



Trouble

SKYLER SNOW
BREA ALEPOÚ

TROUBLE

RUTHLESS DADDIES 2

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BREA ALEPOU

CONTENTS

[Warning and Triggers](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty One](#)

[Chapter Twenty Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty Four](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Ruthless Daddies 2 Series](#)

[No Good](#)

[Skyler Snow](#)

[Brea Alepou](#)

[Also by Skyler Snow](#)

Also by Brea Alepou

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This book contains material suitable only for mature readers.

Editor: Raven Quill

Proofreader: Karlien Fourie

Beta: Tammy Jones

Cover Artist: Charli Childs

Formatter: Brea Alepou

WARNING AND TRIGGERS

Murder, torture, violence, ptsd, manipulation, & toxic relationship.

Please note, the purpose of this book is for romance entertainment **only**. This is a work of fiction. Enjoy your time out of reality.



PROLOGUE

CALEB

MY HEART RACED as I watched the warehouse carefully. Two men out front, one in the back, one circling the entire establishment. I'd give them one thing, they were working their asses off to protect the Vitale's assets. Too bad I was better at what I did. I watched them making their rounds the exact same way they always did for the tenth day in a row. Nothing ever changed. They were as predictable as a fart after eating a can of beans.

It's almost too fucking easy.

I waited until they cleared their normal path before I rounded the building and stopped at the side door. As usual, it was locked. No matter, I had the solution to that. I dragged out my tools and shoved the pick into the lock. The gentle scratching of metal against metal always massaged my brain in just the right way. I grinned as tumblers shifted and I heard that sweet, sweet sound.

Click.

“Fuck yeah.”

I let myself into the building just as the sound of footsteps echoed closer. As soon as it was closed, I let out a deep breath. There were people inside, but they stayed in a room off to the

side playing poker all night, drinking, and smoking. I'd watched them too. They never changed either.

Walking down the rows of containers, I made my way to the central spot, the one I needed the most. Carefully, I stopped in front of one of them and glanced around. Nothing. If there was one thing I knew about men like this, they didn't do cameras in places of illicit activity. Sure, it would be better for them, but someone getting their hands on evidence would turn their whole world to shit. It was better to work in the dark than to get yourself tossed in prison. Not that I objected. It made my job a hell of a lot easier.

I carefully cracked open the top of one of the crates. The creaking sounded so damn loud in my ears that I gritted my teeth and waited. When nothing but the sound of laughter and arguing greeted me, I shook my head. *Yeah, they ain't the brightest.* I opened the crate the rest of the way and laid the top on the ground. When I glanced into the box, my dead little heart went pitter-patter at the glorious sight before me.

Brick on top of beautiful fucking brick of cocaine. Each one was easily worth twenty-eight to thirty thousand dollars once I cut it and packaged it up. The best part was that it was all profit. No more dealing with my dickhead supplier. I sliced one open and tasted it. Tingling danced on my tastebuds. *Good shit.* I was ready to move up to the big leagues. Me and the Hitters had big dreams, it was time to chase them.

I pulled out my phone. "You ready?" I whispered.

Drav gave me a thumbs up and a nod on the video. Good. I pushed my phone back into my pocket and adjusted the piece in my ear so I could talk to him.

"Make sure the car is ready to go."

“It is.”

“And the others?”

“All at the crates. Come on, strap up and talk later, dickhead.”

“You’re a dickhead,” I muttered.

“I swear to god.”

“I’m going, I’m going.”

Goddamn, Drav was no fun. While I was having the time of my life, he was probably sitting behind the wheel, fingers drumming away, trying not to piss his pants. He’d been outvoted to move forward with the plan so he had no choice but to go along with it. I had no idea why he didn’t just sit back, relax, and have some fun with it at this point.

I picked up the first brick and shoved it into the pocket I’d modified on my tactical vest. As quickly as I could, I stuffed one after the other in place until they surrounded my body. I strapped four more to my thighs using my duct tape to secure everything in place. I didn’t want to lose a single gram.

“Hey, someone’s pulling up,” Drav said. “Shit, shit, I think that’s the big boss.”

I froze. “What? Tell me you’re fucking me around.”

“Why the fuck would I be joking?” he snapped. “Shit. That’s Benito Vitale with his little sidekick.”

“The husband?”

“No, the right-hand man himself. Tony.”

At least it wasn’t the husband. The stories I’d heard about Mr. Vitale were enough to make me never want to cross his

insane fucking path. Still, getting the big boss and his number two wasn't much better.

"I'm all strapped up. Heading out—"

"You can't go out the way you came," he hissed. "They went around that way."

"Okay, then I'll go out the front."

"The guards are posted and they are *not* moving," Drav said, the panic in his voice rising. "Shit, shit, shit."

"Will you stop shitting yourself?" I snapped. "Damn, you're gonna make me have a fucking heart attack at twenty-seven." My eyes searched the warehouse. "I'll find my own way out."

"You need to hurry the fuck up. If they come this way, I'm taking off and leaving your ass. I told you this was a stupid fucking pl—"

I hung up on him. If he took off without me, he would get kicked out of the Hitters and would be stripped of his shit. He knew better than to get twitchy.

The door cracked open, moonlight spilling into the dimly lit room. I moved toward the container lid, but if I lifted it, I would be busted in no time flat. Instead, I ducked behind the box and peeked around the side. Benito walked in swiftly with Tony right by his side. They talked quickly, but they were so far away, I couldn't catch a word they were saying. My phone buzzed against my thigh. I glanced down and tugged it out. When I hit the answer button, Drav glared at me.

"What are you doing, dumbass? Get out of there!"

"No shit," I hissed back.

My heart raced in my ears, the sound drowning out everything else around me. *Calm down. The door is right there. All I have to do is wait for them to go into the other room and...*

Every bit of optimism in my chest died as they started walking toward me. They weren't going into the room with the other guys, instead, two of the deadliest men in New York were coming my way. Every step they took made my heartbeat throb in my temples. I was going to die of a stroke if I didn't chill out, but I couldn't get myself to calm down no matter how much I tried.

“Why is that lid on the floor?”

My body stiffened. I glanced around the crate and watched as the two of them stood there, staring at the container top. Tony immediately went for his gun. One second he tugged it out, the next, the click of the safety as he turned it off made me feel nauseous. Had I really even heard a click? No idea. Maybe I was making it all up. Maybe I was hallucinating. Either way, I was about to be dead in less than five minutes if I didn't do *something*.

“Might be from check,” Tony said.

I'd studied both of them closely before I even started on this little trip of mine. Hell, I'd examined all of the Vitales. *A lot of good that's done because I'm about to die.* Every footstep made my blood rush until I couldn't take it anymore. There was no way to get out without being seen. Either I could go for it or I could sit there and die.

My body went from stone-still to action as I charged from behind the crate. I dodged past two shocked men before the first bullet rang out. It shot past my head, narrowly missing me as I panted.

“If you keep running, I’ll put one in your fucking back! Stop!”

Torn between my head or my urge to flee, I shot forward. And promptly sprawled onto my face. The crate I’d tried to dodge dug into my side. Pain flared and my breathing picked up as I tried to drag myself to my feet again. Before I could even get up completely, a foot came down on my back. Fire shot up my spine as I grunted. Cool steel kissed the back of my neck.

“Hands on the floor and spread your fucking fingers.”

I sucked in a shaky breath as I did just that. My mind raced. There had to be a way out of this. There was always a way out of everything. I’d lived my life by that credence. No matter what situation arose, I could talk my way out of it.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” I said, ignoring my racing heart. “I know this looks bad, but it’s not what you think.”

“There’s cocaine strapped all over your body,” one of the men said. “Why? And make it quick before I put a bullet through your pasty neck.”

My heart squeezed. Okay, then that was Tony. Benito still hadn’t taken out a gun, and as I glanced over my shoulder, I noticed he stood glaring down at me while Tony kneeled. The look on the man’s face, Tony, was enough to make anyone piss themselves.

“I, uh…” I wracked my brain. “Yeah, I don’t have a good explanation for that, and I really, really don’t want to get shot, man.”

“If you didn’t want to get shot, you wouldn’t have broken in. I’m gonna say you definitely wanted to get shot.”

“That’s an interesting viewpoint. Shit!” I grunted as he kicked me in the side. “Okay, I get it. You don’t have a sense of humor.”

“Why are you here?”

The voice that spoke sent shivers down my spine. I really should have known the difference between the two of them because I’d heard Benito Vitale’s voice too many times to count on TV. He was a philanthropist, a billionaire, an upstanding citizen of the great state of New York. Unless you looked deeper and saw him for what he truly was; criminal scum just like the rest of us.

“Yeah, I don’t have a good excuse,” I said. “How about I give all this stuff back and just disappear, huh? You’ll never have to see me again.”

“Shoot him,” Benito said.

“Wait!” I called out, my voice shaking. I quickly swallowed, trying to mask the fear in my voice. “You don’t want to do that.”

“And why don’t I?”

My mind raced a million miles per second. What could I tell him that would make a difference? These men didn’t care about much, but they did give a damn about their profit margins.

“You won’t be able to figure out where the rest of it is.”

There was a pause before Benito’s voice rang out. “The rest of what?” he growled.

“Boss, we’ve got a problem,” someone said. “Four more of our warehouses were just hit.”

“Did they catch anyone?”

“No. There’s product missing from each warehouse though.”

I felt their eyes fall on me. “Oops,” I muttered. “That might have been me.”

A swift kick to my side knocked the grin right off my face. I curled inward on myself, groaning as I waited for the pain to stop.

“Take him,” Benito said. “Tony, I don’t have time for this. Figure out where our shit is. I’ve got bigger matters to attend to.”

“Got it, boss.”

A hand wrapped around my arm. I was yanked to my feet until I came face-to-face with Tony.

“Move,” he snapped. “I gotta keep you alive, but you don’t need kneecaps to live.”

“That seems excessive,” I muttered.

As I turned around, something hard struck me on the back of the head. The world went fuzzy as Drav yelled in my ear. Hands grabbed at my body, keeping me from crashing to the floor. My vision narrowed to a pinprick.

Well, this didn’t go the way I wanted it to.

CHAPTER ONE

TONY

A COOL DRAFT wafted through one of the many buildings under a shell corporation that the Vitale family owned. The rough brick scraped against my shirt, catching the soft fabric anytime I so much as breathed. Time ticked away at a snail's pace, but I couldn't afford to rush things. Being brash led to mistakes. Cigarette in hand, I lit up and inhaled the savory taste of tobacco. It coated my tongue and slid to the back of my throat. Euphoria rushed through me.

Really need to give this shit up. I could tell myself that until I was blue in the face, but truth be told, cigarettes weren't going to be the reason I went out. Shit, I'd be bleeding out and still would crave one more hit.

A heavy cloud of smoke settled in front of me, obscuring my view of the idiot who thought robbing the Vitales was the way to go. I knew there were dumb street punks out there, but this one took the damn cake. His breathing changed just slightly. If we hadn't been the only ones in the room, I probably wouldn't have noticed.

Normally Enzo would interrogate; he was a god at it. I envied the way he could tear a man apart without an ounce of hesitation. I didn't care for the blood. I wasn't a stranger to it, but I'd prefer my torture methods to be a little less messy and

chaotic. I could never replicate it but I wasn't bad at it either. Still, Enzo was busy for the night and I was stuck with the coke thief.

I took one last hit of my cigarette and flicked it to the side. Red flakes bounced off the cherry before dying out in a small puddle of water. *I want out of this rank place.* It'd been at least a week since I'd gotten to go home. Benito was on high alert which meant I was working day in and day out.

This fucker is cutting into my down time.

“How long are you going to pretend to be asleep?”

His foot twitched, but he kept his head down as if he was still knocked out cold. His arms and legs were bound but his mouth was left uncovered.

“Sixteen kilos of coke is a lot, what were you planning to do with it?”

No answer.

I pushed off the wall as a heavy sigh dripped from between my lips. Dropping down in a crouch, I attempted to meet his eyes. His brows twitched before smoothing out once more. He was really trying the whole “I'm asleep” thing.

“The faster you talk, the faster I can put a bullet in your head and go home. I have—” Shit I didn't have anything waiting for me, not even food. I should probably put in an order and have it delivered.

I stood back up, groaning as my knees cracked. “Getting too old for this shit.”

I was only thirty-two, but shit, some days it felt as if I was knocking on sixty. I grabbed a fist full of pitch-black hair. I

was met with a sharp jawline and taut cheeks. His nose was perfectly straight and his thick lashes rested on his cheeks.

It's a real shame I'm going to have to mess his pretty face up.

His head fell back. I'd have to applaud the guy for keeping up the facade. I rested my hands on his shoulders and brought my knee up. Pulling it back, I brought it full force into his chest.

A choked off shout came from the thief as his eyes nearly bugged out of his face. "Fu—fuck!" he sputtered as he attempted to breathe.

"I'm being nice right now."

"Could have fooled me," he wheezed.

"Answer my question."

He licked his lips finally looking up at me. Fire sparked in his blue eyes. I was going to snuff out that spark.

"You know, most people tack on a please when asking a question."

"I figured you were dumb but I didn't think you were this stupid," I said with cool indifference.

A visible shiver wrecked his lean frame. "I'll have you know I graduated at the top of my class."

Fine. I let his hair go and took a step back. A single kick hadn't been enough. I rolled my shoulders back.

"Wait. Before you do something we'll both regret—"

My fist cut through the air and landed in the middle of his chest. The heat from his body brushed along my knuckles, sparking my love for violence. I followed up with three more

before I stopped. The thief was coughing and wheezing. Drool coated his chin, and his eyes were wide as he fought his restraints.

“We can keep going.”

I unbuttoned the buttons on my sleeves. Rolling them up inch by inch until they were secure under my elbow. My movements were free, and I was less likely to get blood on my shirt. I examined the man in front of me. I liked this one.

“Fuck.” The thief shook his head. His pitch black hair fell over his face but it did nothing to hide the fight that still burned in his eyes. “Don’t I get a safe word?”

My head fell to the side as I studied the idiot in front of me. He had balls in the most unlikely way. Most people would have been cowering in fear long before they made it to this point.

“You know who I am and who I work for.”

He shrugged. “I mean, aren’t you all the same? Evil villains waiting to kill people for no reason.”

“What were you doing with the drugs?”

“What drugs? Look, I was just there checking security. You know that sort of thing.”

It felt like I was talking to Giancarlo or a brick wall. Maybe taking him to Enzo would be the best route. Showing incompetence wasn’t going to work either. Benito had given me a job and I would see to it.

“Fine.”

“You’re letting me go?” His face lit up like a kid on Christmas morning.

I didn't bother answering him as I moved over to the duffle bag I'd brought with us. "Whoever was on the job with you abandoned you."

"No idea what you're talking about. I work alone."

"He was screaming in your ear." I picked what I needed and headed over to the thief. "What was he screaming? Jacob? No, it started with C or K." I headed toward the thief, thinking with every step. "Kaden, Calum, Ca—" I watched him intently as I listed off names. There'd been nothing to identify him. And for him to be a dumb thief, he wasn't in any of the police systems. I'd had one of the cops on our payroll look up his fingerprints. "Calan, Canon, Caleb, K—" I stopped short as his right foot moved.

"Caleb then."

"That's not my name," Caleb said.

I hummed. "Either way, you'll tell me everything shortly."

"What does that mean?" His blue eyes flickered down to what was in my hand. True panic glimmered in his gaze. He rocked the chair back as if he could escape me.

But he was secured to the chair, and no one was coming to save him. I smiled and moved behind him. Caleb shifted his head every which way looking for me. It would be funny if he wasn't cutting into my sleep time. I checked my phone and groaned. I had another two hours tops.

"If you have somewhere to be, we can reschedule. Or not. You know I didn't get to steal it and—"

"But you hit the other warehouses."

Caleb's mouth snapped shut. The clank of his teeth hitting each other rang in my ears. I pulled the chair back, suspending

it on two legs.

“I won’t bother asking you questions. I know you won’t answer.” I drapped the towel over his face, and before he could dislodge it, poured water over the cloth.

Caleb instantly started squirming, his screams were nothing more than gurgling noises as he thrashed about against his restraints. Keeping the chair back was the hard part. Once the bottle was empty, I dropped it to the side. Caleb was still suffocating with the wet cloth covering his face. The veins in his pale neck protruded as he continued to fight against it.

The way his lungs must be screaming in agony, and his brain was probably on fire, trying to figure out a way to live. I pulled the towel off and dropped the chair back down. I leaned over his shoulder. His eyes were wide, and mouth gaped open like a fish as he tried to remember how to breathe.

“Who are you working for?”

Caleb didn’t answer, and I waited exactly fifteen seconds before I was tilting the chair back again.

“Fuck, no, wait.”

I dropped the soaking wet towel back over his face and he instantly started shouting. A spark lit up in the pit of my stomach and worked up my spine. Shit, my bad habit was coming out to play. I uncapped the water bottle, but before pouring it, I leaned forward and pressed my mouth against Caleb’s ear.

“You can scream all you want.” The serotonin rush was so strong, it was like doing a line of pure uncut coke as it rushed through my veins. “In fact, I want you to. No one is going to save you. Not from me.”

Caleb's muffled words meant nothing if he wasn't going to answer me. I tilted the water bottle and watched the water splash over his face. It soaked into the towel. The moment it did, Caleb's faint curses turned into choked screams. The chair shook, the metal legs clanged against the concrete flooring causing more of a racket. By the time the bottle was empty, Caleb was thrashing so badly, I had to hold the chair with both hands.

Should have prepared better for this. I waited a bit before letting the chair fall back down. The towel made a splotch sound the moment it hit the floor. Caleb's head fell forward. He trembled from head to toe.

I placed two fingers under his chin and pushed his head up so we were eye to eye. Fear and panic were easy to pick out in his too wide gaze, but what surprised me most was the fire still flickering in his eyes. A smile pulled at my lips before I could think better of it.

“Who are you working for?”

Caleb's pink tongue swiped across his lips, clearing it of the water droplets that clung to them. I shrugged when he didn't answer right away. I had plenty of water bottles. And if I ran out, it was nothing to have someone bring me more.

I let him go and made my way to the duffle bag, pulling out the remaining five bottles. I turned with them clutched in my arms. The moment Caleb saw them, he started rocking the chair.

“No, no!”

I quickly sat them down and caught his chair just as he rocked it too hard.

“You can make all of this stop. Tell me who you’re working for.”

Caleb’s chest rose and lowered at a rapid pace. He was going to start hyperventilating if he kept it up. I needed information, and much as I wanted to continue, I wasn’t going to get anything out of him when he was so damn worked up. I wrapped my hand around his throat and brought our faces close. Water droplets sprinkled over my face from his hair.

“Breathe.”

“Ca—can’t.” His panic was building with every passing second.

I pressed harder against his pulse point. “I said breathe. Stop responding and just do it.”

Caleb looked ready to argue. Laughter tickled the back of my throat. This idiot, even while panicking, wanted to talk smack.

“Do what I do.” I inhaled, held it for a second and blew out a breath. Caleb did the same but broke off into another coughing fit.

“Try again.”

Caleb didn’t argue or bother glaring at me as he attempted to breathe with me. After a few more tries, he finally had it and his racing pulse had slowed down somewhat. I let him go.

“No one,” Caleb answered.

“Where is the rest of the coke?”

Caleb flinched. “The moment I tell you, I’m as good as dead.”

He wasn't wrong. I forced him to meet my gaze again and really let him see exactly the kind of man I was. "You're only getting out two ways. A painless death or one where I drag it out so long that by the end, you will be begging me to kill you."

"Can I choose neither?"

I shook my head. Some people were too stupid to live, and Caleb was definitely one of those people.

"Have it your way." I picked up the towel. It was heavy, weighed down by the water.

"Wait, no more of that. Punching works."

The towel smacked against Caleb's face, and I grabbed another bottle of water.

"Waif, waif," he garbled through the towel.

"All you have to do is answer the questions."

If Caleb agreed, I didn't hear or truly care. I poured more water over his face. It splashed off the soaking wet towel and soaked into my shirt. I couldn't find it in me to care one way or another. Instead of stopping after one bottle, I grabbed another. I continued to pour it over his face until I got halfway and he begged me to stop. I removed the towel.

"Fu—please, no, no more." His teeth chattered together as his trembles shifted to a full on shake.

The cool breeze picked up in the warehouse. His lips, once pink, were turning a startling blue.

"You look like a soaked rat."

"I work for no one, I swear."

"Why did you take the drugs?" I asked.

“Easy job, big pay out. No more shit supplier that cuts the already shitty product.”

I rubbed my temples. “How did you know where to hit?”

Caleb didn’t answer right away, and I went back to standing behind him.

“Wait, no. I did research. It’s not hard if you know where to look. I grew up here, and I listen to whispers.”

I didn’t feel like I got the entire truth but it was something.

“Who else was on the job with you?”

“No one. I work alone.”

I tsked. “I know you’re lying. This is your fault, Caleb.”

“No, I’m not!” he shouted. “I hired someone but told him to run if I got caught. I don’t even know him.”

He was lying. I didn’t know how I knew, but my instincts said he wasn’t being truthful and I trusted in my gut.

“Where’s the rest of our drugs?” I asked.

A whimper broke free as Caleb’s entire frame seemed to draw in on itself. “Some of it was sold. But I can get the money and the remainder of the drugs. I can even push it out there. I’m damn good at what I do. I mean, you guys didn’t even know I was there. It just happened by damn luck or misfortune in my case.”

Caleb rambled on as if he could talk his way out of here. I’d already told him he was only leaving here in two ways. Both ended with him chopped up into a couple pieces and scattered, never to be heard from again.

I picked up the towel, ready to go again. The vibration in my pocket gave me pause. I fished out my phone and

answered it the moment I saw who was calling.

“Be good,” I whispered to Caleb as I stepped away.
“Boss.”

Benito groaned. “Caleb Whitouse is the guy you have with you.”

It wasn't really a question, but I confirmed it all the same. I hadn't gotten his last name but I was certain it was Caleb.
“Yeah, something wrong?”

Benito groaned. “Yes, something's wrong, everything is always wrong.” He cursed profusely in Italian, and I knew the best course of action was to wait until he calmed down some.
“He's my uncle's kid. One he had with his goomah.”

“He doesn't have the Vitale name.” I glanced over my shoulder at Caleb. He muttered under his breath, shaking like a leaf. “So now what? Want me to return him home?”

“That would be the simple direction but apparently that's not the only favor my uncle wants to ask of me.”

He didn't have to say it, and my gut twisted. I was going to have a shit ton more work to do.

“Let me guess, he wants you to welcome the kid into the family?”

“Something like that, but if I let my uncle handle it, we'd have more idiots running around and with our current predicament...”

I sighed. “Yeah, I understand. Want me to find someone?”

“No, I need you to do it, Tony. We need everything back and I need to know who he's working for.”

“He says no one but I know he’s working with someone, he just hasn’t given them up yet.”

Benito gave pause, the line going quiet. “You already had an extensive conversation with him?”

“Yep.”

“And he still isn’t spilling everything?”

“Nope.”

Benito hummed over the line. I had to agree with him. He didn’t say it, but that was an impressive quality. Even while being tortured he didn’t give anyone up.

“You know what to do, Tony.”

“I deserve a raise after this.”

“Send the request over to Ash. He’ll make sure to put it in the system.” Benito hung up, ending the call.

I pocketed my phone and stared at Caleb. My long night had ineffectively just gotten longer. I moved closer and squatted down in front of Caleb. His lids flickered up and down as if he was fighting exhaustion. Water and sweat covered his body. He whispered, “No more, please no more,” under his breath.

“Today’s your lucky day.”

Caleb didn’t respond, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he passed out.

What the fuck am I supposed to do with you?

CHAPTER TWO

CALEB

I SHOT UP, my chest rising and falling as I panted. As I whipped my head right and left, I tried to tell myself to calm down, but a tremor worked its way through my body. I wrapped my arms around myself as I squeezed my eyes shut. *Okay, where the fuck am I?* My eyes popped back open and I quickly realized I wasn't at home. I was in a soft bed, the first red flag something was horribly wrong. Even in the darkness of the room, I smelled fresh linens and a hint of cologne. I was far from home.

I swung my legs over the side of the bed and my feet were greeted with thick carpet. With a grunt, I shoved myself up. I wrapped an arm around my stomach. Every step was throbbing, awful pain that tried to steal my breath away. I froze as I thought about being breathless. The empty building, the chair, the water cascading over my face again and again. Bile burned in the back of my throat. I burst out of the room and ran into a bathroom across the hall. As I ejected pizza and beer into the bowl, the sound of footsteps drew closer. I'd barely finished when I glanced up and saw my torturer.

“Shit!”

I fell over and scrambled away from the man, cowering near the bathtub. He stepped toward me, his eyes staring

directly into mine. Slowly, he dropped the lid to the toilet and pressed the button on top. As it flushed, he grabbed a washcloth off a rack and ran it under the water. I stared at him, still remembering the dead look in his eyes as he waterboarded me. He wrung the towel out, and I sucked in a sharp breath.

“Relax,” he said, as he turned to face me. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“For some reason, I don’t believe that,” I bit out.

He shrugged. “It’s not my problem what you believe or don’t believe. Here.” The towel landed with a wet splat on my chest. “Clean yourself up.”

“Where am I?” I bit out, trying to ignore the nausea that rose in my throat from the sound the towel made. It just kept putting me back in that place, that dark, damp room where I knew I’d die.

“My place,” he says.

“Why?”

“Get showered and dressed first. I had clothes delivered. They’re on a chair in the room you were in. You drink coffee?”

I stared at him as if he’d lost his mind. “Weren’t you just trying to kill me last night?”

Tony shrugged. “That was last night. And this is the morning.” He nodded toward the shower. “Get cleaned up, I won’t ask again.” I watched as he walked out of the door. He froze before he turned around. “And I want the goddamn drugs back, understood? I don’t care what you have to do, you make them reappear.”

“I-I told you some of them are sold.”

“Then you owe me money,” he said with another nonchalant shrug. “Hurry up.”

I stared at him until the door shut. Even when his footsteps faded and he was gone, I stayed on high alert. I waited. And waited. And waited. When he didn't return, I slowly drug myself to my feet as my mind raced. *Why am I here? Why ain't I dead? Shit, Drav and the others. Do the Vitale's know who they are by now? Are they okay?*

My heart lodged in my throat as I turned on the sink and splashed water onto my face as quickly as possible. I rinsed the foul taste from my mouth, even found a toothbrush still in the packaging beneath the sink. Once I brushed and cleaned up as best I could, I stepped back and stared at myself in the mirror. There were dark circles beneath my eyes, and a bruise had formed on my right cheek. As I stepped back, I took in the sight of myself and shuddered.

I need to get the hell out of here.

Although, that was easier said than done. Tony knew my name. I distinctly remember him figuring it out. If I fled, would he be able to find my mother? That thought twisted my stomach into even tighter knots as I tried to swallow around the lump in my throat. Panic tried to set in, that telltale tightening of my throat and the feeling of faintness that tried to tell me I would go down at any minute. I closed my eyes, gripped the sink, and breathed through it. When I opened my eyes again, I stared at myself a little longer before I gave myself a pep talk.

Okay, I can do this! Figure out how much they know, get out of here, and then...

“Run,” I muttered.

What other choice did I have? The Hitters were small timers, gangsters who were a pinprick on the map and nothing more. If I knew my crew, they'd all fled back to Jersey to lick their wounds and probably mourn my death. Still, if I could get back to them, at least I could explain what happened. And then maybe we packed up and got the fuck out of dodge. Anything was better than sitting around waiting to be murdered.

“Hey! Hurry up already!”

I jumped and quickly yanked the door open to the bathroom. As soon as I saw the hallway was empty, I dashed across to the room I'd woken up in. The blinds were open now, sunlight flooding the space. I quickly spotted the clothes that had been left out on a chair: a pair of slacks, a button-up, and a jacket.

“What the fuck is this shit?” I muttered.

It wasn't like I had a choice in what to wear. The clothes I'd had on the night before were covered in sweat, dirt, and blood. My blood. I shuddered at the thought and tossed them aside.

Blood wasn't new, especially in my line of work. However, the Hitters and I were more into stealing, slinging drugs, and having a good time. When we saw carnage it came in the form of a good fist fight, a one-on-one type of thing. What I'd experienced last night was something else altogether.

I slipped into the way too fancy clothes and even found a pair of shoes beside the door. One more deep—let's be honest, unsteady as fuck—breath, and I stepped out into the hallway. I followed the sound of music into the kitchen. Tony glanced up

from where he sat, a fork in one hand and his phone in the other. His gaze flickered over my body.

“You can follow instructions. Look at that.”

“What the fuck is going on?” I blurted out. “Come on, this is weird as hell, man.”

“I’m not your *man*.” He stood up and placed a mug of coffee on the counter. “You can call me sir. From here on out, you work for me.”

I stared at him like he’d just grown a second head. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Are you hard of hearing or something?”

“Well, after you tried to drown me a couple hundred times last night, maybe I am now.”

“Don’t be dramatic.” He nodded toward the counter. “Sugar and creamer.” When I didn’t move, he sighed. “If I wanted you dead, I would have done it last night. What? You think I’ll poison you?”

“Yeah.”

“Nah, I’d just put a bullet in the back of your head.”

I stared at him until he cracked a grin. *Is this asshole making a joke?* I failed to see what part of this fucked up situation was funny.

“Sit down already,” he said. When I didn’t move, the grin fell away. “Sit down or I’ll make you.”

I dropped my ass into a seat. He nodded and resumed his coffee.

“Mr. Vitale has decided to go easy on a thief such as yourself. Apparently, your father is someone he owed a favor

to. Why didn't you say you were related to him?"

I gritted my teeth. "I barely know my father."

"Well, he knows you. Apparently, he asked Benito to extend some mercy your way." He pointed at me. "That doesn't mean you're going to get out of paying us back. I want whatever product you can get your hands on and then you're going to work with me."

"Okay," I muttered, trying to figure out where he was going with this. "I'll make some calls when I get home."

Tony shook his head. "There's no going home. You're with me."

My jaw dropped. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about you sitting your happy ass right beside me. Your father wants you in the family business. Time to grow up."

Heat swept over my body as I stared at him. One minute he was trying to kill me, and the next, he wanted to be some kind of mentor? It was laughable. I stood up, placed my hands on the counter, and leaned toward him.

"I don't want to be part of your shitty little family. I've lived my whole life trying to stay as far away from people like you as possible."

Tony raised a brow. "So you became a criminal?"

"I might be a criminal, but I'm not a sadistic fuck."

"You swear a lot. It shows a lack of intelligence. Which I'm not surprised by considering the way you're talking to me right now."

I straightened up as I flipped him off with both middle fingers. “Get fucked. Like you just said, I’m family, so it’s not like you can kill me anymore. I’m out.”

One minute, I was heading toward the door. The next, my body met the wall. I grunted as one of my arms was twisted and pinned behind my back. My muscles burned, screaming in protest after last night’s beating. I shoved back, but he shoved forward roughly.

“Just because you found a way to avoid getting tossed into a small grave doesn’t mean you’re going to get on my nerves. My job is to train you, as well as retrieve what’s been taken. That’s it. So, you can learn with me and have a chance. Or you can ignore and reject everything I do. Eventually, you’ll be on your own, and being stupid is a great way to get locked up or dead. That’s on you.”

“Funny, you say that like you believe it while I’ve basically been kidnapped.”

“That’s what happens when you make idiotic decisions.”

Fuck this guy! My skin crawled like it was covered in a colony of ants. I took a deep breath, and tried to bury that rage that threatened to consume me.

“When I step back, you’re going to listen. Do you understand?”

“Sure, I get it.”

“Yes, sir,” he bit back. “You’re going to respect me like every other grunt that drags their ass to our door looking to join up.”

“I didn’t ask to join shit,” I argued.

He shoved forward again and I groaned. “What did I just say? Do you understand English? I give you an order, and you say?”

I swallowed thickly, battling the urge to fly off the handle. “Yes, sir.”

Tony released me and took a step back. As soon as I turned around, I balled up my fist and slammed it into his face. Droplets of blood decorated my knuckles as I panted. Tony wiped the corner of his mouth before he took a step toward me.

“We’re even now,” I bit out. “Especially after last night.”

Tony’s eyes narrowed. “You do that shit again and I’ll make sure you have an ‘accident.’ Can’t be held accountable for that, can I?”

We held each other’s gaze for a moment longer before he walked away. I swore under my breath. My goddamn father just had to step in, didn’t he? I didn’t want to be anything like these people. It was just my luck to get myself out of a fire and be thrown into an inferno.

CHAPTER THREE

TONY

I DRUMMED my fingers on the steering wheel to the beat of the song playing over the speakers. The base in the trunk bumped with every single hard hit of the base. My ears itched with how loud it was, but anything was better than talking to Caleb. Most people didn't get under my skin. Even Harlow, Benito's psychotic husband, didn't get me riled up as much as Caleb did. If I was going to keep from blowing his brains out, then I needed some time when he wasn't talking.

The song died down as I made a right turn, getting closer to the office. Caleb opened his mouth, and I silently prayed the next song would hurry the fuck up.

“What ar—”

The metal song started up with a hardcore guitar solo and drowned out whatever Caleb had been planning to say. Saved. Caleb moved in my peripheral reaching for the knob to turn down the music. My gun was in my hand and the nuzzle was nestled against his temple in the next second. I kept my eyes on the road.

“Hands off.”

“It's too fucking loud! I'm going to go deaf,” Caleb shouted.

Which was worse, going deaf or losing my sanity?

Caleb lifted his hand away from the stereo and slouched back in the passenger seat. I lowered my gun, flicked the safety back on and put it away. I reluctantly turned down the music. He wasn't wrong; my ears were ringing with how loud I'd had it.

"You were really going to kill me if I turned the music down."

It wasn't a question, but I shrugged all the same. Killing Caleb wouldn't be the hardest thing in my life. People die every day. I would just be helping him meet his maker a lot sooner than planned.

"You're fucking insane, you know that right? That's not worth dying over."

"Says you." I slowed down as we approached a red light. I took my eyes off the road for a second and pinned him with a dead stare. "What you die for is up to you. Touch what's mine and know I won't hesitate to end you."

"Fuck."

"Am I clear?"

Caleb shook his head. "You need to see a therapist about your anger issues."

"I'm not angry." The flow of traffic continued once more, and I relaxed further in my seat. Today wasn't a typical day but it hadn't been a normal day since Benito got married. Chaos was becoming my normal again.

"Sure you're not," Caleb retorted.

I kept from saying anything, hoping we could spend the rest of the drive to the office in silence. Caleb had me

contemplating purchasing a space closer to work just so we didn't have to spend so much time in the car together. He couldn't keep his mouth closed for more than three minutes.

“How do I get out of doing this?”

“A body bag is your only way out.”

“Why is that always your answer? Don't you get tired of killing people?”

Heat skirted down the side of my face. I didn't have to check to know Caleb was staring at me intently. I shrugged. “It will become second nature for you before you know it.”

“I don't want it to.” He crossed his arms over his chest and went back to glaring out the window, watching the serene suburban view disappear the closer we got to the city. “I won't kill anyone.”

“A thief and drug dealer with a conscience.”

“At least I have one,” Caleb snapped.

I nodded. “Yeah, sure you do, because killing people with a bullet is so much worse than you feeding them poison. Don't be delusional. We aren't different, you just don't have the balls to own up to your kills.”

“They choose to take drugs, I don't force them.”

“You don't help either. You offer the product and even make money off their deaths. Shit, you might be even worse than me. I acknowledge that I kill, but I never go after anyone who doesn't come after me first.”

Caleb went silent next to me, and I counted the small blessing. For someone who wouldn't give up any information on the people he worked with, he sure as shit talked a lot.

“We’re not the same,” Caleb muttered.

“You’re right, I don’t make idiotic choices.”

“Fuck you,” Caleb whispered under his breath.

“What was that?”

“Nothing. I’m so glad to listen to the wise words of a gangster.”

I parked in the parking garage and got out of the car. “Come on.”

“Why are we here?” Caleb slid in right behind me as I headed for the elevator that would take us up to the office.

“Work.” I glanced behind me and groaned. He looked a mess. On the ride over, he unbuttoned the first two buttons of his shirt. It was untucked now and he’d left the jacket behind in the car. “Fix yourself.”

Caleb looked down at his appearance and shrugged. “I want to wear my own clothes.”

“You will wear what I give you.”

“The fuck I am.”

It was a constant battle with him. I admired the spark in his eyes last night, but today, it was a pain in my ass. I slammed him against the elevator wall and it rattled from the force. I hit the emergency stop button. The elevator came to a screeching halt. An alarm went off but none of it mattered.

“Want to run that by me again?”

“I want to wear my own clothes.”

“Great, I’ll let you know when I give a damn about what you want.” I released him and buttoned his shirt. I tucked it in properly and pushed his messy hair back as best as I could.

“Say nothing while we’re inside.”

“Or what?”

“I’ll have to kill you.” I made sure he saw the truth in my eyes. He stepped one toe out of line in front of Benito and I was going to murder him. Gladly.

Caleb didn’t look convinced. “You’re going to wrinkle the shitty clothes you picked out for me.”

Did it ever stop, the snide remarks? I blew out a breath. This wasn’t worth getting angry about, he was nothing but a punk that was going to get himself killed. There was no need to care what came out of his mouth.

“How much longer are we going to be stuck in this elevator?” Caleb asked.

Tension built behind my eyes and I groaned. I was going to need a stiff drink and every single kind of painkiller I could get my hands on if I was going to continue to deal with Caleb. I opened my eyes and hit the button for us to continue up. When we arrived, I headed straight for Benito’s office. He should be here instead of Blu today.

I smiled at the receptionist and let myself in. Benito put the paperwork down and glanced my way. His cold gaze moved from me to Caleb behind me. The dumbass at least had the foresight to keep his mouth shut.

“Good morning, boss.”

Benito nodded. “Is it?” He stared at Caleb intently. “Tony told you what you will be doing?”

Caleb glanced my way, and for a second, I had high hopes he’d learn. Those hopes went up in flames the moment he opened his mouth.

“Nope. Just said I had to kowtow to him and suck his dick.”

A single brow lifted on Benito’s face as he looked between us. I said nothing as I forced myself to stay still. The door opened behind us, and Benito’s mouth tilted slightly into a smile. I knew instantly who it was. He only truly smiled for two people. Harlow and their baby, Emika. Harlow walked past me, flipping me off as he went right over to Benito. It was insane how Benito visibly relaxed the moment his husband was next to him. In all my years of standing next to Benito, I had never seen him so happy. It was wild that Harlow made him so happy, but they did say love was blind.

“Why isn’t he dead?” Harlow asked.

His gray eyes landed on Caleb and it was like he was dissecting him without touching him. Caleb moved but I stopped him from taking a step back. The moment he showed them his fear, he was as good as dead. It was like bleeding in a pool full of starving sharks.

“It’s a favor.”

“He robbed us,” Harlow said. “At least cut a hand off.”

“Fuck,” Caleb whispered.

Him being down one hand would make my job that much harder, and that was the only reason I spoke up. “I don’t think that will be necessary.” I stepped forward, knowing if Harlow got his way, Caleb would end up missing more than just a hand.

Benito met my gaze. Nothing was said, but there hardly ever needed to be anything said anymore. Benito trusted me and I would never betray that trust.

“I’m leaving it in Tony’s hands,” Benito said.

“Fine, take all the fun away.”

Benito waved us off as he grabbed Harlow and sat him on the desk. I turned around and ushered Caleb out of the office. They might not be as brazen as Giancarlo and Ash but they didn't always wait for me to disappear. It was almost as if when they were together, everyone else in the world stopped existing.

“Thanks,” Caleb muttered. He stared at his hands.

I grunted. “Come on, we got work to do.”



“HEY.” I waved to the group of thugs leaning on the wall. There was always some small-time gang trying to encroach where they weren't needed. For some reason, they assumed because the Vitales were busy with the triads that they would go unnoticed fucking with our shit.

“They work for the family?” Caleb asked.

“Not a chance. We're here to take care of them.” I nodded my head at the group headed our way. “Well, you're here to take care of them.”

“By myself?”

“If you can't handle this much then are you fit for the family?”

“I don't want to be in your fucked-up family. I don't know how many times I have to stress that.”

“Doesn't matter what you want. Teach them a lesson.”

Caleb shook his head, stepping back. “No thanks. Whatever beef you have with them, you handle it.”

“What the fuck do you two want?” one of the men asked.

Before I could say anything, another stepped up behind the guy in the middle. Metal caught my eye as he attempted to hide the knife in his left hand.

“Go back to your business meeting and fuck off,” one of the guys said.

“For every single one that you don’t take down, it will be a full bottle of water.” I smirked at him, ignoring the guys. “I know how much you enjoyed yourself last night.”

Caleb visibly shuddered. He didn’t argue with me as he moved toward them. “Why don’t you guys just buzz off and no one gets hurt.”

They didn’t listen, of course. They moved in on Caleb. One came rushing toward me and went down the moment I slammed the butt of my gun against his temple. The others stopped fighting Caleb and took a few steps back.

“Don’t worry, I won’t get involved.”

“Thanks,” Caleb grunted out. He relaxed his stance as he lifted his hands.

I remembered the punch he hit me with this morning and rubbed at my swollen lip. He had a mean right hook. Maybe there was a future for Caleb. I watched him intently as he fought against three men. One went for his side as the other swung at Caleb’s head. He dodged every single one and followed them up with his own. He took down one but was quickly met with another. The sound of flesh smacking against each other filled the small alleyway we were in.

One of the guys went down with blood pouring from his broken nose. Caleb groaned, and I was sure he was going to back down, but he pushed forward, handling it on his own.

There's more to him than being a thief, it seems.

By the time he finished, he was covered in sweat and blood. "There, happy?" He panted as he ran an arm over his bleeding lip.

"Not even a little. Come on, we have a few more places to check out."

I took Caleb to three more areas and encouraged him to fight at each one. It wasn't going to solve any problems, but grunts handled the mundane shit like keeping the riffraff out of our territory. I checked my phone to see if there were any more we could hit today. Caleb could still throw and take a punch.

Tony: Usual out here.

I'd made sure to keep an eye out for the Triad. They'd been hitting us in little ways. Blocking some of our drug supply. Hitting up places that were under Vitale protection.

I reached into the backseat of the car and grabbed two bottles of water. I tossed one Caleb's way. He caught it, staring at it as if it was going to bite him.

"Drink up."

"I'm good. Are we almost done here?"

"No, and I said drink some water."

I uncapped mine and downed half of it before I sat it down. Caleb still hadn't touched his. Why was he making everything difficult? Just one time, I'd like to see him listen without me having to threaten his life. This whole ordeal would go by a lot faster.

I took a step toward him and grabbed the water out of his hands. “Need me to hold it for you?”

Fear flashed in Caleb’s eyes and he took a few steps back.

“You’re afraid of water now?”

“You fucking waterboarded me! I’m not afraid of water.”

“Good, then come here so I can pour it down your throat.”

“Not even if my life depended on it.” Caleb glanced around.

He’s going to run. For a split second, I humored the idea. *Oh no, he slipped away and died.* Benito would buy that, right? Then we’d be out of the stolen product, and I’d come off as useless. The momentary dream of being free of Caleb was tossed in the trash just as fast as it had come by.

“Don’t even think about it.”

“What?”

Caleb smiled like a con artist. I hope he realized I wasn’t buying into the bullshit he was trying to sell me. It hadn’t gotten him out of me torturing him, and it wasn’t going to save him now.

“You run, I’ll have to break a leg or two. Then we will have to spend even more time together.”

Caleb’s face blanched even more if that was even possible. He was already white as hell, as if he never stepped foot outside during the day.

“Put the water bottle down,” Caleb said. His voice was shaky at best.

“You need to drink it. You had strenuous activities yesterday and we’ve been moving nonstop today.”

“Who’s—” Caleb snapped his mouth shut and held out his hand for the water bottle.

I handed it over, watching him intently to see if I had to hold him down to make sure he hydrated.

Caleb nervously licked his lips as he looked anywhere but at me. He twisted the cap off the bottle and hurriedly drank from it.

“You’re going to choke.” My warning was pointless as Caleb fell into a fit of coughing. I patted his back until he waved me off.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as he glared at me.

“Keep looking at me like that and I’m going to start thinking you have a crush on me.”

“Ha-ha-ha, you’re so fucking funny.”

I thought I was hilarious. I checked the time and groaned. We were behind. “We’re going to have to push the shooting range to later tonight.”

“I told you, I won’t kill anyone.” Caleb squeezed the plastic water bottle until water spilled out over his fingers. “I won’t carry a gun either.”

“That’s stupid. What we do is dangerous.”

“What you do? I’m here against my will. I won’t be doing shit.”

I stared at him for a long while. “You sure this is the hill you want to die on?”

For a moment, I believed Caleb would shut up and bow his head. Giving into his fate was the best move for him. I should

have known better. Twenty-four hours with Caleb Whitouse had proven to me he had the Vitale stubbornness and the stupidity to see it through.

“Yeah, go ahead and do it. Want me to turn around?”

“For what?” I tilted my head slightly trying to understand where he was going with this.

“So you can put a bullet in the back of my head like you said this morning.”

Oh, yeah. For him to be an idiot, he sure did listen to every single thing that came out of my mouth. I waved him off. “Fine, I will put off you holding a gun for now. How are you with knives?”

“No.”

Irritation buzzed in the back of my head at the pointless conversation we were having. Why was I giving him a choice anyway? Anyone else and they’d already have a gun in their hands.

“You can’t be defenseless.”

“I can fight. You saw me.”

“I saw you take three hits to the rib cage that could have been avoided. I saw you barely hold your own against three men who were sluggish and high. And I saw if I hadn’t been standing there with my gun, they would have easily taken you down and killed you.”

Caleb tossed up his arms and groaned. “Would a ‘good job’ kill you?”

I was on Caleb in a flash. Our bodies nearly touched as I got in his face. “Let me make myself clear. I’m here because I was told to be. I’m not a makeshift stand-in for the daddy that

was never around. You want praise? Drag your pale ass to Silver Dreams and spread your cheeks. Because that will probably be the only time you get praised.”

Caleb’s face morphed into one of pure rage. Red splotches appeared all over his normally clear porcelain skin. His brows furrowed as he swung. I was ready this time and moved back. He didn’t stop there; he moved fast, closing the gap. I might have criticized his fighting but he wasn’t bad at it. His fist smacked into my palm as I caught it. I reared my hand back and slammed it forward. The pain hardly registered as I punched him in the abdomen. Caleb instantly fell forward, wheezing. His lip was busted, blood dripping onto the ground.

That’s for the punch from earlier.

“Next time, I’ll break your fucking fingers.”

Caleb groaned, clutching his stomach. He glared up at me with pure hatred in his eyes.

“After we’re done with work, you’re going to start talking. I want our shit back.” I got lower and grabbed a fistful of his messy black hair. It was just long enough for me to get a good handle on it. “Push me. I want you to, because you’re right, I won’t kill you.” My lips brushed against his ear as I lowered my voice. “We both know there are things far worse than death.”

I let him go and headed toward the car. I needed a second to cool off before I ended up following through and ending him. Caleb was going to get himself killed.

“Come on.”

I glanced over my shoulder just as I opened the car door, only to find Caleb gone. In the next second, I had my phone out and pressed it against my ear. “The idiot ran. Have

everyone on the lookout.” I slid behind the wheel, tension made the muscles between my shoulder blades sore. “You see him, don’t approach him. Let me know.”

He was mine.

CHAPTER FOUR

CALEB

I PANTED as I vaulted over the gate and dropped down on the other side. The stench of piss and garbage infiltrated my nose and mouth, but I pushed through it. *Thank God, that psycho took the fucking bait.* As good as it felt to hit him, it felt better to piss him off so much, he slipped and took his eyes off me. I'd taken his shit all day just waiting for a chance to run.

I wasn't stupid, I knew he'd catch up with me eventually. The Vitale's had eyes everywhere, probably how my father figured out where I was. I'd tried so hard to stay off that man's radar, and now he wanted to play savior?

Move! Stop thinking about him and push!

My lungs burned, my muscles not much better, but I forced myself to go further, harder, faster. One more gate cleared, I turned down another alley and jumped. The creaky old ladder protested but eventually dropped. I climbed up it fast, praying I didn't get tetanus. All I would need is to get lockjaw. That would be great fun.

I jogged to my apartment and, as always, the window was propped open by a yellowing phone book that was at least thirty years old. The minute I hopped inside, a gun was pointed in my face. Drav panted, his expression serious until he realized it was me.

“Caleb, fuck!”

Drav dragged me into a tight bear hug in his beefy arms. We both worked out, but he really *worked out*. But he still retained that round belly that girls found irresistible. Even if he preferred dudes.

The man was double my height, my size, and probably had more brain cells left than I did. But he couldn't keep up with my winning personality or charm. I grinned as he hugged me tighter until I let out an undignified shriek.

“What the fuck are you trying to do, kill me? Oh man, my ribs hurt so bad.”

Drav stepped back, still gripping both my shoulders in his huge hands. “Where were you? Are you okay? Shit, they really messed you up, huh? How are you alive?”

“Gave that guy, Tony, the slip,” I hissed as I wrapped an arm around my midsection. “We got some ice? And some pain pills?”

“I'll check my stash.”

“Uncle Caleb!”

Stasia raced toward me. I ignored how much pain I was in as I dropped and scooped her into my arms. She wrapped her little arms around my neck and I hugged her tightly. When she pulled back, her smile fell away.

“You got a ouchie?” She pointed to my lip.

“Ah, yeah, I got a little banged up. These monsters were after me, but I kicked their fuckin' asses.”

“Language!” Drav shouted.

Stasia fell into a fit of giggles, squirming in my arms to let me know she was ready to be put down. “Did you beat the monsters?”

“Every last one,” I said. “They won’t be bugging you any time soon. As usual.”

“Okay! You’re awesome, Uncle Caleb.”

“Stasia, I need to talk to your uncle,” Drav said, as he returned to the living room. “Go play in your room.”

“Can we play princesses later?” she asked me.

It came out like pwincesses. My heart squeezed. “Sure, we can play. I want the pink dress!”

“Nooo, I get the pink one!” she hollered as she ran off. “I always tell you I get pink and you try to take pink and I want the pink...”

I chuckled as I shook my head. “She’s a handful.” I glanced around. “Where’s everyone else?”

“Out looking for your ass.”

I groaned. “Get them back here right now. The last place they want to be is out there. As a matter of fact, I came to tell all of you to run.”

“What?”

“I’m compromised. I mean, I didn’t tell them shit, but it’s just a matter of time before they trace us back to here. Can you get out of town? You sell yours last night like I said?”

“Yeah.” He grunted. “Felt like dirt doing it, knowing you were probably dead.”

I shook my head. “That doesn’t matter! You want to get Stasia to a nice home, you focus on that.”

“You’re my family too, Caleb. When are you gonna get it through your thick head that you’re my brother? Life wouldn’t be the same without you.”

I waved Drav away, along with the emotions that tried to swallow me. “For a big fucker, you sure are soft,” I muttered.

He grinned as he handed over an ice pack and two white pills. “Take these.”

I swallowed them dry and pressed the cloth-wrapped ice to my abdomen. The chalky taste of the drug lingered on my tongue, tingling as I leaned my head against the back of the couch. *Come on, kick in already.*

“Where are we gonna go?” Drav asked, the Russian accent bleeding into his voice as it always did when he was worried.

“I haven’t worked that out yet,” I muttered as I wracked my brain. “Somewhere they wouldn’t think to look. And then all of you have to lay low. Whatever we didn’t sell, I gotta give back too.”

“Shit. Everyone’s gonna be pissed.”

“You get a couple grand at least?” I asked, peeling open one eye.

“Yeah. Still, it won’t go far between five of us.”

“Four,” I said. “Take care of you and the other guys.”

Drav’s thick black brows knitted. “Where are you going?”

“Back to the Vitale’s.”

“Like fuck you are!” he bellowed.

I groaned. As much as Drav drove me crazy, he really was like a big brother. I knew he wouldn’t let me go back without a fight, but we couldn’t *afford* to fight the Vitale’s. They might

have taken a hit and were more vulnerable than they were before. However, that didn't mean they were down and out. I learned that the hard way last night.

“I don't have a choice. My old man called in a favor to the big boss.”

“Benito Vitale?”

I nodded, and Drav swore under his breath. We went silent, both of us knowing the inevitability of what I was saying. I didn't have a choice in the matter. Tomorrow, I was going to have to go back whether I wanted to or not. *As long as I get them somewhere safe, screw it. I'll keep Tony and the rest of them distracted enough that they can't go after them.*

I was the president. It was my job to lead.

“Are you gonna be okay?”

I shrugged. “I'm fine.”

“You're all fucked up.”

I laughed and groaned when my body protested. “Yeah, yeah, I guess I am.” I sighed. “Listen, I'm gonna do what they want for now. Let them think I'm ready to calm down and do this shit. Nothing's going to make me turn my back on me and mine, you feel me?”

“I feel you, brother.”

The pleasant buzz of the pain pills started to drag me down. I fought against the tide, but it was impossible. My eyelids fluttered as I tried to stay awake. I pushed myself to my feet awkwardly.

“I'm gonna shower and crash for a while. Make sure everyone's ready to go ASAP. That's your job, vice president.”

“Whatever.” He grunted. “Don’t fall in there and bust your head on the tub.”

“You’re so sweet to me. I swear. Best welcome home ever.”

“Idiot,” he muttered.

I grinned. That one word was laced with emotion and concern that no one had ever shown to me except for my mother. Drav and I might bump heads, but I owed him a hell of a lot.

I disappeared into the bathroom, washed the filth from my body and left the shit pile of clothes in the trash can. As soon as I slipped into my room, I nearly face planted on my mattress that sat on the floor. The hard springs poked me in all the wrong places, but it was home sweet home. Peeling paint, the sound of rats scratching inside the walls, and all.



“WE GOTTA GO.”

I woke up to Drav holding Stasia in his arms. She was dressed in all black, just like him. I dragged myself to my feet and dragged on a dark pair of pants and my boots. Once I grabbed my helmet, I felt the sleep shaking off me and I was ready to go.

“What time is it?”

“Ten,” he said.

“I slept all day?” I yawned as I slipped my shirt on and picked up my helmet again.

“No, you slept all day and the next day after that.”

I stiffened. “What?” I growled. “Didn’t I say we needed to go? Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“I did,” he growled right back. “You wouldn’t move. I thought you were dead for a minute.”

“Oh,” I muttered sheepishly. “Sorry. You know where you’re going?”

He nodded. “We found a place. I figured you would want to ride out as far as possible to make sure we got off all right.”

“You guessed right.”

I jogged behind them out of the apartment. It was dark, too silent and empty when normally it was teeming with life and laughter. My chest ached, a dull thing that spread and threatened to swallow me whole.

When we stepped outside, the rest of the Hitters were already there. They waved from their bikes, but there was no stopping to chat or crack jokes at each other’s expense. We all knew what was at stake. It was too serious to be our usual stupid selves.

Drav handed Stasia to me as he rounded the van. I got her situated and buckled in before I grabbed her stuffed bear from the front and passed it to her. I planted a big, wet kiss on her forehead making her giggle and scream, *ew!*

“Uncle Caleb, that’s gross.”

“Yeah, I know.” I laughed. “But hey, listen. I love you. Be good for your papa and do what you’re told, okay?”

She nodded hard, her brown hair falling into her face. Stasia swiped the strands away with the palm of her hand. When she smiled up at me, I got the most insane urge to grab

her and run away with her in my arms. I didn't want them to leave.

I didn't want to be alone.

"Ready to ride?" Drav asked.

I nodded. "Yeah."

Drav nodded at me. That one motion held so much more in it than just a simple gesture. There were things we both wanted to say, but now was not the time. Every second that ticked by left all of us open and vulnerable. I knew that's the real reason he hadn't left; Drav didn't want me on my own. We didn't abandon each other. It was a cowardly move that earned you worse than death. However, I knew that while I slept, he must have held a vote. Otherwise, none of them would be going anywhere.

"Let's ride," I said.

I made my way to my powder blue Suzuki and swung my leg over it. As soon as I started it up, the rumble of it rattled through my soul. I tugged my helmet on and fastened it in place before I gave the thumbs up to the rest of the Hitters. We swung out and followed Drav, weaving in and out of traffic around us. I kept my eyes peeled for Tony or any of his other goons, my heart in my throat as I rode. Usually, nothing was better than hitting the open road, feeling the wind zip past you and zoning out as you weaved in and out of traffic. Tonight, I couldn't get that same high. I was too busy worrying about every car that lingered too long or every gaze that drifted toward our bikes.

Come on, keep it together. Almost got them out of dodge.

We made it to the highway and only pulled off to enter a lonely, dirt road. Drav turned off the van and we all did the

same. By the time I took off my helmet, he was already striding up to me. I groaned before he did it. In an instant, I was dragged into his arms as he crushed me once more.

“Be careful,” he growled.

“I will. Swear.” I grunted. “Jesus, I want to live, man! Come on!”

He pulled back and slapped my face affectionately. “Don’t let them beat up on you, but don’t run your mouth either,” he said, narrowing his gaze at me. “Shut up and keep your head down. I know that’s hard for you since you’re too fucking stupid to live...”

“Hey, hey, hey, I resent that.” I grinned. “I’ll be fine. We’ll meet up again. I swear.”

“Better.” He punched me in the arm, making me grimace. “Sorry. This is where we part ways.”

“Asshole!” I glanced over my shoulder as Demon winked at me. “Better stay alive, you dick.”

“Yeah,” Angel said as he leaned over the bars of his bike. “But I do have dibs on if you’ll die or not. If you go early, I get a lot of money.”

“Thanks.” I groaned.

I nodded to the last member of the Hitters. Shade. He nodded back, helmet on, as silent and stoic as always. When I turned back to Drav, he looked like he wanted to toss me into the van, tie me up, and drag me along.

“No,” I said evenly. “This is for the best.”

“I know. Doesn’t mean I don’t feel like shit.”

“Hey, I’m like a cockroach. It’ll take a pretty big damn boot to squish my ass.” I grinned at him. “I’ll work on things and get you all back. And then? Bigger and better. Stasia will have the world.”

Drav nodded, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallowed. I saw the emotions on his face, but if he got all twisted up, so would I. I tugged my helmet on.

“I’ll contact you when I can.”

“Be safe,” he muttered.

I gave him a thumbs up and turned my bike back on. As soon as I hit the highway, my heart lodged itself firmly into my throat. I couldn’t breathe, couldn’t swallow. My skin broke out in a cold sweat. An ache settled into my fingers as I held the grips so tightly, I thought my bones would break. I hadn’t been away from the Hitters in five years. They were my damn family. And I’d broken us up because I got way too cocky.

Never again. I’m gonna fix this.

The ride back was lonely. No music in my helmet to vibe to, no friends to engage in idiotic antics with, just the lonely open road. By the time I made it back to our now empty apartment, I felt like a stone had settled on my shoulders. As if it would push me through the ground and bury me ten feet deep.

I let myself inside. A hand wrapped around my throat and my back collided with the wall. I let out a rushed breath of air as I stared at Tony. His gun jammed underneath my jaw.

“Where are they?”

“Hard to talk when my jaw is being forced shut,” I muttered.

Tony's face took on a shade of red I was particularly proud to induce. He finally moved the gun away, but his hand stayed around my throat.

"Normally, I'd be into this, but you're not my type," I coughed.

Yeah, that's bullshit. If Tony wasn't such an absolutely huge, gaping asshole, I would have been on my knees for him in an instant. He had that tall, dark, Italian, jerk thing I found hot as hell. Only with him, it was turned up to a thousand, and the fucker had tried to kill me!

"I think you must still have water in your ears," Tony drawled. "Where are your little friends?"

"Gone," I said, a smug smile tugging at my lips. "Don't worry, they left your product."

"Where?"

"Same place we always keep shit. If you let go, I can show you."

Tony reluctantly released my throat. He gestured with his gun. "Show me. Do anything stupid—"

"And you'll bust a cap in my ass," I said, putting on my best gangster voice. "Yeah, whatever. I get it."

I led him into the kitchen. There was one cabinet that looked normal, but was far from it. I unlocked it and then typed the code into the safe. When it opened, bricks of coke were there.

"I'm sure there's more in the 'dishwasher,'" I said, doing little air quotes. "Whatever ain't there, I'll make up for. Cool?"

Tony straightened up and narrowed his eyes at me. “What? Suddenly you’re cooperating?”

I shrugged. I’d avoided saying those words he wanted up until now, but it couldn’t be helped. I had to protect my crew.

“If it keeps my friends safe? Yes, sir.”

His gaze seemed to pierce right through me. Underneath it, I felt exposed, as if he could see every lie I’d ever told. I cleared my throat when I couldn’t take the heat anymore and shifted from one foot to the other.

“I’ll go pack a bag. I’m staying at your place, right?”

“Yeah,” he muttered. “Hurry up.”

“Yes, sir boss man, sir.”

I saluted him and then jogged out of the room. Grabbing a duffel, I tossed some clothes, my back up phone, some pain pills for my injuries, and a few other personal effects. Everything else I left the way it was. As we exited the apartment, I spotted my neighbor. I dug a wad of cash out of my bag and ran up to him.

“Keep an eye on my place and shoot anyone who fucks with it.”

He grinned. “I do enjoy shooting people.”

“Injure. Just injure,” I clarified. “Please don’t kill anyone.”

“Fine. Whatever.”

I grinned and turned back to Tony. He still looked unsure. The redness had disappeared from his face, but he watched every step I took as if I would bolt again.

“Mind if I take my bike?” I asked. “It’ll get stolen if it stays here, and I really don’t want that.”

Tony’s eyes swept me up and down then back again. “Fine. If you deviate...”

“One of your goons will kill me. Trust me, I know the routine by now.” I walked over and swung my leg over my bike. “Hey, uh, no more waterboarding jokes, man. I get it, but that was real fucked-up. I don’t want to think about it. Other than that”—I leaned back on my bike, grinning harder—“I’m all yours.”

“Who the fuck wants you?” Tony huffed out as he turned on his heels.

As soon as he was walking away, the grin fell. *Just make it through this shit and then I’ll do things right. I’ll get me and the rest of the Hitters set up somewhere better. We’ll never have to deal with this shit again.*

“Your ass is mine for running!” Tony called as he wrenched open the driver’s door. “Don’t think I’ve forgotten.”

I shuddered. I really didn’t want to know what punishments someone like Tony thought up.

CHAPTER FIVE

TONY

SLEEP WAS SPARSE AT BEST. I'd stayed up all night expecting Caleb to make another run for it. I had every man we could spare searching for his friends. But there was nothing so far. From what I gathered around the shabby apartment, there was at least a kid involved.

Was it Caleb's? For some reason, that thought annoyed me even more. What the hell would that dumbass do with a child?

The morning sun filtered in through the blinds and bathed my room in bright rays. I rubbed my eyes, checking the tablet once more before getting up. Caleb was still in the bed, sprawled out. He slept wild, like even in sleep, he was a mess. The sheet was tangled around his waist, the pillows and covers tossed on the floor. He'd stayed in the room I'd given him all night. My gaze swept down the length of his body, taking in every single bruise that rested on his pale skin. Desire twisted inside of me as I thought about leaving more on his body. My handprint on his ass, a bite mark on his creamy thigh. Heat rushed down my spine. I gripped the bathroom counter until my fingers began to cramp. Caleb was annoying but he was attractive. I could objectively admit that, not that anything would ever happen between us. I didn't fuck stupid people.

I blew out a steady breath as I released my hold on the counter. “Need to stop by Silver Dreams later.” Whenever later would be. I had a full schedule, and I didn’t see myself getting a break to relieve some pent-up stress anytime soon.

I made quick work of brushing my teeth, only checking the video every few seconds to make sure Caleb was still in bed. Watching him all night might have fucked with my head. I hadn’t expected him to be so cooperative once I caught up to him, but low and behold, maybe the idiot could get his act together. My phone buzzed and I scooped it up along with the tablet as I headed back to my bedroom to get dressed for the day.

The messages coming through were of no use to me. No one could tell me who exactly worked with Caleb. The apartment was under Caleb’s name. For all intents and purposes, it looked as if Caleb worked alone. My phone buzzed again from an incoming call. Benito’s name flashed on the screen.

“Boss.”

“I’m sending Giancarlo over.”

I paused with my black button-up halfway on. “You couldn’t have given me a better warning?”

“No. Our plane takes off in two hours.”

“Turn and burn?”

“Yes.”

I wasn’t shocked. Benito didn’t like leaving Harlow and the baby alone for too long. Even with everything happening around them, Benito made it his goal to get back home. I had no such need to rush. I had nothing and no one waiting for me at home.

“Caleb?”

“He will spend the day with Giancarlo. I’d leave him to some of the grunts but he gave you the slip, we shouldn’t underestimate him.”

I still needed to pay him back for that little stunt. I had plans but it seemed like they were going to have to wait.

“How long—” The doorbell chimed through the house and on my phone. I pulled it away from my face and was instantly greeted by Giancarlo cheeing into the camera. He was way too damn close, I could practically see up his nose.

“Let me in, Tony, or I’m crashing in,” Giancarlo warned. He didn’t give me so much as a single second before he broke out in song. *“I’ll bust the windows out your house.”*

Fucking kill me. “Never mind, he’s here.” The sound of glass shattering was the icing on the cake.

“Bill me,” Benito said as he hung up.

Yeah, for the window and my mental distress. When I joined the Vitale family, I gave them my all and still did. I respected the brothers. They fought tooth and nail to get where they are, but some days, they annoyed the shit out of me.

I headed down the hall, and Caleb burst out of the room with bedhead and drowsy eyes. “What was that?” His fists were balled at his side but that wasn’t what gave me pause. He was naked, his body on full display. The cameras hadn’t caught how stunning the bruises looked on him. The lean muscles displayed the color of his dusky pink nipples.

I need to get my high-def cameras.

Caleb’s mouth hung open as he went still and stared at me. My slacks hung low on my hips and my black button up was

still undone. Electricity sparked in the small hallway. The air felt thinner, and there was an unmistakable mutual attraction. As long as he kept his mouth shut. I could hear the glass shattering as Giancarlo's obnoxious singing carried throughout my small three-bedroom abode.

"Nothing, go get dressed," I said, forcing myself to turn away from him.

"You sure? Sounds like someone's breaking in."

Letting Caleb go and check out the noise was appealing, but I was sure Giancarlo had brought Silvy. And as funny as that would be, once Gin started bashing heads in, he wasn't going to stop until he and his trusted hammer were drenched in blood.

"Back in your room."

Caleb rolled his eyes. "Aye aye, captain."

I groaned and headed for the front of the house. "Hello, Gin."

"Hey, Tony!" He smiled at me as he dusted glass off his clothes. Silvy was clutched in his hand.

"Why do you have that thing on you?"

"Don't insult her." He kissed the hammer. "It's okay, sweet girl, we're just misunderstood is all."

I didn't know what to say to Gin. He was a loose cannon and a mess. But still, he was technically one of my bosses.

"Heard you got a new pet," Giancarlo said.

That was one way of putting it. I glanced over my shoulder, expecting Caleb, but found the space he'd occupied empty. I checked the tablet still in my hands and he was still in

his room. Instead of getting dressed, he'd decided to get back in bed.

“More like a pest.”

He laughed. “It’s all about how you train them. Here.” Giancarlo handed over a few children’s books on how to take care of your pet. “Ash got them for me and figured I should pass them on.”

Ash, his fiancé and an all-around saint had my respect as well. No sane person could deal with Gin.

I looked through the stack of books. “What the hell is this?”

“Books. I wasn’t sure what kind you got.” Giancarlo stood there proudly.

Why was he here again?

“He’s a dumbass, but human.”

Giancarlo shrugged. “Eh, he’s the spawn of uncle Arnoldo, he’s more rat than human.”

I sat the books down. “Thanks.” It was better just to go with it than argue with him. Gin wasn’t a person most people could have a logical conversation with. “I’m still getting dressed, where are you taking him?”

“I have a few debts to collect today. Oh shit, meaning we have one I need to get from him, right?” Giancarlo turned and went to my kitchen. He opened the fridge and frowned. “Why don’t you ever have any food?”

“Why do you check every single time you come over?” I headed for my bedroom, leaving Giancarlo to do whatever he pleased. He’d do it regardless of what I had to say.

I finished getting dressed and let myself into Caleb's room. He sprung up, and the moment his sleepy gaze landed on me, he fell back down.

“Oh, it's just you.”

Don't kill him. Don't do it.

“Get up and get dressed.”

“I'm tired, I'm more of a night owl. Can't we do this later?”

I snatched the sheet off him and fought my desire to look at his naked body again. “Clothes on.”

“Fuck, aren't gangsters supposed to work at night?”

I said nothing as Caleb got out of bed and headed for the closet. His shoulder smacked into mine. Instincts took over. It took nothing at all for Caleb to piss me off. I grabbed him, his body cool to the touch as I slammed him down on the bed. I was on him in seconds straddling his waist and pinning him to the bed. One hand around his wrists and the other around his neck. It shouldn't have felt so good, but his throat fit so nicely in the palm of my hand.

Chewing noises hit my ears, dragging my attention off Caleb. Giancarlo leaned against the door frame, shoveling chips into his mouth.

“Don't mind me, continue.” He waved his wand around before popping another chip in his mouth.

I got off Caleb and fixed myself. Every single time with him, I was losing my shit. It was like I couldn't help myself.

“Aww, come on, this is entertaining. You were either going to kill him or fuck. Either way, you need it.”

“What?” Caleb shoved his messy black hair out of his face and glared at Giancarlo.

I don’t know why, but I tossed the blanket over his naked body. I didn’t miss the way Gin looked at me after.

“Tony here, needs to get laid. He’s so damn high strung, you would think he has a pole up his ass.”

“Gin, that’s enough.”

“See, no sense of humor,” Gin said. He smiled at Caleb but it looked like an alligator ready to eat its meal.

I moved in front of Gin, blocking his view of Caleb. “I’m calling Ash.”

“Wait, come on, you don’t have to do that. I was only kidding, Tony.”

“Get dressed, now. Don’t have me come back in here.” I left his room before whatever had happened, happened again.

“Tony, you’re not really going to call Ash, are you?”

No, only because I didn’t want to see the guy cry. Ash was just as obsessed with Gin as he was with his fiancé. I ignored him and got dressed.

“You know, if you cause an issue, I’m not going to be able to work for a few days. That means you will have to take on my job.”

I glared at Giancarlo.

“Fine. I won’t tease your pet.”

“He isn’t mine.” Not in the way Giancarlo was suggesting. I was stuck with Caleb because Benito ordered me to keep an eye on him and teach him, that was it.

Giancarlo hummed as if he didn't believe me. Caleb came out, his weary gaze aimed at Giancarlo. Good, I didn't need to go into a long explanation as to why he shouldn't try the second in the Vitale family.

"You'll be stuck with me today, short stuff."

"I'm not short."

"You ain't tall either."

Caleb gritted his teeth.

I snapped my fingers, grabbing his attention.

"What am I, a dog?"

"I'd prefer that." I put my shoes on. "You're shadowing Giancarlo for the day. When I get back tonight, we're going to go over how you can start paying us back."

"Me doing this work doesn't count?"

"No," Giancarlo and I said in unison.

"Then why am I doing it?" Caleb scoffed. I stared at him and he groaned. "You don't have to answer that."

I wasn't going to.

"Wait, are you really leaving me here with him?" Caleb jerked his thumb toward Gin, who went back to searching my cabinets.

"Don't get in his way, don't be stupid, and don't touch Baby or Silvy."

Caleb's face scrunched in confusion. "Who now?"

"The car and hammer." My phone buzzed and I checked it once more. Benito was ready. "Don't be stupid."

"Yeah, you said that one already."

I glared at him and moved in closer, invading his space. Caleb met my gaze head-on. Maybe I shouldn't leave him with Gin, he was going to end up dead. Enzo was no better, but if he was going to survive this family, he needed to learn quickly there was a right and wrong way to go about things.

“That’s not how you answer back.”

Caleb bit into his bottom lip. “Yes, sir.” It was said with an attitude but it was getting better.

“Gin, no happy accidents.”

“Not even a toe?” he shouted after me.

I shook my head. Caleb was on his own. His best bet was to keep his head down and follow Gin around like a puppy. I slipped behind the wheel and pulled out of the driveway. My stomach clenched as I remembered something. I had no time to turn around. I hit the contact list on the car’s touchscreen dashboard and called Giancarlo.

“Man, you’re clingy. I would have never guessed.”

“Put Caleb on the phone.”

There was some rustling before Caleb came on the line.

“What?”

My hands twitched on the steering wheel. “Don’t try to run.”

“I told you, I wasn’t.”

“Can’t trust the word of a thief. Giancarlo will not hesitate to introduce you to Silvy.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t leave me here with him.”

A part of me didn’t want to. “I have work to handle.” I hung up before he said something stupid, and I’d have to turn

around to wring his neck.

When I pulled up at the private airport, Benito was already waiting for me. I hurried along and joined him on the jet. He said nothing as I took my seat.

“Give the rundown of what’s happened so far,” Benito said once we hit the air.

I nodded, ready to recite everything that had been happening around the city. Just because I had to take care of Caleb, didn’t mean I didn’t have my own work to take care of. It was why we’re flying to meet some allies that could potentially back us if the war became even bloodier.

The flight went by fast with us going over every little thing possible. It was already ruled out, Caleb and whoever he worked with wasn’t tied to the triad. For now, it would have to be placed on the back burner. We’d checked every single small gang that attempted to make a move while we were focused on the triads. By the time we got off the plane and into the waiting car, I was exhausted. The lack of sleep was catching up to me.

The heat wasn’t doing me any favors. It only made me feel worse. “Glad we aren’t staying. It’s humid as hell here.”

“Could be worse, I’m sending Giancarlo to Arizona next week to meet up with the Laureati family.”

“You think it will result in a full-on war?” I asked.

Benito sighed. “I hope not. But the way they are moving, it feels as if it will be heading that way.”

The car came to a stop, and I got out first. I shoved all my thoughts away and focused. We were in alliance territory but you never know what would happen. Benito slipped out of the car and we headed toward the casino. We made our way

through the busy floor, even mid-day. The place was packed full of people gambling their money away.

“Welcome. He’s running a little behind but you can go ahead inside.” The receptionist smiled warmly at us, gesturing to the door behind her. “Would you like coffee or tea?”

“Coffee, cream and sugar on the side,” Benito said.

“Same for me, thank you.”

She bustled away to get our drinks. I liked my coffee black, no sugar or creamer, but I got it all the same because no one ever gave Benito enough sugar or creamer for his coffee. He took a seat on the leather sofa, opening his suit jacket on his way down. I moved behind him, guarding Benito’s back.

“I’m surprised Harlow didn’t demand to come with.”

Benito groaned. “He did. I reminded him that we both couldn’t be out of the state.”

I’ll never understand how he handles that nut job.

The receptionist came in, handing over our coffees with a side of cream and sugar for us both. The moment she was back out of the door, I handed over my sugar and creamer. Benito added it all, overfilling the cup.

The door opened and Benito stood up with a smile on his face. “Amadeo, it’s been too long, my friend.”

Amadeo Bianchi laughed. “It has. If only we both weren’t deep in bullshit, we’d meet in better circumstances.”

CHAPTER SIX

CALEB

FOR THE FIRST time since coming face-to-face with Tony, I wanted him to come back. *Something isn't right about this one.* He stared, his head tilted before he started to walk around me in a circle. It felt like he was inspecting me, taking me apart and trying to piece me back together. I swallowed thickly.

“Um, what the fuck, dude?”

“Tony was real particular about you.”

“I... guess?” I had no idea where he was going with this. “So, are we going or what?”

Gin snapped his fingers. “Right, I’m supposed to be taking you to work. Come on, got names to check off the list. You know how to fight, cousin?”

I shuddered. Shit, I was technically his cousin, wasn't I? I knew that, but it felt odd as hell to hear someone say it. Even after I'd done my research and figured out who my bastard of a father was, I never connected that I was anything like these guys. They were just rich, violent assholes who could do with a lightning of their pockets. I didn't consider myself related to them, and yet, in the end, that connection was the only thing that saved my ass.

“Yeah,” I said, clearing my throat. “I can fight.”

He looked closely at my discolored, scratched up knuckles and whistled. “I can see that. All right, let’s go, Fido.”

“It’s Caleb.”

“You look like a Fido.”

I groaned. “When is Tony coming back?” I asked as he strolled outside with me in tow.

He shrugged. “Probably not until tonight. Late tonight. So you’re all mine.” He stopped in the driveway and whistled. “Whoa, whose bike is that?”

Tony had left the garage door up. I groaned as I stepped inside and ran a hand over my baby. I’d had my bike for a good five years now, and I took care of it. All my money went to it. Outside of my crew, it was the closest thing I’d had to a relationship.

“Mine. Nice, right?”

“How many CCs?”

“Six hundred.” I grinned. “You like bikes?”

Gin nodded as he crouched down and examined it. “Anything with a motor speaks to me. You ever race on this thing?”

“Only every chance I get.” I chuckled. “I can blow past a cop at 120 miles an hour, but she tops out at 155.”

He whistled as he stood up and stared at me a little too intently. “She got a name?”

“Mistress.” I laughed. “Because if you’re not careful, she’ll toss you on your ass and make you her bitch.”

Gin laughed. “All right, I can’t call you Fido anymore. I guess we really are related.” He almost touched the bike and then raised a brow. “Can I?”

“Oh yeah, go for it, man.”

He lit up like a giddy little kid as he ran a hand over the powder blue paint job. *Not like I’m going to say no to an actual psycho.* Giancarlo could touch my bike all he wanted, as long as it kept me from being on the receiving end of whatever happy little accidents Tony had mentioned on his way out.

A thought occurred to me, and I grinned as I glanced at Gin. “You know, there’s a race tonight. Want to go? It’s not just bikes.”

“Really?”

I nodded. “Yeah, I see you’ve got a badass ride,” I said as I inclined my head in its direction. “Want to see who can kick the most ass?”

“Fuck yeah!” Gin grinned before he groaned. “Work.”

“Let’s run through it real fast,” I said. “Come on, I’m sure a guy like you collects in no time.”

“I’m supposed to have you do it.”

“Technically, I will! I’ll be right by you. People don’t know me like they know you, though. If you say, ‘Give me my shit,’ I’m sure they’ll piss themselves and hand it right over.”

The smile returned to his lips. “That’s true.”

“See?” I waved a hand. “Let’s do that quick and then we can talk engines and have some fun.”

Giancarlo narrowed his eyes as he examined me again. Eventually, the smile returned to his lips and he slapped me on the back so hard, I nearly coughed up a lung.

“Deal!” he exclaimed. “Let’s go. I’ll tell you about Baby on the way.”

“I’m all ears, man.”

This is going to be easier than I thought.



“YOU GUYS GOOD?” I asked.

“As good as can be, holed up in the middle of nowhere,” Drav said. “We gotta get home, Cell. None of us can work out here, and I think the twins are going to kill each other. Or Shade will kill them first.”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it. We’re city scum. Can’t survive in the country,” I said as my eyes tracked Giancarlo who was busy bragging about his Baby. “I’m working on it. You guys get that money where it needs to go?”

“Your mother was first on the list. Had an associate run it. Then some to the church, a bunch to our families, and the last bit went to the food pantry. Everything’s looking good so far.”

“Still.” I sighed. “It wasn’t as big a hit as I wanted. We need to make more.”

“Yep.” He grunted. “Gotta go, Stasia’s staring at me. Think she’s hungry.”

“I’ll call when I can. Don’t call me. Tony doesn’t know I picked this up, neither does Gin. Either that man takes hour long shits or he was fucking his fiancé today at the office.” I shook my head at the memory. “He just grinned when I asked. Weirdo.”

“Keep your head down, Cell.”

“I’m doing the shit,” I muttered. “Gotta go.”

I shut the flip phone and stuffed it into my pocket as Giancarlo swaggered over. He draped an arm around my neck and dragged me in close like we’d been friends for a lifetime. The man still made me uneasy as hell, but he was so easy to distract. I liked him.

“Are we racing or what?”

“Us two?” I asked. “You really want to put your car against my *bike*?”

“I mean, unless you’re a pussy...”

I burst out laughing. “Okay, let’s do this shit.”

“Let’s do it!”

I shook my head as I followed him over to the organizer. When I explained what we wanted to do, the guy looked at Giancarlo and laughed. I quickly shook my head, gesturing with my hand in front of my neck to tell him to knock it off. Yeah, Gin was chill, but today I’d seen the type of violence the Vitale’s were known for. Busted heads, broken kneecaps, the works. Okay, so maybe the few that did get fucked-up deserved it, but it was still messed up. *I don’t know why anyone would provoke a guy that keeps a hammer named Silvy on him.*

Oh well, their loss was my gain. It was survival of the fittest on the streets, and I'd rather it be them than me. At least Giancarlo hadn't killed anyone. Blood, I could handle.

"Sure, you two can go for it," the guy said as he nodded to me. "Get ready." When Gin walked away, he leaned toward me. "A Vitale? Really?"

"Don't ask, man."

The grin he gave me and the shake of his head was completely understandable. As the Hitters, we'd made a name for ourselves, so seeing us with some rich asshole had to be insane for anyone who knew me. It wasn't like I had a choice, though. Either I played along or Tony would probably put his whole ass into hunting down my friends instead of only half of it.

It's a nice ass, though.

I full body shuddered at my own thought process. The man was a pain, and on top of that, he was a fucking psycho. I still couldn't touch water without flinching and he thought it was hilarious. One day, we were going to come to honest blows. For real. And then I'd take his head off.

As I dragged my helmet over my head, I thought about this morning. The way his body pressed against mine. Maybe I was losing my damn mind, but I could have sworn I felt the hard ridge of his cock pressed against my naked body. That should sicken me, I should run right for the hills screaming. So... why did my dick throb in response?

"Hey, we racing or what?" Giancarlo bellowed.

I zipped up my jacket and gave him a thumbs up. The wicked look that flashed in his eyes was amusing. *Poor son of a bitch actually thinks he can beat me.* I swung my leg over

my bike and got myself situated. When I was ready, I signaled.

My favorite part of racing was this moment. Blood rushed in my ears as my heart pounded away in my chest. I almost couldn't catch my breath as the tingles of adrenaline lit through me. However, this wasn't like the panic attacks I had at night, locked in my room where no one could see me. No, riding Mistress was the epitome of freedom. My problems didn't exist when I was blowing down the highway at a hundred miles an hour, wind whipping past me as I wove in and out of cars. I didn't exist. It was just me and my bike.

The air horn blared. Gin and I took off, shooting into the dark. The heat of the day had settled into coolness, but I barely felt it past my gear. Boots, jacket, thick pants, gloves, and my powder blue helmet that matched Mistress, all protected me from the elements. I twisted the throttle. The engine revved up, kicking me into another gear as I caught up with Gin in no time at all. He glanced over at me, surprise on his face. I laughed.

Told you, man. Sorry.

I stayed beside him just long enough to tease him before I shot off into the darkness. My thighs hugged the roaring, vibrating bike as I took a corner a little sharply. I righted myself, but when I looked over, Giancarlo was right beside me.

This crazy son of a bitch.

My heart sped up, threatening to leap out of my chest. Yeah, he was nuts, but damn, was he fun! I pushed myself harder, taking another corner and leaving him in the dust. Exhilaration burst from my chest as I kept whooping his ass. I

saw the frustration on his face, and that just pushed me to keep going. Harder, faster.

More. More. More.

Fuck, it was like good sex, the kind you wanted to go on forever. There was nothing better than flying down a road, every thought pulled out of your head as your body was shaken with vibrations. It was electric.

Gin pulled ahead of me. I let him. The excited look on his face was too good. I chuckled, the sound rumbling through my chest as I let him take the lead. His car might be his Baby, but my bike was Mistress for a reason. She could whip anyone's ass into submission.

I opened up the throttle as Gin approached the finish line and flew past him. As soon as I came in, my wheel slipped, gravel under my tire. *Shit!* I knew what was going to happen before it did, but I was helpless to stop it. My bike slipped, I yelled, and I went down in a heap of metal and dirt. The wind rushed from my lungs. Black spots danced in my eyes as I stared up at the inky sky.

“Caleb? Caleb!”

My ears rang as I came to, panting. I shot up, gripping my chest as I ripped the helmet off. Eyes stared at me, through me. I couldn't catch my breath. Someone kept talking and I waved them away. *Back the fuck off!* I wanted to scream it, but my voice had disappeared. I couldn't breathe.

“Hey, hey!” My head snapped in the direction of that familiar voice. “Breathe, idiot. Breathe. In and out, come on, Caleb. You can at least breathe right, can't you?”

Tony. The worry that pulled his brows together would have been comical. If I could breathe.

“In and out,” he growled. “You die, and it’s my ass.”

I coughed out something between a laugh and a gasp. “Of course, cause it’s all about you, right?”

“Damn straight,” he said, relief coloring his features before he sighed. “You good?”

I groaned. “Yeah.” I waved a hand. “Just wiped out. It’s happened before.”

“You couldn’t breathe.”

I waved him off again. That had nothing to do with the spill, and everything to do with my crippling panic attacks. They quieted sometimes, mostly when I was riding with the people I gave a shit about or on solo trips when I just disappeared. Lately though, they had come back with an ugly vengeance. I refused to give into them. My weak ass father was the one that had given me the fucked-up gene, the one that would make me look like a little bitch if anyone ever knew.

“Can you walk?” he asked.

I checked each leg, extending and pulling it back toward my body before I nodded. Everything was in working order. The only thing that was bruised was my ass, my back, and my ego. I took the hand he held out toward me. Tony pulled me to my feet. The world spun around me for a split second before everything righted. When I glanced up, people were still staring, whispering.

“I’m good!” I yelled. “Whoo!”

The tension dissipated in an instant. Quickly, the crowd thinned as people went back to their rides. Wipe outs weren’t uncommon at races, but everyone always held their breath until the person was all right. We weren’t stupid, what we did was dangerous. However, calling an ambulance risked

everyone as well. Especially the ones who had already been locked up once and didn't want to be heading back anytime soon. Make that double for the ones that no longer had licenses or rode up without license plates...

Tony slapped the back of my head. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?" he asked, invading my space when I faced him. "You were supposed to be collecting debts with Giancarlo, not racing!"

I gestured wildly to Gin who was "polishing" his baby with his shirt. He licked his thumb, working it against a non-existent scratch or fleck of dust or whatever that psychopath saw in his mind. When he finally glanced up at us, he blinked.

"What?"

"I'm telling Benito," Tony said.

Gin's jaw dropped. "What? Come on, don't do that. Tony, I thought we were pals!"

"You almost got this idiot hurt!" Tony snapped, as I trailed him like a kicked puppy. "You were supposed to do *one* thing."

"And we did it!" Gin countered. "Besides, he's fine. You're fine, right?"

I held up my hands. "I don't want to get in the middle of this."

"Hey, get my back, asshole." Gin scoffed. "I'm not trying to get locked up cause of you!"

Nope, I wanted to get the hell out of there. Between Tony's glaring and Gin's justifying, I was in the middle of a mental battle between two insane men. That wasn't my idea of a good night.

“Shit.” I groaned. “I think I hurt something more than I thought. Maybe we should get out of here,” I lied.

Tony glared at me. “So a liar and a thief. Great to know.”

How the hell had he seen right through me? I gave him a sheepish look, but he still held the same expression. As if he wanted to kill me. I was glad when he turned back to admonish Giancarlo instead.

“Something could have happened to him,” he growled.

“It didn’t.”

“But it *could* have,” Tony snapped.

“You’re the one who keeps saying you want to kill me,” I pointed out. The words had slipped from my lips before I thought better of them. I chewed my lip when Tony glared at me. “Sorry.”

“Get in the car,” Tony snapped.

“What about my bike?”

“One of the other idiots will transport it back to my garage. And that’s where it’ll stay!” He cursed in Italian.

“I think you just called me a moron, but I’m not sure.”

Before I could react, Tony grabbed a fistful of my hair. My face erupted into flames as people stared. I wanted to shrink away and disappear.

“What the fuck!” I bit out. “Everyone’s staring at us. Quit acting like you’re my fucking dad!”

Tony tossed me into the back of a sleek, black limo. He leaned on the door, his eyes undressing me in a way that made shivers run up and down my spine. When he stuck his head inside, I felt like prey in the eyes of a predator.

“Maybe I should be your Daddy. Someone needs to teach you to shut your fucking mouth,” he growled. “I’ll happily show you how to do it.”

I glared. “Unless you’re putting your cock down my throat, I don’t think that’ll ever happen, asshole.”

The tension that crackled between us was almost suffocating. It built, a fissure of resentment growing as we stared each other down. He would have to strap me into a chair and drown me again before I would be a good little bitch and keep my mouth shut. Men like Tony irritated the fuck out of me. He thought I should bow to him? I would rather die.

Tony climbed into the limo. I started to protest as I glanced through the rearview mirror at someone touching my fucking bike. Before I could even form words, however, Tony grabbed the back of my neck and shoved me toward his crotch. One large hand undid his zipper, the veins protruding beneath his skin. I stared at them until I was transfixed by his cock.

“What the fuck do you think—”

My words died on my lips as he shoved his dick into my mouth. And me, stupid as I was, moaned.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FUCK.

I swallowed the word as I was wrapped in rapture. The trip back was met with little to no rest. I'd had every intention of going home and passing out for the next few hours. I should have known better. Giancarlo and Caleb were a terrible mix.

Caleb pulled back a little, and I shoved him down, engulfing my cock in glorious wet heat. Fuck, it felt good. Maybe it was the lack of sleep, sex, and patience, but I wanted nothing more than to fuck Caleb's throat raw. Hear his already tempting voice rough from my cock. Just the thought of it had my hips lifting and my dick sinking further down his throat. Caleb choked, a muffled groan echoing in the confines of the limo. A smile pulled at my lips.

"Was this all you needed to shut the fuck up?" I relaxed my hold just a little and Caleb pulled back fully. My cock slipped free of his mouth with an audible pop.

"Fuck you."

I moved fast as my fingers dug into the soft flesh of Caleb's cheeks. His lips pursed, and even then, he tried to talk. He really was only quiet with a cock down his throat.

Good to know.

“Be good and open your mouth so I can fuck your throat.”

Caleb’s face turned red. He looked ready to say no but want shimmered in his baby blue eyes as he glanced down at my cock.

I leaned in closer, my lips brushed along his ear. “You want to suck my cock, don’t you?”

Caleb attempted to shake his head but I held him firm. “No.” The word came out muffled, but it was clear Caleb refused to admit the truth to himself.

“Don’t lie.” I brought the sole of my shoe down over his crotch that strained against the tight fabric of his jeans. “Or maybe you like the fact I’m taking the choice away from you.” My head tilted as I studied Caleb, watching every little movement he made. “You want me to use you like the toy you are?”

His tongue slipped out, swiped over his plump lips and drew my attention to his mouth. *Fuck, he has a mouth a whore would be jealous of.*

The sounds outside grew louder. A group of people laughing and talking moved closer toward us. Their sounds were like a needle slamming into a balloon. Caleb’s head whipped to the side and he went to jump back. I grabbed a handful of hair, yanked him back to his knees, and steered his face toward my cock.

“Where do you think you’re going?” My nails scraped over his scalp, earning me a beautiful sight. Caleb visibly shivered, his lids lowered slightly.

“Oh shit, who the fuck brings a limo to a car meet?” someone said outside.

Caleb glanced over at the window, staring at the people trying to peek in. “People are right there,” he whispered.

I smirked at him. His cock strained against his fly. “Want me to roll down the windows and let them hear you choke on my cock?”

Caleb’s eyes widened, the blush coloring his cheeks deepened. “That’s—”

I pulled him back between my legs and brought his face toward my cock. Caleb opened his mouth and encased me in liquid fire once more. Pleasure raced up my spine and slipped around my throat, choking off my air as I succumbed to it. My hips lifted, forcing my cock further down his throat. The choking noises leaving him was better than any music I’d ever listened to. I did it again. My toes curled in my shoes at the tight feel of his throat around the tip of my length.

“Think it’s unlocked?” someone asked outside.

“Man, leave it.”

“I just want to check it out.” The conversation outside droned on, but my focus was zeroed in on Caleb. He swallowed around my cock. His movements became sloppy as the people kept talking. Caleb lifted his head, but I followed him, shoving my cock back between his lips.

“I don’t think I told you to stop.”

I reached over to the lock on the door and ran my fingers over it. Caleb’s eyes widened and he grunted around my cock. “They should witness how good you are on your knees. Maybe they’ll want a turn.”

Caleb shook his head and attempted to talk around my cock. Pleasure stripped me bare, and I had half a mind to open the door and have eyes on us. The thought of anyone else

feeling this pleasure from Caleb's mouth made me want to cut anyone and everyone's hands off. It was mine. *For now.*

"You shouldn't try and talk with your mouth full."

His brows lowered and the glare he fixed on me had ecstasy racing through me at a dangerous rate. I rolled my hips up, following the call of pleasure.

"That look means you want an audience?"

Caleb flipped me off and a boisterous laugh broke free before I could think better of it.

"Shit, someone is in there. Let's go." The guys standing near the limo disappeared, and I was left to focus on Caleb.

"You're the one who's choking down on my cock, and yet, you're glaring up at me."

It was the same the night I waterboarded him. Caleb had so much fire in his eyes that it called to a part of me that I had ignored for a while. I meant what I said, he needed a Daddy to handle him, put him in his place and use him how he needed to be used. Question was, did I really want to deal with it?

So many years, I'd spent ignoring that specific sexual desire. I enjoyed my short times at the local kink club, but I never took it beyond the walls of the club. I liked my freedom but above all else, I didn't have to live with the anxiety that I had a walking, breathing weakness. Because that's all any partner would become. A weakness for my enemies to exploit.

Caleb's tongue swirled around the tip of my cock dragging me out of my own head. I looked down, and even with my cock in his mouth, it was easy to tell Caleb was smirking up at me.

Cocky son of a bitch.

I pulled him off my cock and yanked him closer. I kissed him. Our tongues twisted together in a battle for dominance, but Caleb needed to learn he'd lose every single time against me. I bit down on his tongue until the tang of blood joined in the heady mixture that was mine and Caleb's taste. I groaned and deepened the kiss further. Every inch of his mouth was taken over by me, and still, I wanted to drill it into his thick skull that I ran things, that I owned him in every way.

The insanity that took over was impossible to ignore when it demanded I break Caleb.

"Fu—ck," Caleb moaned. He pulled back, his pupils blown and his lips swollen from our kiss. His breathing was erratic as if he'd forgotten how to. "I couldn't air."

I lifted a single brow at his jumbled words and stared at his face. He was beautiful. He looked the best with his mouth full of my cock, or dumbfounded after a simple kiss. For a single second, I contemplated keeping him.

"What was that?" he muttered.

I leaned back against the seat, my cock ached between my legs. This was getting drawn out. I was here to drag his ass back to my place and keep an eye on him. Yet I was at a car meet with my cock out and glistening from Caleb's saliva. This wasn't how the night was supposed to go.

"Take it out."

Caleb glanced down at his cock before staring at me. His tempting tongue came back out, calling to me to bite it once more. The sound of his zipper coming down echoed in the limo. His cock sprang free. It was red, precum beaded at the tip and rolled down his flesh. A single vein was more

prominent than the others, and I had the unmistakable urge to trace it with my tongue.

“Want a taste?” Caleb asked, stroking his cock.

“Talking is the least attractive thing about you.”

Caleb’s mouth dipped in a frown, his hand stilled as he glared at me. “Who the fuck cares what you find attractive?”

There he went, mouthing off again. I ran my thumb over his lips. Caleb, conscious of it or not, opened his mouth. His tongue twisted over my thumb and drew it in further. My heart skipped a beat as my cock ached to get back inside of him.

I spread my legs wider and dropped my hand to the side. “You look like you want something.”

Caleb’s blue eyes flickered down to my cock and then back up. That wouldn’t do.

“Ask for it.”

“Fucking asshole,” Caleb muttered under his breath.

I slipped off one of my shoes and pressed my foot against his hard cock. I stroked up. Precum soaked into my sock, making it sticky. Caleb’s groans filled the car. “You sure that’s what you want to say?”

“Thought you liked me quiet?” Caleb shot back.

“I do, but I want to hear you beg for it.” I rubbed the tip, knowing just how to drive him to the brink of insanity.

Caleb’s hands wrapped around my ankle as he bent forward. His mouth hung open as a deep blush flooded his cheeks. Maybe I’d approached him wrong. Physical torture worked on many, but Caleb seemed to respond beautifully to

sexual torture. My heart skipped a beat. I'd found something far too interesting to ignore.

“Please.” Caleb moaned. His fingers trembled around my ankle. “Can I suck your cock?”

“No.”

I pushed down on his hard cock and earned another unfiltered moan. It was loud enough that anyone nearby had to have heard it. The moment it hit my ears, I wanted to hear it again. I stroked his cock with my foot, unable to contain my smirk as Caleb shook on the limo floor.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” His hold on my ankle tightened, stopping my movements. “Please.”

“Please what?”

Caleb's blue eyes searched my face begging me to give him the answer to what I wanted to hear.

“How should you address me?”

Caleb licked his lips, confusion written all over his face. It was easy to tell when he finally realized. “Daddy?”

Bliss rushed through me and left behind a tingle in each of my limbs. Shit. I hadn't expected it to sound so good coming out of his mouth. There was no sarcasm, just an underlying plea to give him what he was desperately begging for. I moved my foot up.

Caleb moaned. “Daddy, right? Fuck, please, Daddy.”

I moved fast, surprising Caleb and myself. My hand slapped over his mouth as my heart pounded against my ribcage. My breathing was short as everything in me screamed to flip Caleb over, carve my name into his flesh and own him

like he was nothing more than a cheap toy. I was the one running things but I felt so out of control.

Soft, wet heat slipped over and in between my fingers. Tingles traveled from my hand down to my cock, driving me insane. I stared at Caleb and the hungry look in his gaze.

“Go ahead,” I said as I removed my hand.

Caleb moved forward, his mouth wide open as he took my cock in his mouth once again. I was brought to the brink of climax without effort. His tongue worked me like a pro. I’d be embarrassed if it didn’t feel so fucking good. My body was responding to him without consent. Yes, I could get off. Yes, I could feel good, but like hell if I’d start craving this. Still, it felt like I had no choice in the matter. Pleasure sank deeper and along with it was the desire to grab Caleb tighter and force him to take everything I had.

“Swallow,” I demanded as I shoved his head down and held him in place.

Caleb’s throat worked around my cock drawing out my climax. My fingers tingled, and the base of my spine erupted in fireworks. I lost track of everything. The entire day was wiped away, and I was left in utter bliss.

I let Caleb go and he fell back gasping for air and swallowing the remainder of my cum. I stared at his hard, angry cock pointedly. “Play with yourself.”

Caleb’s hands moved fast, as if he’d been waiting for me to give the order. He shoved his shirt up and tucked the end of it between his teeth. One hand went to his rigid cock and the other to his nipples. He stroked his cock roughly, even so, the muffled moans spilling free from him were intoxicating. I moved a little to get a better view. I spat on his cock.

“Fuck.” Caleb’s hand moved faster, collecting my spit and using it to jerk himself off.

I wasn’t a chest man or at least I’d been under the impression I wasn’t. Caleb had a very nice chest, however; they were plump and begging to be bitten. My mouth watered at the thought, and before I could think about it, I was leaning forward.

“Don’t stop.” I groaned.

Caleb’s hand flew up and down his cock. His eyes fixed on me as I reached out and slapped his other hand away from his nipple. I took over, teasing both of them. I tugged and twisted, pulling out moans from Caleb as he started fucking his hand faster. The wet sounds filling the limo accompanying his moans was pure erotica.

I palmed his chest. My cock twitched between my thighs. I shouldn’t like so much about him, and yet there was no denying that Caleb was beyond attractive. I knew I liked his body, but watching it through the cameras and playing with it were two very different things.

“More, Daddy, please,” Caleb said around his shirt in his mouth.

I gave in without thought. The moment *Daddy* slipped out of his mouth, I’d lost the battle. I leaned forward and bit down on the stiff peak of his nipple. Caleb’s body jolted up as his muffled moans echoed around us. Hot splashes of cum hit my pant leg, but I couldn’t find it in me to care. I released his abused nipple and bit down on the other.

Can’t show favoritism. I soothed the bite with my tongue earning me more of those delectable moans.

“Ah.” Caleb whimpered. His fingers tangled in my hair and held me close.

“You need to be tied down,” I said around his nipple. I looked up, thinking about Caleb tied up and at my mercy. My body was flooded with desire all at once. I wanted to do so much for him.

He finally let me go, his hands dropping to his sides. There was a well-fucked look plastered on his face.

I hit the button and the privacy window rolled down. “Take us home, Jay.”

Caleb blinked rapidly and he glanced over his shoulder for the first time since getting on his knees. “Fuck.”

I laughed, unable to help myself.

“You knew he was there.”

“Of course. You should always be aware of your surroundings.”

Caleb shook his head and moved to take the seat next to me. I shoved him back down.

“Stay there.” I jerked my head forward. “Jay is a private man. He will forget everything.” I met the driver’s eyes. “Won’t you, Jay.”

“Nothing happened, sir.”

It was rare that I ever used a driver. I preferred to be the only one keeping track of Benito and I’s movements. However, the trip to Georgia had taken a lot more out of me than I thought. Fatigue was right there waiting for me to get comfortable to snatch me up and drag my ass off to sleep.

“Are you fucking serious right now?” Caleb asked.

“Do I need to shove my cock back down your throat in order to make you behave?” I put my spent cock away and shoved my fingers through my hair, grasping onto my self control once again.

Caleb opened and closed his mouth. “No?”

He was too tempting for his own good. The sooner this assignment was over, it would be for the better. If I stayed around him any longer, I was going to be filled with stupid thoughts like the idea of wanting to keep Caleb around and on his knees. My chest tightened and my stomach knotted as I pictured Caleb; messy hair, wild and ready for me to use whenever I wanted. My cock twitched, and I groaned internally.

“I’m hungry, can we order pizza or something?” Caleb asked. “And before you even say it, no, your cum was not enough to fill me up.”

This brat is going to be the death of me.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TONY

“GET UP.”

Caleb groaned, his head buried under a pillow. “It’s too early.” Caleb pulled the pillow off his head, glaring daggers at me. “Do you even sleep?”

“No. Now, get dressed, we have a full schedule.” I sipped the coffee I’d made and stared at him, waiting for him to get out of bed. “I know you slacked off yesterday. Giancarlo did all the work.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Is your first instinct to lie?”

Caleb flung the sheet away, giving me a full view of his naked body. After last night, I shouldn’t have any trouble resisting him. The lust pumping through me at breakneck speed said otherwise. His hair was the usual wild mess that I was starting to like on him.

“Giancarlo did what he does best. He was only showing me so I knew how to do it next time.”

I slowly blinked at him. Caleb had a gift for sure, it was the ability to talk out the side of his neck and have people actually believe him.

Need to leave before I tackle him and fuck him stupider.
“Get dressed.” I headed for the door. There were a few things I needed to get ready, anyway.

“Most people sleep in after getting off, you know?”

I stopped short of leaving his room and glanced his way. “I’m not one of those people. Now, move it. And don’t take those pain pills in your nightstand without eating first.”

“How in the fuck?” Caleb muttered. “Thanks, Dad.” The sarcasm was so thick it was impossible to miss it.

“It’s Daddy,” I shot back.

His curses actually made me laugh as I remembered the night before. Heat twisted my insides, lapping at my desire and coaxing it out.

Calm down.

The window in the living room was repaired, and since one of the guys had to be here to oversee it, I had them stock my kitchen. It wasn’t just me right now, and one thing I noticed was that Caleb didn’t eat. A few days was enough to see he had no idea how to take care of himself. I started making breakfast; eggs, bacon, rice, and some green onions. It was simple but it was better than nothing.

Caleb crashed into the kitchen, his hair wild, wearing a torn sleeveless black shirt and ripped black jeans. “Where’s my bike?”

“In the shop.”

“Fuck, no.” Caleb moved closer to me ignoring the hot stove. His face flushed red with anger. “No one touches my bike, let alone works on it without me vetting them. Not just anyone can handle her.”

Was it a Vitale trait to be idiotic about cars? Enzo wasn't too particular about them but he was still crazy in his own way. Benito—

“I want her back now.”

“Sit down and eat. We have a full schedule. You have a few jobs to handle and we have to check in on the places you stole from.”

“No.”

I sat the plate down on the table before turning back to Caleb. I placed my hands on his shoulders and shoved him down into the chair. He winced but his glare didn't go away.

This was going to be a thing, and I wasn't going to get a moment's rest if I didn't handle it. I grabbed the tablet off the counter and swiped it a few times until I found the email I needed. Passing it over, I went back to making my plate.

“What is this?”

“You can read, right? I know you're stupid. The symbols on that tablet are the alphabet. You use them to make words. You read words.”

I took my seat and did my best not to look at Caleb. The marks I'd left on his body were visible right above his collar. And more laid beneath all of his clothes. I couldn't even delude myself into thinking this was going to be a one-off. As long as Caleb was in my house, I was going to be tempted, so what better way to relieve stress than to use what I had access to. Once he was gone, my life would resume its regular schedule.

“How?” Caleb asked. He sat the tablet down, and I took it. There were a few things I needed to check.

“How what?” He was such a talker.

“How did you know that’s who I use?”

“You mean you and your guys?” I tapped a few more.
“The Hitters, right?”

The plane ride back to New York had been spent going over every single thing the guys had dug up. It honestly would have been a wash if it wasn’t for Caleb and Gin going to race. Once I got a name, that was it.

“Don’t touch them. I said I’d take on everything.”

I nodded. “You did, but you also know it’s not up to me.”

“That’s bullshit, Tony.” He slammed his hand on the table, and I put my silverware down and faced his anger.

“Don’t sit here and get angry with me. All of you knew the risks when stealing from the Vitales. You got lucky staying alive, but there is nothing keeping them safe.”

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” Caleb looked like he was losing his mind. Panic was written all over his face. “Where is Benito? I’ll talk to him. Make some kind of deal.”

“You have nothing to leverage.”

“Fuck.”

I blew out a breath. “Panicking isn’t going to help. Sit and calm down.” My words went in one ear and out the other.

Caleb paced back and forth in the small kitchen. I watched him chew on his nails as he muttered under his breath. I caught a few words but nothing that I could piece together. He was losing it and fast.

I stood up, ready to yell at him when something changed. His eyes had that foggy glazed look. His hand dropped, and I

knew instantly he wasn't breathing.

The hell.

I moved toward Caleb, grabbing him on instinct. "Breathe, come on, snap out of it."

He wasn't responding, and it was the night before all over again, finding him on the ground unresponsive.

"Caleb, look at me." I pressed my head against him and he blinked a few times. "That's it. Now, breathe in with me."

I coached him through a few breathing exercises before he was calming down and was once more with me.

"What was that?"

Caleb ignored me. "I need to talk to Benito, he can't touch them. None of them."

I stared at Caleb for a long while. He wasn't joking or trying to talk his way out of something. He genuinely wanted to keep his small-time crew alive.

"He's not going to listen to you."

"But he will listen to you," Caleb said. He gripped my shirt tightly and dragged me closer. "Please. Fuck, I'll listen to anything you say. You tell me to jump off a bridge, I'll do a fucking flip off it." Desperation wafted off him in waves.

Was I really going to do this? They'd robbed the mafia and thought they could get away with it.

"Okay."

Caleb's eyes widened.

"Don't get your hopes up, Benito doesn't take kindly to thieves." I sat him back down at the table and pushed the food toward him. "Whatever he decides, that's the end of it."

“Shit, okay, but you will talk to him?”

I nodded. “Eat.”

Caleb shoveled the food into his mouth. I grabbed my phone and sent the text off to Benito.

Me: He wants to buy ice cream for the rest of his crew

Benito: Sounds like a trip to the ice cream parlor is in order

That was that. Whatever sacrifice Benito came up with, I hoped Caleb was ready to make it.



“I’M SO DAMN TIRED,” Caleb whined. We’d been busy all day, and unlike when he was with Giancarlo, I made him handle every single encounter.

“Last stop.” We pulled up to an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of the city. A few of the guys moved around in the darkness. “You wanted your meeting with Benito, here it is.”

“Fuck yeah.” Caleb went to get out but I stopped him.

I didn’t warn people, and yet I was giving this to Caleb. “Are you sure this is what you want to do?”

“It’s not about what I want to do. They’re my people. I’m going to do whatever it takes as their leader and friend.”

“Okay.” I had no idea what Benito had planned for him but I knew it wasn’t going to be easy. I led the way to the building, nodding at the few guys moving about.

Caleb stopped in his tracks, his nose scrunching up in disgust. He quickly covered his mouth. “What the fuck is that smell?” He gagged. “It smells like death.”

“Good job, want a treat?” I asked. I went into the building and was instantly greeted by the brothers.

“Actually, yes,” Caleb said.

“Tony, what are you doing here? You missed all the fun,” Gin said. He wiped blood off his face, smiling like the lunatic he was.

Five men sat in the middle of the room. There was nothing but broken limbs, severed fingers, and bashed in skulls.

“You brought him?” Benito asked.

I glanced over my shoulder, meeting Caleb’s concerned gaze. He hadn’t seen the corpses yet but there was no mistaking the stench in the air. A small part of me wanted to turn him around and walk him back out. I squashed it.

“What the fuck?” Caleb whispered.

I headed further inside, the closer I got to the corpses, the more tacky blood I stepped in. I stopped close enough that I could tell one out of five was still breathing. His shallow whimpers could barely be heard.

“We saved this one for you,” Benito said.

I moved to the side, letting Caleb stand in front of the dying man.

“Pl—le—p-p—please. No more,” the man whimpered.

One eye was gone and the other was bloodshot as he stared at Caleb. Maybe he knew out of all the monsters in the room,

Caleb was probably the only one who looked like he'd give him mercy.

“What? I'm not killing anyone.” Caleb backed up, and I stepped behind him, stopping his retreat.

“I don't trust you, Caleb, and I sure as shit don't trust your lying ass father,” Benito pointed out.

“Man, Uncle Arnaldo is the scum, all around worthless low life.” Giancarlo laughed. “Don't think too much about it, Caleb. I'll even let you use Silvy.”

That was a surprise. I knew Giancarlo had taken a liking to Caleb, but I hadn't thought that much. My stomach turned, and I reflectively pulled Caleb away from Gin. He noticed, of course, and gave me a toothy psychotic smile.

“Particular indeed,” Gin said.

What the fuck is he going on about?

“We've done the hard work, all you have to do is end his life,” Benito said.

The pulse point on Caleb's neck jumped. I was so close to him that it was impossible to miss the way his body slightly swayed or the slight tremor wrecking his lean frame.

“I—”

Benito held out a knife and gun toward Caleb. Enzo had a knife and ax in his, and Gin was still offering Silvy.

“How about this, I'll make you a deal since we're family.” The way Benito said family sounded more like a curse than an actual handout. “Your friends won't get the same treatment as these men as long as you follow through.”

Caleb's head snapped up. "I returned everything and said I'd pay it back."

"Not good enough," Benito said.

"One out of three burglars will hit the same mark again," Enzo said.

Caleb shook his head and attempted to take another step back and fell against my chest. It took entirely too much not to hold him.

All eyes were on Caleb, and I could tell he was having a hard time with this. For some reason, I felt compelled to help him.

"Come, we're family, grab that Vitale blood and bang," Giancarlo shouted.

"Grab the knife," I ordered, keeping my voice down. "Hold it together. Don't let them see you breaking," I whispered so only Caleb could hear me.

Caleb didn't answer me but he didn't need to. I wiped the back of his neck free of sweat. I'd never given anyone a second thought. They could either handle it or not. He wanted to save his friends. He needed to pay for it.

Caleb took the knife out of Benito's hand.

"Hurry up. My offer won't last all night," Benito said.

Caleb audibly swallowed, staring at the man in front of him, pleading for his life.

"I have kids. Please. A family."

Caleb grabbed the man's head and held it with a shaky hand. He hesitated, the first cut across the man's neck barely bled. Taking in a deep breath, he blew it out before he tried

again. This time, he dragged the blade over the man's throat. The cut was deep enough his blood spilled over but not so deep it sprayed.

Giancarlo whistled. "Hell yeah."

"He has some talent," Enzo complimented.

Caleb said nothing as he clutched the knife in his hand. His knuckles blanched with how tight he was holding it.

"Welcome to the family, cousin," Benito said. He headed for the door. "Tony, have everything cleaned up. You two can have the rest of the night off."

"You should clean up, your prints are all over that," Enzo said. He looked at Caleb as if he wanted to do it himself.

"Let's go," I said.

"Did you know?"

I stopped in my tracks

"I told you, I didn't want to kill anyone!" Caleb's voice cracked as he shouted at me.

The distance between us disappeared before my brain could even register that I'd moved. I slammed him against the wall.

"You said you were willing to pay any price."

"I didn't think it was this," Caleb growled.

I had no words of reassurance for him. He was a Vitale now. Blood in and blood out. There was no turning back the price he'd just paid.

CHAPTER NINE

CALEB

HAD I ever felt so small before? I reached over and dragged the blanket over my body. As soon as we'd gotten home the night before, I had rinsed off every bit of the grime, blood, and sweat that clung to my body. For once though, I'd gotten dressed again. Jeans, T-shirt, jacket, all of it. I needed a barrier between myself and the fucked-up world I found myself in.

I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to ignore the sun that battered against my lids. No success. It was still there, still insisting. I grabbed the pillow and shoved it against my face.

Red blood, an open wound, gasping.

The images assaulted me one after the other until I threw the pillow across the room. Closing my eyes was apparently not the solution that I needed. Every image that flashed against my lids was more horrific than the last.

It was for them. The Hitters. They're safe. Shade, Demon, Angel, Drav, and little Stasia. I did what needed to be done.

That should have brought me comfort, but it didn't. I had one line I never wanted to cross, and yet I had stepped over it. Who was I? If I would go that far, what else could I do now that I was one of *them*?

I tossed the blanket off my body in frustration. Sleep wasn't going to come no matter how long I stayed in the almost too comfortable bed. I itched for my own. Yeah, it sucked, but it was mine. And when I laid in it, all I heard were the people I gave a fuck about surrounding me. Even when they got on my damn nerves, they were mine. I wanted to get back to them.

I grabbed my duffel and tugged on my gear. My helmet had taken up residence on top of the dresser and I snagged it on the way out the door after tugging on my boots. I made my way to the kitchen and immediately grimaced when I saw Tony at the table, coffee mug halfway to his lips, and books spread out in front of him. We stared at each other, the silence an endless chasm between us until he cleared his throat.

“Morning.”

I stared at him. Was this really the guy whose cock I had buried in my throat the other night? I'd thought it was hot back then, that maybe he wasn't so bad, you know, despite the trying to drown me shit. I was wrong.

“Where's my bike?”

“In the garage. It's been repaired.”

The word thanks lingered on my tongue, but I refused to thank the bastard for anything. Tony could die in a ditch for all I cared. Every little moment of humanity I saw in him, his moments of care and concern, had been tossed in the fucking trash.

“Going for a ride,” I muttered.

“Not without me,” he said as his chair scraped against the floor. “Where are you going?”

“I just said. A ride.” I kept heading for the door, ignoring him. “Feel free to follow me in your car, but I’m going.”

“No one gave you permission.”

I scoffed. “Fuck your permission, dude.”

The fuck’s I had to give had dwindled to exactly none. Tony could say or do whatever he wanted. He could kill me like he always said he would, and I didn’t give a damn. I needed to feel the roar of my bike and the road running beneath my tires. I needed freedom.

Tony stood, and I didn’t shrink back. Instead, I faced him head-on. If he wanted to fight, today was the day. I would punch until I couldn’t punch anymore. If he ended up a bloody pulp on the ground, that was on him.

“Fine,” Tony said finally. He glanced down at the book he was reading. “We should get breakfast too while we’re out. I know a place. Little diner off of the highway.”

I narrowed my eyes at him. *That was way too easy.* I opened my mouth to question why he was going along with what I wanted, but quickly snapped it shut again. *Doesn’t matter. As long as I get some space, I’ll be fine.*

Or at least I hoped so. I had a feeling the type of shit I’d seen would never be erased from my psyche, that I would need deep fucking therapy to ever recover. I shook that thought out of my head and turned on my heels again.

“Whatever,” I called. “Just hurry up.”

There was no smart-ass comeback, and I glanced over my shoulder. Tony was right on my heels, but he wasn’t running his mouth. I had no idea what had crawled up his ass and stolen his tongue, but I hoped the trend continued.

We walked out the house and to the garage. The first thing I did was check my bike over. When I saw it wasn't completely messed up, I sighed and rubbed it gently.

“At least they transported you correctly, Mistress.”

“Silly name for a bike,” Tony muttered.

I cast a glare in his general direction. “What the fuck do you know?”

He shrugged, and I rolled my eyes. I swung my leg over my bike and slowly walked it out of the garage before I turned it around. Tony passed me the key and as soon as it sank into the ignition, I sighed. It was safe. Familiar. Home.

I twisted the throttle, listening to the soothing sound of the engine revving. Automatically, I reached for my pocket to grab my phone and then groaned. *Right, I have coms, but no music.* Tony still didn't know I had a phone, and I doubted the little burner I had picked up could be used for much anyway.

Oh well. At least I get to ride.

My bike bounced as more weight was added. I twisted around to stare as Tony adjusted himself. He fixed his clothes, which I noticed weren't his usual suit and tie bullshit, and stared at me.

“What the fuck do you think you're doing?” I asked, my voice flat.

“Going with you. That's what we agreed on.” When I continued to stare, he nodded. “Are we going or not?”

“I don't recall asking you to be my backpack!” I yelled. I sucked in a breath trying to collect myself. “Get off. Drive your stupid car.”

“No. You could lose me on it. I'll go with you.”

“Tony.”

“I ain’t asking,” he snarled. “Either drive the fucking bike or shut up.”

I slapped the visor down on my helmet. “Fine, hold on,” I yelled.

Tony’s arms wrapped around me. My stomach clenched. I didn’t know if I wanted to throw him off the bike or what, but I ignored it. I kicked the bike into first gear and released the clutch as I pulled out of the driveway and onto the road.

I didn’t have a clue where I was going, I just knew I needed *out*. Not that I was actually getting some peace with Tony hanging onto me.

A thought occurred to me. I smiled as I headed for the highway. The ride started slow, but as soon as I hit the ramp, I sped up. I kicked the bike into second gear, third, fourth. By the time I hit fifth gear, Tony’s grip had tightened around my body. He clung to me, holding on for dear life as I hit a corner and took it hard.

“Fuck, fuck. Holy fuck!”

I laughed at the rapid fire Italian that fell from his lips. *Suffer*. Tony could piss his pants and I would still laugh at him. I didn’t give a fuck about him “just doing his job.” He could get fucked.

As I took another corner, he clung to me even harder. His fingers pressed against my chest, but he couldn’t get through my gear to my skin. I took every corner hard as hell, speeding up until I finally was forced to slow down. I pulled into the parking lot of the diner and grinned.

Tony threw himself off the bike and raced to the corner of the building. I laughed as he hunched over, spilling his food

onto the ground. I swung my leg over my bike and walked over to him.

“What the... Fuck.” He panted as he gripped the wall shakily. “You... you... Oh god!”

I pulled my helmet off as I laughed at him. “I told you to drive your car.” I shrugged. “Should have listened.”

Tony reached for me, but I easily stepped away from him. Clearly, he was still too messed up to even stand up straight. I took the chance to escape for what it was and disappeared into the diner. I couldn't run away from Tony, there was no point, but I could make his life as miserable as he had made mine.

“What can I get you?” the guy behind the counter asked as I sat down.

I placed my helmet to the side and took off my gloves. “Coffee with creamer and let me get whatever breakfast special you have.”

“Coming right up.”

I still didn't have an appetite, but having the food in front of me might make me eat. By the time I was drinking my coffee, thinking about the rest of the Hitters, a heavy hand landed on my shoulder. I glanced back at Tony. The glare on his face was offset by how pale he looked.

“You motherfucker,” he huffed.

“I don't think I've ever screwed someone's mother. Maybe I have. No idea.” I shrugged. “It's been a while since I've slept with a woman.”

Tony balled up his fist. I raised a brow.

“We're in public,” I reminded him.

Just like that, his hand fell away and he plopped down. The same bit of satisfaction I got from terrorizing him faded away as soon as the silence settled in. I could still smell the dampness, the blood, the piss. Seeing that man cower in fear was something I never wanted to see again. I loved going toe to toe, but killing someone with a family... A child.

My stomach tightened as I choked down more of the black sludge they called coffee. Even when my food arrived, I stuck with my drink. I was afraid if I ate, I would throw it all back up.

“Eat something,” Tony said.

I glanced at him. He looked better than before. Sadly.

“Ain’t hungry,” I muttered.

“That’s bullshit. You haven’t eaten since yesterday morning. I know you’re starving by now.”

I shrugged. “I’ll eat when I want to. Why do you care?”

“I don’t,” he said through gritted teeth. “If you’re with me and you pass out, though, it’ll become my problem.”

I waved him off. “No one’s going to faint.”

“Eat.”

“No,” I snapped. “Fuck off. You screwed me over last night. I told you how I felt about killing and you led me there anyway. Didn’t even give me a heads up!”

“Lower your voice,” he said slowly before he leaned in toward me. “I had no idea what the price would be, but I told you that there would be one. Now, it’s over with. You’re a Vitale.”

“Never that,” I bit back. “I hate these people. Why do you think I stole from them?”

“Too damn bad. There’s no going back now.”

“Do you have to be such an asshole all the time?” I asked as I shot out of my seat. “Let’s just go back.”

“Sit down,” Tony said as his hand wrapped around my arm. “Come on. Sit. Eat.”

I stared down at him, but the usual hard expression on his face had softened. *Am I going crazy or is he trying to be... nice?*

Who gives a damn? He’s a jerk.

“I’m not going to beg,” Tony said.

“Maybe you should.” I narrowed my eyes at him. “Tell me the truth. Did you know?”

“No.”

It didn’t make any part of last night’s experience easier, but knowing that he hadn’t set me up felt better to me for some reason. I sat down. Despite how much I hated slicing into that man’s throat, something good had come out of it. At least my little family was safe. I would have to contend with the nightmares on my own.

They didn’t need to know what I’d seen.

What I’d done.

“Caleb.” When I met Tony’s gaze, he nodded to my seat. “Eat something. Starving yourself won’t bring anyone back.”

I searched his eyes as a lump formed in my throat. Crying wasn’t something I did often, so why did I feel like I was about to break down? Instead, I swallowed thickly and sat

down. I hesitated before I drug my plate toward me and stabbed the scrambled eggs with my fork.

“Thank you,” Tony said.

I glanced over at him, surprised. He let out a sigh of relief, but he was already staring at the menu. I stared at him entirely too long.

“What?” Tony asked when he met my gaze.

I turned back toward my plate. “Nothing.”

“Weirdo.”

“Asshole.”

The knot in my stomach loosened just a bit.

CHAPTER TEN

TONY

THERE WAS no way in hell I was getting back on that death machine. The wind slapping me in the face, ripping the air right out of my lungs. All the weaving. My insides quivered with unease. *Nope, not happening.*

Caleb touched his bike like it was his lover. He mounted it with ease and stared at me expectantly. When I made no move to follow him, a knowing smirk came over his face.

“What? Are you scared of Mistress?”

Still a stupid name. “No.”

Caleb shrugged, pulling his helmet over his head. “Then get on.”

Not happening. My stomach was full and it would take nothing for everything to come back up. Nausea rolled through me like a tidal wave, just thinking about flying down the highway at breakneck speed was going to make me hurl. A cold sweat broke out over the back of my neck.

“Then I can go wherever I want, right?” Caleb teased. The smirk on his face was infuriating but it was better than the sullen look that had been plastered on his face since yesterday.

“No, I’ll have someone come pick up your bike.” I had my phone out.

His smile fell. “I’m not done riding.” Caleb leaned over his handlebars. “It wasn’t enough.” His blue eyes pleaded with me to give in.

My fingers hovered over the call button. One look at Caleb’s face told me everything I needed to know. He might be a Vitale, but he wasn’t like the brothers. He still had empathy.

That’s a death sentence in our lifestyle.

“Caleb, running won’t work either.” I moved toward him, feeling the need to comfort him. Maybe his empathy was rubbing off on me. “You did what you had to.”

“That—” Caleb shook his head and started his bike. “Doesn’t make it okay.” He looked anywhere but at me. “Get on or don’t.”

My response was automatic. “You aren’t going anywhere without me.” He was a Vitale, but he’d stolen from us. I still needed to keep him close.

Caleb’s shoulders practically kissed his helmet. Tension rolled off him in waves. I might have gotten him to eat but he was suffering. At least it had been a man he didn’t know. Not one of his friends or so-called family. Benito wasn’t a forgiving person, let alone nice. Loyalty was everything to him, and once you made it to his tight inner circle, that was it. People would kill their mothers to be close to the brothers. Caleb on the other hand, it was clear he wanted nothing to do with the family.

This is a fucking mess. I knew there was no way Caleb would be able to leave the mafia and be fine. There was no future where the brothers looked the other way. For all intents and purposes, Caleb and I were stuck with each other. He was

here against his will, which only made my job that much harder.

I put my phone away. “Pull the same stunt and I’ll make your ass pay.” I swung my leg over the back and adjusted until I felt secure. I placed both hands on his waist and blew out a breath.

“Yeah, my mouth got you wanting to test my ass?” Caleb joked.

“That’s not what I meant.” Although now that he’d said it, I couldn’t get the image of his creamy ass out of my head.

Caleb scooted back until his ass rubbed teasingly against my crotch. Electricity danced along my flesh. My fingers curled on his jacket, and I instinctively pulled him tighter against me.

“Sure,” Caleb tossed over his shoulder.

Before I could say anything, we were pulling out of the diner parking lot and heading into traffic. I gritted my teeth, keeping back the shout that threatened to come out. My heart leapt into my throat, making it even harder to breathe as air slapped me in the face. The cars and scenery passed unnoticed by me. Caleb could have been taking me to a graveyard and I wouldn’t know any better. It was just taking everything in me not to leap off this bitch and get a cab.

Why am I doing this again? No answer came to mind. All I thought about were those pitiful blue eyes. *I’m getting soft, or maybe, I was tired.* I’d been with the Vitale’s for years. Maybe it was time for a vacation. Living this life wasn’t for the weak, and I wouldn’t change it for all the money in the world, but my work life balance was shit. Even the brothers were getting better at it. They had people to go home to. They had

something outside the family, a reason to push on. For a long time, the Vitale family was it for me. I owed them my life, and I'd willingly dedicate every skill I had to them. But I was starting to want something more. I'd never leave the mafia, but maybe I should go visit the local kink club and give it another try. It'd been a few months since I'd had some fun, and even more time since I'd tried to find a partner.

It's just not easy.

We slowed down, and finally, I was able to take in a satisfying breath. The ride hadn't been nearly as rough as the first one. Disappointment dripped through my veins, weighing me down.

"Getting used to it already." Caleb's words cut through my wayward thoughts.

My legs felt numb from the buzzing of the motorcycle. I rubbed them the moment I was off Caleb's bike. My stomach twisted, and I held my breath, waiting for the telltale sign that I was going to be bent over, back hunched as I lurched up every ounce of food I just put in my body. When nothing happened, I blew out a slow steady breath.

"Wouldn't say I'm used to it." I rolled my head back and forth. The stiffness in my shoulders was a bitch. I was too tight riding that death machine.

Caleb got off his bike and took his helmet off. His hair was plastered to his head. He shook it, making the black strands fall in a chaotic mess around his face. I found myself watching him, picking him apart in ways I shouldn't. His brows dipped as he checked his bike over. He rubbed out a scuff before he stood back up. The moment Caleb turned to face me, our eyes locked.

I needed to focus. I turned around and froze on the spot. A small catholic church that had seen better days sat in front of us. The sounds of children screaming and playing in the background finally hit me. The parking lot was sparse; only three other cars were parked out front along with a white van. *Holy Name of Mary Church* was written on its side. The paint was washed out and chipped on some areas.

“What are we doing here?” I asked. For the life of me, I couldn’t think of any reason Caleb would need to be here.

“It’s a church, what else?” Caleb held out his hand toward me.

“Are you going to burn it down?”

Caleb took a step away from me. “What the fuck, man? Who in the hell burns down a church?”

Benito Vitale, although I’m the one who set the fire. I shrugged my shoulders. “Why are we here then?”

Caleb watched me with a look of disbelief on his face. “One of us needs to repent, obviously.” He pocketed his keys and headed toward the church. “I volunteer here sometimes.”

“Why?”

“Me telling you it’s the right thing to do isn’t going to be enough, will it?” He stopped in his tracks and turned around to face me.

I hadn’t taken a single step. Why should I? I had no desire to go into a church. I hadn’t been since I was a kid.

“Aren’t you coming?”

“Not till you tell me why we’re here.”

Caleb sighed. “Because we didn’t get to give them the full donation. In order to make up for that fuck up, I’m here to give back.” Caleb glanced away from me. His pink lips dipped in a frown. “And I don’t know, I need this. It won’t fix anything but it’s better than nothing.”

Had I ever been so choked up about a death? I couldn’t recall a single one. People died all the time, some sooner than others. It was the way of life. Nothing I said could change that fact.

“All right.”

“That’s it?” Caleb questioned. He shook his head and turned away from me. “You know what, never mind.”

I followed behind him into the Holy Name of Mary Church. We stepped through the double doors, and it was about what I expected.

“Caleb,” a soft voice called out to him. His curly auburn hair bounced with every step he took to get closer to us. His blue eyes were on Caleb as if he was his favorite person in the world. He was a toothpick of a thing with a smooth face and happy disposition. He couldn’t be any more than five feet six inches as he rushed over to us.

My fingers wrapped around the back of Caleb’s neck and I yanked him back just as the guy stopped in front of him with his arms wide open. They slowly dropped to his sides. He finally looked up at me. The guy’s eyes widened as he took a step back.

“Oh, um, Caleb, is this a new friend of yours?”

His smile dropped slightly. It no longer reached his eyes as he gazed between us. He recovered his smile somewhat as his eyes settled on Caleb once more.

“Uh.” Caleb attempted to pull free of my hold but it only made me tighten further. He gave up and smiled down at him. “Friend isn’t the word I’d use. More like a friend of my old man.”

Before I could correct Caleb, he rushed to keep talking. “Hey, Shelton.”

The moment his name was out of Caleb’s mouth, I instantly detested it. Shelton on the other hand, lit up like he’d just been given the lottery ticket that would change his shitty life.

Caleb relaxed, fixing his helmet tucked under his arm. “So sorry about the mishap with the donation.”

Shelton shook his head. “Don’t be. Any help is graciously appreciated.” He blew out a breath, an innocent look came over his face. “Father Greg and Sister Brandy are so grateful for any donation.” Shelton took a step closer. “Because of you and the guys, we’ve been able to keep the doors open and help so many.”

One more step. I dare you.

Shelton glanced my way and took another step back. He recovered a lot quicker, keeping his smile on his face.

“There will be more soon. I promise.” Caleb went to reach for him, and again, my body reacted before my brain could wrap around what was happening.

My fingers pressed into Caleb’s flesh. His pulse thrummed against my flesh. It was the only thing keeping me somewhat calm. I had no idea why in the hell I even cared that Caleb was getting close to the guy.

If Shelton noticed him acting strange, he smiled through it. “We have the soup kitchen opening in another hour. We could

use more hands preparing lunch.” His gaze flickered over to me. “Will you be helping as well?”

“No—”

“Yes, he loves to help,” Caleb said, covering my answer.

Once again Shelton looked between us, but there was something in his eyes when he looked at Caleb that annoyed me to no end. A door crashed open and a snot-nosed little boy barged in.

“Shelton! Shelton, hurry, Micheal skinned his knee.”

“Caleb, you know your way to the kitchen area. Please, excuse me.” He turned, but stopped short of leaving. “Will we catch up later?” Shelton’s hopeful words were aimed at Caleb.

“Sure—”

“No,” I said at the same time as Caleb.

The little boy tugged on the man’s hand and he went out the door. Caleb’s elbow jabbed into my side the moment the door was closed. I grunted, and for a second, I thought about not letting him go.

“Let go, asshole.”

No. I mentally had to pry my fingers away from him before I let Caleb go. My hand dropped, and instantly, I was hit with an emptiness. My fingers flexed a few times. I hadn’t been holding him long but it didn’t change the strange feeling on my fingertips.

“What was that about?” Caleb asked.

If he wanted an answer, he had a better chance of deep diving into my psyche before I was able to give him one.

“Nothing.”

I stepped around Caleb and took in the small church. The stained glass windows had seen better days. The pews were old and there was a distinct musty smell in the air. Other than that, the place was cleaned, and it was clear someone cared very much for the place.

Caleb looked me up and down. His gaze almost felt like a caress beckoning me closer.

“What?” I asked. If he kept staring at me, I might just act.

He shrugged and sighed in disappointment. “Thought you’d be a burnt crisp by now or at least be struck by lightning.” He shook his head as if he was truly confused.

I cocked a single brow at him. *He’s finally lost it.* I grabbed him and pulled him close, preferring his scent over the musty smell that permeated the entire church. “Let’s get this over with.”

Caleb broke free, rolling his eyes. “Can’t have you be seen helping the unfortunate. It will hurt your street cred.”

What the hell is talking about? I ignored him. Sometimes it was best not to respond to every little thing Caleb said. If I did, we’d be at each other’s throats more often than not.



HANDING out food and supplies was supposed to be it. Instead of going home, we were stuck at the church. Even after the priest and sister left to drop off the children. Shelton was in the back of the church working on the kid rooms with another

volunteer, which left the kitchen and small eating area for Caleb and I to clean.

My back hurt and I'd done more work than I had in a while. I was a made man, not a house cleaner. Caleb stood up, a bandanna on his forehead as he admired his work. The kitchen didn't sparkle or anything, but it was cleaner than when we'd arrived.

"Caleb, I'm glad you didn't leave yet," Shelton said. He scrambled over to Caleb and the moment he touched him, I saw red. "I'm almost done with the room. I have to disinfect the toys today. But once I'm done, I was wondering if you wanted to get a burger?"

I forced out a breath before I did something stupid. Like kill some random guy. It wasn't worth all of that. I twisted around and left. I needed air. No matter what answer Caleb gave to Shelton, it was going to be a no. I'd drag Caleb back to my place kicking and screaming if I had to.

"Oh, uh, one second, Shelton," Caleb said. "Wait, where are you going?" Caleb's hand seared through my clothes. It felt so hot I could feel it to the bone.

"Going to go smoke." My lips were moving and words were slipping out of my mouth before they could register. "Let's get out of here. I want to go home."

Caleb stared at me for a long time while his blue eyes searched my face. "I need to finish talking to Shelton and then we can go."

An innocent smile took over his face. It was such a drastic difference from his mischievous smirk, I nearly had to do a double take. "Surprised you stuck it out this long."

I shook my head and moved closer. If I couldn't have a cigarette, Caleb was going to be the next best thing. "No, now."

Caleb rolled his eyes and he took a single step away. My hold on him tightened.

"Shelton, help," someone shouted from the back.

The moment he scampered off, I had Caleb moving in the opposite direction. I didn't care where we went. I opened a random door and shoved him inside. I was right on his heels following behind and slamming the door shut behind me.

"What the fuck?" Caleb hissed.

"Get on your knees."

He looked around the small broom closet. There was an old metal shelf stacked high with cleaning solutions, a bucket, and a few old books.

"Hell no." Caleb stepped to the side. "Move."

I slammed his back against the wall, and I was right there crowding his space. "You want to repent so bad, get on your knees and start begging."

Caleb's tongue lapped at his tempting as fuck lips. I was tired, the chemicals were getting to me, or maybe giving in once was the catalyst that would start a hard-core problem.

"Who am I supposed to pray to in this closet?" Caleb could glare at me all he wanted, but there was no mistaking the want that shimmered in his baby blues.

"Knees."

Caleb pushed against my chest. "Fuck you."

Something snapped. It was like an audible click in my brain. My body responded to it like a command. I grabbed Caleb and flipped him around. I pressed him firmly against the wall with one hand and the other hooked in his jeans. He never bothered with a belt, so there was little resistance when I pulled them down his pale ass legs. The little tattoos he had stood out against his flesh.

“We are in a church, you sick fuck,” Caleb whispered.

Should I give a damn?

I brought my hand down on his ass, the smack deafening in the small closet. It was music to my ears, but what was like liquid pleasure pumped into my veins was the sultry moan that came from Caleb. I did it again, pissed that the lighting in the small closet was shit. I didn't want to miss a single ripple of Caleb's ass. Another slap gave me the same results. My hand stung with every crash of our flesh.

“Put your ass out.”

Caleb's breathing was ragged. There was a slight tremble to him, but still, he obeyed me. For once, his mouth was shut and he was listening. Should have started off with this. I caressed the heated flesh of his ass, squeezing the firm globe in my hand.

“You didn't like the nice side of me. Do you prefer when I'm an asshole to you, Caleb?”

When he refused to answer, I cupped my hand and brought it up with a full force. Caleb lifted on his tippy toes his head fell back as his back arched.

I smacked his ass. Each cheek three times before I went back to rubbing the area roughly. Soothing the heated flesh

was the last thing I wanted to do. I wanted Caleb to feel every inch of the pain I was causing him.

“I—” Caleb shook his head. “Fuck, I—”

I stopped rubbing his ass and moved closer to his head. I wrapped my hands around his throat and squeezed until he started gasping. A single glance down let me know everything. His cock jutted out. I let his hands go. Caleb kept them in place on the wall where I’d pinned them. I swiped my thumb over the crown of his cock. With my finger covered in precum, I rubbed it over Caleb’s lips. His tongue flicked out against my thumb. Electricity sizzled up my arm and straight to my cock from the simple touch.

“Which one of us is the sick fuck?”

Caleb moaned. “You.”

“You’re the one getting off on me beating your ass.” Just as Caleb opened his mouth, I slapped his ass again. I didn’t stop even as my hand began to go numb.

“Tony.”

I shook my head rubbing his ass. “No, I don’t think so.” I lapped at the shell of his ear. Caleb moaned with every swipe. “What do you really want to call me?”

“Goddamn it.”

I moved closer wrapping my hands around his leaking cock. It took no time at all for Caleb to break.

“Daddy,” Caleb moaned. He pushed back against me, rubbing his abused ass against my pants. “I want to cum, please let me cum.”

I worked my hand over his cock, circling around the head gathering more precum. The other hand fondled his balls in the

way I knew would have him on the edge of cumming. “Do you deserve it?”

“No.”

It sounded reserved and sullen, and it only made me want to make him cum even more. I stroked faster, increasing the pressure just slightly.

“Wait, no.” Caleb shook his head, shaking in my arms.

“Are you telling me what to do?” I quickened my pace, stroking his cock faster. His flesh felt hot in my hands. I was certain it would be branded in my mind forever.

“No.” Caleb gasped. He rolled his hips back, tempting me to strip and take him like I wanted to so badly. “Fuck, fuck, fuck. Da—don’t, Daddy. Please wait.”

Laughter bubbled freely from me as I blew over his ear. “You were just begging me to let you cum. Now you’re demanding I stop.” I bit his lobe and fondled his balls. “You’re such a troublemaker.”

The moans coming from Caleb drowned out every thought and feeling I might have had. All I could focus on was Caleb.

“Daddy. Daddy. Daddy.” Caleb took in a sharp breath between each word. His whispered pleas were like a prayer, and I planned on granting him this one wish.

“Someone is going to hear you.”

Caleb slapped his hand over his mouth. Being denied his moans only infuriated me.

“Hand down.”

Caleb dropped his hand. He reached aimlessly behind him until his fingers curled around my shirt. His moans were

muffled as he tried to keep them at bay. I bit down on his neck so hard, I was certain there would be a mark there later.

“Daddy.” Caleb’s choked off cry was loud, and no doubt if anyone was close, they heard it.

I caressed his balls one last time and moved between his cheeks. He was hot all over, and the moment my fingers brushed over his hole, Caleb stiffened. His cock jumped in my fist and his hole twitched against my finger. Hot splashes of cum dripped down my fingers. I peeked over Caleb’s shoulder and smirked at the mess on the wall.

“No more.” Caleb groaned. He shook his head and batted at my hands.

“I’m not done yet.”

“Fuck.”

I stroked his sensitive cock, relishing in the way Caleb fidgeted against me. It would be nothing to continue to force Caleb to cum again and again until he was mindless. But I wanted to be in the comfort of my home for that. Everything came rushing back to me all at once. I couldn’t afford for us to be caught slipping. I was so engrossed in Caleb, everything else had become nothing but a fuzzy background.

That’s entirely too dangerous.

I reluctantly stopped. A sigh left Caleb that sounded like relief and disappointment.

“Clean up your mess.”

“Gee, thanks,” Caleb said sarcastically. He grabbed the rag off one of the shelves and went to wipe his cum off the wall.

I slammed his face against it instead. “Not with that.”

“Ugh, fuck.” I offered my fingers to him instead and he lapped up every drop of cum off them.

Every swipe of his tongue was like being electrocuted. My heart was beating so damn fast and my cock was hard, wanting nothing more than to sink into a hot hole. Preferably Caleb’s.

“Now, get the wall.”

“With my tongue?” Caleb asked. He stared at me as if I was insane.

I had half a mind to make him. “Use the rag, idiot.”

I stepped out of the closet, feeling eyes on me. I turned left, ready to draw the gun hidden around my ankle. A set of familiar green eyes stared at me. Shelton’s mouth hung open, and I pressed my finger to my mouth.

“It’s clear. Come on, you need to eat,” I said.

Caleb stumbled out of the closet, groaning as he shoved his messy hair back. His face was still flushed and his pupils blown, only leaving a small sliver of blue behind. “That was reckless.”

I draped my arm over Caleb’s shoulder and met Shelton’s gaze head-on. I didn’t need to say anything as he shrank back and disappeared.

“I’m hot.” Caleb pushed me lightly but not enough to make me disengage.

We headed outside as the sun was setting, taking away its momentary warmth with it. The parking lot was even emptier, the van wasn’t back from dropping kids off and the only other car that was left was an old beat up Honda. I made sure to commit it to memory. It had to be Shelton’s.

“Shit, I don’t know if I can ride my bike.”

I smiled. *Next time, I want to make it so you can't walk.*
“Good, we both can suffer,” I said.

“Sadistic fuck,” Caleb muttered under his breath.

He had no clue.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IS HE STALKING ME?

I watched as Tony doubled back through the living room and made his way back around the house again. He kept taking random walks as I sat on a bar stool in the kitchen, choking down the crap he called coffee. As I stared out the window, I caught him coming back from the corner of my eye.

Definitely stalking me. What the fuck?

I turned as he came back again. “Will you stop pacing around?” I snapped. “What the fuck is wrong with you? Are you bored or something?”

Instead of answering me, Tony disappeared again. Sighing, I shook my head. I wanted to check in on Drav and the others, but I couldn’t do that with him following me around. Even if I wanted to go for a ride on my bike, I couldn’t do that without Tony trailing along. He was all over me at this point, shadowing my every step. It made me want to squirm right out of my skin. Between the events of the warehouse and the church, I wasn’t sure what had fucked me up more.

My life is turning upside down.

I was used to chaos, but this was a different level of insane. And my time was still ticking. According to Benito, I

still needed to be trained, to be useful. Who knew how long I would be working for them to pay off the debt that hung over my head?

“What’s with the face?”

I yelped as I jumped out of my seat. Tony had materialized out of nowhere, his face inches from mine. I grabbed my T-shirt and narrowed my eyes at him.

“Goddamn, dude! Seriously? You’re gonna kill me.”

“You were making a weird face.”

“Why do you care what my face does?”

Tony pulled away from me and went to the coffee maker instead. I stared at his retreating back. There was something up with him. He’d been acting weird since the day before. Was it because I’d had to hurt someone? Or was it because he’d made me cum so hard in that little broom closet that I was sure I’d seen god?

If god was a six foot three psychotic, grumpy, Italian man with a twisted sense of humor.

My stomach tightened as I dwelled on the good memory and not the bad. As long as I kept pretending the fucked-up thing didn’t happen, all I had to focus on was Tony. The way his hands trailed over my skin, his heated voice against my ear, his commands that made me want to obey. It was enough to make my head spin.

No, I need to focus on what I’m supposed to be doing.

“Tony.”

“Yeah?” he muttered, still fiddling around with the coffee pot.

“We never discussed how I’m supposed to pay this money off or how long it’ll take.” I sat back down, resting my elbows on the counter. “I can’t live here forever. Eventually, I have to go back home.”

Tony’s back stiffened. “So?”

“So how long do I have to be here?”

Silence was the only answer I received as Tony sipped his coffee loud as hell. The longer he stayed facing away from me, the more my irritation grew. He might know how to play with my body, but other than that, he was a shit person. I would never have anything to do with him outside of a stupid fucking fling.

“Tony!”

“Don’t raise your voice at me,” he growled, as he finally turned around.

“Then answer the question,” I said, as I tried not to jump over the island and punch him.

Finally, Tony shrugged. “When you’re in debt to the mob, it’s rarely a timed thing. You’re family and you’re a thief, the spotlight is on your ass more than the average person. Anyone else and—” He gestured a knife across his throat. “But you’re special. So, be grateful for that. At least you’ll always have a job. And there’s a hell of a lot more money to be made here than—”

“Do you think that makes a difference to me?” I asked as heat licked up my spine. “If you force someone into working for you, do you think the money makes it better?”

Tony invaded my space. “No one told you to steal from us.”

“As if you would even miss it!” I laughed. “You want to talk about me dealing? Fuck you! You send people out to do it. Port it into the city in bulk and then order people to run it, while you can gain on the profits. You beat people up. You murder people. And you have the nerve to try to say I’m worse than you? No. I might be scum, but at least I’m not a fucking Vitale.”

My chest slammed against the counter, knocking the air out of me. The coffee mug rolled and crashed to the floor. Coffee soaked into my shirt as Tony rounded me and pinned one of my arms behind my back. I used the other to try to push myself up from the marble, but he shoved down harder.

“You *are* a fucking Vitale. And you can sit here and judge them for what they do, but they have a role in society just like all your righteous, holy church friends. You are not *that* damn special or different from them. If you speak badly about them again, I’ll end you.”

I shoved back hard as I stomped my foot down on his. My riding boots plus his foot created the perfect combo. He cried out, hopping away from me as I straightened up. Panting, I shoved my hair out of my face ready to lay into him.

“Shit. Fuck!”

I paused. “It doesn’t hurt that much.”

From the way he was moving around, I was clearly wrong. He limped out of the kitchen, and I trailed behind him into the living room. Tony dropped to the couch, holding his foot as he let out a collection of curse words that would make a whore blush.

“Oh, fuck!”

I hesitated. “You good?”

“Do I look good to you?” he snapped. “Why are you wearing those stupid ass boots?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know! My gear makes me feel safe,” I blurted out before I could stop myself. “Did I really hurt you?”

“What? You wanna gloat about it?” he barked.

“No, not really,” I admitted. I glanced around, unsure what to do. “It’s probably just sore. Here.”

I snatched up his pack of smokes and took one out. As I placed it between his lips, he glared at me the whole time, but he didn’t pull away. I snagged his lighter and lit him up. As smoke curled into the air, I jogged to the kitchen for ice. I stopped as I grabbed a pack and a kitchen towel.

Why am I doing this? He’s always an asshole to me. I should let him stay in pain.

“Caleb?”

“Coming!” I called back, moving swiftly as I returned to the living room. Tony’s face was pinched. He snatched the ice from me as pain colored his features.

“Did you break something?”

“I don’t think so,” I said as I sat on the coffee table. “Let me see.”

“No. Fuck off.”

I rolled my eyes as I snatched up his foot and sat it in my lap. “God, you’re such a baby.” I examined his foot. Carefully, I touched each toe before applying pressure and pulling a little.

“Ow! What are you doing?”

“Proving that you’re a child,” I muttered. “Nothing’s broken. You’re being dramatic.”

“Well, it hurts!”

I glanced up at the grumpy asshole as I took the ice and placed it on his foot. He grimaced, muttering under his breath as he smoked like a chimney. For some reason, my brain took that exact moment to find the situation hilarious. The laughter started slowly before it rumbled up my chest and spilled from my lips.

“It’s not funny.”

“It’s a little funny,” I countered.

“No, it’s not!” he growled.

I snickered. “Big bad mafia guy taken down by a motorcycle punk.”

“I can still kick your ass.”

I rolled my eyes. “No, you can’t. Sit down, shut up, and smoke.” The silence stretched between us. “Want a pain pill?”

“No,” Tony bit out. “Don’t like medicine.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

My frustration returned with a swiftness. I pressed the ice against his foot a little too hard.

“Are you seriously trying to kill me?” he snapped.

“Sorry.”

“Well, at least you can say sorry.”

I groaned. “Why are you always such a jerk? Giancarlo said you need to get laid, is that it? Do you need to run out and

go get some... I don't know what you're into. Dick? Pussy? I mean, I know you've played with me but..."

"Neither." He grunted.

"Plastic?" I asked. "I'm guessing blow up doll or pocket rocket? Butt plug? Whatever you're into, go get it."

Tony stared at me hard. I opened my mouth to say more, but he pressed his finger against his lips and shushed me. I jolted.

"You can't just—"

"I said, shut up." He sighed, blowing smoke as he leaned over to tap the ash off his cigarette. "Why a church?"

I blinked at him. "Huh?"

"Why are you helping that church? Why do you care?"

I'd stepped on his foot, but Tony was acting as if he'd had a stroke. Why did he care why I was into helping people? I searched his face, looking for any hint of malice, but he genuinely looked as if he wanted to know. My stomach twisted in an odd way. I frowned as I tried to gather my thoughts around it.

"They helped us when we had nothing," I finally said. "My mother and I were beyond poor at one point. She didn't have a job, my father was nowhere in sight, and she struggled. When she unexpectedly lost her job, we had to go to the church for help. I played in the back rooms. Ate when they fed us. Had clothes and backpacks for school because they cared. I wouldn't really say I'm religious. Hell, the only person I really believe in is myself. And my family." I shrugged. "But they were there for us. My mother still volunteers, even though we haven't needed their help to survive in decades. I do my part too. They're good people."

“So, the drugs you stole...”

“They went where they were always going to go. People will do drugs forever, I can’t stop them. At least the money goes somewhere good instead of Benito Vitale’s pockets.”

Tony stiffened. “I’ve warned you about talking down on them.”

“You can love them all you want. They mean nothing to me. All of them knew I existed, they had to know. We were just some dirty little secret while my father was off playing mobster,” I snapped, my voice wavering despite how hard I tried to make it stop. “They didn’t give a fuck that we were starving. That my mom had to take degrading fucking work just to save us.”

“Don’t cry,” Tony said.

“I’m not fucking crying!” I snapped.

I felt the tears on my cheeks, hot and wet against my flesh. Dropping his foot, I scrubbed at my face hard until my skin burned in protest. I never cried in front of anyone. Not ever. The last time it happened had been with Drav, in a dingy parking lot, after too many drinks. I was never meant to show such a weak side of myself. Crying didn’t help anything. In the end, all of my problems would still exist.

A hand gripped my face and lifted my head. “Caleb.”

I tried to avoid Tony’s gaze until I couldn’t. My eyes searched his. In my delusion, I saw the softest expression of care and my heart squeezed. That was something I’d wanted forever. I couldn’t get it from my guys, they needed me to be strong. I was the one that had started the Hitters. They didn’t need to see me break down. However, as the tears continued to rush toward the surface, I felt almost... relieved.

I laughed. “Oh man, this is stupid,” I said as I shook my head. “Mind if I go for a ride? I’ll come right back. Just gonna speed around the block a few times.”

Tony’s eyes ran over my face before he nodded. “Stay close to the house. If I don’t hear your bike—”

“I know, I know. You’ll kill me.”

He grunted. “I’ll find you.”

A shiver ran over my body. Why did that sound more threatening than him killing me? I straightened up before I rolled my shoulders.

“I do need to visit my mom soon,” I said. “She hasn’t heard from me in ages. I know she’s worried.”

Tony nodded. “I’ll talk to Benito.”

“Yeah?” I said as I walked over to my helmet and snagged it from the table. “Ask him to let me go too while we’re at it. He didn’t want me then. Why the fuck does he want me now?”

I left before Tony could answer me. He was loyal to the Vitales. I knew he would say anything to protect them. There was no future where he would ever be on my side. So, I was going to have to work and work until they gave me my freedom. And then I was going to put as much road between myself and the Vitales as I could.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TONY

MY FINGERS TIGHTENED around the crow bar as I twisted my body and swung. Metal slammed into the guys's side. Vibrations traveled over my fingers and up my arm. I didn't relish in it as I pulled back and swung again. His body dropped, and instead of the meaty thud from hitting his side reaching my ears, it was a sickening crunch. Hot blood splattered all over my hands and suit as the man fell down face-first.

"Fuck." Caleb groaned.

My head snapped up at the sound of Caleb's voice. Even amongst the room full of enemies, I was hyper aware of him. I wanted to believe it was because it had been well over a week since he'd moved into my place, and since our little talk, I was getting to know Caleb even more.

He stood up, sweat dripping down his face, his black hair sticking to his forehead. "Tell me we're done."

It had been a long while since I'd done grunt work. I had to admit, doing it with Caleb was fun, but my body had grown somewhat lazy over the years. I spent most of the time guarding Benito or being sent out to make deals.

"Yeah, we're done." I looked down and kicked the man on the ground. There was no response. I had my phone out, ready

to call in a clean up crew, when he finally took in a shuddering breath. “Anyone awake over there?”

Caleb wiped his face with the back of his hand, looking around. I froze on the spot as he turned around fully. On his cheek was a mark. I was moving toward him without even realizing it.

“Ugh, I think—Hey.”

I grabbed his face and turned his head roughly, staring at the bruise forming on his cheekbone. Anger blistered under my skin. *Who the fuck punched him?*

“What?” Caleb asked. He pushed at my hands. “Back up, I’m sweating like a whore in front of the pearly gates.”

“You’re hurt,” I pointed out, ignoring whatever the hell he was talking about. I should be worried about my psyche that I was growing used to the stupid shit he said.

Caleb stopped pushing me in favor of staring at me. His brows nearly kissed his hairline. “No shit, we were just fighting.” He smirked, and I knew something stupid was going to come out of his mouth. “Mad someone messed up my cute face?” He batted his lashes at me with fake innocence.

Yes.

I glanced around the room. *They’re supposed to stay alive to be a warning.* People were choosing sides and a lot of them were choosing the wrong one. But now, all I could picture were their deaths. I didn’t give a damn which one of them landed the punch; they were dead.

“Hey,” Caleb called, his voice soft.

I dragged my gaze away from soon-to-be dead men in favor of Caleb. He stared at me for a long while.

“Let’s head home. We’re done.”

“Thank fuck,” he exclaimed. “I’m sweating so much, my ass cheeks are sliding against each other. It’s the type of slip and slide no one wants to play with.” He rubbed his hands together as if to act out what was happening with his ass.

I stared at him as he headed for my car parked in the empty lot across the street.

“Do you say whatever comes to mind without thinking?”

“Yeah, most times,” Caleb said, shrugging.

There was something wrong with him. I let him get ahead of me as I pulled out my phone.

Me: Groceries need to be picked up. Toss any of the bad plums.

Every single man in that place was as good as dead. The next group could be used as an example; this one had gone too far.

“Tony, let’s go! My stomach is eating my spine.”

Couldn’t get him to eat before and now Caleb was eating me out of house and home. *I should let him go back to his own place.* He was no longer a flight risk, but I couldn’t find it in me to agree to let him out of my sight. The drive on the way home was filled with a comfortable silence. Rock music permeating the speakers at a decent volume, a band Caleb and I both enjoyed. Sleep Token.

Ringin’ cut through the car, and I glanced at the dashboard and sighed. Shit. The nursing home was calling. Normally, I was too busy, or better yet, avoided seeing my mother, but Caleb bringing up his mother a few days ago reminded me I

needed to go see my own. Since I had less work watching and training Caleb lately, I had the time.

“We’re going to shower and head back out.”

“Really? We can’t get a beer and eat? Today was a fucking hassle chasing those guys.” Caleb slouched in his seat, watching the window.

Maybe I should go later by myself.

“Are you going to answer the phone?”

Right, the ringing hadn’t stopped. I hit the button knowing I couldn’t put it off. “Hello.”

“Mr. Morelli, this is Savannah from Sunny Meadows Care facility. Do you have a moment to talk?”

I could feel Caleb’s eyes on me. No one but the brothers knew about my mom. She was the only family I had left. Letting Caleb listen in on the conversation felt raw and uncomfortable.

“Is this important or can it wait?”

Savannah cleared her throat, her cheery voice filled the car. “Oh, well, yes. Mrs. Morelli is refusing to eat or move from her chair. I was advised if it has exceeded two days to give you a call.”

Fuck, what happened this time?

“The doctor on call has gone to see her, but she did not take well to seeing him. He was unable to assess her, and any nurse who’s gone in her room has come out injured.” Savannah took in a breath as if she had another list of offenses to go over.

“I’m on my way. Leave her be.” I flipped the turn signal on.

“Thank you, should I tell her?”

“No, stay away from her.” My mother was volatile when she was triggered, and strangers only made things worse. “Where is Haley, her regular nurse?”

“Oh, um.”

There was a muffling sound over the speakers. My fingers tightened over the steering wheel. Why the fuck was she covering the phone? It felt as if I’d swallowed rocks as my stomach tightened. My foot pressed down firmly on the gas as I picked up speed.

I hung up. The longer the silence stretched on, the more annoyed I’d get. I cracked my neck. Tension coiled the muscles in my shoulders until it felt unbearable. *What the hell is going on there?* I paid a lot of money for my mother to be properly taken care of. I even made sure to pick out her nurse, someone who wasn’t too nosy but got along with my mom. I couldn’t do it myself. I’d done what I could for years, to the point I’d almost broken apart. Was I just failing as her son again?

“Tony!” Caleb slapped my chest, pulling me from my own thoughts.

I blinked and slammed my foot down on the brake. We came to a screeching halt, our bodies jerked forward as our momentum was cut short. My heart banged against my ribcage as I stared at the red light in front of me and the ongoing traffic I almost drove into.

“What the shit? You almost killed us!” Caleb berated.

My fingers tightened around the wheel. I'd been so lost in my head... *That's not a good excuse.* If I started slipping now, everything around me would come crashing down. Everything I worked my ass off to achieve. I took in a measured breath and held it, forcing everything down and focusing on what I could do now.

"Sorry," I said.

"Who are you and what have you done with the bastard that's been on my ass this whole time?"

I turned to stare at him.

"What? It's true. I can't even piss without worrying you're watching me."

For some reason, his idiotic words calmed me even better than my breathing technique. "I do." The light turned green but I wasn't ready to pull off.

"I'm sorry, you what?" Caleb fought with the seatbelt before unbuckling it and turning his body toward me. "Are you saying you watch me in the bathroom?"

I chuckled, unable to contain it.

"That's not funny man. That's"—Caleb shook his head—"fucked-up."

I licked my lips just thinking about all the times I watched Caleb. I installed cameras in every corner, and I didn't hesitate to use a single one. Caleb balled his fists, but I stayed still as he punched me. Pain was welcomed as it radiated over my arm. I'd prefer to hurt him instead, but I didn't have the time.

Honk honk.

"Tony, drive. That guy behind us has been honking for a minute," Caleb said, checking out the rearview mirror.

Anger simmered inside of me. I wanted him to continue staring at me. His talking was keeping me from flying off the handle. The light turned red once more, and I relaxed in my seat.

“He’ll be fine.”

“It’s New York. He won’t be fine.” Caleb shook his head. “Damn, there’s a long ass line back there now.”

I reached over and grabbed his face and made him look at me. *Fuck everything else, pay attention to me right now.*

“Caleb—”

Knocking on my window gave me pause.

“Told you,” Caleb said. “That guy definitely got out of his car.”

I rolled down my window just a little.

“What the fuck, asshole? You can’t see the goddamn light? Your mother was too busy whoring herself out to teach you how not to be a bastard?”

Everything around me went still, the momentary laughter gone and replaced with nothing but inky blackness. I opened the door and the guy was still running his mouth. His words barely reached me. It felt as if my ears were clogged. He lifted his fist up, shouting, spit flying out of his mouth. I blinked and it was like the world before me was flipping like a picture book. One second he was standing, the next more blood covered my hands. Another blink and he was on the ground. My knees scraped from the pavement as I laid into the man. Nothing around me was registering, not the pain in my knuckles or the ache in my tired muscles.

“Tony, stop.” Caleb’s hand whipped across my face leaving behind pure fire.

Did he just slap me?

“Get off him.” Caleb looked around and squatted in front of me. “We can’t be here. People are getting out and recording.”

“Fuck, Benito is going to be pissed.”

Caleb nodded. “Come on.”

I looked down at the guy, his face was bloody and his nose broken. His closed eyes were already swelling. He coughed and choked on his own blood. Even with all that, I wasn’t done. I wasn’t satisfied.

“Leave him, he’s sorry. He’s been screaming it.”

As if I gave a fuck. What was I supposed to do with all this pent up frustration and anger? I looked up at Caleb.

“What, you want to kill him for cursing you out?”

As far as I was concerned, he deserved to die. Just like those bastards who’d hit Caleb. Caleb moved, mumbling under his breath. He patted the guy down until he pulled out his wallet.

“Here, we have his license. Now, let’s get the fuck out of here before someone calls the—”

Siren’s pierced the air but that could be for anyone. We didn’t have the luxury of waiting around and finding out. I was up and headed toward my car but not before I kicked the worthless shit one last time.

“Really?”

I shrugged and hopped in the car.

“You want me to drive?” Caleb asked.

I hesitated but I’d seen how he handled his bike. “Fine.” We hurriedly changed spots.

The moment Caleb’s ass was behind the wheel, he peeled off, hitting a hard left. I yanked the seatbelt down and held onto it tightly. He turned down the next few lanes with ease and merged onto the highway. He wove around the moving cars effortlessly. I said nothing. I wasn’t going to distract him, not when he was driving like a lunatic.

I checked behind us just as he got off at a random exit and made wild turns. Before I knew what was happening, he turned hard and we started to drift. Smoke and the smell of burning rubber was all I could focus on. We came to a screeching halt and he threw the car in park. His fingers drummed on the steering wheel as we sat there. Time ticked by and the sirens died out.

“Holy shit, that was fun.” Caleb slapped the wheel, his eyes bright as if he’d taken a hit of the best coke in the world.

I shook my head.

“Come on, Tony, you have to agree it was fun.”

“It was something.”

“You’re smiling.” Caleb jabbed at my side playfully.

“Good work,” I said instead of acknowledging I was, in fact, smiling.

A blush covered Caleb’s face. “Yeah?”

“You’re a good driver, even if I saw my life flash before my eyes.”

Caleb looked anywhere but at me. Was complimenting his skill that meaningful?

“Where to?”

I plugged in the Sunny Meadows address. “Quick stop here, you can wait in the car.”



SUNNY MEADOWS CARE facility came into view.

“Shit, this place is ritzy. Sure we can stroll in there looking like this?”

Both of us were still covered in blood and sweat. Me so much more than Caleb. “It’s fine.”

He grumbled but didn’t argue as he pulled up to the security gate. I leaned over him and handed over the pass to the guard on duty. One glance at it and he hit the switch.

“Have a good visit, sir.”

“What do you own this place or something?”

“Or something.” I pointed to the main building. “Go around back.”

Caleb glanced my way before following directions. The moment the car stopped, we got out. I stretched but nothing was erasing the tension from my joints.

“We can clean up.” I went to the trunk of the car and pulled out a fresh pair of clothes. I could get rid of any evidence here. I’d done it so much it was second nature. “Get undressed and hose down.”

“Fuck, this is going to suck.”

Caleb took his clothes off and I was reminded again why I couldn't resist someone as stupid as Caleb. He checked all my boxes, even the ones that were a definite no for me. I stripped down and grabbed the hose from him.

I ran water over the both of us, blissfully aware of Caleb's eyes on me. Every move I made, he watched. I washed my hands clean of blood using dial soap to clean the cuts that were littered all over them.

“Here.”

“Thanks,” Caleb said.

We made quick work of cleaning our bodies in the ice cold water. I could barely feel it with Caleb so close. There were so many things going through my head, but none of it bothered me for a few seconds while we washed up. I shut the hose off and passed him his clothes.

I left Caleb to get dressed as I got rid of everything else. The license plate was the first to go. I sent a quick message to have our contacts change the information over in the system. A quick call to a few of the Vitale contacts took care of that along with any traffic cameras.

“You've done this a few times, huh?” Caleb asked. His hair was soaking wet, still dripping as he leaned against the car.

“Get in.” I slipped back behind the wheel and started the car up.

“Damn, when did you even get in here and clean? How fast are you?”

“It’s not perfect, but I’ll have the guys take the car and get rid of it later.”

I parked in front of the huge building. It had a hotel type feel to it. Each resident in the place might as well be on vacation. Sunny Meadows Care Facility was no better than a luxury resort. They had every amenity known to man and state of the art everything.

The receptionist at the front smiled as we walked in. “Welcome to Sunny Meadows, where your loved ones are cherished.”

“I’m here to see Bambina Morelli.”

“Oh, you must be Lucas,” the receptionist said cheerfully.

I flinched. Caleb stared at me, but I didn’t want to ever talk about it. He was supposed to be in the car, but I hadn’t had the mental strength to tell him to stay back.

“Mrs. Morelli has been asking for you.”

The anguish that filled me from that name alone never disappeared. People liked to preach that time heals all wounds. Then why in the hell did it feel like mine was gaping and infected?

“Mr. Morelli,” the director of the facility called. She moved toward us. “I’ll handle this, Jennifer.” She smiled at me. “So sorry, she’s new. Please, this way.”

“Where is Haley?”

The directors back stiffened. “Unfortunately, she is no longer working with us. We did attempt to keep her on staff, but she’s moved. These things happen. However, I can vouch that Savannah is a fine match.”

“There aren’t supposed to be any changes without reaching out to me beforehand,” I said.

She stopped and turned around to face us. Her expression was pinched as she stood up straight. “We attempted to reach you, however, you weren’t available. My first concern is the patient.”

If I killed her right now, there would be someone to replace her as soon as she was gone. Warm, rough fingers wrapped around my wrist and squeezed.

“Thank you. I know how hard it can be, especially with staff moving around. We appreciate that you sought out the best caregiver.”

The more Caleb talked, the more relaxed the director became. Her shoulders dropped, a soft expression coming over her face.

“If she doesn’t work, I have a few files on other hires we were potentially looking at. I do apologize for not getting to you sooner.”

She stepped aside, revealing the door that would lead to my mother. The last time I was here was six months ago. *Fuck, I’m a shit son.* I needed to leave, she’d get better, start eating and talking again before long.

The director knocked before I was ready. “Mrs. Morelli, you have some very handsome visitors.” She opened the door and it was like a needle was slowly piercing my lungs. “Please, let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

Caleb tugged on my arm, and I realized I hadn’t made a single step into her place. I hated this.

“Tony?”

I glanced at Caleb. Was I really going to let him see my mom? He'd opened up to me a bit a few days ago, but it didn't mean we were so close we could start showing each other our scars.

"Lucas, is that you?" my mom's voice hit me square in the chest. I always had to correct her.

"No, Mamma. Lucas is gone."

"What?"

She shook her head, reaching out for me. Her thin, delicate fingers still held the ring my father had given to her.

I took the final steps into her place with Caleb behind me. The door closed, and it was like I was stripped bare.

"He's gone where?" Her voice cracked and her brown eyes shimmered with unshed tears.

My stomach plummeted. "He died. Him and dad."

She covered her mouth and it was like that day all over again. This was the worst part about visiting her sometimes. She survived the car crash but her memories were fickle. Tears streamed down her face, and I moved closer to her.

"But you look just like him."

I nodded. The older I got, the more I looked like my older brother and father. "I know."

She fell into my arms and I held her tight. Her tears soaked into my shirt. She'd cry and remember everything that happened, all the empty years. She'd cry over it all but she'd come back stronger and more herself.

Caleb moved around me, and I remembered he was there. He pointed to the kitchen off the right of the entrance. I

noded that he could do what he wanted. I wasn't going to be able to move for a while. I walked Mom over to the couch and sat her down. I found a box of kleenex on her coffee table, and handed it to her. She took it gracefully and dabbed at her eyes before she wiped her red nose.

“Anthony. Sorry.”

I shook my head. I didn't need or want her apologies. If either one of us needed to be saying sorry, it was me. I swore I'd be such a good son, she wouldn't feel the devastation of losing one.

“I heard you're not eating again. Thought we agreed you'd take care of yourself.”

She hadn't gotten dressed up like she normally did. Her once black hair, that was mostly gray now, was down. It was so unlike her. She normally got dolled up every day. It didn't matter if she was going to watch movies all day, she'd be prim and proper.

Mom looked away, anywhere but at me.

“Mamma—”

I saw the moment her gaze landed on Caleb in the kitchen grabbing a drink.

“Oh dear, you brought someone over.” She was smoothing back her hair. “To think my Anthony would settle down.” She looked between us instantly, getting the wrong conclusion.

“Mamma—”

She was smiling so brightly, and I was going to be the reason it fell again. My chest ached. I couldn't stand to see her lose that smile.

Caleb rushed over and offered his hand to her with a charming smile on his face. “It’s really nice to meet you. Tony didn’t tell me his mother was so beautiful.” Caleb glared at me. “Bad boyfriend.”

She blushed and waved off Caleb’s flattery. “Give me one second to get cleaned up, and then I want to hear all about how you two met.”

“Oh, if you have baby pictures of Tony, I want to see,” Caleb said.

Mom’s smile widened even further. Her eyes lit up like she was herself again. “Oh, I have a ton.” She disappeared.

“Thanks,” I said the moment my mom’s door closed.

“For what?” Caleb plopped down on the sofa. “Oh, since you’re being the A-plus boyfriend, are you making us food?”

“What would you like to eat?”

Caleb gawked at me. “Seriously?”

I nodded, heading toward the kitchen. I rolled up the sleeves of my white button up. I knew the kitchen would be well stocked. My mother, even in her old age, loved to cook.

“How about some goulash?”

I hadn’t had it since I was a kid, but I remembered the warmth that filled me every single time we ate it. Cheap, simple, but filling. It brought back memories just thinking of those meals.

“Okay.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CALEB

I STARED into the kitchen as Tony moved around it. He was... different here. I couldn't describe it, but it was like I was looking at a new man. He was still tense, his shoulders up high as if he wanted to protect himself from the world. What was it about this place that put him on edge?

"Sorry about that," Bambina said as she returned. "You must think I'm a mess." She chuckled softly.

The woman we'd met at the door had disappeared. In her place was an elegant woman. She wore light makeup, her hair was twisted up into a fancy bun, and she had even slapped on a pair of pearl earrings. The robe was gone, replaced with a soft blue summer dress. She smiled at me as she took a seat, and I returned it.

"We all have bad days," I said with a shrug. "You've never seen *me* have a panic attack. I look fucking horrible."

Her smile brightened. "Ah, panic attacks. I know something about those. They're shit."

"Mamma," Tony called as he groaned. "Don't let this hooligan turn you into a sailor." He narrowed his eyes at me before he glanced at his mother. "Did you take your medicine?"

“Yes.” She nodded. “It’ll kick in soon. Get some of that fog out of my brain,” she muttered as she toyed with her dress, her brows knitted. “I really am sorry about—”

Tony waved a hand. “Don’t worry about it. I’m cooking us some food.”

“Thank you, honey.” She turned back to me. “So, you’re the boyfriend then. Tony’s never brought anyone to meet me before. It’s Caleb, right?”

I extended a hand. “Yes, ma’am. Mrs. Morelli.”

She waved. “Call me Bambi. How did the two of you meet?”

Now, that would be a hell of a story to tell. I couldn’t exactly say I’d been stealing cocaine from her son’s bosses warehouse, had gotten caught, been tortured by said son, and was now living with him as a full-blown prisoner, now could I? I realized they were both staring at me and quickly pulled a lie right out of my ass.

“We met at work.”

“At the office?” she asked.

“Yeah, at the office.” I kept it vague because I had no idea what she thought Tony did. “He was helping me out because I was new and we hit it off.”

Her smile grew. “That’s my Anthony. Always worried about everyone else.” She chuckled. “He’s been that way since he was a boy.”

Are we talking about the same man?

“Glad he’s not getting into trouble anymore. Anthony attracts problems more than anyone I’ve ever met!”

“Ma!” Tony called.

She leaned toward me. “It’s true. Lucas was always the wild one, but now? It’s definitely Anthony. Or it used to be. I’m glad he’s settling down. Is that because of you?”

I thought about pulling Tony off the man on the ground. There was no doubt that if I hadn’t been there, he would have kept punching until the man was dead. I’d seen that crazed look in his eyes, the coldness that sent a shiver down my spine.

I glanced up at Tony. “I’d like to think so.”

Bambi patted my leg. “I’m so happy he’s found someone as nice as you! Everyone he used to date in the past was so... annoying,” she said as she pulled a face. “At least from what I heard. Though I never heard all that much.”

I saw the sadness come over her face once more and my heart squeezed. They both cared about each other, but it was clear Tony was just like his mother. Both of them had walls and they hid behind them. I knew a hell of a lot about that.

“What about those pictures of Tony? You were going to show them to me.”

She blinked at me before she slapped the side of her head. “Of course! Sorry, my memory is horrible these days.” She stood up and walked over to a bookshelf. “I have so many of him and Lucas. Let’s see,” she whispered.

“Can I get you anything to drink?” I asked.

“A cup of coffee would be lovely, dear.”

I made my way to the kitchen where Tony was hard at work. He kept his head down, completely absorbed by what he was doing. The way his brows knitted so tightly told me he

had a ton of shit on his mind, though. I understood that. My mother was my world, I would do anything for her. But love could feel like a burden, even when you didn't want it to.

I touched his arm. "You all right?"

Tony jolted before he glanced down at me. "Yeah," he muttered.

"Sure?" I asked.

He stopped and searched my face. I saw the worry in his eyes, mixed with something else. Before I could try to figure it out, he returned to chopping ingredients.

"Keep my mother company. I'm almost done."

I nodded. "She wants coffee. Do you want any?"

"Yeah. Mugs are over there," he said as he nodded toward the cabinet.

I grabbed three and went over to the coffee maker. One taste of the stuff and I knew it was old. I tossed it and started a fresh pot. I kept searching until I found a silver serving tray, just like the one my mother loved to break out when I visited. Carefully, I placed everything on it along with cream and sugar before I stopped. Tony stared at me.

"What?"

He kept staring until he shrugged. "Nothing."

"Weirdo."

"Ass," he muttered back.

I carried the tray into the living room just as Bambi settled into her chair. Carefully, I set her mug in front of her along with the cream and sugar. She mixed it to her liking while I sat and did the same. Bambi hummed her approval, and I felt the

stupidest little ache of pride that she approved. It was just a dumb cup of coffee, but she approved.

“Let’s see. Here’s Anthony as a baby,” she said as she slid a book over. “Actually, let me move closer.” Once she was situated next to me, she smiled. “He was the cutest little baby. Fussy as all get out, but a beautiful little bambino.”

I stared down at the super chubby baby and snickered. Tony was completely bald. There were multiple rolls and dimples in his chubby little knees. For some reason I’d been expecting a less angry him, but this was hilarious.

“What’s so funny?”

I jumped at the sound of his voice so close to my ear. He stood behind me, eyes wide as he realized what we were looking at. Tony reached for the book, but I shoved it out of reach. He glared, but I gave him a huge smile in return.

“Leave him be,” Bambi said.

“Yeah, leave me be,” I added. “We’re enjoying the book.”

“I’m going to kill you later,” he whispered in my ear.

Oh, I knew he would. There was no doubt of that. Still, I could enjoy my moments alive, laughing at his expense. Besides, the more I laughed, the more he seemed to return to normal. The more Bambi smiled. I couldn’t do much, but I could at least bring them out of their misery.



“YOUR MOM IS AWESOME,” I said, as I patted my belly in the passenger seat of Tony’s car.

“Yes,” he answered. “Better than I deserve.”

I frowned as I glanced over at him. Tony had been okay when we left, but emotional. I’d seen the way his eyes watered again. It was the same way he’d been when we arrived. Now, he was shut down again, glancing off into the distance. I reached over and pushed my hand into his.

“You’re doing the best you can.”

Tony seemed to wake up and stared at me. “What?”

“With your mom. You’re doing the best you can. I know it’s hard. Clearly it hurts when you visit her. You’re doing the best you can for her.”

Frowning, he stared at our entwined fingers. “Am I? I ignored her for six months. Didn’t even realize so much time had passed.” He wiped his other hand down his face. “How could I forget my own mother?”

My stomach clenched as I pulled his hand from his face. “I’m thinking it has something to do with the fact that it brings up painful memories for both of you. That’s hard to handle, but you both seem so much better once it’s done. She’s a good person. And you’re... well, you’re a horrible person.” When he glared at me, I laughed. “But you’re good to her. That’s all that matters. She knows that.”

Tony’s shoulders sagged. “Thanks.”

I blinked at him. “For what?”

“Today.”

I waited for him to say more, but he went quiet. Tony started the car up and turned the radio on. I tried to remove my hand from his, but he tightened his grip to the point of pain. My jaw dropped as no sound came from my lips.

“Hey!” I snapped.

“Move that hand and you’ll regret it.”

I huffed. “Just say you want me to keep it there. You don’t gotta break my fingers!”

Tony relaxed his hand a bit, and I blew out a breath. He awkwardly shifted gears with his left hand and maneuvered while he held onto me. My heart skipped a beat.

Don’t even. Skipping a beat for this bastard? That’s insane. He’s still a monster.

I tried to remind myself of those truths the entire ride back to the house. Even while my stupid heart continued to pound away. I stared at Tony a little too long. I’d gotten to see a part of him I never thought existed. Maybe he wasn’t all torture, death, and being an asshole. There was more there. Deep, deep, deep, deep, *deep* down.

By the time we pulled up at his place, Tony finally released my hand. Slowly. I glanced down at it and quickly climbed out of the car, trying to put the oddness behind me. If he wasn’t a complete dick, I didn’t know how to feel about him. And I needed to continue to hate Tony. It would put space between us, it would keep both of us safe.

Once we stepped inside, I grunted as he shoved me against the wall. Tony’s mouth found mine, and I gasped against his lips. My eyes widened. *What the fuck is this?* I shoved against his chest, but he pushed back harder, his tongue swiping at the seam of my lips. Stupidly, I opened up for him. His tongue slipped in, sliding against mine as he moaned against my mouth. I shivered, pressing against him as my hands curled around his shirt.

“Take your clothes off,” he growled. “All of them.”

“Why?” I asked. “Haven’t you seen it all already through what I’m guessing is about a hundred fucking cameras?”

Tony’s hand gripped my hair as his lips pressed against my ear. “Take it off or I’ll cut it off.”

“Do it.”

Without an ounce of hesitation, Tony dragged me into the kitchen. He snatched up a pair of scissors and started cutting.

“Hey! Wait a minute—Tony, what the fuck are you doing? You can’t just—ah!”

I moaned as he attacked my neck with his mouth. Every kiss, lick against my pulse point, and bite that threatened to break my skin made my cock ache with need. When he pulled back, determination shone in his eyes. My clothing tugged against my skin as he ripped it off, tossing it to the side after cutting it. I stopped fighting him.

Our mouths crashed together again, and I sank against him. My naked skin rubbed up against his clothed body driving me insane. I needed to *feel* him, to have his fingers all over me as his warmth sank into my flesh. When we pulled apart, I panted.

“My room,” he said before I could even open my lips. “Now.”

For once, Tony wouldn’t get an argument out of me. I practically jogged to his room, letting myself inside. Tony shoved me onto his bed as he walked around it to his closet. I caught my breath before I sat up and grinned. He was a man on a mission, but I was okay with this one.

Tony tossed a bottle of lube onto the bed along with a handful of condoms. But he didn’t get in the bed. Instead, he rooted deeper into his closet.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

He resurfaced with a length of red rope in his hands. Tony’s gaze was dark as he looked at me. I swallowed hard. *Does he want to tie me up?* For some reason, I wasn’t running for the hills even though I knew I should. Being at the mercy of a crazy man? Yeah, instant red flag.

So, why wasn’t I running?

“Get on your knees,” Tony said.

I licked my lips. “What exactly are you going to do when I’m tied up, man?” I asked.

“It’s not man. You know what I prefer.”

My face burned. “What are you going to do to me, Daddy?”

Just saying it made my skin erupt into flames. However, the way Tony’s face melted into desire made it worth every second of my embarrassment. Tony leaned forward, grabbed my chin, and tilted my head up.

“Whatever I want,” he said. “Now, get on your knees.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

The words left my lips on a whisper, my heart firmly lodged in my throat. I leaned forward more, brushing my lips against his.

“Kiss me,” I groaned. “Don’t make me beg. Please.”

Tony searched my face before he kissed me. My eyes closed, my body heating up as his lips consumed mine. His tongue traced mine drawing the most embarrassing noises out of my mouth. Some part of me didn’t give a damn. I wanted him. Maybe we both needed it after today.

When he pulled away, I moved to my knees. Tony directed me to face the wall while he stood behind me. Rope laid against my flesh, dragging over my skin as he began to work. I watched from the floor-length mirror as he outlined both my pecs and began to tie intricate patterns. I wanted to squirm, move around, tell him to fuck me already, but one gaze at him and I calmed down. He was busy, lost in it, and peaceful. I couldn't break that look of zoned out bliss on his face.

“Have you ever had this done before?”

I shook my head. “No. I've seen it in porn and stuff, but that's about it.”

“This is a harness,” he said as he continued to work. “A chest harness. Put your arms behind your back. One on top of the other. Yes, just like that.”

Rope wound around my upper arm and draped over my collarbones. The more he tied, the less I could move. I expected panic, but instead the slight pressure made me feel... calm. I shifted a bit and he stopped.

“Are you all right?”

I choked as I stared at him in the mirror. Tony gave a fuck about me? My tongue darted across my lips as I tried to force my brain to work with that thought in it.

“Yes, Daddy,” I said. “You can keep going.”

“Comfortable?”

I nodded. “Keep going. It doesn't feel bad at all.”

Tony smiled and my heart did a stupid flip flop. “Good. Almost done.”

I sat up a little taller and caught Tony smiling more than before. *Stop making that face!* If he kept smiling, I would

believe that he was more than the monster I knew he was. If I kept seeing those small parts of himself that were undoubtedly human, I would fall for a man that I wanted nothing to do with.

Tony pushed me onto my stomach and grabbed my legs. I grunted as he maneuvered me like a toy until my feet touched the ground. He reached over me, grabbing for the condom and lube. My breath caught in my throat. I turned my head just to watch as he stripped out of his clothes. When he was naked, he glanced up and his lips tugged into a smirk.

“Like what you see?”

“Fuck yes,” I muttered before I could stop myself.

The laugh that fell from his lips did funny things to me. Tony spread my cheeks, examining my hole. Under his scrutiny, I felt my cock twitch. What was it about the man that made me want to beg for him to wreck me?

“You look good in red,” he said, interrupting my thoughts. “It goes with your skin nicely.” He ran a hand over my ass before he gave it a hard slap. “I think it’s your color.”

“Fuck,” I moaned. “More.”

Tony raised a brow. “You like being hit,” he said, the words in no way a question.

When his hand collided with my flesh again, I melted. I shoved my ass back, eager for another one. The more he hit me, the more my skin set aflame. I moaned, rolling my hips back.

“Come on, fuck me,” I groaned.

“Don’t rush me, slut,” Tony growled.

I shivered. “Calling me slut is only gonna make me want it more.”

He chuckled as he poured lube down my ass. Tony’s fingers slipped over the wet mess, rubbing it into my hole before he sank a finger inside. I clenched around it, groaning as I rubbed my cock against the blanket.

“So eager,” he moaned. He grabbed a fistful of my hair and turned my head. “Look at yourself.”

I caught a glimpse of myself in the reflection of the mirror. My hair was a wild mess, my eyes low as my skin was dusted with pink. As I stared, I could pick out marks on my neck from Tony’s vicious mouth.

“Shit!”

I cried out as Tony slammed his cock inside of me, stealing the breath from my lungs. My eyes rolled up, my body bucking as my hole burned around the sudden intrusion. Tony’s hands gripped my hips as he thrust inside of me, hard and fast. I was left to hang on for dear life, left to his mercy. Or lack of mercy.

Tony grabbed the ropes and used them to drag me back onto his cock. Every thrust was a meeting of flesh against flesh, the sharp slapping sounds enough to make me dizzy with desire. He maneuvered me until I was on my knees, only being held up by a strong hand that he pressed against my chest.

“Don’t stop watching,” he told me.

I directed my eyes back to the mirror. Tony’s expression was one I wasn’t used to. Softened even with the lust that raged in his eyes, he looked like a completely different person. As he snapped his hips forward, I nearly fell, but he held me

up, not letting me get away from his cock or the punishing pace he set with it.

“So good,” I moaned.

“You like that? Like when Daddy fucks your tight fucking hole while you watch?” He groaned. “Look at you. You’re taking it so well for me, Caleb. You’re doing such a good job being an eager little slut.”

I nearly blacked out. The last thing I needed him to know was how much I got off on praise. From the smirk he directed at me in the reflection of the mirror, however, I had a sinking feeling that he already knew.

“Come on, you can take it,” he groaned. “You can take all of Daddy’s cock, can’t you?”

“Yes!” I cried out as he picked up speed. “I-I can take it for you. Oh. God!”

“No, it’s just me. But if you want to worship me, I won’t object,” he said as he chuckled. “You’re so tight, you know that? I knew the day I fingered you at the church you would be addictive.”

My face felt like it was going to burst into flames. I shook my head, trying to erase the memory of the church. It went nowhere. Tony had carved every moment of us being together into my brain, until I was sure I would never be free of him.

“Wanna cum,” I whined, not caring how much of a bitch I sounded like. “Needtacum.”

“You can hold it,” Tony said. “Can’t you? Can you be a good slut and hold it for Daddy?”

I was going to pass out. The man knew how to push all my buttons. His fingers dug into my flesh, my back arching as he

drove deeper, rubbing against my prostate. It was like he wanted to claim my soul through my asshole alone.

“Daddy, please,” I groaned, saliva slipping over my lip. “Please let me cum. Please,” I begged, pleading with him in the mirror. “I’ll do anything. Take anything. Please, please. Oh fuck, oh fuck me!”

“You’ll take anything?” He groaned. “Anything I want?”

I nodded. “Yes!”

As far as I was concerned, Tony could use me however he wanted in his damn bedroom. I was into a hell of a lot and I didn’t give a damn what he wanted to do. As long as he let me have the release I so desperately craved.

“Cum for me,” he said as he pushed me back down onto the bed. His hands pressed against my lower back, pinning me to the mattress. “No hands. I want you to cum just from my cock.”

Oh, he had no idea how far gone I was. My brain was a fuzzy mess, my body so sensitive, it tingled all over. I bucked and shifted back against him until I felt it coming. That rush, that wave took me over, and I cried out until my throat hurt as my cock left spurts of cum on his blanket. He groaned, filling me up. It just pushed me on, making me shiver and tremor as I suffered the aftershocks.

“Remember you said I could do anything.”

“Hmm?” I muttered before I nodded. “Whatever you want.”

“Good.”

Tony held still before I felt it. My eyes flew open as he filled me with something so incredibly hot I thought I would

melt and disappear. Our eyes met in the mirror. The pure pleasure on his face as he marked my insides with his piss made me groan.

Fuck, I want to see that more. I want to feel everything you do to me.

“I plan to mark every inch of you,” he said as he gazed at me. “All of you.”

My head was so high, all I could do was nod as I floated away on a dreamy cloud of pleasure. Belly full, balls drained, I agreed.

“All of me,” I muttered. “Don’t stop.”

“Trust me, I’m not going to.”

Pretty sure I’m going to die.

I’m okay with that.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TONY

BLU WAS BUSY AS USUAL, even on a Thursday. The line was out the door and the street parking was full. I pulled into the back lot reserved for the brothers and on the occasions when I wasn't guarding Benito, myself. I parked, Caleb a ball of excitement next to me.

"I'm getting a drink," Caleb said. He jerked the buckle off and went for the handle. I grabbed him before he could jump out of the car and make a beeline for Blu.

"No, you need to stay in the car."

"What? You have got to be kidding me. There's no way I'm not going in." Caleb jerked out of my hold, reaching for the door again.

He never fucking listens.

"Blu is run and owned by the Vitales."

"Good, those bastards owe me twenty-seven years worth of drinks." He was out of the car before I could argue with him. He headed for the back door and the guard on duty stopped him immediately.

I blew out a sigh and got out. I wasn't there for fun, but I rarely ever was. My life consisted of work and it would be the same today. "He's with me."

“Yeah, I’m with him, so move it,” Caleb said.

I shook my head. “Do you ever stop?”

He winked at me over his shoulder, mischief glimmering in his bright blue eyes. “Yeah, when your eight glorious inches are inside of me.”

I must have been losing my mind because my cock twitched at the stupid remark, and I wanted nothing more than to drag his ass off somewhere and fuck him until he cried. Maybe tie him up again and add some toys. There was so much I wanted to do to Caleb. I wanted to push him past his breaking point and then keep going until he was nothing but *my* ruined mess.

Caleb snapped in front of my face, pulling me out of my runaway thoughts.

“I don’t know what you were just thinking about, but no,” he said.

“You said I could do anything I wanted to you.”

Even in the darkened club, I could make out the tantalizing blush that crept up Caleb’s face.

“That was just at that moment. Today is a new day.”

I hummed as I moved closer to him. I leaned down brushing my lips over his ear and relishing in the sharp gasp he let out. “I took it as you gave yourself over to me.” I pulled his ear lobe between my teeth and nibbled on it. Caleb was panting and practically begging me to take what was mine. “I don’t let things that belong to me go.” I backed up and smiled at him. “Ever. Not even when I break them.”

Caleb licked his lips, his pupils blown. *Maybe Benito can wait a bit longer.* The need to grab Caleb was currently raging

through my veins.

“I’m a person,” Caleb finally said.

I tilted my head as I looked him up and down. “No, you’re my new favorite toy.”

“Tony,” Enzo’s voice carried over the thumping music, and I looked up to see the calculating eyes of one of the brothers.

His gaze moved down to Caleb but it didn’t linger too long. I wouldn’t be surprised if Enzo had no interest in Caleb. He nodded toward the direction of Benito’s office, and I knew I was out of time.

“Be good.”

“Never that,” Caleb said. He grabbed my wrist before I was able to walk away. “You sure you’re good to go in alone?” He looked upstairs nervously before he stared back at me.

Was he worried? My chest constricted and I rubbed at it. I couldn’t be having a heart attack at thirty-two, right?

“I’ll be fine.”

Caleb nodded. “If you don’t come down in an hour, I’ll—”

“Do nothing and wait for me like a good toy.” I patted his head, pulling my arm free. A part of me wanted to bring him along but that was for my comfort. Keeping my eyes on Caleb made me feel secure.

“Fuck you,” Caleb said as he headed toward the thumping music and rowdy crowd.

I headed up the stairs, nodding to the few men that stood around. I shoved all thoughts about Caleb down, along with any confusing feelings that were starting to arise. The door opened just as I approached it. Enzo stared at me for a long

while before moving to the side and taking a seat in his usual chair closest to the bookshelves that lined the room. Giancarlo stood behind Benito, leaning against the wall looking bored as if he wanted to be anywhere but at Blu. Benito sat behind his huge desk, his gaze instantly landing on me as I walked in.

The door shut behind me and it was like being placed in a vacuum. All the music and sounds from outside the room were muffled to non-existence. I was left in the office with the three brothers watching me.

I relaxed as much as I could.

“Should I be concerned?” Benito’s voice cut through the room like a hot knife through butter.

“About?”

I knew when he called me to the office what this was about. The videos circling the Internet had even made their way to a few news outlets. Nothing too major, but it was out there. The fact that it took well over forty-eight hours to get to Benito was a surprise.

“Really, Tony? Are you going to attempt to act stupid?” Benito pinched the bridge of his nose. “I expect this kind of shit out of Giancarlo.”

“Hey,” Gin shouted. “Why the fuck am I being dragged into this? My record is spotless. I’m a regular upstanding citizen.”

“But not you. What the hell has been going on?” Benito asked, ignoring Giancarlo’s outburst.

“Nothing, I had a rough day. It won’t happen again,” I said.

Benito shook his head. “You know there are eyes on us but you expect me to believe that you forgot about it and acted rash when you haven’t done that since we were teens?”

I frowned, thinking about those old times. I’d been at Benito’s side a lot longer than most.

“It was a slipup.”

“You visited your mom. Do you need more time off?” Benito asked.

“Maybe more time to spend with a certain black haired cat?” Giancarlo teased.

My back stiffened. *Shut the hell up.*

“Who?” Benito asked.

“Uncle Arnoldo’s kid. The one who stole from us,” Enzo said.

“He’s not bad, don’t make it sound like he’s scum. The guy has great taste in cars and bikes,” Giancarlo praised. “Oh, and it’s Caleb. Tony here has some interest in him.”

All three set their gazes on me as if waiting for me to jump up and down and agree that I had *feelings* for Caleb. I don’t know what I was feeling for Caleb except that a part of me yearned for him. I wanted to tie him up and place him on my nightstand. Or chain him to my house so whenever I came home, he’d always be there to greet me.

“You’re in love with Caleb?” Benito asked.

“No.” Love wasn’t a word I’d use lightly. A man like me wouldn’t ever find it, not when I’d done so much shit in the world.

Giancarlo rolled his eyes. “Man, are you going to be like Benito and swear up and down you don’t like dick even while choking on—” Giancarlo crashed to the ground on his knees. He clutched his stomach wheezing as he tried to breathe. Benito stood over him.

“Want to try that again?”

Giancarlo, being the dumbass he was, lifted a hand, coughing in the process. “You’re all gay!”

“Yes, that has already been proven, why do you keep shouting it?” Enzo asked.

Benito’s fist cracked against Giancarlo’s face and he went down.

“Worth it.” Giancarlo groaned.

“Caleb can learn under one of the other guys. He’s a distraction and I need you focused, Tony,” Benito said.

His words were like hot iron cutting through my flesh. My response was out before I could even think about it.

“No.”

All three brothers stared at me as if I’d lost my mind. Giancarlo pushed himself off the floor, brushing off any debris that was on him.

“What do you mean, no?” Benito asked. His voice deepened and icy tendrils of fear crept up my spine.

I knew what Benito was capable of. He might have taken a step back from his former ways due to his public appearance, but there was no way I’d ever forget the way Benito used to bathe the streets of New York in blood.

“You placed him under me. Handing him over to someone else will only make me look incompetent.”

The brothers gave me more leeway than most, and I was grateful, but I wasn't stupid. If I didn't fix what I'd just started, I wouldn't be walking out without being covered in a little blood myself.

“That's true. Tony is the one closest to us. Everyone is waiting for him to fuck up big time. Half our distant cousins and twice removed uncles look at him in disdain,” Enzo said.

I would have never guessed Mr. Logical would be on my side, but I was thankful for it.

Benito rubbed his chin as he took his seat once more. He watched my every move. I stood there, knees locked, shoulders tightened with tension. I couldn't hand Caleb over to just anyone. I just knew if anyone else got him, I'd lose my shit and the incident from a few days ago would be considered child's play.

“Fine.”

“They are living together; it would be a hassle to have someone else take over,” Giancarlo said.

I'm going to fucking kill him. Ash was going to be planning a funeral instead of a wedding. Why the fuck can't he keep his mouth shut?

“What?” Benito's brows lowered. “Why the hell is he still staying with you?” He waved it off as if he didn't care for the answer. “Send him on his way. You can train him for another week then he should be good to start on his own. I can put him with some of the guys.”

No, a week is too soon. I needed more time. I needed to understand these feelings that were wreaking havoc inside of

me. I wanted things when Caleb was near that probably weren't normal. The desire to peel back Caleb's skin and climb in alongside him came to mind, or to watch his every move even when he was doing something as mundane as washing his bike. I wouldn't have understood it if he wasn't under my roof.

"He's not a flight risk anymore. Tell him if he does try to run or steal from us again, the deals off, and the little video we took will conveniently end up in the police hands," Benito said.

I couldn't breathe, let alone respond. There was so much I wanted to say but couldn't. I nodded. It was the only response I could give.

"Good, that's all. Is there anything I should know about?" Benito asked.

"No." The word scraped over my tongue like raw rusty nails.

"That's all I needed. Take the night off."

I turned toward the door, needing to leave and find Caleb. If I took too long, he would be snatched away from me.

"Oh, Tony? I don't think I have to reiterate this, but we are in a crucial time right now. I can't have you losing it. None of us can."

"Of course, boss."

I understood, and I even agreed, but I couldn't fathom letting Caleb go just yet. Maybe once I worked him out of my system then, and only then, I could let him leave. But even as I thought about using Caleb as much as possible, I didn't see an end date.

I slipped out of the office and took the stairs two at a time. I worked my way to the packed dance floor. Bodies were pressed up against each other and I moved through them in search of Caleb. His black hair, pale skin, and broad shoulders were easy to find. The moment I met his blue eyes and the recognition shone in them, I was able to breathe easier. Despite everything, a smile graced my face.

“Hey, how did it go?” Caleb shouted in my ear.

I shook my head. I didn’t want to talk about it. He’d know he didn’t need to stay with me, and if Caleb knew, he could leave. Then there would be nothing chaining him to me anymore. I couldn’t have that.

Pulling his body flush against mine was like playing with fire. Caleb started moving, rolling his hips and teasing me with his ass. My brain clicked off for a second. I placed my hands on his hips, not sure where else to place them. I danced with Caleb the rest of some popular pop songs blaring through the speakers. The moment it ended, my cock was hard and one thing was clear: I wanted Caleb now.

Benito had already given me a warning. Fucking Caleb in the middle of Blu was probably a bad decision. It didn’t make me want to do it any less.

I leaned forward until my lips pressed over his ear. A shiver worked its way down Caleb. His ears were so sensitive. I salivated at the thought of holding him down and toying with them until he went insane.

“Let’s go home.”

Caleb shook his head. His face was flush and his skin was hotter than usual. “Let’s drink instead.” He grabbed hold of my wrist and dragged me toward the bar.

Tex, Enzo's boyfriend was behind the bar slinging drinks as if he was born to do it. His smile was bright as he greeted customers and handed over drinks. He was a natural, no one in their right mind would have ever suspected him to be a former cop. He twisted around and our gazes met. Tex sported a huge smile on his face as he made his way over to us.

"You know him?" Caleb asked. There was tension in his voice that hadn't been there on the floor.

"Yeah, his name is Tex."

"What's up, Tony? You're never down here." Tex glanced over at the staircase that led up to the back and then Benito's office. "Only you coming down?"

I nodded.

"I'm here," Caleb said.

Tex looked down at him and held out his hand. "Tex, nice to meet you."

"Caleb. I'm staying with Tony for now."

Tex cocked a brow at me but I was too busy studying Caleb. What did he mean by that? For now? Was he planning on leaving me? As if I'd let that happen.

"Cool, I'm staying with Enzo, my boyfriend." Tex looked between us suspiciously.

The moment Enzo's name was out of Tex's mouth, Caleb seemed to relax. "That has to suck. He's interesting."

Tex laughed. "He is." He grabbed a cup. "What can I get you guys?"

Caleb instantly started ordering drinks. I glanced over my shoulder, feeling eyes on us. Enzo stood over the railing,

looking down on us with Gin at his side. Gin waved at me with a shit-eating grin on his face.

Something pointy jabbed in my side. I grunted as I glanced down. “Your elbow is bony.”

“Fuck you, man, just get over here and help me with these shots.”

My eyes widened the moment I took in the rows of clear liquid shots. “What is this?”

“A good time.” Caleb handed me a shot and clinked them together. He tapped the bottom of the shot glass on the bar before downing it. “Bottoms up.”

I followed suit, wrapped up in Caleb’s momentum. The familiar burn of alcohol coated my tongue and seared through my chest, making it feel tight. I blew out a breath between my teeth.

“Come on, again. Keep up, old man.”

“I’m only thirty-two.”

I grabbed another shot and swallowed it down. Shit, there were way too many on the bar just for the two of us. I looked up expecting maybe Tex to be joining us but he was already helping another customer.

Four shots down, and I was starting to feel it. “I think I’m good.”

Caleb frowned, his face looked even more gorgeous with his lips turned down in almost a pout. No matter how he begged, I was done. Caleb grabbed the hem of his shirt and pulled it off. His dusky pink nipples instantly grabbed my attention, and I moved closer to him. Caleb grabbed another shot and poured some on his collarbone.

“Drink up.”

Fuck it. I grabbed Caleb, dipping my head and slurping up the alcohol. It didn't even burn anymore. It was like drinking sparkling water now. It went down with ease as I lapped up every drop off Caleb's body. I wanted more.

I glanced at him. “Again.”



THE WORLD SHIFTED around me in a blur. It felt as if I was moving but wasn't at the same time. I blinked as the scenery changed around me. The sounds went from the club to metal to no music. I was forced onto my feet but standing on them was proven to be a challenge. I'd lost track of how many shots I'd downed off Caleb's body. I might have ordered more Bacardi at some point.

“Damn it, I need help. Who gets this drunk?” Caleb asked. The door shutting near us rattled my brain. It looked like we were in my living room but I might be wrong. That was the couch, right?

“Tony, hey, can you hear me?” Caleb asked. “I need you to focus so we can get you to bed.”

“You don't need anyone but me,” I said.

My head felt heavy and everything was rushing me all at once. It felt like my brain was on fire and I had one brain cell trying to put out all the flames.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Stop asking questions.”

My stomach rolled and the urge to burp or hurl took over. I turned around and covered my mouth. Fuck, why did I drink again? Why in the hell did I let Caleb talk me into so many shots?

“Hey, are you okay?” Caleb was suddenly next to me. Warmth radiated off him, making me even hotter.

“You smell good.” I grabbed Caleb, pulling him closer. Flames of desire lapped at the back of my neck and traveled down to my cock. “I want to bend you over, breed your tight hole until the sun comes up.”

Fuck, why did he smell good?

“Why do I want you so badly?”

“Um, Tony, you’re really drunk. Why don’t we get you to bed,” Caleb said.

His words barely registered. All I could think about was keeping him close and drowning in the smell of him. Even with all the booze I licked off his body, he still smelled like *him*. I tightened my arms around Caleb.

“I don’t think I can let you go.”

“You have to in order for us to make it down your hallway. It’s too damn narrow for us to squeeze through together.” Caleb grunted as I held him tighter. “Fuck, okay, okay.”

We started moving. One moment we were in the living room, and the next we were in my bedroom.

“Here, I’ll—Woo.”

I dragged Caleb down into bed with me. He wasn’t going anywhere without me.

“This isn’t what I expected when I suggested you drink.”

“What?”

I lifted my head a little to look at him. I hated that I was so drunk, he was a bit blurry. I wanted to see him.

“Clingy, obnoxious, out of control, soft, weird, shit, all of it.”

My laughter couldn't be contained, and I laid my head back down. “Yeah, I don't like getting drunk.”

“Oh.”

“I wasn't passing up licking your body. I'd do it again.”

“You're honest when you're drunk,” Caleb said. He wiggled under me, and I held him closer. “Bet you'll tell me your social security number if I asked.”

“135—”

“Holy shit, for real?”

“Go fuck yourself,” I finished.

Caleb burst out laughing and it filled me with butterflies. I wanted to hear that sound more. I wanted Caleb's tears, laughter, happiness, sadness, his anxiety, and his worries. I wanted everything. Silence settled over us for a second and I welcomed the peace. If I wasn't careful, this peace that invaded me would become a high I'd willingly kill for.

“I want to see my family,” Caleb said, breaking the silence.

“What for?” *You have me.*

“What kind of question is that? My crew is everything to me and they're stuck in bumfuck nowhere. I need them back home.”

I shrugged, snuggling closer to him. “Who cares, you only need me.”

Shit, didn't mean to say that last part. My brain was late in stopping me from saying stupid shit. I needed to sleep.

“I care,” Caleb growled. He sounded so upset.

I blew out a breath and booped his nose. “They could come back.”

“They can't, it's too dangerous.”

Black spots danced in my vision blocking my view of Caleb. “No.”

“What the hell do you mean, no?” Caleb asked.

His voice sounded so far away, and I moved to grab him before he could disappear. It was like searching for someone in total darkness.

“Fuck, you're heavy and a needy as fuck drunk,” Caleb said. He batted my hands away but it only made me more desperate.

“Peel back your skin.”

“My what? Have you lost your fucking mind?”

“I need to be as close as possible.”

Desperation burned through me. He couldn't possibly understand this need that was overtaking me. These unwanted emotions were there and impossible to ignore. I was normally level-headed and could make decisions based on all the facts, but when it came to Caleb, my once in control emotions ruled me every single time.

“Fuck, Benito is right,” I muttered.

“What's he right about?”

“You're a distraction, but I don't care. Why is it he can have someone who starts a war and is a fucking psycho, but I

can't have you?"

It frustrated me more that Harlow locked me in a trunk, started multiple fights, and even was part of the reason we were in a fucking war in the first place. And yet I slipped once over the past few years and I was called into question.

"What the hell, Tony, do you like me or something?" Caleb asked, laughing.

Even his laughter filled me with something achingly close to happiness. I wanted it for myself. "Yeah, I—I think so." I shook my head before nuzzling it into Caleb's neck.

"Wait, you're fucking heavy, get up."

"No."

Caleb punched me in the side but the pain was dulled by the alcohol pumping through my system. I wasn't budging even if he grabbed my gun from the nightstand and pressed it against my head.

"Fuck, okay, fine. Stay there, suffocating me, but if you wake up to a corpse don't be mad at me."

"At least you wouldn't be able to leave me."

I dragged in a breath of Caleb's cologne. It was better than any drug out there. Silence surrounded us and the alcohol dragged me down further. I relaxed a bit, letting sleep take over.

Smack.

My eyes flew open and I jerked up. My eyes took a moment to focus on Caleb under me. He was staring at me intently.

“There is a lot to unpack here, but first, finish what you were saying. My crew aren’t in danger?”

I groaned, this again. I flopped back down.

“You fall asleep and I’m going to slap the shit out of you again.”

“They are safe to return. You paid the price.”

“Wait, has it been safe since then?”

I nodded, getting comfortable again.

“Get up, I need to make a call.” Caleb pushed at my shoulders.

Irritation twisted a knot in my stomach, and I grabbed his hands and slammed them down on the bed. “No.”

“Is no all you can say?”

Instead of answering him, I kissed Caleb. Our lips met in a messy connection. I was too drunk to do much more than that, but as long as I could claim a part of him, I would. Our tongues tangling together was familiar and intoxicating. I pulled back, letting one of his hands go in favor of squeezing his cheeks and forcing his mouth open.

“You’re mine, for now. Think only about me or I might have to retrain your brain. Maybe that would work. Breaking you would be fun, don’t you agree?” I couldn’t tell if my words were out loud or in my head anymore.

I fell forward, wrapping him back up in my arms. Fighting the alcohol-induced sleep was impossible, and I was finally losing it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CALEB

THE SILENCE in the car stretched on for miles. I'd wanted to ride my bike, but Tony protested, quietly. Mostly because his head was banging and he looked like he would tip over at any moment. I stared daggers at him as we drove.

"Stop staring at me."

"Fuck you," I said.

He'd sat on the fact that I could call Drav and the others back home. What the hell was that about? I'd sat around worried that they would be killed if they stepped foot back into the city, and they had been safe for ages. I wanted to put Tony's head in the toilet and flush. Several times. He was such a dick.

"Stop crossing your arms over your chest like that," Tony muttered.

"Again, I need to reiterate this. Fuck you."

"I never said they couldn't come back. You just never asked."

I was going to kill him. Hand on a bible, my fingers around his throat, I would *kill him*.

Tony glanced in my direction. "Are you going to be like this all day?"

“Yes,” I said immediately.

He groaned. “It’s bullshit you asked me about it when I was drunk. I probably said something crazy to you and didn’t even mean it.”

My eyes narrowed. “You don’t remember what you said last night? What you did?”

Tony squirmed in his seat. He gripped the wheel even harder than he had before until his knuckles blanched. I raised a brow. When he didn’t say anything else I knew it was true. He had no idea what happened last night.

My mind was instantly thrown back to his hands all over my body. His lips pressed to my skin. Every needy, whiny plea for me not to leave him. Even in the middle of the night when I had to piss, he drug himself out of bed and followed me. He wouldn’t lie down unless I was pressed right up underneath him. My body still felt the weight of him. I was pretty sure at my young age, I’d pulled a couple of muscles as well.

“You really don’t remember anything?” I prodded.

Tony growled. “Just shut up already!”

I grinned. Yeah, some day I was going to dangle that entire night over his head. I couldn’t wait to watch him squirm when I told him all of the embarrassing shit that had come out of his mouth. He’d even said he liked me. I didn’t believe that for a minute, but it was still something I would use against him just to watch him turn red.

“Is this the right place?”

I displaced my anger long enough to look up and examine where we were. The woods thickened as we pulled off of the highway and drove down a dirt road. All I had was the address Drav sent me when I called him this morning and a GPS.

“I think so,” I muttered. “Keep going.”

We turned down a few streets before we were swallowed up by trees again. A long, winding road took us to a dead-end before I spotted the house further into the woods. Tony and I climbed out before we cut through the woods and made our way to the house. It was huge, a two-story farmhouse with a barn off in this distance and a silo to the side.

“Holy shit. Where the fuck are we?” I asked.

“Hick town.”

I elbowed him. “Be nice.”

“Uncle Caleb! Uncle Caleb!”

Stasia tore through the fields. She was as unstoppable and brave as always. Even when she ran up and caught sight of Tony, she only gave him a small glance before she turned back and threw herself at me. I picked her up, tossing her into the air before she fell back down into my arms.

“Hey, princess.”

“Look, look. My toof is gone!” She shoved her tongue through the small hole.

My heart clenched. I glared at Tony. “I can’t believe I missed that,” I said to Stasia before I turned to look at her. “Your first one.”

“Yeah. Toof fairy came and everything. It was awesome!”

“Stasia? Stasia!”

Drav’s panicked voice came around the side of the house. His gun was drawn, eyes wild before he saw his daughter in my arms. He stared for a minute before he dropped the gun and rushed over to us.

“I know you said you were coming, but I still freaked out,” he said as he put his gun in the back of his waistband. “Stasia, you can’t just run off like that! I nearly died.”

“Sorry, papa.”

Drav kissed her pouty face and sat her on the ground. “Go run to Uncle Shade.” We watched as she charged toward the house, only for Shade to step out, scoop her up, and carry her inside. Drav turned back around and dragged me into a tight hug, his big bear paw of a hand slapping against my back. “Cell. It’s so fucking good to see you.”

“You too.” I grunted. “Please, I can’t have one more of you assholes crush my ribs. I’ll die.”

A hand curled against the back of my shirt, fingers shoving into my collar. With a swift yank, Tony ripped me away from Drav. I nearly choked on my shirt.

“What the hell, Tony?”

His eyes were mere slits as he stared at Drav. When I tried to break free, he tugged me back before he wrapped a hand around my upper arm. I groaned. *Does he still think I’m going to run or something? What the hell is his problem?*

“We got a problem?” Drav asked, drawing up to his full, intimidating height. “He hurting you?”

I waved nervously. “No, no, it’s fine. He just thinks I’m going to take off or something.” I sighed. “Everyone ready to come home?”

“More than ready,” Drav said, still eyeing Tony.

“Where’d you find this place, anyway?” I shook Tony off as I walked toward the house. “It’s nice.”

“Nice and out of the way. And boring. And dead,” Drav muttered, trailing me. “We’ve been going insane.”

I knew all too well how my Hitters did when they were left to their own devices. All of us were the type to get antsy immediately when we had nothing to do. Especially when we had problems waiting at home, bills that needed to be paid, and family waiting for us to return. Being too far away from the action wasn’t any of our goals.

“Stasia seems to like it,” I pointed out.

“For five minutes everyday. She’s bored after that. No internet and a spotty signal means her tablet runs for shit.” He stopped and turned to Tony. “Do you mind if the two of us speak alone?”

Tony looked him up and down. I couldn’t tell what that expression was on his face, but it looked like he wanted to eat Drav alive. Why he had an issue with him, I had no idea. I didn’t want to get into the middle of it either. I just wanted to get my guys back and then maybe crack open a cold beer and relax with them. They were such a huge part of my life. Being away from them for so long had felt like someone had cut off a body part and I’d been going on without it as if it was normal.

“Can you give us a moment?” I asked Tony. “Maybe we can help them load up the van.”

He crossed his arms over his chest. Instead of being a reasonable adult and saying yes or no, he simply stared at us. I rubbed my temple. The man was giving me a headache.

“Guess not,” I muttered as I turned back to Drav. “What’s up?”

He glanced over my shoulder at Tony. Whatever he was thinking, he didn’t say it. If it was going to be something to

piss Tony off, I would rather he didn't. The man was hard enough to deal with most days, and I still had to live with him at the end of the day.

“Are you okay, Cell?”

I grinned at Drav. “Yeah, I'm great! Why?”

He grunted. “We haven't talked in a while. That worries me. Everything okay with the Vitale's?”

My eyes drifted over to Tony. He still hadn't stopped staring daggers at Drav. *What does he think Drav's going to do? Kill him?* I realized that's probably exactly what Drav wanted to do. He was always overprotective of the people he cared about.

“Yeah,” I said as my gaze drifted back to Drav. “I got everything squared away. That's why all of you can come back home.”

Drav nodded. “All right. Let's get everyone loaded up.” He slung an arm around my shoulders. “Glad you're not dead.”

I chuckled. “Me too, man.”

One minute I was tucked against Drav's side. The next I was in Tony's arms. He grabbed my upper arm once more and tugged me away from Drav. I groaned.

“He's probably ready to go. Let me help move stuff,” I said.

Drav nodded slowly. “Sure.”

I shook myself free of Tony and jogged to the house. I scooped Stasia up in my arms and we stepped into the place together. The inside held a minimum amount of furniture, just enough to sustain them while they waited to come back home. It made my heart squeeze. The fact that they hadn't been

willing to really settle down showed how much faith they had in me. My stomach still turned thinking about the path I'd had to take to get them home, but I would be lying if I said it didn't feel good to fix what I had caused. To protect them the way I said I would.

We packed up the van with what little items they were taking back before I popped Stasia in her carseat. I strapped her in, making sure she was secure. While I worked, she stared over my shoulder. I frowned.

“Hey, don't just stare behind me. Nothing's creepier than a little kid staring at something. You seeing ghosts or something? Let me know so I can leave you.”

She pointed behind me.

Despite my best instincts, I turned around. “Shit!” I grabbed my chest. “Why are you just standing there!”

Tony pulled a face before he shrugged. “Everyone's ready to go.”

“Who's he?” Stasia asked.

I turned back to her. “That's Tony. He's my...”

I trailed off as I realized there was no way in hell I could explain that to Stasia. *Oh yes, this is the man that tried to kill Uncle Caleb. Yes, I'm still a prisoner. It's okay, he's really nice!* I wanted to laugh at the stupidity of my situation.

“He's a friend of mine,” I finally said as I made sure she was secure.

Stasia waved at him. I glanced back at Tony, ready to tell him to smile back, but he already was. My heart squeezed painfully. *A smile on his face that's not because he's terrorizing me? Never thought I'd see that.* That smile was

impressive. It made him look normal, as if he wasn't a dangerous asshole. There was a reason I was attracted to Tony sometimes. He was a good-looking man. Our eyes met, and he lifted a brow at me.

“Problem?” he asked.

I shook my head. “No. I just had no idea the devil could smile.”

“Let's go already,” he said, his tone clipped.

“You can ride back with us,” Drav said.

Before I could even open my mouth to answer, Tony had my arm in his hand. He started pulling. I dug my heels in, trying to stop myself from moving as I fought against his tightening grip.

“Hey, calm down. Tony!” I grunted when he pulled me forward. “Why are you so strong? I'll see you back at the apartment!” I called to Drav.

Tony kept a hold on me the entire time. He dragged me back to the car, opened my door, and practically pushed me inside before he slammed the door. I stared at him as he stormed around the front of the car, irritation written all over his face. When he climbed inside, he slammed his door and started up the car, a sour expression on his face. We pulled out and headed back for the highway. I glanced behind us, trying to see if the guy's were following us.

“Hey, I was going to wait on them!” I said. When he didn't respond, I blew out a breath. “Just because you're hungover doesn't mean you need to be such an asshole.”

Tony grunted. Like a caveman. I stared at him until he finally tore his attention away from the road for a minute and fixed it on me. Did he even realize he was speeding? I'd never

seen him drive so fast. Good thing it didn't bother me because if I was anyone else, I'd probably be pissing my pants.

"You're close to them," Tony said.

I nodded. "Yeah. Real close. They're like family."

He frowned. "Anything more than familial feelings with any of them? Like Drav?"

I raised a brow. "Are you asking if I've fucked any of them?"

"Maybe."

"One or two."

The car came to a screeching halt, cutting my laughter off. Tony reached over, grabbed my cheeks and yanked me toward him. My heart raced in my chest as he moved his face closer to mine. I could feel the heat of his breath as it fanned against my face.

"Who?" he demanded.

I was lost in his eyes. Tony's gaze was always more commanding when there was that glint of danger in it. *Shit, am I going crazy?* I cleared my throat and carefully removed myself from his grasp. He stared at me the entire time, sending a shiver down my spine.

Tony glared. "Which one of them did you sleep with?"

I blinked. "It was a joke. You know, haha, funny, you laugh. That kind of thing? I never slept with any of them." I groaned as he continued to stare.

"Are you sure?"

"Do I know where my dick has been?" I asked incredulously. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure. Can we go now?"

Tony didn't look away. Instead he examined me like I was under the lens of a microscope. Finally, when he was satisfied with whatever he saw on my face, he pulled back into traffic and headed for the city. I blew out a breath, turning on the radio to calm my nerves.

I stole a glance at him. Tony had gone back to being as cool as always. I looked him up and down.

What is going on with him?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TONY

UNCERTAINTY WASN'T a feeling I was accustomed to. I rubbed at my chest, trying to chase away the lingering discomfort. Caleb moved around the house, picking up his things and taking them back to the room he occupied. It almost felt like he was packing up to leave. I grabbed the tablet and leaned against the kitchen counter. A few taps and I was on the screen with all the camera views. Caleb had his duffle on the bed open, shoving in clothes and shoes. With each toss of clothes, my heart plummeted further. I needed to put a stop to this. I shouldn't have let him go see his friends. A simple call would have sufficed. We'd been doing so good with it just being me and Caleb but now he remembered there were other people beside me in his life. Fucking dumbass, how could I have slipped up the other night? I rubbed at my temples, this was exactly why I didn't drink. Loose lips got people killed, or worse, their hearts torn to shreds.

I still couldn't remember what I'd said to Caleb. He moved from his room and I tracked his movements through the cameras to right outside my bedroom. He rummaged around a bit, and I was up and out of the kitchen. Tablet forgotten, I rushed down the hall. No other thought but stopping Caleb plagued my mind. I had no idea how I was going to do it but I knew I needed to.

“What are you doing?” I asked as I shoved open my door.

Caleb jerked up and shouted as his head hit the bed with a thud. His firm ass wiggled in the air as he scooted from under the bed. “Shit, you scared me.” He rubbed the back of his head but I couldn’t even focus on that. Desire and fear were a dangerous concoction.

“Tony, what’s that look for?” Caleb pushed back, moving away from me. He was only enticing me further. His back hit the nightstand, halting his escape. Big blue eyes stared up at me like a deer in headlights.

“Tony?” He looked at my hands

“What are you doing, Caleb?” My voice scrapped against my vocal cords as if asking him was detrimental to my psyche. One wrong word from him and I was bound to snap.

I’m not sure if Caleb noticed it on my face but he didn’t have his usual snide remark ready. “I was looking for this shirt.” He held up his hand, clutching a black shirt.

“And what were you planning to do with it?” I took a step closer, my hand resting on the door.

“Uh, well, I was, uh.”

“Trying to leave me?”

Caleb looked away. “Don’t make it sound like that.”

“Like what?” It’s exactly what he was going to do.

Caleb rolled his eyes. “Like we’re more than this.” He pointed between us as if that explained everything. “You fucked me a few times, that’s it. Just because you use my body doesn’t mean there is more going on.” He pushed up off the floor. “My guys got to come back, that means I can go home.” He headed for the door, and I stopped him with my hand in the

middle of his chest. “Tony, can you tell me one reason why I can’t leave?”

Yeah, because I need you here. “Benito said you’re to stay with me. We work well together.”

Caleb’s brows furrowed. “That’s stupid. I can do the same shit from the comfort of my own home.”

Why was he so stubborn about the stupidest shit? My home was his. I pushed Caleb and he stumbled back.

“Hey.”

I slammed the door shut, cutting off his exit. “You’ll stay here.”

Caleb glared at me. “Tony, you have to agree, this is insane.”

“It’s not.”

“Now you’re only disagreeing with me to be an ass. You can think for yourself, just because Benito said it, doesn’t mean you have to blindly obey. How in the heck would he know if I go back home?”

My chest tightened and panic wrapped around my neck like a noose. It tightened until it was hard to breathe and spots sparkled in my vision. I couldn’t let him go.

“You’re staying here.”

Caleb tossed his arms. “Fuck it, fine.”

The panic eased up somewhat but not for long.

“I’ll be back then.” Caleb moved around me and headed toward the door.

I twisted around and grabbed his wrist before he could leave. “Where are you going?”

“To go meet the guys. I should have gone last night when we all got in but I was exhausted.” Caleb stared at my hand on his wrist pointedly. “I’m their leader.”

And that should matter to me, because? I didn’t want Caleb out of my sight.

He blew out a breath. “I already said okay to still living with you. I need to talk to Benito about how long he thinks I need to be baby sat.” He shook his head and attempted to move toward the door again. “Tony, you have to let me go.”

My brain shut off, and I yanked him closer. Caleb slipped and slammed against my chest. I used the momentum to send us crashing down into the bed.

“Damn it, Tony, get off! You’re heavy. Have you been drinking again?” Caleb shoved at my shoulders but I wasn’t budging. “You’re so fucking needy.”

I grabbed hold of his face and brought our mouths together in a kiss filled with desperation and need. Heat swirled in the base of my spine and threatened to engulf me as I deepened the kiss. Caleb’s mouth fell open and his pushing turned to grabbing as I sucked on his tongue and teased it with my own. His mind was always behind but his body responded to me perfectly each time.

Desire rushed to my head leaving behind a heady drugged feeling.

“A single kiss and you’re already like this.” I cupped his cock through his loose-fitting shorts. “How could you leave here? No one else can take care of you.”

Caleb groaned, his mouth open, no doubt to refute me but all that came out were moans. I attacked his neck, nipping and

sucking the delicate flesh. I pressed my tongue over his pulse point relishing in the feel of his racing heart under my tongue.

“Shit, you’re annoying,” Caleb moaned as he pushed his fingers through my hair and held my head close.

I knew all his weak spots, but it was a perfect time to remind myself of all of them. Show Caleb that he was good where he was. He didn’t need anyone else but me. “Stay.”

“I’m not a dog,” Caleb said but he didn’t move a single inch.

“Not yet, but I can find a tail, collar, and leash for you.”

“Damn perv.”

I chuckled as I walked in the closet, grabbing everything I wanted to use. There were so many choices, and as long as I did it right, this wouldn’t be the last time I had my fun with Caleb. I headed back to the bedroom to find a very naked Caleb.

“Eager.”

“Don’t act like it’s not what you wanted.” He pointed at me. “This doesn’t change me leaving after. I told the guys I’d come by and I meant it.” Caleb glared at me as if waiting to argue again.

I put everything to the side, staring down at the man that made my cock hard and my heart beat faster than ever. He had no idea the hold he had on me and it only made it more dangerous.

“If you can walk out of here when I’m done, then fine, you can go.”

Caleb smirked. “Easy.”

“Glad you think so.”

I grabbed his ankle and yanked him down the length of my bed. Caleb yelped but other than that, he went silent as I started to wrap the red rope around his legs. I pressed his calf against his thigh as I went around. My fingers caressed against Caleb’s flesh each time. After each knot I stopped and watched Caleb, his breathing evened out, his shoulders relaxed. His response to being tied always took my breath away. It was like he needed it just as much as I needed to do it.

I finished with his legs and worked on his upper body. His arms lay behind him crisscrossed as I secured them there. “Is it too tight?”

Caleb flexed his fingers and moved his shoulders a bit. “No,” he exhaled.

“Anything feel wrong?”

Caleb shook his head.

“I need verbal answers.”

He turned his head, his blue eyes shimmering with desire as he licked his lips. “No, it feels good.”

Desire struck me square in the chest. It took everything in me not to attack, Caleb’s plans be damned. I wanted to sink into his hot body and claim him until he went hoarse from screaming in pleasure. The coppery tang of blood ran over my taste buds as I bit into the inside of my cheek. The pain barely registered as I fought with my need for Caleb.

“Good.” I went to put the remainder of the rope to the side when Caleb’s whimper hit my ears. I paused and stared at him. “If you want something, you have to ask.”

“Daddy,” Caleb moaned. His lashes lowered hiding away his gorgeous baby blues. “Can you tie me up some more. Like last time, over my chest?”

If he asked for every dollar in my bank account like that, I’d be stupid enough to hand it over to him without a second thought. I swallowed thickly, only able to nod as I moved to create the harness over his chest.

“You’re so beautiful, all tied up.”

I ran my hand down his spine admiring the red rope on his skin. I would never tire of it. Red contrasted so beautifully with his pale skin.

“Fuck me already,” Caleb demanded.

I brought my hand down on his ass hard enough that a bright red spot in the shape of my handprint appeared. Caleb choked on a moan, his body moving forward before he rocked back offering his ass up for more. Fuck, he was made for me.

“I don’t think you really want my cock.”

Caleb glanced over his shoulder, his eyes wide and full of desperation, but it wasn’t enough for me. I needed him to feel as if he would die without my touch. I needed him to feel at least an ounce of what I was starting to feel for him. I kneeled on the bed, grabbing his ass and spreading him open. My mouth watered at the sight. His hole was so tight, and all for me.

“Tony, what are you doing back there?”

I paused before my mouth touched him. I blew over the sensitive flesh of his hole. “Be a good toy and call me the right name.”

Caleb shivered. He liked saying it just as much as I loved to hear it. I leaned closer, swiping my tongue over the puckered flesh, earning a cry of pleasure from Caleb. He wiggled his ass and I held him firmer. I rolled my tongue over his entrance, working it into his tight hole with each swipe.

“Fuck, fuck.” Caleb’s hips moved forward and back seeking out more.

I groaned against his hole and pushed my tongue in further. The sounds coming from Caleb were like a siren’s call to a sailor. I was enthralled and driven to draw out more of them. I tongued his hole, saliva dripped down my chin as I devoured him like a starving man.

“Daddy, Daddy. I’m... going to cum. Going to cum,” Caleb chanted breathlessly.

I looked up, moaning against his hole. Caleb was so desperate, he was practically humping my face. I could eat his ass all night. The way he responded to me was addictive. His hands opened and closed in the air as Caleb lost to the pleasure of my tongue in his ass.

However, we were just starting, and I couldn’t let him finish yet. I reluctantly stopped. Caleb let out a string of curses still rocking his hips back.

“I want to cum. Fuck, I want to cum.”

“You can,” I said.

Caleb shook his head. “If you fuck me, I will.”

Patience wasn’t something Caleb was ever going to learn. It was unattractive to most, but I found it appetizing when it was Caleb impatiently begging for my cock. Giving into him would be easy, but holding out would be far more rewarding. I stood back up, grabbed the next toy I wanted and held it for

Caleb to see as I turned him over to his back. I took hold of his cock and his eyes widened instantly once he realized what I had planned for him.

“Daddy?” Fear made Caleb’s voice waver.

I shushed him, rubbing the inside of his thigh. “It’s okay, you know what this is, right?”

Caleb licked his lips, his eyes glazed over. He was already wrapped tightly in the throes of pleasure. “Yes.” He looked at me and then the sound. “Are you going to use that on me?” His chest was rising and falling rapidly.

“Look at me,” I demanded.

Caleb slowly dragged his gaze away from the sound in my hand and to my eyes. Worry was written all over his face. I gave him a reassuring smile. “I know you can take this for me. Can’t you, toy?” I leaned forward and lapped at his abused nipples. The moment my tongue flicked against the hard nub, Caleb’s back arched and he let out a string of curses.

“Daddy wants to make you feel so good. You want the sound in your cock, right?” It wouldn’t be the end of the world, but I wanted to make sure I brought Caleb to the brink of sanity.

“Okay,” Caleb said with a moan.

I lubed up the sound and held Caleb’s cock in my other hand. There was a light tremble to his legs that brought a smile to my face. Torturing Caleb, even sexually, was fun. I pushed the sound into his cock and he sucked in a sharp breath. I pulled it back out and worked it back in, fucking Caleb’s cock slowly. With each push down, I went a bit further with the sound until his cock was swallowing the tool. His entire body was greedy.

“Ugh, fuck,” Caleb moaned. His head fell back on his shoulders as I pushed the sound further into his cock. “This shouldn’t feel good.”

“You like the way I fuck your cock?” I teased. “Every hole on your body is meant to be used by me, don’t you agree?”

Caleb moaned at my words, his hips moving before he stopped himself.

I cupped his balls and rolled them around the palm of my hand, toying with them until he lifted his head and looked up at me again.

“I asked a question.”

Caleb’s eyes looked wild but they still held the fire in them that I admired so much. “Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Fuck, you have got to be—” His words broke off into a moan as I stroked his cock. His hips raised the moment I took my hand away. “Tease.”

I smirked, stroking him again, working him up into a frenzy only to stop short.

“This is torture.” Caleb shook his head, making his hair look even more wild. “Fine, yes. All of it is for you.”

“Not convincing enough.”

Caleb’s eyes widened as I dropped to my knees again and took his balls into my mouth, lavishing them with my tongue. I sucked and licked him until he was shaking on the bed, his cock an angry red color.

“Yes, Daddy, all my holes are for you to use. I’m nothing more than a toy for you.”

I wanted him to believe that. “Good job, you said that so beautifully.” I leaned forward and brought our lips together. Even as my lungs burned for air, I deepened the kiss, mapping every inch and corner of Caleb’s mouth until I knew it like the back of my hand.

Even as I pulled back, I wanted to go right back and kiss Caleb, air be damned. His lips were slightly puffy from the kiss, his pupils blown as he stared at me with nothing but need.

“Look at that. You took the full thing your first time. I’m so proud of you.”

Caleb’s cheeks flushed as he attempted to look anywhere but at me. He was a hardass, but a whore for compliments.

“How are the restraints feeling?” I asked, fingering a few of them to check if they were too tight.

Caleb sheepishly smiled up at me. “They’re good.”

He’s so beautiful. Caleb was annoying and stupid ninety-nine percent of the time but that one percent where he didn’t drive me nuts always took me by surprise. I turned him over back on his knees. He rested his face against the bed and angled so he could watch our reflections in the full-length mirror.

“Wait,” Caleb said.

“Hmm?” I grabbed the next few items adding a little more lube to his ass. My spit could only go so far.

“You said I could cum.”

I nodded. I did and he could. He just couldn’t cum how he wanted.

“But I have this thing in my dick.”

“You ever had a dry orgasm?”

Caleb’s eyes widened and I smiled. *This is going to be fun.*

I worked in a finger, and then another before I grabbed the blue vibrating bullet. Caleb turned his head some more, and I met his gaze in the mirror. I showed him what was going inside of him before pushing it in.

“How many do you think you can handle?”

Caleb wiggled his ass, the wire attached to the bullet swinging like a tail. I might have to seriously invest in a butt plug tail for him. Just thinking about Caleb walking around the house naked with a tail swinging behind him, turned me on even more.

“I don’t know.”

I hummed as I grabbed the next one. “Let’s count together.”

Caleb groaned but nodded.

I pushed in another, watching his ass swallow it up.

“Two,” Caleb said. His mouth fell open as I pushed another one right after. He grunted but still counted. “Three.”

I added more until Caleb had six total bullets inside of him.

“Shit, I feel full.” Caleb shook his head against the bed as goosebumps rose across his back and legs. I rubbed them away.

“You took so many. Such a good little toy,” I praised.

Caleb slowly calmed down his body, responding to me once more, and the toys stuffed in his ass were somewhat

forgotten. I kissed his inner thighs in between the ropes and knots. Not able to hold back, I marked Caleb's pale flesh, loving the way it showed up so easily on him.

"Ready?" I asked, but before Caleb could answer, I hit the switches on two of the bullets, turning them on max. Caleb's muscles went taut as he pressed up against his restraints. His face turned red as the veins in his neck popped.

"Breathe."

When Caleb didn't, I moved forward and slapped him. He took in a sharp breath blinking rapidly.

"Fuck. Damn it." Caleb divulged into nothing but swearing, but at least he was breathing. He started slowing down, and I knew he was getting somewhat used to the vibrations.

I turned on the other four and he lost it. He screamed so loud, it echoed off the walls and threatened to shatter the window. The moment I heard it, I wanted to bottle it up and have it all to myself. I wanted more. Buzzing competed with Caleb's whimpers and moans.

"Daddy." Caleb shook his head. "No... more, please, Daddy." His begging made him even more delicious.

I stripped out of my clothes in a flurry of movements, not giving a damn where anything landed. I rolled Caleb on his side and moved behind him, plastering my body against his. Caleb's nails scratched against my abdomen but I welcomed the pinpricks of pain. It was like he was trying to mark me. I couldn't be outdone, and attacked his neck and shoulders, leaving behind bite marks and hickeys. There wasn't going to be an inch of him unmarked by me.

"Daddy, Daddy, ugh, I—Daddy."

Caleb couldn't string together a coherent sentence as he thrashed against me, his body assaulted with endless pleasure. His chin glistened with saliva as he drooled, unaware of what he looked like. His eyes would move to the mirror for a short second but it was as if he was seeing past our reflections.

“How are you leaking around the sound? You're such a dirty whore. You're only meant to spread your legs for me.” I brushed my lips against Caleb's ear, drawing out more moans as I toyed with him. His nipples were especially responsive. I tugged on them, earning more cries of pleasure. “Look at you, your ass and cock are full and you're still begging for more. You're no better than a bitch in heat.”

I jerked his face toward me and forced his mouth open. I spat in his open mouth and Caleb swallowed it down like the greedy whore he was. His eyes rolled to the back of his head and he opened his mouth again, tongue out as if begging for more.

“More, please, Daddy.”

Fuck, we were meant to be together. *Has there ever been another man in my life that fit me so perfectly?*

I couldn't think of any, the only person I pictured was Caleb. I was done holding out, I was at my limit. I spat in the palm of my hand and stroked my cock a few times before lining it up to Caleb's hole. If he was worried about taking my cock and the toys, Caleb didn't voice any concern. My hips flexed forward and I buried my cock deep into his ass.

The vibrations added to the inferno that was Caleb's ass, and it drove me to the brink of insanity. The plan was to make Caleb more desperate for me, but I swore under my breath as I fell even more for him.

“Fuck, it’s tight.”

Caleb wasn’t even speaking English anymore. His words slurred together as I fucked his stuffed ass, driving myself past the point of no return. I curled my fingers into the rope on his hip and held him still as I slammed forward again and again. I lost track of time as I drowned in the pleasure of using Caleb. His hole tightened around my cock and he let out another scream that grew more hoarse with every release. How many times had he cum?

I let go of the rope and wrapped my hand around his cock. It was sticky with precum. Caleb bucked against me as I stroked his hard cock and plunged into his hole. I slowed down for only a single second and removed the sound. The moment it was out, Caleb let out another shout. His ass tightened around me, pressing the bullets against my cock. I groaned as my orgasm was dragged out of me full force.

Spots danced behind my eyelids as I filled Caleb with every ounce of cum from my balls. My climax was dragged out longer as Caleb’s hole kept spasming around my cock. I finally pulled out, tempted to go again. Fuck his hole until I couldn’t go anymore. My fingertips tingled and my legs felt weak as I forced my body to move. Caleb wiggled on the bed, crying and moaning as he was trapped in pleasure. I rolled him over onto his back. His legs were open, giving me the best view in the world. His hair was wild, some of the black strands clung to his face. A light sheen of sweat covered his body. Bite marks and hickeys were littered all over his body. Cum covered his cock and torso.

Fuck, he’s a beautiful mess.

I’d marked him but it wasn’t enough. I relaxed holding my cock in my hand over Caleb. The telltale sign of my bladder

releasing sent a shiver of pleasure cascading throughout my body as I pissed on Caleb, marking him as mine. He moaned, watching me with a hungry glazed-over look in his eyes. He'd been turned into my toy and there was no going back.

He was shaking when I wrapped my hand around his cock and stroked him hard and fast. Caleb didn't last long; covered in my piss and filled with my cum, he came again.

"Daddy." His scream was no more than a whisper. His back arched off the bed before it fell back down, his eyes closed.

I turned off the toys and made quick work of cleaning him up. Untying him took up most of the time, but I made sure to massage each muscle before moving on to the next one. By the time I finished, Caleb was snoring, oblivious to the world. I wanted nothing more than to fall into bed with him but I needed to get everything cleaned up. I maneuvered a sex drugged Caleb around. He was no more than a doll in my arms from the shower and to his bed. Eyes burning, I finished up cleaning and made my way back to him. I dropped to the bed and instantly pulled Caleb closer. I put him underneath me. Blowing out a breath, I covered us both with the blanket. I felt whole and content for the first time in ages.

"You're mine now."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CALEB

I ROLLED OVER, the scent of Tony's cologne still hanging in the air. Reaching out an exhausted hand, I searched for Tony. I came up empty. My eyes finally snapped open and I sat up, looking around only to find myself back in my room with an empty bed. I listened out for the sound of him talking or music going, but there was nothing. Slowly, I slipped out of bed only for my knees to go weak.

Shit! He really did too much.

I barely remembered what happened last night besides Tony breaking my brain. One minute, I'd been on my way out to see my friends, the next I was tied up on his bed hoping he destroyed me more. My hole pulsed, sore and empty. I wanted him stuffed back inside me. Heat swept over my body at that thought, my cock growing as I groaned.

No way this man has my body responding like this! What the hell?

I'd be lying to myself if I said I didn't have a hell of a time. Even the way Tony kissed me set me on fire. He was an asshole, but... was it odd I liked when he held me? When he kept me from leaving? I knew I had to return to real life soon. My home was in a little apartment in the city, not out with Tony in a peaceful world while he railed my brains out. There

was so much that needed to be done. I couldn't check out and fall into this trap of fucking Tony, fighting with him, and then seeing those small moments of humanity in him that made me wonder, what if?

Forcing my legs to move, I stopped when I noticed a notepad on the table. A bottle of water, pain pills, and a cellphone sat next to it.

Caleb: I had to go into work early and you were still asleep. Take the meds and have something to eat. And this is to replace the cell phone I broke when we met. You can get rid of that ridiculous burner now.

Leave it to Tony to already know I had a phone. Nothing got past the man apparently. I laughed as I picked up the phone. It was already charged and ready to go. Shaking my head, I opened it. The only saved number was Tony's. I bit my lip.

Technically, I didn't have to tell him anything. After all, we were both adults. And if I told him where I was going, he would probably blow my phone up. For some reason, it still felt wrong not to tell him though.

Caleb: Thanks for the phone.

Tony: You're welcome. Are you still in bed?

Caleb: Nope limping for the shower.

Tony: ;)

Caleb: Don't be so proud of yourself.

Tony: That's impossible. I do amazing work.

Caleb: Asshole. Just wanted to tell you that I'm heading out. Be back later.

There was a pause. My stomach twisted in a knot as I stared at the phone. I caught myself doing it and let out an awkward laugh. Why was I sitting around, waiting for him to text me? I didn't need permission. Our Daddy and toy games were strictly in the bedroom, just the way I liked it. I could do whatever I wanted.

That uneasy feeling didn't go away, though.

Once I was showered and dressed in my gear, I checked the phone again. Nothing. I scratched my head. *Did he get my message?*

Tony: Be careful.

My heart did a stupid little flip-flop. I caught myself smiling as I texted him back and quickly wiped it off of my face.

Caleb: I will.

I forced myself to put my phone away before I shoved it into my backpack. Once I was ready to go, I snagged my keys from a bowl on the living room table and jogged to my bike. The moment I swung my leg over it and started her up, I sighed. Now, this was familiar. This was the life that I was used to.

The drive to my mother's house took me from the suburbs to a nice little area with apartments. I packed in the garage and took the elevator to my mom's place before I knocked on the door. She still lived in the same two bedroom place we'd had since I was a teenager. It was better than the dumps we'd lived in before. At least this place was safe enough and my mom liked it. I unlocked the door and let myself in.

"Caleb!"

"Hey, Mom."

I grinned as she raced across the room and practically threw herself at me. My mom still looked amazing as always. Her dark hair was pulled up into a ponytail, big yellow gloves still on her hands from washing dishes. She looked up at me with the same blue eyes as mine, worry lining her face. Guilt immediately hit me in the gut. I pulled her into another tight hug. We didn't pull away from each other for a long time.

When we did, she immediately slapped me in the chest. "Where have you been! All I get are a few messages here and there and Drav telling me you're all right? Do you know how worried I've been?"

"I know, Mom. I know."

"Do you?" She popped her hands on her hips, a move that made me feel like I was seven instead of twenty-seven. "I've been hearing things, Caleb. You're not...involved with those Vitale's right?"

Great. I forgot that, for as big as New York was, everyone seemed to know everyone. Someone must have seen me around them or told a friend who told a friend. Either way, I couldn't lie to my mother. For one, she would find out in five seconds flat. Two, she would be devastated if I lied to her. Then again, she would probably be pretty damn upset at the truth as well.

"A little," I said. "I had to—"

"Are you kidding me?" she asked. "You know what I went through with your father! I worked my ass off not to have you around those people." Her eyes watered, and I reached out for her. "You know what they're like. What they get you into."

I knew all too well. I still had the blood of a man on my hands. Seeing them up close had reminded me of all the

reasons my mother never wanted me around my father. I knew what she'd gone through with him. Lies, broken promises, and finally, him walking away and leaving us to rot. She knew she could have gone to him for help, or even his brother Cesare, but she refused. Instead, she'd worked her ass off, putting food on the table any way she knew how. My stomach clenched, my head feeling like I was on a roller coaster about to drop.

“Yes, I know,” I whispered. “I’m sorry. I didn’t have a choice, though.”

“Didn’t have a choice.” She sighed. “You always have a choice, son. That’s what I’ve tried to teach you all these years. I know what you do isn’t exactly safe and reputable, but at least you do it on your own terms. Those men are all the same. Liars. Cruel. Animals. They will trap you in that lifestyle and you’ll never be free.”

I saw the pain and worry in her eyes. She knew I wasn’t a good person. I’d been picked up more than once for selling drugs, breaking and entering and a whole host of smaller issues. Every time, I talked myself out of it or she turned on the charm and got me off the hook. My mother knew who I was. She also knew what I couldn’t handle.

Tony popped into my mind, and I shook my thoughts clear of him. He was an illusion, I knew that. A momentary distraction that I needed to rid myself of. I hadn’t been worried about the Hitters lately, or my mother, or my life. Everything had been pushed onto the back burner for my own selfish needs. I needed to talk to Benito about moving out from Tony’s place. Even if he still wanted me to work for them, at least I would be in my own space.

I pulled my mom into another massive hug. “I’m being careful, okay? I promise. Pretty soon, I’ll clear all of this up

and me and the Vitale's can part ways.”

She wiped her eyes. “I just want what's best for you.”

“You always have. That's why I love you.”

A small smile tugged at her pink lips. I wanted to hug and squeeze her a million times harder. My mother was right, I needed to be more careful.

Tony is different.

The thought came quickly, poking at my brain. Was he? I had no idea. So far all he'd shown me was that he could be a cruel bastard. Did I really know anything more about him?



MY STOMACH WAS full by the time I headed over to meet up with the rest of the Hitters. No matter how much I protested, my mother insisted on feeding me copious amounts of food until I felt like I would burst. The ride over was difficult as I hunched over and felt my stomach cramp. I loved riding, there was nothing better than that. But I was ready to get off the bike, plop down, and undo the top button of my jeans.

“Yo!” I called as I tugged off my helmet and grabbed the knob. The door stayed shut. I knocked hard. “Come on, man!”

Angel opened the door, a bored expression. His white blond curls fell in his face and he swiped them away. As I tried to move forward, he stood in my path.

“Where have you been?” he asked.

I glared at him. “Don’t start your shit with me, Angel. Move.”

He folded his arms over his chest before he peeked around me. “Is your boyfriend coming?”

I pulled a face. “What boyfriend? What are you talking about?”

“He’s talking about that Tony guy,” Drav said as his big body filled the entryway. “Angel, go make sure Stasia doesn’t flood the bathroom again.”

Angel looked me up and down. “Sure. I’m still pissed you didn’t come over yesterday.”

I groaned. “I got held up.”

Drav nodded toward me. “Obviously.”

I lifted my helmet and stared at my reflection. My neck was covered with bite marks. The darkness of the bruises against my skin were stark. It didn’t matter that because of Tony, I’d started tanning by being outside during the day. My skin had started to bronze. However, the marks were still there. I glanced up at Drav. The disapproving look on his face made me groan.

“It’s not what you think.”

“What is it then?” he asked as he stepped back and finally allowed me into my own apartment. “Because it looks like that guy has been hurting you.”

My face flushed. Technically yes, Tony did hurt me. Hard, often, and in a way that made my cock feel things it had never felt before. I couldn’t tell Drav how much I loved it. The moment those ropes wrapped around my body and tightened, I was transported to heaven. I didn’t have time or room to

overthink or worry. All I could do was give into the feeling of being restricted and let Tony manhandle me until I came so hard, I saw stars.

I cleared my throat. “He’s not. What? Don’t give me that look!”

“What look?” Drav grunted. “I’m trying to see if you have Stockholm syndrome and who we need to call if you do.” He looked me over. “Do you have Stockholm syndrome?”

“No! What the hell’s the matter with you?”

I stopped as those words came out of me. When the hell did I start sounding like Tony? I could imagine his face, the scowl, the way his voice dipped in that sultry accent as he asked it. On instinct, I pulled out my phone, but before I could check to see if he’d texted me, Drav took it away.

“This isn’t your phone,” he muttered. “Whose is it?”

“Tony gave it to me.”

“What?”

I threw up my hands. “Tony gave it to me, all right. He wanted to make sure I had one.”

“Uh huh.” Drav plopped down on the couch, the springs protesting his weight. “I don’t know what kind of feelings you have for him—”

“None. I have none. Who the hell would want to put up with having feelings for that guy?”

I said the words out loud, but they didn’t quite stick. Tony had more bad qualities than good, but he was attractive and he had his moments where he wasn’t a complete jerk. They were few and far between, but they were there. Like when he made

me smile. Or the stupid way he clung to me whenever he was asleep.

Thinking about him was going to make my brain explode. I popped my helmet onto the coffee table as Demon wandered out. He sat on the couch beside me, put his feet on my lap and grinned.

“Are we talking about Cell fucking that guy?”

I groaned. I was never going to hear the end of this shit.

“No,” I said as I shoved his feet off and he practically tipped over. “We’re talking about what our next move is going to be. Right, Drav?”

“I was talking about you and this guy you’re with. He has a major thing for you, doesn’t he?”

I stared at him like he was crazy. “What?”

“He does,” Demon chimed in. “The day you came to get us, he was all over you. I honestly thought he was going to eat you.”

“That’s the stupidest thing I ever heard,” I scoffed.

Tony didn’t have a *thing* for me. I wasn’t going to listen to their teasing when I knew that was all it was, teasing. Besides, it just wasn’t true. He’d said he liked me, that one night he was drunk, but I was pretty damn sure that was the alcohol talking. And yeah, he liked fucking me but so what? I was a fun lay. That’s all there was between us.

“Enough,” I said as I leaned forward and toed off my boots. I undid the top button of my pants and groaned in sweet relief. “Are we going to talk about our next job or what? I don’t know about you assholes, but I actually like making money.”

Drav eyed me carefully. “First, promise that you’re okay. If he’s hurting you, I’ll—”

“I’m fine,” I said, being serious so that Drav knew I meant it. “I swear, I am.”

He sighed, but nodded. “All right, then let’s get started. Shade! Angel! Prez is ready to work.”

I smiled at Drav. He was all hard on the outside and gooey on the inside. The man really was the best person I knew. My mind went to Tony. I pulled out my phone but there was still no text in sight. Irritation worked its way up my spine. Usually he was all over me.

What the hell is he doing?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TONY

THE SOUND of back-to-back buzzing filled the room.

Benito groaned. “I thought you told Ash you would be in a meeting?”

“I did but he can’t live without me.” Gin smiled proudly as he pulled his vibrating phone out. “I mean, let’s be honest here, none of you fuckers could live without me.”

“I could,” Enzo said. He had his own phone out, probably texting Tex.

We were going on five hours of sitting in the room secluded from the world, planning out our next move. We couldn’t let anything slip. Benito was being extra careful. There could be a mole for the FBI amongst us, and a traitor working for the triad. We were never safe, but we all had to be a bit more cautious now.

I took the opportunity and pulled my phone out, finding Caleb’s messages quickly. Still nothing more. I chewed the inside of my cheek. The little cursor flickered, waiting for me to type something. What did I say?

Tony: Get home already.

I hurriedly deleted it. The more I pushed outside of the bedroom, the more Caleb did the opposite.

Tony: Thinking about me?

I deleted that as well. It came off as too needy. How in the fuck did anyone do this? I glanced up and Gin was grinning like a fool as he texted on his phone. Even Enzo's phone was buzzing and he sported a smirk. Benito wasn't any better, the man hadn't laughed so much, let alone smiled, before Harlow had crashed into his life.

"Back to work. The faster we can get this done, the sooner I can stop staring at you assholes," Benito said.

Hours ticked by and we were still in the meeting. My phone burned a hole in my pocket, keeping half my attention.

"Tony, is there something more important?" Benito asked. His dark gaze cut through me.

I stiffened, hating that I was singled out. I was distracted, and a part of me knew I needed to be a hundred percent in, like I always was, but that wasn't as easy anymore. I had someone that meant more to me.

My feelings for Caleb had come out of nowhere, hitting me like a mack truck. He was brash, stupid, and above all else, a do-gooder. My soul was blacker than the devils and my hands were drenched in blood. After one kill, Caleb looked like he was going to break. There was no way we were supposed to be together, and yet I planned on making sure he stayed mine. Even if I had to cut a few pieces off to make sure we fit like puzzle pieces.

"No, sorry, go ahead."

I wanted Caleb, there wasn't any doubt after the other night. The idea of him ever stepping away from me felt like a blow to the chest.

Benito grunted, and all eyes went back to Enzo as he pointed out the normal drug run.

“What’s wrong with the new one we established?” Benito asked.

“It’s already been found,” I said. I pointed at the areas we’d been hit. “Did a trial run after our trip to Georgia. It took no time at all for the FBI to pick it up. Luckily, it was a dummy run and they got nothing but a few pounds of weed.”

“The guys picked up for it taken care of?” Benito asked.

“They knew nothing and have been moved around,” Enzo supplied. He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose, studying the map that lay out before us.

I knew that damn thing like it was my backyard. But no matter how well I knew the multiple routes, it didn’t change that the triads and the FBI were only a few steps behind us. Benito had secured a new supplier with the help of the Bianchi’s in Georgia but we still needed to get rid of the warehouses full of coke. It was no easy feat getting them to New York or getting anything out. We couldn’t suddenly stop supplying but we couldn’t have it on us like before.

Everyone, enemies and allies, watched the Vitales to see what they were going to do. The original deal with the triads was the share of the drug profits. We bought the supply from them in exchange for not going to full-on war over it. We didn’t undercut their prices and they made sure to sell us the same quality. Except now with the confrontation between the Vitales and Triads, there was no moving.

“Declan can’t move either,” Benito said. He rubbed his temples, his annoyance and frustration at the situation visible.

“The Bianchis?” Enzo suggested.

I shook my head. Dario had already reached out to me. “No go, they have their own shit to handle right now. Some russian fucking with them. But not only that, the FBI are keeping an eye on anyone we have known affiliation with.” It was a shit storm and we were in the middle of it.

Giancarlo, Enzo, and Benito stared at the table as if lost for thought. No one had an answer. It was like every single time we found a solution we were slapped in the face with another issue.

“Our contact in the FBI can’t deviate them?” I asked.

Benito grunted. “Gianpaolo is doing everything he can, but after the reporter and now the brewing war, it’s not looking like he can do much.”

“Good, then let him come home. I’m tired of him being away already,” Giancarlo said.

We all shook our heads. If we let him, Gin would go on a whole tirade about his twin and how they shouldn’t have ever been separated.

“We could pull in a low end gang to do the run,” Enzo suggested.

It had to be the most reasonable and logical answer but it was also one that came with a shit ton of risks. Who could we possibly hire that was good enough to move drugs across multiple state lines and be trusted with it?

“But who?”

I asked. No one came to mind out of all the small-time gangs around New York; they all wanted to move up one way or another.

Benito was already shaking his head. He didn't trust anyone.

"It's not like any of us could do it," Gin pointed out.

I wasn't a brother but being at Benito's side meant I had eyes on me just as often. Crossing state lines would draw a target on my back. The moment I tried to do anything, I'd have cops on my ass.

Benito leaned back in his chair, his tattooed hands intertwining as he placed them on the back of his head. He was just as tired as the rest of us, maybe even more so with him being the boss. I'd normally suggest for him to go home, but until we had a solution, we were all stuck.

"It can't just be anyone. One wrong move and we wouldn't just lose the money and drugs. This is a new supplier, and I want to keep things on good terms with them," Benito said.

Gin lit his joint and I pulled out a cigarette. I'd already gone through half the pack since coming in. And at the rate we were going, I was going to finish the pack before I could go home. I sucked in a lung full of nicotine and was instantly hit with bliss. My shoulders relaxed, and I sighed in momentary relief. I grabbed the papers scattered about reading over them as I tried to come up with something.

Giancarlo sat up abruptly snapping his fingers. "Oh shit, what about Tony's boyfriend?"

"His what?" Benito asked at the same time I firmly said no.

There was no way in hell Caleb was making this run.

Benito glanced my way, questions in his dark brown eyes. Questions I wasn't ready to answer. It was new and it was mine. When I was ready to tell him, I would. I'd never lied to

Benito before, and everything in my life had been dedicated to him, but I wanted this one thing. I wanted Caleb to myself.

“Yeah, he runs some group, the drifters or something,” Giancarlo said.

Fuck, he can never keep his mouth shut.

“They’re called the Hitters,” Enzo corrected. He pulled out his tablet and clicked around a few times.

I said nothing, hoping they’d drop this or Benito would say no. He wasn’t going to let a bunch of guys touch our product, especially after they’d stolen from us. That would just be asking for a repeat. Then again, Caleb had proven himself time and time again. He’d made sacrifices for the people closest to him and had done things that he didn’t want to. I knew the brothers noticed, and they respected that about him. But their respect always came at a price, and I didn’t want it to be Caleb.

“Here,” Enzo said.

He passed the tablet over and Benito read it. Gin was out of his seat and hovering over his brother’s shoulder in seconds.

“Holy shit, he’s a modern day Robin Hood.” Gin looked over at me, laughing. “How in the fuck did someone like this get with you?”

“Same way you got with someone like Ash.”

Giancarlo whistled. “All right, you got me there.”

“Caleb isn’t as innocent though,” Enzo pointed out.

“All right, we don’t have to talk about how I robbed my fiancé of his innocence. Let’s focus on Tony and his new boy toy.”

Benito finally looked up from the tablet, his gaze fixed on me. “You were just supposed to train him.”

“Yeah, I know.” I pushed my fingers through my hair and sighed. “It got complicated.”

“Before or after you waterboarded him?” Benito asked.

“Damn, and he still lets you near him? Please tell me he got payback?” Giancarlo plopped back down in his seat and propped his feet up on the table.

Caleb had. It probably wasn’t enough, but I’d make it up to him later.

“He shouldn’t do this job, it’s too dangerous.”

Benito waved the tablet at me. “Enzo, what is the likely chance of this being a success?”

“Seventy-five percent. Regardless, it is our only viable option. Most of them have a record but nothing that stands out enough that they will be on NYPD or the FBI watch list. They can move around a lot easier than the rest of us. Their track record speaks for itself. They aren’t widely known but they are respected in their community. Most of their proceeds go back there after all.”

“Do-gooders. What kind of thief and drug dealer helps people?” Gin asked. He yawned, rocking back in his seat.

“Would you stop that,” Benito growled. He turned to me, his gaze boring into my soul. “Call him, Tony.”

“Benito, I don’t think—”

“I didn’t ask you to think. Tony, we move forward with this. Call him.” Benito’s tone brooked no argument, and I knew he wasn’t asking.

I hoped Caleb would say no.

And if Benito pushes and gives him no option? Whose side will I be on?

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CALEB

IT FELT LIKE OLD TIMES, hanging out in my apartment with the guys. They were all a mess, but they were *my* mess. Stasia ran into the living room once we were done planning and hopped onto my lap. She cuddled up against me, showing me the book she was reading. I helped her with the hard words and she kicked her feet happily. My heart squeezed.

Being away from the Hitters had been rough, like someone amputated one of my limbs. I could still feel them there, feel the phantom tingling even when they weren't around. Being back here made me feel whole. I sighed as I sank into the old cushions and grinned while Angel and Demon pushed each other. Angel ended up on the floor before he jumped up and attacked his twin. I shook my head. *They're all idiots.*

My phone buzzed and I scrambled to pull it out. As soon as I saw it was Tony, I relaxed.

Tony: Where are you?

Caleb: Still at my apartment. Why?

Tony: You know where the office building is, right?

I frowned. Why was he asking me that? I groaned as I realized it must be work related. What could he possibly need help with?

Caleb:...Yes. What's up?

I'd thought he was texting me about something else. I didn't know what. Maybe asking if I was okay. Or telling me to meet him somewhere so we could grab food together. Something normal. *There's nothing normal about us.*

Tony: Come over to Benito's office.

Caleb: I don't want to.

Tony: I'm not asking.

He was so serious. No snarky little comeback or irritation. *Shit. What's going on now?* Reluctantly, I stood up and handed Stasia over to her father. Drav dropped her onto his knee as he stared up at me, a frown on his face.

"I gotta go," I said.

Drav's frown deepened. "You just got here."

"And now I gotta go. What do you want me to do about it?"

"Don't give me that fucking attitude! Are you here with us or not?"

"Papa, that's a bad word," Stasia cut in.

"I know, I know." He sighed as he stood up and put her down. "Go play in your room for a minute."

Stasia was always the smartest person in the room as far as I was concerned. When things were tense, she didn't linger or ask questions or whine. She simply ran for her room. A minute later, her TV came on, the sound of a goofy cartoon coming from that direction.

"Say that again," I said as soon as she was gone.

Drav stepped closer to me. "Are you here with us or not?"

The heat that raced up my body set me on edge. What the hell was he trying to say? I gave my life to the Hitters. I was the one that made us what we were. The one that had pulled them all into being with me. I'd given them a purpose, a reason to exist when they were struggling to keep it together. Had he forgotten that?

"Fuck you," I said.

"I think you're too busy fucking Tony to see reason."

I closed the gap between us. "Don't push me."

"Someone needs to wake you up."

"Enough," Shade said. "Both of you, knock it off. What is fighting going to change? We'll see you soon, Cell. Drav."

When Shade called him, Drav glanced at him before he threw up his hands. He muttered under his breath about me being a dumbass, and I let him as he stalked away. Drav was so sensitive sometimes. If no one knew, they would assume he was a hard ass, but he cared when people disappeared, and I knew he had a good reason for that.

"You should say sorry," Demon said as he stood up and stretched.

Angel clung to his brother. "Yeah, that was mean. If I was Drav, I would have kicked your ass."

I groaned. "Now you're mad at me too?"

"Oh, he's been pissed at you since we got back," Demon said.

Angel nodded.

"Listen, I don't have time for this right now. I'll talk to all of you when I get back. Okay?"

“Whatever,” Angel called. “I’m sure whatever your boyfriend needs is important.”

“He’s not my boyfriend!”

“Sure.” Demon patted me on the back. “Whatever you say.”

As they all disappeared to their rooms, I was left alone. I stared after them. They acted like I didn’t give a damn about them, and that couldn’t be further from the truth. I sighed, grabbed my helmet and keys, and closed the front door behind me. I’d find some way to make it up to them.



THE OFFICE BUILDING Benito worked in was mostly empty by now. Everyone else had gone home, even the secretary. I let myself into his office. The guys were still on my mind, but I pushed it aside. I had to focus on what was going on in front of me.

I stepped into a smoky room. Waving my hand in front of my face, I made my way over to the group of them. They all looked like shit, Tony included. When he saw me, he stood up quickly and closed the space between us.

“What’s up?” I asked.

Tony opened his mouth to say something, but Benito beat him to it.

“Come and sit down,” Benito said.

I looked Tony over. Something was bothering him, I could see it in his face. Instead of saying what it was, he’d fallen

silent. That bothered me. The man never shut the hell up. Usually it was a lecture, but at least he was speaking.

Moving closer to my cousins, I sat down and plopped my helmet on the table. Gin offered me a joint. I shook my head.

“I don’t drive and smoke.”

Gin whistled. “See? Fucking do-gooder over here.”

I raised a brow at Tony. “What is he talking about?”

“Nothing.” Tony grunted as he sat down and took out his smokes. I watched as he lit up.

Benito dragged my attention back to him by calling my name. He rubbed his temple, his face pinched. Something was stressing him the hell out. I knew what they were up against right now, Tony had told me all about it.

“You and your...” He frowned. “Riders?”

“Hitters?” I asked. “Is that what you’re talking about?”

He nodded. “Exactly. I need to know if you all can do a run for me. We have a new supplier, but we can’t run our product where it needs to go. All of us are on the radar of the triads and the FBI. You guys aren’t. Aside from some light charges, there’s nothing hanging over your heads.”

“That’s because I’ve been smart. We look out for each other and hardly ever get caught.”

“Except for last time,” Gin helpfully pointed out.

I glared at him. “Gin.”

“It’s the truth!”

I turned back to Benito. “You want us to run your drugs?”

“Yes.”

“No.” I shook my head. “I won’t put them in the line of danger like that. What we do is small time. This is a A-1 felony charge we’d be looking at. We’d be lucky to get out in twenty-five years.”

“You stole more than a few keys from me,” Benito pointed out.

“And that was the biggest risk we’ve ever taken. It had us at each other’s throats. Got me waterboarded. My friends’ lives were in danger!” I stood up. “Sorry, you’ll have to get someone else to do it.”

I understood they were in a tight spot, but that had nothing to do with me. Stealing from Benito Vitale was the stupidest thing I had ever done. I wasn’t willing to repeat my mistake. Especially knowing that I could put my guys in the line of fire again. They didn’t deserve that. I thought about Stasia never seeing her papa again, and it solidified my decision. I wasn’t going to do that.

Benito stood up, pushing his sleeves up his forearms. “I hate to bring this up, but you owe me. Remember? That amount of money will be hard to pay back. I know for a fact you’ve already given most of it away.”

There was no reason for me to say anything, it was true. Every dime that we’d made off the coke we had went to people we loved and cared about. I didn’t feel bad about that part. The Vitale’s would never run out of money, but my people would. Most of them didn’t know where their next meal was coming from. I’d knock off a hundred mobsters if it meant the people I cared about never had to have an empty belly.

“So,” Benito continued. “You’ll do this for me.”

“Haven’t I done enough?” I asked.

“Excuse me?”

“Caleb,” Tony said as he reached out and grabbed my wrist. “Do not.”

I pulled away from his grasp. He was quiet, too fucking quiet. Was he okay with this? Us putting our lives on the line for some fucking drugs? This might be my family, but it wasn’t my life.

“Your debt will be forgiven and you’ll be paid,” Benito said. “You all will.”

“Fuck that!”

Benito moved so quickly, I gasped as he closed the gap between us and stood in my face. “You’re part of this family now. And you’ll do what you’re told. Me paying you and forgiving your debt? That’s me being nice.”

I swallowed thickly trying to mask the fear that gripped my heart. “I’ve done enough for you,” I repeated. “I’ve done your dirty jobs. I live with Tony because you want me to. Fuck, I’ve killed a man, Benito! How much more do I have to sacrifice?”

Benito pulled back. “What?”

“I said—”

He held up a hand. Benito’s eyes went to Tony who looked everywhere but at me or Benito.

“I told you to cut him loose in a week when we last spoke about him, didn’t I? There’s no reason for Caleb to live with you. He did his part, we have the evidence on him if he fucks up. Why is he still at your place?”

All the wind was knocked out of my lungs. I stared at Tony. *What the fuck?* He'd told me I had to stay, that Benito had demanded it. I'd believed him. How fucking stupid was that?

"Tony." He wouldn't look at me. "Are you fucking kidding me? What the hell? You knew I missed my goddamn family and you just sat there and told me to stay? I just got to see my mother because you didn't tell me I could! Is this a fucking game to you?"

When he didn't respond, I picked up my helmet and threw it at him. "Fucking look at me!"

Why did it hurt? My chest felt heavy, my breathing too fast. I knew what Tony was, knew he was a piece of shit that didn't care about anyone but himself, his organization, and his boss's cock down his throat. So why the fuck was I hurt?

Tony finally looked at me. I searched his face, but what I saw there didn't make me feel any better. He stood up, his hand moving toward me. I pulled away.

"Can I talk to my people?" I asked Benito. "I don't control them. We're a democracy."

Benito frowned. "Do what you have to do. I still expect the run to be completed."

I nodded. Stepping around Tony, I picked up my helmet and tucked it against my side. There was nothing more to talk about. At the end of the day, I didn't have a choice. And now? I almost didn't care. I'd do whatever I had to do if it got me away from Tony.

Giancarlo whistled as I headed for the door. "I think you better go talk to your boyfriend. Groveling helps."

I slammed the door behind me. Tony could stay in there for all I cared, and he would. When it came to Benito, he was first. I got that it was his boss, but he was halfway up the man's ass.

That's not what's bothering me the most. I knew he was a liar. Why did I believe him?

“Caleb.”

I stopped and glanced over my shoulder. Tony stood by the door, a frown on his face. I wanted to slam my helmet into his nose and break it. Instead, I kept my distance.

“Do I get to explain?”

I scoffed. “Explain what? How you keep lying to me? Or how you get me to do shit I don't even want to do? Did you really not know about the warehouse that night? That I would have to kill that guy?”

“I told you, I had no idea.”

“You tell me a lot of shit! Fuck, I don't need some asshole in my life who can't even be honest with me.”

Tony walked over to me, and I took a huge step back. He paused, his hand reaching out before it dropped to his side. The sadness on his face was palpable, but I couldn't bring myself to care when my heart felt like someone had taken a hammer to it. I'd started to believe him. To believe *in* him. Why? It was stupid.

“Take whatever I have at your house and toss it,” I said. “I'm done. And I'm never stepping foot in that place again.”

Tony grabbed me. My back slammed up against the wall as he clung to me tightly.

“Don't say that,” he growled.

I shoved him off me. “Fuck you! I’m getting into arguments with my guys for *you*?” I shook my head. “Stay away from me. I never want to see your goddamn face again.”

Tony reached for me once more, but I pushed him away. If he kept going, I would end up punching him in the face until I couldn’t stop. Instead, I turned on my heels and practically jogged for the elevator. The way my throat tightened and my chest squeezed made me want to go home and never resurface again. But I knew that wasn’t an option.

As I turned around, Tony stood in front of the elevator. I expected him to be as aggressive and confrontational as always, but he simply stared.

“Caleb, I just—”

I held up a hand. “Don’t. Okay? Just don’t.”

My finger jabbed against the button. As the door slid closed, Tony’s face fell further. Part of me wanted to go back and tell him it was fine, it wasn’t that big a deal.

“Shit, they were right,” I muttered as I pinched the bridge of my nose and closed my eyes. “I do have fucking Stockholm syndrome.”

Why the fuck did my heart ache so badly? Panic clawed at my throat, suffocating me. My hands shook as the attack set in. I swayed on my feet.

Something had to be wrong with me. Otherwise, why would I have ever thought there was anything good about Tony?

CHAPTER TWENTY

TONY

EVERY INCH of my body felt foreign as if it belonged to someone else. I stared at the elevator, the digital numbers ticked down and my heart followed.

“You’re going to let him walk away?” Gin asked.

No worked its way up my throat but my mouth refused to let it out. Caleb deserved so much better than me. I was the lowest. My lies had been just that, lies. I was so used to lying to anyone who got close that I didn’t think about it twice when it came to Caleb. Him walking away from me was going to come sooner or later. I knew that from past experiences but it didn’t change the devastation that weighed down on every limb.

“Tony,” Benito called.

I didn’t turn from the elevator. My breathing was shallow, a part of me still held out hope that Caleb would come back up, and I’d have another chance to hold him. The hope died as the seconds passed. I could feel three sets of eyes on me, and I didn’t need to turn around to know all three brothers were watching me. My stomach lay in knots as I dragged my gaze away from the elevator and looked at my boss. Benito was a man I chose to follow and be loyal to, but at what cost? I didn’t care before. Giving him my life was the least I could do

for him after he pulled me from prison and gave my life purpose. But it wasn't just my life anymore. I wanted someone far more important.

“That won't happen again.” I blew out a breath coming to the realization that I wanted Caleb more than I wanted to be loyal to the Vitales. “I won't choose you over him.”

Benito stared at me, our eyes locked in a silent battle the longer we stood there.

“Benito,” Enzo said.

“Then it's clear you need to get the hell out of here,” Gin pointed out.

He shrugged as if me saying I'd choose Caleb over them wasn't an issue. I'd dedicated my life to the mafia without hesitation. It's when I had nothing, but now I had someone or at least I wanted to have him.

I didn't move, waiting for Benito. He wasn't just my boss but my friend. However, I couldn't change my feelings. Caleb meant more to me than my own life.

“We need him to take this job,” Benito said.

My back stiffened. “I know.” The logic was there but it didn't mean anything to my heart. “But if he comes back and says no, that's it.” Before Benito could say anything, I kept going. “I'll take care of it.”

“We've been sitting in the office all day trying to figure it out,” Enzo said. He watched me with an indifference he gave everyone except his brothers and boyfriend. “What makes you think you can come up with a solution to the problem? They are the best option right now. Anything you come up with is bound to be riddled with holes.”

He had a point but I wasn't going to let this drop. "Doesn't matter."

Enzo looked ready to argue further. He'd come at me with all the logic and I'd have nothing but stubbornness. I never thought about becoming the Vitale brothers' enemy, but for Caleb, I'd face the world. I was obsessed with him beyond the usual sex and fun. I wanted to possess every inch of him and hold him when no one else could. Make him cry, laugh, whine, smile. I wanted everything that was Caleb to be mine.

"What's keeping me from having you locked up until the job is done?" Benito asked.

The muscles between my shoulder blades twinged as I held my back ramrod straight. Benito could zip-tie me to a chair four states over and I'd still break my wrists to get free and to Caleb. "Would you sit back and let Harlow put himself in danger?"

Benito shut his mouth, his lips dipped in a frown.

"Would any of you let your men do this?" I asked each of them.

Gin groaned. "Ash would never. He's such a sweet puppy."

Enzo was the one I needed to understand that I couldn't blindly let Caleb do this.

"No," Enzo said. He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. A look of confusion came over his face before it morphed into understanding. "Even if Tex agreed, I wouldn't let him. This is too dangerous."

"Exactly."

"Are you saying you love him?" Benito asked. He stared at me, willing me to answer. When I didn't, he nodded slowly.

“Gin. Enzo. Leave us.”

Benito turned and headed back to his office. I followed behind him. Each step I took, I felt as if I was getting closer and closer to the imaginary chopping block. He sat down and gestured for me to do the same. I was hyper-aware of everything around us and the way Benito stared at me.

“Tony, I’ve never had to question your loyalty. We’ve known each other since we were teens. But right now, what’s more important to you?”

If anyone else listened in on our conversation, it would have been interpreted as Benito demanding I choose a side without flat out saying it. But I knew him. Some days it felt like I knew him better than I knew myself.

“He is.”

Caleb’s bright blue eyes, pitch-black messy hair, sharp jawline, and lean physique came to mind, and I instantly wanted to get up and go to him. I needed to fix my fuck up.

“Don’t ask me to choose.” I stared at Benito, hoping he understood. “I will always have your back.”

Benito lifted his hand, cutting off anything else I had to say.

“I didn’t doubt that. We go way back.” Benito sighed and leaned back in his seat. “You know this puts us back at square one.”

Tension lifted off my shoulders and for the first time since I’d realized my growing feelings for Caleb, I was able to breathe easier. “Yeah.”

Benito waved me off. “Go fix whatever the fuck is going on between you two.” He pinned me with a look. “And next

time you decide to lie, tell me. Fuck, felt like a snitch.”

I hadn't planned on Caleb ever finding out, maybe that was my first mistake. Lying to him and holding information I thought was making him rely only on me. However, it backfired and came crashing down in my face. I got up and shoved the chair back under the table.

“Tell your hellion I said thanks.”

Benito cocked a single brow at me.

I shrugged, heading for the door dead set on going to Caleb. “Before Harlow, you probably wouldn't have sat there and listened to me.”

Benito didn't argue, he just grunted, and I knew he agreed. Prior to his marriage, regardless of our friendship, he would have seen Caleb as nothing more than a tool to be used and my affection for him to be a distraction.

I bypassed the elevator and took the emergency staircase down, jumping half of them to reach the bottom floor faster. Caleb was long gone but there were only so many places he could go. Keys in hand, I unlocked the car and hopped behind the wheel. My heart was racing and sweat beaded on the nape of my neck. When I saw him, what should I say? Many options came to mind but none of them felt good enough. I hit a hard right and swerved as another car turned at the same time as me.

Righting my car, I ignored the finger and constant honking from the jackass. I headed toward Caleb's neighborhood. The closer I got, the more pressure I subconsciously pressed on the pedal. I glanced down and the speedometer read eighty-five in a forty zone. I reluctantly slowed down, forcing myself to take

it easy. Driving like a lunatic would only get me killed. I died and then I'd never get to have Caleb in my arms again.

Pain shot through my chest and my hold on the steering wheel tightened. I was utterly fucked. If Caleb didn't take me back or even give me a chance, I might lose my shit. Ringing cut through my thoughts and I jerked to the left slightly. I fixed the car and hit the answer button on the screen without checking who called.

"Anthony." My mother's sweet voice came through the line and filled my car.

I blinked a few times and looked down. Sure enough, it was her cell. "He—Ma, right now is—"

"Do you think that boyfriend of yours will be up for a game of craps? A bunch of the other residents are putting together a game night. I know how bad you are at it. Figured I'd steal Caleb for the night."

Warmth rushed me all at once at the image of my mother and Caleb next to each other, smiling. She seemed so much happier with him around.

"Is he with you now? I can ask him," Ma said.

"No, he's, um, not around right now."

Silence filled the car. My stomach twisted, it was just like when I was a kid and I'd done something wrong. My mother always knew and she'd just go silent staring me down. The only difference now was it was over the phone but it didn't lessen the amount of pressure weighing down on my shoulders.

"Ma."

“Anthony Cosimo Morelli, you tell me right now what is wrong. I may not see you everyday but a mother knows when her son isn’t okay.”

Laughter devoid of humor broke free releasing some of the tension. I rolled slowly up to the stop sign. The last few had been easy to drive past. I glanced over at the radio.

“I fuc—” I coughed to clear my throat. “I messed up, Ma. I don’t know what to do to fix it.”

“How badly are we talking? Forgot to take out the trash or you slept with someone else?”

“Ma.”

I groaned. I couldn’t be having this conversation with her. The only time I’d ever brought up a relationship with my mom was when I came out at fourteen. She’d been just as supportive but it also had been the year we lost Luca and Dad. I never really dated after that. Anyone who came into my life was temporary. I had the people I needed and didn’t want to lose. Risking having someone so close meant I risked losing them.

“Answer the question.”

I sighed. There was no getting out of it now. “I didn’t cheat on Caleb, he is the only man I want. But I—” I stared ahead and blew out a measured breath. “I lied to him and kept things away from him knowing it might hurt him,”

“Did you do it to hurt him intentionally?”

“No.”

Ma was quiet for a moment before she cleared her throat. “Well, you’re a dumbass and I didn’t raise you to be a liar. Regardless of your intentions, you still hurt that sweet boy.”

Fuck, she was right. If there is one thing about Bambi Morell, she doesn't hold back the truth.

"I know."

"What are you doing now?" she asked.

"Headed to his place to try and explain why—"

"Are you stupid?"

My mother's words gave me pause, and I pulled over, parking in a small shop's parking lot. I pressed the heel of my palm into my eyes until spots sparkled behind my eyelids.

"No?"

"You don't sound too sure about that, Anthony." Ma blew out a breath as if she wasn't sure what to do with me. "Apologizing means nothing, what have I always told you?"

I rubbed my eyes harder before dropping my hands to my side. "Actions are what show a man's true Intentions. My words can paint pretty pictures but my actions could set fire to it."

"Exactly." She went on a tangent swearing in Italian as I sat there and thought about everything that had happened.

"How do I fix this?"

"Show him that you want him at any cost. You do want to be with him, right?"

"More than anything," I said honestly. I stared up at the roof of the car not seeing anything. "I love him, Ma. He's everything I could ever want. He's wild, funny, and caring. Oh, and the way his nose scrunches up when he watches TV is cute." I laughed before it shifted to a groan. "He's shit at taking care of himself. He worries about everyone else but

never himself. His eating habits are nonexistent but when I make food for him, he smiles and happily eats it.” I closed my eyes, instantly assaulted with images of Caleb.

“You love him?” Mom asked.

“Yes.”

“Does he know?”

I shook my head before I remembered we were on the phone. “No.”

And now I might never be able to tell him.

My stomach rolled and the urge to get back on the road and hunt Caleb down came back full force. I couldn’t give him up. I knew the right thing to do was to back away and let him have space, but I wasn’t a man used to doing the right thing. Caleb was mine. If I had to tie him up and drag him screaming and crying, I was going to have him again. Only this time, I planned to keep him forever.

“You plan on telling him?” Ma asked, grabbing my attention.

I don’t know. I wasn’t sure if it would make matters better or worse. I wanted Caleb any way I could have him but I wasn’t stupid enough to try and guilt him into being with me either.

“I’ll tell you this, Anthony, we Morelli’s aren’t quitters. Stop being a punk and go get your man. You do what needs to be done.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Good. Come visit next weekend and tell my partner the game night is next month. I expect to see him, Anthony.”

The beep over the car speakers told me she'd hung up. I blew out a breath. Caleb was mad at me and now so was my mother. She was right. I needed to do everything in my power to fix this. I glanced out the window and noticed the small shop. It was a mom-and-pop grocery store.

I slipped out of the car, heading inside with a loose plan.



THE DINGY old apartment building was falling. It was barely holding to the loose foundation that it sat on. My knuckles wrapped against the thick wood door of the owner. He was on the first floor of the apartment. It was easy enough to obtain information about him on my way over. Grayson, a forty-five-year-old man, opened the door. He was no more than five-foot-eight at best. He was hunched over his hair more gray than black.

“Yeah?” Grayson grunted. He looked as if he wanted to be anywhere but there.

I didn't waste his or my time. I had the cash in hand. “I'd like to buy this place.”

He rolled his eyes until I showed him the real cash in hand along with the cashier's check. His grimace disappeared with a smile. “Why would you want a place like this?”

“That's my business, not yours.” I pulled out the proper paperwork and handed it to him along with a pen. “You get an additional ten grand if you leave now.” I showed him where to sign. “I'm a registered notary so it will all be filed. If you try

and buy this place back or come back you won't be able to ever see your granddaughter, Alice, ever again."

Grayson froze with the pen in his hand, hovering over the dotted line. He didn't bother to read the contract, not that it mattered. He was getting a check for six hundred and fifty thousand dollars as well as ten grand in cash. It was more than he earned from the apartment in a lifetime probably.

"You one of those gangsters?" Grayson asked. He looked up at the ceiling before meeting my gaze again.

"Does it matter?" I pointed to the contract.

"No, I guess it don't." He signed, and I passed over everything. "This is really happening?"

"Yes, leave within the week."

I closed the door and headed upstairs, my heart firmly lodged in my throat. I was going to go see Caleb and beg him to give me the chance I didn't deserve but desperately needed.

I knocked on the door, holding my breath as I waited to see Caleb.

"Papa, someone's knocking," a little girl's voice said.

Shit. I was hoping for just Caleb but luck wasn't on my side. The door opened and the big man, Drav, came out.

"Fuck off," Drav said. His big meaty arms crossed over his expansive chest. He glared down at me as if I was the bane of his existence.

"I need to see him."

"You don't need to see shit," Drav growled. His Russian accent grew thicker with each word.

I glanced over his shoulder just as another door opened. My heart picked up the pace but instantly plummeted as I saw it wasn't Caleb who came out. Loose blond curls came into view along with fire engine red hair. Two heads with identical faces appeared on Drav's right and left side. I remembered the twins from when Caleb and I picked them all up. He called them Demon and Angel, I believed.

"What is he doing here?" Angel asked.

"Leaving," Drav said.

"Tell Caleb I'm out here."

"Cell doesn't want anything to do with you," Demon said. He looked me up and down. "How he looked coming home, we should beat your ass."

Pain flickered over the palm of my hand as my nails bit into the tough flesh. I just wanted to see and speak to Caleb.

"What I have to do with Caleb has nothing to do with any of you."

Drav took another step toward me. I was tall but the man had at least a few inches on my six-foot-four height. His thick finger pressed against my chest. "He's my family. I'm not letting you near him."

Killing any of them would be a bad choice. I was trying to win Caleb, not seclude him again. I blew out a shallow breath and lifted my hands. "I'm not going anywhere until I see Caleb. Tell him I'll be right here." I leaned against the wall and stared at them. They could pull out a gun and threaten to kill me and I wouldn't move. I didn't care how long it took. I was going to have Caleb.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

CALEB

I SAT on my bed with my legs crossed. Shade pulled his cat into his lap, a naked thing that I affectionately called, “bald chicken.” When he threatened to put me through a meat grinder, I switched it to Chicken. He still didn’t love it, but he’d given up stopping everyone from calling him that.

Chicken wandered over to me. I petted his head, giving him a quick scratch behind the ears. Even though I gave him shit, Chicken was comforting. After all the shit I’d been through, he made me feel like I wasn’t going completely insane. Even if I definitely was.

“Cell?”

I glanced up to meet Demon’s eyes. There was worry there. *They don’t need to worry about me.* I was supposed to be their leader, the one driving them toward better things. They didn’t need some mentally screwed up moron who had fallen for the bullshit of a mobster. All of them deserved better than that.

“He still out there?” I asked.

Drav nodded. “Wanders away from time to time, but yep. Still there.”

I shook my head. I'd had more than enough of Tony. Even after I'd told him to fuck off, that I didn't want to see him. There he was, still hanging around and acting as if I wanted him. We had nothing to say to each other. As far as I was concerned, he was just the screwed up asshole that had locked me away and lied his ass off to keep me in some kind of invisible cage. And I was dumb enough to allow it to happen. I'd almost fought Drav over it. How idiotic could I be?"

"You're doing it again," Angel said as he came over and plopped beside me. "Come on, forget about him. I thought we were discussing this job."

"Right," I said as I cleared my throat and tossed the image of Tony as well. "What do you all think? This run would be dangerous, but profitable. We could make the ride quickly, take back roads, and get back."

"Hopefully without getting arrested or killed," Drav muttered.

"Yeah, that part I don't love. I told Benito I wouldn't do it because I didn't want you all in danger. I still don't, but I can't make that decision. We need to put it to a vote."

Demon shrugged. "No risk, no reward."

Shade, still in his helmet as he always was, nodded as well. "I vote yes."

Angel yawned. "Whatever you guys want to do, I'm in. Besides, a little danger makes my cock hard."

Drav groaned. "Will you stop talking like that?" He lectured before he turned to me. "I'm okay with the run as well, though a hell of a lot more hesitant. Getting back to Stasia is the most important thing. If she loses me, she has no one."

“I know,” I said as I stood up. “That’s why I don’t want to do this. Not really.”

“We all know what this life is,” Drav said gruffly. “The dangers involved. We voted to get us into this position, and if this gets us out from under the Vitale’s thumb—”

“It will,” I said quickly. “Benito’s a fucking asshole, but so far he keeps his word. This is our way out.”

“Then I’m with you,” Drav said. “Always will be.”

My chest tightened. Leave it to Drav to make me actually *feel* shit. No one wanted that crap. I cleared my throat again, trying to toss those emotions down a deep, dark tunnel where they belonged. Picking up the round, black paperweight on the windowsill, I pounded it on top of my dresser.

“Then that’s that. We do the run. Get prepared and suited up. Drav, we’ll drop Stasia off at her grandmother’s okay? Let’s be ready to go in the next few hours.”

“You got it, Prez,” Demon said. “Angel, come help me pack.”

Angel draped himself over his twin’s back. “Of course. I do everything, anyway.”

They bickered as they left the room together. Shade scooped up Chicken, cuddled him in his arms, and nodded. Once it was just me and Drav, I sighed and pushed my fingers through my hair, my nails scraping over my scalp.

“What I said the other day,” I started.

“You were having a hell of a time. No need to go back to that,” Drav answered. “I can’t believe you killed someone.”

I’d told Drav everything once Tony came to stake out my apartment. There was no reason to keep it all close to my chest

anymore, not when I needed someone to confide in. Was I crazy? Had I lost my mind? Did Tony mean anything or was it just something stupid and made up all in my head? I'd had entirely too many questions with no answers in sight. Drav had listened, really listened, and didn't judge me the way I judged myself for my own naivety.

"Yeah," I muttered. "I still don't want to talk about it."

"Then don't." He shrugged. "You don't have to. I'm not going to push you into it. But"—he frowned—"what are you going to do about the mobster lingering around our door? None of us can leave."

"He won't stop you," I said.

"No, but no one feels comfortable enough to try that theory out and see if he would lose his shit or not." Drav shook his head. "You have to figure this out, Cell. It's getting to be a hell of a lot dealing with this man. You're our leader. Act like our leader."

His words hit me square in the chest. Drav was completely correct. Maybe I needed to hear that tough love to understand that I was fucking up. I was the leader of the Hitters. My job was to provide for and take care of the people I'd recruited to my cause. If I couldn't even deal with Tony, how could I handle anything else?

"Fine," I muttered.

A big, meaty hand crashed onto my shoulder. "Don't be like that," he said. "You've got this. I believe in you."

I groaned. "Can you stop being so supportive and calm? It's freaking me out!"

Rich, deep laughter fell from Drav's lips. I couldn't help the grin that tugged at my lips in response. No matter how

fucked up, worried, or scared I was, Drav always had my side. He was more than a friend, he was blood. Family. I pulled away from him and shook my head.

“All right, I’m going.”

“Good luck!” he called after me.

I’m going to need all the luck I can fucking get.

The more I walked through the apartment, the heavier my legs became until it was like trudging through wet cement. I stood at the door, my hand wrapping around the knob while my heart pounded away. All I wanted was for the goddamn thing to quiet down. Instead, it beat harder, faster.

Why am I so worked up? He’s just some violent, dangerous, asshole that jerked me around and made a fool out of me. That doesn’t matter. None of it does.

I grabbed the doorknob and wrenched the door open. Standing there, as if he hadn’t been in the same place for three fucking days, was Tony. He was still dressed as sharply as ever. A dark suit clung to his body, a dark shirt underneath. He looked as put together as he always did. Until I looked at his eyes. There were bags underneath, a darkness that definitely came from lack of sleep. I knew he said he’d stay there until we talked, but had he really not moved?

“Caleb.”

The sound of his voice snapped me back to reality. “Go home.”

“I can’t do that. We need to talk.”

I scoffed. All of the rage I’d suppressed came rushing to the surface, right along with the hurt that felt as if someone

had buried a knife in my back. Oh wait, they had. His name was Tony fucking Morelli.

“There’s nothing for us to talk about.” I dialed Benito’s number. When he answered, I spoke quickly. “We’ll do it. Just went up to a vote.”

“Good,” Benito said. “I was hoping you’d make the right choice. I’ll send over all the info via an associate. I’d have Tony send it, but he’s not here. Hasn’t been for a while.”

“That’s because I’m looking right at him,” I muttered through clenched teeth.

Benito was quiet for a minute. “What? He’s there?”

“Yep.”

“Give him the phone.”

I grinned as I pulled the phone away from my ear and handed it to him. Tony took it tentatively before he began to speak to Benito. I couldn’t stop the smile on my lips. Benito was probably going to ream him for his bullshit, and I couldn’t say he didn’t deserve it. Tony needed to leave my home alone and go back to working for his boss who he gave so much of a shit about.

“Here,” Tony said as he passed it back.

I took it, made sure the call was ended, and shoved it back into my pocket. Tony lingered. I expected him to pack up and move out, but there he was, still staring at me. Being in his line of sight made my skin crawl. I had no desire to be under his gaze.

“You can go now,” I pointed out.

“Why would I do that?”

“Didn’t your master call you to come running like a good little bitch?” I bit out.

Tony’s hand flinched. A feeling like pleasure shot through my body at that reaction. I’d irritated him, had gotten under his skin. Good. No one deserved to be bothered the way that Tony did.

“Seriously, I have shit to do. Leave.”

“Not going to happen,” he countered. “Benito didn’t tell me to report in. So, I’m free to be here.”

My face grew hot as I stared at the smug look on his face. It just pissed me off even more. *He should be on his hands and knees begging me for forgiveness. How can he just stand there after what he’s done?*

Right, he was a no good, violent, criminal. I knew that, and yet I’d bypassed all of it. I’d stopped thinking about him as being worse than me when I saw those... other sides of him. The ones that didn’t scream psychopath on a murder spree. All the red flags had just slowly disappeared until I was sure he had a reason for being the way that he was. But no one had a reason like that. Tony had screwed me over, lied to me, manipulated me. There was no way I would forgive him.

“Fine, if you won’t leave then I’ll get you tossed out of here. Our landlord doesn’t like trespassers. I’m sure he’ll handle this.”

“I’m sure he won’t,” Tony said, pushing off the wall to fall in line behind me. “Let’s just talk.”

“No way in hell. Go fuck yourself.”

I made it down to the landlord’s place and knocked on the door. I waited. The next knock turned into a bang as I pounded on the door with the side of my fist. Shuffling footsteps

approached the door before the chain was engaged. He opened it to peek at me.

“Caleb.”

“This man is stalking me,” I said as I jerked a thumb over my shoulder.

He glanced behind me. “Sorry. I can’t help.”

I frowned. “What the hell do you mean? Can’t you get him tossed out for trespassing? You’ve done it before!”

The man sighed. “I’m leaving today, okay?” He nodded with his chin. “That man owns this building now. Sorry. I’ve got to go.”

I stood stone still as the door slammed in my face. My brain refused to connect the dots.

What did he just say?

I must have been having a stroke, because there was no way I’d just heard what I thought I had. Tony owned the building? *My* building?

“Like I said, let’s just talk.”

A hand wrapped around my arm. I yanked it away as if I’d been burned. My eyes narrowed as he stood there, the smug mask still there. Underneath, there was something more. Wasn’t there always? But true to Tony, he hid any semblance of reality and only presented what he wanted to the world. He was fake through and fucking through.

I snatched my arm away. “I told you already, we have nothing to talk about.”

Tony advanced on me so quickly, I barely saw him coming. One minute he was away from me and the next I was

squashed against a wall with his body pressed against mine. He pushed his fingers into my hair, his skin against my cheek as he stroked me. I swallowed hard. The bastard always had a way of turning me into nothing. A way of getting into my brain to make me compliant and stupid. Not anymore.

I shoved a hand against his chest. “Get off me.”

“No,” he growled. “Let me tell you what I need to tell you!”

“You don’t get to tell me anything,” I said evenly.

Tony’s eyes softened. The hardness fell away for a moment, and all I saw was the sadness that resided there. He pulled me against his body and this time it was harder to fight him off again. I just wanted to stay in his arms where I’d started to feel... something. I couldn’t say what it was, couldn’t put words to it. However, it comforted me for some strange reason. It would be easy to fall back into the habit of his warm flesh, his enticing cologne, and his whispered words that meant absolutely nothing.

He lied. He kept lying. Tony would have kept me away from everyone I’ve ever cared about if I’d let him.

I shoved away from him more firmly. When he stumbled back, the sadness in his eyes had turned wild. I shuddered at that look. It screamed he would hurt me if he could and I had no doubt of that. Whatever Tony had with me, he seemed to like the idea of locking me up and keeping me all to himself.

“Stop,” I panted as I tried to claw the tendrils of his influence out of my mind. “I’m not playing. You can buy every apartment in the city if you want to, but I don’t give a damn. You are not welcome in my home, and you’re not going to say shit to me. Fuck off!”

“You don’t mean that.”

“I mean every damn word,” I growled.

“Caleb.”

“Don’t say my name like you know me!” I snapped. “I’ve already said everything I ever want to say to you. Just turn around and leave.”

“I’m not going to give up on you like that. This run you’re doing is dangerous. I didn’t want you doing that in the first place and I don’t want you—”

I laughed so hard my ribs ached. “Do you think I give a damn what you want? That’s hilarious. I’m doing what I have to do for my crew. My family. The one you tried to keep me away from, remember?”

“Caleb.”

“Didn’t I tell you not to call my fucking name!”

I shoved him so roughly he slammed against the far wall. Danger flickered in his brown eyes. But I didn’t care. Why the hell did I keep letting Tony shove me around? He was nothing but a mobster with some kind of god complex. I didn’t want any part of it any longer.

Tony crossed the space and slammed me into the wall again. Before I could say a word, his lips slammed against mine. The heat, the taste of his tongue against mine tinged with mint made me want to buckle. It was the stupidest thing ever, but I wanted to melt for him. Tony’s teeth sank into my bottom lip. The pain registered as pleasure. A moan fell from my lips, a tingle running up my spine as I held onto his suit jacket with my fists. I panted, my lungs begging for air as he kissed me so hard, I forgot how to breathe.

“Don’t say that,” Tony growled against my lips. “You’re mine. Only mine!”

“No, I’m not.” I shook my head.

That was his problem right there. He acted as if I could only belong to him. As if no one else could be close to me. I didn’t want a life like that. My family meant the world to me. The Hitters, my mom, everything around me was a part of my life as well. No one got to decide that I was to be kept in a little box, under lock and key. Not Tony. No one.

“You can’t hide out here forever,” he snapped. “Stop trying to run from me.”

I laughed, the sound dry even to my own ears. “I’m not running from you. Not anymore. You can do whatever the hell you want, Tony. I don’t care.” I leaned forward and pressed my lips against his. Slowly, I kissed him, my heart aching in my chest. For a moment I thought of how things could have been different, but they weren’t. They never would be. “I hate you,” I whispered against his mouth. “Don’t show your fucking face here anymore.”

When I pulled away, he stared at me. I turned on my heels. Pressing my phone against my ear, I called Benito one last time.

“If Tony keeps bugging me, I’ll change my mind,” I snapped. “You can do whatever the fuck you want, but I know you need me. You need us.”

I hung up without waiting for his answer. Tony’s phone rang as I slid back into my place and slammed the door behind me. I waited to feel relief, triumph, the thrill of revenge. None of it came.

“You good?” Drav asked.

I blinked before I forced a smile and nodded. “Let’s get this thing going.”

Anything was better than thinking about Tony.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

TONY

“BACK OFF,” Benito’s words cut through the fog in my brain.

I hate you. Caleb’s words played on repeatedly stabbing me again and again. Pain was all I felt. It was worse than being shot. At least I could bandage that wound, the one Caleb had left wasn’t going anywhere.

“Tony, get your ass back here now.” Benito was talking but I could do nothing but stare at the door where the man I had stupidly fallen in love with ran to.

“Tony!”

Fuck, it hurts. I thought seeing Caleb dead or losing him to the enemy would be the worst but I was wrong. Having him hate me and want nothing to do with me was a far more devastating pain.

Benito swore in my ear, going on a long tangent in Italian as I waited for Caleb to open the door. My lips still tingled from our kiss. I know he felt it. The way we fit so perfectly together. How our bodies responded without thought to one another. We were better together.

I was better with him.

My lungs burned the longer I stood there, holding my breath. Black spots started to take over my vision. I wavered

on my feet and caught myself on the wall before I fell.

“Gin, go get Tony,” Benito said.

I shook my head, doing the best I could to shove the emotion down. I wasn't a man who felt often, but when I did, it was like a tornado was waiting to take over. I felt out of sorts like I had no clue on how to live. I'd been just fine until Caleb crashed into my life but there was no way I was going to be good without him.

“Fuck,” I groaned. The word scrapped against my vocal cords coming out scratchy as if I'd spent nights screaming. I reached up and pressed my thumb and fingers into my eyes trying to get rid of the stinging that refused to let up.

Benito was still on the phone, calling for me.

“I can't let him do this job,” I said.

Benito was silent for a second, and it weighed down on my shoulders. It didn't matter to me how important this deal was or about whatever else was happening. All I cared about was Caleb. There were too many unknowns.

“He agreed and he's a grown man.” Benito sighed. “Come to the office. We can drink and talk it out.”

I appreciated my friend, but the last thing I wanted was to give up. My stomach clenched around nothing, and I stared at the door again. Did Caleb eat? He was shit at taking care of himself.

“Tell Gin not to come,” I said.

“Are you coming to the office?”

We both knew the answer to that. I wasn't budging. I needed to be here. I needed to talk to Caleb, to explain how much he meant to me.

“Fuck, Tony. I expect this shit out of Enzo and Gin but not you.”

Maybe that was true but I was done being logical or responsible. I wanted Caleb above all else. Nothing felt right without him. The call ended, and I leaned against the wall and went to wait for Caleb to come back out. Not even thirty minutes passed before Caleb’s door opened again. I pushed off the wall, my heart firmly lodged in my throat. It all came crashing down as a head full of blond curls came into view. I sank back against the wall and crossed my arms.

“You don’t give up, do you?” Angel asked.

“No.” How could I? I finally found the one person that made me feel. “Tell Caleb to come back out.”

“No can do. Cell’s the prez and what he says goes... Most times.”

“Angel, get your ass back in here and stop fucking around with the mobster,” someone shouted from inside. It sounded like Angel’s twin, Demon.

Standing outside the apartment for three days made it a little easier to get accustomed to their voices. I knew who was who by how loud they were. The twins were the loudest followed by the big Russian, Drav. I was certain there was another guy. He always wore a helmet anytime I saw him, but he wasn’t as loud as the others. The one voice I wanted to hear the most wasn’t loud enough for me to hear.

“Man, this is a shit hole.” Giancarlo’s voice was jarring.

I jumped off the wall, my pulse racing. I’d been so wrapped up in listening for Caleb that I lost track of my surroundings. Stupid.

“Hey, Tony!” Gin waved as if he was there to sell me a box of chocolates and not drag me away from Caleb. His gaze skipped over to Angel who was still peeking out the door. “Who’s the pillow princess?”

“How did you know?” Angel asked.

“Caleb’s friend,” I said at the same time.

Gin sauntered over to me, looking around the small hallway. It wasn’t much. The carpet that lined the floor was a blue-green color with strange burgundy specks. It was too dingy to tell what it originally looked like. There was a draft that came from who the fuck knew where. The window didn’t open; it was glued shut after multiple years of the landlord special. The paint on the wall was chipping in some places. Nothing about the apartment building was a good fit for Caleb.

I could give him so much more.

“Benito sent me over. You grovel to your boyfriend yet?” Gin asked. He took up a post next to me.

The fine hairs on the nape of my neck stood on end. I was tall but Giancarlo was still taller than me, not to mention he had the batshit crazy on his side. If it came down to it, he’d be able to drag my tired ass out of the apartment.

“Calm down, I didn’t bring Silvy up.” Gin fished out a joint and tucked it behind his ear. “Groveling, how much of it did you do?”

I took my gaze off Gin to stare at Caleb’s door. Angel had gone back inside. Smart. Who knew what the hell was going to happen with Gin there?

“None. Yet. I couldn’t get him to listen to me.”

Gin shook his head. “Man, that’s not how it works. You’re supposed to, I don’t know, tie him down. Right?”

I thought about it a few times. Caleb kept his window propped open with a thick phone book. It would be easy to climb the fire escape and slip into his room unannounced. Tie him to the bed and, or better yet, tie him up and drag his ass back to my house and keep him there forever.

“Man, I thought me and my brother’s were”—Gin whistled and twirled his finger next to his head—“coo-coo.”

“Gin.” My patience was at the end of its rope. I had none left to give.

“Yeah, want to break down their door and steal your boyfriend?”

My heart stopped for a second as I let the idea fully cement in my head. It was doable. Gin could more than handle the Hitters while I dragged their leader out. It would be so easy, and I’d finally have what I wanted. My stomach dropped and rolled. My arms fell to my sides, and I pushed off the wall once more.

“No.” I ground my molars, my jaw aching with every passing second. “Caleb wouldn’t like that.”

“Fine, if you say so.” Gin shrugged as if he didn’t care either way but it was nice he’d be on my side when it came to Caleb. “Ready to get out of here?”

Not really. Gin didn’t rush me and I was glad for it. I finally nodded and we headed down the hall. It took everything in me not to glance over my shoulder to look for Caleb. There was no point if he wanted nothing to do with me.

“Silver Dreams?” Gin asked.

The thought of anyone besides Caleb touching me sent a cold shiver down my spine.

“You know what they say in order to get over someone, you need to get under someone new,” Gin said, loudly enough, I was pretty sure the entire block had heard him.

I ignored him, moving toward my car. He stopped me short in my tracks.

“Whoa there. You look like you haven’t slept. Maybe I should drive you.” His phone rang at the same time and Gin fished it out. A huge smile came over his face. “Hey, baby, I’m just picking up Tony.”

I slipped free from his hold.

“Shit, wait, Ash. Tony.”

I waved him off and got behind the wheel. Everything wavered, and I glanced at the apartment building I now owned. The horrified look that had come over Caleb’s face had been shocking.

“What the fuck were you thinking?” I asked myself.

I had no answer. No matter how much I shouted Caleb was mine, it felt like it wasn’t enough. I pulled away from the sidewalk and drove down the street. My head was elsewhere as I took street after street until I was outside one of the many lucrative businesses owned by the mafia. I sat in the parking lot on the east side of New York, away from the Vitale’s heavy influence. The red neon sign flashed on reading Rustic Nails. It was owned by the Falacci’s. They weren’t enemies but they weren’t under the Vitales either.

Before I knew it, I was across the parking lot headed toward the bar. It was a dingy little place but that’s not why

people flooded its doors. It was what was held downstairs in the basement.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” the guy at the door asked. I recognized him as one of Marco Falacci’s guys.

I pulled out a roll of cash and passed it over. He checked it before taking out his phone. I waited for him to check in with his boss. I didn’t give a damn what he said, I was going to get in regardless. I needed to exercise this pain out of me or it was going to consume me.

“You can go in,” the guy said.

I didn’t hesitate. Everything was a blur as I kept straight until I made it to the back door. It was guarded by another man, and he checked me for weapons. I left everything in the car. I made sure even if I did die, no one would miss me. My mom came to mind but she was set up for life. Not to mention Benito promised to take care of her in the end if something ever happened to me.

Caleb came to mind next and the pain in my chest intensified. *He hates me anyway.*

I took the stairs leisurely and headed for the bar. I took out more cash and slid it across. The bartender nodded. “Back rooms are for fights. We have a few free for alls at the end of the scheduled fights. How many do you plan on partaking in?”

“I’m not leaving the ring until I can’t stand anymore.”

The bartender didn’t question me, just took my money and jotted down the info. I slipped away and headed toward the corner, ready for the entire day to be over already.

My phone was in my hand in the next second, and Caleb’s name was pulled up. My thumbs hovered over the keyboard as I tried to think about what to say. It felt like no matter what

came out of my mouth, Caleb had made up his mind about me. And fuck, if he was wrong. I wasn't a good guy, not even a little bit. But why was it so wrong that I wanted to possess every inch of him? That I wanted him to be only mine?

Why did I have to share when I'd finally found the one person that made me want a family again?

The stinging was back, and I pressed the heel of my palm against my eyes until I couldn't tell if tears were going to fall because I was emotionally fucked or from the pain.

I felt somewhat in control as I lowered my hands. The crowd in the basement grew thick and it got louder by the second. Music blared from the speakers as the fights began but all I could focus on was my phone. I'd been too nervous to message Caleb before. Now I felt like it was too late, maybe that's why my fingers moved and I finally had something to say.

Tony: The apartment building is yours. There is enough money for you to fix the place up.

Tony: You don't want to speak to me, I get it. Maybe it's better that you did escape from me. I acted like it wasn't a big deal, waiting outside your place. I knew you were going to come back to me. I had everything you could ever need. But that wasn't the case, doubt that would ever be the case. You need so much more, and frankly, I don't know if I could give it to you. When I'm with you, I want you. Want is a loose term. I need you. I want to possess everything you are and keep it close. It drives me insane having you and not having you. I would say I don't know which is worse, but I do. Not having you in my life is physically painful. You hate me, but I fell in love with you

I went to delete the message. It was emotional and pathetic. No man would ever say any of this shit. Someone bumped into me and my phone slipped out of my hands.

“Shit.”

“My bad, bro. You’re just standing there,” some guy said. Something in my head snapped, and I punched him without so much as a warning. He crumpled to the ground at my feet. I stepped away squinting, my eyes searching the floor for my phone and found its screen cracked. I swiped over it trying to get it to unlock but all I received was a thumb full of glass.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

CALEB

HITTING the open road was a blessing. I'd been cooped up for way too long. I felt it in the ache of my legs and the tightness of my fingers as I twisted the throttle. Despite the aches, the joy I felt from riding Mistress and becoming one with the road was unmatched. It was pure freedom. Every little thought drained away, and I was able to focus on the road ahead.

So why was I still so... sad?

I growled at myself. How stupid was it that I was worried about Tony? The jackass didn't give a shit about me. It wasn't even emotion that he felt, it was nothing but possession. And I didn't want to be possessed. I wasn't a toy to be hoarded.

Then what do I want from him?

I had no answer for that either. All I knew was that I wouldn't be a pretty bird in a locked cage while he held the fucking key. I had a life to live, people to care for. No matter how much I loved kneeling for him, falling into his web of thoughtless pleasure, and even seeing his idiotic smile it was not enough to abandon everything and everyone else that I loved in life.

"Cell, you there?"

I glanced over at Demon. "Yep. Drop is in five miles."

“So far so good,” Angel said over the coms. “Once we’re done, can we please get something to eat? My stomach is devouring my spine.”

“Yeah, why not? Long as Drav’s cool with the detour.”

“As much as I want to get back to Stasia, I’ve got to eat something. That last break was way too short.”

“A meal it is,” I said.

The coms fell silent and my music resumed. I let myself fall into it. The thrashing, angry metal was enough to make me keep going even as my ass throbbed and my thighs protested. My backpack was killing me, the straps cutting into my shoulders. It was only made worse by the realization that we had a ton of coke on us. If any of it went missing, if the cops pulled us over, if we were busted by one of Benito’s rivals...

I shook my head. *Can’t think about everything that could go wrong or I’ll go insane.*

Worrying thoughts pushed aside, I decided to focus on the job in front of me. I pulled off the highway and turned onto a dirt road. Rocks kicked up, one slapped against my helmet, and I gritted my teeth. I was ready for this to be over with already.

“Is that the place?” Angel called over coms, his voice nervous.

I looked at the barn up ahead. “Can’t imagine it would be anything else. Everyone be alert. And if you have to shoot, do it.”

“You got it, prez,” Drav answered.

Having guns while we transported drugs wasn’t the best idea, but I couldn’t leave us open to attack from someone if

they decided to screw Benito over. I wasn't willing to end up a bloody mass of flesh in a remote location for my dear cousin. We pulled to a stop just as the barn doors opened. The man in front of us had a gun clutched in his hands. I swallowed hard. A moment passed before he put the piece away and waved a hand.

We cut our engines.

"Not too bad," the guy called as he glanced at his watch. "I expected the delivery to be late with someone new on the route."

"We don't do late," I said.

I climbed off my bike and everyone else followed. We trailed into the barn. As the heavy, wooden door closed, my heart caught in my throat. I pushed forward, as if I wasn't the least bit bothered. Men stared at us, their gazes never faltering as we walked over to a large table in the middle of the room.

"You can unload here. We'll test one and then you can be on your way. Payment will be sent to Benito directly, electronically."

"Yeah, he already clued me in."

"Then this should go smoothly."

I turned to my crew. "Dump 'em."

We emptied out our bags on the table carefully. Bricks of coke stacked on top of each other until there was a nice little heap of them. The man reached over, cut one open, and dumped some in aluminum foil. I watched as he started to burn it. When it passed his inspection, he nodded.

"Good shit. Tell Benito we can continue to do business together. I'll send payment over now."

It wasn't my problem if he did or didn't. If they sent payment? Great. If not, not my fucking problem. Benito's men would more than likely hunt him down. All I had to do was transport.

"That all?" I asked.

The man raised a brow. "Is there a problem?"

"No offense, but I want to get back on the road. Sitting on your ass hundreds of miles isn't exactly fun. We're all ready to get fucked up and eat."

The man laughed. "Good. Good. I'm Z, by the way. I expect more of this in the future."

I shrugged. "No idea who Benito has scheduled to run, but if he wants it, I'm sure it'll be us."

Z clapped me on the shoulder. "What do I call you?"

"Cell."

He raised a brow. "Cell. All right, hopefully we will do business again soon, Cell."

When he took his hand off my shoulder, I relaxed a bit. No way in hell was I going to do this again. We parted ways, and I was all too glad to get back on my bike and drive away. The further away we got, the more the knot in my stomach loosened. Finally, I could breathe again.

"That was terrifying," Demon muttered.

"Yup," Shade added.

"Well, it's done. Let's call it in and get paid. There's a diner back the way we came, like, five miles up the road. That good with everyone?"

They all agreed they were cool with it, and I was grateful for that. By the time we pulled in, I was just glad to get off of Mistress for a bit. I'd miss her in the next five minutes, but we needed a little time apart.

Great, I'm starting to think about Mistress like that crazy ass Giancarlo thinks about his stuff. I'm losing it.

My insane family was rubbing off on me.

"You coming?" Angel called, his blond curls falling in his face.

"Give me a minute."

"You got it, prez."

They all disappeared into the diner. Drav lingered, but I gave him a goofy thumbs up. He returned it with a half smile before he disappeared into the diner as well. As soon as I was alone, I sagged against the brick wall of the building and pulled out my phone. I stabbed Benito's name and the phone rang as I paced back and forth.

"It's completed," he said.

"Yes."

"Payment has been sent. Do you still have the information I gave you?"

"Wouldn't lose it for the world."

Benito had given me an account that he'd set up for me and the rest of the Hitters. We would be able to retrieve the money whenever we wanted. As far as I knew, he'd done it through one of his companies. I had no idea about any of that, and as far as corporate crime went, I didn't want to know.

“Check it,” Benito said. “I trust everything went smoothly.”

“Very smoothly. Let me look.”

I pulled the phone away from my ear and opened up the app he’d given me. When I typed in the info, my eyes nearly fell out of my skull. *Did he mean to send us this much? There’s no way, right?* I nearly dropped my phone, fumbling it in my hands as I tried to make my mind work.

Half a million dollars.

Between the five of us, that was one hundred thousand each. That kind of money could do wonders for us. Drav would be able to reopen his garage and get Stasia into private school. Shade would be able to repair his bike because that damn thing was on its last leg. The twins could pay off their ridiculous debt. And I could help my mother repair her place.

Thinking about my mother reminded me of Tony’s mom. I could do something nice for her, she was good to me.

As soon as she popped up into my head, Tony did as well. I noticed the messages that I’d left. I’d blocked Tony the moment I stepped back into my place yesterday. Now, as I opened the inbox that held blocked messages, my stomach twisted. There weren’t a thousand like I’d expected. Just two.

“Are you still there?”

“Hold on,” I called to Benito.

“Did he just tell me to hold on?”

I ignored him as I read the messages. The first was classic Tony. Of course, he wanted to give me something, that was so much like him. Did he think that giving me stuff would make me forgive him? I would never fucking—

The second message took my breath away. I stared at the words until they blurred together into a mess of unreadable syllables.

You hate me, but I love you.

“What the fuck?” I whispered.

“Is something wrong?” Benito called.

I pressed the phone against my ear. “Tony loves me?”

There was a pause. “Why are you asking that as if it’s a question?”

My heart skipped a beat. “What do you mean?”

“Did you not realize he loved you?”

“No!” I shouted.

“Yo, it’s Gin. How could you not know what? I could tell in, like... five minutes of seeing you two together.”

“What the fuck?” I muttered. “Where does that asshole get off! He’s done nothing but get under my skin, piss me off, and then he has the nerve to make me feel bad for him? What the actual FUCK!”

“Are you good?” Gin asked.

“No! That asshole. He never told me anything about giving a shit about me. I mean, come on, the jerk beats me up, manipulates me, and oh, did I mention he waterboarded me? Yeah, more than once! Where the fuck does he get off saying he loves me!”

“You should probably calm down.”

“Fuck that!”

I was in a full blown meltdown. Tony loved me? Not once did he ever say anything remotely like that. The only thing he ever did was say how much he wanted to own me, to possess me. When the hell had he ever said he had feelings for me?

“Tony’s always been straightforward. You can’t think of a single time when he said something?” Benito asked.

My mind instantly snapped to the night I got him drunk. He’d been all over me, a mess of a man that wouldn’t let me go. No matter how I tried to pull away, there he was. And in the midst of all the chaos he’d said something that I’d brushed off as him having five too many.

“What the hell, Tony, do you like me or something?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

My brain refused to accept that had actually happened. It was just one of those things, right? A drunken night when you said too much and didn’t really understand what you were saying. What else could it be?

“He’s still not getting it,” Gin said. “Hey, dummy, he loves you. Seriously, I’ve never seen that asshole so messed up in my life over someone.”

“I haven’t either,” Benito chimed in.

“Fuck!”

I wiped a hand down my face. How had I missed that? Even though we’d slept together, spent time together, had worked together, never in my life did I think that there was actually anything between us.

“You don’t love him back?” Gin asked.

“What?”

“You heard me.”

I frowned. Did I love Tony? The truth was that I'd never been in love before. When would I have the time? My idea of a good time was a great fuck and a nice friendship. Being in a relationship with someone? That was completely new and also... scary. Terrifying even.

“I don't know.”

Someone, I assumed it was Giancarlo, whistled. “Well, I guess you don't have to worry about him if you don't care. I mean, I get it, the guy can be a *total* dick. So, if he dies then I guess he'll just die.”

My attention was focused fully on Gin. “What?”

“Yeah. He went to Rustic Nails and decided to enter the fights before you guys started your run. And he hasn't left.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

Gin laughed. “He's sleeping on the floor of a dingy, dirty bar during the day and fighting at night. Apparently, he won't stop.”

“Yes, I did just receive a call from Marco Fallaci. He wants me to check in on Tony. Apparently, he's been fighting, drinking, and passing out since the day before.”

“So you left him there?” I snapped.

“No, I was about to go and check on him, so watch your tone,” he said tightly. “But I'm not in control of Tony, no one is. There's no guarantee he'll leave with me. Seems like that should be left up to the person who put him in such a shitty state.”

My heart squeezed, and I felt sick to my stomach. Had I really done that? Nausea gripped my throat. I'd said I hated

him. Right to his face, after a kiss, I'd told him that I hated him.

"I didn't—"

"We both know that's not true," Benito interrupted. "I don't know exactly what you did, but if Tony's throwing himself in harm's way, I have no doubt you're the cause of it. Go clean up your mess."

"I'm seven hours away!"

"I suggest you ride hard then, cousin."

"Good luck! Go get your man." Gin laughed.

They hung up, and I stared at my phone. It was only two in the afternoon. I had some time before the bar opened and Tony would throw his idiot ass back into danger again. The bags beneath his eyes when he'd stood outside my place showed just how much he hadn't been sleeping. He probably hadn't been eating either.

"Fucking idiot, goddamn moron, asshole!"

"You good?"

I glanced up at Drav. He tilted his head, a worried expression on his face. I swallowed hard as I pulled up the bar and set up the GPS.

"I'm going back early."

"What?"

"Everyone else can stay here and rest," I said. "I have something I need to do."

"Again, what? We're supposed to ride back together."

I shoved my phone into its holder on my bike and snatched up my helmet. As I did, Drav was right behind me. I swung

my leg over my bike and both his big hands gripped my bars.

“What the hell is going on, Cell?”

“I have to go get my moron,” I snapped.

Confusion clouded his face. “What moron?”

“Tony! Or he’s going to get himself killed.”

Drav’s eyes narrowed. “You’re leaving us to go to him?”

“I have to or he’ll end up dead. We’re all fine,” I said as I gestured between us. “But he’s not. I can’t leave him alone, Drav. Don’t ask me to do that.”

“Why do you keep running back to him?”

“Because I love the fucker!” I snapped.

Drav stepped back, his eyes wide. I was just as shocked as he was. Even when I’d stood there, trying to figure out how I felt about him, I wasn’t able to. Until now. I might still be pissed at him, but I didn’t want Tony to die.

No, it was more than that. I wanted him to be all right. Sure, I had to punch him in his chest first, but after that, I needed to take care of him because he was clearly incapable of taking care of himself.

“Bozhe Moi!”

I glanced up at Drav. “Don’t even say it. I know, I’ve lost my mind. But I can’t help how I feel about him, okay? I love him.”

Drav sighed as he straightened up. “Give us five minutes and we’ll get you back.”

“What? No, I can do this myself.”

The glare he directed at me could have easily made someone piss their pants. I was used to Drav being a serious, dangerous man, and even I was unnerved.

“We don’t do anything alone,” he growled. “If our prez needs help, we’ll give it to him.”

I groaned. “Seriously, do you want me to have a heart attack? I’ll die if people keep saying insane shit to me today!”

“Stop trying to act like you don’t feel shit, and you wouldn’t have a problem,” he pointed out.

“Fuck you.”

“Right back at you.” Drav grinned. “I still think he’s a dick, but whatever. Five minutes.”

“Make it three.”

I dragged my helmet over my face and made sure it was in place. Screw food, rest, and everything else. I didn’t have that long to get to Tony. Before he was beaten into a pulp, I wanted to curse him out one more time. He needed to know what a piece of shit he truly was.

After I told him how much I loved him.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

CALEB

THE RUSTIC NAIL was as big of a shit place as it sounded. As I stepped inside, the rowdy noise of a bar filled my ears, but it was nothing like what Benito and Gin had described. I didn't see any fighting, just a bunch of drunks having fun.

“Is this the place?” Angel asked.

I shrugged. “I think so, but I don't see Tony. Do you?”

Drav was still keeping the front door guy busy so I turned toward the next man standing around with his arms crossed over his chest. He was a hell of a lot bigger than me. The look on his face said he wasn't to be fucked with either, but I couldn't stop now.

“Fights?” I asked.

He looked me up and down. “Don't know what you're talking about.”

I wanted to scream. The front door man had said the same before he turned us away. Thankfully Drav, Shade, and Demon handled him. However, I couldn't stand slowing down for one more asshole. The bar was up and running, that meant the fights were on. I had to get to Tony.

“Listen,” I said sharply as I stepped into his space. “I'm Caleb Vitale. Marco said we could be here.”

His lips twitched. I watched a vein in his neck appear as his eyes darted to the side. When he glanced at me again, there was uncertainty in his gaze. That, I could work with.

“Seriously, don’t make me have to call Benito. Or better yet, Giancarlo. I’ve got him right here,” I said as I opened my phone and showed him Gin’s contact.

“Shit,” he swore. “Y-You don’t gotta do that. Go on back, I don’t give a fuck. Not like you’re a cop, anyway.”

The words *I could be* lingered on my tongue, but I let it go. I wasn’t here to screw with the bouncer, I just needed to get back and find Tony. Thinking about him refocused me. I moved forward until I heard my name being called.

“Wait for us!”

Glancing over my shoulder, I grinned as the other three jogged up. “They’re with me,” I told the bouncer. “Hurry up already.”

“Do you have any idea how big that guy was?” Demon asked, panting.

We moved through until we were spit out into a bar area. We all scanned the place. Old, splintered wood, dusty decorations, and a half working stereo system filled the room along with a couple of men who looked like they could and would eat nails for fun, but no Tony. I balled my fists trying to keep calm.

“Where is he?” I muttered.

Angel brushed past me and walked up to the bar. As soon as he did, all eyes were on him. He had a way of commanding an entire room when he walked. Angel leaned over the bar and whispered into the ear of the man behind it. The scowl on his

face disappeared, replaced with a smirk. Next thing we knew, Angel bounced back toward us.

“Back rooms,” he said.

I raised a brow. “How did you get him to tell you?”

Angel shrugged. “I offered to blow him. Who would pass that up?”

I stared at him. “I really worry about you.”

He batted his lashes at me. “I never said I’d follow through, now did I? Come on. Are we going to go get your asshole or what?”

My asshole.

I still couldn’t believe I’d missed the fact that Tony was in love with me. How had I missed that? I wondered if I would have said the same harsh things if I knew? If I thought he wasn’t just screwing with me and trying to stuff me into a box?

We moved through to the back room and it was like another world unfolded before us. The ratty bar disappeared, and in its place were sleek, black walls and dark marble flooring. A man stood by with a clipboard and an earbud. When we arrived, he checked it and waved a hand to the left.

“Second door. Tony versus Joshua.”

“Thanks,” I said with a nod.

I grabbed the knob, my heart racing in my chest. *Am I really ready to see him?* I only thought about it for a moment longer before I let myself inside with my men at my heels. As soon as I stepped through that door, I was transported into a world of blood, sweat, and the screaming of an excited crowd. I froze.

There, in the center of the room, was Tony. He wavered on his feet, his stance faltering as he shook his head and righted himself. Sweat covered his forehead and exposed chest. My eyes were drawn to the bruises that covered his flesh and the blood that dripped from his nose. His opponent, a blond with a nasty smirk on his face, stepped forward. Tony blocked too slowly and took a jab right to the chest.

Fuck, no! That's my job.

I moved through the crowd, not listening to any of their protests. Tony was right in front of me. I reached out for him when someone stepped in my path.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

I blinked. “Excuse me?”

“I said, what the fuck do you think you’re doing, asshole?” he sneered. “If you get in the way of this fight, I’ll put my fist through your face.”

The longer I stared, the more comical I found him. Whiskey wafted from his breath, his eyes were bloodshot and narrowed. I stared at the small vein that etched its way over his forehead. I laughed.

“What’s so fucking funny?” he asked.

“I was just thinking about how ridiculous you look. Like you’re about to explode.” I mimicked his head exploding along with sound effects. “How about you calm the hell down so I can get what’s mine and get out of here?”

“What the hell did you say to me?”

“He said move along,” Drav said as he emerged from my side. “Or I’ll move you along.”

The man's fingers twitched. "I'm gonna put both of you under the ground."

Drav and I exchanged a look. Simultaneously, we both laughed. The guy was so ridiculous, there was nothing to do but smile.

"I'll take care of him," Drav said.

"Thanks. Make it hurt."

"Of course."

"Hey, where do you think you're—"

The sound of Drav's heavy fist smashing into the guy's face brought me pure pleasure. I kept moving. When I stepped into the cleared space, the collective uproar nearly deafened me. I ignored all of it and grabbed Tony's arm, pulling him. He stumbled, his fist cocked before he really saw me. Slowly, his hand dropped.

"Caleb?"

"In the flesh." I grinned before it fell away as quickly as it had come. "You ready to go home?"

Tony's brow furrowed. "Home?"

"Yeah, home. You know the place where you're supposed to sleep instead of the floor of some shitty bar?"

He reached out. The moment his palm touched my cheek, I leaned into it like a fool. Tony's thumb brushed against my skin. He blinked.

"You're really here?"

"Damn, you must be out of it. That the old age catching up with you?"

Tony stumbled forward. "I'm sorry."

My heart did the stupidest little flips and flops. I wanted to yell at myself not to fall for his insanity, but I already had, hadn't I? There was no way around what I felt for him. At some point, Tony had captured my heart and he now held it in his stupid, dirty, bloody hands.

Hands that I missed touching me.

"Sorry for what?" I asked.

"Being such a piece of shit," he said quickly before he frowned. "I don't know how to be anything but trash. What could I possibly offer you?" he muttered to himself.

Fuck. *Why am I such a sucker?* That lost, sad look on his face made me want to pull him into my arms and protect him from the world. I'd seen the bits of Tony that I loved. The man that cared about me. One who would kill for me. The kind of man that loved his mother and smiled so sweetly at both of us. He was what I'd been waiting for. In twenty-seven years, I hadn't found it until I met this beast of a man.

"Tony, I—"

My words were snatched from my mouth when I felt a fist square in my back. Pain shot up my spine, my knees buckled, and I fell into Tony. His eyes practically glowed with rage as he glanced over me at his opponent.

Right, forgot they were fighting.

For a moment, nothing had mattered except for Tony. Now, as sharpness spiked over my skin from the hit, I remembered where we were. I straightened up, righting myself as Tony tried to step forward. He looked like he was about to pass out.

"Let me handle this," I said.

Tony shook his head. "I can take him."

“You can’t,” I said evenly. “That’s why I’m here.”

“What the hell is going on!” someone shouted. “Let the fight finish.”

No way in hell was I going to let that happen. Instead, I tightened my fists and swung at the man across from me. He was easily twice my size, but I didn’t care. My fist connected with his jaw on the second try, the crunch of bone against my fist was satisfying. I ignored the pain that rippled over my hand. Something had definitely snapped. I hoped it was only a sprain and not a full-blown break. But I didn’t have time to think about that right now.

“They’re fucking up the fights. Fuck ‘em up!”

I turned to my guys. “Tear them apart.”

My crew didn’t have to be told twice. Angel leapt on the guy nearest him and they both went down in a heap. It wasn’t long before Angel was on top, his fist slamming into the man’s face. Demon was just like his twin, taking down a guy and making him regret it. Drav and Shade stayed on their feet, trading blows with the men around them. The only difference was that Shade took on one or two while Drav made it his personal mission to drop as many people as possible.

I turned back to the man Tony had been facing, Josh. He glared at me, his blue eyes turning to narrow slits. I grinned.

“Come on,” I said. “Get closer.”

“This was my fight. You’re fucking with my money!”

He lunged forward, but I side-stepped him. When he righted himself, I drove my knee up into his gut. He gasped, a gag on his lips before he went for me again.

“Screw you, asshole!” he yelled.

“Listen, I don’t care about money, okay? I just came to get what’s mine. Stop now and we’ll just leave. I’m sure they’ll call it a forfeit and you can get your cash.”

“It don’t work that way,” he snapped. “It’s last man standing. As long as he’s on his feet, I don’t collect.”

Frowning, I glanced at Tony. He moved forward, ready to fight. I shoved him back.

“Sorry, but Tony’s not going down,” I said.

The anger that colored his face stained his neck as well. He flung himself at me, rage in his voice as he tried to take me down. I ignored my aching body and used my strength to flip him to the ground. As soon as he was down, my fist crashed into his face. I didn’t stop until someone touched me.

“He’s down,” Tony panted. “It’s okay, Caleb.”

My name on his tongue forced me out of my fog. I stood up, my eyes running over his body to make sure he was all right. He did the same to me. For the first time, I truly registered the worry on his face as he took me in. I’d seen that look before. How had I missed what it meant?

“Let’s go home,” I repeated.

Tony nodded before he wavered on his feet. I moved fast, supporting him as I draped his arm around my shoulders. Tony’s heavy breathing and rum soaked breath told me everything I needed to know. I needed to get him home and make sure he was all right before we could even dream of having a conversation.

“Ready, prez,” Drav called.

I glanced up to find the room had fallen into silence. The people who wanted to cause problems were strewn around the

room. Some of them were half-dead, but hey, at least they weren't fully dead. Tony leaned against me. I stared at him, shocked that he'd given into letting anyone help him.

"I'm tired," he whispered.

"I know."

We made our way through the building, but no one fucked with us. I was grateful for that, but even more so for the cool night air that greeted us when we exited the building. Drav pulled open the door of the van for us. I was glad we'd traded it out for our bikes.

"No bike?" Tony slurred.

I shook my head. "I knew you wouldn't be in any position to ride it once Gin told me what a dumbass you were being."

"That snitch." Tony grunted. He glanced at me after I got him situated. I fastened him into his seatbelt and he glanced down at it. When his eyes flickered up, he smiled. "I'm supposed to take care of you."

"Not tonight."

Tony's face fell. "I didn't tell Gin to do that. I hope you get that."

"Why would I think you did?"

He shrugged. "I've been known to manipulate him before."

I paused as I reached out to wipe blood from his face. A second passed before I continued, slowly removing the flaky red bits that stained his upper lip. Tony's eyes searched mine as I worked until I couldn't take it anymore.

"What?" I asked as the van started to move.

“I love you.”

“Yeah, I know,” I muttered. “I—”

“You don’t have to say anything,” he interrupted. “Trust me, I know what I’ve done. I—”

“Do you ever shut up!” I snapped. “I thought I talked a lot, but you take the fucking cake.”

Tony blinked before he frowned. “I keep forgetting what a pain in the ass you are.”

“Me? You’re the biggest damn pain I’ve ever met in my life,” I growled. “Nosey, pushy, crazy. All of that and I still love you. I must be freaking nuts!”

Tony froze. “What did you say?”

“I said you’re crazy and annoying.”

“Not that.”

I blinked as I realized what words had fallen from my lips. Part of me wanted to deny it, but I didn’t have the strength anymore. As my eyes connected with Tony’s, I gathered up all the courage I had left.

“You heard me. I love you. Okay?”

Tony’s face lit up like I’ve never seen before. He reached over, threading his fingers through mine before he squeezed my hand.

“You know, I still want you to be all mine, right?”

I groaned. “Trust me, I know.”

“But... with caveats. You can do whatever you want with your family, run your gang, whatever. As long as you swear you’ll stay by my side.”

My heart sat in my throat. “As long as you promise to stop being a dick.”

“Half a dick,” he countered.

I burst out laughing, shaking my head in the process. “Fine, half a dick.”

A corner of Tony’s mouth tipped upward. I leaned forward and pressed a small, chaste kiss to his lips. When he leaned forward for more, I shoved a hand against his chest until he was firmly back in his seat.

“Not with that disgusting liquor filled breath,” I said with disgust. “Wait!”

Tony scoffed. “I want it now.”

I folded my arms over my chest. “That’s too damn bad.”

His eyes darkened. “Soon as the room isn’t spinning, I’m going to correct that attitude.”

I offered him a wink. “I’d love to see you try.”

Tony’s face softened. “You’re not still pissed at me?”

“Who said that?” I asked, tilting my head. “I plan to make your life a living hell as soon as you sober up.”

Tony blew out a breath. “Great.”

I slapped his cheek with a laugh. “Hey, at least there won’t be any waterboarding involved. Maybe.”

Tony shivered. “Can I change my mind about being in love with you?”

I squeezed his hand tighter, refusing to let go. There was no doubt in my mind that he was full of it. Tony didn’t want to be away from me, the same way I didn’t want to be away from him.

“Not a chance in hell,” I answered.

Tony was *mine*.

EPILOGUE

TWO WEEKS later

I pressed my nose into the crook of Caleb's throat, inhaling him like a coke addict.

"Are you fucking sniffing me?" Caleb groaned. He pushed at me, but I pulled him closer. I never wanted to part from him.

"You smell good."

"Let go, you clingy fuck."

Never again. He had his chance to run from me, and Caleb had come back. I was still reeling from it. Every night and every morning was a shock finding him in my arms.

"Don't you have work or something?" Caleb asked, he grunted and gave up on pushing me away.

He wasn't trying all that hard. He'd avoided most of my lingering bruises. Mostly everything had healed up nice, and I had only one man to thank for that.

"If I leave, you will miss me."

"Let's test that theory."

"No."

“Fuck, Tony, you’re making me hot.” Caleb struggled against my hold again before caving breathing heavily.

“I like when you give in.”

“You know what you sound like? A damn pervert.” Caleb draped his arm over his eyes. “Don’t we have that thing to go to? You know, with your mom.”

We did but now I wanted to call and cancel it. I wanted to keep him all to myself.

“Don’t even think about it.”

“What?” I asked, lifting my head. His blue eyes shimmered like the ocean and captured me in that very moment.

“That look on your face says you want to lock me away in your basement and break my legs so I can’t escape.”

My head tilted to the side as I watched him. That wasn’t a bad idea. No one could rescue him and there was no way Caleb would make it up the stairs.

“One flaw in your plan.”

“Just one?” He cocked a brow at me as if I was the crazy one. But he’d suggested the plan.

“I don’t have a basement. And the garage is too easy to slip out of.”

“So not the fact that you would break my legs or keep me captive?”

I smiled down at him before closing the distance and stealing his perfect lips for a kiss. A groan slipped free, and I took more of his sweetness with me. It didn’t get past me that Caleb was letting me cling to him and touch him freely. There

was so much I needed to say and fix before we were truly okay, but for now, I'd take what I could.

"That's a bonus." I brushed our noses together before pulling back. "You'd be completely reliant on me. In time, you'd fall even more in love with me."

"Fuck, the guys are right. I have Stockholm syndrome."

"I doubt it," I said as I slipped out of bed. My phone glowed on the nightstand and I checked the messages. They were from Benito. Nothing major just more of his gripping because I'd fucked up and now he had to deal with the Fallaci's.

"No, seriously, how do you explain me not running away screaming right now?"

"I'm an amazing man."

Caleb opened his mouth and closed it. "Nope." He jumped out of bed, his naked body calling to me.

In the past two weeks, I hadn't gotten more than a kiss and a cuddle. My entire body burned to be with him. I wanted to claim what was mine all over again.

"Stop staring at me like that. Nothing is happening." Caleb headed toward the shower, his perky ass flexing with each step.

I want to bite it. I ran my tongue over my teeth as the urge grew with every passing second.

"I'm healed up."

"You said that the night you got bandaged up. I don't want to hear it."

The sound of the shower turning on shut down any further conversation. My phone buzzed in my hand, and I reluctantly turned away from Caleb. I'd hunt him down and shove my cock up his ass, but I was trying to be a better man. Still, how long was I supposed to hold out?

"Yes, Ma?"

"Is that how you answer the phone now?"

I pinched the bridge of my nose. "Sorry. Morning, Ma."

"Better. Morning to you, too. Are you and Caleb on your way?"

I pulled the phone away from my face and checked the time once more. "It doesn't start for another two hours. Did something happen?"

"No, no, nothing you need to cause a scene about. I'm just so excited. I've been bragging a bit to Elizabeth down the hall. She's been talking mess about her granddaughter coming around and how good she is at games."

My mom had me late in life. Some days I felt bad I'd never give her grandchildren. It was never a part of my plan but now that I had Caleb...

"I told her my son's hot young boyfriend was going to beat her granddaughter's ass."

"Ma."

I didn't even know where to start. She was sounding better each day. Ever since Caleb and I went to visit her, things had changed a bit. She was calling me more. It was awkward but I was certain we could move forward. I needed to be better, not just for Caleb, but for her too.

“What? I didn’t say anything that wasn’t true. Caleb’s been texting me.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“He’s a good one. Better not fuck it up again.”

She didn’t have to tell me twice. I never planned to lose Caleb again.

“Tony, come on, we have to get ready,” Caleb shouted from the shower.

“We will be there soon, Mom. I think we’re stopping and picking up Caleb’s mom as well.”

“Oh, good I can’t wait to meet the incredible woman who raised such a fine young man.”

I smiled, letting my mother meet any of the guys I liked was always a hassle I never cared for. Over the years, I took less and less to see her. It had more to do with me than it did her.

“See you soon, Ma.”

We said our goodbyes, and I hurriedly checked my messages. Groaning, I shot off a text to Benito.

Benito: Are you going to keep ignoring me?

Tony: I apologized already. I’m calling in that favor. A certain someone’s husband locked me in a trunk not too long ago.

Benito: That’s dirty.

Benito: Giancarlo is here drawing out this pointless meeting. Him and Marco are at each other’s throats. It’s your fault.

Tony: Trunk

Benito: Fine. When are you coming back to work?

I glanced over at the bathroom door. I needed a little more time with Caleb. Yes, I was healed up, but I needed to make sure he understood he was mine and I was his. My drunken apology was nothing more than a blurry memory, but I knew he deserved so much more.

Tony: Another week off

Benito: Four days

It was probably the best I was going to get. It wasn't like we were in peaceful times.

Tony: K.

I tossed the phone to the side and rushed over to the bathroom and joined Caleb. He squinted as water dripped down his face. It was absurd how jealous I was of the water as it cascaded down his body. I wanted to touch him more, to mold myself to him.

“Stop giving me crazy eyes and turn so I can check you over.”

I did as I was told, lifting my arms. My ribs pulled slightly leaving behind a dull ache. Nothing was broken, but my body sure hurt like a bitch. Melony had said everything was pretty much bruised.

“The coloring is getting better.” Caleb's fingers brushed along my flesh leaving behind goosebumps. I fought the shiver that worked its way up my spine. It was inevitable when any touch from him sent me into a frenzy.

“Who were you on the phone with?” Caleb asked.

“My mom, she's ready for us to get there.”

He laughed. “Is that all? Because she texted me something about beating some old lady named Elizabeth.”

I groaned. “Of course, she did. Since when did you two start texting?”

Caleb hummed as he turned me around. His touches were methodical but it didn’t matter to my body. Wherever our skin came into contact heated up, and I was left wanting more.

“The day I dragged your drunk, beaten ass home.”

My brows furrowed as he pressed down on one of the bruises on my hip.

“Sorry.”

I reached for his hand and placed it back over the bruise and pushed down. Pain mixed with the pleasure already riding me hard. “Don’t be.”

“Fuck, you’re making this no sex thing hard, huh?”

If it was up to me, I’d have him on the bed, spread open for me and delirious with pleasure.

“Slow down, cowboy.” Caleb pushed me back but there was no erasing the look of want on his handsome face. “We have to pick my mom up, and I’m not showing up at her front door with my brains freshly fucked out of me.”

“Is that a good enough reason?”

“Yes?” Caleb took a step back and then another until his back hit the shower wall.

I crowded in closer, dropping my arms to cage him in. “I want you.”

“Fuck,” Caleb swore. He looked anywhere but at me. “Tony, the doc didn’t clear any activity.”

“She didn’t ban me from any either.”

His Adam’s apple bobbed as he audibly swallowed.

“What if I say I don’t know if I’m ready.”

He was determined to keep from owning his ass. I could only be put off for so long. I relented and backed up just a little. Even if I couldn’t fuck him right that second, I still wanted to be as close as possible.

“Fine.” I grabbed his other hand, the one he’d been favoring after that fight. The doc had bandaged it. Caleb was shit at keeping it on. I checked that the swelling had gone down.

“You need to wear the brace at night or you’ll fuck it up.”

“It was only a sprain.”

I lifted a brow, and he groaned.

“Okay, you don’t have to look at me like that. I’ll wear it. I just forgot last night. Someone was being extra clingy.”

“I sleep better with you.”

Caleb rolled his eyes but there was no hiding the smile that curved his lips.



“MOM, this is Tony Morelli, my—” Caleb looked at me before facing his mom again. “Partner.”

Her brows lifted as she looked between us. “Are you part of the mafia?”

“Mom, you can’t just ask that,” Caleb stressed.

He was right; she normally couldn’t ask that. Her knowing could place her in harm’s way, but she was also a former mistress of a man. There was no doubt she knew a lot more than some of the wives did.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Her lips dipped in a frown and her hands fell to her hips. “Caleb, what did I tell you?” Her voice wavered. “I don’t want you to end up like me.”

She fixed a glare on me with the same blue eyes Caleb had. Maybe that was why I felt compelled to tell her the truth and be nice.

“You mixing my son in your shit?”

“Mom.” Caleb shook his head. “Stop, please.”

“No, I want him to answer me honestly. You got a family? A wife? Kids?” She took a step closer to me, unafraid as she stood before me.

“I—”

She moved fast, grabbing my hand. Caleb groaned next to me and covered his face. It was cute that he was embarrassed.

“No tan line on your ring finger.”

“I’m not married, and I don’t have any children. In the future maybe, it depends on Caleb.”

“What?” Caleb asked.

I ignored him and continued to answer his mother’s questions. “My affiliation to the mafia is not an issue. I don’t want Caleb anymore involved then he wants to be.”

“That doesn’t mean he won’t be involved.”

She wasn't wrong but I couldn't answer her either. The moment she realized I wasn't going to talk, she sighed.

"All of you are the same. "

"Mom, that's not fair. Sure, Tony is an ass, but he's the guy I decided to be with."

She cupped her son's face and brought him down to her level. She was a little woman but there was no doubt she could give a good fight if need be. I wasn't willing to test her out and made sure I stayed still while in her home.

"You're grown, you do what you think is best but I still want you to hear my concerns. You saw what I went through with your father."

Caleb's brows dipped. "Tony isn't like that."

"If I ever do anything like that to hurt Caleb, please shoot me."

"Tony!"

"Deal," Caleb's mom said.

I nodded, and we understood each other. I never wanted to hurt Caleb again. There were no promises that I wouldn't. I couldn't give them in good faith. But I could do my damndest to do what was best by the man I loved.

"Are you ready, Mom, or do you want to interrogate Tony longer?"

"Don't sass me, and yes, I'm ready." She grabbed her black purse and pulled it over her shoulder as we headed toward the door. We made it to the car with little incident and headed to the retirement care facility my mom stayed at.

"This place is nice," Charlotte said.

“Yes, the facility has all the top quality amenities. I wanted to make sure my mom was comfortable.”

She smiled at that. “Sweet. Maybe you aren’t total scum.”

It was a start. I glanced at Caleb and he shrugged. It was probably the best I was going to get for a while. Especially taking into consideration her past with made men. Before we got out of the car, I stopped Charlotte “My mom doesn’t know what I do.”

“You lie to your own mother?”

“Mom,” Caleb groaned.

“Out of necessity. The last thing she needs is to stress over my everyday life. There is nothing she can do to change the amount of danger I am in. There are plans in place if something happens to me.”

She stared at me for a long while. “They include my son now?”

Caleb pretended as if he wasn’t listening but there was no mistaking the way he peeked my way.

“Of course.”

She nodded and got out of the car.

“Really?” Caleb asked the moment the door was closed and we were left alone. His gaze was focused on me, willing me to answer.

A part of me wanted to ask what answer would guarantee he’d never leave me.

“Yes.” I reached out and pulled him close. “You and my mother are the most important people in my life.”

Caleb sucked in a breath, and I was instantly drawn in even further. I wanted to take him home and kiss him until neither of us could think straight.

“Come on, you two,” Charlotte said.

The moment wasn't gone but it was placed on the back burner for a little while. We got out of the car and headed to the facility together. We were greeted as we entered the double doors. I signed us all in and we were led to one of the bigger banquet rooms.

“It's like a hotel.”

“Same thing I thought,” Caleb said. He had his mom close as she admired the place.

“Anthony.”

My mother's voice carried through the room as she stood. She had on a fitted blue dress. Her silver locks were in an up-do. Her makeup was freshly done enhancing her beauty further. There was a glow about her I hadn't seen in a while. My smile was genuine as we made our way over to her table. Another elderly woman was to her right with a young woman in her twenties sitting next to her.

I instantly knew who they were, and my shoulders relaxed. For all her trash talk, they seemed to be on friendly terms. Ma's eyes lit up the moment they landed on Caleb. He moved toward her and they hugged. The sight filled my chest with warmth, and I was instantly reminded how much I'd needed them. This was what I had been missing in my life. Family. Benito, Gin, and Enzo were the closest I'd gotten since losing my brother and dad, but nothing beat having my very own family.

“Stop smiling like a creep,” Caleb said as he jabbed his elbow in my side. I’d been so lost in the moment, I’d missed introducing our mothers. They were already laughing and talking as if they’d known each other their entire lives instead of ten seconds.

“Off to a good start,” Caleb said. He moved in front of me when I didn’t say anything. He touched my face. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“You sure? You look like...” His words died off as he tilted his head. “I don’t know. Like you want to smile and cry at the same time.”

The warmth in my chest threatened to swallow me whole. It was like I was bathing in the sunlight.

“My family is growing. I need to make sure your mother is protected too.”

Caleb’s brows nearly kissed his hairline. “That has to be the sweetest thing you’ve said. Where is my Tony and what have you done with him?”

“You two over there okay?” Ma asked.

“Yes,” Caleb said. He glanced over his shoulder and gave them a reassuring smile. “We just need a second.”

Charlotte waved us off. “I can start off as Bambi’s partner. I’m a better player, anyways.”

Before I knew it, Caleb was pulling me away and we were headed down a hallway.

“Where the hell can we get some privacy,” Caleb muttered.

My brain wasn't really working, I was reduced to feeling and there was a lot to trek through. My emotions were all over the place, but they all stemmed from one place. I loved Caleb, the way he made me feel, the way he took care of me when he was so shit at taking care of himself. I fucking loved Caleb.

I knew I did and there hadn't been a moment of doubt but it was like the fact was driven home even harder. I dug in my heels and Caleb fell back against abruptly.

“Tony—”

I shoved him against the wall and crashed our lips together. I needed to breathe him in. To have what was mine. Caleb moaned against my mouth, and I took the opportunity for what it was. I deepened the kiss, sweeping my tongue over his parted lips before enticing his to come out and tangle with mine. Tasting Caleb was a heady experience. Each time was like the first, and I was hooked all over again. I cupped his face so he couldn't pull back. I wouldn't be able to survive. I needed him more than I needed air.

“Wait,” Caleb gasped in between kisses.

I pulled back and bit down on my tongue until the coppery taste of blood greeted me. The pain barely registered as I held back as best I could.

“We're in the open,” Caleb pointed out.

I looked up, and finally took notice of where we were. I grabbed his wrist and pulled him behind me. Caleb followed without hesitation. I found one of the custodian closets and opened it. Luckily, it was unlocked, and I shoved Caleb in.

“Another closet? Starting to think it's one of your kinks.”

“I have many but no, this isn't one.” I locked the door behind me and slammed my body against his.

“Fuck, I took you away to talk.”

Talking was the last thing on my mind. Although, I needed to do more of it. There needed to be an undeniable understanding of how much he meant to me. My fingers hooked into his jeans and worked them down his legs. His briefs were gone along with them as I shoved him forward. He caught himself on the shelves and I took a second to admire my meal.

“What are you doing?” Caleb asked.

I spread his cheeks and licked my lips. “I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, you said that before.”

“And I’ll say it again until I’m blue in the face.”

Caleb sucked in a sharp breath. “Not needed.”

“I know it’s not enough. Don’t worry, I’ll make it up to you until all you can think about is how much I love you.”

Caleb round ass in my face was a sight I would never tire of.

“No, thank you?”

I laughed, unable to help myself. It was so effortless around Caleb. “I wasn’t giving you a choice.”

“Of course—”

I spread his cheeks and dove face first between the firm globes. I moaned as I swiped my tongue over his entrance. There was nothing like devouring Caleb until he became a delirious horny mess. The moans filling the closet was like music to my ears. Caleb ground his ass against my tongue seeking out more of me as I ate him out. It didn’t take him

long to lose his mind. Two weeks without sex and I wasn't the only one feeling desperate for more than cuddles.

“Daddy, fuck me already.”

I groaned. He wasn't playing fair. Caleb knew how I felt when he called me Daddy. It made me undeniably turned on. Desire rushed through my veins and demanded I own my feisty little toy. I held him still stroking his cock in time to the movements of my tongue.

“Oh, fuck, fuck, fuck.”

Caleb's legs trembled fighting to hold him up. He was so much fun to tease. His body responded perfectly to anything I did to him. His hole tightened around my tongue as another bead of precum ran down my fingers.

“Your hole is so greedy.”

Caleb's entire body sagged as I slowed down.

“Please.”

“I need you to feel how sorry I am. How much I need you.”

Caleb shook his head, his messy hair draped over his face as he hung onto the shelf for dear life. I pressed my thumb over the slit of his cock and his entire body jumped.

“I see, I get it. I get it!” he repeated it louder each time. Caleb had forgotten we were in public and that anyone could walk by the closet and hear him begging for my cock.

I smiled, tugging on his hips and turning him around.
“Strip.”

Caleb's gaze dropped to the rope in my hand. His pupils were blown, and I wasn't even sure if he was really taking in

what I held out to him.

“I don’t have enough to tie you up how we both like, but this will have to do.” The soft fibers glided over my fingers in a familiar way that settled something deep in my psyche.

Caleb took his clothes off, his eyes never straying from mine. He didn’t even question me as I dragged the rope over his flesh.

“You trust me?”

Caleb sucked in a sharp breath. “Yes.” He smirked, even now driving me insane with want. Even now, he was still his usual self. “Stupid, right?”

It probably was. I grabbed him and kissed him until he fell back against me. His moans tried to escape, but I swallowed them greedily like a starving man. Everything I could have of Caleb I’d claim. As long as I lived I wouldn’t ever stop trying to possess the man who’d laid claim to my heart.

“Be a good toy and let me make you pretty.”

Caleb nodded. “Please, Daddy.”

My cock twitched and I almost said fuck it and bent him back over in favor of sinking into his tight, hot hole. Each piece of rope was placed purposely and tightened so it wouldn’t budge. By the time I was done, euphoria was coursing through my limbs, leaving behind a nice tingle. I couldn’t even tell how much time had passed. I was so wrapped up in Caleb.

The soft little sighs that left him were almost as addictive as his moans of pleasure. I walked around him, admiring my work. The black rope cut under each peck and in the middle, making Caleb’s already large chest look even bigger. I leaned forward brushing my fingers over his sensitive nipples. Caleb

let out a soft moan, and I followed the same pattern my fingers took with my mouth. I drew in the stiff peak of his nipple and rolled my tongue around it.

“Ah.” Caleb stared down at me, his mouth open, his eyes glazed over. “Harder, Daddy.”

I dragged my teeth over the soft flesh, earning another moan before I bit down. Caleb’s head fell back, and I reached up in time to slam my hand over his mouth as a scream reverberated out of his mouth. I soothed the bite with soft licks and a kiss before doing the very same to his other nipple. Caleb’s reaction was priceless, his cock was weeping between his thighs and each touch had him drawing closer to me.

“Mine.”

Caleb surprised me as his fingers curled in the front of my shirt and he dragged me close until our lips were a breath apart. “And you’re mine. No more stupid stunts. Leave that to me.”

I didn’t know it was possible to fall for someone so hard. I nodded, not trusting myself to talk.

“Go, Daddy.”

My stomach knotted and I attacked without thought. Our lips melded together in a familiar dance that was engraved into my very being. I hooked my hands under his thighs. Caleb groaned as he jumped helping me as I lifted him.

“You, a praise slut, Daddy?”

He was one to talk. “Keep it up and I’m going to fuck you until you break.”

Mischief danced in the deep blue depths of his eyes. “Please, do your worst.”

If he kept pushing me, we were never going to leave this closet. Caleb worked his fingers between us, fumbling with my zipper. I balanced him on the wall to free a hand and help him. The moment my cock was free, I didn't wait, and it didn't feel as if Caleb wanted me to either. I lowered him down on my aching cock and was instantly engulfed in flames. Ecstasy zapped up my spine, stealing my breath away as Caleb's body tightened around me.

"You feel so good, toy," I praised.

Caleb's hole clenched around my cock as he moaned. Pleasure slapped me square in the chest, and I was forced to tighten my hold on him. He sank further on my cock, taking me inch by inch until I was buried to the hilt in his ass. Every bit of me buzzed like I was hooked to a live wire. I was nothing more than an addict and he was the fix. The high I got off having Caleb in my arms was unmatched. I lifted him and pulled out slowly, making sure he felt every inch of my cock before dropping him and slamming up at the same time. Our flesh collided together in a thunderous clap.

Caleb reached back, his blunt nails scrapped over the wall as I did it again, fucking his tight hole, reminding his body who it belonged to. I'd let him have his freedom, but at the end of the day, Caleb would only belong to one person and that was me.

I leaned forward, biting down on one of his pecs leaving behind teeth marks. The moment I saw them on his creamy flesh, I was driven to do it again and again until his chest was covered, and I was fucking his hole like it was the last time. Our grunts and the way our bodies slammed into each other were the only sounds I could hear.

“I love you,” I confessed as the impending climax grew closer with every thrust.

Caleb whimpered. “Love you too, Daddy.”

His moans were all that I needed to cum. The base of my spine erupted in fireworks and I held him tight against my flesh as I filled his ass with every drop of cum I had. Hot splashes of cum hit my torso, and I groaned as Caleb’s ass milked me for what I was worth.

The moment we caught our breaths, I dropped down on my knees and helped clean him up. The look Caleb fixed on me made my heart race, and the need to carve my name into his flesh rose up. I wanted the world to know Caleb belonged to me.

“Fuck, you’re so hot,” Caleb said.

“You wouldn’t say that if you knew what I was thinking.”

He smiled at me. “It’s probably something crazy.” He wiggled against me as I rose back up.

I went for the rope still tied around his body. “I think it’s sane.”

“No, can I keep it on?” Caleb asked.

My chest tightened. All I could do was nod as emotions clogged my throat. I pulled him in for a quick kiss, making sure to keep it short before we started something else. There was a knock on the door.

“Shit, we are so in trouble,” Caleb said.

“We aren’t.”

“Okay, seriously, do you own this place?”

I shook my head. “No, Benito does. He bought it when I mentioned my mother needed a good care facility. It was one of the first things he did for me when I got out of jail. I’d left her all alone and he’d helped me the moment he could.”

Caleb’s eyes widened. “That’s why you’re so loyal to him.”

Among other reasons. I nodded.

I finished buttoning my shirt and checked myself over the best I could. “I’m loyal to him, but he knows when it comes to you, not to expect me to choose him.”

“What? Since when?”

“The day they demanded I call you in. I told him after you left.”

“Really?” Caleb’s mouth fell open as if he couldn’t believe what I was saying. I closed it and helped him finish getting dressed. We ignored the persistent knocking.

“I should have said it while you were there or—”

Caleb slammed me against the door and kissed me. I melted into his touch loving the weight of his body on mine.

“Fuck, I love your crazy ass.”

“I love you more.”

Caleb laughed. “Probably.”

“Come out, now,” a woman’s voice said. “I will be calling the police.”

I kissed Caleb once more before opening the door. The director’s face was set in a glare until she set eyes on me.

“Oh, Mr. Morelli.” She attempted to glance behind me but I blocked her view.

“Is there a problem?” My tone was cold as I stared down at her. She’d interrupted a very important moment between me and Caleb.

“There was a report—”

“No, there wasn’t,” I corrected.

Her mouth audibly shut before she pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose. “You’re right, there must have been a mistake.” She turned to the three men standing with her. “Let’s go, Jasper. Please use the utility closet on the third floor for now.”

“Uh, yes, ma’am.”

The moment they were all gone, I opened the door and let Caleb out.

“Wow, it pays to have a terrifying, murderous boyfriend.”

“Is that what we are?”

Caleb took my hand, intertwining our fingers like we were some typical lovey dovey couple.

“Yeah, I live with you, we haven’t gone on any dates yet but we will.” He stared at me pointedly. “Wasn’t that just make up sex? See, boyfriends.”

My chest tightened as I squeezed our entwined hands. He said it so casually, as if it meant nothing when it meant everything. How had I fallen for someone like Caleb who could love without holding back? I wanted to be that person too.

We headed back toward the banquet hall. The noise filled the hall, letting us both know the activities had begun. However, neither one of us picked up the pace, content to make our way there together.

“Did you really mean it when you said that stuff about having a kid with me?”

I nodded. “If that’s what you want.”

“Not right now, maybe when I’m like thirty.” He glanced over at me, his eyes widening. “Shit, you’ll be what, fifty?”

I glared at him. “We’re only five years apart. You never stop, do you?”

“Never. You sure you want me to stay?”

“More than anything.” I stopped and dragged him close, none the wiser to our surroundings. “You’re mine forever. I’d sooner kill us both than let you walk away again.” I kissed him.

“I’m so fucked in the head, I’m starting to think the crap that comes out of your mouth is romantic instead of batshit insane.” He sighed with a smile on his face before it dropped suddenly. Caleb cocked his fist back and I saw it coming before his punch landed square in my chest. Pain rushed me all at once, and I coughed as I tried to remember how to breathe.

“I owed you that.”

Caleb’s hands cupped my face. I was still wheezing as he smiled at me like a fucking lunatic.

“Now we can do this forever thing. Just know, every single time you do something that pisses me off, I’m punching you in the chest.”

“As long as you know I’ll reciprocate in the bedroom.”

Caleb shrugged before kissing me. “Fair is fair in this fucked up thing we’re calling a relationship.”



Problems - Brea Alepou & Skyler Snow

Lethal - Joe Satoria

Lawless - A.W. Scott

Lessons - Ashlynn Mills

Tyrant - Gianni Holmes

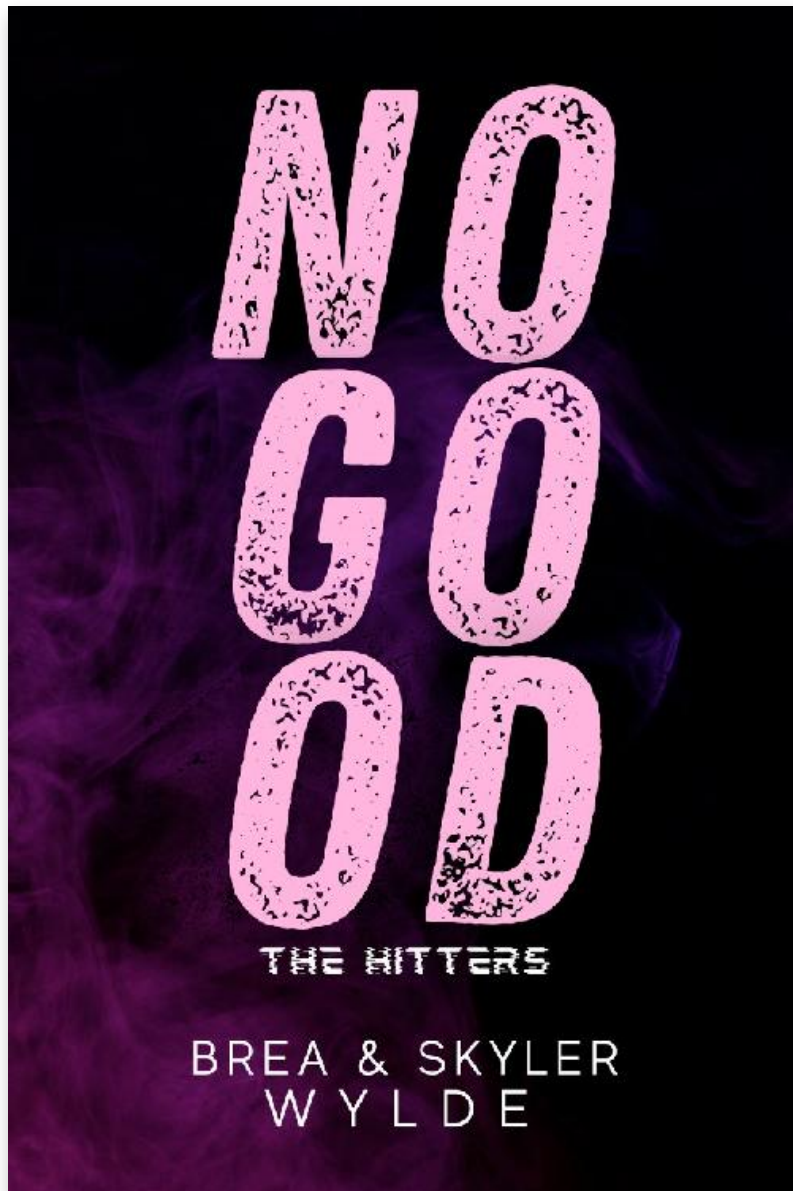
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Brea Alepou realized her dream was to write and tell stories after spending five years in college getting a degree. She has since been writing and letting her imagination free. She thought she would only write contemporary at first but soon found her love for making worlds. So now she rights it all. With her wild imagination, expect lots of different stories, from fairies ruling, to vampires killing everyone, to the sweet loving between two men, passion between two fierce women, or the love of multiple partners. She believes that everyone deserves love even if not all of her characters get it right away. Love is passionate, hot, needy, confusing, painful, draining, fulfilling, and all-consuming.

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