



*My Mafia*  
**BEAST**

ANGEL TAN



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# **My Mafia Beast**

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**An Enemies to Lovers Age Gap  
Romance**



Angel Tan



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Epilogue

# Chapter 1

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## Angelina

**M**y leg shook as I sat in the chair. I put a lot of effort into trying not to let it shake. But this was my opportunity. I was no fool. I knew how much it could elevate my career. Every other job had fallen by the wayside or not called me back. It was a debilitating feeling that stripped me of all my value.

But as I sat in the office, this modernized, overly silver, futuristic place that only specialized in selling brick ovens to pizzerias and making millions a year off of that, I felt like I had a chance to feel alive again. Perhaps there was hope for me to turn things around.

“Angelina Demott.” It was a female’s voice. When I looked up, the woman was sticking her head through a door.

I flashed a smile. My nerves left me for a moment. But it wasn’t a long moment. It was about as long as I flashed the smile. It was game time. I was going into that interview like a lioness. No one was going to take it away from me. No one was going to deny me.

I had expected to see the CEO. After all, I was interviewing to be the assistant to the CEO, so I thought maybe he would interview me. That was what kind of fired me up initially. But, the person behind the desk was not the person I had seen in the photos. He was not the rumored mafia man with a mound of black hair and chiseled arms. Instead, some balding man with glasses pushed them up on his nose while looking at some papers. He only gave me a passing glance which gave me the motivation to be myself. This man was barely paying me the time of day. Why should I have lowered my self-esteem?

” Angelina.” He extended his hand. I shook his hand right before I sat down. Once again, I flashed that smile from before.

What happened next was me being in the zone. His questions were all a blur. They were basic, nothing that had to make me rethink an answer. The answer’s kind of just flowed out of me. I could have likened it to a sport. It was fun, actually.

But then again, I did have this moment of thinking that things were going a little too good. This caused me to slow my words down as if I hit a speed bump in the conversation. I doubted that he picked up on that. It was all in my head. Honestly, the man seemed bored. Everything seemed so generic. That worried me. That made me bite my lip a little bit.

” Well, you definitely have the education. You have internships. You have some assistant experience. This is pretty much all we need. But I think you should interview with someone else.”

I don't know why I took that as a negative thing. That was definitely a positive thing, right? It meant that I had a second interview. That didn't just mean that this man was giving up on interviewing me and ushering in someone else because I was too difficult. Difficult. But that's how my mind worked. My mind went to the negative first before the positives. But this would definitely have to be positive.

No matter what. I was thinking about it, though. It was all irrelevant because I needed to give this man a response. That was the trickiest part. Being in an interview with nothing more than having to sit there with hyper focus and make split decisions between seconds. "Okay. Whatever you think is best."

In my head, I had just ruined the whole thing. These were the most submissive answers that I had ever given in my entire life. Perhaps I was hard on myself, but I don't know. It just sounded like I was pandering. Maybe I was overthinking it, but I was dead in the water. In my mind, this man was not going to bring out anyone else to interview me. The interview had just ended.

He smiled behind the desk, stood up and left the room momentarily. During those seconds when I had to wait for whoever was going to walk through that door, whether it was Barney the dinosaur or Bill Clinton himself, I had no idea what was going to happen next. To say I was nervous was an understatement. My leg was shaking, and my breath was short. I did my best to not bite my nail, but my best was not good enough.

I sat there for a good minute. In an attempt to calm down, I did my best to clear my head. That I did a better job at. My technique was to think about the show Sex and the City. That was essentially my safe space that stopped me from shaking my legs and returning my breathing to where it belonged.

Eventually, that door opened up and then came this tall glass of tan skin, dark hair, popped collar, spicy cologne, and eyes of a lion. I knew this man from the website, from pictures in the hallway. Tomaso Vitelli, the company's CEO— Vitelli Co. He was also the company's owner. The Big Kahuna, if you will. There went my legs shaking all over again. Luckily the table was covering me. But still, I wished that I could get my head in the game a little bit better. Something told me this part of the interview would be harder than the last.

” So you want to be an assistant?” He asked before even sitting down. His voice boomed through the room. It was deep and told me that it smoked for quite some time, a real man's voice. ” Why'd you pick this company versus all the other companies you could be an assistant at? Because I'm sure those other companies would have a less stringent policy on who they hire.”

He whipped at his suit jacket before sitting down. When he did sit down, those lion-like eyes connected with mine. I felt a little turned on just by how his look penetrated me. It was impossible to not find the man attractive. But it didn't mean anything. It was a nice distraction, to say the least. It actually kind of calmed me down somewhat.

” This is one of the top companies in the world. I aim for the top. I won’t settle for less. Maybe that’s a corny answer, but I’m a corny person.”

Okay, that last line sucked. But I was talking so fast that I really didn’t think before I spoke. It happened, and I couldn’t take it back. If anything could come from this whole interview, I would be proud that I was myself the entire time and not some sort of carbon cut out of what an interviewee should be.

He gave me a measured look. ” You think this job is a joke or something?”

My lips pursed. Anyone else in my position would probably start crying. But not me. I wasn’t some bitch who was going to back down because he was a little intimidating and sexy. ” I don’t know where on earth you would assume that I’m not taking this job seriously. What? Because I’m being myself? I don’t think you need an assistant who’s going to be a yes-man. What you see is what you get. I’m not filtered. If that’s not what you want. I can walk right now.”

I was proud of that, on second thought. I was super proud of that. I couldn’t remember the last time I spoke to someone so forthright, let alone in an interview. But hell, I was there for it. I finally matched my dark red hair in terms of my personality. It was fun having a fire under my butt. What was even more fun was watching his reaction to what I had just said. Clearly, he was not used to people talking to him like that. And not to tote my own horn, but if he wanted me to be his assistant, he would have to get used to things such as this.



All the while, I felt that I couldn't help but wonder whether I would be doing good or bad. It felt like I was doing bad. It felt like, at any given moment, he was going to kick me out of the office, and my dreams of getting the job would be dashed. Time did slow down at that moment for me. It didn't help that his face was unreadable as well. Once again, my leg started to rattle beneath the table. The hard part about that was trying to ensure that the rest of my body didn't shake in front of him. It was one thing to talk about, but if he saw that I was nervous,

He leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. I was no expert on body language, but that did not seem good to me. I was waiting for him to just kick me out of the room. Hell, I was even waiting for him to lift the gun to my head and ask me if I was being serious.

"You're right. I don't like yes-men. I don't like people who are going to kiss my ass. And I don't think you're that type of person. I think you're quirky. I wonder whether or not you'd be good with all the clerical stuff." He paused, and it made me feel as though that was my turn to reassure him that I was good with clerical stuff.

"I'm going to find you attractive. I mean doing clerical work. I'm really good at doing clerical work." What in the absolute fuck. Did I really just say that? Did I really just say that I found him attractive? I literally wanted to pee myself. I could feel the heat rising to my cheeks with how red they were turning. And as I looked at the beautiful man before me and at the other end of that table, he was holding back a smirk. His eyes drifted towards my lips. Not only was I embarrassed, but

I was slightly turned on. I only used the word slightly because I couldn't find it in myself to be fully turned on in a moment where I was mortified. Call me crazy."

" All right, I won't beat around the bush anymore. You have the job. You can start Monday. If that's okay with you."

That last part of this sentence was just him being sarcastic. But I did enjoy the fact that he brushed it over the part of my rant that I'd most definitely known he heard. I forced a smile because that felt like the right thing to do and said," thank you. You won't regret it."

And there you have it, I had the job. But I couldn't help believing that interview with my pessimistic mind, thinking I got the job for the wrong reasons. After all, how often do you get a pretty woman to come into your office and admit right then and there that she finds you attractive? Of course, if I was him, I would want to hire me. I wouldn't want to have the pretty girls sitting next to me every day. Just wondering whether or not you're going to have a shot at having sex with her. But I don't know. I chose to look at the positive. I got that job because of my resume and 2% of my interview skills. What's going to happen next? Only time will tell. Something told me that working for Tomasso was not going to be an ordinary gig.

## Chapter 2

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Tomaso

It was probably one of the weirdest interviews I had ever given. But I wasn't using the word *weird* in a negative way. I was using it in a memorable way. That chick Angelina was like no one I had ever met before. That's a guy who came from the mafia world, an unspoken world you weren't technically supposed to acknowledge. I had seen a little bit of it all. But nothing like that ginger, big-breasted, personality-filled woman who was now my new assistant.

And that wasn't even the weirdest part of the whole situation. The weirdest part of the whole situation was that I was at a nice Italian restaurant with a blonde girl with even bigger breasts than Angelina, who also didn't mind showing them in her little cocktail dress, but I was sitting at dinner with her, thinking about Angelina instead. Instead.

"So then I asked for the manager. Because it was the Michael Kors store, the manager wasn't too far away. Yada yada yada, I got the purse for half off."

I'd hate to say it, but I was only saying it to myself. I didn't hear half of her story. I didn't hate materialism. I like a girl who I could spoil. It was just simpler that way. I knew what I was getting into. I also want to say that it was my type. But it would definitely be my type. And I don't know, sitting across from her at the dinner table, I kind of wished that it was Angelina instead.

"Did you hear me?" She asked.

The second she asked me that, just her tone pissed me off. And I think she could tell that because all the tension on her face left her once she saw my reaction.

” Sorry. I didn’t mean to snap.”

I wanted to chuckle at her sudden ability to backtrack. If she wasn’t so sexy, I might have ended the date. Not to be superficial or anything like that. But she was beautiful, and I didn’t want to be a jerk and cut things short just because she pissed me off. I wasn’t that immature, even if my time was valuable.

” That’s all right. I’ve dealt with the worse in my life. Don’t think I’m never listening to you because I zone out for a bit. I heard every little bit of your story.”

She smiled at me and put a piece of her hair behind her ear. The way that she looked down at her plate was tremendously sexy. It was something about a confident girl being coy that drove me insane.

” So what is Michael Kors like, your favorite brand or something?”

The sound of light Italian music playing in the background filled my ears as I waited for her response. It was kind of cute that it took her so long to recall. What bag was her favorite? I don’t know why. Those were the things that turned me on. But at the same time, they were superficial things. They were things that made me want to take her to the bedroom but nothing more.

” I’m actually a huge fan of Kate Spade. That’s my favorite bag.

Suddenly, I was getting a little bored listening to her. ” What do you like to do for your hobbies? I know you’re a banker by day. But what do you do to let loose?” I imagine Angelina sitting across from me, answering that question. It was like I was giving the interview all over again.

She finished spooning some linguity into her mouth before looking up at me and saying, ” I just party with my friends occasionally. Nothing too crazy.”

I nodded. ” I see. What do you do, like go to bars and stuff?”

She flashed a quick smile and nodded. ” Yep. Like I said, nothing too crazy. I’ve known my friends since high school, so we have our little routine. What do you do for fun? Waste management?”

There was no way around that one. That was definitely a mafia joke. And because she assumed that I was part of the mafia and still on a date with me, that turned me off. I wasn’t into girls who were into my lifestyle.

” I don’t really like when people make jokes like that, Angelina.”

Did I really say something that terrible? Because her eyebrows descended into anger and immediately threw me for a loop. And then I realized what had happened. I had called her the wrong name. And you know what, for the life of me. I couldn’t remember what her real name was.

None of that mattered because the next thing that happened was her throwing her drink in my face. This was how you could tell a woman was not truly into you. Maybe it wasn't meant to be if she was willing to end the date that quick. Then again. Maybe she wanted me to chase after her and make things better. But I looked at it more as though it was a sign. I hadn't been feeling her that much anyway.

I refused to be embarrassed and continued to eat my dinner. Just because she had thrown a glass of whatever in my face did not mean I had to ruin my night. After storming out, she came walking back in and flattened out her dress while also putting that same strand of hair from before behind her ear. ” You're not going to chase me out? You're not going to try to fix this?”

Well, I was right about something in my head. She just wanted me to pander to her. Which, of course, I was not going to do.

” You just threw a drink in my face. Walk away from me. This date is over.”

I tried not to look, but her lower lip quivered. I instead continued to eat my linguini and watched her walk out. I'll give it to her. She had a wonderful ass in that sundress. But an ass was not worth being disrespected. Even though I disrespected her in a way, who I really wanted to be sitting across from was Angelina. After one stupid encounter with her, she was the girl that I really wanted to be talking to. Problematic? Maybe. Actually, it was super problematic because she was my assistant.



I shook my head as if to clear my thoughts and continued eating my food while people looked at me as though I was supposed to feel awkward for finishing the date alone. But I didn't. I was still the leader of a huge mafia family. I was the CEO of a company. Why the hell was I supposed to care about these people?

I did take my time finishing the meal. And when I was done, I tipped the waiter an extra \$100 and left the restaurant. When I got in my car, my shoulders hung a little heavier. There was an emptiness inside of my chest. I couldn't really pinpoint why. I just knew that there was no motivation inside of me. I drove fast for no reason. I thought speeding up my car would speed up my mood. But whatever, it felt like a waste of time to sit there and analyze my mood because some girl threw a drink on me, and my dates sucked.

When I got home to my mansion, it seemed bigger than usual. It felt like I was walking through Grand Central station, something I had done a million times, given the fact that I operated out of New York. I lived on Staten Island. And even that borough felt like an empty hell hole.

I poured myself a drink even though I did have a glass of wine at the restaurant. I just wanted to let loose. I wanted to clear my head of the bit of fog that was circling around me. I had this little moment where I did feel bad about what happened with the girl on the date. No matter where I went in my life, I had this negative connotation right next to me. Either. I would still be a mafia man, the boss, or just the empty stud women liked to gawk over. The only one that actually treated me like a

human being who could have an actual conversation with me was Angelina. And because of this, it took me only a few sips of my drink to call her.

I had some ass-backwards, decision-making skills because I thought about calling her before I even had a reason to call her. I had her name on my phone with no reason for why it should be there.

Before I knew it, I was already dialing the phone. With each noise style that popped into my ear, my heart rate raced a little faster. It was the adrenaline rush that I needed for that night.

I heard the click on the third ring as her voice said, “Hello?”

Her voice was soft yet affirmative. Of course, I sexualized it because that’s where my mind was at the moment. There was just something sultry about her voice, something that was utterly alluring.

But now that she had put a word into the universe, I had to come up with something in terms of a reason for calling her. ” I just wanted to make sure I told you the right day to come in. I told you Monday, right?”

Just hearing myself say those words, I knew that I must have sounded sketchy. I wanted to blame it on the alcohol, but I had only two drinks. This was my foolish mistake.

“Um, yes, you told me Monday.” There was a finality in her voice, not a lot of give. Once again, it reinforced the notion that I probably should not have called her.

So I hung up. I didn't say goodbye. I didn't say thanks. I just hung up. It wasn't the most professional way to go about things, for sure. It was going to leave a sour taste in her mouth and make her wonder. Those were not things that I wanted to do, but they were going to happen regardless now.

I threw my phone across the room and walked to my living room, where I lay on the couch. I brought a hand to my forehead and, for once in my life, felt a tinge of embarrassment. It was almost like everything I had bottled up from the restaurant was spilling out. I had to remind myself that I was only human. I was prone to embarrassment just like anyone else. Even if I had seen some of the worst things happen in humanity when it came to my off-the-record job, I still felt things at the end of the day as much as I didn't want to.

I picked up my phone just to see if she would call back. I wished I could tell her it was a mistake to call. But she didn't call back. It was just me left with my own feelings. Which was always the worst. The last thing I wanted to do that night was go beyond my couch and feel things. But I guess I didn't have much choice. With no girls to call, the new assistant who probably thought I was weird, and a slow business day in terms of my mafia life, sometimes you just had to be on the couch and face your demons.

But my peace would be interrupted. If you could call it peace. Because the doorbell rang. This made my heart race because I wasn't expecting guests. And with someone who had my background, unexpected guests were never a good thing.

I got off my couch and started to walk toward my liquor cabinet. I was doing this because my gun was inside a breakaway door on the cabinet. I walked over to the thing and pulled the false store out. Just like that door, there was something else that was false. And that was my sense of security with that gun. If I were to open that door and someone were to shoot me in the head, I wouldn't have time to react. I'd be dead. The only thing that gun did was make me believe I had a chance.

I walked to the door and kept the gun behind me. I did everything in my power to keep my breathing steady because you cannot shoot someone if you are nervous. The question was whether or not I was going to need to shoot one person or multiple. And when the doorbell rang again, my nerves were in a frenzy.

But I opened the door without a second's hesitation. It wasn't an enemy. It wasn't anyone that was going to kill me.

It was my father.

## Chapter 3

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Angelina

The only thing that was on my mind was that phone call. It was strange. It definitely wasn't something that I had expected after that interview. Then again, the entire interview itself was unorthodox. Nothing was normal about that little sit-down meeting that I had with Tomasso. But even though it was a weird occurrence and everything around it had been odd, I wasn't weirded out if that made any sense. I was more intrigued by the situation. It gave my life a little bit of excitement. I just wanted to be a successful businesswoman no matter what it took. And on that road, things weren't always exciting. It was a lot of routines. It was a lot of hoping and wishing for things to pay off. And finally, I got into a big business that's the leader in supplying brick ovens to restaurants. I'm working for a CEO, but things were weird.

The one thing that sucked about the entire situation is that I had three days to ruminate over why he called me like that. It could have just been to double-check whether or not he gave me the right day. A CEO was too busy for things like that. Was I looking into it? Was I making things up in my head? Why did he call me at night? Why didn't he shoot me an email?

The thing that kept replaying in my mind was the way that he looked at me and the interview. I didn't want to have delusions of grandeur or anything like that, but there was a twinkle in his eye. There was this look like he actually enjoyed interviewing me. And I'd hate to say it. But as convoluted as the interview was, I enjoyed being on the other side of that table. I was also

looking forward to my first day at work. But for all the wrong reasons. I was interested in seeing Tomaso. I wanted to see what our dynamic was going to be. Dare I say I was looking to see whether or not there was going to be sexual chemistry. Maybe I needed more hobbies.

” He’s a mafia boss, you know.” Chelsea was the friend I was out at the bar with. And she was the one who told me this information as if I hadn’t heard these rumors prior.

” I had heard that about him. I did Google him and all that. But I don’t know that the mafia even exists nowadays?” I sipped my sangria while looking at the table. It wasn’t like she was an authority on mafia lore, but I wanted to gauge her perception. Because it was so easy to feel like I was alone in the whole thing. I craved an opinion on the matter.

” The mafia totally exists. It just exists in a different way. And you really want to be working with someone who’s tied up and all that?”

I raised an eyebrow at her because what did she expect? I was just going to turn down a once in lifetime gig because of some rumors that my boss may or may not be in the mafia? That was absurd to me. “Chelsea, this company is one of those places with a stronghold on an entire industry.” I could hear myself put my foot in my mouth. The second I said, I chose to keep going to make my point. “It’s one of those opportunities that I can’t pass up. Plus, it’s a corporate building. It’s not like I will be working in some hole-in-the-wall joint where it would be Tomaso and me alone without supervision.”



She gave me an inquisitive look. “On a first-name basis, huh?”

I smiled out of reflex. “What do you want me to call him? Mr. Vitelli? Come on now. We’re not in grade school.”

Chelsea laughed and took a sip of her drink. “I’m just teasing. I’m saying that you should probably be careful with this guy. From the way it sounds, you already got the job in an unorthodox way. Something just seems fishy about it all. It doesn’t help your case that he’s probably killed someone on top of everything else.”

For whatever reason, that sentence stuck out to me above everything else. I hadn’t necessarily thought about the prospect of this man killing someone. And that didn’t sit well with me. In an instant, the idea of Tomaso changed from this charismatic boss to this man who had blood on his hands. I snapped myself out of it and said to Chelsea, “If the entire point of this conversation was to spook me a bit and not find this guy sexy, then you’ve accomplished that.”

She laughed. “I’m just saying. Two giant mafia families are left in New York, and you just happen to be the assistant to a big player in the Vitelli family. I don’t want to see you get it, you know?”

When she said that to me, the ocean of sincerity in her eyes took the fun out of the whole outing for me. It was like when a mom warned you to be careful before you left the house. You wanted to have fun and enjoy yourself, but at the same time, you heeded her warning and had it in the back of your head. And that was the case with my friend’s words.

So, in the days leading up to my first day at work, I had two prominent thoughts that kept tugging at my brain. The first one was, of course, Tomaso's purpose for that phone call. It was on my mind even more after thinking about the mafia stuff that Chelsea had brought to the forefront. At no point was either thought stronger than the other. The only thing that might have been stronger was the fact that I was antsy to just get to that office. Those three days dragged on and on.

Eventually, that fateful Monday morning came, where I took the express bus from Staten Island into Manhattan. It wasn't like your typical city bus. It was pricier, only made stops on the two islands and had cushioned seats. On any other day, I would not have cared about the express bus, but it was kind of soothing, given my mind. I had no idea what I would be in for regarding the job. It was a completely blank slate. My friend's words did not help my imagination.

I stopped off for a cup of coffee and made my way toward the office building on 57th Street once I was off the bus. I really enjoyed being a morning person. I loved seeing the hustle and bustle of tired New Yorkers marching their way to their jobs. Probably thinking about when lunch would be. I didn't have any food on my mind. I just wanted to get my day started and convince myself that I wasn't working for a mafia boss

I checked in and settled myself at my desk with a to-do list of things that needed to be accomplished throughout the day. The list consists of a lot of different emails, spreadsheets, and boring, mundane things that somehow excited me because I knew that I was on my journey to doing something new.

I arrived at 8am, and Tomaso was nowhere to be found. That made my leg shake beneath the desk. It was one thing to start my day and get into the groove of what working at the company was going to be like, but it was a whole other thing, waiting to see what our dynamic would be like in terms of boss and assistant. Then again, he wasn't just any boss. He was the boss that randomly called me one night and made me feel like I was somehow part of his mafia business. I could probably blame my friend Chelsea for that.

I was proud of myself because I got a good head start on everything I needed. Within twenty minutes, I had already finished my email tasks. A half-hour in, and I can handle a lot of his paperwork.

Just as I was calming down and feeling like things were going good, the curveball of his coming into work occurred. It was nine-thirty when he finally decided to come in. I knew he was the CEO. But I don't know. It rubbed me the wrong way that he came an hour and a half later after me. I knew he wasn't in a meeting before arriving because he had come with his briefcase and coffee. His cologne filled my nostrils but in a good way. He had a cinnamon-type smell. It also reminded me of the beach.

" Good morning." He said.

He gave me his eyes. I didn't think he would give me eye contact, and I didn't know why. All I knew was that I was caught off guard by it. But I kept my cool. I could still act

normal, even though nothing was normal about my situation.  
“Good morning.”

He sat down, opened his laptop, and said nothing else. This was weird to me. I felt an ocean of discomfort wash over me. It wasn't the typical type of discomfort, though. It was this strange discomfort that kept me interested in the man. I kind of wanted to poke. I kind of wanted to get him to talk. And I most definitely wanted to know about that phone call.

” Why did you call me the other night? It was really strange. I hadn't even started my first day at work, and you were calling me rather late. And then, on top of that, you didn't even say goodbye.”

He chuckled. ” If I had said goodbye, would that have made the conversation on the phone normal?”

So he did know that it wasn't normal. Then why did he do it? It was like I asked one question and suddenly had a million others. ” Yes. It would have made it a little bit more normal. But again, what was with that?”

He shrugged. ” This is your first day on the job, and you're being rather inquisitive. You're being inquisitive about everything but the job.”

I pursed my lips before saying. ” I think the phone call had everything to do with his job, though. Call me crazy.”

” You're crazy.”

I smiled. I didn't want to smile, but it happened. He just had a way of penetrating my layers. Part of me was super defensive

while sitting at my desk. But he had this ability to break through.

” Okay. I’m not going to push it anymore. I’m just going to sit here since you’re not being honest. That’s all.” I said to him. I was shocked by how forthright I was. If I was him, I would definitely fire me on the spot. And I had no idea where my confidence was coming from with this man, but it kept rolling off my tongue. It was kind of fun to antagonize him. There was joy in trying to poke through his layers. Tit for tat. He was breaking down my walls without trying. I was actually going to try. There was no harm in trying to make the day go by quicker.

” You know you really shouldn’t be speaking to me like that. I called you the other night and asked you about work, and that’s it. There’s nothing more to it than that. I don’t appreciate the sarcasm, and I don’t appreciate being spoken to in the manner that you’re speaking to me.”

His voice had a bite to it. There was an edge that cut deep. He had honestly put me in my place, as much as I didn’t want to admit it. My eyes shot down to my desk, and I said nothing. Maybe I should have apologized, but even those words didn’t want to come out.

To say that I was embarrassed and awkward after that was an understatement. There was nothing but silence that filled the room. I had this huge concern that moving forward, this was going to be our work dynamic. Because how do you come back from such a moment? Especially after having such a

moment with your new boss, whom you barely knew. I guess, yeah, I had crossed the line. And I didn't know how to come back from it.

So, I buried my head in my work and didn't make any conversation after that little incident. Every now and then, I would look up from that computer out of habit just to see what he was doing. It was as though I wasn't even in the room. His eyes were trained on his laptop, and his fingers clicked away. It was kind of hard to believe that he was in the mafia. He seemed so normal. Sure, he was gorgeous with a jawline that looked like it was made out of stone. But I saw such a human side of him. I couldn't compare him to the person Chelsea had brought up at the bar. No matter how hard I looked, I couldn't imagine it, even when he snapped at me.

As I sat there, letting my eyes drift upwards and toward him, maybe I was just a bad judge of character. Maybe I was just thinking with my vagina and hoping for a man to be more civil than he actually is. But again, how could a man who runs the mafia also run a huge company? There were so many questions about this person that I shouldn't have been there, and maybe I was naive.

It was lunch that was my turning point. I guess the time away had given me some sense. I went to this panini shop up the block to clear my head. Being alone helped to ground me.

The panini shop was like any other sandwich shop. I had cheesy paintings of sandwiches on the wall, light music from the '90s, and not enough space for anything other than sitting

down and eating. I would have considered it a place I could go to every day for lunch because their prices were reasonable enough to not break the bank. But it wouldn't be my everyday spot because I had decided at lunch that I was not going to continue working at Vitelli Co. That's right when I looked at everything from every angle, my friend Chelsea was correct, and the day itself had proven to be weird enough for me to quit. I also was very unsure about that phone call. Something in my gut just wasn't sitting right.

As I ate my panini, this flat sandwich filled with salami, my breath grew quick, thinking about quitting so soon. Suddenly he did feel like a mafia man. Because I guess I was scared. I was scared to have to face him down. Especially after how he spoke to me before. But whatever, such was life. There was no way around those hard moments. Sometimes you just need it to rip the band-aid off, no matter how many hairs it is going to take with it.

So after my forty-five-minute break, I marched myself back to the office where Tomaso had been sitting at his desk. I had to briefly wonder whether he had left for lunch. It didn't seem like he had moved from the position he had been in.

He didn't look at me as I walked through the door. I guess he had been well equipped to tell who was entering his office with just his peripheral. He was going to have to look at me eventually, though, because I stood by his desk with my arms folded.

I could have spoken. But I waited for those eyes to look at me. Psychologically, it was kind of a way to control him. If you get someone to look at you, that's a form of control. And this was how I wanted my exit to be. No one was going to speak to me the way he had, and I would go out on my terms.

Finally, those dark brown eyes of his sauntered up to mine. The only thing that threw me off was the fact that his eyes lingered on my breasts for a second. I can't say that I was completely surprised, but there was. I thought the man disliked me. But clearly, he liked my breasts.

"Is there a problem? Do you need something for work?" I could tell just from the muscles in his cheeks that he clenched his jaw when he was done speaking.

"There is a problem. I don't like the way you spoke to me before. Maybe I took things too far, but I won't be a smoking tool like a doormat. I'm quitting."

It did feel scary, but it also felt like a relief saying that. It wasn't the fact that I was quitting my job. It was more the fact that I was standing up for myself.

He left his desk and walked to the door without saying a word. When he closed it, my heart started to race. My breath also grew short. If I had been sitting down, my leg would have been shaking.

"First of all, I'm your boss. And the way that you were speaking to me before was unacceptable. It had nothing to do with work. You were veering off the subject completely. And you were snippy. If you want to quit because of that, I don't



care, be my guest. But if you're going to work for me, I won't be your doormat either. Don't bring the heat if you can't handle me talking to you a certain way."

I hated that I could feel my desire in my panties when he spoke to me the way he did. I could feel myself dripping. Why was I so toxic? He was my boss. Why did I want to antagonize him more? This was a big problem because I was supposed to quit my job. I wasn't supposed to be dancing between looking at his eyes and his lips. But the stubble around those things, I just wanted to feel them. I wanted to be tickled by it when I kissed him. But kissing him was off the table. That was a fantasy that needed to not be anywhere near my mind. "I just don't think you can take a strong woman talking to you. And you get all defensive like a little boy."

He laughed. It was a mocking laugh. "I get defensive? You're the one who just threatened to quit. I moved on after I said what I said. You're the one who is probably fuming throughout lunch because I spoke back to you. What? Maybe you're not used to a strong man talking to you?"

He was only about a foot away from me. I took advantage. Moving in, I did yet another thing that was taboo. I kissed him.

There was this two-second, one Mississippi, two Mississippi, where I waited for him to press off me. I thought I had definitely crossed the line because it was all on impulse. And usually, when you did something on impulse, it was. But to my surprise, he didn't press off. He kissed me right back. He even brought a hand up to the back of my neck to pull me in closer.

His lips were aggressive. And you mix that with the stubble. I was getting wetter by the second. He was hitting all the right places with his lips. The tongue came right after. The way that he put his tongue in my mouth was like nothing I had ever felt before, and I had kissed plenty of men in my lifetime. His tongue felt like it was classically trained or something. I melted in his presence. I lost all sense of where I was or who I was at that moment. Was I his employee? No. I had just become this woman he was making out with, and I didn't want to lose that title whatsoever. If anything, I wanted to double down on it.

So that's what I did. I grabbed him by the hips and moved in, so our chests touched. My nipples were so hard that I wondered if he could feel them through my bra and blouse. I definitely didn't mind if he did.

Because my nipples were hard, my mind went to an even dirtier place, wondering whether or not he was hard downstairs. I pushed my lower half against it to feel. Something long and thick. I celebrated inside with anticipation.

I knew for sure that he wanted me. And I wanted him. I knew that once the kiss ended, things would be different. They would be way different. It would be no going back and putting our little argument to shame. But what was life if you weren't living?

I chose to live.

## Chapter 4

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Tomaso

## Tomaso

**I**n all my years working at the company, nothing compared to what was happening in that office.

I had her up against the door. This was so that I could lock my office. Once that had been accomplished, I moved her off of the door and brought her towards my desk, where I knocked everything off in cliché fashion. What the hell was I doing? This was wrong. This could cost me my entire livelihood. At the same time, I was a mafia boss. We didn't do things like this. All right, maybe we did. It was just a tricky thing, though. Being that I was in my place of business. It was my day job. You don't do those types of things at your day job. That was where you were supposed to be as straight as an arrow. The mafia was where he acted up. That was where you pushed the limit. And your day job, that was a place where you were a good boy. But as my tongue danced with hers, I was everything but.

She started to kiss my neck, and that was when I peered down into her blouse. She had these beautiful breasts that were nestled in this purple bra. They teased me. And I wasn't one that dealt with teasing well. So as those soft and warm lips kissed my neck, right around the stubble, I started to unbutton her blouse.

This was when I felt her body get a little less tense like she was going with the flow of things. That she didn't push my hand away told me she wanted to go further. I was about to see

her breasts, after all. If she had a problem with that, she could stop me. I needed to see them. I wanted to know what her nipples looked like.

The blouse came off, and there she sat, kissing me in just her bra. I wasted no time as I slipped my hands behind her back and unhooked the clamp. About a second later, I was looking at her nipples. They were this beautiful deep red, the size of silver dollars. They were all so massively hard. I had to feel them with my fingertips. The sensation of her rigid nipples made my dick harder. I wondered when she was going to grab it. She took the initiative to kiss my neck, and I wanted her hand to jerk me. I wanted to feel those slender fingers wrapped around my cock.

It was like she read my mind because she hastily unbuckled my pants the next thing I knew. I had forgotten we were at work and actually had to do things. Maybe it wasn't smart to take her right now. I didn't have to worry because my pants and boxers came down. Her eyeballs rested right on my cock. She looked hungry.

When she grabbed the long veiny thing, it was no longer semi-soft. It went fully hard and wrecked. She gripped it tight, making it seem smaller than it was.

When she started to jerk me, I disappeared from the world for a moment. I just kept getting harder and harder somehow. And she knew it. Because she wore a little smirk as she jerked me off. That turned me on because, in a way, she would stay in control. It was much like our little argument before. Tit for tat.

Except now it was literally. And it was my turn to be the aggressor.

I reached down and started to rub her crotch. Her whole body stopped moving for a moment. That made me smile. I watched her mouth open a little bit as her eyes did the opposite. She moved forward to allow me more leverage. She opened her legs wider and guided my hand up and down. She had become a different person in her sexy form, and I loved every second of it.

I stuck my hand in her pants to feel her. She was soaked beyond soaked. This filled me with adrenaline. They made my hand move. Almost like I was a DJ. And then I needed to take her pants off. That couldn't wait one bit.

I did just that, and she welcomed it. The moment when my cock went inside of her was a blur. It happened, though. She was tight. Tighter than I had expected. Even with knowing just how wet she had been. I held both her ass cheeks while thrusting in and out. She let out these little moans she had to cover with her hand. It was both cute and sexy. No matter how feisty she was, she was still coy at times. How could you really blame a girl? This had to be the first time she had sex in an office, so it was my first time, so maybe I was projecting.

Her butt cheeks were squishy in my hands. Warm and squishy. She had a nice big butt that filled both of them. I gave those cheeks a little squeeze with every thrust that I made. She was still covering her mouth as if I couldn't hear her. Those little moans of hers were borderline squeaks. I couldn't help but

smirk the entire time. They made her seem so small. But again, nothing had been sexier.

At one point, she started thrusting her hips into me while I pounded her. That made me want to climax sooner than expected. She wrapped her hands around the back of my head while this happened. We also had this moment where we locked eyes, and I swear, the rest of the world around me no longer mattered. I watched her eyes close. I watched her face grimace with pleasure.

” I’m coming.” She whispered.

I smiled. But I couldn’t allow myself to finish. Suddenly, after pleasing her, the gravity of the situation hit me. What we did was wrong. What I did was out of line. It would cost me my future. It could put a lot of people in trouble. And it could bring too much controversy to the leading company that provides brick ovens to the entire country. I didn’t need that smoke.

” I have to stop.” I pulled my dick out of her, and she was too busy gathering herself to care about what I had just said. I was sure that it would hit her at some moment. But then that one, I just needed to get myself together. I pulled my pants up as she dressed and tried to make myself look like I hadn’t screwed my assistant in the office.

” You didn’t want to finish?” She asked me.

” What we did was wrong, Angelina. It was inappropriate.”

” Did you at least enjoy it?”



I laughed. "Of course I did. I don't regret it. Okay. I just don't want to talk about it. I'm the CEO of this company. This could get me in a lot of hot water."

"Aren't you a—" she stopped herself from saying what I assumed to be a mafia boss comment. I liked that she caught herself. "Never mind. I guess I'm going to continue working here."

That made me laugh. "Yeah, I think you should keep being my assistant. Especially if this happens after lunch every day."

She giggled. "I don't think so. You just said what we did was wrong."

"That didn't mean that I didn't enjoy it."

For the rest of the day, she and I were copacetic. We were way better than before lunch. No surprise there. The only thing that ruined my day in the second half was getting a text from my father. The other night he had warned me of business. I was his reason for coming by. He didn't go into much detail other than that. I looked at it as a courtesy. It was the proper thing to do when something was about to hit the fan. But now, with him saying that we needed to meet after work, I knew there were no more warnings. It was simply me going to have to face whatever music was being brought my way.

As I went home that day, I couldn't even begin to guess what it could be. The world that I lived in outside of my actual business, it was an unpredictable roller coaster. It was almost like being on a roller coaster for the first time but every day.

There was no getting close to predicting what was going to come next.

So I went home that day, missing Angelina. I didn't want the day to end. I wanted the workday to drag on and on. Because, sure, there were perks of having power. I was untouchable in my life. But that didn't come without its downfalls. The constant fear of death. The target on my back. It was a completely ironic thing because you had all this power. You lived in a mansion. You had fancy dinners and nice suits. But you couldn't truly enjoy any of it because you were forced to live in fear the entire time. You were forced to acknowledge the fact that you have borrowed time. And the thing about borrowed time is you don't know how much you borrowed. It could be a lot, or it could be a little. I mean, maybe everyone lived like that. You could be on the train, and that train could derail. You could be on a plane, and that plane could crash. You can get into a car accident while I'm driving a mile from your house. I wasn't special. But I knew where my circumstance was. And that was something that Angelina could never understand. Which is why I kind of regret what happened in the office. Because I never wanted to pull a woman into my world. Given the fact that she had to work with me every day, it wasn't like just having a one-night stand with some woman. There were consequences and repercussions.

When I got home, the place felt emptier than usual. Uneventful would probably be a better term. Nothing was happening for once in my life. My house was boring. And this

was because I was comparing it to work. Work had this level of unpredictableness that my home didn't. No sexy woman was going to pop out of my closet and have sex with me in my bedroom. No sexy woman. Who's going to have witty banter with me. Or provide me with a conversation that would keep me on my toes. Instead, I had to look forward to my father coming over with whatever news he had. How did I get here? How the hell did I get here? I usually have myself all composed and free of overwhelming desire. But now, when it came to Angelina. She changed everything. And this was problematic.

The doorbell rang like clockwork. A cloud of dread hovered over me. My feet were almost dragging on the floor because of how much I didn't want to answer that door and deal with mafia business. It was crazy how a pretty woman could get you to change your tune altogether in a way.

I opened the door, and there was my gray-haired father. He looked like he had gotten shorter since the last time I had seen him. Age was not good for the man. It made me fear my own mortality. If I didn't know better, I would think he was a turtle because of the flabby skin hanging from his neck. " Hello, Dad. Find the place, okay?"

He chuckled. " I'm not dead yet. Neither is my memory. I got news for you. It's big news. Stuff that can change everything."

I shut the door and stupidly tried to imagine what it could be. I had been doing that ever since learning that this was going to happen. " Well, you won't tell me over the phone. You won't

tell me through text. You've been keeping me on the edge of my seat for days now. Just spill it. Dad."

" Pour me a damn drink first."

What the hell was he about to tell me. Was it bad? Why did he need a drink before telling me this?

I did get him a glass of whiskey, and he took one sip before saying, "Vincenzo's family is expecting you to marry Linda. This way, both families get combined. You know. Linda."

" Yeah, Albert's daughter. The head of the damn family. I've known her for years. I'm not marrying her. This is ridiculous. Do we do arranged marriages now? Get out of here." I had to pour myself a glass of whiskey after that news. It was one of the most ridiculous things I had ever heard.

I could hear my father letting out the world's biggest sigh behind me as he followed me to my liquor cabinet. " Why didn't I know you were going to be a little girl about this? Why do you always have to be complicated? Who are you going to marry, huh? Would you have this picturesque white picket fence life ahead of you? This is an opportunity to combine both families to have more power than you ever dreamed of, and you're going to toss it up because you don't like her."

I turned around fast and snapped. " I'm not marrying Linda. I didn't get into this life so I could be told who I was going to marry and sleep next to for the rest of my life. What are you crazy about?"

Even though I had filled my glass up, I downed it in one sip. I couldn't remember the last time I had been so worked up over work. Usually, things had become routine in the mafia life. It was much like a day job, in the way. Of course, every now and then, you would have your crazy crap that would pop off like this, but nothing like this, actually.

My father's face lost all expression. He looked much like a dog who had his food taken away. But I had seen that face before, and it was one where he had to tell me something he wished he didn't. It was like when my mother died. I remembered his face vividly. He had no desire to tell me she was no longer with us. That her heart just suddenly gave out. Ironically enough, that day was when mine gave out too. Maybe not in a physical sense, but whatever. It was all the more reason I was not going to marry this woman.

"Tomaso, maybe I should rephrase how this is going to go. They're not asking, okay. They're expecting. And when you let down a family like that, they take offense to it."

I let out one of those sarcastic laughs. Because I was so sick of hearing this conversation. "Oh, so what? They're going to get snubbed and take offense to the fact that I don't want to marry a woman I don't care for? This is going to start a war?"

That time my father went red in the face and snapped at me. "That's exactly what it is going to cause. You know what happens when you turn down people's offers. You know what happens when you shake things up for the wrong reasons. Everyone feels slighted."

” They could have come and told me to marry an elephant, and I’m supposed to oblige?”

” Tomaso, there’s been talks about bringing the families together for years. This shouldn’t be a surprise to you.”

I shook my head. ” I didn’t think it meant marrying someone.” This was the point in the conversation where I felt like I was losing a little bit of hope. This was when I had a bit of desperation for me. These were feelings that I was not used to. Or they felt that I tried to avoid tremendously. Because you did stupid things when you had those inside of you. And that’s what was going to happen next.

” Well, I’m engaged.” Blurted out. Although the words were fake. They felt so good to say. It felt like I had come to some sort of epiphany.

Watching my father’s mouth open in shock was enough to make me want to laugh. I had to hold that back. That was one of the most difficult things to do. ” What the hell do you mean engaged? Are you being serious right now, Tomaso?”

” Yes. Completely serious. It was supposed to be a secret. I wanted to marry her privately, and now I have to tell you like this.” Who? Who was I speaking about? This was going to be a problem. I wasn’t really engaged to anyone. That’s what’s a problematic lie that should not exist. Then again, who was I to complain if it were to get me out of marrying Linda?

My father brought his hand to his head and paced around for a moment. When he looked at me, there was a glimmer in his eye. I had forgotten that this man actually wanted me to be

happy in my life. Maybe he was happy that I was fake engaged. ” Who’s the girl Tomaso? We must have a girl, or no one will even believe us. Hell, I don’t even believe you right now.”

” Her name’s Angelina.” Once again, I didn’t think before I spoke. A habit of mine. But it seemed like this habit was helping me at the moment.

My father gave me a long look, but it seemed like he believed me. I was getting somewhere. Now the problem was, Angelina.

## Chapter 5

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Angelina

The day with Tomaso had been different at work. I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Everything was just so pleasant. Our little chit-chat throughout the day flowed nicely. The sun out the window was shining brighter. And I don't know, it was this beautiful sense where I could look towards the future and not be afraid. Maybe it was the job. Or maybe it was because this man was nice to me. I used *nice* because I couldn't come to terms with the fact that we did naughty things in a naughty office. A naughty office and only became that way because of us.

I guess what it all came down to. Unlike most people, I had a job that I liked. And maybe it was because my boss was sexy and we had chemistry, but there were times when you just didn't need to look into things. Sometimes you just need it to live in the moment.

But there were also points throughout the day where Tomaso was distant. We would be in mid-conversation, and he would zone out.

"What was I saying?" He asked me.

"You were talking about gas prices."

His eyes descended to his desk as if his thought had been on top of it, and he was looking for it. When his eyes met mine, it was clear that he had forgotten. "Yeah, I don't know where I was going with that."

“Are you okay? There are points throughout this day where you seem a little preoccupied.”

He cleared his throat and shifted in his chair, which only solidified my notion. I may not have known him long, but I could tell when something was weird with someone.” Well, I am the CEO. You and I have a complex thing going on here. You can’t blame me for being a little out there at times. I have a million things going through my head.”

I was surprised by what I said next. I usually wasn’t the one to take the initiative with things. But he drove my curiosity. ” Do you want to talk about what’s on your mind? It’s better to get that stuff out of your head and out in the open.”

He gave me a measured look, almost saying if I had offered him candy with a rapper, that would slightly open. Who was I to ask a mafia boss to open up? It was ridiculous. I had a level of confidence that was kind of illegal in this world of a CEO mafia boss. Or so that’s the way I saw it.

” I don’t think I want to talk about it. No offense. Not right now, at least. But I do have a proposition for you.”

My mind ran in a million directions, probably like his. The only difference was I wondered just what his proposition was.

” Shoot your proposition my way. But I must warn you, I’m a hard sell.”

He chuckled, which was oddly satisfying to see. Something was accomplished about making him laugh. He wasn’t an easy man to break down barriers with. “I’d like to actually take you

out on a date. A real date. Not just talking to you here in the office.”

I could feel my cheeks going red. The warmth was rushing up into my face. I couldn't remember the last time I felt like that. But I welcomed it. Those were the moments when you felt most alive. Now, what was I supposed to say to him? It had to be an automatic yes, right? ” I would love to go out on a date with you. That's shockingly romantic.”

” Now you're pushing it.” He teased. And once again, I could feel the blood rushing to my cheeks.

The rest of the day went swimmingly. It was almost too good to be true. I got my workload done without straining. My eyes stayed glued to the computer. Took a few coffee breaks. I let myself get excited about what would come after the shift. Even though I knew I needed to stay level, I still questioned it. I felt like I deserved happiness. Call me crazy, but it did seem like he was happy too. Maybe I was looking into things a little bit too much. Maybe I was looking at that smirk on his face and thinking it was because of me. It was hard to say anything. Because as much as he gave me emotionally, there was still so much that was unknown when it came to Tomaso. Sitting there with his popped collar and five o'clock shadow, he was a treasure hunt to me. He wasn't just a man. He was a journey. And he was a journey that I wanted to go on.

But the rest of the day dragged on because I was so excited. Despite the good work day, I was still cautious about being on a date with him. I hated that I wasn't as dolled up as I should

have been. I was going to be in my work clothes. Then again, he found those sexy enough to take off of me in the office that once. I had to rack my brain to figure out the last time I had gone on a good date. But I knew when the next one was going to be. I had no doubt in my mind that we would be on a good date. It was going to be an experience. I was also going to use that experience to learn about this man. As toxic as it may have been for him to be in the mafia, I was intrigued and wanted to know more.

He took me to this fancy Italian restaurant. No surprise there. The place was called Florence's Pasta. There was light Italian music playing in the background. There were candles on every table. The walls were this beautiful maroon. The waiters all had suits on. No one that sat at the restaurant had their toes out. No one wore tank tops. No one had a baseball hat on. It was a classy establishment where I almost felt I didn't belong.

"You look kind of out of place?" Tomaso said to me.

"Are you calling me ugly?" I joked.

Surprisingly enough, he looked mortified by my joke. Maybe it flew over his head. "Not at all. I meant—"

"I'm completely joking, Tomaso. I just never get taken the places like these. So maybe that's why I look a little out of sorts."

I liked that he was able to open up to me in that way. It made me feel like I could open the floor to more conversation. "Do you feel like you have too much on your plate?"

” Are you trying to get me to leave my second life? You know the one that I lead outside of my office?”

I had to think about it for a moment. “It’s funny that you would assume that. Are you afraid that getting close to me is going to lead me to want to change you? Is that why you have walls up? Because all women are just out to change men?”

He chuckled. “I don’t like when someone asks a question after I ask a question without answering mine. The truth is, there’s a reason that I’m a little guarded tonight. There’s a reason that I have a lot more on my mind tonight.”

Now my mind was racing. If it had been going a mile a minute before, it was going two million miles a minute now. What was this reason? And was he even going to tell me? “Well, you know that I’m not judgmental. My ears are open.”

“You might be with this one. I want you to be my fiance for \$100,000. My fake fiance.”

And just like that, all the positive vibes were stripped from under me. Like some sort of weightlifter had ripped a rug from my feet. Instant regret filled me in terms of going on a date. I wanted to throw my drink in his face. Because he was serious. I was looking right at him. And there was not a hint of humor in his expression. I gave him my most appalled look. I scrunched my eyebrows and tightened my lips. I hope that he can see the pain in my eyes. Because suddenly, we were not on a date. I had just been lured into doing something for his own benefit. It was a completely absurd idea. So, I got up from my chair and started to leave the restaurant. Screw him.

## Chapter 6

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Tomaso



I never thought of watching a woman leave a restaurant with filmy with such angst. I had never wanted to chase after a woman so fast. The crazy part about the whole thing was that I wasn't even thinking about this stupid contract as I watched her walk out. I was just thinking about how I had offended someone who mattered to me. She just wasn't some girl from the street. She was born in that. Almost instantly. She was a different woman from the rest. Looking at her face across the table as I told her that stung me to the bone. I could have worded it differently. Scratch that. I should have worded it differently. I should have told her what my issue was. I should have been more open about it so that she could have understood what I meant. But there she went, that beautiful ass walked right through the restaurant and didn't look back once. Her confidence was intoxicating. The way that she could just leave me turns me on. Hell. I knew that was toxic. But whatever. It was time to go chase after her.

I got up from the chair with haste. As I walked past the waiter, I grabbed them by the sleeve and said, "We're going to be right back."

Whether that man believed me or not, I was on my way out. I didn't want to lose her. We had both taken our own cars, and she could easily drive away and never see me again. Why would you work for someone after such a proposition?

I could see her walk out the door. Which meant I needed to pick up the pace. And that's exactly what I did. I let my feet do

the talking. The somewhat chilled air outside startled me because I knew how close she wanted to get to her car. ” Angelina. Can you at least listen to me?” Should have probably worded that as a question rather than a statement.

She turned around with a face filled with fire. If I had looked close enough, her eyes would have probably been red. It was such a contrast to the woman who had been inside the restaurant sitting across from me. It was day and night. I had never seen her so angry. Let alone any woman so angry. ” Explain what? In very few words, you just told me that you want me to be your fake fiance. After everything we’ve been through, it may not be a lot, but I thought we had something genuine going. And then you send me down, and it’s almost like you’re selling me a car. How am I supposed to be happy with that? Comment? Supposed to trust you right now. Are you going to sell me a car right now?”

She was talking so fast that I had a delay in digesting what she was saying. “Before I even said any of this to you. I made a huge mistake.” I lowered my voice because the content that was going to come out of my lips was not good for public consumption. ” My father recently told me I was supposed to marry into another family. You know what I mean by family; if I say no, it will start an all-out war. People get slighted very easily in my world. So, when speaking to my father, the only way out was to tell him that I was engaged and his name was the first one on the tip of my tongue. You were at the forefront of my mind. It came out, and now my father believes I’m engaged. So, I had to keep this lie going for a while, and the

only way I thought I could sweeten the pot was by giving you \$100,000. I wasn't trying to offend you. I never formulated this plot on purpose. It just happened."

She's studied me. How she looked at me made me feel like I was a book. I knew that it wasn't the time to think this, but there was something sexy about the way that she looked at me. Up and down, her eyes went on my face as if they were secret clues in my pores. I died to know what she was going to say next. " So, what do you think of me? You actually have me on your brain?"

Without hesitation, I said, " Yeah, if you must know. When I'm not at work, I think of you. And when I was talking to my father, you were the first woman to come to mind. And I'm not making that up. I wouldn't just sweet talk you like this. If I wanted to use you, I would offer you the money. I only offered you the money because I felt you deserved it, and it's still on the table. If you are willing to talk about it. I was enjoying our date, contrary to what you may believe."

Finally, her face softened, and I had won her back. That could have been me being delusional and having delusions of grandeur, but I had hope. " Fine. But I'll need to see the contract and ensure I'm not signing up for something I don't know could put me in a bad position."

My heart started to race. This was really going to happen. Part of me didn't even care that I was getting out of marrying Linda. Part of me was more excited that she and I were going to pretend to be engaged. This meant spending more time with

her. My priorities were ass-backward. There was no way around that realization. But whatever. This one's reality, and I was just living in it.

“You can read the contract as long as you'd like. We can change whatever. But I just need you to pretend to be my fiancée until I figure out the situation, and then you can get your hundred thousand dollars.”

There was a bit of bewilderment on her face. It was a big number, and it probably needed to sink in with her that she would have that much money. All she needed to do was be a fake fiancée. It wasn't a bad deal at the end of the day. But, given that we already had a complicated relationship, I could understand why she was offended in the first place.

We went back into the restaurant, and I happily continued our date. She also looked happy, wearing this smirk she didn't want to advertise. But simultaneously, her eyes told me she would run everything over in her head, which was rightfully so. Her life had just changed in an instant.

“Before I even show you a contract, is there anything you want to ask me?” The voice was still in a somewhat hushed tone. After all, everything we discussed again wasn't for public consumption.”

“What exactly does it entail? You know, pretending to be your fiancée.” She brought her voice to a whisper on that last part. The restaurant may have played music in the background, but it would still be low enough for everyone to hear each other's conversation.

“Maybe we can talk about this in the car. Let’s just enjoy this date.”

She smiled. “I agree with that statement. But I would like to know if any part of you wants me to be your fiance in this whole thing. I want to be romantic with you if that makes sense.”

Could it be that my cheeks went red? ” I can’t deny that if I had to choose anyone to be my fake fiance, it would be you. I’d hate to admit that I think about our time in that office much more than I should.”

She giggled like a little schoolgirl. “I assume you mean us working together.”

“Oh yeah, of course. Just us working. Nothing more than that.”

We both sat there with sexual tension hovering over the table. It was crazy because moments ago, she had just walked out. Life was weird, to say the least. But, once again, I wasn’t dreading what would come next. Of course, there was uncertainty around the fake engagement. Who knew whether or not everyone would believe it. They would still like a lot of logistics that went into pretending to be engaged. My father would be eternally skeptical. The Vincenzo family would also be that way.

In the car, she and I talked more about the contract. We didn’t go into detail, but I didn’t trust some of her questions. “I just need you to pretend to be a fake fiance. Whatever a fiance would do. That’s what you’re going to do.”

Of course, she had to take it to that place again. That place that made my cheeks go red. “Usually, a fiance would have sex with her fiance. So I’m assuming that’s on the table as well.”

I laughed. ” I don’t know about all that. We have a very complex relationship. My life is already so complex. I don’t want to add more complexities to it. I also don’t want to hurt you. Putting you in this contract puts me in a very weird position. I may be in the mafia, but I’m not out to hurt innocent people.”

Silence filled the car aside from the radio. As much as the words might have hurt her, I didn’t regret them because I had been honest. And my intentions were honest. The last thing that I wanted to do was hurt, Angelina. I had hurt enough people in my life. ” Why do you feel like you’re going to hurt me? You feel like you don’t have control over yourself or something?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know, Angelina.”

“I’m just saying. You cut things short in the office. Now you want me to be your fake fiance. But you still pull back. You think I can’t handle your mafia life?”

Mafia. The term sent chills down my spine even though she was right. I guess I didn’t like to hear it from someone else, especially her. But that was who I was. But it’s no hiding that little detail. “It’s not that I don’t think you can handle it. But it’s something that I don’t think you should need to handle.”

“But by me pretending to be your fake fiance so that you don’t have to marry someone in a mafia family, doesn’t that put me

directly in that business?”

Damn it. ” You’re right.”

“So, the thing here is that you have to be honest with me moving forward. I don’t need that written in the contract. I need to hear from you. I need transparency throughout this whole deal.”

“Well, I don’t think you’ll need to pretend to be my fiance for over a few months. It all depends on how this goes.”

“You’re avoiding everything I just said.”

“You have my word that there will be transparency.”

After that, we left the rest of the ride pan out. We really didn’t need to speak.

When we got home to my mansion, our eyes connected, and, dare I say, a spark filled the room.

“It’s nice to be here.” She said. “You know, on the way over here, I didn’t know how I was going to acclimate to being your fake fiance but being in this house feels right.”

I nodded. “I’m glad you feel that way. The easier things are for you, the better. I don’t want you to be uncomfortable.”

We both look the one another again. This time that spark was a flame. We both must have been thinking the same thing because, at the same time, we took a step and kissed one another. This was most definitely not in the contract. This was most definitely something I had told her no to. And yet, I was putting my hand on the small of her back to pull her closer. I

couldn't get enough of her. Her kiss was intoxicating. Her warmth was soothing. She was everything that a man like me needed at that moment. Hell, she was everything that a man like me needed every day. She was what I called the antidote to chaos. To my chaos, and I was going to take her. I was going to take her and breathe again.

All of that contract stuff could wait. Because even though I had told her that we couldn't do what we were about to do, I had no self-control. Not when it came to Angelina. All bets were off. But more importantly, all clothes were going to be off as well.



## Chapter 7

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Angelina

I was hoping that this was what was going to happen. It was all that I had wanted. I was surprised that he had broken so easily despite telling me we would not do anything romantic moving forward. It was crazy to think my being his fake fiancée was an afterthought. But as our tongues were dancing, it was. I had no other thought on my mind other than his dick. I wanted to see it. I wanted to suck it.

My mind had turned into a devilish place. It was one that I did not want to leave. Instead, I wanted to roam around it and explore.

We wound up on his couch. I somehow wound up on top of him. I enjoyed being on top of the big mafia man. He didn't seem so big when I was on top. My eyes studied his face for a moment. Even though it was a millisecond, I got every little detail. Those pinkish-red lips surrounded by stubble; the perfectly symmetrical face holding a smirk; those deep brown eyes of his; no matter where I put my eyes on his face, it was all perfection.

He lifted his head up off the couch pillow to kiss me more. One of his hands pulled my head down as my hands journeyed across his chest. He's still in his button-down shirt. That was going to come off very soon. As a matter of fact, I started to unbutton it as my mind raced. There was also something so fun about having sex in a mansion. Even though our genitals had not touched yet, I felt like I was in my little movie.

One of his hands went to my ass cheek. The way he squeezed made me feel like no fabric was covering the thing. He has such aggression, and with every movement of his fingers, I could feel it pent up and being released. He slipped the same hand beneath the elastic of my yoga pants. And then another hand did the same on the other side. My breath grew quick because I knew what was happening. My pants were about to come off.

When they did, I could feel both my ass cheeks jiggle. That's the fabric left them. He also had my thong inside the pants as well. It meant that he had a full view of my vagina. When he looked down to get a peek, he looked hungry. He bit his lower lip. And I had never been happier to be someone's feast.

With those sauce-like fingers that could fit in the hot dog roll, that masculine hand of his went right to my wet slit. I was surprised his hand didn't slip right off. I was so wet. Somehow he kept a nice grip on me, flicking my clit like a video game. Whatever he was doing down there, I could barely move; it felt so good. When I thought he was going to go fast, he went slow. And when I thought he would go slow, he turned up the aggression on me. It was that level of unpredictableness that drove me insane. I loved being kept on my toes.

But I could run with the best of them. I moved my hand down to his belt and unbuckled it. I momentarily pulled myself away from his touch to get a better perspective. It was a matter of seconds before I was looking down at his boxers with a smile. Oh, what a beautiful sight it was. That little thin fabric was the only thing separating me from his cock. I waited a moment

before pulling the elastic down. But then I couldn't wait anymore.

Out sprung his massive, throbbing cock, veins and all. I honestly couldn't believe how horny I had become. Just looking at it. It took me to a whole nother level. I even fit my lip without telling it to do that.

"You like what you see, baby girl." He said.

I wasn't one that usually enjoyed dirty talk during naughty times, but when he said it to me, I lost myself all over again. He took me to yet another place together. A place I hadn't even visited within myself. We weren't just embarking on a sexual adventure. He would take me on a journey of self-discovery toward what I enjoyed.

I finally grabbed that massive rod of his. The skin was warm and taught. There was no give to it. It was a testament to just how hard he was. Maybe it was even a testament to me that I could get him that hard. But it wasn't time for me to toot my own horn, not in the slightest. It was time to bend down and put my lips on what was throbbing in my hands.

I could feel every bit of him when I put it on my lips. The head tickled the back of my throat. That warm skin felt right on my tongue. I never considered myself good at giving head. But for whatever reason, I needed to be good while sucking him off. I sucked hard. I tried my best to be rhythmic. I used my tongue more than I ever had while doing this.

When his hand started running through my hair, I took that as a sign as I was doing something right. It was really the moans

that got me the most. Hearing him moan in pleasure, these deep guttural things he was trying to hide, gave me a sense of accomplishment. This riled him up because he stopped me while he was as hard as ever. Dare I say, he might have even gotten close to climaxing in my mouth.

I wound up naked on my back, his face buried in my vagina. He wasted no time and tasted every bit of me. There was a lot to taste because I was soaked. His tongue moved so fast. It felt like it had a motor. His hands grabbed my thighs to open my legs wider. I felt so exposed but in the best of ways. He was pleasuring me, and I would be somehow satisfied and wanting more simultaneously. I closed my eyes and just disappeared at that moment. That was all I needed to do. I didn't feel obligated to play a role. Instead, he just wanted to enjoy me. This, in turn, made me feel special. This made me feel more valuable. It might have been silly for others to understand, but sometimes a man just dining on you made you feel like a solid block of gold.

His tongue made this circular motion that brought me super close to climaxing. I focused on it being clockwise because I didn't want to come too quick. Man, he was bringing me there, though. I didn't have a say in the manner. Well, I did, which is why I pushed his head off my vagina.

He had a smirk on his face the second I did that, and rightfully so. He knew how to please me and could be proud of that.

His shoulders were at the same level as mine. I felt his cock breeze over my clit. Not a few seconds later. Did it begin to

enter the hole? It had the squeeze pass as if my lips were a crowd. I could feel all the ridges of his cock enter me. Once it was in, it felt like I had a baseball bat up there. My lips were stretched each time he went in and out of me. It amazed me how you couldn't get rope burned down there. If there was ever a time that would happen, it was that one.

It was maybe ten pumps that my toes started the curl, nails dug into his back, and my mouth opened wide. I was coming. I could hear him giggle a little bit. That was expected. He did something amazing. He got me to come within seconds. That wasn't easy to do when it came to me. There were maybe 15 to 20 more pumps before he had to pull out and finish all over my stomach. I was absolutely still out of breath.

We lay there next to one another after the deed was done. He wrapped his arm around me. I put my hand on it. This was a moment when I didn't need to move forward. I could have lived in that moment forever, but all good things have to come to an end.

“So I'm going to help you move in and everything,” Tomaso said while we were on the couch together. This was after we had gotten dressed and freshened ourselves up.

Jitters filled me. “This is pretty surreal. I'm really moving in, aren't I?”

“That's completely up to you. If you want me to get murdered, that's on your conscience.” But I could tell there was a bit of seriousness in there too. He was telling the truth, after all. The thought of him getting killed legitimately saddened me.

“I don’t think I want a picture that Tomaso.”

He chuckled, got off the couch, and disappeared into the kitchen while I lost myself in the other moment. The mansion around me just seemed so big. The chandelier and the far distance did not seem real. How did my life become when it had become? One minute you’re scrapping by looking to get yourself a career. You are before a chandelier the next moment, and your life has changed.

Moving day was a bit different from everything else that had happened. Tomaso had become a little bit colder. Now, I understood why. He wanted the move to go ultra smooth. He also wanted to go under the radar. So that meant that things had to be a bit formulaic and robotic. We needed to get my stuff in with it being a secret. So he wasn’t tremendously open to me. A lot of it involved him just grabbing boxes from the moving truck and giving me little eye contact. His shoulders were far more intense than when we had been together having sex. Of course, that was no surprise. He was a different man when it came to that. I’d like to think that I got to see the real him. But who knew who the real him was? That was my task in trying to find out.

There were also points during the day when I questioned whether I was doing the right thing. When I saw pictures from my childhood in a box being moved into his mansion, I couldn’t help but wonder whether or not I was making the right decision. It was easy to get lost in the romantic fog that was Tomaso. He put a haze over me without even realizing it. He brought me places he didn’t even know he was taking me.



He was a man in the mafia, though. That sentiment was not lost on me. At times it was. But for the most part, I did keep reminding myself of who he was and what life I was getting myself into. This wasn't just an ordinary contract. I signed my name away to be part of a life that could get me killed. It was like I told myself that I needed to think of this stuff. But at the same time, I was too afraid to do so. Liking Tomaso did not make that any easier. It just made all the decision-making more complicated.

Box by box, we put things into the mansion, and by sundown, we were done on that faithful moving day. They were still a few little knick-knacks at home that I needed to bring. But those could wait. The important stuff like my toothbrush, most of my clothes, and the sentimental things like my pictures and a few other trinkets from my family came with me. Those things put a pit in my stomach because I worried that something would happen to them, but at the same time, if I was going to live there, I needed them to be with me. But again, those were things that I just needed to push to the back of my head. For the time being, at least.

At the end of the moving day, we had dinner with one another. He actually made me meatloaf. As kind as that has been, and as much as I loved watching his muscular back flex while he prepared the meal, he was still quiet compared to who I had been dealing with. It may have been a long day, and I might have overlooked things too much. Maybe my mind lends more toward being over-analytical.

In any case, I did watch it back flex with every movement he made over that stove. That was when he was preparing the meal. At least. I stayed in the kitchen once, but the meatloaf was in the oven, and he had left the room. He didn't say much before he walked out. But it did seem like he wanted to say something.

Eventually, he came back into the room fifty minutes later. That was how long it took for the meatloaf to cook. The beautiful smell of beef in the oven filled my nose and made my stomach growl. I would have been starving if I hadn't been so distracted by Tomaso. But wondering about him kept my appetite at bay.

I finally got my answer when he sat down. "You may have expected this, but you may not have expected it. So soon. You're going to have to meet my father."

So that's what was bothering him. Although it was big news and shook my nerves, it wasn't as big a deal as he may have thought, at least not to me. But maybe it was more nerve-racking than I had realized because my legs had been shaking under the table. It all hit me like a ton of bricks.

"Are you okay?" He asked me. His eyes were filled with concern. It almost scared me how nervous he looked while looking at me. I had never felt a panic attack before, but I had a feeling that whatever I was going through at that table, that was it.

He got up from his chair because I didn't say anything.

When his hand met my back, I said, “I’m nervous. I think I’d be nervous, but I don’t know. I don’t want to get killed.”

“I would never let anything happen to you. Please understand that.”

My leg would not stop shaking. It was like I had a disease. “I’m getting myself involved in mafia stuff. No matter what. I want to believe at the end of the day, I’m not going to be off limits anymore. I’m not going to be innocent. I’m going to be a part of this whole thing. And I can never shed myself of that.”

” You don’t have to do any of this. If it scares you this much, you don’t have to do it, but please believe I would do anything to ensure nothing hurts you. I know that you haven’t known me long enough. But my word is my bond.”

It wasn’t his words that calmed me down. It was his tone. That deep and sexy calming tone of his. He could talk me off a ledge if I was on one. I didn’t have to turn my head far to give him a kiss. His lips were stiff at first. Reluctant. And then they softened. I could tell he was trying his best to push me away in a small way. Because he didn’t want to hurt me.

This also told me that he would protect me. If he was willing to pull himself back and feared that he would hurt me, then I had no doubt he would try to protect me moving forward.

My leg still shook, and I was still scared. But with him by my side, things were a little less frightening.

Call me crazy.

## Chapter 8

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Tomaso

She didn't have to meet my father right away. Not yet, at least. It was definitely going to be soon. It was sooner than I had wanted. But what could I do? This was the life that I was in.

Well, there was something that I could do. I could put all my energy into relaxing Angelina. I could do my best to try and make her forget that she was involved in any mafia business because, obviously, this was weighing on her. And rightfully so. Anyone who agreed to a contract like mine should have been on edge. I had considered that part of the whole scenario between us both. It was a lot to put on someone, especially her. All she wanted in life was to be happy. It was the polar opposite for me, who had embraced doom his entire lifetime. No matter what day it had been, I was always looking over my shoulder and waiting for death to give me a tap. Angelina had her whole life ahead of her. She had promise and hope. I didn't want to be the one to strip her of that.

"So, where are you taking me?" She asked as she sat in my passenger seat.

"I want to take you to a few of my favorite spots in town. You know, kind of like a vacation away without being a vacation."

Her shoulders perked up in the sea, told me that the news made her happy. I did my best to open up to her. It certainly wasn't an easy thing for me to let my guard down and be a little more human than usual. What could I say? She had that

effect on me. She had this marvelous ability to make me forget who I was. If anyone needed to forget who he was, it was me.

” What are your favorite spots like? Are they all places where people were killed?” I could hear the humor in her voice.

” Yes. Every place I’m about to take you to has police tape around it, smart ass.”

She laughed, and that laugh sat on the border of a giggle. I loved when she morphed into her little cutesy form. 75% of the time, she was this strong, unbending woman. Now, of course, in the kitchen. When she started to feel a bit of panic, that woman disappeared. But that was rare from what I could see. She was a giggly and fun girl the other 25% of the time. The crazy thing about that was I couldn’t remember the last time I considered anyone or anything fun.

We pulled up to a boardwalk. There wasn’t much fanfare around it. But something told me she would appreciate it nonetheless.

I parked my car, and she looked around while getting out. ” So this is one of your favorite spots? It’s a little more docile than I would assume.”

” Do I look like someone who would take you to Dave& Buster’s?”

She laughed. ” Absolutely not. This is just so serene. It’s downright beautiful. I don’t know how I’ve never been here.”

We started to walk. Side by side, we went. Our feet were pretty much lined up at the same time. It felt like we were on

the same page with everything. She was nervous about jumping into my world. And I was nervous about bringing her into it. We both had the same outlook but from different perspectives. Again, that was saying a lot. I never felt that with anyone.

” I come here when I want to clear my head. You’ve seen me in my day today, and it takes a toll on you after a while.”

” You’re also living two lives. It’s busy enough being one CEO. When you leave that building, you become a different person altogether.”

” And then I’m another person when I’m with you.”

She paused for a moment. I didn’t blame her. It was a loaded statement. I’d be curious if I was her too. I hoped her next question or whatever she said wouldn’t make me think too hard. After all, this was a place where I like to come to be free and not stressed. ” So, of all three people you are, which is the real?”

There it was. The moment where I had to do a deep dive into the brain I was trying to avoid. ” Why must you always take things to a deep place? I’m really not that interested. You have more of a personality than I do. You have more ambition than I do. You know how they say aliens wouldn’t visit the earth because we’re too stupid? Well, you’re the alien, and I’m the earth.”

She was shaking her head. I could see it in my peripheral. ” I don’t like that.”



That time I looked at her. Her side profile was just as beautiful as her front. They were just those little intricacies about her that drove me crazy. The little hair is by her ear; how slender her neckline was; from the side, you can see just how juicy her lips were. They were so kissable, and the other, I wanted to keep myself reserved. I wanted to enjoy my time on the boardwalk with her and keep her relaxed rather than constantly suck her face off. As much as I wanted to.

“What don’t you like?” I asked her.

“I don’t like that you put yourself down. You’re the strong mafia CEO. Whatever you want to call yourself. And yet beneath, you don’t find any value within yourself. How am I supposed to be your fake fiance when you don’t believe in yourself?”

My lips were frozen. It made me think way too much. She hit a nerve. It was like driving down the road at 90 miles per hour and then heading to a speed bump. That was how my tongue felt.

“I’m sorry if I said too much. I’m just trying to understand you.” Angelina said. Her tone was a little bit more reserved than before. She was still stern, but she pulled back a bit.

“No, it’s fine. Maybe I could benefit from these questions. I don’t know. No one’s ever asked me them before. I don’t know who the real version of myself is. When you have three different versions, it’s hard to tell.”

Based on her silence, I couldn’t tell whether or not she was happy with that answer. But I guess at the end of the day, it

was about her being happy but more about me being truthful. At least I wasn't being fake."

"That makes sense." She said.

We continued to walk. There was silence between us. But it wasn't one of those tension-filled silences. It was an okay silence, one that we were both copacetic with.

"When you're with me," she started, "Do you feel like you have to pretend to be someone?"

"No. And that may sound good to you. But at the same time, it's tremendously scary to be this person that I am with you."

"Well then, dare I say you might actually be the real version of yourself with me."

I chuckled. "Whatever helps you sleep at night, Angelina. But guess what?"

She looked at me with a smile. "What?"

"I know how we can help figure out the sound."

Everything I had told myself about not kissing her before went into the water nearby. Because I turned to kiss her as the sun was setting. It was weird. Somehow the kiss felt different all over again. It was kind of like I was kissing her for the first time. Her lips were soft, plump, wet, everything that would keep a man hooked. And boy, was I hooked. I pulled her in closer to me. The boardwalk would never be the same. It would forever be the place where she and I share the moment. No matter how we ended up or what the contract did to our relationship, this moment could not be taken away from us.

I took her to an outdoor restaurant not too far down on the boardwalk. It was called The Wood House. It was stationed right off the boardwalk, with a little deck with a perfect sunset view. The breeze passed us by, making the moment unforgettable. What was also unforgettable about that moment was her face.

Angelina sat there with wandering eyes. She took in the scenery and would rest her beautiful eyes on the water occasionally. I wondered what she was thinking about. She was curious about my dark mind. I was curious about what went on and that head of hers. We acted like we were together. We did everything a boyfriend and girlfriend should do. It didn't feel right that I was sitting there wondering what our label actually was. To me, that was a girl thing to do. But I couldn't help but wonder. Were we actually dating? Were we boyfriend and girlfriend? We were obviously fake engaged. But when you took away that fake piece of paper, what were we?

“As we sit here and wait for our appetizers, I can't help but wonder, when you look into your future Tomaso, what do you see?”

“See, you just keep coming up with these deep questions.”

She pursed her lips and cut her eyes at me. “I do. And you're going to have to keep dealing with them if you want me to be your fake fiance.”

I smiled and gave her a little shush. “Keep your voice down, okay. We don't need that advertised. Going back to her

question, I looked hard. I went inside my brain and roamed to see what was up there. What did I really want for my future?

If I was being honest with myself, the only thing I could see in my brain was a black fog. I saw nothing ahead of me. This wasn't the answer that she wanted. Hell, this wasn't even the answer that I wanted for myself.

The answer that Angelina probably expected was for me to say I wanted her to be in my future. She probably also expected me to say that I had dreams of a white picket fence, a few kids in the yard, a wedding band, and waking up next to her every morning. Maybe they were parts of that which were true. Maybe I did have inklings of that in my head occasionally, but they were always clouded by that dark fog. That dark fog was not something that you could easily cut through. There was no mental flashlight to see through it. The story never ends well for a guy like me. She didn't want to hear that most mafia men either wind up being killed or going to jail. Sure, we had a fake engagement going. But that wasn't to get me out of my life. That wasn't to end my role in the mafia. That would simply be so that I didn't have to marry Linda. What did my life have in store for me when that contract was up?

It didn't seem like Angelina would be part of that. No matter how many times we kissed. No matter how many times we had sex. She did not deserve to get involved in the world of the mafia. Just because I have moments where I let my guard down and allowed her into who I was, did not mean that I felt secure enough to ruin her life.

As we sat in the restaurant, she gave me this look as though she could hear all my thoughts. It was a broken look. If I had a child and told them that we were not going to Disney World, I would have likened that look to what she had on her face.

“Are you that broken inside, Tomaso? You can’t even imagine yourself living a good life in the future?”

I wasn’t going to make a joke about her asking deep questions again.

Because she knew the answer to the one she had just asked, I wish she didn’t. I wish that I didn’t.

But the truth was that she and I did not have a future. As much as I wanted her to have one with me, a man like me only had two outcomes. I may have been three people. But one of those people had to die. No matter how nice she was to me or how much she got me to open up, that was reality. A harsh reality.

## Chapter 9

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Angelina

**H**e was distant on our date. I couldn't ignore that fact. It was blaring at me like a Las Vegas sign. This was the first thing that I thought of when my eyes opened. Sure, I was in a mansion and pretending to be a fiancée. I should have just embraced the adventure. But at the same time, those little subtle cues from Tomaso reminded me that everything in my life was unreal. We could not keep up the charade forever.

I laid in bed for a good while. I could smell the bacon downstairs. I could smell the eggs as well. The perfect breakfast in the center of a world that could come crumbling down at any moment. It was like being on some sort of Hollywood set. I was playing a character, yet I had feelings for the character across from me. How could that be? How did I get to the point that I was at? I just didn't know why it had to be so complicated. Why did we need to go on a real date? Why did I have to have real feelings for a man to who I was only supposed to be attached on paper?

The sun was shining outside of the window. Just like the breakfast downstairs was perfect, the weather was also. I shouldn't have been upset. I shouldn't have been questioning things. What I should have been doing was going with the flow. But I guess when you want something to be perfect, and all you think about is losing something that you really like, you start to overanalyze.

Because of this, I forced myself out of bed. I needed some activity. A distraction would have been great. But of course, as



I got out of bed, I spotted Tomaso's shoes by the closet. I spotted his pants draped over the chair in the bedroom. And when I went into the bathroom, his razor was out, and there was no avoiding the man, given the fact that I was in his home. This wasn't going to be easy. The situation I was in was going to give me a headache.

If my stomach was growling, I would have stayed up in the bedroom for a bit more just to try to wrangle the thing sitting irritably in my skull. There was no time to sit around and be scared of facing what I was feeling. I went downstairs and bit the bullet.

At the stove was Tomaso, topless, in pajama pants, muscled back. It was a site that was just as delicious as the smell of him cooking breakfast. God, how I just wanted that for my future. But in the back of my head, it kept telling me we couldn't keep the charade up forever. It was almost like it was that traditional scene you'd see in every show, one demon on one shoulder and one angel on the other. This battle was going on in my brain over how I should act and think. As he served me breakfast that morning, I looked up at him the second the plate hit the table and started a drama I probably didn't need to start. I always believed that if you had a fear, you needed to face it head-on without beating around the bush. And this is what I was doing.

"This whole contract thing, you know we're not going to be able to keep it up forever. So what are we doing about this end date?" The words came out of my mouth so fast that they almost jumbled together.

His fingers had barely left the plate as I had finished saying what I said. It was almost comical to see his face. Caught off guard was an understatement. His eyes widened, and his mouth opened a bit. Clearly, he was taken aback. But oh well. That wasn't my problem. My problem was navigating the tricky waters of whatever our contract entailed. It sucked, and I wanted it to suck for him too. Because if he wanted to close up and sew the seeds of being distant, then two could play that game. I sat in my discomfort. I allowed myself to feel the tension because I knew he was a pro at dealing with that stuff. I would bring the heat if he wanted me to play, stay in his life, and live by his rules. Maybe I was getting too cocky in my head, but whatever. The situation that I was in kind of called for it.

A long pause rested, unfordable, on his face while I guess he wondered how to respond. I found it amusing that it took him so long. It made me feel like I was the mafioso for a second. Wasn't he supposed to be the big and tough mafioso who never got rattled? Yet there I was, rattling the cages like the bad girl I was.

"I'll pick an end date eventually," he said right before he took his plate from the counter and brought it to the table to sit across from mine. As I tried to control my irritation towards his answer, I peeped at how he had two extra pieces of bacon on his plate and many more eggs than I had.

"Gave yourself more food than me, huh?"

His eyes left his plate and cut their way toward mine. His jaw had also stiffened in what had to be some level of anger. “You’re really pushy this morning, aren’t you? What’s the issue?”

“I signed an opened ended contract to be your fiancée with some really vague terms and promise of having an end date. We’re in this now, I still haven’t met your father, and frankly, I don’t like how I feel like I can trust you one minute, and then the next, I’m dealing with being closed off.”

“When the fuck did I close up?”

“Watch your tone.” The way my words flew out of my mouth made me proud. I enjoyed that I could hang toe to toe with him. This wasn’t me being immature. It was my understanding of what needed to be done at this moment.

He looked down at his plate like a scorned child at the dinner table. He didn’t need to wear that look. He could have barked right back at me. He could be intimidating if he wanted to be. But not with me, I guess. And I was okay with that. I appreciated that he respected me. “Listen, Angelina. I don’t have a date in mind.” He finally looked at me. “I’m not looking to swindle you or anything like that. The truth is, this situation is fluid. We’ve barely even gotten our feet wet with it yet. You haven’t even met my father. Once we get all of that going, then I can imagine a clear ending.”

A clear ending. Did he mean that? What I had discovered while sitting there was that my entire rationale for bringing all of that up and poking the bear was to see whether or not he

was in this for just the contract or if he was in this for a future with me. And hearing that *clear ending* term, man, that was a bitter pill to swallow. I was just at the other end of his contract. At the end of the day, I was nothing more than a fake fiancée. And it stung. Maybe just maybe, I was wrong and once again overanalyzing. But I don't know. When something feels too good to be true, it usually is. I had begun to see the writing on the wall with Tomaso, our spark, and everything in between; all I could do was hope I was wrong about it. Was hope foolish in a situation like mine? I wasn't really sure. That was the thing about hope. You would be a fool if it didn't pay off. But you were a genius if it did.

In any case, I sat there and shoveled my food into my mouth. If he was one thing aside from being sexy and complicated, he was a good cook. And I wasn't sure why, but knowing that little fact pushed him away even worse. I guess it was because it made him even more of a catch. I didn't want to lose him or what I had with him. It all made me feel small, like a needy little girl.

"I didn't give you as much food as me because I didn't want to make you feel fat."

I looked up at Tomaso. "What?"

He let out a little sigh. "My mother once told me that if I were to ever serve a woman a meal, make sure the portion is less than mine. It sounds stupid, but I remember little things like that."

I held back a smile, which must have rested on my face like a smirk. My cheeks were also warm and must have been red. It was just so damn cute to me that he cared in such a way. It was also cute that he listened to his mother like that. ” Well, I appreciate that. I don’t feel fat now.”

He chuckled and continued to eat his breakfast. Once again, I felt teased. Cute little moments like that were going to be fleeting. They weren’t something that I could get used to. As much as I wanted to. I knew I was on borrowed time with this man.

This also didn’t stop me from asking the all-important question, “When am I going to meet your father, by the way? Because every day that I don’t, I think about it. And it makes me nervous.”

He looked at me while chewing. Once he swallowed, he responded with, “Why does it make you nervous?”

I shrugged. “Because it’s pressure. I have to pretend to be a fiancée. I’ve never been a fiancée or spoken to someone in the mafia other than you. And, on top of all that, it’s a level of acting.”

“You just have to pretend that we’re actually together. Just pretend we’re in this kitchen by ourselves, like right now.”

I paused. When I was going to say next. Probably wasn’t necessary, but it was necessary to me. “But aren’t we acting and faking right now? We’re just co-workers, essentially, right?”

He shook his head and rolled his eyes. “Why do you have to be difficult?”

I didn’t say anything. It was only a few crumbs on my plate. I took it from the table and brought it to the sink. It clanged pretty loudly when it landed. But I didn’t care.

I stayed upstairs for the rest of the day. There was a TV in the bedroom that had become my best friend. I watched terrible sitcoms from the ’90s to keep myself occupied. It was like I was melting in bed. I had almost become the bed sheet. Lethargic was probably the best term for it. I like to motivation to do anything, and this was a tribute to the fact that I hated uncertainty. When it came to my future. I just wanted to know what was going on. It was stupid because you couldn’t predict the future. You weren’t even guaranteed the next day. But damn. I wanted to know the story’s ending, Tomaso and Angelina.

Maybe two hours into my melting, Tomaso poked his head into the door. “You going to meet my father tomorrow.”

My heart started to race at his words. “Tomorrow?” I sat up in bed. “Don’t you think that’s a little short notice?”

He shook his head. “First, you’re dying to know when you’ll meet him, and then when you find out, it’s too soon.”

I rolled my eyes. “I mean 24-hour notice. It’s pretty soon. Especially after me telling you I was nervous.” I tried not to say it with an attitude, but unfortunately, that’s how it came out. He could handle it, though.

“Well, that’s when my father is coming to see us. I’m sure you’ll do fine. You don’t have to stress as much as you are. I have faith in you. I wouldn’t have picked you for the contract if I didn’t.” His head disappeared from the door before that door closed.

Again, my mind spiraled a bit. Picking me for the contract, I took it and made it sound like I had won a contest or something. I made everything seem like a business, and I guess it was. I just wanted more, though. Maybe, just maybe, if I did well with his father, he might see me differently. It was so stupid. It was a hopeful thought, but if I could fit them old and impress him in that way, it might pay off.

I had wished the time would go slow until meeting his father so that I at least had some time to gather my thoughts and prepare. But, of course, that didn’t happen. Time flew by. It was the next day, and I found myself getting ready before my mirror. My heart raced while I did. The anticipation was killing me. Don’t get me wrong, I wanted to do a good job. I didn’t want to let him down. I also didn’t want to let myself down. I saw it all as a challenge. I saw it all as breaking out of my comfort zone. Even if the end result was fairly unpredictable.

When I finished doing my makeup, the second the lipstick left my lips, Tomaso poked his head into the room. “My dad’s downstairs. You okay and everything?”

I thoroughly enjoyed the fact that he cared. I loved that he was checking on me. Of course, I couldn’t deny the bigger

situation and why we were there in the first place but still. At least he was comforting. I didn't feel alone.

I looked at him and flashed what I would like to call a sarcastic smile. I had to do everything to not roll my eyes even if I didn't feel that way. It was a defense mechanism. "I'm good. I'm ready." Both of those statements were lies.

Tomaso believed them because he took his head from the door and was the last I saw him.

I took a deep breath before the mirror and told myself I could do this. All I needed to do was be myself. There was no character that I needed to play. I didn't need to up the Italian to fit in with the mafia life or anything like that. I just needed to be me, Angelina. But the scariest thing about it was knowing I was lying to a man. And I wasn't just lying to anyone. I was lying to the mafia. What long-term implications could that have? Tomaso could frame it in any way that he liked. He could tell me till he was blue in the face that they would not take it personally if the lie ever came out. Because who was I at the end of the day? I know. I was a person. I was a person that the mafia could kill for lying to them.

It was just one of those things I had to push into the back of my head. It was like getting on an airplane and ensuring you didn't think about crashing. I was a human, yes and being human sucked sometimes for the way our brains worked.

In any case, I brought myself downstairs. The second my foot hit the floor, my heart started to race. I took another deep breath. Because I could hear his father talking to him in the



living room. The man had an Italian accent, but his English wasn't bad. Suddenly it all felt real. The fear went away, and it was replaced with this sense of me belonging there. I wasn't scared for the briefest second because what if I wasn't lying? If they came to me and said how dare I lie to the mafia, I could tell them that I care for Tomaso. And I do wish we were together. It can't be a lie if you believe it yourself.

"Hi, how are you," I said to his father as we met.

The smile that he wore while shaking my hand gently was rather comforting. But the fact that some of his men were standing outside made me realize the severity of the situation. I was still involved with the mafia business; at any moment, I could be killed for it. Granted, I didn't think Tomaso would let anything happen to me, but at the same time, if his father wanted to whip a gun out and kill me. But it was Tomaso who was the stiff one. But that doesn't matter to me. My goal was to win this man over.

"So this is the secret fiance. I can't see why he kept you a secret just by looking at you."

My cheeks went red at his father's words.

"Such a suave man, my father, is."

I laughed. Anyone in my life would have thought that it was a fake laugh, but in all actuality, my cute little giggle was genuine. Dare I say I was having a nice time.

The chit-chat in the living room went by quick. Before, anyway, we were at the dinner table. His father never wavered

in his posture. His shoulders never slumped at the table. His elbows never hit the table, either. Tomaso was a different type of man. He was like a caveman and a suit. But I liked that about him.

“So what do you want? Like a really big wedding? Of course, you do.” His father said while plucking a piece of food from his fork.

Of course, every girl has always thought about having a wedding. Maybe I’m generalizing. So that answer came easily to me. “I do want a big wedding.” My eyes quickly drifted over to Tomaso just to see his reaction. His eyes remained glued to its plate as he ate his food.

“Well, just after meeting you, I couldn’t imagine my son marrying a better woman. You’re everything that he needs. He needs a strong woman. He needs someone to keep him grounded. He also needs a little bit of wit and charm.”

I couldn’t tell if he was genuine because I knew the situation. At the end of the day, Tomaso was supposed to marry Linda. But his father’s words did seem genuine enough. And I don’t know, call me crazy, but it gave me some hope that maybe, just maybe, we didn’t need to end the contract.

But that was obviously something I needed to not think about. Because the future was mighty uncertain.

His father could have killed me. But he didn’t. So there was at least that.

## Chapter 10

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Tomaso

I guess it was because she impressed my father that my level of attraction had increased. I felt like a ravenous beast who wanted to remove her clothes.

There was also the element of how she took a downright ridiculous situation and turned it into beautiful fruit. She ran with it. She would sign a contract that didn't make sense and had never been done before. Angelina played her part well. There was part of me that thought she did it for me. It was also part of me that thought she did it for the money. I was 50/50 on that. I had this battle going on inside over whether or not her feelings were true.

In any case, I genuinely couldn't get it out of my head just how good she had been with my dad. She really impressed the man, and I hadn't expected that. I envisioned her sitting at the table, looking pretty and not saying much. That wasn't a put-down in any way. I just hadn't expected her to go above and beyond and really do her part. But it went swimmingly. Now, of course, there was the element of my father. He may have made her feel good and complimented her. But I knew underneath, he was still thinking about Linda and the problem. It was a big situation. My father wasn't going to be rude to her. But it wasn't ideal, and I was sure he was skeptical. A man like him had no business letting me know he was skeptical. It was the perfect play. His job was to just sit back and see if there were any holes in my armor. Maybe he would catch us

writing a script to our charade or something. I might have been cynical, but I need it to be.

But back to my attraction to Angelina. I had never been so enthralled with her. She consumed my mind. I just wanted to kiss her for how good she did. The weird part was that I felt closer to her like we had done something as a team. I rarely felt that with anyone. She peeled back layers on me as if I was an onion, and the craziest part about it all was she wasn't even trying to.

It was the middle of the day on a Sunday. We both had nothing to do. She took advantage of that by watching TV on the couch. I liked to see her there because I knew the other day she was hiding for me in the room upstairs. Maybe hiding was a strong word. She was avoiding me. There must have been something about the dinner with my father that made her want to come out of her hole, and instead of watching reality shows in that bedroom, she didn't mind watching them in the living room again.

"This looks like it's from the '90s," I told her as I approached.

Her head never turned from the TV as she said, "It's The Real World. It doesn't get old. It takes me back to a simpler time."

"You're in your mid-20s. You weren't born in the 90s."

That time she looked up at me. "I absolutely was born in the '90s. Bad at math, I see." She turned back to face the TV. I took a moment standing behind that couch because I could see right down her blouse. It was a tank top, not a blouse. Her breasts had perfectly in her bra. I thought of my attraction for

her upstairs. Just thinking about her was off the charts. But I was wrong. Because standing there, it was out of this world.

I brought myself around the couch and sat down next to her. She looked at me with a smile.

” You’re going to watch it with me?”

Well, now I felt bad. She genuinely wanted me to watch. I couldn’t just sit there and tell her I wanted to fuck. With anyone else, I would have. With her, I was a gentleman. ” Yeah, sure. It couldn’t hurt.”

We sat there silently for an entire minute as I stared at the screen. Not understanding what was going on. Lucky for me, Angelina was very perceptive. ” You going to come here to watch this show with me?”

I moved in to kiss her. She gets me back. But it wasn’t as aggressive as I thought it would be. When I moved, I said, “You really impressed me. I never meant to be so closed off from you.”

She smiled and let out a giggle. Her eyes were looking at my lips. It was making my dick hard. “So what, you’re rewarding me with? Kisses?”

” Nah, I’m going to reward you with my dick,” I said sarcastically to not sound like a pig.

She picked up on that because her hand went down to my pants. She felt the outline of my hardened cock. That was also when she moved in for her own kiss. That time her lips were far more aggressive, and I welcomed it. She had her hand on

my cock above my pants while her tongue slipped into my mouth. Her tongue barely let mine in. But God, how I loved it. This is what passion was to me. I felt like I was missing out on this in my life. If there was ever a moment where I could imagine her in my life forever, it was on that couch while kissing her.

As our lips danced with one another, her perfume entered my nose. It was citrusy mixed with a bit of candy. That made me even harder. The way she stroked my dick above my pants, I only wanted her to unzip them and allow some skin to skin. She took her time jerking me off, though. It was a nice little tease. Her hands were like magic. Better yet, they were like a musician's hands playing the guitar.

I brought my hand to her face to pull her closer. Her chest was pressed against mine. Without even looking, I could tell she was unbuckling my pants. But I could also tell she was doing it for her desire. It wasn't just to please me. And that was the hottest thing.

Because of that, I couldn't help but grab her tits. I squeezed it hard while it sat there in the bra. She had such big breasts that I could barely fit them in my hand. Just thinking about them. I needed more. So we had to stop kissing for a second so I could remove her tank top. She lifted her arms up to help me get it off. My eyes descended to her lacy bra, where her breasts were busting out. That, of course, needed to come off next. So I slipped my hands behind her back and unhooked the thing. Her breasts descended as I washed and then popped out of the bra.



Her nipples were hard and pointy. I grabbed one of her breasts and put the nipple in my mouth. Just as it looked, it was hard between my lips. I sucked it and listened to her little moan. It was a moan that she definitely tried to conceal. But she couldn't help herself, making me smile as I sucked away.

Her hands ran through my hair. Every now and then, she would give him a nice little pull. She was beautiful in her movements, vulnerable in everything else. I returned the favor and had to give her hair a little pull myself. It just felt right. Looking back, I had never been so close to a woman. Sure, I had had plenty of sex. But nothing compared to what we were doing on that couch. It was a different type of connection. It was one that I did not want to end. And there was no end in sight.

Before I knew what, my pants were off. She also took my top off. So I was completely naked; she still wore her pants and underwear. Definitely no complaints there.

Her head landed on my penis like an airplane on a runway. She wasted no time in sucking me off. She did this with her tongue, swirling around the tip of my dick. She did these all while her lips were wrapped around my shaft, her head bobbing up and down like a chicken pecking. She turned into a different woman altogether when she was doing that. And when she did, it felt like I would see the only person that knew it.

When she lifted her head off my cock, I knew it was my turn to please. I laid her down and finally took her pants off. Her

thong was in there as well. Right before, I now was her glistening pussy. She would be soaked. Her little clitoris was poking out at me. Her lips were wide open. Her pinkness was calling me to lick. So that's exactly what I did. I landed my tongue down just like she landed her head down before, and I licked away. I tasted every little bit of her saltiness. I ran my tongue around her hole. I held on to her hips. My tongue worked its magic.

If she had been trying to conceal her moans before, the gloves were off as I licked her because she was almost screaming. With every sound she made, a bit of accomplishment filled me.

I licked her until she pushed my head off. That was my sign to stick it in her. When I did, there was this little moan the second it was fully in. Her eyes locked with mine, and we were off to the races. I held on to one of her titties while going in and out of her. I could feel her tightness and her wetness. I look down at her hard nipples and how she bit her lip. There wasn't any part of her that wasn't sexy.

When she grabbed one of the throw pillows behind her head and her mouth opened wide, I knew she was finishing. This gave me the green light to finish myself. So I went quicker, and then quicker until I pulled out and came all over her stomach. She watched it come out of me. She bit her lip while it did.

After sex, we cleaned up, dressed, and sat on the couch. Angelina rested her head on my lap. I rubbed her head. This

was definitely not in the contract, nor was the sex. But it also wasn't in the contract that we had to acknowledge what we did or were doing. It was by far one of the weirdest situations going on in the world, I would have to say.

For good. While we didn't really need to say anything to one another. It was one of those comfortable silences. Angelina was the one to break that silence.

“Did you ever plan a wedding in your head? You know, like, imagine that day? I know that's usually a chick thing to do, but I'm just curious.”

Curiosity killed the cat. But I wouldn't kill this cat. I could be open with her about some things, even if it did embarrass me a little. ” Yeah. I have. Nothing too specific cuz I don't know much about weddings. I just picture a lot of white. I have this stupid image in my head where there are doves.”

She set up a little bit on the couch and smiled. The way she looked at me, with her eyes all up, told me she was excited about something. ” I picture doves too. I've always pictured doves.”

There was a part of my brain that needed to minimize the coincidence. It was nothing but a defense mechanism. “Well, those are pretty common. Don't get too excited. But you know, since we're on the topic. We should probably plan the wedding or make people think we are.”

There was a long pause that came to her. I couldn't tell if it was because I had dismissed what she said about the doves or

if it was simply because she was thinking. ” And how does one make people think we’re discussing a wedding?”

“I don’t know. When we’re in public. Then we should talk about the wedding when we have to be on. It should define us. We really need to get people to believe that we’re together. If the date comes that we break up, it should come as a shock to people. People should not believe that we’re broken up.”

She went quiet on me. Maybe she didn’t like that. I said if we were to break up. Maybe she just didn’t like the general direction of the conversation, especially after sex.

She rested her head on my lap, and I knew I wasn’t in trouble. I also knew that I needed to be better. Better was a very vague term. Better could mean anything. I didn’t know what it meant in that phase of what we were doing. All I knew was that it wasn’t what I was.

I could be better for her.

## Chapter 11

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Angelina

**H**e was gone for most of the day. Mafia stuff. It was the type of stuff that I wasn't to ask about. I did my part. I met his dad. And I played that part well. Or at least that's what I told myself. So I didn't need to wonder about all the other stuff going on. It was none of my business.

Okay, so I didn't need to wonder. But I wanted to, and I did. Every second that he was away from me, I wondered about what he was doing at that moment. That mysterious mafia life. But I also just hoped that he was safe. It wasn't like any other relationship. I did worry about him. He was the perfect man in my eyes. Perfect because he was imperfect. And then I had to worry about him losing his life every second he walked out the door. You could worry about your significant other getting into a car accident in other relationships.

I never considered myself to be a pessimist. I only became a pessimist when I was scared. I guess when you value something and don't want to lose it, fear comes into play. I was only human, after all. Tomaso wasn't giving me much to work with. He gave what he wanted to give in the rest. I just had to be curious about it. We both had plenty of ups and downs, and I liked it. I liked the chaos, as bad as that may have sounded. These constant nerves made my legs shake and my breath short. And I kind of enjoyed it all.

The downtime sucked, though. That was hard when Tomaso wasn't home, and I just had to be his fake fiance for no one but myself. It was almost like putting on a stand-up comedy show

for no one. What was the motivation? What was I doing with my life? Especially when you have the time to think about the end result. And for me, that end result could be nothing but a called-off fake marriage. How exciting.

I made myself some hot pockets for brunch. It wasn't the sexiest thing that I could be doing. But I was hungry. And I missed Tomaso. Combine the two, and you got a girl who eats whatever she wants. It also took my mind off of sex. I wasn't typically an overly sexual woman, but when it came to him, that, too, went out the window. It felt like he had this uncanny ability to change my DNA. He was like some sort of supervillain in a Marvel movie. He could penetrate my soul and warp it into whatever he wanted without trying.

I was on the couch watching my reality shows. When I heard the key turned in the door. My heart started to race. My man was home. Yes, I called him my man to myself. It was called manifesting. I had to manifest my future because it wouldn't manifest itself.

When the door opened, I kept my eyes on the TV. I didn't let on that I was excited to see him. That was something he didn't deserve to see yet. Obviously, he was making efforts and being better, but I still had to keep some of my guards up.

“Hey, Angelina. More reality shows?”

“I crave reality. Because I live in a fictional world.”

He didn't respond to that. I was really proud of that sentence. It was probably why I was really watching a reality show. Ironic because reality shows were super fake. But still, I would



be choosing that over watching a fictional show like most things on Netflix. “Do you think you can pull yourself away from that for a bit because I want to take you ring shopping?”

Butterflies in my chest dispersed. I knew they weren't real, but mentally I told them to all chill-out. Because what did he really mean by that? Why was this man taking me ring shopping when our relationship was completely fake? But whatever, I would go with the flow. “Ring shopping? Why don't you just give me an old fake ring?”

He walked over and stood before the TV. “Because everything needs to be authentic. I arranged for us to go secretly so no one could see me getting you the ring. Because, after all, we're supposed to already be engaged. You're lucky my father didn't look at your finger.”

“That's a woman thing to do. Men don't think of things like that. I'm surprised you're thinking of this right now.”

He gave me a sarcastic laugh, and it turned me on. “I'm not just a brute or whatever you think of me as. I have common sense.”

I raised an eyebrow while questions sauntered across my brain. The biggest one that did was, “Okay then, what jewelry store are you taking me to?”

He stood there with pursed lips. “Taking you to. I'm not taking you there. We're just going to pick up a ring.”

That same eyebrow from before raised itself. Why did he always have to pull back on what he gave me? It was always

hot and cold with him. “Yeah? Well, when you put it like that, it sounds like you already have something picked out.”

“I don’t.” He said with not an ounce of give in his voice.

“So, I get to pick out a ring I will eventually have to give back?”

“Lotta questions, huh? You’d get to keep it. No matter what happens.”

*No matter what happens.* Boy, did that leave the door open for anything like breaking up or getting mauled by a tiger? But whatever, I was supposed to be thinking positively, right? I was getting a nice, big, fat diamond ring. What was there to complain about?

“Fine. It’s probably a good idea to do something like that, given that we have to keep up this charade, and I don’t want to be killed.”

He rolled his eyes. “I would never let you get killed.”

That made me feel better as I wondered how one of his acquaintances could shoot me in the head for lying. I just kept thinking about his father’s men standing outside the mansion. It almost gave me nightmares to the point where I looked at his father like he was the grim reaper or something.

All that aside, Tomaso kept his word and took me to Tiffany’s in the city. I had never felt fancier. These were the parts of the relationship where I had to remind myself they were fleeting. I could fall into the trap of enjoying luxury or whatever. Those elements didn’t matter and had nothing to do with Tomaso or

me. They were like ornaments on a Christmas tree. The tree didn't need them to thrive. And they weren't going to be there forever anyway.

“Don't get too carried away now,” Tomaso said. Before I could say anything, he said, “I'm kidding. Get whatever you want. I don't know much about engagement rings or styles.”

On the one hand, as I made my way into the store, I was filled with joy over the fact that I could pick out whatever I wanted. On the other hand, I longed for the romance element of it all. You know, the whole getting proposed to type of thing. Of course, I actually wanted that. It may have been a strange situation, but that didn't take away what I wanted. I had always dreamed of the traditional route. But there I was, forced to enjoy the moment.

The diamonds made my eyes water, but not in the way I wanted to cry, more than a hungry way, if that made any sense. Occasionally, I would look through the glass windows and see Tomaso's men standing there. Yes, it ruined the vibe a little bit. But it was hard to notice anything else in a store like that.

Out of all the diamond rings, from the square ones to those with colors, my eyes kept fixating on the circular one that sat in a square. The square had these little diamonds lacing it. No matter where you looked, there was shininess. I was essentially a kid and a candy store.

“Is that the one you like?” Tomaso's deep voice hovered over me.

I wasn't sure why, but I was a bit embarrassed to tell him yes. Even though it was god's honest truth. "This is the one I like. It's the type of engagement ring I've always envisioned."

Tomaso looked up at the clerk and pointed down at the glass where the ring sat. I couldn't even imagine that thing on my finger. But not because I didn't like it but because it was so beautiful. It seemed like something that belonged on a Queen's finger.

I watched the clerk take the thing out, and that's when it became real. Even when it was put on my finger to try it out, it didn't hit me until I saw the clerk handling it.

"So you like it?" Tomaso asked me.

I gave him a smile and nodded my head yes. And you know what, maybe I didn't need him to get down on one knee and be all romantic. There was still something about that moment that made my heart flutter.

We left that store, and immediately the romance died because a gunshot went off across the street. Tomaso quickly ushered me into the car. Now. My heart was racing for a whole different reason.

People ran every which way outside. His men all started to fire back. I watched one man go down. It wasn't one of Tomaso's men. It seemed like it was the shooter. But of course, I could have been wrong.

"What was all that? That had to do with you. Of course, right?"

He pressed down on the gas and didn't say a word. I looked behind without putting my seat belt on and watched the chaos get smaller in the distance.

” Yeah, had to do with me. That's just my life, all right. This stuff happens.”

This stuff happens. It was a basic way to sum up something that was almost killing us. And suddenly, I realized even further how deep I was in. Never before had I been so close to bullets raining past me. And yet I had this beautiful engagement ring on my finger. Something was so ironic about it.

“Just relax. Okay. Like I told you, I would never let anything happen to you.”

My head snapped towards him, almost like a snapping turtle. “You couldn't have prevented a bullet from hitting me. Sometimes I don't know about this contract.”

He continued to look through his windshield when he said, “When you say the word contract, do you mean it, or do you mean me.”

I didn't respond. And that wasn't a good enough answer in my book.

When we got home, things were tense. We didn't say anything to one another. Surprisingly though, it was he who broke that silence about an hour in. He walked into the bedroom with frustration on his face. “I don't want you to stress out, okay. Really. What happened today was not common. From what I

heard from my men, It was just some guy from a low-ranking family trying to make a name for himself against me. No one got hurt on my end. The shooter got hurt.”

I didn't look at him because it was too hard. “The thing is, it's just the fact that it happened, you know? Here I was picking out the ring, and suddenly bullets were flying past my head.”

His eyes went to the floor. He had no answer for me. But then he said, “This isn't the life I always wanted to have. I didn't think of myself the second those bullets went off. I didn't think of anything but one person.”

That time I looked him right in the eye.

“I thought of you, Angelina. I thought about protecting you. I worried that something was going to happen to you.”

It made my heart melt. It took away the anger that I had bubbling up inside of me. It wasn't even real anger. It was just more of an inconvenience laced with uncertainty. ” Okay. Maybe we should just move on from this.”

He nodded. “I agree. I wanted to ask you something before we went through all this.”

There went my heart once more. It would probably break some record for how many flutters it had in a day. “Ask your question. I'm all ears.”

He took a moment before saying it. That only increased the suspense for me. “I think we should take engagement photos.”

From fluttering to stopping, my heart didn't know what to do at that moment because that was such a sweet thing to hear.

But at the same time, was he just doing it because he wanted to make the contract look real? Of course, he was doing it for that reason, but how much was it for the other? I quickly pushed those thoughts out of my head because they weren't doing anything for me. The last thing that I needed in those moments was negativity. I had had enough of that.

"I would like that," I said, leaving out a million different thoughts that could have gone with that.

"All right, great. We'll take the photos next weekend. I have a photographer and everything."

I couldn't help but smile. It was a type of excitement that I definitely wanted to be used to. Even getting that ring had given me goosebumps, but taking engagement photos, whether fake or not, was every girl's dream.

The week leading up to the engagement photos was super slow. All I wanted to do was take them and experience that. I had no idea why but I kept having this vision I would never experience again. This wasn't an done thing for me. And that was crazy because Tomaso was not a one-and-done type of thing. I tried thinking positively and telling myself he would be around long-term. But at the same time, I don't know. It was seeping in.

Don't get me wrong, the week was nice. There were no gun battles, and that was always a perk. I slept next to Tomaso. We had breakfast, lunch and dinner together. We watched movies. We got along like a couple even though a contract hovered over us.

“Tomorrow is the big day. I saw you bought yourself a dress for the engagement photos.” Tomaso said while we watched Forrest Gump on the couch together.

I smiled. ” I did buy a dress. It’s not every day that I will be in front of a professional photographer.”

“Are you excited about it?”

I was surprised by his question. But also, I was intrigued over whether or not he was. “I am excited. Again, I’m never in front of a professional photographer. I don’t have occasions like this. You know?”

“I get it. I’m glad you can find some enjoyment throughout this whole thing.”

Do I ask it? Why not? ” Are you excited about the engagement photos?”

An answer did not arrive immediately. But whatever. That was okay. There was one coming. I could sense it. “Is it weird if I say that I am? Are guys not supposed to be excited about these types of things?”

I laughed. Weirdly enough, I thought about the gunfight the other day. My life was moving so quickly, and none of it made sense. What a cute little moment surrounded by uncertainty. ” No. I’m glad you’re excited.”

We left it at that. At least there were only 24 hours left until I would get that day.

When those 24 hours were up, I squeezed myself into this strapless golden dress, I might add. It made my cleavage look



great. Besides that, I also felt pretty after my makeup and hair were done. On the inside as well. Looking at myself in the mirror, I knew where my soul was. For the first time since signing the contract, I could look myself in the eyes and know I was putting my best foot forward. I was making an effort with everything that involved Tomaso. I was looking for good and healthy results. I wasn't in it for anything devious. And so I could sleep at night. I didn't feel bad about myself. I still did worry that I would get killed at any time by one of his enemies, but I pushed that to the back of my head.

I gave myself one last look over and then left the bedroom.

Downstairs, Tomaso had gotten ready in that bathroom. He wanted to give me space which I found cute. I also liked it because it was a little surprise. Seeing him for the first time in his suit, he was stunning. Even though I love to see him in it, I also wanted to rip that suit right off him.

“You look amazing.”

His eyes were going up and down like an elevator toward me.  
” Me? You look absolutely stunning. Such an hourglass figure. Turn around and let me see that ass.”

I started to laugh almost hysterically. My cheeks definitely went red. Despite those two embarrassing things, I did a little spin for him. When I was done spinning, I looked into his eyes; it was like looking into a lion's eyes. I felt wanted in the best of ways.

” Looking real fine, girl,” Tomaso said. He moved in and kissed me for the first time since everything that had gone

down with that gun battle, and after a week of feeling like friends. His lips were warm and inviting. I had no idea why, but I felt emotional kissing him. It was like a surge of relief mixed with desire. My hands went up to his face to hold him there. His hands rested on my hips. Both sensations made me wet. But I knew none of that would be taken care of because we had photos coming up. That was okay because, again, I was excited.

He had us go there in the limo. This was also exciting because I had never been in a limo before. Granted, he had his men follow behind us. I wasn't surprised by this. I actually felt kind of safe. Safe in an unsafe way. I had these thoughts of all his men being assassinated and then just me being left there. But whatever. You could look at things differently, and I would choose the positive. We were surrounded by cars and people protecting us. There was no need to worry about a bullet hitting me.

"You can relax, you know. No one's going to try to make an attempt." Tomaso said while my leg shook. I realized that I hadn't really gone anywhere since the shootout.

"I know. It just takes a little getting used to, I guess."

I could hear him let out a little sigh that he was trying to conceal. "I know this is all tough and a lot to handle. But I promise you, no matter what happens, I never let anything happen to you."

"Did you really mean what you said about imagining a future where you aren't in this life?"

He looked up at the driver. His driver was probably someone who was connected to his business-wise. ” This is a conversation that we’ll talk about at home. If you don’t mind.”

“I understand.”

We pulled up to this venue that doubled as a farm. I was analyzing the whole thing while taking in the beauty of it. A farm was the perfect setting for fake engagement photos. Not only was it beautiful, but it also provided just enough cover if there was a shootout. You had the mix of outdoors and the barn to run into. There was plenty of open space, so we didn’t have to worry about that. Once I figured that whole system out, I could enjoy the day.

” Hey, guys.” A man with styled black hair and a camera in his hand walked over to us. I could only assume that it was the photographer. He had a feminine tone, and I assumed he was gay. He was dressed better than both of us. “You ready to take engagement photos?” His enthusiasm also told me he had no idea this was a sham. And I guess that made sense. The only ones that really needed to know were Tomaso and me. But it begged the question, did anyone know?

“I’m definitely ready.”

“Okay, so first, I will have you both go by the barn. You can hold Angelina by the hips. Stand behind her.”

The second we got into the pose, I felt myself get wet again. Part of me couldn’t wait until the day was over so that I could rip those clothes off of Tomaso. There was something extraordinarily attractive about him taking photos because I

knew it was out of his element and he was making an effort. But I also knew that he was excited to do it with me. It was just the perfect mix all around.

” Okay, guys. I want you to hold Angelina. Almost like you’re dipping her on the dance floor. Let’s see if you will laugh or give your best smile.”

We looked into each other’s eyes as we did this one. I never wanted him to let me go.

The truth was, I wanted this all to be real. And I knew that it wasn’t. That killed me.

## Chapter 12

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Tomaso

I was out with my man on the job. It was nothing too crazy. All I had to do was watch over one of our guys from afar because we suspected him of snitching. His name was Samuel. Instead of having one of my men go out there and give me a secondhand tale of what they saw, I just wanted to see for myself. If we had a snitch in the midst, they needed to be taken care of. Someone had definitely ratted us out when it came to me getting the ring for Angelina. Now I obviously didn't want to think this way. I never wanted to think that one of my men was behind snitching. But if the shoe fits, what could I do?

It was boring work. And I was barely paying attention. The only thing that I was thinking about was Angelina. I really enjoyed taking photos with her. I enjoyed the entire week leading up to those photos. It was such a weird thing because that wasn't me. I hated photos. I could count on one hand how many photos I had taken in my life. Angelina changed all that for me. She changed a lot of stuff for me. Half the time, I thought I wouldn't want to change these things. I thought I would have a lot more resistance. But no. I enjoyed the person that I was becoming. I meant it when I said I wanted a future void of all mafia business.

"Boss, you missed it. You're not even paying attention." It was Richie, one of my top guys. I was pissed that he called me out on me not paying attention. Because two other guys were in the back, my image was important. You're not going to make me look like an aloof clown in front of my people.

I turned to Richie with a red face, not the embarrassed red, but angry red, and I barked, “Watch who you’re talking to, all right? I see everything that’s going on.”

I smacked them in the back of the head just for an extra measure.

Now the problem was, what did I miss. Did I miss this guy snitching? Or did I just miss him scratching his ass? I couldn’t ask Richie because then I would be proving him right.

“Step outside with me, Richie.”

I knew what he wanted to say, but he was tight-lipped. He wanted to say that if we stepped out, we would blow our cover. And that was a very smart thing to think but not say out loud. Because he was right. We didn’t want to be seen. But I had to talk to him.

“Okay, boss.” He sputtered out.

We both left the car. “Listen. Richie,” I said right after closing the door. “I got a lot on my plate right now with Angelina. We’re planning on wedding.

As you know, my mind isn’t where it needs to be. So I need you to step up, okay. I need you to be my eyes when my eyes aren’t looking. I need you to be my ears when my ears aren’t listening. I don’t mean to berate you, okay. I didn’t mean to hit you, either. I’m only human. And when you’re about to be gunned down with your fiancé, my mind drifts. So don’t take it personal, all right. Now, what did you see with our boy over there?”



” He had a long conversation with the police officer to stop by. And I’m pretty sure it’s the dirty cop who works for your dad.”

I let out a long sigh. It didn’t even feel long enough. “All right. Well, now I know. You can get back in the car.”

I watched him do that as I thought about all the reasons why my father would require info from my men. The answers weren’t far away from me. He must have been trying to get info on my sham marriage. I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised by that. If I was him, I’d be skeptical too. What better way to get the information out of anyone than going to the people who are closest to me. What hurt me most was that this man was a snitch to my father. And I couldn’t do a single thing about it. If I hurt the man, then my father would know. It would raise red flags. It was just the game of chess that I needed to play, And I was not ignorant of those games.

Later that night, I was on the couch with Angelina. We were watching some movie that I wasn’t paying attention to. I was paying more attention to Angelina and her wide eyes when she was interested in something. She would bite her lower lip, which was the sexiest thing ever. There wasn’t a moment where I didn’t want to kiss her. She was this sense of relief after a long day. I hated the term safe space. It felt like some sort of millennial form of softness. That was until I actually had a safe space, and it was Angelina. She was the girl who calmed me down when the rest of the world was chaotic.

Out of all the things that I could say to her, it confused me because this was what I said, “I don’t have an end date to the

contract in mind, and I barely think about it.”

Her eyes remained glued to the TV. “I don’t care.” And then she snuggled up on me.

We were in a state of uncertainty. But I had a feeling that neither one of them minded. I didn’t care where we would end up. At least not at that moment. I didn’t. I was just happy to be in her presence. Hopefully, that’s how it would stay. And hopefully, my brain, family, and circumstances will not get the best of us.

One could only hope.

## Chapter 13

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Angelina

Maybe I was psychic. Maybe I wasn't. But that day, I was leaning more toward the former. Because when I woke up, I had this gut instinct that the rest of the day would not be great. As a matter of fact, something told me that it was going to take a turn for the worst.

Again, that was only coming from a gut feeling.

It probably stemmed from Tomaso not being in bed when I woke up. It was always a mix of being in that big mansion and not having my protection around me that created that ominous feeling. But that day, I swear the ominous feeling was way worse.

To negate that feeling, I had to get myself moving. Half the time, that was the only way to combat negativity. Beat it with action.

I brought my feet to the floor and went to the bathroom to splash water on my face. Splashing that water turned into a shower. That calmed me down a little bit. It didn't do much in the way of my perspective. I still hated the feeling of being alone in that big mansion. I also couldn't help rehashing everything that had happened with that gunfight. It was almost like I had been to war and come back shell-shocked. It was a hard thing to shake. I guess I missed Tomaso. No one that he was out in the world, not wearing a bulletproof vest and always having a target on his back. It made sitting on the couch and watching a movie with him a million times more precious.

He didn't have an end date for the contract. He admitted that to me, and I continued replicating that in my mind for whatever reason. I guess it was because it made me feel we were on the same page. The first time I brought it up to him, it was petty. I had been angry. I had lost my way a little bit. I just wanted him to admit that he had no plan. So, when he said it last night without me even broaching the subject, I felt like I was on top of the world.

When you're in a world filled with uncertainty and your nerves are constantly being tested, you hang on to those little wins. You sit in them like a hot tub because you don't know when you'll ever get them again.

I went downstairs, and the quiet didn't bother me for once. Maybe I was getting a little use to the mansion after all. Or maybe it was the shower. All I knew was I never had concrete answers for anything anymore. When it came to things in my mind, everything felt like a guessing game. Another certain thing, though, was me jumping out of my skin when there was a knock at the door.

Do I answer it? Tomaso said nothing about not answering the door. But it also seems like common sense not to answer the door. Those micro-decisions were everything. Because what if I opened the door and got shot in the face? Months ago? That would not have been a possibility. Maybe a fleeting thought that I would push to the back of my mind because it was so absurd. But now, being the target that I was, anything was possible. I was one mistake away from my brains spattered all over the floor.

I didn't want to be a chicken. I didn't want to live in fear. No matter how stupid that sounded. I walked to the door and opened it.

Before me were two men in black suits. I had recognized them from Tomaso's crew. I had a surge of relief for me. But even with that relief, my leg tremored. I wasn't out of the woods yet. It was ordinary for his men to show up at his house. So in my mind, that told me something wasn't right.

I found it funny how this thought process happened within a few seconds in my head. Maybe not even a few seconds, maybe a few milliseconds.

"Can I help you, gentlemen?"

One of them looked past me. The other one looked at the ground. The one that looked past me said, "Tomaso's not home?"

"No, he's not. But I'm here, and I'm his fiance. You can tell me what's going on."

Okay, so that was very outlandish of me. They could definitely not tell me what was going on. In the mafia world, wives, fiances, and girlfriends weren't anything related to the business. That was my knowledge from at least watching The Sopranos. But to my surprise, they both stepped in.

They looked around as if what they were doing was completely wrong. That was unsettling. That made my heart beat a little faster because what were they telling me? I wanted to think positively, but this situation was nothing positive. It

went back to that ominous feeling from before. ” Word is out that you have a contract for faking engagement. Tomaso’s computer was hacked. We don’t know by who. He had a copy of the contract within his files.”

Now my heart was pounding so fast. I thought it was going to burst out of my chest. This wasn’t only bad. This was probably one of my fears that came to life. Now I was implicated. Now I was part of this. I had lied to people.

” Hey, relax.” The one man said after looking at my leg shake. I couldn’t control it, nor could I control my breathing. I had been hyperventilating. I tried to keep it under wraps, but it looked pathetic. What could I do? I didn’t want to die.

” Are people coming after me now? Are people going to come after Tomaso?”

They both look at one another. It was the only answer that I needed. But they gave me one anyway. “I would lock my doors. But I wouldn’t lose sleep just yet.”

“Why not?” My tone was less than polite.

The one man shrugged. ” Because, when it comes to this type of business, moves aren’t made suddenly. Something like this is like chess. If anyone has a problem with you or your fake fiancée, they will plan this out. That gives you time to plan things out. That gives the boss time to plant things out.”

Although I didn’t mind having more time. None of that made me feel better. I was a nervous wreck biting my nails for the rest of the day and that mansion alone. I didn’t sit on the couch



and watch TV. I instead paced the mansion and cleaned. I did anything that I could take my mind off of things. But no matter what I was doing, from sitting on the toilet to cleaning the house, I imagined being assassinated at every turn.

It wasn't a great existence, to say the least. All I wanted was for Tomaso to come home. But simultaneously, I worried that he wasn't going to. Now, I shouldn't have been thinking so negatively. It felt like a survival mechanism, though. It felt like the right thing to do. Maybe I look through the window too many times. I became one of those people who existed only in paranoia.

It made me do some crazy things. I don't know why I did it, but I went to the grocery store just to get out of the house and try to face my fears.

That was until Tomaso came home. I nearly wanted to jump in his arms when he walked through the door. The man could not stop a bullet, but it felt that way. "You okay? You look scared." He said while he gave me a measured look.

I didn't know where to begin. Sure, there was a beginning, middle and end, but my tongue felt like it had lost the ability to move.

"Angelina, spill it. What's the matter? You look like? You've seen a ghost."

"Two of your men came by. They're saying that news is out that you and I are in the contract. They know Tomaso. They know all about us."

It didn't help that his face went white. It would have helped if he had a war cry or a more soothing look on his face."

"Are you being serious right now?"

I nodded yes because saying the word felt too difficult.

"Damn it." He started to pace back and forth with his hands on his hips. It wasn't what I wanted to see. That made me panic even more. "How the hell did this leak out? You and I were the only two that knew about it."

For a moment, I could have sworn that he looked at me as though I was the one that leaked it. I refused to believe that, though. "It was your computer. Someone hacked it."

"It had to be an inside job, then." It looked as though he was thinking through things. I couldn't fault him for that. It was an unprecedented situation, and we were the first to go through it. Maybe even in the whole world. Should I have felt special for that? Should I have felt like I was on some sort of adventure? Probably not. But hey, at least I did feel alive.

"I need to see my father." He finally said.

I had no answer for him. And after all, it did feel like it was just better to listen than anything else.

"I want you to go with me, though."

Whoa. I was definitely not expecting that. I swallowed. "Are you sure? This seems like something that would be between you and your—"

“Angelina, you are implicated in the contract. You’re part of this. I’m sorry. But it’s better to show your face and at least be in the background. Nothing’s going to happen to you, though, okay.”

Resentment was a real thing at that moment. Because he had promised that I would be nowhere near any of this stuff. He made me feel like I was just a chessboard piece. But now, suddenly, I was wrapped up in the middle of it all. Oddly enough, there was a little bit of confidence in me. I found it cool that I was in the middle of mafia stuff. But of course, there was no negating what I felt in my heart, and I was just sheer fear.

His father’s mansion was even bigger than his. We got there in about a half hour. The gates were super secure. They were men that looked like they were in the secret service standing outside. I knew that I wasn’t in Kansas anymore. That was for sure.

” I don’t need you to say anything. And I don’t mean that in a mean way.” Tomaso started in the car. ” Your job is just to be here so that it looks like you care.”

” I don’t know. Since I signed the contract and pretended to be your fiancée, how could I convince anyone that I care?”

He gave me a quick look. ” Your presence. That’s all we need. You must show this man that you’re not just the contract signer. You came here for support, and that’s what matters.”

It did make me feel a little better. But at the end of the day, I just couldn’t understand how this would improve the situation.

So I just nodded in agreement and dealt with it all. Because no matter what I said, it wouldn't change the situation anyway.

Inside the mansion, it looks like it was built in the 1930s. It was fancy, but it just wasn't modern. It wasn't what I had expected. I was used to Tomaso's mansion. I guess I was comparing.

So much for being there for support, though. Because when we got to his father's office, he had me wait outside. I could hear muffled voices. One of those voices was yelling, and it was not Tomaso. The only words I could make out were Vincenzo's family and war.

Needless to say, this didn't bode well for my future.

## Chapter 14

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Tomaso

I had a room full of eager faces waiting to see how I would address the situation. I would not envy myself if I was someone who wasn't me. But unfortunately, I was who I was, and there was no change. I simply had to deal with my situation. I was the one that got myself here. No one but me. It was my stupid idea to have the damn contract in the first place. I should have known better. I should have known how ridiculous that crap was. Was it absurd that I was expected to marry someone I did not love or care for? That was absurd too. I learned from the whole thing that you could not fight fire with fire. That was a very simple notion, but it could not have been more true. You fight fire with fire and get nothing but a burn-down house. At this time in my life, that house was filled with someone I cared about. And it was probably the worst part about it all. I had dragged Angelina into it, and it was all I could think about. I couldn't have cared less about myself at that moment. All I wanted to do was protect her.

” All right. I've called you all here today to be a man. I won't hide or try to pretend that something didn't happen. I did what I did. Okay. I didn't want to marry this woman. I shouldn't have to marry this woman. And I think it's absolute bull crap. So, against my best instincts, I created a contract with Angelina. I paid her to stay home and be my pretend fiancée. All right? The jig is up. I take full responsibility when it comes to this whole mess. But now, after doing that, the next thing that needs to be done is to find a way to move forward. And that's what we're going to do. None of you have to worry

about anything other than defending yourselves. Keep your eyes open. If you feel suspicious of somebody, trust your gut. This isn't a time to be soft. And this isn't a time to get relaxed. No one should be forced to marry anyone just to combine families. And I stand by that. I know it's not ideal that we are now in the midst of a war, but it is what it is, and we must deal with it. All right? The threats are not imminent. But it's not to be taken lightly."

Leaving a room full of mobsters was not easy. Most of them were stone-faced. They were always stone-faced. That was the nature of our culture. You weren't supposed to show emotion. You were supposed to do your job, shut up, and bottle up your emotions until you exploded. I watched each of them file out of that room until I was the only one left with myself and my desk.

Man, did the world feel heavy? It was a cliché to say that the world was on my shoulders. But it was. I didn't care about the war regarding my men or myself. I really didn't. It was all about Angelina. Every second that passed. I felt terrible that she was caught up in it. I sat at my desk, sulking. I was never someone who enjoyed beating myself up. I didn't like to throw pity parties, and I hated dwelling on things. This was one of those occasions where exceptions were made without my permission.

I didn't have much time to dwell. Not enough time at all, actually. Because my nerves were rattled by the sounds of gunshots. I had a few seconds where it all didn't register with me. I heard loud bangs. I could feel them in my chest as I sat



in my seat. But they didn't feel real. They felt like some sort of mirage or dream. When those seconds of denial passed over me, I left for my chair and looked out the window. I could see a bunch of unmarked black cars right outside. The windows were super tinted. I couldn't get much of a good look because a bullet went flying right through the window. I could have sworn that I saw the hole enter the glass. It had been inching for my face. Now my body was surrounded by the raining glass all around me.

Even though it happened a moment ago, I didn't remember hitting the floor. But I was on the floor. And because of that revelation, I took a second to scan myself. I had to ensure I hadn't been hit by a bullet. I didn't see any blood or anything like that, so I was clear.

As gunfire rained down, I crawled across the floor. It was like I was at war, trying to avoid any damage. My breathing was fast. Never in my life had I worried about losing it so much. Usually, I didn't care. But as each elbow moved forward across that glass-sprinkled floor, my motivation was Angelina. I just wanted to see her one more time. I just wanted to kiss those lips again and wake up next to her in the morning. This was new. But it was keeping me alive. So how could I complain?

I used my fingertips to open the door. This was when I went into the hallway. I was still on the floor on my elbows and knees. The gunfire was increasing in terms of sound. It was getting closer. The only thing I could think to do was grab my pistol from my holster. It sounded like machine guns, though,

so my gun would be nothing in comparison. In the building, a janitor's closet had a false back to a secret compartment that held guns. It was at the end of the hallway. I was, of course, at the very end. The fact that whoever was raining down gunfire on us knew where our hideout was, that was the scariest part.

I crawled and crawled until I finally got into that janitor's closet. I stood up for the first time since being in my office and did it myself. They were little bits of glass in my fingertips and palms. It looked like I had slammed my hand down on a plate of ketchup. There was so much red sprinkled out. I hadn't even realized I had crawled through the glass like that.

I moved the false back and took out the machine gun. That was all I needed to feel some confidence. I left that room and ran throughout the building towards the entrance. Yes, I was that crazy. I wasn't about to let my man go without seeing their leader come front and center to help out. But by the time I had run out there, the cars were driving away, a couple of my men were on the ground, they were alive but bleeding, and the damage had been done.

A message had been sent.

"Is everyone all right?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

Everyone answered at the same time, which made listening hard. Not that I was trying to listen anyway. My brain was moving a mile a minute. It was like I was planning everything step by step in milliseconds. And then, I realized that the most important thing to do at that moment was to not stand there asking questions but to care for them. The one that I love

most. That was the first time I used that four-letter word in my head. I needed to make sure she was okay.

“I have to go check on Angelina.” It felt like that sentence had negated everything that I had tried to do in terms of my leadership. But I didn’t care. I left that building in haste.

Carrying my machine gun to my car out in the open like that was ridiculous, but I could care less. The police were probably on their way after hearing all that gunfire, but I was leaving regardless.

No one came after me. Not any of my men and not any of the police. That was the only solace as I drove. Everything else was pure chaos. I had the worst images of Angelina in my mind. I feared that she had been gunned down. I didn’t want to walk into that house and look at her body in a pool of blood. And it was all because of a stupid contract. How could I be so naive? I shouldn’t have wrapped her up in my world. Why couldn’t I have been better? I was so selfish.

Beating myself up with the theme of that drive. I did run some red lights. I did drive faster than the speed limit. All I wanted to do was see my woman again.

I finally got there. My house looked alien when I looked at it. And this was because I had no idea what was happening inside. I could have been rolling up to an ambush. There were no cars parked outside. There was nothing out of the ordinary, on the one hand. That was a good thing. On the other hand, where was Angelina’s car? Could this all be a setup?

I took my machine gun from the car. And I had my pistol. No matter what was on the other side of that door, I was ready for it. This time, guns would not surprise me; I would surprise them.

I put my key in the door because it was still locked. And when I walked inside, there was nothing. There was no one. I checked the house's interior and looked out the windows while I did that. Nothing.

Sure, it was nice that I didn't get shot at as I walked through the door. But where was Angelina?

## Chapter 15

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Angelina

**F**resh air was something I did not take for granted anymore. It just turned out that when you were worried about dying or being killed, which were essentially the same thing, being cooped up in a mansion was torture. Even though it was a mansion, it was sheer torture.

This is why I opted to go for a drive. My other thought process was that no one could get me if I was on the move. How would the mafia know where I was driving unless I was being tracked? And as I pulled out of Tomaso's driveway, I saw no one tracking me.

I listened to pop music and drove way below the speed limit. I was trying to keep my nerves calm. I felt like this the second that I stopped. Every time I stopped, I was at Target. It was one of the few times in my life that I had ever hyperventilated uncontrollably. I didn't want to die. That was the thought that kept crossing my mind. Next to that thought was Tomaso. I had these grand visions of us having a life together. Every now and then, a new part of that future would pop into my head. Whether sitting at the dinner table with children or watching those children play in the backyard. Ordinary and domestic visions between us both. They were supposed to be happy visions, things you would hope for. But instead, they brought a tear to my eye because I felt like we both had a death sentence. No one would have my back because I signed a contract with the mafia. Who would stick up for me? Who would have sympathy for a woman who did such a thing?

Now the other stark reality that hit me was the matter of me going home. I was getting bored of driving. I wasn't hungry enough to go to a diner, nor did I feel like that was safe. And I didn't want to go anywhere near my family's house because they were the last people I wanted to get tied up in my little problem. This meant I had to go home and go to that mansion which didn't guarantee company. I had no idea when Tomaso would be home. But I couldn't be a chicken, and I knew that if something happened in the mansion, I would just call the police.

I started driving home, and getting there didn't take long. I had butterflies when I saw Tomaso's Cadillac out front. There were no other cars, which I told him he was alone. So hopefully, that also meant no trouble.

I imagined coming inside and just lying in his arms. But I knew that would probably not happen; we were both on edge. As I approached the door, I wondered what the news would be. Had he handled the situation? Was he ready to tell me what happened with his father behind that door? There were so many questions, and I just hoped I had answers.

When I walked inside, Tomaso was pacing. It wasn't long before he sent his angry eyes toward me. I knew that those weren't angry eyes over anything but me. Now came the question of what did I do? Why were those angry eyes directed at me?

Instead of asking, I said, "Hi."



” What the hell were you doing leaving? You can’t be leaving by yourself. Are you out of your goddamn mind? You could have been killed.”

His voice was the angriest I had ever heard it. His lower lip was trembling in between his words. His face was filled with red. I was actually kind of scared. Because I was scared, my natural defense mechanism was to get argumentative.

“You watch how you speak to me. Neither of us would be in this situation if not for you.”

He had a look on his face as though he was formulating his response, going over numbers in his head or situations. “You’re the one that signed the contract too. No one held a gun to your head. You could have walked at any point. You changed your life by signing that paper. You knew what you were getting into.”

How things change. One day he’s singing one song, and then the next, he’s singing an entirely different genre. It was disappointing and put a pit in my stomach. I didn’t want to see him in a bad light. I really wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. Sure, it was an unprecedented situation, but it was his unprecedented situation. I didn’t need to be called out at that moment. I thought he and I were supposed to be a team. Forgive me for thinking that he and I were in it together.

“Yeah, and as I signed on that stupid dotted line, you assured me that all I had to do was play your little fiance, and I would be kept out of the line of fire. But now, suddenly, I should have known what I was getting myself into. He’s sweet. Talk

me into believing I would be okay, and now I can't leave this house. What do you think about that? What's your comeback for that?"

He started pacing back and forth. His eyes were nowhere near mine. "You think I like worrying about you? You think I liked being in this mansion just now worrying that you were dead?"

"Why do you worry about me if I'm such a pain in the ass?"

"I never said that you were a pain in the ass."

"Well, you're treating me like one. You're treating me like a child that doesn't know any better. I didn't ask for any of this, and still want to feel like a human being. I don't want to be cooped up in a mansion worrying about when there's going to be a bullet flying through the window."

He clenched his jaw and gave me a measured look. The only positive thing about my interaction with him was that I felt alive. And despite the tension, I felt safe in his presence. Gone was that moment of fear. As mad as I was at him, I was still happy to be with him. It made no sense to me, but it made all the sense in the world at the same time.

We had this little standoff. He was looking into my eyes with angry passion. And I was looking into his eyes with that same angry passion. But, it was a little reserved. I guess I didn't want to be mad at him. I wanted us to be copacetic. Of course, that wasn't going to be possible with our situation. I was a fool to think otherwise.

” You’re right.” Tomaso started. ” You shouldn’t have to look over your shoulder and live in fear. I should have never come to you with this contract idea or roped you into this world. No one should be roped into this world. No one should even know that it exists. Our relationship is fake. And you should not live in fear because of a fake relationship.”

I couldn’t tell whether or not he was being genuine. All I could do was hope that he wasn’t. Because those words stung. Those words stung beyond belief. Did he really just look at us as having a fake relationship? I almost wanted to cry. I wouldn’t allow myself to do that, though. The last thing I would do was give him that much satisfaction. To me, our relationship was everything but fake. There was something there. Did I imagine it all? Did he really not feel anything for me? And was it all an act? I shouldn’t have been standing there. Thinking about those things. Again, All I wanted was for us to be a team. And suddenly, any prospects of that were out the window.

We didn’t say anything to one another after that. He hurt my feelings, and I think he knew that. Or at least I hope he knew that. I stayed in the bedroom, and he stayed downstairs. We only saw one another when I went to the kitchen for food. I wished that it didn’t have to be that way. Because at the moment when I felt scared, I wished that I had someone.

I had this foolish hope that at some point in the evening, Tomaso would come upstairs, gently knock on my door and apologize. I imagined us cuddling after that. This fantasy replayed in my mind repeatedly while prompting me to look at the door like a fool. I could feel his wall and deep voice in the

room through it. But, of course, he never came. Not once in the evening did he come and check on me. Hearing myself say that made me feel like an entitled brat. The more time passed, my nervousness only increased. Because I grew super antsy. I left the bed several times and went to the door to almost confront him. Luckily for my pride and self-esteem, I didn't do that. I stayed in the room and waited. As the night ended and the moon entered the sky, I knew he was not coming in.

This was when I started to doubt everything. I had begun this journey of self-doubt, self-reflection, and self-pity. I couldn't help myself but wallow a bit. It was all just one big mistake. Outside of the good little parts about what Tomaso and I had together, everything else was a big regret. Never before had I regretted signing that contract so much.

And yet there was nothing that I could do. All I could do was lay in my bed and wait. I was only guaranteed the future until it was no longer there. It was a grim reality check. I had to find some way to move on mentally from Tomaso. Because call me crazy, but it seemed like he had already moved on for me. Of course, I didn't want to admit that to myself. I hope the doubt sentiment was the furthest thing from the truth. But who was I kidding? Like he had said to me downstairs, our relationship was fake. It was nothing more than a piece of paper.

Maybe at the end of the day, that was all I was to him. Once I could understand that and let that sink in, I could move on. Will I be killed? Will this all end in a catastrophe that I could have never imagined? I had no idea. But it sure is heck seem

that way. The sooner I accepted that fate, the more sleep I would get.

It was the middle of the night, and Tomaso still had not said anything to me. The only difference between that time and before was that I cared a little less.

## Chapter 16

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## Tomaso

**S**he had been staying in the guest room. I shouldn't have been surprised by that. The way I treated her and the fact that the contract was no longer enacted, there was no reason for her to sleep in my bed. Oh, how I missed that. Her warm and sexy body next to me. When I went to bed and woke up. You don't realize what you have until it's gone. She was still in my house, but not how I wanted her to be. She would never know that I wanted her back. She would never know how bad I wanted her in my bed. Because I refused to tell her.

I had to keep my guard up. I had to be strong and do the right thing. Because as much as I wanted to do all those things with her and be normal. Didn't that count for anything? Didn't I trying to do the right and moral thing count? It didn't seem that way because she would slam things when we crossed paths in the house. She would make her presence known by walking way more flat-footed than usual. It was the typical argument state. When a couple is fighting and refuses to talk to one another, they have to slam things and make their

feelings known in other ways. Yeah, we were dating, and yet we weren't dating. That's how it felt.

I was reminded of all of this right when I woke up. It was funny; I thought about my drama with her rather than the drama outside those walls. I should have been fixated on the fact that I was being hunted. My main concern should have been trying to end the war by making amends. Or, I should have been focused on getting revenge and not bowing down to an angry mafia family pissed off because I didn't want to marry Linda. How ridiculous. It was the most ridiculous sentiment in the world when you thought about it and dissected every little aspect, even when you looked at it from face value. And yet now, everyone was fighting and risking their lives over it. Because why? They felt slighted? Because they felt like I had disrespected them? Big whoop. Why can't I just marry the chick that I want to marry?

There it was. The realization. I loved Angelina. I wanted to marry her. I wanted her to be my entire world. In all reality, that would probably solve the war. But now, no one would believe it. No one would believe that I actually loved her. They would all just think I was keeping it up to save face. What was I supposed to do to prove them all wrong? Get her pregnant? Even if I married her, everyone would just say I married her to avoid conflict.

I lay in my bed, staring at the ceiling. Thinking about everything a mile a minute. East thought zoomed by me like a car on the highway. I couldn't really just focus on one. Who could blame me in a time like that?



The one thought I could nail down was what I had to do with Angelina that day. If I knew her, she would not be happy with the little meeting I would call in the kitchen. But it had to be done. I had to put my foot down when it came to something. I was so angry when she left the house and did her little joy ride. She could have sniped right through the windshield, and then I would have had to lose someone I cared about more than anyone else. If only I could say that to her without it being a problem. Or better yet, a contradiction.

With this on my mind, I got out of bed and washed my face in the bathroom. I could hear her shower running in the guest room. Oh, how I wished I could see that naked body. I imagined the water dripping off of her nipples. I imagine how her ass looked beneath the stream. We had never had sex in the shower. And there was a first for everything. Somehow I knew they would not be a first for that.

I had dug myself into that hole. I had gotten myself into that mess. Everything would have been real if I had courted her without a contract. There wouldn't be any lies coming to the surface or anything like that. But what was done was done. I could do nothing about it but deal with the outcome.

I took my time getting ready for the day. I couldn't have my meeting with her. If she was in the shower. I had to wait for her to be done. I found myself picking clothes that I knew she liked. That wasn't a good strategy whatsoever. I knew she liked wearing a white t-shirt. The tighter, the better. I also knew she liked gray sweatpants. This she didn't tell me. Her eyes told me instead. My member never hid when I wore gray

sweatpants. The whole world could see it. The outline, at least. The bad part about the situation was that I still wanted to flirt even though we were at the height of our tension. I still wanted to see her lustful eyes. One could fantasize. There was nothing illegal about that in our circumstances. It helped in a way. Those little fantasies could get you through the toughest of times.

The shower stopped. There again. I thought of her stepping out of that shower naked and dropping that towel around her body. I just wanted to put her nipples in my mouth one last time. It could be one last time because I never knew when I would be killed. I shook my head, trying to rid myself of those thoughts.

Once I heard her leave the bathroom and head downstairs, I waited about five minutes before I went down to see her.

She took it upon herself to make breakfast. Angelina had done that ever since our argument. I knew she wasn't doing it out of spite, given that I would make her breakfast. Usually, she was just hungry. And she had every right under the sun to make herself breakfast. My insecurity and dread of the situation made me see it as spite. The silence between two people caring for one another can make your mind go crazy. You begin to make up scenarios in your head, and when you know they're not true, there's nothing you can do about it.

“Angelina.”

She didn't turn around after I said her name. She did say, “Yes? What can I do for you this morning? Need me to sign any other contracts. Would you like me to sign a contract to

pretend to be your mother? Maybe even your father. Are you going to have me dress up as a dinosaur so that we can reenact Jurassic Park?”

I rolled my eyes. I had to do everything in my power to keep a civil tone. I wanted to keep the conversation mature even though she had started it off on the wrong foot. ” Let me cut to the chase, okay? I will be hiring guards to have your back everywhere you go. There are also guards stationed outside of the mansion today. You’re not to leave without being escorted. Do you understand me?”

She shut the flame off her eggs and put the spatula on the counter. I could feel the tension bubbling up in her sternum. Whatever she was about to say to me was filled with fire. I wasn’t surprised one bit. I was ready.

When she spun around, her face was red and not from embarrassment. “Are you out of your mind telling me what the hell I should be doing? Who the hell do you think you are?”

Again, it took a lot of effort to keep me from letting my tone get out of whack. ” Angelina, I’m not trying to be a dick.”

“Well, you’re failing pretty hard. You have me in this world now, and I can’t escape it. The only thing you’re doing is making it a lot worse for me.”

It pained me to hear that. The last thing on earth I wanted to do was hurt her. It was quite the opposite. All I wanted to do was please her. I had the means to give her everything that she wanted in her life. But I had created red tape. I was surrounded by it. I was cuffed by my circumstances. I was stunned by my

ego. I was being held back by my pride. ” I don’t want you to be killed. Angelina. I wouldn’t be doing this if I didn’t care about you. Believe me, I don’t like any of this either. This isn’t what I wanted for you.”

She shook her head. I couldn’t understand what part of that she would disagree with. Then again, I was very stupid when it came to this stuff. The emotional stuff. I was almost like a monkey. A stunted monkey, at that. ” You just don’t understand. You don’t even hear yourself. You told me what you wanted for me. But you never stopped to think about what I would want? Ever since this contract, it’s been about you. It’s been about what you need. Sure, I was supposed to be getting money at the end of this,”

“You can still have the money. This is an unprecedented situation. I just haven’t spoken about the money because—”

She rolled her eyes. “Tomaso, it’s not about the money. It was never about the money for me. Okay, from day one...” she stopped herself. And even though she stopped, I knew where she was going with it. It was hard to hear. It was hard to face. This girl actually cared for me. Not only did I need to be accustomed to loving someone, but I needed to learn how to allow myself to be loved by someone, as cheesy as that might have sounded.

“I get it. Angelina. I completely understand that none of this is ideal. But at this point, I’m just trying to protect you. I’m just trying to minimize the damage. Call it damage control. Call it whatever you want to call it. Just please try to see it from my

perspective. I may have messed up royally. And right now, I'm trying to not mess up anymore. This is why I'm having my men watch you."

She let out a sigh and crossed her arms. Then she started to put away the breakfast she had fixed.

"What are you doing, Angelina? Have your breakfast."

"She continued to put stuff away, and when she said what she said next, she didn't look at me whatsoever." "I want to go home. I don't want to be here anymore. I don't want anything to do with the contract. And I don't want anything to do with you anymore. I just want to go home to my family."

This was the hardest moment throughout our contract, from pretending in front of my father to the gunfight to everything else. This put a pit in my stomach and made me feel gutted. And I couldn't necessarily understand why. I guess it wasn't too hard to understand. I was losing her. This was it. It was probably not coming back after this. How would I win her back if she wasn't even near me? If we didn't have contact with one another?

"Fine, if that's what you want to do, then do it." I left the room after that like a little child. Could one blame me? I was hurt. And I didn't know how to deal with that type of hurt. I hadn't developed those mechanisms yet.

I thought she wouldn't leave, and maybe she was bluffing. But she did take all her things and went home. The day that she did wasn't so bad. I was filled with rage. Denial was another sentiment that filled me. It would stay after she had left where

everything had settled in. It was a Saturday, and there wasn't anything going on with my off-the-books business and, of course, my day job I was off from. So in my mansion, I was left to my own devices. Things that could happen to a man who has lost his love.

What was I really to do at that moment? There was no getting her off my mind. There was no calling her. I just had to deal with it. Just dealing with it sucked. There was no sugarcoating it. It was kind of like going to the dentist. Or going to the DMV. Except losing Angelina hurt me in my soul. It left this empty spot in my chest.

Now, of course, I had my men watching her. That first day I was alone, I said I would not intervene. I had my men reporting back to me, but I told myself that I would get nowhere near the vicinity of her. The last thing that I wanted to be labeled as was a stalker.

I broke that rule because I went with one of my men and watched her house from a car. I wouldn't define it as stalking so much as I would define it as worried. I could barely sleep knowing she could be attacked or threatened. I couldn't imagine anyone laying a finger on her. It made me sick to my stomach.

Richter, the guy I was with, was a quiet dude who sat beside me. As I stared at the house. He would get a good payday, so I didn't feel too bad. I did feel weird, though. I felt like everyone could see through me in terms of what I was doing or, better yet, why I was doing it. It made me feel like I was

wearing my heart on my sleeve. They all knew that. I just loved her. If only the opposing family had seen that, maybe they would let the vendetta go. Life couldn't be that easy, could it?

“You're doing the right thing, you know,” Richter said, surprisingly breaking the silence. Words were the very last thing that I expected from this man. He just always had a very stoic face to him. Better yet, a stoic nature.

“What do you mean? What you talking about?” I had an inclination, but I wanted confirmation.

He took a very long pause to respond. It could have filled an entire novel. “You out here looking after this girl goes against many of what happens in our world. You know. No one ever wants to show that they care about people. Because it's perceived as a weakness. But the truth is, what are we doing this all for? Not to be hokey or whatever, but what are we doing? We make a lot of money. We thrive financially. We don't have to worry about the BS day jobs. Sure, we have a lot to worry about. We may be killed at any given moment. Will you see more bullets than the average human? But if we're not doing it for people? Then what are we doing it for?”

Did I need the poetic stance from this man? Probably not. But at the same time, it motivated me that maybe I wasn't just a creep by stalking her.

“Well, I appreciate that sentiment. Because I'm sure not everyone would see it that way. I'm sure many guys would see it as a waste of time.”

Breaking our conversation was something I did not expect. It made me jump out of my skin and grab my gun. I didn't take the gun out of my compartment, but my hand made to reflex. Next to me, at the window, was a slender tapping finger. The nail on that finger was beautifully done up. They had purple coloring to them. And I knew who that finger belonged to. Angelina.

I was caught. It was one of the few rare times my cheek took on a red hue. I could feel the heat in them. I didn't want to roll down the window because I knew I would have to find an excuse. I would have to conversate with Angelina and somehow undo the creepiness that I had just unfolded on myself. But I did roll down that window.

When I did, she had this look about her where it seemed like she was about to unleash. Her mouth was slightly open, her lower lip quivered, and her eyes cut at me.

"If you don't leave now, I will call your father." She told me.

It was one simple sentence, and yet it carried so much weight. It was also pretty shocking to me. That was the last thing that I had expected her to say.

"Can we talk about this, Angelina?" I kind of already knew the answer to that. But the question was asked.

"No. I have nothing to say to you. You shouldn't be here. You shouldn't be anywhere near here."

What was the man to do at that moment? I didn't want to disrespect her. And I didn't want to be any more problematic.



But I also worried about her. “All right, Angelina. I’m leaving.”

She folded her arms and gave me a measured look. I knew she wanted to say something else. What that something else was. I had no idea. And I would never know because she walked away after that. I rolled up the window, and I looked at Richter. It was more of a comical look because after everything he had just said, I had been chewed out for it.

“Like I said,” Richter started. “Not everyone understands.”

I nodded. “I’m going to go to my car. I need you to go around the block and continue to watch her. That doesn’t mean my men can’t be here if I can’t be here. She can’t be left alone. If they can’t get to me, they will try to get to her. They going to use her as a message.”

“I understand, boss. Don’t worry about her. I’ll catch anyone who tries to creep up. They won’t even see me.”

I felt comfortable leaving everything in his hands. I felt confident in my men and their eyes. The goal was to keep Angelina alive and safe. There were no guarantees in life, but I liked to prove those types of statements wrong.

## Chapter 17

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Angelina

I didn't need to do it. But I officially quit that job with Tomaso. It's not like I have been there as of late. Anyway, He had me on some sort of leave that made no sense on paper. I sent him an email. Even that felt super formal because of our history. Nothing I did felt right. Everything in my life felt just a little weird. Like there was an asterisk next to it.

This part of me was a huge sense of relief over quitting my job. It was partially a feeling of letting go. Moving on. Even though I knew that there was no moving on from the situation that I would always have to look over my shoulders even when I had gray hair, or at least that's how it felt, I could still move on in some way. And that was all that mattered to me.

At home, I shut my laptop and stared out into space. When I did that, of course, my mind went to Tomaso. Even though I was mad at him, and even though he had essentially ruined my life, it was hard not to miss him. It was hard not to think about him. Especially given that he had tried to watch over me despite our circumstances. It still showed me that he had a huge heart. And I'd hate to say it, but it also showed that he cared about me. It was a confusing mental space to be in, to say the least. But I was navigating. I wasn't thriving, but I was surviving. And the more time I put between seeing him and the current moment, the better I felt.

Of course, life wasn't that simple, though. When you tried to go one way, life told you to go another entirely. And I say this because my doorbell rang. I hope that it was the mailman.

Even though I wouldn't expect any packages, I don't know. I irrationally hoped it was anyone but the man I was avoiding and trying to move on from.

When I opened that door, there was that very man.

I tried to shut the door, but he put his hand in the way. "Can you hear me out?"

It was like I couldn't say no. I wanted to. I wanted to with every fiber of my being. But I couldn't. "You have five minutes. And again, I will call you father."

He walked in with hesitation. He did have this smug smirk on his face. That's why I wasn't surprised when he said, "You don't have my father's number, but still, I appreciate the effort."

I shook my head. I had no time for his little quips. "Why did you come here, Tomaso? You and I are done. And don't pretend I don't see your men off in the distance occasionally. Because I see them spying on me."

When I said that, his cheeks went a little red. It made me smile. I had to turn away when I smiled. I couldn't let him know I was letting my guard down. But I'd be lying if I said things didn't feel normal with him in my house.

"You know this is a nice place. Goes to show you that you don't need a nice big mansion to be happy."

"I'm not here for small talk."

"No, you're here because you live here."

I rolled my eyes. ” Just cut to the chase, okay. We don’t have time for any banter or anything like that. I just want to move on with my life.”

He let out a sigh. I could tell just by the look on his face that he didn’t know why he’d come over. Or at least he didn’t have the words planned out. That was an act of desperation, But not in the way most people would think. I found his desperation a little admirable. I saw it as him still trying to save whatever we had. But salvaging us wasn’t going to work anymore. I also didn’t have much to say, but I probably had more than he did. “You know as well as I do that there’s no moving on completely until this is settled. You and I are in this together.”

I shook my head while my heart rate increased. “I don’t know if you’re being manipulative, but I’m not in this with you anymore. I don’t want anything to do with it, and I don’t care who shows up at my doorstep. Yes, I pretended to be your fiancée. What would they want for me at this point?”

“To send a message to me? They want me dead. Or at least they want to break my legs. I don’t know. But if they can’t get to me, they will take you to send a message. It’s simple.”

I started to walk to my kitchen because I needed a drink. My mouth had become a desert. My emotions weren’t helping the situation. He followed me into the kitchen. I wasn’t surprised by that. “This seems like a problem for you. And hypothetically, I came with you and lived with you or whatever you want. What’s being next to you doing anything

for me? How long am I supposed to stay around you to feel safe? What's your plan for getting out of this hot water?"

Once again, I looked upon his face, and there was emptiness. He had no answer in his head. Everything that he was doing was impulsive. There was a bit of pity in me. Not for myself. For him.

"You have no idea about Tomaso, do you? But I have an idea. And I have a game plan. It surrounds me, making sure that I'm okay. And then I'm not fearful. I don't know what our future holds. Okay? But I need you to give me some space. I'm not afraid of any rival mafia family. I'm not part of this contract. And whether it's a lie or not, I am choosing to believe that I am no longer at risk. I will take whatever comes my way. And I don't need you by my side to do that. At least not right now."

Disappointment. That's what filled his face at that moment. All the muscles in his face softened. It was kind of like watching hope leave someone. "All right, Angelina. Maybe I made a mistake coming here today."

He walked out after that, and it was the first time throughout the interaction that I had a hint of regret fill my sternum.

When the door slammed, I was alone. It wasn't that I didn't feel anything. I felt a lot of different things toward Tomaso. It wasn't an easy situation for me. Even if throwing him out may have seemed that way to him. He had no idea how much it hurt me. He had no idea how much I wanted things to be normal, but the complexities only made things hazy. No matter what angle I looked at the situation from, I was screwed. The

only thing that I could do was pretend and lie to myself that I wasn't screwed. So how could I have romantic feelings toward him when he was the root cause of everything?

This was what I was left with after he had gone. I had no idea what was going to happen moving forward. And with each passing second, I was on borrowed time.

It was a sentiment that I would have to live with until things blew over. And if they didn't blow over? Well, I would be in deep trouble. One thing was for sure, Tomaso and we were done.



## Chapter 18

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Tomaso

**M**y hand was clenched no matter what minute it was during the day. Maybe that was a bit of an exaggeration, but it was close to true.

Having Angelina shove me from her life was the final straw. I had really thought that I was going to salvage something. I thought I had a chance, and when I realized that I didn't, well, that was when it all came crumbling down. That was when I lost all my patience. I started to go into desperation when it came to my thinking. This was definitely a bad place to be.

I started the spiral while I was in my mansion. Pacing back and forth. Trying to figure out what to do, but nothing was coming to me. Well, there was one thing. I tried to push it to the back of my head as much as possible, but it kept coming up. And that led me to believe that maybe it was the right decision. Of course, it definitely was not. It was a decision that was kind of like the self-destruct button on a machine.

I sat down on my couch, and I really thought about it. And I'm talking. I spent some real mental energy on this plan of mine. Mine. Because I knew that if I was going to go there with my men or mention something like this, there was no turning back. And that was to plan an attack on the Vincenzo family.

Once I even brought that to the table, it would officially be war. They would take it as me being nothing but defiant. And I guess that's what I needed to be at the end of the day because I wasn't going to be a pushover. I had already lost someone who had meant the most to me. They had screwed it all up even

though, in a weird way, they were the reason that Angelina and I had been together in the first place.

The next day, I was in my office with my men, and they all wore long faces, almost as though they knew why I had called him in there.

” We’re going to attack those motherfuckers. Do you understand me? If they want to play games and Russian roulette with their lives, we will bring it to them. The time for standing down is done. The time for letting them pull the cards and control the chessboard is done.”

When I looked across the room, the faces were mixed. It was clear that some were ready to go. And that was mainly the young guys. The older ones, I knew exactly what they were going to say. When they left the room. They were going to say that I was thinking with my pride. They were going to say that I was experienced and a leader. And I had to block them out no matter how much I respected them. Because, of course, I respected the old heads.

And, of course, I respected my father, who entered the room right after I gave my little hoorah speech. His face was stoned. His lips were pressed tightly together. His eyes were on moving. Call me crazy, but he was not impressed by my speech. I could tell he had a million different arguments for why I shouldn’t pick a fight with family inventions. But, I had to say this. ” Dad, before you say anything, they fought with us.”

” Can you all excuse us?” My father said...

At that moment, I felt like a little boy. I can feel myself preparing to get scorned. He most likely would not speak to me like I was ten years old again. But whatever he was going to say, it wasn't going to be fun.

” Are you crazy? Do you have a death wish?” He asked me.

I turned around with my hands on my hips. It was easier to not look at him while we spoke. It kept my head clear. ” What's the alternative, Dad? Let them keep coming after me? Should I tuck my tail between my legs and let them kill me?”

A pause filled the room. I filled it with my own assumptions. I tried to predict what my dad would say, and I knew.

“You know what the alternative is, son.”

That time I looked at him. His eyes were cold yet sympathetic. Even without him telling me what it was, I knew. But it didn't hurt to reiterate it. “You want me to marry Linda? I have not seen this woman since it all started. You want me to tuck my tail between my legs and marry this woman I don't love. Is that it? Dad?”

“You know that would solve everything. You know they would get off your back if you did that because it would show humility.”

” Humility?! That's what I'm supposed to show this time when they came after me because I didn't want to marry and combine families. When do I get a choice?”

My father shook his head. ” You know damn well that there is no choice regarding the mafia. Choices can get you killed.

We've wanted this for years. And now you're undoing a whole lot of work."

I could feel my heart just bending into a pretzel. I was alone. There was no one on this mountain with me anymore. And I was expected to marry someone that I did not care for. What was I to do? I had no alternative but to plead with my father. "You're really taking their side on this one? Over your blood. All you care about right now is power."

"I don't care about power, son. I care about keeping the peace, and I care about seeing you. Stay alive. There's no way out of this other than death. And you know they'll come after me too."

Something told me he was lying about that. Something told me that, just like Angelina, it would be a message to me. If she were to be Slade, I would be a message to my father. Nothing more and nothing less. So, if I was to stand on this mountain by myself. I could at least go out like a man. I looked my father right in the eyes with a face filled with conviction. "I'm going to plan an attack. I'm going to take back who I am. And I don't care what happens. I'm going out the way I want to go out. I am not marrying that woman. So leave my office, or I'll make you leave."

And just like that, I was a different man altogether. I guess you could say I had snapped. This happens when you lose everything you care about and also lose hope at the same time. I had never really experienced it until that moment. I had never lost anything that mattered to me, like Angelina. Losing

my mother to cancer was up there. A normal part of life. Everything with Angelina just felt unfair. And when you feel like life is unfair, sometimes you tend to lash out.

And you know what, with Angelina no longer in my life, or at least with her pushing me away, I had nothing to lose. The sooner the other family died, the sooner I knew Angelina was safe. Even if it killed me in the process.

## Chapter 19

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Angelina

**I**t wasn't going to work. No matter what angle I looked at it from, there was no way I would remain separated from Tomaso.

The second he walked out of my house was the second that I was filled with regret. All I wanted to do was fix things. Even if I knew that there were no fixing things. That's when I knew we were both doomed. One of us was just in denial. Actually, maybe both of us were. Just in different ways, I suppose. None of that mattered, though. What mattered was the fact that I was hurting. I was hurting in a pool of desperation. I regret every decision I had made when it came to pushing away Tomaso. And the craziest part about it all was that it stemmed from a dream.

I made breakfast for myself while thinking about that very dream. In the dream, Tomaso and I had a family. We had one boy who was seventeen months old. And I had just found out that I was pregnant with his second. We had this beautiful house that wasn't even a mansion. It was just something you would see in a Hallmark movie. I had the white picket fence. My child's room looks like it was on that show's extreme makeover home edition. There were many blue toys, everything you would expect with a 17-month-old.

In the dream, Tomaso was a different man. He looked relaxed. His shoulders were not tense. He had an eternal smile as though he could die any moment, a happy man because he had achieved everything he had ever wanted. The sense of pride

that filled my chest was one that I had never felt before. It was a place that I did not want to leave. I looked forward to the next moment. I craved the future. Even though that child was faceless and was not real, I craved to know what it was like to watch him grow up.

But none of this would come to fruition because I would wake up in a cold sweat. There was that one second when real life seemed like a dream. And then that rubbed off, and I realized that the life that was way too perfect had actually been way too perfect. It was nothing but a dream. And I was the furthest place away from that ever becoming a reality. There was no way Tomaso and I would have a family, not via how I had treated him, not how the circumstances had treated both of us.

And this sent me into a panic. It made me feel like time was taking me down in the worst ways. It was like he was dead, and I had run out of time. Of course, I knew this wasn't true. But that didn't stop how I felt. Instead, I went into this hyperactive state of needing to do something.

While I made breakfast, it dawned on me. There was a way that I could fix the situation. It was one of the craziest things I had ever considered, but it might work.

I had this plan: if I went to the rival Mafia family and told them how much I cared for Tomaso, maybe they would call it off. Maybe I could spin it in a way where the story would be believable. It sounded crazy on the surface. It didn't make much sense if I thought too hard about it. But crazier things have happened in life. And I wasn't about to leave something

on the table without trying it. I would need to do some research on the Vincenzo family. I would need to figure out how to get there. But maybe it wouldn't be so hard. Maybe there was a way.

I met with Tomaso's father.

He was a lot less intimidating when it was just him and me. Instead, he had more of a curious look.

His office looked like it was right out of the '90s. It was a lot of browns. It was nothing too spectacular, no fanfare. A simple place for what felt like a simple man. Or at least I saw him a lot simpler than Tomaso. When I looked at Tomaso's father, I saw a man with everything outlined in his head. In terms of beliefs. There was no wiggle room. He was a man who lived by a code, whereas Tomaso always questioned his own motives. I liked Tomaso a lot better, obviously, for that. I like the man who could reflect rather than just tie himself to one belief system and call it a day.

“Have a seat.”

I followed the man's orders. He was polite about it. But there was still a very high level of guardedness with him. I could liken it to skepticism as well. He just looked at me with cunning eyes. Oddly enough, I relaxed when I sat in the seat across from his desk. Because I guess I had some hope in my heart that my plan would work. I just needed a little bit of information.

“What brings you here today? Angelina? I can make guesses, but why waste anyone's time.”

His tone was much softer than I had expected, which was comforting.

“Let me cut to the chase. I want to go state my case to the Vincenzo family. I want to prove that he and I are in love. Because we are. The only issue is that he pushes me away because of his lifestyle. But other than that, we entered into a contract and are in love. So maybe, if I can be honest and prove my case, they’ll drop the whole thing.”

He started to laugh. It was not the type of laugh that one trying to plead something wanted to hear. “You really think that you’re going to walk into the Vincenzo headquarters, Walt’s right up to Mario Vincenzo, and tell them you’re sorry, or it was one big misunderstanding? You might be good for my son because you both don’t think with your head. My son thinks with his ass, and you, I’m not sure what you think with. But you both are two peas in a pod.”

I tried my best to hide my disappointment. I felt like a little kid at that moment. I almost felt like I was his daughter. Call me crazy, but it was a little touching. In a way, I was talking to my father-in-law. Now, how was I to convince this man to give me the information that I needed? At the end of the day, I didn’t technically care what he thought. But I was hoping a little bit that he would make me feel better and tell me I had a chance. While looking him right in his eyes, I knew that wouldn’t happen.

“Look, you have no reason to believe me. And you have no reason to support me. Me going to visit them is on me. It will

have nothing to do with you. All I'm asking is for this information to visit these people.”

He leans back in his chair. I could feel him thinking. I could feel him measuring me up. I had no way of telling whether or not he was going to give me this information. It could literally go either way with how unreadable he was.

Three seconds. That's how long it was before he said anything. Then the words came out. “I'm going to write down the address. This is where Mario Vincenzo is. They know what you look like. And they know who you are. I have no part in this like you said. But I do wish you the best. Because I know how much my son loves you.”

His eyes left mine after lingering for a moment. They drifted to the piece of paper before him. And I was happy because I did not want him to see my eyes get watery. Because that's exactly what they did. I could see it. He could see it. All I needed to ensure was that Mario Vincenzo could see it. And what I was talking about was Tomaso loving me. But more importantly, I needed to show the world I loved him.

It didn't take long for me to drive to the location. It took long enough. There were moments of sheer terror as I drove. My legs started to tremble even though one of them was on the gas pedal. My breath grew short occasionally to the point where it was almost uncontrollable. But as often as I felt like I would lose control, I also somehow gained the ability over those issues to steady myself. It was either I lived in fear or I faced those fears. And that's what I reminded myself on that drive.

When I got to the building, it looked like a regular home. Except there was nothing regular about it. Upon closer inspection, all the outside cars had people in them. Most of them were on their phones or in a newspaper. The more you pay attention, the more you realize these were his men. This was a house that was protected. It was a business, a front.

Most of the heads looked my way when I parked across the street. But only for a second. A few of those heads lingered, and they looked away the second I made eye contact. It was a very strange environment for a mafia team. They almost seemed timid, like they had expected me to arrive.

When I approached the door, which I had thought was foolish in and of itself, a man popped out of the bushes. Maybe not the literal bushes, but he did seem like he came out of nowhere. “Are you Angelina?”

“Yes.”

He opened the door without any question. And then, he began to follow me. The second I was at the stairwell, he said, “Mario has been expecting you. Tomaso’s father briefed him.”

So much for him not having anything to do with it. I pursed my lips and nodded my head as he escorted me upstairs. I wondered what was in store with every step I took up that staircase. I had this brief thought that I would walk through a door and get killed. Another thought: because this man was ahead of me on this staircase, he would just turn around and push me right down. But none of that happened.

I was eventually led to these giant wooden doors that the man opened up, and on the other side was a far bigger room than I had anticipated. It looked almost like some sort of political room or political library. Because the walls were lined with books. In the center of this room were a wooden desk and a man with slicked black hair lying back in a chair behind that wooden desk. I couldn't tell if his mouth was frowning or smirking. This was mainly partly because of the man's features and how far away the man was in general. There was no doubt in my mind that this was Mario. There went my breath again, going short.

"You have quite the nerve coming here," Mario said. Despite his distance away, his voice felt right next to my ears. It was a booming Italian voice. The English wasn't bad, but you could tell the hint of Italian somewhere. What had I gotten myself into? That was the big question. I couldn't believe where I was. But I didn't have much time to think about that.

I started to walk towards the seat that he was gesturing to. "I figured you would respect my gumption if anything. I don't come here out of pride. And I will come here out of nothing but honesty." Right after the word honesty was said, I plopped my butt in the seat. When I sat down, it all seemed so real. I was really doing this. And I wasn't just doing it for me. I was doing it for Tomaso. I was doing it for many people who couldn't do it themselves. I was stopping a war. Or at least I was trying to.

"I do respect you for coming here by yourself. I could kill you right now. I could have your body hidden. No one would ever



find you. And yet here you are, sitting before me.”

I swallowed. Never before had words hit me so hard. “Well, I hope you don’t kill me. Because I came here to tell you that Tomaso wouldn’t be contracted by his fake fiance. He did not want to marry Linda. But even before that, we had chemistry. Something was brewing. I don’t sit here today filled with hot air. He and I love each other when I tell you it’s true. The contract brought us closer. I’ve never loved a man more. And he loves me. He only pushes me away because he doesn’t want me to be part of his life. I’m not speaking in a general sense. I’m speaking on his forbidden life, for lack of a better term. What we have right now is real. We’re not faking it. What he did was stupid initially. But it turned into something else. I wouldn’t be here today if I didn’t love him. And I mean that. So please, I asked you to spare his life. He has not retaliated against your attack. You made your point.”

He raised an eyebrow. There was no way of telling what that eyebrow meant, of course. At any given moment, he could reach under his table, pull out a gun, and put a bullet right between my eyes. He had made that clear.

“When I heard you were coming, I thought you had a death wish. And, I had no idea you could love a man who would put you in a contract like that. But as I sit here—”

Mario was not allowed to finish his sentence, and it wasn’t because I cut him off. It’s because there was a giant thud at the door. The next thing I knew, that door was flying off the hinges.

In the doorway, with two guns in his hands, was Tomaso.

## Chapter 20

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Tomaso

**I**t was all a blur. I hadn't killed anyone in the front. I had taken them down by force and put them to sleep. I held my guns in some cowardly men who put their guns down and let me in. As it turned out, the Vincenzo family wasn't as tough as they were made out to be. I felt like some sort of action hero going through the motions as I went through that house.

When I arrived at the door which Mario sat behind and his guest, everything slowed down for me. I had to think because the last person I had expected to see in that office was Angelina. But there she was with her beautiful brown eyes, busty chest, and little pink lips. Lips. Was it a mirage? Had I been dreaming? Of course not. But as I stared at her, it was the weirdest thing. It felt like I was staring at my future, and everything was in limbo. I was the one that had control. I could have killed Mario right then and there. And then I'd be locked up forever. I will never get to see Angelina again. So this couldn't happen.

Outside, lining the walls, were my men. I put my hand up and said, "Stand down. Stand down now."

The sound of shuffling and putting guns down filled the hallway. Now it could go either way. Was Mario going to see it as me being disrespectful and trying to kill him? That would be how I would take it if I was him. I wouldn't take it lightly if someone came into my office with guns blazing. Then again, what the hell was Angelina doing sitting there? I had so many questions flooding my way and no answer yet.

Oddly enough, Mario wasn't looking at me with this stain. He wasn't even looking at me with contempt. It was like he was looking at me with revelation instead. "A man with pride in himself would have killed this girl without an issue. You would have killed me, but she stopped you didn't she?"

I took a few steps forward into the room. This was weird. How many times in the history of the mafia could a man hold a gun up to a mafia boss and take a few breaths after? "I make no mistake about it. I came here to kill you because I did not want to marry Linda. I did not appreciate being attacked. You struck first. But yes, this girl stopped me because I love her. Be honest here. You would have done the same thing." It was a bold statement. One that I did not know was true or not. It was me just making assumptions. And it was me hoping for the best.

The smirk on the man's face spoke a thousand words without saying them. But then the man did speak. "I would have done the same thing. Except I would have been far grosser about it. I'd hate to admit it, but you're right. I jumped the gun. And I did go after you. Perhaps, this calls for a truce."

Previously, I had my finger on the trigger in case he would pull something. But I could tell in his tone that he was telling the truth. It was hard to believe that this was happening. I couldn't help it. I briefly looked over at Angelina with a smirk of my own. Because in those moments, everything flashed before my eyes. Once again, I felt like she and I could have a future. It sounded hokey. It sounded improbable. But man, I was a happy camper.

“You know she came here to confess her love for you and convince me you loved her. And for a good while. I did not believe her for a second. But when I saw you look at her sitting here and how you pulled your gun down, you don’t need to marry Linda. You have a girl right here who’s willing to die for you. Any man would be a fool to not understand that.”

It was then if there was ever a time for me to pull my head out of my ass and realize what I had before me. I could no longer doubt Angelina. It would definitely be easier said than done. It would also be very challenging. But the challenge was accepted if it meant keeping her in my life.

“No, I’d hate to break up this love ceremony, but I’m done with the both of you. Tell your father to give me a call too, Tomaso.” Mario said.

## Chapter 21

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Angelina

When we were outside the building, I went to Tomaso's car. It was crazy to me. How many of the mafia men no longer cared for either of us. Their attention had gone elsewhere. Well, Tomaso still had some of their attention. But me, it looked like I was off the hook. There was an odd bit of tension between him and me. We stood against his car, stealing glances into one another's eyes. His shoulders were tense. I had no idea what was on his mind, but I knew there was a bit of confrontation somewhere. And I couldn't understand why. Metaphorically the dust had settled. Why was he still upset? Why did I still feel a little upset?

"Are you going to say something?" I asked him.

And now we will find out.

"You shouldn't have done what you did. Are you crazy?"

After everything we've been through, he was pulling this card. This was really how he wanted it to go down? We were reunited. The lion that had been chasing us was no longer chasing us. We could breathe again. Why wasn't he happy? Why has he overlooked the fact that we could be together? These were things that I should have said to him, but instead, I bawled my fist and got angry. Instead, the words would not leave my lips. My eyes were usually brown but definitely red at that moment.

"This is all you have to say to me. After everything that I just did? I risked my life to settle this all, to get us out of the mess

you created. And yet here we are. You're doing nothing but putting me down still."

He shook his head and ran his thumb and index finger across his forehead. "You just said it yourself. You risked your life. I didn't ask you to risk your life. I wanted you to do the opposite. I wanted you to stay safe because what would have happened if he had been killed?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. I'd be dead. How would I know what would happen next?"

He shook his head almost vigorously. "You know what would happen next, Angelina? I would be without the woman that I love."

Wait a minute. I heard the words, but they weren't digesting themselves in my ears. Did he actually just drop the L word? In those seconds of rumination, my heart fluttered. "Did you just say what I think you said?"

He looked at me like he had to play it back in his head. But he knew. He definitely knew. "I did say it. Because I mean it. I love you, Angelina. And I don't want anything to ever happen to you. This is why I get so angry. This is why I get so defensive. Because if I had lost you, I would have lost everything."

I could feel my eyes getting watery. I was doing my best to stop them from doing that. As much as I liked Tomaso's vulnerability, it was hard for me to show it simply because of everything that we had been through. My guard was still up. But as the seconds passed, it was descending.

“I love you too, Tomaso. More than you know. From the second we entered the contract, I wanted it to be nothing more than real. You and I can move on from everything. We don’t have to live in fear anymore. We no longer have to look over our shoulders with worry. You and I can be everything we’ve always wanted to be, and that’s in love.”

Tomaso looked at me with those dark brown eyes of his. There was longing in them like he was looking for some sort of answer to a question he hadn’t asked yet. But here it came, I could tell. “Why do I feel like something is stopping us then?”

I could feel a little smirk grow because of the revelation that filled me. This same revelation made me like some wise old woman with all the secrets of the world in my palm. Because in my own little way, I did. “I know exactly why you feel that way, Tomaso. Because something is stopping us and holding us back. And it’s you.” I pointed to his chest to put a little emphasis on what I had just said. “You’re the one that’s afraid. There’s a reason that you felt like you needed a contract. That contract was a barrier. It was enacted so you could have an excuse to be intimate with me. But the truth is, I never needed a contract to be in your arms. I would have done it all for free.”

If there was one thing I could tell at that moment, Tomaso believed every word I had just said. I just hoped that he could feel those words in the same way that I had.

“Why do you love me, Angelina? After everything you and I have been through, you’re still here. Hell, you even just risked

your life for us. I'm just a bad guy. I'm replaceable. Disposable."

"Hearing you say that about yourself hurts me. Because it couldn't be further from the truth." I tried to give him a set of eyes that were nothing but genuine to get him to understand that my love was not delusional. I needed him to look at himself the same way that I looked at him. "Tomaso, you don't need to be some bad guy. And at the end of the day, you're a man who's made me feel worthy, valuable and loved. Getting you to see that you could be more than just a guy swinging a gun with power; you could be a guy that could feel; it gave me a sense of accomplishment like nothing else. Dare I say that it gave me a purpose. And I wasn't just going to let that purpose fall by the wayside."

It was then that the words stopped. His lips moved their way toward mine. The next thing I knew, the upper part of my top lip was being tickled by stubble in the best of ways. It was a sensation that I had longed for. Something I had missed. Something I would never let go of until my last breath. With our lips battling against one another in a flurry of passion, how we got to his mansion after that was a complete blur. Because we couldn't keep our hands off of one another. Neither one of us had more passion than the other. When his hands weren't tugging at my hair, my hands rubbed up and down his chest. I couldn't feel him enough. When my hand slipped beneath his dress shirt, opening the buttons with defiance, his pecs were warm, tight, and firm. I was so in tune with everything that his chest hair felt like I was in a pool. Everything was turned up to

ten. We may have been in his mansion, but with our tongues entwined, it felt more like I was traveling through the sky on a magic carpet.

He was kissing me while pushing me across the living room. We interlocked our fingers while we kissed. Never in my life had I kissed someone like that where it was just full, unbridled passion.

Eventually, my back hit the wall gently. I liked it. I enjoyed the sensation of losing control and having him take the reins. He held my arms up against the wall as he kissed me. This beautiful, euphoric rush ran from my lower back and spine. It made me kiss him harder, get wetter, and grow a stronger desire for him. I simply couldn't get enough of him. No matter how fast or aggressively my lips moved, I wanted more.

The scent of his cologne, that aroma that made me feel like I was walking through a market that sold various spices, filled my nose. It was like a drug, an essence that once again took me to that cloud in the sky and away from reality. Or better yet, I wasn't being taken from reality; Tomaso had become my reality.

I let my hand descend between his legs. Those dress pants of his were in my way. My fingers went to the belt and then the button. My heart started to pound when I could feel the cold metal zipper on my fingertips. I was only a few movements away from grabbing that meaty cock of his. I kind of wanted to tease myself and make the desire even stronger. But he made it that difficult for me because he inched his torso closer

to where my panties were most definitely soaked. I had to grab it.

I slipped my finger beneath his boxer's waistband and yanked that shit down. His semi-hard cock sprung up against me, and I caught the thing. It was warm and squishy for a second before fully hard and erect. I ran my finger over the vein that traveled across the front of it. That was my prelude to stroking. The second my hand stroked, his eyes closed, and his movements slowed. It was like I had control of his little joystick. The only thing about that was there was nothing small about his joystick.

He let out these moans that I could tell he was trying to minimize. I could understand why. Here he was as this big and hulking mafia man. His image was tough. He wasn't supposed to be moaning in pleasure. Because of his restraint, it only made me want to go harder to get him to break. I wanted Tomaso to let those walls down and be real. I jerked harder, with more of a rhythmic pattern. When those moans got louder, I doubled down on my technique. He enjoyed the twisting motion that I was doing. He liked the mix that I had going between gentle and aggressive.

"Fuck, baby." He blurted out.

I smiled. I was getting somewhere. That somewhere was where I wanted to be.

I again increased the speed and aggression until his hands fell to mine. He stopped me. "I don't want to come that way." He said, almost in a whisper. Because his face was angled down

when he admitted that, I couldn't tell how red his cheeks were. But I had no doubt that they were most likely tomato red.

“Are you sure?” I teased.

He laughed and kissed me. I jumped a little because he took back the power in the situation. His hand went right to my vagina. He rubbed it so hard that I had to double-check whether I still had fabric covering my slit. I did. He was just so powerful in his movements.

“Take me,” I said to him. Unlike him, I had no reservations about how I came. Whether it was his tongue, fingers, or cock, the only thing I cared about was having this man take me down and have his way with me. He had no reservations because his muscled arms lifted me off the floor, and the next thing I knew, he was carrying me over to the couch. This was everything that I ever wanted. It was much like watching one of those teen drama shows and being envious of the characters who did something romantic like that. You never quite think that you will ever be in those shoes. That's not real, after all. A strong and sexy man doesn't carry you across his oversized living room in his mansion. But there I was, proving the narrative of reality all wrong.

I let out this little giggle when he plopped me down on his big, fluffy white couch. It was my little paradise. Every second that passed was one I was taking snapshots of in my head. I wanted to keep them forever in my head as memories. I knew they'd remain no matter what came into my life after that day.



He and I locked eyes when my back was against those couch cushions. There was this tremendous sense of anticipation inside of me. It was like some sort of level above the excitement. I had never felt such a feeling before, but I loved it.

His lumberjack-like hand followed the direction of his eyes—to my breast. I had no time to let that beautiful gaze sink in because his hand yanked at my top, pulling down the fabric to expose my bra. My nipple grew hard instantly. I was surprised the thing hadn't poked a hole through it somehow. I knew it was coming but wanted him to yank the bra down. I had these vivid images of him putting that nipple in his mouth and sucking. Instead, he pulled me up from the couch to remove my blouse. There was a smirk on my face while he did that. I wasn't psychic, but I predicted he'd waste no time taking my bra off. And he didn't.

When my breasts were free of the bra, he grabbed one firmly in his hand and brought it to his mouth. Those soft yet masculine lips of his wrapping their lips around my little pink nipples were everything. I somehow left my body and never felt more alive at the same time. There were moments when he yanked my nipple, and then there were the times when he was super gentle and knew exactly how to tease me. He made this motion where he'd take the tip of his tongue and flick at the tip of my nipples. Every time I'd think my nipples couldn't get any harder, they did.

While his tongue worked its magic, his hand played with my other breast. My eyes wouldn't look away from how his thick

finger manhandled my nipples. It was like I was being explored on all ends. As much as I loved having him explore them that way, I wanted more. I wanted his cock.

Because I was impatient, I stopped him from what he was doing and pushed him down onto the couch, where I peeped at him, smiling at my actions. I started to suck him off again until he could handle it no more.

He waited a few seconds before he got on top of me and put his cock in me. I was super wet, almost dripping. This made it easy to put his cock in me. I couldn't have been happier once it was. Just the act of having it stuff me was satisfying in and of itself. I almost didn't even need him to penetrate me at that point. But of course, that's what happened a millisecond later.

Tomaso's eyes closed tight. His jaw extended forward to where it looked like he would let out a grunt at any moment. I watched him like I was in a theater watching a movie. Something was fascinating about watching an eternally tough man, usually stoic, filled with thoughtfulness on his face, transform into this vulnerable man all because of me. It gave me a little bit of an ego trip, to be honest. It made me feel far larger than I was. But at the same time, I was getting close to climaxing. The harder he penetrated me, the closer I got, and I felt myself losing control. My legs even started to twitch.

"I'm gonna...." I couldn't finish my sentence even if I tried. He pulled out shortly after I had finished. The warmth of his juices hit my belly, and I could only hope this would be a centerpiece of my future moving forward.

We snuggled after sex. That act was, for whatever reason, surprising to me. I guess I hadn't truly expected the affection so soon after getting back together, even though he and I had just shared our bodies with one another.

We lay there in silence for a good while. That entire time, I wondered what was going through his mind. Those hulking arms of his were holding me close to him. It was like he didn't want to let me go. In a way, that was enough for me. I didn't need more than that in terms of words. A girl could wonder. There was no harm in that. With furry chest inches from my face, why question things and ruin the moment? Why concern him with the future when it wasn't yet guaranteed? I had everything that I wanted right there in the present. And if I had learned anything from my time with Tomaso, the current moment mattered most.

But then, out of nowhere, I got the words I desired and needed to hear to confirm everything I wanted for my future.

“I love you, Angelina.”

With tears in my eyes and a strong attempt to keep those tears from falling, I told him, “I love you more, Tomaso.”

We held one another even tighter after those words were uttered. And call me crazy, but I had no doubts about our future. Perhaps that was not the wisest perception. Perhaps I still needed to not focus on what was to come and instead focus on the man before me. But you know what, I was happy. And that was all that mattered. Plus, something told me that I didn't need to worry about anything else.

I had Tomaso, and he had me.

# Epilogue

**Tomaso**

I thought the contract was the worst thing that could have happened to me. And how could I not? It was set in place to avoid marrying a woman I hadn't seen since the whole debacle had arrived. The contract felt dirty. It felt wrong. And it felt like just another set of shackles outside of trying to be forced to marry Linda. There was nothing fun about having to draw up a legally binding piece of paper that would ruin Angelina's life. I didn't feel good about that. I felt tremendously horrible at first. And I had done some pretty terrible things in my lifetime. You think you get a pass with that stuff when you're in the mafia. Instead, your hands are forced. You become a shell of your former self in an attempt to survive in a world that no one can prepare for. And I dragged her into it with the promise of money, hoping not to have to marry someone. No matter what angle you looked at it from, it was downright terrible to approach her.

At the same time, yes, I was trying to avoid all that. But I also had not been looking for love. What's the last thing on my radar? People like me, people in the mafia, did not find love. They enter into loveless marriages as they try to escape their daily fear of getting killed in the streets. There was nothing real about his marriage. The man at home was not the man he was. He was a character that he was playing. He was trying to be present when there was no being present. The Mafia man was always bound to his fears. He was always looking over his shoulders and waiting for that bullet to be put between his eyes.

Now that was the life that I thought I was going to have. One day. I would hit my mid-thirties, maybe my early 40s, and finally, settle down with a woman I didn't love. The funny thing is, this scenario was about to play out with Linda, yet I couldn't do it. But I also did not envision myself falling in love. I didn't even think that I was capable of such a thing.

But there came Angelina. It was fitting that she had the word *angel* in her name. Because, at times, it did feel like she had fallen from the heavens and right into my lap. She was too good to be true. She had made me want to live for something. Each breath that I took when I was around her had a purpose and a meaning. And because of that, I was doing something unprecedented.

"I'm out, Dad," I said to my father while standing before his desk.

"You're out? Out of what common sense?"

I shook my head with determination in my eyes. This was something that I was not going to waver on. I had given it much thought that there was no going back. "I'm out of the mafia Dad. I'm done. I would no longer be part of this life. The life that I want is with Angelina."

There was a moment when my father didn't move a muscle on his face or say a word. But then, to my surprise, my father smiled. "I genuinely hope you would come to me with this. I dreamed of the day you would ask to be out."

Now I was the speechless one. "What are you talking about? Since I was 15, you wanted this life for me."

He shook his head. “You rewrite history. You came to me. Remember? You saw me kill that man. Maybe it traumatized you. Maybe it didn’t. I don’t know. All I know is when you accidentally walked in on me. Strangling someone who owed me way more money than most people owe in student loans, you changed.”

It was a memory that I had stuffed away. Rightfully so. No man wants to envision his father killing someone. Especially when it was just over money. That moment shaped my life moving forward. It took the joy out of most things and told me there was a brutally ugly side to life, and I wanted to avoid it. Because when I saw my father’s face, the terror that had washed over it, all because I had walked in on him doing something that he did not want me to see, it was like watching a puppeteer put his hand up Kermit’s ass. The magic of life had been ruined for me. I was forever tainted. That was until I met Angelina.

“You’re right, Dad. Maybe I do remember this a certain way. But that’s only a coping mechanism. I know what it did to me. And I’m finally able to walk away.”

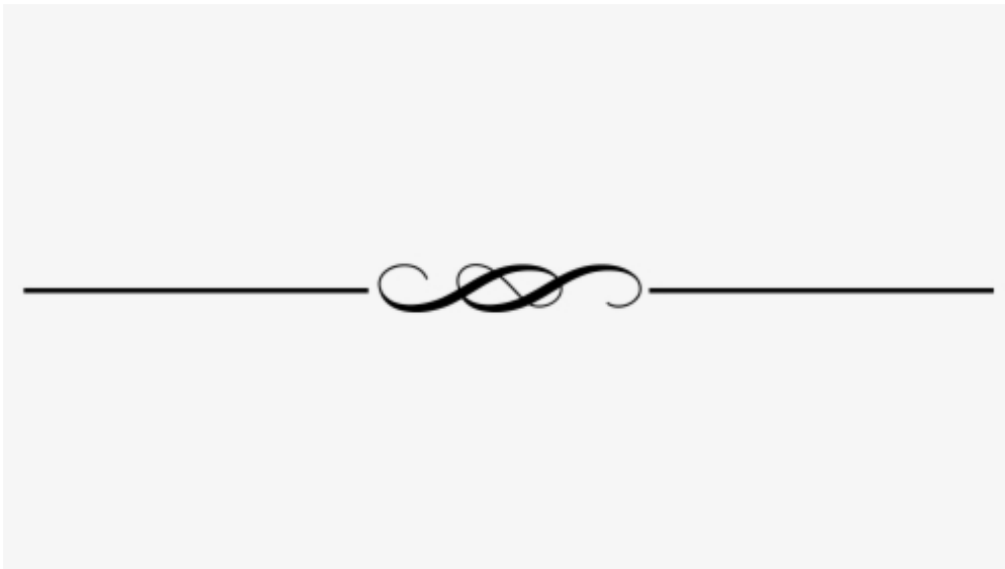
He nodded, got up from the desk, rounded than that, and oddly enough, pulled me in for a hug. I couldn’t recall the last time I had gotten a hug for my father. It was almost startling. It was a feeling I wasn’t used to, nor could I compare it to anything else. Even though the man was capable of heinous things, didn’t have much of a soul left, and would die, I didn’t want the hug to end. I guess that was the little boy in me.



When the hug didn't come, I looked him in his eyes and asked, "Why are you so happy for me?"

After hesitation, he said, "Because you did something just now that I could never do as a man. And I'm proud of you, son. Go live your life with your little girlfriend. Treat her right."

And that's exactly what I planned to do.



After everything that had happened between us, we deserved a vacation, a time away from the place that would always bring us back to the contract. But now, we can look at the contract with different eyes. We could reflect on both. Angelina and I had the same perspective. The contract, which had once had such a dark cloud and evil feeling around it, could now be considered something that brought us together. It was funny how you could change your perception that way.

The little vacation I spoke about, I took her to Hawaii, which neither of us had ever been to. The air that felt so soothing from the palm trees didn't feel real, all the way down to the

way that sun sat in the sky. Hawaii was one of those places that had always been on my mind but never seemed like an actual possibility in terms of travel. My past life did not afford guys like me to go to places like that. But that had all changed, luckily for me.

We walked on the beach. There was no one around us. The only sounds that filled our ears were the rustling of the water and palm tree leaves swaying in the distance. You would think I would be utterly relaxed in a moment like this. And yeah, there was a part of me that definitely was. I was more relaxed and back home in the middle of the mafia business. But I was still nervous enough that it made my hands sweat. Something that, of course, Angelina had noticed.

“How can your palm be sweaty in a place like this?” She asked.

I chuckled. “I don’t know. Maybe I put much pressure on myself to make things perfect.”

She looked at me with wide eyes. “This is a vacation for you as well. There should be no pressure. It should all be about relaxation and fun.”

I nodded. “Well, when you have something up your sleeve that you just want to happen and go flawlessly, the amount of pressure comes in. I really wouldn’t expect you to understand unless you experienced it.”

The look of curiosity on her face is somewhat funny. ” You’re going to have to explain that one to me, Tomaso.”

I wasted no time in giving her an answer. “Of course.”

I stopped her from walking, and that look of curiosity filled her even more so. I got down on one knee as she brought her hands to her face. “I know I got you that ring for the contract, but I got you a better one. And I want this to be real. If you have it, I want this to be the start of our future. Angelina,” I said as I opened the ring box. ” Will you marry me? For real.”

I could see the tears in her eyes and hoped that was the answer I sought.

“Yes. Of course, I will.” She kissed me without me even needing to get up. But I did anyway because I just wanted her lips closer.

I was a little taken aback when she pulled away. “What’s the matter?” I asked her.

She looked to the sand and then backed up at me with a smile. “You’re not the only one with an announcement, Tomaso. I was waiting for the right time, but now that you’ve put this beautiful ring on my finger, I don’t think there’s a better time to tell you you’ll be a father.”

Holy crap. Now my eyes were tearing up.

“Are you serious?”

All she did was nod. And that was the confirmation that I needed to know that my future was secured. I wasn’t going to have to worry about anything anymore. Because I would have the family that I always wanted.

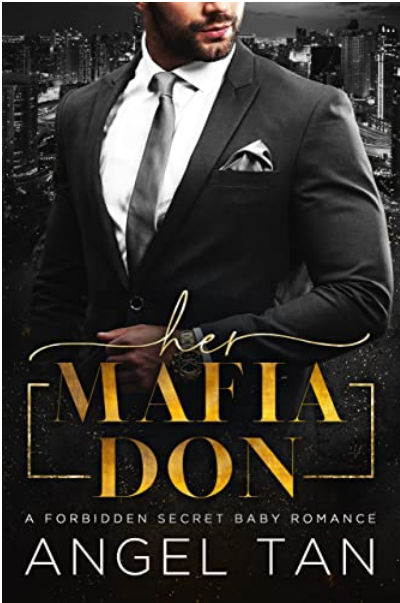
I would have my happily ever after, and so would she.

**The End**

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