



*fractured*

**DYNASTY**

PENELOPE BLACK

# FRACTURED DYNASTY

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## A FIVE FAMILIES NOVELLA

PENELOPE BLACK

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*for my husband,*

*“I’m a soldier, Adriana.”*

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# PLAYLIST

“Boris” by Lo-Fang

“Appointments” by Julien Baker

“Looking Too Closely” by Fink

“Cosmic Love” by Florence + The Machine

“Don’t Forget About Me” by CLOVES

“Petrichor” by Keaton Henson

“Big Light” by Houses

“Flume” by Lotte Kestner

“The Choir” by Morly

“Michael” by Gem Club

“To Build A Home” by The Cinematic Orchestra

“Wicked Game” by Daisy Gray



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Please note that Fractured Dynasty is a dark romance novella and it has some darker themes some readers may find triggering.

Please message me if you have any questions:

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Happy reading!

# PROLOGUE

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MATTEO

“OH, good, you’re all here. Listen, the apartment is ready, so we’re going to start moving today.” I pitch my voice louder as I walk down the hallway of our rented apartment. It’s been fine for a temporary space, but I fucking hate how far away Cherry’s room is from mine. There are only two bedrooms on this side of the apartment and three on the other end. Before I could claim seniority, Leo challenged us to a game of rock paper scissors, and Cherry’s eyes lit up in excitement.

One of these days I might have to learn to say no to her. I scoff and roll my eyes at myself before the thought even fully forms. I don’t think I’ll ever say no to her.

“Uh, brother, how many bedrooms does this new place have?” Rafe yells from inside her bathroom, but I’m distracted by the sight in front of me.

I lean my shoulder against the doorframe and let myself drink in the sight of her. It’s moments like this where I feel gratitude unlike anything I’ve ever felt before.

My girl is tangled in her soft-mint-colored sheets, her perfect body on display for all of us. We’re all moths to her

flame, and the brighter she burns, the closer we swarm her. The usual pinch of jealousy doesn't prick as quickly—or as harshly. A fact, I'm sure, doesn't go unnoticed by her.

I roll my eyes at my brother, but there's no real heat in my annoyance. "I already told you, this place isn't big enough for a movie theatre."

"Hey, how come no one told me we're hanging out in Maddie's room?" Leo comes up behind me and stops at the end of the bed, his gaze glued to our red-haired goddess.

"Does the new place have six bedrooms? Because I think we're going to need it."

It takes a few moments of the collective silence for me to clue in. Cherry had hypnotized me with all that smooth skin on display, each dip and flare of her perfect body enticing me to shed the restrictive fabric of my clothes and join her.

Movement from the corner of my eye captures my attention. Rafe waggles something in the air, pinched between his thumb and index finger.

"Oh shit," I murmur on an exhale. Is that what I think it is? I can't hear anything over the thumping of my heart, it kick-starts the adrenaline that floods my system.

The four of us look from one to the other, sharing so much more than a glance. It feels like we're swearing-in at the round table, all of us feeling the weight of what exactly that piece of plastic represents. As one, we turn our gazes to her.

It's all I can do to stand there and watch as she runs a hand over her lower abdomen, a small smile gracing her lips. "Surprise."

My heart stops at her confirmation. I stare at the love of my life with something akin to awe sliding over me, seeping

into the cracks in my black heart. I feel the pressure behind my eyes as they widen.

Her eyes, a soft blue the color of a cloudless sky on a sunny day, glisten as she looks at each of us and sinks her teeth into her bottom lip. “I know it’s a surprise, and I understand if you don’t want—”

“Stop. Not another word, Maddie.” Dante cuts off her sentence and my view as he lowers himself onto the bed. He leans on his elbows as he slides his hands into her hair by her temples. She reaches up to hold onto his wrists, and I get a front-row seat to their connection.

It’s not that I didn’t know they had one. I mean, fuck, he was willing to die for her—by her hand, no less—just to spare her. And I knew he was infatuated with her, but I’ve never witnessed them quite like this.

He eases his forehead against hers, whispering something too low for me to hear over the pounding in my ears.

A baby.

A baby in the middle of a war.

Panic seizes my heart, like yards of barbed wire wrapping around the patchwork organ and squeezing it tighter and tighter.

“Alright, old man, give our girl some room, yeah?” Leo taps Dante’s shoulder.

Dante pulls back, bringing Cherry with him. The sheet slides down to pool on her lap. He slides his lips across her forehead and steps back. I get a flash of her teary-eyed smile before my younger brother’s back shields her from view once more.

That's fine. I'm in the middle of a goddamn panic attack, so it's better if she doesn't see me like this. Sweat prickles my brow as my chest heaves with the need to take in more air.

Leo kneels on the floor in between her legs.

"A baby," Leo whispers. I hear the awe in his voice, and I imagine his face lit up with wonder like it used to when he was a little boy on Christmas morning.

She runs her fingers through his hair. "Mm-hmm."

"Goddamn. We're having a baby." His last word ends on a laugh, and that sparks a laugh from Maddie too. He leans his forehead against her chest as his arms wrap around her.

Rafe steps forward, stopping just to the right of Leo. Cherry tips her chin to hold his gaze, her fingers never stopping their slow glide in Leo's hair. "Are you sure, Raven?"

She bites her bottom lip again and nods twice, the movement slow and confident. I watch my brother struggle for a moment, his muscles practically vibrating, and relief hits me like a shot of vodka. I'm not the only one who's freaking the fuck out about things.

Cherry pulls her hands from Leo's hair, but his hands are slow to slide from her. He takes his time, letting his fingertips trail her thighs as he pulls back. Before he stands up, he kisses her.

Rafe steps forward again and extends his hand. She slides her palm into his, and then she's swept into a bone-crushing embrace. The sheet gets caught between their bodies, creating a minty-green toga around her waist, but she doesn't seem to mind as she lets out this noise between a sob and a laugh.

His head is tucked into her neck, their quiet conversation background noise to the ringing in my ears.

How can I protect a baby when I can't even protect my woman from men like my father?

Self-loathing coats me like a slick of oil. I'm lost, swirling around in the dredges of my soul when suddenly, a pair of striking blue eyes fill my vision.

The love of my life reaches us and palms my cheek. The scratch of my stubble against her soft fingers pricks at my senses. She pushes onto her toes and brushes her lips across mine. "It's alright, Matteo. I know you'll come back for me."

Her touch, her words—her love shifts the very molecules inside my heart, moving them around until they click into place. I reach behind my head and grab the collar of my black tee. She drops her hand, so I can tug it off with one pull. I straighten it out and slip it over her head. No one questions me as I slip each of her arms through my shirt, the possessive part of me growling in approval as it falls to the middle of her thighs.

"I'll always find you, Cherry." I slip my palm under the shirt and cradle the spot her hand was when she dropped her surprise. "Both of you."



# MATTEO

I TUG the cuffs of my crisp black button-down shirt, exposing a half-inch underneath my suit coat. I shrug my shoulders and roll my neck from side to side. I fucking loathe being in my father's house.

My house now, I guess.

It's a goddamn monstrosity masquerading as a house—much like my father, actually.

“You good?”

I look to the left and see Dante, my best friend and my unofficial underboss, stare at me with his brow raised. I bristle at his insinuation that I'm not okay—even though I'm fucking *not*. I exhale and look forward again, keeping my gaze trained on the long driveway.

“I can't decide if this was a good idea. Calling a meeting with the five families while she's here.”

He steps next to me, and for a moment, we both stare out the window. The sprawling estate looks immaculate from a distance. Years of extensive landscaping and upkeep kept the gardens flourishing. “It's the decision we all made together.”

I grind my molars at his reminder that we're a fucking democracy now. I spent my entire life shouldering the weight



of tough decisions—carrying the debilitating guilt when shit went sideways. Ever since she literally barreled into me and subsequently captured the eyes *and hearts* of my best friend and both of my brothers, we abolished the monarchy.

If I didn't love her so much, I might send them all away.

“The families—including our men—are getting antsy without an official boss. It's time to settle the debt your father made. We've gone too long without one.” Dante raises his hand up, stopping the retort on my tongue. “No one's challenging your authority, but until it's made official, we're vulnerable. And I don't need to remind you why that's a very bad idea for us.”

My fingers curl into my palms at the reminder of why we're already in a precarious situation. My girl dropped a bomb on us last week like it was nothing, conveniently leaving out a positive pregnancy test on the bathroom counter for any of us to stumble upon.

And that's exactly what Rafe did.

I swear to god, I had a mini heart attack when she casually smiled at all of us and said, “Surprise.” To say we were shocked would be the understatement of the century. Dante was the first to move, jumping on the bed and smoothing out the tension radiating from her. As if our baby would ever be something other than a fucking miracle. I know my reaction didn't help, but shock is a fucked-up thing, and it took me a few minutes to work through the panic that seized me.

But it's been a week, and I'm still jumpy as fuck. I keep expecting the other shoe to drop—another ambush or retaliation of a war my father started because he was fucked-up or bored or who knows why. There's a repeated pattern in

my life: get something good, lose it. Whether by force or circumstance.

Cherry changed all that.

Just thinking of all the shit my father started and left us to clean up drives me to violence. “I want to bring that motherfucker back to life just so I can kill him with my bare hands.” The words slip through my lips on a growl. My anger feels explosive inside of me, clawing at my ribs in desperation to be free.

“You’d have to get in line,” Dante snaps, picking up the same train of thought. It’s one of the reasons we’ve been best friends since we could walk.

I turn back on the window and face my father’s office. My fingers drum a staccato rhythm on his heavy wooden desk at the thought. Guess Dante’s not technically *the* number two—the underboss of the Rossi family—yet. Something I intend to change, and one of the driving forces behind the meeting today: it’s time to officially promote Dante.

“You both need to stop assuming that I don’t have just as much vengeance in my blood as either of you,” Leo snaps.

I cut a glance at my youngest brother sprawled in the leather armchair in the corner of the room. I don’t say anything as I look him over, not for the tenth time since we got back from Las Vegas and everything went to shit at the warehouse. I’m not sure what I’m expecting to find—it’s not like Leo will suddenly have a neon sign flashing *help, I’m fucked-up*.

But he’s gotta be, right?

I arch a brow and try to look at him through an objective, critical lens. He seems fine—happy, even—except for right

now. But that's not exactly noteworthy. None of us are exactly thrilled to be back inside these walls.

Leo narrows his eyes on me, picking up on my scrutiny. "Stop staring at me like that. I'm fine. And if I'm ever not fine, I'll tell someone. I'm not a fucking robot like *some* people in this family." He huffs. "Dante's the one that you should be glaring at. He was in that warehouse for *hours* with Dad."

Dante doesn't so much as flinch at the casual mention of our father torturing him. He lifts a shoulder. "It really wasn't that bad. I've been in this life for far longer than you, kid."

"And who's fault is that, huh?"

I nod, accepting Leo's ire. There's isn't much fire in it though.

I can't go back in time, and I don't even know if I would, given the chance. I don't promise that I won't keep side-eyeing him, looking for some indication that he's not okay. We can't afford to be masking our shit and then going off half-cocked at the slightest provocation because we didn't process it properly. It's not just about us anymore—we have Cherry to think of.

And the baby.

My chest gets tight at even the whisper of a thought of something touching either one of them because of us. Our secrets and omissions—this life.

I suppose I should take my own advice and work through this mess with my brother. Leo and Cherry already forgave Rafe—Dante too. But I'm still struggling.

Intellectually, I understand why he didn't tell me. But the rest of me can't stop the harsh sting of betrayal.

Every day that I spend with her, she softens my edges a little. Not enough for me to lose the hardness this life demands, but enough for me to realize that I crave that balance with her.

I fucking need her and for a haunting second in time, I thought she was going to be ripped away from me.

Memories assault my senses, and I grind my molars at the ache her absence causes.

“She should be in here, with us. It doesn’t feel right to separate like this.” I shove my hands in my pockets just to give myself an outlet for the frenetic energy thrumming in my veins.

Rafe and Cherry are somewhere in this monstrosity of a house, but with fifteen thousand square feet of space to explore, they could be anywhere.

I’m twitchy as fuck. I’m not so oblivious that I don’t recognize the out of character behavior, but I’m going to do fuck-all about it. I know I won’t be able to settle my nerves until she’s within sight again.

Dante nods. “Women aren’t allowed in the family meetings, Matteo. We have to trust him at some point. Her too.”

I cut him a glare, so quick my neck spasms. “You know I trust her. And part of me still trusts him. And I’m going to change that stupid fucking rule as soon as I can.”

Dante’s patience seem endless, even today. He nods again, this time slower. “I do. And you know you can’t walk into the meeting today like this, so you need to get your shit together. We’ve been working toward this for years, so time to rely on that famous Rossi charm.”

Leo leans forward, the front two legs of the cherry oak and leather chair slamming to the floor with a resounding thud. “I’m surprised you’re so goddamn cordial, considering you’re the one who suffered most from Rafe’s bullshit plan.”

“Stop bringing up old shit, kid. We’ve already forgiven Rafe, and now we’re moving on, so don’t rile your brother up before we have to sit down with the remaining five families.”

“If you say so.” He shoots me a knowing look.

I’m equally annoyed as I am proud. Dante’s right about one thing, I haven’t been giving Leo enough credit. He’s capable of way more than he’s given. But a little reminder never hurt, right? “Don’t let her out of your sight. I mean it, Leo. If she pees, you’re in the bathroom with her, got it?”

Leo’s with Cherry while Dante’s with me in the meeting, like usual. Rafe is taking point in the security room. There are enough cameras on this house to cover almost every inch of it. I don’t trust another fucking ambush, so he’s our first line of defense.

“I got it, man. We’ll see you when you’re done.” He pushes out of the leather chair, crosses the room, and leaves with a chin lift to Dante.

I glance at my watch and follow the same path as my brother. “They should be waiting for us. Let’s get this over with.”

“That’s the spirit.” It’s as close as Dante gets to smiling before a meeting.

I walk into the conference-style room on the first floor of my father’s estate ten minutes before the meeting starts. Tardiness was one of those things he took as a personal offense, and over the years, it morphed into my every day.

When the remaining five families show up today will determine their level of respect.

Standing at the head of the dark pine table, I catch Dante's eye and give him a subtle nod. He unbuttons his suit coat and unlocks the holster so he has quicker access to his favorite gun.

I fold my arms across my chest, the material of my Tom Ford suit pulling taut. I watch the men filter in the room from underneath my lowered brows. I don't have to look behind me to know that Dante is on edge. I can feel his frenetic energy swelling inside the small confines of this room.

I see him shift in my peripheral vision, and I clench my teeth at his outward display of unease. I know he's just as torn on the idea of Cherry in the same house as these men as I am, but we didn't have much of a choice.

Besides, if I'm going to lead them and start implementing some changes, then they're going to have to get used to her at some point.

Or the idea of her, at least.

Anthony Romano is the last to walk in. He takes a seat, and his son, Tony, trails behind him. I nod to Dominic Marino, and he gets up to close the glass French doors.

I stare at each of the men around the table, looking for cracks in their facade, just one small wrinkle in their defenses. Sweat dotting their hairline, twitching fingers, shifting eyes—anything to help me get a read on who's going to be a problem.

The remaining heads of the five families all sit with straight backs in their seats, their expressions fairly neutral.

After another thirty seconds, I uncross my arms, unbutton my jacket and sit down in the chair pulled out to my right. Dante remains standing behind me and slightly to the right, the perfect vantage point in this room.

It's technically a formal dining room with a square twenty-seater table taking up most of the space in the center of the room. A brassy glass chandelier hangs directly over the middle of the heavy wood table.

Like so many of the rooms in this godforsaken house, it's dark. Dark wood furniture, dark fixtures on the walls and ceiling, and in some rooms, like this one, dark-patterned wallpaper on the walls.

It feels like a fucking mausoleum.

I would just as soon burn it to the ground as I would use it, but since we're all about appearances right now, here we are.

"Gentlemen. Thank you for coming."

"Why are we here, Matteo?" Anthony Romano asks.

"And what are we doing about retribution for Angelo? It's been weeks. Letting it go without bloodshed sends a message that we can't afford right now," Victor Gallo says.

"The attacks on our properties and businesses are changing, but they're not stopping. What are we doing to mitigate the damages?" Dominic Marino asks.

"What about the empty seats? Who's going to step up now that the entire Vitale line is gone?" Gallo asks.

His question isn't entirely altruistic. The man has two daughters and no heir. Four months ago, they were trying to edge him out of his seat at the table.

I lean back and let them voice their questions without saying anything. If they get rattled by my silence, then so be it. It only takes a few minutes, but eventually the questions stop.

I look each man in the eye, including their seconds. “Angelo Rossi is dead and buried. A tragic situation of wrong place, wrong time during these times of conflict.”

Marino snorts. “Is that what we’re calling it now—a *conflict*?”

I lift my brow and look at him before scanning his sons, flanking him. I never had any issue with Dominic or his kids, but I know if I don’t establish respect as the boss right now, I’ll never get it from them. And then, we could have a mutiny.

“Do I need to remind you who I am? And before you answer that question, I want you to think very carefully about your answer.”

The threat doesn’t go unnoticed by anyone. The air shifts then, a tangible feeling sliding over my skin and sparking against my nerve endings. My adrenaline kicks in, a steady pump into my veins as I brace.

“I’m the motherfucking boss.”

Dante shifts behind me, and I know without looking that he’s acutely aware of everyone in this room.

Anthony Romano clears his throat. “With all due respect, you can’t be the boss until you’re married. It’s in the foundation of the five families.”





# MADDIE

I SLIDE my finger along the spines of the books on the shelf. It reminds me a little of one of my favorite Disney movies. There has to be hundreds of stories in here, thousands of hours of adventure.

It's subtle, the shift in the air that precedes one of my men stepping into my space. It's not a predetermined amount of feet, more like some sort of cosmic circumference. My soul recognizes each of theirs in a way that I'm not sure my mind has caught up to yet.

He's quiet, so I don't call him out yet. I like the weight of his gaze along my back as I stare at the muted spines.

He shifts, a soft scuff against the hardwood floor that runs throughout most of the house. "Would you believe me if I told you I read all of these?"

I look over my shoulder and see Leo leaning against the doorjamb, arms folded across his chest and one ankle crossed over the other. His face looks soft, and if I didn't witness everything firsthand, I would never know that he was kidnapped, drugged, and dragged two thousand miles across the country just a couple months ago.

"You don't have to babysit me, you know. No one knows I'm here, remember?"

“I’m not. I’m spending time with my girl. Is that such a bad thing?”

I shake my head a little, a smile teasing the corners of my mouth. He’s too smooth for his own good sometimes. “Did you read them?”

He smirks, this sinful little smile before he pushes off the wall. In three long strides, he’s behind me. His crisp citrus scent surrounds me, and contentment settles into my muscles.

My nerves feel permanently frayed, the ends flapping in an arctic breeze and sending my heart skipping a beat too often. The only time I ever seem to calm down is when one of my men are near. It’s great in theory, but it’s not plausible. Not forever.

Though if you asked any one of them, they’d vehemently disagree. But as much as I love them—and I do—I’ll need my own space. Eventually.

An area where I can start to breathe without the persistent anxiety that creeps up on me whenever I think about some of the big life changes.

My cousin, Lainey, thinks I’m struggling with some post-traumatic stress coupled with the idea that our family is growing. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t nervous about having a baby.

I had always planned on having kids, so it wasn’t that, more of the self-crippling doubt in my ability as a mother, mostly due to my own mother’s shitty parenting. Intellectually, I know that I need to work on moving through her betrayal, but emotionally, I’m just not ready to unpack it yet. How do you even begin to process that betrayal?

*Hey, Mom, don't worry about the fact that you lied to me my entire life, and even when caught in the lie, still backed my biological father who's probably an actual psychopath. See you at Christmas.*

I mentally roll my eyes at myself and sigh. That's a problem for another day.

"Hey, where'd you go?" His palm presses against my waist, a gentle coax.

"Hmm? Nowhere, just daydreaming. So, did you read all these?" I smile, a soft twist of my lips that he can't even see from behind me.

"Nah, not all of them. But I did read this one a few years ago." His fingertips from his other hand skim the tops of the spines in front of me, stopping on a dark blue book with gold lettering.

"Romeo and Juliet?" I don't bother hiding the wide grin at the vision of a young Leo curled up with a Shakespearean tragedy.

"Mm-hmm. Here, look." He tugs on the spine, but instead of the book sliding out, it stays at a forty-five-degree angle. A mechanical hum fills the air, and Leo slides his palm across my stomach. He steps backward, bringing me with him.

"What is that?"

"Just wait." He tugs us back another step as the sound of gears shifting fills the air.

My mouth falls open as I stare at an entire floor-to-ceiling bookcase that hinges open from one end. The other end slides into the room, toward us, and a triangle of soft yellow light spills onto the abstract black-and-gray rug.

“What is this?” Wonder fills my voice as I take a step toward it. I cut a glance over my shoulder at him. “I’m not about to be trapped inside your walls, right?”

He chuckles and steps into me, nudging me forward with a hand on my lower back. “You watch too many true crime documentaries, Maddie.”

I tip my chin up and watch as the bookcase stops perpendicular to the wall. “No such thing, Leo.”

It opens up to reveal a small hallway. Small wrought-iron lights are every few feet along the walls. The air smells stale, like dust and mildly damp. The walls are drywall, and the floor is surprisingly clean for being inside of a wall.

“It’s an escape route. Whoever my parents bought the house from had this framed-out and installed when they built the house.”

I trail my fingers along the wall. It’s cool but not nearly as dirty as I imagined a hallway *within* a wall would be. “Like a panic room?”

I feel his shoulder lift in a half shrug. “Sort of. More like a way for someone to get out of the house if it fell under attack. There are a couple other entry points from different rooms all over the estate, and they all kind of converge a couple different ways, too.”

My head tilts to the side as we shuffle forward. “So there are several exits then?”

“Feel like exploring, baby?” There’s a hitch to his voice, a thread of excitement pushing his words out quicker.

I flash him a grin over my shoulder. “Always, Leo.”

He laces our fingers together and gently tugs me forward with a matching grin.

Light shines from underneath a door to the right of the secret passageway. Excitement bubbles up inside my chest like Pop Rocks on my tongue. The thrill of adventure thrums in tune with the beat of my heart.

I pitch my voice low and mock-yell. “Hey, you guys.”

Leo’s shoulders brush against mine in a silent chuckle. “Okay, Chester Copperpot.”

My lips twist to the side in a smirk and I straighten my spine. I’m quietly preening that he picked up on my *Goonies* reference right away. It’s a classic kids action movie—a comfort movie, really.

“Come on, you can’t tell me this doesn’t remind you a little bit of the *Goonies*? We slipped into the walls instead of the underground, and the Fratellis are the rest of the five families.”

Leo laughs, his laughter puffing against my hair. He slides his palm up my spine and settles it at the nape of my neck. He gently massages my tight muscles while his amusement floats around like the dust mites in the air.

“So, on a scale of one to terrified, how worried should I be that Matteo is inviting everyone over to your dad’s house?”

He skims his lips along the top of my hair. “You think I’d let you be here if I thought you’d be in danger—*both* of you?” He reaches over and slides his big, warm palm against my lower belly. There isn’t a bump or anything outward to show for the life growing inside of me yet, but I know it’s there. And the ultrasound photo tucked into my purse is a welcome reminder.

And it's not like any of them forgot either. I caught all of them passing around baby books over breakfast a few days ago. The four of them stood around the island, drinking espresso and coffee with one hand and turning the pages of *What to Expect When You're Expecting* with the other was almost too much for me to handle. It may or may not have brought a tear to my eye. I can't even blame the surging hormones for that one.

It was such a sweet juxtaposition to see my very alpha, very masculine men devour these pastel pink and purple texts about babies. Just another sword to the patriarchy bullshit that permeates our society like crazy.

His fingertips dance along my shirt, eliciting goosebumps through the soft cotton.

"I'm not worried about me. I'm worried about Matteo. What are the other families going to do when he implements all his changes? People don't like change, Leo. Especially if it means they might take a hit to their bottom line."

He clicks his tongue. "Aye, but Matteo's smart. He's been planning this shit for years—him and Dante. And you know Rafe's been playing his own angles for years too. Trust them."





# MADDIE

I STOP AND TURN, his hand dislodging from my neck as we face one another. Trust is a complicated emotion and one I'm not all that adept at offering. But like with so many other things, with them, it seems easy. I smooth my hands up his chest, taking my time to feel his muscles that twitch under my touch. "I trust all of you. It's just the other people I don't trust."

He nods, his expression drawn and serious as he tucks a lock of hair behind my ear. His gaze bounces around my face before settling. "I understand, baby. But they've already laid the groundwork for a lot of things. This isn't an ambush, and shit won't change overnight. But it's a good start—for all of us. It's time we bring the Rossis into the black, yeah?"

My head tilts to the side as I try to decipher what he means. "Like profit?"

"Above board profit. We've been underground for a long time, and it's time to make some strides to change that—legally. Not everything, for obvious reasons. But we know for a fact that Dad was trying to sell skin for years—and he was doing a lot of shady shit out of the port that the Brotherhood controls." He pauses and bites the inside of his cheek. "There

are rumors that he started trafficking, too. But none of that bullshit flies under Matteo. He'll clean up the five families."

I nibble the corner of my lip, my thoughts straying to the women that were lost all because of the greed of men. "What about those people then? What happens when the Brotherhood or whoever finds them now?"

He shrugs. "I don't know. It's not our territory, but the Brotherhood has a strict no-skin policy, so I'm sure they're on top of it. Rush is a decent guy from what I know. He'll make sure they're taken care of."

I blow out a breath, the air puffing my cheeks out. "Okay. Okay. Remind me of the plan again?"

He smooths his palms up my neck and settles them in my hair, grounding me. "Matteo called a meeting here, the remaining members of the five families will join him and Dante with their seconds only. They're in one of the dining rooms, the one with the huge table. Rafe is slinking around here providing backup, should they need it—not that anyone thinks they will. The biggest opposition to Matteo being boss was taken out while we were in Vegas."

"And you're watching me."

A smile hooks the corner of his mouth upward in a grin that's far too charming for our current location. "Watching is relative, baby. I'm spending time with my two best girls."

It takes me a moment to get his implication, but when I do, I roll my eyes so hard I swear I hear them rattle in the back of my skull. I scoff and playfully swat at his chest. "You don't know that. We won't know for months."

He flashes me a wide grin before he steps impossibly closer to me, trapping my hands against his chest. He lowers

his face until his nose just grazes mine. “Ah, but having a mini you running around here sounds like heaven to me.”

Warmth settles over my head and falls down onto my shoulders and down my hands. I push onto my toes and press my lips against his smiling mouth. “I know what you’re doing, you know.”

He grins without stepping back, his lips brushing against mine with each syllable. “I don’t know what you mean. I’m just going on a *Goonie*-worthy adventure with my girl.”

“Uh huh, sure.” I smile around the words and then seal my mouth to his. He doesn’t hesitate to take control of the kiss, quickly turning a tease into something far more heated.

His grip on the back of my neck angles my head to the side, a perfect position for him to deepen the kiss. Our tongues languidly twist and turn, our mouths expressing our feelings for one another more accurately than words right now.

We break apart, breathless and holding each other’s gaze. Something passes between us, something warm and tender. If I was a betting woman, it feels like our stars aligned and welded together.

No, not welded.

Tethered.

We feel tethered, in a completely wonderful and permanent way.

The tips of his fingers massage the back of my skull, releasing some of the tension I didn’t realize I was carrying. A low groan slips out as my eyelids lower halfway.

“Are you ready to continue exploring or do you want to go hang out back in the rec room?”

His tone is playful, but he doesn't stop his ministrations on my tension, so I don't bother answering him other than a noncommittal noise from the back of my throat.

His fingers stretch outward, gently applying pressure and the feeling sends a shiver down my spine.

The light flickers next to us, a big enough dip in electricity for a dome of shadows to swallow us for a split second. My eyes snap open and I grab onto Leo.

Adrenaline floods my veins as my heartbeat kicks into double-time. The light dips again, but it doesn't go out.

“What the hell was that?” My words come out a garbled hiss, my gaze lasered-in on the offending scone.

“It's nothing. It's a big house, and sometimes the lights dim when the furnace or air conditioner kick on.” He runs a hand down my spine in a sweeping, soothing motion.

My fingers curl, bunching the fabric of his shirt into my fist. “What if the power goes out though?”

“We've got an absurd amount of generators tied to this place. The power isn't going out—not in here, at least. This is Dad's escape route, remember? There's no way he'd risk botching his chance at survival for something as trivial as electricity. The lights in here are on the priority backup generator.”

His words do little to assuage my unease. “Still, let's get moving. I don't want to be in here *if* the power goes out.”

He cocks his head to the side. “I thought Mary was the one afraid of the dark.”

I tug on my bottom lip with my teeth. “She is. But now my mind is spinning with all the terrible possibilities of being

stuck in a tunnel in the dark.”

Leo kisses the tip of my nose as I side-eye the sconces like they’ve personally insulted me. “We really need to talk about your obsession with true crime docs, baby.”

I huff and tilt my head up for a proper kiss. I don’t care that we just got done making out. It’s been at least three minutes since I felt his lips on mine, and it feels like too long.

Our lips slide against each other in a brief kiss. He pulls away a moment later, and links our hands together. With a smirk, he tugs my hand and jerks his head toward the opposite way from where we came. “Let’s go, Copperpot. Treasure awaits.”

I roll my lips inward and shuffle forward, content to let him lead. “Wait. Do you really have treasure hidden in here?”

Leo looks over his shoulder at me, his smile the definition of mischievous. “Honestly, I wouldn’t be surprised if Dad has some shit buried or hidden in these tunnels.”

The desire to discover some buried treasure hums in my veins. It’s like I’m living in my very own action movie—only this one is less danger and mayhem like Las Vegas and more treasure hunting and sneaking kisses.

Time loses all meaning when Leo and I explore the hidden space between the rooms. My hair won’t stop standing on end, but there’s also a little zing of excitement that warms my blood. This feels more akin to an action movie than my real life, but I guess I could say that about a lot of things that happened these last few months.

All the best parts feel like they were plucked from feel-good movies and romcoms. And all the bad parts, well, I try not to think of those.

My footsteps slow as we approach another one of those cutout peep holes. So far, we've seen a handful of them carved into the walls, allowing us glimpses inside various rooms. I wonder what it looks like from inside the room. Are the peep holes situated over the eyes of some renaissance-style painting? If someone looked hard enough, would they see me watching?

It's a theory I'm keen to test when I step up to the little fishbowl glass orbs carved into the wall. Murmurs can be heard through the wall, too low for me to make much of anything out.

"Not a sound, baby. I think these halls will hold our sound, but I don't want to test that theory just yet." Leo's lips brush my ear with each word. It's barely given breath, it's so quiet.

We're pressed against the wall, my eyes peering through a sort of peep hole. It has a wide lens, so it offers a broader view of the room. Which is good, because there's an enormous table situated dead center. I can't quite see everyone seated, but I can see Matteo sitting at the head and Dante standing sentry behind him.

I press my ear against the wall, right next to the peephole and if I strain my hearing, I can just make out the murmurs of the men inside the room. What I hear sends a chill down my spine.



# MADDIE

“I THINK WE SHOULD GET MARRIED.”

The clink of cutlery scraping against plates stops at my statement. I fork a bite of Matteo’s pasta into my mouth and take my time savoring the garlic and oregano on my tongue. In another life, he could’ve been a world-renowned chef.

I look around at each of my men and smile before twirling another forkful of pasta. It takes everything inside of me not to smirk or outright laugh at their expressions. They’ve all shut it down, their reaction so swift, it would be alarming if I didn’t know it’s a conditioned response. Even Leo’s normally open face is shuttered.

Aries’s gaze feels like an afternoon in the Florida sun—scorching and intense. Dante’s face might as well be carved from stone, and if I didn’t see his eyes crinkle ever so slightly in the corner, I might’ve been worried about his reaction.

I take it back. Matteo’s expression is akin to him jumping up and going streaking. He stares at me all wide eyed with his fork frozen halfway to his mouth. He looks like an adorable goldfish, his lips parting and closing a few times. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him so stunned, and considering I dropped some pretty big news last week, that’s saying something.



A tiny part of me that I would deny if ever asked, sort of revels in the fact that I even *can* shock these men. They've seen and done things that would make even the most criminal of men cower.

Matteo recovers quickly and leans forward, placing his fork down. "If this is about the baby, Cherry—"

I cut my gaze to Matteo. "It's not."

Aries slides his palm on my leg underneath the table, his long fingers reaching either side of my lower thigh in a gentle squeeze. "Talk to me, Raven."

I set my fork down and give Aries my attention, praying he can read my determination and love in my gaze. I always thought it was odd, bullshit even, every time I read about a couple falling in love and seeing affection and love shine from each other's eyes. And if I hadn't met them, I might still feel the same way.

But it's not bullshit.

Every time Aries stares at me with his borderline obsessive intensity or Leo with his persistent mischief. Dante with his quiet confidence and Matteo with his unadulterated possessiveness.

They express it differently, but each of them look at me as if they're a meadow of sunflowers and I'm their sun. Their devotion seeps into every little thing they do, and it's one of the reasons I'm not nearly as scared about bringing another little life into this world. I know with every fiber of my bruised and healing soul that their devotion will expand to include this baby—our child.

"I think we should get married because I love you." I look at each of them, pausing so they can read my sincerity. "Each

of you. Irrevocably and without shame. This is just a natural extension of that.”

No one responds, and I think, not for the first time, I’ve stunned them. I reach for my water glass and bring it to my lips.

“Plus, I know you’ll never be boss if you’re not married.” I shrug and take a sip.

Matteo cuts a look at Leo, but he’s too busy staring at me with his bright green gaze. “You sly little fox.”

I let the smirk I’ve been holding back slip free and take another sip before I set it back down. “Leo and I did some ... exploring today. Did you know that there are tunnels between the walls in your father’s house?”

“You took her between the walls?” Matteo’s eyebrows fly to his hairline. He makes it sound like some sort of sex club, which honestly sounds like a voyeur’s paradise. Especially for my man who enjoys to watch.

“Yep. But don’t worry, big brother, we only popped in on your meeting for a few minutes. Then we moved on to some more pressing matters.” He arches a brow and smirks like the cat that got the canary—or the cream in this case.

In fact, the more *pressing matters* consisted of Leo leading me to the other side of the house through their magic tunnel system. We stumbled out into one of the rarely used rooms that had no other use but to look pretty—his words, not mine.

Leo laid me out on an emerald green velvet chaise lounge, stripped me bare, and licked, sucked, and nipped until I came all over his face. Twice. My cheeks heat just thinking about the noises he made as he absolutely feasted on me just hours earlier.

I clear my throat and take another sip, letting the crisp water cool me down. I hold Matteo's gaze as I offer another gentle reminder that this is a partnership. "You should've told me."

Matteo's gaze scans my face for a moment, his mouth pursed. He glances at the others for a moment before bringing his gaze back to mine. "When we get married, Cherry, it's not going to be because some patriarchal bullshit rules demand it of us. It's going to be because I can't stand the thought of walking this earth without you as my wife for a second longer."

My breaths labor as I struggle to take in oxygen after Matteo's surprising admission. It's not that I didn't know he loved me—he's made his feelings very clear. But this feels like more than the three little words.

This—this feels like a vow from his lips, branding itself on my soul.

"It's because the thought of waking up a single day without seeing your beautiful face next to me feels so goddamn painful, I'd rather die than ever be parted from you."

My head jerks at Dante's confession. My lips part and I feel my eyes widen as I look at him. My ever-calm boyfriend stares right back at me, a rare glimpse of vulnerability on his slack jaw and open gaze. "What?"

Dante doesn't answer me, but his deep gaze bares his seriousness.

"Because every day without you as my wife feels like a thousand bites from a herd of centipedes."

A barking sort of laugh breaks through my sniffles. "But you hate centipedes, Leo."

His plush lips tip up in the corner as he flashes me a serious sort of smile. “I do. And I’d endure it for an eternity just to call you mine.”

“Because I’ve been asleep for years, and the moment I saw you in the middle of a crowded ballroom, I woke up.” Aries flexes his fingers on my thigh, his thumb smoothing back and forth with each word of his truth spilling from his lips. “I didn’t think it was possible to be loved by someone as perfect as—”

“I’m not perfect, Aries.” I sniff as a tear rolls down my cheek.

“You are, Raven. To me—and to them—you’re perfect. The way you love me is selfless and you do it so effortlessly, like you were born to love me.”

“To love all of us,” Matteo says.

“Jesus,” I say through a watery laugh. “Did you guys rehearse this or something?”

“We’ve had conversations about our relationship, but no, this wasn’t planned,” Leo answers. “But I’m all-in, baby. So if this is what you really want, and it’s not a bid to appease the five families ...” He trails off, his eyebrows arching toward his hair.

I run my fingers underneath my eyes, catching the tears pooling there and blink a few times to get their faces back in focus. “Well, I always kind of thought we’d tie the knot four ways, but if speeding up our timeline keeps”—I run my hand over my lower stomach—“all of us safe, then it seems like a simple answer to me. I love you. All of you. And that’s not going to change.”

“So, we’re getting married?” Leo’s enthusiasm is infectious, the air around us shimmering with excitement.

“Uhm, yes?” I chuckle, my fingers tingling with happiness.

Aries moves his palm from my thigh to cover my hand on my stomach and leans toward me. “Let’s get married, Raven.”

A small tilt of the head, and our lips just barely graze. “Yeah?”

His fingers slide between mine and he murmurs against my lips. “You’re everything good in my life. I’d be a fool not to.”

I seal my lips to his, a lone tear slipping down my cheek and mingling with our kiss. Aries takes his time as he kisses me with all the love he’s professing, exploring my mouth with every swipe of his tongue.

A throat clears, and after the third time, I pull back.

My eyes are slow to open, lust thick on my tongue but my thoughts are clear. The plan I’ve been thinking about for a few hours now. “Let’s go to Las Vegas. It’s not safe to do it here right now, and we don’t have the luxury of time.”

“I don’t think that’s much safer,” Dante says.

I lift a shoulder and face the table again. “Maybe not before, but now? With my new ... brothers? I think it’ll work. I’ll reach out to Romeo after dinner.”

Matteo drums his fingers on the tabletop. “Take the night, Cherry. If you’re sure—you’re really sure—we’ll do it your way.” He inclines his head to me for a moment. “And you’re right. If I were married, then I’d already be boss. And once it’s established, I can make or remake the rules, yeah?”

I nod a few times in understanding. He wants to give me time to change my mind. He’s offering me the opportunity to

read him clearer right now. But I don't need tonight to think about anything other than flights to Las Vegas. "Alright. Tomorrow, we plan our wedding."



## TOMMASO SANTORINI

I PINCH the dart between my index finger and my thumb and close one eye. I'm not sure why people close an eye when they're trying to *see* a target. Doesn't make any sense to me, but I'm trying to win here, so fuck it. A flick of the wrist, and the dart sails through the air. It misses my intended target by a few inches, but the accompanying grunt soothes some of my disappointment.

“Jesus, fuck. You almost took my eye out that time.”

I narrow my gaze at the man spread out in front of me. He's so low-level that I normally wouldn't even bother with him. We have plenty of trustworthy men to handle our own special brand of information gathering.

But if I had to spend another morning trapped in that apartment with my brother, I was going to kill someone. Better it be this guy than him.

Plus, I signed the three of us up for a dart competition at one of our hotels next month, and I need to practice. Nic's going to lose his shit when he hears I booked his entire weekend at The Golden Goose for this tournament.

“Practice makes perfect, man. I'm confident that in another thirty minutes, I'll be able to hit your eye.”



“You’re fucking crazy, man!” Eric Miften yells. He’s one of our soldiers—well, he *was* one of our soldiers.

My left eye tics like it always does when someone throws out baseless blanket statements like that. I squint, trying to line up my shot. Now I’m fucking determined to hit my bullseye—literally.

“If you can’t keep your mouth shut, I’ll have to tape it shut for you.”

The psychological aspects of my *information gathering* sessions always yield the best results with the least amount of physicality. I don’t need to pull a dude’s fingernails off to get him to spill his secrets. I mean, I have done that, but that’s because that’s how my father did it. He called it family tradition. Like how fucked up is that? Apparently, his father, the late Alfred Santorini, was a real hardass that way, taught Dad all kinds of shit that he then passed on to me.

Dad doesn’t do much in the way of torture these days. He prefers to laze on his throne and watch his worker ants do all the dirty work.

Just another one of the many things my father does in the name of tradition.

“I know you didn’t set it up, just like I know that you gave them passage into the city when you know we have a strict leash on all the narcotics here.”

He stares at me through one swollen eye, his fear pungent in one of the hotel rooms we use for this sort of chat. “I swear I didn’t have a choice.”

I’m growing bored with his refusal to tell me. We both know he knows more than he’s letting on. He hasn’t had the

proper motivation yet. I sigh and prepare to dangle the proverbial carrot.

“Just tell me who ordered the hit, Eric, and then you can go.”

Hope brightens his gaze as he shifts his weight from foot to foot. “You’ll let me go?”

I raise another dart and get into the proper stance. “I need the name.” I count to three inside my head and let the dart fly, purposely wide this time. The dart shoots through the air and cuts through his hair, embedding itself in the drywall right next to his ear.

Eric’s trembles are visible from this far away. Good. That asshole should be scared. The quicker he gives me the name, the quicker I can get the fuck out of here. I’ve got shit to do today. Like watch the ‘80s movie marathon.

“Okay, okay. It was Marco. Marco Stockton.”

I keep my expression blank while I process this bit of information. Seems like the road captain of our neighborhood MC needs a refresher on our agreement. The Hell’s Vipers MC has been more trouble than they’re worth, if you ask me.

A spike of irritation slashes through me when my phone vibrates in my pocket. I dig it out and see my little brother’s name. I debate on letting it go to voicemail for a moment, but guilt kicks in and my finger taps the accept button before I talk myself out of it.

“Yeah?”

“You still having a chat with that one guy?” Romeo, asks.

I rock back on my heels and side-eye Eric. “Sure am. Just got some interesting news too.”

“Good. It’ll have to wait though. Our sister just called. She’s coming Sunday. Got herself a date with Elvis.”

I cock my head to the side. “She called you?”

There’s a pause.

“Yeah. Is that a problem?”

Annoyance pokes underneath my skin and I resist the need to bristle. “Why didn’t she call Nic? Or me?”

Rome scoffs. “Have you even reached out to her—or Mary?” He doesn’t give me time to respond. “Think about it from her perspective, man. She doesn’t know us.”

“Apparently, she knows you well enough to call you and invite you to her *big day*.” I don’t even care how fucking petulant I sound right now. I’m a fucking great brother, and she should be calling me too.

“The invite was for all of us, asshole.”

“Huh. No shit?”

“No shit, brother. So we’re meeting at Lulu’s Café in an hour. We need a plan to get Dad out of town for a few days. You in?”

A chance to stick it to my dad and see my baby sister? It’s a no-brainer. “I’ll see you there.”

Rome hangs up, and I tap the end of my phone against my chin. Lulu’s is only ten minutes away, which means I have a solid thirty with our boy Eric here.

“So you’ll let me go?”

The sound of Eric’s pleading voice pulls my focus back to him.

“What? Of course not, dick-for-brains. It’s just one of those things people say, ya know? Fuck knows where it came from. Probably the movies, eh? They always portray us as womanizing douchebags with no morals.” I scoff.

With measured steps, I eliminate the space between us and pluck the steel-tipped darts from the asshole in front of me. One hard yank, and they’re free with only a little bit of blood and tissue and drywall on the ends. I turn around and find my spot again, lining the tip of my sneaker with the slash I drew on the carpet earlier. I settle my weight and mime the throwing movement.

“You ever see *Die Hard*?”

“N-n-no.”

I pause and straighten up. “Really? It’s been out for decades.”

Eric lifts his shoulders as much as his starfish position will allow him. “I don’t see many movies.”

“Shame. John McClane is a good guy who has to do bad shit sometimes.” I expel a breath and shift my focus to Eric. “I can’t let you go now, you know that right?”

He starts blubbering at this point, nonsensical words dribbling from his mouth alongside the spit.

Ugh, fucking gross. I sigh, my tolerance for him nonexistent, my mind already wandering to my sister coming back to town. I wonder if Mary will join Madison too?

“P-please, Mr. Santorini, I have a family.”

His pleas don’t endear him to me, in fact, they just dump gasoline on the steadily burning flame of rage. “You have a family? *I* have a fucking family, Eric. And when you peddle

your low-grade drugs in my fucking city, you endanger them.”  
I’m near shouting by the end of my little outburst. I rake my  
hands through my hair, tugging on the ends as I release a  
breath.

It’s fine. I’m fine.

Eric won’t be but he sealed his fate the moment he flipped  
for the fucking MC.



# MADDIE

I FLIP the last page of my book and sigh. I always love a happy ending, and this girl got that in the literal sense. Romance novels have been my escape for years—the angstier and spicier, the better. But ever since my cousin ended up with three boyfriends, I started picking up more reverse harem romances.

And now that I have my very own collection of men? It's my new favorite trope.

We're in this sort of limbo ever since the marriage bomb over pasta a few nights ago. I feel restless, anxious about too many moving parts. But I know it's the right thing to do—for more than one reason.

Nerves about Las Vegas permeate everything I've done the last couple days, including even dampening my enjoyment of the book I just finished. Ever since I talked to Romeo, actually. He assured me that they'd come up with a conceivable plan to make sure Vito doesn't catch wind of it. The last thing I want to do is see him.

But I am excited to marry the loves of my life.

We all agreed that on paper, Matteo and I are husband and wife. After all, we need him to ascend to his rightful position as the head of the five families. But in my heart? They'll all be

my husbands. That's why we're having four marriage ceremonies, officiated by Elvis himself.

Well, a very good Elvis impersonator if you don't believe the conspiracy theory that he's alive and well, marrying people in sunny Las Vegas for fun.

I push off the couch with one thing on my mind: finding at least one of my men. It's Friday afternoon, so I know Matteo and Dante are around here somewhere. They make it a point to be home early on Fridays so we can spend time together. Sometimes it's one-on-one, and sometimes it's two or three of my boyfriends. My favorite nights are the ones where we're all together, laughing and just generally enjoying one another's company.

I follow the smell of roasted chicken and vegetables into the kitchen, expecting to find my handsome husband-to-be with his sleeves rolled up behind the island.

Matteo isn't there, but the warming drawer in the oven is lit up.

I head toward the other side of the apartment. "Matteo? Dante?"

"Back here, Cherry."

I follow the sound of Matteo's voice and find him leaning against the wall next to the gray quilted headboard of my bed. I call it mine, but truthfully, it feels like *ours*. I haven't spent a night alone in months—not since the warehouse. After the sixth time reaching for Dante in the middle of the night, covered in sweat and panic racing in my veins, he started going to bed next to me. Thankfully, the bed's big enough that when three of us go to sleep together, there's plenty of room. I



have a sneaking suspicion that Dante had this bed custom made.

Matteo's shirtless, his tattoos on display. They're a physical representation of his story, his journey in life, and I'm eager to see what he adds.

"What's going on?" I stop just in front of him, my gaze zeroed in on the way his shoulder muscles flex and bulge. The last couple chapters in the book I just read are too fresh in my mind, and I'm imagining all the ways we can make use of our time before dinner.

"We thought we could spend some time together." Matteo pushes off the wall and reaches out to finger a lock of my hair.

"We?" My confusion doesn't last long. Dante steps out of the bathroom looking like sin incarnate.

They're both shirtless, dressed only in athletic shorts. My greedy eyes roll down their bodies, and I have to curb the urge to pinch myself to make sure I'm not dreaming. Again.

I bite my lip at their insinuation. I've messed around with Matteo and Dante together before, but it's been too long since we played.

"We thought you could use some extra attention today," Dante murmurs.

My lids are heavy already, lust thick in my veins. I look at Matteo from underneath my lashes. "Both of you?"

"Yeah, Cherry, both of us." His lids are low as he positively smolders. It's the only way I can describe the look on his face.

"We go at your pace, baby girl."

It's an echo of the same thing he told me in the shower in Las Vegas. It feels like a million years ago since that day, but any thoughts of anything else are thrown out the window when my lust perks up at the idea of having both of them. We flirted with the idea of the three of us, but I wasn't ready then.

I'm more than ready now.

A soft flush rolls over me and I'm nodding, too quick to be anything but eager, my gaze flicking between the two of them. I even overlook their matching sinful smirks, too focused on the way their broad chests take up so much more space without a shirt. Their six packs are unreal, like muscles crafted from rockface.

Dante stalks across the room and stops two inches from me. Anticipation saturates the air, the feeling sweet and urgent. I lick my lips and savor this moment, the one where the three of us are holding tight to our restraint. Dante's in front of me, his gaze tracking every swipe of my tongue across my bottom lip, and I decide that I'm going to push them both. Just a little bit.

Their heat surrounds me, a comforting weight, but it's not enough. I need them to both be okay with this. It's one thing to *say* they're okay with it, but to *act* on it is something else.

And I'm not sure if Matteo is ready.

He's always been able to read me in an instant, and this is no exception. He erases the space between us, and my fingers tingle with the desire to touch him.

But I don't. Not yet.

I shift from foot to foot, a small movement, but it seemed to ignite something in Matteo. He moves behind me and presses against my back, his cock already hard and pressing

into my ass. I hold in the moan—just barely. He slides his warm palm on my waist, his fingers spreading wide. His bare skin warms my own through the thin cotton of my tank top.

“Are you ready for us to share you, Cherry?” His breath rolls over the sensitive skin on my neck, behind my ear. A shiver skates down my spine, and I arch my back, my ass pressing into him. He traces my arm with the barest touch, from my shoulder to the tips of my fingers. “Are you ready to take my cock in that pretty little mouth of yours while Dante slides into that perfect pussy?”

I shudder at his dirty words whispered in my ear. He’s torturing me with the light pressure, teasing me as his other hand smooths over the curve of my ass. He stops his descent at the hem of my shorts. They’re comfortable and soft and most importantly, small as hell. Matteo’s fingers graze the swell of my ass cheek as he toys with the hem.

“Or maybe you want me to explore tonight, hm?”

His insinuation freezes the air in my lungs as arousal hits me so hard, I feel my pussy actually clench in excitement. My breath comes back in big heaping inhalations, my chest rising and falling.

“I think she wants to play,” Dante murmurs.

Matteo’s fingers leave my arm and fly to my neck. He holds me almost reverently, his thumb brushing back and forth along my jaw as he tips my head back. “Are you ready to play with us, Cherry?” His voice is low, this perfect, deep rumble that I can feel vibrating in my veins.

My eyelids fall halfway closed, and I lean my head back on Matteo’s chest as I hold Dante’s gaze. “Yes. I want to fuck you. Both of you.”

Dante smirks, dragging his bottom lip in his mouth for a moment. His gaze flicks over my shoulder, a silent conversation over in five seconds. His smile ticks up on one side, and he leans down to capture my mouth with his own. My lips part immediately, and our tongues wage war on one another. Matteo tilts my head to one side and Dante deepens the kiss like some coordinated movement. I don't have time to think about it, because in the next moment, Dante palms my thigh and brings it up around his waist, I feel his cock.

His very hard, very large cock.

His gym shorts and my cotton ones are no match for the sheer size and determination of Dante's dick. He rolls his hips against mine, pushing my ass against Matteo's cock, and something inside of me short-circuits. My hips start swiveling on their own accord, a slow grind between both of them.

The temperature rises, and I'm desperate to lose the layers of clothing between us. It's not much, really. An easily remedied problem. I just made up my mind that my clothes have to go when Dante abruptly grabs my other thigh and hauls me off the ground. The tip of his cock presses against my clit, and with every roll of my hips, he nudges it.

I break away from his intoxicating mouth and pant, "More. I need more."

Matteo's hands join Dante's, and the three of us cross the room to the overstuffed loveseat in the corner of the room. Matteo sits down, and spreads his legs wide, leaving me to settle in the open space in front of him. Goosebumps tiptoe down my back in anticipation, my heartbeat pounding a rhythm that beats for them in my ears.

My brow dips for a moment when Dante remains standing. His cock strains the material of his shorts, nearly peeking out

of the waistband. With an almost excruciating slowness, Matteo slides his hand along the inside of my thigh until he grips my knee. He pulls my leg over his and repeats the same process with my other leg.

I gasp when I look at Dante, but he doesn't meet my gaze, too busy staring at my parted legs like he just found the holy grail.

"Trust us?" Matteo murmurs, his thumbs brushing soft strokes along the inside of my legs right above my knees.

Dante sinks to his knees in front of me, and I feel how wet I am against the tensed material of my panties.

"Yes, yes, yes." I'm practically chanting now.

"Lean back against me, Cherry, and let Dante taste you."

My back hits his front before the command even fully leaves his lips. Distantly, I hear his answering chuckle, but I'm too focused on Dante's face inches from my pussy to care.

Dante takes his time sliding his hands along the inside of my thighs, stopping when his thumbs reach that sensitive part where my hip and pelvis meet. The rough pads of his thumb slide underneath the hem of my thong and my heart is beating so hard and fast, I can feel the throbbing beat in my pussy. I wiggle my hips, not above begging to get him to touch me.

I feel hot and achy and slightly desperate for his touch.

He smirks at me, his eyes wide and glazed over as he glances at me before leaning in running his nose up my pussy. He takes a deep inhale. "You smell fucking delicious, baby girl."

I choke on my next inhale when he hooks a finger around the hem of my shorts and my thong and pulls them both to the

side in one fell swoop. I hear a stitch tearing, but at this point, I'd tear the offending pieces of cloth off of my body myself if it got his mouth on my pussy faster.

I look down and watch in fascination as Matteo's hand replaces Dante's, pulling my shorts to the side. Dante doesn't miss a beat and spreads me open further. "There she is. Look at that pretty little pussy, wet for us already."

His warm breath coasts over my sensitive skin, and I'm practically panting already.

"How does she taste?" Matteo asks.

Dante licks me from ass to clit in one long stroke, and I can't help squirming a little. He does it again and again, finally stopping to swirl his tongue around my clit. It's the perfect amount of pressure, and I can't stop the slow grind of my hips against his face.

"That's right, Cherry, fuck his face. Just like that, such a good girl."

Matteo's words of encouragement and Dante's talented tongue are too much. I'm climbing that peak too fast. "I—I'm going to come soon."

"Come on Dante's face. Show him how much you like it when he fucks you with his tongue."

Dante slides two fingers inside me and nips my clit at the same time, and I fucking detonate. My neck arches and my toes point as wave after wave of bliss roll over me. It consumes me in the best way possible, I'm floating somewhere above my body as I sink into the pleasure.



# MADDIE

I DESCEND BACK to earth at the sound of familiar voices.

“Bro, you couldn’t have waited for us?”

My head snaps forward but my eyes take a minute to focus on the image in front of me. Aries and Leo stand in the doorway, dressed similarly in black and gray gym shorts, respectively, and nothing else.

Dante looks over his shoulder, and I see my come glistening on his lips and chin in the soft light of the room. He makes no attempt to wipe it off or move from his perch between my legs. If anything, he antagonizes them in a totally uncharacteristic move. He looks right at them and licks me off of his lips. “Don’t be late next time.”

My brows dip low as I try to figure out what’s going on, and I glance up to see Leo rolls his eyes. “You fuckers told us the wrong time on purpose.”

“Did we?” Matteo’s voice is all faux innocence, and I’m not the only one who picks up on it.

I look at my quiet man, with his tattooed arms crossed over his impressive chest, trying to gauge his mood, but he’s too far away.



I shift in the chair a little, the cool air teasing my overheated skin. Tingles start to prick my nerves along my body as realization dawns. My breath hitches and my heart throbs double-time. “I feel like I walked into the set of a boy band music video or something. You’re all here, half-dressed. Is this ... it’s not just the two of you, it’s—”

“All of us,” Aries finishes for me.

I know I just had an orgasm, and it was incredible hot, but it’s like my body glitched and forgot all about that at the mention of having all of my men together like this.

Leo chuckles and crosses the room to stop right next to me. With a finger under my chin, he tips my head back. My hair brushes against Matteo’s five o’clock shadow, and I feel even more on display like this.

“Consider it an early birthday present, baby.”

I lick my lips, my heart now beating in my ears. “My birthday isn’t for like nine months.”

“Christmas, then,” Leo says with a grin.

“It’s September, Leo.”

“An early wedding present,” Matteo murmurs from behind me.

I open my mouth, a retort on my tongue, but Leo swoops in and grabs me around the waist. He lifts me up, and I wrap my legs around his waist as he slants his mouth across mine. Pleasure warms my chest at the way they’re moving as a unit. If Matteo wanted me on his lap still, he wouldn’t have let me go. A tiny thrill infuses my blood at the thought of Matteo curbing his possessiveness—at least long enough for me to fulfill a fantasy.

Leo lays me down on the bed, the brushed cotton sheets underneath me a sweet juxtaposition with Leo's hard body on top of me. His nose brushes mine as he combs back my hair. "Hi, baby."

The corners of my mouth curl up in a soft smile as my hands freely roam his body, sweeping over his broad shoulders and down over his biceps.

"Hi, Leo," I breathe out against his lips.

He takes his time placing soft kisses along my jaw and the corner of my mouth before he finally presses his lips to mine. It's tender and filled with so much more than the fast and quick lust I thought this experience would bring. He kisses me with the kind of restrained craving that I'm not used to experiencing from him. Our kisses deepen, and before long, my legs are around his waist, our hips slowly grinding in tandem. Every roll of his hips presses his hard cock against my sensitive clit.

"Leo, I want more."

He pulls back, his lips puffy from our kiss and his pupils blown wide with lust. His gaze scanning my face for a moment before his mouth curls into a smile. "As you wish, but first."

I don't have time to tease him for his movie quote, because he's off me in the next instant, peeling my shorts and wet panties down my legs. He helps me sit up and with a gentle nudge on my shoulder, turns me around. Aries stares at me from the other side of the bed, his expression intense and desperate.

Now I understand what Leo meant.

I kneel-walk across the comforter, the bed squeaking as I go. Even on my knees on the bed, our mouths just barely line up. After Matteo, it's Aries I worry about the most when it comes to sharing. His face is locked down tight, his jaw flexing as he stares at me. If it weren't for the fluttering pulse in his neck, I might think he's indifferent.

Curling my fingers underneath the hem of my tank top, I take it off and toss it to the floor. My soft bralette is the next thing to go, landing next to my tank top. Aries flexes his hands as he gives me a slow-once over, exhaling hard when he zeroes in on my tits. I'm so turned on right now, that the feeling of my own hands on my sensitive skin pricks at my arousal. I wouldn't be surprised if I'm slick all down my thighs by this point. I pluck my nipples, moaning low in my throat at the bite of pain.

There's rustling in the room and half-groans, but I don't take my gaze from my boyfriend. He just needs a little extra time before he feels comfortable with this, and luckily for him, I know just the thing.

I smooth my palms over Aries's chest, tracing the swirls and lines of his tattoos on his impressive chest. I take my time feeling every ridge and valley of his cut body as my exploration descends. His breath hitches when I pause right above his low-slung shorts.

Pulling my bottom lip into my mouth, I curl my fingers over the band of his shorts. The heat of his skin prickles the back of my fingers, so I swish them back and forth a few times before I slowly pull them down.

“Raven.”

My name is a plea as much as a warning on his lips. It only heightens my arousal though. Aries's cock springs free,

impossibly hard. I have to lean down a little to pull off his shorts completely, and I use the opportunity to run my lips over the head of his dick.

Aries sucks in a breath, the sound noisy and somehow still holding the same warning.

A fissure of trepidation punctures the wave of lust I'm coasting on. I'm a little nervous about Aries's cock fitting in my mouth, but I'm nothing if not an optimist.

I slide to my elbows, sitting back on my knees with my ass in the air. With one palm flat on the bed, I encircle his cock with my other hand, pumping him hard and quick, just like he likes. His thighs flex, and I do a one-eighty on my original plan to make him wait. I can't wait a second longer. I lower my head and take him in my mouth.

The groan that rumbles from his chest is the stuff of romance books. My thighs flex and shift, my own lust rising. He wraps my hair in his fist, winding it around his fingers. He doesn't force me or even guide my movements, he's just holding on. The dominant move sends another wave of lust in my bloodstream.

I don't know how much longer I can last. The urge to slide my fingers in-between my legs and circle my clit until I come rides me hard. No sooner than the thought crosses my consciousness, I feel the bed depress behind me.

"Ass up, baby," Leo says, his hands covering my hips.

Excitement explodes inside of me, sending wave after wave of little pleasure sparks ricocheting. I arch my back and spread my knees wider to balance better, never once letting Aries slip from my mouth.

Aries traces underneath my bottom lip and gently tugs his grip on my hair upward. I arch my neck and feel Leo's calming, sweeping strokes along my ass and thighs. He's touching me everywhere but where I'm growing desperate for him.

I look at Aries from underneath my lashes, and his expression sets me on fire.

Reverent hunger.

"That's it, Raven. You look so pretty with you lips stretched wide around my cock. So pretty and so perfect and so fucking *mine*."

I moan around him, his low words succeeding in turning me into a dripping mess. Aries groans again, a lower, drawn-out noise. And a moment later, Leo's hand finally covers my pussy, his fingers applying pressure to my clit. Not enough to come yet, but I already know I won't last long. They've worked me up into a dripping mess. I wiggle my hips and moan again.

"I think our girl likes your dirty words, Rafe. She's fucking *soaked*," Leo says as he lines up his cock with my core and slides in.

There's a moment of awe that flashes bright before my eyes. A white-hot pleasure that cancels all my other senses except touch. The feeling of Leo inside of my pussy while Aries's cock is practically down my throat.

In three more thrusts, Leo bottoms out. He smooths his hands over my hips, reaching around to skim my clit.

I'm exquisitely full, my senses on overload. Sweat dampens my skin, and my hair sticks to my neck. My muscles clench and flex, arch and stretch as I climb toward oblivion. I

hollow my cheeks and suck Aries's cock in earnest, quickening my pace. But Leo maintains his slow and easy glide, barely brushing my clit with his fingertips. A low groan splits the air a second before Aries's grip tightens on my hair. His hips start thrusting, and his cock thickens in my mouth.

He's going to come soon, and I want it all. I reach up and cup his balls in my hand, running my finger down the middle before pulling them taut—not enough to really hurt him, but enough to toe the line. His hips stutter, and I know I've got him. I repeat the motion, stilling my head and letting him fuck my face.

“Goddamn, Raven,” Aries groans as his hips still and he comes down my throat. He takes a step back, falling from my mouth and sinks to his knees. He crashes his mouth against mine, and there's something so incredibly hot about it that I find myself climbing that peak once more.

Leo's thrusts get harder, deepening those slow glides. Aries dominates our kiss, my body going into pleasure overload. It catches me by surprise, my orgasm overtaking me a second later. My pussy squeezes Leo's cock, and he comes seconds after I do.

I tear my mouth from Aries's and hang my head, panting like I just ran a goddamn marathon. I suppose sex with all four of my men could be considered a marathon of sorts.

“Holy shit,” I say between breaths.

“Holy shit is right, baby,” Leo leans over and place a kiss on the middle of my back.

He pulls out, and I roll over onto my back. My skin pricks with aftershocks and the air cools my sweat-dampened skin.

I blink and Matteo appears at the end of the bed, near my ankles. “How are you feeling, Cherry?”

“Like I’ve died and gone to heaven.”

His fingers encircle my ankle in a gentle hold as he smirks. “Let’s take a break, yeah?”

I glare at him, aware this is his way of giving me an out. “Sure, I’ll take a break on your face.”

He chuckles and lifts his chin to the left. “Alright, but first, I had another idea. Trust us?”

A soft smile spreads across my face. “Always.”

“Good girl,” he murmurs with a small smile. “You’re going to ride Dante, and I’m going to play.”

As wrung out as those orgasms made me feel, adrenaline flies through my body at his command. I feel like I blink and Dante’s laid out on my bed like a fucking all-you-can-eat buffet. His body is a work of art, and I’m happy to worship it for the rest of my life. My palms press against his chest, my legs on either side of his hips.

He’s balls-deep inside of me, and I’m ready to beg to get him to move. I roll my hips, and Dante grunts through a clenched jaw. “Easy, baby girl.”

But I’m not sure if I *can* go easy right now. That hot, achy feeling of desperate lust claws over me, demanding I take my pleasure from my man underneath me.

Each of my men are blessed by divine intervention, I’m sure of it.

Matteo nudges me toward Dante with a gentle touch to my shoulder. “Lean forward, Cherry. Remember, we can stop at any time.”

I stare into my boyfriend's dark eyes, the silver specks glowing this up close. I brush my lips across his and say, "I know. I'm ready."

Dante's hands settle on my hips. "Kiss me, Maddie."

We fall into each other, everything outside of the places our bodies touch fades away. Our mouths move slowly against one another, our tongues tangling almost languidly.

The cool feeling of liquid hitting my ass cheeks brings me back to present.

Matteo's warm palm covers my hip. "It'll warm up, just relax, Cherry. I've got you."

I unclench my muscles, the lube already warming up on my skin.

He swirls his fingers around and gathers it on the pads of his fingers. He trails up my ass cheek and settles on my ass. With soft sweeping strokes, he teases the sensitive skin there, circling it with barely-there touches.

Pleasure sparks, quick, hot bolts of arousal igniting inside my body. "That—that feels so good," I say on a moan, grinding as much as I can against Dante's dick. "Keep going."

Matteo continues to draw circles, around and around. The wet noises are a soundtrack to our desires. I shift just a little bit on Dante's dick, and the tip of Matteo's finger slips inside.

My pussy clenches at the foreign feeling. It feels so good and so different, my breath stalls in my lungs. Panting fills the room, a chorus to the euphoria I'm experiencing. I rock back a little, encouragement for Matteo to continue to play.

"Do you like that, Cherry?"



“Yes, yes, yes. Keep going, Matteo. Please.” I’m nodding against Dante’s lips, my words a broken mess. Sparks shoot behind my eyes, and I’m hunting for my next orgasm already. Dante rocks me against his cock with his hands on my hips, small swivels that send Matteo’s finger more firmly inside my ass.

I pull my mouth away from Dante’s and rest my forehead against the perfect place between his neck and shoulder, panting through the bite of pain and the promised pleasure.

“Fuck me with your finger, Matteo,” I murmur against Dante’s skin. “And make yourself come too. I want to hear you come with me.”

“Fucking hell, Cherry,” Matteo grunts.

I roll my forehead to the side and watch as he pulls his hand from my ass and wraps it around his cock. The combination of my arousal and lube coat his dick as he fists it tightly. His other hand resumes his ministrations, circling and circling my asshole. He slips his long digit inside and gently rocks it back and forth. And it’s too much.

The feeling of being so full, watching Matteo stroke his cock with his gaze lasered-in on his finger fucking my ass, and Dante’s cock filling my pussy.

I orgasm so hard, everything in my body clenches tight. I distantly hear and feel both Matteo and Dante come, one after the other, but I’m too busy flying high. I’m on some other earthly plane, catapulted out of the solar system with the tide of pleasure. It feels too good, I’m not sure if I’ll ever come back down.



## NICO SANTORINI

“TELL me again why we have to wait another half hour?”

I adjust my sleeves, making sure the cufflinks aren't smudged, and stare at my reflection in the mirror. “You know why, Tommy.”

My gaze flicks over my shoulder, and I narrow my eyes at my younger brother lounging on my new slate-gray plush couch. It's oversized and overstuffed and cost me a fucking fortune.

“If you damage my couch again, you're going to be replacing it this time.”

Tommy stops the game of toss-up he's playing with his favorite knife, catching it blade-first between his index finger and his thumb. “That wasn't my fault, and you know it. It was a freak accident.” He huffs, his eyes narrow in accusation. “And I told you I'd replace it.”

I refocus on my reflection and straighten my tie. “Yeah, well, I took care of it.”

“You're going to have to give up some control sometime, brother.”

My gaze jerks sharply to the side, but I don't turn around this time. I feel the vitriol on my tongue before it even passes

my lips. “You ready to finally shoulder some responsibility in this family?”

The snick of metal punctuates my harsh words, and I know I’ve pissed him off. I huff but say nothing as Tommy stalks from the room, shoulder-checking me as he rounds the end of my other L-shaped couch.

“Did you really have to antagonize him like that? You know he does more than his fair share for the family.” My youngest brother’s voice carries from the workspace he created in what used to be our dining room. “And the couch thing was an accident.”

I ignore his first point mostly because I don’t have a rebuttal. Tommy isn’t afraid of getting his hands dirty, and sometimes, I wonder if he prefers his own company over people.

“He set our fucking couch on fire, Rome—the six thousand dollar couch that I bought only two weeks beforehand.”

“Fuck off, Nic. It was a burn mark the size of a dime!” Tommy yells from somewhere deeper in the house.

He’s right, and at the time, it was nothing more than a minor inconvenience, but I’m feeling twitchy as fuck today.

We bought the penthouse together years ago, once we realized just how fucking crazy Dad is. Since Tommy and Rome had less than zero interest in furnishing the place with any sense of cohesiveness, I did it.

It’s a softened industrial aesthetic. Something about the clean lines and plenty of black, white, and gray color scheme soothes my brain, truly making it a safe space for me to unwind.

Finally satisfied with my reflection, I follow the sounds of the keyboard keys. Kid's a genius when it comes to the tech stuff—he started building facial recognition software before he could legally drive for Christ's sake.

The modern-style plush rug absorbs my footfalls, not that he would stop if he could hear me coming. When he gets immersed like this, he's near oblivious to Tommy and me. Now, if he were anywhere else, he'd never let himself stay in such a vulnerable situation. But our home—here, not the ostentatious mansion father calls home—is the one place that he can't touch.

Somewhere that all of us can unload the heavy burdens of being Vito Santorini's sons and be ourselves. Whatever the fuck that means.

I've been under his tutelage for so long, sometimes I worry that I'm going to wake up and not recognize myself in the mirror. The thought of me turning into my father haunts me.

I shake off the morose thoughts. There's no room for those today—I don't have time to do the shit I normally do to pull myself out of that spiral. We have to leave in thirty minutes to make it to the chapel.

With that thought pressing against me, I pitch my voice louder. "C'mon, man. We gotta go soon. I wouldn't put it past those assholes to lock us out if we're late."

I roll my eyes at Rome's lack of response. He's not even listening to me. Stopping in front of his four large monitors that shield my brother from view, I rap my knuckles on the blonde oak dining room table that serves as a massive desk. "Rome."

He jerks his head between the monitors and looks at me with wide eyes. “Yeah?”

“We’re out in thirty. I don’t want to be late.”

His gaze darts back to the screen. “Let me wrap this up.”

I tip my chin up and walk around the desk to look at his screens. All four of them are on—some of them have straight text on a black screen. “What’re you working on?”

He cuts his gaze back to the monitors before he starts closing browsers and other shit that looks more complicated than I have the desire to understand.

“Nothing, just fucking around until we have to go.” His response is quick enough that it grabs my attention. I cock my head to the side and look at him.

“Don’t sell yourself short, Rome. Tell Nic all about your little infatuation with the Wren.” Tommy strolls into the dining room with his hands shoved in the pockets of his suit pants, his charcoal blazer pulling taught across his chest. It looks familiar, but most of my wardrobe is suits, so they start to roll together sometimes.

“Wren?”

Rome sighs and hits a few more buttons. All the screens fade to black, and he pushes to stand. “Not a wren like a bird, but *the Wren* like a name or a persona. There’s finally a clue on their real identity.”

My brows dip low over my eyes. “Why does anyone care about who this person is?”

Rome’s brow arches as he looks at me. “There’s a group of people making a name for themselves in the underground, have been for years. This is the first time they’ve left a

tangible clue, so until now, no one's been able to source a single thing."

Tommy's head jerks back. "Not even you?"

Much to my surprise, Rome looks excited about the prospect of someone outsmarting him.

"Not even me—yet. But that's half the fun. I haven't had this good of a challenge in years. Not since I found Madison."

Our sister's name seems to flip on a lightbulb, and Rome walks around the table. "I'll let you guys know when I find him though."

"I thought you said you didn't know who it was?"

"I don't," he calls from the hallway. "But people this good usually end up being part of some high level military shit."

I look at Tommy who's been pretty quiet. He's got a goofy grin on his face, practically vibrating with excitement. "What am I missing?"

"I heard about this group of people. They're making big waves all over, so we should watch our back."

"What kind of waves?" I slide my hands into my pockets. The last thing we need is another enemy, but I'd rather have all the facts now than when I have a six-inch knife in my back.

He rocks back onto his heels. "Rome'll know more, but I heard assassinations and high value theft turned around quick in the underground market."

My mouth tips up into a smirk. "Maybe they'll do us a favor and one of them will take Dad out."

Tommy levels me with a look. "I told you I'll take care of it when you're ready to step up."

I take a step and clap a hand on his shoulder and wait for his gaze to hit mine. “And I told you, I’d never give you that burden.” I lift a shoulder and infect all the nonchalance I have into my next statement. “Besides, I’m in no hurry to become the boss. As long as Dad doesn’t start another war, we’re living pretty good these days.”

“You mean you’re not ready to settle down with whatever pawn Dad decides to marry you off to. Oh, excuse me, did I say *marry you off* like we’re in some fucking Jane Austen movie? I meant *secure a formidable union*.” Tommy impersonates Dad’s baritone with the last few words, and it’s so accurate it’s alarming.

He challenges me with an arched brow when I don’t respond right away. What’s there to say, anyway? He’s not wrong.

“You know that’s how it’s been for generations, and it’s not uncommon in our way of life. It’s part of the reason there’s been peace for so long.”

“Tell that to the cartel. Or the MC.” Rome snorts.

“Those assholes knew better than to try to route their corridor through Nevada to Canada. The MCs up north weren’t too pleased either. On that issue, we agreed.”

Tommy nods. “Right. Mutual end goals, which is what you can do without marrying some castaway from a family just to keep the illusive peace.”

“Devil’s advocate here, but technically, breaking the tradition and subsequently, the union, is justifiable cause for war,” Rome says.

“What the fuck do I care about a paper marriage? We’ll both have lovers on the—”



“Jesus fucking Christ, Nico, did you just say *lover*?” Tommy spits the words out, elation brightening his face and stretching his grin wide.

My ears feel hot and my shoulders hitch toward my ears. “What else am I supposed to call them?”

“Literally anything, bro. Between the two of you, I’m starting to wonder if I missed a Hallmark movie marathon or something,” Rome says on a laugh.

“Fuck off, Rome.” Tommy and I say at the same time.

The three of us grin at one another, and I’m hit in the face with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for my brothers. I don’t know what I would do without them—or who I’d become.

Tommy clears his throat. “When are we going to talk about our sisters and why the fuck Dad hasn’t dragged them both back here kicking and screaming?”

His uncharacteristic silence is alarming. I expected the worst from him, but so far he’s giving us almost indifference, which is probably worse. “We’ll figure something out, yeah? Let’s just get through tonight.”

“What can we even do though? Dad already knows about their existence. The best we can do is shield them from him. He’ll get bored of them within a year,” Rome says.

“I hope so, brother, for all our sake.”

I check my watch. Damn, we still had ten minutes to kill.

Fuck it.

I turn around and stalk toward the front door, doing my best to push all thoughts of my father out of my head. He was away for the weekend, out of the state. It was one of the

reasons I agreed to Madison coming here today, not that she was asking permission.

Not that she even called me.

If I sound bitter in my head, it's because I fucking am.

“Let's go. We've got a sister to give away.”

“About that, so how's baby sis going to marry four dudes? Last I checked, that shit isn't legal. How's that going to work? Are they going to like share custody of her or something?”

I stop in front of the door and turn around in time to see Rome shove Tommy's shoulder forward—hard.

“Shut the fuck up about that, man.”

Tommy winces and rolls his shoulder forward. “The fuck, Rome? Did you have to hit me so hard? I planned on getting lucky with one of the bridesmaids tonight.”

I give my brother a deadpan stare, it's a look he receives often from me. “The only women coming are related to Madison, which means they're related to us.”

Tommy rubs his thumb across his eyebrow, one of his only tells. “Well, shit. No one told me the guest list beforehand, Nic. How the hell was I supposed to know?”

“I don't know, maybe because they're flying out to Las Vegas to get married in one of the million little chapels here?”

Tommy shrugs. “Yeah, alright. But the marriage question was legit, so don't come at me next time for voicing the question we're all wondering, yeah?”

“Whatever,” Rome huffs as he stalks out of the apartment.

I don't bother replying. I'd rather not think about what my sister does with four men from the New York family. Rome

leads us to the elevator, and I mentally go through my check list.

“Bro, I bet they have to get one of those Alaskan king-sized beds. I saw an ad for it one time—that thing’s like the width of an entire bedroom!” Tommy’s voice rises in excitement.

I tune them both out as we descend to the basement parking garage to a level reserved just for us and mentally prepare myself to watch my baby sister marry four men.



# MADDIE

“I NOW PRONOUNCE you husband and wife. You may kiss each other.”

A smile so wide it hurts covers my face as I look at my husband’s intense gaze. A smirk tips the corner of his delectable mouth up a second before he slides his palms up my neck and threads his fingers in my hair. His lips land on mine with a possessiveness normally reserved for behind closed doors.

Sparks shoot all the way from my fingertips up my arms and to my head, leaving me light-headed. He pulls back, the kiss ending as abruptly as it began. My lashes flutter as my eyelids slowly open.

Everything has a hazy quality as joy settles across my vision like a fine mist. My husband takes a step back as fingers tangle in mine from behind. I spin around and smile at the man now in front of me. Leo’s grin is infectious, triggering an overwhelming sense of joy.

He steps into me, cradling our hands against his chest. His other hand smooths along my lower back, pressing us together further. A giggle slips out before I can hold it in. I shouldn’t be surprised that his playfulness extends to today.

We exchange our vows, and Elvis nods. “I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss each other.”

My new husband doesn't wait for Elvis to finish pronouncing us before he dips his head and kisses away my grin. He nips my bottom lip before swiping his tongue inside my mouth and laying claim to our nuptials.

A throat clears, the noise loud and purposeful. Leo takes his time pulling away from me, dragging his plush lips up my jaw and placing a kiss on my neck, right underneath my ear.

A low cough belies the impatience of the man behind me.

My husband lifts his face from my neck and looks over my shoulder. “Yeah, yeah, old man. You'll get your turn.”

I roll my lips inward at the attitude he gives Dante. It might be a little messed-up, but hearing them snark at one another releases some of the tightly-coiled anxiety inside my gut. Then again, I don't think there's anything conventional about our relationship and yet, it's perfect.

“You're taking too long, kid. You can't hog her.”

Leo's dark-green-eyed gaze meets mine, mischief stamped on his smirk and the sparkle in his eyes. “Nah, I think we all know that I'm excellent at *sharing*.”

The playful dig was meant for them but he never takes his eyes off of mine. The corner of his mouth hooking up in a smirk that tells me we're both thinking of the same thing.

My cheeks heat as memories like a movie montage slip over my vision.

Leo inside my pussy as I deep-throated Aries. Riding Dante while Matteo fisted his cock with his gaze trained on the way he finger-fucked my ass.

I bite the inside of my cheek as lust swells inside of me, my blood singing with remembered passion. I look at my husband from underneath my lashes. “Always stirring the pot.”

He grins, totally unrepentant. “You love it.”

“I love you.”

His grin falls into a serious expression. “And I love you more than one person has any right to love another person, more than I ever thought I was capable of.”

I push onto my toes and press my lips against his.

Warmth seeps into the thin satin material of my dress. It’s a strapless sweetheart neckline that gathers in a soft A-line silhouette. The satin is smooth and slinky and just formfitting enough without being tight. It’s perfect, and I feel like some sort of Greek goddess in it.

My favorite seamstress, Dolores, just happened to have “the perfect white dress” when I called on a wing and a prayer. Either fate was making up for all the shit she dealt me the last few months, or one of my men alerted her before I even called. I’m sure they paid her an exorbitant amount to rush the order too.

Callused fingertips trail down my arm, a soft caress that leaves a path of goosebumps in its wake. Leo takes another step back, his touch slow to leave my skin. I release the hold on his charcoal gray suit jacket, but before my hand can land at my side, Dante’s warm palm catches it.

In two steps, he’s in front of me, sliding in the space between Leo and me. Impatience bleeds from his quick movements, as if he couldn’t possibly be pressed to wait another ten seconds for Leo to step back further.

He slides his free hand into the hair at the nape of my neck and joins our lips without pausing a beat.

“Well, now, that’s one way to take care of business, but it’s not exactly the right order of things.”

“Someone’s impatient today.” I giggle against Dante’s lips, the reprimand from a faux Elvis with his admittedly spot-on accent injecting some humor.

I feel him lift his shoulders up. “He was taking too long.”

“Eager to marry me, Mr. Esposito?”

He lifts our clasped hands between us. “Am I eager to bind you to me for all of eternity? I think you know how deep my devotion to you runs.”

He doesn’t have to spell it out. Visions of the warehouse flash before my eye, melding with the reverent way he brushes his mouth across my knuckles. The effect is overwhelming, but the softness of his lips on my skin grounds me.

My breath hitches, my heart swelling inside my chest, pushing at the too-small confines of my ribcage. Dante’s quiet devotion never fails to amaze me.

Elvis huffs next to us, the tinkling of his thick chain-link necklaces and rings break up our moment. “Ready?”

My cheeks hurt from the wide grin on my face. “Yes.”

We exchange vows and when Elvis pronounces us husband and wife, Dante slides one hand behind my neck and the other around the small of my back. In a surprising move, he pulls me against his body and dips me low. He swallows the squeal as he crushes his mouth to mine in a kiss more reminiscent of a romcom than a Las Vegas chapel.



Hoots and good-natured jeers fill the room as Dante kisses me like it's the answer to every single one of his prayers. His fingertips brand themselves on my lower back, leaving behind his claim. I tighten my arms around his neck and inch my leg up higher around his hip. He takes nearly all of my weight as he explores my mouth.

It could've been two minutes or two hours, I'm lost to everything except Dante Esposito.

*My husband.*

The scents of salty sea air and sweet mint swirl around us. But eventually, our lips slow. He brings us upright, our gazes holding as he takes two steps backward.

Like a bolt of lightning flashes between us, static energy crackles around us. I've always been able to feel him differently than the others. Not better or worse, just uniquely him.

The final piece of my heart moves in front of me. He stares back at me, his jawline sharp, his rich brown hair twinkling under the halogen lights. There's a storm brewing in his dark brown eyes. He gives me a purposeful once-over, dragging his gaze slowly down, over my curves, pausing on my lower abdomen. His gaze feels thick, leaving a swath of soft possession behind. He looks at me from beneath his lashes that don't have any business being so dark or long.

He positively smolders as his stare swallows me whole while we repeat our vows.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss each other."

With his hand gently resting at the hollow of my throat, my new husband uses his thumb to tilt my chin up toward his

mouth. “Until the end, Raven.” He whispers the words quietly against my lips, a vow just for the two of us. He seals it with a kiss, a promise imprinting itself upon my soul and stamping against my kiss-swollen lips.

I pull back a hair’s breadth and murmur my own promise. “And then some.”



# MADDIE

CHEERS ERUPT around us and someone pops champagne. The loud smack of the cork popping free of the bottle triggers an involuntary flinch. Aries steps into me further, his body shielding me from the rest of the room.

I grab onto his wrists, slipping my fingertips underneath the shirtsleeve of his all-black ensemble. He looks like he walks with the shadows, seamlessly slipping in and out with ease.

“I’m fine.”

He thumbs my chin, gently tugging the divot under my bottom lip. My lips part as shivers of lust replace the moment of panic. Revelry bounces around the small room. Four rows of short, white pews take up two-thirds of the room, more than enough space for the handful of people we invited today.

Out of the corner of my eye, Elvis slips away from his post in the middle of two ornate golden pedestals. I didn’t look too closely, but I’m pretty sure his likeness is carved in the side of one of them. Fresh pink and white flowers in clear vases perch on top of each pedestal, the delicate floral scent a welcome perfume.

Several small light fixtures hang down from the ceiling—entirely too many for this size room—but I appreciate the

attempt to brighten this windowless room. The carpet is worn and a strange shade of pink, but I don't really care about any of it.

I'd marry each of my men in a back alley in the middle of Brooklyn if that's what it took to call them mine.

"Let's get out of here, wife."

Aries's words sound like gravel, low and rough and hitting me in all the right places, but before he can make good on his promise, my best friend's shriek is so loud, it's practically inside my head.

"Madison Murphy Walsh! I can't believe you just got married!" my best friend and cousin, Lainey squeals. "Wait, I'm going to have to get used to your new last name when I need to hit you with the impact of a full-name reprimand."

I pull away from Aries with a grin. I can't help it, Lainey's joy has always been contagious. Aries's reluctance is apparent, but Lainey doesn't either notice or care. She wedges herself between us and throws her arms around me in a bone-crushing hug. Her dark red hair tickles my face as the familiar scent of strawberries hits my nose.

My shoulders relax further as nostalgia hits me in the gut with all the force of a basket of adorable kittens. It's warm and inviting—and exactly what I didn't realize I needed.

"Quick, squeeze me tighter right now if you need a getaway. Rush'll have us out of here in thirty seconds flat if you need."

I smile at her uncharacteristic absurdity. "I'm not here against my will, Lainey. Technically, I'm the one who proposed the whole thing."

She pulls back, leaving her hands on my shoulders. She's a total knockout in her off-the-shoulder cornflower blue dress. It hugs her figure without being obvious, and the color pops against the deep red tones of her gorgeous hair. Of course, she wouldn't be Lainey if she didn't have a pair of Vans on her feet—all white, in my honor, of course. Her whiskey-colored gaze skips over my face. “My, my, cousin. You've been keeping secrets from me, yeah?”

The other big secret comes to mind, but I'm not ready to tell anyone yet, so I school my expression into something more neutral. I want to keep it something for just us for a while longer yet. “We'll have to get together and trade secrets—and maybe tips.” I waggle my eyebrows at her.

Her face breaks out into a wide grin and she pulls me in for another hug. “I couldn't get Mary to come. I'm so sorry, Maddie.”

My sister's absence feels like an ever-widening canyon in my heart. I wanted her here, but I can't make her be here.

I can't make her love me.

So, slowly but surely, I've been filling the canyon myself. Love and affection from my husbands help, and so does getting to know my new brothers.

“That's alright. She'll come back to us one day, and until then, I have three new siblings to get to know,” I murmur, squeezing her tight.

Lainey pulls back again and links her arm in mine. “Formally introduce me? My first impression was one of them mumbling under his breath about sleeping arrangements for five people.”

I laugh as I lead her across the small chapel, knowing exactly which brother that was. “Ah, so you met Tommy then.”

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MATTEO

“CONGRATULATIONS, ROSSI.”

I accept the champagne flute from Rush’s outstretched hand with a tight-lipped smile. “Thank you. This your idea?” I tip the glass slightly to the left, the bubbles swirling to the rim.

He chuckles under his breath as he stops next to me, sipping from his own champagne flute. “Nah, you can thank Alaina for that.”

I watch my wife with rapt attention as her cousin envelops her in a hug. “Thank you for coming. I know it meant a lot to Madison.”

Her full name feels heavy on my lips, the weight of her being tied to me permanently in such a public way causes my trigger finger to twitch. It puts her on the board, a face for my enemies to target.

It makes her my one and only weakness.

My thoughts pull up short as Cherry and Alaina link arms and walk toward her long-lost brothers, flute glasses dangling from their fingertips.

Two weaknesses now.

Fuck.

I drain the glass in one swallow and roll my shoulders back.

“I need allies, Rush.”

The next boss of the Brotherhood, an Irish family that plays by their own rules, looks at me with a shrewdness he’s known for. We’ve always been on good terms, and a few months ago, I freely gave them some critical intel that saved one of their own. I can only hope that mutual respect we’ve been cultivating for years can grow into a true alliance. I have a feeling we’re going to need it.

“We’re family now.”

I dip my head in acceptance of the easy words that hold so much more value than thirteen letters and watch my wife talk to her brothers. Aries hovers a step behind her, most likely giving her the illusion of space. I clock Dante’s and Leo’s gazes straying to her every few moments despite the conversations they’re having with the remaining members of the Brotherhood—and apparently, Alaina’s men. It seems the Walsh women are going unconventional with their relationships.

“And when it’s inconvenient? Will we still be family then?” I keep my voice even and my face blank but inside my muscles coil tight and my adrenaline starts to flow in anticipation of his response.

He claps me on the shoulder. “Like I said, man. We’re family. And I don’t know how you do things in your *family*, but in *mine*, we stand together.”

The double entendre isn’t lost on me. I nod my head a few times. “Family.”



Wolf meanders over to us with an open bottle of champagne. I hold out my glass without a word and he fills it before handing the bottle to Rush. The three of us are silent as we watch the scene in front of us. The digital clock in the corner of the room displays the timer countdown until we have to leave. The last ninety minutes went quick.

“Where’s the after-party?” Wolf asks.

My lids lower at the prospect of an *exclusive* after-party with my wife.

Wolf chuckles under his breath. “Alright, Rossi. I guess we’re on our own then, yeah, Rush? What’s good in Vegas?”

Rush lifts a shoulder. “Fuck if I know. We’re not usually this far west for fun. I’m sure we can find something to ... occupy our time.”

“Excellent thinking, as always, brother. I’m going to go get our girl.” Wolf leaves his glass on the table next to us and stalks toward Alaina and Cherry. He stops behind her, leaning his face into her neck. Whatever he said has her head tipping back as she laughs.

I’m riveted to their interaction. It’s without reservations, effortless.

*Do we look like that?*

No sooner than the thought crosses my mind, my wife shifts her head, her gaze landing on mine. She offers me a bright grin, laughter slipping from her lips. She tilts her head to the side and bites the inside of her bottom lip.

Arousal thickens my blood, slowing my muscles and heightening my surroundings. I don’t think I’ll ever get over how easily or quickly she can turn me on. If I didn’t think this

chapel would light up brighter than a fucking disco ball underneath a black light, I'd kick everyone out except for her.

And maybe my best friend and brothers.

Dante breaks our connection when he steps in front of her, diverting her attention and shielding her from my view. A moment later, they're walking hand in hand out into the reception area. I'm sure he's stealing her undivided attention while they pay and officially file the paperwork.

“How far along?”

I half-turn my shoulders toward Rush. “What?”

He tips his chin up, his gaze darting to the door Cherry and Dante walked out of. “How far along is she?”

Everything inside of me shuts down, my emotions stripped away and my adrenaline flying high. I don't answer him. I don't even know how to fucking answer him.

*Did she tell Alaina?*

No. She wouldn't have had the time.

My brow dips, just a fraction of an inch, but it's a fucking tell I can't afford to have. He just boasted about us being family, but this is a good reminder that it's a title earned, not given.

He waves his glass in an arc to encompass the whole room. “She hasn't taken a single sip of champagne in the last hour. And three times now, she brushed her stomach in that telltale way women do when they're pregnant.”

I set my glass down and turn to face him. My heartbeat kicks into a rhythm more like the music pouring from the speakers as I mentally prepare myself to shatter an alliance. I

don't want to, but if that's what it takes to keep her—*them*—safe, then there is no other choice.

“Relax, Matteo. Your secret is safe with me. I just happen to be more observant than my brothers, but if you don't want Alaina to know, then I'd take your celebration to somewhere more private. My girl's quick, and she's lived with Madison practically their whole lives. I wouldn't be surprised if she didn't already pick up on it.”

I stare at him as he calmly pours more champagne in his glass before filling mine up again once more. He hands it to me without ever meeting my gaze. Rush and Dante would get along great if they ever spent any amount of time together—both of them so fucking hard to read through their calm façade.

“Congratulations, man.” He raises his glass in the air as a toast. “Birdie's gonna lose her mind,” he mumbles through a smile before he takes a drink.

I reluctantly lift my glass up and take another sip. I don't trust him, but I don't know if I trust anyone other than the four people I share a house with. I was already jaded as fuck, and everything that happened in the last few months with Dad only added to that paranoia.

But for now, I'll sip the champagne and offer a polite nod. Actions speak louder than any words in this life, so when the time comes for Rush's claim of family to kick in, we'll see how truthful his words are.



# MADDIE

“I’VE GOT A SURPRISE FOR YOU,” Dante says as Wolf drapes himself over my cousin, murmuring something in her ear that has her laughing.

I raise a brow, excitement sprouting like my favorite flowers in the spring. “A surprise?”

He entangles our fingers together. “C’mon, in the lobby.”

I leave the untouched flute of champagne on a little table by the door as Dante leads us into the little reception area. There are racks of white dresses in all different styles and lengths, rows of sparkly tiaras, cheesy buttons and sashes, and all kinds of “married in Las Vegas” memorabilia.

A throat clears, the sound feminine and familiar. I tear my gaze from the stack of neon *what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas* tees and lock eyes with my twin sister.

Mary leans against the glass display case of shot glasses, flasks, and lace garters, her arms folded over her chest. Her lavender-colored cardigan is pulled tight, the pearl buttons cinching it closed all the way up to the top. She’s wearing black leggings that look like faux leather—something I don’t think I’ve ever seen her wear before—and her ever-sensible soft leather black flats.

Dante releases my hand and my feet carry me to her without conscious thought. “You came,” I breathe the words out, my chest expanding with something between surprise and awe. “When you didn’t return my calls, I didn’t think you’d show up.”

She doesn’t meet my eyes as she shifts from foot to foot and adjusts her cardigan. I glance at her shoes just to see if there’s something interesting down there or she really can’t bring herself to look at me.

“Of course. It’s not every day that Elvis marries your sister to four dudes.”

She’s surly and despondent, but I’m just so glad that she came, I can easily overlook it this time. A laugh surprises us both, and she jerks her head up in alarm, a scowl marking her beautiful face. I smile at her, and riding that impulsive wave of love and appreciation, I lean forward and wrap my arms around her neck.

She doesn’t move, doesn’t even breathe really as I do my best to infuse my affection for her into her soul. She’s cracked and bruised, my sister, but she’s not broken. Not irredeemable.

She stands stiff, reluctantly accepting my hug but making no move to return it. When I don’t pull back right away, she slowly brings her arms up and pats my back in the most awkward exchange we’ve had in years. Of course, it’s probably the first embrace we’ve had in years too.

Finally, I pull back and look at her. Her hair is pin-straight and looks freshly dyed, an even deeper shade of red. It looks closer to black than her usual strawberry-blonde. Dark circles mar her skin underneath her eyes, but given our family dynamic shift, I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s lost sleep over everything. I resist the urge to ask if she’s talked to mom. Or

any of the Santorinis. She'll always be my little sister, but we're adults now, and it's time I stop mothering her and just accept her for who she is right now.

It takes conscious effort not to run my palm across my lower abdomen at the thought of *mothering*. It's a comforting move but a telling one.

"Well, thank you for coming. If I would've known, you could've flown with us."

She looks at me from underneath her lashes. "And watch your boyfriends—"

I hold my index finger up and smile. "Husbands."

"Yeah, about that. Who's your real husband?"

"They all are."

"Okay." She drags the word out and drops her chin, looking at me like I'm dense. "But like legally."

Something about her tone has my hackles rising. "Why?"

She lifts a shoulder and glances to the side before looking at me and jerking her chin to the right. "Are they in there?"

Now it's my turn to shrug. "Who? My husbands?"

She scoffs. "No, *them*. The men who are masquerading as our blood who abandoned us our *entire lives*."

I'm not prepared for the venom in her voice, and I take a step backward. I don't need to look to the right to know Dante's there. I don't fear my sister, but I don't exactly trust her either. Not when she has this wild look in her eye unlike anything I've ever seen before.

"Just like a man, too. They fucking take and take and *take* and then leave you with nothing," she seethes, staring at the

ground without really seeing anything. “And then heaven forbid, you actually need help.” She whips her head up and holds my gaze. “I hope you know what you’re doing, sister, because when they leave you in tatters, I won’t be there to put you back together again.”

Tears prick my eyes at her hostility. Her hurt and rage balloons and fills the small lobby space, but I’m not afraid or even offended. No, my heart aches for my sister. I step toward her, and he’s so quick and smooth, it’s like he moves with me, Dante is at my side, a hand on my elbow.

I glance at him. “It’s alright. She’s not going to hurt me.”

He doesn’t say anything, just flicks his gaze from my eyes to my stomach and back again. I get his message instantly, and it’s a decision I already made the moment I saw her. Now is not the time to share that I’m expecting. She wouldn’t be able to listen without the harsh judgments of her own issues right now, and I don’t know if I could forgive her if she lashed out at me because of it.

I nod, a tiny movement to let him know we’re in agreement. He lets go of my elbow, but he doesn’t move from next to me.

“What happened, Mary? Want to talk about it?” I keep my tone even and low, approaching her like you would a wounded animal. I see it now, underneath all her buttoned-up persona and her free-flowing barbs, she’s wounded.

She sneers and takes a step back, her arms falling to her sides in clenched fists. “Nah, you haven’t confided in me in years, so why break tradition, huh? Besides, it’s not like I expect you to see where I’m coming from. Just go back to your perfect little life while you can, Maddie. And when it all



blows up, like everything does, I hope you remember what I said: I won't be here."

My sister doesn't give me time to reply before she spins on her heel and leaves the chapel in a flurry of rage and hostility.

"What the fuck, Dante?" I whisper, starting after my sister. "I don't even know what to say."

He hooks his arm around my neck and pulls me into his chest. I nestle my face against his pecs and breathe in the comforting scent of coconut. "She's hurting, Maddie. Best thing you can do is be here for her when she's ready." He runs his hands up and down my back, his fingertips sparking pleasure down my spine with each pass of his fingertips on my bare skin. "But that doesn't mean you take her shit, yeah? You are not her verbal punching bag. I allowed her that one free pass, but next time, I shut that down."

Warmth pools low in my belly at his protectiveness. I don't know what it says about me, but I love it when they show their protective and *possessive* sides.

The door creaks a second before I hear Leo's voice. "Everything okay?"

Lifting my head from Dante's chest, I look over at him. I didn't get enough time to appreciate the way they all look tonight. I push the sadness from my sister down somewhere deep inside me, toss it in a box, and pack it away. That's a problem for tomorrow—or next week.

Tonight is all about me and my new husbands. We have a suite reserved in a resort my brother Nico owns. It's one of the handful of hotels that Vito doesn't have any of his filthy fingers in. I don't think I'll ever be able to call Vito dad or

father. Just thinking his name with those titles makes me gag a little.

I turn to face Leo, Dante's hands settling low on my hips. A smirk tilts the side of my mouth upward. "You know, I think I saw balconies attached to the suites."

My husband's eyes flare with desire, and I know he's thinking of the last time we were on a hotel balcony together. He thumbs his bottom lip and cocks his head to the side. "Is that right? We better check that out right away."

I bite the inside of my cheek, gearing up to tease him. "Mm-hmm. Do you know what I've always wanted to do?"

Leo reminds me of a jaguar when he prowls toward me. All slow, sensual movement, his pupils blown and his anticipation tangible. "What's that, baby? Name it, and it's yours."

I wait until he's standing in front of me. "Remember the stage, Leo? And the private dance? I want to do that again." I tiptoe my fingers up his chest slowly, stopping to slip underneath the open collar at his throat. "With all of you."

He trembles with restraint, and I imagine the need to touch me, to lay claim is pounding at his temples. I wonder how much further I have to push to get him to bend. I erase the space between us, my generous cleavage pressing against his shirt. Hand around his neck, I bring him down and murmur in his ear, "A place that offers amazing music and dancing with enough discretion for a private lap dance."

Dante's fingers flex against my hips, a soft exhale the only indication he heard every word.

Leo surges forward, his hand holding my jaw and his fingertips threaded in my hair. He tilts my face up as he leans

down and captures my lips in a kiss so possessive, my panties get damp.

A needy sort of whimper slips between our lips, but Leo takes that opportunity to deepen the kiss. I push onto my toes as our tongues tangle. Warm palms slide over the curve of my hips almost reverently, a slow perusal that sends my body higher with each sweep.

I'm two seconds away from hiking my wedding dress up and begging one or both of them to make me come when my cousin's voice douses that raging inferno.

"Holy shit, Maddie!" She practically crows, laughing on my name. "As your maid of honor, I cannot let you fuck your new husbands in the lobby of the Elvis chapel where there are probably skeevy dudes jerking off to the security footage."

Dante growls at the mention of security cameras and steps out from behind me. "Be right back." He leaves through a small door behind the glass case just as the rest of our little wedding party come out.

"What's going on?" Matteo asks.

"Dante's wiping the security footage if they have it, and we're trying to find somewhere to dance. Our wife's not quite ready to call it a night," Leo says with a smirk.

"You guys have something with a little more privacy for us?" Matteo asks my brothers.

"Yeah, we got a few," Romeo says.

Tommy tosses back the rest of his drink. "Violet Oak?"

Nico nods. "That'll do. I'll call ahead and have them clear the VIP lounge section."

Dante comes back then and nods at the ceiling where an old-school-looking camera is mounted on the wall. “It’s done. These assholes don’t even have real security footage running. The cameras are a joke.”

Tommy rubs his hands together. “Let’s get going. The night is young, my friends.”



## ARIES

I WATCH my little brother drape himself all over my wife, his front plastered to her back as they dip and sway to the music. The air shimmers with the combined lust of hundreds of intoxicated people who swear by the *what happens in Vegas* mantra. Collective lust swirls around the dimly-lit club, intertwining with strobe lights and smoke pouring from the four smoke machines.

Sully slides a rocks glass with three fingers of liquor, probably Irish whiskey, across the small black circular bar table. He nods toward the dance floor. “Congratulations, man.”

I grab the drink, waiting until the last moment to stop it from slipping off the end of the table. “I know Madison appreciated Alaina’s support today.”

Sully looks at me with a blank expression before he leans his elbows on the circle bar table in front of us. We have a private booth behind us, but it felt too far from my new wife, so we arranged to have some bar tables in this section.

“That’s the oddest thank you I’ve ever heard, and considering I’ve been told I’m *damn-near allergic to them*, that’s saying something.”

I cut him a glare in time to catch his smirk before he tosses back nearly half of his drink. I like Sully well-enough, but

that's not saying much. I haven't lived in New York City for a long time, so I don't have the same repertoire as Dante and Matteo. Plus, I generally think most people are full of shit.

I trust Raven. And my brother, mostly. But if she trusts her cousin, and her cousin's shackled up with them, then I guess by some fucked-up game of telephone, that makes Sully and I friends.

My lip curls up at the thought of *friends* like this is fucking high school.

I scoff at myself inside my head. I didn't have a traditional high school experience, unless you count hanging out on yachts worth more than some people make in a lifetime and having more stamps in my passport than I had high school credits *traditional*.

Regardless, here we are. Surrounded by hundreds of people I don't fucking trust.

Wolf saunters toward us and sidles next to the table. "If we missed this, Alaina would have my balls, and I very much like the way she—"

"You better not finish that sentence," Sully snaps.

Wolf leans to the side to look around me. "Relax, man. I'm just trying to lighten the mood a little. You'd think he'd be a little happier on his wedding day."

"Who says I'm not happy?" I scoff and take a healthy sip. The burn of whiskey as it slides down my throat takes some of the edge off. Their easy back and forth offers a rare glimpse inside another relationship style similar to ours. And it gives me hope that our bond will even out too. I look at Wolf from the corner of my eye. He doesn't seem like the jealous type,

but I think the right woman can turn even the most easy-going man into a possessive asshole.

Luckily for my Raven, she gets four greedy assholes.

“Probably the scowl on your face,” Sully deadpans.

“And the fact that you’re over here sulking while your wife hasn’t left the dance floor in hours.” Wolf smirks as he turns his attention presumably to his own woman.

He claps me on the shoulder. “C’mon, man. It’s your wedding night, go out there and dance with your wife.”

I toss back the rest of the whiskey and set the empty glass on the table, probably harder than necessary. But that asshole is right. Why the fuck am I over here giving her space while everyone else has danced with her?

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## MADDIE

THE CROWD AROUND US PULSES WITH ENERGY. ALL OF US contribute to the atmosphere in one way or another. Rush is wrapped around Lainey, their chests pressed together as she practically inhales him. They haven’t come up for air in a while, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he sneaks her off to one of those darkened corners and they practice a little exhibitionism. Lainey once told me she discovered a thirst for it.

And honestly, I can’t even blame her.

As Leo grinds his dick into my ass, the two of us creating our own sensual dance in the middle of a fairly-packed dance



floor, thoughts of my own exhibitionist desires flood my brain. I can't even blame it on alcohol, but even though this setting is nothing like the one of the masquerade ball all those months ago, I have those same urges to pull one of my husbands into our own dark corner and beg them to make me come.

Like I conjured him from will alone, Aries appears in front of me. I'm not sure if it's some sort of fateful sign or just a coincidence, but either way, I'm glad he's on the dance floor.

"I'm going to grab a drink. Do you need anything?" Leo asks, raising his voice so I can hear him over the pulsing beat of music.

I shake my head, my eyes glued to Aries. "I'm good. Aries will take care of me now. Won't you, *husband*?"

Leo places a kiss on my neck, right underneath my ear, and a shiver glides down my back. That damn spot is almost too sensitive. Thick strands of my loose waves stick to my neck with sweat, and a high from letting your inhibitions go and dancing infuses my blood.

My wedding dress hangs from my body in a slightly wrinkled sheet of satin. I don't even want to think about how filthy the hem is after dragging it through the club. I could've changed out of it, but where's the fun in that? I just married the loves of my life in a gorgeous dress, the world should get a chance to see it.

I'll settle for the people inside this club.

Pink and blue strobe lights cut through the air, highlighting the other people in flashes of neon. Everyone is wrapped up in their own little world, lost to the music and the sensation.

Aries steps into me, his broad chest in my face. I throw my hands around his neck and mold my body against his. "Are

you ready to dance, Aries?”

His palms slide up and down my back, eliciting goosebumps in their wake. He settles them against my lower back, his pinkie finger sliding back and forth over the top of my ass. We sway together, the sensual beat of the song infusing every dip and slide and sweep with lust.

One song turns into two, and two into three. Sweat dampens the back of my neck, my fingers tingling with awareness. Aries’s cock is incredibly hard, trapped against my stomach. My fingers itch to slide down his washboard abs and into his pants to wrap my fingers around him.

“We’re taking a break and grabbing a drink,” Lainey yells over the music. Sully hovers over her, pawing at her hips.

I wave her off with a smile. My bladder takes this as an opportunity to demand I take a break too.

I push onto my tiptoes, so I’m closer to Aries’s ear. “I need to pee. Walk with me?”

I’m not so disillusioned that I’d go around by myself in a place this big. It doesn’t matter that my brothers own it, we have enemies that we don’t even know yet, and I’m not going to put myself in danger. Not when I have someone else to look out for too.

Plus, if these restrooms are anything like the grandeur of the rest of the club, I’m hoping I can persuade Aries to fool around in either a back hallway or a darkened booth along the way.

“Let’s go.” He threads his fingers in mine and cuts a path through the small crowd of dancers.

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“YOU DON’T HAVE TO FOLLOW ME INSIDE, YOU KNOW.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Raven. I’m coming with you.”

Not even his brisk tone can dampen the high I’m flying on tonight. I love dancing, and it’s been too long since I’ve been able to just ... let go like that. I’m not an idiot, I know that at least one of my husbands was constantly surveilling to make sure any potential threats were spotted. But I suppose that’s just another perk about having my very own reverse harem—there’s more than enough eyes to keep watch.

I feel spoiled and loved ... and horny.

All the kissing and grinding has only fanned the flame higher and higher. My pulse beats heavily underneath my skin, heightening every other sense.

The women’s restrooms are set up as a two-room bathroom suite. The door opens into a powder room with cream-colored walls and a gray marble counter spanning the entire side wall. A matching mirror with Hollywood lightbulbs in a neat border three of the four sides. There are two chaise loungers and a few stools in front of the mirrors.

The sound of the club cuts off with the door snicking shut behind Aries. It’s surprisingly quiet in here—no music and no other women.

It seems like the toilet room is split into two different areas, so Aries follows behind me as we walk through the door on the left. It’s dark on this side, the lights dim compared to the bright lights of the powder room. It takes a few moments of furious blinking before they adjust.

“Where’s the fucking light switch in here?” Aries grumbles.

I wave a hand over my shoulder as I cross the room to one of the six stalls. “It’s fine. I can see well-enough, and I’ll be done in a minute.” I send him a smirk over my shoulder with a hand on the stall handle. “Do you need to come inside the stall with me?”

He stops in front of the bank of sinks, leaning his hip against one basin and folding his arms across his chest. “Is that an invitation, Raven?”

Heat pinches my cheeks at his insinuation. My teasing backfired, but I don’t even care. A playful Aries is one of my favorite things to witness. “Nope.” I pop the P and slide into the stall.

Once I finish, I flush and head to the sink next to him to wash my hands. I dry my hands on a paper towel and move to toss it in the garbage can when he pounces.

He’s behind me in a flash, moving so quick, a little squeak of surprise flies out before I can curb it.

“Hands on the sink, Raven.”

His gravelly voice does something to me that doesn’t seem possible. But just hearing that low, possessive tenor feels like I just took four shots of tequila. My hands go to the outside of the white sink, the crumbled paper towel forgotten immediately.

“What’s going on?”

His hand skims my leg from my calf upward, sloping over the curve of my ass and stopping at the thin strap of my dark-blue thong. It takes me longer than it should to realize what he’s doing.

“The bottom of your dress was caught in these,” he murmurs, slipping a finger underneath the band. The silky fabric of my dress tumbles free, but his hand doesn’t move. “Do you remember what I said the last time we were in a bathroom like this?”

My head hangs down between my shoulders as the memory of that day springs to life. It’s dark in here, not as dark as the bathroom at the restaurant, but if I close my eyes, it’s like we’re back there again.

“The dark is intoxicating.” My voice is low, but my breaths come out louder and faster. “And we can let go of our inhibitions and give into our needs.”

“And what do you need, Raven?” His palm flattens across my ass, gently squeezing it. His other hand ascends my other leg, his knuckle of his index finger tracing a path of fire along the back of my thigh.

I’m practically panting, lust thick like honey in my veins. I feel lightheaded and weighed down at the same time. Mostly, I feel fucking needy. Like if he doesn’t make me come and then fuck me in the next instant, I might actually pass out.

“You. I need you.”

He slowly bunches up the skirt of my wedding dress in his palm until the humid air caresses my skin. He sucks in a breath behind me a second before I feel his finger slide underneath the thin string of my thong nestled between my ass cheeks. He follows the curve of my ass all the way down until his knuckle brushes against my pussy.

He sucks his teeth, and I imagine the way his eyes darken with lust. “Is this all for me?”

My cheeks heat as the wet noises fill the space, his knuckle circling my core and playing in my arousal. “Yes. It’s yours, Rafael.”



# ARIES

MY HANDS still when my God-given name tumbles from her lush lips. She doesn't use it often, preferring her own nickname for me. And the territorial bastard inside of me wants to beat my chest like a fucking gorilla at the fact that she doesn't use nicknames for anyone else. So when those six letters fly from her mouth, it's like everything inside of me just stops.

She gets my full attention every time, and she fucking knows it.

When she wiggles her hips, sending her wet cunt slipping over my hand, her clit rubbing against my prone knuckle, realization dawns.

My Raven is trying to bait me.

I chuckle under my breath and uncurl my fingers and cover her sweet pussy with my palm.

She's fucking soaked. For *me*.

That possessive side of me that's always right below the surface when it comes to her heaves forward. The tips of my fingers press right against her clit. I sink my teeth into my bottom lip, hard enough to feel the sting of pain.



If she wants to play, then let's fucking play. I won't ruin her fun and let her know that I figured out her little ploy. Where's the fun in that?

I flutter my fingers softly, just barely brushing her clit. "What's mine, Raven?"

"All of it," she says with a breathy little sigh that sounds more like a moan, her head tilting to the right and her lids falling closed.

I scrape my teeth over the pulse point in her neck, my eyes locked on her face through the mirror in front of us. The lighting is low and leans dark yellow from the metal sconces around the room. But it's bright enough in here for me to see her pupils dilate with pleasure before her eyes close and her lips part on a gasp.

I bury my smirk and swirl my tongue over the tender spot on her neck, my fingers never stopping their slow circles. The noise from the club is muted, like the persistent rumble of a train miles away. And by some grace of fate, the bathroom remains empty. As much as I would kill anyone for laying their unworthy eyes on her like this, I can't deny the voyeuristic thrill that heats my blood at the sheer idea of her taking my aching cock somewhere we could get caught.

"Eyes on me, Raven. I want to see the look in your eyes when this pretty pussy strangles my cock."

Her chest rises on a deep inhale and her eyes fly open. Our gazes connect and she arches her neck even further, offering me her throat like she's submitting. There's something so fucking primal about it that I can't stop my body's reaction any more than I can explain it.

I glide my fingers from her clit and slide them inside of her at the same time I scrape my teeth against her pulse. She lets out a noise of pure need and arches back into my hand.

“Good girl,” I say against her neck. Goosebumps sprout from where my lips touch her soft skin.

I fuck her with my fingers slowly, too slowly if her impatient little hip rolls are anything to go by. I slip my hand holding her dress around her front, bringing the fabric with me, and make sure there is enough room between her stomach and the sink. I’m not so far gone in hunger to not remember I need to be gentler with her—we all do.

I can taste her lust in the air, sweet and addictive like ambrosia. With each thrust inside of her, I watch her face and commit it to memory. She’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen when she comes.

“Please, please.” She rocks against my hand, dipping and rolling her hips just like she did on the dance floor fifteen minutes ago.

I run my lips along her neck and scissor my fingers inside her pussy. A sweep of my thumb along her asshole has her cunt gripping my fingers like a fucking vise. My blood hums with a light tremble underneath my skin, desire slamming against my bones. She’s fucking addicting, and I crave her like nothing else in this life.

“Soak my fingers, Raven.”

It’s all she needs before she clenches around my fingers, moaning her release.

“Such a good girl.” My dick is hard enough to stage a fucking riot, pressing almost painfully against the zipper of my suit pants. I palm it with my free hand, but it does nothing to

alleviate the mounting desire created by this siren in front of me. With my fingers still slowly gliding in and out of her, I unzip my pants. My cock springs free, resting against her perfect fucking ass.

She gasps and looks over her shoulder, contorting her body to keep my fingers inside of her and still see me behind her. She flicks her fucking bedroom eyes from my hand wrapped around my cock to my eyes and back again.

“Fuck me, Rafael.”

I stroke myself with a firm grip, imagining it was my cock inside her tight heat instead of my fingers. If I slid into her now, I’d fucking embarrass myself. I squeeze the tip before stroking up and down, a torturously slow pace.

She faces forward and holds my gaze in the mirror. “If you don’t fuck me, I’m going to drag Matteo in here and have him —”

The quiet tear of her thong ripping wrenches through the air, halting her bullshit gauntlet. We both know she’s not going to drag my brother in here to clean up this beautiful mess *I* made.

My fingers swap with my cock in record time. The head of my cock nudges her entrance, and I hold her there. Her pussy clenches around me, as if she can pull me inside her from will alone. A bead of sweat rolls down my temple, my body fucking overheating. My restraint deserves a fucking award for tonight, and while I’m thinking of all the shit I can to not fucking come the second I’m balls-deep, she takes charge.

She uses her leverage on the sink to push back, sinking my cock inside of her until she’s taken every last inch. I don’t know where she ends and I begin. It feels like a goddamn

religious experience every time I'm inside of her. It's statistically impossible for it to be so good—and get fucking better—every single time.

I thank whatever fucking good deed I did in a past life to deserve this absolute angel that I call mine.

“Harder, Rafael. I—I think I'm going to come again,” she says on an exhaled moan. She braces her hands wider on the sink and arches her back, the curve of her arched spine magnificent. But she never breaks our connection in the mirror.

Muffled voices filter in, probably some women using the powder room, and my adrenaline spikes. I watch Maddie's face for realization, but she's lost to her bliss. Satisfaction bleeds into my veins at that thought alone, and my cock swells.

I rotate and swivel my hips, increasing the pressure and sneaking a hand around her front. My fingers connect with her clit for a single rotation before I pinch it. She's flying high on her next breath, her head thrown back and her eyes screwed shut.

Her pussy strangles my cock, coating it with her come, and I can't hold it back any longer. I thrust once, grinding my hips against her ass as I come inside of her.

Her arms and legs tremble, and before she falls, I snake an arm around her and hold her upright against my chest.

She licks her lips and tilts her head to capture my mouth in a lazy open-mouthed kiss. We stay like that for a moment, my cock still inside of her. We languidly kiss like we're not in the middle of a bathroom in a random club. Our mouths slow, and

she places a few chaste kisses on the corner of my lips before we untangle ourselves.

“I’m just going to clean up.” She holds her dress up with a small smile and walks back into the stall she was in earlier.

I exhale a breath and tuck myself back in my pants as a wide grin spreads across my face.

Official marriage or not, I’m never letting my wife go.



# MADDIE

I'M WALKING on clouds as I follow Aries out of the bathroom. He holds the door open for me, never losing his grip on my hand.

Have I ever mentioned that hand-holding is one of my favorite forms of PDA?

Well, a more PG version, anyway.

The sound of the club assaults my ears, even though it's toned down back here in the hallways compared to the dance floor. Maybe it's the back-to-back orgasms or the long day or one of those pregnancy side effects I read about, but suddenly, nothing sounds better than going back to the hotel and eating French fries smothered in ketchup.

I tug on Aries's hand a little to get his attention as we walk down the hallway. "Let's find the others and go back to the hotel."

His expression falls into a mask of concern, losing the smug male satisfaction he was wearing. "Are you okay? I wasn't too rough, was I?" His hand ghosts over my arm and pausing right above my lower abdomen.

"I'm perfect, and so were you." I push onto my toes and place a quick kiss against his lips. The movement pushes my

stomach against his palm, and a little spark of gratitude and warmth unfurls inside of me. “It’s just been a long day, and I’m kind of tired and hungry.”

“Of course, Raven. Let’s get you home.”

“Did you just fuck in the bathroom of our club?”

I startle at the voice a foot away from us, sinking back to my heels. My heart jumps in surprise but settles quick enough when I see the somewhat familiar face. Tommy stands a foot away from us, his arms folded across his chest.

“Well? Did you?” His eyebrows get a workout, rising into his hair and then slamming down low.

Aries steps around me, grabs Tommy by the collar, and hauls him against the wall with a thud. “The fuck did you just say?”

Alarm bells blare in my head as I instinctively smooth my hair back. My fingers tangle in my hair from trying to finger-comb it back into some semblance of style.

Tommy’s hands instantly go wide, his palms up. “Relax, man. I just meant that we have some private rooms for that. They’re clean and only used—”

Aries rears his arm back and punches my brother in the mouth. Tommy’s head flies to the left, but still, his hands stay out to the side. He looks at me with blood filling his crazed smile, and ice tiptoes down my spine. The fact of the matter is I don’t really know these men. They’re biologically my brothers, but outside of that, I don’t know anything about them.

Well, that’s not entirely true. I know Romeo a little, but still. I have no idea how Tommy’s going to react, and since I



don't have my phone on me, the best thing I can do is de-escalate the situation.

“Don't talk about you fucking my sister, got it.” His sarcasm is thick.

I step next to Aries and rest my hand on his arm. “It's alright.”

“It's not fucking alright, Raven. He disrespected you,” he says through gritted teeth.

“I'm fine though. Let's just get back to the table and go. I'm tired anyway.” I keep my voice calm and my hand resting on his forearm. I feel him flexing, and I see the indecision in his eyes. He wants to teach Tommy a lesson, but it's really not worth it. I can't tell if Tommy is an asshole or if he just doesn't have a filter. Either way, tonight is not the night to discover that.

“C'mon, Rafael. I want to go home.”

Aries lets go after a shove. He points his finger in Tommy's face, an aggressive gesture. “If you ever disrespect your sister like that again, I'm going to fucking kill you and put you somewhere your daddy will never find you. Family or not. Got it?”

Tommy flashes that manic grin again, his teeth streaked with blood. “Crystal clear.”

Aries reaches back for my hand and pulls me next to him. I look over my shoulder and find Tommy's gaze on mine, but there's no malice. Just curiosity, which is not what I was expecting.

Just before we cross back into the bar area, Romeo comes flying toward us. His suit coat and tie are gone and his shirt is

halfway unbuttoned. His eyes are wide and wild as they land on us. Dread sours my gut, and nausea climbs up my throat.

“What’s wrong?”

He exhales like he ran here. “Dad’s here. You have to leave. Now.”

My body freezes, a total ice bath to my system that was riding that post-orgasmic high only five minutes earlier. “What?”

“I thought you assured us he was out of town for at least four more days,” Aries growls.

Romeo nods. “Yes, well, he deviated from his plans, apparently. I’m not his fucking keeper, Rafe! Come on, we have to hurry.”

“I’m not leaving without the others!” I whip my head to Aries. “And Lainey!”

“Nic already went to them. He sent me here to find you guys. They’re already outside at the cars.” Romeo turns around and heads down the hallway we just came from.

Aries reaches out and grabs his bicep. “If this is a trap, I’ll put a bullet in your brain faster than you can blink.”

Romeo flicks his gaze from Aries’s hand to his face, his expression neutral. “Understood.”

Aries releases him, and we follow behind Romeo.

I clutch Aries’s arm with my free hand. “Why? Why would Vito come back early? Does he know I’m here?”

“No, and let’s keep it that way. He came back early to ‘share the good news,’” Romeo says as he pushes open the emergency exit.

We walk down the short alley, a town car waiting on the street. My men are standing around it, their posture rigid.  
“What good news?”

“He found Nico’s wife.”

## EPILOGUE

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JOSEPH KING

COMMOTION FROM DOWNSTAIRS drifts up to me in my study. This is my sanctuary, a place where I handle our business and allow my mind to rest. A room that's completely mine, untouched by all of the women in this house.

My wife gave me our first two daughters one after the other, less than two years apart. And when my third daughter was born the following year, I told my wife we needed a bigger house.

This was the house she chose, and we moved in just before my fourth daughter was born. And by the time my fifth daughter came into the world with a set of lungs that would rival our neighbor's roosters, I had this room semi-soundproofed.

Which means every time one of my daughters goes on a bender about one thing or another, I still hear it.

The sharp crash of glass breaking has me up and out of my leather chair in record time. "That better not be their Ma's favorite glass vase."

I thunder down the stairs of our three-story home in Ireland. From the outside, it looks like a traditionally-built home, but that's an intentional image we do our best to cultivate and perpetuate. Our neighbors see what we want them to see: a father and his five daughters.

Not a man who has killed more people than his years with wild children who grew up playing with guns instead of teddy bears.

My foot hits the bottom stair when I hear another crash. "Jesus fucking Christ. Will you knock it off and stop breaking your mother's shit!"

"Fuck you," my third and fourth daughters yell in unison.

I tip my head back in a sigh and prepare myself for the fight they're gunning for. "Maeve," I holler for my oldest child as I round the banister and head toward the living room and kitchen open floor plan. She's the only one who can talk any sense into my Irish twins.

"You're on your own, old man," Maeve drawls from her laid-back perch on the overstuffed navy loveseat next to the TV. Her legs are thrown over the arm and she casually flips through a magazine like her sisters are just chatting about the fucking shitty weather we're having.

"Some fucking help you are," I grumble.

I should've known she could hear me over all this noise. After all, I've trained all my girls their entire lives.

Maeve closes her magazine with a thwack and pushes to her feet. She's all coiled menace as she prowls toward me. I suppress the grin tugging up the corner of my mouth.

"Maybe you should be asking yourself why your children are ruining all your favorite things, *Da*."

My head whips toward Ava as she smashes my favorite cigar ashtray. “What the ever-loving fuck are you doing?”

Ava and Keira turn to face me. They look so different, yet they couldn’t be more mine with the twin flames of malice shooting from their eyes and landing on my chest. “Oh? Now you want to ask questions, Da?”

I slow my steps as I approach them, much like you would a cornered animal. “Tell me what’s wrong like an adult and stop destroying my things like a fucking toddler.”

It’s the wrong thing to say, and I fucking know it before the last word leaves my mouth. Maeve laughs, the sound entirely too joyful when my other daughters hold my favorite rocks glasses above their heads before they let go. The glass sails through the air and shatters against our dark pine floor.

I’m seething, chest heaving and steam coming outta my ears.

“Ooh, are we breaking shit for fun again? Leave me some!” my youngest, Roisin, yells as she runs down the stairs, her footfalls loud and quick on the carpeted runner. “Fiona! You’re going to miss the fireworks if you don’t stop primping and get your ass down here!”

“I’m not primping, Ro. Some of us can’t just toss our hair in a messy bun and look like they walked off the runway,” Fiona hollers a second before her footfalls hit the stairs.

Roisin slides in the kitchen and grabs an apple, taking a huge bite as her gaze ping-pongs between me and her sisters. “We have the same hair, you know.”

Ava raises a wine decanter, her brow arching into her hairline.

“Maeve,” I grit her name through a clenched jaw. It’s a warning, one she rolls her eyes at.

She sighs and goes to stand next to her sisters, leaning against our island that seats eight. She tips her head back toward them and holds my gaze over the freshly picked daisies in the center of the island. “They found out about your little arrangement with Vegas.”

“Shots fired,” Roisin mumbles around a mouthful of apple.

I throw my hands up in the air before slamming them on my hips. “*That’s* what this is about? Are you fucking kidding me?”

Fiona scoffs as she leans against the island, next to her younger sister and stage-whispers, “What’s going on now?”

Roisin leans over and mumbles, “Fi and Ava are expressing their emotions about Da’s arrangements.”

I run my hand down my face and over my beard. “Oh, for fuck’s sake, girls.”

“Turns out, your children don’t like being auctioned off to the highest bidder, *Father*,” Maeve sneers my moniker like it’s poisonous.

I tip my face toward the ceiling and pray to their Ma to give me fucking strength. “I didn’t auction anyone off. I made an arrangement—”

“Arranged marriages might as well be an auction. You took the highest bid! You—you just promised us away like it’s nothing!” Ava shouts.

“I didn’t—”

“You did though,” Fiona interrupts me, her tone deceptively even. “You’ve promised us to strangers for the

betterment of the syndicate.”

I reach for the calm that’s buried somewhere underneath layers of more volatile emotions and stare at my children. “We need heirs—several of them—and you all know it.”

Maeve throws her arms wide and spins a little. “You have five of them right here. Contrary to the patriarchal bullshit you and your buddies eat for breakfast, you don’t need a dick to be the boss.”

“I would rather die than be sold to a man,” Keira hisses before she storms out of the room.

Ava follows behind her and sneers at me. “You’ve gone too far this time.”

I take their animosity and their rage and I package it up with all the other shit I’ve fucked up since my wife left us. I can’t change hundreds of years of tradition because fate gave me girls instead of boys. A woman has never led the syndicate, and she never will. No one would accept it.

Fiona and Roisin send me scathing glances as they quietly leave the kitchen.

I glance at my oldest child, the one most like me, scanning her face for any sort of understanding. Instead, I find quiet determination. “Mark my words, Da, I’ll not be shuffled off like cattle.”

She leaves the kitchen through the sliding glass door, slipping into the dark night like she belongs in the shadows.

I rake my hands through my hair and expel a breath. One day they’ll see that I had no choice. I’m trying to protect my children, and this is the only way I know how.



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## BONUS EPILOGUE

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SIXTEEN YEARS LATER

MATTEO

“SHOULD WE TAKE HIM OUT, DAD?”

I pause with my glass halfway to my mouth and raise a brow at my son. “Excuse me?”

Ronan huffs. “C’mon, Dad. Those guys are pawing all over Chloe like it’s a frat house and not a family-friendly sweet sixteen.”

“Like she’s not the daughter of a mafia kingpin,” Luca, my other son, says, his arms folded across his chest.

They’re two sides of the same coin. Technically fraternal twins, but my boys could be mistaken for identical. Brown hair perpetually streaked with blond like they spend their days on the beach instead of inside the expensive private school that costs us a fortune each year. They have the same icy blue eyes—just like their mother.

My boys are fiercely protective of their sisters. Just how we taught them. Leo catches my eye over their heads and smothers a smirk behind his glass before he takes a drink.

We decided a long time ago to never lie to our children if we can help it. They're Rossis, and in many parts of the world, that name is synonymous with the five families. And while we hadn't planned on divulging any of the mafia-related aspects of our lives, that decision was taken from us when someone attempted to kidnap Frankie five years ago.

My baby girl was snatched right out of Cherry's hands when she was picking her up from kindergarten. Anna was two and in the middle of a separation anxiety spell, so she was glued to Cherry's hip for months. Some motherfucker climbing the ranks thought it would be good to snatch the boss's little girl and ransom her for fuck knows what. We weren't in the middle of war anymore—thank god—but that doesn't mean shit. There will always be worms masquerading as men, lowlife assholes who think to make a name for themselves by attempting to go toe to toe with us.

They never win.

The way Cherry tells it, as soon as that motherfucker ripped Frankie from her hands, she shifted Anna and started running after them. The guy made it around the block and dragged Frankie literally kicking and screaming into an alleyway. Cherry recalls it as an out-of-body experience, said she saw red and something inside switched off. She pulled out her favorite gun Rafe gave her from her crossbody purse, set Anna down between her legs, and yelled for Frankie to duck before she fired a shot. She nailed that asshole in the chest, and he fell to his knees.

The average motherfuckers think I'm the one they should fear in the five families, but the smart ones, the people who've been paying attention know that Cherry's the real one to fear. She's like a sponge, soaking up bits and pieces from all of her husbands over the years. She turns into a beast when her loved ones are threatened, quietly feral and deadlier than you would imagine.

It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Second only to the way she looks when she comes on my cock.

From that day on, we explained how our family needs extra protection.

I tilt my head to the side. "Mafia kingpin, son?"

Luca lifts a shoulder. "That's what Mason called it."

I shift my gaze to the dark-haired boy standing between my sons. Mason Fitzgerald is Lainey's oldest boy, and Luca and Ronan's best friend. He reminds me of his dads, the way he holds my stare without flinching, his brown eyes guarded in the same way any fourteen-year-old boy's eyes are.

Mason nods. "Yep. I heard my ma yell at my da that she doesn't care if he's an Irish kingpin, in our house, she makes the rules. But then he threw her over his shoulder and stormed outside and tossed her in the pool. Then she got out and pushed him in, and by then, me and my other dads and my brother and sister came outside. It was an all-out pool war then."

I blink when Wolf and Rush Fitzgerald lean against the island, drinks in their hands.

"You tellin' family secrets, son?" Wolf asks.

Mason lifts a shoulder. "Nah, just telling Uncle Matteo and Uncle Leo about the water wars we have in the pool."

Rush meets my gaze across the island, his brows lifted toward his hairline. I smirk and nod before taking a drink. Our wives started using Auntie Lainey and Auntie Maddie with each other's kids when they were babies, and somehow, that snowballed into all of us too.

"Huh, alright. What else is going on over here? You boys don't look like you're enjoying the party," Rush says.

Luca's jaw tightens and he narrows his eyes at something across the room. "That's because some asshole is trying to get handsy with my sister."

"Language," Leo and I snap at him.

The tips of his ears get red and he scowls. "Well, it's true."

I knock my shoulder into his. "It's fine, son. Chloe can take care of herself. Besides, Dante is right there, see? He won't let some punk pull anything, so try to enjoy yourself. Where are the little girls?"

Luca dodges another shoulder nudge from me, his scowl etched across his face. "Whatever. I'm going to find Mom."

He rounds the island, Ronan and Mason catching up and flanking him on either side. Their heads are bent together as they cross the room and settle into some folding chairs around a small square table. The three of them reach for the snacks and sodas in the middle of the table, their brows low, and their lips moving a mile a minute.

"They're still plotting, just further away from us now," Leo says with a bemused smile.

"Should we be worried about what they'll do?" Rush asks as he comes around to lean on the counter next to us.

It's a better vantage point, and I'm sure he's clocking his wife and two younger kids too. Paranoia comes with the territory, and by now, I'd be fucking worried if I *wasn't* paranoid. We've had more people in and out of our house today than we've had in a month. But my baby girl only turns sixteen once, and she begged for a party with her friends from school.

And my brothers and I are a bunch of suckers.

So here we are.

"Nah, they'll be fine," Rafe says, pausing next to Leo and taking a pull from his drink. "But we should probably start a fund for when they really start tearing shit up. I have a feeling those three are going to need it."

I pull my gaze from my brother and focus on my boys. Ronan pushes his chair out and stands up, his movements jerky and stiff. In three steps he's directly behind the kid chatting up Chloe. And in an instant, I see their plan.

"Ronan," Luca yells.

Ronan turns around and pretends to trip, his entire cup of Dr. Pepper spilling all down the kid's back. Chloe shrieks and the kid hops up immediately, whirling on Ronan. My boy only flashes him an innocent smile and a mumbled apology.

The kid's face gets red and he says something to Chloe before turning on his heel and stalking across the room.

I exhale a breath. "Gotta give them points for creativity. Put me in for twenty."

"I don't think twenty bucks is going to cover it if they're pulling these pranks at fourteen," Wolf drawls.

"Grand, Wolf. Twenty grand."

There's a moment of silence between us, a shared acknowledgment of what lies ahead before all of us crack grins.

"Did you guys see Ronan pour his soda all over Chloe's friend?" my wife asks as she walks into the kitchen.

Rafe curves his arm around her shoulders and brings her to his chest. "Think it was an accident, Raven."

Leo and I side-eye each other. It wasn't an accident, but none of us are willing to shatter our wife's image of her boys so soon.

"Poor Walter. I don't know if he'll be able to get the stains out before their date tonight," she says, wrapping her arm around Rafe's waist.

"Date, Maddie?" Leo asks, his head cocked to the side.

"Yeah, Walter asked her out to the movies tonight. They were going to leave after the party."

"News to me, Raven," Rafe murmurs against her hair.

She pulls back and looks at him, her brow wrinkled in that adorable way of hers. "No, I'm sure she told you about it. All of you."

"Huh. Well, I guess the date's off then, yeah?" I bite the inside of my cheek to stop the smug grin from breaking free. I guess I owe thanks to our boys for stepping in.

There's no way my baby girl is going out on a date with Dominic Marino's grandson, Walter.

## A NOTE TO READERS

How are we feeling now?

I have to admit, I really enjoyed hanging out with all the boys in the bonus epilogue! Some of my early readers have asked if I ever thought about exploring the second generation of Rossis and Fitzgeralds, and the idea is tempting! What do you think? Do you want to see more of the second gen? Be sure to tell me in my Facebook group, [Penelope's Black Hearts](#) or on IG!

Turn the page to read an exclusive excerpt for my upcoming dark romantic suspense RH novel, *When It Ends*! It's a natural disaster apocalyptic story, and I'm OBSESSED with it!

Pre-order [When It Ends](#) here.

Oh, and did you see *The Wren* is coming soon too? It's book 1 in our King sisters world! Do you have any guesses which sister is first?

As always, my DMs are always open if you need to slide in there and chat—or proverbially throw your kindle at me! ;)

I would be honored if you had the time to leave a brief review of this book! Reviews are the lifeblood of a book, and I



would appreciate it so much.

xoxo

—pen

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## WHEN IT ENDS EXCERPT

COLE

I watch in fascination as her eyes go from wide and bright, her laugh lines winking at me with her mirth, to shuddered and damn near crestfallen.

She never could hide her expressions from me.

It's one of the reasons I thought she was genuine, but it wasn't until after I realized she's a fucking master manipulator. She should teach a fucking class on acting and follow it up with a course on how to make people believe the lies you feed them.

She turns around fully and slides off the stool. "Cole. What are you doing here? I—"

I take a small step toward her, the toes of my tennis shoes just shy of brushing against hers and rub another lock of hair between my fingers. I know she recognizes the move immediately. Good. I want the reminders of our past life together to haunt her. If I have to live with the memories of everything we shared, so should she.

Despite her fallen smile and halted words, her head tips to the side and her eyes are open and inviting.

Adrenaline explodes like a cannon, rushing through my veins.

No. She's not going to bat her too-big eyes with lashes that should be on a fucking Disney princess and feed me a bullshit line.

So I do the only thing I can think of—push her away before she can sink her claws into either one of us again.

“I think the better question is: What are you doing here? Still running away from your lies, hm? Or have you come back with a new sob story so people feel sorry for the poor little girl whose ma would rather get fucked by strangers for cash than be around her daughter.” I deliver my acerbic gauntlet with a neutral expression, my tone even despite the thundering of my heart. It takes her a moment for her brain to catch up with the rest of her.

“The fuck, man?” West murmurs, but neither one of us look his way.

She sucks in a breath, a wall slams over her eyes and they lose the sparkle they had moments ago. “Still an asshole. I guess five years hasn't changed that.”

I rock back on my heels. “Nah, I'm telling the truth, baby.”

She knocks my hand away from her hair, shuffles backward a step, and bumps into the barstool. In the corner of my eye, I see my brother stand up, effectively caging her between us.

She cocks her head to the side with a little self-deprecating shake of her head. “I can't believe I thought—”

“Thought what? You could roll back into town after five years of fucking crickets, and we'd what? Pick up right where we left off?”

The sunlight casts a square of light across us, highlighting the sheen on her blue-gray eyes. A smattering of freckles wink at me in the sunlight across the bridge of her nose. Her lips are bare, naturally dark pink and plump, and I can still recall the way they feel against my skin.

She's so fucking beautiful it makes my chest physically ache.

And not for the first time, I fucking hate her for making me hate her.

Ready for more? [Pre-order When It Ends here!](#)

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my readers! Thank you for hanging in there with me on all those cliffs on just about every book I write, sending all of you air hugs for that!

Thank you to my husband who's always the first one to champion me. And I love that you're always shouting, "My wife's a romance author!" with pride to anyone you pass on the street. You're the best, and I love you so much.

To my tiny humans: I love you both more than all the stars in the sky. And you have to wait until you're older to read Mommy's books.

To all the bookstagrammers and bloggers and readers that send me messages and create beautiful edits for my books—I'm still in awe. Thank you so, so much. On my most insecure days, I pull up your edits and kind words and never fails to reignite my spark.

To my wonderful family who's encouraged and supported me—thank you, thank you! And thank you to each and every one of you who read my books. I'm looking at you, Grandma + Grandpa!

To my beta besties: I'm so thankful for each of you. Your kindness and support mean the world to me. And special shoutout to Jen for your eagle eyes!

To Christine for jumping right in with a smile! I'm so grateful we met!

To Savy—I'd be lost without you, girl. One day, I'm going to hop on a plane and then tackle-hug you.

Thank you to the amazing babes on my ARC team! I'm so grateful to have you in my corner!

To my Songbirds—I'm so lucky to have you all with me on this journey! Thank you for being a safe space!

And finally, I want to thank my author besties! I found y'all this past year, and trust me when I say, I'm never letting you go! I'm forever grateful for the ease in which you fix crowns, champion one another, and become a safe haven for me.

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# STANDALONE

When It Ends:

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# KING SISTERS

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