



Stefano
DELUCA

M'RENEE ALLEN

SAVAGE *Bloodline*

Stefano DeLuca

By M'Renee Allen

Copyright page



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Stefano DeLuca

By M'Renee Allen



Two broken souls collide in this Dark Mafia Romance

They call him the Silent Beast.

His name strikes fear in the hearts of his enemies, and they shudder at the thought of him. He's a ruthless savage who's earned the right to be called a DeLuca. Like the rest of his family, he fears no one. That is until a 5'6 assassin with tantalizing curves and a mean right hook crashes into his life, awaking a part of him he thought long dead, *his heart*.

She brings with her a list of enemies almost as long as his own. Like him, she's at ease in the shadows and thrives in the darkness. Together they make up one beautiful disaster. The silent beast and his beautiful assassin will make their enemies regret coming after them, and along the way, they'll experience a love neither of them dreamed possible.

Find out what happens when one dark soul falls in love with another dark soul when you read, Stefano DeLuca.

Chapter One



Two weeks ago.

Chicago, Illinois

Sienna

Sweat beaded her forehead as she stitched up her wound.

Gritting her teeth, her hand trembled slightly when she pushed the needle into her skin. If she didn't hurry up, she'd pass out before she was done sewing up the stab wound on her side. She pulled the needle out, then pushed it in again. Her eyes burned from the sweat dripping into them. No matter what happened, she couldn't close her eyes.

Not yet. If she did, she might not open them again... *ever!* And if she passed out before she'd finished her task, she would bleed out while unconscious. Sienna pushed the needle into her skin for the final time. This time, when she pulled it out, she cut the thread, then tied the end into a triple knot before cutting off the slack.

Still not done, she reached for the bottle of vodka next to her. With her hands covered in blood, it was a struggle to get the bottle open. Had she been thinking straight, she would've opened the bottle before she started sewing herself up. Now, her hand kept slipping on the cap.

"Fuck!" Sienna whispered, resisting the urge to smash the bottle into the ground. Inhaling deeply, she exhaled slowly before giving herself a mini pep talk. *Focus, Sienna. You got*

this. You've got to have this because there's no one here to help you.

In the past, she'd had her bestie around to help stitch up her wounds. Now, she was all alone. Blinking back tears, she recited the remaining names on her kill list as she finally got the cap off and began pouring the alcohol over her stitches. The more it burned, the faster she recited the names, repeating them over and over again.

Only three names remained on her list. The other seven were already deceased. The remaining three would've died tonight if her informant hadn't switched sides on her. The intel he'd provided her had been correct. So had the intel he'd given her enemies about her.

Fucking double-crosser.

Her enemies had been waiting for her. They'd waited until she was inside their restaurant, posing as a waitress, before having their gunmen surround her. If it wasn't for the bombs she'd planted before the restaurant opened that day, she wouldn't have gotten out alive. Unfortunately, one of their goons had been waiting outside for her.

He was the one who'd gifted her with this nasty stab wound. As a thank you, she'd used that same knife to slit his throat. Sienna sighed, wishing it was her target's throat she'd slit instead of one of their goons. If it wasn't for her bitch ass informant, tonight, she would've offed the O'Callaghan don and his two sons.

They were the last three people who had beef with her and her best friend, Eden. *Correction!* Her friend went by Eve now. Sienna really needed to remember that. Especially since she would be traveling to Italy soon to meet up with her. She'd hoped to make the trip after she'd cleaned up their past.

Tonight's failure had done the exact opposite. It had dirtied things up even more. The O'Callaghans weren't the type of family to let things slide. They would come for her. The last thing she needed was an Irish crime family on her ass. Sienna swayed, vision blurring. Blinking rapidly to clear things up,

she took a swig of the liquor, then poured more over her wound.

Her attempt to rip a clean piece of her shirt off to cover her wound failed. She was too weak to tear the fabric. The effort her attempt took caused her vision to blur again. This time, no amount of blinking could clear it. Sienna felt like she was falling. The bottle fell from her hands.

The dingy walls of the abandoned house she was holed up in began to fade. Dark spots appeared before her eyes. The spots grew larger until only darkness surrounded her, bringing with it the chill of death. Sienna wanted to fight it. She wanted to hold on. She wasn't ready to die.

She hadn't truly lived yet. Her entire life had been spent running, hiding, and killing, not always in that order. There was still so much she needed to do. There was still so much good she wanted to do. She wanted to prove to herself that she wasn't the psychotic monster her enemies called her.

She wanted to prove she could help instead of hurt. She wanted to prove she didn't destroy everything she touched. However, fate had other plans for her. She wasn't strong enough to fight the darkness and the pain. *Darkness and pain.* It seemed that would be all she'd experience in her life.

Giving up, she allowed the darkness to pull her under. Maybe dying was the one good thing she could do for others. With her gone, that would be one less monster on the streets. Her last thought was that she was glad Eden had gotten away from this life. Had she not, this would've been her fate also. At least one of them had been given a second chance.

Be safe, Eden. I mean, Eve. Be happy this time around. You deserve it. You are not your past. You are so much more than this world tried to force you to be. Be happy, friend.

Sienna passed out.

Pain in her side and her head was proof that she was still alive.

Apparently, even hell didn't want her. Sienna awoke to someone's hands touching her face. Her first reaction was to reach for her weapon. The problem was, she was still too weak to move, which left her at the mercy of her enemies.

"She's awake, Miss Davies," a soft voice called out.

It was a voice she recognized. Sienna's eyes drifted open. Staring down at her, with her greasy died-blond hair slicked away from her pale face, was Joana, the prostitute. Joana smiled, revealing a set of pearly white teeth.

"You got your teeth fixed," Sienna slurred, feeling drunk, which was odd, because she hadn't consumed enough of the vodka to get drunk.

Joana's smile widened. "I did. Miss Davies got it done for me. I brought in the most customers last year. So, I was granted one reward."

"They look nice," Sienna slurred, noticing how strange it was that she was discussing dental work while dying.

"Thanks, Sisi. Hey, Sisi, who did this to you?" Joana asked.

Before Sienna could answer, Joana was pushed aside, and Miss Davies' round brown face appeared in front of her. Miss Davies had always reminded Sienna of Della Reese from the movie, *Harlem Nights*. Like Della, Miss Davies also pimped out prostitutes. If the woman didn't have a bad hip, knee, and back, she'd probably be working in the bedroom also.

On numerous occasions, she'd heard Miss Davies say she missed the old days when she could *swang on a dick or two*. Despite her profession, Miss Davies was one of the sweetest people Sienna knew. Like everyone else around them, the woman had fallen on hard times. She was doing her best with the hand life had dealt her. Miss Davies peered down at Sienna.

"Child, you should be hiding somewhere better than this. Everyone is looking for you. You're lucky it was Joana who found you here and came and got me. If anyone else would've

found you, word of your location would've spread like chlamydia in a whore house.”

“You talking about Chlamydia Jenkins?” Joana asked.

“Shut up, girl,” Miss Davies said with a roll of her eyes. “Did you call Dr. Lucille like I told you to?”

“I did,” Joana answered.

“No doctors,” Sienna slurred, trying to sit up, only to realize she hadn't moved at all.

“Relax. Dr. Lucille is a good one. She's the one I call when an idiot gets too rough with one of my girls. She's blind, deaf, and mute.”

Sienna knew Miss Davies didn't mean the woman was literally blind, deaf, and mute. She simply meant the doctor wouldn't say anything about what she saw or heard. Miss Davies was one of the few people Sienna trusted. She'd come to Sienna's rescue on more than one occasion. If Miss Davies trusted this doctor, Sienna would, too, this time.

“What happened?” Miss Davies asked.

Sienna opened her mouth to tell her. Her tongue felt heavy. So did her eyelids. And why did she feel so drunk? She tried to speak again. In her head, she was saying the words. But she was pretty sure her lips weren't moving.

“I...” She tried again but fell silent. She was too exhausted to speak. Sleep, that was what she needed.

“I see the pill I gave you has kicked in,” Miss Davies said.

Sienna jerked her gaze to Miss Davies. “What...”

“Relax. It's for the pain. Do you feel less pain?”

Actually, she did. She hadn't realized it until now, but the pain was fading. Or maybe she was fading. Something was most definitely fading.

“You're welcome. Go ahead and get some sleep. You're safe, child. We'll look out for you. I won't let anyone kill you on my watch.”

Tears filled Sienna's eyes. It felt good to be looked out for. It felt good to be protected. It felt good to know she wasn't alone.

"Don't cry, girl. Sleep. You're going to need your strength so you can run when you wake up."

Miss Davies was right. Her enemies would stalk her to the ends of the earth. She had to get a head start if she wanted to survive. Closing her eyes, she allowed the darkness to claim her again.

The next time she opened her eyes, she was no longer in an abandoned house.

The walls were still dingy, though. The room smelled of cigarettes and medicine. Sienna tried to sit up. Someone grabbed her arm. She stared over at a face she recognized.

"You're finally awake," Chantae, another one of Miss Davies' girls, said as she helped Sienna sit up. "Are you in pain? It's been about two hours since your last dose of medicine."

Though she was in pain, she wasn't a fan of medicine. For now, her pain was manageable without meds. It hurt like hell, but she'd endured worst.

"I'm alright," Sienna answered. "Where's Miss Davies?"

Chantae sat back down in her seat. "She went downstairs to manage the lobby. Old Man Frank got arrested this morning. So, he can't work the motel's front desk. The other girls are either busy working a room, or they're walking the streets. Miss Davies has to work the front desk by herself."

Sienna stared around her. So, she was at Blue Ridge Inn, Miss Davies' motel that doubled as a whore house. Well, it was pretty much just a whore house. However, sometimes truckers came through town and rented a room. When they found out the staff offered more than just complimentary mints, they rented the staff too. Chantae must've noticed Sienna's frown.

“Don’t worry,” Chantae rushed to say. “The sheets are clean. I did laundry yesterday.”

“No, that’s not it.” She’d found herself in worse places than this over the years. “It’s just the last time I was here, I was working on an assignment for Maureen.”

Sienna fell silent, not wanting to talk about her former boss, the woman she and Eden had killed. They’d had no choice. Maureen had planned to kill them. Because of the drugs and her own guilty conscience, the woman had completely lost her mind and became paranoid about those closest to her.

Chantae leaned closer to her. “You know, Maureen’s men are still looking for you two. I haven’t seen Eden. I was hoping I wouldn’t see you again. I was shocked when the guys brought you in here. Why haven’t you run?”

Sienna clasped her hands together in front of her. “I have something to take care of first.”

“Fuck that!” Chantae rolled her eyes. “Last night, I was entertaining guests in the convention room. I heard someone say that the O’Callaghans got hit up three nights ago. They said it was you who did it. Their family has all their people out looking for you. They want you alive. You know what that means.”

Yeah, they wanted to torture her. She would expect nothing less from such a ruthless family. *Wait!* Three nights ago?

“What’s today?” Sienna’s gaze jerked to the window.

It was still night out. Wasn’t this the night she attacked the O’Callaghans? She thought she’d slept for hours, not days. Chantae told her the date. Sienna’s heart dropped.

“Damn it. I’ve been out of it for three days?”

Chantae nodded. “You awakened every now and then. We fed you, gave you meds, and redressed your wound. Then you went back to sleep. You don’t remember?”

“No.” Sienna tried to rub her hand through her hair, only to encounter tangles.

“Sorry. We haven’t done your hair yet. You sweated a lot when you slept. You had a fever. I planned to do your hair after you were able to shower and wash it.”

Her hair was the least of her concerns right now. Three days had passed since her failed attempt to take out her enemies. Which meant tomorrow was the day she was supposed to fly to Italy.

If she’d slept one more day, she would’ve missed her flight. That would’ve been a tragedy. Eden’s phone was no longer in service. Something had happened to her friend. She had to find her. A wave of guilt washed over Sienna.

If something had happened to Eden, she’d never forgive herself. It was her who’d suggested her friend take over the identity of her dead twin and travel to Italy in the first place. Sienna had thought Eden would be safe there. Now, she was wondering if that had been a bad idea.

Don’t think like that, Sienna. Eden would be fine. Sienna would find her soon. Then, the two of them would find somewhere to lay low together. First, Sienna had to get to Italy. Lying around and taking meds wasn’t going to get her there. Clenching her teeth against the pain, she climbed out of bed. Damn, her side ached something fierce.

“Sisi,” Chantae started. “Miss Davies said you needed to rest for a few days.”

“I’ve already rested for three days. I need to leave.”

“Please get back in bed.” Chantae grabbed her arm.

Sienna glared at Chantae. The woman slowly removed her hand.

“I’ll just go tell Miss Davies so she can talk some sense into you.”

With that said, Chantae stormed out. Sienna searched the room for her clothes and found nothing. Frustrated and still clad in a white oversize tee shirt and gray jogging pants, she limped back over to the bed. She took her time sitting down, not wanting to make her side hurt worst.

She needed clothing, and she needed them now. She and Chantae were about the same size. Perhaps she could get some clothes from her. Sienna swayed. *Whoa*. Either she was getting dizzy, or the room had started spinning. The door to the bedroom burst open. Two Miss Davies entered the room.

“When did you get a twin...” She didn’t get a chance to finish her slurred sentence before she passed out. The next time her eyes drifted open, it was morning. The question was, what morning? The events of the past few days returned to her in a rush. *My flight!*

“Shit,” Sienna muttered as she sat up. This time, it didn’t hurt as bad to move around. It also wasn’t pain-free. But any improvement was welcomed.

“Lie back down,” someone ordered.

She looked left and stared into the face of Miss Davies. This time, there was only one of her.

Miss Davies sighed. “Child, do you have a death wish?”

“I don’t think so,” Sienna replied. Though, sometimes, it felt like she did.

Miss Davies shook her head. “I swear, you girls are going to be the death of me.”

“You’ve got to stop worrying so much.”

“How can I not worry? Look at the condition you’re in. And now you have a mafia family after you. I wouldn’t worry as much if it were just Maureen’s goons coming for you. I know you can handle them. But those men who want you alive, they’re dangerous. Scary dangerous.”

“I know, which is why I need to leave, so I don’t endanger everyone here.”

“Child, you know this place is Switzerland.”

“Not to the Irish mob.”

“True. But almost all the drugs in this hotel are supplied by them and have been that way for years. We’re turning a profit

for them. Trust me. We'll be okay. Plus, they haven't come looking for you here yet."

"Eventually, they will. I need to be gone before they do. And you need to tell them the truth when they come."

"Why the hell would I do that? I'm no snitch. You know that."

"Miss Davies, tell them I was here, but I left before you found out what I'd done to them."

Miss Davies shook her head. "No. Not doing that. That's not in my nature. I'm offended by you even suggesting it."

"If you lie and say I wasn't here, they'll find out, and they'll burn this place down. Probably with you and the girls in it."

Miss Davies' eyes widened. "Damn it," she muttered under her breath.

"But if you're honest..." Sienna started, then paused, letting it sink in for the older woman.

"They'll let it slide so that they don't cause trouble with me and mess up their profit here. I know. I know," Miss Davies said, resigning herself to what had to be done.

"They're ruthless but smart," Sienna told Miss Davies. "Your girls push drugs for them. They won't mess that up unless they absolutely have to. Let's not give them a reason to have to."

"Okay, stop lecturing me. I know what needs to be done. I just hate that you ended up in this situation." Tears sprang to Miss Davies' eyes.

"Don't you dare cry, old lady. You'll make me cry."

Miss Davies blinked back tears. "I watched you grow up. You've lived a hard life, and it's not going to get any easier. I'd hoped with Maureen gone, your fate would change."

So, had I.

"You never know." Sienna tried to sound cheerful. "It might change. We've got to be optimistic." *Lies!* But she

didn't want Miss Davies to continue looking sad. "I've got to get going, Miss Davies."

"I know. But give me a second, okay?"

Sienna nodded.

"Listen carefully, Sienna. You've got three strikes against you. You're black, you're a woman, and you're strong. But guess what? That's also what makes you a survivor. I'm sorry you had to be strong at such a young age. And I wish I could do more for you."

"No," Sienna said, shaking her head. "You've done so much over the years. You let me hide here when Maureen was having her fits. You gave me money for clothes when Maureen punished me and took away everything I had. You and your girls hid me many times over the years when my enemies came looking. You let me come here to eat when I didn't have food." Sienna swallowed, then said, "You've been my guardian angel all these years. Now, it's time for me to protect you. If I stay any longer, you and the girls will die. I've got to go, Miss Davies."

A sob escaped Miss Davies. The control Sienna had over her own tears snapped. She threw her arms around Miss Davies and hugged her, just as she'd done many times when she was a child. Without this woman, she wouldn't be alive today.

"My little chemist," Miss Davies said. "We're going to miss you making concoctions for us. The girls' favorite is the one that makes men pass out after five minutes."

Sienna chuckled. "I'll leave the recipe with you. You can make it for them."

"I'd rather have you here. But, I know you have to leave."

"Thank you for taking care of me," Sienna whispered.

"Thank me by surviving, child. That's all I want. Survive. And make sure Eden survives also."

"I will," Sienna promised.

But to do that, she needed to go to her safehouse, collect her passport and money, then catch her flight on time. All while avoiding being captured by the Irish mob. That was doable. Maybe.

“I’m thankful to Maureen for one thing,” Miss Davies told her. “She made you girls learn foreign languages.”

“Not both of us. Just me. Eden hadn’t had to. Plus, it was only me that Maureen trusted to handle foreign diplomats.”

Sienna wasn’t proud of the fact that she could speak multiple languages. It had been a pain to learn them. Not only because learning them had been hard, but because when she’d messed up, Maureen punished her.

The bottom of Sienna’s feet were full of bruises where Maureen had either beaten or burned her feet as punishment. She’d never struck Sienna’s face. Her face was a commodity, according to Maureen.

And though she’d struck Sienna’s back numerous times, Maureen had realized that marring Sienna’s visible flesh hurt her bottom line. So, she’d resorted to abusing Sienna’s feet, which was one reason Sienna didn’t enjoy getting pedicures. She didn’t like the way the techs looked at her when they saw the bottom of her feet. She wasn’t a fan of having others pity her.

“I’ve got some clothes for you,” Miss Davies told her. “Come on. I’ll help you shower and dress. One of the girls will do your hair. Then we’ll check your bandage one more time before you leave. I’ve got some meds for you to take with you. You haven’t fully recovered, so don’t overdo it when you get to wherever you’re going. And if you’re flying, do not try to take weapons on the plane. I don’t want your journey to end before it even begins. If you’re driving, don’t take a car that others associate with you. But don’t steal one, either. Keep your nose clean until you’re far away from this place, girl.”

Miss Davies continued to give her advice and lecture her as she helped Sienna into the bathroom. After a quick shower and change of clothes, Chantae styled Sienna’s hair in a simple ponytail. Sienna could’ve done it herself, but Miss Davies was

scared she'd pull her stitches. After she was done dressing, she stared at herself in the mirror one last time.

There were bags under her eyes. Her face was slimmer from the weight she'd lost over the past weeks. Running for your life didn't leave much time for eating or restful sleeping. Sienna turned to the side. Her ass was still fat. That was all that mattered. Facing forward again, she took a deep breath, then closed her eyes and did something she hadn't done in a long time. She prayed. After saying Amen, she turned and left the hotel room.

Italy, here I come. I hope you're ready for me.

Chapter Two



Two weeks later, in Bari, Italy

Stefano

He stared at his new documents.

The only thing different on them was his last name. *DeLuca*. He was officially a DeLuca. He thought he'd feel different once the name change happened. Instead, he felt nothing, as usual. He looked up when he heard footsteps approaching. Enzo and Eve came striding down the hall. Enzo had a slight smile on his face.

Eve was beaming. Stefan tensed. When she smiled that big, something was usually wrong. Either she'd pistol-whipped someone at Tower D again and needed him to ensure that person didn't sue her. Or she'd cooked some new and strange meal and wanted him to try it. He hoped it wasn't the latter. The look the couple was giving him made him uneasy.

"What?" Stefan asked when they reached him. "What do you need me to fix?"

Eve shrugged. "Nothing. Why do you always ask me that, Stefano *DeLuca*?" She put an emphasis on the last name.

"Just call me Stefan." He didn't know if he was truly ready to accept the name DeLuca yet.

"Okay, Stefano *DeLuca*." Again, she placed an emphasis on his last name.

Stefan stared at Enzo, looking for a little help. He should've known his friend... no, *brother*, wouldn't help.

When it came to Eve, the savage don turned into a simpering puppy. The last time Stefano told him that, Enzo threatened to put a bullet in his leg. For that reason, Stefano kept his thoughts to himself.

“Don’t look at me,” Enzo said, noticing the look Stefan cast his way. “I can’t control her.”

Eve’s smile widened as she came up on her tiptoes and kissed Enzo on his cheek.

“But it’s so cute when he tries to,” she muttered.

Now, Enzo’s smile was widening. Soon, he’d be telling her how beautiful she was and how he’d kill any motherfucker who looked at her for too long. He was the reason the men at Tower D were afraid to come out of their offices.

They were afraid they’d run into Eve while Enzo was there. If the don caught them looking her way, even in passing, he would threaten to kill them. Which was so damn illogical.

They worked with her. Of course, they had to look at her. Stefan blamed love. It was a disease that made motherfuckers illogical as fuck. He watched Enzo bend down to kiss Eve on her forehead. He looked away, feeling like he was about to be sick.

“Is this what you called me here for?” Stefan asked, holding up the documents he’d found on the kitchen table.

After receiving a text from Enzo stating there was something waiting for him in the kitchen, he’d cringed, thinking Eve wanted him to try out her cooking again. The last meal she’d made had almost killed him. He’d had stomach cramps for three days after eating it. *Never again*. But, this wasn’t much better.

“I told you I’d take care of it,” Stefano told his friend... brother.

“I know. But Eve...” Enzo started.

“Eve?” Stefan looked at Enzo with his eyebrow raised.

“Me.” Eve pointed at herself.

Stefan took a deep breath and forced himself to remain calm. Was Eve calling the shots now? It sure as hell seemed like it.

“As I was saying, Eve *and I* wanted to give you an early birthday gift...”

“It’s nowhere near my birthday.”

“Oh, right.” Enzo frowned. Not deterred, he continued. “Consider it an early Christmas...”

“You already gave me an early Christmas gift. Remember when Eve was practicing her baking skills? You told me to treat the fruit cake as an early Christmas gift. It was a gift that almost killed m...”

Glaring at him, Enzo shook his head. It would make everything better if Enzo would just tell the woman her cooking was bad. Still, Stefano got the message.

“Anyway, you already gave me an early Christmas gift,” Stefano finished.

“Happy Hanukkah,” Eve shouted while rubbing Enzo’s back to calm him down. “Or happy Easter. Merry 4th of July. Look, forget the reason. Just take the gift. You two are brothers. You don’t need a reason to give each other gifts. Enzo was worried that you wouldn’t feel comfortable getting your name changed. He was worried you’d think his uncles would have a problem with it.”

“I wasn’t worried.” Enzo shrugged. “I’m never worried. Dons don’t get worried.”

Eve rolled her eyes. “Sorry. The *don* wasn’t worried. He just wanted to welcome his brother into the family. So, he went ahead and got your paperwork done for your name change.”

“Without my ID or anything?”

“I know a guy,” Enzo told him.

Of course, he did. Stefan knew that guy also. He’d be paying a visit to Erik soon. His gaze jerked from Eve to Enzo.

They both looked happy for him. They'd done this to let him know he was family.

To let him know he was accepted. They didn't know he had mixed feelings about all of this. Those mixed feelings were his burden to bear, not theirs. To placate them, he forced a smile onto his face.

"Is he smiling?" Eve whispered to Enzo.

"I think so. He doesn't do it often, so it's hard to tell," Enzo whispered loudly.

"I see why," she replied.

"I can hear you," Stefan told them.

Eve smiled. "Just kidding. I'll leave you two brothers alone so you can chat. I've got a recipe to work on."

The smile left Enzo's face as she skipped away.

"What recipe?" Enzo yelled, staring after her, panic flaring in his gaze.

"You'll see after I prepare it," she yelled without looking back.

"Eve, we talked about this. Eve. Eve!"

"Stop shouting. She's gone. And I'm leaving before I end up getting food poisoning again."

"Wait, Stefan."

Stefan stopped and glanced over his shoulder.

"Are you really okay with the name change?" Enzo asked. "I know I overstepped my bounds. But you're my brother. My only brother. I want us to bear the same name."

What about what I want?

Stefan stared down at the document. Was he okay with this? The word DeLuca stared back at him, taunting him, daring him to accept the name. *DeLuca*. It wasn't just a simple word. It held meaning. It carried weight. It came with responsibilities and enemies. It came with emotions. Stefan wasn't a fan of emotions.

“If you want, I can have it changed back,” Enzo told him. “Even without the name change, you’re still my brother. I’m sure grandfather would’ve wanted this for you.”

If the old don had wanted this, he would’ve had it done years ago. Stefan pushed that thought away.

“I’m okay,” he told Enzo. “It’s just a big change. It’ll take some getting used to. You should go check on Eve and her new recipe before she burns something up again.”

Enzo shook his head. “I’ll break that stove before I let her cook again. I’m considering getting rid of the entire kitchen. We don’t need it.”

Stefan chuckled. “I’m leaving.”

“See you later.”

“Later.”

Stefan left Enzo’s house. Outside, he nodded to the guards. They nodded back. After sliding into his car and closing the door, he tossed his new documents onto the passenger seat. *Stefano DeLuca*. He still didn’t know how he felt about having DeLuca as a last name. Learning that Enzo was his brother had made the things his grandmother taught him as a kid that much more baffling. He could still hear her words as clear as day.

I know Enzo is your friend, but don’t get too close to him. You’re not one of them.

Be careful what you say around Don DeLuca. Enzo too. You don’t want them to one day use your words against you.

Never bring up your mother around the Don. Don’t ask why. Just don’t do it, boy.

To the outside world, his grandmother had been a loving woman. She’d been a loyal employee to the DeLuca family and showed them the utmost respect. Behind closed doors, Stefan knew she despised them. And on some level, he’d felt as if she’d despised him too. He’d always told himself he was wrong about that one.

Now that he knew his father was Lorenzo DeLuca, he suspected he’d been right all along. His grandmother had

probably despised him because he was a DeLuca also. The question was, why had she hated the DeLucas so much? Though he'd asked her numerous times, she'd never revealed why she'd hated the DeLucas.

He'd even felt guilty for hanging around Enzo while knowing his grandmother didn't like them. Learning he was a DeLuca only raised more questions. Questions he hoped to soon find answers to without drawing too much attention to himself. The older DeLucas didn't like it when people dug into their past.

However, that was exactly what Stefan planned to do. It wasn't like it could make them hate him any more than they already did. Many of the old heads despised him because he'd been close to the old don and Enzo. Closer than some of them were. They claimed Stefano was arrogant.

That was only because he didn't take orders from them and didn't allow them to talk down to him like he was some street filth. They claimed he was freeloading off the family simply because of his pay grade. As if he didn't put in the work. As if he didn't bear the scars that proved he'd earned his pay.

Every dime paid to him by the DeLucas had been earned in blood, sweat, and sometimes tears. How many of them could say that? Thoughts of his grandmother, the old DeLucas, and the questions he needed answers to, consumed his thoughts his entire drive home.

Stefano pulled up to his front gate, then punched in the code. The gate slid open. He drove up the winding driveway to the house Don Ermanno DeLuca had left for him. The code to the estate was his birthday. The old don had remembered his birthday. What did that mean? Or did it mean anything at all?

Just another question Stefan didn't have the answer to. Stefano hadn't been inside the house yet. Going inside meant he accepted the house and all the responsibilities that came with it. It meant he accepted the name, *DeLuca*. It meant he was okay with the fact that the don and his grandmother had kept this a secret from him his entire life.

It meant he was ready to let go of the past and start anew. No. He wasn't ready for a new start. Not yet. He wasn't ready to forgive them for the lies and omissions of truth. He wasn't ready to forget how lost he'd felt growing up in Enzo's shadow. Enzo never made him feel like he was less than him.

And the old don had always been good to Stefano. But Stefano had grown up yearning for someone to care for him the way the don had cared for Enzo. Sure, he'd had his grandmother, who'd raised him the best she could. And he'd mourned her when she'd died. But there had been no love in their home, despite what outsiders believed.

There had only been obligations and responsibilities. He and his grandmother had been forced together by events of the past that hadn't been shared with him. She'd been compelled to either raise him on her own or send him into foster care. She'd chosen to be responsible for him.

And he was thankful for that. However, that responsibility had turned into resentment as he'd grown older. On his end, he'd been obligated to care for her because she'd been the only family he'd had. However, obligations and responsibilities didn't equal love. Sometimes they grew into the opposite of love.

He hadn't realized that until he became an adult. Once he'd realized it, it was too late to change things. He'd mourned her even harder because he'd felt guilty for not loving the woman who'd raised him. Her death had opened wounds he hadn't known he'd had. His entire life he'd been called cold and distant.

Women had told him he was unfeeling and unable to love. His enemies had named him the Silent Beast. He accepted it all as truth. Those who'd been close to his grandmother had constantly told him he was so different from his grandmother. No one had known he was a reflection of the woman his grandmother was behind closed doors.

Though some of the resentment he'd felt toward her was due to the shitty way she'd treated him behind closed doors, some of it had also been because of their living situation.

Though she'd been treated well by the DeLucas, she'd still just been a maid on the DeLuca estate.

Therefore, it didn't matter how close Enzo and Stefano were. Other kids had still poked fun at him and called him the help. He'd been called Enzo's maid, Enzo's errand boy, Enzo's pet. To others, Stefano had been nothing more than a DeLuca servant. The difference between the two of them was as clear as night and day.

One was the beloved heir to the DeLuca organization. The other was his lackey. As a kid, he'd blamed his grandmother for that. He'd wanted to know why she couldn't find a better job and why did they have to live on the Delucas' property. He'd been too young to understand his grandmother had her share of burdens too.

He'd seen the world through a child's eyes and only paid attention to the things he'd lacked. Enzo had learned to fight because the old don had wanted to make him stronger. Stefano learned to fight because he'd grown tired of the bullies calling him the DeLuca's bitch at school and in the streets.

Of course, they'd never said it when Enzo was around. They'd waited until Stefano was alone, and then they'd attacked verbally and physically. He'd learned how to protect himself because he'd had no choice.

By the time the old don offered to let him train with Enzo, Stefano was already known for his street fights. Still, he'd had to pretend he wasn't as strong as Enzo. No one told him to do that. But his grandmother's words had already been instilled in his heart.

Never make them think you're stronger than them. If you do, they'll try to break you down.

Therefore, he'd allowed Enzo to win most of their skirmishes. The few times Stefano had decided to show off, he'd expected Enzo to be mad at him for defeating him. Instead, his brother and the old don had praised him. They'd made him feel good about winning. They'd complimented him on his skills and his strengths.

However, when he returned to the small house he shared with his grandmother at the edge of the DeLuca estate, he'd been yelled at and beaten for not following her rules. Word spread fast amongst the servants. And they hadn't hesitated to run and tell his grandmother how well he'd done, not knowing that they were doing him a disservice.

Stefano gripped the steering wheel tightly as memory after memory slammed into him, bringing with them emotions he'd thought he'd overcome. As a kid, he'd never gotten coddled by his grandmother when he was bullied. He was simply told to ignore them. Yet, he got in major trouble when he fought back.

He'd never been praised for getting good grades in school. That was expected. Yet, when he started receiving bad grades because he'd begun skipping school to keep from getting into fights with his bullies, his grandmother wanted to know why he was letting others treat him like trash.

He'd grown up not knowing what type of person he was supposed to be. The only thing he'd known for sure was that he wasn't supposed to be like the DeLucas. In the end, that was exactly what happened. He now earned a living from fighting and killing for the family his grandmother despised.

First, as a DeLuca soldier. Now, as a member of the DeLuca family. What would his grandmother say if she could see him today? He was all too familiar with her looks of disappointment. Though he expected she'd only wanted to protect him, he was starting to wonder who'd been the bigger threat.

Who was responsible for him becoming the unfeeling monster he was today? Was it the DeLucas she'd feared him getting too close to? Or was it her, for making him distance himself from his family and for making him pretend to be the weak one? Or had he been destined to become a monster from the start?

Chapter Three



Stefano

The low hum of an airplane flying overhead pulled Stefano out of the past. What the fuck was he doing? Why was he sitting around reminiscing over shit he couldn't change? This was unlike him. Cold and detached, that was what he needed to be. Stefano tore his gaze away from the new house that brought back old memories. The answers he sought wouldn't be found there.

He drove around the circular driveway and returned to the front gate. The gate opened and he drove out. He waited to make sure it closed behind him before driving off. He'd feel more comfortable in his own home, the one he'd purchased himself with the money he'd made himself, not a place that was given to him by the DeLucas.

His gaze dropped to the clock. It was still early. Tomorrow, Enzo was spending the day with Eve. That meant Stefano had the day off too. He'd spent most of his week handling complaints he'd received about Eve from Tower D. She was worse than Enzo. So far, blood had been spilled in the Tower twice on her watch.

Both times, by her. The employees in the tower feared her more than they feared Enzo. When Stefano told Enzo that, he'd expected the don to get mad or at least have his pride wounded. Instead, he'd said, "That's why she's perfect for this job." Now, Stefano didn't just have to clean up behind Enzo.

He had to clean up behind Eve also. He deserved a day off. With all the questions running through his mind, he needed

something to help him relax so he could enjoy his day off tomorrow. Tonight, he wanted to fight, fuck, and then forget about his concerns for a little while.

There was only one place he could go for that. Stefano steered his vehicle toward a side of town that not many were brave enough to tread. Yet, it was where Stefano felt the most comfortable. It was where he went whenever he needed to escape. It took him forty-five minutes to reach his destination.

He pulled into a parking space of his favorite bar and stared up at the sign. *Club Tacere*. It was a seedy spot he'd been going to since he was a teen. Back then, he'd been too young to get into the club part. Yet, the owner had let him into the basement for the events that went on down there.

In English, Tacere meant to be silent or hush. *Club Hush*. Like Vegas, what happened there, stayed there. Not many people knew there was a basement underneath the club. Back in the day, that basement was where Stefano earned his money. It was where he'd honed his fighting skills.

Now, it was a place he went to let off steam. Before leaving his car, Stefano grabbed the documents from his passenger seat and placed them in the glove compartment. After exiting the vehicle, he locked the doors, then walked around to his trunk. Some patrons who were leaving the club saw him heading for his trunk.

Their eyes widened, then they raced to their cars. *Scary motherfuckers*. Stefan opened his trunk and found his black baseball cap. He pulled it over his head as he closed the trunk. The car those same patrons were in rolled past him. When they realized he was just getting his hat, a look of relief washed over their faces. Ignoring them, Stefano strode to Club Tacere.

The hum of music reached his ears as he neared the building. There was no bouncer waiting outside to pat him down. Neither was there anyone collecting money. Tacere didn't charge to enter the club. And no one fought there. At least, not in the club part of the establishment.

If you start a fight at Club Tacere, you forfeit your life. If someone had a hit on them, and the hit went down at the club,

the person who did the killing and the person who'd hired them would be ostracized, and the club would put a hit on them. Club rules. Those rules were one of the reasons Stefano liked coming to Tacere.

Inside the club, the noise was much louder, but it was tolerable. The place smelled of alcohol and cigarettes. Since it was still early, there weren't many people present. *Good*. He could have a drink, then head to the basement before the crowd came in. Gennaro Sabato, the owner of the club, greeted him when he reached the front bar.

"Stefano!" Gen exclaimed, smiling. "How the hell are you, my friend?"

Stefano nodded in greeting before sitting down at the bar.

"Your usual?" Gen asked.

Again, Stefano nodded. Gen called to the bartender, who was leaning against the counter, staring down at her phone.

"Cecca! What are you doing? We've got a customer."

Cecca raised her head and glared at Gen, looking annoyed. She opened her mouth to say something, then paused when she noticed Stefano. Her entire demeanor changed. She arched her back, forcing her chest out more. Her thin sleeveless shirt was working overtime to keep her breasts contained.

If she stuck her chest out any further, her shirt would lose the battle, and Cecca's breasts would spill free. Stefano wasn't opposed to that. However, when it came to Cecca, he could look, but he couldn't touch. He didn't fuck the staff at Club Tacere. Plus, Cecca was crazy as hell.

The last guy who'd screwed her then dumped her ended up losing his dick. She'd cut it off. Then she'd beat the man's wife black and blue. Apparently, he'd promised to leave his wife for her. When he didn't, she'd lost it. The only reason Stefan knew this was because Gen told him.

Gen gossiped more than women did. But only about bullshit. This place was called hush for a reason. No one was allowed to talk about shit that could get them killed, which was another reason why Stefano could relax a little here.

Those who saw him here would never tell anyone. If Gen learned they'd told, they would no longer be allowed here.

That is if they survived the beating Gen's men put on them. Stefano tore his gaze away from Cecca's breasts to find her flashing her pearly whites at him as she slid her phone into her back pocket. Tossing her long black hair, streaked with blue highlights, over her shoulder, she sauntered in his direction.

"Stefanoooo," she drawled in the tone she used to get better tips. "I haven't seen you in here for a while. Oh, and I'm sorry for your loss."

Gen patted him on his shoulder. "Don Ermanno was a good man."

Stefano nodded. But the truth was, he didn't want to think about the old don right now. He'd come here to escape his thoughts. *Fight. Fuck. Forget.* He wanted to have a couple of drinks in the club. Then he wanted to head down to the fight ring for a couple of rounds. The money wasn't important. He just wanted to let off some steam.

But fighting wouldn't be enough. That's why he'd then find someone who was just as damaged as him, who also needed an escape, and together, they'd check in at the rundown motel in the back so they could try to forget together. Come morning, he'd wipe the entire experience from memory and return to his own fucked up life.

"What are you having, sweetie?" Cecca asked.

"I'll take my usual."

With a nod, she went to work preparing his drink.

Gen leaned closer to him to whisper, "You're safe in here, Stefano. But you're not safe in this town. That's all I'm saying about that."

Gen didn't have to say more. Stefano already knew the situation.

"Will you be needing a room?" Gen asked.

Stefan nodded.

“I’ll have the wife get one ready for you. Will you be heading down to the dungeon?”

“Yeah, I will. Is the list full?”

Gen shook his head. “Not tonight. A lot of motherfuckers are laying low. I’m sure you know why.”

Because a war was coming between the DeLucas and the Bianchis. Those who weren’t involved were trying not to get caught in the crosshairs. Those involved had yet to make a move. Ever since Enzo killed don Bianchi’s sons, the rival family had been radio silent.

But that didn’t mean they weren’t planning something. And that didn’t mean Enzo hadn’t been searching for don Bianchi. One rumor circulating around Italy was that the don had left the country with his wife and daughters. Another rumor was that he was sending goons to infiltrate the DeLuca organization.

Enzo had the family on alert worldwide. However, nothing had gone down yet. But they were ready. The DeLucas were always ready. Since that night when Enzo killed the two Bianchi boys, other members of the Bianchi family had reached out to him, saying they’d had nothing to do with what the don planned.

They were businessmen only. They didn’t support the don trying to breathe life back into the criminal activities their grandfathers had been a part of. They’d wanted to have a sit down with Enzo to discuss the situation. Enzo declined the invitation stating he’d have a sit down after he killed their don.

Enzo didn’t know if he believed them or not. Neither did he care. He’d told them he wanted their don’s head. And if he found out they were lying, he was coming for theirs too, including anyone else who was involved. That warning was being echoed through the streets, and now everyone was on edge and trying to stay out of the DeLucas way as they hunted down don Bianchi.

“Since a lot of motherfuckers are lying low,” Gen continued. “That means the list is shorter these days.”

The fight list was what kept this place running.

“But with you on the list, with you here period, others may feel it’s safe to come back out,” Gen told him.

“It’s not safe to come back out. But this place is safe.”

Gen gave him a worried look.

“Don’t worry. If a Bianchi shows up here, I won’t kill him. I’ll wait until he’s no longer on your property before I put a bullet in his mouth,” Stefano told Gen.

“Good. Good,” the older man said, appearing relieved. “I’ll go get that room set up for you and add you to the list. We don’t have many women on the list lately. There’s one down there tonight. If no one else shows up, she’s asking if she can fight one of the guys.” Gen chuckled.

“Are you going to let her?”

“What choice do I have? If a guy is willing to fight her, I have to allow it. Or I’ll be labeled as a sexist. Women have rights now. Who knew?”

Stefano chuckled when Gen’s wife called from the back for him to get to work.

Gen leaned closer. “They rule the world, actually. They’re scary too.”

Stefano thought about the hold Eve had over Enzo and shuddered.

“You’re right. They are,” he agreed.

“Enjoy your drink. Let me get to work before my wife kills me.” Gen left his seat and headed to the back room of the bar.

Cecca returned with his drink. “Whiskey on the rocks.”

She placed the glass on a napkin, then slid it across the counter to him. He pulled the straw from the drink and sat it on the counter before lifting the glass and taking a sip. The beverage stung the back of his throat. His body warmed as soon as it hit his stomach.

“When that one gets low, I’ll bring you another one,” she told him. “Your limit is five, right?”

Six would get him beyond tipsy. His cut-off was five. That number was different tonight since he was going down to the dungeon.

“Or,” Cecca started before he could tell her a number. “Since you’re heading to the dungeon soon, do you only want two?”

“Two would be fine.”

“See,” she drawled, leaning against the counter in a way that pushed her breasts together. “I always remember my favorite customers’ habits.”

His gaze landed on her breasts as he took another sip. Since she wanted him to see them, he didn’t feel guilty for staring.

“When are you going to let me take care of more than your thirst?” she asked.

“You know I don’t fuck the staff here.”

“I’ll quit.”

He raised an eyebrow at that. “You’d quit your job just for some sex?”

Her chuckle was low and sultry when she answered. “I’d do damn near anything for a taste of your dick.”

That was another reason he’d never fuck her. Her desperation was the biggest turnoff. Stefano downed the rest of his drink before sitting his glass back on the counter.

“Let’s stick to you being my bartender. I’ll take another whiskey. Bring it to my usual table.”

He didn’t miss the pout her lips formed. He rose from his seat and headed to the table he usually occupied. It was in the back corner of the bar, near the back door, with a clear line of vision to the front door and the back bar. The best seat in the house. He passed the pool tables, nodding at the men playing

and avoiding making eye contact with the women who were with them.

Luckily, his usual table was empty. He sat down and tugged the front of his cap lower. Not even a minute later, Cecca arrived with his drink. Instead of just placing the drink down in front of him and leaving, she moved to stand beside him. Her breasts brushed against him when she leaned close to place his drink on the table.

Mouth near his ear, she whispered, "Sorry. I didn't mean to touch you. I know you dislike being touched. My girls are just so big. I can't control them." She pressed her breasts against his arm to prove her point. "Would you like anything else, Stefano?"

"After this, bring me a water."

"You sure that's all you want, big guy?"

He could feel her breath against his cheek. She smelled of liquor and peppermints. Tonight, she'd find someone to fuck her. That someone wouldn't be him. When he didn't reply to her question, she chuckled.

"One day, Stefano Marcone, you're going to give me a taste. Just wait and see."

With that said, she walked off with a sway to her hips. Her tight jeans stretched across her ass, cupping it in a way Stefano never would. She'd probably make a good fuck. He'd never find out. When she reached the middle of the room, she looked over her shoulder and blew him a kiss.

He had to hand it to her. She was persistent. He took a sip of his drink and stared around the club. The front door opened. A group of ladies stepped inside, all clad in skintight dresses that left nothing to the imagination. Which was good because Stefano didn't have much of an imagination.

One of the women craned her neck to the side, looking toward the back, looking for him. He recognized the redhead. Her name was Sally. Or maybe Sonia. Shelly. Something with an S. She came here often. Stefano had even screwed her a few times. Yet, he still couldn't remember her name.

When she saw him, she smiled. A blush tinted her cheeks, and he knew she was remembering their last fuck. Stefano took another sip of his drink. Tonight, he'd let Sonia-Sheila help him forget his woes. Tonight, he would drink, fight, fuck, and forget. Tomorrow, he'd return to the real world. A world where he was now a DeLuca.

A last name his grandmother despised.

Chapter Four



Sienna

Night had fallen, and she still didn't have the information she needed.

Two weeks! She'd been in Italy for two weeks, and she still hadn't found Eden. Peering out her hotel window, she stared down at the people walking below. Though her eyes were on them, her mind was replaying everything she'd learned after arriving there to see if she'd overlooked anything.

She was staying at the same hotel Eden had stayed in. *Ugh!* Sienna groaned. Why couldn't she stop thinking of her as Eden? She was staying at the same hotel *Eve* had stayed in when she'd arrived in Italy. When Sienna asked about Eve at the front desk and showed them her picture, two of the personnel recognized Eve.

Yet, a look of fear flickered in their gazes the moment they saw Eve's picture. According to them, the woman in the picture had checked out not too long after checking in, and they hadn't seen her again since then. However, it was the look in their eyes that told her they knew more than they were letting on.

She'd tried talking to other staffers on different shifts. Apparently, word had spread that she was looking for someone, so the staff avoided her and wouldn't make eye contact with her. It was taking every ounce of self-control she had to keep her from threatening to dismember them if they didn't tell her what they knew.

Though Maureen had tried beating the rebelliousness and impulsiveness out of Sienna when she was young, it hadn't worked. Those beatings only made her angrier, more rebellious. More determined to do what she wanted, when she wanted. Back then, she hadn't feared death.

She only feared it now because she was so close to being free from her dark past, so close to being able to change her name again and start anew. She couldn't die before she got a chance to see if she could be something more than what she was. Which was why she was glad Maureen had eventually given up on her letting go of her anger issues and taught her other ways to vent her anger.

Killing. Right now, Sienna was angry and wanted to kill someone. Unfortunately, murder wasn't the answer to this situation. At least, not yet. And she couldn't go ask the staff more questions because they'd reported her to their manager. Just yesterday, the manager asked her to stop harassing the staff, or she'd have to vacate the premises. Sienna gritted her teeth.

When he'd approached her in his haughty manner, she'd really wanted to throat-punch him. She was proud of herself for restraining from doing so. She'd follow his stupid rules for now and behave. However, she knew the first two staffers she'd talked to knew something about Eve's disappearance.

The fear she'd seen in their eyes had been proof. Since that day she'd spoken to them, she hadn't seen them again at all. Further proof that something had happened to Eve at this hotel. If these bitches didn't want her to burn this place down with them in it, they'd tell her something, and soon.

Sienna closed her eyes and took a deep breath, trying not to succumb to her anger issues. She'd find Eden.... Eve. *Eve. Eve. Eve. Eve.* She'd find Eve, with or without the hotel staff's help. A ding sounded from her open laptop. She moved over to the small table in the corner of the room and sat down in the wooden chair.

An alert from the Darknet had come across. *Please be from Natalie. Please be from Natalie.* She opened the message. Her

heart sank to her feet. The name was listed as anonymous. There were only three words in the message.

Anonymous10: Where are you?

Natalie wouldn't ask her that, especially not in a Darknet Chat message. The only reason Sienna had risked using the chat at all was because she'd run out of options. Upset and slightly tipsy, she'd decided to message Natalie last night. In her defense, she'd written the message in a code of letters, numbers, and symbols that only a select few would understand.

When the sun rose, and she finished puking her guts out in the bathroom, she'd immediately regretted sending the message. This was unlike her. But she was in uncharted territories. Her best friend, her sister, was missing. There weren't many people she was close to. And she'd lost most of them already.

Losing Eve was not an option! Which was why she'd taken a chance on the Darknet. If this reply had really come from Natalie, Sienna's regret would've dimmed a little. Instead, it was flaring up again as another ding sounded and another little envelope appeared on her screen. Swallowing, she opened it. It was the same message.

Anonymous345: Where are you?

This one was from a different anonymous user. He'd only been a member of the net for three days. This had to be someone from the Irish Mafia. They were monitoring the Darknet for her. Luckily, her computer was protected by the same security software some government facilities used.

It had cost her an arm, leg, and a lung to pay for it. But it was worth every limb and organ. Sienna could ignore the message. But she was frustrated. When she was frustrated, her petty side took over. She clasped her hands together and popped her knuckles, then began typing into the account she'd created right after Maureen's death.

NoName4: You're going to have to try harder than that, bitch!

Smiling, Sienna pressed send. She was pretty sure there was a man on the other side of that screen. Men got hella mad when a woman called them a bitch. It was like the end of the world for them. A ding sounded.

Anonymous345: I'm going to make you beg for your life, bitch.

Sienna chuckled and typed...

NoName4: May the odds ever be in your favor.

NoName4: Bitch.

The little dots appeared in the chat, letting her know he was typing his response. Sienna exited the chat and signed off the Darknet. Though she had top-notch security on her device, she was pretty sure the Irish had top-notch spyware. The longer she stayed logged in, the greater their chances of latching on to her location.

Plus, she knew her getting in the last word and then logging off would piss her enemy off even more. Men hated being bested by women. And he knew she was a black woman. This was going to bother him for a long time. For some reason, that little chat put her in a better mood.

Sienna stretched and stared down at her watch. It was way too early for bed. Plus, she wasn't tired. She stood and strode back over to the window. Maybe she needed to get out and see the city. She glanced down at her clothes. That would involve changing clothes. She was comfortable in her black leggings, black slippers, and her black Tee-shirt that read, *Suck It*.

She wasn't much of a 'bright colors' person. Her bestie loved the color purple. Sienna loved black, light black, dark black, faded black, onyx, all of that. Plus, she didn't like being outside. Bugs were out there. And people. People were the worst. Sienna strode over to her bed and plopped down face first.

Turning onto her back, she stared up at the ceiling. *Eve, where are you? Are you hurt? Are you even alive?* Sienna closed her eyes, trying to shut that last thought out of her mind. Her friend couldn't be dead. She was supposed to be

starting a new life away from all the violence and mayhem of Chicago.

She was supposed to be blogging about her adventures in Italy. But her blog hadn't been updated at all. No matter how positive Sienna tried to remain, she wasn't an idiot. Something had happened to her friend. Something bad. Her body tensed when a knock sounded at her door.

"Room service," a woman called out.

Room service? She hadn't ordered any room service. Stretching her arm out, she slid her hand under her pillow and felt around. *Got it.* She pulled her gun close before standing up. She hadn't been able to bring any guns on the plane. One of the first things she'd done after checking into her hotel was take a walk around the shady parts of the area.

As expected, someone tried to rob her. Now, his gun was her gun. It was low on bullets. But it would do for now. She'd get more weapons soon. With her weapon at her side, she strode over to the door and peeked through the peephole.

A tray of food awaited her outside the door. A blonde with her head lowered was standing in front of the tray. There was no way the Irish had found her this fast. So, who'd sent this chick?

"I didn't order room service," Sienna called out.

"You ordered intel from..."

The woman paused as her pale white fingers wrapped around the handle on the lid. Moving slowly, she lifted the silver lid from the plate. Sienna tried to stare down at the plate, but she couldn't through the peep hole.

"If you're trying to show me something, I can't see it," Sienna called out.

The woman sighed, then placed the lid down gently and lifted the plate of food. On top of a steak was a piece of paper with a message on it. **NIHT365**. Sienna immediately recognized the code and its meaning. In their world, it was always night. Day never came to people like them.

“What’s the password?” Sienna asked.

“Survive.”

“What’s the ultimate goal?”

“Never let them take us alive.”

Natalie! Sienna twisted the lock on the door and eased it open to let her friend in. But she kept her gun close, ready, just in case something wasn’t right. Head still low, Natalie pushed the tray into the room.

Sienna peeked out into the hall. It was empty. She closed the door and locked it. She raised her weapon and pointed it at her friend’s back. You could never be too safe. Natalie stood next to the tray with her hands raised.

“Cap off,” Sienna ordered.

Natalie took her cap off and placed it on the tray. The blond hair went with the cap. This heffa had on a cap wig. Natalie’s hair was pulled back into a low ponytail that was coiled around itself. Tonight, she was a brunette. The last time she’d seen her friend, she’d been a redhead.

“Turn around,” Sienna ordered.

Hands still raised, Natalie slowly turned to face Sienna. Natalie’s eyes landed on Sienna’s gun.

“Are you toting?” Sienna asked.

“Of course.”

“Good.” Sienna smiled.

Natalie burst out laughing. “Bitch, you got me coming out when I’m supposed to be laying low. I had to knock a server out to get this damn tray of food.”

“I didn’t tell you to do that,” Sienna said, pushing past Natalie to return her weapon to its place underneath her pillow.

“Your message told me where you were. So, I had to come here.”

Sienna sat on the edge of the bed. “Were you followed?”

“Of course not.” Natalie sat in the chair across from Sienna. “You’ve lost weight.”

“Everything but this ass,” Sienna joked. “You’ve lost weight too.”

“I wish I could say I was dieting.”

“Is Damian Rochester still after you and Sicily?”

“That bastard!” Natalie sighed. “If my damn sister hadn’t gotten involved with that family, I wouldn’t be going through this shit. Then I have my parents and their bullshit to deal with. I don’t even want to think about my issues. Let’s talk about yours. So, Maureen is dead. You finally killed that bitch.”

Sienna nodded. “I’m not proud of it. I had no choice. It was her or us,” she said, speaking of her and Eve. “She changed. She was already mean as hell. But she started getting crazy.”

“I heard rumors that she’d smoked some bad shit.”

“Could be. Or it could’ve been her own conscience finally kicking in and making her think those she’d hurt were finally coming to hurt her.”

Natalie leaned back in her seat. “Do you think that will ever happen to us?”

“What? Going crazy because of the bad things we’ve done?”

“Yeah.”

“I won’t let it drive me crazy. I did what I had to do to survive. Do I regret some of it? Yeah. But I can’t change the past. I can only look to the future. I deserve a future just as much as anyone else.” At least, that’s what she kept telling herself.

“What do you have planned for your future?” Natalie asked.

“After I find Eden, I hope to find somewhere safe to live and chill. Maybe start a business. Maybe find a job in a small

quaint coffee shop and make lattes all day. Maybe date a fisherman who doesn't have social media, and all he knows how to do is take care of his family and fish. Maybe raise a goat."

Natalie burst out laughing. "I cannot see you doing any of that. But that does sound lovely. It sounds peaceful."

"You can do it too."

Natalie shook her head. "There's no turning back for me."

"Don't say that. After I find Eden, we can all..."

Natalie shook her head again. "I'm tired, Sisi. Tired of running, hiding. I'm tired of surviving. Tired of killing. Hell, I'm even tired of being a big sister."

"I know Sicily is a handful, but..."

"This mess my sister and I have gotten ourselves involved in will probably get us killed. And before you say you can help, the answer is no. If you and Eden can get out, do it. Leave it all behind, and don't look back. Work at that coffee shop. Marry that fisherman. Raise that goat and name it Natalie for me. Just make sure he has a big dick first."

"The goat?" Sienna frowned.

"The fisherman. Not the damn goat."

"Oh!" Sienna laughed. "Of course. A big dick is a must. I'm not spending the rest of my life with a man who has a little dick. I'd end up killing his ass."

Natalie chuckled. "Leave this all behind and live a good life. And if I survive this, I'll reach out to you. But if I don't reach out, don't look for me. Don't message me on the Darknet. Do you know how risky that was, even with our secret codes?"

"I know." Siena sighed. "Trust me, I know. What I did was sloppy."

"Very sloppy. And not like you at all."

"I know. I was feeling desperate."

“I get it. No matter how desperate you get in the future, don’t do it again. And I found the information you needed.”

“What?”

Natalie reached into her pocket. “Actually, I found it before you asked. And when you reached out to me, I realized that the info I had, had to be about Eden.”

“You’ve lost me. Let’s start over. How did you get the intel before I even asked for it?”

“Last night, I was with this guy I hook up with when I’m in Bari, Italy. He works for the Soldano crime family.”

“You fucking a mafia guy? No. I raised you better than that.”

“That’s beside the point. Last night, he was all antsy and kept checking his phone. Normally, he’s not like that when he’s with me. It made me nervous. You know what happens when I get nervous.”

“You kill people. Your ex had a surprise birthday party planned for you. When they popped out and screamed surprise, you shot everybody. I had to call in a crew to clean up the mess.”

“That was the least you could do since you forgot it was my birthday. Anyway. I got nervous with him acting all antsy and shit. So, I started asking him questions. Apparently, a war is brewing between crime families here.”

“What does that have to do with Eden?”

“My friend said a powerful don was killed in January. And there was a witness.”

“Please don’t say that witness was Eden’s dumb ass.”

“It was Eden’s dumb ass. She tried to help him.”

“Fuck!” Sienna yelled, standing up. “No wonder the hotel staff didn’t want to tell me shit. Eden’s gone and got herself caught up in a mafia war. Leave it to her to go to Italy and get involved with the mafia.”

“Says the woman who’s running from the mafia. Yeah. I saw a job on the Darknet. There’s a hit out on you, Sienna Keys. I hope you traveled under a different name.”

“I did.” In Italy, she was Gina Washington. “How much is the hit for?”

“Fifty thousand.”

Sienna shrugged. “Not bad. I thought I’d be worth more, though.”

“Fuck that. Stay off the net. Don’t reach out to associates. You reaching out to me was risky. For money, friends will turn on you quickly.”

“That’s why I only reached out to you. Well, and to Chelsea. But she’s off the radar. She’s been off the radar for a while now.”

“Yeah, Meka is looking for her. I’m glad you didn’t reach out to Meka’s crazy ass.”

“I’m here to quietly find my friend. Meka’s ass would get here and go on a killing spree.”

Natalie chuckled. So did Sienna. Yeah, Meka was a handful. But she was loyal. As a hitwoman, Sienna hadn’t planned to connect with other women in her profession. But she had. They’d even worked jobs together. Actually, that was how she’d met most of them, on jobs. She’d met Chels and Meka while working a job in Florida.

Through them, she’d met Natalie. They’d all bonded over their traumas and unique skillsets. Now, she’d kill for any of those women. And she knew they’d kill for her. But some of them were more intense than others. And Meka was one of the more intense ones. But she was a good friend and a deadly assassin.

“You ready for the rest of the info I have on our Eden?” Natalie asked.

Sienna sighed. Ready or not, she needed it.

Damn, Eden. You just couldn’t travel here and behave, could you?

Chapter Five



Sienna

Sienna took a deep breath and released it slowly.

“I’m ready,” she told Natalie. “So, Eden witnessed the death of a don and tried to help, huh?”

Eden was taking this ‘*try to be a better person*’ thing a bit too far. She was supposed to take baby steps. Not jump right off into the deep end of good samaritanism. Was that even a word? It sounded right. She’d go with it.

“Yes,” Natalie told her. “She was taken to the hospital with him because the police wanted to ask her a few questions there. My friend said his boss heard about her being taken there and sent men to snatch her up.”

“I may have to kill your friend,” Sienna confessed.

“That’s fine. His dick is trash, anyway. I only hook up with him when I’m bored. But, anyway. My friend was supposed to be the one to take her from the hospital, so his boss could question her.”

“Hold up. He just volunteered all this information to you?”

“Of course.”

“This sounds like classified shit. You’re sure he’s not setting you up?”

“Listen, this man has told me plenty of shit that could get him killed. He trusts that I’ll be silent.”

“Why?”

“Because he thinks I’m in love with him. And because he’s an idiot. But I *have* proved my loyalty to him. Nothing he’s told me has ever left my lips until tonight. In the past, none of the shit he told me could benefit me in any way, so I didn’t care. I’m only telling you this because you and Eden are my friends and colleagues.”

“Did he describe the witness? How do you know it’s Eden?”

“Well, I won’t use the exact words he did. I’ll just say, he said the witness was a black woman.”

“He said something racist, didn’t he?”

“The fucker did. Which is why he and I won’t be hooking up again. Paraphrasing him, he said the witness was a black foreigner. I didn’t think anything of it until you reached out to me about Eden. I’m not one hundred percent certain it’s her. But, it’s a lead. My friend said before he could get to her, the don’s family took her.”

Damn!

“So, she’s with some old don?”

“No. The old don died. Now, his grandson is the don. He’s the one holding Eden captive. Because of the old don’s death, the new don is on high alert. Getting close to him isn’t going to be easy. However, getting close to his right-hand man could be.”

“You’ve got details on the right-hand man?”

“Before I give you the details, I’ve got to tell you this. He’s called the silent beast.”

“Silent beast?” *Interesting.*

“Yeah. He doesn’t talk much. But he’s brutal. Savage, some say.”

“Well, I can get savage too. Where can I find this *silent beast* so I can make him talk?”

“I don’t know where he lives. However, there’s a place my guy goes to relax. It’s kind of a haven for killers. Like Miss

Davies' motel."

"We're not allowed to kill on Miss Davies' property."

"Same applies to this place. You can go there to find the Silent Beast. You just can't attack him on those grounds."

"Noted. I'll lure him away from those grounds, then kill him."

"Don't kill him! You need intel from him about Eden first."

"Oh, yeah. That's what I meant."

"No, it's not."

"It is. Go on. Tell me more about this haven for killers."

"It's called Club Tacere. In English, Tacere means..."

"Be quiet or hush. I know. What else can you tell me?"

"Give me a chance to get it out. Damn. It's a neutral place where anyone can come and hang out. What goes on there, stays there. My guy was considering going tonight to see if the silent beast was there. He said if the silent beast was there, he planned to get one of his girls to seduce him away from the bar, so he could have a word with him. His don wants to have a sit down with the silent beast's don. If he approaches the silent beast at the club, it may look suspect. That's why he's having one of his girls do it."

"Which means I need to get to this silent beast before the girl does."

"Yes. Here's the address."

Natalie handed Sienna a slip of paper. "You know I don't like it when information is gotten too easily," Natalie told her. "This info just fell into my lap. True, it arrived before you did. But I'm still wary of it. If you want me to come with you, I will."

Sienna shook her head. "No. You need to lay low. You've got your own shit to deal with. I'll take care of the silent beast by myself. I just need to get him alone, drug him, take him some place where we can be alone, then torture him for

information. I may have to ransom him to get Eve back. Oh, and don't get mad if I end up having to kill your boy toy also. I don't have time for drama. Whoever gets in my way is dying."

"Do whatever you've got to do. But be safe. These fuckers are ruthless here."

"You act like we're not."

"We are. Still, there's only one of you and an organization of them. Plus, you're already hiding from one organization. You can't handle having two crime families on your ass. Maybe we should reach out to Meka..."

"Not happening. Let her keep looking for Chels. I'll find Eden's missing ass."

"Why are my friends always going missing?" Natalie whined.

"Because you only fuck with bad bitches. And bad bitches get into trouble a lot."

"Don't go missing, bad bitch," Natalie ordered.

"I won't, bad bitch."

Natalie stood. "Give me a hug."

Sienna strode over to her friend and gave her a hug.

"I mean it, Sisi. Don't get caught. Call me if you need help. I'm going to leave you with my secure number."

"Alright. And I won't get caught. I hope."

"Sisi!"

"Okay. I won't get caught." *I hope.*

"Oh, I almost forgot about my gift for you." Natalie lifted the white cloth covering the food cart and retrieved a duffle from the bottom of the cart. "I come bearing gifts. I know there's only so much you can sneak onto a plane."

"You're right. I left most of my stuff behind. I was able to acquire a few items after arriving here. But nothing to brag

about. Thank you for the present.” Sienna took the bag and carried it over to the bed, where she sat it on the mattress.

“These won’t get traced back to either of us,” Natalie informed her. “The serial numbers have been filed. Of course, there are other ways of tracing them. If somehow you do lose one and it’s traced, it’ll lead the cops back to Interpol’s headquarters in France.”

“Are you sure these are safe to use?”

“Of course. We have no connection to Interpol.”

“How did you get these?”

“I intercepted a drop-off while in France. These were stolen. And I stole them from the thieves. Whatever you do, don’t get caught with them.”

“I won’t. I feel like a kid on Christmas.”

“Most of these you already know how to use. Look at these earrings. Once you put them on, if you twist the backs on them, they’ll amplify sounds. You’ll be able to listen in on the conversations of others. You must be within five to eight feet of the people you’re trying to eavesdrop on. I haven’t been able to get them to work beyond eight feet. Sometimes seven feet is a little hard, too, if they’re talking really low. Don’t lose the backs on them. They won’t work with other backs. And there are only five pairs. I can’t get more for you. I kept the other five I had for myself.”

“Gotcha. These are more than enough. These are great.”

“If you run into trouble...”

“I know, I know. Call you. I’ve got this. I just need to kidnap my friend from the Italian mafia. A piece of cake.”

“That’s not funny.”

“It’s kind of funny, right? I’m on the run from the Irish mafia. My bestie has been kidnapped by the Italian mafia. My other bestie is gifting me guns probably stolen from the French mafia. Maybe we should form our own mafia.”

“You’re not funny.”

“I kind of am. But seriously, I’m going to head to club Tacere to see if I can link up with the silent beast and make him talk.”

“Do you have a ride?”

“Yes. I have a rental. It’s not under the same name as the hotel. So, if I have to ditch it, it won’t trace anyone back to my room.”

“Good. Be safe. When you find Eden, let me know.”

“Will do. I’ll check in with you in two days whether I find her or not.”

“Alright.” Natalie shoved her cap back on her head. “Do you want any of this food before I roll it out and place it in front of the door where I left the real room service chick?”

“Nah. I’m too riled up to eat.”

Sienna walked her friend to the door and held it open for her to roll the food cart out.

“Bye,” Sienna said.

“Bye.”

A wave of emotions rolled over her as she watched Natalie walk down the hall, pushing a food cart. Natalie stopped but didn’t look back. She just stopped for a few seconds then she continued walking. *Ahhh, she’d wanted to look back.* Sienna swallowed back tears. In their line of work, you never knew when a goodbye, for now, would turn into a goodbye forever.

After closing the door, she strode back over to the bed, where she stared down at the artillery Natalie had gifted her. The earrings weren’t the only useful gadgets she had. There were small bags in the duffel, each filled with gadgets that could help her save Eve. She loved her friends.

They didn’t give each other friendship bracelets or anything like that. They gave each other Glocks and spy gadgets. She had weaponry. Now, she needed something seductive to wear to capture the attention of a beast. She strode over to her luggage, unzipped it, and began searching for an outfit to seduce a silent beast in.

Nothing she had screamed, *mafia seduction*. Plus, it was cold outside. She wasn't trying to freeze her nipples off. After about twenty minutes of piecing things together, she finally came up with something that might work. Black stretchy jeans. They were not designer jeans.

Miss Davies actually made them for her. You could stab them a few times, and the fabric wouldn't tear. They were stretchy enough for her to run, squat, jump, and kick in. Damn, she was going to miss having Miss Davies and her girls make clothes for her. She paired her black pants with a black jacket that reached her navel.

In the pocket of her jacket was a powder that could knock a man flat on his ass in under five minutes. Long enough for her to tie him up and get her torture tools ready. Luckily for her, there was a few torture tools in the duffle that she could use. Her navel would be on display since she was wearing a black tank top that stopped a few inches above her navel.

She would love to put on her navel ring. But in fights, bitches always went straight for the jewelry and tried to rip it out. Which was why she wasn't wearing any jewelry other than her eavesdropping earrings. No necklace. No bracelet. No navel ring. No nipple ring. Not even a toe ring.

She was, however, wearing heels. Not because they were cute as shit, which they were. But because in the right hands, heels could kill. And her hands were the right hands. She strode over to the mirror and stared at herself. Her hair was pulled back to her nape in a low ponytail.

Her ponytail holder was beaded. If she broke any of those beads, the powder inside could be put into someone's drink and used to knock them out also. Inside her jacket were secret pockets where she kept her mini knives. Her ensemble was practical. It wasn't the most fashionable outfit, nor the sexiest, but she should be able to pull a silent beast in it.

And if she couldn't seduce him, she'd buy him a drink and drug him. Either way, she was capturing the silent beast tonight. Damn, she hadn't gotten his last name or a

description. *You're slipping, Sienna. Get it together.* Oh, well. Last name and description weren't important.

She could ask around to find out who the Silent Beast was. As long as she got *him*, she was fine. Sienna filled her smaller duffel with items from the large bag Natalie had gifted her. Once she was packed, she hid the large bag in her closet and placed a ponytail holder over the handle.

If someone twisted the handle without removing the ponytail holder on it, the beads on the ponytail holder would explode. After she was done, she slid the strap of her duffel on her shoulder, then grabbed her hotel room keycard and slid it into her back pocket as she headed for the door.

Silent Beast, here I come. You think you're a savage. I'm going to show you savage!

Stefano

He hated being watched.

Shelly pushed her hair behind her ear and smiled at him from across the room. She wiggled her fingers, waving at him. He nodded, then resumed drinking his whiskey. He wasn't ready to leave the club yet. Therefore, there was no point in approaching her. She'd want to talk to pass the time. Mindless chitchat wasn't for him.

He didn't know how Enzo did it. Enzo could talk for hours on the phone with Eve. Then hang up and have a back-and-forth textathon with her, as if they hadn't already talked for hours. *Then go home to her and continue talking to her.* Stefano shook his head. What the fuck were they talking about?

Spending that much time with another person couldn't be healthy. Being that obsessed with another person definitely wasn't healthy. Yet, his brother seemed happy. Despite all the shit going on around them, when Enzo saw Eve, he smiled. Every time. Likewise, Eve smiled whenever she saw Enzo.

Maybe it was the fact that Stefano had never seen a healthy relationship that made him jaded when it came to love, but he

didn't see how something like that could last. One day, one of them would grow tired of the other. He hoped it was Enzo who grew tired of Eve. Because if Eve grew tired of Enzo first, the don would probably lose his fucking mind.

Stefano finished off his whiskey. It was almost time to head downstairs. He glanced up from his drink when the doors to the club opened. The chill from outside crept into the club, bringing with it a woman clad in all black. All heads turned in her direction. Stefano wished he could say he was different from the others in the bar.

He wished he could say his gaze hadn't been drawn to her the moment she stepped into the club, but he couldn't. As soon as his eyes landed on her, a chill that had nothing to do with the cold, raced down his spine. For a few minutes, her presence held everyone enthralled. The others looked away before he did.

While seeing a black woman enter Club Tacere wasn't a nightly occurrence, it also wasn't rare. The owner's son was married to a black woman. She came to the club to help out sometimes. If Stefan remembered correctly, the woman worked as a translator. The couple had a mixed daughter who was studying abroad right now.

The newcomer in all-black could possibly be related to the grandson's wife. None of that had anything to do with why Stefan's gaze was still glued to her. She was fucking beautiful. Head high, shoulders back, with her hands in her jacket pockets, she strode into the club like she owned the place.

Instead of looking away when she realized all eyes were on her, she smiled as her gaze flitted across the room, making eye contact with everyone. His entire body stiffened when her gaze landed on him. She paused, eyes widening. Her lips parted slightly, just enough for him to slip his finger inside to coax them open more.

His cock throbbed at that thought, wanting to know more about her sexy lips. A seductive smile curved across her face as she eye-fucked him. Then and there, Stefano knew he had to have her. He needed to know what this woman felt like,

tasted like. His mouth watered at the thought of putting his lips on her. *Fuck, he was hard.*

“Hey, Stefano,” a voice said next to him.

He didn’t have to look her way to know who it was.

“I’m busy, Shelly,” he uttered, eyes never straying from his mystery woman, whose eyebrow was now raised.

“My name is Marla,” the woman next to him said.

Who the fuck was Marla?

“But that’s okay. You can call me Shelly if you want. I, well, I was hoping you’d be here tonight. I already got a room, if you want...”

The woman in black looked from him to Marla. Her smile disappeared. And just like that, the spell was broken. For her, not him. With a shrug, she continued to the bar, dismissing him without a second glance. *Shit!* She thought he was with Shelly. Marla. Whoever the fuck she was. Shelly touched his shoulder. Reflexes kicked in. He grabbed her hand and twisted.

“Ouch.”

Shit. “Sorry.”

Stefano quickly released her. The woman massaged her wrist as she stared up at him.

“That hurt,” she muttered, lips forming a pout.

A ball of guilt formed in his chest. He didn’t hurt women. He hadn’t meant to hurt Shelly. She’d caught him off guard. His mind had been preoccupied with someone else. This was the reason he didn’t like to be touched. His natural reaction was to hurt. It wasn’t something he was proud of, but it was the reason he’d survived this long.

“I told you not to touch me unless I ask you to,” Stefan told her. *Shit,* was he putting the blame on her.

“I know. I’m sorry,” she muttered.

“Don’t apologize. It’s not your fault. It’s mine. I shouldn’t have grabbed you like that. Just... don’t touch me again.”

She smiled. “I think this is the most you’ve ever talked to me at one time. Usually, I do all the talking.”

He was already tired of talking to her. His gaze jerked toward the bar. The woman in black was talking to Cecca. Both women were smiling. He normally didn’t care about the conversations that took place in this establishment.

Now, he found himself wondering what they were talking about. Was she asking Cecca about him? Was Cecca telling her some bullshit lies to keep the woman away from him?

“You can make it up to me tonight,” Shelly told him.

Damn, she was still there.

“I can’t tonight, Shelly.”

“It’s Marla,” Shelly stamped her feet. “My name is Marla. How can you not remember my name after all the times we’ve...” She leaned closer to whisper, “Fucked.”

They’d only fucked a handful of times. This was precisely why he didn’t like spending too much time with one woman. They started wanting shit he couldn’t give. A guy from across the room rose from his seat and headed to the bar. Where the hell was he going? Stefano watched him like a hawk. At the bar, the guy stood close to the woman in black. Too close, in Stefano’s opinion.

“Did you hear me, Stefano?” Marla asked.

Stefano pulled some money out of his wallet and handed it to the woman. “Buy you and your friends a few rounds. I’m busy tonight.”

She called his name twice before giving up. Ignoring her, he headed to the bar. But he didn’t miss the fact that Shelly... *Marla*, seemed more persistent than usual tonight. She’d even gotten a room for them herself, something she’d never done before. Had someone set her up to do it? She was lucky he didn’t have time for her tonight.

Because if she had set him up, this night would've ended badly for her. He didn't physically hurt women. That didn't mean he couldn't make her feel like her world was ending. Stefano stopped and stared back at Marla. She looked nervous as hell. Yeah, something was definitely up.

Her smile returned when he started in her direction. When he reached her, he bent down to whisper in her ear. The scent of her perfume tickled his nose. It was too much, too strong. He leaned away a little, not wanting to breathe it in.

"If someone sent you here to get my attention, you did your job. You've got my attention."

"No one sent..." she started.

"I hate being lied to."

The woman swallowed but said nothing.

"Tell whoever sent you that if they need me, they can reach me during business hours. Not when I'm relaxing. As for you, stay the fuck out of my way from now on. If you approach me again, I will make you regret it."

"But, Stef..."

The look he gave her silenced her quickly.

"Okay. I'll tell him. But he only had a message for you. That's it. He just wanted me to relay his message."

"I'm listening."

Her voice shook as she recited the message. "Don Soldano wants to have a sit down with you." She reached into her purse and pulled out a card. "You can reach him here."

"I know how to reach the don."

"He wanted this to be an off-the-record meeting."

Stefano snatched the card, tore it up, then released it, letting the pieces fall onto the table.

"I don't do off-the-record meetings with anyone other than don DeLuca. Let your guy know that his don can reach out to me in the same manner he always has. But if they send

someone to try and seduce me again, we're going to have a problem. Do you understand what to tell him?"

She nodded. Without another word or backward glance, Stefano walked away from Marla. He'd worry about the Soldanos and why they wanted to meet with him tomorrow. Tonight, he planned to focus all of his attention on his mystery woman.

Chapter Six



Stefano

Stefano stalked over to the bar, still hating how close the short guy in the brown jacket was standing to his mystery woman. He reached his destination in time to hear Cecca telling the guy to return to his seat.

“She told you she didn’t need you to buy her a drink,” Cecca was saying, no longer smiling. “Why are you still standing there? We don’t allow women to be pestered at Club Tacere. Do I need to get Gen?”

Though Cecca was a big flirt, there was a reason Gen had her run the bar. She didn’t take any shit from customers. And if the guys got too drunk and tried to harass the women, she handled it. Upon hearing the owner’s name, the guy she was talking to stepped away from the bar. But he couldn’t leave without a parting shot.

“Bitches gonna be bitches, no matter what color they are.”

Luckily, he was speaking Italian. Maybe the foreigner didn’t understand what the man was saying. But Stefano did. When the man turned around to walk away, he walked straight into Stefano.

“Who the fuck...” the guy started until he looked up. “Oh.” The man took a step back. “I didn’t see you there, Stefano.” A nervous chuckle escaped the shorter man as he swiped his hand over his face. “I didn’t even hear you walk up.”

Cecca chuckled. “They don’t call him the silent beast for nothing.”

Shit. Why did she call him that in front of his mystery woman? Did she now think he was some type of maniac, no better than the guy who’d tried to hit on her? The woman looked over her shoulder at him. For a brief second, he forgot the guy before him existed. Stefano now knew the color of her eyes, *brown*.

Her expression was blank as her gaze roamed over him. He shoved his hands into his pocket and stuck his chest out a fraction. He refused to think about why he’d done something as stupid as that. He’d felt like an idiot as soon as he’d done it. It was too late now. Her gaze was slow and steady as she took him in.

To his surprise, she dismissed him again, looking away from him to resume talking to Cecca, *in Italian*. So, she had understood what the guy said. Stefano stared down at the man, who was still talking nervously. The anger he felt at being dismissed filtered into his voice when he issued his order to the guy.

“Apologize to them,” Stefan demanded.

“Huh?”

Stefan didn’t repeat himself. He knew that motherfucker had heard him.

“Oh. Are these friends of yours?” The guys asked.

“Friends or not, is that how you talk to ladies?”

A slight smile crossed the mystery woman’s face. Now, she probably thought he was a gentleman. Because of her, he found himself wishing he could live up to that title. He couldn’t. He didn’t even know how to try. He wasn’t doing this because he was a gentleman. He was doing it because no woman deserved to be cursed at by a man just because she didn’t want him.

“Uh,” the guy mumbled, turning to face both women. “Sorry. I’ve had a little too much to drink.”

Stefan's mystery woman simply nodded without facing the man. Cecca wasn't about to let it go.

"Since you're too drunk to mind your manners, perhaps I should call a ride for you."

"No need," the guy mumbled. "I drove here."

"Then perhaps you should drive home," Cecca told him. "Now!"

"Hey, you can't kick me out just because...."

"You look sleepy," Stefano added, causing the man to tense. "Go home and rest."

The guy ran a shaking hand through his greasy hair. "You two can't bully me. I know the rules. There's no fighting at the club unless it's in the dungeon. This isn't the dungeon. You can't do anything to me if I decide to stay here, or you'll be the ones breaking the rules."

Stefano smiled down at the man. "Just remember this, the club closes at three. What do you think will happen after you leave Tacere grounds?"

The man rubbed his beard, trying to appear brave. The fear he was feeling shone in his eyes and in the way he was tapping his left foot against the floor. Stefano took a step closer to the man.

"I won't be here when it closes," the guy rushed to say before stretching and faking a yawn. "I'm starting to feel tired."

Stefano's mystery woman laughed, causing Cecca to chuckle. Stefano didn't miss the way Cecca stared at his mystery woman. It was similar to how the bartender stared at him. He also didn't miss the look of anger that flashed over the guy's face in front of him.

"This place has changed," the man said as he turned to leave. "I won't be coming here anymore."

Stefan remained standing where he was as he watched the guy storm back over to his table. At his table, the man grabbed his glass of beer and chugged it. Most of the beer didn't make

it into his mouth. It spilled down his shirt, leaving a puddle on the floor that caused Cecca to mutter expletives.

After pouring most of the drink on himself and the floor, the man finally slammed his glass on the table and yelled to his friends, telling them it was time to go. When his friends protested, he placed his hands on the table and leaned closer to talk to them. Stefano couldn't hear what he was saying, but he knew it was about his mystery woman.

A few seconds later, the guy's two friends looked toward them bar. Their glares were directed at the pretty, brown-eyed foreigner. They were going to be a problem. It wouldn't be hard for them to figure out what car she was driving. It would likely be the only rental in the parking lot.

They'd lay in wait for her off Tacere property and try to teach her a lesson. If he killed them before she left the club, then she'd be safe. Stefano kept his eyes on the men until they exited the building.

Once they were gone, he returned his attention to his woman in all black. She had her back to him. He waited for her to turn around and thank him. Or at least smile at him. She did neither, forcing him to start the conversation.

"I'm sorry you had to experience that," he told her in English.

"I'm used to it," she replied, staring down at the pink-colored drink Cecca was placing in front of her. "Thank you," she told Cecca.

Her voice was loud enough to be heard over the music. Yet, he pretended it wasn't and stepped closer to her. He inhaled deeply. *Damn*. She smelled good. He couldn't place the scent. However, he was pretty sure he'd never forget it. What was it about this woman that had him standing there, silently staring down at her and sniffing her?

This wasn't normal behavior for him. He felt like a stranger in his own body. And though he told himself he needed to take a step back, he didn't. He couldn't. Her back was still to him. She still wasn't giving him any of her

attention. His pride was dented. Yet, he couldn't walk away from her.

"Psst," Cecca hissed.

Stefan ignored her.

"Hey, Stefan!"

Sighing, he looked the bartender's way. Cecca motioned for him to come closer. Stefano shook his head. The little woman in black had all his attention. Too bad he didn't have hers. Normally, he didn't have to do much to get a woman's attention. Yet, this woman wouldn't even look his way. Maybe he should introduce himself instead of waiting on her to do it. He was about to do just that when Cecca called to him again.

"Hey, Stefano. Come here. You don't want me to say what I have to say out loud," Cecca cooed.

Stefano gritted his teeth and moved further down the bar toward Cecca.

"What?" he growled. Cecca leaned across the counter to whisper in his ear. His eyes were on his mystery woman as Cecca talked to him.

"Let's share the foreigner," Cecca whispered.

Stefano cocked his head to the side to glare at Cecca.
"What?"

"I see the way you're looking at her. You never look at anyone like that. Not even me. I would be jealous if I didn't want a taste of her too."

From the corner of his eye, he saw his mystery woman move. She fiddled with her earring. A nervous habit, maybe. If she was nervous, why had she come here alone? How did she even know about this place?

"Did you hear me?" Cecca asked.

The woman looked his way briefly. Her gaze met his. Interests flared in her brown depths before she turned away. Stefano smiled. His little mystery woman was shy, that's why she wasn't talking to him. He could work with shy.

“Stefano!” Cecca exclaimed.

“No deal,” Stefano told her. “I want her all to myself.”

“You’re not going to get her by standing there all quiet and shit. And did you sniff her a moment ago?”

Yes. “No.”

“Yes, you did. You’re acting weird. Look, I’ll be your wing woman if you agree to share her with me. I’m dying to know what her pussy tastes like.”

So was he. And he wanted that pussy all to himself.

“No,” Stefano replied.

“We...”

“No!”

Cecca rolled her eyes and pouted. “You’re no fun.”

“You’re right. I’m not.”

“Forget it then. May the best pussy eater win.”

“When did that become your dessert of choice?” Stefano asked, confused.

Cecca leaned closer and whispered, “It’s always been my flavor of choice. There’s a lot you don’t know about me, Stefano Marcone. And believe me when I say I’ve eaten more pussy than you have.”

With that said, she flounced off to attend to a customer. Hands on the counter, he stared down at his mystery woman. This was the part of hookups that he wasn’t good at. At club Tacere, all he had to do was nod at a woman, and she’d be all over him. Holding an actual conversation with one wasn’t something he was used to.

What to say? It was night, there was no point in discussing the weather. Since they were at a bar, he could talk about drinks. But she was drinking something pink. He was a whiskey man himself. They could talk music. Too bad he mostly listened to podcasts instead of music. Cecca walked by.

He chanced a glance at her and found her shaking her head as she cleaned a glass. What the fuck was he afraid of? It was just a conversation. He had conversations all the time. Usually about bloodshed – ordering people to commit bloodshed, ordering people to clean up bloodshed, or ordering people to find out who was responsible for the bloodshed.

He couldn't talk to her about that kind of shit. However, normal conversations weren't much different from bloodshed conversations. Stefano cleared his throat. Before he could speak, his mystery woman did.

She turned on her stool to face him as she said, "If you keep staring at me like that, I'm going to think you want to eat my pussy right here, right now."

Not much shocked Stefano. He'd seen a lot of shit. He'd done a lot of shit. He'd had a lot of shit done to him. However, her words caused his mouth to drop open. He didn't think to close it until he heard Cecca burst out laughing. Snapping his mouth closed, Stefano glared at the bartender. His deathly stare didn't silence her.

"Not sorry," Cecca said, still laughing. "That was funny. I love her. That was too fucking funny. You're now my favorite person." Cecca leaned against the bar in a way that pressed her breasts together. "You must've overheard our conversation, Gina?"

Gina. That was her name. Short. Simple. Easy to remember. He liked it.

The woman smiled. "I wasn't trying to be nosy. I've just got good hearing."

"No problem," Cecca told her. "I suck at whispering. Then again, maybe we weren't trying to whisper." Cecca winked, then propped her elbows up on the counter and placed her chin in her hands, cupping her face as she smiled at Stefano. "The lady asked you a question, Stefano? It's not nice to keep a lady waiting?"

Stefano swallowed. Fuck yeah, he wanted to eat her pussy. If this bar was empty, he'd place her on the counter right now

and feast on her until she knew to never ask him a question like that again. He'd write the answer against her flesh with his tongue. *Yes, always, yes.*

"Look," Cecca cooed. "He's blushing. I've never seen him blush. How adorable."

"I don't blush," Stefan growled, wishing the annoying bartender would go back to doing her damn job.

"Answer the woman. Were you staring at her like that because you want to eat her pussy?"

A chill entered the room as the doors to the club opened.

"Damn it," Cecca muttered. "Why did they have to come in now? This was just getting good. Can I press pause on you two for a second?"

"Do I need to call Gen?" Stefan asked.

Cecca rolled her eyes before telling his mystery woman, "I'll be back. I'm sorry I have to leave you with this grumpy guy. I'll make this quick."

Cecca stepped away from them to welcome the newcomers who'd just approached the bar. Stefano returned his attention to Gina, only to find her staring up at him. Her gaze didn't waver under his. She didn't look away or pretend she hadn't been staring at him. She held his gaze, daring him, challenging him to answer her question.

And to think, seconds ago, he'd thought she was shy. She wasn't shy. She was straight forward. He liked a woman who was straight forward. It meant he wouldn't have to play the guessing game with her.

"When men stare at you, is that normally what they want?" he asked.

"Men stare at me for three reasons. One, is because they want to fuck me or eat my pussy."

He definitely fit into the first category. He waited for her to list the other two categories.

When she didn't, he asked, "Are you going to tell me the other two reasons men stare at you?"

She shook her head. "You only need to worry about the category you fit into."

Stefano smiled. She was not what he'd expected.

"You have a nice smile," she told him.

He froze, smile still in place.

She cocked her head to the side. "What? Has no one ever told you that?"

Had anyone ever told him that? Normally, he didn't pay attention to compliments. Most who dished them out wanted something. Did Gina want something?

"Your turn," she told him.

"My turn? To do what?"

"I just complimented you. You have to compliment me back."

"Is that how this works?" he asked, a slight smile on his face.

She nodded. "Hurry up, or you're going to make me feel insecure."

"I doubt anyone could make you feel insecure."

She mock gasped. "That's probably the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me. Thanks for the compliment."

Stefano chuckled. The sound surprised him.

Gina nodded to the stool next to her. "Have a seat. You're so tall. Having you stand over me like that is a bit daunting."

Right. Stefano grabbed the stool and pulled it a bit closer to her. Not too close. He didn't want to scare her away. He sat down. To his pleasure, he didn't have to start up a conversation. Gina was a natural.

"Hi, I'm Gina Washington," she told him, offering him her hand.

He heard Cecca chuckle. He didn't have to ask her why she was laughing. He already knew. Normally, Stefano didn't like touching people. Touching was for killing and fucking. It wasn't that he couldn't touch others. He just wasn't all that comfortable with it. Yet, he found himself stretching his hand out to wrap Gina's small hand in his much larger one.

The differences in their hands were drastic, and they had nothing to do with their races. She probably couldn't even see the differences. Her small hand probably hadn't hurt anything larger than a fly. While he'd buried more people than he could count on both of his hands, hers too.

When he stared at her hand, he saw smooth brown skin and manicured nails. When he looked at his, all he saw was blood. Blood that couldn't be washed away. Blood that would stain his hands until the day he died and probably continue staining them after he was in hell. Stefano released her hand quickly.

A woman like her shouldn't hold hands with a man like him for too long. Her smile was still in place when she returned her hand to her lap. Stefano placed his hand on the counter, palm open, fingers lightly touching the bar counter. He didn't dare close his hand or rest it flat on the bar.

He didn't dare wipe it against his pants as he often did after shaking hands with others. He wasn't ready for the memory of her touch to be wiped away, and he didn't allow himself to dwell on why he was behaving the way he was. If he did so, he'd miss out on something she was saying.

And he didn't want to miss a word of what Gina had to say. She started their conversation by telling him how beautiful Italy was. And that some parts of it reminded her of a place in Florida, not too far from where she'd lived. He listened intently, eyes on her mouth. He wasn't the type to chitchat.

Yet, he found himself hanging on to every word that left Gina's very fuckable mouth. Cecca cast a confused glare in their direction before going back to preparing drinks. But she continued looking their way. Most of her stares were directed

at Gina. It seemed the bartender was serious about their mystery woman.

The more Stefano and Gina talked, the more irritated Cecca became. She was the one who'd issued the challenge, *may the best pussy eater win*. Stefano may not have licked a lot of pussy in his life, but he was good at whatever he put his mind to.

Eating pussy wouldn't be any different. Gina wrapped her lips around her red straw and took another sip of her drink. Stefano couldn't tear his gaze away from her mouth. He forced his eyes to meet hers when she sat her glass back down and faced him again.

"Since you're from Florida, how did you hear of Club Tacere when you arrived in Italy?" Stefano asked, eager to know more about her. Especially how a woman like her came to be in a place like this.

"Do you want the truth or a story that won't make you think less of me?"

Of course, he wanted the truth. But the way she'd worded the phrase raised more questions in his mind.

"You look like you want the fairytale version," she said with a chuckle.

"No. I want the truth. I'm just surprised you gave me an option. Most people would've just lied."

"I know." She grew solemn as she stared down into her drink. "I really need to start behaving like most people."

"No, you don't," he rushed to tell her. "Most people are idiots."

That made her laugh. Damn, he liked that sound. *Shit*. What was he thinking? He didn't like that sound. She was just a pretty distraction. Hopefully, by the end of the night, she'd help him forget about his problems for a few hours. He was grateful when Cecca slammed a glass of water down in front of him.

“Here,” the bartender told him. “This is something to *cool* you off.”

Stefano nodded and grabbed the glass. Cecca started toward Gina, then paused and muttered a curse under her breath when the club doors opened again. Holding back his smile, Stefano lifted the glass to his lips and took a sip as the bartender moved to greet the newcomers. After setting his glass down, he returned his attention to Gina.

“I’m still waiting to hear how you found this place.”

“Oh, right. You want the sordid tale. So...” she faced him and crossed her legs.

His eyes dropped to her thighs. He would love to have them wrapped around his waist as he fucked her long and hard until they both forgot about the bullshit that brought them to club Tacere tonight.

“I came to Italy for a vacation,” she started. “Only to learn that the tour company I booked my vacation with scammed me.”

That wasn’t surprising. It actually happened a lot.

“The hotel I paid for had no clue who I was, and there was no reservation under my name. They didn’t even know of the tour company. The rental car place didn’t know who I was. I even wired money to the tour company so they could get the currency exchanged for euros or whatever. I think that’s right. Anyway, I was supposed to go to the address they gave me to get the money I had exchanged. Guess what I found when I got there?”

“Undeveloped land.”

Surprise flared in her brown eyes. “How did you know?”

“This happens to a lot of foreigners.” *To naive foreigners.* He kept that part to himself.

She sighed. “This was supposed to be my first real vacation in years. But it was ruined. The taxi driver is the one who told me about this place after I barely had enough to pay him. He turned my money down and even gave me money for

a rental after he realized I'd been scammed." She laughed. "It's so embarrassing. I promise I don't usually believe anything I'm told."

"Don't be embarrassed. It happens."

She was worst than Eve. At least Eve had traveled here safely and hadn't ventured into the wrong parts of town.

"I did my homework before booking this vacation. I even researched the tour company. They seemed legit. Their site had the little Better Business Bureau thing on it. Apparently, I didn't research them enough. And apparently, anyone can create a Better Business Bureau logo. Anyway. In the taxi, I was wearing my T-shirt from the gym I work out at. It had, *Girls Who Box Are Hot*. That caught the driver's attention. He told me about this place and the fight thing they had set up. I think I heard that guy who'd tried hitting on me call it the Dungeon. So, here I am."

"You came here to fight?" Would this woman ever cease to amaze him?

She nodded. "Don't let the big butt and pretty smile fool you. I'm a beast with these hands."

His gaze dropped to her thighs. He quickly brought them back to her face. From the smirk she was wearing, he knew he was busted.

"I'm a beast with that too," she said with a wink before taking another sip of her drink.

Stefano grinned as he took another sip of water. This woman was going to be fun.

"You look like you're working with a beast," she continued, further surprising him.

When her gaze dropped to his lap, his cock throbbed, wanting to be closer to her.

"Maybe after my fight, we can see which one of us is the true beast," she told him, causing him to choke on water.

This woman was going to be the death of him. But Stefano had never been afraid of a little thing like death.

Chapter Seven



Stefano

When he'd begun choking on his water, Gina had stood and rushed to his side. Before he could tell her not to touch him, she already had her hand against his back, patting him.

"You okay?" she asked.

He nodded. "I'm fine."

Another round of coughs racked his body, proving him to be a liar. Gina continued patting him. Cecca came into view. Her laughter annoyed him. Stefano wasn't easily embarrassed. But *this*, this was fucking embarrassing. He was choking on water because a beautiful woman flirted with him.

What was he, a fucking teen or something? How could water bring him this low? He'd been shot, stabbed, hit by a car, and he'd gotten up each time and kept fighting. Now, he was struggling to breathe because of damn water. After a few more coughs, he swallowed and took a deep breath, finally feeling like himself again.

Cecca grabbed a bottle of vodka from the liquor shelf then strode back over to her customers. But not before winking at him. She was enjoying this too much. Now that his coughs had subsided, Gina switched from patting his back to rubbing it. It was an innocent act that sent sinful images flashing through his mind.

He turned his head to the side to tell her she could stop now. He came up short when he found her face right in front

of his. He hadn't realized she'd been this close to him. Close enough for him to kiss her.

"You okay now?" she asked, lips inches from his.

Stefano licked his lips. Her gaze dropped to his mouth.

"Don't do that?" she whispered.

"Do what?"

"Don't lick your lips like that."

"Why?"

"It makes me want to taste you."

Fuck! If there weren't so many people in the club, he'd place her sexy ass on the bar, strip her and bury his face between her thighs. He gritted his teeth to keep from doing just that. She leaned closer to him.

He felt her breath against his lips when she asked, "Can I have one small taste? I promise to make it quick."

His reply was instant. "You can have whatever you like."

He'd barely gotten that last word out before her lips met his. It was not one quick taste as she'd promised. Her tongue probed his lips, coaxing them open. He gave in to her demand, wanting it just as much as she did. When his tongue touched hers, he tasted the fruitiness of her drink.

As their kiss deepened, he felt her hand rub up his back. A shiver raced over him as her hand crept up his neck. Though he wasn't a fan of being touched, his body didn't mind having her hands on him. Their kiss continued as her fingers threaded through his hair.

She gripped his hair tightly, mixing a little pain with their pleasure. That shit turned him on. Before he knew it, he'd picked her up and placed her on his lap. Straddling him, their kiss continued until Cecca's annoying ass voice broke the spell they'd been caught up in.

"Stefano! Gen said your big ass can head down to the dungeon now."

It took a second for Cecca's words to sink in. Even when they did sink in, he didn't end the kiss. Gina did. She pulled away. He leaned forward, wanting to reclaim her lips. He wasn't done with her yet. Plus, he was sure Cecca was lying. Gina placed her finger on his lips, halting him.

"Later," she promised. "Remember why I came here."

He remembered why he'd come there. To fight, fuck and forget. *Fight! Shit.* Fight was the first thing on his agenda. He was allowing a beautiful distraction to disrupt his plans. Stefano grabbed her finger and pulled it away from his mouth. He spread her fingers open and then pressed a kiss against her palm. What possessed him to do that? He had no idea. It just felt like the right thing to do.

"Hey!" Cecca snapped her fingers between their faces.

The movement surprised Gina, causing her to jump back. Before she could fall off his lap, Stefano caught her and stood up. Her arms instinctively went around his neck when she'd felt herself falling. Now standing, he had one arm wrapped around her body and the other under her ass.

And a lot of ass it was. Damn, she was soft and toned at the same time. Her legs were wrapped around his waist now, and she'd clasped her hands together around his neck. He wanted her in this same position later tonight. But they'd be naked the next time they did this.

"Thank you for catching me," she whispered.

"Did you think I'd let you fall?"

She shook her head. "Not you. You're my knight in shining armor."

Was that what she wanted? A knight? He was no knight. He was more like the dragon the knight would protect her from. If she wanted a dragon, a villain, he was her guy. If she wanted a hero, then she'd come to the wrong place and kissed the wrong man. Stefano was nobody's prince charming. He was the monster in the dark who came to burn down prince charming's castle.

“I’m no knight,” he confessed. “But I’m good at protecting the people I care for.”

It should be illegal to have a smile like the one she was gifting him now.

“Am I being added to the list of people you care about?” she asked.

He didn’t know how to answer that. He could lie and say yes. Or he could lie and say no. He didn’t truly know which one was the lie. Yet, somehow, this woman was making him feel shit he’d always tried to avoid. Maybe a good fuck would get her out of his system. He hoped to hell it would.

“It’s okay.” She shrugged. “You don’t have to answer that. It was presumptuous of me to assume you could care about me after only knowing me for like twenty minutes.”

According to Enzo, it had only taken him five minutes to know he was never letting Eve go, ever. *Wait!* Had he caught the same fucking sickness Enzo had? He quickly lowered Gina to her feet. He needed some distance between him and her.

She smoothed her hands over her pants. “I’m sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable.”

“You didn’t,” he assured her.

It’s not you. It’s me. Those were words no woman wanted to hear, which was why he kept them to himself. He was saved from having to explain himself by Cecca’s annoying voice.

“If you two love birds are done eye fucking each other and making me jealous, Stefano, you’re needed downstairs. And Gina...” Cecca’s voice switched to a sweeter tone. “You can stay here and keep me company. Drinks on me, darling.”

“Actually,” Gina said. “I was hoping I could sign up for the fight club.”

“You?” Cecca stared Gina up and down. “You want to fight in the dungeon?”

“As I told the silent beast here, don’t let this big butt and smile fool you. I’m a beast with these hands.”

Gina held up her manicured fingers and wiggled them. That wasn't something a hardened fighter would ever do. Cecca seemed to be thinking the same thing.

"You're too cute to fight," Cecca told her. "Stay here with me, and let's drink out of pretty glasses."

"Awww. You're cute too. And that does sound fun."

A stab of jealousy sliced through Stefano's chest as he watched her give his smiles to someone else. He shoved that jealousy shit aside and wrote it off as heartburn. He didn't get jealous. *Ever!* Why the fuck would he? He didn't even know this woman. More importantly, he wouldn't see her again after tonight, or rather, the morning, if he was lucky.

Therefore, there was no point in his mind thinking about shit like, what did she like for breakfast. Or was she a coffee drinker or a tea drinker like him? Stefano's phone dinged. He pulled it from his pocket to read the text. It was from Gen and had been sent to everyone who'd signed up for the list tonight. It was a call to action.

"Did everyone get a text?" Gina asked, staring around the club.

Stefano followed his gaze. About ten other guys in the club were staring at their phones. The guys at the pool tables laid down their pool sticks and cues, then started heading to the front door. Unlike him, they couldn't go to the back of the club. They had to go outside and take the side stairs down to the basement, where they'd have to show ID before entering the fight club.

"Those who signed up for the fight club received their texts," Cecca told Gina. "Let me check with Gen to see if it's too late for you to sign up. Are you sure you want to fight?"

Gina nodded her head excitedly. This would not end well.

"Alrighty." Cecca went to find Gen.

Stefano wanted to call Cecca back, but she'd already entered the back room.

“You don’t have to fight,” Stefano told Gina. “If you need money, I’ll lend it to you. You can send it back to me when you return to the States.”

If you return to the States. Don’t think like that, he told himself. She was definitely leaving. He wasn’t going to kidnap her like Enzo did Eve.

“That’s sweet, but you don’t have to lend me money. I don’t mind working for it.”

He had a job for her if she was set on working for it. Stefano shoved his hands into his pockets but remained silent. He couldn’t offer to pay a woman like her for sex. She was too good for that. And if he did offer, it would show her just how out of her league he was.

“Plus,” she continued. “I like boxing. It’s my favorite work out.”

“This is very different from the boxing you’re used to,” he told her, picturing her dancing in cute workout clothes while punching the air to the beat of the music. “This gets brutal.”

Some of the excitement left her eyes.

“But the cab driver said it wasn’t a fight to the death. Did he lie to me?”

“He’s right. It’s not a death match. But, it’s still savage. I’ve seen people lose limbs and eyes in the dungeon.”

“Lose limbs and eyes? The driver didn’t say anything about that.”

Finally, she was starting to look nervous.

“Which is why you shouldn’t fight.”

“Are you telling me this because I’m a woman? If so, that’s sexist.”

No, he wasn’t saying it because she was a woman. Actually, he was. He wasn’t sexist. He just didn’t want her to get hurt. Gen said there was only one woman signed up for the dungeon tonight. The women who fought in the dungeon were nothing like Gina. They’d lived hard lives.

She looked pampered, sheltered. So sheltered and protected that she hadn't recognized a scam when she'd encountered one. There was no way she could last one round, much less three in the dungeon. Then again, Eve was a pampered princess, and she'd beat up one of the managers at Tower D just last week.

Stefano knew you couldn't judge a book by its cover. But Gina was no Eve. Boxing exercise classes were nothing like a dungeon fight. She was going to get herself badly hurt. The thought of that happening to her bothered Stefano far more than it should. He wouldn't take time to ponder the reason why right now.

Cecca returned to her post behind the bar and told Gina, "The owner says it's fine. He needs your number so he can send the NDA to your phone. If you get hurt or killed, we're not responsible."

"I understand."

Smiling, Gina rattled off her number to Cecca. Stefano filed it into his memory. Cecca wrote the number down. He was pretty sure she would copy it again in the back to keep it from herself. Why did he feel like he suddenly had a love rival? *No. Not love rival.* Lust rival. Because that was what he felt for Gina, lust, and nothing more than that.

"You also need a stage name," Cecca informed Gina. "For instance, he is the Silent Beast. What do you want your name to be? Oh, and how do you plan to pay the list fee? It's One hundred to fight. You know what? Don't worry about the fee. I'll put it on Stefano's tab." Cecca winked at Stefano before facing Gina again.

"You okay with that?" Gina asked him.

Stefano nodded. He was okay with it. But, he'd rather her not fight at all. His mind immediately started thinking of all the ways she could die in the dungeon.

"I just need your stage name," Cecca told Gina.

Gina tapped her finger against her chin. Though he was concerned for her safety, that didn't stop his imagination from

nosediving into the deep end of the gutter. He imagined himself tapping his cock against her chin and telling her to open wide. When her lips parted, he'd slide his cock inside and fuck her mouth until his cum dripped down her chin, splattering onto her breasts.

“Did you hear her, Stefano?” Cecca called to him.

“What?” Stefan asked, looking from Cecca to Gina.

“I swear,” Cecca said before sighing. “Where is your head at?”

Between Gina's legs.

“She asked you whether her name sounded good or not?” Cecca told him.

He looked at Gina. “Let me hear it again.”

“The Silencer,” she said, smiling.

Actually, The Silencer wasn't a bad name. It just didn't fit her. A better fit for her would be The Curves, or The Body, or maybe even Sweet Temptation. Those names fit her better, further proof that this wasn't what she needed to be involved in.

“You don't like it, do you?” she asked.

“The name is a good name. I just don't think you should be going down into the dungeon.”

“I agree,” Cecca backed him up. “And you know he must be worried because this is the most I've ever seen him talk to anyone, ever! And he's been coming here for a long time.”

Cecca was right. He couldn't remember the last time he'd talked to an outsider for this long. Perhaps it was because Gina didn't feel like an outsider. She felt like... *Oh, no*, he was acting like Enzo again. Was there a vaccine he could stab himself with to keep this shit from happening? Because his will power wasn't strong enough.

“In the end, this is your decision. So, if you're sure this is what you want to do, then we can't stop you,” Cecca told her.

Gina nodded. “I want this.”

“Okay. I’ll take your stage name and number back to Gen. Stefano, you can come with me and head down to the dungeon.”

“I’ll wait for Gina.”

“Hmm...” That was all Cecca said as she walked away.

Maybe if the guys and lady in the dungeon saw that The Silencer was with the Silent Beast, they’d opt out of fighting her. He really hoped that happened because if by some miracle, Gina was able to defeat the only other woman in the dungeon tonight, she’d then have the option of fighting a guy to continue winning money.

And the guys in the dungeon didn’t care who they fought. When it came to money, they’d probably fight a kid. Actually, they would fight a kid. Stefan had been a teen when he’d first started fighting in the dungeon. It was well before he was old enough to enter Club Tacere.

And now Gina was about to step into that bloody cage. How could he not be worried for her? A few seconds later, Gina’s phone pinged. She quickly unlocked her phone and opened the text message. She read the contents and then excitedly showed the screen to him.

“Look. My stage now is now on the list.”

“There’s still time to back out.”

She playfully pushed his shoulder. “Stop worrying. I can take this chick. And, if I’m allowed to fight the guys, I’ll take them on too. Maybe you and I will face each other in the fight ring.”

He gripped her shoulders and gave her a gentle shake.

“Hey!” She tried to pull away from him.

“If you can’t even get away from me while I’m holding you like this, how do you expect to fight in the dungeon?” Stefano asked, hoping this would help her see that the dungeon was no place for her.

Instead, tears filled her gaze. He immediately released her.

“If I hurt you...” he started.

“You didn’t,” she interrupted what would’ve been his apology. “Stefano, I just met you. I don’t know you at all.”

“I know...” he started, only to have her interrupt him again.

“Which is why you get no say in what I’m about to do. I have to do this. Okay?”

He shook his head. “Not okay. You’ll get hurt.”

“Then I’ll get hurt.” She shrugged. “It has nothing to do with you.”

Then why the hell did he feel like he was the one about to get hurt? He watched her press the accept link in the text message she’d received, agreeing not to fault the club if she was badly wounded, dismembered, or killed on Tacere grounds. Stefan sighed. After shoving her phone into her pocket, she looked up at him.

“You ready to go fight for some cash?” she asked. “I know I am.”

One of them was ready. And one of them was afraid.

Stefan had forgotten how horrible it felt to be afraid.

Chapter Eight



Sienna

When she'd entered the club, she'd thought the guy in the red at the pool table was the silent beast. Natalie hadn't given her any physical descriptions of the guy. But the one in the red had a huge scar that stretched from his eye to the corner of his mouth. However, that wasn't what made him look like a beast.

He was big as hell with massive shoulders. Veins bulged from his neck and his forehead. He looked downright beastly. So far, he hadn't said anything. Whenever the other guys spoke to him, he replied in grunts. He fit the silent part of the name also. But she'd been wrong. The man she'd become enthralled with the moment she'd entered the club was her target.

Damn it. Why did it have to be the handsome guy seated alone at the table in the back? She'd wanted to get his number before she left. Sure, she'd come to Italy on a mission to find her friend. But she wasn't leaving Italy without fucking at least one Italian Stallion. Stefano had captured her attention the second her eyes landed on him.

Not many men made her do a double take. Stefano hadn't either. His sexy ass had made her stop dead in her tracks. Her pussy had perked up and claimed him the moment their gazes met. *That's him,* it had purred. *That's our Italian dick for this trip.* This man was beyond handsome. It helped that he wasn't

that pretty boy handsome some women were attracted to these days.

No, this was a man. His rugged appearance hinted at a bad boy persona that called to her wild side. Yet, he was clean-cut, fresh-shaven, and dressed like a gentleman. That mixture of professional and bad boy had her wanting to know which side was the real him. It was too late for that.

Now that she knew he was her target, she couldn't fuck him to find out if the big dick energy he was giving off was real or a façade. She would never get a chance to ride his face to see what his tongue game was like. Sienna held in her sigh. She couldn't recall the last time she'd been this disappointed.

Why did the first man she'd been this attracted to in ages have to be her target? It proved that she had bad luck, and her luck hadn't changed once she'd entered Italy. Her target stared down at her with concern in his eyes. He truly appeared worried about her stepping into the dungeon. Sienna smiled and gripped his collar to pull him close.

When his nose was inches from hers, she whispered, "I promise to tap out if I feel I have to. Is that allowed?"

Eyes on her mouth, he nodded but said nothing.

"But I'll only tap out in the dungeon. That won't happen when you and I are alone. I'm not the tapping out type. So, feel free to be as rough as you want with me."

Before she had a chance to mentally pat herself on her back for getting him riled up, he did something that sent a wave of arousal flooding her system, nearly drowning her with its intensity. He wrapped his hand around her throat and pulled her closer until their lips met. This time, it was his tongue probing at her lips.

She opened for him like a blooming flower. His tongue slid into her mouth, claiming her in a fierce kiss. The taste of this man was something she could get used to. Why did he have to be the silent beast? *Besties before beasts*. She was there to save her friend, not to be dicked down by a beast.

That didn't mean she couldn't enjoy this taste of him. He was the first to pull away from the kiss, but he didn't move far. She could still feel his breath against her lips. Would it make her appear desperate if she kissed him again? Before tonight, she hadn't been a fan of swapping spit. The thought disgusted her. Yet, she found herself yearning to have his tongue caress hers again.

Hand still gripping her throat, he said, "Make sure you tap out if things get too rough in the dungeon. The only one who will be pounding this body tonight is me."

Yes, daddy. Pound me.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, daddy. I mean, sir. I mean..."

Shit. She read too many smutty books and watched too much porn. It was starting to show. Sienna cleared her throat, then tried again.

"Yes, Stefano."

There, she finally got it right. He smiled as he released her. Lowering his hand from her throat, he grabbed her hand and led her to the exit.

"You two can go through the back," Cecca called.

Sienna had completely forgotten the woman existed. Damn, she needed to get her head back in the game. This was a mission, not a vacation.

"We're good. We need to go outside to cool off," her target told the bartender.

And he was right. She was feeling hot all over. Her poor pussy was begging her to fuck him before she kidnapped him and forced him to tell her where her friend was. Would that be cruel of her to use him for sex and then torture him for information? Something about it just felt wrong, immoral.

The cold air was a shock to her system when she stepped outside. She nearly took a step back when her target made a sudden movement. He shrugged out of his coat and draped it

around her shoulders. *Oh, he was just giving her his coat.* For a second, she'd thought he'd figured out who she was.

That was just her paranoid side raising its suspicious head. Even so, she wasn't a fan of sudden movements. Her instinct was to stab first and ask questions later. She damn sure wasn't used to men offering her their coats. Sienna lowered her hand from her jacket pocket where her mini knife was and allowed him to drape the coat around her.

Apparently, chivalry wasn't dead, *yet*. It would be by the end of the night when she was forced to make him tell her what she wanted to know. Guilt gripped her heart. She liked it when her targets yelled at her or cursed her. She even liked it when they tried to kill her. It made her feel less guilty about what she had in store for them.

And it made her actions weigh less on her conscience when she was done with them. Having the Silent Beast be nice to her and treat her like she was special would make it harder for her to torture him later. Maybe fighting him in the dungeon would get her head back in the game. Maybe it would knock some sense into her and remind her that he was the enemy.

"You didn't have to give me your coat. I'll have to take it off as soon as we enter the dungeon," she told him.

"I know. Until then, keep it on. I don't want you to be cold."

Nooo. Don't say that. Don't be nice. Call me a bitch and try to slap me so I can stab you in your left nut.

"When we get in the dungeon, I'll take you to the changing room. In your text message, there was a locker number and combination sent to you. You can put your jacket and heels in your locker. No one else will have that combination. The locks are switched around each night. Until we get there, keep my jacket on. Don't catch a cold."

"Look at you, being such a gentleman. I bet you've got a dozen women vying for your attention."

Hands in his pockets, he shook his head. "Not a dozen."

She stared over at him, taking in his profile. *Tall, built, handsome, and a gentleman. Plus, he smelled good.* He was the ultimate, 'Get The Pussy Wet' package. She should've come to Italy a long time ago.

"But you do have women vying for your attention. Right?" she asked, being nosey.

She couldn't help but wonder how many lucky women were swinging from this tree. He looked her way. She expected him to smile and make some type of joke. Instead, he looked serious as hell when he spoke again.

"Women only see the name when they see me. They don't really see *me*."

Without saying much, he'd just told her a lot. When women saw him, they saw the Silent Beast, a member of a crime organization. They were drawn to the danger, the money, and the prestige. They never tried to get to know the person underneath all that. Even if they wanted to dig deeper and know more, he wasn't in a position to share more.

This lifestyle didn't allow it. She understood what he meant when he said they didn't see him. Even those close to her, Eve included, had never seen the real Sienna. Sometimes she wondered if she knew who the real her was.

"Why do I feel like you're seeing me?" he asked as he pulled his coat tighter around her.

His gaze hadn't strayed from hers. She wanted to look away. His eyes held her captive. Her heart was racing too fast for her to process what was happening. That was a good thing, because she didn't want to process it. Whatever was happening between them, whatever magic this was, it was forbidden.

"Maybe it's because you're not from here," he said, voice low. "Maybe that's a good thing. You don't have any perceived notions of me. Therefore, I can show you a side of me others don't get to see."

Don't do that. Don't show me your other side. I only want your bad side. The side I can torture.

Why was she mad now? She had him right where she wanted him. If she wanted, she could convince him to get a room with her and forget about the dungeon. Then she could drug him with the powder that was in her jacket pocket. Once he was out cold, she could tie his ass up and force him to tell her what she needed to know.

They didn't even have to go into the fight ring. She'd only signed up for it because he'd signed up for it, and she hadn't wanted to let him out of her sight. But now, he only had eyes for her. They could skip right to the *drugging him* part of this party.

So, why wasn't she flirting with him and trying to convince him to leave with her? Why was she standing there, wishing he'd take his coat and run before she showed him her other side, her ugly side, a side she wasn't proud of?

"What are you thinking?" he told her, standing much too close. "I've said too much, haven't I?"

Sienna shook her head and stared down at the ground while blinking back tears. *He's my enemy. He's my only connection to Eve. I have to do this.* Once she'd regained her composure, she returned her gaze to his.

"No. I was just thinking that I wish I didn't have to leave in a couple of days. I would love to spend more time with you."

That wasn't a lie.

His hands cupped her cheeks. "Which is why we need to take advantage of the time we do have."

She had to give it to him. The Silent Beast was one smooth talker. Maybe she *would* fuck him before she tortured him. She'd just add that to the growing list of all the other bad things she'd done in her life. This wouldn't even make the top five. Just as she was about to say, *let's forget the fight ring and get out of here*, an older man came rushing their way.

"There you two are. Things are getting ready to start. Stefano, you're up first." The older man looked her way. "You must be The Silencer?"

Sienna nodded. The man gave her a once-over before shaking his head. Seriously, did she not look like she could whoop ass? Sure, she was putting up a front, but she should look a little deadly to these bastards.

“Alright. You’ll fight last. Come on in, you two. It’s cold as a dog’s tits out here.”

Sienna chuckled. That sounded like something Miss Davies would say. She pushed away feelings of sadness before they could take a firm hold of her. Miss Davies was safer with her gone. Her safety was all that mattered.

Holding her hand, Stefano led her to the staircase on the side of the building. She could hear loud talking coming from the dungeon as they descended the stairs. With every other step, Stefano looked back at her to check on her.

He sucked at being a Silent Beast. He was too kind, too caring. If he was her man, she’d walk all over him. After a week of dating, she would’ve already chewed him up and spat him out, then had him running to his don with his tail between his legs.

Sienna shook her head. Maybe she should look for another one of the don’s goons because this one couldn’t be the savage Natalie had been talking about. Did he come here and pretend to be the Silent Beast without the real Silent Beast knowing about it? That was possible.

It was too late to find out who he really was. The old guy pulled the doors to the dungeon open and stepped aside, making room for them to enter ahead of him. Stefano tried to enter while holding her hand. She pulled her hand back. She didn’t want the other fighters to think they were together.

He looked back at her. “What’s wrong?”

She shook her head, then nodded for him to go into the club. He stood there, staring at her for a long time. Finally, the old man told them to hurry up. With a sigh, Stefano entered the club. Sienna walked in behind him. The noise inside was damn near deafening. The dungeon was much bigger than she’d expected it to be.

She'd been anticipating some run-down setup. It looked like a legit boxing ring stage. Sienna kept her face void of emotion as she stared around her. Really, she wanted to squeal in excitement. She loved this place. She'd always wanted to open a gym for women only, so they didn't have to feel self-conscious about working out with men around.

Because sometimes, women didn't want men staring at them when they worked out. She also wanted her gym to have a boxing area because boxing was good cardio, and it was good for your arms and abs. And also, because she believed all women needed to know how to fight. This world wasn't kind to women.

The dungeon was like her dream come true. Sure, it was a little outdated, and it lacked sophistication. And yeah, instead of ropes surrounding the stage, there were three rows of barb wire enclosing the raised platform. There was no corner padding for opponents to lean against during their short breaks.

Were breaks even allowed in the dungeon? Probably not. And instead of women working out, there were deadly looking men standing around, staring up at a digital board where the names of opponents were flashing in red. The men were cheering loudly, calling out the names of their favorites and the names of those they wanted to see lose.

Then there were a couple of guys going around collecting bets and taking money while writing names on a sheet attached to a clipboard. Oh, and she couldn't leave out the women who were there. They were dressed like it wasn't cold as hell outside. They were what she liked to refer to as Ring Riders.

Women who fucked whoever won in the ring. So, no, this place wasn't *just like* her dream. She still loved it. She and Eve could come into a place like this and make tons of money. Sure, the men looked brutal as fuck. But she'd been trained by an old Russian boxer.

She knew pressure points that would bring a beast to his knees and have him tapping out in no time. It wasn't about

who was the strongest or who punched the hardest. It was about who was the fastest and who knew where to strike to cause the most internal damage. Maureen had made sure Sienna learned to be fast as hell.

Her trainer had made sure she knew how to cause internal damage. She was just what a place like this needed. Too bad she couldn't stick around to have some real fun. Some of the shouting stopped after people noticed Stefano had entered the room. She didn't miss the way the onlooker's gazes jerked from him to her.

Shit! She was still wearing his jacket. After shrugging out of it, she tried to give it back to him. He wouldn't take it. She tried shoving it into his arms. He gripped her wrist and bent low until his nose was almost touching hers.

"Keep it," he ordered.

"But I..."

He turned away as if she hadn't been about to say something. His little act had done two things. It made the other fighters think they were together, thus putting a bullseye on her back. Instantly, his enemies became her enemies. The brutal looking men began smiling at her. She knew how bastards like them thought.

They now not only wanted to take Stefano out, but they also wanted to take out the woman he'd given his jacket to. They thought hurting her would hurt him. *Idiots*. She wanted to hurt him just as much as they did. She was on their side. But they didn't know that.

The second thing it did was make all the women in the room hate her and want to be her at the same time. If looks could kill, the daggers the women were now shooting at her would've ripped her to shreds.

One woman said something to the chick she was standing beside. Both bitches looked at Sienna and then burst out laughing. Giggling bitches were the worst. Neither one of them would last a minute in the ring with her, which was why she ignored them.

What was he looking at? Sienna rolled her eyes at the guy she'd previously thought was the Silent Beast. The bastard punched his hand and then pointed at her. She flipped him off. That vein on his forehead bulged more. Yeah, he would be a hard one to take down.

Stefano bent low to her ear to whisper, "Don't worry. I'll take care of him for you."

As Gina, all she could do was smile and mumble, "Thank you."

As Sienna, she was hoping the big guy would take Stefano out and leave him battered so that when she kidnapped him, he didn't put up much of a fight. Her gaze was drawn to the opponent board. The Silent Beast was up first. He was going against Head Basher. That sounded like a good match up.

Her gaze dropped to the bottom, where her name was. The Silencer vs. Pink Reaper. *Pink Reaper*. That was a cute play on the grim reaper. Sienna's gaze scanned the room. She ignored the men who licked their lips at her or winked their eyes and grabbed their crotches. All over the world, men were the same.

It was in their DNA to be dicks. Maybe she should've made her stage name Lorena Bobbitt. Or The Dick Slicer. It was too late now. Where was the chick she had to fight? *There she is*. Clad in a black body suit, the woman was slender, with her blonde hair cut in a pixie hairstyle.

She had a black eye patch over one of her eyes. Her skin was pale. If Sienna met her on the street late at night, she'd think she was a vampire. Vampires were real. She'd never encountered one. However, she was a firm believer that shit existed in the shadows that didn't want to be found.

This bitch looked like one of those shadow creatures. Her gaze landed on Sienna, and the vampire smiled. She was missing a tooth. Maybe she should stop fighting because it was taking a toll on her body. The woman pointed at Sienna and mouthed, "*I'm going to make you my bitch.*"

Sienna was good at reading lips. So, she smiled and blew the vampire a kiss. Anger flashed in the woman's eyes.

Sometimes you didn't have to fight fire with fire. Sometimes pettiness burned just as hot. Stefan noticed the exchange. He was now glaring at the woman. Vampire bitch noticed Stefan's glare and quickly looked away.

To Sienna's displeasure, Stefano grabbed her hand and pulled her across the room. Which only made the onlookers talk more and eye her angrily. Seriously, what was wrong with this guy? When they reached the other side of the room, he put her back against the wall and stared down at her.

"This is my spot," he told her.

She looked left and right. "It's just a spot against the wall. How can it belong to you?"

"It's where I stand before I fight."

True enough, this was the one spot in the place where no one had been standing. Maybe this would be a good place for her to stand for now. It seemed to be the safest place for her. She tugged on Stefano's shirt.

"Almost all the men in here are shirtless. Shouldn't you go put your clothes in the locker or whatever?"

"I'm going to do that now. Do you want me to put your jacket in my locker?"

Nope.

"I plan to fight with my jacket on."

"Why? Do you think someone is going to steal it?" he asked.

Sure, let's go with that.

"I've already been scammed. I don't want to lose the only jacket I brought with me."

"That's the only jacket you brought with you to Italy this time of year?"

He gave her a look that said he thought she was clueless. *Good.* Keep thinking that.

"I'm a fool, aren't I?" Sienna asked with a pout.

“I’ll get you another jacket tomorrow. A thicker coat.”

Her eyes widened. “Why would you do that?”

He didn’t answer. He simply grabbed her hand and pulled her along with him as he headed to the back. He had a bad habit of dragging her along with him without telling her where the hell they were going. He pushed open a set of double doors.

“This is the changing room,” he announced.

Her nose crinkled. The stench of sweat and blood hung heavy in the air. Did they ever clean this place? There was a wall of lockers at the back of the room. Two men were at two different lockers, shoving their clothes inside. Neither made eye contact with Stefano when they left the room. She followed Stefano over to his locker.

“This is mine. It’s always mine.”

“I thought the locks changed every week,” Sienna said.

“They do. Every week, the opponents get a new locker, and the locks on the lockers are rotated around the room. It’s only mine that never changes. It’s a privilege of having come here since I was a teen.”

He’d been fighting for years. Maybe he really was the Silent Beast.

“Look at your text and see what locker you’ve been assigned to. In your locker, you’ll have a towel and a small plastic bag with pain pills in it.”

As if she’d take some random pills found in a locker. Sienna pulled her phone from her jacket pocket. He was right. There was a locker and combination number for her.

L:5 – C: 963.

She looked along the wall for locker five. *Found it.* She strode over to it and put her combination in. It took a few tries to get the combination right. Seriously, who still used these kinds of locks? Inside were the items Stefan said there’d be. Two pain pills in a small bag and a large towel. At least the towel looked clean.

There was enough room for her to put her jacket and heels inside. But that would leave her fighting barefoot in the ring. Those men looked like they had foot fungus. She was not about to get barefoot on that mat. Then again, if she got slammed on the mat, her face would be touching the same mat their feet touched.

A shiver of disgust raced over her. Maybe she should rethink this. She hadn't even brought along the proper skin care products when she'd traveled here. She looked over at Stefano, preparing to ask him if he was going to fight barefoot. Her gaze landed on him just in time to see him taking his shirt off.

Oh, a strip tease. Sign me up.

She leaned against her locker. She had a front row seat to the Stefano show.

Chapter Nine



Sienna

Where was popcorn when she needed it?

No, she needed some ones to throw so she could make it rain on his sexy ass. He'd already taken his hat off and placed it in his locker. With his back to her, he pulled his shirt over his head. The sinewy muscles of his back and shoulders flexed as he moved. This man was toned as hell. But that wasn't what had her attention now.

Now that she was getting a good look at his back and was thinking with her mind instead of her twat, she realized he wasn't just sexy. He was wounded. Scars littered his back. Those scars weren't attained from fighting in the dungeon. Someone had whipped him. The wounds were deep and old.

They covered his entire back leaving almost no inch unblemished. His back looked much worse than hers. Having felt the sting of a whip herself many times over the years, she knew each one of those lashes had made him wish for death. But after a while, like her, his back had probably become almost numb.

After a while, the old wounds dulled the sting of the whip. They dulled the sting of everything. There were some parts of her that felt nothing. No pain, no pleasure, nothing. The nerves in certain places had died before she'd even reached maturity. Had the same thing happened to him?

Before she knew it, her hand was raised, stretched out, reaching for him. The little girl in her wanted to console the

little boy in him. There had been no one there to console her until Eden had come along.

At first, she'd had to sit alone with her pain. Even after Eden arrived, her presence had only made it somewhat manageable. It hadn't changed the fact that Sienna had felt like her life was worthless.

Had he suffered in silence alone just as she had? Had there been no one to console him? No one to tell him it wasn't his fault and that he didn't deserve this? She wanted to be that someone. She wanted to console him. She wanted to tell him it wasn't his fault. Tears burned her eyes.

Sienna quickly blinked them away and shoved her traumas back behind the door she kept them hidden in and locked it, barring it shut. Lowering her outstretched hand, she reminded herself that she wasn't there to trauma bond with him or to care about who'd hurt him that way and why.

However, the thought of hurting him further and adding more bruises to his already wounded body now made her stomach roil. The thought was literally making her feel sick. Sienna looked away from him, unable to keep staring at his back. Staring into her locker, she took a few deep breaths, releasing them slowly while telling herself that she was alright.

That little mantra had gotten her through many hard times. Even now, it was helping calm her racing heart and reminding her that she was truly alright. She was a survivor. As she exhaled slowly, the sound of something being zipped up or down filled the room. *Wait*. Was he unzipping his pants?

Deep breaths forgotten, she spun around to face him again. Yes. Yes, the hell he was unzipping his pants. Should she look away? No. No, the hell she shouldn't. The Silent Beast pulled his pants off and hung them on a hanger in his locker. She stared back at her locker to see if she had hanger access.

No, she didn't. He really did have his own personalized locker. She resumed watching him, wishing he didn't have on those black briefs he was wearing. Even in them, she could see

that he had a nice ass. She loved a man with a nice ass. Would he get upset if she spanked it? Probably.

A soft sigh escaped her. She'd never get a chance to spank his ass and make him scream her name. Life really wasn't fair. She peeped his toned thighs as he pulled out a pair of boxing shorts. His body was truly a work of art. He had the type of body an artist would love to sculpt.

His thighs looked powerful. Most men with powerful thighs had powerful thrusts. The kind that made you gasp whenever they pounded you. From the way he was built, she could tell he worked out. Not just in the gym. In the streets too.

His legs also had bruises on them. Not bruises left from a whip. The one she was currently staring at looked like a jagged-edged knife had sliced across his calf muscle. He'd earned his name, the Silent Beast, through his blood, sweat, and tears.

No wonder his presence made other men become quiet. His name carried weight. She found him, his wounds, and the fact that motherfuckers feared him sexy as hell. He glanced over his shoulder at her as he pulled his shorts up.

"Do the scars scare you?" he asked, voice low, distant, cold.

"Why would they scare me?"

His chuckle was tinged with sarcasm.

"You don't have to pretend they don't."

"You don't have to assume they do," she replied, understanding how unsettling it was to have someone of the opposite sex, hell, anyone, see the imperfection you tried to hide. "We all have wounds and bruises," she told him, eyes on his back.

"Have you seen enough?" he asked, tone still sounding detached.

"Nope. Let me see the front."

This time his chuckle held mirth. “You want to see the front?”

“I sure do.”

He slowly turned around. *Six pack for days*. And his nipples were hard. She wanted to flick her tongue over them.

“Now lower your pants,” Sienna instructed.

Stefano’s laughter filled the room. Laughter looked good on him.

“Later,” he promised.

He sat down on the bench to pull his shoes off. Unlike her, he had a pair of tennis shoes in his locker. Lucky him. He didn’t have to catch the fungus like she did. He put the last of his items in his locker, then closed it.

When he faced her again, he said, “I’ll leave you to get ready. Be quick. I want your eyes on me when I fight.”

Swoon.

“I have no intention of taking my eyes off you.”

Or my fists. She watched him until he left the changing room. Then she faced her locker again. Was she really about to put her heels in this locker and walk around barefoot? She sucked in a deep breath and released it slowly.

She’d fought in nastier places. Ditches, sewers, graveyards, dump sites. It’s why she used only the best skin care products. No matter how gritty or bacteria-ridden the place she fought was, proper skin care always made her feel like a new woman afterward.

“I’ve got this,” she said out loud.

“I don’t think you do, princess.”

Sienna spun around at the sound of a woman’s voice. It was the woman with the eye patch. *The Pink Reaper*. Sienna hadn’t even heard her come in. *You’re slipping, Sienna*. Her hands went to the backs on her earrings, checking to see if she had to volume turned up. *Nope*. The backs had come loose a bit, causing the volume to be turned down.

In the future, when wearing her eavesdropping earrings, she'd have to remember to check the backs occasionally. Had she done so, there was no way Pink would've been able to sneak up on her. Even without the earrings, the woman shouldn't have been able to sneak up on her. Inattentiveness could get you killed.

She truly needed to get her head back in the game before she lost it. Sienna cocked her head to the side and stared Pink up and down. Why was this chick back there? Was round one between them about to happen right now? The woman smiled as she started toward Sienna. *Round one: fight.*

Sienna stepped out of her heels and used her toe to slide them to the side, out of the way. Upon seeing that, Pink raced in her direction. Sienna would've rather taken her down in the fight ring. However, back here would work as well. Sienna held her ground as the woman approached her.

Pink raised her fist. Sienna squinted. The light glinted off the tiny spikes on Pink's ring. *Sneaky little bitch. I like you. Too bad I've got to put you to sleep.* Sienna leaned to the side when Pink swung at her, causing the fighter to miss. The woman's ring clinked against the locker.

Sienna didn't waste time playing with the woman. She didn't want to miss her Silent Beast's fight. Striking the locker had jolted the woman, distracting her for a moment. All Sienna needed was a moment. She palmed the back of Pink's head and slammed her face into the locker, leaving blood smeared on the locker.

As soon as she released the woman's head, Pink stumbled backward, barely keeping her footing. Sienna strode over to her high heels and picked one up. She turned the heel left and then right, trying to recall which side had the small steel panel sewn in. She tapped the right side against her hand. *There it is.* Pink recovered from her moment of dizziness.

"You bitch," she yelled before rushing Sienna again.

Sienna waited until she was close enough before swinging the heel. The bitch ducked, moving faster than Sienna had expected. Before she could swing again, the woman rushed

her, slamming her shoulder into Sienna's stomach and knocking the wind from her. Sienna's back hit the locker.

Pink raised her fist again, aiming her spiked ring at Sienna's face. Sienna leaned to the side. Too slow. A spike caught her cheek, scratching it. Surprised, Sienna touched her fingers to her cheek. Pulling them away from her face, she stared down at the smeared blood on her fingers. Rage filled her as she glared at Pink.

"You made my face bleed," Sienna hissed.

"That's not all I'm going to do, princess."

Pink went to punch her again. This time, Sienna moved to the side just in time. She slammed her fist into Pink's cheek, causing the woman's head to jerk to the side. Another punch caused Pink to stumble to the side. Another sent the woman to the ground. Pink spat out blood. But Sienna wasn't done with her yet.

"You made me bleed," Sienna yelled as she stomped on the woman's stomach with her bare foot, causing Pink to double over in pain. Using her heel, the steel side, she slapped Pink across the face. The woman fell back against the floor, lips and nose bleeding.

"You made my face bleed," Sienna yelled again, slamming her shoe into the woman's face again, then again, and again until finally, Pink passed out, face covered in bruises. "Stupid bitch. And you got blood on my shoe. Damn it!"

Sienna squatted in front of Pink and rubbed her shoe against the woman's clothes, trying to get it clean.

"If you've made me miss Stefano's fight, I'm going to come back here and beat you again," Sienna muttered as she checked to see if her shoe was clean.

"Gina!"

She froze. *Oh, no! It's him.* Wasn't he supposed to be fighting? Sienna stood up and spun around. It wasn't just him. It was the old man too. Damn it. Sienna thought back to the saddest day of her life, causing tears to fill her gaze.

“Stefano,” she whined, amazed at how pitiful she sounded.

Stefano rushed to her side. He pulled her close as he looked from the woman on the ground to her.

“What happened?” he asked.

“I was standing in front of my locker when she attacked me.”

“She attacked you?” the old man said. “Then why is she unconscious?”

Shut up, old man. Sienna forced tears from her eyes as she stared up at Stefano.

“Look at my face,” she whined.

Stefano gripped her chin and turned her face to the side.

“She hurt you,” he whispered.

Sienna nodded pitifully.

“Look at *her* face,” the old man said, pointing to the woman on the floor.

Seriously, old man. Shut up!

“Why was she back here?” Stefan yelled. “Is this how you run your business now, Gen?”

Yeah, Gen?

“Gina had a reason to be back here,” Stefano continued. “This woman didn’t.”

Gen rubbed his chin. “You’re right about that.”

“I thought fighting was only allowed in the ring,” Stefano continued.

“It is,” Gen rushed to say. “I don’t know what possessed her to come back here and attack her opponent. It’s just... look at her.” He nodded to Pink. “And look at her.” Gen looked at Gina. “Shouldn’t they be reversed?”

Stefano looked at her as if he’d just realized that himself. Sienna held up her shoe for him to see.

“I beat her with this,” Sienna admitted as if that explained everything.

“No weapons are allowed,” Gen told her.

“Tell *her* that,” Sienna complained. “Her ring scratched my face.”

Gen squinted to see the scar on her face. He shook his head and then sighed. “Her coming back here and starting shit is against the rules. That automatically disqualifies her. Since she used a weapon, you get to decide her punishment. She can be banned from the club forever if you’d like.”

“Nah, that’s too harsh,” Sienna said. “You decided the punishment,” she told the old man. “Sooo, I won this one, right?” Sienna asked, keeping the act going.

“No!” Gen told her, standing up straight while rubbing his lower back. “Since the fight happened outside the ring, it was never a battle for the prize. It doesn’t count.”

“Damn it,” Sienna pouted.

Did Stefano just let out a sigh of relief? If he thought she was giving up that easy, then he didn’t know her at all. Actually, he didn’t know her at all, so that would explain why he thought she was giving up that easily.

“It’s not my fault the match was disqualified. I should still get a chance to fight whoever wins from the guys,” Sienna said.

“No!” Stefano yelled.

Sienna cocked her head at Stefano.

“Excuse me?”

“No,” he said again.

“You don’t get to decide,” she told him. “Gen does.” She looked to the old man whose gaze was moving between the two of them.

“Uh, no,” Gen said.

From the corner of her eye, she saw the slight uptick at the corner of Stefano's mouth. He thought he'd won. *How cute!* Sienna folded her arms over her chest.

"If I hadn't shown up, would you have allowed Pink to fight one of the guys?" Sienna asked.

Gen looked to Stefano for support.

"This has nothing to do with him," Sienna said. "Before tonight, I had no idea who this man was."

"Oh," was all Gen said, still looking at Stefano.

"I'm over here," Sienna waved her hand at Gen, drawing his attention back to her. "And I already clicked the link saying I wouldn't hold you responsible if something happened to me. At this point, if you don't let me fight, then you're just being sexist, right?"

"I hate that damn word," Gen muttered under his breath. He cast Stefano an exasperated look. "I'm sorry, Stefano. I have to let her fight, or my wife will have my nuts."

Sienna clapped excitedly. "Thank your wife for me."

"Yeah. Yeah. I'm going out. Fights start in ten. If you're not in the ring on time," he told Stefano. "Then you're disqualified, and it counts as a loss." As Gen walked away, rubbing his back, he mumbled, "I'm getting too old for this shit."

Sienna turned her smile on Stefano to find him glaring at her.

"So," she said. "Is someone going to carry her out of here?"

"Gen will send someone. How much money do you need?"

"Not this again."

"I'm serious, Gina. How much? I'll give you however much you need."

Awww. A true gentleman. He wasn't even asking for anything in return. Or was he?

“What do I have to do to get this money, Stefano?”

She stepped closer to him, staring up at him, loving how much taller than her he was. She was a sucker for tall men. And he was stacked, a big mountain of a man. *Damn it.* Why did he have to be the Silent Beast? Unable to help herself, she wrapped her arms around his neck and came up on her tiptoes.

“Answer the question, Silent Beast. What do I have to do to get this money?”

He stared down at her. “Nothing. The money comes with no strings attached.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

She pouted. “I was hoping you’d make me do something strange for a little bit of change.”

“What?”

His frown was adorable.

“Nothing. You can keep your money. But there is something you can do for me.”

“What?” he asked.

“You promise to do it?”

“Yes.” His dark eyes dropped to her lips.

“Give me a kiss for good luck.”

They could consider it a kiss goodbye since it would be the last kiss they’d ever share. He lowered his head. She readied herself for his taste. However, instead of pressing his lips to hers, he picked her up.

She yelped in surprise as he kicked Pink’s legs out of the way and moved over to the lockers, pressing Sienna’s back against them. With his hands cupping her ass, he lifted her until they were eye level with each other. With his hat gone, she had a better view of his face. No goon should be this handsome.

“Does your face hurt?” he asked, tone and expression soft, concerned.

Kiss me already!

Sienna shook her head. “I’m alright.”

His expression changed, becoming murderous when he angled his head at Pink, who was still unconscious.

“I don’t hurt women. But I want to kill her,” he growled.

For making me bleed? Uh, swoon!

He was truly her dark knight in shining armor. Wait! Had he just said he didn’t hurt women? *A goon who lived by a code*. Did that mean Eve was alive? With Eve’s smart ass mouth, she’d make a saint want to off her. Still, hearing him say that gave her hope that her friend was alive and well.

How could the Silent Beast work for a mafia family but not hurt women? Did that mean he’d let her tie him up and torture him without trying to fight back? She doubted it. He may live by a code, but that didn’t make him an idiot. When he returned his attention to her, she smiled at him.

“I’ve got some medicine you can put on your face. It’ll keep it from scaring. I’ll bring it to you tomorrow.”

He kept speaking of tomorrow as if he was one hundred percent certain he was going to be seeing her again. He was, just not in the way he thought he was. Yet, his confidence about it was off the charts.

“Thank you, Stefano,” she said, trying to sound as appreciative as she could.

Which wasn’t hard to do because she really did appreciate him offering to bring her medicine. His behavior was confusing the hell out of her. He wasn’t living up to the brutal title of his name.

“You’re welcome, Gina. Now,” he said, gaze dropping to her lips. “About that good luck kiss.”

Don’t talk about it, be about it. She was ready. From the way he was staring at her mouth, she knew he was ready for it

too. His lips slowly descended onto hers. It was a gentle kiss. He was kissing her like he didn't want to hurt her. Like she was a fragile little butterfly whose wings were easily broken.

Fuck that! She was no butterfly. She was more like a hawk – proud, strong, a hunter. Gentle kisses were for the virginal damsels. She wanted him to kiss her the way he had in the club. She wanted fire and passion. Sienna threaded her fingers through the hair at his nape and not so gently tugged it until he released her mouth. He stared down at her in confusion.

“What’s wrong?” he whispered.

“I’m not a butterfly, Stefano.”

“What?” His brows drew together in confusion.

“Don’t treat me like I’m fragile.”

The confusion faded away.

“But your face,” he started.

“Is fine.” *Oh, right!* She was supposed to be weak Gina. “I mean, it hurts a little...”

And if I end up with a scar, I’m hunting Pink down and murdering her weak ass.

“I don’t want it to hurt more than it already does,” Stefano told her. “I’m still pissed off with that bitch for sneaking back here. I should’ve stayed with you until you were ready to come out. This is my fault.”

It seemed he was the type who blamed himself for shit that wasn’t even his fault. They were too alike. She too often carried the blame that should fall on others. Sienna wondered if he realized what he was doing was a side effect of trauma. She’d learned that from a therapist she’d been ordered by Maureen to kill.

She hadn’t killed the woman. Together, she and Eve had faked the woman’s death so that Maureen could never find her. During the process of getting her a new identity, the woman had taught Sienna a lot about depression and trauma. Sienna used to believe depression wasn’t real.

She thought people who said they were depressed were just weak and pretending. Imagine her surprise when she realized she often suffered from bouts of depression herself. She just hadn't had a word for it at the time. Depressed people weren't weak. They were actually strong as fuck.

And everyone suffered from depression at some point in their lives. Many just didn't want to admit it or acknowledge it. Like her, some didn't know what to call what they were experiencing. The world wanted them to believe they were weak or confused about their feelings.

The world sucked. And those who tried to diminish the feelings of others sucked too. She wished the world would normalize seeking counseling. She wished there wasn't a stigma surrounding the word counseling. It had helped her to understand herself a little better. If she had been willing to dig deeper, to explore her traumas more, it would've helped her more.

But her traumas scared her. So, she avoided them. But because she had traumas, she recognized them in others. And blaming yourself for things that weren't your fault was a side effect of having been told shit was your fault for years until you eventually started to think everything was your fault.

What happened between her and Pink had nothing to do with Stefano. Pink chose to come back there on her own. Sienna chose to fight the bitch because she happened to like fighting. None of that was his fault. She wished she had more time to explain that to him. Since she didn't, she tried to make light of the situation.

“You want to make it up to me?” Sienna asked.

“I do.”

“Good. I want another kiss. This time, don't treat me like a butterfly. Kiss me like you can't wait to fuck me after the fight is over. I want a taste of what I'm going to get later.”

The smirk he gave her looked like both a promise and a threat.

“You sure?” he asked.

Sienna nodded. She was sure. At least, she'd thought she was. Turns out, she wasn't sure of shit.

Chapter Ten



Sienna

Now, this was a kiss!

This time, when he touched his lips to hers, there was nothing gentle about it. He pressed his body against hers as he kissed her. Her arms tightened around his neck, holding him close, enjoying the warmth of his naked chest against her. This was the type of warmth she'd love to wake up to on a cold Chicago morning.

This was the type of kiss she'd love to wake up to *any* morning, anywhere. This man was the type of man she needed in her life. Everything about him appealed to her, especially the way he rubbed his tongue against hers, forceful yet gentle at the same time, tasting of whiskey and sin.

She bet he could eat pussy just as well as he kissed. She'd pay to find out if that was true or not. He ground his mouth against hers, drinking in her taste. She wiggled against him until her jacket parted, allowing her hardened nipples to press into his chest through the fabric of her thin shirt.

She knew the moment when he felt her girls against his chest. His kiss deepened, became more heated, more demanding. He swallowed her moan before emitting one of his own. Over the intercom, a deep voice made an announcement. Though Sienna heard the announcer talking, she had no idea what he was saying.

The entire world had faded away, leaving only Stefano, his mouth that was driving her wild, and his hands that were

gripping her ass. Sienna rubbed her body against his, eliciting a moan from them both.

Some men didn't like making noise in the bedroom. From the deep moans coming from Stefano, she knew he wasn't one of those men. Disappointment flared within her when he pulled away from the kiss.

"Fuck!" he muttered breathlessly.

She was happy he was just as shaken up as she was by their kiss. Usually, it took more to get her this riled up. Not this time.

"Don't go," she whispered, trying to pull him back to her, not ready for this spell to be broken.

"I don't want to go," he told her, voice husky with lust. "I have to. They're calling my name."

That's when she heard it. *Last call before forfeit for the Silent Beast*. Sienna pouted, playing the role of Gina, but feeling it as Sienna also.

"It's not nice to get a girl worked up and not finish her off," she complained, staring down at his chest.

He lowered her a bit. For a second, she thought he was about to place her on her feet. Instead, he lowered her until her center was pressed against his hardness. Her lips parted, but no sound left her mouth. To say she was shocked would be an understatement.

"You feel that?" he asked.

How could she not? Snapping her mouth shut, she swallowed while nodding her head. She was pretty sure she looked like a bobblehead at this point. Did she care? Nope.

He leaned close to whisper in her ear, "That's what you do to me."

His muscled arms continued to lift her, then lower her, rubbing her against his erection that was straining against his shorts. It felt big. It felt really big. And hard. And long. And thick. So thick. *Shit!*

She wanted to touch it, to taste it, to rub it against her breasts, against her face, to tap it against her clit. If pussies could pout, hers was doing so right now. This man needed to be hers. This dick needed to belong to her.

“I want you so much it hurts,” he whispered in her ear, tone almost a growl as he ground against her. “But I can’t do a quickie,” he told her. “Not with you. I need to be buried deep in this pussy for hours.”

Sienna was pretty sure she came a little bit at that moment. She was a hundred percent certain that she was dripping wet. Her panties were soaked. This filthy mouthed savage had her ready to risk it all for him and the monster in his shorts.

“Are you wet for me?” he asked.

“Yes,” she whispered, pussy throbbing, needing to be filled. He kissed her neck, causing her pussy to clench.

“I’ll take care of you after the fight,” he told her. “I won’t leave you wanting.”

“Promise?” she whispered almost desperately.

“I promise.”

He pressed a chaste kiss to her forehead before lowering her to her feet. She was hesitant to unwrap her arms from around him.

“I have to go,” he said again.

“I know,” she whispered, still not releasing him.

“You have to let me go.”

“Do I?” Her hand trailed over a raised scar on his back. Absentmindedly, she continued rubbing her hand over it.

“What if I like holding on to you?”

He chuckled. “If you keep this up, it’ll be me who doesn’t want to let you go.”

Her gaze rose to his. His expression was serious. So was hers. She’d just met this man. What magic was he weaving over her to make her feel this way? She didn’t like it. *Return to sender*. She didn’t need these types of complications in her

life. The confusion she was experiencing must've registered in her expression because he pressed a quick kiss to her lips.

"Let's talk about it after the fight?" he told her.

After the fight, he'd find out who she really was. By then, he'd feel differently about her. Much differently. There would be no more forehead kisses. No more adoring glances. No more sexy words. There would only be hate. She wasn't ready for him to hate her. She wasn't ready to become his enemy.

"Stop frowning," he told her. "We'll figure this out."

From his expression, she could tell he wasn't just talking about sex. He wanted more. She didn't have more in her, not for him. *Ugh!* She wanted to ugly cry right now. This man! She wanted to keep him. Why did he have to be her enemy? Sienna blinked back tears. As Gina, she nodded in agreement.

"Okay," she whispered, agreeing to something she knew would never be.

A liar, that's what she was. She told herself she was just sticking to the script. In her heart, she felt horrible for lying to him.

"And don't worry about the money," he continued. "I'll win all the rounds and give the winnings to you. Just make sure you don't challenge me at the end."

"What if I do? Will you let me win?"

"I will," he told her, surprising her.

"That would tarnish your reputation."

"I've never cared about what people think about me."

"I'm sure they'd know you let me win. There's no way I could take down a man like you."

He trailed his hand across her cheek. "I'm starting to think you've already taken me down."

His words left her speechless and weighed her down with guilt. She swallowed back the dumb ass emotions threatening to take hold of her. *He's just a man*, she reminded herself. *He's*

just a walking, talking, breathing dick. Stop reading more into this. Stop thinking he's special because he's not.

Remember the mission. Remember why you're here. Remember, Eve. Step away from this man before you fuck everything up. Sienna remained rooted in place, unable to move. Luckily, she didn't have to push him away. He stepped back on his own, taking her hand with him.

"Let's go."

He pulled her with him as he headed toward the fight ring. She didn't pull her hand back or tell him she'd be out later. She followed him obediently while she mentally warred with herself. Part of her wanted to change her plan. The Silent Beast didn't seem like a bad guy.

Maybe if she asked him nicely, he'd tell her about Eve. He'd already said he didn't hurt women. Then again, if Eve was fine, why hadn't she reached out to Sienna yet? And if he didn't hurt women, why had that woman he'd stopped and talked to inside the club, looked scared after he walked away from her?

Never trust a big dick and a smile. That was one of her mottos. Stefano wouldn't be the first guy who'd said what a woman wanted to hear just to get what he wanted from her. And he wouldn't be the last. The Silent Beast had already proved himself to be a smooth talker. This could all be part of his plan to get into her panties.

Cheers erupted when Stefano stepped through the double doors into the fighting area. His facial expression remained stoic as he led her to his spot against the wall. Another reason she knew he was pretending to want her was because if he really wanted her, he wouldn't do this. He wouldn't lead her to his spot on the wall.

He wouldn't give her his coat or hold her hand in front of his enemies. He wouldn't give others a chance to learn of his weakness. And he was treating her like she was that, a weakness that could be exploited by others. Or was he doing this on purpose to make her cling to him and seek out his protection?

He left her there without a backward glance. Sienna sighed as she watched him storm over to the stage where his opponent was already waiting. Apparently, the Head Basher was the guy she'd previously thought was the Silent Beast. It sucked that Stefano had to go up against him first.

Maybe watching her target get his ass kicked would help get her head back in the game. She prayed it would. Because as it stood, she was close to trying to find another way to reach Eve. This was so fucking unlike her. She'd never let dick distract her before. Why now? Why here? Why him?

Her target bent low at the waist to go between two of the barb-wire ropes. He did so without scratching himself against the wire. When he stood up, he moved to his side of the ring. Head Basher began pacing on his side while beating his fist against his bare chest.

Stefano stood still, arms at his side, as he waited for the announcer to finish talking. From her vantage point, she could see the top parts of the fighters' bodies. But because of the crowd, she couldn't see the rest of them. *Fuck standing here.* She moved closer to the stage. She was glad Stefano wasn't looking her way.

Though he wasn't moving, she could tell he was focused solely on his opponent. As she made her way through the crowd, someone grabbed her ass. She stopped and stared behind her. No one looked her way. One of the motherfuckers had grabbed her. But if she started some shit, she'd get kicked out.

That would jeopardize her plan. It pained her soul for her to turn away and continue walking. She hated not being able to find out who'd done it and make them pay for it. She knew it would bother her for days to come. For now, she shoved it aside and moved to the back, where some chairs were.

She saw two women standing on chairs so they could see better. *Good idea.* She'd do that. And there weren't many guys around them. Even better. The women glared at her as she neared them. Ignoring the bitches, she grabbed an empty chair and pulled it from by them.

“Our friend is sitting there,” one of the women shouted.

“Is your friend imaginary?” Sienna asked as she stepped out of her heels and picked them up.

“Stupid bitch,” the woman muttered.

Sienna took a deep breath and released it slowly. That was another one she’d let slide for now. She had a mission to accomplish. Getting kicked out of the Dungeon wasn’t part of that mission. As she stood on her chair, she noticed the guy standing to the right of the two women laughing as he watched her.

She wanted to ask Chuckles what the hell he found funny. Again, she held her tongue. She felt like she was about to explode from holding so much in. Eve owed her big time for this. Clutching her shoes, she kept her eyes on Stefano as the announcer started listing the rules. There weren’t many rules.

This was not a match to the death. But if someone died, it wasn’t the club’s fault. There would be three rounds. Less, if an opponent got knocked out before the third round. If both opponents were still standing after the third round, the resident doctor would determine the winner based on who was the less injured.

Hmm. Seemed fair. Weapons were not allowed. If a fighter used a weapon, that fighter would be disqualified. Not only would his opponent win, but his opponent would be allowed to decide the fighter’s penalty. Which was why Gen had asked her what she’d wanted to do with Pink.

That was an interesting rule. She had weapons on her. But she didn’t plan to use them in the ring. And if Stefano kept his promise, the only person she’d have to fight was him. She was pretty sure he’d take it easy on her at first. However, she had no intention of taking it easy on him.

Ignoring the tremor of guilt rippling through her veins, she focused on the fight. The announcer was done doing his part. Round one of three had officially started. The crowd began chanting *Head Basher* over and over again. Sienna rolled her eyes. Head Basher was not going to win.

Wait, wasn't she supposed to be rooting for Head Basher? Then again, she needed Stefano to win so she could fight him. Having an enemy she wanted to fuck was messing with her ability to rationalize her priorities. What did she want? No, that was the wrong question. The right question was, what did she need?

She needed Stefano to win. But she also needed him to get roughed up and be as weak as possible when she finally got to him. That way, their fight wouldn't last long. So, when he threw the fight as he'd promised to do, Gen wouldn't call foul. By the time she was done with him in the ring, he should be like putty in her hands when it came time to lead him to her car.

Of course, he'd need to be unconscious when that time came. She didn't need him awake, saying shit like, "*Get this bitch off me. This bitch is trying to kidnap me. I don't know this crazy bitch.*" Conscious men tended to use the B-word a lot when she kidnapped them. It was best to knock them out first.

Thankfully, Stefano had been so touchy-feely with her since she stepped into the club, that the club owner shouldn't think it strange when Sienna volunteered to take the big man home and put him to bed. That's where the secondary hotel room would come in. The more rundown, the better.

She'd passed by one on her way to the club. The key to the room was in the glove compartment of her rental car. The motel was so old they still used keys instead of key cards. There hadn't been many cars in the parking lot. And the old lady at the front desk had told her they didn't get many customers these days.

The best part about it was that the old lady told her they were short-staffed, and the front desk would close at midnight and not open again until ten a.m. Finally, Lady Luck was sprinkling some of her pixie dust on Sienna. During the night, there shouldn't be anyone around to complain if they heard a scream or two.

By ten a.m., she should know where Eve was and be done with Stefano. Hell, there might not be any screams at all. The weaker he was when they arrived at the motel and the more pain he was in, the easier it would be to get him to talk. The more he talked, the less she'd have to torture him.

The less she tortured him, the fewer noise complaints she'd get. She should be able to get information on Eve with minimal fuss. At least, that was the plan. As long as he won each fight but got beat up along the way, her plan should go off without a hitch. This was a good plan, a solid plan. So why the fuck was she nervous?

Stefano and his opponent were circling one another, studying each other, waiting for the other to make the first move. Sienna came up on her tiptoes, trying to see better. Other women were standing in chairs now, blocking her view. *Shit.* She hopped off her chair, picked it up, and began moving through the crowd.

Onlookers grunted and shoved at her as she bumped her way through the crowd. She was called a bitch, and more unpleasantries as she made her way to her destination. Ignoring them, she continued forward until she reached the spot where Stefano had told her to stand. It was the only spot that wasn't too crowded.

She placed her chair against the wall, then stood on it, still gripping her heels. This view was better. Sure, she still couldn't see the guys as fully as she'd liked to. But she could see better than she had at her previous spot. And she felt more comfortable with her back to the wall.

No one would be able to sneak up on her while she watched the fight. She clutched a heel in each hand, just in case someone decided to try her while she was watching the fight. The chants grew louder when Head Basher decided to stop pussyfooting around and made his move. The larger man rushed Stefano. Sienna's mouth dropped open.

Well, that was unexpected.

Chapter Eleven



Sienna

The announcer's loud voice filled the room.

“Round one goes to the Silent Beast.”

Wait a damn minute now! What the fuck just happened? That wasn't a fight. Stefano punched the guy one time, and he fell to the ground. Head Basher still hadn't gotten up. The crowd cheered for the Silent Beast. However, Sienna stared on in confusion. She instantly replayed what had just happened in her mind.

Head Basher had roared as he'd lunged for Stefano. Stefano cocked back and smashed his fist into Head Basher's nose. Head Basher's eyes widened, and blood spurted from his nose as he stumbled back. The big man stood still for a second, face expressionless. And then he'd slowly fallen backward until his big weak ass had hit the stage, out cold.

The fuck?! Sienna came up on her tiptoes, trying to see what was going on with Head Basher. Someone, she assumed was a ref, had come onto the stage and was now kneeling next to Head Basher, possibly checking to see if he was still breathing. Stefano had returned to his side of the ring and stood there with his arms folded over his chest.

Sienna rolled her eyes. Again, she was torn about who she was rooting for. Yeah, she'd wanted Stefano to win. But not this easily. He didn't have a bruise on him. She side-eyed her target as she stood there, waiting for the next challenger, untouched. That motherfucker thought he was a savage.

Head Basher was just weak as fuck. Head Basher had all those damn muscles for no damn reason. Why had he even signed up for the fight if he was going to get dropped within seconds? She was embarrassed for him. A sigh escaped her when the announcer's voice came over the intercom again.

"First fight goes to The Silent Beast."

She resisted the urge to throw her heel at someone, anyone. She had to keep her cool, because the night was just getting started. She stared up at the scoreboard. The names on the board had changed. Silent Beast was still on the top row. However, one of the names from the second row had moved up to the top row also.

Oh, so that was how things worked around here. The winner would keep fighting each name on the list until he was taken out, and that winner would then fight the rest of the names on the list until he was taken out. Then she'd have to fight whoever was left standing since she was a woman and didn't get to be part of the main list.

Sexist bastards. No wonder Stefano had said he'd win every round. If he kept winning, he'd literally have to fight every round. That made things easier for the people at the bottom of the list. They'd be in prime condition by the time they got to him, while he'd be battered from winning every fight up until then.

That didn't seem fair. Maybe Sienna wouldn't end up fighting Stefano after all. If someone else won, that would fuck up her plans. But damn, if he kept winning, he'd end up with more bruises on his already wounded body. Ugh, she was doing it again. *Don't feel sorry for him, Sienna.*

This was his plan for tonight, even if you hadn't shown up. He isn't doing this for you. He's doing this because he likes fighting. And, apparently, he was good at it. Better than she'd expected. She'd just call him the One Punch man from now on. Or The Fist. No, that sounded too much like a porn she'd recently watched.

Maybe the next opponent would put up more of a fight because, at this rate, Stefano wasn't going to be wounded

badly enough for her plan to go off without a hitch. Head Basher wasn't rising to his feet. Instead, four guys were making their way through the crowd with a stretcher.

Together, they loaded Head Basher on it, then wheeled his weak ass out. All the while, the crowd was cheering like the fight had been exciting. There had been nothing exciting about it. The announcer called the next fighter to the stage. The guy who stepped into the ring was skinny as hell.

But he was ripped. He may or may not put up a good fight. She'd find out soon. A bell rang, and like before, the fighters started circling one another. Stefano had his fists raised, blocking his face. Her pretty boy didn't want to get hit in the face. That reminded her! Sienna touched her fingertips to her cheek.

She better not be left with a scar. The skinny guy swung at Stefano, pulling her attention away from her face and back to the fight. Though Stefano's opponent was quick on his feet, he wasn't getting much done. The smaller man kept darting here and there, swinging and then dodging. So far, Stefano hadn't swung once.

And none of the skinnier guy's punches had landed. He was what Sienna's trainer called a projector. His posture projected his next move before he even made it. He leaned right when he was ready to throw a right-handed punch, giving Stefano time to protect himself from the blow.

He leaned left when he was ready to throw a left-handed punch. And the guy was dancing around the stage too much. Was he trying to run the timer down so he could make it to the second round? The fights were three seven-minute rounds. If the guy managed to remain on his feet, he'd make it to the second round.

Hopefully, Stefano would knock his ass out before then. He didn't deserve to make it to a second round with the Silent Beast. Sienna stared up at the timer on top of the scoreboard. There were four minutes left in round one. *Come on, Stefano. Knock him out so we can move on to the next opponent.*

The guy danced around the stage, swinging, missing, dodging, kicking out, missing. The crowd was yelling for the Silent Beast to swing. Sienna was hoping for the same thing. Stefano started moving closer to his opponent, fists still in front of his face. He dodged a right punch, then swung on his opponent before the fighter could regroup and block.

Skinny guy's head jerked back, and he nearly fell down. Sienna groaned when he remained standing. But he was moving slower now, fists raised, protecting his face. Stefano smiled at the guy. That made Sienna smile. Her beast was toying with his prey. *How fun!* Skinny leaned back.

He was about to kick. Sure enough, the fighter kicked at Stefano. And since he'd projected, Stefano anticipated the move. Stefano kicked the man's leg away, almost forcing the guy into a split. Thrown off balance, the fighter dropped to one knee. He tried to scramble to his feet.

It was too late. Stefano advanced. A one-two combo dazed the man. An uppercut sent his back to the mat. Stefano moved to stand over his opponent, but he didn't attack. Sienna watched Stefano's lips move. She would give one of her pussy lips to know what Stefano was saying to the guy.

Was he threatening him? He was probably threatening him. Like, *stay down bitch, if you know what's good for you.* Just the thought of him threatening the guy had her excited. The ref came onto the stage as Stefano backed away from the man, who still hadn't gotten up. The ref hit the mat, and the crowd counted with him.

One. Two. Three. Stefano was the winner. Sienna cheered along with others in the crowd. The dungeon was different from other boxing events she'd been to. Then again, this wasn't really boxing. It was a mix of MMA, boxing, and wrestling. It was basically a free for all, just no weapons.

But that was cool. She liked it. Stefano returned to his side of the stage and stood with his arms folded over his chest as his former opponent rose to his feet. The ref helped the man off the stage. *Another weak ass bites the dust.* This was another victory for Stefano.

On the scoreboard, a new name moved up next to his. He wasn't given a break. But he didn't need one. He'd yet to exert any real energy. The next guy coming to the stage was called Dominator. That sounded kinky. He was about the same size as Stefano. It looked like this one would be a good match-up.

This guy smiled when he entered the ring and motioned for Stefano to come to him. Stefano raised his fists in front of his face and remained where he was. The guy chuckled and said something. Was that bitch taunting her beast? She hoped Stefano shut him up real quick. The man looked her way.

Why the hell was he looking at her? He stuck his tongue out and began flicking it at her. Okay, that was hot. Yet, he wasn't doing it for her. He was doing it to piss Stefano off. If Stefano was upset, he wasn't letting it show. *That's right, Silent Beast, never let them see you sweat.*

Stefano remained where he was, fists still raised as the guy faced him and taunted him some more. Stefano was saying something now. She twisted the back on her earrings and flinched as the crowd's cheers became magnified. *Shit.* She hurried up and turned the dial down.

She really wished she could hear what Stefano and his opponent were saying to one another. Her gaze jerked up to the timer. They'd spent a full minute talking. *Fight, motherfuckers!* The man began moving left while beating at his chest, signaling for Stefano to come at him.

Stefano moved right, fists still raised, shoulders hunched, core in. Dominator feigned a punch. Stefano didn't fall for the fake out. The two of them danced around each other as the crowd cheered. Dominator feigned another punch, trying to get Stefano to react and swing, thus opening himself up, making himself vulnerable.

Stefano didn't flinch. Dominator feigned a punch again, then kicked out swiftly. Stefano caught his leg and raised it, forcing the man onto the floor. The crowd roared. Sienna came up on her tiptoes but still couldn't see well. As the crowd hooted and hollered, Sienna climbed off her chair, put her heels back on, then climbed back on her chair.

That helped a little. She saw movement on the mat. Stefano was on top. Dominator had his legs wrapped around Stefano. But Stefano's arms were free, and he was swinging, punch after punch striking Dominator's face. The man shoved at Stefano. But her savage was brutal. He continued to swing.

She flinched when the Dominator landed a blow on Stefano's face. That angered her Beast. He raised his elbow and brought it down on the man's face twice. A left punch clipped Stefano's eye. Sienna clutched her hands into fists when blood trickled down the side of Stefano's face.

Heart racing, she watched the Dominator knee Stefano in the side. Her Beast doubled over, giving Dominator the opening he needed to move away from Stefano. Both men rose to their feet swiftly. Sienna was pleased to see blood dripping from the Dominator's forehead and the corner of his mouth.

The bastard moved forward, swinging. *Left. Right. Left.* Stefano dodged and tried to get in an uppercut. Dominator blocked. Stefano kicked at the man's leg. Dominator jumped back. Stefano landed a punch to Dominator's stomach. The fighter's hands lowered an inch. Stefano went in.

Left. Right. Dominator raised his fists to cover his face. Stefano sent a punch to the man's core again, then an uppercut before Dominator could regroup. Dominator's head jerked back. Stefano kicked out, knocking the man's legs from under him. Dominator hit the mat. But he scrambled to his knees quickly.

Before he could rise to his feet, Stefano did a spin kick, connecting with the man's chest. Blood spurted from Dominator's mouth as his body flew backward, back hitting the mat. The man coughed as he tried to rise. Stefano was at his side in an instant. Again, Sienna wished she could hear what Stefano was saying.

Stefano wiped his hand over his eye, wiping away the blood. He flicked his hand at the Dominator, who still wasn't getting up, then walked away. The ref came onto the stage. Dominator just lay there, breathing heavily. The crowd

counted. *One. Two. Three.* That round went to the Silent Beast also.

The ref tried to help the Dominator from the stage. The fighter shoved the ref away from him and cast another glare at Stefano before leaving the stage. Stefano was standing on his side of the stage now, arms folded over his chest, blood still dripping from the wound near his eye. A new name appeared next to his on the scoreboard.

Another fighter stepped into the ring. The crowd cheered, whooping, and hollering. Sienna watched on, cheering along with them as history repeated itself. Another fighter was knocked out in the first round. At least he'd lasted longer than the Head Basher. So far, Head Basher had been the worst.

A new opponent entered the ring. Like the others, he didn't last a full seven minutes and didn't advance to the second round. However, he went for a full six minutes. And by the time the fight was over, her Silent Beast had blood dripping from a cut on his ear, and his eye was bloodshot.

She glanced up at the scoreboard. Only two more fights to go. She wrung her hands together. *Come on, Stefano. You've got this.* The next guy to enter the ring was called Cemetery. He was a little smaller than Stefano. Tattoos covered his body from his bald head down to his toes. She squinted to see his ink better.

He was covered in headstones with RIP tattooed on the headstones. He was a walking cemetery. Sienna didn't know whether she hated it or loved it. Okay, she loved it. His tattoos were amazing. Did he get a new tattoo with each person he killed? That would be sick as fuck. The good kind of sick as fuck.

The crowd began chanting Cemetery's name. Sienna rolled her eyes at the fan favorite. As soon as the announcer said *fight*, Cemetery charged Stefano. Cemetery was brutal. She could tell he'd earned his name. It wasn't something he'd just come up with for the fight.

He and Stefano went at each other in a flurry of fists. Stefano was moving slower than Cemetery. In her Beast's

defense, this wasn't his first fight, as it was for Cemetery. And Cemetery wasn't wounded like him.

Which was why Sienna was growing worried. Cemetery's right hook caused Stefano to spit out blood. An uppercut sent Stefano stumbling backward, almost causing him to scrape his back against the barb-wire ropes.

"You better break his fucking neck, Stefano!" Sienna yelled. All onlookers who were close enough to hear her turned their gazes to her. *Oops*. Sienna smiled. "Sorry. I'm excited."

The man closest to her laughed. She bit her tongue to keep from punching the motherfucker in his throat.

"Vicious," he said. "I like it."

Her smile widened. Maybe she wouldn't punch him in the throat.

"Thank you." That should've been her stage name – *Vicious*. Maybe next time.

She returned her gaze to the stage. Luckily, Stefano had spun around in time to avoid brushing against the barb-wire. However, avoiding it left him vulnerable to Cemetery's attack. Cemetery kicked the side of Stefano's leg. Stefano went to his knees.

A kick to the side of his head left Stefano dazed. Cemetery lifted his elbow, preparing to bring it down on Stefano. Stefano leaned forward, causing the fighter to miss. Stefano turned around and kicked at Cemetery. The man grabbed Stefano's leg and tried to flip him. Stefano gripped the man's wrist and pulled him close.

A headbutt by the Silent Beast sent both fighters to the ground. Stefano stood first. He stumbled over to Cemetery. His opponent's back was still on the mat, yet Cemetery was able to wrap his legs around Stefano's waist. Unable to get free, Stefano was left with no choice but to pick the man up. Sienna expected him to slam Cemetery down on the mat.

Instead, he took him over to the barb-wire ropes and slammed him against them. Cemetery cried out as Stefano

slammed him against the barb-wire again, dragging the man across it. Blood dripped onto the mat as Stefano turned and slammed Cemetery onto the mat, forcing the fighter to finally release him.

Stefano let off a flurry of swings in rapid succession. *Left. Right. Left. Right.* Sienna lost count of the punches thrown. Blood was flying everywhere. *Damn. RIP Cemetery.* The ref came on the stage and pulled Stefano away from the tatted-up fighter. It was a good thing he did so because Stefano was probably about to kill his opponent.

Cemetery remained on the floor, unmoving, as the ref pushed Stefano into his corner of the ring. The ref said something to Stefano. Her beast nodded but didn't reply. Sienna cheered as the ref did his count, and Stefano was declared the winner. Stefano seemed out of breath. At least he was still standing. But he wasn't done yet.

The final fighter for the night was called Killer G. He was a massive man. He couldn't slide between the barb-wire to enter the ring. For the first time that night, the ref unhooked the barb-wire from one corner to allow the opponent entry into the ring. Big man towered over Stefano's tall ass.

Luckily, Killer G was slow as fuck. But his big ass could take a punch. He was the first fighter to make it to the second round. He was larger and taller than Stefano. And he looked more like a sumo wrestler than a boxer. His weight and height gave him an advantage over Stefano.

A punch to the gut didn't seem to faze Killer G. Sienna would be surprised if he even felt it. He took that shit like it was a mosquito bite. Luckily, his punch range wasn't long. Stefano was able to duck and dodge his fists with no problem. The only problem was that Stefano was getting tired.

His movements were becoming slower. And blood was dripping into his eyes. He kept shaking it out. If he kept that up, he'd only make himself dizzy. For the first time since he'd stepped into the ring, she was really starting to worry. If she could let him tap her in to handle this one, she'd definitely do it.

Where the fuck was Gen? Why wasn't there a short break between fights? There wasn't even a stool for him to sit on between fights. No one was offering him water or a towel to wipe his face. This shit was savage. And he'd been coming here since he was a kid. Sienna shook her head.

She'd whip his mammy's ass if she could. This place needed to be shut down. It violated over a hundred codes. And it didn't smell good. Stefano hit the big man with a one-two combo. The man's body shook. But that was about it. The Sumo wrestler just wasn't going down.

The guy swung at Stefano and missed. But when Stefano jumped back to avoid the punch, he slipped down on blood. Probably his own, probably that of previous opponents. Either way, someone should've cleaned that shit up before her Beast fell. He hit the ground hard. And Sumo didn't waste any time jumping on him.

Stefano tried to roll out of the way. But sumo landed on his legs. There was a collective flinch that rippled around the room when the man landed on Stefano. The lower half of Stefano's body was pinned to the ground. The ref started toward the ring. *Oh, no!* If Stefano stayed down, unable to get up, he'd lose the fight. *Shit.*

"Stefano!" Sienna screamed as the ref continued forward from his post across the room. Even he had a seat to sit on, while Stefan didn't. Dumb ass ref.

"Get up, Stefano!" Sienna screamed.

He was trying to move, but the sumo wasn't budging. Neither was the big bastard fighting. He knew all he had to do was lie there to win the fight. Lazy ass! He didn't deserve to win.

"Stefano!" Sienna yelled again, knowing he probably couldn't hear her over the jeering crowd.

Fuck this. She hopped off her chair and raced toward the stage, shoving people out of her way as she continued calling Stefano's name.

"Stefano! Get up!"

Someone shoved her. She hit the ground. Her ankle twisted a bit. *Fucking high heels.* Sienna pulled her shoes off. Gripping the heels tightly, she rose to her feet and tried to continue forward. *Oh, wait. That hurt.* Each step sent pain spiraling up her left leg. Gritting her teeth, she continued limping toward the stage.

Her gaze darted to the other side of the stage, where the ref was approaching from. She had to get to Stefano before he did. Motherfuckers didn't want to move out of the way. One man saw her trying to get through.

He looked from her to Stefano. Then he moved in front of her and started clearing a path. Bless his heart. She had no idea who he was, but she was thankful that he was shoving motherfuckers aside. When she reached the stage, the man smiled down at her.

"Thanks," she muttered.

"No problem. I owe the Beast. He did me a favor a few years ago. I never had a chance to repay him. Now, I've helped his lady through the crowd. I'd call us even."

Not likely. But, she wouldn't be the one to tell him that. Sienna got as close to the stage as she could. The ref was now stepping under the barb-wire ropes.

"Stefano!" Sienna yelled as loud as she could.

He looked her way. He'd heard her. Yes! Their gazes locked on each other. *Oh, Beast.* Tears filled her eyes. Maybe it was seeing how swollen his face was from this close. Or maybe it was the blood in his eyes. Either way, nothing could stop the tears from dripping down her cheeks.

What the hell was wrong with her? She barely knew this man? Why did it hurt to see him in pain? And the fact that he'd been doing this since he was a teen only made her ache for him more. Back then, he may have needed the money. But he couldn't possibly need it now, especially since he was willing to give it to her.

Why was he putting himself through this? It wasn't worth it. She opened her mouth, but no words came. Just silent tears.

He looked like he wanted to say something. Like her, he couldn't find the words either. So, they just stared at each other, both lost in their own thoughts. The ref was on the stage now, moving toward Stefano.

"Get up," Sienna whispered, too fucking choked up to yell it.

Stefano's bloody gaze moved from her to the big man on him. He tried to sit up as the ref dropped down beside them. Big man wasn't budging. The ref slammed his hand onto the mat and began counting. Everything started moving in slow motion. *One*. Stefano raised his elbow and began bringing it down on the big man's back.

He did it twice. The large man's body jerked. But he didn't get up. *Two*, the ref counted. Sienna held her breath as Stefano leaned forward and brought his elbow down on the back of the man's neck. Big man's head jerked back. Stefano was now able to move his leg. He kneed Killer G. Groaning, the bastard rolled to the side.

"Three!" the ref yelled just as Stefano pushed himself to his feet.

The big bastard was still on the ground, trying to get up. But Stefano was standing. Did that make him the winner? Did it? Did it? Killer G coughed, then he threw up. Sienna took a step back and covered her nose as the crowd roared.

All those punches that didn't look like they'd done much had actually done a number on the fighter who was now lying face down in his own vomit. The ref restarted his count. *One. Two. Three*. Killer G didn't get up. The announcer's voice came over the intercom.

"And the victor is the Silent Beast."

Sienna nearly sank to the ground in relief. Her gaze rose to Stefano, who was slowly returning to his side of the stage. Instead of looking straight ahead as he'd done after all his previous fights, his gaze locked on her and stayed there. Sweat covered his body. He swayed slightly but remained standing.

Caught up in the moment, she began cheering with the others. Her shoulders relaxed, and she let out a sigh of relief as the four guys started removing Killer G from the stage. Finally, Stefano was done. Now it was time to take care of those wounds of his. The crowd started cheering again.

What the hell? Her eyes rose to the scoreboard. A new fighter's name had appeared next to the Silent Beast's name. *The Silencer. Fuck!* She'd almost forgotten why she was there. She'd almost forgotten he was her target. She'd almost forgotten he was her enemy.

The tension returned to her body, and she chastised herself for momentarily forgetting her plan. It was time for her to step into the ring. It was time for their feelings for one another to change. It was time for her to show Stefano he wasn't the only savage in the building.

Chapter Twelve



Sienna

He smiled at her.

A real smile that held no malice. Her heart broke as she watched him wipe blood from his eye. Tears filled her gaze as he moved to take a knee. He was about to bow out of the fight and let her win. She couldn't let that happen. The crowd began to boo. They, too, understood what he was about to do.

The announcer called her name again. People began staring around, looking for her. Before she knew it, she was being pushed toward the stage. Even if she wanted to back out of the fight now, the crowd wasn't going to let her. Her eyes rose to Stefan's as she climbed onto the stage.

He shook his head, wanting her to get off. Instead, with her heels on, she bent at the waist and lowered herself under the barbed-wire ropes, careful not to let them touch her. She was really about to do this. She was really about to fight her beast. She couldn't describe what she was feeling right now because she'd never felt this way before.

It was a mixture of fear, nervousness, guilt, and something else. *Shame*. That's what that last feeling was. She felt ashamed of her actions. Despite those feelings, despite that shame, she was still about to do this. What other choice did she have? The crowd cheered as she strode across the stage, moving to her side of the ring.

Once she was on her side, she faced Stefano and stepped out of her shoes, ignoring the blood that was on the stage. She just needed to make sure she avoided the spot where the sumo wrestler had vomited. Using her toe, she slid her shoes to the side and assumed a fighter's stance.

The announcer was saying some stupid shit about this fight being a lover's quarrel and asking the crowd would the Silent Beast give his all or would he let his lover win. The crowd erupted into laughter. The announcer went on to say that if the Silent Beast let his lover win, his name would come down from the list of undefeated champions in the dungeon.

"Love or honor," the announcer yelled. "Which will the Silent Beast choose?"

Stefano headed toward the barb-wire ropes. He'd made his decision. He was leaving the stage. Should she just follow him and leave too? She could still pull off her plan without fighting him. He was already weak. Well, *weak-ish*. Weak enough.

Maureen's voice drifted through her mind, preventing her from following behind him. She hated that it was always Maureen's voice that filled her thoughts when she was undecided about something.

Even from the grave, the woman was still a part of her life, still guiding her and sometimes dictating her actions. The scary part was, sometimes Sienna needed Maureen's voice to guide her. Like now, her mentor's words were exactly what she needed to hear.

"Never change a plan unless you absolutely have time. Changing plans on the fly can lead to failure and the loss of life. Your life," Maureen had told her numerous times. *"And for fuck's sake, never change your plans because you feel sorry for someone. The same motherfucker you're feeling sorry for wouldn't feel shit about you if the roles were reversed. Protect yourself, girl. Ain't nobody else going to do it for you. And don't get caught up in love and shit like that. You can ask any older woman on this earth, and they'll tell you that love ain't never did shit for them that they couldn't do for themselves."*

Sienna swallowed back tears. She had to protect herself. And she had to protect Eden. *Eve!* She'd come too far and endured too much to let her plan fail because of some silly emotions. Emotions that would be forgotten in a week. Sienna clasped her hands together as she called out to Stefano, taunting him and driving the crowd wild.

“Hey, pretty boy!” she yelled, popping her knuckles while working out the kinks in her neck. “I don't take handouts. I want to win this fight because I'm the best. Not because you ran off like a little bitch.”

Her gut twisted, the words she'd said hurting her more than they hurt him. His eyebrow rose as the crowd laughed. That was his only visible reaction to her taunt. She jerked her head to his corner of the stage.

“Let's do this,” she told him, ignoring the question in his dark eyes.

The announcer's voice came over the intercom. “The Silencer has called the Silent Beast a Silent Bitch.”

No, I didn't. Though that did sound like some shit I'd say. Still, the announcer was petty as fuck. And messy. However, that announcement made her Beast react more than her taunts had. He glared at her for a long time.

His silent message was clear. *You win. Let's go.* He was willing to humor her. Sienna swallowed the lump in her throat. No matter what, she was sticking to her plan. She motioned for Stefano to bring it. The announcer's petty ass spoke over the intercom again.

“I think there's trouble in paradise, folks,” the announcer continued.

Moving slowly, Stefano returned to his side of the stage. But he looked pissed off.

“And it looks like we're going to have a fight, folks!” the announcer exclaimed. “This one should be an easy win for our champion.”

Sienna rolled her eyes. Easy? She'd show them how easily she took him down. Once he was back in his corner, he stood

facing her with his arms folded over his chest.

“You gonna take your jacket off?” he asked.

She shook her head and raised her fists. “No more talking.”

He cocked his head to the side, studying her. The announcer’s voice rang out loud and clear. *Fight!* Sienna didn’t waste any time. She wasn’t there to dance around the stage or try to run the clock down. She wanted him unconscious as fast as possible. *Remember the mission.* She rushed forward, noting the way his eyes widened.

He lowered his hand to haphazardly block her punch to his stomach, not taking her seriously. While his hands were lowered, she swung at his face, connecting with the spot above his eye that was already cut and bleeding. He flinched. Her heart constricted. *Remember your mission.*

He pushed at her, shoving her back. She took two steps back, then crouched low. Sienna kicked her leg out, swiping at his ankles. He stumbled to the side. She jumped up and executed a spin-kick, slamming the side of her foot against the side of his head. The crowd shouted their approval as she landed in a fighting stance, fists still raised.

Already wounded, Stefano stumbled backward, back hitting the barb-wire rope. He grimaced but didn’t make a sound. Her heart constricted. *Remember the mission.* He moved away from the barb-wire, and all she could think about were the old bruises on his back. Because of her, there would be new bruises.

Shame tried to bring her down as her heart and her throat constricted. *Remember the mission.* She rushed forward, swinging when she neared him. *Left. Right. Left.* He dodged each blow, then grabbed her around the waist and picked her up. Sienna tried to shove him away, but he clutched her to him tightly to whisper in her ear.

“What the fuck are you doing?” he growled, restraining her.

Her eyes landed on the mark on his head that was bleeding. Ignoring the guilt that was causing her chest to ache, she headbutted him. He grunted and released her, dropping her onto the mat. She punched him in his ankle twice. That granted her another grunt. He reached for her. She moved around him until she was behind him.

Before he could turn around, she planted her heel against his Achilles heel, making his body buck and sending him to his knees. Swallowing back her guilt, she raised her elbow, preparing to bring it down on the back of his neck and end this by knocking him out. Her elbow came down. He spun around before she could hit her mark.

Moving faster than she thought he could in his current condition, he grabbed her and flipped her over his head, slamming her onto the mat. She landed on her back hard, the fall knocking the wind from her. But who needed air? Maureen had made her train plenty of times with her nose and mouth taped shut, fighting until she passed out from lack of oxygen.

The longer she lasted, the fewer lashes she got on her feet after she awakened. Sienna jumped to her feet and raised her fists. She raced forward again, reaching Stefano before he stood up. She swung. He dodged. She swung again. Missed. He reached for her, not yet fighting back. She stepped back, then kicked, foot striking his elbow.

He pulled his arm back. She kicked at his throat. He caught her foot before it could hit its mark. She knew the crowd was cheering, howling like rabid dogs out for blood. Sienna couldn't hear them. Her mind, her energy, everything in her was focused on knocking him unconscious.

Still holding her foot, he pulled her forward. Sienna tried kicking at him in an attempt to get him to loosen his grip on her foot. His grip only tightened as he stood up, her foot still in his grasp. Leg in the air, she swung at his side, connecting with a dark wound another attacker had caused.

He made no sound as he grabbed her hand before she could pull back. He now held her left foot in one hand and her right wrist in the other. She swung with her left fist. Being

right-handed, her left punch wasn't as strong. It was weakened even more because she lacked balance since he was still holding parts of her.

He started pulling her closer to him. Sienna struggled to break free of his grip. She felt like a fish out of water. Her movements were awkward. She could hear the crowd now. They were laughing and telling him to finish her. *Finish her!* She would not be finished. She would do the finishing. As soon as she got free.

But damn, he had an iron-clad grip on her. He pulled her closer, then released her unexpectedly. She started to fall. He caught her and dropped to the mat with her, pinning her beneath him with her arms tucked at her sides. She felt helpless as the crowd went wild. She bucked, trying to get him off her.

That's when she felt it. His erection was pressed against her leg as he laid across her, his weight on her making it hard for her to breathe. And she wouldn't think about the tinge in her side. It had been two weeks since her run-in with the Irish mafia. The parting gift they'd left on her side was still healing.

And it still ached if she bumped it. Him pressing against it like he was, was causing it to do more than just ache. *Fuck!* How had she let herself get pinned like this? And why the fuck was he turned on by this? His breath was hot against her ear when he spoke to her.

“Are you fighting me for real?” he asked.

“What the fuck do you think?” she growled, trying to raise her knee.

He threw his leg across hers, further immobilizing her. Helpless, that was how she felt. And she wasn't a fan of that feeling. *Remember the mission. He cannot win. Fuck the prize money. You need the upper hand, or you'll never save Eden.* Sienna forced tears into her eyes, which wasn't hard to do.

She had a shameful habit of tearing up when she was frustrated. Maureen had tried to beat it out of her. Her mentor's efforts hadn't been one hundred percent effective.

Sienna thought of Eden and imagined the worst. She imagined her friend broken, beaten, and at the mercy of the Italian mafia, being punished for a crime she hadn't committed.

Those images forced tears down Sienna's cheeks. As expected, those tears caused Stefano to go from being a savage beast to a big teddy bear. His grip on her loosened. He immediately raised his hand to her cheek to rub away her tears. *Shame*. It was back in full force. Sienna resisted the urge to lean into his touch. But she was tempted. So, very tempted.

"Gina," he whispered, concern clouding his eyes and his judgment.

Maureen was right. Emotions made you weak. Emotions led to distractions, and distractions could lead to death. Someone should've taught the Silent Beast that. She'd give him a lesson about distractions tonight, free of charge. She coughed like she was having a hard time breathing.

Her big teddy bear rose a fraction, lifting the brunt of his weight off her, giving her room to move her arms. The first thing she did was punch him in the throat. He gasped, struggling to breathe. She slammed her fist into his nose. His hands went to her throat before she could punch him in the eye.

Throat, nose, and eyes. Those were her go-to spots to hit when she was at a disadvantage. Damn it, she'd wanted to strike his eyes. With his hands clutching her throat, she still tried to claw at his eyes.

He turned his face to the side, avoiding her nails. Her hand slipped across his cheek, smearing her palm with the blood dripping from his wound. Her heart constricted. *Focus on the mission*. She was failing. Failure wasn't an option.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Fuck you," she gasped, reaching up to grab a hand full of his hair.

She did not fight fair. She tugged on his hair, pulling as hard as she could, given her position. He jerked his head away

from her, freeing himself from her grasp but leaving strands of his hair in her hand.

“Who sent you?” he yelled, squeezing her neck tighter.

She wanted to say, *I thought you didn't hurt women.* Unfortunately, she couldn't get the words out because she couldn't breathe. A feeling of betrayal coursed through her. He was hurting her.

Her big teddy bear was hurting her. *Rude!* The tears that welled in her eyes this time weren't forced. He saw them. But he'd learned his lesson. This time, he didn't let them sway him. *Rude, again!*

“You don't have to do this,” he yelled. “We can end this right now.”

Could they? No. They couldn't. She would never stop. She couldn't. But she may have no choice because her vision was becoming hazy. From the corner of her eye, she saw the ref approaching them. Damn it. He was about to count.

She was about to lose. She lowered her hand to her chest just as the ref dropped onto the mat beside them. If she could kick him away from them, she would. Her eyes didn't stray from Stefano's as her hand crept along her chest until she was able to slide it under her jacket.

She saw the anger and confusion in his gaze. But the confusion was seeping out, leaving behind only the rage as it finally sunk in for him. She was his enemy. She was never the woman she'd pretended to be. Her heart constricted. *Remember the mission.*

“One,” the ref yelled, slamming his hand against the mat, causing her body to shake a little.

Sienna grabbed the mini blade from the slit in her coat. She pulled it out as the world around her began to spin. She was growing dizzy from lack of oxygen. His hands hadn't eased up on her throat. She whipped the blade out, clutching its tiny hilt in her fist to conceal it. Was she really about to do this?

“Two.” The ref hit the mat again.

Was she really about to stab Stefano, the man who hadn't done anything to prove he was the monster she believed him to be? How could he be a monster when he was her savage teddy bear? *Remember the mission*, Maureen's voice echoed through her mind. With the blade jutting between her fingers, she aimed it at her target, her enemy.

But hesitated. She never hesitated. Only with him. Only because he was different, and he made her feel like maybe there was another way she could handle this. Should she just tell him who she was and why she was there? Time was running out. If she was going to come clean, she had to do it now.

Fuck it. For the first time in her career, she'd let her emotions lead her. For the first time in her career, she'd put her trust in an outsider. Sienna's lips parted just as Stefano leaned to the side. She hadn't expected him to do that.

She gasped and tried to move the blade back. Since he still had her pinned, there was only so far she could pull back. Panicking, she tried to move the blade in a different direction. He moved in the same direction.

She ended up slicing the blade across his body *Oh, no.* She felt his body jerk. She'd stabbed him. Not on purpose. But he didn't know that. *Fuck.* He released her as the ref hit the mat again.

"Three!"

Sienna rose to her feet as quickly as she could while simultaneously shifting the weapon in her fist to hide it. Her eyes dropped to his side. She prayed she hadn't hurt him badly. She couldn't see the wound because Stefano was clutching his side while glaring at her in disbelief and fury.

Had she hurt him badly? *I'm sorry*, she thought. But the words wouldn't come. And to think, she'd had a chance to change this, to end it. He'd offered her that chance. But she'd waited too long to accept it. Now, there was no going back. For a second, a thread of fear slivered through her heart.

She forced it down. Assassins feared nothing and no one, not even the grimm reaper. She'd made her bed. Now she had to lie in it. If she wanted to escape this place, she had to go through him. She lunged for him, hoping to take him down just long enough for her to get away.

Once she was in her car and gone, he'd never find her, and she would find another way to save Eve. The ref yelled for her to stop, screaming that the match was over. Forget winning. She was trying to get out of the dungeon alive.

She punched at Stefano, going for his cheek. That would wound him, but he'd live. He gripped her side and dug his fingers in. Sienna cried out. *Shit*. He'd seen her scar. Found her weakness. And it hurt like hell.

"The fight is over," the ref yelled. "Separate."

If they found out about the weapon, they'd punish her, and she'd never find Eve. She fought until she could fight no more. That's how she'd been trained. She knew no other way. Even if she was in pain, even if her heart was hurting and she felt guilty as fuck, she would still fight.

Never let them take you alive. She'd been taken alive before. She knew what it was like to be tortured. Luckily, the last time she'd been snatched, one of Ms. Davies' girls had come to her rescue, pretending to want to make some extra money by dancing for the men, only to drug them and free Sienna.

Sienna had killed all the men present to make sure they never came after either of them later. If she was captured now, who would save her? She twisted to the side, hoping to free herself of his hold on her wounded area. No luck. He wasn't letting go. She brought her elbow down on his arm. His hand jerked, digging into her side more. *Damn, that hurt!* Trying to hurt him was only bringing her more pain.

Couldn't he sense she was no longer fighting him wholeheartedly? She was now fighting to escape. Maybe he did but didn't care. Why should he? She had stabbed him, after all. Her gaze rose to his. He looked pissed off. Sienna sighed.

What had she expected? This was how they should be. This was their destiny.

All of that shit from before was fake, a dream, an alternate reality. A fairy tale. Cinderella and prince charming. This was the real world. And in the real world, they were fated to be only enemies. Two villains forced into the same story. The evil witch of the North and the big bad wolf. She hurt him. He hurt her. The one who hurt the worst lost.

Therefore, she shut off her emotions. No fear for Eve. No guilt for him. No concern for tomorrow. Only one thought filtered through her mind, *never let them take you alive*. She leaned into his touch, not flinching when the pain in her side reached level ten. His eyes widened briefly in shock. Did he think she feared pain?

Hell no! Only the living could feel pain. Survive first. Tend to your wounds later. Deal with your emotional distress last. Yeah, her views on life were toxic as fuck. But when you grew up the way she had, toxic was all you knew. She swung at Stefano, letting the mini blade slip between his fingers. *Wound, don't kill*, she reminded herself.

He leaned back, gaze dropping to her fist. He released her side. The pain dropped to a nine as a small gasp of relief escaped her. She swung again. He dodged. She'd expected that. She pulled her punch and lashed out again. Her blade slid across his ear. *Sorry, Beast*.

Before she could pull back, he gripped her arm and twisted. She swallowed down her grunt of pain and kicked at him. He turned his lower body in time to avoid a heel to his crotch. He twisted her arm harder. It felt like he was pulling her skin from her bone.

Though she tried to hold on to her weapon, his finger pressed into her wrist, and she was forced to drop it. Someone screamed, "weapon." The crowd picked up on it and began hollering that she had a weapon. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.*

Think, Sienna. Think. Okay. First, get free. Damn it, the old man was on stage now. What was his name? Gen. Gen was rushing toward them as Stefano glared down at her with her

twisted arm in his grasp. His other arm was fisted in front of her like he was ready to hit her at any moment.

To make matters worse, there were men in black shirts climbing into the ring. Where was security when she'd been attacked in the back room? Now, they were encircling her and Stefano as the announcer's voice boomed over the intercom.

"Weapons are not allowed in the ring. The Silencer has been disqualified. Our champion is the Silent Beast."

Fuck the fight. She needed to escape. She couldn't let them capture her. She raised her free hand, preparing to keep fighting despite the odds being stacked against her. The men around her moved in closer.

"Don't touch her," Stefano ordered them as he stepped forward.

Sienna swallowed down the panic attempting to bubble up inside of her. *Never let them take you alive.* But she had to be alive to save Eve. *Fuck my life!* Stefano was toe to toe with her now.

A lesser woman would've shattered under his angry glare. But she was Sienna Keys. She may bend, but she'd never let anyone break her. She lifted her chin and defiantly met his glare. The magic from before was gone. Only guilt and regret remained.

"Who are you?" he asked, voice low.

"Your enemy," Sienna replied, but her tone lacked the anger from before.

The fire flickered out of his gaze, cooling into something dark, dull, dead.

"Okay, Gina Washington. It's time for me to show you how I treat my enemies. Especially those who try to murder me."

His arm snaked out. She winced, thinking he was about to strike her, wondering if she deserved it after all she'd done. Instead, he jerked something from one of the men in black

shirts. She felt the sting before she could look to see what he held in his hand. Her eyes widened. Her lips parted.

But it was too late to do anything. The drug was already flowing through her veins. Her body was already getting weaker. At least the pain was becoming dull. Her vision blurred as her eyes slid shut.

He'd tranquilized her. Maybe this was the ending she deserved. Maybe telling him the truth wouldn't have changed anything at all. Maureen's voice was the final thought that drifted through her mind.

Those who hesitate always lose.

Once again, her mentor was right. She'd lost the fight. She'd lost her best chance of saving Eve. And she'd lost Stefano. Now, she may lose her life.

Chapter Thirteen



Stefano

“I read this entire situation wrong,” Gen said, moving to stand next to Stefano.

The fucked up part was that Stefano had read it wrong also. He’d done something he rarely did. He’d let his guard down. And Gina, if that was her real name, had quickly reminded him why he didn’t do that. She’d quickly reminded him why he steered clear of women until he needed them for a release.

She’d quickly reminded him why he avoided emotions and why he didn’t let himself get too close to others. He still didn’t truly understand how she’d wiggled her conniving, lying, manipulating ass under her skin. But she had. She’d made him wonder if all the shit Enzo had said about love at first sight was real.

She’d made him *want* it to be real. *Stupid motherfucker!* He was stupid as fuck for thinking he’d found something akin to what Enzo had found with Eve. Even if that fairytale shit was real, it didn’t apply to men like him. He stared down at the unconscious bundle of lies in his arms.

Bella bugiarda. A beautiful liar. He held her against him, allowing her head to rest on his chest, ignoring the rage coursing through him. He didn’t hurt women. Not unless they tried to kill him or kill those close to him. Right now, he

wanted to break Gina's fucking neck. And not for stabbing him in his side. He'd been stabbed before. He'd live.

Her tiny knife hadn't gone too deep. He'd moved back in time. But it had still streaked across his flesh, drawing blood. However, that had nothing to do with the reason he wanted to break her neck. He wanted to break her neck for smiling at him, for teasing him. Why the fuck had she kissed him if she wanted to kill him? Why flirt with him?

Why say she didn't mind his wounds and make him believe there would be a tomorrow for them? Stefano chuckled sarcastically. She'd done it for the same reason everyone else got close to him. To hurt him or to use him. Gen stared down at him like he'd lost his mind.

"Stop moving," Gen ordered. "Let the medics treat your wounds."

Gen was using the term *medics* loosely. Neither of the men who were treating his wounds had any official training. But they had years of experience patching up people like him – misfits who hated hospitals or who couldn't go to the hospital for various reasons, some of them nefarious.

The younger medic could be no more than twenty-two or twenty-three, but he'd worked in the dungeon with his father since he was a teen. The young man's hands shook slightly as he bandaged Stefano's back, where the barb-wire ropes had wounded him. His father, the older medic who was balding, was finishing up stitching the wound over Stefano's eye.

"You have to put her down if you want us to treat you properly," the older medic told him once he was done with the stitches.

"I'm not putting her down," Stefano told them for the second time. "I won't say it again."

The older man nodded, his gray eyes moving from Stefano to Gina, then to Gen. Finally, the medic sighed.

"Well," the man started. "Can you shift her to the other side? The wound I need to stitch is on the side she's on."

Stefano moved Gina to his other leg, holding in a groan. *Fuck*, his side hurt. Sometimes it was the smaller weapons that hurt more than the larger ones. Or maybe it hurt more because of the woman who'd wielded it. Seated on a bench in the changing room, he positioned her against his chest to keep her head from lolling to the side.

According to the medics, the drug he'd given her should last for another two hours. Stefano would ask for a few more syringes of it before he left. He had a feeling he'd need it. With Gina tucked against him, he held up his other arm so the medic could reach his wound. Gen moved to the side to stand in front of Stefano.

"My team has cleared out the building. Cecca has closed up the bar and is cleaning up. The only cars left in the front lot are yours and..." Gen nodded to the woman in Stefano's lap. "I don't know what to do with her car because I don't know what your plans for her are. If you're leaving her here for us to handle, we'll have her car returned to the rental..."

"I'm taking her with me," Stefano forced through clenched teeth as he was stitched up.

Gen noticed his discomfort. "Do you want any pain pills? Or whiskey, maybe?"

Stefano shook his head. He wanted to feel the pain. He needed it. He deserved it. It served as a reminder not to trust the woman resting against him. Unconscious, she looked so innocent, like she could tell no lies and do no harm. But of all his opponents tonight, she'd done the most damage. And he wasn't talking physically.

"How do you plan to handle this, Stefano?" Gen asked. "According to our rules..."

"I'm handling this by my rules," Stefano informed him.

"I get it. You're angry. And maybe even embarrassed."

Stefano frowned. "Why the fuck would I be embarrassed?"

"Well, because you were, uh, smitten with her."

“Smitten? Do I look like the kind of man who gets *smitten*?”

Gen nodded. Stefano felt murderous.

“I’ve never seen you look at a woman, or anyone, the way you looked at this little lady tonight,” Gen pointed out. “Even Cecca said...”

“You gossip too much for a man,” Stefano growled.

“Okay. Okay. Forget the smitten part. But we have rules here for a reason. People feel safe here because of the rules. They’ll be watching me, waiting to see how I handle this, which is why I need to know who sent her here. I need to know who violated my rules so my people can ensure they never do it again.”

“I’ll get that information to you once I have it.”

“But the rules...”

“She just tried to kill me,” Stefano growled. “You saw it.”

Gen nodded. “Yeah. I saw it. That’s why I want to follow the rules and...”

“It was me she tried to kill. Not you. Me! That means she’s mine, right? To do with what I want? To punish how I see fit?”

Gen rubbed his hand over his face, looking torn. “But, she’s a woman, Stefano. If she was a guy, I’d let you kill him and...”

“She’s not just a woman. She’s a woman who tried to kill me. For that, she must pay.”

Gen released a deep breath and nodded. “Wouldn’t it be easier if my people handled her? You don’t have to get your hands dirty. Plus, you don’t hurt women and...”

“Unless they try to kill me.”

“Huh?”

“I don’t hurt women. Unless they try to kill me.”

“Oh. Right. I forgot about that one condition. I’ll be straight with you. My wife is against you taking her out of

here.”

“Tell your wife to worry about protecting women who deserve it. This *piccola demone* can protect herself.”

Gen chuckled. “She did come after you like a *little demon*. But why does it sound like an endearment when you say it instead of an insult?”

“Trust me. It’s an insult.” This woman would get no more compliments from him.

Gen stared down at Gina. “I knew there was more to her when we found the Pink Reaper unconscious back here. There’s no way a naïve little foreigner who stumbled in here on a whim should’ve been able to take out Pink Reaper.”

Stefano should’ve known something was up then, also. At the time, he’d been too blind to be rational. He’d been worried about Gina while she’d been plotting against him. Never again.

“I’ll tell the wifey that you and your *piccola demone* had a lover’s spat. And that you weren’t hurt badly. That’s the only way I won’t end up in the doghouse tonight. But Stefano, If you need me to handle this, I can. You and your people got your hands full with...” Gen paused and looked at the medics. “With other stuff.”

“I’ll handle her. I’ll let you know when I have information on who sent her. As for her car, return it to the rental place for me. Send me all her possessions that you find in the car. Until I get the information about who sent her, you can tell others it was a lover’s spat to keep them from pestering you.”

Gen nodded, still looking unsure about allowing Stefano to leave with her. Usually, the club would let the person who’d been attacked choose what happened to the attacker. Never did they let the person leave with the attacker. There was no way Stefano was letting someone else handle this. He would be the one who figured out who the hell Gina Washington really was and why she’d targeted him.

“All done,” the older medic said, rising from the bench. His son was already loading stuff back into their kits.

“Thankfully, none of your internal organs were damaged. It’s merely a flesh wound. But, in that area, it could have been much worse. The cut above your eye bled a lot. However, the wound isn’t deep. Cuts in that area tend to bleed a lot. The cut on your ear is merely a scratch. It’s nothing to worry about. Just be careful that it doesn’t get infected. You took a lot of punches and kicks in those last runs. Because of that, you’ll be sore for a few days, but you’ll live. Try not to aggravate your wounds. And the stitches may itch some. Do not scratch them.”

He already knew the drill. Stefano nodded to the woman in his arms. The medic’s gaze jerked from Stefano to Gina.

“What?” the medic asked. “Do you want me to take her?”

“No.” *Idiot*. “Check her. She’s hurt too.”

The medic looked to Gen.

“We don’t usually...” the medic started. “When someone has a weapon, we...”

“Just do it,” Gen told the medic. “Can’t you see he’s smitten with his little demon?”

Stefano glared at both men. He’d never been smitten a day in his life. And who the fuck used the word smitten these days? He wasn’t smitten, nor was he concerned for Gina at all. However, he needed her alive and well when he questioned her.

He couldn’t have her dying from internal bleeding or anything like that before he got his answers. And he didn’t want her in pain. Pain was a distraction. He needed all her attention to get the answers he needed. Staring straight ahead, he lifted the hem of Gina’s shirt so the medic could check her wound.

“This wound looks recent. She didn’t get it tonight, but she did get it within the last month,” the medic observed. “The stitches were done well. But not by a professional. I see stitches like these when the wounded stitch themselves up.”

His brows drew together in an angry frown, causing the small bandage over his eye to wrinkle. That was the least of

his concerns. Gina had been forced to stitch herself up! *What kind of trouble are you in, little demon?*

Stefano stared down at where the medic was looking. Jealousy roared through him as he watched the older man gently touch Gina's side. He wanted to break the bastard's fingers for touching her. He wanted to rip the man's fucking head off. He wanted...

"Uh, Stefano. Calm down," Gen said, bringing Stefano's attention to him.

Stefano blinked. The sound of gasping caused him to stare back at the medic. *Fuck!* Stefano released the man's hand. The medic stared at his fingers, which had turned red and were now bent in a weird way. At least they didn't appear to be broken. The doctor stumbled away from Stefano.

"I'm done here," the medic said, voice strained. "For your next fight, call someone else, Gen."

"Come on, Joel," Gen said. "You haven't finished treating her."

"I draw the line at being abused," Joel screeched, his entire body trembling. "Get your things, Martin," he said to the younger medic. "We're done here. Gen, we'll send you the bill and a list of medics you can work with in the future."

Joel cast one last nervous glare at Stefano before hurrying from the room, hand raised as if it would pain him to lower it.

Gen sighed. "Did you have to grab the man like that, Stefano?"

The truth was, he hadn't realized he'd done it until after the fact. This woman had him so far gone that he didn't even know what he was doing anymore. He needed to get out of there. He needed to go home, to rest, to clear his head, to plan.

"Now, who's going to treat her? Who's going to treat the fighters next week?"

Stefano pulled Gina's shirt back down.

"I'll take care of her myself," he told Gen before rising to his feet. "And you have a list of black-listed and unlicensed

medical workers willing to help out here for the right price.”

“That’s beside the point. You can’t go around breaking people’s fingers. And just to be clear,” Gen said. “I don’t agree with you leaving with her.”

“We’re clear.” Stefano tossed his little murderous ass demon over his shoulder and strode toward the exit.

“You probably shouldn’t carry her like that,” Gen called after him as he followed him from the changing room. “You could aggravate her wounds.”

True. He lowered her from his shoulder and changed her position, now carrying her like she was a baby, cradled against his chest.

“I got pain pills and gauze,” Gen said, following Stefano through the dungeon.

Stefano stopped. “I don’t need those things. But I could use more of your knockout drug.”

“Why?” Gen asked.

“For when I don’t want her conscious.”

Gen sighed and looked like he was about to give Stefano a lecture.

“Forget it. I’m sure I have some of my own.” Stefano started across the room again.

“It’s not that I don’t want to give it to you,” Gen explained. “It’s just... I’m Switzerland, remember? I have rules. And they work. They keep this place safe. And when shit like this happens, my people take care of it. Since you’re taking care of it, I need to distance myself from it until you give me more information about who sent her. You understand?”

Stefano stopped and faced Gen. “I understand. I’m not trying to undermine your authority. I promise once I have information, you’ll be the first to know. But Gen, you don’t have to handle the person who sent her. I’ll handle it. And I’ll make sure they never send someone to your club after me again.”

Gen patted Stefano on the shoulder. “I know you will. I just...” Gen sighed. “I just saw the way you looked at her. I’d hoped you’d finally found...” Gen went silent. “Never mind. Goodnight. I’ll take care of her car and have her possessions delivered to you, along with your winnings.”

Stefano nodded. The cold air whipped against him when he stepped outside. He pulled Gina closer to him, ignoring the fact that his first thought had been to shield her from the cold, not himself.

“You sure are protective of a woman who just tried to unalive you.”

He looked up to find Cecca standing by his car, waiting for him as if he didn’t have enough to deal with. Ignoring her words, he strode toward his car.

“You sure you don’t want Gen’s guys to handle her?” Cecca asked when he reached his vehicle.

“This woman belongs to me.” How many times would he have to say that before they got the damn point?

Cecca stuck her hand out. “Give me your keys. I’ll unlock the door for you.”

“No need.”

Cecca snatched the keys from him.

“Cecca,” Stefano started, voice low, deceptively calm. “Now is not the time for this shit.”

“I know,” she told him as she unlocked his back door and pulled the door open. “I just wanted to help.” She handed him his keys and stepped out of the way.

He strode to the back of the car and placed Gina inside.

“Careful,” Cecca instructed. “She’s already hurt.”

He didn’t need her telling him how to take care of his woman... *his enemy*.

“Watch her head.”

“Cecca, why the fuck are you out here?”

“I’m just here to remind you of something you probably already know.”

“Make it quick.”

“I wanted to remind you that sometimes when women attack ruthless men, it’s because they’ve been forced to, not because they want to.”

Bent over his back seat, Stefano stared down at Gina. The statement the medic made a few minutes ago had stuck out to him. According to Joel, Gina’s stitches looked like she’d done them herself. Stefano lifted her shirt to examine the wound. It was time for those stitches to come out.

But Joel was right. They looked like they were done by her. When in pain, it was hard to make the stitches even. When bleeding out, getting the stitches right didn’t matter. All you cared about was closing the wound before you passed out from the pain. To him, the stitches appeared to be two to three weeks old.

So, about three weeks ago, someone tried to kill her. And she hadn’t been able to go to a hospital. She’d had to stitch herself up. Since she hadn’t done a bad job, it meant she’d done it before. *Three weeks ago*. That was around the time of Little Em’s attack and car accident. Stefano didn’t believe in coincidences.

Who are you, Gina Washington? Though he was fucking pissed at her, he couldn’t help but wonder what trouble had led her to him. Now Cecca’s words were causing him to wonder if Gina had been forced into this situation. Stefano rubbed his knuckle along her cheek. No one should be this damn beautiful.

Who would want to hurt her? Were they in the States, or were they here? This woman had stormed into his life, bringing more chaos into his already fucked up world. She was a problem. An unnecessary distraction. She’d tried to fucking kill him. Yet, he wanted to know who her enemies were so he could end them.

He wanted to know if her enemies were his enemies, too, and were they using her against him. *Is that why you attacked me, Piccola Demone? Did someone force you to do it?* Stefano sighed. He was doing it again, letting his judgment become clouded. Even if she'd been forced to do what she'd done, it didn't matter.

It didn't change the fact that she'd lied to him. Or the fact that nothing they'd shared had been genuine. Lowering his hand from her cheek, Stefano buckled Gina in and then positioned her head comfortably against the headrest. When he finished, he closed the back door, careful not to slam it. He locked the door before facing Cecca.

"If you have something to say, Cecca, say it. If not, I'm leaving."

"Okay, I'll say it. Just because someone tries to kill you doesn't mean they don't like you."

Stefano sighed. Were all women this damn insane?

"What the fuck are you talking about, Cecca?"

"Yeah, Gina, if that's her name, tried to kill you. That doesn't mean you two can't work this out. It's not like attempted murder is a deal breaker."

What the fuck was she talking about? Stefano was in pain. He was irritated. He was frustrated. And he wanted to go the fuck home. He didn't have time to deal with Cecca's crazy ass.

"I'm leaving."

"Wait!" Cecca yelled. "What I'm trying to say is, don't kill her. You may regret it later."

"Cecca, if you're saying this because you like her, don't bother. She's not worth it. Trust me. You can do better. Find yourself a woman who isn't crazy as fuck."

Smiling, Cecca blushed a bit. "I think those are the most words you've ever said to me. And probably the nicest, too."

"I'm gone."

“And for your information,” she yelled. “I happen to like crazy. I’ve always gone for the Harley Quinn type when it came to women.”

He had no idea who Harley Quinn was, and he was sure he didn’t want to know. Stefano turned to get into his car.

“Wait!” Cecca yelled.

Closing his eyes, Stefano gritted his teeth. He’d come here to fight, fuck, and forget. The only thing he’d accomplished was the fight. There would be no fucking. And he’d never forget this night. Now, he just wanted to go home.

“Cecca, you have one minute to say everything you want to say, then leave me the fuck alone.”

“So impolite!” Cecca complained. “I really don’t know what Gina and I see in you. Oh, I remember. The dick. It’s the dick for me.”

“Fifty-eight seconds.”

“Just be careful with her. Don’t hurt her. I promise I’m good at reading people, and she’s not bad. Sure, she has violent tendencies, and she tried to stab you. And yeah, maybe she’s a little crazy and murderous.”

“Forty-five seconds.”

“But nobody is perfect. Plus, she stared at you like you were the greatest man on earth, and I promise that wasn’t fake. Even I was a bit jealous of the attention she gave you, Stefano.”

“Thirty-two seconds.”

“You don’t know how to count.”

“Fifteen.”

“Stefano, I looked at the cameras. She hesitated.”

“What?” he asked.

“In the ring. She pulled her weapon and was going to stab you. But she hesitated. Then you moved. And you, uh, you kind of, um, bumped into her little knife.”

Bullshit. “You’re saying I stabbed myself?”

Cecca shrugged. “Kind of. And it wasn’t really a stab. More like a scrape.”

“Five seconds.”

“Watch the video when you get a chance. As for her, well, just don’t write her off, and don’t kill her. I’m not saying go easy on her or anything. Just remember that she could be a victim too. That’s it. I’m done.”

Deep in thought, Stefano turned and unlocked his car door. *She could be a victim too.*

“You’re not going to respond to all the shit I just said?” Cecca asked as he opened his door and slid into the car.

She continued talking as he cranked his car up and put it in reverse. Even as he backed out of the parking lot, he could hear her yelling not to kill Gina. Stefano steered his car away from Club Tacere. *Club Hush.* What went down there, stayed there. Yet, Stefano had a feeling this incident wasn’t going to be kept on the hush.

Motherfuckers would talk about the woman who’d enchanted the Silent Beast and then tried to kill him. They’d want to know who she was and where she was from. They’d want to know who’d sent her. They’d want answers to all the questions he wanted answers to. And some, those who hated him, would want her for themselves.

Either to get to him, because they knew he wanted her. Or they’d want her so that he couldn’t have her, again because they knew he wanted her. Either way, this woman’s life was in danger, with him or without him. Despite the anger he was feeling, he couldn’t deny that the things Cecca had said were working their way through his rage.

Gina could be a victim, a tool his enemies were using against him. There was a chance she hadn’t wanted to do this at all. There was a slight chance she’d truly felt a connection to him. But there was also a chance that she’d wanted to do this. There was a chance that she’d faked everything to achieve her goal.

He wouldn't have answers until she woke up. Once he got his answers, then he'd decide what to do with her. He'd decide whether she lived or died. If death was the right path to take, he'd turn her over to Gen. Stefano didn't want her blood on his hands. If life was the path he chose, he'd hand her over to Cecca.

Cecca had room in her life for crazy. Stefano didn't. Either way, soon, he'd have his answers. Then he'd be rid of Gina forever. He swallowed as he eased up on the gas pedal. *Don't think about the kiss, he told himself. Don't think about how good she felt pressed up against you.*

His jaw tightened as he tried to keep his eyes on the road. *Fuck it!* He needed to look at her. His gaze jerked to the rearview mirror. He despised the calm that came over him once he saw her. She was still out cold.

Was Cecca telling the truth? Had his little demone hesitated? Did it matter? He returned his gaze to the road, preparing to take his exit. As he turned, he heard movement in the back.

Stefano waited until he'd merged into the center lane before glancing up into the rearview mirror again. His turn had caused her to shift a bit in her seat. Her head was now positioned in a way that looked uncomfortable. For a split second, a very brief split second, he considered pulling over to make her comfortable.

Again, the fake air of innocence surrounding her was clouding his judgment. He steeled himself against the unwanted effects her presence had on him. *Fuck her and her comfort!* She was lucky to be alive. Stefano forced his eyes back on the road. He needed to remain alert. At this hour, there weren't many cars out.

That didn't mean he could get comfortable or lax. He sat up a little straighter, eyes on the rearview mirror, eyeing an approaching car. The car switched lanes and drove around him. He got a glimpse of the passengers as they passed. It was a group of kids, early twenties, in a red convertible, top up.

They were probably leaving a party. He relaxed a little. Against his will, his gaze returned to the rearview mirror and landed on Gina. *Fuck it.* Stefano pulled over. He would make her comfortable this one time. But never again.

Chapter Fourteen



Sienna

Pain! Everything ached. She hated waking up in pain. It always took her a minute to remember why she was in pain. This time, it was taking her longer than usual to actually wake up. Though she was conscious, her eyes were still closed. It would take energy she didn't currently have to open them. Her brain knew what that meant.

However, it was too foggy at the moment to process it. *Sleep.* That was what she needed. She'd sleep just a bit longer. And when she woke up, she'd figure everything out. She slipped back into unconsciousness, back into the darkness where pain and stress didn't exist. She didn't know how long she slumbered. She awakened to voices. Her eyes were still too heavy to open. But her ears were working just fine.

"No. I don't want to join you two for lunch," a deep male voice was saying. "Because I happen to like my insides and I don't want to end up puking them up. Just tell her she can't cook. If you get sick, I'm not taking you to the hospital."

That voice sounded familiar.

"She's not cooking? You're going out to eat? That's new. Oh. Shit. You did? When? They came in last night?" The man chuckled. "So, you told her you wanted to stay in the guest house, just so she wouldn't know they were taking the stove out of the main house in the middle of the night. That's ruthless."

The man chuckled again, then groaned. He sounded like he was in pain.

“Nah, I’m fine. Look, if she’s already mad at you, now is the perfect time to tell her she can’t cook. That way, she won’t get mad at you again later. You can resolve all of this in one argument. You’re right, I know nothing about relationships, and I don’t want to know. But I do know her cooking is going to be the death of you. The guest house still has a kitchen, or did you forget that?”

The man laughed again, and suddenly she remembered that laugh. Stefano! Club Tacere! The Dungeon! *Shit*. Her plan! She’d hesitated. *Shit. Shit. Shit*. Her heart began racing. Captured by the enemy. And alive! *Fuck!*

“Getting rid of the kitchen was the right move,” her enemy said. “A wise man would’ve gotten rid of both kitchens. Whatever. Okay. Yeah. Enjoy your day off. The next day too. You need time to get back in the good graces of your woman. I’ll handle the call with Lino and Terzo. If any issues pop up, I’ll handle them. Bye.”

She kept her eyes shut, mind racing, body throbbing all over. Memories of the last twenty-four hours were bombarding her brain. She’d hesitated. Despair reared its ugly head. She shoved it down. *Forget the past. Focus on the present*. Presently, she couldn’t move her arms or her legs.

She held herself still, not wanting her captor to know she was awake. It was impossible to ignore the ties at her wrists and ankles. She was seated upright. Her back was pressing into the cushion of a soft chair. And it was tall because her head was also cushioned. Usually, when she was kidnapped, she awakened in much more uncomfortable conditions.

She’d once awakened and found herself hanging upside down in a meat factory. Butt ass naked. Yeah, this was an improvement. She inhaled deeply. The room smelled of medicine and cleaning products. She inhaled again. Her nose was filled with the scent of rubbing alcohol and something she couldn’t pinpoint at the moment.

“Open your eyes!”

She jerked at the sound of Stefano’s voice. It was much closer than she’d anticipated. She hadn’t heard him approach

her. From the sound of his voice, he was directly in front of her. Sienna debated over whether she should open her eyes or not.

“I know you’re awake. I can tell by your breathing.”

Of course, he could. There was no point in stalling. This confrontation was inevitable. She slowly opened her eyes. There he was, Stefano, the Silent Beast. Her enemy. Her target. Her only connection to Eve. The man she’d stabbed. But not intentionally. She’d changed her mind. But would he believe that?

Of course, not. Which was why she was wondering if she’d made the wrong decision when she’d hesitated. She’d allowed herself to give a fuck and look where it had gotten her. Because of that, she was now his prisoner. The bastard hadn’t hesitated to drug her and kidnap her. Sienna gritted her teeth, anger rising with each second that passed.

“You look like you hate me,” he drawled, observation skills on point.

Sienna remained silent, trying to formulate a new plan. Did she hate him? She should. Yet, her heart refused to read that memo. Stefano leaned back against the black recliner he was seated in. He was shirtless with a beige bandage wrapped tightly around his midsection. She cringed as she stared at the wrapping. He noticed.

“Admiring your handiwork?” he questioned.

Did he think she was proud of herself for hurting him? She should be. But she wasn’t. She schooled her features into a nonchalant expression, not wanting him to know the anguish his pain brought her.

“All true artists admire their own work,” she told him.

“Is that what you consider yourself – an artist?”

“I guess. Some people sculpt. Some paint. Some write. I kill. Either way, we all take something and turn it into something else. I take something that once breathed, moved, and loved, and I turn it into something that can no longer

breathe or move, but can still be loved. Doesn't that sound like art?"

That was how Maureen had rationalized killing to Sienna when she was younger. She told her to think of it like painting, just with blood. And to think of it like sculpting, but instead of using marble, she used flesh. Sienna was thankful Eve hadn't been around at that time. Her friend would've ended up like her, unstable with a macabre fetish.

"You sound like a psychopath," Stefano replied.

She'd been raised by one. So, that kind of made her one too. *Nature versus Nurture*. Her mentor's dark nurturing had shaped Sienna's current nature. How could she not end up a little insane, a little... damaged?

"Psychopath, artist, same thing." She shrugged. Well, she tried to. Her arms were tied behind her back too tightly for her to even lift her shoulders. She really hated being restrained. She glanced down at her legs and then up at him.

"Is all of this necessary?" she questioned, voice husky, throat dry. She cleared her throat. Was it too soon in the kidnapping to ask for water? This was usually around the time they offered her water.

"Of course, it's necessary."

"Really? I'm just one woman, Stefano. Not an army. Tying my wrists and ankles is a bit overkill. You could've just tied up one or the other."

And made it easier for me to get free.

"I won't underestimate you again, *Gina*."

She read the unspoken question in his eyes. He wanted to know her real name. Depriving him of that would make him angrier, which was why she remained silent. The petty in her wouldn't let her tell him what he clearly wanted to know. *Don't give in to emotions, Sienna.*

She'd almost told him who she was and what she wanted in the ring. Now she was suffering because of that. She wasn't going to make that mistake again. Plus, names were sacred.

You shouldn't tell just anyone your name. They could use it against you in the court of law. Or on social media. She was against both of those things.

"Who are you?" he asked, interrupting her internal monologue.

"Gina Washington."

"Who are you?" he said again.

"Gina Washington."

"Who the fuck are you?"

"Gina Fucking Washington."

There was a tick in his jaw. *Yup*. Her beast was mad. *Poor Beastie*. Sienna continued her perusal of him. Along with the wrapping around his abdomen, the cut above his eye had been bandaged. *Good*. She'd hated how badly that bruise had been bleeding. There was a dark bruise on the side of his head where she'd kicked him.

There was that feeling of guilt again, gnawing away at her. Though she was able to ignore it, it never truly went away. It lingered along the surface, waiting for a chance to infiltrate her heart and make her feel all weird and unlike herself. She took in the bluish ring around one of his eyes.

There were a few discolored spots on his chest. Other than that, he looked fine. But Sienna wanted to see the scar she'd caused to ensure she hadn't wounded him too severely. If she asked him to show it to her, he'd probably think she wanted to admire her handiwork. That wasn't the case.

She may not be a surgeon or a nurse, but she knew her way around a wound. She knew the proper aftercare to keep him from getting infected and causing problems later. If he'd let her, she'd help him tend his wounds. What was she thinking? He wouldn't let her. Not after the way she'd gone after him in the ring.

She shouldn't even be considering helping him. Somewhere between catching her flight to Italy and laying eyes on Stefano, she'd become a wishy-washy bitch, a

lukewarm assassin, a hesitator. If her assassin buddies could see her now, they'd disown her. Meka would probably threaten to kill her if she didn't woman-up.

Chels would tie her up until she got her head back in the game. Natalie was a fan of sensory deprivation. Sienna shivered. She didn't want to endure that. As for Eve, she'd tell Sienna to fuck him, then kill him. Fuck him because he was fine as hell, and it was never okay to let good dick go to waste.

Then kill him because he'd had the nerve to kidnap her and drug her. Damn, she missed her bestie. Sienna sighed as she unabashedly observed him. Even battered, he was truly a fine specimen. The way he was seated against the recliner, hands gripping the armrests, body tense, muscles coiled tightly as if he could pounce at any moment, was sexy as hell. Her gaze dropped to his lap.

Memories of him rubbing her against his hard, thick cock lived rent-free in her head. It had signed a lifetime lease and never planned to move out. Though she tried not to think about how it had felt against her, she failed. Sienna curled her toes into the plush carpet and tried to keep her mind out of the gutter.

Wait. She curled her toes into the carpet again. His carpet was extra soft. But that wasn't the point. Why the hell was her feet bare? She stared down at herself, this time really observing her attire. Why the hell was she wearing too-big navy blue jogging pants and an oversize navy-blue shirt? She wiggled her shoulders, making her boobs jiggle.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

Ignoring Stefano's gruff voice, Sienna continued jiggling her girls. She didn't have a bra on. She wiggled her bottom, trying to see if she had on panties. She honestly couldn't tell. Her gaze jerked to him to find him staring at her chest. Warmth spread through her belly. *Don't think about his big cock. Focus on the problem at hand.*

“Where the hell are my clothes, Stefano?”

His gaze rose to hers. His very fuckable lips lifted in a slow, sexy smile that streaked across his handsome face.

“Ask nicely, and I’ll tell you.”

This dirty motherfuc.... Calm down, Sienna. You catch more flies with honey. But can you catch a beast with honey?

Softening her tone, she asked sweetly, “Where the fuck are my clothes, Stefano?”

His smile widened. “Much better. They were a safety hazard. So, I removed them.”

“A safety hazard?”

“For some reason, your clothing had knock-out drugs hidden in them, along with miniature blades. I counted six. I don’t know where you purchased that outfit, but you shouldn’t shop there again. A fragile woman like you could get hurt wearing stuff like that.”

A badass woman like her could hurt someone while wearing stuff like that. Which was why she hadn’t truly been panicking, given her situation. She’d planned to work her hands loose enough to reach into her sleeve and retrieve a blade.

But her blades were gone. So were her sleeves. *This dirty motherfucker!* Here she was, feeling guilty for hurting him while he’d stripped her bare. She needed her jacket and her heels. Now, she was weaponless. Other than her fists, she had nothing to defend herself with.

Her hopes of escaping him had been dashed. If Natalie could see her now, her friend would be so disappointed in her. All those weapons she’d given her, and Sienna had lost them all. Lady luck had abandoned her once again.

“Who told you to undress me?” she yelled, embarrassed, and she didn’t even know why.

That was a lie. She knew why she was embarrassed. She wasn’t ashamed of her body or anything. She was a bad bitch, and she knew it. But, if he’d undressed her, that meant he’d

seen her scars. He'd read her diary that was written across her body in welts and raised bruises.

Each bruise told the story of a different moment in her life. All of those moments were filled with darkness and despair. She often joked that her body was her dark diary. Which was why she fucked with the lights off. She didn't want any man reading her secret diary entries. Yet, Stefano had read them. *Fuck.*

"Who gave you the right to undress me?" she asked.

"Who told you to kill me?"

"Oh, you think I had to be *told* to kill you?" She chuckled, pissed off. "That's cute."

"I know someone sent you."

"Do you?" Her eyebrow raised.

"They told you where I'd be. They told you how I looked..."

"Let's skip all of the bullshit, Stefano. No one sent me. I came after you because you're my enemy."

She couldn't tell him about Eve. Not yet. That could further endanger her friend. Sienna needed to be in a better position, a position to bargain before she asked about Eve. Right now, her position was less than desirable.

In fact, she was no better off than Eve. Her enemy leaned forward in his seat. She didn't miss the slight grimace that flickered over his features when he moved. He was in pain. Her heart constricted. *I'm sorry.*

"You're not my enemy, Gina." He closed his eyes briefly. "I'm not going to keep calling you that." When he opened his eyes, he said, "I know that's not your name."

"Names aren't important. You can call me whatever you want."

"Okay, piccola demone."

Little demon. How adorable. She smiled. His eyes widened.

“That’s cute,” she told him, meaning it. “I like it. I may get it tattooed on me.”

He took a deep breath and released it slowly.

“Stefano,” she started before he could. “You’re wasting your time. No one sent me. I just don’t like you. I heard about you in the streets and...”

“Stop lying to me,” he yelled.

“I’m not lying,” she yelled back, surprised by the hurt his yelling had inflicted on her emotions.

Relaxing against the recliner, he rubbed his hand over his face, causing his muscles to flex. She stared down at the black carpet, embarrassed with the way she was responding to his yelling. She swallowed, hating the fact that him yelling at her had hurt her feelings. She wasn’t supposed to have any feelings for him to hurt.

Yet, there she sat, trying not to cry. She was losing her damn mind. First, she’d hesitated to complete her mission. Now she was getting her feelings hurt. Her body was betraying her. So were her emotions. If her brain decided to jump ship also, she’d be a goner for real. Silence ensued.

Sienna took the quiet time to listen to her surroundings and get a better feel for where she was at. Birds chirped outside. It was morning, so she’d been out of it for a few hours. There were no sounds of traffic. No sounds of neighbors. The living area they were in wasn’t large.

From the interior décor, she figured they weren’t in a cabin. Everything she could see was modern and expensive looking but not overly fancy. She could tell he liked dark colors. So, did she. But where the hell were they?

If they were near the docks, she’d hear boat horns and other dock-ish sounds. If they were by the train station, she’d hear the trains and possibly the announcer in the station. If they were in a residential area, she would hear kids or at least cars coming and going up and down the street. She heard none of that.

All she heard was the clock on the right wall ticking as seconds turned to minutes. Since Stefano worked for the mafia, they could be anywhere. However, she didn't see any guards around. No cleaning staff. The smell of breakfast wasn't in the air, so, no kitchen staff either. RIP to the coffee she wouldn't be drinking this morning.

She missed it already and would soon be experiencing the headache that showed up whenever she missed a day of coffee. Being kidnapped freaking sucked. Her stomach chose that moment to rebel by rumbling loudly. Had he heard it? She hoped not. Head still lowered, her gaze darted left then right, searching for exits.

She only saw one door she could escape out of. There were three windows. But the curtains were so thick and dark, she couldn't see outside. Therefore, she didn't know if she was on the first floor or higher. The silence stretched between them. Sienna was starting to think she was truly all alone with the Silent Beast, the man she'd tried to kill.

Not intentionally! Go away, guilt!

“Was any of the shit that happened between us real?”

His deep voice startled her.

“Um. What?”

“You heard me.”

She had. But why was he asking her that? Shouldn't he be torturing her to find out why she'd attacked him? Shouldn't he be disgusted by what he'd read in her dark diary?

“Was it real?” he asked again, this time more forcefully.

Sienna nodded. “Yeah, I was fighting you for real in the ring. I was giving it my all.”

“You know that's not what I'm talking about.”

Yeah, she knew. But she didn't want to talk feelings with him. She didn't even understand what she was feeling. He'd read her dark diary, and he was still looking at her like he cared. That shit was confusing the hell out of her. Was he

pretending he hadn't seen the scars? Was that easier than acknowledging that she was too flawed to be beautiful?

Maureen's voice drifted through her mind. It was the day Maureen stormed into Sienna's room while she was drying off and getting ready to get dressed to go to lunch with Eve. Instead of leaving the room, Maureen had walked circles around Sienna, staring her up and down.

Then her mentor smiled and said, *"I think I've scarred you too much, broken butterfly. Only the men who frequent Miss Davies' establishment will want you now. Poor girl. You used to be beautiful. Young, smooth brown skin. Bright smile. I used to be a bit jealous of you. Not anymore."*

That was one of the last things Maureen said to her before she started acting paranoid. Sienna had pretended the words hadn't bothered her. She'd locked them away in that dark room where she kept everything that could bring her distress. The fact that she was thinking of them now proved they'd bothered her more than she'd realized.

But even if Stefano was okay with the wounds he'd discovered, since he too was wounded, his feelings for her should have dimmed a little because of the fight ring. He thought she'd tried to kill him. Yet, he wasn't punishing her. That made absolutely no sense to her.

Who the hell are you, Silent Beast? Her emotions were all over the place at the moment. If she didn't understand them, there was no way she could make him understand them. *Real or fake?* She didn't even know what was real or fake anymore.

"Don't make me ask again, little demon."

Sienna swallowed. "You have to be more specific, beast. Was what real?"

He looked like he wasn't going to say anything. Suddenly, he stood up. Damn, he was leaving the room. *Oh, well.* At least she'd get some peace and quiet while she tried to figure out how she was going to get out of this messed up situation. She watched him head toward the door she hoped to soon escape out of.

Sienna tapped her toes against the floor. Was he really leaving? He'd given up too easily. The Silent Beast sucked at interrogation. Or was he leaving the room to go get his torture kit? *Shit. He's coming back.* Her beast spun around. She stared down at the carpet, pretending she hadn't just been watching him.

"I'm talking about the kiss," he stated as he approached her. "And the looks. The touches. All of that shit."

He now towered over her with his arms folded over his chest.

"Ohhhh!" Sienna drawled as if she'd forgotten about all of that.

She hadn't. She never would. Their short *almost-a-romance* was imprinted on her mind for all eternity. Honestly, it may be the closest she ever came to the real thing. Of course, she had to hold that memory close. But it could never be more than that, so it was best not to discuss it. It would be best if they both put it behind them.

"Was it real?" he whispered.

"No, it wasn't real," she lied, hating the flicker of hurt that flashed in his eyes.

There one second, gone the next. More pain caused by her. *Sienna, you're the worst.* His pain would end if he stopped caring. When you didn't care about someone, nothing they said could hurt you.

"You know," Sienna started, hoping to help him stop caring, stop hurting because of her. "I think I may have been an actress in my previous life. I'm great at performing. Hey, let me ask you a question. How was my performance at Club Tacere?" she joked. "Was it convincing? Would you give me five daggers? You get it? Five daggers instead of five stars."

"I'd like to stab you with five daggers."

Sienna burst out laughing. He cocked his eyes to the side, eyeing her like she was losing her mind. Maybe she was. This felt like insanity.

“That was funny,” she told him. “You’re a comedian. Who knew?”

He continued staring at her. The longer he stared, the more uncomfortable she became. Could he tell she was lying about their interactions not being real? It would be best for both of them if they’d just pretend the past hadn’t happened.

Sure, they’d met, they’d kissed, and it had been epic. Then the sun rose, and they realized they were enemies, so what was the point in dreaming of the magic they’d briefly shared if they couldn’t keep it going? That would be emotional torture, which was something she wasn’t a fan of.

She could still feel his heated gaze on her, examining her, peering into her soul, searching for the truth. Her toes dug into the carpet. She wiggled her fingers, trying to work the ties at her wrists loose. The silence stretched between them.

She was hyper-aware of their breathing. It was the only sound in the room. Well, that and the ticking of the clock that was starting to bother her. *Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.* Seconds felt like hours. Hours felt like days. Finally, he broke the silence.

“The way you looked at me, the things you said, was any of that real?” he muttered.

“I already told you it wasn’t.”

“It felt real to me,” he whispered.

Was he trying to break her? Was this some sort of new interrogation technique? If so, it was brutal. It was worse than being stabbed. She’d rather have him break her fingers and threaten to gouge her eyes out. Sienna didn’t want to think about the things that transpired between them before she’d revealed her true nature.

Thinking about those things only made her feel guilty and made her wish for a future that would never happen. And it made her feel silly for wishing for that future because she knew things like that didn’t work out for people like them. She’d learned a long time ago to never believe in fairy tales.

Fairy tales were for women who didn’t have to hide their true identities. For women who were free to give their all to

the person they loved. Women who could allow themselves to be vulnerable and not have to worry about being taken advantage of. Even some of those women didn't get the fairy tale love they dreamed of.

If they couldn't get it, there was no way she could. What was the point in getting her hopes up when she knew they'd be dashed in the end? She was no Cinderella. He was no prince charming. There could be no happily ever after for them. Only bloodshed and anonymity. So, was what they shared real? No. It couldn't be.

"Nope," she said, making an irritating popping sound on the letter P. "It was all fake. Just part of the job."

He opened his mouth to say something. She hurriedly spoke over him.

"My answer isn't going to change, Stefano. So, you can stop asking."

Her words didn't deter him. Her stubborn Beast knelt in front of her. His hand reached for her. She leaned to the side to avoid his touch while craving it at the same time. She'd never been more at odds with herself. He paused, raised hand hovering between them. Sienna held her breath, waiting to see what he would do.

Part of her hoped he'd touch her. The other part of her wanted to stab him if he did. In the end, he decided to lower his hand onto the armrest of her chair. Close to her, but not touching her.

Disappointment settled in her chest. That insane part of her wanted to lean closer to him, so her arm could touch his fingertips. *Damn it, Sienna, you're just as silly as he is.* Neither of them would learn their lesson until one of them got burned.

"Are you in trouble?" he asked.

"Nope," Sienna answered, staring straight ahead, not wanting to see the concern in his eyes.

"You can tell me the truth."

“I am.”

“No. You’re not. You’re shutting me out when I’m probably the only person who can help you out of this.”

Like you helped Eve when you took her from the hospital? Anger flared within her. Her eyes jerked to his.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” she yelled. “I tried to kill you. Yet, you’re kneeling here, asking me if I’m in trouble.” Sienna let out a high-pitched bark of laughter. “Are you insane? I want you dead. Deader than dead. And you would be if I had lured you into my motel room instead of joining you in the fight ring.”

“Was that what they told you to do?” he asked softly.

“No one told me to do shit, Stefano.”

“I can protect you.”

This fucking man! “Do I look like I need your protection?”

He nodded.

“I don’t. We’re enemies. Stop with this weak shit. It’s beneath you,” Sienna sneered.

He chuckled and stared down at his hand resting on the armrest.

“I know,” he admitted. “It’s been a long time since I’ve felt this,” he paused, searching for the right word. “Since I’ve felt this confused.”

Confused was a good word. Sienna was feeling pretty confused herself.

“I should treat you like I treat any other person who tries to kill me. But I don’t want to be another person who wrongs you. That’s why I want to make sure you don’t need my help. Where we go from here is up to you. I’m giving you a choice I’ve never given anyone else. You can be my enemy. And I’ll treat you like my enemy. Or you can be my...” He went silent as if he was unsure of what he wanted her to be.

“Your what?” she prodded. “Your woman? Your mistress? Your piccola segreto?” Sienna burst out laughing. “I will not

be your woman, mistress, or your little secret. Save those positions for someone who really wants them. As I've told you many times already, that shit in the bar was fake. I was acting. You are a job to me. Nothing more, nothing less. Plus, you're not my type, Beastie. I like my men..."

Now, she was the one trailing off, leaving her sentence unfinished as she searched for the right words to make him give up on her.

"What?" he asked, curious. "You like your men what?"

Sienna swallowed. *Like you*, she thought. *I like my men like you. Rough around the edges with a heart of tarnished gold. Bent but not broken. Wounded but not defeated. I want you, Silent Beast. Because of that, I hesitated. I second-guessed myself. And I ruined my plan. If I keep this up, I could get myself and my bestie killed. That's why I must do this. Forgive me.*

"I want a man who is good," Sienna told him.

Stefano flinched as if she'd physically struck him.

"I want a man who will only bring positivity into my life. I've already had a lifetime of negativity. I'm done with that. I want someone who has nothing but light in them. A pure heart. Not someone who works for the mafia."

"That's enough," he muttered, no longer able to meet her gaze.

"Not someone who kills for a living."

"Shut up," he whispered.

"Not someone whose enemies will target me to get to him. I don't want to die because you pissed off some other family's don and..."

"Shut the fuck up!" He stood and glared down at her, chest rising and falling rapidly.

"Basically, I want someone who is nothing like you," Sienna finished, hammering the final nail into the coffin.

The emerging feelings he had for her should be dead and buried now. The pain in his dark gaze mirrored the pain in her dark soul. *I'm sorry*. He'd never hear that apology. But she still had to say it, even if it was only to herself. Tears blurred her vision as he stormed away from her, heading toward the door.

An insane urge to reach for him, to pull him back to her, crept over her. Thankfully, she was tied up and couldn't go to him. Blinking back tears, she forced herself to hold it together. She couldn't break in front of him. *Never let them see you sweat*. A sob nearly escaped her when he stopped to look back at her one last time.

That look nearly left her breathless. No one had ever longed for her the way this man longed for her. He was wearing his heart on his sleeve. It was all there in his eyes and in the way he clenched and unclenched his fists. He was struggling with this. And so was she. She could tell him who she was right now.

She could ask him about Eve and see what he had to say. If she was right about him, if he truly wasn't the monster Natalie painted him out to be, then they could chalk this up to a misunderstanding. She wasn't a fan of misunderstandings and didn't want to be the cause of one. However, this was a delicate situation.

If she was wrong about him, if he was who Natalie painted him out to be, that could jeopardize Eve's safety. Sienna couldn't afford to be wrong. She needed more time. She hadn't known this man for a full twenty-four hours yet. How could she put all of her trust in him right away?

She couldn't. No matter how badly she wanted to. It just wasn't a realistic option for her. *Leave already*, she silently begged him. *Don't just stand there, staring. Leave, before I hesitate again and tell you everything, all of my secrets, things no one should know*. She took a few deep breaths to calm her heart and the nearly uncontrollable urge to cry.

Finally, he left the room. The door slammed shut behind him, hammering the final nail into her coffin. Tears raced

down her cheeks, and she wished with everything in her that she'd met him under different circumstances. She wished they'd met before their souls had been corrupted. The girl she would've been, and the boy he could've been, would have been great together.

But the woman she was today and the man he'd been forged into would be a disaster together. A beautiful disaster. But a disaster, nonetheless. Despite knowing that, tears slipped down her cheeks as she cried for what could've been something great if only the world hadn't deemed them unworthy.

Chapter Fifteen



Stefano

He slammed the door behind him and pressed his back against it. Too bad he couldn't shut out her words just as easily. Stefano closed his eyes and rested his head against the door. The shit she'd said shouldn't be getting to him this way. This woman had gotten under his skin in a way many had tried but failed to.

For the life of him, he didn't know how she'd managed to do it. In the past, he hadn't cared what anyone thought of him. And they'd called him far worse shit than she had. He'd been called brutal, savage, cold-hearted, selfish scum, a street rat, a maniac, and more shit that hadn't bothered him.

But she'd said the most basic word, and he'd felt like he was about to lose his damn mind. She'd said he wasn't good. *Good*. It was something he'd never strived to be. It was something that no one was. Nobody was good. Not in the true sense of the word. Everyone was flawed. Hell, she wasn't even good with her crazy ass.

So why the fuck was it bothering him so much that she wanted a good man, and he wasn't that man? All of Gina's words were on repeat in his mind. It was like an irritating bird outside of his window, chirping while he was trying to sleep. Her chirps kept echoing through his head.

Good.

Positive.

Not a killer.

Not in the mafia.

She wanted the exact opposite of what and who he was. As much as he hated to admit it, that shit stung. He tried to shut her voice out. It was impossible. He found himself analyzing her words, searching for loopholes. *She wanted a man who was good.* If she had a good man, she'd only try to corrupt him.

She wanted a man who was positive. Stefano was a hundred percent positive she'd drive that man insane. *She wanted a man who wouldn't bring danger into her life.* Her crazy ass was the danger. She would bring danger into that man's life. *She wanted a man who wouldn't get her killed.*

No man would get her killed because she'd kill him before that happened. Whether his little demon knew it or not, she needed a man like him. Someone who could handle her crazy. Someone who would protect her from her enemies. Someone who wasn't good and who didn't expect her to be good either.

Someone who knew that life was a balance of negatives and positives, good and bad. No one could be positive all the time. Those who were, were just faking it. This world was too unstable for that. She needed someone who was dangerous and could handle the dangers that came with her.

But that wasn't what his little demon wanted. That shouldn't bother him. But it fucking did. He couldn't blame Gina for wanting a better man than him. No woman truly wanted men like him. Those who did crave his attention shouldn't. It would be safer for them not to.

Darkness followed him everywhere he went, clinging to him like a second skin. And that darkness would be transferred to any unlucky soul who dared love him. Look at what happened to his mother. He hadn't discovered all the details yet, but the jest of what happened seemed pretty clear.

She'd fallen in love with Lorenzo DeLuca, and she'd died. She'd be alive today if she had never fallen in love with him. Men like him, men of his bloodline who walked amongst the shadows and thrived in the darkness, couldn't truly love someone else. Not the way that person needed to be loved.

He knew that. He'd always known that. Even his grandmother had kept her distance from him. He hadn't understood why until he'd learned he was a DeLuca. Even before he'd learned of his dark heritage, that darkness had lived in him, making him unlovable to the one person who should've been the first one to love him.

If she couldn't, how could anyone else? No, he wasn't good. Neither did he pretend to be. And he didn't need Gina fucking Washington to tell him that. Fuck her crazy ass! It wasn't like he wanted to fall in love anyway. He didn't want some woman in his face every time he stepped into his home.

He didn't need her calling him and texting him when he was torturing someone or burying a body. He didn't need her asking him where he was and who he was with. He didn't need any of the complications that came with being in a relationship. He craved silence. He craved solitary.

He was better off alone. He was better off without her. He faced the door, barely suppressing the urge to kick it in. What the fuck was wrong with him? *Her. It was her*, Stefano thought, pointing at the closed door. She was what was wrong with him. He needed to get away from her.

He needed a moment to breathe without seeing her face or hearing her voice. Without thinking of her smile or the fire in her eyes. Without remembering the tears that had welled in her eyes when he'd been fighting in the ring. That type of concern couldn't be faked. Or maybe it could.

He didn't know. Stefano sighed. He was tired of going around and around in circles, trying to decipher what was real and what wasn't when it came to his little demon. Balling his hand into a fist, Stefano turned and stormed down the hall of his home, heading toward his bedroom.

Why was his room so damn far away? He rounded the corner and marched down the next hall. When he reached his room, he entered it, slammed the door behind him, and locked it. He stalked over to his large bed and fell back onto it. *Fuck*. He groaned, back aching and bandages bunching up.

How had he forgotten that he was still healing? He remembered where each bruise, cut, and scrape were on Gina's body. Yet, he couldn't remember that he, too, was wounded. And some of those wounds had been inflicted by her. Embracing the pain, he stared up at the ceiling, trying to erase her from his mind, if only for just a minute.

He needed to get some rest while she could. His little demon was tied up well. There was no way she could escape. Even if she escaped her ties, she wouldn't make it off his property. The house was on lockdown. No one could get in or out without his permission. She was safe from his enemies and hers.

But was she safe from him? He didn't know the answer to that question yet. And he was too drained to think about it. Stefano closed his eyes. Time passed. Sleep failed to claim him. Damn it. He shoved his hand into his pocket and slid his phone out. Since he was too riled up to sleep, he may as well get some work done.

Enzo had asked him to check in with Terzo and Lino to see how things were going. He may as well do that now. After unlocking his phone, he scrolled through it until he found the number he was looking for. Before he could press call, his phone started to ring. *Think of the devil, and he'd appear.* Stefano answered the call.

“What's wrong, Terzo?”

“Is that any way to answer the phone, *cousin*?” Terzo asked.

Stefano closed his eyes. *Not this again.* Since learning they were related, Terzo hadn't ceased trying to get Stefano to call him cousin.

“You there, cousin? Or did you hang up?”

“What's wrong, Terzo?”

“Let me borrow one hundred dollars, cousin?”

Opening his eyes, Stefano shook his head. “I'm hanging up.”

“I’m just fucking with you, cousin. I called to talk serious shit.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“First, call me cousin.”

Stefano ended the call. He kept the phone by his ear. When it rang, he waited a bit before answering.

“What do you want?”

“You’re just as ornery as your brother,” Terzo complained.

Stefano held in his chuckle. “You said you had serious shit to tell me. Do it.”

“Oh, yeah. Don Bianchi’s cousin, Arnaldo, was spotted in Bari, Italy, last night.”

The smile left Stefano’s face.

“Where is he?” Stefano growled.

“I don’t know. But my source says he was eating at a restaurant with his mistress last night. His wife and kids haven’t been seen. Neither has his cousin, Don Bianchi. Since Don Bianchi went ghost, Arnaldo has been out of sight also. For him to appear like this, in public, on our turf, means he’s sending a message. I take it as them saying, *they’re back. And they’re not scared.*”

Stefano heard their message loud and clear. He was glad they were back. Soon, they’d be buried. He sat up slowly, careful of his wounds. They were back just in time because he needed someone to take his frustrations out on.

“Which restaurant did he eat at?”

Terzo listed the restaurant.

“Shit,” Stefano muttered. “Enzo took Eve there last week.”

“I know. And get this, Arnaldo and his lady ordered the same food Enzo and Eve ordered. And you know Eve asks for weird shit when she eats out. His date asked for the same thing.”

Another subliminal message sent and received. They were hinting that they were after Eve. Stefano sighed. He hated this subliminal shit. He wanted to meet these bitches face to face and end this. Sneaking around, sending messages, that wasn't what he was into. They wanted to play games.

Stefano had never been interested in games, not even as a child. He wanted to put his hands on them. He wanted to see the fear in their eyes seconds before the light faded from their gazes, and they were gone forever. He wanted to feel the warmth of their blood seeping between his fingers as he squeezed the life out of them.

"I wanted to tell Enzo this," Terzo continued, pulling Stefano away from his dark thoughts. "But he'd lose his damn mind if I did. He's already crazy. He gets extra crazy when it comes to Eve. If I'd told him this first, he would've run off on a killing spree by himself. That's why I decided to tell my calmer cousin first. That's you, by the way."

Calmer? Yeah, he was calmer than Enzo. Most of the time. But Stefano also wanted to go on a killing spree. He was in the mood to be bad, be negative, to be a killer who was part of a mafia family. To be everything his little demon despised. Why the hell was he thinking about her at a time like this?

"My source doesn't know where Arnaldo and his chick went after their meal. I don't know if they're still in Bari or not," Terzo informed him. "I've got a guy watching Arnaldo's estate. If he shows up there, my guy will let me know. So far, Don Bianchi hasn't been to his estate or any of his usual spots."

Stefano had a feeling Don Bianchi hadn't left the country. He was lurking under the radar, watching and waiting for the right time to come slithering out of whatever hole he was hiding in. He couldn't hide forever. When he emerged, they'd be waiting for him.

As for Arnaldo, he'd signed his death warrant the moment he'd decided to go up against them. Targeting Eve meant his death would no longer be swift. He'd suffer greatly before they finally ended him.

“I want eyes on Arnaldo,” Stefano ordered. “I want him in front of me as soon as possible. Alive. I want to be the one who ends him.”

“Gotcha. There’s one more thing. It may not be important.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“Lino’s friend told him about this new drug on the streets. It’s, uh, different.”

“Different, how?”

“It makes motherfuckers forget what they do after they take it. I mean, the memory is just gone. Anything you do after the drug kicks in and before the effects wear off is gone.”

“This got Lino worried?”

“He’s not worried about it affecting our business. He’s worried about the timing of it popping up on the streets. If the Bianchi’s are back, and this new drug is hitting the streets at the same time, they may be connected. Then again, maybe not. We just wanted to give you a heads up.”

“Noted. I’ll let Enzo know.”

“And tell Eve I said hi.”

“You must have a death wish.”

“It’s not fair that Enzo keeps her all to himself. I have to go all the way to Tower D to have lunch with her.”

“You should stop doing that. Enzo has threatened to cut your dick off.”

“If he cut a few inches off, it would still be bigger than his.”

“Terzo!”

His cousin laughed. “Calm down. Eve is family. Why can’t I have lunch with her?”

“Leave her alone, Terzo.”

“I’m not doing anything wrong. I don’t flirt with her. Much.”

“Terzo!”

“It’s not serious flirting. She’s already threatened to cut my balls off if I do anything to upset Enzo. I just hang out with her to keep an eye on her, to make sure she’s safe. She’s family. Plus, sometimes I need her advice on women.”

Advice on women?

“Does, she, uh...” Stefano rubbed his hand through his hair. “Does she give sound advice on women?”

“She does and... Wait. Why do you want to know?”

“Just curious.”

“Yeah, right. You’re never curious about anything. Do you have a woman, Stefano?”

“Hell no.”

“A man?”

“Terzo!”

“Just asking. I wouldn’t judge you if you did.”

“I’m hanging up.”

“Hey, wait!”

“What?”

“Tell me about your lady friend. Does she have big breasts? Is she into double penetration?”

“I’m hanging up.”

“No! Wait, there’s something else.”

Stefano hesitated before asking, “What, Terzo?”

“The last time I brought Eve lunch, we talked about her friend from Chicago. Eve believes her friend is in danger, and she said you were looking for her friend. I think her name is Sierra.”

“Sienna,” Stefano corrected him.

Eve’s friends’ name was Sienna Keys. He couldn’t forget the name because Eve texted him every other day asking if

he'd located her yet. He'd yet to get any hits on the woman. Stefano hoped she was still alive. However, he feared he'd have bad news for Eve when his investigation was done.

"Have you heard anything about the woman?" Terzo asked.

"Not yet. I've got your cousins in Chicago looking into it."

"*Our* cousins."

"What?" Stefano asked, frowning.

"You said *my* cousins," Terzo told him. "But they're *your* cousins too, which makes them *our* cousins."

"I've got *DeLucas* in Chicago looking into it."

Terzo chuckled. "Don't fight it, cousin. You're family. Blood of my blood. You can't escape it. You're a DeLuca."

Don't remind me.

"Why are you asking about that?" Stefano asked.

"Eve wanted me to look into it too. I've got some connects in Illinois. I guess she doesn't trust you to get it done."

"She doesn't trust anyone to get it done. She even faxed all of the information to them herself because she felt like I'd forget something."

"She gave me the pic of the chick to have my connects search for her. When I find her, I may have to claim her. She's a beauty."

Stefano hadn't had a chance to look over the information himself. And now, he had his hands full with a beauty of his own. If Terzo wanted to handle the Sienna case, he'd let him. But Stefano would still reach out to his cousins in Chicago to see if they'd found anything. He wanted Eve to be reunited with her friend.

"If that's all, I'm hanging up," Stefano told him.

"That's all for now. Later."

"Later."

Stefano ended the call. He was glad Terzo had brought up Eve's friend. Stefano needed to check in to see if there was any progress on locating Sienna Keys. He sent a quick text, asking if there were any updates on the woman he was searching for. After sending the text, he shoved the phone back into his pocket.

He didn't expect there to be any news. Eve's friend was doing a damn good job of lying low. Her image had yet to pop up anywhere his cousins in Chicago could find her. And she wasn't using the phone associated with the number Eve had given him. The best-case scenario was that she was hiding, surviving.

Worst case scenario, she was captured or dead. That was some news he didn't want to deliver to the don's woman. Since she and Terzo were friends, maybe he'd let Terzo deliver the news. Terzo was good at calming Eve down when she was upset, which pissed Enzo off. So did the fact that Terzo could make Eve laugh, even when she was mad at Enzo.

If Terzo wasn't careful, Enzo would forget they were family and put a bullet in him. Stefano wondered what type of advice Eve had been giving Terzo about women. As crazy as Eve was, he'd be surprised if her advice was sound. Since she was crazy, maybe she'd give good advice on how to deal with a woman who was just as crazy as her.

Speaking of crazy, it was about time he checked in on his little demon. Stefano rose from the bed and strode across the room to his desk. With a flip of his wrist, he opened his laptop and waited for the lock screen to appear. After sitting down and scooting his chair closer to the desk, he typed in his information and pulled up his security cameras.

Normally, he didn't have so many cameras in the room Gina was in. He'd added a few this morning while she was out. After bathing Gina and changing her clothing, he'd tied her up in his small living area and positioned hidden cameras all around the room. Why? Fuck if he knew. It wasn't like he needed to keep an eye on her to keep her from getting free.

He clicked on the camera that gave him the best view of his prisoner. She was relaxed against the chair, head back, eyes closed, sleeping. *Sleeping!* She was kidnapped, yet she was sleeping like she didn't have a care in the world. Fuming, Stefano rewound the footage to see what she'd done right after he'd left her side.

He'd been losing his mind thinking about her. But her ass had been sleeping. He stopped it when he saw himself exit the room. He pressed play. Seconds later, Stefano's eyes widened. She was crying. Why? He rubbed his palm against his chest, trying to ease the ache there.

Why was she crying? Were her ties too tight? Was she sick? Her lips moved. She was talking to herself. Stefano turned the volume up. With it at its highest level, he could still barely make out what she was saying. But, it sounded like she was apologizing.

"I'm sorry, Beast," she cried. "I'm so sorry."

Stefano stared on in shock. She was apologizing to him. He leaned closer to the screen. Tears were leaving her eyes because of him. He blinked when the screen moved, the image becoming smaller.

Damn, he'd touched it. Without thinking, he'd tried to wipe her tears away. Like an idiot, his rubbing the screen had changed the size of the image. He clicked to pull the proper image back up.

"If it weren't for my mission, I wouldn't dare hurt you," she cried.

So, someone had sent her. Stefano leaned so close to the screen that his nose almost touched it. His little demon was truly crying because of him. She felt terrible for what she'd done. He was glad she regretted it, but she didn't have to cry about it. It was just a little cut. He'd had worst, much worst.

Seeing her cry made him uncomfortable. Stefano wanted to wipe her tears away and make her promise she'd never cry over something so unimportant again. Seeing this changed

everything. All the anger from before was gone. He watched as she closed her eyes, trying to reign in her emotions.

“Pull yourself together,” she told herself. “Crying over a guy you just met and failed to defeat is something weak bitches do. You’re a bad bitch. Ugh, but bad bitches have bad days too. And apparently, bad bitches fall in love at first sight too!” Her shoulders shook as more tears spilled down her cheeks. “I’m so screwed,” she cried.

Stefano laughed, then groaned and clutched his side. This woman. Though he was in pain, he couldn’t wipe the silly grin off his face. *Love at first sight*. He chuckled as he stood up. *Love at first sight*. Why the hell couldn’t he stop smiling? He was acting like Enzo now. He rewound the video back some and watched their interaction together.

Whenever he’d winced or seemed in pain, she’d cringed and guilt had filled her eyes. His little demon wasn’t as aloof as she’d pretended to be. That made him happy. Very happy. Stefano schooled his expression into one of seriousness. Again, watching this video had changed everything.

First things first. He’d find out who’d sent her, who’d forced her to do this, then he’d end that person. *As for his little demon*. Stefano continued staring at her image on the screen. His little assassin was now under his protection. She belonged to him. She’d chosen to walk into the Beast’s lair, and there she’d remain.

Because of love at first sight.

Chapter Sixteen



Sienna

He was back.

Sienna prayed no traces of her tears were left on her face. It wasn't like she could wipe them away if they were. She hadn't meant to have a mini breakdown. It had all just hit her out of nowhere. Emotions weren't her thing. She had a hard time processing them, which was why she tried to avoid them.

Her life was complicated enough. Add emotions and that just made things chaotic. Add Stefano, and well, that was a recipe for a beautiful disaster. Especially since he'd made her feel all the emotions in the world in under twelve hours. *Curiosity, excitement, arousal, hatred, love: or something akin to it, hope, guilt, regret, shame, and more.*

All of those ingredients had been thrown into one big pot, and after he'd left the room, that pot had boiled over. In her defense, she couldn't have mentally prepared herself for the storm that was Stefano, the Silent Beast. There was nothing she could've done to get herself ready for their first encounter.

Now, Sienna was feeling overwhelmed and needed time to herself. Yet, he was back. Once again, the pot was starting to simmer. She'd just calmed herself down. His presence was stirring things up again. Stefano stormed across the room, not sparing a glance for her. *Ouch.* Being ignored by her enemy shouldn't sting. But it did.

He headed to the corner of the room. With his back to her, she couldn't tell what he was doing. She found herself leaning forward in her seat, straining upward, trying to see what he was up to. When he turned around, she quickly pretended she hadn't just been watching him. To her surprise, he held a glass of water in one hand.

She couldn't see what he had in the other. It was probably pain pills. Or something he'd tell her was pain pills. It could be anything. She had to remain alert and cautious. He stormed over to her. Once he was standing in front of her, he opened his other hand. Yup, two white pills were in his palm. Sienna wasn't taking that shit. She'd suffer in silence.

“What's that?” Sienna nodded to the white pills in his palm. “Are you going to poison me? Only weak men poison people.”

Eyes glued to hers, he brought the pills toward her lips. She turned her head to the side to avoid having the pills shoved into her mouth.

“Just because you're mad about what I said earlier doesn't mean you have to poison me,” she told him. “I have a right to feel what I feel.”

He slammed the glass down on the end table next to her, causing water to slosh over the rim. He then gripped her chin and forced her to look his way. It was a struggle to keep her lips pressed together. A struggle she quickly lost.

The bastard forced her mouth open and pushed the pills inside. Before she could spit them out, he was pouring water down her throat. She coughed, damn near strangling on the liquid. He placed his hand over her mouth and tilted her head back.

“Swallow,” he ordered.

She hadn't wanted to swallow. It happened involuntarily. Her body did what it had to do to keep from choking to death. She swallowed. He removed his hand and she erupted into a fit of coughs. She couldn't believe she'd thought she was falling in love with this brute!

“Do you need another sip of water?” he asked.

Hell yeah. But she couldn't say that because she was drowning. She sucked in a deep breath before another round of coughing consumed her. Her eyes watered. So, this was how it would end for her.

She always thought she'd get a Viking's funeral. Put her on a pyre, light it up, and let her soul return to Valhalla to be with the rest of the Valkyries or wherever female assassins went after they perished.

“Do you want the water or not?” he asked.

“No. I don't need any...” She coughed again, throat burning. “Of your dumb ass water.”

Just give it to me. Don't make me ask for it. My pride is too big.

He chuckled. “You sure?”

Was he laughing at her pain? She glared up at him. She wanted to say no again. But he seemed up to something.

“Give me some of the dumb ass water,” she demanded, but her words didn't pack any punch.

She sounded like a chipmunk. She'd accept the offer just in case he left the room and told her this would be the last glass of water she got. She may be petty, prideful, and vengeful, but not enough to jeopardize her health. Well, sometimes enough to jeopardize her health, but not this time. She didn't struggle when he placed the rim of the glass against her lips.

“Open your mouth for me, *piccola demone.*”

Why did he have to say it all sexy-like? *The bastard!* She parted her lips.

“Wider,” he demanded.

She parted her lips a fraction more, wide enough for water to enter.

“I think I'm going to have to teach you what wider means, *bella demone.*”

Pussy, I know your stupid ass is not getting turned on by this. Read the room. We're tied up and not in the good way. This motherfucker is holding us captive. He's angry with us for stabbing him and then insulting him. We could die here. Stop being nasty.

Swallowing down her pride, Sienna opened her mouth wider. With one hand, he tilted her chin back. With the other, he slowly poured water into her mouth. Her eyes remained on his. His remained on her. Neither looked away. It was the stupidest, most erotic shit ever. Water splashed against her tongue.

Had water always tasted this good? It couldn't have. There was no way. If it had, she would've drunk more of it. The room-temperature beverage rolled over her tongue before sliding down her throat. No gagging this time. Miss Davies' girls had taught her how to control her gag reflex.

He'd almost choked her the last time. This time, she was ready for it. She swallowed it down while keeping her mouth open and her eyes on him. His gaze became heated as he watched her. She couldn't help but wonder if he was imagining her drinking from him, no gagging involved.

"That's my good girl," he whispered, voice deep, seductive. "Drink as much as you need."

What the hell was happening right now? She was ashamed of the arousal coursing through her. Stockholm syndrome was real, and she was experiencing it right now. He stopped pouring, and she swallowed what she had in her mouth. He used his thumb to slowly wipe away a droplet of water from her lips.

She wanted to look away from him, she really did. But his dark eyes held her captive. Instead of looking away, she licked her lips before he removed his thumb. Her tongue grazed the pad of his finger. She shivered. Or maybe he shivered. One of them shivered. He slowly moved his hand away, but his eyes didn't leave hers.

She'd never been eye-fucked before. But it felt like his eyes were fucking her up against her damn chair. She squeezed

her thighs tighter together and told herself to calm down. She really should say something to fill the awkward silence between them and rid the room of the sexual tension that was clouding her judgment.

“Thank you for the pain meds. But I would’ve been fine without them.”

Seriously, Sienna? Was it that hard to say thank you? Why did she have to add that last part? Why couldn’t she just thank the man? Instead of being angry, her savage gifted her with a smile that made her wish he was the one tied up and at her mercy so she could do wicked things to him.

“I never said those were pain meds,” he whispered.

Wait a minute now.

“What did you say?” Sienna asked, pulling herself away from her wicked thoughts.

“Those weren’t pain pills, little demon.” He chuckled as he turned to leave the room.

“They weren’t pain pills? What the hell were they? Hey! Hey! Stefano! Get back here and tell me what the hell you just put in my mouth. You rat bastard. If you poisoned me, I’m going to kill you. For real, this time. Stefano. Stefano!”

The door closed behind him. A lock clicked. Her captor was gone. Seriously though, what the hell had he given her?

“Stefano!” Sienna shouted.

Was she starting to feel light-headed? Yeah, she was. Wasn’t she? The lock clicked again. Her eyes returned to the door as it opened slowly.

“You’re still conscious?” he asked, frowning.

“You drugged me?” she whispered.

“Why do you sound shocked? You *stabbed* me.”

“I...” She went silent. Actually, it was an unintentional stabbing. The blade hadn’t even gone deep.

“So, you can stab me, but I can’t drug you?” he asked.

Sienna opened her mouth, then closed it. This was a weird conversation, and she didn't want to be a part of it. He walked back into the room. The door closed behind him with a soft click.

"Are you going to answer me?" he asked, moving to the chair across from her. "You stabbed me," he said again.

But did you die? She'd stabbed lots of people in her life. She'd been stabbed by lots of people. Stabbings happened. It was a part of life. Her gaze dropped to his bandage. She really wanted to check his wound. It was bothering her that she couldn't.

"You stabbed me," he said again.

She eyed him. "You're acting as if you were a perfect gentleman to me in the ring. You threw me onto the mat, Stefano," she reminded him. "That hurt."

"You stabbed me."

"It was just a flesh wound."

"It required stitches."

"Well, you pressed your thumb against my wound that you could tell wasn't fully healed. That shit hurt."

"You..." he paused.

For a long time, he just stared at her. The clock ticked. She counted the seconds. She'd almost given up on him saying anything when he finally replied.

"About that," he started. "I'm... I'm sorry."

Her mouth almost dropped open. She must be dreaming. That's it. She'd fallen asleep, and now she was dreaming. Because there was no way the man she'd stabbed was apologizing for hurting her. No way! *Who the hell are you, Stefano?*

"I'm also sorry for throwing you onto the mat. And for drugging you," he apologized. "If I hadn't drugged you myself, the security team would have. Then they would've

carried you off, away from me. They would've punished you. Trust me. You didn't want that. I'm the lesser of two evils."

Maybe. But what was she supposed to say to that? This wasn't how any of her past interactions with kidnappers had gone down. Sienna was confused, and she hated being confused. He'd drugged her to save her from a worst fate. Even after she'd stabbed him. Information overload. This was too much for her suspicious brain to process at once.

"Um," she started. Yeah, she had no words.

He leaned forward in his seat. "I'm man enough to admit when I'm wrong, Gina."

My name is not Gina. But I'm not woman enough to admit that. Guilt flashed over her. Since he was being so open with her, it made her want to be honest with him. It made her want to tell him everything. Sure, he was the Silent Beast. But with her, he was just a savage teddy bear. Or at least he pretended to be. Like clockwork, Maureen's voice filtered into her thoughts.

Never be fooled by the enemy, especially if he's a man. Men expect women to be emotional. So, they play on our emotions to get us to talk. Show no emotions. To survive, we must be dead inside. If not, they'll eat us alive.

Sienna swallowed. What to do? Just sitting there, being quiet, was all she knew to do right now.

"I know your real name isn't Gina," he told her. "When you're ready, you can tell me who you really are. And when you're ready, you can tell me who sent you."

"No one sent me," she muttered, staring down at the carpet.

He sighed heavily. She could hear his frustration in the sound.

"Gina..." he paused.

She glanced up at him to see his eyes closed. Her poor Beast was barely holding it together. He opened his eyes and continued.

“Little Demon, you can be honest with me.”

“I am.”

“I’m serious,” he said, anger evident in his tone. “I’m learning that I can take a lot when it comes to you. I can be patient with you. But I won’t tolerate you lying to me. I can’t do that because this involves your safety. I’m not willing to play around with your safety just because you’re afraid to tell me who sent you. So, say you’re not ready to tell me. Say you’re afraid of telling me. But don’t tell me no one sent you because I know someone did.”

Her first thought was to ask him who the hell he was yelling at. Her second thought was to tell him that she didn’t give a damn about what he could or couldn’t tolerate. What stopped her from going on the defensive and lashing out was the look in his eyes. He looked lost, desperate, hopeful.

It was a look that floored her. It was a look that made the guilt and shame return in full force. Sienna knew she should say something. He was waiting for her to say something, anything. But she had a bad habit of making things worse when she talked. Hell, her mere presence in places tended to make things worse for people.

That was why she needed to push him away. He may think he wanted her, but he didn’t want the trouble that was Sienna Keys. Even her mentor, the woman who’d trained her to be who she was, hadn’t wanted her in the end. Sienna blinked back tears. Now was not the time to dwell on the past. She opened her mouth and said the only thing she could think to say.

“My arms have gone numb.”

His eyes dropped to the floor as he rubbed his hand through his dark hair, clearly frustrated with her.

“I’m not trying to make you mad,” Sienna told him. “I just... I’m being honest. And I feel like you’re not.”

“I’m the only one being honest in this room,” he told her.

“Lies! You’re acting like you truly felt something for me at Club Tacere. But I know you only saw me as an easy fuck

when I walked into the bar.”

Since he wanted to be honest, then he should be honest about how he’d viewed her when he’d first seen her.

“Is that what you want to hear?” he asked.

“If it’s the truth, yeah. Stop sugar-coating things.”

“Okay. I’ll tell you the truth. I went there to fight and fuck,” he admitted. “You stepped in, looking like a naïve distraction. And I had to have you. One touch had you begging me to kiss you.”

Her cheeks heated in embarrassment. It wasn’t one touch. It was more like two. *I mean, come on!* She wasn’t *that* easy.

“Had you not tried to kill me,” he continued. “I would’ve fucked your brains out then forgotten about you, just like the other women who’ve gone to motels with me after I left the dungeon.”

It’s okay, heart. Don’t break. You can’t break over someone you just met.

“You were just another distraction to me,” he admitted. “Nothing more. Nothing less. The only reason you’re here with me now is because I need to know who sent you. Once I find out, I’ll get rid of you. The mastermind behind you is the person I’m concerned with. You’re just in the way. If it takes you too long to tell me who sent you, I’ll torture the information out of you. Then I’ll end you.”

There he was. The savage. The man who showed his prey no mercy. She’d known if she kept pressuring him for the truth, he’d eventually reveal his true colors. Yeah, his words hurt. At least she could stop feeling guilty about stabbing him. Stefano, the Silent Beast, was indeed the monster she thought he was.

And that fact hurt more than his words had.

Chapter Seventeen



Sienna

“Are you happy now?” he asked.

Happy? How could she possibly be happy after he’d dropped that bomb on her?

“Is that what you wanted to hear?” he continued. “That you meant nothing to me? Less than nothing? That you were just going to be a piece of ass to me?”

She closed her eyes in an attempt to shut him out, barely believing the truth could hurt so damn much. Anguish flashed over her, surprising her with its intensity. *Don’t feel*, she told herself. *Don’t feel. Never let them see you sweat.* Usually, she was a pro at shutting off her emotions.

His words had broken her emotion-lever, and she couldn’t seem to shut off the flow of pain trickling in. Why did his words hurt so fucking much? They were just words. What happened to *sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me*? Lies! Words could hurt worse than sticks, stones, and daggers.

Physical wounds could heal. The wounds inflicted by words never went away. They festered until they either broke you or changed you. He ordered her to look at him. She ignored him. She’d look when she was good and ready. He gripped her hair and tilted her head back.

“Open your eyes,” he demanded.

She didn’t want to. She didn’t want to see the painful truth in his heartless stare.

“Now!” he yelled.

If she opened her eyes now, she'd start crying. *Never let them see you sweat.* Ugh! Would she ever stop hearing Maureen's voice in her head?

“Don't make me ask you again,” Stefano growled.

Fuck it. She opened her eyes. Their gazes clashed. She refused to look away. So, did he.

“You wanted to see what your words did to me?” she yelled. “Then look. See what they did.”

She let the tears fall, unashamed yet, ashamed at the same time. No other man had ever seen her cry. No other man had ever made her cry. She withheld her tears and pleas from her enemies because she knew that angered them. She'd trained herself to suffer in silence.

Yet, she was shedding tears in front of Stefano. She was shedding tears *because* of Stefano. Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Since he wanted to admire his handiwork, since he was determined to see the art his words had created, she let him.

She let the hurt out and showed it to him. Every artist deserved a chance to bask in the glory of their creation. She flinched when he placed his thumbs under her eyes and wiped her tears away. Though his expression was one of fury, his tone was soft.

“Stop crying, little demon.”

Sienna shook her head. “This was what you wanted.”

“This is not what I wanted. I could never want this, piccola demone. I took it too far. I'm sorry.”

That only made her cry harder! *What the hell is wrong with me? Am I sick? Maybe I'm dying. That must be it.*

“I did go to Tacere to fight, fuck, and forget about my problems,” he confirmed. “And when you walked in, I thought you'd make a beautiful distraction. But then something happened. I don't know what it was.”

He wiped her eyes again. Sienna remained silent, holding on to each word he uttered.

“Maybe it happened when you smiled at me,” he continued, gaze dropping to her lips. “That smile did something to me. It touched something deep. Something I didn’t know was there.”

More tears fell, not because his words hurt. But because she understood them. She understood how a smile could touch someone who didn’t get smiled at often.

“Or maybe it happened when you kissed me. I don’t like being touched. I associate touch with... fighting.”

He was choosing his words carefully as if he was afraid what he’d reveal would frighten her. It would take a lot to frighten her. Like, the devil would have to dig his way out of hell for her to be frightened. Even then, she’d be more concerned with him getting dirt on her heels than the actual fact that the devil was in front of her.

And if he had horns, she’d probably ask if she could touch them. She had a monster fetish. Basically, she could handle a lot, and not much scared her because she’d already been through so much. The devil couldn’t be any worse than Maureen.

“I understand not liking to be touched,” she told him. “I get it.”

“I also don’t like kissing,” he added. “But with you, it was different. You didn’t kiss me like you were trying to seduce me. Or like you were trying to please me so that I’d end up liking you. It wasn’t fake or scripted.”

His words made her feel good, especially since she wasn’t a fan of kissing. His words made her forget all about the tears she’d just shed.

The narcissistic part of her had her asking, “Since you say I didn’t kiss you like I was trying to please you, what did I kiss you like?”

Her beast didn’t hesitate to answer.

“You kissed me like I was air. And I responded in the same manner because you had become like air to me.”

Air? She was officially confused.

“Explain.”

Stefano chuckled. “It may sound crazy, but you kissed me like you needed me. I sure as hell needed you. To feel your need for me only made me need you more. And that’s crazy as hell to me because I’ve always thought I didn’t need anyone.”

Same, Beast. Same. This man was so much like her that it was crazy.

“I’m not sure if it was the kiss or the smile,” he confessed. “Maybe it was a combination of both. Perhaps it was just because it was you. But I went from wanting you to be a distraction, to just wanting you to... *be.*”

“Be what?” she questioned, wanting to hear more, needing it like... *air.*

“I don’t know,” he answered, staring down at the armrest. “I just needed you to *be.* To be real. To be with me. To be near me. I wanted you to be you and to be okay with me being me. I just need you to be... there. I needed you to be there with me. To be here with me. To be wherever I’m at because I want to be wherever you are. I needed you to be... mine.”

It was official. She’d fallen in love with her enemy in less than twenty-four hours. Time didn’t matter to her heart. To her heart, it seemed like she’d known this man forever. Most of her life, she’d felt there was something missing. Like there was more out there, and if she could just be free of Maureen, she’d find it.

Stefano was that *more* she’d dreamed of, the more that was missing from her life. This man was no prince charming. That was fine with her. She’d take a savage over prince charming any day of the week. Everything seemed to click for her now that she’d realized there had been a Stefano-shaped space in her heart that had been empty.

He’d stepped into that space the moment he approached her in the bar. If he was to walk away now, she’d be left

feeling empty again. She didn't want to go back to being empty. But to go in the direction he was trying to steer them was as scary as it was exciting. Did she have the courage to embark on that journey with him?

“When I was in the ring, my mind wasn't on the fights I was fighting,” he told her. “I was thinking about you. I was thinking about my life. And how mundane everything I had become. Then I saw you crying for me when I was close to losing the fight, and I wanted...”

He went silent, and she was left hanging off the steepest cliffhanger to ever exist.

“What?” she whispered, needing to hear more. “You wanted what?”

He shook his head. “You want me to bare my soul to you, but you don't want to share anything with me. It doesn't work like that, *piccola demone*.”

“But...”

“No buts. If you're honest with me, I'll be everything for you.”

This man! More tears filled her eyes. Was he serious? She searched his gaze, looking for the real Stefano. Was the man before her him, the real Stefano? Or was the man who'd drugged and kidnapped Eve the real Stefano? Considering that he'd drugged and kidnapped Sienna also, maybe he was truly the villain of this tale.

Then again, maybe she was the villain of this tale, because he'd yet to hurt her. But he was wounded because of her. Perhaps, he hadn't hurt Eve either. If he hadn't, then where was her friend? A little voice at the back of her mind told her to just ask him. Another voice told her that asking would only put Eve in more danger.

At war with her thoughts, she didn't know what to do. She was so close to finding Eve. She was in Italy. She was with the man who'd taken Eve from the hospital. She couldn't risk messing this up. But what if Eve was fine? What if he hadn't

hurt her? What if he'd offered her friend aid the same way he was offering her aid?

Ugh! She was tired of being an adult and making her own decisions. She wanted someone to make them for her because adulting was too hard. Perhaps she was making it harder than it had to be. Damn her and her inability to trust and connect with others! Stefano rubbed his thumb across her cheek. Sienna found herself leaning into his touch.

"You don't trust me yet," he whispered. "I get it. I have a hard time trusting people also."

"That's not it. It's just..." Sienna went silent.

"Don't go quiet on me. Talk to me."

"You're confusing me and making me question everything I've done since the moment I met you," Sienna admitted, opening up just a tiny bit. "You're supposed to be the Silent Beast," Sienna told him. "But you're acting like a big teddy bear. I'm so damn confused."

"What if I told you I don't even know who I am? I'm just a product of what this world pieced together."

"Me too, Stefano," she admitted, opening up just a little bit more. "I," she started, then shifted in her seat to get more comfortable.

"Would it help if I undid the ties?"

Her eyes widened. Was this a trick question? He stood and strode across the room. She really felt like this was a trick question. He returned with a pocketknife. *A weapon!* Her gaze jerked to the door. If he freed her hands and feet, she could escape. She could use the pocket knife to defend herself.

Guilt washed over her as soon as that thought entered her mind. Was she really considering stabbing him again and escaping? Even after everything he'd just told her? In her defense, she was an assassin. Work habits were hard to break. It wasn't just a habit. It was a reflex. Whenever she saw a weapon, she had to grab it.

She held herself completely still as he freed her ankles from the ties. He made his way to the back of her as she planted her feet firmly on the floor. A few seconds later, her arms were free. From the corner of her eye, she saw him place the pocketknife on the end table next to her. He was testing her.

She'd never been that good at tests. Especially not multiple-choice tests. *A: Grab the knife. B: Leave it alone. C: None of the above, use your fists. D: Other.* Sienna eyed the knife. The career woman in her told her to choose A. Her rational mind said to choose B. The violent bitch in her with anger management issues said to choose C.

And her other personality, the one who hated making decisions, that confused heffa chose D. Again, she'd never been good at tests. Would she and her multiple personalities fail this one? She slowly brought her arms around to the front of her. The feeling was returning to them.

Instead of being numb, they now felt like a thousand tiny needles were pricking them. She'd felt worst. She tensed when he reached for her. Side-eyeing him, she didn't fight him when he bent down and scooped her up out of her seat. His jaw clenched as he sat down on the chair with her in his lap.

"Your side," she reminded him. "You shouldn't lift heavy things when you're wounded."

Says the woman who wounded him. At this point, she was in a constant state of guilt.

"You're not heavy at all," he told her.

Yeah, right.

"And my side is fine. It isn't your scratch that hurts me. It's the beating I took. Killer G was heavy as hell."

"I know. I thought you were a goner when he fell on you."

"You kept me going. Thank you for that."

His flattery was unnerving. She kept her eyes on him, trying to figure out what he was up to. All the while, she was

conscious of the knife on the end table that was begging her to pick it up. She flinched again when he reached for her arm.

“Stop flinching,” he told her as he began massaging her arm.

“What are you doing?” Sienna asked.

“What does it look like?” He smiled.

That smile! He was so handsome when he smiled like that. If she’d never come to Italy, she never would’ve met him. What a pity that would’ve been.

“If you keep looking at me like that, you’re going to make me think you like me,” he joked, making her remember a similar statement she’d made to him in Club Tacere last night. But her statement had been a bit more risqué.

“Does this arm feel better?” he asked.

Sienna nodded. He reached across her and pulled her other arm closer to him. He slowly massaged that arm too. His touch felt like heaven. She’d never had someone care for her as gently as he was.

Silent Beast, are you trying to ruin me for all men? Because no one will be able to measure up to you from now on. They wouldn’t even come close. He pushed her shirt sleeve up to stare at her arm.

“I’m sorry for twisting your arm in the fight ring,” he apologized sincerely. “No matter how angry I was, that was not okay.”

“It doesn’t hurt,” she assured him.

“Still, I shouldn’t have done it. Forgive me. *Mi vergono,*” he whispered. *I’m ashamed.*

Awww. Here, just take my heart already, Stefano. Damn! At this point, resisting him was akin to fighting a losing battle. There was no way she could win against his charm. A charm he probably didn’t realize he had. A charm that was breaking down the walls she’d erected around her heart, her mind, her soul.

It had taken her years to build a city of defense around her heart. It was equipped with booby traps and mazes to keep intruders out. Yet, Stefano was navigating around that city like he'd been given a road map of her heart, with instructions on how to overthrow the red queen who lived in the castle.

It was like he'd studied the rugged terrain there and knew the secret entrances into her fortress. He knew just what to say, just how to touch her to make her feel wanted and safe. Two things she'd rarely felt in life but had yearned for fiercely. And he was giving them to her without even trying, and without being asked to.

She now knew what he'd meant when he'd called her kiss unscripted. It was real, no force needed, just a desire to be with the person you were attracted to. The person whose demons calmed your demons. If only he knew how much that meant to her. If only she knew how to explain it.

She felt so vulnerable in front of this man. The feeling was uncomfortable because it was new. But risks were usually uncomfortable. *Are you worth the risk, Beastie? Please be worth the risk because I'm terrified right now. But I'm trying not to let it show. I'm trying my hardest not to go on the defensive again.*

That pocketknife was calling to her. But Stefano's call was louder. This was the most brutal and frightening battle she'd ever experienced. But if she won, if she made the right choice, it could become her greatest victory. Maureen's voice filtered into her thoughts. She shut it out. *Not right now, bitch!*

"I'm the one who's ashamed," she told him. "I regret how I treated you in the ring. I didn't have to take it that far."

"I guess we both have regrets," he told her. "I hope they can end here. *Niente più rimpianti, piccola demone.*" *No more regrets, little demon.*

She didn't want any more regrets either. She wanted to relax against him but didn't want to hurt his wound. A wound she'd caused. Sienna sighed, trying to ignore the guilt.

"Don't think. Just relax," he told her.

“I can’t shut my brain off,” she complained, as thoughts of her initial mission flowed through her mind, reminding her that she’d come to Italy for one reason only. And that reason wasn’t love.

“Just focus on what I’m doing,” Stefano instructed in that deep, soothing voice of his.

As much as she wanted to obey him, his words were easier said than done. Her mind was once again becoming overrun with thoughts of her mission. Her heart was overloaded with emotions. She kept replaying their fight in her mind. She remembered the hatred she’d felt toward him. Looking at him now, she felt none of that.

She was truly becoming a wishy-washy bitch and a horrible friend. She could no longer take not knowing. They couldn’t move forward until she had the answers she’d come here to get. It was time for her to question him about Eve. But she was a selfish bitch. And the selfish part of her needed one more thing to remember him by, just in case he really was the monster who’d taken her friend.

“Stefano, can I ask you something?”

He stared up at her, those dark eyes penetrating her soul.

“You can ask me anything you want, love. As long as you’re willing to share with me also.”

“I’m willing to share now.”

His smile was so fucking radiant!

“Ask me,” he told her.

She took a deep breath and released it slowly.

“Stefano?”

“Yes, piccola demone.”

“Can I fuck you?”

Chapter Eighteen



Sienna

His reactions to her question were instantaneous.

His eyes widened, his nose flared, and his body became tense. Sienna couldn't help but wonder if she'd sprung that on him too quickly. Maybe she should've eased him into it. Teased him a bit. Just when she was about to say a joke or something to lighten the mood, he did something that sent them further down the path of no return.

Releasing her arm, he reached up and clutched her throat gently. Applying just enough pressure to get her pussy excited and cause her heart to start racing. He pulled her closer, until her face was only a few inches from his. She damn near went cross-eyed trying to hold his intense gaze.

“What did you ask me?” he whispered.

Sienna swallowed. “I...”

Why was she so nervous? Sex was her thing. She enjoyed it. She was good at it. To her, there was almost nothing off-limits in the bedroom. Except for her one major rule, *lights off*. Other than that, she was game to try almost anything. But the look in Stefano's eyes had her feeling shy. And that was so freaking unlike her. *Just say it, Sienna. You've already said it once. Why is it so hard for you to repeat it? I want to fuck you, Stefano. Simple!*

“I,” she started, only to grow silent once more. Apparently, there *was* a shy bone in her body. Who knew?

He licked his lips before whispering, “Say it. Ask me again. I need to hear it again.”

Her gaze dropped to his very fuckable lips. Her shyness melted away, leaving only desire for her beast behind.

“Can I fuck you, Stefano?”

He closed his eyes. The shiver that racked his body traveled through hers also. When he opened his eyes, a change had come over his features. Her savage teddy was gone. Her savage beast was present.

“I have one rule when it comes to fucking you,” he told her.

“I already know it,” she told him. “No touching.” She could work with that.

“That rule doesn’t apply to you. You can touch me wherever you want, little demon.”

This time she was the one surprised. Her beast was okay with her touching him. That had to be a huge leap for him. It almost brought her to tears knowing he was okay with her touching him in a way he didn’t allow others to.

“O-okay,” she stuttered before recovering from her surprise and pulling herself together. “What is your rule for me?”

His grip on her throat tightened a fraction. Not enough to cause pain. Just enough to let her know he meant business. Could he feel her pussy throbbing against his lap? Her girl was trying to jump out of her panties to get to him.

“My rule is simple,” he told her. “If we do this, if you give yourself to me, then I expect you to *give* yourself to me fully. You can never be with anyone else.”

Huh?

“You mean like ever?” she questioned.

“You can never be with anyone else,” he stated again.

Though she’d heard him right the first time, she needed a bit of clarification.

“Like, never again in my life?” she asked.

Leaning closer, he pressed his forehead against hers.

“Listen to my words carefully. If we do this, you can *never* be with anyone else,” he repeated.

Her thoughts were racing as she tried to process his meaning.

“It means you’re mine,” he told her. “No one else can have you. No one else can touch you. No one else can look at you. I don’t even want them breathing near you. Can you obey those rules, little demon?”

Little red flags were popping up everywhere. She dodged them because what he was saying sounded dominant as fuck. And she was so surprised that she liked it, considering she was dominant as fuck herself.

Making a promise like that would be easy. But could she keep it? His other hand went to her thigh and squeezed. Her pussy wept tears of joy, wetting her panties with the evidence of her arousal. That’s if she even had any panties on.

“What about you?” Sienna asked after she found her voice. “Does this mean you’ll never be with anyone else?”

He leaned back and pressed a chaste kiss to her forehead before answering.

“You own me, little demon.”

This fucking man! She shut her brain off. Tuned out Maureen’s voice and focused only on the man who now owned her heart.

“I agree to your rule, Beastie. I’m yours. All yours.”

Please don’t make me regret this!

His smile was savage when he said, “Hold on to me.”

Immediately, she obeyed. He stood, rising with her in his arms, and strode across the room. He shifted her weight to his left arm, so he could use his right hand to open the door. She marveled at the strength this man possessed.

He stepped out of the room and strode down the hallway with her in his embrace. The assassin in her told her to pay attention to her surroundings. But Sienna couldn't tear her gaze from her Beast's face.

"The longer you stare at me, the harder I get," he joked.

"That's funny because the longer I stare at you, the wetter I get," she admitted.

He stopped walking and stared down at her. She smiled.

"How wet are you?" he asked.

"Dripping," Sienna purred.

Before she could blink, he lowered her to her feet and pinned her to the hall wall.

"Stefano," she gasped, back against the wall.

"I need to see for myself."

When he said see, he meant *see*. She stood still as he gripped the waistband of her pants and pulled them down. Cool air stroked her clit. *Panty-less*. She'd been panty-less this entire time. He went to his knees in front of her.

"Part your legs for me," he growled.

She parted her legs. A shiver raced down her spine when he slid a finger between her wet folds.

"Fuck, baby," he groaned.

His words caused more wetness to pool at her center. Then he did something even sexier. His gaze rose to hers as he removed his finger from her heat and brought it to his mouth. She came a little bit as she watched him suck her juices from his finger. Her pussy wanted that same type of attention.

"Step out of these," he ordered, speaking of her pants.

Sienna quickly obeyed, stepping out of the pants and kicking them aside. She stood there, staring down at her savage, waiting to see what he'd do next.

"Shirt, too," he told her.

She grabbed the hem of her shirt, preparing to lift it over her head, then paused. *My back*. She released the shirt.

“Can we go to the bedroom first?” she queried.

“I need to taste you right here, right now,” he demanded.

“I don’t need to take my shirt off for that.”

His gaze jerked to hers. Old insecurities raised their heads. For a long time, he just stared at her. Then he stood up. *Shit*. She’d ruined the mood. She should’ve just kept her mouth shut. It wasn’t like he hadn’t already seen her wounds. He turned around. Panic flared through her. Was he about to walk away?

With his back to her, he said, “Most of these were done by my grandmother.”

Her gaze jerked to his back and the wounds that crisscrossed over his flesh.

“Your grandmother did this?” she asked, stepping forward.

“Yes,” he whispered.

Her hand stretched toward him. She stopped just shy of touching his back.

“May I touch them?” she asked, knowing better than to do so without his permission.

He didn’t reply right away. Her hand hovered between them as she took in the scars on his flesh. How could anyone hurt their loved one this way? At least Maureen hadn’t been her blood relative. Then again, her blood relatives hadn’t been much better. She would’ve never ended up with Maureen if it hadn’t been for her parents.

Her mother had tried selling Sienna to Miss Davies because she blamed Sienna for the inappropriate attention Sienna’s father paid her. Luckily, Miss Davies was a good person. She didn’t take Sienna in. But Maureen did, claiming she’d always wanted a daughter. Sienna didn’t know her parents well.

But she knew her father visited Miss Davies' establishment a lot. Whenever she visited Miss Davies while her father was there, the ladies would steer her away from him. But Sienna had seen the way he'd stared at her. She'd seen the evil in his eyes. One day, he'd approached her while she was sitting on a tree stump behind Miss Davies' establishment.

He'd told her that her mother wanted to see her. That she missed her. By then, Sienna had already been trained by Maureen. She knew not to trust men, especially men like her father. She'd allowed him to lure her away from the building. He'd lured her into a back alley, and that was where he'd tried to attack her.

And that was where she'd left his body for the police to find. She never told Maureen or Miss Davies that she'd done it. But she had a feeling they knew. She'd visited her mother's house after the funeral. She'd been hoping that with her father gone, maybe the two of them could have some sort of relationship.

She wasn't expecting a mother-daughter relationship. It was too late for that. But she'd hoped they could at least be friends. Instead, her mother had told her to stay away from her because there was no place in her life for a child. At the time, Sienna had pretty much been taking care of herself for years while Maureen watched over her.

Her? A child? Where? When? She never got a chance to be a child. But she hadn't told her mother that. Sienna had stared around her mother's run-down house and noticed the needles on the floor. That's when she realized Maureen had been the lesser of two evils.

With tears streaming down her face, her mother had told her, "I knew Miss Davies was a good woman. If she took you in, I knew she wouldn't make you do what she and her girls do. I was hoping she'd make you cook or clean. I didn't care what the job was. Just as long as you weren't here with me and that monster. But Maureen took you. And I know what she does too. At least you're alive. I know you... I know you hurt people. I'm not saying you're wrong. I can't call you wrong. Look at me. Look at what I did to you."

Her mother had stared around her rundown home.

“Look at how I live. I’m no good. I’ve never been good. My mama was no good. Her mama was no good. My mama got hurt by men. And she let me get hurt by men. I told myself I wouldn’t be like them. But I fell in love and trusted the wrong man. I did whatever he wanted me to. I didn’t care that he sold drugs. The money he made had me looking better than all the other girls. That changed when he started dipping into his own supply. He got hooked on drugs. He made me do them, telling me if I loved him, I’d do them with him. The next thing I knew, we’d lost our house, cars, and customers. We were the ones begging for a hit now. Then I got pregnant with you.”

Her mother had chuckled hysterically as she ran her hand through her micro-braids that looked like they should’ve been taken out months ago.

“When I found out I was pregnant, I tried to change. I tried to get clean. I ran from him. I went to my mama’s apartment. She was doing better than me by then. I just wanted a place to stay until I found a job. Do you know what she did? She went behind my back and called him. My mama gave me back to him for a hit. A hit! That’s the kind of women we have in our family. So, what you do, it’s not wrong. It’s better than what we do. I knew I couldn’t be a good mama to you. I tried, though. But when he started looking at you funny, when he started wanting to bathe you and tell you bedtime stories without me present, I knew something was wrong.”

Her mother had stared blankly at the wall, reliving a past that no woman should have to suffer through.

“I knew what he was up to because that’s how it started with my mama’s boyfriends and me. And she turned away, pretending she didn’t see it. With you, I didn’t pretend I didn’t see it. I saw it. And I did the best thing I could for you, girl. I got you out of there before the same thing could happen to you. I got you out before the cycle could continue. That’s the only thing I could do for you as a mama. I can do no more. I don’t have any more to give. It’s all gone. I’m just a shell now. So, leave. And don’t come back here. When you can, leave

Maureen too. This world is bigger than this corrupt city. Go out and see it. Do what the other women in our family couldn't do. Don't survive. Live. Now go. Go live."

Sienna had cried that night. Cried for the women in her family. Cried for the endless cycle of torment they'd experienced. Cried because they hadn't been able to break free of the pain and suffering, and instead, they allowed it to keep happening to those around them. The next morning, her mother died of a drug overdose.

And Sienna had cried again. Cried for the mother she'd never had. Cried because she'd never got to be a daughter. Cried because she hadn't thanked her mother for not pretending she hadn't seen what was coming. Cried because, in a way, her mother had broken the cycle, and no one had acknowledged it.

After wiping the tears away, she'd told herself she would never lose herself because of a man. She'd never put herself in a position where her life and happiness depended on someone else. She told herself she'd break the generational curse in her family. And that one day, she'd be proud of the woman she'd become.

That day had yet to come. Despite the lies she fed herself to keep herself from going totally insane, she wasn't proud of the woman she'd become. She wasn't like her parents or grandparents, but she wasn't better than them either. The generational curse was continuing, just in a different way. Like them, Sienna was surviving, not living.

"You don't have to," Stefano said.

His voice pulled her out of her own head.

She blinked and stared up at the back of his head. "Huh? Sorry. My mind floated away for a moment."

He stared over his shoulder at her. "I said you can touch them if you want."

She nodded, but her hand didn't move.

"Where did your mind go?" he asked.

It was her turn to grow quiet. But she wanted to tell him the truth. She wanted to be honest with him. You couldn't break a generational curse without taking risks.

"I was thinking about my parents," she answered honestly.

Their eyes were locked on each other. No words were needed. Everything that needed to be said was communicated through the silence and the pain in their eyes.

"I'm still trying to figure out who my parents were," he told her. "I know who they are. But I don't know what they were like. They both died before I got the chance to know them. I didn't get a chance to be a son. I didn't even get a chance to be a grandson."

Sienna blinked back tears. "I didn't get a chance to be a daughter," she admitted. "I don't think people realize how important those titles are, son and daughter. When we're born, those are one of the first titles we receive. If we don't get a chance to be a son or daughter, or even an adopted son or daughter, something in us changes. Something breaks. A connection that should've been there since birth is broken."

"And it changes us forever," he finished for her. "We never get to be who we were truly meant to be."

He understood. Finally, someone understood. Sienna slowly lowered her hand to his back, giving him a chance to tell her to stop if he wanted her to. He didn't say stop. Her fingertips touched the raised welts on his back. He didn't flinch. He didn't shiver.

"Can you feel that?" she whispered.

"I can. I can feel your breath against my back too."

A slight smile crossed over her face as she gently moved her fingers from welt to welt.

"Is this okay?" she asked.

"Yes. And... thank you for asking."

"Tell me to stop if it becomes uncomfortable."

"Never stop."

Her smile widened as she continued touching him, careful not to touch his bandages or the discolored parts of his back. She was reading Stefano's dark diary. And the words within it broke her heart.

"Don't go to the fighting ring anymore," she told him, throat aching as she struggled to hold back tears.

"I don't think I need to go anymore."

"Why?"

"Because I have you. I don't need to fight, fuck, and forget. I want to remember everything that happens between us."

Sienna swallowed. "Who taught you how to be such a smooth talker?"

"Am I a smooth talker?"

"The smoothest."

He laughed. "I don't know how to be a smooth talker. I don't even know how to flirt. I just say what I feel when I talk to you."

This man and his words! She wanted to believe them. But she couldn't be like the other women in her family. She couldn't put her trust in the wrong man. The outcome would be disastrous, and the cycle would continue.

"I don't want to be hurt, Stefano," she whispered, despising how vulnerable she sounded.

"I would never hurt you, Gi..." he paused. "Tell me your name. I can't keep calling you Gina."

Her hand stilled against his back.

"I won't hurt you. I swear," he told her. "I'd burn this fucking city down before I let anything happen to you."

Who knew the Silent Beast could be so freaking romantic?

"Why?" she asked, holding back stupid ass tears that were threatening to fall. "What's so special about me?"

He turned around, forcing her fingers away from his back. He stepped forward and placed his hands on the wall, caging her in. Surrounded by his muscular frame, she stared up into his handsome face.

“Everything about you is special,” he told her. “Including the scars on your back and the ones on the bottom of your feet.”

Stupid tears. Don't fall. Damn it, stop falling.

“You weren't supposed to see them,” she sputtered, choked up.

“I didn't want you to see mine either. But here we are. There's no going back. I don't want to go back. I want you to know me. I want you to see me. All of me. I'm a brutal man. A savage. I'm not good, and I don't pretend to be. I'm not positive...”

“Forget I said that,” she interrupted him, angry with herself for saying those hateful things to him. “I only said that to push you away. I'm none of those things either.”

“I know,” he told her, wiping her tears away. “And that's part of what makes you special. When I thought you were a naïve foreigner, I wanted to protect you. Now that I know you're a badass, I still want to protect you, but I'm no longer afraid of you knowing the lengths I'd go to in order to protect you. I'd kill for you. I'd kill because of you. I'd kill to avenge you. I'd kill to protect you. I'd kill to make you happy. I'm a killer. I'll always be a killer. Now, I'm *your* killer. Does that scare you?”

Sienna shook her head. “That's the most romantic shit anyone has ever said to me.”

He smiled, looking proud of himself. Her heart melted. This man! This savage!

“I loved the way you smiled at me when we first met,” he continued. “I loved that you handled the Reaper by yourself in the changing room. Though, I still wish I hadn't left you alone. I loved how you cheered for me and supported me when I fought. No one has ever cheered for me like that before. I

loved the way you fought me in the ring. You've been trained. And it shows. You sort of remind me of my brother's future wife."

Sienna smiled. "Your brother is engaged to an assassin?"

"Yes. But he treats her like she's a damsel in distress, despite the fact that she has some of his guards scared of her."

Sienna chuckled. "I'd love to meet her."

"I'm sure Eve will be happy to meet you too. Like you, she's from the States."

Sienna froze. "What's her name?"

"Eve. My brother's fiancé's name is Eve."

Eve! Her mind and heart were racing. *Eve. An assassin from the States.* Could it be her Eve? Had her fucking friend been living it up with an Italian mobster this entire damn time? *Motherfucking Eve!*

Chapter Nineteen



Sienna

“What’s wrong?” Stefano asked.

Sienna tried to calm her frayed nerves.

“Is Eve from Chicago and came here to run a travel blog?”

Stefano frowned. “How do you know that?”

I’m going to kill her. That little fucker was safe and sound and hadn’t reached out at all. Her friend was safe and sound. She wasn’t dead. Sienna burst into tears.

“What’s wrong?” Stefano yelled as Sienna sank to the floor in front of him.

How could she explain that she was angry and fucking relieved at the same damn time? Her friend was alive. Her friend was safe. Her friend had found love with a man who treated her like a damsel in distress. Everything Sienna had prayed for had come to pass. Finally, at least one of her prayers had been answered.

And she was so very thankful. But she was upset too. That bitch hadn’t called, written, or sent a fucking carrier pigeon to let Sienna know she was alive. For weeks Sienna had been hoping for the best but fearing the worst. She’d lost sleep many nights because of her worrying.

Her night terrors had returned because of it. She’d even lost some hair because she’d been so stressed. That heffa owed her some hair! Now kneeling in front of her, Stefano cupped her cheeks and forced her to stare up at him.

“Listen to me. You are not allowed to cry anymore. I can’t fucking take it. I can’t fight tears. Give me a name, a location, something. Or just tell me what is wrong. I’ll handle it. I’ll always handle it.”

That only made her cry harder, causing him to look more helpless and frustrated. She’d cried more in the last twenty-four hours than she’d cried in her entire life. She felt like the weakest bitch alive right now. But she couldn’t turn the tears off.

They just kept coming, despite her wanting them to stop. She didn’t know what was wrong with her. Unable to talk at the moment, she threw her arms around Stefano’s neck, needing to hold on to him until she could pull herself together.

Maybe she’d be able to absorb some of his strength as she processed what she’d just learned. Eve was alive. Stefano wasn’t a monster. Was this really happening? Had she found her friend and the man of her dreams in Italy? She couldn’t be so lucky. She had to be dreaming. She pinched him.

“Love, why are you pinching me?” he asked, arms wrapped tightly around her as she sobbed against his chest.

He’d felt her pinch. That meant this was real. She cried even harder. She’d be embarrassed later. Right now, she was too overwhelmed with emotion.

“Let it out,” he told her while rubbing her back. “I’ve got you. Let it all out, little demon.”

It was a full five minutes before she calmed down enough to wipe her eyes and lean back to stare up at Stefano.

“Tell me what’s wrong,” he demanded. “And don’t say you can’t tell me or that you’re not ready to tell me. I’m done with all of that. I need to know now. Right now!”

She smiled up at him. “No one sent me to kill you,” she started.

He inhaled deeply, a frown marring his handsome face. Her words had clearly frustrated him. She needed to explain it better.

“I came here to find my best friend, my sister, Eden. Now known as Eve.”

His exhale came out as a cough. She patted his back gently. That wasn't the reaction she'd expected.

“Are you okay?”

He nodded, then cleared his throat. “You're Sienna?” he rasped.

“I guess Eve told you about me.”

“She has the entire family searching for you.”

Really? “At least she didn't forget about me. Maybe I won't kill her after all.”

Stefano's gaze searched hers. “Are you really Sienna Keys?”

Sienna nodded.

“Why didn't you say something?”

Before she could answer, he pulled his phone from his pocket and scrolled through it.

“Look,” he said, handing her his phone.

It was a text message. She read the texts between him and someone else. Her gaze snapped to his.

“You've been searching for me too?” she asked.

“I have. I let Eve send your picture to my cousin because she said if she wanted something done right, she had to do it herself.”

Yeah, that sounded like Eve.

Stefano sighed. “If only I'd looked at the picture, I would've known who you were when you walked into the club. None of this misunderstanding would've happened.”

Sienna glanced back at the text message. He'd been searching for her. He wasn't her enemy. Never had been. Guilt was back, and it was dragging her down. Her gaze rose to his.

“I stabbed you,” Sienna whispered. “I tried to knock you out, and I planned to kidnap you and torture you for information on Eve.”

Stefano started laughing.

“It’s not funny,” she told him, mortified by her actions. “I’m serious. I had a separate motel room ready and everything. I planned to drug you and then contact your don with my demands. If needed, I would’ve...” she paused, ashamed to admit the lengths she would’ve gone to.

“You would’ve killed me,” he finished for her.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

He must think she was a monster now. Instead of getting angry, he rubbed his hand across her cheek.

“*La mia farfalla viziosa,*” he whispered. *My vicious butterfly.* “You have nothing to apologize for.”

“But I...”

“No buts. This life we lead forces us to make tough choices. Had my brother gone missing, I would’ve done the same thing,” he told her. “I would’ve asked no questions and gone straight for the kill to get him back.”

Hearing that didn’t lessen her guilt any. She still felt horrible.

“Stop looking sad,” he told her. “What you did proves you’re loyal and caring. You’d sacrifice yourself for the people you love. That only makes me adore you more. Now I understand why you were angry with me. You knew it was me who took Eve from the hospital, right?”

Sienna nodded.

“I deserved your anger. I kidnapped your friend. I interrogated her harshly. I turned her over to my don when I couldn’t get the answers I needed from her.”

“Did you hurt her?” Sienna asked, afraid to hear the answer.

“I didn’t. But she hurt me.”

“She did?”

“Don’t smile,” Stefano admonished her. “Your friend gave me food poisoning.”

“Eve cooked?” Sienna yelled. “She can’t cook!”

“Please tell her that. I’m serious. Tell her that as soon as you see her. She can’t cook, but she keeps trying to feed us all. We won’t survive much longer if someone doesn’t stop her reign of terror.”

Sienna burst out laughing. She wanted to say Stefano was being dramatic. But she’d tasted Eve’s cooking. Never again!

Sienna sighed. “I can’t believe she’s safe and happy. Maybe,” she paused. “Maybe I need to leave her be. I don’t want to interfere with the life she’s started here and...”

“Stop,” Stefano ordered.

“What?”

“Don’t start getting in your own way.”

She wanted to argue with him. But she couldn’t.

“You noticed that habit of mine, huh?” she asked.

“I did. Trust me. Eve wants you here. She needs you. Enzo needs you here because he can’t handle her on his own.”

Sienna chuckled. “My Eve is a handful.”

“They’re not the only ones who need you. I need you, Sienna. Damn, it feels good to finally know your name.”

A blush heated her cheeks.

“Also,” he continued. “Even if you wanted to leave, do you really think I’d let you?”

Her eyebrow raised. “Do you think you could stop me?” she countered.

“Do I need to chain you to my bed, Sienna Keys?”

She nodded. “I think you do, Beast. You should also spank me. I mean, I did stab you, after all.”

“You have been a bad girl, haven’t you?”

“Yes, sir. And bad girls need to be punished.”

He smiled. “I’m so fucking blessed to have met you,” he told her, surprising her. “I may not be good. But I promise to be good to you,” he vowed.

“You’re getting off to a rocky start,” she told him.

“How?”

“You got me all wet a few minutes ago and then just left me hanging. You should never get a woman aroused and not finish her, Silent Beast. I think I’ve told you this once before.”

“Don’t you want to go see Eve?” he asked. “To make sure she’s okay.”

“Hmm. Can you call her, just so I can hear her voice?”

He appeared deep in thought. “One sec.”

He grabbed his phone from her and scrolled through it until he found the number he was looking for. He pressed *call*, then turned the speakerphone on. With the phone face up between them, they listened to it ring. A deep voice answered on the third ring.

“Miss me on your day off, brother?”

Stefano smiled. “Just calling to make sure you’re still alive.”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I thought Eve may have killed you by now.” Stefano winked at Sienna.

“My treasure would never hurt me,” the man said.

In the background, Sienna heard Eve’s voice.

“I will hurt you if you don’t fix my kitchen, Enzo!” Eve yelled. “I’m trying not to retaliate,” she screeched. “But I will if you leave me no choice. You do not want to see my petty side, don Enzo!”

Sienna covered her mouth to keep her laughter from being heard. It was so good to hear her best friend’s voice. Sienna was glad her little sister hadn’t become a pushover.

“The kitchen was my sanctuary,” Eve yelled. “How would you like it if I messed with your stuff?”

“Everything I have is yours, my love,” Enzo said, trying to placate Eve. “You can do whatever you want to it.”

Eve let off a string of curses.

“Can’t you hear the love?” Enzo asked Stefano.

“I don’t hear it,” Stefano said.

“That’s because you don’t know what it’s like to be in love.”

Stefano stared at Sienna. The blush was returning to her cheeks again.

“Tell Stefano to get over here and help you fix this!” Eve yelled in the background.

“That’s my cue to hang up,” Stefano said.

“Don’t hang up,” Enzo started.

Too late. Stefano ended the call.

To her, her beast said, “Do you see what I mean?”

Sienna chuckled. “Though she sounds mad, she also sounds happy.”

“My brother will do anything to keep her happy.”

Sienna sighed. “That’s good.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to go to her? I can take you to her now.”

“I am ready to go to her,” Sienna admitted. “I can’t wait to give her a big hug and tell her how happy I am that she’s safe. But just knowing she’s fine, better than fine, is okay for right now. Right now, there’s something else I need to do.”

“What’s that?”

Sienna pressed her hand against his cheek. “I need to thoroughly apologize to my beast.”

“You owe me no...” he started, only to have her interrupt him.

“Trust me. I need to do this. For you. And for me.”

He nodded. “Alright. You can apologize. I’m listening.”

She shook her head. “I can’t do it here. We need to be on a bed for this apology. Or a couch. Something you can bend me over.”

Lust flared in his dark gaze. One second, she was seated on the floor with her beast kneeling in front of her. The next, she was being lifted and tossed over his shoulder as he rose to his feet.

“Stefano, your stitches!” she exclaimed.

“Fuck those stitches. You owe me an apology.”

She smiled, staring at the floor as he stormed down the hall, heading to his bedroom. He didn’t set her on her feet until he reached the bedroom, shut and locked the door behind them, then strode over to the large bed at the center of the room. When she said large bed, she meant large bed.

His bed was far bigger than any bed she’d ever seen before. This wasn’t a normal king-size. It was something bigger. And she was already in love with it. He gently laid her down on the center of the bed. The bedroom light was off. Sunlight drifted into the room from underneath the dark curtains that hung over the windows.

It was just enough light to make her uncomfortable. Maureen’s voice filtered through her mind, telling her that her scars were disgusting, and eventually, Stefano would come to realize that and want nothing to do with her. It was hard to do, but Sienna ignored those nagging thoughts, refusing to let them deter her from what was about to take place.

She needed this. And from the way he was staring down at her, she could tell he needed it also. Gripping the hem of her shirt, Sienna slowly lifted it over her head and cast it aside, leaving herself naked and vulnerable before her Beast. She wasn’t ashamed of the front of her body.

Maureen was careful not to bruise that side of her. Her titties sat right. Her stomach was flat, thanks to the crunches she did each morning, that is, when she wasn’t healing from a

stab wound to the abdomen. Her body was toned. She kept it that way because her body was her best weapon.

And with the way Stefano was staring at her, she was thankful for all the work she'd put into staying fit. That didn't mean she didn't eat junk food when she was craving sweets. Eve liked to joke and say that Sienna's late-night binge-eating went straight to her butt. It probably did because Sienna had a lot of junk in her trunk.

"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," he complimented her.

She'd never blushed this much until she met this man.

"Thank you," she whispered, arching her back a bit, giving him a better view of the girls, as she stretched her legs out. "You're beautiful too. I wish I could see more of you."

She winked. He grinned that devilish grin that made her pussy throb. Every part of this man was designed to make her melt for him. From his sexy lips and the way he smiled at her, to how he arched his eyebrow when she said something he disagreed with. Then there were his nipples that were already hard for her.

She couldn't wait to rub her tongue across them. Her gaze dropped to his abs. She barely held back her sigh. Her beast had abs for days. And that little V at his waist was calling to her as he hooked his thumbs in the waistband of his pants and tugged them down. She found herself leaning forward, wanting a better view of him.

A small gasp escaped her when she realized he'd tugged his pants and briefs down at the same time. Doing so had freed a monster. It sprang forth, saluting her and making her mouth water. She'd expected him to be big. She'd felt his monster through his pants in the changing room of the dungeon. But this wasn't just big. This was... this was....

"Have you changed your mind?" He asked, deep voice pulling her out of her dick trance.

Her gaze rose to his. There was that cocky grin. He had a right to be cocky. Her beast was blessed. She was ready for

him to bless her.

“Did he scare you?” her Beast asked.

This man! He knew he had a monster. Sienna licked her lips as her gaze returned to his cock. Sienna Keys had never backed down from a challenge. His brow lifted as she moved to her knees in front of him.

“There’s one thing you’ll quickly learn about me, Stefano...” She paused. “I don’t know your last name.”

He hesitated for a second before saying, “DeLuca.”

DeLuca? He wasn’t just a part of the Italian mafia. He *was* the Italian mafia. *Wow!* She’d let that fact penetrate her mind later. Right now, his cock was about to penetrate her mouth. Sienna crawled toward the edge of the bed.

“As I was saying,” she continued, approaching him slowly. “One thing you will quickly learn about me, Mr. DeLuca...”

His cock jerked when she called him that.

“Is that there isn’t much that scares me, and I never back down from a challenge.”

“Is that right, Sienna Keys?”

“Yes, sir, Mr. DeLuca.”

His dick jerked again. She was going to call him that every time she wanted that dick.

“Bring that dick closer,” she ordered.

Stefano obeyed, moving closer until his legs were touching the bed. His cock jutted forward, large, thick, and proud. But it wasn’t ready yet. She had a feeling it could get harder. She licked her lips. He leaned forward, bringing his cock closer to her mouth. She resisted the urge to stick her tongue out and taste him. She wanted to tease her savage a bit.

“You’re so fucking hard,” she whispered.

“You got me this way, *piccola demone*.”

“You’re so big, Stefano. I can’t wait to have you in my mouth,” she moaned.

“Take it. It’s yours,” he groaned, hands clutched into fists at his sides.

“All mine?” she asked, moving closer so her breath could caress the tip of him when she exhaled.

“Only yours, Sienna. I swear,” he groaned, almost near his breaking point, where she wanted him. But not quite there yet.

She moved even closer until her lips were pressed against the tip of him in the lightest butterfly kiss.

Then she whispered, lips moving against his tip as she said, “I can’t wait to feel your dick rubbing against my tongue as you shove into my mouth, over and over again.”

His cock jerked against her mouth. He groaned as a drop of precum dripped onto her lip. She didn’t lick it away. Not yet. Instead, she continued talking, allowing it to smear across her lips like gloss. She’d call it *Beast Gloss*. All the ladies wanted it. But only she could have it.

“I want to feel your cum coating the back of my throat.”

Her Beast’s hips jerked as more precum coated her lips, his cock weeping, ready for her to put him out of his misery.

“I’m thirsty, Beast,” Sienna purred.

He grabbed her ponytail, fisting it as he growled, “Drink. Drink as much as you need.”

Sienna parted her lips. He brought his hips forward slightly, easing his cock into her mouth. She loved the feel of his smooth skin rubbing against her tongue. She closed her lips around him as he stared down at her. With her eyes on him, Sienna twirled her tongue around his slit, drinking in the precum he’d gifted her.

His eyes drifted shut, and his grip on her hair tightened. This was where she’d wanted him. On edge, close to losing control. Now, it was time for her to push him over the edge. She bobbed down on his cock, taking him as deep as he could go – *no gagging*. She didn’t stop until her lips were wrapped around the base of him with her throat cradling his tip. Her Beast’s eyes popped open.

“Fuck, Sienna,” he groaned.

Then she swallowed, just as Miss Davies’ girls had told her to do. And her Beast’s eyes damn near rolled into the back of his head. Now, she had him right where she wanted him. Stefano DeLuca officially belonged to Sienna Keys.

Chapter Twenty



Sienna

It was time for Sienna to show her savage who he belonged to. She pulled back until only his tip was left in her mouth, then she eased back onto him, slowly taking him in inch by inch, driving him wild. She repeated her actions, easing back slowly, then taking him in deep, only faster this time.

Her mouth watered around him, wetting his cock as she pleased him. Who knew dick could taste this good? She swallowed around him, but saliva still dripped from the corners of her mouth. She was making a mess, and her savage seemed to love it. His guttural groans were like an aphrodisiac to her.

They made her want to be even nastier for him. His entire body shuddered as she sucked him harder, bobbing on his cock to a rhythm that had his breaths coming in gasps. Eyes never straying from her, her savage watched her with a predatory glint in his gaze that thrilled her, setting her body on fire.

She knew she didn't have long before her Beast took over. She wanted to bring him to an orgasm with her mouth before that happened. Closing her eyes, she focused only on pleasuring her savage. He thrust into her mouth, matching her rhythm, almost causing her to gag on his length.

The cucumber she'd practiced on hadn't been this damn long or this damn thick. But she was determined to take it like a champ. Mouth stuffed with cock, she focused on breathing

through her nose as she pleased him. He clenched his fists tighter at his sides. A sign that his control would soon snap.

Sienna continued fucking him with her mouth, bringing him closer to the brink of insanity while praying she didn't fall over with him. Never had giving head brought her this much pleasure. Could she cum from sucking him? It sure as hell felt like it. Her pussy was hungry for him.

Her mouth was hell-bent on devouring him until his essence splashed against her tongue, marking her as his. She was ready to drink him. She sucked faster. He roared her name. Unclenching his fists, his hand moved to the back of her head. Her savage grabbed her ponytail.

With one hand gripping her ponytail and the other cupping the back of her head, he guided her mouth up and down on his cock. His hips bucked as he fucked her throat, precum lubricating her tongue. Her pussy clenched, growing envious of her mouth. She moaned around his thickness.

He fucked her mouth faster, balls slapping against her chin. The freak in her wanted them to slap her harder. A shudder wracked his body, causing her to tremble when its aftershocks reached her. Her savage's movements were frantic now. He was mumbling in Italian as he thrust against her tongue.

“Mi hai rovinato nel modo più bello, piccola demone. Non sarò mai più lo stesso. Non voglio essere l'uomo che ero prima di incontrarti.”

It took a moment for her lust-filled mind to process his words.

You have ruined me in the most beautiful way, little demon. I will never be the same again. I don't want to be the man I was before I met you.

Then he roared her name as his cum filled her mouth. She drank it down, trying to swallow it all. But there was so much that she could feel it leaking from the corners of her mouth, dripping down her chin as he continued to pound her mouth.

Her pussy clenched as his cock pulsed against her tongue, shooting streams of cum down her throat.

Her savage's growls were sexy as fuck. And maybe it was those animalistic sounds he was making that pushed her over the edge. Or maybe it was the feel of his cum sliding down her chin and throat. Then again, it could've been the taste of him or the feel of his fist tightening around her ponytail as he slammed against her lips.

She didn't know which one it was. Perhaps it was all of them combined. But Sienna ended up doing something she'd never done in her life. Her pussy clenched. Her clit throbbed. Her body shuddered. *Was she about to... was she about to...* *Yes she was!* She rolled her hips, grinding against the air as she came, orgasming as she sucked Stefano's cock.

With no clitoris stimulation, with no cock or fingers inside of her, no dick in her ass, nobody sucking her titties, *nothing*, Sienna came, body quaking as her hips jerked. Her cry of pleasure was muffled by Stefano's cock. She sucked him until she drank down the last drop. Then, he released her ponytail as he slipped from her mouth.

Sienna licked her lips and wiped at her chin and mouth, removing the remnants of her savage's orgasm. But she couldn't let it go to waste. As he watched her, she licked her fingers clean, causing him to groan his appreciation.

"You're so fucking sexy," he moaned, eyes never leaving her, chest rising and falling rapidly. "My beautiful assassin," he whispered.

She preened under his compliment. She'd never grow tired of the sweet shit he said to her. His words lit up her dark soul. They were like medicine to the wounded part of her that thought she only deserved harsh words and pain. Feeling emotional and sated, Sienna started to move back and lie down on the bed.

"Don't go," he whispered.

Hand still cupping the back of her head, he pulled her forward until her face was resting against his thigh. He then

slid his hand down to her neck. His thumb absent-mindedly caressed her throat as he struggled to catch his breath. Relaxing against him, she trailed her fingers up and down his thigh, unable to stop touching him.

She didn't know what to call this moment they were sharing. She'd never experienced anything like it. However, she was enjoying the closeness of it, the intimacy of it. Was it too soon for her to say she wanted this forever? They hadn't known each other for a full twenty-four hours yet, and already they couldn't stop touching each other.

There was a connection rapidly developing between them, and it wasn't just physical. They were connecting on all levels, and it had started with hello. If Sienna didn't know any better, she'd call it fate or destiny. Was Stefano DeLuca her destiny? Had she, Sienna Keys, found the one who was created solely for her, her better half?

A giggle almost escaped her. She held it in. She was too grown to be giggling and thinking about destinies. Yet, Stefano spoke to a side of her that longed for that. That wasn't the only side of her that her savage spoke to.

Sienna stared at his still semi-hard cock that was inches from her mouth. It was a beautiful dick, even when it wasn't standing at attention. But when it was standing at attention, that thang was a work of art. A masterpiece. Unable to help herself, she eased forward, stuck out her tongue, and licked it.

His cock twitched, and her beast groaned. Reactions like that were part of the reason she'd orgasmed when he did. This man was weaving a spell over her mind, body, and spirit. She hoped the spell never broke and the magic never ended.

"You're trying to kill me, piccola demone," he told her, still sounding breathless. "Give me one second, and I'll take care of you."

Aww. How sweet. But in the future, she wanted to be the one who took care of him. They could take care of each other sexually and emotionally. Like her, he hadn't had anyone to take care of his emotional side.

Now, he had her. She would learn how to nurture this savage, and in return, she'd learn how to accept nurturing from him. They had a long road of loving and healing ahead of them, but it was going to be fun. Especially the sexual side of things. Smiling, she licked his cock again.

“You’re asking for trouble,” he warned her.

Sienna wasn't the type to heed warnings. She licked him again.

“You’re going to pay for that,” he told her.

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

Feeling mischievous, she licked his cock again. It jerked, growing hard once more. Her eyes widened. *Already?* Wasn't it supposed to take a few minutes for that thang to recharge? Her gaze rose to his. The smile had left his face. Her savage was ready to take charge.

“Lie on your back, *piccola demone*,” he demanded.

Sienna swallowed. She'd teased a savage. Now she had to answer for it. And she planned to enjoy every second of it.

Stefano

This woman was trying to break him.

And he was trying his best not to be broken. But the way she'd sucked his cock had him close to losing his fucking mind. He'd fucked plenty of women. He'd had his dick sucked plenty of times. He was a healthy man who enjoyed sex. But he'd never experienced anything like what she'd just done to him.

He'd never experienced a woman like Sienna Keys. Her moans had vibrated against his cock, driving him wild and tearing at the control he could feel slowly slipping away. And when she'd swallowed around his cock, mouth gripping him

tightly, he'd vowed then and there that he'd travel to hell and back for this woman.

Gripping his dick, he stroked it as he stared at her. She was the first woman he'd ever let into his home. The first woman to ever lie on his bed. The first woman to ever touch his scars. The first woman to ever touch his heart. He could no longer tease Enzo about falling so hard, so fast for Eve.

Stefano was now infected with the same disease that had caused his brother to lose his damn mind for a woman. Now he knew why Enzo was always smiling. Now he knew why Enzo let Eve get away with anything and why he couldn't bear to tell her she couldn't cook. *When it's right, you know.*

Those had been Enzo's words. Finally, Stefano understood them. And Stefano knew Sienna was the woman for him. He felt like there should be a part of his brain warning him that this was moving too fast. The survivor in him, the cautious side of him, should be telling him to take his time and not rush things. That was not happening.

It was all hands on deck with this. Everything in him wanted this woman who was currently splayed out on his bed, back flat against his mattress with her legs parted. Her knees were raised, feet flat on the comforter. With a wicked grin on her face, she was the most delicious thing Stefano had ever seen in his life.

He licked his lips. She gripped the comforter in her fists and parted her legs a little wider. It was an invitation Stefano would not ignore. However, he wanted to stare at the pussy that belonged to him for a second. And what a beautiful pussy it was. He wanted to taste it, to tease it, to teach it how to respond to his commands.

When he whispered in her ear for her to get wet, he wanted her pussy to immediately obey his command. Her gaze followed him as he sank to his knees in front of her. A knowing grin spread across her face.

Gripping her ankles, he pulled her to the edge of the bed and positioned her legs over his shoulders. With one hand wrapped around her thigh, holding her in place, he used his

fingers to spread her lips apart so he could get a better look at her pussy.

“You’re making me blush,” she whispered. “Do you have to stare at it like that?”

“I do. And I’m going to enjoy playing with your *Bella figa*.” *Pretty pussy*. He slid his finger along her slit, which was growing wetter.

“Little demon, did you cum already?” he asked, lathering his finger in her juices.

His little demon nodded. Pride filled him. She came from sucking his cock. The evidence was coating his finger and couldn’t be faked. Stefano brought his finger to his mouth to taste her orgasm.

“*Dolce come il miele*,” he whispered. *Sweet as honey*.

“You’re determined to keep me blushing,” she told him. “I’m not even a blusher. But when you talk like that...” she went silent.

“What happens?” he asked, inhaling her scent. It was the most intoxicating fragrance he’d ever smelled.

“It makes me want to ride that dick until you fill me up with cum,” she whispered.

Fucking Sienna! Closing his eyes, he pressed a kiss against her inner thigh as he tried to keep himself from losing control and doing exactly what she wanted. He wanted to watch his cum leak from her pretty pussy when he was done fucking her properly. But before he did that, he owed her a proper orgasm.

Stefano pressed kisses along her inner thigh, kissing and licking his way toward her center. She was squirming before he reached his final destination. He ran his tongue between her folds, licking away the evidence of her previous orgasm. He was ready to replace it with a fresh round of her juices.

After he’d licked her clean, he leaned back to examine his work. Her pussy glistened with his saliva. He rubbed his thumb over her clit, applying a bit of pressure. Her hips jerked. Lowering his mouth to her tiny nub, he replaced his thumb

with his tongue. A moan escaped his beautiful butterfly as he flicked his tongue against her clit.

This wasn't something he could say he was good at. But he'd get good at it for her. Plus, he loved the way she tasted. He had a feeling her pussy was going to be his new favorite dessert. And normally, he wasn't a fan of sweets. Because of her, he was quickly developing a sweet tooth.

He sucked her clit, loving the way she lifted her hips to grind her pussy against his mouth. His cock throbbed against his stomach, hard as a rock, aching to be inside of her. With his mouth fastened around her clit, he twirled his tongue over it. Her moans filled the air, exciting him and pushing him to lick her faster. His tongue flicked back and forth over her nub.

Her hips jerked, almost matching the movements of his tongue. Stefano slipped his tongue between her wet folds, gathering up her nectar and swallowing. *Fuck!* Her taste was divine. But, one taste wasn't enough. He needed more. With both arms now wrapped around her thighs, he pulled her body closer to his face.

Sienna continued lifting and lowering her hips, grinding her body against his tongue. He tightened his arms around her thighs, shoving his tongue into her, letting her pussy drench it. Her passion fueled his passion as her essence coated his tongue, lips and dripped down his chin. He swallowed her juices, craving more.

He had a feeling he'd always crave more of his Sienna. His tongue delved between her silken folds before sucking her clit into his mouth. She rolled her body against his face. He was fairly certain he was getting high off her taste. Her pussy was addictive. Unable to help himself, he thrust his cock against the bed, pressing it into the mattress as he devoured her.

Her moans echoed through his mind as she threaded her fingers through his hair, holding his face closer to her body. Her thighs pressed against his cheeks when he ground his mouth against her center. *Fuck!* He loved the feel of her, the taste of her. He loved the way she moved and the sounds she made as her body began to quake.

She was close to coming. He was ready to take her over the edge, but he was afraid he'd fall with her. His cock throbbed, weeping precum, pleading for a chance to be buried deep inside her. He couldn't wait to have his cock drenched in her juices. Not yet. He wanted her to come on his tongue at least once before he fucked her.

He wanted to know what it felt like to have her orgasm wash over his tongue as he pleased her. He wanted to drink her orgasm straight from the source. He sucked her clit hard before plunging his tongue into her depths. He fucked her with his tongue, thrusting it into her center, feeling her walls spasm.

She screamed his name as he tongued her down. He held on to her tighter as her legs shook. Her body bucked, hips lifting off the mattress. Her moans grew louder. Her thighs trembled against his cheek. His woman was about to cum in his mouth. Her body jerked once, twice, then she exploded, shaking uncontrollably.

Her flavor burst onto his tongue. And still, he continued licking her, drinking in her essence until her quakes subsided, until she released his hair. And still, he wasn't done with her yet. Licking his lips, Stefano lifted his head to stare at her. Her eyes were half closed as she gazed down at him with a look of awe on her face.

He'd surprised her. That made him feel good. The truth was, he'd surprised his damn self with how hungry he'd been for her taste. He was still hungry for her taste. Stefano had never craved anyone the way he craved this woman. He had a feeling his addiction to Sienna Keys would last a lifetime. He prayed it would.

"That was," she started, only to let out a long sigh. She took a few deep breaths, exhaling slowly before saying, "That was the best thing I've ever experienced in my life."

Don't smile, Stefano. Play it cool. Act like you're a fucking professional at this pussy eating shit. Damn it! He couldn't stop a proud smile from gliding across his face.

"Do you want this every morning when you wake up?" he asked, hoping she didn't notice his fucking blush.

She nodded. “And twice on weekend mornings.”

He chuckled, gaze sweeping back to her pretty pussy. He leaned back in, craving more of her. He ran his tongue along her wet folds a few more times, lapping up the remaining evidence of her orgasm. He only stopped when she pushed his head away.

“No more,” she panted. “My kitty is too sensitive for more.”

Her kitty belonged to him now. And he was sure she could handle more. He wiped her juices from his mouth and chin as he stood up. Standing at the edge of the bed, he stared down at the woman of his dreams. His little demon had a satisfied smile on her beautiful face. He’d brought that smile to her face.

He wanted to keep her smiling. No more tears for her. No more pain. He planned to cherish this woman for the rest of his life. And right now, he intended to prove to her that her kitty could take more. It could take whatever he gave it because it was his. Stefano palmed his cock, lubricating himself with her honey that he’d wiped from his mouth and chin.

“On your knees,” he demanded.

Still breathing deeply, his beautiful butterfly obeyed. On her knees, she arched her back, then stared at him over her shoulder.

“Like this, sir?” she whispered.

“Just like that, love.”

Chapter Twenty-One



Stefano

Stefano stared down at Sienna.

Lust flared through him. However, it was overshadowed by the anger he felt as he stared at the raised welts on her back, welts so similar to his own. When he'd bathed her earlier, he'd tried his best not to look at them. He knew how it felt to have someone stare at your wounds in disgust or pity.

Even though she'd been unconscious, he'd known she wouldn't have approved of the pity he'd had in his eyes. The bottom of her feet were worse. He closed his eyes, trying to rein in his anger. Closing his eyes didn't shut out the rage coursing through him. He needed to know who'd done this to her.

He needed to make them suffer ten times worse than they'd made her suffer. If she hadn't killed the person already, he would. He only needed a name and a location to make it happen.

When he opened his eyes, he found her looking back at him. The pity he'd tried to hide was there in his gaze when his eyes met hers. He couldn't hide it. His heart hurt for the wounded girl inside of her.

"I can turn over if you want," she whispered.

"Don't you dare, Sienna. Why would you say that?"

Her mouth opened, then closed.

"Who did this to you?" he asked.

“She’s already dead,” Sienna told him.

“Good. You didn’t deserve this.”

“How do you know? Maybe I misbehaved,” she joked.

But he understood the joke for what it was. *Deflection.*

“No one deserves this. Especially not you,” Stefano told her. “Your wounds don’t deter from your beauty.”

She let out a sarcastic chuckle.

“I’m serious,” he told her.

“Yeah, right.”

“Sienna, look into my eyes.”

There was a moment of hesitation, a brief pause before her gaze returned to his.

“Your wounds don’t deter from your beauty,” he said again. “They add to it.”

She shook her head, but he continued before she could protest.

“They tell a story of strength and survival,” he continued. “A story of resilience. They show me that you’re unbreakable, unshakeable. You’re a warrior, Sienna Keys.”

She stared down at the mattress and whispered, “Why are you trying to make me cry?”

“I’m not. I just want you to know how I see you.”

Her gaze returned to his. Blinking rapidly, she told him, “Thank you, Stefano.”

“You’re welcome, love. Can I touch your back?”

She nodded before facing forward and staring down at the mattress again. Stefano released his cock as he leaned forward to press a kiss between her shoulder blades. He placed his hands on her sides, holding on to her as he kissed his way down her spine. Her smooth brown skin was like velvet against his lips.

He'd never kissed anyone this much. Sex was usually a quick fuck to him. Foreplay wasn't needed or desired. At least, for him, it wasn't. He hadn't been too concerned with what his partners wanted. Foreplay was for lovers, people who craved intimacy. Stefano had never had a lover, not until Sienna.

Other partners had merely been fucks. Limited touching. No kissing needed. Little to no talking. No intimacy. No love. He knew where to touch a woman to make her cum so that she at least got something out of the arrangement. But it was never anything more than an orgasm for him and for the women he screwed.

With Sienna, he wanted everything he'd never had in the past. He wanted to be her lover. He wanted to touch her, to kiss her, to experience everything he'd denied himself in the past. He wanted to use his hands, his lips, and his tongue to show her how beautiful she was to him.

With her, this wasn't just about an orgasm or about pleasure. He wanted to truly become one with this woman. He wanted to know her in every way possible. Likewise, he wanted her to know everything about him. No secrets. How could there be secrets between them when they were two halves of the same soul?

Look at me, thinking like a poet or some shit. He didn't even know where those thoughts were coming from. He hadn't thought himself capable of anything other than bloodshed and all that came along with it. A heart. He had a heart. If she hadn't shown up, would he have figured out he could feel this strongly for someone?

Probably not. She was the catalyst that had awakened this side of him. And he couldn't turn it off. She was responsible for that. Which meant, from now on, she had to be responsible for him and never leave his side. It also meant he had to make sure he never gave her a reason to want to leave his side.

Stefano was up for the challenge of making sure this woman stayed happy and satisfied. After pressing kisses down her spine, he proceeded to trail kisses over her wounds, touching his lips to each one of them.

The majority of them were at her lower back as if someone had strategically struck her in places that would be least visible to others. He hoped Sienna had made her abuser suffer. He still wished he could've done it for her. Lifting his head, he stared down at her as he rubbed his hand over her back.

“Can you feel this?” he asked.

“Some of it,” she answered softly.

Stefano clenched his teeth to keep from cursing. He was angrier with her abuser than he was with his own. Her wounds seemed as old as his own. Which meant she'd been a young girl when she'd been hurt. How could anyone do this to her? Stefano rubbed his thumb over her lower back. She shivered.

“You felt that?”

“I did,” she whispered.

Though he knew he couldn't erase the memories of the pain that caused her wounds, he was willing to spend the rest of his life kissing them and showing her that she was beautiful. Maybe one day, the memories of his kisses would overshadow the memories of the pain. He bent down and kissed the spot he'd just rubbed his thumb over.

He kept his mouth there, making a silent promise to protect this woman so that she never found herself in a position to be hurt by anyone again, not even him. He lifted his head when she looked over her shoulder at him. Her eyes brimmed with unshed tears. But she smiled. And his heart did something weird in his chest. *Was this love?*

“Thank you,” she told him.

“You have no reason to thank me. I love touching you,” he admitted. “And kissing you.” *I love everything about you, Sienna Keys.*

“Do you?”

“Of course.”

“Then, you wouldn't mind kissing a little lower, huh?” she winked.

Farfalla cattiva. Naughty butterfly. He kissed a bit lower on her back.

“Here?” he asked.

Shaking her head, she said, “Lower.”

He rubbed his hand over the curve of her ass, loving the feel of her. And damn, she had a lot of ass. He squeezed her ass gently. His cock throbbed as he pressed a kiss to her ass.

“Here?” he asked.

“A little lower,” she instructed.

He kissed lower, pressing his lips to the lower part of her bottom as he gripped her hips.

“Here?” he asked, licking his lips, knowing where she was directing him and ready to kiss her there.

“A little lower,” she whispered, widening her legs.

Facing forward, she rested her forehead on the bed and arched her back deeper, giving him a better view of the place she wanted him to kiss. His beautiful butterfly was once again ready and wet for him. Stefano kissed her where she wanted, his lips connecting with her lips. He kissed her there twice before raising his head.

“Here?” he asked.

“Yes,” she mumbled against the mattress. “Now, use your dick to kiss it,” she whispered.

He held in his chuckle. He wasn't done kissing it with his lips yet. Stefano licked his lips, then pressed another kiss to her wet folds. He kissed her there again. Then again. Until she was pushing back against his face, needing more than just a kiss. He swiped his tongue along her slit, drinking in her juices, making sure she was wet enough for him.

She was almost there. But he knew she could get wetter. He slid his tongue between her folds, lapping at her juices. She squirmed against him, moaning into the mattress. He gripped her ass as he devoured her. He should be full off her taste.

He'd already drunk in one of her orgasms. But he wasn't. He would never have enough of her.

He continued licking her. When he felt her body shiver, he knew she was ready. He swiped his tongue across her pussy one final time before moving back to wipe his mouth. He palmed his cock, rubbing her juices over his dick as he climbed onto the bed with her. She didn't look back at him.

But she did push her ass in his direction, ready and eager to be filled with his dick. He ached to be inside her. Gripping his cock, he aligned it with her entrance. He rubbed the tip against her pussy, coating it in her nectar. His eyes nearly drifted shut as he began easing into her. He pushed into her slowly, allowing her to get accustomed to his size.

He could feel her stretching to accommodate him. He pulled out a little, then eased back in. His eyes drifted shut. *Fuck*. She was so damn tight. He groaned, urgently needing to slam into her. He resisted that need... for now.

But he didn't know how much longer he'd be able to resist. He inched into her some more. Eyes popping open, he gripped her hips, a gasp escaping him when she tried to push back at him. He held her still.

"I need," she started.

"I know, love. Just relax for me. I'm going to fill that sweet pussy up soon."

He just didn't want to hurt her. His words caused her pussy to grow slicker, readying itself for his size.

"Fuck me, Stefano," she whispered. "Don't worry about hurting me. I can take it," she promised.

The question was, could he take it? The thought of causing her any pain terrified him. He would take his time with this, even if it almost killed him.

"Open for me, love," he told her.

"It's been a while...." She started, then muttered, "Sorry."

"Don't apologize for this." He thrust with a little more force. "This is perfect. That's it. That pretty pussy is so

fucking tight, Sienna,” he groaned, control slipping as he eased into her.

“You’re so big,” she whispered.

“Tell me if I hurt you,” he told her.

“Hurt me, Stefano. Hurt me so good.”

He closed his eyes, balls tightening, cock throbbing. This woman would be the death of him. But this pussy would resuscitate him. Gritting his teeth, he pushed deeper into her. Arousal dripped from her, coating his thick cock as he eased into her inch by inch. It was sweet fucking torture to take his time this way.

But it was worth it. They both felt it when her pussy finally accepted his size. Her body grew slicker. A moan escaped them both when he thrust deeply, driving himself home. Stefano opened his eyes. *Home*. That’s what this was. That’s who she was. *Home*. He was damn near shivering by the time he was buried deep inside of her.

“You’re so deep in me,” she moaned. “Gosh, I feel so full, Stefano. Don’t stay still, Beast. Fuck me, love.”

It was the word *love* that got him. Women had called him many names in bed. *Daddy*, which made no fucking sense to him. He’d been called baby, sweetheart, and more. No one had ever called him love. And she sounded like she meant it. It was that word, that tone, that caused his fragile grip on control to snap.

Stefano eased back until only the tip was in her, then he shoved into her with a force that rocked the bed. He pulled back and then plunged into her again, filling her completely and making her moan his name. Her slick heat welcomed him, gripping him tightly as he pounded her body, causing the bed to shake.

His beautiful butterfly fistled the sheets and pushed back at him, rocking her body into his, meeting him halfway. Stefano thrust into her. She rocked onto him. Together, they found the perfect rhythm that drove them both mad.

The friction of their bodies colliding was divine. It was destiny. It was what they'd both been missing in their life. They were like two puzzles that, alone, created no picture, but together, revealed a beautiful scenery. The sounds they made as they fucked created the sweetest symphony.

Further proof that Stefano and Sienna were meant to be. Her walls tightened around him, causing him to jerk. His woman moaned his name as her movements became frantic. She threw her head back as her body writhed.

"I'm about to cum," she called out. "I'm so close, Stefano."

Her words made him pound her faster. He wanted to cum when she did. He wanted them to orgasm as one. So, he fucked her faster, harder. And she tried to match his pace. But she could no longer keep up with his savage thrusts. Instead, her body slowly sank to the mattress. He followed, still fucking her hard.

His hands moved from her hips to the mattress, caging her in as he fucked her. Eyes squeezed shut, she moaned his name over and over again, body trembling. Her hands found his wrists and held on. Staring down at her, he plunged into her sweet heat. He couldn't stop his thrusts if he wanted to.

He'd never felt this wild, this far gone, this caught up in passion. He was a captive to their lust. And she was caught in its thrall also. Sweat glistened on their bodies. Their breathing was becoming erratic.

Stefano lowered himself to his elbows, needing to be closer to her, needing to feel her body against his. Her arms wrapped around his biceps and held on. As he fucked her, he pressed kisses to her shoulder, neck, and cheek, unable to keep his hands, lips, and cock off his woman.

"Sienna," he groaned. "My Sienna," he whispered as he shoved into her, glad to know the name of the woman who'd reminded him that he had a heart.

Eyes still closed, she tilted her face upward so he could claim her lips in a fierce kiss. His tongue slid into her mouth

as his dick drilled her into the mattress. She kissed him back, tongue dancing with his as their bodies neared the point of no return.

A shudder rippled through him. Or had it rippled through her and vibrated against him? It was hard for him to tell which one of them shuddered first. But they were both shuddering. Her walls clenched him tightly seconds before her orgasm washed over his cock, drenching him in her ecstasy.

She wrenched her mouth away from his to cry out, body writhing underneath his. He wrapped his arms around her, holding her close, lips pressed against her cheek as he continued pushing into her tight channel that was spasming around his thick cock.

“You’re doing so good, baby,” he whispered to her. “You’re taking this dick so good.”

“Stefano,” she moaned. “Don’t stop. Don’t ever stop. I need you.”

She needs me. That fact shoved him over the edge. A growl that sounded more animal-like than man, ripped from his throat as he came, shooting streams and streams of cum into her pussy.

His orgasm hit him hard, nearly knocking the wind out of him. But who needed air when he had Sienna Keys? He bucked into her, no longer in control of his own body. He held her close to him, unable to stop thrusting.

“Baby, this pussy feels so good,” he groaned as her pussy milked him. “Tell me this pussy is mine,” he growled. “Tell me.”

“It’s yours, Stefano. All yours,” she whimpered, convulsing around his cock. “And that dick is mine,” she groaned.

“All yours, baby. All of me belongs to you.”

Stefano closed his eyes and gritted his teeth to keep from crying out as he bucked into her once, twice, and on the third time, his back bowed, and a cry slipped past his lips as the last of his seed flooded her pussy.

“Sienna!” he roared.

He could’ve sworn he heard her whisper, “*I’m here. I’ll always be here.*” But he wasn’t sure. All he could hear now was his heart pounding in his ears as he collapsed on top of her, spent, barely able to breathe. Eyes closed, he rested his head in the crook of her neck.

Arms wrapped around her, he held her close with his sweaty chest up against her sweaty back, bodies still locked together. Neither of them moved, but both of them moaned when his cock finally slipped from her. It was a long time before they were able to start breathing regularly again.

An even longer time before their bodies ceased trembling from the aftershocks of their orgasms. He kept her wrapped up in the protection of his arms the entire time, never wanting to release her but knowing he had to. He was a big man. Though she hadn’t protested yet, he knew he had to be heavy.

Once he was able to move his legs, he turned over onto his back and brought her with him, pulling her up against him. She let him. With her head resting against his chest, Stefano stared up at the ceiling, sated and content.

Usually, this was the point when he got up, got dressed, and checked out of the motel. Stefano smiled. Thankfully, those days were over. No more fighting, fucking, and forgetting. Now, he would fuck and then cuddle. Fuck, and then get up and cook breakfast.

Fuck, and then watch a movie. Fuck, and then fuck some more. Fuck and then shower together, a future first he couldn’t wait to share with his Sienna. He stared over at his woman to find her eyes still closed.

Stefano ran his hand over her back, touching his fingertips to her wounds. A smile drifted across her face. His own smile widened. *So, that was what healing looked like*, he thought. She pressed a kiss to his chest, something that would’ve angered him if another woman dared to do it.

Instead, it warmed his soul. So, this was what healing felt like. It felt good. It felt long overdue. It felt right. And it was

all thanks to a little demon who'd tried to kidnap him. He was so fucking thankful she'd stormed into his world. He was so fucking thankful she'd hunted him down. If she hadn't, he would've never known true love existed.

And that would have been tragic.

Chapter Twenty-Two



Stefano

He couldn't stop looking at her.

His beautiful butterfly with her battered but not broken wings. Stefano trailed his fingers over back, loving the way she smiled and relaxed into his touch. He paused when that smile turned into a frown.

“What are you thinking?” He asked, hoping he hadn't done something wrong.

It couldn't be him touching her back. That had just brought a smile to her face. Was it about the sex? Should he have been gentler? Should their first time not have been in doggy style? *Shit.*

Was she regretting being with him now? *Too fucking late, Sienna Keys.* She owned a part of his soul now. They could no longer be separated. He was just about to tell her that when she spoke up.

“I was thinking,” she started, then stopped.

“What?” he rushed to ask, heart racing.

“Have you ever measured your dick and sent the measurements in to the Guinness book of world records?”

“What?” he asked, thoroughly confused.

“Never mind. I think I once read that the man with the biggest dick had a cock that dropped almost to his ankles. Still, your dick is hella big. The good kind of big. Not the rip a bitch's uterus out kind of big. You're in the top ten in the

world, for sure. And it's thick," she told him. "And feels as good in my pussy as it does in my mouth." She sighed. "I think I've fallen in love with your dick."

Stefano burst out laughing.

She opened her eyes. "What's funny?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said. "And everything."

She smiled. "I say whatever comes to mind. Sometimes what comes to mind is weird as fuck."

"Don't ever stop being weird as fuck."

Her smile widened. "No takebacks. Years from now, don't try to return me to sender or anything like that."

"Never. And same to you. Don't ever try to get rid of me."

"Never. I'm keeping my savage teddy."

He chuckled. "Savage teddy?"

She nodded. She started to say more, but her eyes widened, and she sat up.

"Your wounds!" she exclaimed, staring down at his body, fear etched into her expression.

He followed her gaze to his abdomen. His bandages were loose. But no blood tinged them. Which meant he was fine.

"We can't do this again until you heal," she told him. "No more fucking."

"I'm fine. It was just a scratch."

"It wasn't..."

"It was," he interrupted her. "Let me check your wound."

"My wound isn't important. Yours," she started.

She went silent when he raised up and pinned her to the bed.

Glaring down at her, he growled, "Don't ever say that again. Everything about you is important to me. From now on, you will no longer talk down about yourself or make light of yourself. Do you understand?"

Eyes wide, she nodded.

“Say you understand,” he demanded.

“I understand,” she whispered.

“Louder.”

She smiled. “I understand,” she yelled.

“Louder!”

Laughing, she screamed, “I understand, Stefano DeLuca.”

And that was the first time he didn't cringe inwardly at someone calling him a DeLuca. Again, so this was what healing felt like. A yawn escaped her.

“You should get some sleep,” Stefano told her, moving to his back again and bringing her with him.

“I don't want to sleep. I want to stay up and chat with you.”

“We can chat later. We can when we wake up. We can chat tomorrow. And the next day. The day after that.”

“Is that your way of saying we have all the time in the world together?”

“Not all the time in the world,” he told her. “Tomorrow isn't promised to anyone. But every day that we're alive, we can chat. Deal?”

“Deal.” She yawned again.

“Go to sleep, love.”

“I think I will,” she mumbled, half asleep already.

Stefano couldn't sleep yet. He held her in his arms until her breathing became even. She fit against him so perfectly. It was hard to believe that yesterday, this woman wasn't in his life. Who had he been yesterday? Miserable Stefano. Lost Stefano. Unwanted Stefano. Killer Stefano. The Silent Beast.

Staring down at Sienna, he now felt like so much more. Stefano couldn't keep the grin from his face. Why didn't everyone do this? This love shit? It felt good as fuck. And that's what this was. It was love. It had to be. Then again, he'd

never been in love, so he couldn't be sure. Whatever it was, he wanted it forever.

It was Stefano's turn to yawn. But he couldn't go to sleep yet. Not without checking the house and cameras to make sure all was secure for Sienna. He eased her off his chest and gently lay her on his pillow. Once he made sure he hadn't disturbed her sleep, he climbed out of bed to check the house.

Though he knew everything was locked, he still checked each door, each window, each fucking closet. It was no longer just him living inside. He had a woman to protect. Then again, she was strong enough to protect him. But he didn't want her to have to be strong. Not when behind the doors of their home.

Here, she was safe. He'd make sure of it. Here, she could relax and just be Sienna. She didn't have to look over her back or wonder if anyone was after her. Here, she had him. And he'd always keep her safe. After checking the house and the security cameras, he climbed back into bed beside her.

He pulled her back into his arms until she was once again resting on his chest. She slept through it all. His little demon was tired. She'd had an eventful past twenty-four hours. Apparently, he was tired also. He'd told himself he would stay awake and watch her sleep for a while. *Wrong!*

Her soft snores lulled him to sleep. He didn't know how long he'd slept for, but he was awakened by the sound of his phone buzzing. He reached for it, jostling Sienna. She whispered something in her sleep but didn't wake up. He gently moved her to her own pillow. A frown marred her face before she snuggled into her pillow, relaxing against it.

His phone continued to buzz as he watched for her for a second, making sure he hadn't disturbed her rest. His cell phone ceased buzzing, and the house phone started to shrill. *Shit.* Stefano hopped out of bed and raced across the room, trying to be as quiet as he could.

He snatched up the phone and growled, "Who is this?"

"It's me. Terzo. You didn't answer your cell. Hang up. I'll call you on your cell."

Clutching the phone tightly, he slowly lowered it back down, telling himself he wouldn't fuck Terzo up when he saw him. By the time he reached his cell phone, it was already buzzing. As he answered it, he glanced at Sienna to ensure she was still sleeping. She was snuggled up against his pillow, where she belonged.

Phone to his ear, he left the room and gently closed the door behind him as he listened to Terzo.

“We've got Arnaldo,” Terzo told him.

“Alive?”

“Yes.”

“Location?”

“He's at Lino's warehouse. Warehouse B. Uncle Pietro is here with us.”

Pietro? “What's he doing there?”

“He's in town. He was at our house when I got the call from my informant that Arnaldo had been spotted. So, the old head tagged along.”

“Don't let anything happen to him.”

Of all the old heads, Pietro... Uncle Pietro was his favorite. He'd always treated Stefano like he was family. Now, he knew why.

“What could happen to him?” Terzo asked. “He's with me. Plus, we may need his help. The old head still got it.”

“I'm on my way. Do you have an update on don Bianchi?”

“Not shit. And Arnaldo isn't talking.”

“I'll make that bitch talk,” Stefano growled.

“Alright. See you soon.”

Stefano ended the call and stared at the time. It was three a.m. Damn, he'd slept for a long time. Stretching, he worked out the kinks in his body before returning to the room to get dressed. Sienna was still asleep. He didn't want to wake her. It wasn't like she could come with him.

Since there wasn't yet an update on don Bianchi, there was no point in waking Enzo up. Especially, since Eve would demand that she be allowed to come with him. Stefano strode into his bathroom. Navigating the space with the lights off, he washed up. There was time for a full shower.

After drying off, he headed to his closet. Pulling his clothes from their hangers, Stefano pressed the button on the back wall of his closet. He cast a glance at Sienna as the back panel slid open. Had it always been this loud? Cringing, he watched her until the door fully opened, then he stepped into the room.

He didn't bother closing the door behind him because he didn't want to cause that noise again just yet. He dressed in a black long-sleeved button-down, black slacks, belt, socks, and shoes. Once dressed, he stared at his wall of weapons. He was sure everything he needed was already in Lino's warehouse.

Warehouse B was a good location for this to go down in. Not only was it out in the middle of nowhere, but the walls were soundproof. So, even if someone did happen by the wooded area it was located in, they wouldn't hear the screams coming from inside.

Another plus was that it wasn't far from Stefano's home. Stefano grabbed a duffel labeled number three and slung it over his shoulder. The number three duffel was for making motherfuckers talk.

With everything he needed ready, he exited the room and pressed the C button on the panel. The hidden door slid shut. He closed his closet door and then strode over to his bed where his woman was still resting. She hadn't moved from the position she'd been in before he'd gotten dressed. Leaning over, he pressed a kiss to her forehead.

"Be back soon," he whispered.

If he was lucky, he'd be back before she awakened. *If he wasn't lucky...* He strode over to his desk and wrote Enzo and Eve's names down on a piece of paper, along with Enzo's phone number and home address.

If he didn't return... Stefano inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly. He'd never worried about returning or not. He gazed back at Sienna. Emotions that were almost too much to handle surged through him. He'd never had a reason to worry.

So, this was the other side of love. *Fear*. He walked over to the nightstand and placed the paper on it. Unable to help himself, he kissed her one more time, barely resisting the urge to wake her up so he could hug her close. Forcing himself to leave, Stefano strode from the room with his weapons in tow.

He locked up behind him, then left the house. Next stop, Warehouse B. His drive to the warehouse was uneventful. When he parked, he exited the car and strode to the front door of the facility, where two guards were standing.

They nodded. He nodded back. One opened the door. Stefano strode inside. Terzo's loud voice was the first thing he heard.

"Cousin!" the young DeLuca yelled, rushing over to Stefano.

He braced himself for impact. Terzo hugged him, squeezing him tightly.

A few seconds later, Stefano growled, "That's enough."

"That's one second longer than last time," Terzo said, releasing him. "Progress. What took you so long to answer your phone? Were you with a woman?"

"None of your business." Stefano looked over at Lino who was approaching them. The man looked tired. Lino swiped his hand over his face.

"You need to get more rest," Stefano told Lino.

"Tell that to streets," Lino complained. "I'm monitoring this, that, and the other. I'm busy as fuck."

"Do you want me to tell Enzo to lighten your load?" Stefano asked.

"So he can kill me? No, thanks."

Terzo shook his head. “He was up late with a prostitute. Don’t let him make you think he’s been working. Now, me. I’ve been working. I’m the one who’s tired as fuck.”

“Language,” Pietro said, approaching them.

Lino and Terzo stepped aside so their uncle could approach Stefano. Smiling, Stefano stuck his hand out.

“I didn’t know he could do that,” Terzo said.

“Shake hands?” Lino asked.

“Smile,” Terzo replied.

Ignoring them, he tried to shake his uncle’s hand. Pietro shook his head and pulled Stefano in for a hug. Stefano hugged him back.

“Oh, you’ll hug uncle, but not me?” Terzo complained.

“Ignore them,” Pietro whispered in Stefano’s ear.

“I always do,” Stefano replied. “It’s good to see you.... Uncle.”

Pietro smiled. “It’s good to finally hear that word, nephew.”

The two men pulled apart. Pietro and Stefano’s father, Lorenzo, looked very much alike. Staring at Pietro was almost like staring at his father. *Almost*.

“Before you leave,” Pietro said. “I need to talk with you.”

“About?”

“We’ll talk later.”

Stefano nodded. Had the other old heads told Pietro that Stefano had been looking into the past, into his mother, and his father? Probably. He pushed that thought aside and he strode further into the nearly empty warehouse. Three bodies were strung up from the ceiling. From the way their heads were lulled to the side, he knew they were dead.

Under one of the bodies, was a man who appeared to be in his late forties. He was tied to a chair. Blood dripped from the body hanging above him, splattering onto the man’s face. This

had to be Arnaldo Bianchi, the weak bitch who'd decided to go up against the DeLuca family and organization.

"Who are the other three?" Stefano asked as he approached Arnaldo, who glared at him, mouth taped shut at the moment.

"Those were his guards," Terzo answered. "My informant called me because the four of them were spotted at a nightclub."

So, this motherfucker felt confident enough to go to clubs and shit.

"Any trackers?" Stefano asked.

"On their cars. They went to the club in two cars. I had my guys dump them by the river. We extracted money, weapons, and enough drugs to fill a pharmacy from the trunk. They had trackers too. My guys disabled the tracking devices. Lino's guys are taking care of what was in the trunk. I figured we could use this bitch's own money to pay the cleaners to clean this place up. And Lino's guys could push his drugs on the streets. If we get the details we need from him, this will be a win all the way around."

True. But when had a win ever come this easy?

"And there were no other trackers on them?" Stefano asked.

"None," Terzo assured them. "My guys checked them over. From their mouths to their asses. There's nothing."

"Okay." Stefano stepped up to Arnaldo Bianchi and leaned down to peer into the man's cold, dark eyes.

Arnaldo glared at Stefano, trying to hold his gaze. Stefano knew the man wouldn't last long, not many did. Sure, Arnaldo was a monster. He was a killer. But Stefano was the thing monster's feared. The thing killers ran from. Stefano smiled. Arnaldo looked away.

It was time to begin.

Chapter Twenty-Three



Stefano

He had Terzo move Arnaldo's chair away from the hanging bodies.

Stefano slid his black gloves on, then laid his kit out on a wooden table Lino had brought out of one of the warehouse office rooms. With Pietro standing next to him, Stefano looked over his kit. What did he want to use?

"I'm serious," Arnaldo yelled. "I don't remember anything. Torturing me will get you nowhere. The drug won't let me remember." Arnaldo laughed.

The sound irritated the fuck out of Stefano. He added it to the list of reasons why he wanted to shut Arnaldo up forever.

"You can kidnap all of my cousin's men. You'll never get anything out of them. We're all taking Blackout," Arnaldo confessed.

Turning away from the table, he faced Arnaldo.

"Blackout? That's the name of the drug?" Stefano questioned.

"Yes. A fitting name, isn't it?" Arnaldo asked. "Since it blacks out your memories."

Stefano nodded. "It's a fitting name. And a convenient drug for don Bianchi. But it's a problem for you, Arnaldo."

"Fuck you. Just kill me."

"Kill you? Why would I do that?"

Arnaldo's eyes widened. "You're not going to kill me?"

Stefano shook his head. "See, I know this neurologist. I think he's a neurologist. Uncle Pietro, is Benji a neurologist?" Stefano asked.

Pietro moved to stand next to him. "Benji's a sick fuck who likes to cut people's heads open. He used to be a surgeon. I think."

"Yeah," Stefano agreed. "I think he was a surgeon. Not a neurologist. Anyway. That was before people found out about his underground clinic where he was performing surgeries on unwilling patients."

"Is that supposed to scare me?" Arnaldo asked. "Because it doesn't. Fuck you. Do your worst. I won't tell you shit because I can't. I take the drug before all of my calls with the don. I don't remember them after I've completed my task. Your cousin already asked me everything. Yeah, I was at the club. But I don't know why. I don't remember now. And yeah, I was at the restaurant. But I can't even tell you what I ordered. I forgot as soon as the drug wore off. I just followed instructions and then waited for the next call."

Ignoring Arnaldo, Stefano told Pietro, "Benji told me about this procedure called a lobotomy. Do you think that will help Arnaldo remember?"

"I'm not sure," Pietro told him. "It's worth a try."

"No," Arnaldo rushed to say. "It's not. That's not what a lobotomy is for."

Still ignoring him, Stefano asked Pietro, "Do you think Benji will come do it?"

Pietro shook his head. "The man is wanted by damn near everybody. He won't come out. But if I call him, he'll talk you through it. For a fee, of course."

"We just came into a trunk load of money. We can pay him in cash."

"I'll make the call. Oh, he's going to ask if you have your tools ready."

“What do I need?”

“A chain saw for starters.”

Stefano smiled. Duffle number three came with a small chainsaw. He strode over to his bag to retrieve it as Pietro pretended to make the call. The truth was, they wouldn't dare call Benji unless it was absolutely necessary. The man was insane. He'd kill them too if he had the chance.

“Hey, Benji,” Pietro said. “Yeah, I know it's late. But we got this guy who says he can't remember what we need him to remember. Would a lobotomy work for that? It would. Good. Yeah, we've got a chainsaw. Okay.”

Pietro lowered the phone to stare over at Stefano.

“He said to saw around his head, careful not to crush the brain. Reveal the skull, so you can see the brain.”

“I can do that,” Stefan said. He turned to his cousins and told them, “Hold him still so that I don't mess this up. This is my first lobotomy.”

His cousins rushed to do as he asked. Gripping the end of the saw tightly, Stefano pressed the ridges against Arnaldo's head.

“Wait!” Arnaldo yelled.

Stefano paused. “You ready to talk?”

“Fuck that. This isn't a lobotomy. This is a craniectomy. They're different. Cutting open my skull won't get you anything.”

“A craniectomy?” Stefano frowned and looked at Terzo.

Terzo shrugged. Stefano looked at Lino.

Lino shrugged and said, “Don't look at me. I don't even know how to spell those words.”

Frowning, Stefano looked at Pietro.

“Benji said just go with it,” Pietro told him.

Stefano nodded. “Benji's the doctor on duty. Craniectomy it is.”

Stefano sawed the tool across Arnaldo's skull, careful not to go too deep. Blood splattered as Arnaldo's high-pitched scream rang out.

"Stop!" Arnaldo yelled. "Please stop. Please. I'll talk. I'll tell you whatever I can."

Stefano stopped saw and nodded for his cousins to release the man. Blood ran down the side of Arnaldo's face and head.

"You fucking cut into my head," the man screamed, neck straining, forehead vein looking like it was about to burst.

"Did you think we came here to fuck around with you?" Stefano asked. "You're already a dead man, Arnaldo. How you die, is up to you. It can be painful, with me cutting into you for hours. Or it can be peaceful, a bullet to the head. But if you choose the painful route, that's going to take up my time. And I'm going to get pissed off. When I get pissed off, I start thinking shit, like, does he have a son I should kill to take out the rest of my anger on? Or is there a wife? A mother? A father? Shit like that. Understand?"

Tears streamed down Arnaldo's cheeks.

"We just wanted a chance to get our family name back to where it used to be before you DeLucas ruined it. Before don Ermanno took over these streets and territories, the Bianchis ruled them. We were the ones everyone feared. We went to war with the DeLucas and lost. Since then, we've been laying low, staying out of you guys' way. The old heads gave up. They didn't think we had the foundation to go up against you. And most of the younger guys don't want to return to the old ways. But there are some of us who do. We want to bring respect back to our name. And the best way to do that is to take out the don. The way your grandfather took out ours."

"I don't know the details of what all went on back then," Stefano said. "Explain it to me. Why did you all go up against don Ermanno back then?"

Before Arnaldo could get the words out, Pietro spoke up.

"I'll tell you later," Uncle Pietro told him. "It's not important right now. What you need from him is info on the

current don Bianchi. Not the old.”

Terzo and Lino may not have picked up on what Pietro had just done. Stefano had. His uncle was hiding something. Besides this, what else was Pietro hiding about the past? Could he answer the questions plaguing Stefano? Now was not the time for that. And his uncle was right. They needed info on the current don, not the old.

“Blood is getting in my eye. Can someone bandage my fucking head?”

“No,” Stefano answered. “Your don used Emelia to take our don Ermanno. How did he get her to come to your side? And don’t say you don’t know. I’m sure the blackout is a new drug.”

Arnaldo smiled. “That was easy as fuck. We didn’t go to her. She heard we were trying to make a return, and she came to us. The entire plan was hers. And it went off exactly as she’d said. If she told you differently, she’s a fucking liar. Wait, she can’t talk. She’s resting, right?” Arnaldo laughed, then cringed. “Please, bandage up my fucking head.”

“Not happening,” Stefano said. “What all did Emelia do for you?”

“I can’t talk with all of this blood on my face.”

“Talk, or I’ll saw some more.”

“Money!” Arnaldo yelled. “Our family needed money. And she gave it to us. Lots of it too. See, the rich fucks in our family didn’t want to get involved. They didn’t want to offend the precious DeLucas. So, they didn’t give us the funds we needed. Emelia was more than happy to fund our return to the top. I actually kind of liked her. Tried to fuck her once. She didn’t let me.”

“Careful what you say about our piccola Em,” Pietro said from near the table. “Or I’ll make sure death never comes for you. Only pain. Forever.”

Stefano had never seen Pietro look that upset. But he loved Em. The entire family did. Her betrayal had hit them hard. Enzo still hadn’t recovered. It would seem Pietro hadn’t either.

Apparently, Pietro's anger was conveyed in his tone, because Arnaldo went silent.

Now that Stefano had determined the man could indeed remember stuff from around the time Enzo learned who'd actually killed the don, it was time for him to ask the important questions.

"Where is don Bianchi?"

"I don't know."

"Do I need to ask again, with the saw?"

"I don't fucking know! If I did, it's gone. The blackout drug."

"I'll get the saw," Stefano said, turning toward the table again.

"Wait!"

"Did you remember?"

"No. I really don't know where he is. But, after his sons' death, he first went to the States. Minnesota, I believe. We have... we have family there."

"Where did he go next?"

"I don't know."

"Arnaldo, don't shit me. You said he first went to the States. Which means, he went somewhere afterward. Where?"

"He..." Arnaldo stared around the room. "He..."

"Can I saw him this time?" Terzo asked.

"He came back here. To Bari," Arnaldo answered.

"Fuck!" Terzo mumbled. "He's been here this entire time."

"Where in Bari?" Stefano asked. "Where is he hiding?"

"I don't know. At first... at first..." The man's eyes fluttered.

Soon, he'd pass out from blood loss. Right now, he was looking like a horror movie poster with blood running down the side of his head and face.

“Come on,” Stefano said, slapping him on his clean cheek to rouse him. “Where is he in Bari?”

“I don’t know,” Arnaldo drawled. “I can’t think with my head fucking throbbing. You sawed my fucking head,” Arnaldo sobbed.

“Terzo, grab the saw and finish removing his skull.”

“Fuck yeah!” Terzo yelled.

“No, please,” Arnaldo cried, snot running down his nose. “I... He... I don’t know where he is right now at this moment. But, I know...he told me if I went to the club, and let you all take me. I just needed to stay alive long enough for him to track me to where don Enzo was. He thought don Enzo would be here. Since he likes killing his enemies with his own hands. He planned to stomp Enzo’s fucking head in. But Enzo isn’t here. And... I can’t hang on, much...”

Terzo’s phone rang.

“Longer,” Arnaldo said before his chin dropped to his chest.

“Hello,” Terzo answered his phone. “Cars are approaching? Fuck. Alright. Hold them off.” Terzo ended the call. To Stefano, he said, “Incoming. Three black SUVs.”

“I thought you got all of the trackers off them?” Stefano asked as he approached his duffle. He grabbed a vest and slid it on as Terzo talked.

“We did. Teeth and ass, too, just to be sure.”

“It’s the drug,” Pietro said as he grabbed a weapon from Stefano’s bag.

“Uncle Pietro,” Stefano started. “You should go in one of the offices and sit this one out.”

“I’m not that old, kid,” Pietro told him.

Stefano started shrugging out of his vest to give it to his uncle.

“Keep it,” Pietro told him. “I’ve got my own. Lino, get my bag.”

Lino rushed to the corner and returned with two duffle bags as Stefano checked his clip. He was fully loaded.

“What do you mean it’s the drugs?” Stefano asked as his uncle put on his vest and his cousins double-checked their clips.

“I only know because of Em. The last time I visited her at her office, she’d been discussing a new drug with one of her colleagues. I remember her saying that the pill would be good for psychiatric patients because it came with a tracking device. So, if they got lost, the facility or their family could easily find them. I remember hearing her say it was created by a pharmaceutical company in Japan. I asked her about it later. She tried explaining it to me in scientific terms. I don’t remember all the big words she used. I just know the tracker is an ingestible sensor, the size of a grain of sand, and it could be put in any kind of pill. Once it hits the liquid in our stomach, it’s activated, and it sends a signal to whoever is monitoring the patient. That way, they knew the patient had taken their meds on time. And they could track the patient until the sensor is digested and eliminated from the body as waste. But even before it’s officially taken, it’s still trackable. You know, some patients sell their meds on the street. This was also a way for doctors to keep track of whether the drugs were being resold.”

“So,” Stefano started, mind racing. “Since Arnaldo took it but hasn’t shit yet, the tracker is still active.”

Pietro nodded. *Fuck.*

“And the only reason the Bianchis have knowledge or access to such a drug is because of our Em,” Pietro continued, shaking his head as he pulled night-vision goggles from his bag. “We failed that one.”

Stefano had his own thoughts about that. He didn’t think anyone failed Em. She failed herself and others. Because of her actions, she was in a coma, and her chance of waking was slim. He’d never tell Enzo that she deserved it.

But she did. She’d lived a pampered life. No one had beaten her. No one had scolded her daily. Instead, she’d been

given everything she asked for. And the one thing she wasn't given could have become hers after Enzo became don.

Instead of waiting for the chance, she'd taken matters into her own hands. No, Stefano didn't feel sorry for the betrayer. She felt sorry for the don, who was betrayed by the grandfather he adored. Stefano grabbed his own night visions. Their gazes were pulled to the front door when shots sounded outside. They heard cars skidding to a halt outside the facility.

"Kill the lights," Pietro yelled, moving to the side of the room.

Stefano slid his goggles on, then grabbed his duffle and followed Pietro, sticking close to the man, ready to protect him. A few more rounds sounded. Then there was silence.

But that was just the calm before the storm.

Chapter Twenty-Four



Stefano

Bullets riddled the door seconds before it was kicked in.

Bianchi's men stormed in, firing as they swarmed the room. Stefano counted the men entering the room. *Six*. There were three DeLucas with him. They could handle six of Bianchi's men. Bullets tore through Arnaldo's body.

Killed by his own men. What a fucked up way to go. Stefano had wanted to see more on him. Maybe give Terzo a chance to see more on him. Too late for that. The firing stopped. The men were reloading. And that was their cue to enter. Stefano stepped forward, gun raised, eyes on his target.

He fired two shots. The guy in the front dropped. The others started looking for cover. In the main room of the warehouse, there weren't many places for them to hide. Which made them easy pickings for his team. Too easy. They had all six men down within eight minutes. Terzo started pulling off his goggles.

"That was easy," Terzo said.

"Wait," Stefano told them. "There's no way six men came in three SUVs."

"Get back," Pietro shouted just as a smoke bomb came rolling through the door. "Masks are in the bag," Pietro shouted as they raced back to the other side of the room.

More gunmen entered the room, firing as they stormed forward. Stefano made sure Pietro had his mask on before donning his own. Coughing was what drew the gun fire their

way. Stefano jumped in front of Pietro as bullets sparked against the wall and ground closest to them.

He was out of ammo and the bag was too far for him to reach it to grab another gun. He waited until the four men who'd entered the building stopped shooting before racing forward.

"Cover me," he shouted as he ran.

It would only take his enemies a few seconds to reload, which meant time wasn't on his side. He reached the first guy just as the man aimed his reloaded weapon at him. Stefano gripped the man's wrists and thrust them upward. A shot was fired, striking the ceiling.

As he tussled with the man, the guy next to them went down, throat ripped open by a bullet fired by one of Stefano's men. Stefano managed to knock the gun from his enemy's hand. He punched the guy, making his head jerk back, then he grabbed him, using him as a shield as one of Bianchi's men fired on him.

The bullet struck the man he was holding in the head. Damn, that could've been Stefano. Stefano shoved the now-deceased man forward. The other gunmen dodged the dead body, but Stefano was right behind it. He punched the man's arm, forcing him to release his weapon. More shots rang out around him.

Ignoring them, he battled it out with the bastard who'd just tried to shoot him in the head. The man was strong. Stefano would give him that. He fought hard. Or maybe it was because Stefano wasn't fully healed from his time in the dungeon. Either way, it took him longer than expected to take the man down.

"Want me to shoot him?" Terzo called from behind him as a fist slammed into Stefano's jaw.

Stefano spat out blood before saying, "I got this."

His enemy, the last of Bianchi's men, smiled. That smiled pissed Stefano the fuck off. He raced toward him, ramming his

shoulder into the man's chest. His enemy brought his elbow down on Stefano's back.

"I think I'll just shoot him," Terzo yelled.

"Don't fucking shoot him," Stefano called as he lifted the man and slammed him onto the ground hard.

Pain shot through his side. Not the side Sienna had scratched him on. The other. Cemetery had landed a few punches there. So had Killer G. Stefano was still sore. Thumping his enemy on the ground had nearly knocked the wind out of Stefano. Stefano raised up to stare down at the man. He wasn't dead. *Yet*. Blood pooled from the back of his head. Yet, the bastard still reached for Stefano's throat. Stefano grabbed the man's wrist and twisted it. A pitiful groan escaped him.

"Can I shoot him now?" Terzo asked, sounding too close.

Releasing his opponent's wrist, Stefano stared up at his cousin, who was standing next to him, gun pointed at his enemy's head. Sighing, Stefano pushed himself to his feet.

"Go ahead," he told Terzo.

Terzo fired one shot, sending the last of Bianchi's men into the afterlife. The lights flickered on. Stefano searched for Pietro. He found his uncle standing against the wall, removing his goggles. Stefano was able to exhale a sigh of relief.

"Don't take your masks off yet," Pietro yelled. "Lino, stop standing around and get that bomb out of it. It's still pouring gas."

"On it, Unc," Lino answered.

"Does this mean I saved your life?" Terzo asked.

"I wasn't dying," Stefano pointed out.

"Right. But it still counts, doesn't it."

"No." Stefano walked off.

"But I put a bullet in him."

"But I dropped him," Stefano explained.

“Yeah, but I sealed the deal.”

“I signed the deal before you sealed it.”

“But...” Terzo started.

“Enough!” Pietro ordered, causing Stefano and Terzo to both go silent.

Stefano followed his uncle to the center of the room.

“Don’t call the cleaners for this one,” Pietro said. “Not yet. These bodies are still being tracked because of that drug. We don’t want them to know the route the cleaners take or find out where they dump the bodies. We’ll burn these ourselves. But not tonight.”

“Why not tonight?” Stefano asked, wanting to get this done as soon as possible so he could return home to the woman waiting for him. He almost smiled. He had someone waiting for him at home. That shit felt good as fuck.

“We can’t burn the bodies tonight because Bianchi already knows of this location. If we leave the bodies here, maybe he’ll send more men out. This time, we can try to take one alive. Which is why we’ll call some more men out and have them keep an eye on this place until Stefano, Enzo, and I return tomorrow.”

“I want to come, Unc,” Terzo said.

“You’re needed elsewhere. The drugs you confiscated have tracking devices in them, remember?”

“Shit! We’ve got to ditch those drugs and clear out that warehouse before Bianchi’s men show up.” Terzo pulled his phone out and stalked across the room to make a call.

Pietro looked at him. “Tomorrow, we’ll burn the bodies and bury the ashes.”

“Why the three of us? You, me, and Stefano?”

“Because I need to talk to the two of you about the Bianchi family and what happened in the past. It’s connected to the two of you.”

Stefano wanted to say more. He wanted to ask questions. But Pietro looked tired and ready to go.

“Lino,” Pietro shouted. “Take me back to your place. I’m old. One shoot-out has tuckered me out. Back in the day, I could go for three shoot outs or more in one night.”

“Alright, Unc,” Lino said. “I’ve got some guys on the way to monitor this place in case anyone shows up.”

With one last nod to Stefano, Pietro, and Lino left. Stefano pulled the bodies into one pile as Terzo ended his call.

“My guys are going to burn the drugs where they are. They’re on the lookout for any incomers. Damn. I hate to see those drugs go to waste. But, oh, well. So, we’re just leaving our dead here, huh?”

“Pietro’s orders.”

“Alright,” Terzo said, following Stefano out of the building. “And the cars?” he asked as he locked up. “We’re burning those too? Shit. My guys out here!”

The two guys who’d been standing out front were dead in front of the building.

“I’m not burning them. They’re getting proper burials,” Terzo said, looking pissed off.

“I’ll help you,” Stefano started but paused when one of the men coughed.

“He’s alive.” Terzo rushed to the guard’s side while Stefano checked the author guard for sides of life. He had a pulse.

“He’s alive too,” Stefano told his cousin.

“Finally, a win. Help me get them in my car.”

Stefano helped his cousin load the guards into his car. Terzo, the playboy, who claimed he didn’t like getting blood in his sports car, didn’t complain once about his guards bleeding in his car. That was why Enzo endured Terzo. Well, more than endured. Enzo was fond of him. So was Stefano.

Terzo was loyal, reliable, and though he pretended to be a playboy, he was far from that. Stefano assumed Terzo had his own reasons for pretending. They all had their own reason for doing the shit they did. Each DeLuca had a story.

“I’m going to take them to one of our hospitals. The closest one is the one Em is in. Maybe I’ll check on her before leaving.”

Stefano nodded.

“Thanks for your help,” Terzo told him.

“You’re welcome, cousin.”

Terzo smiled. “That’s what I’m fucking talking about. Say it again. Call me cousin again. Hey, hey!”

Stefano kept walking to his own car. He didn’t get all the information he needed. But he wasn’t coming away empty-handed. He knew Bari had returned to Bari at some point and may still be there. He also knew he was using a medicinal tracking method Em had introduced him to; to make his men forget their tasks after they were done.

And, he was setting his own men up to be kidnapped in hopes of finding Enzo. Which was why Stefano didn’t want Enzo coming tonight. People knew Enzo liked to get his hands dirty. They knew he wasn’t the type of don to let others handle things for him. He enjoyed the gritty side of this life.

And don Bianchi was trying to use that to his advantage by trying to lure Enzo out. For now, Enzo was safer at home. And if he had to work, then he could go to Tower D with Eve. But he couldn’t be in the streets. Stefano would handle the streets for him. Driving home, his phone rang. He answered on the second ring.

“Hey, Stefano.”

“He, Gen. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Just wanted to apologize for not bringing your little vixen’s stuff over before now. Is she dead?”

“No. She’s alive. And mine.”

Gen chuckled. “My wife used to stab at me too. Before we were married. She was one of the crazy ones. But those are the best. If you treat them right, they’ll love you forever. If you don’t, they’ll bury you. Gotta love a woman who doesn’t mind burying a body.”

Stefano smiled. Was he toxic for being happy that Sienna could help him bury a body if needed? Probably.

“But, I got all of your woman’s stuff. I found a key card to a fancy hotel room. So, we went there and got that stuff for you too. And left the card on the bed, so the hotel thinks she just checked out. If you’re home, I can bring it by. If you’re out, we can meet up.”

“I’m out. Let’s meet up.”

Stefano gave Gen the location. They met, and he loaded Sienna’s stuff into his trunk. The woman had weapons for days. She’d really planned to torture him, Stefano thought, smiling.

“Go home to your wife,” Stefano told his friend.

“Go home to your future wife,” Gen said. “I would ask why there’s blood on your neck. But I’m tired. Get some rest, Stefano. Real rest. A long rest. Take your woman on a vacation. There’s more to life than this. Got it?”

Stefano nodded. Gen’s words stuck with him the rest of the ride home. There was more to life than this. Before yesterday, this was all he’d had. It was all he knew. It was all he wanted. And he still wanted it. But he wanted more also. He wanted Sienna. He wanted the organization.

He wanted a family. He wanted to protect the DeLuca name. He wanted vacations with his woman. He wanted to help his uncle burn bodies. He wanted it all. The light and the dark. But if Sienna wanted to walk away from the dark, he’d understand. And he’d move with her. Because above all, he wanted her.

He wanted to love and be loved. But first, he had to make sure the Bianchi’s were taken out. He wouldn’t rest until don

Bianchi was dead, because he knew his brother couldn't rest until don Bianchi was dead.

But for now, his family was safe. All of them. And he even had time to go home and shower before he started on his Sienna's breakfast. He'd worry about the rest later. For now, breakfast with his woman was all that mattered.

Chapter Twenty-Five



Sienna

A yawn escaped her as she stretched her arms out.

Legs too. Her body felt so relaxed. She'd slept so peacefully. No bad dreams. No waking up in cold sweats. Hot sweats either. Nothing. Just sleep. Was this how normal people lived? If so, where was the application to sign up because this shit felt great? She opened her eyes and stared up at the ceiling.

It didn't take a moment for her to realize where she was. She instantly knew where she was. She was right where she wanted to be. In Stefano DeLuca's bed. But where was her savage? She stared over at his pillow. Touching it, she found it cold. He'd been gone for a while. Her brain kicked into high gear. She sat up and stared around the room. Light still drifted in from underneath the curtains. Birds were still chirping outside.

Damn, how long had she slept? Because it couldn't be the same day. She felt too rested for that. Sienna climbed out of bed. Naked, she stared around the room. She really needed some clothes. She strode over to the Stefano's dresser. Would he mind if she borrowed one of his shirts?

Surely not. Men always liked it when women wore their clothing. Sienna chose a black Tee shirt and pulled it over her head. It dropped to mid-thigh. Perfect. Panty-less, she headed to that door in the corner of the room, assuming it was the bathroom. She was right. She stared at herself in the mirror.

Bitch, you look scary. She was a fright for sore eyes. Turning the faucet on, Sienna washed her face, then washed her mouth out. She searched his cabinets, looking for extra toothbrushes. She found a pack that had been opened, and took a new one out. She was just making herself at home in Stefano's place.

Smiling, she brushed her teeth. Once she was done, she tried to do something with her hair. Sleeping without a bonnet on was not the way to go. She didn't even have any hair care products here. That would be remedied soon. Until then, she undid the ponytail holder and placed it around her wrist.

She proceeded to wet her hand the smooth her hair back with the water until she looked decent. After wrapping the ponytail holder back around her head, careful not to break the beads, she washed and dried her hands then left the bathroom in search for Stefano. The scent of coffee and food filled the air.

Following it, she found Stefano in the kitchen. With his back to her, he was clad in a white Tee-shirt, gray joggers, and white socks. Had no one told this man that jogging pants were like lingerie for me. It got women worked up. Not only that, the fact that he was making breakfast had her ready to jump him.

"Hey, sexy," Sienna called out.

He spun around to face her. *That face. That smile. That man.* Her heart did some weird shit in her chest. If she didn't know any better, she'd think she was having a heart attack. But she did know better. And she was pretty sure she was falling for her Beast. Or, maybe she'd already fallen. This was all so new to her.

"You're up," he said, smiling beautifully at her.

"I am." She stretched as she approached him. "Someone fucked me so good yesterday." She paused. "It was yesterday, right? I'm getting my days confused."

"Yes. It was yesterday. You slept all day and all night," he informed her.

“I think it was the dick. It was so good, it relaxed me so well. I think it’ll have to be my new sleep aid,” she said once she was standing in front of him.

He lowered the spatula he’d been holding and then wrapped his arms around her.

“It can also be used to wake you up, if you need it,” he told her before lifting her up to kiss her.

Tall men were the best. It was a chaste kiss. But she loved it nonetheless. He returned her to her feet before reaching behind him and grabbing something.

“Here.”

He handed her a plate of crepes and scrambled eggs.

“I’m not used to making an American breakfast. But, when I went online, this is what it showed me that Americans liked.”

“This is amazing Stefano. Usually, I’m a cold cereal girl. But this is far better. Don’t spoil me too much, Beast. I may get used to it.”

“Get used to, Sienna,” he told her, getting all serious on her. “This is what I want to do for you. Forever.”

Be still my beating heart. And pussy. All of me, just chill the fuck out. But her body was reacting strangely.

“Don’t cry,” he rushed to say.

“I’m not. I’m just tearing up.”

“What did I say?”

“Everything,” she told him, confusing him further. “It’s not you, it’s me,” she told him.

He shook his head. “Don’t say that. Ever.”

Sienna chuckled. “I mean, I liked what you just said. I loved it. I don’t know why my emotions are all over the place.”

He wiped her tears away.

“I’m not just saying it to say it,” he told her. “I want to make you breakfast every morning.”

“It’s that why you weren’t by my side when I woke up?”

“No, sorry. I had to go out last night. There’s a family after my family, and I needed to interrogate someone.”

“You should’ve taken me with you.”

“You were sleeping so peacefully, I didn’t want to bother you.”

“Next time, take me with you. I’m a pro at interrogating fuckers.”

Stefano chuckled. “I’ve got to out later,” he said. “To uh…”

“Just say it.”

“Burn some bodies with Enzo and my uncle.”

“And Enzo is Eve’s man, right?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Do you want me to go?”

“Not this time. My uncle wants to have a talk with us. I’ve got a feeling he wants it to be private.”

Sienna nodded. “I would say take me to Eve when you go, but, I don’t have anything to wear.”

“Oh, Gen got me your stuff from your hotel and from your motel. Did you really need that many weapons?”

Sienna blushed. “I did. I do. Not for you though. But, a girl has to have her weapons. So, you got all my stuff.”

He nodded. “It’s in the guest room. You can make that your weapons room if you’d like.”

Yes. She had hair care products.

“Wait,” Sienna said. “I get a weapons room all to myself?”

“You get whatever you want, whatever you need, Sienna Keys.”

He pressed a kiss to her forehead. Was this Christmas? Was he the Santa for naughty girls because she damn sure hadn’t been nice.

“Now eat,” he told her.

“Where’s your food,” she asked, forking a bite of crepes into her mouth.

Before he answered her question, she closed her eyes and moaned. This was the best crepe she’d ever tasted. It was light and fluffy and sweet. And the strawberries on top were fresh. It was heaven in her mouth. When she opened his eyes to tell her that, she found her beast staring down at her with lust blazing in his gaze.

“This is good,” Sienna told him. “Try it.” She forked some into his mouth. He chewed it but said nothing, just kept staring at her in that way that made her pussy perk up.

“It’s alright,” he told her. “But I want something sweeter.”

He reached for her. “Wait. I haven’t showered.”

“I can take you upstairs and bathe you right now.”

She cocked her head to the side. “Really. Can I eat while you bathe me.”

“Listen to me carefully. You can have whatever you like, Sienna Keys.”

She was starting to believe her savage. She ignored Maureen’s voice at the back of her head, telling her this wasn’t real. It was a scam. He was a fake. Eventually, that voice would disappear. She hoped. Until then, she’d just ignore it and focus on what felt good. Stefano DeLuca, he felt good to her.

She squealed when he picked her up and stalked from the room with her. He kept his promise. He sat her plate on the bathroom counter, and undressed her. While she ate, he ran her bath water. She finished her food by the time the water was ready. He stripped and climbed into the tub behind her.

She relaxed against his chest as he bathed her. It was the most erotic bath she’d ever had. He thumbed her nipples as he bathed her, causing them to harden underneath his tongue. He took his time with her pussy, massaging her clit as she squirmed against him, wanting to be filled with cock.

When it was her turn to bathe him, she made sure she tortured him just as much as he'd tortured her. She played with his nipples, showing him that men were sensitive there to. The gasped that escaped him when she licked his nipple made her pussy purr. Her poor savage had never been pleased properly, and it showed.

Bathing forgotten, she let the water out and made him stand against the shower wall as she showed him all the parts of his body that could cause pleasure when licked. She started with a kiss to his lips, deepening it when he moaned and pulled her up against him. She went to her tiptoes to press a kiss to his forehead.

Noticing she was struggling to reach it, he lifted her up, rubbing her body against his until he had her high enough for her to kiss his forehead. As she kissed his forehead, he pressed a kiss to her chin. Her sweet savage! After he lowered her to her feet, Sienna proceeded to press kissing along his throat.

He turned his head to the side, giving her better access. She kissed her way down his chest, noticing the way he trembled lightly with each kiss. Her savage body was needy. He'd gone years without being cherished this way. She would enjoy showing him that he deserved this type of attention.

Her beast deserved all her attention. He was worth it. She played with his nipples as she licked her way down his chest and abs. His cock jerked, jutting forward, wanting attention. As if she could ever ignore Beast number 2. That thang was so damn beautiful. She couldn't resist rubbing her nipples against it as she kissed and teased with him.

"I don't know how much more I can take," her beast growled, hands clenched into fists at his sides.

"Hold on just a bit longer for me," she whispered.

Fully erect, his cock was nestled between her breasts as she licked his abs, while thumbing his nipples. She rubbed her body against him as she licked him. His cock pulsed against her breasts. His abs tightened. He thrust his hips, pushing his cock between her breasts.

“Sienna,” he growled.

“Stefano,” she moaned, moving lower, trailing kisses against his heated flesh until she made it to his cock. She licked precum from his slit, twirling her tongue around it until she’d gathered it all up. Then wrapping her lips around his tip, she swallowed.

“Fuck!” He groaned.

Before she could do more, she found herself being lifted like she weighed nothing at all. Bodies dripping wet, he carried her from the bathroom.

“I wasn’t finished,” she protested.

“I’ll finish this,” he promised.

“But,” she tried again.

“There’s only so much I can handle,” he growled as he laid her wet body on his bed.

She parted her legs, welcoming him into her heat. With a growl, he accepted the invitation. Gripping his cock, he climbed between her parted legs and claimed her lips in a kiss that had her pussy pulsing. That pulsing became more intense when he rubbed his cock between her folds.

He dipped into her a bit, then eased out. He did it again, only letting the head slide in, before pulling out.

“Stefano,” she groaned into his mouth.

He teased her one more time, before slamming into her, filling her completely, causing them both to gasp. He’d promised he’d finish it, and finish it he did. He fucked her until her body was trembling uncontrollably. She tried to match his pace.

She tried to fuck him back. But she got so caught up in the pleasure that all she could do was wrap her legs around him and hold on as he fucked her until she was crying out his name. Thrusting deeply, he lowered his body to hers until they were chest to chest.

Her beast wrapped his arms around her, cradling her head in one hand and her ass in the other as he pounded her body. No one had ever fucked her so well. No one had ever gone so deep, reaching places she never knew existing. No one ever made her feel this damn good.

No one, until Stefano. The man of her dreams, once she finally ceased having nightmares. When her orgasm hit her, it felt like her body had been struck by lightning. Her body jerked, back arched, pussy clenched. She cried out, closing her eyes against the intense pleasure coursing through it.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, baby. But you fucking shine when you cum,” he growled.

Her pussy clenched him tighter, pleased with his words. And her heart did a little flip in her chest, happy because of this savage and the sweet shit he said to her. Her body trembled as his jerked. He groaned loudly, cum shooting into her, filling her up. Together, they rode the waves of pleasure.

Caged in his embrace, she felt warm, protected, satisfied, and loved. That was all she’d ever wanted. And she’d found it all in this man. Sienna slowly opened her eyes once her body stopped trembling. She found her beast staring down at her.

“Thank you for finding me,” Stefano told her.

Why did that bring tears to her eyes. She was such a fucking baby now.

“I was lost, Sienna. I’ve been lost for a long time. Probably forever. But you found me.”

Okay, so now the tears were free and running down her cheek. Yeah, she was a big baby.

“Beast...”

“I need you,” he told her. “I need you in my life. So no matter what happens in the future, if I upset you, yell at me, curse me, fuck it, stab me if you need to...”

She shook her head.

“Just don’t leave me. If you need me to change something about myself, just tell me. No more misunderstanding.”

“I promise no more misunderstandings. Usually, I’m straight forward. I was just afraid of putting Eve’s life at risk. But going forward, I won’t let any misunderstanding arise between us. You say you need me. Well, guess what, Beast? I need you more. And I need you just the way you are. You don’t have to change a thing for me. I already love you for who you are. You’re my savage teddy. Brutal and sweet. Perfect.”

His eyes widened.

“What?” she asked. Had she said something wrong. She really wasn’t good at this love shit?

“Say that again?” he demanded.

“Which part?”

“Sienna!”

“Seriously, Beast. I’ve got so many emotions running through me that I barely know what I said.”

“Do you love me, Sienna?”

Oh, that part.

Sienna smiled. “I love you, Stefano DeLuca.”

He blinked, then looked away from her.

“Is my beast tearing up?” Sienna asked.

He chuckled then faced her, allowing her to see his eyes that were brimmed with tears.

“Is it okay for me to be this happy?” he asked.

“Aww, beast. Yes. It’s okay. It more than okay. You deserve it. I deserve it. We deserve it.”

He swallowed. “I love you, Sienna Keys. I will always love you and only you.”

“Thank you. And I love you, Beast. Let’s be happy together, forever. And if anyone gets in the way with our happiness...”

“We’ll burn them alive,” he finished.

“I was going to say bury them alive. But I like your plan better.”

They both started laughing and it was a beautiful sound. A beautiful sound that was cut short by the sound of his phone.

“Fuck,” he groaned, lowering his forehead to his.

“Family stuff?”

“Probably.”

“Go get it. And go take care of business. I’m not going anywhere.”

As his phone rang, he lifted his head and stared down at her. “My Sienna,” he whispered, a look of awe on his face that tugged at her heart strings.

“My Stefano,” she whispered.

The phone continued ringing. “We’ll continue this later,” he promised before standing up and striding over to his desk.

Sienna turned onto her side and admired the view. She’d struck the jackpot with this guy. He was so damn fine. And that dick wasn’t even hard any more. Yet, it was still thick and long. She’d hit that jack pot with that cock. Sienna sighed as she thought of all the freaky shit she wanted to do this man. Her man. Sienna had a man. Giggling, she turned onto her back. Then she remembered she wasn’t alone. Gazing at her man, she found him smiling at her as he listened to someone the other line.

Sienna blew him a kiss. Her savage caught it and pressed it to his cheek. He was so fucking silly and she loved it. She blew him another kiss and this time, pointed to his cock. He caught the kiss then palmed his cock. She covered her mouth to keep from laughing. But she adored the beautiful smile on his face.

She planned to keep this savage smiling. When he finally ended the call, he strode back over to the bed. He gave her a quick kiss, gripping her titty as he did so.

“I’ve got to go, love.”

“Do you have time for a quick shower? It got cut short by our.... Fucking.”

He nodded. “I’ll make time.” He scooped her up in his arms. Standing at the edge of the bed, he stared down at her.

“You make me blush when you do that,” Sienna said.

“I like it when you blush, little demon.”

“You can’t call me little demon anymore. I’m well behaved now.”

“Really?”

She nodded.

“How is vicious butterfly.”

“I’m not vicious,” she lied.

“How is brutal pixie?”

Sienna laughed. “I’m not brutal,” she lied.

“How is Mrs. Beast.”

“I like it.”

“You do?”

She nodded.

“Okay, Mrs. Beast. Let’s go shower.”

“Okay, Mr. Beast.”

She held on to him as he carried her to shower. She planned to hold on to this man forever because he was the savage who’d stole her heart.

Chapter Twenty-Six



Stefano

Before leaving the house, he made sure Sienna was settled.

He showed her where her items that Gen had brought over was. He also let her know the fridge was fully stocked. The thing that made her happy was seeing her jacket with all its hidden compartments. Since she liked clothing like that, he'd make sure he had some made for her, so she could hide her weapons in fashion.

He'd also shared a link to the store that Eve had fallen in love with. Since tonight, she was going to reunite with her friend, he wanted her dressed nice. And she'd said she hadn't brought anything nice with her. When he left her, she was online on her phone, looking up things in the store.

When she was ready, she'd text him the outfit he liked, and he'd stop at the store and get it for her. Since Eve was a regular there, he'd been to that store many times. The associates would be happy to help him, because they knew he'd tip them nicely. Stefano steered his car to Enzo's house.

Pietro had already called Enzo and let him know they needed to take care of some bodies and have a talk. When Stefano reached Enzo's place, he almost backed out of the driveway, because he'd thought he'd come to the wrong address. He stared up at his brother's home.

This had to be the work of Eve. There's was no way Enzo did this shit. His eyes widened as he stared at the monstrosity that used to be an elegant mansion. Enzo came walking down the cobblestone driveway.

After rolling his window down, Stefan called out to Enzo, “What happened to your house?”

Without looking up from his phone, Enzo answered. “Eve’s mad.”

“So, she had the house painted this horrendous color?”

“You should see our bedroom.”

“And you’re not going to do anything about it?”

“I told her it’s beautiful. That made her angrier. I’m sure the house will be a different color by next week.”

“And you’re okay with this?” Stefan asked.

Enzo stared up at him and smiled. “She could paint me pink, and I’d be okay with it.”

Stefano pondered Enzo’s words as his brother climbed into the passenger seat. In the past, Enzo’s words would’ve confused him. Now, understood completely.

“Stop worrying about my house and drive. According to uncle Pietro, we’ve got a few bodies to bury. I want to get it over with quickly, so I can get back to my Eve.”

“And your pink house.”

Enzo chuckled. “And my pink car.”

“She had the Benz painted pink?”

“Hot pink.”

“Damn, she’s real mad.”

“Real mad,” Enzo agreed.

Stefan laughed. If Sienna painted his house and car pink, he’d probably be just as at ease about it as his brother was. Love made you crazy. But Stefano had never been sane anyway. He steered them toward warehouse B. They arrived to find Pietro and some of his guys outside.

“I called in my own team,” Pietro told them when they approached him. “They are professionals at chemically burning bodies. They brought their equipment and are getting

it set up out back. They'll make them melt without all the flames and burning flesh stench."

Pietro was brutal. Stefano liked it.

"You got this, uncle," Enzo said. "Why did you call us out?"

"They'll work. We'll talk. Let's go over here."

Enzo looked to Stefano. Stefano shrugged. Pietro let the back down on his SUV. Three chairs were inside.

"Get those out for me," Pietro told them.

Enzo grabbed two. Stefano grabbed the last one. He sat on it, as Pietro sat on the one Enzo had given him. With Pietro sitting near the SUV, and Enzo to his left, and Stefano to his right, the older man folded his arms over his chest and stared up at the sky.

"Have either of you been in love?" Pietro asked.

Enzo raised his eyebrow. Again, Stefano shrugged.

"Enzo, you're in love with Eve. I know that already. And while the family may be hesitant to accept her, I know you don't give a fuck. And you shouldn't. Love who you want to love."

Enzo nodded. "I don't need the old heads acceptance to be with Eve. As long as I don't hear them talking shit about her, I'm fine whether they accept her not."

"They don't accept you as don, yet. So, they can't accept who you choose to love. It doesn't matter to all of them that she's black. Some would hate her even if her skin was made of diamonds and rubies. But some do hate her because she'd black. Those racist fucks are miserable and want you to be miserable. Fuck them."

Stefano smiled. So did Enzo.

"So, Eve's the one, huh?" Pietro asked.

Enzo nodded. "I plan to marry her. We're just waiting until we locate her friend. She won't marry me until her friend is here to be her bridesmaid."

Stefano squirmed in his seat but said nothing.

“Hurry up and find her friend. Get a ring on that woman as soon as possible. She makes you happy. And that’s rare to find. And Terzo says she’s a fighter. He’s been singing her praise.”

“Yeah, well, if Terzo wants to keep his vocal cords, he’ll stay the fuck away from my Eve,” Enzo snarled.

Pietro laughed. “I like that. Protect your woman. Protect your happiness. Just don’t kill Terzo. He’s got his own issues. I can vouch for him. He likes Eve like a sister.”

Enzo nodded, but Stefano knew his brother would fuck Terzo up about Eve.

Pietro looked to Stefano. “Nephew, do you have anyone you love?”

To admit it or not to admit? That was the question. He wanted the world to know he was in love with Sienna. But, he wanted to surprise Eve later tonight.

“I heard,” Pietro continued. “That there was a woman in the dungeon this past weekend at Gen’s place.

“Tacere?” Enzo asked.

Pietro nodded. Of course, word had spread that Stefano had fought someone. That info was too juice to be kept on the hush.

“I heard she tried to kill you,” Pietro said.

“Someone tried to kill you and you didn’t tell me?” Enzo asked.

“She didn’t try to kill me.”

“And,” Pietro continued. “I heard you wouldn’t let Gen and his team handle it. You insisted on taking her with you. But first, you insisted on having her wounds treated.”

Enzo frowned. “Why would you get her wounds treated after she tried to kill you? Fuck her. Where is she? Who sent her?”

“And,” Pietro said before Stefano could reply. “I heard she’s still with you, at your place, right now.”

Stefano shook his head. “Gen called you, didn’t he?”

Pietro grinned. “Gen and I have been friends since before you two were born. He looks out for you, Stefano. He was excited to see you happy.”

“Happy?” Enzo said. “What the hell is going on?”

“And,” Pietro said. “I heard she’s a black woman. A gorgeous black woman who can fight her ass off.”

Enzo stood up. “Someone better tell me what’s going on or I’m killing the men out back. All of them.”

Pietro frowned. “Why? They didn’t do anything.”

“Because I need to kill someone right now and I can’t kill you two. Now talk,” Enzo said. “Who is this woman?”

Pietro looked to him. “Who is that woman?”

It was time to share. Stefano smiled. Enzo plopped down in his seat.

“He’s smiling,” Enzo said. “Has he met a woman or a miracle worker?”

“Shut the hell up,” Stefano said. “I was going to tell you later on the drive home. Tonight, tell Eve to dress up, and you need to order some food from a fancy place she likes, because I have someone for her to meet. And I want them to have dinner together tonight.”

“A woman?” Enzo asked.

“Do you think I’d bring a man to her?”

“I’d kill him.”

Stefano chuckled. “I found Sienna Keys. Well, she found me.”

Enzo leaned forward in his seat. “Are you fucking serious? Eve’s Sienna?”

Jealousy roared through Stefano. “My Sienna.”

Enzo frowned, then laughed. “Eve is going to kill you.”

“Why?”

“You found her friend and now you’ve claimed her. She’s been looking through magazines, planning to get the guest house ready for Sienna to live there.”

“Sienna will live with me,” Stefano told him.

“Eve’s not going to like that.”

“Eve is your problem.”

“And to keep her happy, I might have to insist Sienna stay in the guest house.”

“And I might have to burn that guest house down,” Stefano told him.

“Hey! Eve loves that guest house. Don’t you fucking touch it.”

“Well don’t try to take Sienna from me. She’s mine. And she loves my house.”

“Boys!” Pietro yelled.

Stefano leaned back in his seat, glaring at Enzo. His brother glared back.

“Don’t look at me,” Stefano said.

“You looking at me,” Enzo countered.

“You should be happy I’ve found Sienna.”

“You found her and then took her. Eve is going to be pissed. Can’t you let Eve have her a while?”

“I can not.”

“One month.”

“Fuck no.”

“We’ve got a problem then.”

“*You* got a problem. I’m good,” Stefano told him.

“As your don, I demand you let Eve have her friend for a month.”

“As your right-hand man, I’m telling you that’s an unreasonable demand. And I don’t agree with it.”

“As your don...”

“Boys!” Pietro yelled again.

Enzo and Stefano went silent.

“You can handle who gets rights to Sienna later. Let’s get back to the conversation at hand. Stefano, are you in love?”

“I am.”

“How?” Enzo asked. “You just met her.”

“Says the man who fell in love with Eve the moment he saw her.”

Enzo opened his mouth and then closed it.

Pietro chuckled. “It’s good that you two haven’t changed. It’s good for you as brothers. And as the don, and his right-hand man. Seeing you argue makes me happy. It’s when you stop arguing like this, that problems arise. Don’t let this life change you. Don’t let the organization change you. As for your women. Well, two brothers have fallen in love with two best friends. Just buy one big house.”

“Fuck that,” Enzo and Stefano said in unison.

Pietro laughed. “I’m happy you’ve found love. And I’m happy you’ve found it with women who can embrace this life. That’s important. Because this life can ruin a relationship. And it can ruin you, if you end up with the wrong person. That’s why I wanted to talk to you two today. I want to talk to you about why the Bianchi family was brought down by the DeLucas back in the day.”

“I thought it was because they came up against us first,” Enzo said.

“That’s true,” Pietro told him. “But I’m going to tell you how it all went down. After this conversation, there will be no need to continue looking into the past.” Pietro glanced at Stefano.

Stefano nodded.

“Relax boys. This will take a little while.”

Stefano was too tense to relax. He listened closely as Pietro told him the story of his Lorenzo DeLuca, the woman he loved, and the woman who tried to destroy that love, and the family who'd sent her to do it.

“Lorenzo was a ladies' man,” Pietro told them. “He was handsome. Like myself. Like you boys. But he stopped his playboy ways when he fell in love with Enzo's mother. Problem was, she was the granddaughter of the Abeli family.”

“Abeli?” Enzo asked. “I thought...”

“You were told a different story back then because my father didn't want you to try to get to know the Abelis. So, he told you it was a family who relocated, left Italy. So, you wouldn't try to search for them.

“I wouldn't have searched for them. I'm a DeLuca. Italy is my home. The DeLucas are my family.”

Pietro smiled. “The Abeli's are your family also. But after the granddaughter of the family died in that crash, they disowned you. Which was fine with us. You belong to us. Old man Abeli hadn't wanted his daughter to be with a DeLuca. She went against his wishes and was seeing your father anyway. My dad didn't want Lorenzo to be with her. But, Lorenzo was in love. And he wouldn't let her go. They would sneak off together on vacations. It used to piss my father off. He threatened to have her killed. Lorenzo said he'd kill to protect her. He wanted to marry her. But, she wanted to try to convince her mother to be okay with it. So, they kept seeing each other in secret.”

Pietro swiped his hand over his face. “Stefano's mother was one of Lorenzo's confidants. She covered for him when he snuck out. She lied for him whenever father asked if she'd seen him. She was a good girl. But, she ended up hanging with the wrong crowd. Her and a guy she was seeing robbed a man one night. Turns out, that man was the current don Bianchi.”

“What?” Enzo and Stefano said.

His mother had robbed the current Bianchi don. Was that why that bitch was acting like this? Over some money?

Chapter Twenty-Seven



Stefano

Was his mother the reason all of this was happening.

“Is that why don Bianchi is doing this? Over some money?” Enzo asked what Stefano was thinking.

Pietro shook his head. “Let me tell the story.”

Enzo nodded.

“The current Bianchi was younger then. Stefano’s mom and her boyfriend roughed him up, took his money, and his drugs. More than anything, they embarrassed him in the streets. The Bianchis were a big name then. He ended up killing the guy later. He planned to kill your mother, Stefano, but the current don stopped him. Instead, they wanted to use her to bring down Lorenzo. They knew Lorenzo was seeing the granddaughter of the Abelis. And while the DeLucas and the Abelis didn’t want that union to happen, the Bianchis thought that if it did happen, it would make the two families stronger. Too strong. So, they wanted to stop that. They gave your mother two choices, Stefano, seduce Lorenzo or die.”

“And she chose seduction,” Stefano muttered.

“We all want to live. She was no different. She did it. Lorenzo trusted her. So, when she said she wanted to drink. He thought nothing of it. He’d heard of her boyfriend’s death. And wanted to console her. They got drunk. The next morning, housekeeping found her in Lorenzo’s bed. And told the don. He was enraged. He beat Lorenzo black and blue. He threatened to fire your grandmother if she didn’t control her

daughter better,” he told Stefano. “As for your mother, Enzo. She found out what happened, and she planned to break it off with Lorenzo. But he did what all of us men do when we’ve done wrong. He admitted his fault and begged her not to leave him. Months later, she agreed. But, by then, she was about three months pregnant. And Stefano, your mother was nine months pregnant. Of course, this pissed my father off. He called Lorenzo all sorts of name. Names he later regretted. Enzo, your mother moved into my father’s house with Lorenzo. Lorenzo had a plan, to stay until both babies were born. Don Ermanno had convinced Stefano’s mother to turn the child over to him. And she’d agreed. She wasn’t ready to be a parent. So, it was Enzo’s mother who had you after you was brought home from the hospital.”

“Really?” Stefano asked.

Pietro nodded. “She fell in love with you. Don Ermanno named you. He didn’t give you the DeLuca name. Your mother insisted that you at least have her name. It was part of the agreement. She disappeared for a few months. Enzo’s mom raised you. Your grandma, well, that old bat didn’t even come see you. She was angry with her daughter for doing what she’d done. And later, after the shit hit the fan, I believe she took that anger out on you, Stefano.”

“What do you mean?” Enzo asked, looking from Stefano to Pietro.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Stefano said.

Enzo sighed, but let it go.

“My father swore he wasn’t going to spend any time with you, Stefano,” Pietro said. “He was angry and he said he didn’t want to see you at all. He told Enzo’s parents to keep you out of his sight.”

Stefano hated to admit it, but that hurt. That hurt bad.

“But, he kept coming to their wing, checking on you. Claiming it was because they didn’t know anything about babies and he wanted to make sure his grandson didn’t die.” Pietro chuckled. “I came to visit him once, and found him in

the garden with you, Stefano. He was holding you and walking around the garden. He was humming. He got so red when he saw me watching him. He tried to say he was holding you because Enzo's mother was close to giving birth and she may drop you. The truth was, he'd fallen in love with his new grandson and he hated putting you down."

Stefano smiled, blinking back tears.

"But when Enzo's mother went into labor, things changed. The Abelis wanted her to return to them. When she wouldn't, they started threatening her. At the hospital, they tried to have Enzo kidnapped. Lorenzo wanted to act against them. But my father wouldn't let him. He said for him to send their granddaughter back to them. He didn't mean it. He was still angry. But that hurt Lorenzo. So, he packed up his woman, and his boys, and he tried to leave."

"With both of us?" Enzo asked.

"Yes. They planned to go to the States and raise the two of you. But, the Bianchis got wind of it. You see, Stefano's mother was having a hard time on the streets alone. So, she turned to the Bianchis for help. She had friends who still worked on the DeLuca estate, and through them, she kept up with what was going on, and told the info to the old Bianchi don. When she heard Lorenzo and his woman was leaving the estate, she told the don, not knowing how vicious the Bianchis were."

Pietro inhaled deeply, and exhaled slowly. Wiping tears from his eyes, he said, "It was the Bianchi's who caused that wreck."

Stefano clenched his hands into fists.

"By the we got there, Lorenzo and his woman were already dead. Lorenzo had bled out. Your mother, Enzo..." Pietro pointed at his stomach. Something had pierced her stomach when the car flipped over into the woods."

Enzo wiped his eyes. Stefano found himself blinking back tears also.

“But you two,” Pietro said after clearing his throat. “You two were in the backseat. In car seats. You had scratches on you. But for the most part, you were fine. When don Ermanno arrived at the crash site, he broke down, blaming himself for what happened. When they freed you from the wreckage, he rode in the ambulance with you. I rode with him. He didn’t want to leave your sides. His two grandsons. That’s all he kept saying, “My two grandsons, I’ve got to watch over them for Lorenzo.”

Stefano exhaled, barely holding it together.

“Then he went on a rampage. Before Lorenzo was even laid to rest, he’d already found out who the informant in the house was, and that he’d been feeding Stefano’s mother information. He had them killed the night after the crash.”

Tears spilled down Stefano’s cheeks. He felt like he shouldn’t cry for his mother. She’d brought her death on herself. Yet, she was his mother. How could he not mourn the mother he never got to know?

“Then, he sent everything he had at the Bianchi family. I’m talking hell. We gave them hell. There was no code, no honor in what we did. And I don’t regret it. They took my brother from me. He was my best friend. I was past thinking of codes and honor then. Ermanno was the one who put the bullet in the old don Bianchi’s chest. My father wanted the don’s heart to hurt like his heart was hurting. After that, we buried our dead. And we mourned them. And father blamed himself. He planned to raise you both together. But, Stefano, your grandmother wanted you to come with her.”

“Wait,” Stefano said. “She wanted me? She always said I was forced on her.”

“Lies. To repay her for the child she lost, she asked the don to let her raise you. He felt guilty for what he’d done to your mother after he calmed down some. So, he let your grandmother raise you. She wanted to quit working for him and leave the estate. That, he wouldn’t let her do. He wanted to keep you close. She agreed, but only if he would keep your story a secret from you. She didn’t want you to know you were

a DeLuca. Father agreed, but only because he knew the pain of losing a child. He knew how badly she was suffering. At the time, he would've agreed to almost anything, other than her leaving with you. So, she raised you to believe your father was the guy who was killed for robbing someone. I'm not sure what all she told you about your mother. But, I'm sure she talked bad about us DeLucas to you."

Stefano nodded. "She did."

"She did?" Enzo asked.

Stefano nodded again. "The marks on my back, were all caused by her."

"You said they were from the fight ring," Enzo said.

"I didn't want you to know."

"You should've said something," his brother yelled.

"They don't call me silent for nothing," Stefano tried to joke.

"That shit isn't funny," Enzo said. "I thought she was a nice old lady. She always smiled when she saw me."

"She was probably cursing you in her head," Stefano told him.

"Damn. Fuck her for what she did to you. You didn't deserve that."

Stefano smiled at his brother. "But it was my mother who led to your mother and my father's death. Maybe I did deserve it."

"Yeah, your mother fucked up. But she didn't deserve to die. I think that's why grandfather wanted me to forgive Em. He was tired of death. He was tired of us hurting those close to us."

Stefano could understand that.

"And Stefano," Enzo continued. "You didn't deserve to be punished by your grandmother. She took her anger for our grandfather out on you. That's never right. I'm surprised you don't hate me because of all of this."

“How could I hate you?” Stefano said. “You’re my best friend, even before I knew you were my brother.” He got choked up on that last word.

“Thank you,” Enzo said. “And since I’m your friend, and your brother, let Sienna stay with Eve for a mon...”

“Fuck you,” Stefano said. They all started laughing.

Pietro sighed. “Now you know why we ruined the Bianchis. And why the current don wants revenge. He’s insane with it. Honestly, I’m surprised he waited this long to get it. He won’t stop until you two put him down for good.”

Enzo nodded. “We plan to. He’s the one who started this war. And we’re going to finish it for him. Not just for us, but for our parents.”

Stefano nodded. “And for our grandfather.”

Pietro smiled. “I’ll leave it to you both to show don Bianchi who we are.”

“DeLuca savages,” Enzo and Stefano said.

He was finally ready to embrace his last name.

Sienna

“You sure you’re okay?” Sienna asked, seated in the passenger seat of Stefano’s car.

Ever since he came home with her beautiful black dress, heels, and a fucking diamond necklace, he’d been kind of silent. Well, more silent than he was rumored to be. She could understand why. He’d told her about his conversation with his uncle Pietro. She’d wanted to know more about the chemicals used to melt his enemies’ bodies.

But she’d blocked that curiosity out and focused on his story. A story that had left her crying like it was her damn story. The fact that he’d shared it with her moved her. It made her want to comfort him.

And if they didn't have plans to spend the evening with Eve and Enzo, she would've stayed home in bed with him. He needed time to process everything he'd learned today. But life came at you fast. You couldn't press pause on it. Still, she needed to know that he was okay.

"Stefano, baby?"

He looked her way. "Yes, baby?"

"I asked if you were fine."

He smiled. "You've asked that a dozen times."

"I've asked nine."

He chuckled. "I'm fine. As fine as I can be."

"Okay. I won't ask again." She would. She couldn't help it.

"How are you? Nervous about seeing Eve?"

"I am. And I don't know why. It's not like we're meeting for the first time. I know she's going to be shocked to see me."

"That's if Enzo hasn't told her. I still can't believe he tried to take you from me to give to her."

"You two act like I'm a puppy or something."

Stefano laughed. "You're no puppy. But you are mine. And Eve can't have you."

"There's enough of me to go around."

Stefano shook his head. "I'm greedy. I want all of you."

"Well, when Enzo demands I spend a month with Eve, just counter that maybe she can come spend a month with us."

Stefano shook his head. "She can't stay with us, love. I'm sorry. But I couldn't bear it."

Sienna chuckled. "Don't do my friend like that. Eve is wonderful. But I'm sure Enzo can't part with her. So, he won't agree."

"Ohh. I see. I like the way you think, little demon."

Sienna chuckled.

“This is it,” Stefano said.

Sienna stared up at Enzo and Eve’s mansion. Her mouth dropped open. This was not what she’d expected. It was so... pink.

“Does Enzo like pink?” Sienna asked.

Stefano laughed. “Eve did this.”

Sienna burst out laughing. “Did he make my friend mad?”

“He did. He took the stove out. So, she had the house painted pink. And their bedroom. And his car.”

“Savage,” Sienna said. “I love it.”

Stefano sighed eyed her.

“Don’t worry. I won’t have your house...”

“Our house,” he corrected her.

“Right. I won’t have our house painted pink. I’m a different kind of petty. I’m just get rid of all your left shoes and cut holes in the crotch of your pants.”

“Savage,” Stefano muttered.

“Thank you!”

Laughing, he opened his door. When she went to open his, he stopped her.

“Don’t open that door,” he told her as he closed his.

Oh, right. She was with a gentleman. Smiling, she waited for him to open her door. When he did, she took his hand and let him help her out of the car. It felt good to be a damsel instead of a warrior for a change. Though, she’d never take off her warrior hat. It was okay to keep it in the trunk while wearing her damsel hat.

Together, they strode up the walkway to Enzo’s house. Out of habit, she took in her surroundings. If something popped off, she’d memorized the route from here to Stefano’s place, just in case they got split up.

Guards were at the front door. They nodded to Stefano, who nodded back. She stared them up and down, noting the

caliber of weapon they carried. Nice. She'd have to disarm them quickly... Wait, what the hell was she doing?

This was not a job. She was not on an assignment. She was with her man. And she was about to see Eve, the entire reason she'd come to Italy in the first place. Sienna inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly. She looked at Stefano when he squeezed her hand.

"You good?" he asked.

She nodded. *Just trying to break old habits and stop plotting murders.* The door to the house began to open. It was time for her to see her best friend. Sienna smiled. Finally, her mission was over, and she could get ready to rest.

Chapter Twenty- Eight



Sienna

Some tall, handsome guy opened the door.

He looked just as savage as her Stefano. Then he smiled at her. And she realized he had to be Enzo. The savage who was crazy in love with her bestie.

“Don’t smile at her,” Stefano growled.

Sienna melted against him. The guy who had to be Enzo, shook his head.

“Come inside. I’ll go get Eve.”

Sienna and Stefano stepped inside.

“Can I shake her hand?” Enzo asked.

“No,” her beast replied. “I’ll make the introductions.”

“Talk lower. Eve may here you,” Enzo said.

“Enzo, this is Sienna Keys. Mine.”

Sienna laughed. Was he a cave man or what?

“Nice to meet you Enzo,” Sienna said, not bothering to try to shake his hand. Her beast wasn’t ready for that yet.

“Nice to meet you, Sienna. I’m Enzo. Eve’s husband. Well, I’ll be her husband soon now that we’ve found you. I’ll go get her. You two stay here.”

Enzo left the room, heading to a staircase. Sienna glanced at Stefano.

“Did you have to be mean to your brother?”

“Mean? When?”

Sienna shook her head. “Never mind.”

“I’m not mean. I’m just possessive. I’m not ready to share you. I’ve just found you. Maybe in a few years, I’ll be ready. Not yet.”

Red flag. And she was fucking okay with it. She wanted to be possessed. Call her toxic, but that shit sounded sweet as fuck to her.

“Am I scaring you?” Stefano asked.

Sienna shook her head. “You’re wooing me. And since you’re saying such sweet shit, I’m going to suck your dick on the ride home.”

A smile crept across his face. He started to say something, probably something filthy that would make her pussy purr, but Enzo’s voice filled the air.

“I’ve got you,” Enzo said, carrying a blindfolded Eve in his arms.

The moment she saw Eve, the tears flooded her eyes and her knees buckled. Stefano was there to catch her before she could fall. He scooped her up into his arms and she tried her best not to cry and ruin her make up. Enzo walked to the center of the room and sat Eve on her feet with her back facing them. He motioned for Stefano to come closer. Stefano carried her over to Eve, then sat her on her feet behind her friend. Sienna wiped her eyes.

“Enzo,” Eve said. “Is the surprise a new stove?”

Sienna barely held in her laughter.

“Baby,” Enzo said. “I told you we don’t need a stove.”

“But...”

“I’ve got you something better than a stove.”

“Can I look now?” Eve asked.

“Almost,” Enzo said as he removed the blindfold from Eve. “Don’t turned around until I tell you to.”

She nodded.

“On the count of three,” Enzo said.

“Okay.”

“Remember our deal,” he told Eve. “If you love my surprise, you have to stop being mad at me.”

“I remember, hon. Come on. Let’s do this.”

“Okay. One,” Enzo counted.

Sienna smoothed her dress down her front as Stefano smiled at her.

“Two,” Enzo counted.

Sienna touched her hand to her low ponytail. She’d decided to keep it simple. Plus, her beads were a weapon. And she needed them. She also had her jacket with her knives in it in the car. She’d forgotten to grab it before coming inside. Rookie mistake.

“Three!” Enzo yelled.

Sienna smiled as Eve slowly turned around. Face to face, their eyes connected. Eve’s eyes widened and her mouth dropped open. She took a step back. Enzo caught her before she could fall. Silent tears streamed down her sister’s face. Sienna blinked back tears of her own as Eve slowly approached her.

Eve touched her hand to Sienna’s cheek. “Are you real?”

Sienna nodded.

“For real?” Eve whispered.

“For real, Eden. I’m here for real, sister.”

A sob escaped Eve right before she threw her arms around Sienna’s neck. Sienna hugged her friend back, unable to keep her tears in check. They flooded her eyes, and stormed down her cheeks as she and her friend held on to each other.

“Sisi!” Eve cried. “Oh my God, I was so worried, Sisi.”

“I know,” was all Sienna could get out.

They stood there crying and holding each other forever, and neither man rushed them. By the time they were done sobbing uncontrollably, Enzo had tissues ready for Eve and Stefano had tissues ready for Sienna.

Wiping her eyes and then nose, Sienna tried to pull herself together. This was a happy occasion, why was she sobbing like she was at a funeral? After drying her eyes and calming herself down, she faced Eve again. Their gazes connected.

A second later they were crying again and holding each other. It was almost an hour before they were okay enough to sit down across from each other at the dinner table that Enzo's cook had arranged.

"Had I known you were finally here," Eve said, sniffing. "I would've made dinner for you."

Seated next to her, her Silent Beast cleared his throat.

"That's okay," Sienna told Eve. "I'm just happy to see you alive and well."

"When did he find you?" Eve asked.

Sienna looked at Stefano, wondering if she should tell the truth or not.

"Tell her," he said.

When she faced her friend again, Eve's gaze was moving from Sienna to Stefano. Eve stood up and pointed at Stefano.

"You fucked my friend didn't you?"

Stefano choked on air. Sienna laughed.

"I told you to bring her to me and you fucked her," Eve shouted.

"Calm down, Eve," Sienna said. "That's not exactly how it happened. I sort of tried to kidnap him."

Eve cocked her head to the side. "Really?"

Sienna nodded.

Smiling, Eve returned to her seat. "I'm listening."

Sienna and Stefano told the story of how they met, fought, and fell in love. By the time they were done, Eve was practically swooning, while Enzo was clutching his side laughing.

“She stabbed you?” Enzo asked.

Eve shushed him. “It was a stab of love. Trust me, if I’d had a knife when you kidnapped me, I would’ve stabbed you thirty-eight times.”

Enzo stopped laughing.

Eve smiled at him, “But they would’ve been stabs of love.”

“Yeah, right,” Enzo said.

Eve faced Sienna. “So, you’re staying in Italy, with Stefano and me?”

“With me,” Stefano said.

Sienna put her hand on Stefano’s lap.

“I’m staying with Stefano. But I’m starting over here. And I’m happy I’ve got you with me, Eve.”

“You need a job. You can come work with me at Tower D.”

Eve went on to explain to her what Tower D was.

“Sounds fun. But, I want to take some time off and just live. I want to go to new restaurants and try new foods. I want to swim in different oceans and meet new people.”

“Girls trip?” Eve asked.

“Yes!” Sienna shouted.

Stefano and Enzo groaned.

“But, I can’t do that yet. I have to wait until I’m sure the Irish mafia isn’t after me.”

“What?” everyone asked.

Stefano turned her chair to face him. “The Irish mafia?”

Sienna nodded. "I kind of tried to kill their Chicago don. But, I failed."

"Shit," Eve said.

"I know," Sienna said.

"It's my fault. I should've killed him when I had the chance."

"It's not your fault. We had bad intel that time. And my informant ratted me out this time. Either way, eventually, they'll come looking for me."

"For us," Eve said. "They want me too."

"Fuck that," Enzo and Stefano said.

"When they come, we'll handle it," Stefano told her.

"We'll start on it now," Enzo said. "I'll have my men look into this guy. I just need his details."

Eve was quick to rattle off his details. Stefano massaged her leg. His expression was one of worry. She'd ruined her happy mood by talking about her enemies. She needed to get them back on track.

"We should eat before the food gets cold."

"Yeah. Because to heat it up, we'll have to go all the way to the guest house." Eve glared at Enzo.

Smiling, Sienna started eating her food. The conversation returned to being pleasant. She and Eve chatted about their past as Stefano and Enzo listened, asking questions here and there. Eve told Sienna about how her life had been in Italy so far.

Sienna and Eve planned a girl's trip, that Stefano and Enzo said they would join them on whether they wanted them to or not. Then Sienna steered the conversation to the brothers, asking them about their childhood. The stories they told had her laughing and helped her see that there had been some happy moments for Stefano when he was younger.

The way he was smiling made her realize that he was noticing that too. The darkness had overshadowed the

happiness. But if you let light in, it could reveal those happy moments you'd almost forgotten. Look at her happy ass, being all poetic and shit. The conversation was going well, until Enzo's phone rang. Seconds later, Stefano's started to ring.

The foreboding feeling that something was about to go wrong crept over her and Sienna looked to Eve. Eve felt it too. When you lived in the darkness for a long time, you could tell when it was near. And Sienna could feel the darkness creeping into the room.

“What the fuck!” Enzo yelled.

“We're on our way,” Stefano said, ending his call.

Enzo looked at Stefano. “That was Lino. Em was attacked at the hospital.”

“That was Terzo. He's with Lino. He was at the hospital, visit his guards when he saw a strange man coming out of Ems room and noticed that her guards weren't there. He found her guards on the floor of her room, dead. And Em was convulsing.”

“That's the same thing Lino said. They chased the man,” Enzo told them. “But he escaped into a dark green car. They're following the car now. He's supposed to be connecting me to his GPS, so I can track him.”

Enzo's phone dinged. “Got him. Let's suit up.”

Eve stood up. “We're coming.”

“Not this time love.”

Sienna stood and faced Stefano. “I'm coming,” she told him.

“Baby I didn't bring a bag...”

“I've got one for her,” Eve said. Eve walked around the table and stretched her hand to Sienna. “Come with me. We'll suit up. You can borrow my clothes and weapons.”

Sienna took Eve's hand and followed her upstairs.

Behind them, they heard Enzo whisper, “Control your woman, brother.”

“Control yours first, brother,” Stefano said.

Control? Eve and Sienna had no idea what that word meant.

Chapter Twenty-Nine



Stefano

He wasn't ready for this.

He steered his car toward in the direction Terzo was headed. He had the GPS pulled up. It seemed his cousin was heading north, toward the docks. The same docks they'd dealt with the Soldano soldier at. If the Soldano's were involved.... Enzo inhaled deeply and released the breath slowly.

Then there was Sienna, seated next to him in an all-black outfit, paired with black boots that Eve had given her. Stefano had made sure she wore a bulletproof vest. But that didn't decrease his worry at all. His hands were shaking. He lowered one hand from the wheel and reached for hers.

She grabbed his hand and gently squeezed it. He needed to feel her, to know she was safe. How the hell was he supposed to do his job with her there? How could he focus on what he was doing when he was worried about her safety?

He knew she was capable of protecting herself. That still didn't make this shit easy. She squeezed his hand. He looked her way. She motioned for him to come closer. Returning his eyes to the road, he leaned over to hear what she had to say.

"I promise to follow your lead. If you tell me to stay back, I will."

Stefano exhaled. *This woman!* But could he ask her to stand down just because his heart was weak? No. He couldn't do that. If he wanted her to accept him for who he was, he had

to accept her for who she was. And she was a fearless badass. He leaned back over. She noticed and met him halfway.

“Don’t stand back. Be the badass that you are,” he told her.

The smile she gifted him could outshine the sun. She kissed his cheek. Inhaling deeply, he sat straight in his seat and prayed for strength.

In the back seat, Eve asked, “Is Em okay.”

“Yes,” Enzo said. “Luckily Terzo was there visiting his guards with Lino. Or, she wouldn’t be okay. I’m killing the entire staff. How the hell did they not notice something was wrong.”

He wouldn’t actually kill the entire staff. He’d at least let the elderly and the women live.

“They’re heading to the docks,” Stefano told Enzo. “The same docks we met the Soldano’s at.”

“If those bitches are involved, I’m taking out that entire family,” Enzo growled.

“When I was at Club Tacere, the Soldanos sent someone to try and set up a meet with me. Just me. They didn’t want you to know about it.”

“Those bitches don’t want these problems,” Enzo said.

Even if they thought they did, they would soon learn they were wrong. They were getting closer to Terzo now. It seemed he’d slowed down at the docks. Stefano was about ten minutes away when Enzo’s phone rang. His brother answered and put the phone on speaker phone.

“Hello, Lino.”

“You’ll never know who’s here at the docks waiting for us?” Lino said.

“The Soldanos,” Enzo guessed.

“How did you know?”

“Where are they?”

“They’re at the docks. We stopped. We didn’t follow Bianchi’s men inside.”

“Are you sure it’s Bianchi’s men you’re following?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen these guys before,” Lino said. “We pulled over a way back. But the Soldanos’ SUVs rolled by and entered the docks. I know it’s them. They’re the only ones with that stupid looking S on their man windows. I don’t know what made them decide to advertise themselves like that. But they’re here.”

“Stay where you are unless things change. We’ll be there in under ten minutes.”

“Okay, don.”

Enzo ended the call. “What the fuck are the Soldanos trying to do?” Enzo growled.

“I don’t know. But they’re meeting the Bianchis, after the Bianchis ordered a hit on Em. That’s not coincidental. I’m not in the mood to talk. Or to negotiate,” Stefano said.

“Niether am I,” Enzo said. “We’ll kill them all. Whoever the fuck is here. Call Ozark. See if he can be here in twenty minutes.”

Ozark, the fire starter.

“Fire?” Stefano asked.

“Fire,” Enzo answered.

Stefano made the call. Ozark said it would take him thirty to gather his supplies, team, and get there. Stefano told him to hurry. When they arrived where Terzo and Lino were waiting, they found their cousins standing outside their vehicle. Stefano pulled up beside them. Terzo walked over to Stefano’s window. Stefano rolled the window down.

“Cousin,” Terzo greeted him, then looked to the passenger seat. “Not cousin.” Terzo’s eyes widened. “You’re Sienna Keys.”

“Step away from my car, Terzo,” Stefano said.

“You found the girl of my dreams.”

Stefano glared at Stefano. “She’s mine.”

“What? No. Enzo already claimed Eve. I claimed Sienna the moment I saw her picture.”

“Sorry,” Sienna said. “I’m all Stefano’s.”

Stefano smiled.

Terzo pretended he’d been shot in the chest. “You wound me with your words, queen.”

Stefano opened his dark, hitting Terzo with it when Sienna laughed. Enzo climbed out of the back seat. Both brothers walked to the other side of the car and let their ladies out.

“Damn,” Terzo said. “Did I die and go to heaven? This is like a chocolate dream.”

“Terzo,” Enzo growled. “I will shoot you. You know that, right.”

“Yeah. You’ve done it before.”

“Don’t make me do it again.”

“I just find it unfair that you two get both beautiful ladies and I’m still single. Forget it. Let’s catch up. Lino. Over here.”

Lino stalked over. “No other cars have gone in. But...”

Lino went silent when shots rang out coming from the docks.

“What the fuck?” Enzo said. “Are the Bianchis and the Soldanos at war?”

“Should we go check it out?” Lino asked.

Enzo shook his head. “Let them come to us. Stefano, can you reach out to don Soldano?”

“I can. What do you want me to say? Ask him if his men are alright.”

“Do we fucking care?” Stefano asked.

“No. But if he’s not here to go against us, but he finds out we were here, he may think we were in on it. This is to cover our asses. Let’s not start a war if we don’t have to.”

Nodding, Stefano pulled his phone out. He already had the don's number in his phone. Vinnie, don Soldano's nephew, gave it to him a while ago. The don didn't take long to answer.

"Hello, Stefano. It seems you've gotten my message."

"My don and I got the message," Stefano replied.

There was silence for a second. "Don Enzo is there. Hello, don Enzo."

Enzo stepped forward to speak into the phone. "Don Soldano, tonight, the Bianchi family tried to kill my cousin."

"What?" Soldano said, sounding shocked.

"We followed them to the docks. Guess who they're meeting here?"

"I have no idea, don Enzo. Tell me."

"Men in Soldano vehicles."

Soldano went quiet again. This time when he spoke, he sounded upset.

"Are you sure they were my vehicles?" the don asked.

"They had your logo on them," Soldano said.

"Fuck! I have nothing to do with that snake of a bitch, don Bianchi. If any of my men are there, you're free to kill them."

"What if Vinnie is here?" Enzo asked.

"He's not. He's in Sicily. Whoever's there are not there by my orders. In fact, I want nothing to do with Bianchi or the blackout drug he's pushing. I've sent an order to my entire organization to stay away from this fight between your two families. But I won't be surprised if some flunky decided he wanted in on those drugs and tried to do it behind my back. You have my permission to kill them."

"Thanks, don Soldano. And don Soldano, what do you want with my brother?"

"Well, that's a conversation we can have later, don Enzo. I thought going through him would be easier than going through you. Turns out, both of you are hard to deal with. I have a

business proposition for you, don Enzo. But it can wait until you handle the Bianchis. I'll tell you this for free. Don Bianchi is in Bari. He met me two days ago, trying to get me to allow him to push drugs in my territory and to join him in taking you down. I told him I wanted no part in it. I don't believe he's left Bari yet."

"Noted," Enzo said before nodding to Stefano.

Stefano ended the call. Shoving the phone back into his pocket, he told Enzo, "He sounds like he's telling the truth. And you know if he was going to send someone to handle something, he'd send Vinnie. That the person he trusts the most."

Enzo nodded. More shots sounded from the dock. Then the sound of scars screeching reached their ears. Stefano grabbed Sienna's hand and pulled her with him.

Over his shoulder, he said, "Take cover."

Everyone was already racing to get behind a car. He held Sienna close. He looked down at her to check on her. She had her gun ready, her eyes on the road. Stefano smiled. He was worried. She was ready. He needed to be like her. He pulled his weapon from his holsters. Two cars sped by. Bullet holes riddled the car. They had the Soldano S on the back window. One car continued forward. One swerved and then hit a tree.

"Stay here," Stefano said.

Sienna nodded without protest. Stefano looked to Enzo. Enzo nodded. Together the two of them headed to the wrecked Soldano vehicle. They made it there and stared through the shattered passenger window. The driver had been shot in the abdomen. Stefano put his hand to the man's nose.

He was gone. Movement in the backseat had them moving that way. They opened the back door. A frightened young man, no more than eighteen or nineteen, raised his weapon.

"Stay there," the boy yelled. "Stay, or I'll fucking shoot."

Stefano raised his hands. "I'm Stefano DeLuca. I'm only after the Bianchis."

Weapon still pointed at Stefano, the boy said, “DeLuca?”

“Yeah. DeLuca. You know us.”

The boy nodded.

“You’ve been shot in the arm. Everyone else in the car is dead. Get out. We’ll get you some help.”

The boy shook his head. “We... went against don Soldano. We tried to sell drugs for the Bianchis. We wanted the drugs. But the don lied. When we got here, he told us we had to go to a hospital and kill someone. A DeLuca. He said his men failed to do so. We said we wouldn’t do it. We said we wouldn’t go against the DeLucas. And he went crazy. I... I tried to run. He got me. That’s...” the young man looked at the driver. “That’s my brother. Fuck!” the boy sobbed. “It wasn’t supposed to go down like this. It wasn’t.”

“I know. Just get out of the car,” Stefano tried again.

The boy shook his head. Enzo approached the back.

“We don’t have time. Get out,” Enzo said.

The boy pointed the gun at his head. “Don Soldano is going to kill me. I messed up. We went against him. I may as well do it myself. I don’t want to be tortured.” The boy looked behind Stefano and then shouted. “Get back. I’ll shoot.”

Stefano glanced back to see Sienna and Eve approaching. Sienna winked at him.

“It’s okay. I’m Sienna,” Sienna said. “I’m not a DeLuca or any of the other Italian families you’re afraid of. This is my sister, Eve.”

“Hello,” Eve said. “I’m sorry about your brother. But you don’t have to die too.”

“I do.”

“You don’t,” Sienna told him. “We can torch this car. Hell, we can kill a Bianchi and put him in here to make it seem like it was you. As for you, you can disappear on your own and leave this life behind.”

“But my brother...”

“Is gone,” Sienna said. “But I’m sure he wouldn’t want you to die too. Get out. Hurry. I hear cars leaving the dock.”

“It’s don Bianchi. He’s crazy.” The boy said.

“We’re crazier,” Stefano told him.

The boy swallowed. With a nod, he handed his weapon to Stefano and began climbing out of the car. He couldn’t exit the car on his side because the car was pinned to the tree. He had to climb over a dead body to get out. Once he was out, Sienna and Eve helped him across the road just as a black SUV came speeding in their direction.

This one didn’t belong to the Soldanos. This one had silver chrome accenting it. Could this be Bianchi? Someone began shooting out of the car window. Stefano and Enzo raced across the street. As the vehicle rolled past, the back window rolled down. Don Bianchi smiled at them as the car drove past.

Fuck that. Both Enzo and Stefano raced into the street. They fired at the tires, flattening them. The car continued forward, causing sparks to pop along the road as they drove. Stefano and Enzo chased after the car, not wanting to let Bianchi escape. But they weren’t fast enough.

They stopped running. Another car turned onto the road. Bianchi’s driver swerved to avoid hitting the car. The car plowed right into Bianchi.

“That’s Pietro’s car,” Terzo yelled.

All four cousins took off running down the road, trying to get to Pietro. What the hell was he doing there? Had he followed them and sat waiting for something to happen? Stefano wouldn’t put it past him. He blamed Bianchi for the death of his brother, Lorenzo. Of course, Pietro would want in on the action.

The driver got out of the car and approached Pietro’s car. Another driver got out of the passenger side of Bianchi’s car and approached Pietro’s ride also. Shit. Stefano stopped and raised his weapon. But he was too far. The sound of a car approaching made him look back. It was Terzo’s car. But Terzo was with him. The car sped past.

“Sienna,” Stefano shouted.

“Eve,” Enzo shouted.

And in the back seat, it was the young man from the Soldano organization. Stefano continued racing forward, followed by his cousin. Shots rang out. Eve or Sienna shot at Don Bianchi as they passed his car. They stopped in front of Pietro’s car. From the inside, Eve fired at the man approaching Pietro’s car.

Two bullets sent him to the ground. Sienna fired at the man approaching from the other side. A headshot ended the guy. Enzo and Stefano reached the Bianchi car just as the back door opened, and Bianchi stumbled out, clutching his side, gun raised. Stefano and Enzo both raised their weapons.

“I fucking hate you DeLucas!” don Bianchi roared.

Enzo and Stefano fired, sending two rounds into the don’s head. The man’s head jerked back. He’d managed to get one shot off. It sparked against the ground as don Bianchi fell backward, slamming into the ground. Enzo and Stefano stood staring at the body of their enemy.

“I wanted to torture him,” Enzo said.

“Don’t worry. He wasn’t acting alone. We’ll find all of the Bianchis who sided with him, and we’ll take our time killing them.”

“For our parents and our grandfather,” Enzo said.

“For our parents and grandfather,” Stefano repeated.

It was over. Don Bianchi was finally dead. Stefano exhaled deeply as Eve and Sienna came racing their way. He opened his arms, and Sienna ran into them, wrapping her arms around him. It was done. His family was safe, and so was his woman.

Blessed. Stefano DeLuca felt blessed.

Stefano

Lying in bed with his woman next to him, Stefano listened as she rattled off all the reasons why he and Enzo should buy one big house for all of them to live in.

“Eve and I can go to work together. You and Enzo can go to work together,” Sienna said.

“Not happening.”

“Come on, love,” Sienna said.

“What if we found houses next door to each other? Would that work?”

Sienna paused. “Yes. Actually, that’s a brilliant idea.”

Stefano chuckled. “Good. Now go to sleep. Tomorrow is your first day of work at Tower D.”

“I’m excited.”

“Are you?”

“Yes. Can’t you tell?”

“I can. You once said my dick put you to sleep. But I just fucked you with all I have, and you’re not tired at all.”

“Oh, you gave me the wrong combination just now. You gave me that Team No Sleep dick. If you wanted me to go to sleep, you should’ve hit me with the Team Lights Out dick.”

Stefano laughed. His woman said the craziest shit. But he loved it. He loved everything about the beautiful brown woman who hunted him down and then claimed for himself. He would spend the rest of his life loving his little demon. And soon, he’d destroy her enemies, and she’d never have anyone to fear again.

Until then, he’d watch over her as she worked at Tower D, protecting her in case the Irish mafia showed up. Stefano listened as she told him what she planned to wear to work in the morning. Then she started telling him about what she wanted to change about his house. She talked until she started to yawn.

Then she talked some more. And Stefano hung on to every word she said because he loved the sound of her voice and

loved the fact that his home was no longer silent. No, if only there was the patter of little feet running around.

“Sienna, let’s talk about babies,” Stefano said.

“Huh?”

“Babies. Let’s talk little Stefanos and Siennas.”

The sound of snoring filled the air.

“Hey!” He shook her. “I know you’re not sleeping. Stop playing.”

She fake snored louder.

“Sienna! Sienna.” He rose up to look down at her. He watched her snore. Finally, she opened one eye.

“How many?” she asked.

“Five.”

“Two.”

“Three,” he countered.

“One,” she said.

“Okay. Two.”

Opening her eyes, she smiled. “Now that the baby conversation is over. Want practice making one?”

Stefano grinned as he pulled the covers over them. They spent the rest of the night practicing for the future. And for the first time in his life, Stefano DeLuca was excited for what the future could bring. And it was all thanks to the little demon who showed him he deserved happiness and love. And that he could give happiness and love also.

It was all thanks to the future, Mrs. Silent Beast.

Thank You!

Thank you for reading Stefano DeLuca. I hope you enjoyed his and Sienna's story. This is only the beginning of their story. I still have so much to say about these two. I spent a lot of time building the connection between them to show you how deeply scarred and flawed these two individuals are.

And there's still so much to tell. For starters, the Irish mafia is coming. So, uh, get ready for that. And you still have to see Eve and Sienna take over Italy. I so wanted to show you their Italy escapades in this book. But I had to delete them. As I said, this book ended up being longer than intended. Don't worry. They're coming. And I'm going to share it all with you soon. And you still have to see Terzo find the love of his life.

In Terzo's book, you'll get more of Enzo and Eve, plus more of Stefano and Sienna. So, it'll probably be a long book also. Terzo DeLuca is coming when the next season of DeLucas are released in 2024. Oh, and the DeLucas have something special coming for you in November 2023.

So be sure you're in the Savage Romance Collections group on Facebook so you don't miss our DeLuca surprise in November. Thank you for reading and loving our savages. Because of you, we continue writing these brutal, flawed, loyal, beautiful characters. Thank you and we appreciate you.

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