



After Exile

THE LUPO FAMILY

AWARD WINNING AUTHOR

E.M. SHUE

Her Exile

THE LUPO FAMILY

MAFIA MADE
BOOK EIGHT

E.M. SHUE

Mountain
ROSE
PRESS

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Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Mafia Made World](#)

[His Wicked Obsession by KL Donn](#)

[About E.M.](#)

[Also by E.M. Shue](#)

Synopsis

From Award-Winning Author E.M. Shue written in USA Today Bestselling Author KL Donn's Mafia Made Series. Her Exile is book 8 in the Mafia Made Series.

I am no one.

A ghost.

I have very few memories of a life before this one. Because with a wave of her wrist she tore me from the only family that loved me. Sent me to a priest who sold me. My family thinks I'm dead. They are bitter dreams that haunt me.

Now I exist for one thing...

To destroy.

I'm the person they bring in to take care of the monsters in the closet. I'm the destroyer of organized crime syndicates.

I'm now the monster.

Until I meet a man who promises me a future. Who tells me he wants me. Who doesn't care about the blood on my hands. And wants me to be...

His everything.

But what happens when he introduces me to my past?

He'll become my lover and protector, but can he be the glue to hold me together when I find out the truth. That I have a family. A brother. A father. Men who would die for me.

Dario is my future and I'll destroy anyone who tries to take him from me. Even the government that claims to have created me.

I've lived in Exile.

I'm ready to be free.

Trigger warning: Her Exile contains hot and steamy sex, graphic violence, torture, murder, mention of rape with intent, and may contain other content that could be sensitive to some readers. Her Exile is meant for mature reading audience, 18+.

Introduction

Welcome to *USA Today* Bestselling Author KL Donn's Mafia Made world, featuring *Award Winning* Author E.M. Shue with 3 of her own books included in the Mafia Made series.

You can find complete details of the series here: [MAFIA MADE WORLD](#).

While the books are interconnected, each book in the series can be read as a complete standalone story.

For my bestie, without you this story wouldn't be. Thank you again for asking me to be a part of this journey. Also, for my readers that love Mafia Made tough girls, here's another one for you.

CHAPTER

One

I sit outside the fence of the vineyard, watching the woman in the gazebo. Her light purple hair hangs over her face as she reads a book, and her legs are curled up under her dress. I notice the bassinet next to her. She doesn't know I'm sitting here. I could easily kill her, and she would never know I was there. Her guards walk the perimeter, not seeing me either.

I'm not here on an assignment. I'm not supposed to be here, but I can't stop myself. Ever since the memories began plaguing my dreams, I've been drawn to this property. I remember the garden. I remember sitting in that gazebo and playing with dolls. There is a huge gap in my memories, but lately the space has been growing smaller. With every frequent headache, a flashback is unveiled, showing me bits of a past I can't fully remember.

Growing up, I was told I wasn't wanted, that I was left at a church, and then the *doctor* came for me. But that's a lie. I had a loving family. I had a brother and a father who cared about me. I know this because today I remembered the moment I was taken to the church. A woman had driven me to a priest and told him to get rid of me. She looked down at me and grabbed my chin so hard she left marks.

"They love you so much they are blinded with it, and he won't give me a child. I must have an heir if I want to control the family. Therefore, you must go far, far away." She shoves me away from her. *"Father, maybe you should make sure she's pure."* Her laugh is evil as she walks out. *I scream for Dante and Papà, but they don't come for me.*

The memory causes a sharp pain in the side of my skull. I grab my head and close my eyes, hoping the pain subsides along with the nausea. Instead, another memory flashes behind my lids.

I'm giggling and laughing as I run through the maze of the garden. I turn

my head back to see a tall, dark-haired man chasing me. “No, caro fratello, no.” I laugh as his long legs eat up the distance. He swings me up in his arms and laughs as I squeal in delight. When he hugs me to his body, I take a big sniff of him, smelling the vineyard on him. He squeezes me tighter to his chest.

“Love you, Luna Lou.” He kisses my forehead before he sets me down.

A stick snaps, and my eyes flash open. I’m dressed in all black with black grease camouflaging my face. I carefully twist around and see the form of someone moving closer to me. It’s not one of their guards.

I look back at the gazebo, and that’s when I see him walk out and take the woman into his arms. He holds her for a moment before kissing her hard on the lips. He then reaches into the bassinet and pulls out the blue bundle of blankets.

Dante.

I have to focus on what I need to do. I must lead the enemy away from them. I silently move along the perimeter of the fence until I’m out of sight of his guards. Once I’m far enough away that they can’t hear me, I take off running.

I need to get away. My punishment is going to be severe for coming here. This is nowhere near the location of my last assignment. I went dark and didn’t check in after my last hit. Something pricks the back of my neck, and I pull it out. It’s a dart, which I toss away from me.

I want to laugh at them. He trained me to be almost immune to most sedatives. I take a deep, calming breath to help slow my blood pressure so the poison doesn’t hit me faster. I turn and face off with the first man, my knife out and the blade arcing in the darkness. I use black tactical knives so they don’t reflect any light.

We are in complete darkness out here so far from Venice, where the Lupo vineyard is. The doctor’s guard falls to the ground, but before I can turn and run again, another is on me. He shoots, and I barely dodge out of the way. The bullet slices through my side, but I don’t care. I come at him with my gun. The silencer muffles the sound as I shoot him up through his chin into his head. Blood and brain matter splatter me, but I don’t react. I’ve been killing for years. I’m desensitized to it.

A second dart hits me in the back, and I can’t reach this one to stop the flow of the sedative into my system. I turn and face the wimp as he steps back as if waiting until I’m incapacitated. I see the fear in his eyes as I

advance on him. I drop to my knees and look beyond him to see the doctor making his way toward me.

“Oh, my daughter, you’ve been a very bad little girl. Now, Father will have to punish you.” His voice is full of promise and growls from where his throat was damaged in a previous fight. He has a thick Russian accent that he tries to cover but is unable to, even after all his years working with the KGB before he got his job at the *school*.

I have the urge to spit at him, but that will only make my pain and punishment worse. He punches me, and I fall to the ground. Just before I lose consciousness, he hovers over my body.

“Father is going to show you what happens when you disobey me.”

I fall into the bliss of whatever sedative concoction he made to bring me down. Good, because I don’t want the memories of what he’s going to do to me. I have too many of them already. At least he’ll be fired if he rapes me again, or so the deputy chief threatened. It gives me some comfort, but not much though.

Several hours later I come to in the warehouse in Léon. This is where the doctor and his team usually do all their work. I’m not the only *patient*, but I’m his longest living one. So many before me ended up killing themselves when they went crazy from all the drugs they were given or the shock therapy. I don’t know why I haven’t yet. I’ve thought about it.

I don’t move or change my breathing so that no one knows I’m awake yet. I’m strapped to the chair and my head is already locked into place with the bite block in my mouth. I can’t turn my head and look around, but I hear Deputy Chief Moreau’s voice as he hisses in anger.

“You told us she was good. You said that she was completely under your control and wasn’t slipping. I told you if she isn’t under control, we’ll have to get rid of her. She knows too much. She could bury us both, or she could go crazy and go on a killing spree. Neither of us can handle the hit to our careers. You were barely hanging on at that school when we found you. Do you want to go back to that?”

“I have complete control over her. She isn’t slipping. I don’t know why she was there, but we’ll take care of it now. I decreased her dose last time

because we haven't had an operative under this kind of control for so long. I don't know the risks," Doctor Formanski defends himself.

I'm not slipping their control because of less medication. I'm fairly certain that my mind has decided enough is enough. That my own body and mind are finally fighting the drugs and torture he's put me through for years. Ever since I was a small girl, he's been giving me different vitamins, medications, and a mix of illegal and controversial drugs. I did some research recently on some of the medications I knew the names of. I have a photographic memory, and I memorize the names from the bottles sitting on the counter before he drugs me. I'm able to remember them afterward with lots of concentration. I leave myself notes to remember certain things. This time I won't be able to leave a message for myself except for the backup plan I've put into effect. I need to get out of here before the doctor turns my brain to mush from all he does, or the agency sends a hit squad after me.

I'll never be able to return to my family as long as both of these men live. Deputy Chief Moreau does work for Interpol, but this agency of his is a side project. I wonder if they know he uses his own company to do contract work for them.

I start concentrating on their voices again.

"We need her for at least two more assignments. Then you can do whatever you want with her, or if she is still good, we'll use her for some other side projects." I hear the glee in the deputy's voice. "But we need her for this one in six weeks. It's the key to getting her into the other." What I assume is a folder slaps down on the table behind me. I continue to keep my breathing normal and my eyes closed so they don't know I'm awake. This way I can learn more. "Get her ready for this one. She'll need hand-to-hand combat and some sex appeal." I don't understand why he doesn't think I'm sexy. They made me this physically fit. They demanded I look like this. "Then we'll set her after them. She'll start with the family in Vicenza and then move to them." I don't know what "them" they are talking about, but something in my gut turns. "And stop raping her." I hear their bodies shuffling around, and I imagine that Moreau grabbed a hold of the doctor. "We can't have her get pregnant or be repulsed by sexual contact. We need her to lure him in. I've warned you once; I won't warn you again. I'll set her on you to kill next time."

"She won't kill me." There is a touch of tenderness in the doctor's voice. He thinks I care for him. I try to hold the vomit in my mouth. He makes me

sick. “Besides, she can’t get pregnant. I had a vasectomy years ago, and I control her body. She’s medicated every three months,” he spits out, and this time the vomit causes me to cough. Now they know I’m awake. The doctor is lying, but he’d kill me if I told anyone why he can’t get me pregnant. He’s been raping me over and over since I turned fifteen, but lately, I know he does it before he wipes my mind because I feel it afterward. The fear that he’s done something to prevent me from ever getting pregnant isn’t there because I don’t deserve that miracle.

I’m a monster.

I hear them moving toward me and prepare myself for what’s to come. I hate this chair. I hate what it does to me.

“I know you’re awake, *suka*.” The doctor calls me a bitch in Russian. He doesn’t think I know what it means. He thinks he knows so much about me. My eyes snap open, and I don’t hide the hate from them. “Oh, my pretty little daughter. You were a bad girl.” His hand brushes down my cheek, and I growl around the bite block as I try to move away from his touch.

I pull against the cuffs around my wrists neutralizing my hands, and when I try to fight with my legs, a guard comes over and secures the straps tighter. I’ll have bruises, but I don’t care. I will fight them with everything in me.

I want to remember.

I want my life back that they took from me.

The first drug hits my system in a warm blush across my body. Euphoria and weakness slam into my brain. It’s a blend of different drugs, including LSD and something the doctor used in the KGB to wipe people’s minds. I’ve never been able to find out what that is, but I know it has scopolamine in it. I can’t move; however, I’m aware of everything they are doing to me. My senses are dulled, yet I still watch them. The helmet with the electoral pads is strapped onto me and tightened on my chin, the bite block secured another notch. My lips crack from the pull against them. I taste blood, but the bite block keeps me from biting my tongue. Automatic intravenous pumps are attached to the IVs in my arms.

Everyone steps back after the cables are all attached, and they all watch, even the deputy chief. I don’t see pity in his eyes but calculation, while the doctor has glee in his. He gets off on my pain. It’s why I’ve stopped screaming when he rapes me. The first jolt of electricity hits my body, and I bow from the table. Muscles that were loose from the drugs now lock up, and my mind blanks. Before the second one hits, I feel the coolness of something

entering my veins and then nothingness.

CHAPTER

Two

SIX WEEKS LATER

LUNA

I sit outside the deputy chief's office, waiting for him to call me in for my next assignment. The door is cracked open, and I can hear him yelling at Doctor Formanski about how long it's taken for me to get back to work after my last mission.

I stare ahead, not understanding what they are talking about. I've been in training for the last several weeks. A continuation of my training with guns, knives, hand-to-hand combat, and languages.

I don't look at the receptionist because she will report to them if I show any emotion other than indifference. I'm confused because their words don't make sense to me. The doctor has been running a lot more tests on me, or I think he has. I can't remember.

"Adams," Deputy Chief Moreau yells, and I rise.

I brush my hands down my legs to remove any wrinkles. The black slacks are perfectly fit to my body. I have a green shell on that brings out the green in my hazel eyes. The black jacket hides the weapons that I have hidden on me. I step into the office and close the door.

"Who are you?" he asks me, and I figure he wants to test me just like the doctor has over the past few weeks.

I stare him down, not blinking. "I'm Luna Adams." I've been trained to only give the basic information needed. Answering a question with too much information can cause me to be figured out. I'm never to be caught, and if I am, I must commit suicide. It's been ingrained in me for so long I wonder if I've ever known anything else.

A bolt of pain stabs my head behind my eyes, but I don't acknowledge it. I can't. I hold my body perfectly still. The pain becomes a dull headache, and I continue to ignore it.

"Tell me," he demands, and it takes everything in me not to lift the corner of my mouth into a smirk. A memory of standing here several times over and going through this same questioning fills my mind. Okay, this isn't new. Why did I think it was? Another memory of me looking into his eyes as I lie vulnerable hits me. Again, I don't physically react. I answer his question in full this time.

“I’m Luna Adams of Spokane, Washington. I am the only child of a couple who passed away in a car accident when I was away at college. I graduated in May, early with my master’s in art history from the Royal College of Art in London. While attending my classes, I managed a gallery and have been studying to be able to appraise art too. I speak English and know a bit of Latin.” I focus over his shoulder to the view out his window, not wanting to give away the fact I know those are all lies. I don’t know how I know, but I do.

“See, I told you she was fine.” Doctor Formanski throws out his hand toward Moreau.

“But she was there,” Moreau argues. He looks back at me as if he can see through me, as if he knows me. I was trained by the best, and they think I can’t lie to them. “Where did you go after your last assignment? Why were you in Italy?” he yells as he rises from his desk. He thinks his height will intimidate me, but I’m five nine without heels. Today I’m in a high enough heel that we look each other eye to eye.

“Sir, I don’t know what you are talking about. As my after-action report stated, after I neutralized my last assignment, I went back to my hotel and watched a television show, then I went to train.” I know he doesn’t believe me. I don’t know where I went, but he must know, and it wasn’t what I said.

An hour later I’m on a plane heading to Bucharest. A Romanian mafioso has been selling women and torturing them. I’m reading through the file as I take in his arrogance that he only has a two-man guard. I memorize his schedule. By the time we land, I have a plan, and I head to the hotel.

After checking in, I move to the elevator and check out the camera in the reflection of the doors. I know the hotel doesn’t have any cameras in the elevator shaft. So I hit the button for the top floor and get off. When I step off the elevator, I wait, then click the button on the disrupter in my pack so the cameras can’t see what I’m about to do. As soon as I hear the elevator moving down, I pull another device out of my pack to pry the doors open. I look down the shaft and retrieve the small pack from my backpack. I let it fall to the top of the elevator and then let the doors close and hit the stairs before security comes looking to see what’s causing an issue with the camera.

When I get to my room, I proceed to stage it to look like a person stayed in it. Housekeeping won't know the difference when they come in the morning. I take a quick shower, making sure not to get my hair wet, before getting ready to go out.

Again, I get into my bag of tricks and pull out a dress along with all my things I'll need for the night. I put on my makeup, being sure to contour my face to give it a slightly different look. I slip a blond wig over my dark brown hair, then proceed to get dressed in a long black dress that accentuates my curves and bust. The material is soft and chiffon-like as it skates down my body. The bodice cuts in on the sides, and with just the right angle, someone can see my side boob. I step into the four-inch black strappy high heels, completing the look.

This is just a quick hit, not an infiltration. I'll be in and out before anyone knows it. But if I'm dressed sexy, they won't think anything of me. It's the perfect cover. They'll remember me, but in this dress, they wouldn't know where I'm hiding weapons or that I'm even capable of hurting anyone.

I strap several throwing knives high up on my leg, where the slit won't expose them, and put the small compact gun in my black clutch. I toss my now almost empty backpack in the trash on my way out the door. I won't need to retrieve it later. Everything I'll need is waiting in the elevator shaft on top of the elevator. There is nothing in the bag that will lead to me, not even my fingerprints. Those were removed by acid several years ago.

The elevator arrives on the main floor, and I make my way to the bar to wait for the man I was sent here to end. The company sends me in when they can't get anything to stick legally with these organized crime men. I make sure they can't do anymore business. I usually am sent in to bring the whole organization down, no matter what it takes, but this man is just a hit because he's selling flesh—young girls. I don't have any emotions on most of my jobs, but men like this make my skin crawl with the need to end them.

I don't have any remorse for what I must do.

When I step into the bar, soft piano music draws me in for a moment. It's calming to my senses. I look over and see the wide back of a man moving to the music as he plays. His dark head looks across the shiny surface and down so I can't see his face. I walk to the bar and carefully hook my heel over the rung of the chair as I pull up to sit on it. I'm careful to make sure my dress doesn't cause me to flash anyone. The music stops, and I look up to see soft brownish eyes looking at me. He raises his eyebrow as his eyes move down

my body, taking me in as if he's sliding his hand down my skin in the softest caress. My breath hitches, and I'm instantly turned on.

This doesn't happen to me. I don't desire to be touched by anyone, but I want this man. His dark hair is wavy and brushed back from his face. He has a short, groomed beard and mustache, and he keeps his dark eyebrow raised as he continues to stare my way. He smirks with a tip of his kissable full lips. I look down and see that my dress has slipped and is showing too much leg. I fix it and look back up. He shrugs, and his smirk turns into a full smile.

I break eye contact with him and turn to the bar to order a Kir Royale. One look in the mirror behind the bar shows he's still focused on me as he begins playing again. I take him in. He's dressed in black slacks that end at his ankle, loafers that look like he doesn't have socks on, and a black silky short-sleeved shirt buttoned to his collarbone. His long legs let me know he's probably well over six feet tall. Muscles that are long and sinewy ripple under his shirt. He's not taking his eyes off me as he continues to play, and desire pools in my belly. My nipples pucker behind the pasties I'm wearing so I can go braless in this dress. Gooseflesh pops up on my back as he continues to stare.

Movement in the mirror causes me to look away, and I see my target walk into the room. He's only accompanied by one guard. I'm ready to make my move when the second walks in with a young woman.

She changes everything.

I was going to be the lure and get him to take me to his room, but now I must alter my plans. I calculate how I'm going to get her out and still fulfill my mission. It's going to be harder, but I need to save her if I can. She's too young.

With my focus on my mark, I don't notice the piano music has stopped until a body stands near me. I completely missed his approach because I was focused on the couple across the room.

"I'm Dario. Can I get you a drink?"

I look at him but keep the group in my peripheral. I was right, he's six foot four at least. Up close, he has hazel brown eyes, the ring a mossy green. He smells like a vineyard, and a memory slams into my head of a man bigger than him, followed by a woman and then an infant. *My family*. My eyes flare wide, and I wobble from the intense images and pain.

Dario wraps his hand around my arm. His long fingers with blunt nails caress me like his eyes did earlier. "Are you okay, *mio angelo*?"

“I’m sorry?” I look up at him in confusion. I know what he called me, but I can’t let him know I know. How I know what he said confuses me, but after that memory, I’m wondering if I’m Italian.

He lets me go and steps into me more. “I called you angel.” No, he didn’t. He called me *his* angel. “I don’t know your name, so I don’t know what to call you.” His full lips tip up on the side, and my heart rate increases.

“I’m Luna,” I say, but then movement catches my eye and I know I have to work. “I have to go. You play nicely,” I say, feeling awkward. I don’t know how to flirt unless I’m working.

“Don’t run off.” He grabs my arm. I slip away from him and off the other side of the stool. With a smile at him, I grab my clutch and take off.

A part of me wishes I could stay and get to know him, but I have to do this. I want to protect the girl. It’s my job.

They move across the lobby toward the elevators, and I move faster to catch up to them. When they step into the open elevator, I throw out my arm to stop the door from closing. This isn’t what I exactly had in mind, but it will work.

The guards try to stop me and protest in Romanian. I ignore them like I don’t know what they said and move inside the car. It’s going to be tight, but I can do it. I push the button for the top floor so I’m with them as long as possible. It’s also their destination, where I know they have a suite. Discreetly I pull the chain that retracts into my clutch and hold it with one hand while I step back, making sure to keep the girl behind me. I click the button on the responder in my bag to scramble the camera.

“Hey, watch it,” my mark says, and I turn to look him in the eye.

One of his guards moves toward me, and I whip the chain out and wrap it around his neck. I spin him around and use the momentum to throw my body at the other guard, nailing him with my heel, before I fire a shot into the mark’s head between his eyes. The girl starts screaming. I turn toward the guard wrapped in my chain and snap his neck, then I pull a knife from my garter and throw it at the other guard, who is up and coming toward me. I grab a second knife and slice his throat.

“I’m here to help you,” I tell the girl as I stop the elevator. Her screams turn to cries now. “Come on, we only have a few seconds.”

I wrap the chain for my clutch around my waist and secure my gun again. Using the handrail in the elevator, I climb up and open the hatch. Once I pull myself out, I turn back for the girl’s hand and help her up. We stand there for

a second before I reach for my pack on the roof. I open it and retrieve the grappling hook gun along with a harness. I only have one harness because I thought it would just be me.

The elevator starts moving again, and I know we don't have much time now. I slam the hatch closed, throw my pack over my shoulder, secure myself into the harness, and shoot the hook. Grabbing the girl around the waist, I click the button so we are retracted up toward the top. We make it to the roof access when the elevator hatch is opened and bullets start flying toward us. With her hand clutched in mine, I run across the roof to the next closest building. I jump across the space, then coax her to do the same.

"I'm afraid I'll fall," she whimpers.

"If you don't jump, they will come get you again."

Just then the door to the roof opens and guards run out. I shoot them before they can get shots off. The girl jumps, and we escape inside the next building.

An hour later, after I dropped the girl off at an Interpol safe house I trust, one where the doctor or deputy chief can't get her, I'm sitting in another hotel room in shorts and a tank top. I'm bruised but don't care. *The Big Bang Theory* is on the television, and I'm relaxing with a tray of food from room service.

I lie back and laugh as Sheldon and Penny are talking. An image of Dario, the piano player, flashes through my mind. If I wasn't worried about running into police or any of the bad guys, I'd go look for him, not that I really need to worry. I make sure I don't leave any trace that I was there. My mark had two main bodyguards and an army of men with him. Police are looking at another organized crime family as the hitters. They'll never figure out it was me. They never do.

A knock at the door has me moving to the bathroom and away from any direct shooting. After a pause, another three knocks sound, and I know it's the team. I didn't contact them. How did they know I was here? I open the door and take in the two-man team. I don't turn my back on them as I retreat to the main part of the room.

"I haven't even called in yet. You guys are on top of it tonight." I

recognize them as two of the men who accompanied me to Bucharest.

I reach for my sweatpants to pull on over my shorts when I feel the sting of a dart. I turn to look at them and find one of them holding a dart gun. I advance on him, but I'm hit with a second dart before I get to him. I try to slow my breathing and control my system, but whatever is in the dart hits hard and fast. I drop to my knees with my sweatpants caught around my calves. Looking between their bodies, I see the doctor enter the room. He comes right up to me and grips my hair close to the base of my skull. I try to fight him as he lifts me up by my hair, but my arms are like lead weights.

"Why didn't you bring the girl to me?" he spits next to my ear. "You'll regret that." He releases me and hits me on the side of my head. I fall to the floor, smacking the other side of my head on the wheels of the chair pushed into the table. My eyes close and I'm out.

CHAPTER

Three

DARIO

I sit across my father's desk in his office. As he leans over the desktop, I notice the fine lines he had a few years ago are deeper and are full-on wrinkles now. He looks tired. I've known for a long time that he expected me to take over the family, but I've enjoyed just running the businesses and being able to travel when I want to. I have a feeling that decision is about to be taken from me though.

Just two weeks ago, my trip to Bucharest to meet with a colleague my father wanted me to order guns from was a nice distraction—and so was the beautiful Luna. But the deal fell through and I was left without the shipment we needed when our contact was killed.

“Papà, we really need to consider contacting the Lupu family and negotiating with them.” I've been trying to talk him into this for six months. Ever since the Nigerians decided to make a play for our territory.

“No. I won't give them that satisfaction. Don't you know that a Lupu is now in charge of the Bocharov Bratva?”

“I heard. She's also a Bocharov and married to a hitman for the family.” I can't hide the chuckle. My papà is so old-fashioned he can't believe a woman can run an organized crime family. Or that a head of the family would marry so beneath their station. His father was the same way. It's one of the reasons I choose to travel. I don't want my papà to set me up with women he deems are appropriate. Just that thought causes the blonde with beautiful hazel green eyes to flash through my mind again. My distraction that didn't happen. She was sexy as sin, but I don't think the carpet matched the drapes. I wonder what her real hair color is. I wish she hadn't taken off right before Kovacs was killed.

His death was a blessing. I didn't want to do business with Kovacs. I'd rather we stay here in Italy and work with one of the other families, but my father doesn't trust the Lupu family because of how they took over after the Rossis were killed. He isn't sure he wants to be associated with them either because of their connection to the Morellos and the Kid Killer. Especially now that the Cararellis have come back too. We need to do something to prevent the Nigerians from taking more of our foothold here in Northern

Italy. They've already opened a club in direct competition to several of ours.

"Do you want to work with the Bratva again? You barely survived the previous Bocharov." He reminds me of the time when I was almost assassinated by Konstantin, the last Pakhan. He wanted to take over our clubs here in Vicenza, which are huge moneymakers. I was shot several times, my lung collapsed even.

"If I don't have to, it would be better. But I've heard it's different than when he was in charge. Maybe we should just contact Dante Lupo, the consigliere, and have a meeting with him. I can set one up under the pretense we are honoring his new heir."

My father tips his head to the side and then slightly nods. "Do it. That way you can also get a lay of their land and see if we should just bury them and take over their area. Then Musa would think twice."

I shake my head and lean forward, resting my elbows on my knees. "Papà, no. There is no way that Dante will let us get away with that. He and Mattia just went through their own men to test their loyalty. I've heard rumors that it's because they found a living Rossi."

"What?" He rears back in shock. "That's not possible. They were killed, all of them."

I lean back, taking in my father's defense, and then it hits me. "*Fancula*. You knew about the hit on the family." It's not a question because I don't doubt he helped coordinate something.

"Don't you swear in here, Son." He waves his hand around as if "fuck" hasn't been said here many times in many languages. "I didn't kill anyone, I just gave some information I had."

"Papà, why? They massacred that family, even the wife. Women and children shouldn't be touched."

"I didn't want the Rossis ever coming after us. Giancarlo was eyeing our lands. I know it."

"You've always been paranoid. I have an opening tonight at the gallery. I need to go." I stand and head for the door.

"Do what I said, Dario. Make the meeting, but don't talk about an alliance."

I stop and turn before I open the door. I love my father. I even respect him most of the time, but his thirst for power and his paranoia are getting worse. I'm not going to lie to him, so I just nod and step out.

I move through the house and kiss my *nonna* on the cheek before I head

out to my black Ferrari LaFerrari. I open the butterfly doors and slide in to head to my small vineyard I've been slowly restoring.

As I pull down my long sweeping driveway, I look out over the right side to my now empty vines. Harvest was a couple of weeks ago. On the other side of the driveway, I have olive and fig trees growing. My father hates that I love being out in nature or in my art gallery than being at the clubs. I still like to run them, but the places I feel the most accomplished are here or in town at one of the two art galleries I own.

Tonight I'm proudly showcasing one of my cousins, who has been trying to break into the art world for a while now. She has beautiful pieces that are inspired by some of the classic impressionists. I like to help and support my family to do things other than the family business. My father hates that I'm helping her. As far as he's concerned, she should be focusing on finding a good man to marry. She told him he needs to step into this century. *Nonna* told him to leave her be, and of course he stopped. My grandmother is the only woman he will listen to. From what I understand, my mamma was another woman he listened to. It's because he lost her to a rival family that he is so determined to avoid others. She was killed by a Romanian, which is why I'm glad we didn't do business with Kovacs. Sure, not all Romanian organizations are the same, but it's still a bitter pill to swallow.

I pull into the double car garage attached to the house. The attached single garage is full of construction supplies so I can finish the rooms in the manor. After growing tired of living in a condo in town, I bought this place two years ago and gutted it. I've finally got the main floor done. I still need to do the upstairs, but I wanted to get the vineyard running and all its buildings completed. I also restored the pool and spa off the back. It's too cold to swim, but the spa is nice at night.

Moving through the house to the other side where my office is, I take a seat behind my large desk and log on to my computer before calling Dante on my mobile.

"Hello." His deep, gruff voice comes across the line, and I hear the hesitancy. Okay, so I've already been talking to Dante. He and I have met without either of our fathers' blessings. I know he's shocked I'm not calling him from a burner phone but from my real phone number, which I gave him after our first meeting. He and I want the same thing.

Peace.

"Lupo, it's Dario Revello." I smile so he doesn't hear anything but

kindness. I play it off just in case my father has someone listening in on my phone. “I was wondering if we could meet soon.”

A baby cries in the background, and I hear the soft voice of a woman. Is it strange that I’m actually jealous? I want to settle down. I want a family. I want what he has. I’ve never met his wife or child. They had a whirlwind relationship, and I know she is the Rossi heir. I didn’t tell my father the truth because Dante told me that in confidence. He’s trying to protect her in case there are still enemies out there. Unfortunately, there are. My papà being one.

“Hello, Revello. How can I help you?” He goes along with the ruse.

“Like I said, I want to meet. I think we have a common interest.” He already knows this, but again it’s all a play for those who may be listening in.

“Just a moment, *bambola*, let me take this call and we can go,” he says away from the phone, and again a pang hits my chest.

It’s funny that he’s calling her doll. It makes me wonder what she looks like for him to refer to her as that. Like me, he’s a tall man; however, he has a lot more muscle than I do.

I hear him moving on the other end of the line, then he says, “I’ll have to look at my calendar, but how does next weekend sound to you?”

“I can do that.” I type it into my calendar app and then send him the invite to the email address I have on file for him.

“Got it. We’ll talk soon. I don’t need to tell you to come alone, do I?”

“You know I can’t do that.”

“Thought I’d try.” He hangs up without saying goodbye.

I know why he asked. I’ll be going to his family’s home and he’s just thinking of her. I’ll figure something out. Unlike him, I don’t travel with very many guards. Ever since the attack years ago, I prefer to be by myself. It draws less attention, and I can fight and shoot as good as any guard my father would hire. But only a few people know that.

After a long shower, I dress in all black and head out to the gallery to get ready for this evening.

Luna

I look at myself in the mirror one more time. I was put on this assignment a couple of days ago and arrived here in Vicenza to scope out everything before tonight. The reflection that looks back at me is of a beautiful dark-haired woman with hazel eyes. I have a bruise on the side of my head by my ear and more along my jaw. They must be from my last assignment, which I don't remember. The doctor helps me forget them. He says it will make me a better operative if I don't remember everything I've done in the past.

I turn to the side and take myself in. The white knee-length sheath dress is completely open at the sides of my torso and closes with a large gold zipper that extends from the left side of my waist to just above my knee. The bottom of the dress is asymmetrical, going from my left knee and ending about mid-calf on my right side. The top comes all the way up to just above my collarbone. The whole effect doesn't show much, but what it does is alluring. I slip on a pair of red high heels, and my long hair that I've flattened out falls over one shoulder.

This is a long assignment. I'm meant to infiltrate the organization and bring them all down. Implode it from the inside. This is my first step. I'm going to an art gallery owned by the lieutenant, the son of the Capo, which makes him the second in command. The artist showing is another family member of theirs. If I can get one of them to befriend me, I can get in deeper.

I pick up my clutch that has a camera in it and my key to the robin's-egg blue Maserati that I get to use. I make my way out of the hotel and down to the main floor, where the concierge signals the valet to get the car for me.

It's waiting for me when I step out onto the sidewalk. I tip the valet and slide into the driver's seat, then I take off. The purr of the engine lulls me for a moment, and I shake my head as a memory flashes through it. A dull headache at the back of my head causes me to close my eyes for only a moment to ease the pain. I open my eyes and swerve to miss the car that is stopped in front of me. The roads are tighter the closer I get to the city center where the historic city once sat. I pull into a parking spot and give the valet my key before I walk the short distance to the gallery. I met the young artist earlier when I cased the place. She's about twenty and excited about her showing. This is her first one, and I walked around admiring her pieces.

I've studied art design in university, so I knew what to say to impress her and not sound stupid. She's actually more talented than I figured. I thought the family was taking pity on her and letting her show at their gallery as a favor, but she will more than likely sell out tonight with the pieces she has on

display. The young artist might be my way in. I can get in her good graces and start a friendship with her.

Walking carefully over the cobblestone toward the gallery, I notice it's lit up and shining in the now setting sun of the evening. A few cars are parked directly in front of the gallery along the old street. A black Ferrari and Mini Cooper in a bright white. People are milling around, and the urge to move away from them is so great. I hate being in crowds even though it's the best cover. For some reason I've never liked it.

I step to the podium and am about to sign the guest log when a squeal and voice stop me.

"You came."

I turn to see the girl walking up. I rack my mind that is still hurting with a dull thrum for her name. Vittoria. She rushes up to me, and for the first time in a long time when she pulls me into her embrace, I don't cringe away. She's dressed in a white Grecian inspired long gown that is over one shoulder.

"I told you I would come." I chuckle, and for once it's not a lie. My eyebrow lifts as I try to figure out why making her happy makes me *happy*. These are feelings I've never had before. I'm about to step away from her and flee, but she grabs my hand and pulls me farther into the gallery toward a man. He has his wide back to us, so I don't see much other than his tall frame. He's dressed in all black. The shirt is so silky looking it almost shines in the glow of the lights. His dark hair is curly and the same shade as Vittoria's.

"Rio," Vittoria says, and he turns.

I step back because there is something so familiar about the man. His piercing hazel brown eyes are laser focused on me. He has a trim beard and mustache that covers the lower part of his face, but his lips are full and look soft. I pull my bottom lip between my teeth, and his eyes flare at the move. I release it and look for the closest escape. Something about this man is causing my body to riot. My breathing quickens. My pulse is racing. Even my core that never responds to a male softens and aches.

I want him.

"Dario Revello." He holds out a large hand with long fingers.

Something like déjà vu hits me. I look down at his hand and then back up to his face again. I see those fingers playing a piano, and I don't know why. I see those eyes drinking me in up close. His lips that I want to kiss me.

"Luna Adams," I say softly, and reach out my hand toward his. When his

long fingers wrap around my hand, I swear the hair on my arm raises and I stumble. He pulls me into him.

“Whoa there.” He holds me close, and Vittoria chuckles.

“I’ll leave you two alone now, but come see some of the paintings, Luna. I found the perfect one for you.” She moves away from us, and I look up at him.

“Um.” I step back and everything in me rebels the action, but I can’t be this close to him. I can’t be here with him. Something is terribly wrong with me.

His eyes sparkle in the dim light, and his full lips tip up into a smile that shows all over his face. “What are the odds of meeting again in another city? I knew blond wasn’t your color.”

My eyebrows drop in confusion. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I need to go see what Vittoria wants me to see and then I have other plans.” I start to move away, but his arm wraps around my waist. His fingers slip into the opening at the side of my dress and graze the bottom of my exposed breast. I shiver from the warmth of his hand and moan.

“*Fanculo*,” he says as he pulls me away from the crowd.

We end up in a dark hallway, where he presses me into the wall. My hands land on his chest, and I want to fight him. Something deep inside me says to flee, but I grip his soft shirt in my hands as his head lowers to mine. Just before he kisses me, he pauses.

“I’ve dreamed of these lips for two weeks, *mio angelo*.”

It’s like a whirlwind. His lips land on mine and take me to places I’ve never been before. I’ve been kissed, but not like this. When his tongue begs to enter, I open, and it goes so deep that my toes curl. My back arches away from the wall and into his body. Memories slam into my mind, and I remember him calling me his angel. He didn’t kiss me, but I wanted him to. I remember killing the men in the elevator. The blood. The girl.

I pull away from him, breathing heavily. He is watching me with concern in his eyes.

“I remember you.” The words are torn from a place in my mind that hurts when I think about it again. “How?”

“I saw you in Bucharest.”

More memories flood my mind. Being attacked in the hotel afterward by the doctor. I know now where the bruise on the side of my head came from. Just as the thought enters my mind, Dario slides his hands against the side of

my head, and I cringe. He pulls away slightly but only to have me tilt my head. He inspects the bump and mark on my skin.

“I’ll kill the *stronzo* who did this to you, *angelo*. Tell me his name.” He bites the words out, but his touch is so gentle and soothing. He leans in and kisses the hurt spot. Another memory fills my mind. This one is of a man leaning down to kiss my knee when I tripped and fell. I pull back so fast I hit the wall, and Dario pulls me back into him. “Don’t hurt yourself, *angelo*.”

I want to tell him. I want to ask him what’s happening to me, but I’m sure he won’t know either. Something about him calls to a part of my soul. I want to wrap myself around him and never let him go. But I can’t do that. I have a mission to complete.

I slowly push him away from me and then look up at him. He’s so tall. Even in my heels, I have to look up. He looks down at me with concern in his eyes.

“We should get back.”

I slip along the hallway away from him. As soon as I step out into the main gallery, his hand is against my lower back in a possessive move. I try to step away from him, but he moves with me as if we are dancing.

Another memory causes me to pause. This one hurts so much, I lean forward and hold my head. Memories of bodies flood my mind. People dead around me.

“Let me get you some water.” He leaves me, and I feel lost for a moment. I need to get away from him before I say or do something to blow my cover. I find Vittoria. She’s standing by a beautiful picture of a vineyard.

“This is the one I thought you’d like.” I look at it again and then to her. She’s right, I love it. Something about it makes me think I’m in the middle of it. It calms me.

“I love it. You were right. I want it.”

“Awesome.” She hugs me against her. “I’ll let Dario know. Let me go get him.”

“Um, I have a really bad headache. I’m going to take off. I’ll stop by tomorrow and pay for it. Is that okay?”

“As long as you let me show you around tomorrow. Vicenza is a beautiful city, and I want to show it to you.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

I make my escape before Dario can find me again.

Moving through the dark streets to my car, I feel like I’m being followed.

I slip down an alleyway and wait. When the person enters, they are unprepared for my attack. I have them pressed against the wall with their arm twisted up behind their back, ready to break it.

“Why are you following me?” I say softly in their ear. The man is about my height without my heels. So he’s shorter than me now. He’s thin, and when he turns his head, I realize he’s a young teenage boy.

“Don’t hurt me. I’m supposed to give you this.” He hands me a packet with his other hand.

“Who are you?”

“I’m Matty. You helped me. You told me if you ever returned to Italy, I was supposed to give this to you.” His voice quivers in fear. “Please don’t hurt me, Luna. You said I’m supposed to say, Luna Lou, it’s time.”

I step back so fast I almost fall over. The kid turns and reaches for me. He grabs my arm to hold me up.

“Matty?” I say his name as the memory of rescuing him from a Nigerian organization flashes through my mind. I killed a man because he was going to rape a young Matty. He was only twelve at the time. It’s clearly been a few years. “How long has it been?”

“It’s been five years,” he says. “You were only sixteen when you saved me.”

I remember the case. I was sent in to infiltrate the ring as a young girl they were going to traffic. I helped Matty, and he and I escaped together. I slide my hand against the bruised skin Dario kissed as I remember the beating the doctor gave me for not bringing him in. Just like I didn’t take the girl to him the last time, two weeks ago. I’ve been keeping the kids away from him ever since I can remember. I made contacts in cities.

“I didn’t expect to see you here. But when your tracker started beeping, I knew I had to help you.”

I look down at the bracelet on my wrist that I always insist on wearing. It’s got a tracking chip in it. If I’m close to the monitor, it will let him know and he was to bring me this. I don’t know what it is, but I have a feeling it’s going to answer a lot of my questions.

“Thank you, Matty. Are you being safe?”

“Yeah, I’m working as a picker. I travel around during the harvests.”

“You need a better job. I’ll try to help you.”

He chuckles softly. “After you help yourself.”

I nod.

“Sorry I missed you when you were here a couple of months ago. By the time I got to Venice, you were already gone.”

“I don’t remember being here,” I confess.

“I know.” How he knows and I don’t puzzles me, but I know whatever is in this packet will explain. “I’ll be in the area for a bit if you need me. You’ll know how to reach me.” He waves toward the packet and then disappears in the darkness.

I walk back to my car confused. I remember Matty. I remember that assignment. I remember meeting Dario, but I don’t remember anything else about my life. I know what I’ve been told to say by the doctor and the deputy chief, but I know nothing more than that.

CHAPTER

Four

LUNA

I'm sitting on the bed watching the screen, not seeing Penny and Leonard. Nothing about my favorite show is calming me tonight. I'm in shorts and a loose T-shirt. I see the phone number again on the piece of note paper that was included in the packet.

Before me is a written account of my youth. I was sent to a church, where I was bought by the doctor. He took me to a school in Russia, where I was trained to kill. He used drugs and electric shock therapy on me. After I rescued Matty, I remembered everything and made this account. I gave it to him and sent him away from me so he couldn't be found.

I knew I was from Italy. I know I'm here for a reason.

I turn on the burner phone that was in the packet and text the number like the message says to do.

ME

Luna Lou of Whoville needs a roast beast

UNKNOWN NUMBER

Package on its way

I lean back and try to watch the show, but I'm not seeing it. I know in my bones after every assignment, every kill, I watch this show because it helps me process the pain of what I just did.

I'm a monster.

I kill people.

I can honestly say some of them were bad and needed to die, like the man who had Matty and the man who had the girl from two weeks ago. But not all of them were bad in the sense they were evil. They were bad because they ran organized crime families.

There is a knock on the door, and I roll to the side to grab my gun. Moving toward the door, I don't look through the peephole or stand in front of it. Instead, I step into the entrance of the bathroom.

"Who's there?"

"I have a message for Luna Lou," a male voice I don't recognize says. Only a few people know that nickname. It's one of the memories I had since

entering the room and trying to relax after seeing Matty again. “Big Bang Theory,” the voice says, and I open the door, holding my gun in the man’s face. “I have a delivery.” He hands me the package, and I look at it.

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. I was contracted six months ago to find you if you sent me a message.”

This is the person I texted a bit ago.

I hand the man some money, but he shakes his head at me. “I owe you.” He walks down the hall, and I stick my head out to look at him. He knows me. He owed me?

I move back to the bed with the new package and open it up. It contains a laptop, cell phone, and a small surgical kit.

Luna,

It's me. I'm you. Only use this laptop and phone for contacts after you watch the video. It will explain what you need to do. It's time to fight for yourself. You've been tortured enough by the doctor.

Me

I reread the letter over and over before I open the laptop. I see the fingerprint scan and press my index finger to it. I’m surprised when it unlocks and a screen pops up of a video stopped. I press play and watch myself telling me what I need to know.

I learn more of what I was already sure of. I learn how the doctor has been controlling me with mind control drugs and shock therapy. But the scary part is I have a tracker in my body so they can find me at any time. I watch the video over and over until I get the nerve up to do this. I have to.

I walk into the bathroom with the small kit and roll it out on the counter. Carefully, I slip my hair to the side and see the small scar. I take the scalpel. I’m not afraid of the pain. I’m not nervous about pulling it out. I’m worried they will know what I’m doing and take me back.

But I did what the video me told myself to do. I have my bags packed,

ready to leave if I have to, but for a bit I'm going to continue on this mission. I don't know what it's about, but something about Revello is important. And it's not just his sexy body or soft full lips. It's something so intrinsic to my system. Something that I feel will help me to remember everything.

I slice into my skin carefully. Blood seeps out and slides down the side of my neck and down my chest. I watch it, entranced for a moment. I see blood splattering across a room. I see blood over and over in visions. People dying.

Death.

I shake off the thoughts and return to the task and see the small tracker. I pull it out carefully with my gloved hand and wrap it in a warm washcloth and glove. After setting it on the counter, I stitch up the small incision. It's things like this that I wonder how I know, but I don't know.

Just like I knew that Dario was speaking to me in Italian tonight.

I clean myself up and put a small flesh-colored bandage on myself. My video instructions said I had to carry the tracker with me everywhere I go for a couple of days so they think I'm still working for them.

My video self couldn't tell me much about my past, but I remember what I think are memories of myself. I'm playing and two different men are with me. I see two women too. One smiles at me, but she's sick. The other hates me. I feel it in my bones.

When I fall asleep, it's full of dreams and nightmares. I see the men I've killed in the past. I see the doctor as he rapes me over and over. I see more of the two men who I know love me.

Love. I'm not sure how I know what it is, but I can feel it. I feel it in my chest when I see them in my dreams. The feeling of peace and calm.

CHAPTER

Five

DARIO

I'm still pissed she snuck out on me last night, but when my cousin said she was showing her around the city today, I decided to crash. I don't care that Papà wants to meet about my upcoming meeting with Dante. I tell him we can speak later.

I'm waiting with Vittoria in the town square at a small table in front of a café, sipping my caffè as I watch her approaching. She's in black leather pants, a cream-colored lacy blouse, and a black jacket. The jacket has a military knockoff look to it. She's in high fuck-me heels that are cream-colored and bring her higher up for me. I can't wait to get between those creamy thighs. To feel those heels pressing into my back as I drill into her with my cock. She's got dark sunglasses covering her beautiful eyes, and her long hair is pulled back in a half up half down style. She smiles at Vittoria but gives me a pinched look.

"Vittoria." She leans in, and they kiss cheeks. She's taller than Vittoria, but the heels put her well over my cousin's five-foot-five height.

"Dario." Her voice is soft but holds a hint of uncertainty to it. She's not sure what to do, so I take the decision from her. I'll lead her where I want her. I'll never leave her hanging.

I pull her into my body and lay my lips on hers. She clutches at me, not sure what to do, but I keep my lips working over hers and turn my head to go deeper into her mouth when she opens up for me. Our tongues tangle and glide together. Making love like I want to do to her whole body. By the time I pull my head away, her lips are bruised, there is beard burn around her mouth on her delicate olive undertone skin, and she's holding on to me. Her fingers laced behind my neck.

"Hello, *mio angelo*. You left last night before I could talk to you more."

"I'd say you two did more than talk." Vittoria giggles. "I ordered you a black Americano. Isn't that what you Americans drink?" Vittoria says to Luna.

"I don't drink it. I drink caffè too."

"Oh, let me go get you one. I'll let you and Rio talk." My cousin takes off quickly, and I pull out a chair for Luna.

“Why did you leave me last night? I had plans.” I kiss her neck and notice a bandage there. “What happened?” I squat down beside her so she has my full attention and I have hers.

“I had a really bad headache.”

I notice her skin is paler than it was before, and when I lift her sunglasses to the top of her head so I can look into her hazel green eyes, I notice they are darker than normal.

“Are you feeling well?” I ask, and she leans back her head, tilting it ever so slightly as she looks at me curiously. “I notice everything about you, *dolce angelo*.” I move to the chair next to her and pull her closer to me. She tries to pull away, but I don’t stop until her chair is between my long legs and she’s pressed into me.

“I can sit over there,” she says, giving me sass, and I smile. I love her fire.

“I want you here. I like you close by. That way any *stronzo* around knows you are mine.” I didn’t mean to lay claim to her, but now that I’ve said the words, I realize how true they are. I know she’s mine.

She looks at me, and I see emotions swirling in her eyes. She closes her eyes for a moment, and when she opens them, they are blank and I hate it. I want her back.

“Okay, one caffè and a *rusumada*.” Vittoria sets the drink down along with the egg mixture. Without missing a beat, Luna dumps the mixture into her caffè and slowly mixes. I look at Vittoria, and she’s got a brow raised and watching in fascination too.

“Are you sure you’ve never been to Italy, *dolce angelo*?” I ask her, confused.

Vittoria told me that Luna said she was travelling around Europe to finalize her education in art history after she got her master’s degree in it at Royal College of Art. She stated she’s from Washington but never has been further than England. The fact she knows the local tradition to mix the egg mixture with our morning coffee is only known by those who have grown up around here. I watch as she lifts it to her lips and takes a sip. She looks back at us with both her eyes flared wide.

“I’ve never been here?” It’s not a statement. She doesn’t know.

“*Angelo*, tell me about growing up. Where did you? How were your parents?” I ask her, trying to see if maybe her family is Italian. She does have the more olive complexion that is known for the Mediterranean.

“Like I told Vittoria, I grew up in Spokane, Washington. My parents died

when I was studying at Royal College of Art. I have a master's in art history. I decided as part of my studies, I would travel around and learn more. I was in Paris recently and, of course, Bucharest, and now I'm here."

I don't understand why she was in Bucharest, but I don't question her more.

"How did you know to put your *rusumada* in your caffè?" Vittoria asks her the million-dollar question.

Luna looks around, avoiding answering the question before she turns back to us. That blank look is back in her eyes. "I read about it."

I can see Vittoria is about to question her, but I hold up my hand to stop her.

"Let's go look around," I say as she takes the last swallow.

Luna

I'm messing everything up. I screwed up breakfast. I don't know how I knew to mix that cup of egg mixture into my coffee, but I knew. Just like I've never liked American coffee or an Americano. I'm tired. That's the only excuse I have for why I'm not on my game.

We walk around Vicenza and go to several sights. When they walk up to a church, I can't step inside. They try to talk me into it, but I can't. I know what I read last night, but as I walked up to it, I saw faces of other girls. I saw a priest with a sinister look in his eyes. I couldn't do it.

I told them I'd wait outside. Vittoria went in, saying she had to light a candle, but Dario stayed with me. He's also bothering me and not in a bad way. He is attentive. Caring. Holds my hand and makes sure that he translates everything so I understand. What he doesn't know is he doesn't have to do that.

I know the sights. Some of them give me déjà vu moments, as if I've been there before. As far as I know, I've never been to Vicenza. But something deep down makes me think I have. We walk up to a large structure they say is called the Palazzo Chiericati that is a famous art gallery. Historically it was a

Renaissance palace. I stop as a wave of nausea hits me and my head starts throbbing. My eyes burn, and I close them as a memory runs through my body.

“Papà, will you build me a house like this when I get married?” I look up at the man holding my hand. He’s tall and has dark brown hair that is wavy and brushed back from his face. He has a mustache, and when he leans down, he picks me up into his arms and hugs me to him. I smell cigars, leather, and something I don’t know but I know is all him. I lay my head on his shoulder, and he carries me through the art gallery.

“My little princepsa will get whatever she wants.”

I feel Dario grip my arm, and I strike out, not thinking. I dislodge his hand from my arm and step back, ready to fight. When I look at him, he’s staring at me with a hard look. His body is vibrating as if he can’t stand not touching me. I realize I have tears rolling down my face and turn away from him. I never cry. I feel his body pressing into mine and move away further.

“I don’t feel good. Can I call it a day?”

I take off without waiting to hear their response. We’ve already made plans to go to Dario’s for dinner tomorrow, but I’ll be cancelling that. I can’t handle this.

I slam the door to my suite closed and move to the bed, where I flop down. Tears continue to roll down my face. I ran most of the way here. I’m scared of what I saw. Even though the file told me so much, it didn’t tell me everything, and from the memories that invade my mind, I know I was loved and wanted.

A man hugged me. He called me his princess. I called him Father. The doctor told me I had no family.

I jerk up from the bed and barely make it to the toilet where I throw up until I’m dry heaving. When I fall back against the wall, I realize I can’t do this anymore. I need to get away from them. I have feelings for both of them. I like Vittoria and want to be friends with her. I don’t think I’ve ever had a friend before, let alone a girlfriend. She makes me laugh, which is something else I never did before now. At least I don’t think I have. I want so much more with Dario. I want to explore these feelings I have for him. The way he makes my body feel alive.

I sit there until my butt is numb and my legs are cramped. When I get up, I brush my teeth and strip naked. I put my hair up into a messy bun on my head and then slip on the robe from the bathroom. I put on some television

and call room service for dinner.

A knock at my door has me moving slowly to the bathroom entrance again.

“Open up, Luna.” Dario’s voice drifts to me.

This could be the last time I see him. I’m taking off tomorrow. I’m escaping all this. I don’t need to solve my mystery. I need to be free and away from all of it.

I open the door and take him in. He’s still in the slacks he was in earlier and the blue button-down long-sleeved shirt. His beautiful hazel brown eyes move up and down my body, and the next thing I know, I’m pressed against the wall. The door snicks closed as he kisses me. My hands go into his thick dark hair and pull at him. I want him deeper. I crave him in a way I’ve never craved someone before.

“*Dolce angelo*, I had to see you again,” he growls against my lips. His normally deep voice is so gruff, it causes my core to clench.

“Please,” I beg him. I don’t know what I want, but I want him. I want my last night and time in Vicenza to be with him. I want with him what I’ve never given to a man, my soul. My passion.

“I’ll give you what you need, *mio angelo*.” He pulls back from my lips and kisses over the incision where I removed the tracker. “I still want to know what happened to you.” He groans when I wrap my legs around his hips. My robe slips open, and I’m bare to him. All my scars and skin are on display for him to see.

He pulls back and looks down my body. I know what he sees, but he doesn’t say anything. Not one word about the scars from bullets, knives, and years of torture. He leans back into me and kisses along my neck. Nipping and biting his way down to my collarbone. When he gets to my breasts, he hikes me up the wall more and slowly drags a nipple between his lips. He sucks it deep, and I rock my soaked core against him. He moves to the next nipple and treats it the same while his hands free my hair from the messy bun.

He pulls away from the wall and we are moving. I kiss his neck and nibble on his earlobe and then along his Adam’s apple. He stops and pulls my legs from around him. I stand in front of him, and he brushes the robe from my body. I’m bare and he’s fully clothed. I want to hide myself, but I don’t. I keep my hands at my sides.

“I like your eyes like this. Full of need for me. Full of passion. I hate

when you close me off with them.” Instead of unbuttoning his shirt, he flexes and pulls it over his head. His tattooed chest is wide and tan. He has trim, defined muscles. More tattoos cover his arms.

I reach for his belt and unbuckle it before I pull it from his trousers. I pop the button and then lower his zipper, revealing his black boxers and his straining cock visible against the fabric. He wiggles and the pants slide to the floor. He steps out of his shoes and then the slacks.

We stand before each other completely exposed. I see the scars from bullets along his chest and arm. I lean forward and kiss each mark, wishing he didn't have to know this pain. I have no memory of when mine happened or what they felt like, but I imagine they had to be painful.

He groans and pulls my long hair back, fisting it at the back of my head as I lower to my knees in front of him. He's so long that his cock is peeking out the top of his boxers. Precum leaks from the tip. My mouth waters and I can't stop myself. I lick it off as if it were ice cream. His hands bury into my hair, pulling ever so slightly. I trail my hands down the outside of his legs as I lower the boxers to the floor, and he steps out of them. I focus back on his cock and suck it deep into my mouth. I don't think I've ever done this before, but I know I've never felt what I'm feeling right now. I'd never forget this feeling. Something clicks deep inside me, and my heart clenches.

His fists tighten in my hair, and he guides me back and forth on his cock, taking it deeper each time. He's using my mouth the way I want him to use me, and I feel more moisture between my legs. I reach down with one hand and trail my fingers through the wetness. I've never touched myself like this. I moan around his cock before he yanks me away and I'm flat on my back on the bed. He's over me with his head where my fingers were.

His tongue slides through my folds, and I arch and push myself deeper into the bed. My skin is so sensitive, it's on fire. When he zeros in on my swollen clit and sucks it deep like he did with my nipples, I scream out and grip his head tight. I work myself on his face, feeling his beard burning a path along my thighs.

He moves to my entrance with his long fingers and slams two into me. I feel full, and I'm writhing on the bed, moaning his name and begging.

“Dario, please. I don't know what I need, but I need you.”

I whimper when he pulls away from me and his warmth spreads over my body as he holds me close. His cock is where I want and need it. He pumps through my moist lips before he slams deep into my body. I cry out at the

intrusion and tears prick at my vision. I know from the memories I've been raped in the past, but this isn't like that. This is sweet and loving. It's warm and causes my body to shiver with desire. I've never felt an intrusion like this. He's so long and large that it's a tight fit.

"You're so tight my, *dolce angelo*. I'm going to come deep in this tight cunt. I'm going to come so hard, you'll never want another," he growls in my ear before he levers up, and then he's kneeling over me. His hands grip my hips to pull me up his legs, angling my body as he fucks into me deep. I can't stop myself, I grab my breasts and start playing with my nipples. "*Angelo*, you're the best thing I've ever seen. You on my cock and your breasts on display." He leans down and takes one of the nipples I offer him into his mouth as he continues to move inside me. He lifts back up, pulling me up with him so I'm on his lap. He's so deep inside me it almost hurts. It hurts in a good way. A pain that lets me know it's real. We both start moving together. Him going up and me coming down hard on him. I throw my head back, my hair falling down my back to the bed, and scream as I come so hard my vision blurs for a moment. It's the first time since yesterday that I feel free and only care about what is happening to me right now. I'm not concerned with my past or my future.

"Dario," I beg and plead with him.

He continues to move in and out of me as my body ripples around his cock, continuing the orgasm into another and building it up higher than anything I've ever felt. It's huge. It's going to destroy me, and I know it. I'll never be the same. I know it like I know that I have so much more to learn.

His body stills and mine explodes as I feel him tense, and he groans my name. Hot jets of his cum spray my insides, and a past conversation floats through my head.

"She can't get pregnant. I make sure of that."

I still and realize we didn't use a condom, and I'm not even concerned. I realize that I wish I could have Dario's baby, but I can't. I'm too broken. I've done too much damage to this world.

He falls forward, and we land with me on my back and him still deep inside me. We lie there collecting our breaths, and I'm trying to figure out a way to walk away tomorrow. I'll never be whole again after this.

His body is caging me to the bed, and I'm not scared or freaked out.

CHAPTER

Six

DARIO

Roll to my side, slipping from her body. I know she's in her head right now, but I had her all to myself for a while, and I loved it. She's perfect.

I don't know what happened today at the palazzo, but I had to come find her. She told Vittoria where she was staying. A slip of a bill at the front desk got me her room number. I hold her to me until her breathing calms, and I look down to see her asleep.

I don't discuss the fact I took her bare. I don't discuss that for a moment there she acted like she was a virgin when I know she isn't. I felt it, but she's also tight as fuck, as if she's not as experienced as she led me to believe. I also don't discuss the fact that she's never getting away from me.

Pulling the blankets from the foot of the bed up over our bodies, I drift off to sleep with her in my arms. When I wake later, the television is still on and she's crying in her sleep. I know not to touch her after what happened at the palazzo.

"Wake up, *dolce angelo*," I say softly in her ear, and she calms instantly.

I brush her hair to the side to see the delicate tattoo down her back. It's of two paint brushes end to end with watercolor spiraled around it in blue gray. It's a beautiful tattoo, but it lacks color and makes me wonder more about her. She has so much that she hides. I can feel it like I feel her body.

Luna is a contradiction of everything. She says she's American, but several times I heard her perfectly pronounce Italian words, and when she wasn't careful, I knew she understood what I was saying in Italian to Vittoria. My cousin asked me if I was going to pursue her friend. I didn't deny it because I knew the first moment I saw her that she was mine.

I pull Luna into me, spooning her body, and she sighs before she falls deep into sleep.

I'm awoken to her luscious ass pressed into my morning wood. I carefully move her to her stomach and slide one of her legs open, cocking it at the knee to open her up to me. I scoot down the bed and lick her before she moans and presses into my mouth more. I eat her like she's my morning breakfast. When I slam into her from behind, she cries out and proceeds to show me that ass that I will claim soon enough.

We make love again in the shower before I convince her to order room service so we can head out to my vineyard for the day. Vittoria is meeting us there. We are spending the day exploring the whole property.

She tried to get out of it by saying she needed to move hotels, but I wouldn't let her put that wall between us again.

I help her move to another hotel. She doesn't explain why she's checking out. She had to return her car too, so she rides in mine, and we head for my small estate. When we pull up in my Ferrari, Vittoria's small Mini Cooper is sitting there waiting for us.

Today Luna is dressed in a calf-length dress with a fitted bust, which means she doesn't have a bra on those sexy tits of hers. The back of her dress is open, exposing her tattoo. I can't get over the fact that she has so many scars covering her body. Scars that look like gun and knife wounds. Wounds she shouldn't have.

Her long hair is down again, and she looks so calm as she takes in the land around her.

"It's beautiful, Dario," she says in a soft voice.

I move to her side and take her hand to lead her over to the side of my property where the olive and figs are growing.

"These were all here when I bought the property. I knew I had to purchase it. But this"—I turn to the other side with the now bare vines—"is my future." I'm serious. I know my father wants me to lead the family, and I will. But this right here will be my priority. Luna and my land.

A plan starts forming in my mind.

A way to keep her with me always and to secure our future.

We spend the day walking around the gardens and hanging back on the lanai. Luna and Vittoria laugh and joke, talking about going shopping tomorrow at some of the boutiques in town.

"We have dinner with my papà tomorrow," I remind Vittoria and let Luna know.

Luna's body stills, and she turns to me with wide eyes. For the first time since I took her last night, she closes her eyes off to me. I stand and take her hand.

"We'll be back, Toria," I say as I lead Luna through the door that leads directly into the master suite.

"Wait, Dario." Luna tries to stop me, but I don't let her. I lift her up and throw her over my shoulder, holding her skirt down.

When I drop her on the bed, I fall on her and cage her in.

“Don’t freak out. My father is a very important man in Vicenza. In America, you’d call him the boss. Here we call him the Capo.”

She looks over my shoulder and doesn’t look me in the eye. “Like a mafia capo.” Her soft voice holds no fear in it, as I would have thought. She doesn’t word it like a question either but a statement, as if she already knew.

More secrets.

I gently grip her chin and turn her face to focus on me. When she tries to look over my shoulder again, I drop down, putting a lot of my weight on her but not too much. We are breathing each other’s air, and she can’t look anywhere but at me.

“Yes, like that. But after I tell him you are mine, it’ll be okay. He’s demanding a family dinner, and I didn’t want to not include you. You’ll get to meet my *nonna*.” I told Luna earlier how my *nonna* raised me after my mamma died. Instead of making her feel like we had something in common, I noticed she didn’t acknowledge it. She has so many secrets and hides so much of herself from me, but I’m willing to battle *her* for all of her.

“Okay,” she says softly, and I kiss her lips deeply. Before it can get out of hand I jackknife up off the bed and lead her outside, where my housekeeper is setting the dinner food out.

We eat dinner together, and instead of Toria going back to her parents’, I let her stay in the spare bedroom on the floor I have done. She’s stayed there many times when she was trying to get away from her parents. Her papà is just like mine, old-fashioned and trying to set her up with men that will make a good union for the family instead of for love and something more.

I’m not going to allow my papà to do that to me with Luna. I want her and I will have her. He can’t stop me; he knows I’ll walk away. I’ve told him that already regarding my galleries and the vineyard. I’ve always liked art and music. Things he deems are distractions. But for me they are calming and centering.

Luna

I've enjoyed the day more than I thought possible. Dario and Vittoria are fun to be around. They joke like what I think a brother and sister would do instead of cousins. The banter had me laughing so hard one time I almost fell out of my chair. Dinner was amazing. Dario has a housekeeper, but he made sure to tell me he was a good cook too.

When we walked through the fields earlier, I had a recollection of myself watching a faceless couple in a garden at dusk. The memories are coming more and more. I had a dream last night while I was sleeping next to Dario of myself killing another man.

I tried. I really tried to get away from him today, but I couldn't do it. I know if I'm not here, they will send someone else. But the pain of lying to him over and over about why I'm here is becoming too much. I can't tell him the truth, or he will push me away, and I know that to walk away from him would kill me.

My heart is involved now.

After Vittoria heads into her room, Dario smiles at me. His grin is devilish, and my panties instantly combust with desire.

"Come with me." He stands and holds out his hand, which I take.

We move from the poolside lanai to a pathway that leads around the side of the manor to the backside and along the wall where the master suite is. He stops at a spot shaded over with beautiful trees. A spa tub is lit up with underwater lights, and there are candles on every surface. A door from the master suite leads to the private area.

He pulls me into his arms and kisses me tenderly. It's these kisses that are causing my heart to clench and thump harder for him. The zipper at my back is slowly drawn down. He steps back and watches as the red material slips down my body, leaving me in only a red thong. I slip my fingers in the sides and let them fall to the ground too. He reaches down and snags them when I slip them off my feet. I slide my sandals off and move to the edge of the tub. I take the steps and watch him as I sink down into the hot water. He strips and is in next to me in no time.

When he lifts me to straddle him, I don't hesitate to slide down his length and take him all the way in. We hold there with him deep inside me as he kisses me thoroughly. He kisses my neck, then he pulls my hair from the water to fist it in his hand as I slowly move up and down on him.

"Ride me, *dolce angelo*. Take your pleasure on me. Use me." His words do something to me. I started out slow, at a pace that gave us both pleasure,

but I can't take it anymore. I'm riding him hard now, using him as he told me to. I'm chasing that orgasm as he licks and sucks my skin.

"Dario," I moan when he pinches my nipples and cups my breasts. My orgasm slams into me and I cry out.

"My turn," he groans when he stands and lays me on the edge of the tub without breaking our connection.

He stands on the seat and starts moving in and out of me, looking down at my body. The coolness of the stone under my body, the heat of the tub of water that sloshes on me as he uses me like I did him, and the desire that is pulsing through me all cause a hurricane of emotions. I scream when I come this time, and he falls over me as he comes too.

"I'm going to fill you with my cum, *il mio dolce angelo*. I'll breed your body so you can't ever leave me."

I can't stop the words. "I'm no angel, Dario. I can't have children."

He pulls up and looks down at me, and I realize what I said out loud. I pull away from him, but he grabs me back and I land on his lap again in the water.

"You speak Italian?"

I nod because I can't lie to him, but I can't give him the words.

"You can't have children? Ever?"

This time I shrug.

"Talk to me," he demands.

"I can't." I lean into him and just hold him, knowing it's the end. He doesn't tell me to go, but he will. So I decide to leave him myself. I move away, and I'm standing at the side of the spa.

"I need to know. Please, Luna." He stands up, the water sluicing off his naked body. I'll never see him like this again. I'll never be with him. I have to leave to protect him from those that seek to destroy him and his father.

I turn away, breaking the connection as I slip my dress over my head. When I look back at him as I zip my dress up, I make the decision I should have before. I shouldn't have grown this close to him.

"No." I grab my sandals and take off running, knowing he won't chase me naked.

"Luna," he yells my name, but I don't stop.

I'm down the driveway, feeling the gravel and sticks cut my feet, when I hear the car approaching. Taking off into the fields, I hide from him. I don't have a phone on me because I left the burner at the hotel. I left the cellular

that the agency gave me at the original hotel along with the tracker.

I've officially gone against them. They'll be sending a hit squad after me, but I'd rather face them than kill Dario or hurt him by killing his family. Now I'm on the run from Dario too.

Hours later I'm exhausted as I make it into my hotel through a back entrance. I saw Dario out front, but I'm not going to let him get his hands on me. I need to get away from here and him.

I'm marked for death. A hit squad will have already been issued for me. The only hope I have is to get away from those I care about before they are casualties of my past.

As I sit in the bottom of the tub after cleaning myself up from the run to town and through the vineyards, I try to figure out how to get out of here without Dario seeing me. The water beats down on my body, and I'm hunched over my knees. My heart is breaking because for once in my life, at least I think, I want to be with someone. I want to see what happens with him. Where we can go.

So far, he hasn't realized I'm in my room. I'm fairly sure he took off and left me for dead or just left because I'm too much. My tears flow because I'll never see Dario again. I can't give him what he wants. I don't know if I can ever have children. I don't even know my past, just the few bits and pieces.

A sound that doesn't sound right hits my ears and my brain clicks into fight mode. I know the exact pace count from the door to the bathroom. It's a trick I was taught years ago about learning my space. I could maneuver in the dark if I had to. I wouldn't hit a single piece of furniture as I got away from anyone. But that sound wasn't a normal hotel sound.

I know every sound hotels make, and I definitely know the sound of a gun cocking. No matter how hard they try to cover it. I also know the sound of a silencer being screwed onto a barrel. I've done it enough times. I hear that telltale sliding sound of a gun again. Another shooter. This is the hit team I was waiting for. I don't know how they found me so easily. I hear an AK-47 racking in preparation to be shot. I reach over the side of the tub and behind the toilet, where I secured one of my backup guns and some knives when I first checked in while Dario was talking on the phone. I slink low into the

tub, sure that they will aim high because I have the showerhead on. They most likely think I'm standing, which is an assumption that will get them killed. They're just a hit squad; they don't care about finesse and style. They think only of getting in, killing, and getting out. Me, on the other hand, I will kill them all without having to reload my gun.

Just as I predicted, the bullets hit where my body would have been. The door is shredded as it's riddled from the overkill of firepower. I wait under the rain of water as glass from the enclosure and stone shards from the walls fall around me. Sharp pieces slice into my skin, but I don't care about the pain. I'm trained not to feel it. I determine from the number of guns and the sounds that there is only a team of four of them.

From my inclined position with my legs pulled up under me, I shoot a burst of bullets, controlled and aimed, at the gunmen who had the AKs. I hear both of their bodies fall as I rush out of the tub naked. Gun in one hand and long-blade knife in the other, I exit the bathroom through the useless door. I slash out with my blade and nearly take the head off the third guy. He falls with his gun in his hand and his eyes still focused on me. The fourth realizes he's the last one left, and I'm on him before he turns his back to run. I shove my gun into his chest and shoot him twice in the heart while also driving my knife into his abdomen. It may be a little overkill, but the deputy chief should have known that four men wouldn't be enough, and I'm making a statement now.

Adrenaline is pumping through my system as I hear someone enter the room. I swing around and register it's Dario before I pull the trigger. He has a gun out but drops his arm when he takes in the scene.

"Luna." His voice trembles with fear as he looks at the four bodies lying on the floor around me. I look too and see them for the first time as humans. My legs give out, and Dario catches me.

"I'm sorry. I was sent to kill you," I say before I fall into unconsciousness from the bullets that hit me.

CHAPTER

Seven

DARIO

I'm not waiting anymore and make my way to her room. The elevator door opens to the sound of gunfire. I'm out and running with my gun in my hand, knowing it's coming from her room. I burst through the door of her suite and round the corner to the bedroom and see her standing there naked. She's got a gun perfectly aimed at me, her arm not quivering in the least. A military style knife is in her other hand. Her body is poised to kill whoever comes in next.

No hesitancy. No fear.

Her body is perfectly still. The knife has blood dripping from the blade. There is blood on her arm too. Across her face and chest is more along with wounds and her scars. But what causes me to pause are the fresh gunshots to her body. One in her side and the other in her thigh. She doesn't seem to realize she's hit as she's ready to battle some more.

She lowers her gun and looks around at the bodies like I am. Men in full tactical body armor lie dead. Two have been shot in the head. One has his neck cut, and the last has been shot and stabbed.

I watch as her knees wobble and she starts to go down. I race to her side and hold her to me, not caring about the blood and gore she's covered in.

"I'm sorry. I was sent to kill you. But I can't." With her eyes puffy from crying and her bleeding in my arms, I know she's telling the truth.

I can't tell my father this.

He'd kill her himself.

I know she'd never hurt me.

I dial the number for a doctor I keep on personal retainer and tell him to meet me at the manor, then I take off. I leave everything in the room except for the comforter off the bed I use to wrap around her. I have to get her away from here. I know what happened. She didn't do what she was sent to do, so they sent people to kill her.

I will find out the truth from her soon, but first I need to make her safe and make sure we aren't followed. I cover her head with the comforter and carry her out over my shoulder like a rug. I set her down by the loading dock and pray she'll be safe while I go get my car. I rouse her and give her my

gun. Her head lolls to the side, but her eyes are open and focused on the exit doors to protect herself.

When I have her in the passenger seat and we are finally on our way, I text the number to initiate the plan I've been working on all day. He'll help me.

ME:

I will be bringing my intended to you. I need your help to protect her.

He will know what to do. He'll be able to help me get her to safety.

An hour later, after the doctor stitched up her wounds and I washed her body, she's finally stirring again. She comes up off the bed fast and doesn't even groan from the pain, but I see the tightness in her lips from holding it back. She looks around for a weapon before she sees me sitting in the chair in the corner of the master suite.

"What am I doing here?" She stands there in my T-shirt I put her in. I watch as she slides a foot back. She's trained. Very trained from what I saw in her room.

"It was the most secure place I could think of. I have men all around the area. How did you get by them before?" I have my own personal guards when I need them. They have no associations with my father or the family. It's my way of making sure that I and my home are always safe. There is never any doubt in their loyalty. I called them in as soon as she and I got to the property. I only had a small unit of them here earlier because I don't need them on a regular basis.

"I'm trained to not be seen."

"Who are you?" It's the question I've been mulling over for a while now. Is her name really Luna? Is she from America? Is she CIA? Or some other alphabet company.

"I'm Luna."

I notice she doesn't say a last name.

"Luna what?" I ask, and she sits back on the bed and shakes her head. "Tell me so I know that the woman I screwed is really who she says she is.

The woman I'm falling for and dumped so much cum into she's probably carrying my child already. Who are you?" I yell as I stand up to my full height.

She stands too but doesn't move. Doesn't go on the defensive.

"I'm Luna. That's all I know. I don't have a last name. I work for a private contractor, and I'm an assassin." She doesn't flinch as she says it. "I don't know who I am or where I came from. After I met you two weeks ago, my mind was wiped so I wouldn't remember the kill or you. I was sent here to infiltrate the Revello organization and bring it down, even if it meant killing its heads." Now I see the emotion. She is shaking. "I didn't want to lie to you, but like I said, I didn't know who I was." She pauses and sits back down. "After I met you at the gallery, I was stopped by a friend. Well, at least I guess that's what I would call him. I saved him five years ago when he was twelve. I was sixteen, or at least that's what I was told. He gave me a packet of information about me. I had put it together a couple of years ago so I could get out. The doctor who took me when I was a kid wants me to kill someone you are associated with. I was sent here by my contractor for your family, but the doctor wants me to also kill this other person. I don't know who they are. The doctor gives me drugs so I don't get pregnant, but I don't know if they are permanent. He also uses a special mixture of drugs and other things to alter my memory and program me. But they haven't been working as much lately. I don't know why, but I'm able to recall memories. I know I've killed a lot of people. I also know I've saved several young children and women from being taken by the doctor. I take them to contacts I've made in different cities. It's how I got this." She motions to the bruise and small scar on her temple. "I didn't take the woman I rescued from that guy in Bucharest to the doctor." She speaks in a monotone voice, as if she's talking about someone else.

"Kovacs." I offer the name.

She nods. "I don't know their names all the time. Or I forget them. But I can't forget their faces. I see them in my nightmares." She taps her head.

I finally can't take the space between us and move to her. I sit on the bed with her and take her hand in mine.

"Do I need to worry you'll kill me in my sleep?" I chuckle, hoping she takes the joke, but she doesn't. She jumps up and stands in front of me with her hands on her hips. Her hair is hanging down and she's naked except for my shirt.

“I won’t hurt you. I don’t want to. You and Vittoria are my friends. The only friends I’ve had except for Matty. I promise you right now I couldn’t kill you. I can’t tell you how I feel, but I can tell you this. I’m contracted through Interpol’s organized crime division. These truths could get me killed, but I don’t care. I don’t want you or Vittoria hurt. I don’t want Matty found. I need to get out of here.”

I pull her between my legs and hold her to me. She trembles, and so do I. What she just said to me is a lot. She’s right, it could get her killed. Just her talking to me could get her killed. Not only by her people but by my own family.

“I have a friend we are going to go see.”

I pull her down and we lie in the bed spooned together. When she wakes me with a nightmare, I hold her, and she settles back down. What she explained sounds like torture, and after seeing her body, I don’t doubt that’s what she went through. The scars make more sense now.

We wake early before Vittoria, and I leave a note with the housekeeper to give to her when she wakes. I know my papà will be upset that I’m not meeting with him, and just doing what I’m doing is grounds for treason in the family, but one thing I figured out while Luna slept in my arms is that I love her, and I want her.

She is mine.

Luna

We have been on the road for almost an hour when Dario pulls the car through a large set of gates into an expansive vineyard. I sit up and look around me. Something about this place causes a niggling in the back of my mind. My head starts hurting, and I hold it between my hands, hoping to hold it together because it feels like it’s going to explode.

“Luna, are you okay?” Dario puts his hand on my thigh.

We had to stop at a boutique on our way out of town since he left all of my clothes at the hotel. I’m dressed in a pair of brand-new jeans with holes in

the knees and a long black shirt that looks like a dress on one side and stops at my waist on the other. It's long-sleeved and covers the wounds I sustained last night in the hotel. I have on black knee-high heeled boots in a soft buttery leather.

His hand on my knees stirs me from the pain in my head.

"Headache," I tell him. "This happens when I have a memory. It's like they are fighting their way out. But this time my head feels like it's going to explode."

He pulls up into a circular driveway in front of a large manor that has flowers all around. Vines climb the walls. It's old, and I feel like I've been here before. I lean forward, hoping I don't yack up everything in my stomach as the pain rolls through my brain more.

A voice in my head is telling me to kill. Something about this place brings back a memory of the doctor telling me that I need to kill. My palms itch for weapons. I need to kill those that live here. They are bad, evil, or something else. This is the person Dario was supposed to lead me to.

My door opens, and I look up into Dario's soft hazel eyes. The brown ringed in green, and I sink into them to focus myself. To remember I'm not just a killer.

"Everything okay over there?" a deep voice that rattles through my mind too says. But this time the memories of running and laughing are greater than the kill order. Dario pulls me from the automobile, hiding the man from me.

"I trust you," Dario says softly in my ear as he kisses it, and the pain subsides for a moment. The voices silence. It's just Dario and me.

Dario turns our bodies after he helps me out of the car. I see a large man just a hair taller than Dario. He has thick muscles and dark chocolatey brown eyes. The scruff that lines his face is dark. He reaches his hand out to me, and I realize I'm staring. But something about this man is so familiar. Something deep inside me clicks as soon as our hands touch.

"Dante Lupo." His deep voice washes over me, and my eyes start to roll back as I collapse against him. Memories flood my mind, and my head feels like it exploded.

"*Caro fratello*," I say in a whisper, calling him what I did when I was a little girl.

"What?" He grabs for me and pulls me to his chest. I hear the voices all around me, but I see it.

The car ride to the church, the woman, the priest, the doctor, and all the

killing. But the image of the doctor telling me I need to kill him is foremost in my brain. I can't kill my own brother. I won't kill him.

"Luna Lou," he says in a broken sob as he holds me to him.

"Hey, give me my girl," I hear Dario yelling, but it all fades as more and more memories flash behind my eyes.

Torture.

Pain.

Rape.

Death.

CHAPTER
Eight

DARIO

I move on Dante to take Luna from his arms, but he pulls a gun from his back and aims it at me.

“How do you have her? Where did you get her?” he barks orders. His wife, McKenna, who followed him outside is crying and holding his arm.

“Is it really her?” McKenna asks softly.

“She is mine.” I stand my ground. My hand itches to pull my gun, but I don’t want to hurt Luna. “I’ll keep her. I brought her here to save her life because my father will kill her when he knows why she was sent here.”

Dante must sense my unease, and he carefully hands her back to me.

“Follow me,” he orders, and I carry her as he picks up his wife and carries her into the house.

“*Bambola*, it’s her. She used to call me that instead of big brother. It was always dear brother,” he tells McKenna as he carries her in, and I look down to the woman in my own arms.

Mio angelo.

I kiss her forehead and worry that she fainted from blood loss, but she was saying her head hurt when we pulled onto the property. We move into a large great room, and Dante sits with his wife next to him as he watches me intently with Luna. I sit and hold her to my chest.

“Where did you find her?”

There have been rumors for years about the missing Lupu heiress. She disappeared when she was five. Some thought her own mother sold her for money. Others said she was killed. My grip on her body tightens as I realize how much more danger she is in if she is a Lupu.

“She found me.”

“How?”

“He was my assignment.” Her voice is so soft. Luna starts to move off my lap, but I hold her close, worried that she will be taken from me. “I was sent to infiltrate his family’s organization to bring them to justice or kill them. I was also sent to kill you.” She points at Dante. His wife gasps and holds on to him tightly. “I’m not going to. I can’t. But they didn’t know that. No matter what they did to me, I know in my heart I can’t kill you.” She

pauses for a moment and takes a deep breath. “As soon as you touched me, I knew who you were.” She doesn’t explain more.

“Where have you been, Luna Lou? Who are they?”

She shakes her head slowly. “I can’t tell you. It’s safer for you. I didn’t want to tell Dario, but I had to. He’s the only person I can trust.” She turns to look at me, and I see all the emotions in her eyes. Emotions I haven’t seen from her before. She looks back at her brother. “I can’t stay here because the next hit squad will be bigger, and the doctor will make sure he has someone on it that will finish my mission in regards to you. I don’t know why, but he has you marked for death.” She slips from my lap to sit next to me, and I wrap my arm around her tight.

“I brought her here because if my father finds out she was sent to kill us, he’ll kill her.”

“Why? What hit squad?”

“Because she is mine.” I turn toward her and take her hands in mine so she’ll look at me. “Because I love her.” I start to lean down to kiss her as I confess this, but instead of her taking my lips, she jumps up and away from me.

“You can’t love me. I murder people on a regular basis. I’m a monster.” She paces and yells. “Until a few moments ago, I didn’t know much about myself. You saw what I did to those four men who were sent to kill me. I killed them all. I only know how to kill. I’ve never been on a date, and until you and I had sex, I’d only ever been raped by the doctor.” Her words suck all the air from the room, and her brother and I both stand up. She doesn’t realize it though as she continues to pace and rant. “Until Dante touched me, I didn’t know I had a mother. I didn’t know that I had family. I suspected it, and I’ve been here before to watch out for them. I recovered all my memories in that moment, but I also realized I had to kill him.” This time McKenna jumps up.

“You won’t kill my husband.” She pushes past Dante to get to Luna, who finally has stopped and is looking at all of us.

“No, I won’t. I can’t. But you need to get out of here. Somehow, they are still tracking me even though I removed the tracker in my neck.” She waves her hand toward the bandage, and now I know how that injury happened. She did it to herself.

“I’m not letting you go. I told you already I love you. I want you. I don’t care about your past. I know deep down inside you are a good person. We’ll

figure out everything else.” I stomp over to her and grab her arms. Without thought, she breaks my hold and slams her palm into my chest, sending me staggering back.

“Do you want that? That’s only a piece of what I could do.”

She faces off with me and is ready to fight until Dante steps between us. I’m jealous that it only takes a word from him and she stops.

“Luna Lou of Whoville, tell me a story,” he says.

She shakes and drops to her knees. I’m pushing past him to get to her, but he holds me back and kneels by her side.

“Tell me.” It’s all he says, and she cracks.

“She took me away. Livia came to my mom’s and my place. She talked my mama into letting me go with her. She said she’d take care of me better than my mama could. Mama was having one of her bad episodes. She was hearing the voices again, and I was scared.” Luna curls into herself, but Dante continues to hold me back.

“I was sitting in the back seat of the car; a man was in the front with her. I’d seen him before sometimes with Papà. They were discussing this church to take me to. I asked when we were going to see Papà and you, but she told me to shut up.” Luna starts shaking.

“She left me there, told the priest to purify me, and left. I was so scared. Other girls tried to talk to me, but the nuns pushed them away. I was there for only a couple of weeks when the doctor came. The priest told him I was a Lupo, and the doctor laughed.”

Luna finally looks up at Dante. “I was scared, *caro fratello*. I cried. I begged them to let me go. I told them my *fratello* would hurt them, but they just laughed and hit me.”

I can’t take the distance anymore and push past Dante. I take her in my arms, but she doesn’t realize it’s me. She’s focused on her story.

Luna

It’s like a switch has been flipped. It was a game that Dante and I would play

when I was little. I would tell him about the stories in the artwork around the house. But this story is mine. All the pain. All the blood and beatings. Dario holds me in his arms, but I'm focused on Dante. I'm telling him the story.

"I ended up in a school, but it wasn't really a school. It was in Russia." I can't tell him the exact location because it will lead him to the doctor, and I won't let Dante be hurt by him too. "The doctor would experiment on me with different drugs, electric shock, torture, and military interrogation training. When he wasn't hurting me, the school was teaching me to kill. I hated it there, but at that point, they had me convinced that I had no one. That I had been abandoned. Then the mind control started when I hit thirteen. I know now why. The doctor started raping me. He didn't want them to know."

Dante's body convulses like he's been shocked. I try to pull away from Dario, but he holds me tight. He pulls me onto his lap and kisses the side of my head.

"This is why you have to leave me. I don't even think I'm human anymore. I'm a product of the school and the doctor. The Interpol contractor oversaw everything. They hired the doctor to create me, and they've been pulling my strings since I was five."

Dario gently rocks me, kissing my forehead, as Dante just shakes. I can feel myself slipping from the memory and back to the room of people I confessed my darkness to.

McKenna leans down. "Come on, Luna. Let me get you a cup of tea and these men can talk." I nod at her because I know she is the weak link here. Her love for my brother and their son will be my way of getting away from them all. I know with her help, I'll be able to escape.

"I'll go with you on one condition."

"Okay," she says.

"No, wait." Dante tries to stop what he knows I'm going to do.

"You take my nephew and brother to Papà's before nightfall."

"I can't speak for Dante, but I will take Gian and we will go. Will that make you feel better?" It's as if she knows that I'm going to get them all killed. I'm the harbinger of death.

"Yes." I'll take whatever I can get.

"Come." She takes my hand, and I stand up.

I look back at Dario, who is just watching me. Before I step out of the room, I have a plan in motion.

"McKenna, can I borrow your phone? I need to check my messages. It

will let me know how long I have until they come after me.” It’s a lie, but I need to get a message to Matty. He’s going to be my only hope of getting out of this country.

I text a coded message to his number that I memorized, then I log into a secure email server that Interpol had set up for me. I send a message that I’ve been compromised and I’m exiting. That should buy me some time. I also tell them that I was captured by the Nigerians to take the heat off of Dario’s family and away from Dante. As I’m about to exit the system, a message pops up from the doctor. I open it and stop.

I know where you are. I know you removed their tracker, but I have one on you too. I’ll kill them if you don’t leave now.

It’s signed Daddy.

I cringe. I’ve always hated that he wants me to call him that when we are alone. I decide not to tell him I have my memories back or what happened. I lie as I send a response back to him.

I’ll be leaving these people’s house soon. I don’t know why I was brought here, but I’ll be home soon.”

It’s coded with words so he will think I’m still under his influence. I log out and erase everything I’ve done. I need to find that last fucking tracker, but I don’t have the equipment here to do that.

It will take Matty several hours to get to me, so I decide to use the time I have left to get to know my brother and his family. I also will need to say goodbye to Dario. I can’t give him the words he gave me because I don’t know what that is. I don’t know what love is anymore. I have my memories but not the feelings or emotions. I don’t want him hurt. I don’t want to be away from him, but I must do this. He and Dante will never be safe as long as the doctor and deputy chief are still alive.

A couple of hours later, after a filling dinner on their back veranda, we discuss the men’s ideas to get me free. McKenna is inside packing for her and baby Giancarlo to go to Mattia’s home at the Rossi estate.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to tell Papà you are here?” Dante asks

me for what feels like the thousandth time.

“I can’t. Until we know how to survive the hit squad coming after me, I can’t risk any more lives. If I had known Dario was going to bring me here, I would have figured something else out.”

“I can scan you for the chip, and we can send it away from here.”

I look up at my brother in shock as he moves back to the table after refilling his wine glass.

“You have the equipment to do that?”

“I do. Give me a moment while I contact my head of security to have him bring it here.”

As he gets on the phone, Dario slips his hand into mine. “*Angelo*, you are being too accommodating. I’m sorry, but I don’t trust it.” His grip tightens, and he looks me in the eye. I’ve been trained to lie, but with him it’s hard, and I turn away. “You see, I know.” He gently grips my chin and turns me to look back at him. I try to hide everything that I’m sure he sees in my eyes, so I change the subject.

“Dario, I can’t tell you I love you, but I can tell you I have deep feelings for you. I’m not going to risk your life. I’m not going to allow you to be hurt.”

“I’m tougher than I look.” He chuckles softly and leans forward to kiss my forehead. I lean into him more and fake a yawn.

“I’m getting tired. Can I go lie down?” I look between him and my brother.

“I’ll have them put the device in my office. We’ll get the chip out in the morning. Go turn in,” Dante says, and I move toward him to give him a hug. When his large arms engulf me, I feel a moment of peace and safety, but that’s all. I’m going to have to protect my family now.

I make my way to the room we are staying in. It’s all the way across the villa from the master suite. Dante might call it a cottage or farmhouse, but it’s a small villa. It’s huge, and I’ve been scoping out all the security and cameras. I don’t have any of my equipment to get past them, but I’ll just use all my training to do the best I can.

When I come out of the en-suite after a shower, Dario is sitting on the bed. I expected him to stay with Dante and talk more. The plan is for us to stay the night and then make our way to Rome. I didn’t tell them that the office is in Léon because I can’t have them following me. I can be in Léon in a couple of hours and out of Italy with the help from my contacts before they

even realize I'm gone, but Dario is going to make this difficult if he doesn't give me the time to escape.

I move to the side of the bed, keeping the towel wrapped around my body. He moves in behind me, caging me in against the side of the bed. I turn and he flicks the towel, letting it fall.

I wrap my arms around his neck and tilt my head back. When his lips touch mine, I moan with my need for him. Even with everything going on, I want him. It's as if he's unlocked something deep inside me. I crave his touch. I want him deep inside me. I've never wanted sex like I do with him. Yes, I've been raped numerous times, but it's not that with him. I don't cringe away from it.

Our tongues slide and dual against each other. My fingers slip into his hair and pull him down more. He has one arm locked around my waist, pulling me into him, while the other holds my chin and tilts my head where he wants so he can go deeper. When we finally pull apart, we are breathless and I'm so wet for him.

I can feel his erection against my stomach. He flips me around and pushes my hands down to the bed, bending me over. His belt hits the floor and then his zipper slides down. His hands move to rub my butt and squeeze each globe of my ass.

"*Mio angelo*, I'm going to take you rough this first time because I need inside you now."

It's the only warning I get before he slams his hips forward and takes me hard. I should be afraid. I should cringe away, but I don't. I crave this. I like him wild and untamed. He holds my hips as he moves into me over and over. His heavy balls slap against me, and I moan with each thrust. I reach down and slide my fingers against my swollen clit and rub it like he did before. I'm still learning what my body likes and craves, but mostly it craves Dario. My toes curl into the carpet, and I rise up, trying to get him in the spot that will set me off. Dario presses a hand to the small of my back, and it causes my hips to lift ever so slightly. It's all I need. I go off, screaming his name.

"Luna," he growls mine as he comes deep inside me. His hips continue to slowly move until he's completely spent. I know he's tired because he watched over me all last night. We crawl into bed after we clean up, and he wraps himself around me. I roll so we are facing each other, and he slides into my body again. This time he makes love to me slowly as we look into each other's eyes. I open up to him. I give him everything he wants, and I see

his heart. I feel his love. It washes over me like warm water in the shower. When he finally orgasms, he's so exhausted and falls asleep after cleaning us both up.

I lie there, pretending I'm asleep, until I finally hear his soft snores. I wait a beat longer then slowly untangle myself from his body.

When I'm finally free and standing next to the bed, I look at him. The moonlight is shining down on him, and I know in that moment I should have told him. As quietly as possible, I dress in the change of clothes and slip on the flat shoes McKenna gave me. I wouldn't be able to move through the vineyards in heels, so I asked to borrow these from her. I suspect she knows I'm going to run. She's tougher than my brother thinks.

I'm glad she and the baby aren't here now, but I wish Dante had gone with her. I make my way through the house to Dante's office, where I grab the small device that can be used to scan for microchips. I slip it into my pocket and then head through the kitchen to the old-time servant's entrance. It's used for easy access to the kitchen from the outdoor kitchen now. I slip out the door, knowing it doesn't have a sensor on it because I partially disabled it earlier in the day.

Keeping to the shadows, I make my way to the part of the vineyard where I know from my previous trip here there is a hole in the security team's rounds. I'm able to get through the fence and to the utility road where Matty is waiting for me.

"It's about time," he grumbles.

"Keep your lights off until we get to the main road." I direct him as I look back, making sure I wasn't followed.

I've given my brother and Dario enough misinformation that they should be safe and won't come after me where I really will be.

I must do this by myself. To ever be free or for me to protect them, I have to do what I was trained to do.

Kill.

CHAPTER

Nine

LUNA

After I left Matty at the small airport I used right outside Venice, I made my way to Paris. While in the air, I found out where the tracking chip was. I waited until I landed in Paris so they would think I was coming back like a good little girl before I removed it. The damn thing was almost buried in the muscle of my arm, but I got it out without damaging it. I slipped it onto the bus heading for Léon and proceeded to get myself to where I am now.

I'm standing outside the main headquarters for the contract company Deputy Chief Moreau runs. His offices are on the top floor of the four-story building. It's only a couple of blocks from the main Interpol location. I've been scoping it out for the last few days. But no more waiting. I've watched a couple of hit squads leave already. Any that head to the airport will be met with some friends of mine.

I might have been under their control most of my life, but not all of it. I had lucid times, and I saved lots of people that are now helping me. I have my own hit squad, a little less trained, waiting at the airport. It'll be enough to keep them busy and chasing their tails.

This isn't going to be easy, but I'm not giving up. I have a key card for one of the cleaners clipped to my waist. They know I'm coming after them or they suspect it because there are now metal detectors at the service entrance at the back where cleaning staff enters. My long hair is up and hidden beneath a bright red wig, and I'm even wearing glasses to further my disguise. The glasses are equipped with microchips to disguise me from the facial recognition software I know they're using to search for me.

As I enter the building, I keep my head down like the other workers. I move to where the carts with cleaning supplies and other things are. I had another contact set up a cart for me with weapons hidden in it. I don't know how they got them in. I didn't ask. They are helping me, and that's all that matters. Some of the people helping me are organized crime families I was sent to take down. The fact they are helping me is good. I know it's for favors later. The biggest favor is that I won't be around to end them or their activities again. I told them I was out after this.

They know, just like I do, that I'll be dead before the night is out. I don't see myself surviving this. I'm good, but I'm not that good. I want to make sure those I care about are safe, and the only way to do that is to take care of the two men who did this to me. The two men who think they created me. Oh, they created the killer in me, but me as a person, I did that. With every time that the doctor has thought he wiped my memories, with every time that I've been drugged, trained, or tortured, I've learned how strong I am. I've learned that I'm not only tougher than these two men, but I'm also a better person because I don't want to kill if I don't have to.

I will, however, kill them all to save Dario.

I am a killer though, and I don't deserve what my brother has found with McKenna. I love Dario. I'm sure of that because I miss him so much right now that my stomach hurts. My body feels like it's trying to shut down from the need for him. But I need to focus. I know Moreau and Formanski will be going after the Revellos. I still don't know why the doctor wanted me to kill Dante, but I'll find that out if I survive this first part.

My surveillance has shown me that Formanski isn't here right now. I don't have much time before Dante and Dario figure out where I am. I left Dario a note. I begged him not to come after me, but Dante I know will. So I have to take care of Moreau now. He's working late in his office, and there is a skeleton crew due to the search for me.

As I walk into the supply closet with some of the other cleaning crew, I see the cart that is going to be mine. The number on it matches the number my contact gave me. Another worker goes to grab it, and I stop her.

"That one is mine. See the number," I say in perfectly accented rural French. It must suck for them that they trained me so well I can speak in so many languages with clean dialect for specific regions. The woman apologizes and grabs another cart.

We move as a group out of the supply closet and break off at the elevators. Three others and I board the elevator, and each get off on their respective floors. When the elevator dings for the fourth floor, I get off and immediately turn into the women's bathroom. There are no cameras in here, of course, so I open the coveralls I'm wearing and proceed to put on the bulletproof vest and harness I will use to escape. If I survive this. I arm myself with the provided guns and knives. I slide a shotgun and a light machine gun into the trash bin on the cart so I can grab them easily. My favorite sidearm and knife are slid into each of the pockets at my hips. My

contact did well. I double-check the explosives I requested. Sitting among the weapons is a Catholic token on a chain. I lift it up and see it's Saint Julian, the patron saint of murderers. I slip it around my neck and let it drop between my breasts. I could always use a little luck.

When I'm finally ready, I move out of the restroom with the cart. I pass a couple of employees who are heading out. I keep my head down so they don't recognize me. They don't even look my way. I'm invisible to them in this disguise. I make my way across the floor to Moreau's office. His executive assistant has already left for the evening.

It doesn't cross my mind that this could be a trap until this moment. The floor is almost deserted. I push the cart through the waiting area and right to his door. I don't knock. I let the door swing open as I push the cart in. Several guards are sitting around the room in different poses. They all jump up.

Yep, he was expecting me.

"I'm here to clean," I say in French and try to keep my cover for a moment longer.

"Come back later," Moreau says.

I take him in and finally see the evil in the man I was programmed not to see for years. His hair and beard are grayer than brown, like they were when I first met him. He's attractive, but his eyes are shrewd. I must not drop my eyes quick enough because he sees me for a moment and that's all it takes. I grab the machine gun first and send several bursts around the room as I kick the door closed and take shelter behind the cart. It was reinforced just for me. When I pop up again, I send a final burst at the group near the sofas and drop them all. The shotgun is next, and I send bullets around the room. I'm purposely leaving Moreau unscathed, but his men are falling around the room. I notice the door being opened behind me, and I shoot the person trying to enter before I wedge the cart against the door, locking the wheels in place and thus barricading us in the office. I pull my handgun and a knife out and start shooting any stragglers or those who are trying to reach for guns. When I get to Moreau, I find him cowering behind his desk.

For a moment I'm shocked I made it this far, but then I remember they trained me for this. I open my coveralls and unfurl the climbing rope from across my body, then I shoot the grappling hook into his thick desk. The thing is anchored to the floor. I bet that's a major design flaw he regrets now.

"Let's go for a ride, Deputy Chief." I advance on him.

The man was so confident his personal guard would protect him from me

that he doesn't even carry a gun. After fastening the zip ties around his wrists, I move back to the cart and grab more guns, ammo, and a couple more knives before arming the explosive device. The last thing I grab is the small kit to blast the window.

I put the small controlled explosive putty in each corner of the thick bulletproof glass. Idiots on the other side of the door are trying to shoot it, but it's bulletproof too. Plus, the cart is still locked in place.

I flip the button on the small device, and the glass blasts out. I clip the carabiner to my harness after I remove the coveralls completely. Moreau fights me when I grab him by his hands. A quick punch to his face subdues him before I jump out the window as the bomb in the cart goes off. We are free-falling before I catch us and hold him for a moment. We are still two floors up from the ground. A fall from here wouldn't necessarily kill someone, but it could really hurt them.

"Time to die, Moreau. Where is the doctor?" I ask as my grip on his heavier body slips slightly. He grabs on to me, causing me to lose my grip on the rope, but I catch us quickly. The auto belay does its job and holds both our weight.

"I don't know. Have pity on me. I have a family." I see the cold calculation enter his eyes. "I didn't rape or torture you, that was all *him*." He begs and pleads, but I don't care.

"You still made me what I am. You allowed him to do those things. Now you want to go after my family and the people I love. I have no remorse for you. Ask your maker. Remember I'm the villain," I yell back at him.

I let him go and watch as his body slams into the ground. Just in case he survived the drop, I shoot him a couple of times as I continue down. As his brains explode against the pavement, I finally feel something for the first time since I stepped foot in that building. I feel relieved. I shoot the guards swarming out of the building when I hit the ground. Bullets hit the pavement around me as I run for my car parked across the street. A couple hit the plate at my back, but I keep running. Another grazes my thigh, but again, I don't stop. My tires are squalling, and I'm off before they can give chase.

Laughing, I look behind me. Adrenaline is pumping through my system. I can't believe I survived that. "That was so fucking easy." I question it all as my car is slammed from the side. I turn to see a large Humvee's grill at my door. My head is fuzzy from hitting the glass, but I shake it off. This isn't over.

“Doctor Formanski, I presume,” I yell before I slip into the passenger seat.

My car is being pushed toward a couple other vehicles, attempting to trap me against them. I shoot out the shattered windshield and kick it until I can climb out. Jumping onto the hood of the Humvee, I shoot at the driver, hitting him in the head. The vehicle jerks, tossing me from the hood.

I hit the pavement hard, my head bouncing. I curl to protect myself as much as I can. When I finally stop rolling, men are approaching me. I look around me for an escape, but there is none. I slowly stand to my full height. The aches and pains are making themselves known. Doctor Formanski, who is about six feet tall with extra weight around his middle, is stomping toward me from behind the men. I’m surrounded now.

This will be where I make my last stand.

“Who wants to dance first?” My words slur slightly, and when I wave my knife, I swear I see two of them. My head injury must be worse than I thought, but I blink my eyes slowly to gain control again.

“Don’t kill her,” Formanski orders as the first gun fires. The bullet hits my chest directly in the vest, and I stumble from the pain. The next is a dart, and it impacts my arm.

“Didn’t you learn these don’t work on me?” I rip it from my arm as I move toward them. I lost my gun, but I’ll carve him up with my knife. I have one goal in mind. I want my blade running with Formanski’s blood.

In the distance I hear the French police approaching. I know he’s not going to want to get caught, so I’ll have to make this quick. I stumble toward the gunman who shot me. He moves to hit me with the stock of his gun, and I drop and slide my blade along his inner thigh, cutting his femoral artery. He drops to the ground screaming, and I come up as another dart slams into my leg. I pull that one out too and throw it to the side.

“I can do this all day.” I wobble. My lips feel fat, and my tongue is thick and dry. My head is swimming. I move a couple more steps toward him.

“Now,” Formanski barks.

Two more darts impact my body, but I keep moving toward him. I can see the fear in his dark eyes.

“Daddy, I’m home,” I say as I swipe my knife at his chest.

He doesn’t step back fast enough and the blade slices through his clothes. A thin line of blood appears. I smile in satisfaction as I drop to my knees.

“I don’t want to play anymore.” I fall on my face as the knife clatters to

the ground next to me.

CHAPTER

Ten

DARIO

I look at the note again and reread the words. She's not in Rome or Paris. We've been searching for days, and finally today we heard on the news about a terrorist attack on a building in Léon. The perpetrator got away, and a manhunt is under way. She lied to us. She said she was doing it to make me safe, but I'm the man. I'm supposed to make her safe, not the other way around. I don't care if she's tough, strong, or a warrior. She is mine to protect.

"I'm calling Ana," Dante says as he slams the hotel phone back into the cradle. He's been off and on the phone with several contacts he has, trying to find out where she really went. We are sitting in this hotel in Paris, and I'm about to go stir crazy. I move to the piano in the large suite and sit down.

The music flows from my fingers as I remember the first time I saw her in that hotel bar with that awful blond wig on. Now that I know she has long, luscious brown hair, that's all I want to see her with.

My mobile rings in my pocket, and I pull it out to sit on the piano top as I look down at my father's name. I ignore it, just like I have every other call he's made since the day I called him and told him that Luna took off. He's mad at me for searching for her.

"She was sent to kill you." His words were harsh but truthful. I knew that, but it didn't change my heart. I don't know how he found out, but it makes me wonder. He knows too much.

"But she didn't. She's going to take care of the threat on our family herself," I yelled into the phone.

"Come home now, or I'll disown you," he barked back at me.

"I don't care." I hung up on him and yet he still keeps calling me.

I'm no one without Luna. I'll find her and make her mine completely. I don't care if it goes against the family. Something my father had said makes me think he has something to do with the hit on Dante. He said that the Lupos should be cut apart just like the Rossis had been.

I don't know what it meant. All I knew was that McKenna's parents had been found dead in their car and everyone assumed she had been with them. No one ever said they were cut up. Their bodies were burned.

“Did you hear me?” Dante breaks me from my thoughts.

I shake my head and look up from the piano toward him.

“I’m calling Anatonina. She’ll know where the school is, if Luna went there next.”

“What makes you think she went there?”

“Because she said she was going to make us safe.” He points at the letter. The letter where she told me she cared about me and that’s why she had to do this. She had to get rid of the threat, and it could only be done by her. She needed to do it. She signed it “Always yours, Angelo.”

Angel.

She fought me when I called her that, but she is my angel. No matter if she was trained to kill.

She’s my avenging angel.

“Fine.” I don’t want to bring more people into this just in case my father decides to retaliate, plus she’s Bratva. She’s a Bocharov. I don’t care if the Bocharov Bratva tried to kill me before.

He dials a number and then puts the phone on speaker. It rings a couple of times before it’s picked up.

“*Da.*” A woman with an accent answers.

“Ana,” Dante says, “I need your help.”

“Just a moment, Dante.” I hear a man’s grumbled voice across the line and then movement before the snick of a door closing. “I’m just going to the office,” Ana says to someone else, and I hear heavy boots stomp as she moves. “Stay here,” she orders someone, and then another door opens and closes. “Okay, I can talk. The baby just went to sleep. He’s in the middle of a growth spurt and restless. I didn’t want to wake him. Plus, Vitaly just got home from a trip to Moscow.”

“It’s Luna. She’s alive. She was taken to that church in Rome that Pace destroyed. She was then purchased by a doctor contracted by Interpol and taken to a school in Russia. The school you said you found out she was taken to. She said Interpol contracted the doctor to train her to be a one-woman army against organized crime.” He rushes to explain. He’s been on edge since she left too. He’s not with his wife and child, who he found out a hit squad was sent to his father’s villa. They were stopped at the airport in Venice before they even got off the tarmac. I haven’t heard that a squad was sent to my father, but I warned him. He didn’t seem to care about it much. He actually brushed it off. We found out that the unit that neutralized the hit

squad at the airport was hired by Luna.

“I know about that doctor, but I thought he was killed before she was taken. He was there when I was there. He’s former KGB.” She pauses for a moment, and I can hear clicking in the background. “I saw the news about Léon. That’s where Interpol’s main headquarters are, but it wasn’t them that was bombed. It was an office building. Let me do some looking around. I still have people in the intelligence community that can look into things for me. If not, I know a hacker. Give me about an hour.” She hangs up without waiting for our response.

I stand from the piano and start pacing. Everything that has happened so far and everything we’ve learned runs through my mind. For the last few years, we’ve all watched as other families were taken down from the inside. None were in Italy though. It all happened in other areas. I pause as a thought occurs to me. It’s time to find out what my father knows, because I have no doubt he’s involved to some extent.

I grab my phone and dial his number as I move out to the veranda and look out over Paris.

“Dario, come home, now,” he says by way of greeting.

“No.”

“Don’t make me disinherit you.”

“Who would you give the reins to? There is only me. You have no brothers, and you don’t think a woman could do it.” I pause and pinch the bridge of my nose. One of my grandfather’s greatest regrets is that he only had one son and three daughters. My *nonna* hated that my grandfather treated the girls differently. “Look, that’s not why I’m calling. What do you know about a special unit of Interpol that goes after organized crime?”

“There is nothing special about them. They’ve been trying to take all of us down for years.”

“Not that one. A secret one that kills the heads. Assassins. Maybe something about mind control and super soldier types.” I wait. When I hear the slight hitch in his breathing across the line, I know. “You know about them.”

“I’ve heard rumors of them.”

“No, you know more. How about the doctor?”

“H-He’s no one.” There’s the studder in his speech. All signs of stress.

“What did you do?” I demand. The phone creaks in my hand as my grip tightens.

“I didn’t do anything,” he says. “And you can’t prove I did.” There’s the kicker. He’s right, I can’t prove it. But I know he’s got something to do with this. I have to get the proof and take it to the family. If I can get him overthrown, I can right the wrongs he’s done.

“We’ll see about that.” I hang up, not wanting to give him any information he can give to the doctor.

I hear Dante’s phone ringing and move back inside. He answers, again putting it on speaker.

“Ana.”

“I’d suggest you get on a plane and get your asses here. My hacker is looking at some things. He’s digging up the footage from all the cameras that haven’t already been scrubbed from today’s attack. It was her.”

“Someone scrubbed the cameras already?” I ask.

“You must be Dario Revello.” She chuckles.

“Cousin fell for her hit, just like I did with Vitaly.”

“How do you know who I am?” I move across the room.

“I make it my job to know everyone associated with my family. But I also know who you are because there was an attack on you years ago by my uncle’s men. I apologize. I also know that you want a union with the Morellos, Lupos, and the Cardarellis. I used to work with the Morellos. Let’s just say that the Capo and I discuss alliances such as those. Your father won’t do it.”

“I know. I need the proof.”

“What proof?” both she and Dante ask. This is family business that I shouldn’t be sharing.

“If I can get proof that he knew about or aided in the Rossi attack, along with the latest hit on Dante, I can get a no-confidence vote from the other families under ours. I can take over the family.” Our family organization consists of several families united together like a board of directors. They voted for my father as their leader, just as they did his father. It’s how our organization has been run for hundreds of years, and for all those years a Revello has always held the seat. But with my father attempting to make war with other organizations, I can get the families on my side.

“You think your father had something to do with both of these attacks? But why would they send Luna to kill you?” Ana asks the million-dollar question.

“I don’t know. Only Luna and the doctor know that. Her contact at

Interpol might know too. Can we meet with him before we fly there?”

“Only if you have a pass to the pearly gates. Luna killed him today, as well as blew up his office. She did that right after she sent a massive file to Interpol revealing what the contractor was actually doing. They didn’t know that an assassin was being sent to kill those families. She was apprehended by the doctor and his team and was headed to the school shortly afterward.”

“*Fanculo*,” I exclaim in Italian, and Ana agrees.

“I’ll get the jet ready and see you in St. Petersburg in the morning,” Dante tells her.

“Vitaly will pick you up. Luna isn’t going to have much time. I’m having my hacker friend find out what the security around the school is like. As far as I know, it was abandoned years ago. As for the doctor...” She pauses, and I wait for her to continue as Dante texts his pilot. “Doctor Laurence Formanski studied psychology and pharmacology. He was trained by the KGB. He’s known for a specific brand of torture.” She pauses again, and this time I’ve had enough.

“Spit it out, Ana,” I yell into the phone.

“Don’t yell at my wife.” A deep voice comes across the line. This must be her husband, Vitaly.

“I’m sorry, but I need this information, and she’s not giving it to me. I don’t want to be protected from the truth. I know it’s not going to be good. I’ve seen the scars that line Luna’s body.”

“He was tortured by the KGB for playing both sides. Whatever they did to him, he hasn’t had use of his male parts since then. Not many people know that.”

“But Luna said he rapes her. She said he gives her some drugs to make sure she can’t get pregnant.”

“At the school it was a regular practice to give us girls a birth control shot. I’ll have Lex pull her records from the contractor. They should state what she’s been given.”

“Ana, please have a doctor waiting at the mansion after we recover Luna. She might need it,” Dante adds in.

“She will. She was shot at least once in the leg and arm.”

“From the footage Lex was able to recover from a bank ATM, she was hit with multiple tranq darts too.” Vitaly’s deep Russian accented voice comes across the line. It’s hearing his voice that I realize Ana has a different accent. Not Russian and not Italian. I can’t place it.

“Like I said, have a doctor waiting. Formanski could try to scrub her brain again.”

“Lex is trying to hack into an account the doctor uses to chart his notes. It’s going to take some time, but he’s the best I know. I’ll see you soon.” Ana ends the call.

“Okay, go get your bag. The plane will be ready shortly.” Dante turns to me.

I move toward the room I’ve been staying in and try not to let everything I just learned buckle my knees. My angel is tougher than I thought.

I’m glad we finally have some forward motion. Maybe we can get to her before her mind is wiped again. I hate that we need to go to St. Petersburg first. But according to what Dante said, Ana won’t give out the information on the school directly, and we can’t fly into it by plane.

CHAPTER

Eleven

PETROZAVODSK, RUSSIA

LUNA

Everything hurts as I come to lying on my stomach. I'm clothed in a scratchy hospital gown and nothing else. A bright light is aimed at my back, and I know what is about to happen to me.

I'm about to freak out and start fighting when I realize I'm not strapped down yet. I rack my brain for a memory as to why I would be here and not strapped down, then it hits me. He doesn't know how much of my memory has returned. I look over and see the chair with its straps and the IV pole of fluid he'll put medications into. I also see the machine that shocked me for years.

I need to formulate a plan. I must get out of this. I'm sure he didn't use the machine on me yet because I don't have the post headache I used to get. I remember everything. I remember the pain it would cause me when they'd shock me. The pain of the doctor violating my body with phallic objects because his penis doesn't work anymore.

In the distance I hear a door open and then footsteps. I know the span of space from the outer door to this inner office down to the exact centimeter. I only hear one set of footsteps approaching. When he'd rape me, he'd leave his guards in the outer area. No one can know he's only half a man. There is a panic switch for him to use if he needs them, but I can get to it before he does.

I lie back down and control my breathing so I appear to be unconscious still. The door to the inner room opens and then closes. The lock clicks into place. He's so sure of himself and his control over me. I count his steps as he moves to the counter and opens a file, then I hear the click of the recorder. He always records his notes so he can transpose them later. He doesn't trust anyone with his knowledge.

"Patient zero one nine eight has displayed more aggression and some return of memories. She had to be taken down with more than six darts before she lost complete consciousness. She's also overdue for her next injection to control her ability to reproduce." He pauses for a moment, and I continue to keep my breathing even. I hate that he only refers to me as a number or his daughter. He refuses to use my name. "I banked some of my sperm before the

accident. I should consider impregnating her. If the offspring was raised from birth with control and drugs, would it be better than the host?" I almost react from the thought of having his baby and him hurting it that way, but I maintain my control. He continues to talk, and I slowly open an eye. His back is to me. I know the gown will make noise and I won't have much time.

I spring up off the table, ignoring the pain from the fresh bullet wounds. At least they were attended to while I was unconscious. I move fast, becoming the killer they created. I slam his head against the cabinets in front of him. Bone cracks and blood spurts. I reach for the scalpel on the counter and hold it to his carotid artery. Gripping his thin hair in my other hand, I drag him to the chair he's tortured me in over and over. He starts to come to, and I grab the metal pan his fake penis is in and smack him hard across the face. He falls unconscious again, and I strap him in.

I look around the room. I have to take care of him, but I have questions. I walk over to the sink and fill the now dented pan with water then return to where he's strapped down. He comes to, sputtering and yelling, when I throw the water at his face. I stand back and wait for him to stop as I casually tie up my hair.

"I don't know if I can find a vein, so tell me what happens if I just shock you and don't drug you." I keep my voice low so he'll have to stop yelling in order to hear me. I repeat what I said, and his eyes grow huge. I walk over to the machine and look at all the dials and switches. "I'm not sure how to turn this on." I chuckle as I flip the switch, knowing how it all works. I've watched so many times, I know it by heart.

"Daughter, don't," he barks, trying to remain in authority from his prone position with that brain helmet over his head. There are wires coming out of it that connect to the machine.

"Can I have children?"

He scoffs and starts to laugh. I hit the switch and watch as his body jolts around in the chair.

"Yes. Yes, you can," he finally says, his voice quivering. Tears roll down his face. I remember every time I cried and begged him not to do this to me.

"Why Dante?"

He rolls his lips into his teeth, and I hit the button again. I didn't give him the bite block, so his teeth pierce his lips.

"I was hired to kill him." Blood drips down his chin. "Please stop, my daughter," he begs. Spittle and blood fly around him.

“I’m not your daughter!”

I hit the button again. This time I let him have it for a bit longer. He falls unconscious from the pain, and again I fill a bedpan with water and throw it at him. He wakes up, spitting blood from his mouth. His eyes darken and his jaw squares. He’s going to try to intimidate me now.

I can’t hold in the guffaw at his audacity. He can’t manipulate me.

“Who hired you?”

With his lips tight, he just stares at me. I move my hand to the switch and watch as his eyes finally flicker with emotion.

Fear.

I hit the button, giving him a short burst. He sighs in relief, and I hit it again. I do it over and over for about six reps of quick bursts of electricity in between quick moments of peace. When I finally stop, he’s not glaring at me anymore.

“The same man who hired me to have the Rossis killed.”

His words give me pause for only a moment, and I raise my eyebrows in shock. His sinister smile is wiped from his face when I hit him with another jolt of electricity. I move toward the tray next to him and stick him quickly in the arm with the IV needle. I slide the cannula in as he screams and flexes his arm.

I love that he made this room soundproof so none of his guards can hear what’s going on in here. I don’t know how many are out there, so my next question is about that.

He has no problem answering that one. There’s seven of them. I’m sure he told them not to disturb him because he always says that.

I slide the roller clamp to open the tubing and let the solution flow into his arm. I’m not going to medicate him yet. I want him lucid to answer my questions. Moving back to the cart holding the electric shock machine, I hit a quick burst to remind him I’m still in control.

His eyes are glazed over from all the pain he’s in, but I’m not going to give him a reprieve.

“Who hired you?” I bark, waking him up before he slips into unconsciousness.

“Revello,” he slurs, and I click the button to shock him. I know Dario wouldn’t go after Dante, and he wouldn’t kill McKenna’s family.

When I stop shocking him, he’s out again. This time I smack him on the knee hard with the metal bedpan. He comes to, screaming again. I move to

his feet and take his shoes off. Using the scalpel, I slice the soles of his feet as I yell at him.

“Tell me the truth.”

He stops crying, and I look up his body.

“Revello gave me the information to kill the Rossis after I was hired by that Lupo bitch that got rid of you. Then Revello contacted me again after the Rossi heir was found alive. He hired me to kill Dante.” He takes a big breath and watches me. “Please, my daughter, let me go. I’m the closest thing to a father you’ve ever had,” he pleads with me, but I laugh and move to his head.

“I had a father, but you took me from him. You lied to me. Raped me. Drugged me and even tortured me. Like I told Moreau, I have no remorse for you.” I push the button to activate all of the plungers of medication to enter his system in one whack and move to the machine. It will take a moment for the different drugs to enter his nervous system. “I’m done with you.”

“No! Wait,” he yells as I turn up the dial to as high as it can go and flip the switch. His body jolts, and his eyes roll back. After a minute, the system short circuits, blowing a fuse. The room darkens as the lights go out. I move to the corner and hold the scalpel as my only weapon and wait for my death in the form of the seven guards.

Dante is safe. Dario is safe. The recording of everything that happened is on the counter still running. Dario will know his father helped perpetrate those murders and Dante’s attempted murder.

Dario

Petrozavodsk, Russia, is over five hours from St. Petersburg, but Anatonina’s husband, Vitaly, got us a helicopter. We circle the school and see the guards before we land and move toward our destination. Vitaly wanted to shoot the men from the air, but Dante talked him into a quieter approach so we don’t alarm any guards inside and get Luna killed.

As we walk up, Dante decides to make conversation with them and find out who they are and what they are doing here. I’m beyond my patience and

raise my silenced gun. I send a bullet into each of the three men I catch off guard. Dante and Vitaly take out the rest while I move to the building set away from the main school. A burst of electricity flashes and the building goes dark.

I grab the flashlight strapped to my leg and attach it to the top of my gun as I take lead and head into the building. I'm afraid of what I'm going to find when we get in there.

"I got the door," Vitaly says as he puts a small explosive on the handle and steps back. It explodes, and he kicks in the door. There's nothing but an outer chamber. I make out desks and medical equipment. Three lone doors sit farther down the hall. We each take one and signal a count in a whisper so we don't startle anyone. On three, we all burst through the doors.

The beam from my flashlight illuminates a dark clinical room. I see a person prone in a chair that looks like something from a dentist office. Something tells me not to move, but I can't keep the tremor from my voice.

"Luna?" My voice cracks, and I move the beam around until I see a form in the corner. Her hair is tied up sloppy on her head, strands falling loose. The hospital gown she's in is dirty and bloody. But it's the tears in her eyes that have me moving across the room. "*Mio angelo*, please tell me you are still with me."

There's a loud click, and the power comes back on. She jumps for me, and I hear a clatter of metal, but I don't pay it attention as I pull her into my body.

"Dario, I love you," she says over and over as she kisses me.

I pull my head back and take in her face. "Are you okay?"

She slowly nods, and I take her lips in a fierce kiss. I don't care about the blood coating her or anything else. I only care about her.

"What the fuck," is exclaimed from behind us.

I set Luna down before turning around to face Dante. He holds out a blanket, and I wrap it around her. She rushes to him and takes him in a hug too.

"Who was this?" Vitaly asks as he waves to the body of a man. The face and head are charred, and he's got blood seeping from his feet.

"That was Doctor Formanski. I killed him."

"Good. Let's go." Vitaly turns to walk out, and we start to follow. I pick up Luna to carry her.

"Wait! The recorder." She points to the counter, and Dante takes the mini

recording device. He clicks it off and then grabs some files from the counter before he walks out. Luna and I are the last to leave the room, and I watch as she slowly fades into unconsciousness. We need to get her back to the Bocharov mansion, where a doctor is waiting.

It's been hours since she slipped into a deep sleep. The doctor told us she needed to rest so her body and mind could heal. He couldn't give her pain medications until he ran a full drug panel on her to determine what she was given. He looked over the medical record Dante took from the school to determine if she had been drugged or what she could have potentially been given. I wasn't shocked to learn Formanski planned to put her mind into a vegetative state. According to the medical chart, she hadn't been given anything recently. I still agreed with the deep drug screening though.

After we got back to the Bocharov mansion and the doctor looked her over, I carefully washed and cleaned her whole body, then I dressed her in one of my shirts. She's been lying there ever since. I watch her as her body quivers and shakes. The doctor said it could be from coming off meds or just shock from everything. She has a couple new bullet wound scars, and bruises line her body from fighting and everything she did over the last few days. I've been sitting here in this chair just watching her, and I can't take the distance or the fact that she is still out any longer. Standing up with a huff, I strip down to my boxers and move to the side of the bed. I know that if I startle her, she could attack, but she didn't do that when the doctor examined her or when I bathed her. I slide under the blankets and pull her trembling body against mine.

She sighs and her trembling decreases a bit. I spoon my taller body around hers and hold her tightly to me. She moves for the first time and turns around as she burrows into my body. Her head is tucked under my chin and her arms wrap around me.

"Are you awake?" I ask softly, and she hums.

"I love you, Dario." She says the words again, and my heart thumps hard.

"I love you too, *mio angelo*." I kiss the top of her head. "Sleep, *amore mio*."

She sighs, and this time when she falls back to sleep, she is calm. I hold

her for a while until I fall asleep too. She is my future, and after Dante came in earlier to tell me what the recorder said, I know that she and I will rule the Revello family together.

CHAPTER

Twelve

DARIO

We haven't told my father that we are coming. After I contacted a trusted member of the corporation, they set up this meeting. The car slowly pulls up to my father's large estate. I'll let him keep this home because it's *Nonna's* home more than it has ever been his. If everything goes well today, I'll run the business from my offices in the city.

Luna squeezes my hand, letting me know she loves me without saying the words. I turn to look at her, and she smiles at me. She has smiled more in the last couple of weeks than she ever did before. We had to spend an extra week in Russia so that she could heal and we could figure everything out. Dante ended up having McKenna, his son, and his father flown up for that week in order to keep them safe.

Anatonia's hacker, Lex, found the wire transfers my father recently paid Formanski to have Dante killed. Lex also found evidence that members of my personal security team were on my father's payroll. That explained how he knew our every step. I fired that agency and hired a man who used to work with Ana in the past. He's sitting in the front seat now. He has free rein to hire whomever he wants, and he'll be my and Luna's security from now on. Luna tried to tell me she didn't need security, but I'm not going to play around with her safety. She's mine, and I know people will try to come after her in the future because of all she's done. The records that she leaked prove that Moreau and Formanski pulled the strings, but she was their weapon. Her name was never released, but that doesn't mean people can't find out.

"Boss, you sure about this?" Spencer's deep voice breaks me from my thoughts.

Looking around the driveway, I see several cars. All of them are members of the board, but some are family too. I look behind us when Spencer looks back. Today, instead of being in my Ferrari, we are in a sedan so that we can have guards with us.

"Don't worry, that's my cousin," I say as soon as I see Vittoria's small car pull up behind us.

"They are blocking us in." Spencer jumps out of the car to stop her.

I watch as she gets out of her car and he stops and stands there, just staring.

I open the door and reach in to help Luna. She is dressed in a long-sleeved crew neck cream-colored dress that falls to mid-calf and matching cream-colored ankle boots. The dress is plain, but with her curves, it's stunning on her. She's completely opposite of my all-black suit, the only color being my white button-down shirt. I hold her to my side with my hand around her hip, and she melts into me. When she looks up at me with her hazel green eyes, I know why I'm doing this. There is no doubt in my mind or heart. She is mine, and I'll keep her no matter what.

"Rio." Vittoria rushes to our side. She leans up to kiss my cheek and then pulls Luna from my hold to hug her. She's dressed in a very short black pencil skirt and a wide collared jacket that has accents of blue in it. "I was so worried about you. Mamma and Papà said that you were okay, but I didn't believe them." Vittoria's father could be my hold out on the vote. He's always sided with my father on whatever direction the family was going to take.

"Come on, let's get this over with." I direct both ladies to lead the way.

I follow behind and can't keep my eyes off Luna's sexy ass. I had her just before we got dressed, and I want her again. I avert my eyes when we get to the door. Vittoria opens it, and we walk in, but she stops for a moment and turns to look at me.

"Papà didn't say you were going to be here. They aren't going to be happy."

I don't do more than nod as I see my father moving toward us. He has a gun in his hand aimed at Luna. Luna holds her ground, and I watch as she holds a hand out to stop Spencer from jumping between them.

I move though because I'm not going to allow anyone to threaten my woman.

"Drop your gun, now, Papà," I demand in English so that Spencer knows what's being said.

"No, she threatened this family, and I won't have her here. She's a damn *Lupo* too." He spits her name. I pull her into my side tight and hold up her hand that has *Nonna's* ring on it.

"She's my wife," I declare, and Vittoria gasps. "You threaten her, you threaten me." While in Russia, we got married. It was one of the ways I knew I could protect her, but I did it mostly because she's my love. "She's a

Revello now.” I spit my last name at him just like he did hers. Luna’s body vibrates next to me. She doesn’t like that gun aimed at her any more than I do.

“I can’t believe you got married without telling me,” Vittoria squeals and tries to move between us and my father, but his guards are bearing down on us now.

Spencer grabs her from behind and shoves her behind him. I’m glad he thought to see to her safety because just as I think it’s going to cool down, my father cocks his gun and Luna springs into action. The gun fires as she pushes it above our heads. She twists and turns in a blur, and my father is pushed across the room and his guards are falling as she takes them out. I have a gun in my father’s face as I hear Spencer bark.

“Now,” he says into his comm, and the house is swarmed by Lupo soldiers. Dante strides in and stops next to his sister.

“Call off your guards, or I’ll let her kill them all,” I order my father. Luna only hurt the guards; she didn’t kill them.

“This is my home. Stop it, now,” *Nonna* says loudly, and everyone turns to her.

“You gave him your ring to marry her.” My father tries to push my gun away, but I keep it right in his face. He glares at me, but until he calls off the attack on Luna, I won’t give.

“I did. It’s time, Giuseppe. You’ve done enough.” *Nonna* tries to soothe him.

His features change and darken right in front of me. I see the evil that has lurked there for so long. He pushes my gun away again and pulls a second one that he aims at me. I’m out of the way and the gun is going off before I can blink. I look over to see Luna holding the gun in his face. I don’t understand how it missed her, and I move to her as she crumples to the floor. I run for her, but Dante gets to her first. He hands her to me. She holds the gun to her chest as she looks up at me.

“I love you, *amore mio*. I couldn’t have him kill you.” Her words give me pause, and I look to where my father is holding a knife that is piercing his chest. I look back to her and start looking for the bullet wound but don’t see it. I don’t see blood.

“Here.” Dante holds a knife out, and I use it to slice her dress open and find she’s wearing a thin bulletproof vest. I put on one, but she told me she didn’t need to. This is why. She already had one on. She just didn’t tell me.

“Is she okay?” Vittoria is crying as she clings to Spencer’s back. He’s holding two guns on my father’s guards.

“Get a doctor,” I bark the order, but it’s not for my father. Luna took a direct shot to her vest. While the vest did its job, there’s still a possibility she could be really hurt.

Luna

I lie in the bed with the television playing reruns of *The Big Bang Theory* while Dario is downstairs taking care of the family business. I knew that a direct shot to the vest could kill me, but it was better me than Dario. Vittoria is lying in the bed at my side sound asleep. She cried herself to sleep after Spencer brought her in to be with me. She stayed with Dario and me while the doctor checked me over.

I have lots of bruising, but I’ll live. I knew what was going to happen before it even happened. I saw the change in Dario’s father the moment he made the decision to end his son’s life. I pulled out the knife I always have strapped to my thigh, and I did what I had to do. I feel bad he had to die, and I’m afraid that Dario’s *nonna* will never forgive me for killing her son.

A knock sounds on the door, and I pull the gun from the nightstand and hold it next to me.

“Come in,” I yell.

The doctor said I shouldn’t fight or do anything too strenuous or heavy for the next several days because my shoulder is extremely bruised.

“Hello.” *Nonna* stands in the doorway.

“Mrs. Revello, I’m so sorry,” I apologize again, like I have many times.

“Don’t you worry, *piccolo angelo*,” she coos as she moves across the room. She’s tiny, and I see where Vittoria gets her small frame from. “I know it’s awful to say, but I’d pick Dario over my son every chance. My son’s heart was bad. He hasn’t been the same since he lost Dario’s mother. Her death broke him.” She tries to explain. She sits on the side of the bed. “I’m just glad Dario and you are safe.”

She sits with me for an hour until Dario comes upstairs and tells me it's time to leave. In the car on the way back to his vineyard, he explains that he got a unanimous vote once all the evidence was exposed. Dario is the head of the family now and will continue to lead the Revello family with the help of the Morellos, Lupos, and Cardarellis. The information that pushed the board the most was the fact that Giuseppe went with the Nigerians to give information about the Rossis, which led to their murder. The Nigerians are the enemy of all the families. No one should have sided with them, and it's what angered them the most.

Now I lie in our bed and feel Dario's soft breath on my skin as he sleeps. I've been willing to die for this man over and over because most of my life I lived in exile away from those I love and care for. He freed me. He broke me from my mind and soothed all my scars with his lips.

"You're thinking too much," he growls in my ear.

I roll over and slide my leg over his hip so his cock is pressed at my core.

"Make love to me," I whisper against his lips before he kisses me gently.

He doesn't rush. He doesn't slam into me like I want. Instead, he makes sweet, slow love to me. Cracking open my heart more and making me love him more.

Epilogue

THREE YEARS LATER

LUNA

As I walk through the gallery, I smile when I see the walls covered in Vittoria's artwork. All on display, and all sold. She smiles at me as I move among the people, making my way to where she and Dario are standing. She's dressed in a slinky wrap dress that barely covers her butt.

Dante put me in touch with Isabel Cardarelli, who was one of the girls who helped me at the church before I was sold to the doctor. Meeting her and seeing that she survived that place makes me feel better. I knew somewhere down deep in my soul I was saving all those kids and other people from the doctor because of my brief experience at the church. I wish I had remembered the church sooner so I could have helped more. When Isabel told me that her husband, Pace, blew it up, I felt a lot better.

I smile at my husband. I'm so glad every day that we found each other. He knew before I did that we were meant to be together and fought to prove it to me. He showed me that I am so much more than what they created. I'm Luna Lupo-Revello.

Someone bumps into me, and I watch as my husband storms across the gallery toward me.

"Watch it, fucker. Can't you see she's pregnant," he barks in Italian, and the guy who bumped me cringes away.

My husband, the Capo of the Revello family, is usually calm, cool, and collected. But since the moment I told him I was pregnant seven months ago, he's been a bear. He makes sure that everyone knows it's his baby I'm carrying and that if they touch me, he'll kill them. He has a protection detail on me at all times, even when I'm here at the gallery that I now run.

It took us a while to get pregnant, and I know Dario is worried about me and the baby both. The specialist I'm seeing says that all of the drugs should have worked out of my system by now and that's probably why it took me so long to get pregnant. I don't care because it gave Dario and me time to be a couple and travel. I can now say I've traveled and not killed someone in every town I've visited.

I laugh and run my hand down his chest. "*Amore mio*, I'm okay." I soothe him, and he leans down to take my lips in a nearly scandalous kiss for being

in public.

“Okay, you two, come up for air, would you?” Vittoria chuckles as she moves close to me.

“All sold, little cousin.” I laugh at her as Dario holds me tight to his front. I know he wants me, because I want him too. We’ll be lucky if we make it home without stepping into my office so we can relieve each other of this constant need we have.

“All sold.” She starts jumping up and down. “How many buyers?”

“Only one.” I look to Dario, and he raises a dark brow at me. I shrug and smirk. It was a shell corporation that bought them all, every single one.

“I’m going to get my wife home and off her lovely feet.” Dario starts to pull me away.

I look at one of my assistants and nod. She’s trained well enough that she can handle anything that should arise. And now that all the paintings have been sold, she doesn’t have to worry about much.

Out front, the sedan waits for us, idling at the sidewalk. I miss that Spencer is no longer with us, but I understand why he left. He’s still in charge of our security, but he has a company to run now.

I slide into the back seat, and Dario slides in right against me. “*Mio angelo*, I need to get you home. Now.” His voice vibrates with his desire right against my ear.

“Yes, please.”

I sigh as his hand slides up my dress to where I need him the most. The partition rises, and he precedes to make me fly before we even get out of Vicenza city limits.

“I love you, *angelo*.” He kisses me deep, and I kiss him back until I feel my lips bruise.

Thank you for reading Her Exile. The next book in the series is [His Wicked Obsession](#) by KL Donn.

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Darkness surrounds me. My head is buried in my raised knees as my arms holding them tight to my chest as I rock back and forth in the corner. I hear it all the time now. Even when others are in the room with me. *Hello, darling,* follows me everywhere I go.

Into town.

To dinner.

The shower.

And in my sleep.

I can never escape. I've tried putting in headphones, but I still hear it which has led me to believe I'm crazy. Certifiable, institutionally available, bat shit crazy.

"Ssshhh, do you hear that Bella?" My sisters voice when we were eight and hunting for chameleons in mama's garden, and instead spotted a blue and purple hummingbird feeding from the honeysuckles.

The memory is so clear. Like a looking glass into the past. The warm sun on our skin, the tickling of dirt between our toes, the brush of leaves on our hands. I'm transported back in time.

To happier times. Dinner as a family. Sundays in the park with a picnic. Bedtime stories about magical creatures and princes saving princesses. Laughter filling a house bursting at the seams with love.

Nothing like I've known since they died. We went from sunshine and roses to blackholes of despair and emotional The voice begins again. Never really stopping. Slamming my hands over my ears, I try to block them out. To stifle their sound but nothing works. Not ever. I still have to try though because the alternative is to go insane.

Father Cassio was right, you are a filthy sinner. You deserve to be in hell. This is your penance. It hisses, echoing in all corners of my mind.

"No, no, no, no!" I scream. Father Cassio is dead. He was the bad man.

He was the sinner. I'm an innocent in all these foolish games.

“Bella?” I hear, the voice familiar, but I can't trust anything I hear. “Bella, what's happening?” It's closer now, masculine, comforting and warm. It sounds like Lude. But I won't be tricked. Not again. Not after I heard papa's voice.

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About E.M.

E.M. Shue is an Alaskan award-winning romance author. She writes in many different sub-genres but always features badass heroines in gritty situations. As the mother to three grown daughters and two granddaughters she wants readers to be able to see that tough girls can have happy endings too. She is married to the love of her life of over twenty years who she married within months of starting to date, instalove is real.

She published her first book in 2017 after having a dream that later became the Beverley Award winning, *Sniper's Kiss*. Since her debut, she has gone on to win this award three more times with different books and has published over forty titles.

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