

The background of the entire image is a vibrant, glowing red and orange gradient, filled with numerous small, bright white and yellow stars and bokeh light effects. In the center, there is a detailed bouquet of roses. The bouquet includes several large, fully bloomed red roses with deep red petals, a few light pink roses, and several green rose buds with pointed sepals. The overall aesthetic is romantic and dramatic.

EVIE ROSE

caught
claimed
and
snatched

Books 4 - 6

LONDON MAFIA BOSSES

CAUGHT, CLAIMED, AND
SNATCHED

LONDON MAFIA BOSSES

EVIE ROSE

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CONTENT NOTES

These content notes are made available so readers can inform themselves if they want to. They're based on movie classification notes. Some readers might consider these as 'spoilers'.

- Bad language: frequent
- Sex: fully described sex scenes with dirty talk
- Violence: on and off page
- Other: death of parent, parental neglect/abuse, dubious consent, kidnap, bondage, age gap, primal play, stalking

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CAUGHT BY THE KINGPIN

Helping the most dangerous mafia boss in London was a risk,
but I didn't expect to see his gorgeous face everywhere
afterwards.

I fall asleep to dreams of my escape tomorrow, cupcakes, and
the ice blue eyes of my kingpin stalker who leaves me
presents.

I awake to gunshots. A hand over my mouth. In a blur of noise
and smoke, he steals me away. The kingpin treats me like a
captive princess and I'm conflicted. He's twice my age. It's
wrong to desire *him* and not the freedom I've been planning.
So I creep out of the luxurious bedroom. At the end of the
corridor, I hear his deep voice.

“That's the game you want to play, is it? Try then. But if I
catch you, you'll be mine.”

I run.

FELICITY

I dread my phone ringing. Not just because messages are much more civilised, though that's definitely the case. It's so intrusive to make someone's phone yell at them until they talk to you. A message ping doesn't necessitate panicked handwashing when you're in the middle of a messy baking moment and have eggy fingers, butter smeared on your forehead, and flour on your boobs.

What? I had an itch.

No, I dread my phone ringing because invariably it is my father making a demand from the next room, when he could just get up.

“Whisky,” he barks. “And tea for my guest.”

Not sure if his orders would be better via message, actually. Maybe semaphore?

As I put the kettle on, clean myself up, and pull out the fancy cut-glass decanter with the whisky, I feel kinship with the guest. One sniff of my father's clear beige nail varnish remover—sorry, whisky—makes me want to barf. It's not even as though my father really likes it. When I swap out the expensive bottles for the stuff on special offer, he doesn't notice the difference. A lack of taste that will ultimately lose him his little slave: me.

There was a short time when I looked forward to messages on my phone. I did beta reading of romance novels to make money towards one of my first escape attempts, and the buzz

as a new smutty story arrived, or an author thanking me for my comments, made my heart fill with helium.

Finding all my earnings stolen was how I discovered my father taps my phone. My father called it “rent” when I asked him, and had one of his goons punch me in the stomach when I complained.

I try not to complain anymore.

They’re in the grandest of the reception rooms, all gaudy old uncomfortable furniture and paintings of sludgy landscapes in gilded frames. The man my father is talking at has his back to me. His curly cropped hair is so black it has a sheen of blue as well as flecks of silver and his broad shoulders are encased in a fine grey wool suit that I know without touching would be warm.

My father’s shoulders are by his ears, uncharacteristically tense for a mafia boss. He ignores me as I start to unload the tray onto the low table between him and the unknown man.

“This is an excellent investment opportunity. I would prefer to keep it for myself, but some of my capital is tied up at the moment.”

I manage not to snort with derision as I place the cups and saucers. Tied up? Yeah. His money is very tied up with the Westminster mafia he owes money to. This man will be fleeced if he invests. Probably deserves it though, he’ll be a mean old mafioso like the rest of—

I glance across to the man my father is attempting to con, and I’m caught.

His eyes. They’re light blue and staring into me. Not over my head, or examining my chest with idle speculation. He’s looking at me as though he can strip away my outward appearance and these shapeless dark clothes and see the swirls of pink and green and blue I imagine make up my soul. As though he can see stars in my drab, colourless eyes and a rainbow in my brown hair. This man looks at my plain appearance and freckled cheeks like I’m an oasis after weeks in the desert. Like I’m beautiful.

Which I've been told repeatedly, I'm not.

But *him*, he's utterly compelling.

Not handsome, exactly. Nothing like the slick and preening young men who work for the Kensington mafia, with their designer clothes and smooth jaws. Nope. This man looks exactly like what he is: a powerful and ruthless mafia boss. Broad shoulders, muscled thighs, a light smattering of hair at the wrists exposed by crisp white cuffs. Strong and dangerous and gruff and... Kind? I'm probably making that last bit up, but his eyes are more summer morning sky than winter glacier. Although his hair is salt and pepper, the stubble on his jaw is black, and a thin curved scar runs across his cheek.

He knows about pain, this man.

"Interesting." The man's voice is rough and low, lightly accented. Italian maybe? He flicks his gaze dismissively to my father, then returns to me. "Tell me about the potential profits."

My neck creaks like I'm stone as I drag my eyes to my role. Anonymous maid serving drinks.

My father begins a long and deliberately confusing explanation of his con. He's sweating and nervous, trying to sound authoritative but this man has him rattled.

The man is dominant. There's no other word. The strongest of a pack of wolves, with his light eyes. It's not his house, but he's utterly at ease. He leans back, and for a second I'm self-centred enough that I think it's so he can see me from the corner of his eye as I finish transferring the contents of the tray to the table.

I pour out exactly two fingers of whisky for my father and while he gulps half of it down, I ask, "Would you like milk and sugar, sir?"

"Marco."

I blink and almost say we don't have any of that. But his *name*. Oh gosh that sinks into me all the way to the bone. Marco is exactly the right name for him. Straightforward and blunt, but also rich and lyrical.

“Marco.” I bite my lip and nod to prevent myself from repeating his name to myself again and again. It replays in my head anyway. *Marco*.

Then the significance hits me. A mafia boss. Called Marco.

Marco Brent.

I go still. Even I have heard of the kingpin of the Brent mafia. Dangerous. Secretive. Powerful. Obscenely wealthy. Marco Brent is a bogeyman, head of the most discreet, subtle mafia of London. Brent is whispered in fear and respect by my father’s henchmen.

“Milk, no sugar. Thank you...?”

“Felicity,” I squeak as I pour the milk with shaking hands.

A grunt of disapproval comes from the other side of the table as my gaze meets Marco’s and there’s a ghost of a smile around his mouth as he takes the tea I offer, murmuring, “Thank you, Felicity.”

I know it means happiness, but I’ve never felt any joy at people saying my name. It generally means there’s washing up to do or someone needs a three-course meal made in forty minutes’ time.

But Marco saying my name... that does feel like happiness. Fizzing, popping, laughter and spinning around, bright-coloured exhilaration. I should be scared, but being regarded by Marco is how I imagine it feels to be wrapped in a sun-warmed towel after a cool, invigorating swim in a clear green-blue ocean. A shiver of heat and comfort, the scent of salt.

“As I was saying,” my father continues with his pitch.

Marco takes me in as I stand, pale blue gaze dragging slowly up from my sensible black shoes, bare calves, shapeless knee-length black dress in a scratchy material I’ve never quite identified, to my face. I fight the urge not to fidget as he regards my hair, pulled back into a neat French braid. I can feel that a dark strand has come loose, as my soft flyaway hair often does, and is lying untidily across my cheek.

He follows the movement of my hand as I sweep the tendril behind my ear with something hungry in his expression.

That focus on me is... I can't remember anyone making me feel so special. There's a connection between us. It is as instant and undeniable as water into icing sugar. However rich he is, I don't want Marco to end up in the twenty-minutes-too-long-in-the-oven cake that my father is preparing.

"Would you like a cupcake?" I blurt out just as my father says, "The gross capital gain will have compound interest and make crypto look like peanuts."

My father goes red in the face. "That won't—"

Marco cuts him off. "I'd love one of your cupcakes."

I snatch up the tray and rush out.

"There's no need to humour her," my father says in a carrying voice. "Thinks she's something special because her mother was my whore—"

I shut the door and take the labyrinthine route to the kitchen. I don't allow myself to think as I place yesterday's baking onto a tray. I rifle through the cupboards until I find my father's favourite decorations—gold powder—and sprinkle it over a few of the cakes with delicately piped buttercream and icing butterflies.

Is that clear? I hope so. I add a bit more.

My father is still speaking as I enter. The massive silver tray is tricky to juggle with the doors, but I chose it because it's too big to hold for long and might draw Marco away from my father so I can warn him.

Marco looks over as I place the tray onto a table on the other side of the room, well away from where they're sitting.

"Will you come and choose?" Please let my father be typically lazy.

"Just bring two over here," my father grunts. "We have urgent business to discuss."

Ahhggg. That'll spoil everything.

"Yes, sir." He likes it when I call him sir. Makes him feel superior or something.

"I'll choose myself." Marco's lip curls and he stands with deliberate slowness. His eyes flash cold and he strolls over to the tray of cakes, and lounges, one hand in his pocket. No hurry.

I pick up one of the gold cakes with plenty of icing, and scuttle over to my father, placing it on a plate for him. He scowls and gives me a look I know means, *You're pushing your luck.*

One day I'll leave here and open a bakery. I'll make my talent for making cakes into a legitimate company so successful it'll make my father's mafia enterprise look like the failing forgot-the-eggs cake it is. As incompetent as it is illegal.

After all, he hasn't realised in over six months that I've been slowly skimming off money from the grocery budget via the special offers that provide cash back rather than a discount. Despite calling me into his office and examining each item on the receipt every week, he doesn't look at what really matters. He growls over things like cheap pyjamas, despite my actually needing new sleepwear. But he doesn't notice the pricey branded tinned tomatoes or sugar.

And every week I pocket the extra, saving for the day I will escape.

In the meantime, I'm going to help this terrifying, scarred kingpin who has shown me the kindness of looking at me rather than through me.

Marco has his face turned as though regarding the cakes, but is watching from the side of his eye as I walk back to him.

"They all look perfect," he says, but he is looking right at me, not the cakes. "I don't normally have a sweet tooth, but I'm tempted beyond belief by your... cake."

Pleasure skitters down my spine from the expression of unfettered desire on his face. Oh god why does he have to be a

mob boss? Why can't he be a cupcake aficionado I meet when I'm set up in my new life?

"Don't choose that one." I point at one of the cakes I slathered in gold. "It's so pretty, but the decoration doesn't taste of anything. The plain-looking ones are better." There's no inflection in my phrase, and I've made the same comment many times, so no one listening would suspect. But does Marco understand what I mean?

His gaze lingers on my lips and my heart races.

"I agree. The overlooked ones are the sweetest."

But still, he's not looking at the cupcakes. He won't have noticed the cake I'm indicating is the *gold* one. The cake signifying wealth. The ones that are just a sheen of gold on top, but aren't as valuable as they seem.

I move to his side.

"You can't trust him," I whisper, the words tumbling out.

"Did you make these?" he says loud enough for my father to hear, then adds under his breath, "Are you in danger? Do you need help?"

From a kingpin? Because that worked out so well for my mother. Marco is gorgeous, yes, but I can't allow that to fool me.

"I made them all myself." I reply at normal volume, shaking my head, then add, "He owes money to Westminster."

The kingpin raises one eyebrow and the corner of his mouth hitches up. "That's quite a talent you have."

Yes, it is actually. No one takes any notice of me so they continue talking about confidential matters while I clear up their breakfast or serve afternoon tea. And for him to smirk? Pah.

"They shot the kneecaps from my father's second-in-command," I hiss.

"Uncivilised pigs." He adjusts his cuffs. "I'm sorry you had to see that."

We're talking in undertones, and it's a given that we're friends. I don't know why. But he trusts me and I trust him.

Because he saw you, a little voice pipes up. *He noticed you when you're invisible to everyone else.*

"If you ever decide to sell these cupcakes, let me know. I'd be happy to help." As he looks at me, heat flares over my skin, stealing my breath.

"Anytime," he adds, and it feels like a promise.

I nod and Marco finally casts a cursory glance over the cupcakes.

"This one is *mine*." He takes the simplest of the cupcakes; the one I would have chosen. White butter icing with a slice of strawberry on top. Elegant. He strips back the paper and bites.

A raw sound of enjoyment and appreciation comes from him as he chews. I stare unabashedly at his dark and bristly jawline. I wonder what it would feel like beneath my fingertips. He swallows and oh gosh, his throat. It's so strong and firm and I fight the urge to rub my thighs together. I'm flushed and more aware of the space between my legs than I ever have been before in my twenty years of life.

I glance across at my father, who is just finishing his cake, brushing crumbs from his chin.

Marco finishes his mouthful and pins me with that pale blue gaze again. "Delicious, cara. Thank you."

Cara. A sweet Italian endearment in his husky voice.

It probably means nothing. Just gratitude for having warned him off working with the Kensington mafia.

But the next batch of icing I make I'll be adding tiny drops of blue until I recreate the colour. The blue of his eyes.

"Don't stop baking," he murmurs as he walks away, back to my father. "I'll be back to claim *everything*."

MARCO

I sit back into the limo, my head reeling despite having endured sixty fucking minutes with that idiot Kensington after seeing Felicity.

For fifteen years I've been the head of the Brent mafia. I've quietly pulled it from obscurity compared to our famous London neighbours, first to acknowledgement, then discomfort, and finally respect and pure dark fear. In all that time, I've focused on my work and making a team I can rely on to carry out my orders. I've built an empire. But no one tells you the price. I don't think even I noticed until it was too late.

Being at the top of the pyramid, however solidly you've built it, is lonely. No one can touch me. That feeling has been my only constant companion, a pane of glass between me and the world. Protective, yes, but isolated.

The moment I saw Felicity, it shattered. I could feel her vibrancy, her determination, and the heat of her lush body. She's the sun revealing itself in a glorious rainbow after a long drizzly day.

Brave as well as gorgeous, such an angel, trying to warn me about her father. Unnecessary, since I was only there to assess the extent of the financial problems at Kensington. I was never going to invest, but though I suspected Westminster's dirty tricks were involved, she saved me some questions by confirming that. My girl already knew where her loyalty lay: with me. But she's far gutsier than most women would be with a vindictive dickhead like Kensington, taking a

risk talking back to him and putting her safety at risk to help me. And that trick with using the gold cupcakes to warn me off investing? Amazing. Subtle and witty and intelligent.

A whip-smart mind and perfect beauty hidden in plain sight. Big grey eyes, the colour of smoke and just as mysterious. I can't believe she's been overlooked all this time, as though all the men in Kensington knew she was mine and left her alone, waiting for me. The Kensington mafia are clearly ignorant misogynists, unaware of how this woman will be a powerful ally. Nimble and strong enough to break all my defences. I've never been bothered by younger women before. I prefer more experience and fewer expectations.

Felicity broke that idea. Pulverised it. I want her to ask things of me, and I want to be the man to introduce her to everything she wants in the world.

I can't believe it. After years of being alone, my heart demanded I claim her the instant our gazes met. Along with my cock it was the leader of a fuck coup against my brain, and they threaten to lead my whole body to do something animalistic. It took all my self-control not to just take her the moment I saw her.

Thankfully I managed to simply take a sip of tea, like a good British psychopath should, repressing all my Italian fire, and swear she'd be mine.

I've never believed in fate. I make my own luck, I don't wait around for anything. But Felicity? I think maybe meeting her was some sort of magic. Destiny.

She felt it too, I'm certain. The only reason I'm leaving without her slung over my shoulder is because of that shake of her head.

I'll have to wait. There will be hours and days until she's by my side again. It makes my teeth ache.

Will she be as sweet as one of her cupcakes when I lick her out? I bet she'll be even more delicious. Sweet and salt and moaning as I make her come.

There are a hundred ways I'm going to give her pleasure. On my fingers, my tongue, my cock. With her naked and grinding onto my face, using my mouth, and at my mercy, tied up while I pleasure her again and again until she begs me to make her mine.

My cock is so fucking hard, and I wish I had a photo of her to look at. CCTV. I'll find footage. I'll discover everything about her, and grant her every wish. But right now...

"Circle around for a bit," I order the driver before flicking the switch to close the screen between us.

I barely wait until it's shut before I fumble with my belt, the clink loud in my ears, and rip open my flies. My cock pokes up, and it's half a second to shove my boxers down and expose it.

I close my eyes and think of Felicity as I grasp my cock and fist it hard. I can't wait to see her dark hair spilling over my pillow. I wonder how far those cute freckles extend?

My cock is leaking with how much I need release, and although part of me wants to wait until I'm with her, I'll go mad without relief.

I've never wanted kids before, but as soon as I think of being with Felicity naked, it's right. I'll breed her. She'll be rounded with our child. Ripe and even more desirable.

My thoughts are soft, but my actions are rough. Brutal even. I hate that I need this, that it's not her hand on my cock. Or her wet heat sheathing me and milking out my orgasm into her body as she comes on my cock. So I do what I have to in order to sate the bodily need I feel after seeing her.

"Felicity." I choke out her name as I come, and the memory of her face makes the sharp wash of pleasure a release and an ache.

Cleaning up and tucking myself away, my skin prickles.

This was wrong. She should be here, with me. I should be licking her pussy and taking care of her, and I'm left with an overwhelming instinct to return to her.

I thought an orgasm thinking of my girl would take the edge off. Maybe make it easier to think rationally.

It hasn't.

I'm worse. More obsessed. I don't think I can do this again—touch myself—until we're together. That pleasure was empty without her, a shell of the satisfaction I'd have sinking into her welcoming pussy. I scrape my hand over my face and through my hair, my frustration worse than it was before.

Feeling this dirty might have to be something I get used to.

At thirty-nine, I'm probably twice her age.

She's tiny and pure, sweet and innocent. I'm amoral, scarred, and probably going to destroy her family.

She's also strong and clever. The only reason a girl like her says she doesn't need any help when she's obviously in a shitty situation is because she's cooking up a way out. I hope there are no men involved, because they'll have an untimely death if they touch my girl.

I'll be watching every moment, protecting her. Life has dealt her a poor hand so far, but from this point onwards, that changes. She's about to become very lucky. I'll discover all the things she wants most in the world, and give them to her along with all the love and orgasms she can take. That sadness I saw in her grey eyes? I'll remove every cause, including her father.

I won't stop until Felicity is happy.

From today, I have a new job. The whole of Brent's considerable forces will be focused on one person. Felicity. And one task.

Operation *Wife*.

FELICITY

Since Marco, I've been living in a mirror. It all looks the same, but feels totally different.

Narrowing it down, the change is three things.

First, my whole body has decided to vibrate. Not literally, I'm not having a stroke. But my nipples tingle and my pussy gets warm whenever the vision of Marco's face appears in my mind. That's honestly, like eighty per cent of the time, because cooking, cleaning, and planning escape aren't particularly exciting.

Along with that, the dull fear that has accompanied me for years, probably since my mother "disappeared" when I was eleven after a particularly angry argument with my father, has lifted. I've been scheming this latest escape for months, and if I'm honest with myself, putting it off to avoid another disappointment and punishment.

But since Marco's visit, I'm confident. I can do this. A big scary creature saw something compelling in me, and that knowledge makes me believe I'll succeed.

The third invisible change is how it feels to be watched.

Anyone involved with the mafia is always being observed. Suspicion is the stock in trade, and I'm used to all the little ways of hiding myself and what I'm doing. And that's still present, don't get me wrong. But there's another layer now, a warm protection.

I guess it's just the satisfaction of having outwitted my father—he thought I was just showing off my baking skills.

For once, the punishment burn on my arm doesn't hurt that much. I run my finger down the pale scars from previous infractions, and I think of that scar on Marco's cheek. The similarity is a line of connection, a pale link. The same feeling as being watched over, guarded.

I'm probably imagining things.

It's been four days and it seems like a dream when I remember him. His pale blue eyes. That grey suit. The scent of the ocean when I stood next to him.

Every night, I think of Marco and, dream or not, the wetness between my legs and the squirming need that makes me shift in my narrow bed is real. I touch myself and come to a silent, shuddering release, my body washed with relief after a whole day of turning myself inside out with wanting him. I stroke myself in the dark of night in my bedroom and think of his deep voice and his words.

I'll be back to claim everything.

What will he claim?

I guess it doesn't matter. I finally counted the cash I've been saving up and allowed myself to believe I could get away. Less than a month and I'll have enough money to leave and I won't see Marco again, even if he did return to claim... me.

I'd be far away, starting my new life in Scotland.

I chose Scotland for three reasons. One, it's as far from London as you can go and still be in the same country. Important consideration, since I don't have a passport.

Two. The best strawberries come from Scotland. Raspberries too. The sweetest, plumpest, best fruit that I use to decorate my cupcakes, arrives from the north. They're always gorgeously red on the inside, like the lipstick Mum used to wear. Got to be a good place if they have strawberry farms, right? At a pinch, I could always work on one if I can't make my bakery work.

I will, though.

And three is a bit silly. Romantic, especially for the daughter of a... But in my favourite historical romance book the handsome hero sweeps the heroine off to Gretna Green, just over the border into Scotland, to marry her against her father's wishes.

Obviously I don't have any illusions about anyone wanting to marry me. Nah, not going to happen. I'll be on my own, as I always am, but... I dunno. I want to run to Scotland so I can imagine I'm going to Gretna Green with a man so passionately in love with me he's defying family and convention to marry me. I'm going to Scotland because it's a place to build the life your heart desires.

It's all planned out and the bank notes hidden, rolled into the seams of my favourite old hoody. It will be a long road to my dreams, and even then, I'll still be alone. No scandalously flirting with a Regency duke, marriage at Gretna Green, orgasms, babies, and a husband to love me.

The love bit is probably the most unlikely part of all that, including a duke from the Regency. I'm not very lovable. People like my cupcakes, even if everyone here has an opinion about whether they're too sweet, moist, dry, or have too little decoration or too much. However hard I try, I'm not lovable.

Marco Brent won't come for me. No one ever has. So I breathe deeply, tell myself escape to Scotland will be enough, and fall asleep into a sea of pale blue.

A visit to the supermarket is a red-letter day. Even before I started saving up, I loved going to the supermarket. I get to look at things and fantasise about buying whatever I want. And no one follows me around. So far as my father is concerned, shopping is a menial task that I do and he merely has to check the receipt for anything illicit.

Like, you know. Clothes. Chocolate bars. He grumbles every time he sees period stuff on the bill, like I'm inconsiderate to bleed every month.

I suggested four years ago when I'd just turned sixteen, that if he didn't want the expense of keeping me around he should allow me to leave. His mouth made an ugly line. He said that if I was more costly than useful, he'd take me up on that offer and I'd leave in bin bags.

On balance I prefer all my limbs attached and in old pyjamas. I think that suits me better.

Hence the need for this convoluted plan and careful use of supermarket trips.

Today, it's a bit different. I think I'm sensing a ghost? A nice one that accompanies me to the supermarket?

I have this weird tingle over my neck and scalp, and I keep almost seeing someone out of the corner of my eye. But when I look, they're gone.

Probably I'm just so starved of positive interactions that my mind is playing tricks.

I indulge in browsing the paperbacks. I limit my imaginary purchases to three, and dither over the third book. They're historical romances. Two are my favourite authors, a dead cert, but should I have the one with a duke who's a spy, or a marriage of convenience with a rake? I read the blurbs and check the prices and the relative length and focus as though I'm actually going to purchase any of them.

I'm not.

In the end I go for the duke spy. Powerful and dangerous book boyfriends, who can resist, right? I hold the three books in my hands and imagine taking them home, putting them on my bed, and reading them until they're tattered and dog-eared. I sniff the spines for that paper smell. Then I put all the books back into their correct place on the shelf, for someone else to read.

It's only when I'm unpacking the shopping that I find the duke book.

It's tucked between two bags of sugar. And much as I try to think of how it could have happened accidentally, they're all just as implausible as a poltergeist.

It was a ghost. My ghost.

I won't be able to take much with me, so the next week I look at the jewellery in the store-within-a-store. Again, just to dream.

There's a locked cabinet with expensive rings and necklaces. I stare through the glass and imagine the weight of the metal on my finger, or over my clavicle.

I press my nose up to the cool glass and admire the way the diamond sparkles on the big engagement ring, holding my hand out and trying to see what it would look like on me.

Two more supermarket trips and I'll have enough money saved.

There's increased tension at home. Westminster are making bleak threats about what they'll do if they aren't paid soon. From that I assume Marco hasn't fallen for my father's scheme, and although I ought to be nervous about my family's finances, I'm only relieved Marco won't lose out.

I find the ring in a bag of cherries I don't remember buying.

Exactly the one I'd been looking at. The most expensive ring in the display.

Not a ghost, but a man.

A thief? For me?

I'm heated all over that someone cares enough to give me this ring, because it's no accident. And though I've never seen him, I know the feel of this man's attention and it is the most consideration I've had in years.

Subtle too, not putting me in danger from my father. It's like I've been given invisible armour. Someone values me, albeit anonymously.

I secret the ring into the right cuff of my hoody, but I can't resist bringing it out and looking at it every night. I slip it onto

my fourth finger and imagine a duke gave me it because he wants to marry me.

A duke with pale blue eyes, salt and pepper hair, and a scar down the side of his face.

This is the last time I'll buy my father's groceries, and see my ghost. I choose a greeting card that says *Thank You* and prop it open, sticking up out of the shelves. I know he's watching.

In the next aisle, I browse kitchenware for a few minutes, unable to concentrate on the bowls in soft blues and greens that I usually love. I'm eager to get back to the greeting cards, but I don't want to scare him off. I sneak looks out of the corner of my eye.

A middle-aged woman with a baby. A young guy in a T-shirt who walks past makes me blink, but no. I don't think that's my stalker. Then a tall shadow of a dark suit and a flash of blue eyes. So smooth and fast, by the time my brain has caught up and I've turned, he's gone. I rush to the end of the aisle, and then look down the next, and the next, almost sprinting.

Where is he? Marco. Was that...?

But he's nowhere to be found. Holding in the scream of frustration is like shutting an overflowing fizzy pop bottle. All the disappointment is there, waiting to spill over the moment I open the cap.

It wasn't Marco.

Kingpins do not go around leaving presents for girls they met once. Maybe it *was* a ghost.

With heavy feet scuffing the smooth floor, I walk back to my trolley.

I almost don't return to the card section, but go out of duty. Should put the card in its correct slot, right? No need to make more work for the shop assistants.

Where I put the thank-you card, there's another replacing it. It's red and white. Simple and baffling.

It's designed to look like a playing card: the queen of hearts. It reads, *And I'm playing for keeps.*

I huff in irritation even as delight tingles under my ribs.

But it's over. Next week I'm putting my plan into action.

When I get back home and I'm unloading the shopping, I tell myself I'm not expecting anything, because how can he top the ring from last week? And maybe I imagined the whole thing. Among the other confectionery, making me doubt whether I bought them myself, is something I've never had.

A bag of Hershey's kisses.

I smuggle them up to my bedroom and suck each one. I relish the chocolate as it melts in my mouth.

And I try not to feel sad that I've never had a kiss in real life.

It's not just anticipation of escape that makes my head full of buzzing insects all week. There's a lot of stress about Westminster, which is convenient as my tenseness is even less noticeable. I'm so close to getting out I can almost taste it.

I look at the gifts my stalker-ghost gave me and remind myself someone thought I was worth that risk, before returning the ring to the broken seam of my hoody.

The girl who was given a ring, a book, and kisses is capable of pulling off a bold escape. I've got my outfit ready for tomorrow: my hoody and my favourite jeans. Though I'm wearing my hoody to bed as usual since it's cool tonight. I'm all set to never see any of this life again.

There is one thing I'll miss. My ghost.

Whoever it is who is stalking me, leaving me gifts and messages, and I suspect, sometimes watching me in the garden. I can't be certain my stalker is a man, but sometimes I catch a sweep of scent. A moment of ocean salt and fresh air.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow I will enter the supermarket and walk straight back out to the taxi rank. From there, I've got the route mapped out to get to Scotland.

I'm nervous. Excited. I need to sleep, because tomorrow will be big.

FELICITY

A warm dry palm stifles my scream as the gunfire yanks me awake.

“Cara,” a deep voice whispers in my ear. “All is well.”

He’s leaning over me, and though we’ve only met once, I know him.

Marco. The scent of salt and the outdoors, his voice, and his shadowed face are familiar. My wrists are pinned and my mind whirls as more shots are fired. There are yells and grunts.

Evidently all is *not* well.

I pull on my wrists, but he’s holding me tight.

“We need to go now. Will you be a good girl and stay quiet for me?”

I fight. Kicking and wriggling, but not screaming. Whatever is going on, I won’t draw attention to myself.

That’s when the tang of ammunition reaches my nostrils. Acrid and smoky. It occurs to me that if he wanted me dead, I’d have never woken.

Doesn’t mean I’m going to let him wreck all my plans. I won’t be another kingpin’s captive. I bite at his hand, thrash, and try to claw at him. Just because he was kind to me once doesn’t mean he will be again. This could be my chance to get out of my father’s house. Unexpected, yes, but no less welcome for that.

A frustrated snarl comes from deep in Marco's chest and he uncovers my lips for an instant before his mouth lands on mine.

What?

Why is Marco...? My lips soften under the pressure and my mind goes blank. I forget about escaping him.

As first kisses go, this is...

There's the snick of plastic and a sharp pinch at my wrists, slamming them together. The covers are tugged away, leaving my legs bare.

It's not a kiss.

Marco is not kissing me. He's preventing me from screaming as he gathers my ankles together, his grip uncompromising and his mouth hard. Another zip tie, and I jack-knife myself, trying to knee him. I try to scream now, but it's too late.

I'm caught.

He lifts me with surprising gentleness, one hand under my shoulders and the other on my bum, mouth still on mine, my arms trapped between us. Slipping out of my room he moves down the corridor in assured but silent strides.

I don't know what to do, whether to try to struggle or try to shout. Who is the biggest threat here? Brent, who is kidnapping me? The Westminster mafia, sending smoke and yells through the house? If I managed to get away from Brent and jumped two-footed through the house like the world's most malcoordinated kangaroo, would Westminster kill me? Would Kensington—given he didn't even give me his name—even think to search for me?

A sob tries to rise up out of my belly. Escape was so near.

I stop fighting. Brent is massive, and zip ties are impossible to break, so it would be futile. Besides, he seems intent on getting me out. He moves confidently through the maze of narrow corridors. At the bottom of the first flight of

stairs, he pauses in a dark alcove as there's gunfire. Close, far too close.

"Okay?" he whispers against my lips.

"Let me go," I hiss.

"Don't be afraid." I feel his words as much as hear them. "I'm going to protect you."

I try to be angry. He's captured me against my will and I really should be furious. But honestly, the massive warm bulk of his body pressed to mine and his arms around me make this the most cared for I've felt in since my mother died. Which is a timely reminder of how this will end.

"You." I have to swallow before I can continue that sentence because my throat is dry as overcooked sponge cake. "Fucker."

He huffs with laughter and hitches me up his body. "Put your arms around my neck."

Slowly I obey, my body having a will of its own.

He hums approval.

It's as though my weight is nothing at all and despite the chaos around us, I'm not scared. I trust he's not going to allow anything to happen to me.

"You're doing so well," he says in the same low voice as the noise in the corridor beside us recedes.

He moves with sure, light steps to an old servants' entrance. Pausing by the door, he squeezes me to him reassuringly as a black SUV pulls up.

I don't know how, but he opens the door still holding me and before I've really thought through the implications of leaving with him, I'm on the spacious back seat, and we're speeding away. I look back through the rear window, and there's a flickering yellow glow in the window of the second floor as well as the fading crack of gunfire.

"What was that about?" I snap, turning away from the place I grew up in.

“You were in danger,” he replies calmly as he kneels before me. The back of this car is excessively spacious. “I wish you hadn’t forced me to do this.”

“Force you to abduct me?” I watch as he slices off the plastic zip tie from my ankles and rubs his thumb over the red place where my skin was constricted.

“The constraint. I hoped you’d come with me willingly, knowing you’re safe with me.” Marco moves to the seat and smooths his hands down my arms and over my hands. I consider kicking him as he releases my wrists, but it seems a churlish way to get myself tied up again, and I’d do better to wait for a chance to escape. And besides, him carrying me, restraining me, and kneeling at my feet has done something odd to my insides. Liquified them. I’m frozen soup, thawed and moulding to his heat.

It’s only when he clasps my hands in his that I see I’m trembling. Shaking uncontrollably all over.

“Did he die?” I ask in a whisper. Shock, I guess.

“I think so, yes.” Softly, like I’m a flighty woodland creature he’s captured and trying to keep quiet. “Westminster were very angry when they found he couldn’t repay his debt.” Marco doesn’t ask who I mean. My father might have been a sub-standard parent—the best things he gave were decent skin and strong impetus towards entrepreneurialism—but I probably should care he’s dead. A true daughter, a loyal member of the mafia, would feel sad.

I don’t. I feel nothing.

“And everyone else?” It’s not that I liked all the mobsters, but... Gone?

“I’m sorry, cara.”

The silence in the car is as thick as the noise and smoke we came from and my brain won’t work properly, still fugged with sleep and disbelief. Despite everything that’s happened, I can’t stop sneaking looks at my... I’m going with kidnapper? But I have a question mark over other possible terms to swap in, some of which are less disturbing, some... Not.

Saviour. Mafia boss. Guardian angel. Abductor.
Inappropriate older crush.

...Stalker?

Is stalker better or worse than kidnapper?

Ope. Who knows?

He's wearing dark trousers and a charcoal grey shirt unbuttoned at the neck and sleeves rolled to the elbow, revealing muscled forearms covered with black hair that makes me long to pet him.

I keep my hands to myself and run my thumb over the bulging seams of my hoody as I look at him from the corner of my eye, my nose a shadow over what I'm trying to see.

I don't know how long it is until we stop and Marco opens the door. I follow instinctively, but when I go to stand, he tuts and sweeps me into his arms, one hand at my knees and the other under my shoulder blades.

And oh god I shouldn't like this mode of transport so much. Forget bicycles or roller skates, Marco is the most fun way to get from A to B. I surreptitiously sniff his skin and it must be pure pheromone, because I don't know what he smells like except something that makes my insides quiver. The heat of him penetrates wherever we touch, and his hold on my bare legs is fire.

"Welcome to my home."

"I can walk," I protest as he strides across the gravel and in through a massive open door, spilling yellow light like a magic portal. Because this much enjoyment of being carried is not healthy.

"Without shoes?" he points out and, yeah. Maybe not. I shut up but there's a low hum and I wonder if my ears are ringing from the gunfire.

"Put me down," I insist as soon as we're through the door, blinking at the light.

Marco nods and rolls his eyes with fond wryness and the hubbub peters out slowly as he slips me down his body. For a

second we're the only two people in the world. My hoody and top ruck up and the soft warmed cotton of his shirt brushes my stomach. I look into his light blue gaze and the hunger I saw in his face when we met is back, carnal and fierce. Low in my belly, something responds.

His hands are still holding me, stabilising me and I tip up my chin in invitation.

The hum brightens.

There's... Applause. I turn my head away from Marco's mesmerising gaze, and only then do I notice the rows of staff. Bulky mafia goons in suits, but also neatly dressed household staff all smiling, nudging each other, clapping and whooping. There are calls of, "Boss, finally!" and "Get in!"

I stare. Confounded.

It's the middle of the night and they've all but rolled out a red carpet and bunting.

In one of my favourite historical romances there's a scene where the aristocratic hero brings his bride home to his enormous country estate. The servants are all lined up in an intimidatingly formal parade. She charms them all, and wins the duke's heart as well.

This is like that scene, and yet. Not at all. There's no hostility when my glance darts over the faces in the crowd. They're not haughty. I don't have to win them over; they're predisposed to like me.

Is this what Marco gets every time he comes home after nefarious mafia business is concluded? I sneak a look at him and he's glaring at a man near the front with dirty blond hair, glasses, and an immaculate three-piece suit.

What's going on?

A middle-aged woman approaches with a tray of daintily iced mini cupcakes and a cup of tea and I stare, confused, at what seems to be my favourite herbal tea.

I've slipped into an alternative dimension. Only explanation. First the ghost. Now this.

It's a dream. I'm going to wake up with drool on my pillow and my phone screeching at me to bring coffee to my father's office, stat.

"Paulo, is everything as we discussed?" Marco says behind me.

The man with blond hair steps forward. "Stage two of operation why... Uh." He coughs. "Whisky has been implemented as best we could, sir."

Marco shoots a disparaging look at Paulo and puts his hand on the small of my back. I can't help but lean into his touch.

"What's Operation Whisky?"

"Some..." He sighs with exasperation. "Important logistics."

Oh. He does like whisky then. Huh. I assumed he didn't, and we had that in common. I'm irrationally sad.

"Tell me what would make you feel comfortable?"

I think about the unhinged things I could say, and I wonder if he'd do them. Things like, *stroke my hair, take me to bed and cuddle me, drape me over the table and make me yours*. I settle for something merely weird.

MARCO

Those pyjamas are going to kill me. Cherry-patterned pyjama shorts that reveal her long smooth legs.

It's been almost a month since we met, and Felicity has been in every one of my senses all that time. I can't forget her vanilla and berries scent, the vivid feel of her warm skin, the sound of her lyrical voice that has a thousand chords inside it, all harmonious.

Something in me awoke when I saw her, a possessive creature stirred and focused, and growled, *mine*. And finally that creature is content.

I love seeing her in my home. My girl, safe in my house, protected. And maybe so does she, because her answer to what will make her comfortable isn't going back to where she's lived her whole life, or being with her family.

She's suspicious, unused to being the centre of attention and seemingly not sure she likes it. But despite her fear and the fact it's the middle of the night, she gulps and whispers, "That tea, a cupcake, a book, and then to go to bed?"

I grab the tea tray from Maria, giving her a nod of approval. They're all going to get chastised for making such a big scene and Paulo might be laughing now, but he nearly made it sound like I'd plotted this whole incident to catch my girl. Which is only partially true. I was still working out the details of my seduction when the situation with Westminster happened. I'm not one to turn away opportunities.

“Come,” I say to Felicity. “All of you lot are dismissed,” I toss over my shoulder. They’ve worked hard to ensure everything is perfect for Felicity, and I’m grateful. But right now I need my girl to myself. It’s only a minute to make our way across the house, and Felicity’s mouth drops as I swing the library door open. She makes a gurgling noise.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes,” she squeaks. “I just... Wow.”

I suppose it is quite impressive.

Two floors high, the pale wood gleams. There are multiple ladders on wheels, and discreet labels separate sections on virtually every topic and genre. All the knowledge you might need, and the entertainment. My collection of murder mystery novels takes up floor to ceiling for twenty feet. But I don’t think that’s what she was thinking of when she said a book.

“I think this nook will particularly interest you.”

I lead her to an area by the window with a big plush squashy chair, a plate of cupcakes on the small table, and bookshelves surrounding at almost arm’s length.

She regards the shelves suspiciously.

“Do you think there’s something you’ll want to read?” I ask innocently. I’m not going to confess I picked up on her book downloads while I was investigating her father’s financial situation. Or building this corner of my library especially for her. To make her happy.

“Yeah. I like these authors.” She gestures at the rows of books.

It doesn’t even occur to her to ask why something is as she likes it. I know without asking it’s not because she expects it—her eyes are like saucers. No, it’s because she thinks it’s a coincidence. The concept that someone has gone to effort for her is as alien as the smutty sci-fi romances she reads. She doesn’t ask because she assumes this is for someone else.

In time she’ll understand that nothing is too much trouble. That she can ask for anything she wants and I’ll just tell her

that the outrageously expensive requests will be delivered immediately but the impossible will take a little longer.

“You can read whatever you want from here. Just take it.”

She screws up her face in scepticism. “Whatever I like?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll check up on what I’m reading,” she scoffs. “Limit the number of books.”

I shrug. “How many books were you thinking of taking?”

“Book collecting and reading are separate hobbies,” she says defensively.

“You think I am not aware of that?” I raise one eyebrow and glance at my library. “I have read many of these books, but of course there are more I haven’t even opened.”

She bites her lip as she regards the thousands of volumes that surround us.

Picking a few books from the shelf, she starts reading the backs.

I’m reminded of how she chose the books at the supermarket. So serious and analytical, as though this one decision would determine her future, rather than merely a few hours of enjoyment. A moment later she sinks into the padded seat to assess the books she short-listed.

I purr inwardly at the sight. Almost exactly as I imagined her when I arranged this part of the library myself. Except that ideally I’d be behind her and she’d lean back and snuggle into me.

She catches me looking and bolts upright. “I wasn’t—”

“It’s okay.” I approach slow and cautious, as though I were touching a wild animal, I place my hand on her sternum and push her backwards. The cotton of the hoody touches my fingertips, but it’s the heat under my palm that sends blood rushing to my cock. She lets out a soft whimper and squirms, her lips parting as I press her into the seat. “Relax. Take all the time you need.”

At my command, she does, eyes still darting around, unable to settle fully. But suppressing that urge to run, so reluctantly I lift my hand.

She blinks, nods, and sorts through the books again, re-reading the cover of one with a woman in a long blue dress.

I sink into the window seat and watch her. So pretty. Her coffee-with-a-drop-of-milk-coloured hair that will be wrapped around my fist as I tug her head back one day soon. Her pink lips, perfect for sliding over the head of my cock. I've never wanted anyone like I do Felicity. But it's been a lot for her tonight, without being lusted after by a man almost twice her age. I can play a longer game.

"Can I borrow this one," she asks eventually, holding up the one with a woman in a red dress.

I nod and she almost smiles in response.

"I'll show you to your bedroom."

I see the moment she notices the open window behind me. A crack to vent in the air. It's a split second of her focus, so swift that if I wasn't as attuned to her as I am, I'd have missed it. Smart, my girl. Used to concealment, she doesn't show that she saw the potential escape route.

"Just one thing, cara," I say as we're climbing the stairs. "Don't try my patience by attempting to escape." My voice goes hard without my volition. I won't allow her to put herself in danger.

This isn't the way I hoped we'd meet again. I wanted to get her out from her father's clutches and woo her gently, as she deserves.

But I saved her, I kidnapped her, and while if she really wishes to leave, I'll provide everything to make her life comfortable, I'd rather she stayed. It's not unreasonable to want the chance to win her over and bring her happily to my bed and have her as my bride.

Her mouth flattens. "I'm a prisoner here. Nothing has changed."

“You’re my guest.” Until she’s my wife, that is.

“But I can’t leave.” Fingering the cuffs of her hoody, she glares at me, eyes and voice like steel.

“It’s the middle of the night. We’ll talk about tomorrow in the morning.” That would be my preference, anyway, but I suspect my stubborn girl has other ideas. I’ll be ready. “You’re not leaving.”

FELICITY

There was an open window in the library.

I lie in the massive, very comfortable bed and think about my life turned inside out and upside down, and the potential of that open window.

My father is dead. That means he won't come looking for me. I'm safe from his influence and if I get away, I'd have a real chance of escape. I have with me almost all the things I'd have run away with—except more sensible clothes.

Part of me wants to wait until the morning. Marco saved me, and where my father has fear and brutality, he has loyalty. It's obvious his people respect him in a way no one at the Kensington mafia ever did my father. Maybe whatever he has planned wouldn't be so bad?

We'll talk about tomorrow in the morning.

I've been fobbed off.

Do you think this was what it was like for my mother at first? Maybe my father was charming and kind before he got bored of her. Perhaps he even promised marriage, and my mother thought he would eventually make an honest woman of her. He probably didn't start off with, *You'll be nothing to me and your daughter will be my servant.*

Marco isn't like that. He wants to take care of you, a voice whispers in my head.

Sure, his attention gave me the confidence to finally decide to enact my escape plan, but that doesn't mean he's not

dangerous. He is still a deadly mafia kingpin.

And there's that other voice.

You don't deserve a man like him. You won't be able to keep the interest of a gorgeous, powerful, wealthy kingpin for long. He'll get bored of you.

I want to believe the affection in Marco's eyes, the feeling of rightness when I was held in his arms. The inclination of my heart to trust him, fall asleep, and enjoy his attention for as long as I have it. But I don't want my heart broken when he inevitably decides I'm not enough, as everyone else thinks.

Perhaps he doesn't want you at all. Maybe you're a mafia bargaining chip.

There's no way I'm staying as his little hostage.

I crawl out of bed before I can change my mind. I'll get out, run to a road. It didn't work when I tried it from my father's house, but he's gone.

I silently try the door handle. Unlocked.

The night air is cool, and there's moonlight spilling silver onto the long passageway. I noted the route down to the library. All I have to do is not get caught.

I take a shaky breath and one step forward. I can do this.

No klaxon sounds. No trap goes off. Another, and another, on silent feet.

At the end of the corridor, I hear his deep voice. "Felicity."

Oh god. The kingpin.

I turn, my body already trembling. He stands outside a now-open door opposite the one I came from, partially hidden by shadows. He's shirtless. I can make out only the outline of his physique from this distance and in the white moonlight, since he's half hidden by the shadows. But I can see muscles and a crisscross of scars.

"I told you, we'll discuss this in the morning. I'll take you wherever you want to go. Provide whatever you want. Be it cakes or books or freedom."

He seems sincere, and yet I take a tentative step backwards. The kingpin is huge. Muscled. Strong, yes, but I bet he's not fast. And I have a massive advantage. He'll assume I'm going for the front door and there's easily enough space for me to turn back to the library on noiseless bare feet.

I'm good at being quiet and quick. Lots of practice.

"Go back to bed, cara." The command reverberates through me.

I nearly do it. There's a battle of wills going on up and down forty feet of corridor shrouded in darkness.

That rough tone. The stark beauty of his unclothed but scarred body. I'm a bit scared, yes, but there's also another emotion bubbling up.

I'm excited. I shake my head.

"That's the game you want to play, is it?" he purrs.

I take another step away. I think I can make it to the window. I *must*. Because while adrenaline is pulsing in my blood, right from my heart to every extremity, and throbbing at my core, I can't lose.

"Try then. But if I catch you, you'll be mine."

His.

I run.

I've taken off before I can think through the consequences. His heavy thudding strides follow. Exhilaration races through me. Running, my legs and arms moving, alive after so many years of stasis.

He was offering something normal, to talk about the future in the morning. But I couldn't settle and now all his attention is on me as I try to escape. I screech around the corner of the corridor and throw myself into the open hallway, the smooth white walls and occasional minimalist painting reflecting moonlight.

My muscles burn with the effort of running.

And oh does it feel good. I check over my shoulder and his eyes are trained on me, intent as a predator. He's focused. I whip my head back around. He's chasing after me like he wants me, like that kiss meant something and he won't let me go.

I should be tired after waking in the middle of the night, but I'm more energised than I've been in my life as I sprint down across and take the stairs two at a time. I can hear him behind me, but not close enough to see, I'm pretty sure.

That's not disappointment. It's not.

I'm getting out of here.

I round the corner at the bottom of the stairs and slow, trying to control my breathing, which is fast and from the whole of my lungs, my chest heaving, throat on fire. But I make my bouncing steps light on the cold marble flooring.

The sound of him coming after me doesn't pause. I grin. I've outfoxed him. I glance back, confident that—

He's there. Right behind me. I shriek with fright and accelerate. I'm really sprinting now.

Half of my heart wants to escape. It's beating oxygenated blood around my limbs and urging me faster and onwards. It's reminding me why I was trying to leave the mafia life in the first place. That part of me is trying to get away and has real panic at the thought of being caught.

But the other half... Oh, the other half wants to run too. But that section of my heart is gleeful. Looking for places to slow or trip. Urging me to look behind again and check he's following, and see the intent look on his face. This part of my heart delights that he wants me so much. Enough that he'll chase me through his house in the dead of night.

This part of my heart *wants to be caught*.

His promise. I'll be *his*. That ought to be terrifying, by all rights, but it's not. I need to own and be owned. I crave the intensity and the struggle, the proof that he'll overcome my every objection, even as my feet slap painfully on the floor.

To be owned by him wouldn't be slavery as it was with my father. No, his mafia loves him as their leader, that is clear. If I were owned by him, I'd be an indulged pet, given every best titbit and snuggled. Protected.

It couldn't last. I know that, and I want freedom more, even if I'll be alone again. Scotland is the only option.

I can hear him and my fogged brain thinks I can smell his sweat and feel his heat. He's a force of nature.

My lungs are close to bursting with the unfamiliar effort of running and I'm heaving in air, panting with my whole chest. My knees hurt with the force juddering up through them with every stride, cracking up my bones. Every muscle in my body is engaged.

There. I recognise the entrance to the library at the end of the corridor and my mind, seeing freedom is possible, pushes my legs faster. I half expect him to pounce as I throw the door open in front of me like the melodramatic arrival of a queen, but no. He's at my heels though, his hard breathing close.

This is one of those moments in a film where the plucky heroine gets out, despite insurmountable odds. There's an epic soundtrack that's swelling to a crescendo. I'm going to dive through that window like Indiana Jones rolling out of a doomed temple.

The wooden floor is shiny and as I round the corner to my reading nook, I almost lose my footing, sliding to the side. Only Marco's arm as he reaches out saves me from crashing into the bookshelf, but I manage to evade being grasped, and then—

The window is closed.

The two halves of my heart squeeze together.

I lunge for it anyway, across the big window seat, expecting to feel Marco's big body smash into me as I yank the handle and fall onto the cushions. It doesn't budge. Locked.

Of course it is.

Marco doesn't land on top of me as I expect, and my heart stutters. He doesn't need to.

I'm caught.

I turn slowly, creeping onto my knees and stare at his bare chest. He's standing at the edge of the window seat. Suddenly I could throw up, I'm so sick with regret. I'll deserve this punishment. I'll take it bravely, I promise myself.

I shouldn't have run. Stupid.

"Look at me." His voice is implacable. This isn't a request.

Miserably, I raise my eyes at a snail's pace. What revenge will he take? I can't cope with any more pain. I curl into myself even as I'm compelled to look at his face. An angry mob boss is a terrifying creature.

I hesitate at his neck. I don't want to find anger where there used to be affection.

But when I meet his gaze, in his face isn't fury or disappointment. Just understanding and patience. Possessiveness and... love?

All my fears melt away like ice in a hot drink.

"Say no, cara," he states. "Say no, clear and loud, if you don't want to be *mine*."

I open my mouth but sound doesn't come out. I even form the word, but my tongue sticks to the top of my mouth.

He won, fair and square. He promised not to harm me. He gave reasonable demands—for a mafioso.

I accepted the risk when I ran, so although he's telling me I could refuse, I don't. I swallow, and his gaze flicks down to my neck.

He nods, taking my silence for acceptance, which it honestly is, and sinks down onto the cushions of the window seat.

"So beautiful. I'm going to spoil you," he murmurs as he pulls me into his lap and leans back into the cushions. Too confused to struggle, I let myself rest on him and he hums with

contentment. While I'm still breathing heavily, my chest tight, he's utterly calm.

That wasn't even a competition. He could have snatched me up at any point, I realise, but he let me come down to see for myself that he'd already thought to bar my exit.

"Why did you run from me?" His hands are clamps on my side and back and when I peek up his stare is uncompromising but somehow kind.

Why did I run? Because of my whole life. This isn't one or two sentences, but I suppose it boils down to this. "I was scared. Why did you chase me?"

"You'd have hurt your feet on the gravel. Why were you scared?"

Because I didn't plan for this to happen, and I don't know what to make of this connection between us. But I don't think he'll accept that, because that wasn't the cause of the fear. Not really. And the relentlessness of his hold and the quiet patience as he waits informs me he's not going to be satisfied until I've confessed all.

So I do. It pours out of me.

All that has happened. My mother. My father. The things I've seen. Why I want to go to Scotland. He listens and strokes my back, with a thunderous rumble when I tell him something particularly unpleasant. He demands that I show him each scar, and I try to remember which one is which. He strokes his palm over the old hurts. It shouldn't do anything, but it does, wiping away the residual, lingering pain. Those stories are mostly associated with the escape plans that didn't work, and his eyes are glacial. But when I tell him about the one that nearly did, oh, that's different. There's a gleam in his summer-sky eyes then, and when I press my cheek to his stubbled one, I can feel his smile.

He nods and chuckles and murmurs, "I knew it. So clever," as I explain how I stole from my father and was going to get away. He wants to know every detail, and I swear it sounds

like he's proud of me. The low purr of approval from his chest relaxes me more than any tea, cake, or novel I've experienced.

I find myself soaking up his warm strength and breathing in his scent. Not the ocean, exactly. It's been a long day. Night. Whatever.

He smells like sweat on a warm summer breeze, fresh air and musk and... something male. When I slump down, his chest is warm and solid, even as his chest hair tickles my nose and is the tiniest bit abrasive.

We lapse into silence and I start to look at my captor in the moonlight. Every part of him is gorgeous and different to what I feel on my own body. Where I'm slight and podgy, he's firm and muscled. And those scars. His chest and arms are covered with marks that indicate the brutal life he's led. And yet he's holding me with so much tender care. He's strong.

Need rises like a cake cooking low in my belly.

He chased me. Snippets come back. The pounding of my heart and our feet. The flare of excitement and the thrill. The inevitability of him catching me.

He still hasn't taken anything and the fuzzy-edged images of what he might want from me pucker my nipples under my camisole even as they sharpen in my mind's eye. The details get clearer. His hand in my hair, urging my mouth onto his cock as I watch his light blue eyes darken with lust. A flash of his dark stubble as I turn to see him as he takes me from behind on my hands and knees.

I want that.

"All your planning. It seems a pity to lose it entirely. Anticlimactic. You want to go to Scotland in the morning?" he asks eventually.

I hesitate. Surely I do. I don't want to be his, like he said. I don't want to be owned and petted and coddled. I'll be okay up in cold Scotland, on my own. "Yes."

"Okay."

Nodding is harder than it should be. It feels like this is the end of our conversation, but I can't let it finish.

"I thought..." Did he not mean it? About me being his?

"What is it?" He presses a kiss on the top of my head.

I roll words around my brain like marbles.

"I thought you'd..." I thought he'd hold me down and take my virginity, that's what I thought. "Do whatever you wanted to me. Because you said I'm yours." Just that idea makes heat bloom again between my legs and I wriggle in his lap, pressing my thighs together.

This doesn't mean I trust him. How can I? I know how these mafia bosses work. It's not real without a marriage. He'll tire of me. I'm very tiresome.

But in the meantime, maybe I can allow myself to give in, and he'll make me feel good.

"Exactly," he says, low and rough. "I cherish what's mine. I wouldn't hurt you or force you. When I slip into your tight pussy you'll be soaking wet and begging me."

Oh...

Oh my. Yes, I'm really not far from begging.

"You want that possession. To be owned." It's not a question. He's seen inside me and knows.

A delicious shiver goes down my back. I hide my face in his chest as I nod. Yes. I want the comfort of decisions made for me, to be looked after and cosseted. It's been so long that I've been alone with every burden.

"Have I disappointed you?"

My throat seizes up. "Maybe."

"Well," he murmurs. "We can't have that now, can we?"

MARCO

She's all soft curves and nervous sexual energy in my arms. So fucking sweet and a temptation like no other. So enticing.

Every part of me thrums with the desire to roll her underneath me, push that tease of fabric aside and thrust into her.

"You've been so brave and strong." Everything that has happened to her makes my heart ache. "But you don't have to be, anymore. Lie back, and let me take care of you."

Now she's with me, and I'm going to please her. That's my whole reason for living.

Those dove grey eyes blink uncertainly as I lift her from my lap and lay her back onto the cushions, dragging extras to go beneath her head so she's at just the right angle to watch me eat her pussy, and under her hips to give me all the access I want.

I take my time kissing down her body, pulling her old hoody up to access her skin. The dip between her breasts is still covered in that little camisole with a frilly edge and a bow. She clutches my hair as I slip the neckline down and reveal one plush breast, then further, and I admire her dusky pink nipple before I devour it.

She writhes, unable to figure out if she's seeking more or evading it, overcome. Her fingers tighten on my hair.

"You like that don't you, my sensitive girl. So responsive to me."

“Uhh.” Her reply is just a moan of desire as I reveal her other breast and bite gently on it. I could tease her like this forever, and one day I’ll dedicate hours to worshipping this perfect chest. But right now I want to see her luscious pussy.

The innocent cuteness of her flat stomach and belly button leads to the waistband of those damn shorts. I slide it down, and *yes*. No underwear. I groan and take a moment to palm my cock through my boxers.

During our chase I thought I could see peeks of her sweet, rounded butt cheeks as she ran, revealed by her shorts riding up. And I was right. “Your curves are mouth-watering, you know that?”

“No?”

I huff a laugh into her cotton-covered abdomen. “You are. You’re my perfect girl.”

I keep one hand cupping her hip, holding her to me and urging her closer. The other I trail down her stomach, smiling to myself as she squeaks and tries to withdraw from my touch.

Nope. Not happening.

And I must be losing my mind, because instead of removing her shorts, I keep them on, teasing us both by kissing her through the fabric, getting lower and lower. Her legs are already spread to accommodate my kneeling between them but it takes no more than a tiny nudge and she opens further for me. Over her mons I brush my fingertips, further down, until I feel what I’m searching for. The loose fabric gapes and reveals one side of her pussy, glistening.

“Such a lovely welcome,” I say, and my voice is gravelly with arousal. I push the fabric aside—damp. The sign that makes my cock even harder in my boxers. Her pink folds shift as she tries to get contact on her clit, and she whimpers softly with need.

“That’s it,” I say and let my mouth touch her and she lets out a moan like relief and frustration balled into one.

Yes. That wetness, not from my mouth. This is seeping out of her, just for me. I take one long lick at her seam, a greedy

taste of her honey.

“Good girl being so wet for me.” I get my lips onto her then, a simple press of a kiss, but she chokes and her legs scrabble for purchase.

Ha. I can provide that. I clamp my palms over both of her ankles and this time I go right to her clit and suck.

She keens, so hot and wound up. Desperate to come.

It’s a promise, this act tonight. I’ll give her everything she needs if she’ll trust me. No more running away.

I reward her for being mine alone. I gorge. I get my whole mouth and cheeks in that beautiful pussy of hers, covering myself in her juices as I suck and lick at her. I thrust my tongue into her tight passage for the joy of her taste. I lap at her hard, using the flat of my tongue, and she chases me when I try different patterns and rhythms to find what makes her tear apart

“You’re so delicious.” I love that she’s made herself crazy for this, and all I have to do is set her off. She’s my firework, but I’m certain, having watched her for weeks, that she’s like this for me alone. When anyone else touched her she shied away. There was no melting like she is now.

I’m going to make it so sweet and hot and all she deserves. She’s mine to care for, and to breed, though I haven’t said that second bit yet. I don’t want to scare my girl away with my obsession. But it’s going to happen. I’ll be inside her, filling her up with my come. Painting her with the seed that will make her lush and ripe. Fuck, I cannot wait to see my girl pregnant with our child.

While I like pinning her ankles down, there’s a more important thing I want to feel. I release her and place one forearm banded over her lower belly to keep her in place, and bring my other hand to that little hole. A touch and she cries out. I slide in one finger right up to the second joint and she is so slick it goes in easily. She arches—good thing I have her held by the hips. So then it’s a second finger—tight, so tight now—and I fuck her with them. I curl up to rub that sensitive

spot inside her, and suck her clit. I'm covered in her and revelling in the sweet and salt taste of her, the yielding pink flesh of her soaked pussy as my fingers stroke into her harder and faster. I'll never get enough.

Her hands find my head and comb through my hair then grip. A tightening of pain, and I relish it for how possessive she's being. This isn't one-sided, of me giving her an orgasm with my tongue. With her hands on me, holding me to her, she's claiming me as surely as I am her. She's taking ownership of this otherwise dubious situation, and the bite of her fingers on my scalp sends a message right down to my cock, making it throb. I want to be hers.

She's losing control, pulling me down in her search for the pleasure that will push her over the edge. I'm suffocating, drowning in her, and it's the most perfect way to die. So damn happy.

It doesn't take long like this, my fingers in her sweet wet passage, my tongue insistent, and her hands gripping me.

She clamps down on my fingers and screams. She's loud, my girl, and I can hardly repress a smugly satisfied grin as she jerks and cries, coming so hard she kicks me in the side repeatedly, hands tugging at my hair.

I don't let up. I ease her through it, feeling for when she needs more, harder to push her higher, then gradually backing off until she's collapsed, panting, and I'm softly kissing her inner thighs.

As I stretch out my cramped shoulders, fingers, and jaw, I take a moment to enjoy the sight of her. Ruined. Her eyes are shut, her cheeks are pink, and her dark hair is askew and haphazard over the cushions from where she's thrashed as she came. Her little cherry-patterned shorts are stretched out of shape and the hoody is still rucked up, revealing the swell of one breast. Her lashes are starred with tiny droplets of tears.

I lie down beside her and gather her into my arms. She comes willingly, soft and pliable as she accepts she's caught.

"You okay?" I ask, and pray I don't regret the question.

There's a shift of her skin on mine as she nods, then takes an inhale. Stops. Again. Taking a breath as though to begin talking, but doesn't.

“What is it?”

She hides her face against my chest, her soft cheek pressed to my pectoral and speaks into my skin. “Was that using me?”

“Oh, cara.” She has no idea. “Yes. And I'll use you in other ways too, don't worry.”

She lets out a shuddering sigh of what sounds like relief.

“I'm looking forward to using your beautiful body in filthy and depraved ways that make you cry for more.”

“Really?” And there's uncertainty in the question I don't fully understand.

I stroke down the silk of her hair, reassuring. “I'll also treasure you.”

Now I've had her tucked into me like this. Now I've made her come, the hunger isn't diminished. The sharp edge is off, but now my desire for her is deeper, wider. It's the ocean flooding up a brackish estuary. I thought I was obsessed before, but it's worse now. I love her.

She's told me what she wants: to go to Scotland, as far away from here—and me—as possible. And while I'll make that first part happen for her, there's no way it will involve me letting go.

I hold her closer to me and press my fingers into her waist. I breathe in her sweet strawberry and vanilla scent.

“You're *mine* now. Mine to give orgasms to.” She sighs and rubs the corner of her mouth to my skin, the hair shifting beneath her lips. “Mine to care for. Mine to adore.”

FELICITY

We lie together for a long time in the library. His big solid chest reassuringly my pillow and his arm my safety belt. I don't know whether I slept there, or what time it was when Marco slid my hoody back down, carried me upstairs and laid me into his bed. I was too exhausted and sated to think. But I remember his presence and rumbling voice telling me, "Go to sleep. It's been a long night."

I've never slept in the same bed as anyone. He's warm. Big, too. I hadn't thought of sleeping by myself as lonely. I'd just accepted it was cold, and tucked myself into a ball most nights and waited to fall asleep.

Being his means that he tucks me into his bed and spoons his body to my back. Slipping into oblivion with Marco at my back... That's different. For the first time in my life I'm not alone when I lose consciousness.

I wake to the scent of Marco on the pillow, salty ocean and musk, but no warm presence behind me. Cracking one eye open, I regard his bedroom with trepidation. It's austere and simple, only softened by the yellow light of dappled sunshine. Huge floor-to-ceiling windows open onto a woodland and I watch as a red and white and black bird swoops in and lands on a tree trunk.

He lives in the countryside, or has a garden so big it might as well be the countryside.

A bird feeder is hung high in the branches of a tree just outside the window, close. It's covered with half a dozen little

birds of all colours, pecking away. They dive and squabble, their wings a blur. The birds with gold, red, and black markings stay on the feeder, jostling and feasting. But the little pink, white, and grey birds hang back, waiting for a gap then darting in to snatch a bit of food before beating their wings to fly away.

They all have their strategies, and have come to get their breakfast, confident in their provider.

Huh. Big scary mob boss likes to watch the birds.

And kidnap girls, give them orgasms, tell them they're his, make them think they've lucked out, then leave them alone. Why didn't he just allow me to escape?

“You're awake.”

I scramble to roll over, clutching the covers to my chest even as relief floods into me. Marco is sitting in a blue armchair wearing a crisp white shirt open at the neck, revealing a strong, tanned neck and the dip between his collarbones. He has a laptop on his knees and is wearing black-rimmed reading glasses. And his mouth—the same mouth that he put on my pussy last night until I screamed with pleasure—turns up in a slow smile. It starts in his eyes and spreads across his face in a slide of light and heat like the sun rising on a summer's morning.

He removes his glasses and although I have a pang for the loss of his casual hot professor look, the better view of his pale blue eyes makes up for it. He appears happy to see me, and it makes me shy. I don't know what to do with this approval. I'm not used to it, and am half expecting to be told off for sleeping in, but he nods to his side of the bed.

“There's breakfast for you.”

I turn and find a neat wooden tray covered with dozens of mini pastries, a cafetière of coffee, orange juice, a bowl of melon and strawberries, and what looks like blueberry muffins. My stomach rumbles in response and Marco's laughter washes over me, warm and affectionate as I blush.

“All my favourites,” I mutter into a croissant, snatching it up before it’s taken away.

“Always.”

It’s not a question about whether he stalked me, or an answer. But it skirts too close for me. What if it wasn’t him? The crispy-soft buttery pastry in my mouth means I don’t have to reply.

I think I’m almost willing to admit—to myself at least—I like that he watched me. If it was him. And sure, not having to tell him what I want to eat for breakfast is a bonus, but it’s not the main reason. The truth is, the thought he’s gone to trouble for me is the smell of perfectly-baked cupcakes: mouth-watering anticipation of comfort and delight.

What would it be like to bite into that proffered cupcake? To accept the promise of what he offered rather than going to Scotland?

True, he gave me up very easily, offering to send me north in the morning after he chased me last night. Will he still do that? The croissant suddenly feels dry in my mouth. I take a sip of orange juice, and despite it being fresh and sweet, all I can taste is the sour.

“When am I leaving?” This is like a band aid. Easier to cope with if I rip it off and make it hurt all at once.

Marco puts aside his laptop and comes over to the bed, towering over me. His height and the evident strength of his body makes my tummy squirm and my nipples stand to attention. He’s gorgeous and I’m entirely in his power.

“Whenever you like,” he says eventually. “You’re not a prisoner.”

I gulp. “Now.”

Marco’s lips tighten, but he doesn’t comment. Just gestures for me to go with him, holding out his hand. His palm envelops mine with strong warmth.

I manage to not cry as I leave behind that delicious breakfast and sunlit bedroom where Marco slept with me, his

arm possessively over my waist.

I should have said tomorrow, or never, because I'm desperate for more information about my captor. Trying to take in all the details of his home is futile. I crane my neck as I follow him downstairs, admiring abstract art and elegant sculptures in the modern but warm house. I'm still wearing my cotton pyjamas and hoody as we enter the marble-floored entrance hall and I wrap one arm uselessly around my ribcage.

A murmured request to a man waiting for Marco's command and a black limo purrs outside.

My heart is breaking. I don't want to do this. He's really going to let me go? After all his declarations last night. This morning. Whenever.

He leans over and brushes a kiss on my hair. "It's okay."

It's not. I have this feeling like I missed out the baking powder in my cake mixture. I've missed something important and it's all flat.

"I'm here," he murmurs. "Though my fingers might not be for much longer unless you stop trying to break them."

"What?" It's only when he lifts our joined hands that I realise I'm gripping onto him like he's the only thing holding me onto the planet. "Sorry," I mutter, tears prickling as I begin to withdraw my hand.

He doesn't let me, lacing our fingers together and squeezing.

"Come on." With his other arm, he holds me to his chest and carries me out to the limo, our hands still linked together. I don't want to let go.

He ducks into the limo and sets me down on the leather seat.

I have what I was aiming for. My savings, my father gone and not able to hunt me down. Freedom.

I need *him*. The kingpin who saw me, saved me, caught me, and has cared for me.

“Marco...”

He sits next to me and my heart pulses.

“What?” he asks casually, pulling me into his body. “You didn’t think I was letting you go alone, did you?”

Yes. Idiot that I am, I thought he was sending me to Scotland, not accompanying me. Thank god. I have longer with Marco before the consequences of my poor, if seemingly rational, decisions materialise.

“How long does it take to get to Scotland?” I ask because I am apparently all in for torturing myself.

He shrugs one shoulder. “Six hours. Ish. But we need to make a couple of stops on the way.”

Stops? What for?

MARCO

Apparently the mysterious and deadly reputation only works outside of my inner circle, as my second-in-command never ceases to give me shit. But he does get the job done. With no more than my vague order to Paulo as we left, we draw up outside a perfect little independent boutique.

“Are we going shopping?” my girl asks, confused, as I open the door and scoop her into my arms.

“Yep. You need something to wear that isn’t those pyjamas. I might not get you any shoes though, so I have an excuse to carry you everywhere,” I tease her.

“Marco, stop,” she says urgently, eyes darting to and fro.

“What?” I don’t stop. I shoulder our way in.

She wriggles and hisses, “I can’t, we have to leave!”

The shop assistant, clearly well briefed by Paulo, flips the lock behind us, lowers the blinds, and slips into the backroom.

“You don’t like the clothes?” I set her onto her feet and she snarls up at me like an angry kitten. I was so sure this would be her style. Sort of, relaxed-beach-girl vibe.

“I like them,” she says, massaging her forehead, looking at the floor, where her toes are curling. “But I haven’t got any money to pay. I can’t afford—”

“That’s not an issue. I’m treating you.”

“I’d be in your debt,” she hugs herself with her arms and I manage not to step forwards and force her not to cover her

beautiful body.

“The reverse. I am in *your* debt. I stole you from your home. You let me taste you last night.” She begins to object to that phrasing, but I’m not listening to any nonsense. “You’ve trusted me. I’m merely requesting you allow me to give you some clothes since you haven’t got any, and I feel responsible.”

“I’d be doing you a favour, would I?” she asks with narrowed eyes and a sceptical furrow of her brow. She’s unfurled a bit since she woke, but not enough.

“Yes, that’s exactly it.” I try to look innocent. Though honestly, she would be helping me out. If I see her much longer in that top that hints at the swell of her perfect tits and those tiny shorts, her long colt-like legs on display, I can’t be held responsible for what I might do.

“Well, maybe just a pair of shorts and a top, so I have something other than these.” She plucks at the cherry-pattern fabric, looking around with longing eyes. A bad habit. She’s limiting this, fearful I’ll pick through her expenditure like her father did.

“You need more than one outfit. I don’t know if we’ll be able to get anything from Kensington. Let’s start with a hundred outfits.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she scoffs, “I only need one.”

There’s some further negotiation about how many clothes I’ll buy her, during which I manage to haggle her up to ten outfits, and settle into a comfortable sofa and watch as she browses. It’s like when she was in the supermarket. She loves pretty things, but I can see her checking the tags and assessing the price and the value.

The first thing she tries on is a deep indigo colour skimpy silk top with a lace trim, and a pair of cut-off jean shorts. I almost groan. It’s basically as revealing as those fucking pyjamas. Yes, it’s summer, but could she not choose something that wasn’t torture? She’s going to kill me.

She fingers the silk and turns to look from all angles in the mirror.

“It’s so nice,” she whispers. “Can I have it?”

“Yes,” I answer without hesitation. Even if it probably will be the cause of my demise. There was me thinking it would be one of the other mafias, but nope. Felicity in that top and those shorts will do it.

“I didn’t even say please,” she objects, blinking in disbelief.

“Even better. What else are you going to demand?”

“What about...” She points at a rack of hoodies. Unlike the camisole, there’s nothing sexy about them. Just cute. Maybe she thinks that she’s only allowed sexy clothes?

“You can have that too.”

“I didn’t even say which one, or how much they cost,” she huffs. “How can you be sure?”

“Because, one, anything will look great on you. And two, I don’t care about the cost. I can afford it.”

It’s difficult for her. She’s been told she doesn’t deserve anything, and however hard she has fought, shit like that sticks.

“Believe me, you would have to work much harder than this to put a dent in my finances. You can buy the whole shop and every other shop on the street and it wouldn’t be even a small percentage. But even if it were, I’d still do this.”

“But why?” There’s bafflement in her voice and she scuffs her bare feet on the floorboards, her dark hair falling over her face.

I tilt my head and consider. There are a thousand reasons, and it’s just a matter of which she wants to hear right now. *Because I love you* is the simplest, but not for this moment.

When I don’t answer immediately she peeks from under that protective waterfall, her grey eyes pale with expectation of being rejected.

“You deserve it.”

She splutters with disbelieving laughter. “What?”

“For being strong and brave and you,” I say matter-of-factly. “For being the one I want, and for being mine.”

Her eyes light and there’s a second of her smile before she covers her mouth with her hands. So happy over some clothes. Spoiling her will be a joy.

She pads over to a rack of dresses. Floor length, black with a bold flower pattern, strapless, with a long split up one side that reveals her leg. She glances at me as she strips off right there, in the main part of the shop, and slips the dress over her head. The confidence of the gesture is that of a sultry girl and it suits her.

“What about this one?”

“Of course.”

Approaching me with slow, deliberate, steps she widens her eyes, slides her finger over her inner bottom lip and drags it across. Coy and sexy and knowing and pure.

“Please Mr scary mafioso, please can I have the expensive dress?” I lean back and my hard-on tents my trousers. I don’t bother to hide it. I think she’ll like to see the effect she has on me. Nothing like a man being helpless with desire to make a woman feel powerful.

“Please? I really like it.” She makes puppy eyes at me. I’m nonplussed for a second, then get it. She’s never asked for what she wanted before. She’s too proud to beg, because pleading never made any difference with her father. But this is a strange sort of truth. She’s asking, but she knows I’ll say yes. She’s realised this shopping trip can be a fun game she can play safely with me.

I put on a severe expression. “Will you wear it? It’s not okay to waste clothes.”

“I promise I’ll wear it.” She does a little twirl, showing off the dress, but I only have eyes for the girl inside.

“But only for me,” I say sternly. “It’s very revealing. I won’t have any other man looking at you.”

“Why not?” She blinks up at me, all naivety.

“Because I’d have to kill them, cara,” I say, then sigh with mock regret. “I currently have a good reputation as a fair but demanding boss. If you show other men—even my men—that gorgeous body of yours, you’ll make me a wild animal.” I palm my hand over the solid length of my cock and she follows the movement. That regard turns the slight pressure into a stream of sparks. “You’ll be a siren, luring men to their deaths.”

She snorts with laughter but when she sees my face remain serious a shiver goes through her...

“Does that mean I can have it?” She tips her chin down and looks from under lowered lashes.

I sigh thoughtfully, take my reading glasses from my pocket and beckon her to me with one hand. There’s an extra sway in her hips as she approaches and I go to slip my glasses on. “Let me have a look at this dress you want so much, mmm?”

“I think this is a good angle.” She drops to her knees between my thighs.

My reading glasses drop, forgotten.

Probably a good man would refuse with some shit about how he doesn’t want her feeling that she owes me this for some clothes. But fuck, I’m not a good man. Never pretended to be. My belt buckle clinks as she undoes it, clumsy in her inexperience with men’s clothing, and my cock presses up. Eager. So fucking desperate for her touch.

“Go on,” I growl when she pauses.

She focuses on the button and zip.

“I’ve never done this before,” she says, almost to herself, and runs an experimental finger down my length. The first touch of her hand to my cock is electric, even though it’s just a

brush through a layer of fabric. I hiss with the effort required to hold back.

I hold my breath as she drags my boxers down. Not just because the cotton rubs my cock, but because I'm aware that what she's revealing is, shall we say, intimidating. Big. Thick and long.

"Oh!" She stares at my cock. "That's... Will it fit?"

"Yes." Because she was made for me. She might be small, but I have no doubts. "It'll hurt a bit the first time. And it'll always be tight, but I promise it will be worthwhile."

She nods. Her little hand cups around my length.

"That's it." A flex of my hips and she shifts her hand. An experimental stroke that feels simultaneously too much and not enough.

It's so slow that she brings her mouth to the rounded head. Pre-come beads at the top and the whole length throbs. Then blessed relief, her lips touch. A shudder goes through me. Her tongue slides out with deliberate languor, swishing over that droplet. She tastes me, pressing her lips together.

"You little tease," I growl as she draws back.

"You're salty, I knew you would be." She licks more confidently this time, a broad sweep that sends sparks of pleasure right down to my balls. She explores me tentatively with her mouth and hand. Testing my hardness and easing her fingers around my girth. "How do I make you feel amazing?" she breathes onto my skin. "Teach me."

"Take me in your mouth." I can't keep in a grunt as she leans forwards further, her breasts pressing to my thighs and her forearms resting on my lap. "Suck."

I push her hair back when it falls over her face. I want to see her expression as she takes me in her mouth for the first time.

There's an infinite moment as she pushes the head of my cock between her plush lips. "Good girl. That's it."

She's hesitant at first, and the sight of her trying to figure out how to get more of me into her mouth is filthy as fuck.

"Up and down. It's most sensitive over the tip. Yeah like that, fuck but you're whip-smart," I add as she does as I say, her hand grasping at my leg.

She begins to bob her head, a sound of arousal and content from her throat. I've been dreaming of this, of her, and she is even better than I imagined. Sweet and intrigued and *willing*.

She's speeding up, getting into a rhythm, driving me right into craziness.

Oh fuck. I'm not going to last. She's so darn perfect. Except when her teeth catch me and I wince. Instantly she recognises the mistake and covers them, smoothing her hand up my side in apology.

Curious kitten that she is, her other hand eases down to my balls and she lets out a little whimper as she cups them.

"Is it their size you like?" They are big, and she nods. "The weight? They're full to bursting with seed just for you." That makes her redouble her efforts on my cock, the swollen head hitting the back of her throat. Her eyes are watering, but she's driving this, not me. She's swallowing further, harder, dirtier than I would have asked. But since she's offering, I'll fucking take it all. Particularly the submission of her sucking my cock like this. Her *choosing* to serve me. It's a powerful drug for us both. Me because I'm seeing her on her knees, sucking my cock just as I imagined when we first met. She's pleasuring me alone.

Her because she will only ever get complimented for this, and I'm at her mercy. I think she knows I'd do anything for her right now.

I might be hard as granite, but I'm putty in her hands.

"You're so good at this. The sight of your mouth around my cock is the sexiest thing I've ever seen. Your pink lips stretched. Those sounds you're making." Small whines of delight. "Your sweet tits just there for me to see bursting out of that dress."

Lacing my hand into her hair, the silky strands sliding over my knuckles, I encourage her. Show her the speed to tip me over.

The pressure builds and my balls tighten as she rubs them. I groan as I begin to lose control.

“I’m going to come. You don’t want...” I try to pull her head from my cock. Partly because I don’t want to shock her. The other aspect of my reluctance is far less honourable.

I want to see her marked as mine. My seed splattered over her creamy skin. On her face. Deep in her pussy, filling her to the point it drips out in a pretty mess. I want to breed her with babies who have my blue eyes and her straight dark hair.

She doesn’t let me draw her away.

“Felicity.” The pleasure overtakes me, fizzing down my back. I spurt into her mouth and she mews as it hits the back of her throat. My first orgasm since I jerked myself harshly in the car just after meeting her.

I should just accept this gift, but I’m a greedy bastard. I shove backwards and grab my cock. A line of spit curves between her lip and my shaft as I stroke through the last of my orgasm. Right onto her chest. Over the swell of her breasts, falling stark and white on the black of the dress.

Her throat bobs as she swallows, and that, along with seeing her covered with my mark, heightens the pleasure.

We both breathe hard, watching each other’s eyes for a long moment as the tremors of coming fall away. I’m half expecting her to change her mind, feel bad perhaps. Have doubts.

“So.” She sits back and gives me a cheeky grin, even as her eyes are shining with pride at having unravelled me. “I’d better have this dress, right?”

I roll my eyes, barely able to think past the post-orgasm bliss. Despite how intense that was, there’s still a scratch. I need to fuck her. I have to fill her up, gushing wet heat while wedged deep inside her. But there’s time.

I rally my thoughts. “How am I ever going to get you naked, and under me, if you own all these clothes?”

“You could take them off? Might be fun.”

“I could rip them off. Then we’d end up back here next week, and the week after, and the one after that, with you trying on clothes and showing me your delectable body in infinite variations of pretty wrapping.” That sounds like a great idea to me and the way she presses her thighs together suggests she thinks so too.

“That one we’ll take, but it’s a bit dirty. Is it available in white?” That would suit my purpose very nicely and save us another stop on our way north.

She tilts her head and rises to her feet. At the rack she finds the white version of the dress and holds it up, considering. It’s slinky and long, with a slit up the side almost to her hip. “I can have this one too?”

I pretend to consider, pinching my eyebrows together as I do up my trousers.

“Cara, you can have *everything*.”

FELICITY

I love him.

This should be insane. My rational brain is pointing out all the reasons this ought to be wrong, but it's not. It's *so right*. Every part of me has known rejection and hurt and heartbreak. I've spent years being unwanted. It's been an itchy, too tight, bobbled dress I've worn so long I didn't realise how it made me feel.

But that does mean I recognise how different being with Marco is.

Being with Marco isn't just having taken off that ill-fitting dress. It's like the clothes he bought me: perfectly fitted, soft and luxurious.

And it was that feeling which made me want to pleasure him, not the gifts.

I've heard about blow jobs, and been the subject of crude gestures and jokes. But being on my knees for him was a thrill of power. He broke apart for me, a girl who nobody thought was special.

And I saw the savage look in his eyes as he covered my breasts with his come. It was claiming, yes, but it was vulnerable too. At that moment I knew I could ask for anything and he'd do it, not just to have the moment of sexual bliss again, but to please me.

Afterwards he kept saying yes. Never impatient, never annoyed that I wanted something. We came away with bags of

clothes and underwear that whenever they touch my skin, I'll remember the heat of his attention.

We have hours in the limo driving north to chat. I lean against him and answer his questions about cupcake recipes and decoration. He tells me about his work, pausing at the more unsavoury aspects, but continuing when I nod, unfazed. You don't live in a mafia compound all your life without seeing some darkness, and god knows it wasn't like there was anyone to protect me.

Until now. Marco seems intent on looking after me. He feels free to touch my body now, curling a strand of my hair around his finger or tucking it behind my ear. His hands are on me constantly. A stroke of my cheek, holding my waist.

We stop for an excessive lunch at a country hotel, with so many courses I lose track. I'm wearing the cut-off denim shorts and cami from earlier, along with cute canvas-top sneakers, and I'd probably have felt underdressed. Except I was with Marco, and he has this presence that says, *Do not fuck with me, you'd regret it.* And no one even looks askance at me.

Back in the car, it's like he can't decide what he wants to look at more as I speak. His gaze flits between my face, my legs, the place where the delicate top meets my breasts. And if that sounds carnal and greedy, well. I'm worse. I'm trying to cram a lifetime of memories into this journey. I catalogue his every feature, from his excessively long eyelashes to the silver in his curly hair.

"You can ask," he says eventually when I'm running my finger down his cheek again, skirting the scar.

"About...?"

He huffs.

Right. The scar. I'm curious, naturally, about how it happened. But that turns out not to be the question I care about most. "Does it hurt?"

"Not anymore, though it's a bit sensitive."

I press a kiss to his cheek, right over the scar, then check if he's okay with that. He's watching me, wary and still as a predator showing its underbelly.

“Who did it?”

“My father,” he says calmly, a hint of amusement in his eyes. “He's already dead. By my hand.”

Good. I don't reply because my jaw clenches so hard I may have to have it surgically re-opened. How dare that... I struggle to think of the right word. Bastard. Fucker. Cocktwat-douchbag. How dare anyone have harmed *my* man. Marco.

“You look positively murderous,” he teases. “Do I need to dig him up so you can kill him again?”

I slap Marco's chest lightly, pouting. “Yes. We'll do it annually.”

His chin tips up and he gives a growling purr. It's only then I realise what I've said. I've implied we'll be together. For years.

A sign for Carlisle flashes past.

That's close to Scotland, isn't it?

Oh no. No no no no no.

My tummy goes heavy, like I've eaten too much uncooked cake mixture. This is worse than getting salmonella poisoning. I cling to Marco.

“It won't be like that for our kids,” he murmurs as he strokes my hair. “They'll have a good dad, I promise.”

My eyes are hot and dry. I should just accept whatever happens. But I can't. I'm done with letting anyone determine my fate. I dig my nails into my palm as I look into his face.

“What's going on? What's the plan when we get to Scotland?” See, I can be brave.

“Isn't it obvious?” He quirks one eyebrow up, those blue eyes like the reflection of a blue-sky white water.

“No!” I’m brittle, caramelised sugar breaking into pieces as it cools. Stretched and changed by being with this man, I can’t return to my original state of boring white granules of sweetness after being sinuously bent and heated.

These conflicted signals from him. First he says I’m his and makes me come so hard I nearly cracked a tooth, then he’s taking me to Scotland. “What is all this for?”

He smooths his thumb over my lips. “We’re going to Gretna Green.”

I have definitely misheard. I’m losing my mind, because I could swear he just said we’re going to Gretna Green.

“Why?” I croak.

“You want to be married, correct?”

How does he know that? I look away, out of the window. I can’t bear for him to see how much I need this, because this is a cruel joke. I must be. The entirety of what I want does not just appear. That happens to... I dunno. No one. Girls in Regency romances, maybe. Or dogs, because all they want is a squeaky toy and a bowl of dog biscuits.

People like me don’t get handsome men who adore and want to marry them. Green fields blur past and dappled light shines through the trees in their summer finery.

Marco grasps my chin uncompromisingly, hard enough to hurt, and forces it up so I have to meet his eyes.

“I know about what happened between your parents. How she fell for him and he abused that love. How he used her, and never married her, didn’t give her the respect she deserved.”

“How—”

“It’s my business to make you happy, cara. That means I had to know about you. My entire team worked on Operation *Wife*. Paulo nearly gave the game away,” he adds wryly. “Whisky, indeed. I know you didn’t get the recognition a mafia princess should, or the love. And all that ends today. As my wife, you’ll have everything.”

The shock is biting into a plain cupcake and finding delicious lemon curd filling. He knows all this—that I was unwanted and unnamed—and his answer is to give me his surname. Marriage. As clear a commitment as I could ask for.

“I can’t bring back your mother.” He shakes his head regretfully, not saying what we both know. She’s dead. If she wasn’t, she’d have come for me. “Your father was a petty, insecure, cruel man who couldn’t cope with a woman who challenged him as your mother did. I could have stopped Westminster from murdering him, but I think he deserved it.”

“I do too,” I whisper.

My heart throbs. There’s just one question I have to know the answer to before I say anything about marriage. “Was it you?”

MARCO

It depends what she means.

When I don't reply immediately she adds, "The book, chocolates, the card. And the... Ring."

Fingers crossed for foolhardy, but I won't lie to her. Even if my obsession could scare her away for good. "Yes."

"You were following me?"

How to explain the visceral need to see her, to be with her, to keep my girl safe? It's been a constant tug at my chest since we met, leading me to her.

I don't attempt to say all that. I simply nod.

"Stalking me."

I think of the CCTV cameras in her father's house that I hacked into. There wasn't anything too private, I'll give the bastard credit for that at least. Just corridors, public areas, and the kitchen. I liked watching Felicity in her kitchen. My baking queen.

"You could put it like that."

She licks her lips. How is it even legal for a girl to be this pretty?

I wait for the disgust, or judgement. Or perhaps the next question: *Why*. She shoots a look at me from beneath long black lashes and I see the words in her eyes.

I'm willing to lay out my heart for her. I love her. I'm certain we belong together.

“Thank you for the gifts,” she says instead.

“I’m sorry you had to leave them all behind.”

“Only the book. I ate the kisses...” She smiles ruefully.

“And the other gift?” My heart hammers in my chest. A diamond ring. Not exactly the most subtle gift I’ve ever given, even if it wasn’t as expensive as what I’d have chosen. But I saw the longing on her face as she examined the jewellery that day and didn’t care about anything but making her smile.

“Why did you give it to me?”

“Why do you think?” I quirk one eyebrow up and she blushes. We’re both circling around the real question here.

“I couldn’t wear it before... But... I could now...?”

“Would you like to?” My heart is bashing around my ribcage as though it’s been tossed over a waterfall in a barrel.

She’s digging eagerly into the seams of her hoody grabbed from where it was discarded earlier, and a cautious smile lifts the corners of her mouth. “If you’d like me to?”

“I would.”

Then the ring is glinting in her palm.

I lift it and for the second time in as many days I’m kneeling at her feet in the back of the car. But instead of snapping her bonds, this time I’m taking her hands in mine. They’re small and delicate. I stroke my thumb over her palm. Her mouth falls open into a little ‘o’ and her pupils go wide. Blown.

Mmm. My girl.

I slowly slip the ring over her fourth fingertip, holding her gaze all the time. It’s borderline erotic, a fore echo of my taking her virginity, slipping my cock into her, and we both know it. The smooth unyielding metal and her soft skin. My cock twitches. I’m rock-hard again.

Sliding it further, curving over her finger, it reaches her second knuckle. I push, the slightest pressure. Then the ring is over the barrier and onto her finger, snug.

Her breasts, only just covered by that little top, are rising and falling with laboured breath and the bottom of her neck is tinged pink. This is the hottest moment of my life, and none of the apparent good bits are involved. Not my cock, not her pussy. Not even our tongues.

I had no idea that the mere act of putting my ring on her finger would make pre-come seep from my erection. I'm so ready to claim her in the other way.

She flexes her hand and looks at the ring, admiring it, a pleased smile on her face.

"It suits you. A beautiful diamond for a beautiful girl."

"Thank you." She takes a deep breath. "Can I have one more thing?"

I wait.

"A kiss," she finishes awkwardly, eyes darting away. "A proper first kiss."

"First?" My mind goes full of static. We haven't kissed? No, she's right.

"When you... Put your mouth on mine last night. It was my first kiss," she confesses in a rush.

"Oh cara. I'm sorry." Not that I was the first to kiss her. I'm positively gleeful about that. But she's so perfect. Her first kiss should have been all sweetness and—yes—love. Not a tumultuous mixture of desperate lust and the need to keep her quiet.

I surge up and onto the seat beside her. Then I steady, focussing on her. I want us both to remember this. I skim my fingers through her hair deliberately until I reach the back of her head, then plunge them into the silk. I draw her forwards until our lips almost brush, so close my skin tingles in anticipation. For a few breaths I relish this moment.

"Let's try that first kiss again, shall we?" I whisper, and she whimpers and nods.

The first brush of our lips is a shock, even though I'm expecting it. Her lips are plush and soft but there's electricity

between us. I'm leisurely. Gentle presses and catches, not deepening the kiss until I hear her breath hitch and she reaches for me. Her hand finds my shoulder and grips tight. An anchor in the storm of our kiss.

Her lips fall open and I take the invitation, sliding my tongue into her mouth. She lets out a mew of delight as I stroke the inside of her lip.

Our hands are still joined, and as I hold her head I rub my thumb over the place where her palm and fingers meet, feeling my ring there. She's wearing this sign of our commitment, and even though no words were said, I know she understands the significance. Pride seeps through me, feeling that band of metal—a sort of collar of ownership—as I kiss her. I take her first kiss and make it mine.

And when the kiss gradually goes deeper, wilder, dirtier, I can't help but grin. Because my clever girl is a quick study. No sooner as I've shown her something that feels good, but she tries it on me. To devastating effect.

I touch my tongue to hers, she copies and arousal unfurls in my groin. I suck her lip and graze it with my teeth and she retaliates with a nip.

“So perfect. You're being such a good girl for me,” I growl as she tries thrusting her tongue into my mouth. Her hand on my shoulder has begun to wander. No longer looking for just support, she's stoking our desire by kneading the muscles and pressing her thumb along the roughness of my unshaven jawline.

I kiss her with all the longing of weeks of wanting her by my side, and the intensity demanded by my aching cock. I've thought so many times of this moment, of her in my arms, my ring on her finger.

I have to have her, and she has to be my *wife*.

“Cara,” I say, drawing back. “Marry me.”

Her eyes go wide. “But...”

FELICITY

I'm drunk on his kisses and his presence. And that ring. But yeah, it feels too good to be true. I'm struggling to believe it. "You really want to be married?"

I thought men avoided marriage, tried to not get trapped.

He cups my jaw, stroking my cheek with his thumb.

"Given your parents' story, I thought this would be important. I'm showing you in the best way I can think of, that I'm in this. You're it for me. I didn't spend weeks of my life obsessing over getting you into my life and bed to walk away afterwards. When we met, your soul tugged on a thread to mine I hadn't ever seen. That thread reeled me to you, and I'll never let you go. I love you."

He feels that too? My heart bursts.

"If you didn't want to be mine, you shouldn't have run and made me chase you. You should have said no. It's too late now, I'm keeping you." He grins wolfishly. "And that means that we'll be married today."

I gape. I didn't believe him when he said I was his, but he's serious. All my doubts melt, insubstantial as rice paper.

"I love you," I whisper back. And it feels momentous to confess that, and also enough. I trust him. I did last night when he rescued me, and when we played chase. When he caught me. "We don't have to get married, so long as we're together."

This thing that's been part of my dreams I suddenly have clarity about. Marriage wasn't what was missing for my

mother. Love was. All that matters is my being with Marco, and that we love each other.

A smile as warm as a waft of vanilla from an oven spreads across Marco's face.

"I want to. I want you to be mine, permanently, and everyone to know. And I want you to know you are mine, with no doubt whatsoever."

There are no words to do justice to this moment, so instead I crawl across the short distance of seat and snuggle into his lap, my thighs over his. He tightens his arms around me, pulling me flush to him, the hard length of his cock pressing into my lower belly. Heat unfurls, bright and pleasurable.

He wants me.

And I want him, so what exactly am I waiting for? A divine sign of approval?

Who needs god if Marco will call me his good girl.

"Marco, I can't wait for marriage. Please. Now." I have to have him inside me, filling me.

I'm grasping at his belt before I can think through what I'm doing. It's no easier this time, apparently once is not enough to make me less fumbly, but I realise I have a bigger issue. My shorts.

Marco, my husband-to-be and absolute trooper, doesn't hesitate. He releases his cock without another word as I stand on wobbly legs. The movement of the limo threatens to unbalance me and so do my weak knees.

He reaches out a hand to steady me as we round a corner, at the same time he strokes his cock with the other and I'm hopelessly distracted by the sight of his big hand on his cock as I strip off the shorts, and the knickers we bought too, shimmying them down my legs.

"And your top." His voice is uncompromising.

I obey, and unclip my new bra too, tossing it aside and kneeling over his lap.

“I need you,” I say around his kiss as he drags me closer and devours my lips. My knees dig into the seat and I writhe against the solid presence of my fiancé.

“Go on then,” he murmurs between kissing down my neck, making his way to my breasts where he moans as he sucks first one nipple then the other into his mouth. “Use me. Fuck me. Make me come right up against your womb and breed you. You want that too, right?”

I nod desperately. Yes. Yes, that as well. Having a baby always felt further away than the moon, but with him? Yes.

“Take everything you need. I’m yours.” He holds his cock in one hand and my squishy hip in the other and lines us up.

I lower myself, my dripping folds coming up against the immovable hardness of his erection. Already it’s a feeling of completeness. My pussy throbs. My clit, I dunno how, but I swear it bounces like an overexcited creature with its own will.

Bearing down is sweet torture. It’s pressure and stretch and I hiss at the burn as I take his first inch.

“Yes. You’re so brave, I know that hurts,” he murmurs, his voice low and gruff. “Now more, because you feel like heaven to me.”

He said to take him, but of course he’s still in control of this, encouraging me as I slip another inch onto his cock. I’d think it wasn’t possible, that we won’t fit, but Marco doesn’t leave any more room for that anxiety than he does space in my stretched-out pussy. There’s no fear left anywhere. He has chased it all away with his love and his amazing big body.

The next inch is easier, so I slip down another, my thigh muscles creaking with the effort. The next is more difficult again, but now instead of holding still, Marco is thrusting from below. And each slow retreat takes him deeper as he slides back into me. So devious, my husband-to-be. He takes what he wants without asking.

And what he wants is—and this shocks the hell out of me, even after his declarations—me.

I try the same trick as him, rising up and lowering myself harder, trying to get him deeper.

“That’s it, you’re so good.” He’s holding me with both hands now, no need for his guidance to keep us together. “You’re taking me perfectly. My good girl.”

His praise lights me up. The reassurance that I’m doing this right, combined with the delicious hardness of him stretching me open is magic.

It takes several careful thrusts, working him into me, until he’s sliding all the way with no friction. He’s so deep I can feel him up to my belly button. I swear he rearranged all my internal organs for that massive cock of his. How do I even have room? He’s filled a gap I didn’t even know existed.

It wasn’t there, obviously, otherwise he wouldn’t have stretched me out. It was a gap that he had to prise open to reveal, a void of loneliness that is now full of him. Stuffed. And soon he’ll spill wet heat into me, seed that will bind us together even more. Joining with Marco like this chases away the last tiny vestige of loneliness.

We’re both moving faster now, getting savage and needy. He’s gripping my hips to slam me down onto his cock and I’m holding his shoulders, supporting myself as best I can to meet the thrusts he’s filling me with from below. He’s a force of nature. A hurricane and I want all of him. Daily. Forget an apple to keep the doctor away, or a balanced diet, I’m having sex with Marco. His cock inside me is all the sustenance I need. There’s no discomfort now. The feel of his cock sliding on my inner walls is fogging my mind.

He plunges his hand into my hair even as he slides his hold to my bottom, digging his fingers in so hard it might bruise. I don’t care. I want his marks on me. He’s so confident, I love it. I’m his to do with as he wishes, and he wants to fuck me. Spill inside me. Breed me, he said.

“Look.”

I can’t. I’m almost cross-eyed with pleasure.

He snarls at my disobedience and thrusts up, hard. I cry out at how deep and good he feels.

“Look,” he orders again.

I follow his gaze to between our bodies. His cock is glistening with my arousal, stark skin surrounded by dark fabric. I’ve creamed all over him and it’s obscenely hot against that pristine suit.

“See how well you’re taking my fat cock?”

His cock disappears into me as I feel him thrust, and somehow seeing that at the same time as the pleasure spreads out from where I’m taking him makes this all the hotter. I thought nothing could feel as good as him inside me, but I was totally wrong. The sight of him sliding between my legs is better, spiking arousal that makes my clit pulse.

“Such a good fucking girl.” He reaches between us and his thumb finds that bundle of nerves that respond better to his touch than anything else. I meet his gaze and it’s implacable. “Now, cara,” he says in a stern voice. “Come on my cock.”

MARCO

She grips me with her cunt so intensely as she comes, I might pass out from the blood trapped in my cock. I hang onto her curves, tensing every muscle I have in me to prevent her from tipping me over too. Not yet. One orgasm is not enough for my girl on her first time. Two, absolute minimum, especially as she still owes me one of her orgasms for earlier in the boutique.

She's so sensitive to my every touch, alight with every stroke of my hands and every thrust. We're attuned to each other.

Fuck, she feels amazing. My perfect fit. This sweet, cupcake making, suspicious woman is my whole life now. Her pussy has demonic magic, so hot and tight I think it's eating me whole even as her orgasm ebbs away. Absolutely the best thing I've ever felt is her coming from my touch.

"You're mine. I'm not letting you go now," I tell her as she sags against my chest. "I'll stalk you to the ends of the earth if you try to leave. Wherever you go, I'll follow. Your dark shadow. I'm that addicted to you, and I'll make you addicted to me too."

She sounds like she already is, whimpering as her hair tickles my throat when she nods.

I've ruined her. She's practically boneless now and fun as it is to have her on top of me, I need more. Or rather, the possessive monster in me needs to take control, and isn't satisfied.

I want her on her back, beneath me, looking up as I cover her with my body and fill her. I'm still completely dressed, but for my cock poking obscenely from my trousers. When we're married there will be so many opportunities for us to be skin-to-skin, intimate. For now, I just need her to come again so I can release into her.

I hold her to me as I shift and lay her down along the padded bench seat, her naked skin creamy and freckled against the black leather. The movement draws me out nearly all the way, just the tip of my cock still in her. I drive in, hard, and she gasps, rolling her hips up.

"That's my good girl."

She whines in what I can only assume is agreement. Smiling as I settle into a rhythm that keeps me right on the edge of coming, I take her in. Hair a mess, spread around her head. Naked body exposed and writhing with renewed pleasure. I'll want this girl forever. There's no way I can get enough of her soft body and strawberry scent.

Her tits are way too tempting, falling a little to the side and jiggling as I thrust into her again and again. I lean down and bite that soft plump flesh gently, then not-so-gently as I hear her gasp and her pussy clenches around me. I worship her breasts and she writhes, offering herself to my dirty fantasies.

So damn pretty. Holding myself on one elbow so I can kiss her mouth, I lift her thigh, opening her up so I can go deeper.

"I love you. I'm going to have you in every way you can imagine and many you can't," I say between dirty kisses that she returns with tongue and teeth going wild. "On your hands and knees, your arse in the air. With your ankles at my shoulders. Riding me from behind as I stroke your back or cup your tits. I can't wait, cara. I'm going to defile you in the most delicious ways."

She clutches at me as I pump into her, her hips meeting mine, slapping our flesh together almost violently. Her fingers can't settle. They're in my hair, nails digging into my scalp and dragging down my back. Even through my shirt I can feel

her intent to take a chunk out of me for herself. And that's fine by me. I'm hers.

And she is *mine*. I catch one of her hands, lacing our fingers together, and press it into the seat beside her head. Then the other. Having her pinned beneath me by my pistoning cock is primitive. Close and intimate despite my clothes. The sort of sex I dreamed of having with her.

I'm pounding her into the seat, out of control and animalistic. My head is full of possessive lust and the need to paint her with my seed. To come deep inside her so she's pregnant with my child after this. To breed her.

It's not just the unimaginable pleasure of her tight virgin pussy, although that's like nothing I've ever felt before. It's the feeling of owning my girl, of having her completely, and watching her pleasure. Her fingers grip the back of my hands where I'm pressing her down. And after weeks of being apart from her, the creature in my chest that wanted to drag her to its lair is purring. I'm staring into her grey eyes, seeing her lose herself in pleasure I've given her, spearing her with my cock and holding her hands in mine, palm to palm. Those eyes of hers are beautiful, full of white stars I fall into.

I can't believe I'm this lucky. She's perfect and amazing. I tell her in broken phrases how she's my world. That I love her and I'm going to care for her and fuck her and give her orgasms every day. And my girl smiles as she pants and whines, so close to coming.

"I'm going to spoil you," I grind out the promise, still looking into her eyes. I want her to see when I spill into her. "I'll give you all of me. Every drop of my come until you're overflowing with it, wrecked and dirty. But I'm going to take as well. Your virginity is already mine, but I'm ravenous. I'll have all you give me and more. I'll take your pleasure, and steal my own, using your pussy and your mouth. I'll make you my sweet, cherished whore as well as my wife. Everything. I'll have to be inside you more times a day than you can take."

"I can take it," she gasps out. "Anything you give, everything you want, Marco."

I growl. That's the answer I didn't know I needed. She'll give me *everything*.

And in return, I grant the release she's desperately seeking. I reach down, cramming my hand between our bodies and not letting up on the hard thrusts. My fingers find her clit, and I stroke her.

Once, twice, and she shatters. She grips my cock even tighter than before, milking me. And I didn't mean for this to end—god knows I'd have kept fucking her until the end of time, I love being inside her that much—but she drags me over with her into hot spurt after hot spurt.

I keep coming, more than I can remember. I've been waiting for her and my body knows what its job is here: to breed her.

It's with primal delight I feel the wetness overflowing, making us both sticky. All that seed for my girl, and a baby soon too.

She giggles and hides her wide grin when we pull up outside the famous blacksmiths in Gretna Green. The sunset stains the sky red and purple, and the yellow evening light catches on Felicity's white dress, making it gold like the decorations she used to warn me the first time we met.

She changed into that flowing dress when I finally conceded she'd had enough orgasms for now. I allowed a slight clean-up, but I know for a fact my semen is still dripping through her knickers and down the inside of her thigh, and I'm glad. I want everyone to smell sex on her, and know she belongs to me.

"I can't believe we're really going to get married at Gretna Green today," she says as I help her out of the limo and she straightens her white dress.

"Do you mind?"

"No." She wraps an arm around my waist. "I like that you know what you want."

“And what I want is you.” I pull her in with a hand on her shoulder. She fits me perfectly.

“It’s like a romance novel,” she marvels as we take in the little whitewashed cottage.

“You wanted to be married to a Regency rake, didn’t you?”

“A duke, actually.”

“Brat,” I reply affectionately. I love her sassy mouth. “You got kidnapped by a...” I’m distracted by her hand sliding down to the top of my arse.

“I think you count as a highwayman?”

“Right, a highwayman. That will have to do, as I have no intention of letting you go.”

“Oh thank god, because I suspect I’d die without you.”

“Mr Brent.” A man meets us at the door with a nod. I owe Paulo a pay raise I decide, as I find he’s fixed all the paperwork so I don’t have to threaten to kill anyone because they don’t deal with getting us married quickly enough, as well as arranged nice touches like a bouquet and champagne that make the stars in Felicity’s eyes sparkle even brighter.

The ceremony is thankfully short, which is good because I’m impatient to have Felicity in my arms and on my cock again. There are vows that I repeat, promises to love no matter what. And when she says the same to me, my heart expands so big it threatens to crack my ribs from the inside. She slides a ring onto my finger and we smirk at each other at the symbolism and the memories. There is going to be so much time for us to make all the tender and wild moments together. The rest of our lives.

We retire to a hotel and it’s after I’ve got her back into bed and enjoyed my white-clad bride that we’re lying on the bed, her laid over me, that she brings it up. We’ve talked about some of our future, each feeling out the other’s preferences. I just say yes to whatever she wants. Eight kids? Sure. Another library? Why not. A bakery? Why not two?

“What about Westminster?”

“What about them?”

“Won’t they still be after me? They were pretty intent on wiping out Kensington.”

I pull out my phone.

“How do you have this number?” the kingpin of Westminster, Benedict Crosse, snaps.

“Hello to you too, Crosse.” I get distracted by Felicity’s ankle, bending her knee so it’s closer, stroking over the bone and pressing into her achilles.

I only realise I’ve been silent when my neighbouring mafia lord says irritably, “What do you want?”

“If anything happens to Kensington’s daughter, I will consider it as a personal attack.” Her whole foot fits in my hand. It’s dainty and I massage the arch, making her sigh happily.

“Oh that was you, was it?” he drawls. “I wondered who took the girl.”

“My girl.” I transfer my attention to the ball of her foot. I’ll need to do her other foot too. “My *wife*.”

“Mmm. She’s inherited a lot of debt.” Crosse’s last word is clipped and threatening.

“And you’re going to wipe it off her record, or I’ll be offering that university student who visits you *a job*. Your son’s girlfriend, I believe?” Two can play at threats to young women under the care of mafia bosses. I have an extensive spy network, and I know about Crosse’s soft spot for the girl.

There’s a long, tense silence.

“Fine,” Benedict spits, then hangs up.

“All sorted.” I toss my phone away and pull Felicity up to kiss me again. “Now, what else would my wife like?”

FIRST EPILOGUE

MARCO

6 years later

The scent of vanilla and the ring of laughter draws me away from work. I follow my nose and lean in the doorway to the kitchen. My wife and daughters are baking.

Felicity leaves her bakery early on a Friday and spends the afternoon with our twin troublemakers before we travel up to Scotland to spend the weekend in our other family home.

“Less eating the icing, Maeve, or there won’t be any left for the cakes,” Felicity says, taking a batch of cupcakes from the oven.

Sophie and Maeve look at one another. They’re wearing identical outfits, little white dresses with red polka dots that if I didn’t know better I’d say were reminiscent of cherries. My wife has a naughty sense of humour and loves to remind me of when our babies were conceived.

“How does she know without even looking? She’s magical,” I say. Two pairs of bright silver eyes swivel to me and there’s the screech of chairs as they both throw themselves out of their seats and race around the table to clutch my knees.

“Daddy, Daddy! Pick us up!”

“Pick me up first!” Sophie demands.

“You’re getting too big for this.” Leaning down I grab them both up simultaneously, one in each arm, gripped to my sides. They’re still not heavy, but I like to tease them a bit.

“Never too big,” Maeve whispers, pressing a sticky kiss to my cheek. They love sugar, my girls. Almost as much as I do. I’ve discovered a sweet tooth since I met Felicity.

“Never,” I agree, kissing her on her dark curly-haired head. I had a bet with Felicity that they would get my eyes.

Yeah. Expensive call.

Not that it mattered. I can afford anything she wants. I still run Brent, and it remains the inky shadow of the London mafias. Darker, quieter, more likely to swallow you whole. But with a little less direct involvement from me than I used to demand. Paulo relishes his expanded position, and frankly has earned it. And in turn, I adore spending time with my wife and family.

Scaring my enemies is still fun, don’t get me wrong, but I prefer my two little terrors.

“Right, are you two going to decorate these cakes with me, or what?”

There’s yells and squeals of approval as I carry my giggling daughters over to the table where Felicity is waiting, a wry smile on her face. It amuses her how indulgent I am of our kids.

“Hello, cara.” I lean in and kiss my beautiful wife, and she sighs with happiness.

“Daddy! Cupcakes!” Sophie complains when Felicity and my kiss goes on longer than she thinks it should.

“Later,” I promise Felicity as I pull away, kick out a chair, and settle the girls on my lap.

I scoop over cupcakes and a piping bag of icing. The three of us decorate our cakes. Under my daughters’ watchful eyes and with their directions, I do most of the tricky piping of the buttercream. Felicity contentedly decorates the remaining cakes in her signature elegant style and putters around the kitchen. She loves to just have me and the kids with her, enjoying the things she loves.

With bright coloured hundreds and thousands and every decoration on the table, Sophie is an agent of chaos. Nothing is too pink or too much. Maeve is more thoughtful, but still has the instincts of a little girl, making her cake also very pink, if more restrained. They both eat an obscene amount of the sugary decorations. The jelly lemon and orange slices are a favourite for eating, if not for putting on their cakes. Me? I prefer the ripe red fruits Felicity always puts out. Raspberries and strawberries from Scotland, soft and sweet and just a tiny bit sharp. Fragrant, and they go ideally with vanilla.

I try to keep my cupcake simple, though I know it's a failing mission. Both girls delight in piling decorations onto mine when I'm not looking, which makes Felicity laugh behind her hand.

When at last all of our cupcakes look as though a decoration tornado has hit, I say, "Are we ready? We're ready!"

"Who is going to win this time?" Felicity comes around behind us and looks over my shoulder. This is part of our tradition: she judges the cake decoration with her expert eye.

"It's mine! Mine is the best!" Sophie shrieks right in my ear, and I wince.

"Certainly you're the loudest," I mutter.

"Mmmm. This one has lovely colours," Felicity says, pointing at Sophie's cake. She finds something to praise on each of the cakes. Even mine. "I love this pattern here," she adds, pointing at Maeve's swirl of red.

"I think..." She leaves a long pause, like we're contestants on a television baking show. "Daddy's is the best."

Maeve and Sophie let out twin exasperated groans of, "Oh Mummy!"

I cackle as I lift my daughters off my knees and stand to claim my prize. Where Sophie or Maeve get extra time on their preferred games or credit towards whatever they're saving up for, I get my favourite reward.

"No more kissing, it's yukky!" Sophie complains.

“Alright, we’ll save my prize for later,” I say, and Felicity smiles. “Let’s get this cleared up and let’s have some dinner.”

The girls hurry to help.

I pick up the last of the buttercream we used to decorate the cakes. “I’ll be taking this.”

Felicity’s eyes go wide. Because she knows what that means. She knows how I like to eat buttercream icing.

Want more Marco and Felicity? [Get the Exclusive Free Second Epilogue straight to your inbox.](#)

CLAIMED BY THE MOBSTER

I'm in love with my ex-boyfriend's dad: a dangerous and powerful mafia boss twice my age.

He saved me.

I was desperate for a place to spend the night, and when I turned up on his doorstep in the pouring rain, Mr Crosse took me in.

For six months we repeated this pattern, the attraction shimmering between us, hot and wrong.

He kidnapped me.

On a lonely night back at home, I wake to the stab of a needle. The last thing I remember is Mr Crosse shooting my attacker and scooping me up. When I come to, I'm trapped with him in his bedroom, and... Oh, ground swallow me... I think I confessed my love while out-of-it.

Now my ex's dad won't let me leave.

Claimed by the Mobster is a sweet and spicy age gap instalove romance, starring an obsessed billionaire mafia boss and the girl he mustn't have, but can't resist.

ANWYN

Even though it's dark and pouring with rain, I hesitate before climbing the steps to the imposing London townhouse. With the orange glow of streetlights, shiny black tarmac, and low dark sky flickering around me, I run through my options again. I search desperately for a better alternative than throwing myself at the mercy of my ex-boyfriend's dad.

Cold water seeps between my toes and fogs my brain. Mr Crosse was always kind to me, in an offhand way. He's a bigger, grumpier, intimidating version of his son. Generous too, encouraging Tom to treat me with gifts and telling me I was welcome here anytime. He meant as Tom's guest, I suppose.

I'm testing that statement tonight.

Who else have I got who I can ask? I've walked miles across London and cannot afford pride. I mount the steps and press the bell, huddling a bit as a gust of wind tries to snatch my hood and succeeds in plastering it against my face. Ugh. December in London is miserable.

As the door opens, I ready the speech I prepared on the walk over. All about how I know Mr Crosse—or rather his son Tom—and please would they let Mr Crosse know I'm here and why I need his charity in the form of a bed for the night.

“Miss Kendrick.” Framed by the yellow light, Mr Crosse takes up the whole doorway and my throat goes dry. My lips are gummed together. The carefully crafted speech slices into my tongue.

He remembers me. Even as a drowned rat in a waterproof coat, he knows who I am?

My eyes take a second to adjust from him being a massive shadowed presence, to a man I've seen many times.

But none of them like this. I saw he was handsome before, but only in an abstract way. I didn't *want* him. My core didn't tingle. Somehow I missed Mr Crosse's raw sexuality.

He's dressed in a dove grey shirt undone at the neck and rolled to the elbows, revealing muscled forearms with a dusting of black hair. But his face. I don't know how aggressively masculine he is with his stubble, hard jawline, and severe nose. How did I ever breathe when he was around? I guess he was just my boyfriend's dad.

But he's not anymore.

He stands back, silently inviting me inside. I follow him into the house. I haven't been here for two years, since Tom and I left school and went to university. He broke up with me in our first term apart. We're still friends. We were just friends, really. Never even kissed properly. I tried, but Tom only hugged me and gave a peck of a kiss. I think he liked the symbol of a girlfriend and the reality of a friend.

The Crosse house is just as understated traditional luxury as I remember. Thick wallpaper in creams and blues, with intricate patterns of leaves, flowers and birds. And I'm standing here, in my cheap waterproof and yoga pants that are soaked over the thighs.

Kill me now.

"Sorry." I shrink back, dripping on the front mat.

Mr Crosse takes me in, a sweeping look from my soaking canvas shoes to my hood, covering the strands of beige hair that worked out of the ponytail as I walked.

"Tom's not here."

"I know," I whisper miserably. I would have texted him if he was, but we've sort of lost touch recently. He's always too busy to talk to me now.

I meet Mr Crosse's gaze, expecting to find distaste in the grey eyes he gave to Tom, but no. It's not that. Just a curiously intense expression.

I'm shedding water everywhere. I shouldn't have come, it was a humiliating mistake. "I'll go—"

"Best get you out of those wet clothes," he interrupts as he reaches out and draws down the zip of my waterproof.

My breath clogs in my throat.

It's nothing. Only him undoing my coat, but I'm peeled like a banana. Exposed and my cheeks heating, as he grasps the lapel and slowly lifts it.

He hasn't touched me. He's totally respectful and appropriate as he helps me out of the soaked garment. He's not interested in a girl half his age with no experience, who used to date his son. It's me who is being weird. My body is bubbly all of a sudden. I'm a bottle of fizzy pop that has been sitting on the shelf, inert and dull, then seeing Mr Crosse has unscrewed the cap. There's sensation everywhere. Little crackles as Mr Crosse's eyes glide over me, bursts of awareness of my clothes on my skin.

Wet yoga pants are not erotic. They aren't. Just objectively. But my pussy is defying that law of physics and is heating as Mr Crosse eases my coat from my shoulders. The bedraggled garment is hung up while I watch, so confused and turned on, I can't bring myself to say or do anything but press my thighs together.

"Come." He turns and strides away and I'm left trotting to catch up. We twist through the house to a room I've never been in. It's a cosy library and I barely repress a gasp. The walls are covered with dark wood bookshelves and a table has old maps unfolded. Flames flicker in a large fireplace and two plush chairs are placed on either side. Mr Crosse gestures to one chair and folds his massive body into the other, taking a glass of amber liquid from a side table and swirling it thoughtfully.

I sink into the seat and struggle to begin my explanation of why I've turned up at his house. But instead of a coherent story, what emerges is, "I need somewhere to stay for tonight."

Mr Crosse nods slowly, goes to take a sip of his drink. Whisky? But he stops as the glass touches his lips, lowering it again and swallowing hard. His hand encompasses that chunky glass—I bet it's crystal—like it's nothing. A toy. But I can see it would be solid if I lifted it.

What would it be like to be touched by his hands? So strong and big.

"Do you mind my asking what happened?" His voice is a calm rumble, and though he couched it as a question, it's not. It's a command.

I guess he's used to not having to ask twice.

Mr Crosse is a huge deal. Country girl that I am, I didn't know anything about the London mafias when I was going out with Tom, and when he told me his dad was the kingpin of Westminster, I scoffed. Ridiculous.

Not ridiculous, as it turns out. My mafia-obsessed housemates have been swooning over Westminster, the most influential of the London mafias, as well as giggling about the Bratva. Even I've seen photos in the gossip magazines of mafia bosses. And if I looked a bit longer at the ones with Benedict Crosse in them... I'm only human, alright? A virgin, not a pot plant.

And if I had any options, I'd be literally anywhere else.

The truth is, he's still the only person I know in this city. I assumed a lifetime of being a scholarship student at a posh boarding school had prepared me for university, but it didn't.

I'm shy, I guess. I don't know how to make friends, and have no family. None alive who want me, anyway. My aunt and uncle were happy enough to ship me to boarding school and there was never a good time for me to see them, so I stayed there for holidays too. Until Tom asked me to be his girlfriend, and I finally had somewhere to go. I thought being

in London would force me to be more outgoing, but it's all so expensive. I'm left working shifts at a coffee shop and falling into bed having done nothing but work and study.

"I have to get some sleep tonight. I'll lose my bursary if I don't."

He doesn't say anything and his excessive patience is in big black capital letters. MR CROSSE IS WAITING.

I curse myself. I had this all worked out logically, but seeing him has me out of whack. "I share a student house with five girls. It's in Whitechapel and it's really cheap."

Nope. Still not making any sense.

"Five. And currently, around forty of their closest friends and more bottles of vodka than I've ever seen in my life."

A huge Sunday night party I first heard about when the music was turned up at eight. Two hours later, I was about ready to tear my hair out. I know by now that there's no point in asking them to keep it down.

"I tried to stop it, but..." No one in that house listens to me. When I switched the music off I got elbowed out of the way and shouted out of the room. I called the police, but they said they couldn't do anything.

Last night they had a massive party too, and if I'm not on my A-game tomorrow, I'll be kicked off my scholarship, and so the end of going to university. Two years of work and student loans wasted. That means I won't have my dream job of being a plant geneticist and I'll probably be working in the Lazy Bean coffee shop until I'm eighty.

You know, I should have gone with that. It would be better than Mr Crosse's look of polite confusion.

Or I could have opted for the slightly less apocalyptic choice of getting a hotel room. But I did that yesterday, and last Saturday, and payday isn't until next week. I'm more terrified of debt and failure than I am of severe Mr Crosse and the feelings he evokes in me.

I am.

Probably.

Scary mobster or not, I'm out of options.

"I have an exam tomorrow. If I don't get any sleep tonight, I'll definitely fail."

"Mmm," he says, a muscle twitching in his jaw. "I'll find you alternative accommodation."

"There's no need," I rush to assure him. I cannot afford to get a new place. The landlord will take my deposit and the whole year of rent, and I'm broke enough as it is. "I just have to have somewhere for tonight. The house is usually fine."

He stares me down. "Evidently not."

"Except for the parties," I concede. And that most of my housemates loathe me. But lalalala, let's ignore that since I can't do anything about it. The rent is super cheap.

He scowls and runs his fingers around the rim of his glass.

Lucky glass.

I lick my lips and remind myself that lusting after your ex's dad is not the behaviour of good girls who study hard and have successful careers studying plants.

Mr Crosse—Benedict Crosse the gossip article said, and I obviously cannot allow myself to think of this gorgeous man as anything as intimate as just his first name—folds his arms over his chest and looks into the fire. He glances back at me and for a second I'm sure it's an admiring look, speculative, yes, but not in the "what am I going to do with her" way. More, "what wouldn't I like to do to her".

Then it's gone, and he unfurls himself, standing so much taller than me. He approaches and my mouth waters. He's big, and my head is level with his crotch. I could...

Stop it, Anwyn. He won't ever think of you like that. But my mind does a slideshow of smutty images anyway, blurry as they are since they're based on books rather than reality.

"I'll take you to your bedroom now. And in future, when your housemates are having a party, you come here."

BENEDICT

Six months later

I deserve torment.

Don't get me wrong, I have done many bad things in the pursuit of power and I'm sure I have a penthouse in hell waiting for me. Every violent and ruthless action I've ordered—I don't tend to get blood on my hands directly anymore, but obviously I used to—marks my soul as much as scars cover my body under this suit. I absolutely should burn for all the dark acts I've committed to keep my people safe and my mafia as the foremost in London.

But surely, *surely*, I do not deserve this.

I wait a moment before I look up as Anwyn hovers in the doorway to my office. I pretend I haven't given everyone strict orders that from Saturday afternoon to Sunday late morning I am not to be disturbed unless it is a crisis of the highest magnitude.

I feel her eyes on me and it's this bittersweetness. Anwyn is an angel. Far too young for me. Much too innocent. She's beautiful and funny and she's my son's ex-girlfriend.

"Hello." I push my keyboard away.

She smiles tentatively. "Hello, Mr Crosse."

"Benedict."

"I can't call you that." She shakes her head ruefully, as she has a dozen times before.

I wonder if she knows she ought to call me Mr Crosse to keep me at a distance. If she calls me my given name it might be too easy to forget all the reasons Anwyn is forbidden to me. Not just because of her youth and her relationship with my son. No, I was forcibly reminded recently that the other mafias will use anyone I care about to leverage the absolute power I hold over London.

No doubt Marco Brent figured out that I have a soft spot for Anwyn because he has a bride even younger. There's no such thing as too careful, so I've had to become more circumspect in my behaviour towards Anwyn.

But I want her.

From the tips of her honey-blond hair to her pastel-varnished toes, I can never get enough. A glimpse of her peaches-and-cream skin, like today when she's wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt, and I'm overwhelmed with the desire to find the places where she's pink and sensitive, and make her feel good.

I suppose many people long for Saturday night as much as I do. I believe it's considered something of an opportunity to relax. But it's not relaxing when Anwyn is with me. She's a temptation like no other, as she's curled on the sofa in my office, reading. Not having her with me chips away at my soul, but her presence tests my patience. I thought my self-control was unbreakable until I saw her on the doorstep that night. Fucking egotistical. Every week I hold on by a thread, and manage not to ravage her. Wreck her.

My son's ex-girlfriend. When I told him about Anwyn coming over because her house is a noisy shit-hole, he thanked me. He sounded surprised, and said to tell her hi, and he'd see her when he was back for the holidays. I think I know the reason he loves her as a friend, but still. She is—or was—his girlfriend and best friend.

Students should have longer terms, the vacations are too damn long. Thankfully Tom had plans for nearly all of it, only staying for a few days between mountain climbing trips with his new friends.

“They started the party early today, huh?” I lean back into my office chair and take in the sight of Anwyn in the doorway. She has her hair down today, falling over the small rise of her breasts. There’s a hint of anxiety in her blue eyes and she nibbles on the plush pink of her bottom lip.

It’s only four o’clock. Anwyn’s visits have crept forward, week by week.

“You don’t mind, do you?” She doesn’t meet my gaze, the whites of her eyes flashing like a wary animal.

I swallow, my throat dusty, and wave her in. “Of course not.”

I love that I get longer with her, and I hate it. Having to control myself even longer is my favourite punishment.

“I brought some work to do while you finish up.” She indicates her armful of books like they’re tickets of admittance and I’ll inspect them.

I did once. Amongst her textbooks about trees was a single paperback with a floral cover. Totally innocuous, and I’d have passed right over it.

But the way she snatched it back, cheeks bright red, and muttered, *it’s just a novel*, was not innocent. I looked up the title later, and suffice to say, it wasn’t *just* anything.

My girl was reading pure unadulterated smut while sitting opposite me. The book had an older hero and a virgin heroine. Knowing she reads that really doesn’t help the constant hard-on I have when she’s around.

I’m my own worst enemy.

This whole, spending the afternoon together, thing was at my instigation. At first Anwyn arrived just before ten o’clock and went straight to bed. It was good to have her safe under my roof, but far from enough. I suggested hot chocolate, and we stood around in the kitchen drinking it. Soon we were sitting in the library for two hours, spinning out the tepid drinks while we talked. When she accepted biscuits eagerly, I enquired about whether she’d eaten.

Suffice to say I was furious to discover she'd only had a snack since lunchtime. I shouldn't have demanded she arrive in time for dinner the next week, it was a step too far. But she arrived at seven and a light casual pasta supper the first time turned into three courses with one glass of wine—only ever one—coffee and chocolates afterwards.

“More plant genetics?” I ask as she goes to her usual place—the leather sofa adjacent to my desk.

“Yeah.” She opens a textbook onto her lap. No girl porn reading today, and I don't know if I'm relieved or disappointed. It's a warm evening and she's wearing a pair of cut-off denim shorts with a blue T-shirt that matches her eyes.

She's so adorable my palms itch.

I click my mouse around, pretending to work, as I covertly watch her. Having Anwyn here has the weird effect of relaxing me as well as putting my whole body on high alert. “How did your exam go?”

“I got ninety-two per cent.” She says it cautiously, like that might not be enough, but raises those blue eyes to mine to drown me. “Top of my class.”

Never thought I'd be entranced by a girl half my age, and absolutely never imagined she'd be incredibly smart as well as beautiful.

“Good girl. I'm proud of how hard you worked for that.”

She glows under my praise, shoulders lowering and wriggling into the sofa, kicking off her shoes and tucking her feet under her to get comfortable. “Thanks.”

So pretty. I'd love her to snuggle into me like that.

I guess she sees me as a father figure, caring and asking about her work. I even scold her a little when she doesn't do well on a test because she didn't spend enough time studying. This dynamic we've fallen into is part Sugar Daddy, part friend, a smidge of mentor.

I enjoy all of that. I just wish we could add, *lover*.
Husband.

The time before dinner was introduced by Anwyn, and it has crept up. She used to arrive just before food, letting herself in with the key I gave her. About two months ago I was firefighting a territory issue with Lambeth and couldn't leave my office. She tiptoed in, and I murmured that she should entertain herself while I finished up. And that's how we began to spend half of Saturday together.

She studies and I clear some emails for an hour—how mafia bosses still get emails I don't know. I should just shoot anyone who asks questions I've already answered, but I don't because Westminster has legitimate aspects to the business, pretending to be law-abiding. Can't murder people; we have to disappear them.

Deniable. Westminster is all about the veneer of respectability over absolute power and wealth. That's one of many reasons I cannot act on my desire for this young woman.

"Ready to eat?" I ask when a respectable amount of time has elapsed. Anwyn nods eagerly, and I have a sudden vision of her on her knees, eating something else. Taking my cock in her mouth. Heat flares and the thought is closely followed by the image of her on my desk, legs spread, my own personal buffet. I'd gorge myself on her.

What a fuck up. I'm rock-hard from the smallest fantasy of her.

She's your son's ex-girlfriend, you asshole, I remind myself. The dignity of Westminster demands I keep my needs to myself, subtly hiding my erection as I stand.

My chef has excelled herself this evening, and I resolve to give her a raise when Anwyn falls on the aperitifs with a happy sigh and exclamations of how tasty the food is. Now we're officially not working, she chatters about her week when I prompt her. We eat and talk, and I allow myself to enjoy her company.

This is bad. Painful, in a literal sense because I have to keep my aching cock under the table and away from Anwyn's curious gaze, when what I really want is her touch.

But it's only the beginning of my suffering, I'm aware that the worst is yet to come.

Once she leaves in the morning, that's when the feeling of emptiness sets in. It'll be a whole week without her before she's under my roof again, giving me that shy smile, her caramel hair laid on her collarbones and her scent—roses—surrounding me.

It's once she's left to return to her student life, young and brimming with potential, that I'm stabbed with how alone I am. My son has turned his back on the mafia. There are my staff around me, but none of them see past the severe looks or the sharp suits. They don't *see* me. Not like she does. I'm utterly alone without her and it's agony for those hours until the scouring pain eases.

And every Sunday morning, like she's my fucking religion, it's the same worship. She says she'll go. I insist on her eating first. We have breakfast in the light-filled kitchen, sitting at the breakfast bar side by side. She talks a lot on Saturday nights, but during our Sunday mornings there's easy silence, with her stealing glances at me while she nibbles at the croissants and jam that are her favourite. I think it's comfortable for her, anyway. For me, it's a wrench, forcing myself not to spin out her company any longer. I repeat in my head she will never want me the way I crave her, and this has to be enough. It must be, because I cannot scare her away with the depth of my longing.

"I really have to go," she says once I've scowled at her for refusing a third pastry, and we've irrefutably finished our coffees.

"Have a good week." I don't say that I'm insane without her and I miss her when she's not here like she's my frontal lobe.

When George has phoned me on the return journey and confirmed that she's safe, I give in. I get into the shower, turn the heat to scalding, and jerk myself off to the fresh image of Anwyn.

I'm brutal with my poor aching dick, which doesn't know what it's done wrong and can't help but respond to her more than any other woman. It's bordering on pain, sharp and rough, when I spurt the evidence of my desire over the tiles.

Each week I wash it away and say I shouldn't do this again. That I should send her to a hotel, or at least not make myself come with her name on my lips.

It's a lie. Just one more bad action I've taken. Desperately lusting after this slip of a girl, too perfect, young, and innocent for me.

My son's ex-girlfriend.

Fuck.

And the absolute worst thing?

There was a time, not so long ago, that I looked at her with utter indifference. I barely noticed her and I don't think Tom saw her as a woman either. When I gave Tom "the talk", he blushed furiously and confessed they'd never even kissed. Obviously I didn't point out to my closeted son that wasn't normal. I just told him I loved him and he could tell me anything.

I had forgotten all about Anwyn until she turned up that night.

A good man would wish that had never changed and I'd never opened my eyes six months ago and seen Anwyn. So sweet and ripe, I wanted her the same moment her eyes met mine. I was putty in her hands.

I am a bad man. Because I don't want to go back.

Sunday is typically awful, and I throw myself into work. As the sun sets, red and purple through the window, I stretch out my fingers and sigh. Six long days until I see her again.

I work late, then collapse into bed, mercifully too exhausted to do anything but drag covers over me and fall asleep in the coal-black darkness.

The shrill ring of my phone wakes me. Dread wipes away sleep instantly. My people don't call me in the middle of the

night about nothing.

The screen shows my most-trusted lieutenant, my second-in-command. He accompanied Anwyn home this morning, always does.

“She’s in danger.”

Adrenaline floods me.

“Why?” I snap. I don’t ask who. We both know who. There is only one *she* who justifies waking me.

“We can’t be sure. I just got a tip-off. A message came through the website for the shell company that sells garden furniture saying there was a hit out from the Bratva on Anne. Tonight. No more details than that.”

“You think it’s her? And real?” Anwyn isn’t Anne. But neither do we have anyone called Anne associated with the company.

George hesitates. “It could be totally coincidental. It could be a spurious report, or common nonsense. But...”

“I can’t take the chance.”

Anger takes over. The arsehole Bratva mafia have been a thorn in my side for years now. The mafia boss is a nasty piece of work, barely restrained by his younger brother Artem and has been causing problems for my people that we’ve been constantly having to fire-fight. I accept that. Comes with the role of being the mafia everyone knows the name of in London. Westminster is the authority, making the laws and ensuring trouble is dissolved in a vat of acid. We set the example of appearing faultless, while using power to make more money than almost any other mafia in London.

The Bratva are the opposite. Uncouth, rich but brash, and with no interest in protecting those within his territory. I hated but tolerated them before.

But if they’ve touched my girl?

They’ll wish for death when I’m done.

“Get a car ready. No need to wake anyone else, I’ll deal with this.”

I hang up and throw on clothes. I don’t allow myself to acknowledge the fear that I might be too late. I can’t be. I will be there for Anwyn. *I must*. I’ll murder any and every person who gets in the way.

I’m a bad, ruthless man, but the head of the Bratva is an evil bastard. If there is even a two per cent chance they’re after my girl, I’m going over there in person. And I will rip the limbs off anyone who threatens her with my bare hands.

Despite my order, my second-in-command gives me a sharp look when I arrive in the armoury. George is plucking ammunition from a box and loading it into a pistol that he shoves at me without looking.

“Sure this is a good idea boss?” he asks without inflection.

There are a staggering number of ways this is not. I take the gun, starting with the fact that if the Bratva didn’t know before that I have a personal interest in Anwyn, they’re about to be certain. And she’s my son’s ex-girlfriend. Yes.

Anwyn’s student house is squeezed shoulder-to-shoulder with its neighbours in a residential street, a 1980s design that style forgot.

George grits his teeth when I tell him to stay in the car when we arrive. He doesn’t like to allow me to go into a potentially dangerous situation alone, but in this case he can put up and shut up.

The front door is unlocked when I try it, and that makes me shake my head. Either I’m going to have to lecture Anwyn about security, or this is bad.

The house is quiet and dark. My feet are silent as I creep up the stairs. No point in alerting her housemates that something is going on. If indeed it is.

Never thought I’d say this, but I really hope I’m sneaking around a girls’ student house for no reason.

A door on the second floor is open, and I swear inwardly. The intel was correct.

My heart is in my throat as I look through Anwyn's door. A man dressed in black is leaning over her. I aim my gun at him, but the shot isn't clear. I'd hit my peacefully slumbering girl too.

My sleeping beauty.

There's a glint of metal and I recognise a syringe. Shit. That bastard is going to drug her. The needle is in her arm when three things happen at once.

"No." I step into the room. The Bratva kidnapper jerks up, and Anwyn's eyes fly open.

I shoot. The silencer takes most of the sound. The bastard's brains splatter over the wall behind the bed, and he collapses, dead, over Anwyn.

She lets out a sob, and sees me, her eyes wide with terror.

"Anwyn, it's okay." My voice is a gravelly whisper.

"Ben..." Her eyes roll back in her head and she slumps into the covers.

I dive forwards, and only just remember to shove the assassin's body off Anwyn but not off the bed. He's a big bastard. Can't be waking Anwyn's housemates.

The horror grips me as I gather her up in my arms. So small and delicate. She's wearing pyjamas and is as floppy as a rope, but breathing.

If I'd been another minute later. If we hadn't had that tipoff... Cold skitters over my skin at the thought. I could have lost her. If the Bratva had got her, I'd have torn down the whole of London to find her. Return her to my side, where she belongs.

Not letting her go, I frisk the pockets of the dead man, hoping for another vial. An antidote perhaps.

Nope. Blank.

It's the work of a moment to scoop up Anwyn's keys, hold her slight weight close to my chest. I work efficiently, locking doors behind us and sprinting to the car.

"Drive," I snap and arrange Anwyn on my lap as we speed away. I cradle her, my heart thudding.

She called me Ben. Probably she meant to finish that word and say Benedict. A slip of the tongue. But hell. My girl called me by my *name*.

ANWYN

I feel like I've been in a tumble dryer. My mouth is woolly, my head is pounding.

Prising open my eyelids, I find Mr Crosse watching me. Or is it? My vision blurs in and out.

Is this a hallucination? Or a dream?

I try to remember how I got here, or where I am. But it's dark when my eyes dart around, and I can't focus on anything.

"Anwyn," he sighs, and for once it doesn't seem to be exasperation. "Water?"

I've barely nodded before he has an arm beneath my shoulders and is helping me sit up, a glass at my lips.

His face is so close. Far nearer than we've ever been even in the last six months.

"Drink," he whispers, not taking his eyes from my face. I'm glued to him too. Or I think I am. As cool water slips down my throat, I give in to the need to stare at him.

His arm is a warm solid band behind my shoulders and he's cupping the back of my head with strong fingers.

Must be a dream. Being held by Mr Crosse? Being able to look at him. I can finally examine his eyes the way I've always wanted to. Well, if I could keep my focus. It keeps blurring, and my eyes won't stay open. I've looked at him, covertly. But never had him look at me straight on. Not since the first night I sought refuge with him.

“Enough?” he asks gently, taking the glass away.

“So handsome,” I slur out the only thought in my head.

This isn't real, because he doesn't respond to my statement. Not with horror nor even a hint of a smile. Nothing. Just keeps looking at me, his chest rising and falling quicker than usual.

I bring my hand up to his face—nope, that's his shoulder—ahhh. Yes. Slight bristles.

“Want to look ... at you.” But my eyes are closing again without my volition. I have to keep them open. Really like this dream. Don't want it to end.

I want...

I'm eased back onto... a bed? It's so comfortable, and yet it's not familiar. Not the bed I use when I stay with Mr Crosse. I try to look around but my head is so heavy, my neck stiff, I can only see Benedict. His grey eyes.

“Please... Kiss...” I can't get the next word out as my vision swims.

“Sleep.”

The last thing I feel before I slip back into unconsciousness is warm lips and rough stubble on my forehead.

“Fix her!”

I'm too groggy to open my eyes.

“...Have to be patient.” A soothing voice.

“...Not a patient man, Doctor...” That's... That voice, it's brusque and commanding. Grumpy. Home. He's the sound of home. Then a name. It's Benedict Crosse, snarling. “Make her well, or suffer the consequences.”

I try to move, and say I'm fine. He doesn't have to worry about me. I'll be out of here in a moment. It emerges as a whimper.

Footsteps approach and I prise open my eyes to see grey wool-clad legs before my vision swims and spirals.

“Anwyn.”

My hand is held, strong fingers clasping mine and a thumb brushing over my knuckles.

There’s a sound like a wounded animal. Then black.

This time when I wake, I merely feel like I’ve been beaten up. My head aches a bit, but although I wince as I open my eyes the nausea and fog have cleared.

The room is painted in charcoal grey shadows and peach sunlight. I look around cautiously.

I’m in a bedroom. It’s old-world luxury. Deep green and black patterns and brocades, paintings with wide gold frames on the wall, and the scent of a forest and moving water. This one room is the size of the entire ground floor of the student house I live in.

Where am I?

The crisp white sheets rustle as I try to drag myself into a sitting position. I’m weak as a kitten.

“You’re awake.”

Benedict Crosse unfolds himself from a chair right beside me. The light spilling in from a gap in the curtains reveals half of his face, and my heart flips.

His expression is grave and he looks... Honestly if I didn’t know better I’d say he’d been up for two days straight. He seems exhausted. Wrecked, and a little over-intense. His grey eyes are silver, and the peachy light brings out the flecks of white in the hair at his temples and in the stubble that covers his jaw. He hasn’t shaved, I’d guess for a couple of days, and Mr Crosse is always perfectly shaved. He gets a five o’clock shadow, sure, but he is invariably in a suit, controlled.

Mr Crosse is basically a businessman from a men’s razor advert.

Except, right now he's not. He's the suggestive aftershave advert, all rough sex appeal and smouldering roughness. He's popped open his shirt collar and removed his tie. His hair is mussed too, as though he's been running his hands through it. There are dark circles under his eyes.

"What time is it?"

He checks the solid watch on his wrist. "Nine."

I nod. Well that's embarrassing. I've clearly overstayed my Sunday morning welcome. "Sorry I slept so late. I'll get up."

"In the evening, darling." The corner of his mouth kicks up. "And you're staying in bed."

"Wait it's..." There's a tickle in my memory. "What day is it? And what happened?"

"It's Monday night. And there was an attempt to kidnap you," he replies calmly.

I blink.

Someone tried to kidnap me?

I scrabble backwards up the bed, until my shoulders bump into a panel. The image of a gun in Mr Crosse's hands, pointed towards me, flickers.

"A successful attempt." My voice is wobbly, but at least my vision is clear again. Except for the minor detail of the sight of Mr Crosse at my bedside being overwhelmed by the dread that's congealing in my memory.

I'm pretty sure Mr Crosse pointed a gun at me and I've ended up with him, somewhere that isn't my house.

Sounds a lot like kidnap.

"You were in danger." He's implacable. Unmoved.

I replay the incident in my mind, as best I can. It all happened so fast. A noise that woke me. The pain in my arm. I grasp my upper arm where, yes, it is a bit sore, and find a smooth hydrocolloid dressing over the skin.

"It happened then."

Mr Crosse nods.

Another flash of recollection: the sudden weight of a man's body slumped over me, knocking my breath away. The air is fire in my throat.

"The man," I croak. "Is he dead?"

"Yes." And Mr Crosse doesn't sound at all regretful. Not even slightly.

"Was he one of your...?" I'm not certain what I'm asking.

His lip curls. "Not mine. Some... rivals who wanted to hurt me by taking you."

How would that impact Mr Crosse? "They thought taking your son's ex-girlfriend would affect you?"

He looks stricken and the sequence of last night runs on like a movie I was half watching, until I remember. *Oh no. No-no-no-no-no.*

"That's it, yes." His tone is excessively mild. He presses his lips together.

Of all the humiliating times for my massive crush on Mr Crosse to emerge from my mouth.

I told him he was handsome.

I asked him to *kiss* me.

I close my eyes. Maybe it would have been better to be kidnapped by Mr Crosse's rivals, dumped at sea with hungry sharks, or stranded in a jungle with a ravenous panther. I'm wearing *pale pink* pyjamas. Something wild and dangerous eat me now, please.

No, I mean, not like that, and yet, yes, like that. Ugh. My brain.

"Fine." I roll out of bed. From about a thousand angles this is something I'd prefer to forget.

"What are you doing?" And there's a note of genuine panic in his words.

“I’m going home.” My legs aren’t wobbly, just a bit out of practice, but I get to the door. I yank it open one inch before Mr Crosse reaches me and slams it shut, trapping me between his forearms, his towering body, and solid wood.

“You’re not leaving,” he growls.

Heat flares over my skin as he looks down at me, and I look over my shoulder at him. I want the kingpin so much. My nipples pebble, and I’m half a second from climbing him like a particularly attractive tree.

I practically drooled over him last night. And yeah, I’m doing it again. My cheeks flush.

“Let me go.”

“It’s dangerous.”

It is here too. The warmth of his breath on my neck makes me weak. I turn in his arms, tilt my chin, and look up into his face. “Then give me a reason to stay.”

His jaw clenches and a frisson of fear goes down my back. Fear of what nearly happened last night and that if I leave here there’s no option but to give up everything I’ve built in London—my degree and my modest little job in the coffee shop. Chats with my fellow barista, Lina, and the happiness and fun and quiet companionship of being with Benedict, because he’s right that another London mafia is after me. Fear that Benedict hasn’t got anything more than the most tepid, cool emotion towards me when I burn every night. When I can’t sleep for wanting him. Or worst of all, that maybe this isn’t one-sided, but he won’t confess his feelings out of loyalty to his son. That Tom is more important than I will ever be to him.

“I can’t, Wyn. I can’t.” He leans closer, holding my gaze, a mixture of longing and torture. His arms shift until there’s nothing in the world but Benedict, surrounding me. His scent is intoxicating.

“Why not?” I breathe, trying to get all of his smell into my lungs, like I could trap it there.

“You’re my son’s girlfriend—”

“Ex-girlfriend,” I correct him.

“This is wrong.”

I keep piling up mistake upon mistake. Idiot.

I’m not staying here for more humiliation, even if it is entirely my own fault this time. I duck under his arm and pull at the door as there’s a click.

It doesn’t budge, and it’s a second before I see the glint of metal. A key.

“Give me that.”

Benedict goes to pocket it, then as I reach down holds the key above his head, way higher than I can grasp but instinctively I try, too ashamed and angry to restrain myself. I grab his arm and try to pull his clenched fist to me, and he groans, stepping backwards.

Then he’s across the room, shoving open a window and I’m speechless as he tosses the key out.

A small tinkle says it has reached the ground outside.

“Neither of us can leave now.” For a second I swear he’s going to smile, but immediately his expression is grave again.

I dive to the window, but I already know what I’ll see. This room is adjacent to the one I’ve slept in every Saturday for the last six months. And yeah, two floors below is the patio I’ve spent evenings lounging around on, reading smut and sipping mocktails.

All this time, I slept only a wall away from Benedict.

I wonder if he heard me...

My face heats. I bet he’s known all along.

“Just wake someone up!” I hiss. My body is aflame with desire after touching him, and I’m going out of my mind. I cannot stay here. I’ll die of horny embarrassment, which is not the way I wanted to go. I’m trapped with a man who doesn’t want me, who has seen my pyjamas. “You have guards. Get them up here, tell them you’ve been an idiot and dropped the key out of the window, and let me out.”

“No,” he replies in that scary mafia kingpin voice that makes me go still. The tone he uses when he tells me to eat a piece of fruit for breakfast, or finish reading that chapter on leaf morphology before I turn in for the night. “And you’re not going to scream either. Even if you did, they wouldn’t do as you asked, because they work for me.”

Usually, he uses that voice and I go to mush. It makes me instinctively obey. I do whatever he says because it’s so dominant. A dark, rough growl that vibrates through my body.

And yeah, it does all that delicious vibration this time too, but I’m pissed.

“You can’t just kidnap me and hold me prisoner,” I seethe.

“Yes. I can,” he replies implacably.

“No!” I grab fistfuls of his shirt and force him around to look at me, and in my still partially dozy lack of spatial awareness, I misjudge the distance between us. The precise gap that we both maintain so carefully. Two inches or a foot, a big enough space that I don’t know what it feels like to touch him.

My front presses to his. My forearms are on his sculpted chest, my breasts touching the top of his abdomen, my hips on his thighs. And nudging at my belly is a solid length.

And suddenly I know he’s not so unaffected.

He’s hard. The significance clubs me around the head.

Benedict Crosse wants me. Me.

I’ve gone six months thinking my inappropriate crush, which worsened week after week, was just that. Unrequited. He’s a powerful man, and he could have anyone. He’s twenty years older than me, experienced and with an air of authority that has me light-headed.

But he’s got an erection, and he has trapped us together in this room for... Well at least a few hours. He looks like he sat by my bedside while I slept off whatever they drugged me with. And suddenly, I don’t want to leave. I think I’m in exactly the place I should be.

I boost onto my tiptoes and lean into his warmth. Oh god his cock feels so big. I squirm a little and I'm gooey between my legs.

"We're going to be together all night, Ben." I dare to use his name. "Tell me why they were after me."

He swallows and shuts his eyes. "Because you are precious to me."

Precious. I'm dizzy with that one word.

I'm *precious*.

He killed a man who was trying to hurt me. My insecurities could find plenty of reasons to doubt this, but I don't let them. Fingers crossed for foolhardy.

I pull on his shirt, dragging him down. For a second he's immovable, an oak tree versus a hummingbird. Then with a groan, he lowers his head and takes my mouth.

And when I say takes, I mean that literally. His hand goes to the back of my neck, and his tongue plunders. I'm helpless against the force of his unleashed passion.

As if I'd protest. I try to get closer, to give as good as I get, but he doesn't give me a chance. Our mouths are sealed together, and he holds me to him, my breasts crushed and heat flaring everywhere across my skin.

He drives me backwards and I think he's going to push me to the bed, but he pivots so my back is against the door and he's holding me, braced. He strokes my cheek with his thumb, fingers in my hair and whispers my name like it's a prayer as he runs his hand up and down my side, teasing against my breast. His body traps me in place, his hard length digging into my belly and I've never felt anything so swoony in my life.

"Anwyn, we shouldn't do this," he says, then covers my lips again in a punishing kiss. He's shaking, I realise. He wants me so much he can't contain his need. That fills me with heady power. All this time I've been miserable because he didn't want me and thought I'd have to grovel for the smallest acknowledgement of his affection. His impersonal protection he gives freely, but this? Up-tight, grumpy Mr Crosse? The

head of the most influential and important mafia in London does not lose control.

He does with me.

I'm held as he kisses across my face and down my neck.

"This can't be happening," he growls, but doesn't stop. The sensation of his rough stubble on my jaw makes me weak and heated between my legs.

"Ben, it is," I whisper, because I'm done with denial. I've pined after Benedict Crosse for six months.

"We mustn't." But this time, he stops, slamming his palms on the door both sides of my head. "I can't betray..."

"No one will ever know." I'm not saying my ex's name right now, and I think Ben doesn't want to either.

"Fuck..." He dips his head and closes his eyes. A pulse beats fast in his neck.

There's a long moment and for all the time I can see him fighting with himself. His sense of honour battling with his desire.

He eases back and I restrain a sob. No. No...

His eyes catch me as I'm falling into despair.

"Just tonight."

My heart does an awkward, flopping flight. A swoop of happiness and a slam down onto hard ground. A young bird trying to fly. He wants me, but only for one night.

I nod, quick. Eager.

"No one can ever know. Especially not my son."

The hurt that I'm something dirty, that he'd be ashamed of being with me, is another test flight for my fledgling heart. A secret is deliciously naughty. His. Private and cherished.

But the reference to his son? Ow. Stubbed toe and period cramps levels of ouch.

"One night, to get it out of our systems," I say, because that sounds worldly and experienced. In fact, it's just

something I've read in romance books.

He sighs deeply, as though this arrangement is causing him considerable inconvenience. Well, listen up buddy. I'm inconvenienced by him being a mafia lord and kidnapping me and keeping me captive, not to mention wanting him for the past six months. We all have to deal with the challenges life throws at us.

"I'm too old and dangerous for you, Anwyn," he grinds the words out, rough and low. "Say no, as you should, and I'll tuck you back under the covers and sit by your side as you sleep."

I trail my fingers down his chest. "Give me a reason to stay awake."

He nods slowly. "Get on the bed."

BENEDICT

She scrambles to obey my barked command.

I don't allow myself to think about how wrong us acting on our attraction is as I look at her. All the reasons this is taboo are faded, a distant hum compared to the immediacy of *her*. Eagerly climbing onto my bed, waiting for me. And I can't deny that when I don't remember exactly why this is wrong, the lure of the forbidden makes her all the more appealing.

"So beautiful," I murmur as I sink down to sit on the bed before her. We have all night, so I gaze into her eyes and curl a blonde tendril around my finger. Incredibly soft. Her expression is trusting now, open and curious.

I sweep my hand into the silk of her hair, and gently draw her to me.

Our lips meet. A questioning, slow kiss, this one. A prelude of music, testing both players. Hot breath and supple skin. Everything about her is soft. The skin of her cheek is a contrast to my own as our mouths brush. Where I'm harsh, she's yielding.

I'm slow in deepening our kiss. First coaxing her mouth open, then dragging my lips over to dally at her cheeks. By the time I slip my tongue in to touch hers, she's whimpering and has crept forwards. Sweet, so sweet.

Drawing her to sit over my lap I allow myself to roll my hips, my aching shaft pressing into the yielding part of her belly.

Her hands find the back of my neck and my shoulders, timidly exploring and anchoring herself as our kiss intensifies.

I've never been so turned on by a mere kiss. It's because she's Anwyn: the sexiest woman I've ever met, and the bravest. From turning up at a mafia boss' home because she needs refuge, to taking kidnap and being drugged in her stride, with no screaming or panic, Anwyn is stronger than most people twice her age.

I've had almost a whole day to absorb that my innocent girl has a tattoo of leaves over her breast, peeking out from her strappy top. I've been entranced by the revelation of her hidden self since I saw it when I laid her into my bed. So pretty, and clearly a reference to her study of plants as well as a rebellion. I love it and I'm desperate to see it all.

I can barely breathe as I lift off her tease of a camisole and reveal her glorious chest and the rest of her tattoo. I stroke my palm over the black ink first, admiring the art she chose before the beauty she was born with. The continuation of the pattern is fronds pointing down to her nipple, finely worked and elegant. I trace the design, then go where it leads: her breasts.

A small handful, they fit into my palms and she looks at me shyly, from under her lashes as I cup them and drag my thumbs over both of her nipples simultaneously. That makes her mew with need, so I give in and bring my mouth to the sensitive flesh I've revealed, tonguing and teasing her with gentle bites. My sweet girl.

She lets me unwrap my perfect little present. I leave slow kisses wherever I peel off clothes. I lick her skin; I'm a beast, tasting her and leaving my scent on every part. Next are her pyjama bottoms, baggy over her legs and riding low on her hips. I can't help but feel she's a gift for me as I pull undone the bow she's tied at her navel.

Mine.

I mouth the possessive word into her neck as I slide my hands over her smooth buttocks and drop the fabric down her thighs. I squeeze the creamy flesh and force her to me, flexing my hips the slightest amount to ease the need and ramp up the

tension. She gasps at the sensation of hard into soft. My cock against her belly.

Mine.

For tonight, she is my captive and my lover. Mine to pleasure and protect.

If I ever doubted whether she held all of my heart, that doubt ended the instant I saw that man standing over her, *hurting* her. I almost regret killing him outright. I'd like to have the option of murdering him repeatedly, torturing him for laying a finger on her.

No one will ever hurt my girl again. Not even me, unless she asks for it. Damn but I wouldn't mind pulling her hair or smacking her bottom.

My cock is seeping precome, but all I want to do is touch her. I want to explore her body until I know every dip, every sensitive place, and sweet clever girl that she is, she understands that I need her naked, and lifts herself to wriggle out of her remaining clothes.

"Hold my shoulders," I tell her when she wobbles trying to get out of her shorts.

The good thing about being almost forty is that even though I'm aware we only have this single night together, I know not to rush. Twenty years ago—hell even a decade ago—I'd have tried to hurry. I'd have sought to do everything in these few special hours we have. Now I know that this time is a gift to be savoured, not an invitation to run towards some goalpost that would leave us both unsatisfied. I want her to remember this for years to come as a perfect introduction to how a man can make her feel.

How *I* make her feel.

So when she reaches for my trousers, although my cock aches, I let out a soft sound of disapproval and guide her away.

"No fair," she complains. "Don't I even get to see your chest?"

I sigh and I'm not sure if I'm irritated or amused, flattered or turned on that she'd like to see my body. I suppose it is more covered, as a rule, than hers.

"Did you mean to torture me with those little dresses you wore?" I ask as I strip off my shirt.

Her lips twitch and she fails to hide a satisfied, naughty grin as she regards the muscles I've revealed.

"Minx," I growl. "I'll make you pay for that." I drag her close again, kissing and exploring her body. She's equally greedy, still reaching between my legs.

I need to control this before it gets out of control. I trap her wrists where she has unbuckled my belt, grabbing first one hand then the other and pinning them at the small of her back. She arches into me and arousal flares from my heart to my cock at the sight and feel of her caught. Under my command.

Completely naked for me. I can't get enough of touching her, pressing my fingers in where she's soft and nipping at her where it makes her cry out. I sweep away her hair from where it covers her breasts and give it an experimental tug. She lets out a sigh and rocks her pussy into me.

Mmm. Filing that information for later.

"Are you wet, darling?"

"Maybe."

Such a brat. A complete disobedient tease, my girl. She's perfectly diligent with her studies, but with me she can be naughty.

"I bet you are," I say between kisses. I'm going to have her thighs as earmuffs, to drown out the chant that I'm a bad man for wanting her and a worse one for taking this. Finally.

And I've got an idea about how to make this even better. Hotter. A moment I can claim her, that she won't forget.

Jealous rage sparks at the thought of some fool in the future not making her come like I'm going to. I ignore it.

Releasing her hands, I lie back on the bed, smiling at her expression of alarm and curiosity.

“I want you to sit on my face.”

“What?”

“I said, sit on my face.” I make my tone deep and commanding.

A snort of laughter escapes her. “I can’t! I’ll squish you. And I haven’t showered.”

“I don’t care,” I say roughly. I reach for her, but she resists. There’s a gleam of arousal in her eyes, but she shakes her head.

“I’ll suffocate you.”

“Let’s hope.” I grasp the ripe handfuls of her arse and drag her forwards. As soon as she’s within range I lunge and give her a greedy lick.

She squeaks with surprise, and holds herself away.

Nope. Not accepting that. I urge her down onto my mouth, tongue fucking her as I do.

“I’ve been thinking about this,” I admit harshly. “About how you’d taste.”

“How do I taste?” she gasps out, a thread of worry and also defiance in her words.

“Fucking delicious. The best flavour I’ve ever known.” I stroke her thigh. “Now give me your pussy properly, darling.”

She slowly lowers herself fully to my mouth as I lay my head on the sheets. I don’t hesitate. I eat. I feast. I cover myself in her sweet and salty taste, gorging. I hold her in place with both hands on her plump arse as she writhes and pants.

“That’s it. Ride my face,” I encourage her as she gains confidence. “Use me. Give me your orgasm, it’s *mine*.”

She’s all mine, and her wet slit is heaven. Feeling her soft folds on my tongue and giving her this pleasure—I’m certain this is her first time and I’m savagely happy to do this for her.

We're both figuring out how she likes this, so it's not instant, even though I can feel how worked up she is. She's soaking. Her honey dribbles down my chin, and it's a fucking badge of honour.

I lick and nibble. I suck. I shove into her hole, fucking her with my tongue. I listen to her every moan and feel how she moves into some motions and stills on others. And then I find it. Firm, long licks from her tight little hole all the way over her clit. She shakes. It drives her crazy.

"My good girl." Then I go at her harder with those licks that I've discovered. She moans and I don't stop. My tongue is aching. My jaw is cramped. Don't care. Nothing will ever be as perfect as she is.

Then I get my reward.

I feel it before she cries out. A tightening. A pulse.

She sobs as her orgasm overtakes her, legs going weak, falling forward onto her hands above my head. Finally she fully rests her weight on me as I gently lick her through the jolts and shudders. The way her pussy clenches makes my cock even harder.

I'm so stupidly proud. Of her. Of myself. I'm the most influential kingpin in London, and obscenely wealthy, and I want to beat my chest that I've made my girl come all over my face.

Look, no hands needed. Ha.

She slumps and I can't hold onto restraint any longer. I lift her off my face and lay her back onto my bed, a ruined girl, all mussed hair and tired limbs.

Then I'm kneeling over her. Anwyn's eyes are hazy with lust as she looks up at me, wrecked, her hair gleaming sunshine and caramel, all over the pillow, her lower lip plump and red from where she's bitten down on it as I made her come.

I need relief. I told myself I could deal with not coming, but that was a fucking lie. I'm a beast and while I can manage not to take her virginity, I am going to mark her. I free my

erection and my fist is over the leaking head, stroking up and down, enjoying the moment before her eyes even go wide.

My grip is brutal and my chest is heaving. I look at her all I want, gaze skittering from her breasts to her face, down to her exposed cunt, wet and swollen from my ministrations.

“You’re so gorgeous,” I tell her as the pleasure coils at the base of my spine.

“No, you are.” Her hands find my fine-wool-covered thighs, not even naked skin because I was too desperate to do more than pull out my aching cock. She burrows her fingers between the fabric and my skin as though she needs to feel me as much as I did her.

Over the last six months we’ve both kept our eyes and hands to ourselves, and now the cumulated greed is unassailable. She clasps my leg like she’d keep me here, knelt over her, knees either side of her thighs, and looks at where the hair trails down my pecs, over my abs and to my cock.

There aren’t words for this moment. Everything is both of us taking what we need. A lifetime’s worth of seeing each other after far too long waiting.

“I’m going to spill all over you,” I grind out. “I want to see you with my seed on your lovely skin.”

I swallow back the other words. Words of my desire to shove my cock in as deep and hard as it will go, right to her womb, and spill there. To breed my good girl.

“Yes. Yes, I’m yours. I want it.”

This is so dirty, so wrong. I’m going to come on her face. Her breasts. I should be ashamed to make her filthy like this. So young and innocent and I’ve corrupted her, and now I will mark my territory.

I’m an animal as I shove my cock into my clenched hand and imagine it’s her virgin pussy.

“Ben. Please.”

That does it. Pleasure so intense it’s almost sharp wracks through me. But I’m not so lost I can’t aim at the parts I want

to see white all over. Her breasts. Belly. Chin. It drips down her neck as my muscles twitch and tense.

“Good girl,” I breathe.

Through the glow, I regard Anwyn. Naked. Covered in my seed. Her pert rosy nipples are stiff, and the come slowly dribbles over the curve of her peachy breast. Her skin was perfect before, but with the reams of white? With my scent all over her? Even better.

Mine.

The best moment of my life is the pleasure combined with that sign of possession. Or perhaps that was making her come, on my mouth and so intimate. Who knows. I love seeing her like this, her eyes bright and a smile curling at the corner of her mouth, confident and sexy.

“You look so pretty painted with my seed,” I say eventually. And yeah, that’s the right comment as she breaks into a grin. Happy. And I return the smile, hope a bubble that encompasses us both to float into the velvet night sky.

I gather her up into my arms, her legs gripping my waist, and it’s messy. Ejaculate smears onto my pecs. Her wetness brushes my lower stomach. She buries her face in my shoulder and wraps her arms around my neck as I carry her to the bathroom.

I sit on the edge of the massive claw-footed roll top bath as it fills, holding her spread on my lap, collapsed onto me. I stroke her back and the sticky wetness I spilt over her glues us together. As steam fills the air, clouding the room, I whisper that she did so well and how much I liked feeling her pulse and writhe. How I want to do it again, and make her scream louder.

The words I restrain are those of love. How I want to be all her firsts and her always, how she owns my torn and hardened heart, however worthless it is. Keeping this physical is the only way to survive it. I tangle my fingers in her blonde hair and tell her she’s such a sexy good girl.

I lower her into the bathtub when it's full, and when I'm about to ease away, she grabs my hand.

"You get in too."

"Wrong way around, darling. I give the orders," I rumble.

"Please?"

The one thing that will melt me. I'm already pushing off the last of my clothes as she looks up with those big blue eyes. I'd bow to her. Only her, a queen for a kingpin.

I focus on not crushing her as I step into the bath at her back. She can't know how much I need her, because this isn't forever. Scarred, brutal men do not hold onto women like Anwyn. Sweet. Innocent. I'm undone by her, and I suspect my heart is in my eyes now the lust is temporarily slaked. Clever kitten that she is, she'll notice the change. Six months I've kept all possessive instincts under wraps, and one damn night has blown it apart.

I keep her facing away from me and wash every inch of her body. I pull her to lie on my chest and contentment seeps into me as I care for her and have her close. Her pretty breasts, made for my hands, get more than their fair share of washing until she's moaning and rubbing her arse onto my hardening cock.

When we're both rinsed, the strokes get less to do with being clean, and more for the enjoyment of pinching her nipples and stroking her clit. The flutter of her pleasure as I make her come again is stabler ground.

I can segment my love for Anwyn and my need to protect her away from the demands of my cock. I have to. That my heart wants her snuggled against me, skin to skin, is more problematic and I block that off.

I hold her as she shakes and pants and when she's boneless, I lift her from the water and indulge in patting a towel over every curve. She's exhausted, eyelids shutting and leaning against me.

"Should I go...?" she asks as I lean over to pick her up.

“No.” She belongs with me. I sweep her into my arms, bringing her back to the bed and laying her in the middle. “Stay here tonight.”

“But—”

“No.” Absolutely not. The uncertainty in her sleepy voice kills me. “Until we get the door unlocked in the morning, we’re together. That was the deal.”

One forbidden night. The only question is: how will I ever let her go?

ANWYN

I should have slept soundly after all the terror and drugging stuff. And I do. But it's punctuated by the feeling of Benedict's warmth and his hard frame. When I awoke, he did too, his mouth finding mine, languid and sweet, and his hands skimming down my body. I don't know how many times he fingered me to orgasm last night.

A lot.

I've had many unexpected wakings in the last forty-eight hours, but this one is the best. Ben is asleep. I get to look at him, up close. The sheet is around his waist and he's naked, sprawled on his back, one arm loosely clasping my shoulder.

I carefully lever up onto one elbow, moving slowly so as not to wake him. My kingpin is even more gorgeous than I had realised and I catalogue each part. The black stubble that covers his jawline and down to the protrusion of his Adam's apple. His eyes are closed, long lashes fanned on his cheeks. The eyebrows which are usually pinched down in a scowl are relaxed. The lines of silver at his temples glint. His chest is gloriously naked.

That happy trail... Ugh so good. Dark hair down his sculpted abdominals like that should be illegal. He's practically a honeytrap. Irresistible physically, but add in his smooth dark voice, the way he told me I'm his good girl, gives me dinner, and listens to everything I say, I've no chance. And I'd be lying if his power wasn't heady. He's the most noteworthy mafia boss in London. The man everyone looks to for permission to do anything.

And he wants me. A nothing-special girl with no family, who likes books way too much and is a bit—alright a lot—of a nerd.

My first proper kiss. My lips are tingly and plump from the force of his passion. The ones on my mouth, yes, and also the lips at my core. Benedict Crosse demanded I ride his face until I came, and I did it.

Who is this Anwyn, because I'm pretty sure she's not me.

Or, a little voice suggests, maybe this is you, and no one else has ever seen you like he does.

The daring voice that could get me into trouble.

I run my hand down his chest, tracing the soft and wiry hair of that happy trail.

The sheet has a lump in it. His cock. My mouth waters as my fingers brush back the fabric, so near to touching him as I've longed to do. Finally.

"Anwyn." A dangerous snarl, and Ben traps my wrist between his palm and his belly. "That's enough."

"I can make you feel good," I say, desperation beating in my heart. I can't leave him, having made me twist up with pleasure, hard and unsatisfied. He has to break apart too. "I want to lick you."

"It's morning."

I don't understand why his tone is harsh and why that's significant for a moment.

Then it rushes back.

He's my ex's *dad*. This is taboo. Wrong.

No. I don't accept that, and he doesn't want this to be over. I can tell by the gravel in his voice.

"It's still the night if we haven't got out of bed yet," I try, rubbing my thumb over his skin.

For a second our eyes meet, and I swear I see the world reflected back to me. He's trying for stern and unfeeling, but

there's a tumult of pain and desire in his expression.

Then he shuts, a wall of black onyx crashing between us. "One night, Anwyn."

He puts my hand away from him and rolls off the bed, stalking across to a wardrobe where he's pulled on boxers and is buttoning a shirt before I catch up.

"That's it?" I whisper.

"Yes." He doesn't look around.

"We're going to pretend nothing happened?"

"No one can know."

I'm dried out and brittle, dead. I'm a leaf cut from a tree, wilted, scorched, then crushed beneath Benedict Crosse's well-shod heel.

Fuck him.

Really. Fuck him for making me love him even more, floating me up into the air, high on pleasure, then cutting the spell and letting me crash down to the ground.

I find my pyjamas and when that's not enough covering, I don't even ask. I barge him out of the way of his wardrobe and the first shirt that reaches my hand goes over my head.

It smells like him and my heart aches.

"Are you going to call someone to get the key and let us out?"

He doesn't answer and after a few seconds I look at him. Standing in his usual pristine suit, this one pale grey with a white shirt. He has fully dressed, tie and cufflinks included, and transformed into the immaculate, controlled mafia king of Westminster, rather than my patient lover of last night.

This is not a man who would call me his good girl and give me orgasms.

"The key," I repeat.

A muscle ticks in his jaw and he strides to the bedside cabinet and yanks it open.

“You had a spare all this time?”

“Of course,” he replies calmly.

“You asshole!”

I don't know why I'm so angry about this. He's the one who threw the key out the window after all. I was always the captive. But knowing it was there makes it all feel sordid. Like he was humouring me.

“Give it here.” I snatch the key from him and my hands are shaking as I unlock the door and try to flee. I storm downstairs, and it's only as I get to the generous hallway that my brain catches up. His room is right next to mine. That's why it was so easy to find my way out of this otherwise impenetrable house.

All this time when I've spent the night here, he was just next door. A few feet and a whole world away.

I hate him.

And love him. Tears prickle behind my eyes and the room swims as I drift to a halt. The front door will be locked. I have no shoes, money, or key to get back into my house. No phone, either. I'm wearing nothing more than Ben's shirt. If I could even get out of here, I'd be stuck walking two miles home across London streets that if I'm lucky will cut my feet but not give me a deadly infection.

Yay. So potentially, I would have survived one kidnap and escaped another, only to be brought down by a lack of street cleaning and inadequate public health measures. Fun.

“I bought you a house.”

I turn to find Ben right behind me, cool as you like. Fucker. He's silent as a cat. I'd put a bell on him if he were my pet.

But he's not mine, is he? And I don't know what he's on about. A house?

“Let me out.” I'm resigned, trying to be as unfeeling as he is, when I'm overflowing with emotions. I'll take my chances with the walk.

“Not while the Bratva still know where you live, and have access from your housemates.”

“I’m going home,” I insist. “Today.”

“You are ho—” He cuts himself off, shoves his hands in his pockets and takes several deep breaths, head bowed. “Tomorrow. The lawyer said your house would be ready tomorrow, and I’ll deal with the Bratva...”

My expression must be as thunderous as I feel, because he sighs and adds, “Alright. Today. This evening, you get a new home. I’ll get George to pick up your things—”

“I can get my own stuff,” I say, instead of asking why Benedict Crosse bought me a house. I wonder what it’s like? A property only for me, that I could go to whenever I want? Mad.

“No. You can’t.”

I remember the last time I was in my room, and shudder. Yeah. Okay, maybe he’s right.

“I don’t want to lose my deposit,” I mutter.

He nods. “You’ll get your deposit back. Or the equivalent. And if you stay here until tonight, you’ll have a place of your own.”

“Payment for my compliance, and not reporting you to the police?”

“If you choose that interpretation. The police do what I say. But I’m offering you safety, Anwyn, if you can just be pliant enough to take it.”

It’s not security I desire, it’s him. I bite those words back. “Fine. I want breakfast,” I grumble.

A sad smile tugs at the lips I kissed last night.

It’s much like our Sunday mornings together, except I’m aware of what he looks like without clothes on.

Which, you know, is an issue. It makes me hungry, but not for the treats he sets out. Sweet and milky Darjeeling tea, toast with lashings of butter and marmalade.

Over the past six months, a wall between us had come down, chipped away, brick by brick.

We've lost all that intimacy. Every casual laugh and shared smile. We'd started telling each other truths and revealing details of our lives without even noticing. I'd told him about my studies and he'd spoken about the petty squabbles of the other mafias that he adjudicated.

It's only when we sit across from each other in silence but more physically aware than ever before that I feel how far we'd come and how much I long for its return.

I spread deep red cherry jam over a piece of toast. Ben's eyes follow my hands as I take a bite. He's staring at my mouth as I chew and his eyes go dark when I lick the jam from my lips.

It's lewd and forbidden, how I feel about him. But we said one night, so although I'm desperate to ask what his watching me means, I don't. I sip the tea he made me and consider the last thing he said.

"Tell me about the house." Because rich as this man is, buying me a home is still... Significant. To someone like me, whose main family has been a boarding school and primary home—homes—shared with dozens of others, it's the promise of spring after the longest winter. I love visiting Ben here. Powerful kingpin he might be, but his house is always calm and quiet, unlike anywhere I've lived before. Just him and me, despite the fact I know he has dozens of staff.

"It has a big garden." He frowns. "Trees and stuff."

My hand stills halfway in bringing toast to my face. A garden. A place to grow plants of my own and sit in the sunshine. My throat goes dry.

"There's a breakfast room with French doors that lead to a terrace with long stone troughs full of plants."

"Herbs?" I choke out, because in my imagination that's what a fantasy house has. Fragrant pots of lavender and rosemary and mint, and a deckchair that I lie in. An umbrella

so I can see my laptop screen as I work, bare legs stretched before me.

He raises one eyebrow in an eloquent statement of *how would I know, you're the plant expert*. "I noticed the purple one that you like."

Lavender then. The rest of the house might be a wreck, but I'm already entranced.

"Is that why you bought it?" I joke.

"Yes." A simple reply, his expression serious. I don't know what to make of it, because yes, he's observant. I told Ben I liked morello cherries once, and the next Sunday morning there was this jar on the table.

Nothing escapes his notice.

But maybe this is more than his professional diligence?

"It's just outside London," he continues.

My heart jumps again. Close enough that I could visit him. I could continue to see him.

"So you can finish your studies."

Oh.

My heart snaps, a tender shoot from a seed broken off before it can reach the light. This doesn't make me special.

Probably lots of girls would be too proud to accept a gift like a house, but I'm not going to argue when someone is offering me what I've wanted since I was old enough to comprehend what a home was, and that I didn't have one. Just a place to live.

Many things have changed since the time I first dreamed about a home and a family to love. Not least, all those fuzzy dreams have sharpened into focus. Not just a home, but a townhouse in Westminster. Not just a family, but children with big grey eyes. Only one person to love me: him. Ben.

"Thank you, Mr Crosse."

There's a beat of silence.

“Back to this,” he mutters. “You called me Ben last night.”

“You gave me orgasms last night,” I retort.

He sighs and runs his hands through his hair in a gesture of such frustration I almost feel sorry for him. Almost.

Then I remember that he thinks I’m too young and girlish to deserve more than one night of his attention.

This tension between us is horrible.

“When did you get the house?” I ask, more to fill the silence than anything else. I expect him to say it was part of some mafia deal and he had it lying around like normal people have a scattering of coins. Might have found it down the back of his sofa. Ah! That’s where I lost the gold bullion and a four-bedroom house.

But he doesn’t. He gulps tea and says, “Yesterday morning. I searched online for hours while you... It took me a while to find what I wanted. I’d been thinking about it for a while, not actioning it because...” His mouth twists and he trails off again, so unlike him. He’s usually crisp and concise with his words. “It was imperative. I saw I’d already waited too long.”

He bought me a house while I was asleep in his bed.

“Trying to get me out of here.” I attempt a laugh but I’m just broken and trampled. I thought... I was so sure last night that he felt something for me.

Turns out that something was guilt.

“Trying to keep you safe, darling. From the Bratva. And from myself,” he adds softly.

Safe from him? I’m not a child to be dictated to. Of all the arrogant things. And to call me by a sweet endearment, teasing me with everything he’s withholding? That. That’s the worst.

“Don’t call me darling unless you mean it.”

“I mean it.” I look up and his eyes lock with mine across the table. He sets down his tea and focuses entirely on my face. “You are my one good girl. My darling. My queen. Even

though we can't be together, Anwyn, you'll *always* be my darling."

The heat of my anger grows into a blaze of love and arousal, only tempered by the acknowledgement that we can't be together. "Really?"

"Yes."

And yet in the way he stands straight and folds his arms I recognise he's not going to change his mind. The honour of Westminster and the legacy of his son mean more to him than being with me.

"I'll arrange some clothes for you, and whatever else you need. Then this evening, I'll take you to your new home."

I nod my acceptance and tentatively, we're friends again despite all that has happened in the last twenty-four hours.

It's less than an hour and a whole wardrobe's worth of clothes arrive for me. Everything I might want, all in my size. I pick out a white sun dress with buttons down the front to wear, and brush my hair so it flows over my shoulders.

As we relax into the day, me stealing books from his library and him having a series of phone conversations that amount to plans to kill the Bratva, I see how it could be. It's just as comfortable as it's been all along, but with the extra intimacy that has developed since last night.

I love him.

I can't go back to seeing him only once a week.

We have lunch, and Ben fusses—if that's the right description for dark scowls and pointed looks—over whether I've eaten enough. The day goes by far too fast, and anxiety puts out suckers in my tummy, twining and curling around me, trying to choke the air from my body.

The evening, he said. He'd take me to this beautiful house he bought me, and I won't have an excuse to visit every week.

I thought I was okay with this plan.

But the edge of the cliff is approaching fast. The moment when I'll never see Benedict Crosse again. And that is when I change my mind. I have only a few hours left with him then I'll be out of his life forever.

There's only one thing to do: what he did to me.

Last night he undid me with sheer pleasure. My body was no longer my own. He showed me that no one will ever make me feel as good as he does, and covered me with lines of his come. He made me his in all the ways that matter, except one.

He claimed me.

Turnabout is fair play. *I'm* going to claim *him*.

BENEDICT

She's a rainbow of emotions. A pretty way of describing how she's been by turns furious, sad, elated, and now there's a glint in her blue eyes. Violet. An endgame and I don't know what to make of it.

This is the first time we've spent a whole day together—not counting my sitting with her when she was unconscious. I've wished for more time with her, and while this isn't what I had in mind, I'll take it.

“Is it just me, or is it hot in here?” Anwyn looks at me from under her lashes, and pulls off the cardigan, leaving only that white sundress. Hardly any more flesh exposed, really. Just her arms, and shoulders. Okay, and the valley between the swell of her breasts. The neckline reveals the tattoo. I haven't spent enough time looking at it to trace the design from memory. I should have.

She saunters over to my desk, and I'm hypnotised by the sway of her hips. The floaty dress catches between her thighs and I suppress a groan.

“What are you doing, Anwyn.” I make the words harsh and the tone worse because my cock, which was already halfway to being hard, is now a steel rod.

“I was just thinking...” There are buttons down the front of the dress and I basically have a heart attack as she trails her fingers over them and leans over my desk.

That's when I recognise this emotion from the range she's going through.

Denial.

She's not going to give up on what we gained last night.

I should tell her to stop as she undoes first one button, then the next.

"It's hot in here."

It's not particularly, but I nod.

"I'm a bit sore..."

Alright, she's right, it is roasting. I'm light-headed. She's been through a lot in the last few days, but I'm the one that feels overwhelmed as she bares the valley between her breasts. So beautiful, I can't drag my eyes away.

"Would you check something for me?" She has never smiled at me like this before, slow, wicked, and seductive. Sliding around the table, she perches on the edge, bare legs over mine. Arousal is flowing through me and into my dick. I swear it must be leaking precome. There's a flyaway whisp of honey-blond hair on her cheek and yeah, I want to brush it tenderly away. I also need to greedily scoop up all those silky strands and hold her as I fuck her so thoroughly she cries.

"Here." She drags the hem of her dress up.

It should be my hand doing that. Undressing her. I clench my fists. To think I used to say Anwyn's mere presence was torture.

What a naive man I was.

This. *This* is true suffering. To know what her cunt tastes like, and not be able to lose myself in her sweetness again, because if I did I'd be a shitty father and a bad example to the whole of my territory. She's half my age.

She shifts so the top of her thigh, then the seam of her knickers is revealed and I can't breathe. It's all I can do to stop myself from reaching and pulling her onto my lap. I drag my gaze up to her face and there's challenge there. Glittering defiance.

"Have I got bruises?"

“No.” I keep my gaze trained on her blue eyes. I’m going to drown in her and I don’t even care.

“You have to look,” she replies teasingly. “What about here?” A brush of fabric on skin, and without my volition I’m staring at her pert arse cheek where it’s exposed by her pulling up her little lacy knickers.

The knickers I bought for her.

I wonder if my cock will ever be soft again. Perhaps I’ll explode? The ache is practically a burn now. It’s taken over my whole body. I’m throbbing.

“Well?” she prompts me. My naughty minx. I catch her glancing at where she’s made me very obviously hard, and shit. This is playing with fire.

“No.” I drag in a breath like I’ve been trapped underwater. “You’re not bruised.” Thank god. I managed not to bruise her last night.

I will not feel disappointed that I didn’t leave a mark on her. I will not.

“Appreciate you checking.” She toys with the hem of her dress, letting it slide down.

Okay, that’s a bit more air in the room, but definitely disappointing. The sweet curve of the bottom of her arse, damn I’d look at her all day.

“I’d like to repay your kindness.”

“No thanks needed,” I grind out. “And I’m not *kind*.” I’m a slathering horrible monster.

“Maybe you need someone to be kind to you then. As an example.” She brushes her hand over the obvious bulge in my lap.

“Anwyn,” I say, the warning loud.

“I want to taste you, Ben.”

Ah fuck. She undoes me when she says my name.

“Let me make you feel good.” She leans over me. “Like you did for me last night.”

Words roll around in my head. I don’t speak.

“I could use my mouth. I didn’t have the chance to do that.” A hint of uncertainty, a pinch of yearning. The idea of my girl missing out on anything she wants is unthinkable. She can have everything.

“Go on then.” I barely recognise my voice. There’s authority, yes, but the rasp is all desire. “Get to your knees.”

She slides down eagerly, eyes shining with anticipation.

“Take out my cock.”

I think I intend to scare her, but as her lips part I slide my hand into her hair so very gently. As soft and tender as she deserves, even as I struggle not to shake. Her small hands on my belt. The tightening at my waist, then my trousers settle, looser. The button pops. The sound of the zip is a purr. She takes every movement with tentative slowness. Unfamiliar with a man’s clothing.

She’s so arousing, it’s unreal. The combination of eagerness and innocence.

She shifts and I see the carpet digging into my girl’s knees, and *oh absolutely not*.

“Stay there,” I bark and I ignore her hurt mewl as I stride off. Cushions. For a second my brain is so fried I can’t remember where in my own house I’d find a goddamn pillow, but I manage and haul two back like a caveman bringing home a kill. I toss them onto the floor.

She looks between me and the cushions and gulps. I don’t know what her over-active imagination has dreamed up, but I point. “Kneel there.”

Her shoulders relax as she crawls over and damn, I didn’t think I could get any harder, but apparently the sight of Anwyn crawling over to kneel and be more comfortable as she sucks my cock has the capacity to make precome leak from my cock. I’m desperate.

So you'd think it would be rough as I stand before her. But while I'm tempted to shove away my clothes, pull her mouth onto my cock and thrust, I'd prefer to savour her expression when she discovers me.

Savage pride at her bravery fills me as she draws down my boxers and her thumb brushes the head. Her eyes go wide as she reveals my length.

I'm beyond being objective right now, but her hands seem little next to my erection. I'm harder than I can ever remember, which is quite something given how I've thought of her for the last six months.

"Do you like your man's cock, darling?" And though her expression was eloquent, a knot constricts in my chest as I wait for her answer.

The smile spreads across her face, lighting her eyes. She leans forwards, gaze fixed on mine and licks the tip. Once.

I jerk. That brief contact of her tongue forces a hiss from me.

"You tease," I grind out, but there's so much affection in it that she grins.

"Do you want me to suck your cock, Mr Crosse?"

My fist closes and she smirks as the action tightens her hair onto her scalp.

"Brat," I murmur as I draw her inexorably to where I need her. She gasps as I tug. "I'll get you back for this."

I will. I'm going to lick her until she screams for mercy after her seventh orgasm in a row.

Right after... Oh god.

She takes the sensitive tip of my cock between her lips and my chest compresses. My breath is stolen. The pleasure is unlike anything I've experienced in my forty years of life. Her mouth is hot and wet and soft. Her lips press over the helmet and I'm cross-eyed. I'm big. Intimidatingly so, but she's so freaking brave, and though it's obviously stuffing her mouth

and she must be forcing her jaw open, she covers her teeth and it's all smooth heat.

“Deeper,” I tell her, and she obeys, taking me down until my cock hits the back of her throat. Then without being told, she bobs her head and hollows out her cheeks.

“Good girl.”

She whimpers and I feel her nod. Oh, she likes that, does she?

“My good girl, I love the way you're sucking my cock.” I don't know who is more turned on by my words, her or me. I see a shudder go through her and reach down to find her nipple. “You like this too, don't you? Is your pretty slit wet for me?”

“Uh,” she makes a noise that could be a yes or just a wordless indication of need.

“You know what good girls who have pleased their man with the way they suck his cock get?” I don't wait for her answer. “They get to receive more. I'm going to take your virginity, darling. I'm going to stretch you out, open you up, and ruin you for any other man.”

I didn't intend to be so possessive, but I can't help it. She has her mouth over my cock and I want her. I want more, damn it. And wrong or not—who am I kidding, it is deliciously taboo to be shoving into a woman twenty years younger than me—I'm not stopping. She's my son's age. Even though virgins have never been my thing, with Anwyn it makes this insanely hot.

“Good girls get fucked in their mouths.” I can't believe I'm saying this, or going to do it.

She moans her assent.

Ah, right. That's why. Because she's brave and strong and can take all of me. The light and the dark.

“And if it's too much, good girls tap here.” I place her little hand on my thigh, even as she continues to drive me out of my

mind with her tongue exploring the taut skin of my cock. “Do you understand?”

Another whimper, and our eyes meet over my glistening shaft. I card both hands into her hair, the silk holding me, as I shift so I can see as I pull her further, deeper with each thrust of my hips upwards and pull of her down. It feels like Anwyn is smooth everywhere I touch. I bet her pussy is heaven. My brain stutters on that, the taboo wrestling with how perfect this is.

She’s mine. I’m the only one who will ever fuck her mouth. I’m not going to let her go. She’ll never have bad sex, or heartbreak, or be messed around.

Nope. She’ll be loved and cherished and given orgasms and complimented. And used too, because my dirty girl likes this.

As I fuck into her mouth, I’m unable to look away, and she doesn’t let go of my thigh, digging her nails into my quads and encouraging me to take her rougher and harder than I would otherwise. Her eyes water, but her hand never wavers. Never taps. And she doesn’t take her eyes off mine.

It’s passionate in a way I should have known it would be with Anwyn. The back of her throat makes the top of my cock tingle. I’m not fully in, just the head, really, but it’s enough. It’s more than enough with her blue eyes on me. My balls pull up, readying. Pleasure spirals low in my belly.

It’s a damn good thing I feel her slight nod and her grip my leg, but that’s not where I’m ending this.

“You do that so well, darling,” I rasp.

A small choke from her, and I lift Anwyn’s head away, a line of spit connecting us until she swallows and then licks her lips.

“Why have you stopped?” There’s a hint of confusion in her open-mouthed look. Her exposed breasts heave and yes, she looks wrecked, lips red from taking my cock.

“I’m a bit old-fashioned,” I say with a lopsided grin. “I’m going to mark you as mine. But tell me, darling, where would

you like my seed?”

Her eyes go wide.

“Where would you prefer my seed to go, my good girl?” I rasp. “In your mouth? Over those creamy thighs you teased me with? Painting your little tits? Or going bare and deep into your pussy, and breeding you.”

“Yes.”

And we understand each other, this girl and I, because I don't have to clarify. She means she wants all of those.

“We will. But tell me what you want now.”

ANWYN

In six months of spending Saturday evenings together in his office, the recurring fantasy I've had is so cliché I'm almost embarrassed.

But there's a risk this is the one and only time, so there's no room for my shyness. "Will you take me on your desk?"

He slants one eyebrow. "You want me to lay you across the table and devour you, like I've lost control?"

I nod rapidly. Oh *yeah*. That. So much that.

With a reckless throw of his arm, he sweeps everything off the shiny wood. The glass paperweight, all his reports and chunky pens, books, and even his computer peripherals of keyboard and mouse, all crash to the floor. The paperweight rolls then smacks against a bookcase, bouncing off into a rustle of papers then coming to a standstill. The quiet is punctuated by my gasps for air and Ben's deep rasps. The dark shiny wood is exposed, ready for me to be defiled.

It's what I wanted. Ben to lose control, yet I'm as horrified as I am excited. He's seen inside my head and—

"Turn around."

The shock makes me stone. But not normal stone. Magma, heavy and burning hot. Impossible. Elemental. As with all those evenings together, he's so dominant and bossy that my clit jumps at his order.

Ben levels me with a haughty look and as my cheeks flush, I obey.

There's a pause. I know what's coming, but I wait.

"Bend over." His voice is soft and calm, but commanding.

I do that too, laying my cheek on the cool wood. And even though I'm clothed, and so is he, it feels filthy. My breasts press into the polished table, and my slit is flooded with yet more arousal at how my bottom is in the air.

"Pull up your skirt."

I quickly yank it up to around my waist, eager. I want him and everything I've dreamed of is so close, I can barely think.

"Take down your knickers." He sounds a bit hoarse, and as I slide my white lace knickers down my thighs he groans. "You're so wet, darling."

"You made me wet, Mr Crosse."

"Ben," he corrects and there's the rustle of cloth.

"Ben," I sigh. "Ben." I love both names. My sweet and caring lover, Ben. And severe, dangerous, scary mafia kingpin, Mr Crosse.

Something hard and blunt and hot touches my soaking pussy. His crown.

"Do you want me to fuck you, darling?" He strokes the blunt tip over my folds, not quite where I need him. Only brushing my entrance and skimming over my clit.

"Yes." It comes out as a whine. A cry of desperate need and I push back onto him.

He eases away with a chuckle. "Patience, my slutty girl. You want my cock, huh?"

"Yes. Please. Mr Crosse, please." Vaguely my brain registers he's bare. That he's going to fuck me raw, no condom. And hell, but that's makes my clit twitch and I writhe, mindlessly trying to get more contact to my pussy. I trust him. I want nothing between us.

"Open your legs."

I scramble to obey. I've been so busy rubbing my thighs together in an attempt to ease the ache in my clit, I kind of forgot. I shift my feet apart and as a reward he pushes further, stepping between my feet. The smooth fabric of his trousers on my bare inner thighs emphasises how naughty this is. He's fully clothed, I'm not. I'm his slut, bending over the desk to be railed by the older, forbidden man.

Getting railed in a sundress.

A powerful mafia boss who could have anyone he wanted, and has chosen *me*.

“Oh you're so pretty like this, Anwyn. Pink and lush.” He almost purrs as he teases us both, dragging his cock where I'm slick. He must have his cock in his fist, and the thought makes my insides clench. Empty, so empty.

He pauses. “There's one more thing.”

“Anything.” I'm so focussed on the place between my thighs where he's notched into me, just the very tip resting in my folds, that I can't think.

He gathers my torso up into his arms, his hands on my belly and sternum. The coarse bristles of his cheek rub mine, and he presses a kiss next to my mouth.

“I love you,” he whispers. “Once I've been inside you, I won't let you go, Anwyn. Any price, I'll pay it. The censure of the world, the anger of my son, the disapproval of your friends and my business associates. I don't care, so long as I have you as my wife.”

This is what I wanted to hear, all these years. I wanted to be enough for someone, to be loved. Benedict Crosse is willing to burn everything to the ground to have me.

“In my bed, in my life, filling you up constantly. You better ready yourself. I'm going to be insatiable unless you stop me *right now*. This moment.” He stills, giving me the space to think.

Ha. No need. Threatening me with a good time, with being *his*, isn't going to put me off.

“Don’t stop.” I melt, arching back into him. “Please.”

“You must be very sure, darling. There won’t be any one-night stands or being a promiscuous student for you,” he growls. “You’ll be married to a beast. I’m jealous. You won’t be able to touch other men, because any part of them that contacts you will be cut off.”

I’m clearly as deranged as he is, because arousal shoots to my core. He wants me. I’m his possession and he isn’t going to compromise.

“I want this.” It’s not even a question. He’s the only person I want to touch me, and I want to rub against him like I’m a cat and he’s catnip. He’s a pretty, slightly grey drug that I can’t believe I am the first one to claim. He’s been on this earth forty years, being so absolutely perfect, and I’m the one he wants.

I went for a wildlife walk in the local park and found a lion that demands to be my housecat.

“Good. Then let me in, darling.” Eases me forward onto the desk again, and pushes into me.

I gasp, because although I’m dripping with arousal and so turned on I’m practically glowing, there’s a pinch. I’m too tight for him to enter, and for a second I panic.

Maybe this is impossible.

“I know, I know it hurts,” he murmurs soothingly. “But it will feel good, I promise.” He shoves my dress further up and strokes circular motions onto my back, even as he presses deeper, the constriction blooming into a delicious stretch.

“Ben, I...” I’m going to say I can’t do this, but he reaches around and unerringly finds my clit. Something adjusts, slotting into place as he rubs me. The pleasure spirals up to where my nipples are hard on the table, and down to my pussy. And I’m no longer fighting him. I’m welcoming him. I need more.

“Yes, that’s my good girl, Wyn,” he growls over my neck, making a shiver go up and down my spine. “Open for me

more. You should see how you look taking me into your slit. Beautiful.”

And that’s when it begins to be everything. I’m rocking back onto him, and he’s groaning. He’s big, and I’m tight, but I hadn’t anticipated how hot and smooth he’d be. Not like a cold and impersonal toy that I’ve used before. When I feel his hips on my butt I know he’s as deep as he can go.

I’m wrong.

The next thrust, he’s deeper again. I swear I can feel him under my ribs.

I whimper something that might be his name, or a plea for more, or words of love. It would definitely be that last one if my brain hadn’t regressed evolutionarily. I’m no more competent than a sensitive plant. A Venus flytrap, triggering at his lightest touch.

I grasp and scrabble at the smooth table, not even knowing what I’m lacking, but I’m a wildflower buffeted by the wind.

His hand comes down firmly on my wrist, pinning it in place. Then the other. He’s caught me before I realise what’s happened, and is holding both my hands onto the wood with one of his. It’s like all the energy I was expending thrashing around is redirected by him, streaming it into my pussy, where I throb all over. He is pinning me, my arms in the air, his other hand stroking my clit, and his cock fills me. I’m surrounded by his touch, unable to escape.

“You’re so fucking beautiful.” He pulls almost all the way out, then slams back in. Again, faster, and I can’t breathe for the pleasure building. It’s tingling across my whole body. My breasts are squashed into the table, and so are the front of my thighs, and being trapped makes this all the hotter.

I’m his to use. His to fill and claim and breed. He’s hammering into me, and there’s no space for anything but Benedict Crosse in my body or my life.

“Come over my cock, Wyn.” He pushes my clit more vigorously, or something, I don’t even know. It just feels

amazing. Overwhelming. “I want to feel you cream all down yourself. I’m going to spoil my good girl.”

I can’t hold out, even if I wanted to. The harder he pounds into me, the higher I spiral, until I get to the top, and burst.

My pussy pulses, hard. I think I yell.

“That’s it,” he croons. “You’re doing perfectly. You are the best thing I’ve ever heard, coming and screaming like a banshee. You feel so good, coming around my cock, darling.” And it sounds as though he’s coaching me through a trial, but it’s pleasure so intense it might split me apart.

As my body eases, I’m aware again. Not just of his impossibly large and solid cock thrusting into me, only the tip at my entrance, slowly now, almost lazily. His hands digging into my hips, the smooth wood of his desk under me.

“Oh my god.” My brain is limp as a dramatic houseplant that hasn’t been watered for a week. My body is a sack of feelings, all good, all his.

“My best girl.” Ben leans over me, reaching out, and I stretch around to look into his face.

“That was...” There are no words.

“I’m glad.” He smiles, feral and dangerous, then his eyes narrow. “But this is wrong.”

BENEDICT

“Wrong? No,” she protests.

“Shhh, shh, that’s enough.” I pull out of her abruptly.

A sob escapes my girl and she grasps for me even as I pull her up and turn her into my arms. Face to face, as we should be for the first time I come inside her. Breed her.

No misunderstandings because she can’t see how sincere I am about this. About her.

“Mr Crosse, Ben. Don’t stop. It’s right,” she babbles. “I swear it’s right.” Her eyes are wide and I think she might be about to cry.

“Silly girl,” I mutter just before my mouth hits hers again. Then we’re kissing, tongues tangling, and her hands grasp the back of my head, holding me to her. “Thinking I’d leave this hot wet cunt of yours before I’ve filled you up.” I hitch her up my body—she’s so petite—and sit her on my desk. Then I drive back into her hot, waiting slit.

She really shouts this time as I enter her, and I roar.

“If you and I are wrong, I never want to be right.” I growl the words into her mouth around our kiss. “I don’t care. I’d defy every law in every part of the world to have you. Any price, I’ll pay it. Anything.”

“Yes. Yes.”

“You were made for me,” I say as I drag my tongue over her cheek.

“I thought—”

I laugh harshly. “You thought I’d give you up? *Never*. You’re mine now, Wyn. I’m going to move you and fuck you exactly as I choose.”

She lets out a squeak I’m taking as agreement, since it’s accompanied by a nod of her head that I feel against my ear.

“But the first time I come inside you I want you to see me, darling. Look into my eyes and see how I’m claiming this virgin cunt as mine. I’m going to watch you come again, and see your expression when I tell you I will breed you.”

Her look is full of wonder. “You want—”

“I’m raw inside you. That wasn’t an accident.” I grab under one of her knees and bring it up until her heel is on the edge of the desk. It opens her out, as I intended. Her head falls back and she moans. I drink it in, kissing her exposed neck, biting gently as I keep pistoning into her.

“I’m going to fill you up with my come. I’m going to press the head of my cock right up to your womb and plant my seed there.” I cram my hand between our bodies and indicate the place, low on her abdomen, where she’ll increase when she’s pregnant.

“Yes.” She’s shaking a bit and I love that.

“You want me to put a baby in you? You want me to make you round and ripe?” My chest constricts as I speak. I’m laying out all my dreams for her, revealing my secret wishes in dirty talk.

“Breed me, that’s what you—” I cut her off, my lips silencing her.

Thank fuck.

I don’t think I could stop if she’d said no. She’s in my blood, this girl. I kiss her mouth as I thrust into her, relishing how soft and tight she is. The scent of her, the velvet feel. She’s perfect in every way.

“Ben.” She tilts her hips and I go deeper. “More.”

“Six months,” I grumble. “You kept this from me for six months. From *the* pussy I own. And now you’re making demands.”

We’re so close I feel her smirk as much as see it as she digs her heels into my buttocks. We both know that I’m rewriting history in the most ludicrous manner. But right now all I can think is that she’s mine, and *I could have lost her*.

If I’d got out of my own idiot way, I could have claimed her months ago and she’d never have woken to fear and death.

“Sorry, kingpin. I should have got myself kidnapped sooner.” She rakes her nails across my back rough enough to make me hiss. “Punish me for it.”

“I will.” Gathering her hair up, I pull to reveal her tender creamy throat. I bite her. Then I slam in hard. She cries out.

I don’t ask if she’s okay. She is, and this is a punishment. It’s supposed to have a sweet edge of pain. Again and again I thrust, using her pussy to spiral myself towards release. I’m marking her in the most primal way, sucking love bites onto her jawline and I grip the soft curve of her hip brutal enough that my fingers will leave bruises. I don’t care. *No*. I’m gleeful that she’ll see these marks, and her cunt will be sore and used, and she’ll know she belongs to me.

The pleasure is making me crazy. I’m so obsessed with her. This is far too fast and hard for her first time, but watching every expression on her face gives me permission to use her hot wet slit to make myself feel good.

So I do. I take her forcibly, pushing the sensitive tip of my cock right into her, shoving up against the top of her passage, over and over.

“You’re being such a good girl for me,” I say, looking into her eyes, drowning in that blue as she whimpers in response. “You like being taken like this, don’t you, my pretty girl?”

“You feel...” She trails off into a moan.

“What?” I demand.

“Huge inside me. You’ve...” Her breath comes out in pants.

“Go on.” I’m swelling inside her further.

“Found a whole new part of my body...” Tossing her head, she’s struggling to keep the thought straight. I thrust harder, an incentive to continue and a punishment for not focusing on what I’ve asked her. I can feel her begin to tense and it’s ecstasy like I’ve never felt.

“I love...” The rest of her declaration is lost in a cry of pleasure as she grasps the back of my head, and holds me to her, her pussy clamps down on my cock in waves. She’s coming on my cock. My girl, made speechless by how we are together.

My brain short circuits. Orgasm steals up on me without warning, pulled from me by the words she almost said and the sensation of her milking the come from me.

“I’m going to fill you up,” I choke out.

“Yes, Ben.” The phrase is muffled by us both wanting to kiss.

One thrust more, and I lodge myself as deep as I can and it spurts out of me in wave after wave that wrack my body. She gasps as we grip each other, me holding her arse and her keeping my forehead pressed to hers. I’m cross-eyed, but I can see her blue eyes as I spill right against her womb.

“Take it all, darling.”

She lets out a squeak of agreement and digs in her nails enough to hurt. Another wave hits me at the feel of her claiming me, and I’m spent. Drained. As my orgasm ebbs away, I lift her and fall back onto my office chair, still lodged in her.

I need skin-to-skin contact. I don’t know if I’ll ever allow her to leave my side again. She relaxes on top of me with a contented sigh, nestled on my lap.

“You stretched me open to the light. You inside me was like sunshine after a lifetime of shade. I didn’t know sex

would feel like my body was finally alive.”

Holding her even closer to me, I try to swallow the tightness in my throat. Because although she’s the virgin here, or was, it’s her who is expressing how this feels. I’m living now I’m with Anwyn.

“I love you.” I never want her to doubt, so I repeat the vulnerable-making declaration. “I love you so fucking much. You’re my everything, Anwyn.”

“I never thought I’d have you,” she confesses into my shoulder. “I thought I’d tragically carry around this unrequited love for my ex-boyfriend’s dad forever. Permanent sad cat.”

Even as I wince at the reminder of Tom, I choke with laughter. But I meant it. Having Anwyn is worth any price I have to pay.

“Mr Crosse!” There’s a loud knock at the door, and my second-in-command’s panicked voice reverberates through the wood. “Sorry to let myself into the house, but I had to get hold of you.”

I frown as I spot my phone on the floor, swept away when I cleared the desk to place my girl in the centre of my life.

“What is it?” I shout.

There’s a pause.

“Your son has been kidnapped.”

ANWYN

Ben listens, pale faced, as George explains what has happened, to the best of his knowledge. The details are scant. Tom was spending a couple of days camping with a friend, and it was only when he didn't arrive back as scheduled that George realised something was up.

Then the message from the Bratva arrived. Moments later, a tip-off the same as the one that had alerted Ben to my being at risk.

“*Bring the girl* were definitely his exact words?” Ben asks again.

George nods soberly.

“It's a trap.” Ben paces around the office like a caged panther.

“Obviously,” George concurs.

“In what way?” I'm standing awkwardly to the side, next to the desk where Ben took my virginity not that long ago. We both threw on clothes in record time.

Nothing like realising someone might die to kill the warm afterglow. Pun not intended. Mostly.

“He knows you're my priority. But he's got my son. Get you both together, he has you both at risk, and me off-balance.” Ben scowls at the floor as though if he's scary enough he'll terrify physical structures to rise up and do his bidding.

“It's going to be okay.” I catch his hand as he passes me.

“For you, yes.” He stops and strokes his knuckles over my cheek. “You won’t be in danger.”

“I’m not being left here.” Whatever is happening, I’ll be at Ben’s side.

“You’re staying here.” His voice is steel.

“One, last time I was home without you I was kidnapped. Two, telling me to stay put doesn’t turn out how you think it will. And three, I’ve got skin in this game. If my future husband and my ex-boyfriend are doing something important, you better believe I’m going to be there.”

Ben grabs my hand and jerks me abruptly into his arms. A sense of calm envelops me as he presses his forearm into my back and a kiss to the top of my head. I breathe in his scent. Spicy and masculine, as well as musky. He smells like dark sex and warm pine forest breezes.

“Putting you in danger isn’t worth it,” Ben mutters. “I should just leave Tom to it.”

“No way.” And though I’m speaking into his chest and my selfish heart is gleeful that Ben would give up everything, even his son, for me, I can’t let him do that. “I’m in Westminster now.”

“Really?” He sounds a bit shocked. “You’d accept being part of Westminster?”

“Yes,” I insist.

“This will end in bloodshed. Are you prepared for that?” He’s checking, I think. Probing to see if this is something he has to give up for me.

“I know. I’m ready.” That’s a total lie, I’m one for plants and books, not guns and knives. But I’m going to be Benedict Crosse’s wife, and Westminster is part of *him*. The kingpin and the sweet paternal figure, I love both sides. Whatever happens with Tom, I’m not having my man give up on his life’s work.

He stares at me, incredulous. Minutes, days, aeons tick past. It’s probably only ten seconds. A slow, pleased smile spreads across his face, lighting his eyes to silver. “I think it’s

time for a regime change in the Bratva.” He nods thoughtfully. “I don’t usually get involved with such things, but I’ll make an exception. Do you want to help?”

“Yes.” Fear pulses through me but I’m here. I’ll be by Mr Crosse’s side and in Ben’s arms until the end of the world.

“Good.” Just that word from him sends pleasure skittering down my spine. He pulls his phone from his pocket and opens a message. “Remind me the name of your friend at the cafe you work at?”

“Uh.” I don’t have any friends there. Unless you count the girl who does the shift before me. Sometimes I chat with her. “Lina?”

“Yes. Thank you.” He holds up his phone and speaks into it. A voice message maybe? Or speech to text? “Artem, I’m thinking of offering Lina a job. If you don’t want that, you should call me.”

I frown, and Ben reaches over, smoothing my brow with his thumb. “Nothing’s going to happen to your friend, don’t worry. But it was recently impressed on me how significant a little pressure on a girl can affect a man.”

Me. He means me. I open my mouth to ask him what happened, but he beats me to it.

“You’re a clever girl. Much cleverer than the Bratva think, Anwyn. Are you willing to work very hard for me, darling?”

“Always.” I’d do anything for Benedict Crosse.

“Then I have an idea of how you can come with me. As Queen of Westminster.”

We arrive at the warehouse designated as a neutral place to meet just as the colours fade into grey night. Ben has been drilling me all day. I started off not having ever touched a gun, but now I know every part by name, how to keep my arms braced, and I’ve taken it from the holster on my thigh a hundred times or more.

Exactly as Ben predicted, they're all patted down by the Bratva goon, and one of the Westminster men does the same to the Bratva men. Everyone is unarmed.

But when the Bratva goon approaches me, Ben growls, dark and feral.

“Touch my fiancée and it will be the last thing you do.”

So low and possessive, his rumbling words send a bolt of pure longing from my throat to my pussy.

Gulping, the goon backs off.

And the gun remains in its holster on my leg. An insurance policy, Ben said. There is a plan A, and although he explained it to me, I'm... Sceptical. I guess having no family myself, I can't imagine betraying them.

The Bratva delegation is five men. The aforesaid goon and a man about my age stand together. My ex-boyfriend Tom, eyes wide and mouth taped, a man behind him. He's as tall as Ben, with black hair and I think they're about the same age. Attractive if you like jawlines so square you can cut yourself on them.

Then the Bratva kingpin stands alone. A little shorter than the other man, he has all the same features but they're mixed up differently. Two plants with lush green leaves and red berries—one poisonous, one sweet.

“What do you want, Victor?” Benedict asks from next to me.

“Your territory for your boy.” Victor flicks his fingers at Tom, who is shoved to his knees by the taller man. He catches Ben's eye above my head, and there's a tense moment. The younger Bratva man is looking at the floor, seemingly impotently angry, eyes hard.

“That's unreasonable and you know it, Victor.” Ben is completely unflustered. Calm. You wouldn't know he paced this afternoon, or patiently showed me time after time after time how to pull the safety off the gun I'm wearing, even as I got it wrong repeatedly.

“You want me to compromise?” Victor has a strong Russian accent, whereas his brother’s is less noticeable. “I compromise. Half of Westminster for half of the boy.”

He barks out a cynical laugh that makes it clear he’d enjoy cutting someone in half.

“I keep the half with The Busy Bean coffee shop. My fiancée works there, you know. I’ve been keeping a close eye on it. Sweet place. But you wouldn’t have any access to it. No crossing the lines at all. For anyone.” Ben’s gaze flits between the other two Bratva family members.

“Don’t,” the second man says, eyes flashing.

“Shut up, Artem. If I want your opinion I’ll ask for it.”

Oh, that’s Artem. Ben said he was Victor’s brother.

“Enough talk of coffee shops,” Victor snaps and points the barrel of his gun to the back of Tom’s head. Tom is trembling and his grey eyes are brimming with fear as he looks to his father for comfort. To Benedict.

My stomach plummets as I realise my ex-boyfriend might die because Ben prioritised me instead of him.

This isn’t going as I expected from the plan. Why has he allowed it to happen? Surely Tom is in danger?

I attempt to assess the situation, even though I have literally zero experience with this. I could pull out my gun and try to kill Victor, as Ben showed me. But if I miss, Tom will definitely die. If I hit Victor, will he be able to shoot Tom before he goes down? I have no idea. This is not my area of expertise. I am significantly better with plants.

If only the mafia all sat down and resolved their differences with who was faster at genetic sequencing, I would be a perfect asset to Ben. As it is, I’m a liability.

“Dad.” The youngest of the Bratva men steps forwards. “Don’t do this. Please.”

I see Tom’s eyes flick up to the young man with pain and hope and betrayal and I still.

He's gay, and I can read Ben's face so easily. It's Tom's choice of partner that surprises him, not their gender. Tom has been in a relationship with the Bratva.

"Shut up, Sergey." The Bratva boss doesn't take his gaze from Tom. "Crosse. It's a simple choice. What do you value? Your territory, or your son?"

"It's not that simple though, is it? I don't like the way you run your operation, Victor. You're asking me to put the lives of numerous women and children under my care over that of my own son." Ben is calm, impassive even, but I can see the war raging inside him, even as Tom's shoulders shake.

Tom makes a muffled attempt to speak, and Artem sighs dramatically, stomps over to Tom and brutally rips off the tape from his mouth with a sound that makes me wince.

Victor's hand doesn't waver as Artem steps back.

"I love you," Tom blurts out. "Dad."

"I love you, too." Ben's jaw clenches. It's taking everything in him not to cave.

"And Sergey," Tom adds quietly. "I loved you as well."

He's already talking about himself in the past tense, resigned to his death.

"Tom..." Sergey breathes, stepping forwards again, his face stricken with grief.

"You stupid p—" Victor begins, turning to his son.

"Dad, don't give—" Tom looks up.

A gunshot blasts out, and Victor slumps to the ground. Blood trickles from a hole in his temple.

On the other side of the room, Victor's goon steps towards Ben, a knife glinting, while he is focused on Artem.

The rage is instant, red hot, and furious. After everything that has happened, no one is going to take Benedict Crosse from me. I snatch up my dress, yank out the gun and fire at the man's chest, squeezing the trigger the moment I line up the sight on him. The biggest target.

The noise doesn't even register. All I can think is, *Ben*.

The man staggers, arms falling. Then Sergey races to the goon, snatching the knife from him and I'm not as quick this time, staring at my hand. That hand shot a man. Sergey doesn't hesitate. Knife in hand, he falls to his knees at Tom's side, just as Ben stops George and me, a hand out in both directions.

Sergey cuts the ties at Tom's wrists, and Tom collapses forwards, Sergey catching him in his arms. Tom's mouth finds his lover's, kissing him in a way that he never did with me, before burying his face in his neck.

There's a silence as we all watch Sergey comforting Tom.

"Thank you," Ben says softly, his eyes meeting mine, and I'm covered in warmth. "And you too." He nods to Artem.

The gun slips from my hands. I just shot a man. I look at the goon bleeding on the floor. His eyes are open but glassy. Lifeless. My gaze springs back to Ben. I should feel bad, but there is no room for regret. I'd a thousand times rather he was dead and Ben safe.

"Well, I think that's the end of that," Artem says, pocketing a gun.

I get it now. That was what Ben meant when he said I wouldn't be the only armed person present. George deliberately didn't take one of Artem's guns when he frisked him. Ben threatened Lina in the mildest terms, and Artem murdered his brother rather than have her in the Westminster territory but forbidden to him. By Ben's account, Victor had it coming but still. Artem made a bleak choice.

"I'll be taking over the Mayfair Bratva. I hope we can deal politely with each other, Mr Crosse. I can't pretend I'm delighted that my nephew is banging your son."

Ben rolls his eyes. "That was very nearly Shakespearean. I suggest we do something to prevent such occurrences again. A London Mafia Syndicate, perhaps. I'll have invitations sent."

Artem looks down at his dead brother with distaste. "So long as they can be together without compromising the security of either of our activities, I have no objection."

“About those operations.” Ben has taken this with the sort of sang-froid that makes him a terrifying mafia boss and me his student girlfriend. “I don’t like—”

“Neither do I.” The new boss of the Bratva nods. “You’ll find I run things differently to my brother.”

“Do you want to take that corpse, or shall I have my men dispose of it?” Ben doesn’t even spare a glance for Victor’s dead body.

“I’ll take him. I don’t want to inconvenience you. But...” Artem looks with undisguised contempt at the man I shot.

They sound like they’re discussing who will pay the bill. Very courteous.

“Not at all,” Ben replies. “I’ll handle that mess.”

“Kind of you.” Artem sucks his teeth. Victor is not a small man, but Artem sighs wearily, kneels and hefts his dead brother over his shoulder. “My thanks. Saved me a job. Come, Sergey. Fuck, I need a coffee,” he mutters, then leaves.

“Thank you,” Ben states. “For the tip-off.”

It takes me a moment to realise he’s talking to the youngest Bratva. Sergey.

Ohhh. Tom’s boyfriend alerted Ben about my impending kidnap. I guess he didn’t know that when that failed, his father would take Tom instead.

Sergey swallows and jerks a nod. “No problem.” He transfers his gaze to Tom and I see adoration in his eyes. “I’ll message you,” stammers Sergey, and races away.

We’re left, just the three of us.

“Dad.” Tom doesn’t move, and there’s a new wariness on his face, different to the outright fear when he had a gun to his head.

“George, could you...” Ben waves at the dead goon on the floor.

George winks. “Got it, boss.”

“Come.” Ben wraps an arm around my waist and tows me out of the warehouse, Tom following. When we’re safely ensconced in the limo Tom looks between Ben and me. We’re not hiding. Ben has his hand on my shoulder, gently stroking me there. He kisses my head as soon as we are settled into seats, me next to Ben and Tom opposite.

Tension prickles up my bones as Tom takes in the casual intimacy.

“So... You two.” He scowls.

“Yes,” Ben replies simply, tilting up his chin as though to dare his son to say something.

“But... Anwyn?” Tom’s lips press into a displeased line. “My ex-girlfriend? That’s just... She’s my age.”

“A sexually mature adult, then,” I point out.

Ben raises one eyebrow, a glint of amusement on his face. “The heart wants who it wants, Tom. Love isn’t about age or nationality or... gender.”

Tom digests that. “You knew.”

“I’ve known you a long time,” Ben replies.

“Right, but Anwyn.” Tom rounds on me. “My dad? Couldn’t you have—”

“You don’t speak to her like that,” Ben snaps. “And if we’re talking about inappropriate choices of partner, we can start with the son of the mafia who has been attempting to take down Westminster for ten years.”

Tom swears and drags both hands through his hair in a frustrated gesture so like Ben I have to laugh. “Are you going to ban me from being with him?”

Ben huffs out a breath that’s equal parts irritation and amusement. “No. But I might use it to force you to accept Anwyn as your step-mum.”

“No!” Tom looks so horrified.

“That’s not how it will be,” I cut in.

“Though you will have some half-siblings,” Ben adds lazily. He’s enjoying this and I shoot him a look. He gives me an unrepentant wink, mouths *breed you*, and I blush.

Tom winces. “Fine. If I can be with Sergey, fine. I never want to hear about any of how that happened. Ever.”

Ben and I grin at each other. “Deal.”

EPILOGUE

BENEDICT

10 years later

I still look forward to Saturdays. Particularly on drizzly winter late afternoon weekdays like this one, that has been a long sequence of minor mafia fracas to manage, followed by a report that I need to make a decision on. Westminster is more wealthy and powerful than ever, but there are always reasons for me to be wary, and keep looking out. Thankfully disputes with the Bratva are years in the past. But there's still a chunk of most of my days that requires me to work. Saturdays are a treat to look forward to because the Crosse family spends the whole day together.

Henry, our eldest son, is nine now. Serious and hardworking, Wyn says he's just like me. But his smile is identical to hers. Then there's Molly, seven, our tearaway. How Wyn and I produced a girl who loves to be naughty as much as she does, I don't know. Two years ago I found her sitting on the roof of Wyn's country house, calm as you like. I nearly had a heart attack. Elizabeth is four, and as sweet and funny as her mother.

Even Tom and his husband Sergey usually manage to come for lunch on Saturdays. Tom was a little freaked out when Wyn was pregnant, but Sergey—the sensible one of the two—took to the babies immediately and has become a sort of surrogate brother. I think his enthusiasm dragged Tom along, and I heard him broach the idea of starting their own family when Sergey was playing trains on the floor with Henry last month.

It's almost laughable how much work was my whole life, not so long ago. And there's still plenty to do. I tell myself it's a good thing, as Anwyn's job as a university professor is demanding, and the kids have to go to school. Even if I could pass off all responsibilities for Westminster, to spend all my time with my wife and kids I'd have to home educate our kids, and figure out ways to keep Anwyn entertained...

That doesn't sound terrible, actually.

Not yet. I love my kids and they deserve a better education than I'd provide. I turn my attention back to the report, my eye catching on a plant in my office that I'm sure wasn't there yesterday? I have so many now, and Wyn cares for them all, sneakily adding more, or swapping out ones that have finished flowering.

There's a tap on the door before it slowly opens and Henry peeks around the corner. "Dad?"

"Come in," I reassure him, turning off the screen to my computer. He might be born into the mafia, but that doesn't mean he'll see too much too young. I protect my family from the grittier aspects of my job. "Bring a chair."

He smiles and his bright blue eyes light up just as his mother's do. My heart melts a bit. Damn but I'm a fool for my kids.

"What is it?" I ask as he flops into the chair, having put it next to mine at the desk. I notice that he has an exercise book clutched in his hand.

"Science homework." I don't even have space to raise an eyebrow in surprise before he adds, "I know Mum is the one to ask about that, but she seemed really tired when she picked us up from school. I don't want to bother her."

I hide my smile. Tired, huh? I'd noticed the same and put it down to that time of the month, but if Henry has noted it too... Perhaps I should ask my wife a question this evening. There might be a moment for one of my favourite opportunities to look after her.

“Proud of you for being so considerate, Henry. You did the right thing.” My boy can shoot five bullseyes in a row, but it’s his emotional smarts that will get him to the top of whichever profession he chooses. I suspect it won’t be the mafia. I have a fiver on Molly being more bloodthirsty and risk-taking than I am, and that she’ll be my second-in-command by the time she’s sixteen and running Westminster when I retire, though Wyn is convinced our middle child will end up in the circus.

“You’re not as good at science as Mum, I know, but I thought maybe you could help me figure it out?” He holds out the exercise book, which has a sheet of paper with the printed homework slipped in.

I snort as I take it. Kids. Never going to hold back to save your pride, are they? I restrain myself from pointing out that I’m no slouch at chemistry (the bomb-making part of it, anyway), and physics (bullet trajectory is a specialist subject) and that his Mum is primarily good at biology (trees, and yes, she’s an expert on making babies). Instead I say, “Sure, show me.”

We work together for over an hour. After I’ve read the assignment and explained it to him in a way he understands, he does the questions on his own, sitting at my desk beside me while I read the report on a tablet. Angled away from his curious eyes.

The scent of onions and garlic fried in oil wafting into the room makes us look at each other. Thank god for Janet, our housekeeper, who ensures everyone eats when Wyn and I are distracted by work. Or each other—that’s a thing that happens too, just as often now as ten years ago when Henry was conceived.

“Dinner,” I tell Henry. “Go and set the table please, and see if Janet needs any help with serving up please, and let her know I’ll be there in a minute with the girls.”

Henry nods eagerly, always happy with a task and responsibility and bounds away. I go to find Molly first. She’s playing a computer game that Wyn sometimes plays with her. Zelda something, I think.

“Hey Dad.” She doesn’t look up from where she’s focussed on the blond boy–elf?—on screen. I wait a minute while she tries to solve a puzzle, leaning over the back of her sofa to watch my daughter. A couch in her room? I shake my head internally. We really are indulgent parents.

She growls with frustration as she fails again.

I muss her hair as she pouts and tosses the controller onto the cushion.

“Save it, and come and have dinner.”

“Dad!” she whines.

“Molly!” I mimic back at her. “You’ll figure it out better with some brain food.”

She huffs and follows me out. With her on her way to the dining room, I head to the lounge where I suspect I’ll find my wife and youngest.

I do. In our jungle-like lounge, Elizabeth is watching a cartoon, curled against Wyn who is leaned into the squashy sofa, asleep. There are work papers in her lap, and her blonde hair is spilt over her shoulders. She’s wearing a cute knitted jumper and a pair of jeans and looks so adorable and good I want to hold her, unpeel her, and gobble her up like sweet apple pie.

Elizabeth’s eyes light as I approach, reaching out her arms with a big smile, anticipating being picked up.

I nod. “Mummy first.”

“Ben?” Wyn stirs as I kiss her forehead, but struggles to open her eyes.

“I think there’s something you’ll want to tell me, right?” I tease as I stroke her cheek. “It’s okay. Stay here. I’ll bring you some food in a bit.”

“Mmm, ’anks,” she slurs and flops deeper into the cushions. The first part of her pregnancy is always tiring. She needs her rest, and she knows I’ll take care of everything. No need for her to get up if she needs to sleep.

I scoop Elizabeth into my arms. I'll have dinner with the kids and come and wake up my wife to eat later.

And if she is pregnant again, as I suspect, I have the ideal way to make her warm and happy.

Fancy seeing what Ben does for Anwyn later that evening?
(It's sexy!) [Get the exclusive extended epilogue straight to your inbox.](#)

SNATCHED BY THE BRATVA

He's perfect. Until he kidnaps me.

I have an excruciating crush on this man who comes into the coffee shop. Every day. He's older, gorgeous, perfectly dressed. He has a Russian accent and silver eyes.

On my last shift, I stop him as he's walking out. Just to say... I don't know. I love you, marry me, and let me have your babies? Thanks for the generous tips, have a nice life?

Then he shoves me to the ground, his hard body on top of me. Shots are fired and he drags me out the back.

Before I can breathe, I've been stolen away. And the mafia boss won't let me go.

Snatched by the Bratva is a sweet and spicy age gap instalove romance, with a jealous and possessive billionaire mafia boss and the innocent girl he's been stalking...

LINA

I know it sounds unhinged, but I treasure the notes he leaves as tips. They're crisp and bright and feel more valuable than they are because they're always perfect and they're from him. He places one into the tip jar and winks at me every weekday.

I serve him coffee, and have managed to resist the urge to drape myself over the wooden countertop next to his cup, and ask if he'd like to take me in those big, capable-looking hands.

So far.

Side of desperate girl with your coffee, sir? No charge. On the house. Complimentary.

What he'd do thereafter is honestly a little blurry around the edges. I have experience of caffeine highs that make my pupils large as dinner plates and my body twitchy as a wind-up toy. Dating? Not so much.

Which is an issue for my chosen enthusiasm: writing monster romances. Don't get me wrong, I love to read steamy scenes. I just can't seem to write them.

And my readers are getting a bit frustrated with my fade to black or tab A, slot B, attempts. They say they're unsatisfied.

Same readers, same.

Which is why after a year of scrimping and saving I'm finally going to do that MA in creative writing. Perfect combination, right? Much more likely to help me lose my V-

card and amp up my romance stories than the graveyard shift at an all-hours coffee shop.

If I can't get laid and improve my novel at university, I'm more of a sad case than I realised. Which is... Horrifyingly possible.

Anyway. It's the morning of my last ever shift. My bags are packed and in my car, which is in the long-stay I use for work. Can't park nearby—I'd have no profit left at the end of the day with the price of parking in London. I'll drive north this afternoon, probably spending the night in said car. But I'm moving on to a better stage of my life and career. I should be excited.

I am.

I totally am.

I am not mourning an entirely one-sided crush on a customer. *Sir*. It's hardly as though being a barista has a ton of strict conditions associated with it, but high on the list is not drooling. That's not like latte art. No one is going to look at my slobber and think—oh yeah, she takes her job seriously.

At half-four I allow myself to begin to get excited. I serve the few bleary-eyed customers coming in before their shifts, and watch the door out of the corner of my eye.

When a woman comes in at ten past five, smiling and chatty, wanting to tell me about her holiday, I am efficient. I make the coffee. I smile politely. I don't ask her about her flight or where she's been. I really don't want someone else spoiling the last time I'll see my sir. I all but shoo her out of the door so that when the sky is turning white-gold I'm ready to take in every part of him. To look my fill.

Every day sir arrives at quarter past five in the morning. I'm always a little self-conscious because I'm at the end of an eight-hour shift and he's clearly a morning person who just got up, but today, I'm determined to make this count.

Then right on schedule, there he is, striding through the door, gaze already focused on me. My CEO. Possibly. I have

no idea what he does for a living, but he has an air of power and grace that suggests he is used to being obeyed.

He takes my breath away.

Where I'm a normal girl with black hair, a snub nose, a permanent coffee stain on my jeans, he's a god in a three-piece suit with dark brown hair and steel-grey eyes. The shiny silver metal of his cufflinks screams wealth, as does the thick luxurious cotton of his shirt. His clothes are of the highest quality, chosen with care, and those details are insanely hot to me. Because a man who has the diligence with that sort of precise clothing, while also exuding power as sir does, I bet when he concentrates on something—or someone—it's like the August sunshine.

Honestly, this man is straight out of an advert in a glossy men's magazine, complete with scratch and sniff. The hint of his aftershave that I catch sometimes as he takes the receipt is addictive. Better than the crazy expensive Columbian single-estate coffee the boss once accidentally bought.

“Good morning, sir!” I always give customers a bright smile, but with this man, it's real. It bubbles up from my heart.

I don't know his name, so I call him sir. I tried to see it on his matt black bank card once when our payment machine was having a hissy fit about contactless, but it was written discreetly on the back.

“Good morning, kisa.” He always calls me that and I've never been brave enough to ask what it means. I suppose it's Russian for barista, or something? But the way he says it in his deep voice and rough accent sends delicious shivers down my spine.

His grey eyes look right into mine. Not glancing at the menu, or my boobs, or fiddling with his phone. Nope. When he's here, he's present. He focuses on me. Occasionally I catch his gaze dipping to my mouth, but otherwise, he's so level and collected. It's a relief at this time in the morning, after I've dealt with bleary-eyed night shift workers and frazzled young mothers.

I know his order by now, and I've got the cups ready. But we have this dance, where we pretend we're strangers. Or I do anyway. I act like I haven't been thinking about him all shift.

"An espresso to drink in, and a flat white to go." He never says please, or makes his voice rise at the end of the sentence to make it a request. There's something in his tone that is gravelly and authoritative. *Dirty*.

It's the sort of voice that if he told me to get on my knees and suck his dick, I'd do it. No questions asked.

To be fair, I wouldn't care how he said it. A soft dare. A crudely barked command. A plea, or just a crooked finger. If I got to taste him, that would be enough.

Despite always leaving a cash tip, he pays with his phone, like a normal person. Then he pulls the note from his pocket, and I can't move as his big square hands curl it and tuck it into the tip jar with a handwritten label and smiley face. Who has cash these days? Only drug dealers and old people. And although he's older than me—maybe in his late thirties or early forties I'd guess—he's not using-cash sort of old.

When he's left, I'm going to fish out that note and keep it forever, never spend it.

The stretch of his arm reveals his cuffs and a smattering of dark hair over his wrists, and a curl of dark ink. A tattoo. I'm so intrigued by what it might be, that tattoo. And the way he moves his hands is borderline—alright, for me, well over the border—erotic. It makes my pulse race.

It's not the money, I do get paid for this job and the amount isn't so much. It's *him*.

"How was your day?" he asks in a deep rumbly voice as I make his drink.

I'm always torn between taking as long as possible to spin out the time with him, and making it as quickly as I can to see if I can get that nod of approval and to the next bit of our routine that I like even better.

"The blender is on the fritz, so I had to ask a customer to leave when they started shouting about how her need for a

three AM strawberry smoothie was a human right.”

“Shall I have them killed for you?” he asks casually.

I snort and shoot a grin over my shoulder. “Overreaction, much?”

He shrugs, the corner of his mouth hitching up slightly.

“I think she was hormonal. Said something about night sweats.”

The scent of fresh coffee fills the air as his espresso hits the cup.

“Ah. Mitigating circumstances.” His eyes twinkle. “We’ll hold off on the murder.”

“She might just need some drugs,” I joke.

“That could be arranged.”

I giggle again as I grab the milk jug—freshly refilled—and start heating it. Just right. Although I’m distracted by his presence, I never burn the coffee or scald the milk. Not for him. “Your humour is so dry.”

“If you say so,” he replies evenly.

I flush and fight the urge to bite my lip. Did I push it too far? Ugh. Say the wrong thing? I hate being in my brain sometimes. All night I speak with people and try to be fun and chirpy, but get home and wonder why I’m lonely.

That’s when I think of him. In bed after my shift, more times than I care to admit I run my fingers down my body and imagine they’re his. I’m always wet if I’ve been thinking of him, and the orgasm helps me sleep.

Not happening today though, is it? I hide my face in a dip of my chin as I pour the milk over the coffee and make a leaves and flower design. The flower looks suspiciously like a heart.

I take my time screwing on the cap to his mug and placing a spoon and a little biscuit on the side of the saucer beside his espresso. I can feel his gaze on me as I carry both drinks to the service area for him to pick up, and he mirrors my movements.

I place his coffees down and wipe my sweaty palms on my apron.

Then this is the best bit. He leans his hip against the bar, picks up the espresso, and inhales the scent. There's no pretentiousness. He just appreciates quality.

Shuffling the cocoa and sugar shakers around, I surreptitiously watch his throat bob as he sips the hot crema-topped drink.

His mouth. Oh god, his mouth was made for sensuous pleasures. It was made for coffee and cream and chocolate. His lips are the perfect shade of dusky pink, full but masculine. Someone like me will never touch that mouth, but I've tried to write about it. Him. I've pressed my hand to my lips and wondered how kissing him would feel.

He sighs deeply at the second sip. "Delicious. I needed that."

"Everything okay, sir?" I ask tentatively.

A taut smile. "Fine. Just a bit stressful. Tell me how you're getting on with your new book." He never talks directly about his work, but since I let slip about my writing, he always asks.

I flush, because the hero is totally inspired by him. In every detail. "I wrote two thousand words yesterday."

"Good girl." He nods with satisfaction and drinks a little more coffee.

Umph. I melt when he praises me. Weekends were bad enough, how am I going to cope with never having my sir call me a good girl again?

"What about the cover?"

I tell him about the premade cover I found for hardly any money, and he nods. After a lifetime of being ignored, first by my parents who really shouldn't have had a child and I don't think remember I exist now I've moved out, then by almost everyone else because I struggle to speak up, the way sir takes an interest in me is a revelation.

“The cover might be a bit dark,” I admit. It’s far too easy to tell this man things.

“Dark is good,” he murmurs.

“Yes,” I squeak. My heart thuds as he tips the little cup up, draining the last of the espresso.

“Thank you, kisa.” Scooping up his takeaway flat white, he’s going before I’m ready.

I wanted more. A few more minutes, the guts to admit I think he’s beautiful. But he’s leaving, and I’m frozen. He’s striding away with those long legs—he must be six-foot-three at least.

This is the moment. The last time I’ll see him. I have to see his face again. Once more.

He’s at the exit.

I screw up my courage and dart around the counter after him.

“Excuse me, sir.”

He turns as he pulls the door open. Those grey eyes spear me as I screech to a halt before him.

Oh god what am I going to say? I should have planned this. I can’t just blurt out, *Please take me home with you, marry me, and give me babies.*

“What is it?” He moves towards me, the door swinging, then bam!

The gunshot is so unexpected, my brain doesn’t process it as real.

My sir flies forward, taking me with him.

ARTEM

It's pure instinct to throw myself over my girl, rolling in the air so I take the brunt of the fall, but flipping her and pinning her to the ground as another shot blasts over my head.

Fuck. Have to get her out of here.

A fucking mafia war isn't the place for my sweet little barista. My kisa, my kitten.

I hold her down as she whimpers in fear, grab my pistol, and fire over my shoulder. There's the squeal of wheels and more gunfire as I shoot again at whichever not-long-to-be-alive bastard who dares try to take me out, and more importantly, risks my girl.

"Come on."

"Wha-what?"

Hoisting Lina's shocked body into my arms, I half carry, half encourage her to the back of the coffeeshop and barge into the storeroom as another cascade of bullets shows this isn't over.

"The other exit," I demand. Those bastards think they have us trapped. Thankfully my bulletproof SUV is on a quiet backstreet.

"There..." She gestures around some shelves.

I shove my way through the clutter of half-opened serviette packets and piles of bags of coffee beans.

"What's happening?"

“I’m getting you to safety.” That’s not the question, really, but it’s all I’ve got as I set her onto her feet, shielded by the wall, put my finger over my lips to indicate she should be quiet, and creek open the door an inch. The street is hushed. I’m suspicious as I creep out, gun ready, but it’s empty.

They’re at the front. Thank god.

Low-key paranoia is part of being in the Bratva. It pays to be unexpected in my line of work, like parking at the back and walking around. Any other mafia boss would pull up ostentatiously at the front door. But I’m sloppy. A kingpin for only two months, I’m still used to being the man who arranges hits on our enemies and protects the boss.

Which was fine until I killed him.

I turn and reach back inside for Lina, and our eyes meet.

She understands. I drag her out, holding her fingers in a punishing grip. We cross the street and duck down the shadowy side alley where I left my vehicle.

It’s not a second too soon. A car cruises by with a throaty roar, then stops at the rear of the coffee shop.

A few more steps and Lina is walking on her own as we reach my car.

“Get in,” I say as I unlock it.

“No.” She snatches her wrist from my surprised hands—I’m not used to anyone telling me no—and darts her gaze to the main street we came from. “I can’t leave work, and I’m calling the police.” She turns on her heel and panic flares in my chest.

I grab her. Fingers over her mouth and pressing her torso to me as I open the passenger door and shove her in, my gun still in the other hand.

“Stay there,” I snarl. No compromise. My enemies cannot get hold of her.

Her gaze goes to my weapon, the whites of her eyes large like a frightened animal.

Fine. If that's what it takes to protect her.

I've slammed the door, and I'm in the driver's seat and firing the engine in a moment, gun still in hand.

"Put on your seat belt," I snap as I drive away. My whole body is on alert for continued danger, and tingling from the brief contact with Lina and her proximity.

"What the hell?"

"The seat belt, kisa. *Now.*"

"You've kidnapped me!" She eyes my gun and then the car door, nervously. "I'm not doing anything until you tell me—"

"Seat belt!" I roar as I take a corner fast.

"No need to be a dick about it," she mutters as she straps in.

I place the gun in my lap and focus on driving. Getting home as quickly as possible so I can keep Lina out of harm's way and sort this mess.

"What's this about?"

I grit my teeth and don't answer.

Obsession.

It's about my obsession with *her*.

I should have stopped.

She'd have been safe if I hadn't shown my hand, day after day, visiting this innocent girl. I already knew one other London mafia had figured it out, but that had been a fluke. Chance. I told myself I was careful.

Not careful enough.

The Mayfair Bratva is known for being obscenely rich and mean. The mean part died with my brother, Victor, but anyone who thinks there is vulnerability or an opportunity to get even now is *dead wrong*.

How did they find her? I'm so careful about my daily indulgent trip to visit Lina Breock.

I hacked the employee records so I could groan her name while I stroke my cock in the shower, hot water coursing over me as I jerk myself to an orgasm with a sharp edge of guilt. She's young. Innocent. Naive and nothing to do with the bloody mafia world I inhabit.

A split second before she lunges for the door, I see what she's trying to do and engage the locks.

She howls with frustration and fear as she pumps the handle. "Let me go!"

"Nope."

I catch her fist before it hits my jaw, and smile. The kitten is attempting to find her claws.

"Don't do that," I say mildly. "It won't work, but might hurt you."

She wrenches her hand away and from the corner of my eye I see her rub her knuckles.

I refuse to apologise, but I'm proud of her for attempting to fight, even if it's inconvenient, and obviously makes her hand sore.

"Arsehole," she grumbles.

"If you really wanted to get away, you should have dropped to the ground quickly, and kicked. Not let me get the upper hand and scoop you up. Used your legs, not your arms. They're much stronger."

She scoffs. "You just told me how to escape."

"You're not going to escape me now," I reply evenly. "Like I said. It's too late."

There's a long, thick silence.

"Tell me why were they shooting at you," she demands eventually. "Us? Me? Surely not me?"

Ah shit. This is complicated. "Because I've done some bad things."

“Oh.” Her voice is full of disappointment. Small, and a bit fearful. “If they’re not after me, why don’t you let me go?”

Because they know I care about her now. They’ve seen me hustle her out. I can’t release her because whoever they are, they’d take her and torture her, and I’d rather see London burnt to the ground than allow anyone to touch her.

It’s my fault this happened. I shouldn’t have continued to visit the *Lazy Bean*. Should appoint a second-in-command and get comfortable with being the boss. Alone. When I became kingpin that was the moment to put aside the sweet fantasy I acted out. The one where I was an averagely immoral man who flirted with the pretty barista.

“I won’t hurt you, kisa,” I say as I fly through yet another red light. “I’ll keep you safe.”

“Sure,” she scoffs, but then falls silent.

I sigh and call today’s duty guard, Kirill.

“Get everyone up,” I bark as he answers. “There’s a meeting in the main hall.”

“Yes, boss—”

The ten-minute journey across the city takes five. I’m going to have to pay off some cops because I’ve been through a dozen speed cameras.

Lina’s gaze flits around skittishly as the door opens to the underground car park below my house in Mayfair. It’s bloody good I don’t have anyone to answer to—except my own conscience and that’s a sick, skeletal ghost of a thing—because I have no idea what I’d say as I abandon the car next to the elevator.

I stride around to open the door and offer her my hand like this is the date I’ve been secretly dreaming about, rather than whatever shitshow this is.

She doesn’t take it, and I’m struck anew by her proud resilience. Even in her coffee-stained clothes, she’s a queen.

My queen. The thought is quiet but insistent. I cannot give in. She deserves better than me. This sweet kisa should

have...

Ah fuck, I'm not a good enough man to imagine her with someone else. No one would take care of her as well as I would, but I can't have her and draw her into my dark world. She's just here until I can murder every member of the mafia who threatened her. Then I'll set her free, and return to watching from a distance.

"Come." I indicate the brushed steel doors. I feel her reluctance and the furtive way she checks her surroundings. "It's pointless running. I'll catch you."

She has no option, and she knows it. Folding her arms, she stomps into the elevator. The mirrors reflect her stormy expression. It was less than an hour ago that it was a normal day for us, flirting lightly, longing for the next time I can see her, trying unsuccessfully to keep my cock under control.

She's slight and small, her dark hair pulled into a simple ponytail. I've made myself come more times than I care to remember over the thought of what her hair would look like down, falling over her shoulders as her perfect pink lips took all of my cock. And her tits. The way they're hidden under a baggy white shirt is a greater crime than anything the Bratva does.

The doors open into the original foyer of the house, and a chaos of my black-suited men milling around with more weapons than buttons on their shirts.

"Boss!" Vlad looks like he might vomit. "We were coming to look for you. We thought..."

Lina shrinks to my side and without my volition my hand goes to the small of her back.

"We're fine." I glance down at Lina, and I think that's when Vlad first notices her, such is his panic.

Around us, silence falls. All my men turn to look at me.

"Someone shot at us this morning," I tell them. "And there will be consequences."

There are murmurs of excitement and concern, along with lingering glances at my girl.

“This is Lina. She got caught up and is my guest. No one touches her,” I say a little louder. “You understand? She’s under my protection.”

There are some curious stares and my control snaps. “She’s *mine*.”

The eyes that had been speculative, taking in Lina’s beauty and the significance of her being here, snap to the floor, confused.

“Arrange the briefing rooms,” I tell Vlad. He’s remarkably awake when everyone else, except Kirill who was on duty, is still dopey with sleep. I really should appoint him as my official second-in-command. I don’t know why I haven’t. He’s eager and always there when I need him. “Work on any intel you can find. I’ll be with you soon.”

I guide Lina through the maze of formal rooms. She looks around in awe.

I suppose my house in Mayfair is quite impressive. I’m used to it, but the Georgian mansion is all wide spaces, high ceilings, marble floors, and wallpaper that is as detailed as the art of the gold-framed paintings on top.

At the back of the house, I stop in a garden-facing sitting room I use sometimes. It’s less priceless furniture and more relaxation. There’s a television and everything.

“Sit.”

Her brows knit together and I think she’s going to argue. She decides against it.

“Would you like something to drink? Eat?”

“No, I want an explanation and to go home. Back to work. Whatever. My boss will probably dock my last pay packet and I can’t afford that.”

“Last?” I catch onto that detail, because it’s been my job for many years to notice everything.

She huffs. “Well, it’ll definitely be last now, won’t it? Because she’ll sack me for leaving the place unattended.”

“Fine.” I reach into my inner suit jacket pocket and pull out my personal bank card. A sane voice in my head points out she could spend a lot of money with that card. Millions. I’d love to see what she’d buy if money isn’t a limitation. “This will fix any of those problems.”

She picks up the bank card and there it is. The reason I haven’t told her anything about me for the whole year I’ve been going to the *Lazy Bean* to see her. Realisation. Fear.

“Artem Moroz,” she says softly, and hell but I really like the sound of my name on her lips. Even better if hers was paired with it. Lina Moroz. “You’re in the mafia.”

“The Bratva,” I correct her, because this distinction matters, somehow. I’m not like the dozens of mafia bosses in London. I’m worse. Even if I’m cleaning up the worst of Mayfair businesses, I won’t hide from who I am.

“What’s that?” Her forehead creases.

“The *Russian* mafia.” I tip my head ruefully. “I lead the Mayfair Bratva.”

She closes her eyes and there’s a sort of pain in her expression, and also understanding. “You’re a mafia boss. I thought you were a CEO or something.” She half-laughs. “I was so stupid.”

“No. No, Lina. I...” I sink into the chair next to her and take a breath. Her blue-ringed green eyes flutter open and regard me. The fear has eased into distrust, but I don’t like that any better. “Not only did I take some care to be normal, I wasn’t the kingpin when we met.”

Hope flares in her expression and as she tips her head, curious. A strand of her soft-looking black hair falls across her cheek. My fingers itch to push it away.

“But now you are, and someone is after you?”

“Yes.”

“And what does that have to do with me?”

Everything. Somebody knows that I'd risk everything for my girl. I compromise, given she isn't aware she's mine. Yet. "They know where you work."

"I was trying to tell you, that was my last shift." She leans forward, and for a second my body tightens. I'm convinced she's going to touch me. "I'm moving out of London."

No. No. A dragon in my chest breathes fire. "You wouldn't be safe," I grind out. "You're staying here until I find and eliminate the threat."

"You can't just kidnap me! People will notice..." she tails off.

"Then call whoever will miss you. Now." I circle my hand impatiently. "Tell them you're okay."

Sliding her phone from her pocket, she looks at the screen, indecision flickering over her pretty features. "No."

I raise one eyebrow. Trying my patience as well as my self-control was not something I had on my list of possibilities for this scenario.

She huffs and slumps onto the back of the sofa, chin in her hands. "That was supposed to make you realise you can't do this."

"I can do whatever I want, Lina."

She jerks at her name. "How do you know my name...?"

We've been talking almost every morning for a year. She's told me about many things, but we've never exchanged names. I call her kisa and she calls me sir.

"The Bratva has a long reach of influence." Better that vague statement than letting her find out I've been stalking her. "Now phone."

The corners of her mouth turn down. "There's no point."

"Go on," I urge. "Call your friend who takes over after your shift at the coffee shop."

"Anwyn," she replies, and oof, the way she says it sounds like a sore spot. "She doesn't work there anymore. Since she

got engaged, I don't see her much.”

“I might be able to arrange for you to see her.” The words are out before I can stop them, an attempt to make her smile. My girl is skint? I have money. My girl is lonely? I'll fix that too.

Lina blinks at me in confusion and shakes her head slowly. To be honest, that's a good thing. Anwyn is married to the Westminster mafia boss, who also happens to be the only person—to my knowledge—who knows about Lina and how I'd do anything for her.

After all, he saw me murder my own brother in cold blood rather than allow any threat of harm to Lina. And in return, I promised that his girl would be safe from me. It would be a very awkward conversation all round if it turned out I had to kill Lina's friend because her husband hadn't kept his word.

I know from our conversations that her parents aren't around. “Your housemates then.”

“There's no one, alright!” she blurts out. “I'm alone!”

She hugs herself and I have never needed to take her in my arms as much as I do right now. Not to ravish her, as is usually what I want, but to comfort. To tell her she's loved and safe and beautiful, and that I'm going to give her everything she needs.

I can see that isn't welcome though. And the only thing to say is something true.

“So am I.”

“Pfft. You're a mafia boss. You have all this power and money. I bet you have no shortage of company. You could click your fingers and have supermodels on your doorstep, begging you to...” She swallows and looks away.

Reaching one finger beneath her chin, I guide her face to look into mine. What I see there is enlightening. A grumpy sadness with a layer of—yes, I'm reading this correctly—jealousy.

“I don’t want a supermodel.” I just want her. She’s all I’ve wanted since we met and there haven’t been any women in my bed or life for this whole year. “My job isn’t easy, and I don’t have anyone to confide in. I have everything to lose if anybody sees weakness.” That was true, perhaps more true before I killed Victor. “No one to talk to. When I say I’m alone, kisa, I mean it. And a genuine connection with someone who doesn’t just value me for money or power means the world to me.”

This confession is an unravelling, painful and revealing.

She scans my face and I wait, impassive, hoping she’ll see the truth there and not recognise the infatuation. The obsession.

“Is that why you come to the coffee shop?” she replies at last.

“Yes.” That at least is honest. I come to see her.

“Well. I won’t be at the coffee shop, but if you let me go, we could talk on the phone instead?” she offers.

I let her chin go and fold my arms. She really isn’t getting it. “We’ll be spending a lot more time together talking *in person*.”

Enough time for her to fall in love with me? That’s probably not achievable in decades. But I’ll take Stockholm syndrome if she’ll look up at me with reverence like she has every weekday morning since we first met.

“You think I’m going to *talk* with you?” She shakes her head firmly. “No way. You don’t get to kidnap and imprison me and also banter about how you like big books.”

I ignore her jibe. That was a fun conversation about big books, and worth repeating. But I’m stuck on another point. “You’re my *guest*.”

“A guest who can’t leave is a prisoner.”

“Fine,” I snap, and stand. “You’re my prisoner.”

“What am I supposed to do? Just sit here until you’ve achieved this goal of hunting down an unknown person or

persons?”

Come on my face. Repeatedly. Take my cock like a good girl.

The tint of sarcasm in her tone irritates me. As though I'd leave her *bored*.

“Use that.” I indicate the card lying forgotten on her lap. “Buy whatever you want to amuse yourself.”

And if you don't find anything to do, I'll make you come over and over until you can't think of leaving because you're gooey with pleasure. Then I'll fuck you and fill you up until you're pregnant with my baby and that will keep you busy instead.

I grind my teeth. Yeah, tempting as that idea is, it's not the way to treat Lina as my guest. Prisoner. Whatever.

“I'm going to call the police.” Her mouth sets into a mulish line and she picks up her phone.

“If you do that either they will ignore you, because they're in my pocket, or you'll wish they had. My men will kill them if they insist on coming into my domain.”

She gapes. “You're a madman.”

“Now you're getting it.” I prefer to think of myself as merely unhinged and powerful. But she might be right. “They can't help you, kisa. I'll let you go once the danger has passed.”

It's a lie.

She's mine. And I will never let her go.

All I have to do is get her to fall in love with me.

I said I was changing my life, but this really wasn't what I was expecting. It's been four days since I was kidnapped. No one has come for me. No one has even rung me.

I've dialled the police from my phone a dozen times, then stopped. Because what if he's right?

Actually, I have no doubt that's the truth. Mafia boss clicks. It makes perfect sense for sir. Artem Moroz.

After he left on the first day, his housekeeper, Galina, turned up. A matronly woman with smile creases around her eyes. She ushered me through the house, chattering in a combination of English and Russian. She made a point of telling me what every room was, opening doors and knocking on others.

"Mr Morez's bedroom," she said when we were at the front of the house upstairs, one side of the main staircase. And on the other side? "You sleep here."

The room allocated to me is extraordinary. It's all the cliches about old, refined luxury. Decorated in a pale powder blue with fancy white edges, the carpet is so thick you could get lost in it, and everything is spaced out, like a normal set of rooms, but for giants. Whereas in my old room I could reach my wardrobe from the bed, here I not only have a separate sitting room—this in addition to the rooms downstairs—it's like ten paces between the bed and the dressing table. I can do laps in it. Run a marathon.

I mean, I could run around it if I wanted. Actually, what I did was take a running leap into the massive four-poster bed. Only once though.

Okay, five times before I tried to be an actual adult and just look in every wardrobe and drawer like a normal-level weirdo.

I have considered escape, there is constant security. When I got close to the wall that surrounds the grounds—after several football pitches' distance of garden—a guard appeared behind me.

This house is a busy place. There are people coming and going at all hours, not that you'd know unless you were spending an unhealthy amount of time hanging around the main staircase. Which obviously I am doing.

The Bratva men are brash and efficient, rough and loud. Apart from when they pass me, see me, or have to talk to me. Then they are intimidating, but mind their own business. They don't meet my eyes, they walk past or deliver food with quiet voices. It's like there is a force field around me that turns them from panthers into black house cats.

All except one. The man Artem spoke to when we first arrived. He has this sly look when he sees me that I'm not keen on. It makes me uncomfortable, but thankfully the rest are nice.

I could be working on my book, but instead I'm constantly waiting for a glimpse of *sir*. I've swapped my cafe shifts for peeking around doorways and over bannisters in his house.

I told Artem I didn't want to see him, but it was a pathetic little lie. I miss our morning chats. I want to ask about his mafia business, and what he's doing to find the man who was after us. Him.

And he always sees me. Every time.

It's like my eyes are lasers. If I'm looking at him, he feels it, and it might take three seconds or ten minutes, but eventually he'll turn, and our gazes will meet.

Then heat sears through me. I'm set aflame by this man's stare. By his grey eyes and the rumble of his accented voice.

His attention sends liquid to my core and makes my tummy bounce.

Then, with the same inevitability as my nipples perking up—girls calm down, he's a *very* bad man—I remember that Stockholm syndrome is a thing, and however gorgeous he is and kind he seems, I shouldn't allow myself to get attached.

That beautiful bastard holds my gaze for a dozen heartbeats, a constant until I tear myself away.

The bouncing stops and my body feels heavy again when I've withdrawn. It's the most ridiculous feeling of rejection. For a year we've chatted every day. I miss our mornings together like I've chopped off a limb. I guess I thought he would ignore my request, but he seems intent on taking me at my word.

And I can't find the words to back down.

What's a girl to do but try retail therapy? I've never been able to afford to before, but he kidnapped me and gave me his card. I think it's fair that I use it.

The first day I bought a notebook and pen on Artem's card, and some clean knickers. White cotton. Plus a T-shirt and a pair of jeans. Just the minimum, right? I'm not greedy. Then some little devil on my shoulder goaded me and said, why not? And I ordered a skimpy nightie. White silk. It's aimed at brides I think, but I couldn't resist.

I kind of assumed he'd say something about my purchase. But nothing. They arrived in a neat brown cardboard package, brought to me by one of his men and left by my door with a knock.

Day two, I was braver. I bought *pretty* knickers. White lacy ones that cut over my bum in a way that makes me want to wiggle. I think of Artem peeling them off, and have to press my thighs together. Umph.

Into the shopping cart also went a new spicy fantasy romance I've been wanting to read—in hardback with gold foil page edges and an embossed dust jacket. And I purchased three full outfits, including a dress so cute it should be illegal.

The third day I got a laptop. A really expensive one, because honestly, when is he going to stop me? I bought a dozen of my favourite books in paperback, and an ereader. And I ordered the biggest, poshest coffee machine that I could find. Like, commercial quality, and lavish coffee beans.

Because two days without decent coffee? I was broken by the time it arrived, and yeah, Galina hid her indignation well, but even she admitted the coffee I made was delicious.

Honestly, a bit better than the *Lazy Bean's*.

I have polite staff who bring me whatever meals and snacks I ask for, a whole house to wander through as I please, a seemingly endless budget, and all the time to write I could want.

But I'm blocked. Cannot write. Every time I sit down to put words onto paper, I think of the reader comments about my tepid sex scenes, then of Artem and longing so powerful overtakes me that my chest might burst.

I need to see him.

I knew I looked forward to seeing him, but this is like my oxygen supply has been cut off. It was an invisible, life-sustaining thing that I had never really appreciated. Except my life-sustaining thing is six-foot-four with grey eyes.

Today, I decided to fix this. And perhaps goad my absent captor a little.

I've bought a vibrator.

If I can't have a real man, or an MA in creative writing, maybe a great orgasm will get my book unstuck.

The package arrives as I'm downstairs for once, reading the spicy fantasy romance in the garden. I smile my thanks to Galina.

"You need anything?" she asks.

"No." I'm already on my feet. I need to come. Immediately. "This is just some toiletries. I'm going to take them upstairs."

She nods and I force myself not to race up with my new treasure. But at the top of the stairs, I find myself turning in the wrong direction and I'm in front of what Galina told me was Artem's bedroom door.

Not talking with him has made me lose my mind. That's the only explanation for why I try the handle of the deadly kingpin's bedroom.

It turns.

The door swings open and I dart inside, closing it silently behind me. Fingers still on the handle and gripping my book and package to my chest, I wait, head down, for a klaxon or something.

But nothing. Warily, I look around and make an involuntary whimper. It smells like him, that rich spicy scent. Sandalwood and coffee and a unique musk. I drag in a long, deep breath.

Artem's bedroom is the dark reflection of mine. The detailing is a charcoal grey instead of white, and the pale blue is a rich dark blue with a hint of green. The floor is shiny wood. It's austere. There's almost no furniture, only an enormous bed with plain grey sheets that have a soft sheen.

Heart pounding, I toe off my shoes and creep to the bed. Now I'm here, I recognise that what I want is to come while I'm surrounded by him.

I sit gingerly, and run my hands over the smooth fabric. Closing my eyes, I can almost imagine him here, watching me. What if he was in bed? Does he sleep naked? My body flushes at the thought. I've never seen a man without clothes in real life and imagination only takes me so far, but it's enough. Lying back, I turn my head and breathe in the scent of him. I shuffle backwards until my heels hook onto the bed and my skirt falls over my thighs, a whisper of silk.

Allowing my knees to fall open, I think about the way Artem used to smile at me and my pussy clenches on nothing.

Empty, so empty.

Ugh. I'm turned on and needy for the man who kidnapped and imprisoned me.

Probably it was just from the scene in the book I was reading. Okay, yes it did have a hero with dark hair and silver eyes, but that's a coincidence. Because the hero is a powerful fae king with magic powers. He saves the human heroine from the neighbouring elf bad guys who have a war with his kingdom, and it takes some time for her to trust him, a bit of a slow burn. But when they eventually have sex, it's burning hot.

Totally different.

I snatch up the package and rip it, revealing a small silicone toy that looks like a red rose, and as I brush my fingers over the top, is as soft as petals. A button makes it vibrate, and I smile. Here we go. I don't need a creative writing course, or sir. I have a book and a toy.

Leaning back, I open the book and flick through the pages until I get to my favourite scene. The one where the hero tells the heroine that she's his mate, and he's loved her from the moment he saw her, and they first have sex.

Within seconds I'm imagining the scene. And yes, in my mind the hero looks a lot like Artem.

But pointy ears make him *not* Artem.

I touch the toy onto my now-damp knickers and ohhhh. Yes.

I pull the lace aside, and spread my legs further, touching the little rose to my clit. My back arches, and it's amazing, but not quite it. I'm empty, throbbing, and my nipples are begging to be touched.

Giving in, I put the book down and slide down one shoulder of my dress to expose my breasts. The pages fall into the middle, and I huff with annoyance.

Bringing my fingers to my breast, I pinch my nipple, sending a spike of pleasure down to where the toy is doing its work. My pussy clenches again.

Maybe a finger? I've done that sometimes, slide just a fingertip into my warm wet passage and think how it would feel if it were bigger. More.

The knickers make it awkward, but I'm too on edge to stop and remove them as I reach down and awkwardly try to get my hand into the right position around the lace. A bit of rearranging and my forefinger sinks into my own wet heat.

Oh god I'm soaked. And I'm aware of exactly why. It's being in my sir's house. In his bedroom, surrounded by the feeling of him.

But he's not here.

We haven't talked in days. I know I started it, but he can't like me much if he's willing to leave me alone. That's cool water that washes away the heat of excitement.

I need it back. The toy, my fingers, they're all nothing when my head is up to the brim with rejection.

Maybe if I could just read the passage where the hero of that fantasy romance thrusts into the heroine and tells her he loves her over and over again, that would tip me into orgasm. I wriggle my elbow to the side, trying to keep the book open, while dipping my forefinger into my pussy and keeping the rose in exactly the right place. It's like that exercise circling your tummy and patting your head. I'm entirely focused on all the things I'm holding so I ignore a sound from outside.

The toy slips off my clit and I keen with frustration. My fingers aren't enough, the vibrator won't do its job. My body desperately needs to be filled to tip me over the edge. Why didn't I buy a dildo? I fumble while trying to keep my finger sliding into my passage.

"You need help with that?"

My eyes fly open to find Artem leaning against the closed door.

My brain stutters. He's wearing his customary immaculate pale grey suit and polished shoes. His eyes are dark as he regards me.

Oh. God.

I freeze. Unable to close my legs, or turn off the vibrator, or even take my finger from my pussy.

"Because it looks like you need a bit of help," he continues.

"What are you doing here?" Because I've observed his movements over four days. It's early afternoon, and he's never returned upstairs before eight in the evening.

"You didn't think I keep tabs on what goes on in my own bedroom?" He tilts his chin up arrogantly. "I have a live feed to my phone. I saw you as soon as you walked in."

My cheeks flame. He saw everything. All my clumsiness, and the way I rolled around on his bed, breathing in the smell of him.

"It's rude to watch." I intend to sound aloof, but it comes out as a squeak.

"It's rude to start without your partner."

"This toy is my partner." I lift the little rose and I'm amazed at my own daring. "Not you." He has ignored me and walked away from me for four days. He kidnapped me. He doesn't get to just wander in and crook his finger.

“You came to my bedroom.” He unbuttons his suit jacket at a leisurely pace, shrugs out of it as he stalks towards me. He tosses the expensive garment onto the far side of the bed and stands over me and he’s a stark silhouette with a dark background. He’s an avenging angel. A sinister villain. A fae lord. He looks down, taking in everything from my naked toes to my no-doubt flushed face.

I can’t move. I thought I was turned on before, but Artem regarding me, heat in his eyes, is next level.

“You’re on my bed, legs spread, pink cunt exposed for me, and soaking wet. I think that makes you *my* toy, kisa.”

An actual, for real, can’t-help-it, whimper escapes me. My hips roll, and my clit pulses, despite the fact the toy isn’t on it.

Leaning across me, his gaze flicks between my eyes and my lips. Which are in a little “o” as I pant. He lowers his head so slowly I’m not sure it’s really happening. Perhaps I’m hallucinating what I want most in the world. He might be moving gradually, but he’s insistent. His lips touch mine, then press, then insist I open more to him as his tongue invades my mouth. Desire flares through me. It’s sweet and dirty and taking this kiss, like walking into the calm sea and finding the sand slopes away and you’re on tip-toes, being pulled by a current much stronger than you could ever be, dragged deeper until you’re swimming for your life. Except I’m not swimming towards shore. Nope.

I’m tangling my fingers—sticky with my juices—into his hair to hold him to me.

“Mmm. That’s it,” he murmurs into my mouth, then breathes in. The mattress depresses as he kneels on the bed. A nudge to my thigh and he’s between my knees. Taking my hand from the back of his head, he pulls himself free, rears up and holds my wrist as he brings my fingers to his mouth. For each fingertip in turn, he sucks them clean.

“Delicious.” His voice is a rumble and I’m helpless. Under his spell. This started with me trying—I admit it—to get his attention.

Well, I have it all now, and I love it.

He stretches over me, grabs a pillow and lifts my shoulders until I'm propped up, then plucks the vibrator from my hand. I let him, like I'm a doll.

Kneeling between my open thighs, he skims his palm over my knickers, holding my gaze all the time.

“And you're wet too. These are soaked. Did you choose somewhere comfortable to get yourself this worked up?”

I make a noise that could be denial or agreement. I don't even know myself.

The fabric tugs, then rips between his hands and he carelessly shoves the broken lace scrap into his pocket. The air on my sex emphasises how bare I am. How exposed. And my treacherous body loves it.

He holds my gaze. The pleasure as he slides the toy through my folds makes me jerk, then my back arches as it touches my clit and I choke a scream.

“Eyes on me.”

I hadn't realised I had closed them, but when I blink up at him, a smug smile hitches the corner of his mouth. He smooths his palm over my inner thigh, closer with every stroke until he gets to where I'm wet. Soaked. His forefinger pushes at my entrance as he continues to circle the vibrator over my clit.

“Nice and tight,” he comments with an approving nod.

A gentle slide in, but like his kiss, it's insistent and within a moment he's in me up to the knuckle. A withdrawal, and a second finger advances, stretching me open, and I gasp.

The vibration is as unrelenting as his dark gaze.

“Palm your breasts.”

I obey, skimming my thumbs over my nipples, and it multiplies the pleasure somehow, doubling it, tripling it. This is what I wanted earlier, and couldn't do it for myself. I needed him.

He begins to slide his fingers out and I moan with bliss and frustration until he thrusts them back into me.

I'm so close to orgasm.

"Roll your nipples." His rough voice is another layer on my arousal, and I do that too. He's pumping his fingers into me now, the vibrator rocking over my clit.

"So pretty. You're taking me beautifully. Your pink folds are gorgeous. I've never seen anything so lovely. Come on my fingers."

I break. Probably it's a coincidence, but as he tells me, my clit spasms and pleasure crests. I clench on Artem's fingers so hard pain mixes with the desire. He removes the vibrator from my clit and it's almost a relief to drop back down.

Then he's next to me, the vibrator turned off and tossed away, and he's kissing my neck as the orgasm recedes, leaving me more satisfied than I can remember. Boneless.

"That was excellent," he croons. "You're my good girl. But I need you to have another orgasm for me."

I choke on my own breath. What? "I can't!"

His fingers are still inside me and he continues to slide them in and out, oh so slowly.

"The first one was for you. Now, this is for *me*."

"I've never..." I've never come twice in a row. That's what I don't tell him. I'm way too embarrassed to say to this hot, older, experienced man that I'm a virgin who has never had more than one orgasm at a time.

"Don't you want to be a good girl for me?"

I bite my lip to stop the instinctive response. *Yes*.

By kissing my neck—how did I not know about neck kisses until now?—he makes me weak. I'm a puddle, completely his, ready to pour into whatever form he desires. I'm basically a hot melted jelly.

"Don't you want to be my best girl?"

I want to be his *only* girl.

Now he's rubbing just inside my passage and oh god that feels amazing. Like sparkles. Despite my silence I can feel pleasure gradually spiralling upwards.

Impossibly.

"You'll make me so proud of you, kisa. I know you can come for me again." His thumb starts with slow brushes below my clit, and yes. Yes, that's incredible. My clit is still too sensitive, but where he's touching me is the right side of too much, the precipice.

"Tell me."

I let out a juddery breath and shake my head, but I don't know what I'm saying. No, I don't want it? I do. No, I won't speak it aloud? No, I don't want to disappoint him by not being able to come?

I think it's that last one.

He stops moving his fingers, starting to move away, and I chase him. Without thought, my hips shift of their own accord.

"Uh-uh." His hand is suddenly on my lower belly, holding me down. "Say it and I'll make you come like a good girl should."

"Yes, sir." The words are out of my mouth, led by my pussy not my brain. I want this, despite the doubts. I'm now beyond little considerations like dignity and reality. Give me the crazy train. I need him to be proud of me.

"That's my good girl." There's a rasp of his stubble on my cheek as he smiles, then the cool of air as he's gone. The next thing I know, all the squidgy grey matter goes from my head. It's just air and tumbleweed inside my skull as he holds my thighs apart and takes a long, luxuriating lick. Like I'm an ice cream.

"Your honey is delicious," he murmurs before licking me again. A second later, his fingers ease back into me, a light stroke to my inner walls at first. I'm so wet, utterly messy, and

I'm just as he said: his toy to play with. He switches easily from licks to sucks to my clit and firm thrusts of his fingers and I bow with the intensity.

And the intimacy. He grunts, sounding pleased, as he uses his mouth to drive me into pleasure and squeezes my hip possessively.

With infinite patience, he beckons my orgasm to him. This one is his, just as he promised. He lures the desire with sweet words dispersed with filthy touches. He eats my pussy like he adores the taste, and tells me he loves it. Tells me my cunt is the best thing he's ever tasted, and he can't get enough.

I'm shaking, head to foot, already. My hands clutch the sheets helplessly. I'm vibrating like I'm his instrument and he's my musician.

"Give me one more," he coaxes. "You can do it, kisa, one more orgasm for me. You're being my best girl, don't stop now."

Then his mouth is back on my clit, and I tip over into the longest throbs of pleasure I've ever felt.

I scream, and sob, and I think I kick because he holds my legs down. This climax is drawn from me with a steel hand in a velvet glove. It has snuck up on me and now I'm drowning in the pulses that go on and on. Where the earlier one was high and almost sharp, a quick wave, this is a current, a tide. It's broad. It flows from my core right down to my toes.

I think I black out.

When I come to, the first thing I'm aware of is the blood zinging around my body. I feel more alive than I ever have before, and yet there's an ache between my legs. I'm still empty.

Wait—I'm alone.

Blinking against the light, I find my knees are together, my skirt down over my thighs. A whisper of cloth, and I see Artem standing at my side. He leans over and brushes his knuckles down my cheek.

“Brat,” he says affectionately, eyes soft. “I need to get back to work, but was that what you wanted?”

He has his suit jacket on and yeah, he does look about to leave me here alone.

All the fuzzy contentment in my body abruptly drains away. My heart tears. That was just an interlude to him, whereas it has rearranged my whole world.

How dare he treat me this way?

“I want you to let me go,” I hiss, the hurt firing into anger.

His expression shutters, the playful indulgence gone. “No.”

“You can’t keep me here, doing nothing!” I clench my fists.

And while he could justify that I have everything in the world I could want—specifically the space and time to write, which is precisely what I told him I wanted—he nods slowly. Dragging in a breath, he exhales in a rush.

“From now on, you’ll have dinner with me. Every night.”

ARTEM

I try to focus on work for the rest of the day, but I don't. I think about Lina.

Whenever it's been about five seconds since I last thought of her, I imagine I catch the scent of her pussy and my balls tighten. She might be the most delicious thing I've ever eaten. Fuck, she was so sweet and juicy and soft, like slices of peach.

The way she came for me the second time was so damn perfect. She gripped my fingers and all I could think of was how she'd feel as I filled her up with come. As I bred her, my little kisa.

My cock is so hard it's basically a steel rod, a constant reminder that I am a bad man, lusting after my innocent captive who is half my age.

I can't stop wanting her to be mine, and apparently, I can't keep my distance. When the alarm on my bedroom went off, and I opened the security camera app only I have access to that covers the key parts of the house, I couldn't believe it and saw her rubbing herself, like the little cat she is, on my bed. My heart might have ached for how she was obviously bored and lonely, but my body responded with baser instincts when she hitched up her dress.

The sight of her glistening pussy lips as she pleased herself, clearly revelling in being in my bedroom, will be with me forever. Every part of that has shown me I'm powerless when it comes to Lina. I'm not certain "no" would even stop

me if I let myself get carried away with how I really feel. I want her more than life. I thought I had my addiction to Lina under control, but it never was.

She's my *captive*.

How can I let her go?

That's part of my mind's refusal to solve the problem of who came after Lina and me. If I track down who is responsible and make them die in the way they deserve for scaring my girl, I won't have her with me anymore. But equally, I have to keep her at arm's length. If she gets close, if I give in to what I most want and pound her into the mattress until she comes on my cock and is round with my child, she'll be my prisoner forever.

"Boss?" Vlad pokes his head around my office door. "The spy teams have been dispatched for the evening." He nods meaningfully and I get the hint. There won't be any intel until the morning when they return. I should clock off, and allow the rest of my team to do the same. They've had a gruelling few days as I've worked them insanely hard.

"Thanks," I mutter. "I'm just going to see if there's something in these numbers..."

"Galina says to tell you dinner is ready."

My head snaps up. "Already?"

"As you requested?" Fear streaks over Vlad's face. "Did I tell her the wrong time? I'll get—"

"No." I check the clock on the computer screen, and he's right. It's time.

Excitement flares through me. I wonder what my kisa will have decided to wear? I instructed Galina to cook something delicious and let Lina know when and where to meet me.

"Galina says dinner is on the west terrace."

Huh. Not the grand formal dining room or the kitchen where I sometimes grab breakfast. The air is warm and fragrant with herbs and pine as I step outside and come to an immediate stop.

A white fabric-draped structure sits in the centre of the stone paving, with a table for two set in the middle. String lights, lanterns, and candles are strewn around, casting a glow in the fading evening light. A bottle of champagne is on ice in a silver bucket.

That's pretty enough. Romantic. But what takes my breath away is Lina. Wearing a shimmering turquoise silk dress, she's standing at the stone balustrade, looking out over the darkening garden. Her hair is over her shoulders, and my god, how did I live without seeing her hair down? It's remarkable. A wonder of the world, as sleek and shiny as a panther's fur.

If I thought she was entrancing in that simple white shirt she wore at work, this curve-clinging piece of temptation is enough to turn me into a beast. I simultaneously want to hide her away so no one will ever see her, and show her off for the perfection she is.

Either way, the feral creature under my ribcage demands that she is *mine*. Well, for tonight at least, I can pretend.

I saunter with deliberate steps to the champagne, pop the cork and fill two flutes, then approach Lina. Standing beside her, I offer the glass.

She accepts it, our fingers brushing and my heart skips as though I'm a boy of twenty rather than a man of twice that.

"Who did this?" Because my house is many things, but whimsically romantic is not one.

"You don't like it?" she asks, her eyebrows pinching together, taking a sip of champagne.

"I like it." If it's what she likes, yeah. I like it.

She wobbles her head. "Galina helped. Found the things I asked for."

"Good." I want her to treat this place as her own. For her to be queen of this domain. We're both staring into the waving flowers in deep shades of purple and blue.

"And I got a couple of your men to put the pergola up. Kirill, I think?" she adds.

That wild animal at my centre growls, low and jealous. “If you need help, you ask me, in future.” When she opens her mouth as though to argue, I silence her with a look. “You ask *me*. Whether it’s a pergola or you need to come, no man helps you but me. You understand?”

She rolls her eyes. “You paid for it. And it was for you.”

For me.

That phrase expands in my chest, a soft-point bullet that takes out the envy I felt just a moment ago. She did all this to have dinner with me. Sure, maybe she wanted to rile me by spending money—as if that were possible—but the result? She’s made a perfect summer evening, with all the pretty, romantic nonsense that anyone could want.

Apparently, I’m not immune to it.

“Okay,” I mutter. I probably should ban her from telling my men what to do, but they all know better than to touch what’s mine, so I guess there’s no harm.

A subtle cough comes from behind us, and we turn to see Galina disappearing into the house with a smile over her shoulder. I shake my head.

“I think we’re being told to eat while it’s hot, kisa.”

She smiles wryly. “Galina had very fixed ideas about what food was to be served.”

Touching the small of her back, I guide her to the dining table and pull out her chair for her, all formal, like this is a date and I haven’t kidnapped her and licked her out shamelessly in my bed.

“I think this is beef stroganoff,” she says, examining one of the dozen dishes. “But what’s this?” She points at the borscht.

“Better try it and find out.” I ladle the rich beetroot soup into her bowl.

Cautiously, she dips her spoon in and brings it to her lips. There’s a moment of hesitation, then she nods. “It’s delicious.”

“Try it with the garlic bread.” And then all the tension is gone. We’re chatting like old friends as I tell her about all my favourite Russian dishes. It’s the same as when we used to talk early in the morning. Relaxed, happy.

And after coffee, when before we’d separate and maintain appropriate distance, she asks about the garden. I offer to show her, and in the deep shadows I slip my arm around her shoulders and pull her in to tuck her into me. She fits perfectly.

How am I going to ask her to stay forever, when she’s so young, innocent, and sweet?

“Artem, who do you think was shooting at us?”

“Ah, Lina.” I stop next to a water lily-covered pool. “It’s too beautiful a night to talk about that, isn’t it?”

She shakes her head slowly. “Who was it?”

“I don’t know,” I admit with a sigh. Four days and I’m no closer to being certain who is after me. And more importantly, how to keep Lina safe.

“You must have some idea.”

Those words are like nails into my heart. When I find out who is the threat, and dispose of them, I’ll let her go. That’s the undertone here.

“The obvious culprit is Benedict Crosse, kingpin of Westminster.”

“I’ve heard of him.” She tilts her head. “But why?”

“He knew I liked to come to your coffee shop.”

I shrug. The truth is, Crosse suspects my weakness for Lina and has exploited it before. When Victor kidnapped Crosse’s son, I had the choice of saving my elder brother or Lina.

I shot Victor in cold blood.

Sure, I said it was because I was done with the revolting lines of business my brother favoured. That’s true. But the

reason I acted then, rather than on the slower timescale I had been pursuing, was for Lina.

Then by kidnapping her, I've revealed the extent of my obsession.

"You don't think it was him though, do you?" she says, eyes narrowed.

"No." Crosse has become almost a friend since that incident, and has started a syndicate to try to prevent the sort of incidents that led to the kidnapping of his now wife and his son. "I'm in the process of investigating Crosse, but I don't think this was him."

She presses her lips together thoughtfully. "So, who else could it be?"

One hand clenched at my side, the other resting on her shoulder, holding her to me. If only it were so easy to keep her from shying away when she knows the truth. "I took over from my brother two months ago. He made a lot of enemies."

"How?"

My throat seizes up. I would have rather not have had to tell this sweet girl exactly how evil the mafia I run is. Or, more accurately, was. Badly enough that for a whole year I held back from doing anything but chatting with her every morning. My caffeine fix, yes, but she was my light too. A candle in a dark, cold cave.

A little touch of her hand to my cheek makes my heart skip a beat.

"It's okay. Tell me."

"Victor did terrible things." This part is difficult. "Some of which I helped him do. And while he's dead now, my enemies haven't forgotten. They're still out for blood. Revenge. Some even see the change of leadership and business activities at the Mayfair Bratva as weakness. They think I'm not as strong as Victor was."

The moonlight highlights her face in silver, a fairy-tale creature in my arms. I know she's a dream I'm spinning

myself, but I can't help but want more.

"Is that true?"

This girl has a way of seeing right into my fears. "I'm not as brutal as he was. I don't do the things he did."

"That makes you stronger. Cleverer." She moves closer. "If you can still be a mafia boss and hold onto being human too, that means you can hold onto power with respect and justice rather than fear."

"I hope so." She doesn't sound disgusted, so maybe... But I run through the events of that morning again in my head, as I have a hundred times already. And suddenly I'm stuck not on why someone tried to murder me, but why she was there at the door, vulnerable.

"What were you going to say, kisa? Before whoever it was shot at us."

"Yeah..." She shifts and looks away into the darkness. "Just that I'm leaving London to go to university."

"What? Why do you want classes?" That's ridiculous. She can't not be in London. I won't allow it. It has become painfully clear that I need her.

She rolls her eyes. "To try to improve my writing."

"Who says there's something wrong with your books?" I snarl. "Give me their names." I'll kill them all. Every one of them. Anybody who one-starred her book, I'll tear them limb from limb. People who make my kisa unhappy are on my shit list, and I don't give a fuck if I'm overreacting.

She laughs, but it's a little sad, and my heart thuds as she puts her hand on my arm. It's tensed, I notice. "No, don't do that. They're entitled to their opinions—"

"Wrong opinions—"

"And besides, they're kind of right."

"No."

"They are," she insists. "My sex scenes suck. They aren't sexy. I don't feel comfortable writing them, and the result is..."

Tame. It's fine for some of my readers, but it's not spicy and I want to do better. That's why I want to do the creative writing course."

"You think that'll help?" I reply, more than a little sceptical. Education is a good thing, but that doesn't sound like the best way to learn to write sex. Clearly she has amazing fans—apart from the haters who I suppose I can allow to live if she really wants me to be merciful. So why does she need a professor to tell her how to do what she's already doing?

She shrugs bashfully. "I was also hoping to get some, um..."

Oh no. That's not it.

"Experience," I finish for her.

"Yeah. I want to lose my virginity. I've never done anything with a boy. Man. Beyond some very uninspiring kisses. I can do virgin scenes alright, but blow jobs? Forget it. I'm clueless."

That hits me like I've been knocked over the head with a mallet. There are little tweeting bluebirds and stars and everything.

She's never been with a man. The possessive and territorial monster inside me roars with satisfaction and insists she's *mine*. She didn't realise it, but she was saving herself for me. To have her first orgasm around a cock on *my cock*.

"I thought if I go to university I could get hands-on experience," she continues, twisting her fingers together. "Well. Mouth-on experience."

No. No way.

"It's too dangerous for you to leave."

She nods and glances up at me speculatively. "Do you think I could still get to my course? I've only lost a few days."

"I made you come," I point out, struggling not to growl. I ignore the bit about sex. I can't offer her that without her being mine forever. "What more do you need? What do you want to experience?"

“I want to give a blow job. To return the favour.” She looks at me from beneath her dark lashes, hair falling over her cheek. “I want to make *you* come. With my mouth.”

Tentatively, she reaches for my cock. Her little hand barely covers half my length, and I’m suddenly aware of our size difference. I would break her.

Or she’d stretch, take me. Give herself to me and let me in. I’d come right up by the entrance to her womb. Breed her.

Hell.

This girl is going to kill me.

She strokes up and my cock twitches. I grab her wrist before she can go any further. Before I lose control completely.

“Please.” Boosting onto tiptoes, my fearless kitten, she tips her chin up, tempting me to kiss her. “I want to pleasure you. I know you’d be the perfect tutor.”

I’m incapable of denying her.

“I’ll teach you, kisa. I’ll direct you in how to pleasure a man with your mouth, if you’ll give me one thing in return.”

“What?”

Your love.

That isn’t going to happen. I’m a scarred, tattooed mafia boss and she’s an innocent angel. She used to work in a coffee shop as a sweet little barista; she’s good with people in a way I’m not.

I think of the London Mafia Syndicate meeting I’ve called tomorrow night. A whole evening apart, a night lost when I’ve only just had the chance to be with her for more than ten minutes. Crosse is sure we’ll figure out who is behind the attack, then it will be a few murders, and I’ll have to let Lina go. My little kitten will go to university, lose her virginity to some other man who deserves her, write her books and be happy. Without me.

My heart can’t take it.

I need something. I can't take her virginity; I'd never be able to allow her to walk away if I did. All I can have is her company.

“One evening as my fiancée.”

I blink in disbelief. “You want me to be your fake fiancée?”

This gorgeous, powerful man wants me to pretend to be engaged to him, and in return I get to give him a blow job? Has he lost his mind? I should be paying him for both.

“There’s a meeting I want you to attend with me. You’ll need another dress, like this one.”

“Kidnapping is an expensive occupation.”

He doesn’t acknowledge my joke. “And shoes, a necklace, *wear my ring.*”

“Really expensive.” Is it my imagination or was there possessiveness of that last statement?

Wear his ring. My tummy squirms. I get to pretend to be his wife-to-be, fake that he chose me to spend his life with, that he loves me instead of my being a girl he felt duty bound to save when she got caught up with mafia business.

And I get to see him come. Feel him in my mouth. My lips tingle at the thought.

I wish this were real.

It isn’t about writing a great sex scene for my book, if it ever was. It’s not just fiction on my side. It’s...

My heart stops.

“Hey, it won’t be that bad.” Artem’s expression is instantly worried. “One night, kisa.”

That's the *problem*. Emotion clogs my throat as the realisation washes over me. We've talked every morning for a year, and I was already a bit obsessed. Now I know him better...

This is a disaster.

I'm *in love* with this man.

I want forever. I'm helplessly in his thrall as I nod, forcing myself to swallow down the tears that threaten. I've had an evening of his undivided attention, and it's as good—maybe better—than my wildest dreams. It's everything I've ever wanted, being with Artem.

"I'll do it."

He brightens, his grey eyes lighting up and a joyful smile spreading across his face. "I'll get you a ring. All the rest, you order tomorrow."

I nod. Maybe, just maybe, if I can be the best fake fiancée ever... I'm kidding myself, of course I am. But it's such a good fiction. Better than any fantasy romance I've ever read. Far better than anything I've written.

"Come on then, let's get to your lesson."

"Yes, sir."

He wraps his arm around my waist, and we fall into pace as he guides me back through the garden to the house. I'm almost disappointed to be going inside. It's such a beautiful evening, and there's an enchantment out here that I love. Like reality doesn't exist. He's not a mafia boss, I'm not a normal girl, we're not captive and captor. We've been just: us.

But where I expect him to head for the door, once on the terrace he turns towards the pergola I had put up, with its white linen drapes.

"I thought...?"

He chuckles darkly. "You thought I was going to hide you away in my lair? No, you're far too beautiful for that. I want the stars to see you and weep at your perfection."

He thinks I'm beautiful? Or, no. That's all pretend, right? If he's giving me the full fake fiancée treatment, including a seduction leading to me swallowing his cock, telling me I'm attractive is part of the act?

My heart doesn't know that. It sends out happy vibes along with blood, pumping around every channel inside me. *He thinks I'm beautiful.*

"Then why not in the garden?" I like the idea of falling to my knees on the grass, staining my dress. Maybe a stone would dig into my skin, make me bleed. The little pain and the scar would be something tangible to hold onto. Proof that this happened when I'm far away, living some drab safe life without him. A way of retaining the memory forever.

"Nope," he replies implacably, towing me with him. As we pass the drapes, he snags the tie and the curtain falls across, screening most of the seating area.

He sprawls in the largest of the comfy outdoor sofa-type chairs I bought for this evening. "Because we're going to be comfortable for this. I won't hurry your lesson."

Arms resting on the back, his spread legs make no secret of his erection. He's a dark king, hair tousled, eyes glittering. Seeing him so powerful, dangerous, and calm makes my clit desperate to be touched. It's just like when he walked in on me on his bed.

"What if someone sees from the house?" I glance towards the windows. Most of them are covered by the drapes he released, or are dark.

"Would you like someone to see you being a good girl for me?"

My heart leaps, and I... Maybe. Would I feel embarrassed, or proud?

Both. And turned on, I think.

"You better hope they don't," he continues in a gravelly tone, "because although you were made to be shown off, anyone else who sees your pussy won't see the next sunrise."

That warning shivers through me.

“Tell me what to do.” If it sounds like begging, then yeah. It probably is. Please, please let me get this right. Please let me be so good at this he’ll...

“I will.” He crooks his finger and saves me from completing that thought. “And you’ll obey.”

It’s instinctive to take a step forward. He’s taking control and there’s this look on his face saying if I don’t, someone is going to be punished.

My mouth waters. “Yes, sir.”

“Mmm.” He purrs with satisfaction at my calling him that and our eyes meet. “Get a cushion.”

“What?” I don’t move. That’s not what I was thinking. I want a little discomfort. Perhaps his cock in my throat making me gag.

“Get. A. Cushion.”

“It’s fine,” I insist. “I just want to be taught—”

“Now, or you’ll be getting my palm on your backside, not my cock in your mouth,” he snarls.

I scramble to comply because although that threat thrills me, and the way he’s so strong and dangerous is part of what makes him compelling, I do actually want to give him a blow job.

I’m desperate. When I’ve fetched a cushion from another of the chairs, I stand before him. The ferocious, dark look on his handsome face makes me squeeze my thighs together. How did I get so lucky to have him watching me like that, his gaze like the midday summer sun. Almost too hot.

“What should I do now, sir?”

He spreads his legs and eases lower in his seat with a cocky gesture that shouldn’t be attractive, yet is. On him, it really is.

“There, kisa.” He points between his feet. “Kneel there and suck your fiancé’s cock.”

I hold in my whimper as I get to my knees. My *fiancé*. I know we're pretending, I heard what Artem said. But some screwed-up part of my brain thinks that if I can give him an orgasm as good as the one he gave me, maybe he'll fall in love too?

My breath shudders out as I lean into him, my hands on his strong lower thighs. The muscles are taut, like he's holding himself back.

“Belt first.”

My hands tremble as I reach out. It's fine leather, black, warm and supple as I tug it out. He doesn't help, idly trailing his fingers down my arm.

“That's it. Go on,” he murmurs as I slide the leather apart.

I move onto his flies, my fingers brushing down his erection. My heart hammers. The sound of the zip is loud as the gun from days ago. Then his boxers, they're soft black fabric, and slide over his skin. And I gasp, I really do, as his cock is revealed.

It's huge. Long and thick and even as part of my brain is insisting I'd never get all that to fit anywhere in me—my mouth, my pussy, I don't think I could even grip it properly—anticipation flows through me.

And probably it's the wrong thing, but I've lost my mind. I need the hot proof of his desire blocking out everything else. I lean over him and rub my face onto him, cat-like. His length is hot and silky smooth. I know the hint is in the phrase “hard on”, but I can't believe how like stone he is. Sun-warmed, velvet stone. His erection smells deliciously musky. Sandalwood and sweat and pure masculinity. His groan rumbles into me and my pussy is flooded. I'm so wet it's seeping out and dripping down my thigh.

“Oh kisa.” His hands shift to the back of my head, combing his fingers into my hair, smoothing it from where it was obscuring my face.

Then he tightens his hand, tugging. I whimper. The pressure is just right, like those times that I've pulled my own

hair to experience it because I was convinced no one would ever do it for me. Except this is *better*.

“You look so pretty. Your hair is lovely, but I want to see you take my dick.”

Eagerly, I part my lips and kiss the heated length of him.

“You wanted to be told what to do?”

“Yes,” I breathe.

“Use your mouth. Your tongue.”

I begin to lap. Open-mouthed licks that make him slick. Then kisses, working my way up to the curved top, beaded with moisture. It’s salty and I love it because I think—yeah I’ve read smutty books—that it means he wants me. He’s hot and reassuringly solid in my mouth as I slip my lips over the head of his cock and test how far into my mouth I can get him.

“Cover your teeth with your lips,” he says in a low purr. “Let me see them stretched like your little pussy would be.”

I do as he directs, and push more firmly onto the back of my throat.

“That’s right. Beautiful.”

The praise lights me up as much as the feeling of his smooth length. I wrap my fingers around the substantial base of his cock, stroking up his shaft as I try to get him deeper.

And again.

Again. This time I gag, but I don’t stop. I repeat, altering the angle.

He groans and oh god that sound is so hot I’m ash. I’m a shell of a girl as I keep working, greedily trying to get more of him. Like I’d consume him if I could.

The power in this is heady. My teeth are right there, and he’s not in control of this, his eyes going hazy. He might be instructing me, but I’m doing this to him. It’s a gift and this big, scary man is moaning with pleasure that I’m giving.

I'm vaguely aware the reason for this was to experience giving a blow job. I should be cataloguing his reactions, thinking about how I'd describe this in neat little sentences and paragraphs.

But I have no words. I'm about as articulate as the cushion smooshed under my knees. I'm a creature of wet heat and nerve endings that are trilling with delight. Apparently, there is a direct line between my cheeks and my clit, because when he strokes his knuckles along the hairline of my face, sweeping tendrils of hair away and tucking them behind my ear, the pleasure is like the buzz of that vibrator I bought.

Being with him heightens every sense. I'm hyperaware of the earthy, sweet and salt taste of his cock, of the scent of the night air. The sounds of birds calling to each other as they settle into their nests and Artem's breathing, faster now than when we started. The lights I hung earlier cast his face into shadows, emphasising the square line of his jaw and his defined cheekbones. I have both hands stroking up and down the half of his length I can't get into my mouth over, and nothing has ever felt as vital under my touch.

His hand tightens in my hair. At first I think he means to hold me back—which isn't happening let me tell you. A girl like me only gets one chance to do this, and I'm gonna milk it—ah, pun unintentional—for all it's worth. Then my brain goes to encouragement, thinking that he'll force me down onto his erection. Then he thrusts up, into my mouth, hitting the back of my throat.

"I'm close, kisa," he grinds out. "Where do you want it? Tell me before I fill up your mouth."

Yes. The satisfaction in me that he is going to come surpasses anything I've done before. Good grades, book sales, nice reviews, that time I was first at sports day. Even Artem's treasured tips while I was at the coffee shop. That's all nothing compared to him giving me his orgasm. Coming for me because of my touch.

The options whip around me. I could pull away and ask him to come on my breasts, or my face. And yeah, that would

be hot, but I ignore his question.

I want to swallow it all and my mouth is too gloriously full of his cock to tell him.

“Fuck,” he mutters, and his hips jerk upwards. It’s only then I recognise how he’s held himself back. He has let me figure this out, with only slight guidance from him. But as I watch him, his forehead creased as though almost in pain, he gives in and thrusts, holding my head.

His come fills my mouth as his cock jerks. His shudders are whole body, making him vibrate. And suddenly, although his hand is still around my neck, I’m the one who is mighty. This brutal kingpin is shaking beneath me, from what I did to him. Another spurt, and another, and I imagine how those pulses must feel as he empties. He’s a brief taste of salt and sour as I pull back and swallow. Red and still seeping come, slick from where I’ve been swallowing him down, I can barely believe so much of that delicious cock went into me.

I want it again.

Who needs coffee and balanced meals? All I want is Artem’s come. Three times a day, please. Yum. I sink my lips over his head again, and he grunts. He could wake me—

“Get up here.” He tugs on my hair but his other hand grabs into my armpit, pulling me off his cock with a wet pop.

I protest, but barely get a word out before I’m on his lap, knees either side of his, and he’s kissing me.

“You were perfect for me,” he murmurs, holding me tighter. “So clever, so quick to learn. The best blow job I’ve ever had, kisa. Did you enjoy it too?”

I did, but I’m a writer, alright? Not one of those smart people who can say the right thing at the right time and make everyone laugh. I can’t figure out words on the fly and say them aloud, so I just nod.

That was everything I’d dreamed of and more. I have an imagination, but reality with Artem is even better. His cock is trapped between my stomach and his, still a hot, hard length that makes my pussy clench. Empty, so empty.

“Tell me, are you wet?”

I nod again, words choked in my throat.

“Speak to me, or I’ll find out in my own way.” Then his hand drags up my skirt and is between my legs. I cry out as he cups my open, soaked folds, just brushing my aching clit.

“You loved sucking my cock, didn’t you?” The pride and satisfaction in his voice reverberates across my skin. “I knew it.”

He slides into my folds and strokes. I cry out and bury my head in the warm cotton of his shirt as he sinks two fingers into me, and his thumb swirls over my clit. The pleasure spins from where he touches, sending a jolt through me.

“That’s it,” he whispers in my ear. “Come for me. I’m going to make you feel so good.”

I give myself over to him, and I’m so worked up it’s moments before I’m cresting. Coming with bone-shaking intensity, helpless to do anything but accept what he’s giving.

An orgasm.

Then another, built slower this time, when he won’t let me off his lap. Then a third before he’s satisfied.

But not his heart.

That black credit card he gave me won’t buy me what I want most: for this to be real.

ARTEM

There was me thinking that smoothing Lina's dress down her thighs, walking her to her own bedroom, and leaving her there with only a soft kiss to the top of her head and a promise to see her in the morning was the hardest thing I've ever done.

Nope. Not even close.

Lina looks amazing. Again. The dress is long this time, shimmering green-blue like peacock feathers, and draped over her gorgeous body. Gazing up at her from the bottom of the stairs, I realise what a mistake it was to agree to go to the London Mafia Syndicate meeting. Even though I called said fucking get-together.

Past me is an idiot.

Past me was desperate for my girl to be safe, and willing to negotiate with or kill any man to achieve it. But now I'm faced with two issues: one, I don't want to share her, especially when she looks so tempting. And two, I do not want her to leave the house. I want to keep her here and ravage her like a beast.

The hardest thing I've ever done is not grab Lina, pull her down right here, drag that delectable dress off and fuck her until she comes on my cock with a scream.

She descends the sweeping staircase with careful steps, her high-heeled shoes unfamiliar. Can't wait to have her barefoot again, her heels digging into my back, not balancing down the stairs.

I meet her at the final step, stopping her so I can see right into her eyes without looking down. Those pretty, blue-green eyes. Her hair is up in some fancy thing with pearls glistening amongst the dark strands. I want to pick out each one and sink my hands into the softness. But I'm not a prick. I know that a woman might have spent hours preparing for an event she was nervous about, and I can see in Lina's face that she's apprehensive.

It's a little disconcerting having her above me. I like it. She's a queen, and I'm her devoted subject.

"Do I look okay?"

"No."

"I thought I was doing the right thing," she babbles. "I'm sorry—"

"You don't look okay. You look *perfect*."

"Oh!" Pink flushes her cheeks, and she dips her head. And yeah, that makes her look different perfect. Sweet and delicious and so damn tempting to throw her over my shoulder and take her to bed right now. Make that blush extend all the way down as I make her come time after time after time.

"Except for one thing." I pull the ring box from my pocket, heart hammering at my rib cage as though its agitation could break it out of its prison.

I sink to one knee and offer up the open box. The moment of confusion is replaced by awe.

"It's..." She sounds choked up. "Wow, that's beautiful. That sapphire is amazing. Are you sure you want me to wear it while we're out tonight?"

"Absolutely." And keep it on her finger for the rest of her life, along with a wedding band. "Why don't you take it, see if it fits?"

With slow movements, like she might disturb the ring and make it bolt away, she takes it from the box, and examines it. I stand, and my knees creek but thank me for removing them from the marble floor. By thank me, I mean, hurt like a bitch.

“You didn’t buy it especially, did you?” She turns the ring with her forefingers and thumbs, studying it. “Or have it on loan?”

“It was just hanging around,” I lie easily. Hanging around since I bought it earlier today.

“Like a family heirloom?”

“Something like that.” I would really like it to be a family heirloom Lina passes to our daughter. Maybe even one of our daughters.

She holds my gaze as she slides the ring onto her finger and my cock throbs. It fits. Of course it does. But I let go of the breath I was holding, and damn but I want to rearrange myself below the waist. Everything is uncomfortably tight in this tuxedo. My balls are primed and ready, my cock is at full mast as she smiles shyly and says, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” I offer my arm, and she places her little hand on my sleeve. “Shall we go?”

“So, as your fake fiancée, what do I need to know?” she asks as we walk out to the car. “Who will be there?”

“Your friend Anwyn.”

“Oh!” She grips my arm a bit tighter. “That sounds good.”

“But don’t assume the wives are any less dangerous than the husbands. I’ve never tested any of the kids, but safe to say they are murderous too.”

She laughs, and I smile as though that was a joke. It wasn’t.

“Doesn’t matter, because I’ll protect you.” I let my arm slip down, fingers trailing over her naked shoulder.

That elicits a contented sigh, and she peeks up at me from beneath her lashes. She’s done something with them, and they appear even longer than usual. The effort she’s gone to warms me. I don’t care about the makeup or the dress. But I do appreciate that she has taken care to look good for me. That I love.

The evening seems like it is going to be usual. It's pleasant to have an excuse to hold Lina's hand in mine as we arrive at the meeting. There's the same posturing, boasting, and every man looks only at his partner. It used to make me jealous as fuck. Not because I want any of the other women here—they're fine, pretty wallpaper, nothing compared to Lina—but because I craved what Lambeth and Crosse had. Laurent, as well.

The woman I love at my side, and a cute kid or two. At the time, having Lina seemed as far away as the sun. Our age gap, my being chest deep in blood and mafia connections, her innocence. All insurmountable barriers.

But apparently when it comes to my girl's safety, all bets are off. I want her with me, and I want to protect her. Conflicting impulses, since she'd be safer far away from all of these men.

Then the kingpin of Canary Wharf, Rhys Cavendish, walks in looking so wound up he might explode out of his suit.

"My fiancée doesn't know I'm in the mafia," Cavendish announces. "Everyone has to pretend this is a maths club."

I blink. We're the leaders of London's grubby underworld. We're here to discuss kidnap and murder, not feign to like algebra.

"Amateur dramatics is next door," drawls Laurent.

"I'm not doing that." Rafe Blackwood, the leader of Sutton, folds his arms. "Not happening."

Cavendish glares daggers and reaches inside his jacket for his piece.

Oh great. Just what I need. Some fight breaking out over trivial nonsense that could derail this whole thing and kill any chance of me using this meeting to find out who was stupid enough to come after me. I push Lina behind me without thinking. If shit is going down, any bullet will go into me, not her.

Westminster clears his throat and both Cavendish and Blackwood shoot glares at him like two arguing schoolboys.

He tilts his chin up and they both curl their lips as they put their hands away from their guns.

“Why the hell does she think this is a mathematics club?” Lambeth asks, rolling his eyes.

“I’ve been under...” Cavendish hesitates. “A lot of pressure recently. It was a sudden situation.”

“Honesty is the best policy—”

“No,” Cavendish snaps, cutting Lambeth off.

Next to me, Lina snorts with laughter. And her amusement releases me. If she thinks this is funny. Fine. I wrap an arm around her waist and pull her flush to my side.

“We’ll do it.” I called this meeting. It runs by *my rules*.

Westminster raises his eyebrows infinitesimally. I do the same back, daring him. His blonde wife tugs on his arm and he immediately leans down so she can whisper in his ear. And whatever she says, convinces him.

He nods agreement and begrudgingly, everyone else follows our lead. Westminster might not be as rich as Mayfair, but it has influence.

“Just be *creative* with your numbers,” I say, thinking that I really have to be able to actually get down to some business talk, despite this inconvenience. Lina’s side vibrates against me, and I look down to see her face full of mirth. I pull her closer still, smiling. Damn, but seeing my girl happy is a sheer delight.

“The first rule of maths club is don’t talk about maths club,” Lambeth says, mouth twitching.

“Don’t. Start,” Cavendish snarls, then spots someone and strides away as Laurent sniggers.

“I’ll take her aside for some social stuff. Leave you boys to talk,” Lambeth’s wife reassures... I dunno, everyone, I think. We all turn and look as Cavendish meets his girl.

A blonde woman in a green dress stands in the doorway. I glance at Lina’s raven hair, so dark it’s almost blue. Her stark

beauty outshines every other woman by a mile. Far too lovely for her own good. I tighten my fingers at her waist and tentatively, as though she's not sure she's doing the right thing, she places her hand over mine.

While we're all smirking and being politely accommodating of Cavendish's stupid facade, all my attention is on Lina's hand. I can feel her engagement ring, sharp against my knuckle.

Lambeth's wife draws Cavendish's away. And fuck, I do not want to let Lina go. But Crosse's wife, who used to work with Lina, is coming over smiling, and I cannot think of a single reason that Lina should stay with me and be terrified by what I am.

Except one. I want her by my side.

"Lina!"

"Anwyn." Lina smiles with genuine pleasure. I see how this could be between us. Lina could fit into this life.

They hug and are straight into catch-up chatter. "There are cocktails waiting," Anwyn says, trying to drag Lina away, but Lina digs in her heels.

"What about the..." Her gaze flicks to Crosse and the other mafia bosses standing around and proud as fuck of her. "I could stay?"

"I'll take care of everything." She belongs with me, but I cannot be an asshole about this. Anwyn is her friend. "Go and represent Mayfair in the women's *mathematics* conversation."

She blinks up at me, surprised.

I lean down and whisper, "You're my fiancée, remember?"

For a second, she melts against me. But when I withdraw, there's a shadow over her eyes.

"Fake," she mouths with a rueful twist of her mouth, then turns away, following Crosse's wife.

I go cold.

Idiot. I should never have suggested a fake date. Nothing about how I feel is put on.

By the end of tonight, I swear I'm going to resolve this. The threat to her life, yes. Then I'm going to convince Lina—by any possible means and I'm not above seducing and getting her pregnant if that's what's needed—to stay with me.

First though, there's the minor issue of taking out whoever is trying to kill us. When we all settle around a table and whiskey is poured, I take the paper I prepared from my pocket and slide it into the middle.

“This is a list of everyone I can think of that Victor... Did some *algebra* with.” And by algebra, I mean, killed someone they loved. It's a long list. “I'd appreciate your help with identifying which of these is most likely to have been seeking a solution to their *maths problem*.”

Nobody moves. I curse inwardly. Fucking hell. I'm here, aren't I? I agreed to this ridiculous club, and now I need some assistance, they're all going to be arseholes.

Admittedly, there might be some of their names on that list. My shitty brother. I should have killed him long ago.

“If you're looking for information about *equations*, I'll need to discuss that with my wife,” Laurent says.

“Pussy whipped,” sniggers one of the others.

“If that's what you want to call it.” Laurent smirks with the confidence of a man utterly secure in his skin. “My wife is a ruthless mathematician,” he adds and makes the word seem sexy. “I value her opinion as well as her—”

“I don't think it's any of them,” Crosse flicks the paper back into the middle of the table.

“What?” That list is comprehensive. I sweated over it, as did Vlad.

There's a brief scuffle as everyone else decides they want to see what is on the list, and it ends up with Cavendish and Blackwood at a careful truce both reading at a ninety-degree angle.

Crosse shrugs. “They all know the deal. *Maths* spats happen. Most of these were a while ago, and Victor is ah—” He glances over to where the women are sitting. Probably out of earshot, but not definitely. “He’s zero now.”

Crosse doesn’t add that the most recent incident involved him, and was the tipping point for me killing my brother and his nod to me says it all. If he can forgive Mayfair for attempting to kidnap his wife, and successfully kidnapping his son, why would anyone else hold a grudge?

I swear under my breath.

“I’d look internally, were I you,” Crosse continues.

I think of my reluctance to appoint a second-in-command. How Vlad seems to be the perfect choice, but I can’t bring myself to trust him.

“What about your number *one*?”

For a moment, I don’t know who Crosse means. Whose idea was going along with this maths nonsense? It’s bloody ridiculous. Then I bristle. “Lina is not involved with this *equation*.”

“How do you know?”

I don’t.

“Or could your nephew be involved with Victor’s algebra?” suggests Laurant. “Wasn’t there a family disagreement—”

“Have you met Sergey?” My tone is sarcastic. “My nephew Sergey wants nothing to do with Mayfair. Only crossing *pens* with Crosse’s son.”

Crosse winces but nods. “If it’s any consolation, I’m hoping the child Anwyn is pregnant with currently will be more inclined to take over Westminster’s *fine mathematical tradition* than my firstborn. But honestly, I don’t think any of this list should be worrying you.”

“Anyone else?” The paper has been passed around, and there’s some chatter. But not the comprehensive, clear answer I was hoping for.

“I will look at my own team then, to solve this maths problem.” My jaw clenches. I thought everyone was happy with the changes I’d made, or at least obedient. “*Zero* is a dish best served cold. Whoever it is, I’ll make them *pay*.”

At the end of that little speech, I look up to find my kisa watching me across the room. Her eyes are wide with—fuck that’s fear, isn’t it?

Simultaneously, I realise two things. I am in love with Lina. Not obsession. Not lust. This is DNA-level love, a part of me, and will always be. Every piece of me adores her and wants what is best for her.

I love her, and she fears me. She’s only here because I kidnapped her. I turn away, heart compressing painfully.

Because the other thing I realise is—I have to set her free.

Fake.

That word rolls in my head as I listen to Anwyn telling me about how happy she is with her husband, stroking her almost flat belly, and cooing over my ring. I cannot fall for Artem Moroz. Any more than I already have.

This is all way too good to be true, and it's not true. That's the point.

And now, fool that I am, I'm glancing over at Artem and smiling. That shared smile, the understanding between us feeling like it always did when he arrived for coffee every morning at the cafe, reliable as clockwork.

I admit, it is extremely hot seeing Artem in his element. All those terrifying mafia bosses were hanging on his every word. I don't know what he said while Anwyn and I have been over here with the other women, but I'm very well aware they are the most powerful men in London. And when Artem told them to play along with that other mafia boss' request earlier?

They jumped.

And my clit jumped too.

It's nice to chat with Anwyn, and hear about her pregnancy. Even if we have to keep the non-baby conversation to coffee and books, rather than what I really want to know: how did she get her silver fox mafia boss to fall in love with her, and how can I replicate it? How can I get pregnant by my gorgeous kingpin? Could she get her husband to vaguely but anonymously threaten me, so Artem doesn't let me go?

God, I am disturbed.

Excitement trembles in my belly when Artem rises from the table he's been sitting at with the other mafia bosses, and comes over.

Holding out his hand, he looks down at me, head to the side, with what seems to be a sad smile. "Having a good time?"

I put my hand in his and, obviously I'm a fully grown adult and I don't need his help to rise from the sofa Anwyn and I have been lolling on, sipping our drinks. But he's so warm and steady, his hand is so big compared to mine. I kinda need him to help me or I might melt into a puddle. He smooths his thumb over the ring he gave me. That gorgeous ring. I wish I could wear it forever.

Artem draws me away from the hubbub of voices, into a secluded nook where sweeping curtains screen us from the rest of the room. He steps close, and shifts his hand to the small of my back, gently holding me to him. His other palm cups my jaw, and his thumb sweeps my cheek this time.

He doesn't say anything for a long moment, and looks so sad my heart begins to break for him. I'm on the cusp of asking what's wrong when he takes a deep breath, releases my cheek and reaches into a holster at his chest that I hadn't even noticed—I am so bad at this whole mafia thing. He pulls out a matt black metal gun. Making something click, he takes my hand and puts the weapon into it.

I stare at the thing stupidly, so heavy and unnatural.

"Artem..." Panic shoots through me.

Artem lifts my wrist and points the barrel of the gun at his chin. "If it's you who wants revenge, kill me. I'm fine with that. There's a silencer. Just walk out and never come back. Everyone will assume it was one of the others."

I don't move. I don't dare.

"Take it away," I whisper. I don't know what this is about, but I don't freaking like it. At all. I'm holding a king cobra, every instinct yelling to throw it far from me.

“Sure?”

“Yes!” I squeak. So slowly, with infinite care because I absolutely don’t want to trigger this thing to go off and I have never touched a gun before in my life, I move the weapon from Artem’s head.

“Take it,” I order him when it’s by my side, my voice seeming to come from a thousand miles distant.

Silently, Artem slips the gun from my hand, does something, then it disappears under his suit jacket, and I can breathe again.

I grasp his lapels and pull myself into his reassuringly warm bulk. A little hesitantly, his arms go around me.

“Well, that removes one of Crosse’s theories,” he mutters wryly, then kisses the top of my head.

“Theories?”

“He thought maybe you were part of the murder attempt.”

“Me?”

“I didn’t think it was very likely either.” And now I can hear a smile in his voice.

“His theories are bullshit,” I grumble and breathe in Artem’s scent like an addict.

Artem shakes with silent laughter, and we stand there, me in his arms, him stroking my hair, for I don’t know how long. Time enough for me to become aware of every place we touch. The heat of him. How solidly muscled he is beneath my hands and pressed to my soft curves.

“Now.” Artem sets me away from him and the grave expression is back, along with the distance between us. He swallows and I watch his Adam’s apple bob just above his collar. “If you want to go with Anwyn and Crosse, I’ve arranged for him to look after you.”

My mouth falls open in shock. If I thought the gun was insane, this might be even more so. This wasn’t what I expected. Is that why he looks so sad? My mind whirls.

“I don’t understand,” I say eventually.

“Crosse thinks that whoever came after us at the *Lazy Bean* was internal. Not another mafia, but someone within Mayfair.” He visibly steels himself. I can see how much this is costing him. “And upon reflection, I agree. It makes more sense. But I haven’t figured out who it is yet, and I promised I’d keep you safe. So go with your friend. You’ll be better protected in Westminster.”

“I don’t want to be safe.” The words are out before I can consider whether they’re wise.

“Kisa—”

“What if I want to stay with you?”

“It’s dangerous.” But his hand tightens at my waist and his eyes aren’t bleak anymore, they’re filling with wary hope.

My heart leaps that he hasn’t said no.

“I’ll help you figure out who it is. There’s one man—”

“Not if it puts you at risk,” he cuts me off.

I grasp at a promise he made. I’m willing to try anything to stay with him. I’m in this now. His life. “When you kidnapped me, you said you’d protect me.”

“I did.” He nods. “And I meant it.”

“Well.” I summon my most bratty, insistent look. “You don’t get to pick and choose, sir.”

He heaves in a breath and exhales like the weight of the world is on his shoulders. “Kisa—”

“What does that mean?” I demand. He’s been calling me kisa for a year and suddenly I can’t bite my tongue any longer.

He steps closer, crowding me into the wall behind. I boost onto tiptoes as he dips his head.

“In Russian, it means kitten. *My* kitten.” Then he kisses me.

It's sweet in a way, this kiss. Firm, but without filthy licks or nibbles. It's a statement, a press of his lips to mine. A claiming almost. I cling to him, hoping that if I just hold on, I can keep him forever.

When he draws away, we're both breathing hard.

"You want to stay with me, despite the risks?"

"Yes. I want to help." A thousand times yes. I want his ring on my finger for real and to be in his bed every night. I want to hear all his hopes and dreams and fears and be the person he turns to—not only for coffee and a smile, like we were before—for everything.

"Well. My little kitten has been creeping around my house. Tell me who you don't trust."

"All your men are very considerate, except—"

"Bastard," Artem growls.

"Nothing happened," I hurry to reassure him. "I just felt uncomfortable."

Artem's scowl deepens. "Who was it?"

"I don't know his name. He looks a bit like you, but younger."

"Sergey? No. Was it..."

"You spoke to him the morning we arrived after you..." I'm reluctant to say the word now. Kidnap seems an ungenerous way to describe how Artem has cared for me. "Snatched me away."

There's a pause.

"Oh you're kidding." And then he's holding me so tight I'm crushed to his chest. I don't care. I love being close to him. "It took you, and the fucking *London Maths Club*, to help me put two and two together."

In the car on the way back to his house, he tells me the plan as he drives, knuckles white as he grips the steering wheel.

“Promise me you’ll stay upstairs,” he demands. “I’m not having anything happen to you.”

“I promise.” And I don’t have to even cross my fingers, because I know exactly how I’ll do as he tells me, but also see what is happening.

“Everyone in the main hall. We’re going out,” he says into his phone when I nod that I understand the plan. A message for his men.

Just as when we arrived at his house five years ago—correction five days ago—Artem walks around and helps me from the car. We walk together to the elevator. But this time, I catch his hand and hold it, my heart swelling with love even as my throat is dry with nerves. He pushes the button for the ground floor, and the one above. Then as we rise, he backs me to the mirrored wall and kisses me like I’m air. Then as the elevator stops, he sets me away from him.

“Go to my bedroom, kisa. I’ll feel the alert on my phone and know you’re safe. Wait there. I’ll be with you soon.”

I believe him. But I want to see Artem at his best and worst. I have to be by his side. Cheering. I nod, and he walks out of the elevator around the corner into the main hall as the sliding door shuts off my view.

My heart thumps and adrenaline courses through me as I step into the hallway upstairs and, checking left and right as Artem instructed, remove my high heels to walk silently down the smooth polished floor. I open Artem’s bedroom, dart inside and then straight back out. Long enough to trigger the cameras, but not to miss what’s happening downstairs.

Closing the door behind me, I creep down the hallway to the sheltered spot at the top of stairs where I’ve spied on Artem before. His voice echoes up.

“I’ve dealt with Mayfair, and you all, differently to my brother’s way.”

He’ll feel my eyes on him, I’m sure. He always does. But hopefully it will be in a good way.

On my hands and knees, I peek one eye around the corner of the bannister.

I haven't seen all of Artem's men gathered together before. It seems when I first arrived that wasn't all of them. They're standing in an arc with Artem in the middle, every face turned towards him as he levels a stare at the men.

"If you don't like the way I run things now, you're free to leave. Go now, peacefully, and that will be the end of it."

Seconds tick by. No one moves. With slow deliberation, Artem draws the gun and points it into the crowd of men. "But I won't have anyone endangering my fiancée, Vlad."

Warmth seeps into me. I'm still his fiancée, even as I'm shocked by Artem calmly pointing a gun at the scuzzy man who looked at me like I was meat.

Vlad sneers and steps forward. "You got Mayfair by blood inheritance from Victor. My claim is just as good. His *son*, who will restore things to the way they were. Who's with me?"

"I liked Victor's ways better," says a voice.

Two shots ring out and I freeze, all my muscles bunching me into the smallest possible space. But I continue watching, not even daring to blink, unable to look away like if I do everything will end.

A body lies crumpled at the bottom of the stairs, blood pooling at his head.

"He was going for the stairs, boss. To get your girl, I assume," a man says, almost sheepishly. "Sorry about that."

Shit. Coming for *me*? The air solidifies in my lungs.

"Not at all, Kirill," Artem replies coolly. "You've just been promoted to my second-in-command."

My gaze darts to Artem. He has a gun in both hands, and another man lies dead among the crowd. The man who said he preferred Victor's ways.

"Anyone else?" Artem drawls.

Oh, I see now. Artem shot the vocal supporter, and Kirill shot another man who had silently gone for the stairs.

Good. It's deranged, but seeing what Artem will do to build a better organisation, and to protect me, fills me with bloodthirsty pride. I don't want to wield guns myself, but hell yeah, I like that he doesn't hesitate to kill for me. For us.

"Now. Give me one reason not to kill you, Vlad."

A space has opened up around Vlad, where Artem's men are distancing themselves from the traitor. He's upright, smirking, hands loosely by his sides, and his gaze flicks to where I'm hiding.

"You took my father from me, Artem," Vlad says. "But I'm a Moroz." He shifts a hand casually to his pocket. And from this angle, I can see what no one else can. A gun.

Fear punches my gut. Nausea inducing, sharp terror.

Artem might die without me having told him I love him. Without him having been inside me. Without having the chance we'd have a child together, a part of him to live on.

No. No way.

"Even if you think you've won, I learned more from Victor than you did," Vlad continues.

What can I do to help? Make a distraction? I look around.

"I'll ensure you regret your win—"

I shift backwards just as there's a barrage of shots, a shriek loud in my ears, pain that flares across my head, and a thump.

Then I'm on my feet, and running downstairs, regardless of what Artem said. Because if he's injured, if anything has happened to him, I'd rather die by his side than never see him alive again.

Where is he? He was—I slam right into his chest and his arms brace me.

"Lina. Are you hurt?" Artem's mouth finds mine and our kiss is desperate, life and death, need him right now intense.

One hand at the back of my head, he forces me to look at him, scanning over me before growling. “You’re bleeding. That fucker *shot* you.”

“I’m fine...” But he’s right. There’s wetness in my hair. I reach up and touch it, and it’s red.

“The bullet must have grazed you.” He holds me closer as he turns around. Like he’ll never let me go again.

His men are where he left them, some holding their guns, some not, all staring up at us on the landing where the stairs turn.

“That is what happens to anyone who harms a hair on her head.” He jerks his chin towards the dead body of Vlad. “Kirill, secure the house. Everyone else, get some sleep. Tomorrow is a new start.”

ARTEM

I carry Lina up to my bedroom, ignoring her protests that she's fine. The sight of blood in her hair has made me insane.

"I told you to stay here." I don't release her to get us into my suite, kicking the door shut and flicking on the master switch for all the lights. "I should punish you."

"I had to know you were okay. I had to see you. Ohhh, I like your bathroom," she says as I push into the white and green tiled room with chrome fittings. I sit her on the edge of the freestanding bath that I bought because it was long enough for me to lie properly in, even though I've only used it once. Maybe I'll get Lina in it with me.

"Don't change the subject." From the medicine cabinet I pull out the necessary equipment.

"I thought no one would see me," she tries, and I shoot her a dark look. "I'm sorry."

"Better." I move her hair out of the way, and she winces. "You might still get punished. You were lucky. The bullet just skimmed past you." There's blood, but it's beginning to clot as I clean it up with an alcohol wipe.

"Is it going to have a brag-worthy scar?" she laughs. Despite her defiant words, she's shaking like a leaf in a gale beneath my hands.

"Not unless you shave your head."

The relief that she's okay is unspeakable. Seeing Vlad point his gun up to where I knew she was hiding was the worst

thing that has ever happened to me. Hundreds of times worse than any other bullet I've ever fired or had dug out of me.

I'd have never lived with myself if Lina had been seriously injured. And I'm never letting her go.

She heaves a shuddering sigh and grips me tight.

"I was scared."

"I know." I was too. Terrified I'd lose her because I was an idiot who didn't insist she went with Crosse. That she wanted to be with me was too alluring. The implication that she'd take the risks required to be a mafia queen, and stand by my side, was heady.

But I'm not sure my heart rate will go below two hundred again.

"I don't like it," she says as I put healing gel over the cut, sounding almost angry. Rebellious and stubborn, same as when I found her touching herself and using a vibrator in my bed.

"It won't. You're not going to be hurt again," I promise.

"That's not it. I don't want to remember him every time I'm scared. I like..."

"What is it, kisa?"

My little kitten digs her nails in and whispers furiously. "I like the hint of fear. I liked being caught by you, and that you're intimidating. But now what I fear more is that every time I feel that twinge of fear, I'll think of that asshole and be really afraid, rather than think of you, and be..."

Turned on.

Blood surges to my cock.

"Say it," I demand, my voice gravelly and harsh.

A second ticks past.

Another.

A third.

I grip her hair, careful of the side of her head, the silk tightening over my clenched fist, and pull her head back to look into her eyes. She gasps but meets my gaze.

“Squirmy and hot and needy,” she admits, half embarrassed, half defiant.

My cock responds in the only way I know and dragging her to her feet, I wrap my arms around her and kiss her.

“I thought you were going to die,” she says into my mouth.

“Not anytime soon,” I assure her as I kiss over her cheeks and down her neck. “I’ll never leave you alone. And I’ll never let anyone hurt you.”

“I thought I might die without having you inside me.” She’s grasping inexpertly for my belt, her movements hasty and panicked. “I thought you might die, and we’d never have been together. All I could think is that I wanted you, and you might be shot, and I’d be alone.”

“I’ll erase that memory.” I cover her hands with mine, stilling them. “I promise.”

“Make me.” Her breath is hot on my jawline. “Chase me.”

That makes me pause. Chase her?

I lower her down until her feet touch the floor, having to peel off her hands from my chest. She looks up, excitement on her face, and trust. And something else I can’t bring myself to name.

It takes all my control not to snatch her to me and rip off her dress right here.

She’s mine.

The possessive pounding through my arteries makes me want to claim her for my own. Permanently. I could rut her on the bathroom floor. But that’s not what she wants. Lina needs to erase the memory of true fear.

She needs me to change the terrifying to merely scary and exhilarating. She needs me to be her monster. I take a step backwards, putting space between us.

“When I catch you, kisa, I won’t be so nice.” I make my voice low and menacing. “The things I’ll do to you...”

The threat hangs in the air.

“Run.”

She hikes up her dress and takes off, not holding back, rushing out of the bathroom. Fast.

I move to the door and take a moment to watch her. She’s beautiful running, hair flying behind her, strong and smart. But I don’t wait for long.

What she needs is to be wanted. Desired to the point of obsession. She has to feel my power and that I’m swifter, stronger and more determined to catch her than she is to escape.

I love that. I love her.

This must be proof that I’ll protect her and keep her. No more compromise. No more denial.

So I sprint after her like my life depends on it—because it does. She does. At the door she pauses, casts a look over her shoulder, and when she sees me, a smile curves her lips before she yanks open the door to my bedroom and dashes into the next room of the suite.

It’s a sitting room that I more often use as a corridor to get to my private study at the end and she casts her eyes from side to side, figuring out which might be the better way to go. She can’t decide, pausing at the door that leads to the hallway.

“No,” I growl, and my good girl dashes past to bring me around in a circle, slipping through the plush sofas I’d love to tumble her onto. I get closer, but although I could easily catch up, I want her to enjoy this fully. I ease my steps, keeping a short distance away.

She has a burst of speed, and throws the door to my private office open wide. I grin and follow. Because what I know that she doesn’t is that room only has one way in and out. And I can shut us in.

I slam it behind me, and she comes to a screeching halt in the middle of the room as she looks for an exit.

“There isn’t one.” I turn the lock and drop the key into my pocket. “Now. My pretty little prey. I have you, and no one can disturb us.”

She feints, then runs the other way, and I pound after her, relishing the hunt. We do laps of my desk, me allowing her to tire herself out and burn off the adrenaline of the evening. It’s been a lot.

I’m wired too, on high alert, following her every dodge and enjoying her surprised squeal as I hurdle a sofa to get closer.

We play this game for minutes, me never drawing quite close enough to grab her up, always allowing her to escape.

Until she slips and nearly falls, and no way. No more hurt for my girl. After that I’m not messing around. My muscles burn as I accelerate, getting to her before she has even fully recovered and run.

Catching her by the waist, I snatch her into my arms, propelling us against the nearest wall. She struggles, clawing, and I grab first one wrist, then the other, pinning them above her head.

She tries to knee my balls and I dodge just in time with a chuckle. Then I use my hips to hold hers. She pushes back against me, and my cock responds by going from erect to furiously hard. Running after her means blood is pumping through my arteries, my cock filling to bursting.

“I won’t stop, kisa.” I keep her in place, helpless and in my power. “You’re mine.”

Her mouth falls open and those green-blue eyes widen. So damn pretty.

Grinding myself against the gap between her legs, I leave no room for her to think of anyone but me. Her beautiful hair is soft against my forehead as I savagely press my face into her neck and bite.

“Feel what chasing you, catching you, and holding you does to me.”

She lets out a whimper and writhes against me.

“Tell me,” I order.

“It makes you hard,” she pants out.

I roll my hips, pushing against her softness so much it must hurt. But she doesn't complain, just whimpers with need. Keeping her wrists pinned in one of my hands, I sweep the other down her body in a blatantly possessive show. “I caught you. You're mine, Lina. I want to claim what's *mine*.”

She jerks her hands and I tighten my grip.

I search her face for fear, and yeah. It's there. It sends a thrill down my spine and right to my cock, which responds to her struggle with a twitch.

Releasing her, I slam my palms each side of her head. “Do you need to run again?”

She grabs the back of my neck and yanks me to her, smashing our lips together then scratches over my shoulders so deep I hiss. I hope there's blood. I deserve it for what she went through this evening.

“Take me.” Her words are muffled.

My groan is lost. Fuck, she wants it. My little prey is hot for me. I press her into the wall, covering her, telling her with my body that she's safe with me, kissing her ravenously as she tries to devour me while my mind whirrs. Can I really do this?

Drawing back, I grab her chin, forcing her to look at me. I've always known that if I cross this line, that's it. But if she thinks we're faking, that ends now. She has no idea what a possessive monster she's allowed to catch her.

“If I slip into this wet pussy, it's *mine*. You understand that, Lina?”

A smile lights her face, the easy and bright contrast to my dark and serious expression. “Yes.”

Her hands go to my belt, and I let her, dragging up her skirt by the fistful as our eyes continue to be locked. I'm shaking with need as she frees my erection and I push her knickers down before pulling her to me, kissing her. My cock presses to her core, and she's wet. I groan as we so perfectly notch together. She already feels impossibly good.

"I'll never let you go." I have to make her understand, and yet I cannot stop. I'm so close—the tip of my cock is settled right at her entrance, in her soaked folds—I'm mad with need for her. "I'll keep you, breed you, care for you. I'll fuck you every day."

"Artem. Please."

Her begging undoes me.

"You're going to be my wife." I groan as I sink just the head of my cock into her.

She lets out a sound of surprise and pleasure and perhaps a bit of pain too. A shuddering moan with a hint of squeak. She's so wet, but did I do that too fast for my virgin girl?

"Yes." The word is panted out. "I want to be your wife."

"It's going to feel good," I promise her, easing out and pushing in the same inch, slower this time, careful. No further. Just a taste, enough to get her used to the stretch of my substantial girth. "Trust me."

"It does, it does. I..." And she tilts her hips, trying to get more.

"Uh-uh." I draw back, even as my cock is begging me to take everything my innocent girl is offering.

"Now."

"I will. I will as soon as you relax."

"Stop teasing me!"

In answer I give her the smallest thrust in and out, still barely inside her, stretching open her entrance. "Like this, kisa?"

She sobs with frustration.

“Or do you need more?”

“More!” She scrabbles at my back. “More. Please.”

“Mm.” I grin at how desperate she is. That is true magic. I thought I was insane, but we’re mad together, the ideal fit. “More of your future husband’s cock?”

“Yes.”

“Say it. I need to hear the words.”

“Please?” She keens, and I take pity, grabbing her thigh and easing it up mine. My good girl wraps it around my hips, opening herself to me.

“Not the right words.” I ease a little deeper and she gasps.

“Artem, that’s...” Whatever she was going to say is forgotten as I give her more shallow thrusts, sliding over her clit before slipping into her.

“Whose is this pussy, Lina? Who do you belong to?”

“Yours,” she sobs, moving with me, finding my rhythm without a single missing beat. “I’m yours. I love you, I love you.”

“Good girl.” Possessive glee fires in my chest and I ram all the way home. The hard thrust draws a cry from her and a deep grunt of contentment from me. “I love you too. I love you so very much.”

I push her more firmly into the wall, driving into her and she meets me every time. Fuck, she’s a sex kitten. So beautifully responsive. I reach down, cramming my hand between our bodies to find her clit, and stroke.

“You feel amazing. So tight and wet. You’re my perfect virgin wife-to-be. Come on my cock, Lina.”

I press just a little harder and then, as I instructed, she’s gripping my length as she comes, the sensation rippling over me, as sweet as if it were my own.

Breaking off our kiss, I keep up the firm slide of my body into hers, both because I need it and I think she does too because with every thrust she shudders with pleasure.

“I loved you coming on my tongue. But this way, on my cock, I get to watch your pretty face. It’s even better.” I love the feel of her, clenching on the most sensitive part of me as she pulses again and again, sobbing and shaking. And she’s beautiful as she comes, utterly gorgeous, those fathomless eyes closed, overcome.

“Good girl,” I say as her climax ebbs away. “So good. Now you’re going to take my seed and get bred.”

LINA

My rational brain knew Artem was huge. I had coffee with this man every weekday morning for a year. I've looked at what he's packing. Of course I noticed.

What I did not know was how he would feel inside of me, and holding me. His muscled, tattooed bulk protects me in a way I can't explain. I'm filled to bursting. I'm smothered by him, pressed into the wall, sandwiched between immovable objects.

And I want more.

Even as I float back to earth after a life-changing orgasm, I need this again. I crave seeing him come, lose control. I want my deadly mafia boss to be unable to hold himself aloof, to wreck him like he has me. It's just the two of us in this locked office lined with shelves of books and dark windows, and I love him so damn much, I'm never letting him go. He'll be lucky if I allow him to leave the house after all that's happened.

"Lina," he breathes, grabbing my arse and holding me to him, remaining firmly and deliciously wedged inside of me as he carries my not-inconsiderable weight as though I were a doll. He pushes past the doors I ran through, and takes me back to the bedroom we started in, settling me gently onto the bed and covering me with his body.

I have so many conflicting urges. I can't wait to see his naked body, I still need to see all his tattoos, but I love how he's so desperate to fuck me that we're both still fully clothed.

So when he braces his forearms either side of my head and pins me with his cock and his hips as he rolls into me, I grip his shoulders and dig my heels into his buttocks, urging him on, faster and deeper as pleasure spins from my core.

“Come inside me,” I say before I’ve processed the thought.

He said something about breeding me, and I’m desperate for that. I need to tie him to me in every way, even if that’s probably not needed. I have a feeling Artem will never let me out of his sight again.

“You want that?” he grinds the words out, a rumble of sound.

“So much.” I want to feel him unravel. “Pound into me. Take everything and more.”

He groans.

“I mean it.”

“Fuck. Little kisa, are you trying to make me rut you into the mattress? Give you friction burns? Bruises?”

“Yes.” I want his marks and to wake up and know this wasn’t a dream because there’s physical evidence in the form of every pinprick of hurt that amplifies the pleasure. “All of that.”

“I’ll come inside you, and I won’t let that come out. I swear, if you’re not pregnant after a week, I will dedicate myself to fucking you every two hours each day until you can’t walk. I’ll make sure you’re pregnant, then I’ll look after you, and our children. You have my ring on your finger.”

I’d forgotten about that. The beautiful sapphire that he gave me.

“Marry me.” He thrusts and it’s like he’s invaded me and drawing out all these sensations I didn’t realise I could have. Sparking, spinning, bubbling pleasure radiates out from where he’s stroking into me. “Marry me.”

I grip him even harder.

“Say yes, Lina. You’re going to be my wife.”

“Yes. Yes, always yes.” I’d beg for it, he doesn’t need to ask. I’d crawl on my hands and knees across broken glass and fire if I could be his wife afterwards. If this dream where he is making me feel so good, impaling me on his cock, would never end.

I thought, having used my fingers, that I kinda knew what sex would be like.

I didn’t.

It’s so much better. He’s hot, and smooth, and unlike the fateful night that he discovered me touching myself, there is absolutely no way he’s missing the spot. He’s also everywhere, above me, in me. It’s not just my pussy, it’s a whole-body experience. His skin is warm and soft as a silk-covered rock left in the sun and only enhanced by his rough stubble that scrapes at my cheek as he kisses me. It’s all so different from using a toy. He’s reverent and disrespectful at the same time, using my body and worshipping it.

And his words.

His words melt me. He tells me over and over again how I’m his good girl, and tight and perfect. How he’ll want me every morning and every night until eternity. He tells me he loves me, and fucking loves me, and fucking loves me so much, more than life itself and he’d do anything for me. How he can’t wait for us to be married and for me to carry his baby. For us to have as many children as I want and that he’ll protect and cherish us all. Me, our kids. Our *family*.

And all I do is whimper and listen and try to get him even closer. Like I could have him so deep in me I don’t know where he ends, and I begin.

I’ve never had a real family, or someone who loves me without restraint or condition. And Artem does, I know it for certain. He’s obsessed, a little crazy, but earlier today he gave me a gun and told me that what I wanted was more important than his life.

If that's not love, I don't want whatever tepid thing love is. I want Artem.

With every thrust sparks of pleasure shower through me. It's like I'm a firework, lit by his every movement. It's sweet and sharp, and though I teased him, no toy could be as perfect as he is. He's stuffing me overfull, pushing at the edges of what I can take and stretching me further than I ever thought possible. I love it as he hits the limit of me, so deep inside it's as though he's thrusting up to my heart.

"You have to come again," Artem demands. "Can you do that for me, kisa?"

My brain is stuttering. I can't speak. Come again?

Artem growls.

I'm filled with him and it's heaven but—

Then I'm empty.

"No!"

"Yes." Artem shoves me up the bed and buries his head between my thighs, licking me like a man possessed.

It's a shock. Having him inside me was delicious, tingling, and sweet, but this is insistent. He's telling me with his mouth that I'm his and I have to do as he says, even if that's coming when I think I'm finished.

He threatened punishment for my disobedience in not keeping myself safe, as he instructed. This is it.

The echo of his cock is still in my pussy, and he's giving me no space for anything but extreme pleasure, dragging me up the mountain, sucking my clit.

I writhe, and he clamps down on my thighs, holding me down firmly.

"Be a good girl for me," he says, and the words are muffled because he doesn't let up. His tongue is too much, too intense. Then he tosses me off the top of the cliff, and I'm flying. I sob and thrash. I cry out.

"That's it," he purrs.

While I'm still coming, he pulls me forward and thrusts back inside me in one smooth stroke. Another pulse of orgasm takes me, even stronger now.

"I love you so much." He grabs my hair and holds me in place. "You're my world."

I've never felt anything like this as he kisses my mouth. I can taste myself, and he's prolonging my pleasure well beyond the point of sanity.

"I'm going to breed you."

"Please," I beg. "Sir."

His silver irises are dark with emotion as he shudders above me, never letting go as he fills me with his seed in pulse after pulse. I watch each moment of his orgasm ravenously. Every rolling, heated shake of his body as he empties into me. He's gorgeous like this.

My future husband. The man who'll be the father of my children. My love. And I know beyond doubt that he loves me too.

EPILOGUE

ARTEM

9 years later

I place the bouquet of flowers onto the table and look at the table critically, tweak the petals and put one of the hardback books upright to show off the gilded edges. I like the display treats to be just right when Lina has a book launch.

“Dad, it’s fine. Mum will love it whatever,” Mila says, coming up beside me and leaning her head against my arm.

“Morning malyshuka.” I turn and kiss the top of her head, which she accepts with a grumble. She’s wearing cartoon pyjamas and pouting. Not a morning person, our daughter. Grumpy, just like her father.

I can’t believe that she reaches almost to my bicep now.

Every year I swear the kids can’t get any bigger, I can’t get any greyer, Lina can’t be any more beautiful, and I can’t be any prouder of my talented wife.

Every year I’m wrong.

But probably Mila is right. It’s not how I’ve arranged the flowers and books and champagne and chocolates. It’s what they represent: ten books published, after nine years together. It’s a remarkable feat, especially given we also have two children and a mafia empire to run.

“Can you get Alexi down?” I ask Mila, who rolls her eyes and pads off back upstairs to find her brother.

Our five-year-old will be awake, he takes after me that way. But he's probably plugged into whatever game—animal living? Is that what it's called?—he likes at the moment. Prone to be obsessive, my boy is going to be a top-notch leader of Mayfair. Mila is more interested in following in Lina's footsteps as a writer. I'm not sold on journalism, personally. Too many opportunities for my daughter to poke her nose in where it's not wanted, and start a mafia war.

But I'll save that worry for another ten years' time, when she's eighteen, not eight.

In the meantime, both the kids know the drill. Book launch days are special. I like to have all the family together to celebrate my wife's achievements.

I look over at the breakfast table, where there are all of Lina and the kids' favourites. Fruit salad, pan au chocolate, croissants, Danish pastries, and cereal for Alexi.

Checking everything is in place, I prepare coffee for Lina and me. On normal mornings, she makes the coffee, just as she used to when we met. But she taught me to use the machine, and while I'm not as good at it as her, I make a decent espresso.

As I finish making cappuccino for my wife, a pair of arms wrap around my waist and a familiar rose scent meets my nose, above the coffee.

Lina presses her cheek into the dip of my spine. "Thank you."

"I'm so proud of you." I turn, pulling her close and kissing her. "You've done amazingly."

She's soft and sweet in my arms, wearing a silk dress already, her black hair falling around her shoulders. My cock starts to respond, hardening. She's so gorgeous, and I still want her constantly. I know she's off for a lazy lunch with Anwyn and her other friends to continue the tenth book anniversary celebrations, and has dressed up for that. I have to work. I wonder if we have time to quickly have a personal celebration...

“Happy launch day!” Mila and Alexi burst into the kitchen and hug us both, gripping Lina’s back and my hip.

“Thank you!” Lina breaks off our kiss with a soft groan of disappointment.

Oh children. They have such perfect timing. But I can’t help but laugh and hook an arm around them both to squeeze them too.

“Mum, did you see?” Alexi demands. “You have a gold book!”

“I know, it’s called gilded edges.” We break up the group hug to admire Lina’s book. Something about dragons, though I admit I haven’t read this one yet. I surreptitiously rearrange myself so my erection is covered. That’s just for Lina. No one else.

“And your dad is very naughty,” Lina finishes, as she shows the book to the kids. “As I think that’s real gold.”

“Of course it is.”

“You’re ridiculously indulgent.” She smiles up at me. “You always made launch days so special. Shall we have breakfast, then I need to spend a bit of time on social media. My reader group will be excitedly tagging me in everything.”

Darn. No chance of dragging her to bed then.

“Dad,” Alexi says as we sit down to eat. “Why does only Mum get special treatment for her celebrations?”

I sip my espresso and raise one eyebrow. “The party we had for your end-of-year report cards wasn’t a celebration?”

“But—” Alexi has his mouth full of cereal now.

“Yes,” Mila interrupts, pinning me with her pale bluey-green eyes. They’re a mix of mine and Lina’s. “But what about *yours*? At work and stuff?”

Well, when Daddy has made a particularly lucrative illegal deal, Mummy gives Daddy a celebration blow job.

The kids don’t know the full extent of what I do. They have a vague sense that it’s dangerous and I run several

companies. That's enough for a few more years at least.

My eyes meet Lina's, and her smirk is so downright naughty that my cock throbs. It's a damn good thing we're all sitting at the table.

"You're right, Alexi. Your dad deserves more celebrations," Lina says, blinking innocently.

"Don't worry about me," I assure the kids, both of whom have wrinkles in their brows thinking about this perceived injustice.

"Why don't we have a party for Dad tomorrow morning?" Lina suggests. "You two can plan it with Galina's help."

Mila and Alexi are immediately enthralled with this idea, chattering together about what they should scheme.

"And I'll give you a gift in the *very* early morning," Lina adds under her breath, for my ears only.

"I'll hold you to that," I reply, as though I don't get it every day. I still love a five AM wake-up call with Lina. The coffee is later now, but those early hours of the day remain ours alone.

"A promise is a promise, husband. We have a lot to celebrate." And her smile is so happy my heart is too big for my chest, threatening to burst out of my ribcage.

Later tonight, or as I wake. I can't wait to discover what my gorgeous wife has in mind.

Want more Artem and Lina? [Get the Bonus Story straight into your inbox.](#)

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THANKS

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INSTALOVE BY EVIE ROSE

Mafia Boss Marriage

Owned by her Enemy

I didn't expect the ruthless new kingpin—an older man, gorgeous and hard—to extract such a price for a ceasefire: an arranged marriage.

Kingpin's Baby

I beg the Kingpin for help... And he offers marriage.

Grumpy Bosses

Older Hotter Grumpier

My billionaire boss catches me reading when I should be working. And the punishment...?

Everyone is Watching

His Public Claim

My innocence is up for auction, sold to the highest bidder.

Marrying the Boss

Baby Proposal

My boss walked in on me buying "magic juice" online... And now he's demanding to be my baby's daddy!

London Mafia Bosses

Captured by the Mafia Boss

I might be an innocent runaway, but I'm at my friend's funeral to avenge her murder by the mafia boss: King.

Taken by the Kingpin

Tall, dark, older and dangerous, I shouldn't want him.

I thought my mafia connections were in the past, and I was alone. But powerful mafia boss Sebastian Laurent hasn't forgotten me.

Stolen by the Mafia King

I didn't know he has been watching me all this time.

I had a plan to escape. Everything is going perfectly at my wedding rehearsal dinner until *he* turns up.

Caught by the Kingpin

The kingpin growls a warning that I shouldn't try his patience by attempting to escape.

There's no way I'm staying as his little prisoner.

Claimed by the Mobster

I'm in love with my ex-boyfriend's dad: a dangerous and powerful mafia boss twice my age.

Snatched by the Bratva

I have an excruciating crush on this man who comes into the coffee shop. Every day. He's older, gorgeous, perfectly dressed. He has a Russian accent and silver

eyes.

Kidnapped by the Mafia Boss

I locked myself in the bathroom when my date pulled out a knife. Then a tall dark rescuer crashed through the door... and kidnapped me.

Filthy Scottish Kingpins

Forbidden Appeal

He's older and rich, and my teenage crush re-surfaces as I beg the former kingpin to help me escape a mafia arranged marriage. He stares at me like I'm a temptress he wants to banish, but we're snowed in at his Scottish castle.

Captive Desires

I was sent to kill him, but he's captured me, and I'm at his mercy. He says he'll let me go if I beg him to take his...

CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE BY EVIE ROSE WRITING AS EVE PENDLE

Secrets of Wildbrook

[Her Nemesis until 5pm](#)

He's grumpy, she's sunshine. Workplace rivals are about to get snowed in together.
And there's only one bed.

[Her Fake Date Until Midnight](#)

He's hot. Rich. Domineering. And grumpy.
She's kind, trapped, and soon to be broke.

[Her Grumpy Neighbour until Halloween](#)

He's gorgeous but grumpy
She's conspicuous, cheerful, and in a lot of trouble

[Her Boss until Christmas](#)

She can't stand him, but his offer is too tempting
He's a cynical billionaire with too many secrets