



Three
of a
Kind

New York Times, USA Today & Wall Street Journal Bestselling Author

SANDI LYNN

THREE OF A KIND

KIND BROTHERS SERIES, BOOK 3



SANDI LYNN

SANDI LYNN ROMANCE, LLC

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Sandi Lynn

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MISSION STATEMENT

Sandi Lynn Romance

**Providing readers with romance novels that will whisk
them away
to another world and from the daily grind of life – one
book at a time.**

CHAPTER 1



Sebastian

I opened my eyes, and the first thing I noticed was a perfectly manicured hand with red nail polish dangling over my waist as the smell of cheap perfume still lingered in the air from last night. The last time I checked, it was two a.m. before I closed my eyes and fell asleep. Now, it was seven, and I needed to get Darla out of here. Slowly lifting her arm off me, she let out a moan and rolled over. I sat on the edge of the bed and ran my hands over my face before getting up and heading to the bathroom for a quick shower. When I was finished, I wrapped a towel around my waist and walked into the bedroom.

“Darla, you need to get up.”

“Why? And the name is Carla.”

Shit.

“You need to leave.”

I picked up her dress and panties from the floor and tossed them on the bed.

“Get dressed, please.”

“What the hell, Sebastian? It’s seven-thirty in the morning,” she moaned as she grabbed the pillow and put it over her face.

“Get up, please.” I took the pillow and tossed it. “I have things to do.”

“You’re a grump in the morning.” Her lips formed a pout.

Grabbing a pair of sweatpants from my drawer, I slipped them on, grabbed a t-shirt, and headed out of the bedroom.

“You have ten minutes.”

I went down to the kitchen and brewed a cup of much-needed coffee. The hangover I had was from one too many shots I’d done last night with Simon and Roman at the bar. The same place I met Carla.

“Can I at least have a cup of coffee first?” Carla asked as she stepped into my kitchen.

“Of course.” I gave her a friendly smile.

Placing a to-go cup under my Miele coffee machine, I brewed her a cup and secured it with a lid.

“To-go-cups? Really?” Her eyes narrowed at me. “Is this your way of kicking your houseguests out without looking like too much of an asshole?”

She was cute. But not attractive enough to stay and set my mood for the day.

“I’m guessing I won’t be hearing from you,” she said.

“Listen, Carla. Last night was fun and all, but—”

“But it was a one-time thing, right?”

“Right.” I brought the cup up to my lips.

Tears started to fill her eyes as she stared at me in silence.

“I’m sorry,” I spoke to break the awkwardness that filled the kitchen.

“So am I. You used me, you son-of-a-bitch.”

I let out a sigh.

And here it came.

“I thought you were into me. At least that’s what you led me to believe last night.” She grabbed her purse and threw it

over her shoulder.

“I didn’t lead you on, Carla. What happened last night was a mutual decision.”

“Yeah, only because I thought we had a connection. I felt a connection, Sebastian.”

Oh my God. This was not happening.

“Listen,” I walked over and gripped her shoulders, “you’re a beautiful girl, and we had a good time last night, but I’m not in the market for anything more. I kind of thought I made that clear last night.”

“Obviously, I didn’t get the memo.” She pushed my hands from her shoulders and stormed out the front door.

“Carla, I’m—” I followed her outside.

“Go fuck yourself!” She flipped me off, climbed in her car, and sped out of my driveway.

I stood there and rubbed the back of my neck, and when I looked over, I saw my new neighbor struggling to get a large box out of her Jeep. Running back into the house, I threw on a pair of sneakers and walked over. She had just moved in yesterday, and I wanted to give her some time to get settled before introducing myself, but I used it to my advantage since I saw her struggling.

“Hi.” I grinned, “It looks like you could use some help.”

“Hi, neighbor. If you don’t mind, that would be great.” The corners of her mouth curved upward. “The guy at the store loaded it for me last night, and I guess I didn’t realize I would have trouble getting it out of the car myself.”

“No worries.” I smiled as I lifted the box from her car. “Where do you want me to put it?”

“Inside. Follow me. You can just set it right there.” She pointed to the floor in the living room.

I set the box down and extended my hand to her with a smile.

“I’m Sebastian. Welcome to the beach.”

“Emilia. Thank you.”

“Mrs. Patterson’s granddaughter?” My brow arched.

“No.” She laughed. “But I did buy the house from her.”

My God, she was beautiful. I knew she was gorgeous from afar, but now that I’ve seen her up close, damn. She stood about five feet six inches and was all legs. Lean, toned legs that would look beautiful wrapped around my waist. Her long straight hair was a rich brown that accentuated her almond-shaped light blue eyes. Her high cheekbones, full lips, and perfectly shaped nose made her look complete. She was one hell of a sexy woman.

“Your girlfriend didn’t seem happy this morning.”

“You saw that?” I slowly nodded my head.

“Yeah. I noticed.” A smirk formed on her lips. “Especially when she told you to go fuck yourself.”

“She’s not my girlfriend.”

I stood there with my hands tucked tightly in the pockets of my sweatpants and lowered my head. I found myself embarrassed, and I didn’t know why.

“Sorry if I was staring yesterday from the patio. I couldn’t help but notice four guys and a baby.”

“Henry is my new nephew, and the other three are my brothers.”

“Your brothers?” She cocked her head. “You all look about the same age.”

“We are.” I smiled. “We’re quadruplets.”

“Wow. That is so cool. Do your brothers live around here?”

“They do. Stefan lives next to me, and Sam lives next to him, and Simon lives on the other side of Sam.”

“That’s awesome.” She laughed. “Can I offer you some coffee or something?”

“No. Thanks. I’m meeting my brothers down at the beach to go surfing, so I need to get going. It was nice to meet you, Emilia. If you need anything, just let me know. Shout out the window, throw a rock, or walk through the sliding door off the back.” I smiled.

“Thanks, Sebastian. It was nice to meet you too. Thanks again for helping me with the box.”

I stared into her beautiful eyes for a moment, gave her a smile and a nod, and turned around and walked out the door.

Walking over to my house, I put on a pair of board shorts, grabbed my surfboard, and met my brothers, who were already in the water.

“What the fuck, bro?” Simon said.

“Yeah. Where the hell were you?” Sam shouted to me.

I put my board in the water and paddled out to them.

“I was helping our new neighbor carry a box inside.” I grinned.

“Was that before or after that chick told you to go fuck yourself? You’re lucky Lily was still sleeping. And didn’t I tell you to sneak them out the back?” Stefan said.

“I didn’t have a chance. She went psycho on me.”

“What else is new? I want to hear about our new neighbor,” Simon said.

“Her name is Emilia, and she seems very nice.”

“Nice? That’s it?” Sam asked.

“I was only at her house a few minutes because I had to meet you douchebags. She’s sexy as hell, and I told her to let me know if she needed anything.”

“I bet you did.” Stefan grinned.

“I take it she’s not married,” Sam spoke.

“I don’t think so. She said ‘she’ bought the house from Mrs. Patterson’s granddaughter.”

“She probably has a boyfriend, and if she doesn’t, you still need to restrain yourself and don’t do anything stupid. She’s your next-door neighbor, bro, and pursuing her for your sexual satisfaction is not a good idea. It’s not like you can ship her off somewhere and not see her again. She will be there, right next door, every single day.”

“Yeah. Yeah,” I said.

“Just do us all a favor and think with your brain and not your dick. Just this once.”

“He kind of has a point,” Sam said.

“Like either one of you can talk.” I pointed to Sam and Stefan. “You still carried on a sexual relationship with Julia even after you found out she was your personal assistant. And you, Stefan, couldn’t keep your dick in your pants longer than a week with Alex. So, the two of you are not the ones to be giving advice on self-control.”

“You’re right, my brother,” Simon said. “But I am the one, and I’m telling you to stay away from Emilia. We don’t need any neighbor drama because if it affects you, it affects all three of us.”

I rolled my eyes and paddled further out.

CHAPTER 2



Emilia

The moment the door shut behind him, I let out a breath. How was anyone that damn handsome? Six foot three inches, short dark brown hair, dreamy ice blue eyes, a neatly trimmed beard that sat upon his masculine jawline, and a muscular body that was built and defined.

The ringing of my phone jolted me back into reality. Grabbing it from the island, I saw my mom was Facetiming me.

“Bonjour, darling.” A wide grin crossed her face.

“Bonjour, Mom.” I smiled back.

“How’s the new house? Give me a tour.”

“It’s a mess right now, Mom. I have boxes everywhere.”

“Doesn’t matter, darling. I want to see where my daughter is living.”

I walked around and showed her the house as she made some sort of comment about every room.

“It’s going to be a big adjustment for you. You’ve never lived away from your family. I really wish you would have stayed in New York with your brother and sister.”

“I couldn’t, Mom. You know that.”

“Can’t and couldn’t are not words in the Gallo vocabulary. You need to put what happened behind you. It’s been almost a year.”

“Mom. I’m not doing this right now. I have things to do, and I need to go shopping. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Emilia, don’t you dare hang up.”

“Bye, Mom. Love you.” I blew her a kiss and ended the call.

I had never been so thankful as I was at this very moment that my parents lived in Paris. As I was walking out of the kitchen, the ringing sound of my laptop stopped me. Walking over to it, I hit the button, and my sister, Lydia, appeared on the screen.

“Hey, sis.” She grinned.

“Hey, you.”

“What’s wrong? You look stressed? Is it the house?”

“No. The house is great. I just got off Facetime with Mom.”

“Oh, that would stress me out too.” She smirked. “What did she do now?”

“She insisted I walk through the house and show her, and she had a comment about everything.”

“Sounds like Mom. Are you getting settled?”

“I am, but I still have a few boxes to unpack.”

“I wish I could be there to help you. Have you met any of your neighbors yet? Wait. Do you have neighbors?”

“Yes.” I laughed. “I did meet my next-door neighbor earlier when he helped me carry in a large box. He seems very friendly.”

Her brows furrowed.

“How old is this ‘he’?”

“Early thirties.”

“Hot?” Her brow arched.

“Maybe.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Is there a wife?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Girlfriend?”

“He said the woman who stormed out of his house this morning wasn’t his girlfriend.”

“So, you have a neighbor who’s hot, in his early thirties, and single?” She grinned.

“Yes, but that’s not the only thing. He’s a quadruplet, and his three brothers all live in their own homes next to him.”

“Shut up! Seriously? I can’t believe that you, of all people, end up living next to four guys.”

“Yeah.” I bit down on my bottom lip. “Crazy, right?”

“Did you get his name?”

“Sebastian.”

“Sebastian, what? I want to stalk him online.”

“I don’t know.” I laughed. “I didn’t get his last name. You can meet him when you, Jacob, and the girls come to visit.”

“Shit. I have to go. Isabelle is up from her nap. Love you.”

“Love you too. I’ll call you later.”

I was starving, and I hadn’t had a chance to go grocery shopping, so I slipped on my shoes, grabbed my purse, and climbed into my jeep. When I pushed the start button, the only thing I heard was a clicking noise.

“Oh, come on. Not today.”

Click. Click. Click.

“Ugh!” I shouted as I beat the steering wheel with both of my hands.

“Is everything okay over here?” Sebastian smiled as he walked over.

“My car won’t start. I think the battery is dead.”

He walked over to the driver’s side and opened the door.

“Let me give it a try. Yeah, I think you’re right. I can give you a jump.”

He popped open the hood and took a look.

“Bad news.”

“Don’t tell me I need a new battery.”

“You need a new battery.” His lips formed a smirk.

“Of course, I do.” I sighed.

“No big deal. I can pick one up and put it in for you.”

“That’s okay. I honestly don’t want to bother you. I can call a shop or something.”

“It’s not a bother at all. What are neighbors for?”

“All I wanted was to go get some breakfast. I haven’t had a chance to go shopping yet, and I’m freaking starving.”

“Then it’s settled. You’ll come over to my house, I’ll cook you some breakfast, and then I’ll go get a new battery for your car.”

“What?” I frowned. “I wasn’t asking you to cook me breakfast.”

“I know. I’m telling you that I am.” He gave me a sexy wink. “You’re starving, I’m starving, I have food, and I can cook. I’ll whip us up a couple of omelets. You do like omelets, right?”

“Yeah, but—”

“No, buts. Come on.” He gestured with his head and a smile.

I took in a deep breath and followed him over to his house. When I stepped through the door, I was surprised at the cleanliness of his home. He was a guy, after all.

“Wow. This is really nice,” I said as I followed him into the kitchen.

“Thanks. Can I make you a cup of coffee?”

“That would be great. Thanks.” I took a seat on the stool at the island. “You have a built-in Miele?”

“Yeah. It brews an exceptional cup of coffee. Are you familiar with it?”

“My brother has one. I’m looking to get my kitchen remodeled, and I’m going to have the contractor put one in.”

“Who are you using for the remodel?”

“I don’t know yet. I have to start looking at some companies.”

“My brothers can help you out.” He set the cup down in front of me. “Well, two of my brothers. My brother Simon is a detective with the LAPD, so he wouldn’t be of any help.”

“Your other two brothers are contractors?”

“Sam is the architect, and Stefan is the builder. They run our family business called Kind Design & Architecture. Is a western omelet, okay?” he asked.

“Sounds delicious. So, if Sam and Stefan run the family business and Simon is a detective with the LAPD, what is it you do?”

“I’ll tell you in a while.” He grinned. “So, what made you buy Mrs. Patterson’s house? I didn’t even know it was for sale.”

“A friend of mine is a real estate agent, and when the listing came through, she called me right away. She knew I wanted to find a house before I moved here.”

“You’re not from California?”

“No. I’m from New York. She showed me the house via Facetime, and since it was listed for an exceptional price, I bought it. Mrs. Patterson’s granddaughter just wanted it off her hands.”

CHAPTER 3



Sebastian

I placed the omelet on a plate and set it down in front of her.

“Thank you.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips. “This looks amazing.”

“You’re welcome. Enjoy.” I gave her a wink. “So, if you don’t mind me asking, what brought you to California? Work?”

“Pretty much.” She took a bite of her omelet. “Oh my God,” she brought her hand up to her mouth, “this is delicious.”

“I’m happy you like it.” I smiled at her.

“I think this is one of the best omelets I’ve ever had. I’m serious.”

I let out a chuckle.

Suddenly, the sliding door opened, and Stefan walked in with Henry, who was screaming at the top of his lungs.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you had company,” Stefan said as he tried to calm Henry down.

“Emilia, this is my brother, Stefan. Stefan, this is our new neighbor Emilia.”

“Welcome to the beach. It’s nice to meet you.” He extended his hand to her.

“Nice to meet you, Stefan. Is that your baby?” she asked.

“Yes. This is Henry, and something’s wrong with him. He’s been screaming on and off all night.”

“And you brought him over here. Why?” I arched my brow at him.

“Alex and Lily ran to the store because we’re out of k-cups. I’m desperate for a cup of coffee, and I can’t wait for them to get back.”

“I’m going to run home and grab something. I’ll be right back,” Emilia said as she got up from her seat and walked out the sliding door.

“Bro, you’re cooking for her already?” Stefan asked with a smile. “Did you not hear what Simon said?”

“She went to go get breakfast, and her Jeep wouldn’t start. I took a look for her, and it needs a new battery. She was starving, so I made her an omelet. No big deal.”

“I bet you’re going to help her with that new battery, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. I told her I’d go get one, and I’d put it in for her.”

Emilia walked back inside holding a black bag in her hand.

“Let me take a look at him,” she said.

“Oh. Are you sure?” Stefan handed Henry over to her.

“Trust me.” A friendly smile crossed her lips.

Stefan and I followed as she took Henry out of the kitchen and laid him down on the couch in the living room. Opening her bag, she took out an otoscope and looked in his ears.

“His right ear is red and infected.” She looked over at us.

“You’re a doctor?” Stefan’s brow arched.

“I’m a pediatrician. If you give me your pharmacy’s number, I’ll send in a script, and your wife can pick it up on her way home.”

“She’s not my wife yet, but she will be in a couple of months. Thank you, Dr. Emilia.”

“You’re welcome. He’s a handsome boy.” She picked him up and handed him back to Stefan.

I was shocked, to say the least. She was a pediatrician, and I would never have guessed that. I put the lid on Stefan’s to-go cup and handed it to him.

“Thanks, bro. This is much appreciated. Wow. A pediatrician,” he whispered in my ear. “How lucky are we?”

“Get out of here.” I laughed.

He took Henry and his coffee and left. Emilia sat back down at the island to finish her omelet.

“What?” The corners of her mouth curved upward when she saw me staring at her from the other side of the island.

“A pediatrician?” I cocked my head with a grin.

“Yeah. That’s the reason I moved to California. I start my new job tomorrow at Dr. Reynold’s practice. He’s getting ready to retire, and I’m going to take over the practice.”

“Please don’t take this the wrong way, but how old are you?”

“Does it matter?” Her lips gave way to a smirk.

“Well...no.”

“I’m kidding. I just turned thirty, and I’ve recently finished my residency in New York.”

“You look much younger.” I gave her a playful wink.

“I bet you say that to all the girls.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever said that to a woman before.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“Now that you know I’m a pediatrician, what is it you do?”

“Why don’t you take a guess?”

“Okay.” She sat up straight on the stool and stared at me for a moment. “Firefighter?”

“Nope.”

“Doctor?” Her eye narrowed at me.

“Nope.”

“Definitely, not a lawyer.”

“Why do you say that?” I let out a chuckle.

“You’re not the lawyer type. Hmm...I know. You’re in advertising.”

“No.” I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Come on, Sebastian. Tell me.”

“I’m a chef.” I smiled.

“Oh my God.” She laughed. “I should have known. What restaurant do you work at?”

“My own.”

“You own a restaurant?” She grinned.

“I do. It’s called Four Kinds, and it’s right down the road.”

“Four Kinds, eh? Four kinds of what?”

“Four brothers. Our last name is Kind.”

“Sebastian Kind. Nice.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“And your last name is?” I arched my brow at her.

“Gallo.”

“It’s nice to make your acquaintance, Dr. Gallo.”

“Same, Mr. Kind. I will definitely stop in and taste some of your other delicious foods.”

“Looking forward to it.” I smiled. “If you’re finished, I can run to the store and grab that battery for your Jeep. It won’t take long.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to interrupt whatever plans you had for today.”

“You’re not. Trust me.”

Emilia left to go back to her house, and after I cleaned up the kitchen, I grabbed my keys and headed to the store to get her a new battery.

CHAPTER 4



Emilia

While Sebastian was getting a new battery for my Jeep, I sat down on the floor, ripped open a box, and stopped as thoughts of him invaded my mind. Moving next door to him was the worst thing that could have happened to me. It wouldn't be an issue if he weren't nice, sexy, and so helpful. I should have had Laurie check out the neighbors before I put in an offer. Had I seen he was my next-door neighbor first and known he was single, I wouldn't have bought the house. Stupid, I know. But I had my reasons as to why I'd felt that way.

I decided to go down to the beach to clear my head. The ocean, the sand, and the serenity of it all was the biggest reason why I'd bought the house. I loved the sea and found that I felt a sense of peace when I was near it, which wasn't very often. My mind automatically had done a reset, and the chaos of my life seemed to settle down. I wanted to feel that every day, and I looked at the ocean to be my medicine and heal the broken pieces inside me.

As I sat in the sand, feeling the warmth between my toes, I stared out at the vast body of water and listened to the sweet sounds of the waves crashing against the shore.

"Who are you?" I heard a small voice.

Turning around, I smiled at the little girl with the long blonde hair who stood behind me.

"I'm Emilia. Who are you?"

“Lily.”

“You’re Stefan’s and Alex’s daughter, right?”

“Stefan is my dad, and Alex is going to be my step-mom. But I consider her my real mom now. She used to be my nanny, and then my dad fell in love with her, and they had my brother Henry, and they’re getting married.”

“Oh.” I pursed my lips as my brows raised.

“Are you the lady who moved in next to my Uncle Sebastian?”

“I am.” I smiled.

“So, you’re the doctor who prescribed my brother medicine.”

“I did.” I gave her a slight nod. “It’s very nice to meet you, Lily.” I extended my hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Emilia.” She placed her small hand in mine.

“Lily? What are you doing?” A woman walked over.

“I’m talking to Emilia.” She smiled.

“Oh my gosh. Thank you so much for looking at Henry. I’m Alex.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Alex. I’m Emilia.”

“I was going to walk over later to thank you and introduce myself. I hope Lily isn’t bothering you.”

“No. Not at all. She’s adorable.”

“Welcome to the beach. You’re going to love living here. In fact, Julia and I would love to get together with you sometime.”

“Julia?”

“Sam’s wife. She owns the coffee shop down the road.”

“Mojo Madness?” I smiled.

“Yep. That’s the one.”

“I was just in there yesterday. It’s a great coffee shop, and everyone was so nice.”

“She only hires the best.”

“And she makes the best homemade apple turnovers,” Lily said.

“She does? I love apple turnovers.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“I got your battery,” I heard Sebastian shout from my driveway.

“I better get up there and make sure he knows what he’s doing,” I smirked. “It was great to meet you, Alex. And you, too.” I bent over and tapped Lily on the nose.

Walking over to my driveway, I watched as Sebastian removed the old battery from my Jeep.

“I see you met Alex and Lily.” He smiled.

“I did. Alex is really sweet, and Lily is adorable.”

“Yeah. They’re great.”

“Is this really happening?” A handsome man walked over with a smile on his face.

“Shut up, bro. Sam, meet Emilia, our new neighbor. Emilia, my other brother Sam.”

“It’s great to meet you, Emilia. Welcome to the beach.”

“Thanks, Sam. It’s nice to meet you too.” I gave him a warm smile.

“Are you just going to stand there, or are you going to give me a hand?” Sebastian asked Sam.

“Looks to me like you’re doing just fine all by yourself.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“You’re the architect, right?” I asked Sam.

“Yes. I am.”

“Sebastian said you and Stefan might be able to help me. I want to remodel my kitchen and move some things around. I

have some ideas, but I'm just not sure if they're possible."

"Excellent. We can definitely help you with that. Stefan and I can come over later and take a look. Say around six?"

"Six will be great. Thanks, Sam."

"You're welcome."

"Bring Julia too. I'd love to meet her."

"I will." He smiled. "Anyway, I should go. You got this, bro." He gave Stefan a wink as he patted his back and walked away.

I let out a snicker.

"Okay. Go give it a start," Sebastian said.

"Let me go grab the key. I'll be right back."

I ran into the house and grabbed my key fob. When I pushed the start button, my car started immediately.

"It works! Thank you, Sebastian. You're a lifesaver."

"You're welcome. Here's your receipt."

Taking it from his hand, our fingers brushed, and a scorching heat blew through me.

"Enjoy the rest of your day." The corners of his mouth curved upward.

"You too. And thanks again for the delicious omelet."

"You're welcome. I'll talk to you later."

I stood there next to my Jeep and watched him walk back to his house. Living next to him was definitely going to be an issue for me.

CHAPTER 5



Sebastian

I was on my way out the door to head to the restaurant when Simon walked in.

“Hey. Are you heading out?” he asked.

“Yeah. I’m going to the restaurant for a while. Why?”

“No reason.” He tucked his hands in his pockets, and I narrowed my eye at him.

“You talked to Stefan, didn’t you?”

“Yep. So much happened today with you, and I’m feeling a little left out, bro.”

“You’re being dramatic, and you weren’t home.”

“You’re not crossing to the other side, are you?”

I let out a chuckle.

“How can you even ask me that? She needed help with her Jeep. I helped. You would have too if you were around. Listen, bro, she’s my next-door neighbor, and you’re right. I’d just be asking for trouble. No matter how damn sexy she is, I need to look the other way and not give it another thought, as much as it pains me to say that.”

“I’m proud of you, bro. Seriously, it’s such a bad idea. Not to mention the awkwardness of it all after the fact, especially with her being right next door. She’d be watching your every move, seeing the women come and go, etc. I’m a cop, and I’ve seen some bad shit with neighbors.”

“I know.” I let out a sigh as I patted him on the back.

“Go on and get to the restaurant. I’ll talk to you later,” he spoke.



When I arrived at the restaurant, I said hello to my staff and went into the kitchen.

“I thought you’d be in earlier?” Marco, my head chef, said.

“I was planning on it, but I had to help my neighbor out. The battery in her Jeep was dead, so I picked one up and put it in for her.”

“I thought Mrs. Patterson passed away?” His brows furrowed.

“That’s right. I haven’t seen you in a couple of days. I have a new neighbor.” I grinned.

“Judging by the grin on your face, I’m assuming she was worth helping out.”

“She definitely was. Her name is Emilia, she just moved here from New York, and she’s a pediatrician.”

“Her husband or boyfriend couldn’t help her with her battery? Or am I to assume there isn’t a man in her life?”

“I know she’s not married, and I’m pretty sure there isn’t a boyfriend in the picture.”

“What’s her hotness factor on a scale from one to ten?”

“She set the scale up in flames, my friend,” I smirked. “I’ll be in my office if you need me.”

“Sebastian?” Savannah, my pastry chef, stopped me. “I need your opinion on this.” She handed me a plate with a dessert on it.

“Looks delicious. What is it?”

“It’s an apple tart with liquid caramel, vanilla, and mascarpone cream.”

Picking up the fork that lay on the plate, I cut into it and took a bite.

“Wow. Yeah.” I nodded my head. “This is fantastic. Put it on the menu for next week, and we’ll see how it does.” I gave her a wink.

“Yes! Thank you.” Her eyes lit up.

“How many did you make?”

“Enough for you to take home to your brothers.” Savannah smiled.

“Excellent. Do you have any extras? I’d like to bring one to my new neighbor.”

“I do. I’ll get them boxed up for you.”

“Thanks, Savannah.” I smiled.

After finishing some paperwork, I stepped into the kitchen to check on my staff. It was five p.m., and the dinner rush was starting.

“I’m taking off for the night. Is there anything anyone needs before I head out?” I asked.

“We have it covered, boss. Go enjoy your evening,” Marco said.

I saw Emilia setting up a white wicker chair on her porch as I pulled into my driveway. Stepping out of the car, I shut the door, and she glanced over me with a slight wave and smile. I returned the gesture to her, went inside, and set the box of desserts on the island in the kitchen. Pulling out my phone, I sent a message to Simon.

“Are you home? I have something for you.”

“I’m out on the patio drinking a beer. I’ll have one waiting for you.”

Grabbing one tart from the box, I placed it on a small paper plate, covered it with saran wrap, and walked over to Simon’s house. When I approached him, he handed me a beer bottle, and I gave him the tart.

“This looks delicious. What is it?”

“It’s an apple tart with liquid caramel, vanilla, and mascarpone cream. Savannah made it,” I spoke as I took the seat next to him.

“Damn. I need to try this now.” He pulled the saran wrap off, picked it up, and took a bite. “This is excellent. Tell her I said thanks.”

“I will.” I let out a chuckle. “I have one for Sam, Stefan, and Emilia. Sam and Stefan are going over to her house around six to look at her kitchen. I figured I’d pop over and give all three of them one at the same time.”

His brow arched at me as he brought the bottle up to his lips.

“I thought you were staying away.”

“I am. It’s just a tart. Why make three separate trips when they’re all going to be in the same place?”

“Uh-huh.” His lips formed a smirk. “I want to meet her.”

My eyes steadily narrowed at him.

“Why?”

“What do you mean? She’s our new neighbor. I know everyone around here. Why would she be any different? And don’t you even start with that shit like Sam and Stefan did.” He pointed his finger at me.

“Come over to her house then. As I said, Sam and Stefan will be there around six.”

“Maybe I will,” he smirked.

I finished off my beer and headed back to my house.

CHAPTER 6



Emilia

As I stood in the middle of my living room holding a glass of wine, I let out a deep breath at the cleanliness of it. I'd finally unpacked the last of the boxes and put everything in its proper place. I couldn't believe I was here, standing in my very own home. And come tomorrow, I'd start my new job at the practice and get on with my life. A life that had been spent in numbness for the past year.

I was jolted out of my thoughts when I heard a knock at the door. Walking over, I opened it and saw Sam and Stefan standing there with a woman I presumed was Julia.

"Hi." I smiled. "Come on in."

"Emilia, this is my wife, Julia."

"Julia, it's so nice to meet you." I extended my hand.

"It's great to meet you too, Emilia. I know you're going to love living here."

"I hope so. So far, so good." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

"Wow. It looks like you're settled already," Sam said.

"I can't stand all the clutter, so I didn't stop until everything was put away."

"I like you, Emilia." Sam pointed at me.

"Bro, shut up." Stefan smacked his arm, and I couldn't help but laugh. "You have to excuse my brother. He's an OCD

clean freak.”

“So is my brother.” I gave a small smile.

“Don’t listen to him. I just like things to be neat and organized.”

“OCD,” Julia whispered in my ear.”

Sam opened his drawing pad and walked around the kitchen.

“Why don’t you start by telling me what you have in mind?” Sam spoke.

“I want to make this an open concept kitchen with new cabinets, granite countertops, backsplash, built-in appliances, and a bigger island.”

“Excellent. That’s exactly what I was going to suggest. I want to be completely honest with you upfront. This isn’t going to be cheap.”

“I know it’s not.” A small smile crossed my lips. “I can afford it.”

“Okay. Let me draw something up, and then we can go over it. It won’t take long.”

“There’s beer in the refrigerator. Help yourselves. Julia, can I offer you a glass of wine?”

“I’d love some.”

Grabbing the bottle of wine from the refrigerator and two wine glasses from the cabinet, I took them into the living room, where Julia and I sat down on the couch.

“Alex told me that you own Mojo Madness,” I said as I handed her a glass.

“I do. Have you had a chance to stop by?”

“I was in there yesterday, and I totally love the vibe of the place.”

“Thanks. It’s always been my dream to own a coffee shop. I’m happy you like it. Stefan told me you’re a pediatrician, and you’re going to be taking over a practice.”

“Words travels fast around here.” I laughed.

“Let me let you in on a little secret. The brothers tell each other everything.”

“They seem close.”

“They are. Do you have any siblings?”

“I have a sister and a brother. You?”

“I have a twin sister named Jenni.”

As we were talking, there was a knock at the door.

“I wonder who that could be.”

“I think I know,” Julia smirked.

Getting up from the couch, I opened the door and saw Sebastian standing there.

“Hey.” I smiled.

“I come bearing delectable desserts.”

“In that case, come on in.” I gestured with my hand.

“My pastry chef, Savannah, made these delicious apple tarts.” He opened the lid to the white box he was holding.

“Wow. I can’t wait to try one. Can I offer you a beer?”

“Sure.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

I took the box from him and set it on the island in the kitchen.

“Hey, bro,” both Sam and Stefan said to him.

“I brought you each an apple tart that Savannah made,” Sebastian said.

“I love Savannah’s desserts. Thanks.” Stefan smiled.

Sam had finished a rough layout of my kitchen and we sat down at the table and went over it.

“I can have the final layout done by tomorrow evening.”

“And if you decide you want to go with us, I can put you on the schedule,” Stefan spoke.

“Well, I love what you did, so consider yourselves hired.”

“Excellent.” Sam grinned.



“*I* really like your family,” I said to Sebastian as I reached up in the cabinet and pulled down a small plate.

“Thanks. They are the best.” The corners of his mouth curved upward as he leaned against the island.

Opening the drawer, I took out a fork.

“What about your family? Do you have any siblings?”

“I have a brother who is thirty-five and a sister who is thirty-three. They live in New York, and my parents are currently living in Paris.”

“Paris? Wow.”

“They live there six months out of the year and the other six months in New York.”

“What do they do?”

“My father owns Gallo Technology Group, and he has two offices. One in New York, which my brother works at, and one in Paris.”

“What about your sister? She doesn’t work for the company?”

“She used to until she had my two nieces. Now, she stays at home and raises them while my brother-in-law works for my father.”

“You weren’t interested in the family business?”

“Not really. I’ve always wanted to be a doctor. I take it you weren’t interested in your family’s business either?” My brow arched.

“Nah. I’m a shareholder, and that’s good enough for me. I love food, and I’ve always enjoyed cooking. Are you going to

try that tart or what?” He chuckled.

“Yes.” I smiled as I dipped my fork into it and brought it up to my mouth. “Oh my God. This is—this is amazing. I can already tell living next door to you is going to be a problem for my waistline.” I pointed my fork at him.

“I doubt that. You have a great figure.”

I lowered my head so he wouldn't see me blush. He placed his finger under my chin and slightly lifted it as his gorgeous blue eyes stared into mine.

“I didn't mean to embarrass you.”

“You didn't.” I bashfully smiled.

I could feel the heat rise in my body as I set down my fork and turned to the wine bottle sitting on the island. Picking it up, I refilled my glass.

“I should get going,” Sebastian said.

“Okay. Thanks for the delicious tart.”

“You're welcome. And good luck on your first day tomorrow.”

“Thank you.” I smiled as I walked him to the door.

“Enjoy the rest of your night,” he spoke as he stepped outside.

“You too, Sebastian.”

I shut the door, pressed my back against it, and let out a deep breath.

CHAPTER 7



Sebastian

I'd had a lot on my mind lately, things I hadn't even mentioned to my brothers yet. The last thing I needed was thoughts of Emilia swirling around in my head. The instant attraction to her took me by surprise. I wasn't talking just physical attraction because any beautiful woman caught my eye. I was referring to the attraction I felt when we held a conversation and when she was around my family. From the moment I saw her struggling with the box in her Jeep and then banging on the steering wheel like a crazy person when it wouldn't start, I felt this uncontrollable gravitation towards her. I couldn't explain it, and I sure as hell didn't want to.

The following day, I woke up earlier than usual, made a cup of coffee, and took it out on the patio. As the sun rose over the ocean and the waves danced, I glanced over at Emilia's house when I heard her sliding door open and close. She caught me as she brought her hand up and gave me a small wave.

"Good morning." I smiled.

"You're up early," she said.

"Couldn't sleep."

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Yeah. Everything is good." I grinned. "Are you nervous for your first day?"

"Not really. It'll be nice to get into a routine."

“What time do your doctoring duties end?”

“The office closes at five.”

“Why don’t you stop by the restaurant on the way home for a celebratory drink on me?”

“Maybe I will.” The corners of her mouth curved upward as she slid open the door and stepped back inside her house.

I smiled as I brought my cup up to my lips. Heading back inside, I took a shower, got dressed, and walked over to Stefan’s house to cook my niece the pancakes she’d been asking for.

“Morning,” I spoke as I walked through the door.

“Uncle Sebastian!” Lily exclaimed as she threw her arms around me. “You are making me apple cinnamon pancakes, right?”

“I am, your highness.”

“Yay! I’m going to go get ready for school.”

“I could have just sent her over to your house,” Stefan said as he popped a k-cup in the Keurig.

“Why didn’t you say that before I brought everything over?”

“I just thought about it. Coffee?”

“Nah. I’m good. How’s Henry?”

“He seems to be doing better, thanks to Dr. Emilia. The crying has subsided. Have you found out anything else about our doctor neighbor?”

“Just that she has a brother and sister back in New York and her parents live six months out of the year in Paris.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Her dad owns Gallo Technology Group and has an office in New York and one in Paris.”

“Why isn’t she working for the family?”

“She wanted to be a doctor instead.”

“Sounds like someone else I know.” He gave me a smirk.
“Except replace doctor with a chef.”

“Morning, Sebastian.” Alex walked in with Henry.

“Good morning.” I smiled. “How’s my favorite nephew?”

She held him up to me, and I kissed his tiny head.

“He’s wide awake, and I’m exhausted.”

“Go sit down. The pancakes will be done in a few minutes.”

“You’re a godsend. Thank you.” She reached up and kissed my cheek.

“What about me, babe?” Stefan asked.

“You’re not making me pancakes, are you?” Her brow raised.

“No, I’m not. But you know I love you.” He kissed her cheek and then Henry’s head. “I’m going to finish getting ready so that I can drive Lily to school.”

“Are you having any pancakes?” I asked him.

“Do I like pancakes, brother?”

“That’s right. You’re the adopted brother.” I smiled.

“I’m ready,” Lily said as she walked into the kitchen.

“And so are your pancakes, your royal highness.” I smiled as I set the apple cinnamon pancakes topped with whipped cream and mini chocolate chips down in front of her.

“Thanks, Uncle Sebastian. I love you.”

“I love you too.” I gave her a wink.

“Can I make you a cup of coffee?” I asked Alex as Henry was almost asleep in her arms.

“That would be amazing. Thank you.”

I popped a k-cup into the Keurig, and while the coffee brewed, I set her plate of pancakes down in front of her.

“I need to talk to you after Stefan and Lily leave,” she whispered.

“Okay. I’ll just be over here cleaning up.”

“I knew I smelled apple cinnamon pancakes,” Simon said as he walked through the door and kissed the top of Lily’s head.

I gave him a smirk and told him to sit down while I threw some more pancake batter on the griddle.

“Where’s Stefan?” he asked.

“I’m right here. Lily, are you done? We have to go, or you’re going to be late.”

“I’m ready, Dad.” She grabbed her backpack. “Bye, Mom.” She kissed Alex. “Bye, Henry.” She pressed her lips on the top of his head. “Bye, Uncle Simon. Bye, Uncle Sebastian.”

“Bye, your highness.” I gave her a wink, and she laughed.

Stefan said goodbye to us and stepped out the door. The pancakes were ready, so I placed them on a plate and set them down in front of Simon.

“Thanks, bro. Coffee?”

“What am I? Your servant?”

“You told me to sit down,” he said, and Alex laughed.

“Sebastian, I want to bartend a couple of nights a week,” Alex spoke and caught me off guard.

“Really?” My brows furrowed.

“Yes. I haven’t talked to Stefan about it yet, but I need to work. Just a couple of nights.”

“I’m not sure how Stefan is going to feel about that,” Simon said.

“Do you really think your brother has a choice?” Her brow raised.

“Right.” Simon nodded his head.

“I’d love for you to come back, and I can give you a couple of nights a week. Name the nights you want to work, and they’re yours. But you have to make it clear to Stefan that it wasn’t me who asked you.”

“I will. Thank you, Sebastian.”

“No problem. You know I love having you there. Everything is cleaned up, so I’m going to head back to the house. I need to get to the restaurant and start prepping for the lunch crowd.”

CHAPTER 8



Emilia

I walked into Four Kinds around six o'clock and took a seat at the bar.

"Welcome to Four Kinds. What can I get you?" A young man asked.

"I'll have a Manhattan, please."

"Coming right up."

He made my drink and set it down on a cocktail napkin in front of me.

"Are you Emilia?" he asked.

"I am."

"Sebastian mentioned you might be stopping by. I'll go let him know you're here."

"Thanks—"

"Raul." He smiled.

"Thanks, Raul."

Picking up my drink, I took a sip and relaxed as the liquid slid down the back of my throat.

"Hi." Sebastian smiled as he placed his hand on my back. "I'm happy you came."

"Hi. I needed a drink after today." My eyes lit up when I saw him.

“I’m assuming you didn’t have dinner yet.”

“You have assumed right.” My lips formed a smile.

“Come with me, and we shall have dinner together.”

“No, Sebastian. You’re busy. I can pick something up on the way home.”

“Nonsense. You’re already in a restaurant, and I’m not busy. My staff has everything covered. Come on.” He grabbed my drink from the bar.

Picking up my purse, I followed him through the restaurant and to a booth tucked away in a corner.

“This really isn’t necessary,” I said as I slid into the seat.

“Yes, it is. I’m hungry, you’re hungry, and I’m pretty sure you never went grocery shopping yet.”

“You’re right. I still have to do that.” I sighed. “Your restaurant is beautiful.”

“Thank you. Sam designed it, of course, Stefan built it, and with the help of an interior designer, it all came together.”

“What can I get you, boss.” A young girl with long auburn hair walked over.

“Do you like seafood?” Sebastian asked me.

“I love it.”

“Filet?” His brow arched.

“Medium rare.” I smiled.

“Meredith, get us each the filet and lobster tail.”

“Soup or salad?” she asked me.

“Salad.”

“Is the house dressing, okay? It’s a champagne vinaigrette.”

“Sounds perfect.”

“I’ll have the same. Grab a fresh loaf of the bread from the warming oven.”

“Coming right up.”

“So, tell me how your first day was?” he asked with a smile.

“It was a little chaotic. Screaming kids, unhappy parents, the usual. But I wouldn’t trade it for another job in the world.”

“You love what you do, and that’s what’s important.” A sexy grin crossed his mouth. “So, how do you know Dr. Reynolds?”

Meredith walked over, laid the warm loaf of pumpnickel bread on the table, and set our salads in front of us.

“He was my pediatrician when I was a kid, and he’s also my father’s good friend. They’ve known each other since they were eight years old. He moved his practice to California when I was fifteen.”

“He can’t be that old to want to retire already?”

“He and his wife, also a doctor, are moving to South Africa to practice medicine. It’s been a year-long process for them, but they were finally approved and are leaving next month. When I overheard him telling my father he needed to find someone to take over the practice, I jumped at the opportunity, spoke to my father about it, and he helped me out. My mom wasn’t happy about it because she didn’t want me to leave New York. Oh my gosh. Does this butter have cherries in it?” I asked as I took a bite of my buttered bread.

“Yes.” A sexy grin crossed his face. “I hope to God you’re not allergic to cherries. I should have warned you first.”

“No. I’m not allergic. I’m in love with it. This is the best bread and butter I’ve ever had.”

“I’m happy you like it.” The smile never left his lips. “So, do you miss New York yet?”

“I miss my brother and my sister. Parts of my other life, I don’t.” I looked away from him.

Shit. Why did I just fucking say that out loud?

“Like what?” His brows furrowed.

“Nothing. Anyway, enough about me. Tell me about your parents.”

He let out a chuckle as he shoved a piece of bread in his mouth.

“Long story short. My parents divorced when we were five, my mother is on her third marriage, and my father is on his most recent marriage for the fifth time.”

“You’re not serious?” I laughed.

“Oh, but I am. It’s embarrassing.” He shook his head.

“Do you think your father will stay with wife number five?”

“Honestly,” he picked up his drink, “I think so. Celeste is different. She’s the reason he retired so soon and handed control of the company to Sam and Stefan.”

“Well then, maybe he just had to go through the other wives to find his soulmate.” My lips formed an uncertain smile.

Did I believe in such a thing anymore? Absolutely not. I inhaled a sharp breath to stop the tears from forming in my eyes. The expression on Sebastian’s face after I’d said that told me he didn’t believe in it either.

“Can I get you another Manhattan?” he asked.

“Actually, I’ll stick with water. Let me ask you something, neighbor. From what I can tell so far, you’re a great guy. You live in a beautiful home on the beach, and you own this amazing restaurant. You’re kind, helpful, and extremely handsome. How is it some lucky woman hasn’t snatched you up yet?”

“I could say the same goes for you.” He smirked.

“That’s not an answer to my question.”

He wiped his mouth with his napkin and leaned back in his seat.

“My interests lie in all things casual,” he said.

“Because of a past lover or broken heart?”

“No.” He chuckled. “As I told you, my parents have been married multiple times. I’ve seen what relationships can do, and honestly, I don’t want or need the drama and chaos of it.”

“Sam and Stefan seem to feel differently about that.”

“Now they do, but the shit they went through though with Julia and Alex.” He shook his head. “I don’t have time in my life for that. Now it’s your turn to tell me why someone as beautiful as yourself isn’t taken.”

“My career is my priority. End of discussion.” I politely smiled.

“Fair enough.”

We mostly talked about our careers while we ate the lobster and filet. When I was finished, I wiped my mouth with the napkin and set it on the table.

“Thank you for the delicious meal, but I better head home,” I said as I slid out of the booth.

“You’re welcome. I’m happy you enjoyed it.” He slid out from his side. “I’ll walk you out.”

Placing my purse over my shoulder, I swallowed hard when I felt his hand on the small of my back as we walked to the door. That gesture. The one that signaled flirting. The one that tested the waters. The motion made my knees weak.

I could feel my heart picking up its pace for reasons unclear to me. Was it because I’d felt the chemistry between us? Or was it the anxiety rearing its ugly head at the thought?

“Before you go, let me give you my phone number,” he said before opening my car door for me. “Just in case you need something.”

“Sure.” I smiled as I pulled out my phone.

He rattled off his number, and I stored it in my phone.

“Thanks again, Sebastian.” Our eyes locked on each other.

“Anytime.”

I immediately broke our gaze and climbed into my Jeep.
He shut the door, gave me a wave, and I drove away.

CHAPTER 9



Sebastian

I stood in the parking lot with my hands tucked tightly in my pants pockets and watched her drive away. Something was up with her. I could feel it. Especially when she refused to talk about why she was still single. She said her career was her priority, which I believed. But I saw the pain in her eyes, and the way she shut the conversation down within seconds led me to believe she either had or was suffering from a broken heart. I'd made my decision right then and there to pull back and keep my distance. My life was busy enough, and it was about to get even busier after I talked to my brothers about my plan.

When I got home at nine o'clock, it was still early enough to have my brothers over. Pulling out my phone, I sent a message in our group chat.

"My house. I need to talk about something. I'll light a fire and have a bottle of scotch waiting."

It didn't matter what time it was. If one of us needed the others, we were there. Grabbing the bottle of scotch and four glasses, I stepped out onto the patio and set them down while I lit the firepit. I heard the ding of my phone in my pocket, and when I pulled it out, I had a text message from Simon.

"I'm on my way home from the station. Be there in about fifteen minutes."

"What's going on, brother," Sam said as he placed his hand on my back and then took a seat.

“I’m glad you called this little meeting,” Stefan said as he walked up. “I was going to come over anyway to discuss something.” He grabbed the bottle of scotch as he sat down.

“I already know what you’re going to say, and it was not my idea. Alex approached me about it.”

“About what?” Sam asked.

“Alex told me tonight that she’s going back to work at the restaurant a couple of nights a week,” Stefan sighed.

“And?” Sam asked.

“I have mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, I want her home with me. You both know I’m selfish when it comes to her. But on the other hand, I know how much she loves it, and I think getting out a couple of nights during the week is good for her.”

“So, what’s the problem then?” I asked.

“I’ll miss her.” He leaned back in the chair and brought the glass up to his lips.

Sam and I both let out a laugh.

“You won’t have time to miss her between taking care of Lily and Henry,” I said.

“That’s what she said when I was pouting. I’m at work all day, and then when I get home, she’ll be rushing out the door.”

“And when she gets home, the two of you can have wild sex to make up for not seeing each other all day,” Sam smirked.

“Ah, that’s very true.” Stefan grinned.

“I’m here. What’s going on?” Simon asked as he walked up and took a seat.

I poured him a glass of scotch and handed it to him.

“I want to open a second restaurant,” I said.

“Why?” Stefan asked.

“Why not? I think it’s time to expand.”

“Where are you thinking?” Sam asked.

“Downtown L.A.”

“Have you looked at properties yet?” Simon asked.

“Not yet. I wanted to run it by you guys first.”

“Your dreams are our dreams, bro.” Stefan reached over and placed his hand on my shoulder. “I’m on board with the idea.”

“Me too,” Sam said.

“So am I.” Simon smiled.

“I’d run it by Dad first, however. Just to get his opinion,” Sam said.

“I’m planning on it. Thanks, my brothers. I knew I could count on your support.” I held up my glass to them.

“We’re family, and family sticks together,” Sam spoke as the three of them tapped their glasses against mine.

“Then it’s settled. I’m going to start looking for properties tomorrow.” I grinned. “On another note, Emilia stopped by the restaurant after work, and we had dinner together.”

“Why?” Stefan narrowed his eye at me.

“I mentioned this morning when I saw her standing on the patio to stop by after work for a celebratory drink. To celebrate her new job and her first day.”

“Uh-huh,” Simon smirked. “So much for you staying away.”

“She asked me why I was single.” I took a sip of my scotch.

“Oh boy.” Sam sighed.

“I was honest with her.”

“And? What did she say?” Stefan asked.

“When I turned the tables on her and asked why she was single, she said, and I quote, ‘My career is my priority. End of discussion.’ And then she cut it off.”

“Sounds to me like someone broke her heart,” Simon said. “Which is good for you, bro.”

“Anyway, as much as I find myself extremely attracted to her, I need to look the other way. She’s damaged, and I don’t have time, nor do I want to deal with someone like that. Especially now that I’m planning on opening another restaurant.”

“And how did you conclude that she’s damaged?” Stefan asked in a serious tone.

“Because I saw the pain in her eyes when I asked her.”

“So what, bro. Everyone is damaged in their own way.”

“Stefan’s right. Look at how damaged Julia and Alex were when we met them,” Sam spoke.

“I’m different from you two. You chose to go down that road. I’m not.”

“I can’t say that I blame you,” Simon said. “If it were me, I wouldn’t go down that road either. Especially with a woman who lives right next door.”

CHAPTER 10



Emilia

I glanced out the window and saw the four brothers sitting around the firepit with drinks in their hands. I'd wondered what they were talking about. I was sure Sebastian told them about our evening since Julia said they told each other everything.

As much as I enjoyed having dinner with him, I couldn't continue doing shit like that. I needed to stay away from Sebastian Kind. My body needed to stay away from Sebastian Kind. To me, he was a lethal drug, and I wasn't about to overdose on him. My life was complicated enough. My existence was shattered by trust and indescribable pain that would stay with me for a very long time.

I ran to California to hide and heal my soul, leaving everyone and everything I knew behind. To start fresh and bring back the woman I once was because I didn't like whom I'd become. But it was going to take a miracle for that to happen.

The ringing of my phone jolted me out of my thoughts. Turning away from the window, I grabbed my phone from the island and saw my sister was Facetiming me.

"Hey." I put on a brave smile.

"I've been waiting for your call. How was your first day?"

"I'm sorry, Lydia. It was a hectic day, and I got home late, took a bath, and just forgot to call you."

“Are you okay? You seem really down. God, Emilia. I wish you wouldn’t have left.”

“I’m fine.” I smiled. “I’m just tired.”

“Okay. You’d tell me if you were feeling down, right?”

“Of course. You know I would.”

“How’s the hot neighbor?”

“Fine, I guess. I haven’t seen or spoken to him recently,” I lied.

“Are you avoiding him?”

“No.” I laughed as the lies continued to spew out of my mouth.

Another call came through, and it was my brother trying to Facetime me.

“Listen, Luca is calling in. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Okay. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

I clicked over, and my handsome brother’s face appeared on the screen.

“There you are. For a minute, I forgot I even had another sister.”

“Very funny.”

“How’s California and the house?”

“So far, it’s great.” I smiled. “How are you doing?”

“I’m good, sis. Mom called me today. She said you’re avoiding her calls.”

“She’s crazy. Okay. She did call earlier, but I was with a patient. I haven’t had a chance to call her back. You know how it is with the time difference.”

“You haven’t had a chance, or you just don’t want to.” His brow arched.

“Both.” I grinned.

“Listen, Em, another call is coming in that I have to take. I’ll talk to you soon. Love you.”

“Love you too, Luca.”

I turned off all the lights downstairs and went up to my bedroom. Climbing into bed, I plugged my phone in, set it on the nightstand, and pulled the covers over me. The beautiful breeze blowing through the window and the waves crashing against the shoreline lulled me to sleep.



Sebastian

“Thanks for coming, Dad.” I hugged him when he stepped into the restaurant.

“Of course, son.”

“Marco is making us some eggs benedict. It’ll be out soon. Can I get you some coffee or a mimosa?”

“Coffee would be great.”

After pouring two coffees, I set them down on the table and slid into the seat across from my dad.

“Here’s your breakfast.” Marco set our plates down.

“Thank you, Marco,” my father spoke.

“Thanks, Marco. If we need anything else, I’ll let you know.”

“So, what did you want to meet about?” my dad asked as he cut into his eggs benedict.

“I want to expand by opening up a second restaurant, and I want your opinion.”

“I think it’s a good idea. Where are you thinking?”

“Downtown L.A.”

“You mean the area where I told you to put this place?” He smirked.

“Pretty much.” I chuckled.

“Have you found a piece of property yet?”

“No. I’ve just started looking.”

“I know how busy you are with this restaurant, so I’ll help you look.”

“Thanks, Dad. I appreciate it.”

“Have you talked to your brothers about it?”

“I have, and they support me one hundred percent.”

“Then you’re good to go.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “Lily told me that you have a new neighbor.”

“Yeah. Her name is Emilia Gallo, and she’s a pediatrician.”

“And her husband?”

“She’s not married. I helped her out with a couple of things. She’s really nice.”

He sat across from me with narrowed eyes.

“How old is she?”

“Why do you want to know how old she is?”

“Because I do, son. Now, how old is Emilia, the pediatrician?”

“She’s thirty.”

“I figured as much. Is she attractive?”

“Yes, Dad. She’s beautiful. What is your point here?” I asked with an irritated tone.

“She’s your next-door neighbor, son. Need I say more?” His brow arched.

“No, Dad, you don’t.”

“Good.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “This was delicious as always, and I need to get home. I’ll make a couple of calls regarding the properties.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

We both slid out of the booth, and I hugged him.

“Tell Celeste I said hi.”

“I will.”

CHAPTER 11



Emilia

My eyes flew open as my heart pounded out of my chest. Sitting up, I grabbed my phone from the nightstand and looked at the time. It was five-thirty am. Throwing on a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt, I went down to the kitchen, made a cup of coffee, and took it down to the beach. I could have sat on my patio and listened to the whispers of the ocean, but I wanted to be closer to it, and sit in the front row as the waves performed their morning dance. I nestled myself in the sand and brought my knees up to my chest as I sipped the piping hot liquid. This day was one I'd been dreading for months. The day that completely changed my life, and if I could sleep it away, I would. All I needed was to hold myself together until three o'clock. Then I would come home and get ready for my date with a bottle of Gin. I just needed to be sure and be up tomorrow morning when my delivery arrived. A delivery I had been waiting for all week.



Sebastian

I got up early and threw on my wetsuit. When I stepped out the sliding door to grab my surfboard, I saw Emilia sitting in the sand near the shoreline. The last time I'd seen her was Monday night at the restaurant, for I'd made good on my promise to myself to stay away from her. Sam had asked me if I wanted to go over with him to get the contracts

signed. I'd told him no and ensured I was at the restaurant that night. I didn't have time for anything else between the restaurant and looking for property.

Staring at her sitting there, it took everything I had not to walk over and ask if she was okay. And I knew if I took my surfboard out, I'd do just that. So, I decided to wait until she went back to her house.



Emilia

Just as I finished my coffee and was heading back to the house to shower and get ready for work, I heard Stefan shout, "Good morning, neighbor."

Looking over, I gave him a small smile and a wave.

"Good morning."

"Do you have a second?" he asked.

"Sure."

I stopped, and he walked over to me.

"We're having issues with one of the jobs we're doing, and unfortunately, it's been put on hold for a while. So, I was able to put you on schedule to start the demolition next week."

"Wow. Already?"

"If that's too soon, I can push it back."

"No. Next week is fine. The sooner, the better." I smiled.

"Great. My crew will be over Tuesday morning. You can either leave the door unlocked or give me a key."

"I have a spare key, so I'll get it to you before then."

"Sounds good. I'll see you later. Have a good day." The corners of his mouth curved upward.

"Thanks. You too, Stefan."



Sebastian

“Hey, bro,” Stefan spoke as he stepped through the sliding door.

“Hey. I saw you talking to Emilia.”

“Yeah. I was telling her that my crew can start tearing her kitchen apart on Tuesday.”

“That’s good. She must be happy.”

“I guess. It kind of looked like she had been crying.”

“Really?” My brows furrowed.

“Yeah. Have you talked to her lately?”

“Not since Monday night.”

“Oh. Anyway, Alex and Julia are going out tonight with Jenni, and Mom and Curtis are taking Lily for the weekend. So, I figured we could all hang out at my house tonight. Are you working?”

“No. Not tonight. I’ll be there. Do you want me to bring the pizza?” I arched my brow.

“That is so nice of you to offer, bro.” He grinned as he placed his hand on my shoulder. “I have to drop Lily off at school. I’ll catch you later. Oh, and bring a couple of those Italian subs.” He pointed his finger at me as he stepped out the door.



Emilia

“Shit,” I said as I searched my cabinets for a box of k-cups.

I had used the last one when I woke up, but I could have sworn I had another box. Grabbing my purse, I climbed in my

car and stopped at Mojo Madness before heading to work.

“Hey, Emilia.” Julia grinned when she saw me walk in.

“Hi, Julia.”

“What can I get you?”

“I’ll have a medium vanilla latte with almond milk.”

“Steph, I need a medium vanilla latte with almond milk. I’m happy you stopped in. Alex, Jenni, and I are going out tonight for a girl’s night, and we want you to come with us.”

“Thanks for the invite, but I have plans for tonight.”

“Oh. Okay. Another time?”

“Yes. Definitely.” I smiled.

Steph handed me my latte, and when I went to pull out my wallet, Julia stopped me.

“No charge. It’s on the house.”

“Julia—”

“No argument.” She grinned.

“Thank you.” I looked at my watch. “I have to run, or I’m going to be late. Have fun tonight.”

“You too, Emilia.”

CHAPTER 12



Sebastian

I grabbed the pizzas and the subs and walked over to Stefan's house.

"Hey." Alex smiled as she opened the sliding door for me.

"Hey. You look great." I grinned.

"Thanks."

I set the food down on the table, and Stefan walked in with Henry in his arms.

"Bye, babe." He walked over and kissed Alex. "Behave yourself tonight. I know how things can get with Jenni around. I'll make sure the sound on my phone is turned up in case you need me to bail you out of jail."

"Shut up." She laughed. "I'm going to miss you, my sweet boy." She pressed her lips against Henry's head. "He should go to sleep soon. I love you." She reached up and gave Stefan a kiss.

"I love you too, babe. Don't worry about us. We'll be fine."

"I know you will be." She grinned as she walked out the door.

The four of us sat at the table and ate the pizza and subs I'd brought over. When Stefan finally got Henry to sleep, he grabbed the monitor and met us outside on the patio.

“It’s too bad Emilia couldn’t go with the girls tonight,” Sam said.

“I didn’t know they had asked her.”

“Julia asked her this morning when she stopped by the coffee shop on her way to work. She said she had other plans for tonight.”

“Her car has been in the driveway all night, and all the lights are on in her house.”

“What are you doing? Stalking her house from your windows?” Simon asked.

“Shut the fuck up.” I reached over and smacked his arm as he let out a chuckle.

“It was her first week of work. Maybe she’s just tired and has plans to stay in and watch movies all night,” Stefan said.

“Or maybe not,” Sam said as he pointed down to the beach.



Emilia

I opened the sliding door and stumbled down to the beach with the bottle of Gin in my hand. The chill in the air felt good, as did the sand between my toes. A gentle breeze swept over my face as I brought the bottle up to my lips and took a drink. The salty smell of the air gripped my senses, as did the whispers of the ocean. I held my arms out and tightly gripped the bottle that was now under half full. Making my way to the shoreline, I started twirling around as I unleashed the anger that filled my soul.

“I hope you’re happy, asshole!” I shouted as I took another drink from the bottle and lost my balance. A sharp pain tore through me as my hands hit the shoreline, and the water swiftly swept over them.



Sebastian

“Damn,” Stefan said. “I’d say she’s totally wasted.”

“At least she decided to drink at home,” Simon said.

“She’s too close to the water,” Sam spoke.

The moment she fell, both Simon and I jumped up from our seats and ran down to the beach.

“Emilia.” I knelt and lightly took hold of her arm.

“Leave me alone.”

With the slight turn of her head, she stared at me with a dazed look. Her eyes were wet and swollen with mascara stains underneath them.

Simon picked up the bottle of gin from the sand and held it up to me. My brows furrowed as I noticed a stream of blood coming from her hand.

“She’s bleeding. Run up to the house and get the first aid kit,” I told Simon. “Come on, Emilia. We need to get you back to the house.” I took her arm and put it around my shoulder as I helped her up.

“I want to stay out here.” She slurred.

“Well, you’re not. It’s not safe out here for someone in your condition.”

Simon ran over with the first aid kit and looked at her hand.

“Looks like she could have cut it on a shell when she fell.”

“Just wrap it for now, and I’ll clean it up when I get her up to her house.”

He pulled the gauze from the kit and wrapped it around her hand as her head lay on my shoulder. Once he had it secured, I swooped down, picked her up, and carried her to her house.

Walking up the stairs, I found her bedroom and sat her up on the edge of the bed.

“Thanks, bro. I got it from here,” I spoke as Simon set the first aid kit on her bed.

“Yell if you need some help.”

“I will. Thanks.”

Gently picking up her hand, I started to unwrap the gauze when she announced she was going to be sick. Grabbing her arm, I quickly helped her to the bathroom, where she barely made it.

I let out a sigh as I knelt behind her and softly rubbed her back since I didn't have to hold her hair because she had it secured into a ponytail.

“Get it all out. You'll feel better once you do.”

I didn't know what to think. Seeing her this way bothered me. It was apparent she'd been crying. Over what? I would assume a guy because of what I'd heard her shout.

“Bro,” I heard a low voice from behind.

Turning around, I saw Sam standing in the doorway of the bathroom.

“Is she okay?”

“She will be.”

I got up and told her to stay put. Walking to the bedroom, I grabbed the first aid kit off the bed.

“How much of that bottle did she drink before she dropped it?”

“I have no idea.”

“She could have alcohol poisoning. Maybe we should take her to the Emergency Room.”

“I'm going to stay with her tonight and watch her. If she gets worse, I'll take her in.”

“If you need anything, let me know.”

“Thanks, Sam.”

When I walked into the bathroom with the first aid kit, I found Emilia sitting against the bathtub with her knees up and her head down.

“Feeling any better?”

“No.”

I knelt in front of her and took hold of her wounded hand, which she quickly pulled away from me.

“I need to clean your wound.”

“And I need you to go home. Please, Sebastian,” she spoke without looking up at me.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that. Give me your hand, Emilia.”

I removed the gauze from it and examined it.

“Good news is you don’t need stitches.”

I took a cotton ball and poured some of the wound cleaner on it from the kit. Gently dabbing her cut, she flinched.

“In the state you’re in, I’m surprised you even felt that. What’s going on with you?”

“Nothing.”

“Something is for you to drink a bottle of gin. Or are you just an alcoholic?” I smirked.

“I’m not an alcoholic, and I didn’t drink the whole bottle. Only half.”

“Ah, only half. Well, that’s better.” I reached for the band-aid and put it over her wound.

“I need to lay down. I don’t feel so good.” She fell forward, and I caught her.

“You need to change into your pajamas or something. Your dress is wet from when you fell.”

“It is?”

“Yes.” I chuckled as I helped her up and led her to the bed.

“Top left drawer of the dresser. Just grab whatever’s on top.”

I went into her drawer and pulled out a black short sleeve nightshirt with the letter V in pink across the chest. When I turned around to hand it to her, she was flat on her back, passed out.

“Shit.”

I couldn’t let her sleep in wet clothes, and I couldn’t undress her for obvious reasons. Pulling out my phone, I called Sam.

“Talk to me, brother.”

“Is Julia home yet?”

“She and Alex just pulled up.”

“Can you send them over to Emilia’s?”

“Sure.”

I heard the front door open, so I went downstairs.

“Is she okay?” Julia asked.

“She’s passed out. Can you two change her into her nightshirt?”

“Of course, Alex said.”

I waited downstairs until Julia and Alex were finished.

“We tucked her in. She’ll probably be out the rest of the night,” Julia spoke.

“Yeah. I’m sure she will be, but I’m going to stay with her tonight. You know, just in case. She did drink half a bottle of gin.”

“That’s very sweet of you.” Alex smiled as she placed her hand on my chest.

After they left, I kicked off my shoes and went upstairs. Sitting in the corner by the window was a black leather reclining chair that used to be Mrs. Patterson’s. Grabbing the blanket off it, I sat down, reclined it, and stared at her while she slept.

“What secrets are you hiding, Dr. Gallo?” I quietly spoke.

CHAPTER 13



Sebastian

I awoke to the knocking at the front door.

“What the hell?”

I climbed out of the chair and went down to see who it was.

“Morning,” I spoke as I opened the door.

“Morning. We have a delivery for Dr. Emilia Gallo.”

“She’s still sleeping, but I can accept it.”

“Tell us where you want us to put it before we take it off the truck.”

“Put what?” I furrowed my brows.

“The piano she had shipped here from New York.”

“Piano?”

Shit.

I glanced around the living room, and the only place it could go was in the corner by the window.

“I guess put it over here.” I pointed.

“Okay. I’ll be right back,” the man said.

After the delivery men brought in the piano with the bench and set it up, I reached in my pocket and pulled out two one-hundred-dollar bills.

“Thank you.”

“You’re very kind, sir. Have a good day.”

“You too.”

I walked over to the Steinway piano in the color ebony and ran my hand across it. It sure was beautiful and very expensive. To have it shipped all the way from New York told me that this piano meant something to her.

I popped a k-cup in the Keurig and brewed myself a cup of coffee. I’d thought about going home, but I wanted to be here when she woke up, in case she needed anything. Taking my cup up to her bedroom, I planted myself in the recliner and scrolled through my phone while I drank my coffee.



Emilia

I slowly opened my eyes as the pounding of my head wanted to force them shut. My body ached from head to toe, and the dryness of my mouth made it difficult to swallow.

“Good morning,” I heard a voice that startled me.

With the slight turn of my head, I grabbed the sheet and pulled it up to my neck when I saw Sebastian sitting in the recliner.

“What the fuck!” I yelled. “What are you doing here? How did you get in my house? Oh my God, this goes beyond creepy, Sebastian!”

“Calm down, Emilia. Do you not remember anything from last night?”

“The last thing I remember was walking out of the house and down to the beach.”

“Then we have some talking to do,” he said as he stood up from the chair. “I’ll make you some coffee and some toast, and we’ll talk.”

As much as I wanted him out of my house, I needed to know what happened last night. Shit. Whatever it was, I was

sure I humiliated myself.

“Why don’t you try to take a shower? It’ll help you feel better. I’ll be downstairs waiting for you. By the way, your piano was delivered.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “I had the delivery guys put it in the only spot it could go by the window.”

“Thank you. That’s where I wanted it.”

He walked out of the bedroom, and after I finally made it out of bed, I went into the bathroom and stared at myself in the mirror. Puffy eyes, puffy face, and mascara stains that made it look like I had two black eyes. He saw me like this, and I had never been more embarrassed than I was at this moment. After taking a hot shower and changing into a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt, I gripped the railing of the stairs and slowly walked down them. A smile crossed my lips when I saw my piano sitting in the corner of the living room. Walking over, I inspected it to make sure it wasn’t damaged.

“It’s a beautiful piano.” Sebastian smiled as he walked into the room and handed me two aspirin and a glass of water.

“Thanks. I’m happy it arrived undamaged. I was really worried about that.”

“Are you ready for some coffee and a little chat?” A smirk crossed his lips.

“Coffee, yes. Do I have a choice about the chat?”

“No. And let me tell you why. I possibly saved you from death last night. Not only did I do that, but I also slept in the recliner all night across from your bed in case something happened. So, as far as I’m concerned, that entitles me to an explanation of why you went on a drinking binge.”

“You stayed here all night?”

“I did. I wasn’t sure if I was going to have to take you to the ER or not.”

“And you changed me into my nightshirt?” I narrowed my eye at him.

“No. I called Julia and Alex over to do that.”

“Oh my God! They saw me like that?” I placed my hand on my forehead.

“Sweetheart, we all saw you like that, including my three brothers.”

“Fuck my life,” I said, and Sebastian chuckled. “I need to move now. I am so humiliated.”

“Don’t worry. We’ve all been there. And you’re not moving. Come on. Your coffee and toast are ready.”

I followed him into the kitchen, took a seat at the table, and laid my head down. Sebastian placed the piping hot coffee in front of me, and the aroma made my stomach churn.

“Let’s go sit on the patio to talk,” he said as he held up a plate of toast. “It’ll help you feel better.”

“I can’t. What if your family is out there?”

“So what?” He let out a laugh. “There’s nothing to be embarrassed about. Come on.” He gestured with his head and a smile.

Pushing myself up from the table, I followed him outside and sat down in the lounge while he took a seat in the lounge next to me. I sat there in silence for a moment while I sipped on my coffee.

“Eat.” He handed me a piece of toast. “What was going on with you last night?”

“Before I tell you, can you please tell me what I did? Why is there a band-aid on my hand? And what did you mean when you said you possibly saved me from death?”

“You were too close to the water. You fell and cut your hand on a seashell. You could have drowned, Emilia. If you had walked into that water in the state you were in, you wouldn’t have made it back out. My brothers and I were sitting on Stefan’s patio talking when we saw you go down to the beach. You were yelling something about hoping that some asshole was happy. I carried you back to the house and brought you up to your room.”

“Nice.” I took a bite of my toast. “I am so sorry you had to see that.”

“Who’s the asshole?”

I took in a deep breath before I told him.

“Yesterday was the one-year anniversary of my wedding day. A day that was a year in the making. Four hundred guests, a beautiful church decorated to the brim with white florals and satin bows, a custom-made dress that costs more than a wedding dress should, and a groom who never showed up.”

CHAPTER 14



Sebastian

“What?” I furrowed my brows.

“Talk about humiliation.” She grabbed another piece of toast from the plate. “No phone call and no text. After an hour of waiting for him and when the guests started to get antsy and wondered what the hell was going on, his best man sent me a text message and told me that Damien wasn’t coming, and he was calling the wedding off. So, yesterday was a hard day for me because it could have been my one-year wedding anniversary married to the man I loved and had been with for five years. A man with whom I was supposed to share my life and have a future with. A man who made so many fucking promises.” Tears fell from her eyes. “The same man who made me happy and yet destroyed my life in a matter of seconds.”

My heart ached for her as I reached over, placed my hands on hers, and gave it a gentle squeeze.

“Did he explain why he didn’t go through with it?”

“Three days later, the coward did. He said he realized that he didn’t love me enough to spend the rest of his life with me like he thought he did.”

“I’m sorry, Emilia. You didn’t deserve that.”

“If I could have run away right then and there, I would have. But I was in the middle of my residency, and I wasn’t about to give up everything I’d worked so hard for because of him.” She brought her hand up and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“And when you heard about Dr. Reynolds needing someone to take over his practice, you knew that was your ticket out of New York.”

“Yeah. And my father agreed it was probably for the best. I was a hot mess for a long time after. Hell, I guess I still am after last night. But I just wanted to not think about it. I wanted the memory and the pain to go away.”

“That’s understandable. I don’t blame you, and I probably would have done the same thing. You haven’t spoken to him since?”

“No. He tried to reach out to me a few months ago via a friend, but I shut that down immediately.”

“Tell me about that beautiful and expensive piano sitting in your living room.” I smiled. “I’m going to assume you play.”

“I do. I’ve been playing since I was four years old. My aunt, who is a pianist, taught me.

My parents went on a ten-day vacation with friends, and my aunt watched us while they were gone. When I was little, I had horrible separation anxiety, and I was quite the handful when my parents left me. I remember screaming and crying for my mom after they had dropped us off. My aunt picked me up, took me over to her piano, set me on her lap, and began to play. Instantly, I calmed down, and I watched the way her hands and fingers moved across the keys. So, she taught me how to read music and play. I picked it up very quickly, and by the time my parents returned from their vacation, I was pretty good. My aunt told my mom that I had great musical talent, just like she did. So, when we got home, my father went out and bought a piano for the house, and for my sixteenth birthday, he replaced it with the Steinway. They thought I would follow in my aunt’s footsteps and become a pianist. That piano has gotten me through some tough times. It’s my escape from the world. When I play, I forget about everything bad, and I let the music take me to another place. A place where nothing or no one can hurt me.”

Her passion for the piano put a smile on my face.

“I want to hear you play right now.”

“Now?” She let out a laugh. “I’m too hungover to play right now.”

“Nonsense. Come on?” I held out my hand to her as I stood up.

“Just one song.” She placed her hand in mine, and I helped her up from the lounge chair.

Walking back inside, she took a seat on the bench, stretched her fingers, and struck a couple of keys for a sound test.

“What do you want to hear?” she asked.

“Whatever you want to play.”

She played a classic by Chopin, and I was blown away. She was good. Damn good. When she finished, I slowly clapped my hands with a wide grin across my face.

“That was brilliant.”

“Thank you.” A bashful smile crossed her lips.

“I hope to hear that a lot. Listen, I should get going.”

“Of course.” She got up from the bench and walked me to the door.

“I hope you’re feeling better about yesterday.”

“I am, and I’m sorry for the trouble I caused. Thank you for being there for me.”

I brought the back of my hand up and softly stroked her cheek.

“You’re welcome,” I softly spoke.

I held her gaze for a few moments, and then I quickly turned away, for the only thing I could think about was kissing her full beautiful lips.

“If you need anything, call me.”

“I will. Thanks.”



After I went home and showered, I walked over to Sam's house to talk. Stefan and Alex were out, and I didn't know where the hell Simon was.

"Hey, Sebastian." Julia smiled when I stepped through the door. "How's Emilia doing?"

"She's doing better."

"I thought I heard you." Sam smiled as he walked over, and we fist-bumped. "How's Emilia?"

"She's okay."

"Did you find out what all that was about last night?" he asked.

"I did." I sighed.

"And?"

"You know what, Sam? That's really none of our business, is it?" Julia spoke.

"Please, you want to know just as badly as I do, baby."

"You two keep it right here and don't go mentioning it to her either."

"We won't," they both said at the same time.

"A year ago, it was her wedding day, but the groom never showed up and called off the wedding."

"Oh my God!" Julia brought her hand up to her mouth. "That poor girl!"

"That's terrible." Sam's brows furrowed.

"She was at the church waiting for him, and he never showed. The douchebag had his best man text her and tell her. He told her that he didn't love her enough like he thought he did to spend the rest of his life with her."

"Oh my God!" Julia exclaimed. "How long was she with him?"

“I guess about five years.”

“What an asshole.” Sam stood there shaking his head. “I can’t say that I blame her for drinking like she did last night.”

“She said she just needed to forget about the day. I found out another thing about her today.”

“What?” Sam asked.

“She plays the piano, and she is fucking phenomenal. Her piano from New York was delivered this morning, and I asked her to play something for me. So, she played a piece by Chopin, and I was blown away.”

“Another person with musical talent?” Julia pouted. “I feel like I’m the odd person out.”

“Aw, baby.” Sam hooked his arm around her. “I told you that I’d teach you how to play the guitar.”

“And what happens every time?” Her brow arched. “You teach me one chord, and then we get distracted.”

“True.” He grinned. “I can’t help how it turns me on seeing you with a guitar.”

“I need to run. I have a couple of properties I’m going to look at. Any chance you’d want to come?” I asked Sam.

“Are we doing anything, baby?” Sam asked Julia.

“No. Actually, I have to go to the coffee shop for a while. You two go and have fun.” She smiled as she kissed his lips.

“Let’s go.” Sam grinned.

CHAPTER 15



Emilia

Picking up my phone from the island where I had left it last night before going down to the beach and making an ass of myself, I noticed it was dead. Walking over to where the charger was, I plugged it in, and instantly I had five missed calls from my mom, Luca, and Lydia, along with several text messages. Sighing, I sent a group text.

“I’m fine. I went out last night and left my phone at home and forgot to charge it.”

“We’re having a family zoom call, so get on now!” My mother texted me.

“Great.” I rolled my eyes.

When I logged on, I prepared myself for my family’s wrath.

“Do you have any idea how worried we all were about you?” my mother asked.

“I’m sorry. As I said, I left my phone at home, and when I came back, it was dead, and I forgot to charge it.”

“We knew you were safe,” my sister said. “Luca called the LAPD last night to report you missing, and a Detective Kind called to let us know you were okay. He said that you were safe at home and that your phone was probably dead.”

“How would this detective know that? And who is he?” Luca asked.

“He’s my next-door neighbor’s brother, and he lives a few houses down. I went out with them last night.” I lied.

“So, you didn’t stay home all depressed and drink yourself into oblivion?” Lydia asked.

“Nope. I went out and had a great time with my neighbors.” I plastered on a fake smile.

“Well, I’m happy you did that,” my mother spoke. “Next time, make sure to charge your damn phone.”

“I will, Mom. I’m sorry I made you all worry. Actually, I need to go. I have to run to the store. I love you all!” I blew them a kiss.

I couldn’t tell my family what really happened. I’d tell my sister in time, but for now, I had to keep it to myself. I hated myself for behaving that way, and I wouldn’t say I liked the fact that Sebastian and his family saw me like that. After making another cup of coffee, I took it down to the beach to try and clear my head.

“Hey, Emilia.” I heard a voice in the distance.

Glancing over to my right, I saw Simon walking towards me with his hands tucked tightly in his pants pockets.

“Hi, Simon.”

“How are you?”

“Hungover.” A small smile crossed my lips.

“Figured as much.” He chuckled as he sat down next to me. “I wanted to let you know that your family tried to report you missing last night.”

“I know. I just got off the phone with them. Thank you for letting them know I was okay.”

“You’re welcome. One of the guys from the station called me last night because he recognized the address your brother gave.”

“He can be overprotective sometimes. I’m sorry.”

“Nah, don’t worry about it. That’s what brothers do.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“I don’t want you to think that what happened last night is something I usually do. I’m sure Sebastian is going to tell you because Julia told me the four of you tell each other everything.”

“She’s right. We do.”

“Long story short, yesterday was supposed to be my one-year wedding anniversary, but my fiancé at the time never showed up to the church. He decided that he didn’t love me enough to spend the rest of his life with me.”

“I’m sorry, Emilia. I had no idea.”

“I moved here to make a fresh start.”

“You’ve come to the right place, and you’re going to love it here. You already have friends in all of us. You honestly can’t ask for anything better.” He grinned.

I let out a laugh.

His phone rang. Pulling it from his pocket, he spoke, “I have to take this. I’ll talk to you later. Stay strong, my friend.” He placed his hand on my shoulder before walking away and taking his call.

“Thanks, Simon.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.



It was six p.m. when there was a knock at my door. Walking over and opening it, I smiled when I saw Sebastian standing there.

“Hi. Come on in.”

“I’m sorry for just dropping by unannounced. I saw you were home.”

“I don’t mind you dropping by.”

“You shouldn’t have said that. It might become a habit.”
He gave me a sexy wink.

“Hey, why not? You already spent the night here.” I grinned.

“True.” He chuckled. “Anyway, I’m here to invite you over tonight for a barbecue. It starts in about an hour. I know it’s last minute, but this is what we do.”

“Thanks for the invite, but I have to pack up my kitchen tonight since the guys are coming on Tuesday to tear it out.”

“You really want to spend a Saturday night doing that?”

“Not really, but I have to get it done.”

“I’ll tell you what. You come to the barbecue, and tomorrow, I’ll help you pack it all up.”

“You’ve done enough for me already. I can’t ask you to do that.”

“You didn’t ask. I offered.”

“Thanks, Sebastian, but I don’t think so.”

“Listen, Emilia. I know you probably don’t want to come because of last night. But everyone knows, and nobody is judging you. Trust me. So, put your embarrassment aside and join us tonight. I promise you’ll have a lot of fun. We’re great people.” He grinned.

“I know you are.” I couldn’t help but smile back at him. “Fine. What can I bring?”

“Just yourself. I hope you like chicken.”

“I do.”

“Good, because I can barbecue chicken like nobody’s business.”

“In that case, I can’t wait to try it.”

“I don’t disappoint.” He gave me another wink.

The moment he left, I let out a deep breath. As much as I didn’t want to be, I was incredibly attracted to him, not just physically but sexually. I hadn’t had sex in a year. Hell, I

hadn't even looked at another man in that long, and now, I have one of the sexiest men I've seen living right next door. I wasn't sure if this was some kind of cruel punishment or what. But it would be a cold day in Hell before I ever trusted another man again.

CHAPTER 16



Sebastian

I took the marinated chicken from the refrigerator and brought it outside where the grill was heating up.

“Hey, bro.” Simon walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder. “Damn, that smells good.”

“Thanks. Did you tell Roman to come tonight?”

“Yeah, and he appreciated the invite, but he’s taking his mom out for her birthday. I talked to Emilia today.”

“You did? When?”

“Earlier this afternoon. I saw her sitting down by the water, and I wanted to let her know that her brother called the station last night to report her missing.”

“What?” I laughed. “From New York?”

“Yeah. Stan called me because he recognized the address, so I called her brother to tell him she was okay and safe. She told me what happened. Man, that guy is a fucking dick.”

“I know, and if he were here, I’d track him down and beat his ass.”

“Hmm. Just like Stefan did with that douchebag who screwed with Alex?”

“You bet. In fact—”

“You can forget it.” He put up his hand. “You are not having me track down that guy in New York so you can fly

there and kill him.”

“Hey, my brothers. What are you talking about?” Stefan asked as he walked up.

“Our brother wants to beat the guy’s ass who left Emilia at the altar.”

“What an excellent idea.” He grinned. “I’m in.”

“Right? Except Simon won’t track him down for us.”

“Track who down?” Sam walked over, holding Henry.

“The guy who left Emilia at the altar,” Stefan said as he hooked his arm around my neck. “We think he deserves a good ass beating. Why do you have my kid?”

“It’s one thing if he was here in California, but he’s not, and no one is flying to New York just for that,” Sam spoke. “Julia handed him off to me.”

“Right? That’s what I said.” Simon shook his head.

“I invited Emilia to join us tonight. She should be here soon.”

“Oh, by the way, Jenni is here. She stopped by to visit Julia, and we invited her,” Sam said.

“Jenni is here?” Simon smirked.

“Don’t even think about it.” Sam shot him a look.

“Here comes Emilia now,” Stefan said as he gave her a wave.

“Hey, boys.” Her lips formed a beautiful smile.

“Hey, Emilia. There’s wine, beer, scotch, whiskey. You name it, and I have it in the house.”

“Thanks, but I’m just going to stick with water after last night.”

“How’s your hand?” Stefan asked her.

“It’s fine. Thank you for asking. Listen, I am so sorry about last night.”

“Don’t be. Your actions were warranted,” Sam spoke. “Besides, the four of us have done some pretty bad shit ourselves. No judgment here. Trust us.”

“Thanks. Aw, can I hold him?” she asked Sam.

“Of course.” He handed Henry over to her.

“How are you feeling, little guy? You look much better.” She smiled at him.

For some reason, my heart started to race a mile a minute.

“He is feeling much better. The girls are inside if you want to go in,” Stefan said.

“I think I will.”

She took Henry and stepped inside the house.

“She’s great with kids. Don’t you think, bro?” Stefan patted my shoulder.

“I would hope so since she’s a pediatrician.”

“Speaking of pediatricians, Alex wants to start taking the kids to see her,” Stefan said.

“Why? What’s wrong with your pediatrician?” Sam asked.

“Apparently, Alex likes Emilia better.” He shrugged.

“I’d want her for my doctor.” Simon grinned.

“Shut the hell up.” I pointed at him with the tongs I had in my hand.



Emilia

“Hi, Emilia,” Both Alex and Julia spoke as I stepped into the kitchen.

“Hey.” I smiled.

“Emilia, this is my sister Jenni. Jenni, this is Emilia.”

“It’s so good to meet you.” She extended her hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Jenni. “Julia, Alex, thank you for last night. I’m so embarrassed.”

“Oh my God, don’t be.” Alex reached out and placed her hand on my arm. “You had every right to do what you did.”

“What did she do?” Jenni asked. “What am I missing?”

“I got wasted, fell by the water, and cut my hand. Sebastian saw and carried me back to my house and put me to bed. Julia and Alex came over and helped me out of my wet clothes and into my nightshirt.”

“Oh.” She smirked. “I’ve had a few of those nights myself. Were you celebrating something?”

“More like trying to forget something.”

“Aw, a fight with your boyfriend? An ex?” Jenni’s lips formed a pout.

“One year ago, yesterday, my ex-fiancé called off our wedding while I was at the church waiting for him so we could start the ceremony.”

“Oh my God.” She brought her hand up to her mouth as her eyes widened.

She reached over, took Henry from me, and handed him to Alex.

“I am so sorry.” She hugged me tight. “You know that was the universe saving you from a life of misery.” She broke our embrace and firmly planted her hands on my shoulders. “Julia has an awesome therapist you should talk to.”

“I’m okay. I don’t need therapy.”

“Really?” Her brow arched. “If you were okay, you wouldn’t have gotten so plowed last night, alone.”

I looked away because she did have a point.

“Alex has this amazing dream guy checklist. I have one too since I only seem to date losers.” She smirked.

“Dream guy checklist?” My brows furrowed.

“You make a list of everything you want in a man, and if he checks off all your boxes, he’s your dream guy and the perfect man for you,” Jenni said.

“You are absolutely gorgeous. How do you only date losers?”

“I keep asking myself that same question.” She frowned and we all laughed.

“We better get this food outside. I’m sure Sebastian’s chicken is almost done,” Julia spoke.

We each grabbed the food from the island and took it outside to the long table Sebastian had set up.

“Chicken is ready.” Sebastian grinned as he set the platter in the middle of the table.

“I love your chicken, Uncle Sebastian,” Lily said.

“I know you do.” He reached over and tickled her.

Sebastian took a seat directly across from me. Picking up his drink, he held it up.

“To our new neighbor, Emilia Gallo. May you find yourself surrounded by friends and happiness here.” The corners of his mouth curved upward as his blue eyes stared directly at me.

“Cheers!” Everyone said as they picked up their glasses.

“Thank you.” I held up my glass as my eyes never left him, and he gave me a wink.

CHAPTER 17



Sebastian

After we cleaned up from dinner, I joined my family outside around the firepit. Stefan, Sam, and Simon had their guitars and were strumming a tune.

“Do you play?” Emilia asked as I took the seat next to her.

“He plays,” Stefan smirked. “Don’t let him tell you otherwise.”

“Play something. I played for you earlier.”

“Played what?” Simon asked.

“You didn’t know we have ourselves a pianist living next to us?”

“Shut up!” Jenni exclaimed. “You play the piano, Emilia?”

“I do.” A bashful smile crossed her face. “I want to hear you play sometime.”

“The boys were going to start their own band when they were younger.” Julia grinned.

“Really?” Emilia scrunched her nose at me.

“Yeah. Really.”

I got up from my seat, went inside the house, and grabbed my guitar.

“Let’s see if you know this song.” I smiled as I started playing.

“Summer of 69.” She grinned.

As I strummed the tune, everyone joined in by singing the lyrics.

“That was awesome. You were awesome.” The smile that was on Emilia’s face grew wider.

“Thank you. I’m happy you enjoyed it.”

“It’s been fun, bro, but Alex and I need to get the kids home,” Stefan said.

“All right, my brother. I’ll see you in the morning out on the water.” I stood up and hugged him.

After everyone left, Emilia grabbed the beer bottles from the table and took them inside.

“You don’t need to do that. I got it.”

“Don’t be silly. It’s only a few beer bottles. Besides, it’s the least I can do since you’re helping me pack up my kitchen tomorrow.” She smirked.

“Ah, that’s right. I did promise, didn’t I? Do you need any boxes? I can grab some from the restaurant.”

“Thanks, but I still have the boxes in the garage from when I moved in.”

She walked over to the sink and started rinsing the bottles.

“Oh crap. My band-aid came off.”

Walking over to her, I turned the water off and took hold of her hand.

“Does it still hurt?” I asked as I examined her cut.

Her eyes stared straight into mine.

“Not really.”

“If you want another band-aid, I can go get you one,” I softly spoke as I stared down at her lips.

“I really don’t think I need one.”

I wanted nothing more than to taste the sweetness of her lips.

Bringing the back of my hand up to her cheek, I softly stroked it before leaning in and brushing my lips against hers.

“I should go,” she said as she placed her hand on my chest.

“Yeah. It’s late.”

“Thanks for a great evening. Your chicken was amazing as usual.”

“You’re welcome. Thanks for coming.”

Her lips formed a small but unsure smile as she headed towards the door.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. Just let me know what time.”

“I will.” She gave me a nod, opened the door, and walked out.

Letting out a sigh, I ran my hand through my hair and leaned against the island.

“Stupid. Stupid. Stupid,” I said with irritation.

What the hell was I thinking? She wasn’t ready for that.



E milia

Placing my fingers on my lips, I shut the door and slid down until I was sitting on the ground. My heart was racing out of control, as was the fluttering in my belly. I still could feel the softness and warmth of his lips against mine as his scent still lingered even though he wasn’t here. A smell made up of amber with a hint of citrus, a touch of spice, and danger.

I flinched when I heard a knock on the door. Standing up, I took in a deep breath and opened it.

“You left your phone at my house.” The corners of his mouth curved upward as he handed it to me.

“Oh my God. I didn’t even realize I didn’t have it. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Goodnight, Emilia.”

“Goodnight, Sebastian.”

He turned and stepped off the porch. My heart wouldn’t calm, and my body was silently screaming to let him have me. It had been a year since I’d had sex, and I was scared. What if I wasn’t good enough? What if he never spoke to me again after?

Fuck it.

“Sebastian, wait!” I shouted.

He stopped, and with the slight turn of his head, he looked at me. Walking out the door, I went over to him, placed my hands on each side of his face, and smashed my mouth against his. Our tongues met with pleasure and our lips tangled underneath the moonlight.

“Are you sure?” He broke our kiss and stared into my eyes.

“Yes.” My lips formed a small but sure smile.

In one swoop, he picked me up and carried me back inside the house, kicking the door shut with his foot. The moment we made it up the stairs and to the bedroom, he set me down in front of the bed, pulled his shirt over his head, and cupped my face in his hands while his thumbs stroked my cheeks.

“You’re sure? I don’t want you to regret anything.”

“I’m sure, but you should know that I haven’t been with anyone since—”

“We’ll go slow, and if at any time you’re uncomfortable or want to stop, just tell me.”

The corners of my mouth curved upward at the gentleness of this man, which made me want him even more. I quickly pulled my shirt over my head and tossed it on the floor. Taking down the leggings I wore, I threw them to the side and stood there in only my bra and matching panties. His hungry eyes raked over me before leaning in and bringing his mouth to mine.

“You are so beautiful,” he breathlessly spoke as his hand reached around and unclasped my bra.

The feeling of being wanted and desired by him was overwhelming. Just as overwhelming as the need to feel him inside me.

His tongue slid across my collarbone and down to my swollen breasts. My hardened peaks were sensitive to his touch as his mouth wrapped around them before exploring the rest of my body. Fireworks went off the moment he wrapped his fingers around the waistband of my panties, pulled them down, and asked me to lay down. He knew exactly what I wanted. I wasn't sure how, but he did. Moans escaped my lips at the pleasure he gave me. A joy I hadn't felt for so long.

CHAPTER 18



Sebastian

The sound of her subtle moans and the sweet taste of her on my lips aroused me more than I already was. She was like a fine cuisine and deserved to be devoured. Her moans heightened, and her body tightened as she orgasmed. Standing up, I took a condom from my wallet, took down my pants, slid it over my throbbing cock, and hovered over her. Our lips met, and her arms wrapped around my back. Slowly slipping inside her, I gasped at the way her lips swelled around me.

I broke our kiss to stare into her eyes as I moved in and out of her slowly while her nails dug into my back. The feeling of being inside her and her lean legs wrapped around my waist was nothing short of surreal. From the moment I laid eyes on her, I wanted her. I promised I would go slow, and I'd kept that promise even though the beast inside me was dying to get out. I could feel her tightening around my cock, and when the pulsating started, I buried myself deep inside her.

"That's it. Come for me because I'm about to. Oh my God," I moaned as my cock exploded.

I dropped my body on hers and buried my face into the side of her neck, taking in the sweet floral fragrance I'd smelled since the first day I'd met her. Her fingers stroked my back as I lay there trying to regain my breath.

Lifting my head, I ran my finger across her mouth before lowering mine to meet her lips.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m good.” A beautiful smile graced her face.

Rolling off her, I climbed off the bed and disposed of the condom in the bathroom. Now came the awkward and uncomfortable part—the part where I wasn’t sure if I should stay or go.

Shit.

“It’s late,” I said.

“Yeah, and I know you have to get up early to go surfing with your brothers.”

“Right. I should probably go.” I grabbed my pants from the floor. “Or I could stay if you want me to.”

“I’d like that.”

I dropped my pants, climbed in next to her, and rolled on my side, so we faced each other.

“I hope I didn’t disappoint you,” she said.

“No, Emilia. You were fantastic.” I grinned. “I hope I didn’t disappoint you.”

“Umm, I’d say not since you made me orgasm twice.” She laughed.

I reached up and brushed a strand of hair from her face.

“We should get some sleep. I won’t wake you in the morning before I leave.”

“Okay. But if you do, I won’t mind.”

Turning the other way, I lay there for a moment to collect my thoughts before closing my eyes and drifting off into a peaceful sleep.



“*S*hit,” I said as I looked out the sliding door and saw my brothers by the shoreline.

Walking over to the front door, I stepped outside and carefully closed it not to wake Emilia. As I was running over to my house in nothing but my pants, carrying my shirt and shoes in my hand, I saw Lily staring at me from the front lawn.

“What are you doing, Uncle Sebastian? Why were you at Emilia’s house so early? Did you have a sleepover?”

Fuck!

“Why are you outside this early? Where’s Alex? Does she know you’re out here?”

“Yes. I just came out to get my jump rope I left out here yesterday. You didn’t answer my question.”

“I’m helping Emilia pack up her kitchen because your dad is going to be doing some work there Tuesday.”

“With no shirt or shoes on?” She cocked her head.

“Go inside, your highness. I have to meet your dad and your uncles in the water.”

“Okay.” She smiled. “Bye.”

“Bye, Lily.” I sighed.

Running into the house, I grabbed my wetsuit because it was a little chilly, grabbed my board, and ran down to the water.

“What the hell?” Stefan held out his arms.

“Sorry. I overslept, and then I got stopped by your daughter out front.”

“Why were you out front?” Sam frowned.

“I thought I heard something.”

“You are so full of shit!” Simon said. “We know when you’re lying, bro.”

“You didn’t—Sebastian, tell me you didn’t—” Sam said.

I had no choice but to tell them because Lily would tell Stefan what she saw.

“Yeah. I did.” I put my board in the water.

“You slept with Emilia?” Stefan asked.

“I did, and your kid saw me leaving her house in nothing but my jeans. Okay? There.”

“Damn it, Sebastian!” Stefan yelled. “What did you tell her?”

“Gee, Stefan, which answer do you want? The one where she asked me why I was at Emilia’s house so early or when she asked me if we had a sleepover?”

“Fuck!”

“Hold up,” Simon said. “Did I not make myself clear enough to you how bad of an idea that was? Now what?”

“I don’t know.” I paddled out, and my brothers followed.

“What do you mean you don’t know?” Simon spat.

“Bro, that was kind of —” Stefan started to say.

“Don’t!” I pointed at him. “And you either,” I pointed at Sam. “The only one who gets to say anything is Simon. So go ahead, bro. Let me have it.”

He stared at me as he shook his head.

“She’s broken, brother, and I hope you didn’t damage her even more.” His voice was calm.

I looked away from him because the same thought crossed my mind.

“I hope I didn’t either.”

“Leave him alone, bro. Like you can talk. I saw Jenni leaving your house this morning,” Stefan said.

“What the actual fuck, Simon?” Sam said.

“What? It’s totally casual.” He grinned. “You know it, I know it, she knows it. And she came on to me. Who was I to turn that down? We’re friends. Nothing more.”

CHAPTER 19



Emilia

I opened my eyes to the sun filtering through the curtains. Rolling over, the side of the bed where Sebastian slept was empty. I must have been really out because I didn't even hear him leave.

Climbing out of bed, I walked over to the window and stared at the four brothers as they surfed, focusing on one of them. The one I slept with last night. The one who made my body tremble just by the way he looked at me. And the one who was going to break my already fragile heart.

After I quickly showered, I got dressed and went down to the kitchen to make a cup of coffee. Taking the cup over to my piano, I sat down and started to play. The feel of the keys beneath my fingers relaxed me, as did the music that came from them. I needed to escape getting inside my head because that was precisely what happened after last night. Fear tore through me, and the thought of rejection paralyzed me.

Getting up from the bench, I walked into the kitchen and sent a text message to Sebastian.

“Hi. I hope you had fun with your brothers. I just wanted to let you know that I don't need your help packing up the kitchen. I'm almost finished. It didn't take as long as I thought. Have a great day!”



Sebastian

My phone pinged with a text message from a number I didn't recognize. Grabbing it from the island, I stood there and read it as my brows furrowed.

"What's wrong?" Simon asked as he sipped his coffee.

"I just got a text message from Emilia saying she doesn't need my help with the kitchen and that she's almost done packing it up. What the fuck is that about?" I looked up from my phone.

"Either she couldn't wait for you any longer, or she regrets what happened last night." His brow arched. "I'm going with the latter."

"Shit!" I spewed. "I specifically asked her if she was sure because I didn't want her to regret it, and she told me she was positive."

"That's women for you." He smirked. "I warned you, bro." He pointed at me.

"Shut up." I shook my head.



Emilia

I waited for Sebastian to respond, but he didn't. Walking to the garage, I brought some boxes in and set them on the kitchen floor. I'd start with the dishes first and make my way to the pots, pans, and then the pantry. Thank God I barely had any food in it.

As I was taking the dishes down from the cabinet, I heard a knock at the sliding door, and my heart jumped out of my chest. Looking over, I saw Sebastian standing there.

"Do you know you just scared the shit out of me?" I asked as I opened the door.

"Sorry. It's a habit. This is how my brothers and I go in and out of each other's houses. Would you care to explain that

text message you sent?”

He stepped inside and began opening all the cabinet doors.

“Almost done, eh? It looks like you just started. Why did you lie to me, Emilia?”

Shit.

“Because I didn’t want you to help. Like I said before, you’ve already done so much for me, and I can do this by myself.”

“Isn’t that what friends do? Help each other? We are friends, right? Or am I just imagining things, and this is one-sided?”

“No. Of course not. We’re friends.” I walked over and placed some plates in the box.

“Right. Does this have anything to do with what happened last night?”

“No.” My brows furrowed.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m positive. It’s just—”

“Just what, Emilia?”

“You know what? I’m over it. I don’t feel bad anymore. If you want to help me pack up the kitchen, then grab some stuff and start boxing it up.” I smiled. “So what if you helped me carry a box in, made me breakfast, put a new battery in my jeep, carried my drunken ass in the house, sat with me while I puked, put me to bed, and then stayed the night to make sure I was okay. Oh my God.” I cupped my face in my hands. “I’ve only known you a week, and you’ve done all that. I am such a hot mess.” I turned away from him out of embarrassment.

He let out a chuckle as he walked over, gripped my shoulders, and started massaging them with his strong hands.

“I think it’s cute you’re such a hot mess,” he whispered in my ear that sent shivers down my spine. “Come on, let’s get this kitchen packed up.”

My body still trembled even though he removed his hands from my shoulders. Turning around, I gave him a small smile and went back to taking down the rest of the dishes from the cabinet. There were a couple of bowls up on the top shelf that I struggled to reach. Putting them up there was a hell of a lot easier. So, I climbed on the counter and sat on my knees.

“Whoa. You’re going to fall,” Sebastian said as his hands gripped my hips from behind.

I froze as I reached for the bowls, and my heart started pounding out of my chest. I took a deep breath, grabbed the bowls, and took them down. After setting them on the counter, Sebastian lifted me and turned me around. My legs locked around his waist and my arms around his neck. Our eyes locked onto each other’s as he stood there and held me up.

“You should have asked for help.” A sexy smile crossed his lips.

“I was confident I didn’t need help.”

“Do you want me to put you down?” His voice was soft as our lips were mere inches from each other’s.

I wanted to tell him, yes, but after last night, the word wouldn’t come out of my mouth.

“I take your silence as a no.” His lips brushed against mine.

Within seconds, we were locked in a passionate kiss. I could feel the rise of his cock against me, and my body screamed for it. Carrying me upstairs as our lips stayed locked, he gently laid me down on the bed and hovered over me. He broke our kiss and lowered his head.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“We can’t do this. I don’t have a condom with me. My wallet is at my house.”

“I’m on birth control, and I just got my shot two weeks ago.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to use a condom? I mean, I’m one hundred percent clean. But if you don’t feel

comfortable.”

“I feel comfortable.”

The corners of his mouth curved upward as he kissed my lips, stood up, and stripped out of his clothes. Sitting up, I pulled my shirt over my head while he reached for my leggings and pulled them off me.

“Now, where were we?” He smirked as he climbed on top of me, and his lips trailed across my neck.

CHAPTER 20



Sebastian

As I thrust in and out of her from behind, her fingers gripped the sheets as she came. The buildup was there for me, and I couldn't hold back any longer. Gripping her hips, I halted, pulled out, and exploded all over her backside. I wasn't sure why I felt the need to pull out instead of coming inside her. Perhaps it was—I didn't even want to think about it.

Climbing off her, I went into the bathroom, grabbed some tissues, and cleaned her up. I'd expected her to say something, but she didn't. So, I did.

"I'm sorry about that."

"No, it's fine. I get it." She rolled over, sat up, and grabbed her shirt. "You don't trust me." She climbed off the bed, pulled on her leggings, and walked over to her dresser drawer. Opening it, she pulled out a folded piece of paper and handed it to me.

"What's this?"

"It's a summary of my last doctor's visit dated two days before I moved to California. Just in case you had doubts if I was telling the truth." She walked out of the bedroom.

"Emilia, wait!" I said as I grabbed my pants and put them on. "I'm sorry. It's just—" I ran down the stairs.

"Don't, Sebastian." She put her hand up. "I'm not mad you pulled out. It's hot as far as I'm concerned. What bothers me is

I believe you did it because you didn't trust my word."

What the hell was I supposed to say? She was sort of right.

"Okay. Fine. You want the truth? I had a little doubt. I mean, you know how women can be."

I needed to shut the hell up.

"You mean women who trap men on purpose? Is that what you think about me?" she asked in a calm voice.

"No. I mean—I barely know you. Okay. I'm just going to shut up now."

"I think that's a good idea," I smirked. "Anyway, you saw the proof. The last thing I want right now is a baby."

"How is that possible? You're a pediatrician?"

"I love kids, and I want them. But not right now when I'm just starting my career, and I'm single. I'm not in the market to be a single parent. I've seen my fair share of them during my internship and residency at the hospital."

"Yeah. It's rough. Stefan was a single parent to Lily."

"Lily mentioned to me when we first met that she considers Alex, her 'real' mom."

"Yeah." I smiled. "Monica, Lily's birth mother, left her with Stefan when Lily was three years old. She took off and never came back. But she is slowly making her way back into Lily's life. It's a long story, and I'll tell you about it another time. I think we should finish the kitchen."

"Yes. Let's do that." She sighed as she looked at the empty boxes on the floor.

While Emilia emptied the pantry, I took care of packing up the pots and pans.

"Where did you go to medical school?" I glanced over at her.

"Columbia."

"Seriously?" My brow arched.

“Yes.” A smile crossed her beautiful face. “Is that hard to believe?”

“No. Not at all. I knew how smart you were the moment we met. Is that where you met—I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—”

“It’s fine. To answer your question, no, that’s not where I met Damien. We met in a coffee shop. I was sitting at a table studying for exams when he walked over and set a raspberry cream cheese muffin down on the table and said I looked like I needed a break. So, I invited him to sit down, and that’s how we met. Had I never asked him to sit—”

“Hey.” I walked over to where she stood and placed my hands on her hips. “I’m sorry. I should never have asked.” I pressed my lips against her forehead. “Some people are just born natural assholes, and one day he’ll get what’s coming to him for doing what he did to you. In the meantime, you’ve got this great new life here in California, and you have the best neighbors anyone could ever ask for.” My lips formed a smirk. “I’d say you’re winning.”

“I do have the best neighbors anyone could ask for.” She laughed.

“Damn right you do.”

We finished packing up her kitchen, and I left to head to the restaurant.

When I arrived home around ten p.m., I saw her lights on and her silhouette sitting by the window playing the piano. Walking into the house, I flipped on the lights and set my phone down on the island. Walking over to my bar, I picked up a bottle of scotch and poured some into a glass. Taking it outside on the patio, I leaned over the railing, stared out at the water, and listened as the waves crashed against the shore.

“Did you just get home?” Stefan asked as he walked over.

“Yeah.” I handed him my glass.

“Thanks.” He took a sip and handed it back to me.

“What happened with Emilia?”

“I went over to help her pack up her kitchen, and we kind of got distracted again.”

“Damn, brother.” He shook his head.

“Yeah.” I let out a sigh. “It’s all in fun. But she’s really damaged from her ex, and I’m afraid that if we keep doing what we’re doing, she’s going to get hurt because I’m not in or on the market.”

“Then you need to put a stop to it immediately.”

“I know I do.” I finished off my drink.

CHAPTER 21



Emilia

I set up my Keurig in my home office on the console table against the wall, and when I went to turn it on, it wouldn't. So, I unplugged it and plugged it back in.

"Oh, come on," I spat as I kept pressing the power button, and nothing was happening.

Letting out a heavy sigh, I slipped my shoes on, grabbed my purse, and drove to Mojo Madness.

"Hey, you." Julia smiled when I walked in.

"Hey, Emilia." Jenni turned her head. "We were just talking about you."

"You were?" I grinned.

"Julia and I are going to dinner tonight, and you're coming with us. Alex has to work, so she can't join us.

"I'd love to. What time?"

"Six-thirty?" Jenni spoke.

"Sounds good. I can meet you there from work. Which restaurant?"

"We were thinking about Nobu," Julia said.

"I love Nobu. I used to dine at the one back home."

"Awesome. Then Nobu it is. I will see you ladies at six-thirty." Jenni smiled as she turned and walked out of the café.

"Hot or iced coffee?" Julia asked.

“Hot. Just a large black. I had moved my Keurig to my office at home, and it wouldn’t work when I went to turn it on. I think it finally gave out.” I pouted.

“Oh no. That is a tragedy right there. Sam and I, and Alex and Stefan, are always up at the crack of dawn, so feel free to come over any time in the morning for a cup. Here you go. One large black.” She grinned as she handed me my cup.

“Thanks, Julia. I’ll see you later.”

“Emilia?” she spoke as I was about to walk out the door.

Turning my head, I looked at her.

“Yeah?”

“I’m thrilled you’re coming with us tonight.”

“Me too.” I smiled.



I was ten minutes late meeting Julia and Jenni for dinner.

“Sorry, I’m late. We had to squeeze in a patient at the last minute,” I spoke as I slid into the booth.

“No worries. Our server hasn’t even been here yet to take our drink order,” Julia said as she handed me a menu.

“Good evening, ladies. My name is Jayden, and I will be your server tonight. What can I get you three lovely ladies to drink?”

“I’ll have a glass of chardonnay.” I smiled.

“Same for us,” Jenni spoke.

“May I start you off with some sushi?”

“How about the house special?” Julia looked at me.

“It’s one of my favorites.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Excellent. I’ll go put that in for you.” He grinned.

“He’s kind of cute,” Jenni spoke. “In a weird waiter way.” Her brows furrowed, and I couldn’t help but laugh. “Oh, I brought you something.” She reached into her purse, pulled out a piece of paper, and handed it to me.

“My Perfect Guy Checklist?”

“The one and only. Fill it out. You never know when you might run into the one who checks off all the boxes.”

“Thanks. I’m not sure I’ll need it since I have no intentions of dating anytime soon.”

Jayden walked over with our sushi and drinks.

“I know it must be hard for you to trust a man,” Julia said.

“It is.”

“Well, you still need sex,” Jenni said as she picked up the sushi with her chopsticks. “You don’t have to date them, just have sex with them. Do what Julia and I do. Or what Julia used to do before she met Sam. Well, wait, she did it with Sam. Anyway, you choose whom you want to have sex with. That way, you can enjoy the pleasure of a man without any emotional attachment.”

“I don’t understand.”

“First of all, you never have sex with a man when you’re inebriated because then you’ll have done the walk of shame. You need to be in control at all times, and if the guy fulfills your needs, it’s considered a victory lap.” Jenni smiled. “So, if you’re out and about and a guy walks up to you, and you know he’s only thinking about sex, you assess him carefully, talk for a bit, and then you decide if you want to sleep with him. If you don’t, you tell him you’re not interested. Works like a charm with no regret in the morning.” She shoved a piece of sushi in her mouth.

“Or you could just keep banging your hot neighbor.” Julia grinned, and I turned fifty shades of red.

“What?” Jenni exclaimed. “You slept with Sebastian?”

“It’s okay.” Julia reached over and placed her hand on mine. “She slept with Simon, twice.”

“You did?” My eyes widened.

“I did. Actually, it was three times. You just didn’t know about the third time, sis.” A wide grin crossed her face. “Perfect example of choosing whom you want to have sex with.”

“Are you two—”

“No.” She shook her head. “We’re just friends. I swear.” She put her hand up. “So, spill the tea on the hot chef.”

“It just happened.” I bit down on my bottom lip. “He’s the first guy I’ve had sex with in over a year.”

“And?” Her brow arched.

“It was amazing.” I smiled.

“Right?” Jenni said. “There’s something about those Kind brothers that they just know how to nail it in the sack.”

“She’s right.” Julia grinned. “Alex will tell you the same thing.”

“What’s wrong?” Jenni asked as my face fell flat.

“I don’t know. I’m just so ripped apart inside still. I can’t seem to shake what Damien did to me. My family tells me to get over it. Like it’s just that simple. Maybe I do need some therapy.”

Julia reached into her purse and slid a business card across the table.

“This is Dr. Strong’s phone number. She’s one of the best. I saw her for a couple of years after my fiancé passed away and again after I met Sam.”

I picked the card up and looked at it.

“Oh my gosh. She’s in the same building as my practice. She’s one floor down.”

“Perfect,” Jenni said. “It wouldn’t hurt to talk to her.”

CHAPTER 22



Sebastian

“Hey, boss,” Kylie, one of my employees, spoke as she walked into the kitchen.

“What’s up, Kylie?”

“I thought you should know that Alex is crying behind the bar.”

“Really?” My brows furrowed. “Thanks for letting me know. Marco, watch this sauce for me.” I washed my hands and walked out of the kitchen. When I reached the bar, I saw Alex drying her eyes. “Hey. What’s wrong?” I hooked my arm around her.

“I’m sorry, Sebastian. It’s just—I miss my baby.” Tears started to fall from her eyes.

“Aw, Alex.” I pulled her into me. “Do you want to go home?”

“No. I’ll be okay, eventually.” She sniffled.

“I kind of figured this would happen, being it’s your first night back. Are you sure you don’t want to go home?”

She gave me a nod.

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No.” She took in a deep breath.

I pulled out my phone and texted Stefan on my way back to the kitchen.

“Hey. Can you bring Henry up here so Alex can see him? She’s having a hard time. Tears and all.”

“Shit. I knew this was going to happen. I told her not to go back. I’ll be up there in a few. Thanks, bro.”

“No problem. I’ll see you soon.”

“Is Alex okay?” Marco asked.

“Yeah. She will be as soon as Stefan brings Henry up here.”

When I put my phone in my pocket, I took it back out and thought about sending Emilia a text since I hadn’t talked to her since yesterday after I helped her pack up the kitchen. Nah, it was best I didn’t.

“Uncle Sebastian!” Lily came running into the kitchen.

“Hey, my beautiful niece.” I hugged her.

“My dad said you’ll give me some ice cream.” She grinned.

“Did you eat your dinner?” I arched my brow at her.

“Of course. I always eat my dinner.”

“Then go sit down over there, and Marco will make you a yummy sundae. Just tell him what you want on it. I’m going to go talk to your dad.”

“Okay.” She went and sat down.

Walking out to the bar, I placed my hand on Stefan’s back as he sat down on the stool while Alex held Henry tight and plastered him with kisses.

“I’m hoping I get that kind of attention when she gets home.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Shut up.” I laughed.

“Have you talked to Emilia today?” he asked me.

“No. I haven’t. Why?”

“Just wondering.” He shrugged.

“Okay. I’m good now.” Alex put Henry back in his car seat. “I need to get back to work. Thank you for bringing him up.” She gave Stefan a kiss. “I love you so much.”



As I pulled up into the driveway, I glanced over and saw Emilia pull into hers. It was eleven o’clock, and I wondered where she was so late.

“Hey,” I shouted over to her when I climbed out of the car.

“Hey.”

“You’re just getting home?” I casually walked over with my hands tucked tightly in my pants pockets.

“Yeah. I had dinner with Jenni and Julia, and then we hit up a bar for a couple of drinks after.”

“Sounds like you had a nice time.”

“I did. You’re just getting home from the restaurant?”

“It was hectic tonight, and there were a couple of kitchen disasters. But it’s all good. I better get inside. I just wanted to say hi.”

“Okay. Have a good night.”

“You too.” I gave her a nod and turned away. “Emilia?” I stopped.

“Yeah?”

“Sweet dreams,” I spoke as I turned and looked at her one last time before she went inside.

“Sweet dreams, Sebastian.”

I walked into the house and threw my keys down on the kitchen counter. Pouring myself a much-needed drink, I turned off the lights downstairs and took it up to my bedroom. After stripping out of my clothes and pulling on a pair of pajama bottoms, I grabbed my guitar and sat on the edge of the bed as I strummed a few chords. I thought about how beautiful she

looked standing in the driveway of her house as the lights that hung on each side of the garage illuminated down on her. But then again, she always looked beautiful.



As we stood in the space, I asked my brothers what they thought.

“Well, what do you think?”

“I like it,” Simon spoke as he walked around.

“It’s a great location,” Sam said. “And the parking is good.”

“It has good structure,” Stefan spoke.

“If this is the place you want, I think you need to make the offer quick before someone else gets in here,” Sam said.

“That won’t be happening. I bought the building this morning.” I grinned.

“Congrats, brother.” Simon smiled as he patted my back.

Grabbing the bag that sat on the floor, I pulled out a bottle of champagne and four cups. After popping the cork, I poured some into each cup and handed them to my brothers.

“I’m on the clock,” Simon said.

“I know. That’s why I only poured you a sip.” I smiled. “To Four Kinds II.” I held up my cup.

“Do you have the blueprints?” Sam asked as he tipped his cup to mine.

“I have them in my car. I’ll give them to you when we leave.”

“I’m excited to get started on this,” Stefan said. “What are you going to do about an interior designer? Because you sure as hell aren’t using ours.” His brows furrowed.

“Oh yeah,” Sam spoke. “That’s right. You caused our last one to quit because you couldn’t keep your dick in your pants,

and somehow it was our fault.”

“That chick was a bit unstable anyway.” Simon laughed. “You two even said that before all that shit went down.”

“I’ll find someone. There are plenty of interior designers around.”

After we left, I ran to the restaurant to check on things, and then I headed to the grocery store to pick up some stuff for the house. As I wheeled my cart through the store, I saw Emilia standing by the prepared foods counter.

“You’re seriously not thinking about buying any of that, are you?” I asked with a smile as I walked up to her.

“Oh, hey.” She grinned. “Fancy seeing you here. Actually, I am. My kitchen is gone, and I can’t cook, so—”

“So, I’ll cook for you.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “Be over to my house in an hour, and I’m not taking no for an answer.” I took my cart and walked away. “Just come in through the sliding door. It’ll be unlocked.”

“But—” I heard her shout.

“I said I’m not taking no for an answer. See you in an hour, Dr. Gallo.”

CHAPTER 23



Emilia

I stood there with a smile on my face and shook my head as I watched Sebastian walk away. A home-cooked meal from him sounded delicious and relaxing. After leaving the store, I drove home and found the workers were still there. When I walked into the house, I took in a deep breath.

“Hey.” Stefan smiled. “Welcome to the disaster zone.”

“Wow.” I looked at the space that was once my kitchen.

“We have everything cleaned up, and your refrigerator is in the garage. I would suggest going this week and ordering all your appliances.”

“Already done.” I grinned.

“Good.” He smiled. “What are you doing for dinner? Alex is cooking tonight and told me to ask you to come over and join us.”

“I ran into your brother at the grocery store, and he invited me over for dinner.”

“Sebastian, I hope.” He smirked.

“Yes.” I laughed.

“We’re out of here, boss,” one of the workers spoke.

“Thanks, guys. Great work today. I’m going to head home. Try not to walk barefoot in this area.”

“I won’t. Thanks, Stefan.”

“You’re welcome, Emilia. I’ll talk to you later.” He placed his hand on my shoulder and walked out the sliding door.

After changing my clothes, I went over to Sebastian’s house. The moment I opened the sliding door and stepped inside, the aroma of homemade sauce filtered through the air and made my belly grumble.

“It smells amazing in here.”

“Thanks.” Sebastian turned around with a grin on his face. “I’m making eggplant parmesan.”

“Sounds delicious.”

“There’s an open bottle of wine over there. Help yourself.”

Walking over to the other side of the kitchen, I picked up the bottle and poured some into a glass.

“Is there anything I can help you with?”

“Can you cut bread?”

“Of course, I can cut bread.” I laughed.

He took a loaf of bread out of the bag, set it on the cutting board, and handed me a serrated knife.

“Have at it, Dr. Gallo.” He winked.

“Is this from the restaurant?” I asked.

“It is. I also have the cherry butter you love in the refrigerator.”

“Stop it. Do you really?” I grinned as I glanced over at him.

“I really do.” He gave me a sexy wink and turned his attention to the oven.

As I cut the bread and set the slices in the basket on the counter, he walked up from behind and looked over my shoulder.

“You cut that perfectly. I’m impressed.”

“I will admit, I do have some mad surgical skills. I can cut into someone like nobody’s business.” I tilted my head back,

held up the knife, and smiled at him.

“You’re kind of scary.”

I laughed as I took the basket over to the table. Suddenly, there was a knock at the front door.

“I wonder who that is. Can you go see while I finish plating the food?”

“Yeah,” I said as I walked to the front door.

Opening it, an older man stood there and narrowed his eye at me.

“Well, hello there, pretty lady. This was very unexpected.”

“Dad?” Sebastian walked over.

“Hello, son.”

“Come in. What are you doing here?”

“Before I answer that question, may I ask whom this beautiful woman answering your door is?”

“This is Dr. Emilia Gallo, my new neighbor. Emilia, meet Henry Kind, my father.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Gallo.” His father extended his hand.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Kind. Please, call me Emilia.”

“Only if you’ll call me Henry. I looked over all the paperwork for the building. Everything looks good.” He handed Sebastian a large envelope.

“Excellent. Thanks, Dad. We’re just sitting down to have dinner. Would you like to join us? I made eggplant parmesan.”

“As wonderful as that sounds, I’m taking my beautiful wife out to dinner. So, I have to run.”

“Okay. Thanks for looking over these.” He held up the envelope.

“Anytime, son. Emilia, I hope to see you again soon.”

I smiled at him before Sebastian shut the door.

“Your dad seems very nice,” I said as we walked back to the kitchen.

“He is, but he can also be a ruthless prick when he wants to.”

“So can my dad.”

Sebastian walked over and set a plate of eggplant parmesan down, and I immediately picked up my fork and cut into it.

“Wow. Wow. This is delicious. Is there anything you can’t cook?”

“No.” A grin crossed his face as he sat down across from me.

“I really love your passion for cooking. I think the best thing in life is doing what you love.”

“Like your passion for taking care of sick children?”

“Yes. Exactly. I could have gone a different route and become a pianist or worked for my father’s company, but I knew those would be things I wouldn’t want to do for the rest of my life. Playing the piano is a hobby and a personal passion. I couldn’t imagine playing under so much pressure. And a corporate setting just isn’t for me either. I knew that when I was a kid when my dad would take me to work with him.”

“I felt the same way about my father’s company. Don’t get me wrong, I love the family business, and I am on the board, but I’d rather be cooking and creating things in my kitchen. Sam and Stefan always knew they’d work for the company.”

“And Simon?”

“When we were thirteen, his best friend was murdered. The killer was never caught, and Simon has been obsessed with it ever since. He won’t give up until he finds the person who did it.”

“That’s terrible. You’re talking almost twenty years now, right?”

“Yeah. But knowing my brother, he will find that person and make them pay dearly until the day he dies. I haven’t had a chance to tell you, but I’m opening a second restaurant.”

“You are?” My eyes lit up. “That’s great. Where are you thinking?”

“Downtown L.A. The papers my dad looked over were for the building I bought.”

“You bought the building? The whole building?”

“Yes.” He chuckled. “I also own the building for Four Kinds. I don’t like someone having that kind of control over me. I want everything to be mine. The building, the restaurant, all of it.”

“Good for you.” I smiled. “It must be very exciting opening a new restaurant.”

“It is, and it’s very time-consuming, frustrating, and a lot of stress and headaches. But in the end, it’s worth it.”

After we finished eating, I cleared the table and helped him clean up the rest of the kitchen. He tried to stop me, but I wouldn’t let him.

“When my kitchen is done, I’m going to cook for you.” I glanced over at him.

“Oh yeah?” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “What can you cook?”

“All kinds of things.”

“Like?”

“Why does it matter?” I narrowed my eye at him.

“Why won’t you tell me?”

“Why do you care?”

“Why do we keep answering each other with questions?” A smirk crossed his lips.

“I don’t know.” I laughed as I leaned up against the island.

He took a few steps closer to me and placed his hands firmly on the granite top. His face was mere inches from mine

as I took in his scent.

“Maybe we should stop talking.” His eyes diverted to my lips.

His look and the way he leaned over me made my body tremble. This man didn't even have to touch me to send my body into a fiery rage. Tucking my fingers around the bottom of his shirt, I pulled it up, and he lifted his arms.

“Maybe we should.”

CHAPTER 24



Sebastian

I knew the moment I asked her to come over for dinner, she wouldn't be leaving without me burying myself inside her again. As hard as I tried to stay away, I couldn't. Every time I saw her, my cock reminded me of how good it felt to be buried deep inside her and how the softness of her skin felt against mine.

As I brought my mouth to hers, our lips locked, and I lifted her on the island and pulled her shirt over her head. Unclasping her bra with one hand, I slid it off her and tossed it on the floor. The look and feel of her soft breasts against my hand sent pleasure through me, and the way her nipples hardened between my fingers aroused me even more than I already was.

I suddenly stopped and looked at her.

"I'm sorry. I'll be right back." I kissed her lips.

Walking over to the sliding door, I locked it and pulled the blinds over, ensuring they were closed tight so nobody could see inside. I wasn't taking any chances that one of my brothers or even Lily would walk in.

"Now, where were we?" I smiled as I took down her pants and panties while I stared into her beautiful eyes.



er back laid across the island as I held her arms above her head with the grip of my hand, while I thrust in and out of her as my other hand groped her breast. Just watching the expression on her face and the sounds of her pleasurable moans made my cock pulsate and ready to explode. She'd already orgasmed twice, and a third one was coming. Her body tightened, as did mine, while my moans gave way to the gratification of coming inside her. When I was finished, I let go of her wrists, and she brought her hands to my chest as we held our gaze. My heart was beating out of my chest as I leaned down and brought my lips to hers. Pulling out, I took her hands and helped her up. Picking up her panties from the floor, I slid them on her and helped her from the counter.

“Thanks.” She smiled as she reached for her bra and shirt.

“You’re welcome.”

After we both were fully dressed, I walked her back to her house.

“Thank you for dinner. It was delicious.”

“It was my pleasure.” The back of my hand stroked her cheek. “Enjoy the rest of your evening.” I leaned in and brushed my lips against hers.

“You too, Sebastian.”

Tucking my hands in my pockets, I turned, and as I was heading back to my house, Simon pulled up in his driveway.

“What are you doing?” He shouted as he climbed out of his car.

“Nothing.”

“Bullshit. Get your ass over here.” He gestured with his head.

Letting out a sigh, I walked over and followed him inside the house.

“You just left Emilia’s, didn’t you?”

“I walked her home. We had dinner together since her kitchen is all torn up.”

“You fucked her again. I can tell.” He smirked as he opened the refrigerator and grabbed a couple of beers.

“And?” I removed the cap and tossed it at him.

“I thought you were going to practice the art of staying away from her?”

“I was—I am. It just happened.”

“Uh-huh.” He brought the bottle up to his lips as his eye steadily narrowed at me.

“How is this any different than you fucking Jenni? At least Emilia isn’t semi-related to us.”

“Jenni is not related to us.” He pointed at me. “Besides, we both know there’s nothing between us. It’s just pure, fun, casual sex.”

“That’s all it is between Emilia and me. Why can’t you grasp that?”

“Because you’re lying to yourself, brother. Anyway, I’m not discussing this anymore with you. If you want to bang her 24/7, be my guest. But don’t say I didn’t warn you when shit hits the fan and you’re stuck with her living next door.”

“Yeah. Yeah.” I sighed. “Since we’re not talking about it anymore, Dad looked over the papers for the building.”

“What did he say?”

“He said everything looks good. So, I’m moving forward. Starting tomorrow, I’m beginning the process for Four Kinds II.”

“Good. I’m here to help you with anything you need.”

“I know.” I placed my hand on his shoulder. “I appreciate it. Thanks for the beer, but I need to get home.”

As I walked back to my house, I stopped before opening the sliding door for I could hear Emilia playing the piano through her opened window. It was a classical tune, Beethoven

perhaps, but I wasn't exactly sure. What I did know was that it put a smile on my face. Instead of going inside, I sat down on one of the loungers, placed my hands behind my head, and listened.

"What are you doing?" Stefan asked as he walked over.

"Shh." I brought my finger up to my lips.

"Is that—"

"Yes. Sit down and be quiet."

"Damn, bro. I had no idea she could play like that."

"I told you she could." I glanced over at him.

"I know, but I didn't think like that. Shit."

The music stopped, and when I glanced over, her living room light turned off.

"How did dinner go tonight?" Stefan asked.

"It went well. She enjoyed it."

"Listen, brother, you can talk to Sam and me. Forget Simon because he doesn't understand. But we do."

"Talk about what?"

"You know what. You and Emilia."

"There's nothing to talk about." My brows furrowed.
"We're friends, and that's it."

"Okay. I suppose you're not ready. I get that." He stood up.
"I'll talk to you tomorrow." He held out his fist.

"Tomorrow, bro." I fist-bumped him.

CHAPTER 25



Emilia

It was ten o'clock when I grabbed my laptop and climbed into bed to get caught up on some of the notes for my patients. As I was typing, a Facetime call was coming through from Lydia.

"Why are you up?" I frowned when she appeared on my computer screen.

"Lorenzo is on a business trip for a couple of days, and you know I can't sleep when he's not here." She pouted. "How are you?"

"I'm good." I gave a sly smile.

She sat there in bed with her hair pulled up into a high ponytail and narrowed her eyes at me.

"Something's different with you. How's your sexy new neighbor?"

"He's good."

"I knew it! You slept with him. I can tell because you blushed when I asked you about him!"

"Maybe." I chewed on my bottom lip.

"Halleluiah. Thank the lord. My sister is back!"

"Stop that!" I laughed.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Her tone became irritated.

“I was going to, but I’ve been busy. Listen, Lydia, I have so much going on in my head, even the piano isn’t quieting things down.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I think I need to talk to a therapist.”

“Again, thank the lord! Sweetie, we’ve been telling you that for the past year, and you refused.”

“I know, but now that I let my guard down and let Sebastian inside, I’m scared. Like, really scared.”

“Scared of what, Em?”

“Scared of not being able to trust him, scared of sabotaging happiness, and scared of letting him in even more. He only broke through half of my shield. One side is still completely up, and I’m not sure if it will ever come down.”

“Em, listen to me. Damien is an asshole, and that’s me being nice. He did you a favor by not showing up. You need to realize that. I hate him so much. Trust me. Because of him, you moved across the country. But a part of me is happy he did what he did.”

“How can you say that, Lydia?”

“Because he saved you from years of agony. If he hadn’t left you, you would have married a man who wasn’t ready or in real love with you. Then what? He would have felt trapped, probably cheated, or the two of you would have grown apart and fought like cats and dogs. One year of you being miserable is better than multiple years of it. Because that’s exactly what would have happened if he ignored how he felt and married you anyway.”

I wasn’t sure how to take what she had just said. A part of me was pissed off, and the other was just — pissed off.

“Yeah. Maybe you’re right.” I agreed with her because it was late, and I wasn’t getting into it.

“Go to therapy, Em. It sounds like you really like this Sebastian guy, and I’d hate to see you ruin your chance at happiness because you can’t get over Damien.”

“Get some sleep, Lydia. I’ll talk to you soon.”

“Wait, before we hang up. Have you talked to Mom or Dad?”

“No. Why?”

“They’re coming back to New York.”

“For how long?”

“For good.”

“Wait a minute. Why?”

“I guess Dad has everything under control at the Paris office, and they miss the kids. Mom said they’ll still have to fly to Paris here and there, but only for a week or two at a time.”

“When did they tell you this?” I asked.

“Three days ago.”

“That’s great. Give the girls my love and a big hug from me.”

“I will, sis. Sweet dreams.”

“Sweet dreams, Lydia.”

I ended the call and sat there staring at my screen for a moment. I couldn’t believe my mom or dad didn’t tell me. I guess it didn’t matter if they told me since I wasn’t living in New York anymore. Tears started to sting my eyes because suddenly, I felt so alone. I’d left my life and my family behind because of Damien. His life wasn’t disrupted in the least, and that pissed me off. Wiping my eyes, I set my laptop on the floor, turned off the light, and went to sleep.

The following day, I woke up at six a.m. after tossing and turning the entire night. It was three o’clock in the afternoon in Paris, so I decided to call my father. After the fourth ring, he answered.

“Hello, sweetheart. I’m in a meeting. Is it important?”

“No, Dad. We can talk another time.”

“Okay. I’m sorry. We’ll chat soon.”

Click.

Taking in a deep breath, I called my mom.

“Bonjour, Emilia. How are you, darling?”

“I’m okay, Mom. I talked to Lydia last night. Why didn’t you tell me you and Dad are moving back to New York for good?”

“Darling, I was going to tell you. I just hadn’t had a chance yet. With your busy schedule, it’s hard to get a hold of you.”

“No, it’s not, Mom.” My voice was irritated. “You could have sent me a text message, or hell, even an email.”

“Emilia, I have no idea why you are getting so upset.”

“I’m upset because you didn’t tell me! Just because I moved to California doesn’t mean I’m not a part of this family anymore!”

“I honestly have no idea where all of this is coming from. Your father and I were going to tell you.”

“When? When you were already back in New York? You know what, Mom, that’s great you and Dad are moving back. I have to go. I need to go for a run before I get ready for work.”

“Emilia, don’t you dare—”

“Bye, Mom.”

Click.

After pulling on a pair of black Capri leggings and throwing on a Columbia sweatshirt, I pulled my hair up in a ponytail, slipped on my running shoes, grabbed my air pods, and headed out the door. I ran two miles. It was all I had time for since I had to shower and get ready for work. I could have kept running. God knows I wanted to. As I came up the beach, I saw Sebastian and Simon coming out of the water with their surfboards, so I ran over to them.

“Good morning.” Sebastian smiled.

“Morning, Emilia.”

“Morning. Listen, can I grab a cup of coffee from you?” I asked Sebastian.

“Of course. Come on. I’ll talk to you later, bro,” he said to Simon before we walked away.

“Thanks. I appreciate it. I have to run to the store later and buy another Keurig to get me through this kitchen remodel.”

“Go inside and make yourself a cup. The to-go cups are up in the cabinet,” he said as he began to take off his wetsuit on the patio.

Stepping inside the kitchen, I grabbed a to-go cup and brewed a cup of coffee.

“Are you okay?” Sebastian asked when he stepped inside.

“I’m fine.” I let out a sigh. “Actually, I’m pissed off.”

“What could possibly have you pissed off this early in the morning?” A smirk crossed his lips as he reached up into the cabinet and pulled down a mug.

“I talked to my sister last night, and she told me that my parents are permanently moving back to New York.”

“And you’re pissed off about that?”

“I’m pissed off because my parents didn’t tell me. It’s like I don’t even exist since I moved away.”

“You know that’s not true.”

“I don’t know, Sebastian. Thanks for the coffee. I have to go get ready for work.”

As I began to walk away, he reached out and grabbed hold of my hand.

“I think you’re feeling homesick.”

“Maybe I am.” I looked down.

He let go of my hand, stood in front of me, and lifted my chin with his finger.

“Don’t let it bother you. You’re exactly where you’re supposed to be.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

I gave him a small smile as he leaned in and softly brushed his lips against mine.

“Now go and have a great day.”

“I’ll try. That also goes for you.” My lips formed a small smile.

“My day is already great.”

CHAPTER 26



Sebastian

I'd spent half the day putting together my business plan and filling out the necessary paperwork for the permits I needed. As I was on my way to the county building, I got a phone call from Marco.

"Hey, Marco. What's up?"

"Hey, Sebastian. I hate to do this to you, but I need the rest of the day off. My mother just called, and my father had a heart attack this morning, and he's in surgery right now. I need to get to the hospital."

"God, Marco. I'm sorry. Of course, you can have the day off. I'm on my way to the county building to get the paperwork filed for the new restaurant, and then I'll be in. Have Lucinda take over until I get there."

"Thanks, boss. I appreciate it."

"No problem. I'll keep your dad in my prayers. Keep me posted, and don't worry about the restaurant. Take as much time as you need."

"Thanks. I'll talk to you soon."

After filing the necessary paperwork, I headed to the restaurant and went straight to the kitchen.

"How's it going, Lucinda?" I asked as I walked over to her.

"It's good, boss. We got this."

“I knew you would.” I placed my hand on her shoulder. “Listen up, everyone. We have a full house tonight and a party of twenty coming in. I’ll handle the cooking for the party while the rest of you take care of the orders for the other patrons. Since Marco isn’t here, Lucinda is in charge tonight, so you follow her orders. Understand?”

“Yes, boss.”

“Good. You know I love you guys. So, let’s get cooking.” I clapped my hands together.

I had the best kitchen staff any restaurant owner could ask for. I only hired the best, and it wouldn’t be any different for the second restaurant. We were one big family, and they knew they could count on me to take care of them.



Emilia

I grabbed the chart before walking into the room and smiled when I saw the name at the top. Opening the door, I stepped inside.

“Alex.” I grinned.

“Hi, Emilia.”

“Hey, Henry.” I walked over and patted his leg. “I see he’s here for his shots and a well visit.”

“Yeah. I decided to switch pediatricians.”

“I’m happy you did.” I grinned. “You can go ahead and lay him down on the table. You look just like your daddy,” I said in a playful voice as I placed the stethoscope on him. After checking him out and assessing him, I turned to Alex.

“He looks great, Alex, and he’s growing right on schedule. How is he sleeping?”

“He’s waking up every three to four hours at night to eat.”

“Not bad. He should start sleeping in longer stretches.”

“God, I hope so.”

“How are you doing? Any signs of post-partum depression?”

“No. None at all. I’m doing really good.” She smiled.

“And you’re getting the help you need at home?”

“Definitely. Stefan is an amazing father, and Lily helps a lot. She’s a wonderful big sister.”

“Good. Support is very important.”

“If you’re not busy tomorrow night, we’d love to have you over for dinner. I would have you over tonight, but I’m working.”

“I’d love to. Thank you.” I hugged her. “I’ll send the nurse in to give Henry his shots, and then you’re all set.”

“Emilia,” Renata, my office manager, stepped inside my office.

“Hey, Renata.”

“Don’t forget tonight is the going away party for Doctor Reynolds.”

“Ugh. I totally forgot.” I placed my hand on my head. “What time?”

“Seven o’clock at Four Kinds in Venice Beach. It’s one of Dr. Reynold’s favorite restaurants.”

“Yes. Excellent place. Thank you for reminding me.”

“You’re welcome.” She smiled.

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I saw a text message from my dad.

“Sweetheart, your mother told me you were upset we didn’t tell you about our move. I’m sorry, but we were going to tell you. Call me when you get a chance.”

I rolled my eyes and set my phone on my desk. Pulling out Dr. Strong’s card Julia gave me; I dialed her number and was surprised when she answered.

“Dr. Strong, here.”

“Uh, hi, Dr. Strong. This is Dr. Emilia Gallo. I work in the pediatrician’s office one floor up.”

“Hi, Dr. Gallo. What can I do for you?”

“I was calling to schedule an appointment. You came highly recommended by Julia Kind. I honestly wasn’t expecting you to answer the phone.”

“I normally don’t, but my receptionist and two other employees called in sick today. Let me look at my schedule and see when I can fit you in. What time do you start work?”

“I’m in the office before nine o’clock.”

“If you’d like, I can see you tomorrow morning at seven-thirty.”

“That would be great. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I look forward to meeting you, Dr. Gallo.”



I had wondered all day if Sebastian was working tonight, so after I saw my last patient, I sent him a text message.

“Hi. Are you working tonight?”

“Hi, beautiful. I am working tonight. Why?”

“Then I’ll see you. We’re having a going away party for Dr. Reynolds.”

“Excellent. I didn’t know the party was for him. I’ll make sure it’s extra special. I’ll see you soon.”

“See you soon.”

Looking at my watch, I had enough time to run home, change my clothes, and freshen up before heading to the restaurant. When I pulled into my driveway and climbed out of my car, Lily came running over.

“Hi, Emilia.”

“Hi, Lily.” I smiled. “What’s up, kiddo?”

“Can I come over and see your piano?”

“You sure can. I have to change and freshen up for a dinner that I have to go to, but you can come on in if you want.”

“Thanks.” A big smile graced her pretty face. “I have to let my dad know. My mom just left for work.”

“I’ll text him and let him know. Come on.” I patted her on the head.

Once we stepped inside, I set my purse down and pulled out my phone.

“Hey. I just wanted to let you know that Lily is over at my house. She wanted to check out my piano. I’ll send her home before I leave for dinner.”

“Thanks, Emilia. If she’s any trouble, kick her out.”

“She won’t be.”

“Wow. This is so nice,” Lily said as she sat down on the bench.

“Go ahead and press the keys. I need to go get changed.”

“Okay.” She smiled.

I pulled a casual black tunic dress from my closet, slipped into it, and went into the bathroom to fix my hair and freshen my makeup. As the curling iron was heating up, I touched up my makeup and took my hair down from the ponytail it had been in all day. After brushing it out and putting in a few loose curls, I set it with a touch of hairspray, grabbed my tall boots from the closet, and headed downstairs.

“You look so pretty, Emilia!”

“Thank you, Lily. How do you like the piano?”

“I love it. Can you play something for me?”

“Aw, sweetie. I can’t right now. I have to get to a dinner party. But I’ll tell you what. Your mom invited me over for

dinner tomorrow night. After we eat, you can come back here, and I'll play for you. Deal?"

"Deal!" She grinned.

"Good. I need to send you home now because I have to go."

"Okay. Have fun at your dinner party. Thank you for letting me play your piano."

"You're welcome." I smiled as I hugged her.

CHAPTER 27



Sebastian

I walked into the room where the party was being held, introduced myself to the guests, and presented them with a bottle of champagne on the house. Scanning the room, I didn't see Emilia until I turned around to head back to the kitchen. She stood in the entranceway of the room, and I'd nearly lost my breath.

"Wow. You look amazing."

"Thank you." Her lips gave way to a bashful smile.

"Emilia, come sit down." A woman walked over and took her hand.

"I'll talk to you later, Sebastian."

"Stick around for a while after the party," I said.

"I will."

It was after nine when everyone from the party had left. Walking over to the bar, I saw Emilia sitting on a stool talking to Alex.

"How was dinner?" I asked as I placed my hand on her back.

"It was wonderful as always." The corners of her mouth curved upward. "I think I'm going to head home now. It's been a long day."

"Okay. I'll walk you to your car."

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Alex. Thanks for the martini. It was delicious.”

“You’re welcome. See you tomorrow.”

“Is there anything I can bring?”

“Just yourself.” She grinned.

When Emilia stood up from the stool and grabbed her purse, my hand gravitated to the small of her back as we walked out of the restaurant.

“Are you okay to drive home?” I asked as we stood by her car.

“I’m fine. I had one glass of champagne and one martini.”

“Okay. Just be careful. What’s going on with Alex tomorrow?”

“She invited me over for dinner.”

“Ah. That’s nice. As long as Stefan doesn’t cook, you’ll be fine.” I smirked, and a soft laugh erupted from her.

I leaned in and brushed my lips against hers. Within seconds, we were locked in a passionate kiss.

“I better go,” she said.

“Yeah. Me too.” I swallowed hard. “If you want a cup of coffee in the morning, just come over and make one. The sliding door will be unlocked.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

She climbed into her car, and I shut the door. As she was pulling away, I lifted my hand and waved goodbye.

By the time I arrived home, it was eleven-thirty. After I climbed out of my car, I shut the door and dropped my keys in the driveway.

“I thought you were a quiet neighbor,” I heard Emilia’s voice as she pushed up one of the bedroom windows that faced my driveway.

“Why aren’t you sleeping?” I asked with a smile.

“I’ve been asking myself that same question.”

“Is there anything I can do to help you sleep?”

“Maybe.”

“Let me run into the house for a minute, and I’ll be right over.”

“I’ll unlock the door. Just come upstairs.”

A wide grin crossed my face. She wanted me to fuck her as badly as I wanted to. After changing into a pair of sweatpants, I walked over to her house, opened the door, and locked it behind me. Once I reached the top of the stairs, I entered her bedroom and heard her speak, “what took you so long?”

“I promise it’ll be worth the wait,” I said as I took down my sweatpants, lifted the covers, and climbed in next to her.

She was completely naked, and I was already hard. Our mouths met as my hand explored her beautiful body, rubbing and teasing her down below as the warm wetness poured from her. I wanted her to come, and I wouldn’t stop until she did. Pleasurable moans escaped her lips as I hit the sweet spot inside her while my thumb stimulated her clit. Her body tightened as I felt the vibrations of her orgasm. She pushed me on my back and climbed on top, grinding her hips and riding my cock like it’s never been ridden before. My hands played with her breasts, and my fingers tugged at her hardened peaks. She moved back and forth fast, causing our moans to heighten. The buildup was coming, and the need to erupt inside her was near.

“Come with me,” I breathlessly spoke as I gripped her hips. “Ah,” I moaned. “That’s it, baby. That’s it.”

The tightening around my cock sent it to explode as I held her hips down and strained to push out every milky drop inside her.

Her body collapsed on mine, and I felt the rapid beating of her heart against my chest. Wrapping my arms tightly around her, we lay there for a moment, still and out of breath while I buried my face in her soft hair.

Climbing off me, she laid on her back and placed her arm across her forehead as she still tried to regain her breath. With the slight turn of her head, I could see a smile across her lips as the light of the moon filtered through the sheer curtains.

“Will you stay?” she asked in a soft voice.

“I wasn’t planning on leaving.” I held out my arm, and she snuggled against me.

“I need to get up earlier than usual. I have a seven-thirty appointment,” she spoke as her finger softly stroked my chest.

“I need to get up early myself. I have a delivery truck coming to the restaurant at seven-thirty.”

“I have my alarm set for five forty-five. Is that good for you?”

“It’s perfect.” I kissed the top of her head.

CHAPTER 28



Emilia

When my alarm went off, I didn't want to move, for his arm tucked securely around me felt good. Reaching over, I shut off the alarm and turned to face him.

"Good morning." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

"Good morning. Is it bad that I don't want to leave this bed?"

"If it is, then we're both bad because I don't want to leave it either."

"Unfortunately, we don't have a choice. I'm going to head home and shower. I'll make you a cup of coffee and bring it by before I head out."

"Thanks." I grinned as I leaned in and kissed his lips.

Climbing in the shower, I let the hot water run down me as I thought about last night. Inviting my hot neighbor over for a booty call wasn't me. But the kiss last night in the parking lot of his restaurant left me craving more of him. I was letting my guard down, and I swore I would never do that. But he made it so easy with his kind, sweet, and caring ways. He was beginning to feel like home, and it scared the hell out of me.

Sebastian walked into the bathroom holding a to-go cup as I finished brushing my hair.

"One freshly brewed cup of joe for the beautiful lady." The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Thank you. I need this.” I took the cup from his hand and held it up.

“I need to get going,” he said.

“Okay. Have a good day.” I reached up and kissed his lips.

“You too.”



When I stepped into Dr. Strong’s office at seven twenty-five, she emerged from her office and greeted me.

“Dr. Emilia Gallo, it’s nice to meet you.” She extended her hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Dr. Strong.”

“Come in and have a seat. Can I get you a cup of coffee or some water?”

“I’m good, thanks.” I smiled as I took a seat on the dark brown leather couch.

“Here is some paperwork I need you to fill out, but you don’t have to do it right now. You can bring it back to me later.” She took a seat in the chair across from the couch and crossed her legs while holding a notepad and pen in her hands. “So, what brings you in today?”

I told her about Damien, my move to California, and all about Sebastian.

“The fact that you opened up to Sebastian and told him what happened to you is a start. That’s an indication that you’re learning to trust someone again. But I feel your issues are with your own self-trust, and that is why you won’t let your shield come down completely.”

“I don’t think I understand what you mean?”

“You’re walking the fine line of not being able to trust someone and not being able to trust yourself to find a man who’s going to love you like you deserve to be loved. You’re

afraid you're going to make the same mistake you did with Damien."

I had never looked at it that way before, but she was right. I didn't trust myself to find someone who wouldn't hurt me the way Damien did.

"Our time is almost up." Dr. Strong looked at the clock on the wall. "I want to continue seeing you at least once a week. We have a lot to work on still. But don't worry." She smiled. "We'll get your trust back so you can enjoy the relationship you were always meant to have."

I left Dr. Strong's office feeling good. For the first time in over a year, I felt hopeful. Maybe I should have gone to therapy sooner, but I wasn't ready, and I was determined to keep men out of my life until I met Sebastian.



As I was changing into something more casual, my phone rang, and when I grabbed it from the bed, I saw my mom was calling.

"Hey, Mom."

"Hello, darling. I wanted to let you know that your father and I just landed in New York. I didn't want you to think we were keeping you out of the loop."

I rolled my eyes.

"That's great, Mom. Thanks for letting me know."

"After we get settled, we're going to come to visit you."

"Okay. But you'll have to wait until my kitchen is finished. Right now, I don't have one at all."

"And when will that be?"

"Hopefully in about a week."

"You let us know when it's done, and we'll be on a plane out there. We miss you, darling."

“I miss you too, Mom.”

“I have to go. The car just pulled up. We’ll chat soon. Love you, Emme.”

“Love you too, Mom. Tell Dad I said hi.”

I ended the call and let out a sigh as I tossed my phone on the bed and finished getting ready to head to Alex’s house for dinner.

“Hi there, Henry.” I smiled as I picked him up from his bouncy seat. “If you ever need a babysitter, just let me know.”

“Really?” Alex smiled.

“Of course. I love kids, and I’d be happy to keep an eye on this little guy and Lily if you and Stefan want an evening alone.”

“That is so sweet of you. Thanks. I might just take you up on that.”

As she prepared dinner and we talked, we heard Lily scream from outside.

“Oh my God!” Alex spoke as we both went running out the front door and found Lily lying on the sidewalk crying and holding her arm.

“Lily, what happened?” Alex exclaimed.

“Lily, don’t move,” I said as I handed Henry to Alex. “What happened, sweetie?”

“I tripped over my rollerblades,” she cried. “It hurts.”

“Your arm?” I asked as I carefully looked at it.

“Yes.”

Simon pulled up in his driveway and ran over.

“What happened?”

“Alex, I’m pretty sure her arm is broken. You need to get her to the ER.”

“We can take her in my car,” Simon said. “We’ll get there faster.”

“You’re such a brave girl, and you’re going to be okay.”

Simon carefully picked her up and carried her over to his car.

“Oh my God. I can’t believe this. I have to call Stefan,” Alex said.

“You can call him on the way to the hospital. I’ll watch Henry.” I took him from her.

“Thank you, Emilia. Thank you so much. Oh my God, dinner.”

“Don’t worry about dinner. I’ll take care of it. Just go and be with Lily.” I placed my hand on her arm.

As soon as Alex climbed in the back of Simon’s car, he backed out of the driveway and turned his siren on. Taking Henry back in the house, I set him in his bouncy seat and checked on dinner. The chicken pot pie she made looked done, so I took it out of the oven. Henry started to cry, and when I walked over to him, I knew why.

“You are one stinky little boy.” I smiled as I picked him up and found his diaper exploded all over his sleeper.

Taking him upstairs, I changed his diaper and his sleeper. As I was walking down the stairs holding him, Sebastian walked in.

“Hey.”

“Oh, hi.” I smiled.

“Where’s Alex? I brought the bread from the restaurant she asked for.”

“Alex is on her way to the ER with Lily.”

“Why? What happened?”

“She fell while rollerblading, and I’m ninety-nine percent sure she broke her arm.”

“Oh no. Poor kid.”

“I told Alex I would watch Henry for her. In fact, can you take him while I clean up the kitchen?”

“Sure. Come here, buddy.”

I kept stealing small glances as he walked Henry around the kitchen and talked to him. I didn't think he could be any sexier than he already was. Boy, was I wrong.

CHAPTER 29



Sebastian

Emilia kept glancing at me with a smirk across her lips as I held Henry.

“What?” I smiled.

“You look like a natural with a baby.”

“I helped Stefan out a lot with Lily when she was a baby. So, I know a thing or two.”

“Just by the little bit I’m seeing here, you’re going to make a great dad someday.”

“Kids aren’t part of my plan, and I’m happy with my nieces and nephews.”

“You never intend on having children or a family?”

“No. Remember we talked about it before, and I told you I like to keep things casual. Plus, I have a family.”

“I know you have a family.” Her eye narrowed at me as the corners of her mouth slightly curved up. “But—you know what? Forget it.”

As I sat there, I couldn’t help but wonder if she was feeling me out for her own sake.

“But what, Emilia?”

“Nothing, Sebastian.” She turned away from me and began cleaning the sink.

Getting up from my chair with Henry in my arms, I walked over to her.

“Finish what you started to say.”

“It’s no big deal. I was just going to say that the family you have won’t always be there.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. My brothers will always be there for me no matter what. There are no guarantees when you venture off to make your own family. There’s divorce and all sorts of things where one person can just walk away. The family I have is solid, and that’s how it’ll always be. I mean, look at what happened to you. Shit. I shouldn’t have said that.”

Before she could say anything, Alex, Stefan, and Lily walked in.

“Uncle Sebastian, Emilia, look!” She held out her arm.

“Wow. Hot pink. You are too cool, your highness.” I smiled. “How are you? Are you in pain?”

“A little bit. The doctor gave me some medicine for it.”

“I’m sorry that happened to you.” Emilia pouted.

“It’s okay. I’m a big girl, and I can handle it. Do you like the color of my cast?”

“I love it.” Emilia smiled as she tapped her on the nose.

“You won’t be able to teach me to play the piano, though.” Lily lowered her head.

“As soon as that cast comes off, I’ll teach you. I promise.”

“Thank you for everything, Emilia.” Alex walked over and hugged her.

“You’re welcome. I’m going to get going. If you need anything, call me.”

“Thanks, Emilia,” Stefan said.

“No problem, Stefan.”

“I’ll walk you to the door,” I said as I handed Henry over to Alex.

“I can manage to get to the door myself.” Her eye narrowed at me.

As soon as she walked out, Stefan and Alex looked at me.

“What was that all about?” Stefan asked.

“I said something I shouldn’t have.” I sighed.

“Not surprised. You are Stefan’s brother,” Alex smirked. “I’m going to take Henry upstairs and feed him. Thank you, Sebastian.” She reached up and kissed my cheek. “Whatever you said to her, you better make it right.” Her brow arched before she walked away.

Stefan opened the refrigerator and grabbed four beers.

“Come on, let’s go out on the patio,” he said.

The moment we sat down, Sam and Simon walked over.

“Just in time,” Stefan said as he handed our brothers a bottle of beer. “It seems our brother over here said something he shouldn’t have to Emilia, and she left all pissed off.”

“What did you say, bro?” Sam asked as he took a seat next to me.

“We were talking about kids, and she asked if I wanted a family. I told her no and that I already had one.”

“And here we go,” Simon said as he brought the bottle up to his lips.

“Shut up, douchebag. Anyway, I told her that there are no guarantees when you venture out to make your own family. Then I told her to look at what happened to her with her fiancé.”

“Ah, shit. You did not,” Stefan said as he reached over and smacked my arm.

“I did. It just slipped out.”

“So, was she trying to figure out if the two of you are more than just sex friends?” Simon asked.

“Yeah. I think she was feeling me out, to be honest.”

“You said a stupid and hurtful thing.” Sam pointed at me.

“I know. I’ll go over there after I finish this beer and apologize.”

“Your logic is bullshit, bro,” Stefan said.

“I agree.” Sam took a sip of his beer.

“Really?” Simon cocked his head at them. “You once felt the same exact way. So don’t sit there and say that shit. But seriously, Sebastian, that was rude.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I know.” I sighed as I finished off my beer. “I’m going over there right now.” I stood up from my chair. “I’ll talk to you guys later.”

I walked over to Emilia’s and knocked on the door. She didn’t answer, so I knocked again. Pulling my phone from my pocket, I sent her a text message.

“I’m at your door.”

“In the bathtub.”

“Will you text me when you’re out?”

“Sure.”

Placing my phone back in my pocket, I went back to Stefan’s.

“That was fast,” Sam said.

“Did she slam the door in your face?” Simon laughed.

“She didn’t answer. I texted her, and she said she was in the bathtub. I told her to text me when she’s out.”

“That’s girl code for fuck off,” Stefan smirked.

“Definitely.” Sam chuckled.

I glanced over at Simon, who sat there staring at me with an arch in his brow, shaking his head.

CHAPTER 30



Emilia

I sat on the stairs with my phone in my hand and waited for him to leave. He took the one thing he knew hurt me the most and threw it in my face. Getting up from the stairs, I walked over to the couch and sat down. The perfect guy list that Jenni had given me was sitting on the coffee table. Staring at the few qualities I had already written down, I crumbled up the paper and threw it across the room.

The ringing sound of my phone jolted me out of my thoughts, and when I picked it up, I saw it was my answering service. A new and concerned mom had a couple of questions, so I called her and put her mind at ease. After I ended the call, my phone pinged with a text message from Sebastian.

“You’re going to turn into a prune if you stay in there any longer.”

I didn’t intend to text him after I said I would, and I sure as shit wasn’t replying to him now. He knew I was upset, and he probably wanted to apologize. But I didn’t want to see or speak to him anymore tonight.



Sebastian

I’d waited all night for her to text me, and she didn’t. She was definitely pissed, and as far as I was concerned, if she didn’t want to talk to me, so be it. I wasn’t

the type of guy to chase a woman down and beg for forgiveness. I was a busy man, and I didn't have time for games.

I promised Lily, I would make her the egg bake she loved so much for breakfast. After all, the poor kid broke her arm and needed some comfort food. After taking it from the oven, I walked the dish over to Stefan's.

"Morning, bro," he said when I walked in.

"Is Lily up?" I asked as I looked around and didn't see her.

"She's still sleeping. Alex thought it was best if she stayed home from school today.

"Morning, Sebastian." Alex smiled when she walked into the kitchen holding Henry. "Lily just woke up and asked if you brought her breakfast over yet."

"Fresh from the oven."

"You spoil her." Stefan reached into the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of orange juice. "Did you talk to Emilia last night?"

"No. She isn't texting me back."

He snickered.

"Whatever. She can be mad all she wants. I have a busy day today. Which, by the way, I'll be at the office around noon to go over the design for the new restaurant."

"Sounds good. Sam and I will be there. Since you're coming, can you bring lunch?"

"Uncle Sebastian!" Lily walked over, and I hugged her.

"Good morning. How's the arm?"

"It hurts." She pouted.

"It'll feel better soon, kiddo." I patted her head. "Go sit down, and I'll get your breakfast."

Reaching up into the cabinet, I pulled down a plate.

"So, about lunch?"

I sighed as I looked over at my brother, who was leaning up against the island with a glass of orange juice in his hand.

“Have I ever not brought you some kind of food when you ask?”

“Just making sure, bro.” He placed his hand on my shoulder before giving Alex, Lily, and Henry a kiss goodbye.



Emilia

I was with a patient when I felt the vibration of my phone in my pocket. After I was done, I left the room and saw a missed call from Stefan. Walking into my office, I sat down behind my desk and called him back.

“Stefan Kind.”

“Stefan, it’s Emilia.”

“Hey, Emilia. I have great news. Your cabinets and granite countertops are in, so we can start rebuilding your kitchen tomorrow morning.”

“Oh my gosh, Stefan. That is great news.”

“I knew you’d be happy. Anyway, can you stop by the office? Sam and I just want to go over everything one last time. If you could come during your lunch, that would be even better. Just in case we need to make a change before tomorrow.”

“I can do that. I can be there between twelve and one. It depends when the last patient before lunch leaves.”

“Excellent. We’ll see you then.”

It was ten minutes after twelve, and I had just finished with the last patient before the office closed for lunch. Taking off my coat, I hung it up, grabbed my purse, and headed to see Sam and Stefan.

“Hey.” Stefan smiled as he got up from behind his desk. “Let’s go down to Sam’s office. He has the designs.”

Walking down to Sam's office, Stefan opened the door, and we stepped inside.

"Hi, Emilia." He smiled as he got up from his seat.

"Hi, Sam."

We walked over to the table where the design for my kitchen was spread out. As the three of us were going over it, the door opened, and Sebastian walked in carrying a large brown bag.

"Sorry, I'm—hey, Emilia."

"Hi." I looked back down at the table as an uncomfortable feeling settled inside me.

"We'll be done in a few, bro," Stefan said. "We're just going over the design before the crew starts her kitchen tomorrow."

"That's great. You must be happy?" he asked me.

"Everything looks perfect," I said to Sam and Stefan.

"Great. Then we're all set. Our crew will be at the house tomorrow morning at eight o'clock. When are the appliances coming?"

"Day after tomorrow."

"Perfect. Sebastian brought lunch. Why don't you join us?" Sam asked.

"I'm afraid I don't have time, but thanks for asking."

"Emilia, can I talk to you for a minute?" Sebastian asked.

"I need to get back to the office." I grabbed my purse and opened the door. "Thanks, Sam. Thanks, Stefan. I'll talk to you two later."

As I walked out, Sebastian followed behind.

"It'll just take a minute," he said as I pushed the button to the elevator.

"Fine. What?" I turned to him.

"You never texted me back last night."

“I was busy.”

“Listen, Emilia. I know you’re pissed off at me. All I want to do is apologize for the stupid thing I said. I’m sorry if I hurt you. That was never my intention.”

The doors to the elevator opened, and when I stepped inside, he placed his arm against the door to stop it from shutting.

“Okay. I accept your apology.”

“Thank you. How about dinner tonight?”

“I can’t. Maybe another time. I have to get back to the office.” I pointed to his arm that was holding the door.

“Yeah. Of course. Sorry. Another time then.”

I gave him a small smile as the door shut and the elevator took me down to the lobby. I couldn’t have dinner with him because I’d decided last night that it was best we kept our relationship strictly as neighbors.

CHAPTER 31



Sebastian

“Did the two of you arrange that?” I asked as I stepped back inside Sam’s office.

“No, bro. It was just a coincidence,” Stefan said.

“Yeah. Pure coincidence.” A smirk crossed Sam’s lips. “How did it go out there?”

“She said she accepted my apology, but I’m not sure she meant it. I asked her to have dinner with me tonight, and she said she can’t.”

“Maybe she’s busy,” Stefan spoke.

“Yeah, bro. She probably has plans.” Sam reached in the bag and took out the food.

“Something tells me she doesn’t have plans. Whatever. I don’t have time to deal with this shit. I apologized, and if she still wants to be mad, that’s on her. Let’s go over the designs while we eat.”

After I left their office, I headed to the restaurant. As hard as I tried to act tough in front of my brothers, it was bothering me about Emilia. By the tone of her voice, I could tell she only accepted my apology so I’d leave her alone.

I’d arrived home around seven-thirty p.m., and after pouring myself a drink, I took it out to the patio and narrowed my eye when I saw Emilia sitting down at the beach. Taking in a deep breath, I walked down and sat next to her.

“I hope you don’t mind.” I smiled.

“And if I said I do?”

“I’ll just ignore it and sit here anyway. Drink?” I held my glass out to her.

“No. Thanks.”

“I thought you had plans tonight.”

“I did. I had dinner with Renata after work.”

“I’m sorry, Emilia. I’m not sure if you were sincere when you said you accepted my apology. But I am truly sorry for what I said.”

She glanced over at me for a moment without saying a word.

“Even if that’s how you feel, it was still a shitty thing to say to me.”

“I know it was, and I truly didn’t mean for it to come out the way it did.”

“I think I believe you.” Her lips formed a small smile. “May I?” She pointed to my glass.

“Of course.” I handed it to her.



Emilia

My body trembled as he thrust in and out of me. I had no intentions of sleeping with him again, but it happened, and I let it. From the moment he placed his hand on mine down at the beach, I knew I was done for. I couldn’t escape the fact that I had feelings for him. Feelings I never intended on having for anyone again. But the feelings were there, and I was screwed. In the back of my mind, I knew the only thing he cared about was sex.

His body collapsed on top of mine and his fingers tangled through my hair as we tried to regain our breath. The feel of

his muscular arms cradling me as we lay there, felt good, and I didn't want him to let me go. So much for my promise to keep our relationship strictly neighbors.

He rolled his body off mine and held out his arm while I snuggled into him and laid my head on his chest.

"You might as well stay the night. That way, you can have a fresh cup of coffee in the morning," he said as his fingers stroked my arm.

"That sounds amazing."

"What does? Staying the night with me or the fresh cup of coffee in the morning?"

"The coffee."

"Wow." He chuckled. "Thanks."

"Spending the night is just a perk." I lifted my head and gave him a smirk.

"Is that so? Come to think of it. I do believe I ran out of coffee this morning."

"If that's the case, then there's no need for me to stay." I jokingly went to get up, and he grabbed me and pulled me back down.

"You're not going anywhere. You'll get your coffee in the morning along with something else." He gave me a sexy wink.

"Looking forward to it, Mr. Kind."

"I aim to please, Dr. Gallo."

The following day, I let out a moan as the sound of my alarm on my phone woke us up. Reaching over to the nightstand, I shut it off and set my phone back down.

"Dinner tonight?" Sebastian asked as I rolled over and laid my head on his chest.

"I have plans."

"Again?"

"I'm having dinner with Jenni."

“Okay. Do you think you can pencil me in at some point this week?”

I let out a laugh as I sat up and grabbed my clothes from the floor.

“You’re cute. We can have dinner tomorrow night.”

“Are you sure, Dr. Gallo? Maybe you should check your schedule in case you forgot about other plans you may have made.”

“I’m sure. Would you mind if I took a shower here?”

“Not at all. Be my guest. I’ll go make some coffee for us.”

I grabbed a towel and wrapped my hair up in it to avoid getting it wet. As the hot water hit the front of my body, I glanced over at the built-in shelf and noted all the products stored in it. Moroccan Oil Shampoo & Conditioner, an electric body groomer, Malin+Goetz Rum hand and body wash, a Sonicare Skin Cleansing Brush in black, a black loofah, and a deep facial cleansing wash by Elemis. Grabbing the loofah sponge, I pumped some rum hand and body wash on it and brought it up to my nose. It smelled of spices and just like him. Glancing around, I prayed there was a bar of soap somewhere. There wasn’t. So, I had no choice but to walk around all day smelling like a man.

“Here’s your coffee,” I heard his voice as he walked into the bathroom and set it by the sink.

“Do you have anything in here that doesn’t have a man’s smell?”

“No.” He chuckled. “Why would I?”

“Just asking.”

I turned the shower off, slightly opened the shower door, grabbed the towel that was hanging on the hook, and wrapped it around me before stepping out because I knew he was standing there watching me.

“Enjoy the show?” I asked as I stepped out.

“I did. Thank you for making my day.” He smiled.

He leaned over and pressed his nose against my neck.

“You smell like me.”

“You have quite a supply in your shower,” I smirked.

“You should see Sam’s shower. Ask Julia about it next time you talk to her.”

After putting on my clothes from yesterday, I finished my coffee and set the cup in the sink.

“I have to go and put on some makeup and fix my hair before I have to leave. Plus, the workers will be there soon. Thanks for the coffee.”

“You’re welcome. Thanks for last night.” He gripped my hips as a bright smile crossed his face.

“You’re welcome.”

“Have fun with Jenni tonight, and don’t forget to pencil me in on your busy schedule.”

“Very funny.” I scrunched my nose at him.

He leaned in and softly brushed his lips against mine.

“Have a good day.”

“You too.” I placed my hand on his chest before walking out the door.

CHAPTER 32



Emilia

“You smell like a man. Were you just with someone?” Jenni grinned as she hugged me.

“No.” I sighed as we both slid into the booth. “I took a shower at Sebastian’s this morning, and he didn’t have anything other than spice-smelling body wash.”

“Oh.” Her brow arched as a sly smile crossed her face. “How’s it going with Neighbor McHottie?”

“I don’t know.” I let out a sigh.

“Hello, ladies. My name is Mac, and I’ll be your server.” He smiled as he placed two drink napkins down in front of us.

“Well, hello there, Mac.” Jenni’s face lit up.

He gave her a playful wink and asked us for our drink order.

“I’ll have a Moscow mule,” I spoke.

“I’ll have the same, Mac.”

“Excellent. I’ll be back with your drinks.”

“He is one fine-looking waiter,” Jenny said as she watched him walk away.

“He is hot.” I grinned.

“Speaking of hot. Tell me what’s going on with the sexy Kind brother.”

“We got into a little argument the other night, and I wouldn’t talk to him for a day.”

“About?” Her brow arched.

“I commented on him looking like a natural holding Henry, and I asked him if he wanted kids. He said no, his nieces and nephews are all he needs, and he already has a family.”

“Sounds like a Kind brother.” She nodded her head. “Sam and Stefan were the same way. You’ve really fallen for him, haven’t you?”

“Yeah. I think I have. Even though every part of me fought like hell not to, I did anyway. The problem is I don’t think he feels the same way about me.”

“Why do you say that?”

Mac walked over, set our drinks down before us, and took our dinner order.

“Thank you, ladies. I’ll go put your order in now.” He gave us a wink.

“He really needs to stop with the winking, or I may have to take him home after dinner,” Jenny said, and I laughed. “Anyway, you were starting to say why you don’t think Sebastian feels the same way.”

“He’s not interested in getting into any type of relationship, except sex. He always has time for that.”

“Typical man.” She rolled her eyes. “Listen, you’re stuck in a situationship.”

“A what?”

“A situationship. Have you never heard of that?”

“No.” I laughed.

Mac walked over to check on us.

“Is there anything I can get you before your food comes?” he asked.

“Mac,” Jenni said, “have you ever heard of a situationship?”

“Yeah. Of course.”

“Can you please tell my friend here what that means?”

“It’s the new term for ‘friends with benefits.’ It’s a romantic arrangement without defining the relationship. So basically, it’s just a sexual relationship.”

“Well said, Mac. Thanks.” The corners of Jenni’s mouth curved upward in a flirty way.

“No problem.” He gave her another wink and walked away.

“A couple more winks and Mr. Mac is mine for tonight. Anyway, that’s what you’re in right now, a situationship. You can either stay in it, tell the sexy chef how you feel, or get out of it and stop having sex with him.”

“I want to stop, but I can’t,” I whined.

“I feel you, girl.” She sighed. “Every time I see Simon, BAM! We hit the sheets. But our situation is different. Besides friendship, I don’t have feelings for him, and he feels the same way. He’s a good friend—”

Mac walked over, and as he set our food down, Jenni finished what she was saying.

“But those Kind brothers have packages and moves that just keep you wanting more. Their junk is like crack. Am I right?”

I wanted to die when I saw the way Mac looked at her.

“What?” She lifted her shoulders and held out her hands as we both stared at her. “It’s the truth.”

“I’m assuming you’re talking about your boyfriend,” Mac spoke.

“Oh no, darling. I’m one hundred percent single.” A wide grin crossed her face.

“You look so familiar to me, but I can’t put my finger on it. I feel like we’ve met before. I swear that’s not a line. I mean it.”

“We’ve never met, but maybe you’ve seen my picture in many fashion magazines.”

“Oh my God, you’re a model. My girlfriend used to look through those fashion magazines all the time. Well, my ex-girlfriend. We broke up about two months ago.”

“I’m sorry.” Jenni placed her hand on his arm.

“No. Don’t be. She wasn’t a very nice person.”

“I’m a nice person.” Jenni grinned.

“I can tell you are. Maybe I can get your number and take you out sometime. Like, maybe Saturday night.”

“Let me ask you something, Mac. Is being a waiter your life dream?”

“No.” He chuckled. “This is only temporary until I graduate from the police academy.”

“Oh.” Her brows raised. “You’re going to be a cop?”

“Yeah. That’s always been my dream.”

“Well then, hand me your phone.” She held out her hand.

Jenni typed in her number and handed Mac his phone back.

“I look forward to hearing from you.”

“And I look forward to taking you out.” He winked before walking away.

“Am I to assume cops are your type?” I laughed.

“Nah. Not really. I’m more into corporate men. But I like me a sexy police officer now and again. They like to pretend their dick is their gun. Don’t tell Simon I said that.” She laughed.

I picked up my glass and held it up to her.

“May Mac’s gun be everything you’re hoping for.”

“And may you move up from your situationship with the sexy chef.” She tapped her glass against mine.

After eating, we moved to the bar and had a couple more Moscow mules.

“I don’t think I can drive home,” I said.

“Fuck. Me either. I’ll call Julia. No, wait. She’ll just yell at me. I’ll call Simon. He’ll get us. No questions asked.”

She pulled out her phone and called Simon.

“Hey, sexy detective. Can you spare a moment and pick up two women who had a little too much to drink? The Water Grill. See you soon. He’s on his way.”

“How did we drink so much?” I asked. “I didn’t even realize we were.”

“That’s because we were having too much fun. And since we’re waiting on our ride, we might as well have another.” She grinned.

“None for me. I’ve had enough, and I can’t be hungover in the morning while I’m examining kids.”

“True. All that screaming and shit. I have nowhere to be in the morning. Bartender, another Moscow mule.”

“Oh my God. How am I going to get to work tomorrow?”

“Ask the sexy chef to drive you to your car before work.”

“I hate to ask him. He’s already done so much for me.”

“Em, do you not fulfill his needs when he needs you to?” she asked in a serious tone.

“Yes.”

“Then he can fucking drive you to your car in the morning.”

“Hello, ladies.” I heard Simon’s voice from behind.

With the slight turn of my head, I saw Sebastian standing next to him with his hands tucked in his pants pockets.

“Oh yay. He brought the sexy chef with him. Bartender, can you put this in a to-go cup?” Jenni held up her glass.

“No, Jenni. You don’t need to take that home.” Simon took the glass from her.

“You’re such a party pooper, Simon.”

“I know.” He hooked his arm around her and helped her off the stool.

“Are you coming?” Sebastian smiled as he held out his hand to me.

“Yes.” I placed my hand in his, and he helped me up.

He held my hand to the car. Jenni climbed in the front with Simon, and Sebastian climbed in the back with me.

“Do you think Mac will call me?” Jenni turned her head and looked back at me.

“He will call you.”

“Who’s Mac?” Sebastian asked.

“Our waiter.”

“Ah.” He slowly nodded.

“Are you picking up random guys again?” Simon asked her.

“He’s not a random guy. He was our waiter, and he’s in the police academy.”

“For fuck’s sake, Jenni. Did you get his last name?”

“No.”

“Get it before you go out with him so I can run a background check on this guy.”

Simon pulled up to Jenni’s building, parked the car, and climbed out.

“It was fun, my friend.” Jenni grinned. “Let’s go out again soon.”

“Definitely. And next time, we’ll just get a car service to drive us.”

“Great idea!”

“Come on, Jenni. Let’s get you up to your apartment.”
Simon helped her out.

“Do you want to stay? You can stay?”

“Not tonight.” He shut the car door, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Sounds like you and Jenni had fun tonight,” Sebastian said.

“We did. I love her.”

He chuckled. “She’s quite a woman. For being Julia’s twin sister, they are total opposites.”

“Can you take me to get my car in the morning before I have to be at work?” I asked as I laid my head on his shoulder.

“Sure. I’ll drive you.”

“Thanks.”

Simon opened the door and climbed in.

“Is Jenni okay?” Sebastian asked.

“She’s fine. Nothing much-needed sleep won’t cure.”

Simon pulled up in my driveway, and Sebastian helped me from the car.

“Thank you, Simon.”

“You’re welcome, Emilia.” He smiled. “I’m happy you two called instead of trying to drive home.”

I handed Sebastian my keys so he could unlock the door. When we stepped inside, he held onto me as I went up the stairs.

“I’m fine,” I said.

“Just making sure you don’t trip and fall.”

CHAPTER 33



Sebastian

When Simon walked over to my house last night and told me we were picking up Jenni and Emilia because they were too drunk to drive, I laughed. After I'd brought her home and made sure she was safe and tucked in bed for the night, I headed home. I'd thought about staying with her because I was finding that I liked sleeping next to her, but I had some things to go over for the new restaurant. I had been working on something when Simon walked over and pulled me away.

I got up, showered, and made her a cup of coffee in a regular mug since I'd run out of to-go cups. When I walked over to her house, the work trucks were already parked along the curb.

"Hey," I said to Sam and Stefan when I stepped inside. "What are you two doing here?"

"The question is, what are you doing here?" Sam asked with a smirk.

"You shouldn't have." Stefan reached out to grab a cup of coffee, and I pulled it away from him.

"Bro, this is for Emilia."

"What are you talking about?" Sam asked. "She's already gone for the day. Didn't you notice her car isn't here?"

"Her car isn't here because Simon and I had to go pick up her and Jenni last night because they both drank too much and didn't want to drive home. She hasn't been down yet?"

“No,” Stefan said.

“Shit.”

I ran up the stairs and to her bedroom. When I opened the door, she was sound asleep.

“Emilia.” I sat on the edge of the bed and placed my hand on her shoulder. “Emilia, you need to get up.”

She let out a light moan as she stirred and then slowly opened her eyes.

“Sebastian? What are you doing?”

“It’s eight-fifteen. You overslept.”

“WHAT?” She quickly sat up. “Shit!”

She threw the covers back, ran into the bathroom, and started the shower.

“Please, for the love of God, tell me you brought coffee.”

I picked the cup up from the dresser and handed it to her.

“Oh my God, I love you.”

I froze for a moment when the words came out of her mouth as I waited for her reaction. She didn’t have one as she took a couple of sips and stepped in the shower. Walking over to her bed, I made it for her and headed downstairs.

“Was she still sleeping?” Stefan asked.

“Yeah. Now she’s in panic mode. I have to drive her to her car so she can go to work.”

“Good luck.” Sam patted my shoulder. “We’re going to head to the office. We just stopped by to talk to the crew.”

After my brothers left, I went back upstairs and found her in the bathroom, quickly putting on some makeup.

“I can’t believe I overslept. I never oversleep on a workday.”

“Must have been those Moscow mules last night,” I smirked as I leaned against the bathroom counter.

“Ugh. Don’t remind me. I’m going to be so late, which is going to put me behind with patients for the entire day.”

“Yeah. I have a lot to do myself.”

“And?” She glanced over at me.

“Nothing. I’m just saying we need to get going. I have a job too.”

“Wow. Okay. Go then. I’ll call an Uber.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Emilia.”

She ran a brush through her hair and went to her closet to find some clothes.

“Do you mind?” she asked in a snotty tone before taking off her robe.

I let out a sigh as I walked out of the bedroom. I wasn’t sure where that comment I made came from. Maybe it was the fact that she just blurted out she loved me, and it left me with an unsettled feeling in the pit of my belly.

“I’m ready.” She flew down the stairs.

Walking over to my car, we climbed inside, and I could tell she was irritated by the look on her face.

“Just drive me to the office.”

“What about your car?” I asked.

“I’ll have Renata drive me to it after work.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m positive. I don’t want to be late, and I don’t want to disrupt your plans anymore for today.”

“Emilia—”

“Just drive me to the office, Sebastian. And for the record, I didn’t ask you to do this.”

“Um, actually, you did. You asked me last night in the back of Simon’s car.”

“Oh. That’s right. I think I remember that.”

The rest of the way to her office was silent. When I pulled into the parking lot and in front of her building, we had made it on time with five minutes to spare.

“Thanks for the ride.” She climbed out and shut the door.

I shook my head as I pulled away, took out my phone, and sent a text message in our brother’s group chat.

“My house tonight. Come whenever you can.”

“Stefan and I will be there.”

“Count me in.”



Later that afternoon, I had a few interviews with some highly recommended interior designers. The last person I used worked for Sam and Stefan. She was attractive, we worked closely together, and I slept with her. After that night, she believed it meant we were together, and when I had to tell her otherwise, she told me to fuck off, blamed Sam and Stefan, and quit. After my father found out, he ripped into me like nobody’s business.

After conducting my interviews, one woman stood out. Her name was Delilah Gray, and her portfolio was outstanding. She was a fifty-five-year-old woman whose husband had recently passed away, and this was her first job interview since. She’d told me she was ready to get back to work, for she needed to keep busy. After talking with her for an hour, I felt a real work connection with her, so I hired her on the spot.

I couldn’t stop thinking about Emilia all day. Pulling out my phone, I sent her a text message.

“Do you need me to drive you to your car after work? I can pick you up.”

Thirty minutes later, my phone pinged with a text message from her.

“No.”

One word. That's all I got—no explanation of who was taking her, nothing.

When I arrived home around six-thirty, I saw her car in the driveway. I'd thought about walking over there to talk to her, but I thought it was best I left her alone. Grabbing the bottle of scotch and four glasses, I took them out to the patio and then grabbed my guitar. Sitting down, I began strumming while I waited for my brothers.

"What's up, bro?" Sam walked over.

A few moments later, Stefan and Simon walked over.

"Did you get Emilia to her car in time?" Simon smirked as he picked up a glass of scotch from the table.

"You heard?"

"Of course, I heard."

"I drove her straight to the office. That's what she wanted and then gave me an attitude." I brought the glass up to my lips.

"I saw her car in the driveway," Sam said.

"She was going to have someone else take her after work."

"Why? What happened this morning?" Stefan asked.

"She was running late, and I told her to hurry up because I had things to do too. Apparently, that pissed her off. She told me she loved me today."

"Oh shit." Simon sighed.

"When did she tell you that?" Sam asked.

"This morning when she was rushing to get ready."

"As she was rushing and in panic mode, she just blurted out that she loved you?" Stefan's brows furrowed.

"She said it after I handed her a cup of coffee I brought over."

"Bro, how exactly did she say it?" Sam asked, and Simon chuckled.

“I handed her the coffee, and she said, ‘Oh my God, I love you.’”

“Alex tells you that all the time when you make her favorite dish and bring it over.”

“So does, Julia,” Sam said.

“They’re different. They’re family.”

“Listen, brother.” Simon slapped his hand on my thigh. “She meant it in a friend-like way. Come on, you know better than that. What’s really going on here?”

I finished my drink, reached for the bottle, and poured another.

“Nothing is going on. I just think things are moving in the wrong direction, and it’s time I pull back.”

“Here we go,” Simon said.

“Why? Because you have feelings for her, and you can’t handle it?” Stefan asked.

“No. I like her as a friend. We have fun together, and I think she’s misconstruing that for something else.”

“You think. You think. You think,” Simon said. “Is it a fact? Do you have proof? You can think all you want, but until you have proof, it means nothing. You know what they say about people who assume things.”

“Stop playing detective here, Simon. I don’t need proof. I can tell by the way she acts. She takes things the wrong way, and I don’t need that drama in my life. I’m busy with the restaurant and trying to put the new one together. The last thing I need is some chick causing chaos in my life.”

“Um, bro?” Sam said as he stared behind me.

Turning around, I saw Emilia standing there with tears in her eyes.

“Emilia, I—”

“I—I just wanted to give you your mug back.”

She set it down, turned, and walked away as fast as she could.

“Fuck! Emilia, wait!” I shouted as I quickly got up from my chair and went after her.

I reached her before she made it to her porch and lightly grabbed hold of her arm.

“Emilia, I’m—”

“You’re what? Sorry for speaking the truth?” she shouted, yanked herself from my grip, went inside, and slammed the door.

I stood there in the middle of her driveway and ran my hand through my hair. Walking back to my patio, I stood there and stared at my brothers, who sat there with looks of disapproval.

“Wow. You really fucked that up,” Simon said.

“What is going on?” Julia stormed over. “I heard yelling.”

“I did too,” Alex walked over, holding Henry.”

“Sebastian said something he shouldn’t have, and Emilia heard him.”

“What did you say?” Julia demanded as she placed her hands on her hips.

I stood there shaking my head.

“What did he say, Sam?”

“Stefan?” Alex cocked her head.

“Julia, I think it’s best—”

“Finish that sentence, Samuel, and see what happens.” Julia pointed her finger at him.

“One last time, Stefan?” Alex narrowed her eye at him.

“He said he doesn’t need some chick causing chaos in his life. Sorry, bro. I had no choice.”

“What the fuck, Sebastian!” Julia shouted as she walked over and punched his arm.

“Ouch, Julia!”

“You men and your mouths,” Alex said as she handed Henry over to Stefan. “You can go home right now and watch your children while we do damage control.”

“Yes, baby.” Stefan got up from his chair.

As Alex walked past me, she smacked my arm.

“Ouch! Come on. Jesus Christ.” I sighed as I sat down. “Are you just going to let them hit me like that?”

“Better them than us,” Sam said. “Because right now, I have a good mind to toss you on the ground and kick the shit out of you.”

“I didn’t know she was there!” I ran my hands down my face.

“Welp, you’re fucked. I warned you time and time again about getting involved with the neighbor. Now, you have to live with the consequences.”

I looked over at Simon and slowly shook my head.

“Shut the fuck up, bro.”

CHAPTER 34



Emilia

I slammed the door, locked it, and stood against it as the tears in my eyes fell down my face. I'd heard everything he said, and it left me numb. He blamed me for taking things the wrong way, but the reality was, he didn't know how he sounded when he said it. He didn't need some chick, aka me, causing chaos in his life. How the hell was I causing chaos? By asking him if he could drive me to my car? I hadn't asked him for help since I'd moved here. He offered, and when I tried to refuse it, he insisted and wouldn't take no for an answer. And for him to call me 'some chick' really pissed me off. That's all I was to him? I was his neighbor, and I thought I was his friend, but I was nothing more than some chick he fucked when he felt like it. The more I'd thought about it, the angrier I became.

The knock at the door startled me, and I froze.

"Emilia, it's Julia and Alex."

Letting out a sigh of relief, I unlocked and opened the door.

"Come here." Julia wrapped her arms around me as she stepped inside.

"I'm not even going to ask if you're okay because I know you're not." Alex hugged me.

"I'm fine." I began to cry.

“Aw, let’s go sit on the couch.” Julia hooked her arm around me.

“We need some wine. Do you have any?” Alex asked.

“In the laundry room. The glasses are in the cabinet across from the washer and dryer.”

“Those brothers.” Julia shook her head.

“Sebastian referred to me as ‘some chick.’ Can you believe that?” I wiped the tear that fell down my cheek.

“Unfortunately, I do. When Sam and I got into a huge fight before we officially got together, he told me that I was nothing more than his personal assistant and a girl he fucked. So, you being referred to as ‘some chick’ is mild.”

“I agree.” Alex walked over with the bottle of wine and three glasses. “When Stefan and I got into a heated argument when I was working for him, he told me I was an amazing woman, a good friend, and nothing more than a sex partner.”

“Wow, and you both forgave them?”

“They ended up redeeming themselves. Just like I know Sebastian will.” Julia gave me a sympathetic smile. “He likes you, and it scares him.”

“I don’t care anymore. I truly don’t.”

Julia reached over and handed me a tissue.

“If you didn’t care, you wouldn’t be hurting like this,” Alex said.

“I let myself get involved and feel things I shouldn’t have allowed myself to feel.”

“You’re not a robot, Emilia. You’re human.” Julia gave my hand a gentle squeeze. “The two of you spend a lot of time together, and you’ve been sleeping together. How could you not develop feelings for him? Especially after the things he’s done for you.”

“Sebastian is just scared right now,” Alex said.

“That’s what I told her,” Julia spoke.

“I don’t care. This is the last time I will let a man affect me like this. I’m still broken by my ex, and no matter how hard I try to forget what happened, I can’t. I have such trust issues, but somehow, my heart decided to trust Sebastian. I’m so fucking stupid!”

“No, you’re not.” Alex hooked her arm around me. “You got swept up in a Kind brother. Trust us, we know.”

“Give Dr. Strong a call tomorrow and see if she can squeeze you in for an appointment. She’s really good about that. She used to do it for me all the time.”

“I will.”

“On another note,” Alex said as she got up from the couch. “Your kitchen is looking amazing so far.”

“Yeah. It is.” I managed a small smile. “It’s exactly what I wanted. Stefan said they should be done in a few more days. They’re installing the countertops and backsplash tomorrow. And if time allows it, they’ll install the appliances.”

“As soon as it’s finished, you should have us over for a housewarming party,” Julia said.

“Just us girls, including Jenni.” Alex grinned.

“Good idea. I think I will.”

We talked for a while more, and then they left. Picking up my wine glass, I took it over to the piano and started playing to escape the pain that tore through me.



S ebastian

As Sam, Simon, and I were sitting there, Julia walked over and hit me in the back of the head before sitting down next to Sam.

“Ouch! For fuck sakes, Julia.” I rubbed the back of my head. “How is she?”

“How do you think she is?”

“I need to go talk to her.”

“No, you don’t. Leave her alone, Sebastian, and give her the space she needs.”

“I can’t do that, Julia.”

“You have no choice. Maybe in a couple of days when things calm down, you can try. I need you to trust me on this.”

“You better listen to her, brother,” Simon said. “Julia knows. She’s been through it.”

“Shut the hell up.” Sam shot him a look.

Simon chuckled as he stood up from his chair.

“I love you, bro. If you need me, you know where to find me.” He placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Thanks, Simon.” I let out a sigh.

Julia left, and Sam stayed a while longer. Holding the glass of scotch in my hand, I looked up at the night sky.

“You need her in your life, brother. You can sit there and deny it all you want, and you can find the littlest things about her to convince yourself she’s causing chaos. But in reality, she’s not doing a damn thing but making you happy. You know it, I know it, we all know it. You’re hiding behind the restaurants and using them as an excuse to run from the best thing that has ever happened to you. You weren’t looking for her, and she certainly wasn’t looking for you. But here the two of you are. Think about that.”

We both got up from our seats, and he walked over and hugged me.

“I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

CHAPTER 35



ONE WEEK LATER

Emilia

I'd avoided Sebastian like the plague the past week. It wasn't that hard since I'd left my house earlier than usual in the mornings and didn't come home until later at night. But today, I had to go home straight from work because Stefan called and said they had finally finished my kitchen.

When I pulled into the driveway, the crew was heading out. Stepping into the house, I set my purse down and went straight to the kitchen, where Sam and Stefan were waiting for me. This was the first time I'd seen both of them since that night.

"Well, what do you think?" Stefan grinned.

"It's beautiful!" I spoke with excitement as I looked around. "It's so good to have a kitchen again. I can't wait to get everything put away."

"It'll be the best feeling in the world once you get it all organized," Sam spoke.

I glanced over at Stefan and laughed when he rolled his eyes.

"Thank you both for everything. You guys are amazing."

"We aim to please our most important customers." Sam gave me a wink and smile.

"How are you, Emilia?" Stefan asked in a serious tone. "I'm sorry about the other night."

“Don’t be. You have nothing to be sorry for. I’m okay.”

“We know you’re angry with our brother, but we’re here for you too. You’re our friend, and what happened won’t change that,” Sam said.

“I feel the same way.” My lips formed a weak smile.

After Sam and Stefan left, I ran upstairs to change my clothes before I started putting everything back in the kitchen. When my phone rang, I saw Jenni was calling.

“Hello.”

“I’m headed to Julia’s to return something I borrowed before she and Sam head out for the evening. Do you want to grab some dinner after?”

“I’d love to, but my kitchen is finally finished, and I was going to spend the rest of the night putting everything back and getting it organized.”

“Sounds like fun. I’ll come over and help.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“I know I don’t. I want to. I’ll bring a bottle of wine, and we can order a pizza, put on some music, and have a dance party while we organize.”

“Sounds like fun. Thanks, Jenni.”

“Don’t mention it, my friend. I’ll see you soon.”

As I was bringing the boxes into the kitchen, there was a knock at the door.

“Wow, that was—” I froze when I saw Sebastian standing there with his hands tucked in his pants pockets.

“Hi, Emilia. I take it you were expecting someone else.”

“Yeah. Jenni is on her way over. What do you want, Sebastian?”

“I want to talk.”

“Good for you because I don’t.”

I went to shut the door, and he stopped it with his hand.

“Please, Emilia. Just give me five minutes.”

“Fine.” I walked away, and he stepped inside. “You have five minutes.”

“Wow. The kitchen looks amazing.”

“Your time is ticking.”

“I want to apologize for the other night. I honestly didn’t mean—”

“Didn’t mean what?” I interrupted him. “For me to hear what you said? Well, I did, and I was meant to hear it so I would know how you were using me this whole time.”

“I never used you, Emilia. Not once. And you’re not just some chick. I was in a bad mood that day, and I shouldn’t have said that. It’s just that I have a lot going on right now.”

“And you having a lot going on has nothing to do with me. You’re the one who kept offering to help me. You’re the one who insisted after I kept telling you no. And suddenly, I’m the one causing chaos and drama in your life? I didn’t fucking ask you to pick us up from the restaurant. Jenni asked Simon.”

Suddenly, the front door opened, and Jenni walked in.

“Oh. Hey.” She waved. “I’m going to visit Alex and the kids. Just let me know when you’re done here.”

I gave her a nod, and she walked out the door.

“I know you didn’t ask. I came anyway.”

“That’s on you!” I shouted as I jammed my finger into his chest. “I’m the stupid one ever to think that I could be important to somebody.” I folded my arms and turned around.

“Emilia, that is not true.”

“Five years of my life was wasted on a man who I thought loved me. Only to find out, he didn’t love me enough and left me standing at the church like an idiot.”

“I know how badly he hurt you, but I’m happy he left you at that church.”

“What?” I turned around and narrowed my eyes at him.

“If he hadn’t, you never would have moved next door, and I wouldn’t have ever had the pleasure of meeting you. And believe me, meeting you has been the best thing that has happened to me. I want to forget all of this and move forward. And I want to do it with you. I’m sorry, Emilia, for everything.”

“So, you just decided now you want to date me?”

He took in a deep breath.

“Yes. I want to see you every day, take you out, and spend time with you.”

“But you told me you like to keep things casual, and you don’t want any type of relationship.”

“I know what I said, but with you, I want it. I want to sleep with you in my arms at night and wake up to you snuggled against me in the mornings. I want the first thing I see in the morning when I open my eyes is your beautiful smile.”

“As nice as that sounds, I’m afraid I’m going to have to say no.”

“What? Why?” His brows furrowed.

“Because I don’t trust you anymore for that type of relationship. I’ll always consider you my friend, Sebastian, but that’s all. I can’t walk down the same road I’ve been on for over a year. I moved here so I could finally start to heal. And as long as we continue to see each other, I can’t do that. I need to find the best version of me again because she’s been lost for so long. I hope you can understand that.”

He brought the back of his hand up to my cheek and softly stroked it.

“I do understand, Emilia, but—”

“No buts, Sebastian. I accept your apology, but our relationship is strictly of a friendship nature and nothing more. And there can’t be any awkwardness between us. Because if there is—”

“There won’t be. I promise you. If I can only have you in my life as a friend, I’ll take it. Because it’s better than you not

being in my life at all.”

A tear fell down my cheek, and he gently wiped it away with his thumb. I better go so Jenni can come over. If you need anything at all, you can always call me.”

“I know.” I looked away.

CHAPTER 36



Sebastian

I walked out of her house feeling defeated as tears filled my eyes. I loved her, and I wanted to tell her, but I couldn't. I gave her time, just like Julia said to. A week. One fucking week and I missed her like hell. Not seeing her, talking to her, or being with her opened my eyes to how much I was in love with her. I knew it from the first time we had sex. I'd never felt a connection with someone as I did with her.

I opened the sliding door to Stefan's house, and when I stepped inside, Stefan, Alex, and Jenni stared at me.

"You can go over to Emilia's now," I said to Jenni.

"Is everything okay?" Jenni asked as she walked over to me.

"I'm sure she'll tell you all about it."

She placed her hand on my arm and gave it a sympathetic squeeze before walking out.

"What happened?" Stefan asked.

Alex opened the refrigerator, pulled out a beer bottle, and handed it to me.

"Thanks, Alex. I apologized and told her I wanted to be with her, and she told me no."

"What?" Alex asked. "She really said no? I'm sorry, Sebastian. I better go feed Henry," she said as his cries came through the monitor.

“Let’s go sit outside, bro.”

I opened the sliding door and stepped outside. Stefan started a fire in the fire pit while I took a seat.

“I’m going to text Sam and Simon and have them come over when they get home. I can’t believe she said no. Did she have a reason?”

“She said she didn’t trust me anymore to have any type of relationship with me except a friendship. She said she moved here so she could start to heal from what happened a year ago, and as long as we continued to see each other, she couldn’t do that. She’s also trying to find the best version of herself again, and she hopes I understand.”

“Wow.” He let out a heavy sigh. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. It’s my fault.”

Simon walked over and took the seat next to me.

“What happened?”

I told him exactly what I had said to Stefan, and he reached over and gripped my shoulder with his hand.

“Listen, if you’re going to tell me shit about how I shouldn’t have gotten involved with her—”

“Relax, brother,” Simon said. “I’m not going to say that. You’re not a man who gives up. None of us are. That’s why we’re where we are in life. Don’t give up on her.”

“I’m not, and I won’t. I’ll be her friend for as long as she needs me to be, and I’ll get her trust back, no matter what I have to do.” I brought the bottle up to my lips.



E milia

As soon as he walked out the door, I gripped the edge of the granite counter, pushed myself back, and lowered my head while the tears streamed from my eyes. I heard the sliding door open, and within seconds Jenni was at my side.

“What happened?” she asked as she hooked her arm around me. “Did he say something to hurt you again?”

“No. He apologized and said he wanted to be with me.”

“Em, that’s great. I knew it. Why are you crying? This is good news. The man finally came to his senses.”

“I told him no.”

“Say what? Why?”

“Because I can’t be with him. Not right now. I have to work on myself because if I don’t, I will never be able to have a healthy relationship with a man.”

“Okay.” She slowly rubbed my back. “I get that, and you need to do what’s best for you.”

I heard the front door slightly open, and Julia’s voice echoed through the house.

“Can we come in?”

“Come in, sis! We’re in the kitchen,” Jenni shouted.

Julia and Alex walked over and hugged me.

“We decided we wanted to have a dance party.” Julia smiled. “So, we’re going to put on some music, pour some wine, dance around, and help you get this kitchen organized.”

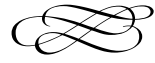
“You are going to feel so much better once we’re done here.” Alex grinned.

“You three are the best friends anyone could ever ask for. Thank you.”

“We women stick together.” Jenni hooked her arm around me and pulled me into her.

“Jenni, music!” Julia pointed at her.

CHAPTER 37



TWO WEEKS LATER

Emilia

I was in a bind. A bind I didn't know how to get out of. It was too late. The damage was done, and I had no choice. As I walked back to my office, I pulled my phone from my pocket and texted Sebastian.

"Hi. Can you come over tonight? There's something I need to talk to you about."

"Of course. I'll be home around seven."

"Thanks. I'll see you then."

I exhaled a breath and placed my hands over my face as I sat down at my desk. We'd had small conversations since our talk that night. Either from across our patios, across our driveways, and at Mojo Madness when I stopped in one day, and he was also there. I wouldn't lie and say I didn't miss him because I did.

It was ten minutes after seven when I poured myself a glass of wine and took it down to the beach. Sebastian walked over with a drink in his hand a few moments later and sat down in the sand next to me.

"Hi." A smile crossed his lips.

"Hi." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

"What did you want to talk about?"

"I need to ask you for a favor," I said as my heart pounded out of my chest.

“I’ll do anything for you. You know that.”

“My parents are flying in this weekend.”

“That’s great. You must be excited to see them.”

“It’ll be nice, I guess. But I told them something a few weeks ago and—oh God.” I threw back my wine and finished the entire glass in one gulp.

“What did you tell them?”

“I’m sorry, but I need that.” I pointed to his drink.

“Okay.” He chuckled as he handed me his glass.

I threw it down the back of my throat and handed the empty glass back to him.

“I can go refill if you need more.”

“No. I’m fine.” I took in a long deep breath. “I may have told my parents that we were dating. And I only told them that to get my mother off my back. She wouldn’t stop. She just kept going on and on about how I need this, and I need that, and I need to grow up and get over the past, and it just came out of my mouth,” I spoke as fast as I could because I was nervous as all hell.

“Stop.” Sebastian reached over and gripped my hand. “Breathe, Emilia. So, what you’re asking me is to be your pretend boyfriend while your parents are here?”

“Just for one night. I’m going to make a nice dinner — it’s just for one night.”

“Consider it done.”

“Thank you.”

“But I have one request.”

“What’s your request?”

“Let me cook.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Why?” My brows furrowed. “You still don’t think I can cook, do you?”

“I didn’t say that. But I would like to make a good first impression. After all, if your pretend boyfriend is a chef who owns his own restaurant, don’t you think it’s a good idea that I do the cooking?”

“Fine. You can cook. My mother would probably criticize my cooking anyway.”

“What happened?” he asked as he pointed to the bruise on my wrist.

“Oh, this? A child bit me today.”

“Oh.” He let out a chuckle. “Does it hurt? It looks like it hurts.”

“Not as much as it did when he first did it. He hates doctors, and he has some behavioral issues.”

“How old is this kid?”

“Four. Just another perk of the job.” I laughed.

“I guess so. What day do you want to have dinner?”

“Friday night. Their plane gets in at four fifteen. So, by the time they get their luggage and get here in rush hour traffic, it’ll probably be around six o’clock. I told them I’d have a nice dinner waiting for them when they got here. But if Friday doesn’t work for you because of your schedule, we can do it Saturday night.”

“Friday is fine. I’ll plan a menu and go to the grocery store in the morning or early afternoon.”

“I took the day off Friday, and I was going to go shopping. Maybe we could go together?”

“Can you just take the day off? Aren’t you the only doctor there now that Dr. Reynolds is gone?”

“My PA will be there to take appointments.”

“Ah, okay. Then, yeah, we can shop together.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “Just let me know what time you want to go.”

“I will. Thanks again for doing this. Me and my big mouth.”

“You’re welcome. I know how parents can be. Trust me.”

“I better get back inside. I have some things I have to do.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

I grabbed my wine glass sitting in the sand, and we both stood up.

“Enjoy the rest of your evening, Emilia.”

“You too, Sebastian.” My lips formed a small smile.

CHAPTER 38



Sebastian

I went inside the house and set my glass in the sink. I could feel my phone vibrate in my pants pocket, and when I pulled it out, there was a text message from Simon.

“We saw you and Emilia down at the beach. Get your ass over here and talk to us, bro. We’re out on the patio.”

As I opened the refrigerator, I grabbed a beer bottle and walked over to Simon’s.

“We were watching you two the whole time,” Stefan smirked.

“The two of you looked pretty cozy.” Sam smiled.

“She texted me earlier in the day and told me she needed to talk to me,” I said as I sat down.

“About?” Simon’s brow arched.

“Her parents are flying in on Friday, and a few weeks back, she told her mother the two of us were dating.”

“What?” Sam laughed.

“I guess her mom is giving her all kinds of shit about dating, so she just blurted out that she was dating me.”

“Bro, I’m confused.” Stefan furrowed his brows.

“She asked me if I would be her pretend boyfriend for one night.”

“Oh my God.” Simon threw his head back and laughed. “You agreed, didn’t you?”

“Fuck yeah, I agreed.” I took a sip of my beer. “I couldn’t have planned this better myself. Talk about an opportunity falling into your lap.”

“Don’t get too excited, brother,” Sam said. “She said it’s only for one night.”

“I know, but after Friday night, she’ll realize she was meant to be mine. She took the day off on Friday, and we’re going to the grocery store together.”

“Sounds exciting.” Simon’s tone was sarcastic.

“Shut the hell up.” I threw a bottle cap at him. “We’re going to spend the day together because I’m cooking at her house.”

“All I can say is you better do whatever it takes to get her back because you’ve been a total douchebag for the past two weeks,” Sam spoke.

“Total douchebag.” Stefan shook his head.



E milia

“Dr. Gallo,” Margaret, one of my nurses, walked into my office.

“Yeah, Margaret?”

“Mrs. Lawrence left her wallet at the front desk. Before we noticed it, she was gone.”

“Did you call her?”

“I tried, but she didn’t answer.”

“Keep trying. I’ll keep it locked in my desk until she can come and get it.”

It was a busy day, and after I saw my last patient, I was more than ready to go home.

“Did you ever get ahold of Mrs. Lawrence?” I asked Margaret.

“Yes. She’s distraught she left it, but she can’t leave work before we close, especially since she was late after bringing in Jeremy this morning. I was thinking about taking it up to her work and dropping it off on my way home, but I forgot I have dinner plans, and it’s the opposite way.”

“Where does she work?”

“At the animal shelter. I believe it’s on your way home.”

“Get me the address, and I’ll take it to her.”

“Thanks, Dr. Gallo. I’ll give her a call and let her know.”

After grabbing her wallet, I threw it in my purse and headed to the shelter.

“Hi, can I help you?”

“I’m here to see Briana Lawrence.”

“She’s in Activity room one. It’s just down the hall and first door on your left.”

“Thank you.”

When I stepped inside the room, Mrs. Lawrence turned towards the door and looked at me.

“Dr. Gallo. You have no idea how much I appreciate you bringing my wallet by. It’s been such a bad day with Jeremy being sick and trying to get his deadbeat father to look after him since I had to work today.”

“You’re welcome. It was on my home anyway.” I smiled. “Who’s that?” I glanced over at the golden retriever lying in the corner with a sad look on its face.

“That’s Ruby.”

“Why does she look so sad?”

“Her owner passed away a few days ago, and she was brought into us. When Mrs. Nelson’s neighbor hadn’t heard from her in a couple of days, she went over to check on her.

That's when she found Mrs. Nelson lying on the kitchen floor. Ruby was lying next to her with her head on her."

"Oh my God." I felt the stinging of tears fill my eyes.

"Since then, she barely eats, she won't play, and she just lays there all day with that sad look on her face. She's grieving, and I'm not sure she really trusts anyone right now."

"Poor thing. How old is she?"

"She's three."

Walking over to her, I got down on the floor and began petting her head.

"Hi, Ruby," I spoke in a soft voice. "I'm sorry for your loss. And it's okay to take as much time as you need to grieve. There's nothing wrong with that. Every day will get a little bit easier. I promise." I rubbed under her chin.

"That was sweet what you said to her." Mrs. Lawrence smiled.

"Sometimes, a girl just needs to be reminded that she has support. Tell Jeremy I said hi and call me if the medication isn't working."

"I will. Thank you again, Dr. Gallo."

I placed my hand on her arm and gave it a gentle squeeze before heading towards the door.

"No, no, Ruby."

Turning around, Ruby had followed me to the door, and she wouldn't stop staring at me. She sat and put her paw up.

"Aw, it was nice to meet you too, Ruby." I smiled as I lightly shook her paw.

"She's never done that before. I think she really likes you."

"You're a sweet girl, but I have to get home."

I stepped out of the room, and I could hear Ruby whining down the hall. Stopping, I stood there and closed my eyes for a moment. I couldn't believe what I was about to do. Turning

around, I went back to the room, opened the door, and Ruby came running over.

“Dr. Gallo?” Mrs. Lawrence said.

“I’ll adopt her.”

“What? Are you serious?”

“I’ve never been more serious in my life. I want to adopt Ruby and take her home with me. Right now. I want her right now.”

“Have you ever had a dog before?”

“Nope. But it’s fine. I’m a doctor, and I take care of children. I can certainly take care of a dog.”

“You’re sure?”

“One hundred percent. She likes me, right?”

“Yeah. She does. I haven’t seen her behave this way with anyone since she’s been here.”

“Well, I like her too. So, get whatever paperwork you need to get ready for me to sign.”

“Okay.” Mrs. Lawrence grinned. “You’re going to need to stop at the pet store for a few things for her.”

“I can do it on my way home.”

CHAPTER 39



Emilia

I went a little overboard at the pet store. Five hundred forty-eight dollars and fifty-three cents overboard. But as far as I was concerned, she was worth every penny.

“Welcome to your new home, Ruby.”

I took her leash off and let her sniff around in her new surroundings. Did I do the right thing? I thought so. She needed me as much as I needed her. After unloading the car and bringing everything in the house, I set up her food and water bowl, and she immediately ate. She was already feeling comfortable, and that made me happy. Then reality set in. The reason I’d never had a dog was that my mother hated dogs. She was bitten by one and needed stitches when she was a child. Oh well, she’ll just have to get over it if she wants to stay here when they visit.

I wanted to share the news with my sister and brother, but I couldn’t risk them telling my mom, so I texted Sebastian.

“Can you come over for a minute?”

“Sure. I’ll be right over.”



Sebastian

I was pleasantly surprised when I got Emilia’s text. Slipping on my shoes, I walked over to her house. When I

knocked on the door, my brows furrowed when I heard what sounded like a dog. She opened the door with a beautiful smile, and when I looked down, I saw a golden retriever standing at her side. The dog slowly began to back away while letting out low growls.

“Um, what’s going on?” I asked.

“Ruby, no.” Emilia took hold of her collar. “Come in and meet Ruby.”

“Um, I’m not so sure I should. Whose dog is that?”

“Mine.”

“What?” My brows furrowed.

“Just get in here, and I’ll tell you. Go sit down on the couch and be still.”

I stepped inside and walked over to the couch. What did she mean that was her dog?

“She has some trust issues.”

“Yeah. I can see that.” I narrowed my eye.

“It’s okay, Ruby. This is Sebastian, and he lives next door.” She pointed at me while petting her. “Now sit on the floor and call her.”

“Are you serious?” I frowned.

“Very.” Her tone was stern.

I got down on the floor and pressed my back up against the couch.

“Hey, Ruby. It’s nice to meet you.” I held out my hand.

Ruby slowly walked over and sniffed my hand. I felt like I was her prey, and she was getting ready to attack. But instead, she started licking me.

“That a girl.” I smiled as I brought my other hand up and began petting her. “I think she likes me.” I glanced up at Emilia.

“I think you taste like food.” She laughed.

“Probably.”

“Would you like to explain what’s going on here?”

“I adopted her.”

“Oh. Okay. I didn’t know you wanted a dog.”

“I didn’t. We just kind of found each other.” She smiled.

Ruby laid down and rested her head on my lap.

“And where did you find Miss Ruby at?”

“The animal shelter. One of my patients left their wallet at the office today, and she couldn’t leave work to get it before we closed. It was on my way home, so I dropped it off. That’s where I met Ruby. Her owner passed away a few days ago, and she’s been depressed ever since. Mrs. Lawrence said she would barely eat, she wouldn’t play, and she wouldn’t have any interactions with anyone there. All she’d do is lay around and be depressed.”

“So, in other words, you saved her?”

“Yeah. I guess I did. We bonded immediately, and when I went to leave, she started whining. My heart broke for her, and that’s when I knew I needed to bring her home.”

“How old is she?”

“She’s three.”

“She’s a beautiful dog,” I spoke as I stroked her head. “What are you going to do with her all day while you’re at work?”

“I’m bringing her with me. I have a big office, and I bought a dog bed. I’ll keep her in the back and away from the patients unless they want to see her.”

I stared at her for a moment, and I could already tell how much this dog meant to her.

“You made the right decision bringing her home.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Thanks. I think I did too. There’s only one problem.”

“What’s that?”

“My mother hates dogs. She was bit by one as a kid and needed stitches.”

“Well, she’ll just have to stay away from her then.”

Ruby lifted her head from my lap and started licking my face.

“Wow. Thank you, Ruby. I appreciate the kisses. My family is going to be very excited to meet you. Especially Lily.”

“I’m going to take Ruby for a walk.”

“It’s getting dark out. Maybe you can wait until the morning. Or I could go with you.”

“What do you think, Ruby? Do you want Sebastian to go on a walk with us?”

Ruby began jumping around and started whining.

“I think that’s a yes.” She smiled.

After our walk, I said goodbye to Emilia and Ruby and headed home. I still couldn’t believe she had adopted a dog. I poured a glass of scotch and took it out to the patio. As soon as I lit the fire pit, my brothers walked over.

“Hey, bro.”

“Hey, brother.”

“Why the bat signal?” Simon smirked.

“Just because I light the fire pit doesn’t mean you douchebags have to rush over.”

“Sure, it does.” Simon frowned. “Where’s the bottle of scotch? In the house still?”

“Yeah. Grab three glasses. Guess what?”

“What?” Both Stefan and Sam said.

“Emilia adopted a dog today.”

“What?” Sam said. “I hope it’s one of the breeds that doesn’t shed.”

I cocked my head at him.

“Her name is Ruby, and she’s a golden retriever.”

“Aw, how cute. I love golden retrievers,” Stefan said.

“So, she took in a dog instead of you?” Simon chuckled.

“Shut the fuck up. She rescued her from the animal shelter.”

“Why?” Sam asked.

“She said they shared an instant bond. The dog’s owner just passed, and when the neighbor found the owner on the kitchen floor, Ruby was lying next to her with her head on her.”

“Oh shit. That’s so sad. Why did you have to tell us that part,” Stefan said.

“If you want my honest opinion, I think Emilia needs Ruby as much as Ruby needs her. The dog backed away and started growling at me when I first walked in, and Emilia said she didn’t trust me.”

“Oh, so she has trust issues like her new mom,” Simon spoke.

“You are so close to getting punched, bro.”

“Do it.” Simon grinned. “Come on. We haven’t had a good knockdown fight in a long time.”

“You two knock it off,” Sam said.

“Ruby, no!” I heard Emilia yell.

Suddenly, Ruby ran to my patio and laid her head on my lap.

“Hey, girl.” I ran my hand over her head.

“I am so sorry.” Emilia ran over out of breath.

“It’s totally fine. She can come over any time she wants. Isn’t that right, girl?”

“Hey, guys.” Emilia waved.

“Congrats on the dog. She’s gorgeous.” Stefan smiled. “Lily is going to love her.”

“Yeah, Em, congrats. A new addition to the family is always exciting.” Simon smiled. “Come here, girl.” He held out his arms.

“You can leave her here for a while. We’ll keep an eye on her, and I’ll bring her home.”

“No. I can’t ask you to do that.”

“It’s fine. You’re not asking. I’m volunteering.”

“Well, I did want to take a bath.”

“Go take your bath, and I’ll bring her home to you soon.”

“Okay. Bye, Ruby. You are to be good for Sebastian.”

Ruby went from Simon to Sam and then over to Stefan.

“She seems to like us,” Stefan said.

“Of course, she does. She’s a girl. What girl doesn’t love us?” Simon smirked.

“I can count on both hands the number of women who hate you,” I said.

“True.” He tipped the glass to his lips.

“So, this is how you’re going to do it?” Sam asked.

“Do what?”

“Get back into Emilia’s heart? Through her dog?”

“Hey, I’ll do whatever I have to, and the sooner, the better. I hate this.”

“Hate what? Not having sex?” Simon asked.

“Yeah, that too. But I hate not having her in my life 24/7.”

CHAPTER 40



Sebastian

I texted Emilia to let her know I was on my way over to pick her up so we could go to the grocery store. She told me the sliding door was unlocked and just to walk in through there. When I opened the door, Ruby came running over and placed her paws on my chest.

“Hey, Ruby.” I ran my hand over her body. “How are you, girl? Where’s your mom?”

“Right here. Ruby, get down. You really shouldn’t let her jump on you like that.”

“Nah. She’s fine. Are you ready?”

“Yeah.”

I could tell Emilia was on edge.

“Hey. Come here.”

“What?” She looked at me from across the kitchen.

“Come here.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

She walked over and stood in front of me as I gripped her shoulders.

“Everything is going to be fine with your parents. Relax.”

“You’re right. It’ll be fine. Come on, Ruby.” She grabbed her leash.

“Um, we can’t bring the dog into the grocery store.”

“I know. Alex texted me earlier and told me to drop her off at her house when we leave.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Lily wants to play with her.”

“That’s great. Let’s go take her to Lily.”



*W*e finished the shopping, and while I brought all the groceries in, Emilia went over to get Ruby from Stefan’s house. When she returned, Ruby ran over to me with a bone in her mouth.

“Alex said she was a complete angel and played with Lily the whole time. She said she had Henry lying on a blanket on the floor, and Ruby went and laid next to him. Almost as if she was protecting him.”

“She’s a good dog. Aren’t you, girl?” I ran my hand across the top of her head.

I started prepping dinner while Emilia ran around, ensuring the house was spotless.

“Let me help with something,” she said.

“I got this.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

There was a knock at the door, and when Emilia checked her ring, she gave me a weird look.

“What?” I asked, even though I knew who it was.

“It looks like a delivery guy.”

She walked over and answered the door.

“Hi, are you Emilia Gallo?”

“I am.”

“I have a flower delivery for you. I just need your signature.”

I couldn't help but smile as I chopped up the lettuce for the salad.

"Who was it?" I asked as I heard the door shut.

"Someone sent me these beautiful red roses." She set the box down on the island.

"Who would do that?" I furrowed my brows to throw her off.

"I have no idea."

She removed the clear wrapping and took the card from the holder. Taking it out of the envelope, she read it and looked at me.

"Do you want it to look real?" I smirked.

"Really, Sebastian?"

"Yes. Really." I smiled. "Don't pretend boyfriends send their pretend girlfriends flowers? I'm just playing my role." I gave her a wink.

"Thank you. They're absolutely gorgeous."

"You're welcome."

She removed the vase of roses and set them in the middle of the table.

"Everything is set and in the oven. I'm going to run home, take a quick shower, and get back before your parents arrive."

"Okay." She let out a deep breath.

"Relax, Em."

"I am. I think I'll play the piano while you're showering."

"Good idea."

As I opened the sliding door and went to step out, Ruby started whining.

"Is it okay if she comes with me?"

"I guess." Her brows furrowed.

"Come on, girl. Mom says it's okay. Be back in a flash."

CHAPTER 41



Emilia

I nervously paced back and forth across the living room, looking at the time on my phone.

“They should be here in about ten minutes.”

“What are you so nervous about anyway? They’re your parents.”

“You don’t understand, but you will. Trust me. It’s not so much my dad. It’s my mom. She can be so condescending, argumentative, and aggressive with her words. Oh, and she likes to manipulate.”

“That’s funny. You just described my father.” He smiled.

“This isn’t a time for jokes, Sebastian.”

“That wasn’t a joke. You just described my father.”

“Whatever you do, do not use the words ‘can’t’ and ‘couldn’t’ in a sentence.”

“What?” He chuckled.

“Emilia, can’t and couldn’t are not in the Gallo vocabulary.” I imitated my mother’s voice.

“Ah. Point taken.” I walked over to where she stood and placed my hands on her shoulders.

“Relax. You’re not only giving me anxiety; you’re giving Ruby anxiety.”

I heard a car pull into the driveway, so I ran to the front window.

“They’re here.”

“Do you want me to hold Ruby back?”

“Absolutely not.”

I took in a deep breath and opened the door as they stepped onto the porch.

“Mom. Dad.” I grinned.

“Hello, sweetheart.” My father gave me a tight hug. “It’s good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you too, Dad.”

“Bonjour, darling.”

“Bonjour, Mom.” I hugged her.

When my parents stepped inside, Ruby came running over.

“Ah.” My mother jumped back. “Emilia Grace, what on earth is that creature doing here?”

“Mom. Dad. Meet your grand dog, Ruby.”

“Hello, Ruby.” My dad smiled as he bent down to pet her. “You’re a beautiful girl.”

“You know I don’t like dogs, Emilia.”

“I know, Mom, but she needed a home.”

“Hello.” Sebastian walked over with a smile on his face.

“Mom. Dad. This is Sebastian. Sebastian, Enzo and Coraline Gallo.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both.” He shook their hands. “Let me take your bags upstairs for you.”

“Thank you, sir,” my father said.

As soon as Sebastian was out of earshot, my mother turned and looked at me.

“Nice, Emilia.” She smiled. “He’s good on the eyes. What is that wonderful smell?”

“Sebastian cooked for us. Remember, I told you he’s a chef and owns his own five-star Michelin restaurant.”

I looked over at my dad, who was having the time of his life with Ruby.

“You’re a good girl. Such a good girl.” He rubbed her belly, and I couldn’t help but smile.

“Let me show you the rest of the house,” I spoke as we started upstairs and ended with the kitchen.

“It’s lovely, darling.”

“Thanks, Mom.” I smiled.

“I would have chosen a different color for the kitchen and different fixtures. But if you like it, that’s all that matters.”

I was biting my tongue so hard it felt like it was going to fall off.

“What beautiful roses, Emilia.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Did Sebastian give them to you?”

“I sure did.” Sebastian walked up to me from behind and wrapped his arms tightly around me.

“They’re simply gorgeous.”

“Only the best for my beautiful girlfriend.” He kissed my cheek, and I swallowed hard. “Please, everyone, take your seats. Dinner is ready.”

We took a seat at the table while Sebastian served us. Steak au Poivre, which was my father’s favorite, chateau potatoes, green beans tossed in a lemon sauce, a salad with a homemade champagne vinaigrette, and the bread from the restaurant I loved so much.

“This is probably the best Steak au Poivre I’ve had yet.” My father smiled.

“Thank you, Enzo.”

“These potatoes are delicious. Everything here is. You are one talented chef, Sebastian. Your restaurant must do

amazing,” my mother spoke.

“It does. I’m in the process of opening another restaurant in downtown L.A.”

“Congratulations. Have you thought of taking your restaurants around the country? Perhaps one in every major city?” my father asked.

“That would be a dream.” He smiled.

“My daughter is fortunate to have someone like you in her life. I’m not sure if she’s cooked for you or not, but she isn’t very good at it, which is my fault.”

“Thanks a lot, Mom.” I cocked my head.

“Actually, I’m the lucky one,” Sebastian spoke. “I never knew I could be so happy until I met Emilia. I’m thankful every day that she moved here.”

I reached my foot over and lightly kicked him under the table.

“Well, I, for one, am not happy about her leaving New York and moving away from her family. But I am happy that she has found someone like you. Especially after that Damien fiasco.”

“Let’s not bring that up, Coraline,” my father said. “It’s in the past, and we need to let it stay there.”

“Thank you, Dad.”

“I’m just saying we never thought she’d open herself up again to anyone. I can sleep better at night knowing she’s safe here with you.”

I could feel the life being sucked out of me as I sat there and played with my food.

Sebastian reached over and took my hand.

“I will always protect your daughter. You don’t have to worry about that. She’s the most important person in my life, and I love her very much.”

“Aw, stop that. You’re embarrassing me.” I glanced over at him with an ‘I’m going to kill you’ smile.

“You are a wonderful man, Sebastian.” My mother placed her hand over her heart.

CHAPTER 42



Sebastian

I could tell Emilia was getting angry with me, but I didn't care.

"You need to stop what you're doing," she whispered as I stood at the sink rinsing off the dishes.

"Never." I nudged her shoulder as the corners of my mouth curved upward.

"I'm serious," she spoke through gritted teeth.

"So am I, babe."

We were interrupted when her mother walked over and placed her hand on my back.

"Dinner was wonderful. Thank you, Sebastian."

"It was my pleasure, Coraline." I grinned, and Emilia rolled her eyes.

"Darling, pour me another glass of wine," her mother asked her.

"Sure, Mom."

As Emilia poured her mother a glass of wine, her parents and I went into the living room. They sat down in the two accent chairs while I took a seat on the couch. When Emilia walked in and handed her mother her drink, I held out my hand, gesturing she sat next to me. When she sat down, I hooked my arm around her and pulled her close. She looked at me with a terrifying smile.

“Stop it,” she whispered in my ear.

“No,” I whispered back.

“Stay just like that,” Coraline spoke as she got up from her seat and pulled her phone from her purse.

“What are you doing, Mom?”

“I just want to take a picture of the happy couple.” She smiled as she held up her phone. “Smile.”

My smile was genuine—Emilia’s, not so much.

“You two are such a beautiful couple.” She smiled as she showed us the picture she took, and my grip around Emilia tightened.

After an evening of good conversation and listening to Emilia play the piano per her father’s request, her parents were tired and decided to head up to their room.

“Are you staying the night, Sebastian?” Her mother asked me.

“Umm.”

“No, Mom. He’s not. That would be uncomfortable with my parents in the house.”

“It’s fine, darling. Your father and I don’t mind. You are an adult,” she said with an arch in her brow.

“Thank you for your blessing, but I need to get home. However, I will be over to cook you a delicious breakfast in the morning.”

“I can’t wait.” Her mother smiled. “Goodnight, you two.”

“Goodnight, Mom. Goodnight, Dad.”

“Goodnight,” I said.

I got up from the couch to finish cleaning up the kitchen.

“You can go. I’ll finish cleaning up, Emilia spoke as she walked over.

“I’m not leaving you with all this, and I’m not leaving until it’s done.”

“Why are you doing this, Sebastian?”

“Because it’s a mess?” I furrowed my brows at her.

“No. Not that. Why are you doing this to me?” Tears filled her eyes.

I cupped her chin with my hand.

“The only thing I’m doing is loving you, Emilia. I already told you how I felt a couple of weeks ago, and I told you what I wanted. I know you’re not ready, and I respect that, but I’m not going to stop until you get it in that thick head of yours that I mean every word I say. I’ll wait for you until you’re ready and you find the version of yourself, you’re happy with. But I happen to love this version of you. I’m not going anywhere, so you’re just going to have to deal with it.” A tear fell from her eye, and I gently wiped it away. “I will wait for you, Emilia. I don’t care if it takes weeks, months, or years. You have me for a lifetime, and you have since the moment I laid eyes on you from across the patio.”

“Sebastian, don’t.”

“Too late. I already did it.” My lips formed a slight smile as I placed my hands on each side of her face. “I will give you all the space you need, but I’m going to kiss those beautiful lips now, and I won’t apologize for it.”

Leaning in, I softly brushed my lips against hers. A light gasp escaped her as her lips sunk into mine. Her arms reached up and wrapped themselves around my neck as our passionate kiss aroused me. As much as I didn’t want to, I broke our kiss and stared into her beautiful eyes.

“I’m going to finish cleaning up and head home.” My thumb softly stroked her cheek.

“I’ll help you.”

“You don’t have to.”

“I want to. I want to help.” She turned away and grabbed a couple of dishes sitting on the island.

Once we finished cleaning the kitchen, I said goodbye to Ruby, and Emilia walked me to the door.

“I’ll see you in the morning.” I kissed her lips. “Sweet dreams.”

I stepped out the door, and as I was halfway down the driveway, I heard Emilia’s voice.

“Sebastian, wait.”

Stopping, I turned around as she ran up to me and jumped in my arms, securing her legs tightly around my waist while her arms locked around my neck.

“I don’t want you to go.”

“I don’t want to go.” Our mouths smashed into each other’s, and I carried her back into the house and up the stairs to her bedroom.

CHAPTER 43



Emilia

His muscular body hovered over mine as he slowly thrust in and out of me. Wrapping my hand around the back of his neck, I pulled his lips to mine to muffle the sounds of the orgasm that was taking over me. I'd missed this with him, and my body was ecstatic to have him back, fulfilling the pleasures it sought. While our lips tangled, he let out a soft moan as he buried himself deep inside me and exploded. He lowered his heated body against mine and buried his face into the side of my neck.

"I love you," I whispered in his ear as my fingers gently stroked the back of his head.

"I love you, too, Emilia." His lips pressed into my flesh.

Climbing off me, he rolled on his back, and I snuggled against him while his arm securely held me in place.

"I can't believe I just had sex with my parents down the hall. I feel like a freaking teenager sneaking a boy into my room." I lifted my head and smiled. "I have never done that before."

"You've never had sex when your parents were home?"

"Never."

"There's always a first time for everything, even if you are thirty years old." He smirked.

"Shut up." I laughed as I playfully smacked his chest.



Sebastian

We both got up as the sun rose and took Ruby for a walk. When we got back, I kissed her lips and hugged her tight.

“I’m going to go home and take a quick shower, and then I’ll be back and start breakfast.”

“I can start it.”

“You’re cute.” I tapped her nose. “Don’t touch a thing.”

“I’m going to cook for you one day, and you’re going to eat it and like it.”

“Uh-huh.” I grinned.

“Go take your shower before I change my mind about you.” She grabbed my shirt and kissed me.

“You can change your mind all you want, but you’re stuck with me, baby.” I smiled as I ran over to my house.

I finished my shower, wrapped a towel around my waist, and jumped when I saw my three brothers sitting on my bed.

“What the actual fuck?”

“Morning, bro.” Stefan smiled as his back sat up against the headboard.

“Hey, bro.” Simon grinned.

“Want to tell us what’s going on with you and Emilia?” Sam asked with a smirk.

“Lily saw you and her kissing in her driveway,” Stefan said.

“Is there anything that kid of yours doesn’t see?”

“No. Actually, there isn’t.”

“Well, like you and Julia.” I pointed to Sam. “And you and Alex.” I pointed to Stefan. “We’re officially a couple.”

“Way to go, bro. I knew you could do it,” Stefan said.

“Thank God.” Simon let out a sigh of relief.

“I’m happy for you, brother.” Sam walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Thanks. I’m happy, guys. Happier than I’ve ever been. Now that you know, can I please finish getting dressed? I’m making breakfast for her parents.”

“Can we come?” Stefan asked.

“No. You cannot come.” I furrowed my brows.

“Bro, denying your brothers food is like a sin.” Simon shook his head.

I let out a sigh as I grabbed my phone from my dresser and sent Emilia a text message.

“Hey, baby. My brothers are here and want to know if they can come to breakfast?”

“Of course. My parents would love to meet them. Tell them to bring Julia, Alex, and the kids. The more, the merrier.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive. The more people here to distract my mother from me, the better.”

“Emilia said you’re all invited, and she wants Julia, Alex, and the kids to come too.”

“Excellent.” Stefan jumped up from the bed.

“Are you by any chance making eggs benedict?” Sam asked.

“Maybe.”

The corners of his mouth curved upward as he patted my shoulder.

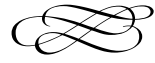
“I’ll see you fools in an hour,” I said.

“Hey, by the way,” Simon popped his head back into the room, “I’m happy for you, bro. I truly am.”

“Thanks, brother.” I smiled at him.

I threw on some clothes, grabbed a few things from the refrigerator, and headed over to Emilia's.

CHAPTER 44



ONE MONTH LATER

Sebastian

I walked over to the bar and poured four glasses of scotch. After handing them to my brothers, I held my drink up and gave a toast.

“I can’t believe you’re finally getting married. I know you’ve been waiting for this day for a while, and it’s finally here. And we’re here, again, in the same suite as we were for Dad’s marriages and Sam’s.”

All three of them chuckled.

“May your life with Alex be filled with joy and happiness for the rest of your lives. Cheers.”

“Thanks, guys. And here’s to our last single brother, Simon. May you find a woman who will make you as happy as we are.”

“I appreciate that, but I’m good. I like options.” He grinned as he held up his glass.

There was a knock at the door, and when Sam opened it, our father walked in.

“Another Kind wedding. I never thought I’d see the day.” He smiled as he walked over to Stefan and patted his face. “I’m proud of you, son. Alex is a beautiful and kind woman, and I’m happy to be able to call her my daughter. I’m also honored to be walking her down the aisle to you.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“Now, what about you?” He turned and looked at me.

“Emilia and I have been together for a month. We have a lot of time, Dad.”

“Don’t wait too long to put a ring on her finger. You’re not getting any younger, son. I’ll see you boys in the Gardens.”

“Dad, what about me?” Simon asked.

“I’ve given up hope for you, son. But three out of four isn’t bad.”

“Aw, thanks, Dad. I knew you were smart.” He pointed at him with a grin.

Looking at my watch, it was time to head to the gardens.

“It’s time to go. Are you ready?” I placed my hand on Stefan’s back.

“I’m ready. Let’s do this.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

We stood at the altar and waited for the ceremony to begin. Looking out at the seated guests, I didn’t see Emilia, and I started to get worried.

“The ceremony is getting ready to start, and I don’t see Emilia,” I whispered to Simon.

“Didn’t you send a car for her?”

“Yeah. I did. Shit. You don’t think something happened, do you?”

“Did you ever stop to think that maybe attending this wedding may be too hard for her?”

“We talked about it, and she assured me it was okay. You don’t think she changed her mind, do you? Shit. What if she did?”

“I’m sure she would have called you, bro. Relax.”

A few moments later, she walked in, and my eyes had never seen such a beautiful sight. She took her place in the second row, which was reserved for family, and mouthed, “Sorry.”

I smiled at her as I was relieved she was here and okay.

“See, you were panicking for nothing,” Simon said. “I can see why she was late.”

“Why?” I narrowed my eye at him.

“Because she is looking sexy as hell.”

“Keep your eyes off, my girlfriend. Go get your own to stare at.”

“Why would I do that when I have all your women I can stare at?” He smirked.

“I heard that,” Sam said as he leaned over, and Simon chuckled.

“You want to take him outside and teach him a lesson after the wedding?” I asked Sam.

“Yeah. I think we should.”

“Shit.” He laughed. “I love you guys.”

The ceremony was beautiful, and tears were shed as they recited the vows they wrote to each other. I now understood what my brothers tried so hard to tell me. The past month with Emilia was indescribable. I didn't think it was possible to love her any more than I already did, but every day and every minute spent with her, I found myself loving her a little bit more.

After the ceremony and before we left to take photos, I walked over to Emilia and placed my hands on her hips.

“You look absolutely gorgeous.” I softly kissed her lips.

“Thank you. And you look deliciously handsome.” She flashed a flirty smile. “I'm sorry I was almost late.”

“I was worried.”

“Well, I was here. They wouldn't let me up to your suite because someone forgot to have them put me on the list.”

“That is not true. When I got here this morning, I gave the flaky girl your name and told her you'd be coming later and

give you a key to the suite. I watched her type it on the computer.”

“She did. Just under the wrong reservation. Anyway, with the manager’s help, he found it and gave me the key.”

“I’m sorry, baby. I’m going to have a talk with management after the wedding.”

“No need. It was a mistake, and it’s done. I’ve let it go, and so will you.”

“Mr. Kind, we need to leave now,” the photographer said.

“I’ll be there in a second.” I held my finger up. “I have to go. I’ll see you in a while.”

“I’ll be waiting.” She smiled as I leaned in and kissed her goodbye.



Emilia

“Your dress is stunning.” I smiled as I hugged Alex. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you. You look gorgeous.”

“Emilia!” Lily came running over. “Do you like my dress?”

“It’s the most beautiful dress I’ve ever seen. You look like a royal princess.” I smiled. “How’s your arm feeling now that your cast is off.”

“It’s good. See.” She held out her arm, and I examined it.

“Looks good. Be careful on those rollerblades next time.”

Sebastian walked over and wrapped his arm around my waist.

“What are my two favorite girls talking about?”

“Girl talk, Uncle Sebastian.”

“Oh, I see.” His brow raised. “Do you mind if I steal her away for a bit?”

“No.” Lily giggled. “Go ahead.”

“Are you nervous?” he asked.

“About playing? No. Not at all. I’m flattered that Stefan and Alex asked me.”

“They think you’re amazing, as do I.” I leaned in and pressed my lips against hers. “And everyone else here tonight will think the same thing.”

After an elegant dinner, I took a seat at the piano in the corner of the room, stretched my fingers, and started playing. Instead of playing to escape reality and pain, I played for happiness and celebration, and damn did it feel good. For the first time in a very long time, I was genuinely happy, and no one was going to ever take that from me again. As my fingers played the last note of the third song, people in the room started to clap.

“Isn’t she amazing?” The DJ announced. “Thank you, Emilia, for those beautiful songs.”

It was time for the bridal dance, and I stood next to Sebastian and watched his brother and Alex share their first dance as husband and wife.

“Are you okay?” Sebastian asked as he took hold of my hand.

“Are you kidding?” I smiled. “I’m great.”

“Good.” He kissed my forehead. “I need to use the bathroom. I’ll be right back.”

Sebastian’s father, walked over as I was standing there.

“You look beautiful, Emilia.”

“Thank you, Henry.”

“I wanted to thank you.”

“For what?” I looked at him.

“Giving my son a chance. You make him very happy.”

“He makes me very happy, Henry.”

“Do the two of you have any plans on moving in together?”

“We haven’t talked about it. It’s easier for us because we live next door to each other.”

“Yes, but doesn’t it get tiresome going back and forth between houses?”

“Not really. We’re both only a few steps away.” I looked at him in confusion. “Plus, we’ve only been seriously dating a little over a month. I think that’s way too soon to start talking about moving in together.”

“It’s never too soon when you’re in love, sweetheart.”

“May I ask why you’re asking me all this?”

“Just wondering. When the time comes, I’m assuming you’ll move into his house, and if that’s the case, I would like to discuss the sale of your house before you put it on the market.”

“What?” I frowned.

“My son is coming. We’ll discuss this another time, and please do not tell him we had this conversation.” He walked away.

When another slow song started to play, the DJ asked the guests to join the bride and groom for a dance. Sebastian grabbed my hand and led me to the dance floor.

“What were you and my father talking about?”

“He was just thanking me for giving you a chance.” I grinned.

“Are you serious? He actually said that to you?”

“Yes. He said he’s never seen you so happy. So, he was thanking me for making that happen.”

“In that case, I can’t be mad at him.” A smirk formed on his lips.

“No.” I laughed. “You can’t.”

“You know what I can’t stop thinking about?” he asked.

“What?”

“Tonight, and how I’m going to take that sexy dress off you, kiss every inch of your beautiful naked body, give you at least three orgasms, if not more, and hold you in my arms all night.”

“I am so looking forward to that.” I smiled as our lips met.

CHAPTER 45



ONE MONTH LATER

Emilia

I had just arrived home from work and changed my clothes to head to Sebastian's for the night. His brothers and sisters-in-law were coming over, and we were all going to sit out on the patio around the fire pit, have a few drinks, have great conversation, and the boys were going to play their guitars. As I was running the brush through my hair, I heard a knock at the door, and Ruby started barking. It was probably Lily. Running down the stairs, I opened the door, and paralysis gripped me when I saw who was standing there.

"Hi, Emilia." Damien smiled.

"Damien, what are you doing here? How did you know where I lived?"

"I'd heard you moved to California. It wasn't hard to track you down. May I come in? I need to apologize to you."

"I'm heading out." My heart pounded out of my chest.

"Please, Emilia. Just listen to what I have to say, and then I promise I'll go. I need to do this for me."

Against my better judgment, I let him inside the house, and Ruby started growling the moment he walked in.

"Ruby, stop it."

"You got a dog, eh?" He smiled.

"Yeah. I did."

"Come here, girl." He bent down and stuck out his hand.

Ruby growled as she stood in front of me.

“She’s not big on strangers.”

“She’s a good guard dog.”

“Listen, Damien. I’m pressed for time. So, I need you to say whatever it is you need to.”

“Right. You look absolutely gorgeous, Emilia.” He smiled. “I’m sorry for leaving you the way I did. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you.”

Something was off with him. I couldn’t explain what, but my gut told me to get him out of the house as quickly as possible.

“I know, Damien.”

“No, Emilia. I don’t think you do. I did love you. I still do. I just didn’t realize how much until I didn’t have you anymore. That’s why I tried to reach out to you. I needed to tell you I made a mistake, and I wanted you back, but you were still hurting, and I figured I’d give you more time. Then I’d found out you moved here. I’m not surprised, however. I know how much you always loved being by the ocean. It’s a great house.” He looked around.

“Thanks. I really like it here.”

“I bet you do. I also heard from a friend of your parents that you’re in a relationship with someone.”

I swallowed hard as my body began to tremble.

“I am. He’s a good man.”

“I’m a good man too, Em. Remember all the good times we had? The way I made you laugh, the goofy things we used to do, and the way we’d stay up all night and talk about our future and our plans?”

“I remember, Damien.”

“I want all that back, Em. I want you and everything we had. We can just put what happened behind us and move forward with our lives.”

“No, we can’t. You left me standing in the church before all our family and friends. Do you know how humiliated I was? Do you know how bad you hurt me?”

“I know, and I’m sorry. I’ll apologize to you a million times over if I have to. It’s been a tough year. But I know that everything can be good again with you by my side. We can have the future we always talked about, baby.”

He took a step closer, and Ruby growled.

He stopped, and, in an instant, an angry look crossed his face.

“Can you please do something about that dog? I really don’t want to hurt her.”

My heart was pounding out of my chest, and it felt like a panic attack was about to emerge. I was scared for me, but more for Ruby. My gut told me he’d hurt her if he had to.

I heard the ringing of my phone that was sitting on the island in the kitchen.

“Let me just get that.”

“NO!” he shouted. “Leave it! You’re not talking to anyone until we settle this.”

“You know, Damien. I’m still hurting. Even after a year, it still hurts so bad.”

“I know, baby, and I’m hurting too. Together, we can take away each other’s pain.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“YES, IT IS!” he shouted as he threw his hands up and balled his fists.

Ruby let out another growl.

“This is the last time I’m going to ask you to do something about that fucking dog.”

“Okay. Okay.” I put my hands up. “I’ll just let her outside in the back. She loves to play by the water. I’ll get her out, and we can keep talking. Okay?”

“No. You can let her out in the front.”

He walked over and opened the front door.

“Tell her to go.”

“Come on, Ruby, let’s go outside,” I nervously spoke as she followed me to the door. “Go on?” She wouldn’t stop staring at me as she stood in the doorway.

“Get the fuck out of here!” Damien shouted as he lifted his foot, gave her a swift kick, and slammed the door before she had time to react.

I jumped as tears filled my eyes, and I covered my mouth and nose with my hands.

“If we’re going to be together, I think you’re just going to have to get rid of her.”

Adrenaline rushed through me, and anger took over.

“We are never going to be together, you psychopath!” I shouted. “I am with a man I love more than anything in the world. He is the very air I breathe, and I’m never leaving him for you.”

“Stop it, Em.” His head shook back and forth. “You don’t mean that. He can’t give you what I can.”

“He already has. The only thing you give me is grief and pain. He would never hurt me the way you did.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“Yes, I do!” I shouted. “Now, get the fuck out of my house!” I pointed to the door.

“I was afraid something like this was going to happen.”

He pulled a gun from his back pocket and pointed it at me. Tears streamed down my face as my body shook.

“See, here’s the problem, Em. If I can’t have you, he can’t have you either.”

CHAPTER 46



Sebastian

My brothers and I sat in the loungers on the patio while the girls were in the house changing Henry's diaper.

"Where's Emilia?" Sam asked.

"I don't know. I just tried to call her, and she didn't answer."

"She's probably in the shower," Stefan said. "And Simon is on his way."

Suddenly, Ruby came running over to me, and she was barking.

"Hey, girl." I ran my hand down her back as I looked around. "Where's Emilia?"

She barked again, turned around, and looked in the direction of Emilia's house, then turned and looked at me as she yelped.

"Why is Ruby barking like that?" Julia asked as she stepped out on the patio.

"Something is wrong!" I jumped up from my chair. "Julia, text Simon and tell him something isn't right at Emilia's and to hurry."

My brothers and I ran across to Emilia's house, and when I opened the sliding door, I froze.

"You must be the new boyfriend," the guy who had a gun pointed at Emilia said. "Who the fuck are they? All three of

you get in here. NOW!”

I put my hands up and stepped inside.

“Relax, man. We can talk this out.”

“Sebastian,” Emilia cried.

“It’s okay.” I went to step closer to her, and he stopped me.

“Stop! Don’t you go anywhere near her. If you do, I swear I’ll kill you and her.”

“Okay.” I held my hands up. “What do you want? I’ll give you anything you want. If it’s money, I have it.”

“I want her!” he shouted.

I looked over at Emilia, and she slowly shook her head as tears streamed down her face.

“But apparently, she doesn’t love me anymore because of you!”

“Damien?” I narrowed my eyes at him.

“Yeah. That’s right. I know I did a bad thing, but I came to make things right.”

“Do you honestly think she’s going to forgive you?” Stefan asked.

“Shut up! You two,” he pointed to Sam and Stefan. “Sit down at the table and don’t move. One single move, and I will shoot her.”

“And I will kill you with my bare hands if you even try,” I said.

“I didn’t want to do this, but she’s giving me no choice. She said she would never leave you, and that’s not good for me. I need her back, and then we can have the future we always wanted. That’s why I came here. But she’s being a fucking bitch!” he shouted.

I looked at Emilia as she stood there shaking. I wanted to reach out and grab her, but he was too unstable. The best thing I could do right now was to try and reason with him.

“Listen, man. Let’s all just calm down for a minute.”

I looked behind Damien and saw Simon standing around the corner.

“Keep talking.” He mouthed.

“Why don’t the three of us sit down and talk about this?”

“There’s nothing to talk about! She either agrees to be with me, or she dies. It’s her choice.”

Simon slowly came up from behind and pointed the gun directly at the back of his head.

“No one is dying tonight, and she certainly isn’t getting back together with a dumb fuck like you. Now, slowly put the gun down.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m family, and you don’t fuck with my family, asshole. Put the gun down before I blow your fucking brains out.” He cocked his gun.

Damien slowly bent down, laid the gun on the floor, and Simon kicked it over to me. Picking it up, I locked it and set it on the table and grabbed Emilia and held her tight.”

“You’re safe, sweetheart. I got you.” I held her head against my chest as she sobbed.

“Back up is on the way,” Simon said as he grabbed Damien’s arms and held them behind his back. “You want to take a swing at him, bro?”

“You fucking bet I do.”

I handed Emilia over to Sam, who grabbed her and held her while I punched the shit out of him.

“I’ll file assault charges!” Damien yelled.

“Shut the hell up,” Simon said. “You got hurt because you resisted arrest, which is another charge added to the multiple charges against you already.”

I walked over to him, balled my fist, and punched him as hard as I could while Simon held onto him.

“That’s from Emilia.”

I punched him again.

“And that’s from me. If I ever see your face again, I will kill you.”

“He kicked Ruby, Sebastian!” Emilia yelled.

I grabbed his shirt with one hand and balled my other fist.

“You kicked my dog?” I spat in his face before I hit him again.

We could hear the sirens and see the flashing lights out the window as the police cars pulled up and two police officers ran inside.

“What do we have, Detective Kind?” one of the officers asked as they came in with their guns out.

“Assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder, and resisting arrest.”

“I didn’t resist arrest!”

“Yes, he did. And the four of them witnessed it. Get this piece of shit out of here.”

The officers handcuffed him and took him out.

“Are you okay?” Simon walked over and placed his hand on Emilia’s back as I held her against me.

“Yes.” She nodded her head.

“Unfortunately, I’m going to need you to come down to the station and give a statement. All of you do since you were witnesses.”

“Bro, can it wait?” I asked. “She’s in no condition right now.”

“I’m sorry, Sebastian. We really need to get this done. I’ll give you a couple of hours. Deal?”

“It’s okay. We can go now,” Emilia said. “I just want to get this over with.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“I’ll drive us there,” Sam said.

“Ruby. Where is she?” Emilia asked.

“She’s with Julia and Alex. They’ll keep her while we’re down at the station,” Stefan spoke.

CHAPTER 47



TWO WEEKS LATER

Emilia

That night would always be in the back of my mind. During our time together, Damien had never once hurt me physically. The man that stood in my house was not him. About a week after the arrest, we learned a doctor in New York newly diagnosed Damien with schizophrenia. It ran in his family as his aunt and a distant cousin had it. He refused to take the medication. His girlfriend left him, he lost two jobs over the course of the year, and his father passed away. The only time he could remember being happy was with me, hence the reason why he came to California.

For the past two weeks, I slept at Sebastian's house, for I couldn't bring myself to sleep in my own home after what had happened, even with Sebastian there. We were out the patio talking and having a glass of wine when Simon walked over.

"Hey, bro." Sebastian smiled.

"Hey, Simon."

"Hey, you two." He knelt in front of me and took hold of her hand. "Listen, Emilia. I wanted to let you know that Damien committed suicide in his cell today."

"Oh. Okay." I frowned, for I didn't know how I felt. "Thanks for letting me know."

He gave me a soft and sympathetic smile as he gently squeezed my hand.

"I'll leave the two of you alone to talk," he said.

“Thanks, brother. I’ll call you later.”

“Come here.” Sebastian patted his lap, and Ruby got up and walked over to him.

“As much as I love you, girl, no lap today.”

She lowered her head and laid down on the patio.

“You hurt her feelings,” I said as I climbed on Sebastian’s lap and wrapped my arms around his neck.

“She’ll get over it. Talk to me, baby. Tell me how you’re feeling right now.”

“Honestly, I don’t know. I’m sad he took his life, but now he’s free from the unbearable pain inside his head. Yeah, I’m sad.” Tears filled my eyes.

Sebastian pulled me into him and held me tight while I wept.

“It’s okay, baby. Let it all out.”



Two weeks Later

I had just gotten home from work and climbed into the bubble-filled bathtub when Sebastian walked in.

“Hi.” I smiled. “You’re home early.”

“I was going over some things with Delilah at the other restaurant and figured I’d just come home. I missed you.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Enough to get in here with me?” I smirked.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

He stripped out of his clothes and climbed in as he wrapped his arms around me from behind.

“How was your day?” he asked.

“It was good. I was hit and got kicked a couple of times, but other than that, it was good.”

“Sounds like the perfect day. By the way, Sam texted me earlier and asked if we could come to his house tonight for dinner. You didn’t make plans for us, did you?”

“Nope. No plans.”

“So, then you don’t mind going?”

“Not at all.” I smiled as I tilted my head back.

He lowered his head and kissed my lips.

“Good. I told him we’d be there. There’s something else I want to talk to you about.”

“Would that be the hardness I’m feeling against my back?”

“Trust me. We’ll get to that. Turn around.”

I did as he asked and wrapped my legs around his waist and my arms around his neck.

“I’ve been thinking about something for a while.”

“What have you been thinking about, Mr. Kind?”

“You’ve been staying here for a while now. You’re barely ever home. You run over to get a change of clothes, and you come right back here. Your refrigerator is empty, all your girly products are stored in my bathroom, you have a basket full of clothes in the corner of the bedroom, you do your laundry here, and I can’t remember the last time you played your piano.”

“Are you kicking me out?” I furrowed my brows.

“God, no. Why would you even ask me that? You know how much I love you and love having you here.”

“Then why are you saying all that?”

“Because I want you to move in with me completely.”

“What about my house?”

“You’ll put it up for sale.”

“But I haven’t owned it very long.”

“It doesn’t matter. You paid under market value for the house, and you’ll sell it for way more than what you paid for

it. You'll make a good profit, move in here with me, and we'll live happily ever after." The corners of his mouth curved upward. What do you think?"

"I think I just fell more in love with you." I smiled.

"Is that a yes?"

"Yes. I would love to move in with you completely. What about the Steinway?"

"I've been thinking about that, and we'll move out a couple of chairs in the living room and put it in the corner by the window. Now that we have that settled, there's another matter we need to attend to before we get out of this tub." He grinned as his lips met mine.



Sebastian

Emilia and I walked over to Sam's house, and I took a seat outside on the patio while Emilia went inside with the girls.

"Beer or scotch?" Sam asked.

"Beer is fine if that's what you're all drinking. I have some good news."

"Do tell, brother," Simon said.

"I asked Emilia to move in with me, and she said yes."

"That's great, but technically she is already living with you, bro," Stefan said.

"We're making it a permanent situation."

"So, she's putting her house up for sale?" Sam asked.

"Yes."

"Ah, so we'll be getting another new neighbor," Simon said. "Can you tell Emilia to please sell to a nice couple?"

I let out a chuckle.

“Why? Are you afraid another hot chick is going to move in and set her eyes on you?” Stefan laughed.

“Very funny, douchebag.” He threw a beer cap at him.

The ladies walked out and set the pizzas and the salad down on the table.

“Pizza’s here,” Julia spoke.

As soon as we were all seated at the outdoor table, Sam asked for our attention.

“Julia and I wanted you all here tonight because there’s something we need to tell you,” Sam spoke and then turned his attention to Julia.

“We’re going to have a baby.” Julia beamed with excitement.

Both Alex and Emilia screamed as they got up and hugged her.

“Congratulations, bro.” I hugged Sam.

“Thanks. We’re very excited.”

“Congratulations, mama.” I turned to Julia, kissed her cheek, and hugged her. “You’re going to make a wonderful mother.”

“Thanks, Sebastian.”

“Welcome to the parent’s club.” Stefan hugged Sam. “I can’t wait for the dirty diapers, the toys laying all over the house, bottles lined up in the sink, baby food everywhere, spit up all over your clothes—”

“Okay. I get it. I can handle it.”

“Fantastic news, brother.” Simon walked over and hugged him. “This family just keeps expanding. You know, it’s kind of nice. Have you told the parents yet?”

“We’re telling them tomorrow. By the way, Sebastian, we need the table at the restaurant tomorrow night. We invited both Mom and Dad.”

“Ah, that should be interesting. I’ll make sure to stay in the kitchen.” I smirked.

CHAPTER 48



ONE MONTH LATER

Emilia

We were in the middle of having sex when I blurted something out because I figured it would have softened the blow, and what better time than when all the feel-good emotions were running through Sebastian's head.

"I sold my house to your father."

"What?" Sebastian stopped and stared at me as his body hovered over mine. "Did I just hear you say you sold your house to my father?"

"Yes. But don't stop. Please."

"Well, that just killed everything." He rolled off me and onto his back.

"Oh, come on, Sebastian."

"Why on earth would you sell my father your house?"

"Because he wanted it." I bit down on my bottom lip. "He offered me double of what I paid. Plus, it was all done through his lawyers, so I didn't have any realtor fees. It was too good of a deal to pass up."

"Why didn't you discuss this with me first, Em?"

"It all happened so fast, and you were busy at the restaurant. I called you, and your exact words were, 'I love you, and I miss you, but I can't talk. I'm in the middle of a kitchen disaster.' And then I said, 'I have an excellent offer on the house.' And you said—"

“If you think it’s a great offer, accept it.” He sighed.

“And then you hung up. So, I tried to talk to you about it first.”

“It’s my father. You could have told him you needed to discuss it with me first.”

“I tried, and he said, ‘This has nothing to do with my sons. It isn’t their house, and they aren’t the ones selling. This is between you and me, and I’m offering you a hell of a deal.’” I imitated his father’s voice. “Plus, he can be very intimidating.”

“Why does he want it? Is he going to rent it out? Airbnb it? What?”

I swallowed hard as I stared into his sexy blue eyes.

“Emilia? Do not tell me that he and Celeste are moving in it.”

“Well—”

“Fuck! Are you serious?” His voice grew louder.

“Why do you have an issue with your father moving in next door?”

“Really? How would you feel if your mother moved next door?”

I puffed out my cheeks and then let out a breath.

“Right.” I slowly nodded my head. “He and Celeste are always traveling anyway, so they’ll barely be there. If you’re going to be mad at me over this, then I’m sleeping in the other room.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Watch me!” I started to climb out of bed, and he hooked his arm around my waist and pulled me back.

“You’re not sleeping anywhere but here in this bed with me.”

“Not if you’re going to be mad at me over this.” I glared at him.

The corners of his mouth curved upward as he brought the back of his hand up to my cheek.

“You’re very sexy when you have an attitude. Listen, Em, I’m a little mad because I wished you would have talked to me first, but I know my father, and I know he most likely put you on the spot. How am I going to tell my brothers?”

“You don’t have to. He’s announcing it tomorrow at Alex’s birthday party.”

“Great.” He sighed. “Bring those lips over here.”

“I don’t think so. I’m mad at you now.”

“You’re mad at me?” He laughed. “You deliver the news that my father is moving in next door, during sex, might I add, and you’re mad at me?”

“Yes. I don’t appreciate your attitude, Sebastian.” I rolled over and pulled the sheet over my naked body.

He rolled on his side and hooked his arm tightly around my waist as I could feel his hard cock pressing against me.

You can be mad at me all you want, but we have some business to finish first.”

“I’m no longer in the mood.”

He thrust inside of me, and I let out an exhilarating gasp.

“Are you sure about that?”

“Uh-huh.” I moaned as his hand squeezed my breast, and he slowly thrust his hips back and forth.

“I love you, baby.”

“I love you too. Oh God,” I moaned.



Sebastian

We hosted Alex’s birthday at the restaurant. It was a surprise party, and she was surprised since her birthday wasn’t until next week. The entire family was there, including

my mother and father. I needed to brace myself for the announcement my father would make because I knew how my brothers would react.

“I need everyone’s attention, my father spoke as he stood up and lightly tapped his glass with a spoon.

The room went silent, and I reached over and grabbed Emilia’s hand.

“Here we go.” I let out a sigh.

“Happy birthday to my amazing daughter-in-law, Alex. It’s no secret that our family is growing and growing strong. I couldn’t be happier or prouder of my sons than I am today. As I stand up here, I have two announcements I would like to make. The first one is that I’ve purchased Emilia’s house, and Celeste and I will be moving in within a few weeks.”

“What the fuck?” Sam said as he looked at me.

“Bro, did you know about this and didn’t warn us?” Simon narrowed his eye at me.

“You have got to be kidding.” Stefan shook his head.

“Grandpa, you’re going to live by us?” Lily asked with excitement.

“That’s right, sweetheart, and you can come over any time you want.”

“Yay! Dad, isn’t that great news?”

“Sure, baby girl.” Stefan patted her head.

Now, there is something else Celeste, and I want to share with you.” He hooked his arm around her.

“We’re going to have a baby.” He grinned.

A feeling erupted in the pit of my stomach as my me and my brothers stared at each other in shock.

“Oh, for god sakes, Henry,” my mother voiced.

“How is that even possible?” Simon blurted out.

“Do I need to explain the birds and bees to you, son?”

“Uh, I’m good, Dad. Wow. Congratulations.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Sam whispered.

“How are we supposed to react?” Stefan asked us.

“Did you know about this?” I asked Emilia.

“Hell no. I had no clue.”

“Dad, that is—wow. Fantastic,” I said.

“I know it’s a bit of a shock to all of you.”

“A bit, Dad?” Simon cocked his head.

We all walked over and congratulated our father and Celeste.

“Your father really outdid himself this time,” our mother spoke as she walked over to us. “How are you boys feeling about the news?”

“We’ll get back to you on that as soon as the shock wears off,” Stefan said.

She snickered and walked away.

As soon as the party ended, we all met back at Stefan’s house, grabbed some beers, and went outside on the patio.

“When I said I wanted a nice couple to buy Emilia’s house, I didn’t mean Dad and Celeste,” Simon said.

“At least it’s your house he’s living next to,” Sam smirked as he patted my back.

“It’s too close. I love him, but it was nice that he was across town,” Stefan said.

“Why the fuck didn’t you tell us?” Sam said. “Because I know you knew.” He pointed at me.

“I just found out last night when Emilia blurted it out during sex. It’ll be fine. We need to address the fact that our father is having another kid. He’s like too old to start over.”

“Celeste is only forty-two,” Stefan said.

“Only? Do you realize that we will have a sibling who is thirty-three years younger? My god,” Simon spoke. “You

don't think that's fucked up?"

"Well, yeah, a little. But what can we do?" I spoke. "He's finally happy, and we should be too. Plus, if he has a new kid to occupy his time, he won't have time to get in all of our business."

"True, Stefan spoke.

"Did you see the look on Mom's face?" Sam laughed.

"I thought she was going to pass out." I chuckled.

"I hope you boys are being nice out here," Emilia said as she stepped outside and wrapped her arm around my neck.

"Always, baby." I kissed her cheek.

"Isn't it exciting you're going to have a new sibling?" Emilia asked with a smile.

"No." Simon looked at her. "It's fucked up. Totally fucked up."

CHAPTER 49



Sebastian

I stood on the patio with my cup of coffee and watched as Emilia played with Ruby down by the water. If someone had told me a year ago that I'd be living with the woman of my dreams and had a dog, I would have told them they were crazy.

I smiled and gave her a wave as she looked over and caught me staring at her. She was the most beautiful woman in the world, and she was all mine. Setting my cup on the table, I walked down to the beach and wrapped my arms securely around her.

"Why didn't you wake me up?" I asked.

"Because you've been working so hard between the restaurants, you need your rest."

"Have I told you how much I love you?"

"A few times." A smirk crossed her beautiful lips.

"I want you to know that I plan on marrying you one day, and I hope when the time comes, you'll say yes."

"You know I will, Mr. Kind." She grinned.

"I'm not going to tell you when, where, or how. But it will happen when you least expect it."

"I'll be ready whenever you are." She brushed her lips against mine.

"Good morning, you two." I heard my father's voice shout.

Turning my head, I gave him a wave as he stood on his patio.

“Good morning, Dad.”

“Good morning, Henry.” Emilia waved.

“Yeah. This is just too weird,” I said to Emilia.

“You’ll get used to it.” She laughed.



*M*y family stood gathered outside my new restaurant for the unveiling of the sign. I had a surprise, and the only ones who knew about it were my brothers. Of course, I had to tell them what I wanted to do, and I received their full support.

“Where is Simon?” I asked for he was fifteen minutes late.

“I don’t know. I tried to call him, and he didn’t answer,” Stefan spoke.

“I tried calling him from Julia’s phone since I left mine at home, and he didn’t answer.”

“Well, I’m not waiting any longer.”

I stood in front of the restaurant as my family gathered around.

“As you all know, we’re getting ready to open in a couple of weeks. I want to thank every one of you for all your support in helping me make this happen. I love you all so much, and I couldn’t have done it without you. Welcome to Emilia’s.” I pulled the cord as the black covering came down.

“What?” Emilia brought her hand to her mouth. “Oh my God.”

“What do you think, baby. Do you like it?”

“I—I. Oh my God. I can’t believe you did this.” Her eyes filled with tears as she hugged me. “Why did you change the name?”

“I did it because I love you. You’re a huge part of my life, and I wanted something that represented us. This restaurant does that for me. You’ve been with me since day one of this journey, and I couldn’t have done it without your love and support.”

“I love you so much, Sebastian. Thank you.”

“Let’s go inside, shall we?” I opened the door.

“Nice job, son.” My father smiled as he patted my back. “I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“Now that you’ve named the restaurant after her, when are you going to put a ring on her finger?”

“Soon, Dad. Soon.”

“I’d say Emilia was speechless.” Sam walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Yeah. I took a video of her reaction. I’ll send it to you.” Stefan grinned. “Shit, where’s my phone?” He patted his pockets.

My phone started to ring, and when I pulled it from my pocket, I saw Simon was calling.

“Speaking of the devil.” I held up my phone and showed my brothers. “You better have a good explanation as to why you aren’t here,” I answered.

“Sebastian, it’s Roman.” I could hear all kinds of commotion in the background, and suddenly a sick feeling rose inside me. “Your brother was shot tonight, and he’s being rushed to Cedars Sinai. You and your brothers should get down there as fast as you can.”

*T*hank you for reading Three of a Kind!

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