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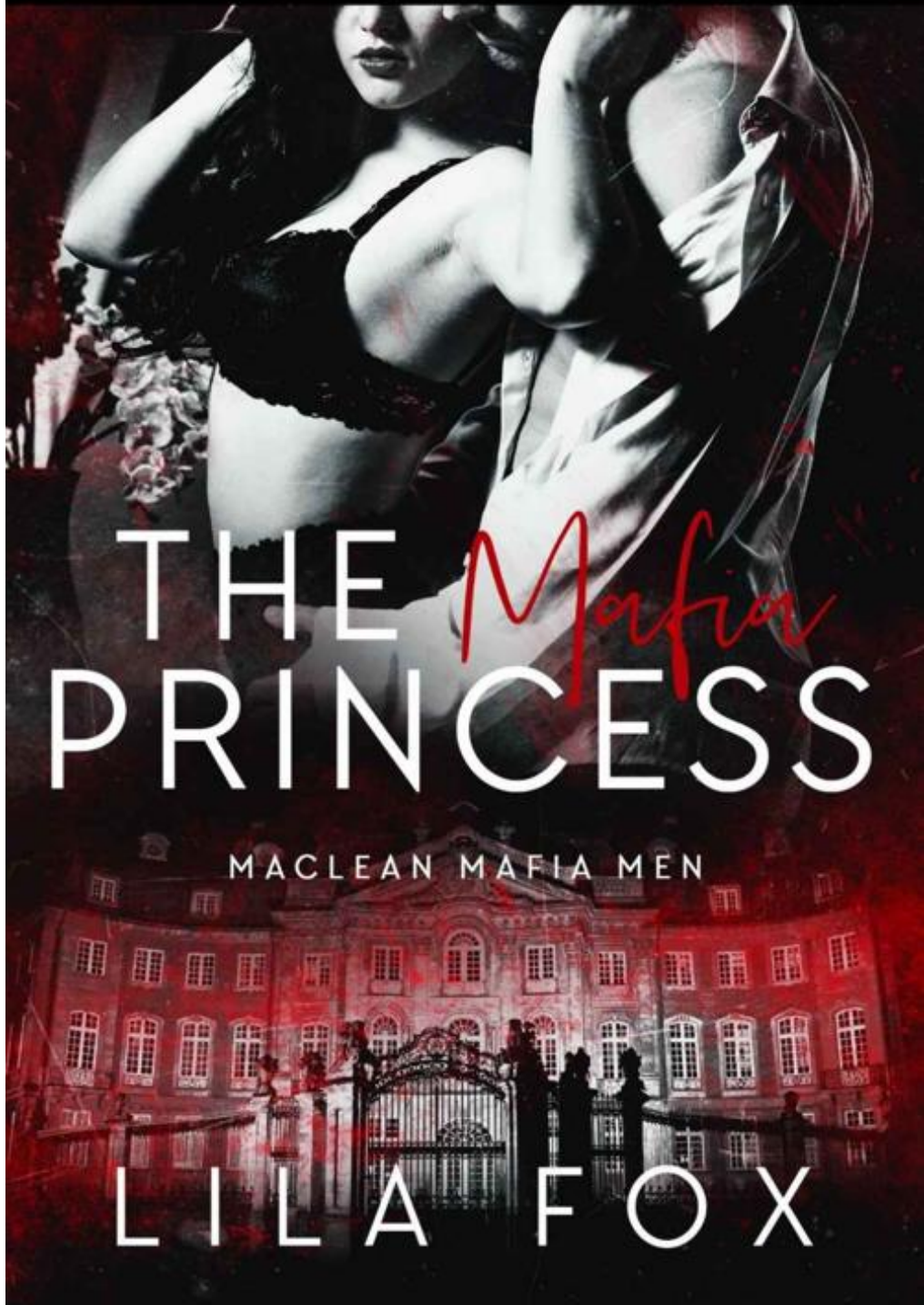
THE *Mafia*
PRINCESS

MACLEAN MAFIA MEN



LILA FOX

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THE MAFIA PRINCESS

Maclean Mafia Men, 8

Lila Fox

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Chapter One

Aryanna stopped outside of her father's office and took a breath to steady herself. She hated being summoned there because it was never good news.

She ignored the looks she got from the guards stationed up and down the hallways. Her father had a hundred men just to protect him. He was paranoid that someone would assassinate him. Too bad they hadn't been effective when her mother got shot in the backyard of their home six years before.

She pressed on her stomach where the anxiety made it cramp before she lifted her chin and nodded to the guard to open the door. The scent of rotting leather, stale scotch, and cigars filled the room. She was used to it, so it no longer bothered her. As a child, she had to fight not to choke on the smell of the cigars her father was addicted to, and he always had one lit on his desk beside him. Today was no different.

Aryanna stood in front of her father's huge desk and waited for his attention.

Antonio, her father, finally put his gold pen down and looked up at her.

"I have an assignment for you," he said.

She waited, ignoring the anxiety that built in her because she felt she wouldn't like what he had to say.

"James Maclean and I have decided you're going to travel with his son, Remington, to the United States."

Her brows pinched together. Why would her father have anything to do with the Scottish Mafia? "I don't understand."

"James and I made an arrangement. You will travel as his valet."

"I still don't understand. Don't they have people for that? And isn't a man supposed to help him?" she asked.

“Yes, of course, they have people, but I owe James. He wanted to have a woman with his son, not as a companion but more like a slave. You’ll do whatever he needs.”

“A slave? You want me to be a slave?”

“It’s only for a year,” Antonio said.

She felt sick to her stomach. “Why me?”

“You’re the best one I could think of because you don’t do anything, and I thought it might teach you to be humble. You’ll leave with Remington tomorrow morning and fly to the United States. He will stay with his cousins for awhile. He’s looking to start a business there.”

“I’m sure they have maids or valets there?”

“He wants one to stay with him until he gets settled.”

“How long will that be?”

“If it goes according to plan, he’ll stay there for good. But you’ll only have to be there for a year, maybe less.”

Her eyes widened in shock. “A year?”

“Yes. I’ll need you back here because I have several men in mind for you to marry.”

God, it just got worse. She gritted her teeth. “So, let me get this straight. I am to be enslaved for the son of the Mafia for a year and then come back and be sold off as cattle.”

“Watch your tone of voice,” Antonio growled.

She fisted her hands at her side. “I don’t know how to be a slave.”

“You’ll have to learn quickly. You’ll wear a maid’s drab clothing and your hair braided with a handkerchief over your head. Lucile will show you how to wear it and the basics of how to do what he needs.”

“So, I’ll be in disguise?” she asked.

“Yes. You’ll have to pretend you’re a maid. I don’t want him to see the way you normally look.”

“He won’t know who I am?”

“No, and he must not know.”

“Why?”

“That’s between James and me. I’ll let you choose your husband if you can keep your identity a secret. He can’t know you’re a princess. If he finds out, I’ll give you to someone I know you’ll be miserable with.”

Jesus, what kind of father would do this?

“When do I leave?”

Her bastard father looked at the clock on the mantle that had been her mother’s pride and joy because it came down from several generations of women. Aryanna knew her mother was the last woman to possess it because her father had taken it the day after her mother’s death.

She’d only been gone six years, but it seemed like a lifetime.

“In three hours. There’s plenty of time for Lucile to teach you what to do and get you dressed. She already has bags packed for you.”

Aryanna was in shock. Her father had always been a bastard to her, but this was going too far. “And if I refuse?”

Her father smirked. “I think that time spent in the dungeon would make you think twice about obeying me.”

Her mouth dropped open. “You’d put your daughter in a cage in the basement?”

“Yes. And I’d keep you there the same amount of time you’d spend with Remington. So, choose. Be a slave or a prisoner for a year,” Antonio said.

God damn him. As much as she wanted to fight back, she had no power. She never had. Without another word, she turned and walked out.

She heard him sputter because he hadn’t dismissed her, but she didn’t care. At that moment, if she had a knife, she would have killed him. God, when had she become so violent?

The tension in the house grew as time passed after her mother's murder, and the worse her father had become. She didn't know if it was because he missed her or that her mother wasn't there to keep him in check since she was the descendant of the throne, not him. He just married her. He was only a king by marriage. He'd still be in the island's Army if her mother hadn't married him.

Aryanna raced up to her room, closed the door, leaned against it, and closed her eyes.

"Oh, Miss Aryanna. I wish I could fix this for you."

Aryanna looked at her trusted maid Lucile across the room.

"How can he be such a bastard?"

Lucile sighed.

Aryanna looked down. "Did you know if I refused to do this, I'd spend the next year in the dungeon?"

From the shocked look on Lucile's face, she knew it surprised her, too.

"Oh, my Lord. You need to leave this place. Your father is getting more unreasonable," Lucile said. "I think this might be a blessing in disguise."

"How?"

Lucile gripped her hands. "You'll be in America, Aryanna. Maybe you'll find a man you fall in love with ... or another opportunity. This might be your only chance to get away from here."

She hadn't thought of that. But Lucile was right. It was either make a run for it now or end up the wife of whatever disgusting man her father found for her.

"You're right."

"We don't have much time. I need to review some things you'll need to know and get you dressed."

"But what am I to do when I get there?"

Lucile rolled her eyes. “I don’t know. But America is the land of the free so anything can happen. Keep your eyes and ears open. Now, we don’t have time. Let’s get you dressed before they come for you.”

Aryanna felt tears fill her eyes. “Why do I feel like this will be the last time I see you?”

Lucile tried to smile, but Aryanna could see the emotion she was trying to hide.

The older woman hugged her. “Let God decide the future, and remember he has a plan for everything.”

Aryanna nodded, but it didn’t make her feel better. This was the only friend and home she ever had. It would be gut-wrenching to lose it all.

Chapter Two

Aryanna held tight to her satchel as she waited by the plane's pilot. Even after everything Lucile told her, she was still clueless about how to act, so she planned to act meek and never look him in the face. The eyeglasses the maid gave her to wear had a tint to them that would hide the light-blue color of her eyes to a point, but they were still unusual enough to get attention.

If she was quiet enough, she might just be invisible to him.

"There they are," the pilot said.

She nodded and studied the two limos that pulled up. Several men got out. A few pulled bags from the cars and brought them to the plane while a small group stood talking.

She somehow knew that the bigger man was the one she'd have to deal with, which made her stomach tighten with dread. His demeanor spoke of an alpha male who needed to control everything and everyone around him — much like her father — but her father hadn't had the male attraction this man did.

Aryanna could tell the man, Remington, was getting impatient and started her way. Her chin went down, and she stiffened when his shoes came into view.

"You must be the maid my father sent for me?"

She nodded. His Scottish burr was more pronounced than she expected, and she had to concentrate on his words to understand him.

"What's your name, Lass?"

"Ar ... Anna, sir."

"All right, Anna. I want you to stay out of my way. Just keep our room clean and my things organized, and I'll call on you if I need you. Do you think you can do that?"

"Yes, sir." That actually sounded wonderful to her.

“Let’s get moving.” Remington turned to the group of men trying to get his attention and held up a hand. “Enough. If you feel it’s important, send me an email.”

Remington turned without another word and climbed the stairs into the plane. The men stared at her.

“You might want to get on the plane, Miss,” the pilot said.

“Oh, yes.”

She scrambled on and walked to the very back area. The plane was very luxurious and resembled a plush living area. There were a few reclining chairs up front, sofas and a kitchenette in the middle, and then more reclining chairs at the back.

The small plane she’d ridden on to get there had been anything but luxurious. Even the seats were hard and uncomfortable. These would be much better.

She took the furthest seat back and closest to the window. She jumped when the pilot came on the loudspeaker.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, please get your seat belts on. We’ll be taking off in the next few minutes.”

She set her bag on the seat next to her and buckled herself in. When the plane started moving, her nails dug into the arms of the seat. This would be the second time she’d ever flown, the first being in the last few hours, and it was more nerve-racking than she thought it would be. The first flight had been a smaller plane that took her to the Scotland airport.

Her stomach dropped when the plane tilted up and then flew into the sky. She was almost nauseous, watching the land grow smaller as each second passed.

The pilot’s voice came over the speakers again. “We are at flying altitude at thirty thousand feet. You may take your seat belts off. We will fly into New York in eleven hours.”

Oh, God. She hadn’t realized she’d be stuck on the thing for that long. She’d brought a few books and her journal

so she would have things to do, but she also hoped she'd get some sleep.

“Anna.”

She could feel the fatigue that was already pulling her down.

“Anna!”

Her head jerked up. “Y-yes, sir?” She could tell he wasn't happy with her already, and they'd only been together less than thirty minutes.

“I'd like a coffee and whatever breakfast they have.”

She scrambled out of her seat, straightened her handkerchief over her hair, and the glasses on her face.

She had no idea how to make coffee and was already starting to panic when she noticed the carafe of already-made coffee and pastries. There was also fruit in the small frig. She set up a tray, trying to remember what was brought to her in the morning for so many years, and then carefully took it over to his seat.

He was reading papers, so she set them on the table in front of his chair.

“Would there be anything else, sir?”

“No,” he said without looking up.

“Okay.” She moved back to her chair and sat, releasing the breath she'd been holding. She'd done it. She served him a meal and hadn't dropped it onto his lap.

Several hours passed, and as hard as she tried, she could not sleep. Remington worked the whole time, and Aryanna didn't see him stop but take a bite of whatever food she set beside him on his table, or use the bathroom.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, we will land at JFK in the next few minutes. Buckle yourselves into your seats. It should be a smooth landing,” the pilot said.

Aryanna tucked herself into her chair and watched as Remington casually put his things away before he relaxed and

buckled himself in.

If she thought it had been nerve-racking watching the plane rise and the land get smaller, watching it come at her quickly made her tremble in fear.

She squeezed her eyes tightly closed as the plane softly bounced a few times and then glided to a stop next to a building with several small planes parked.

Aryanna had to take several breaths to calm her heart before releasing her buckle.

She hated how her legs shook when she stood and fought off the weakness. She made sure her hair and glasses were in the right place. The back of her neck had itched most of the flight because Lucile had braided her hair and put it down the back of her shirt to conceal it. Besides her light-colored eyes, her thick black hair was noticeable, so she needed to hide as much as possible. She hadn't realized that people thought her looks were unusual and made her stand out.

“Grab your bag and come with me,” Remington said. “I have people coming to get mine.”

“Yes, sir.”

She picked it up and almost groaned. It wasn't necessarily heavy, but she was weak from lack of sleep and not having eaten for over twenty-four hours.

She followed him off the plane and down the stairs. Three steps from the bottom, she tripped over her bag. If it hadn't been for the pilot catching her, she would have landed on her face.

“Whoa, are you okay?” the pilot asked.

She nodded, smoothed the bandana on, and pushed her glasses back up her nose.

“Yes. Thank you so much.”

“You're most welcome.”

She caught the curious look on the man's face and decided to ignore it and hurry after Remington. He was

standing beside a car, talking to a few men.

She stood behind him, waiting for her instructions.

The driver reached for her bag. "Let me take that, Miss."

"Thank you."

She wrapped her arms around her waist to try to hold in some of her body heat. It wasn't cold, but the cool wind drifted right through her.

Remington slid into the car, and she looked at the driver.

"Should I sit up front with you?"

"No, Miss, there's no room. We have a bodyguard who will ride there."

"Anna, get in here," Remington growled.

The driver tried to smile. She crawled into the back and sat opposite him and tightly in the corner. She kept her eyes down and stayed as quiet as possible.

"Were you able to get any sleep, Lass?" Remington asked.

Her gaze sprang up and back down to her lap as she shook her head. "No, sir."

"I really detest talking to the top of a person's head."

She raised her head. Thankfully the car had only dim light. "I'm sorry."

"You're forgiven. Just don't do it again."

"Yes, sir."

"We'll be at the hotel in a few minutes, and then you can rest," he said.

"What about you?"

"I'll rest for a bit, but then I have a meeting."

"What would you like me to do?"

“Take care of my clothes. I’ll be back after dinner.”

Great, another meal she’d go without, or maybe someone thought about her this time, and there would be food in the suite. When they were on the plane, she hadn’t known if she was supposed to eat. When she got nauseous, she finally ate a banana, but that was it. “All right.”

She looked forward to his absence to get a little peace and quiet.

Chapter Three

Remington, his guards, and Aryanna got to the hotel and had their bags delivered. The guards left the room, but she heard at least two would be outside the door.

“Just unpack the small brown one when I’m gone, Lass. I don’t think we’ll spend more than a night or two here. Then go get some more rest.”

She nodded. “Thank you, sir.”

When she woke from her nap a few hours later, he was gone and the suite was dark. The shadows felt cold and menacing, making shivers run down her spine, but she continued to his room instead of running back to hers. She looked for the bag he described in his room and then hung up his clothes. She finished with his clothes and then locked herself in her room.

After a shower, she decided to get into the sleep pants and t-shirt Lucile gave her to sleep in and lay back down because there was nothing else she could do.

An hour later, she heard shuffling outside the door and saw someone turning the knob. For some reason, she didn’t think it was Remington.

A scream tore from her mouth when the door was kicked open, and a man dressed all in black with a stocking cap over his face came at her. He smacked her a few times and then kicked her when she fell to the ground. “You fucking whore. Tell your employer to watch his back because he’s already made an enemy, and it’s all because of you.”

Aryanna cried out. Where were the guards? Did he not leave any for her? Hell, why should he? She was only a maid.

He gripped her hair, lifted her, and threw her on bed, making her scream. “Next time I get ahold of you, I’ll teach you what a real man feels like.”

She was afraid to move when he ran from the room. When she heard the outer door close, she raced into the

bathroom and locked the door. It was the only safe place she knew of.

The wall felt cool against her back as she slid down and wrapped her arms around her legs. The tears tore from her, making her body shudder. She'd never been beaten or hit in her life and didn't know how to deal with the pain and fear rushing through her.

When she could get herself under control, she stood and looked at herself in the mirror.

Besides a red face, mostly because of her crying, she didn't see any bruises yet, but it still stung, so she was unsure. She raised the shirt she wore and saw how much damage the kick had done. It was tender to the touch, and she knew it would bruise because it was already starting to darken, but it wouldn't keep her from doing her job.

She wet a washcloth with cold water and pressed it against her face until the redness was mostly gone.

It took a few minutes to get the courage to open her bathroom door. When she saw she was alone, she hurriedly shut and locked her bedroom door again and then moved the chair and nightstand in front of it.

Aryanna looked around for any kind of weapon and couldn't find one. She kept looking because she knew she wouldn't rest until she could protect herself.

She grabbed a blanket, pushed her back against a corner of the room, and wrapped it around her. The pain was receding a bit, but she guessed she'd feel the attack for a few days.

Now she had to decide what to tell Remington. Should she tell him what the man said? Tell him that it was because of her somehow and for some reason. She felt sick that he wouldn't believe her since they had just flown in and hadn't been in the city for long, or worse, send her back to her father.

What could she have done that caused the man to make an enemy of Remington? Was it just her, Remington, or both that angered the man?

She decided to wait and see if anything else had happened.

A sound in the other room made her stiffen. She heard a few voices and then relaxed when she recognized one of them as Remington. She lay on her side on the floor and closed her eyes, ignoring the tears that she couldn't quite stem. A knock on her door the next morning woke her.

She groaned when she scrambled to her feet and pressed a hand against her side.

“Yes?”

“We're leaving in thirty minutes, Lass. I need you to pack my things while I make a few calls.”

“Of course, sir.”

She waited until his footsteps receded before she hurriedly got dressed in the ugly clothes. Her hair was messy but still mostly braided since she hadn't washed it the night before, so she left it alone and stuffed it into the back of her shirt. The bandana went on next, and then the glasses.

Aryanna hurriedly put the few things she'd unpacked back into her bag and then moved the furniture into place. She looked around one more time before she opened the door.

Remington was sitting on one of the sofas with a TV on, talking on the phone and eating a huge breakfast. She felt her stomach cramp and promised herself she'd grab food wherever she had to and keep it in her bag for when she got hungry.

In his room, the sight of the unmade bed made her pause, and a feeling she couldn't describe filled her. She pushed it aside and got busy. She dragged the bag out, set it by the door, and stood waiting.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“Good, let's go.”

A few of the guards took the bags and followed her as she walked behind Remington.

She had no idea what felt worse — her hunger pains, the damage done by the kick, or her lack of energy. All she knew was she had to keep it together because the thought of the man her father would choose for her if she failed made her sick to her stomach.

She'd rather be dead.

Chapter Four

Remington sat in the back of the limo that was taking them to the airport. They would fly to Arkansas, where his family was. He was anxious to see them again. It had been years since they'd been together.

He and Alastair were the closest since they were more alike and the same age as the others. They were all great, and he enjoyed being with them.

His gaze went to his maid, Anna. She was a timid little thing and reminded him of a field mouse because of her plain looks and temperament. However, something about her bothered him, and he couldn't put his finger on it. Every chance he got, he studied her trying to figure it out. He didn't like unanswered questions.

When they pulled up to the plane, the sun shone in on her side, giving him a glance at her pale skin.

The side door opened, and he got out and stopped her with a hand on her shoulder when she stood beside him.

“Are you feeling ill?”

She shook her head.

“Then why are you so pale, Lass?”

“Oh, well, I ... I'm not used to traveling, sir.”

She turned her head away, and that's when he caught sight of a blueish mark on her cheekbone that resembled a bruise, but he couldn't remember seeing it the day before.

She gasped when he pressed his thumb against it and tossed her head to the side.

“Is this a bruise, Anna?”

She pressed her hand to her cheek. “I don't know what you mean.”

Now she was just pissing him off. He hated to be lied to. “I...”

“Sir, the plane’s ready,” the pilot said.

Remington sighed. He’d have to wait until later to question her.

“Fine.” He grabbed ahold of her upper arm and started walking to the plane.

“Sir, I can walk on my own.”

“Shush.”

He caught the stubborn tilt to her chin before she corrected it, making him even more curious. Maybe she wasn’t as meek as she pretended to be.

She pulled away from him and sat in the back as she had before. He thought about sitting with her so they could talk, but she looked so fragile at the moment he decided to let her rest.

He got settled in the chair he had used before and started pulling out paperwork. They would have a few hours before they got to their destination, and he could get a lot done in that time.

It seemed like he’d just started to work when they were landing. He looked over his shoulder to ensure Anna was buckled in and saw she had fallen asleep. Good, it looked like she needed it. It wouldn’t keep him from questioning her, but he did want her to feel better.

They rolled to a stop before he unbuckled and walked to the back to wake her. The sun coming into the window made the bruise stand out starkly, and the color of it told him it was new.

What the fuck!

He gripped her shoulder. She jerked awake and screamed.

His brows snapped together. “What is that about?”

He saw her pressing on her side as she sat up and quickly moved her glasses back in place.

“Anna, answer me.”

“You just startled me. It’s not a big deal.”

“What’s wrong with your side?” he asked.

Her hand dropped away. “Just a little cramp. It’s already going away.”

He didn’t believe her, but they were again interrupted when the pilot called out to them.

“Come on. We’ll talk later.”

It looked like she was going to argue, but then she just nodded. “Yes, sir.”

He helped her to stand and then led her out. He caught the look in the pilot’s eyes.

“Go on to the car,” he told her. When she was away from them, he turned to him. “What are you thinking?”

The pilot looked surprised. “I don’t know. There’s just something off about her.”

Remington nodded. “I know. I feel it, too. I’ll figure it out eventually.”

“I hope so because she looks more fragile than she had yesterday.”

Remington shook his hand. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Remington walked to the limo his cousins had sent and stepped into it. Anna was already stuffed against the doorway, as far away from him as she could get.

“Are you afraid of me, Lass?” he asked.

She looked startled. “No, sir.”

“Something scared you, and I want to know what it is.”

She turned her head away. “I don’t know what you mean.”

He gritted his teeth. “I will eventually find out, Lass.”

She glanced at him and nodded before turning away again.

The sunlight coming through her window showed how delicate her facial features were. He couldn't tell the color of her eyes because of the glasses she wore, but he knew they were big and shaped like a cat's. Her hair was another thing he'd been unable to see because it was hidden under the piece of cloth she wore. He did know it was black because of her eyebrows and the little hairs that had escaped from whatever tethered it. He might think she was beautiful if it weren't for the glasses and hair.

Her body shape was another. He could tell she was tiny because of how thin her arms were, but she wore an ugly maid's uniform that covered everything. The brown color washed out her already pale features.

She ignored him as he studied her, and he could tell she knew he was staring but chose to pretend he wasn't there. She'd find out that he would not be disregarded, and he'd learn every secret she had.

Chapter Five

Remington looked out the window when the car slowed and pulled into the long driveway.

Jesus, the house still looked monstrous to him. As a child, when he'd visited, he'd thought it was a magnificent castle. He looked to see how Anna was reacting to all the armed guards, but it didn't seem to affect her at all. It was like she was used to it. Maybe it was from working in the castle in Malta? Yet another question he had.

The door opened, and he stepped out and scanned the area before reaching back for Anna.

She stood silent and followed a few steps behind him. The front door opened, and he grinned. The butler never seemed to age.

"It's good to see you, Master Maclean."

"It's good to see you, too, Martin. Do you think since I'll be living here now, you'll call me by my first name?" Remington asked.

The butler's lips twitched. "Of course, Master Remington."

Remington chuckled. "Fine. I can deal with that."

"Master Alastair is in his office waiting for you."

"I'll go see him now." He turned to look for Anna. "This is Anna. She's my personal valet, so I'll need her in the same suite as me." If Martin was surprised, he didn't show it. It still confounded him why his father demanded he have Anna with him and why get a lass from Malta instead of Scotland. She was to stay with him until he was settled and then fly back to Malta. His father dodged every question he had, but he would find out eventually.

"I'll take care of it right now."

He started walking to Alastair's office and turned to see Anna still by the door.

“You’re with me, Lass.”

She nodded and hustled to be behind him.

Remington knocked and heard Alastair call to enter. He opened the door to see his cousin with his wife on his lap, kissing. It was a beautiful sight to see him happy like this.

He lifted her off his lap and stood. He caught her hand and pulled her to ensure she stayed by him.

Alastair hugged him tightly and pounded on his back. “It’s good to see you.”

Remington grinned. “You too, it’s been too long.”

He wrapped an arm around his wife. “I’d like you to meet my wife, Beth.”

Remington held his hand out. “I’ve heard a lot about you, Lass.”

She shook his hand and then smiled up at Alastair. “I hope you’ve only heard good things.”

Alastair playfully growled and squeezed Beth. “Of course, wife. There’s nothing bad to say about you.”

Beth rolled her eyes. “Yeah, right.”

Alastair’s hand slid down over her ass in a silent threat. “Are you saying you think I’m lying?”

The beautiful woman shrugged, but he could tell she held back a smile.

“Maybe, maybe not.”

Remington was shocked at the play between the two and how unafraid she was of him. He was one of the meanest sons of bitches he knew, and he never talked like this.

Remington looked behind him to see Anna trying to make herself as small as possible.

“I’d like you to meet Anna. She is my valet that will be staying with me.” He pulled her up beside him. He enjoyed the twin looks of surprise on both their faces.

“Welcome to our home. Please don’t hesitate to ask for anything,” Beth said as she stepped forward to shake Anna’s hand.

“Thank you so much. I will stay out of sight as much as possible.”

“Hogwash,” Beth said. “I want to get to know you, and I know my sisters will, too.”

Remington saw the suspicious look on Alastair’s face and decided to talk with him about his concerns after the women left.

“Beth, why don’t you show Anna to the suite they’ll use? There in the west wing,” Alastair said.

“Absolutely.” Beth took her hand and started to pull her out of the room.

Remington had to bite the inside of his cheek at the shock and apprehension on Anna’s face.

He faced his cousin after the door closed.

“Do you want to tell me what that’s all about?” Alastair said. He walked to the bar and poured two glasses of bourbon.

Remington sat on the chair across from Alastair after taking the glass.

“It’s strange. My father demanded I bring her with me as my valet.”

“Why, have you suddenly forgotten how to dress yourself?”

Remington snorted. “No. That’s why it’s weird. He would evade my questions about her.”

“Do you think she’s a spy for your father?”

“I thought of that, but my father trusts me. There’s no reason to have a spy. Besides, if he did, he’d piss me off and he doesn’t like doing that.”

“I bet. So, what are you going to do?”

“Keep her close until I figure it out.”

“Your suite only has one bed, but it has a sofa for her, or I can have a rollaway brought in.”

He shook his head. “No, we’ll figure it out. Tell me what you thought of the lass.”

Alastair sat back in his chair. “I think she hides behind all the ugly clothes and glasses. I’d bet the glasses are just glass, and she doesn’t need them.”

Remington nodded. “I thought that, too. It would be a pity if they got stepped on.”

Alastair laughed. “If you want answers, I’ll get the women on it. If anyone can get that woman to open up, it’s them.”

“I like that idea.”

“Good. I’ll set it up for tomorrow while we look over the different buildings we can use. I would bet you had nothing to do with the bruise on her face.”

“That’s another thing. She was fine when we got to the hotel suite. She was left alone, but at least two guards were in the vicinity. I didn’t think they would need to guard the door. That’s when something happened, but she won’t tell me. Someone hit her face and side because she’s braced her hand against it a few times but drops it the moment she sees me watching her. I want to know who the fuck did it.”

“Who had access to her? Was anything delivered to the room while you were gone, like a meal for her?”

Remington sat up. He couldn’t remember her eating anything.

“What?” Alastair asked.

“I don’t think she’s eaten anything since she’s been with me.”

“What the hell? Is she trying to starve herself?”

Remington shook his head. “No, I think it’s more like I didn’t pay attention. I’ve never had to look after anyone

before.”

“You’ll get used to it.”

“Maybe.”

“I’ll have a tray sent up to your suite to snack on because dinner won’t be for another few hours,” Alastair said.

“Good. I’ll make sure she eats.” No wonder she was pale.

“We’ll find out everything you want to know. Just give me a few days.”

“Thank you. I’m going to head up now. I’ll see you at dinner.”

“Don’t forget to bring your valet.”

Remington chuckled. The house was so big it took him a few minutes to get to the west wing where his suite was. He didn’t knock and silently opened the door to see Anna standing at the window, looking unhappier than anyone he’d ever seen.

He closed the door behind him, leaned against it, and studied her. She had her glasses off and her arms wrapped around her waist. He wanted to demand answers, but he knew she’d fight him, so he’d have to wait for the women to get them for him.

Chapter Six

“What do you think of our suite, Lass?” Remington said behind her.

Aryanna squealed and twirled to face him. She realized she wasn't wearing the glasses and rushed to get them back on. The fact that he was several feet away from her, and hadn't been able to get a good look at her eyes, made her calm down.

“Oh, I think it's fine. Will they be bringing in another bed?” she asked.

“No, Lass. I told them it wasn't needed.”

She gritted her teeth. “So, I'm to sleep on the floor like a dog.”

One of his brows rose, she assumed, because of her tone.

“No. You'll either sleep on the sofa or on the bed.”

“Where will you sleep?”

“On the bed,” he said.

“But ... you can't ... we can't sleep together.”

“Why not?”

He tilted his head to the side. A move she would have found extremely attractive if not for the fact that she was trying not to freak out.

“It's just not right.”

“In Malta? Are the rules strict there?” he asked.

She almost choked. For most of the population, it was fine, but for her, she was guarded against any man getting close to her. “My household is very conservative.”

“But you're not home right now. You're in America. You can have any freedom you like, Lass.”

She paused. Why had her father let her come without guards? Wasn't he afraid that some man would take advantage

of her? She considered the disguise she had, but it was illogical to think she'd be able to use it for long without something happening.

“I understand that, sir. It's just how I was raised.”

“You'll have to loosen up a bit because you live here with me now.”

She felt her spine stiffen, and pain immediately flowered in the ribs from the kick. She automatically pressed her hand against it but dropped it immediately when his gaze zoned in on it.

“For one thing, we don't live together. You make it sound like ... well, you know. I am here to serve you.”

“Yes, you are. I was told you would take care of *all* my needs.”

It took her a moment to understand what he meant, and she could feel her face heat in a fiery blush.

“That's ... you can't think that I ... I'm not a prostitute, sir.” If she didn't know better, she would have guessed he was teasing her because he was fighting not to laugh. She wanted to yell at him so much it took all her strength to hold back.

She was startled when there was a knock at the door. He turned and opened it, and a maid pushed a cart through.

“Here are some before-dinner snacks. Dinner will be served in two hours. Is there anything else you would like?”

“No, thank you. That's plenty,” he said.

Aryanna felt saliva pool in her mouth at the sight of fresh fruit and small plates of crackers, cheese, and thinly sliced meat.

She looked up when she realized he was standing and staring at her. God, she wouldn't be able to watch him eat again without crying.

“I think I'll go take a shower,” she said and turned to go.

“No. You’ll sit at the table and eat while I apologize.”

Her mouth dropped open. “Apologize? For what?”

“For not taking better care of you. I hadn’t realized you hadn’t eaten since you came to stay with me.”

“But that’s not your job. It’s mine to take care of you.”

“How about we take care of each other?” he said.

She somehow felt there was a deeper meaning but was too afraid to ask.

“Come and sit.”

She walked over to the chair he was holding and sat. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

They sat opposite each other and snacked. She was aware of his scrutiny and decided to ignore it.

“Don’t eat too much. We have dinner in a few hours.”

“I can’t sit at the table. I’m an employee. It’s just not done.”

“I think it will be okay.”

She thought of how she looked, cringed in embarrassment, and tears burned her eyes. “Please don’t make me go. I’ll be extremely uncomfortable.”

He didn’t say anything for a long moment and then nodded.

“You can have tonight. But expect to have meals with the family.”

She exhaled. She’d figure out how to get out of those. She was just glad she didn’t have to go tonight.

“I’m going to take a shower and dress. Can you bring me one pair of black pants and a white dress shirt?”

“Oh, well, yes. Of course.”

He stood and walked into the bathroom, and left the door open a few inches.

Aryanna went into his closet and pulled out the clothes he wanted. She'd been surprised that the maids had everything unpacked by the time they got to the room. She also grabbed a pair of his silky boxers, black socks, and shoes.

She heard the shower turn on and then splashing, telling her he was in. She knocked on the door.

“Come in, Lass, and put it on the counter.”

“Yes, sir.” She tried to keep her eyes away from the shower, but it was impossible. The glass had a frosted look so she couldn't see anything but the outline of his body.

When the water turned off, she hurried out of the room and quietly shut the door behind her.

A few minutes later, he came out, trying to button his sleeves.

“Can you help me with this, Lass?”

She stood to face him and saw that the front of his shirt was open, letting her see the muscular contours of his chest. She concentrated on getting the button through the hole. It was difficult because her hands were shaking so much. He stood silently and patiently.

When she finished, she breathed a sigh of relief and stepped back. “There you go, sir.”

“Thank you, Lass.”

She nodded, sat back down, and concentrated on her food again.

He went to his briefcase and grabbed a file, came back to the table, sat, and started reading it.

“Aren't you going to button your shirt, sir?”

He looked down at it and then nodded. “I will before I leave the room.”

Aryanna gritted her teeth and tried to concentrate on her crackers. She caught the smile on his face and wondered what was funny. Her eyes narrowed. He wasn't laughing at her discomfort, was he?

He looked too innocent at the moment, and like his paper got his full attention, so she relaxed. After awhile, he stood and put the paper back in the briefcase before slowly buttoning up his shirt. When he glanced her way, she ducked her head and kept her gaze on her lap.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come, Lass?” He stopped with his hand on the door.

“I’m positive. But thank you.”

“All right. I’ll see you later.”

“Okay.”

She heard his footsteps fade and exhaled. God, peace was exactly what she needed. Her nerves were at their breaking point.

Aryanna figured she’d have a few hours to shower, dress in her pajamas, and maybe watch a little TV before bed. She planned to sleep on the sofa. It was no hardship since the thing was very comfortable.

The shower she took was long and hot and felt wonderful. She scrubbed her scalp until it tingled before putting conditioner on it. She washed her body and then rinsed before she turned off the water.

She wrapped a towel around her head and one around her body. After finding a blow-dryer, she got to work on her hair. It took a long time to dry because it was so thick, and she wanted it dry so she could braid it again.

Her side started to ache from having her arms lifted, so she stopped, put lotion on her body, and then put on her pajamas. She decided to brush her teeth later because she planned to eat a little more from the tray. Everything on it was scrumptious.

After finding blankets and pillows in the closet she made a bed on the sofa. She turned off the lights and the TV on and found a movie she liked. She got comfortable with a plate of snacks in her hands, a lemonade on the table next to her, and a sweet romance to watch.

The night turned out to be one of the best in her life, which sounded pathetic, but she hadn't been allowed many things at home.

Staying in America was looking better and better. She needed to consider and find information about living expenses and a job. She didn't think she'd be able to tap into her inheritance because her father would block it, but it was something she could check into and maybe start getting money from and pray no one would tell him.

She started to feel sleepy, so she turned off the TV, brushed her teeth, and braided her hair before lying down. Between one minute and the next, she was asleep.

Chapter Seven

Remington let himself into his suite and saw the empty bed. He walked into the little living room to find Aryanna asleep.

He crouched down beside her and smoothed the hair that escaped her braid away from her face. Without the glasses to hide behind, he could see the beauty she didn't want anyone to see for some reason.

At dinner, he'd talked with the girls and devised a plan to get Anna to open up. One of the first things he wanted to know was who hurt her and when. The second was why she was in disguise and who she really was.

She hummed and then snuggled farther under the blanket. The room wasn't cold, but it wasn't warm either, and he devised another plan. He'd make the room even colder and hide any other blankets, so she'd have to come to him. He'd try that tomorrow. He stood and walked into the bathroom to undress and brush his teeth. After he turned off the lights and got into bed, he stared at the ceiling and thought about everything that had transpired in the last few months.

The idea to move to the United States had been his father's idea. Remington rebelled initially because he loved Scotland but understood where his father came from.

The businesses they owned in Scotland had been doing poorly for a long time, and there hadn't been any other opportunities for them, so his father suggested moving to America with his cousins and starting a few businesses there. *When* and not *if* he became successful, he'd send money home, so his father could stay in the house he'd been born and raised in.

The house was close to two hundred years old and had all the character of being that old, but the place had been added on to and modernized through the years to make it nice to live in. If at times they could feel the damp breeze through a

door or window, they lived with it and just added wood to the seven fireplaces in the house.

Maybe his father and his companion would visit him in America some time. But he knew it would be hard for his father to leave his home and the woman he loved. He hadn't started to miss it yet but knew he'd eventually have to go home to visit his father.

His home in Scotland had a different feel than Alastair's. Where his cousin's house was huge and bright, his home in Scotland had a lot of brick and dark wood, giving it a homey family feel, even though it was considered a mansion.

His thoughts turned to the girls at dinner. When he explained what was happening, what he knew, and what he wanted to find out, they were totally onboard. They were actually excited to have another woman in the house. They made it sound like he wanted Anna beyond a valet, but he didn't have time for a relationship. He wanted to be able to concentrate on building the businesses for the family.

He fell asleep even though he had several ideas bombarding his mind. His body was done for the day, and he wasn't going to fight it.

When he woke the next morning, he saw Anna dressed and ready for the day with her little glasses perched on her nose. Those damn things were going to get accidentally broken today. She just didn't know it. He sat up and stretched before standing. He heard her squeak and then saw the blush on her face. He looked down at himself and realized he only had his boxers on.

"Hey, you're lucky I wore these because I usually like to sleep naked."

Remington hadn't thought she could get any redder, but he was wrong, so he decided to give her some space and get dressed before he burst out laughing.

"Lass, get me another pair of pants and a shirt and bring them into the bathroom."

"I ... okay."

It was getting hard to hide his amusement over her embarrassment. The lass was definitely innocent. When she came through the door, she paused and stared as he conditioned his beard and mustache.

“You’ve never seen a man do this?”

She shook her head.

“Come here.”

She walked to him, and he lifted her hand so her fingers could feel his beard.

She smiled. “It’s so soft. I didn’t think it could be like this.”

He waited until she realized she was stroking his face even after he let go of her hand. A gasp tore from her throat, and she took a few steps back.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be. I enjoyed it.” He pulled on his socks, pants, and shoes before lifting his shirt.

“Do you need anything else, sir?”

He shook his head. “No, Lass. We’ll be going down to breakfast after I’m dressed.”

“Oh, can’t I stay up here? I’m really not hungry at all,” she said.

“No, you’re with me.”

“Can I sit in the kitchen?”

“No. You’ll sit beside me.”

“But it’s just not done. Servants never sit with the family.”

“How would you know?”

“Because my father was serious about protocol, and servants eating with the family was a no-no.”

“Oh.” He knew the moment she realized she’d talked about something she was told not to. “So, is your father an

important man?”

“Oh, I ... well. Don't you think we should go? They're probably waiting for us.”

She scurried out of the room.

He followed closely behind, buttoning up his shirt and grinning. She definitely wasn't good at lying. In fact, she sucked. He caught the bulge of her hair that she had put down the back of her shirt to hide and wondered how long and soft it was.

When he got to the dining room, several of the girls surrounded Anna, and he could tell she was ready to panic.

“Excuse us, girls. You can get to know one another after she eats.” He pulled out a chair and nodded to Anna. “Sit, Lass.”

She sat and immediately draped the napkin over her lap. He watched her carefully and found that she had better manners than most. He didn't think an average maid would know these. How she sat and talked also revealed that she was more than she was telling him.

After the meal, he stood and pulled out Anna's chair. “Stand up, Lass. I'll be gone most of the day, so I want you to spend the time with the women.”

“Oh, no, I couldn't do that, sir. I'm fine up in the room.”

He cupped her chin. “You'll do what you're told.” He enjoyed how her spirit tried to break through her control and was excited to see the real Anna.

“All right, sir.”

He took a step back. “Oh, and Lass?”

“What?”

“Today, I will have all the answers to my questions. Do you understand?”

Her chin went up. “I have no idea what you're talking about.”

He grinned. “Yes, you do. I will see you this afternoon. Behave.”

She gasped. “Like I’d ever disrespect this family.”

“All right. Bye.” He left the house more excited than he thought he’d be and knew Anna had something to do with it. He couldn’t wait to hear about the real Anna, even though he felt it would change his life. He’d wait and see.

Chapter Eight

Aryanna watched Remington walk out of the room and almost ran after him. She glanced at the women and knew in her gut that they would get everything from her.

Beth took her hand. "Come on, Anna. Let's walk in the garden. It's so pretty out."

"All right." She let herself be led around for an hour before they sat at a white metal round table.

"Okay, we've made nice, but I can't wait another moment. What's your story?" Hope asked.

Aryanna almost smiled. She could have guessed it would be this woman to attack first by her demeanor.

"What do you mean?"

The girls rolled their eyes or snorted.

Beth tapped her arm. "Anna, why are you trying to look ugly? Because I have to tell you, it's not really working."

She gasped and patted her hair. "Yes, it is."

The women smiled and shook their heads.

She felt herself deflate. She didn't have the energy to keep lying. "Fine, what do you want to know?"

They squealed and clapped.

"Let's take this into my bedroom because those awful clothes are getting burned," Angel said.

They dragged her through the house and up a flight of stairs.

One of them slammed and locked the door behind them as a few others started helping her strip. It was a bit overwhelming because she had never had any girlfriends when she was younger.

She stood in her lacy bra and panties as the girls stared, and could feel herself blush.

“What?”

“You’re gorgeous,” Faith said.

“I’m not any more beautiful than you guys.”

Beth picked up strands of her hair. “Your hair is black. Is that the natural color?”

Aryanna nodded.

“I think your eyes are the most beautiful ones I’ve ever seen,” Angel said.

She wasn’t used to this.

“You guys, stop. We’re making her uncomfortable,” Hope said.

Aryanna relaxed when the girls laughed.

“I want to pick out her dress,” Angel said and ran into the closet. She returned with a light-blue sundress, a bit darker than her eyes, and it shimmered.

Faith laughed and jumped up and down. “It’s perfect.”

“I’ve got several dresses you’ll look great in. I’ll have a maid take them to your room,” Beth said.

“You guys don’t have to do that.”

“Um, yeah, we do, because if I have to look at the one you were wearing another moment, I’ll puke,” Hope said.

Aryanna couldn’t help it. She laughed. “Is it that bad?”

They all nodded, making her giggle, then started talking about the different dresses they wanted her to wear.

“Can I brush your hair?” Angel asked.

Aryanna nodded. “Yes. I haven’t had it brushed since my mother was alive.”

“Oh, no, what happened?” Beth asked as she sat beside her on the mattress.

“She was murdered in our backyard.” She couldn’t believe how sad the women looked. A few even had tears. “I’ve never had girlfriends before.”

They looked shocked.

“Why?” Angel asked as she glided the brush through her hair.

“I was forbidden to.”

Hope squeezed her hand. “Why?”

“I’m afraid to tell you because I don’t think you’ll like me anymore.”

“We swear,” they said in unison.

She got up and walked a few steps away before she turned to face them. “Let me introduce myself. I’m Aryanna de Cardona, Princess of Malta.”

She saw the shock in their eyes and felt her stomach tighten. She took a step toward the door.

“Wait, where are you going?” Hope asked.

“To my room. I understand. It’s happened my whole life.”

“Have you been to the United States before?” Hope asked.

“Well, no.”

“Well, we think it’s exciting, but you’re not the only royalty we have here,” Faith said.

“Really?” she asked hopefully.

“Yeah, we have the Queen of Pop, Beyonce, to name just one,” Angel said. “There’s Madonna and Prince.”

“I’ve never heard of them,” Aryanna said.

“We’ll show you so many things you’ll never want to leave us,” Beth said.

“You really want me to stay?” she asked.

The girls surrounded her with a group hug, almost falling over and laughing.

“We absolutely do,” Angel said.

“Who ate onions for breakfast?” Hope said with her nose crinkled up.

“I had an omelet,” Faith said.

Hope took a few steps back and waved her hand in front of her face. “Next time, warn us before we hug.”

Aryanna couldn’t help it. She laughed until tears ran down her face. When she finally got control, she wiped her face and grinned. “God, you guys have no idea how much I’m going to cherish you.”

“You’re officially a part of our possie,” Angel said.

“I will gladly take on the challenge of becoming as wonderful as all of you.”

Hope snorted. “Wow, that’s cheesy.”

Beth gasped. “I can’t believe you said that, Hope. She just met us.”

Hope shrugged. “So. She’ll get to know us very quickly, and she’s stuck now, so she can’t run from us.”

Beth rolled her eyes. “Still...”

Aryanna couldn’t help but chuckle when the two started to argue. They were treating her like a regular person, and she loved it.

“I have another question,” Faith said.

They turned to face her.

“What’s up with the bruises?”

Aryanna sighed. She was hoping they hadn’t noticed.

“Yeah, I’d like to know, too,” Beth said.

She went over what had happened in the hotel room.

“God, what did Remington say when you told him?” Angel asked.

“I haven’t.”

“Why?” Angel asked.

Aryanna sat on the side of the bed and stared down at her hands. “I thought he might not believe me, or if he did and he thought I was too much trouble, he’d send me back to my country.”

Faith shook her head. “Absolutely not. These guys aren’t pussies. They can handle anything.”

“Oh, I’m going to tell Graham you think he’s a hero,” Hope said snidely.

Faith narrowed her eyes at her sister. “Then I’ll tell Mama you lost one of her sapphire earrings.”

Hope gasped. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me,” Faith said and grinned.

“You’re such a bitch,” Hope said. Faith gave it right back to her, and it was fun to watch.

Angel wrapped an arm around her waist. “You would think they were the younger ones, wouldn’t you?”

Aryanna laughed.

“It’s about lunchtime. Why don’t we take it out on the patio?” Beth said.

“Great idea. It will give us some privacy for more questions,” Faith said and grinned when Aryanna groaned.

They spent the rest of the day together. Aryanna couldn’t remember a time in her life when she was this happy, and she hoped it never ended.

Chapter Nine

Remington followed Graham and Alastair to the front door. He was excited about the things they showed him. They even found a few already established and successful businesses, but the owners wanted to sell for one reason or another.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” Martin said.

“Where are the girls?” Alastair asked.

“They are at their girls’ retreat, sir.”

Anna had been on his mind all day, and he wondered if the girls had gotten any information from her. He followed behind the others and into the room.

“Did you knock, Husband?” Beth said.

Remington glanced at Alastair and saw the gleam of animal aggression in his eyes.

“Why, no, I didn’t, Wife. Why don’t we go to our room and discuss it?”

Remington looked around and was disappointed that Anna wasn’t there.

“How’d it go today, girls?” he asked.

They all smiled and turned to the bathroom door, where a gorgeous woman stood. It took him a moment to realize it was his Anna.

“Holy shit,” Graham said. “That was unexpected.”

Remington tried to smile but was frozen.

“Why don’t you take her up to your room and talk?” Alastair suggested.

He nodded and held a hand out to her. “Come with me, Lass.”

She hesitated.

“Now, or I’ll just carry you there.”

He saw the spark of anger bring color to her complexion, and he wanted to see more.

She walked toward him.

“Tell him everything, girl. He needs to know it all,” Hope said.

Anna nodded and took his hand.

“We’ll see you at dinner,” Alastair said.

Remington nodded and pulled her along behind him. When he got to his room, he shut and locked the door, leaned against it, and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Explain.”

She walked a few steps away and then turned, crossing her own arms over her chest.

He couldn’t take his eyes off of her. Her hair was pure black and had a blue tint when the light shone on it. It also fell to her hips. Her eyes also drew him, but he almost felt hypnotized by them. They were the lightest blue he’d ever seen and looked almost crystal in the bright light.

“Why the disguise?”

She went through everything her father said and did.

“Talk about the bruises.”

“The night in the hotel, a man wearing a stocking cap broke into my room and hit and kicked me. He told me he was there for you because of me. I was too scared, so I didn’t ask questions. He said he’d find me again and then...”

He hated to see the anguish on her face. “And then?”

“He would show me how a real man would be. I’m sure he was talking about ... you know.”

He nodded. “And then he ran out?”

She nodded.

“What did you do?”

I barricaded the door with everything I was able to move in front of it.”

“Did you hear when I came in?”

“Yes.”

“Then, why didn’t you come to tell me?”

“I didn’t know if you’d believe me at first, and then I thought you might send me back to my father.”

“That’s never going to happen,” he said.

“The girls said I need to tell you who I am.”

He nodded. “Okay.”

She took a breath as if to brace herself.

“I’m Princess Aryanna de Cardona of Malta.”

Jesus. A fucking princess. “And your father sent you with me without protection?”

She nodded. “Yes. I don’t know what he is planning.”

“We’ll find out.”

“You’re not freaked out?” she asked.

“No, not really. You’re still my Anna. I don’t care where you came from or your title. You’re still just a beautiful woman.”

She smiled. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet because I want to see the bruises, and I don’t think you’ll like it.”

“You’re right. You don’t need to see them. They are already healing.”

“You don’t get a choice.”

Aryanna lifted her chin. “The hell I don’t.”

He grinned. Here’s the spirit he had a glimpse of before. “Listen, for some reason, my father put you with me, and until we learn what it’s about, you’re under my protection.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Oh, I know so. Now, we can do this the easy or the hard way.”

He bit the inside of his cheek when she growled. He walked to her and tilted her head up to the light. He carefully pressed on the bruise on her cheek, watching her for any signs of pain but got none.

“Lay on the bed so I can see your ribs.”

She balked and shook her head.

“I’m just going to look at your stomach. We can use the blanket to cover you up if that would help.”

He could tell she was nervous, but she lay on the bed. He pulled the blanket up to her waist.

“Okay, now pull your dress up,” he said.

She wiggled but managed to pull the dress up and tuck it under her breasts.

He saw right away where the man had kicked her. The bruise was dark and in the shape of the top of the shoe.

“How bad does this hurt, baby?”

“Hardly at all now. It’s just when I move a certain way,” she said.

“I remember. I often got punched in the ribs as a kid.”

“Why?”

“The boys I played with were a bit rough.”

“What did your mother do?”

“I never had one. My father told me she was a one-night fling, and she dropped me off to him when I was a few days old and said goodbye. He can’t even remember the woman’s name. He never married for some reason but has a companion that has lived with him for several years.”

“Were you sad?” she asked.

“No. I didn’t miss what I never had. How about you?”

“My mother was killed about six years ago.”

“I’m sorry, Lass.”

“Thank you. I really miss her.”

Remington didn’t think she realized he’d been sitting by her hip on the mattress with his hand spanning her waist until he ran his fingers down to her belly button. She gasped, and her gaze went to him.

“It’s all right, Anna. I’m done looking.”

“My name is Aryanna.”

“To me, you’ll be Anna. I hope that’s all right.”

“Oh, well, I don’t know.”

He smiled. “You’ll get used to it.”

She frowned at him and shoved her dress down before pushing the blanket aside.

“You’re a beast,” she hissed.

He chuckled. “That’s something else you’ll get used to.”

“No.” She rolled off the other side of the bed. “Since everything is out in the open, I can get my own room until I figure out what I’ll do.”

A spike of anger grew. “Well, Princess, that won’t happen. You’re stuck with me.”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “I don’t think so.”

He stood to his full height and walked toward her. She took several steps back when he got close to her and didn’t look like he was going to stop. She gasped when her back hit the wall.

He laid his hands on the sheetrock on either side of her shoulders, penning her in.

“I’m only going over this once. My father gave me you for a reason, and you’ll be in this room until I get the story from him.”

“You can’t tell me what to do,” she said.

He cupped her chin in his hand. “Let’s see if you don’t already belong to me.”

He caught her gasp in his mouth when his lips pressed down on hers. He was gentle and slow at first but immediately needed more from her, so he opened her mouth to feel and taste her the way he wanted to. When he lifted his head a minute later, his arms were tight around her, her head was back, and her eyes were closed. The flush on her face told him she was as affected by him as he was. His head dipped, and he took her again because he wasn’t ready to let her go yet. Her moan pulled him out of his hazy need, thankfully, before he went too far.

“Hey, Love. I think that proves something, doesn’t it?”

He loved how she struggled to settle and open her eyes.

She blinked several times. “What?”

He grinned. “I think I muddled your brain. That’s good.”

“Muddled?”

“Yes. I made you hot.”

He knew the instant she became aware of being pressed tightly against his chest when she gasped and tried to push him away.

“I can’t believe you did that.”

Remington grinned. “Oh, I’m going to keep doing that and more.”

She smacked his shoulder and then pressed a hand to her mouth. “I’m sorry. I can’t believe I just struck you.”

Damn, if she wasn’t the sweetest woman he’d ever known. “You didn’t hurt me, Love.”

Aryanna relaxed. “Okay. Good.”

He wasn’t going to tell her he hardly felt it because it would just piss her off again.

He needed to get on her good side. It would be easier to take care of her and do the things that popped into his mind the longer he held her.

Chapter Ten

Remington finally released his hold on her so she could step back and smooth her clothing. Her heart still hadn't calmed, and she had to concentrate on breathing normally.

She walked a few steps away from him and turned. "I think we need a few minutes and then discuss this again.

He crossed his arms over his chest. "There's nothing to discuss."

She stomped her foot. "There damn well is."

His eyebrows shot up, and he smirked. God, he loved hearing her spunkiness.

"We'll see," he said and knew he'd pissed her off.

"Let's get ready for dinner. We'll have time to talk about this later."

"Fine."

He watched her stroll into the bathroom and close the door. He looked at his watch to figure out the time difference between Arkansas and Scotland. He could wait until after dinner to call his father. He grabbed some of his clothes and draped them over a chair to wait for her. He poured himself a drink and turned on the stock market.

He almost choked when she came out in a white dress and sandals. Her hair was down, but she pulled it back with some clips. Her face was oval with high cheekbones. Her eyes were even larger than he first thought but had a cat-like look. She had full lips that he envisioned wrapped around his cock.

Hell. He'd been semi-hard before, but now he was at full staff and couldn't do anything about it unless he tried to take care of it in the shower, and that didn't sound good at all.

"I'll go shower. Just relax until I'm done."

She stared at him but didn't say anything.

He closed the door behind him and stripped. He washed his hair and body in the shower and was done in a few minutes. He decided not to masturbate but might have to before he went to bed. He got dressed, finger-combed his hair, brushed his teeth, and conditioned his beard before he walked back into the bedroom.

When he saw that she had left without him, he grinned. “Oh, you want to play this game, Princess? You’re going to be mighty upset when you lose.”

He walked down the stairs. He blanked out his expression because he wanted her to think she was in trouble.

A few groups were standing around.

“Have you seen Anna?” he asked Graham.

Graham grinned. “She’s going to be a handful like the rest of them.”

He tipped his head forward. “I suspect.” He walked away after Graham pointed outside and ignored his cousin’s ribbing.

Remington followed one of the paths until he saw Anna and Beth talking. He saw how Anna stiffened when he came to stand by her side.

“Good evening, Beth. I thought I heard Alastair looking for you.”

“Oh. I better go and see what he wants.”

He reached out and circled Aryanna’s upper arm. “Oh, no. We have a few things you need to understand.”

“Really? What?”

It took some doing to keep his face hard and angry, but inside, he was laughing his ass off.

“I told you to wait for me. Why didn’t you?”

“I don’t remember that.”

He could tell she was lying. “How about this? If I ask you to do something and you don’t or disobey me in any other

way, I'll take it as a bid for attention."

"I don't think so, Remington."

He nodded. "Oh, yes. Now that you know, you'll feel what happens with that bid for attention."

Her eyes narrowed. "Like what?"

He pulled her into his arms and squeezed her when she tried to back away. "No. I'm not done yet. If that happens, you'll feel my hand on your ass." He bent to whisper in her ear. "And it won't be a nice feeling that I'll give you when you're good. Your ass will be hot, and it will be hard for you to sit for a few hours."

She stiffened. "You mean you'd spank me?"

Her voice had slowly risen with each word.

"Yes, Love. You're mine, and you'll have to come to grips with it."

"You can't just decide that," she said angrily. "What if I don't want you?"

One of his hands cupped the back of her head. "Didn't I already answer this question? I could always remind you again."

His mouth covered hers hungrily.

It took a second to realize someone was calling his name. He broke their connection and stared down at her. He was pleased to see she was as affected by him as he was by her.

"I'll show you every time you question this thing between us."

She just nodded.

He curled an arm around her waist. "Let's go. I think dinner is ready."

Throughout dinner, he watched her converse with the family and could see how relaxed she was in that type of

environment. Her grace, confidence, and charm came easy to her, and he didn't think he'd ever get tired of watching her.

Someone tapped his arm. He turned to see Ewan.

"I'm assuming she's yours, and I've got no chance with her," Ewan said.

Remington shook his head. "She was mine before I even knew it, and she'll stay mine. Sorry, cousin."

Ewan grinned. "Hey, it was worth a try. My brothers say a woman will drop into my lap when I least expect it. I tell myself I'm not ready to settle down, but it doesn't keep me from looking."

Remington nodded. "I'd be the same way."

The dinner ended, and the family moved into the large living room. He sat on the end of one sofa and maneuvered Anna to sit next to him. He was pleased she didn't fight it and relaxed for a moment and listened to Alastair. Beth came over to them.

"Can Anna come with us? We're going to watch a movie in the women's room."

He looked to see Anna staring at him with a spark of temper in her eyes. "That's fine. I'll come in to get her."

"All right." Beth pulled her up.

"Anna, remember what we talked about, Love. Don't disobey me."

She tensed, and he could tell she wanted to yell at him, but she was too much of a lady and princess to do it in front of people.

He watched her walk out of the room.

"Another one bites the dust."

He turned to see Angus grinning.

"What, Uncle?"

"You boys keep finding women you want to be tethered to you, so I'm assuming you'll want to marry her

soon.”

“Marry?”

“It’s a way to protect her and keep her with you,” Graham said.

“I hadn’t thought that far ahead.”

“When you decide, we can have a wedding put together in a day,” Angus said. “We’re getting good at it.”

Remington grinned because he’d been told how his cousins had gotten married. “I’ll think about it. Right now, I need to call my father.”

“Tell him we said hello, and I’ll call him later,” Angus said.

“I will.”

“You can use my office,” Graham said.

“Thank you.”

Remington closed the door behind him and sat in the chair. He dialed his father’s number and waited.

“Hey, it’s my boy,” James, his father, bellowed.

Remington laughed. “Yes, Father. How’s everything going there?”

“Fine, fine. I’ve been anxious to hear about the businesses you’ve looked at.”

“Is there something else you’re curious about?” Remington asked.

There was quiet on the other end.

“Father?”

“Oh, yes. How’s it going with the valet?” James asked.

“You mean Princess Aryanna?”

Another bit of silence.

“What is going on?” Remington asked.

“It’s a long story, son.”

“Give me a brief version.”

James sighed. “I got some information that Princess Aryanna was in danger.”

“How do you even know her?”

“I’ve known her since she was born. We never had any face-to-face, but I’ve always gotten pictures and news about her.”

A sick thought sprang into his head. “Father, is she your daughter?”

“Oh, goodness, no. I wish but no. There is no blood between you.”

Remington relaxed. “Keep going?”

“I’ve done business with Antonio, Aryanna’s father, for years. The man has said some things over the last year that concerned me enough to get her away from there.”

“Like what?”

“That she was going to be assassinated like her mother was.”

The thought made him sick. “Why? And who would do that?”

“The *who* is her father, and the *why* is because she stands between him and the throne. He should not be ruling that country. It was supposed to go to Aryanna.”

“Does she know that?”

“No.”

“Wouldn’t it be safer for her under lock and key?”

“Where she’s at now is safer because I trust everyone.”

“She was attacked the first night in the hotel.”

He heard a woman’s gasp and wondered about it.

“Is she all right?” James asked.

“Yes, just a few bruises, but the man said he’d find her again, and something about both of us pissing someone off.”

“What in the world?” James said. “I need you both to be safe.”

“We are. She won’t leave here until I get more answers, and we always have several guards and cars with us for protection.”

“Good.”

“What else can you tell me?” Remington asked.

“That I’m working on getting him taken care of.”

“He thinks you’re his friend.”

James snorted. “No, he just likes thinking he has the Mafia in his pocket. But it’s the other way around.”

“I still don’t understand why he let her come here?”

“I’m guessing he thought he’d be able to get her taken out easier than in a castle filled with guards. If she were killed at home, he’d have a revolution and people fighting to get him off the throne, but if she dies in the United States, they’ll feel bad that he lost his family and let him stay in charge. The good citizens of Malta don’t know how corrupt the son of a bitch really is. It all came down to it being easier to kill her where you are.”

“What should I tell her?”

“Nothing, if possible. Things will start moving forward. Just keep her safe.”

“I’m going to marry her,” Remington said.

He heard murmuring in the background and guessed it was his companion. Pictures of the woman that had lived with his father for six years popped into his head, and something niggled at the back of his brain.

“I think that’s a good idea, son.”

“Will she have to go back to Malta?”

“Not if everything falls into place.”

“I don’t want to be a king, Father.”

“I don’t think that will happen, but if you marry her, you’ll be a prince, whether you like it or not. You can ignore the title. It doesn’t have to change your life.”

“Good.”

“I wish we could be there,” James said.

“I do, too. When everything settles, I’ll bring her home for the holidays.”

“That’s wonderful. I miss you, son. Please stay safe.”

“I will. Love you.”

“I love you, too.”

Remington sat back in the chair. There was so much racing through his head he couldn’t pin down just one thought. He got up and poured another drink, and then shot it down. He’d take everything a step at a time but knew he needed to marry her as soon as he could.

Remington walked back into the living room to see most of the people still there.

“How quickly can we put a wedding together?” he asked and grinned when Alastair groaned. Angus snorted, and the others chuckled.

“How does tomorrow sound?” Angus said.

“Good. Now I just have to get her to agree.”

Chapter Eleven

Aryanna sat between Beth and Angel on the sofa, watching a movie she barely saw. She had so many questions about what her next move would be. Since she wasn't a valet anymore, she had no reason to be at the house or with Remington. Right?

A sound at the door got the girls' attention.

Angel elbowed her and laughed. "I think that's your ride."

"Let's go, Love."

She tried not to show how much the tone of his voice and the names affected her. She stood and walked over to him. She turned back to the woman and waved. "I'll see you in the morning."

They all smiled and waved.

He took her hand and led her through the house again and up the stairs to the room they were using. Her stomach tightened when she heard the door close and the click of the door lock.

"Why don't you get ready for bed first?" he said, unbuttoning his shirt.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He snorted. "I'm getting undressed. I'm not wearing my clothing to bed, Lass."

That did sound stupid. "I know that. But why don't you wait until you're in the bathroom?"

"Because I'm not modest like you. You'll be able to walk around the room naked in front of me before too long."

She shook her head. Just the thought made her shake.

He nodded. "Go. Unless you'd like me to help you."

She jumped when he took a step toward her. She slammed the bathroom door shut behind her and leaned

against it.

Damn, how the hell was she going to deal with this? Wasn't it wrong for her to be around a naked man? She knew she'd already seen him mostly undressed, but that's when she was a valet.

She wanted to ask someone but had no idea who she'd ask.

“Hurry up, Love, or let me in to brush my teeth.”

“No!” she yelled. “I mean, just give me a few minutes.”

She quickly undressed, put her hair up, and walked into the shower. She didn't waste time relaxing under the steamy water because she felt so vulnerable naked while he was on the other side of the door.

After she got out, she brushed her teeth and took her hair down. When she looked around for her pajamas, she realized she'd left them draped over the sofa. Her clean underwear was in the closet attached to the bathroom, which also had a door that was open into the bedroom so he'd see her.

He knocked again. “What's keeping you, Lass?”

“I-I'm about done. I just have to get dressed.”

She opened the closet door and peeked in. The other door was open, but she couldn't see Remington, so she hoped he was still standing by the bathroom door. She'd just have to be quiet or gain his attention.

She pulled a pair of panties out, and with the help of leaning against the cabinets, she was able to pull them on under the towel. Now she just had to get by him. She pulled down one of his shirts and put it on, and buttoned it. It was a bit better because she felt it covered more than the towel had. She screamed when she turned to find him in the doorway to the closet.

He grinned. “I think that shirt looks better on you than it ever did on me.”

She snorted. “I had to borrow it until I could get my pajamas that I left on the sofa.”

“You can use anything of mine you want, and we’ll work on getting you some things tomorrow.”

“Oh, I don’t need a lot.”

“I want you to feel comfortable here, Love. I don’t ever want you to go without.”

“I’m not big into clothes or anything, and I never wore three-quarters of the clothes I had in my closet at home.”

He walked her way and laid his massive hands on her shoulders. “But I want to see you in pretty clothes that make you happy.”

God, he seemed so big standing in front of her. She didn’t let the fact that he only had on his boxers bother her, but it was hard when her face came to his chest, even with the valley between his pectoral muscles. She had to swallow a few times because the saliva kept filling her mouth. His grip tightened when she tried to step back.

“Not yet, Love. Do you understand that I need to feel like I’m taking care of you?”

“But you don’t need to. We might not see each other after I decide what to do.”

“I think you need to consider that you and I will be together forever.”

“What? You can’t want that?”

“Why not?” he asked and grinned.

“Just ... because. We don’t even know each other.”

“Are you saying you’d be able to get to know the man your father would choose for you before you married him?”

God, that was a sick thought. She could picture some of the men her father had visit him, and none of them were appealing.

“Why do I have to marry anyone?”

“Would it be so awful to be married to me?”

The tone of his voice made her think she'd hurt his feelings, but he had a gleam in his eyes she didn't trust.

“I'm not saying that.”

“So, you will?”

“Maybe. I have so many questions.”

“Do you not think I'd be a good husband?”

“No, I think you'd be a great one.”

“You know I'd take care of you. I apologized for starving you at the beginning.”

She gritted her teeth in frustration. “I'm not saying you wouldn't take care of me.”

“Good. For a second, I thought you were going to say no,” he said.

She had the feeling he was trying to confuse her. “Can we talk about this tomorrow, please?”

“That's fine, Love.”

“Thank you.”

“I'll go brush my teeth.”

She watched him walk away, and she had the strangest feeling that he was talking about something different than she was. She knew he talked about marriage after they knew more about each other, but he spoke as if it would happen soon.

God, maybe she was more tired than she thought. She walked to the sofa and looked around for her clothes.

“Hey, Remington. Did you see my pajamas anywhere?”

He walked out of the bathroom while brushing his teeth. “No. I bet the maids took them to get washed. Just wear what you have on. It covers you from your shoulders to your knees like a gown.”

“I guess I'll have to.”

She made her bed, crawled in, and got comfortable. The chill in the air made her burrow under the covers.

“The bed is big enough for both of us, Love.”

“No. That’s fine.”

“I understand you’d like to be married first.”

She looked over her shoulder to see him sitting on the side of the bed facing away from her, taking off his watch. She studied his back and had the urge to run her hands over him. His shoulders were wide, and his skin was a few shades darker than hers. He was very strong, and she was amazed at how safe she felt with him.

The light turned off.

“Good night, Love.”

“Good night.” She closed her eyes and slept.

An hour later, she woke up shivering with her teeth chattering. God, it felt like winter in the room. She got up to get another blanket from the closet and didn’t find one. Damn, she thought there had been a few more. She could get dressed, but the thought of sleeping in her clothes made her cringe.

“Babe, I can tell you’re cold by the way your teeth are chattering. Come here. You can wrap your blanket around you. Let me get you warm before your teeth shatter.”

She couldn’t think of another idea, so she crawled up on the mattress into the middle of the bed, where Remington held the blankets up. She rolled on her side, facing away from him.

He laid the blanket over her and then pressed his body against her back. The heat from his body immediately took the cold away, and she felt his body heat seep into her pores.

God, she could really get used to this.

Chapter Twelve

He grinned an hour later when he heard her complain and her teeth snapping together. It was still dark, with only a bit of light coming through the drapes, so he couldn't see her, but she could get around without running into something. Now, he just had to act blasé and invite her into bed with him.

It happened quicker than he thought, but feeling the chill of her skin, he understood she had to be very uncomfortable.

Fuck, when he finally had her beside him, he felt calm and peaceful like he never had before. He pressed his nose to the back of her head and inhaled her sweet scent. Although it relaxed him, it made him horny as hell at the same time. "How are you doing, Love?"

"Good. You're like a furnace."

He chuckled. "Get some sleep."

"Okay. Thank you."

"You're welcome." He knew he should feel a little guilty that he tricked her into getting in bed with him, but he figured he could use anything to defeat her resistance. He made it sound like they were going to war, and in a way they were, so he would use whatever he could to win.

He heard her breathing level off and deepen. Damn, he could really get used to this feeling of tranquility. It didn't take long for his eyes to close, even though his cock was still hard as a rock. Just holding her in his arms was enough for him.

When they woke in the morning, the blanket between them was gone. She was splayed over his chest, the shirt she wore was hiked up to her breasts, and his hand cupped her ass. They still had the covers on, so it kept them nice and warm.

He grinned when she started to wake up. He closed his eyes to pretend to be asleep but had a hard time keeping his mouth still.

He heard her inhale sharply when he slid his hand up and down her ass.

“Remington,” she whispered.

He stayed silent.

She poked at his chest. “Remington,” she said louder.

“Mmmm.”

“Your hand.”

“What about it, Love?”

“It’s on my bottom.”

“Oh.”

She nudged him again. “Wake up.”

“In a minute.”

Aryanna hissed. “No, now. We shouldn’t be like this.”

“Why? We’re engaged.”

“We’re what?”

He grinned when she screeched but quickly hid it when she raised her head to look at his face. “We’ve already talked about this, Love.”

She looked confused and pissed at the same time.

He tried to distract her. “You’re so fucking beautiful.”

Her body jerked. “Oh, well ... thank you. Now, let me get off your chest.”

“You don’t like being on me?” he asked.

“That’s not what I’m saying.”

“Okay. Will this help?” He rolled them until he was on top and between her legs. His elbow was set by her shoulders and helped keep some weight off of her. “Is this better?”

She looked startled at first, and then her brows snapped together, and she opened her mouth.

He pressed his hard cock against the junction of her thighs, hitting her clit directly and instantly, making her soften beneath him, and her gaze got hazy.

Jesus, if this wasn't the sexiest thing he'd ever seen. He moved against her and groaned when he felt her wet heat seep through her panties and his boxers. One little move would get him into her, and he wanted that more than anything, even his next breath.

She lifted her hips, making his body stiffen and press harder against her cunt. Her hands started moving up and down his back, making shivers run down his spine.

“Look at me, Love.”

Her eyes blinked open.

“Fuck, I need at least one kiss.”

He bent his head and kissed her lips in a slow, hot, demanding kiss. He lifted his head a moment later. If he didn't control himself, this would go farther than he wanted. He wanted to take her virginity on their wedding night.

“Love, I think we need...”

She whimpered and wrapped her legs around his hips. Hell, she was too far gone, and if he didn't make her come, she'd be aching, and he didn't want that.

“All right, Love. Let me make you feel good.” He started pulsating against her, making contact with her clit. He could tell he was hitting the right spot when she groaned. “That's it, let it take you. I've got you.”

She bucked and cried out. “Remington!”

He cupped the back of her head in one hand and slid the other one in between them. “I know, Love. Just relax, and I'll get you where you need to go.”

God damn, she was wet and needy, and he loved it all. He slid his finger into her sopping panties and started finger-fucking her in shallow little thrusts that instantly had her undulating under him.

“I can feel you, Love. Let go.” She tightened on his finger so hard it was impossible to move it. When she cried out and stiffened, he felt his own orgasm take him. He couldn’t remember losing control before, but he could see it happening a lot with her.

He pulled his finger out of her when she collapsed against the mattress. He moaned when he popped the finger into his mouth to suck off her juices. “Fuck, you taste sweet. I’m going to have my head between your legs a lot.”

A grin spread across his face when he saw her try to struggle to gain some control.

He pressed his mouth against hers again and gave her a sweet soft kiss. “That was beautiful. Thank you.”

She stopped moving and stared up at him.

“Did I make you feel good, Love?”

She turned a bright red but nodded.

“Good, I’m going to do that a lot, and it gets even better. I promise you that.”

“That might just kill me,” she said.

He laughed. “No, I’ll take care of you.”

She nodded.

“We should get up and shower. Why don’t you go first since it will take your hair a bit to dry?”

“Okay.”

He rolled off of her and let her sit up. She hurriedly smoothed the shirt down to cover her body.

“Baby, I’m going to know that body better than you, and there’s absolutely nothing I don’t love about it.”

“I’m not used to this.”

He grabbed her hand. “I know, and I’ll keep reminding myself that, but I need you to trust me.”

“I do. I can’t think of anyone else I’ve trusted as I do you.”

“That makes me happy.” Damn, if she didn’t make him feel ten feet tall.

She nodded, scooted off the bed, walked into the bathroom, and closed the door. Pretty soon, there wouldn’t be doors between them. He wouldn’t allow it.

He dropped back to the mattress and stared up at the ceiling. If someone had told him a week ago that he’d trick a woman into marriage because he craved her so much, he would have laughed.

Now, he couldn’t see his life without her in it. For the next few hours, he’d have to use anything and everything he could think of to talk her into it, because her saying no to him was not an option.

Chapter Thirteen

Aryanna raised her face to the water, letting it run down her sensitized body. It hadn't stopped throbbing but in a good way. She'd read about sex before, but she could never have imagined it as overwhelming or as wonderful as it was.

She giggled. She couldn't wait to do it again. The thought of doing it with anyone else made her feel sick. Her body already belonged to Remington. She didn't want him to know it yet, but it felt good to have that much control.

She finished up, wrapped her hair and body in a towel, and stood in front of the mirror.

She jumped when he knocked on the door.

"Are you decent?" he asked.

"Well, yes, kind of."

The door opened before she finished the sentence.

"I didn't say you could come in," she complained.

He stood behind her with his hands on her bare shoulders and a grin on his face.

"We're engaged, Love. I thought I was being nice to let you shower alone."

"Nice?" she asked and laughed.

"Yeah. You're going to love it when I bathe you. My hands will be all over you, making sure every inch is squeaky clean." He leaned forward and pressed his lips against her neck. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he whispered.

Every thought in her head scattered as she watched him press his lips and tongue to her neck and shoulder.

"We'll talk more later. We really should get a move on. After breakfast, I have a meeting with Alastair and a few men this morning."

She swallowed and nodded.

He kissed the top of her head and then walked over to the shower. Before she guessed what he would do, his boxers dropped to the floor, leaving his beautiful body on full display.

She knew she made a sound when he laughed.

She growled and walked into the closet to pull on another dress the girls got her. When he walked out of the shower with a towel around his waist, she was dressed and blow-drying her hair.

After he dressed, he stood beside her, combed his hair, and put cream on his facial hair.

She put the dryer away. "I'll let the rest air-dry, or we'll be here another ten minutes."

He took her hand. "All right. Let's go."

A few minutes later, they walked into the dining room to see several people already sitting.

Two of the girls smiled and waved.

"Do you want some coffee, Love?"

"Yes, please." She sat down beside Beth. "Good morning."

"Good morning."

They ate and talked. One of the brothers kept the girls laughing.

Remington stood and pressed a kiss to her head. "I'll be in meetings most of the day, but I'll see you this afternoon."

She nodded. "Okay."

The other girls came in, so she sat back with another cup of coffee and talked while they ate breakfast.

"So, I was looking through my dresses last night, and I found a few that might work," Faith said.

"Me, too," Beth said.

"Dresses for what?" Aryanna asked.

"The wedding," Hope said.

“Whose wedding?” she asked and then was confused when they all started laughing.

“Yours,” Beth said.

She stiffened. “Wedding? That can’t be. Dammit. How many days do we have to get ready?”

The girls laughed again.

She picked up a Danish. “If you all keep laughing, I’ll throw this roll at you.”

Angel squeezed her arm. “You’re getting married today.”

Her mouth dropped open. “When was I going to be told?”

“We thought he might have already told you,” Beth asked. “He actually could have, but the way he talks makes it hard to understand him sometimes.”

Aryanna rolled her eyes at Beth’s joke and thought about the conversation they had the night before. She remembered being confused a few times and thought she said yes but hadn’t understood why she said it. God, could he have tricked her into marrying him?

Damn him. It wasn’t right. “Don’t we have to be engaged for more than a few hours?”

They smiled.

“I wasn’t engaged at all,” Hope said.

“Me, either,” Faith said.

“I don’t think any of us were. It’s just the way the family works,” Beth said. “But just think, you’ll officially be part of the family.”

Oh, hell.

Hope laughed. “That got her. Good job, Beth.”

Aryanna glared at Beth. “You’re as devious as the men.”

Beth shrugged. "I've been here awhile. I had to learn something from them."

"Let's get on with the dresses," Angel said and stood.

"Fine, but I'm not going to make it easy on him. I want him to sweat a bit."

They all giggled.

"We'll help with that, too," Hope said.

The girls locked themselves in Beth's bedroom and had her try on a dozen dresses until they came to one they all agreed on. It was tea-length, short in the front and long in the back. It was white lace, and with the skin-colored slip underneath, it looked see-through in some places.

"He's going to flip when he sees this," Angel said.

"Alastair would have a cow if he caught me in that," Beth said.

"I think they all would," Hope said.

Faith straightened the top of the dress. "I think we should just pin some flowers in her hair, and you'll look gorgeous with the bouquet the maids are making."

"I don't want to give in so easily, so what do I do?" Aryanna asked.

"We'll find a place to hide you, so he'll have to look for you," Hope said.

"I don't want you guys to get in trouble. Just point out a few places, and I'll pick one, so you're telling the truth."

"I'm not worried about it," Beth said. "Alastair has never hurt me, and between us girls, I push him sometimes into punishing me because we both love it so much. He just doesn't know it."

"Wow, Beth, I didn't know you were such a perv," Hope said.

Beth threw a pillow at her. "Bite me, bitch."

“Oh, God, Alastair’s going to kill us for corrupting you,” Angel said.

Beth giggled.

“I have something you’ll like,” Faith said and ran out of the room.

When she came back, she handed Aryanna a tissue-wrapped package.

“What is this?”

“Open it. Think of it as a present between us to you.”

Aryanna opened the wrapping on it and found white lace.

Faith laughed, pulled the scrap of fabric out of the paper, and held it up to show it was very sexy lingerie. The girls laughed and clapped.

“There’s barely anything to it,” Aryanna said.

“It will cover the important parts, but I guarantee he’s going to love it.”

Aryanna ran her fingers over the lace, inhaled, and nodded. “Thank you, guys, so much.”

The girls surrounded her in a group hug.

“Let’s put everything away and have lunch after we get you ready. Okay?” Faith asked.

“It sounds good to me, but I don’t know if I’ll be able to eat.”

“At least something,” Beth said. “Or you might have an upset stomach. After, there will be a lot of food, and the party lasts for several hours.”

“It’s going to be a long day, isn’t it?”

The women laughed and nodded.

Chapter Fourteen

Remington tightened his tie and checked himself once more in the mirror. He thought he'd feel more anxious, but all he felt was excitement to marry Anna.

There was a knock on the bedroom door.

"Come in," he said as he walked into the bedroom to grab his jacket.

"Hey, do you need anything?" Duncan asked.

He shook his head.

"Cool. I'll go down with you. Everyone is here and ready."

"Good. I want this part over."

"I understand. I was the same way with Angel."

The men walked downstairs and into a sunroom that was set up with chairs on either side of the aisle. At the end of it, the judge stood talking to his Uncle Angus and his cousins, and their women were getting ready to sit.

Duncan slapped his back. "Congratulations."

"Thank you."

He was straightening his cuffs when Alastair walked over to him.

"We might have a problem," Alastair said.

"What?"

"You have a runaway bride."

At first, he felt panic start to grow until he saw the twinkle in his cousin's eyes. "Oh, really. How did you come about this information?"

Alastair's lips twitched. "My wife said she was very nervous, and she walked off, and the girls haven't seen her since."

“You better know where she is.”

“I don’t yet, but I know a way we can find her.”

“Let’s go,” Remington said.

Alastair walked him down to the security room.

“Hey, Tony, we need help finding a runaway bride,” Alastair said.

The guys in the room laughed.

“Do you have to keep saying it that way?” Remington asked.

“Yes.”

Tony grinned and turned in his chair. “When did she go missing?”

Remington scowled. “You lads don’t have to enjoy this so much.”

There were snickers but no other comments.

“They got dressed in my and Beth’s room, and the girls came down thirty minutes ago.”

Remington watched Tony go through the video he had from that time period.

“There she is,” Remington said. He was surprised he was able to talk because she took his breath away in her white dress.

Tony followed her for a few minutes until she ducked into a room.

“What’s that room?” Remington asked.

Alastair smiled. “That’s my dad’s old office that he rarely uses anymore.”

“Show me.”

Remington patted Tony’s shoulder. “Thank you.”

“No problem. Good luck.”

Remington grinned.

Alastair showed him the room.

“There it is. What should I tell the family?”

Remington wiped a hand down his face. “Hell. Tell them we’ll be there shortly.”

“Good enough,” Alastair said and walked off.

Remington counted to ten before silently opening the door. At first, he didn’t see her, and then the desk chair moved a little. The back was so big she was invisible. He bit his lip when he heard her mumbling.

“I’m stupid,” Aryanna said. “I’m a stupid princess.”

He heard her sigh when he stepped closer.

“I’m hiding like a child,” she whispered.

“You’re not a child, Love,” he said.

She screamed and twirled around in the chair, almost falling out of it.

“How did you find me?”

He crossed his arms over his chest. “There’s surveillance all over. I had the security guy, Tony, track you. Do you want to tell me why you’re hiding from your soon-to-be husband?”

She looked down at her hands. “Because I don’t remember you asking and me saying yes.”

He walked around the desk, bent to pick her up, sat down, and placed her on his lap. He cuddled her against his chest.

“I’m sorry, Love. I tricked you a bit because I was afraid you’d say no.”

She tipped her head back to look up at him. “I wouldn’t have said no.”

He caressed her cheek with the tip of a finger. “Even after you found out the wedding was today?”

“I might have suggested you give me time to organize a wedding.”

“From what I understand, my cousins are really good at putting together a wedding in hours.”

She nodded. “That’s what the girls said.”

“Were they happy with theirs?” he asked.

“Yes. They said they were.”

“So, what do you think we should do now? We’ve got a bunch of people waiting for us right now.”

She sighed. “I think we should get married.”

“Will you regret it if you do?”

She thought about it for a moment and then shook her head. “No.”

He tipped her head back farther and gently pressed his lips against hers. “Then let’s go get married.”

She smiled as he lifted her off his lap and took her hand. He was still afraid she’d change her mind, so he hurried them both back to the sunroom the wedding was set up in. Instead of letting her walk down the aisle to him, he pulled her down to stand in front of the judge that was marrying them, ignoring all the hoots and laughter.

He nodded at the judge. “Please begin.”

The judge snorted and started reading. Remington heard her sweet voice take him to be his wife and just about shouted, “Yes.”

When it came to his turn, he answered every question before the judge finished, and he kept trying to pull her closer so he could kiss her.

“Jesus. Did I look that crazy when I married Beth?” Alastair asked.

He got several people barking “yes’s,” which made Alastair grunt.

Remington felt better that he wasn’t the only one who felt this level of emotion.

“Son, if you stop pulling at her and let me finish, then you can kiss her.”

He nodded and waited impatiently. He exhaled when the judge said he and Anna were man and wife.

“Now, you may kiss her,” the judge said.

He pulled her into his arms, tilted her head back, and started kissing her. He would have kept going if the room hadn't erupted in clapping and remarks.

When he looked down at her passion-flushed face, he knew he loved her with everything in him right then.

His world would be perfect if he knew she loved him, too.

Chapter Fifteen

Aryanna smiled so much her cheeks hurt, but she couldn't help it because she'd never been so happy before in her life. Remington had yet to release her and held her even when they were eating.

She looked around the long table to see everyone having a great time. The sunroom and dining rooms were decorated perfectly. The meal that was served was the best she'd had in a long time, and they somehow had time to make a beautiful wedding cake that she and Remington cut and fed each other.

One of the cousins was everywhere taking pictures, and she couldn't wait to see them.

Remington pressed his lips against the side of her head. "How are you holding up, Love?"

She looked up and smiled. "Really good. This was perfect. Thank you."

"Don't thank me, the whole family had a hand in it," he said.

She grinned. "I'll thank them later. Everyone is looking a little too happy."

He chuckled. "I'm ready to leave. How about you?"

She rested her head against his chest. "Yes. I'd like that. It's been a long day."

Remington yelled out good night and then swept her out of the room before anyone could stop them. He lifted her into his arms at the bottom of the stairs and walked up to their room.

"You're going to hurt your back," she said as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

He snorted. "My briefcase weighs more than you."

She rolled her eyes at the exaggeration.

He kicked their door closed behind them and lay her on the mattress.

She lifted her arms above her head and watched as he took his jacket, tie, and shirt off.

“I like your gaze on me, Wife.”

“I like my gaze on you, too.”

He chuckled and undressed down to his boxers.

“Should I take a shower?” she asked.

He shook his head. “No, because I’m just going to get you messy again.”

She inhaled. As much as she wanted his hands on her, she was terrified. He slipped her shoes off and then worked the dress down.

“Have I told you how beautiful you look?”

She smiled. “Yes, about twenty times.”

“Which isn’t enough. I’m already slacking.”

She laughed. He took a step back when she was down to her lingerie.

“Jesus Christ, woman. What are you wearing?”

She loved his response. “The girls gave me a present.”

“I think it’s more like they gave *me* one.”

He came and lay down beside her and placed his hand on her stomach before he bent and took her lips.

He kissed her for a long time, and she was breathless when he raised his head.

“I want you to relax, Love, and let me make you feel good.”

“I’m a little scared,” she admitted.

“I know. I’ll do everything I can to make you love what I do to you.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

He started to kiss her again. She gasped when one of his hands covered her breast. She arched off the mattress when he started pinching her nipples.

“Do you like that?” he asked.

She nodded.

He slid the lacy fabric off of her, leaving her naked. But at that moment, she was oblivious to it. Remington kept running his hand up and down her body but kept his fingers away from where she needed them the most.

“Please,” she begged.

“I know, baby. Just a little bit longer.”

Her legs spread farther apart when his hand glided between them. One of his fingers slid in between her pussy lips and then around her clit, making her breath stall in her throat. She started to beg him again when she felt his finger push into her cunt. Her thoughts splintered, and her attention went to how he stretched her.

“That’s it. Take my finger. Damn, you feel so good.”

He talked to her the whole time, but she couldn’t comprehend most of it. She just knew the tone of his voice helped settle her.

“Let’s try two.”

“Ah...” The feeling of being stretched was making her want more at the same time, thinking about how his cock was going to fit if she was already having problems with two of his fingers. She was mindless with need, but he kept at her and worked three fingers into her at the same time.

“Okay, we’ll take this nice and easy.”

He came over her, cupped the back of her head with one hand, and guided his cock into her cunt with the other. She felt pressure but not really any pain. He was taking so long, and she begged him to hurry, although she didn’t really know what she was asking for.

She felt him bump into something inside of her and gasped. Before she took another breath, he had thrust through the membrane and taken her virginity.

She cried out and dug her nails into his shoulders. “That hurts.”

“I know, Love, but that was it. That’s the only pain you’ll ever feel.”

God, she hoped so because it felt like he’d torn her apart.

“Give it a minute,” he said. “I promise it will get better.”

He stayed still as he placed kisses over her face and gave her time to adjust.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“I think I’m okay. How about you?”

He grinned. “Like I’m in Heaven.”

God, she loved when he said sweet things like that to her.

“Let me see how this feels.”

He slowly pulled out and then pushed back in. He kept at it for a long time, slowly building his thrusts in strength and speed. The tightening in her womb and a throbbing began deep inside of her cunt. She pushed her hips against him trying to relieve the pressure.

“Remington...”

He nuzzled her neck as he continued to power into her. “Shhh. Just relax.”

She wanted to laugh at that but couldn’t get enough breath in her lungs to accomplish it. She hit her peak and balanced there until his next hard thrust. Her body convulsed, and a scream tore from her that sounded like a cry of relief. He continued to pound into her after she collapsed against the mattress, her arms dropped to her side.

Her eyes closed because she didn't have the strength to keep them open, but she heard his deep groan of satisfaction. He lay over her, but he was careful to keep most of his weight off her chest so she could breathe.

Aryanna started to drift off when he kissed her lips and lifted himself off of her. She whimpered when his cock slid from her cunt, mostly because she felt so empty but also because she was a bit sore. A gush of liquid slid from her body. Her eyes popped open. Oh, my God. He hadn't used a condom.

“What happens if I get pregnant?”

“Then we'd have a beautiful baby,” he said. “I'll be right back.”

She turned to her side and adjusted the pillow, and crashed. She vaguely felt him between her legs again with a wet cloth but didn't have the energy to fight him.

Remington got them situated and curled his body around hers.

“You're mine forever, Lass, and you'll never get away.”

She wanted to say she didn't want to but just smiled and fell asleep.

Chapter Sixteen

Remington was sitting with Alastair when Graham came in.

“You’re going to love this, Remington.”

Remington turned to look at him.

“They caught the assassin that attacked Aryanna that night in the hotel.”

Remington straightened. “Who was it? Where was he?”

“No one we know, but the King of Malta, her father, was the one that sent him. He was acting like a delivery man, but Security stopped him.”

“Why didn’t he kill her that night?” Alastair asked.

“I guess the King wanted it to look more like natural causes. If their people knew she’d been murdered like her mother, there would have been a revolt. The people don’t like him.”

“From what Anna has told me, he was a horrible father as well as a king,” Remington said. “How was he going to kill her?”

“He had poison on him. He won’t tell us how he would have done it.”

Remington nodded. “Where is he?”

“At one of our warehouses,” Graham said.

Remington stood. “He’s mine.”

“I’ll take him,” Graham said.

Alastair nodded. “Take a few cars. I want you heavily guarded.”

Remington followed Graham out of the house and into the back of a car.

“Tell me what you need from me,” Graham said.

“Just to stand back and watch the show.”

Graham chuckled.

On the ride there, Remington went over the past few months in his head. He couldn't believe he and Anna had already been married for seven weeks. He knew the businesses he bought were taking up a lot of his time and energy, which attributed to the feeling that the weeks had flown by. He hated the fact that most nights, he came home, ate, and then pulled Anna to bed.

He didn't fuck her like he wanted to, but he at least got to hold her. She'd been acting funny the last couple of weeks, and he meant to talk to her, but the time just sped by.

His thoughts scattered when they pulled up behind a large gray warehouse. He needed to put her out of his mind for now because he had questions that needed answers, and he was looking forward to getting them the hard way. It had been a while since he'd killed anyone, and although he didn't like the killings for the fun of it, it was a necessary part of being in the Mafia, and he'd only ever killed bad people. This one would be easy because the man hurt and threatened his woman, and no one would get away with that.

They walked into the back door and into a large part of the building. The place was clean and looked organized, with boxes stacked neatly on the sides and one row down the middle. He caught sight of the man tied to a chair with a gag in his mouth. That wouldn't do. Not only did he need answers, but he would enjoy hearing his screams and pleading for life.

“Get the gag off of him,” Remington ordered.

Remington stood in front of him and crossed his arms over his chest. It looked like the men had a bit of fun with him before he got there, which was fine as long as the bastard was able to talk.

“Do you know who I am?”

“Yes, you're the bastard I was forbidden to hurt.”

One of his brows rose. “Why is that?”

“That’s what the orders were.”

“So, you were just ordered to kill the princess?”
Remington asked.

“Yes.”

“Her father was the one to give you the orders?”

The man spat blood to the side. “Yes. You’ll make an enemy of him if you don’t let me go.”

Remington laughed. “I’m already his enemy. No one touches what belongs to me without dying.”

The man laughed. “You can’t kill the King.”

“From what I understand, it might have already been done. If not, it will happen soon.”

The man’s eyes widened, and real fear started to show. The man had been an idiot if he thought he would leave the building alive.

Remington took his suit coat off, handed it to the nearest man, and then rolled up his sleeves.

“Listen, mister, I wasn’t really going to hurt the woman.”

Remington punched him on the side of his face making his cheek burst open and blood run down his neck.

“Don’t you fucking tell me that shit. We both know you would get great pleasure from killing the princess.”

“Listen!” the man yelled.

“The time for talking is over, my friend.”

Remington went at the man with all the pent-up anger he’d had since she was attacked in the hotel. Besides punching him, he kicked him in the gut as he’d done to her. It knocked him over a few times, but a man was always there to lift him back up.

When he took a breath, he saw the man was bleeding from every orifice on his face, even his eyes and ears. The bastard was barely breathing already.

“Fuck, Lad, you hardly gave me any sport,” Remington told the man in the chair.

The men around him laughed.

He held out a hand. “Knife.”

One of the men immediately set one in his hand.

“You fucked with the wrong family, and now you’re going to Hell.”

Remington slit the man’s throat and stood back as he bled out.

“You men know what to do,” Graham said and handed Remington his jacket. “I’d wait to put that on before you change your clothing. You got a little blood on you.”

Remington snorted but draped the jacket over his arm. He got more than a little and knew it had splattered on his face and arms. He just hoped they didn’t get pulled over on the way home. “I need to get back to change because I have a meeting in an hour.”

Graham nodded. “Then let’s go.”

The short ride back was made in silence. A normal person might have dwelled on the fact they had just taken a person’s life, but he considered it part of his job and moved on to the business meeting he had later.

“Hello, gentlemen,” Martin said as he opened the front door.

He liked how the man didn’t blink when he saw the blood on him. “Hello, Martin.” He turned to Graham. “Will you give Alastair the rundown?”

“Sure. I’ll do it now if he’s not busy.”

“Thank you.”

Remington walked up the stairs and into his room, threw the jacket on the bed, and unbuttoned his shirt. He stopped short and mentally cursed when Anna walked out of the bathroom.

“I thought you and the girls had something planned, Love.”

Her eyes scanned him and got wider the more she saw.

“Were you in a fight?” she asked.

Fuck. “Kind of.”

“How can you kind of be in a fight, and where are you hurt?”

He put out a hand when she came toward him. “No, Love, I don’t want to get blood on you. I’m not hurt at all, but the other man is.”

She looked confused. “All that blood is his?”

“Yes. See, you don’t have to worry about me.”

“He’s dead, isn’t he?” she asked in a low tone.

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Yes.”

“You killed someone?” she asked with wide, frightened eyes.

He immediately went to her and clutched her shoulders, tightening his grip when she tried to take a step away from him.

“First off, you’re not allowed to be afraid of me.”

She tried to smile, but it was a sad one that tore at his heart.

“I just never thought you were that type of man,” she said.

“What type?”

“The type to hurt and kill people,” she said.

“I’m part of the Mafia, Love. We have to be hard bastards sometimes, but we’ve never hurt an innocent.”

“Do you like hurting dogs or cats?”

He rolled his eyes. “For fuck’s sake, I’m not a psychopath or serial killer. I’m just a man who does what he needs to get the job done and protect this family.”

“And this man deserved to die?”

“Yes. He was the man who attacked you in the hotel and was trying to get to you in the house today to kill you.”

She jerked in his arms. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. Now, do you think it was okay?”

“I ... I don't know,” she said.

He dropped his arms, walked around her, and stripped out of his clothing as he went. He dropped the bloody clothes in a plastic sack and set it in the hamper, so they didn't touch the other clothing. The staff would take care of all of it.

Remington felt her follow him but ignored her to start the shower and step in. It took him a minute to wash. He wrapped a towel around his waist and stepped out to see her leaning against the doorjamb with her arms crossed.

He ignored her again and walked into the closet, where he put on another suit. When he returned to the bathroom, he saw she hadn't moved.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“I have a meeting.”

“You can't leave before we talk about this more.”

He raked his fingers through his hair, checked himself in the mirror, and then walked to the door. “There's no time.”

She followed on his heels and grabbed onto his arm before he opened the door.

“Remington...”

He turned and glared down at her. “Enough. I don't like that you're interrogating me. Stay in the room until I get back.”

“I'm being punished? And for what?”

“I don't like being questioned, Wife.”

“I don't like a man that kills people, Husband.”

He growled and gripped her face in one of his hands. “I want you naked and in bed when I get back. It should be after dinner. Do you understand?”

She stood and stared at him with her chin raised.

Hell. “I’ve got to go.” He turned and left. He’d deal with this later.

Chapter Seventeen

Aryanna watched the door close and felt something in her break. She didn't know if it was her trust, innocence, or heart, but she had a lot to think about.

An hour later, there was a knock on the door. When she answered, Beth stood with a smile until she saw her face.

Beth stepped into the room and gripped her hand. "What happened?"

Aryanna closed the door, pulled Beth over to the table, and sat. "I'm not sure how to feel about something. Remington came into the room a bit ago with blood on him. I asked if he was hurt, and he said no. I asked if the other man was dead, and he said yes. I never thought I'd be married to a murderer."

Beth signed and squeezed her hands. "I was the same way. A minute after meeting Alastair, he shot a guy holding me in the head. His blood and brain matter was all over me."

"Oh, my God."

"I was terrified, to begin with, and then he did that. I thought I'd lose it."

"Why did he kill him?" Aryanna asked.

"Because the man had kidnapped me and taken me to this room. I was struggling and crying, but the men — there had to be six or seven — stood around and looked at me like it was nothing. Alastair was pissed that the man had mistreated me."

"You just met?"

"Yes, but Alastair would tell me later that he knew within a second when he saw me that I was his. He called it our destiny."

"So, then he kidnapped you."

She didn't understand why Beth was smiling.

“I made it so hard for him. He made me shower, of course. I was gross and then wore his shirt. He made me lay in bed beside him. He promised he wouldn’t touch me, and he didn’t. Well, not until I scared him. I would wake up in the middle of the night every night and make a bed on the sofa. He’d find me gone and take me back to bed but held me against him. When I didn’t eat, he spoon-fed me himself. He was incredibly sweet.”

Aryanna’s mouth dropped open. She’d never seen any softness in the man.

Beth laughed. “I see your expression. No one believes me, but they see how he is with me in the house.”

Aryanna wanted what they had, but... “How did you get past the killing?”

“He did it to protect me, and they only kill people who are dangerous to us and others. Tell me, do you know who the man was?”

“Yes, Remington said it was the man that attacked me in the hotel, and he tried to sneak in here to poison me.”

Beth gasped. “I’m so glad they caught him.”

“I am, too. It’s just knowing how violent my husband can be that I’m having a hard time with.”

Beth squeezed her hand. “I hope I helped a little. I hadn’t seen any violence before in my life before Alastair brought me here. It’s part of who they are, and we either accept it or not, but I can’t see him letting you go.”

“Probably not.”

“Let’s go talk to the others.”

“I can’t. I have to stay in the room.”

Beth laughed and rolled her eyes. “We’ve all been there a few times. If you need anything, dial three, which is Martin. Or the kitchen.”

Aryanna hugged the woman. “Thank you.”

“Talk to the others because they all have stories. Just remember you’re not alone. Not only do you have us, but you also have a man that I know loves you and would do anything for you, and he just proved it today.”

Aryanna nodded and closed the door. She leaned against it for a moment. What was she going to do? Would she be able to leave him? He’d changed a little over the time they’d been married and was turning into a hard, gruff, and now violent man. He was still gentle with her, but she disliked the coldness she sometimes caught in his eyes.

She ignored the tray that had been sent up because her stomach still hadn’t settled. She decided to shower and get into a comfortable lounge outfit she liked to wear at night in their room.

It was past seven o’clock, and he still hadn’t come. She got a wild hair and decided she’d make it a bit hard to get his hands on her. She left the room and walked around until she found an empty bedroom and got comfortable on the window seat to wait.

It wasn’t long before she heard his bellow, and she cringed. She thought she might have made a mistake pushing him at the moment, but it was too late now. She’d just have to pay the consequences.

Within ten minutes, Remington barreled into the room. The look on his face would have scared her, but she knew he’d never hurt her.

“Do you want to tell me why you’re here and not naked in our bed?”

She shrugged.

His eyes widened and then narrowed into angry slits making a shiver go up her spine.

“Why are you pushing me, Love?”

“I didn’t think I was. I just didn’t want to do what you ordered.”

“But, Lass, you’ll always do what I ordered or face the consequences.”

Her chin went up. “Really? And may I know what they are?”

She knew her tone was snotty, but he was starting to piss her off.

“That’s it,” he growled.

There was no time to escape when he headed toward her. She screamed when he threw her over his shoulder and headed out of the bedroom. Within a few minutes, they were back in their room. He tossed her on the bed and closed and locked the door.

She watched him as he slowly discarded his clothing, and his eyes never left her.

When he stood beautifully naked in front of her, he started stroking his cock. “Tonight, I’m going to show you the consequences.”

“You won’t hurt me,” she said with conviction.

“No, but I can make you uncomfortable.”

“What’s the difference?” she asked.

He rolled his eyes. “How about I show you?”

Remington pulled her clothing from her quickly and easily. She didn’t have time to fight, and frankly, she didn’t want to. She didn’t want to think about the violence or the murder. She just wanted to feel as close to him as she could.

He came down on top of her and took her lips like a starved man. He pried open her mouth with his tongue and touched and tasted every part he could reach as his hands swept over her. His hand engulfed her breast, which made her arch off the mattress.

“Easy, Love, I’ll get you where you need to go, eventually.”

He took forever going slow and easy, feeling every part of her he could.

“Remington.”

“I know. This is part of it. Do you feel how uncomfortable it is and how your cunt throbs? This is what’s going to happen every time you disobey me. I could let you suffer for hours. But I just want to give you a taste of it tonight. You could also be put over my knees and spanked. Would you like that?”

God, she couldn’t believe he was doing this to her. She would much rather be spanked than this.

Chapter Eighteen

A fine sheet of sweat covered his body. Fuck. If I don't get into her soon, I'll explode.

He ran his hand down her body in between her legs. He groaned when he felt how wet she was. He pushed one of his fingers into her cunt, which instantly tightened on him, almost strangling his finger.

"Jesus, Love. I need to get in you, but first, I have to get you ready."

"I am ready," she cried.

"Not for what I'm going to do to you." He backed off of her. "Roll over onto your stomach."

She immediately did what he wanted.

"Jesus, I love your fucking body," he said.

"I'm glad."

He kept his hand moving on her legs and ass, dipped his fingers between her ass cheeks, and pressed on her asshole. He gathered some of her cream, brought it back up to her hole, and pressed it into the depths of her ass, going deeper every time.

"Oh, God, Remington, what are you doing?"

"I'm getting your ass ready for me. This is the only part of your body that I haven't claimed as mine. Besides, it might help you remember who you belong to."

"I know it's you."

"You're damn right it is." He pulled the lube from the nightstand and poured a glob onto his fingers. "Let's try two." He worked his fingers into her and then scissored them inside to help stretch her. He did this for a while and then forced three fingers into her.

Her cries got louder, and her body wouldn't stop pushing back against him.

“I know, Love. Be still for a moment.”

He pressed the opening of the lube to her ass and squeezed a hefty amount into her before rolling on a condom and making sure he was covered in the gel, too. He pulled her until her ass was on the edge of the mattress, widened, and tucked her legs so her knees were against the sides of her chest. Then he stuffed a few pillows under her, gripped her hips, and started to work his cock into her.

His eyes almost rolled back at the feeling of a heated vice gripping his cock. He worked his way into her inch by inch until he couldn't go any further. He stopped to savor the feeling of having made her, his.

“Remington...” she cried over and over.

He knew it was from need and not pain because she kept trying to push back against him.

“I know.”

He started moving in and out at a snail's pace until she tightened further on him. It went on for several minutes before her cries got louder, telling him she was close. He was glad because he'd been close to coming since he worked his way into her.

His pace started moving faster, and each thrust was harder than the one before, giving her the friction she needed to go over.

“Come for me, Love.”

He hissed when her cunt clamped down on him, making it impossible to move for a moment. When she finally released him, he started to pound into getting his own satisfaction and pleasure.

After he orgasmed, Remington stood silently as he tried to gain control of his body. His breathing billowed in and out of his lungs, and his heart felt like it was about ready to break out of his chest. He glanced down at her to see her eyes closed.

He pulled out of her and laid her on her side. “I’ll be right back.”

He walked into the bathroom to get rid of the condom and showered quickly before he started the tub and went back for her. He grinned when he saw she hadn’t moved at all.

She grumbled when he picked her up, which made him smile. She still seemed to be lightly dozing when he stepped into the tub and sat down with her back against his chest.

“I don’t want a bath. I want to sleep.”

“I’ll get you in bed, but I want you comfortable. I don’t want you sore tomorrow.”

He reached for one of her hair bands and pulled her hair up. When he looked at it, he smiled. It was lopsided and hanging in her eyes, but her hair was out of the water.

Remington made them stay in the water for fifteen minutes, and she dozed against him the whole time. He murmured to her when he stood to get out. He dried her off and then himself.

“Let’s get our teeth brushed and then into bed.”

She nodded groggily and quickly brushed. He pulled out the hair band and finger-combed her hair, lifted her, turned off the light, carried her into the bedroom, and set her on the mattress. He turned off all the other lights, ensured the door was closed, and then crawled into bed with her. After maneuvering her around a bit, he finally got her where he wanted her.

A sigh escaped when he was finally able to relax. He could tell by her breathing she was still awake after a few minutes.

“Anna, I know it was hard to learn about a different side of me. And I know you’re having problems accepting that, but first, I have to say I’ll never let you go. You know that, right?”

She nodded.

“And you know I’d never hurt you or anyone we cared about.”

“I know.”

“Then you just have to deal with it. I’m not going to change. Hell, I couldn’t. I’ve been like this most of my life. I grew up in a Mafia family and have never lived like a normal person. And I don’t want to.”

“It was a shock.”

“I know. I didn’t want you to see me like that, but it’s done, and I’m glad you know that part of me.”

“Are there many more parts of you I should brace myself for?” she asked.

“Maybe.”

She stiffened. “Like what?”

“I really liked being in your ass, so I’m going to spend a lot of time in it.”

She slapped his arm, which was wrapped around her waist. “I can’t believe you said that.”

“It’s the truth. In fact, you should know that the next time you’re sassy with me, I’ll know you’re asking to get butt-fucked.”

He smiled when she gasped.

“That’s not true.”

“It wasn’t before, but it is now. You’ll keep this in your head now, and it may stop your mouthing off so much.”

She hissed. “You’re being unreasonable.”

“Probably. Let’s go to sleep because I want us to plan a trip to Scotland so you can meet my father. He’s anxious to get to know you.”

She sighed. “I would love to meet him, too.”

He pressed a kiss to the back of her head. “Night, Love.”

Chapter Nineteen

“It looks so different here,” Aryanna said as she stared out her car window. There were so many stone walls and miles of fields. Everything was so bright and colorful.

“We’re just about there,” Remington stated.

“You missed this, didn’t you?”

“Yes. We’ll come back to visit a few times a year, but I’d like to live in the United States. There are so many more opportunities there.”

“That’s fine. I don’t mind as long as we’re together.”

“Are you going to miss Malta?”

“Yes, but it would be too dangerous until my father is taken care of.”

“Do you ever think about being the Queen?” he asked.

“Oh, God, no.”

He laughed.

“I’ll do whatever I can for the people, but I don’t want to rule the country.”

“I understand that. Now look.”

They drove around a curve.

“Oh, my God. Is that a castle?” she asked.

He chuckled. “Some of the locals call it that.”

“It’s huge. How old is it?”

“It’s been in my family since the 1700s.”

“Wow.”

They pulled into a long drive and parked next to other vehicles in front of a long garage.

He got out, came to her side, helped her out, and then wrapped an arm around her waist. They walked up some

curved stone steps and into a huge kitchen.

An older woman squealed and raced toward them. Remington laughed and hugged the woman. She was shorter than Aryanna, very robust, and had the prettiest sweet face she had ever seen.

“Anna, I’d like you to meet Helena. She makes the best haggis around.”

“Oh, poo,” Helena said. “That hasn’t been in the house since you puked it up, making your father do it too. He used to like it before that.”

She grinned when she watched the two poke at each other.

“I meant she used to make the best haggis,” he said and grinned. “Helena, I’d like you to meet my love, Anna.”

“My, you are a pretty thing.”

She felt herself blush. “Thank you. I’m thrilled to meet you all.”

“Something sure smells good. I hope it’s one of my favorites,” he said.

“It might be.” The woman got a strange look on her face.

“What?” Remington asked.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I keep forgetting what I was doing. It’s age. I can’t help it. You better go in to see your father. He’s been pacing all morning.”

Remington led her through several hallways and then into a large room with all four walls packed with books and a large desk by the back window. It had a few brown leather sofas and chairs. The rug on the floor was expensive. Everything in the room was.

An older man stood up from his desk chair.

“There’s my boy,” he yelled, then walked over and pulled his son into his arms. They held each other for a long time, making tears pool in her eyes.

They pounded on each other's back a few times before they separated. Remington pulled her into his arms.

"I'd like you to meet your new daughter, Anna."

He looked down at her. "This is my father, James."

She reached out a hand.

"What's that?" James said and then yanked her into his arms. She felt like she was going to smother at one point when he finally released her. "I'm very pleased to have a daughter. I've been praying for one since this one turned three. The kid was a hellion."

Aryanna laughed.

Remington grunted. "I was not. I was just an active boy."

James sniffed and then grinned. "Come, come, have a seat, and tell me how the trip was."

James walked over to a chair, and she and Remington sat on the sofa. They talked for over an hour about the trip they had, the business Remington had in the States, and a honeymoon they were putting off for the time being.

James looked over her shoulder and smiled. "Stop being a baby and come here."

Aryanna turned to see who he was talking to and thought she saw a ghost. "Mama?"

The woman, Aleah, came and stood by James's chair. "Yes, honey. I'm so sorry about so many things."

"I thought you were dead. How can you be alive and not want to see me?"

Remington tightened his grip on her. She looked at him and saw confusion also. "You didn't know?"

He shook his head. "No, Love. I thought you resembled someone, but I couldn't place who. Now I see it. You two could well be sisters."

James pulled Aleah down to sit on the arm of the chair.

Aleah cleared her throat. “Your father tried a few times to kill me. Even with guards around, he got close. When I got shot, the Master Guard, Camden, and later the doctor declared I was dead. They managed to hit my shoulder, but it looked like the bullet hit my chest. There was so much blood he fell for it. They got me to Scotland, and James has been taking care of me ever since.”

“How did you know him?” Remington asked.

His father spoke up. “We had known each other for a long time. We actually wanted to get married, but her father forbade it and made her marry Antonio. But we never lost touch.”

“Was I ever going to know you were still alive?” Aryanna asked.

“Yes, of course. We’ve been working to get enough evidence against your father to take to the council.”

“What’s that?” Remington asked.

“It’s a group of Elders that help us make decisions. I set it up when my father died, and I was pregnant with Aryanna. I didn’t want your father to make any decisions. Antonio disassembled the council when they tried to tell him how to do things, but unannounced to him, they are still together and working behind the scenes.”

Her mother sighed. “When we found out he was going to get you killed, we set you up as Remington’s valet. James has become a confidant for your father. When Antonio told him his plan, it was James that got you out of the country and with someone he knew could protect you. The fact that you would live in the Maclean’s mansion helped because we know what a fortress it was.”

“The assassin attacked her the first night in the hotel and then tried to sneak into the mansion,” Remington said.

“I’m assuming he’s been taken care of?” James asked.

Remington nodded. “Yes.”

Her mother had a hand to her mouth. “How bad were you hurt?”

Aryanna looked at Remington and then back toward her mother. “Just a few bruises. It was nothing serious, I promise.”

“Your mother never left you without protection,” James said.

Her mother squeezed James’s shoulder. She could see the love and affection they had for each other. “The council, several trusted guards, and a few maids.”

“Did Lucile know?” Aryanna asked.

“Yes, but she swore to secrecy.”

“Who is that?” Remington asked.

“She was my nanny,” Aryanna said. “Now she’s just my friend. Or I thought she was.”

Remington gripped her hand. “She still is, Love. What she did was try to protect you the best, maybe the *only*, way she could.”

“I have to tell you that she wanted to kill your father when she found out about him trying to hurt you. I talked her out of it,” James said. “She would immediately be put to death, and she said she didn’t care as long as you were safe. It would have put our plans on hold for a bit longer. We’re weeks, maybe days away from taking him out, and then your mother can take her rightful place again.”

She caught the sweet look between her mother and James.

“What will happen with you two?” Aryanna asked.

James grimaced until Aleah smacked his shoulder. “James and I will marry and live in Malta. He hates the thought of being called King, but he’ll get used to it. We’ll also spend a lot of time here. I wouldn’t dare take my man away from his own castle.”

James snorted out a laugh.

Her mother looked back at her. “Do you think eventually you’ll be able to forgive me?”

Aryanna looked at Remington and got his smile of approval before turning back to her mother. “There’s nothing to forgive, Mama. We’ll just need time to get to know each other again.”

Aleah’s eyes filled with tears, and she pressed her hands against her chest. “Thank you. Would you mind if I hugged you? I’ve been waiting for so long.”

Remington lifted her to her feet, and her mother immediately engulfed her in a hug. She let her mother weep and even shed a few tears herself, even though she was still in a bit of shock.

James said something, making her mother gasp and turn to him.

“You have to stop calling me a baby, James.”

“When you stop acting like one, I will,” James said.

She saw Remington cover his laugh with a cough, and she couldn’t help smiling herself.

“Let’s go in to eat,” James said. He grabbed Aleah and pulled her against him. “Helena has outdone herself with a homecoming feast.”

They sat around the dinner table until after midnight, telling story after story. Aryanna could show her mother some of the wedding pictures, which prompted her to cry again, and his father heckled her. It was funny to watch. She couldn’t remember seeing her mother this carefree and happy.

Once in their bedroom early that morning, Aryanna pulled the blankets back and jumped in, yanking them to her chin. Even with the fire blazing in the fireplace, it was still cold.

“Hurry,” she called out.

He chuckled as he climbed in and pulled her against him.

She laughed when he hissed.

“Jesus, your feet are like ice.”

“See.”

He cuddled her tightly to his chest and put her feet in-between his. “Is that better?”

“Mmmm, yes. Thank you. You’re good at this. You did it once before in the room at Maclean’s. It was only that one night that the temperature was so low ... did you ever ask Alastair about that?”

Remington stiffened. “About that.”

The End

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BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER

HER MAFIA DESTINY

Maclean Mafia Men, 1

Lila Fox

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Sample Chapter

“Yo, brother, I think you need to go back home and mellow out.”

Alastair turned abruptly to face his brother, Calum, getting in his face and gritting his teeth. “Would you like to say that to me one more time?”

“Jesus Christ.” Calum raised his hands and took a hasty step back. “Man, it’s just that you’re really pissed off....”

“Aren’t you usually like this after talking to your mother?” Alastair asked.

“She’s your stepmother. That counts, nut fuck. But yes, I do. The woman’s a viper. It’s just when you’re pissed like

this, someone usually ends up dead.”

Alastair rolled his eyes, turned, and walked down the long hallway. The woman, Calum’s mother, was his fourth stepmother. Alastair’s mother died a few days after giving birth to him, which ruined his father. From what his family had told him over the years, they had been passionately in love, surprising because of their lifestyle.

Being a part of the mafia was not easy. You had to be cold and vicious to survive. It was especially hard for the women. The wives and mistresses had to deal with a lot.

His father had married four more times, trying to find the love he’d had with Isabella, Alastair’s mother, and it had never happened. This last one, Una, Calum’s mother, was the worst.

The first three stepmothers had died of surprisingly natural causes and not murder like one would expect living with the mafia—one in a car accident, one in an accidental drug overdose, and an accidental fall down the steps.

Alastair had liked that one the most. Nessa had been Logan, Ewen, and Rory’s mother and had been sweet as can be. It had hit his father hard when she passed away. Not as hard as Alastair’s mother, Isabella, but it took a while for him to want to have another woman in the house and in his life.

This last wife was a viper, and Alastair hated her, but he had to get along with her because his father was alive. After the stroke, his father had been unable to lead the Maclean clan, so Alastair had taken over the whole operation then, which was fine because he ran most of it anyway.

He shivered inside. Two minutes with his stepmother was torture. The woman was as mean as they came, and he couldn’t understand what his father saw in her. She might have been attractive if not for the permanent sneer she had on her face.

His brother was probably right, but he couldn’t stand the thought of going home to the same house his stepmother lived in, knowing she’d probably try to hunt him down to talk

some more because he'd walked out on her tirade. The temptation to just kill her was too strong, and he didn't know if his father would ever forgive him.

“What exactly are we looking at?” Calum asked.

“Our strip joint in Newport needs new women, and I sent out some of our guys to find ones who were attractive and loved being a stripper. Most of the ones we have now are getting old and tired, so we'll get them other jobs in the business.”

“Cool. Maybe think about taking one of them home,” Duncan, another brother, said. “It might help your disposition.”

“Fuck off,” Alastair said without turning around.

Alastair opened the door to what could pass as a conference room. It had a long table and chairs and a small bar off to the side. Some meetings went late, and the guys were more pleasant if they had some alcohol in them. But not too much, or they started killing each other.

The women were already there waiting. The ones that noticed him stood as seductively as they could, begging for his or his brothers' attention. Being one of their mistresses was sought after not only for their good looks but mainly for the money.

“Hey,” Stuart, one of his best men who had been with him for years, said and walked over to shake his hand. “I think we did well.”

“You checked for diseases and made sure they had no children?”

“Sure, boss. I know what you like.”

Alastair nodded. “Where's Ross? He was supposed to be helping you.”

“He's coming in with the last one or two.”

Alastair turned to Calum. “Can you get me a bourbon on the rocks?” He wouldn't admit it to his brothers, but he did need to mellow out, and a nice drink helped every time.

“Sure.”

The first drink went down smoothly and helped calm his anger a bit as he talked to Stuart and ignored the women trying to vie for his notice and interest. He shook his head and snorted when his brothers did give the women their attention and had girls all over them.

“Craig is going to take these women to the club if you’re okay with them,” Stuart said.

Alastair turned and whistled for Duncan. “I’m going to put you in charge of this. Take them to Speedy’s, get the women who will live in our apartments next to the club moved in, and take the rest back to their place but tell them they have to be at work tomorrow. If they are late, they’re fired. There are no second chances.”

“I got it,” Duncan said.

His brother and a couple of the men rounded up the women and took them out a back door to the vans waiting.

“Are you going to wait for the last of them?” Stuart asked.

Alastair looked at his watch and sat down. “I’ll give them a few minutes.”

He hadn’t finished with his second drink when a side door opened and Ross, one of his guys, walked in, dragging a woman. She was crying and fighting to get away from him.

“Shut up, bitch,” Ross said and shook her.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Stuart yelled.

Alastair held up a hand, set down his drink, and stood to face Ross. He walked to stand in front of the man and crossed his arms over his chest to keep from strangling the man, trying to ignore the woman’s pleas and cries. “Tell me.”

Ross stuttered. “Oh, well, her uncle owed us some money, and I was supposed to get it, but he didn’t have it, and so I thought we could use her as collateral until he pays up.”

Calum, Stuart, and the rest of his guys cursed, and the tension rose in the room.

Alastair just stared at the woman. She was tiny but had curved hips and larger breasts. She was dressed in a long white nightgown with lace. Her dark hair was tousled like she'd been pulled from bed.

"Who gave you permission to do that?" Alastair asked when he turned back at Ross.

"Well, no one. I just thought..."

"Is it your job to think?" Alastair asked.

"Well, no."

"Jesus Christ, you dumbshit," Stuart said.

Alastair walked up, cupped the woman's chin, and raised her face. His breath stalled in his lungs because her eyes were the most beautiful he'd ever seen, even when they were red and swollen from crying. They were light blue in the middle and green on the other part, and they seemed to look right through him.

"Who is your family?" Alastair asked her.

She sniffed. "I don't have one besides an uncle I haven't seen in years."

"No husband?"

"No. Please, let me go home. I won't tell anyone. I don't even know you," she said.

For once in his life, he made a decision with his heart instead of his head. He pulled out a gun and shot Ross in the forehead in one smooth move.

Everyone in the room stood frozen and in shock until the woman screamed.

Alastair put his gun away and reached for her when it looked like she was going to faint, only to have her flinch in horror away from him. He knew why, but it still pissed him off, which was ridiculous. Of course, she would be terrified of him. He just murdered someone in front of her.

He didn't like the blood that had been sprayed over her from Ross's head, and he wanted her clean as soon as possible.

He kept a few feet away from the woman and waited for her to be calm enough to hear him. "My name is Alastair Maclean. We're the mafia in this part of the city."

Alastair heard his brother curse behind him and ignored him.

The woman was hunched against the wall. Tears mixed with blood and brain matter ran down her face. "Why are you telling me this? Are you going to kill me next?"

Alastair shook his head. "I'm making sure that you won't be able to go anywhere, ever."

"I don't understand. I've never done anything to you or anyone."

"I know. Sometimes your life takes a path you didn't expect." *No kidding.* He never predicted he'd kidnap a woman and plan to keep her forever. "My advice is to make the best of this. I'll treat you like a princess as long as you're loyal to me. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't. I don't understand any of this."

He sighed. "That's okay. We have plenty of time." He held out his hand and waited.

She shook her head.

"You can either take my hand and walk out of here with some dignity, or I can have a few of my men carry you out. Choose."

She studied him for a moment and before she reached for his hand. He could see how much she was trembling, but he would take care of her as soon as they got home. When her shaking, tiny cold hand slid into his hand, something inside of him settled, and a warmth filled him.

"That's good, baby." He pulled her along and looked at one of his men. "Take care of Ross."

"You got it, boss."

As he led her out to his car, he felt something shift in his universe, and he knew he'd forever be changed. He just didn't know if it would be for the good or bad. Only time would tell.

End of sample chapter

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