



*Santino*  
**DELUCA**  
PART 2

KENYA WRIGHT

**Santino by Kenya Wright © 2023**

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means such as electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the authors of this book.

This is a work of fiction. Any characters, names, places, brands, media and incidents are used solely in a fictitious nature based on the author's imagination. Any resemblance to or mention of persons, places, organizations or other incidents is coincidental.

**Printed in the United States of America**

**First Printing, 2023**

# Table of Contents

[Copyright Page](#)

[Santino II](#)

[S. Cohen L. Nichols N. Chatman | T. Cleaver C. Carbon A. Burgett | A. Hush T. Paten](#)

[Prologue | Dancing with the Dead | Santino](#)

[Chapter 1 | Meet the Ex | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 2 | Play the Piano | Santino](#)

[Chapter 3 | A Taste of Ecstasy | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 4 | A History of Violence | Santino](#)

[Chapter 5 | Hungry | Santino](#)

[Chapter 6 | The Diamond Syndicate | Santino](#)

[Chapter 7 | Free At Last | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 8 | A Bigger Throne | Santino](#)

[Chapter 9 | The Tasting | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 10 | Heartbreak | Santino](#)

[Chapter 11 | Male Ego | Santino](#)

[Chapter 12 | Gangster Stylist | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 13 | The Fitting | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 14 | Vengeance | Santino](#)

[Chapter 15 | Dead Souls | Santino](#)

[Chapter 16 | The Morning of the Wedding | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 17 | The Wedding | Kashmere](#)

[Chapter 18 | The Reception | Santino](#)

[Epilogue | Italy | Kashmere](#)



Dear [KW Patrons](#),

I cannot express in words the depth of **my gratitude** towards each and every one of you. Your unwavering support and encouragement throughout the writing process of Santino has meant the world to me. Your kind words and appreciation for my work have been a constant source of motivation, pushing me to pour **my heart and soul** into every page of this book.

It is because of **your support** that I have been able to bring this story and these characters to life. **Your passion for romance literature** is truly inspiring, and it has been a privilege to be able to share my work with you.

It is **because of you** that I can confidently say that this book is another one of my best works. Your feedback, suggestions, and constructive criticism helped me to improve and grow as a writer.

Let's knock out this 2023 with **mind-blowing love stories** that will wet readers' panties and thrill their hearts!

With love and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenya Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

I must first give a **sincere, heartfelt acknowledgement** to my **Diamond Divas**:

**S. Cohen L. Nichols N. Chatman**

**T. Cleaver C. Carbon A. Burgett**

**A. Hush T. Paten**

Your **staunch loyalty and unwavering commitment** to the growth of my writing career have been absolutely unyielding. Your steadfast support has enabled me to compose more powerful books with intricate, **increasingly complex plotlines** and **masterfully-crafted characters** that will stay with readers for many years to come.

I couldn't have done it without you!

**THANK YOU, Diamond Divas!**

“But **love** is a difficult thing to kill. Actually, it’s the only thing in this universe or any other that you can’t **kill**. No weapon that has ever been made can put a dent in it. You might punch it, stab it, whip it, and hang it out to dry—you can even drive a spear through it, pierce its very heart. But all you’re going to get is blood and water, because **love gives birth to love.**”

— Charles Martin, *The Water Keeper*





# Prologue

## Dancing with the Dead

### Santino

The moonlight illuminated the funeral procession as they slowly marched past the white mansion like ghostly serpents.

The men and women were elegantly dressed in blood-red.

All donned elaborate, menacing masks. Some of their masks only covered the upper half of their face. Other faces were completely hidden. Glittering gems adorned some of the masks, while many looked like skulls. Several resembled grimacing animal heads.

They looked like a luxurious army of nightmarish figures, eager to devour the world.

Meanwhile, several men carried coffins made from polished wood and outlined in gold leaf.

Lots of women held burning bushels of sage in their hands.

Almost all sang out these odd, haunting, rhythmic chants over and over. Others cried, filling the air with an eerie chorus of mourning.

They continued forward to Dream Lake. When they reached the waters' edge, they placed the coffins side by side, and separated into groups that spread out to various areas surrounding the lake.

There, they stood next to the water in reverent silence.

The lake's black surface reflected the stars above them.

*So far so good.*

Kashmere was adamant that my men and I could only be observers and remain at a safe distance near the mansion.

First, tonight's event was a secret, sacred ritual that only Killer Crows participated in. We had not married yet, so I

would not be considered a true Killer Crow if I tried to attend. That would make things even more tense. I didn't want to bring more trouble her way.

*We will play by Killer Crow rules for now, my love.*

Second, Kashmere had not even wanted me to be outside tonight, scared the Dream Lake's ghosts would taunt and torment my men and me. All day, she had warned us of the dangers of the spooky lake, where restless spirits lingered and had been known to wreak havoc on the living—especially white people.

While I had shuddered at the thought of being playthings for these vengeful souls, I also refused to remain in the mansion when something could happen to her on the outside.

*Ghosts or not, my future wife must be protected.*

Therefore, Kashmere and I came to a compromise. My men and I would remain far off by the mansion, armed and watching. Additionally, we would not get too close to the lake or interfere with their ceremony in any way.

*Stay safe, my love.*

Finally, if any ghosts appeared near us, we were to rush back into the house.

My gaze drifted across the lake, where I saw the sea of people enveloped in red. Their suffering and mourning echoed across the lake's moonlit surface.

*Which one of you may want revenge?*

The Killer Crows weren't just some simple gang. They operated like a business.

Long ago, the organization itself began with them being diamond thieves. Now they fenced luxury items like sports cars, jewelry, art, etc.

Kashmere served at the top level as Chairman. She was the second female to hold the title and the youngest Chairman in the history of the Killer Crows.

Under her, thirty men were supposed to provide guidance while she ruled. They were called the Board of Directors. The Board was also divided into two branches—Shareholders and Executives. Each branch held fifteen men.

Before I arrived, most of them did not want to work with Kashmere. Some probably figured she was too young to rule. I bet many did not like the idea that she was a woman having such a high position. But mainly they were power hungry.

*Have you all learned your lesson when it comes to plotting against and challenging Kashmere?*

Three days ago, Kashmere and I killed all of Killer Crow's Executives. This was the first time in their history a Chairman had done such a thing.

Now Kashmere had fifteen slots to fill and many enemies lurking within the shadows, ready to seek revenge.

*No one better come for her. Do not test me.*

My veins coursed with the power of the DeLuca Family—an army of thousands upon thousands of Italian mafia soldiers ready to take out anyone who threatened what was mine. Already, I could feel the heat of their guns building up inside me as I anticipated the chaos that could ensue.

“Well. Well.” Tommaso stepped to my right and patted down his dark, wavy hair. He was a tall man that was so pale he looked like he had been built from marble.

In the DeLuca family, Tommaso was not a *true* soldier. I had never saw him personally shoot anyone. I wasn't even sure if he could. Tommaso's duties were to manage events and gatherings. He made sure proper security was in place as well as ensuring celebrations were thrilling and exciting.

When Don Enzo needed a massacre, he called me.

While Tommaso was phoned for birthdays, weddings, and funerals. In fact, he would be planning Kashmere and my wedding.

Tonight, a small red mask covered half of Tommaso's face. “This is quite a festive event. By chance, do you know when

the cocktails and hors d'oeuvres will be served?"

On my left, my main guard, Leonardo snickered.

I scowled under the mask, wishing Tommaso could see my face. "Does this seem like an event that would be serving food and drinks?"

"Well, I believe so, yes. The Killer Crows have a history of being classy and pulling out all the stops." Tommaso shrugged. "I think they are just beginning, so I would say the cocktails will be coming soon."

Tommaso's assistant, Knight nudged him. "Sir, I did bring a flask with your usual. Let me know when you need it."

Tommaso's voice lightened. "Dry martini?"

"Yes sir."

"Chilled?"

"Of course, sir. In fact, the inside of my jacket is close to frozen—"

"What about olives?" Tommaso rubbed his hands together. "Did you happen to bring some?"

"Enough." I sneered. "This is not a cocktail party. We are here to make sure my fiancé remains safe while unknown enemies surround her. You can drink later."

"Well. You are correct, Santino." Tommaso nodded. "I do apologize for my bad manners."

I rolled my eyes and gazed back at the lake, putting my focus back on Kashmere.

She was captivating in a red gown, which flowed into the lengthening shadows. Usually, she had her favorite two guns—Blossom and Bubbles—in her diamond holster. To show the Killer Crows that she would not bring any more violence, she left the guns in our master suite.

*Don't worry. I have enough guns ready to shoot for you.*

I perused the rest of her enchanting form. The soft moonlight glowed on her dark brown skin. A very small mask

covered the upper part of her beautiful face.

The small mask had been another part of our compromise. I always had to know where she was this evening, so her face couldn't be completely hidden.

*God, I can't wait to get you in bed tonight.*

A throbbing ache swelled in my cock, and an insatiable craving consumed me.

With her so far away, I was tortured with longing. Her body was like a narcotic. I could not resist the pull to take her over and over again.

*When will this be done, my love? I need to be inside of you right now.*

Kashmere's team stood by her, also thinly masked and dressed in red. Rue was on the left, serving as Kashmere's number one. Slim and tall, she wore a red suit and kept a pistol in her holster.

Dane towered over her on the right and scanned the area. He had a tough build. When we battled her enemies days ago, he had shot down so many, so fast it was hard to keep up with him.

And right in front of Kashmere, her cousin and number three, Merik held his red machine gun with the gold tip and monitored all walking by them.

*At least she has a good team to watch out for her when I'm not close enough.*

Slurping suddenly sounded on my right.

I snapped my view to Tomasso.

*Seriously?*

He loudly drank from the flask. When he realized I was watching him, he took one last gulp and rushed with putting it away.

I frowned. "Are you done?"

Tomasso cleared his throat. "I am. Apologies. I was a little parched."

"So you needed the dry martini to hydrate you?" Leonardo chuckled.

Tomasso sighed. "I must admit that this...situation is a bit too creepy to not have a few sips of alcohol."

I glanced around, not noticing anything out of the ordinary.

*No ghosts. I wonder why they are not out now?*

The next part of the ceremony must have begun because soon light chatter rose around the lake, and even some laughter slipped over the water. In other areas, people began to sing different songs. Many also swayed back and forth with the music.

Tomasso leaned my way. "Did Kashmere tell you why they are wearing the masks?"

"To scare away demons."

"Demons?" Tomasso shrieked. "I may need another sip from my flask."

Leonardo snickered again.

"Calm down. It is all mainly symbolism to respect their ancestors' traditions." I kept my focus on Kashmere. "They call this ceremony Dancing with the Dead."

"But not many are dancing."

"Perhaps, it is just the name." I shrugged. "More important, this ceremony is to celebrate the lives of the deceased. Bringing their dead to the water and talking about their lives, is the Killer Crows' effort to encourage the souls to reach salvation. At the end, they will sprinkle water from Dream Lake on top of the dead's faces. Tomorrow, they will be buried in the ground as usual."

"Ghosts and demons and sprinkling water on the dead." Tomasso pulled out his flask and took a sip.

Leonardo spoke, "I am more surprised everyone is not fighting. All know that Kashmere helped killed their loved

ones.”

“Don’t be surprised.” I glanced at some of the others near the lake. “They are calm because they see the hundreds of us, armed and waiting to come to Kashmere’s rescue, if needed. Sometimes guns are a great motivator for peace.”

*They want to come for her though.*

Many watched Kashmere under their masks and whispered to each other. Surely, they were plotting and planning their attack, but none would come tonight. Not while I was on guard.

*Soon there will be war.*

Kashmere wanted to unite the Killer Crows. She dreamed of everyone finally coming together under her rule and walking off into the sunset.

I didn’t think it would be possible.

Instead, I welcomed the bloodshed.

*Let them all come.*

When they sought revenge, I would greet them with a storm of bullets and bloodshed.

Out of nowhere, a rumble of engines roared off in the distance.

*Huh?*

Leonardo and I turned in that direction.

Flashlight beams danced around the property, flickering along the trees and lighting up our faces.

*Who the hell is this?*

My answer appeared next. A hoard of hundreds of bikers, zoomed onto the Killer Crows’ massive estate. They were dark figures in the night, speeding forward.

My men took out their guns.

I followed, placing my weapon by my side.



*I don't remember hearing anything about bikers being in Paradise City.*

I glanced at my fiancé.

Kashmere and her squad were already heading the bikers' way, along with ten more of her trusted soldiers.

*Oh no. You won't be talking to anybody without my being by your side.*

Taking off my mask, I walked off in that direction too. Whoever this was, they needed to know what I looked like so the next time that they saw me, they could properly run off in the opposite direction.

Leonardo and several of my men got rid of their masks and followed me.

Soon the bikers closed ranks, parking their motorcycles in long rows twenty feet from the mansion.

Then, one man slowed his speed, maneuvered around the other men, and stopped several feet in front of the them. He was a bulky guy with a brown leather jacket on. His long brown hair waved in the wind, and his face wore a fierce expression.

*This must be their little leader.*

Kashmere got to my side and walked forward with me. "Don't have your people shoot. I know them."

"Who are they?"

"They're a biker gang called the Coffin Cheaters. Their leader Pedro was married to my sister, Chanel."

"Was?" I raised my eyebrows. "They divorced before she passed?"

"No." She shook her head. "Pedro went missing, and no one has any idea what happened to him. We might have investigated it, if not for my sister being murdered the next day and everything being so chaotic within the Killer Crows after that."

*These men will want answers for why their leader is missing.*

I frowned.

*We don't have time for this shit.*

I tenderly took her hand and guided her forward. “And the guy parked in front of them? Who is he?”

“His name is Gypsy—Pedro’s brother.” Kashmere let out a long breath. “And...he is...my ex-boyfriend.”

I gritted my teeth, already wanting to kill him.



# Chapter 1

## Meet the Ex

### Kashmere

These days since meeting Santino and then consequently heinously killing my grandmother and the Executives to say I was, irrevocably altered was putting it mildly.

I was no longer the same Kash. My soul had been buried deep within a frostbitten abyss, and my physical shell became a mask of stone.

In the past, people whispered behind my back that I was a trigger happy hothead. I hated that label and always tried to prove them wrong. I did my best to stay calm and not shoot my gun.

But now...I accepted the name. I was done being nice and playing by old rules created by old men. It was time for the Killer Crows to greatly change like I did.

*But could I do it, and unify us at the same time?*

Too much weighed on my shoulders.

*And now the Coffin Cheaters have arrived here. Why?*

Santino and I stopped five feet in front of Gypsy as he sat on his bike and watched us.

*Come on. Don't give me more trouble.*

Needing my fiancé's comforting strength I squeezed Santino's hand harder to anchor me, and even inched closer to him. "Thanks for being here, baby."

"Always, Kash."

Smiling at him using my nickname, I let out a long breath and studied Gypsy, wondering what new madness was spinning around in his insane mind.

*Please don't start any shit tonight, Gypsy. It's been a long week for me.*

Still with no one saying anything, Gypsy moved his gaze along my body.

I gritted my teeth.

Then, Gypsy directed his gaze to my hand as it held Santino's.

Santino groaned in annoyance. "Are we supposed to invite him to a conversation or is he going to eventually get off his bike and explain why he is here?"

"Wait for the fire." I frowned. "He likes to do a big introduction."

"Fire?"

Then the show came without my having to explain. Gypsy let out a shrill whistle that pierced the air. His men joined in, revving their engines and roaring. It was a raucous cacophony of sound that shook the very earth under my feet.

*Get on with it.*

Next, fire shot from their headlights, lighting up the estate in a glow and filling the air with a crackling heat. Smoke rose around them. The Coffin Cheaters were all about fire. Always. They didn't just use guns, they were liable to set everything ablaze with your family and you in it.

Killer Crows had lost many to their fires.

*Come on, Gypsy. There's a peace treaty. Don't give me new trouble.*

More flames rose in the air, as the Coffin Cheaters roared.

I glanced at Santino to see his reaction.

A bored expression covered his face.

*At least, he isn't easily rattled.*

I smiled.

*He is going to be just fine in Paradise City.*

I turned back to Gypsy right as he climbed off his bike and prowled forward.

I could never deny the haunting physical beauty of this man. His features were chiseled perfection, his shoulders broad and strong. His long brown hair cascaded down his neck like a river of silk, mesmerizing any women near him.

But through spending alone time with Gypsy, I quickly realized the twisted reality that he lived in, and wanted no part of it.

The rest of the Coffin Cheaters put away their fire. More smoke swarmed around the bikers.

*Here we go.*

Gypsy stopped three feet in front of us. Again, his gaze went back to Santino's and my intertwined hands.

I tensed, wishing I had my guns with me. "How can I help you this evening, Gypsy?"

He directed his gaze to my face. "Who is *this* guy?"

Santino spoke, before I could, "Answer her question."

Gypsy didn't look his way. "It usually takes you time to warm to a guy, but you're holding hands. And I know he has not been in the area too long. I have people watching you."

*What the fuck?*

"I'm confused." Gypsy frowned. "How long have you been dating him?"

I did my best to keep my annoyance off my face. "Gypsy, you're interrupting our ceremony—"

"About that." Gypsy's gaze scanned all of the masked Killer Crows by the lake.

They all stared at us, probably assessing every move I made. Surely many hoped to get revenge. While the rest wondered if I could truly lead them.

Gypsy put his view back on me. "A ceremony to mourn your dead, and the Coffin Cheaters were not invited? Are we

no longer family?”

*I have no idea anymore.*

“Gypsy, it has been a crazy month,” I said. “Let us finish this conversation in a few days.”

“Where is my brother, Pedro? I haven’t heard from him in weeks. Every time I have called here, no one has given me answers.”

*I had no idea you were calling. It must have been the old Board hiding more shit from me.*

Tension gathered in my shoulders. “Truthfully, I have no idea about this, but I plan to investigate—”

“Your sister is dead. Is my brother also?”

Santino glared. “Kashmere just said that she did not know. That is the end of it.”

Gypsy turned to Santino for the first time that evening. “Kashmere, can you tell your doggy to be silent while we talk?”

“Coffin Cheaters.” Santino let go of my hand. “I like the title. Very bold. Escapers of death. Right?”

Gypsy’s expression turned to stone.

More of Santino’s men gathered behind us.

Meanwhile, Gypsy continued to appear unfazed.

“However.” Santino raised one finger and wagged it. “I could show you how wrong that name really is. You won’t cheat death with me.”

I blinked.

A mind-numbing silence ensued as both men glared at each other. The air crackled with testosterone.

I stepped forward. “Gypsy, this is my fiancé, Santino.”

Gypsy slowly directed his gaze to me. “I am confused by a lot of things this evening.”

I eyed him. “What are you confused about?”

“Now that Chanel has passed, who is in charge of the Killer Crows?”

“I am.”

“Correction.” Gypsy shook his head. “Pedro would be in charge.”

Rage rose within me. “Pedro has been missing this entire time, and even if he wasn’t, only Jones blood would sit on this throne.”

“That wasn’t the guidelines of our peace treaty.” Gypsy sneered. “Where is my brother?”

“I don’t know, but I will find out.”

“If he is dead, then I expect the Coffin Cheaters to be given answers and well-compensated for whatever happened.”

“Fine.” I shrugged. “Once I know, I got you.”

Gypsy kept his glare on me. “Good.”

“Awesome.”

Then, he formed his lips into a cruel smile. “However, if my brother is gone, you do understand that a new *arrangement* must be made between us.”

“Give me a week and we can discuss all of this. Right now, I am busy.”

“Busy?” He twisted his face like he had just swallowed something nasty. “Busy planning for your supposed wedding?”

“Gypsy, we will talk later. Have a good evening.”

“Not so fast.” Gypsy stepped forward.

Santino frowned.

Gypsy kept his view on me. “Our peace treaty only exists because Killer Crows and the Coffin Cheaters became family through marriage.”

“I know what the treaty is about—”



“Then, you know that if *you* are now the new head of the Killer Crows, then our treaty dictates that you marry the next new head of the Coffin Cheaters.”

I widened my eyes.

Gypsy touched his chest. “Me.”

*Say what now?*

Santino radiated fury, seething with a silent rage that was more intimidating than any words he could have said. His hand shot up with lightning speed and a deafening clatter of metal filled the air behind us.

*Fuck.*

Slowly, I glanced over my shoulder.

I snapped my head back. My stomach dropped at the sight of Santino’s men. Their guns pointed firmly at Gypsy and the Coffin Cheaters.

Meanwhile, Killer Crows crept closer to us, probably trying to hear us better. I felt the weight of their judgement.

Not moving too fast, I placed my attention forward.

Gypsy watched me. “You know how many of us exist, and what would happen if something happened to me.”

“Nothing will happen tonight.” My hands shook at my sides. “No one is shooting anyone.”

Santino put his hand down.

Movement sounded again behind us, letting me know that Santino’s men had put away their guns for now.

*Thank God. I only have attention for one group of enemies at a time.*

I cleared my throat. “I just need time to fix this situation. A week.”

That cruel smile spread back on Gypsy’s face. “If Pedro is dead, then *we* marry. Do you understand?”

I was thankful that Santino made no response or movement, even though deep down inside I knew he was

seething.

I held out my hands. “First, let us get the facts straight before we start declaring anything.”

“Facts. I like that.” Gypsy raised his hand to place it inside of his jacket.

Now Santino had his gun out in a blur and pointed at his head.

*Jesus Christ. He’s fast.*

My bottom lip quivered.

“I would never hurt, *Kash*.” Gypsy frowned. “I’m getting *facts* out of my jacket. Not a gun.”

I shivered.

Santino lowered his weapon.

Gypsy pulled out a thick folder. “When my brother didn’t call and none of the Killer Crows would give me answers, I decided to do my own digging.”

“O-kay.” I stared at it.

Gypsy handed it to me. “By the way, you can keep this folder.”

*What the hell is this?*

I grabbed the folder and opened it.

The first picture that greeted my eyes showed Pedro stepping into a hotel late at night.

I looked up. “What is this?”

“Images from the street cameras.” Gypsy winked. “The Diamond Syndicate isn’t the only people with government connections. This image was the last place that my brother was seen at.”

“Okay.”

“Flip to the other image.”

Sighing, I checked the next picture.

*Shit.*

Lei walked into the same hotel. It was still in the evening.

*Come on, God. Do I need more problems?*

When my sister, Chanel was alive, Lei had been beyond obsessed with her. Had life been fair for the both of them, the Board would have let Lei and Chanel marry.

However, my father who was living at the time knew that the North and South leaders in the Syndicate would have seen their marriage as two great powers uniting against them.

He wasn't completely wrong either. The East and West made a lot of money. Together, we would have been unstoppable.

Additionally, the Coffin Cheaters and Killer Crows had been battling for years over territory. Romeo was in charge during this time and was having a lot of trouble battling against them. We lost a lot of Killer Crows in those years.

My parents thought a peace treaty through marriage would solve two problems—keep the Killer Crows powerful and end our war with the Coffin Cheaters.

It did.

But Lei never stopped loving Chanel and never moved on. He remained single and completely obsessed with my sister, even years after her marriage.

*Why did Lei go into this hotel?*

I flipped to the next image. Now it was morning as Lei walked out.

*O-kay. Where is Pedro?*

I went to the next image.

*Damn it.*

It appeared to be later in the day. Now Dima headed into the hotel with several men.

*Really, guys? You all are keeping secrets from me?*

I went to the next picture.

This image showed Marcelo and his men entering the hotel.

*This is bullshit.*

I looked up. “I don’t know what is going on, but I will find out.”

Gypsy softened his expression. “Watching you go through these pictures and seeing your reactions, tell me that you *truly* had no idea about this.”

“I didn’t.”

“Dima, Marcelo, and Lei are hiding something from you.”

Fury bubbled within me. I closed the folder and placed it at my side.

“If you continue through the images, you will see Dima’s people carrying bags of items out of the hotel. Additionally, one of those bags look like the body of a person.” Gypsy sneered. “Who do you think that could be?”

I gritted my teeth.

Gypsy shook his head. “If it is confirmed that my brother was the body in that bag, Coffin Cheaters will not forget the Diamond Syndicate’s disrespect.”

*I won’t either.*

“This will be war.” Gypsy pointed at me. “And I expect the Killer Crows to stand with us.”

*Alright. Hold on there.*

“And... I expect *us* to marry.” Gypsy winked and headed off.

*Goddamn it.*

Santino began to prowl forward.

I placed my hand on his arm. “Not right now, Santino.”

He pursed his lips and turned to me. “What do you mean not right now?”

“Killing him won’t solve the problem. It will just be hundreds more Coffin Cheaters at our door an hour later.”

“And I have a hundred more bullets.”

“The Coffin Cheaters may not seem like much, but they are thousands and thousands—”

“Same as the DeLuca Family.”

“Yes, but the Coffin Cheaters have battled us before and they are tough to kill.” I formed a circle with one hand. “They live in this sort of valley surrounded by mountains. We have no idea how to even get in to get them, but they can always seem to get us.”

Santino crossed his arms. “We can swarm in with helicopters—”

“We tried that, and they shot them down.”

“None of that scares me.”

“Santino, I am not entering another war when Killer Crows are currently divided and my relationship with the Syndicate is...shaky. I need time to get all of this together.”

“Time?” Santino leaned his head to the side.

“I have to meet with the Syndicate and...”

Santino quirked his brows. “And?”

“And we should delay the wedding until—”

“We are not delaying our wedding.”

“Just until I strengthen the Killer Crows and—”

“There will not be *any* delay.”

More Killers Crows gathered around us, being nosy as fuck.

The roar of motorcycles filled the air as the Coffin Cheaters sped away.

Santino scowled at me.

I lowered my voice. “I just need some extra days to—”

“No.”

I wanted to punch him in his face. Instead, I gripped the folder. “This conversation is over.”

And then, I turned around and head back to my mansion.



# Chapter 2

## Play the Piano

### Santino

*Delay the wedding? Has she lost all sanity? Does she not truly know who I am?*

I watched Kashmere walk off. Her hair flowed behind her. Those hips swayed in a mesmerizing rhythm.

*And then you leave, saying the conversation is over?*

She continued forward.

The crowd of my men split apart, creating a path for her to the mansion.

*Oh, no. I must make things clear.*

Leonardo stepped to my right. “What do you want me to do, boss?”

I looked at him. “Did she really say the word *delay*?”

Worry filled his eyes. “Yes, sir.”

Tomasso came to my left. “It is possible to delay the wedding for a few days. It would give us more time to—”

“There will not be a delay.” I glared at him. “In fact, we can move it up.”

Tomasso frowned. “Santino, you cannot order the bride around as you would order your men.”

Ignoring him, I turned back to Leonardo. “Get some people on The Coffin Cheaters. I want to know everything about them.”

Leonardo nodded.

Fury coursed through my veins. “And add people to each territory leader in the Diamond Syndicate—Dima, Lei, and Marcelo. I want them monitored. Find out their strengths and weakness. I’m going to destroy them.”



Tomasso shrieked.

“No problem.” Leonardo raised his eyebrows. “Anything else? You want anybody killed right now?”

“Not yet.” I stormed off, keeping my gaze on Kashmere the whole time.

Several feet up, Kashmere’s people kept her pace. I could tell Rue and Dane were desperately trying to give her proper advice and guide her towards sensible solutions.

*They better be telling her not to delay this wedding or I will get rid of them too.*

Surely, the Coffin Cheaters and this damned proposed peace treaty was a new problem in this chaotic situation—a storm hovering over an already tumultuous environment. However, I would not let Gypsy or anyone else determine when I would finally put my mother’s wedding ring on my bride’s finger.

*I would kill him and that whole biker crew first.*

Kashmere and her squad entered the mansion.

I increased my pace. Several of my guards surrounded me.

“Santino.” Tomasso hurried to me, panting and out of breath.

I entered the mansion. “What?”

“You cannot bully her.”

“I don’t plan on it. Enough have bullied her in the past.” I headed up the stairs, focused on each step, and gripped the sparkling gold railing to steady my balance.

Yesterday, Kashmere had told me about how her great grandfather crafted this clockwise staircase to not only be a stylish focus in the mansion, but it held a malicious purpose. He had designed certain steps to deliberately off-kilter and cause unsuspecting enemies to stumble and fall. The sheer wickedness of his plan impressed me. I found the man to be a genius.

My admiration for Kashmere and even the Killer Crows was unrivaled. When we united, I envisioned a force to be reckoned with—unstoppable and unconquerable in every way.

Plus, my newly rising love for her and the idea of becoming one intensified with each passing moment, until it was undeniable in my mind that we were meant to be together.

But did she feel the same way?

*Delay?*

I gritted my teeth.

*Is it cold feet? Or are you truly worried about these dingy Coffin Cheaters?*

“Santino.” Tomasso struggled to keep up with me and almost tripped on one step. “What are your plans when talking to her?”

Kashmere and her team disappeared ahead of us.

I frowned. “I’m going to stress the fact that she has no choice but to marry me on the day—”

“Santino, hold on. Let us talk—”

“There is nothing to say—”

“I believe I have more skills when it comes to maintaining a proper relationship.”

I got to the top of the stairs and turned to him. “Are you saying I have no experience with women?”

“Surely you have had many. I’ve seen a couple different ones on your arm from time to time.”

I smirked. “Then, why would I need your advice?”

“Because Kashmere isn’t like any of *those* women. She is different.”

“Okay.” I sighed. “Go ahead.”

“Be gentle.”

I sneered.

“Do not order her.” He raised both of his hands and moved his fingers like he was playing a piano.

I quirked my brows. “What the hell are you doing?”

“A good woman is a finely tuned instrument. One must be very delicate when playing her with precision in order to get the proper melody.” Tomasso lowered his hands. “In other words, no yelling. No ordering. Listen as much as possible, and tell her how you *truly* feel.”

“I did outside.”

“No. You told her what she could not do and that it was your way and that it was final. You will need to dig deeper.”

“Explain.”

“What fear comes when you think of the idea of her delaying the wedding?”

I stiffened. “I don’t want to delay the wedding...”

“Because?”

I swallowed. “I finally like the idea of...perhaps...having a family. And Kashmere and I could be one. I don’t want to delay that.”

Tomasso curved his lips into a smile. “That warms my heart.”

I scowled and walked off.

Tomasso called after me. “Now say *that* to her and go even deeper to push the point. Play the piano, Santino!”

I rolled my eyes.

*Play the piano? He’s insane.*

I fisted my hands at my side. I loathed the idea of having to be in touch with my feelings, but I was willing to take it there for Kashmere.

It was hard because my primal instinct screamed to simply unleash my anger and yell until Kashmere bowed down to me.

But I knew, even in my blind fury, that such an attempt would be futile against a woman like Kashmere. There was no

denying that loudly yelling at her would get me shot.

I smirked at the thought and stopped at our bedroom suite.

Her guards nervously glanced my way. Then, one reluctantly opened the door.

*Okay. Play the piano.*

I entered to a shocking sight.

*What the fuck is this?*

Kashmere and her people stood on one side of the room.

Meanwhile, a half-naked, brown-skinned man stood on the other side, holding a whip and wearing only red boxer briefs. Unfortunately, his erection was on full display.

And apparently, I stepped into the middle of a heated conversation between Kashmere and him.

*It appears the craziness of this night will keep on going.*

Although a wicked smile spread across his face. His voice held annoyance. "This is not tradition, Kashmere. The Chairman requires more than one tongue to relieve stress."

My earlier fury shifted to murderous rage. "Excuse me? And where is your tongue supposed to be going?"

Noticing my entrance for the first time, Kashmere snapped her view to me. "Oh shit."

"Oh shit is right." I headed this mad man's way and stopped a foot in front of him. "Who are you? And why are you in *our* bedroom talking about your fucking tongue?"

Kashmere hurried our way. "Santino, Brian was just leaving. In fact, I was just in the process of terminating him and it wasn't going well."

"Oh really?" I glared at this Brian. "And what's your job?"

Worry creased over his face. Brian edged back. "I come from a long line of Stress Relievers. The men and women in my family have made it their purpose to take care of all the needs and passions of Killer Crow Chairmen."

*Fucking stress reliever. I had planned to meet you.*

Kashmere got between us. “And that tradition has now ended as I was just explaining to Brian before you came in.”

Brian moved his view to me. “Kashmere, you would really disgrace me in *this* way?”

I smiled. “Better than my torturing and killing you due to the mere thought that your tongue would ever touch her body.”

Brian widened his eyes. “But...all Chairmen have had stress relievers—”

“Times are changing.” Rue cleared her throat. “Bye, Brian. Please excuse yourself.”

No fool, he rushed with putting the whip on a cart next to him stacked with dildos, bottles of lube, and various sex toys.

I tensed.

*Did he plan to use those on my fiancé? Oh, the things I would have done to him.*

I watched Brian hurry and push the cart away.

*Oh, I'm going to kill him!*

Dane gestured at everyone. “We should give Santino and Kashmere privacy.”

I put my view on Kashmere. She still had her back to me, but her shoulders relaxed.

Everyone left.

The door closed.

I scanned the room, making sure there were no more idiotic surprises.

The oddest part of the room was that the large windows were barred and blocked by intricately designed black metal shutters. They were locked over the windows and balcony openings, and resembled the commercial metal ones that business' put over their doors and windows to prevent theft and vandalism.

But, I knew that the Killer Crows did that to keep the ghosts from coming inside. The shutters weren't just metal.

They had biblical scriptures and holy crosses carved on the outer side of them. This made sure the ghosts remained on the other side.

Sighing, I moved my view back to my fiancé.

Kashmere didn't turn around. "I don't want to argue, Santino."

I took off my jacket, flung it to the floor, and walked over to her. "This won't be an argument."

Now so close, the heat of my longing for her was so powerful that I could hardly contain myself.

*Damn it.*

My heart raced as I ached to take her in my arms. Even my lips desperately wanted to ravage hers.

But I held back, steeling my resolve.

My hands clasped around her waist, and instead of tensing she leaned into me, as if needing my embrace as much as I yearned to give it.

Then, she spoke, "No arguing?"

"No arguing."

Slowly, she turned my way. "Then, you understand?"

I leaned her way and brushed my lips against hers. "What I understand is that I must take my time to fiercely articulate my point so that there would never be any doubt between us again in the future."

She looked up into my intense gaze. "Meaning?"

"You think I would let you marry someone else, after finally finding you?"

"Santino, I don't plan to marry Gypsy. I'm not even considering it." She pierced my heart with those beautiful brown eyes. "I only want *you* to be my husband. How could you ever doubt that?"

My heart warmed. "Then, why the delay?"

“It is to give me some more time to come up with a proper way to smartly deal with the Coffin Cheaters—”

“We kill them. Problem over.”

She let out a long breath.

I tilted my head to the side. “You doubt that we could take them on together?”

She looked away. “If Killer Crows were unified and I didn’t have more enemies within my own people, then I wouldn’t doubt it. I would load up my guns and race off in the night with you.”

“Hmmm.” I licked my lips, enjoying that thought.

“But, if we are to take on the Coffin Cheaters, we must do it properly and together. That includes all of Killer Crows unified.”

“Forget them and focus on us.” I took her chin and moved her view to me. “I will kill anybody for you. Have I not showed you that?”

“You have.”

“Your problems are *my* problems. That includes the Syndicate and the Coffin Cheaters.”

She shivered. “I just don’t want a shootout on my wedding day.”

“I agree.” The line of my jaw clenched. “Death to the man that disrupts our nuptials.”

“I second that.”

“Then, we continue forward with no fear. War or not, our wedding plans continue.”

Her bottom lip quivered. “Okay.”

“And...” I stiffened. “Tomasso told me that I should go deeper with you on my feelings about this.”

“Oh, really?” She smirked. “Well by all means ... go deeper.”

I gazed at her. “When my parents died, I was passed around from household to household. It wasn’t that I was a troubled child. Believe me. I did my best to be accepted by any of them. I cleaned up after myself. I stayed quiet. I didn’t eat too much and always went to bed hungry. Still, they moved me from house to house. Now I know that it was just that no one really wanted to be bothered with the responsibilities of raising a kid.”

She frowned. “That’s horrible. I’m so sorry that happened to you.”

“All of this hardened me.” I moved my hand from her chin. “Because of that, I...placed this invisible armor around me. I decided to never love anyone too much, never hope to commit to anyone. Being alone would always be better. It would protect me.”

Sorrow filled her eyes.

“Nothing was to shatter this armor around me.” I frowned. “But then I came here and saw you.”

She bit her bottom lip.

“It wasn’t just that you were gorgeous. I saw how you were treated by your family and instantly yearned to protect you. That need surged fast within me.”

“And that’s what you did, Santino.” Her voice was a soft whisper. “You have protected me since coming into my life.”

“And that is what I will *always* do.”

“But Santino...can we really just kill everybody and that be the end?”

I grinned. “I’ve found that death solves many things.”

“Fuck.” She shook her head. “Then, that means that the Killer Crows will go back to war with the Coffin Cheaters.”

“I doubt there will be much of a war. I plan to crush them well before the wedding.”

“Santino, our wedding is in four days. Do you *really* think you can do that so fast?”



“Trust and watch me.”

“Okay.” She let out a long breath. “I’ll trust you. What do you need from my people?”

“Nothing. I just need you to unify Killer Crows.” I leaned my head to the side. “Do you have any ideas on how to fix that?”

“A few. It would involve meeting with the Syndicate and getting some strings pulled within the prison system.”

That shocked me. “What’s your plan with that?”

“The Board members in prison loved me. Perhaps, I could free them and get them on my side.”

“Not a bad idea, if you can pull it off. If you free incarcerated men and return them to their families, then they will be loyal to you forever.” I bobbed my head. “If I remember correctly, there was one man on the screen during that meeting that cheered for you while you shot up everyone.”

“That was Roscoe—Merik’s older brother and my cousin. My grandmother loved him so much just like Romeo.”

“But he cares for you?”

“Yes. When Roscoe was out, he always looked out for me.”

I nodded. “Then, perhaps Roscoe should take Simon’s old job as Chief Executive Officer.”

“That’s what I was thinking.”

“And this is the other reason why I have fallen for you so fast.” I tapped the side of my head. “You’re fucking intelligent.”

“I just hope it will all work out.”

“It will. But for now let’s not think about that.”

“No?”

“No. Because, there’s *another* problem.”

“Oh. I know what you’re talking about.” She glanced at the door and then looked back at me. “I’m sorry about what

happened earlier. I terminated all of my stress relievers this morning. Brian apparently, did not like that decision and wanted to show me one last time why I should change my mind.”

I kept a calm expression, even though I rippled with rage.

*Oh, buddy. I will be having a conversation with you later.*

I hit her with a wicked smile. “Brian is not what I am talking about.”

“Then, what is it, Santino?”

“Never walk away from me like that again.”

She blinked.

“I could deal with many things. I can take on bikers shooting out fire from their headlights, enemy Killer Crows lurking within the shadows, and even those idiots in the Diamond Syndicate. But I won’t ever put up with the pain of abandonment. Don’t ever make me doubt what we have together again.”

In a moment of pure shock, she pulled my body close and embraced me, hugging me tight. She whispered into my ear, “I promise to never do that again.”

In that instant, the hardness of my resolve shattered into a million sharp pieces. My cold hard armor further melted away into nothing, leaving my heart exposed and vulnerable.

*I will never let her go.*

I held her fiercely and captured those lips. We kissed with a passionate intensity, a dizzying blend of desperation and desire.

I had no idea what was coming, but with her, I would not be afraid. Death, damnation or eternal torment, I would be fearless, for her love was becoming my new armor—my new impenetrable shield.

I was ready to face the fury of the world if it meant more of Kashmere.



# Chapter 3

## A Taste of Ecstasy

### Kashmere

Santino enveloped me in a passionate embrace, and all I could think of was how I had ever considered delaying our wedding.

*That was crazy. I can't be without him.*

While Rue, Dane, and even Merik had my back, this man had my heart and soul. There could be no delay in anything that would bring us closer.

We were so close that I could feel his heart pounding against my own. His breathing grew heavy.

*Yes. This is my man, and that's that. Fuck Gypsy. He doesn't run shit over here.*

Santino stared at me with a fervor that sent chills down my spine. The gaze burned into me, unrelenting in its intensity. "The amazing love that we will have...I don't want it with anyone else."

I shivered.

"That is why I need you to walk down that aisle as soon as possible." He looked deep into my eyes. "I'm all in. And it is more than the fact that I crave you."

My heart pounded against my chest.

"I want *us*."

I parted my lips in longing.

"This is forever, Kash."

I leaned into him. "Forever."

My whole being was overcome by Santino's enchanting words.

"I can't wait until you have my last name." His hands slowly danced around my body, up and down, exploring all of

my curves and sending delicious shock waves of pleasure coursing through my veins. “I can’t wait until you are completely mine.”

Like an electric shock, all my senses ignited. Desire swelled within my core and I also ached for the moment I could take his name and be fully his. No man had ever wanted to commit to me this fast and this deeply.

My bottom lip quivered. “My heart wants you. There could never be anyone else.”

He captured my mouth, and his kisses were sweet lightning. The sensation of Santino’s tongue sent shivers down my spine. Each twirl in my mouth was a warm taste of ecstasy.

Moaning, I arched my back.

*God, yes.*

Every inch of my skin threatened to explode into a thousand pieces with the raw passion of him.

When he pulled back from my mouth, I whispered, “Take me.”

Fast, he lifted me up in those strong arms as if I weighed nothing to him.

I wrapped my legs around him and kissed his neck. I wanted to kiss and touch every inch of him.

Instead of placing me on the bed, Santino pushed me against the nearest wall, grinding his hardness into my softness.

“Oh!” My gasp of surprise only seemed to incite him further as he loudly groaned. It was a deep primal sound that vibrated across my skin.

“That being said. You were still a very naughty girl.” His thick cock pulsed against me, teasing my body. The only thing that separated my pussy from the relief of having him inside of me was our damned clothing.

“Give it to me, Santino.”

“Just that easy?”

“Yes.”

“But how should I punish you, Kash?”

“With your cock.”

A wicked grin spread across his face. “If I punish you with my cock, then it will be more pain than pleasure.”

“I don’t believe that.”

“No?” He dove one hand under my dress.

My body hummed with need. “No.”

“Take your tits out for me. I want to see them.”

I yanked the top of my dress down. My breasts spilled out.

Gazing at my nipples, he traced a sensual heated trail along my silk panties with his fingertips. Soon, he slipped those fingers under the silk and drew long, slow circles along my clit.

“Shit.” I trembled in desire. A pulsing ache spread from my core to my thighs and back again.

His hungry gaze devoured my nipples. “God, I wish I had more than two hands.”

“Why? What would you do with the extra ones?”

“I would play with those nipples.” His tongue darted out and licked his lips in anticipation. “Instead, *you* must show me how you like them touched.”

I slipped my hands up to my breasts and closed my eyes, reveling in the feel of my fingertips on my aching flesh.

“Open those eyes.” He slipped one finger inside of me.

“Oh.” I opened my eyes.

His thumb flicked against my clit as he fucked me with his finger.

“Oh, God.” My pussy clenched around his fingers.

“Go ahead and show me how you like to touch those nipples.”

One hand grazed over a sensitive point. The soft touch jolted through me.

“Hmmm. I know you like more than that.” Santino thrust a second finger inside of me. “Show me more.”

I pinched both nipples until they were hard nubs and then rubbed the tips between my thumbs and forefingers.

“So fucking beautiful.” Santino’s eyes went wild. “I could look at you play with your breasts all day.”

Shuddering, I toyed with the sensitive points some more. My lips parted, yearning for his kiss.

“Bring them closer to my mouth.”

Shivering, I leaned forward.

“Yes, like that. You’re so fucking sexy.” His breath came in shallow pants. He looked at me like he was ready to devour my soul. Then, he had his mouth on me and began sensually tugging.

“Oh!” I melted against him. “Oh!”

While his fingers continued to fuck me, he traced a lazy circle around my nipple. I rocked my hips back and forth with the rhythm of that magical hand.

“Damn, Santino.” I let my head fall back as a wave of pleasure spread outward from my core.

Closing my eyes, I lost myself in the sensations.

He left that nipple, wet and needing more. “You like that?”

“God, yes.”

His lips moved to my other one. Sucking gently, he began to trace lazy circles around it as well.

Between my legs, I felt a familiar throbbing that signaled an impending orgasm. “Oh, Santino.”

“Hmmm.” His eyes zeroed in on me again as I began to get closer to my climax.

“Yes. Oh, yes.”

His thumb rubbed my clit furiously. “You want to cum all over my hand?”

“Yes.”

And then the hand was gone.

“No. Bring it back.” I blinked as he abruptly took me off him. My feet hit the ground. Dizzy with lust, I tried to get my balance. “W-what?”

Fast, he spun my body around with a swift force and throwing me onto the ground. I fell on all fours.

*What the..?*

My palms and knees dug into the carpet.

“Remember, Kash.” He roughly bent me further over and violently wrenched my dress up to my hips. Part of the fabric ripped at the waistline. “You still need to get punished with this cock.”

*Oh shit.*

I widened my eyes. “But...I’m still getting it?”

A zipper sounded.

“Oh, you’re getting it.” His hands gathered up all the wet arousal from my folds. “All of it.”

“Please.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Santino.”

“Hmm.”

Next, I loudly gasped as he thrust his hard cock deep into my ass.

“Oh my God!” I screamed in a fit of pleasure and pain.

He fisted the hair on the back of my head and rammed into me harder. “You really thought you were going to cum without feeling my cock?”

“Oh!” My legs shook uncontrollably. My orgasm continued to build to mega proportions.



“Huh?” His grip on the back of my head tightened and he pounded into me, relentless and ravenous, shaking my very core.

My ass bounced with his thrusts.

“Oh my God!” Loud moans ripped from my throat.

“If you ever try walking off like that again,” he lowered himself and growled into my ear, “I’ll throw you to the ground and fuck you in front of your men.”

The truth of those words sent chills up my spine.

*Oh shit.*

His brutal, punishing thrusts sent ripples through my entire body and I let out uncontrollable cries of pleasure.

“Do you understand?!”

“Yes.”

“Don’t test me like that again.” The more he rammed into me, the more I wanted it. The sound of him slapping against my ass filled the space.

“Oh!” I wanted him to destroy me, fuck me like I had never been fucked before.

And he didn’t disappoint.

My entire body was on fire with need for him. And I was lost in the trance of his rhythm. Nothing else mattered in this moment and I felt as though we were the only two people in existence.

The scent of our sex and sweat wafted in the air. And all I could hear was his moans, my moans, and the breathless panting from the both of us as we worked in unison, pushing each other further beyond pleasure.

“Oh!” I threw my head back and closed my eyes.

“You feel so fucking good.” He grunted and picked up the tempo, slamming into me with an animalistic intensity.

My head shook back and forth as I wailed in lust.

Every thrust brought me closer to the edge. “Oh, Santino.”

“Fuck, Kash.” He groaned and slowed his pace, sliding in and out of my ass. “Look at me while I’m deep inside of you, fucking you in the ass.”

Panting, I glanced over my shoulder.

His expression was tense, and his face glistened with sweat as he worked his hard cock inside me.

And just like that, the sight of him pumping into my ass made me orgasm. My body tensed from head to toe and then spasmed with insurmountable ecstasy. “Oh God, I’m coming so hard!”

It was like nothing I’d ever experienced before. It was powerful and overwhelmingly beautiful. Santino continued to pound that cock into me and another orgasm rocked through my body.

I lost myself in the erotic madness of the moment.

Santino let out a low, guttural growl. “Goddamn it.”

“Oh!” My vision clouded. “Oh!”

“Yes. Don’t you turn away.” He gripped my hair tighter and thrust into me. “I want to see you cum.”

“Oh.”

He slid his other hand around my hips and played with my clit, rubbing and circling it. Driving me over the damn edge of ecstasy. “Say my fucking name!”

“Santino.” My toes curled. “Santino.”

His cock twitched.

Slowly my orgasm began to dissipate. “Oh my God.”

I knew he was close himself. I waited for him to shoot his load into my ass and fill me with warm cum.

To my surprise, Santino pulled his cock out, spun me around and pulled my face to his cock. “Suck it.”

Shivering, I did, with surprising enthusiasm. What was it about this man that made me want to submit and please him in any way he desired?

*Damn, Santino.*

He pumped into my wet mouth, looking like a wild animal.

“Fuck!” His head tilted back and his eyes shut. His body shook. “Suck my cock good, Kash.”

He pumped my mouth harder and faster as I kept my lips wrapped around his cock and his warm cum shot into my mouth. Loving those primal sounds he was making, I swallowed it all down, moaning at delighting him.

The taste of my own ass was on his cock and I licked the head clean, not caring.

“Goddamn it. Enough.” He trembled. “Stop licking it like that I’m already obsessed with you.”

Grinning, I lapped at his cock once more and then fell back to the floor in the midst of my torn dress. “Damn...”

He collapsed on top of me and it took a long while for either of us to find our breaths.

Then, Santino rolled onto his back. “You’re lucky we have shit to do this week.”

I was still too tired to move my arms or legs. “W-why?”

He turned his head to look at me. “I was thinking about pulling my cock out of your ass and filling your pussy up with my sperm.”

I chuckled through panting. “That would have been fine.”

He quirked his brows. “Are you on the pill?”

“Yes.”

“Get off of it.”

I widened my eyes and laughed again.

A serious expression covered his face.

I blinked and stopped laughing. “Wait. Are you for real?”

“You want to wait?”

“Of course, Santino.”

“Until when?”

“At least a year or two. I want to learn more about you before we bring a baby into this.”

He lazily wrapped his arms around my body and pulled me closer to him. “One year.”

Smirking, I closed my eyes. “Three years.”

“It appears that I need to punish you some more with my cock.”

“Fine.” I opened my eyes. “A year and a half.”

“Hmmm.” He ran his fingers through my hair. “I can agree to that.”

I yawned. “I should have not walked off from the ceremony. I was supposed to officially end it, but I was so fucking annoyed with Gypsy bringing more problems.”

“How are you supposed to end it?”

“I was supposed to say a prayer.”

“Don’t worry. After what we will do to the Coffin Cheaters and any other enemies, there will be time for prayers later.”

I knew that we should rise and at least get in our bed, but I was too exhausted. “Speaking of what we will be doing this week, I wanted you to come with me to meet the Diamond Syndicate tomorrow.”

Santino kissed my forehead. “Oh, I planned to be right by your side, with or without an invitation.”

I opened my eyes and looked at him. “While you are coming with me to the meeting, I would like you to...be...”

“Silent and not kill anyone?”

I smirked. “For now.”

He winked at me. “For now.”

I let out a long breath and closed my eyes. “Dima, Marcelo, and Lei better have answers for me about Pedro. They also better have some sort of solution for how *they* are going to deal with the Coffin Cheaters.”

“Oh, they will, my love.” Santino kissed my forehead again. “If not, then I will have a few things to say.”

I sighed again. “Thanks for protecting *us*.”

“As I told you before, we are forever.” He slipped his finger along my cheek. “You said Gypsy was your ex?”

I tensed. “When we were teenagers.”

“It seems like the heartbreak is still new.”

“Because something is wrong with him. In my mind, our little teenage relationship is a distant memory.”



# Chapter 4

## A History of Violence

### Santino

The next morning, we strode through the mansion, hand-in-hand.

Today I would finally meet these so-called heads of the Diamond Syndicate. I always loved putting faces to the names of the men I intended to eventually kill.

*Dima, Marcello, and Lei, your time on this earth is limited.*

Next to me, Kashmere strolled with soft, feminine grace and her heels made a whispery sound across the smooth tiles.

I looked at her through half-closed lids and saw a portrait of perfection.

She looked exquisitely dangerous. Her long black hair was intricately woven into a sparkling, red-beaded braid that fell over one shoulder. Her brown skin glimmered with a sinister light. She wore a sparkling red dress that billowed around her silhouette like a cape of flames. Every movement she made was deliberate, sending ripples of power through the air.

*She's mine.*

Continuing forward, I tightened my grip on her hand.

*All mine.*

For now, I would make sure that she solidified her power in the West of Paradise City. Then, I will move like a raging storm, conquering the North, South, and East. Before Christmas, I hoped to wrap those territories up in bows and gift them to my queen.

Kashmere turned my way. "You look delicious today, baby."

"Don't I always look delicious?" I winked.

She grinned. “That is a fact, Santino.”

This morning, I dressed with the theme of lethal dominance in a suit crafted from Saville Row—a street in London known for its traditional bespoke tailoring for men.

I only flew to London to grab suits.

This one had come from my last trip there. It had taken the tailor two hundred painstaking hours to be made and every stitch was carefully sewn with horsehair so the suit would hold its shape forever.

Twenty feet up, Dane, Rue, and Merik stood like statues in a menacing, ominous line at the front door, their bright red coats blazing like a warning. Their guns were openly displayed in their holsters, shining.

Dane towered over everyone else, his muscular physique standing out like a beacon of power.

Rue looked like some goddess among mortals, glowing brightly with her shimmering red glasses studded with diamonds.

Meanwhile, Merik combed his long beard with his fingers and wore this humorous expression as if he had a funny joke stuck in his head.

I curved my lips into a smile. “Have I told you how much I like your inner crew?”

“No.”

“How did you pick them?”

“Dane came from my sister Chanel’s old team. He was her number three. Before she rose to Chairman, he managed her security team and helped with strategic decisions.”

“Impressive.” I nodded. “And Rue?”

“Rue served as my brother’s number one for five years. She’d proved her loyalty and impeccable work ethic with him, so I grabbed her for my crew.”

“And she seems smart. The times that I’ve heard her suggestions to you, they have been on point.”



“She majored in Psychology in college. Then, went on to get her doctorate in business management.”

“Makes sense.” I looked at her. “And my favorite of the three, Merik?”

Kashmere chuckled. “Merik’s resume is that he has been by my side since I was a toddler.”

I quirked my brows. “Cousins. Right?”

“Yep. Our mothers had us a week apart, so we always played together. Merik knows me better than I know myself and has always had my back.”

“Very loyal and intelligent inner crew.” I squeezed her hand and guided her toward them.

We made it to the door.

Kashmere raised her eyebrows. “Where’s Leonardo?”

“I sent him on a separate mission of getting to know our perceived enemies in Paradise City.”

“I could have told you anything you needed to know.”

“And you will, on the ride to this meeting. However, it is always helpful to see what Leonardo can find from navigating the streets as an unsuspecting civilian.”

She nodded. “Cool. Let me know what he finds.”

“Of course.”

Kashmere gazed at her people. “Do we have the Caviar Lime pies?”

“You know it.” Merik gestured behind him. “Three pies are in the cooler and waiting to be given out in the meeting.”

I blinked. “Pies?”

Rue stepped forward. “It is Diamond Syndicate tradition for each leader to bring a gift to a meeting. It is a symbol of love and being a family.”

I crossed my hands in front of me. “Hmmm.”

Rue continued, “The gift giving part can be touchy. A leader never wants to give a gift too expensive because another leader can see it as that leader boasting.”

“But then you don’t want the gift to be too cheap or everyone will take it as disrespect.” Merik snickered. “But as long as my mom has been a teen, she has made these Caviar Lime pies that all in Paradise City agree are the best.”

“Everyone in the Diamond Syndicate love them,” Dane added.

Rue shrugged. “Dima has a sweet tooth. Honestly, I believe some of the meetings he has called in the past, have been just to get one of Merik’s mother’s pies. He actually admitted that one time.”

Chuckling, Dane opened the front door. “Santino, do you have any other questions for *us* before this meeting?”

“I do.” Guiding Kashmere through the door, I glanced at him. “Which one of these three *gangsters* annoy my queen the most?”

Kashmere chuckled. “Marcelo definitely.”

I frowned. “Marcelo bothers you?”

Cool wind brushed against my skin as we headed out.

Two black crows squawked over us.

Kashmere stopped laughing and stared into the dark sky, following the path of the two birds as they flew further and further away, until they finally disappeared over Dream Lake, their deathly omen still hanging in the air.

Dane got on my left. “Marcelo annoying Kashmere is more a historical beef than anything else.”

Kashmere cleared her throat and continued forward with me.

Rue went to Kashmere’s side. “Marcelo runs Rowe Street Mob in the South of Paradise City.”

“Killer Crows hate the South because their ancestors were a part of the Week of Blood.” Merik strutted in front of us.

“That shit was long ago, and it isn’t fair to blame the great-great grandkids for their ancestors’ atrocities, but life isn’t fair so fuck it.”

I thought back to my research on this area. Being that I lived next to a haunted lake of ghosts that didn’t like white people, I figured it would be smart to understand why those ghosts were so upset.

I read that beneath Dream Lake lay a small village called Crownsville.

Long ago, it had been a thriving town of over 6,000 people and completely Black-owned. The prosperous residents remained in their small town and never ventured out to the surrounding area.

Meanwhile, the Whites in the North and South of Paradise began looking to Crownsville as the problem for why their residents were impoverished.

They were just waiting for a reason to take Crownsville over and punish the Black residents for their success.

And then, a South Paradise White woman claimed that she had been blindfolded, beaten, and raped by a Black man.

South Paradise men went to Crownsville. They burned the villages’ churches, schools, and businesses. They broke into homes, shot husbands, raped wives, and hung children.

Killer Crows called this the *Week of Blood*.

It was also why they always wore red.

The few survivors of Crownsville fled.

When they returned, they discovered the government had flooded their town and turned it into Dream Lake.

I gritted my teeth.

*Then, the South will be the first place that I take for my queen.*

Kashmere spoke, “Marcelo’s family was some of the main motherfuckers leading the Week of Blood.”

Rue raised on finger. “However, Marcelo has shown that he is not like his ancestors.”

“Shit.” Merik waved her comment away. “Just cause a motherfucker got Black people in his crew don’t mean shit.”

Passing the white columns, we headed down the mansion’s front steps.

“What about the North?” I asked. “From my study of Paradise’s history, the Whites in the North also played a part in the Week of the Blood.”

“True.” Kashmere nodded. “But Dima and his family weren’t here during that time. His mother and uncles showed up much later as Russian immigrants.”

I smirked. “And their name is the Flower Mafia. Why?”

“They never took Dima’s mother seriously when she first showed up. She tried to do business in the North, but the men would laugh at her and say she headed the Flower Mafia.” Kashmere shook her head. “So, when her brothers showed up in town, they killed everyone, covered the North in blood, and then sprinkled flowers on their dead bodies.”

Merik laughed. “And they kept that fucking name too. That shit is boss.”

Rue spoke on Kashmere’s side, “Dima is by far the most intellectual person in the Diamond Syndicate, although you will find that he can be...socially impaired.”

Dane frowned. “Mainly, he’s fucking psychotic.”

“I don’t know about that.” Rue fixed her glasses. “I believe there is something deeper going on with Dima that does not deal with him having any sort of psychological issues.”

“Doesn’t matter.” Kashmere shrugged. “I like Dima because I can always depend on him to say the absolute truth, even if it would make him look like an idiot.”

“That’s an understatement.” Merik chuckled.

“Santino! Kashmere!” Tomasso sprinted over to us. His assistant Knight barely kept up. There were all types of small

slips of paper in his hand representing almost every color in the rainbow.

We paused in the pathway and turned to him.

“Where are you two going?” Tomasso panted and got to us. “We have a wedding coming! I have a menu and cake tasting scheduled—”

“Reschedule the tasting for this afternoon.” I got ready to guide Kashmere away. “We will see you then.”

“Hold on.” Tomasso got in front of us and gestured to Knight. The assistant waved the colorful papers in front of us. Tomasso pointed to them. “What colors do you want for your wedding? I need you to pick two.”

I looked at Kashmere.

“Red.” She smiled. “You pick the next.”

I put my view back on Tomasso. “Gold. Are we done?”

“Who will be in the wedding party? And who is invited, I must hurry and send out all the invitations today. We are giving absolutely no real notice. I hope some people show up.”

Rue raised her hand. “I can get you the guest list for Kashmere.”

“Invite everyone in the *Family*.” I shrugged and guided us away.

“Okay, but please be back for the tasting this afternoon. It is important. I must give the menu to the caterer as soon as possible.” Tomasso called after us. “You do understand that this time limit is impossible. I have had to strong arm several brides this morning just to get several gowns. They scratch!”

I rolled my eyes.

A minute later, we made it to Kashmere’s Rolls Royce Ghost. A shiny red decorated its powerful body. I’d actually been looking at purchasing one this year. It had a 6.7-liter V-12 engine that boasted endless power. It was the equivalent of six hundred horses, cranked up on steroids and cocaine.

I peered inside. The cabin had been upgraded with solid black wood trim.

I smirked.

*My queen has impeccable taste.*

Merik opened the door.

I let go of Kashmere's hand and stepped back to allow her to climb inside.

She entered the Ghost.

Dane and Rue watched me.

"And what about the East's leader?" I leaned my head to the side. "Tell me about Lei."

Rue sighed. "He runs the Four Aces, and they would be nothing without the Killer Crows."

Dane bobbed his head. "We were the first to start working with Lei's father."

I eyed them. "What's the Four Aces' business?"

"They sell guns, but *they* don't actually need them." Merik grinned and whipped his hands around and around over and over. "They be on that Kung Fu shit."

Rue scowled at him. "What Merik is trying to say is that the Four Aces are efficiently skilled in several fields of Martial Arts."

"Due to the group being made up of many immigrants from various Asian countries, they're proficient in various martial arts." Dane nodded. "Karate. Jujutsu. Taekwondo. Judo—"

"And Shaolin Kung Fu." Merik kicked his leg. "Don't forget that shit. Lei be flying through the air like in the movies."

Rue let out a long breath. "In other words, Lei is probably the most lethal of the three."

"But he is still just a man, capable of dying from bullets." I climbed into the Ghost. "And I have plenty."

Dane's face showed worry as he closed the door.





# Chapter 5

## Hungry

### Santino

Within the car, I glanced at Kashmere. “Your crew won’t be riding with us?”

“They usually do.” She crossed her sexy legs. “But, since you’re here, I wanted to start the tradition of only *us* riding together.”

My heart warmed. “I like that.”

“Good.” She gestured to the black Ghost that pulled up behind us. “They’ll be riding in that one.”

“Okay. But, when I am not around, they ride in the car with you. You must remain safe.”

“I agree.” She smirked. “And you will need your own car too. What do you want?”

I grinned. “You will be buying it for me?”

“Of course.”

I chuckled.

She frowned. “What?”

“I am not accustomed to a woman buying me a vehicle.”

“I’m not just some woman. I’m your future wife.”

“Very true.” I leaned forward and brushed my lips against hers. “I must remember that things will be different when it comes to you.”

“Damn right you better remember.” She pecked my lips. “What color Ghost do you want?”

I gazed at my breathtaking fiancé. “Red. Of course.”

“Of course.”

“Surprisingly, red has become my new favorite color.”

“Damn right it has.” She chuckled.

The driver sped us away.

I wrapped one arm around her shoulders and slipped my other hand to her dress, raising the bottom up to expose her sexy thigh.

“You are a vision.” I breathed in her lush perfume. “I love the fact that when we walk into the meeting spot, you will be the most breathtaking and dangerous woman in the space.”

Her lips curled into a knowing smile.

A surge of excitement raced through my veins. I slipped my fingertips along her thigh.

A low moan left her.

“You were exhausted last night—”

“From your cock.”

I chuckled. “Yes. From my cock.”

“I want more tonight.”

“Trust me, *Kash*.” My body heated. “You will get this cock a lot earlier than tonight.”

She licked her lips.

“However,” I moved my finger from her thigh. “I want a more expanded explanation on your relationship with Gypsy.”

She blinked. “What?”

“You said teenage love. The way he looked at you last night, it appeared that his need for you was still bubbling and boiling in his heart. To him it wasn’t just some teenaged love.”

“It’s all history, Santino.”

“History that I want to know.”

She looked away. “What do you want to know?”

“Everything.” I went back to playing with her thigh.

She looked back at me and moved my hand.

I quirked my brows. “Never move my hand.”

“I need to focus.”

A devilish smile spread across my face. “Still, you will be punished for that later.”

She grinned. “I may enjoy that.”

“You will.” I placed my hand on my lap. “But back to my question.”

The grin left her face.

“How did you meet Gypsy was it due to the war?”

“No.” She shook her head. “What I should explain is that the Killer Crows and the Coffin Cheaters go back pretty far.”

“Really?”

She nodded. “Back when our ancestors fled the Week of Blood, the massive group separated. My ancestors journeyed far out to Cloud Mountain which is one of the mountains that surround the Coffin Cheaters valley.”

“The valley that is difficult to enter?”

“Yes. Everyone calls it Hidden Valley. It’s completely surrounded by tons of mountains. There is clearly some road that goes into it but no one has discovered this road.”

I leaned back in the seat. “Very interesting. Finding this road will be my first point of business.”

“If we can get into their valley, then we would be leveled in power.”

“So, your ancestors settled on Cloud Mountain after the massacre in Crownsville. That was how they met the Coffin Cheaters.”

“I wouldn’t say settled, I would say temporarily camped there.”

“Okay.”

“After weeks of them being there, the Coffin Cheaters crept up on them with weapons and wanted to know why they were over there. My people explained what happened in Crownsville.”

“And the Coffin Cheaters were sympathetic?”

“It seemed that way. The story goes that the Coffin Cheaters gazed at them for several silent minutes, then eventually lowered their weapons, and Killer Crows were allowed to remain on the mountain.”

“And then they became friends?”

“Very tense ones. Some of the Killer Crows were allowed to go into the valley with the Coffin Cheaters leader. His name was Dakota, and was Gypsy’s great grandfather.”

“Why were they taken into the valley?”

“Dakota offered food and of course my people were hungry.” Kashmere’s face tensed. “They were blindfolded when they were taken into the valley.”

“Very smart.”

“Once they got in, many claimed that the valley was this massive space full of men, women, and children. Apparently, the valley is half the size of Paradise City.”

“Very interesting.”

“The Coffin Cheaters gave them tons of cooked meat and took them back to Cloud Mountain.” Kashmere sighed. “Because of that, Killer Crows ate for several days. However...”

“Yes?”

“Their stomachs never really became accustomed to the meat. Some grew sick. So...then it occurs to the few Killer Crows that went into the valley that they never remembered seeing livestock.”

I raised my eyebrows.

“Days later, the Coffin Cheaters returned to visit my people and bring them more food. Killer Crows respectfully asked what sort of meat it was—cow, chicken, mule, horse...”

“What type of meat was it?”

“Dakota laughed and told them that they were eating the valley’s criminals.”

My stomach twisted. “Human meat?”

“Exactly.”

“The Coffin Cheaters are cannibals?”

“That was how they survived so long in that valley. They ate each other, but only the ones accused of vile crimes.”

My stomach didn’t settle. “But, somehow Killer Crows and the Coffin Cheaters still became friends?”

“One never insults a man that eats men. My people thanked them for the meat, watched Dakota and his men leave, and then they booked it out of there.”

“What did they do with the meat?”

“Buried it at the bottom of Cloud Mountain.” Kashmere gazed out of the window. “Once the Killer Crows returned to Paradise City and saw their land was flooded, they began to live around Dream Lake, and eventually bought the property.”

“I saw the framed news articles in your office.”

“Well,” Kashmere looked at me. “Once my people built their homes around Dream Lake, Dakota and hundreds of Coffin Cheaters appeared one day.”

“For what?”

“They wanted their patch of land too. According to Dakota, because the Coffin Cheaters helped them survive, the Killer Crows now owed them money, property, and land in Paradise City.”

I frowned.

“And so the war between the Killer Crows and the Coffin Cheaters began.”

“Your ancestors have been through a lot.”

“That’s why Killer Crows’ motto is *Family over Everything*. We’ve learned that uniting, fighting, and building together is the only way to survive in a cruel world.”

Kashmere looked back out the window. “That’s why I’m so embarrassed about dividing us.”

“You didn’t. Simon and your grandmother did.”

“True, but a leader never blames her followers.”

I ran my fingers along her braid. “Have you ever heard of Sun Tzu?”

“The name sounds familiar.” She looked back at me. “Definitely an ancient guy. Right?”

“Correct.” I traced one of the sparkling beads on her braid. “Sun Tzu was a Chinese military general, strategist, philosopher, and writer who lived back in the period BCE.”

“O-kay.”

“Sun Tzu said that *unity* increases from acting together under *external pressure*.”

“So some threat on the outside?”

“Exactly. Shared danger gets everyone acting as a group.”

“Like the Coffin Cheaters is our shared danger?”

“Correct again. Unity doesn’t come from making profound speeches or being a loving and nice leader.” I traced my finger down to the end of the long braid. “Opposition creates unity because it forces the group to come together to survive.”

“So…” Kashmere faced forward. “Sun Tzu would probably look at this possible war with the Coffin Cheaters as…a way for me to unite Killer Crows?”

“Right again, my queen.”

The Ghost pulled up to a small white building.

The ocean lay in the background.

I pressed a button. The window slid down, letting in a cool, salty breeze.

I eyed the area. “This is the meeting spot?”

“It is the entrance to Poseidon—a luxury underwater restaurant.” Kashmere pointed to the white building. “Inside of

there, it is a hostess at a desk. She checks to see if your name is on the list and then a guard escorts you to the elevator.”

“Do you always meet at *this* restaurant?”

Kashmere nodded. “Due to it being underwater, it is a bad idea to shoot guns down there.”

“Hmmm.” I smiled. “Paradise City is quite an intriguing place.”

We left the Ghost.

Several of my men left my white vans and rushed to us, dressed in black suits with red ties. Killer Crows approached next, all donning designer red suits. Then, Dane, Rue, and Merik arrived in the other Ghost, left the vehicle, and kept a three-foot distance from us.

Meanwhile, Merik held three pies wrapped in plastic. However, each pie’s plastic was carefully coded. One was yellow. Another was green, and the last was blue.

*Let us begin.*

We strode toward the restaurant with our hands locked as one. This was the most I ever walked with a woman, and never did I hold her hand while doing it. But Kashmere had ignited a flame within me that I could not deny. I was discovering that I was willing to try things I’d never done before, and the thrill of it all consumed me.

I savored every new sensation.

Kashmere caressed my hand with her thumb. “You’ll love this place, Santino.”

“Will I?”

“This is one of the most luxurious underwater restaurants in the world and has the best seafood delicacies in Paradise.”

“I’ve never been to an underwater restaurant so this should be a lot of fun.”

“Then, good. Even though we are here for business, you should try the food. The famous Michelin star chef Joel Lawson owns it.” She stopped us in front of the door and

turned to me. “Before we enter, do you have any more questions?”

I lifted her hand and kissed the top of it. “You still didn’t give me the history of Gypsy and you.”

She pursed her lips together.

*She is hiding something about their past relationship. But what is it? And why does she keep avoiding telling me?*

My nerves flared with the possibilities of what this secret could be.

I studied her. “We walk into our marriage with no secrets.”

Sadness filled her eyes. “I...agree.”

“After this meeting, I want to hear *everything*.” I hit her with an intense gaze, letting her know that there will be no escape from that story.

She swallowed. “It’s weird talking about my old love with my new love.”

The line of my jaw twitched. “So, you do admit that there was love between you in the past?”

“Yes, and that love is now gone.”

“Yet, it is uncomfortable for you to talk about it, which tells me that there are still *some* feelings there.”

“Santino, when I love, I give all of me. So...sure once I’m done there may be some feelings of *caring* for the person.” She lifted my hand and kissed it. “But Gypsy is the past. If I wanted him, I would have been with him, when you arrived. *I* ended it, and now I’m with you.”

That answer was good for now, but soon I would want more, and after that, I would want him dead.

No other man could walk this earth and have even a tiny bit of her affection. The very thought made my blood boil with fury.

*Sleep with one eye open, Gypsy.*



I lowered our united hands and nodded. “We will talk more about *that* later.”

“Okay.” She put her view on the door. “Now for the meeting.”

“I will remain on your side, silent and obedient,” I looked at her. “As long as they remain respectful to my queen.”

She gave me a sad smile. “Then, you might not be so silent the whole meeting. I have a way of pissing Marcelo off to the point where he may lose his temper.”

“He’ll learn to control it soon.” I gritted my teeth in anger.



# Chapter 6

## The Diamond Syndicate

### Santino

Dane rushed up to the door and opened it for us.

We entered a small, white room. A bright light shone above us. I glanced up at the ceiling and spotted a captivating mosaic of intricately patterned glass.

In the center of the room, a petite blonde sat at a large, mahogany desk. Six huge men stood behind her, wearing all black and clutching guns.

The blonde spotted Kashmere, nodded, and pressed a rectangular red button next to her.

A beep sounded on the right.

I looked that way.

A white wall slid open, exposing an elevator door. The beep sounded again and the door slid open fully, displaying the full width of the elevator.

The blonde gestured toward the opening. “Enjoy your visit, Ms. Jones.”

We headed that way and stepped into the elevator. Dane, Rue, and Merik got on the elevator with us, along with three of my main guards.

The rest of our people waited behind. Surely, they would ride down later.

The elevator doors closed. We lowered.

I glanced at the pies in Merik’s hands. “Everyone is very serious about color here.”

Merik grinned. “You have no idea.”

I checked out those pies. “I would love to try your mother’s pies one day.”

“Don’t worry about that. She plans to hit you two up with tons of treats for your honeymoon.” Merik rubbed his stomach with his other hand. “It’s going to be this big red basket full of tasty things.”

Rue nudged him. “I’m going to tell Aunt Irene that you are giving away her wedding gift surprise.”

“Oh shit.” Merik shrugged. “I guess that is a surprise. Huh?”

Kashmere chuckled. “It’s fine, Merik. Surprise or not, I’ll take Aunt Irene’s pies anyway I can get them.”

“You’re right about that.” Merik winked.

Dane cleared his throat. “Enough about pies. Let us focus on the intensity of this moment.”

Kashmere let out a long breath. “Any advice?”

Dane looked to Rue.

She touched her glasses even though they didn’t need to be fixed. That told me that this movement must have been a nervous tick. “Well, the problem with the Diamond Syndicate isn’t so much the presence of conflict as the lack of order.”

I widened my eyes. “I thought Dima was in charge.”

Kashmere frowned. “Only because my brother Romeo was killed.”

“Dima only stepped up to the role because no one else wanted to sit in place of Romeo.” Rue shook her head. “Dima is highly intelligent, but has never needed to stand in a leader position with the Syndicate. While he rules the North, attempting to be in charge of other leaders like Marcelo, Lei, and even Kashmere...that is a mind-twisting obstacle that he may not be up to.”

*Interesting.*

“This meeting will be high-energy.” Dane looked at Kashmere. “Especially, since weeks ago you broke into Marcelo’s condo and woke him up with a gun to his head.”

I grinned. “Oh, really?”

Kashmere rolled her eyes. “It was only because someone had taken my sister’s dead body from the funeral home and they were all dressed in green, so I assumed it was Rowe Street Mob.”

I blinked. “Someone took your sister’s dead body?”

Kashmere nodded. “We couldn’t do the Dance of the Dead or bury her properly.”

I glared at the elevator doors, ready to choke the hell out of the corpse thief. “And did you get her body back?”

“I did.” She glared at the doors. “Lei brought the body back. Fucking obsessive weirdo .”

Dane frowned. “And we have agreed to forgive Lei for the betterment of the city. Right, Kash?”

I sneered.

*I don’t forgive this Lei.*

Rue sighed. “Lei loved your sister and has always been loyal to the West. I have no doubt that he feels bad about taking the body, and will be on your side in this meeting.”

Kashmere rolled her eyes.

Dane bobbed his head. “Dima loved Romeo and Chanel like they were his siblings. He will also be on your side as long as you don’t disrespect him.”

Kashmere rolled her eyes again.

“All emotions have a tempo. Calm emotions like happiness are slow and deliberate.” Dane raised his hands in front of him and began moving them as he spoke. “Emotions of arousal like hostility and defensiveness are fast and confused. The pulse quickens. Thoughts race. Words fly.”

I directed my view to him, highly interested in his point.

Dane continued, “One of the best ways to change the emotion of a group is to change its tempo. As you attempt to intervene, decelerate your pace of speech.”

Kashmere sighed and looked at him. “Okay. What else?”

“You may need to raise your voice a decibel or two to be heard above the rumble. But once you’ve attracted attention, lower your voice and speed to direct the tempo.”

*Interesting.*

Rue pointed to Dane. “Exactly. For example, everyone is loudly arguing. You stand up and yell, ‘Hey!’ Everyone looks at you, and then what do you do?”

“I lower my voice and speak at a calm pace.” Kashmere turned back to the doors. “Got it.”

*I really like this team.*

The doors opened.

We stepped out and were immediately welcomed by two staff members who began to guide us through a 180-degree glass dome where a man played piano in the center.

The dome protected us from the ocean, yet provided us with a spectacular view of exotic fish, squid, and colorful coral.

The blue ocean, at least from the perspective of the dome, looked like it was constructed entirely of cans of paint, and the various exotic creatures were triggered from a talented artist’s brushes.

The restaurant’s floor was gold and silver tiles in an interlocking shell pattern that reflected light like tiny mirrors.

One large circular table stood in the very back of the dome. Three men sat at the table, and all were looking at Kashmere.

A fourth chair was empty at the table, waiting for Kashmere to take it.

*Didn’t expect me? Did you?*

In front of the empty chair, there were three gifts placed on the table. Each was wrapped in the color red. One was in the shape of a bottle of wine. Another was a long box. The final gift was a crystal red vase full of a dozen red roses.

Continuing forward, I scanned the rest of the space.

The leaders' men stood several feet away from the table, giving the sense of respectful distance. But it was easy to see who belonged to who. On the left, men wore green. In the center, yellow suits decorated them. And on the right, all the men donned blue.

I smirked.

*The colors will allow me to kill the right people easily.*

We arrived at the table.

All three men stood for Kashmere, yet their gazes fell on me, and none of them looked friendly or welcoming. Their hostile gazes attempted to pierce me like daggers, but I had been cut many times, and never feared pain.

*Bring it on, fellas. I'm ready for whatever you've got.*

Merik placed a pie in front of each man and then hurried away.

While two of the men continued to glare at me.

Across from us, the one man in the yellow suit, looked down at the pie and grinned. His face brightened as he picked up the pie and inhaled.

*This must be Dima since he's apparently addicted to Mrs. Irene's pies.*

I assessed the North's top gangster. He must have been three inches taller than me, and that was saying something since I usually towered over most men. Short hair. Blue-gray eyes. And he was all muscle, not one inch of fat on him. A diamond rose was on his ring finger, but I didn't think it was an actual wedding ring. Perhaps, it was a promise to someone that marriage would soon come.

Dane brought a chair over and placed it next to the empty fourth chair.

On the left, the man in green waved his hand. A deep voice boomed from him. "Who the hell is this guy to sit at the table with us?"

*And this must be Marcelo.*

I assessed the gangster of the South. His green eyes matched his green suit. Long black curls fell over Marcelo's forehead. Additionally, Marcelo was as tall as Dima, and the only jewelry he wore was the Rolex wrapped around his wrist. Which was all diamonds and white gold.

Rue gathered up Kashmere's gifts from the leaders.

Dane headed off, not answering Marcelo's question.

The man in blue spoke, "If this is Kashmere's *guest*, then we will welcome him."

*And that is Lei.*

I turned to him.

On the right, the man had a hard face like a fighter, yet his warm gaze rested on Kashmere.

*Rue was right. Lei will be loyal to Kashmere and the West. Perhaps, I won't kill this one.*

I studied him.

Lei's long black hair was tied in a ponytail that fell down his back. He wore a blue leather trench coat along with a white buttoned-down shirt and dark blue pants. The curvy bumps in front of the coat told me that he had several knives and guns strapped inside that trench.

Smacking sounded in front of me.

I moved my view back to Dima in front of us. In between the time I checked out the leaders, he had taken off the plastic, cut off a slice, and began forking pieces of pie into his mouth as if he were starving.

Marcelo glared at Dima. "Do you think we can start the meeting, or should we wait until you finish the pie?"

Dima swallowed and then licked his lips. "I would rather you all wait until I finish the pie."

Marcelo sneered.

"However, we don't have the time." Dima set the pie down on the table and looked at Kashmere. "After you."



I stepped forward and pulled out her chair.

She whispered, “Thank you.”

Once she sat down, the rest lowered too. I got into my chair. Under the table, I took Kashmere’s hand, letting her know that I would always be there for her.

Four waiters rushed to the table and placed gold cutlery and crystal plates in front of us. Then, they headed away.

Dima took another bite from the pie, then placed the plastic over it, and set it on the other side of the plate. “Aunt Irene’s pies are so good I lose myself. Thank you, *Kash*.”

“You’re welcome, Dima. I’m sure those lovely roses were from you. Please give an extra kiss to your mother from me, I bet they were straight out of her garden.”

“They were.” Dima leaned forward. “Like me, she is heartbroken over the loss that Killer Crows has experienced. Romeo and Chanel will never be forgotten.”

“Thank you, but let’s get to the present.” Kashmere let go of my hand and placed her hands on the table. “The Coffin Cheaters showed up at my estate last night with pictures showing that you three had something to do with Pedro being missing. I want answers.”

Lei stirred in his seat.

Dima pulled out a tiny notebook and a pen.

I eyed him.

Then, Dima began writing in the notebook.

*What is he doing?*

Meanwhile, Marcelo glared at Kashmere. “*You* want answers?”

Kashmere turned to him and hissed. “Yes, and I want them now. Not later. Not tomorrow. But, now.”

“And I want answers about why *he* is here at an official Diamond Syndicate meeting.” Marcelo pointed at me. “And

why there are at least a hundred armed Italians walking around Paradise City like they own the fucking place?”

I chose that moment to speak. “Five hundred.”

Marcelo slid his heated glare to me. “Excuse me?”

“Five hundred armed Italians are walking around Paradise, and five hundred more will land in the city by this evening.”

Kashmere stiffened next to me.

Marcelo’s eyes went wild. “And why are they here?”

Done talking to him, I moved my view along the table to get everyone’s reaction. Dima’s face hardened to stern and emotionless as he scribbled something else into his notebook.

Lei simply watched Kashmere. “We can provide answers.”

Marcelo slammed his fist on the table. Our cutlery bounced a little. “First, I want to know if Kashmere has not only declared war within the Killer Crows, but if she going to battle against the Diamond Syndicate too.”

Kashmere looked at him. “War within the Killer Crows? What the fuck are you talking about, Marcelo?”

Marcelo stabbed the air in front of him with his finger. “You think we don’t know that you have killed half of your Board, slaughtered them during an official meeting just like this.”

“How about you mind your fucking business.” Kashmere leaned into the table. “I don’t go down to the South and knock all the dicks out your mouth when you’re leading.”

Marcelo jumped up to standing position.

I rose with him, ready to knock his head off if he dared come for my queen.

Kashmere remained sitting. “Marcelo won’t do anything, Santino. He knows his place.”

Marcelo glared at her. “You think that now you’re a leader you can do whatever the fuck you want?”

Kashmere eyed him. “If I did think I could do whatever the fuck I wanted, then the South would be red, and your ass would be dead.”

Marcelo widened his eyes. “Is that some kind of threat?”

“Sit down, Marcelo, and please have respect, Kashmere.” Dima placed his notebook next to his pie. “You both are acting like idiots and extending a meeting that I don’t even want to be at. I would rather be in my bed, lying next to the love of my life. Instead, I am here with you, and the only reason why I am still here is because of the pie.”

“Enough about the fucking pie.” Marcelo lowered to his seat.

I returned to my chair.

Dima turned to Marcelo. “Then, can I have your pie?”

Ignoring Dima, Marcelo glared at Kashmere. “I want answers about these Italians.”

“Motherfucker, I want answers about Pedro.” Kashmere raised her voice. “Fucking Gypsy came to me with his men, talking shit about a possible war with Killer Crows because Pedro was missing which is something I have nothing to do with, so you can shut the fuck up!”

“Which one is it, Kashmere?” A dark chuckle left Marcelo. “You want answers or you want me to shut the fuck up?”

She sneered. “I want you dead.”

“Third fucking threat this month from you.” Marcelo bobbed his head. “Is that why the men are here? You’re coming for me—”

“Boy, please. You’re paranoid. Your bitch ass is not even on my mind.” Kashmere turned to Dima and then Lei. “What happened with Pedro, and why wasn’t I told about it?”

Lei sighed. “I believe we were going to eventually say something—”

“No.” Dima shook his head. “I planned to keep it a secret forever.”

Lei frowned.

Dima continued, “So secret that I had not even discussed this with Lei, even though I knew he was at fault.”

Kashmere raised her hand and snapped her fingers.

Rue hurried over with the folder that Gypsy had given Kashmere last night. She set the thick folder down on the table.

Kashmere opened it and then spread the pictures along the plates and cutlery. “Answers. Now.”

Lei, Dima, and Marcelo stared down at the images.

“Marcelo has had his nose in Killer Crow business.” Kashmere placed her hands back on the table and knitted her fingers together. “Lei clearly did something to Pedro, and Dima cleaned the shit up. And not one of you came to me about it.”

They raised their view to her.

“I’m sure you all want to know why Italians are in Paradise City.” Kashmere gazed at them. “I am getting married this week. You all will get invitations, even fucking Marcelo. That is *my* showing you that we are all still friends, but are we?”

Marcelo blinked. “Marriage?”

“It would be a smart move for Kashmere to align with the DeLuca Family.” Dima turned to me. “My only discomfort comes from the fact that you chose Santino DeLuca dubbed the Destroyer of Cities.”

*So the Russian knows exactly who I am. I guess he is smart.*

Kashmere shrugged. “It was love at first sight, Dima. What can I do when the heart wants what it wants?”

Dima put his attention back on her. “Do you remember the story of Paradise where many years ago, the Coffin Cheaters had a good bit of control over this city, and our families united into the Diamond Syndicate and got rid of *them* and others?”

“I know the story.” Kashmere nodded. “What’s the point?”

Dima pulled out a black king chess piece with diamonds on it. Slowly, he twisted the king between his fingers. “The moral of the story is never bet against us.”

Lei spoke, “I killed Pedro.”

Kashmere snapped her view to him. “Why?”

“Because Romeo had died and your sister Chanel was in her office crying, and it pissed me off that her supposed husband was not there consoling her.” Rage decorated Lei’s face. “So, I went to find Pedro, and when I did, he was at a brothel getting his dick sucked by two women. I killed him right there, and I won’t apologize for it.”

Kashmere nodded. “Pedro was a cheating asshole. I won’t shed any tears for him, but there’s the problem of the Coffin Cheaters.”

Dima tapped the king chess piece against the table, getting everyone’s attention. “I should have told you, Kash, but there was so much going on. I hoped the secret would remain buried just like Pedro’s body. Therefore, the problem of the Coffin Cheaters does not fall on your shoulders. This weight is something that the Diamond Syndicate will carry.”

Marcelo raised his eyebrows. “Your marrying has nothing to do with toppling over the Diamond Syndicate or grabbing my territory?”

“I want to make Killer Crows strong, and,” Kashmere moved her hand to my lap. “And...I am *actually* falling in love.”

“Then, I’ll be at your wedding with a nice tux and a beautiful woman on my arm, ready to celebrate your love.” Marcelo nodded. “Meanwhile, Rowe Street Mob will unite with the rest of the Diamond Syndicate in handling the Coffin Cheaters.”

Lei nodded. “Four Aces will surround the West and some of my best men will unite with your main guards.”

Marcelo formed his hands into fists. “And we won’t stop until we finish Gypsy and his men for threatening you.”

*Hmmm.*

I tenderly squeezed Kashmere’s hand, letting her know that I approved for now.

Waiters appeared with plates of food and set them down in front of us. I looked and saw a lovely cut of seared sea bass laying on top of squid ink risotto. Savory steam rose from the plate, luring me to give it a try.

“So, that is settled.” Dima picked up that notebook and wrote something down. “The Diamond Syndicate will go to war against the Coffin Cheaters, and we will also be going to a wedding this week.”

Marcelo didn’t pick up his fork. Instead, he scowled at Kashmere. “I still have not gotten an apology for your disrespect in breaking into my house and putting your fucking guns in my face.”

Kashmere leaned her head to the side. “You didn’t get my *I’m sorry* card? The mailman must have lost it.”

Rue loudly cleared her throat in the back.

Kashmere let out a long breath. “Marcelo, I am sorry. I thought your men took Chanel’s body to fuck with me while I was mourning. Therefore, I wasn’t thinking clearly.”

Dima swallowed down risotto. “I’m more surprised Kash didn’t kill you.”

Marcelo nodded. “The verbal apology is a great *start*.”

I eyed him.

*He will be expecting more later.*

Lei rose. “If this meeting is over, then I must go.”

Kashmere turned to him. “Where are you going?”

“I have urgent Four Aces business to handle.”

Dima sneered at him. “Still?”

“Still.” Lei bowed and headed off.

*What business does Lei have?*

Kashmere turned back to Dima. “I need a big favor.”

Dima looked at her. “How big?”

“Pulling many government strings big.”

Dima raised his eyebrows. “What do you want?”

“Fifteen guys set free from prison.”

Marcelo snorted. “That’s not a big favor that is a fucking gigantic one you would owe us forever favors.”

Kashmere didn’t look fazed. “Can you do it, Dima?”

“Give me the list.”

Kashmere raised her hand and snapped those fingers again.

Dane rushed over and placed a folded paper in front of Dima.

Dima took the paper and placed it inside of his jacket pocket. “They’ll be out by the evening. Just remember that part of your making this up to me is making sure I have the West’s votes in my mayoral election.”

Marcelo chuckled. “I still don’t know why you are running for mayor.”

“It is because I am a very petty man that has chosen to fuck with our current mayor.” Dima looked at Kashmere. “Can you give me the West’s vote?”

“You release those guys and all Killer Crows will not only vote for you, they’ll be fucking carrying *Vote for Dimitri Ivanov* banners around.”

A huge smile spread across Dima’s face. “Then, the men on that list will be out by this evening.”

*Very very interesting.*

As we all ate, Kashmere, Dima, and Marcelo continued with their meeting. The topic moved to Diamond Syndicate business—drug shipments and brothel prices, fencing updates and the news of recently murdered Syndicate soldiers.

To my surprise they let their guard down and discussed this in front of me.

Don Enzo would have never so easily brought anyone into the Family. However, that didn't make me see this Diamond Syndicate as weak.

I sensed the family bond between them. Even Marcelo and Kashmere spoke friendly during the rest of the meeting like two constantly arguing siblings who truly loved and respected each other, but just didn't know how to properly talk to each other.

To my shock, I found myself appreciating these men and the proper respect they were giving Kashmere.

Granted, Dima watched me a lot during the meeting and wrote notes, probably still assessing me. But, even that made me happy.

*The Diamond Syndicate is good for my queen...for now.*

I leaned back in my chair and considered what I would do with these men now. Kashmere had already lost so much. If the Diamond Syndicate served as a sort of crime family that provided her with real support, then I would not end them, at least not yet.

The test would be how they handled the Coffin Cheaters and stood next to Killer Crows.

*We shall see.*

As if hearing my thoughts, Dima watched me, placed his notebook on the table, and twisted that king chess piece.





# Chapter 7

## Free At Last

### Kashmere

After the Diamond Syndicate meeting, Leonardo met us outside of Poseidon. Santino took him to the side for a quick update.

Then, the air laced with thick tension as Dima and Marcelo emerged from Poseidon's entrance and spotted Santino and Leonardo talking.

I remained by my Ghost, taking in the scene.

Next, both groups of men studied each other with glares as cold as steel blades. Taut muscles twitched under their dark suits and testosterone flooded the air, creating a palpable atmosphere of hostility.

It was a wonder they didn't have a shootout right there.

Marcelo headed off with his people and left.

Dima went off to his side, yet didn't leave. Instead, he stood by his Phantom and scribbled in his notebook.

Santino strolled over to me. "Our men have studied the Diamond Syndicate to my satisfaction. Now we're going to check out the Coffin Cheaters' valley."

I tensed. "What?"

"Apparently, there's a Paradise City helicopter tour company that does regular journeys over their valley and around the surrounding mountains."

I calmed. "Please, be careful."

"I will. I plan to have a family with you. Therefore, I will be cautious." He kissed my cheek. "I will see you for the tasting."

My body melted from those lips. “I can’t wait to see you again.”

He gave me a devilish smirk. “I agree. I’m not happy when we are not together.”

“Then, hurry back.”

He kissed me again, this time his lips crashed onto mine with a fiery passion that sent a wave of shivers through my entire body. This time, my nipples hardened and my skin tingled with anticipation. This time, I almost begged him to take me in the Ghost and fuck me really quick before he left.

A soft moan escaped me.

When he pulled away, lust blazed through his eyes. “Don’t ever make that noise when I have to go.”

“Why not?” I bit my bottom lip.

“It makes my cock throb with need, it’s almost impossible to walk away.”

I smirked. “Then, don’t.”

“I plan to have you walk down the aisle without any stress on your mind, that means dealing with your enemies before our wedding.” He stepped back and placed his hands in his pockets. “My phone number is in your phone, and your people also have Leonardo’s and my contact information. Call if necessary.”

“I will.”

Santino loudly dragged in a deep breath as if I were a drug, and my scent brought him insurmountable pleasure.

*Santino. Santino.*

He walked away. His muscles flexed beneath his designer jacket as he moved away from me, the enticing curves of his muscular ass served as a siren song that I could not resist. Every step he took made my desire for him burn brighter, until I was left with only the thought of his touch radiating through my body.

*I may not have done a lot right since being Chairman, but falling for him has been one of the things I did right.*

Dane got to my side. “Check your left.”

I didn’t want to look away from Santino, but Dane kept my mind on business. I put my attention to my left.

Dima stood by his car, staring my way and scribbling more into his notebook.

Dane spoke, “Dima was watching your show with Santino the entire time.”

Swallowing, I glanced back at Dane. “Is that a good or bad thing?”

“I think it’s good. The meeting shifted to nice and jolly, but I know Dima and Marcelo are still on guard with the presence of Santino and his men in Paradise City.” Dane crossed his arms over his chest. “I’m sure they’re suspicious of this upcoming marriage. However, that kiss between Santino and you was hot and passionate. No acting or faking in that one.”

I blushed.

“I’m sure there’s now no doubt in Dima’s mind that you actually like Santino, and that Santino is truly into you.”

“Good.” I glanced back. “Oh shit.”

Dima headed over with several of his men.

Santino and Leonardo began to drive off in their SUVs, but I spotted Santino gazing out of the window at Dima’s approach to me. Soon, Santino’s SUV stopped as if he wanted to make sure everything was fine.

*God, he’s so protective and I fucking love it.*

It felt good to finally have someone truly look out for me, and not because it was their job or duty.

Dima stopped in front of me. “I just had an idea.”

“Okay?”

“Let us go to the officials *together* to get your people out of prison. You should meet them.”

I widened my eyes. “You want me to meet *your* government contacts?”

“Actually, they’re *Diamond Syndicate* contacts.” Dima tucked his notebook in his pocket. “Once we’re done, we should go to the prison and pick up your men. They should see *your face*, when they are freed after they were supposed to spend the rest of their lives behind bars.”

Excitement hit me. “I would love that. I haven’t hugged many of them since I was a little kid.”

Rue and Merik got to my side. I could feel the eagerness buzzing off Merik to finally see his brother, Roscoe on the outside.

I tried not to get my hopes up too high. “Would it really be that easy to get them out today, Dima?”

“Since running for mayor I have managed to garner many important political contacts throughout the State and even higher. The Diamond Syndicate has more power inside the government than they have ever had before.”

“Does that mean less of my men going to prison?”

“That is my goal.”

I studied him. “And why are you being so nice to me?”

“I believe I have always been nice to you, Kash.”

“But you’re being extra nice.”

“Oh, that is because I believe sucking up to you and giving you everything you desire will keep you loyal to the Syndicate.”

I blinked.

*Good old Dima. Brutally honest as usual.*

Dima raised one finger. “Also.”

I quirked my brows. “Also?”

“After seeing that kiss, I can tell that it is *you that* has the true power in this new relationship with Santino DeLuca.

Where once I feared his men being in Paradise City, now I see opportunity.”

“I don’t have the power in the relationship.”

Dima chuckled. “Did you forget my business, Kash?”

“Brothels and sex.”

“Which means that I know the great power of women.” He turned around and headed off. “Have your cars follow me.”

I checked to the side and saw that Santino’s SUV still remained where it was. He watched Dima walk off and then he looked at me.

*It’s okay, baby.*

I gave him a smile and nod.

Seconds later, his SUV left.

And that was my day. Dima introduced me to Paradise City’s most powerful politicians. We even went to the courthouse. I watched several judges sign off on decisions to allow my men to be relieved of all their legal consequences from criminal convictions.

Rue called Tomasso to let him know that the tasting with the wedding caterer would need to be pushed back to the evening.

Finally, we arrived at the prison.

Merik had a fun idea, and I let him do it.

Fifteen limos waited outside. Beside each limo my men’s families stood—mothers, wives, girlfriends, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. They’d been ordered to dress quickly and come welcome their loved ones back to freedom. Many of their faces were covered in shock. Some faces held suspicion as if I had brought them out to set them up somehow. Most of the women cried. The men were equally effected—tears streamed down their eyes.

Far off, I remained by my Ghost with Dane and Rue.

Merik had joined his mother Aunt Irene over by the first limo. Roscoe's wife and teenaged twins, Melody and Melanie, chatted with them. Roscoe had been in prison the night his twins were born. As far as I knew, he had never gotten to hug his kids.

*If Dima can truly keep my people out of prison and with their families...then I would remain united with the Diamond Syndicate. It would be nothing but love from here on out.*

Aunt Irene went to the back of the limo and pulled a large plate out.

It was crazy, but Rue, Dane, and I stared at that plate like we hadn't ate all day.

Dane spoke first, "What do you think she made him?"

My stomach growled. "Roscoe loves smothered pork chops and rice with a big helping of her special greens. I bet that's it."

Rue shook her head. "I only eat pork a few times a year, and when I do...Aunt Irene made it."

"Hootie hoo!" Noise sounded from the front of the prison.

We all turned that way.

Roscoe walked out with a bop. "Hootie Hoo!"

Dane leaned my way. "Will we tell him that the phrase isn't a popular thing in Paradise City anymore?"

"No way. Let Roscoe have his day."

The twins ran to him. "Papa!"

"Oh my God!" Roscoe spread his huge, muscular arms and rushed their way. "God is so good! He'll show you. Won't he?"

There, they hugged for several minutes and Roscoe broke out into a sob.

My eyes watered.

One by one, more men headed out.

Their families all tackling them with love.

My throat went dry. “Okay. We can go now.”

“The hell we can.” Dane shook his head. “This moment will forever be remembered in Killer Crow history, and *you* made it happen. No one else.”

Rue wiped a tear from her eye. “I agree.”

Dane gazed at the hugging families. “You stay. So that when people think back to this memory, your face will be imprinted in their minds.”

Holding back as many tears as I could, I looked at him. “Do you think *this* will help me unify Killer Crows?”

“Now you have a new Board of Executives that will die for you, just because you let them see their family again when they thought they would die behind bars.”

Sorrow shivered through me.

Rue added, “New shareholders within the prison will be assigned by *these men* who just left. That means that whoever sits in the shareholder seat in prison would have been loyal to the Executives.”

“Maybe we can get them out too.” I swallowed. “I don’t want any of our people behind bars.”

“Soon, Kash.” Dane put his gaze off to the distant right where Dima stood by his Phantom, scribbling in his damned little notebook. “If we put Dima in office, then we have a mayor in our pocket. Less time for Killer Crows in prison.”

I sniffled. “Then, after the wedding Killer Crows’ top priority is getting all of the West to vote for Dima. No one else can win.”

As if hearing us, Dima nodded and waved goodbye.

I smiled and saluted.

It must have caught him off guard because he looked at me oddly, pulled that notebook back out, scribbled something, put the notebook up, and then gave me an awkward salute back.

*What the hell?*



I laughed as he got in the back of his Phantom and his driver sped him away. Yellow SUVs full of his men followed him toward Caviar Lime Highway.

“Mayor Dimitri Ivanov.” I shook my head. “Romeo and Chanel are doubling over with laughter in heaven.”

\* \* \*

Several hours later—after tons of grandmothers had prayed over me and mothers kissed my cheeks and all my new Board Executives embraced me hard as fuck while they thanked me for their freedom, I sat in the Exquisite Knot restaurant.

Tomasso dabbed a white silk cloth on three long scratches on his cheek. “Leonardo told me that Santino is less than five minutes away. We will begin shortly.”

I peered at that wounded cheek. “You sure you don’t want me to check the female that scratched your face up?”

“No. No.” Sitting next to me, Tomasso dabbed at the scratches again. “You must understand that she booked Exquisite Knot two years ago. This caterer is *that* good. Quite a long waiting list. And she lost her booking today due to my saying six words.”

“What were the words?”

“I am with the DeLuca Family.”

“That name makes people move *even* in Paradise City?”

“I have yet to see the name not work in any place on this planet. I once did a birthday party for the past Don in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They didn’t understand much English, but they knew the word *DeLuca*.”

I frowned. “So, now this bride has no caterer?”

“Oh, I’m not heartless.” Tomasso moved the cloth and the scratches appeared to have stopped beading. “After the little tussle which involved my trying not to hit her as she attacked me, I gave her my assistant Knight. He secured her a new caterer, and I plan to pay for it.”

“No.” I shook my head. “I will pay.”

“No, my queen.” Santino’s voice sounded behind me. “Tomasso can foot the bill. I’m sure Don Enzo gave him a hefty budget.”

“He sure did. One of the biggest budgets I’ve had in a long time.” Tomasso rose and stepped away from the table. “I am glad that you are *finally* here, Santino. I will get the Chef for the tasting.”

Santino walked over to me and landed a soft, passionate kiss on my cheek. “How was your day?”

“Very productive.”

Santino moved the empty chair right next to me. Then, he sat down. “Did Dima come through with freeing your men?”

“He did, and I was there to welcome them back. I believe this will unify the Killer Crows.”

“Hmmm. Then, your place on the Killer Crow throne is solidified?”

“Yes.”

Santino leaned back. “Then, Dima can continue to breathe for now.”

I blinked.

“Just tell me *when* you want the Diamond Syndicate gone.”

My stomach twisted. “Ending the Syndicate has never been a part of my plan.”

“Understand my love, that it has been a part of *my* plan, since the first day I stepped into this city.”

*What?*

A cold shiver sliced up my spine.



# Chapter 8

## A Bigger Throne

### Santino

In my mind, blood poured and flooded Paradise City's streets. I could see a clear vision of my conquering the Diamond Syndicate and handing my queen an even bigger throne.

Yet to my surprise, fear consumed Kashmere's cheerful expression, and I had no idea why. All I knew was that I desperately wanted to soothe her.

"What's wrong, Kash?"

She sat up in her chair. "Santino."

I quirked my brows.

"The Diamond Syndicate was started by my family. There is a whole history involved. I've already broken traditions within the Killer Crows, I will not also be the Chairman that destroyed the Diamond Syndicate."

Shocked, I leaned my head to the side. "You don't want me to get rid of them for you?"

"No."

"Hmmm."

She blinked. "What does that *hmmm* mean?"

"I'm thinking about this new information."

"Dima was my brother's best friend. Chanel also loved the hell out of him. I've known him since I was a kid." Kashmere shook her head. "To see Dima dead..."

I let out a long breath. "I can keep *him* alive, and only go after Marcelo."

"Dima will not silently stand by while you attack Marcelo."

"And what about Lei?"

“I don’t know. He feels so guilty about my brother and sister’s deaths that he may stand by, but that still leaves Dima, and the North will not be so easy to conquer.”

“I don’t fear the North, East, or South, but I will give whatever area mercy that you chose.”

She widened her eyes. “Santino, was that yours and Don Enzo’s plan from the very beginning?”

“The DeLuca Family wants to play in Paradise City, but...”

“But?”

“*How* we play is flexible.”

“Explain.”

“Paradise City brings in millions upon millions of dirty money. This has truly become a gangster heaven.”

She nodded. “The West is a large part of those millions.”

“Once we marry, a portion will eventually go to the DeLuca Family along with my other investments and territories.”

“What cities are you in charge of?”

I grinned. “I control the entire West Coast.”

“Fuck.” She blinked. “That’s right. For some reason, I thought that was just a title, not...shit. The whole coast?”

I nodded. “I wish it was just a title, but that position does require me to head to the West Coast a lot more than I would like and oversee any problems that may come up.”

“What is the percentage that the Killer Crows will give to the DeLuca Family?”

“Whatever you want? You rule this area.” I placed my hands on the table. “But, understand that this percentage comes with a loyal army behind you. And if you have an army, you might as well use it and go to war.”

She frowned. “Did Sun Tzu say that?”

“No, *I* say it.”

“I don’t want to go to war if I don’t have to. I simply want peace for the Killer Crows.”

I pointed at her. “After all that has been done to the Killer Crows, you all should be running Paradise City by yourselves.”

She pursed her lips.

I fisted my hand. “I understand your loyalty to the East, but the North and South should be bowing to my queen, and that is what I intend on them doing after we marry. *You* will be the only person that wears the crown in Paradise City.”

“And what about *you*?”

“What do you mean?”

“Won’t *you* be wearing a crown also?”

“No. Paradise City only needs one ruler. I have enough on my plate. However,” I hit her with a devilish smile.

“Understand that while you are a *queen* on these streets, I am *king* in our bedroom.”

A heavy silence settled between us and the air felt electric. I watched her intently, wondering what thoughts were swimming in the depths of her beautiful mind. The tension was palpable as I leaned back in my chair. My eyes never left her perfect face.

I decided to break the silence. “After we are married, what will you want me to do, Kash? Stand down from destroying the Diamond Syndicate or move forward with war?”

She swallowed. “Let’s table this topic for another day. We have enough going on, and for now the Diamond Syndicate has been helpful to the Killer Crows.”

“They’ve been helpful because they know the Boogeyman is in their town, waiting to eat them up.”

She smirked. “And in this metaphor, *you* are the Boogeyman?”

“Do you doubt that?”

“Not one bit.” She tapped the table. “Dima said something interesting to me today.”

“What did he say?”

“He saw our kiss and commented that I was running the relationship.”

“Then, he is even more observant than I give him credit for.”

She blinked.

Tomasso hurried over with a woman in a white suit. She had dark brown skin, and a short curly black afro.

She pushed a large cart over stacked with tiny plates displaying savory hors d’oeuvres.

Tomasso stopped her at our table and held out his hands. “And here is the gorgeous couple.”

She smiled at us.

“This is Chef Julieta Ramirez.” Tomasso gestured to her. “I’ve heard that she is the best wedding caterer in Paradise City and providing gourmet cuisine and elegant touches to celebrations.”

“Oh, that is too kind.” Julieta waved at us. “I am simply passionate about helping two people in love see their dreams come true.”

“And that makes me quite happy to work with you.” Tomasso picked up a plate and placed it on the table in front of Kashmere and me. Two golden crusted balls sat in the center. Some sort of white herbed sauce topped them. Tomasso clapped. “Just look at this sophisticated plating. Stylish, yet mouth-watering. She’s clearly an artist. I may steal you away from Paradise and make you my top assistant.”

Julieta chuckled, but I knew Tomasso wasn’t joking at all. He had a reputation for stealing people’s chefs. Once he’d been invited to a Made Man’s home for dinner, and hired the chef by dessert.

The Made Man had called Don Enzo to get permission to kill Tomasso, which he did not receive.

Meanwhile, the chef left with Tomasso. If I remembered correctly...that chef was Knight who was now his assistant.

“Well thank you so much, Tomasso.” Julieta gazed at us. “I want your wedding planning to be stress-free.”

Kashmere snorted. “Let us hope that will be the truth.”

I eyed her. “It will.”

“For your wedding, I thought that your reception menu could be a fusion of Southern Soul Food and Italian cuisine.” Julieta pointed to the plate before us. “First, we have risotto balls drizzled with goat cheese.”

“It smells so good.” Kashmere picked up her fork and lifted one ball.

Curving my lips into a smile, I lovingly watched her sample that and moan.

*You will definitely have my cock in your mouth this evening.*

She moaned again. “So good. Santino, try it.”

“I would rather watch you eat the next one.”

She sucked her teeth. “This is your wedding reception too. Make sure you love the food.”

I picked up my fork and took a bite of the remaining risotto ball. As soon as it hit my tongue, I found that it had an excellent balance of flavors and was crunchy on the outside, yet soft on the inside, exactly the way I loved it.

“If you want to make any changes to the menu, please let me know and I will listen closely to your ideas and include any requests that you might have.” She began placing more small plates on the table in front of us. “My goal is to craft a personalized reception dinner that feels unique to you both as well as delights your guests’ taste buds.”

Kashmere took everything in. “All of this looks amazing and smells fabulous. I doubt I will have a problem with the



menu.”

I swallowed the risotto ball. “I agree. You have quite a flair in the kitchen.”

“I told you.” Tomasso bobbed his head. “She is definitely coming with me.”

Julietta widened her eyes and began pointing to another dish. “These are my special fried mac and cheese bites.”

“Oh yes.” Kashmere grinned. “That will be a hit with the Killer Crows.”

“Perfect.” Juliet gestured to the other plate. “And these are mozzarella stuffed meat balls.”

Excited, I reached for one of those. “Fabulous.”

“Here are small squares of honey butter cornbread. Then, I decided to have fun with this one, it is a roasted red pepper and ricotta crostini topped with a caviar lime pork rib.”

“Oh wow.” Kashmere reached for that one. “With all these great hors d’oeuvres do we even need a sit down dinner?”

“God yes.” Horror covered Tomasso’s face. “You have not met all of the DeLuca men yet, but they are big guys that like to eat a lot.”

I nodded. “This is correct.”

Tomasso came closer to the table. “I would like you both to close your eyes.”

I frowned. “Must we?”

“Yes.”

Kashmere obeyed.

I groaned in annoyance, yet did the same.

Tomasso spoke, “Picture a massive tent near Dream Lake, and on the inside there is a lovely jazz band and tons of breathtaking decor done in red and gold.”

I smiled.

“There are two bars on each side of the tent, serving high-quality liquor. In the center, there will be a champagne fountain. We will have a caprese salad station right next to a fresh raw oyster bar. Of course there will be tons of hors d’oeuvres being passed around by waiters among the laughter and dancing. Then—”

A deep voice boomed. “Then, bullets spray everywhere, ripping bodies apart and spilling blood all over the silverware.”

*What?*

I opened my eyes.

Kashmere had her eyes open and her mouth parted in shock.

Gypsy strolled in with a long red rose in his hand. Four men flanked him, pointing their guns at us, Tomasso, and even Julietta.

*What the hell happened to our guards outside?*



# Chapter 9

## The Tasting

### Kashmere

Terror moved through my body, but I wouldn't let Gypsy see it.

Instead, I glared at him. "Did you kill Dane and Rue?"

Holding some stupid rose, Gypsy grabbed a chair from another table and brought it over to ours, then he sat down as if we had invited him to join our tasting. "You just lost your brother and sister. Why would I get rid of more people that are close to you?"

Relief poured over me.

Gypsy raised the rose and sniffed at the petals. "I remember that you loved the scent of roses."

I noticed two men targeting their guns at Santino's head and gritted my teeth. "Do not shoot anyone, Gypsy."

"As long as *he* remains silent, there will be no need for anyone to die."

Under the table, I slowly placed my hand on Santino's lap. I could already feel the rage radiating off him.

*Please, stay quiet for now, baby.*

Gypsy's other two men moved closer to Julieta and Tomasso. The poor woman shrieked and shivered.

Meanwhile, Tomasso appeared annoyed. Clearly, he was used to having guns pointed at him.

Gypsy twisted the rose in his hand and gazed at the petals. "The red rose has been in tons of literature and lots of poetry."

My heart boomed in my ears. "What do you want, Gypsy?"

“A red rose symbolizes romance and passion.” Gypsy moved his gaze to me. “If the rose is a deep red, this can be a sign of the giver being ready for a deeper commitment.”

*As soon as I get a chance, I am going to fucking kill you.*

Gypsy placed the rose on the table in front of me. “I give this rose to you, Kash.”

Santino leaned forward, but at least he did not say anything.

Gypsy turned to him. “Do you know how many times I’ve made her moan from my cock?”

Fast, Santino rose.

One of the men shot by the wall near him. It didn’t hit Santino’s arm, but it was a clear warning to sit back down.

However, Santino remained standing.

My hands shook. “Please, Gypsy. If you *truly* care about me, then you will not hurt him.”

“That is the only reason why he is still alive at the moment.” Gypsy watched Santino. “I ask that you respectfully sit back down, before my kindness shifts to fury.”

Santino sneered and lowered back down in the chair next to me.

Gypsy placed his view on the table and grabbed one of the squares of honey buttered cornbread.

“I had men watching you today.” Gypsy popped the square into his mouth and munched on it. “They say you met with the Diamond Syndicate.”

“I did.”

Swallowing, he bobbed his head. “Very good. This cornbread should definitely be at *our* wedding reception.”

I stiffened. “Killer Crows had nothing to do with Pedro’s...death.”

Gypsy didn’t look surprised by the last word.

I cleared my throat. “Lei killed him. Dima hid it. If you want to work out some sort of reciprocity with the Diamond Syndicate, I can help be your voice in the next meeting but any desire for Killer Crows to step into this conflict in any other way, will not happen.”

Gypsy perused the other plates and glanced back at Julieta. “There should be French fries in brown paper cones to represent the Coffin Cheaters. Make sure you include a tasty dipping sauce.”

Shivering, she nodded.

Gypsy turned back to me. “I knew that Lei killed Pedro. That was no great mystery. Lei has hated my brother ever since he married Chanel. I’m sure Romeo’s death gave him the perfect opportunity to kill him.”

I scowled. “Then, why come to the Killer Crows asking where Pedro was?”

“I wanted to know if *you* had anything to do with the cover up of my brother’s death, and I realized that you did not.” Gypsy gave me a warm smile. “You’re still *my* Kash.”

Santino seethed on my side. Had these men not been in here with guns, I had no doubt that Gypsy would be dead by Santino’s hands. In fact, I couldn’t guarantee Gypsy would even be alive by the end of the week. I just had to make sure that Gypsy didn’t shoot Santino in this moment.

Afterwards...I would help Santino kill him.

*Just talk to Gypsy until he gets out of here with those fucking guns.*

I swallowed down my fear. “Why are you here, Gypsy?”

“Will Killer Crows stand by my side when I go after Lei?”

I gritted my teeth. “At the moment, Killer Crows are not at our best. Therefore, we will be staying out of business that does not concern us.”

Gypsy pulled the plate of meatballs close to him and tried one. Munching, he frowned and glanced over his shoulder.

“This doesn’t pass. Not enough quality in this ball. I’ll bring you some meat that is grade A.”

My stomach twisted. Knowing Gypsy, they would definitely barbecue a few people for a big celebration like a wedding.

Gypsy grabbed a napkin and spit the meat into it.

I wore a disgusted look.

Gypsy set the rolled-up napkin on the table and picked up another cornbread square. “And the Peace Treaty? You obviously plan to ignore the fact that you and I should be tying the knot.”

“It is a new day, Gypsy. And I am a different Chairman. Anything that was signed back in the day has no worth anymore.”

He studied me. “So, the Coffin Cheaters and Killer Crows are no longer at peace?”

A cold shiver ran through me. “I have no problem with you, Gypsy. We have had history. Therefore, I have no plans for Killer Crows to disturb the Coffin Cheaters’ territory and businesses. In fact, we could work together on making money, isn’t that the whole point of this.”

Gypsy frowned. “Your problems with the Coffin Cheaters would be simple if all I cared about was the money.”

I quirked my brows. “Then, what do *you* care about?”

“You.” He glared at me. “And we shared more than *history*, Kash, or did you forget?”

Guilt sank in my heart. Tension gathered in my shoulders. “If you really cared about me, then you would stand to the side while I—”

“What?” He glared. “Marry this guy?”

“Gypsy, we have not been together in years, so don’t start \_\_\_”

“We haven’t been together, but you also have not dated anyone else either. Do you know how I know this?” He

touched the corner of his right eye. “Because I’ve had men watching you since you broke my heart, and their only job for years has been to report back to me if any idiot in this city dared to approach you.”

*O-kay.*

Gypsy leaned his head to the side. “Do you want to know what would happen if a man did?”

“It is not my concern anymore—”

“I would have butchered him and served his meat to the most loyal in my clan.” Gypsy turned to Santino. “Did you know that if you eat a human brain, it can make you go crazy?”

Gypsy knew that people only saw the Coffin Cheaters traditional eating of their enemies as 24-7 cannibals when really they probably ate human flesh three or four times a year. Granted, that was still pretty fucking disgusting, but the Coffin Cheaters loved to scare everyone with the idea that they were hardcore cannibals.

Gypsy smirked at Santino. “Did you know that?”

A dangerous edge laced Santino’s voice. “Is it *my* turn to talk?”

“It is.” Gypsy shrugged. “I believe it will be entertaining.”

“From what I have gathered in the two times of seeing you, Gypsy.” Santino leaned closer to the table. “You appear to be a knowledgeable man.”

“Some would say that.”

“So, you know who *I* am?”

“I do.” Gypsy nodded. “You are Santino DeLuca. I have been advised by my elders to not kill you.”

“And do you usually listen to your elders?”

Gypsy put his view back on me. “Not when it comes to love.”

I sighed.



Gypsy rose from the table. “Kash, you have been through a lot. I’ve heard that you even had to bury your grandmother.”

I frowned.

“Therefore, I will excuse your thinking for today.” Gypsy pulled out his gun. “I ask that you spend tonight *really* thinking about my proposal, and also...think about our past.”

“Gypsy—”

“It is true that the Coffin Cheaters aren’t as sophisticated as you Paradise City folk.” Gypsy whipped around and shot in Julieta’s direction. It was so fast I gasped.

*No.*

The bullet zipped to her. A black hole appeared in the middle of her forehead. Blood oozed from the hole as she collapsed to the ground.

Gypsy placed the gun in front of his face and blew at the tip like he was some cartoonish cowboy. Then, he winked at me. “We may not be that sophisticated, but we sure know how to shoot Killer Crows.”

My whole body rocked with rage.

Gypsy put his view on Santino. “Did you know that human buttocks make a good Sunday roast. The problem is you have to cook it real slow in a sauce.”

*Get the fuck out of here.*

“We marry at the end of this week, Kash. It can be in the courthouse, in my valley, or by your mansion.” Gypsy put his gun back in the holster and licked his lips as he looked at me. “Either way, I will be *your* husband and you will be my dutiful wife. You fucking owe me that happy ending, and it is finally my time to have it.”

I fisted my right hand.

“And our honeymoon night.” He whistled. “I’ve been thinking about the things that I will be doing with you for years. Oh my!”

One of his men snickered.

“Let’s just say that your pussy will be sore for the rest of the month.” Gypsy headed off.

His men continued to point their guns our way as they backed up and then eventually exited.

They slammed the door shut behind.

Tomasso rushed to Julieta’s dead body. “No. She was such a sweetheart.”

Santino jumped out of his seat. “Enough of this, I’m ending Gypsy tonight.”

I got up with him. “No.”

Santino spun around. “No?”

“*We* end him tonight.” I headed off, needing to make sure Dane and Rue were fine. “And *we* have to get his ass before he hits the mountains or we’ll lose him.”

Santino followed. “How far are we from the mountains?”

“Between fifteen to twenty minutes, but the Coffin Cheaters don’t go by the speed limit.” I increased my pace, got to the door, and opened it.

Cool night air hit my face.

I spotted Dane and Rue watching the Coffin Cheaters zoom away. More relief hit me. While Gypsy said he didn’t kill Rue and Dane, it didn’t mean that he hadn’t hurt them.

They turned our way.

Dane frowned. “The Coffin Cheaters had machine guns pointed at us right as they rode up.”

Rue shook her head. “Sorry, Kashmere. We dropped the ball. That will never happen again.”

Santino glanced at Leonardo who scowled at the bikers. “Get the cars ready. We’re going after them.”

Leonardo turned to him. “Now?”

Santino pulled out his gun. “Right fucking now!”



# Chapter 10

## Heartbreak

### Santino

The night was dark, illuminated only by the flashing headlights of our cars and the Coffin Cheaters' motorcycles. We had our windows down.

A furious wind blew through the car with a loud howl.

*Come on. We have to gain speed on them.*

The thunderous roar of engines shook the air itself as the Coffin Cheaters tore down the Caviar Lime Highway. They were an army of riders in an endless wave of brown leather and glinting chrome, their bikes a swarm of power and speed that swallowed up the night.

Thousands of them were racing to their fate, a dark cloud on a mission of death, and I planned to help them get there quickly.

The chase had become a game of cat and mouse as our people desperately tried to take out the bikers. Shots were fired in a deadly flurry, yet none hit their target. Our people were running out of time and options as the bikers sped away, taunting us with middle fingers and increasing their speed.

“Fuck you, Gypsy!” Kashmere had her guns in her hands. The wind blew along her braid, twisting strands around her beautiful face. Fierce violence filled those eyes.

*Goddamn it. We have to get them before the mountains come up.*

The road stretched before us, a long ribbon of asphalt.

It felt good to have the female version of me by my side and ready to fight.

She sneered. “I wish I had a fucking bazooka to end them right now.”

“I will be sure to get you two red ones for your birthday.” I checked my watch. “Goddamn it. Ten minutes have passed, and we still haven’t gotten close enough.”

“Most of them have been riding this road since they were teens.”

I yelled at the driver. “Go faster!”

The engine roared as the driver must have jammed his foot hard on the floorboard, pushing the car to its limit and weaving through the Killer Crows’ SUVs.

I clenched my teeth. “Fucking piece of shit thinks he can marry you.”

“Fuck him. That’s why we are not going to fail.” Kashmere kept her gaze on the road, her face flushed with a fiery determination.

Suddenly, a deafening explosion came from the SUV in front of us.

*What?*

Our driver slammed the brakes and swerved around it wildly, causing us to violently jerk to the side.

Then, another explosion came. A different Killer Crow SUV in front of us burst into flames.

The driver skidded out of the way.

“Shit!” My body bounced a little and then slammed back into the seat.

I quickly turned to look at Kashmere. She had her guns in her holsters and held onto her seat. “We don’t have bazookas, but it looks like they do.”

My frown deepened. “They were ready for us to chase after them.”

I caught a sudden glimpse of a biker driving in the wrong direction and heading our way. The closer he got, the more I realized he was pointing his gun our way.

*What?*

He must have fired because the sound of several gunshots reverberated through the air.

“Watch out!” I yanked Kashmere down to my lap, ducked, yet kept my gaze ahead.

Bullets punctured our windshield, shards of glass rained down around us like a deadly hailstorm.

“Asshole,” Kashmere rose, pulled out her gun, and leaned out of the window. She got the biker in the chest.

I checked the driver and made sure he was still alive.

More bikers followed.

Killer Crows and my men let loose a barrage of bullets, getting many in the head and littering the highway with dead bodies and crushed motorcycles.

Two bikers charged towards us.

I thrust my arm out the window, gripped my gun tightly, and unleashed a fury of lead into them, tearing through flesh and bone until they crashed into each other.

“Goddamn it!” Kashmere hit the side of the door.

I snapped my view to her. “What?”

She pointed ahead. “The mountains.”

It was so dark that it was difficult to see, but as my eyes adjusted, I could make out large solid black objects looming ahead.

Letting out a long breath, she put her guns up. “We’ve got to turn around. The closer we get to the mountains, the darker it is, and Gypsy keeps Coffin Cheaters guarding the area and ready to shoot oncoming cars.”

The sounds of gunfire and screeching of tires echoed in the distance.

“Fucking shit heads.” Kashmere pulled out her phone, dialed, and spoke, “Retreat. Now.”

Further ahead the sky lit up like fireworks had been set off.

“Damn it.” I gritted my teeth, pulled out my phone, and placed it against my ear.

The phone rang.

Leonardo answered, “Yes, sir?”

“Have everyone turn around.”

“Okay.”

“What happened up there?”

“It looks like some sort of missile hit three Killer Crow SUVs up ahead.”

I gripped the phone harder. “Get everyone out of there. We can’t have any more losses.”

“Yes, sir.”

I hung up, put my phone in my pocket, and gazed at Kashmere. “We’ll get him.”

“I know.”

“The fucking bastard was ready and knew exactly what he was doing.”

“What I don’t understand is why he didn’t shoot you in the restaurant when he had a chance.” She looked at me. “I was terrified.”

I pulled her close to me. “Don’t ever be afraid for me—”

“How could I not?”

“He didn’t shoot me. Let us just focus on that.”

“I can never let him get that close to you again.” She looked up at me. “I’m putting twenty men on you.”

I didn’t mean to laugh, but I couldn’t help it.

She frowned. “What is so funny?”

“I’m sorry, Kash. I’m just really not used to anyone protecting me, especially a woman.”

“Well, get used to it.” She widened her eyes. “I’m serious. Gypsy can never be in the same room with you again.”

“I actually would like to meet him again because the next time I will be armed.”

She glanced back at the front of the car as the driver did an illegal swerve onto the highway’s grass median. Next, the driver slammed on the gas. The tires screeched as the Ghost raced over the divider.

A minute later, the driver had us on the other side and speeding away.

I checked behind us. Many of my men and Killer Crows followed behind us.

*Good. We didn’t lose too many.*

Kashmere leaned against my chest. “Finally, I will have some happiness in my life because of you, and I won’t let Gypsy or anyone else take you away from me.”

My heart warmed. “I second that, Kash. Together we’ll watch all of our enemies burn in flames.”

“That will be a perfect wedding present.”

I smiled. “We truly are meant to be together.”

The rest of the ride was silent as I considered various ways to get rid of the Coffin Cheaters. Gypsy and his people knew the land and had experience fighting here. That gave them a great advantage.

Earlier today when Leonardo and I rode the airplane near the Coffin Cheaters’ valley, I did not get as much information as I had hoped.

Even though it was daylight, the valley depths were unnaturally dark. The most I could make out was that the surrounding mountains had gigantic trees that cast large shadows on the massive space. In some areas, I made out simple houses and small buildings, but the area appeared more like a shack-filled village than a modern city.

*I need to know more.*

I ran my fingers along Kashmere’s silky braid. “Have you ever been in the Coffin Cheaters’ valley.”



She shivered against me. “Yes. Once.”

I placed my hand to her chin and lifted her view to me.  
“Tell me about it.”

She swallowed. “Gypsy wasn’t supposed to bring me there, but we were both hard-headed teenagers who didn’t care about rules.”

“So you got to see one opening to the mountains?”

“No way. Even though Gypsy broke the rule of bringing me there, he still blindfolded me when I got close.” She sat up. “When we finally arrived and he took off the blindfold, I thought I was in some sort of shanty town from the past.”

“Not modern at all.”

She shook her head. “Back then, I understood why the Coffin Cheaters wanted a piece of the pie in Paradise City as well as land. They had to figure out plumbing which was not up to par when I was there.”

“What about electricity?”

“A few lights here and there, but the Coffin Cheaters are not on our level in the city.”

“Yet, they have weapons?”

“Tons of them. My father and brother never figured out who they were buying from, but it wasn’t the Four Aces. Lei and his family looked down on the Coffin Cheaters.”

“Due to the cannibalism?”

“You must admit that most large groups of people can’t agree on a lot, but cannibalism is one of those things that almost every human is disgusted by.”

I studied her. “Why did Gypsy take you to his village?”

She looked away. “It was...umm...well, we needed privacy.”

I gently grabbed her chin and put her view back to me.  
“Privacy for what?”

“It was the day he took my virginity.”

My entire body began to tremble with an anger so deep I could barely contain it.

Still, I held in my rage, knowing I couldn't be mad at her. Every muscle in my body was coiled and ready to explode with fury. It was just the thought of this filthy piece of shit cannibal thrusting inside of her that made me want to rip his head off his body.

She widened her eyes. "Santino?"

I stilled myself. "Did you two have sex only once?"

"Do you really think that this is important information for killing him?"

"Sometimes I'm a caveman and want to know the things that I shouldn't."

She frowned. "It was more than once."

*I won't kill him quick. It will be several days of torture just because he got to taste her before me.*

She sighed. "Either way, I ended it."

"Why?"

She gazed out of the window. "Once Pedro and Kashmere were set to be married, my family found out about Gypsy and me. My father and Grandma thought it would be strange for me to continue dating him."

"Hold on. You two dated while the Coffin Cheaters and Killer Crows were at war?"

She didn't look back at me. "Yeah."

"How did that happen?"

"One night, I was out with Merik at the movies in this town outside of Paradise called Glory. We were supposed to be doing some gun training bullshit with Romeo, which is why we were hiding in the movie theater miles away, sipping on a bottle of whiskey I stole from his office." She turned back to me. "Anyway, Gypsy happened to be at the movies with some chick and a few of his bikers. At the time, we're both

teenagers so...it wasn't like we were going to blast each other."

"You didn't have guns then?"

"I did, but I hadn't killed anyone yet. And honestly, I never got the whole war thing between the Coffin Cheaters and Killer Crows. I was a teenager who thought it was all bullshit."

"Gypsy approached you first?"

She nodded. "After the movie, he stepped up to me, leaned forward, and whispered that I was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen."

I felt like I had tasted something disgusting on my tongue.

"I rolled my eyes and pointed to the chick Gypsy was with. And he did something crazy."

"What?"

"He called the chick over and told her that I was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen and that she would need a new ride home." She shrugged. "I know. He was not Prince Charming when we met, and because of that, I left with Merik, laughing the whole ride back to Paradise City."

"But then you saw Gypsy again?"

"Chanel always let me drive one of her cars to school. Anytime, I left the West, Gypsy was zooming behind me on his bike and following me around." She gave me a sad smile. "He pretty much stalked me for three months, waiting outside of my school and never saying anything, just smoking a cigarette and leaning against his bike."

"Didn't he have school too?"

"I'm sure he did."

"When did you two finally talk?"

"One day, I had enough of him stalking me, so I walked across the street, pulled my gun out, and told him that if I saw him again, I would put a bullet in his head."

"And what did he say?"

“He ignored my gun and whispered that I smelled good and that he desperately wanted to take me out to a nice restaurant.”

How I wished that we had been in the same town growing up. I understand exactly how Gypsy felt. One look at Kashmere and how could a person continue about their day? Surely, I would have stalked her too and been willing to let her shoot me in the chest just for one date.

“So...I went out with him that night.” She shrugged. “I used to feel lonely back then...even though so many people were around me.”

“You were invisible to your family.”

“Most of the time, unless they needed me to do something for the Killer Crows.” She tucked her hair behind her ear. “It felt good to be truly *seen*.”

I stiffened. “You said that you stopped seeing him due to your father and grandmother, but there has to be more to the story.”

She widened her eyes.

“Kash, are you hiding things from me?”

“No.” She lowered her voice. “I’m more...embarrassed by it and...it always makes me really sad.”

“What happened?”

“I got pregnant.”

Shock vibrated through me. “Pregnant?”

“I was a teen, super scared, and now I was pregnant by Gypsy who was my family’s enemy. They were fighting a fucking war with his people for God’s sake, and now I’m pregnant. I didn’t think I could tell Romeo or Chanel because their whole focus was killing the Coffin Cheaters. And there was no way I would tell my parents.”

My heart boomed in my ears. “What did Gypsy say when you told him?”

Her eyes watered. “I didn’t. I hid it. Merik took me to a clinic in Glory and...”

I tenderly grabbed her hand and squeezed it. “That must have been a heartbreaking moment.”

“I was just a kid...making a big decision and...” Tears left her eyes. “I still don’t know if that was the right decision. At times I look back and think of how much of a coward I was.”

“You were young—”

“And stupid.”

“Don’t say that.” I wiped her tears away. “Never say that.”

She swallowed. “When I left the clinic, I was sobbing and...it was raining and...”

I raised my eyebrows.

“And Gypsy was standing outside with no umbrella, just staring at me, heartbroken and confused.”

“What did he say to you?”

“Nothing and truthfully, I think he was crying too, but I couldn’t tell due to the rain.” She looked away. “And so... because I was an immature coward, I told him that we were over due to the war between our families. And then I rushed off with Merik.”

*No wonder he isn’t over her.*

She cleared her throat. “Merik told his mom, Aunt Irene that Gypsy and I had dated. Then she told some other aunts, and next the whole family knew, but at least Merik never brought up the abortion. But, that was how my grandmother got into it.”

“That was good.”

“Once the Peace Treaty happened, I did my best to avoid Gypsy. I hid during most of the wedding. Anytime there was some sort of family event, I didn’t show up. It wasn’t like my family realized that I wasn’t there.”

“But, I bet Gypsy missed you.”

She placed her hands in her lap and twisted her fingers. “Gypsy reminds me of that horrible decision. Every time I see him, I drown in guilt and regret, thinking of the baby I... killed.”

Now I was understanding more why she had been so lenient with him last night. She knew she hurt him in the past and only wanted to find some semblance of peace between them.

But what she didn’t understand was that once a man had a taste of her, there would be no peace until she was back in his arms.

“So, there you have it.” She gave me a sad smile. “That’s my history with Gypsy.”

And quite a history it was.

I pulled her into my arms and held Kashmere close to me. “Thank you for telling me. This helps a lot.”

She leaned into my embrace. “How does it help?”

“Now, I know that Gypsy will never give up. He *truly* wants to marry you, and it has nothing to do with the Coffin Cheaters or Killer Crows.”

She shivered against me.

“In fact,” I frowned. “There is no amount of negotiations, land, or power that will keep him away from you.”



# Chapter 11

## Male Ego

### Santino

A seething animosity ran through me as I considered the time Kashmere and Gypsy had together.

The thought of him planting his seed in her before *me* twisted my stomach with a burning fury. This emotion was raw and uncontrolled, like an animal's instinct to protect its claim. It was a sensation of pure possessive jealousy, and never had I experienced this before.

*What was this strange emotion, this primitive rage?*

Silently, we arrived back at Kashmere's mansion.

Her inner crew met her outside and went over possible strategy.

I continued forward to the mansion and disappeared into the library, needing time to calm myself.

The Jones library was as luxurious as the rest of the massive house. It had dark wooden floors, a huge fireplace, and crystal chandeliers. Shelves lined the walls filled with hundreds of brown leather-bound books with gold lettering. Meanwhile, the steady ticking of a grandfather clock sounded in the corner.

Tons of framed pictures decorated the north wall around the fireplace. They were all images of her family. I saw her brother and sister smiling among her parents, cousins, grandparents, and even great grandparents.

Unfortunately, not one picture showed Kashmere. It was as if they forgot to make sure she was up there, representing part of the family.

In the middle sat a mahogany table flanked by red leather chairs on each side. One massive red leather book sat on that table with a gold crow decorating the cover.



I walked over to the large book and flipped it open. The scent of leather and ink hit my nostril. A quick browse told me it was a historic collection of writings on the different Killer Crow generations.

I closed the book and stared back at that wall of pictures.

A flash of Gypsy kissing Kashmere hit my mind.

A wave of anger surged through me.

*He fucking tasted her.*

I pressed my fingers into my forehead, desperately trying to contain the raging thoughts, but the image of them together kept replaying in my mind like an unrelenting loop.

My hatred for Gypsy intensified and swelled with every passing second.

Not long ago, my laughter used to echo off the walls, mocking men who let jealousy rule them. How foolish they all were to me, with so many women in this world.

What kind of idiot wasted his energy fixating on one single woman when there were so many more out there?

And here I stood...loathing one man for touching my queen with his filthy fingers. He knew how Kash sounded when she moaned, how her body writhed in pleasure, how her sweet pussy smelled wet with arousal.

He knew it all.

His knowledge of her felt like a violation, burning into me like a branding iron, and my hatred for him seethed through my veins like molten lava.

I clenched my fist as the green serpent of envy coiled around my heart and squeezed, making my lungs constrict in agony.

*How could he have been with her before me? I should have fucking met her long ago. She's mine!*

My phone rang.

Leonardo's name showed on the screen.

*Good. I need a distraction.*

I answered on the second ring. “Yes?”

“Our men have arrived. I just checked them into their hotel rooms.”

“Good.” I put my back to the pictures on the wall. “Soon, we will need to figure out where to permanently place them in the West.”

“I could have someone looking for several properties.”

“Do that, but make sure that person works with Dane, Rue, or Merik. My queen’s team should be advised of all moves happening in the West.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Also, notify Don Enzo of the fact that I will be going to war with the Coffin Cheaters.”

“No problem, sir.”

“And then have two women go to Tomasso’s room tonight, make sure they have an expensive caviar with them, nothing lower than Royal Ossetra or Kaluga Hybrid Reserve.” I let out a long breath. “I think he may be heartbroken about the caterer’s death. I don’t want him a wreck for the rest of the week.”

“Good thinking, sir.”

“Oh, add champagne to the order of caviar. If I remember correctly Tomasso likes Armand de Brignac Rose.”

“I just wrote all of it down. Anything else, sir?”

I gritted my teeth. “Leonardo?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Jealousy...”

Leonardo cleared his throat. “Yes?”

“How do you easily get rid of it?”

“I would say that many men have battled with that question. Would you like to...expand on the dilemma?”

“I must admit that I am embarrassed to say it.” I went over to the table in the center of the room and leaned against it. “You know of my sexual exploits. You’ve been around me through many of them.”

“Yes, sir. Six. Seven. Even eight women in one night and in one bed.” Leonardo laughed. “There were many times when I had to rush into the room and help you separate naked women fighting over you.”

One would think that reminder down memory lane would have soothed my jealousy, but my envy was unrelenting.

Even with the reminder of my insatiable sexual past, nothing could bring me peace as the memories of what Kashmere had confessed stung my heart like a thousand needles, inflicting an agony that felt hotter than an oven’s flames.

I swallowed down the pain. “How does one get over the fact that...the woman they love has *also* had a past?”

“I doubt Kashmere has had as extensive a sexual history as yours.”

“Yes. That is true. Hers is completely unlike my past, but still...I am illogically aggravated that someone else has touched her...intimately.”

“Ahh.” Leonardo cleared his throat. “I too have had a few occasions when my male ego has cracked a little.”

“That’s what it is?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And how does one deal with that?”

“I would say that the best way to heal male ego is to boost it back up. Remind yourself and even her, of who *you* are.”

A wicked smile spread across my face. “Yes. I like that idea very much.”

A hint of humor laced his voice. “Enjoy your evening, sir.”

“I sure will.” I hung up and headed out of the library with a new mission booming in my head. I bounded up the stairs,

careful to not trip on the tricky steps.

My heart pounded and a fire of lust raged in my groin.

*You had better be in our bedroom, Kash.*

My body jolted with anticipation at the thought of dominating her completely tonight.

*He may have had you, but now I do, and you will always be mine.*

If she didn't know by now, she would know tonight that she was truly mine. I would show her what it meant to be owned—to be purified with my relentless cock and make her forget any man who dared touch her before me. And her pussy would soon learn that no one could compare to my passionate possession of her body.

Fast, I walked into the bedroom and shut the door behind me.

*Oh.*

To my surprise, Kashmere stood, exposed and vulnerable, in the center of our bedroom, her naked body lit up by the pulsing red glow of a crystal lamp by the bed.

*All mine.*

I stared hungrily at her with a burning passion in my eyes, my gaze never leaving her delicate form.

Kashmere radiated breathtaking beauty from every pore, her mesmerizing curves under the dim light was like pure liquid chocolate within a golden hue. It shimmered like a brilliant star.

She had completely taken her hair out of that beaded braid. Now those long black strands draped her face and fell past her shoulders.

Her breasts were magnificently round with taut nipples that begged to be touched.

The sight made my mouth water and my head dizzy with longing.

*I would tear this city apart for her if she simply asked.*

Her soft silky voice left those full lips. “Where did you escape to?”

I prowled her way in predatory silence.

With every step I took, she widened her eyes.

Once close, I ravished her warm, smooth body without a word, only my hands and mouth speaking of my intentions—my deepest carnal desires.

She gasped in shock as I captured her mouth. Our tongues dancing, tasting each other, mingling and tangling together.

My fingers entwined her hair as I pulled her closer, silencing her breathless moans with a passionate kiss that seemed to last an eternity.

Kashmere’s intoxicating scent mixed with her essence was the most potent aphrodisiac and the elixir of my existence.

Continuing to kiss her, I slid my hands down to her ass and squeezed the soft flesh.

She moaned between the twirls of my tongue in her mouth.

Fast, I lifted her up.

She gasped again and wrapped her legs around my waist.

In seconds, I had her against the wall. My voice rode a dangerous edge, coming out gruff and commanding. “Take my cock out.”

Such a good fiancé, she tore open my pants. The loud rip of my zipper sounded. My cock sprung forward with ferocity.

Her breathing quickened.

With one swift thrust, I filled that slick, wet pussy, loving the feel of her soaking tightness. The pleasure was overwhelming.

With a loud groan, I further crushed her small body against the wall, making sure our bodies were pressed tightly together, so much so that I could feel her heart pounding against mine.

And there I slammed my cock into that wet pussy with all my might.

My mouth hungrily captured hers as I devoured all her gasps and moans of pleasure. My fingers clawed into her soft enthralling curves, gripping her hips in a firm vice.

Kash let out a loud cry as I moved faster, her entire body quivering uncontrollably and convulsing in ecstasy.

And still, I pounded deep into her depths, trying to fuck her soul. Her hair and breasts bounced with each thrust and the sounds of my cock driving into her filled the air with slapping noises and the slurping wet sounds of sex. The pleasure was unbearable.

Her moans trembled and rang out in the space. “O-oh! O-oh!”

Still fucking the shit out of her, I leaned back, looked into those beautiful brown eyes. Fear and arousal blossomed in her gaze.

I sneered at her. “Now only *my touch* will make you tremble, like this, with pleasure.”

She shivered. “Yes.”

“Now only *I* have the power to make your body, heart, and soul fucking throb and vibrate this way.”

“O-oh!”

“You’re mine forever.” I dove back in, slamming my lips against hers, my tongue savagely exploring her mouth with a wild ferocity.

The wet smack of my cock overloading the tight confines of her pussy grew more frequent and louder. My balls slapped hard against her ass with each thrust.

My cock pounded into her.

Kash moaned loudly as her climax claimed her, her body tensing up, her fingernails digging deeply into my back.

“That’s it, baby.” I groaned into her mouth. “All mine, even your orgasms.”

“Yes!” she moaned against my mouth, ending on a high-pitched cry as her pussy clenched around my cock, spasming and shuddering. Her orgasm flooded her body. It was so powerful that the orgasm also radiated through *my* body.

A primal groan ripped from my throat, and my hips jolted forward. “Kash!”

Her pussy milked my cock, sending me crashing over the edge and cumming into her with a fierce groan. Hot semen shot out from my cock in thick white strands into her pussy.

I held her close as the waves of pleasure pulsed through us both in the form of deep throated moans. I gripped her ass so hard my nails might have drawn blood.

I slumped forward, my lips still pressed against hers, our breaths mingling and becoming one. My entire body trembled slightly as her body quaked.

Kash broke the kiss, resting her head against my shoulder. “Oh...my...God.”

She slowly caressed my back, slipping her hands up and down and calming me.

*There. The jealousy is gone.*

The musk of our sex lingered in the air, mingling with the smell of salty sweat.

*So illogical. She is mine and will forever be mine.*

I raised my head and gazed down at her

“Santino, I don’t know what I did to get punished with your cock this time.” Kash panted next to me. “But...I won’t lie...I damn sure will do it again.”

A dark throaty laugh rolled out of me.

I enjoyed the sensation of the warm, sticky juices that coated my cock as I thrust deeper into that tight pussy and raised an eyebrow and smirked. “Did you like that?”

“I loved it,” she breathed out, panting as her body trembled around me.

I licked my lips. “Then, I will punish you again and again.”





# Chapter 12

## Gangster Stylist

### Kashmere

*The Last Dance* was the epitome of Paradise City bridal chic. They housed the finest in luxury bridal couture fashion. They had every gown one could imagine—edgy and minimalist to airy and ethereal, silks to lace. There were sleek and simple dresses. Then, there were jewel adorned, fairytale gowns complete with regal accessories. Some displayed hand-detailed accents, while others boasted a vintage-inspired design.

Pricing ranged from \$20,000 to well over \$100,000.

And the shop itself was a monstrous size. They had two lobbies, five show rooms, and ten private suites where the staff greeted hopeful brides and their friends with complimentary drinks on arrival.

Presently, I stood in one of their lavish private suites surrounded by an unending sea of gowns. Mirrors lined the walls from floor to ceiling, creating an infinite reflection of the room and its contents.

*How am I going to figure this out?*

I rummaged through the gowns on the rack, trying to find *the one*.

It was a dizzying array of gowns in an ocean of white, cream, and ivory.

Looking completely out of place, my and Santino's men scattered around the space with their one duty to guard me. I also had both my guns in their holsters. Gypsy wouldn't catch me off guard again. Next time I saw him, it would be *me* firing a gun into his forehead.

"You can try these too." Tomasso brought out a few rare gold gowns and then headed to the back for more gowns.

*Could I wear gold?*

They hung in front of me, taunting my eyes with their untouched beauty. They were like liquid sunbeams, glittering and shimmering.

*Which gown will be the perfect one for my wedding day?*

Heart pounding, I was paralyzed in place like a frightened rabbit, completely mesmerized by the magical scene that made me feel as though I had been transported into a fairytale.

Loudly sighing, Dima leaned against the wall with his big arms crossed over his chest and gazed at the mannequin next to him. “When you asked to meet, I expected to be talking in your office, not here among white lace and shimmering pearls.”

Three of his men stood by the door.

“Sorry, Dima, but unfortunately, I have to multi-task today.” I pulled out a strapless gown with a beaded bodice. “That means that you are helping me strategize how to get rid of my Coffin Cheater problem, *and* assisting me with picking my gown.”

“Marcelo’s men have blocked all roads surrounding the Coffin Cheaters’ mountain range, hoping to stop any supplies from going in there.”

“That’s assuming Marcelo is blocking the right roads.” I held up the strapless gown. “Do you like this one?”

“No. It is by far one of the ugliest gowns in here.”

“What?” I widened my eyes. “How?”

“Whoever designed it must have been heavily medicated. The beadwork is atrocious. The span of the fabric at the hips will make you look fat.”

“Well damn.” I placed the gown back on the rack. “Leave it to you to keep it real with not one bit of a chaser.”

“You asked for my opinion.”

“Unfortunately, I did.” I moved to the next pair of gowns. “What else is the Diamond Syndicate doing? Gypsy killed an innocent woman yesterday. He must be stopped—”

“Of course we have taken care of the funeral bills as well as provided the family with money—”

“We should give this to the police and have his face on TV screens.”

“I want to annoy Mayor Parks, but I think he could point this event at Diamond Syndicate business being that you were involved. I’m presently trying to put distance between myself and the Diamond Syndicate so this must be kept—”

“Dima, I don’t give two fucks about your candidate race. The Coffin Cheaters need to be destroyed. That means any way possible. Period.” I yanked out another gown and raised it in front of me. “What do you think about this one?”

Dima assessed it.

The white gown was long. The fabric was made of silk and it shimmered in the light. The beadwork was elaborate and intricate, each tassel and bead was probably hand sewn and carefully placed. There were even silver sequins along the back.

Dima twisted his face in disgust. “No.”

“What?” I looked back at it. “What’s wrong with this one?”

“Are you getting married or entering the Miss Paradise City pageant?”

“Damn.” I studied it. “Okay...I see the pageantry in it.”

“The problem is you are looking for a pretty gown instead of a *moment*.”

I put the gown back up. “A moment?”

“The wedding gown symbolizes a princess that is untouchable and pure transforming into a regal queen of perfection.” Dima lowered his arms and walked over to another rack. “These represent more of that symbol.”

“O-kay.” I left the rack I was at and went over to the one he stood by. “We have to figure out a way to get into the

Coffin Cheaters' valley. It is a goddamned shame that we haven't solved that puzzle by now."

"One would think that Chanel would have discovered it."

"Not one bit of information. Pedro hated her, and she hated him."

"That marriage was by far the biggest mistake in Killer Crows history."

I rolled my eyes. "That's right, Dima. Feel free to shit on my family as much as you need to."

Dima continued, "The people who thought the marriage was a good idea weren't even in the marriage."

I spotted one gown and was about to pull it off the rack.

"Absolutely not. Trashy, ugly, and unfit for someone of your quality." Dima frowned. "You're not taking this seriously."

"I am."

"Why are you even looking at white gowns, Kashmere?"

"You are the one that told me that these gowns were better."

"I said they represented the proper symbolism, I didn't say you should pick them."

"Dima, I'm about to shoot you."

"Death would be better than being surrounded by these god-awful gowns." Dima stomped off to a rack on the other side of the room.

That rack had tons of colorful gowns.

"There is nothing traditional about you, Kashmere." He pulled out a breathtaking red gown. The dress's bodice was embroidered with red gems. Its material appeared to be silk, but it was so bright red, it reminded me of blood.

For some reason, that made me smile.

"Hmmm." I headed that way. "I can't believe I'm listening to you, but...this is the best one I've seen so far."

“People call me the smartest man in the world.”

“No one says that.” I grabbed the gown from him. “This is so nice.”

Dima perused the other gowns and pulled out a few more. “One would think that a Killer Crow would wear black or red for their wedding, not white.”

“Black?” I blinked. “Could I really wear black?”

“It is *your* wedding.”

“Sure, but I should follow tradition.”

Dima glared at me. “Should you? If you do that, then you will trip over them.”

I parted my lips.

He studied me. “Is that how you are leading? By tradition?”

“Well...I’m trying...I mean...I did kill half of my Board so I’m not fully following the rules.”

“You’re the leader. Do what you want and hope that it is the best.” He handed me several black gowns. They weighed my arms down. He continued to look through others. “I need you to step up with the Killer Crows and do a lot this year. I want Marcelo and Lei to be impressed.”

I placed all of the heavy gowns over a chair to the side of me. “Why do you want me to impress them?”

“This is it.” Dima lovingly gazed at one black gown. “Yes. Beautiful. Gorgeous.”

“That *is* nice.” I held out my hands to grab it.

“No. I’m keeping this one for Rose.” He put that one over his arm.

“What the fuck?”

“She should be wearing yellow, but she should have options—”

“Who the hell is Rose?”

“My soon-to-be fiancé. I plan to propose to her a week after your wedding.” He grabbed more gowns and put them over his arm. “She would look nice in red too.”

“Eh.” I held my hands to the side. “Dima, you can’t be hoarding bridal gowns for a woman who you don’t even know if you’re marrying—”

“I just told you I’m proposing. It’s not like I would let her say no.” Dima walked over to his men and gave the gowns to them. “Put these in the Phantom.”

“Dude, are you going to buy those?”

“Tell the store owner that they’re going with me.”

I frowned.

He pointed to the gowns on the chair. “Red would be good, but consider black also.”

I glanced at them. “Why?”

“It was custom in Roman Catholic traditions for a Spanish bride to wear a black gown paired with a veil, called a mantilla. The black gown symbolized the bride’s devotion to her husband until death, and ensured her loyalty.”

“Oh.” I looked back at him. “That’s deep.”

Dima leaned his head to the side. “Do you plan to be devoted to this Santino until death?”

“I do.”

“Then, forget about red and go for black.” He crossed those big arms over his chest.

I rubbed my head. Dima had my mind all over the place.

“Okay.” I lowered my hand. “First of all, who is Rose?”

“A woman that I am in love with. We have a cat named Barbara Whiskers. She lives with me.”

“The cat?”

“And the woman.”

I thought back to what he had said earlier. “Why do I need to impress Lei and Marcelo?”

“Because if I win the mayoral race, you will be in charge.”

I froze. “What?”

“Rubies.”

I blinked. “Rubies?”

“They would be perfect with the black bridal gown. Rubies are the gemstones of passion, and they would be a further nod to Killer Crows.”

“Dima, can you focus on one topic at a time?”

“I can’t. I’m bored and ready to go.” He scanned the space. “Marcelo’s men will continue to block presumed roads going into the Coffin Cheaters’ valley. I have a small army, serving as additional security for your wedding. Once we know how to get into the valley, all of the Diamond Syndicate’s people—North, South, East, and West—will be geared up and ready to destroy the Coffin Cheaters.”

I swallowed. “Perfect.”

“Your wedding will be safe.”

“Thank you.”

He targeted me with an intense gaze. “Once you’re married you will focus on strengthening Killer Crows and making sure that your new husband doesn’t come for other Syndicate territory.”

I tensed.

“That is your promise to me.” Dima pointed my way. “The election happens in a year which gives me time to soften Marcelo to your leadership. Plus, you will make an effort to be nice to him and the South.”

I stifled my groan.

“Then, I win and you take control of the Syndicate throne like Romeo and Chanel would have wanted.”



My eyes watered at the mention of my siblings. “You think they would have wanted that?”

“Of course.” Dima placed his hands in his pockets. “Do you understand my plan?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Dima pulled out his tiny notebook and scribbled something down.

Tomasso arrived with more gowns from the back. “Okay. Just a few more choices to select from.”

A bell sounded.

I glanced over my shoulder.

Dane entered. “Sorry to interrupt, Kash. Mrs. Tina will be arriving shortly. She also wanted to help you with finding a gown.”

“I’m cool with it.” My heart warmed. “That’s nice of her.”

Dane checked his watch. “Rue is bringing over your cousins and they will be here soon.”

“And Merik?”

“Roscoe and he were up all night drinking and laughing about good times.”

I grinned.

“Merik asked if he could take today off to apparently continue to sleep next to the toilet.”

“Wow. Quite a night?”

Tomasso parted his lips. “Who is Mrs. Tina?”

“That is the mother of Romeo and Chanel.”

Tomasso stepped back. “I thought both of your parents were dead.”

Dane winked at me and headed out the suite.

“They are. I’m the daughter of my father’s *second* wife. Romeo and Chanel are from his first wife.” I shrugged. “We’re

all family so we don't introduce each other as half-siblings or anything like that. *Half* never existed in our eyes."

Dima added, "The Killer Crows also never liked Kashmere's mother. They all preferred the first wife, which is Tina. Therefore, they basically ignored the second wife and Kashmere."

I turned his way and glared. "Thank you, Dima for that additional information that no one asked for. Would you like to add more gossip about Killer Crows?"

"Oh." Dima nodded and turned to Tomasso. "When Kashmere's mother had her, many whispered she wasn't even Mr. Jones child. Too dark. Hair too kinky. Mother told me that —"

"What?" I shook my head. "That's not true. No one ever questioned my being my father's child?"

"I disagree." Dima held up one finger. "I was just a kid, but there was tons of gossip about it for a long time. I think it ended around the time I was in junior high which would put you in elementary school. Mother came home one night raving to my uncles about how your father had shot three men dead for questioning if you were his child."

*I...didn't know that?*

I froze.

Dima nodded. "After those men died, people kept their thoughts to themselves, and were forbidden to whisper about it."

"I never...ever...knew anything about this."

Dima shrugged. "I always found the dynamics interesting. When we were in high school, Romeo used to tell me how he hated the way your family treated you."

My heart warmed. "Really? He said that?"

"Chanel too. She thought that if their mother had you, then things would have been different for you."

I blinked. "But...some people loved my mother."

Dima shook his head. “I don’t believe so. Not according to Romeo, Chanel, and even my mother. You must remember that *your* mother was the other women.”

*Say what now?*

“Wow.” I edged back. “Now that’s not true.”

As a kid, I had never put two and two together when it came to grown folks’ business. For as long as I could remember, my mother and father had been married and I had a brother and sister. Being that my father had full custody, Mrs. Tina always came around to see Romeo and Chanel, and when she did, she always was nice to me.

Tomasso noticed Dima’s men holding several gowns. “Are they keeping those for you, Kashmere?”

“I’m taking them.” Dima put his notebook in his pocket.

Tomasso quirked his brows. “Excuse me?”

Dima placed his view on me. “Are we done?”

“Well, you have completely shocked me with your plan for the future, disrupted my thoughts on my childhood, and also taken some gowns, I would hope you are finished.”

“Good.” Dima gave me an awkward salute and headed off.

His men followed, carrying the gowns.

Tomasso pointed at them. “Are they really taking those gowns?”

I let out a long breath. “Just put it on my account. Arguing with Dima, once he has his mind set on something is a complete waste of time.”

“Al-righty.” He turned to the gowns on the chair. “Red and black. Very interesting.”

“Yeah.” I grinned. “My gangster stylist thought it would be a good idea.”

“O-kay.” Tomasso pushed the new rack over to the side. “I have to rush over to Santino to make sure his tuxedo fitting is

going well. Also, several DeLucas have arrived early either for the wedding or war. Only God knows.”

“Oh. Who came?”

“Don Enzo is here with an army. Nicolo, Giovanni, Corso, Primo, Carmine—”

“I have no idea who any of them are.”

Tomasso gave me a sad smile. “You will soon. DeLuca men are not the invisible sort they are big, dangerous, and imposing. And soon they will be your family.”

My nerves flared.

“Alright.” Tomasso clapped his hands. “Let’s have you go to the dressing room in the back and try everything on. Pick your favorite five gowns so that you can model them off for Mrs. Tina and everyone else.”



# Chapter 13

## The Fitting

### Kashmere

The bridal dressing room was down the hall from my private suite. The enclosed space had a white door. A mural of brides decorated the four walls. In the back, a small space was curtained off with silver drapes. And the whole space smelled of a summer garden—lilacs and roses, sunflowers and lavender.

Two women had carried gowns into the space and hung them on racks near the drapes.

Another woman appeared with a silver tray stacked with a steaming cup of tea, a bottle of sparkling water, and a glass of champagne. She left it on the table near the door and disappeared with the other women.

Then, there was silence.

I went to the white door, locked it, and placed my guns by the tray.

*Okay. I'm really going to pick one.*

I unbuttoned my shirt and placed it on the table.

Next, I took off my shoes and my pants.

When I looked at myself in the mirror, a woman who looked both nervous and happy stared back at me.

*I'm getting married.*

I went toward the drapes and picked the only white gown that I liked. The rest were red and black.

My fingers tingled with anticipation as I touched the edge of the gown and traced the white silk with my fingertips. I had never worn anything so fine before.

*I'll check this one out first, even though I doubt this is the one.*

Dima's thinking really had seeped into my mind.

Therefore, I had tons of red and black gowns to try out.

With a deep breath, I stepped into the white gown, buttoning up each clasp with trembling hands.

*Let's see.*

I made my way over to the mirror, feeling a surge of adrenaline rush through me as I took a glimpse of my reflection. The white gown contrasted sharply against my brown skin, and suddenly I was filled with an intense sense of anticipation.

*I'm really fucking doing this. I'm going to be Santino's wife.*

The thought sent shivers up my spine, and I felt my whole body flush with warmth.

Any doubts vanished from my mind, as if they never existed. That was the distant past. It was the future that mattered now.

My heart pounded in my chest.

"Is this the one?" I did a slow turn. The gown flowed and twisted, swirling around me in a flurry of grace and beauty.

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine I would be doing something like this.

*But will Santino like it too?*

Breathing in and out, I strolled over to the door, unlocked the knob, and opened it.

*No.*

Gypsy loomed menacingly on the other side of the door. Blood dripped from his hands.

Terror shot through me like a bolt of lightning.

Fast, I sprinted for the table, desperate for my guns, but he moved too quickly, catching me before I could move more

than three feet.

I fought against his hold and screamed.

He clamped his hand over my mouth and dragged me away from the door. That was when I caught my dead guards laying on the floor with their throats sliced.

“Nice dress.” Gypsy used his foot to shut the door.

It slammed shut.

I screamed behind his hand, but it was muffled.

A knock sounded.

Gypsy gripped me tighter. “Come in.”

The door opened. A long-haired man ducked his head in. “We’ve got all the women duct taped and tied up.”

“The guards in front of the store?”

“Dead.”

Panic seized my heart.

“Good work. Stay outside the door.”

“Okay, boss.” The man left and closed the door.

*Fuck this.*

I frantically jerked my body, desperately trying to break free of his iron grip. In a final, desperate attempt, I lashed out with all my strength and kicked him square in the shin.

“Shit!” His grasp slackened momentarily, allowing me to pull back and punch him in the chest.

He exhaled sharply, his body going limp for a moment before he quickly recovered, grabbing me by the arm and yanking me back to him. My body pressed hard against his chest.

“You fucking asshole!” I pounded one fist at his arm, but my blows had no effect.

He gazed down and licked his lips. “I love it when you fight back.”



“Good, then let me go so I can fight you some more.”

“Okay, Kash.” He hurled me across the room. The force of his throw knocked my breath away.

Screams ripped from my throat as I slammed into the silver drapes. They fell down around me.

Desperately, I struggled to regain my footing, all the while hindered by the cumbersome white gown that kept tangling around my legs.

Once I recovered, I looked his way.

I glanced towards him and saw the glint of a steel knife in his hand.

*Oh fuck.*

My heart sank.

I gazed at my guns that lay on the table behind him.

*God, please let me get to them. Please.*

“I told you to truly think about the decision.” Gypsy sneered. “That gown tells me that you chose wrong.”

“Gypsy, you have to move on and let me go.”

“Is it that easy for you?”

“It’s been years.”

“Yet, still I miss you.” Rage blazed in his eyes. “But do you miss me?”

“Put the knife away and leave.”

He yelled, “Do you miss me?!”

I trembled. “Y-yes.”

“Yes?”

“Sure.”

“Then, come here.”

“Put the knife down.”

“Are you scared that I would hurt you?”

“Yes.”

“You really think I could?”

I edged back. “Yes.”

“Why *him*, Kash?”

My bottom lip quivered.

“Answer me!”

“Gypsy, please don’t do this.”

Fast, he charged towards me.

I quickly drove my fist into his jaw and felt the reverberation of pain in my fingers.

His head jerked back wildly.

I twisted around him and raced for the table.

He grabbed me by the hair and yanked me down to the floor with brutal force. My scalp burned from his tight grasp. The gown tangled along my legs.

My heart boomed in my ears.

Still holding me by my hair, he kneeled on the ground and hovered over me. “What was that, Kash? One would think that you are trying to get away from me.”

“Gypsy, please.” My voice trembled. “This isn’t you.”

“How would you know?” He lowered the knife and placed the sharp blade against my throat.

I shivered in fear, knowing he could take my life in seconds.

*God, help me.*

“You’ve been avoiding me all these years. You think I’m stupid?”

“N-no.”

“How long have you known this guy?”

“Gypsy, don’t hurt me. If you really loved me you wouldn’t do this.”

He slipped the blade down to my cleavage.

Terror vibrated through me as I felt the cold steel against my skin.

His voice was low and menacing. “How long have you known him?”

My breath came in short, ragged gasps. “Don’t hurt me, Gypsy.”

“Not long. Right?” He slid the knife down to the top of my gown and began slicing it. “That is okay.”

“What are you doing?”

“I have plans for you.” He cut more of the gown’s bodice and exposed my bra. “By the time I’m done, you’ll be the old Kash that I remember, but obedient.”

Fear ripped through me, making my body shake. “You can’t do this.”

“Why not?” He continued to slice away at more of the gown. “Your *fiancé* is blocks away, trying on fancy little tuxedos. I’ve killed the men surrounding this store and brought their bodies inside.”

He kept slicing the fabric of the dress away. “I can do whatever I want with you.”

*No, you can't. I will figure out a way to kill you. Trust me on that.*

Then, he threw the knife with a force so powerful it cleaved through the air like a lightning bolt and slammed against the wall.

*Fuck.*

Taking advantage of his momentary distraction, I lunged for him, clawing and scratching at his eyes with every ounce of strength I had.

He reeled back, narrowly avoiding my grasp, and yanked my head backwards with a sickening twist. And then, he lowered to me, burying his face into the curve of my neck,

putting his lips on my neck. His hot breath steamed down my neck.

“Get off me!” I fought against him, jabbing and punching, thrashing and kicking.

“I missed you.” He sank his teeth into my collarbone.

A vicious clamping pain drilled through me as I screamed in agony. “Ah!”

My vision blurred.

I blinked through the pain.

When he finally took his teeth away, he raised his face above me. Blood dotted his teeth.

“I’m going to put my mark all over you.” He slid his free hand to my bra and wrenched it down. My breasts spilled out.

“No. No. No.” My eyes watered. “Don’t do this, Gypsy. Please, don’t.”

“Why not?” He grasped one breast and squeezed it hard.

I squirmed under his hand. “You do this and I’ll never forgive you.”

“And what about my forgiveness?” With my breast firmly in his hand, he leaned his face close to mine and licked the blood off his teeth. “Have you ever hoped to get my forgiveness?”

“Y-yes.”

“You killed my baby and then threw me away like I was trash.” He seized my nipple and twisted it hard.

“Ow!”

“Did you ever feel bad about that?”

I cried out, “Yes!”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I felt so guilty for all these years.” I whimpered. Tears streamed down my cheeks. “T-that’s why I didn’t just run to some other guy. I-I didn’t think I deserved love.”

He let go of my nipple and then began to roll it between his fingers. “That’s what I assumed until weeks ago when *he* began to be seen around you.”

“Stop it!” With a sudden surge of strength, I forcefully shoved his hand away. He retaliated by gripping my hair harder.

A pained cry escaped me.

“You planned to wear white for him, but you’re no virgin.” He slid his hands down the shredded front of my gown and then plunged his hand inside the ripped end, groping his way closer and closer to my panties.

I punched at him.

He jerked away, but still shoved his hand down the gown.

“Stop it!” I struggled against him, punching and writhing.

His face took a hit or two, but still he was able to yank my panties away.

“No—no!” I screamed.

He gripped my hair again, yanking me so hard my neck ached.

Pushing through the pain, I kicked and arched away from him, but he was so strong. He put his hand between my legs and tried to insert a finger into me.

Screaming, I lashed out at him again.

“Fuck!” He had to give up. Wrenching his hands out of my gown, he grabbed my throat and dug his fingers into it until I was gasping for oxygen.

“Stop fighting me!” he hissed. “I’ve waited forever for this moment. Don’t ruin it!”

The thunderous boom of gunfire sounded off in the distance.

“What?” He widened his eyes in terror, turning his head slowly toward the door in anticipation of what awaited him on the other side. “What the fuck?”

I capitalized on his fright and lunged forward, digging my nails deep into one of his eyes.

“Aah!” A piercing scream erupted from his lips as he released my hair, and fell backwards, clutching his ruined eye.

I punched him hard in the crotch.

He doubled over.

I spun around like a raging tornado and jumped up off the floor, the momentum of my movement propelling me forward with enough force to make me stumble.

*Please, God!*

The gown snagged at my feet, almost tripping me.

Gypsy roared behind me. “Kash!”

I didn’t look back. Instead, I dove for the table, crashing into it with a thud, as my guns clattered to the floor.

Gypsy grabbed my foot, but I was still able to quickly pick up my guns.

*Thank you, Jesus!*

I gripped Blossom in my left hand and Bubbles in my right.

Gypsy’s grip tightened around my foot and yanked me to him.

“Fuck you!” I whirled around and pulled the trigger. Bullets zipped through the air, hitting him in the chest and face. And still I kept pulling the trigger, filling him up and leaving no chance that he could survive. “Die, you son of a bitch! Die!”

“K-kash...” Gypsy jerked, contorted in agony, and fell back as more bullets ripped through his body. The stench of blood and gunpowder filled my nostrils, coating my tongue, my throat, my soul.

My vision blurred, but I couldn’t blink. I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t do anything but keep pulling the trigger.

Gypsy lay dead on the ground.

No more bullets left my guns, but I kept on aiming at his lifeless body and pulling that trigger.

**Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.**

The door burst off its hinges, crashing against the wall.

In a frenzied rush, Santino raced in. Blood splattered his face. His tuxedo was torn. He wildly gazed at Gypsy's dead body and then he rushed to me.

That was the moment I dropped my empty guns and fell into his embrace.

He lifted me up, squeezing me hard against his body.

I buried my head into his shoulder and sobbed.





# Chapter 14

## Vengeance

### Santino

I scooped Kash up in my arms and rushed her out of there. Never had I felt so helpless and full of rage.

*I should have been there. This never should have happened. There should have been thousands of my men protecting her.*

Once I got Kashmere home, I ran the warmest bath for her and bathed her body, whispering promises of love with every gentle stroke of the sponge. Minutes later, I dried her skin, wrapped her in rich red silk pajamas, and carried her to our bed.

There, I lay beside her and held her close until finally, after hours of comforting, she drifted off to sleep in my embrace.

Slowly, I slipped out of bed and made sure Rue and Dane would remain by the door.

*Now it is time to kill them all.*

Roscoe and Merik met me on the way out of the mansion, armed with guns and ready to kill for what had happened to Kash.

Dima showed up with his people. Marcelo and Lei met up with us on the way back to the bridal shop.

Unfortunately for the Coffin Cheaters, Don Enzo and all the main DeLucas were already in town for my wedding. Gypsy had picked the wrong day to fuck with my queen.

She had been wronged and there would be severe consequences.

A wave of righteous hatred swept through me, igniting my soul with a pure and burning fury. The flames of vengeance licked at my insides, quickly boiling over into an insatiable

desire to hurt those who had wronged me. My veins coursed with that fierce energy, and I could feel my hands trembling with anticipation.

Nothing could contain the molten hate surging through my body, and I swore to exact my punishment on whomever had dared cross me.

Vengeance guided the rest of my day, and it was such a beautiful thing, a purity of hate and rage. The need to hurt and kill was a hot ball of molten fury dwelling deep in my chest.

First, we gathered Gypsy's corpse and his dead biker cronies' bodies sprawled around the bridal shop, loaded them on helicopters, flew off, and dumped all those corpses into the valley.

Coffin Cheaters shot at the helicopters, but it was waste of bullets.

Next, we poured gasoline across the valley and shot bazookas to ignite the flames. And in that moment, white-hot anger incinerated my moral compass.

Fire ripped through valley, spreading fast and forcing the Coffin Cheaters and their families to flee. Clouds of smoke rose in the air.

Cries of terror echoed through the mountains.

Towards the bottom of the mountains, stone split and rock cracked. Secret tunnels revealed themselves, mysterious pathways that had been carved into the mountainside and hidden with deceptive slices of stone.

We let the women and children race by us and escape.

For the men, bullets rained down from the Diamond Syndicate and the DeLucas. We were a deadly storm, colored in yellow, blue, green, and my family in dark suits.

"All of you go to hell!" I reveled in their fear and pain, sorrow and regret. I laughed as they fell to the ground one by one, spilling blood everywhere.

I roared and shot some more, tasting thick vengeance on my tongue.

A deafening roar filled the air as the Coffin Cheaters were mowed down by our armies.

Everywhere there were scattered and broken bodies, littering the ground.

Meanwhile, fire devoured the valley, incinerating buildings, shacks, and mountainsides until everything was engulfed in a sea of furious flames.

When it was all said and done, every male Coffin Cheater was dead, and the valley was nothing but ash.

But it still wasn't enough.

I yearned for more revenge, more people to kill.

*He hurt her.*

My gut churned remembering how broken her spirit was when I found her. Never did I want to see her so devastated again. If that meant killing everyone in this fucking city, I would.

My men turned to me, waiting for the next order.

My blood boiled with rage.

*Who else should die today?*

Bits of ash stuck to Dima's skin as he made his way toward me.

Wild with rage, I glared at him.

He stopped in front of me. "What more can we do to make this right for Kash?"

I clenched my jaw. "Who else has harmed her?"

Dima gazed around. "I believe all of her enemies are dead."

An angry glint flashed in my eyes. "And what about the Diamond Syndicate?"

"We stood strong for her today." Dima put his view back on me. "There is no question that we are loyal to her and the Killer Crows."

“Gypsy should have never gotten that close to her.”

“That is your fault just as well as mine.”

“What the fuck did you say?” I charged for him.

Leonardo and my other men jumped between us.

Dima remained where he was. “I didn’t intend to disrespect.”

“I will fucking kill you!” I shoved Leonardo aside and got out of his hold to have three more of my men grab me.

“Santino!” Don Enzo roared behind me.

I gritted my teeth and gave up with fighting against my men, yet I still didn’t turn around to face him.

Don Enzo’s voice pierced the smoky air like a sharp blade. “We’re done, Santino. Go home to your fiancé.”

\* \* \*

Late that night, I returned home. Kashmere was still in a deep slumber, exhausted from the mental turmoil and horrific experience.

I relieved Rue and Dane and then took a shower to get rid of all the blood and ash. Warm water poured around me, washing away some of the grime.

Still, I scrubbed my body frantically, desperate to get rid of all memories of this day.

But how could I forget?

Tears streamed down my face as I thought back to that vision of Kashmere from earlier today—the tattered white fabric of her bridal gown clinging to her body, her exposed breasts adorned with bruises, her hair in a tangled mess, and two guns trembling in her hands. That image would be forever burned into my memory.

I cried for the first time in a very long time. And those tears I shed could not quench the fires of rage swirling in my soul. I doubted that it would ever burn out.

*More people should die over this.*

In the shower, my cries sliced the air like sharp blades. I slammed my fists against the wet tiled wall, needing to hit something. Blood sprouted around my knuckles.

*I want to kill more people. No one should live due to what happened to my queen.*

The valley's chaos and destruction left in its fiery wake would never be enough. Not enough people had been made to pay for Gypsy's crimes against Kash.

I wanted the world to suffer.

But, I couldn't think of who else to kill, who else to make pay.

All I could do was finish the shower, dry off, put on silk red pajama pants, crawl into bed, and hold Kashmere tightly in my arms.

And instantly her warmth radiated through to my body. It anchored my darkness and even swallowed up some of my vengeance. With every breath, I drank from her soothing energy. Her presence reassured me that even in the midst of despair, there was still hope for our future.

A fierce determination burned within me as I held my beloved queen close, swearing to myself that no harm would ever come to her again. I would lay down my life, if need be, to keep her safe and protected.

Soon my mind quieted as I tried to go to sleep.

And in that silence a hushed whisper came from the metal shuttered balcony doors. "Santino."

I raised my head and gazed at the blocked balcony opening.

The sound came again. "Santino. Come to us."

I should have been scared and shaking, but I had researched their tales of sorrow. My heart ached for the atrocities they endured.

The lingering ghosts of Crownsville filled the lake with an oppressive darkness, a reminder to this city of the inhumane

cruelties that had been inflicted upon them for no damned reason. The ghosts refused to be forgotten and terrorized those who dared to venture near the lake, a walking testament to their endurance and strength in the face of tragedy.

I appreciated that a lot.

But what would they want with me?

“Santino.”

I shouldn't have...but I quietly left the bed. My bare feet padded against the carpet as I crept over to the balcony doors. The metal curtains blocked the view and there was absolutely no way to move them.

Last time I tapped at the curtains and rattled the shutters, light green light had spilled from the top corners of the metal as if someone on the other side of the balcony had shone a green flashlight in my direction.

“Santino.”

I gently knocked at the metal.

A strange, sharp noise cut through the other side of the metal shutters.

I raised my eyebrows.

The green glow brightened at the corners. Then, something rustled on the other side. “Santino.”

“What do you want from me?” I gritted my teeth.

The warm air chilled around me.

“Come to us.”

A smarter man would have gone back in the bed and pretended not to hear the voices. But I had swam in death today. My soul, my morality smothered in that fire that I set upon that village.

“Santino...come...”

I gazed at the metal shutters. “I was told that you play terrifying games with white guests that stay on the property.”

The voice's whispery voice sharpened. "Not...with Santino."

"Sure." I formed my lips into a dark grin. "What would make *me* so special?"

"You...are the beginning...to the end."

"The end of what?"

"The end...of us. Our final vengeance."

I blinked. "I don't understand."

"Come."

"Where?"

"Outside."

I gave that shutter a sad smile. "Even if I wanted to, Kashmere's men would shoot me in the leg before letting me out the front or back door. So protective of me, she actually ordered them to do it."

*My queen loves me so much.*

It suddenly occurred to me that we still had never spoken those magical *three words*, even though we had surely shown each other through our actions how much we loved each other.

*I will have to tell her I love her immediately.*

"Go to the library."

I widened my eyes.

"Place your palm on the front of the Grandfather clock and walk through."

My heartbeats pounded in my chest. "There's a secret passage there?"

"Come."

Then, everything went silent, and the green light disappeared.





# Chapter 15

## Dead Souls

### Santino

I shouldn't have gone. I should have went back to bed and lay next to Kashmere. Only a mad man would go somewhere at the order of ghosts.

And clearly I was a mad man because I was seized by an insane impulse—an overpowering force—to obey the phantom voice that had called out to me on the balcony. Perhaps, it was because I was so mystified and completely consumed by the eerie mystery entwined with the voice.

I stepped out of the room in only my red silk pajama bottoms. No shirt. No shoes. No common sense.

I left the bedroom before I could further think of the consequences. Outside Kashmere's men stood up and began to walk with me.

I waved them away. "I'm only going to the library."

One Black man stepped forward. A grim expression covered his face. "We must still walk you there. Chairman's orders. It is night..."

There was no need to finish the sentence. We both knew that he was referring to the ghosts.

I nodded and walked on. My heart raced as I hit the staircase, hurried down, and got to the library. Five Killer Crows followed behind me.

Once at the door, I turned to them. "You will not need to go into the library with me."

Another man spoke, "Are you sure, sir?"

"After today, I need privacy."

He sighed and stepped back. "We will be out here."

I entered the library, turned on the light, and closed the door. My gaze went to the grandfather clock that stood against the far wall.

Slowly I walked over and studied it further.

The dark mahogany wood of the clock had been carved in a very old-fashioned style that people rarely made anymore. The clock's face was a cream-colored finish decorated with gold numbers and red letters. A gold pendulum swung from side to side and the ticks almost seemed a heartbeat.

I thought back to what the ghosts had told me.

*“Place your palm on the front of the Grandfather clock and walk through.”*

Gritting my teeth, I did as instructed. I slowly placed my trembling palm on the clock.

As soon as my skin made contact, a shiver of dread ran up my spine, and the steady ticking of the clock suddenly ceased. The pendulum stopped mid-swing as if time had suddenly frozen in its tracks.

With a loud groan, the front of the clock disengaged and creaked open like a door, exposing a dark tunnel inside the clock.

*Jesus. What mad genius put this here?*

I ducked my head down and entered the tunnel, creeping forward. My bare feet smoothed against the cold wooden floor that rattled under my weight. My footsteps echoed and the lack of light made it difficult to see.

*I should have brought my gun.*

But what would it have done, but given me a false sense of security? How did one kill something that was already dead?

I continued forward and sniffed the air. The smell of dead roots filled the tunnel.

*When was this built?*

Enclosed within the darkness, I walked for five minutes until I couldn't go forward anymore.

*What now?*

I raised my hands and touched what was in front of me. Wood pressed against my palms. I slid my hands down and felt the knob on the right.

*Okay. Another door.*

I turned the knob and pushed it open.

*Outside.*

The night sky hovered above.

Cool air brushed against my skin, but that wasn't what gave me chills.

I froze in the doorway, unable to comprehend the supernatural sight before me.

Hundreds and hundreds of translucent people stood in front of me—men, women, and children. A green glowing hue outlined their bodies. They were surreal shadows of humanity.

Their images flickered in and out like a mirage of wavering spectral figures. It was hard to make out good details of them, but through the flickering I noticed them wearing tattered and charred clothes from a long-ago fashion.

I could not move or speak. All I could do was remain rooted in the doorway while the acrid scent of burning wood and hair swarmed into my nostrils. My lungs burned with each breath while terror gripped my heart.

And then one of them stepped forward, seeming to cross some invisible barrier between the living and dead. The air crackled around them.

This ghost was a petite Ebony figure. The brim of her feathered cowboy hat cast a deep shadow over her piercing gaze. She was clothed in a tattered white buttoned shirt and faded brown pants. Two guns cinched tightly to her thighs. Her neck was wrapped in a colorful bandana, billowing in the wind like a warning flag.

*Who is this?*

And then, she spoke in that hushed whisper, “You came... Santino.”

I shivered.

“Come closer.”

“W-why?”

“You must get the last key.”

I swallowed.

“Santino.” She held her flickering hand out to me.  
“Come.”

“The key to what?”

“Our vengeance.”

“And...what would I unlock the key with?”

Cackling and screeching rippled along the hundreds of ghosts behind her.

*Are they laughing at me?*

A few flickered faster as they doubled over and let out this maddening chuckle.

But the woman in the cowboy hat didn't laugh. She kept her hand out. “You will not open it.”

“Then...who will?”

“Give the key to Lei.”

I widened my eyes. “Lei?”

The ghost flickered as she nodded her head. “He will know what to do with it...one day.”

Was it odd that Lei being involved with this gave me strength? That eerie realization gave me confidence that this was not a game, but some serious mission for the ghosts. One that they could not do without humans.

And being that I planned on living on this property among them for the rest of my life, I thought it would not be a bad idea to be on their good side.

“Okay.” I took one step outside. “You will not kill me?”

“If I wanted to kill you,” the ghost tipped her hat. “Then you would have already been dead.”

I trembled as I walked forward. “Where is the key?”

She turned around. “I will take you to it.”

*This is such a fucking bad idea.*

I completely stepped outside. Grass and dirt stuck to my bare feet.

*If they don't truly kill me, Kashmere will. What was I thinking?*

Like an idiot I followed her.

All the hundreds of ghosts separated, making a clear path for us to walk down.

*Is she their...leader?*

She spoke, “Do not forget...give it to Lei.”

“I won't forget.”

I walked away from the house, in the midst of glowing green ghosts who didn't taunt me. They simply watched me walk by them with an odd curiosity.

I shivered. “Who are you?”

The ghost turned and smiled at me. “I am no one.”

I continued to follow her to Dream Lake. When we got there, she went right and walked near the water for several feet.

I glanced over my shoulder.

The hundreds and hundreds of ghosts remained by the house and kept all their gazes on me.

I got closer to her. “W-will they hurt me?”

“Not if you continue to do right by Kashmere.”

I blinked. “You know her? Are you related? Are you a Killer Crow or Jones or—”

“Here.” She stopped and pointed by a tree that was several feet from the outline of the lake. Two crows sat on a low bench and watched me. She nodded. “Dig over there.”

“Dig?”

“The key will be there.”

And so I hurried over to the tree and dug through the cool, wet soil with my hands. I ripped wildly at the earth, clawing through the dirt, grass, and roots. A brutal sense of urgency rose within me.

*The key. I must find the key.*

Soon my fingers hit something flat. I felt a surge of relief. But it wasn't metal. It was this thick wood.

Confused, I pulled out a flat wooden dagger. “This isn't a key.”

Suddenly, the ghost sounded right behind me. “Give it to Lei.”

Still gripping the wooden dagger in my hand, I rose and slowly turned around.

She was inches in front of me. “Do. Not. Forget.”

The horrifying proximity of her presence was too much to bear.

I stumbled back, my foot suddenly caught in the jagged hole I had carved in the ground moments before. I felt a sharp crack as my head collided with the unforgiving trunk of the tree.

Before I could catch my breath, I was tumbling further backwards, playing a dizzying game of catch with gravity until I found myself lying flat on my back.

Pain bit through me.

I closed my eyes and groaned.

A soft voice sounded over me. “Santino. Santino.”

*God, my head hurts.*

Keeping my eyes closed, I rubbed my head.

“Santino!” a woman screamed. “Santino!”

I opened my eyes, and to my shock. It was morning. Sunlight sat in the sky.

And over thirty Killer Crows headed my way with Dane, Rue, and Merik right in front of them.

“Santino!” Kashmere hurried ahead of the group and rushed over to me, still wearing her red pajamas.

I blinked. “It’s morning?”

“What the fuck were you doing out here?” She ran into my arms and fiercely held me. “How the hell did you get out here?”

Blinking my eyes, I was still so confused. I gazed around me.

Everyone else got to us.

Merik shook his head. “You are one lucky white boy. I’ll tell you that.”

Kashmere cried into my shoulder and held me tighter. “I told you not to go outside at night. Why did you do that?”

I felt the wooden dagger in my hand and looked down. “It’s still here.”

Kashmere leaned away from me and stared at me wildly. “What the hell? What happened? Are you okay?”

“Don’t worry.” I gazed around at all of the Killer Crows watching me. “The ghosts were nice.”

Merik laughed.

Rue nudged him with her elbow.

I raised the wooden dagger in the air and showed Kashmere. “This is the key.”

“Oh shit.” Merik laughed louder. “He lost his mind.”

Kashmere tried to get it. “Put that down. Whatever the ghosts said to you, ignore it.”

I moved the dagger out of her reach. “This is the key, and I’m supposed to give it to Lei.”

Merik stopped laughing.

Other Killer Crows whispered among themselves.

“What?” Kashmere shook her head. “Who told you that?”

“This ghost. She was a small woman in a cowboy hat. She had guns strapped to her thighs. Do you know who that is?”

“No.”

“Are you sure? Maybe we can check the book in the library—”

“Santino, don’t fucking come out here again!” Kashmere stepped back and rang her fists in the air. “And never listen to the ghosts!”

“They were nice to me. I think the ghosts and I are friends.”

“Holy fuck.” Merik shook his head. “We done made his ass go crazy.”

Kashmere pointed at me. “Don’t listen to them and put that key back in the dirt. You don’t know what sort of bad energy or whatever is on there—”

“They were nice. I’m listening to her.” I tucked the dagger in my pajama pants and headed back to the mansion. “I’m also giving this key to Lei.”

“A key?” Merik chuckled. “That shit looks like one of those ugly ass knives that Chanel used to carry around when she was little.”

Kashmere followed after me. “Do not give Lei anything, put it back or—”

“It is the key to their vengeance—”

“Who’s vengeance?” She got to my side.

“The ghosts.”

“Have you lost your mind, Santino?”



A maddening laugh left me. “Me? I didn’t bring the ghost here. I am only working with the environment that I have been put in.”

Kashmere got in front of me. “Do not come back out here like this.”

“I will if they ask me to—”

“You will not!” Kashmere’s voice cracked. “I woke up and didn’t see you in bed and my heart...”

I stopped walking and looked at her.

Her bottom lip quivered. “I can’t lose you too.”

I pulled her into my arms. “You will never lose me, Kash. I just had a little mission from the ghosts.”

She groaned in annoyance.

“I am sorry for giving you cause to worry for me.” I hugged her tighter.

“Santino, please—”

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine. I need you to not—”

“Today is our wedding.” I leaned away from her and gazed into those beautiful brown eyes. “Today, you will be my wife.”



# Chapter 16

## The Morning of the Wedding

### Kashmere

*Fucking crazy ass fiancé.*

I was still pissed with him, but thankful that he was okay.

I glanced his way. “Are you going to get rid of that wooden dagger?”

“When I see Lei, I will.”

I rolled my eyes. “What if it has bad spirits or something on it?”

“You mean like a haunted lake and tons of ghosts swarming the property at night?”

I frowned.

“Don’t worry. I trust her.”

“Her?”

“I’m going to call her Cowboy Ghost.”

“Oh my God.”

Merik snickered behind us. “Santino is going to keep things interesting around here.”

I let out a long breath.

We all headed back to the front of the mansion and bumped into thirty men, dressed in yellow suits and holding tons of garment bags.

*Now what?*

Santino eyed them. “What is this?”

Rue stepped forward. “Whatever it is, it has something to do with Dima.”

I crossed my arms over my chest. “Yes?”

One of them walked up to me and held out a red envelope. “Mr. Ivanov ordered us to bring these bags and his message to you. I am not to leave until you read it.”

“I see this day is already starting off as a hot mess.” I took the card and opened it. “What is Dima doing?”

“I just decided I wasn’t going to kill him.” Santino got closer to me to check it out. “Let’s hope he doesn’t change my thoughts.”

I pulled out a thick gold card with black letters. “At least he always has style and finesse.”

Santino frowned. “We’ll see. Nothing can bother you today.”

I looked at him. “You mean besides my fiancé going missing and playing in the dirt with ghosts?”

“Besides that.” He smirked. “Read the note aloud.”

**Dear Kash,**

**I wish I had not left you at the shop yesterday. It hurts to think about. It sickens my soul.**

**As soon as we heard, my mother flew seven hours with Rose to Paris to purchase as many designer red gowns as possible.**

**As you probably know by now, I remained to kill with your future husband, Santino, who I now approve of. He is a good shooter.**

**Rose and Mom only arrived less than an hour before this delivery.**

**I hope you choose one of these gowns.**

**I DO NOT want you to choose anything from *THAT* shop, but Rose told me that it is your choice, and I am not to bully you about it.**

**However, I hate the shop now. I bought the property this morning. At midnight, I will burn it down.**

**Romeo is gone. That means that I am your only living brother now.**

**Sincerely,**

***Dima***

Tears left my eyes, and I hadn't even known that I was crying.

Rue headed for them. "Okay, fellas. I'll show you where to put all the gowns."

Dane walked off. "I'll grab Tomasso. He wanted me to let him know as soon as Kash was done searching for Santino. He has all types of shit planned."

Merik nodded. "Eh, Tomasso is in the kitchen with Mom. They're both working with the caterers to make sure the menu is perfect."

Still, my body rocked with this odd sorrow. I rushed with wiping my tears.

Santino pulled me into his arms. "I love you."

I tensed. "What?"

"I love you." He leaned away and looked into my eyes. "Do you know that we have not said those words yet?"

"Things have happened so fast."

"Yet..." He licked his lips. "I really love you...so fucking much."

I shivered. "I love you too."

"Good. Pick a dress. I am ready to officially call you Mrs. DeLuca." He started to head off.

"Wait a minute." I sniffled and gazed at Santino. "What does Dima mean that he helped you kill?"

"Oh." He tucked that damn dirty wooden dagger into his pocket. "We ended the Coffin Cheaters."

I widened my eyes. "All of them?"

“We let women and children go, but that was it.” A wicked smirk spread across his face. “And the valley is nothing but ashes.”

“Oh shit.”

He leaned his head to the side. “Do you know why?”

“Why?”

“Because I love you, Kash.” He turned around and walked off.

*Oh. Shit.*

I stood there, completely stunned. When I woke up, I thought handling the Coffin Cheaters would still be on my to-do list.

More men in yellow marched up the grand steps of my estate with several more garment bags.

A convoy of white vans drove onto my property. There must have been thirty vehicles. Men jumped out, rushed to the back, opened the doors, and unloaded chairs and tables.

“Kashmere!” Tomasso yelled from the top of the steps. “What are you doing?! We must get you ready!”

“Oh...yeah.” I gripped Dima’s gold card and rushed up the steps. “I’m coming.”

“And Santino saw you this morning.” Tomasso held his hands at his face. “That is bad luck.”

“Well blame him. He went missing—”

“No more mishaps can happen this week or I will have a heart attack.” He gently took my hand and guided me away. “I have planned many things, my friend—funerals, baptisms, Made Men oath ceremonies, but this may be the one event that kills me.”

I shouldn’t have, but I laughed.

We rushed up the stairs.

Rue had all the exquisite red gowns hung up all around my suite. Each one was captivating. Mrs. Tina arrived with my

maids—Gloria and Lola. It must have taken me an hour to pick the perfect gown. Thank God I had them helping me.

“You picked the right one, Kash. This is a masterpiece.” Rue gazed at it. “Dima, spent a fortune on all of these.”

I blinked. “You think so?”

Mrs. Tina pointed to the front. “Those aren’t fake beads, sweetie. Those are real diamonds.”

“Wow.” I studied the gown.

All red, it was made of the finest silk and studded with what had to be over 150 carats of diamonds. The fabric was embroidered with more than one hundred delicate Chantilly lace flowers on the silk and seven petticoats had to be worn under it. Plus, it had a 10-foot train.

Mrs. Tina pulled out a tissue and sniffed. “Chanel would have loved to see you in this gown.”

“She’s around. Romeo too.” I hugged her. “I feel them around all the time.”

Tears left her eyes. “You too?”

“Yes.”

“I swear they come by to visit me.” Mrs. Tina dabbed at her tears with the tissue. “These two crows keep messing with my vegetables in my garden like they’re trying to get my attention.”

“They are.” I let her go. “Next time...go out and talk to them.”

Mrs. Tina’s lip quivered. “I will. I sure will.”

My heart ached. I stepped back from Mrs. Tina, knowing that if I hugged her again, I would cry too. I could already feel the tears welling up in my eyes.

“Okay.” Rue let out a long breath. “This part is done. Dane texted me that the band has arrived, and the tent is up. Now for the rest.”

Tomasso nodded. “The florists are decorating. Knight is running around and overseeing all décor.”

Mrs. Tina looked at me. “And who is in your wedding party?”

“Oh shit.” I turned to Rue. “Do we know?”

“I wouldn’t be your number one if I didn’t.” Rue winked. “Merik wanted to walk you down the aisle, no matter how Dane and I tried to talk him out of it. So, he’s putting on his gold tuxedo. Apparently, he has a top hat and cane. I just can’t with Merik right now.”

Mrs. Tina laughed.

I grinned. “I’m cool with that. Merik is perfect. There’s no other person I would want by my side today.”

“Then, we have your cousins, Shanice, Alyssa, and Madeline. They actually asked if they could be in the wedding so I went with it.” Rue shrugged. “Besides, it further unites Killer Crows on top of making three families happy and feeling like they are a part of this big event.”

“I love that. All three women are loyal soldiers, money makers, and family members that never did me wrong.” I nodded. “And you’re in it too, right?”

“Me?” Rue widened her eyes. “Oh. I...well, I was going to help Tomasso make sure everything was on point.”

“No.” I touched her hand. “I thought it was understood that you would be my maid of honor.”

“No.” Rue parted her lips.

Tomasso clapped. “That’s fine. I have at least fifty gold gowns waiting for you to try on, Rue. Let’s go.”

“But...” She looked at him and then at me. “I’m in the wedding? I’m usually not...in front of crowds or...in anything”

“Girl, you better find yourself a nice gown.” I chuckled. “You are definitely my maid of honor.”



“Let’s go, Rue.” Tomasso was already at the door. “And we’ll need a team to do your hair and makeup.”

“Oh wait.” Rue held up her hands. “What do you mean a team? Touching and messing with me?”

Mrs. Tina shoved Rue along. “Time for some pampering, missy.”

I grinned.

Once Mrs. Tina, Rue, and Tomasso left, I showered.

Then, Lola and Gloria worked on me. They swept my hair into an elegant updo, woven with gold and red ribbons. Next, they tugged my long red gown over my hips with a series of petticoats, zippers, and buttons. The heavy diamond lace fell to the floor, giving me the illusion that I floated in an elegant red cloud.

Gloria dabbed concealer under my eyes and brushed my cheeks with powder. She pulled a lipstick from the pocket of her apron and painted my lips. “So gorgeous. I cannot believe my little Kashmere is getting married today.”

Lola brought a long mirror over and I took in my reflection. My heart stopped. Everything about me had changed and I didn’t think it was the dress that did it.

It was taking over Killer Crows.

It was Santino entering my life.

It was even...killing Gypsy.

The person in the mirror was an elegant royal princess who was ready to rule and would kill anyone who challenged her.

I could hear Romeo on my right.

*“I’m proud of you, sis.”*

Sweat beaded on my forehead.

Gloria dabbed at my face with a napkin. “Nervous?”

I shivered. “A little, but I know...it will be okay.”

*I love Santino.*

“Would you mind if we do something, Kashmere?”

I looked at Gloria. “Sure.”

She took my hands, closed her eyes, and bowed her head. “Let us pray.”

“Okay.” I closed my eyes too. “Nothing wrong with prayer.”

“God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.” Gloria gently squeezed my hands. “Lord, I pray that this new couple may have a true and understanding love for each other. Bless them both with faith and trust.”

I swallowed.

“Give them the grace to live with each other in peace and harmony. May they always bear one another’s weaknesses and grow from each other’s strengths.”

I shivered.

“Help them to forgive one another’s failings, and grant them patience, kindness, cheerfulness and the spirit of placing the well-being of one another ahead of self.”

*Wow. This is going to be...big.*

“May the love that brought them together grow and mature with each passing year.”

*Please, God.*

“Bring them both ever closer to *You* through their love for each other. And finally, let their love grow to perfection. Amen.”

Shivering again, I opened my eyes. “Amen.”

She smiled at me. “And let them name one of their beautiful daughters Gloria.”

I chuckled. “I will definitely keep that in my notes.”

“Congratulations, Kashmere.” Gloria hurried off with Lola. “Now we have to get ready.”



# Chapter 17

## The Wedding

### Kashmere

Merik slowly guided me down the twisted staircase. “You should have worn slippers going down here.”

“Boy, I’m not wearing slippers on my wedding day.”

Five of my female soldiers wore gold tuxedos with red roses in their lapels. One by one, they held out my long train.

On my head, I wore a jeweled crown and an elegant veil.

Merik frowned. “I just hope your ass doesn’t fall.”

I held on to him. “That’s why you’re here.”

He frowned at me. “I can’t believe you made me leave my cane.”

“The cane was too much, Merik. Silver money signs, diamond cars, and gold naked women plastered all over it.”

“It was stylish.”

“It was going to make the guests’ eyes bleed and clash with my gown.”

“See. You’re hating.”

“How about this? Bring it out for the reception.”

“Perfect.”

We hit the bottom of the stairs and carefully headed toward the front door.

My butler Frederick stood by the door and smiled. “You look quite lovely, Kashmere.”

“Thank you, Frederick.”

Merik guided me forward. “We didn’t do a practice thing, but Tomasso walked through this shit seven times with me last

night. I ended up dreaming about it. Then, I showed up this morning and he walked me through it again.”

“Good.” My bottom lip quivered. “Because not only do I not know where I am supposed to go, I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

Merik stopped us in front of the door and glanced at me. “Doesn’t matter about the other stuff. Just say yes when the pastor asks if you want to marry Santino.”

“Okay.” I swallowed. “I got that part down.”

“Good. Because if you didn’t, I think Santino would shoot us all down.”

I grinned.

Two of my men opened the door for us.

We continued forward.

Outside, the setting sun was warm. No clouds filled the sky, and the air was mixed with the scents of perfume, flowers, and savory foods. The band’s music was soft, a song of celebration and serenity. Hundreds of guests spoke in hushed tones.

As I was heading down the stairs, I scanned the place. “Oh my God.”

Thousands of lit red and gold candles shimmered on the surface of Dream Lake, creating a sea of flickering lights. It was picturesque, like something out of a movie or a scene from a fairy tale.

*Damn, Tomasso. You do not play.*

Merik caught where I was looking. “Kash, I think the ghosts have given their blessing for the wedding.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Tons of white people were up on the lake today, putting those floating candles there. We tried to warn them. They ignored us. Either way, not one died.”

“That’s progress for sure.”

“Maybe, Santino *really* did make nice with the ghosts.”

“Please, don’t remind me.”

I gazed off at the rose garden, marveling at how different it looked today.

Tons of red roses outlined the long golden aisle.

On the right of the aisle sat, tons of white men in suits. That had to be many of the men from the DeLuca Family. To my shock, a good bit of the guys had Black women on their arms.

Merik chuckled. “They sure don’t have a race problem in this family.”

“Sure don’t.”

On the left of the aisle, tons of Killer Crows sat. There were so many that some even had to stand out in the garden. And it was a sea of luxurious red with tons of gold and diamonds.

I also caught sight of Dima, his mother, and a beautiful woman in a yellow dress that must have been Rose. Marcelo sat behind him with a woman wearing a huge curly afro. I spotted Lei’s aunts and some of their people, but not Lei.

*Wow. So many came.*

Merik kept his voice low. “Once you let my brother and the rest out of prison, everybody fell behind you.”

I held onto him as I continued forward.

“You’re the only Chairman to do it.” Merik nodded. “That shit meant something, bringing families together and what not.”

“I pray we remain united.”

“People see what you’re doing. Got the Diamond Syndicate going to war for you. Green, yellow, blue, and red was fighting because something happened to you. That says Killer Crows are stronger than ever.”

Tension gathered in my shoulders. I felt like I was carrying a heavy weight, but finally I was more than ready to bear it.

“I love Romeo and Chanel, but you’re going to go down in history as the most bad ass powerful Chairman that Killer Crows has ever seen.”

“Jesus.”

He chuckled.

The band slowly stopped playing their song and shifted to playing *Here Comes the Bride*. Those notes signaled all to end their conversations. And the guests did, turning around and placing all their gazes on me.

My nerves frazzled and my heart hammered in my chest, yet I kept taking each step forward.

When we got to the beginning of the aisle, I could finally see Santino standing near the arch, and he was an irresistible sight to behold. The fit of the black tuxedo accentuated his strong shoulders, wide chest and trim waist. His smile showed from ear to ear.

A flame sparked in my heart and spread through my body.

*That is my man...my husband.*

“Damn, Rue cleans up well.” Merik whistled. “I might have to ask her out one day.”

I grinned under the veil and moved my view to the left.

My cousins and Rue donned breathtaking gold gowns.

*Good job, Tomasso.*

The gold material draped each woman and reflected their true personalities. Rue’s gown wasn’t too tight, yet it wrapped around her like an armored goddess. Alyssa wore a strapless one. Shanice had an hourglass figure that sparkled in hers. And Madeline remained conservative in a simple silk one.

We strolled forward, halfway down the aisle.

I noticed the men near Santino.

Before we headed out, Tomasso had rushed with spouting out the wedding party's names, but I had made a special effort to remember the men that Santino had chosen to celebrate our special day.

Don Enzo stood next to him, representing the best man.

I blinked.

Shocked, that he wasn't an older guy with a potbelly and tons of wrinkles.

*Well, damn. Don Enzo isn't bad looking.*

All this time I had been thinking of the old Godfather films, and he shattered that thought.

I checked the other guys.

Standing next to the Don, Brizio DeLuca was tall, lean, and toned. He had a low-cut beard and a head full of dark curly hair that reached his shoulders. For some reason, he kept checking a woman in the audience. No doubt she must have been a girlfriend or wife.

Then, there was Nicolo DeLuca who had a sexy lumberjack vibe going on, yet much more sophisticated.

Finally, the last guy was Franco DeLuca. 6'4 and with a muscled frame, he had green eyes and chestnut hair. His hair was longer on top. Shorter on the sides. Angular lightly bearded jaw line and a slightly pointed chin.

*The DeLuca men have some mighty good genes. I have no doubt Santino and I will have pretty babies.*

With now only a few feet between Santino and me, my nervous gaze turned back to him. Instantly, this sense of warmth filled my heart.

*Thank you, God.*

I felt so whole, so connected to this man that I was now ready to commit my life to.

I took those last steps to his side, and that was when I noticed his eyes were watering.



*Oh, baby.*

He cleared his throat, telling me that he would not let one tear fall in front of his family.

The music stopped.

Pastor Martin stepped toward us, wearing a blood red robe. Long ago, he'd been a Killer Crow, now he only served God.

Last time I had seen him was at my siblings' funeral. Now he served at my wedding.

He gave me a huge smile back and loudly spoke, "Who gives this lovely woman to this man today?"

Merik smirked. "I do. Merik Rashad Jones. Who is also single and looking, with very good credit and owns his own home, and not one baby mama."

A few ladies giggled in the crowd.

*Oh my God.*

Pastor Martin sighed. "Well...single and looking Merik, you may sit down and be quiet now."

Santino slowly moved the veil away. I wasn't sure if that was a part of the ceremony, but I smiled.

Taking me in, Santino licked his lips.

I extended my arm in Santino's direction. When our fingers entwined it felt like an electric current coursing through my veins.

Pastor Martin spoke, but I was unaware of the words coming out of his mouth. All I could focus on was Santino, and the passionate intensity flowing between us. I doubted Santino heard him either as he tenderly pulled me closer to him and began tracing circles on my palm with his thumb.

*God, I love him.*

The sun continued to set, casting a golden hue over the garden and bringing a sense of romanticism to the air. A gentle breeze rustled through the trees, causing the colorful flower petals to dance wildly.

Suddenly, two men came over. One brought a small table and set it in front of us. Another had two trays of tiny vials. Each tray carried four vials.

*What the hell is this?*

I decided to start paying attention.

Pastor Martin walked over to the vials and loudly spoke. “Marriage is not a simple feat. Sometimes it isn’t all love and fun.”

A man bellowed, “Well.”

“No. No.” Pastor Martin shook his head. “Sometimes the good lord puts the marriage through trials and tribulations.”

A woman muttered, “Preach, Pastor.”

“That is why we will follow the Killer Crow tradition of Four Elements.”

*Four what?*

Santino widened his eyes and took in the vials.

I did too.

*What the fuck is in these vials?*

One tray was in front of me, and the other put close to him. We at least both had vials of the same thing, but I had no idea what could be filling them.

I assessed my tray. There was a vile with yellow liquid. Another had a light brown fluid. The third was red liquid. Finally, the fourth was a golden brown.

*O-kay.*

I’d avoided most of Chanel’s wedding due to Gypsy being there. Now I was mad I hadn’t checked it out and at least learned about our marital traditions.

Pastor Martin raised his hands in the air. “In true Killer Crow tradition, we will have the bride and groom get a literal taste of flavors that represent the distinct stages in a marriage.”

*Oh hell no. We have to drink this stuff?*

Pastor Martin gestured to the yellow vial. “Santino and Kashmere, please drink this one first.”

Santino raised his eyebrows. “Drink it?”

Several Killer Crows chuckled.

Pastor Martin gazed their way.

They went silent.

“Go ahead, Kashmere and Santino.” Pastor Martin gestured to the vials. “This is one stage.”

*Here we go.*

Together, we grabbed our first vials, placed them to our lips, and drank them.

Sourness hit my tongue.

*Lemon. What the hell?*

“The sour lemon juice represents the disappointments the couple will face.” Pastor Martin touched his heart. “I ask that you stand together in those moments and hold onto your faith in God.”

We both set the empty vials down in the tray.

*The rest better not be any nasty stuff.*

Pastor Martin pointed to the vial with brown liquid. “Now for the next one.”

Sighing, I picked it up.

Santino wore a tickled expression as he grabbed his.

Pastor Martin nodded. “Go ahead and drink.”

*Can't we just say I do and kiss?*

I drank the vial in one shot and immediately regretted it. “Ugh!”

The Killer Crow side laughed.

*What the hell are they doing? Trying to kill us?*

“That is vinegar.” Pastor Martin grinned. “Sometimes marriage reflects bitterness. Know that you must overcome

fights and trying times.”

Santino placed his empty vial down and did not seem pleased at all.

I frowned at Pastor Martin. “What’s the red liquid?”

“Follow tradition, Kashmere.”

I let out a long breath.

Pastor Martin gestured to that one. “Go ahead newlyweds.”

I stifled my groan and picked up the third vial.

Santino gazed at me as if completely unsure.

I shook my head and whispered, “Sorry. You are marrying into a crazy family.”

He chuckled.

Together, we gulped down the liquid.

*Holy shit!!!*

I didn’t know what it was, but the liquid was hot as fuck.

*Fucking crazy people!*

We both coughed into our hands.

Tears left the corners of Santino’s eyes. He wiped them. “Oh my.”

Pastor Martin chuckled. “Look at what this man will do for love.”

*My poor baby.*

People clapped in the audience.

I coughed again and glared at Pastor Martin.

*You all are lucky I don’t have my guns on me.*

Pastor Martin held his hands up. “This liquid of pure cayenne is a hot element to show how bringing spice and passion to the relationship will keep you together for a very long time.”

My eyes watered from my tongue still being hot.

I frowned at him.

Pastor Martin pointed to the last one. “Come on. Almost done.”

Santino eyed me as if to say that we still had time to escape this craziness.

Sighing, I reached out for the last vial.

Santino followed me, grabbing the vial with the golden-brown liquid.

*Please, don't let this be piss.*

“Go ahead and drink.” Pastor Martin kept his hands in the air. “After this, comes the kiss.”

*It's about time.*

Granted, I was still nervous about what this vial could have in it.

To my surprise, Santino took my free hand and squeezed it. “Ready?”

“Yes.”

“One. Two. Three.” Santino placed his vial to his lips.

I did too.

Then, we both drank the liquid.

*Mmmm.*

The liquid was nice and sweet.

“See. Not so bad.” Pastor Martin chuckled. “Finally, we have you drink honey to show the great joy in marriage.”

Santino exhaled in relief.

“By tasting each of these flavors, you have symbolically demonstrated that you will be able to overcome everything together.” Pastor Martin gestured for the men to take away the trays. “Now for the final question. Do you Santino take Kashmere—?”

“I do.” Santino moved with lightning speed, gripping my waist, and capturing me in his grasp. A second later, his hungry lips smashed against mine, sending a jolt of electricity through my veins as our passionate kiss became the center of attention.

“Well...” Pastor Martin chuckled. “I now pronounce you two husband and wife.”

Laughter and applause filled the air as I melted into his strong embrace.



# Chapter 18

## The Reception

### Santino

The band jammed, filling the air with upbeat music. Laughter bellowed throughout the estate. Glasses clinked. People danced, swaying back and forth with the beat.

People surrounded Kashmere as she danced with Merik. They watched and threw crisp hundreds at her. One of her guards hurried after them, picking the bills up and stuffing them into a satin bag.

I stood in the far corner, surrounded by DeLucas smoking the finest cigars.

Now that we had eaten an exquisite meal, I could finally relax.

Still, I scanned the crowd of guests, searching for Lei. I'd kept the wooden dagger in my jacket's inside pocket. While there had been a large representation of men and women in blue, Lei had not been one of them.

*Why didn't he come? What would be more important than Kashmere's wedding?*

It appeared I would have to give it to him on another day. I hoped the ghosts wouldn't be upset.

Tomasso hurried over with two glasses of champagne.

I held my hand out to him. "Thank you."

"Thank you?" Tomasso took a sip from both of them. "These are mine. I am officially off duty."

I chuckled and placed my hand on his shoulder. "You know what?"

Tomasso sipped from one. "What?"

"You deserve those and more."



“Is that your way of saying thank you?”

“It is.” I gestured at waiter. “Keep this man’s glasses topped. He should not be able to walk at the end of the night.”

Leonardo lit his cigar. “I’ll make sure to carry you to your room, Tomasso.”

“Aww.” Tomasso gulped down a glass. “I love my family.”

Don Enzo got to my side. He’d changed out of his tuxedo and now wore a black-on-black designer suit. The tailoring was impeccable as usual. “Where’s your cigar, Santino?”

Leonardo pulled one out for me. “Here you go, boss.”

Don Enzo leaned my way. “What did you think of my Eve, when you met her?”

I grinned. “A beautiful and sweet woman. I’m glad you brought her.”

Nodding, he took a puff of his cigar. “I must give you your gift. It is nothing that can be wrapped.”

“No?”

He shook his head.

“What is it?”

“Your gift is one wish, within reason, to be granted whenever you or your bride need it.”

I quirked my brows, registering the enormity of this offer. It was a massive gesture. While Don Enzo gave me men for war when I needed it, a wish was entirely different. It held more power.

If it made sense, I could have him order an assassination on the president, and he would do it.

Tomasso finished one glass and burped. “Okay. Wishes are good, Don Enzo, but what Santino needs is advice for keeping Kashmere.”

I rolled my eyes.

Don Enzo laughed. “Well, Santino, all I can say is that love is special. Protect it the way you protect the family.”

“Thank you, Don Enzo.” I lit my cigar and blew out smoke. “I promise that and more.”

A waiter brought Tomasso another glass while he finished the last one in his hand.

Don Enzo headed over to Eve and began dancing with her. I hadn't seen him this happy in a long time.

*That's how Kashmere and I will be.*

Franco DeLuca headed over with his bodyguard Clip. “Look at this guy.”

I grinned.

“You're married.”

“That I am.” I took a puff from the cigar. “Any advice on love?”

He focused those green eyes on me. “Love Kashmere with your entire heart, and always put her first.”

“Good stuff, Franco.” Tomasso finished the third glass and gestured for more DeLucas to head over. “Hey, Santino needs advice.”

I held up my hand holding the cigar. “Oh no. That's quite enough.”

Franco winked at me. “I hope you like his and her Cartier watches.”

I nodded. “I believe we will love those a lot.”

Brizio and Nicolo headed over. Laughing, Brizio spoke first. “You need advice for the bedroom?”

I frowned. “Absolutely not.”

“Listen.” Brizio got close, telling me he'd had a good bit of drinks, but I wasn't crazy enough tell him to stop drinking. That job was now for his new wife Maya.

Brizio wore a silly grin and repeated himself. “Listen.”

I smirked. “I'm listening.”

“I got you a dark web code that will give you and Kashmere secret information on the Diamond Syndicate. This may be beneficial to you both in the future.”

I blinked. “That’s my wedding gift?”

Brizio nodded.

“I love it.”

Tomasso burped and grabbed what I believe was now his fourth glass of champagne. “Now for the advice, Brizio?”

I waved Tomasso away. “No. We don’t need to make this a thing.”

“Oh, that’s easy.” Brizio smiled. “Teach your wife everything you know. Make sure she is your partner in crime, your equal.”

“Okay.” I nodded. “I like that.”

Tomasso yelled, “Nicolo, get over here and give Santino some love advice.”

I choked on my cigar. “Eh, that’s quite enough.”

Nicolo came over. “Santino needs advice?”

I waved smoke away. “I don’t *actually* need—”

“Keep it HOT in the bedroom.”

I sighed. “I believe I’m good in that department, Nicolo—”

“And keep *everyone*, especially the family out of your business.” Nicolo pointed to his wife Simone who was now chatting with Kashmere. “That’s how you keep everything in perfect harmony.”

“I’ll take your advice on that.”

Nicolo handed me a gold envelope. “Here you go. I didn’t want this to get lost among all the wrapped boxes.”

I took it from him. “What’s this?”

“Serious stock options. The sort that would retire you both.”

“Thank you.” I slipped the envelope inside my jacket pocket. “Thank you very much.”

“Alright.” Tomasso wildly gestured at the rest of DeLuca men. “Come on and help Santino out.”

“Absolutely not. My new wife is calling me.” I slipped away, only hearing a barrage of loud laughter come from them.

Minutes later, I kidnapped my gorgeous queen and had her on the other side of the mansion, devouring her in the center of the rose garden.

So horny for her, I buried my face in the curve of her neck and bit.

Kashmere chuckled. “You’re biting me so hard.”

“You’re lucky my cock is not deep inside of you and that beautiful gown is not in shreds on the ground.”

She nipped at my lips. “Am I?”

“Yes.”

“But you will be ripping this gown later?”

“I will.” I held her close to me. “You know that marrying you was the best decision of my life?”

“Mine too.”

“I was given a lot of advice tonight on how to properly love you.”

“Oh yeah?” She eyed me. “And are you going to take that advice?”

“I believe so.” I inhaled her sweet scent. “The more I stand here with you, the more I don’t see this gown surviving.”

“Santino, I think we are supposed to be mingling with our guests not fucking by the garden.”

“Is that what you believe?” I licked my lips.

She chuckled. “Yes. There’re traditions and all that shit.”

An engine roared and headed our way.

*What is this?*

I straightened and glanced over my shoulder.

Merik parked a new red Ghost behind me. A massive black bow decorated the top of it as the luxury vehicle glowed in the night. Hip hop music blasted from it.

I blinked. “Is that mine?”

“Yep.” Kashmere straightened the front of her gown.

Merik rolled the window down, letting more music out. “Come on, girl, before everyone notices.”

Laughing, Kashmere grabbed my hand and tugged me forward. “Come on, baby.”

I hurried with her. “Where are we going?”

“Honeymoon.”

“But that is *my* surprise.”

“Yeah, but I know we have to get on your plane to get there. Right?”

“That is correct.”

“Then, let’s get the fuck out of here.”

When we got to the Ghost, I opened the back door and watched her climb in. That long train towed along. I had to gather it up and place it in the Ghost.

Next, I climbed inside and shut the door. “And what about Killer Crow traditions and rules?”

“Fuck tradition.” She beamed. “I’m the Chairman. I don’t follow. I lead.”

“Damn right.” Merik handed Kashmere a joint wrapped in gold paper. “This is my present to you both.”

Watching her smoke, my cock stiffened.

Merik sped off, and I was kissing Kashmere through puffs of the golden joint.

Kashmere lay in my arms. “And where are we going, once we get on the plane?”

“Italy. Of course.”

“Oh wow.”

“Have you ever been?”

“Never.”

“Good. We’ll be there for two months.”

She blinked. “Oh shit. I should have told—”

“Dane and Rue.” I nodded. “They know.”

Merik spoke from the front, “I’ll be in charge the whole time.”

I shook my head. “Rue will be Acting Chairman.”

Laughing, Merik drove us off the estate and in the direction of Caviar Lime Highway.

“First, I’ll show you all the touristy parts—Rome, Venice, Florence, etc, then...”

Her eyes sparked with excitement. “Yes?”

“Then, I’ll take you to Sicily where I have distant family that I barely visit.” My heart warmed. “I want them to meet you.”

“Damn.” Merik hooted. “Two months? Kash going to come back pregnant as hell.”

“Shut up.” She handed me the joint.

I took it and gave her a wicked smile. “Actually, getting you pregnant is exactly my plan.”

She parted those lips in shock. “Santino—”

“Lots of babies.”

“Okay, but I have the Killer Crows to—”

“I’m shooting loads of cum inside of you every damned day—”

“Wow! Wow!” Merik sped up. “Can you all save that talk for the plane?”

“Oh yeah.” I dove my hand inside of my jacket and pulled out the wooden knife. “Give this to Lei for me.”

“The ghost blade?” Merik shook his head. “Hell to the fuck no, man. I would do a lot for you, Santino, but not that.”

“Then, perhaps you can give it to Leonardo and he do it.”

Sighing, Merik took the dagger. “That I can do.”

“Perfect.”

Kash frowned at me. “And that’s the end of that, baby. No more talking to the ghosts and being their delivery person.”

I kissed her cheek. “We’ll see.”





# Epilogue

## Italy

### Kashmere

I had a startling secret bubbling in my throat, but couldn't find the best moment to let it out.

*Soon...but not yet...*

The gentle sway of the yacht in the Adriatic Sea always lulled me into a sleepy trance. It was hard to not let myself get carried away by the subtle undulation of the waves.

In our master suite, Santino and I rocked back and forth in the king-sized bed, embracing each other and sharing in the sensual harmony of our movement.

We'd been on our honeymoon for two months, and still I could not believe that he was my husband, and I was his wife. Our moments were so romantic. So precious. So surreal. There were times when I sat on edge waiting for someone to jump out, appear with a gun, and ruin it.

But, it never happened.

Santino and I remained safe and happily in love. Just two newlyweds touring Italy.

Nothing could have prepared me for the sheer power of love that we shared on this honeymoon.

This vacation gave me the time to really think about my life since Santino entered it. From my assessing my reflections I realized that love was finding someone I cared about so much that I would put my needs before them and work together as a team.

I appreciated Santino for teaching me that.

Meanwhile, Santino showed me the amazing beauty of this country. We traveled from city to city, sampling incredible

food, visiting rich historical sites, perusing highly regarded art, and staying in charming, picturesque places.

Although Santino had a set schedule of what he wanted to show me in Italy, he would always encourage me to seek out little-known spots that excited me. Many times, we would veer off the beaten paths just because something caught my eye. And he would grin the whole time, watching me fall deeper and deeper in love with Italy.

So many times, I took us off to explore places of natural beauty I spotted. A patch of purple wildflowers in a distant field, an eye-catching grouping of trees on the horizon, an old bridge over a bubbling brook.

However, Santino had truly put together a great schedule for us. There were many highlights in those two months that would remain in my heart for the rest of my life.

In Rome, Santino rented out the Colosseum so we could take our time and walk around it hand-in-hand. There, he told me about its history. We made love in the center of the hypogeum where long ago ancient romans used to keep the animals and gladiators before entering the arena.

In Venice, I watched my first opera at the *Teatro La Fenice*. I had never heard of this story called *La Boheme*, yet now I would never forget it. As the performers wooed my eyes and ears, I became obsessed with this romantic and heartbreaking couple—Mimi and Rodolfo. For them, it was love at first sight just like Santino and me. Granted, there were parts of the opera that I missed out on as Santino fingered my pussy, then later lowered to his knees, and licked me until I came.

By the end of that night, I threw away my birth control pills. In between sights and making love, Santino talked about wanting to start a family together. His childhood hadn't been ideal just like mine.

For most of our lives, we both had secretly yearned for love and the real idea of a family. Now we decided to create our own.

In Florence, we stayed in a luxurious old palazzo. It had been carefully restored. I was amazed by the high ceilings, stunning exterior, and rich décor. After checking in, Santino surprised me with a romantic picnic at the Boboli Garden—a breathtaking space of green hills, exotic plants, and intriguing sculptures. Santino told me that the gardens were originally designed for the Medici family in the 1700s.

The whole time he fed me Bistecca alla Fiorentina, Ribollita, and Pappardelle al Cinghiale. They were all traditional dishes from Florence that I soon came to love.

We had so much fun that in those two months that we eventually decided to extend our honeymoon for a third month.

I'd already texted Merik, Dane, and Rue this morning with the news.

I had barely communicated with anyone back in Paradise City. We exchanged a few texts here and there, but Santino had demanded that no one bother us this whole time. The most I got from Dane was that Lei wanted permission to explore around Dream Lake with some new Black chick and a little girl. Other than that, they never bothered me.

However, now we lay naked in our bed on the yacht heading to Sicily so that he could introduce me to his distant family.

Santino thrust his hips forward, his hard length filling me completely. His hands firmly grasped my hips as he moved in and out with a powerful rhythm that had me clinging to him. His lips found mine in a passionate embrace, his movements becoming more ravenous by the second as the pressure built up inside me.

I gripped his back, riding the waves of pleasure. “Oh, Santino.”

“Yes, my queen.” He drove into me so deeply I cried out in pleasure.

“You are my wife.” He sucked on my lip and then let it go, pumping into me some more. “Forever.”

“Forever.” An electric current raced through my body as the pressure of pleasure intensified, built higher and higher.

Our skin was slick with sweat as our bodies moved in unison.

I moaned, not wanting this exquisitely perfect moment to end.

“Damn, Kash.” He thrust into me hard. “I may not take you back to Paradise.”

I chuckled in between moans.

“I’m serious.”

“Oh.”

“We’ll stay on this yacht forever.”

“Oh, baby. Fuck.”

“I love you, my queen.” He thrust harder into me.

“I love...you, king.”

He groaned and began slamming his cock into me. My body shook with each brutally erotic pound. A massive wave of pleasure washed over me, leaving me panting from the intensity of it. Soon, I felt myself soaring beyond any plane of reality I had ever experienced before.

“Fuck, Kash.” Each thrust sent shockwaves of ecstasy along my spine.

“Oh, Santino!”

The pressure built and built until I could no longer hold back the force of it. I came hard, my pussy clenching around his cock.

A loud roar erupted from Santino’s lips and he came with me. The waves of pleasure swept through us as we rocked together in the boat.

“I love you.” He kissed me and tucked me into his side.

I smiled and closed my eyes.

“You’re going to like it. It’s a family thing.” Santino kissed my forehead.

“I’m sure I will.” I snuggled into his arms and fell asleep.

I yawned and tried to stretch my arms over my head. My hand bumped into something. I opened my eyes to find myself in a strange place.

“Santino?” I looked around the unfamiliar tent. He wasn’t there.

“I’m over here, my queen.” I heard his voice from behind the bed curtain across from me.

“Oh

My body continued to pulse around his as I clung to him. Finally, Santino stopped moving. I hid my face against his chest as I struggled to catch my breath. I had never experienced anything so amazing.

His hands slid up my back and into my hair as he gave a deep, contented sigh. “I will never let you go.”

“Please don’t.” I panted. “I might find and trap you back to me.”

The intensity of my desire overwhelmed me, and I felt the familiar tightening in my core as I hurtled towards orgasm. My legs tightened around Santino’s hips, and he responded with a guttural growl of pleasure as his own orgasm joined mine.

Our bodies rocked together in a blissful cacophony of pleasure as the waves of bliss cascaded through us on the rocking deck of the yacht.

Every nerve in my body felt like it was on fire as I moved closer to the edge of pleasure. My muscles clenched around Santino’s cock with an intensity I had never felt before and my screams of pleasure burst into the air.

“My pussy.” He matched my energy, and a powerful roar left his lips as we shattered together in a feverish explosion of passion, the waves of pleasure radiating from us and rocking the entire yacht.

The heat between us began to simmer. Our chest rose and fell together.

*God, I love this man.*

As our bodies calmed, I drew him into a passionate kiss, tangling my fingers in his hair. The feel of my breasts pressed against his chest, his cock buried to the hilt in my pussy and his body molded against mine as he gazed into my eyes was almost more than I could stand.

I mustered up the strength to whisper my three favorite words to him. "I love you."

He hit me with a silly smile and kissed me. "I love you, too."

My heart and soul filled with joy. I had never considered myself to be the kind of woman who could be happy with a man in her life, but he had proved me wrong. It was almost too good to be true.

Slowly, he pulled out of me and rolled to the other side.

I grinned. "Maybe, we should live on this yacht forever."

"Don't tempt me, Kash." He gathered me in his arms. "I will do it. I'll trap you here forever."

*Now's the time for the secret.*

"So..." I slowly rose and left his arms.

"So what? Where are you going?"

Chuckling, I leaned over to the side table next to the bed, pulled the tiny drawer back, and took out the small present.

It was a long, little square black box with a red ribbon around it.

He eyed me as I handed it to him. "What's this?"

"A secret."

"What sort of secret?"

"You won't know until you open it."

“Kash, you know I am not accustomed to all of these presents from one beautiful woman.”

“Get used to it. You’ve been surprising me the whole honeymoon—”

“As is my job as your king—”

“Open the present, Santino.” I grinned.

“It better not be too expensive.”

“Unfortunately, it is priceless, so you’ll just have to deal with it.”

Frowning, he sat up. “Then, I will surprise you with something even more priceless.”

I laughed. “We’ll see about that.”

He snatched the bow off and lay it on the bed. “My sneaky little queen. What surprise will this be?”

I tensed as my nerves flared.

*Please say he will be happy. Please, God.*

Santino took the top off the box and froze as he saw what was inside.

I didn’t move either, not sure if he was terrified or shocked with happiness.

The moment stilled with the rocking of the yacht and the sound of the sea outside.

Finally, after a few quiet minutes, Santino picked up the pregnancy test out of the box and looked at me with watered eyes. “You’re pregnant?”

My bottom lip quivered. “Yes.”

A wicked smile spread across his face. “We are going to be parents?”

“We are.”

“We will have a family.”

“A beautiful one.”

“And very large.”

“Well...let’s just see with this first one.”

Fast, Santino pulled me into his arms. “God, woman, I love you so fucking much. You’re right. This is a priceless gift that I could never top.”

“Just keep loving me like you do, Santino, and you’ll top it all.”

\* \* \*

Later that day, we stood on the deck of the yacht side-by-side, looking out at the orange and pink sunset over the sea.

My phone rang.

Santino grinned. “They must have gotten your texts.”

“Probably.” I pulled the phone out and placed it next to my ear. “What’s up?”

Merik’s voice rode the line. “Another month in Italy, Kash? You must be loving the hell out of that Italian food.”

“That’s one of the many reasons.”

“Word? Shoot. Enjoy yourself. Shit is chill right now in Paradise City anyway.”

“Oh really?”

“Hell yeah.” Merik chuckled. “We kept your mission. The West Coast is coming out for Dima. There’s not one lawn in the West that doesn’t have his campaign sign. All red cars got his bumper stickers on the back.”

“Good shit.”

“Oh!”

I blinked. “What?”

“I’m finally alone so I can tell you this shit. Kash, guess who I walked in on during your reception night?”

“Who?”

“Tomasso and Mom.”



I shrieked. “Aunt Irene and Tomasso!”

Santino snapped his view to me and quirked his brows.

“Yo, Kash. All I saw was Tomasso’s bare white ass and him holding a tub of whip cream. Mom was on the floor. I rushed out of the kitchen after that.”

“No?”

“I’ve been having nightmares about it ever since. I may need to see somebody.”

“Are you serious?”

“Unfortunately, yes.” Merik let out a long breath. “I couldn’t tell anybody because if Roscoe heard about that shit \_\_\_”

“He might shoot Tomasso?”

“Facts.”

“Is Tomasso even still there?”

“Hell yeah. He got a condo downtown. He leaves every now and then to do jobs I guess, but he said his home base is Paradise City.”

“And your mom?”

“She be sneaking her ass out at night with pies and shit. Every now and then I bump into her downtown. Roscoe better not find out.”

“Hey. That’s grown folk business.”

“Since we on gossip, you know Rue and Leonardo got a thing going?”

“No.” I stepped back from the side in pure shock.  
“Leonardo and Rue?”

Shock covered Santino’s face as he watched me.

“When did this happen?”

“Must have been at the reception. Look, Kash. The all-night bar was a bad idea. Everyone was clearly fucking by the end of the night.”

“But Rue and Leonardo though?”

“They keep it secret, but I see the glances as they handle Santino’s and your business.”

“I can’t believe this.”

“Kash, things are hot in the West but at least in a good way.”

“Yes. I agree.”

“Alright then. I’ll let you get back to being nasty out in Italy.”

“Thank you, cuz.”

“Peace.”

I hung up with a huge smile on my face.

Santino stared at me. “Leonardo and Rue?”

“Apparently, that’s a secret thing.”

“Interesting.”

“And don’t forget Tomasso and Aunt Irene.”

“I’m not shocked about that.”

“What?”

“Tomasso will sleep with anyone who is a master in the kitchen. His sleeping with Aunt Irene was simply a matter of time.”

I chuckled. “Well, why didn’t you tell me that?”

“Because we were busy.” He gathered me in his arms. “And now we will be even more busy, raising a little one.”

I shivered in fear, but knew all would be okay. “You’re right.”

“You’re going to be an amazing mother.”

“And you will be an awesome father.”

“I love you, Kash.”

A wave of emotion crashed into me as I whispered, “I love you too, Santino.”

I rested my head against his strong chest, feeling my heart swell with emotion as the sun slowly sank below the horizon. His arms held me close and time stilled as I watched the sky turn shades of pink and orange, until the last sliver of light had finally slipped away.

Finally, I got my happy ending.

Yet, it was a blissful ending that would start a new beginning of passionate love, a blessed life, and a loving family.

[Jump on my NEWSLETTER to get Santino Bonus Chapters starting in February.](#)

[Join my Patreon community to help guide my books and be part of the fun.](#)

The image shows a screenshot of a Patreon page with three membership tiers. Each tier includes a title, a price, a 'Join' button, and a list of benefits.

| Membership Tier | Price        | Benefits  |
|-----------------|--------------|---|
| Bronze Babes    | \$10 / month | Marvelous Monday's Weekly exclusive episodes of new or completely reworked KW stories. <b>Behind-the-Scenes Access:</b> Blog updated weekly discussing what I am writing. Behind-the-scenes: Book covers, character images, teasers.  |
| Silver Swans    | \$15 / month | ALL THINGS Bronze Babes in addition to:<br>1) Access to Specialty Posts: One example of a specialty post is <b>Inside of You</b> which are episodes that feature KW Alphas trying to be...<br>Weekly in-progress chapters (unedited). |
| Gold Goddesses  | \$25 / month | ALL THINGS Bronze Babes & Silver Swans in addition to:<br>1) <b>Fuck, Marry, Kill Monthly Drawing:</b> Winner will be made into a character in one of my upcoming stories.<br>Book copy of KW (Dr Taylor Rice) New.                   |