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Innocent Temptation

CHAPTER 1

"Gianna I swear to God if you don't get your ass outta that door in the next three seconds I'm leaving without you!"

I rolled my eyes in annoyance at the screeching sound of my best friend's voice echoing throughout our apartment, I chose to ignore her and instead continued my sleep, snuggling further into the warm couch.

I could have sworn I heard her mumble something along the lines of 'no wonder you can't keep a job' but I ignored that too and shut my eyes, hoping to fall back asleep. My eyes were clouded with images of my dreams when I felt my body hit the floor with an extremely painful thud.

"What the fuck?" I gasped. "You did not just push me off the damn couch!" I yelled at her, over the sound of her booming laughter. I got up and wiped the imaginary dust off my ass

before glaring at her and stifling a yawn, grabbing a seat cushion and shoving it in her face, finally shutting her up and she groaned, the sound muffled by the pillow in her face.

"I'm going to ignore that because we're late." She said, grabbing her keys off the table and slinging her bag over her shoulder. I rolled my eyes for what had to be the thousandth time today and followed her to the mirror in the hall, where we both fixed our messy hair.

I was met with the reflection of two extremely tired twenty-two-year-old girls who looked like polar opposites in every way. One blonde with shimmery straight hair and gloss plumped lips who looked like she had her entire life planned out, and a brunette who couldn't achieve a normal sleeping schedule and survived on ice coffee and hopes for the future. The only form of makeup on my face was the remnants of sleep-smudged mascara which I used a hoodie sleeve to wipe off.

"Remind me again why I have to come with you to pick up your sister? I'm pretty sure you can handle a five-year-old on your own." I asked, popping a mint into my mouth as we entered the elevator.

We lived on the second floor, much to Celine's disagreement but my fear of heights over-powered my needs to let her have her way. Despite being so close to the ground, our apartment

was still unbelievably expensive, but definitely worth the thousands we pay each month.

90

Despite being so young, Celine had managed to score this apartment using some of her saved up cash, and with a little help from her parents, the deed was put in our name just two years ago.

1

The idea of me leeching off my best friend didn't sound so appealing, I luckily, after endless months, convinced her to let me take care of the utility bills to which Celine reluctantly agreed, if only to make me feel better.

"Yes but, the whole point of having a best friend is not to be alone during boring stuff like this." She spoke, breaking my train of thoughts and backing out of the driveway.

"I'm a thousand percent sure that's not the reason but I'll let you think so." I said, causing a grin to spread over her face. I placed my head on the window and watched intently as the heavy New York traffic flashed by my eyes.

Celine and I had been best friends for the best part of ten years. We were attached by the hip. Two peas in a pod. Despite the obvious differences in personality and style, we were the same

person. She was beautiful of course, much like me in that department.

It was when I caught her stuffing socks in her bra in grade school that I knew we'd be friends for life. I smiled at the distant memory, inwardly chuckling at the mess of Victoria secret perfume and puberty we were at that age.

Her glossy lips parted as she began to speak, breaking my train of thought. "Alright we're here. Let's get in, get Lily and leave, before any of them get the chance to put their sticky little fingers on me." She visibly shuddered at the thought while I just laughed at her distaste for children.

We were different in that way. I loved kids and planned to have many of my own, while she decided to be the rich aunt who travels the world and spontaneously shows up at Thanks Giving dinner with a foreign husband. Christmas too, if we were lucky.

I opened the door and stepped out, in awe of the school in front of me. It stood tall, shiny and intimidating, further away from the bustling noise of the city. We instantly spotted Lily from afar, her platinum blonde hair and dazzling smile standing out in the crowd.

She sat in a circle with two other girls, the three of them passing around dolls and giggling once in a while at something

the other had said. It reminded me of this exact situation Celine and i were in at that age.

Ripping off the doll's head just to traumatize my bestfriend was my favorite past time.

We walked down the rose filled pathway that led into the playground and crossed the threshold. The silence that once filled the air was instead invaded by the sound of little feet padding the asphalt and distant cries mixed with laughter. She noticed us and immediately smiled, her being the only girl who wore a Disney princess dress to school was one of the reasons why she stood out so much. She was as out there as her sister.

I smiled when she ran up to us and clung to both our legs with her tiny palms. When she let go, a look of realization flashed across her face and she frowned. "I thought I asked you guys to wear your princess dresses too!" I faked shock and tapped Celine on the arm. "How could we forget?" kneeling down I kissed the toddler on the cheek and whispered something in her ear which instantly made her smile a toothless grin. She skipped away and grabbed her small pink backpack, waving at her friends and leading the way to the car.

Celine gave me a questioning look and I just shrugged. Opening the door and hopping back into the front seat, sneakily smirking.

"Cel! Gianna said we could go for ice-cream. Can I get two?"

I laughed at the groan my best friend let out, silently cursing me for not letting us go home.

We arrived at a cute local ice-cream shop a few minutes later, Lily had almost jumped out the window at her excitement. I held her hand tightly in my grasp as we walked through the door together. "Oh my gosh strawberry! Can I get strawberry? I like it, its pink! Please Gi?" she gushed. I looked down at her doughy brown eyes and smiled as she squished her face and hands against the cool glass, admiring the sugary substances.

"Yeah of course." I reached into my pocket and grabbed the money, paying despite Celine's protests which I shrugged off.

"I can't believe you convinced me into bringing this little brat to buy dessert at one in the afternoon." Celine grumbled from besides me, her sister immediately caught onto what she was saying and frowned. "Hey! I'm not a brat." she whined and I giggled teasingly at their interaction.

she never shows it, but hanging around her sister is the highlight of any day for Celine. despite the little spat they just had, i knew nothing was as special as a sister-to-sister bond. I sighed sadly but my straying thoughts were interrupted when I heard a little squeal as Lily looked up at our order.

We grabbed our cups and sat down in a small booth next to a little playground for kids. I turned my direction to Lily when she asked to go to the restroom, her sister opting to take her.

I was pulled out of the focus of the delicious ice-cream in front of me when I heard a loud cry. My eyes settled on a young girl. Maybe five or six, crying as she clutched her knee which looked to be dripping blood. I watched for a few seconds and noticed no one coming to her rescue. Leaving me no choice but to get up and rush over to her.

"Hey sweetie" I knelt down next to her and smiled, reaching for her small, shaking hand, which made her calm down slightly.

"Don't cry okay? Here, let me get some wipes and wipe this clean for you yeah?" she sniffled and nodded as I wiped the blood away as best I could, reaching into my purse and grabbing a blue Band-Aid that I had kept from the last time I went to the park with Lily. The girl had fully stopped crying as I placed it onto her knee. Covering the small scrape.

"There you go. Where's your mom at?" Before she had the chance to respond I heard a voice shriek behind me.

"Oh my gosh, my poor baby! Come here!" I turned around and stood up, only to be met with a beautiful woman, she looked to be in her thirties, lifting up the child that was once next to me.

I stared at her in complete awe for a second, enthralled by how pretty she was. Her hair was shiny and smooth, straight out of a L'Oréal commercial. A dark red lipstick lined her heart shaped lips, complimenting her dark eyes. She had to have been some sort of model with her long, tan legs. She looked to be in her late thirties.

After checking if the child was still in pain she looked towards me and smiled, the toothy grin immediately radiating kindness and compassion "Thank you so much for helping her darling! I had to leave for a moment, you know, business." She explained, consoling her child as I stood there awkwardly. I smiled at her and nodded. "Of course. Don't worry about it." I said, turning around to head back to my table where Celine watched me curiously.

"Do you do this type of thing often, by any chance?" the woman asked before I had the chance to reach the booth

I looked at her in confusion and asked her what she meant.

"Well, you see. I wouldn't ask if I wasn't so desperate. I really have to get away with my husband on Monday and it would be great if you could spend a couple hours babysitting. It's just this little cutie, her brother and their younger sister, She's two. I know it's a lot to ask seeing as we just met but I'm willing to pay you two hundred dollars and hour, if that's okay with you."

My eyes bugled out of their sockets at the amount of money mentioned. I would be insane to pass this up. Celine's voice crossed my mind and I almost heard her say the words, 'take the offer dumbass! Not like you have anything better to do on a Monday night.'

Couldn't she ask a family member? I'd never risk putting a stranger in charge of my children—good first impression or not. But I shrugged anyway.

As if she needed to convince me more. Mystery woman took her phone out of her dress pocket and spoke. "Here, take down my phone number and give me a message if you find yourself interested okay?"

I nodded and took out my phone, taking down the numbers as she read them out.

"Anyway, it was nice meeting you..."

"Gianna." I finished off.

"Ah, Gianna. A beautiful name! I'm Sarah." she runs a hand through her long hair. "I've got to run now but I hope to hear from you soon." She smiles one last time and lifts her daughter. I smiled politely at her and waved at the little girl in her arms as she walked out the door.

This sounded perfect for me. I mean, what could go wrong?

"What was that all about?" Celine asked as I approached my seat, shoving a half melted ice-cream cup towards me. I took it gratefully and shoved the spoon into my mouth before I could get out a reply. I moaned at the taste and she rolled her eyes, a slight smile lining her lips.

"I think I just got a job." I said, twirling the utensil between my fingers. Her eyes widened and she raised her eyebrows, expecting a detailed explanation and I delved into the story. From the little girl crying on the floor to her mom offering me a job and she stared at me, her mouth agape, attempting to take it all in.

"And you're taking it, just like that?" she asked, her toned laced with confusion.

"Yeah probably. she's offering me two hundred and hour! I'd be stupid not to take it." she gave me a look that said 'you're stupid anyway.' and I rolled my eyes.

"What if her family is a bunch of serial killers?" she asked and I shrugged.

"I'll do an extensive google search on them just for you when I get home. Plus I'd rather get murdered with a bunch of money in my bank account." I smirked teasingly and she stacked our empty cups in the middle of the table, making sure to clean up for the server who would collect our trash.

"i don't know Gi." Celine sighed and stroked the hair of her sister who fell asleep on her shoulder, strawberry ice-cream lingered around her lips and I smiled. "I have a bad feeling about this."

"Oh, come on." I whined, waving a dismissive hand in front of my face. "She looks nice enough. I'll be extra cautious." I said, attempting to calm her nerves which seemingly didn't work, based on the reluctant expression on her face. "If it seems suspicious or anything I'll be out of there quickly." her face relaxed slightly and she nodded.

"Come on, my sisters been asleep on me for a while and its giving me bad cramps. Who naps in the afternoon anyway?" she snickered, gently lifting her adorable snoring sibling.

I grabbed her backpack and we walked out of the shop, "You." I said, stating the obvious.

She rolled her eyes and pointed an accusing finger at me.

"Whatever, we aren't done with this conversation."

I chuckled silently and shook my head, placing it against the car seat.

I may or may not become a stranger's babysitter tomorrow.

They say all good boys go to heaven. But bad boys bring heaven to you."

315

I lazily fluttered my eyes open and was met with harsh sun-rays casted into my room and I groaned, immediately pulling the warm covers over my messy nest of hair. For as long as I could remember, I'd slept through most of my alarms on every single occasion. Including forgetting to pick Celine up from a hair appointment and when she strolled in two hours past her pickup time—with great hair of course—she was fuming. She never spoke to me for a whole week and only forgave me once I promised to pick Lily up from school on her behalf. Which wasn't so bad-- I loved the kid and she only harassed me for ice-cream twice, so it was a win-win situation.

28

A few minutes later, I rolled over and glanced at the time on my phone. It was way too early for me to be up but I powered through anyway, nothing some strong coffee wouldn't fix.

2

After showering and lathering myself in perfume and essential body products, I threw on a lazy outfit for the morning and groggily made my way downstairs. The smell of burnt pancakes washed over me and I grimaced. The last thing I wanted to wake up to today was our kitchen catching fire because of Celine's god-awful cooking habits. Usually we picked up food on our way out but I assume she wanted to make sure I ate before I left to babysit three kids whose mom I had just met two days ago. Sarah and I had texted back and forth over time and she seemed nice enough.

19

I had nothing to lose and the money would definitely come in handy in the future. I knew today would go by smoothly. I was great with kids and was old enough to know what they liked and disliked, how to handle their consistent mood swings and needs and what to do if either one of them got hurt. Which hopefully wouldn't be the case today.

12

As I approached the spacious kitchen, the burnt smell of pancakes was stronger and I scrunched my nose up, frantically waving my hand in front of my face to get rid of the smoke surrounding the room. In the middle of it all stood my incapable best friend, covering her mouth with her hand as she coughed into it and fanned the smoke away from the smoke alarm.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me."

She spun around once the strong fumes had died out and glared at me as I laughed. "Want me to call the fire department?" I questioned. My eyes slightly red. "Ha-ha very funny." I snickered even more at the defeated look she held, before grabbing my phone and ordering us some breakfast instead. "Ah, the wonders of technology," I spoke. "Now we won't have to starve to death." I patted her shoulder and went over to the coffee machine. Brewing us both a cup before sitting across from her at the island in our kitchen.

I slid the hot mug to her and she smiled at me appreciatively, blowing over the steam to cool it down. "I don't think I'm getting better at the whole cooking thing." She mumbled, more to herself than me. I gave her a look that told her I agreed and she rolled her eyes playfully.

I swiftly changed the subject from her cooking catastrophe to ask her what she was going to get up to today. "I have a date with Ian Somerhalder." She beamed. "I thought you finished the show yesterday, I could hear you crying from my room." She nodded her head and took another sip of the caffeine in front of her. "Well, yes, but I'm starting it from season one again today."

Before I had the chance to question her well-being the doorbell rang and I basically flew to the front door, eager to get some

food in my system. I handed the boy around my age some money and he smiled gratefully, accepting the tip with it. "Thank you." I said, about to shut the door when I noticed his eyes lingering on my cleavage a little longer than they should've.

Boys. I thought, rolling my eyes.

The aroma of the food caught my attention instead and after shutting the door, I walked back into the kitchen, listening to Celine drone on about some Lana Del Rey song while I plated up some bagels and bacon, pouring some orange juice to go with it. The smell wafted through the air and I instantly felt my mouth water at how delicious it all looked.

It had been a few hours later and I was seated on the floor in front of my large mirror, applying minimal makeup to my eyes and attempting to style my hair into something more professional than a messy bun. I had opted to wear something comfortable as I would most likely get my outfit dirty somehow.

My eyes landed on a cute red and white dress that was perfect for the occasion. Not my most modest piece of clothing but not too revealing either.

I grabbed a pair of flat shoes and slipped into them with ease. Once I was done I gave myself a once-over in my mirror. My hair cascaded down my back in light waves, the black color

complimenting the mascara on my eyelashes. I rolled my lips together, smoothing out the cherry flavored lip gloss that coated them, before picking up my purse and heading downstairs. I waved goodbye to Celine who dismissed me quickly and turned back to whatever show was occupying her.

"Good luck!" she yelled and I closed the door behind me, making my way to the sleek black car parked in my spot. I set the directions of the house into my GPS and made my way there. Texting Sarah to let her know I was on my way.

I arrived around twenty minutes later and gaped at the huge mansion in awe. It was at least twelve times bigger than our place—it was modern and beautiful. The place was absolutely stunning to say the least. I approached the large entrance and the gate automatically opened. Giving space to a driveway that looked like it stretched out forever.

I slowly drove to the front of the home and parked my vehicle next to what looked like the most expensive cars. My family was well off, but this was a whole new meaning of wealth.

Just as I was shutting my door I heard the click of heels and turned around to be met with a smiling Sarah who pulled me in for a hug which surprised me at first, but I returned eventually, inhaling her expensive perfume.

"Giada! You made it right on time, I'm so glad you're here" I smiled at her as we walked up the stairs and through the oversized front door.

"Oh, uhm, it's Gianna, like with an N." I commented lightly.

She turned around on the top step, "Gianna. Yes, that's what I said."

I raised my eyebrows but decided to drop the situation entirely, she'd learn it eventually.

"Anyway, my husband will be down in a minute! We shouldn't be too long, just a couple of hours." She said, leading me through the large foyer that looked bigger than my entire apartment altogether. Two staircases curved around the room and conjoined at the top, each one was designed with what looked like white and black marble—matching the railing next to them.

"No worries." I smiled, attempting to not get lost as I followed her through the house.

"The credit card is on the kitchen counter." I followed her into the- as expected- large kitchen and smiled, "You can order pizza later or cook if you don't mind it, nothing too big as I've already taken care of lunch for them." I nodded absentmindedly and looked around, taking in each and every detail with awe. The interior design was amazing and as if she had read my mind,

Sarah began to speak. "Beautiful isn't it?" she asked, smiling proudly.

I returned the grin and immediately agreed, completely enthralled by the structure of her house. "My husband has great taste in interior design."

"It seems so, you have a lovely home." I complimented, which made her eyes light up and another smile grace her features.

"Now that that's out of the way let's go see the kids shall we?" her heels clicked on the marble floors as she walked into a room with a huge TV where two small children stared intently at the cartoon being displayed while another one sat soundly asleep on the large couch, enclosed with multiple pillows and blankets. She was beautiful and looked more like her mom than the other two, which was strange but I brushed it off, focusing on the faces in front of me.

"Alright guys! Your babysitter is here!" she announced, clasping her hands together. Their attention was taken off the screen and instead zoned in on me. I waved at them and smiled when they reciprocated the action.

"The one on the left is Elena, you met her the first time. She shouldn't be too hard to handle, just keep her busy with her toys."

I beamed at the small girl I had met last week. Her hair sat neatly in two ponytails on the sides of her head, a few stray pieces hanging out of the front, she brushed the hairs away and her eyes flashed with the recognition that she had met me before.

"Over there napping is Maria. She typically just wakes up to eat and falls right back to sleep, so not much of a stress there. I do have a few pre-made baby meals should she need to be fed again, I'll show you where at in a second. She's only four so not too high maintenance." She knelt next to the little toddler and brushed her knuckles against her rosy pink cheek.

I cooed at the little girl, she was adorable. All of them were. What was it about rich people genes?

"And last but not least, Luca he's almost ten so much more mature and normally stays in his room playing videogames."

I turned to look at the boy and internally gushed at how adorable he was as well. His brown hair was strewn messily across his forehead, a mischievous glint was spread across his brown eyes and he winked at me, causing a small giggle to erupt from my throat.

I'd definitely have my hands full with him.

Sarah smiled tightly and leaned over, "Don't tell anyone, but Maria is my favorite. So be the nicest to her." She winked, but I couldn't wipe the frown off my face.

"Luca acts out the most, please don't let that discourage you." She sighed. "I wish I knew what made him so troubled but unfortunately he keeps that to himself."

"Hey you two." I smiled at the two staring kids, choosing to ignore Sarah's words. For now. they repeated a shy 'hi' making their mother and I laugh.

"Okay and where's my fourth baby? Ah- there he is."

I swiveled to the direction of footsteps coming down the stairs and felt my smile waver. There stood a glorious man, who looked to be in his late thirties, maybe early forties.. Securing a watch around his wrist. A white dress shirt clung to his muscular figure. Enhancing his biceps. The sleeves were rolled up his arms haphazardly and black pants were covering his firm legs as he jogged down the last few steps.

He has gorgeous inky black hair, littered with a few sparse grays.

From what I could see, his eyes were a beautiful deep brown color. Mine were the same but his held more depth, as if he was hiding a thousand layers under those mesmerizing orbs. As if I hadn't taken in most of his physical features, I continued to

study his face as he busied himself with the end of his expensive looking watch.

I had never seen a man whose presence immediately demanded everyone's attention. He oozed dominance and power and I felt myself embarrassingly clench my thighs at the sight of him.

What was wrong with me? I inwardly chastised. This is why I can't have nice things.

I looked away from the sexy man in front of me before I started noticeably salivating. God he was as stunning as they came and I had to pull myself together before his wife noticed me obviously ogling her husband.

He seemed to only have noticed me a few seconds later and gave me a breathtaking smile, revealing a pearly white set of teeth.

"You must be Gianna." He spoke with a thick Italian accent which made my head dizzy with each syllable he spoke.

I was a sucker for Italian men.

He stuck out his arm, his skin a deep rich colour, dusted with black hairs, and I took hold of it, shaking lightly before releasing my hold on him.

"I'm Alexander, lovely to meet you."

3

"Go easy on the lipstick, you're about to get kissed"

86

I sighed and sat down in front of the two kids, holding a half asleep Maria in my arms. I grabbed ahold of her shirt and raised it to her lips, wiping the small bit of drool that escaped from her mouth. The little girl woke up in a confused daze as soon as the door shut and I spent the past few minutes attempting to calm her down and lull her back to sleep. Were four year olds supposed to sleep this much?

61

Not that I had room to judge, at twenty-two, I couldn't go a day without an afternoon nap.

17

Sarah and Alexander left the house around ten minutes ago, leaving me to babysit for a couple of hours. My mind drifted back to when I had just met Alexander-Alex, as he told me to call him. I was breathless. Never had I laid eyes on such a handsomely crafted male. The feeling of his eyes running down me was exquisite, not in the way I wanted to be- but I didn't

necessarily expect anything less from a married man with three kids.

140

I had to stop my thoughts from wandering to places they shouldn't have. I was already disgusted by my reaction to seeing him for the first time. As if I was a teenager new to lust and went after any man within reach. It was crude and unlike me and I cursed myself for it.

12

He stared at me as if I was just a kid-and he, an older man taking in my appearance for the first time. Which was disappointing to say the least. Most men drank up my figure as if I was the only woman on earth—which was understandable. My long, tan legs and curvy waist went unnoticed even by me. I'd shamelessly stare at myself in the mirror daily and after years of attempting to build up my confidence, I was finally where I wanted to be.

153

Besides, my rush of excitement was a spur of the moment thing, I didn't actually want to jump my boss on the first day. Or on any day. I had more respect for him, his wife and their three beautiful kids. It wasn't my place—nor anyone's to disrupt that kind of bond.

93

The primal side of me wanted me to say fuck it—throw caution to the wind. But my rational side knew that this time was different, he wasn't a random man I had the luck to meet at a bar downtown, he was forbidden, sinful and risky.

28

I haven't been sexually active with a man in over a month—I blamed my intrusive thoughts on my lack of dick and although a little sex deprived- I'd say it was going well.

89

Until now that is.

2

That's it. I just needed to get laid and this would all be over.

7

"Can you go make us dinosaur nuggets Gigi?"

187

I was snapped out of my thoughts when I felt a tug on my hand. Looking down, I smiled at Elena.

"Didn't you eat before your parents left honey?" I asked her, brushing my hand over her frizzy hair. Her big brown eyes stared up at me hopefully and I knew I couldn't say no.

"No. mommy and daddy were fighting again." She pouted. "I can't eat while they argue. That's why they went for counseling." She giggled at the grown up word she had used, her sadness long gone.

1.1K

I arched an eyebrow up at her. Knowing she wasn't supposed to tell me such private information but kids were never good at keeping secrets anyway.

11

The thought of Sarah and Alex facing marital problems sparked an unwanted wave of excitement in my chest but my curiosity overpowered it and I was left wondering what was wrong. They seemed happy together but I of all people know how easy it is to fake the situation you were in and immediately all the thoughts went away.

23

"Yeah sure. You coming Luca?" I asked the boy, placing his youngest sister back into her small playpen. He shook his head shyly and stared back up at the show that buzzed in the background. His sister seemed less shy and more outgoing, grabbing my hand and leading me back into the kitchen.

58

"I think they're in the freezer down there." She said. I bent down and sifted through the cooled draw, searching for the chicken nuggets and placing them on the counter. As the little girl climbed on the stool to gaze at the sparkly chandelier.

I'd be the same if my house looked this way.

I finished preparing the food and placed a small plate in front of her. Squirting some ketchup onto the side.

20

"Please may I have some-what do you call it? Succo d'arancia?" she asked.

183

"Orange juice?"

16

She gasped. "Yes! I I always forget what it's called. Mommy says it's 'cause I was born in Italy."

9

I smiled and poured her a glass of the liquid I found in their fully stocked fridge.

3

"You want some?" she asked, mouth full of food. I shook my head and thanked her, laughing at her childish ways.

1

Looking down at my watch, I noted the hands ticking closer to six p.m., I had around two hours before they came back.

1

"You wanna go swimming Gianna?" I looked back up at Elena, her once full plate now empty. "Maybe another time sweetheart, you can't swim on a full stomach." "My stomach isn't full," she said. "I am. But my stomach isn't." I laughed at her, "I'm afraid that's not how it works. Why don't you go get your brother and we can play a board game in the meantime yeah?"

17

"Okay!" she scurried off and I grabbed her plate, placing it in the dishwasher and heading back into the room with the kids.

By the time we were finished our first game of monopoly, I heard the door open and the sound of angry footsteps overcame my senses. Without so much of a greeting Mr. Moritello trudged up the stairs, not noticing us. He looked mad and my confusion only grew.

44

From the looks of it, he had unbuttoned the top of his white shirt and rolled the sleeves up to his elbows. I was surprised to

see a long trail of ink from his wrists which probably led up to his shoulders and I could only feel my attraction growing. Especially because I could practically see the anger radiating off his figure.

72

Take it out on me. I wanted to scream.

639

"Oh. Gianna, I forgot you were here." I turned my head from the trail of the steaming man and instead faced a tired looking Sarah. She placed her purse on a random table in the room and shrugged off her coat, hanging it behind her.

56

I smiled at her and got up, dusting off the ends of my dress.

"I hope we're not too late and I definitely hope the kids weren't too much of a stress." she said, smiling as best as she could while she went to greet her children. I watched them converse for a few seconds before she turned back to me.

3

"No of course not. I love them already." I truly did. In as little time as I'd known these three children—they had me wrapped around their rich little fingers. Each one of them had separate personalities and characteristics that made them stand out

from one another. I couldn't grasp much from Maria but I knew she'd be as bubbly and loving as her sister when she was older.

5

From what I'd seen, Luca took after his father. Quiet and mysterious. He only spoke when it was necessary and when he did have something to say it was always something intelligent that made you wonder how a ten-year-old had such a sharp mind.

82

"That's great. Would you like to stay and eat something?" she asked me tiredly. The offer came from a good place but I could see she wanted me to leave and I wasn't oblivious enough to notice that she needed her space at the moment and I wouldn't want to intrude on that.

29

"Thank you but I'll have to pass. I should be getting home now." Her eyes softened with relief but I couldn't feel mad at her for wanting me to leave—she was tired and quite honestly, so was I. And the thought of going home to my warm room after the long day I'd had sounded like heaven right now.

1

"Of course, another time then. Kids! Come say bye and thank Gianna for looking after you!" Sarah beckoned the kids over with her manicured fingers and they ditched the TV show they were so focused on a second ago to rush over to me.

15

I smiled as the two wrapped their hands around my legs, rubbing their heads. "Arrivederci amore mio!" I said to them, and by the reciprocated smile on their faces I knew the two of them understood my words. With one last kiss to both their cheeks I walked out the door with Sarah by my side. Getting into my car and waving at her as I drove down and out of the gates, letting out a yawn as I made my way home.

192

I opened the door to my apartment ten minutes later and followed the sound of the television. I grinned at Celine staring intently at the show she was so enthralled by; I'd doubt she noticed me walk in. I picked up a stray pillow off the floor and threw it at her head, laughing uncontrollably at the surprised scream she let out.

7

"You bitch!" She yelled, holding a trembling hand to her chest. I laughed my ass off for the next five minutes, brushing off the deadly glares she sent my way.

2

I rolled my eyes and sat down next to her. She ignored me for a few more seconds before turning to me with a gasp, as if she'd just remembered where I came from and why I was out all day.

"Holy shit, I almost forgot. How did it go?" she asked, lowering the volume of the TV and turning to face me completely.

1

"Well. Her kids are really nice. We watched movies. Ate food. Her husband is a sex God. Ate more food and then played monopoly. How was your day?" I asked casually.

12

"Good. Although I think I have a rash on my-wait what!?" she screamed. I looked at her weirdly. I gave her a look that said, a rash on your what? But she ignored that, widening her eyes instead.

39

"Tell me you boned him." I rolled my eyes at her crude question and faked a smile, nodding my head frantically.

32

"Totally. We had out of this world sex in the rose bushes while his wife watched." The smile on my face was starting to hurt and she lightly shoved me back.

51

"Are you serious?" the excitement in her eyes went unnoticed and I couldn't believe she actually thought I'd get in bed with a married man. Although a ring didn't stop me before—but kids definitely would.

250

God, was I really such a slut? I let the shame trickle over me for a few seconds before it ebbed away.

40

"No." I flat lined, dropping the grin. Her happiness instantly vanished and was replaced with irritation. She folded her arms across her chest and pouted at my laugh.

"Seriously though, no we didn't. He's married and I'm way too young for him ." I reminded her and myself. Way too young.

11

"You are not too young for him, what is he ? forty?" I nodded ".How did he not make a move? Is he blind? Secretly gay? Small dick?" Celine asked, pushing the topic further.

54

"None of the above--I think. Just a loyal married guy." I shrugged and grabbed the remote from her, surfing through the channels as an attempt to change the topic, but of course—when Celine wanted information, she was relentless about getting it.

4

"Yeah no. 'Loyal' and 'guy' don't go in the same sentence in the twenty-first century." She said matter-of-factly.

387

"No guy can resist Gianna Vidal." She said it so confidently and I couldn't help but feel giddy in my chest at her ego boost.

7

The question is. Was she right?

Not that I'd explore that anyway, but it was nice to know.

4

Drunk girls in bathrooms are the most empowering and supportive people. We should all be more like drunk girls in bathrooms."

115

(SA TW)

89

"You're going."

1

"Nope. I'm staying right here." I told her, attempting to shut my door in Celine's face but she caught it just in time, following me into my room.

"You're going." It was more of a demand than anything else and I instinctively rolled my eyes at how annoying her persistence could be.

"Celine. If I'm 'going' to do anything-its slap you." I said, flopping down onto my bed with a loud sigh. She'd never drop this and a nagging feeling in my chest told me I'd end up giving in just to shut her up.

10

"Oh come on." She dragged. "It's JJ's birthday- you have to go." Almost like clockwork—she brought out the puppy dog eyes and pouted bottom lip, shaking it slightly for dramatic effect but I shut my eyes tightly and looked away.

104

"you know how I feel about Jackson, Celine." Which was true, due to his many attempts to seduce both Celine and I in front of each other and his suggestion of a threesome, which by the way—I had declined many times. I had grown a certain distaste to the boy I had known through-out high school.

72

"It's one night Gianna. One night, and we'll only be there for four hours; five tops."

1

"I hate being around him. I don't want to have to pepper spray him again because he tried to kiss me." I said. Cringing at the tenth grade memory. "Do you know how violating that was?"

17

"He said he was sorry!" she defended, throwing her hands up into the air with an exasperated sigh as if she had given up on me altogether.

327

"How about the time he tried to hit on my dad. In front of me." I gave her a pointed look and knew she wouldn't be able to defend him this time.

247

"I mean- your dad is kinda hot. I'd do the same thing." I fake gagged at her, causing laughter to erupt from her lips. "Plus he was drunk. Your mom gave us wine for the first time remember."

72

"That was grape juice."

102

"Okay, this is my last resort. I promise if you come with me tonight, I'll wash the dishes for the whole week."

22

"The whole week?" I asked, intrigued. I hated doing the dishes.

21

"Yes. Everyday." She promised.

"Why are you so interested in going anyway? I thought you hated him." I asked, twirling a loose piece of fabric between my

fingers. She pulled up her hair into a tight ponytail and flopped down next to me with an excited grin on her face.

3

"Gives me an opportunity to get laid after months." She stated as if it was the most obvious thing on the planet. "And besides, we haven't done anything fun in ages. Think of it as a way of celebrating your job today."

She had a point. And I was somewhat tired of being cooped up in here all the time. I took five minutes to contemplate taking the deal. I hated dish duty. Just the thought of slimy, wet food all over my hands made me want to throw up all over my comforter.

27

"Fine." I mumbled, crossing my arms over my chest.

She jumped from her place at my side and tackled me, squealing "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

I playfully pushed her off me and got up to rummage through the dozens of clothes in my closet while she typed away on her phone, probably letting him know that we would both be there.

"You have to help me get ready though."

"Done." She clasped her hand together and scrutinized all my clothes with a concentrated gaze.

This would be a long night.

**

"I can feel my blood slowly clotting. This is so tight." I groaned, meaning the satin green corset I had put on.

211

I was standing in front of the mirror next to Celine's bed. Tightening the straps of my high heels. We spent hours raiding my closet to find something sexy yet not too revealing to wear and now we were in her room. Clothes were strewn all over her bed and somehow-her underwear hung from the bed post.

9

"What is the point of you having nice tits if you aren't going to show them off?" she questioned, applying a shiny pink gloss to her plumped lips.

63

I rolled my eyes and ignored her question, focusing on my face instead. "Hey can you pass me that?" I asked, referring to the eye lash curler next to her.

1

She paused and threw it to me before continuing her make-up application.

"Maybe I'll find a hot sugar daddy in the club tonight." She said, smiling slightly. I rolled my eyes at her. "I'm sure you will too Gi, get your mind off that hot boss of yours." She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively and I groaned.

59

"First of all, my mind isn't on him. And secondly, no. I need money not men. If anything, I'd like to have a sugar buddy. Where he just sends me a grand for being a good friend." I told her, layering thick coats of mascara onto my naturally long eyelashes.

168

I stepped into the fabric of my denim shorts and stared in the mirror, then across at Celine in her silver low-cut dress.

We looked hot.

6

After we had both finished getting ready, we walked downstairs and into the kitchen.

I went into the highest cabinet and grabbed a bottle of our strongest vodka, waving it around. "Pre-shots?" I asked, also picking up some small shot glasses from the cabinet next to me.

3

"Fuck yes." She yanked the bottle out of my hand and filled up the two small glasses, lifting one up to the air, me following suit.

"To not killing JJ." I said.

"Ditto." I lifted up the glass and drank the burning liquid, feeling the sting settle in my throat. I slammed it back onto the table and smiled at my best friend.

111

"Come on let's go, don't want to be late." I grabbed my purse and slipped my phone inside, grabbing her hand and walking out the door. The uber she had called for arrived and we hopped in the back, asking the driver to take a photo of us before we left which he too happily complied to.

4

"Which club are we going to anyway?" I asked, settling into my seat. "Some new place that opened up a year ago. 'Moritello's' I think."

194

The name sounded familiar but I couldn't place where from and decided to put the thought aside for later.

30

"This is going to be fun, I promise." Celine swore, grinning from her seat next to me.

4

1

She lied.

51

We had only been here for about eight seconds and I wanted to go home.

121

Don't get me wrong, I'm a huge party person. Just not when it came to the birthday boy.

Speaking of, "Hey sexy Lexi." He said, slurring in my direction.

75

I looked at Celine and rolled my eyes.

"It's Gianna." He was already so drunk, which was highly expected. I don't think I ever had a sober conversation with Jack. Which was intriguing in high-school, but as he grew up it became sadder more than anything.

1

"Gianna? As in hot dad Gianna? Shit, I barely recognized you, sweetness." He laughed at some unspoken joke and almost fell over, slinging an arm on my shoulder for support. I shared a look with Celine and she shrugged, winking at me.

87

I'm pretty sure Jackson was gay, he never confirmed it but he always slipped up when he got this drunk. I never brought it up whenever I would see him—he'd talk about it when he was ready and I definitely wasn't one to push.

20

"Celine's here too!" he exclaims rather loudly. Before he got the chance to open up his mouth again, she interrupted him. "Yes Jackson, you invited us remember?"

1

"Oh right, right. Did you get a boob job? 'Cause damn I could-" I cut him off mid-sentence and stabilized him on his own two feet.

22

"Want to go get a drink?" I asked him, my words slow so he could understand me better. His eyes lit up and he turned around, expecting us to be trailing behind him.

"Of course! Follow me." He screamed over the booming music. We stayed put, finally rid of him.

22

I turned to Celine and gave her my biggest smile.

"You know what, maybe you're right. This just might be a fun night." The sarcasm rolled off my tongue in waves and I'm sure she could tell.

By ten p.m. I was already drunk out of my mind. Shots after shots slid down my throat and I felt the heavy buzz of alcohol running through my system. I was having way too much fun to regret how much I had to drink.

I swung my hips in circles and danced around to some upbeat song in the middle of the dance, as I had been for the past five minutes.

'I feel so close to you right now, it's a force field.'

115

The familiar song blasted through the many speakers in the loud club and I sang out the lyrics, probably out of tune but I was too focused on my movements to care.

I felt unfamiliar hands grasp my hips, but I was far too gone to care and instead leaned back, linking my arms around the stranger's neck.

138

'I wear my heart upon my sleeve, like a big deal.'

5

The blue strobe lights were a blur as I swung my hips side to side, my hair sticking to the sides of my face and my neck slightly sweaty.

2

'Your love falls down on me, surrounds me like a waterfall.'

The man's hands travelled down my sides and gripped my hips, turning me around and guiding my movements. They felt calloused and rough but I didn't care.

'And there's no stopping us right now.'

15

I turned around to stare at the stranger for the first time, I took in his facial features with a lazy smile. He looked to be my age which disappointed me a little but I shrugged it off. He leaned down and lightly nibbled on my ear. By now Celine was nowhere to be found as I searched for her over the crowd.

98

'I feel so close to you right now.'

3

The beat dropped and I found myself dancing on him more, feeling his growing bulge press into my lower back, which ignited something in me. I was hungry for the attention that I hadn't received in too long.

31

I grinded myself into him more, sweat forming on my body in tiny droplets. This was the most fun I'd had in a while and I embraced it. I completely let loose, allowing his hands to travel to my lower back, caressing the bare area, sending tingles up my spine and increasing my heartbeat.

I sang along with the music for a bit, the lights flashing all over the place created a glorious ambiance, setting the mood for all the gyrating, horny teenagers over the floor.

1

Goosebumps erupted over me when he leaned in and whispered into my ear. "Wanna get outta' here?" he asked rapidly. I nodded my head hazily and he led the way.

44

He wasn't old enough or nearly attractive enough to be my type, but he would be okay for tonight, I needed to release all the growing sexual tension inside of me and this was the perfect way to do it.

1

The lyrics of the song repeated themselves and the music got quieter as we headed to the exit and outside the door.

Before I had the chance to catch my breath, I felt my back hit the hard, cold wall behind me. His lips scattered sloppy kisses all over my neck and the valley of my breasts, till he reached my mouth and planted a wet kiss on them, moaning into me. I kissed him back for a few seconds, slightly cringing at the feeling of his saliva on my body. I could taste strong liquor on his tongue and that was enough to kick me out of my trance.

43

He was sleazy and slightly repulsive. My taste in men was bad sober, but highly questionable when drunk.

I tried pushing off me lightly and laughed, "Hey, I want to stop now, I think we should go inside." He ignored me and continued messily leaving marks on my skin with his teeth, the feeling stung more than it was supposed to and I shuddered, the alcohol suddenly leaving my system. "Stop." I tried pushing off me but still he wouldn't budge. Tears threatened to spill out of my eyes when he pushed himself into me more. "I said stop!" I screamed, thrashing in his arms.

39

But before I could try to push him off me once more I felt his body being pulled away from mine and I heard him groan as he was harshly forced onto the hard concrete, the sound of his head crashing against it made my heart beat faster than it already was.

72

I heard rapid cursing from somewhere just to the side of where we were standing. "She said stop!"

56

My eyes widened at the manly voice and I looked up. Only to come face to face with an extremely angry, yet sexy, Alexander Moritello.

5

They say I did something bad, why's it feel so good?."

98

I stared up at Alex in shock. I had to shut my eyes and open them once more just to establish that I wasn't dreaming and he actually was standing right in front of me. An angry scowl was plastered onto his handsome face and I immediately felt confusion settle into me. Goosebumps rose on the skin of my arms and I would've assumed they were from the chilly night air—but sober me knew that wasn't the case.

2

Why was he here? How was he here?

1

And then it clicked. The conversation I had with Celine, this was Alexander's club.

3

My eyes averted to the stranger who was now staggering as he got up to face Alex. "What the fuck man? I was totally about to

get laid." He threw a weak punch towards my savior who caught his fist inches away from his face.

120

With fury glazing in his eyes, he twisted the foreign man's arm, the sound of bones slightly racking filled the still air. "Shit man, I didn't know the whore was yours, fuck, that hurts let me go." I couldn't focus on the pounding of my head, or the cold wall against my back. My mind was instead focused on the anger that coursed through me and I crossed my arms over my chest.

88

I scoffed at the crude comment. I was the whore? I wasn't the one who forced himself on people because no one willingly wanted him. I was about to throw out a sassy remark when Alexander lifted his fist and roughly connected it with the man's jaw. His suit remained flawless and in place as the boy went flying backwards and I widened my eyes in shock.

45

"Non e una puttana, l'unico difetto che sento e il suo gusto negli uomini. Testa di cazzo." His voice was cruel and menacing and sent chills down my spine.

489

My mind was still a bit hazy from the alcohol but I made out his words and blushed, of course he didn't know I could speak in Italian, which was obviously why he used his native tongue.

5

With one last angry glare, Alexander grunted and walked towards me, placing his hands in front of my face. I grabbed it and he pulled me up with minimal force, but I managed to stumble and fall over onto his chest. I giggled at the hardness of it.

21

He tensed as I hugged him. "You're so warm." I sighed deeply and tightened my hold around his broad shoulders.

187

My sober self would've never said something even remotely close to that and although I knew I'd regret it in the morning—I would blame my behavior on the alcohol induced state I was in.

6

"What were you doing here?" he asked rather aggressively.

27

I snorted and let go of him. "What are you? My dad?" I asked, looking up at him through my eyelashes. I didn't miss the way

his breath became heavier, but my brain could have been playing tricks on me.

"No. but I cannot have my kids being babysat by a child who spends her free time fucking strangers and getting drunk." His accent was thick as he spoke to me and I wanted to slap him right there for being so rude to me.

136

What was it with men tonight?

5

I gasped at the tone of his voice and words. "I'm twenty-two, asshole! An adult. I don't know what made you think you can speak to me that way but I'm not your child. What I do with my time is none of your business!" I yelled at him. Jabbing a finger into his undeniably toned chest. "And I'm not their babysitter that was a onetime thing!" despite my sudden outburst, he looked amused which only made my anger skyrocket.

44

I grabbed what was left of my dignity and turned around, letting my hair slap his face as I walked down the street, not even knowing where the hell I was going at this point, but I was furious and couldn't care less.

102

I heard footsteps behind me and continued walking, my feet almost caving at the torturous feeling of my heels on my toes. A large hand encircled my waist as I tripped over my own two feet.

1

"Come on darling, I'll take you home." I had no time to object before I was lifted bridal style into the arms of the man I had just walked away from. I felt a warm material enclose around my shoulders and figured he had shrugged off his suit jacket to put around my cold body.

292

I struggled against his hold, battling with what my heart wanted and what my mind knew I had to do—in the end, my heart won and once again, I'd blame it on the liquor. Eventually I relaxed against him and nuzzled my head into his neck. He smelled like expensive cologne with the faintest hint of cigarettes and I sighed, wanting to inhale more of his scent.

43

It wasn't long before I was placed in the warm seats of his vehicle. I snuggled into the leather and heard the door close on the opposite side.

"Your address?" he asked me faintly. But before I could get the words out I closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep.

15

The last thing I heard was him chuckle and I smiled lazily.

9

44

I heard the opening of a door and felt myself being lifted out of the warmth of the car, instead being placed in the safeness of Alexander's arms once again.

I faked still being asleep, not wanting to walk through the large building in these heels. Plus, I was slightly drunk, I didn't want to risk knocking down some expensive sculpture that I didn't want to go through the trouble of paying for. It was also an excuse to cling to him longer than what was necessary and if anyone was to see us, it would look highly inappropriate.

29

I tensed at the thought of his wife or kids seeing me like this and as if he read my thoughts Alex spoke up, "They aren't here. She took them over to their grandmother for the night."

134

After hearing that I felt myself being placed onto a bed, I whined at the pain in my feet. He looked at me in question and

I pointed at my shoes, instantly melting at the sight of him on his knees in front of me, slowly undoing the straps of my heels. I then, without thinking, started untying the loops around my tight fitted shirt. Feeling more relaxed as it wasn't as tight anymore.

151

Alexander cleared his throat and began to speak again. "I will be downstairs if you need anything." With that, he briskly walked out of the room and out of sight.

13

I leaned back on the comfortable bed and instantly fell asleep. Knowing I would regret everything the next morning but for now, the happy feeling that swarmed through my stomach made everything worth it.

I woke up to the sound of my phone ringing loudly, groaning, I rolled over and turned the volume down, deciding to ignore whoever it was for the time being.

1

I sat up and winced at the splitting headache I had. There were two Advil sat on the bedside table, with some water and a note which read 'take these for the migraine.' I smiled, but it was

soon replaced with a frown as memories from last night came crashing down on me.

1

The lights.

The music.

The guy who wouldn't stop touching me.

1

All the alcohol.

And of course, Alex.

27

Who I had made a complete fool of myself in front of.

I let out a sigh and placed my head back into the pillow, letting out a loud, frustrated scream.

I had completely embarrassed myself.

I picked up my phone once more and it flashed with dozens of messages from Celine, ranging from;

'Are you okay? I can't find you.'

'Omg you're getting laid aren't you? Yes girl!!'

198

'Okay it's been two hours, I've looked everywhere for you, call me Gi.'

9

I smiled sadly and replied to her messages, stating that I was okay and I'd be home to explain everything soon.

It was then that I decided to get up, downing the pills and finishing the water. I stared at myself in the mirror above the bed frame and cringed. My hair was a wild, tangled mess and I felt like shit. I needed a shower and lots more sleep.

8

I grabbed my heels and they swung in my hands as I walked down the stairs. I couldn't avoid seeing him forever and just wanted to get home—even if that meant making a complete fool out of myself again.

I tried my best to tip-toe out the door but was caught by a deep voice that seemed to constantly send chills down my spine.

"Leaving so soon?" I turned around and cursed. There stood Alex, in all his hot man glory. Holding a cigar between his lips. I had no option but to stare at him in awe.

150

I was snapped out of my gaze when he looked at me knowingly, "I'm so sorry about last night. That was so out of character for

me and I totally understand if you never want me around your kids again." I rushed through my words and blushed when he chuckled.

"Ah, no need to apologize, sure it was a bit inappropriate but I was that young too once, I had fun too believe it or not."

14

I smiled and nodded. "Well. Thank you for the Advil and all, I'll be going home now." He stood up and put out his cigar, placing it in the ash tray beside him. "Nonsense, I'll take you, your car isn't here and I certainly don't expect you to walk all that way." He put out his cigar and dusted his hands on his dress pants.

31

For the first time, he was dressed so casual. Loose fitted pants hung from his hips and a black shirt clung to the top half of his body. As usual, he looked good enough to eat.

50

I was going to call an uber. I thought. But smiled nonetheless, thanking him and following his steps out the door.

1

We got into his car and I gave him the directions of my house, the drive was completely silent and admittedly a little awkward. We got there in almost no time, to my relief and I thanked him

once more before getting out and unlocking the door to my apartment entering and closing the door behind me.

I was tackled at the door by my best friend, instantly bombarded with questions.

"Oh my God! Please tell me you're okay." She rambled, embracing me into a tight hug.

"I'm so sorry I dragged you there, I'm the worst friend ever." I patted her back and she let go of me slowly, instead holding on to my shoulders. I took her hand and we walked to the couch before I sat down next to her.

124

"It's fine Cel," I started, "I'm the one who decided to leave, don't worry about it." I gave her an assuring smile and she looked at me skeptically.

She nodded and continued to quiz me. "Where were you last night?"

10

I decided to start from the beginning and tell her about the guy I had met at the club and what had happened after. "And now I'm here." I ended off.

She gasped and brought me in for another hug. "What was his name? I'll find him and kill him, I swear." I laughed at her

enthusiasm and told her that it wasn't a big deal and I'd be fine as long as I never saw him again.

5

"As long as you're okay now." I reassured her once more and promised we'd talk more after I had a shower and caught up on sleep.

I tried to ignore the pit of regret in my stomach as I trudged up the stairs but knew that if I ever saw Alexander Moritello again—I would be more awkward than confident and that was enough to keep me away.

6

"I'm so in love that I might stop breathing, drew a map on your bedroom ceiling."

61

174

I held Maria in my arms, humming the tone of an Italian lullaby my mother used to send me to sleep with. I smiled at the thought of my mom, wishing she was still alive to watch my beautiful children grow.

3

Rita Moritello was a beautiful woman, there was no denying it. In the words of her lover, she was created by a combination of the moon and stars. She made you feel the effects of a Friday on a Monday, she felt like summer and her scent was best described as freshly bloomed flowers. My mother was God's gift to mankind. An angel among demons, or better yet, the light in the darkness.

83

Her and my father represented what could only be true love. Growing up, I looked up to them and hoped one day I would have the type of love they had. Love that swept you off your feet but kept you on your toes at the same time.

3

If my father could see just how terrible my love-life had turned out, he would be rolling in his grave next to my mother. The two of them would've disliked Sarah the moment they met her. Although our kids were beautiful and I knew they would spoil and love my children to the ends of the earth.

56

I had hoped marrying Sarah would give me the love that I craved, but with time, I understood that she wasn't the one who could give me that. I was getting too old to start over and find someone new, accepting my failed marriage was the only thing I could do.

141

After ensuring my daughter had fallen asleep, I set the small angel down in the centre of my king sized bed, and walked out of the room, shutting the door carefully behind me as I exited.

12

Making my way downstairs, I heard the laughter of my other two children and smiled instantly at the sound. The two of them sat in the middle of the living room, arguing over who had the best toys. Elena was obviously the winner, she had me wrapped around her finger since the second she was born. My son was more on the quiet side which resulted in him usually keeping to himself which I didn't mind, as long as he was happy. Unfortunately I noticed a growing anger in what was once a happy young boy, it was heartbreaking and I had no idea what to do for my son.

21

Sarah was sat in the kitchen, flipping through fashion catalogs as she usually did, and often marking what she wanted to purchase using my card. I had endless amounts of money and her using my money didn't bother me as much as her not paying attention to her kids all that much. Some people were meant to be mothers and some were just meant to be trophy wives. I wish I had seen the difference earlier.

114

Her head shot up when I walked in and she almost instantly began to speak. "Hey love, are you doing anything important today? I scheduled for us to meet up with Anastasia later on. I think I might call in that babysitter to look after your kids." She smiled at me but I could tell how fake the words were.

I cringed at her choice of words. She had been acting as if the kids were solely mine and mine only nowadays. She was barely home for dinner and didn't make time for them anymore, which saddened me but after a few years, I learned to accept my fate with Sarah.

84

Anastasia was our marriage counsellor. We've been too her office more times in the past three months than ever. After almost every silly argument, Sarah would ensure we went to see her. As if venting to an uninterested stranger was going to fix our rocky marriage.

20

"I'm not up for it Sarah, maybe another time?" I asked kindly, hoping she doesn't cuss me out again.

10

"Another time?" she asked exasperatedly.

Here we go again. I thought, rolling my eyes as I poured myself some scotch. The burning taste of the liquor sliding down my throat felt less irritating than her voice.

1

"Yes. Another time, I'm tired today and would like to spend time with my kids before I have to get back to work." I smiled

apologetically and planned to walk out the kitchen before I heard her speak once again.

30

"You're always working." She mumbled, loud enough for me to hear.

37

"Well that's what pays the bills isn't it?" I asked her, surprised she would even mention something so absurd.

89

"Maybe if you paid more attention to me we wouldn't have to be in dire need of a therapist, but here we are, falling apart because you love your work more than me!"

201

I looked at her in shock as she spoke, anger brewing in my veins.

"Excuse me? I spend countless hours with you when I have the time to be home, and when I'm not, I text you every five seconds! You've lost your mind." I didn't mean to speak harshly to her, but I couldn't sit back as she spoke a bunch of *bullshit*.

95

She nodded her head and looked at me sympathetically, raising her voice a few octaves higher. The kids could probably hear us by now.

2

"You're probably fucking your receptionist." She smirked at my reaction and I seethed at her.

234

"You will not disrespect me under my own roof." There was practically smoke coming out of my ears. "Do not provoke me Sarah. Not everyone will bend down to your *pathetic* level. You are nothing more than a child."

181

I ignored her shocked gasp and turned making my way out the kitchen, but stopped to speak to her once more.

"A therapist will not fix something that was never working in the first place."

142

With one last glance at her, I sighed deeply and left the room. Wanting nothing more than to avoid her for the rest of the day. I grabbed the keys to my car and drove away from the large manor, hoping to blow off some steam with one of my good friends.

15

"Don't you think you were being too hard on her, brother?" my friend asked me, pouring another beer into my half-full glass.

283

The two of us sat in a local bar twenty minutes away from my home. It wasn't the classiest place I've ever been in, but the bar held a special significance in my life. The two of us had been coming here since before Alexander Moritello was widely known. I'd rehearsed countless business deals at this exact table. If anyone knew how to calm me down after a spat with Sarah, it was him.

2

"Possibly but she was pushing my buttons man." I finally answered. He laughed as I took another sip of my drink, slightly buzzed with the alcohol.

2

Antonio and I had been best friends since we were small kids, I trusted him with everything and I longed for his advice whenever I had issues of my own, he always knew what to say to help through any situation I found myself in and I was grateful to have someone like him at my side.

110

"I cannot tell you what you want to hear *hermano* I despise the woman, and she despises me too. The spawn of Satan I swear." He whispered the last part as f Sarah was sitting right next to us and I chuckled in agreement.

135

Sarah had a bad impact on most of my friends. She definitely wasn't a people person. She was the perfect trophy wife and loveliest mother in the view of the public, but only a few people knew just how demonizing she really was.

4

She was brought into this world with a silver spoon in her mouth, and it hadn't been taken out from under her pearly white teeth since.

10

"What do you suggest I do then?" I asked, wanting to hear Antonio's opinion.

2

"Do what you've been doing for the past ten years." He shrugged. Put up with her until you don't have to anymore. Do it for your kids if anything. They deserve to have both parents in their lives as they grow up."

298

I nodded my head in understanding. Everything I did was for my kids. The only reason joy passed through me was them, but I didn't think letting them see our unhappy marriage would do them any good in the long run. I was at a crossroad and truly didn't know what to do.

2

"It's almost as if I'm their only parent these days, I'm the one who feeds them and bathes them, all while running the best clubs in the country. It's catching up to me." I joke, with hidden truth behind it. It was a lot on my plate but I could handle being their dad and sometimes even their *mom*. I had no choice but to.

29

My business was my fourth baby. '*Moritello's*' was the most successful night club in all of New York City. I spent a lot of time there, ensuring everything ran smoothly. Tiresome hours went into running my successful companies but I wouldn't have it any other way.

5

"Hmm you're right *hermano*, I can see the gray hairs coming in even more." I swatted his hand away from my almost perfectly black hair as he threw his head back and chuckled.

2

"Fuck off. I'm still as young as ever and I look like it too." I teased playfully, taking a large gulp of my beer, not before looking at my reflection in the bottle.

1

I was *not* completely gray yet.

40

He laughed again before plastering a serious expression on his face and I raised my eyebrow in question, urging him to speak what was on his mind.

"Maybe you need a babysitter? I feel like the kids could adjust to that." He suggested, not knowing we already tried that a few days ago.

15

At the mention of a babysitter, my mind instantly wondered to Gianna. The little *vixen* I had only known for a short amount of time. But somehow, I felt instantly drawn to her. She was attractive, yes, but I didn't want to cheat on my wife. I had more morale than that. And yet, I couldn't stop thinking about the young girl.

83

She did a great job with Luca, Elena and Maria in the short time she had spent with them last week. They couldn't stop talking about her even after she left. Which was unusual, especially for Luca who found it hard to completely open up to anyone.

52

She was only a young woman, I had to remind myself. I was a forty-year-old man with a set family and business, the two of us were facing different levels in life and I couldn't be attracted to someone like her. *I was married after all.* And despite my growing dislike towards my wife, I wouldn't go as low as being unfaithful towards her. I was almost positive she had someone on the side, I always thought I never brought it up to avoid heartbreak but now I was sure that I just didn't care. If it meant getting her away from me, Sarah could do whatever she pleased with her free time.

39

Memories of last night were implemented in my brain. I had the sudden urge to protect her from all the danger this world could offer, and I did.

35

My body was fueled by anger when I saw that little *boy* touching her inappropriately and I couldn't help myself. He was lucky she was there; fucker wouldn't even be

alive if she wasn't. Despite me saving her, she still had that snarky attitude that all women her age had and I wanted to punish her for speaking to me the way she did, which was very unlike me.

240

I instantly found out the boys name and got him banned from my property for the foreseeable future, unbeknownst to Gianna.

1

I was pulled out of my thoughts when I heard Antonio's voice, ordering a few more drinks, which I gladly accepted.

I lit my infamous cigar once more and smiled at the orange glow of the stick before bringing it up to my lips, looking forward to a night filled with alcohol, smoking, and a whole lot of conversation with my best friend. I had a lot of thinking to do and needed an excuse to stop the dozens of thoughts swirling around in my head.

3

It had come to a point where the only option I had was to drink away my problems.

And that is exactly what I did.

7

"I don't really give a fuck and my excuse is that I'm young."

57

2

4

My sleep was interrupted when my phone blared its ringtone. Harry Styles' voice filled my room and if it had been any other sound, I would have thrown the device across the room but because I may or may not have a soft spot for the singer—I let it ring just a little longer.

428

After a few more seconds, I picked it up and groaned at the time displayed across the screen.

11 a.m. way too early for me to be up considering the headache I was sporting.

I read the screen, the name 'Sarah Moritello' displayed across it. I sat up in my bed and clicked 'accept' setting the phone against my ear.

"Hello?" I answered groggily, stifling a yawn.

2

I heard small cries on the other end of the line and paused, attempting to listen to what was happening in the background like the nosy person I am. It was quiet on the other end of the line for a few more minutes and I felt myself wanting to fall back asleep.

3

"Sarah?" I asked, "You there?"

A loud bang resonated from her side and I cringed, something must have fallen and she finally spoke out. Cursing, most likely at the fallen object which sounded like it was now broken on the ground.

"Gianna? Oh honey thank you for picking up so early it's just I -" she struggled to finish her sentence as she let out a frustrated cry and all the previous fatigue I felt had slipped away.

39

"I need you to come watch over the kids for a bit? Is that okay? I'm sorry it's such short notice, my husband isn't here right now and I really need to go look for him and everything's a mess I just don't know what to do." Another frustrated sigh escaped her lips and I got out of bed in a rush, ripping the covers off my figure while she continued speaking.

53

I hadn't known Sarah or her family long enough to form real opinions on their relationship but from what I'd observed—they seemed to face marital problems every day and I couldn't see why. Sarah seemed like a wonderful woman and her husband seemed to be a great man. What could possibly be going wrong for people like them who had everything?

42

"I sent a text to his sister but she hasn't replied yet and I can't wait any longer." She explained, her voice furthering away from the receiver.

13

She managed to rush out a sentence in between her constant tears and hiccups. I decided not to pry, knowing my place and accepted the offer, telling her I'd be there in an hour.

36

I hung up and set my phone on the table next to my bed, a dozen thoughts running through my mind. I decided to ignore them and went over to my bathroom, freshening up and heading downstairs.

The first thing I came face to face with was a sleeping blonde, who passed out on the couch. Some Netflix series playing

quietly in the background. I walked up to her and threw the small throw blanket over her frame, silently giggling at her soft snores.

My feet made a slight padding sound as I walked over to the kitchen and started up the coffee machine, my mouth already watered at the smell of the coffee. I made a batch separately for Celine and added ice cubes into mine, preferring iced coffee over the usual hot beverage that everyone seemed to like.

41

I grabbed a bagel and some cream cheese, toasting it and spreading around the delicious substance. By the time I was done, Celine had woken up and joined me at the counter, thanking me for the coffee and slowly sipping it.

15

I spoke to her about my sudden plans for the day, apologizing that I couldn't watch movies all day with her like we initially did on lazy days like this. She waved me off with her hand and told me to 'go look after the sexy guy's kids' to which I laughed and rolled my eyes, making sure to clear my schedule for tomorrow so I could make it up to her.

1

After I had cleaned up, I stepped back into my room and changed into my outfit for today. A pair of high jeans and a

strapless black top, something simple in case I got some sort of mess on myself today. My makeup was minimal—I was too sleep deprived to put in any real effort so I decided on some simple mascara and a quick swipe of my lip gloss. I looked back at my reflection and shrugged. It was good enough.

42

I bid my goodbyes to Celine and closed the door behind me, not before hearing her shout out a quick 'safe sex is always the way to go!' but I ignored her and rolled my eyes, entering the elevator on our floor.

26

As soon as I reached the mansion they resided in, memories of the last time I was here came crashing back onto me and I cringed—trying to push the endearing thoughts away. I didn't want Alex to look at me like some irresponsible teenager but that was exactly what I did and I couldn't be more embarrassed even if I tried.

I got out and made my way to the front door, pushing the thoughts into the back of my mind to dwell on later. Upon climbing up the steps, I noticed the door was slightly ajar and a confused expression settled onto my face.

40

What the hell? I thought.

Pushing it open, I stepped inside and glanced around, not noticing anyone or anything out of the ordinary, the house looked as spotless and pristine as it usually did which made me calm down a little, if I was walking into a burglary—it would be messier. *I hope.*

"Sarah?" I called out, but got nothing but an echo in return. My confusion grew by the second as I silently walked around the kitchen and playroom, expecting them to be in there but still—nothing. I clutched my purse tightly in my hand and continued wandering around the house.

4

The last place I decided to check was the living room and I made my way there in a hurry. I was about to walk out again when I noticed movement in the corner of my eye and rushed over to Maria, grabbing ornaments off the table and attempting to stack them over each other, the tower was slightly leaning to the left and I hurriedly grabbed them before the glass shattered onto the floor. I pulled her away from the table and perched on my hip, she was grinning from ear to ear as if this was the most normal thing ever.

"Where's your mom love?" I asked, and she shrugged . reaching out to grab my hair, tugging on it as if I were a doll and I tried to ignore the sting of my scalp.

6

Children had an extremely strong grip.

19

Before I could do anything else I heard small footsteps speeding behind me and came face to face with the two other kids and I frowned blankly. Elena had what looked to be concealer in her hair and a whole bunch of lipstick smeared all over her face. I looked to the left and quirked an eyebrow up at Luca who had makeup smeared in the exact same places—including some eyeshadow where the blush was supposed to be.

19

"Gianna! Luca let me do his make-up!" she squealed, wrapping her arms around my legs. She stepped back and pointed at her brother who stood there shyly and I smiled despite how weird this all was. "See, look how pretty he looks!" she beamed. Luca grinned at his little sister and I smiled.

104

"You both look great!" I complimented, ruffling his brown hair which made the boy groan in protest and I chuckled. I smiled at them but it instantly faltered when I remembered the rest of the house was vacant.

"Where's your mom?" I asked, more directed at Luca, who seemed more focused than his sister who was now staring at herself in the nearest mirror.

"Oh she left. Said we shouldn't open the door for anyone but we were playing outside anyway." He said sheepishly. "We aren't going to get in any trouble are we? I swear nothings broken." He pouted in my direction and I sighed.

255

"Not unless we keep this between ourselves. Can you do that?" he nodded eagerly and I stuck my pinky and he hooked his finger through mine, sealing the deal. "Why don't you go get you and your sister cleaned up and we can bake something after?" he agreed and beckoned his sister up the stairs so they could clean up and I turned around with a huff, my mind going back to Sarah.

She left her kids here, all alone?

182

"Gianna! Can you come help me get this off my face? It's super sticky!" I hear from upstairs. I sighed and trudged up there to see the mess.

Elena had spilled water all over the place, attempting to get the makeup off. Her brother stood over her, swiping at it with a tiny cotton round. I smiled at the visual and Maria laughed at

her siblings, hoping down from arms and stalking closer. "Pretty El." she commented, giving her a toothless grin.

12

"Thanks! I can do yours too if you want, here let me grab the lip-" I intercepted her little fingers and held the tube away from her.

"Absolutely not. Let's clean this up so we can go downstairs and find something fun to do." they both pouted but listened anyway. And within half an hour, both kids had been showered.

1

The two had on a fresh set of clothes and a clean face, all previous signs of the mess were gone. I dragged the three of them into the kitchen and they set next to each other on the large stools—Elena leaning onto her brother for help and I smiled.

"Mommy and Daddy were fighting again" she announced, staring up at me with wide eyes.

10

"Is it because of us?" she asked. "Did we do something to make them mad?"

157

I grabbed her face and peppered little kisses all over it, causing giggles to erupt from her small lips. "Of course not! Sometimes adults don't agree on everything, completely normal." I tried to placate her, hating the sad look on her face.

2

"So." I began, clasping my hands together. "Who wants to bake cookies?"

1

I regret ever asking that question.

22

We were only thirty minutes in, but they managed to get cookie dough everywhere. From the counter, to their hair. It was splattered all over the once clean white walls and if I wasn't confident in my cleaning abilities, I would've been freaking out by now.

We barely got around to baking them, filling ourselves up with just the dough, which probably wasn't healthy but it tasted too damn good for me to care and as long as they were happy, so was I.

4

"I feel like that really fat guy in the Disney movie I always watch." Elena groaned, dragging a chocolate chip through her hair and eating it despite complaining about how full she was.

85

I laughed at her and took the rest out, smiling at them in the process. Her brother laid on the floor, patting his stomach with a pained expression on his face.

12

"Me too. I feel like the cookie monster!" I helped Luca off the floor and he dusted the back of his shirt, swirling his finger along the edges of the empty bowl once more.

1

"Okay, okay. Let's get you guys washed up. I'll finish cleaning up here and you go take a bath yeah? I'll come help you get dressed." I told them, shaking the cookie crumbs off my clothing.

6

They nodded their heads simultaneously and slowly walked up to their rooms.

Two too many showers. Kids were messy.

After I finished doing the necessary chores, which included scrubbing the walls extra hard. I heard the doorbell and stood up to go open it, hoping to find either one of the kids' parents. But instead, I opened it to come in contact with a girl who looked to be about a decade older than me, that I had never seen before. Her face looked familiar and attempted to wrack my brain to figure out where I had seen her before but she interrupted my thoughts when she spoke.

"Who are you?" she asked, mimicking my confusion.

8

"I find myself in a shit position."

164

I cleared my throat and attempted to discreetly stare at the unfamiliar woman standing in front of me. She was much taller than me, closer to Alexander's height, give or take a few inches. Her hair was a beautiful dark colour—flowing all the way down to her waist. It looked so silky I wanted to reach out and touch it but even *I knew* that would be weird, so I kept my hands to myself.

Her eyes were brown with tiny gold specs surrounding them and I realized just how similar her and Alex looked. Their noses were both straight—well, Alex's was a bit more crooked due to the usual mischievous things boys got up to in their lifetime. Hers was straight and pointy at the tip. Perhaps she was a relative of his?

8

Instead of gawking any longer, I cleared my throat once more and decided on answering her. "I'm babysitting, who are you?" I asked cautiously. Praying to the Gods that she wasn't here to kidnap me.

1

I've watched too many crime shows. I thought.

"Oh of course, I'm Serafina, Alex's sister. Mind if I come in?"

133

I nodded inattentively and stepped aside as she walked in, the strong scent of her luxurious perfume roaming in the air.

I didn't know he had a sister. Then again, I had only been here around three times and we weren't necessarily friends.

17

The comparison between them was as bright as day. They both had a very strong aura around them, as if everything they touched turned to gold. Both siblings were absolutely easy on the eyes, as elegant and dazzling as ever. Her brown eyes sparkled in adoration as the two small children came running towards her.

"Ah! Ciao amore mio, mi sei mancato!" she spoke, a huge grin breaking out, displaying her pearly white teeth.

55

They murmured a muffled 'we missed you too.'

She said something else to them and they scampered upstairs giggling, probably to continue what they were doing in the first place.

The guest got up from her squatting position and smoothed out the wrinkles that had appeared on her expensive looking skirt. She adjusted the Louis Vuitton bag on her shoulder and turned to me, giving me a dazzling smile.

"Sorry about that, you must be Gianna, I've heard great things." A smirk graced her features, and she stuck out her hand. I mirrored her actions and shook it.

23

Sensing my confusion, she spoke once more. "Alex told me about you, said the kids love you already!"

21

I nodded my head in understanding, but I still had a lingering question.

"I don't mean to come off impolite, but what are you doing here?" I asked her.

"Oh, of course. Sarah called and asked me to come pick up the kids- said she had errands to run, and she couldn't reach her babysitter. Seeing as you're here, I assume she eventually did."

My mouth formed an 'o' shape and I nodded, slightly disordered.

"I apologize for the mix-up, if it's too much of an inconvenience for you, I can leave them here."

I was quick to object, noting how excited they looked to see her. "No, please, go ahead, I'll just stick around for a few extra minutes and clean up."

"Are you sure? You drove all this way."

I waved her off. "It isn't far."

Just as I finished that sentence, feet padded down the stairs and ran to the front door, there stood Elena, Luca and Maria. Their clothes colour coordinated.

Of course.

Serafina turned to them and arched her perfectly shaped brow, "Are you two forgetting something?" She asked, staring at their bare feet.

"Where is my brother anyway?" she asked me.

"I'm not too sure. I was called here because Sarah had to go look for him."

A look of annoyance flashed through her eyes but was gone before I could blink. She muttered quietly, something along the

lines of '*that bitch must have driven him to drink again.*' But I wasn't sure if I had heard right.

18

After a few minutes, everyone was finally ready to go.

Sera, who had allowed the nickname, was now showering the smallest Moritello with kisses, to which she replied in an adorable giggle.

"Alright babies, say goodbye and thank you to Gianna and head out to the car, okay?"

They nodded and rushed towards me, knocking me off my feet with a hug. I kissed all three of their heads and they headed out.

"I better get going now, but it was lovely meeting you!"

I smiled and wished her a good day, closing the door behind her.

The house that was filled with laughter just minutes ago, was dead silent.

I had just finished cleaning up all the kid's toys. Sighing, I sat on the couch and held my head in the palms of my hands.

I stood up in search of my purse and lightly jogged up the stairs, remembering I set it there at some point.

My make-up had smudged, and I decided on removing and re-applying my mascara and lip gloss, puckering my lips to evenly spread it.

Before I had the chance to descend the stairs, I heard a loud bang from the kitchen and stilled. Placing a hand over my mouth in shock at the thought of an intruder.

This is it. I'm going to get murdered.

I haven't even had kids yet.

I haven't met Harry Styles yet.

My life is unfulfilled.

I took a deep breath and tip-toed to the nearest bedroom.

Luca's.

I quietly advanced to his toy box- the banging still going on downstairs- and grabbed a baseball bat just as I heard more glass shatter.

My footsteps were light as I gripped the wooden weapon tightly in my hands and walked down. I stopped on the last step, glancing at my reflection in the mirror opposite. Was I about to walk into there? I stared longingly at the front door and willed myself to go in there anyway.

This is exactly how people die in horror movies.

As I grew closer, the 'burglar' then started slurring a bunch of words that became clearer the closer I got.

As soon as I reached the kitchen, I ran and swung the bat around, screaming, Indiana Jones style, but instantly drew my lips together at the scene.

This was no thief.

Rather, the house owner.

Alex. I could tell even from my position that was he was a little drunk. His suit tie hung haphazardly off his neck, the top two buttons of his white dress shirt were unbuttoned, leaving me to ogle the visible skin beneath the shirt. In his hand were a pair of keys, curled tightly between his fingers.

"Gianna?" he slurred, drunkenly, "Why the hell do you have a bat?"

I shyly dropped the object to the floor and pursed my lips. "I thought you were a burglar."

I then noticed the state of the kitchen and sighed at the mess of a glass vase.

He stumbled towards me and almost lost balance, slightly tripping over his own two feet. "S-sorry 'bout that. I'm just a little tipsy." Gosh, this was embarrassing for him. Was I like this

the other night? If so, I was never picking up another drink again.

This time he did fall over, but I managed to catch him before his head hit the floor.

This man was as heavy as a whale. I blame his dumb muscles.

"Whoa, looks like I'm falling for you, huh?" he giggled. *Actually* giggled. I tried to ignore the fact that that was probably the worst pick up line I'd ever heard and dragged him into the TV room, setting him down on the couch with a loud thud, trying to grasp for air.

I wonder how I kept this body; I was as athletic as a seal.

Thank God for a fast metabolism.

Alex rolled over, blinking up at me, his head slightly tilted to the side. He brought both fists to his eyes and rubbed them, groaning in the process. I knew he'd wake up with a massive headache tomorrow and I instantly felt bad. I turned back in the direction of the kitchen, grabbing a glass and filling it with water. The medicine cabinet was probably somewhere upstairs, luckily I carried some Advil in my purse after my last stint with alcohol.

After placing the water and pills next to Alex, I softly tapped my knuckles against his bristly cheek to wake him up. He opened his eyes slowly, trying to adjust to the lights.

"Sit up." I ordered, placing the glass in his hand after he was upright.

"And take this, it should help with the pain." He swallowed them down, leaning back to stare at me. His eyes were still slightly hazy but not as bad as ten minutes ago.

"Your hair." He commented. I was close enough that he could reach over and grab a stray chunk of my dark tresses. "Soft." he murmured, more to himself than me.

I smiled tersely, moving away from him despite how much I wanted to stay exactly where I was. I deserved an award for my self-control.

"Will you be okay here?" I asked, smoothing my hands down my legs as I stood. I was stuck between leaving him to nurse his hangover on his own, or staying and risking Sarah coming home to us here together.

Alex finally looked up, blinking repeatedly as if only just registering my presence. He cleared his throat and attempted to smile. I shrugged and took his silence as a yes.

"Here, use this trashcan if you can't get up to go to the bathroom in time." I placed it at the foot of the couch.

My feet inched away ready to leave when I felt a hand tug on my wrist with surprising force and I stumbled into his hard chest, gasping.

"Sorry, didn't mean to pull you that hard." He said, leaning his face into my hair.

I shifted against him, fighting against my heart and my conscious.

My heart was telling me to stay trapped in between the man's arms.

But my mind was telling me how drunk he was and how he would probably regret this tomorrow.

I would probably regret this tomorrow. This is not how I would've wanted this to go. Alex was still drunk and continuing down this slippery slope would've only ended terribly.

I tried getting up, only for him to tighten his hold on me and I rolled my eyes.

"Alex." I breathed.

"Just two minutes, lie here." He murmured, patting the small space next to him. The couch still wasn't big enough for us to both lay down comfortably. "

Why was I even considering this?

I didn't move for a minute, which seemed to give him enough time to fall sleep. His breathing evened out and the grip he had on me loosened.

I sighed, carefully extracting myself from his hold, hoping he wouldn't notice the shift in position too much. Luckily when I looked back, Alex had barely moved.

I smoothed out the slight groove between his eyebrows and smiled when his whole face softened. He was truly a beautiful man. He had what looked like the softest pillowy lips ever, slightly parted to let out soft breaths of air. His lips were framed with unshaven stubble he must've acquired over the past day or so. Running my knuckle over the hair, I couldn't help but wonder what the bristly texture might feel like on my-

Nope. Not going there.

I dropped my hand and continued ogling the hard planes and structure of his face. Those enticing brown eyes were covered by his eyelids, hiding the specks of gold I had gotten close enough to know were there. There were faint lines marring the sides of both eyes, showing his age, crow's feet. If anything, it made him more attractive for I knew a lifetime of smiling had put them there.

I took one more look at him and decided I'd had enough time to be a creep.

Grabbing my purse off the table, I walked out of the house.

9

"He wanted it comfortable, I wanted that pain."

106

My heart may have won this time.

27

I sat there tensed, but slowly relaxed and leaned into him as his hand caressed my arm.

85

Goosebumps erupted onto my skin and I prayed he wouldn't notice the effect he had on me. Although I already think he knows.

1

Before I had the chance to change my mind I felt his lips press light feathery kisses against the base of my neck, so light it was as if I was imagining the whole thing. Eventually, his kisses got more prominent and he began to feverishly suck on the skin, leaving me a breathless mess before him.

311

With lightning speed he flipped us over so I was trapped under him. He continued laying kisses on my neck and travelled down to the valley of my breasts.

3

A moan erupted from me when his hand slowly crept up and grabbed my boob, kneading it.

205

I pulled his head up to mine and was about to place a much needed kiss onto his lips before he stopped me, lust blazing in his eyes.

1

"You sure you wanna do this?" he asked breathlessly.

295

I nodded and without hesitance he smashed his lips against mine and I moaned at the feeling of the soft skin.

121

He sucked my bottom lip as if asking for entrance, which I denied much to his dismay. He then resorted to biting it, which made me gasp.

1

I felt Alex grin against me in satisfaction, the smile soon fading when I propelled my hips forward, the feeling of us colliding was enough to send me over the edge.

"God Gianna." *Kiss.* "You're so," *kiss.* "Fucking beautiful."

189

He placed kisses down my torso, lifting up my shirt as he did so.

2

I was writhing beneath him when his face was dangerously close to where I needed him the most.

3

I still couldn't believe this was happening.

45

The view of his head between my thighs was mouthwatering.

22

But before he had the chance to continue, the sound of the front door opening caught both our attention and we sprung apart, snapping out of the lust fill trance that we were in.

357

I adjusted my shirt and sat on the opposite couch, trying my best to act as nonchalant as possible, as if I wasn't about to have sex with my much older boss just minutes ago.

41

The footsteps got closer and soon enough, Sarah was standing right in front of us with a surprised look on her face.

4

"Gianna? You're still here?"

I swallowed the lump in my throat and got up, heading for my purse and nodding.

"Uh, yeah, I was cleaning up but I'm leaving now."

She looked at me, and then her husband, as if playing an intense game of '*connect the dots*' in her head and nodded, unconvinced.

"Sorry I left you alone for so long, but it looks like my husband kept you company."

I couldn't help but notice the double meaning behind her words but shrugged it off as nothing.

Did she know?

Was my lip gloss smudged?

I looked down and let out a relieved sigh.

At least my panties were still on.

My eyes moved to Alex, observing how his eyes were on anything but me and his wife, as if he felt guilty for what just played out.

Of course he did. This was a mistake.

"Anyway, it was nice seeing you again Sarah, Mr. Moritello, I'll be heading out now." I said, breaking the awkward silence.

She nodded in my direction and her husband remained still.

I turned around and walked out the house, leaving behind the rest of my dignity.

Alex's P.O.V.

After hearing the door shut, I sighed and laid back on the couch that still held the girl's scent.

I could almost *hear* the wheels turning in my wife's head.

"So you're fucking the babysitter now?" she asked.

Jumping to conclusions, as usual.

Well, you were about to. My subconscious reminded me.

"So you're assuming things now?" I countered.

"I saw the way she looked at you!"

"And how was that?" I asked, straightening up, knowing I wouldn't get to sleep off the last bit of my hangover.

My head was pounding and my 'wife's' nasally voice was not helping the situation at all.

"Like she wanted to pounce on you with her dirty little claws! And you probably wanted the same thing. You're a damn child predator."

"She's almost twenty for God's sake. And no, unlike you I can keep it in my pants. She was eighteen, but that was besides the point. Technically I did.

At that, Sarah gasped and threw her purse at me, thinking the light object was going to knock me out or something. Luckily, I dodged it last minute, instead it went flying to the floor.

"That bag was Gucci you ass!" she screamed.

"Then don't throw it at me!"

I stood up from the couch and sauntered away, sick of arguing with her, it was the reason I left in the first place. But of course, I couldn't catch a break, the sounds of her heels following me into the kitchen. The mess still lay there from when I fell into Gianna. I grimaced at the memory.

That definitely can't happen again.

What was I doing? My wife was right, she is merely eighteen years old.

"You can't walk away from me Alexander! Won't let you openly cheat on me with someone so inferior."

I cringed at her cruel words.

"I did not cheat on you. I have no business lying about it either, I can't force you to believe me and honestly, I don't give a fuck whether you do or not."

If she got to play around on the side, why couldn't I?

She raised her voice once more, basically screaming at me. I was surprised the windows had not cracked. "Fuck you! I know you're lying! Wait till I talk to my lawyers about this, I'll sue you for it."

I laughed at her attempted threat towards me.

"You're filing a law suit against me? Smart, that'll look great in the public eye. I can already see it now. 'Brooklyn's richest housewife Sue's her husband for simply telling the truth.'" I laughed at the thought, which angered the woman more.

"Our kids would never forgive you for this." She chastised.

"Oh, so now they're our kids? What happened to them only being mine? You're only their parent when it's suitable for you.

Otherwise you do nothing else but lounge around and purchase whatever rubbish it is that you already have."

By now, tears were running down her face and my heart twisted with guilt. I hated seeing women cry because of me, but I knew they were fake, she had lost all her emotions a while ago.

"That's it. I'm getting out of here. You can pick up your kids from your sister's house now. Or leave them there for all I care. I can't be here anymore."

I looked at her as if she had grown two heads, but she ignored that and turned around, trudging up the stairs, and making sure her footsteps were heard.

I didn't care that she would be leaving.

She did this every couple of months, I was used to it by now.

But maybe this time. She wouldn't come back.

10

"Tell me who I am, guess I don't have a choice. All because I liked a boy"

41

1

"He just *ignored* you? Didn't even say anything after?" she gasped.

28

I nodded and took a sip of the cocktail in front of me. After the awkward happenings at the Moritello house, I came straight home and told Celine all about it. She instantly suggested we make some drinks and that's what we were doing at the moment.

"Are you okay?" she asked attentively.

I sighed and placed the drink down, staring at the chipped silver nail polish on my finger nails. "I guess so, I didn't expect him to welcome the situation openly. Also, his wife was right there." She smiled softly.

6

"Doesn't make it hurt any less." I shrugged and looked away from her sympathetic smile. I wasn't at all *heartbroken*, but it stung. I didn't want to admit how smitten I had become over Alex in just a short period of time.

I blamed it on how long it has been since I've enjoyed any sexual experience. That was definitely the only logical reason as to why I was acting so *deprived*.

27

Celine stood up and dusted the back of her skirt. I looked up at her in question and she spoke, "Come on, no more moping around, and let's go out."

"Where?" I asked skeptically, wanting to stay in my apartment all day and lounge around.

"We'll have a girl's day, it's been way too long. Also, don't think I don't notice how messy your nails look."

4

I groaned at her and she winked at me, walking off to freshen up, probably. Soon after, I followed suit, touching up my make-up.

The sound of my best friend's heels echoed across the room and she picked up her purse and keys.

"Ready to go?"

*

"Which colour should I go with? Pink or white?" she asked, placing a hand on her hip in thought.

22

We were currently sitting in one of the most well-known Spa's in our area. Deciding on what nail polish to choose, out of the vast variety of shades.

3

I looked up in the direction of all the fake nails and pondered on which colour would suit her better.

"Definitely go with the nude pink- it'll match with your skin tone more."

4

She snapped her fingers and looked at me in thanks. "Total lifesaver, I would have been here forever. What are you choosing?"

1

I adjusted the cucumber slice over my eyes once more and sighed in content at the relaxing feeling of my feet sitting in a tub of warm water.

"Rose gold." She hummed in agreement and I felt her sit next to me and heard the water splash from her feet matching the place where mine were.

Celine was right. This was definitely needed.

I always took for granted how special and enjoyable hanging out with your best friend is. My friendship with her was one of the most important things in my life and I couldn't see myself living without her. We had a pact that promised us to always be friends no matter what tried to come between us, we've stuck to that for the most part.

"Don't you feel much better now?" she asked, breaking my train of thought. "Now that you've gotten Mr. 'Sexy Jerk face' out of your head."

I replied, "Well now that you've mentioned him, he's right back in my mind."

I had successfully forgotten all about Alex and our awkward encounter. I couldn't help but wonder what was going through his head at this moment. *Was he thinking about me? Was he getting his nails done and bitching about me to his best friend?*

Probably not, but the thoughts still lingered.

She sighed and reached across from her massage chair, gripping my hand slightly. "Sorry, you know me, I don't think before I speak." I laughed at that and shrugged my shoulders, thinking

of something to say but couldn't find the right words. Settling us into a comfortable silence.

I pulled the strap of my purse, over my shoulder and walked out of the Spa, smiling over at Celine.

"That was so relaxing, I feel like all my chakras are finally aligned." I erupted into a fit of laughter and nodded my head in agreement.

We were just about to head over to *Leo's Pizzeria* and pick up something to eat, starving from not having lunch prior to leaving our apartment.

The bell at the top of the door chimed as we entered, allowing everyone to be notified of the new presence in the aromatic restaurant.

My eyes roamed over the surrounding, slowly taking note of all the customer's faces, when suddenly, in my peripheral vision, I recognized a mop of blonde hair, eating alone at one of the tables. Before I could act upon it, I felt a tug on my elbow and looked over at Celine in question.

"Isn't that the snarky Moritello bitch who gave you the stink eye over her husband?" she whispered, even though Sarah was far enough for her not to be able to hear us. She hasn't even noticed us yet.

I nodded my head and turned to look back at the older woman, freezing in my place when her eyes caught mine. She scraped her chair against the floor and walked towards us. My hands slightly trembled in nervousness at the idea of her causing a scene.

Sarah cleared her throat and looked at me for a mere second before shifting towards Celine and extending her hand forward. "Hi, I'm Sarah, the mother of the children Gianna looks after." Celine slowly shook hands with her and immediately let go.

"I've heard *all* about you Mrs. Moritello." She answered with a snappy undertone, smiling slightly.

The tension in the room was as thick as possible.

"Gianna." She started anxiously. "I came over here to apologize to you for my rude behavior early today. I had taken out all my frustration on you and I It was highly unprofessional. I hope you can forgive me for it."

I didn't really have a choice. I thought, not wanting to come off as rude.

The way she acted towards me was unjustifiable and I had no intention of taking her apology, so I settled for nodding lightly and smiling at the woman.

"I'd like to make it up to you. Would you consider coming to house tomorrow, for dinner? No babysitting involved."

I considered the idea for a bit and ended up agreeing to her invitation. Not wanting to pass up the free food.

She smiled gratefully. "Awesome. I'll see you tomorrow at three."

She gazed at Celine who stood there somewhat surprised, and waved, before doing the same to me and turning around, heading back to her food.

I stared at her retreating figure dumbfounded.

What have I just gotten myself into?

"I'd stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror. It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti hero."

"Are you sure you even wanna go? Just cancel, say you got sick or something." Celine spoke up, from her seat at the edge of my bed.

I was presently standing in front of my vanity, curling the ends of my hair long dark hair. I pushed her question to the side for a moment and placed down the hot curling iron, gazing at myself in the mirror, slightly admiring my reflection.

My body was bejeweled in a sparkly champagne coloured dress that flowed past my hips and stopped just below my knees, hugging the dips of my curves. I smiled at the gleaming beads that were scattered over my torso.

The dress was definitely a bit much. *But* it was the type of outfit you wore when you had a set mission to steal someone's man. Or *at least* make him aware of what he was missing. I planned on taking advantage of my invite to the Moritello mansion.

I figured I would probably regret this later on, but for now I wanted to bask in the glory of knowing that Alex found me attractive. I giggled. Being a home wrecker certainly wasn't in my summer plans, no turning back now.

Celine cleared her throat from beside me and I finally turned around to acknowledge her. "I feel like a total third wheel next to you and your reflection." She said, playfully rolling her eyes.

I ignored her statement and answered her previous question. "I don't want to cancel, I needed an excuse to see Alex anyway." She shook her head knowingly, but soon enough her face turned serious. "You sure? Want me to drop you off?" I instantly declined.

"No Cel, I'm fine, don't worry about me." She opened up her mouth to try and convince me otherwise but I stopped her. "Besides, I won't have too much to drink." She nodded and dropped the subject.

"You look beautiful by the way." She complemented. I took one last glance at myself and smiled at her in appreciation, grabbing my purse. "I think I'm ready to go."

The gates of the huge manor opened up and I drove up to the small car park, turning off my car and opening the small compact mirror I carried in my purse. I puckered my lips to evenly spread my peach flavoured lip gloss and smiled, adoring my newly done nails in the process.

I stepped out of the vehicle, one leg after the other and glanced at my smooth, newly waxed legs. Telepathically thanking my best friend for dragging me to that spa yesterday.

I then walked to the front door, and before I could press the doorbell, it swung open and I looked down to come face-to-face with a grinning Luca, flour sprawled all over the small apron he was wearing. "Gigi! You came just in time. I'm helping papa make ravioli! Come in." Before I had the time to process what he said, the little boy grabbed my hand and ushered me through the house and to the kitchen.

Alex stood at the stove, stirring something that smelled wonderful, he hadn't noticed me yet. I took the time to study his firm muscles, almost drooling at the sight of them rippling beneath his button up shirt.

I was broken out of my trance when I felt a tug on my hand. "Mommy is just getting dressed, she'll be down in a bit. Wanna go play?"

His father tensed at the stove and slowly turned around. He gave me a once over, his eyes lingering on my bare legs for a minute extra and I smiled in satisfaction.

Got him right where I wanted him to be.

"Good evening Mr Moritello." I spoke, with a noticeable seductive tone.

"Gianna." He acknowledged. "My wife will be down in a bit, you should go join the kids while we sort out the remaining dishes."

Ouch. I thought, taken aback by his impolite tone. This man was surely bi-polar.

I nodded my head even though he couldn't see me and turned around. Luca trailing happily behind me. "Mia is sleeping, as usual. But Elena and I were playing with her dolls. You can be Barbie, I'm ken." I smiled at his rambling and told him how fun that sounded.

"Hey Gi!" his little sister beamed, standing up from her position on the ground and running towards me, wrapping her dainty fingers around my legs.

"Hey baby." I cooed, lifting her up into my arms. She giggled as I placed feathery kisses all over her slightly tanned skin.

"Hey. Why didn't you kiss me like that?" Luca whined from behind me. I placed his sister back down and bent to his level, placing a kiss on his cheek. He smiled in triumph, causing me to laugh.

The click of heels could be heard, coming down the stairs and I caught a glimpse of an annoyed look flashing across Sarah's face, which soon turned into a half assed smile.

"Oh hi, Gianna. You're here early." She announced, not caring to greet me.

Wasn't the sole reason for my attendance her being nice to me?

I looked at the time on my phone and refrained from rolling my eyes. "Actually, its fifteen minutes past the time you asked me to be here."

She cleared her throat and nodded, walking over to her children.

I took this time to check her out. She wore a strapless red dress that clung to her skin so tight, I could imagine her circulation being cut off. Her heels were at least four inches high and I wondered how she could get around with them so easily.

She dressed like she was my age. The only difference is, I can actually pull it off.

"Let's go to the dinner table, shall we?" she asked, leading the way.

I followed her into the separate room and my mouth watered at the sight of the delicious Italian dishes I had instantly recognized from my childhood.

I noticed some of my most favourite. The *panzenella*, which was a delectable Tuscan bread salad. As well as *Pasta Con Pomodoro E basilico*. One of the best Italian pasta bowls.

The food looked great, let's hope the company is too.

"I don't dress for women, I don't dress for men, lately I've been dressing for revenge."

Alexander's P.O.V.

I cleared my throat and placed a forkful of pasta into my mouth, the cheese instantly melting in my mouth. The sound of cutlery clashing plates could be heard, echoing off the walls.

This was by far the most awkward dinner I have ever attended, I would make up an excuse to leave, but this my own house.

"So, Gianna." I heard Sarah start from beside me, I slightly rolled my eyes, already imagining the thoughtless things she wanted to say. I anticipated my wife leaving and hopefully never turning back. But sadly- she decided she wasn't going to give me a break, and instead torture me even more with her presence.

Our guest swallowed the food she was eating and bit her bottom lip in nervousness.

The sight was almost *stimulating*.

I shifted my vision back to my wife.

"Any boyfriends around?" she asked, with a wink and a smirk following her question.

Gianna shook her head and smiled coyly, "No, I'm pretty much focused on everything else." She mumbled, shoving a spoonful of salad into her mouth to avoid speaking more on the topic.

Thankfully Sarah dropped the subject and instead turned to the kids, asking them silly questions to keep them from making a mess.

Before I had the chance to get up, I felt a leg slowly sneak up mine. I shook my head lightly and gripped her calf, gently throwing it back to the ground and hoping no-one caught on to what was happening.

The last thing I needed was my wife throwing her sharp stiletto heels into my eye.

I looked across the table and Gianna smiled seductively, biting into her soft lip one more time. Minute or two passed and I sighed, glad we were in the clear and her little game was over.

Soon enough I realized that I had spoken too soon, except this time she opted higher and I felt her foot lazy drag itself up and down my length, which was now hardened. I shot her a look and she ignored it, rolling her eyes passively and continuing her actions while eating, as if she was used to multitasking in such a way.

I moaned softly, covering it up with a cough and my wife stared at me questioningly. I gave her a small smile and stood up,

wiping the corner of my mouth with a serviette. "Excuse me." I said, making my way out of the room.

I landed up on the balcony, staring at the stunning view of the city lights, trying to calm myself and take deep breaths. I took out a cigar from the front of my pocket and lit it, taking a long drag and puffing out the smoke.

Despite the bad effects smoking had, I found myself doing it to calm down. I felt soothed by the burning feeling that ran through me.

After a few minutes, I put out the cancer stick and popped a piece of gum in my mouth, smiling at the minty flavor's contrast to the cigar.

The sound of the door opening caught my attention and I didn't feel the need to turn around, knowing who it was.

"You're missing out on all the fun Mr. Moritello." She spoke, leaning against the railing and looking out into the distance.

"You were reckless in there, what if my wife had seen you?" I asked rather brutishly, but she ignored it and instead turned to smile at me.

Her pearly teeth shone in the moonlight and I stared at her, inwardly cursing myself for looking at this young girl in such a sexual way.

I had never been attracted to woman who weren't the same age as me. I found them intriguing in their own mature sense. They were old enough to know what they wanted in life and I always found a stable relationship fitting for me. I was a simple man with humble needs.

But I would be a fool to ignore the captivating beauty of the young female Goddess in front of me. I found her more than *intriguing*, more than just *simple*. She was a breath of fresh air, to put it lightly. I found myself being more enthralled each time I laid eyes on her.

Gianna was almost as beautiful as Sarah, if not more. Which was understandable due to the age difference.

"You enjoyed it Alex." She whispered. "I saw how pleased you were."

Her hands slightly gripped the end of my tie and wrapped it around her manicured fingers, pulling it towards her, me following with it. We stood there face to face to for a minute before she leaned forward and placed feathery kisses on the naked column of my neck.

I tried my best to stop her, not wanting to get caught by anyone, but I couldn't find the strength within me to do anything other than enjoy the feeling of her teeth slightly nip

the skin. I moaned lightly and felt her smile against me, accomplished.

She reached my lips and I held my breath. "See, giving in wasn't so hard was it Alex?" she whispered.

I nodded my head and gulped, waiting to feel her lips on mine. Wanting-no *yearning* for the feeling, but it never came.

"Well you're gonna have to work a little harder for it." She stated, pulling away completely and letting go of the material that was in between her fingers.

I stood there dumbfounded and stared at the teasing girl surprised. She winked and turned away, swaying her hips from side to side and leaving me shocked.

After a few minutes, I got myself together and opened the door, walking back into the room where everyone was sat, the table now cleaned of food.

The girl winked at me slyly and smirked at my unimpressed expression. She wants to play dirty?

Game on.

13

"And when her halo broke, She carved the two pieces into horns"

28

I dropped the last bit of my laundry in the basket and let out a breath. Placing one hand on my hip and using the other to wipe the small beads of sweat that had formed on my forehead.

I strode back into my room and fell face down onto my bed. Letting out a huff of annoyance which was muffled by my bedding.

Today was going to be a terrible day, I can already tell.

3

I got up and placed the soft material of my satin gown over my body, sliding on my fluffy slippers and walking down the stairs. The quiet irked me, usually I'd be met with the sight of my best friend at the kitchen table or laying on the couch, but today I was alone.

I took out my phone and stared at my recent text messages. Sighing in relief when I read over Celine's text.

Went out for a run, brb in an hour. Will pick up breakfast 4u to cheer you up.

7

I sent back a quick reply and smiled, lazily grabbing the now hot water and pouring myself a strong cup of coffee. I'll definitely be needing this for the day.

2

My feet dragged against the tiled floor as I sluggishly walked towards the television. I stared at my reflection in the mirror and winced at what I saw.

A nest of hair sat on top of my head, strands falling down the sides wildly. My eyes had visible bags underneath them and I noticed a hint of mascara still lingering around my eyelids.

4

By the time I finished scrutinizing myself, the front door opened and in walked Celine holding a bag of aromatic breakfast foods in one hand, and her keys in the other.

1

She smiled at me and rushed over, setting the bag down and lightly pecking my cheek. "I'm gonna go shower and I'll be back to eat with you okay?" I nodded silently and she ran up the stairs.

5

I opened my phone once more and looked through the rest of my texts, noticing one from Sarah and rolling my eyes at the words displayed on the screen.

Thanks for accepting our offer! Can't wait 2 c u!

78

I ignored the text, not bothering to reply. My mind went back to the other night I had dinner with Alex and his family. The night continued with the man shooting daggers into the back of my head after he returned from the restroom. As the time approached for me to leave, Sarah offered me a full time job. Which definitely surprised me, I selfishly assumed she felt intimidated by me. But I guess she has no reason too. A beautiful matured woman has more to offer than I do.

42

I laughed silently and shook my head.

Who am I kidding? Her husband is wrapped around my perfectly manicured fingers. Sarah Moritello has nothing on me.

My thoughts were interrupted when I heard footsteps behind me and felt the couch dip. "Are you feeling good today?" Celine asked me. Grabbing a bagel from the bag in front of us.

"As good as I can be, I guess." She gave me a sad smile and I waved my hand, hoping to forget about what today was, but I knew I could never really run from the burning thoughts of my subconscious.

"Are you going out later?" I swallowed the bite of food I had taken and faced her, crossing my legs and nodding.

"Maybe in an hour or so." I replied, "I want to shower and freshen up a bit first."

"Would you like me to come with you?" she asked cautiously.

"No, I'll be fine." I laughed, attempting to lighten up the mood.

15

We ate in silence for a few more minutes before I thanked her and walked back to my room, hopping into the shower and washing away all the sweat and dirt from the night before.

1

I got out and brushed my hair, sliding on a plain white shirt and some leggings with a pair of black sneakers, not caring to put on make-up as I wasn't going to see anything.

7

My fingers wrapped around my set of car keys and I called out to Celine, letting her know I was leaving, before walking out the door and shutting it behind me.

I got out of my car and grabbed the bouquet of white roses from the passenger seat. The gravel crunched beneath my shoes as I walked through the vacant cemetery, but instead of feeling nervous, I felt completely at ease, as sad as it is, this was almost my second home.

1

In no time I was standing over the neatly kept gravestone that read.

'Tatiana Vidal. Loving daughter and sister.'

189

I replaced the similar bouquet that had been left there a few weeks ago with the new and fresh flowers, smiling at the memory of my sister picking them from our garden and angering our mother. I sat on the ground and played with the grass in front of me.

"If anyone saw me sitting here alone, talking to a dead person, they'd totally think I was crazy." I laughed, a tear falling out of my eye.

36

"I bet you're looking down at me right now and wondering what the hell I'm still doing here after four years." I tried my

best to lock out the memory of the awful day my sister was taken away from me and how I've never been the same again.

10

"I met a guy. Feels kinda stupid talking about it, we aren't really dating or anything. But he's superhot and way older so I know you'd approve." I giggled once more as tears continued to stream down my face.

10

"He does have a wife though, but that just makes it more fun. You always were one for the thrill Tati." I said, referring to how alike I and my sister were. Not only did we share the exact same face-we had similar *tastes* too. She taught me everything I knew about men. Their habits, likes and dislikes.

69

"He makes me feel really confused at times. All men do, but there's something oddly different about this one. I don't know if I should continue playing this game. You know how terrible I am at dealing with heartbreak." I soundlessly thanked myself for not wearing make-up, knowing it would be all over the place by now.

4

"I miss you T. this has to be the hardest day of the year for me. How dare you leave me here all depressed and confused and shit. It's like, tremendously bad mojo for twins to be apart. "

170

I placed a smile peck at the tips of my index and middle finger and set them on the stone, lightly tracing it. With one last look, I got up and dusted my pants, turning around, only to be met with a figure kneeling a few feet away from me, seemingly copying my previous actions with his deceased loved one. He must have arrived after me, I was sure I was the only one here.

I may have been staring too much because suddenly the strange boy's eyes darted up to meet mine and I instantly looked at the ground beneath me, embarrassed that I was caught invading someone else's privacy.

Way to go Gianna.

14

"You're on your kid, you always have been."

I gathered up the courage to walk past the curious stranger, not before looking around at my other exit options. It was either trudge over other dead people which would no doubt be *extremely* disrespectful, *or*, walk off the side of the small hill and tumble to my death which would be highly ironic seeing as I *was* at a cemetery.

2

Was I being overly dramatic? Yes. He already caught me staring, there's no turning back now.

My feet started moving in his direction and he noticed, standing up and repeating my previous actions of dusting my pants off.

2

The boy seemed to be about my age, a year older at most, with slightly curled brown hair and a gorgeously sculpted face that looked as if the Gods had sent him down to earth on a mission.

19

He's no Alexander. My subconscious reminded me, causing me to roll my eyes. Not everything was about him and I cursed myself for comparing the two.

9

He gave me a small smile and surprisingly spoke up. "Hey." He said, with a hint of a French accent. I stood in place silently for a few seconds before shooting back the same greeting and nodding politely.

125

"Just thought I'd stop you to let you know that there's a couple of grass strands in your hair." He said, smiling politely but obviously holding in a laugh at how ridiculous I probably looked.

49

"Oh gosh I didn't realize that, thank you." I said, visibly cringing as I rapidly brushed my fingers through my damp hair.

He nodded his head and I thanked him once more, waving and walking back to my car to drive back home.

I was ready for today to be over already.

3

2

I opened the door to my apartment and sighed, dropping my keys on the nearest table and walking into the kitchen to grab a glass of water.

1

My throat felt raw and nasty after how much crying I had done today. I was used to it though, this day always took a toll on me.

Celine seemed to not be home once again and I checked my phone, not seeing anything from her this time but I shrugged it off, not wanting to bother her wherever she was and instead dragged my feet into my room and settled down for a much needed nap, hoping to escape the hardships life offered for a few hours as well as intending to get in as much sleep as I can before starting work tomorrow. Not that I minded, I really wanted to see the *kids*.

I woke up a while later and stifled a yawn, still sleepy despite being fast asleep for three hours. My ears sensed commotion downstairs so I got up and headed to the kitchen to see what all the noise was. Hoping it wasn't a burglar, but I calmed down remembering how stupid my paranoia was the last time.

Luckily, I was met with Celine hauling a few bags of groceries onto the counter top with a loud huff. She turned to smile at me, "Sorry I didn't shoot you a text or anything, I realized we

didn't have food for tonight and went to pick up some stuff." I nodded and returned her smile. "it's okay, what did you get."

She nervously grinned at me and I rolled my eyes. "Late notice, but I invited some of our friends over tonight, it'll be really low-key. I can cancel if you're not comfortable-" I waved my hand in dismissal. A get together could be a good distraction for me.

"No, I'm cool with it. What did you buy?" I repeated, looking at the array of wines and cheeses, as well as salted crackers and cold meats.

"I'm planning on making a couple of cheese boards and maybe salsa and chips, haven't decided." I nodded in approval and my mouth watered at the thought.

I loved cheese.

"When are they coming?" I asked Celine, taking a large gulp of the water I had just poured.

"In an hour or so." She said.

I grabbed a piece of mozzarella and shoved it in my mouth while she wasn't looking.

"Oh and Gianna?" she called, just as I was about to go up to my room and freshen up. "Not too much wine, you're a total lightweight. "

I stuck out my tongue at her and flipped her off, leaving the girl laughing in our kitchen.

I stared at my closet for a good twenty minutes. Despite the large amount of clothes I owned, I still didn't feel like I had a good enough outfit.

Eventually, I settled on a black bralette with a sheer black tee over it as well as a pair of high waisted shorts. I curled my hair and applied minimal make-up to complete the look. The sound of the doorbell ringing caught my attention and I looked in the mirror.

Decent. I thought, puckering my lips.

I smiled and grabbed my phone, an idea instantly popping into my mind. My fingers tapped on the camera app and I hurriedly took off the black shirt covering most of my cleavage, then proceeded to snap a few photos of my torso in my mirror, slightly giggling at the dumb yet rebellious thing I was about to do. I cropped out my face and opened up Alex's contact number, biting my index finger nervously.

Before I could stop myself- I hit the send button and immediately shut off my phone- not wanting to see his response just yet.

Perhaps after a little more wine.

"And after that, he literally stripped naked and dived into the pool- I was scarred." I laughed along with the rest of my house guests to the story of Mason over doing it with the alcohol last summer.

"It was one time! This is why I only came for the food. The gay best friend is always neglected." He pouts, picking up his wine glass and taking a sip of the bitter liquid.

I was currently surrounded by some of our closest friends. Hayley, Mason, Tessa and of course Celine. The night had started off great and I already felt slightly buzzed by the amount of alcohol I had consumed. My best friend's warning played in the back of my mind but I shut it down as quick as I could, trying to relieve myself of a headache.

I got up in a haste and whined, slightly bouncing up and down. "You okay Gi?" the brunette, Hayley, asked from beside me.

"Yeah, shit, I totally need to pee. Bathroom?" I asked, looking at them all expectantly.

"You should know where that is, you live here." She laughed, causing the others to follow. I cursed and nodded, running in one direction to the bathroom.

I swiftly did my business and washed my hands, feeling my phone vibrate in my pocket as I dried them. I opened up the device to find one new text, from the one and only.

***Alex;)* : don't send me this type of shit Gianna. You're making my life extremely hard.**

He's definitely into me. I thought.

Me: apologies Sir, that was intended for your dick, not your life.

I giggled at my smart response and mentally high-fived myself.

***Alex;)* : I'm leaving you on read now.**

Me: oksy sexc cu tmrw kisses1!

***Alex;)* : are you drunk? You have work tomorrow. Slacking already? You need to be punished.**

My pulse started to quicken at his way with words. He knew what he was doing.

Me: sounds gud 2 me!

***Alex;)* : would you be able to handle it?**

I stared at his question, trying my best to decipher it in my state, but before I could, a knock came at the door.

15

"Everything in the world is about sex. Except sex itself, sex is about power."

I sighed as I scrolled through and read over the text messages I shared with Gianna last night. My finger hovered over the picture she sent me, I contemplated deleting it, but who I was kidding,

It was the sexiest thing I had seen in a very long time and I cursed myself for thinking so. I felt even more alarmed when I realized how *aroused* the picture had made me, a thirty four year old man, turned on by a girl who was way too young for me. Perhaps the most shocking thing was my lack of surprise, I knew she was beautiful, *alluring* and *enticing*. I just hoped I could control myself for longer than I did.

190

The girl had yet respond to my previous text, maybe I had taken things too far with her and she regretted our conversation. I could only pray that wasn't the case.

31

If my wife had to see this picture and the way the babysitter and I had conversed, she'd throw another one of her expensive accessories at me, maybe something even worse. I've never known Sarah to be the jealous type, not until Gianna came

around at least. I'd like to say my wife had nothing to worry about, that there was no competition between the two, but I'd be lying. Sarah radiated envy and it didn't look good on her.

25

My thoughts were interrupted when I heard the clicking of heels against the kitchen floor. *Speak of the devil*, I thought.

6

"Babe." She chimed, almost skipping up to me. She placed her heavily caked lips onto my cheek and I felt her bright purple lipstick glue itself onto my skin. I sighed and looked at her expectantly. "I'm off to the gym. Be back in an hour okay? Love you, kisses." She said, placing her manicured fingers on my bicep and squeezing it lightly. "Wearing that?" I asked, staring at her skin tight dress. "I'll be changing there." I nodded my head and ignored her excuse, not caring in the slightest what she was up to. She didn't bother saying goodbye to our kids, let alone getting them ready after they woke up, previously telling me. *'the nanny will sort it out.'*

After the door had shut I walked into the room where the kids were sitting and smiled at all of them, picking up Mia and grinning at her. "Do you guys want me to make you something to eat for breakfast?" I asked, breaking their concentration on the television which played some cartoon. "No thanks papa."

They replied simultaneously. "We're waiting for Gigi." Luca said, his eyes lighting up at the thought of her coming to visit. I nodded in return and felt slight warmth at them being excited to see her, I felt that way too.

68

As if she read our minds, the doorbell rang and I immediately rushed to the door, setting my youngest daughter down into her little playpen.

3

I opened the door to be met with a somewhat hung-over Gianna and smiled at her, holding back a laugh. She walked in and rolled her eyes. "Don't test me today Moritello. I am not in the mood." I held my hands up in surrender and closed the door behind her. She looked absolutely beautiful, almost as if she had a set mission to tempt me today.

My kids ran up to her and fought over the space to hug her. She laughed and it was a beautiful sound. "Hello my loves!" Gianna kissed the top of their heads and I walked over to the kitchen, grabbing some coffee.

2

"What do you lovelies want to eat today?" I overheard her asking Elena and Luca, hiding her fatigue. I heard them talk about pancakes and soon enough, she walked into the kitchen.

"You're basically asleep right now." I pointed out.

"I assume my punishment is about to come then?" she asked, grabbing pancake mix out of the pantry. I almost choked on my water and Gianna noticed, smirking.

She walked towards me and I raised my eyebrows. The smell of her perfume overloaded my senses when she got closer and placed her chest close to mine. "What are you-"she pulled her hand back and I noticed her holding a small bottle. "Sorry you were standing in front of the cinnamon." I huffed and shook my head storming out of the kitchen and into my office to hopefully get some work done and forget about the woman in my house.

Gianna's P.O.V

I had to control my laughter when Alex angrily marched out of the room due to my teasing.

I would probably make it up to him.

I grabbed the pancakes I had made for the kids and took it over to them with some chocolate milk, as well as some mashed up peaches for Mia which I fed to her slowly.

I then took their plates back and organized a tray of pancakes, fruit and more coffee to take to Alexander. Hoping he hasn't

eaten breakfast yet. I smirked and went over my plan one last time before making my way over there. My hands reached around the knob of the large wooden door and I opened it, shutting it with my hip.

He looked up and I basically drooled at the sight of him wearing his glasses. "I brought you food." I spoke casually, setting it down on the table next to him. He merely nodded and I pouted in his direction. Without even asking, I took one of the pancakes and bit off half of it, feigning surprise when the cool sticky syrup dripped down into the valley of my breasts. "Oops. Clumsy me." I said, making sure his eyes were on me. I slid my finger over the liquid between my boobs and collected it, innocently slipping the finger into my mouth and sucking it off. The man in front of me took in a sharp breath and stared at the area where I just spilled the syrup onto. For a time that would have been deemed appropriate if that wasn't my plan this whole time.

I walked towards him slowly and sat on top of his desk, eyeing him. I lowered down my shirt slightly and asked, "Is there any more?" he gulped and shook his head, probably feeling the sexual tension that radiated through the walls.

Fuck it. I thought.

I leaned forward, asking for a kiss which he delivered at lightning speed, gripping my hips and sliding me into his lap. I

wrapped my hands around his neck and played with the loose tendrils of his soft hair, moaning into the kiss, the feeling of his tongue tangling with mine was indescribable. It was lust mixed with sin and pent up sexual tension. A release that was begging to come out and play.

What was supposed to be pure, short kiss unavoidably turned into a heated make-out session. Not that I had any room for complaints. I had tried to keep this purely professional. But that all went out the window, along with all my morals. If I ever had them, that is.

The desperate need for each other was too powerful and alluring to fight, we both knew that. His large, strong hands travelled around my body almost magical. Stopping at my rare and tightening his hold onto it, pushing us together which elicited a mewl out of the back of my throat. "I can't resist you." He growled, his voice deep with need.

I felt the same way and began leaving kisses on his exposed neck, feverishly undoing his buttons as I did so. I was careful not to leave any marks, despite how badly I wanted to experience that type of intimacy from the sculpted God I was on top of. He let out a groan and I almost melted at the sexy sound. My hips began grinding against his pelvis, connecting us where it was needed the most. I felt him harden against me and moaned at the large size I already knew he had. "Be

quiet *tesoro*." He whispered roughly, forming a hold on my neck with his spare hand. I felt his plump lips suck on the exposed skin of my breasts, my shirt nowhere to be seen.

I got off him and kneeled on the ground, breathing heavily and went straight for the zipper of his slacks, undoing it and motioning for him to lift his hips as I slid them down. My hands shook as I grabbed the waist band of his Calvin Klein boxers and followed suit. His cock sprung to life and hit his abdomen, my mouth almost watered at the sight.

"I made you this hard?" I mused, biting my bottom lip as I took his length in my hand. I slid my finger over a stray drop of pre-cum and brought it up to my lips, tasting him. "I need a better taste." I spoke, in a sultry voice. I lowered my face and took the tip of his head in my mouth, swiping my tongue across him to collect more of the fallen cum. He tried his best to quieten the moans that threatened to leave his mouth and I smiled in satisfaction, softly sucking on the head and releasing him with a loud pop. I unhurriedly dragged my tongue all the way up from his base, to the tip of his veiny cock, I went past the tip this time and took all of his erection into my mouth, using my hands to stimulate the rest I couldn't fit.

He groaned and bucked his hips, allowing it to go further.

"That's it *princessa*." He whimpered grabbing my hair and creating a makeshift ponytail. "Take it all. Let me fuck this

pretty little mouth of yours." This time, I moaned at his dirty words and he roughly pushed me down, forcing me to gag on his heavenly length, but I didn't mind the feeling of him hitting the back of my throat. By now, tears were slightly streaming down my eyes but I was smiling internally, loving how this was going.

My head bobbed up and down for a few seconds longer before I felt him pulsate in my mouth, my eyes met him in the most seductive way while doing so. I worked my hands faster and soon enough, hot spurts of cum were shooting down my throat. I swallowed all of it and showed him my tongue. "Good girl." He praised. Stroking my hair.

It was then, I knew for a fact, his wife could never compete with me.

I stood up and he grabbed my hips once again, placing me onto an empty spot on his desk. "You didn't think we were done did you?" he asked in a low voice, nibbling on my neck as he spoke.

His hands snaked their way between my thighs, spreading my legs as he did so. I felt the tips of his fingers caress the outside of my silk panties before he slid them down my legs and stuffed the inside his pocket. "Those are mine now." I couldn't anything else but nod. I brought his face to mine and kissed him roughly, pulling him into me awaiting his next move.

His fingers resumed their position between my legs and he slowly dragged his index finger up my slit, leaving me breathless as he did so. "So wet for me." The Italian god whispered to me. I moaned as he entered two of his fingers into me at once, forcing me to accommodate the surprisingly long length of his fingers.

Pleasured sounds flew out of my mouth one by one as I succumbed to the intense feeling of him penetrating me with his fingers which curled perfectly, hitting my most pleasurable spot and he muffled my moans by commencing a kiss between us.

He continued his torture and I felt myself quickly inching towards an intense orgasm. I felt out of breath as his fingers slid out of me, watching as he lifted them up to his luscious lips and sucked them intently. "Sweeter than I expected." He spoke.

I got off his desk and pulled down my skirt, walking over to my discarded shirt and slipping it onto my body. I looked over to Alex who cleared his throat as he buttoned up his shirt and slacks.

Without a second that I rushed out of his office and shut the door, leaning on it and breathing heavily.

What the *fuck* had I just done?

16

***"There's an energy, when you hold me, when you touch me.
It's so powerful"***

17

To say the rest of the day was super awkward would be an *extreme* underestimation. Alexander and I never crossed paths again for the next few hours I had been there. He made sure he remained pent up in his office and I, sitting with his kids barely paying attention to what was happening around me.

11

The most embarrassing realization was the slight limp I had whenever I walked. I could almost see the look of satisfaction that would spread over that stupid man's face at his accomplishment. I didn't feel a single ounce of regret towards what had happened. If anything, it set my plan into motion even more, I knew he wanted me before, but now it was *definite*, no going back.

74

I walked out of his door at exactly 4 p.m. cursing at the fact that he still had my underwear and I had to go home in my mini *skirt*.

5

I drove down the street, gliding through the familiar roads.

I yawned and rubbed my eyes with the back of my hand as I rode the elevator up to my apartment complex, wanting nothing more than to get out of these sticky clothes and take a much needed shower. As soon as I set foot inside, I sighed in contempt at the cool feeling of the air-conditioning blasting over me.

My feet carried me to my room, not bothering to check for Celine, knowing she was out job hunting. I fell onto the plush mattress and almost instantly heard my stomach growl in hunger. Before I got the chance to get up and satisfy my cravings, my phone rang and I reached for it on my nightstand, accepting the call without looking at the name displayed across the screen.

"Hello?" I said, putting the phone on speaker and undressing myself to change into something more comfortable.

"Gianna, love, hi!" Sarah's high pitched voice just about yelled from the other end of the line. I cringed inwardly and rolled my eyes.

"Hey Mrs. Moritello. Is everything okay?" I asked, not caring in the least bit. I imagined her red lips puckering as she pondered over what she had called me for.

"I was wondering if you could over a little earlier tomorrow. It's my birthday and my husband and I have some things planned for the day.

106

I sighed in annoyance, hoping she couldn't hear me as I took hold of my phone again and sauntered to the kitchen barefoot. "Yeah sure, that's fine." My reply was smooth and quick, despite how badly I wanted to protest.

"Thanks, kisses!" my eyes instinctively rolled again but lit up once I caught sight of the pizza that Celine had probably left for me.

42

I set my phone down on the nearest counter and immediately took a bite, not bothering to warm it up first.

"Gianna! You're here." Elena cooed, grabbing my hand and hauling me into their expensive home. Once the door had shut behind us, I was taken into their TV room, where her siblings were.

"Hola mi bebe's" I said, reaching down to kiss the top of her brother's head. He smiled in return, wrapping his arms around my legs. "Hi Gigi!" Mia yelled, stumbling towards me. I took her into my arms and showered her adorable face with kisses.

Before I had the chance to converse with them more, the infamous click of heels could be heard, almost vibrating the wooden stairs as Sarah descended.

She wore a loose fitted red sundress, rather than her usual skin tight clothing. I also noticed the lack of make-up that normally adorned her face.

68

"Oh good you're here." It took everything in me not to roll my eyes at her greeting- or lack of one. "You aren't on time really, but that's fine- we weren't in a rush. "

96

"You didn't give me a specific time to come, you just told me to be here early." I snickered. At this point, I wanted to just turn around and go back home. Before we could get into an actual *argument* her stimulating husband walked through the door, clothed in a *Ralph Lauren* polo shirt and some white beach shorts to match. He looked edible, simply irresistible. His eyes met mine and I smirked knowingly, to which he merely nodded in my direction and ignored, with a hard look on his face, looking at his wife instead.

78

He walked up to her and placed a kiss on her temple, wrapping his strong hands around her waist, as if to say, '*this is the*

woman I love' which was absolute bullshit. Sarah looked to be on cloud nine with his simple gesture and I lowly huffed in annoyance. But I'd allow him the satisfaction of thinking so for a little while longer.

125

"Are you two ready to leave?" he asked his older children. It was only then that I noticed they were as well dressed casually in summer clothing. Luca got up and rushed to his father, taking him by the hands. "Can Gigi come with us? Please daddy!" he whined.

58

"Oh-uh, that's fine Luca don't worry about it." I said. "I'm going to stay here and take good care of your little sister alright?" i bent down to his level and ruffled his hair.

"Great, now that that's sorted. We're heading off to our Yacht Club for the today, hopefully we won't be too long." Their mother rushed out, grabbing Alex's hand in a tight grip.

6

Those same fingers were inside me just yesterday. I wanted to say, but decided against it, not wanting to blow my cover when the fun has *just* started.

416

"Please can she come mama? Call aunt Sera to look after Maria for today, it'll be so much fun please?" I watched as Elena gave her parents the best puppy- eyes she could muster and her father sighed, looking at his partner next to him. Before I could intervene he spoke up.

22

"I suppose she can." He spoke, causing his wife to turn to him slightly surprised and angered. I beamed inwardly at the prospect of possibly seeing Alexander shirtless today and felt like cart wheeling around their living room.

71

"I guess we called your sister to come over." Sarah said, with a tight smile.

"Are you sure, I wouldn't want to intrude on your plans" I asked.

Sarah waved her hand in dismissal. "Oh no silly, it's fine, we can go up to my room so you can choose swimwear if you want?"

113

I looked at her suspiciously, I was pretty sure Alex was just as surprised at her hospitality. With agreement, I walked upstairs and into their master bedroom. Taking my time to look around the large space and all the interior designing that made it look

stunning and comfortable. Their bed was huge and I couldn't help the thoughts that came over me about her husband taking me right on their bed.

16

"Here, I have a couple of old bikini's that should fit you perfectly." I stopped my mind from wandering off and turned to face the woman holding three options. I stared at the black, yellow and red two piece suits and chose the one that I thought would complement my skin tone more, the black one.

I awed in astonishment at the marvelous boat in front of me. I've been on two of these throughout my whole life and none of them could nearly compare to the size and glamour of this one. The words '*Dea Dell'acqua*' were displayed on the side of the vessel, meaning '*Goddess of the Water*' in English. "This is beautiful." I gaped, staring at the blue water that contrasted against the rays of sunlight.

7

I felt someone come up behind me and a little hand tangled through mine. "Isn't it? This is papa's boat. Cool right?" I nodded and placed Elena's hand in front of mine, making sure she climbed the stairs carefully without falling over.

19

Once we were all successfully on board, the five of us sat around the table and talked about the most insignificant things, we ate and drank for another hour before I decided to get up and explore more of the ship like boat. I stood at the bow of the yacht and admired the view of the glistening waters.

2

I remembered the last time I had experienced something so calming and enjoyable was the very last days I had spent with my sister. We snuck out of our house in the middle of the night and roamed the empty streets of New York City. It had to be one of the best nights of my life- nothing compared to the feeling of being surrounded by the most beautiful lights with someone who appreciated you more than anyone else.

8

I slightly jerked forward after feeling a hand on my lower back, breaking my string of thoughts. "Gianna? What are you doing?" Alexander asked, leaning against the railing next to me.

1

I smirked at the thought of a movie I had once watched that reminded me of this exact situation. "Have you ever seen 365 days? It's a new movie that just came out." He looked at me in confusion and shook his head. "No, is it a kids movie?" I

laughed at his question. "Unless you consider two people openly fucking on a yacht a kid's movie, then yeah, definitely."

537

At my words his face turned to a more serious expression, as if he remembered why he came to look for me in the first place. A long sigh dragged out of his plump lips before he spoke again. "Gianna. What happened yesterday can't happen again."

150

Without hesitance, I laughed out loud causing the Italian man to look at me in surprise. "Is something funny?" he asked, annoyance flashing through his eyes. "Yes. I gave you the best blowjob you've possibly ever experienced and instead of thanking me by having sex against this boat, you tell me it can never happen again?"

114

He ignored my remarks and continued speaking. "I have a family, a wife and kids. I can't just throw that away."

121

I laughed once more and instinctively rolled my eyes. "I'm pretty sure she threw you away a while ago, but suit yourself." Before he had the chance to say anything else, I walked away.

197

I was *definitely* going to show him what he had just given up.

61

Sarah gathered all of us and *forcefully* made us sing 'happy birthday' to her. Which was awkward enough without her thanking us individually as if we had bought her a new car. Of course their children were having a blast, especially when the time came to dock the boat so we could all go for a swim in the blue waters.

39

I made sure my man's eyes were on me as I took off the dress I had been wearing over the bikini and dropped it to the floor. His eyes turned a shade of black as they raked up and down my curvy figure. I tightened the string of the already tight upper half, making my cleavage pop. Satisfied with my appearance, I slowly descended into the water, chuckling as Luca started to splash water all over me.

156

"You look so pretty Gigi. Can you be my girlfriend?" he asked cutely. I snickered at his father's expression and leaned down to kiss the head of the little boy. "Sorry little man, but you're a little young for me. I like my men *older*." He pouted and swam

away, not noticing the double meaning in my words, but I confirmed his father would, winking at him in the process.

218

"Dad! Come swim with us." At the request, Alex took off his shirt. I could feel the sex appeal oozing off his tanned, sculpted body. He was truly handpicked to perfection. I stared as his muscles flexed beneath the water, causing a ripple effect in the waves that surrounded us. He smirked when he caught me staring and I cleared my throat, instantly looking away with a crimson colour shading my cheeks.

13

We splashed around together innocently for about as Sarah watched us, not daring to come into the water, something about wetting her hair. She disappeared into the bathroom while Luca and Elena fell asleep upstairs after swimming for an hour.

2

"Can we have freaky underwater sex now please?" I asked Alex, shivering as he swam closer to me.

229

"We've spoken about this." He countered.

"Yes, but it went in through one ear and came right out the other."

99

I didn't give him any time to reply, crashing my lips against his as I wound my legs around his. He groaned into my mouth and with that, I knew he had lost all control.

108

"Fuck the consequences." he whispered, taking hold of the back of my thighs. he kissed my with full force, tangling his hand in my wet hair and slightly pulling at it, causing me to moan and allowing him to slide his tongue into my mouth, we both fought for dominance in the kiss but of course, he won. I grabbed his hair and pulled at the damp strands, mixing our moans together.

71

his hands magically traced down my spine, landing on my ass and gripping it roughly. i shuddered at the feeling and pushed myself against him more, grinding my heat against him.

we were so lost in the feeling that we didn't notice the high pitched voice call out for him in surprise.

17

***"So when you hold my hand, do you wanna hold my heart?
When you say you want me. Is it all or just one part?"***

24

14

"Alex?" she called out again. I thanked all the Gods that we decided to move round the boat and weren't right where Sarah could see us. She'd most definitely drown me.

74

With one more knee-buckling kiss, Alex swam away from me. I took that as my cue to go the opposite way and climb onto the boat as quickly and unnoticeably as I could. "What were you doing?" I hear her ask with suspicion lining her voice. "I swam around for a bit after the kids left." A smile graced my lips at how fast he had managed to come up with a good lie. "Where's Gianna?" of course she would ask that. *Nosey bitch.*

46

Before Alex could reply, I shut the bathroom door and walked towards them, as if I had been in there all along. "I'm here. Is

everything okay?" she eyed me questionably and my smile never faltered. "Yes. It's time to get going now so I wanted to round everyone up." I nodded at her and sauntered past her husband, making sure to sway my hips as I did so.

32

I placed my dress over my figure once I had dried myself off. My hair was sprawled down my back in long damp waves, which contrasted to the usual straight hair I had kept. I scrolled through my phone for a while until we arrived back where we began.

6

The ride home was uneventful, I sat with the Luca and Elena, fighting the urge to fall asleep after the day I'd had. My eyes rolled back when I caught a glimpse of Alexander *holding hands* with Sarah in the front seat. *Asshole. Think rationally Gianna. He probably forced him into it.*

27

I sighed and closed my eyes, leaning against the window and closing my eyes.

"Gianna." I felt a hand on my shoulders and opened one eye, peaking at the idiot who decided to wake me up from my *glorious* nap. Speaking of glorious. Alexander smiled and I glanced at my surroundings noticing that we had reached their

home. I stretched my limbs and took note of the empty car, my mind wandered back to our interrupted make-out session earlier, but I decided against finishing it in such a risky place.

"We're here c'mon." I got out of the car and he walked me over to mine, standing at the door as I got in. I looked at him with a smile. "What? No goodnight kiss?" he rolled his eyes. "Maybe another time, we almost got caught today." I laughed and he stared at me in question. "Not my fault your wife is clingy." Alex chose not to answer me and instead turned around without another word, walking into his huge 'family home.'

45

The drive back to my apartment was silent, thoughts of earlier clouded my mind and I smiled eternally.

For the first time in a while I had felt absolutely content and happy with my life, despite the obvious barriers between Alex and I being together, I still felt giddy knowing I had come this far with him. Although I knew he still felt hesitant to be with me, which made sense. He was married after all. *Unhappy*, but still married. And he was too good of a man to just throw that away.

I pulled into my driveway and stared at my reflection in the wing mirror. My mascara was slightly smudged, not too much to make me look homeless, luckily. Overall, I had a good day, up

until Sarah decided to ruin it, but that wasn't about to lower my mood, I still had other chances.

I unlocked the door and was greeted with an empty apartment one again, just as I was about to text Celine, my phone rang. "Hello?" I asked, placing the phone between my shoulder and ear. I walked up to my room and flopped onto the bed, awaiting the voice of my best friend. "Okay I really need to make this quick." She whispered. "I'm literally calling you from this guy's bathroom to let you know that I won't be coming home tonight for various reasons, getting laid being one of them, but I'm safe. Tell me all the dirty details of your day when I get back. Okay gotta go I love you." She hung up the phone before I had the chance to reply. I laughed at her antics and shook my head smiling at the thought of her having a fun night for the first time in a while.

A few hours later, the sun began to set. The deep orange glow blurred with shades of red, purple and pink, illuminating the late afternoon sky with stunning colours. The silence was only broken by the light buzz of vehicles rushing to get home and sleep in the weekend. The wind rippled lightly, blowing in my face as I stood on the small balcony adjacent to my bathroom.

After lounging around on my bed for a few more minutes I got up with the intention of freshening up and preparing myself for the night. I walked inside of my en-suite and looked at my

reflection, noticing my flushed cheeks and plump pink lips. I grinned, satisfied with my appearance and stepped into the shower, ensuring the water was at its hottest temperature. I grabbed the vegan body wash I had loved and lathered it all over my figure, making sure to rid myself of all the dirt and sweat from the day. I turned the water back on and rinsed off the soapy residue, the smell of lavender and vanilla clung to me as I reached for the fluffy white towel next to me.

I then brushed my teeth, finishing off with a few skincare products to keep my skin glowing and radiant. I threw on a white tank top and a pair of my most comfortable pajama shorts, yearning to cuddle up into my sheets.

I lazily scrolled through social media and responded to texts for an hour before deciding to get a goodnight's sleep before the weekend started.

I tossed and turned in the sheets, feeling restless, until I decided to get up and go drink a glass of water, hoping it would settle my mind.

I prayed my ears were deceiving me when I heard a slight knock on the door. My body stilled in place, slightly alarmed at who that could be.

A burglar wouldn't knock, Gianna. My subconscious reminded me.

Cautiously, I advanced to the door and slid open the peephole, sighing in both relief and surprise at the person on the other side. I opened the door to be met with a very, as usual, drunk Alexander. "Alex? What are you doing at my house?" I asked quietly as he strolled into my living room without as much as a greeting. "Got any water?" he replied.

112

I silently made my way back to the kitchen and filled up a glass of room temperature water for him. By the time I had gotten back, he was sprawled out on my couch, quietly staring at the ceiling. The clock on the wall read ten p.m. and I looked at my guest expectantly as he began to chug the water. "Sorry didn't mean to crash." He said not bothering to make eye contact with me. "Had a huge fight with Sarah and went out for a few drinks and I didn't wanna go back home." His words were slightly slurred but more put together now and I looked at him with pity. "I'm sorry." I frowned, unsure of what else to say.

36

"Do you want to talk about it?" I asked, sitting next to him on the leather couch. He didn't reply, instead leaned back and closed his eyes, resting his hand on my bare knee, causing incorrectly timed butterflies to sprout inside my stomach. "No." he replied.

We sat in a comfortable silence for a few extra minutes. I stared at the man in front of me in awe as a sliver of moonlight cascaded over his eyes, releasing a glimpse of his freckles to my wandering eyes. As the silence continued, I decided to get up at the thought that he had fallen asleep. But before I could fully stand up, he tightened his grip on my tan skin and I stilled. "Did you know Sarah isn't the kid's real mother?" I looked over at him in question and surprise. "What do you mean?"

401

"Their mom died a while back. Her name was Emily. We had Luca and Elena together." His eyes flickered open, staring at my stunned expression. "What happened to her?" I asked cautiously, not wanting to strike a nerve. "Car accident." He mumbled emotionally. "It was four years ago today actually." I cursed myself for not being good at handling people's emotions, knowing I could never comfort him like he needed right now. "Sarah hates it when the day comes around. Always moaning about how I should be over it by now." I gasped lightly. "No offence, but why on earth did you marry such a gremlin?"

114

"Sarah wasn't always like that." A humorless laugh escaped his pink lips. "We met about ten years years before what happened, her and I were best friends and she'd always come around to comfort me. Which Emily didn't agree with , but she had nothing to worry about. At some point after her death I got lonely, I was deteriorating and I needed someone. She was there for me when I had no one." By now his head was lying across my lap as I dragged my fingers through his soft hair, lightly pulling the tips. "One thing led to another and she fell pregnant. She practically begged me to marry her when we found out. The kids seemed to like her too, so I decided it would be best if we all lived together anyway. At the time I had come into a lot of money and then got to her head. She began to love her card more than me."

39

I tried to hold back my tears at the thought of someone not loving this man as much as he deserved to be. I always knew Sarah wasn't as perfect as she portrayed to be, but this was extreme. Alexander seemed like the perfect husband and the most loving family, I knew he deserved the world. No one could convince me otherwise.

34

"Why don't you just get a divorce?" I whispered.

3

"For the kids. I don't want them to go through something like that at such a young age. I don't know which is worse. Living with divorced parents, or living with parents who don't belong together." My heart broke at his words and I wiped away a tear before I began sobbing in front of him.

176

I knew what he meant, I knew it all too well. Growing up in a broken household is an experience I wouldn't want anyone else to have. Nothing hurts more than not having a relationship to look up to. Not seeing your parents as in love as they should be. It ruins your perception on love, forcing you to figure out what you should and shouldn't stand for in a relationship, it was hard.

103

My parents have never known peace, they fought over every little thing they disagreed on. There was never a calm day growing up in our household. We had to learn how to black out the constant noise.

31

Finding out about their separation was the best day of my life. I finally felt like I could be happy in my own home again, not having to find an escape in school.

12

"Gianna?"

"Yeah?" I asked sleepily.

"Do you want to go with me to an event tomorrow? It's a charity ball out of town, I don't know if you're interested in that kind of stuff but-"

I cut off his rambling with a big sleepy smile on my face. "I'd love that."

His voice drifted into the night as I fell asleep against the saddened man on top of me, falling into what I didn't know, would be the best sleep I've had in a long time.

18

"You take Wednesday, Thursday, then just send him my way."

-

83

"We've been here for hours Gi, you can't tell me you haven't found a dress yet." I ignored my best friend's remark and let the silky material of a long blue ball gown fall through my fingers. It was breath taking, but not exactly what I was looking for.

"I fell back onto the nearest seat and let out a loud sigh.

"Maybe I just shouldn't go." Celine rolled her eyes and sat next to me, turning my shoulders towards her. "That's not an option, we'll find you a dress. But can we please go get some food."

22

"We have seven hours before I have to see him, no time for lunch breaks." I grasped her hand and dragged a whining woman out of this store and into the next.

I hated to admit, but I was slightly nervous for what the evening might hold. Alex and I had never been anywhere alone. Did he consider this a date? I decided I wouldn't bring it up, to save myself the embarrassment.

8

The two of us have been at this mall since early, I've been in and out of several shops and tried about thirteen different dresses, but nothing was as eye catching as I hoped.

"This is the last store then we're going to eat. And if you dare disagree, I'll throw a tantrum in front of everyone." I nodded in her direction as we sifted through the fancy and expensive ball gowns inside 'Royal boutique' they have to have something for me here.

"Oh, how about this." I swiveled in her direction and came face to face with a beautiful satin gown, rose gold accents covered the lengthy material. It was stunning and ticked all the boxes.

6

"I love that!" I squealed, taking it out of Celine's hands. "Let me go try it on."

Without waiting for a reply, I scurried into the nearest dressing room and put on the dress as fast as I could, hoping it looked as good on me, as it looked off. I was happy with the final product. Adoring the way the luxurious material clung to my curves. The dress was very flattering, it complimented my skin tone perfectly and I could see myself wearing this tonight.

10

With one final look at my reflection, I opened the door and exited the room. Within seconds, Celine came rushing to me,

gushing over the ethereal gown. "holy shit. I think I might cry. You look gorgeous." I smiled at her, "I love it. I think this is the one."

31

"Well then let's go pay for it so we can finally get out of here." She shooed me back into the dressing room to change back into my normal clothes. Once I was done, I picked up the dress and held it against me once more and grinned happily. The two of us walked to checkout to pay for the dress, relieved that we could go get some food after the long day. I didn't need to check the price tag, I knew I wanted this one no matter what. As I was reaching for my card, a lady who I presumed to be the manager came up from behind me.

"Excuse me Miss," she smiled. "You aren't panning on taking that gown are you?" I looked at her confused, my face matching Celine's. "I am, is there a problem?" my heart rate sped up at the thought of not getting to buy this. "Well, the dress is already sold, if you check the tag it says so right there." With a frown on my face, I found the tag and turned it around, to be met with the word 'SOLD' in big red letters. My whole world came tumbling down as the realization hit me. "I'm so sorry but I'm going to have to ask you to return that to me." I handed the dress of my dreams back to Karen, as her name tag

read, with a heavy heart. Without a second glance, she went away.

"Gi, I'm so sorry, I didn't look at the tag I didn't even notice it." Celine apologized sincerely. I knew it wasn't her fault, I didn't notice it either.

I looked at her with sad eyes and told her it was okay and that we should just go home. The drive back to the apartment was silent. "I'm sure we can find a good dress for you in my closet, you'll look good in anything you decide to wear." I sent a grateful look towards my friend and sighed heavily.

When we reached our destination, I got out of the car and we walked into our apartment together. "Hey what's that by the door?" I looked in the direction she was talking about and shrugged, confused. "Probably just an amazon package." I said, advancing closer. "Looks way too fancy to me." Once I was within close view of the package I picked it up and took notice of the big white bow on the box. We walked inside with the package and placed it on the nearest table. "Look there's a note." She pointed out. I grabbed the white note from under the bow and opened it to read what was inside.

'I hope you love it as much as I do, can't wait to see you tonight- Alex.'

"Well shit, this might be the most romantic thing I've ever seen." Celine said, just as surprised as me.

I let out the breath I was holding and opened the lid of the box. I audibly gasped at the contents. A beautiful cream coloured gown sat neatly inside. I took it out and held it up, just as stunned, if not more, as I was when I saw the other dress. It was otherworldly. The one shoulder strap was embedded with the prettiest arrangement of flowers, which flowed down the rest of the dress in sequence, stopping about a quarter of the way down. I was mesmerized.

"You know what, I think I need a rich sugar daddy too." I lightly slapped Celine in annoyance. "He isn't my sugar daddy."

"You sure about that? This must have cost a fortune." She said. I did agree with her, this was a designer dress, nothing I would ever buy for myself. I have a lot of money to my name, but not as much as the Moritello family did.

Without waiting for a reply, she continued speaking. "You have around 4 hours to do your hair, makeup and get dressed, so I suggest you go now." I nodded in her direction and got up, taking my beautiful gift with me.

"Are you sure you're putting on the right shade of eye shadow? It doesn't look blended at all." Celine was no makeup guru. Her daily routine consisted of mascara and lip-gloss. She didn't need

anything to add to her natural beauty. This led to her not being able to do any sort of extravagant looks on anyone. "Oh hush you look perfectly fine. You haven't even seen the finished product yet" She said. "I'm following this James Charles look to the best of my ability."

I had been sitting in this chair for about an hour after I made sure to take a hot, calming bath to calm my nerves. There was nothing to be nervous about. This wasn't anything too drastic, I've done worse things with this man, maybe I was reluctant to admit that after last night, I had fallen slightly deeper for someone that I knew I couldn't have.

Feelings scared me. I'd like to think I wasn't the only one who felt that way. Who wouldn't be terrified of them? Feelings got me into this mess and I hope to whichever God is listening, that they don't get me into trouble.

"Just a little more gloss." Celine's voice snapped me out of my thoughts as she applied a second layer of lip gloss onto my plump lips. "And, perfect, all done!" she swiveled the chair I was seated in and I gasped at my reflection in the mirror. "Holy shit." Was all I managed to say.

I looked gorgeous. My eye lids were coated in a sparkly shade of rose gold, complimenting the rosy tint on my cheeks.

Surprisingly, Celine did not disappoint. "My best friend is a literal Goddess." She gushed, admiring her work. "Cel, this is

amazing, I promise to never underestimate you ever again." I admired myself in the mirror a little longer, loving the look.

"Okay, enough staring at yourself, we have hair to do." She wasted no time and picked up the already hot curler. "I'm going to curl your hair yeah? I think that'll look the most elegant." I nodded in agreement and sat in silence as she worked her magic. My nerves slowly subsided as I sipped on some champagne.

After a few more minutes, I was satisfied with my hair and immediately put the dress on. The soft material felt comfortable against my skin, clinging to all the right places as I knew it would. I fell in love with it instantly.

"Alex is going to faint when he sees how stunning you look." I turned to Celine and gave her a grateful smile, silently thanking her for all her hard work. "I do feel beautiful." I said.

Before she had the time to reply, we heard a knock at the door.

19

"Put him on his knees, give him something to believe in."

27

1

I stood directly in front of the door of Gianna's home, raising a fist to knock against the hardwood. I took in a breath to at least try and calm my nerves. I felt like a teenager in high school, about to take the prettiest girl to prom. But this was far more anxiety inducing than what my younger self had gone through on the day. I felt a sliver of regret creep its way into my mind. I knew this was immoral of me. Falling to the knees of a girl almost half my age, but I had been captivated from the start and was too far gone to turn back now. Perhaps it was time to do what I pleased without worrying about repercussions.

32

I pushed the bothersome thoughts to the back of my mind and cleared my throat as I heard the opening of the object that blocked my view of my stunning plus one. Instead of coming face to face with Gianna, I was met with a blonde haired girl. Beautiful, but not enough to hold a flame to my little vixen. This must have been Celine, the best friend if I recall.

25

"You must be Mr Moritello." She greeted, with a smile on her face, she slowly opened the door wider and beckoned me in. I tried to ignore the holes she burned onto the back of my head as she checked me out, but I'm used to it by now. I knew I was an attractive man.

61

"Please, call me Alex." I replied politely.

My mind wandered back to the last time I was here, just last night where I shared my whole life story with the other occupant of this home. I was reluctant to leave at 4 a.m. but I knew better than to stay overnight.

"Alright Alex, she'll be down in a minute. Last minute nervous jitters." She laughed, allowing the sound to echo throughout the room. I gave her a tight lipped smile in reply.

"Better yet, let me go check on her." Before I had the time to speak, the blonde rushed upstairs. "You didn't mention he was that fine." She whispered not so quietly. I heard a faint 'shhh' before they both erupted into a fit of giggles.

The clicking of high heels could be heard as I took a first glance of Gianna. She was strikingly beautiful, I expected nothing more. The dress I had chosen hugged her luscious curves perfectly, clinging to all the right places. Her hair cascaded in

perfect curls down her back, completely enthralling me. She nervously locked eyes with me and for the first time in almost ten years. I felt butterflies. I, Alexander Moritello felt fucking butterflies as I watched her advance closer to me.

"Hi." She whispered, staring into my brown orbs. I grabbed her hand and lifted it to my lips, never breaking eye contact. "You look out of this world." I complimented. Her roommate squealed from behind us, breaking the trance we both seemed to be in.

"It's picture time!" Gianna groaned as a camera was shoved in her face. "Come on just one." I smiled at her and pulled my date in by the waist, smiling happily as I heard the shutter click. "Perfect. You two should go now, don't wanna be late, bye! Have fun and remember, safe sex is the best sex!" Gianna's check flushed red as the door was shut behind us. I laughed out loud despite how coy she seemed to be.

Without another word, we both got into the limousine I had decided to hire, was it a bit extravagant? Yes, but I wanted only the best. Tonight has to go perfectly.

"Woah, this place is incredible." She smiled in awe at the luxurious hotel where the function would be held at. It was two hours away from the city, I could only hope I wouldn't run into any business partners here.

The inside of the hall was adorned with chandeliers on high ceilings, as well as white and pink drapes complimenting the white tablecloths. It was designed and catered to perfection, as it usually was.

The Breast Cancer Awareness Ball took place annually. This type of event was never intriguing to Sarah so I had always come on my own. It made me happy to see how appreciative Gianna was, despite only being here for a short amount of time. Her sparkly brown eyes travelled across the room, scanning the guests and staff with a small smile on her perfectly structured face.

I placed my hand on her lower back and guided her to a reserved table near us. "Mr Moritello." A waitress stood three feet away from us and stared at me, not bothering to hide the lust in her blue eyes. They weren't as eye catching as Gianna's. "Could I offer you a drink Sir." I read the name on her name tag. Julia. She looked to be in her early thirties. "I'll take water, thank you." I replied. My eyes wandered to the girl next to me and I held back a laugh at the way she rolled her eyes. Completely disregarding Gianna, she spoke again. "I'll be right back."

Before she had the chance to leave, I spoke up, forcing her to turn back. "You forgot about my date. She'll have champagne, right babe?" Both the waitress and Gianna looked at me in

shock, their eyebrows slightly raised. "Um, yeah sure." Without wasting time, she scurried away from our table with a flushed face. "Babe? That's new." I snickered at her reaction and took her hand in mine.

"Come on, let's dance."

The two of us swayed back and forth on the now crowded dance floor. A light classical tune played in the background. As I held this beauty in my arms, I wondered if she could hear my heart beating rapidly against her head that was set against my chest. Could she tell that I was nervous? Maybe I was overthinking things. *Mettiti insieme amico*. I chastised myself internally.

"Your heart rate is speeding up." She commented, smiling up at me with her gorgeous eyes. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say the great Alex Moritello is anxious over me? What an honor." I sighed lightly and gave her a small peck on the head. "What did you expect? I'm here with the most beautiful girl." She giggled at my corny joke and I lived to hear that sound again.

"Do you know anyone here?" she asked, placing her arms over my shoulders, she took full advantage of her added inches due to the high heels on her feet.

"No, they're mostly business men from out of town, we don't really care for each other's private business here. Everyone

makes sure to donate as much as they can and stay for few drinks." She nodded her head.

"I'm gonna go use the restroom really quick, I'll be right back." I felt a lingering sense of sadness wash over me when her hands fell off my body, but recovered quickly and sent her a smile as she made her way off the floor.

I sat at our reserved table for a few minutes before I felt a tap on my shoulder, I hoped to come face to face with Gianna, but was sadly disappointed by the waitress in front of me. Julia.

"Hope I'm not being a bother Alex, I just noticed you were alone, your daughter left?" she asked slyly. I cursed a string of Italian words under my breath. "My girl is gone to the restroom, I'm sure she'll be back soon, you can leave now. We don't need any drinks. Thank you."

"Are you sure?" by now she had moved closer and had her hands on my tie, I began to feel more irritated as the seconds go on. But before I had the chance to excuse myself harshly, I heard a voice from behind me.

"Yeah, he is sure. I'm positive I saw someone puke in the bathroom a second ago, you might want to go clean that up, thanks Julianne!" Gianna handled herself properly in front of the older women and I couldn't help but smile in adoration. The woman scurried off, embarrassed for the second time tonight.

"I think it's about time we leave." I said, placing a kiss on her pink lips. I drowned in her taste for a few seconds before reluctantly pulling away.

Tonight would be a long night.

20

"Do you like the way I flick my tongue or nah ?"

265

"You got us a hotel room?" Gianna asked, slightly surprised.

10

I swiped my assigned room card through the door and waited a few seconds before pulling down the handle. I gestured for her to go in first and made sure to lock the door behind us.

16

"Is it okay that I did?" I asked her responsively, awaiting her reply.

6

"Yeah, just surprised that's all." I shrugged my shoulders and watched as she nervously glanced around the pricey hotel room.

1

We were staying overnight in the Hilton hotel, rather luxurious for a one night stay but as I had previously mentioned, I only wanted the best for the stunning lady in front of me.

27

I took off my suit jacket and loosened my tie around my neck. The belt from my slacks followed in sequence after my shoes. "You look really handsome tonight, in case I didn't make it known." I smiled down at Gianna as she advanced closer to me. "You don't look to bad yourself."

5

That was a total underestimation, she looked magnificent and I made sure she was aware of it. She deserved to be shown off and treated like the Goddess she was.

22

I grasped her hips and pulled her into me. "As beautiful as this dress looks on you, I've been itching to take it off since I first saw you." Without a word, she turned around and I instantly latched my fingers onto the zip, pulling it down in a slow manner, we were in no rush. My lips instinctively drew into a smile as I felt goose bumps arise on her skin from my delicate touch.

93

My hands grabbed the strap on her shoulder and dragged it down, allowing the dress to fall off her soft skin and onto the hardwood floor. I took in a breath at her half naked state. She

fully faced me and pushed the gown aside carefully, she was so gentle with everything.

18

I took the time to appreciate her golden skin as I stared in adoration. Her long legs went on forever, complimenting her torso. Her breasts sat perfect and firm on her chest and it took all my willpower not to reach out and touch them, I felt deprived of her, as if she was the air I needed to breathe in order to stay alive. Gianna bent down to take off her heels and I stopped her before she could. "Keep them on." I instructed, grinning as she bit her lip.

306

I couldn't refrain from touching her any longer and slowly began to pepper kisses down the column of her throat, causing a light gasp to tumble past her pink lips. Just the sounds she makes drives me fucking crazy. Her hands grabbed my face and pulled me in for an earth shattering kiss. "Gianna." She completely ignores me, kissing me with even more force than before. I casually slap her ass which catches her attention. "Go and bend over that table."

"Yes sir." She responds, doing as I say. Her words make me clench my jaw in desire, I had to contain my almost animalistic

desire to throw her and the bed and fuck her like there is no tomorrow. But I had to take it slow.

96

She does as she's told, bending her pretty little ass over, giving me a nice view of it. I hurriedly follow behind her. I slipped off the pants I was wearing and took off my tie from around my neck. I hook my fingers onto the edge of her black thong and slowly slide it down her smooth legs. As I move down, I lower myself onto my knees behind her and coax her thighs apart with my hands.

81

I gently placed my lips onto her skin, nibbling on it, causing her to instantly let out an aroused breath which sent a tingly feeling through my body. I continue trailing my lips across the warm sensitive skin, feeling every small reaction she has to be touch, instilling more excitement in me as the seconds go by.

3

Once I'm sure I've teased her enough, I dip my tongue into her awaiting slit. "Oh my God." She moans, the sound was music to my ears. I held her up as I picked up the pace, making steady strokes with my tongue. I clasped my lips onto her clit and feverishly sucked on it, savoring the taste of this fucking

beautiful woman. Without a warning, I stuck two of my fingers inside of her, allowing her to melt against me.

76

I added my tongue in her hole, stretching her as far as I could. "Holy fuck you taste so good." Her juices were coating the small stubble on my chin but I couldn't care less. "Just as I remember."

"Oh yeah keep doing that- I'm about to-" I pulled out my fingers just before she could find a release triggering her to groan in anger.

"What the fuck why would you do that?" I slapped her wet pussy in response to her rough language making her gasp and moan at the same time. "Watch your tone bambina." I scolded.

I got up off my knees and grabbed one of the condoms I had brought with me. I hurriedly sheathed myself, craving to be inside of her as soon as possible. With one hand on her hip, and the other around my length, I guided myself into her walls and stretched her out with its size. "fuck papi you're incredible." I raised my hand and slapped her ass as hard as I good, causing a string of moans to tumble past her lips. The name instantly made me harder. It feels as if she was made for me to be inside of her. Only me.

I picked up the pace and pounded into her, groaning at the intense pleasure I was feeling. "Who's pussy is this?" I asked, curling my fingers around her hair and pulling her up with it, allowing her to slide up and down at an orgasmic angle. "All yours papi." She whimpered as I push in further.

I didn't want to risk hurting her by going too fast and too hard but there's no way in hell I'm being gentle with her. Her moans became even more desperate as I fucked the absolute life out of her, one of her arms latched around my neck for somewhat stability. "Oh yes!" she whined, grinding up and down on my dick.

I pulled her hair up, exposing her throat and marked her. "You're mine understood?" she nodded her head at a fast pace, I could tell she was nearing her orgasm. "Good girl." With one last stroke, I felt her come undone, squirting warm spurts of cum onto me, I could only imagine what that would feel like without the condom, which gradually lead me to follow suit, spraying my seed into the covering.

I eased out of her, watching hungrily as her juices slid down her log in heaps.

My hands caught her before she could hit the ground, and carried her to our bed. She laid back on it, with that sexy look in her eyes.

"We're not done yet." I said, sliding on another condom and laying down next to her. "Ride me." She once again, bit her lip seductively and got on top, opening her legs and lowering herself onto me with a gasp.

She felt so good from this angle. I placed my hand on her back, bringing her chest closer to my face and sucking one of her hard nipples into my mouth as my hand played with the other. She bounced up and down on my dick, switching paces every once in a while, allowing me to feel completely and utterly consumed by her.

After a few minutes in that position, I lifted her off me and got behind her, drooling over the view of her voluptuous ass. I wasted no time in sliding back into her, I held both her hands back as a restraint and fucked her into the mattress, making the headboard slam against the wall.

"Right there." She breathed out, letting it be known that I found her most pleasurable spot. Within seconds I had her cumming over me and screaming my name for the second time tonight. It was euphoric.

Two rounds wouldn't be enough for tonight.

21

***"I know I'm young but if I had to choose her or the sun, I'd be ,
one nocturnal son of a gun."***

—

156

I woke up to the feeling of Alex's strong muscular arm curled around my waist and sighed in content. His heated skin felt warm against my bare back. His arm was draped around me possessively, as if someone could take me away any minute. His nose was buried in my hair, in the crook of my neck. I could feel his labored breaths against my skin.

46

I felt incredibly warm despite the chilly weather from the cold morning. I shifted slightly and smiled as he tightened his hold on me. My eyes fluttered open and I looked down at his arm, admiring the corded muscle, the veins, and the way he held me like I was someone special.

22

An involuntary smile made its way onto my face as I sunk back against him, closing my eyes briefly and enjoying the closeness.

Once my eyes opened again, I stared at the numbers displayed along the alarm clock on my bedside table.

1

7:42a.m.

4

It would probably be going off soon, letting us know that we had about an hour before we have to check out. I didn't want to. I wanted to stay like this for as long as I could, forever, if possible.

I tried to reach for it before it went off, interrupting his sleep but I couldn't. The tips of my fingers couldn't even reach it. I wiggled a little out of his hold which only caused him to groan and hold me tighter against him. His hot breath hit my neck as he nuzzled closer to me, the sensation elicited excitement to rush through me, making it even worse when he whispered in my ear with his raspy morning voice.

39

"Where do you think you're going?" he rumbled, eyes still closed.

60

"I wanted to turn off the alarm so you could sleep a little longer." I said, threading his fingers through mine shortly. He

softened his hold on me and I reached over, switching the device off.

I then realized how close he was to me, causing his morning wood to place itself between my ass. I shifted back slightly, hoping he wouldn't really notice how turned on I felt by that. But he instead moved closer, pushing his tip more into me and I moaned softly, with a hint of tiredness laced in my voice.

82

Last night was incredible. I have no other words to describe how surreal it all felt. I knew he was good at what he does but I didn't think he was *that* good.

1

I was pulled out of my thoughts by the feeling of his hand slightly lifting my naked leg, pushing himself more into my centre. I trembled at the feeling, still sensitive from last night's activities. But before I could get accustomed to his size, he completely pulled away, forcing a scowl onto my face. "Hey!" I turned around fully and gave him the hardest glare I could conjure up.

24

He leaned over and planted a quick kiss on my lips, long enough to leave a slight tingle against them when he pulled slightly away, inches from my face. "I figured I'd give your body a break after

yesterday." He smiled as he leaned in to kiss me for the second time today.

I could get used to this.

With quick movement, I flipped over and sat myself on Alex, allowing my legs to sit on either side of his waist. He stared at me with the same glimmer he had in his eyes when he saw me for the first time yesterday. A crimson colour tainted my cheeks and I looked away, not wanting him to know the effect he had on me.

It wasn't long until I felt his delicate hand grasp my hips and pull me closer to him, silently leading us into another mouthwatering kiss. I moaned at the feeling, lightly running my fingers through his mop of black hair.

In this moment, I felt all my worries wash away with each peck he gave. As if the negative baggage I held was taken off my shoulders.

It was a bittersweet feeling, knowing someone held this much of a power over my happiness. It led my mind to wonder if it would be like this between us forever, but that was unlikely. I wasn't naive. I knew at some point everything would crumble. This relationship- *or whatever it is*- was a ticking time bomb. Waiting for the perfect moment to blow up in our faces. The thought alone made me feel butterflies, but not the good ones.

The type you would get right before receiving a test back knowing you didn't study for it.

I was *nervous*.

I shook my head to clear the troubling thoughts circling my mind, instead putting all my focus on the work of art in front of me.

His forehead was pressed against mine, heavily breathing. "You look extremely fuckable this morning mi amor." He whispered, threading his long fingers through my somewhat tangled sleep hair. I smiled in delight when he tugged on the roots forcing me to expose my throat to him. "I do?" I asked, allowing my grin to linger as he laid peppered kisses on the column of exposed skin on my neck.

"You always do. But something about that after sex glow makes you look ten times stimulating than you already are."

I laughed at his response, too distracted by his lips on my skin.

To help the situation, I slowly began to move on top of him, grinding back and forth on his clothed length. The friction didn't feel nearly as good as the real thing, but for now, I felt slightly satisfied.

I picked up the pace when I heard a throaty groan released from his mouth, content that he feels as good as I do in this position.

Within seconds he had my underwear slipped off and thrown somewhere across the room, my mind too occupied to figure out where. He slowly raised his head to look into my eyes as he felt him slip inside me for the *fourth* time this weekend. *Perhaps more.* We held intense eye contact for a few seconds, allowing me to lose myself in his hazel eyes.

I was first to snap out of it, throwing my head back in bliss as I slowly rode him. It was *phenomenal*.

"Beautiful." He whispered, breaking me out of my daze.

"What?" I asked breathlessly, I could barely focus on his words.

"You look radiant." I opened my eyes and stared at him while continuing my work, my head lulled forward and I placed my forehead against his, admiring him up close.

"How so?"

He placed a small kiss on my collarbone, slightly sucking the skin.

"The morning sun is shining down on you, it sort of makes you glow. *Sei il paradiso in terra, bellezza mia.* "

I swooned at his words, everything said in Italian was made to be ten times hotter. Everything this man did was perfect, almost as if the world was carved out to be fit for him, rather than the other way around.

I could only hope to stay in this moment forever but I knew life wasn't that easy, as much as I wanted to it to be.

I picked up the pace, moving in delicate but strong circles.

I felt his hand crawl up my neck and grasp the sides, lightly choking me and I moaned at the overall sexiness of the situation.

My reaction only egged him on, allowing me to have control for a few more seconds.

Moments later he flipped us over and I landed in his former position on the bed with a slight gasp. Alex grabbed my leg and positioned it next to my ear before slamming into me with no warning. I cried out in pleasure at the new spots he was hitting. My vision was clouded with stars as I rolled my eyes back. I could imagine the satisfied smirk on his face as he pounded into me.

"Fuck." He groaned laying his head into my neck to harshly suck on the skin once more.

"Are you," *moan*. "You hungry baby?" he asked, raising his head from my neck but not slowing his pace *at all*.

I twisted my face in confusion at the odd question. *Could he tell?* "I-I guess so?" I answered, confused.

I hadn't eaten for more than seventeen hours so I was rather famished. "Pick up the phone, call room service."

"What?" *what was he doing?*

"Do I have to ask you twice?" his hand reached for my throat again, tighter this time, but pleasurable as always.

I shook my head and haphazardly searched for the landline on the small bedside table without breaking eye contact with the man who was relentlessly impaling me with his cock.

My hand finally met the device and I brought it up to my ear with slightly shaky hands and dialed the first number I saw.

I held in my moans as I heard the phone being picked up on the other end, but the harsh sounds of skin clapping could still be heard.

"This is the Hilton hotel room service, Good morning how can we help you?" the male voice came through the receiver and I took in a breath.

"H-Hi." I stuttered sheepishly, watching Alex smirk in satisfaction as he leaned back into my neck.

"Get whatever you want." He whispered, nibbling on my earlobe as he spoke.

"Oh uhm- could I get a bunch of breakfast foods? I don't really care what you bring we aren't picky." I felt bad for rushing

through the conversation and perhaps coming off as rude but I didn't want to give away what was *actually* happening here.

Before I could process the boys reply, I felt fingers slipping down my torso and landing over my aching pussy and feverishly rubbing my clit in *satisfying* ways.

I gasped so loud, I was positive the poor guy heard us. Without a reply to his previous statement I called out the room's number and dropped the phone onto the floor without a second thought. "Fuck yes, feels so good."

"You did so good baby, cum for me, let me feel you."

At the sound of his words, I came undone, unraveling myself before this man, we both let out sounds of our own as we both reached the end of our climax.

I was so lost in our little world that I didn't notice the sound of the line only *just* going dead.

After we both took a quick shower, alone. I wandered back into the bedroom and wrapped myself with the white satin sheets, not bothering with clothes just yet.

I yelped at the feeling of a hand harshly slapping my ass and glared at a smirking Alex.

This man was a sixteen year old at heart. I thought.

"Hey! You have a nice ass, can't expect me to just ignore it."

I smiled sheepishly at the fact that I had instead spoken out loud and leaned up to kiss his clean shaven face, smiling through it. Before we could get any further,

There was a firm knock on the door and I covered myself completely as he went to open the door for our room service.

The boy, who I assumed picked up the phone earlier, pushed a fairly big cart into the room, avoiding eye contact after a quick greeting to both of us.

I arched my perfectly shaped eyebrow at Alexander and he shrugged, a slight smile on his face.

Before we could tip the boy, whose tag read *Bryan*. He walked out the room and shut the door in haste.

Alex and I looked at each other. Me with embarrassment in my eyes and his holding a certain playfulness.

"He definitely heard." We say in unison, erupting into a fit of laughter.

If only we had been more careful with who we let see us together that day.

22

Welcome to the panic room, where all your darkest fears are gonna come for you."

87

The day had flown by in a blur and before I knew it, I was fitting the small golden key into my front door.

It had only been half an hour, but I had already started to miss the beautiful man I had spent a good portion of the weekend with. But the little alone time I had with him was blissful enough to keep me going until I got to see him again.

We spent a little over thirty minutes eating breakfast after the server had left, I had come to learn that his favourite movie was *The Notebook* and that he was a sucker for cheesy romance movies and novels. Which was completely understandable. I sat timidly on his lap as he fed me the lovely blueberry pancakes we had ordered, stealing sticky kisses when the syrup had '*accidentally*' missed my mouth.

90

Everything about my time with Alex was perfect. I felt unexplainable rage at his wife for not treating him like the angel I knew he was.

15

He deserved so much better and I knew without a doubt, that I could give it to him. But I wouldn't tell him that, not until I was sure he felt the same way.

33

I rid my mind of the memories as I pushed the door open.

My aura was slightly uplifted knowing Celine was on the other side of this door, we usually didn't spend much time apart and although I was pretty *preoccupied* the past couple of days, I did miss her.

1

I expected to see her as soon as I walked into the apartment but was instead met with an *odd* silence. I shrugged it off and continued my way through the house. Smiling instinctively at the framed pictures on the wall of my best friend and I throughout the years.

29

I dropped my keys into the ceramic bowl in the living room before slipping my feet out of my wedged heels and into the fluffy slides I had left down here in a hurry before the event. My feet made a light noise as I trudged up the stairs and into my

room, yawning in the process. I was absolutely spent and know I need a full twenty-four hours to recover from Alex.

I flopped onto my bed with another yawn and snuggled up into the scent of my white throw pillow, I missed my bed and the comfort it brought me.

2

Before I could get too deep into my thoughts, the sight of my phone lighting up caught my attention.

I had two unopened texts, one from Celine and the other from Sarah, *surprisingly*.

8

I decided to only open the former, not wanting to deal with whatever sour Sarah had to say.

The message read;

Sorry I couldn't be home when you got there! Something came up. Be back soon!

46

I didn't bother replying to the text, knowing she'd explain when she got here.

I got off the comfortable bed and plugged my phone into its charger then made my way into my bathroom to brush my

teeth for the second time today. I changed out of the sundress I was in and slipped into a more suitable outfit for the rest of the day.

Before I had the chance to do anything else, I hopped back onto my bed and fell into a deep sleep.

The sound of the door slamming woke me up from my nap. I yawned and rubbed the sleep out of my eyes. Taking note of the darkness outside, I picked up my phone and looked at the time displayed across the screen.

7:37 p.m.

Had I really slept the whole day away?

I lazily sat up and slung my feet over the side of my bed, sliding my feet back into my warm fuzzy slippers. I trudged down the stairs and into the kitchen, hopeful to see Celine after this long.

My feet shuffled along the tiled floor as I entered the room.

"Hey you're back."

She turned around and smiled at me, I took notice of how it didn't really reach her eyes but I ignored that. I'd bring it up another time.

Her arms pulled me into a tight hug and I embraced her with open arms, this lasted about five seconds before we both let go.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here this morning, I had to go do something and it took a little more of my time than I had hoped."

"Is everything okay?" I asked warily.

She brushed off my question with a wave of her hand. "Yeah, yeah everything's fine."

I nodded slowly and we both grabbed leftover pizza that she had bought last night. We headed to the living room and each sat on one of the few arm chairs in the space. Despite Celine telling me everything was fine, I knew that wasn't the case. The tension in the room could be cut with a blunt knife.

We ate in a relatively awkward silence and I made sure to busy myself with the dishes after we were done to avoid how tense everything was.

The only sound in the apartment were light footsteps heading towards her room but I stopped her before she could fully enter her room.

"Are you sure nothing's wrong? You're acting super weird and I just need to make sure-"

She brushed her hand through the golden locks sitting on her head and sighed. "If anything was wrong I'd let you know Gi."

"Are you sure? You can tell me anything you know that."

An annoyed expression flickered through her eyes. "I said drop it."

She stormed into her bedroom and I stood in place, shocked at what had just unfolded.

Did I do something wrong?

A few hours had passed and Celine had stayed locked behind her door. I didn't have the energy to argue with her so I figured I'd leave the situation for tomorrow.

I tossed and turned beneath my sheets for some time until I realized I wouldn't be able to go back to sleep. The time on the alarm clock read *11:43*.

With a heavy sigh, I decided to get out of bed and maybe leave the house for a bit. I knew I wouldn't be able to fall asleep again and assumed fresh air was needed. It probably wasn't the best idea to go out this late but I knew for sure nothing bad would come out of it.

I tied the black laces of my sneakers and threw a hoodie over my leggings, the night air was chilly but this would keep me warm.

I tip-toed downstairs and made sure to lock the door behind me, carefully lacing my key under the welcome mat.

As I walked down the street I scrolled through my phone, going back to Sarahs text from earlier and opening it.

Hope to see you tomorrow at three. Don't be late.

I typed back a short reply but before I could press send, my phone completely died. *Shit.*

I sighed heavily and stuffed it into my pocket, hoping I wouldn't need it tonight. The streets were empty and I smiled lightly at the calmness of everything. The world was more peaceful at night, that was a given. The sounds of owls in the distance could be heard, overpowering the closeness of the crickets I could recognize if I focused enough. The air felt less polluted as I breathed it in happily.

I could've sworn I heard footsteps behind me, but when I turned around no one could be seen. I shrugged and continued walking, I was probably just being paranoid.

It wasn't often I found myself wandering the streets at night, but it was good for clearing my head when I couldn't find the ability to fall asleep.

I pushed open the old gate of a small community park I'd always find myself in as a kid. I was last here a few months ago but everything looks exactly the same as I left it.

The rickety red swing swayed back and forth with the wind. I sat on one of the wooden platforms and pushed myself off the

ground, swinging to and fro with a small but happy smile on my face. The wind blowing through my hair made me feel as if I was flying and I welcomed the content feeling, closing my eyes

My blissful moment was cut short when I heard movement on the other swing. I ignored it, no one was here this late.

But as soon as I heard the sound of a voice my eyes opened hastily.

"It's late for a pretty girl like you to be out here all alone."

I gasped at the voice and almost fell off, but luckily held myself up before I hit the ground.

Too startled to say anything, I stared in shock at the person next to me. He looked to be my age or a bit older, I definitely knew him from somewhere, I just couldn't figure out where.

Instead of giving him the time of day, I turned around, prepared to run as fast as I could from this place, but he was too quick. His hand grabbed onto my arm before I could take a single step.

I raised my fist in the direction of his face trying my best to remember the self-defense class I had taken a few years ago. But before I could deliver a hard blow to his face, he caught my wrist and twisted it in the opposite direction.

Pain shot through my whole arm and he took my weakness as an advantage and twisted my whole body, forcing my back against his chest.

He smelled like cigarettes and I hated it.

"Get off me!" I screamed, wriggling out of his hold, I kicked him where I knew it would hurt and he screamed out in pain. "You whore!" I felt a hard smack to my face and fell to the ground crying in pain.

I got up with blurry vision due to my tears and tried to ignore the pounding in my head. I fought against the man as much as I could but it was no use. I felt myself cry even harder.

Why does this shit happen to me?

Suddenly my pockets felt heavy and I freed my hand to search for the item that may be helpful and when I pulled it out, I couldn't help but send a prayer. *Pepper spray.*

I must've left it in here from the last time.

Without a second thought I swung my elbow into the guys face and he let go of me, stumbling back, I took this as my chance to forcefully spray the lethal mist into his eyes and he cursed, falling to the ground.

I instantly ran as fast as I could, not wasting a single second as I sprinted three blocks back to the safety of my home. My heart

was beating rapidly in my chest as the adrenaline pumped through me. I was running out of my breath and my lungs felt tight but I knew I couldn't stop.

It took me roughly twenty minutes to get there. I hurriedly reached for the key and locked the door behind me after I was sure of my safety.

I ran up into my room and shut the door, sliding onto the ground and sobbing into my hands.

I was terrified.

The feeling of his hands around my neck could still be felt and I cried some more, my hands were shaking and my lungs were on fire from all the running and my face was still throbbing in pain. *Breathe Gianna. In and out.*

After ensuring my heart was steady, I shakily reached for my phone that had just buzzed in my hoodie.

I could've sworn that was dead.

An anonymous number was displayed across my screen and I shivered at the message.

23

"She lives in daydreams with me."

89

*

The sounds of birds singing woke me from my sleep and I winced at the bright sun rays wafting through the tall windows. I had no clue why the drapes weren't closed to shield the morning sun from my sensitive eyes but I shrugged it off, yawning as I stretched my arms over my head.

3

I couldn't help but smile in remembrance of the blissful weekend I had just spent with the stunning girl I've come to know more of over the past two months. Gianna was a breath of fresh air for me. I felt as if the colours of the world were a little brighter when we were around each-other.

13

I knew, somewhere in the back of my mind that this shouldn't go on for long and that it wouldn't end well, but I immediately buried those thoughts and replaced them with the glorious image of her dark hair wrapped around my fingers.

6

She was *Paradiso in terra*.

76

Having to depart from her yesterday left me miserable and I knew I needed to see her again soon if I wanted my mood to be uplifted. I was slowly beginning to rely on her for added happiness in my life which I knew wasn't healthy.

rimettiti in sesto, vecchio.

75

I pushed the nagging thoughts away and finally rotated to face the woman who I was forced to share a bed with, but to my surprise and *gratification*, she wasn't lying next to me as I had expected. Which explained the sun shining through the room. She undoubtedly woke up early for once.

5

With a sigh, I got off the comfortable mattress and sauntered into the bathroom. My bare feet made a padding sound on the wooden floor beneath me and I grimaced at how cold it was.

2

After completing my morning routine, I made my way into my children's rooms and knocked on each individual door. I was

confused at the lack of reply and opened each door just to come face to face with empty bedrooms.

Where was everyone?

8

I jogged down the stairs and opened the door to the game room. It was empty. My confusion only grew as I walked through the seemingly quiet house.

It was when I walked through the living room I heard laughter coming from the kitchen, the smell of various breakfast foods wafted through my nose. I was met with the sight of my wife dancing through the kitchen as she cooked what looked to be waffles, Maria hung tightly on her hip as she giggled at her mother's antics.

193

My two other children munched on toast and sipped orange juice as they watched the scene unfold, eyes wide in happiness.

I rubbed my eyes feverishly, confused on whether I was still sleep or not.

"Papa! You're up!"

I felt little arms wrap around my legs and I smiled, lifting my daughter into my arms. "Good morning *la mia principessa*. I smiled, stroking her pink cheek with my index finger.

"Oh my love, you're just in time for the breakfast I made, come eat come eat!" Elena jumped out of my arms, allowing her mother to embrace me in an awkward hug, her arms wrapped around my torso and I lightly tapped her head. She stood on her toes and leaned up, placing a kiss on my lips.

For old times' sake, I kissed her back, much to her satisfaction.

It didn't feel like it used to. Kissing Sarah felt wrong.

She directed me to the steaming foods on our kitchen table and I sat on the opposite end of her after greeting the rest of my kids.

I decided to bury my dozens of questions, not wanting to ruin whatever this is- for my kids.

"I made waffles, eggs, a fruit platter, fette biscottate and other Italian dishes I have no idea how to pronounce. Oh and smoothies. There's orange juice too if you'd prefer that." The woman in front of me clasped her hands together, plastering a huge smile on her face after listing all the foods she had prepared.

Sarah *never* cooked. I was astonished that she even knew how to.

Last time she attempted to cook anything was just after we got engaged.

"Looks lovely." I complimented, eyeing the food suspiciously. She was being nice. *Too* nice, it was almost suspicious. But I brushed off the feeling and plated a few of the delicacies in front of me anyway.

Surely she wouldn't be poisoning innocent kids.

"Mamma, will we be seeing Gigi today?" Lucas asked, staring at the woman with his chocolate brown eyes.

Sarah dabbed the corner of her mouth with a paper towel, patting away nonexistent food before she answered. "Yes darling, your father and I have plans for today so we'll be leaving you with her for a few hours, si?"

I looked at her in question but she waved her hand in front of her heavily caked face and mouthed, 'I'll tell you later'

Gianna never wore heavy make-up.

Now is not the time. I reminded my subconscious

I instinctively smiled at the thought of seeing her later, she managed to brighten my day without being around me.

I felt like a high-school kid.

With a wife, and kids, and a supposed mistress.

But those were minor details.

Breakfast flew by with minimal chatter between Sarah and I, the kids filled up the silent room with silly questions and random facts they had learned throughout the day.

Everything surprisingly tasted good, I was impressed.

"Are you pleased with the food baby?" she asked, sipping on the orange juice in front of her.

The pet name sounded strange coming from her but I didn't show it, choosing to ignore her odd behavior for now.

"It was great thanks Sarah." I smiled tightly.

She nodded proudly and I got up from my seat, excusing the two toddlers who seemed to have been done with breakfast. They scampered out of the kitchen and I lifted Maria from her high chair, aiming to clean the contraption as well as all the baby mush she had managed to get all over her face.

An hour later, the room was fully cleaned.

I strode towards the trashcan, emptying our leftovers into it.

The take-out bag from our favourite breakfast place going completely unnoticed.

"Alright Sarah cut the crap, what's with the 'trophy wife' act."

I strutted into our walk in closet and leaned against the entryway. Staring at the woman in front of me, awaiting her answer.

"What do you mean?" she asked, feigning ignorance. Her manicured hands searched through her large amount of clothing, pulling out a dress and lining it against her body. She stared at herself for a few minutes before turning to me. "How do I look?"

I ignored her question and impatiently tapped my foot against the tiled floor. "You're a bore Alexander, has anyone ever told you that?" she rolled her eyes and slipped the sundress over her slightly curvy figure.

"Answer my question." I was growing each impatient as each second passed by.

She sighed and walked out of the room and into our bedroom, compelling me to follow her.

"Look, I know I haven't been the best wife or mother for a while now. And I figured I'd try harder for you. I don't want it to come to the point where you're looking for validation from other women."

I already have. I mused, deciding not to voice my thoughts as she continued.

"That's why I've arranged for us to go see Ana again. I figured if anyone could help save our marriage, it would be her."

I desperately wanted to tell her how nothing could save our failed marriage but decided against it. In the back of my mind, I

knew trying with her was the right thing to do for both my image and my family but I tried my hardest to suppress the thoughts.

"Do you really think seeing our marriage counselor will help? It's don't nothing for us in the past."

"I truly do think it will. We could at least try right?" she looked hopeful and I saw genuine excitement flash through her eyes, and something else I couldn't put my finger on.

I sighed and sat on our bed, placing my head in my hands.

I missed her.

"Alright fine, whatever."

"What was that?" she asked, strolling towards me with what looked like a hopeful expression on her face.

"I said I'll do it. We'll go."

Sarah squealed in excitement and bounced on her feet in happiness. "Oh thank you mi amor, I promise you won't regret this." *I hope not.*

I sat on the leather armchair in the living room and watched as my smallest child played with a set of blocks on the floor. Grinning at how adorable she was. My phone alerted me of a new message and I picked it up, hopeful for a text back from Gianna, but still nothing.

I tried not to grow worried but I assumed she overslept.

My wife jogged down the stairs in her white flat shoes and white sundress, her blonde hair held back by an expensive pair of sunglasses to match the look. "Are you ready?" she asked, standing next to me.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" I asked, looking toward our other children who just walked in.

Realization spread across her face and her red lips formed into an 'O'. she glanced at the time on her watch and scowled. "She should've been here by now. I'll call her."

I nodded in her direction as she dialed Gianna's number. The phone rang for a few minutes with no answer and she huffed. "I could've sworn I told her to be here early last night. She must be hung over."

I rolled my eyes discretely and refrained from saying anything uncivilized, not wanting to upset her moments before we left.

"I'll text your sister instead. We have no more time to waste."

I ignored her words and checked my phone once again, only to be met with a blank screen.

Why hadn't she answered?

By the time my sister had arrived, I still hadn't received any texts or calls from the girl and I sighed worriedly.

"Bye my loves!" Sarah knelt down to the kid's level and placed kisses on all their faces, staining their cheeks with her red lipstick. "We'll bring back some ice cream for you, yeah?" they nodded happily, forgetting all about the smudged make-up on their skin.

I embraced my sister in a tight hug and thanked her for arriving on such short notice, to which she replied with a wave of her hand. "No need to thank me, I love spending time with **mi bebés** we're gonna have so much fun right, angels?" she asked, ruffling their hair.

Sarah turned around and walked through the door without a second glance, totally disregarding my sibling, who snickered at the woman discretely.

"Still the same witch brother. You could do better."

I smiled at her and said goodbye to my children once more before grabbing my keys and following my wife out the front door.

"I'd say it's a pleasure to see you both but judging by the circumstances that would be misleading, no?"

Anastasia Jilten was a woman too old to still be working. She belonged on a field in Italy, sipping on fine wines, but instead. She sat in this clammy office all day, mending other people's problems. But from what I had gathered, she adored it.

Sarah and I sat in the chairs placed in front of the woman and I smirked at her. "It's always great to see you Ana, no matter the situation."

"Oh hush, Alex. You know you're always welcome here."

I doubt she could say the same about my wife.

"So what brings you here today?"

Before I could get a word out, Sarah spoke. "We're here to fix our marriage. It's long overdue." I nodded curtly and loosened my tie from around my neck.

"Why the sudden need to repair it?" she asked, jotting down notes into her large book.

"Well," Sarah began, looking at me nervously. I stared back at her in confusion, waiting for her to finish her sentence.

"I'm pregnant."

24

"We are liars . We are beautiful and privileged. We are cracked and broken"

27

*

Life was a complex work of art.

2

Billions of people walked the earth. Each had an intricate story that led up to this very moment in life. Tragedy, heartbreak, love, birth of life as well as loss of life. Factors like those kept the earth rotating. By looking at a single person, you could never truly reveal their whole life story. To you, they were just another human walking across the streets. But no one could know that they had just lost their mother that same day.

5

It led us to the phrase, '*never judge a book by its cover.*' Which was a great slogan to live by. Although, people could never live that way. We were judgmental and rude and sick. Liars, thieves, murderers. Hungry, *greedy* for information where it didn't concern us.

10

The earth was cruel and everyone knew it.

6

You would never know the true intentions hidden behind the words we were told.

Which was foolish in itself. Knowing people are liars but not having the ability to realize when they were being dishonest, and what they were lying about.

In the grand scheme of things. We were broken. Not two halves of a whole. But trillions of pieces that were shoved onto earth and forced to become one again. Once more, it was *unwise*. As long as life existed, so would too much hate and not *nearly* enough love.

20

We had trust to fall back on. Our friends, family. We put our trust in them in the most unseen ways. Sleeping next to your spouse *alone* was an unknown form of trust. Who's to say they wouldn't turn around and murder us in the night? Poison the food they cooked for us? Your own life is put in the hands of many people, without you knowing it.

14

I threw open the door of my vehicle and slammed it closed. So hard I would've assumed the hinges had fallen off. They didn't. *luckily.*

6

"Alex, Alex please stop and listen to me for one damn second!"

6

I overlooked the whiney voice in the background and fixated on controlling my anger. I pulled open the door with the same force and strode through the grand entrance of my home, not waiting to see if she had followed me inside.

5

"Alex *godammit* stop it!" the woman shrieked, grabbing ahold of my wrist.

2

I forcefully pulled my hand away from hers and looked at her irritably. I was sure smoke was soaring through my ears.

She had to have been lying. She couldn't be pregnant. I knew she couldn't. Sarah and I hadn't had sex in almost two months, and when we did. She made sure she was on the pill and I know for certain she wouldn't lie about it. Right?

"What? What else could you possibly have to say Sarah." She stepped back at my harsh tone and I relaxed a slight amount, not wanting to alarm her more. I was angry, anyone could see that. But the last thing I wanted was for her to fear me.

"You aren't happy." She stated matter-of-factly. "I thought you would be Alex we're having another *kid* together. Why aren't you happy?" she emphasized the word *kid* as if that would make me feel any better.

"You think I should be *fucking* happy?" I asked, heatedly.

"Yes, actually, I do." Her face turned slightly red as she raised her voice. At this point, neither of us were holding back. "Give me one valid reason as to why we can't have another child? We have the money to support it. That's all that's important!"

I stared at her, mouth open and eyes wide. *Was she stupid?*

"That's your problem Sarah! That is your *fucking* problem. You think money is enough to make up for the lack of love we'd be able to give the child? How is that going with the three kids we *already* have. You're barely there for them. We have to rely on a *fucking babysitter* to look after our children when you're a stay at home wife! Which, by the way, means you have *no* reason to not be there for our children. A stranger who we *barely* know, cooks for them, cleans them up *and* sings

them to sleep because you aren't enough of a mother for them."

Tears brimmed in her blue eyes but I couldn't feel bad and carried on. "You leave the house at odd ass times of the day and aren't there way past dinner. Is the kid even mine? Or are you fucking some other random rich man-" before I could finish my obsessive rant, she raised her hand and slapped me straight across the face.

I flinched back at the sting at stopped myself from retaliating. I knew I wouldn't lay my hands on her, but the urge to throw something ate away at me and before I knew it, I flung the closest thing I could find, against the wall. The vase shattered and fell onto the floor.

"You *fucking* idiot! She screamed. "Don't ever speak to me like that again. This *is* your child whether you like it or not. And we're having it." "No." "No?"

"Get rid of it. We aren't having another child."

"What?" She screeched. "I'm not doing that. Are you out of your mind?"

"No. I'm being rational. I don't want it. Get rid of the child."

If possible, her face got redder and she raised her hand once more but I caught it in time before she slapped me again.

"Don't ever raise your hand at me." I warned. Before grabbing my keys off the floor and marching out the front door.

I had no clue where I was going but I needed to leave.

I raised my fist against the wooden door, knocking repeatedly.

"Pazienza, pazienza I'm coming."

The door swung open and I came face to face to face with my best friend, who I hadn't seen in way too long.

"Alex what are you doing here at." His eyes glanced towards his watch. "Four thirty." He asked, raising his eyebrows in question

I strolled past him and into his large home. "Is your wife here?" I asked, ignoring his previous question and searching the area for the woman.

"No, she's out with some friends. Are you okay?"

Antonio's wife, Hera, was a beautiful woman. They complimented each other perfectly and I often felt myself being envious of their blossoming marriage. As far as I'm concerned, they were always happy and never stayed mad at each other for more than a few hours at a time.

My mind drifted to when Sarah and I were like that. A *long* long time ago, we were happily in love. I'd be lying if I said I didn't

miss the time. But I knew we would never be the same, our marriage was too far gone.

"She's pregnant." I announced grumpily, placing my head into my hands.

I heard him choke on nothing but air, which lead him into a coughing fit. "*Vieni di nuovo?*" he whispered, in his native tongue. Antonio was never one for English despite speaking it fluently.

"She announced it in front of our *fucking* marriage counselor a few hours ago." I mumbled, my voice muffled by my hands.

He let out a string of Italian curse words before sitting next to me. "*come ti senti a riguardo?*"

"Pissed off. We had a huge argument about whether or not we should have the child."

"And?"

"I don't want it." I replied, lifting my head from its position and facing my curious friend. "I told her to get rid of the child and she almost slapped me."

"Oh *hermano*, you can't tell a woman to terminate her child. Any man with a brain knows that. What were you thinking?" His eyes held a concerned expression.

"I know. I fucked up. But we can't have another kid man. It wouldn't be brought up in a healthy family and I can't do that to more innocent children." I explained, almost in tears at the thought.

My three kids already grew up in an almost unstable manner, which would affect them in the future. I didn't want them to expect a shitty relationship when their older because that's what their parents portrayed at home. It's the reason why I tried to keep our marital problems away from them but sometimes, married life got too much to handle.

"Well, are you positive the baby is yours?"

I thought back to the many times I had watched Sarah leave the house at absurd times over the morning and only return late at night. It was enough to leave any man suspicious. Knowing how rocky our marriage is only added to the feeling of distrust I had.

You're one to talk. I reminded myself.

Which was true, I was being hypocritical. I had fucked another woman and enjoyed it many times. I didn't feel all that shameful anymore, although the feeling lingered in my head on occasion. I shrugged it away most of the time.

The whole situation was messy. And the longer I stayed, the messier it got.

"I'm not completely certain it is. I don't know what scares me more. Being the father, or *not*."

He nodded in understanding and stood up. "I'll go get you a beer, si?"

I smiled at him in appreciation and leaned back into the leather couch. Running my hands through my dark hair.

Dozens of thoughts swirled around my mind, causing me to feel suffocated once more. I felt claustrophobic in the large space.

My phone alerted me of a new message and I picked it up, the message immediately calming me.

'I'm sorry for not making it today, I wasn't really feeling well. See you in a few days maybe?'

I smiled at the text. Which was unusual for me.

Why in a few days? Couldn't she see me tomorrow?

I sent a text back asking that same question and received a reply almost instantly.

Busy today. The text read.

I arched my eyebrow in concern at the disinterested text and worry instantly settled into my body, relieving me of any previous baby stress.

I needed to go see her.

"Here it is. One large pint, it'll calm you down a little." I accepted the alcohol into my hand happily and drank almost half of it in one sip.

"*Calmati* Alex. The beer isn't going anywhere." My friend laughed, attempting to lighten the mood.

"Would it be rude if I told you I had to leave?" I asked apprehensively staring at the man next to me.

He chuckled lowly, twirling the ring on his finger. "It's the girl isn't it?" he asked.

I nodded shyly and he patted my knee. "*vai allora*. I won't stop you. She seems good for you hermano, I can't wait to meet her."

"Thanks toni, I owe you." I embraced him in a brotherly hug.

"Nonsense. Now go, my wife will be back soon and I can't have you stealing her from me."

I laughed at his words and hurried out the house after one last goodbye. My car came to life as I started the engine, reversing out of my friend's backyard.

The streets were busier than they had been when I arrived. Or perhaps they seemed busier because I was anxious to reach the one person who I knew could take my mind of everything.

I sped as safely as I could through the bustling streets of New York City, strumming my fingers against the wheel impatiently at every traffic light I came across.

After almost half an hour of travelling through the busy roads. Gianna's apartment came into view and I sighed in relief.

I exited the vehicle and shut the door behind me. Knocking at her front door impatiently.

Please be okay. I chanted over and over.

But nothing could've prepared me for what was on the other side of that door.

25

***"Secrets I have held in my heart,
Are harder to hide than I thought,
Maybe I just wanna be yours
I wanna be yours"***

61

*

"Who the fuck are you?" I asked apprehensively and rather rudely at the *shirtless* stranger in front of me.

65

The unknown man looped his belt through his loose fitting jeans and stared at me simultaneously with wide eyes.

1

He looked confused for a few seconds before answering. "Oh-uh, I'm Mason, who are you?" the boy asked, tapping his foot against the ground impatiently.

32

I scoffed the boy who looked to be only eighteen years old. *Probably didn't even know how to shave.* I chastised inwardly.

10

"Mason? Who was at the doo-"

1

The young beauty whose presence I've been missing gracefully walked down the stairs, her feet lightly padding on the carpeted wood. She brought a manicured hand in front of her face, brushing her black locks from her slightly flushed cheeks.

34

"A-Alex?" she stuttered, staring at me confusedly. She absentmindedly tugged at the graphic shirt she was wearing, attempting to cover her bare legs. "What are you doing here?" she asked.

18

A few seconds had gone by and I stared at the shirtless boy and back at the shirt barely covering her sinuous figure. I pieced the puzzle together in my head and a wave of jealousy instantly washed over me and I brought my hand up to my face, rubbing my beard with a sly grin on my face.

2

"You're fucking *him* now?" I asked, leaning against the threshold with crossed arms.

104

I couldn't help but discretely clench my fist together, slightly hiding them in the confines of my black leather jacket.

"I think I'm just going to go Gi. I'll call to check on you later babe." The guy whose name, I had come to find out was Mason, said, pecking her cheek. My eyebrows raised even more. By now rage had consumed me, replacing the blood pumping through my veins.

71

He grabbed a random shirt off the ground which I hadn't seen before, slipping it over his body. "It was nice meeting you Alex." The boy's eyes glimmered in what looked to be... *amusement*? I nodded in his direction and he brushed past me, exiting the apartment and venturing off into a car that I hadn't noticed was there when I arrived.

I stepped past the door, angrily shutting it behind me and walked past the girl who stood silenced in the hallway. I should've turned back around and left, but my pride didn't allow me to.

"I know you didn't just embarrass me like that in front of my friend." She seethed, marching towards me. Her face held the nastiest look she could muster but even then she looked adorable.

Focus Alexander.

"We fuck friends now?" I asked, matching her anger.

Was I jumping to conclusions? Yes. Did I use this as an excuse to project all the anger I feel on the upset girl in front of me? Maybe. Was I mad at even the slightest possibility of a man who wasn't me touching *my* girl? Absolutely.

"Say some bullshit like that again and I swear I'll grab you by the balls and throw you out of my house." Her voice raised a few octaves higher and I felt my rage go through the roof.

Did she really see no problem with this?

"You know," I started, lacing my hands together behind my head as I made myself comfortable on her leather couch. I placed my legs on the wooden coffee table. I knew I was slowly but surely pissing her off. It was toxic and I knew it, but I wanted her to feel the anger I was feeling.

"I didn't think you were one to mess around with multiple guys but I guess I don't know you as well as I thought I did."

If this was Sarah, she would've lashed out, thrown something at me or possibly attempted to hit me. Admittedly, the woman had never raised her hands to be. Today being the exception. Which is why Gianna's reaction surprised me.

She laughed.

She fucking laughed at me.

And not one of those manic, evil laughs.

The sound was melodious. The beautiful noise echoed around the empty house. I tried to not let it affect me, but could slowly feel my anger diminishing. Although I stood my ground, not letting the irate expression on my face slip off.

"I don't know what's stuck up your ass today. But I'm not going to tolerate you barging into my house and being a piece of shit to my friend." Ragged breaths were following shortly after the words tumbled out of her mouth.

"Friends, don't hang around each other half naked Gianna. His pants were barely on!"

"He had just come out of the shower!"

"And how the fuck does that make it any better?"

At this point we were both screaming at each other, labored breaths filled the silence of the room.

"Because he probably wanted to smell good before going to see his boyfriend." She let out a string of Italian profanities and I cursed inwardly.

His boyfriend?

"I don't believe you. Why are you wearing his shirt then?" I challenged, smirking in satisfaction.

"This *isn't* his shirt you stupid old man. I do own clothes. Haven't you thought about that?"

I let the old man comment go. I wasn't *that* old.

It all began to make sense and I cleared my throat. Avoiding eye contact and staring at the floor with fake interest. I was embarrassed.

"I'm sorr-" before I could fully complete my apology, she began speaking once again.

"And even if I was sleeping with other people. Why would you care? You have a wife last time I checked! I can fuck whoever I want!" she threw her hands in the air exasperatedly and looked over at me, awaiting my response.

Where did that come from?

I got off the comfortable seat and stalked towards her.

I locked eyes with the girl in front of me as she slowly backed against the wall. Our eyes stayed on each other as I reached her, grabbing hold of her neck, gently, but with a slight amount of pressure to make my anger known.

The flare of innocence she had left flashed through her golden orbs as she stared up at me, slightly confused but still confident

in her rage. "You are mine." I stated, growling lowly. "Mine to touch." I reiterated my point by using my other hand to grasp the side of her hip. "Mine to kiss." My lips traced a light pattern against the bare column of her neck. The feeling of her pulse accelerating went unnoticed. I felt slightly at peace again as soon as her scent penetrated my senses. "And most *definitely* mine to fuck." I tightened my grip on the side of her throat and inwardly grinned in satisfaction at the shaky breath she had let out. "You hear that *piccola*?" I whispered, innocently nibbling on her ear.

My hand caressed her hip once more before following the curve of her waist and landing on her deliciously inviting ass. I grabbed it harshly and she bit her pink lip to avoid letting her moans slip out.

How dare she deprive me of the harmonious sound I hadn't heard in *way* too long?

"I asked you a question." My hand rubbed delicate circles onto her hot skin. She looked back into my eyes, the same fierceness swirling inside her brown pools. "Fuck you." She sneered. And within seconds she had her lips on mine, ferociously kissing me. I couldn't help but groan in pleasure at the feeling I had missed so much. I was so lost in the sensation of her body against mine, that I didn't notice her hands harmlessly sliding up my

torso and onto my chest only to disconnect our lips and forcefully shove me away from her.

I stared at her retreating figure in confusion for a few seconds before acting upon the situation. I grabbed the back of her hair that was tied into a messy ponytail and curled the locks around my hand, delicately but firmly pulling her to me, until her back was against my chest. I held her in my tight embrace for a few more seconds, tugging her head upwards using her hair that was still wrapped around my hands. "Well that was a little rude of you."

"Let go of me." She insisted, attempting to shimmy out of my hold, but it was no use. I would never let go of her. Both figuratively and literally.

"I think you know what happens to girls who have bad manners, don't you baby?" my hand let go of her hair, instead trailing down her body and landing on her hips, pulling them into me.

Instead of answering me, like I assumed she would. The girl decided to roll her eyes at me. I shook my head and laughed at the tainted beauty in my arms.

"Wrong answer." I murmured, letting go of her waist and instead sitting on the leather couch next to us. I grabbed her hand and she fumbled towards me. "W-what are you doing?"

she asked, the ferocity that was once in her eyes was long gone. Replaced with confusion and a hint of excitement.

"Bad girls get punished." I announced. Her eyes widened in realization and I wasted no time in draping her over my body, so that her ass was right in front of me and on display.

She was alluring, tempting and tantalizing altogether.

Gianna Vidal was my *innocent temptation*.

The Italian seductress gasped at the newfound position and I smirked in approval. I set my hand on her exposed ass and gently palmed the skin. Preparing her for what was to come.

"Count." I instructed firmly.

"Count wha- ow!" she screeched.

The skin immediately turned red, my handprint already formed. I rubbed the area gently, attempting to soothe the sting.

"What did I just tell you?" I asked, harshly slapping the skin once more. I watched in awe as her ass rippled. My pants immediately became tight at the site.

"One." She mewled weakly.

"Good girl." I praised, reaching down to innocently place wet kisses on her reddened skin.

"Say it again. *Please*, say it again." She asked in a reluctant voice.

I arched my eyebrow in confusion. "Say what?" I asked.

"You know what I mean." She muttered shyly.

Realization instantly dawned over me and I grinned. "Does my baby like to be praised, hm?" I asked. Placing another slap onto her left cheek.

She hissed in pain and counted the second hit. "You're always a good girl for me, Aren't you *piccola*?" I asked.

"Yes." She answered breathlessly, receiving another slap.

"Yes what?" I asked. *Five*.

"*Si papi*."

I nodded although she couldn't see me, satisfied with her answer. "I think that's enough for today. Your legs are shaking." I pointed out. "Did I hurt you too much?" I asked with genuine concern.

She shook her head and I sighed in relief. My fingers trailed down the centre of her panties, grinning at the wet spot under my fingers. My growing erection ached to be inside her once again.

Patience. I chastised myself. *Let me have my fun*.

I placed my thumb directly above the spot, lazily rubbing circles around it. Gianna purred in satisfaction. "You enjoyed it didn't you?" I mused. She chose not to answer me, instead writhing in pleasure at the slight stimulation I was giving her.

"I guess I'll reward you for taking it so well." I flipped her over causing her to moan at the loss of friction. "Patience baby, Patience." I whispered.

I lifted myself off the comfortable seat and kneeled at the edge of it. Pulling her legs towards me so her pulsing flesh was right in front of my face.

"I'd love to taste you but I think I'll get to the point today yeah?" she nodded her head in agreement and I took that as my chance to slide her black lace underwear down her silky long legs.

I was met with the mouthwatering sight of her wet, dripping pussy. Glistening in the pale moonlight. **So delicious.**

She was simply irresistible and I couldn't help but drag my tongue along her pink folds. Almost moaning at the sweet taste. Her own whimpers could be heard, tumbling incoherently from her pink lips.

I decided to tease her more, lapping at her wetness and eventually sucking her pulsating clit into my mouth. My fingers dug into her luscious thighs, most likely leaving marks. But I

wasn't worried about it hurting her, I knew my baby liked it rough.

"You taste so good baby, *so good*." I commented, before diving back into my favorite meal. A few minutes later I had spasming all over my tongue, hips bucking wildly, sweet whines flowed from her mouth. Her face was flushed red and she blocked my view of her by squishing my head in between her thighs.

I couldn't take it anymore.

I stood up and unzipped the pants I was wearing, allowing them to drop to my ankles and provide me some sort of relief. My boxers followed suit and I almost moaned in relief when my finally free erection slapped against my abdomen.

I sat next to the pleasure stricken girl and locked eyes with her, motioning for her to come sit on me. It was one of my favorite positions after all.

She got up on shaky legs and I watched lustfully as her cum dripped down her thighs. My mind was instantly brought back to its place when I felt her hands on my shoulders.

I placed a delicate kiss on her forehead. "You ready baby?" I asked, receiving a slight nod. I lowered her down onto my pulsating dick and almost climaxed right then and there.

I gave the poor girl no time to adjust. Immediately using her selfishly to satisfy my needs. Not the she minded, her approving whimpers egged me on more.

I raised the graphic tee over her head, throwing it somewhere in the room. I wasted no time in latching my mouth onto her hardened nipple, using my hand to fiddle with the other.

"Fuck yes, just like that." She moaned absentmindedly.

I picked up my pace and was rewarded with loud screams emanating from her throat, feeding my already grown ego.

"Faster...please." She begged. And what kind of man would I be if I deprived my angel?

I felt the tip of my dick hitting her cervix with each passing moment and I cried out in an animalistic way.

"You feel so good bouncing on my dick baby." I praised, harshly slapping the already tender skin on her ass. She moaned in delight and I felt her deliciously clench around me. Letting me know that she was close.

I brought my hand down to where our bodies united and frantically rubbed her clit, wanting us to both reach our high at the same time.

With one last scream, she came all over my thick shaft and that was all it took to make me follow suit. Releasing ropes and ropes of cum into her womb.

She slumped against my chest, still pulsating around me. My hands instinctively wrapped around her back and held her against me in a relaxing embrace.

Holy fuck. I thought.

Although I knew it wouldn't be rainbows and sunshine from here on out.

We had a lot to talk about.

26

***"The only Heaven I'll be sent to
Is when I'm alone with you"***

70

*

Peace was a bittersweet feeling.

Reason being, tranquility was never definite. At any given moment, the world could crumble beneath our feet. Leaving us empty and confused.

I was a realist in an abundance of ways. I always knew not to hold on to a single sliver of happiness I was feeling because instantly, it could be snatched away from you. The realization dawned on me when I was only eight years old.

8

It was moments when mom and dad were cuddled on the couch together, reminiscing on their childhood while my sister and I sat doe-eyed at their feet, hanging on to every word that exited their red stained lips.

2

It was blissful and I cherished every second of it, for I knew, even at my young age, that my parents were slowly but surely falling out of love with each other.

I always had my suspicions about them getting a divorce, it was the unfortunate fate that my family had been dealt and I couldn't do anything to fight against it. There were days where I silently *begged* whichever God was listening, to separate them. But it never came.

5

With each growing day I became numb to the sound of mothers favourite antic china hitting the walls, dad yelling at her *to control herself*.

11

She never did.

All I could do was sit silently at the top of our unnecessarily long staircase and eavesdrop on all their marital problems. On occasion, I'd hold my sister in my arms, stroking her black hair, wiping away the tears that continuously ran down her doll like face. She was always more sensitive to the topic.

17

I'd tell her that everything would be okay, and that one day our family would be whole again. Our mother and father were just going through a rough time but they'd be fine.

They were all lies and I knew it. But somewhere in the back of my mind I had *hope*. The spoiled little rich girl had *hope* that at some point, everything would go back to normal.

But that's just the thing about having faith.

1

Hope in the shadow of fear is the world's most powerful motivator.

12

I was nothing if not a naïve little girl who had too much on her shoulders.

But in some messed up way, that was how the world worked.

It dealt too much pain to people who deserved to see the rainbow at least once.

3

*

I splashed the cold water onto my reddened cheeks, turning the faucet off and proceeding to stare at my features in the mirror in front of me. My reflection displayed a girl who looked way

too tired despite sleeping her life away for almost forty eight hours. My eyes held darkened bags beneath them, proving just how shitty life was going for me at the moment. My cheeks were a light crimson colour after the sexual activity I had just involved myself in. Matte black hair clung to my damp face, slightly sticking up in different directions.

I brought my hand to the nest on my head, attempting to comb through it with my fingers. It didn't do much, but I didn't feel the need to make a large effort to look good only to sit in my bed for *hopefully* the rest of the week.

But that was wishful thinking. I had to go back to work at some point. Staying home any longer would've raised suspicion and provoked questions that I didn't feel like answering.

I decided on ignoring the situation. Not bothering to speak to Alexander about it, for I didn't want him to unnecessarily worry.

My fingers delicately brushed over the faint bruise I had on my skin. It was not noticeable unless you looked really close and so far I had successfully hidden it from the prying eyes of my best friend, who was too busy being unreasonably mad to notice the panic attack I had as soon as I woke up.

She was out the door by the time I arrived in the kitchen but I expected nothing less.

We would talk when she was ready, but for now I'll give her the space she needs.

With one last look at my reflection, I exited my bathroom and walked into my bedroom, only to be met with a semi naked Alex. He scratched the dark stubble on his chin awkwardly for a second before looking at me, gripping the loose towel that hung around his bare hips.

I assumed he would need clothes after our shower together.

Without a word exchanged between us. I opened my closet and shuffled through the clothes I had stored away. "Will this work?" I asked, throwing a simple pair of grey sweatpants at the man.

He smiled appreciatively. "That's perfect, thanks baby."

My insides turned to instant mush at his choice of words, causing a slight blush to coat my cheeks.

I watched in awe as the the perfectly sculptured man dropped the white towel to his feet. His figure was in immaculate shape for a man who was five years shy of being forty. Before I could ogle him more, I felt the rough tips of his fingers lift my chin, allowing me to stare into his hypnotic eyes. "It's considered bad manners to stare at people. Am I going to have to teach you another lesson so soon?" his head tilted sideways in question, green orbs dancing swimming with amusement.

I widened my eyes and shook my head instantly, stepping back from the comfort of his heated body.

He chuckled at my sudden shyness and grabbed my hand. "Come on, you must be tired." Our hands were clasped together as we took the few steps to my large bed.

I momentarily let go of him, getting comfortable in my cozy sheets. "Can you stay?" I asked nervously as he spun around to turn off the light, immediately covering us in the darkness of the night.

"I wouldn't leave even if you asked me to."

The bed dipped next to me, alerting me of his presence as he got comfortable beneath my sheets. He wasted no time in wrapping his large muscled hand around my waist and pulled me into him. I immediately felt relaxed in his warmth and smiled.

I could get used to this.

It won't last forever. My subconscious reminded me.

I was pulled out of my daze when I felt the tips of his fingers rubbing smooth circles onto my bare stomach. The sound of rain pelting against the windows created a calm aura around us.

"Was that guy-uhm, Mason, really gay?"

I couldn't help but laugh at the cautious tone Alex used.

"Why, are you really jealous?"

Absentmindedly, his hold tightened on me. "Yeah." He mumbled.

"What was that?" I asked, holding back a smile.

"Yeah, whatever. I was jealous. So what?"

I shuffled in his hold and flipped myself around to look into the eyes of the man who occupied my bed.

"He does have a boyfriend." I confirmed. "I called him here because I'm not really on good terms with Celine and I needed a friend to talk to."

"You could've called me."

"You have bigger problems to deal with. I didn't want to bother you."

For what seemed like the hundredth time today, his hand grasped my cheek tenderly, forcing me to look up at him. "You aren't a bother *piccola*. You call me whenever, *inteso?*"

"You have a wife and kids to take care of, I don't expect you to run over here at any given time of day." I explained carefully, not taking my eyes off his.

"Sarah's old enough to take care of herself." He spoke plainly, his tone suggested the end of the conversation and I dropped the topic, sensing his hostility.

"Is everything okay at home?" I asked hesitantly.

He dropped his hand from my skin and I almost shuddered at the loss of warmth. "Everything's fine." He replied.

The slight undertone in his voice didn't go unnoticed but I shrugged it off. He'd let me know if something was wrong.

We fell into an uncomfortable silence for a few minutes when the sound of my phone ringing interrupted the quiet.

I grabbed the device and pulled it up to my face, scanning the caller ID.

"Mason? Hey." I spoke.

"I'm here as your reminder to take the meds I brought you." He sang through the receiver. "They're going to knock you out but the pain will subside. Is your hot boyfriend still there? *Ow- babe he's like sixty!* I gotta go Gi, love ya!" he ended the embarrassing rant and I stifled a laugh which soon subsided when I heard the almost strained voice from beside me.

"Pain?" he asked, repeating my friend's words.

"What pain is he talking about Gianna?"

He barely used my name like that.

Instead of answering the man, I took sudden interest in my hands that sat on my clothed legs.

"Look at me. What is he talking about?" he asked again, more assertively.

Before I had the chance to reply, he quickly turned on the small lamp that was perched on my bedside table.

I blinked rapidly, attempting to adjust to the bright light.

Instead of infuriating him further, I nervously looked at Alex, hoping he wouldn't notice the fading bruise on my cheek.

He didn't notice it before, so why would he now?

"Are you going to answer, or do I have to force it out of you?"

"It's nothing. I have period cramps and he brought me pills, that's all." I shrugged nonchalantly, hoping he wouldn't catch on to my lie.

"Bullshit. We had sex just a few hours ago and I'm pretty sure I'd notice some blood."

Shit.

"Speak to me Gianna what's going o-"

Before I got the chance to pull my arm away from his direction, he grabbed it curling his fingers tightly around my wrist which

elicited a loud pained shriek- which of course, scared the confused man.

Tears clouded my vision as memories from the night before came crashing down onto me in a rush.

A choked out sob left my throat as he pulled me gently into his side. Stroking my untamed black hair. "Oh baby, what happened to you?" he whispered.

What should've been a twenty minute explanation turned into half an hour, my endless tears prolonging the conclusion of my story.

"its okay baby, I'm here okay? You're safe." He whispered in my ear, attempting to calm down my shaking figure.

I nodded feebly and gripped onto him tighter, I was probably hurting him. But he didn't seem to care and I was thankful for it.

Despite the kind words he mumbled to me, I could still sense the anger radiating off him in waves. I felt highly comforted knowing he wanted to keep me safe.

I was being taken care of instead of the other way around for *once*.

I knew it would only deepen my feelings for the man, which was dangerous. I could only expect disaster in the end.

"Do you know the guy?" he asked, hesitantly.

I sniffled quietly and shook my head. "No. he looked familiar but I can't put a name to his face."

"We'll find him." He spoke enthusiastically. "We'll find him and I'll kill him."

I removed myself from the safety of his arms and instead turned to face him, the anger that danced in his eyes went unnoticed.

"No." I immediately declined his offer. "No I don't want him to have any other reason to come after me, he'll kill me-"

"I'll handle it. I promise. Do you trust me?"

Without hesitation I answered. "Yes. Of course I do."

He smiled, seemingly pleased with my answer.

"Good." He lightly kissed my forehead, leaving his lips to linger on my skin for a few seconds.

"Get some sleep. I'll be here the whole night."

I didn't bother questioning why he didn't go home, or why he ignored the constant flashing of his phone, for I was way too tired.

But if only I had known what my favorite man was hiding from me.

27

Dear lord, when I get to heaven. Please let me bring my man."

101

"Faster. *Faster* please." I begged, sinking my nails into the older man's back, most likely leaving a stinging trail, but I was too selfish to care.

205

Alexander easily complied, impaling me harder beneath him. I couldn't help the strangled moans that escaped my throat at the euphoric feeling of him hitting spots I didn't even *know* were there.

4

"You like that baby?" he asked, curling his hand around my throat. I couldn't form proper sentences so instead opted for whining pathetically, much to his satisfaction.

30

"Fuck, fuck yes. Keep clenching around me like that baby."

1

I was a simple girl. Alexander instructed, I listened.

22

My walls zealously clamped around his thick shaft, the sound of his raspy morning voice sent shock waves through my body.

14

The feeling of his hand tightly wrapped around my throat, as well as him fucking into me mercilessly caused my climax to approach me *way* faster than I had anticipated.

My body instinctively shuddered at hearing the dirty words that continuously spewed out of his experienced mouth. "Look at you." He spoke out, breath fanning my ear. "Cumming all over a *married* man's dick. You must be proud." He commented sarcastically.

246

I rolled my eyes as best as I could, grabbing his face and ensuring his eyes were locked onto mine. "It's a privilege for *you* to be fucking *me*. *Not* the other way around." I reminded the cocky man, running my tongue over my bottom lip.

134

My favourite man smirked knowingly and angled his head lower, attaching his pink lips to mine. Our lips fought for

dominance and I brought my hands to his mop of black hair tugging on the soft strands—*which I knew he loved*.

His reaction was as I expected. A low groan was released from his lips and onto mine. He pulled back and rapidly flipped us over so I was on top of him.

"Come on *piccola*. Ride me." He suggested breathlessly. It took no convincing as I situated myself on top of the glorious man. Hissing at the intrusion in my sensitive pussy.

41

I could still feel myself spasming from when he woke me up with his tongue between my folds just ten minutes ago.

108

My vision was directed to Alex, staring in awe as the morning sun lightly cascaded over his dizzying features. His stubble was growing rapidly and I found myself more attracted to him, if that was even possible.

"Oh." I moaned leisurely, picking up the pace. His hands snaked their way to my bottom, striking the skin harshly, and most likely leaving a lasting mark.

2

My clit met his pelvis with every thrust and I threw my head back, breathing heavily. The rough, carnal sound of skin slapping could be heard echoing around my large room.

"Yes baby, just like that." He praised, eyes shut tight.

Pleased with his reaction, I increased my pace, making sure to not let him slip out of me as I rode him into oblivion.

"Fuck! I'm gonna-" I couldn't manage to finish my sentence before he interrupted.

"Cum for me baby, cum all over my dick, show me how good I make you feel."

That's all it took for me to climax all over the man I had come to heavily adore the past few months. His seed spilling into me not even a second later.

Exhausted, I slumped onto his warm chest, relishing in the feeling of his large size twitching inside of me.

His arm came around my back and held me against his manly frame, whispering comforting words into my ears and stroking my hair as my eyes slowly fluttered closed once more.

"Are you sure you wanna do this?"

"Yes Alex." I giggled. "I'm fine. Plus I miss your kids, it's been too long since I've seen their adorable faces."

His face faltered slightly at the mention of his children. A guilty look spreading across his handsome features as if he remembered that if this ever had to come out, his kids would be disappointed in him.

I cleared my throat, hoping to subside the awkwardness. "You should go. I'll be there after I've eaten."

He nodded tightly and turned around to exit my door, dragging my heart along with him. But before he fully exited the building, he swiveled on his feet and made his way back to me.

"Be safe okay *bambina*?" he whispered, laying feathered kisses on my head. I snuggled against his tall frame for a few seconds, my heart swelling affectionately, before I nodded and stepped back. Instantly missing his warm embrace.

With one last kiss, he walked out my door.

I immediately got to work, whipping up a quick breakfast that consisted of eggs and bacon on toast. Making sure to leave some for my *still* absent best friend. I shot her a text hoping for a reply but was met with nothing.

I sighed in frustration and dragged my hind through my barely dry hair. Trudging up the stairs after I made sure to clean up after myself. I grabbed a bag full of what I deemed would be necessary for the day and half an hour later, I found myself standing outside the *Moritello's* mansion.

I stood nervously outside the large double doors, tapping my foot against the hard ground. My hand reached up to relieve my hair of its restraint, dragging the yellow hair tie from my hair. *It needed to be cut.*

My fist raised to knock three times against the wood. I waited patiently for a couple of seconds before the door opened, I expected to be met with Alex or *at least* one of the kids. But no. I was graced with the presence of *sour Sarah*.

"Oh Gianna darling, hi!" she ushered me inside the large home, ignoring the look of confusion that was plastered onto my face.

"I am so glad to see you." She gushed, straightening the sides of the unnecessarily tight red sundress that she slipped over her door-like figure.

She walked us into the family room, manicured hand clasped around my dainty wrist.

"I apologize for not being here when you aske-" she waved her free hand in front of her made-up face dismissively. "Oh, don't worry about it honey, you're here now."

I smiled at her, confusion still laced in my eyes at why she was being so nice.

"The kids are upstairs getting ready, they'll be down in a bit. They haven't eaten breakfast yet but I'm sure you're capable of making them something."

"You couldn't do that for them?" I asked, arching my brow.

A look of annoyance rapidly spread across her face but she masked it with a smile. "I've had a busy morning, if you must know."

I nodded slowly, rocking back and forth on the soles of my feet. A heavily awkward silence enveloped the two of us which was soon interrupted by the sound of light footsteps trudging down the stairs.

"I'm gonna beat you Luca, you're too slow." My favourite six year old giggled.

The two of them raced down and my heart beat wildly through my chest at the thought of one of them falling. But luckily, they reached the bottom unscathed.

Both heads turned to us at the sound of their mother clearing her throat. Simultaneously, both kids gasped. The two of them instantly ran towards me wrapping their small hands around my exposed legs.

"Gianna! You're here. We missed you so much Gi." Elena mumbled, voice muffled by my skin.

Her brother nodded his head in agreement. My heart swelled for the second time today because of a member of the *Moritello* family.

Once their small hands had detached from my legs, I knelt down and individually kissed their pink cheeks, ruffling their hair in the process which caused them to giggle loudly. "Oh I missed you too loves." I replied, smiling at the blush that coated their cheeks.

Once again, their mother cleared her throat and each pair of eyes turned to her. A bored expression laced her features and I held back a laugh. "Mommy needs to leave now okay babies?" she looked down at them and a smile coated her red lips.

"I'll be back in a few hours from my doctor's appointment." Sarah announced, staring at me. "If you need anything, my husband is in his office. But you're a big girl, I'm sure you can handle yourself right love?"

I ignored her jab at me and decided to be decent in front of the children and just nod in her direction.

She clasped her manicured hands together and gave one last kiss to them two. "Great. I'll see you all later. Be good!" and with that, she was out the room.

I let out a sigh of relief and grabbed both Luca and Elena's hand, seating them on a nearby chair.

"So, what do we wanna do after breakfast today?"

An hour later I found myself shimmying into the black bathing suit I had brought long with me. As soon as I suggested

swimming to the kids, Elena was ecstatic about the idea. Her brother? Not so much. Instead he opted to play video games in his room which I agreed to.

I had easily avoided Alex all day, sensing he was busy with work and didn't want to be distracted.

After throwing on a sheer dress to cover my half naked figure, I walked out of the bathroom and into Elena's room, where she sat on the bed with an angry pout on her face. I stifled a laugh at the sight of her arm tangled around her bathing suit and rushed to help her put it on correctly.

"What happened angel?" I asked, pulling her arm through one of the holes.

"I got stuck." She admitted embarrassingly.

Once I ensured she was properly fitted into the material, I poked her little button nose, instantly causing the little girl to replace her frown with a joyous giggle. "That's alright sweetie. I fixed it and you look so pretty. Go look." I ushered her towards the unnecessarily large mirror in her room and she smiled, twirling around in her frilly mermaid bathing suit.

My heart melted at the site.

"Come on. Let's go check on your sister and then we'll head out to the pool."

I grabbed the little girl's hand but noticed the sad pout that still laced her features. "What's wrong El." I asked, making use of her nickname.

"Daddy never comes swimming with us." I frowned at the tears that welled up in the corner of her eyes.

"Can you ask him to come out with us? Please Gi. He's always so busy."

My heart strings tugged and I immediately felt bad for the girl. "Let's make a deal."

She looked up, suddenly interested in what I had to say. "If you promise to stop crying, I'll go talk to your dad right now." I proposed.

Elena sniffled a few times before wiping the tears from her face. "Deal."

With happy smiles on both our faces we wandered down the stairs.

How on earth was I going to get Alex to agree to this?

"Nope. I'm not doing that."

"What? Why not?" I asked the brooding man in disbelief.

"I have loads of work to do." He argued, pointing at the pile of papers he was currently scribbling on.

"Oh come on. You own the company, surely you can find some other time to do this."

Alex sighed in annoyance and slipped off the reading glasses that were perched on his straight nose. His suit jacket hung loosely on the back of his work chair and a few buttons were undone on his white shirt, allowing me to dreamily gaze at his exposed chest.

I snapped out of my daze to find him looking at him at me amusedly. "Oh don't flatter yourself old man, I wasn't checking you out."

"Yeah you were."

"Was not."

"Yes."

"No."

"You're doing it again."

I scoffed and flipped him off causing him to laugh at my childish antics.

The scowl was wiped off my face as soon as I heard the words tumble out of his mouth. "Let's say I do consider this—what would I get out of it?" he asked.

I stared at the man dumbfounded. "The satisfaction of knowing your kid is happy." I stated obviously.

"And I get to see you in a hot bathing suit." He murmured, as if he was speaking to himself.

A second later he nodded tiredly and I squealed happily, throwing my arms around his neck. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" I chanted, peppering his face with kisses.

He tapped my bottom lightly. "You go wait out there with El, I'll be down after I changed."

I nodded enthusiastically and exited his office, prepared to tell his little girl the great news.

Minutes later I was lounging on the deck chairs besides the massive swimming pool. My sunglasses were perched on my nose, hiding my closed eyes as I tanned.

The sound of splashing waves and innocent giggles filled my ears and I smiled.

Eventually the sound died down and was replaced with more quiet giggles. I figured the two were playing a new game and opened my eyes, ready to take in the scene in front of me and was met with Ale, holding a water gun in his hand while his daughter held a smaller one.

I gasped as the two sprayed the cold water onto my tanned skin. Laughter filled the cool air as they continued their torture on me.

"Get her daddy!" Elena yelled, joining her father once the water had run out of her toy.

I tried my best to ignore the water, shrieking as Alex purposefully aimed for my back. I ran towards the little girl slinging her small body my shoulder and she screamed "No, no, no. put me down! Dad! Help!" but it was too late, for I had already flung the girl into her small kiddie's pool.

She emerged from the water, wiping the stray strands of blonde hair from her face.

"Not so fun is it?" I asked, controlling my giggles at her pouty face.

After the fun had stopped, I carried a sleepy and dry Elena to her bedroom, light snores flowing out the tired girl.

Once situated in her bed, I kissed the girl on her cheek and she shuffled slightly, grabbing onto my hand before I could leave.

"Thank you." She murmured quietly. "For what love?" I asked the girl.

"For being a better mommy than my real one."

And with that, I froze.

28

"I'll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife"

15

I lightly jogged down the unnecessarily long flight of stairs in the Moritello household, my hand tightly clutched the railing as I neared the end. By the time my foot settled on the hardwood floor, I was embarrassingly out of breath.

I needed to get back into the gym.

26

My main source of working out was sex with Alex—which took up most of my energy. Not that I was complaining.

20

Hushed voices in the kitchen pulled me out of my train of thoughts and I heard the distinct sound of Sarah's voice. I instinctively rolled my eyes but advanced closer to where the sound was coming from, my heart beating rapidly against its cage in my chest.

My breath hitched in my throat as I eavesdropped on the couple's conversation.

"So, what did he say?" Alexander's voice echoed off the large walls of the house, his tone was demanding, powerful and drew the attention of anyone who had the luck to be in the same room as him.

9

From the reflection of the door, I took note of his position. He stood against the marble counter, arms crossed tensely. His figure was clad in a dress shirt and some formal black slacks, a good substitute for the swimming attire he was just in. Droplets of water fell from his drying hair, —he looked undeniably edible and I would've spent more time ogling him if it wasn't for Sarah's voice snapping me out of my haze.

2

"Who?" she questioned, filling the portable blender in front of her with a combination of kale, spinach and avocado. My eyebrows shot up in surprise at the unusual smoothie ingredients but I shrugged it off.

1

"Smith. Your gynecologist." Alex stated matter-of-factly. His slightly angry tone went unnoticed and my confusion grew.

9

Why would he be mad at that?

1

"Oh- uhm, everything's good, he gave me relevant information."

34

He looked at her with a bored expression on his perfectly sculpted face, urging her to continue.

"Why is it so important anyway? You weren't too happy when I told you." Sarah let out a puff of air and took her focus off the green juice she was making, instead turning to Alex. She mimicked his expression and crossed her hands over her chest.

Told him what?

"And I'm still not happy. But I have the right to know."

I took sudden interest in the conversation, but the guilt of invading their privacy sat heavy on my heart and I decided I couldn't eavesdrop any longer.

19

My feet lightly pattered against the expensive flooring and I stood in the doorway of the large kitchen, clearing my throat to alert the two of my presence. Both heads turned to my

direction and I smiled sheepishly at the pair. "I'm about to leave if that's cool with you." I said, mainly awaiting an answer from Sarah as I knew looking at Alex would raise suspicion somehow.

Her blonde hair that framed her face bounced around her head as she nodded enthusiastically. "Sure honey, I'll take over now. The money's already been transferred to your account."

I thanked her politely and with one last daring look at a smirking Alex, I rolled my eyes and walked out of the kitchen.

My keys were looped around my index finger, swinging back and forth as I closed the door behind me. After ensuring it was locked, I threw the keys into the designated bowl.

I threaded my fingers through my untamed hair and brought it to the back of my head, tying it into a makeshift bun before letting out a loud yawn, proof of the tiring day I had. My bare feet dragged along the cold tiles as I made my way into the kitchen.

Expecting to be met with an empty room—I was instead *finally* graced with the presence of my best friend, a warm cup of coffee sat between her lips.

The awkward tension was still as present as it had been for the past few days and I cringed inwardly. "Hey." I said, alerting her of my presence. She turned around and gave me a tired smile,

it was only then I noticed how red her eyes were, as if she had been sleep deprived for days.

"Hey." She replied timidly, taking another gradual sip of the hot beverage in front of her. "I didn't think you'd be home so soon."

I tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear and placed my purse on the counter. "Well, I do live here." I joked, attempting to lighten the mood.

She didn't laugh. If anything, it amplified the bored expression on her worn-out face.

"I'm gonna head up to my room." I watched as Celine set the mug in the sink and before she could fully leave the kitchen I grasped her wrist, forcing her to turn back to me.

"Cel." I whispered, "What's going on? Talk to me *please*." I practically begged the girl.

In all the years I had known Celine, I was used to her pushing me away after we had an argument. She was closed off and hard to get to open up, many years of past trauma brought her the sad abundance of trust issues she had today. She usually felt as if telling me her problems would make her seem like a burden to me, which she never was. I gave her space—but enough was enough, I needed my best friend back.

It was when her eyes started to water that I knew something was really wrong. Without another word, I grabbed her shaky

hand in mine and dragged her to the living room. The two of us sat on one of the leather couches. I crossed my legs and turned to face her, not before taking a few tissues from the box on the coffee table and handing them to her.

Celine smiled at me gratefully and I let her take some time to gather her thoughts before we spoke.

She sniffled one more time before speaking. "I don't... I don't know how to go about having this conversation." She laughed dryly, fingering the loose threads on our seat.

"Take your time." I nodded slowly. "I'm not going anywhere."

"I don't even know where to start."

"This all began a few days ago. Start there." I offered.

"You have to promise though. You have to promise me you won't be mad or hate me or end our friendship over it." Celine held her pinky up, awaiting mine to lock with hers. I did it. No hesitation. I trusted her.

"I promise. Now tell me." She nodded shyly and went back to fiddling with the material on the couch—a nervous habit of hers.

"Do you remember the night we went to that stupid club—*Moritello's* I think it was?"

"Yeah, I met that lowlife who tried to have sex with me and wouldn't leave when I said no." the memories came flooding back to my mind and I instinctively shuddered. I could still feel his intoxicated breath on my neck and his calloused fingers dig into my waist, the night was still fresh in my mind despite happening over a month ago.

"What does that have to do with anything?" I asked, my confusion growing.

The girl in front of me chewed on her bottom lip nervously and more tears threatened to escape her vibrant eyes. Almost instantly I grabbed her hand, an act I knew she would appreciate.

"I went home with someone that night." She stated.

"Okay? So you got laid by some guy, I still don't get what that has to do with me."

"I made a big mistake that night—I promise Gi I didn't mean to

"What did you do?" I interrupted her rambling. A method she had used to stall telling the truth.

Her next sentence was barely above a whisper, so soft I had to ask her to repeat herself. "What?" I asked, my voice coming down to a whisper as well. I dropped my hold on her hand and she visibly swallowed.

"I slept with him. The guy who—you know."

I stood up rapidly, staring at my friend in disbelief. "What?" the word could barely escape my lips.

"You have to understand Gianna, I didn't know it was him until—"

"Until what?"

"He mentioned you guys got together after we were done and I figured he had a harmless crush on you so I gave him your number."

"No. no, you're lying." By now tears were flowing down both our faces, blurring my vision and making it hard to see the girl in front of me.

"I was so drunk Gi, I thought I'd be doing you a favor I didn't realize—"

"What else did you tell him?" I asked, folding my arms over my chest.

"He said something about an old guy beating him half to death outside, and asked how you knew him and I may or may not have told him you kinda liked the owner of the club." The last sentence came out in a rush, as if hearing it quicker would prolong the inevitable feeling of betrayal that weighed on my heart.

Don't make any irrational decisions. I chanted over and over in my head.

Before I could reply, she spoke again. "He hasn't texted you has he?" she asked. I shook my head slowly and she let out a breath of relief. I didn't mention the suspicious texts I'd be receiving or the encounter I had a few nights ago. The two situations couldn't have been related anyway.

"Jason. His last name is Flint if I remember correctly." She spoke quietly for she knew I was still ragingly mad.

The familiar name rang a bell in my head but I couldn't put my finger on where I had heard it before.

"I'm so sorry Gi, I swear I would've told you sooner but I felt so guilty and I didn't want you to hate me. " she took in a breath before continuing, "If I had known he did that to you I would've never slept with him, I feel so trashy."

My heart strings pulled at her tone. I knew she was sorry and I understood that it was a harmless mistake but I couldn't help but feel anger bubbling inside of me at how easy it was for her to tell a random stranger information about me.

I sat back in my seat next to her, although further away from the girl than I had previously been. "It all still doesn't make sense. Why were you mad at *me*?"

"Oh uhm- that was for a different reason completely." Her face got impossibly red and I stared at her, urging her to continue speaking. "Well?"

"I'm seeing someone." She stated.

My face cringed, a disgusted look took over my feature. "Don't tell me you're dating that son of a bitch-"

She immediately shook her head, forcing a few blonde strands to frame her heart shaped face. "No. *fuck* no. it isn't him."

My heart rate slowed down considerably and I relaxed into the couch. "So, who is he?"

Her eyes widened and she cleared her throat. "Well, that's the thing."

I looked at her confusedly.

"It's a girl." She muttered so lowly, if you weren't right next to her, you wouldn't have heard it.

Immediately all the anger I had previously felt, left my body completely.

I gasped and lightly shoved her shoulder. "No way!"

My best friend smiled shyly, a pink blush coating her cheeks but that didn't last long. "I'm sorry." She murmured.

My smile dropped from my face. "What? Why are you sorry?" I asked perplexedly.

"I don't know if that makes you uncomfortable or not. -"
I *immediately* interrupted her.

"Woah. Uncomfortable because you like a girl? *Fuck* no. why would you *ever* think that?" I felt *hurt* that she would ever think that about me. Did she not trust me anymore?

As if sensing my thoughts, she spoke up again. "When I knew for sure... I went and told my parents about it. They kicked me out." She laughed dryly. My heart completely dropped out of my *ass* and I felt the anger bubble inside of me, but I kept calm, instead opting to hold my best friend, lightly caressing her golden hair.

Celine looked up, attempting to stop the tears from falling. Choked sobs escaped her throat and if I could take the pain off her and store it inside of me—I would. Tears threatened to escape my eyes too.

"She told me I could come back when I *got rid of it*. Whatever the fuck that means. That's why I felt so mad—I took it out on you and I shouldn't have, I'm so sorry Gi."

I had barely been around Celine's parents, the lingering feeling of them not liking me made it way too uncomfortable for us to be around each other. From what I knew, they were the most

strict and closed minded people I had ever met. A perfect example of how you *shouldn't* parent. But I kept the thoughts to myself, continuously stroking my fingers through her hair in an attempt to calm Celine down.

"Look at me." I lifted her face from my shoulder and rubbed the pads of my thumbs down the puffy skin of her cheeks, ridding the tears. "First of all, fuck them." the ghost of a smile lingered on her lips. "You can love whoever the fuck you want. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that and it doesn't make you invalid in the least bit."

"You mean that?" she asked unsurely.

"Fuck yeah! And if anyone *ever*—and I mean *ever* tells you otherwise. Let me know." She nodded more enthusiastically, the tears on her face all dried up.

I spent the next few minutes hugging my best friend—consoling her as her mother should've. I felt unexplainably proud of her for being so strong, I would've crumbled in a situation like hers.

"Are we going to sit here and cry all afternoon or are you going to tell me about the lucky girl." I asked, changing the topic to something lighter.

My methods were effective because soon enough her bright eyes sparkled once again. "Her names Azalea." She started, *finally* allowing a smile onto her face. "She has the

prettiest black hair. And she's the nicest person I have ever met
Gi, no joke I think she might be the one."

"She's the one who you've been spending most of your nights
with I assume?" I asked teasingly.

"Yeah. She has the best set of-

"No thank you. I *do not* want to know."

Celine's melodious laugh filled the silent space and I watched in
adoration. "When do I get to meet her?"

"Oh shit yeah. Can we do tomorrow? If you're busy I totally
underst-

I nodded eagerly. "That's perfect. I can't wait."

29

" I kissed a girl and I liked it."

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3

"What do you think?"

It was currently ten in the morning. My windows were open to cast the bright sun rays into my bedroom. Dozens of clothing articles were messily strewn across my room as they usually were whenever Celine and I had a semi- important day planned out.

The lavish lifestyle we grew up with allowed us to have most expensive designer clothes we wished for, paving a path for us to have great fashion sense, unfortunately that path was only followed by my best friend. I was more of a—slap on the first thing I see type of girl.

12

Celine stood in front of my mirror, pulling at the material of her thigh length dress. She looked at me expectantly and arched one of her perfectly shaped brows. "Well?"

The dress fit her voluptuous figure like a second skin. The soft material clung to all the right places, accentuating her hour-glass figure. Delicate heart patterns lined the dress, creating a cute, soft look. "Hot." I finally answered, grinning happily.

She squealed in excitement and began applying minimal makeup to her bare face. "What are you going to wear?" she asked, lathering mascara onto her long eyelashes.

"I'll probably throw on a dress too." She looked at me wearily and I rolled my eyes. "I promise I won't leave the house looking homeless." I assured.

1

After one last scrutinizing glare in the mirror, Celine clasped her hands together and redirected her vision onto my lazy figure. "Now. Time to fix whatever that is."

1

*

"You look perfect. Where in this fashionable world would a homeless looking Gianna Vidal fit in without me?"

I briefly glanced in window reflection of the store in front of me. The smile on my face lasted a few seconds before I rolled my eyes at Celine's comment. "You're just jealous that this

dress makes my hips look curvier than yours." I teased, lightly clashing my side into hers.

We walked down the bustling streets of New York City. Deciding to leave our cars at home, the place was a short walk away and it was a beautiful enough day. The sun shot bright rays onto the pavement, a great contrast to the rain filled days we had previously experienced.

3

Wind blew through the countless trees scattered around us, lightly blowing my hair in numerous directions, causing me to raise my hand and brush the stray tendrils from my face every so often.

I probably should've tied it up.

"Wait what?" Celine's voice pulled my wandering vision from the streets to her face. I jokingly giggled at her wide eyes, knowing I had got to her. "Does it really? Oh my God no—do I look bad?"

I grabbed her shoulders in my hand and shook them lightly. "Get your shit together Cel. I was kidding. You look beautiful." I assured the anxious girl.

"You're sure?" she asked, biting her lip, she then tucked a loose strand of blonde hair behind her ear, a gold earring hung from the bottom of her lobe, reflecting the rays of the sun.

"One hundred percent. Now, let's go before we arrive way later than we already are."

She nodded and I wasted no time in linking our arms together and dragging her down the street.

A few minutes later, we found ourselves stood inside *Lark Café*.

"Hi! Welcome to Lark Café! I'll be your waiter today, my names Jacob. Table for two I assume?"

We both smiled at the chirpy waiter in front of us. His silver hair stood out against the matte black uniform he was wearing. A bright smile graced his features and if you were looking closely, which I was, you would notice the shimmering gold gem on his tooth.

I cleared my throat and rocked back and forth in my flat shoes, smoothing down the material of my dress.

"We made a reservation." I spoke up, causing the bubbly man to focus his attention on me. "Should be under *Vidal*."

"Oh that's right, here it is, right this way."

Jacob led the way through the gardenia themed café and I took the time to scrutinize every detail of the place.

The whole place gave off a fresh, comforting vibe. Multiple thick vines ran down the tall walls, curling around the odd pillar that stood near both the entrance and exit. A shelf was placed

against the wall, copious pot plants sat in between each square space, along with a few coffee mugs and different hot beverage options that could probably be seen on the menu.

As we walked further through the rows of tables and chairs, I took note of the happy faces of each and every customer and inwardly smiled.

"So this is our outside patio. Your table is on the far left, next to the Aphrodite statue." I followed his pointer finger and was led to the sight of a small Greek statue sat on top of a rustic silver pillar.

"I'll be back in a few minutes to write down your orders."

The two of us smiled at the boy as he handed us our menus. Without another word, he walked away.

"This place is cute." Celine commented, glancing over the décor.

I hummed in agreement and picked up the white booklet in front of me, skimming over the delicious looking options.

"Az just shot me a text, said she's running late and will be here in five."

I nodded at my best friend and set the menu down after making my choice. "You look so nervous, it's going to be fine." I assured her.

She sighed hesitantly and lazily dropped her head into the palm of her hand. "I just want it to go well, you're both the most important people in my life."

"It will go well. I'm totally a people's person." She rolled her eyes and I was suddenly bombarded with the urge to pee.

"I'll be right back. Don't chicken out and run away okay?"

The last thing I saw was the deep scowl on her face and I laughed all the way to the restroom.

After completing my business, I washed my hands thoroughly and dried them off, turning to face the mirror hung against the wall.

I took the time to *finally* get a good look at the dress I was comfortably fitted in. It had to have been the most simple yet elegant piece I owned. The shiny pink material clung to my skin, accentuating my shapely hips and stopping halfway down my silky thighs.

I traced the seams of the low neckline, adjusting the necklace around my neck.

I was brought out of my trance when I heard the unmistakable sound of the large door being pushed open.

I smiled at the frantic girl who began fixing her bright red hair in the mirror. She returned the smile and looked me up and down,

grinning. "Oh you're hot." She commented, eyes lingering on my chest. I laughed uncomfortably and walked past the girl, exiting the bathroom.

As I approached Celine, I took notice of the new occupant at our table. The black haired girl, who had to have been Azalea, leaned over the surface, laying a short sweet kiss onto my best friend's cheek.

Neither were aware of my presence yet and I decided to slow my steps, wanting to allow them a few moments alone.

I cleared my throat once I was in earshot of the two, hushing their quiet whispers.

"Oh my god, Gianna right?" Azalea eagerly jumped off her chair and I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. The beautiful girl wasted no time in grabbing my shoulders and pulling me into a bone crushing hug.

I stood startled for a few seconds before hugging her back, smiling as naturally as I could. I caught the eyes of Celine and she giggled before mouthing "*She's a little over the top.*"

I nodded slowly and stifled my own laugh when she pulled away. "It's super great to meet you." She beamed, clasping her hands together. The bunch of gold bracelets slammed against each other at the movement.

"It's great to meet you too, I've heard great things." I mused, causing the girl to blush slightly.

After exchanging words for a few more minutes, the two of us sat down in our respective seats.

"Now that that's over, I'm starving, let's order."

The two of us immediately nodded in agreement with Celine and we searched the perimeter for our waiter Jacob, flagging him down.

"And the *whole* time, I literally had white icing *all* over my nose. I was so embarrassed."

I snorted in an attempt to keep my laugh in at how awkward Celine could be.

"You looked so cute babe, I didn't have the heart to tell you."

The three of us had been sat in the Café for about half an hour, the scraping of cutlery against plates was the only sound heard—besides our consistent chatter and the light classical music that hummed in the background.

We were deep into a lighthearted conversation about how the two sweethearts in front of me met.

So far, I was pleasantly surprised at how well Azalea and I seemed to get along. I had come to learn that she was a lot like me in certain ways—we found interest in some of the same

things and had similar dislikes. I couldn't help the full smile that tugged at my lips at the thought of us being good friends for all the right reasons and not because we both shared love for Celine.

"Wait. The two of you met in a bakery?" I asked, pulling myself out of my daze.

They nodded in unison. "Oh it's the cutest little shop ever." Azalea spoke, swallowing a sip of whatever hot beverage she had ordered. "I work there actually."

"You do?" I asked, intrigued. My fork sliced through the decadent chocolate cake in front of me and I brought a piece to my mouth as I awaited her next sentence.

"I do. And Celine over here, walked in on the gloomiest Wednesday night. It was overall a shitty day. My dog has just passed away and I was *not* in the mood for anyone."

I stared sympathetically at her and she waved her hand dismissively. "I'm slowly getting over it. Anyway, I was closing up the bakery when I heard the door open and I *literally* could've killed her for keeping us open that extra few minutes."

"Hey!" Celine exclaimed from beside me.

"Oh hush babe I'm not finished yet!" Azalea patted her thigh gently.

I chuckled lowly at the grumpy expression that graced my best friend's features and continued munching on the mouthwatering dessert.

"As I was saying before I was interrupted." She shot a pointed glare at Celine. "She came in and asked to sample a few pieces of our vanilla cake, I asked her what the occasion was and she said it was for her birthday but I came to find out that was a *complete* lie."

Celine rolled her eyes and huffed. "I may or may not have walked past the bakery three or four times that week just to see you, until I gained the courage to actually walk in." she mumbled, a crimson color tinting her cheeks.

"Oh I know. I saw you every single day but decided to see how far you'd take it."

The two had completely forgotten about my existence, but I didn't feel left out. I felt happy for them.

I did miss Alex though.

Does he miss me too?

"No way!"

"What? You aren't exactly stealthy." Azalea shrugged, spooning a piece of the *tiramisu* she had ordered.

"Am too."

"Not even a little bit."

They were so cute.

"I'm getting distracted! Sorry Gi." She smiled apologetically and I waved my hand in dismissal.

"She was onto her second slice of cake and it was all over her nose. I had to hold back my laugh every time I looked at her." She laughed in remembrance.

"She came back every day for the next week to ask me out and after the seventh day, I finally gave in and said yes."

She smiled at Celine and grabbed her hand, interlocking their fingers. "It was the best decision I ever made, and the rest is history."

I smiled at the overall cuteness of the pair and felt my chest swell up in joy.

It felt as if nothing could go wrong.

30

Go ahead and cry little girl, nobody does it like you do."

154

"That went so much better than I thought."

I trailed nonchalantly behind Celine, slipping out of my heeled wedges and placing them neatly besides the threshold. I winced slightly at the painful feeling that shot through my toes.

3

Walking around in heels was *definitely* a bad move.

"You thought it wouldn't have gone well?" I asked her, flopping down on the nearest couch with a tired sigh. I shut my eyes and awaited her response.

"Well you aren't the most easily approachable person."

My eyes shot open and I gasped. "Says the girl who made up an excuse about *falling down a flight of stairs* in order to avoid going on a date in ninth grade."

8

She scoffed and squinted her eyes. "It was with Blake Riley. You *know* why I couldn't go out with him."

"Him being a Sagittarius would not have affected your relationship." I shut my eyes once more and could practically feel the daggers she shot onto my skin.

155

"You know I have bad luck with Sagittarius men." She argued.

41

"You have bad luck with all men."

4

Silence filled the air for a few seconds before we both burst out into a fit of giggles.

1

"That's why I play for both sides now." She winked, and more of our unfiltered laughter filled the air.

2

"No but seriously. I'm so glad you two get along so well." She smiled appreciatively at me and I reciprocated the expression.

"You two are the most important people in my life now."

The smile that lingered on my face dropped at the subtle mention of her lack of parental support. I immediately felt anger bubble inside of me at how awfully they had treated the sweet, loving girl who I had known for so long.

"Even if I didn't like her—I'd make an effort to get along with her. If you're happy I'm happy."

"I know. And I appreciate that more than you know. You're my favorite home wrecker Gi."

52

I scoffed and rolled my eyes, raising my middle finger towards her which caused her to laugh happily.

"How is he anyway—Alex?" she asked, toying with the material of her dress.

"So great. I'm so happy Cel. It sucks because I have a really bad gut feeling telling me to not get too invested but I think I'm already in too deep."

She frowned at my statement. "You think something's wrong?"

1

"No. Well, yes. But I'm probably just overthinking things."

15

She nodded in understanding and I stood up, stretching my arms over my head with a yawn. "I think I'm going to head to bed." I announced, grabbing my purse off the side table.

"Me too. It's pretty late."

I made my way to the stairs and glanced one last time at my best friend. "Night Cel."

"Love you!" she yelled.

I repeated the phrase back to her and smiled all the way to my bedroom.

After completing my nightly routine, I shut off the lamp on my bedside table, grabbing my phone for a quick scroll through social media before I officially went to sleep. My fingers hovered over a message from Alexander that was sent two hours ago.

Miss your voice Tesoro, call me if you can.

I smiled at the text and instantly pressed the call button, bringing the phone up to my ear. The continuous ringing lasted approximately five seconds before he picked up the phone.

The familiarity of his voice filled my heart with joy and I felt myself instinctively relaxing.

"Baby, hey." He greeted. The sound of papers ruffling could be heard in the background.

"You're still up." I commented, glancing at the illuminating clock that hung from my wall. The numbers read ten o'clock.

"Just finishing off the last bit of paperwork I had from yesterday."

I nodded even though he couldn't see me. As if he was able to sense my acknowledgement, he spoke again. "You have a good day today?"

A wide grin spread across my face as I recalled the events of the day. "It was great. I hung out with Celine and met her new girlfriend today." I told him happily.

"That's great. Do you like her?"

"I do. She seems great."

"I'm glad you had a good time." The light sound of pen scribbling against paper stopped and his breathing deepened. "I missed you. Elena does too, she wouldn't shut up about how much fun we all had yesterday."

My heart fluttered at the thought of the little girl missing me. Her confession lingered in the back of my mind the whole day and I had unconsciously grown more attached to her.

"I miss you both as well. Lucas too, even if he's a bit more on the shy side."

"Oh he loves you, he's always been that way. Soon enough he'll get more used to you being around."

The scribbles picked up again.

"Does that mean you want to keep me around for a while?" I teased, twirling a soft strand of hair around my finger.

"I plan on it."

My already wide grin got impossibly brighter. "I'd like that."

After that, silence filled the air and the only sound was his relentless scribbling. "Still there?"

"Shit, yeah. Sorry baby." Could imagine him pulling the reading glasses off his tired face and rubbing his jaw, fingers grazing his growing stubble.

"For the first time in forever, I think work is making me a little stressed."

I frowned at his statement and an idea instantly popped into my rebellious mind. I bit my lip apprehensively and made my preposition.

"I could help." I offered, hoping he caught onto what I was suggesting.

His tone picked up, alerting me of the knowing smirk on his handsome face. "Yeah? Are you sure baby?" Alexander was

hesitant, I could hear it in his tone and for the hundredth time today, I smiled.

"*Si.*"

I knew of the effect me speaking Italian had on the man and I was shaking in anticipation, excited to see where this would go.

"What are you wearing *piccola*? He whispered.

"Just a shirt." I answered simply, tugging on the material, the increase of his breathing went unnoticed.

"No panties? Did you have set plans to tease me tonight?"

"Nope." I replied, accentuating the *p*.

"I wanted to wear my favourite red lace underwear tonight, but it seems to be missing. Know anything about that?"

I knew he still had them somewhere in his office from the very first time we had a proper sexual encounter. Hopefully they were hidden far away from his wife's prying eyes.

"I do. Actually. I kept it locked under my desk for those nights when **papi** needed to be reminded of you."

I took a few seconds to gather my thoughts and finally formulated a response. "Yeah? Is this one of those nights?" I asked teasingly.

He hummed in confirmation and the sound of a belt buckle being undone in the background caught my attention.

"Are you touching yourself for me baby?"

My hands trailed down the soft skin of my stomach and landed at the waistband of the panties that I actually *did* have on. *But Alex didn't need to know that.*

After throwing out a quick *yes* to the man on the other end of the line, he spewed out more enticing sentences from his talented mouth and soon enough, my night was fully occupied by my favorite man.

"Are you sure you want to spend this beautiful morning doing something like that?"

The black coffee in front of me turned into a lighter colour as I stirred it around gently. After I ensured it was sweet enough, I rotated to where Celine was standing.

"It's his birthday Cel." I sighed, crossing one leg over the other.

"I have to try at least once a year."

She nodded in understanding and took a sip of the hot beverage in front of her.

"Speaking of birthdays, we have a real special one coming up soon." She wiggled her eyebrows excitedly and I groaned at the action.

"You know I hate celebrating my birthday."

"Fine. No parties, nothing. Just you and I." she shrugged her shoulders and began tapping her feet on the ground—a habit she acquired that told me she was lying.

"I'm serious Cel. No surprises or anything okay?"

She raised her hands in surrender. "Fine. Nothing, I swear."

"Do you have any plans for the day?" I asked.

"I'm hanging out with Az for a few hours later, she wants me to help out at the bakery but if you want me to come—"

I raised my hand and interrupted her sentence. "No I'll be fine." I looked at the ticking clock above her head and sighed. "I have to leave in a bit."

"Have fun okay? And call me if you need anything at all."

I smiled appreciatively at her and walked out of the kitchen, dreading the start of my day and by the time I raised my fist to knock on the familiar hardwood door in front of me, my nerves had drastically increased. My breath hitched in the back of my throat as it opened and I was welcomed by a face I had subjected myself to only see annually.

"Hey dad."

The same shock that was always present whenever I visited was written all over his well-aged face. Thick rimmed glasses caged his light brown eyes and memories of me trying them on as a kid wafted back into my mind but I quickly brushed them away.

"Gianna? Baby, oh my goodness." He pulled me into what was supposed to be a comforting hug, but instead felt like a million heavy bricks falling onto me all at once and I cursed myself for not being able to find peace in my father's arms. His familiar scent filled the air, he smelled like coffee beans and book pages. An odd combination, but it suited his lifestyle.

I patted his back awkwardly as he pulled away and let out a small *forced* smile.

"Happy Birthday." I handed him the wrapped package in my hand, a collection of antic classical books.

"Thank you sweetheart." He accepted the gift gratefully. "Come in, please." He ushered me inside his home. By the look of it, you would never imagine he made thousands of dollars every day.

Comfort oozed out of the vintage-looking home. A huge contrast to the mansion I found myself living in as a child.

Nerves swam around in my belly as I followed him through the unfamiliar halls and into the living room—where he sat the gift

onto a nearby table. "Can I offer you anything? Tea, maybe some coffee?" he offered, a hopeful look in his eyes.

"I'm good, thanks dad." The hopeful smile dropped off his face and I felt my heart drop.

Try Gianna.

"In fact, I think I'll have some hot cocoa, have any?" and just like that, the grin was back on his face.

"Sure do. I'll be right back kiddo."

I nodded and sat myself on the nearest couch. My phone lit up with a new notification but I ignored it.

"Here you go." He set the mug down in front of me. "With extra marshmallows. Just how you like it." I smiled appreciatively and took the hot beverage into my hands. The sweet taste of chocolate hit my taste buds and it was enough to calm me down, the nostalgia flooding through me.

Seeing my dad was always an occasion I didn't necessarily look forward to. My heart selfishly held onto all the bad memories I associated him and my mother with and I never had the courage to let go of the feelings I harbored. In the back of my mind, I knew he regretted it. I knew his life choices held him down every day. More specifically my mother, who was off lounging somewhere fancy with another man who was *not* my father. I hadn't spoken to her in two years, and I had no

intention of doing so. He was far from obtaining the ability to move on from her—the man did everything in his power to save his marriage but alas, some things just weren't meant to be.

"Spoken to your mother recently?" he asked, attempting to seem nonchalant about the situation but I knew him. And I knew he was hurt. A part of me felt selfish for leaving him to battle his demons all by himself.

I shook my head solemnly and he sighed. "Well that's okay, I'm just glad you're here. How are you?"

I looked into his brown, kind eyes. *Really* looked into them. They were still full of hope, and the somewhat happiness he had many years ago. They were kind and accepting, a safety net for me as a child. They held a genuine concern for my well-being and I smiled sadly.

I had missed my father.

"Good. I've been good. I started a new job a few months ago."

"Oh yeah?"

I delved into a deep conversation about my experience with the Moritello family—excluding my relationship with my boss. He didn't need to know about that. *Yet.*

"The pay is good too. Not that I need the money, but it keeps me busy."

He nodded at my explanation, pouring more tea into his empty cup.

The rest of my day was spent conversing with him, meaningless chatter about anything and everything and I could only hope this was the beginning of us being okay again.

if only i had taken the time to read the text i had been sent from the unknown number who i had completely forgotten about.

31

Secrets I have held in my heart—are harder to hide than I thought ."

79

Family visits are always fun, does daddy know about his home wrecking daughter?

145

My eyes scanned over the text for the hundredth time in the past hour, my nails were in awful shape from the constant nibbling I had put them through.

1

"This can't be happening." I murmured unfocused, I ignored the stinging sensation of my teeth ripping the skin off my bottom lip.

"Do you know who it's from?" Celine asked, eyes glancing over my screen. The worried tone in her voice went unnoticed and I felt a slither of comfort knowing I had someone to keep me grounded through this situation.

12

"Well, I sort of have a clue."

She stared at me confusedly for a second and I knew it was time for me to come clean about what happened almost a week ago. I wrapped my arms around my knees, pulling them into my chest. I took my time explaining the events of that night to my best friend, including the bruise that was barely visible on my face, making sure I didn't skip a single detail.

6

"No fucking way." She gasped, her jaw slack on the floor and eyes wide. "And you didn't tell me?"

20

I knew using her anger at me as an excuse would be low. But that was the only reason why she never knew what happened to me. I hid everything expertly from her eyes, not that she was home much anyway.

"We weren't exactly on speaking terms." I explained, leaning back against the headboard.

The two of us sat on my bed, her feet dangled off the edge of the mattress while mine sat still above my unmade covers, signifying that I only woken up an hour ago.

"Bullshit. You could've still come to me. I would've put everything aside." I knew she was deflecting her guilt onto me with anger, and I knew I wasn't in the wrong, but in some way, neither was she.

4

"I'm so sorry Gi. I'm *so so* sorry."

"It's fine Cel. Alex helped me through it. I could've come to you but I didn't so you wouldn't have known."

"Still, I should've checked up on you, it was selfish and I'm sorry."

1

Despite my heart beating out my chest, I embraced her in a long lasting hug. "It's fine. I'm okay now—this text scares the shit outta me. He knows where I live now."

"What are you going to do?" She asked, stroking my back lightly.

"I think I'm going to show Alex, see if there's anything he can do."

I glanced at the time on my phone. I was fifteen minutes late.

1

She nodded in approval. "Be careful okay? Take pepper spray with you just in case."

True to my word, I stuck a small bottle of pepper spray into my purse, keeping it within reach on my lap as I nervously drove to work.

The door to the large mansion was slightly ajar as I walked up to it. I pulled on the brass handle and walked in, not bothering to knock. The main hall was empty and quiet. I figured the kids were in their playroom so I started there. As I neared my destination, I heard the hushed giggles and instantly smiled.

I pushed passed the door, and instantly caught sight of little pink toes peeking out from under the makeshift lemonade stand. I decided to play along. "Elena?" I called out. The giggles made another, more quiet appearance. "Where could she be?"

"Boo!" I jumped to the back of her hiding place and came face to face with a shocked Elena, her favourite doll secured around her small arms.

"Mira I *told* you to be quiet! She found us." The little girl chastised her American girl doll, dropping it on the floor and running into my arms.

"You have great hiding spots." I praised, tickling her sides. She squirmed in my arms and more joyous giggles left her pink lips.

"Really?" she asked, light eyes staring into mine.

Who wouldn't love this kid?

"Oh yeah. I spent like three minutes looking for you."

I walked her out of the playroom and into the kitchen, setting her on the white marble counter. "That's a really long time!" she beamed.

"Have you eaten yet?" I asked, pulling a carton of orange juice out the fully stocked fridge.

"Nope. Mommy left early this morning. She went to see Mr. Smith I think. He has a really weird bald head." She wore a grossed out expression on her face and I laughed distractedly.

Another doctor's appointment?

"And daddy is still sleeping, so is Luca but I was bored so I came down after mommy took me back to bed."

"I see. I'll make you some waffles, how does that sound?"

"Perfect."

An hour later, the two of us sat in front of a largely stacked pile of hot waffles. "This is so awesome!" Elena grabbed onto the

"Hey! You can't drink syrup straight from the bottle **baby.**"

Elena stopped, syrup dribbling down her chin and onto her shirt, a glossy sheet of tears covered her doll eyes.

"No, no, no don't cry okay? Here you can have a little more." I took hold of the sticky bottle and poured more of the substance onto her steaming food.

I looked up and immediately and the tears that stained her rosy cheeks were completely gone, replaced with a devious smile instead. "Thanks Gigi." She grinned, digging into her breakfast.

I stared at her in shock for a few seconds before regaining my focus and eating my meal, stealing glances at the child every few seconds.

She'd definitely been around Sarah too much lately.

"Are we having breakfast?"

A loud booming voice wafted into the kitchen, and instinctively I straightened my back at the sight of a shirtless Alex walking into the kitchen. His hair was messily strewn across his head, a few strands falling down onto his forehead.

"Gigi your mouths open!" Elena yelled, pointing her hand in my direction and laughing.

My eyes widened and I cleared my throat, focused on chewing the food inside my mouth instead of the amused man who was now beside me.

"Yours is in the warmer." I commented, wiping my hands on the kitchen towel I set on the table.

He nodded appreciatively and grabbed his plate, covering the food in gooey syrup. *Lots of it.*

"Warm and sticky, just how I like it." I chocked on my second waffle, desperately reaching for a glass of water to soothe my throat.

"You're so weird daddy." Elena giggled at her father's supposedly funny sentence, not catching on to the double meaning.

Alex winked in my direction and took a bite of the breakfast in front of him, groaning at the taste. "So delicious." I clutched my fork tighter between my fingers and decided to ignore his silly teasing.

After we had all eaten and I ensured the dishes were thoroughly cleaned. I took Elena from her playroom and into the en-suite bathroom she had in her room.

"Can you put in the pink bubbles Gigi?" she asked, staring at the choice of pink and green bubble bath in my hands. I nodded and opened the bottle, pouring a lid full into the large bath.

"Oh and my blue ducky! He's over there on the counter."

I grabbed the small blue water toy off the counter and threw it in as well. "I'll let you play for a little before we gotta get you cleaned up okay?" the little girl nodded, barely acknowledging my sentence as she filled the duck with water.

After ten minutes had passed, I began washing the reluctant child, lathering lavender scented shampoo onto her hair, I used the same scented soap to wash her body clean.

"Come on El, time to get out."

She put up a fight for a few minutes but got out at the promise of some chocolate ice-cream.

"All done." I adjusted the purple bow on her head.

"I look like a princess!" she exclaimed, twirling in front of her mirror.

"You really do, gorgeous." I complimented, smiling at the little girl.

"Come on, I think your mom's home." I grabbed her small hand in mine and the two of us walked down the grand steps, approaching the two voices in the kitchen.

"You can't keep the details from me Sarah."

He sounded mad.

"I think I'll let you play instead yeah?" I said, kneeling so I was at eye level with Elena. She smiled enthusiastically and ran straight to her pile of toys. I closed the door behind me and made my way back into the kitchen.

I interrupted their continuous arguing by clearing my throat. "Oh Gianna! Hey darling." Sarah smiled happily in my direction, slicing through a block of cheese. I only nodded politely and waved at Alex who ignored my greeting.

Weird.

"I've just come back from my doc." She began speaking about the appointment that she attended and I took that as invitation to sit on one of the unoccupied kitchen stools.

"Sarah—I don't think you should—"

"Oh nonsense honey. It's exciting news!"

"Exciting news?" I asked, a huge smile on my face.

Were they finally getting a divorce?

I looked at Alex but his vision was set on anything other than me. A defeated expression graced his chiseled features and I continued staring at him.

"I'm pregnant!"

My smile dropped faster than my grades would've had I been in school.

"W-what?" I asked, attempting but failing horribly to mask the shock in my voice. A quiet string of curse words exited Alex's mouth

"It's wonderful isn't it? Alex and I are so ecstatic." She continued cutting slices of mozzarella and I could only wish to grab that knife and twist it into her chest, but instead I forced a happy smile onto my face. I could feel tears threatened to fall out my eyes any second now. I opted for not looking at Alexander again, knowing that's all it would take to make me burst out into tears.

"So wonderful. I'm so so happy for you guys." I smiled so hard, my cheeks began hurting.

"Why thank you darlin' I'll make sure you're at the baby shower."

I nodded stiffly and hopped off my chair.

I needed to get out of here.

"I think I'm going to get going now." I announced, my hands were balled into fists.

"So soon?" she asked, the taunting bright grin lingered on her face. As if she knew how badly this affected me and got a rise out of seeing me so flustered.

"Yeah, I promised my roommate I'd be home for her birthday." I made up a random excuse off the top of my head.

Without another word, I sped past a completely still Alex and out the door.

"Gianna! Gianna, wait! Please." I ignored his pleading voice as I hurriedly rushed down the steps, fury laced in my veins.

How could he keep something like that from me?

"Look at me." He pleaded. I abruptly turned around, immediately I was lost in his eyes. The pools of honey surrounding his pupils had me stuck and everything else around us ceased to exist.

"Please let me explain." His jaw hardened and his question sounded more like a demand.

I snapped out of my daze. "Let me go." The tone I used was harsh, it sounded nothing like me. I kept my tears at bay, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry. I ripped my arm away from his hold and continued to my car.

Why'd I have to park so far?

"Gianna, please." He begged, trailing after me like a lost puppy. I had never seen him look so defeated.

"Believe me baby, I wanted to tell you-" his voice was low as he inched towards me.

"When?" I yelled, shoving his chest. He barely moved which intensified my anger. "After it was born? Fuck *this* and fuck *you*."

I thanked whichever God was listening that we were further away from the actual house and surrounded by a few trees.

"Baby..." It took everything within me to not give in and forgive him, realize it was a misunderstanding and move on from this so we could be happy again.

But unfortunately, our little bubble of happiness had popped and just like that, reality slapped me in the face.

"Don't you dare call me baby." I growled, inching towards him. "How could you?" my voice raised with every sentence that hastily tumbled out of my mouth. I could feel the tears falling from my eyes despite my consistent attempts to stop them.

"Why? Why tell me I can talk to you about anything when you don't ever do the same for me. I trusted you enough to tell you what happened to me that night. And you sat there, knowing you got Sarah pregnant and didn't fucking bother to let me know? Fuck you Alex."

He looked at me, a look of shock mixed with guilt was written all over his face. "I didn't have sex-"

I couldn't care less about what he had to say. "*Fuck you* for making me think you wanted me." *Shove*. "*Fuck you* for lying to me for so long." *Shove*. "Fuck you for using me." *Shove*. "And most importantly, *fuck you* for making me fall in love with you."

Thunder boomed across the sky, heavy rain fell onto the two of us and I almost laughed at how symbolic the drastic change of whether was. The water pelting down onto my face mixed with my tears, both rushing down my face furiously.

I had never seen Alex so breathless. The expression he wore was hurt combined with surprise and some other emotion I couldn't put my finger on. I waited for him to say something...anything. But the only sound heard was our heavy breathing as well as the harsh rain.

I stared at him for a few more seconds before gathering the courage to turn around and walk away from Alexander Moritello.

For the very last time.

32

"The house was awake with shadows and monsters, the hallways they echoed and groaned."

39

I fucked up.

135

I had everything I've ever wanted right in front of me and just like that, it was snatched away.

3

The thunder roared in the sky, as if it was laughing at the predicament I was in. I stood in place as I watched Gianna speed out of my driveway for what seemed to be the last time. I could only stand hopelessly in the rain and feel sorry for myself. Unsaid words lingered in the air and I hated myself for causing the beautiful girl so much pain.

I love you too.

116

I forced myself back into the house, a dejected expression plastered onto my face.

"Oh honey, you're all soaked, come in!" I was snapped back to reality at the sound of Sarah's nasally voice that only added onto the copious amount of anger that was rushing through me. I barely acknowledged her, instead distancing myself and walking through the living room. I didn't miss the frown on her face but I couldn't possibly care enough to apologize to the woman I had once loved.

28

I made my way into our shared bedroom and straight into the shower, shrugging off the wet clothes that annoyingly clung onto my body. The scorching hot water burned my skin, but I felt numb to the pain for I had already experienced the worst when Gianna walked away from me.

27

The pain was like no other. I felt as if a million needles dug into me just by her looking into my eyes with such raw intensity. Water flowed down my face as I faced the shower head, my thoughts were completely and utterly consumed by her. I could still smell her on my skin, hear her voice in my head. The memory of her fingertips dragging across my scalp came rushing back and if I focused hard enough, I could still feel it.

7

I threw on a pair of warm sweatpants, covering my torso with a plain white tee and throwing my wet clothes into my laundry basket which was empty. A signification that Gianna had done it for me despite me telling her I could handle it. Another reason to love her, a list I had formed a while ago without knowing.

13

Growing up, I imagined myself getting married to one of the supermodels my sister forced me to watch almost every single day. I would never admit it, but that had slowly become my favourite time of the day. Not only because I was lucky enough to spend time with my sister, but because I would often imagine myself as the perfect suitor for one of the mesmerizing models.

1

As I got older, my innocence slipped away. I spent more nights between random girl's legs than I did in my own house. I thrived on the attention and power I received from each desperate individual, and once I was done. I never saw any of them again.

18

I made myself believe that they were everything I've ever wanted and I would only be happy if I ended up sleeping next to a girl as beautiful as the ones I had seen on screen. As a

young boy, I thought the most important thing in life was beauty. And if I had found a good-looking girl, I would be complete for my life.

And that is exactly what I did.

At the ripe age of twenty-one, I had the fortune of meeting Sarah. She came strutting into my club, stole the attention of every single man that had the luck to be in the same room as her and had each and every one of them offer to buy her a drink. She turned them all down.

I stood in the private room, overlooking the lit up dance floor and caught sight of her. Long blonde locks whipped across her face as she danced for what looked like hours. The first thing I took note of was her undeniable feistiness. I saw the pride in her eyes when she pushed every other man away from her. She knew they were no good for her.

I then went on and tried my luck with offering her a drink, my mind lingering on my wife and beautiful son who I had missed so dearly. I couldn't wait to get home.

Surprisingly, she accepted. Sarah was never shy. She strode into my private area as if she owned the place. "Holy shit man. You're the owner? This is sick." She was never one to hold her tongue either.

The little spitfire and I became good friends almost instantly. I often found her at my dinner table, spilling her relationship issues to my wife and I, not daring to filter anything around my kids. Who she never really seemed interested in anyway.

She was a breath of fresh air, and after the tragic death of my wife. She took it as an opportunity to infiltrate my life in unimaginable way, inevitably turning it upside down.

And soon enough, she became Sarah Moritello.

I looked past all her personality flaws, I looked past the greed, the sudden hunger for money she possessed over the years. I made myself believe I loved her, and that she loved me.

Sarah was the one for me. That is, until, she wasn't.

Because there came Gianna Vidal at the perfect time. The ultimate sin. It felt as if the universe was laughing at me, dragging the petite brunette into my life when I was at my lowest point in my marriage. I felt an odd sense of déjà vu, perhaps life was indeed just a continuous cycle because there was no way meeting her was purely coincidental.

Now, I don't believe in fate—nor do I have strong beliefs in destiny. But everything I claimed not to believe in, was somehow understandable when I had met her. She was the big plot twist in my book of life. The surprise ending.

But as all good villains do. I ruined her.

"Alex, honey? Are you coming down for dinner?"

I focused my attention onto Sarah who stood against the door, eyebrow quirked up in question.

I tried to find her. The fireball I had met almost fifteen years ago. I looked past all the betrayal, the lies, the arguments, but I couldn't. As much as I tried searching. The Sarah I once knew was long gone.

"I'll be done soon." I mumbled, still not over our little spit earlier.

Satisfied with my answer, she swiveled around on her tall heels and walked back into the kitchen.

True to my word, I walked into the dining room soon after to find Sarah placing what looked like *chicken alfredo* onto two plates. She cooked?

"Where are the kids?" I asked, taking my seat at the head of the large table.

"I set them down for a quick nap, I made sure to feed them beforehand."

I nodded and watched closely as she poured our most expensive champagne into two tall glasses, handing me the first. "Let's dig in."

We sat and ate in silence, the screeching of forks against plates filled the room. A classical music piece hummed in the background, creating a restaurant sort of ambiance.

But I couldn't do it. I couldn't bare sitting here and acting as if everything was okay when it wasn't. we were too far gone to be considered okay.

"Cut the shit Sarah." I spoke, dropping my cutlery onto the plate in front of me. She looked up in shock, confusion written all over her face.

"What do you mean?" she asked, feigning innocence. She wasn't naïve, Sarah knew I had caught onto her silly games.

"All of this." I said, gesturing to the meal in front of us. "The home cooked food, the music, just you and I on our own. What are you getting at?"

She laughed. Her smile bright and eyes shut tightly. "Darling, can't we celebrate my pregnancy just one night?" she asked, as if it was the most normal question.

"No. we can't. Not when you haven't kept me updated on all your visits to Smith. I have a right to know." The wide smile dropped off her face, a guilty look flashed across her eyes at the speed of light and then, it was gone. As if I had imagined it.

"You do. You're right."

I let out a relaxed breath at the thought of her finally opening up about her newfound pregnancy. I wasn't happy about the kid, but I couldn't force her to get rid of it if she didn't want to, I realized my mistake from our last argument. If the child is mine, I'll be sure to look after it. And if it isn't both her and the newborn would exit my life. I wouldn't be taking care of someone else's child.

"He told me I'm three months along. They did an ultrasound, the baby has a healthy heartbeat and so far everything is good. I was told the pregnancy do's and dont's but I'm already aware of the basics. "

I gestured for her to continue and she stared up at the ceiling, a habit she used when thinking.

"Oh! He also told me the gender. We're having a girl!" she squealed, clasping her hands together. A happy smile was etched onto her face as she looked at me, awaiting my reaction.

All I could do was focus on the rage coursing through me.

"Bullshit." I growled, my chair screeched noisily as I stood up, clutching the edge of the table so tightly, I was scared it would break off.

"W-what?" she stuttered nervously, alarmed at my reaction.

"The gender of a baby can only be found out at eighteen weeks, not the twelve you've been so called 'pregnant' for." I set aside my rage for a few seconds to look up at Sarah, a look of realization crossed her eyes as they widened.

"D-did I say three months? I-I meant six. Silly me." She attempted to laugh it off, casting her eyes anywhere but on me.

I chuckled humorlessly. "At six months, you'd be showing. And your stomach is as flat as always. Do not test my intelligence."

By now, I had caught onto Sarah's twisted lie and she knew there was no way to save herself. "Alex, b-baby please."

"Sit the fuck down Sarah." I shouted, banging my fist onto the table. She sat back down from her standing position, slightly jumping at my outburst. She had never seen me this angry and in totally honesty, neither had I.

"Are you pregnant?" I asked, getting right to the point.

She shook her head sadly, confirming my thoughts.

"Fuck!" I cursed, grabbing the empty champagne glass and flinging it against the wall. "You lied! You fake a whole pregnancy? For what—huh? For attention? You're sick." I spat, not caring that tears were ferociously falling down her face.

"N-no, I just wanted us to get closer Alex, I-I thought this would be the way to do it, I didn't think you'd be so upse-"

"You didn't think I'd be upset?" I repeated slowly. "I'm fucking furious Sarah." I paced back and forth in the centre of the room, my hand dragging through my hair every few seconds.

"You put us through all that and thought I'd be all happy after you came clean? You thought you could fix our many marriage problems with a fake baby?" I asked, still shocked at how devious she could be. I knew Sarah wasn't the best person, but this? This was a new level of low.

"Yes! I just wanted us to be happy again, Alex please!" she stood up and reached for my hand but I snatched away as soon as I felt her fingertips near mine.

All I could think of was Gianna. All the pain, betrayal and sadness she was feeling, was all for nothing. It was all one big sick *lie*.

"I want a divorce."

"What? Please, no, I'm so sorry Alex, please don't do this." Her voice was shaking just as much as my hands were. But I couldn't feel sorry for her. I'd had enough.

"I've made up my mind. Say whatever you want to my kids. But I want you out in the next few days."

"You don't mean that. You're just mad. That's all. You just need to calm down." She pleaded, a scared look on her face. But no, that wasn't what I needed, I had made up my mind.

"No. this is the last straw Sarah." I slid the wedding ring off my ring finger and a loud sob broke free from her throat.

"I want you out."

I dropped the object onto the table and hurriedly walked out of the room, a free man.

33

I let my guard down and then you pulled the rug, I was getting kinda used to be someone you loved."

91

It was too good to be true.

I was the only one at fault here. I knew something like this would happen, I had a persistent gut feeling that warned me. But still, I was stubborn. I held onto the thought that maybe, just maybe the odds would be in our favour. Maybe despite everything, we would overcome every obstacle the world threw at us. But God, was I naïve.

10

Which led me to this exact moment. I had gone through two whole boxes of tissue, each individual piece lay messily scattered across my bedroom floor. My body was nestled comfortably under my sheets, shielding me from the outside world. Celine would come in hourly, forcing me to sip some water or eat some of the food she had surprisingly made for me—no kitchens burned down in the process.

I declined her offer, only grabbing a few bites to ease the worry lines on her forehead once in a while. "Come on Gi, who doesn't love pizza?"

25

"Hmmp." I mumbled, my voice muffled by the thick sheets that completely covered my head. "What was that?" she asked, inching towards me. "Go away." I sniffled lightly, trying to hold back my tears, but unfortunately, I was too weak, and they dripped out of my eyes rapidly. I ferociously wiped them off my face but it was no use.

I felt the bed dip on the other side and soon enough, the warm shield of blankets were ripped from my face and I let out a whine. "Leave me alone." I mumbled incoherently, my eyes tightly shut, avoiding the sunlight that so brightly shone through my windows

"You can't throw your life away over him Gi, it's not worth it." Her hands dragged through the messy lump of hair on my head, attempting to get rid of the knots "Also, you smell like a trash can, have you showered at all in the past two days?" she brought her face closer to my figure and sniffed it. "No." I answered, finally pushing her face away from mine.

48

It was true, I hadn't left my bed in two days since the incident with Alex. Celine understood why for the first day, she never left my side as I cried to her for a majority of Sunday afternoon. My phone rang over thirty times that day. I ignored all his texts—all his calls and voicemails too.

12

"Yeah, that? That's gross. Come on." She got off the bed and completely pulled the cozy blankets off me and I groaned in disapproval. "I don't want to go anywhere. Leave me alone Cel, please." I begged, looking into her eyes for dramatic affect. She only sighed, rolling her eyes in the process.

2

"I hate seeing you like this."

1

I bit my lip to prevent the tears from slipping out my eyes once more. "I know."

"Okay, let's make a deal." She walked over to me, avoiding the massive heap of tissue paper that was all over the floor and finally sitting herself on the edge. "Come out with Az and I today, for three hours max." I opened my mouth to protest but she stopped me by pressing her index finger to my lips. I narrowed my eyes at her and she dropped her finger. "Anyway, if you aren't having a good time I will personally drive you home

to bathe in your own self-pity and..." her eyes glanced around the room. "Snot." I didn't miss the disgusted look in her eyes and I rolled my eyes.

I sighed heavily, knowing I wouldn't be able to wiggle my way out of this one. "Fine." I mumbled, furiously rubbing my eyes with the palm of my hands. "What was that?" she asked, a hopeful smile on her face.

"I said I'll go."

"You won't regret this. I promise."

I was already regretting it.

"See, this isn't so bad."

I rolled my eyes and sighed dramatically, twirling the long-forgotten fettuccini around my fork. turning down pasta was a definite sign that I wasn't in the best mood. I instead opted for sipping the alcohol laced lemonade I had ordered Despite Celine's attempt to keep me sober.

The two of us were sat in the middle of Central Park, nibbling on what was left of our food. My eyes trailed to a nearby bench watching intently as Azalea whispered harshly into her phone in what looked to be an attempt to hide her irritation. I furrowed my brows but shrugged it off and turned back to Celine.

"My foods cold." I complained.

"That's because you left it for too long. Face it, this is the perfect day." She said, pointing at the dish in front of my crossed legs.

"Fine, whatever, maybe coming out wasn't so bad." I mumbled, much to her satisfaction. She nodded happily and turned to the direction of her approaching girlfriend. The frown on her face went unnoticed but was instantly replaced with a smile at the sight of Celine.

"Everything okay?" she asked, watching as the dark-haired girl crossed her legs and began pulling out the small patches of grass. Azalea looked up at her and grinned. "Yeah, everything's fine. It was just my mom." she confirmed.

My phone vibrated against my leg and I reached for it, the small sliver of happiness I had was soon washed away at Alexander's name that flashed across my screen. The two girls surrounding me must've noticed my mood change because suddenly my phone was ripped from my hands.

"Hey!" I yelled, attempting to grab my phone from Celine, the two of us fought over it for five seconds but it was no use, she had already answered. I lunged for the device once more, causing the two of us to roll around in the grass. The distinctive sound of Azalea's laughter could be heard in the background.

"Hello? Gianna?" his voice was raspy, more than usual and the giddy feeling I was used to was replaced with emptiness.

"No. This is Celine. Remember me?" I held back a loud whine and worked harder to grab my phone from her hand. "Yeah-- I do but where's Gi--"

"She isn't here right now. And if she was-- I doubt she'd want to talk to you. Bye now!" the line went dead and she threw my phone into my lap, I fumbled in an attempt to catch it and when I finally did, I stared up at her in shock and she shrugged. "What? You weren't going to answer anyway."

I brought my fingertips up to my head, lightly massaging the area in order to soothe my growing headache. "You did not need to answer it either." I complained, glaring at my nonchalant best friend.

"Is that Gi's boyfriend?" Azalea asked, nibbling on the strawberries we had brought with us and interrupting my glare.

I was quick to answer "No." while Celine chose to say "Yes." causing yet another lethal stare to be thrown her way. "It's way more complicated than that." I clarified, causing her to roll her azure eyes. Azalea nodded in understanding and I instantly changed the subject.

"Can we leave now? The grass is making my ass itch." I complained, attempting to pull my dress further down my

thighs. The two of them giggled and began cleaning up their trash and we strolled towards the nearest trashcan, dropping it all in.

"It's almost four so I guess we should be heading out anyway." Celine glanced at the dainty watch wrapped around her wrist, examining the time. The three of us made our way through the park, stopping every few minutes to pet the dogs that ran around freely. I watched closely as a couple cuddled next to each other in a secluded corner of the park. I had to refrain from rolling my eyes.

Just because you're unhappy doesn't mean the rest of the world has to be. I reminded myself.

We walked two blocks in a comfortable silence. The only sound heard was the consistent traffic that just never seemed to go away, but by now we were all used to it.

"Why couldn't we just hop on the subway?" Azalea asked, tilting her head back as she groaned. I immediately agreed, my feet slightly aching with each step I took.

"Because," Celine replied, swatting her hand slightly, "This is more fun. The subway scares me and who would want to miss out on this view?" I tore my vision away from her and stared onto the street ahead, grimacing at the rat that swerved through each trashcan. The air smelled more polluted than the

bottom of the ocean and I'm pretty sure I just stepped in someone's used gum. Thank God for flats.

As if she read my mind, Celine's face turned into a grossed-out expression. "Okay maybe you're right. This isn't the best neighborhood. Should we hail a cab?" the two of us instantly agreed with her, thankful to be off these streets and in the safety of a moving vehicle.

After standing around for five whole minutes attempting to grab the attention of one cab driver, I felt the sudden urge to pee. Knowing how weak my bladder was, I wouldn't be able to hold it in for much longer. "Great now I need to pee." I complained, tears threatening to fall from my eyes. Could this day get any worse?

Celine's eyes widened and she shook her head frantically. "No way. No. Hold it in." she instructed, probably not wanting to look for a restroom right now.

"But I can't," I whined. "You know I have a weak bladder."

She sighed dramatically and looked around, probably in search of somewhere I could go. "Fine. I think Ralph's is still open. We'll walk you there." I smiled happily and glanced down the alleyway that led to the small pub down the street. Just as the three of us began to walk, a yellow cab finally pulled up. And Azalea exhaled in relief.

"You guys wait in the car. I'll go and be back in five minutes." I said, not wanting us to miss out on a ride home. My phone vibrated in the pocket of my dress but I ignored it, already knowing who the caller was.

"You sure, Gi? It's getting pretty dark." Celine looked at me hesitantly but I shut down any worried thoughts by smiling at her. "Yeah, I won't be too long and it's just down the street." before she was given the chance to reply, I speed walked into the small alley, a few minutes away from literally pissing myself.

A few minutes later, I walked out of the semi-busy joint with a sigh of relief. The streets had less people on them now due to the chilly weather and I figured a dress wasn't the best option to wear. The goosebumps on my skin confirmed that.

Ironically, the hair on my neck began to rise up to and I rubbed my hands up and down my arms, attempting to give myself some much-needed warmth. I was so focused on heating myself up, that I didn't notice the footsteps behind me. I looked back and the noise instantly stopped. I was probably just imagining things.

I continued my walk a little faster, but before I could fully reach the main street a calloused hand grabbed me by my waist, the other placed around my mouth and my eyes widened. My fight or flight instincts kicked in and I struggled against the strong

hold, kicking and screaming as best as I could with a hand over my mouth.

This was it. Today is the day I die. In a dark alleyway. Left to be eaten by rats.

"Shut the fuck up!" was the first thing I heard before I was forcefully shoved into an even darker corner, my head smacked against the hard concrete and I winced.

I'd heard that voice before.

My heart pounded frantically against my chest as I attempted to focus my blurry eyes on the figure in front of me. Once it had finally cleared, I stared back at him and instantly everything fell into place.

"Wanna get outta' here?" he asked rapidly. I nodded my head hazily and he led the way.

"Stop." I tried pushing off me but still he wouldn't budge. Tears threatened to spill out of my eyes when he pushed himself into me more. "I said stop!" I screamed.

"It's late for a pretty girl like you to be out here alone."

It was him.

34

"I'm well acquainted with villains that live in my bed."

13

It was often that we, as humans took life for granted. We didn't take time to cherish getting home safely, or sleeping in warm sheets, the comfort of our friends and family, the sound of annoyingly consistent birds chirping early in the morning.

6

Freedom to walk around during the day without worrying if you would get back to loved ones, simply trusting that the universe would have our back and we would end up right where we belonged every single time.

We failed to feel any sort of gratitude towards the earth, or God, or any higher power when we were constantly protected from the harmful happenings in every country, on every street, in every neighborhood, on a daily basis.

8

It was only now, seated in a cold dark alley, when I finally realized just how important it was to be thankful for my life. My head pounded against my skull and I brought my hands to the sides and rubbed small circles around the painful area, attempting to release some of my discomfort.

The man in front of me looked unbothered. A bored expression was plastered onto his familiar face. I took in every single detail of him. The scar above his left eyebrow that I had failed to notice the very first time I met him. His hands that noticeably shook every few seconds, the consequence of a bad drug habit.

It was right there. Right at the back of my head. He looked so *familiar*. His facial features were so recognizable, I just couldn't put my finger on who I saw them on first.

3

"Gianna Vidal." he tsked, prowling forward. He kneels down to my level and grabs a stray strand of my hair, twirling it in his calloused finger. He reeked of cigarettes and sweat and I grimaced, snapping my neck away from the man, which only caused him to laugh. "We meet again."

8

I decided to ignore him. Not wanting to give him the satisfaction of having a conversation with me. "Oh, the silent treatment? I can work with that." my vision lingered on the

corner of the alley I was trapped in. If I just tried to run. There was a small sliver of a chance that I would make it unscathed. But even I wasn't that naïve, it was no use. I immediately began to feel trapped, my breaths shortened and I shut my eyes tightly to avoid any tears leaking from my dull eyes. I wouldn't let him see my fear. So instead, I stared right at him and without a second thought, I slapped him across the face.

That felt so good.

I anticipated his reaction. Watching as the initial shock left his expression and was replaced with a mocking smile. And then, he laughed.

It was manic.

The sound brought shivers down my spine.

"You little bitch." his grey eyes blazed with fury and he grabbed my face, forcing me to look at him. "You are so lucky I'm not in a violent mood today princess." he spoke, before releasing my skin and grabbing a zip tie, tightening it around my wrists. I struggled against his hold but he was too strong and I cursed.

"Why are you doing this to me Jason?" I whispered, completely oblivious to why I was experiencing this.

"Oh Gianna." he almost looked sad. "Poor innocent, young and naïve Girl." he pulled out a sharp object from his back pocket. A small pocket knife engraved with the initials; J.F.

"Do you see what getting involved with bad men gets a beautiful girl like you into?" he asked, flipping the tool around.

What?

I contemplated lunging for the knife, but decided against it. By now my friends would've realized I've been gone for too long and are searching for me.

They'll be here any minute now.

"I see the wheels turning in that pretty little head of yours. Come on, think."

Alex. He was talking about Alex; I knew that much. But what did he have to do with any of this?

"You could've had any man you wanted. Me! You could've had me! I gave you the opportunity. I followed you to that club, I got you to dance with me." he looked up, as if he was reminiscing on the night. A bright smile dawned on his face. "I got you to kiss me." he sighed happily, but soon enough that smile turned into a deep scowl. "You were going to leave with me! But no, he just had to get involved."

His breaths quickened and he tightly curled his fingers into a fist to calm himself down and I backed up against the wall, not wanting to be within proximity of that knife.

He was crazy.

But still, I had no clue why he was after me.

Jason chuckled darkly, looking back into my scared eyes. "My suspicions were instantly confirmed that night." he nodded happily, taking a few steps closer to me.

"Alex Moritello was fucking someone. And it wasn't my mom."

"W-what?" I whispered, my eyes widening and his revelation.

Jason was.... Sarah's son?

So crazy runs in the family?

Not the time Gianna.

"I finally had it. I had the one thing that would make my mom finally love me again. I just had to tell her about the affair. I was so close." he whispered the last part, as if he was speaking to himself and completely forgot I was even here. I could use this as my escape, but something compelled me to stay. I needed to hear more of the story.

"But she accused me of lying." his hand suddenly gripped my throat, constricting my airways and I let out a strangled scream. "She thought I was fucking lying!" his voice rose and his hand tightened around my neck. I clawed at his fingers and he looked down at me, oblivious to the pain he was causing. He instantly let go and I coughed, gasping for air as I tried to regain my

breath. Tears welled up in my eyes but this time I couldn't stop them from falling.

Okay, this had officially been the worst couple of days.

"I figured the more I followed you around, the more proof I could get. So, I trailed you to the cemetery. But I couldn't stay away. I just had to hear your voice, touch your skin." his hand traced the side of my face and I jerked away from him.

"T-that was you?" I asked, the memories of that day instantly flooding into my mind.

"I was falling in love with you. And I just knew, given the chance, you would too." his gaze softened. "But you just wouldn't stop seeing him! I thought I could let it go. I thought you'd make the right choice. The best choice. But you didn't." I didn't get the chance to ask him what he meant before he began speaking again. "You didn't choose me. Like I had hoped you would. I had so much faith in you princess. So much."

He stayed silent for a few moments, watching me quietly. An eerie feeling lingered around me but I shrugged it off.

"So, I took matters into my own hands. After seeing you with him, at that hotel. I was furious." his breathing accelerated just in time with my raging heartbeat. "You deserved what I did to you that night in the park. You know that princess? You deserved the pain. After all, my silly little girl was parading

around with married men. You deserved the texts. You deserved to feel hurt. Just as I did. Especially after fucking pepper spraying my eyes! It took me *days* to recover from that." he sneered, picking up the long-forgotten pocket knife. He slowly dragged it down the side of my arm and I winced in pain as blood trickled down my smooth skin.

"P-please, I'll do whatever you want just please let me go." I begged, sobs breaking through my body.

This was it. I was going to die today. I wouldn't get to have kids, or get married. Or know what true love felt like.

Who was I kidding, I know *exactly* what true love feels like.

He looked at me for a split second before laughing out loud.

"Let you go? Now that I've finally gotten to you, you're more naïve than I ever thought." he checked the time on his wrist watch, cursing at the numbers displayed at the gadget.

"It's time." he grabbed my arm and forcefully dragged me up.

"We need to leave."

"W-where are you taking me?" I stuttered, my feet unable to keep up as he dragged me forward.

Shit.

"W-what? No." my lips trembled. "No please. C-continue the story, what made you fall in love with me?" I asked, but it was no use, he ignored my question.

Think Gianna, think. What could make a psychopath distracted long enough to open an escape window?

"What made Sarah hate you?" I tried again, hoping this time it would work. And by the confused expression on his face, I knew it did.

Bingo.

"H-hate me?" he stuttered. As if the realization finally dawned on him. He let go of my arm and paced back and forth on the concrete. "N-no. She doesn't hate me. She can't. I only made one mistake. No no no!"

"Has she—has she ever told you that?" his voice came down to a whisper and I shook my head frantically, not wanting to anger him anymore. "No. But I bet she'd hate it if you took me away. She wouldn't want that." I tried to persuade, hoping he didn't know too much of my twisted 'friendship' with Sarah.

That conniving bitch. She was probably picking out nursery colors with the man I loved while I sat in a dark alleyway, on my way to be murdered by her wicked son.

Alex. I wonder if he missed me? My anger at him withered away when I thought about how devastated he would be if I had

died at the hands of his wife's son. Like the noble man he is, he would blame it all on himself.

I wouldn't let that happen. I had to get out of here.

He looked at me for a few seconds, contemplating the decision and I smiled, enticing him to let me go.

"No."

My smile dropped.

"What?"

"No. She wouldn't want that. Mom hates you for ruining her marriage I know she does." he grabbed me again and I forced my heels into the concrete, attempting to prolong the inevitable. "I'm doing the right thing." he murmured and as we got further from the main street, I threw caution to the wind and took the risk.

I screamed. As loud as I could.

The sound startled him and I took that as my chance to run. As fast as I could in the shoes I was wearing. I didn't get far before he harshly gripped my hair and slammed me against the brick wall. Stars clouded my vision for a little while and I kneed him in the groin, causing him to collapse to the ground with a thud.

That always worked.

I grabbed the fallen pocket knife from the ground and lifted it up in protection as I watched him clutch his genitals in pain. I prayed someone would walk by but I knew it was too late for anyone to be out in this area anyway.

I had to get out of this, somehow.

The sound of steps caught my attention and my head snapped towards the direction of the sound, hopeful for a savior but instead I was met with a curious puppy. I furrowed my brows and stared at the familiar navy-blue collar around his neck but before I could recognize it, everything went completely black.

35

"Before you go, was there something I could've said to make your heart beat better?"

19

I crossed my arms over my chest and watched carefully as dozens of men transported Sarah's belongings out of my house and into a large moving truck in the driveway. The sight was pleasing enough to *almost* bring happy tears to my eyes but I held back the emotion for her sake.

30

At the prospect of moving out—Sarah was livid, she hid her anger by masking it with sadness. Which resulted in her sobbing on the stairs in front of me and I tried not to roll my eyes at how awfully dramatic she was being. Her tears were fake and the mascara rolling down her cheeks had the texture of water rather than tears. It was a sight for sore eyes. The act had the same effect as an equally bad Hallmark movie and I wanted to laugh at her state—but I didn't. I wasn't that cruel.

23

My foot tapped impatiently against the hard concrete as I observed two men carry out her extensive coat selection on an over designed rack which I was glad to see go, it looked like a mix between tacky Versace and Louis Vuitton. *I hated that thing.*

"Be careful with that! It costs more than your entire monthly salary!" she screeched at the two people who were only doing their jobs and they looked at me in question. I waved my hand dismissively and told them to continue dragging it away, much to Sarah's distaste.

7

She stared at me with unbridled anger swimming in her eyes and I quirked my eyebrow, waiting to hear whatever shit she has to say for herself this time. "Alex, tell them to stop!" she begged. "Why do they have to take everything? I'll only be gone for a month at most. That's how long breaks last right?" her tone was laced with frustration as she looked up at me, but I didn't feel a single thing.

No remorse. No guilt. No *love*. I felt absolutely *nothing* for the woman in front of me and it had to have been the best feeling.

"A break?" I repeated, staring down at her in shock. I couldn't help but tilt my head upwards and laugh. "We are done. Divorced. Over. *Completely* over. No more second chances—

or *seventh* chances, in your case. This is it Sarah." I told her, watching as her bottom lip wobbled. It was what she always did when she wanted to get her away and a year ago it might've worked on me, but not this time.

"W-what? Alex, honey, don't be so dramatic we can fix this I promise."

I scoffed and took in a deep breath to control how angry I was becoming. I silently praised myself for making my sister pick up the kids this morning—I knew eventually Sarah would cause a scene and even though she didn't care what they saw happen between us, I did.

Letting them know about their mother and I splitting up wasn't going to be easy. In fact—I was nervous. *The Alexander Moritello* who made billion-dollar business deals and held important meetings almost every day was nervous to speak to his own children.

I had no idea how they would take it or if they'd even understand what it all meant. I was stuck between ruining their lives and their view on love and marriage at an early age and keeping something this important from them. My kids were smart. Eventually they'd ask where their mother was and why all her belongings weren't around anymore and as much as it pained me to go through—I know I had to get out with the truth.

"We've been trying to fix this for a long time now Sarah. It isn't going anywhere and dragging our relationship along is doing nothing for our family, please understand that." In all the years I had known her, I had never seen Sarah so...glum. I was used to her witty attitude and constant mood swings, not tears and what convincingly looked like heartbreak. The last shred of me that cared about her and knew her as a great friend before a terrible wife wanted me to keep her in my life, give her a second chance. But I knew I'd end up regretting that decision. It would be hard for now, but I had things to look forward to.

Like Gianna. My *beautiful* girl. Who I missed dearly. I needed her like I needed the air to breathe. She was everything Sarah failed to be and I knew I had to get to her as soon as all this was over and try to fix everything I had selfishly fucked up.

I just hope it wasn't too late.

"Sir, this is the last box. Anything else you need?" I was snapped out of my thoughts and read the name tag of the younger man in front of me.

"That'll be all Ryan. Thank you." I nodded once and he tipped his hat towards me before continuing his path down the marble stairs.

"Alex, stop this nonsense right now!" at this point, anyone within a fifty-mile radius could hear Sarah's whiney voice. The

realization finally dawned on her that I was serious about this and she had truly driven me to the end of the rude with her bullshit.

"It has to happen Sarah. I gave you the opportunity to stay here for a few days and you declined my offer—this is no longer my problem." I told her, attempting to keep my voice low.

"Where will I stay then?" she asked, eyes wide.

"You should have thought about that before threatening to fill my shampoo bottles with a hair removal cream." I thought back to a few hours ago when Sarah decided it was clever to throw a tantrum instead of behaving like the adult she was supposed to be. The broken flower vase on the living room floor was proof of how crazy she could get and I was surprised I lasted so long in this marriage.

My mother would've been so disappointed in what my life had become.

"I didn't mean it! Please understand that, you can't do this to me!" she marched up the stairs as best as she could in four-inch stilettos, until she was right in front of me and I could feel the tips of our shoes touching. "Please, give me one more chance." She sobbed out loud and threw her arms over my shoulders. I gently removed her hands from me and placed them at her side.

"Don't make this harder than it has to be." I told her, keeping a cautious eye on the woman in case she decided to attack me. Sarah usually wasn't a violent woman, but I wouldn't put that past her.

"It was *one* lie. And I only did it to save our marriage Alex. I did what I did for *us*." As if that made it all better.

"What you did was for *you*. Not us. You thought a baby could trap me in this marriage and went along with that crazy plan for selfish reasons. That one mistake was the last drop of water in an already full glass—this is what is best." I had to repeat myself several times before she got it into her head and even then, I knew she didn't understand why this was happening. Sarah was a smart woman, education wise. Otherwise, not so much.

"What will I do without you?" she whispered.

"You will live. Take a break from relationships to focus on healing yourself and making amends with your children. You have already wasted so much of their lives being absent. Make it up to them." I grabbed her palm and slid the ring off her finger, ignoring her continuous cries and the beating of my heart that was so loud, I was afraid she could hear it.

"My mother will hate you." She snapped, snatching her hand away from me.

There she is. There's the Sarah I know and have come to loathe.

"Nothing I can't handle." I said, shrugging my shoulders to show how little I cared about Mindy Flint's opinion on me.

As much as I disliked Sarah's behavior, I knew her mother had an awful lot to do with how she turned out. Everything worth loving could be paid for according to her—and that included her daughter. As much as she craved the love she lacked as a child, this was not the way to get it and deep down, I know Sarah knew it too.

She deserved better. Real, breathtaking love. I believed that everyone should receive that type of epic love at least once in their life. Sarah needed it. She didn't need expensive dinners, lavish cars and houses or huge paychecks. She need loving arms to warm her, home cooked meals and picnics under the sun. The type of love that made her cold heart thaw.

As much as I resented myself for not being able to give that to her, I knew we weren't for each other and that's okay. Someone out there would teach Sarah the meaning of love and the importance of the little things in life. And I could only hope she would get her happy ending at some point.

I had found mine. I let it go—like a fool, but I had it in the palm of my hands. And I'd do whatever I could to get Gianna back

into my home, away from all the bad things the world had to offer. I loved her.

I loved her passionately and fearlessly. Some would call us crazy for falling so hard so fast but I didn't believe that loving someone had a certain time frame. When you feel it, you know, no one else had to understand it except you.

I wanted to be the person she woke up to every morning. The person she waited for at the door when I came home from work. I wanted both her and my kids under one roof, playing silly board games and watching ridiculously unentertaining cartoons. I wanted to watch her dance around my kitchen as she cooked for us. I want to consume her thoughts. Be the first person she thinks of when she gets up and the last person to cloud her mind before she falls asleep.

I wanted Gianna Vidal to be better known as Gianna Moritello.

"It's her isn't it?"

Sarah's voice startled me out of my thoughts and I looked to her, taking a quick glance at the watch on my wrist. "Excuse me?" I asked, confusion etched onto my face.

"You love her. That kid, Gianna." The distaste in her voice went unnoticed and I wanted to give in to the anger coursing through my veins. But for once, I didn't.

"I'm not having this conversation with you Sarah." I told her, strolling down the stairs and onto the driveway where her car was parked. I opened the door for her as she followed me, hoping she would just get in and drive away. But no, that was too easy for her.

"So it's true. You're fucking a minor?" she shook her head slightly and laughed for a few minutes, as if the scowl on my face was the most hilarious thing in the world. "What, does she fuck better than I do?"

She was taunting me. Practically begging me for a reaction, and that is exactly what I gave her. I nodded instantly, placing my tongue in the corner of my mouth as the fresh memory of Gianna's hair wound around my fist settled in my brain. "Yes, actually. I never have to think of cheap pornos to get myself up before we fuck. Can't say the same for my time with you."

I knew by the shocked gasp that tumbled out of her lips that I had gotten to her and I smirked. Like clockwork—she raised her hand and I caught it just before her manicured fingers came in contact with my face. I pulled her closer to me and she almost cowered back at the expression on my face. "I warned you about touching me in that way. This time, I won't be so nice. Stay off my property Sarah. I'll send my lawyer your way to discuss custody of the kids."

I let her go before she could say anything else and speed walked back into my home before shutting the door and making sure I locked it. I took a deep breath and made my way into the kitchen, pouring myself a much needed shot of bourbon before the loud ringing of my phone filled the silent air.

I looked at the screen and stared at the common hospital name displayed in front of me and my heart immediately stopped. My first thought was that my kids were in trouble. My sister maybe? I accepted the call and rushed to grab my keys, knowing I'd have to leave. "Hello? Alexander Moritello?"

"This is him. May I ask why you are calling?" I questioned, rushing into my garage through the side of my house.

"Yes, Sir. We have you listed here as the only reliable contact for Gianna Vidal, she was placed into our care a few minutes ago."

The voice on the other end of the became quieter the more I panicked and I could only think the worst.

What the hell was happening?

36

"I appreciate the way you watch me, I can't lie"

19

*

The first thing I noticed when I opened my eyes was the low light cast over the room. The second was all the cords hanging down next to me, for the nurses call button and the IV solutions. An electronic machine sitting on a cart with odd wires leading from it, a privacy curtain hung from a track in the ceiling, shielding me from unwanted eyes.

2

I turned my head slightly to the side and took note of the bedside table which had a large bouquet of white roses inside an intricately designed vase and reached out to stroke the petals, only then had I observed the pulse oximeter clamped onto my index finger and I frowned.

1

An aqua coloured water glass was placed directly in front of the flowers, a bent straw perched in the middle. Without much

hesitance, I extended my arm and grabbed the drink, wanting to ease the dry, scratchy feeling in my throat.

I ignored the straw and took a big gulp of the leftover water, exhaling when I felt the uneasiness in my throat go away.

A large TV hung in the corner, tuned to a news channel that displayed the usual robbery in the less populated streets of NYC, the remote control seemed to be missing and the nurses wouldn't be able to reach that high to change it, I assumed.

The only sound I could hear was the consistent beeping of the heart rate machine I was connected to and the squeaking of tennis shoes on the hard floor outside my room.

11

I blinked a few times and sat up in the oddly uncomfortable bed, leaning my back against the stack of pillows behind me. My head pounded erratically against my skull and I groaned at the pain, looking around for some sort of medication to ease it. But before I could find whatever it was that I was looking for, the door opened and the bright hallway lights shone directly onto my face, making me hiss in reaction.

2

"Sorry darling." After the door shut, and the lights returned to the low level I was accustomed to, I looked up at the seemingly kind nurse who adjusted my IV levels. "Didn't mean to wake

you. You feelin' alright?" she asked, pushing her glasses back onto her ears.

1

I nodded slowly, still slightly confused as to why I was here. I read the nametag sewn onto the middle aged woman's doctors coat. *Dr. Henley.*

4

"Do you remember anything at all?" before I could answer, she raised her hand to my forehead and placed the back of it against the skin. "You aren't running a fever, so that's something to be glad about."

"I've prescribed you with a few meds for any pain or discomfort you're feeling. Just the usual *iBuprofen, Tylenol* and a few over the counter antibiotics that you may have already heard of. It's nothing you aren't used to based on your medical records." She grabbed a few plastic containers off the counter and set them on the table next to me and I stared at them with confusion.

She gave me a sad smile. "Any pain right now?" I nodded and she stared at me expectantly. "A headache." I answered, speaking for the first time since she arrived.

3

"Ah, yes. You were hit pretty bad from what I've been told. Here take this." She placed a pill into my hands and refilled the glass of water, urging me to take it.

3

"What happened?" I asked timidly, placing the drink back in its position. She cleared her throat and picked up a clipboard I hadn't noticed before and gave it a once-over.

1

I could remember leaving my friends to find a bathroom and stumbling upon Sarah's spawn-of-Satan son. I also remembered everything he told me, but nothing else from then was set in my mind no matter how hard I tried to remember it all.

2

"You suffered a mild concussion to the back of your head, your wound was inflicted with something hard and heavy. Do you remember what that could've been?" Dr. Henley asked in a calm voice, probably not wanting to trigger me. I shook my head and she nodded, flipping over the page.

"That was my main concern, you may be suffering from post-traumatic amnesia which is normal after the encounter you had. It'll wear off in some hours—worst case scenario, it would take days. Hopefully that is not the case with you."

12

I took in the information better than I expected. The headache I had was slowly disappearing and I felt myself gaining stability quick. I was less confused and everything seemed less hazy.

"Besides that, your other injuries are less vital." She lifted my wrist and I stared at the puple-ish bruise surrounding it, frowning slightly. "These might be around for a while, but if for any reason you start to feel pain from it—let me know."

I listened intently but was still confused as to why she wasn't asking any questions about what happened? Did she know? Did Celine tell her? *Where was Celine?*

"You must have a thousand questions right now and I can assure you they will all be answered. But for now—my work here is done. This red button over here," she pointed at the call button I was staring at earlier, "Can be used whenever you need assistance. At the moment, I recommend taking a nap until the morning where we will decide if you're ready to be discharged or not."

I didn't feel as if I needed to sleep but the drowsiness that washed over me said otherwise and she noticed. "That would be the effects of the medication you took earlier."

"What time is it?"

"Almost seven. Your last visitor left an hour ago when visiting time was up but he promised to be back bright and early tomorrow. He left you those pretty flowers." She pointed at the white roses with a smile.

10

He? I still had a lot of questions but before I could get any of them out, I fell asleep.

38

The minute I woke up the next morning I was pleased to be rid of the headache I had last night. My body felt less under pressure and more relaxed. I was closer to feeling like myself again and hoped that would be enough to get me out of this place.

A tray of food was set on the now cleared bedside table and I lifted the metal lid. The tray had a fruit cup, what looked to be a chocolate muffin, some yoghurt and a bowl of cereal with a water bottle in the corner. All this time I had ignored just how famished I was and picked up the platter, propping myself up on the pillows and digging in.

10

Hospital food was never anyone's favourite and this time was no different but I was too focused on getting myself full to care.

7

As I stabbed the last strawberry in the miniature cup, the door swung open to once again reveal Doctor Henley and I smiled, placing the empty tray back onto the table.

"Good morning sweetheart. Glad to see you're up and running. How do you feel?" she asked, standing next to me and scribbling something onto her clipboard.

"Better, thanks."

"Good to hear. You seem to be doing well, take one more dose of these meds I've brought and you should be good to go once your discharge papers have been signed." She placed a few pills with a glass of water in front of me.

2

"Who brought me in?" I asked, swallowing the pills as I awaited her answer.

"A friend. Celine—she said her name was, in fact, I think I might've—ah, there she is."

1

I glanced at the opening door and smiled brightly at the view of messy blonde hair that came barreling towards me. Celine wrapped her arms around me as best as she could. I looked back at Doctor Henley once more and with a wink and a smile, she was out of the room.

"Holy shit, Gi, you look you've been run over *three* times." She whispered, patting down my hair which was probably a wild mess.

2

"Gee, thanks." I muttered, smiling nonetheless.

She hugged me again and I relished in the scent of her that I had grown so accustomed to. "I'm so sorry." Her voice was low when she spoke, as if she was the reason I was in there.

11

She didn't have to say anything for me to know she blamed herself. Which was completely ridiculous. I was the one who chose to wander off in a shady part of town *knowing* there was a psychopath on the loose.

14

"You have nothing to apologize for." I told her sincerely. She held my hand as she stood next to the bed, her eyes not

meeting mine. "Hey, look at me. I'm fine, really." She nodded, seemingly unconvinced but decided to drop it anyway.

"You must have a *shit*-load of questions to ask."

1

"I do."

She took a seat near my legs and I moved over slightly to make room for her. "Go ahead."

I had no idea where to start.

"How did I get here?" was my first question, "I don't remember escaping, you know—"

"Azalea and I brought you here." She cut me off so I didn't have to say his name which I was grateful for. I didn't really know what to say so I waited for her to continue. "We knew you were gone for way too long and started to get suspicious so we tried to find you. Do you remember seeing a dog? Had a blue collar." She looked at me expectantly and I nodded, the memory coming back to me.

1

"Shit, yeah. It was the last thing I saw before I got knocked out. I remembered it from somewhere but couldn't really put my finger on it." I told her.

1

"That's Masons' dog. He lives in the apartment above the bar you used the bathroom at. He said he saw you leaving and wanted to say hey and lost you, that's when he bumped into us."

1

Now that I thought about it, I remembered the little dog Mason and his boyfriend had adopted a few months ago. In between babysitting days, he got me to look after it one night.

11

I didn't have the chance to say anything before she continued. "We told him it was weird that you were gone for so long and we looked for you together for an hour or so until his dog started sniffing around an alleyway. I didn't think you'd be in there so I called him back but he never listened and that when he started barking. We knew something was up and followed him there and found you lying unconscious on the ground." She explained, looking to me for a reaction. My face was completely stoic.

2

"Did you find him?" I asked, my voice low.

By the reluctant expression on her face I knew Jason had gotten away before they had the chance to get him. "I'm so fucking sorry Gi. We've given his description to the cops with our statement and they have people looking for him. The second they get him onto custody you can ID him and put him behind bars for a while."

6

I nodded, letting the information sink in. I was pleased to know they were searching for him. I'd feel a lot safer knowing he wasn't out there anymore.

"They'll be coming over later to take your statement too."

"Okay, that's fine."

"Oh—and Gianna?"

"Yeah?"

"Did you list your mother or father as your emergency contact on your hospital record?" she asked, a nervous smile plastered onto her face.

2

"No." I told her. Remembering that at some point I was too possessed with anger to bother letting them be in charge of knowing if I was ever in any medical trouble, I didn't think they would've cared.

"Well, because of that. They had to call the number listed under your resume as your only reliable contact besides me."

"Who?" I asked, slightly confused.

Celine parted her lips to answer but before she could, a voice interrupted her from the door.

"Me."

37

"Let's pretend you never lied, so I can give it up all night."

8

*

20

The two of them immediately turned at the sound of my voice. Gianna met my eyes for a little while, surprise flashing through them which I wouldn't have seen if I wasn't so focused on her. Her eyes were only on mine for a few seconds before they shifted back to *anything* else in the room.

Her friend—Celine, I think it was—broke the obviously tense air by clearing her throat and rising from her seat on Gianna's hospital bed. "I'm going to go..." she trailed off, not meeting my eyes either. She bent down and whispered into Gianna's ear and kissed the side of her face. "Will you be okay?" she asked and was instantly reassured by an encouraging smile.

She straightened up and I moved out of her way so she could exit but instead of walking out like I expected, she stared at me for a few seconds. "Don't fuck it up." Her tone was light but I

knew, by the serious expression on her face that she meant the words and I nodded.

18

I closed the door behind her and took a deep breath before walking towards her. It was only five steps, but it felt like a mile, I couldn't get closer soon enough. I cleared my throat and sat down on the small couch next to the bed. Awkward silence lingered in the air and I had no idea how to start a conversation like this but I knew I had to do it if I wanted to have any chance of getting Gianna back in my life.

"We should talk." I told her, at the same time she spoke.

"What are you doing here Alex?"

14

She finally turned to me and I stared deeply into those brown eyes that I've grown accustomed too over the past few months. I could read her like an open book and by the emotions swirling around her orbs, I knew she felt *hurt and angry*.

14

"I needed to see if you were okay." Which was true. As soon as I got the call I dropped everything and made my way here, almost gaining a few speeding tickets in the process. I immediately assumed the worst but from what I could see, it

wasn't all that bad. She looked like she always did despite a few eye bags that she didn't usually have and a couple of scratches on the side of her cheek.

3

I frowned and lifted my hand, carefully grazing the marks and she hissed, pulling back from my touch. "What happened to you?" I asked, hoping I didn't sound too anxious of the answer.

She chuckled lightly and avoided my gaze. "Not important." She murmured, clearly still upset over our misunderstanding earlier.

1

I wasn't an idiot. I knew I should've told her the second Sarah gave me the slightest hint that she was pregnant and I was a fool to string it along for that much time. I also knew I'd have to work extra hard to gain Gianna's trust again. I wanted nothing more than to come out with it and tell her it was all one big fucked up lie—but if I wanted to fix everything between us this conversation had to be done the right way.

"Look at me." I whispered, gripping her face in my hand and tugging it in my direction. "What happened?" I repeated, hoping she'd give me an answer this time.

she sighed and grabbed my hand, taking it off her warm skin and placing it between us so that I was no longer touching her. It hurt, but I tried not to let it show. "I'm not going to feed you

some sob story for pity Alex. You have bigger responsibilities now." Her voice was calm when she spoke but I knew what she was feeling was anything *but* calm.

The same storm in her eyes that lured me in was still there, as bright as day. I was desperate to know what happened to her, but I had to clear the air on my part before we took any more steps forward.

I smiled at her for the first time since I walked in and she frowned in return, confused at my change of mood. "I have so much to tell you."

Seeing the relief flood through Gianna once I told her all about Sarah and her evil ploy to tie us together was the most fascinating thing I had ever witnessed. She was angry, I could tell. But this time, not at me.

"That *psychopathic* bitch." She gasped, more to herself. I leaned back and placed my elbows against my knees, watching intently as she took everything in.

"So you aren't having another baby?"

In as little time as I had known Gianna Vidal—I had never witnessed her as vulnerable as she was now. It made me want to pull her into my lap and kiss her until the flames I was so used to were back inside those mesmerizing eyes of hers.

"No, baby, I'm not." Without hesitance, she pulled on my hand and I stumbled over to her, dropping into her warm, familiar embrace. I felt the tension in my shoulders immediately disappear as she hugged me for what was only a few minutes, but felt like forever.

I lifted my head from its spot in the crook of her neck and advanced closer to her lips, wanting nothing more than to lose myself in the soft feeling of them and with a light tap of encouragement on the back of my head, I filled the space between us and kissed my girl as if it were the last time I could.

It was here, in this moment that I knew my home wasn't that big mansion on the other side of town, it wasn't where I grew up in Italy as a little boy. It was wherever this woman and my kids were. Home was a feeling, not a place. And I felt it whenever I was surrounded by the people who I loved.

I knew this was crazy. Some would call it foolish, but *fuck*, I didn't care. Not one bit. For now, I was happy, my kids would be happy—and that's all that mattered. I could tell they loved her just as much as I did and getting used to her being in our lives more often was something they would eagerly accept.

It wouldn't be easy, but I could handle that. I was in love with Gianna Vidal. And I wanted to scream it out to the whole world.

"You sure you haven't left anything?" I asked again, closing the door behind me.

"Yes Alex, you've asked me that about a hundred times now." She giggled, flopping back onto one of the numerous couches in the living room.

"Just making sure." I mumbled.

After ensuring Gianna was all set to leave the hospital, I gave her the option to come home with me or to be dropped off at her apartment, she chose the former. Something about *'wanting to make up for lost time.'* I made a habit of asking if she was comfortable every few minutes and I couldn't tell if I was being too overbearing—if that was the case, she hadn't mentioned it.

I grabbed a glass of water from the kitchen and emptied out two pills from the little capsule she had. "Here, take this." She swallowed the

meds and looked around the perimeter of the house as I sat next to her.

"Are you completely positive that you're okay?" I couldn't help but ask her again. After she filled me in on what got her into the hospital on the ride here I wanted to kill the bastard for even looking at her.

I hadn't met Sarah's son before. After the stories she constantly spewed about how awful the result of her first marriage was, I knew he wasn't the type of company I wanted to keep.

It didn't surprise me that crazy ran through her family but he had taken it too far. Part of me wondered if Sarah knew this was his plan all along. I shifted uneasily in my chair at the thought and redirected my mind onto something else.

"It's so quiet." Gianna observed, noticing the lack of cries and cartoons that usually buzz in the background.

"My sister took the kids till I got everything sorted around here and Sarah's gone, hopefully for good." My last statement brought an instant smile to her face and I chuckled, shaking my head.

"So we're here all alone?" she asked, standing up before placing herself onto my lap. I quirked an eyebrow at her and she shrugged innocently.

"We are." I confirmed, grasping her hips. She mumbled a sound of approval and began peppering light kisses to my jaw. I attempted to ignore the stir in my pants and pulled her away from me.

She glanced at me with confusion and I placed a hand on her cheek. "We don't have to do this if you aren't completely comfortable yet."

Gianna rolled her eyes as if what I said was completely stupid and resumed her work on my slightly stubbled jaw. I usually opted for a freshly shaven face but couldn't be bothered the past few days. Judging by the lack of complaints, I figured it suited me. "I *need* this right now." She mumbled against my heated skin. My tongue darts out to wet my lips. "I've gone too long without you *touching* me, *tasting* me or *fucking* me and its driven me insane every day. I need this." She didn't need to convince me.

I let out a growl of approval when she began shifting slowly over my shaft. I didn't want our first time in my house to be on my couch of all places, so without another thought I hooked her slender legs around my waist and carried her up the stairs, stopping every few seconds to lay wet kisses down the column of her throat, her soft moans only spurring me on.

I dropped her onto my bed with a bounce and she squealed as I hurriedly got rid of the shirt on her body. I threw it somewhere across the room, my shirt following suit and I dropped to my knees in front of her, removing the plain white panties that she managed to pull off and make sexy.

The view was indescribable. Me on my knees in the presence of a woman whose body deserved to be worshipped, loved and taken care of. A sense of pride washed through me knowing I could give her that.

I parted her wet pussy lips with two of my fingers and groaned at how ready she was for me. "*Fuck* baby. You're *soaking*." I stared at her in awe and wet my lips, my cock strained in my pants, eager to be inside of her but I had to wait. I needed to taste what was mine first.

Without another wasted second, I leaned in and attached my lips to her pussy, reveling in the way she moaned my name into the air. She grabbed my hair and selfishly used my tongue in the most erotic way I had ever experienced. "*Yes yes yes*." She chanted. "Right there."

My hand gripped my pulsating cock as I continued to devour her like she was the last meal on earth. My eyes caught hers and she removed her fingers from their grip on my hair and placing them on her pebbled nipples, playing with them while I watched. I could've come just by watching her help pleasure herself but I knew I wouldn't be satisfied if I didn't end up emptying myself into her at least once today.

"*Fuck* Alex—I'm close, *please* don't stop." Her hips grinding against my face as well as the sight of her pert nipples had cum pooling at the tip of my dick.

I eased a finger into her tightness, adding onto the pleasure she was feeling and she cursed. With a few more pumps of my finger and one leisurely lick of her slit, she came all over my mouth, riding out her orgasm on my face.

A few heavy breaths later, I got up from my place in between her legs. The feeling of her juices on my beard went unnoticed and I smiled happily. "You're fucking heavenly, Gianna." I whispered, placing a kiss onto her ribcage. She moaned tiredly and I chuckled pulling away from her and securing my pants around my hips.

"What are you doing?" she asked, leaning up on her elbows.

"Cleaning up." I shrugged, moving to grab a warm towel from my bathroom before she stopped me with a tug on my arm.

"We aren't done here. I still need that dick." She pushed me back onto the bed and unbuckled my tight pants, pulling them down along with my boxers and setting my erection free.

"You're so hard for me." she murmured, stating the obvious and palming my cock in her hands. I shivered at the contact but it went unnoticed as she focused more on teasing me.

When she saw the needy expression on my face, she crawled onto me and lowered herself onto my awaiting hardness. The feeling of her tight, warm pussy enclosing on me was close to perfection. *Fuck. It was perfection.*

We both took deep breaths as she lowered herself onto me, inch by inch until she was successfully stuffed. She exhaled lightly before moving up and down on my cock, she repeated the motion again and again, my hips rising to meet her

bounces. Skin slapping against skin filled the room and the smell of sex and sweat lingered all over us.

"Just like that baby, ride my cock." I cooed, closing my eyes and placing my hands on her hips to take control. She circled her hips and bit down on her lip to control her moans but I needed to hear her *scream*, which resulted in me fucking her harder and deeper. She was so tight around me and the new feeling made her clench.

"*Fuck*, I'm gonna cum again." She purred, focusing on riding me into oblivion. "Please cum inside of me." the question flew out of her parted lips I scoffed. *As if I wasn't going to.*

I started fucking her harder, dragging her onto my length as I continuously thrust into her until every inch of my cock was lodged so deep in her pussy I was sure she would feel me between her legs with every step she took for the next *week*.

We were fucking like animals. Hard, fast and needy, which was what we both needed right now. My hand found her enlarged clit between us and I circled it with my thumb, bringing her closer to the edge for the second time tonight. "Whose pussy is this?" I asked her, surprising myself at how rough my voice sounded.

"Yours." She moaned, shutting her eyes and tilting her head so far back I knew she was seeing stars. "Say it again." The

demand was clear as day and she repeated herself countless more times before I finally—*finally* felt her cum so hard, it completely soaked my entire cock, coating my balls as it dribbled down my legs. With one last satisfied grunt, I did the same, shooting my entire load into her as she collapsed against me.

Our heavy breathing filled the air for a few minutes and she got off me and I tucked her into my side, stroking her hair which was slightly wet due to our previous activities.

Her snores filled the room instantly and I chuckled at how easy it was to tire her out.

With one last kiss to her forehead, I whispered the words I knew would change everything for us.

"I love you, too Gianna."

38

Oh dear diary, I met a boy."

128

*

7

For the longest time, my theory on love has been conceptualized to be a feeling of overwhelming happiness. It's the stolen glances across a room, when two souls intertwine and everything else ceases to exist. It's the little things like paying attention to one's likes and dislikes, miniscule personality quirks—like making a nervous habit out of biting your nails or sticking to unusual routines.

4

Love, in my eyes, is the sickest form of heartbreak when fate isn't on your side. Fate decides whether you get your way or whether you don't. We often believe bad things happen to bad people because they chose to live an immoral life. But that's bullshit. Sometimes—there isn't an incredible backstory as to how or why people behave the way they do. No justifications, nothing. People are just shitty and that's the way it is.

6

And then there's me. I haven't achieved anything incredible in my eighteen years, haven't solved world hunger or cured cancer. I simply exist. And by luck or fate—whatever, I managed to exist in the same timeline as Alexander Moritello. And if I happened to own a list of great achievements, that would be my very first one.

101

I would go through a thousand hardships if it meant I ended up in this room, with this man, in this exact same position. In my eyes, it was worth it all. Because in the end, what is love if not the journey of darkness until you reached the light together?

3

I took note of my surroundings immediately before opening my eyes, fully prepared to wake up alone. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to feel the warmth of a body behind mine and short steady breaths against the nape of my neck. A heavy familiar arm was wrapped possessively around my waist. In his sleep, Alex ran his hands across the skin of my stomach, leaving behind a trail of goosebumps as he went. A sleepy smile spread across my face at the remembrance at how many countless hours his hands had traced my skin and how it had the same knee-buckling effect each time.

2

I shifted my body and pressed myself even closer to his figure, a sense of déjà vu passing through me. almost a month ago we were in this same position together. Except in a hotel, and not the comfort of his bed. We had come so far since then.

3

A part of me wondered if I should feel ashamed at everything I'd done with this man but I didn't. I couldn't force myself to. Not when he came into my life at the right time and slowly crept his way into my heart. More like fucked his way but, same thing.

18

Shifting out from under his arm, attempted to maneuver out of his hold but he had other ideas, pulling me even tighter towards him. He mumbled out a quick no when I tried to move again and I had to stop myself from cooing out loud at the adorable furrow in his brows.

42

I froze when there was a sudden break in his breathing and exhaled when he turned onto his back. I drank in the sight of his sleepy figure. The small pout on his full lips, releasing even breaths. The bridge of his nose, sitting between what were the

most gorgeous eyes I had ever looked into. Above them, dark lashes curled naturally.

I tugged down the white sheet that clung to his hips and almost moaned at the sight of his chiseled figure bathed in the morning sunlight that wafted through the windows. Alexander may have been a thirty-four-year old man but his body was more defined than anyone else I've ever been with.

He looked almost unreal and I had to blink away my sleepiness to make sure that he actually was here and he was real, and thankfully—mine.

It took all of my strength to not reach down and drag my tongue along the ridges in his abdomen but I held back, wanting him to wake up inside my mouth rather than by teasing kisses.

I made room for myself between his legs—after admiring how well worked out they were—and teasingly traced his slight bulge with the tip of my fingernail, reveling in the way it twitched under my touch. I tugged down his briefs and placed sloppy pecks on the ridge of his dick, watching as his breathing picked up.

With my eyes still on his face I took the entire length of him into my mouth. Almost immediately, he groaned and opened

his eyes. I released him long enough to send a dizzying smile in his direction and winked before going back down on him.

"I must've been a fucking saint in my past life to deserve waking up like this." I swallowed back a laugh at his statement and dragged my hand down the part of him I couldn't fit in my mouth. His hand was buried in my hair, tugging the strands into a makeshift ponytail and burying himself even deeper into my throat.

"Fuck, Gianna." I hummed pleasantly at his approval and removed him from my mouth with a soft pop sound. Alex thrust his hips up, chasing my mouth and I denied him by placing wet kisses on every inch of him. I played that game for a few more seconds until he grabbed my hair and I knew he had enough of my teasing.

Tears burned in my eyes from the stinging in my scalp but I ignored it and kept him lodged in my throat. He would pull me up until only the tip sat in my mouth and I slipped my tongue through the tiny slit, moaning at the salty fluid I collected there.

"Fuck, look at you." He grunted, desperately chasing his orgasm. "On your knees in front of me, taking my cock like you were fucking born for it." The fire burning inside me only intensified at the look of lust within his eyes and a sense of pride washed through me knowing I was the lucky girl who got to keep this man satisfied.

And *god*, was he right. I was born to satisfy this man.

He pushed my head down until I gagged over his length, causing him to release a low growl which sent shivers down to my pussy which still trembled from how long he kept me up last night. I was convinced we made up new positions with how he bent be all over the surface of his shower. I shuddered at the memory.

I ran my tongue along the slit as he let me back up and the tingling sensation I felt only deepened with each moan he let out. Nothing had ever sounded as sexy and appealing as hearing a grown man succumb to his knees for you.

"Breathe through your nose, *tesoro*. That's it, baby." He instructed, noticing the tears in my eyes. I complied, and when he allowed me back up, I gasped for air before being shoved down again. It was intense and rough and raw as every sexual encounter with Alex was and I loved every brutal second of it.

I went down one last time before a harsh grunt made its way through him and his hot cum shot down my throat. I swallowed instantly, taking a second to cringe at the tangy taste.

I had no idea how women swallowed without wanting to throw up after. The idea that cum actually tasted good had to have only been true in movies and books.

But, this was neither, so I rushed to the bathroom to brush my teeth to rid my mouth of the taste, not before hearing Alexander's sleepy chuckles which brought a smile to my face.

Minutes later, I arrived back into the room, showered and ready for the day ahead. And by ready, I mean I slipped on one of Alex's casual shirts which stopped mid-thigh. He stood in front of a large mirror, fiddling with a tie, the muscles in his back rippling with every movement. His tongue jutted out of his mouth in focus and I smiled at how adorable he looked. How could someone go from sexy and dominating to fucking adorable in just a few minutes? Only Alex.

"Having trouble?" I asked, leaning against the wall. He turned to face me, a defeated expression on his face and I walked up to him, fixing the tie for myself. as I finished up the last knot, I felt his heated gaze on me and I looked up into those azure eyes that I had grown so accustomed to, and grinned. "What?" I stepped away from the warmth his body radiated but his hands stopped me, holding me close to his figure. "You're mine now, yeah? like officially." I wanted to point out the fact that he was technically still married but—*minor details*.

For as long as I'd known Alex, every time he spoke, it was with an undeniable confidence. but at this moment, I sensed the insecurity in his voice and wanted to laugh at how he could be unsure of my feelings for him.

"I was yours the second I walked into your home." I reassured, allowing him to relax. "House." he mumbled. "Since you walked into my house. it's only a home now because you've made it that way in such little time." Tears welled up in the corners of my eyes, threatening to spill out at his confession.

When did I become so sentimental?

Being with Alex would come with a lot of complications, I knew that—yet it was a risk I was one hundred percent willing to take. I was young, some might say my decision made me naïve, but I couldn't care less. I was old enough to know what I wanted at this man in front of me was exactly that.

I opted for giving him a shy smile in return and that seemed like enough for him. "I love the kids." I told him, already wanting to see the little ones.

"They love you too. Hard not to." I rubbed the rough stubble on his jaw with my thumb and pulled him into me, wanting nothing more than to stay in the warmth of his protective embrace. We hold onto each other so tight that I don't know who is who holding who up but for a moment, I'm scared to let go. Terrified to open my eyes and find out that this was just some crazy dream and Alex isn't really here.

But he is. Always has been and always will be.

"Alright I've got to run. I have a meeting in twenty minutes so I'll be back in an hour." He released me and took a step back, glancing at the time on his wrist. He had an apologetic expression on his face as if him going to work upset me. "I really wish I could call it off but—" I dismissed the sentence with a wave of my hand. "No, I'll be fine. Go make million dollar deals." I grinned up at him and his eyes softened. "I'll have breakfast with me when I'm back so you can take your pills on a full stomach okay?" I immediately declined despite the fluttering in my stomach but he wasn't having it.

"Nutella pancakes with strawberries and a blueberry bagel right?"

He remembered my order from the hotel. A heat enveloped my cheeks in remembrance of that weekend and by the sly smirk on his face, I knew Alex was thinking about our little room service escapade too.

"Are you feeling any better today? I hope I wasn't too hard on you last night." he murmured, tucking a stray piece of my overly long black hair behind my ear. I shook my head and smiled. "No. you were good, it was perfect." I patted his chest lightly and stepped back watching a bright and beautiful grin illuminate his face.

"So how about that bagel?"

I nodded in confirmation and he lightly pecked my forehead before calling out one last goodbye and departing through his door. Lazily, I flopped back onto the comfortable bed and scrolled through a few texts from Celine.

I read over the conversation and chuckled lightly before throwing my phone onto some random spot on the bed and swinging my legs over the side of it. I took two steps at a time as I trailed downstairs and into the large the kitchen area after grabbing an interesting looking book from the vast range in the library. The kitchen was completely spotless as usual, as if no one used it regularly which was unsettling seeing as the room was packed with modern, state of the art appliances and a huge fully stocked fridge.

I grabbed a bottle of water and took one of my pills to lessen the headache I was starting to form then sat on one of the many stools surrounding the island in the middle of the kitchen and began to read the book I brought down. I only lasted around forty-five minutes before the front door opened and I instantly smiled. "Back so soon?" I asked, patiently waiting for the echo of Alex's shoes against the tiled floors but it never came. Instead, I heard the distinct and familiar sound of heels strutting this way and the hairs on the back of my head stood in awareness. *Shit.* "I *fucking* knew it!"

Sarah's blotchy face came into view and I cursed inwardly at the sight of her. Gone were the tight dresses and obnoxiously short skirts—instead, she wore an oversized hoodie and sweatpants. Who paired high heels with sweats? *I had no idea*. Her normal full face of make-up was completely bare—not including the red tear streaks.

Before I had the chance to do literally *anything*, she marched up to and I stood behind the island, attempting to forge a much needed barrier between us. "S-sarah, what are you doing here?" I asked, attempting to sound stronger than I actually felt. My head was still pounding and she was crazy enough to strike while I was vulnerable.

"This is my *house*! What are *you* doing here? Besides the obvious being a home wrecking *whore*!" her voice was shrill and did nothing to help the ache I was feeling. Usually, I'd be up for a spat with Sarah. I had a *lot* of pent up frustration and her being the cause of it all made her the perfect target, but right now I didn't need to strain myself more.

I knew Sarah didn't live here anymore. Alex told me he practically threw her shit out yesterday and what a mess she was in because of it. I had no idea if she knew how her son was tied to me *or* if she was aware of his insanity—but judging by the feral look in her eyes, the apple didn't fall far from the tree.

"Sarah, I can explain-" I had no chance to finish my sentence before she was screaming at me again. I was thankful that she stuck to her side of the kitchen, luckily, I had the knives on mine in case she decided to attack me, I wouldn't put that past her.

"Explain? Yeah, go ahead! Go right *the fuck* ahead. Explain to me how I invited you into *my* house to take care of *my* kids and you were whoring around my husband instead! Using him for his money like a true slut!"

I raised my hand to silence her and apparently the gesture seemed to work. Despite telling myself to stay calm, I couldn't help the anger bubbling up inside of me. "*First* of all, I do *not* need your husband nor *any* man for money. This isn't the 1950s Sarah—where I come from, women make their *own* money." She scoffed irritably but I wasn't done. "And second, it was never my intention to hurt you." Which was the truth. Sarah was a bitch from the beginning but no one deserved to be cheated on, even though she's a below average mother and was a pretty shitty wife. For all I know, she could've been fooling around too and we had no idea.

"You're disgusting. I might be able to forgive my husband but you are never allowed back onto our premises ever again. I will make sure of it." She sneered, eyes so wide I could've sworn they were about to pop out.

That's it.

"Alexander *left* you." I practically screamed. "Should I say it fucking slower so you can get it through your thick head? He *left* you. That's it. Done. Over. This isn't your property and this isn't your house. So you can crawl back to whatever hole you came from because we don't want you here. You're a shit mom and an even shittier human." Her jaw dropped but I continued. "You don't deserve Alex or his kids and you sure as fuck don't deserve their love. You're lucky they're young enough to not understand why their mother neglects them so much because if I were them? I would hate you. So for *once*, open your eyes and not your legs—if you had done that sooner maybe you still would've had a chance with Alexander." By now I was breathing heavily and unevenly, that being the only sound that filled the room.

For a fleeting second, I could see the bitchy exterior deteriorate from her and it made my heart clench. Maybe I went too far.

I sighed and closed my eyes, inhaling. "Look, I didn't mean—"

But my apology lingered in the air, and before I knew it, the old Sarah was back. And she was charging.

Right for me.

I shut my eyes once more and waited for the impact, but just like *déjà vu*, it never came.

39

"Romance is not dead, if you keep it just yours."

11

I would argue that every person on earth has a moment they can pinpoint in their life as the *oh shit* moment. The *oh shit* moment refers to some pivotal event in a person's life that changes the course of their existence from that moment forward.

19

That something doesn't have to be to be mind-blowing or completely unforgettable. In most cases, it isn't. The moment could be tear-jerking, disturbing or something completely trivial like accidentally spilling coffee on another person or running out of gas, you get the gist of it.

Standing exactly as I was in Alexander Moritello's kitchen, I knew that this was my great *oh shit* moment.

"Jesus Christ woman, are you out of *fucking* mind?"

1

Watching Serafina Moritello, my savior, struggling to hold back a shrieking Sarah was just about as *oh shit* as life could get.

Is that a common thing around here? The Moritello siblings getting me out of shitty situations that could've been avoided? I really needed to take a crash course on staying out of trouble.

As soon as the female voice resonated with Sarah she immediately gasped and made a full three-sixty to face her. A look of pure shock and the slightest tinge of embarrassment replacing the blazing anger from a few seconds ago. I stood completely still, eyes open and mouth wide as I watched the scene unfold in front of me. My heart fell from its place in my chest all the way down to my ass and was still *hammering*.

"Oh, Serafina? Oh my god, I- what are you doing here?" she stuttered, attempting to hide the fact that she was just about to pounce on me like a wild animal.

"Oh don't play coy Sarah. It's pathetic to watch and quite honestly? You're getting too old." In all the time I'd come to be acquainted with the woman who hired me, I had never seen her so slack-jawed and speechless. If I wasn't still reeling from what was about to happen minutes ago—I would've laughed at the baffled expression on her face.

"This is all some kind of misunderstanding." She babbled, desperately waving her hands through the air. "This, *this*

slut made my husband and I drift apart and I just, I needed to.... We were talking it out I know Alex would never cheat but I had to see for myself—"

Serafina raised her perfectly manicured hand in the air, instantly silencing her. "Cut the shit. My brother told me all about your foolish plans to trap him with you, you're lucky I'm not calling the police for trespassing on property you aren't allowed on." The scolding tone she spoke with would've sent direct shivers down my spine had she been talking to me.

After lightly shoving an incoherent Sarah away from me, Serafina gave me a small smile and rubbed her hand down my back. "You alright, sweetheart?" she asked, a frown replacing her smile. I nodded, still confused—although grateful—about why and how she was here.

As if sensing my dilemma, she began to speak again, directing her attention to Sarah who leaned idly against the counter, completely avoiding my gaze, her face gone completely pale. "During your stupid little *kamikaze* mission you forget to recall the cameras set up all over the perimeter of the property, now imagine the confusion I felt when my brother sent me a text to get here as soon as I could because having you around could never be good and thank *fuck* I did."

This time to spoke to me, "He'll be here. Ten minutes' tops." She whispered.

"Thank you." I replied, finally snapping out of the confused daze I was in.

I wanted to yell at Sarah. I wanted to scream at her for having such a fucked up son who tried to literally *kill* me. I wanted to scream at her for being such a fucked up person. And I wanted to scream at *me* for taking this job when Celine told me I was walking into a hostage situation. *Who knew she'd end up being right—sort of, anyway.*

Woke up this morning to great dick and now I'm in the middle of a cat fight with my supposed boyfriend's ex-wife. *I should've stayed asleep.*

"You can't possibly be taking this homewrecker's side." Sarah huffed, her anger boiling to the surface once again. "She came in here and *seduced* my husband, she, she manipulated him into having sex with her like a *filthy whore*—"

"Enough." My gasp was intertwined with a booming voice that I knew all too well. Immediately my heart rate slowed down, despite the murderous look on Alexander's face. I knew I was safe.

He stood in the door of the kitchen, oozing male testosterone and obvious displeasure. You could tell by the stiffness in his shoulders that the love-struck man I was with all this time was gone. Instead replaced by the cruel heartless CEO he was to the

rest of New York City. I don't know if I should be scared or turned on. *A little bit of both.*

And by the change in Sarah's breathing, she knew it too.

"You dare come into my house and throw around disgusting accusations at my future wife?" he asked, leaving no room for an answer. The cold tone he used was effective in chilling the air in the already cold room.

"Future wife?" I whispered, a little shocked at his statement.

He glanced at me for a few seconds and replied in a low voice so only I could hear. "We'll talk about it later it sounded badass in my head."

I nodded and regarded him with an encouraging thumbs up.

"Fuck yeah." His sister exclaimed at the same time Sarah released a shaky choked sound, placing a hand on her chest.

"W-what? Alex, this has gone on too long my love, we swore to be together forever why would you let some shrew come between that?" she asked.

"Excuse me, I'm literally right here." I raised my hand in her direction.

Sarah's insults and words of shame did nothing to deter me. I knew who I was and where I stood in this situation, I wasn't

about to let own insecurities get the best of me. in the end, I knew I'd win.

She ignored me anyway and took a step toward Alex who looked at her with such distaste it was humiliating. "I've apologized multiple times and-"

He let out an aggravated sigh and ran his thumb and index finger over the creases on his forehead. "An apology will not cut it Sarah. This is over. It has been for a while but we failed to acknowledge it in the interest of our kids but it is obviously taking a toll on them as well. Accept what it is and move on, you are making a fool out of yourself once again and I can't promise I will let it slide one more time. I'm giving you the opportunity to leave with what little shred of dignity that you still have or stay and face even worse consequences. I do not want to see you nor do I want to hear from you anywhere other than a courthouse. My lawyer will be in contact with you as soon as I make sure there isn't a single hair harmed on Gianna's head. And for your sake—you sure as fuck should hope there isn't."

Pride swelled in my chest at his words and I couldn't help but stare up at this man in complete awe at the way he handled the situation. The three of us surrounding him were in shock as silence enveloped the kitchen for a few short minutes.

I snuck a glance at Sarah who already seemed to have her eyes set on me. I tensed up, waiting for another shrewd comment but it never came. Instead she wiped at the corners of her dripping eyes, a defeated expression on her face.

"Congratulations." She muttered, giving Alex a nod which he returned and walking out of the kitchen.

I didn't have a chance to bring up her son, and neither did I want to. I knew Alexander would take care of it. He'd take care of me, always had.

He looked at me, silently asking me if I was okay, but before I could let him know, his sister beat me to it.

"Now, when the *fuck* were you going to tell me you're banging the babysitter?"

"You alright, darling?" Alexander asked for the fourth time in the last half an hour. I placed my hand on top of his large one, stroking it lightly.

"I'm fine, really. I think I've reached my quota on craziness. I've faced enough to last a life time." I laughed attempting to ease the tension that was straining the room.

After taking the time to explain our situation to Serafina, who had her mouth hanging open throughout the duration of us talking, she took a minute to process it all before telling me

she's okay with it as long as I don't turn out to be Sarah 2.0. which I guaranteed wasn't going to happen.

"Yes, you have, I apologize for it all." He said, taking the seat next to me. "I somehow feel as if this is my fault." I interrupted him by shaking my head.

"None of it was all your fault. I doubt you knew any of this would have happened and you would've helped in any way you could if you had known." He glanced at me through thick lashes, searching my face for any hint of a lie, which he wasn't going to find. Once satisfied with my confession, he visibly relaxed.

"I just don't want you to go into this...relationship, with any regrets." He mumbled, absentmindedly playing with my fingers. He traced delicate patterns along my skin and the contrast of his huge, tanned hands against my small nimble ones had me transfixed as I answered him.

"I have none. Only that I didn't get to throw Sarah into a pit of fire but there's always next week!" I chimed happily, hoping to lighten the mood which worked perfectly because his booming laughter filled the air a second later.

"There won't be one. She won't be back here. I saw it in her eyes—for the first time in years she looked utterly defeated."

"Do you feel bad?"

"No. Her persistence only got her hurt in the end. If she had listened the first few times it wouldn't have been that bad."

I nodded in understanding. I could only hope Sarah could get the help she needed to be better for their kids.

I decided to change the topic of conversation onto something lighter. "So, future wife huh?" I teased, nudging his side with my elbow.

Alex pursed his lips and turned to the side but I could still see the expression on his face. Was Alexander Moritello, billionaire, CEO and father, *shy? Shit. He was.*

"Oh my God, are you blushing?" I asked, taking his face in my hands and turning him to me. *He so was.* I chuckled at seeing him like this for the first time. The man who always had the equivalent of a *resting bitch face* was blushing and it was all because of *me.* "No."

"Yes you are." I smiled. "I would never."

"Your cheeks are totally pink right now." My grin grew wider at the annoyance flashing through his eyes.

"Quiet."

"Let me look for my phone, I need to photograph this moment."

Before I could get up in search of my device, Alex grabbed onto my wrist. "Do that, and I'll leave your ass red for the next week." That shut me up.

After a few minutes of comfortable silence and me trying my best not to bring of the crimson colour of his cheeks, his eyebrows furrowed together, a look of deep thought.

I turned to him and ran my fingers through his thick black hair.

"Everything okay?" I asked, my own expression mirroring his.

"Is that something you'd be interested in?"

What? "What are you talking about?"

He cleared his throat. "Marriage. To me. in the future at least."

Oh. I wouldn't lie and say the thought of being married to this wonderful man in front of me hadn't crossed my mind, because obviously it had. He was every girl's dream and just getting to *kiss* him made me feel a sense of joy and calmness like nothing else had.

Even though I hadn't known this man long, I knew I wanted him in my life forever. The whole packaged deal which included three wonderful kids who had made a home so close to my heart.

Being Gianna Moritello would be heaven on earth. But I was only twenty two —and I had a whole world out there to conquer before I earned a ring on my finger.

"Never mind, I should never have brought it up." Assuming Alex took my silence for a no I immediately spoke up.

"No. No, I'm glad you did. Nothing would make me happier than marrying you in the future." I reassured, lacing our fingers together. His shoulders relaxed an inch and he sighed in relief.

"But." I said, "I'd like to get my degree first. Do the whole college thing, you know? It's always been important to me." I winced, worried he would reject the idea. Which was foolish of me, I knew I'd be supported in whichever route I chose.

"Of course. Degree first, and then I get you to be my wife, yes?"

A future that included me being married to the hot dad I had the luck of babysitting for?

Heck yes.

40

Even when the night changes, it will never change, me and you."

55

Two months later;

3

"Gianna. Gianna, wake up." A voice whispers, shaking me and I groan at the interruption of my sleep.

I roll onto my side, black hair matted onto the side of my face and look up at a blurry Celine. I rubbed my eyes with the palm of my hand until she came into focus.

"Is the building on fire?" I asked, my voice still groggy.

"What? No."

"Is someone dead?"

"No." she frowns.

"Then why are you waking me up so early on a Saturday morning?" I groaned, shoving a pillow over my head to block out the blaring sunlight.

13

"Because, bitch, it's not every day you turn nineteen. Get your ass up."

338

I sat up abruptly, my loose curls from the half-assed braid I put in my hair last night fell haphazardly over my shoulders. I grabbed my phone from its place on my nightstand and took note of the date. Sure enough, it was my birthday.

5

"Shit, you're right. It completely slipped my mind."

I scrolled through a few messages, one from my dad and a few from three of my other friends. Which I was totally fine with, who has time and mental capacity for more than three friends *anyway*.

3

"Happy Birthday my little homewrecker!" Celine suddenly yelled, from her new place at the edge of my bed.

54

"*Homewreck-*"

3

"Look I baked you a cupcake!"

I let the homewrecker comment go, *for now*, to stare at the goopy sludge on a plate that held on single unlit candle that looked like it was about to topple over.

"What is that?" I asked, grimacing at the sight.

2

Her smile dropped. "A cupcake."

"No. no it isn't. What is that." I asked again.

1

"I just told you—hanging out with your elderly boyfriend has made you senile. It's a *cupcake*."

19

"Okay first of all, I'm going to let that go because it's too early for violence and secondly, emphasizing the word *cupcake* isn't going to turn whatever that is." I pointed at the mess with a raised eyebrow. "Into one."

1

She gasps, "You are *such* an asshole, if you won't eat it I will."

I smirked and nodded, forcing her to go along with what she said and placing the sludge into her mouth, chewing for two seconds before she gagged and swallowed it down forcefully.

"Tastes good?" I asked.

Celine coughed into her hand and tried to blink back the tears in my eyes, she mumbled a quick "mhm" although I could see the need to throw up.

2

"Okay fine I'm a shit baker. Postmates it is." She picked up her phone off my bed and we decided on a breakfast place to order in.

Twenty minutes later, we both sat around the kitchen counter, munching on pancakes and streaks of bacon with cups of decaf coffee which I only drink—instead of regular coffee, to salvage my sleeping schedule.

2

"So, what's on the agenda today?" I ask, tapping my nails against the counter which causes Celine's gaze to drop down to them.

"First, nails. You're in desperate need of a manicure."

5

"Gee, thanks."

"The second appointment is a surprise." She wiggles her eyebrows and I feel my stomach churn. I *hate* surprises.

9

"Cel.." I start, my voice a warning.

The last time she gave me a birthday surprise I ended up drunk, throwing up expired taco bell over the Brooklyn bridge in a mini skirt at two a.m.

33

She waves her hand dismissively as if she knew what I was thinking about. "Oh, come on. It's nothing like that this time. You'll love it I promise." She winked.

I highly doubted that.

*

"What colour are you going for?" I ask, my eyes scanning the wide selection of nail polish colours. I take my time scrutinizing each one as if I'd choose any colour other than white.

"Hmm." Celine tapped her chin in thought.

"White?" she asked the same time I suggested it.

I swayed my feet back and forth in the warm foot tub, cringing at the feel of tiny tadpoles attaching to my skin. "This feels weird." I say, glancing over at Celine who has her head tipped back against the chair.

8

"They're eating off callouses its relaxing, just enjoy it."

1

Eventually the slimy feeling became slightly more enjoyable and I sighed, relaxing into a more comfortable position. Two women sat on either side of us, attending to our nails.

"Have any plans with Daddy today?" I opened my eyes and turned my head to glare at Celine. Knowing she wasn't talking about my *actual* father.

5

"No. he doesn't know it's my birthday, never told him." I shrugged. Alexander had texted me this morning to check up on me and let me know we couldn't see each other today, something about having a few extra business meetings which I completely understood.

33

The past two months had been incredible and freeing. I spent most of my free days lounging around his house in one of his old t-shirts and some sweats, occasionally playing with the kids. Not because I had to babysit them, but because I wanted to and I could.

When we first broke the news to them I was nervous. I didn't want to seem as if I was trying to replace their mother but Elena and Luca are still too young to comprehend the intensity

of the situation and just seemed eager to have me around more often.

6

Although Luca mumbled something about me not being his girlfriend anymore because he couldn't share me with his father.

115

Alex and I don't show any affection in front of them just in case they weren't ready for that yet which was okay with me, whatever kept him and those children happy would keep me content too.

Celine nodded, a small suspicious smile on her face but I ignored it, instead focusing on the thought of seeing my man soon.

8

*

"Celine, no."

"Yes, come on."

"I am not doing this."

I slapped her hand, attempting to loosen the hold she had on my wrist.

"Yes you are, it won't hurt *that* bad."

"You're already on the chair wearing nothing but a sheet, step one complete."

"I want to go home." I knew I was acting like an insolent child but waxing, was the worst pain.

18

"We're already here babe."

While Celine and I bickered for a few more minutes, the door to our appointment room was opened and in walked a middle aged woman with a short purple bob and a nose ring hanging from her septum. She wore a nametag with the name *Alyssa* stamped onto it.

11

"Hello, ladies." She spoke with a pronounced new Yorker accent. "Celine, it's good to see you." She brought Celine in for a quick hug and turned to me. "You must be Gianna." At my nervous smile she chuckled. "First time, huh? Don't be worried, I promise it doesn't hurt all that bad."

"Ready for your Brazilian?" my best friend asked, holding back her own laugh from the seat next to me.

34

"Do I have a choice?" I ask, looking around the classy salon. All the colours were a light pastel and suited the calming vibe perfectly. *Not*. I was a tremor away from full on shaking.

"Well, sit back and say goodbye to your waxing virginity." She mumbled, concealing a laugh with a devious smile that made my stomach curl up in knots. I have a sinking suspicion I'm going to hate this.

2

"You'll love it." She says, smoothing down my hair. *Yeah, I doubt it.*

2

Alyssa returns with her supplies and begins conversing with me as she fiddles with different wax melts. "Since this is your first time I promise to make it as painless as possible." She sounded sincere and I let out a breath of relief.

"So on a scale from one to ten how painful will it be?"

"Eh, nine." She shrugged nonchalantly.

19

My heart fell to my ass and I groaned, covering my eyes with my arm.

1

She explained the process to me in detail which only made me jumpier. Was I overreacting? Definitely not. The technician clapped her hands together and smiled. "For the next half an hour your vag is under my control. Let's get this started." I couldn't help but laugh, not expecting her to say that which made my nerves lessen a great amount. She pursed her lips together and they twitch with entertainment.

"Don't be shy, spread those legs for me, spread 'em wide."

81

What the fuck? I'm at a loss for words but do as I'm told anyway. Even though this feels like I'm in some cheap low-cut porno. I looked at Celine but she just winked at me and I rolled my eyes. "Calm down, Gi."

1

I gave her a hard stare. "Calm down? I feel like I'm about to get my ass ate."

4

"We do that too, if you're interested." Alyssa commented as if she was announcing the weather and my head snapped to her.

71

"Ass waxing, not eating." she gave me a *duh* look and I closed my eyes, embarrassed.

21

"You're going to want to pull your knees back a bit—yeah, just like that. Perfect." I pull them back further so the technician can apply the wax better. Even though I'm in a completely exposed position I can't help but laugh lightly at how funny this memory will be when I look back on it in a few years., which lessens my embarrassment slightly and I began to relax.

2

"Take a deep breath." Alyssa instructs, "I'll rip them off on the count of three."

I nod.

"One."

I suck my bottom lip under my teeth.

"Two."

"*Fuck.*" I jerk back as much as I can without completely falling off. "You *said* three." I hissed, shutting my eyes as if that'll somehow take away the stinging sensation from below.

That *hurt*. The pain is so brutal; unlike anything I've ever felt before.

9

She shrugs. "Easier that way." Before I have the chance to comment, Celine rounds the table and gawks at my freshly waxed goodies. "Oh that's fantastic. Alyssa, you are a goddess."

20

I roll my eyes just as she lowers my legs till their dangling off, then lightly taps my knees. "You did great. Enjoy the rest of your day." the woman scurries out of the room and I rush to get dressed despite the stinging sensation I still feel.

3

I wince at the tender feeling and Celine snickers. "Don't be such a baby. Pretty hurts." I send her a look over my shoulder and begin wiggling into my jeans.

1

"Tell me why we had to do this anyway?" she looks up from her phone and opens her mouth for a few seconds before closing it. "Take it as a birthday surprise, although not that fun but the outcome is amazing. And anyway, you had nothing else to do."

3

She had a point. If Celine never dragged me out I'd probably still be in bed, wasting away the day until I could see Alex tomorrow.

"I guess. Where are we off to next?" I ask, collecting my purse and following her out the door, watching as she types away on her phone.

1

"Okay, unless you're texting me the answer, I'm taking your phone away." But before I could reach for it she snatched it away and I eyed her suspiciously. "Why are you being so weird."

2

She laughs, waving me off with her hand. "We are going to pick Azalea up from the airport, her plane is arriving in twenty minutes."

Celine's girlfriend flew across the country to visit her parents and has been there for the past two weeks—much to my best friend's dismay.

The drive to the airport took less time than I thought it would. "I think you're driving the wrong way." I pointed out, turning my neck to point at the *Airport* sign we just drove past but Celine just stayed silent, a small smile on her face.

20

We drove into the private aircraft section behind the airport and more confusion settled into me, that is until we round the corner and my jaw instantly drops.

3

Standing a few feet in front of us was Alexander, behind him was a giant private jet, bigger than anything I had ever seen. My eyes widened and I felt my heart constrict at the sight of him.

26

Celine's hand lightly tapped my jaw. "Mouth closed honey, you'll catch flies." She murmured teasingly but the taunt flew right over my head as I continued to shamelessly check out Alex.

1

"The suspense is *killing* me." Celine whined from her place in the driver's seat. "What are you waiting for? Get out there and see him."

I didn't need to be told twice. My feet moved before my brain could catch up and I was barreling towards his looming figure with fast steps, I decided on skipping the last two and instead launched myself into his awaiting arms, attaching my legs around his waist.

I heard a distant squeal in the background, but decidedly ignored it, opting to shift myself in his embrace so I could look into his eyes.

"Hi." I whispered, nibbling on my bottom lip to avoid smiling too big.

Alex's eyes crinkled on the sides with his grin, he brought his hand up, now holding me to him with one hand behind my back.

"How's my girl?"

I couldn't help but smile anyway. "Better now." I murmured, bringing my lips down on his to tangle in a heated kiss. It lasted about a minute before I heard a loud piercing sound in the background. I jumped slightly and looked over at Celine who waved frantically as she drove off and we both laughed as the car moved further away.

I pulled my head out of the crook of Alex' neck and whispered my question, not wanting to break the bubble we were in.

"What are you doing here?"

"Well, I just so happen to have a private jet that hasn't been in use for a while and figured we could use a little alone time for the weekend. What do you think?" his eyes twinkled as he awaited my answer and I felt myself falling for the man all over again.

How was this my life?

"Are you being for real?" I asked, still in a hushed voice.

"You bet, baby. Come on." He let go of me and I immediately missed the closeness. "I got Celine to pack your luggage with everything you might need for the next few days. She was extremely helpful after the initial squealing and pestering me for details."

I let out a laugh and glanced at the cluster of suitcases. "Where are we going?"

Alex grabbed my hand and linked our fingers together. "I guess you'll have to wait and see."

"*We're in the Maldives?*" I practically screamed, my face smushed against the jet window as I gazed out at the most crystal blue water. I had just woken from a long nap and knew I must've looked questionable with my hair sticking out at every angle but I couldn't bring myself to care.

I was so hopped up on adrenaline that I lunged from my seat opposite Alex' smiling figure and latched myself onto him. "Are you kidding? This is so insane."

He drew lazy circles around my back and grinned. "I think I heard you mentioning something about this place being on your bucket list? I couldn't help myself."

I felt my eyes go heavy with unshed tears. "I love you, you know that? Thank you, this is incredible." I made sure to maintain eye contact so he knew just how much this meant to me.

"Qualsiasi cosa per te piccola." I sagged against him, leaning into the tender kiss that he placed on my lips and knew that this would be the most memorable few days of my life.

Epilogue

"My hand, was the one you reached for, all throughout the Great War."

39

Spending time way from civility with an attractive man who easily resembles a walking aphrodisiac could only mean one thing and one thing only.

1

Sex. Lots of it.

21

Alex and I had spent the last two hours since our arrival, christening the luxurious bungalow we were to be staying in for the next two weeks. I barely had time to take note of the stunning building before I was pushed up against the closed door and ravished repeatedly, which wasn't out of character for Alex.

5

Although I was fairly certain the Egyptian cotton sheets were top quality as I had spent quite some time on them already. In

my current position I stared at the ceiling which reflected the tantalizing image of Alex and I, our bodies intertwined. Was there anything more alluring than a mirror above the bed you were sleeping in?

4

"Alex" I sighed, "I don't think I could take another one." I halfheartedly complained, although who could refuse another orgasm.

2

I'm too weak to move but Alex has other plans. He plays with me, gently tracing the lines and inside my folds with his index finger. The act itself feels feathery and light, almost soothing. I watch his gaze as he studies the swollen area. I feel absolutely no shame in being spread out before him. There is something so comforting in being open with your sexuality in front of a partner.

5

"You're so pink." He murmured, resting his head on my hip, "Does it hurt?"

31

I placed my hand in his dark hair, pushing it away from his forehead. "No, it's kind of relaxing if you go slow."

He smiled lazily and moved to a new position, between my legs. My thighs spread apart on their own and he slowly lowered his mouth to my inner thigh, collecting the mixture of our juices with his tongue. The act was extremely sexy and I smiled contentedly as he made his way back to the center of my pussy and began laying tender kisses on my clit.

I love that he's so comfortable with my body. this man knows exactly how to please a woman.

2

there's no rush to the way he eats me. he takes his time lapping at me with gentle soft strokes. I hardly move when my orgasm appears after thee few minute build up. he keeps the slow and steady pace the entire time, working me through it until I shatter with a full body tremor, completely spent for the time being.

7

Alex rises from his place between my thighs and crawls up my body to lay a sweet soft kiss on my lips.

"You did so good for me baby." He whispers, staring into my eyes. I couldn't look away if I tried. how was this my life?

4

I gaze longingly at the glistening waves just outside the patio doors. They were a striking blue, so clear and inviting. I couldn't wait to dip in. "what are you thinking about?" Alex asks circling his thumb above the skin on my hip. I let out a sigh and closed my eyes. the intimate touch causes a swarm of butterflies to swirl in my stomach.

"Just how good you are to me." I'm not sure what I did to deserve this but I'd do it a thousand times again if it meant I got to be here with you." the smile he gave me was blinding and I found myself wishing to see it every day for the rest of my life.

"There is nothing I wouldn't do for you." He places a delicate kiss on my collarbone. "Witnessing the joy in your eyes after what I've done for you today is the biggest reward. If I could see that smile on your face every day, It would be the biggest honour."

He melts me.

"Now, enough of that. Why don't you go and slip something nice on? I have a surprise for you at dinner tonight." He swats my bum, and I squeal, my laughter filtering into the air.

Life could not be better.

An hour later, I wore a beautiful summer dress that fell all the way down to my ankles. The intricate flower design was

captivating and I adored the way it hugged my figure. By the look on my mans face, I could tell he loved it to.

He stroked the light stubble on his face. The memory of it being between my thighs only hours ago was still fresh in my mind, and I tried not to say fuck it and stay here the whole trip. This beautiful island had to be explored.

"Should we just forget the dinner so we can stay here, and I can make you my dinner instead?"

"Tempting." I smirked, "but I'd hate to miss out."

He snapped out of his lust filled daze and grabbed my hand. "si. You have a point, let's get going before I change my mind."

I grinned and placed my hand in his outstretched one, linking our fingers together as we walked off the front deck and onto a beautiful cobble stone path lined with lit torches that paved the way for us. A few steps into our walk, my feet began to ache, and I immediately regretted wearing the strappy heels Celine had packed for me.

Before I had the chance to even look in Alex's direction. I was being lifted into the air and into his strong arms. I turned my face to him and gave him questioning look.

He shrugged. "What? You looked uncomfortable and I thought I'd help."

My smile turned into full blown laughter, and I rested my head against his chest. As we round the corner, my jaw drops. My eyes widen in surprise as I take in the scene before me, wondering how he made this happen while we were still lounging in the bungalow.

I'm greeted with red and White Rose petals scattered along the stone path. The glowing torches have been dimmed, allowing a few candles to light up the table before us in a soft glow.

"Alex!" I gasped, unable to look away. He set me down and I wobbled on my feet, trying to gain back my balance. Clutching his shoulders, I turned to him.

"When did you do this? I asked. "None of it was here when we arrived."

"I gave specific instructions to the resort and they set it all up while we were...occupied."

"This is stunning. I can't believe you did this for me." Tears sprung to my eyes but I willed them back down, this was a happy moment.

"Believe it, baby. Compared to what you deserve, this is only the beginning. Now come on, I'm starved for real food before I get to my dessert back in our room."

I gripped the back of his neck before he could move an inch and pulled it down for a lingering kiss, reminding myself that I still had days to thank him. I was so lucky.

I shake my head, blinking a few times. I can't believe how thoughtful he was to set this up.

Alex pulled out my chair and walked over to his, taking a seat. A waiter arrived shortly, introducing himself to us as we went over the menu. Everything was high end, and I didn't seem particularly drawn to escargot. I looked to Alex, who prattled off about wine samples.

"As enticing as your menu looks, I think my lady and I will just go for a simple cheeseburger and fries." He said, shutting the booklet and handing it back to the waiter who spluttered at his request. I couldn't hold back my grin.

"A burger sir? Are you sure? We supply multiple local delicacies that you might enjoy instead." I doubt he was used to clients who didn't request intricate meals.

"No, thank you. I think we'll stick with something simple tonight."

The waiter, Michel, hurried away in a rush, our soft laughter following him down the path. "I think we broke him." I commented, placing my head in my hands.

Looking at Alex, I willed my heart not to burst out of my chest at the sight of him. It took my breath away every single time. His beauty was competing with that of the moon behind us, gently overlapping with the waves in the distance. I itched to grab my phone and snap a picture of my view, remembering I would have the rest of my life to do so.

"Thank you for this tonight."

Alex has his arm around me, and I dragged my nails back and forth over his forearm. We're sitting on our deck feet lightly swaying in the water. After a romantic dinner. With the most beautiful view, we walked the short distance back to our private oasis.

Alex doesn't say anything, instead bends down to capture my lips in a bruising kiss that makes me feel so fucking happy inside I swear my heart beats right out of my chest. Breaking the kiss, his eyes meet mine and he smiles.

"Months ago, I was stuck in a loveless marriage and an unhappy home. It was breaking my kids and each day I could see how the neglect would effect them. In an ideal world, they wouldn't have needed a babysitter because we should've been the ones to take care of their every need. I'll regret not being there for them for the rest of my life."

My eyes softened at his confession. "You are there for them. Those kids worship the ground you walk on and that'll never change. You're a good father and take it from me, that's not something they'll ever forget."

I linked our hands together and stared out at the open water, the moon's reflection glistening on the waves and thought of my own father. "Growing up, I barely saw enough of my father. If he wasn't arguing with my mother, he was drinking himself into a stupor in his study. The death of my sister made everything even worse for all of us. I think that's what finally pushed my parents to divorce. The saddest thing is to be relieved that your parents aren't together anymore, their endless bickering made my life hell."

In an act of comfort, Alex dragged me into him, so my head was against his chest. The soothing sound of his heartbeat calmed my own. "I admire your efforts to not allow your children to have seen too much of you and Sarah constantly going at it. I think that stability is so important, and you do your best to give it to them."

He placed a short kiss on my head. "Thank you." Alex whispered, "you have provided so much light and comfort to my three children and I. I will forever be in debt to you."

Before I could protest, he pulled me back down. "I'm hoping to have the rest of my life to show my appreciation."

"Now, before the night ends, I have one more surprise for you waiting inside."

I couldn't contain my grin. "You spoil me Alexander, what else could possibly make this night better?"

He smirked, leading me inside, "I have a few ideas."

We enter the open plan bedroom and my gaze bounces around the space, not sure which part to take in first. "Alex." I whisper. Bringing my hands to my mouth.

He placed his palms on my hips and led me further into the room. There were miniature candles everywhere, just as there had been at our dinner spot. More roses littered the floor and petals were strewn above the comforter, but what stood out most to me was the huge bouquet of what looked to be around fifty stunning pink roses, a contrast to the rest of the colours within the room.

I walked up to them and picked out the white card at the top, flipping it open it read.

Happy birthday bellissima, ti amo. – Alexander

I smiled. So, he hadn't forgot. Of course, he hadn't. this man knew me like the back of his hand. I turned around, my lips slightly parted.

The first thing I notice is the shimmering silver ring in Alexanders hands. I gape. "W-what?"

"This isn't what you think it is." He murmurs, holding my gaze.

If that was the case, I would have gotten down on one knee. But because this is a little less extravagant, I figured staying upright was the best choice. I think we still have a long way to go before we reach marriage, although I do know if I were to get married again. It would one hundred percent be to you."

I chuckle through the tears that somehow escaped my eyes.

"For now, this promise ring will have to do. I thought I'd go in the direction of some cheesy Google poem that would probably make you laugh and cringe a little, but when I put my mind to it, The words seemed to form on their own. This ring promises so many different things, but right now I want to promise that I'll never abandon you. As long as you walk on this earth, I promise to always be by your side. This also promises that no matter how difficult the days might get, and they will, I will always do my best to remember how worth it you are to me and my children. No amount of words could show my gratitude to you, but I hope this is a good enough start."

Tears are rapidly streaming down my cheeks and my lips feel swollen from the emotion. I can barely focus over the pounding

of my heart. The only thing I can do is give him my shaking left hand as my answer.

His shoulders, tense, finally relax and Alex lets out a relieved sigh, as if I would've said no to him. Impossible.

He grabs my hand in his, warm toned fingers against my lighter ones, and slides the delicate jewelry onto my finger with a slight tremble of his own.

A little sob escapes me. I can't believe this is my life.

I closed the distance between us, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. cupping my cheek softly, Alex leans in and captures my lips with his. My eyes close and I press my chest to his, kissing him back with the same slow intensity he's kissing me with.

Nimble fingers caress the back of my dress where they pull the zipper down, allowing my dress to fall to a heap at my feet and leaving me in only my heels.

Alexanders hands skim up my bare body, running along the sides of my bare breasts. He's definitely pleased with my lack of a bra. My hands move over his clothed chest, undoing the buttons of the white dress shirt he's currently sporting. Then I'm unbuckling his belt and pulling down his zipper.

I trace the hard length of him with my pointer finger, enjoying the way his breath immediately shallows. My hand glides over

the thick head of him before moving from base to tip repeatedly. Nothing like a solid handjob to bring your man to his knees. Literally.

I watch in awe as Alex drops to the ground and begins lowering my underwear until he's facing my pussy with no barrier. I let out a soft sigh as he latches his his mouth to my pussy. "Do you always get this wet?" he asks, licking his already wet lips. "or is this just something I do to you?"

Cocky bastard.

With a smirk, he leans forward to press a small kiss on the inside of my thigh. My brain nearly frazzles out with how delirious I already feel at the simple movement.

A deep rooted moan escapes my lips when he drags his nose along the length of my slit and presses it against my clit. He uses two fingers to spread my lips apart and flattens his tongue against my sex. "holy shit." My eyes roll to the back of my head. I writhed above him, full of a arousal and desperation, one that certainly matches his own. He dips a finger inside my hole. Gathering some of the sticky wetness and rises to his full height, before holding the finger in front of my mouth.

"Suck." He orders, eyes going completely dark.

I take his finger into my mouth, swirling my tongue around the digit, making sure to remove every single drop of myself, knowing he would go back for more.

And he does.

"I'll fuck you just like this, one finger sawing in and out of this pussy until you're so needy you're begging me to take you right here on this floor." His words are whispered right against my ear, causing me to shiver. And when I begin to close my eyes, one large hand wraps around my neck, forcing me to hold eye contact while his thick finger fucks me dizzy.

"Look at me when you come *bambina*, I want you to know who owns this pussy."

My brain struggled to formulate a reply, and before I could get a single word out. I shatter, coming all over his hand. The triumphant smirk he had on his face once I could see straight was filled with male satisfaction.

Alex brought his fingers to his own mouth, licking away my juices in a sinful act. "Deliziosa." *Delicious*.

A second later I was lifted into the air and thrown onto the bed, rose petals sticking to my sweat slicked skin. I watched delightfully as he removed the rest of his clothes I tried to haphazardly pull off.

His gaze was predatory as he climbed over me. My body is lax, my legs quivering on the edge of need as he presses his lips to mine. I lift my knees and slowly open my legs to expose myself to him. "I want you in me". I say, touching my pussy. I'm more than ready for him.

His eyes flicker with black shadows against the candle flames surrounding us. "Yeah?" his nose trails up my neck. "How do you want me?"

"Hard." I whimper, back bowing as he suckles on my heated skin.

"Anything you want baby."

Grasping his cock, he angles it at my entrance but doesn't slide in straight away. Instead choosing to drag the sticky tip through my folds, pressing lightly on my clit.

"Please." I beg, knowing it's what he wants.

And that does it. Alexander guides his dick into me painfully slow, allowing me to adjust to his size. We hold the position for a few heavy seconds before I'm suddenly flipped over on top instead.

His hands grip my hips and I slowly begin to move, riding him at a leisurely pace. My hands cup my aching breasts, massaging them lightly.

"Look up." He orders. I do, and the view, along with the overstimulation I'm feeling, causes me to gasp. The mirror I had forgotten was above us showcased the most erotic image I'd ever seen.

My dark hair tumbled down my back in waves, the ends resting against my ass. My pussy was stretched out over his thick length, witnessing sliding across both our thighs. My achy tits looked even better and so did the glistening body of the man I loved beneath me.

With a quick thrust I was brought back into the moment, riding him so hard I could've been an Olympic medalist.

"Fuck, *fuck*." A slew of curses released themselves from Alex and after a few minutes I could tell he was close.

"So, so good." I moaned, collapsing against his chest so my nipples rubbed against the slight hairs on his chest, causing perfect friction that I needed to tip me over the edge. With Alex snaking his hand between us to strum at my clit, I detonated, my sudden orgasm ripping a loud scream from me.

"That's it baby, come all over my dick. Show me how good my cock feels." He grunted, soon after finding his release and spilling himself inside of me.

This. This was bliss.

Minutes later, I laid still as Alex stroked his hands up and down my back, playing with the curled edges of my hair and occasionally whispering how much he loved me.

The soft thump of his heartbeat was a glorious tune for me to fall asleep. For after everything that had brought us to this exact moment, I was exactly where I was meant to be.

.....**The End**.....

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