



VALACHI

COSA NOSTRA HEIRS

ATLAS ROSE
RAVEN SCOTT

VALACHI

Cosa Nostra Heirs

ATLAS ROSE



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Evan

“This is new,” Bruno murmured and fingered the long russet-colored strands of the wig I wore.

“Yes.” I looked up at him. “Do you like it?”

His gaze bore into mine. The intensity made my breath catch. It’s always the same with Bruno...intense, demanding... *compelling*. Especially when it comes to me.

“If you’re wearing it, then I like it,” he answered, his brows furrowed for a second. “But do you need it this time?”

This time...

I look past him to the boarded-up derelict warehouse and pull the coat tighter around me.

My pulse was already scattered, frantic, racing. I could almost smell it in there. The cold concrete choking. Panic fluttered inside me. “Yes.” I met his stare once more. “I think it might help.”

He gave me a slow nod. “Whatever you need, you know that.” He reached up and brushed a strand of hair from my face. The sweet before the savage, right? Because once we walked through those doors, everything would change...like it always did.

I couldn’t help but find the door now. Couldn’t help but see the rusted chains on the locks and the boarded-up windows over smashed glass. That same terror clawed its way up my

throat and clenched tight. I'm almost back there, to that day... that *fucking day*.

"We don't have to do this, you know," Bruno said quietly, but he knows the truth as well as I do.

We do...

It's therapy.

Our own special kind of therapy. I opened my eyes and he saw this, my desperation and need. Then he lowered his hand and gave a careful nod.

He leaned closer, but he didn't kiss me. Instead, he growled in my ear. "Pain and pleasure, right?"

The words make a lair of the flutter in my belly. I thought it was panic, but maybe it's him. Maybe it's always him. *God, I hope so.*

Because I'd rather be tormented by a desire for my husband than by that *bitch*. My hand went to my side, to the dull throb that still haunted me, all these months later. "Yes." I breathed. "Pain is pleasure."

Bruno's hand moved to mine, his fingers clasping tight. "Then let's get started."

He turned, pulling me gently toward the chained front door, only letting my hand go in order to work the single key he had in his pocket into the lock. Chains fell, hitting against the door frame with a *thud*. Then we're inside, in that stifling, dank darkness. It wasn't quite the same as the bunker where she held me prisoner...but it was close.

Close enough to resurrect the demons.

And banish them for a little while at least.

My husband bought it for demolition. But he kept it for me.

For this purpose alone.

The steel links gnashed as Bruno secured the door from the inside. I stood in the dark, staring into that black pit that waited for me, until Bruno flicked on the light from his cell, and I was bathed in the iridescent white.

I didn't move while he came closer and stood at my back. He didn't touch me, not yet. He knew what I needed.

"Get inside, Evan," he commanded.

There's no tremor in his voice, just a hardness. And as always, I couldn't move. I was frozen.

As always, he gave me a way out, making sure I knew who was really in charge here. "You know the word to say if you want out."

That cold, wet air was a rag down my throat.

"Evan?"

I couldn't think. Couldn't move.

"*Evan.*" The concern in his voice snapped me out of the panic.

I flinched and jerked my gaze over my shoulder. "I know."

"You still want to do this?"

No...yes. I don't know. I didn't know which Hell was better. The nightmares that plagued me...or this. I winced, remembering the nightmares. The gripping, overwhelming terror where I woke screaming, feeling that blade as it plunged into my body once more. Not that...*not fucking that.*

"Yes," I whispered. "Yes, I want to do this."

"That's my phoenix," Bruno murmured, his voice growing darker, more intense...more controlling. He reached around and brushed the back of his curled fingers over the peak of my breast. I hardened with the sensation, unable to stop that charge tearing through my body all the way to my pussy. "Now get in-fucking-side, Evan."

I moved, triggered by that savagery in his tone, and took a step. My heels crunched on debris and shards of glass. The place was filthy and hollow, nothing more than concrete and steel. Half-finished and soulless, containing nothing more than my moans and my screams.

I dropped my hand and unbuttoned my coat. The frigid air reached in, finding its way between the buttons of my blouse. I

made my way to the heart of this shell of a building. To where there's a room with a bed in the middle. One just for us. Bruno's steps were heavy behind me, drawing my focus to him.

"You're back there, aren't you?" he murmured behind me. "That day...that bunker. You opened your eyes. Tell me what you see, Evan."

"Her," I answered as that bitch raged inside my head. "I see her."

She looked like me...

That's the first thing I remembered. Her hair, her clothes. They were my clothes and my hair. They were all mine. In my head she took a step toward me, and it's only then I see the knife in her hand. The silver shine glistening.

She's going to cut me...

She's going to...

I unleashed a moan. The sound wounded and feral. But then Bruno's voice invaded. "I'm right here. You can feel me, right?" He took a step closer until his body pressed against mine. Heat pressed against my back. "You can feel I'm right here."

I nodded. "Yes."

"Good," he murmured and reached around.

He worked the buttons one by one until he pushed the opening apart. His hand moved to my breast. His big hands kneading, mauling. I'm not there, not yet. I'm still trapped in that Hell. Still seeing the shine of steel as the knife plunged inside me.

"So goddamn beautiful," Bruno murmured, sliding his fingers under the edge of my bra. "I want to fuck you all day, every goddamn day. Your body is mine. You understand me?"

He gave a soft pinch of my nipple, somehow still hard enough to make me flinch, but there was no pain. Just that same fierce flare that hit me between my thighs. He knew just where to go.

“Tell me you understand, Evan.”

“I understand,” I answered.

“Tell me what you see now. In that bunker where she stabbed you.”

I closed my eyes again. The knife. The blood. “I’m falling.” I can almost feel the thud as I hit the ground. “And she’s leaving.”

“To die.” His words are brutal, and my heart lunged against my chest. But his fingers. Oh, God. His fingers, rolling, pulsing, grazing across the peak. Then he slipped lower down my stomach, staying away from the scar, and reached for the zipper of my slacks against my hip. “She left you to die, helpless, bleeding.”

My slacks fell, landing at my feet with a *thump*. They were dirty now and ruined. But I didn’t care. Bruno pressed harder, lowering his head to kiss the top of my shoulder. “You’re bleeding out, watching her leave. Tell me what you feel, Evan.”

His breath was warm on my skin; his fingers careful, sliding under the elastic of my panties as he reached for my clit.

“Talk to me, Evan,” he growled out. “Keep talking to me.”

My voice trembled, still I forced the words. “I see nothing. Nothing but emptiness and I just know that this is the end.” Because here was the truth of the matter. Here was the core of my nightmares. If I was honest, it wasn’t really about her. It was all about this moment, this desperation, and knowing I couldn’t do a damn thing about it. My heart thundered now, just as it did then. And I can’t help but feel that same nothingness reaching for me now, just like before.

Bruno slid his fingers all the way along my crease and pushed inside. I stiffened, dropping my hand to grasp his thigh. Still, he never stopped fucking me, sliding back out before he danced around my clit.

“Death,” the murmur came against my ear. “That’s what you see, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Heat built inside me at the circling of his finger, making me shift against him, aching for more.

“Get on the bed, Evan,” my husband demanded, his fingers slipping from my body.

I made my way to the bed in the middle of the room. Trembling fingers worked the buttons of my blouse and dropped it at the foot of the bed before I reached for the clasp of my bra. Then Bruno was there, sliding the straps from my shoulders, letting the garment drop. I stood there before him in nothing but my panties.

“So goddamn beautiful.” He slid his hands down my body, catching the edges on my G-string. “So alive.”

He kneeled, sinking to the filthy floor in his Armani slacks before he dragged my panties down with him. His lips were warm as they kissed my hips and the curve of my ass. I lifted my foot on instinct, stepping out of the panties until I was naked in front of him.

“Bend over the bed, Evan.”

I did, hands splayed on the comforter as I sank into the plush warmth. It was beautiful, mink, white. Something so beautiful shouldn't be in a place like this. The idea of that hit me. Beauty, warmth, perfection mingled with the darkness and the dank stench.

“Talk to me,” he urged. “Tell me what you're feeling.”

“I feel helpless,” I answered as the heat of his breath warmed my body.

“Helpless.” He kept going, pushing inside my pussy. “So goddamn helpless.”

I unleashed a moan at the sensation as he fucked me with his fingers. There was no hesitation with us anymore. Not like it was on our first night. He pushed his face in hard against my ass, licking and searching. “Fuck, you taste so good.”

His breath. His words. The sensation of his fingers drove me deeper into that desire. I closed my eyes and pushed back against him.

“Good girl,” he murmured. “So goddamn good.”

The praise made me whimper. I fisted the comforter and rocked, driving myself toward that moment where desperation turned to desire. That moment where all I thought about was him. Where all I *felt* was him. His big fingers slid inside me, that warm tongue giving me exactly what I needed.

“Jesus...” I moaned. “Bruno, I’m going to...”

He slid his finger out, gave me one lick, and pulled away. “No, you’re not. Because we’re not anywhere near done, Evan.”

I trembled as he rose from the filthy floor. The rattle of a buckle followed slide of leather. I stayed like that, bent over the bed, the sheets buckling in my grasp. I knew that this night was for me, that this was more about driving away the darkness than sex.

“Not anywhere near done, Phoenix.” The warmth of his cock pressed against my ass.

Fuck. This is what I needed. Bruno was an ass man, and he claimed mine every opportunity he had. The head of his cock pushed against the hard ring of my ass. I exhaled slowly and forced all my attention to this feeling. To the push against me...the force of his hunger.

I unleashed a moan and dropped my head forward. “More... please, Bruno, more.”

He slipped his cock along my crease, pushing into my pussy just enough to wet the head. I closed my eyes, unleashing a moan at the sensation of him stretching me before it slipped away, leaving me wanting. “Bruno.”

“Yes, baby?”

I needed more. More desperation, more drive. I needed him to take from me. To take until there was nothing left. I ached to be empty. To feel nothing but his body taking what it wanted from mine. He thrust slower, pushing against the tight ring of muscle of my ass until that burn rose as he made me stretch.

“Breathe, Evan.”

I loved it when he spoke to me like this, when he called my name and made his demands.

“Fuck me.” He groaned, pushing the head of his cock inside before he pulled back out.

“Turn around and lay back.”

I shifted, sliding my ass along the bed until I arched my back against the bed.

“Knees up, legs spread.” He looked down at me, his dark eyes glittering in the murky gloom as he watched me slowly open.

I was vulnerable to him, exposed and trembling. He looked down at me, his gaze sliding down my body until it lingered between my thighs. “Touch yourself, spread yourself for me.”

I reached down, my body quivering with a touch of my own hands as I cupped my pussy, slid two fingers on either side and opened.

“That’s the way, baby.” He leaned closer, watching me before he left a hand and dragged his finger along my slit, and pushed inside, working me until I moan.

Heat rushed through me and lingered in my belly, blending warmth with desire and anguish all in one. I shifted my ass on the bed, widening my legs, watching him as he stared down at me.

My breaths became heavy. That need to come moved closer and closer. “Bruno...”

“Let go for me, Evan,” he urged.

And I did, letting that inferno unleash inside me until it was all I could think of, and all I could feel. I wanted to come, come so fucking hard.

Then, in an instant, he pulled away.

I lifted my head. “I’m not...”

He lowered his body, his hands pressed on the inside of my thighs, opening me as he leaned forward and licked. I closed my eyes, pressed my head back against the building and unleashed a moan. “Oh god. Oh god, Bruno.”

Each lap of his tongue stoked the flames. In the wake of his fingers, the desire had ebbed. Now it rushed back to the surface, more desperate than it was before.

I thrust against his mouth, reaching down, sliding my fingers through his hair, pressing his head against me. “Harder, more. I need more.”

He speared his tongue inside, curling the tip until he dragged along my crease and circled my clit. I cried out with the sensation, bucking my hips as he sucked that tiny nub. Electricity hummed, tearing through my body until all I could think about was being fucked. “I’m going to come... I’m going to—”

He pulled away again, lifting his head, his lips glistening with my desire.

“What the fuck are you doing?” I snarled, pushing his head back down, needing to ride his face.

He rose in front of me, gripped his cock, and aimed it at my entrance before thrusting in hard. The sensation was overwhelming. He rammed into me, punching his hips forward until the invasion was so brutal it was all I could feel.

“Do you want to come, baby? Then come.”

The ebb and flow.

Ebb and flow.

Come, don’t come.

Frustration and overwhelming need flooded me. It was cruel and beautiful all at the same time, a perfect torment balanced on the edge of a blade. I unleashed a moan, and that turned into a cry. I could feel the scream building in my chest, clawing its way up my throat until it ripped free.

The guttural sound bounced against the walls of this filthy warehouse. I clamped my mouth down, still in the sound.

“No.” Bruno smiled. He was savage. A beast. Thrusting his hips as he fucked me with all of his strength. “Do you want to scream, baby? Then scream.”

That sound came once more, tearing from me as I clawed his back, pulling him against me. “*Harder!*” I howled. “Bruno! For fuck’s sake, fuck me harder!”

And he did, leaning over me, caging me in until the brutal thrusting of his hips bounced me against the bed.

My orgasm barrelled into me until I was a shuddering, weeping mess.

“That’s it, baby.” Bruno growled. “Scream it all out.”

White sparks danced in the back of my eyes. The end came rushing over me, sweeping me away with an unmerciful roar. I trembled, shaking and shuddering. I couldn’t feel my body, I couldn’t feel my mind. There was nothing but him as I floated in nothingness.

Bruno grunted. He lowered his body, gripping hold of me, his breaths were heavy and hot against my ear. “I love you.” He groaned and came in a rush.

Bruno

“Evan?” I looked down.

She was curled against me. Knees drawn up, arms wrapped around her shins. The sight hit me like a sledgehammer to the chest. I swallowed, tried to calm myself. The last thing she needed was for me to unravel. “Baby, can you hear me?”

She let out a moan. The sound was wounded and low, straining something in my chest. I winced, knowing there was nothing I could do to help her. I wanted to hold her, wanted to kiss her, wanted to feel something else but like a bastard.

What we did on these nights wasn't just sex. It was savage and raw. It was a damn battle against the demons that plagued her. I'd fulfil any role she needed: husband, protector, hitman as well. It didn't matter. *Whatever she needed.*

When I composed myself, I reached out, wanting to touch her. But I didn't, just clenched my fingers and pulled away. I know I can't reach her right now. She was all the way in the dark now, trying her best to crawl back to me.

I needed her back.

Because I can't go through this world alone.

I rolled over and climbed from the bed, then gathered my clothes from the ground where I left them. The air was pungent and heavy. Cold concrete over the scent of sex and hunger. My hunger. I know that I'm too much for her. But I can't help myself. She's all I think about. All I want, every second of every day.

I want her smiling. I want her free. Most of all, I want her safe. I pulled on my clothes and gathered my things before I started the slow process of dressing her. “Evan, baby. I’m going to get you home, okay?”

She’s unresponsive, and I do the best that I can; talking to her as I slide her G-string over her feet and along her legs, working the garment back into place, before I start with her slacks. Her bra was next, and I couldn’t help but linger at the warmth of her body. I leaned down, closed my eyes, and dragged in the scent of her before lightly pressing my lips to her shoulder.

Her eyes were closed, but I knew she wasn’t asleep. Because when you’re sleeping you’re not gripped in panic. And Evan was panicked. Her chest rose and fell with shallow breaths. Her pulse a flutter under my touch as I gripped her wrist and fed her limbs through the arms of the blouse.

“It’s okay if you can’t come back.” I try to keep talking to her. “It’s okay if you need to stay there. I get it. Believe me, I do. But there must be a better way to get through this, baby. There had to be a better way to get past what happened on that goddamn island.”

I worked the buttons of her top with shaking fingers, then rose. I didn’t pull on her coat or slide on her heels. She doesn’t need them, not when I’m here. Still, I grab them and slide one hand under her knees before I lift her from the bed, leaving the sweat-stained sheets behind. I’d return later, strip the bed, and take the soaked bedding to the cleaner until next time.

The fact that there was a next time made me sick to my stomach. I didn’t know what else to do. And I tried everything. But tonight was the worst it’d ever been. The nightmares that plagued her since the island had been slowly growing worse, growing in intensity.

She’d been in and out of so many damn psychologists’ offices, I’d lost count. Five of them in the space of a month for her to spiral back here...

Me fucking her, blending pleasure with her own personal version of Hell.

The police listed her abduction and the attempt on her life because of the powerful connections her father had. But those on the Commission knew the truth, and the real events that happened on the island.

“Sleep, baby.” I cradled her against me and carried her out of the warehouse to the car. “I’ve got you.”

I hit the button, starting the engine as I strode toward the car and yanked open the door, sliding her into the passenger’s seat. She shivered and drew her knees up to her body, shifting so her back faced me. I reached out and adjusted the heat for her, then I closed the door and headed back to the warehouse. I locked and chained the warehouse door as the night she first came to me resurfaced in my mind. It’d been three weeks since I closed the deal on this place. I’d already made plans to tear the place down. But she asked me to stop them. She said she had better use for the place. A way to help her fight back against the darkness.

Christ, that was six months ago. I didn’t want to think about how many times we’d done this.

Six months of fucking her in the filth and the dark.

Anyone else would think we were fucking crazy.

Fuck what they thought.

All I cared about was her.

She was just a shadow when I turned and made for the driver’s side, yanked open the door, and slid behind the wheel. I found her as I shoved the four-wheel drive into gear and backed out. But she never opened her eyes. She was asleep, or close to it. Spent; body, mind, and soul. She’d sleep all night now. And tomorrow...

Tomorrow I prayed she’d be better. Happier. Filled with hope instead of torment.

Until next time.

I drove her home, slowing to pull into the driveway, until the sensor triggered the gate to open. Movement came from the dark. I glanced to one of Devious’ men as he patrolled the

grounds and gave a wave, pulling the four-wheel drive around the back of the house and climbed out.

Her breaths had slowed by the time I killed the engine. I climbed out, rounded the front of the car, and pulled her into my arms to get her into the house. My steps hit heavy as I carried her through the house and upstairs to our bedroom. Still, she looked so goddamn perfect as I yanked back the sheets of our bed and laid her down.

“You can sleep now,” I murmured and worked on removing her clothes. “I’m right here. No one is going to get to you.”

I removed her blouse, her slacks, then her bra and soiled panties, leaving her naked under the sheets until I tugged the comforter high. She reached out and grasped my fingers before I pulled away. “Bruno.”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you for taking care of me.”

My heart throbbed, aching with the words. “Always, baby. Always.”

“I love you.” She slid her hand away and rolled over.

“I love you too,” I answered, but her breathing was already deepening as she slid back into sleep.

I stood there, watching her for a moment before I worked the buttons of my shirt, kicked off my shoes, and made for the bathroom.

The shower filled the room with steam. I didn’t need to leave the door cracked open. I know she’ll sleep, and I pray that in the morning, she’s better. Heat stung as I stepped into the spray and braced my hands on the wall. That ache in my body lingered, stopping my hands from drawing her close to the edge before leaving her to slide away.

It’s a good ache.

A powerful ache.

I could still feel the moment I slid into her. Still see the desperation in her eyes...when all she saw was me.

All she felt was me.

My body.

My love.

I washed and dried my body, then tugged on boxers before I made my way to bed. She never moved when I climbed in. I watched her, desperate to pull her into my arms. But she needed sleep more than she needed me to touch her. So, I slid my hand under my head and watched her, my mind shifting to tomorrow.

Tomorrow I'll kill her demons...one by one.



"MORNING."

I cracked open my eyes to find her close to me. Her perfect blue eyes were fixed on mine. *She's back, thank fucking God.* I gave a weak smile. "Morning," I said, and exhaled with relief. I took in every second of this. Her. Me. *Us.* I steeled myself and tried to keep concern from my tone. "Are you heading into the office today?"

She gave a nod. "For a while. I need to do some bookwork, anyway. Catch up on all of the interstate runs that we have coming up for the next few months. There's a lot of shipments to move. My father thinks we might be able to push into new territory. You?"

What? Michele never spoke to me about any new goddamn territory.

I licked my lips. "Pushing into unfamiliar territory is dangerous." I can't help my gut clenching. I didn't want her involved in anything that could bring any more attention to her, especially now.

Her smile widened. "Bruno, everything we do is dangerous." She rolled, leaving the comforter and sheet to slide away, giving me a glimpse of her breasts.

I let out a soft snarl. “You can always stay in bed with me. I could make it worth your while.” The scent of her made my cock harden.

But she gave me a chuckle, sliding out of reach. “I thought you were busy today?”

I was busy...hunting down the men who came to kill us. “Never too busy for you.” I lunged playfully, grabbing hold of her as she slid from the bed.

The crack of laughter she gave made everything worthwhile. She stumbled backward, then turned and headed for the bathroom. “You’re just insatiable, aren’t you?”

I flopped back down against the pillow, smiling. “You have no idea.”

I listened to her hum under the hiss of the shower and tried to swallow the pissed off flare of anger as my cell gave a *beep*.

Deviouz: It’s all ready to go.

I WINCED and punched out a reply.

Me: Did you know Michele wants Evan in the office today?

I WAITED...

D: No. The plan was

I DIDN’T NEED to wait for an explanation.

Me: He fucked us.

Me: There's no way I'm having this go down without her under guard at the house.

D: It's too late for that. Far too late. Talk when you get in.

THERE WAS NO ANSWER. I'd already said too much over text. But there was no way out of this. Michele Valachi fucked us. "Asshole," I muttered.

"You say something?"

I jerked my head up at the sound of her voice. I forced a smile, watching her step out of the bathroom and towel dry her hair. "Nothing. Just wish you'd say at home today."

She stilled, lowered her hands. "Why?"

I just gave a shrug. *Because shit is going down and I need you...safe.* I wanted to say the words, but I couldn't. I couldn't tell her how dangerous today really was...I just couldn't. "I thought we might make plans. Maybe even take off tonight. I can have the jet on standby, go anywhere you want. Jamaica, Belize...hell, Paris for that matter."

"Oh?" One brow rose. "Paris...that sounds...*nice.*"

There was a smile on her lips, an actual smile and after the haunted look in her eyes last night it looked almost like the sun had come out across her face. I shoved upward. I wanted that sun to stay, to feel the warmth and let it dance across my skin, for just a little while longer. "Then, Paris it is."

"I thought you were busy today," she said carefully. "You've been cagey, weird."

I winced at the words. She didn't seem to notice. I prayed like Hell she didn't notice. "I am." I rose from the bed and padded around to her as she stood in the doorway of the bathroom. "But as soon as today is over, I'm all yours."

"All mine," she repeated, her smile growing wider as I pulled her into my arms. "I like the sounds of that."

I grinned. "I figured you would."

Beep.

I winced and internally cursed the sound of the interruption and, just like that—the spell was broken. Evan’s smile faltered, and she took a step backward, glancing across the bed to the dresser where my cell gave a *beep* again. “You’d better get that.”

And if it was any other day, I would’ve ignored the damn calls. But I couldn’t...*not today*.

“Paris.” I started stepping away and turned toward the gating sound.

“Maybe.”

I winced and hurried, snatching my mobile from the dresser. I glanced at the caller ID. *Fuck. Of all damn people*. I hit the button before answering. “Yeah?”

I turned, shielding the screen from Evan, but I didn’t need to. She just glanced my way with a look of disappointment, and then she stepped into the bathroom and closed the door.

“What?” I said a little louder.

“What’s the hold up?” Jannick snapped. “I didn’t come all this way and do the things I did to stand here with my dick in my goddamn hands, Bruno. So quit blue-balling me and give the fucking command.”

Give the command.

Do it.

That’s what he wanted to hear. It’s what he *deserved* to hear. Six months ago, I unleashed a hunter. Now I had him tethered and bound, right before his chance to kill. “I’m coming in.”

“Then get your fucking cock out of Valachi pussy, and get your goddamn ass in the goddamn car.”

I winced, opened my mouth to snap right back, but the call was over...and the line was dead.

By the time I opened the door to the bathroom Evan was done with her hair and makeup. She gave me a hint of a smile as she pushed past and stepped through the door.

“Evan,” I called.

But she was gone, moving into the walk-in closet. There was nothing I could do but get today over with and move on with the rest of our lives. I showered and dried. Evan was gone by the time I stepped out. I glanced out of the bedroom window as I fitted my holster over my chest and slipped on my jacket.

Ten minutes later I was headed for the city. I reached out, pressed the button on my cell, and Jannick answered on the third ring. “Yeah?”

Only two words were needed. “Take them.”

Evan

Something didn't feel right. I sat behind the desk in my father's study, trying to focus on the list of interstate runs in front of me. The map was flat out on the desk at my right, pinned with all the markers that corresponded with the list of trucks and inventory numbers on the screen. But I couldn't focus on them. The numbers blurred, the details were just not sinking in.

As hard as I tried, I couldn't concentrate, and I *had* to. There were a lot of runs happening next month. A lot of escorts needed for not two borders, but five. We were moving everything from guns, drugs, to fucking diamonds cut straight out of a mine in South Africa. Their value made me sweat just thinking about it.

There were a lot of wealthy men who required a lot of dangerous goods and my father was desperate to corner the market. But the pinpricks that race along my arms had nothing to do with money and everything to do with that panicked feeling in my stomach. One that wouldn't go away.

I lifted my gaze to James, who stood in the corner of the office glancing out of the window. "You need to hover so damn close? What's going on with you today?"

It wasn't just the breathing down my damn neck, either. It was the twenty-minutes added to the goddamn trip into the city this morning that were supposedly due to "precautions."

Precautions, my ass. The guy was starting to freak me out.

First Bruno was not happy about me coming into the office and now this.

“Nothing.” James answered. “Just doing my job.”

I gave him the wave of my hand. “Can you at least do your job in the next room?”

He never moved, just gave a shrug. “Don’t tell me you’re sick of my face already.” He gave a chuckle.

Sick of his face? I barely saw him. He was a master at blending into the background, even with a six-foot-four muscled frame. I didn’t see him really, just knew he was *there*. Until today.

Today he bugged me, drawing my focus to the bulge of his gun under his jacket and my own husband’s cagey questions. There was something going on. Something Bruno wasn’t telling me. I glanced at my cell and picked it up, punching out a message:

Me: Hey, what’s going on?

I HIT send and waited for a reply. It was never long before Bruno texted me back. It didn’t matter what he was doing, he always made time for me. I sat my cell back down and tried to narrow in on the details in front of me, making sure we paid who needed to be paid. It all came down to money and connections, and my father knew them all. Over three hundred thousand had been spent greasing palms and aligning times to get the guys across the border. We had each shipment tracked down to the minute.

And it all needed to go smoothly.

Still, I couldn’t help but glance at my silent cell. I picked it up, checked the signal, and made sure it was working. There was no reply, not for me at least. James turned, grabbed his own from his pocket, and glanced at the screen. It was lit with a message on the screen. Was it Bruno?

Jealousy flared deep inside me.

I couldn't *not* be drawn to the way James slipped his phone back into his pocket and turned, glancing at me before focusing on something else.

The fact he was in here at all said how much trust we were putting in the bodyguard. No one other than family was privy to the details of Valachi business...and here he was. Former Navy SEAL who stood there watching me from the corner of his eye. I glanced at the outline of his cell under his jacket and fought the need to ask him who was messaging him.

You're being paranoid...

The voice rose inside my head. But was I? I'd learned the hard way a little suspicion was a good thing. The wound at my side gave a twinge, reminding me why. I'd ignored that nagging voice inside my head once before, and I almost paid for it with my life.

I wasn't about to make the same mistake again. A grating feeling grew into my heart when I looked at my silent cell. I wasn't a nagging wife, wasn't clingy, but Bruno was turning me into someone I wasn't. I snatched my cell from the desk and rose. "I'm taking a break."

"Good," James muttered. "I could do with a walk myself."

I shot him a glare. "Unless you plan on accompanying me into the bathroom, you can take a walk somewhere else."

He scowled for a second, and I could see he actually thought about it. Anger flared, burning inside. *Just try it.* I inhaled hard and turned, leaving him behind. Bruno's lack of messaging was starting to get to me. This wasn't like him. Not like him at all.

I strode out of the office at the back of the building and made for the private area. It was dark, all shadows and sullen lights. The place was black leather and chrome; it was a man's place designed for seedy deals and hookers. It wasn't what I wanted. But this was my father's game...for now.

Things would change when I took over.

And I *was* taking over. With or without a damn Bernardi at my side.

I made for the ladies bathroom and stepped inside, locking the door behind me. Unable to wait any longer, I punched out a text to Deviouz.

Me: Hey, is Bruno with you?

I WAITED A SECOND LATER.

D: Yeah.

YEAH?

That yeah didn't ring true. I pulled up the map loaded on my cell and checked D's location. He was west. Way out west. Then I shifted, checking the tracking on Bruno. He wasn't with him. His cell wasn't, at least.

So, either Bruno was without his cell...or his bodyguard was lying.

Me: Okay, just checking.

I DECIDED to message Bruno again, this time under the guise of dinner plans as to not appear as the needy wife.

Me: Thai for dinner?

A SECOND WAS ALL it took for the bubble and those three tiny dots to appear. *Thank God.* Relief washed through me as I

waited for his reply...and waited...and waited. Then the dots stopped flashing...and the bubble disappeared.

What the Hell?

I swallowed my anger until it was an ache. “Just answer. Give me anything...anything to signal you’re okay.”

But he never responded, and in the quiet, that nagging voice came out to play. *It’s you...you’re too much. Last night...last night pushed him over the edge.* I winced as flashes of what we did last night returned. *That’s it baby, that’s it, scream it out. Scream it all out.*

“Oh, God.” I braced my hands on the sink and dropped my head. “It was too much, too dark...too *everything.*”

I pushed him away. I’d *been* pushing him away, forcing him to do things he didn’t want to—*for me.*

“No,” I moaned out, shaking my head. “I did this...I did this... I—”

He was having an affair.

I clenched my eyes closed. He was seeing someone else, at least. It was the only thing that made sense. The only reason he’d avoid me, the only reason Deviouz would lie for him. Because the bodyguard did lie...

It was another woman.

It had to be.

It was the only thing Bruno would ever hide from me.

The only thing that made sense.

Agony carved through my chest. I shuddered, buckled, and hit the floor. “No...no...*no.*” Not Bruno. I couldn’t lose Bruno. I couldn’t...*lose...the only thing I had left.*

Cold from the tiles bled through my slacks. I curled my knees up, the act just like I’d done before—*just like last night*—but there were no tears, just an emptiness. A cruel bitterness that swallowed me whole.

A soft knock came on the door. “Evan?” James called.

He was checking on me, making sure I was still here. Making sure I didn't ruin whatever Bruno had planned.

"Mrs. Bernardi?"

I winced at the name as pain crushed my chest. "Mrs. Bernardi," I repeated. Was I? Was I, really? I lifted my hand and stared at the simple gold band etched with diamonds. I wore the ring, but I was losing the man.

I was losing Bruno.

"I'm here." My words were hollow and strange when I answered. "I'm here."

"Okay," The bodyguard on the other side of the door answered. I guess he didn't know what else to say. There was nothing to say. That bitch... *that fucking bitch finally won.*

I stayed like that, sitting on the ground with my knees against my chest until I couldn't stand the sight of that bathroom wall any longer. Then I rose, smoothed down my blouse and swallowed my pain.

Bruno wanted me to stay home today. He said so last week, making sure I was resting and getting plenty of sleep. If he wanted me at home, then that's where I needed to be...at home.

I yanked open the bathroom door, drawing James's focus from the end of the hall. "Take me home," I demanded.

"Already? Didn't you want to—"

I didn't wait for him to finish, just turned down the hall and headed out of the building to my car. By the time I yanked open the rear door, he'd followed me out, reaching for the handle just as I yanked it closed out of his reach.

They all worked for him.

All worked for Bruno or my father.

No one was loyal to me.

Not me alone.

I tugged the seatbelt closed and wrapped my arms around myself as James climbed in behind the wheel. “Cold?” he asked.

I met his gaze in the rear-view mirror. “Does it matter?”

He scowled for a second, then adjusted the temperature of the car and backed out of the garage before heading out. Security gates of my family’s compound opened then closed. I sat back, losing myself in my head. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t tear myself away from the anguish in Bruno’s eyes last night, and that growing fear he betrayed me rose like a storm in my head.

By the time we turned into the drive away of my home, all I could feel was the darkness, and all I could hear was the thunder. He was leaving me...*no, he couldn't*. He needed my name, needed my business. So, he was just going to ignore my calls when he was with someone else? Was that it?

Was that it?

James pulled the vehicle into the garage at the back of the house. I was already climbing out before he killed the engine. He knew better than to follow me inside the house. That was my only boundary. No protection inside, unless in an emergency.

This might be an emergency for me...

But not for them.

I left him behind, all but running for the rear door of my house. A house that Bruno bought me. A house where we were supposed to be happy...but what now?

I waited...

And steeled myself for the end of my life as I knew it.

Bruno

“Don’t tell me you’re going home already?” Deviouz strode toward me from deeper in the warehouse, moving out of the shadows like wrath himself.

“I have to.” I sucked in a hard breath, answering. “Evan will be done by now, and I want to make sure I’m home before dark.”

D glanced at his gold watch, staring at the time while all I saw were the flecks of blood on the wristband as he muttered. “Then you better get going.”

Evan...

Shit.

I winced as fear punched through me. I forget about the text messages...

I grabbed my cell with shaking fingers.

“She doesn’t know, right?” I jerked a glare at him.

My bodyguard just shook his head. “Not a damn thing.” There was blood on his face and his hands were a goddamn mess.

I gave a jerk of my head. “You might want to get that cleaned up before you go anywhere.”

Deviouz glanced at his fingers, clenching them into a fist. “Who said I was going anywhere?”

An icy shiver of fear moved through me. I was already breathless, shaking and trembling from what we’re done.

Adrenaline was a goddamn bitch, but Christ, this felt almost righteous. “We’re really doing this, aren’t we?”

“Yes, we’re really doing this,” D answered.

This was an end to the darkness and the monstrous events that haunted us from the island. This was the only thing I could do to protect the only one that mattered to me...Evan. I’d go to the ends of the earth to make sure she was safe, killing her nightmares one after another.

There were four men at the back of our building. Four men bound, beaten, and bloody. Four men who begged for their lives, promising anything in return. Money. Power. As if they had anything we wanted...maybe they had something...their goddamn lives.

Believe me, I was going to take those, too. Snuff them out one by one. Right after they confessed.

I needed that confession. I wanted to hear from their lying, cheating, filthy goddamn mouths what they did and why. They’d tell us the truth—I glanced at the blood on Deviouz’s hands—*eventually*.

I slid my thumb across the screen and punched out a message in reply to the ones she’d sent me hours ago.

Me: Sorry baby, got caught up. I’m on my way.

I MET my bodyguard’s stare. No words were needed. He’d keep going after I was done, I was sure of that. There was just as much rage in him then there was in me. We wanted to know the depth of how deep this shit ran for them. We wanted to understand, no...*I* needed to understand because then I could hate.

And fuck me, I did hate.

I hated them for what they did to us.

I hated for what they did to *her*.

I could still see Evan's haunted eyes, still hear her tormented screams, and feel the trembling of her body, night after night, when she woke, terrified for her life.

We all carried scars. None more than Deviouz, who almost didn't make it. Six gunshots and a knife to the side almost took the man down. How the man was still standing in front of me was a miracle. A savage, ruthless miracle. And I was thankful for every goddamn second I had with him.

"Go." He gave a jerk of his head. "I'll take care of everything here."

"You'll call if anything changes?"

He gave a low, threatening chuckle, then turned, giving me his back. "No. Now go be with your goddamn wife."

Asshole...

I hurried from the warehouse, nodding at Oliver and Paul as they stood sentry. We had the entire place on lockdown. But it wouldn't be forever. By tomorrow, this would all be over. I pressed the button and climbed into the Explorer, staring at the dark satin on my hands. I wiped them on my slacks before shoving the four-wheel drive into gear.

Deviouz wanted to drive, especially after today. But I needed him here...working.

I backed out of the parking space, glancing at Jannick's black Mercedes before I turned my focus toward home. What the hell would I tell her? *Hey, by the way, we abducted and tortured the men who funded the attack on the island today... how was your day?*

I winced, concentrated on the road as I drove out of the city and headed for the quiet back road that'd take me home. By the time I got home it was almost dark. I pulled in, waited for the gate, and then pulled around the rear of the house, parking next to the Range Rover.

An icy northern wind picked up as I climbed out and glanced at Evan's car before making my way to the house. The torchlight clicked on as I neared. I flinched and jerked my gaze to James as he stepped out.

“Mr. Bernardi.”

“James,” I answered. “She inside?”

“Yeah.”

But the way he said it sent a flare of concern ripped through me. Was she sick? Was she...*bad*? I lengthened my stride and pushed through the rear door and into the house. But there were no lights on, no dinner cooking, no sounds at all. “Evan?”

And no answer...

I climbed the stairs, making my way up to the bedroom. “Evan?” My voice echoed in the silence. That cold wind plunged deeper, chilling me to the bone as I stepped inside the bedroom. But the place was in darkness...

I craned my head, listening.

“I texted you today.”

My heart hammered, making me jump at the sound of her voice. “Jesus Christ, E.” I barked, inhaling hard. “You scared the shit out of me.” I searched for her, finding a silhouette in the darkness. “What the hell are you doing in the dark?”

“Where have you been, Bruno?”

The way she spoke made me cautious. I caught the faint gloom against her body. “I’m sorry I didn’t get back to you.”

She stepped toward me. “Where have you been?”

Panicked, I gave her a half truth. But even that was dangerous. “Jannick...we had a meeting.”

She inhaled sharply at the sound of his name. “Jannik knows where you were?”

It was dangerous saying his name. For the both of us. Her father had matched her with my cousin, forced her to court him until the fucking bastard raped her...right in front of me. I hated him for that moment. I wanted to kill him for that moment...I would if he wasn’t fucking blood. And a goddamn savage.

Jannick was merciless. The kind of beast you unleashed on your enemies and for the past six months, I'd done just that, and led us here today.

"Yes, baby. He knew where I was today."

"When you were with another woman?"

What? Her words were a punch in the gut. "Another woman?" I took a step closer, pulling her into my arms, but she was rigid and unforgiving. "Why the hell would you think I was with another woman?"

"Then where were you?" She tilted her head up to me. There was fear in her voice, real fear, and I was the cause of it.

"Evan..."

"Where were you!" she screamed and shoved away, stumbling backward. "You don't answer my questions. You don't text me back, and I know damn well Deviouz was lying when he said you were with him. You're keeping secrets from me, Bruno, and that was the *one* thing we swore we'd never do. I know something is going on, and I know you're lying because of it. So, I'm going to ask you one last time and, I swear to God, you'd better tell me the truth. Where were you?"

My senses were screaming, caught between the pain I'd caused her with the truth and the demons of her past. If I could just get her to wait. "The meeting..." I started.

She just turned and left with barely more than a sound. The light flicked on inside the walk-in closet, flooding the bedroom. The thud of something hitting the floor drew me closer. "Evan...*Evan*, what the fuck are you doing?"

Her hands shook as she shoved clothes into an open overnight bag. "What the hell do you think I'm doing, Bruno? I'm leaving."

"Leaving?"

Fear drove me forward until I grabbed her. "No, no, this isn't happening. Baby, please."

She wrenched out of my hold. "Don't. Don't bother to try to evade the truth, Bruno. I'm done."

“Done?” I shook my head, unable to understand what was happening.

Tears glistened in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks as she yanked a jacket from a hanger and turned for the door. I couldn't stop myself from stepping in her way. “No. No, you're not going anywhere.”

She lashed out, punching my shoulder. “Get the fuck out of my way, Bruno!”

I couldn't do it. Couldn't just stand aside and let her leave. I wasn't that kind of man. I looked down as I grasped her arms, still seeing the dried blood. “Don't...”

“*Don't what?*” she screamed. “Don't leave? Don't lie? Don't hold things back from me? Tell me what do you want from me, Bruno? *What do you goddamn want!*”

You...

That's all I wanted to say. I want you. “I'm not having an affair, Evan.”

Her lips curled back from her teeth, her eyes were wide and wild. Still, I'd never seen anyone more beautiful. “I keep nothing from you, Bruno. I give you everything. My nightmares, my love, my goddamn honesty, and you give me secrets and lies. I told you once before I can't live like that. I *refuse* to live like that. So, I'm asking you to move out of the doorway, don't make this any harder than it already is.”

“We found them...” The words slipped free before I knew. And the ugly truth was there.

She flinched, her brows pinching as she gripped her overnight bag with one hand and her jacket with the other. “You found them?”

I nodded. “Yes, baby. We found them.”

Her chest rose hard, and then fell. “The men you've been hunting?”

“Yes.”

A look of torture cut across her face. “When?”

“Three months ago, and we’ve been gathering evidence every day. We needed to make sure before we”—I licked my lips—“Before we made contact.”

“Made contact,” she whispered, repeating the words.

I gave a slow nod, watching as it hit home. She knew we were after the men who helped orchestrate the attack on the island, but that was all. She didn’t know who...or why. She didn’t know anything until now.

“Today...” she whispered. “Today you made contact?”

I swallowed hard and brushed her arm, then winced as I looked at my hand. I pulled away, curling my fingers, and she knew. God help me, she knew. She grabbed my hand and stared at my fingers. Anyone who was in our line of work knew what it was. We’d seen more than our fair share.

I expected her to break down. I expected her to lock herself in this walk-in closet. Fuck, I would if I were her. She’d been through more than any one person should.

She lifted her gaze to mine, and those blue eyes that reminded me so much of her father glinted like ice. “Take me to them.”

“What?” I hissed. “No, Evan.”

Those lips curled tighter as she took a step closer and growled. “Take. Me. To. Them.”

In this moment, she wasn’t my wife. She was Evan Valachi, the daughter of Michele Valachi, heiress to the Valachi family. She was dangerous; she was deadly in this moment, a force to be reckoned and someone you didn’t want in your way.

I fell in love with her power and her strength and, for my own selfish reasons, I used it to my advantage. Now I stood before as a husband...and an equal. She demanded no less. She *deserved* no less. I gave a nod. “Okay, if that’s what you want. I’ll take you.”

I expected her to drop the bag, leaving her things where they should be—in our home.

But she didn’t. When I stepped out of the doorway, she carried them with her.

“Aren’t you going to leave your clothes here?” I followed her into the bedroom.

“Why?”

“I’m doing what you asked, taking you where you want to go.”

She spun on me and closed the distance. “Oh, don’t you worry. I’m still leaving, Bruno. I’m going to take some time to think about this night. Because you didn’t just lie, you treated me like a fucking idiot. I sat in my father’s office today and planned the next month’s inventory of guns and bombs and fucking smuggled diamonds,” she forced through clenched teeth. “And you treat me like I needed wrapping in cotton wool. Have you forgotten the woman you married? Have you forgotten *who I am?*”

I swallowed and swallowed again, trying like hell to find the right words. “I guess I did.” My honesty stunned her. I rubbed my temples. “I just wanted to protect you.”

“You protect me by standing with me. *You* protect me by including me. How the fuck did you think this was going to go any other way?”

“You’re so fucking tormented,” I whispered. “So fucking sad, and I wanted to do this.”

“You don’t get it, do you?” she whispered. “You just don’t see.”

“I guess I don’t,” I answered. “You want to see them...you want to see the kind of things I’ve done to protect you, then go ahead. Get in the car, Evan. I’ll show you who I really am.”

Evan

He was really taking me. I glanced across the car to find his scowl deepening. Bright lights from oncoming cars blinded me as we headed for the city. Bruno hadn't spoken a word since climbing into the car, just stared straight ahead. His jaw clenched, hands fisting the wheel. I glanced over my shoulder to my overnight bag I'd thrown in the backseat, along with my coat.

He thought I wasn't serious. Then he found out just how serious I was.

Fear trembled through me. I wasn't going to stay if there were secrets. I've seen enough of the way my father treated my mother to know what was in store if I let this continue.

I wasn't my mother.

I wouldn't take the lying and the cheating.

I wouldn't take the secrets and the rage.

I wouldn't take anything less than pure, brutal honesty.

The drive back into the city was awful and quiet. I sat there, trying to keep hold of the rage I felt inside. But I just felt scared, I just felt anxious...and the darker Bruno became, the more afraid I became as well.

We pulled into the warehouse, waiting for the gate to roll open. We had three men working in the yard, under the guise of labor. But there was no mistaking the bulge under their jackets and the way their focus drifted along the street,

watching the cars that passed behind us. We were under lockdown. There was no mistaking that. We drove in and parked around the rear. There were five more men who stood in the open; they carried guns as they watched the rear of the warehouse.

I glanced toward the bunker we had at the back of the warehouse. The one locked and secured and was off-limits to anyone who wasn't cleared by the Bernardis' or the Valachis'.

And in this case, those people were few.

Bruno pulled the Explorer into the garage and killed the engine. But he didn't climb out, just turned to me with fear in his eyes. "I really wish you wouldn't do this."

"Because you don't want me to find out the truth?"

Sadness cut across his face. He scowled deeper. "No. Because I don't want you to see what I really am."

It took all of my strength not to touch his cheek. "Bruno, I've always known who you really were. Why do you think I married you?" My voice was soft and somber. The truth was always much crueller than a lie.

He gave a nod, then climbed out of the car. I followed and, after I left my bag and coat in the back, we headed toward the bunker. His fingers moved across the keypad, punching in the numbers as he lifted his gaze to the camera poised above the door. I didn't need an explanation to know who was inside. Deviouz would be watching, maybe even Jannik, too.

The thought of seeing him again after all these months made me feel panicked. He was just as much intertwined with my nightmares as the bitch who stabbed me. My husband's cousin had been the one that drove me away from my father and the rest of my family. He'd been the one that made me fear the Bernardi name.

Until the island...

Bruno yanked open the door and held it open for me. He was the one who bought me back from that place alive, and the one who made me realize that a name was just a name. That we control who we become, and that's why I fell in love with him.

The door closed with a *bang* behind us. I couldn't help but jump, and clamp down on the inside of my mouth, stifling a scream. Steps lead down into the darkness. The murky glow of light spilled across the bottom of the stairs, barely lighting the way.

"Grab hold of the railing, Evan." Bruno's hand brushed my arm, then closed around my wrist, guiding my hand to the railing. "I don't want you to fall."

I stepped, my ankle buckling until I found my feet.

"Careful, baby."

I licked my lips and kept going until I reached the bottom. The moment I did, my steps faltered. The stench of blood and fear hit me like a slap, one that reached around and gripped tight before dragging me back to that filthy bunker in my nightmares. My knees locked, and my feet refused to move...

"Evan," Deviouz murmured.

I flinched, my breath caught as my eyes adjusted to the gloom until I was able to spot four men kneeling in the middle of the bunker; their hands bound behind their backs and a black shroud over their heads.

I glanced at Deviouz. To those brown eyes that always seemed so warm and comforting but were now cold as stone. His jaw was hard, his scowl deepening as he cut Bruno a glare behind me. Still, my bodyguard said nothing, just watched as I stepped closer, dragging my gaze from the men in front of me to the wall of information behind them.

Six months.

Six months of watching. Six months of waiting, gathering every piece of evidence they needed to find the truth. These were the men...*these were the men who funded the attack on the island.*

This is what Bruno had been working on in the background as well as running the family business. I had no idea...

"Who are they?" My voice was hoarse. I licked my lips, cleared my throat, and tried again. "I said, who are they?"

In an instant, the sight of the blood and the bunker hit me. I couldn't breathe. Couldn't catch my breath and the pounding inside my head was deafening. The walls closed in, and it was too much like that hell where she left me to die. It was too much, too sudden, too real...

A sickening sound wrenched from my throat. I shook my head, trying to dislodge the image in front of me. But I couldn't do anything but stare at those men as they knelt on the floor, with their hands clasped behind their backs and those black cloths over their heads. I wanted to see their faces. I *needed* to see their faces. But I couldn't. I couldn't do anything but turn around and run.

I shoved past Bruno and grasped the railing before I all but threw myself up the stairs and slammed against the door. But it wouldn't open. The lock held tight, closing me in. I shoved and shoved, driving my shoulder into the door.

"Evan!" Bruno roared. "Evan, for God's sake, *stop!*"

"I have to get out of here..." desperation was a shrill scream inside my head. "*Bruno, I have to get out!*"

Then he was there, shoving the door wide for me to stumble out into the cold, night air outside. I sucked in lungfuls. The world was spinning because I couldn't get enough air. I stumbled, dropped hard, and hit the ground. Agony tore through my knees. Bruno grabbed me with powerful hands, pulling me from the ground until I was against him. "Evan, baby. Talk to me."

I shoved against him. "Don't." I shook my head and moved backward before I turned and lunged toward the warehouse.

My hands were shaking. My fingers barely hit the buttons as I stabbed in the code for the lock and then yanked on the handle. I was inside before I knew, still I couldn't shake the image of that bunker, or the smell and knowing that this was it, this was the end...the end to the monsters who tried to kill us. Bruno's steps were heavy behind me. "*Evan, talk to me!*"

Talk to him?

Talk to...him.

“Bruno, don’t.”

“I told you,” his voice was a growl behind me as I raced into the office and slammed my hands against his desk. The thud of boots muffled the pounding of my heart. It was all I could hear until the click of the lock came behind him. “I told you, Evan. I warned you it was too much.”

I squeezed my eyes closed and shook my head. My hands braced on the edge of the desk. “I can’t.”

He slid his hands around my waist and pulled me against him. “Turn around, look at me.” His voice was etched with fear.

I did as he demanded, opening my eyes before I turned to meet his stare. “Do you think I’m a monster?” he asked.

Was he a *monster*? The words hurt me to hear.

“Yes,” I answered, slowly. “But aren’t we all?” That was the truth of it. We were all monsters, each one worse than the other. Until there was no “other” left. Just beasts...killing, brutal beasts.

His body was so warm pressed against mine. “I tried to warn you.” He lowered his head to murmur, “I tried to make you understand. There’s no stopping this, Evan. No undoing what we’ve already done. No, what *they’ve* done.” His hand slid along my back, and with my head pressed against his chest, I could hear the pounding of his heart.

“They’re the ones who started this...” His words vibrated against my ear. “But I have to be the one who finishes it. To protect you.”

Those last words hit home. *To protect you*. That’s what drove Bruno. Me.

It was *always* me.

I couldn’t do anything but hold on to him, sliding my hands along his back. He was so real in this moment so blindingly real and raw. Through the horror and the torment, something else rose to the surface. The kind of hunger that didn’t deserve a place in what I’d just seen. Still, it was here and howling.

I clenched my fingers, fisting his shirt until I pulled him closer. Bruno looked down at me. That savage glare in his eyes sparkled with excitement. “Evan—”

I rose and wound my hand around the back of his neck, pulled him close until I kissed him. That heat turned to something alive. That’s how he felt to me...*alive*.

Fierce yarning filled me. He kissed me back. His tongue pushing into my mouth as his hands slid over my body and cupped my ass. A moan tore free. That sound was all he needed, tearing him away for a second. His lips were red from the force of my mouth. “Evan, I—”

“Shut up, Bruno,” I demanded, pulling him back down. “And fuck me.”

I fumbled with the buttons of my blouse and kicked off my heels as my husband yanked at his belt. We were savage in that moment, desperate and aching. I shoved my slacks and panties down, stepping out before Bruno was on top of me, driving me back against the desk.

We scattered papers to the floor. I sent a coffee cup and pens and something else he was working on flying.

But I didn’t care, and neither did he.

The room was filled with the dark, sultry scent of him. In my head, all those dark, tortured days where he spent hating and hunting slammed into me. Where he gave the order to take them...and set unmerciful events into motion.

“Jesus, woman,” he growled the words out as he palmed my breast and drove me back onto his desk. His calloused thumb brushed my nipple, sending a shudder tearing straight to my clit. “Can’t you see?” he murmured and licked his lips, dragging his hand from my breast to my side until he caressed the scar at my side. “Everything I do is for you.”

I saw it now.

Saw just how deep I was under his skin.

And just how hard I drove him...giving him my love.

I reached up, slid my hands under his arms, and pulled him down. “I love you,” I whispered. “Christ, I love you”

He reached between us, grabbed his cock, and aimed it against my core. “You drive me to madness,” he gritted out, then bucked his hips.

Desire flooded me with the invasion. I dropped backward, leaning flat on his desk, leaving him to grab my hips and drive himself deeper. He was all I could feel, all I could see. All I wanted. His big hand splayed against my stomach as he thrust hard.

“You’re...not...leaving...*me*,” he growled out, bucking his hips. His eyes were dark and savage. “You got that? There is no *out*, Evan.”

Desire slammed into me with his words. I gasped hold of the edge of the desk, widening my legs. “Deeper,” I demanded. “Fuck me deeper, Bruno.”

He leaned over, slid his hand around my throat, and squeezed. It wasn’t hard enough to cut off my air, but it was forceful enough to make me realize just how serious he was.

“Till...death...do...we...part.” His lips curled. His words savage as he thrust his cock into me.

Only I knew it wasn’t a threat to my life...

No. I knew Bruno too well for that.

It wasn’t a promise of taking care of me in sickness or weakness.

It was a promise of violence, of the kind of bloodthirsty ferocity that would terrify even the leaders of the Commission. My orgasm slammed into me, dragging a moan that rumbled in my chest. This was the making of Bruno. This was his play for power...only he didn’t realize it.

With an unmerciful growl, he closed his eyes and gave one last thrust before stilling.

Hard breaths punctured the air.

Reality was slowly creeping in...

This was his making, and he didn't understand at all.

But I did...*I did.*

I pushed up on shaking limbs to slide my hands around his body. "No leaving." I forced the words around my gasps. "On the condition there are no lies, Bruno. No secrets. Not between us."

He pulled away, staring into my eyes and slowly gave a nod. "No secrets, not anymore."

I searched his gaze for a flicker of deceit. But there was none.

Some part of me knew there never would be again.

Because he knew what would happen if there was.

Bruno

Jesus Christ...

My breaths were savage, my pulse raced. I still buried my cock inside her. She'd think I was even more of a monster now. I pushed against the desk and glanced at the floor that was littered with the contracts of the three warehouses we were buying, as well as pens I'd signed them with. My office now looked like a goddamn bomb hit it.

Still I didn't care. I eased backward, looking down as my cock slid from her pussy. Her desire glistening on my shaft, I lifted my gaze as she turned to look at me over her shoulder.

"No more secrets," I whispered.

She turned, grabbed her panties and slacks, and pulled them up to cover herself. "Everything else can go to hell, Bruno. But we need to be honest with each other. If this marriage is going to work, it needs brutal honesty, and nothing less."

I gave a nod.

She adjusted her clothes, worked her blouse into place and smoothed down her hair before she leveled me with a stare. "I want to go back in there."

I flinched with the words. "What? No."

That flare of anger sparked in her eyes once more. That fierce determination to be what she was meant to be. And that was an unmerciful force. I tried to control my fear and my tone. "Are you sure about this?"

There was that steel steadfast look in her blue eyes. That plunging arctic cold that forced her to keep going. This was the beast that saved her in that bunker that day. This was the determination that made her get up from that floor and keep moving, even as she bled out.

I'd seen glimpses of this Evan on the island when she fought not just for her life, but for mine as well.

"Yes," she answered. "I need to do this for myself."

I thought of her back in that place, staring at those men as they knelt on the concrete floor. She didn't understand what she was saying. She didn't understand who they were. But I knew. I knew how dark this went, and the loyalties that were ruined. Maybe I needed to trust that she was stronger than I thought.

If this moment gave me any kind of reflection, it was that.

"Are you prepared for what you will find?" I worked the buttons on my shirt, watching her.

"No, but that won't stop me anyway."

I knew at this moment it wouldn't.

"Okay." I met her gaze. "If you really need to do this, then let's do this. I'll be right there with you."

She straightened herself, inhaled hard and nodded. "Okay, I'm ready."

I opened the door, letting her walk through first as we headed back out of the warehouse. I didn't like the idea of her going back down in that bunker, but I wouldn't stop her. Not if it meant keeping things from her. I'd let her decide what she could handle. But she could be damn sure bet I was going to be right here for every damn second of it.

She pushed out of the warehouse, and I followed, making sure it locked behind me before we headed back to the bunker. Her fingers shook as she punched in the code, yet still, she never slowed. She yanked the door open and stepped into the darkness.

I followed her back down. This time she grabbed the railing, taking the steps slower until she reached the bottom. Deviouz

was standing there, waiting as the moans and the whimpering from the four bound men continued. D glanced my way, one brow rising with a question: *Everything okay here?*

I gave a nod and turned my attention back to Evan, watching as her gaze moved to Jannick as my cousin stepped out of the darkness, followed by her father, Michele Valachi.

She reacted at the sight of my cousin, her breath caught, and her hands clenched at her side. But Jannick never spoke to her, just glanced my way.

“Evan.” Her father glared, not impressed that his daughter was here in this blood and filth.

But she never answered, just turned her focus to the men kneeling in the middle of the room. Her focus shifted to the board against the wall at the end of the bunker, one filled with the information we needed to take these bastards down. But her attention didn’t linger, instead she moved into the middle of the room, until she stopped in front of them.

My pulse thundered. She was too close, far too fucking close, making me break out in a damn sweat. Deviouz shifted beside me, his hand dropping to his gun. Neither of us wanted her here.

“Remove the coverings,” she demanded.

I winced as Deviouz stepped forward. “I don’t think that’s a good idea—”

She never looked his way, just stared down at prisoners. “Remove. The. Coverings.”

The bodyguard cut a glare my way. Still, he did as she demanded and stepped closer to Garland Cantrall and ripped off his hood.

Evan flinched, taking a step backward. I wanted to stand at her side, but I knew she had to do this on her own. Reese Mantrel was next. The tape across his mouth stretched tight as he jerked his gaze up to her and unleashed a muffled, savage roar. The bastard could howl all he wanted. I wasn’t about to let her stand here and listen to the lying filth.

I stepped closer as Deviouz neared to the third man, and I steeled myself for my wife's reaction. D lifted the covering from Liam Petrov's head. There was a second before he glared up at her. There was blood crusted around his nose. The bastard put up a good fight, for a while at least. But he was no match for the brutality of Jannick.

"Liam?" Evan whispered. Her blue eyes grew wide as she met my stare.

I just gave a slow, careful nod. She wanted to know...now she did.

She took a step forward until Deviouz barked. "No!" His gaze tracked her movement. "Don't get too close, E."

One slow nod and she stepped backward. And the son of a bitch in front of her howled, his words indistinguishable.

"Dad?" Evan looked at her father. "He's your best friend. My uncle." Her words were a murmur as she wrapped her arms around her body.

"He's also a liar," I answered, as his muffled cries only grew louder. I took a step until I stood beside her, but I fixed my attention on him. "We have all the evidence we need."

"You funded the attack on the island?" she whispered.

The bowed man in front of her was silent. And for a second, I thought she was going to crumble... I thought she was going to break...until she took a step forward, whipped her hand through the air, and unleashed a slap across his face with a *crack!*

Liam's head rocked to the side. He fell, hitting the concrete hard.

"You tried to kill us!" she screamed, and the room rocked with the sound of her fury. "*You son of a bitch! You son of a goddamn fucking bitch!*"

She lunged, slamming into him with her fist, repeatedly. His eyes were wide, knees drawn to his chest. He tried to protect himself, but it was useless with his hands bound behind his back.

A blur of movement came from the only one still with his head draped in cloth. Harland Quinn lunged forward, tracking her by sound alone, and unleashed his fury as he slammed into my wife.

“No!” I roared, driving myself toward them.

And in the blur of an instant, the room erupted into chaos.

Bruno

“*Evan!*” I screamed as the four men kneeling in front of me lunged.

Screams erupted, coming from Deviouz, Jannick...and her father.

But all I could see was her. All I could feel was her. Adrenaline pumped through me, and in an instant, I was ripped from this bunker and thrown back into that island once more. All I could see was Evan as she was grabbed from behind by that bitch who tried to kill her on the island.

“*No!*” The three betraying bastards lunged in front of me, dragging me back to the bunker. One of them rushed me while the other two made for the stairs.

Bang!

The gunshot boomed inside the bunker. Liam Petroff fumbled, dropping to the ground. He was so quick, slipping his hands underneath him before he shoved upward and lunged; he grabbed Evan and slid his cuffed hands around her throat.

“*No!*” I roared as he yanked her with a savage jerk. Her hands flew backward and, for a second, her feet left the floor with the force. I made for him, driving toward him until his eyes widened and that tether around her throat grew tight.

One panicked yank and he tore the tape free from his mouth and sucked in hard breaths. “Come closer and I’ll snap her goddamn neck.” He yanked, making her eyes widen and her breath catch.

I froze and glanced at Evan as she gasped, shaking her head as Liam dragged her backward.

“There’s no getting out of here,” I forced the words through clenched teeth. “You’re a dead man either way, Petrov.”

“Then if I’m dead, I’ll take Evan with me.”

The sound of those words was a knife in my heart. My lips curled as I glanced at his hand. “You won’t make it.”

The words weren’t a threat, but a promise.

Boom! Boom!

The crack of the gunshots boomed inside the bunker. But Petrov jerked, yanking the cuffs tighter around her neck.

Screams erupted behind me as Petrov stumbled backward, using my wife as a shield.

I turned my head, leveling at Jannick as he took aim at Petrov’s head. “*No!*” I roared.

Evan unleashed a gasp as Petrov stumbled backward, skirting Deviouz. “Let me go, Bernardi.” He yanked her harder against him. “Let me go or I will fucking kill her now.”

She shook her head. “*No.*” Her word was a hiss.

“There’s no getting out of this.” I shook my head. “You’re dead either way.” I took a step closer, my gaze fixed on his as though I could somehow draw his focus to me and only me. “So let her go.”

His eyes were wild, cutting to Jannick behind me before he leveled his glare at me. “The bitch didn’t die before, but she will now if you take one more fucking step, Bernardi.”

I saw that connection in her eyes, saw the moment reality hit home. Her blue eyes darkened until they were almost steel. Her lips curled, baring her teeth, and there was that fighter I knew.

There was the Evan who wasn’t just my wife, but who was a Valachi.

She yanked her arm backward, then drove her elbow into Petroff's side.

The bastard doubled over. The air was nothing more than a hiss as it left his lungs.

She spun, still clutched in his hands. "You tried to fucking kill me!" She unleashed her blow, slamming into his shoulder. "I loved you!"

She tried to wrestle out of his hold, but Petroff held tight, clinging to her.

There was no stopping her now. No holding back her pain and her fury. Her blows were wild, slapping and punching as she unleashed a tirade of blows. Petrov stumbled backward, his hold easing around her neck. Then she stopped, grabbed a hold of his shirt with both hands, and drove her knee into his balls.

He doubled over, his hold slipping over her head as she ducked and kept on hitting him, driving her fist into his nose. "*You fucking bastard! You fucking, goddamn bastard!*"

Petrov's head snapped backward, and I rushed forward, pushing her out of the way. My hands were around his throat in an instant as I yanked him close. "You will *never* touch my fucking wife again." I stilled. "You understand me?" I drove my fist into the bastard's face, watching his head snap backward.

But Evan wasn't done. Unleashing a scream, she lunged, pummeling him as she screamed. "*You fucking bastard!*"

"You should've died on that island!" he howled, blood spurting from his nose.

Smack.

My fist hit his nose. Blood gushed out, splashing against my arm.

His screams were nothing more than whimpers. "You should've died, all of you should've died!"

Smack!

Crunch!

I drove my knuckles into his face. Through the pummeling and smacks of fists on flesh, Petrov hissed. “You should’ve all died.”

That was the last straw. The last words I wanted to hear from his mouth. I clenched my fist around his throat and squeezed, driving all my strength into that pressure. His face turned white. Eyes bugged out of his head. I squeezed and squeezed, unleashing my rage until it was all I could think of.

Protect her!

Save her!

There was no breath for him, no air...

His hands slapped my arms. His feet flailed, kicking desperately against the ground. But there was no getting out of this. They wanted us dead, yet he was the one who was dying now...

Minutes were all it took. Still, it felt like a lifetime as I waited for his movements to come to a stop. When I released my hold, a single slow breath released with a hiss, and he dropped to the floor.

“Bruno...” Evan choked words were all I heard

I jerked my gaze to her, then lunged, pulling her against me. My words were hoarse and husky as I ran my bloody hands over her body and cupped her face, staring into her eyes. “Are you okay?”

She nodded “Yes. I’m okay.”

Thank God...

Bruno

“Evan.”

Her breaths were hard and heavy as she turned to me. There was a spark of fear. I lifted my hand and brushed her cheek. “Are you okay?”

She froze, her chest stilling for a second before she lowered her gaze to the dead man at my feet. My hands ached, fingers burned, still curled with the memory of being wrapped around Petrov’s neck. Then she gave a slow nod.

“You scared the fuck out of me.” I slid my murdering hands around her, drawing her against my chest. “When he grabbed you like that I thought...”

She clung to me, fisting my shirt in her hands. Hands that were flecked with blood. “I’m okay,” she whispered, repeating the words to herself. “I’m okay.”

“What the fuck happened?” Deviouz strode toward us, his gun still in his hand.

I looked down at my curled fingers, still feeling the blows on Petrov’s face. “Everything is okay now.”

My bodyguard moved closer to Petrov, giving him a kick to make sure he was dead. But it was Jannik who drew my wife’s focus. The gun was still in his hand, still aimed at the two dead men at the bottom of the stairs.

We bought four men in alive, and now they were all leaving in body bags.

“Evan.” Deviouz moved to her side. “Are you okay?”

She gave a nod. “Yeah, thanks to Bruno,” she said as she lifted her gaze to me. Christ, my heart felt like it was gonna come out of my chest. I stepped closer, pulling her against me once more.

My hand slipped over her body, I could feel the pounding of her heart against my chest, and it took all my strength not to carry her from this place back into the quiet of my office, to undress her, to search her body for every goddamn bruise and scrape. I needed to feel her warmth, feel her heartbeat, feel the life throbbing in her veins.

I just needed to feel *her*...

“This is a goddamn mess,” Michelle Valachi muttered.

It took all my strength not to lunge across the room and grab the bastard by the throat. Instead, I pinned him to his spot with a glare. “It wouldn’t have been had we just stuck with the plan in the first place.”

The plan that had my wife safe at fucking home, not in the middle of the goddamn city.

There was a flinch in his eyes before he glanced at his daughter. The bastard knew damn well what he’d done. Deviouz moved to each body, then set to work, dragging them into the center of the room.

“So, what the Hell do we do now?” Michele Valachi looked at me like I had all the goddamn answers.

“We do what we’ve always done,” I answered, holding his daughter against me as I turned to Deviouz. “We clean house and then we protect what’s ours.”

I grabbed my cell out of my pocket and pressed the button. A curt and careful tone answered me on the second ring. An address was all I gave before I gave Deviouz a nod. My bodyguard straightened, dropping Petrov’s feet to the floor, then grabbed his cell and punched out a message.

Jannick set to work, removing any identification on the bodies, rings, wallets. Their cells had already been destroyed and left

behind before they even came near the place.

“Evan, baby. You might want to go home for this.” I glanced her way, hating the thought of her leaving. She looked shellshocked. Not a good time to leave her on her own, especially after what it just happened.

“No.” She rolled up her sleeves, and started helping D, rifling through the dead man’s pockets, pulling out anything that could lead back to us.

“It seems as though you have this handled, Evan,” Michele muttered, giving a nod to his daughter.

But my wife barely gave him so much as a glance, just rose from one body and moved to the next as her father turned and left, disappearing into the gloom of the stairs, leaving behind only the thud of his boots.

Only then did Evan look his way.

I caught the twitch in the corner of her cheek as he disappeared. Her father was a cold, ruthless man...and the only one standing in her way of taking over the seat on the Commission.

I glanced at the pile of bodies at her feet. The bastards were the last connection to the events that happened on the island. The last fucking tether that held us trapped in that place. They came to kill all of us one by one, and yet we survived.

That trapped *her* in that place. We were the ones who severed the connection.

Not the Salvatores. Not the Rossi’s. The Bernardi’s...and the Valachi’s.

Me...

And Evan.

We were the ones making a play for lead chair on the Commission.

Deviouz straightened and grabbed his cell as the screen brightened. “The cleaners are here.” He glanced my way.

“Go.” He looked from Evan to me. “We’ll take care of this.”

“Will we?” Jannick snapped.

Deviouz glared at my cousin. The man had all but raised the both of us over the years. “Yes,” he answered, earning a glare. “We will.”

“Fine,” Jannick mumbled. “Whatever.”

The door above buzzed, drawing Deviouz’s attention. He looked at the cameras.

“The cleaners are here.” Then turned his focus to me. “Go, both of you.”

“Okay.” I crossed the room and reached out, giving her my hand.

She took it, then jerked away when she saw the blood on the tips of her fingers.

“Here.” I grabbed a handkerchief from my pocket and wiped the blood from her fingers before tossing it on top of the bodies.

I led her to the stairs, pushing open the door as the clean-up crew waited.

They didn’t need instruction, just for us to be out of their way. I gladly left them, pulling Evan with me as we made for the Explorer. I unlocked the vehicle and wiped the handle of the door and opened it for her.

We were inside in a heartbeat, and we’d backed out of our parking space and drove through the gates of the warehouse before I finally gave in and exhaled.

“It’s really over?” she asked.

I glanced at her and gave a smile. “Yes, it’s really over.”

And it was... finally.



I OPENED the rear door of our home and waited for her to step in. Three men patrolled the grounds. But inside this

house, it was just us. No bodies, no impending attacks. Just a quietness. Just her.

I grabbed her hand, leading her along the hallway, through the kitchen, then up the stairs to our bedroom before I turned.

“You scared the hell out of me today.” I work the buttons on her blouse and let the clothes fall at her feet.

I’d burn them by morning, and the cleaners would come and clean the car and everything else we’d touched.

She held my stare. “You scared me.”

I leaned down, capturing the point of her chin until I took her mouth. Her body pressed against mine, the warmth comforting. I worked the buttons of my own shirt, shedding my clothes before I led her into the shower, making sure the water was hot.

She shuddered against me, her teeth chattering. She wasn’t cold, but in shock. We both were. We showered in silence, then stepped out, dried ourselves, and went to bed, sliding under the sheets naked.

But there was no sex tonight, just warmth and comfort. I held her in my arms and closed my eyes. Still, sleep was a long way from us. I held her against me until the silence of the night became comforting. By the time the sun rose and peeked through the curtains, we were calm.

“Bruno?”

“Mmm.”

She lifted her gaze to mine. “I think I’d like that trip to Paris now.”

I leaned down, brushed her lips with mine, and whispered. “Your wish is my command.”

Epilogue

The sounds of the smell of the city hit me the moment we pulled up outside The Four Seasons Hotel in Paris, and the rear door of the limousine opened. The scent of freshly baked bread and coffee wafted over me as the greeter opened the door and held out his hand.

“Madame.” He smiled. “Welcome to Paris.”

We touched down at night time, before climbing into the hire car and headed for the city. The tour through the bright lights of Paris was spectacular to say the least. My breath still raced, that excitement building like the flutters in my chest. It took me a long time to realize that we’re finally here.

The wheels of our jet skid against the tarmac, and we were out, breathing in freedom.

Freedom...

In Paris. The city I’d dreamed of seeing.

Bruno rounded the rear of the car. The concierge just smiled and gave a slow nod as he made for the rear of the car and hauled out our luggage. I took my husband’s hand, giddy with promise. Because that’s what it felt like now. A fresh start and finally hope of the future, no longer filled with the ghosts of our past.

“We are finally here,” I whispered as Bruno close the door behind me.

He smiled, grabbing my hand tighter. “We are finally here.”

It was our dream to come here. A dream that hadn't eventuated until now. Before this we couldn't escape the fear of what happened to the island happening again.

So, we closed ourselves off, barricaded behind fences and guards with assault rifles while we waited for change.

This was change...

We had changed.

Doors of the hired car closed with a thud. The concierge grabbed our bags as we made our way into the lobby. The moment the glass doors closed behind us we became swallowed by a vacuum of silence.

Bruno headed to the reception desk and slid his card across the counter. The check-in attendant gave me a warm, bright smile. Although she spoke in French, Bruno knew enough to fumble his way through the conversation, gaining keys to our room after he finished checking us in.

I couldn't help but chuckle at him as he glanced my way and grimaced. Seconds later, he was striding toward me, and he motioned for the elevator. We rode all the way up to one of the executive suites, then waited as the bellhop ushered our luggage inside.

Warm caramel sheer chiffon curtains fluttered, catching a breeze from outside the moment we stepped in. It was beautiful, brown and black, mirrored with warm beige tiles and soft, plush carpets. We waited while our bags were unpacked, and they stored away our clothes. Bruno's focus never shifted from me, waiting until the bellhop was finished. Bruno tipped him, walking to the front door, and closing it behind him.

The faint sound of the city drifted in. Horns blared under the drone of the traffic. Still, I pushed the sounds aside and watched my husband as he strode along the hallway toward me. And this moment felt far too perfect...

As though we didn't deserve it.

A smile trembled at the corners of my mouth as Bruno spoke. "God I've never seen anything so beautiful as you are right

now.”

My smile faltered as fear pushed in. Then, in an instant, he closed the rest of the distance between us and slid his powerful hands around my waist. “I want it all when it comes to you, Evan. I want it all.”

He leaned down, brushed his lips across mine, and I couldn’t stop the flutter in my chest. My hands went around him, pulling him close. I wanted it all when it came to him as well. Every single thing...

The good.

And the bad.

He broke the kiss to whisper against my ear. “Smile, baby. We’re in Paris.”

And that made me smile. “We are in Paris,” I repeated. “We’re...*in...Paris.*”

His hands slid over my ass, cupping me hard against him. “And I’m about to fuck you in the most beautiful, consuming way.”

I let out a chuckle as he worked the buttons of my blouse and I followed, tugging off his jacket and his shirt.

He lifted me up and carried me across the bedroom until we fell, hitting the mattress before we sank into the soft comforter.

“Christ, you are so beautiful,” he whispered. “I’m so damn lucky to call you my wife.”

“Bruno?”

He left his head. “Yeah?”

I held his gaze, the words stuck in my head. Still, they couldn’t come out. I knew what the doctors said; after the attack and the knife wound there was a strong chance I’d never carry a child. Would marriage without children be enough for him? Would *I* be enough for him? I didn’t know.

“Nothing touches us here,” he whispered as he dragged his finger along the edge of my jaw, lifting my gaze. “Okay?”

I gave a slow nod. “Okay.”

He lowered his head, kissing my mouth, then my neck, and worked his way lower until he found the swell of my breasts. Warmth closed around my nipple as he took me into his mouth. I unleashed a moan as he kissed all the way down my stomach until he met the crease of my pussy. Lips, tongue. He slid his finger along my center and gently pushed in deep. “So goddamn beautiful.”

I lowered my gaze, watching him as he tasted me. My hand went to the back of his head, fingers sliding through his hair. Bruno was right. This was perfect. This was enough. I didn’t need to think about the future because I was sure the future was thinking about me.

It was planning, scheming. I didn’t know what it had installed.

But I knew one thing. That whatever happened, Bruno would be by my side, and I’d be beside him.

I unleashed a moan as desire flooded my body. The stroke of his tongue stoked the flames before he rose upward, leaving me to reach down, clenching my hand around his cock.

God, I loved how he loved me. All-consuming. Strengthening. And always protective...