it's about time you got out again," she continues, speaking to me. "Anyway, haven't you been off on family business for a while?"

My jaw clenches as I consider all the ways that I have had to renegotiate that family business sense the death of my brothers Leonardo and Frederico and my father.

“I have been away quite a bit,” I finally say. “But I’m back now, and ready to secure my place in the Vegas Families’ businesses.”

We sit together for a solid hour. Gia is actually a good conversationalist, I realize. I shove my hatred for her family down deep, allowing it to serve as fuel for the game we’ll have to play. And once I do, Gia begins drawing me out, asking me questions about my time in Italy with my grandfather’s family and sharing stories of her own visits both to Sicily and to northern Italy.

I can see why her father treats her like a capo. She’s smart, socially smooth, and charming.

Everything I might actually want in a wife.

If not for the fact that her father had arranged to have my father killed, I might have found her absolutely alluring.

As it is, I have to keep reminding myself that this is not what it seems to be. We are not flirting, aren’t building a relationship, and will never be happy together.

Still, by the end of the evening, she’s resting her hand on my thigh, giving me teasing glances from underneath her lashes.

And I am as hard as the landscape in Red Rock Canyon.

Something about this game between the two of us turns me on even more than the endless chase I’m used to with the other women in my life.

I’ve had just enough alcohol to lower my inhibitions, enough to make me want to take her into my arms and kiss her.

If not for the fact that I’m playing a long game, I might actually do it, too.

Instead, though, I stand up.

“Sorry, ladies. But I have to call it a night. I have work to do tomorrow.”

Adele pouts. “No, really? You don’t have to go. Tomorrow won’t be that bad if you stay just a little bit longer.”

“Are you sure?” Sarah asks at the same time.

“Absolutely certain.” I turn to Gia. “Can I call you sometime?”

She flutters her lashes. “Absolutely. What’s your number? I’ll text you mine.”

I fish a card out of my wallet to hand to her, and she taps it on the table with a nod.

I’m not even all the way out the door when my phone pings with a text from Gia.

Nice show. I think Sarah and Adele bought it.

I stare down at it for a long moment, trying to decide how to answer.

As I wait for my car to arrive after I hand my ticket to the valet, I respond.

Dinner tomorrow night at La Sérénade. I’ll pick you up at eight.

Gia doesn’t answer until I’m almost all the way home. And when she does, it’s only to say, ***See you then.***

I’m smiling as I make my way to my suite in the family house.

Gia has absolutely no idea how good my game is.

But she’s about to find out.

CHAPTER 7



GIA

The next night, Lorenzo picks me up at exactly eight o'clock. Bruno joins Lorenzo's driver in the front seat of the armored town car while Lorenzo ushers me into the back seat.

I realize I haven't discussed what we are going to do about guards. I suspect he won't want Rossi family retainers in his household, but there's no way Pop will agree to send me off with Lorenzo without my own guards.

Definitely something to bring up soon.

We walk into La Sérénade, the latest haute cuisine dining experience in the casino owned by the DeSantis family.

I've been here several times with Elio, and I'm glad to see that neither he nor his brothers are in evidence tonight.

The maître d' greets me by name, and Lorenzo shoots a raised eyebrow in my direction.

I ignore it, simply saying hello to Matt. Elio always refers to him as Matt the maître d', and I grin a little at the memory.

Still, I'm surprised how little I miss Elio.

Lorenzo and I are seated at a small table for two, and he leans across the table to take my hand. "You ready to put on a show for everyone?"

He flashes his most charming smile, and I can't help but smile back. "Sure. I have some things I want to discuss, anyway."

"Perfect. We can sit here looking like we're whispering sweet nothings to each other."

I nod and lean in closer, fluttering my lashes and lowering my voice. "Okay, then. First of all, we didn't discuss bodyguards." I tilt a glance toward Gino. "My father has a contingent on my apartment around the clock. I'm sure he expects to send them with me when I move into your house."

Lorenzo's expression clouds. "Max isn't going to like that."

This time, I'm the one who raises an eyebrow. "What's your opinion?"

He chuckles and glances down at our fingers twined together on the table. "It's fine with me. You can staff the entire house with Rossi men, as far as I'm concerned."

My eyes narrow. "You really that confident in your guys?"

"I am. Our men won't betray us to anyone."

I understand his stance. After all, our men are deeply loyal to us, as well. "Okay, then. I'll bring three guards who can each do an eight-hour shift, plus two others for the weekends."

"Excellent. What else?"

This next one is going to be harder, I know. And more embarrassing. A burning flush crawls up my cheeks.

But there's no way to deal with it except to dive right in.

"We already agreed on a wedding night consummation."

Lorenzo nods, his green gaze boring into me.

"I want to clarify that there will be no sex for that. It's a wedding night consummation—and that will be our first time."

Something sparks deep in Lorenzo's eyes, and he lets out a laugh, leaning back in his chair. Letting go of my hands, he taps the table. "Works for me, Principessa."

His use of Pop's nickname for me spins through me, leaving me feeling a little off-balance.

"Anything else?" Lorenzo asks.

"Nothing I can think of right now."

"Let me know if you come up with any more rules you'd like us to follow." I hear laughter underscoring his words, and I blush harder.

Everything about this man leaves me reeling.

I'm not sure how I'm going to get through the next several months.

Because Pop has promised I won't have to be married to Lorenzo for more than a year, tops. Not if I do my job right. We will destroy the Beneventi family and the marriage will be annulled before I ever even finish my college degree.

And the best part? My father might be using me to increase our fortunes, but after this, I will inherit the business.

And even before that, I'll get to be in charge of my own life. Pop promises I will get to choose my next husband myself.

"Let's celebrate our agreement," Lorenzo murmurs, leaning back and waving down the nearest waiter.

He orders for us both— something I would normally hate, but Lorenzo seems to have done his homework. Everything he orders is precisely what I would have gotten for myself, from the Chateau Lafite Rothschild Bordeaux wine to the Tournedos Rossini entrée—though I don't miss the irony of the beef, truffle, and foie gras dish having a name so similar to my own surname.

When he's done ordering, Lorenzo glances at me. "Did I get it right?"

I laugh, and for the first time in his presence, it isn't at all forced. "You got it perfectly right."

He turns the conversation to benign topics, sharing gossip about people we both know and keeping the conversation light—and well away from the agreement we had signed.

We finish the meal and are examining the dessert cart when a deep, sultry female voice interrupts us.

"Lorenzo Beneventi. You were supposed to call me when you got back to town."

I glance up to find Anna Maria Calvi standing next to our table.

"Anna Maria," Lorenzo says, his voice completely flat. "How are you?"

If ever I had a nemesis, it was Anna Maria. She was everything I would never be—tall, slender, dark hair and dark eyes, a true Sicilian Italian.

She's also the biggest bitch I've ever met. And she proves it once again as soon as she opens her mouth.

"I'm doing well, darling. You should've told me you were coming out tonight. I could have kept you company."

Lorenzo leans back, waving the pastry chef away.

Good—any desire I might have had for dessert has disappeared with Anna Maria's arrival.

"As you can see," Lorenzo drawls, his voice taking on a sharp edge, "I had excellent company this evening." He reaches across the table and threads his fingers through mine.

I flash him a tight smile, unreasonably grateful for his defense.

What is it about this woman that can send me straight back to junior high school? Suddenly, I'm no longer the second in command of the Rossi family. Instead, I'm a gawky, round thirteen-year-old, carrying more baby fat than I know what to do with, and just figuring out that I will never be the kind of dancer I wanted to become.

I shove the reaction down deep and put on my sharpest smile. "Anna Maria. I'm so sorry. I didn't know you and Lorenzo were friends."

Hatred flashes through Anna Maria's gaze, and she bares her teeth in a red-lipsticked smile. "No worries, darling. I'm sure I'll see him again soon." She leans over and sets her cheek against Lorenzo's for a split second, kissing the air beside him. "Do call me when you get bored with this one." She flicks her fingers in my direction and turns to leave without another glance at me.

I clench my teeth, fighting back an urge to claw her eyes out.

Lorenzo watches her leave, then shakes his head. "I take it there's history between you two?"

My lips twist, but I answer honestly. "Nothing serious. She's just..."

"A bitch?"

I laugh. "In a word, yes."

Lorenzo takes my hands in his again. “Not to worry. I won’t be seeing her again. We only went out a couple of times. And she’s a little too hard for me.”

So does that mean I’m not?

Butterflies flutter in my stomach at his words, and I swallow hard.

Do not fall for Lorenzo Beneventi, I admonish myself. He is your prey, not your fiancé.

Still, I can’t ignore the heat swirling in my stomach as he stares into my eyes.

To my dismay, I’m beginning to figure out that I might actually like Lorenzo.

And that’s the very last thing I need.

Especially if I’m going to follow my father’s orders and take him down along with the rest of his family.

CHAPTER 8



LORENZO

No sex until after the wedding.
I hadn't expected that.

Apparently, Gia Rossi plans to do everything by the book. Or at least by the contract.

But something about her pronouncement that we won't be having sex before the wedding night sets off my competitive side. Suddenly, I'm determined to try to seduce her into bed before her self-imposed deadline.

So I turn on all the Beneventi charm I have at my disposal and aim it directly at her all night long.

I consider taking her out dancing again after dinner, but at the last minute, I change my mind. We're going to be seeing plenty of each other from here on out, and Anna Maria's stop at our table will lead to plenty of gossip.

Besides, I want to put my seduction plan into motion.

I ignore the voice inside my head whispering that I really just want to move the timeline up so I can assuage the desire for her burning deep inside me.

In the back of the town car after dinner, I thread my fingers through hers, trailing my other hand up and down the side of her arm and running it across the inside of her elbow.

She blinks, turning her big blue eyes toward me.

"You don't have to put on a show for anyone anymore," she reminds me.

"Who says that I'm putting on a show?" My voice drops into a seductive whisper. "How do you know I don't just want to touch you?"

A shiver courses through her body, and I give her a dark smile.

"Remember the rules," she says, her own voice slightly breathless.

“There are plenty of things we can do before the wedding and still follow your rules.”

She laughs and shakes her head, glancing away from me and then back down at our intertwined fingers. “Maybe I should be a little more specific about those rules.”

With a shrug, I let go of her hand and lean back in my seat. “Your call.”

She shakes her head again, but I’m not sure exactly what she’s denying now.

I suspect it might be her own desires.

“Let’s keep it simple and private, save the show for public consumption.”

“Your call,” I say again. I glance out the window at the desert landscape stretching away into darkness. I don’t mean it. There’s no way in hell I’m waiting until the wedding night—not if I have anything to say about it.

We pull into her apartment garage, and I get out of the car.

“You don’t have to walk me to my door,” she says. “Gino can escort me.”

I glance at her bodyguard, a muscular, attractive man about my age. One of Rossi’s men.

“I’m sure he can,” I say dryly. “By that’s a rumor I don’t want to get around about me. My father—” I have to fight to keep my voice from cracking when I say the word, “—taught me how to treat women right.” I give a significant pause. “And I intend to treat you very well.”

Her eyes widen at my words, but she nods. “Suit yourself.”

We make our way to the garage elevator and are silent all the way to her apartment door.

The far-too-attractive Gino opens the door and checks out the apartment. “All clear,” he announces, stepping back into the hallway and taking up a post several feet to our left, between us and both the elevator and the stairwell.

He stares straight ahead, his hands clasped in front of him, deaf, dumb, and blind to anything he might see or hear—except, of course, what thinks his boss should know.

He's a good Mafia soldier. If he didn't belong to the Rossis, I might consider poaching him for our team.

But Gia's right—her father's men are deeply loyal, by all accounts.

Well, then. I'll give him something to report to Rossi.

Gia steps into her apartment and turns, one hand on the doorknob. But I follow her inside, so as soon as she faces me, she comes up against my chest.

She lets out a little squeak and tilts her head back to stare up at me. I reach out both arms and step in closer, so she's caught between my legs and arms and I'm caging her against the entryway wall.

She freezes like one of the small kangaroo rats in the desert outside Vegas—as if by not moving, she can somehow escape my attentions.

I dip my head toward hers, and unconsciously, she tilts her face up toward me.

At the last minute, though, I slide to one side, whispering in her ear. “One good night kiss,” I say, my breath fluttering the curls along her neck. “Surely that won't hurt. Or break your rules.”

Another shiver goes through her, and I smile even though she can't see it.

“One kiss,” she agrees, her voice raspy.

I slide my hands down her arms, thread my fingers through hers, and lift her hands above her head so she's completely pinned against the wall.

She exhales, and the sound is shaky.

Slowly, I lower my mouth to hers, allowing my lips to brush across hers, once, twice, before I claim her mouth with my own.

Gia melts against me, her breasts pressing against my chest, every bit as soft and pliable as I had imagined she would be.

I slide my tongue against the seam of her lips, urging her to open them, and she gives little sigh as she does.

Then our tongues are tangling, the heat of her flowing into me, my desire for her surging through my body and into my cock. I press it against her, and she whimpers into my mouth. I feel her pulling on my hands, and I let hers go. She drops her arms down around my neck, her fingers tangling through the hair at the nape of my neck. She throws herself into the kiss completely, her whole body responding to me just as I had hoped it would.

My hands slide down her back and cup her ass. She tilts her hips toward me, and it's all I can do not to pick her up, carry her into the bedroom. Fuck her hard.

Make her mine now.

But my plan is to ruin her, and at the last minute I remember.

The best way to do that is to seduce her completely.

Not for one night, but forever.

I'll make her believe I'm hers.

And then, when I'm done with her, I'll throw her away like the Rossi garbage she really is.

So despite my raging hard-on, I let go of her ass, reach around behind my neck, and untwine her arms from around me. I hold them down at her side, softly end the kiss, and take a step back.

Gia glances up at me, her heavy-lidded eyes confused. But then she blinks several times, her vision clearing. She pulls away from me and blows out a sigh. "We can't do that again." She shakes her head and stands up straight, casting a rueful smile in my direction. "Not if I'm going to stick to my guns about our wedding night."

"There's no reason to do everything by the book—or the contract, either," I suggest, my voice dropping to a low rumble.

She laughs, but the sound is shaky. “Oh, there’s every reason.”

On that cryptic note, she turns to head into the apartment.

I watch her hips sway as she walks away, and my cock jumps as if it wants to follow her.

Maybe she’s right.

It’s probably better if we don’t get too tangled up in each other before the wedding.

After all, the last thing I want is to actually care about her.

Not if I’m going to follow through on my plan to ruin her and return her to her father.

And I’m as determined to stick to my own plan as she is to stick to hers.

“Day after tomorrow?” I ask.

She nods. “Someplace public again?”

“It’s a surprise, but yes. The more gossip surrounding us, the better.” I wink, and she smiles as I step away and move toward the elevator.

Gino stays in the hallway, and Gia shuts the door behind herself.

I hope she’s feeling as unfulfilled as I am.

OVER THE NEXT THREE WEEKS, THE TWO OF US RAMP UP OUR public appearances, making sure we’re seen at all the Vegas nightlife hot spots, always holding hands or wrapping our arms around each other.

And the longer it goes on, the more I want to pull her into a darkened corner, pin her against a wall, and take her.

Contract be damned.

To be honest, I didn’t know how Gia manages it. She goes out almost every night—and by all accounts, has been doing so for years—and also manages to carry a full load at UNLV.

“What’s your major?” I ask her at dinner one evening, back at La Sérénade for the second time. Rumor has it she’d been seeing Elio DeSantis. His family owns the restaurant, and it gives me a perverse kind of pleasure to take her there. Unfortunately for me, Elio isn’t at the restaurant this time, either.

“Business and marketing,” she says. “I decided it would be a good major if...”

Her voice trails off, and I finish her sentence silently in my head. *If I were going to take over the family business.*

Of course, as far as she knows, her marriage to me will destroy those ambitions.

I ignore the unspoken part of her sentence. “That’s what I majored in, too.”

“You went to school at NYU, right?”

I nod. “Frederico went to UNLV, but he wanted to make sure the rest of us went to the best schools available.”

Her expression turns sympathetic. “You must miss your brothers and father terribly.”

I frown before I remind myself to nod.

Does she really not know about her father’s role in my family’s death?

My jaw clenches involuntarily. Either she truly doesn’t know, or she’s trying not to give it away. Either way, it doesn’t matter. She doesn’t have to understand her role in my revenge for me to use her.

I force myself to put on a pleasant expression. “Let’s not talk about that now. Tell me all the classes you’re taking.”

And so, over the course of the next several weeks, we get to know each other—or at least, she gets to know the version of me that I want her to see.

Every so often, a dark expression flits across her face, and I have to wonder if perhaps I’m not seeing all of her, either.

But I decide it doesn't matter. As far as she knows, she's stuck with me. And that's what I want her to continue believing right up until the moment I'm done with her.

And every night, I kiss her goodbye at her door, never pushing it any further than that first kiss.

That's part of the plan too.

By the time she gives in to me, it will be because she can't help herself.

What she doesn't know is that no one can help her.

Not now, not ever.

CHAPTER 9



GIA

Three weeks after Lorenzo and I begin being seen in public together, Pop throws a small party to announce my engagement to Lorenzo.

Small by Las Vegas Mafia standards, anyway.

We hold it at The Trademark country club, neutral territory so all the Vegas Mafia families can attend.

They don't know why they're here yet. It was Lorenzo's idea to make a huge production of it. So an hour into the party, just as everyone sits down to dinner, Pop stands up and taps his wineglass.

Waiters move through the crowd, handing out champagne and my stomach clenches.

Here goes nothing.

"If I could have your attention please, I believe Lorenzo Beneventi has a few words he'd like to say."

Everyone flashes knowing glances at each other.

This is the biggest act of all—pretending no one knows what's coming.

Pretending I don't know.

Lorenzo stands up, and I have to admit, he looks almost unbearably handsome in his dark suit, his green eyes sparkling as his gaze flickers toward me and then away.

Pop says a few words, thanking everyone for coming, and then a waiter moves to hand Lorenzo a cordless microphone.

He moves to the stairs. If nothing else, my intended has a flair for the dramatic. He climbs several steps up, then turns to face the waiting crowd.

"Gia, would you come stand with me?"

I stand up from my seat at Pop's table, and my stomach flutters as if this were somehow real.

I promise myself the next time it will be.

This will be the only time my father uses me as a pawn in one of his schemes.

As soon as I've destroyed the Beneventis, I will have my freedom.

Somehow, the thought rings hollow. So I shut it down and climb the stairs to stand next to Lorenzo, just as we discussed.

“Gia,” he begins, “I didn’t expect to see you again when I came back to Vegas. And I know this is sudden. but I have something important to ask you.”

I force my eyes to go wide as I stare at him, as if I have no idea what’s coming next—or, if I do, that it is a sudden surprise to me.

“Since I’ve come back to Vegas, I have come to admire your beauty, of course, but also your brains and wit. I never expected to fall in love. But I have.” I blink rapidly, as if pushing back tears, and for a heartbeat, that darkness that I saw in Lorenzo’s gaze in the beginning shines out at me again, threatening to swallow me whole.

But then it’s gone, and Lorenzo moves one step down to drop to one knee. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a blue Tiffany’s box.

He opens it to reveal a pink diamond solitaire on a simple platinum band. My hands fly to my face, covering my mouth as I gasp—and that, at least, is real. The ring is exactly what I would’ve chosen for myself.

“Gia Rossi,” Lorenzo continues, “will you marry me?”

I blink and nod and draw him back to standing, allowing him to put the ring on my finger and kissing him passionately when it’s done.

And for the first time, I don’t feel anything at all when he kisses me.

THE REST OF THE EVENING IS A BLUR.

Everywhere I look, Mafia bosses and their capos are making deals.

As I watch, a dark anger simmers inside me. I should be part of those deals. Instead, I'm expected to smile and look pretty in my Versace dress and Prada shoes, flashing the pink diamond Lorenzo presented to me.

Eventually, I can't stand it any longer. I have to escape.

But Pop will kill me if I duck out entirely.

So I escape to the women's bathroom, glad to see when I enter that there's no one in there other than the attendant, who smiles and hands me a towel when I run my hands under the sink.

I inhale deeply, taking my first full breath since the evening started.

I have to have some reason to be in the restroom, so I touch up my makeup. I'm adding another layer of Dior lip gloss when the door opens.

I don't glance over, so I don't realize it's Lorenzo until I see him in the mirror behind me.

He catches the attendant's eye and jerks his head toward the door, then hands her a twenty-dollar bill.

What the hell is he doing?

He glances into the stalls, making sure they're empty, then steps to the door behind her and locks it.

"Why are you in here?" I ask aloud.

He steps close to me, blocking me in, and gestures at the ring on my hand. "As far as everyone in our world is concerned, you belong to me now, Principessa." With one sudden, smooth move, he places his palms on my waist and lifts me onto the bathroom counter between the two sinks. "But that doesn't have to be a bad thing." His hands slip down my outer thighs and slide up under my dress, where he hooks his thumbs in my panties and pulls hard, ripping them off.

“What are you doing?” I try to wriggle down off the counter, but he holds me in place, his hands still under my skirt.

Then he kneels in front of me, staring up at me with those sparkling green eyes of his. “You’re going to ride my tongue until you forget every other man you’ve ever known.”

“This is against the rules,” I remind him, but he ignores me, pressing my knees apart with his palms and then reaching out to grab my hips and slide me to the edge of the counter.

“Shut up, Principessa,” he says, giving me a wicked grin. “You need to know exactly what you’re signing up for.” He slides his hands around inside my thighs again and flutters his fingertips until he reaches the creases at the tops of my legs.

The breath that I’ve been holding shudders out of me, and suddenly, I don’t want him to stop.

He leans in and kisses the insides of my thighs, first one and then the other.

Heat pools deep in my core, and I lean back until my head touches the mirror behind me.

“That’s my good girl,” he murmurs, his breath hot against me. “Lay back and enjoy it.”

He pushes my skirt up, and I lift my hips to help him.

This is not a smart move, and I know it. The last thing I should do is get attached to Lorenzo Beneventi in any way.

If I’m going to have to destroy him and his family to take over their business, I decide, I might as well enjoy it while I can.

He starts with tiny flickering licks against the soft skin between my legs, and then he pushes my skirt higher and raises up from his knees enough to lick above my sex, circling around the one spot I want him to touch more than any.

When he finally moves in closer, I whimper, and I feel him smile against me. “Is this what you want,” he asked, his voice dark and his breath hot against my clit.

“Yes,” I whisper.

“Tell me you want it.”

“I want it.”

“Tell me exactly what you want me to do,” he orders.

I groan, then follow his command. “I want you to lick my clit.”

He centers his mouth over my sensitive core, his lips brushing against my clit as he whispers again. “Beg me.”

Part of me wants to resist. I’m used to being in control in all aspects of my life.

But I’m swollen and aching, and none of this is real.

“Please, Lorenzo,” I say. “Please lick my clit.”

“Put your hands in my hair and hold on, Principessa.”

With a moan, I grab his head, threading my fingers into his hair and pulling him closer.

And finally, he slides his hot tongue across me, sending sparks spiraling through my entire body. He makes circles with his tongue, flicking it across my clit and sliding up and down.

I wiggle further toward the edge of the bathroom counter, holding his face tight against me. He licks and sucks until I’m writhing, clenching my teeth against the moans that want to erupt.

Then he reaches up and slides two fingers into me, pumping in the rhythm to the motion of his mouth, and I ride him, pushing my hips forward and back as my orgasm builds higher and higher in my core.

Pleasure washes over me, overwhelming my entire body as I clench around him, my muscles fluttering around his fingers and sliding against his tongue. I barely manage to bite back a scream as I ride the waves.

As my orgasm fades away, Lorenzo ends with a few soft licks, sending aftershocks through me.

When he finally stands, I’m slumped against the mirror, my skirt around my waist, my ripped panties on the floor. Lorenzo runs his thumb across his bottom lip and follows it with his

tongue, his darkened gaze heavy on me. “That’s just a preview, Principessa.”

Then he turns and leaves without another word.

I’m left to try to get myself back in order.

As I slide off the counter and straighten out my dress, my legs are still shaking. I turn to the mirror. My cheeks are flushed, and my hair mussed.

I definitely look freshly fucked.

The last thing I need is to rejoin the party looking like this. So once again, I redo my makeup and fix my hair, smoothing the tangles out of the curls.

As I bend over to swipe my ruined panties off the floor, the door opens and Sarah and Adele sweep into the bathroom. I wad the ripped silk in my hand, clenching it in my fist.

Adele takes one look at me and bursts out laughing. “Oh my God. You really were in here getting laid, weren’t you?”

My cheeks burn with a hot blush.

“So how is Lorenzo Beneventi in bed, anyway?” Sarah asks, moving to the counter and leaning in toward the mirror to touch up her lipstick—the same mirror I was resting back against just moments before.

I move to the trash receptacle and toss in my panties with more force than necessary, hoping the white scraps look like paper towels.

But Adele catches a glimpse of the lace as it flutters into the trash can. “And he ripped off your panties, didn’t?”

Sarah let out a low whistle. “Damn, girlfriend. That’s hot.”

I finally grin and shake my head. “You two are terrible. And none of that is any of your business.”

By the time we leave, we’re all laughing, but I know they haven’t given up trying to find out more about Lorenzo. They’re confused about this sudden supposedly whirlwind romance. They haven’t seen me much in the last three weeks,

and they've spent too much time quizzing me about my relationship with him.

I've tried to gush about him, to make it seem like I'm absolutely smitten.

The problem is, they know me too well, and I know they're wondering what the hell is going on.

Finding me in the bathroom disheveled like that actually seems to have given them more certainty about my relationship with him than all my words could have.

But there's another, much bigger problem.

I'm suddenly less certain about my plan to take him down than I was before.

I knew letting him touch me before the wedding was a bad idea.

Especially since now I want him to do it again.

CHAPTER 10



LORENZO

I expect our interlude in the bathroom at the country club to assuage my desire for Gia.

It doesn't.

Instead, I spend the next three weeks aching for her even more than before—even though they're a whirlwind of wedding planning. Mostly on her part, not mine.

I already own a tuxedo, so my role is mostly a matter of agreeing to the various things Gia asks my opinion on.

The truth is, I don't care. Not about the wedding itself—she's determined to be married in a Catholic church, she says because it will help sell the story that she's marrying me of her own free will.

Even though we both know that's not entirely true. There will be people who never believe our story.

And of course, there are people who already know the truth.

I keep waiting for the day she learns that her father lost her to me in a poker game. No one has told her yet about that game. Somehow, I don't think she will react well if she ever discovers that her father bet her in a game and lost.

But apparently, he's told his men to keep their mouths shut, and word hasn't gotten to her yet.

We continue going out several times a week, being seen together in public as much as possible. Now, however, I insist on a nightly kiss goodbye—even though it makes me ache to taste her again.

The one night we go out to a club again, I drag her up against me on the dance floor.

"Wrap your arms around my neck," I instruct her. Her eyes flash in irritation at the order, but she follows it.

I love that I can make her follow my commands.

This is going to be fun.

With both hands, I grab her hips, sealing our lower bodies together as we dance.

She goes stiff in my arms, and I lean down to whisper in her ear, pausing before I do to draw in the heady scent of her hair. “Loosen up, Principessa, or no one’s going to believe you want me as much as I know you do.”

I feel her jaw clench, and I pull back, giving her a wicked smile. “You know I’m right.”

She tosses her hair back behind her shoulders and forces her muscles to go soft and pliable. “Not as much as you want me,” she counters.

Then she melts against me, rolling her hips and thrusting them against mine to the beat of the music.

Oh fuck.

My cock instantly hardens, and I bite back a groan.

She’s right. Somehow, the memory of the taste of her only makes me want her more, not less. The thought of making her mine is an ache that keeps me hard almost constantly.

This time, she’s the one flashing a wicked smile.

But I roll with it. “That’s better,” I say. “Now everyone might believe we belong together.”

She takes it as a challenge. “Oh, I’m sure we can convince everyone of that.” She places her hand flat upon flat on my chest, then runs it down to my waist, where she plays with my belt buckle.

This time, I can’t hold back the moan. “You’re playing with fire, Principessa,” I warn her.

She shrugs and laughs. “I haven’t been burned yet.”

Maybe not, but she will be.

At the end of the song, I pull her to a circular booth in a darkened corner and order drinks. I stretch my arms out along

the back of the seat, and she ducks in under it, snuggling up against me.

The heat of her body permeates me, and it's all I can do not to lift her onto my lap and fuck her right there in the club. It's as if that fire inside her, the bright light that I so often see straining inside her to escape, radiates a warmth just as strong as the light. And I want to bury my cock in it—bury my darkness in it until her brightness overwhelms me.

Several of her friends join us in the booth, including the ubiquitous Adele and Sarah

Gia slides one hand along my inner thigh.

“Fire,” I mouth at her.

She grins and shrugs, and her fingers flutter against the fabric of my pants.

I swell in response, and her mouth crooks up, even as she turns to talk to her friends—all of whom seem to have accepted our engagement without any further question since they passed me coming out of the women's bathroom at the country club on their way in.

The music changes, and Sarah squeals. “I love this song. Come dance with me.” She reaches out her hands to Adele and Gia, and as they all get up to leave, Gia drags her nails up my leg, across my balls, and along the hardened shaft of my cock, which jumps as if it wants to follow her.

As if it has a mind of its own.

But as much as I want her, I'm no longer a teenage boy, prone to being led around by my dick.

Sure you're not, a tiny voice inside my head mocks me. I shove the voice down and stay in the booth to finish my drink, until the erection subsides. For the moment, anyway.

Still, my need for her burrows deep down into my soul, sliding into that internal darkness that has tried to consume me ever since my father and brothers died.

There, my desire for Gia Rossi smolders, like a burning ember ready to burst into flame given even the slightest fuel.

I watch her on the dance floor. She's curvier than either of her friends, and she moves better too. Every wiggle of her hips makes me think of sex, and I remember the sound of her repressed cries as she came against me, the taste of her flooding my mouth.

"Quit it, Lorenzo," I admonish myself. After all, my goal here is to eliminate my erection, not exacerbate it.

As the song ends, I toss back another whiskey and stride out onto the dance floor.

I've had too much to drink tonight, but not so much that I don't know exactly what I'm doing.

I grab Gia's wrist in my hand. "We're leaving," I tell her.

She blinks in surprise. "But..."

With a sharp tug, I pull her up against me. "I told you that you were playing with fire. Now say goodbye to your friends."

For an instant, the mutinous look on her face suggests that she's going to refuse.

But then she gives a single, short nod. When she turns to her friends, she's all sunny smiles again. "Looks like we're heading out, girls. Good night."

Sarah and Adele flash knowing glances at each other, but Gia leans in and drops some air kisses on their cheeks, and they let her go without comment.

We don't speak while we wait for the driver to bring the car around, but as soon as we slide into the back seat, Gia makes sure the window to the front is closed, then spins on me angrily. "Don't ever talk to me like that in front of my friends again," she begins.

"Shut up, Principessa." I grab her by the shoulders and drag her into my lap, pressing my mouth against hers, swallowing any other words she might've had.

She lets out an irate squeak, and I suck her tongue into my mouth.

She goes stiff, as if she's about to resist, but I soften my lips against her and begin rolling my tongue through her mouth, flicking it against the roof, playing with the sensitive interior of her mouth.

Within seconds, she melts against me, and my grip on her shoulders loosens.

I slide one arm around her and drop the other hand down to cup her breast. She arches her back against my hand, and I flick her hardening nipple through the fabric of her dress and bra.

I pull away from her mouth just enough to whisper, "You're about to get burned."

She laughs into my mouth, a dark, sensual sound, and I pinch her nipple until she gasps.

I let go with a slight tug and drop my hand down between her thighs.

Her silk panties are hot and slightly damp against my fingers, and I circle her clit, then slide in under the elastic. Gia makes a tiny noise in her throat, something between denial and desire, and I deepen our kiss again as I slide my middle finger up and down her damp lips until she opens her legs a little wider for me and I slip it inside her.

This time, the sound she makes is unmistakably one of need.

She's slick and ready, and she turns sideways on my lap to give me better access as I add a second finger, pumping in and out as the heel of my hand massages her clit.

Within moments, she's writhing in my lap. Her head tilts back, her long blond hair spilling around her shoulders, and my other hand slides up to the center of her back to support her.

She closes her eyes, and suddenly, I want to watch her beautiful face when she comes.

"Open your eyes, Principessa. I want to watch."

She goes completely still for a moment, but then follows my instructions.

Her cheeks turn pink, her eyes grow wide as she gasps, and her whole body tightens as she lets out a series of whimpers.

I feel her inner walls flutter, and she shudders with her whole body, flooding against my hand.

“That’s my good girl,” I tell her as she finally sits up straight.

She laughs shakily and leans her forehead against mine. “Remind me to piss you off more often,” she says, her tone turning teasing.

I press my hips up against her ass so she can feel my hard cock. “Don’t be so sure you want that, Principessa.”

She swallows hard and opens her mouth as if to say something, but we pull into the parking garage of her apartment, and the moment is gone.

Two weeks until the wedding, I reminded myself. And then she will be mine to do with as I want.

I only hope I can wait that long.

CHAPTER 11



GIA

The day of my wedding dawns clear and bright, a sunny counterpoint to the dark flutters in my stomach.

I didn't expect to feel so anxious, so worried about my future.

This is, after all, a marriage of convenience for me. No matter how attracted I've found myself to Lorenzo over the last six weeks, and no matter how hard we've worked to convince everyone that we've fallen madly in love, I am still under Pop's orders to infiltrate Lorenzo's family and take over their businesses.

I can't imagine my new husband-to-be will want to spend very much time with me after that.

I sigh as I step into my Vera Wang wedding dress.

Sarah and Adele and I have spent the bulk of the day being pampered, first heading to our favorite spa, then convening at the church, where my hairdresser had already arrived with an entire team to do our hair and makeup.

I'm surprised by how nervous I am.

My mind keeps slipping back to the kisses Lorenzo and I shared.

It's not like I'm some shrinking, shy virgin.

But damned if I don't feel like one right now.

I take a deep breath when the wedding coordinator ducks into the room. "The chapel is absolutely full," she chirps brightly. "We'll be ready to begin in about five minutes"

I nod, and Sarah and Adele flutter around me.

"You look beautiful," Sarah says.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Adele asks, her brows drawing down into a frown.

"Adele," Sarah scolds. "What a thing to ask at a time like this."

Adele shrugs. “It’s pretty much Gia’s last chance to back out. I can’t think of any better time to ask.”

I laugh, but the sound comes out harsher than I intend. “It’s an okay thing for you to ask,” I reassure Adele. “And yes, I’m certain I want to go through with it.”

But I’m not.

Still, Sarah’s right—this is not the time to be asking that question. Not really. After all, it’s not like I have any other choice. If I back out now, it will cost Pop more money than would be worth it.

Better to go through with the wedding and implement our plan.

After all, we’ve all signed contracts.

Mama comes into the bride’s room as I’m checking my makeup one last time. “Will you girls excuse us for a moment, please?” she says to Sarah and Adele, her words a polite request, but her tone making it clear this is an order.

My friends both lean in, each giving me an air-kiss on the cheek, careful not to smudge my makeup or leave lipstick prints.

Gotta keep the façade intact, I think, my mental voice turning sardonic.

Mama turns to me, staring at me for a long moment with her blue eyes, the color accentuated by the navy dress she wears. “You don’t have to do this,” she finally says. “I don’t care what your father has told you. You can walk away now. I’ll make sure there aren’t any repercussions.”

I gape at her, unable to think of a response. Never in my life have I ever seen my mother defy Pop.

“I mean it, sweetheart. I want you to be happy. And if Lorenzo Beneventi is the man who can give you that, then I won’t stand in your way.” She pauses for a long moment, glancing down at her shoes, as if they can somehow hand her the words she’s looking for. Finally, she glances back up, her gaze turning pleading. “If you love him, I will welcome him into this family

with open arms. But if you're marrying him for any other reason, please don't go through with this."

This time, I'm the one staring at my shoes for inspiration.

They don't offer any, despite being Giambattista Vallis.

"I want to do this, Mama."

Maybe not for the reasons she listed, but I do want to do it. Pop's plan is a good one, and it will increase our family's fortunes—fortunes that I'll be in control of someday.

Not to mention it will lead to my complete freedom from any further marital obligations to anyone but myself.

Mama heaves a sigh, but she nods. Then she carefully takes my face between her hands and kisses my forehead. Her hair, still a beautiful blond with only the barest hint of gray, waves around my face, and I inhale her scent. Even as an adult, I find her touch and smell comforting.

Then she's gone, and I'm alone in the bride's room for a few moments.

And for the first time since we put this plan into motion, a deep sense of foreboding comes over me.

Mom and Adele are both right. This is my last chance to back out.

What if what I'm doing is wrong? Am I really willing to tie myself to a Beneventi for the rest of my life?

All the reasons I shouldn't marry Lorenzo cascade through my mind, sending out a flood of anxiety.

I barely know him. He doesn't have the kind of power that my family commands. I still don't completely understand why he fought so hard for this match.

After all, his family nearly ruined mine when I was a child.

But the answer I gave Mama and Adele still stands.

I agreed to this.

Besides, I've spent the last month and a half working so hard to convince everyone that Lorenzo and I couldn't keep our

hands off each other that I've half convinced myself.

The memory of the way he touches me slides through me again, and I shiver.

If that kiss was indicative of anything, my wedding night is going to be something to remember.

I don't want to admit it even to myself, but the anticipation for our first night together is at least half of what propels me out the bridal suite door when the wedding coordinator comes to tell me it's time.

Pop would never forgive me if I backed out now, if only because he was footing the bulk of the bill for this enormous party.

With a grim smile, I inhale deeply, count to five, then blow it out again.

Here goes nothing.

I HAD INITIALLY WANTED TO HOLD THE CEREMONY AT THE Historic St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church just off the Strip, but in the end, it had been too small to accommodate our overflowing guest list.

Besides, the parish priest had been a bit too exacting in his insistence that Lorenzo and I undergo the Catholic marriage preparations, which would have taken six months, and neither Lorenzo nor I were willing to wait that long.

So we had moved the entire plan to the northernmost Catholic church in Vegas—a newer building in a parish with a less rule-bound priest, one who was willing to waive some of the more onerous, time-consuming preparations for a fee.

Also, it doesn't hurt that he's a distant cousin, I think as I meet my father at the chapel entrance.

The chapel itself is beautiful, with stark white walls, a desert mural decorating the reredos behind the chancel, and gold and tan inlays in the marble floor echoing the colors and shapes of

the mural. The space was cool and soothing, and I knew as soon as I saw it that it would be the perfect wedding venue.

The chancel around the altar is covered in white roses, as are the edges of the pews along the aisle.

Pop leads me to the entrance and holds out an arm to me. “You look beautiful, Principessa,” he murmurs to me.

“And you look incredibly handsome,” I reply.

But as striking as Pop looks, it’s nothing compared to how unbearably gorgeous Lorenzo is, standing at the end of the aisle, waiting for me and wearing a black tuxedo. My mouth dries as I catch sight of him waiting for me.

The string quartet inside the chapel begins playing “Here Comes the Bride” and the doors open, revealing the man who is about to become my husband. Those green eyes of his lock onto mine, and despite the rows of pews full of people who have stood and turned to watch me enter, there might as well have been no one in the chapel but the two of us.

All the faces staring back at me—other than Lorenzo’s—are a blur.

Pop and I begin the stately procession down the aisle, and I find myself smiling as widely as if I were actually in love with Lorenzo.

My blood pounds in my ears so hard I can barely hear anything, but it doesn’t matter.

Lorenzo’s intense gaze holds all my attention, and for an instant, I’m certain I see light and dark fighting for dominance in the way he watches me.

Not until I reach the altar and Pop kisses me on the cheek before taking his seat do I realize that Max, Lorenzo’s older brother, is staring at me just as intently—but without the glint of anticipation I detect in Lorenzo’s eyes.

If I were forced to categorize it, I would say that Max’s stare holds an undercurrent of warning.

Max is Lorenzo’s only groomsman. Instead, he has two candles on his side of the altar, representing the brothers he

lost in a car bombing.

The priest had asked us if we wanted to add a section with our own vows, but we opted for a traditional ceremony, eliminating any need for either of us to speak our mind.

I suspect that might be a bad idea in our case.

The ceremony doesn't take long at all.

Not nearly long enough.

THE RECEPTION IS A BLUR. ALL THE APPROPRIATE PEOPLE GIVE speeches, but they're fairly generic. As best man, Lorenzo's brother Max tells stories from their childhood—including one about Lorenzo putting on their father's tuxedo jacket and announcing that he had a very important business meeting to go to. Then he notes that Lorenzo is wearing their father's tuxedo jacket again today.

Max gives a significant glance at my father when he says this, and Pop raises one eyebrow sardonically.

I'm not sure what the interchange means, but it's not unusual for a Mafia family. I suspect he's reminding Pop that the Beneventis are still an important family, even with their patriarch out of the picture.

Similarly, in his speech, Pop talks of me, about how my wedding dress reminds him of the dress I wore for my first communion and how proud he is of the woman I've grown up to become.

Significantly, he does not welcome Lorenzo to the family. Instead, he tells my new husband—*husband*, I can barely think the word—to take care of me, to cherish me, to treat me as the priceless treasure Pop knows me to be.

His words are laced with an implicit threat.

A warning not to harm Pop's property.

In other words, a typical Mafia wedding reception.

As Lorenzo and I open the dancing, he leans down and whispers in my ear, “You’re mine now, Principessa. And I can’t wait to get back to our room tonight.”

My nipples harden at his words as a rush of heat floods my body, and he flashes a dark smile as I shiver.

When I dance with Pop, his whispered comment is, “Remember why you’re doing this.”

Instead, I’m filled with rage when I’m reminded of the way men in my life control me.

But not forever, I promise myself. Not much longer at all.

I barely touch my dinner, though it’s being catered by La Sérénade. Adele and Sarah assure me it’s delicious. As far as I can tell, though, it might as well be cardboard. I wash down my few bites with too much wine, followed by too much champagne.

I dance, I feed Lorenzo a bite of wedding cake and allow him to do the same for me. When Lorenzo and I wrap our arms around each other to drink champagne, I’m glad to have something to wash down the lump of cake in my throat.

I feel like a doll being put through the motions. I say all the right words and go through the motions, but I might as well have a pull string in the middle of my back for all the thought I put into any of it.

I dance with my friends, then again with Lorenzo—and this time, it’s to a song with a fast beat, so there’s little time for talking.

In the end, that’s all I remember of the reception.

And then comes the moment when Lorenzo and I have to leave.

I’ve tried so hard not to think about what comes next, despite Lorenzo’s continued seduction of me—in the bathroom at the country club, in the back seat of his town car, and through every word and every touch over the last several weeks.

We dash through the bubbles blown by everyone still at the reception, running to the limousine waiting for us. My heart is

pounding.

This is the one night I can't say no to Lorenzo.

The contractually obligatory consummation of our wedding.

After this, it will be more difficult to get an annulment—though not impossible, particularly with a priest as willing to take donations to his church as the one who performed our wedding ceremony.

Six weeks ago, being married for two years in order to earn my freedom for the rest of my life didn't seem like such a long time.

Now it stretches out in front of me like an eternity.

And I'm terrified.

CHAPTER 12



LORENZO

As the reception winds down and we climb into the limousine, I glance at Gia and realize that her face has gone completely pale—porcelain white with bright red splotches in her cheeks.

Under other circumstances, I might think it was the wine and champagne.

But somehow, I know that she's thinking about the night ahead of us.

I've spent the last several weeks seducing her, so I know she wants me. But still, her father traded her off as payment for a gambling debt. She might not know about the poker game, but she knows how our world works, knows she's merely a part of a larger game rather than a player.

I expect to feel nothing, but compassion for her rushes in, twisting my stomach, and I find myself wanting to reassure her.

And the best way I know to do that is to make her want me as much as I want her.

In the backseat of the limo, I take off my jacket and slide it over Gia's shoulders. I had taken my father's tuxedo jacket—the last one he ever wore—and had it altered to wear during the wedding.

As far as everyone else is concerned, wearing the jacket is a sentimental gesture. But for me, it's a reminder of exactly why I'm marrying Gia. No matter how much I may want her, my goal here, my true goal, is to avenge my father's death. Similarly, I wear a set of cufflinks that belonged to my brother Frederico and a bowtie that belonged to Leonardo.

All night long, wearing their clothing has reminded me that I'm here for a reason. And it has nothing to do with marrying a woman I love.

It's all about revenge.

But at this moment, the only use I see for the jacket is making her feel better.

At the hotel, Gia doesn't even look at me as we make our way to the private elevator leading to the penthouse suite I've reserved. Whatever else she might be feeling, she's obviously nervous as hell.

I would never admit it to anyone else—hell, I can barely admit it to myself—but I'm nervous, too.

The elevator requires our room card, and once we step out into the enormous suite, I lock the elevator behind us.

No one will bother us again until I allow it.

Gia pauses, staring out the windows to take in the panoramic view of the Vegas night. "It's always so beautiful from way up high," she murmurs.

I move up behind her and wrap my arms around her waist, speaking directly into her hair. "It can be beautiful at street-level, too."

She shrugs. "Sure. But there's no chance of seeing the dark side of the city from up here."

Somehow I don't think she's talking about Vegas anymore.

I turn her around in my arms and softly kiss her mouth.

She might have been coerced into this marriage by her father, and I might be planning to destroy her before it's over, but somehow, in this single moment, I want her to be happy about finding herself here, now.

It's a stupid desire, and I know it. But if I can find a way to make her happy for just this brief instant, perhaps someday I can be redeemed for what I'm planning to do to her before our marriage ends.

I take her hand and draw her to the luxurious bedroom, where I pull her down onto the bed, stretching out beside her until we're lying face-to-face, my breath fanning the ringlets that have come out of her updo and hang loose around her cheeks.

I reach out and run my fingertips gently along her shoulders, and then back up to cup her cheek in my hand. Leaning in, I press my lips to hers.

To my surprise, as I start to pull away, Gia reaches out with one arm and tugs me closer. “Don’t go,” she whispers, her mouth dancing against mine as she speaks.

Without replying, I simply deepen the kiss, gently slipping my tongue between her lips.

She responds feverishly, her own tongue capturing mine, tangling with it.

I pull her closer to me, her breasts brushing against my chest. With a moan, I bring my fingertips up to flick against her nipples through the fabric of her wedding dress. A tiny noise escapes her throat, and I press into her, my whole body straining toward her.

“Are you ready for your wedding night?” I whisper.

Her blue eyes burn with lust, but she blinks. “I think so,” she replies softly.

“Good.” I stand and pull her to her feet, turning her around to unfasten the row of tiny buttons along the back of the dress. After a long moment, I shake my head. “Are these meant to be impossible to open?”

Gia laughs. “I think they’re supposed to make you slow down and savor the moment.”

With a groan, I unbutton several more, and then give up. “Fuck it,” I say, taking the two sides in my hands and giving them a tug. With a ripping noise, buttons fly off in all directions, and Gia gasps.

“I can’t believe you did that!”

“Believe it,” I growl. “And I’ll do the same to anything else that gets in my way tonight.”

This time, her laugh is slightly breathless, and she glances at me over her shoulder. “Oh, really?”

“Absolutely.” I turn her to face away from me again and deftly unhook the strapless bra she’s wearing underneath the dress. Then I take the whole satiny mess and shove it down to her ankles.

Delicately, she steps out of the dress, hooking it on one toe and kicking it off to one side.

As I rise to stand from where I’m kneeling, I realize she’s wearing only thigh-highs, a garter belt, and a pair of white silk panties.

Just a few scraps of fabric between me and her entire body.

The realization makes my cock stand tall, straining toward her.

I position myself in front of her, my gaze roving up and down her body. “Beautiful.”

She puts a hand on her stomach, as if trying to hide it from my gaze, but I’m having none of that tonight.

I grab both her hands and, with a swift movement, put them both behind her back as I stare down into her eyes.

“No,” I order her. “You will not hide from me.”

“But—” she protests, testing my hold.

“You belong to me now, and I want to see you. Every inch of you.”

She swallows and nods, and I release her hands, taking a step back to survey my new wife.

As my gaze travels across her body, it’s all I can do to keep from shoving her back onto the bed and taking her right then.

But I’ve promised myself that I will make sure she enjoys this night.

Besides, I have to make her love me before I can destroy her.

CHAPTER 13



GIA

Lorenzo releases my hands and steps back to undress with quick, efficient movements, his gaze never leaving mine.

My mouth waters as he drops his tuxedo trousers and stands in front of me in all his glory.

He's every bit as beautiful as I've imagined.

I gasp at the sight of his cock—it's huge, already hard, ready for me.

"Don't worry," he whispers, his voice a dark promise. "I'll make sure you're ready for me when I fuck you."

Somehow the crass words send heat arrowing straight to my core.

Slowly, I reach out to stroke him with a long, slow touch. It jumps under my touch, and I swallow again, licking my lips.

Lorenzo steps closer to me and kisses a path down my throat, between my breasts, over my stomach, to my closed legs, until he's kneeling in front of me, his face even with my pussy.

"Open," he says, his voice an order even as his hands gently nudge my thighs apart.

I whimper and part my legs for him.

As he did in the bathroom at the country club, Lorenzo kisses and licks me, sliding one finger inside, then another, and pumping in and out. I arch my back, shivering in pleasure.

His warm, wet tongue flicks my clit until my legs begin shaking.

"Good girl," he whispers, his lips flickering against me.

Then he stands and scoops me into his arms, moving us to the bed.

I ache to feel him against me, inside me.

But he's not done with me yet.

Lorenzo slides down between my legs, using his mouth to edge me closer and closer to coming, then backing away again, until I'm ready to scream in frustration.

"Are you ready now?" he asks, his voice a harsh whisper as he grabs my hands, imprisoning me against the bed.

"Oh, God. Yes. Please," I beg.

He kisses me, his tongue tangling with mine, trapping me against him. He trails another path of kisses down my body and sucks on one of my nipples, then the other. I writhe beneath him, moving my hips against his, unable to stop myself from moving, trying to convince him to take me now.

Lorenzo chuckles and slides a finger inside my pussy, then another, pumping them inside me once again. "I'll give you what you want, Principessa," he says, his voice filled with lust. "I will fuck you so hard that everyone in the entire goddamn hotel will hear you scream my name."

"Yes," I breathe out, unable to say anything more. All I can do is moan for him. "Please, yes."

At the sound of my pleading, Lorenzo groans, and finally—finally—moves atop me, positioning his shaft at my entrance.

With a quick thrust, he pushes himself partway inside me, then holds himself still there, staring into my eyes. I gasp at the feel of him deep inside me.

With a groan, he picks me up. I wrap my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist, and he slowly slides me down even further onto him.

"Gia." Lorenzo moans my name against my neck as he pulls me slowly down against him until his cock, huge and hard, fills me completely.

Heat pools deep in my core, and Lorenzo's cock begins to jerk inside me. He closes his eyes as if he's barely able to keep from coming now that he's inside me.

I whimper and writhe against him as he begins pumping into me, the tip of his cock bumping against my cervix, sending chills running up and down my spine.

My orgasm begins building, a hot wet wave of euphoria rising to a crescendo. Lorenzo reaches down between us, resting the tip of his finger on my clit for a split second before he begins flicking it in time to his thrusts.

The wave crashes over me, sending pleasure slamming through my entire body until I can't imagine anything else in the world but the two of us coming together. I scream his name over and over again, just as he promised I would.

I whimper in protest when he withdraws—until he grabs me by the hips and flips me to bend over the bed.

“I'm not done with you yet,” Lorenzo promises, and he pushes himself inside me again, his sentence ending on a groan as his cock slides home inside me.

From this angle, I can feel every ridge of his cock as it slides into me. He thrusts at a steady, slow pace, relishing the feeling of his body joined with mine.

“More,” I moan.

“Are you sure?” Lorenzo asks, and again I hear that darkness lurking inside him, waiting to come out. I shiver, and I'm not sure if it's with fear or anticipation.

But I know I don't want him to stop.

“Yes.”

“Then beg me again.”

“Please.”

“Tell me you belong to me.”

I pause, but what can it hurt to say it? They're just words, right? “I'm yours, Lorenzo Beneventi.” My voice comes out harsh and breathy.

With a strangled sound, he clasps my hips and pulls me back against him, slamming his cock into me, tapping against my g-spot with every thrust. He reaches around and lets his fingers play with my clit, alternating between flicking and rubbing it as my moans grow louder and louder.

Pleasure swirls through me, building higher and higher with every touch, until finally I come so hard that my pussy clenches down on his cock, holding him inside me.

“I want you to come,” I tell him as my shivering tremors fade. “Please show me how much you want me.”

With another groan, Lorenzo’s movements pick up, until his cock begins jerking inside me. He pulls me back hard against him, and the hot feel of him exploding inside me sets off yet another orgasm, until my whole body is trembling.

I collapse onto the bed, and he lands atop me, my face pressed into the mattress. He rolls over to his side, taking me with him, his cock still inside me.

“That was amazing,” I whisper.

Lorenzo gives another darkness-laced laugh. “We’re not even close to done, Principessa.”

And he’s right.

We don’t fall asleep until sometime after dawn.

CHAPTER 14



LORENZO

When I wake the next morning, it takes me a moment to figure out where I am.

Right. The hotel room the morning after the wedding. I roll over and stare at Gia asleep beside me, her sandy lashes casting shadows against her cheek.

Even without makeup, she's beautiful. Maybe even more so.

Shit. I can't stay here.

Quietly, I slide out of bed and scribble a quick note to leave on the bedside table.

I make my way to the A-B Clubs, still thinking about the night before with Gia.

"Hey, boss. What are you doing here?" Benny asks. "Aren't you supposed to be on your honeymoon or something?"

"Just checking on a few things." I have to fight to keep my face from twisting into a frown. After all, he's right—not about the honeymoon itself. We decided there was no need for one. But because coming to work the morning after my wedding night was an odd choice.

Now I'm wishing I had scheduled a honeymoon. It would give me a chance to get Gia away from all her family and friends. The better to cement my control over her.

After all, this marriage is one of convenience for her. I'm going to need to use every means at my disposal to bind her to me.

Sex is one of those means, of course. I had expected to seduce her into caring about me.

What I hadn't expected was how much I would still want her after our first time together.

I'd thought I would spend my lust in one night, to fuck her and be done, as had happened so many times before with other women.

I'm considered the Beneventi playboy, and there's a good reason for it. My reputation comes in part from my tendency to pursue new conquests, and then walk away once I'd had them.

Anna Maria Calvi had been one of those conquests.

I had worked tirelessly to get her into my bed, and as soon as I had, I was done with her.

With Gia, though, things are different.

Somehow, despite how easily she responded to me when I had tasted her on the bathroom sink at the country club, it never occurred to me that she would be so amazingly responsive in bed.

Nor that I would feel such a deep-seated urge to make her scream my name—not just once, but over and over again.

For the first time ever, I understand my brother Max's desires to tie a woman down and force her to come again and again.

Not that Max has any idea I know anything at all about his sexual proclivities. But it's impossible not to hear Valentina's cries of ecstasy echoing through the house, combined with the sound of leather smacking against her skin.

Besides, I found whips, ropes, chains, and more tucked away in the guest bedroom where Max held Valentina prisoner before they married.

Not that I think Gia would ever acquiesce to those kinds of games.

She's far too independent.

And yet somehow, that makes me want to force her to submit to me even more.

With a wave at Benny, I make my way to the back office, where I drop into the chair at my desk. I don't really have anything to do here. I simply needed to get away from my overwhelming emotions.

"Lorenzo." Diamond's sultry voice comes from the door of my office, and I glance up from the nonexistent paperwork on my

laptop.

“Yes?” I sound brusque, and I know it, but any attraction I had for the dancer has completely evaporated.

“Just checking to make sure everything’s okay.” She sounds taken aback by my response to her.

It occurs to me that perhaps I should try to force myself to recognize that other women are still beautiful, even when all my attention is bound up in Gia.

So I make a conscious effort to mitigate my irritation. “Everything’s good. I’m just wrapping up a few things before I leave for the rest of the weekend.”

Diamond nods, the motion causing the sequins on her skimpy top to sparkle in the morning light coming through my window.

“Okay, then.” She pauses as if she is going to say something else, then ends by saying, “Have a good weekend.” She turns and leaves, drawing the door shut behind her.

I let out a sigh. This is ridiculous, not to mention useless. Trying to hide from my new bride in my office isn’t keeping me from thinking about her incessantly.

So I log out of the laptop and close the cover.

We still have several hours before we have to check out.

Time enough to go back to the hotel and find out if fucking her one more time will slake this apparently insatiable lust I seem to be developing for my new wife.

WHEN I RETURN TO THE HOTEL, GIA IS STILL SLEEPING. THE note I left hasn’t been disturbed.

I drop down into one of the comfortable armchairs in the corner of our suite and watch her.

Wife.

What an odd word for me to be using to describe anyone.

Much less the daughter of the man who colluded to have my family members murdered.

That's what I have to keep in mind. No matter how much I want her, I cannot view her as a person.

She's simply the means to an end. The key to my revenge.

And if I enjoy fucking her in the meantime? Well, that's simply a bonus.

And yet, even as I watch her sleep, my dick hardens. I imagine sliding it in between her slightly parted lips, feeling her wrap her mouth around me, drawing me into her hot wetness.

I blow out a breath on low groan.

Will I ever get over wanting her this much?

At the sound of my exhale, her eyelashes flutter, then open as she blinks and glances around her, as confused by her unusual surroundings as I had been when I'd woken.

I see the moment her gaze clears, when she remembers everything that happened between us the night before.

I'm going to make sure she doesn't forget how much she wants me—any more than I can forget how much I want her.

CHAPTER 15



GIA

“Good morning.” Lorenzo’s voice, low and dark, echoes through the room as he stands, rising from the shadows in the corner.

I roll over on my side and watch as he stalks toward the bed, slowly removing the black t-shirt he’s wearing and dropping it onto the floor.

He moves to stand next to the bed, staring down at me, and I tentatively reach out my hand to run my fingers along the hard planes of his stomach.

He unbuttons his jeans, drops them onto the floor, and slides in under the covers with me.

Then his mouth is everywhere, and I can no longer think clearly.

When he enters me, so much heat surrounds us that I worry for a moment about spontaneous combustion.

As we move together, the air around us practically shimmers like red-hot sparks shining in my eyes, until the heat from our joining explodes into something exquisite, both of us crying out within moments of one another.

AT NOON, WE LEAVE THE HOTEL AND I MOVE INTO THE Beneventi home.

Lorenzo has had his own wing of the house since he became an adult, but now that we’re married, he and I are taking over the part of the house that used to belong to his brother Frederico.

“You can do whatever you like with it,” Massimiliano tells me, gesturing around at the furnishings, which had apparently never been changed since Frederico’s death. “And don’t worry

about bothering anyone. Max and Valentina are in New York for the rest of the week.”

I can't help but feel thankful for their absence. It's difficult enough to try to acclimate myself to living in a new space with a new husband I barely know. Interacting with a brand-new brother- and sister-in-law is more than I'm ready for. Especially after just twelve hours with Lorenzo has left me reeling.

Not that his brother is likely to fuck me senseless. Because that's how I feel—senseless. Unable to quite figure out what is happening to me.

All I know is that I want Lorenzo to touch me again.

God. Don't be so needy, I admonish myself.

“Is there anything in particular you would like to have in here?” I ask Lorenzo, determined to focus on anything other than my new husband's skills in bed.

“Nope.” He wraps his arm around my waist and kisses my forehead—a move that surprises us both, apparently, because he just as quickly removes his arm from around my body and pulls his wallet out of his pocket, a red blush staining his cheekbones.

“Here,” he says, fishing out a platinum American Express card and handing it to me. “Get whatever you need.”

I start to ask him what my limit is, something I've always done with Pop—despite our family's wealth, I learned early on not to squander money.

But this isn't Pop, I remind myself.

This is Lorenzo Beneventi—*my husband*, I think in a kind of surprise that doesn't seem to be dissipating—and I don't care if I squander his family's money.

After all, I won't be around long enough to deal with any aftermath of extravagance.

So I simply say, “Thanks,” and tuck the card into the back pocket of my Escada jeans. “Can I see your suite?” I ask Lorenzo.

He blinks, confused. “Why? I mean, sure... But why?”

I shrug, thinking of the delicate furniture coming from my apartment. “I want to get a sense of what you like.”

“Okay. It’s this way.” He leads me out of our newly shared suite, down a hall and up a staircase tucked away at the back of the house. “This is technically a servants’ stairway—the house was built to accommodate a large family.” A shadow crosses his face, and I know he’s thinking of his dead father and siblings. Then the expression clears. “But we’ve always used it when it’s more convenient. Anyway, Susan and Nevaeh are part of the family, practically.”

I memorize the servants’ names. Nevaeh will be easy enough to remember—I’ve always loathed the name. “Heaven” spelled backwards strikes me as tacky, a kind of conspicuous piety that reeks of a self-righteousness with little substance.

But it’s not my name, so I’ll figure out how to say it without a sneer.

He leads me to a suite decorated in dark brown leather and hardwood furniture, a far cry from my own airy tastes.

I glance around in dismay, uncertain how I’m going to blend our two styles.

Lorenzo catches my expression and grins. “Don’t worry about trying to find something I like. My mother decorated this room for me when I was a teenager. It’s actually a little heavy for my taste.”

I try not to let the relief show on my face, even as I once again reminded myself that I am not moving in permanently. We are married, but I have no intention of staying that way.

So instead, I simply nod. “Once I get everything set up in the new suite, you can change out anything you don’t like,” I offer, eager to seem as if I am settling in for good and trying to be agreeable.

He shrugs, and I get the distinct impression he doesn’t much care about his surroundings.

Then he takes me down to the kitchen to meet Susan and Nevaeh. They were at the wedding Saturday night, but I'm grateful for the reintroduction—everything from the wedding is a blur, and I need the reminder. The older woman is Susan, and her daughter Nevaeh works with her.

“We will serve lunch whenever you're ready,” Susan tells me. “Just let us know if you want to have it served in the dining room or in your suite.”

I glance at Lorenzo, who shakes his head. “I'll be heading into the clubs soon, so I won't be here for lunch. Possibly not for dinner, either,” he tells Susan.

I blink in surprise. This is the first time I've heard of his plans for the day.

Before I have a chance to say anything, Susan glances out the window. “It looks like your moving truck has arrived,” she announces, her face wreathed in smile lines.

Lorenzo walks me to the front door, where he greets the movers and shows them up to our suite. “Everything currently in here needs to go into storage in the second garage building,” he tells them, showing them to a freight elevator I hadn't realized existed.

Once they get started working, he says, “I'll be home this evening.” He touches my wrist lightly, and for a moment I think he's going to lean in and kiss me goodbye.

But then he thinks better of it and simply turns to depart.

IT FEELS WEIRD MOVING INTO A DEAD MAN'S SPACE, BUT WHEN the movers Lorenzo hired finish clearing out the suite, I begin directing them to unload all my furnishings.

I break from decorating and moving only long enough for lunch and then again for dinner. The staff is unfailingly polite, and the workers Lorenzo hired to help after the movers left equally so, though I'm fairly certain most of them work for the Beneventi family in other, less savory capacities.

Of course, I'm used to that. I've spent my life surrounded by men and women like the ones I'm directing now.

And as we go, I make a list of all the items I need to buy. I shoot off a note to Sarah and Adele, asking if they'd like to meet me for lunch the next day at La Sérénade. They both reply instantly, probably eager to know how my wedding night went. I grin at my phone and tuck it back into my pocket.

That evening, I tumble into bed exhausted and fall asleep almost immediately, waking deep in the night only long enough to discover Lorenzo has at some point slipped into bed beside me. He's breathing deeply, evenly, his arm draped over me.

But when I wake up in the morning, he's gone again.

If he doesn't start spending more time at home, I'm never going to fulfill my mission for Pop.

And that means I won't be able to earn my freedom.

I am going to have to find a way to keep Lorenzo's attention on me so I can get him to begin sharing his family's secrets with me.

CHAPTER 16



LORENZO

“That’s what I’m hearing from my contacts at the State Department, anyway—that El Toro’s men just made their way through customs in L.A. and are on their way to Vegas,” Max says, the sounds of a New York street echoing behind him. “Keep your eyes open, bro.”

It’s the second time I’ve listened to the voicemail.

It’s not surprising that El Toro is out to get us, after all. After all, Max took out one of El Toro’s main hitmen, and then I helped our men dispose of him out in the desert.

Sometimes I wonder how many sins the sand of the Mojave Desert has buried.

I am, however, surprised at *why* El Toro has sent his men.

I start the message over for a third time.

“Hey, Lorenzo. Thought you should know the latest. Apparently El Toro’s pissed at your new father-in-law. He seems to have promised Gia to El Toro’s son at some point along the way, so now El Toro’s pissed off and sending more goons in our direction. That’s what I’m hearing from my contacts...”

In my office at the club, I swipe my phone off, drop it onto the desk in front of me, and stare at it, my thoughts whirling.

Fuck.

Our two best men, Dominic and Vic, are in New York with Max and Val. We have plenty more, of course, but none I trust as much as those two.

I had hoped to put this confrontation off a bit longer.

Okay—to be honest, I’ve been burying my head in those desert sands, hoping I could hide from reality a bit longer.

I just didn’t expect that reality to include Edoardo Rossi double-crossing me. And worse, double-crossing his own daughter.

Does Gia know anything about this plan?

The thought makes me sit up straight.

I want to believe she doesn't.

But she is a Rossi.

This time, I say it aloud, and then again for emphasis. "Fuck. Fuck."

I can't get anything done here.

Not that I've been terribly useful at the clubs at all in the two days since my wedding.

My concentration is shot. I've been useless the last two days at work. I can't think of anything except Gia.

My plan to exorcize my lust for her by making her mine is failing miserably. It's all I can do not to take her in my arms every time I see her. Hell, I'd had to leave our bed this morning to keep myself from fucking her awake.

On second thought, maybe I should have done exactly that.

I don't know how I'm going to go through with my plan to destroy her and send her back to her father.

I'm beginning to think maybe I won't.

A new plan is beginning to form, though, one that might be almost as effective.

After all, losing his favorite daughter to the Beneventis will make Edoardo Rossi miserable, too, right?

I'm guessing he plans to knock me off and present Gia to El Toro.

I will not allow that to happen.

I need to find something else to do.

Something that might allow me to get a head start on the men El Toro is sending to Vegas.

With a final curse, I push my office chair back and head toward the exit, swiping my phone off the desk as I go.

AS ROSSI'S BRAND-NEW SON-IN-LAW, I AM, IF NOT EXACTLY welcome, not precisely unwelcome in his home, either. His staff meets me at the door, inviting me in and showing me to his office.

But it doesn't take long for his people to let me know Edoardo is not in. They send in the closest thing he has to a capo now that Gia is out of the house—her cousin Giovanni, who tries to get me to explain why I'm there. But as soon as I realize Giovanni's uncle isn't in, I leave again.

I spend the next two hours stalking through Edoardo Rossi's favorite haunts, pausing to chat with acquaintances and trying to find out what rumors might be going around about El Toro's men.

Unfortunately, what I initially discover is that I'm the primary topic of gossip at the moment.

As I watch the end of a poker game that's already been running for hours, Nico DeSantis slides up next to me at the same casino where I won Gia in the first place. He hands me a bourbon, then clinks his own bourbon glass against mine and downs the shot.

"Congrats on your wedding," he says. "No one saw that coming."

I nod my head in acknowledgment. After all, that had been my plan—for no one to see what was coming.

"My brother Elio is pissed," Nico adds. "He was pretty sure he had Gia locked down—that he was going to slide in there and take over the Rossi family fortune."

I realize from his expansive hand gestures and the slight slurring of his words that Nico's already half drunk.

This might be a good time to get information out of him.

Nico is the DeSantis family equivalent of—well, of me. The easy-going, even-tempered brother.

At least publicly.

I don't know if he hides a dark side like the one I've developed in the last five years. But it doesn't matter. His friendly side is out today, and I decide to take the opportunity to gather as much information from him as I can.

"Did Elio and Edoardo have an agreement?"

"Not officially," Nico says.

"What about unofficially?"

Nico gives another expansive hand gesture that might loosely be interpreted as a shrug and makes a noncommittal noise. "Meh. You know how these things are. Lots of innuendo, a few offhand comments, maybe even a handshake deal. But nothing official."

My vision darkens for an instant, and rage begins to bubble up inside me.

I'm starting to think Edoardo Rossi has been promising his daughter—my wife—to anyone he thought might be interested.

Anyone who could offer him something valuable in return.

"Hey, is it true that Gia negotiated her own wedding contract with you?" Nico asks as an afterthought.

My stomach clenches, and suddenly I realize exactly what has happened.

Edoardo Rossi left himself an out.

By allowing Gia to negotiate our agreement, he's given himself room to claim that she was the architect of her arrangement with me.

Even if everyone in town knows that he lost her in the bet to me, they also know that under normal circumstances, those kinds of bets are easily shifted over to a cash basis.

I say goodbye to Nico, more distracted than I should be when dealing with other members of the Mafia, but I need to find out what other stories are circulating.

By the time I finish my circuit of the current Mafia-heavy social scene, I've heard more stories than I can count.

I was right. The more I talk to people, the more I figure out that Edoardo Rossi has promised his daughter to practically every family that has any connection to the mob.

About half of them think that Gia insisted on breaking her father's word and that he is just too loving a parent not to follow her wishes.

The other half think I have some hold over the Rossi family. They would be just as happy to see me wiped out.

They all wanted her because they believed it would give them a lever to use against the Rossis.

But as far as I can tell, not a single one of them wanted Gia for herself.

Neither did you, a tiny voice inside my head whispers, and I shove it down.

No matter how I started this marriage, I'm beginning to realize that part of me wants it to be real. And besides, that's not important. Not right now.

Because the biggest story going around is that El Toro wants Gia for his eldest son.

And if he can't have her, he'd rather see her dead.

So El Toro is sending his men to kill me and to claim her.

I'm determined that won't happen.

CHAPTER 17



GIA

L *et's meet at La Sérénade.*

I glance between the text on my phone and the restaurant sign and shake my head.

We really need to find someplace else to frequent as our favorite restaurant. But Sarah and Adele are, as usual, determined to go to the trendiest spots.

With any luck, Vegas high society will soon tire of the DeSantis restaurant.

In the meantime, though, I take a deep breath and head inside. Gino follows me, taking up his post inside the door, leaning against the walls, and crossing his arms, far enough away from our table to avoid overhearing anything we said, but close enough to keep an eye on me.

Sarah and Adele stand and offer air kisses as I arrive at our table.

“Aren’t you supposed to be on your honeymoon?” Adele asks, grinning at me. “What are you doing meeting us out?”

“You invited me,” I remind her with a smile. “Besides, Lorenzo is working today. Something came up at the clubs.”

Sarah and Adele give each other a significant glance.

“What?” I demand.

Sarah glances down at her perfectly manicured nails resting on the edge of the table. “So how are you spending your days?”

“I’ve been redecorating our suite in the Beneventi home.”

“Oh, fuck,” Adele mutters under her breath, and I follow the line of her gaze to see Elio DeSantis making his way toward our table.

A hot flush rises in my face. This is the first time I’ve seen him since beginning my whirlwind “romance” with Lorenzo.

Still, I manage to gaze at Elio more or less objectively.

He's definitely attractive. Then again, all the DeSantis triplets are, with broad shoulders narrowing down to a tight waist, medium-brown hair, full lips, big brown eyes.

"Which one of the DeSantis brothers is that?" Sarah whispers.

I shake my head. I've never been able to understand why most people can't tell the DeSantis triplets apart. Although I recognize that they look alike, I've never had any difficulty knowing which one is which—not the way so many other people seem to.

"Elio," I hiss, then paste a bright smile on my face—one that I'm sure doesn't quite meet my eyes.

Elio reaches our table and flashes his own sunny smile at us. But his expression doesn't reach his eyes, either. "Ladies," he says. "So nice to see you again. It's been so long." His last words are directed at me, and his gaze turns particularly hard.

Guilt slashes through me. I should have been more direct with him. Instead, I broke up with him over the phone, hanging up when it got too uncomfortable.

"You look well," I say softly.

"So do you," he replies shortly. Then he turns his attention to my friends, smiling and flirting.

My stomach twists into knots. I know him well enough to know his feelings are hurt.

And yet, somehow, I think I should feel even worse.

But Elio was never anything other than a temporary fling for me.

He stands at our table for what feels like an eternity, then finally takes his leave. "You ladies enjoy your lunch," he says, his smile tightening as he turns to go.

As soon as he disappears into the kitchen, I take a sip of the water in front of me. "I'll be right back," I mutter, then stand and head toward the restroom. Gino watches me go, but he knows the layout of the restaurant—there's nowhere for me to go other than to and from the women's room.

Inside the bathroom, I splash water on my wrists, and then pat a little on my overheated cheeks, careful not to smudge my makeup.

I'm going to have to get used to this, I remind myself. After all, the DeSantis triplets move in the same social circles Lorenzo and I do.

Besides, if I ever decide I want Elio back, I can have him again—after I have taken down the Beneventis.

But somehow, that idea isn't as comforting as it might've been just a week ago.

Finally, I feel prepared to face the world again—or at least my friends. With a deep inhalation, I step out of the restroom.

Where I find Elio DeSantis waiting for me.

I gasp and take a half step back. Elio steps forward, blocking my exit. I try to sidestep him, but he slides in front of me and stretches his arms out to cage me against the wall.

“What you want, Elio?”

“Why didn't you tell me?”

I frown, confused by the question. “I did tell you. I told you I couldn't see you anymore.”

“But you didn't tell me why.”

He leans in over me, and for the first time since I've known him, I find Elio more frightening than attractive.

Still, I try to talk to him. “Do you think it would have made you feel any better if I told you I was breaking up with you because I was getting married?”

Elio snorts, a derisive sound. “Maybe if you'd told me you were being forced to, yes. I could have helped you get out of it, Gia.”

It's too late now, though, isn't it?

I don't say the thought aloud. Instead, I shake my head and say, “I agreed to this, Elio. I helped negotiate the contract.”

What I can't say, of course, is that it's all part of a plot to completely destroy the Beneventis.

But Elio is part of this world. He knows how it works. He should have known from the beginning that we weren't destined to last forever.

Now Elio is the one frowning in confusion. "You're telling me that you agreed to let your father use you as payment for a gambling debt?"

I freeze, my heart jumping up and settling in my throat, becoming a lump I can't swallow down—but I try anyway. "What do you mean?"

Elio's face clears, and he lets out a short, harsh laugh. "Oh, my God. You don't know."

"Don't know what?" My tone is as harsh as his laugh, undergirded with the horror of what I'm beginning to realize. "Tell me everything you know, Elio."

He shrugs. "At first I thought it was just a rumor, but I've heard it several times now."

I feel the blood drain from my cheeks as Elio tells me the story going around town.

"It's true, isn't it?" he asks as he finishes telling the story of my father betting and then losing me in a poker game to Lorenzo Beneventi.

Without a word, I shove my way past Elio and march back into the dining room.

On my way, I meet Gino, who presumably has decided I've been in the bathroom too long and is coming to find me. "Have the car brought around," I say shortly, my voice hoarse with anger.

I stop at the table long enough to gather my handbag from the back of the chair.

"What's going on?" Sarah asks.

I start to walk away, then stop and turn back to face my supposed friends. "You knew, didn't you?"

“Knew what?” Adele asks tentatively.

I roll my eyes and laugh, but there’s no humor in the sound.

“You did. You knew about the bet.” It’s not even a question.

This time, their guilty glances give them away entirely.

I knew it.

I shake my head and turn to leave.

They don’t even bother to follow me out.

I manage to keep my composure all the way back to the car, but only by refusing to meet anyone’s eye.

I think I might vomit.

Pop let me believe that I actually had a say in what was going on, that I had some control over my life, my future. I don’t know who I hate more right now—my father, or my husband.

“Where are we going?” Gino asks, his voice worried, as I slide into the back seat of the town car.

I put my hand to my forehead. “Home,” I say, then realize I don’t even know where home is anymore.

Married for three days, and my life is a wreck.

But Gino takes me at my word, and all too soon, we’re pulling into the garage of the Beneventi mansion.

I don’t know what I’m going to say, but as soon as I get out of the town car, I realize that I have to confront Lorenzo.

I make my way to our suite, determined to come up with the perfect words, the absolute most vicious, cutting remarks I can devise by the time he gets home—only to discover when I arrive in our suite that the shower is running. Lorenzo is already there.

I don’t give myself time to overthink it. Instead, I slam open the bathroom door, ready to lay into him, determined to make him feel as awful as I feel.

That’s when I hear him moaning my name.

CHAPTER 18



LORENZO

After learning everything I can about Rossi's willingness to use Gia for his own ends, I head back home, where Susan tells me Gia has gone out to meet her girlfriends for lunch.

She has her bodyguard with her. He's well trained, so I'm less worried than I might be otherwise. Besides, El Toro's men won't hit the Vegas airport for another hour, according to Max's message.

I make my way up to our shared suite, but everything about it reminds me of my new bride. Even though she's only been here for three days, it even smells like her.

Am I fooling myself by thinking I can have it all—that I can destroy Edoardo and keep Gia?

With a frustrated growl, I run my hands through my hair.

I feel like a horny teenager, unable to control my response to this one woman.

So I do what sometimes worked to cool my lust when I was that age.

I decide to take a cold shower.

But that doesn't work, either. Instead, I find myself turning up the temperature of the water, stroking myself as I think of her, of our wedding night, of the way it felt to slide inside her.

I wrap my cock in my fist, imagining that it's her, and just as I say her name aloud, the bathroom door slams open.

I'm startled into releasing my hold on my cock—but I find myself wanting to drag her into the shower with me.

But when I open the door, I find my beautiful new wife glaring at me, her chest heaving with anger.

"What is it?" I ask calmly, reaching for a towel and wrapping it around my waist. As I glance back up at her, I catch her staring wide-eyed at my hard cock, and it jerks in response.

God, I want her.

She shakes off the momentary distraction, turning her furious attention back to my face. “You won me in a bet?”

It’s a question, but she doesn’t wait for an answer. “How dare you treat me like I’m something to be owned? Like I’m worth nothing more than the money it would take to pay off a gambling debt?”

I raise my eyebrows at her and shut the shower door, leaning back against it and crossing my arms over my bare chest.

Her anger has made her even more beautiful, bringing a sharp brightness to her eyes, and I want to convince her to expend all that violence in sex—but somehow, I don’t think that suggestion would go over all that well right now.

So instead, I shrug. “You’re worth a lot more than the value your father assigned to you,” I agree, keeping my voice calm and even. “He didn’t deserve to have that much control over you.”

She lets out an actual growl, primal and fierce, as if it’s the only sound violent enough to give voice to her emotions. “Neither do you,” she snarls.

“Probably not. But now I have you—and you agreed to the contract, so I expect you to abide by it.”

For an instant, I half expect her to raise her hand to slap me—it twitches, and I can practically see her forcing her arm to stay down by her side. But she gains control of herself, and I wait, curious to see what she’ll do next.

Finally, she clenches her teeth together and inhales sharply through them. When she exhales, the breath is shaky, but controlled.

“You’re right,” she says, standing up straight and baring her teeth in an expression that has very little in common with a smile, despite her best effort. “I did sign a contract. And I will abide by the terms—*strictly* by the terms—of the agreement. You got your wedding night consummation. Now I owe you nothing more until after I finish my degree.”

She turns on her heel, her back ramrod-straight, and takes one step toward the bedroom. But I flash my hand out like a snake striking and pull her back toward me. With a single move, I spin her around and pin her up against the glass door of the shower, pressing my body against hers as I hold her hands above her head. “Not so fast, Principessa,” I murmur. “You’ve had your say. Now it’s my turn.”

She starts to speak, but I transfer both her wrists to my right hand and hold my left forefinger to her lips. “Hush. Listen.”

Gia glares, but clamps her mouth shut, and I nod. “Very good.” I trail my fingertip down her chin, along her neck, and across her collarbone, tracing the lines of her body until it dips down inside her designer blouse, where I stroke along her cleavage.

I lean in even closer, until every part of my body is pressed against hers, holding her in place, and whisper in her ear. “I don’t blame you for being angry.”

I nip her earlobe, and she shivers.

I’m glad to know she responds to me, even now.

“And you can deny me, it’s true.” I pull back just enough to make eye contact with her, watching her pupils dilate as she stares into my eyes. I smile, allowing the darkness I’ve held so tightly inside ever since Pops and my brothers were killed to leach into my expression.

I see the moment Gia recognizes it. Fear flashes across her face, and a deep sense of satisfaction settles inside me.

“But I won’t be waiting until after you finish your schooling.” I inhale her scent, allowing it to shoot straight down to my cock. As I harden against her, I push in again and whisper my dark promise.

“No. Long before that happens, you will be on your knees, begging me to take you again.”

I give her wrists a final squeeze and with a tiny shove, I push her back into the glass door. And then I turn, drop my towel to the bathroom floor, and stride out into the bedroom, leaving her panting behind me.

I move into my walk-in closet and pull on my clothes, already mapping out a plan to seduce my wife.

Again.

Any suspicion that she might have known about her father's plan to set El Toro on us dissolved when she made it clear she knew nothing about the bet.

Whatever she might believe she's been doing, that betrayal stung her to her core.

And somehow, I find myself more resolved than ever to protect her.

Not only from El Toro's men, but from her own father, as well.

After all, he's already proven that he'll sell her off without any qualms at all.

And Gia doesn't even know the whole story—that Edoardo sold her off not only to me, but to practically the whole Vegas mob.

She's right; he didn't deserve to have that much power over her.

Maybe I didn't, either. But I've finally realized that I am absolutely determined to keep Gia for myself.

I will never let her go.

She is mine.

Now and forever.

CHAPTER 19



GIA

I swallow hard as Lorenzo drops his towel and stalks out of the bathroom.

How can I be so damned attracted to a man who just threatened me?

But every part of my body tingles, straining to follow him, and I have to force myself to remain perfectly still as I hear him get dressed and leave the suite.

As soon as he's gone, I race to the window and watch until I see his car pull out of the garage and take off.

Then I slip downstairs and head to the garage myself, being careful not to let anyone see me. I lift a set of keys on my way out of the house and waste several precious moments figuring out which car they belong to.

One of Max's sports cars.

There will be a record of me leaving, of course—the Beneventis recently increased their security—but no one tries to stop me.

The Beneventis may never forgive me for any of this.

But I have to talk to Pop, see if I can force him to tell me his real plan.

Because suddenly, I'm certain that he never means to give me my freedom, no matter how effectively I'm able to ruin the Beneventis.

I'm too useful to the Rossis as a pawn.

And I may never forgive my father for that betrayal.

WHEN I ARRIVE AT MY FATHER'S HOME—MY HOME FOR MOST of my life—Lorenzo's car is already in the circular drive out

front.

That confuses me. I'm pissed off at Pop, for sure, but what would Lorenzo have to discuss with him? After all, my husband already knows that he and my father colluded to marry me off to him.

So instead of announcing myself in any way, I use the key I still have to the house and slip inside.

Again, I'm certain the security system will pick me up on the cameras, but there's no reason for anyone to alert my father that I'm here. I've come and gone as I please for years.

The housekeeper catches a glimpse of me as I make my way toward Pop's office, but I wave her off, keeping my expression pleasant. She smiles and goes about her work.

I glide down the marble-floored hallway, glad that I'm wearing flats instead of heels today, so their tapping doesn't give me away.

I make my way to Pop's office door, which is standing slightly ajar, and pause next to it, listening.

I hear the deep rumble of masculine voices coming from inside and recognize that Lorenzo is speaking. But I can't make out the words, so I step in even closer. By the time I can understand what they're saying, Lorenzo has fallen silent, and Pop is talking.

"I don't see how that's any concern of yours, boy," Pop says in the tone he's always reserved for underlings when he's annoyed with them.

"Not my concern?" Lorenzo replies, and his voice is ice-cold. "You have promised my wife to families all over Las Vegas. I'd say that makes it my concern."

Wait. What? What does he mean by 'promised' me?

What has Pop done?

I can't see either of the men speaking, but I can picture Poppa waving his cigar in front of him in a dismissive gesture as he says, "None of those promises came with contracts. And

you're the one who's married to her, so why are you complaining?"

I bite back a gasp.

My mind is reeling as I put together the pieces—something Lorenzo has clearly already done.

My father has been using me as even more of a pawn than I ever realized.

How many of the deals he's made over the last several years have been finalized by promising me to various Mafia families?

But if he really did promise me as collateral, then why did he have me go through with the wedding to Lorenzo?

Something bangs in the office, and I jump, only barely managing to suppress a surprised squeak. Unable to resist my curiosity, I creep even closer to the door, putting my eyes to the tiny crack of the opening.

Pop is sitting at his wide oak desk, leaning back in his big leather chair—the one I used to love to crawl into as a child because it smelled like him, like cigar smoke and leather. Like safety.

A safety that, it turns out, was always a lie.

And I was right, he is holding a cigar, almost certainly gesturing with it as he speaks.

Lorenzo stands with his back to me, his palms flat on the desk as he leans over it. I can imagine him slamming his hands down onto the flat surface. That was probably the sound I heard.

"But you also promised her to El Toro, didn't you?" Lorenzo's voice goes soft and dangerous, and a shiver runs down my spine. Pop may not find my husband threatening, but I've seen a darkness in his eyes that my father apparently hasn't noticed.

Pop confirms my theory when he laughs, setting his cigar down in the ashtray in front of him and interlacing his fingers across his stomach. "And if I have?"

That bastard. My teeth clench, and my hands fist at my sides.

The Colombian cartel is dangerous, vicious. If they think Pop has double-crossed them, they won't hesitate to wipe out not only him, but our entire family, too.

"But they won't come after you, will they?" Lorenzo asks in that same cold, toneless voice.

They won't? Why not?

Pop answers my questions as readily as if I had been in the room to ask them myself. "As far as the Colombians are concerned, Gia arranged the match herself, following through when she heard about the bet I'd made with you. They think she chose the Beneventis over Los Kappas." He picks up his cigar and takes several puffs, leaning back and blowing smoke rings up into the air.

I stand frozen outside the door, horror at what my father has done racing through my body.

All this time, I truly believed Pop was grooming me to take over the Rossi empire.

Instead, he was setting me up to cover his ass, using the promise that he would hand me over to some other family—many other families, it seems—to seal whatever deal he was trying to complete at that moment.

He hadn't been lying when he told me he didn't intend for my marriage to Lorenzo to last.

He just failed to explain that he was using me to set up the remaining Beneventi brothers to be executed by the Los Kappas cartel.

My heart breaks in that moment, shattering into a million pieces as I realize that the one man I thought I could trust turned out to be the most duplicitous of them all.

And in the next instant, my heart heals just a little as Lorenzo stands up straight, pushing back from the desk, and says, "Gia is far too good for you. I will deal with El Toro and his people. And once I do, my wife will be allowed to decide what she wants to do with the rest of her life."

My father starts to say something, but Lorenzo interrupts him. “No. You will never again have any say in any part of Gia’s life.”

That seems like as good a cue as I am likely to get, a perfect line on which to make a grand entrance.

But before I can push open the door, someone grabs me from behind, snaking one arm around my waist and clamping the other over my mouth.

I’m hauled up against a hard body, and a rough voice says in accented English, “Come with me quietly, and I will not kill your husband or your father.”

I struggle against his grip, but his hold is like iron as he lifts me off my feet and begins backing away from the door.

No one knows where I am. No one knew where I was going when I left Lorenzo’s home. There’s no telling how long it will take for anyone to realize I’m gone—and even more time will pass before they think to check the cameras at my father’s house.

Suddenly, I realize that Lorenzo is the only man I trust to save me.

I begin struggling in earnest, but the Colombian holding me simply continues inching away from the door.

Finally, in a last effort to draw Lorenzo’s attention, I draw my knees to my chest and kick my feet straight out.

I hit the door of Pop’s study, and it flies open, landing with a crash against the far wall.

In the same instant, Lorenzo spins around to face the door and Pop stands up from behind the desk.

The man holding me freezes for the barest second, then says, “You shouldn’t have done that, *puta*.”

He drops his hand from my mouth, and the next thing I know, he’s holding a gun, pointing it into the room at Lorenzo and my father.

CHAPTER 20



LORENZO

It takes a moment for my mind to interpret what my eyes are seeing—but then I realize that Gia has kicked open the door to Edoardo’s office and the man holding her is holding a gun on us.

But when he speaks a single word in Spanish, the whole scene resolves itself in an instant.

“Pare!”

El Toro has sent him to take Gia to Colombia with him.

I don’t know what they’re doing here, but it doesn’t matter.

My hand twitches toward the Glock 9mm I tucked in my waistband before I made my way into Edoardo’s home.

Edoardo moves toward his center desk drawer at the same moment, but the Colombian catches sight of what we’re doing and begins waving the gun between us wildly. “Stop,” he says in heavily accented English. “Take out your guns slowly, put them on the floor, and kick them to me.”

There is no way in hell I’m going to allow him to get away with her. But first I have to get her away from him, and that means buying time. So I hold up my hands as if I’m following his orders.

Edoardo and I each pull our guns out of their respective hiding spots, holding them barrel-down, dangling them by the grips.

The Colombian hitman gestures with the gun. “Come out from behind your desk, Señor Rossi.”

Edoardo steps up beside me, and we both kneel to place our guns on the floor. Then we push them with our toes, sending them spinning across the floor.

Gia’s gaze flickers down to the one closest to her, and I can see the wheels turning in her head.

But her captor isn’t letting go of her.

Beside me, Edoardo tenses and then relaxes, and from the corner of my eye, I see him flicking his fingers dismissively. “Take her,” he says to the Colombian hitman holding Gia. “And give her to your boss with my compliments.”

An expression of pure misery flits across Gia’s face, but then her features harden, and she looks away from her father as if dismissing him entirely.

If we get out of here, I swear to myself, if we escape with our lives intact, I will make sure this woman never again feels unwanted or unloved.

“Oh,” the Colombian said, “but my boss, he wants to know why you married her to his enemy.”

Edoardo’s chuckle rings a bit hollow. I suspect having a gun pointed at him is not his favorite position to be in. Still, he answers calmly enough. “My plan was to take over the Beneventi empire, what’s left of it, anyway, and pass it to El Toro along with my daughter. If your boss hadn’t been so impatient, I would’ve managed it, too.”

“You son of a—” Gia begins cursing and struggling in her captor’s arms as if she wants to attack her father. I don’t blame her—he deserves that and worse. Her impressive command of both English and Italian curses would bring a smile to my face if not for the dire situation we’ve found ourselves in.

And yet, something about her performance rings hollow, as well.

Because it’s exactly that, I realize—a performance.

The whole time she’s cursing and fighting, she’s also staring intently into my eyes as if willing me to understand something.

I narrow my eyes just the tiniest fraction, but it’s enough to let her know I’m paying attention. As soon as she’s sure I’m watching, she flicks her eyes to the bookcase on her right, my left.

I wait until the Colombian’s attention is on Edoardo, then glance at the bookshelf myself.

It's mostly filled with books and a few art objects. What does she want me to see?

When I glance back at her, she pauses as if to draw breath and mouths the word *box*. Then she dives back into her cursing streak again.

"Shut up, woman," the Colombian says, and he shakes her.

While he's distracted, I glance at the bookshelf again, and this time I see it. A small wooden box nestled in among the books at just about eye level.

I look back at Gia and give a tiny nod, disguising the movement by shifting my weight from one foot to another.

Then Gia mouths the word *gun* at me.

We'll have to move quickly, and in almost perfect coordination.

Any of my brothers and I could manage it. We spent our entire lives training together, learning to work together to overcome any captors who might attempt to kidnap us when we were young, then training to work as a team when we got older.

I can hear my father's voice echoing in my memory. "You never know when a situation is going to turn against you. You have to be ready to work together."

I have no idea if Gia's had any training at all, or if she's always been a stereotypical Mafia Princess, pampered and protected from the uglier side of our lives and businesses.

The fact that she knows where her father keeps his guns is a good sign, but I still don't have the details I need.

I inhale, considering all my options.

I could let the Colombian take Gia to El Toro, and that would save my ass.

But it would break my heart in the process.

It really isn't an option at all.

If I'm able to overcome El Toro's man, it will leave Edoardo with a hell of a mess. Whatever promises he made to El Toro

will be broken, and the leader of the Los Kappas cartel will be out for Edoardo's blood.

That might break Gia's heart.

But it will save her life, and right now, that's all I care about.

Having come to my decision, I give Gia another tiny nod.

But this time, her captor sees it.

"What are you saying to her?" he demands, his gun swiveling to point directly at me.

That's when Gia makes her move.

El Toro's man has made the mistake of thinking that because she's small, Gia will be easy to control. But my wife is muscular and strong. And she uses that strength against him, leaning forward a few inches, then slamming her entire body into his, her back connecting with his chest and stomach with a resounding thump. It breaks his hold on her just long enough for her to throw herself down to the ground, where she grabs the gun.

As soon as she moves, I dive across the room, swiping the box off the shelf and ducking down behind a nearby leather chair. I fumble the gun out of the case, praying it's already loaded, and rise from behind the chair, using it as cover.

Gia is still on the floor, but she's wrapped her legs around the Colombian's, keeping him from moving more than a step or two, and she has my Glock pointed directly at his crotch. He, in turn, has taken aim at her, as well.

Edoardo is cowering behind his desk.

"Drop the gun, or I shoot your bride," the Colombian says.

"Let her go, or I'll shoot you," I counter.

Gia doesn't bother to say anything at all.

She simply fires.

The gunshot echoes through the room, mingling with the Colombian's scream—but that's cut short as I take aim and fire, as well, dropping him with a bullet to the head.

Gia scrambles to her feet, looking down at her blood-soaked clothes with a grimace. She stalks over to her father's desk, sets the gun down on top of it, and leans over to speak to him where he still hunkers next to the chair. "I'm going to go take a shower," she announces. "And then I'm going to leave this house, and I don't ever want to see you again." She straightens her shoulders and turns to face me. "If you're interested," she says to me, her voice calm and sure, "I would like to start over. Just us. No contract, no agreements, no payments. Just the two of us. Together."

I step toward her, ready to take her into my arms, but she holds up her hands in a warding motion and moves away from me. "Just a yes or no right now. We can seal the whole thing with a kiss after I get cleaned up."

"There's nothing I would like more," I tell her, grinning widely.

I gesture around the study with the gun, pointing at the dead body still oozing blood on the floor. "This is your mess to clean up, Edoardo."

He frowns and turns to Gia.

But my wife shakes her head before he has a chance to speak. "No. You are never again going to use me, Pop. I'm done being your pawn. And I'm done with you."

I watch her leave the room, stepping lightly around the Colombian's lifeless body as she goes. Then I turn to face Edoardo, who finally stands up.

"You should know," I say conversationally, "that I'm going to make sure El Toro finds out exactly what happened here. And all the rest of the connected families in Vegas and beyond, as well. They'll all know you made promises you can't keep. You're finished. And I don't really expect you to live all that much longer." I pause, considering my next words. "I'm also going to let it be known that Gia's mother and sisters are under Beneventi protection. Feel free to send them to our house—we'll take care of them. But Gia's right. You are not welcome."

I pick up my Glock from the desk and tuck it back into my waistband, and I take the gun I used to shoot the Colombian with me, as well.

And then I go to the foyer to wait for my bride.

It's time for us to go home and start our new lives together.

And somehow, after tonight, I suspect that she'll be instrumental in helping me enact my revenge on El Toro and Los Kappas.

I cannot wait to get to know my wife.

Intimately.

CHAPTER 21



GIA

We slam into each other before we are even all the way inside our part of the Beneventi mansion, our mouths and hands desperate for one another as we stumble into our suite.

Lorenzo reaches around me to shut the door, and then pushes me up against it. His hot lips sear my mouth as his tongue flicks into mine, seeking out the most sensitive spots so that I shiver against him.

Slipping his hands down my back, he reaches the top of my thighs and lifts me up, sliding my back up the door at the same time that he kisses down my neck and in between my breasts. I wrap my legs around him, the Dolce & Gabbana jeans I wear a barrier between us, but no obstacle for me to feel the hot thickness of him pressed against me. I whimper, pulling my legs tighter around him and crossing them behind his waist.

“Too many clothes,” he mutters.

“God, yes,” I agree.

With a single boost, he stands us up from against the door and begins walking me back to the bedroom. I dip my head to capture his mouth with mine and whisper against his lips, “The bedroom’s too far away,” before pressing against him, allowing the liquid heat of his mouth to melt me.

Lorenzo stops at his desk, moving around it to set me down. He pulls away from our deepening kiss long enough to say, “Here?”

“Please,” I whisper.

He lifts me up long enough to slide the pants down, capturing my panties as he goes. The wood of the desk is cold against my ass, but I lose all sense of that as Lorenzo hooks his executive-style desk chair with his ankle and pulls it up behind him.

He sits down in front of me, his hands pressing my inner thighs farther and farther apart as he slides his shoulders under my legs and pulls me toward him, his hands hot on my hips.

I whimper as I think of how amazing his tongue felt on me in the country-club bathroom.

This time, though, I want to watch him bring me to ecstasy.

I lean back on my elbows and stare at him over the swell of my breasts as he dips his dark head downward. I force myself to remain absolutely still, despite how much I want to rise up to meet his mouth.

Instead, I wait, listening to the sound of our harsh breathing and my racing pulse.

He inches closer and closer until I can feel the heat of his breath blowing against my clit.

Then, so softly I would barely feel it if he were touching any other part of my body, he flicks his tongue against me.

I moan and let my head fall back, my hair streaming down toward the desk. "Please," I whisper again.

"Please what?" I can hear the teasing in the deep throatiness of his voice.

When I don't respond, he repeats, "Please what?"

"Please touch me." The words are barely spoken aloud, but he responds instantly, moving down even further so that his lips brush against me every time he speaks. "You mean like this?"

I shudder at the sensation, and he runs his thumbs along the creases where my thighs meet my hips, down into the insides of my upper thighs, using the motion to push me open even wider.

"More," I say, tilting my pelvis up enough to hold my clit against his lips, and the touch of his widening smile sends sparks spiraling through me.

"You mean like this?" With that, he buries his face between my legs, running his tongue in circles around my clit, stopping only long enough to pull it into his mouth and suck, playing

with my clit, sending aching need flowing into my core, building higher and higher.

As I tremble in reaction, my elbows give out, and I drop backward until I'm lying flat across the desk, my knees bent and my feet resting on his back. I grasp the edge of the desk, using it to pull myself even closer to him as he slides one hand under my ass to hold me against his mouth.

He slips his tongue back and forth, faster and faster, using his other hand to slide first one finger inside me, and then another, matching the tempo of his tongue so perfectly that I can hardly tell which is sending more heated, throbbing, whirlwind sensations through me.

I buck and moan, a hot glow beginning somewhere near my deep center, a golden ember burning with need. It curls around the sparks he's sending through me and circles lower and lower, building on itself as it moves through me—until it meets the point where the sensations from Lorenzo's tongue and his hands ignite a fire.

The flame expands, the fire whirls, until they're indistinguishable, the part of me that responds to him physically and the part that responds emotionally.

All I know was that they're building high and higher until I shatter in his arms, curling my fingers into his hair and grasping his head in my hands as I scream his name aloud

When the firestorm recedes a little, I collapse against the desk, breathless and shaking.

“Wow,” I manage to say.

Lorenzo stands up and pushes the chair away again. I sit up and twine my arms around his neck, kissing him and tasting myself on his lips.

“Your turn,” I whisper.

“I have a better idea,” he says, picking me up and setting me on my feet, sliding me down him so I can feel the hard length of him rubbing against me.

“Oh, God, yes,” I say as he turns me around to face the desk, wraps his arms around my waist, and pulls me up tight against him long enough to feel, through his pants, his cock nestled against my ass.

Loosening his hold slightly, he holds me there lightly with one arm as, with the other hand, he unbuttons his pants, shoves them down to the ground, and steps out of them. I shudder in anticipation as the entire length of him presses against me, searing into my bare skin.

Careful to hold me lightly enough so I know I can get away if I want to, but tightly enough to remind me of his strength, Lorenzo uses one foot to kick my legs apart a little, as if he were about to cuff me, take me prisoner.

Then he uses the other hand—the one not grasping my hips—to push me down, placing his palm in the center of my upper back so it arches a little as I bend over.

I whimper again, shivering as he holds me both against him and down on the desk. I tilt my ass up in the air a little higher, arching my back even more, until Lorenzo slides his cock along my slick opening.

“Tell me you belong to me,” he commands.

I whimper in response, and he slaps my ass. “Tell me you’re mine,” he rasps.

“I’m yours.” The words come out shaky and quiet.

“Again,” Lorenzo orders. “Louder.”

“I’m yours,” I say, my voice stronger. “I belong to you, Lorenzo.”

He pushes against me a little harder, and I’m so wet that he slides entirely inside me easily, filling me up so completely that I have no choice but to push back against him, aching for even more. He pauses for a moment, and his cock throbs inside me.

I want to rock back and forth against him until he explodes inside me, even as I also want to make sure he never comes so that he’ll never leave.

When he finally pulls out, he withdraws almost completely, leaving only the tip still in place, until I shake and beg him not to go.

“Tell me again.”

I know exactly what he means.

“Please, Lorenzo. I’m yours. All yours. Now and forever.” At my words, he plunges into me even harder than before, until he’s slamming himself into me thrust after thrust and I push back every bit as hard to meet him, crying out that I belong to him.

At the last minute, he slides one hand around me, dropping it from my stomach to my clit, pressing the heel of his hand into my abdomen as his fingers dance over me and he grinds his hips against my ass.

He pulses inside me as he comes, and I follow him over the edge into ecstasy, pressing my mouth against the desk as my orgasm lifts me off the floor and up onto my toes.

AFTER WE’VE CAUGHT OUR BREATH, LORENZO PICKS ME UP and carries me to our bedroom, where he puts me on my feet next to the bed.

I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him down to me. The heat of his lips slanting across mine sends chills racing down my spine, and my shiver seems to move through me and into Lorenzo.

Sliding his palm down my back and settling it in the small indentation just above my ass, he pulls me closer to him, molding my body to his until I can’t tell where I end and Lorenzo begins.

The realization that he wants this every bit as much as I do lights me from within, and I meet his heat with a fire of my own, pressing hard against him and pushing his lips open with my tongue, deepening our kiss.

With a groan, Lorenzo skims his mouth down the side of my neck, dropping tiny kisses along the way until he reaches the hollow just below my collarbone. When he licks that spot, I whimper. Then he's pulling off my shirt and casting it aside and tugging at my bra with one hand. He draws me tight against him with the other hand against my back and sucks my breast into his mouth, running his tongue over my pebbled nipple.

Streaks of heat spark from my nipple straight down to pool in my abdomen, where it throbs in time to my heart, every beat a pulse of sheer desire.

"Please," I whisper, not even sure why I say it—but the single word seems to act as a spur for Lorenzo, who pushes off my pants and sweeps me up with both hands under my ass, lifting me from the floor.

He moves his mouth back to mine for another deep, tongue-tangling kiss.

Instinctively, I wrap my legs around his waist, crossing them at the ankle behind him, and tighten my arms around his neck.

I feel him hard against me, our underwear between us an irritant. With tiny, inarticulate noises, I wiggle a little, as if I can dislodge the fabric between us by motion alone.

I gasp when Lorenzo tugs my panties out of the way. Then I moan as he guides the tip of his cock to my slick entrance, and I wiggle as he barely pushes upward and then slides back out without fully settling me onto him.

"Hang on," he whispers, then thrusts upwards at the same moment he loosens his grip enough to let me drop down onto him.

The sudden sensations as I stretch to take him in completely make my eyelids flutter closed.

All I can do is repeat "yes," over and over, even as I tighten and loosen my thighs to meet him, thrust for thrust, as he pumps into me.

Fucking as soon as we walked in the door wasn't exactly what I had planned.

Then he's inside me again, and there's no more room for thought.

I pulse around him, pulling him into the deepest, hottest part of me.

Lorenzo shifts his hands to grip my ass tightly, pulling me closer as he drives into me. I whimper, and he moves his hands again, this time making sure he can still hold me with one hand while he slides the other between us.

For an instant, I wish I'd had the foresight to take off my underwear before he picked me up. But I discover quickly enough that he can fit his hand down the front of them.

Lightly, he drags his knuckles downward until he brushes them against my clit. My sharp inhale and the tightening of my pussy around his cock make him swell even more, and he circles my clit with his thumb as he moves inside me.

My own rhythmic motions grow faster. Throwing my head back makes it more difficult for Lorenzo to hold me in place, but I don't think he could've stopped me.

Then I lean my forehead against his and stare into his eyes, my breath hard and fast and mingling with his own.

It's all I can do to keep from coming right then.

Yes. I belong to this man.

Now.

Always.

I close my eyes, my breath ragged and my movements wild as I grind my clit against his hand and pull myself down onto him until he's deeper inside me than anyone has ever been.

I can feel the way he grows harder and harder, the pressure building as he moves closer to exploding into me, and still he tries to move even closer to me, further into me, as if he could reach the very core of me.

I come with a cry, shudders wracking my body as I cling to him, tightening around his cocks in waves that seem to match the beat of my heart.

Of his heart.

And then he's pouring himself into me, every pulse of his own orgasm a hot reminder of how much he needs me.

The way he swells inside me, the heated feel of him, triggers something inside me—a second orgasm, or possibly a continuation of my first.

In any case, that white-hot passion wipes out everything else from my consciousness, leaving me draped helplessly, almost bonelessly, around Lorenzo. He manages to keep us upright, but his legs are shaking.

If I had been in charge of keeping us upright, I wasn't sure I would have done as well.

The thought makes me giggle against the crook of his neck, and I drop a kiss against the hollow there.

“What?” Lorenzo asks, his voice more than a touch breathless.

“You can put me down now, I think.”

At that, he laughs, as well. “I can try. But don't be surprised if I drop us both to the floor.”

“Maybe we should move to the bed.”

So we do.

EPILOGUE



PENELOPE DIAZ

“**H**ola, Papi!” Marco shouts, his chubby little legs pumping furiously as he runs into my father’s house. “*Donde esta, Papi?*”

“Don’t yell, Marco,” I tell him. “And remember, we’re speaking English right now.”

“Yes, Mami,” Marco says, lowering his voice momentarily before he takes off running through the house again, calling for his grandfather at the top of his lungs.

I laugh and shake my head as he races up the staircase.

My father steps out of his upstairs meeting room, catching Marco under the arms and swinging him around before settling his grandson on his hip. They lean over the railing on the landing and wave to me.

Then Papi sets Marco on his feet and pats his diapered bottom. “Mariana has fresh *arepas* in the kitchen, I believe,” he tells Marco. “You should go get some.”

Marco bounds back down the stairs and takes off toward the kitchen. My father follows him more slowly down the staircase.

“What are you doing up there?” I ask.

He gives a wave of his hand. “Preparing for a meeting with El Toro.”

I work to keep my face expressionless, but he knows how I feel about his boss, Mauricio Velazquez, the leader of the Los Kappas cartel.

He was Uncle Mauricio when I was growing up, but since I’ve been old enough to know exactly what El Toro does—and what my father does for him—I’ve rarely bothered to hide my opinion of the other man from my father.

Under other circumstances, my father could’ve been a kind, gentle man.

He still is most of the time, especially with me and Marco.

But I know that he kills people for El Toro. So the best I can do is keep my opinion of Mauricio to myself.

Papi slings an arm around my shoulder. “They’ll be here any minute. If you want to avoid seeing El Toro, you should probably join Mariana and Marco in the kitchen.”

“*Gracias.*” I flash a smile at him. He drops a kiss on the top of my head, and I make my way into the kitchen to wait out the arrival of the cartel leader and his lieutenants.

In the kitchen, I join my father’s housekeeper as she prepares empanadas for dinner.

Since my own mother died a decade ago, Mariana has stepped into that role as much as a servant could, so I’m glad to have the time to spend with her, catching up on the local gossip.

I wait until I hear all the men arrive and head up to the conference room Papi has ready for them, and then I go to Marco’s room to put him down for his nap.

I stare down at my beautiful angel as his eyes begin to drift closed, glad that he and Papi have such a wonderful relationship now.

I wasn’t always sure that would be the case—especially right before he was born, when I refused to tell my father where to find Marco’s father.

The truth is, I hadn’t known.

I still don’t.

I’d been in Bogotá at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia studying English when I met and fell in love with an amazing American man.

Freddie Goodman.

Truth be told, Freddie was the reason I now insisted on teaching Marco English. Someday, I hope that Marco will have the opportunity to meet his father.

Assuming Freddie is even still alive.

I run my finger down Marco's cheek. He looks so much like his father.

Quietly, I tiptoe out of the room, making my way to my own bedroom, the one Papi keeps for me here, even though Marco and I have our own apartment.

I've just stretched out on my bed for my own siesta when I hear Marco's door creak open. I expect him to come into my room and crawl into bed with me as he often does, but instead, I hear the sound of his feet slapping against the stairs as he runs up them again.

I curse under my breath and get up to follow him.

"Marco," I hiss. My son turns around and flashes an impish grin in my direction, then turns and bolts up the stairs.

I chase after him, catching up with him just as he throws open the double doors to the conference room.

I bend over and scoop Marco up in my arms, already apologizing as I stand up straight.

"I'm so sorry—" My voice trails off, and I stare open-mouthed at the images on the screen at the far end of the conference table.

El Toro says hello to me, but I can't even think enough to answer.

I try to take in what I'm seeing, try to make it fit anything I know.

There's a name at the top of the screen.

Beneventi.

Under that is a row of three pictures, then a second row with two more pictures. The ones on the top are all marked through with bright red Xs.

They have names, plus birth and death dates.

And the third one is labeled Frederico.

But that's not the name I used for him.

The death date has to be wrong, too.

Because his death date is almost eighteen months before Marco was conceived.

The man listed as Frederico Beneventi is Marco's father.

And at least eighteen months after El Toro's men believe they killed him, Frederico Beneventi was very much alive.

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ABOUT RED-BLOODED ASSASSIN

Frederico Beneventi

I died four years ago.

At least, that's what the world believes.

I was supposed to be in the car with my father and brother when the bomb set by the Colombian drug cartel Los Kappas went off.

But I wasn't there.

I was following the bombed car.

And as soon as I realized what had happened, I knew what I would have to do—go underground until I could take out Mauricio Velazquez, aka El Toro, the leader of Los Kappas.

But I never expected to fall in love while I was plotting my revenge.

Certainly not with the daughter of El Toro's main hitman.

But in the end, my revenge was more important, so I walked away from her.

Now my plan is ready to put into action.

If only I could stop thinking about how it might hurt her.

Penelope Diaz

It's been three years since my whirlwind affair with the mysterious American man who came into my life like a hurricane and left just as suddenly.

And a little more than two years since I had his son.

My father is still furious at me for refusing to tell him who little Marco's father is—but I can't tell Papi what I don't know.

Because no matter how hard I searched, I never could find Freddie Goodman again.

Now Papi's boss, El Toro, is planning to go to war with the Italian-American Mafia. When I accidentally walk in on a

meeting and see images of the Beneventi family, I realize I have information no one else in the Kappas Cartel knows.

Frederico Beneventi is alive.

And he's the father of my child.

So now I have questions to answer, decisions to make.

Do I tell my father what I know?

Or do I try to save the man I love by warning Frederico?

And how can I protect my child from the dangerous world we live in?

“Red-Blooded Assassin” is the third book in the King of Clubs series. It is a stand-alone Dark Mafia Secret Baby Romance, complete with HEA and no cliffhangers.

Please note: this book is a dark Mafia romance that contains mature content, graphic violence and may contain triggers. If such materials offend you, please do not read.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

USA Today, *Wall Street Journal*, and *New York Times* bestselling author **Margo Bond Collins** is a former college English professor who, tired of explaining the difference between “hanged” and “hung,” turned to writing romance novels instead. Sometimes her heroines kill monsters, sometimes they kiss aliens. But they always aim for the heart.

Want to hang out with the author, win book prizes, see the cool covers first, and support Margo’s books on social media? Join [The Vampirarchy](#), Margo’s street team on Facebook!

London Kingsley writes steamy contemporary romance with a dark twist. She is the co-author of the King of Clubs series.