



in
THEIR
hearts

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
JULIA SYKES

IN THEIR HEARTS

THEIR CAPTIVE BRIDE #3

JULIA SYKES

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CHAPTER I

NORA

Pain tore at my scalp, yanking me back to consciousness. A scream ripped from my throat as the Russian dragged me to my feet by my hair.

“Don’t touch her!” Dante’s furious bellow shuddered through me, but his deep voice didn’t echo off the warehouse walls.

My captor pawed at my chest, and revulsion twisted my stomach. I blinked hard, willing myself back to awareness.

“I’ll touch your wife as much as I want.” My attacker’s laugh oozed over my skin, his breath hot on my neck.

He pinned me against his front, one brawny arm an iron band around my waist. I twisted in his grip, struggling to get to Dante, the terrifying monster who would do anything to save me. He’d taken a bullet for me. He would tear through the Russians to get to me.

“Dante!” I cried out for him, desperate.

But even as I screamed his name, reality coalesced around me. A leering, hulking man held a phone directed at my face.

Dante’s voice emanated from the speaker, little more than a savage growl. “Tell me where you are.”

“You want her back?” my captor taunted. His meaty hand fisted in my blouse, tearing at the delicate material. The buttons popped against the cement floor like gunshots, rending the air from my lungs. “Come and get her.”

I screamed for Dante again, but he didn't respond. The leering Russian pocketed the phone, cutting off the connection to my monstrous husband: my dark savior.

A sob wracked my chest as all my oldest, deepest fears solidified around me. The Russians had me. Just like they'd captured my mother. They'd tortured her before they killed her. All to send a message to my father.

My father, who'd sold me to the Bratva. I was bait, a trap for Dante so that the Russians would do Giuseppe's dirty work and eliminate my sadistic husband for him.

And they would make sure I suffered for their amusement until he came for me. Until they lured him into this warehouse and murdered him. They wouldn't have set this up if they didn't have the numbers to ensure his death.

Would he come for me at all?

My blood ran cold.

No, he wouldn't come. Dante was the Devil, not my savior. He wouldn't risk his life for me if he didn't have the upper hand. He was too calculating to walk into a trap.

And my real husband, the man I loved, was locked in a cage, unable to get to me. Did Luca even know that I'd been taken?

Regret honed my fear until it was sharp enough to cut, shredding my insides. I'd never confessed my feelings for him. I'd abandoned him in that hell, and all I'd gained was my own torment, a fate far worse than being the object of Dante's dark obsession.

The tip of the Russian's knife scraped my collarbone, and I choked on a scream.

It didn't truly hurt. Not yet.

But terror clogged my throat, fear suffusing my mind like a suffocating fog.

The cold steel slipped beneath the heart shaped padlock that secured the matching rose gold chain around my throat.

The glint in my tormentor's black eyes told me that he recognized the trinket for what it was: a symbol that I belonged to Dante. His initial was engraved into the gold, marking me as his possession.

"This is mine," the leering man told his friends, hooking the blade beneath the padlock and yanking hard.

I shrieked as the chain bit into my skin, but it was too thick to snap.

The man stepped away, his sick smile never slipping. I didn't have time to draw in a heaving breath before he returned, pressing into my personal space as though my autonomy meant nothing to him; I wasn't a person at all. I was a pawn, a thing to be used and then discarded.

"Please..." I managed to choke out as he hefted the bolt cutters. They were grimy with dried blood: a well-used torture implement.

The sharp tips grazed my throat, but he didn't cut deep when he clipped the padlock so that it fell into his waiting hand. The chain slid from my neck, the gold glistening with my blood as it snaked around his thick fingers.

Masculine heat crushed me as they closed in, making me feverish and dizzy. I didn't know how many of them threatened me; I couldn't claw my way through the terror that blanketed my mind to count the hands that touched me.

Dante's name reverberated through the warehouse, the sound of my blind panic mingling with cruel laughter.

Pain overwhelmed me, crushing the last flicker of my hope for rescue.

The Devil wasn't coming for me. Luca wasn't coming for me.

I would suffer and die here, alone and abused.

I sank into agony, falling out of time and losing track of my surroundings. For a few seconds, merciful darkness closed over me, but fresh pain continually yanked me back to

consciousness. The torment went on and on, until my screams died and the fire of my defiant will was extinguished.

A feral roar thundered through the sick laughter that surrounded me, and the suffocating weight of the Russians was suddenly lifted away. I gasped for air, and oxygen flooded my lungs. The sudden shock of awareness was cruelly sharp, magnifying the pain that'd become dulled by disassociation.

I lifted my face from the pool of warm blood beneath my cheek, the world reeling at the smallest movement of my abused body.

Gunshots rang out in a deafening barrage. My tormentors fell around me, some screaming, others deadly silent. Guttural groans were cut off with savage swipes of wickedly sharp blades.

Shockingly green eyes filled my world, and Dante rasped my name as he reached for me.

The firefight continued to rage around us, but the ringing in my ears muffled the deafening booms that echoed through the warehouse.

Dante's calloused fingertips caressed my bloody cheek—the barest brush of his hand—before he was ripped away from me.

I cried out at the loss, terror flooding my dulled senses.

The Russians would kill him. My savior would die, and then I would be murdered too.

The world wavered at the edges as I took in the horrific scene, unable to look away from the carnage.

But it wasn't the Russians who had Dante in their murderous grip; Luca grappled with him, a silvery blade flashing between them. Dante twisted to the side, releasing a roar of rage and pain when the knife sank into his shoulder. He shoved Luca off him, and the hilt slipped from my husband's hand, the blade lodged deep in Dante's flesh.

Dante's lips stretched in an animal snarl, and he wrenched the knife free and tackled Luca. His blood glistened on the

steel as it arced toward the man I loved.

“No!” I screamed, horror crashing through my haze of agony. “Dante, don’t!”

The blade halted at Luca’s throat, a crimson line beading beneath the sharp edge. My husband went utterly still, and Dante growled in his rage-reddened face.

“Stop!” I cried, struggling to my knees.

Dante’s keen eyes cut to me, piercing my chest. The possessive fury that burned in their depths knocked the air from my lungs, but I managed to plead with him.

“If you care about me at all, don’t hurt him,” I begged.

He lifted the blade, raising it for a killing blow.

My heart hammered against my ribcage with bruising force. I struggled to my feet, desperate to put my body between the Devil and my vulnerable husband.

“I love him!” I shouted.

Dante roared, and the knife slashed toward Luca.

I slipped in the pool of my own blood, and the world spun. Darkness crashed over me.

CHAPTER 2

DANTE

Nora's knees buckled, and she crumpled to the blood-soaked concrete floor. She didn't move.

She didn't try to get to Luca, *the man she loved*.

Jealousy sank sharp black claws into my heart, but the blade in my hand shifted. I slammed the hilt into my enemy's skull, and his eyes rolled back in his head. I'd made sure he couldn't fight me anymore. Not when Nora's life was on the line.

"Fucking bastard," I growled at my unconscious enemy. "Stupid, selfish son of a bitch."

Instead of prioritizing her safety, he'd tried to kill me.

I craved to kill *him*, to end him so that he could never breathe the same air as her again. If I slit his throat now, he'd never be able to tell her the truth that we both knew: he loved her too.

It was why he'd accepted this tenuous, temporary alliance with me against the Russians. It was all to save her. He would sacrifice anything for Nora.

If you care about me at all, don't hurt him. Her plea tormented me, staying my hand when I should've ended Luca's life with one swift slash of my knife.

An animal sound tore from my throat as I shoved away from my enemy and sheathed the blade at my side, rushing to Nora's unnervingly still form. She was unbearably delicate,

her skin too pale against the crimson pool beneath her body: a fragile, broken doll.

Mine. She was *mine*, and the Russians had brutalized her.

And it was all Luca's fault. I still wasn't sure exactly how she'd fallen into the Bratva's hands, but the reckless bastard had let her flee from the safety of my estate.

My stomach twisted. Did she loathe me so much that she felt she had to escape from our home? Had I hurt her so deeply that she truly thought I was a monster, her captor rather than her husband?

I gritted my teeth and shoved the dark thoughts away.

All I'd ever wanted was to protect my wife.

I'd failed.

I carefully gathered her up in my arms, holding her close to my chest. She didn't stir.

"Nora." I rasped her name, taking in her injuries.

She was breathing shallowly, and her face was bloody. I could see dark bruises forming on her soft skin where her clothes had been ripped away. And the slick crimson smear between her thighs...

I howled out my rage, but I kept my hold achingly gentle. I wouldn't do anything that might harm her. Not ever.

Gunfire still popped around us, the battle ongoing. Luca and I had surged in first, desperate to get to Nora. Now, our men had the Russians pinned down, our combined forces more than the Bratva had bargained for.

I scanned the warehouse for survivors in our immediate vicinity, and something gold glinted to my right. Another primal sound ripped from me at the sight of Nora's pendant in the dead man's hand. I snatched it back, the jagged, cut metal biting into my palm. It pained me more keenly than the wound where Luca had driven the knife into my shoulder; that pain was little more than a low buzz at the back of my mind. I was too high on adrenaline to feel it, and my full focus was centered on Nora. I had to get her out.

The need to kill more of the Russian bastards was an itch beneath my skin, but she was more important. I would take my full revenge later, when I could truly savor their screams.

I tried to step over Luca's unmoving body, but my feet stuck to the concrete.

I love him! Nora's desperate declaration grated through my mind.

I couldn't leave the son of a bitch here to die. She would never forgive me. She would never love me.

The realization hit me like a sucker punch. I didn't simply desire my wife's devotion; I wanted her love.

But she'd given her heart to Luca, the weak, useless bastard.

Her heart would break if he died today, and she'd already suffered so much. I wouldn't be responsible for her pain.

I'd already failed her unforgivably.

Half a dozen men burst into the warehouse, breaking past the Russians to help rescue my wife. I recognized one of them who was loyal to Luca. The rest were mine.

"Get Vitale out of here," I ordered my men. "We're going back to my estate. We'll finish the Bratva soon enough."

"I can't let you do that," Luca's man protested, anvil-hard jaw set with determination.

I narrowed my eyes at him. We didn't have time for him to get in my way.

"Kill him."

Without question, one of my men shot him square in the chest.

The obstacle between me and what I wanted was effectively eliminated. Now I just had to get Luca back to my waiting armored SUV before more of his sycophants made it to the warehouse.

My enemy would live. I would do everything in my power to ensure his survival.

For Nora, I would do anything.

CHAPTER 3

LUCA

My head throbbed, and nausea churned my stomach. But the physical discomfort was secondary to the desperate fear that gripped me as soon as I struggled back to consciousness.

“Nora.” I groaned her name and forced my heavy lids to open, searching for her.

The deafening gunfire had died down, and the quiet made my blood run cold. I couldn’t hear her pleas, her screams.

I blinked hard and gasped her name again, pushing myself upright.

A strong hand clamped on my shoulder, shoving me back down. I didn’t hit the concrete floor; I was lying on something soft and strangely comfortable.

“Stop thrashing, you useless bastard. You’ll hurt her.”

I willed the world to solidify around me. Sharp green eyes pierced me, as though Dante could pin me down with the force of his will rather than his restraining hand.

His cutting gaze quickly flicked away, his intense focus centering on Nora. She laid on the bed beside me, pale and utterly still. A man I didn’t recognize leaned over her, carefully cleaning the blood from her face so that he could study her wounds with clinical efficiency.

“What’s happening?” I demanded, capturing her chilled fingers in mine. “Where are the Russians?”

I tried to sit upright again, but Dante forced me back down. Pain jarred my head, and the room swam around me. I willed away the darkness that flickered at the edges of my vision, clinging to consciousness so that I could stay with her.

“I killed as many of them as I could before I got her out, no thanks to you,” Dante growled at me, but his intense attention remained fixed on Nora’s bloody face. “We’re back at my estate. She’s safe now.”

I tore my gaze from her to study my surroundings. My stomach dropped when I recognized the setting: we were in Dante’s bedroom. He’d saved her from the Bratva, but he’d dragged us both back to hell.

“She will never be safe with you,” I seethed. “Let her go.”

His eyes blazed, fixing on me once again. They burned into me, his hatred searing my soul. “You did this,” he hissed. “I don’t know how, but this is your fault. You knew that she’d left the safety of the estate. You let them get to her.” He bared his teeth at me. “I should kill you slowly for that.”

I snarled right back at him. *He* was the one who was meant to be dead. But my blade had missed its mark. A thick bandage was wrapped around his shoulder, already soaked through with blood. But the fucker was still breathing. The injury I’d inflicted didn’t seem to pain him at all; he was too consumed by his rage and loathing to notice the wound.

Or maybe it was his concern for Nora that kept him upright. Despite his contempt for me, his gaze strayed back to her, his sharp features pinching as though her agony was his own.

I focused on her too, addressing the man I surmised was Dante’s private physician. “How is she?” I asked. “What did they do to her?”

“You know what they did!” Dante thundered, but he didn’t make a violent move against me. All his muscles locked up tight, and a vein pulsed at his brow as he glowered at me. “And it’s your fault.”

My stomach sank. “I had to get her away from you.” The excuse was bitter on my tongue. “Her father sent Giana to retrieve her. I wasn’t going to deny her the chance to escape this hell.”

“She doesn’t need to escape from me,” he barked. “She is my wife. And you let her run straight into a Russian ambush. They must’ve grabbed her when she was on the way to her father’s house. For all I know, they might’ve attacked Giuseppe too. I haven’t been able to reach him. I could’ve used his men to kill more of the Russian bastards during the assault.”

My fists flexed. I hoped the Bratva had killed Giuseppe, my oldest, most hated enemy. Although, he deserved to die by my hand after abusing Nora for years. And after how he’d caused my own mother’s death. If the callous bastard had died, I hoped it’d been slow and painful.

Dante’s attention strayed to Nora again. “How is she?” he asked the doctor, voice gravelly with something like fear.

Nora hadn’t so much as stirred during our argument. She’d been bleeding from a head wound. I could see that she was breathing, but that didn’t mean she’d ever wake up.

“She’ll live,” the doctor responded in clipped, clinical tones. “Nothing is broken, but I’ll monitor her head injury for the next few days. She’ll be in a considerable amount of pain for a while, but she’ll heal.”

Dante sagged with relief, leaning against the bedpost for support. He quickly straightened and went to her bedside, carefully taking her small hand in both of his. He held her as if she was made of glass.

I kept my own careful hold on her other hand, my mind sticking on Dante’s accusation.

You know what they did! And it’s your fault.

The Russians had brutalized the woman I loved.

Another memory flashed through my mind: *I love him!*

Nora had declared her love for me while she begged for my miserable life, for Dante to spare me from a killing blow.

Guilt tore at my heart more keenly than any blade. The Russians had raped my wife, and it was my fault. I'd told Nora to flee with her sister. I'd urged her to leave Dante's estate, when I knew that they'd staged an ambush nearby only days earlier. Dante had taken a bullet to save her during that assault, and it'd only been a few miles away from his defensive walls. I'd allowed her to run straight into the Bratva's waiting hands.

I wasn't worthy of her love; I'd never been worthy of her. I'd been selfish and used her for my own ends, and then I'd failed to protect her from Dante's sick games. Now I'd failed her in the worst way. It was unforgiveable.

I released her hand as though her chilled fingers had burned me, unable to bear the tender contact when I knew I didn't deserve to touch her.

She groaned, and her hand twitched toward me. "Luca..." My name was a barely intelligible mumble, and the pain that laced her voice cut at my soul.

"Hold her hand, you selfish fuck," Dante seethed. "I will do anything for my wife, even if that means letting you touch her." His lips twisted as though the words were sour. "The Russians might've broken her, thanks to you, but I'll do whatever it takes to put her back together again. You should be screaming for death right now for what you've done, but I won't kill you because that would hurt her."

My heart sank. It would hurt her because she loved me.

Reluctantly, I wrapped my fingers around hers, squeezing in a small pulse of comfort even though the contact turned my stomach. My unworthiness was poison in my veins, making me sick with the knowledge that I'd failed her in the worst way.

"I still have Gabriele and Lorenzo as my hostages," Dante reminded me sharply. "Don't test me, or they will suffer. Just because you're not in your cell, that doesn't mean you're not

my prisoner. I won't harm you, but I won't hesitate to torture your friends."

My fingers tightened around Nora's as impotent rage pulsed through my self-loathing, a toxic mix of emotions.

"Luca..." Her lashes fluttered, but her eyes didn't quite open.

"I'm here." I choked out the promise. "I'm right here."

"You're safe, Nora," Dante murmured, his full attention fixed on her again.

"Dante?" she whispered, and jealousy punched me. "You came..."

"I will always come for you," he swore. "I will always protect you. The Russians will die for what they did. They will never touch you again."

She jolted at the mention of the Russians, then went limp on a groan as the movement jostled her head injury.

Dante cursed and motioned to the doctor. "Give her something for the pain."

"No!" I barked, fresh fear gripping my heart.

They couldn't give her opioids. For a moment, memories of my mother's broken form lying in her hospital bed assailed me. They'd given her plenty of painkillers after my father had beaten her in retaliation for her affair with Giuseppe. She'd become addicted, and a few years later, she'd died of an overdose.

"My wife won't suffer for one more second," Dante seethed. "And you are the last person who will cause her pain ever again." He nodded to the doctor. "Go ahead."

I gritted my teeth as I watched the needle ease into her arm.

I didn't want Nora to suffer. She must be in agony after what the Russians had done to her. I couldn't let her succumb to their torment for another moment.

I took a breath and forced my own dark memories and fears away. I wouldn't allow my wife to become addicted. She could get the medical treatment she needed, and I would protect her from the potential consequences.

When the tension eased from her pinched features, Dante barked at the doctor again. "Check his head."

"But your shoulder—"

"I'm fine." Dante cut him off and glowered at me. "You don't get to die, you selfish son of a bitch. I won't do that to her."

"I'm not hurt," I ground out, ignoring the throb in my head. I'd suffered far worse, and I didn't want them to drug me too. I wanted to stay with Nora, not be unconscious. I wouldn't leave her vulnerable to Dante.

"Shut up, or I'll cut out Lorenzo's tongue," he threatened coldly. "I won't do anything that might hurt her, and that includes making sure you survive. She loves you." He spat the words.

The reminder of her desperate declaration knifed through my heart.

My fault. What'd happened to her was my fault. Her father might've sent Giana to free her, but I'd urged her to go. I'd commanded her to run straight into the Russians' waiting hands.

So, I let the doctor check my head injury. It was nothing compared to the agony of my failure, and I easily ignored the small flare of pain as he prodded me. I was so focused on her that I didn't even notice when the needle pricked my arm. Warm darkness crept in at the edges of my mind, and I growled a slurred curse at Dante. I didn't want to pass out. I wanted to stay with her.

He ignored me, his intense green gaze fixed on her face as he tenderly stroked her hair back from her cheek. The nauseating image was the last thing I saw before the drugs dragged me under.

CHAPTER 4

NORA

“Don’t give her any more of that shit.” I recognized Luca’s low growl through the haze that fogged my mind. “She’ll get addicted.”

“I’m not going to let her suffer,” Dante snapped back. “You’re even more of a bastard than I thought if you leave her in pain.”

“Try it, and I’ll find a way to drive a knife into your heart this time.” The threat was cold enough to draw a shiver to the surface of my skin.

“You seem to have forgotten what will happen to your friends if you challenge me.” Dante’s tone was impossibly icier.

“I don’t fucking care. I will do anything for her. I will sacrifice anything. I’m not going to let you give her any more opioids. I’m not going to watch her wither and waste away like my mother.”

A moment of heavy silence passed, weighing on my chest. My entire body ached as though I’d been hit by a truck. But my mind was fuzzy, and I couldn’t manage to open my eyes.

“And you think I’ll allow that?” Dante finally bit out. “I’m not going to let anything or anyone harm my wife. Never again.”

“You don’t know what can happen.” Luca’s voice was haunted, old nightmares tormenting him. “You can’t watch her every minute of the day. She’ll overdose and die. That shit is poison.”

Another beat of silence.

“Your mother died of an overdose.” Dante didn’t phrase it as a question. “You’re right. I can’t be with her every moment. Fine. You’ll help make sure that she doesn’t become addicted. You’ll devote yourself to her entirely, won’t you?”

“I already am devoted to her,” Luca vowed.

“Then you’ll be the one to dispense her medication.”

A growl vibrated through the tense silence. Luca was upset.

My stomach tightened at his distress, and I struggled to reach for him. Even the tiny twitch of my hand sent pain radiating through my ribs. A small whimper eased from my throat as I tried to open my eyes and find Luca’s ochre gaze.

I couldn’t move. I couldn’t think.

The pain was growing sharper, cutting my insides.

“You do it, or I will,” Dante threatened silkily.

Something pricked my arm, and warmth flooded my veins, a soothing wave that smothered the agony.

“I’m right here. I won’t let anything bad happen to you.” Luca’s fierce promise rumbled over me, blanketing me in comfort.

I released a shuddering sigh and relaxed into the darkness.



A HARD CHEST braced my back, and strong arms surrounded me. Fear flickered through my hazy mind, sparking an instinct to struggle my way free from captivity. I twisted in the firm, masculine grip, and pain radiated through my body. My fear became a copper tang on my tongue as my teeth cut my cheek.

The arms firmed around me, trapping me.

“You’re okay, Nora. It’s me. Calm down.”

At the sound of his deep, rumbling command, all the fight instantly drained out of me.

“Dante?” My voice was strangely slurred, and my eyelids were so heavy.

I blinked slowly and found my terrifying, beautiful husband staring into my soul. His emerald eyes were keen enough to cut, but the intensity that’d once terrified me now brought me comfort. No one would hurt me while I was in his arms.

He held me on his bed, his back propped against the headboard. Everything around him was blurry; he was all I could see. Dante filled my vision, and I clung to the only solid thing in my world.

My fingers flexed into his black cotton shirt. Beneath the soft material, I felt thick bandages.

Memories churned like dark, turbulent waters.

He’d been shot when he’d saved me during the Russian ambush. He’d taken a bullet for me.

And then the Russians...

“You need to eat, darling.” Dante’s low murmur grounded me to him, keeping me anchored in the present.

I didn’t want to face the darkness that lurked just beneath the surface of the haze that blanketed my mind. I leaned into his body, reassured by his heat and the strength in his corded muscles.

He shifted, picking up something from a tray on the nightstand. A rich, comforting scent of honey and cinnamon suffused my senses, and he lifted a spoon to my lips.

I turned my face away, gut tightening with reflexive anger.

More memories surged: Dante, feeding me from his hand. Forcing me to eat. Humiliating me.

“Nora.” My name was a deep rebuke. “Don’t be difficult.”

Difficult. He was stripping away all my control, debasing me. And he expected me to meekly acquiesce to his insane

demands.

“No.” My refusal was slow and slurred. I swallowed and tried again. “You can’t make me. I won’t.”

His thunderous frown shuddered through my body like a visceral wave of disapproval, but I tipped my chin back and held my ground.

Pain was coming. He would spank me for my defiance.

But I already hurt so much, every inch of my body aching in protest as I struggled for lucidity.

His low curse knifed through my mind, but he handled me with aching care as he shifted me off his lap.

“You do it,” he bit out. “Take care of her.”

Even the gentle movements made the deep ache between my thighs flare. The pain where the Russians had...

“I’ve got you,” my husband promised, pulling me into his arms. “You’re safe.”

“Luca?” His name was little more than a whimper of relief.

“I’m right here,” he reassured me, his big hands skimming over my body to soothe me.

I whispered his name again and melted into him, leaning into his strength. My love for him flooded my heart, filling it until it ached with every beat.

“You have to eat, kitten,” he murmured.

The spoon lifted to my lips once again, and I didn’t fight him. Luca wasn’t trying to humiliate me; he was taking care of me.

“Good girl.”

The praise warmed my insides, sending a pulse of comfort through my bruised body. I ate everything he offered me, content to be held by the man I loved while my mind floated. As long as I remained in this strange haze, I wouldn’t have to remember. I wouldn’t have to face the agony of reality.

“She needs more painkillers.” Dante sounded angry, his voice tight.

I turned my face to find him, but pain sliced down my spine. I stilled on a moan, and Luca shushed me gently.

“Just a little more, Nora. You’ll get through this. I’ve got you.”

My husband’s promise was followed by a slight sting on my upper arm, and warm darkness enfolded me once again.

CHAPTER 5

DANTE

I paced across my bedroom, not caring that Luca watched me like I was a particularly rabid predator.

Good. My enemy should fear me.

We'd established a truce for Nora's sake, but I still loathed him for killing my brother. He would never be forgiven for that.

He had so many sins to pay for. He'd murdered Francesco; he'd allowed the Russians to capture Nora; and he'd fucking stabbed me.

I rolled my shoulder and smothered a wince. His knife had driven into the bullet wound I'd sustained during the Russian assault outside my estate. I'd be lucky if I made a full recovery. The bastard might've injured me for life.

But I couldn't lift a finger against him.

Not as long as Nora loved him.

A sour tang coated my tongue. I'd have to find a way to change that, to prove to her that I was the better man, the better match.

If that meant swallowing my hatred for Luca in order to help her heal, I'd do it.

And I needed his men if I was going to take on the Bratva. Already, they'd splintered away from me, old rivalries resurfacing now that Nora had been rescued. If Luca didn't order them to pledge their allegiance to me, I'd never be able to avenge my wife.

It didn't help that I couldn't reach Giuseppe. I could've used his men, but I hadn't heard from him since the day Nora had been captured. Had the Russians managed to get to him too?

"You need to rally your men," I told him, trying to look directly into his eyes in order to avoid seeing the tender way he held Nora's sleeping form.

His gaze left her face, snapping to mine. "They will never answer to you. I might be your prisoner for now, but you will never take my birthright."

"Entitled son of a bitch," I spat. "We need our combined forces if we're going to take on the Bratva. Or do you not give a fuck about avenging Nora?"

His jaw ticked, and he spoke through gritted teeth. "Let my friends go, and I'll consider working with you again."

My lips curled in a sneer. "You don't deserve her. You would try to bargain with me instead of prioritizing her?"

One day soon, she'd come to her senses and see that he wasn't worthy of her.

She whimpered softly in her sleep. He shushed her and pulled her closer, and she relaxed on a shuddering sigh.

My fault. The realization hit me like a blow to the chest. She clung to him because of me, because of what I'd done. Ever since I'd stolen her away from him, she'd painted me as the villain in their story, and my decision to use her to break him had only deepened that belief.

Nora secretly loved our darker games, but she resented me for using her against Luca. If he'd never kidnapped her and forced her to marry him, she would've been mine and mine alone. I could've introduced her to my more sadistic ways of seduction more slowly, shown her how good it could be between us.

But my vendetta had blinded me to her needs. I'd sought revenge against Luca for so long that I'd prioritized it over my wife's wellbeing.

If I gave her the choice, she'd leave me for him. She would abandon me.

My gut tightened, and I shoved the dark thought away.

I would make this right. Somehow.

"She is my only priority." Luca finally answered me in an undertone when he was certain she'd been soothed back to sleep.

"Then you should prove you give a shit and rally your men," I barked, frustrated at the sight of them cuddled up together.

Nora moaned and shuddered. Her lashes fluttered as her eyes moved rapidly behind her closed lids, facing a nightmare that we couldn't see. She thrashed, and Luca firmed his hold on her to keep her from exacerbating her injuries.

Her sharp cry pierced my chest, and I immediately went to her side, grasping her small hand in mine.

"Wake up, darling," I urged, brushing my thumb over her clammy palm. "You're safe."

She gasped, and her eyes flew open. They were dark with her nightmare, unfocused. I cupped her cheek in my hand, and she flinched away from me with a soft sound of protest.

I smothered a scowl and ignored the sense of rejection that knifed through my gut.

My wife would not fear me. Not ever.

Never again.

I stroked the line of her cheekbone as she tucked her face close to Luca's chest. I could feel his glower burning into me, but I didn't deign to look at him. She was all that mattered.

"It's me," I reassured her, refusing to withdraw my gentle touch. "You're safe, Nora."

"Dante?"

She turned her face into my hand, and warmth pulsed through my chest.

“I’ve got you.” Luca couldn’t quite keep the possessive growl from his voice.

I didn’t give a fuck about him. I would touch my wife whenever and however I wanted. She was mine, and she needed me to promise that she was protected.

And that she would be avenged.

Her glassy eyes finally focused on me, but the shadows didn’t clear from their lovely hazel depths. She hadn’t been this lucid for five days. Not since we’d rescued her from that hell.

I watched as her dark memories flooded back, tears spilling down her cheeks as sob wracked her delicate frame. A sense of helplessness I’d never known before hollowed out my insides. I traced the line of her quivering lip with my thumb, and she didn’t flinch this time.

“I thought...” Her voice hitched on another sob. “I didn’t think you would come for me.”

“I will always protect you,” I swore. “I will always come for you. The Russians will die for what they did to you.”

She shuddered and pressed closer to Luca at the mention of the Russians. Her gaze turned distant again, haunted.

“How could he do that to me?” she asked on a broken whisper. “After what they did to my mother. And he let the same thing...”

She jolted upright on a gasp, then dropped back into Luca’s arms.

“Giana.” She groaned her sister’s name. “He still has Giana.”

My hand tightened around hers. “Who has your sister?”

Giana had been captured too? My people hadn’t found her when we’d gone in to save Nora.

“My father,” she admitted on a strained whisper. Her eyes shone when they focused on me again. “He betrayed you. He wants you dead because you killed Alberto. He gave me to the

Russians to lure you into a trap, so that they would do his dirty work for him. And I thought... I didn't think you would come."

Every time she said it, my heart twisted. Did she really think so little of me? Did she not understand that I would do anything for her?

"Your father gave you to the Bratva?" Luca snarled, but his hold on her remained gentle.

She swallowed another sob and nodded. "He sent Giana to get me away from Dante."

I gnashed my teeth but said nothing. She truly had been desperate to escape from me, despite the fact that I'd taken a bullet for her.

How had I fucked up my marriage so badly? When I'd always sworn to myself that I would be a better man than my father, a better husband?

I'd thought Nora would come to understand me in time, but the budding fear at the back of my mind warned me that I might've damaged our relationship beyond repair.

"But when I got home," she continued, "he gave me to the Bratva. He always claimed to love my mother, and he was devastated by her death. The Russians brutalized her before they killed her, all to send a message to my father. And he let them to the same thing to me." Her eyes tightened, and she blinked away more tears. When her gaze fixed on mine, it was hard with determination. "I have to save Giana from him. How long has it been since they... Since Giuseppe betrayed me?"

"Five days." Luca answered before I could speak. My throat was too tight to force out the words.

What they'd done to my wife was unspeakable, but her father's betrayal was unfathomable. The old bastard would scream before he died. I would make the agony last for days, until his black heart finally gave out.

Her gaze tore from my face to look into Luca's eyes. She stared up at him with desperation, seeking his comfort and protection rather than mine.

Jealousy punched me. For a few minutes, she'd accepted my tender touch. She'd looked to me for answers.

Now her full attention was on him, and it was as though I didn't exist.

I gritted my teeth and suppressed the visceral urge to wrench her away from him, my worst enemy. Taking a breath, I reminded myself that I couldn't do anything that might hurt her, and taking her from him would cause her distress.

It was a testament to her strength that she was even capable of speaking rather than sobbing in the aftermath of what she'd suffered. Her concern for her sister seemed to override her trauma.

"You have to save Giana," she begged Luca.

"Yes," I bit out. "And we'll need our combined forces to do it. Rally your men. If you truly care about Nora, you'll do whatever is necessary to save her sister and punish the monsters who hurt her."

I skewered Luca with my sharpest glower, willing him to comply. His answer could break her. If he refused, I might not be able to stop myself from attacking him, no matter how it might upset Nora.

CHAPTER 6

LUCA

I gritted my teeth, hating the bastard with every fiber of my being. The last thing I wanted was to work with him, especially when he was still holding my friends as his hostages.

But there was only one answer I could give. I looked down into my wife's wide, shining eyes and brushed the tears from her cheeks.

"I'll do whatever it takes to save your sister," I vowed. "And I will make sure that your father can never hurt you again."

Then I turned my own fierce glower on Dante. "But I will never pledge my loyalty to you. This is another temporary truce. For Nora."

She placed her soft hand on my stubble-roughened cheek, calling my attention back to her.

"Thank you." Her voice hitched with emotion.

I could see her unspoken feelings in her intense gaze. She was grateful to me for swallowing my pride for her sister's sake. For her sake.

When it came to protecting my wife, my pride didn't matter. Nothing mattered but her.

And I'd failed her in so many ways. I'd allowed Dante to steal her away from me. I'd allowed Giuseppe to use Giana to lure her into a trap. And I hadn't succeeded in my attempt to

kill Dante during the firefight when we went in to rescue her from the Russians.

Now we were his captives once again. No matter how tenderly he treated her, he would always be her tormentor. He'd done unspeakable things to her, using her to hurt me.

I would never surrender my birthright to this monster, and it wasn't entitlement that made me refuse to bend. I would never stop fighting him. I'd never stop trying to get her away from him, to free us both from his evil, twisted games.

"Luca, I..." Her voice wavered. "Thank you."

Her head tipped back slightly, her lips parting in invitation. I leaned into her an inch before I stopped myself. She wouldn't welcome that kind of contact after what she'd suffered.

Her eyes tightened, and she dropped her shining gaze. My stomach twisted at the rejection that pinched her pale features.

"I don't want to hurt you," I murmured, caressing her chilled cheek.

She kept her gaze averted, staring at something I couldn't see.

"I understand," she whispered so softly that I barely made out the words.

"I will never cause you pain," I vowed.

"That's not why she's upset," Dante growled, shocking me out of the private moment with my wife. "How are you so fucking blind to what she needs?"

Ignoring the cutting insult, I curled two fingers beneath her chin, lifting her face to mine. Her eyes were dark with pain.

"What do you need, kitten? I'll give you anything. Just ask."

Her lower lip quivered. "I understand if you don't want me anymore," she mumbled, cheeks flushing. "After what they did, I..."

She trailed off, and fresh tears slid down her cheeks.

Horror rendered me silent for a few awful moments. My wife thought I wouldn't love her anymore because of what those Russian bastards had done to her?

“Comfort her, you coward,” Dante spat. He hovered beside us, at the edge of our personal space but not imposing himself on her. His disdain pulsed over me in a menacing wave. “She loves you.” His mouth twisted around the words as though they were sour. “If you weren't such a self-absorbed asshole, you'd know how to give her what she needs.”

I love him! Her desperate declaration rang through my mind, grating across my thoughts.

My love for her swelled in my heart to the point of pain, but the words remained locked in my tight chest. Unworthiness crushed me, bearing down on my shoulders like the weight of a boulder. I didn't deserve her love. I didn't deserve to touch her, to hold her.

But despite my failings, she looked to me for comfort.

I couldn't deny her anything.

My desire for her was poisoned by my hatred for Dante, which was edged with resentment sharp enough to cut my insides. How could he so clearly see her needs when he would never be anything other than her tormentor?

Defiance reared up inside me, and I lowered my lips to Nora's before more doubts could plague me. My hand cradled the back of her head, holding her steady while I carefully traced the line of her pouty mouth with my tongue. She opened for me on a shuddering sigh, and her hands fisted in my shirt to pull me closer. Her tears wet my cheeks, and I did my best to kiss away her pain and fear without jarring her injuries.

I was so lost in her that I barely registered Dante's feral snarl or the stomp of his boots on the hardwood floor. Nora jolted slightly when the bedroom door slammed behind him, but I kept my hold on her, refusing to break our kiss to allow her to think about the bastard.

He'd all but commanded me to kiss my wife. If he was jealous at the sight of her surrendering to me, that was his problem. I hoped it pained the son of a bitch to see her clinging to me for comfort, not him. I might not be worthy of her love, but she would never care for him. She would never see him as anything other than the monster he was.

Watching him touch her hadn't made me want her any less. What the Russians had done to her would never dull my need for her, either. If anything, my desire was keener than ever, lodged in my heart like a dagger piercing me with sweet pain.

I love you. I made the silent vow with my tongue against hers, claiming her deeply. I couldn't say it aloud, not until I earned the right. And I had so much to atone for before I could declare my feelings. Once the Russians and Dante were dead, I could finally stake my claim over her heart. Only then would I stand a chance at deserving her.

I couldn't confess the depth of my feelings, but I pulled back so that my heated promise could whisper over her lips. "I will always want you, Nora. No one will ever take you away from me. You're mine."

"Yours," she agreed on a shuddering exhalation, a sound of relief and release. The last of the tension melted from her slender frame, and she leaned into me. "I love you."

I sealed her lips with mine once again, showing her my love in the only way I could.

We stayed locked in each other's arms for long minutes, and I scarcely allowed her space to breathe as I kissed her with the full passion of my feelings for her. I couldn't handle her in the rougher way I liked, but I could steal her breath and make her forget about the terrible, dark things that'd happened to her.

My hold on her shifted, my hand sliding through her hair so that I could tangle the silken strands around my fingers.

She whimpered into my mouth and stiffened when I touched a tender spot on her scalp.

I instantly eased my grip and gently broke our kiss.

“You need to take your meds,” I murmured against her lips, regret lacing my tone. I didn’t like the idea of giving her more painkillers, but I could at least decrease the dosage as she healed. Dante had said that I could be in charge of dispensing her medication, and I would be careful with how much I allowed her to take. I’d never let her suffer needlessly, but my wife would not become addicted.

“I don’t want to sleep anymore,” she protested, her fingers curling into my shirt. “I want to stay with you.”

“I’ll be right by your side the whole time,” I promised. “I’m not going anywhere.”

I retrieved a pill from the bottle on the nightstand and ordered her to take it. She hesitated for a second, but a stern look from me made her swallow the medicine.

“Good girl.” I carefully trailed my fingers over her silken hair and pressed a tender kiss to her forehead.

She rested her head on my shoulder, and I stroked her until she fell back asleep, mercifully free from nightmares. I’d protect her from all the dark things that haunted her, especially Dante Torrio.

CHAPTER 7

NORA

“Did you save Giana from my father?” I asked as soon as Dante stepped into the bedroom, my heart leaping into my throat.

I turned my face away from the final bite of mashed potatoes that Luca offered me. I hadn’t objected to him helping me eat my dinner, but now that Dante had returned, my stomach knotted too tightly to take another bite.

His beautiful features pinched in a scowl, and his dark curls tumbled over his brow as he shook his head. “Your father’s home in the city is deserted. He must’ve decided to go into hiding when he realized I survived the assault on the Russians to rescue you.”

The mention of the Bratva made each of the bruises on my body flare with pain, and for an awful moment, their sick laughter echoed through my aching head.

Luca’s arms were warm and strong around me. “You’re safe,” he promised. “I’ve got you, Nora. Stay here with me.”

I blinked hard, willing the stinging tears to clear from my vision before their leering faces could coalesce before me in an echo of the nightmare. Between the drugs and Luca’s steady presence, I’d been able to keep the worst of the traumatic memories at bay. Now they threatened to overwhelm me, but I gritted my teeth and shoved them back. Giana’s life was on the line, and I didn’t have time to linger in my own remembered agony.

Dante's scowl swam back into focus. His shockingly green eyes glittered as he watched Luca's hands rove over my body, imbuing me with his warmth.

"Do you know where your father might have taken Giana?" he asked through gritted teeth. Something like pain tightened his jaw, as though he was fighting against some unseen strain.

I wracked my brain. "Did you raid Giuseppe's beach house?"

Even as I asked it, I knew my father would never go somewhere so obvious. He would know that Dante had me once again, and he wouldn't hide out somewhere I might be familiar with.

Dante shook his head, confirming my suspicions. "He's not there, either. Any other ideas?"

I bit my lip, wishing I knew what to say, something that might help save my sister.

"Would any of your father's associates betray him? Who is the weakest?" Dante pressed. "Give me names, and I'll hunt them down. I won't ask nicely for Giuseppe's location. I can make a man talk."

A memory stirred, dangerously close to the trauma I'd just endured. Instinct warned me to flinch away from it, but deep in my gut, I knew that the answer was at the edge of my consciousness.

"Giana didn't come alone when she helped me escape your estate." My voice was too weak, but I managed to say the words.

Dante's lips twisted when I said *escape*, but I couldn't focus on his displeasure. My sister was more important.

"Antonio Di Mauro," I continued. "He smuggled her in and then drove us to my father's house."

"I'll find him," Dante vowed darkly. "And I'll make him scream."

“No, wait,” I said quickly. “I think he cares about Giana. Or at least, he wants her.” I remembered the hungry way he’d watched her. “He might help you save her. You could use him to get her out. Don’t torture him.”

Dante’s jaw ticked. “Fine. I’ll torture him after we save your sister. He gave you to the Russians. He’ll pay for that with his blood.”

He took a breath and schooled his features to something less feral. “I’ll find Antonio, and he will help me rescue Giana, one way or another.”

“I can help,” Luca rumbled, a primal edge to his voice. “Let me hunt him down.”

Dante’s eyes turned ice cold. “Your job is to take care of Nora. Or do you not care about protecting the woman you love?” He spat the words, and I stopped breathing.

Did Luca truly love me? He’d never said the words, even though I’d declared my love for him. My heart ached, and my stomach churned. I wanted so desperately to hear him say it that I felt sick with anticipation.

“You haven’t told her yet.” Dante’s tone was frigid with disdain for my husband. “Stupid son of a bitch. You can’t give her what she needs, and yet, she loves *you*.”

Luca’s corded muscles flexed around me, and he scowled at Dante. “How I feel about my wife is none of your fucking business.”

I looked up into his eyes, searching. For a terrible moment, I was swept up in the fierce loathing that darkened their ochre depths. There was no affection there, no warmth. Only hatred.

“You don’t have to say it,” I whispered, my heart clenching.

He’d kissed me earlier, but maybe he couldn’t love me after what the Russians had done to me. My skin felt like it was caked in dirt, and my blood turned toxic in my veins. They’d defiled me, and now my husband might never feel the same way about me as I did about him.

His eyes focused on me, and his lips twisted with something like regret. “I love you, Nora.” Even though he rasped out the words, he spoke with the weight of an oath. “I don’t deserve you, but I love you.”

“No, you don’t deserve her,” Dante growled and stormed toward us before I could draw breath to respond. His body swelled with fury, but his hand was gentle when he captured mine and lifted it to his lips for a featherlight kiss. “I’ll always take care of you, no matter what it costs me. I’m your husband.”

A protest that he wasn’t truly my husband teased at the tip of my tongue, but I swallowed it down. Dante looked... He was too volatile to ever call him vulnerable, but he was particularly on edge at the moment.

Luca was my real husband, the man I loved. But Dante had risked his life to save me from the Russians. Before that, he’d taken a bullet for me. And he’d spared Luca when I’d pleaded for him to show mercy. Luca had tried to kill him, but my declaration of love had stayed Dante’s hand and stopped him from retaliating.

You can trust me. I’ll prove it to you. Dante had once promised me that he would win me with actions rather than empty words. I’d thought he was insane to think that he could ever win so much a shred of affection from me. But now...

He could’ve simply killed Luca and eliminated his rival for good. Instead, he allowed his sworn enemy to hold me, even though I could see that the sight of our intimacy enraged him. He was jealous and possessive, but he was sharing me with Luca because I needed my husband. I needed the man I loved to caress me and promise me that I was safe.

Dante gently squeezed my hand before reluctantly releasing it. “I’ll draw you a bath, pet. Take your medicine and relax.” The last was accompanied by a warning look at Luca.

To my surprise, Luca gave him a sharp nod of agreement. I’d expected him to bristle, but he simply turned his attention to the bottle of painkillers on the nightstand. He pressed a single pill into my hand.

“It’ll just take the edge off,” he promised. “You won’t fall asleep again until you’re ready.”

I heard the bath running in the next room as I obediently took the pill. Despite the fact that I was barely drugged, everything seemed slightly surreal. Dante and Luca were putting aside their feud to care for me. For so long, they’d fought over me like I was their favorite toy. Or worse, their property.

But now, they were suppressing their mutual loathing to see to my comfort and safety. After everything my husband had suffered at the Devil’s hands, he was swallowing his pride for my sake. He was no longer trying to fight Dante or vowing to kill him. Instead, they both seemed completely focused on me.

Even Dante seemed more intent on saving my sister than subjugating Luca and taking control of the organization.

“Come here,” Dante commanded, his deep voice echoing slightly in the bathroom.

I expected Luca to tense at being ordered around by our captor, but he simply gathered me up in his arms and carried me to where Dante waited for us beside the massive tub.

Dante’s eyes glinted as he issued another command to Luca. “Get undressed. You’re going to hold her.”

A low growl rumbled from my husband. He chafed at the imbalance of power, the reminder that he had to do as Dante said, or his friends would suffer.

But Luca didn’t hesitate to carefully set me on my feet so that he could strip. It seemed he cared more about seeing to my needs than he did about the wound to his pride.

“I love you,” I told him, imbuing the words with the depth of my gratitude for all that he was sacrificing for me.

Dante’s big hands bracketed my waist, supporting me as he pressed his chest against my back.

Luca stepped out of his sweatpants and returned to me, caressing my cheek. He didn’t try to rip me away from Dante.

Instead, he handled me as though I was made of glass. His nakedness didn't frighten me, despite what I'd endured. He was my husband, the man I loved, and I could never fear him.

Even Dante's steady heat at my back was comforting. Their strength surrounded me, shielding me. No one could get to me while I was in their arms, under their protection.

Luca stared down into my eyes, peering straight into my soul. "I love you too."

I released a shuddering sigh, the last of the tension easing from my muscles.

My husband loved me, and I was safe.

"Take off her robe." It sounded as though Dante issued the order through gritted teeth, but I couldn't look away from Luca's intense gaze to study his face.

"You can leave," Luca told him without taking his eyes off mine, tone hostile. "We don't need you in here."

"I'm not going anywhere," Dante hissed. "My wife needs me."

"She's not your wife! Nora is mine." His blazing gaze snapped to his enemy, fixing him with a glower. I gasped at the loss of connection, but the men were too caught up in their argument to notice.

"You are only here for her sake," Dante warned. "You will remain here for her sake. What I do to your friends is another matter entirely."

His threats made my blood run cold. Dante had used Gabriele and Lorenzo to subjugate Luca ever since he'd been captured. Seeing my strong husband controlled by a madman turned my stomach.

I placed my hand over his heart to call his attention to me.

It's okay, I tried to say, but the words stuck in my constricted throat.

"She doesn't need your hands on her," Luca seethed. "Not after everything she's been through."

Yes, I'd suffered so much. The Russians...

I swallowed hard, and cold sank into my flesh. Dark memories churned, rising up to drown me in terror and agony.

"My *wife* needs me more than ever," Dante snapped back.

Dark laughter suffused the air around me, making it heavy enough to suffocate me. Masculine hands groped me, leaving trails of grime on my skin.

"Please..." I begged to be spared, to be saved.

But no one would save me. Dante wasn't coming, and Luca couldn't come.

"Nora." Dante's voice, rough with strain.

I leaned back into his steady heat, his strong body. "You came." I whispered.

"I will always come for you," he swore. "I'll prove it to you every day. You're safe with me."

Luca's thick fingers trailed over my cheeks, wiping away tears.

"Stay here with me." My husband's voice was deep and steady, a gentle command.

I drew in a deep breath and focused on the two men who had saved me. Both of them, surrounding me, protecting me.

"Let's get you warmed up," Luca rumbled.

He didn't continue his argument with Dante. Their quarrel seemed utterly forgotten as their full focus centered on me.

Handling me as though I was a spooked doe, Luca moved slowly as he reached for the silken tie on my ankle-length black robe that preserved my modesty. He'd caressed me and soothed me since I'd been rescued, but I hadn't been completely naked since they'd saved me. At least, not when I'd been conscious.

The tie fell away, and the robe parted. Cool air kissed my sternum, and I suddenly felt horribly exposed, despite the fact that my breasts were still covered. A whimper slipped between

my pursed lips, and I fisted the soft material, pulling it tightly around me to cover my body.

Sick laughter echoed through my head, and ice encased my bones.

“No, darling.” Dante’s voice was soft but firm, his warm breath fanning my neck in contrast to the chill that’d frosted my skin. His hands engulfed mine, and he slowly guided my fists apart, easing the robe away from my body. “Look at Luca.”

My husband’s familiar touch warmed my face as he cupped my cheeks, calling my attention back to him. I fell into his ochre gaze, allowing myself to be utterly consumed by the depth of his love.

“I’ve got you,” he promised.

I released my tight grip on the robe so that I could cling to his broad shoulders, my fingers flexing into his muscles. Nothing could harm me when Luca was holding me.

Dante slowly parted the robe, and although a shiver raced over my skin when it slid down my arms and revealed my breasts, I didn’t struggle or cry. The dark memories hovered at the edges of my mind, but the fierce men holding me kept the worst effects of the trauma at bay.

“Let go of Luca,” Dante murmured in my ear, cajoling rather than commanding.

I hesitated to release my husband, but Dante pressed a tender kiss to my shoulder.

“He’s going to hold you the whole time,” he promised. “You have to get in the bath first.”

Reluctantly, I pried my fingers free from Luca’s shoulders and allowed the robe to slide to the floor. Before I could shiver with cold, my husband’s arms closed around me, and he held me close as he eased both of us into the tub.

“You’re doing so well,” he praised. “Good girl.”

I buried my face in his chest and breathed him in as we sank into the warm water. Dante sat beside the tub, with us but

apart. He didn't impose himself on me, but he did roll up his sleeves to reveal his corded forearms.

"Relax," he urged. "And tell me if anything hurts too much."

A few of the bruises that covered my body flared with pain at the firm contact with Luca's hard body, but I didn't care. I welcomed that slight discomfort because it grounded me to him. And with the mild drugs still swirling in my system, the worst of it was dulled.

I settled with my back pressed to Luca's chest, his imposing frame enfolding mine. The men didn't speak to one another again, but they both lathered up their hands and began to gently wash my abused body. With every brush of their soap-slicked hands, the sense that grime coated my skin began to slide away. The Russians had groped me, used me. Their cruel, grasping fingers had pressed dark bruises into my arms, my legs, my hips. And they'd...

"Breathe, Nora," Dante commanded. He pressed his palm over my racing heart, right between my breasts. "Deep breath in." His glittering green eyes filled my world, and my lungs expanded. "Very good, little bird. Again."

I obeyed, and oxygen flooded my system, making me slightly lightheaded. Everything seemed surreal, the world going soft around the edges as my traumatic memories receded.

"Touch her," Dante rumbled the command at Luca, but he didn't take his eyes off me.

"She doesn't need that right now," my husband growled.

Dante's hand eased from my sternum to cup my breast, his fingers lightly tracing around my nipple. I squirmed against Luca as an echo of fear pulsed alongside pleasure.

"It's exactly what she needs," Dante replied steadily. "My wife deserves pleasure and intimacy. Those Russian bastards won't take that from her."

"She's still hurt," Luca's chest rumbled against my back, and I leaned into his fierce strength.

“And you won’t cause her any pain,” Dante said, calm and confident rather than antagonistic. He was my lifeline, and he wouldn’t waver. He wouldn’t bend or compromise.

Luca’s touch was hesitant as he cupped my other breast, his fingers testing my peaked nipple. “You want this, kitten?” He murmured, his lips brushing the shell of my ear.

“I want you,” I whispered raggedly.

I wanted my husband’s touch to erase what the Bratva had done to me. I wanted him to take the nightmares away.

And I couldn’t seem to break from Dante’s intense green gaze. The man who had once been my monster was now my anchor, keeping me bound to reality when I might’ve been dragged into darkness at the contact with my most intimate areas.

“You’re so brave, Nora,” Dante praised. “The bravest woman I know.”

With his free hand, he lifted mine from the water and brushed a kiss over my knuckles. His other continued to massage my breast, stimulating me and coaxing pleasure from my ravaged body. Luca’s hand was firm on my other breast, toying with my nipple in the way he knew I liked. He handled me more gently than usual, but I couldn’t take harsher treatment at the moment. And cruel, sadistic Dante stroked me as carefully as though I was a kitten.

“Touch her clit,” he ordered Luca.

My husband grunted, a sound between irritation and desire. His cock was hard against my bottom, but I didn’t experience so much as a flicker of fear. I could trust Luca.

And I trusted Dante to never hurt me. He’d saved me so many times, putting his own life on the line for me. How could I fear him after that?

What we were doing together should feel perverse, but all I felt was comfort and pleasure at their hands.

Dante was right: I needed this.

And even though Luca didn't seem to understand my needs in the same way, he loved me, and he would do anything for me.

Luca's fingers trailed down my stomach, swirling around my navel before exploring lower. He slowly tested me, ensuring that I didn't respond with fear before touching my sex.

The first brush of his thumb over my clit made me buck against him, a shocking mix of terror and pleasure bursting through me. I cried out, and Dante pinched my nipple, capturing my attention with the small flare of erotic pain.

"Don't stop," he growled at Luca.

He pinched my nipple again, tugging and rolling it between his deft fingers in the way I liked best. I whimpered, and my eyes slid closed as my head dropped back on Luca's shoulder. My husband kissed my neck, nipping at my tender flesh to light up my body with carnal awareness.

But in the darkness behind my closed lids, visions of my tormentors began to coalesce. I tensed and thrashed again. Luca held me fast, his thumb rubbing my clit in firm, determined circles.

"Look at me," Dante ordered.

My eyes flew open, and I gasped as I was immediately captured in his intent emerald gaze. I drew in a shuddering breath and released it on a soft sob of relief.

"Dante." I whispered his name like a prayer, and my fingers sank into Luca's thighs on either side of me, anchoring myself to him.

"I love you," Luca rumbled in my ear, his teeth tugging at my lobe with a little bite of pain. Just the way I liked it. "You're so beautiful, kitten. Such a good girl, submitting to me. I want an orgasm."

He rubbed my clit in a firm, demanding rhythm while Dante toyed with my nipples. My back arched on a sharp cry, and pleasure burst through me. Both men held me fast as I

writhed between them, bliss singing through my veins, chasing away the last of the toxic taint left by my tormentors.

I didn't think about the Russians. I didn't think about anything at all.

All that existed was the ecstasy of Luca and Dante's hands on me, their deep, rumbling voices lavishing me with praise.

Even as I began to float back down from my high, peace enfolded me. My eyelids were heavy, and I blinked slowly.

"You did so well, darling." Dante brushed a kiss over my flushed cheek, but he didn't try to claim my lips.

Something like regret tugged at my gut when he pulled away, but Luca was instantly there, his big hand urging me to turn my face to his so that he could capture my lips in a fierce kiss.

While I remained locked in my husband's embrace, Dante finished washing my body, prioritizing my needs above his evident desire for me. I could see the bulge where his cock strained against his pants, but he didn't try to touch me sexually again. I was overstimulated, every inch of my flesh tingling. I couldn't have taken more intimate contact. Not yet, when my body was still recovering.

After a while, Luca lifted me from the cooling water, and Dante wrapped me in a fluffy towel, carefully drying my body before slipping a silky red nightgown over my head. It was one of the indecent scraps of lingerie he'd bought for me when he'd first captured me, but the garment didn't bother me anymore. I didn't feel any modesty around either man. Too much had passed between us for me to feel any embarrassment over my nakedness when I was with them.

And I was so sleepy. I wouldn't have protested even if I had been irritated by his choice of sleepwear.

I yawned, and Luca carried me the short distance to the bed. Worry nipped at me, and I clung to Luca's shoulders as my eyes found Dante's once again.

"I don't want Luca to leave," I said, a pleading edge to my voice. I didn't want him to return Luca to that awful cell; I

needed him to hold me and keep the nightmares at bay.

Dante frowned, but his voice was gentle when he replied. “Luca isn’t going anywhere, Nora. He hasn’t left your side since we returned home.” His expression hardened to something more forbidding. “But I’ll be damned if I don’t share a bed with my wife. Luca is staying, but you sleep with me, pet.”

Confusion threaded through me as both men settled into the massive bed on either side of me. Luca pulled me close, so that my head rested on his chest. Dante’s heat pressed up against my back, his body molding to mine. Their warmth and strength surrounded me, protecting me.

Before I could puzzle over the bizarre arrangement, I fell into deep sleep, free from nightmares. Nothing bad could touch me while I was in their arms.

CHAPTER 8

NORA

It'd been nearly two weeks since Dante and Luca had rescued me, and between the nightmares and worry for Giana, I was barely functioning. If Luca didn't feed me every meal, I doubted I would've been able to eat anything at all. As it was, I felt constantly queasy and jumpy, fear gripping my mind at the slightest unexpected movement or sound.

Bizarrely, the only time I managed to find peace for a few hours at a time was when I shared a bed with Luca and Dante. The arrangement should've repulsed me, but I secretly felt safest when I was nestled between them.

I would never tell Luca, but I worried that he sensed the truth. I suspected it was why he barely argued with Dante about caring for me, touching me, holding me. The men had established a tense truce for my sake, and I tried to silently convey my gratitude by accepting their tender caresses without flinching, even when I felt triggered.

Every day, Dante left me alone with Luca while he went out to hunt Antonio. The quiet time with my husband helped me maintain my sanity, but I didn't truly calm until Dante came home. I only felt secure with both of them watching over me.

Even if my hopes for my sister were dashed every time Dante returned emptyhanded.

He'd been gone a few hours now, and the wait for news about Giana was slowly tormenting me. Only the gentle, lazy patterns Luca traced on my skin kept me sane, grounded to

him. I cuddled closer, tucking myself against his chest as I tried to read my favorite romance novel to distract myself. The familiar words blurred before me, and I simply stared at the page as worry for my sister consumed me.

Panic jolted through me at the soft click of the bedroom doorknob turning, and I yelped in alarm, scrambling closer to Luca. His arms closed around me, stilling my frantic movements.

“Dante.” I released his name on a relieved exhale when he appeared in the open doorway.

He strode toward me and cupped my cheek in his big hand, and I turned into his comforting touch without thinking. “I’m here, little bird. You’re safe.” His sharp eyes pierced Luca. “Get dressed. Mattia and Diego are waiting for you in my study.”

Luca’s brows drew together, and he didn’t make a move to release me from his firm embrace. “What are they doing here? They don’t answer to you.”

Dante scoffed. “They were tempted to betray you and join me before Giuseppe turned on us both. They’re your only men who will talk to me at all. You will meet with them and get them to cooperate, along with anyone else who will answer your call. Your people need to see your face and know that you mean to command their loyalty, and I’m not speaking for you. They’ll help us find Antonio and get Giana to safety. Then we can talk about taking our revenge on Giuseppe and the Bratva.”

And what then? I wondered, but I kept the question to myself. Would Dante go back to tormenting Luca once all the other threats were handled? Was he still intent on breaking my husband’s will and crushing his spirit?

“Giuseppe is mine to kill,” Luca growled, his muscles flexing around me.

I remembered how he’d told me that my father had been partially responsible for his mother’s death: she’d died of an overdose, but she’d only become addicted to opioids after

Luca's father had beaten her for having an affair with Giuseppe.

Dante's eyes darkened. "The old bastard gave my wife to the Russians. I'll be the one to make him scream. But you're welcome to take out your own revenge on him too. I intend to keep him alive for a long time."

My husband's handsome face sharpened to something almost feral. "No mercy."

"None," Dante agreed. He tipped his head toward the door. "Mattia and Diego are waiting. I'll stay with Nora."

Luca dropped a swift but fierce kiss on my lips before he reluctantly released me. Dante was at my side instantly, gathering me up in his brawny arms. It seemed neither man was willing to leave me alone with my nightmares, and gratitude washed through me in a strong enough tide to make my eyes sting. I turned my face into Dante's chest and willed the tears away. I didn't have to be afraid when they were with me, guarding me. We were safe on Dante's estate, in the privacy of his bedroom.

Within a couple of minutes, Luca was dressed, and he'd arranged his tousled hair into a neater style. He looked rougher than the man I'd been forced to marry, less polished and controlled. But he was still stunning enough to capture my full attention, his rugged air making him even more magnetic than ever.

Or maybe it was my feelings for him that made him so irresistible.

"I love you." I said the words without hesitation or fear or rejection. I was completely confident in the bond I shared with him.

He pressed a kiss to my forehead. "I love you too, kitten."

He shot a final glare at Dante. "You'll take care of her while I'm gone." It wasn't a question.

"Better than you ever could," Dante retorted. "Nora is safe with me. In every way."

Luca's jaw ticked, but his eyes softened as his focus shifted back to me. "I'll be back as soon as I can. We're going to find Giana. I promise."

I nodded, throat too tight with emotion to manage any words. I didn't want Luca to leave, but my sister was more important than my desires.

And even though it made my husband angry, I knew that I truly was safe with Dante. We both knew it; that was why it infuriated Luca so much. He wanted Dante to be nothing more than the monster holding us captive, but he was different now: caring and almost alarmingly attentive. He often seemed to sense what I needed before Luca did.

And he hadn't once threatened to kill Luca. Or use me to break him.

My husband lingered for a moment longer, his eyes roving over me as though he was memorizing every nuance of my face. After a final, quick kiss on my lips, he turned and strode out of the bedroom, leaving me alone with my dark protector.

Dante shifted me off his lap and stood, holding out his hand to me.

"Come on, little bird. You need to get up and move around a little now that you're healing."

I shrank back and crossed my arms over my chest as fear fluttered in my belly. I was safe in Dante's bedroom. No one could get to me in his private haven.

"I don't want to leave." I defied him, but my voice was little more than a whisper.

His stern expression melted into compassion—an emotion I'd never seen cross his face. His glittering eyes were as intense as ever, but concern for me softened the harshest edges of his sharp features.

He reached out and snagged my wrist, his long fingers encircling it so that he could slowly pull my arms free from my chest, unfolding me from my defensive pose. I became aware of how frail I'd become; I'd lost weight despite Luca's efforts to encourage me to eat.

“You can’t stay in here forever, darling,” Dante said gently. “We’re just going downstairs. I promise that we won’t leave the house. Not yet.”

He tugged at my wrist, inexorably pulling me to my feet with steady pressure; there wasn’t so much as a flicker of violence in the way he handled me. He’d never been violent with me, even when he’d tied me up and toyed with me mercilessly. Dante was a mercurial man, but he was patient with me, and he’d never hurt me for any reason other than erotic pleasure.

If I was being honest with myself, I’d experienced dark ecstasy when he’d bound and tormented me.

What I couldn’t bear was the fact that he’d done it to break Luca. He’d hurt my husband in the worst way, and I wasn’t sure if I could ever forgive him for that. Dante might no longer be my personal Devil, but he’d done terrible things that he would never be able to take back.

But now, he stared down into my shattered soul, waiting until I was steady enough to leave the room that’d become my safe space. He was pushing me just a little, but not more than I could handle.

I couldn’t cower in his bedroom forever. I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t allow the Russians to take one more thing from me.

I sucked in a deep breath and willed my knees to stop shaking.

Dante’s full lips curved in a proud smile. “You’re so brave, Nora. I know you can do this.”

I managed a tight nod and took a step toward him, away from the safety of the bed where they both held me at night.

“That’s it,” he praised. “You’re doing so well, pet.”

Warmth pulsed through my chest, imbuing me with strength. I straightened my spine and took another step. Another.

Dante held my hand in his and walked beside me, guiding me down the corridor and toward the massive double staircase

that led down to the foyer. My feet stalled slightly.

“I thought you said we’re not going outside?” My voice lilted on a shaky question.

His thumb rubbed my palm in a soothing gesture. “We’re not. I wouldn’t risk taking you outside even if you wanted to leave. I’m keeping you close until we handle all the threats against you. We’re only going down to the music room now.”

I took another breath and continued our progress, trusting that Dante wouldn’t lie to me. He’d never lied to me, even when a pretty falsehood would’ve been preferable to the ugly truth. He’d promised that as my husband, he’d always be completely honest with me. He’d proven himself over and over again, sometimes with chilling results.

He’d promised to kill Alberto for me, and he’d followed through. When he and Luca had come to me covered in my cousin’s blood...

I swallowed hard and shoved the memory away before I could linger over it. I never should’ve agreed to take Dante in my mouth while Luca claimed me. It’d been a moment of madness driven by bloodlust. It’d been wrong, a betrayal. Luca could pretend that I’d done it under coercion, out of fear of Dante. But deep in my heart, I knew the truth: in that moment, I’d wanted both of them, even if it had been on an entirely carnal level.

Dante brushed my palm with his thumb again, calling my attention back to him. “You’re safe, Nora.”

He’d misread the tension that pinched my features. I wasn’t frightened of leaving the bedroom anymore; I was torn over my traitorous feelings.

I should hate Dante.

But I didn’t. Not anymore. Not after he’d risked his life to save me twice, and he’d spent the last weeks seeing to my every need. He’d bled for me. He’d killed for me. And he cared for me more deeply than I dared to contemplate.

He’d allowed Luca, his worst enemy, to touch me. I’d seen the jealousy that blazed in his green eyes and the furious

tension around his jaw when I leaned on my husband for support.

He did it all for me, sacrificing his own selfish desires for my sake.

We stepped onto the parquet floor of the opulent music room, which was dominated by a grand piano. My feet stalled again, and I locked my knees in place.

“You want me to play,” I surmised, voice tight.

Piano was my emotional release, a way to channel all the dark, intense feelings of pain and confinement in my father’s abusive home. But I’d suffered so deeply at the hands of the Bratva, and the trauma was too close to the surface. If I played, my volatile emotions would overwhelm me, and I might shatter.

Dante turned to me, caressing my cheek with one hand while the other settled on my hip, holding me firm.

“I do,” he confirmed. “No one has played it since I lost my mother, but I had it tuned for you before our wedding.”

Memories of that awful day churned through my mind, threatening to sour the moment with my dark protector. He’d drugged me and dragged me back to his estate. He’d forced me to take part in a farce of a wedding ceremony. And then he’d chased me through the woods like I was his favorite prey, delighting in my fear, my screams of frustration and defiance.

“How did you know?” I asked breathlessly. “When you first brought me here,” I clarified, voice gaining strength. “You knew all my hobbies, and you’d even brought my favorite books and put them in your library.”

His thumb caressed my chilled cheek. “Yes, I did it all for you.”

He seemed to think he’d done something good.

“It was horrific,” I told him, no venom in the words, only stark truth. “You terrified me. You kidnapped me and forced me to marry you.”

His dark brows drew together. “I asked your father what you liked because I wanted you to feel at home here.” His jaw ticked, but his hold on me remained achingly gentle. “You were meant to be mine. This was the marriage we were meant to have if Luca hadn’t stolen you away from me. *He’s* the one who forced you into an unwilling marriage. You agreed to be my wife, remember?”

“Only because I thought you were capable of hurting Giana,” I answered honestly. He was twisting the situation. “I didn’t want an arranged marriage at all. I pledged myself to you in order to save her.”

His lips pinched with something between disgust and regret. “If I frightened you by attacking the guard who hit you on the day of our engagement, I’m sorry. But I won’t apologize for protecting you. Not ever. And as for Giana,” he barreled on, “I never wanted her. I wouldn’t have accepted a match with her. You were the one I came for that day. I’d seen your strength, your poise. I knew you would be able to handle the darker things I need from a wife, and I intended to show you how much pleasure can be found in pain. We’re a good match, Nora. Don’t deny that you’ve found ecstasy in our more sadistic games. That was the marriage I wanted with you. It’s the happiness we could’ve had if Luca had never stolen you away from me and turned you against me. All I ever wanted was to make you safe and content.”

He trailed his fingers through my hair, stroking me in the way I liked. He’d learned my body, and I couldn’t deny that he knew how to wring pleasure from me, whether I was willing or not.

“I might have experienced ecstasy, but I didn’t want it,” I murmured, enlightening rather than accusing. I didn’t feel any loathing toward Dante, but he had to understand that what he’d done to me was horrific. He didn’t want to be the villain, but he’d done terrible things to Luca, and I’d been collateral damage.

“What you did to Luca was barbaric, and you used me for your revenge. You hurt me in ways I never could’ve imagined, and I’m not talking about the whip or the ropes. I was nothing

more than a pawn to you, a torture implement to use on Luca. You might have wanted a happy marriage, but you destroyed any chance of that with your sadistic actions.”

“I’m sorry,” he rasped, lines of strain drawing deep around his remarkable eyes. “I was wrong. I can see that now. I never should’ve involved you in my vendetta. I will spend every day of the rest of our lives making it up to you. We can still have the marriage I wanted for us. I can build that life for us. For you. It’s all I want: to see you safe and happy.”

“Why do you care about my happiness at all?” I asked, a tear scouring my cheek as emotion overwhelmed me. I’d once wanted the life he was describing, but he’d ruined any chance of that.

And Luca had promised to make me happy too. I loved him now. That would never change. There was no chance for Dante and me.

“Because I...” His gaze shifted from mine for the space of a heartbeat before spearing my soul once again. “It’s all I ever wanted.”

“But you didn’t even know me,” I pressed. “And how could I ever be happy in a cage?”

Frustration pinched his brow. “You’re not my prisoner; you’re my wife. I will cherish you and give you anything you desire.”

I hesitated for a moment, then dared to say, “What I desire is Luca’s freedom.”

Dante’s eyes darkened, and he looked away from me again, his jaw working as though he was chewing on words he wouldn’t say.

“He killed my brother,” he finally said on a growl. “Francesco was the only family I had left who hadn’t abandoned me or abused me, and Luca took him from me.” His emerald eyes peered into my soul, a desperate light flashing over the green depths. “I wanted a family with you, Nora. I still want that. I swear I will never use you against Luca again.”

“I know I’ve been hard on you,” he continued. “I pushed you too far, too fast, and I broke something between us. But I can fix it. Let me.”

“I don’t see how you can,” I replied shakily, another hot tear branding my cheek. I’d never seen him this raw, this vulnerable. My heart ached for his loss—I couldn’t imagine a world where Giana was ripped away from me forever—but that didn’t erase what he’d done to me. It didn’t save Luca from him.

“I know I was wrong to use you against Luca, but I pushed you in other ways. You hated when I forced you to eat, but that wasn’t about controlling you or humiliating you.”

My cheeks burned with residual humiliation at the mention of the awful way he’d stolen my shreds of control away from me.

“Of course it was about controlling me,” I countered. “You took everything from me, Dante. You stole my freedom and crushed my will, just like you’re doing to Luca.”

His features went slack, as though I’d slapped him across the face with devastating force.

“No,” he breathed. “It wasn’t like that. I’m not like that. I’m not like him.” He shook his head as though clearing away dark memories. “My father was a volatile man. He took out his rage on my mother. I watched her waste away in this house. She had an eating disorder too, and it was all about maintaining control over one thing in her life. I saw that in you, and I refused to let it happen to my own wife.”

He kept saying that: *his wife*. Not me, Nora. Just a woman who would serve his needs and fulfil a role in his life.

“She abandoned me,” he continued roughly, eyes haunted. “She had to save herself from my father, so one day, she disappeared. She left Francesco and me at our father’s mercy. I won’t let the same thing happen to my children.” He brushed the tears from my cheeks. “I will make things right with you, Nora. I swear I’ll always see to your wellbeing and happiness.”

“It doesn’t have to be me,” I said quietly. “Listen to yourself, Dante. You want a wife and a mother for your future children. That picture has nothing to do with me as a person. Any woman would do. You can let me go.”

His big hands bracketed my face, holding me close. “I can’t,” he rasped. “I told you: you were the one I wanted from the very beginning. I didn’t know you well then, but I was sure you were the perfect partner for me. And now that I truly know you, I can’t lose you. You’re brave and loyal and cleverer than I could ever deserve, and I want you so badly that sometimes I think I might die of jealousy. I forget how to breathe when Luca touches you. I can barely think when you’re in his arms, not mine.”

I was the one who’d forgotten how to breathe. With each of his desperate declarations, my chest grew tighter, crushing down on my heart. He’d never been so vulnerable with me: raw and real. He’d never been vulnerable at all.

His mother had abandoned him. He was afraid that would happen again. He was afraid that I wanted to leave him.

And I did.

Didn’t I?

I loved Luca, but I couldn’t deny being drawn to Dante from the very beginning. He’d poisoned what could’ve been between us by using me for his revenge, but I could see the depth of his regret shining from his eyes.

Dante had become my dark savior, and I couldn’t hate him anymore. If I escaped the cage that he’d built for me and Luca, he’d be utterly alone again.

You’re not my prisoner; you’re my wife.

That was the marriage I wanted with you. It’s the happiness we could’ve had if Luca had never stolen you away from me and turned you against me. All I ever wanted was to make you safe and content.

In another world, under other circumstances, could I have been happy with Dante? He’d described me as his *perfect partner*, not simply a submissive wife, a woman to be left at

home to quietly raise his children without a will of her own. He wanted me to challenge him; he liked my defiant spirit, my strength of character. He'd seen it in me before we'd even been engaged.

How long had this beautiful fallen angel wanted me?

Dante was capable of monstrous things, but he wasn't my monster.

"Dante, I—"

"I can be a better man for you," he forestalled me, something like longing roughening his tone. "I'll prove to you that I will be a good husband, a good match. The right one for you. Because I can't let you go, Nora. I need you to be mine."

But I wasn't his. I belonged to Luca. My heart belonged to my husband.

Even as I thought it, my head tipped back, and my lips parted. Dante's raw vulnerability called to something deep inside me. He didn't want to be alone anymore. He wanted *me* to be his companion, his wife. No one else.

His lips brushed mine, and I didn't turn my face away. With the first spark between our bodies, desire ignited in my soul; more than simple physical lust. Dante knew how to make my blood sing in my veins, but this time, my heart tugged toward his. My arms twined around his shoulders, and I went up on my toes as I surged closer to his masculine heat, his intoxicating scent.

I'd never offered him a kiss before; he'd taken them from my lips, stealing them in moments of agonized ecstasy.

Now, we came together as equals for the first time. Desire crackled along my skin, lighting me up with awareness everywhere his body touched mine. His tongue plundered my mouth, and I met him with frantic, hungry strokes. He stepped toward me, his strong arms bracing my waist as he guided me back to the piano. His hands cupped my bottom, and he suddenly lifted me, setting me down on the polished black surface. He leaned over me, urging me to lay back with his hand tugging at my hair.

He tore his lips from mine, and a soft keening sound burst from my chest at the loss. He soothed me with primal, hot kisses down the column of my throat before nipping at my shoulder. My flesh tingled at the small bite of pain, and I arched into him. He made his way down to my breasts, sucking the tight peaks through the thin silk nightgown that barely covered me.

“Dante...” I moaned his name, half protest, half plea for more.

He growled and bit my nipple hard enough to make me shriek. Hot lines of pleasure sizzled down to my clit, and my sex pulsed with the need to be filled.

An echo of fear shuddered down my spine as my body responded to the sexual stimulation.

He seemed to understand what was happening before I did.

“No,” he rumbled, savage and possessive. “Stay with me, Nora.” He kissed my neck again and reached between my legs, clever fingers stimulating my needy clit. “No one can touch you here. No one but me. This pussy is mine.”

I jolted at the words, and Luca’s blazing ochre eyes flashed across my mind.

“When he touches you, it’s my hand,” Dante snarled against my skin and slid a thick finger inside me. “When he holds you, it’s only because I command it. I’ll give you anything you need, Nora. Even if that means allowing him to think you’re his. We both know the truth. You’re mine, little bird. Your body responds to me. You were made for all the dark things I need to do to you. He can never fulfil you like I can.”

He curled his finger against my g-spot and rubbed my clit with his thumb while he nipped at my breasts. I arched toward him on a rough shout, writhing in his cruel, demanding grip.

“He can’t make you scream like I can. He doesn’t know how to do this to you. He wouldn’t even want to. You would spend your life knowing that you could have what I offer, and he’d never be able to give it to you.” His voice was guttural,

savage. “You want me to break your careful control. You want to be free from that burden. I am the only one who’s strong enough to shatter you. To set you free, little bird.”

He kissed a tear from my cheek, and I tried to babble a protest as another shockwave of pleasure wracked my body.

This was wrong. I belonged to Luca.

But Dante was playing me like his favorite instrument. He knew exactly how to make me whimper and writhe.

“Don’t be afraid, darling,” he crooned, his emerald eyes burning into me. “I’ll always put you back together again. You know I will.” He rubbed the sensitive spot inside me with ruthless pressure, hard enough to force my back to bow with aching pleasure. “Shatter for me, Nora.”

I came apart on a scream, releasing my guilt and shame on a riptide of ecstasy. Nothing existed but Dante: his hands on me, his fiercely beautiful eyes consuming my soul.

He crushed his lips to mine, saving the flavor of my blissful cry. As my body began to shake, he didn’t relent. He continued to stimulate me until I became overly sensitive. I jolted beneath him, but he pinned me down, teeth sinking into my lower lip as he rubbed me in a demanding rhythm.

Another violent orgasm tore from my body, bursting from my core to ravage my entire being.

He stroked me through the aftershocks of my second peak, and he kissed more tears from my cheeks as he coaxed the last sparks of painful pleasure from my sex.

“You are so beautiful,” he murmured, lavishing me with praise and more tender caresses. “So perfect for me. My Nora.”

Mine! Luca’s possessive roar thundered through my mind, and a soft sob wracked my chest.

Dante shushed me and held me close, cradling my shaking body in his brawny arms. “Don’t worry, pet. You did nothing wrong.”

He read me so easily. He saw me so clearly.

There was a familiarity between us that couldn't be denied. He'd always peered straight into my soul, and today, he'd allowed me to glimpse his in return. He'd shared his pain with me, his deepest fear: that I would abandon him.

My heart ached at the thought of causing him so much pain.

But Luca was my husband, and in the end, I had to choose him.

If Dante would ever let him go.

Even though I knew Luca was still his prisoner, Dante's strong arms no longer felt like a cage around me. I felt... free.

And that terrified me.

CHAPTER 9

NORA

Guilt and worry ate at me, hollowing out my insides. Dante had been gone for hours, and he'd promised he wouldn't return until he had Giana under his protection. One of Luca's men had managed to contact Antonio, and he'd turned on my father to help Giana. Right now, Dante's men were preparing to raid Giuseppe's hideout. But only after Giana was safely out of the line of fire.

Dante had promised that she wouldn't be harmed, and I believed him.

Still, there were so many things that could go wrong. The violence might break out too soon, and my sister could be caught in a firefight.

And Dante...

He would risk his life to save her for me. I knew it deep in my heart. He'd sworn that he would atone for his sins against me, and this was how he would prove his devotion as my husband.

I bit my lip and snuggled closer to Luca, guilt turning my stomach. What about my sin against him? Yesterday, I'd kissed his worst enemy, his tormentor. I'd allowed Dante to touch me, to make me come in ways that Luca hadn't dared since I'd been rescued from the Russians. Luca held me and comforted me, but he'd been so gentle with me. Dante had known that I needed to be handled more roughly, to be forced to orgasm in order to break through the barriers of fear that'd been instilled by my trauma.

“It’s okay, kitten,” Luca rumbled, tracing the line of my lip where it was trapped between my teeth. “Giana will be fine. She’ll be here soon.” His jaw firmed. “Although I’d prefer to have her almost anywhere else. Having her here will only give Dante more leverage against us, another person to threaten in order to control us.”

I shuddered, but I knew Dante would never harm my sister or use her against me. The repulsed reaction was borne from fear that the men would resume their feud as soon as all the threats against me were handled. Dante might torture Luca again, and Luca would try to kill Dante.

I couldn’t bear the thought of either of them in pain, or worse, dead. I couldn’t lose either of them.

And that traitorous feeling ate at my soul. I belonged to Luca, and my loyalty should lie with him and him alone.

My husband stroked my hair back from my cheek, soothing me. He’d misread the reasoning behind my distress.

“Don’t worry, Nora. I’m going to get us out of here. And when I do, we’ll take Giana with us. Dante will be dead, and we’ll all be free.”

“He saved my life,” I said hesitantly. “And he spared yours.”

Luca grimaced and pulled me closer to his chest. “You don’t owe that sick bastard anything. I’ll handle it, Nora. I swear. I’ll rip out his heart and give it to you, so you’ll know he can never hurt you again.”

I recoiled before I could think better of it. “I don’t want that.”

Luca’s fierce expression softened, and he resumed stroking me. “I’m sorry, kitten. I won’t make you watch if you don’t want to see the blood. I’ll take care of everything. I’ll take care of you.”

“That’s not what I mean. I…”

I trailed off, and his brow furrowed.

“Talk to me,” he urged. “You can tell me anything. Just tell me what you want, and I’ll do it for you.”

“I don’t want you to kill Dante,” I whispered, hardly daring to say the words aloud.

I knew what I was asking was impossible, just as Dante claimed it was impossible for him to ever release Luca. He would have his revenge, and nothing I said would change that.

Luca’s stony features hardened to granite. “Don’t ask that of me. After everything he’s done to you. I’ll make him scream before he dies.”

The corners of my eyes stung, but I tipped my chin back in challenge. “He’s different now. You’ve seen how he’s been since...” I stumbled over the memories of what I’d suffered. “He cares about me, Luca.”

My husband gnashed his teeth, and his corded arms flexed around me. “He just wants you for himself. It’s another sick game, another manipulation. That’s not kindness, Nora. It’s not love. *I love you. You’re mine.*”

My heart skipped a beat, then squeezed tightly to the point of pain. Dante had promised that I was his, not Luca’s. He’d sworn that all he wanted was my happiness and safety.

And I believed him.

“He apologized,” I said quietly. “He wants to atone for what he put me through.”

“There are no words that could ever erase what he did!” Luca barked, his handsome face darkening with rage even as he held me with tenderness.

No. Words would never be enough. But Dante was a man of action. He proved himself through deeds, not flowery promises. He’d vowed that he would make things right, and I knew he’d do everything in his power to follow through.

“And even if that sadistic sociopath somehow feels something like guilt for what he did to you, he will never let you go,” Luca seethed. “We’ll always be his prisoners unless I kill him. That’s the only way this nightmare ends.”

Luca would never stop trying to murder Dante as long as he was a captive, and Dante would never release Luca because of his vendetta.

But if there was some way for them to make peace...

“He says that you killed his brother,” I pressed despite Luca’s volatility. He would never lash out at me, no matter how righteously enraged he became. “He hates you for that.”

Luca’s entire body tensed. “That’s not how it happened. Yes, I’m responsible for Francesco’s death, but I—”

The bedroom door banged open, and I yelped in alarm.

My burst of fear immediately morphed into a sob of relief when I saw my sister standing in the open doorway, Dante hovering protectively behind her.

“Giana!”

We both ran toward each other, meeting in a fierce embrace.

She murmured my name over and over again, holding me tight. Her delicate body trembled with emotion and a ghost of the fear that must’ve haunted her ever since Father had given me to the Bratva.

I pulled back so that I could study her, my eyes raking over her to search for any signs of injury. Her jaw was marred by a bruise that’d turned a sick green hue, an older mark of abuse that she’d tried to conceal with makeup. And her right wrist was in a splint, sprained.

“What did Father do to you?” I demanded, rage making the question little more than a growl.

Her hazel eyes roved over me, checking me in turn. I was grateful that Dante had given me yoga pants and a soft cotton, long sleeved shirt before he’d left this morning; the clothes covered most of my bruises. He must’ve known that an exchange like this would happen and that I wouldn’t want to upset my sister by allowing her to see the marks of abuse.

He understood me so deeply that it should’ve been disturbing, but I was too grateful to him to be upset.

“Tell me, Giana,” I pressed, and murderous impulses curled my fingers to fists.

My father would die for harming her. I wouldn't allow him to hurt her ever again. For too long, we'd endured his merciless punishments. My sister would be safe from now on. I would guarantee it.

“I tried to stop them,” she said, grasping my fists in her shaking hands. “I wasn't going to let them take you from me. But the Russians...” She trailed off, shuddering at the awful memory of the day they'd taken me.

I ignored the sick laughter that echoed in my head, shadows of the trauma I'd endured. My sister was more important.

“Who did this to you? Was it Antonio?”

“No!” she exclaimed, eyes going wide enough that her thick lashes brushed her brows. “Antonio would never hurt me. He protected me from the worst of it, but I couldn't stop them from taking you away. I'm so sorry, Nora. I thought I was saving you from Dante, but I led you straight into a trap. I didn't know. I swear, I had no idea what Father had planned.”

I hugged her tightly. “I know,” I promised. “I'm safe now. I survived.”

Her delicate features drew sharp with fury. “The Russians will pay for it,” she seethed, eyes shining with unshed tears. Her gaze slid past me, finding Dante's. “Kill them all.”

My dark protector offered her a short, savage nod. “I intend to. I'll avenge my wife, and I'll slaughter everyone who hurt her. Starting with that traitorous fuck, Antonio. He disappeared during the firefight when we raided Giuseppe's hideout. Do you know where he might have gone? I'll kill him for throwing Nora to the wolves.”

Giana swallowed hard and shrank closer to me, her fingers threading through mine for support. Despite her evident fear of the deadly predator in the room, she held her head high when she defied him.

“Antonio didn’t know about Father’s deal with the Bratva,” she asserted, voice barely wavering. “He thought he was helping me save Nora. From you.” Her eyes narrowed at Dante. “I’m grateful to you for getting me away from Giuseppe and for saving Nora from the Russians, but I still don’t trust you. I know you’ll avenge her because you think she’s your wife, and I’ll stand with anyone who fights for my sister. But I was there on the day you took her from our father’s house. You drugged her and dragged her away from me. She didn’t want to go with you.”

“Giana,” I scolded in an undertone, squeezing her hand in warning. “Dante will protect me. You don’t know...” I suddenly became acutely aware of Luca’s eyes on me. “I’ll explain later. It’s more complicated than that. What matters now is that you’re safely here with me. What happened to Father?”

“The old bastard slipped through my fingers,” Dante rumbled. “Antonio got Giana out before we raided Giuseppe’s hideout, and in that time, he must’ve been tipped off that we were coming for him. When we breached the house, he was already gone.”

He leaned against the doorjamb, his face paler than usual despite his murderous expression. Crimson stained his white shirt, soaking the fabric at his shoulder.

“You’re hurt!” I exclaimed.

Panic punched me, and I wrenched my hand free from Giana’s tight grip so that I could go to him. My fingers flew to his buttons, tearing at them in order to take off this shirt. I had to inspect the extent of his injury.

His long fingers encircled my wrists, slowly directing my grasping hands back to my sides. His eyes glinted with a hungry light as he drank in my concerned expression.

“I’m fine, darling. My stitches tore when I was firing the assault rifle. I killed as many of the traitorous bastards as I could. They won’t be able to threaten you ever again.”

“But you’re bleeding,” I insisted, jerking against his hold.

“I’ve already called my private physician. He’ll take a look at the wound.” He released one of my wrists so that he could trace the lines of strain around my mouth, as though he couldn’t quite believe they were etched there. “I’m okay, Nora. I’m not going to let anyone hurt you.”

“Neither will I.” Luca’s fierce growl rumbled over me as his chest pressed against my back. His hands settled on my waist in a possessive hold, but he didn’t tear me away from Dante; he wouldn’t risk accidentally hurting me.

I looked up to find his ochre eyes boring into Dante’s. “You should’ve died today. Soon enough, I’ll take care of that too.”

Dante sneered at him. “Try it, and see what happens to your friends.”

“Stop!” I demanded. “Neither of you is going to die, and Luca’s friends won’t be harmed. I won’t allow it to happen.”

I lifted my chin and met Dante’s disapproving glower head-on. “We’re going to have a talk. All three of us. This ends today.”

Luca’s fingers flexed into my hips. “There’s no use trying to reason with a madman. And nothing he can say will make up for what he’s done to you. To us.”

I spun, rounding on my husband. “He’s risked his life to save mine more than once.”

Luca scowled. “I’ve already told you that you won’t be responsible for his death. I will.”

“I won’t let you kill him,” I said bluntly.

His brows drew together, expression thunderous. “He’s been a dead man since the day he stole you away from me. It’s done, Nora.”

“And you’ve been damned since the day you killed my brother,” Dante hissed. “There’s no stopping this, little bird.”

I shook my head. “I’m going to make sure Giana feels safe and comfortable here,” I announced, skewering Dante with a hard stare. “You are going to see the doctor.” I turned my gaze

on Luca. “And you’re not going to try to kill anyone. Not until we talk.”

My husband’s jaw was so tight that he spoke through gritted teeth. “You can’t ask that of me, Nora.”

I placed my hand on his cheek to soften my demand, but I remained firm in my resolve. “I’m not asking. I love you, Luca, and I’m going to find a way to free you. I’m going to end this nightmare. For all of us.”

“Not possible,” Dante bit out. “You can beg me as prettily as you like, pet, but I’ll never forgive him.”

“Well, I’m going to try,” I insisted, looking from Luca to Dante and back again. “I can’t keep living like this. I know you’ll both protect me, but I’m trying to protect us all. You’ve both promised to do anything for me. Are you going to deny me a simple conversation?”

“All right, Nora,” Dante ground out. “We’ll talk. I always keep my promises, and I meant it when I offered you anything you desire.”

Luca couldn’t seem to manage more than a wordless growl of frustration. I caressed his hard jaw and softened my tone.

“Please, Luca. I need this. I need you.”

He turned his face into my tender touch and kissed my palm before managing a stiff nod. He couldn’t seem to find the words to reply, but he agreed to my demand.

I didn’t know what dark secrets would be revealed when I asked for the truth about the night Dante’s brother died, but there was more to it than coldblooded murder at Luca’s hand. My husband seemed to carry guilt over Francesco’s death, and even though he’d claimed responsibility, he’d suggested that the situation was more complex.

Dante would never listen to Luca if he denied any culpability. But my dark protector would listen to me. It might be within my power to end this feud, and I wouldn’t give up until I’d saved them both, just as they’d saved me.

CHAPTER 10

DANTE

My freshly stitched shoulder wound ached, but that pain was nothing compared to the agony of knowing that Nora loved Luca, not me. I'd agreed to a talk with my enemy because I couldn't deny her anything, but I already knew it'd be useless. Nora was goodhearted and a little naïve; she thought words would be enough to mend the bloody rift between Luca and me.

She was wrong.

I'd planned my revenge for years. A single conversation wouldn't sway me. Nothing could ever make me stop hating Luca Vitale. He'd taken my brother from me, the only person in the world who had loved me.

I'd done terrible things to Luca, but he hadn't even begun to suffer the full extent of his punishment. I'd never use Nora against him again, but there were so many other ways to crush his will and shatter his soul.

I paced across my bedroom, not deigning to look at the bastard where he lounged on the bed that I shared with my wife. And *him*.

I ground my teeth at the thought of him holding her. The hands that'd ended my brother's life now caressed the woman who was meant to be mine forever, and she melted at his touch.

Any minute now, she would return from getting Giana settled in, and she would go to him, not me. She would cuddle up to him but shoot me those secret, wide-eyed glances: the

ones that gave me foolish hope that I hadn't completely broken our marriage.

She appeared in the open doorway, floating toward me with her remarkable grace, the dancer's poise that'd first captured my attention years ago. I expected her to fling herself into Luca's arms, but she came to a stop between us, as though she could use her slight body as a shield.

Luca sat up straighter on the edge of the bed, and I stopped pacing. Our keen attention fixed on her, and for a moment, she squirmed at the scrutiny. Then my brave wife took a breath and lifted her chin in the defiant way that made my blood race for her. Pride and possessiveness heated my chest. This stunning, strong woman was my partner, and I would never surrender her to my enemy. No matter what she might say next.

She fixed me with a steady hazel stare, face utterly composed and firm with determination. "We're going to talk about what happened to your brother."

My fists instantly clenched at my sides.

"I already know what happened," I snapped, turning my glower on Luca. "This motherfucker murdered him."

Luca's jaw firmed, and his eyes darkened with guilt.

"Don't listen to his excuses," I warned Nora. "He knows what he did."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Luca shot back, voice tight. "Francesco is dead because of me. I've had to live with that for years, but—"

"Finally, the truth," I seethed, turning my attention to my wife. "There's nothing to discuss. He's guilty, and he's admitted it right in front of you. Don't ever beg for mercy on his behalf again, little bird."

"Don't you dare threaten her!" Luca barked, surging to his feet.

Nora instantly stepped in front of him, blocking his path to me. I rolled my shoulders, bracing for the attack. I ignored the

flare of pain as my stitches strained. That discomfort didn't matter. Nothing mattered but avenging my brother.

And protecting Nora.

As long as she kept her slight body between us, neither of us could throw the first punch. Not without risking my stubborn, headstrong wife.

"I'm not the one who killed him," Luca seethed. "And you've tormented Nora when she's entirely innocent."

"Of course you killed him!" I bellowed, my entire body coiling tight with the need to throttle him. "Francesco cursed your name with his final breath. It was his last word as he bled out in my arms. You came to the raid on our estate when my father betrayed yours and attempted to take control for himself. I tried to keep Francesco out of it; he was only fifteen, and the two of us had nothing to do with our father's coup. There was no need for us to die defending the bastard who'd beaten my mother so badly that she abandoned us. But then *you* arrived to help do your father's dirty work, and you left my brother to die after you shot him."

"You don't know what the fuck you're talking about." A vein pulsed in Luca's brow, and Nora pressed her hands against his chest, directly over his heart. He halted as though she'd chained him in place. "Francesco came out of hiding to fight *with* me. To protect me. He took the bullet that was meant for me. He died to save my life. I'll always bear the weight of his death on my conscience, but I'm not the one who pulled the trigger."

My spine stiffened, my entire body locking up tight as my mind viscerally rejected his distorted version of events. "You're lying. Why would my brother risk his life to protect you? You were always just Tommaso Vitale's spoiled heir. He didn't owe you any personal loyalty."

Luca's cheeks flushed with something like shame. "Because he was in love with me. He'd told me only a few days before, and I rejected him. I...said some things I'm not proud of. He was my friend, but I never thought about him in

that way. And if our fathers had ever found out that he said something like that, they—”

“Stop lying!” I roared, my entire body practically vibrating with the force of my rage.

“I’m not lying! You think I don’t regret the shitty things I said to him? Do you think I wanted him to die for me? Or do you not want to believe that your own brother might have loved another man?”

“Of course I knew! He was my brother.”

I’d warned him so many times to hide his true self; in our world, his sexuality could’ve gotten him killed. Our father would’ve done it himself if he’d ever found out. When the raid had happened, we were still barely more than kids. We wouldn’t have survived standing up to him back then. I’d urged Francesco to keep his secret and wait for a time when I would be strong enough to protect him from others who might not accept him.

But he’d died before that day ever came, thanks to Luca fucking Vitale.

“Dante,” Nora said quietly, calling my attention to her.

I hit her with the full force of my murderous glower, but she held her ground without so much as flinching. Her eyes shone with emotion, the intense exchange touching her soft heart. The sight of her compassion made something twist painfully at the center of my chest.

“If you knew,” she pressed, “then is it so hard to believe that Francesco would sacrifice himself for someone he loved? If your brother was anything like you, I can believe it.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying.” My voice was strangely rough, gravelly. “Luca would never have been good enough for my little brother. He’s always been an entitled, cocky little shit. If I’d known that Francesco was even thinking about him in that way, I—”

“Exactly,” Nora interrupted me, gentle but firm. “You wouldn’t have known.”

She didn't say anything more. A tear rolled down her cheek as she allowed the silence to grow heavy with the weight of the truth.

No. It couldn't be true. I'd loathed Luca for years. Every conniving, calculated move I'd made was in pursuit of the day that I would finally have him in my power. I'd plotted and planned and killed for this. I'd done terrible things to Nora in order to exact my revenge.

And if Luca's version of events was true, then...

A wordless roar of denial tore from my chest, and Nora flinched toward Luca.

I backed away, unable to bear her tearful, wide-eyed gaze on me for one more agonizing second. Dawning realization of the depth of my sin bore down on my shoulders, crushing me. I turned away from them with another bellow, and animal sound of rage and pain. I stormed away from them, knowing that Luca would hold her close in my absence. He would comfort her, soothe her. She would melt in his arms and accept his kiss.

Not mine. She'd never been mine.

And she never would be.

I didn't deserve her.

I tore my way through the house, smashing priceless art as I blindly stumbled away from them. Eventually, I half-fell into my study and found my whisky. I grabbed the bottle and knocked it back, as though the burn of the liquor would somehow grant me absolution. Or at the very least, oblivion.

The thought of them entwined together in my bed made my stomach lurch, but I crushed down the primal urge to storm upstairs and claim my wife.

She could cut out my heart for what I'd done to her, and it wouldn't be a cruel enough punishment.

And Luca...

Even now, my fists flexed at the thought of the bastard: an ingrained response from years of obsessive loathing.

But he hadn't killed Francesco. My brother had loved him deeply enough to die for him, and instead of honoring his sacrifice, I'd devoted myself to destroying Luca Vitale. I'd made him watch as I touched the woman he loved. I'd bound him in chains of my will and forced pleasure from Nora's unwilling body.

Knowing that the Russians were raping my wife while I scrambled to gather the necessary firepower to save her had been the most soul-wrenching experience of my life. I'd never felt more helpless, and it had shredded me.

I'd done the same thing to Luca. I'd made him live through that harrowing experience over and over again.

It was a wonder he was still sane.

Of course, he wanted to kill me. How could he not? It was his duty as a husband to avenge Nora and his right as a man to make me scream for my crimes against him.

I truly was the villain in their love story, the sadistic monster who'd tormented them both in the most unspeakable ways. Nothing I could do would ever absolve me, but I couldn't simply run away and exile myself for my sins.

I couldn't bring myself to leave Nora. She was still at risk, and she would always have my protection. Even if I wasn't worthy of touching her ever again.

I'd always been expert at punishing my enemies. I knew exactly how to mete out justice. There was only one way I could think of to begin to atone.

CHAPTER II

NORA

Luca's arms were warm and firm around me, and I leaned into his strength. The revelations that'd just unfolded had disturbed me to my core. All the pain and loss, and the years of hatred that'd twisted Dante into something monstrous...

It was almost too heartbreaking to contemplate. Dante had lost the only person in the world who loved him when he was little more than a child. His father had abused him, and his mother abandoned him. Francesco had been his anchor, and part of his humanity had died along with his brother. He'd become cold and sadistic, only finding peace when inflicting the pain that ravaged his heart.

That pain bound me to him, and in a perverse way, it'd formed a more intimate bond between us than sexual union. He'd released a fraction of his anguish in tormenting me, making me hurt like he hurt.

And my body had welcomed it, finding kinship in years of suffering and cathartic release. We'd both endured abuse and loss.

I couldn't help responding to his dark games with arousal, but the visceral connection I felt toward him was so much more overwhelming than simple lust. It was no wonder that I completely lost myself in him when he unleashed his most deviant needs on me.

But Luca was the one holding me, not my dark protector. My husband was steady and solid—an anchor of my own. Our

love had been forged in darkness, our defiant spirits bonding us with a common cause: to free ourselves from Dante's cage.

And now, I'd finally set us free.

"Do you understand now?" I asked Luca quietly, my voice thick with tears that I shed for them both. "Can you see why Dante did those terrible things?"

He pulled back from me slightly, brows drawn forbiddingly over his eyes. "Dante's misinterpretation of the situation will never undo what he put you through. He's still a monster, Nora."

I rested my hand over his heart, keeping him tethered to me. "He has no reason to hold you captive anymore. You saw him just now. He's devastated by the truth. There's no longer a need for him to exact revenge. He'll set you free, and no one has to die."

Luca's features firmed to a forbidding mask. "I need his men to take down Giuseppe and the Russians, so I'll spare him for now in order to protect you. But as soon as you're safe, I'll put him down."

"But I don't want—"

"He's right." Dante's gravelly voice cut over me, and he stormed into the room, purpose in his sure strides. "Luca can't kill me until you're safe. But I have an alternative to death." He came to an abrupt halt a few feet away from me and met Luca's blazing glower, his expression cool and stoic. "Punish me the same way I punished you. Fuck Nora in front of me. Claim my wife while I watch, knowing she'll never be mine."

"No!" I exclaimed, a vehement denial of the disgusting sacrifice he was making.

Dante's eyes glittered when they met mine, pain in each stunning green facet. They shined sharply enough to cut my heart.

"You should be with the man you love," he said, strained but firm.

His agonized gaze swung back to Luca, and he squared his shoulders like he was facing a firing squad: proud, but ready to suffer the consequences of his actions.

“You can chain me down if you want. You can do anything to me, and I’ll take it, if only I can stay close to Nora and protect her.”

“Don’t do this,” I begged, voice breaking.

Dante always proved himself through actions, and he was throwing himself at Luca’s mercy now to demonstrate the depth of his regret. He was resolute in his decision to accept the worst punishment for his sins against my husband.

When Dante said nothing, I turned to Luca with my pleas. “Don’t do it. If you truly love me, you won’t degrade him like that. I don’t want any more suffering or cruelty. I can’t bear more torment, and I won’t be used as a weapon between you ever again.”

Luca’s mouth twisted in a frown, and he caressed my cheek. “He has to pay for what he did to you.”

“You should be with him,” Dante interjected, tone low and determined. “I don’t deserve you, Nora. I can see that now. Make love to Luca in front of me. Show me that you’re his, because you will never be mine.”

My spine stiffened, and anger surged up in a wave to drown my anguish.

“I won’t be used as a weapon, and I won’t be used as a tool for you to torture yourself. I don’t consent to any of this.”

“No,” Dante bit out. “You didn’t consent to anything I did to you. But you love Luca. You chose him, and I gave you no reason to choose me.”

My eyes burned with the ferocity of my rage and pain. “You never gave me a chance to choose. And you can’t make the choice for me now. Only I can do that.”

A single dark brow rose, challenging despite the tension around his full lips. “You aren’t going to forsake the man you

love for the man who tortured you. You don't want to cause me further pain? Then don't pretend otherwise."

Suddenly, his hands bracketed my waist, and he turned me away from him so that I faced Luca. He wrapped my hair around his fist and tugged back sharply, pressing me closer to my husband with a firm touch at the small of my back.

"Kiss her, Luca," he snarled. "Claim her. I know you want to. You want it more than your next breath."

Before I could protest, Luca's mouth sealed mine. His kiss was a brand, a declaration of ownership. I was his, and he was mine.

But this was wrong. I couldn't—

Dante's fist tightened in my hair, lighting up my scalp with little sparks of pain. I gasped, and Luca's tongue surged into my mouth. Their masculine heat surrounded me, and their possessive hands held me at their mercy. A shiver raced over my sensitized skin as every inch of my body came alive for them: the two men who had pledged that that would sacrifice anything for me.

But Dante was hurting himself in the worst way, and it was too awful for my heart to bear. I couldn't experience transcendent pleasure when I knew his soul was in agony, no matter how good it felt to have both of them touching me.

I struggled to free myself from Luca's savage kiss so that I could reason with them, but Dante held me firm with his punishing grip on my hair, and Luca devoured my soft cry of protest with hungry strokes of his tongue. Despite myself, I shuddered and softened in their arms, leaning back against Dante for support while my head tipped back farther to allow Luca to claim me more deeply. My fingers sank into Dante's thighs, clinging to him in carnal defiance. His cock stiffened, pressing into my ass. Luca was hard too, his thick length straining against the confines of his jeans.

They wanted me as desperately as I wanted them. Both of them.

I grew lightheaded before Luca finally allowed me an inch of space to draw in a ragged breath.

“I won’t choose,” I gasped before he could silence me with his tongue again.

Dante pulled my hair in a punishing warning, and he growled in my ear, “Your decision has been made already, little bird.”

“No,” I countered, vehement. I stared up into Luca’s blazing eyes, trying to convey the depth of my feelings for him with more than just words. “I want you both.”

Luca reeled back as though I’d slapped him, but I clutched at his shoulders to hold him close. He could’ve easily pulled away, but he halted as though I’d bound him with rope.

“I love you,” I promised, “but I care about Dante too. He’s suffered so much. You don’t have to punish him more.” I tipped my chin back, holding my ground. “I won’t let you.”

“Don’t pity me,” Dante seethed, his angry words hot on my neck.

“You don’t get to tell me how I feel,” I shot back, even though I couldn’t turn to face him with his cruel grip on my hair. “You both vowed to give me anything I desire. This is what I want.”

I needed both of them to hold me, to claim me in their own way. Luca was primal in his passion for me, a possessive beast who would do anything to keep me for himself. Dante inflicted exquisite pain, making me shatter for him so that he could put me back together again: his deepest expression of affection and intimacy.

Luca’s square jaw was sharp enough to cut. “I can’t deny you anything, Nora. But what you’re asking of me—”

“You’re still a selfish bastard,” Dante hissed. “We robbed her of her right to choose. You forced her into marriage, and then I stole her away. We both claimed her as our own without her consent. You owe her this. Show her some fucking respect and honor her choices if you’re ever going to stand a chance of being worthy of her.”

Luca's eyes darkened. "You want both of us, Nora? Then Dante can pleasure you, but he has no right to you. You can use him the way he used me: like I was your own personal sex toy."

I traced the line of his granite jaw, my touch tender but my words firm. "I know he hurt you. I'm not asking you to forgive him. I'm asking you not to hurt him in return. There's been too much pain between us, and I want to feel pleasure. I've suffered enough. So, no," I refused. "You'll both be with me because you want me, not because you want to use me to punish each other."

I caressed their cocks with either hand, proving the depth of their desire for me. "Don't make me choose. Please."

My plea was a trigger, and their hands were on me, tearing at my clothes in a frenzy. Within seconds, I was naked, my tattered shirt and yoga pants tossed away.

"You want this, kitten?" Luca growled, a primal challenge. "I'll make you come so hard that you forget your own name."

"I'm going to make you sing for me, little bird," Dante warned, dark anticipation roughening his tone.

Luca grabbed my shoulders and shoved me back, so that I fell onto the soft mattress with a squeak of alarm. Then Dante was on me, his weight pinning me down. His long fingers encircled my wrists, and he dragged my arms above my head, squeezing to impose his will.

"Don't move, pet."

Luca grasped my jaw in one big hand, forcibly turning my face so that I was forced to look into his blazing eyes. They burned with a feverish light. "Obey, or I'll punish you. You will submit to me in every way, Nora."

"Yes," I agreed in a fierce whisper.

This was what I needed: to be completely overwhelmed, to give myself over to them. Once I was theirs, I'd know deep in my soul that I was owned and protected. Safe from harm. Loved.

After one last lingering, warning glower, both men eased off of me. They watched me hungrily as they quickly stripped out of their own clothes, each man utterly captivated by the sight of my bare and vulnerable body stretched out before them like a sacrifice.

Their powerful muscles rippled and flexed as they prowled toward me; Luca feral and slightly broader, but Dante even more gloriously terrifying in his intensity. My husband looked at me like he wanted to devour me, and the glint in my dark protector's eyes promised sweet pain along with ruthless pleasure.

Despite their imposing demeanors, a surge of feminine power rushed through me, intoxicating me. Even though they were utterly dominating me, these strong, fierce men were *mine*.

They closed in on me, their body heat kissing my flesh and chasing away a chill I hadn't realized pebbled my skin. Luca settled his massive frame beside me and crushed his mouth to mine in an all-consuming kiss. At the same time, Dante grabbed my thighs and shoved them apart, pinning them to the mattress with enough force to leave possessive marks. I gasped at the slight flare of pain, and Luca nipped at my parted lips, urging me to open for him so that he could claim me more deeply.

Luca palmed my breast, squeezing to the edge of pain, inflicting just enough so that I was fully aware of his power over me. Dante's teeth sank into my inner thigh, marking me again, harder this time. I cried out and writhed as he held me in his bite, refusing to relent. Luca pinched and twisted my nipple, and hot lines of pleasure sizzled down to my throbbing clit.

I stilled on a whimper, giving in to their erotic demands. They would force pleasure from my body, working me to a frenzy until we were all mindless with carnal hunger.

Luca broke our kiss so that he could stare down into my eyes. He kept his cruel pinch on my nipple while he tenderly stroked my hair back from my cheek.

“You are so beautiful when you surrender to me.” His calloused fingertips trailed down my throat, making my sensitized skin tingle and spark beneath his touch. “Such a sweet kitten.”

Dante finally released me from his bite, and his tongue flicked my clit. Stars burst across my vision, and my back arched on a ragged shout. I tried to lift my hips to grind against his face, but he held me firm with a warning growl, his teeth grazing my most sensitive spot.

A broken sound tore from my chest as Luca turned his cruel attention to my other breast, torturing me sweetly. Dante eased two thick fingers inside me and continued to tongue my clit.

I jerked beneath them and struggled to escape the torment even as I begged for more.

My lower lips began to ache, my core contracting with the need for Dante to fill me with his big cock. He’d never fucked my pussy, and I longed for him to stake his claim over me.

“Please,” I begged. “I need you inside me. Both of you.”

“I want your mouth,” Luca growled, almost beyond words.

I’d never taken him in my mouth before when it wasn’t under duress. I craved to offer myself to him in whatever way he desired.

“Yes,” I panted. “Take me.”

Dante grabbed my hips and flipped me onto my front before landing a stinging swat on my upper thigh. “On your knees, pet.”

I yelped at the flash of pain, but I obeyed, kneeling before Luca. His fingers tangled in my hair, and he tugged me toward his hard cock, forcing me to bend forward and balance on my elbows. He fisted his length and rubbed my lips with precum, a promise of how he would mark me when he released inside my mouth.

“Lick me,” he snarled. “Worship my cock with your tongue.”

As I began to taste Luca like my favorite candy. Dante's fingers swirled in the wet arousal that coated my inner thighs. His cockhead pressed at my slick entrance, slowly penetrating me so that I felt every delicious inch of him stretching me for the first time.

I released a happy hum, and Luca bit out a curse as the sound stimulated him. He pulled sharply on my hair, anchoring me in place so that he could slide inside my mouth.

Pressure against my asshole made me jolt, but the way my body bucked between the two men only increased their savage arousal. At my sudden movement, Dante's thumb pushed past my tight ring of muscles, filling me in every hole. He rocked into me in a brutal thrust, shoving my body into Luca so that his cock hit the back of my throat. I gagged, and he pulled back just enough to allow me to draw in a quick breath.

"You can take him," Dante admonished, delivering another burning slap to my opposite thigh.

I shrieked against Luca's cock, and he pushed all the way into my throat with a guttural groan.

"Do that again," he hissed at Dante through gritted teeth.

His dark laugh rolled over me, caressing my skin like a stroke down my spine. The cruelly amused sound was quickly drowned out by the smack of his hand mingling with my muffled cries. I tasted the salt of my tears on Luca as I struggled for breath, becoming lightheaded between my desperate screams and his cock in my throat.

"Good girl." The praise was so rough that it was barely intelligible, but it stoked the fire that licked at my veins.

Ecstasy coiled deep inside me with every harsh thrust of Dante's hard length into my wet pussy. And the forbidden, humiliating pleasure of his thumb stimulating my asshole sent me flying higher.

"That's it, pet. Suffer for me."

He stopped spanking me and reached around me to find my clit. I came undone at the first brush of his fingers over the needy bud, and bliss sang through my entire body. My core

contracted around Dante, and Luca released a feral roar as my ecstatic scream stimulated his thrusting cock.

He pushed deep into my throat and bellowed his release, fucking my mouth as he reached his peak.

My orgasm ripped through me, drawing a sob from deep in my chest. The visceral rush of ecstasy was almost too much to bear, but Dante wasn't ready to relent. He wouldn't stop until he utterly devastated me.

Luca groaned and pulled out of my mouth. I heaved in a desperate breath, and the rush of oxygen made the world go fuzzy around the edges. My body was light enough to float away, but Dante bound me with his ruthless hold. He continued to rub my clit, even though it stung and I whined in wordless protest. The stinging pain morphed into pinpricks along my sex, needling me with darts of cruel pleasure.

“Sing for me, little bird.”

Purely wanton sounds washed over me in an erotic melody, and I didn't recognize that they issued from my own abused throat.

Dante continued to torment me while Luca stroked my hair and kissed the tears from my cheeks. He murmured words of praise while Dante chuckled at my pitiful pleas for mercy.

He used me until I had only one word left in my muddled mind: “Dante!”

He released a ragged shout and drove deep one last time, his hot seed branding me as his own. The jagged intimacy of our harsh union triggered another orgasm. It exploded from my core with blinding force, rushing all the way to my fingers and toes in a shockwave of ruthless ecstasy. My inner muscles contracted around his throbbing cock, greedily keeping him inside me as I rode out the relentless waves of bliss.

He didn't withdraw until the aftershocks of my orgasm crackled through me like little lightning strikes. My entire body felt heavy, but my mind floated. Then their hands were on me, petting me, holding me. Their deep voices rumbled over me, telling me how perfect and beautiful I was. I sank

into the warm glow that blanketed me. Or maybe that was their arms around me, cuddling me between them as we all drifted into a deep, sated sleep.

CHAPTER 12

LUCA

“I have something to show you.” Dante stood over the bed, his voice pitched just loud enough to rouse Nora and me.

He was already fully dressed in dark jeans and a white button-down shirt. Something needled at the back of my mind, and it took me a moment to process the disquieting feeling: vulnerability.

I was naked, in bed with my wife.

Dante had seen my body many times, but it felt different after the intense, fucked up things we’d shared last night. He was as coolly composed as ever, and I scrambled to catch up as I blinked the last lingering fog of sleep from my eyes.

Nora stirred, and I kissed her forehead while maintaining eye contact with Dante. Even though I’d shared her with him, she was still mine. The harsh slash of his mouth told me that he knew it too.

Good. Nora might’ve begged for peace between us, but she would never be his. No matter how many times he made her come or how loudly he made her scream his name.

Something sharp pierced my gut: jealousy tinged with shame.

I’d enjoyed every deviant moment of what we’d done together, even while the bastard was touching my wife.

But in the cold light of day, regret began to creep over me.

“Nora, why don’t you go check on Giana,” Dante said. It wasn’t really a question. “Luca and I need to have a discussion.”

Her brow pinched, and her lush lips pursed in a frown. “You can say whatever it is in front of me.”

He took her hand in his and brushed a kiss over her knuckles. I suppressed the nearly overwhelming urge to rip him away from her.

“I promise I’ll explain everything later, darling. I expect that this will be a tense meeting, and I don’t want to put you at risk, no matter how remote it might be.”

Her small hand wrapped around his, tethering him to her. “If it’s dangerous, I don’t want you going. Either of you.”

“How dangerous it is will be up to Luca.”

“Just tell me what the fuck you’re planning,” I growled, irritated at his enigmatic demeanor.

He eyed me coldly. “Come with me, and you’ll find out. I want to control all the variables in this situation for as long as possible. I don’t intend to die today.”

“No one is dying,” Nora said firmly. “We discussed this already.”

Dante nodded, eyes shuttering to conceal all flickers of emotion. “I’ll come back to you. I promise.”

“Okay,” she agreed, placated. “I’ll go talk to Giana. Come and get me when you’re finished with your meeting. I want to know what’s going on.”

“Of course.” Dante was quick to give her what she wanted.

Whatever she desired.

My cheeks heated, and I shoved away the fresh memories of what I’d given her last night when she’d revealed her deepest, darkest desire. What I’d sacrificed for her.

And I would do it all again. Anything for Nora.

Even allowing her to fuck my worst enemy.

He'd come to us offering himself up for torment, but somehow, I was the one who'd been tested yet again. And by Nora's will this time, not his.

An ugly emotion that felt too much like resentment tightened my chest. I took a quick breath to clear it away. I could never resent my wife. Not after everything she'd been through. She'd suffered horrific abuse because I'd failed to protect her so many times. I would do whatever I could to begin to atone for that.

If absolution was even possible after the magnitude of my failures.

I pressed a swift kiss to her lips before getting out of bed, ignoring the chill that frosted my skin in the absence of her gentle heat. In a matter of minutes, I was composed enough to accompany Dante to his mysterious meeting.

He lingered a few moments longer with Nora, promising her that she was safe in his home, even if he wasn't by her side.

Their home.

I ground my teeth. She didn't belong here. She didn't belong with him.

I kept my anger locked inside my chest, trapping spiteful words that might upset her. We would have to talk more later about this messed up situation with Dante. I didn't know what to think about her plea to be with both of us, but I didn't dare to contemplate it too long. I'd drive myself mad if I allowed my budding fears to overtake my rational thoughts.

Later. We would talk everything out as soon as I was able to return to her.

So, I followed Dante down to his study, on edge and pissed off.

Then the door swung open, and my rage flared into an inferno.

Gabriele and Lorenzo waited in the center of the room, their expressions of loathing identical when their dark eyes

fixed on Dante. Two other men I vaguely recognized kept them under guard, guns drawn to keep them in line.

I rounded on Dante. “Fucking liar. You promised Nora that your vendetta was over; she said that I would be free. But you’re still keeping my friends as your hostages to control me. Let them go, you sadistic bastard.”

His mouth twisted with distaste. “That’s exactly what I’m doing. I just need to make sure that they’re not going to go feral and tear this place apart as soon as they’re free. Nora needs us to be united if we’re going to end the threats against her. That means we need every man we can get. I won’t have our people at each other’s throats.”

I eyed him warily, every engrained instinct screaming at me that he was a master manipulator.

He sighed and waved for his guards to stand down.

“Wait!” I bellowed at my friends just before they sprang into action.

They froze, muscles flexing with unspent violence after weeks of helpless captivity.

“Wait,” I repeated, more calmly this time. “Let me think.”

Disbelief punched me. Was Dante truly setting us all free?

Nora seemed to believe his promises, but I was far more skeptical.

“What is there to think about?” Dante asked tersely. “Nora ensured your freedom, and here it is. Your friends are no longer my captives. I hold no sway over you. You could kill me right now if you wanted to. At least, you could try.”

My fists clenched at my sides with the barely leashed need to attack him. I craved to punish the motherfucker who’d caused me so much pain, the monster who’d used my innocent wife to torment me.

But he was right: we needed every man we could muster to root out Giuseppe and then take on the Bratva. For Nora’s sake, I could spare Dante. For now.

I addressed Gabriele and Lorenzo. “Are you hurt?”

“No lasting damage,” Gabriele bit out.

I glowered at Dante. “You told me that they wouldn’t be tortured if I cooperated. I never gave you cause to hurt them.”

He shrugged. “And I kept my word. I roughed them up a little bit on the first day to make sure you understood the stakes. After that, they’ve been well cared for.”

Lorenzo snorted derisively. “You locked us in a cell for... fuck knows how long. Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t kill you for that.”

“You can’t,” I cut over him before he could lose his temper. “It would put Nora at risk. I need him alive so that his men will work with me to protect her.”

Gabriele’s heavy brows drew together, and his pursed lips all but disappeared beneath his unruly black beard, which had grown thicker in captivity. “He kidnapped your wife, and now you’re willing to work with him? We all risked our lives to rescue her from him. Lorenzo was fucking shot.”

Guilt nipped at me, but I didn’t have a choice. I had to ally with my enemy to save the woman I loved.

“We can discuss killing him after Nora is secure. Sit down. I’ll explain everything.”

My friends stared at me with twin expressions of disbelief tinged with betrayal, but they obeyed. I would find a way to make this right with them. Somehow.



“SO, WHAT WAS THE MEETING ABOUT?” Nora asked as I led her back into the privacy of the bedroom.

She’d talked with Giana while I was downstairs, and she seemed lighter now that she knew her sister truly was safe.

Dante was still meeting with his own people to strategize how to find Giuseppe. That left me to be the one to explain the

situation to Nora.

“Dante released Gabriele and Lorenzo,” I admitted as she sat on the edge of the bed beside me. “He doesn’t have any hold over me anymore.”

She nodded. “He always keeps his promises. I knew he’d prove himself to you and set you all free. He wants to make things right with you.”

“That’s not possible,” I said stiffly.

She grasped both of my hands in hers, offering me a gentle squeeze to cool my mounting anger.

“He came to you last night and was willing to let you take out your revenge on him in the worst way,” she said quietly. “I won’t ask you to forgive him—only you can make that choice—but I’m begging you to spare him from your retribution.”

I tugged my hands free from her gentle grip, the ugly feeling of resentment tightening my chest once again.

“And I did spare him, didn’t I? I honored your wishes, and somehow, I ended up being the one tormented again. He touched you, Nora. And you welcomed it. You asked me to share you with him after everything he’s done to me. To you.”

Her eyes began to shine. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. And it wasn’t meant to be a betrayal. I love you, but I can’t bear to cause Dante any more pain.”

I flexed my fists to stave off some of my rage. “There’s a difference between not causing him pain and begging him to fuck you.”

A tear spilled down her cheek. “Do you hate me now?” she whispered tremulously. “I know I asked a lot of you, but you could’ve refused. I thought you enjoyed it too. If I’d thought you were unwilling, I wouldn’t have continued. I’ll never violate you like that. I... I’m sorry, Luca.”

Something cracked inside my chest, and my arms were around her before I could think, soothing her. “I don’t hate you,” I swore. “I could never hate you. But I’m afraid...” I took a breath and forced the truth out into the open. “I’m

afraid that you'll come to love him too, and I don't know if I'm capable of sharing your heart. Not with anyone, but especially not with him."

She buried her face in my chest, and her tears wet my shirt. "I do care about Dante, but I love you, Luca. Nothing will change that."

Selfish bastard. Dante's accusation rang through my mind. He'd claimed that I didn't deserve Nora because I always put my own desires first. I was trying to be worthy of her, but my possessiveness and jealousy were impossible to deny. I knew I owed it to her to give her what she needed. I'd kidnapped her and forced her to marry me. I'd taken her virginity on our wedding night to sate my own desires. And I'd only wanted her happiness because that would make my life more pleasant.

That was all before I'd fallen in love with her, but I'd treated her inexcusably.

I'd been so focused on securing my birthright that I'd used her as a pawn without any concern for her feelings, her autonomy.

Was I much better than Dante when it came to our sins against her?

By some miracle, this strong, compassionate woman had found it in her heart to forgive both of us. To care for both of us.

Her promise of love would have to be enough to sustain me. If she had feelings for Dante, I'd have to find a way to live with it.

And a traitorous, quiet voice snaked through my mind, telling me that I'd secretly enjoyed every deviant moment of the fucked-up sex we'd shared last night. I might hate watching Dante touch my wife, but her reactions to his crueler forms of seduction got me hot. She'd surrendered so beautifully, so completely. She was stunning in her agonized, ecstatic submission.

I didn't know if I could bear to share her heart, but I could try sharing her body, if that was what she wanted. She'd been

so broken after the Russians had brutalized her. Despite my resentment, I couldn't deny that Dante had known how to put her back together again. If she needed him on some level, I wouldn't allow my selfishness to cause her one more ounce of suffering.

I still loathed Dante, but for Nora, I would try to suppress my most murderous impulses.

CHAPTER 13

NORA

When Dante finally returned to us that evening, Luca shocked me to my core.

My husband extricated himself from my arms and stood to face Dante, his hulking body swelling with tension that I feared might turn violent. I was instantly on my feet, placing a restraining hand on his shoulder.

He glanced down at me. “It’s all right, Nora. I have something I want to say.”

Drawing himself up to his full, impressive height, he faced Dante with something like grim determination. “Nora wants you,” he said tightly. “I will try to allow you to touch her without wanting to kill you. For her.”

“Luca,” I breathed, stunned and more than a little hesitant. “You don’t have to do this.”

After our fraught conversation earlier, I’d decided not to push him further. I hadn’t decided how I was going to deal with my growing feelings for Dante when I was deeply in love with my husband, but I’d reasoned that I couldn’t hurt Luca.

He turned to me, eyes shining with desperate desire. “I’ve been selfish, Nora. So fucking selfish. I’ll prove that I can be worthy of you. From now on, I’ll always put you first.”

I caressed his stubble-roughened cheek. “Putting me first doesn’t mean that I’ll allow you to torment yourself. You said that what we did last night hurt you. If I’d realized—”

“Seeing you submit so completely was the hottest fucking thing I’ve ever experienced,” he rumbled. “My feelings about this situation are complicated. I still hate him. But I love you more.”

I stared up into his eyes, willing him to see the truth in my heart. “Nothing will ever come between us,” I swore. “Nothing will change the way I feel about you. And that fact that you’re willing to try for my sake...” I swallowed hard, staving off a rush of emotion. “It makes me love you even more.”

Hesitantly, I turned to face Dante, who hadn’t said a word in response to Luca’s proposition.

“Are you willing to share me too?” I asked, scarcely able to breathe for fear of rejection.

I needed them both. I was the selfish one, the perverted one. But each of them gave me something that was utterly essential. I wouldn’t have survived my ordeal with the Bratva without both of them holding my broken soul together. Now that I knew what it was like to have them, I didn’t think I could ever exist with only half of my heart.

My breath caught, the revelation stunning me. I pressed my lips together to hold in the intense declaration. Things were still too raw between the men for me to declare the depth of my feelings for Dante. Mere hours ago, Luca had admitted that he didn’t think he could share my heart with another man. I wouldn’t hurt him with the complicated truth. Not yet. Not when there was so much pain that still separated them.

Dante had been silent for too long, studying Luca and me. My heart twisted. I might be asking too much of my dark protector.

After what felt like agonizingly long minutes, he finally stepped toward me, closing the distance between us. Two fingers touched beneath my chin, lifting my face to his.

“I would do anything for a chance to touch you one more time,” he said with the weight of an oath. He looked to Luca.

“She belongs to you. If we do this, know that I don’t have any right to claim her. I understand that.”

My heart ached for him. Dante had done terrible things, but he wanted to atone. He deserved to be loved.

I placed my hands over both their hearts, connecting all three of us. “We do this as equals, or not at all,” I insisted. “Everyone has to consent. No more violations. Never again.”

Luca placed his hand over mine. “I love you far more than I hate him,” he promised.

“I don’t hate you at all,” Dante told Luca, his green gaze steady and shockingly earnest. “I wasted years loathing you, all for the sake of my revenge. I’m paying for my sins now with my broken marriage: the union I destroyed before it could even begin.”

My eyes burned. All Dante ever wanted was a family of his own, someone who loved him. Someone he could protect, the way he couldn’t protect his brother. I understood him now: the depth of his loss and his anguish.

Drawn to ease his pain, I went up onto my toes and pressed a kiss to his lips. He didn’t respond to my tenderness. Instead, he grasped my shoulders and forced me to turn to Luca.

“Hold her.” His command was cold and clipped, and he immediately stepped away from us.

“Where are you going?” I tried to reach for him.

He narrowed his eyes at Luca. “I should’ve expressed myself more clearly: restrain her.”

“Dante!” I protested, even as Luca grabbed my wrists, shackling them in one hand and pinning them at the small of my back.

“You wanted to play a game, little bird,” he said, still cool and aloof. “And I make the rules.”

Luca pulled me close and nuzzled my neck. His rough stubble lightly scraped my sensitized skin, making my nerves crackle and dance.

“I’ve got you, kitten,” he murmured, a threat rather than a reassurance. He nipped at the shell of my ear. “You’re at my mercy now. Isn’t this what you wanted?” he crooned. “To be helpless? To be used by two men?”

“No,” I countered breathlessly. “Not just by two men. By you and Dante. You’re the ones I need.”

“You like how he makes you suffer,” Luca said, the words heated with lust rather than jealousy. “I could never hurt you like that, but watching you come apart is the most breathtaking thing I’ve ever seen. That’s what you need from him, isn’t it?”

I bit my lip and nodded. There was so much more to it than simple physical connection, but now wasn’t the time to confess my intense feelings for my men. They’d agreed to share me, and I wouldn’t risk shattering this chance for us to be together as equals, even if I would be forced to submit in the end.

I craved the release that only Dante’s sadism could give me, and I needed Luca’s unconditional, fiercely possessive love more than I needed my next breath.

Dante tossed something on the bed and returned to us. I tried to crane my neck to see what he’d retrieved from his closet, but his hulking body blocked my view.

“Give me her wrists.”

Luca didn’t flinch at the order. He released me from his firm hold, and Dante immediately grasped my hands in both of his. He directed me to twine my arms behind Luca’s neck, and I happily leaned into my husband’s sculpted chest.

Something soft and silky wrapped around my wrists, drawing them together and binding them in place. Shocked, I tried to pull away, but I was shackled to Luca, locked in an embrace.

“What are you doing?” I demanded, but there was no force behind the words. My voice shook slightly, and my knees grew weak at my predicament. Lust began to pulse through me, tightening my nipples so that they peaked against the thin

cotton shirt that had provided me with modesty before my men had started toying with me.

Dante ignored my question and addressed Luca again, cold and utterly composed. Unfeeling.

“Hold her hips. Don’t let her feel your cock. She hasn’t earned it yet.”

My belly flipped, torn between alarm and desire.

I hated the emotional distance between us, but I was just as helpless as Luca had said. I was powerless against them, and they’d barely begun to torment me.

A shudder of trepidation raced through me, an erotic anticipation that made my fingers flex and my toes curl.

Luca’s hands bracketed my hips, guiding me away from his stiffening cock. My arms were still bound behind his neck, and I had no choice but to lean on him for balance as he positioned me where Dante wanted me.

Cool air rushed over my bottom when he fisted the soft material of my yoga pants and yanked them down my legs, exposing me. I stepped out of them and spread my legs in wanton invitation, letting him see how aroused I was for him already.

Dante swatted my thigh in a stinging rebuke. “You don’t get to come until we’re both inside you. You’ll beg for our cocks before we finally give you what you want. You’ll scream for me until you’re hoarse, and then I’ll let Luca fuck your throat so you can show him how badly you want him. You’ll take him any way he wants to use you because all you want is to please him. Isn’t that right, pet?”

His fist sank into my hair, tugging my head back so that I was forced to stare up into Luca’s glinting ochre eyes.

“Tell him,” Dante growled. “Tell him that you’ll do anything for him, anything he wants.”

“I’m yours,” I panted. “I’ll give you anything, Luca. I’ll give you everything, all of myself.”

His jaw sharpened with hunger. “Such a sweet kitten,” he purred. “You’re my good girl, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” I breathed, clit pulsing with need. His filthy words of praise had become an erotic trigger, and desire washed through me even though neither man was touching me sexually.

“Yes, *Sir*,” Dante corrected me, his voice a deep rebuke. “Address Luca with the respect he deserves.”

“What?” My mind reeled at this new turn of events. For so long, Dante had degraded Luca and told me that he wasn’t worthy of being my husband. Now he was demanding respect for the man who had once been his most hated enemy.

A line of fire lashed my thighs before I registered the sound of the cane smacking my delicate skin. I screamed at the shock of pain, then gasped for breath, struggling to understand what was happening.

Another fiery brand across my thighs, closer to my bottom this time. Luca’s jaw ticked as he studied the way I sang Dante’s perverse song.

“Does it hurt, kitten?” he murmured, sounding almost concerned.

“Yes,” I squeaked, shifting my body toward his as though I could evade the next hit.

His merciless fingers sank into my hips, and he forced me to stand exactly where Dante wanted me. His eyes flicked past me, finding my tormentor.

“Again.”

The cane branded me, and a harsh cry ripped from my chest.

“I gave you an order.” Dante’s voice drifted through the haze of pain that clouded my thoughts. “And Luca asked you a question.”

“I don’t... I can’t...” I babbled, scrambling to recall what they’d said. Everything was fuzzy, my mind floating while my body burned.

Luca leaned in close, so that his heated question threaded through the fog. “Does it hurt?”

“Yes, I...” There was something else, something I wasn’t

—
Another strike, another brand seared into my sensitive flesh.

“Yes, Sir!” I shouted, Dante’s order clicking into place without conscious thought.

I couldn’t think; I couldn’t breathe.

I pressed my face into Luca’s chest and gasped for air. The intoxicating, comforting scent that was uniquely *Luca* surrounded me, enfolding me. My tears wet his shirt, and he released my hips to stroke my hair, a decadent caress after the cruel, unfeeling rebuke of the cane.

“You’re being such a good girl for me,” he rumbled, drawing a sob from deep inside me, a sound of visceral release.

The tie on my wrists loosened, but I had only a moment to cling to my husband before Dante drew my hands behind my back and bound them once again. I tugged against the restraint.

“Please,” I begged, voice ragged from screaming. “I want to touch you. Both of you.”

Dante gripped my hair and forced me down onto my knees. “You haven’t earned that yet, pet. Worship Luca with your mouth, and I might show some mercy.”

Dante’s cruel, cold demands were a shocking contrast to Luca’s words of praise. I craved them both. Dante’s iron control forced me to yield, setting me free, but Luca’s particular brand of tender possessiveness made my heart sing.

My husband’s cock strained toward my mouth, and I parted my lips in welcome. As he slid along my swirling tongue, Dante sank to his knees beside me. For a moment, I thought it was a position of supplication, but then I realized the truth: he wanted better access to continue tormenting me.

“Fuck her face,” Dante ordered. “It feels so good when she gags on your cock.” His fingers tested the slick arousal that coated my inner thighs, and he hummed his approval. “You’ll take everything he gives you, won’t you, little bird?”

I moaned in wordless reply, unable to respond even if I’d been capable of speaking. Luca filled my mouth, stroking in deep. I tried to focus on taking all of him, but Dante distracted me by rubbing around my clit. It pulsed madly, but he didn’t touch me directly where I craved it most. He coaxed me to the edge of orgasm and held me there, giving me just enough pleasure to drive me into a state of desperate, mindless lust. But he refused to allow me to reach the peak, denying my release until I sobbed around Luca’s cock. I twisted against the binding that restrained me, aching to touch myself and find sweet relief.

Dante cupped my breast and pinched my nipple hard. Even through the thin barrier of my soft cotton shirt, the pain was enough to remind me that I was powerless against him. There was nothing to be gained by struggling, only his dark amusement. His cruelly delighted laugh ghosted over my skin like a lover’s caress, and I shuddered in longing. My core contracted around nothing, painfully empty. I needed to be filled, to be fucked and claimed.

Luca cursed. “I can’t last,” he ground out. “Not when she’s moaning around my dick.”

Dante carefully wrapped my hair around his fist and gently eased me away from Luca, his cruel touch turning suddenly tender. Tears of relief blurred my vision, and when he released the binding on my wrists, I clung to him like he was my lifeline, the only thing tethering me to reality.

“You’re doing so well, pet,” he praised, lifting me up to cradle me against his chest. “You’re going to ride Luca while I fuck your ass. Then I’ll let you come.”

I was dimly aware of clothes rustling, and then Dante was lowering me onto Luca. My husband was gloriously naked. He was so strong, powerful enough to protect me from any harm. And he was all mine.

A long sigh of relief whooshed from my chest as Dante guided me down onto Luca's waiting cock. He stretched me slowly, and I moaned at the decadent sensation of being filled after the endless, torturous emptiness. When he was in me to the hilt, Dante peeled my shirt over my head and tossed it aside, leaving me completely bare too.

He left me briefly, but before I could cry at the loss, Luca wrapped his hand around the back of my neck and pulled me toward him to claim a soul-searing kiss. I fell into our connection, allowed our love to enfold me. My heart glowed, and warmth pulsed through my veins.

Dante's heat warmed my back, and then his lubricated cock was pressing against my tight entrance.

I whined into Luca's mouth. He wouldn't fit. Not with my husband inside me.

Luca broke our kiss so that he could stare into my eyes, impressing his will upon me. "You can take him, kitten. I want you to. Do it for me."

"Yes," I pledged on a broken whisper. "Anything for you, Luca. Anything."

"Relax, pet." Dante stroked the length of my spine and pressed into me, stretching my tight ring of muscles.

I cried out, and my head began to shake. They were too big. I couldn't take them both.

"You want to be a good girl for Luca, don't you?" Dante asked through gritted teeth, straining to hold himself back. "He wants you to let me fuck your ass. You aren't going to disappoint him, are you?"

He punctuated the challenging question with a particularly hard pinch to my nipple. I writhed in his merciless grip, and he sank deeper inside me.

"That's it," Luca hissed. "Fuck, you're so tight when he's inside you, kitten."

"Hold on to him," Dante urged, gentler than before.

My fingernails dug into Luca's shoulders, but he didn't flinch as I scored his flesh.

"I've got you, Nora," he promised, voice tight with the effort of forcing himself to stillness.

They were giving me time to accept them into my body without pain. They wanted me to feel only pleasure when they were inside me like this, claiming me in the most decadent, forbidden way. Dante's cruel game had all been to prepare me for this, to make me so hot and wet that I was more than ready to take them both.

Even in this deviant act, they were protecting me. Cherishing me.

My men would never hurt me. They were utterly devoted to me, just as I was devoted to them.

When Dante pushed deeper, I accepted all of him. They were both stretching me, filling me. It was almost more than I could bear.

And then Dante moved.

I bit down on Luca's shoulder with an animal wail, and he released a guttural shout. For a moment, I tensed, worried that I'd caused him pain.

"You can't hurt me, my sweet little kitten." His fingers tangled in my hair, holding me closer and encouraging me to mark him as my own.

As they both began to gently thrust into me, I clung to him with teeth and claws, reduced to a purely primal state.

My body softened, and pleasure gathered at my core. I moved against them mindlessly, craving more, craving all of them. They became rougher, their ragged breaths and low groans harmonizing with my wild cries of ecstasy every time they drove deep.

Luca roared out a curse, and his hands sank into my thighs, pulling me all the way down onto his cock as he released his seed into my pussy. His possessive hold trapped me in place, pinning me at Dante's mercy. My sadistic husband thrust hard

and fast, using me for his own pleasure. At the same time, he reached around me and pinched my clit.

My back bowed on a scream, and my vision flashed white as my orgasm tore through me in a shockwave. The long-denied release claimed me with electric intensity, pleasure crackling along my veins and pinging across my sensitized flesh.

Dante shouted out my name, and his heat branded me, marking me as his.

My bliss crested, the high prolonged by the satisfaction that I'd made him come undone. He was mine.

And as they held me, stroking me in the aftermath of our devastating union, I dared to believe they could both belong to me forever: my dangerous, devoted husbands.

CHAPTER 14

NORA

A shrill ringing sound jerked me awake, and I blinked against the sudden wash of light as Dante turned on the lamp. He answered his phone, and his expression darkened to something thunderous.

“How many?” he asked in clipped tones. “The Russians? We can handle— Fuck! Get Luca’s men to pull back to the house. And I want snipers on the roof. Now.”

He raked a hand through his dark curls and barked another curse as he ended the call.

“What’s going on?” Luca demanded. “Are we under attack?”

Dante gave him a grim nod and got out of bed, rushing to the closet to hastily pull on some clothes.

“Get dressed,” he commanded. “And put these on.” He hefted two Kevlar vests and put them on the bed, waiting for Luca and me.

“The Russians?” Luca pressed, jerking a t-shirt over his head.

My blood froze in my veins. They were here, in our safe haven. They would get to me. They would...

My husband’s arms enfolded me, warming my chilled skin. “I’ll protect you, Nora,” he vowed. “They won’t touch you. You have to get dressed right now.”

I nodded mutely and allowed him to start tugging clothes onto my stiff limbs. I took deep, calming breaths, struggling to

remain in the present with them. We were all in danger, and I couldn't allow myself to go catatonic with terror. I'd become a liability, and I wouldn't put my men at risk needlessly.

"Giuseppe's men are with them," Dante growled. "The old bastard has fully allied himself with the Bratva so that he can kill us and take control of our organization. Or the shreds of it that would be left if he had his way. He's gone insane."

"No," Luca ground out. "He's always been a proud, greedy son of a bitch. And he's callous enough to sell his own daughter to those monsters. He won't give a shit about losses on our side. He'll be King of the Ashes, and he'll be satisfied, as long as he's in power."

Luca fitted my Kevlar vest before securing his own.

My stomach flipped. "Where's your vest?" I asked Dante, voice shaking with echoes of my trauma.

He ignored me and passed a gun to Luca. "Protecting her is your responsibility now. Don't let them anywhere near her. If any of those Russian bastards come for her, you blow their brains out. No hesitation. No mercy."

"None," Luca agreed.

"Where's your vest, Dante?" I straightened my spine and imbued my voice with as much strength as I could muster.

"I only have two up here. Luca needs one so he can protect you."

"But what about you?" I insisted.

He didn't meet my eyes. "I have to go out there and kill as many of them as I can. I won't let them get to you, Nora."

"But you need a vest." Why wasn't he looking at me?

"I'll get one from the armory."

My heart twisted. "You promised you'd never lie to me," I accused. "You always keep your promises, Dante. Look at me!" I shrieked the last, fear for him tearing at my insides.

His emerald eyes pierced my soul, glittering with a fervent, desperate light. He cupped my cheeks in both hands.

“I swore to protect you, Nora. That’s the only promise that matters now. You’re all that matters to me.”

I grabbed his wrists as though I possessed the strength to tether him to me.

“Don’t go,” I begged.

“I would die for you,” he vowed.

“No one is dying!” Tears made my voice break. “I already told you that. I’m not going to allow it.”

He surged toward me, sealing my lips with a fierce, desperate kiss. I wrapped myself around him, as though I could anchor him to me forever.

It lasted only a few seconds. He easily broke free from my hold and turned to Luca.

“Don’t let her follow me.”

“I won’t.”

Luca’s brawny arms closed around me in a protective cage.

“You’ll come back to me,” I demanded. “Promise me you’ll come back.”

He pressed one final kiss to the top of my head and murmured in my ear. “Goodbye, little bird.”

He grabbed an assault rifle from the closet. Then he was striding away from me, storming toward the men who might hurt me with murderous intent.

“Dante!” I twisted against the iron shackles of Luca’s arms. “Let me go!”

“No, Nora,” he said, gentle but firm. “He’s made his choice. You’ll be safe here with me.”

“No!” I protested, furious. “That’s not a choice he gets to make.”

“He’ll come back to you if he can,” Luca said, trying to soothe me. “He’s a cunning, ruthless bastard. He’s hard to kill.”

“But he—”

“He’d kill me slowly if I allowed you to go after him.” Luca cut me off with the blunt truth. “And I won’t allow it. We’re staying right here.”

A distant scream pierced my chest, even though it was barely audible at this distance.

“Giana!” I tried to go to my sister, but Luca held me in that unbreakable grip.

“I won’t risk you,” he growled. “You’re not going anywhere.”

I twisted to face him, so that he could see the stark truth shining from my eyes. “I will never forgive you if anything happens to her. I love you, but she’s my sister. Without her, my world is meaningless. I can’t lose her.”

I’d spent my whole life protecting my fragile, sweet-natured sister. If I didn’t have her to defend, I didn’t know how I’d exist. The need to protect her gave me strength I never would’ve possessed otherwise. Without her, I’d shatter into a million pieces, and even Luca and Dante wouldn’t be able to put me back together again.

Dante. My heart ached for him. He’d lost his brother. For a terrible moment, I understood the full, devastating horror of his loss.

“You have to help me save her,” I begged Luca. “You know that was her scream.”

Luca’s jaw was tight, his eyes dark. “It’s gone quiet.”

What did he mean...?

I slapped him across the face with my full strength. He barely flinched.

“She’s not dead!” I shouted. “Let me go to her right now, or I’ll hate you forever.”

He spat a curse, then released me from the cage of his arms. He snagged my hand before I could dash away.

“We’re going together, and you will stay behind me,” he commanded. “No matter what happens, you don’t let go of my

hand unless I tell you to,”

“Let’s go,” I urged, nodding my agreement.

Precious minutes had ticked by since I’d heard my sister scream. Anything could’ve happened to her in that time.

And it was so quiet in the house now...

“She’s not dead,” I repeated, seething. It couldn’t be true. I wouldn’t allow it to be true.

“Almost there,” Luca said rather than answering my vehement declaration.

He checked her bedroom, forcing me to remain behind him while he dared to round the corner, making himself a target.

“Empty. She’s not here.” He turned to me and gently grasped my jaw, forcing me to look up into his eyes. “I can’t let you—”

Gunfire popped just outside the house, far too close.

“It’s the snipers,” he explained, tone far too calm. “They’ll pick off our enemies as they approach. But I need to get you someplace safe.”

I looked around my sister’s room, frantic. The bedside lamp lay smashed on the hardwood floor.

Signs of a struggle.

“Someone took her!” I exclaimed. “They have my sister.”

Luca muttered another curse. “They’ll be planning to take her to your father. He’ll know that she’s a valuable hostage now. We went to all that trouble to extract her with Antonio’s help. He had time to escape because we prioritized her safety. He knows she’s a weak spot, and his people couldn’t get to you because Dante and I would’ve slaughtered anyone who came for you.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” I demanded. “We have to save her before he gets his hands on her. If he does, we’ll all be vulnerable.” I reasoned with him since my pleas for my sister’s life didn’t seem to be enough to sway him. “Like you said, he knows she’s a valuable hostage. You and Dante would

put yourselves at risk to rescue her for me. And he knows that I would surrender myself for her in a heartbeat.”

Luca bared his teeth at me. “That’s not happening under any circumstances.”

I tipped my chin back and met his feral snarl with a growl of my own. “Then come with me to rescue her before Giuseppe gets to her.”

He didn’t say another word. He simply grabbed my hand and started running, pausing to check for shooters every time we needed to round a corner. Within breathless minutes that felt like hours, we made it to the foyer. Luca snagged my waist and pulled me into the shadows beneath the curved double staircase before I could bolt out into the open.

The gunfire was dying down outside, but a deafening *bang* shuddered through the cavernous space when my father burst through the front door.

He had Giana pinned, using her as a shield. His eyes were wide and wild, almost insane. And he was holding a gun to my sister’s head.

Luca’s hand slapped over my mouth just as I tried to cry out for her. He pulled me deeper into the shadows. I tried to kick my way free, but he pressed me tight to the wall, so I didn’t have any room to maneuver.

“Dante!” Father bellowed. “Luca! Come out here, you cowards.”

I was vaguely aware of engines revving outside, tires squealing. The gunfire died down almost entirely.

The Russians were retreating. Giuseppe was on his own. No wonder he was half out of his mind with fear. But his terror was nothing compared to the all-consuming horror of seeing my father hold a gun to my sister’s head.

He’d sold me to the Bratva. He wouldn’t hesitate to kill Giana. Especially now that he was backed into a corner, no escape. His allies had just driven off and abandoned him to his fate.

Giuseppe wouldn't survive this, but he might decide to take my beloved sister down with him.

"I'll fix this for you, Nora," Luca murmured, brushing a kiss over my cheek. "Stay here, and don't make a sound. I'm going to save Giana. I'll protect her as though I'm protecting you."

My throat tightened. That meant he would die for her.

I didn't want to lose the man I loved. And Dante...

Where was Dante?

He couldn't be dead. I refused to contemplate it.

"Stay here, no matter what." He issued the command in an undertone, but it was a firm order, nonetheless.

"I'm here, Giuseppe," he called out, lingering in the shadows but stepping away from where I was hidden. "Let Giana go, and you can have me instead."

He shot me a swift, warning glare, and my protest died in my throat, I had to trust him. He was wearing a bulletproof vest. My sister wasn't.

"Come out here and face me like a man, Luca," Father sneered. "You never were worthy of taking your father's place. You've always been too weak to be the heir."

"Let Giana walk three paces to your right, and I'll come to you."

"Not happening. I won't release her until I see that you're unarmed."

Father jammed the gun into Giana's ribs, and she cried out. I felt an echo of her pain radiating through my own body. Desperation clawed at my insides, and the need to go to her was a maddening itch beneath the surface of my skin.

I took a breath and forced myself to stillness. I trusted Luca. He wouldn't simply allow Giuseppe to shoot him in order to save my sister.

Would he?

Oh, god.

The realization hit me as soon as he stepped out into the open, arms raised in a show of surrender.

I would sacrifice anything for you.

He'd made himself an open target. He might be wearing Kevlar, but a headshot would end him before I could scream his name.

Giuseppe's gun swung away from my sister, toward Luca.

Dante plowed into my father with a bellow of primal rage, tackling him and Giana to the ground. The gunshot rang out, but Luca wasn't hit.

"Run!" Dante roared at Giana, and she scrambled away from the grappling men.

I darted out to drag my sister to safety just as another shot thundered through the cavernous foyer. Luca was already there, covering her with his body. Dante shouted in wordless fury, wrestling the older man onto his back. A third shot, and my father's brain splattered against the wall.

I reached them in a few racing heartbeats, dropping to my knees beside Giana. Luca rolled off her, and I ran my hands over her, checking for injuries.

"I'm okay," she sobbed. "I'm okay." But she hugged her knees to her chest, rocking back and forth as she stared at our father's ruined skull.

I spared a glance at the bastard, just to reassure myself that he was dead.

Icy terror encased my heart, and I flung myself toward the men I loved.

"Dante!"

My fierce husband lay on his back, clutching at his stomach. Crimson stained his white shirt, and a gory pool was growing beneath his powerful body.

Luca applied pressure to the bullet wound, and Dante roared, the sound of his pain knifing through my soul.

“Stupid bastard,” Luca muttered. “I’m the one wearing Kevlar. You didn’t have to throw yourself in front of a bullet for me.”

“I did,” Dante forced the retort through gritted teeth. “She loves you.”

I grabbed his hand, squeezing with my full strength, as though that would be enough to keep him here with me.

His eyes pierced me, his gaze so intense that it knocked the air from my lungs.

“You can be together now,” he said, gentle tone roughened by agony. “He does deserve you, Nora. I was wrong.”

“You deserve me too,” I insisted, blinking away the tears before they could blind me. I couldn’t lose sight of him. I couldn’t lose him. “I need you.”

His dark lashes fluttered, and he forced his eyes open wide as he caressed my cheek with his bloody hand. “It’s...better this way.” He choked on a breath, chest convulsing. “You don’t have to worry about hurting me. Your choice is made.”

“You don’t get to make the choice for me, remember?” I reminded him. “Stay with me, Dante. I love you.”

“I’m sorry.” He released the apology on a ragged sigh, and his eyes slid closed.

His hand dropped from my face. I grabbed it and pressed his palm to my cheek, willing him to touch me.

He couldn’t be dead. I wasn’t ready to give up on him. Not ever.

“Stay with me,” I begged.

I couldn’t lose Dante, or I’d lose half my heart.

CHAPTER 15

LUCA

I sat on the loveseat Nora had arranged by Dante's bedside. Although I was content for her to lay her head on my lap while I stroked her silken hair, I knew she longed to shape her body to his. It would be the most visceral way to reassure herself that he was still alive, but Dante's condition had been too unstable for that.

His private physician had said that he could wake up today, and Nora had been staring at him for hours, chewing on her lower lip as she anxiously watched his chest rise and fall.

All I could do was hold her and soothe her as best I could.

Because I wasn't the only man she loved; she'd confessed her feelings for him while he'd been bleeding out.

He'd been out of it for five days, and that'd given me a lot of time to think about what I wanted to do. I was at peace with my decisions, but I was uncertain how Nora would feel about them. And of course, Dante had to agree too.

She loved both of us, and I couldn't deny her anything.

Could he?

Now that she'd confessed her feelings for him, would he become jealous and possessive again, tormenting me by trying to take her from me?

I caught myself drumming my fingers on my knee with my own anxiety, and I forced them to stillness. All I wanted was for Nora to be safe and happy. I'd do anything in my power to make this work between the three of us.

Somehow.

Finally, Dante stirred, groaning Nora's name.

She scrambled upright from where she'd been curled up beside me and then dropped to her knees at his bedside, as though in prayer. She reached for him, the barest brush of her fingertips over his furrowed brow.

"I'm here," she promised.

"Nora..." He rasped her name again and blinked slowly, searching for her.

She caressed his cheek, touching him as though he was made of glass. "I'm right here, Dante. You're okay. The doctor says you're going to make a full recovery. Just rest for as long as you need to. I'm not going anywhere."

"Your sister..."

She shushed him gently. "Giana is fine. She's safe, thanks to you and Luca."

"Luca?" He grunted my name and jerked. "Giuseppe was aiming at him. The gun went off, and I tried—"

"Hush," she admonished softly, applying the barest pressure to his shoulder to guide him back down. "Luca is fine, too. You saved his life." Her tone firmed. "We're going to have a discussion about that when you're better."

He blinked again, intense gaze finally fixing on her. "Of course I saved him," he said, his voice regaining its usual strength and clarity. "I did it for you. And for him," he admitted. "For everything I put him through."

"If you'd died, Nora never would've forgiven you," I informed him.

"We don't have to talk about that right now," she said, placating. "You just focus on getting better."

Dante eyed me warily, then turned his gaze back on her. "Go ahead," he prompted. "I'd rather hear it now than agonize over it for days."

She grasped his hand, holding him so gently. “You tried to die on me,” she admonished. “You thought you could sacrifice yourself, and that would somehow make me happy. You tried to my choice away from me because you thought you could decide what’s best for me.”

His dark brows drew together. “Luca is what’s best for you. You can share a life with him. You love him.”

“But I love you too, Dante.” She held his hand to her chest, pressing his palm over her heart. Even as she made her fierce declaration, she eyed me hesitantly. “I love you both, I won’t choose between you.” She reached for me with her free hand, and I grasped it in both of mine. “I know you once said that you couldn’t share my heart with him. Do you still—?”

“No, Nora,” I reassured her before worry could consume her happiness at Dante’s recovery. “I don’t hate him anymore.” I met him squarely in the eye, addressing him man-to-man. “I don’t hate you. I thought it would be impossible to share Nora with you after everything you put us through, but you took a bullet for me. You were ready to sacrifice your life for her happiness. I’ll never be able to forget what you did, but we’re not enemies anymore, Dante.”

“You forgive me?” he challenged quietly. “As easily as that?”

“There’s nothing easy about it,” I replied evenly. “I’ve had a lot of time to think about what I want out of life while you’ve been unconscious.” I took a breath, bracing myself to surrender everything I’d worked so hard to achieve for my entire life. “You should be the Boss, Dante. I will be your consigliere, if you’ll have me.”

His features went slack as though I’d sucker punched him.

“You’re willing to give up your birthright?” His jaw firmed, and his eyes narrowed at me. “You don’t owe me a debt, if that’s why you’re doing this. And I won’t accept if this is a decision made from misguided guilt.”

I squeezed Nora’s hand, anchoring myself to her. “Ever since Nora confessed that she loves you too, I’ve known that

she wouldn't choose between us. I've thought of a way that we might be able to make this work: whatever you call what this is between us."

It definitely wasn't love. Not between Dante and me. We didn't even like each other.

But I was willing to work on that. I no longer loathed his guts, and that was a start.

"I was raised to be the heir," I continued, standing firm in my decision. "No one ever asked what I wanted."

I'd never even dared to ask myself what I wanted. I'd been so desperate to meet my father's expectations that I'd never taken time to think about what I really wanted in life; what mattered most to me.

Seeing the depth of Giuseppe's callousness in his treatment of his daughters had stirred old, dark memories of my mother's death. I'd failed her, but I would never fail to protect my family again. I would never fail Nora.

"All I want is to make Nora safe and happy," I confessed. "She is my only priority." I kept my attention on Dante, letting him see the resolve behind my words. "You're clever and ruthless. You'll make a strong leader and restore order after all the chaos. You will stabilize the organization, and Nora will have the full power of our family to protect her. If you and I are a united front, the bloodshed stops. We need all the strength we can muster. The Bratva was crippled in their misguided assault on your estate, but there are still more of those bastards for us to kill together."

Dante regarded me silently for a long moment, expression enigmatic. I had no idea what he might be thinking, but I'd just offered to hand him the position of power he'd tried to steal through treachery and torment. He should be thanking me and promising his love to Nora.

"I'm humbled by your offer," he finally said with the weight of an oath. "Considering everything I put you through, I can't say that I deserve it. I will work every day to prove to you and to Nora that I will make things right with you."

“You’ve already proven yourself to me, Dante,” Nora interjected softly, hope shining in her hazel eyes. “Would you really be able to work together for my sake? To put your old wounds aside and be partners?”

“I would be honored to have you as my consigliere,” Dante told me. “And if we’re going to make this work, Nora has to remain legally married to you, not me.”

“What? No!” Nora vehemently refused. “I won’t favor one of you over the other. That’s not how this is going to work.”

“No one will accept that the three of us are in some sort of unconventional relationship,” Dante said firmly. “Publicly, you will be Luca’s wife. He’ll be spending more time with you while I consolidate power and secure my position. It will look more natural for the two of you to be together. Everyone will see our relationship as a close alliance after a period of instability, and nothing more. This is the way it has to be. It’s to protect our family, Nora.”

“Our family?” she breathed.

He traced the line of her parted lips. “We’ll figure this out. You’re my family. Nothing will change that, no matter whose ring you wear or what some legal document says.”

I knew what he wasn’t telling her: that this was yet another way he was making his amends to me. He would allow me to be her husband in public as yet another sacrifice in an attempt to atone.

I studied the man who’d once been my worst enemy. He was still a sadist capable of monstrous things. That would never change.

But he might just have his own twisted code of honor, even if on the surface he seemed to be a volatile madman.

He wasn’t my friend, but he was a man I could respect.

“You make me so happy,” Nora declared, eyes shining with the depth of her joy, “Both of you. I love you so much.”

“I love you, Nora.” It was the first time Dante had said it aloud, although I’d seen it in the intent way that he’d watched

her and in the way he'd so jealously guarded her from me.

But as Nora leaned down to brush a gentle kiss over his lips, I didn't experience so much as a flicker of jealousy. I was secure in the knowledge that she had enough love in her heart for both of us.

CHAPTER 16

NORA

Six Months Later

“I have something for you, darling.”

I tipped my head back and beamed up at my sadistic husband. “You spoil me too much. I don’t need any more gifts.”

His sharply delighted grin made my belly flip, a thrilling, primal warning at a predator’s approach.

“I’ll spoil you as much as I want,” he admonished me. “And this gift is just as much for me as it is for you. And for Luca.”

“Luca’s home?” I practically bounced with the force of my happiness.

Both of my men were back on the estate with me after a week of taking turns watching over me. They’d been dealing with some bloody business pertaining to the Bratva, and I hadn’t asked for details. I didn’t like to think about the Russians at all; it was enough to know that my husbands were avenging me whenever they saw an opportunity to eliminate some of the men responsible for my suffering, no matter how tenuous their connection to my tormentors.

Most days, I was in Luca’s arms more often than Dante’s, but that arrangement didn’t seem to upset him. He was perfectly content to share me with the man who was once his

most hated enemy. He was reassured to know that Luca was protecting me when he couldn't be at home with me.

My dark protector skewered me with that sharp, slightly maniacal smile, but his hand was gentle around mine as he led me through the house.

My feet stalled out when I realized our destination.

“Don't be afraid, little bird,” he coaxed. “Luca's waiting for us.”

“In there?” I squeaked.

We hadn't returned to Dante's kinky dungeon since the day he'd set Luca free. I'd avoided the space, worried it would be haunted by dark memories that were best left in the past. We were all in a relationship as equals now, and I didn't like to reflect on those harrowing first days of our fraught time together.

“I won't force you, Nora,” he swore. “But I think we need to face it.”

“But I forgive you,” I said quickly.

I'd fully forgiven Dante for his cruel actions a long time ago, but that didn't mean I liked to linger over them.

As dark as those days were, I wouldn't undo them if I could. I never would've found love with my dangerous, fiercely possessive men if we hadn't endured those horrors together. We'd all been broken when we'd come together in a rush of pain and mutual suffering. We picked up each other's broken pieces and put them back together as best we could. We supported each other: a true family, even if the men shared more of a respectful friendship than the intense love that I felt for both of them.

Dante brushed a kiss over my knuckles. “And I'll always be grateful for your forgiveness, even if I can't fully understand it.”

I traced the hard line of his jaw. “You'll believe you deserve it one day. I'll keep telling you until you do.”

He pressed a swift, hard kiss to my lips. “I love you so much, Nora. You don’t know what you do to me.”

I offered him a lopsided smile of my own. “I have a general idea.”

Even after six months of our secret marriage, Dante made my knees weak every time he walked into a room. He was just as magnetic and terrifying as ever, but he was *my* monster now. My beautiful, cruel fallen angel.

I took a breath and put my trust in him.

“I’m ready,” I assured him. “I want to see Luca.”

Dante led me the short distance to the space that’d been the scene of some of my worst nightmares, and my breaths quickened as we approached.

“Say the word, and we’ll leave immediately,” he promised.

I nodded, and the door swung open to reveal my other husband: the ruggedly handsome man I’d secretly wanted for years before he’d stolen me away and made me his wife.

He held out his arms for me, and I was instantly caught up in his warm, reassuring embrace. Nothing bad could touch me when he held me with fierce possessiveness. He wouldn’t allow it.

“Are you all right?” he asked, leaning back slightly to study my face. “Dante wanted us to meet here. I agreed, but —”

“But we’ll leave if Nora is at all uncomfortable,” Dante finished for him. “I already promised her.”

And he always kept his promises.

I reached for him, drawing him closer to Luca and me, so that their strength surrounded me in a protective cage. Even my darker memories couldn’t get to me when I was in their arms.

“I’m okay,” I promised, studying the erotic space with fresh eyes.

The whips that'd once terrified me no piqued my curiosity. And the coils of rope that hung neatly on the far wall sent an echo of remembered pleasure shuddering through me. I loved when Dante bound me and toyed with me for hours on end, taking my mind to the transcendent, peaceful place I could only find with him.

Maybe I'd been wrong to avoid this place. We had each other now, and we didn't have to be afraid anymore. We could reclaim the space for all three of us, a kinky haven where we could engage in the most wanton, deviant acts, and no one would judge us.

I glanced between the two men. "I think I'd actually like to spend more time in here if that's something you would both want?"

Dante grinned. "You make me so happy, darling."

"Anything for you, Nora," Luca swore.

I searched his caramel eyes, but I didn't find any shadows haunting their depths. He'd left the pain of those awful days behind him too.

"I have something for you," Dante reminded me. "Both of you."

My brows lifted, surprised that he'd gotten a gift for Luca too. They got along, but they weren't exactly affectionate.

Before I could puzzle over it further, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a familiar length of rose gold chain. He opened his fist, revealing the delicate heart-shaped padlock that marked me as his.

My heart clenched at the sight of it. I thought the Russians had stolen it from me, a trophy to remember how they'd defiled Dante Torrio's wife.

A shiver raced over my skin, and my men stepped closer, enfolding me in their comforting, steady heat.

"You got a new one?" I asked, my voice small.

He shook his head once, jaw tight with his own dark memories of that terrible day. "I took it back from them. But

look. I fixed it for you. For both of you.”

At first, I thought he meant he'd gotten the broken lock repaired. I peered at the trinket, and my breath caught. Dante's initial wasn't etched into the gold; Luca's was.

My eyes burned. “What is this?”

Was Dante further distancing his public association with Luca and me? We managed to share this massive house without anyone asking too many questions; the mansion was enormous enough to house several families.

But it was Luca's ring that I wore when we left the house. It was his last name that I'd legally taken.

“Turn it over,” Dante commanded gently.

I obeyed and released a sigh of relief. The delicate *D* was still etched into the padlock.

I traced the curving lines with reverent fingers before meeting his glittering gaze. “I'll wear this side against my heart.”

I couldn't go around wearing a trinket that marked me as Dante's wife. If I had to love him in secret, I would keep him close to my heart.

“I want you to wear it for both of us,” Dante rumbled. “If Luca wants that too.”

“Yes,” he answered immediately, love spilling from his ochre eyes to flood my soul. “You belong to us, Nora.”

“So, you accept our claim over you?” Dante pressed, waiting for my response.

I went up on my toes and brushed a tender kiss over his lips. “Of course I do. My Master.”

I'd never willingly called him that before, and his jaw went slack with something between shock and wonder.

“You don't have to say that,” he offered, but his voice was rough with longing.

“I want to,” I insisted, gentle but firm. “I want to give myself to you in every way you desire. Both of you.” I included Luca in my fierce pledge.

“Lift her hair for me,” Dante commanded Luca.

He complied without hesitation or complaint. His pride no longer chafed at following my sadistic husband’s carnal orders. He enjoyed our dark games just as much as Dante.

Luca wrapped my hair around his fist, tugging it out of Dante’s way just sharply enough to capture my full attention but not to punish.

Dante’s hands encircled my throat, and the chain slid into place. The padlock clicked softly when it closed, but I felt the sound thrum through my heart.

They were each dangerously possessive in their own way, but they shared me willingly. My husbands would do anything for me, and I would always love them for it. I would spend every day of the rest of our lives proving that I was worthy of being their wife.



Thank you for reading IN THEIR HEARTS! I hope you loved Dante, Nora, and Luca’s twisted romance.

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SWEET CAPTIVITY

EXCERPT

“You don’t want to do this,” I choked out past the lump of terror that clogged my throat. I kept a wary eye on the wicked hunting knife Cristian Moreno held naturally at his side, as though it were an innocuous extension of his arm rather than a threat to my life. “Let me go.”

He threw back his head and laughed, his perfect white teeth flashing as the booming sound assaulted my eardrums. My hands shook violently, causing the ropes that bound my arms behind me to chafe against my wrists. The burn of the rough fibers against my skin and cold bite of the metal chair beneath me were peripheral; my entire focus was centered on Moreno and the way the gleam of the spare overhead light bulb made his dark eyes glint as sharply as the knife in his hand.

“No, Samantha,” he corrected me calmly, his light Colombian accent making his deep voice almost lyrical when he spoke my name. “You’re never leaving this place. Not alive, at least. If you answer my questions, I might be inclined to mercy. Otherwise...” He left the unspoken threat hanging in the air, the implication clear. I would experience agony before he finally disposed of me.

No. Don’t think like that.

I gasped in several deep breaths so I could manage to speak again.

“My friends will find me,” I asserted, knowing Dex wouldn’t leave me to die here. My best friend would do

whatever it took to rescue me.

“If they do, they won’t find more than what’s left of your body.”

Ice crystallized in my veins. He took a step toward me, raising the knife. I tried to shrink away, but the unyielding metal chair behind my back kept me immobile.

“You can’t hurt me,” I said desperately, twisting against my restraints. “If you kill me, my friends will hunt you down.”

His dazzling smile illuminated his darkly handsome features with cruel amusement.

“I want them to know what I’ve done. Your death will be a warning. We’re going to send a little message to your friends.” He gestured behind him, and for the first time, my gaze darted away from the threat before me.

A man loomed a few feet away, the light on his smart phone indicating that he was recording me. A wicked scar puckered his tanned cheek, deepening his fearsome scowl. His black gaze bored into me, his dark glare penetrating my soul. I shuddered and tore my eyes away, unable to bear looking at him.

Moreno laughed again. “What, you don’t like my little brother?” He cocked his head at me. “Maybe I’ll give you to him to play with, after I’m finished with you. He has... very *unique* tastes.” He reached for me, his long fingers trailing down my cheek. I cringed away, my stomach churning. “I think Andrés will like you. Such pale skin. It will mark up nicely.” He shook his head slightly, still smiling. “But I’m getting ahead of myself. He can have you when I’m done. I’m going to extract my answers first.”

The cool tip of the knife kissed my throat, and I choked on a scream as horror overwhelmed me.

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